Black Sacred Breath: Historicity, Performance and the Aesthetics of Black Pentecostalism

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of English in the Graduate School of Duke University

2013
ABSTRACT

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Abstract

“Black Sacred Breath: Historicity, Performance and the Aesthetics of Black Pentecostalism” considers the aesthetic practices found in Black Pentecostalism, a multiracial, multi-class, multi-national Christian sect that began in Los Angeles, California in 1906 to argue that the aesthetic practices are the condition of possibility for a performative assessment and antiphonal criticism of normative theology and philosophy. Indeed, the history of these performances is an atiological-philosophical project, produced against the grain of liberal logics of subjectivity. By showing that theology and philosophy were abstractions of thought that produced the conceptual body as the target of racialization, the atiological-philosophical couplet indexes modes of intellectual practice that engulf and exceed such reductivism. Black Pentecostalism is a social, musical, intellectual form of new life, predicated upon the necessity of ongoing new beginnings. The religious practices I analyze produce a range of common sensual experiences: of “shouting” as dance; “testimony” and “tarry service” as song and praise noise; “whooping” (ecstatic, eclipsed breath) that occurs in praying and preaching; as well as, finally, “speaking in tongues.” I ultimately argue that these aesthetic practices and sensual experiences are not only important objects of study for those interested in alternative modes of social organization, but they also yield a general hermeneutics, a methodology for reading culture.
During the antebellum era, both clergy and scholars alike levied incessant injunctions against loud singing and frenzied dancing in religion and popular culture. Calling for the relinquishment of these sensual spiritual experiences, I argue that these framing injunctions led to a condition where Black Pentecostal aesthetics, even in the much later institutional Black Studies, were and are thought as excessive performances. “Black Sacred Breath” investigates how discourses that emerged within the cauldron of spatiotemporal triangular trades in coffee, tea, sugar and human flesh of Transatlantic slavery necessitated a theology and philosophy of race, and consequently, the racializing of aesthetic practices. Over and against this discursive theology-philosophy were the performance practices of Black Pentecostalism, an atheology-aphilosophy. These sensual experiences were not merely performed through duress but were the instantiation and sign of love, of life. As love and life, these performative dances, songs, noises and tongues illustrate how enjoyment, desire and joy are important for the historicity – the theory of history found in these practices – that antiphonally speaks back against aversion, embarrassment and abandonment, against the debasement and denigration of blackness. Fundamentally, “Black Sacred Breath” is about the possibility for Black Study (as opposed to and differentiated from university institutional Black Studies), about the capacity for aesthetic practices typically deemed excessive can be constitutive, can provide new models for collective intellectual practice.
Dedication

To BlackPentecostalism: the "place" I first learned to hear the world and imagine possibilities.
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Introduction

I believe in Black Study and “Black Sacred Breath: Historicity, Performance and the Aesthetics of Black Pentecostalism” is about the possibility for such a collective intellectual project. Black Study is the force of belief in blackness set loose in the world, disrupting the institutionalization and abstraction of thought that produces the categorical distinctions of disciplinary knowledge. To make a claim for belief – in and of Black Study – is to already trouble and disrupt epistemological projects founded upon pure reason, pure rationality, in the service of thinking with and against how that which we call knowledge is produced and dispersed. Black Study is a wholly unbounded, holy, collective intellectual project that is fundamentally otherwise than an (inter)discipline.

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This refusal of disciplinary boundaries is important because disciplinary knowledges attempt resolution, attempt to “resolve” knowledge “into objectivity…that have characterized modern knowledge since the earliest statements on how (Bacon’s instrumentalism) and why (Descartes’s formalism) of knowledge with certainty.”

“Black Sacred Breath” is not about resolve but about openness to worlds, to experiences, to ideas. “Black Sacred Breath” does not so much arrive to conclusions as it tarries with concepts.

Black Study is the affirmation of and belief in blackness, though belief is radically under assault, coded through and attacked as “the religious.” One need only read contemporary work of the “New Atheist” movement – Sam Harris and Christopher Hitchens as two such examples – for the ways belief becomes racialized, and how that racialization is part of, not distinct from, a general anti-blackness sentiment.

Characterized by Harris as the most virulent and dangerous strain of belief, one wonders at his interarticulation of Islam and otherness that seems to animate Harris’s thought. It is not simply that belief is a problem, but belief that is accompanied with overt, explicit aesthetic practices – wearing hijab, praying five times a day eastward –

\[2\] Denise Ferreira da Silva, ‘To Be Announced Radical Praxis or Knowing (at) the Limits of Justice’, Social Text, 31 (2013), 43–62 (p. 44).
\[3\] See, for example Glenn Greenwald, ‘Sam Harris, the New Atheists, and anti-Muslim Animus’, The Guardian, 3 April 2013, section Comment is free <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/apr/03/sam-harris-muslim-animus> [accessed 17 April 2013] for a discussion of anti-Muslim sentiment within the New Atheist movement.
that makes of such belief a general antagonism, a general threat. I opine that the general antagonism and threat of belief is because belief, when borne out through certain aesthetic behaviors, is considered to be blackness itself. Whiteness is considered the absence of such purportedly primitivist behaviors, and thus, a lack of belief that moves the flesh. As such, “Black Sacred Breath,” considers the aesthetics of belief, the performative behaviors and gestures that accompany collective modes of intellection and knowledge of divine, otherworldly worlds.

During the antebellum era, both clergy and scholars alike levied incessant injunctions against loud singing and frenzied dancing in religion and popular culture. Calling for the relinquishment of these sensual spiritual experiences, I argue that these framing injunctions led to a condition where Black Pentecostal aesthetics, even in the much later institutional Black Studies, were and are thought as excessive performances. For example, Bishop Daniel Alexander Payne of the African Methodist Episcopal church responded to the loud singing and “ring shout” dancing of black worshippers by denouncing their practices as primitive and unnecessary. Payne’s response was animated by aversion, embarrassment and abandonment, a triangulation of affective response. This triangulation was presaged in the Enlightenment thought of Immanuel Kant, reverberated in sermons delivered by George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards

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4 See, for example, Talal Asad, Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003).
during the Great Awakening revival movement and echoed in post-bellum creations of “jubilee” choirs at Black colleges.

The objects of analysis “Black Sacred Breath” considers are the aesthetic practices found in Black Pentecostalism, a multiracial, multi-class, multi-national Christian sect that began in Los Angeles, California in 1906. I argue that the aesthetic practices are the condition of possibility for a performative assessment and antiphonal criticism of normative theology and philosophy. Indeed, the history of these performances is an atheological-aphilosophical project, produced against the grain of liberal logics of subjectivity. By showing that theology and philosophy are abstractions of thought that produced the conceptual body as the target of racialization, the atheological-aphilosophical couplet indexes modes of intellectual practice that engulf and exceed such reductivism. “Black Sacred Breath” investigates how discourses that emerged within the cauldron of spatiotemporal triangular trades in coffee, tea, sugar and human flesh of Transatlantic slavery necessitated a theology and philosophy of race, and consequently, the racializing of aesthetic practices. Over and against this discursive theology-philosophy were the performance practices of Black Pentecostalism, an atheology-aphilosophy. These sensual experiences were not merely performed through duress but were the instantiation and sign of love, of life. As love and life, these performative dances, songs, noises and tongues illustrate how enjoyment, desire and joy are important for the historicity – the theory of history found in these practices – that
antiphonally speaks back against aversion, embarrassment and abandonment, against the debasement and denigration of blackness. In each of the chapters, I investigate one aesthetic, performative practice of BlackPentecostalism, how the practice emerged during the early twentieth-century moment but also how the practices are consistent with other movements that came before the 1906 Azusa Street services.

There is clunky terminology throughout “Black Sacred Breath.” I utilize the portmanteau BlackPentecostalism because I consider both blackness and Pentecost-ness to be forces in the world that do not belong to any group, that are only insofar as they are given away. Both are transformational energies that are carried in the flesh and I think the two concepts together, each as constitutive of the other. If blackness is the history of resistance that inheres objects, and if Pentecost-ness is the capacity for new beginnings ongoingly, BlackPentecost is the capaciousness of new resistance that rises to, while emerging from, the occasion of its genesis. I also use the couplet atheological-aphilosophical, which attempts to name the intimate relationship of the collective intellectual project that is BlackPentecostalism to thinking about “god talk” as well as concepts of being, morality, knowledge and law. But like the resolve that is the aspiration of knowledge in theology and philosophy since Bacon, as da Silva noted

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above, I am interested in the otherwise than theology and philosophy that is no less intensely concerned with these various ideas. And the object of BlackPentecostalism, of Black Study, what Black Study tries to produce and analyze, is a collective possibility for belief in another world, one that is a creative critique of the one(s) in which we exist.

In Chapter 1, “Black Breath: Pneumatology and Black Study,” I construct the theory of history embedded in the performance and transference of breath as the necessary physiological and spiritual force that is the constitutive element of BlackPentecostal performative production. As breathing is the vivifying physical process enlivening and quickening flesh, this chapter sets the theoretical groundwork and structure for thinking the atheological-aphilosophical concept. In Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment, Leigh Eric Schmidt discusses a person’s capacity to hear one’s own breath as prayerful posture.7 Breathing is a reminder of the connection with divinity and Jean-Christophe Bailly writes about how the “slightest breath” is the sign of irrepressible life.8 To consider the aesthetics of breathing, I turn to pneumatology – the study of pneuma, the Greek word for “breath” – as pneumatology is about the relation of spirit to flesh. Analyzing lynching practices between 1880 and 1930, I argue that BlackPentecostal whooping during preaching and praying literally responds

to the eclipsing of black breath through aesthetic breathing. This chapter extrapolates a "blackness pneumatology," an atheology-aphilosophy of breathing that informs BlackPentecostal aesthetic cultural production, as a poetics and a form of life.

"Shouting and Aversion as Theological-Philosophical Figurations," the second chapter of this writing, is animated by the breath of the first chapter. An analysis of Immanuel Kant’s Enlightenment anthropological thought and sermons by George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards – grounded as they were in the Calvinist doctrine of predestination – are generative for defining what I term a “choreosonic itinerary and protocol.” This choreosonic itinerary and protocol is a series of placements and arrangements for how blackness was cognized, creating the concept of racial difference. "Choreosonic" is a portmanteau underscoring the fact that choreography and sonicity – movement and sound – are inextricably linked and have to be thought together. This chapter untangles the “choreo” of the choreosonic, illuminating how both predestination theology animating the Great Awakening Revivals, as well as Enlightenment Philosophy were the theological-philosophical conditions of emergence for what Frank Wilderson calls the “spatial and temporal coherence” that not only instantiates subjectivity but marks the dividing line between white bodies and the complex modes of fleshly disembodiment that are called blackness. A case study in aversion as a concept, this chapter argues that there is a choreography of atheological-aphilosophical thought that exceeds normative theological-philosophical figurations, found in performance of
moving flesh – that which exists before the abstraction of spatial and temporal coherence. Moving flesh speaks back and against problematic conceptions of blackness. I thus analyze the historicity of Black Pentecostal dancing flesh through interrelations among Afro-Arabic Islamic saut, nineteenth-century Ring Shout and twentieth-century Black Pentecostal “shouting.”

In Chapter 3, “Black Pentecostal Soundings: Testimony and Tarry Service and the Politics of Avoidance,” I analyze performances of the atheology-aphilosophy of blackness aestheticized by a specific kind of singing and praise noise heard during two particular moments of the Black Pentecostal church service, Black Pentecostal sounds during Testimony and Tarrying. These songs and sounds offer sharp criticism of the given world, a political economy that is foundationally built on exploitation and abstraction. An attention to the history of songs and sounds, as ephemera, is urgent for thinking about the ways Black Pentecost manifests before the 1906 Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles, how the sonic resources of resistance in Black Pentecostalism are found in varied contexts, some seemingly secular and others purportedly only sacred. Three Jennys – an enslaved woman, Jenny von Westphalen (Marx) and Jenny Evans Moore (Seymour) – ground the chapter, using the “sonic” aspect of the choreosonic as a critique of capitalism and its abuses. Listening to the sound of singing during Testimony Service and praise noise during Tarrying makes the atheological-aphilosophical antiphonal resistance to aversion and embarrassment audible. Embarrassment – an affective
response produced through a submission to respectability politics – is the concept untangled in this chapter that the three Jennys refuse. Rather than embarrassment, they each utilize the politics of avoidance, an atheological-aphilosophical intellectual performative practice.

In the fourth chapter, “Speaking In Tongues, Black Studies and the Language of the University,” I write about how, at the turn of the twentieth-century, a crucial debate emerged amongst the nascent BlackPentecostal movement: was speaking in tongues glossolalia – “heavenly language” or xenolalia – speaking a language that the individual has not learned? What was the breath doing in the flesh and how was that aestheticized breath registered in this community? Rather than leaving behind the aesthetic spiritual practice, BlackPentecostals employed speaking in tongues with reckless abandon. I argue that these are two minuscule but inassimilable concepts, each grounded in particular conceptions of personhood. The debate about glosso and xeno elucidates concerns about capacities to speak for oneself or for an Other, and to speak to an Other. Moreover, the debate was also about the possibility of converting an Other – someone in India or Spain, for example – without the need to cognize in the language, thought and mental aptitude of the Other. This debate about performative distinction is the grounds for a BlackPentecostal critique of the liberal subject. And this distinction between glosso and xeno, it turns out, buttresses different approaches to the study of black life as well as divergent approaches to Black Studies.
In “On the Jewish Question,” Karl Marx interrogates Bruno Bauer’s idea that integration into German society for Jews depended upon forced relinquishment their relationship to Jewishness – the cultural and historical performative practices of religiosity. Usually figured as anti-religion, Marx indeed otherwise and famously claimed that religion and opiates were co-constitutive for masses. However, in “On the Jewish Question,” which queries the possibilities for Jewishness, Marx demonstrates how relinquishment to gain freedom and citizenship – what he calls “political emancipation” – is a ruse. Giving up cultural and historical performative practices does not produce abolition but another set of strictures and bondage. In another register and key, we can say that one gains political emancipation through aversion, embarrassment and abandonment, and this political emancipation is the condition of emergence for the theological-philosophical production of “the body.” “Black Sacred Breath” allows me to think not only about the generalizability of Marx’s analysis to consider the ways in which black pneuma and black flesh are denigrated, but how BlackPentecostal aesthetics rise to the occasion of, and overcome, the denigration of and distancing from blackness.

This is no history of the modern global Pentecostal movement and I am not primarily concerned with creating an historicist project with names, dates and primary, spectacular events that took place in Azusa, and things that both preceded and came

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9 Karl Marx, ‘On The Jewish Question by Karl Marx’, 1843
<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/jewish-question/> [accessed 4 August 2012].
after that particular flashpoint. I opt, instead, for historicity, a mode of thinking of performance as history, of a way to ask: what is the thing, or the things, we call history and historical? This may prove troubling for religious historians but I want to pressure the assumption about the narrativity of historical events to think through other lineages, to move toward, after Foucault, genealogy rather than archeology. I am not looking so much for missing documents as much as I am listening for the “‘broken’ claim to connection” between anything that has receded into the ago and that which bears down on the now moment through its categorical soon-ness.

“Black Sacred Breath” is about, and is an attempt to produce, Black Study. Black Study is similar to what Denise Ferreira da Silva describes as “knowing (at) the limits of justice,” that is “at once a kind of knowing and doing; it is a praxis, one that unsettles

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12 Nathaniel Mackey, From a Broken Bottle Traces of Perfume Still Emanate: Bedouin Hornbook, Dḥot Baghshortus’s Run, Aṭet A.D., 1st edn (New Directions, 2010), p. 34.
what has come before but offers no guidance for what has yet to become.”\textsuperscript{13} And Black Study is a particular strategy of mixture, “self-life-writing” of both “cultural and political critique.”\textsuperscript{14} For this reason, “Black Sacred Breath” moves in and out of the autobiographical, the fictional, the performative, the theological and philosophical in order to enact a politicocultural criticism, one that is unflinching in its belief in blackness as a sociohistorical and ontological force of change, resistance, pleasure and love in the world.

\textsuperscript{13} Denise Ferreira da Silva, p. 44.
1. Black Breath: Pneumatology and Black Study

If there is something called air, and I would presume there is insofar as I presently breathe and you do as well, this irreducible admixture is one that is shared, an admixture of both the common and quotidian, ever present but certainly not generally the “stuff,” the materiality, of thought. Consider this shared materiality and the processes by which it is consumed in cramped stretches, unraveled time: places like airplanes, or maybe in crawlspaces waiting for, while enacting, freedom, or even – deeper and further and lower still – in holds of ships. But the process by which we participate in this common object, with this common admixture, not only must be thought out but must be consumed in order to think, something like what Nahum Chandler describes as a “double-gesture.”\(^1\) The double-gesture of inhalation and exhalation is, in effect, a matter of grave concern given the omnipresence of this shared object. Breathing is the process by which air – a mixture of nitrogen, oxygen, other minute atmospheric gases as well as other particulate matter – enters and exits the flesh and this process can most certainly be aestheticized. Children play breathing games, seeing who can hold one’s breath longest; singers breathe to hit high and low notes, to climb and descend scales; not just whistling “Dixie”; dancing and sitting; sleeping and snoring; all necessitate the performance of a double-gesture, the process of breathing.

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And so: gulp it in pause, until lungs – no longer able to contain that which is held – release, bursting forth and free from the flesh. BlackPentecostalism is grounded in this double-gesture, this process of breathing; it accentuates breathing as an aesthetic production, a mode of life, a politics of resistance.

If there was a movement that “began” in Los Angeles on Bonnie Brae Street in 1906, which would eventually be called Pentecostalism, this movement would always and everywhere be claimed by what Laura Harris calls the “aesthetic sociality of blackness”:

The aesthetic sociality of blackness is an improvised political assemblage that resides in the heart of the polity but operates under its ground and on its edge. It is not a re-membering of something that was broken, but an ever-expanding invention. It develops by way of exclusion but it is not exclusionary, particularly since it is continuously subject to legitimated, but always incomplete, exploitation. Its resources, which can never be fully accessed by the structures and authorities of legitimate political economy, are taken up by the politically and economically illegitimate in their insistence on living otherwise, in ways that resist repression, denigration, and exclusion and violate brutally imposed laws of property and propriety. It is a mode of intellectuality that, in the face of the vicious constriction of life, integrates the widest possible range of expression — corporeal, sensual, erotic, even violent. What emerges from this other intellectuality...is a very different kind of work in which collectivity is not preestablished but develops out of collaboration...²

BlackPentecostalism is an enactment of this aesthetic sociality and, as such, is a moment of originary difference, irreducible openness, the encounter of displacement as

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commons, given as the interplay between breath and rest, between surplus and lack that prompts movement away from any claim for origin. BlackPentecostalism is the ongoing emergence of (otherwise than) spatiotemporal itineraries, prompted by sounds – such as of violent winds of change – compelling the ongoing necessity of escape as the figuration of possibility for the perpetual reconfiguration of normative, violative modes of repressive and regulatory apparatuses. BlackPentecostalism, following Laura Harris, is ever expansive, emerging through having certain religious practices excluded from categories of the “mainline,” the “mainstream,” that were always critical stances and positions regarding theology and philosophy, but ever inclusive of those whom would be excluded. It is an egalitarian mode of spirit indwelling, wherein that which those filled with the Spirit have is immediately given way and away to others through aesthetic proclamation, through linguistic rupture that announces and enunciates expanded sociality: the sound of violent wind is matched with, but also exceeded by, an intensive, intentional and pullulating capacity for new sociality. And what is held and

3 Both Andrew Benjamin and Nahum Chandler help me understand something about irreducible difference, originary displacement and originary difference. See Andrew E. Benjamin, Translation and the Nature of Philosophy: a New Theory of Words (London; New York: Routledge, 1989.). Nahum Chandler, ‘Originary Displacement’, boundary 2, 27 (2000), 249–286. In terms of a refusal of a claim for origin, one could ponder if the disciples “received” the Holy Spirit previous to the Acts encounter when Jesus, after his resurrection and appearance to the disciples, “breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (John 20:22, NRSV). With both narratives, we can consider that breath and a capacity both to be moved and to receive are consistent in both stories of the reception of the Holy Spirit. But what is of import here is that the claim that the Pentecost moment in Acts is the origin of the Holy Spirit’s “work” in the world is obscured by another moment with a similar claim. Originary difference is what animates the discourse of the Holy Spirit and the aesthetics of indwelling movement.
given away, what is involved in reciprocity of gift and exchange, of aneconomy, is the 
breath, that which animates the flesh and makes it move. The energy of Pentecost found 
in the biblical Luke-Acts 2 narrative was carried into, and given away within, the early 
twentieth century by an intergenerational, interreligious, multi-gendered group of folks, 
an enactment of a spiritual “motley crew.”

The aesthetic production of breath in BlackPentecostalism is what I will index as 
black pneuma, the capacity for the double-gesture of inhalation and exhalation as the hint 
of life, life that is not merely social – though contained and engulfed by gratuitous 
vioence – but life that is a radical critique of Orlando Patterson’s theory of Social Death.
What I will expand upon in this chapter are the ways that breath is not only important 
but also holy, and this holiness is not reducible to confessions of faith or anything that 
could simply be called “religious.” Analyzing the BlackPentecostal tendency for prayer 
and preaching to end with “whooping” – the speaking of phrases melodically, with 
excitement, usually breaking into loud exclamations and declarations repetitiously – will 
yield robust analyses of liberal concepts of subjectivity and of the body.

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1.1 Whooping

The “whooping” in praying and preaching invites congregants to most intensely engage the one leading prayer or the one who preaches in antiphony. Homiletician Evans E. Crawford describes this process as climatic and celebratory:

Sermon delivery is a creative and inclusive moment where the preacher embodies for the whole congregation or group of hearers their celebrative gifts. It is a time when all that has been generative in the pulpit, pew, or elsewhere is seen as organic to life. What results is not far from chant. […] In some circles this is called “whooping,” where meter and message not only meet but celebrate. […] The sound of the sermon is not simply something added to the substance but rather is inseparable from the experience of participant proclamation, which is a communal event in the life of the congregation.⁶

While Crawford concentrates on the role of the preacher and preaching, the enactment of Black Pentecostal force in congregations demonstrates that this mode of meter-meeting-message through celebratory proclamation occurs when people testify during “Testimony Service” as well as when people pray to open or close the service, before or after the sermon, or even during the offering. The aesthetics of Black Pentecostalism operate through irreducible openness, never adhering to containment, to producing performative specific behaviors during specific, acceptable moments of church services. Though speaking specifically about the sermon, what Crawford says about “the pause” – that it “is much more than a break in delivery” but is also “an opening in the

preacher’s consciousness through which the musicality of the Spirit breathes so that the musicality of the sermon resonates with the living truth” – is instructive for theorizing the double-gesture, the process of breathing as aesthetic production.\(^7\)

The pause or the break when one prays or preaches is an atemporal eclipse of speech, allowing a collective deep breath – audibly and often with intensity wherein the materiality of the flesh is produced by the forceful vibrations of nasal passages, the tongue smacking the roof of the mouth, the constricting of the pharynx, the augmentation by admixture of linguistic vocable appendages to words – to gather more resource from which to continue performance is invitational in its enactment, it creates a gap wherein the voices of congregants can “fill” the (otherwise than) empty silence. The meaning of holy as “set apart” highlights the way whooping is the performance of setting apart, the dissecting and analysis of breath. Whooping, let’s say, “severely clip the wings” of the double-gesture, but this clipping moves opposite Immanuel Kant’s formulation.\(^8\) Rather than the sacrifice of imagination through the serrational edge of understanding – a project and process of rationality, of enlightened thought – the “some of it” that whooping sacrifices is containment, the ruse of continuity, of uninterrupted

\(^7\) Crawford and Troeger, p. 17.
flow. That is, whooping – as the instantiation of imaginative leap and flight – sacrifices the concept of the enclosed liberal subject.

With whooping comes the expiration, the giving out of the excess, the constitutive that exists on the outside, the other side of breathing. Dorinda Clark-Cole (http://youtu.be/-HIco2jMHcw), Juandolyn Stokes (http://youtu.be/mTLXipHwvE), Wanda Frazier Parker (http://youtu.be/4Vx8rBWMjj4) and Iona Locke (http://youtu.be/z6dfd-R6cJ0) illustrate this point. These examples demonstrate how “musicality is a sonic manifestation of various social and cultural forces alive” in the preacher-as-performer. And when we consider the whooping as antiphonal, as the congregation preaching back to the preacher and vice versa, evident is how antiphony allows for the congregation – an internally differentiated group – to breathe aesthetically, productive of socio-sonic black torque, centripetal and centrifugal force of giving and withholding air, performing the double-gesture collectively.

Crawford states, “We often ignore the climatic factor that is most obvious yet essential to all preaching: that our speaking is surrounded by silence and that it is in the ‘pause’ of delivery that ‘sound’ or ‘pitch’ resounds or reverberates.” How the words, how the sounds, how the whooping is received, then, is determined fundamentally by the break and pause, its discontinuity, its openness and vulnerability on all “sides.”

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9 Crawford and Troeger, p. 20.
Enlightenment thought, however, constructed an otherwise subject, one not subject to openness and vulnerability, one created by the shoring up against movement, one that is, finally, fully contained. But the silence that surrounds is illusory at best. Or maybe, there is no such thing as absolute silence. What silence indexes, rather, is a certain quality of seeming noiselessness, but this quality is effectuated by context. When Clark-Cole exclaimed (http://youtu.be/-HICo2jMHcw?t=3m26s)

I wonder if I got some women’hah /  
That’ll open up your mouth’hah /  
And say lawwwd’hah!  
Oh lawwwd’hah!  
Oh-oh law-aw-aw’d’hah!  
OOOOH-Aaaaayye-eah-eah!

she retreats into a silence, of sorts, but immediately the whooping produced the sonic space as discontinuous and open, open to the other voices that both proceeded her moment of being overcome with Spirit – such that other women gathered around, held and hugged her – and extended the preacherly moment by sociality, through opening up and diffusing the very grounds for the concept of preaching, for listening, for breathing. They all in that space breathed the same air, the same irreducibly impure admixture: Clark-Cole gave it, they received it, they gave it, she received it. The fundamental quality of such aesthetic sociality is not that it can be shared, but that it

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11 This assertion about Enlightenment Thought will be explored fully in Chapter 2.
must be common and used by all, for vitality, for life. This sharing in and as commons enacts violence against any form of marginalization or oppression.

What is merely hinted at, slightly, in the attempt to transcribe Clark-Cole is more explicit in Juandolyn Stokes. For example, when she says

(http://youtu.be/mtTLXipHwvE?t=4m15s)

Tell’em neighbah’tuh /  
God’s gonna deliva you tonight, hah /  
Thank you, Jesus, hah /  
So the Bible said’tuh /  
So Amnon laid down, hah /  
And he made himself sick, hah /

there is necessarily an excessive otherwise of breath, which enunciates itself with vocables such as “hah” and “tuh,” impure admix of appendages to words that are no less important for, no less generative of, meaning. Not even the word “neighbor” could be contained, enclosed, by grammar, by logic of boundaries and borders. The word “neighbor,” at once vernacularized through the replacement of “or” with “ah” but also extended through “tuh.” This “tuh” has no inherent value, its content lacks reproductive meaning. But yet, it is there, it elucidates the air that not only leaves the flesh, but escapes, absconds through its excess, is uttered emphatically and with joy.

Whooping aestheticizes breath, which is also and likewise to assert that whooping aestheticizes life. Even when the community normatively understood as scientific takes up the concern over respiration, the relationship of breathing to emotion
is theorized as one wherein physiological response of the flesh is in accordance with emotional posture: “Specific respiratory symptoms are frequently reported in association with emotionally stressful states, a sudden scare takes the breath out of each of us, we can easily observe the connection in ourselves or among others between certain states of consciousness and changes in breathing (e.g. sleep-wake differences or acute fear), and we know that the particulars of speaking and other behavioral activities must be coordinated with our breathing.”12 Moreover, “Breathing leads the list of vital needs in terms of the limits of time of deprivation; without an adequate supply of oxygen (O2) cells die within minutes and life ends.”13 Finally, “The activities of breathing in and breathing out are a curious mechanism because this activity comes from the unconscious regulation of a metabolic requirement, and simultaneously expresses emotion involuntarily.”14 Consensus here is given in the idea that physiology shares with emotionality, that what the flesh does and how the person feels are not easily disentangled. Thus to assert again that whooping – as the performative double-gesture of respiration – is a mode of aesthetic practice, utilizing the breath physiologically to effect affective mood of the one preaching, the one praying and the

congregation. What is notable in the four examples above is the effort necessary to sustain the performative moment, which is not only the sound and melodic phrasing but the fleshliness of such an enterprise. The flesh is forcefully foregrounded by the intentioned respiratory process. We might ask, simply, what is the purpose of praying, of preaching, like that? The like that is a concern fundamentally about, and the intellectual work that is done through, form.

One sees respiration outside of oneself in others’ bodies and in the bodies of creatures. One sees it just as easily when they stir slowly in the most profound sleep as when they are running and out of breath from something that caused them to panic. And yet we are used to the range of breath – from a prolonged, even dilation to gasping and panting, and from joy to suffocation. It is the animal form of being in life, the space of our most proper emotion, and the fundamental rhythm through which we identify life and the living. And it is even the sign of life that persists and resists. Whoever has watched over the dying knows this slow extinction of breath. It is a completely mysterious passage where, to speak like the ancient Egyptians, the voyager swings from one enigma to another. And yet, what persists does so with the thinness of a thread, since the thread of existence only holds as long as there is an accord with the immense outside, whose air, passing through the nostrils, is the final messenger. This amounts to saying that living – in each of the living – is not the result of a hatching that has the virtue of being spread around without the risk of being broken. Instead, living is immediately constituted and produced, until the end, as a porosity.15

Jean-Christophe Bailly claims that living is porous, intimating its capacity to be an antidote against enclosure, seizure, capture, enslavement. It is not a certain kind of living, but the fact of living itself, the fact, that is, of the breath, of the performative

15 Bailly, pp. 4–5.
double-gesture of respiration undergirding the facts of life – from Mrs. Garret’s, Tootie Ramsey’s and Blair Warner’s to whomever reads this present writing. Whooping is the intellectual practice of aestheticizing the bridge between the fact of breath and the lived experience of breathing. Fred Moten in “The Case of Blackness” explicated the concern about the space between “fact” and “lived experience” and for him, the cut between fact and lived experience is the occasion to consider the case of blackness. Similar to Moten, I am interested in the generativity of the case of breathing, which is also and likewise to assert, the performance of the double-gesture of respiration, for intellectual practice. This bridge, whooping, is necessary because there are all sorts of studies about blackness that are grounded in the purportedly pathological behaviors, conditions and constraints of the curious black figures, from antebellum worries over Drapetomania to post-Reconstruction concerns about the problematic patricidal tendencies of Negro families. The “fact” of breathing, so some theories could attempt to claim, would not be evidence of life, social or otherwise. The fact of breathing in figurations of blackness-as-death would submit this double-gesture to the merely biological, and those relegated to the zone of breathing’s “fact” would be said to have no lived experience because we are likewise, and as an a priori principle, said to lack the capacity for experience. But the case of breathing, the double-gesture of respiration as black pneuma rises to, while it emerges

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from, its specific occasion. Breathing is a resource from which to perform the resistance that is prior to power and whooping is but one audible example of such performance. And the occasion – whether with Harriet Jacobs’s insurrectional inhabitation or being violently forced to abide in the hold of The Lord – the case of breathing is an ongoing openness to life that is always and exorbitantly social: from W.E.B. Du Bois’s pre-death, posthumously read note, “As you live, believe in life!”;\(^\text{17}\) to Sethe’s pondering the handholding and play of shadows, “A life. Could be.”;\(^\text{18}\) to, finally, Gilles Deleuze’s inhabitation of the break of immediate liminality, “pure immanence,” “A LIFE … [that] is everywhere;”\(^\text{19}\) and even so, ever so abundantly. The zone of the purportedly merely breathing, those whom are “living death,”\(^\text{20}\) must be rethought and this mode of thought must be an other-than-theological, other-than-philosophical project. The intellectual practice of the atheology-aphilosophy of black pneumonia, the breathing exercises of four women above, the birthing of refusal, is my concern.

Whooping, as an intentioned aesthetic of breath, elucidates concerns about gender and performativity. It is not haphazard nor random that I selected women as the “sound” of BlackPentecostal breathing exercises. Homiletic writing about preaching and

style tend to focus on theology and, when writers do consider “style,” male-identified preachers become the anchoring point of aesthetic analysis.\textsuperscript{21} However, Jerma Jackson’s writing offers a fresh perspective regarding gender and the sound of Black Pentecostalism:

> Barred from the pulpit, women used musical forms that became the rudiments of gospel to testify to their religious convictions, sustain fellowship, and pursue missionary work. In the process they helped shape the contours of gospel’s solo tradition. Their influence was not confined to the church. The proscriptions against female preaching that initially inspired women to pursue gospel’s also gave them an incentive to push the music beyond church doors, as they ventured first onto city streets and then into the commercial arena.\textsuperscript{22}

Gender befalls, like a border, on the flesh, creating through such bordering, the concept of the body itself, and the notion of “gender” and “sex” as originary markers of deficiency for those who do not have “it.” But it is the sound of women – on street corners evangelizing; in churches testifying – that set the sonic environment from which all Black Pentecostal sound participated and from which sound was drawn. It is urgent,

\footnotesize


then, to consider the ways the sounds of whooping, as signs of life, are a critique of violence and violation that produce the terms of gendered order, of sexuality and difference as deficiency.

1.2 Breathing and the Boundary

Why did Clark-Cole, Stokes, Frazier Parker and Locke preach like that, why did they intention breath in such a way as to be gratingly audible in the ears of the congregation? What does the like that, the form in performance, elucidate about the case of breathing? They could have easily preached without the flourishes and embellishments, without pushing the lungs to capacity. The case of breathing invites consideration of choice and will that is not circumscribed through gratuitous violence and violation, but choice and will that emerges within the context of its utterance, choice and will that is produced by antiphonal collectivity. Through meter-meeting-message in the celebratory enunciations of whooping, the speaking of a phrase with a momentary eclipse of speech with a pause foregrounds the intensity of the pause, felt instantaneously, as absolute potentiality, absolute capacity, in the split second that builds, that constructs, that forms what architects call a parti, through sonic accrual.

A parti, according to Julio Bermudez, is “the most basic organizational principle that expresses [the] architectural design. It is the scheme, main concept, or idea that
explains better than anything else the character and appearance of your design.”\textsuperscript{23} Moreover, a \textit{parti} “provides a horizontal thrust that connects program, site, experience, form, and tectonics together in such a way that, if very well done, it also points to a vertical dimension.”\textsuperscript{24} I want to pause to specifically consider how the \textit{parti} offers explanation for “character and appearance” as well as how it is the anoriginal locus for “horizontal thrust” and “vertical dimension[ality]” of design. Character, appearance, horizontal thrust and vertical dimension are, I argue, otherwise examples of \textit{black pneuma}, whooping, that materialize before any “end” – before any presumed final destination or point of nadir – and these four categories are, when together, nothing but originally celebratory.

\textsuperscript{24} Bermudez, p. 2.
Figure 1 Author's Personal Collection (2002)
As a very young child when I thought was a budding artist, the method I was taught for drawing was to create a border first then “color within the lines” so ascribed. The border, the line, would precede and be the guiding principle for coloring, for shape making, for art. Whatever would emerge from the artistic practice – a shape, a head, a three-dimensional box – would not be from the sociality of color internally differentiating the object through gradation, but through being contained, as N. would
say, “previous to situation.” However, much later in life, I had the occasion to take two architecture courses while an undergraduate student at University of Pennsylvania. In those courses, we were taught the skills for coloring and shading, for drawing straight lines, making shapes and coloring in within borders. In my initial drawing exercises in architecture, I brought with me the knowledge of my grade school teachers; I would first draw the bold outline – darkly – then color the shape after. The two images above (Figures 1 and 2) – parti drawings for what would eventually be a built design – are evidence of this method. In the parti above, one is immediately struck by the ways the borders are very thick and defined. The thin rectangles underneath the assemblages in both parti are most pronounced.

However, after going through a process of unlearning wherein the architecture professor encouraged students to think otherwise than preceding boundaries and constraints, we were told that designs did not necessitate the creation of initiatory, originary borders. Rather, shading itself could create the contours of the “space,” not a border that encloses as an a priori principle. In the following two images (Figures 3 and 4), notice how though there are blocks of color, none of them are “defined” – set, formed – by a border but each block is shaded to its limit.

25 Mackey, From a Broken Bottle Traces of Perfume Still Emanate.
Figure 3 Author's Personal Collection (2002)
I think of the difference between the images as the distinction between the wholly bound subject and the one that is discontinuous; they are, in effect, theological-philosophical propositions. Susan Buck-Morss has the following to say about discontinuity, which gets us back to the concern over flesh:

The nervous system is not contained within the body’s limits. The circuit from sense-perception to motor response begins and ends in the world. The brain is thus not an isolable anatomical body, but part of a system that passes through the person and her or his (culturally specific, historically transient) environment. As the source of stimuli and the arena
for motor response, the external world must be included to complete the sensory circuit.\textsuperscript{26}

Brian Massumi would simply call this open system of nervousness “the charge of indeterminacy carried by a body [that] is inseparable from it” because that which is called the body “is a passage or in process...”\textsuperscript{27} The first two parti drawings, I opine, are figurations of classical continental western philosophy of the subject that is wholly bound, enclosed, encased. The final two parti drawings, however, offers a critical performative analytics of such boundedness, such desire for enclosure. The blocks of color in the final two parti are not easily isolable from the environment in which they are a part, the capacity for making a distinction between background and shape withers away because of the unspecified, the refusal for, bordering.

As Buck-Morss states, the external world is not excluded but included in making a system; the external world likewise passes through the seemingly internal one. There is an intense and intimate relay between external and internal, they are – even at the level of artistic objects in parti drawings – figurations of the double-gesture of respiration. In the final two parti, the shapes appear, as a city, standing forth and out, presencing: “The city appears to you as a whole where no desire is lost and of which you are a part, and since it enjoys everything you do not enjoy, you can do nothing but inhabit this desire

What is important is not the “whole” of desire wherein one walking through the city should be fully content with its contents. What is important is that the city, as a collection of reciprocal relations, stands and furnishes forth.

This collection of discontinuous breaths, figurations of whooping, may at first appear unfamiliar but there is, yet, an occasion for celebration: “[T]he more one was lost in unfamiliar quarters of distant cities, the more one understood the other cities he had crossed to arrive there; and he retraced the stages of his journeys, and he came to know the port from which he had set sail, and the familiar places of his youth, and the surroundings of home, and a little square of Venice where he gamboled as a child.”

That which is at present unfamiliar is the accrual and distance of that which has been traversed; the ago, then, acts as alluvial, sedimentary. The unfamiliar is compression, as in held breath, forced exhalation. The unfamiliar heightens the awareness of that which is now receded from view, sharpens memory. Out of the unfamiliar, then, is an outreaching of knowledge of the withdrawn.

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Calvino, p. 27.
it happened again and i don’t know what to make of it. not staring but
the sorta moment you feel someone looking at you from across the room and you
look up from the convo you’d been engaging and, sure enough, there he is,
looking. you make brief eye contact, he takes a deep breath and looks away,
almost as if his looking – the very fact of his doing it – stunned him, so he also
was not immediately able to look away. you’re the trainwreck. the fire to which
the moth is attracted. beautifully so [or, at least, you convince yourself]. but also:
he’s cute. very cute. so the hesitant averted gaze, the stalled look away, the wary
worry which announces, before any “hello,” the emergence of problems.

it was at calvin’s art opening a few weeks ago, his first gallery showing
in fact, so things were abuzz and he was rather excited. wine was flowing and
there was genuine giddiness in the air. i was pleased to support and met all sorts
of folks: people i’d never seen or heard of before – who knew so many cool, artsy
folks lived here? – and finally met folks that i’ve known online but never in
person from twitter and facebook, for example. anyway. the artwork was
nothing short of amazing. called it his “music and movement” installation where
he’d taken all sorts of media and used oil paint to create these abstract swirls and
strokes, all based on the music to which he’d be listening at the time. the painting
was to approach a kind of sonic referentiality, was a type of metaphorization of
the sounds, of the music. i was moved by the colors he used, mostly darker gradations :: deep purples and blues, dense, full-bodied reds, and lots of black.

he used a variety of surfaces, “to bespeak the everydayness of our encounters with music. this is a piece about the sublime’s relation to the ordinary.” sure, i laughed a bit at his description, but more because i never pay attention to what artists say about their own shit…it’s always on the edge of self-congratulatory “look at this cool shit i did and now please pay me” message implicit in their self-referential descriptions, and so they always misread their own motives. but aside from his description, it truly was amazing. couldn’t deny it.

the problem, of course, was that there was this hella cute dude there with his girlfriendofthreeyears [he said it, rushed just like that, while she was in the restroom]. calvin wanted me to meet this guy because he’s a likewise nerd and sometimey musician, so he thought we’d hit off. dude had been glancing at me even before the official introduction, when i stood across the gallery space talking with some other folks. and then we were introduced and of course i was surprised to learn that the young woman was not just a friend but was, in fact, the girlfriendofthreeyears. but anyway, nice guy and his girlfriendofthreeyears were, in fact, cool as hell. the three of us talked for at least an hour, conversation moving through all sorts of terrain, from theology to the presidency. needless to say, i got along with them very well, so calvin wasn’t wrong at all. the problem?
well…you know how i tend to get a bit on the edge of loud, and insistent, when
i’ve had one too many glasses of wine. not the sorta belligerent volume but
speaking my mind, sans filter, so also full of conviction. i was on some, “i voted
green party! not even gonna vote the next time around if things keep going the
way they’re going!” shit. and though true, it’s always weird to sorta feel that
settled with folks you’d just met. anyway, girlfriendofthreeyears went to the
restroom but saw an old colleague and stopped to talk to her for a while. so dude
and i kept talking and it was nice. it goes without saying that i noticed how
handsome he was and how, had there been no girlfriendofthreeyears present, i
would’ve overtly flirted. but i’m not desperate. nor that needy. nor grimy. but
things did cross my mind. his smile, his eyes, his lips? just.yes.to.it.all.

so after this hour or so convo and girlfriendofthreeyears returned, i bid
them adieu so that i could meet/talk to other friends i hadn’t seen in a while. we
facebooked each other and i scurried away. whispered to calvin “oh my
god…he’s cute! ugh!” and he laughed. i settled on a new group of old friends
with whom i could catch up. but while drinking this newest glass of wine and
having convo where i laughed a lot and made several points – with my hands, so
you know i was doing my good talking – i looked up and saw him. not quite
staring but definitely looking with an almost insatiable desire. i felt it. felt it in
me. knew someone was looking, just had to find the directional field from which
the energy emanated. and each time [it happened about four times throughout the duration of the evening after we’d met to say nothing of the before] when he realized i realized he was looking at me, he’d sorta almost – faintly – smile but not really, because there was also a slight hint of embarrassment on his face, in his heart i presume as well, that he was looking at me like that in the first place. made me question what it was that prompted his search that landed in my face, in my eyes, each time, causing him to further still: search.

[are metaphors a displacement of thought? do they get us closer to the heart of the matter? or are they some other kind of complication?]

i think he saw something familiar in me that he’d not ever named. it almost sounds egotistical to think it the way i’m thinking it but that’s not what i mean. i wish things were much less complex but this has happened with so many dudes that it’s pretty common now. declarations of heterosexuality are cool but then they long for something otherwise and see me, and act as if whatever that otherwise might be is somewhere hidden in me, is something familiar. and i had this weird experience when i was a kid that was all about familiarity. we took a bus trip when i was in the fifth grade to Baltimore or some other city and the trip included everyone in the fifth grade so all the teachers, most of whom i did not know, went along. there was one teacher on the bus who, upon catching my eye in the rear view mirror the first time [she was staring
at me], continued to look at me. I would turn around to someone behind me and begin to talk and she'd walk up to me, grab my arm, tell me “didn't I tell you to turn around?! stop talking! and look forward!,” forcing me to turn around on the bus so she could continue to look at me in the rear view mirror. She would not let me talk to others, made me to face forward. She stared into my reflection in the mirror. Needless to say, I was not a little bit uncomfortable.

Upon my return home, I told my parents about the entire affair and when I told them who it was, they said “the next time you see her, ask her if she knows elder so-n-so.” So the next time I saw her asked her if she knew my father and when I did, she exclaimed loudly, hugging me hard, “I knew it!” Turns out, she saw my parents – mother’s mouth and lips, daddy’s voice [even though I was too young, fifth grade...but I suppose I had pre-pubescent hints of the voice to come, it’s futurity already with me and if I learned anything from my father, it was the insistence in voice, the conviction] – in me, on me. The point is that familiarity shows up in all sorts of weird ways. Something about – literally external – to me bespoke something in me. But that something was noise at best, incoherence, or at least, incomprehensible, ineffable audiovisuality [sorta like how cell phones used to produce all of this static whenever you’d go out of range]. Nevertheless, it was a certain sort of knowledge, a knowledge of having known, a knowledge of knowing, a knowledge of desire to know. That
knowledge – the who that i was – was there, while withdrawing with each
pondered “but how do i know him? but where do i know him from?” furrow of
her brow. i felt abused by her force on the bus, felt ashamed and felt that she was
misunderstanding my simple wish to talk to other kids. and i’m not the least bit
disabused of the erotics that sorta underpinned the staring into a mirror to figure
me out. she was trying to remember something without knowing what it was.
and so dude with the girlfriendofthreeyears, i think, also was cathected by some
sorta eroto-libidinal excess, provoked by the insistence of my voice, an insistence
that produced in him some desire to know more. to “get” what was so familiar.
maybe he thought he could, if he stared enough, figure out what it was for which
he was longing. of course, a few days after the event, it all became a bit clearer
with a message on facebook that would feign the flirting that is certainly implied,
so vague that a claim of ignorance and misunderstanding – another sort of noise
and static – could be made, though the apparentness of the interactions is no less
there.30

The unfamiliar is often a cause for anxiety and anxiety – as emotional response – has a
physiological affect on the process of breathing. It happened when “A” looked across a
room and noticed someone staring at him, and upon such a stare being noticed, the one

30 Ashon Crawley, Moth’s Powder (Unpublished manuscript, 2012).
staring breathed deeply with a slight sigh. But sighing is not the only cause for some such search for familiarity, for stable ground and coherence. Such that when a Black woman who stands outside Columbia University in New York City “yell[s] at Whites, Latinos, and East and South Asian students, staff, and faculty as they entered the university” while “accus[ing] them of having stolen her sofa and selling her into slavery” but in contradistinction, “She always winked at the Blacks,” the fact of a declaration that “we didn’t wink back” because “Some of us thought her outbursts bigoted…[but] others did not wink back because we were too fearful of the possibility that her isolation would become our isolation,” it is not too farfetched to imagine this refused sociality as anxiety-inducing and, as such, obstructive of breathing. She winked because of familiarity but the “we” that refused saw nothing other than unfamiliar territory.

To return to the final two parti images refracted through the fictional story “A” recounts and through the narrative of averted gaze and heightened breathing Frank Wilderson details, the images can now be considered instantiations of aestheticized flesh – what Hortense Spillers describes as such: “But I would make a distinction in this case between ‘body’ and ‘flesh’ and impose that distinction as the central one between captive and liberated subject-positions. In that sense, before the ‘body’ there is ‘flesh,’

that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the
brush of discourse or the reflexes of iconography”32 – and the borderless parti drawings
are illustrative of whooping, of the double-gesture of respiratory function. Flesh is that
which stands forth, unbounded, discontinuous, open, vulnerable. Flesh is anorignal.
Flesh designates a borderless, discontinuous object, previous to its being sexed, previous
to its being raced. As Spillers would have it, the “body” that comes after flesh is
produced through rhetoric, through discourse, through – what Judith Butler would say
– discursive practice. For Butler, the “body” is constituted by the discursivity of “sex”:
“Sex is…not simply what one has, or a static description of what one is: it will be one of
the norms by which the ‘one’ becomes viable at all, that which qualifies a body for life
within the domain of cultural intelligibility.”33 The “body” – through sex, through
rhetoric – is a categorical coherence, it is a theological-philosophical concept of
enclosure, a grammar and logic producing something like bodily integrity. But
breathing flesh makes apparent the importance of openness, of resistance to grammar.

Zero degree flesh, the shapes in the image, the double-gesture of respiration,
whooping, black pneuma is thrust upon its environment, it literally enfleshes itself and
stands forth. Let “thrust” designate the force of that which has been, to follow Martin

32 Hortense J. Spillers, ‘Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book’, in Black, white, and in
Heidegger “thrown” (Geworfenheit). According to Heidegger’s thrownness, Being – Dasein – is “thrown into its There (Da)” and thrownness is likewise “a constant accompaniment of Dasein’s existence.”\textsuperscript{34} Dasein’s thrownness also has the capacity for infinite possibility: “Dasein confronts every concrete situation in which it finds itself (into which it has been thrown) as a range of possibilities for acting (onto which it may project itself). Insofar as some of these possibilities are actualized, others will not be, meaning that there is a sense in which not-Being (a set of unactualized possibilities of Being) is a structural component of Dasein’s Being.”\textsuperscript{35} Bermudez intimates that the force of the horizon, its thrust, also has within it the capacity for verticality; thrust is the locus, that which holds the gathering of exorbitant potentiality. This is because, as Brian Massumi asserts, “A path is not composed of positions. It is nondecomposable: a dynamic unity.”\textsuperscript{36} He uses the example of an arrow thrust from its bow with force and it is only after it hits its target, after it stops, that “the arrow is in position. It is only after the arrow hits its mark that its real trajectory may be plotted.”\textsuperscript{37} But the horizon is never

\textsuperscript{36} Massumi, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{37} Massumi, p. 6.
exhausted, it always recedes even as an arrow approaches it as target. Thus, thronness is constant and thrust eternal.

The Burkean pentad of fiction – agent, agency, act, scene, and purpose as the principal elements involved in the human drama – is compressed in the singer into a living body, insinuating itself through a material scene, and in that dance of motives, in which the motor behavior, the changes of countenance, the vocal dynamics, the calibration of gesture and nuance in relationship to a formal object – the song itself – is a precise demonstration of the subject turning in fully conscious knowledge of her own resources toward her object. In this instance of being-for-self, it does not matter that the vocalist is ‘entertaining’ under American skies because the woman, in her particular and vivid thereness, is an unalterable and discrete moment of self-knowledge.38

Clark-Cole, Frazier Parker, Stokes and Locke, in this particular instance – because the compression of song into the singer’s body is animated by breath, by the capacity to aestheticize and stylistically rehearse the double-gesture of respiration – are engaged in intellectual practice by their “vivid thereness,” targeting and presencing, enfleshing through performance. They breathe stylistically toward a horizon that recedes as they approach, but their movement, their double-gestures of inhalation and exhalation push respective congregations to ecstasy. See, because they not only preached, but preached like that, they performed a form of intentional sustained breathing as an intellectual practice over and against the range of other possibilities for preaching the same text with

the same congregation – inclusive of not preaching at all. Out of infinite possibility, even in constraint, never exhausted. Creativity rises to the occasion of constraint.

Calvino’s invisible cities are epistemic. If one does not experience the depth, even when confronted with it as a parti that stands forth, presences, eventuates, one has refused the thrusting gesture, the wink, the extensional movement that reaches out for sociality. This sociality occurs through what Michel de Certeau describes as “walking through the city” where the built environment participates in the acoustemological possibility. Acoustemology also means that the presencing, the standing forth of the city, is not reducible to ocularcentrism, but happens for varied enfleshed abilities.

Though his eyes were removed at the age of three, Ben Underwood (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bOip27ee54E), for example, was able to utilize sound to “see” depth of the environment, that which stood forth. Utilizing an otherwise-than-whooping aesthetics of breathing, creating a clicking sound by sucking in air and forcing it towards the surfaces in the mouth, the sound – once released – would bounce off the surrounding environment through echo. “An echo, for example, cannot occur without a distance between surfaces for the sounds to bounce from. But the resonation is not on the walls. It is in the emptiness between them. It fills the emptiness with its

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39 Michel De Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life (Berkeley : University of California Press, c1984.).
complex patterning.” Underwood’s ability to experience different worlds was predicated upon a sociality of sound, but importantly, through the discontinuity of what is called “the body” and what is called “the world.” It was the space between, the in of the break, in the pause and eclipse, that experience manifested. This is true for seeing, hearing, tasting, touching and smelling. Nearness and distance, proximity and approach, the capacity for encounter. This brokenness is an occasion for celebration: “Broken speech, seeking to break new ground, brings a further sense of ‘broken ground’ into play – the prospect and promise of a new beginning” and Nimi Wariboko describes the “capacity to begin” as the “pentecostal principle.” So that it is in the break, pause and broken discontinuity that beginnings happen and this broken break, this pause, is anoriginal. So we can ask, quite literally, what is the sound of the city? What depth of perception is possible through listening, through the air that moves both in the city and in flesh? What is the sound of the parti drawings?

The parti drawings are figurations of varied experience of flesh, of what it means to be thrown into the world and stand forth, and in such standing – creating one such surface among many other surfaces – are the conditions of emergence for experiencing worlds. Prior to sexing, racing, prior to being theologically-philosophically conceived as

\[40\] Massumi, p. 14. 
a body: flesh. “The field of emergence is not presocial. It is open-endedly social. It is social in a manner ‘prior to’ the separating out of individuals and the identifiable groupings that they end up boxing themselves into (positions in gridlock). A sociality without determinate borders: ‘pure’ sociality.”42 As sociality, what is necessitated is an aninstitutional, anoriginal practice, what Michel Foucault calls “friendship” that is nothing other than “a way of life.”43 Life, breathing flesh as irreducibly social, must “invent, from A to Z, a relationship that is still formless, which is friendship: that is to say, the sum of, everything through which [one can have] pleasure.”44 I am attempting to call attention to the various enactments of black pneuma, of the double-gesture of respiration, of the aestheticization of breathing that, rather than the institutionalization of function and form – bordering – that exists in the service of coherence with the state, is the refusal of figurations.

In Calvino’s theorizing, unfamiliar territory is generative for thinking the past with nuance and previous crossings; the unfamiliar “now” produces knowledge of the “ago.” The unfamiliar is that which posits, that which extends, knowledge of the past. But the unfamiliar, at its realization of its unstable ground and incoherence, is also the point of departure: the crossings of the path were not mere gestural, but were

42 Massumi, p. 9.
44 Foucault, Hurley and Rabinow, p. 136.
choreographic epistemologies. When one *crossed* by way of paths created in order to arrive at some unfamiliar territory, though one may not have been conscious of the knowledge project of crossings, the very movement toward some unfamiliar was also the movement of the production of knowledge. But what can be said about the situational unfamiliarity of a “now” yelling Black woman, who intentionally winked, jokingly, only at Black flesh? It is apposite to ask about the knowledge of the “we” that refused to wink back, the knowledge of such presentist unfamiliarity, the directional field of emanation and historicity of the past upon which reflectional posture is pointed. Or, more simply, what can be said about the held breath that sets loose a particular critique in Black Studies, in Africana Studies? What can be made of such a confession? This concern will be elaborated fully in Chapter 4.

### 1.3 Racial Emphysemas

Lynching violence, and its varied antithetical campaigns, were all about the breath. Both Billie Holiday ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h4ZyuULy9zs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h4ZyuULy9zs) until @0:10) and Nina Simone ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7sBojD-cfs&t=6m0s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7sBojD-cfs&t=6m0s) until @6:10) sang about the terror of southern trees bearing strange fruit, a song that neither of them wrote. The difference with which they sang, the way in which they participated in the performance and dispersal of affect, was through the breath, through the

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45 ‘Strange Fruit’, *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*, 2012

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aestheticizing of the reciprocal double-gesture of respiratory process. The fugitive inhalation of oxygen plus more and fugitive exhalation of carbon dioxide plus more was the method through which the terrible and terrifying was atheologically and aphilosophically critiqued through the enunciative force of breathing’s performance. And the nuance, the “slightest breath” each used, gathered up and dispersed the air that was eclipsed in victims’ bodies. They participated in a sonic “public zone,” a zone that is fugitive and insurrectionary, where borrowing from a common store is a way of life, not as theft, but as a means to producing a social world where sound and song are both gift and object of exchange. The performance of song and sound from the public zone is a social experiment such that singing and sounding out are tentative, improvisational processes, open-against-enclosure. The social experiment of utilizing the same song and sound produces inflection, accent, and most importantly, critical distance from other performances. The object – whether song, sound, image or text – thus has within the capacity to be a multiplicity, the performative force of diaspora. Édouard Glissant described diaspora as “the passage from unity to multiplicity.” What the passage, as performance, enfleshes, what it lets stand forth and burst free, is the fact that the multiple is a fact of the unit, that within any object are multitudes. This multiplicity is

integral to ascertaining the force of an otherwise theoria-aesthesia, a mode to redeploy that which is at once denigrated and improper, a means to critical distancing as an intellectual performative practice, a way of life.

The performative force of diaspora – the critical distance between Holiday and Simone – is heard, is rehearsed, as the matter of breathing, as a concern for breath. Perhaps authenticity is not a grasping for a foundational claim of origin/ality, but is a reaching – with depth and breadth – inward and outward, an extensional mobility, a centrifugal movement and dilation that seeks escape and refuge, creating sonic spaces in which one can inhabit that are, at the same time, the public zones in and through which contact occurs. But public zones of contact are not only where pleasurable intimacies happen. The behaviors of lynching – “an offense has been committed to which the group responds in community spirit with burning, mutilation, gathering trophies, and initiating children,” what Trudier Harris calls “ritual violence” – likewise took place in public zones of contact. From trains and automobiles into and out of city centers, to the photographing, selling, buying and mailing images of killed, swollen, burned, mottled flesh – not always black, not always male – lynching practices were the instantiation of what Joseph Roach calls the “It-Effect”: not only were blacks made bodies through discourse and material violence, but those bodies were radically, unalterably – after

Spillers, “vividly there” – available to the public, what Roach calls “public intimacy” that is “the illusion of availability.”

Unlike Roach’s description Uma Thurman on the cover of a magazine, however, the It-Effect of blackness is not the ruse of public availability but a violent performance that attempts to make It available, that attempts to furnish forth It itself. In the case of racial mob and lynching violence, making It available meant closing off objects, silencing and shutting them up, it was to force enclosure, to create a boundary, to produce, that is, a liberal subject. Chapters including “accessories,” “clothes,” “hair,” “skin,” “flesh” and “bone” – and each of these categories were integral to mob violence against conceptions of blackness with the theft shoes and rings, with the stripping bare by removal of sartorial stylings, with the cutting of hair to save as mementoes, with the severing and cutting of skin, with the lacerating of flesh and breaking bones – Roach’s primarily eighteenth-century history of It does not deal directly with the question about racialization of the modern world that produces the It-Effect. Lynching, I opine, is the practice of doing violence to things, of the rhetorical and material production of black bodies after the fact of flesh. Holiday and Simone, because theirs are performances that illustrate the efficacy of intentioned voice, of intentional patterned breathing exercises, perform diaspora, perform multiplicity even through rehearsing scenes of violence and

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violation. Though participating in the commons of aural worlds, airy zones, Holiday and Simone make this one song’s lyrics their own by giving it away, through the exhalation of the always attendant plus more of carbon dioxide. That is, Holiday and Simone breathe in such a way as to melodically break down the theological-philosophical conception of unitary totality; theirs are performances of multiplicity. Just breathe because, simply, the capacity for undoing any scene of subjection exists within the scene itself. Singing, praying, preaching – through breathing exercise – are intellectual practices. Turning to Ida B. Wells-Barnett’s and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People’s (NAACP) antilynching campaigns shows them as likewise breathing exercises, and as such, Wells-Barnett’s and the NAACP’s campaigns participated in – through anticipating, extending and secularizing – the BlackPentecostal practice of whooping.

In 1892, the then 30 year old Ida B. Wells(-Barnett) published the antilynching pamphlet, “Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases,” which proclaimed to “give the world a true, unvarnished account of the causes of lynch law in the South.”50 The pamphlet was a “contribution to truth [and] an array of facts,” with Wells hoping that it would allow the “demand [for] justice [to] be done though the heavens fall.”51 In this

51 Wells-Barnett and Wells-Barnett, p. 25.
work, Wells contended that rape was a rhetorical device used to veil the fact of antiblackness as the root of lynching violence. When reporting how J.C. Duke questioned the erotic and racial atmosphere in post-emancipation Alabama, Wells concluded with the following: “Mr. Duke, like the Free Speech proprietors, was forced to leave the city for reflecting on the ‘honah’ of white women and his paper suppressed…” From *h-o-n-o-r* to *h-o-n-a-h*, the difference between *or* and *ah* as not a little bit about the interrogation of southern sentiment, the linguistic, accented, sounded construction of whiteness, through linguistic rupture. Wells engaged a literary whooping of sorts, similar to the preaching moments of Juandolyn Stokes above. Wells not only wrote, but she wrote *like that*. I contend the whole of her antilynching oeuvre was quickened by a similar figural gesture, sonic replacement, reintentioning violence and violation of white mobs and journalism against itself. The intellectual practice of breathing as the critique lynching – which is nothing other than the eclipsing of the possibility for breathing – is what she wrote into her campaign. Her campaign was animated by the desire for others to breathe, to participate in the airy qualities of life.

In “Southern Horrors,” Wells keyed in on the fact that economics was an integral aspect of the violence black folks suffered: “[T]he leading citizens met in the Cotton Exchange Building the same evening, and threats of lynching were freely indulged, not

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52 Wells-Barnett and Wells-Barnett, p. 31.
by the lawless element which the deviltry of the South is usually saddled – but by the leading business men, in their leading business centre.”

Sociologist Susan Olzak corroborates Wells’s connecting of violence to economy and politics: “economic slumps, particularly those that affected the least-skilled workers, increased rates of both lynching and urban racial violence, as did rising competition from immigration.”

A series of concerns emerge: if the narrativity of lynching was rooted in the protection of white female “honah,” what is implicit is white male desire to enforce patriarchal hegemonic control over the public and domestic spheres, which included economic control of white women. Virtue and honor, thus, had political-economic resonances and consequences.

Anxiety emerged from the threat over control, their not being able to figuratively perform the function, the task, of white masculinity.

Both lynching and urban violence rose during periods of economic turmoil. Following the end of Reconstruction in 1877, the supply of low-wage labor…increased competition for jobs and other scarce resources in the United States. Rising competition seriously threatened job monopolies and other advantages enjoyed by native whites in both regions.

Professional and entrepreneurial blacks were frequent targets of mob violence in the South, especially when their commercial activities weakened the grip of white business owners who systematically exploited blacks. For Wells, the tragedy and personal loss were extremely difficult to accept, especially when the local white press applauded the

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55 Olzak, p. 396.
violence. That she had long borne witness to white journalists’ usual justifications for lynching as the only way to handle black criminals and “Negro rapists” left her no option but to speak truth to power.56

Economic forces caused collective anxiety – a racial emphysema – and mass racial violence and lynching appears to respond to the very physiological response to black breath as a conceptual fugitive breathing, stolen breath. Blackness, let’s say, took their breath away and lynching – with its homoerotic sensuality57 – sought to restore patterned, “normal” breathing. When one has emphysema, “the tissues necessary to support the physical shape and function of the lungs are destroyed.”58 Such that the southern horrors Wells rehearsed were fundamentally a concern about breathing. Whiteness, while being “self-fashioned” at the scenes of subjecting blackness, cohered around this collective political-economic anxiety. Of anxiety and breathing, Yuri Masaoka et al. state that “[E]motional experiences are not only productions within the brain accompanied by physiological activity such as sweating, increasing heart rate and respiration; these activities result from an unconscious process.”59 What we discover with racialist mob and lynching violence is an American Studies, a Masculinity Studies, a Gender and Sexuality Studies, grounded in the physiological responses of the body to

59 Masaoka, Kanamaru and Homma, p. 55.
politics and economy. What we discover in racialist mob and lynching violence, in other words, is the aspiration for picket fences and dreams of stability, a movement toward purity against the impurities of black breath, of immigrant community. White anxiety was produced by trying to, metaphorically, breathe pure oxygen, to breathe in, that is, air without it fundamentally being an admixture, trying to breathe in (both resonances are necessary here: in as ingestion; in as within) an undiluted, unadulterated, unobstructed “America.” The racial emphysema was, it seems, a response to the ongoing question posed about color lines, about feeling like a problem, about “a complex idea formed inside the (historical-transcendental) movement of the constitution of the African American as material idea.”

But lynching was more than a metaphor, lynching, that is, was not simply a response to after-the-fact material competition. “Potential competition [could] spark such antagonism before much direct (head-to-head) competition has occurred. […] Evidence suggests that racial violence in response to potential competition was sometimes not directed against its competitors.” Shortness of breath from thinking the very capacity of Others breathing the same air, it seems, was a vivifying force of racial mob and lynching violence. Jonathan Markovitz describes how if one traces the history of lynching, one will likewise trace the change from the material to the metaphorical.

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61 Olzak, p. 401.
However, even if presently “it is now possible to see lynching primarily as a figure of speech,” speech acts share in the fact of whiteness and anxiety, whiteness and breathing: attempts to silence, induce despair and cause pain have – because of the heightened emotive responses so desired – a physiological aspect, the quivering of flesh and forced eclipsing of breath.62 “Charges of improper sexual conduct were often tacked on as a secondary justification for lynching when the primary reason for the lynching was economic or political.”63 Breathing, to be blunt, shares a relation with any political economy. Lynching, as a peculiar performance of moral uplift for whiteness and moral degradation against blackness, was grounded in concerns over economy.

In A Red Record, Wells stated: “The purpose of the pages which follow shall be to give the record which has been made, not by colored men, but that which is the result of compilations made by white men, of reports sent over the civilized world by white men in the South. Out of their own mouths shall the murderers be condemned.”64 Perhaps A Red Record is something like “unceasing variations around a theme,” using the violent tendencies for the destruction of violence itself.65 Because Black journalists could not be trusted, so the narrative goes, Wells used the writing of violence and violation – quoting

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63 Markovitz, p. 10.
64 Wells-Barnett and Wells-Barnett, p. 64.
directly from the journals and even including images from those “trusted” news sources – in order to critically address and analyze the racist and sexist posturing.

“Out of their own mouths,” Wells recognized the expiration, the exhalation, of their performances. But, as with air, there was an admixture even at the level of racist “journalistic” rhetoric, there was a plus more. Wells utilized that which was publicly available, that which was deposited in a public zone, the same air as a means to dissolve the narrativity of white female innocence, white patriarchal protection and black male bestiality. Wells inhaled from the resource that was available, that was public, that was common, breathed it in in order to expire it like that, with difference. The undoing of the dominant narrative of lynching practice was internal to its own being reported. Thus text and images are redeployed. Those texts and images that were supposed to incite celebration of the achievement of whiteness over purported black incivility, because of the breath stolen and held in each image, in each story recounted, in each quantifiable but unidentified deceased victim, Wells and the NAACP were able to call attention to an otherwise aesthetic, an otherwise theory, for black social life.

When you yell/scream, you take a deep breath and basically hold it to get the sound out...so you are not breathing. This leads to decreased oxygenation to the fetus. Oxygenation to the fetus is always important, but becomes critically important during the labor process. The contractions associated with birth have the potential to lead to decrease oxygenation to the fetus, leading to a certain type of heart deceleration,
leading to a possible urgent/emergent situation. So yelling in labor can be like a double whammy.66

An OB/GYN colleague of mine sent me a personal communication concerning the nature of screaming when giving birth. It was on the occasion of the birth of my godson at a natural birthing center in Philadelphia that whet my appetite for thinking the relationship of sound, and breath, to screaming. The midwife told my friend that screaming while in labor merely restricts airflow into and out of the body, whereas moaning would allow her a bit of physiological reprieve, how moaning would, indeed, let her labor with less discomfort. Though the pain is sharp, screaming blocks airflow, it is literally sound without the exhalation of air, sound without the operation of breathing.

Wells’s antilynching writing in both “Southern Horrors” and the later improvisational and extensional “A Red Record” participated in a likewise double-gesture of respiratory process. The writing itself was lament, seeking clarification and justice. She shared in the fleshing out and of black social life by attending to the brutality of lynching, by enunciating the varied ways breath was eclipsed in defense of white gentility and “honah.” The writing itself, in other words, was a scream. But in (both resonances, again: taken in, ingested; and existence within) the writing, what informed the writing, what gave the writing its form is breath, was the air in which all participated, was the desire for life against eclipsed breath. The life force was held and contained within the

66 Personal correspondence
movement to write against violent death itself. Un-exhaled, but given, scream. Inhaled and held, air.

Lynching is defined by its being out on the outside, by its being extrajudicial in nature, so antilynching campaigns breathed – through attending to shared breath as common resource, even against the rhetoric and appeal to the state – outside the law, outside the judicial and juridical to think how the judicial system is predicated upon the possibility for this type of violence and violation, how the judicial system coheres around anxiety over infraction and seeks to account for and amend the capacity, the potentiality, for wrongdoing. Given the fact that lynchers and those who produced mob violence against black people asserted that certain types of crimes placed blacks “outside the pale of humanity,” it becomes necessary and urgent to think about social life that emerges “outside” this judicial system.67 To be extrajudicial is to consider the judicial as the grounding principle, the foundational theological-philosophical claim such that to be “extra” or in excess of the judicial is to still make claims about the rightness of the judicial system itself. But what of other modes of life that do not assent to this judicial system at all, such that breathing is not the apposite response to extrajudicial killing, but is the otherwise?

Orlando Patterson posits that in contradistinction to conceptions of citizenship and family, slavery denied enslaved people kinship through natal alienation: “Alienated from all ‘rights’ or claims of birth, he ceased to belong in his own right to any legitimate social order. […] Not only was the slave denied all claims on, and obligations to, his parents and living blood relations but, by extension, all such claims and obligations on his more remote ancestors and on his descendants.” Patterson continues, “Slaves differed from other human beings in that they were not allowed freely to integrate the experience of their ancestors into their lives, to inform their understanding of social reality with inherited meanings of their natural forebears, or to anchor the living present in any conscious community of memory.”

Similar to the figuration of the coherent and stable rightness of the law in extrajudicial murders of black folks, Patterson’s understanding of violence and alienation are likewise confessional in posture: that blood relations established by law – the law that includes through exclusion, the law that creates the concept of population as a means to state formation, state coherence – are necessarily the only, or the most important, forms of relationality. Not only does Patterson’s “natal alienation” establish itself through aspirational heteronormativity, it mines the very rationalist science discourse about the effectiveness of blood as a means to measure – which is also and likewise to say, border – affective modes of relationality.

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68 Orlando Patterson, p. 5.
The problem, of course, is that the idea of kinship here is grounded in a general, non-specific affectable thing called “the law,” that is, if “kinship is denied entirely by the force of law,” its very denial obtains through the belief, the confessional posture, that kinship is something the law has the ability to give or withhold. Maybe this is why the Saints are important with the use of sister/brother/mother – means to name congregants. Maybe this is why kith bonds – play cousins, play aunties, mom-moms and great uncles – are likewise. Not because legal kinship is denied but because legal kinship is the ongoing, repetitious denial of other modes of relationality. Legal kinship, it could be then said, is a figuration of the extrajudicial.

Cedric Robinson, in Black Marxism: the Making of the Black Radical Tradition, historicizes black violence against the civil society, about how, even during insurrections, enslaved blacks killed so few whites:

Again and again, in the reports, casual memoirs, official accounts, eye-witness observations, and histories of each of the tradition’s episodes, from the sixteenth century to the events recounted in last week’s or last month’s journals, one note has occurred and recurred: the absence of mass violence. Western observers, often candid in their amazement, have repeatedly remarked that in the vast series of encounters between Blacks and their oppressors, only some of which have been recounted above, Blacks have seldom employed the level of violence that they (the Westerners) understood the situation required. When we recall that in the New World of the nineteenth century the approximately 60 whites killed in the Nat Turner insurrection was one of the largest totals for that century; when we recall that in the massive uprisings of slaves in 1831 in Jamaica-where 300,000 slaves lived under the domination of 30,000 whites – only 14 white casualties were reported, when in revolt after revolt we compare the massive and often indiscriminate reprisals of the
civilized master class (the employment of terror) to the scale of violence of the slaves (and at present their descendants), at least one impression is that a very different and shared order of things existed among these brutally violated people. Why did Nat Turner, admittedly a violent man, spare poor whites? Why did Toussaint escort his absent “master’s” family to safety before joining the slave revolution? Why was “no white person killed in a slave rebellion in colonial Virginia”? Why would Edmund Morgan or Gerald Mullin argue that slave brutality was directly related to acculturation, “that the more slaves came to resemble the indigent freemen whom they displaced, the more dangerous they became”?69

And historian Bruce E. Baker completed a case study of a “reversed” lynching in 1887 in South Carolina where a small black crowd lynched a white man because of the rape, and subsequent death, of a black girl.70 What Baker demonstrates is that Black people do not have an ontological aversion to violent behavior; the fact of the lynching of Manse Waldrop illustrates the lengths to which Black men would, at times, attempt to correct infractions against Black community. However, the question of scale cannot be easily dismissed, one that Robinson begs: why was there so little a violent response to such violent conditions? Perhaps we have discovered the ethics of black pneumonia, a withholding of certain forms of violence while letting oneself and others breathe, even in the face of the capacity for one’s own breath to be interrupted and ended. We are back, in other words, to a mode of thinking personhood that is porous and unbounded, that

sees air as belonging to the commons, where interior and exterior are not only difficult to detect but illusory distinctions.

1.4 Broken Flesh

Disintegrating into nothingness, into the background such that foreground is forever at play – a concept constructed at the making of the images themselves – the two depictions of persons in Sit HAIRO’s collection interrogates the conceptual grounds upon which the capacity to be wholly bound, a subject that is fully contained, settles.
Figure 5 Sit HAIRO (2012) Collection - Untitled\(^7\)

\(^7\) http://www.sitnie.com/HAIRO-2012
Perhaps it is important that the “points” of disintegration in the images are the heads of the individuals. It is difficult to know if materiality – like black air – is 

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72 http://www.sitnie.com/HAIIRO-2012
descending with flesh created through seemingly sedimentary processes, or if the materiality – like black air – is bursting forth and leaving, escaping, on the run. Perhaps the directionality of the disintegration is not of great import; it is the head where knowledge is held and from which it is given. It is the head that allows us both an individuation and connects us to all others. Flesh – made of tiny particles coming together for specific occasions called life only to, once breath has expired, break down again – is the thingliness of gathering together in the name of, in the cause for, breathing.

What lynching photographs capture, what they hold, is an instance of paused and held anxiety, desired enclosed purity over and against open break downs. They would so-obscure this possibility but the fact of life – of the refusal of borders that befall creating subjects and objects, creating distinctions that are not tenable – is also the case for breathing.
Figure 7 Burnt corpse of William Stanley. August, 1915, Temple, Texas

The image of William Stanley shows a white crowd that had a “barbecue” in order to alleviate the pressure in their collective political-economic, physiological chest, a desire to relieve the stressed breathing that blackness purportedly instantiated for them.

Various visual studies have closely “read” this image of Stanley. In this image is the burnt corpse, their sacrificial propitiation, for their inability to breathe easy. Like a Messianic figure with salvific potentiality, Stanley – and many others, both named and

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74 Allen, panel 25.
unnamed – stands in and is sacrificed for the collective racial emphysema of whiteness.

And whiteness, Americanness, cohere through – literally stands around – that which is sacrificed within its midst. As sacrificial, the words of theologian James Cone are instructive:

Both Jesus and blacks were publicly humiliated, subjected to the utmost indignity and cruelty. They were stripped, in order to be deprived of dignity, then paraded, mocked and whipped, pierced, derided and spat upon, tortured for hours in the presence of jeering crowds for popular entertainment. In both cases, the purpose was to strike terror in the subject community. It was to let people know that the same thing would happen to them if they did not stay in their place. [...] The crucifixion of Jesus by the Romans in Jerusalem and the lynching of blacks by whites in the United States are so amazingly similar that one wonders what blocks the American Christian imagination from seeing the connection.76

Using Cone’s verbiage, both the cross and lynching tree were about the capacity of mobs – that create something along the order of a nation-state through anonymizing citizenship – to inflict harm as a means to control. Lynching, then, was the demonstration of the forcing of flesh into a “body,” both rhetorical and physical, forced entry into western modes of theological-philosophical reflection. Though Cone is most concerned with a Christological understanding of lynching violence – and, to be sure, the coherence of white Americanness around a lynching tree or pole, around a burning or bullet-ridden body, is also an articulation of American Christianity and theologies of refusal to see and regard the pain of others – what I am interested in is how there is an

76 Cone, p. 31.
a theological-aphilosophical impulse at work in the recasting, repurposing, of antilynching critique.

Perhaps what is needed is a confession, which, they say, is good for the soul. But we would do well to linger with the question of the “they” that stands at the center of such a declaration. What constitutes this they – which at times positions itself under other headings, “we,” “us” – that make declarative orations over, and yes, against, others? It is the question of “they” that is at the heart of the matter, a concern about the construction of worlds that function by way of gathering up and discarding, that function through exclusionary praxis. The world of they is often set loose in the concepts of citizenship, a peculiar desire for inclusion in a nation-state that – at the very moment of inclusion – necessitates exclusion from every other nation state. The question of they – what Frank Wilderson calls “civil society,” the capacity for “spatial and temporal coherence,” which is at the same time always the capacity to be “human” – is the operating elaboration of lynching violence.\(^7\) And the grounding logic of such bounded groupings, such coherent socialities, is that this distinction between spatial and temporal coherence on the one hand, and the black on the other, can be made pure, essential, like oxygen against the impurity of air.

\(^7\) Wilderson.
The transformation of flesh into bodies could not reduce the irrepressible life that those on the receiving end of gratuitous violence carried in them and dispersed. The breath, literally of life, was in them and emerged to counteract the occasion of brutality. The creative impulse was not murdered but targeted towards the object of abjection: the purported severing off from the capacity for sociality. For example, Peter Linebaugh has this to say about the Pidgin English fashioned on slave ships: “It was a language whose expressive power arose less from its lexical range than from the musical qualities of stress and pitch” and that “Pidgin became an instrument, like the drum or the fiddle, of communication among the oppressed: scorned and not easily understood by ‘polite’ Society.” Language was instrumentalized, used for varied insurrectional practices and resistances aboard these many floating cargo transports. As the “go-between,” meaning was made in the pause, in the break, in the space in which echo resonated and reverberated. The building blocks of such musicality was the shared air on and below deck, the common breath into which each person deposited and withdrew.

It is appropriate to think of mob racial and lynching violence as a confession of faith, a declaration given about the interdiction of the capacity of blackness to move, to be on the run, to have pleasure. Simply, the anxiety of whiteness, the racialist emphysema, enacted on black flesh is a theological-philosophical claim that one must

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78 Peter Linebaugh, ‘All the Atlantic Mountains Shook’, Labour / Le Travail, 10 (1982), 87–121 (p. 111).
believe, that one must confess, about blackness, bestiality and the capacity to be civil.

Racial mob and lynching violence attempted a theological-philosophical production of the Human, of desired coherence against indeterminacy, though Brian Massumi argues that indeterminacy is ontic: “To say that passage and indeterminacy ‘come first’ or ‘are primary’ is more a statement of ontological priority than the assertion of a time sequence. They have ontological privilege in the sense that they constitute the field of the emergence, while positionings are what emerge.”\footnote{Massumi, p. 8.} Immanuel Kant conceives of the Transcendental Aesthetic as the production of space and time, and it is on this terrain, this mode of contemplative thought, that those whom “have” a “body” are produced.\footnote{Immanuel Kant, \textit{Critique of Pure Reason}, Penguin Classics. (London ; New York : Penguin, 2007.).}

Of lynching photography, generally, Leigh Raiford says,

[W]e can understand these images to be sites of struggle over the meaning and possession of the black body between white and black Americans, about the ability to make and unmake racial identity. In the hands of whites, photographs of lynchings, circulated as postcards in this period, served to extend and redefine the boundaries of white community beyond localities in which lynchings occurred to a larger “imagined community.” In the hands of blacks during the same time period, these photographs were recast as a call to arms against a seeming neverending tide of violent coercion, and transformed into tools for the making of a new African American national identity.\footnote{Leigh Raiford, ‘Lynching, Visuality, and the Un/ Making of Blackness’, \textit{Nka Journal of Contemporary African Art}, 2006 (2006), 22–31 (p. 22).}

Though I am a bit wary about the making of a national identity given the fact that nation-building typically is the creation of caste and class, Raiford’s untangling of the
differences with which whites and Blacks handled and passed on images of violence and violation is productive for thinking about the possible grounds of such a distinction. With such a distinction, the question emerges: what created the capacity for any one image to do various things? And we are back, it seems, to Glissant and the concept of diaspora, that there is multiplicity in any unity, that the idea of unity veils the originary plentitude inherent in any object. Recasting the same material for another purpose is to take the common object, breathed air, and to aestheticize it. The irreducible impurity called air – breathed in and out, inhaled and exhaled, through the double-gesture of respiratory process – is both archive and anarchival. Air and its vibration – the sounds of cracking fire and singed flesh; the screams and pleas of lament and pain; of crowds laughing and children crying – are arrested in each image, a capturing of infinitesimal collective anxiety. The point I seek to make, apposite the others that have come before me, is that the image of the crowd standing around Stanley’s Black flesh indexes its own undoing through refused relationality. Even when sent to family members and friends, what is created through lynching photography in the hands of whiteness is the dispersal of anxiety, of racial emphysema, and its desired removal. This anxiety is generative for wholly bound subjects, for fully contained and continuous bodies. This anxiety, in other words, is anti-social and against sociality. Such that sending to family members and

friends is not a calling out to others to be together, but one instance among many of the way alienation appears, the way alienation anti-socializes through binding and shoring up against porosity.

If there is an antilynching capacity, it is within the image itself, it is within the shared air, as shared breath, of blackness. The various images of lynching produced by white anxiety – through the physiological eclipsing of breath, through the muting of sound-as-breath – illustrate the relation of whiteness, of Americanness, to silence.
To look at various images of lynching violence, one is struck by the seeming silence that pulsates in and around them. But silence, of course, is never absolute; at most one can achieve is relative silence. How, then, might there be a noise in the image, a captured

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sonic environment presencing and breaking the enclosure of frame? It is, again, all about the breath. Nimi Wariboko, writing about what he calls the “pentecostal principle,” says it is “the capacity to begin” and that this principle “encapsulates the notion that no finite or conditioned reality can claim to have reached its destiny” and that, moreover, “Because of the demand of new beginning, more is expected from every moment, every life, and there is a radical openness to alternatives and surprises.” Of sound, he says that it is “an opening toward others in a movement that does not have a final object or destiny,” building off Victor Zuckerkandl’s philosophy of music. For Wariboko, sound “represents excess that cannot be fully incorporated, institutionalized, or controlled by a system or used as a basis for sovereignty or governance.” Sound even of silence, then, is never complete or totalizing. And the Pentecostal principle is at work, it seems, even in the recasting and repurposing of lynching images. That is, the work of Wells and the NAACP not only show the object’s capacity to begin, but – nevertheless and in spite of – the object’s capacity to begin again with new purpose, a quickening freshness, that is originary to its having been made.

84 Wariboko, p. 1.
86 Wariboko, p. 25.
There is even a silence, therefore, that can be heard in any image, felt in any cut
cloth or severed finger, a silence – as a sonic event – that escapes, like life.\textsuperscript{87} If air was
there at the scene of subjection, and breath was the desired object to be stolen, this
slightest breath at any moment of enframing, of eclipsing, evinces the life that escaped,
through screams, through moans, through pleas. Whiteness would have itself be
totalizing, pure gratuitous violence. But the breath, the air, allows in admixture,
produces the violent force of violence’s own dissolution. Not even the “conditioned
reality” of racial mob and lynching violence is ever “complete” and never arrives to any
fixed destiny. Thus, I ask: Can breathing be a collective memory and rememory?

Memory is about the proximity, the balance, between remembering and forgetting:

Then, perhaps, life only offers the choice of remembering the garden or
forgetting it. Either, or: it takes strength to remember, it takes another
kind of strength to forget it, it takes a hero to do both. People who
remember court madness through pain, the pain of the perpetually
recurring death of their innocence; people who forget court another kind
of madness, the madness of the denial of pain and hatred of innocence.\textsuperscript{88}

Rememory would be the remembering of the balance, of the historicity of the necessity
of forced recall and compelled forgetting. The rememory of breath as the intentioned
performance of breathing – whooping, for example – produces another history, one not

\textsuperscript{87} Michel Foucault, \textit{The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction} (Vintage, 1990), p. 143.
\textsuperscript{88} James Baldwin, \textit{Giovanni’s Room} (Delta, 2000), p. 25.
dependent upon Newtonian physics of smooth, linear, contained time and space, but a historicity of breathing and its eclipse as the hallucination of life and love in the face of the plentitude of gratuitous violence and violation. It is to remember the balance between the individual and the social, to generate variations around the theme of discontinuity and openness as a way, as a form, as a politics against violent silences and enclosures, mutilations and deaths.

Remembering that breath, and thus life, is in any scene of violence and violation – against the very desires of whiteness to produce silence, against the very physiological anxieties that produce whiteness itself – allows for images like the one following to “make sense.”

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These images (Figures 9 and 10) of Bishop Charles Harrison Mason, founder of the Church of God in Christ, performatively breathe critiques, they repurpose and recast the “sensual ensemble” to demonstrate – even at the same temporal moment and spatial locations that lynchings and mass mob racial violence were prevalent – what it meant to live in a new world as a radical critique of the one from which we escape, to dwell in the present now while, at the same time, beginning again. Mason touches one man on his head (Figure 9) while a visibly black crowd – mob – encircles him. But rather than violence, they breathe in the same air as he, likely, prayed for and exhorted the crowd.

90 Moten, *In The Break*. 

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Not a sacrificial messianic figure but a communal act of love, of caring for flesh that stands out and bursts forth, against the grain of surveillance and possible disruption. In another image (Figure 10), a woman with a hat peers out from behind a crowd, Mason sitting atop a Cadillac. Another “sister” stands in the foreground, purse in hand. These images are both “ordinary” and, as Gwendolyn Brooks admonished in *Maud Martha*, can be cherished moments.\(^91\)

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COGIC settled, not just in Tennessee, but in the place from which Ida B. Wells escaped: Memphis. Between 1880 and 1930, “Tennessee had 214 confirmed lynch victims during this period; 37 victims were white, 177 were African American. An additional 34 remain as unreconciled listings. Tennessee ranks sixth in the nation in the number of lynchings.
behind Mississippi, Georgia, Texas, Louisiana, and Alabama.” So though Wells encouraged Black people to leave the city, in less than 20 years, COGIC was repopulating it: exhaled, inhaled. COGIC was also the target of racial terrorism and violence well after its inaugural years. Mason, as well, was the target of racial mob and lynching violence because of his pacifistic stance:

Following President Woodrow Wilson’s entry of American into World War I in April 1917, Congress approved a massive national conscription campaign. Charles Mason encouraged men in the COGIC to avoid war-making by registering as “conscientious objectors.” Because of this, the FBI began an investigation of Mason and began proceedings accusing him of draft obstruction. When the word got out among whites in Lexington, Mississippi, a lynch mob formed and Sheriff Palmer had to arrest Mason in order to prevent him from being lynched.

Mason was released on bail when it could not be determined if he were of the dangerous sort, and he immediately went to Memphis to deliver the sermon “The Kaiser in the

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93 For example, “A larger, more looming issue that faced the women and the denomination was Bishop Mason’s advanced age and ill health. In order for him to be more comfortable, the Women’s Department, under Coffey’s direction, purchased a ranch-style home for him in Glenview, a white neighborhood in Memphis, Tennessee. When Mason moved into the home in 1957, a cross was burned on his front lawn, and the following year, Mason’s son’s home in the same neighborhood burned under suspicious circumstances. White protesters had held a protest to discourage blacks from moving into the neighborhood and to appeal to whites not to put their homes up for sale. In addition, the burning of Mason’s church to the ground under suspicious conditions during this period put a tremendous strain upon the denomination at a time that its profile was increasing, and the civic gains all the more important” from Anthea D. Butler, Women in the Church of God in Christ, p. 153.
Light of the Scriptures,”95 which, Craig Scandrett-Leatherman argues, “indicates that Mason understood baptism as an immersion into the way of Jesus’ nonviolence. Those baptized into Christ would not seek justice through violence but by speaking the truth and accepting suffering.”96 Mason’s conceptualization of manhood was not grounded in the capacity to produce mob and lynching violence, but was an ethical stance of how to be together with others in an unjust world. And given Mason’s belief in the aesthetics of BlackPentecostal movement of the spirit, we must attend to the social form that this BlackPentecostal group took as an enactment of an ethics of black pneuma, an intellectual practice of being together with others to perpetually begin again. The again – like particulate matter in air – is the plus more and alongside of oxygen and carbon dioxide, it is the fugitive otherwise of sociality. COGIC organized like that, with attention to function and form. Craig Scandrett-Leatherman says of COGIC is, “in part, as a black ritual system of liberation in response to the white system of lynching” and that “Afro-Pentecostal dance and conscientious objection were affirmations of life, which resisted the expected norms for black men: lifeless acquiescence comportment or life-taking participation in military violence.”97 And as Cheryl Townsend Gilkes argues, “Black women and men have perceived racial oppression to be the most pervasive source of

96 Scandrett-Leatherman, p. 105.
97 Scandrett-Leatherman, pp. 95, 96.
their individual and group suffering, but it has not been the sole catalyst for their collective action,” such that the gatherings together are shown to be in the name of, in the cause for, breathing. Breathing, then, is the care of flesh.

The flesh is animated and breathes. This breath is sacred in its antiphonal and social nature, shared in and as commons. The flesh steps outside, moves, cares and sustains, rectifies and reproduces. And Baby Suggs, holy, knew about the flesh and the intense necessity for its care against the outside boundary.

“Here,” she said, “in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don’t love your eyes; they’d just as soon pick em out. No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder they flay it. And O my people they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty. Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with them, path them together, stroke them on your face ‘cause they don’t love that either. You got to love it, you! And no, they ain’t in love with your mouth. Yonder, out there, they will see it broken and break it again. What you say out of it they will not heed. What you scream from it they do not hear. What you put into it to nourish your body they will snatch away and give you leavins instead. No, they do not love your mouth. You got to love it. This is flesh I’m talking about here. Flesh that needs to be loved. Feet that need to rest and to dance; backs that need support; shoulders that need arms, strong arms I’m telling you. And O my people, yonder, here me, they do not love your neck unnoosed and straight. So love your neck; put a hand on it, grace it, stroke it and hold it up. And all your inside parts that they’d just as soon slop for hogs, you got to love them. The dark, dark liver - love it, love it, and the beat and the beating heart, love that too. More than eyes or feet. More than lungs that have yet to draw free air. More than your life-holding womb and your life-giving private parts,
hear me now, love your heart. For this is the prize.” Saying no more, she stood up then and danced with her twisted hip the rest of what her heart had to say while others opened their mouths and gave her the music. Long notes held until the four-part harmony was perfect enough for their deeply loved flesh.⁹⁹

Baby Suggs’ s sermon at first breath seems to support the claim that blackness is in social death, with her figuration of here in this place and out there. Though the clearing is where they would come together for sustenance, they would return to “civil sociality.” But a return is not what they desired; they would have the logics – the spatial and temporal theological-philosophical thought that produced such illusory distinction – undone. But how are they able to gather, and gather quickly, in the midst of that which bears upon them? It means that even in civil society – even under surveillance of cameras, under lash and whip, hanging from trees and poles, stripped naked and bullet-ridden – they are always in the clearing, they carry the clearing in them, enact the clearing. This mode of gathering in clearing existed before Middle Passage, but they, indeed, gathered like that against the violence of flesh trade. COGIC gathered in public zones like that around black flesh against racial mob and lynching violence, instances – captured and held in frame – of black pneuma.

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1.5 Black Pneumatology

Here I want to consider Italo Calvino’s discussion of invisible cities as enactments of black pneuma, intentionally aestheticized breath, through a figuration of Nahum Chandler’s “problematic.” Chandler is critical of what, I presume, is a theological-philosophical comportment that animates African American and Africana Studies – the possibility of making a distinction, a distinction grounded in the notion of purity even while proclaiming its antithesis, that essentialism is fundamentally flawed. For example, Chandler asserts, “[A]lthough it is rather typically assumed, too simplistically, that the grounds of historical and social existence and identification were placed in question for ‘Africans,’ or ‘Negroes,’ or ‘Blacks,’ configured in this vortex, what is not so typically remarked is the way in which a fundamental questioning of the roots of identification and forms of historical existence for ‘Europeans’ or ‘Whites’ was also set loose at the core of this historical problematization.”

Propulsion is the name of the game; Chandler goes deeper and higher still, rigorously arguing about the notion of a pure discourse:

It naively implies that a nonessentialist discourse or position can be produced. As such, it presupposes an oppositional theoretical architecture at its core, in the supposed and self-serving distinction between a discourse or position that does not operate on the basis of an essence and those that do. It thus all the more emphatically presupposes a

simple essence as the ground of its discourse, in both conceptual and practical, that is, political, terms. 101

Let the “it” in the above statement be the humanities and social sciences that utilize Newtonian physics, complete with the space and time metaphors, “[a] concept of the purity of identity as a fixed, natural (physically or ‘biologically’ given), even metaphysical, character is operative here.” 102 Such that the architecture internal to racial mob and lynching violence – as an enactment of theological-philosophical thought – is of the purely oppositional character of desired civil society, of desired whiteness, to blackness. The structuring coherence at the heart of such violence is the conception of full and complete nonconvergence with blackness and that blackness is a violation of this nonconvergence. The simple essence at the heart of the matter is distinction, distinction that emerges through gratuitous violence and violation. The purity of civil society would be the lack of being the target of gratuitous violence, that violence does not structure the being of the white, of the nonblack. And if there is indeed a purity of identity, it is the black-as-slave through the performance of gratuitous violence enacted against this entity, this collectivity, this “body.” But violence, in this figuration, takes on an aesthetic quality.

I make the claim about gratuitous violence as an aesthetic practice – as a performance form – based on a reading of Achille Mbembe’s influential article “Necropolitics.” In this article he says, “Slave life, in many ways, is a form of death-in-life” and that “Because the slave’s life is like a ‘thing,’ possessed by another person, the slave existence appears as a perfect figure of a shadow.”\textsuperscript{103} But, as mentioned above, even the sociality of shadows is generative for intellectual reflection: “A life. Could be,” grounded in a celebratory BlackPentecostal nevertheless and in spite of (about which more below).\textsuperscript{104} Mbembe contends that there is, within the cauldron of enslavement practices, a “triple loss” of the notion of “home,” “rights over his or her body” and, finally, “loss of political status.” This triple loss, then, “is identical with absolute domination, natal alienation, and social death (expulsion from humanity altogether)” thus and therefore, the plantation creates the condition in which the slave does not have anything like “community” because community “implied the exercise of the power of speech and thought.”\textsuperscript{105} But was domination, indeed, absolute? Is there a giving and withholding that could ever be intentional? Fred Moten says that there is, within an individual, the capacity for withholding consent: that though one might not give consent to conditions,

\textsuperscript{104} Morrison, Beloved, p. 60. 
\textsuperscript{105} Mbembe, p. 21.
one can *withhold* – as in breath – such sentiment. And is the triple loss a loss at all? That which produces the concept of the human, the individual, western man was embodying itself at the moment that the African was being stolen; that is, to speak of loss would presuppose an oppositional coherence at the core, an operational architecture that would have home, rights over bodily integrity and political status mean and function universally before the point Cristóbal Colón ever made a journey, before the *San Juan Bautista* ever landed at Jamestown.

For Mbembe, “*Colonial occupation* itself was a matter of seizing, delimiting, and asserting control over a physical geographical area – of writing on the ground a new set of social and spatial relations.” Under colonial relations, that which he calls the “conditions of vertical sovereignty and splintering colonial occupation,” Mbembe says “communities are separated across a y-axis. This leads to a proliferation of the sites of violence.” The dispersing of violent locales is the means through which it improvises at specific points of spatial and temporal organization. So we are talking, here, about aesthetic practices of violence, the tension violence creates, which is also and likewise to say, the *form* it takes. Form is, thus, raised to the level of ontological condition and 

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107 Mbembe, p. 25.
108 Mbembe, p. 28.
status, inescapable. However, Jared Sexton considers performance to be impotent, to
never efficaciously changing conditions and configurations of the world:

One could object, in an empiricist vein, that the slave too resists in ways
that are quite nearly as self-destructive as an improvised explosive device
and that the colonial subject too resists through the creation and
performance of music and the stylization of the body, but that would be
to miss the symptomatic value of [Achille] Mbembe’s theorization.\textsuperscript{109}

\textit{[W]hen [Frank] Wilderson writes that “performance meets ontology,” he
is saying quite a bit more than that. Though he is attempting to think the
two registers together—the performative and the ontological—he is
indicating not so much that ontology is not performative, but rather more
so that performativity does not, in fact, have disruptive power at the level
or in the way that it has been theorized to date. More radically still, he is
suggesting that this theorization remains insufficiently elaborated.}\textsuperscript{110}

Sexton’s claim, here, is that performance does not have disruptive capacity; performance
of resistance, as such, is empty, is incapable for rising to the occasion of the gratuitous
violence that would come to “define” – which is to say, to border, to befall, to enclose,
thus, create – blackness. For this reason, the impossibility of generative black
performance (and here i specifically mean performativity that does something in the world,
that not only does something, but creates new words, new worlds) also means for Sexton
that there could never be a criminal act of the enslaved since the enslaved is always
criminal, that there can be no fugitivity because the enslaved is engulfed by – which is to

say, enclosed, within – “the social life of social death.” However, what constitutes the very grounds upon which Sexton conceptualizes blackness is performance, the performance forms that violence takes. But in these apophatic renderings, these performances, these forms are, somehow totalizing. That is, there is a full elaboration of – or at least, a desire to fully elaborate – performance when the form is considered to be violence, violent force, antagonism in the service of constituting coherence.

In BlackPentecostal spaces, during various moments in the church service – during testimony service, for example – an expeditor or preacher could scream on the microphone the word “Nevertheless!” And sometimes, BlackPentecostals would be encouraged to “give God an ‘in spite of’ praise!” That word, and that phrase, point to the primacy of particularity, that though one may feel encased, enclosed, contained, that nevertheless, and in spite of – there is an excessive force that sustains that exists before any social situation. I keyed in on this word, this phrase, given Sexton’s attention to it:

Uncritical, and ultimately romantic, ethnographic claims...about the slave’s capacity and capability for ‘stylization’ are theoretically untenable since the publication of Scenes of Subjection over a decade ago. I am talking broadly here about the sort of claims about slavery that rely on phrases like ‘In spite of the terror’ and ‘...nevertheless...’

What is curious, however, is the way that the structural core – which is and likewise to say, the operating assumption – of any thought is the nevertheless and in spite of

condition. Sexton implies that conditional sentiments body forth the merely marginal example, inefficacious for understanding the brutality of enslavement. Something like arguing that thought whites were indeed targets of mob and lynching violence historically – nevertheless and in spite of these historical conditions – the gratuitous violence of which blackness is the target makes of those historical truths but a marginal example. This structural coherence of the nonconvergence of the marginal, of the otherwise example, allows for the emergence of categorical distinction, of violence against blacks on the one hand and other modes of violence on the other. Those marginal examples might be targeted by violence but it is not gratuitous, they might experience alienation but it is not natal. And thus, nevertheless and in spite of these marginal and otherwise examples of violence and alienation, a theoretical coherence about the blackness as living death, blackness as slavery, is rendered. But this conditional is unspoken and as such, more emphatically structures the argument about ethnographic approach given the operational presumption that that the performance forms violence and alienation take can be better or worse. This unspoken nevertheless and in spite of is emphatic, and thus, this theoretical elaboration – while claiming itself to be non-general regarding the specificity of the social death and blackness – immediately renders everything otherwise as the general and non-specific, under the heading of the those, after Patterson, who would have something called social life (will, honor, natality).
As an interrogation of coherence and the possibility for pure distinction, I turn briefly to Einstein: “What Einstein rejects most forcefully of Newton’s conception of space and time is its commitment to understanding space and time as separate and physically independent, autonomous entities” and “In Einstein’s reconceptualization, space, time and matter are interconnected and interdefined, relative terms.”112 We run back into the horizontal thrust of parti drawings, the thrownness of whooping that presences the black flesh of women preachers insofar as the distinction between background and foreground, between that which is thrown and the environment into which Dasein finds itself withers away. The ontological distinctions of civil society and blackness must be recast according to a different relationality. The confessional posture of the instrumentality of racial violence breaks down through a general hermeneutics given by black breath, black pneuma, a mode of intellectual practice and performance of the breathing in and the breathing out, the reciprocity of exhalation and inhalation, the giving and sharing in the commons of air. But what of blackness and pneumatology?

Pneumatology – as a field of inquiry within Christian theology – is a relatively new series of studies, emerging approximately fifty years after the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles 1906. While it is true that theologians and philosophers have spoken about spirit generally, and the Holy Spirit since the days of – if certainly before –

Pentecost, the “third person of the Trinity” was often cast as the forgotten member, with God the Father and God the Son taking precedent in treatises, tomes and testimonies. Jürgen Moltmann, perhaps the most renown theologian of pneumatology, says that as late as the 1970s, “it was usual to introduce studies on the Holy Spirit with a complaint about ‘forgetfulness of the Spirit’ at the present day generally, and in the Protestant theology in particular.” 113 Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen discusses the recent interest in the Spirit under the rubric of a “renaissance”: “In recent years, one of the most exciting developments in theology has been an unprecedented interest in the Holy Spirit.” 114 This renaissance is response to – not the forgetfulness of the Spirit – but its subordination, its repression: “Rather than speaking of a Geistvergessenheit (oblivion of the Spirit), we should speak of a pneumatological deficit.” Though the Spirit has a prominent place in various biblical narratives, the “birth” of the Church in the Luke-Acts narrative of flames and speaking in various tongues as an emphatic example, discourse about the role of the Holy Spirit, the power and force of this entity, remained largely peripheral until the mid-twentieth century. Moltmann credits a non-specific, general Christian ecumenical movement as part and parcel of this sweeping interest in the Spirit: “[it] is without a

doubt the most important Christian event of the twentieth century. For the first time, there is a revolution of feeling.”

The Pentecostal movement that began in Los Angeles 1906 was intergenerational, interreligious, interracial and internationalist in its composition. Women and men preached and prayed together, white men glorifying the fact that black women and men prayed for them – laid hands on them even – and they worshipped together. Children spoke in tongues, prophesied and interpreted the meaning of such words with boldness, conviction and clarity. 1906 Los Angeles was a meeting place for a many-headed hydra of internationalism and interraciality, from Chinese to Mexican, from Irish and German to American descendants of the enslaved. And in 1900, members of the Evening Light Saints would testify that they were “saved, sanctified, and prejudice removed,” intriguing because in later Pentecostal testimony services, people often say that they are “saved, sanctified, and filled with the precious gift of the Holy Spirit.” To have prejudice in the heart seems to be at odds with having the Holy Spirit – the breath of divinity – working in the flesh.

115 Moltmann, p. 4.
116 Alexander, p. 113.
117 I opine that prejudicial reasoning, which emerges out of racialist discourse of continental philosophy and western theology – is but one reason why William Seymour’s Azusa Street Revival became a nodal point from which Global Pentecostalism emerged. A student of Charles Parham – a white man living in Texas that also believed in the “third work of grace,” the movement of the Spirit with glossolalia as evidentiary – Seymour, under Parham’s tutelage, was not allowed to pray with his classmates at church altars, nor sit in the classroom because of the submission to discriminatory logics.
Pneumatology is the study of *pneuma* – the Greek word for “breath.” The Holy Spirit’s labor in biblical narratives is connected, particularly, to the invisible world of intangible, but also material, animation:

[I]n the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek term *pneuma* is almost always equivalent of the Hebrew *ruach*...The idea behind *ruach* is the extraordinary fact that air should move; the basic meaning of *ruach* is, therefore, “blowing.” Both terms in the Bible, the Old Testament *ruach* and the New Testament *pneuma*, carry the same ambiguity of multiple meanings: “breath,” “air,” “wind,” or “soul.”\(^{118}\)

This plenitude of meaning, this exorbitance of terminology, for what the Spirit does, is an instance of *black pneuma*, the other-than-coherent and static, the otherwise-than-determinant. This plenitude of meaning, this exorbitance is originary displacement, an original difference of black performance, of double-gesture of respiratory function and form. Other theologians speak about the radical sociality – as hospitality – of Spirit: “The Spirit who gives life is evident in hospitality shown toward strangers.”\(^{119}\) Such that we might say that Spirit – *pneuma*, breath, that which animates the body – is grounded in the necessity for sociality. Not only does Spirit give life, but that life is evident in how one leans toward others, how one engages with others in the world. We do not merely share in sociality, but we share in the materiality of that which quickens flesh, we share wind and air through the process of inhalation and exhalation. This radical sociality, this

\(^{118}\) Kärkkäinen, p. 25.

sharing of breath, of air, occurred previous to an ecumenical movement, so named intentionally as such. This ecumenism was enacted in brush harbors and praise houses. This ecumenism was certainly a primary feature of the Azusa Street congregants. So it is odd, indeed very curious, for Moltmann to assert, “The successful growth of pentecostal churches outside the ecumenical movement is also a serious challenge to all the old, mainstream churches.” What I seek to do is foreground the grounding principle for such a claim about the figuration of Pentecostal churches as the outside of an ecumenism. It turns out that this outside that materially enacted (with failure, though the aspirational quality was there) that was also the constitutive force for thinking ecumenism as a modality for thought.

What I am tracking, in other words, is the way theological studies of pneuma repress blackness internal to its elaboration by glossing over, if ever even mentioning, the fact, the lived experience, the case of breathing on Azusa Street.

Breathing strange utterances and mouthing a creed which it would seem no sane mortal could understand, the newest religious sect has started in Los Angeles. Meetings are held in a tumble-down shack on Azusa Street, near San Pedro Street, and devotees of the weird doctrine practice the most fanatical rites, preach the wildest theories and work themselves into a state of mad excitement in their peculiar zeal. Colored people and a sprinkling of whites compose the congregation, and night is made hideous in the neighborhood by the howlings of the worshippers who spend hours swaying forth and back in a nerve-racking [sic] attitude of

120 Moltmann, p. 4.
prayer and supplication. They claim to have “the gift of tongues;” and to be able to comprehend the babel.

 [...]  
An old colored exhort, blind in one eye, is the major-domo of the company. With his stony optic fixed on some luckless unbeliever, the old man yells his defiance and challenges an answer. Anathemas are heaped upon him who shall dare to gainsay the utterances of the preacher.

Clasped in his big fist the colored brother holds a miniature Bible from which he reads at intervals one or two words-never more. After an hour spent in exhortation the brethren [sic] present are invited to join in a “meeting of prayer, song and testimony.” Then it is that pandemonium breaks loose, and the bounds of reason are passed by those who are “filled with the spirit,” whatever that may be.

 [...]  
Among the “believers” is a man who claims to be a Jewish [sic] rabbi. He says his name is Gold, and claims to have held positions in some of the largest synagogues in the United States. He told the motley company last night that he is well known to the Jewish people of Los Angeles and San Francisco, and referred to prominent local citizens by name. Gold claims to have been miraculously healed and is a convert of the new sect.121

If the Spirit has been subject to being forgotten, what drops out of the study of pneuma is breath itself, and how breath moves and changes and performs in the world, the world that is made at the moment of the emergence of being together with others. William Seymour and Azusa serve the role of intellectual practitioners of an atheology-aphilosophy. The wooden floors of the Azusa Street Mission are the grounds upon

121 ‘WEIRD BABEL OF TONGUES’, Los Angeles Daily Times (Los Angeles, CA, 18 April 1906).
which incoherence and indeterminacy were played out to create something like a radical sociality of intense feeling. Difficult to understand, mouths given over to seeming gibberish, Jewish men named Gold with black women named Jenny, the intellectual practice of Black Pentecostalism privilege the flesh, that which stands forth and bursts free, thrown into environments and making worlds, intense, dense, loving worlds in the “now” of their unfamiliarity.

Particularity, plentitude, possibility are, unfortunately for Moltmann, problems for pure theological reflection: “Talk about Eastern or African spirituality unfortunately blurs this precise sense of the word and reduces it again to ‘religiousness.’”\(^{122}\) This is not to assert that pneumatological theologians do not ever consider the concepts of gender, sexuality, ecology and race, but that such thinking constitutes itself through the presumption of spatial and temporal coherence. This presumption, however, does not operate on the wooden floors of the Azusa Street Mission. In the world but not of it; of some other world but not in it. Nahum Chandler’s critique cuts along the bias of the problematics for thought, upholding the concept of purity that grounds many philosophical and theological projects. Pneumatology – as a mode of theological-philosophical positioning – seems to be similarly structured by the nonconvergence of blackness and thought. The materiality of blackness, the animating breath that is

\(^{122}\) Moltmann, p. 83.
gathered and dispersed in Los Angeles 1906, is given scant attention. The particularity of the margin – the African, the Eastern, blackness – is generative of the blurring of boundedness, it is a problematic for thought. Coherent thought, coherence itself, emerges from the dislodging of difference as originary. A case that one will, ongoingly, “have to come back to” in a perpetual deferral. The thing that yields an emphatic and intense elaboration of the Spirit – the fact, the lived experience, the case of breathing – is not only repressed but removed through the nonconvergence. The materiality that prompts the standing forth, the bursting free, of thought is – through the brush of discourse and reflex of iconography – decoupled from that which it makes. The Spirit – *pneuma*, breath, air – is evacuated from flesh, productive of a thought body (*a corpus*) of work. Pneumatology is the “body” but the flesh was Azusa.

And if the repression of the breath of blackness is an animating feature of theological pneumatology, studies in humanities and the social sciences predicated on Newtonian physics are not merely reflections of philosophical thought but modalities of violent theologies. Whooping, then, is the convergence – against presumed nonconvergence – of blackness and the world, blackness in the world *against* social death, blackness in the worlds of its own making as a critique of worlds produced through exclusion. While Achille Mbembe asserts, after Patterson, that slavery creates the condition of total, absolute control, “Control, especially ‘absolute’ control, over someone else’s intention requires recognition of that intention: There is no need to
control that intention which has no force. This force, the force of an intention other than that of the slave owner’s, is signified practically by the risk of flight or escape: The slave can always choose to escape or attempt to escape, including by way of death or suicide.”

Michelle Koerner offers another way to think about this mode of recognition, as a line of flight, “not [as] a concept of negativity or of destruction; it rather seeks to give consistency to social compositions that are not accounted for by state theory.”

The intensity of whooping, the double-gesture of respiration, the aestheticized breathing of flesh, is “invented” by the one who is, by the ones whom are, performing. The intensity and intentionality of such performance makes the scene “absolute,” as it is not determined by the “relative speed” of civil society, of whiteness, of what it means to be human.

Wanda Frazier Parker (http://youtu.be/4Vx8rBWMjj4 until @2:04) walks and marches and steps throughout the pulpit and altar space while preaching, pausing for dramatic effect at 1:50, after repetitiously proclaiming to the congregation what she was capable of doing through the power of God. This was the accretional peak and the point of departure for spontaneous, improvisatory praise. One does not get the sense that she “planned” to perform that choreographic skip-to-my-lou-my-darling-hop-scotch run in

125 Koerner, p. 173.
place. The choreography, animated likewise by breath, enfleshed her at the moment of performance – vividly there, in the unalterable “now” of unfamiliarity. It was not planned but it absolutely happened; it was not produced through surveillance and lack of will but the most emphatic enactment of such capacity.

In the Poem “Speech to the Young: Speech to the Progress-Toward,” Gwendolyn Brooks says the following:

Say to them,
say to the down-keepers,
the sun-slappers,
the self-soilers,
the harmony-hushers,
“even if you are not ready for day
it cannot always be night.”
You will be right.
For that is the hard home-run.

Live not for battles won.
Live not for the-end-of-the-song.
Live in the along.126

A pneumatology of blackness is generative for reading this poem, the breaks in lines as solicitations for an intellectual sociality of breathing, for breath. But more, a blackness pneumatology compels me to read such breakage as hallucinatory of whooping, a double-gesturation of respiration, an accretional build of intensity with the barest of phrases. To “live in the along” is to live as flesh, to refuse the enclosure of language that

produces grammar, the enclosures of land that produces private property, the 
enclosures of flesh that produces the conceptual body. To “live in the along” is to 
intimate that path and passage are ontological, given and prior to Newtonian physics, 
space and time. To “live in the along” is to “journey through” worlds, it is to, of priority, 
steal away.127 “Live in the along” is the prime meridian of Brooks’s poetics, setting the 
velocity of everything that came before it. As a command, as a solicitation, it is flesh, the 
meridian point is the parti that stands and furnishes forth.

So Clark-Cole, Stokes, Frazier Parker and Locke not only preach but they 
preach like that, with absolute intensity, with absolute intentionality. And when they 
pause – invitational eclipse of speech for congregational antiphony – through their will, 
through their capacity for intellectual practice, the congregation swells to the point of 
rupture. And everyone, because of praise, is out of and held within breath.

127 Tim Ingold, ‘Against Space: Place, Movement, Knowledge’, in Boundless Worlds: An Anthropological 
Approach to Movement, ed. by Peter Wynn Kirby (Berghahn Books, 2010), p. 41.
2. Shouting and the Philosophical-Theological Figuration of Aversion

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.
Acts 2:1 (NRSV)

Pentecost is a moment of originary difference, irreducible openness, the
encounter of displacement as commons, given as the interplay between breath and rest,
between surplus and poverty that prompts movement away from any claim for origin.¹

Pentecost is the ongoing emergence of spatiotemporal itineraries, prompted by sounds—
such as of violent winds of change—compelling the ongoing necessity of escape as the
figuration of possibility for the ongoing reconfiguration of normative, violative modes of
repressive and regulatory apparatuses. Pentecost is an egalitarian mode of spirit
indwelling, wherein that which those filled with the spirit have is immediately given
way and away to others through aesthetic proclamation, through linguistic rupture that
announces and enunciates expanded sociality: the sound of violent wind is matched in
with but also exceeded by an intensive, intentional and expansive capacity for new

¹ Both Andrew Benjamin and Nahum Chandler help me understand something about irreducible difference,
originary displacement and originary difference. See Andrew E. Benjamin. Nahum Chandler, ‘Originary
Displacement’. In terms of a refusal of a claim for origin, one could ponder if the disciples “received” the
Holy Spirit previous to the Acts encounter when Jesus, after his resurrection and appearance to the
disciples, “breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (John 20:22, NRSV). With both
narratives, we can consider that breath and a capacity both to be moved and to receive are consistent in both
stories of the reception of the Holy Spirit. But what is of import here is that the claim that the Pentecost
moment in Acts is the origin of the Holy Spirit’s “work” in the world is obscured by another moment with a
similar claim. Originary difference is what animates the discourse of the Holy Spirit and the aesthetics of
indwelling movement.
sociality. This energy of Pentecost was carried into, and given away within, the early twentieth century by an intergenerational, interreligious, multi-gendered group who felt that the biblical Luke-Acts 2 story mirrored their own desire for spiritedness and a new sociality that was nothing other than an enactment of a “motley crew.”

This chapter is concerned with movement: away from the claims for origin and purity while dancing toward historicity – a theory of history through performance – of Pentecost that operates within “open sociality,” what in another register and key we call blackness – the testimony of the resistance of objects. Because of this open sociality, I choose the word BlackPentecostalism to describe the interrelationship of – following Frantz Fanon, being objects “in the midst of other objects,” and following Luke’s narrative, being together in one place on one accord – as the condition of emergence for what Nimi Wariboko describes as the “pentecostal principle,” the “capacity to begin. It encapsulates the notion that no finite or conditioned reality can claim to have reached its destiny.” As such, BlackPentecostalism allows us to such consider the bridge between what it means to have being as object and what it means to have being as together, that is, the bridge between thingliness and sociality. I am concerned with the critique of

\[\begin{align*}
\text{2 Linebaugh, The Many-headed Hydra.} \\
\text{3 See Moten, In The Break, p. 1 where Moten says ‘The history of blackness is a testament to the fact that objects can and do resist. Blackness - the extended movement of a specific upheaval, an ongoing irruption that anarranges every line - is a strain that pressures the assumption of the equivalence of personhood and subjectivity.’} \\
\text{4 Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, Revised (Grove Press, 2008), p. 109.} \\
\text{5 Wariboko, p. 1.}
\end{align*}\]
theology and philosophy, the other-than-theological, the other-than-philosophical – or what will be called through shorthand, the atheological, the aphilosophical – of thought that vivifies and quickens a “politics of avoidance.” The politics of avoidance is the performance and performativity of the atheology-aphilosophy of blackness, aestheticized in and through “shouting,” a historicity of dance performance linking the Afro-Indigenous and Afro-Islamic to the (New World) Afro-Christian. The atheological and aphilosophical, it will be demonstrated, are necessary markers for what is produced through BlackPentecost – the recovery of flesh from which “the body” is a conceptual abstraction produced through normative theological and philosophical discourses.

BlackPentecost is the “irreducible density” of being together in one place that responds with aesthetic vitality to historic, metaphysical and material moments and movements of violence and violation. BlackPentecostal shouting – the bodily manifestations of divine call and encounter of the early twentieth-century – is not limited by a Christological Pentecost of the Christian Bible’s Luke-Acts account.

BlackPentecostal shouting spans and comes before the moments of biblical aesthetic

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6 The “politics of avoidance” will be fully explicated in Chapter 3. However, briefly, the politics of avoidance is ontological and we find a strain of its historicity in the performances of the always (mis)read as excess and excessive moves and programatics of black social dance. The politics of avoidance is an “insistent previousness evading each and every natal occasion” (Nathaniel Mackey, From a Broken Bottle Traces of Perfume Still Emanate: Bedouin Hornbook, Dibot Baghotus’s Run, Atet A.D., 1st edn (New Directions, 2010), p. 42).

performance. The choreographic tradition is irreducible and inexhaustible, compelling a critical analytics of the energy and indwelling of a spirit of commons, of resistance to violence and violation. With the Luke-Acts narrative, the spirited response to descent of spirit, wind and sound – which eventually would be called Christian and Pentecostalism – is anachronism. This retrospective lets us see the gathering and dispersal of persons who were not Christian-identified but came together to create a new way to be in the world. And their “new way” has reverberated and echoed to our present moment. Thus, BlackPentecost is a capacity to give away that which one has in order to receive more; it is an entry into a type of friendship as a way of life that lays bare the queerness of any sociality.8

Consideration of spatial movements upon the ground is but one interrogation into the aesthetic value of BlackPentecost, a creative commons and sociality against which Calvinist theology and Enlightenment philosophy denigrated. But more than denigration, normative theology and philosophy are produced through aversion, through a shuddering look and look away, a deafening hearing and hearing away from BlackPentecostal aesthetic performance. Calvinist theology is exemplary because of its relation to the Great Awakening revivals of the eighteenth thru nineteenth centuries in the West. Camp meetings, soul feasts and the weeping and gnashing of repentant teeth

8 Foucault, Hurley and Rabinow.
are the primary mimetic structure for “revival,” and the gatherings of the Great
Awakening are remembered as specifically aesthetic employments of “enthusiasms”
that bear a genealogical – if not anthropological, musicological, axiological and
sociological – relation to the twentieth century Pentecostal movement. Enlightenment
thought is exemplary because of the ways theologies were articulated both along with
its flows and sometimes against its currents. The category of blackness is relational as an
oppositional force, engaged through aversion and this aversive turn and turn away is
theological, philosophical choreography. These various logics accentuate how
BlackPentecost might give us a hermeneutics, a mode of study, a means to education.

Within Calvinist theology – using George Whitefield⁹ and Jonathan Edwards as
two exemplar figures – and within Enlightenment philosophy – using Kant’s
anthropology as a secular figuration of such aversive thought – one finds the fact of their

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“asserted that only God’s actions were efficacious in redemption, effecting salvation through nothing less
than a ‘union of the soul with God’ resulting in the ‘one thing needful,’ the new birth. God’s grace alone
saved men and women; human merit played no role whatever. As early as 1740, Whitefield split with his
mentor, John Wesley, over the doctrine of ‘universal redemption,’ the idea that salvation was available to all
who would accept it. Whitefield clung to a strict predestination whereby the sovereign God elected whom
he wished to save” (15). It will be important to note, in the chapter about glossolalia, that salvation depended
upon the written text. “The central role of reading in Whitefield’s conversion is noteworthy because of the
scant attention historians have given to print in the evangelical revivals. The focus has been on the orality of
the evangelist’s ministry, suggesting that the religious awakening represented a face-to-face world in
retreat before the oncoming tide of rationalism in print. From the outset, the printed word had a profound
influence on Whitefield both in informing his own understanding of experimental faith and in conveying
the gospel to a transatlantic audience” (17). It seems that predestination might seem to dovetail conveniently
with the ability to read; the capacity for salvation is regulated by the ability to read.
being a collection of *choreographic protocols and itineraries*. The choreographic is set loose through thinking the concept of *aversion* that kindles these interconnected theological and philosophical traditions. To say that Calvinist doctrine and Enlightenment thought are a choreographic protocol and itinerary announces the through which the relationship of the secular and the religious, the interior and exterior, the moving and stilled are necessary for the creation of race as an organizing logic and teleological principle.\(^{10}\) It is also to consider how these secular and spiritual thought exercises necessitated multiple leaps, splits, displacements, varied pirouettes, pliés and postures, that followed or averred a path, both with and against each other but, most profoundly, always away from the concept of blackness.

Both Calvinist and Enlightenment thought elucidate a concept of blackness embodied in the figure of the black, Negro, racial/ized figure. This chapter considers the specifically choreographic aspect of what I call the *choreosonic*, the always attendant and interconnected concept of movement and sound, as the *atheology-aphilosophy* of blackness, how BlackPentecost utilizes choreosonics as a *politics of avoidance* that exists previous to aversive theological, philosophical thought.\(^{11}\) Thus, the spirited, theological,

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\(^{10}\) Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race*, Borderlines (Minneapolis, Minn.) ; V. 27. (Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, c2007.).

\(^{11}\) The splitting of the choreo from the sonic is an illusory one but is necessary for theorizing at least momentarily. That is, the shout does not take place without making sound, taking sound and breaking sound: the shout traditions are choreographic insofar as they are sonic, and are sonic insofar as they are
expressive Black Pentecostal dance tradition called “shouting” at the turn of the twentieth century. But we’ve gotta get there first, so I explore the historicity of expressiveness of this choreosonic dance tradition, found in the “Ring Shout” tradition that precedes Black Pentecostalism, and within the Afro-Arabic saut tradition of Sufi Dervish tradition that precede them both. (What I will, when speaking of the three together as a unit, term “shout traditions”). Not only the physical movements of such counter-clockwise itineraries, the chapter also probes the homophonic substance – the reiteration of the sound of the word, of the concept pronounced “shout” in New World English – of this choreographic tradition.

2.1 Shouts and Historicity

[O]ften the John Brown song was sung, but oftener these incomprehensible negro methodist, meaningless, monotonous, endless chants with obscure syllables recurring constantly & slight variations interwoven, all accompanied with a regular drumming of the feet & clapping of the hands, lake castinets; then the excitement spreads, outside the enclosure men begin to quiver & dance, others join, a circle forms, winding monotonously round some one in the centre. Some heel & toe tumultuously, others merely tremble & stagger on, others stoop & rise, others whirl, others caper sidewise all keep steadily circling like dervishes…At last seems to come a snap and the spell breaks amid general sighs & laughter.¹²

To what social conditions was this twentieth century group, that called themselves Pentecostals, responding? And why was the response borne out in aesthetic behaviors that were thought to be at once primitivist, unnecessary and discardable? And how was the overarching resistance to such aesthetics the condition of possibility for atheological and philosophical thought that came before this twentieth century moment, this movement? Black Pentecostalism is the allowing of the irruption of spirit, not as interruption but as critique of normative modes of thought, ways of being, of doing. It is an aesthetic practice that clears the space for folks who want the funk, the fact of the funk, for folks to come together, to dance, to sweat. To perform this irruption is one of our tasks.

If you had been standing on the white sands of this island (Sapelo Island, GA) at dayclean in 1803, or a little later, you might have seen a tall, dark-skinned man with narrow features, his head covered with a cap resembling a Turkish fez, unfold his prayer mat, kneel and pray to the east while the sun rose. This was Bilali, the most famous and powerful of all the Africans who lived on this island during slavery days, and the first of my ancestors I can name.13

Choreosonics are ephemeral performances and Ronald Judy’s (Dis)Forming the American Canon gives concrete ground from which to begin an analysis of theology, philosophy and the multiple modes of placement and spatially organized ideas and bodies, as he is

attentive to the question and problematic of canonizing ephemera. He urges against the ways in which the very notion of a literary tradition redoubles the unnecessary opposition of *theoria* – the “abstract and cognitive contemplation of the invisible, indivisible Being,” the “order of rational discourse built on the principle of noncontradiction” – to *asthesis* – the “field of the sensible as illusion.”\(^{14}\) He finds this historic split between theory and aesthetic to be a crucial factor in the constitution of an American canon generally, and an African American Black Studies canon particularly. Judy engages the work of John Blassingame’s *The Slave Community*, to highlight the ways in which Blassingame finds the autobiographic writing to be most useful for understanding the historiography of black people during enslavement. Judy acknowledges Blassingame’s attachment to autobiography as it is a “deliberative discourse” which “provides information about the psychology of the slave, how the slave experienced reality as given” even when there are shortcomings to such narrativizing.\(^{15}\) It is the question of the verifiability of the slave narrative, of the slave autobiography, that for me makes the urgency of thinking Calvinist theology and Enlightenment thought as a choreographic itinerary and protocol.

We can focus on the choreosonic in order to think a different intentionality, a way of life and thinking. This chapter gives attention to the graphesis of the choreosonic

\(\text{\footnotesize\(^{14}\) Judy, (Dis)forming the American Canon, p. 46.}\)

\(\text{\footnotesize\(^{15}\) Judy, (Dis)forming the American Canon, p. 34.}\)
response to such theologizing and philosophizing that we find in the material, on-the-
ground movements of the shout traditions. These movements are necessarily ephemera,
once foot shuffles upon ground, once vibration and friction literally sound out, its
graphesis dissipates. Performance allows us to think with Judy and around such
autobiographical necessity for verifiability and reliability: Austin’s performance of the
everyday is not about the truthiness or falsity of any such claim but rather about the
efficaciousness.16 Does the performance do something in the world; and if so, what is
and what is the result of such doing? Can the performance of movement, even in its
repetition, teach us something about enslavement? Can it present a different
“documentary history of the collective African American experience of America in
slavery”?17 Are shout traditions, and what are the ways for them to be, an aesthetic
prompting for imagining a new world?

At last seems to come a snap and
the spell breaks amid
general
sighs & laughter.18

Some would argue that any scene of enslavement is one of subjection and terror, that
any possibility for enjoyment or imagination is radically inhibited by the desire of the

16 J. L. (John Langshaw) Austin, How to Do Things with Words, William James Lectures; 1955. (Cambridge,
Mass. : Harvard University Press, c1975.).
17 Judy, (Dis)forming the American Canon, p. 35.
18 Higginson, p. 28.
institution of enslavement itself. But what does the performance of the shout traditions prompt in the performers and the onlookers, onhearers of such aesthetic practices? How to understand that historicity of movement, a particular politics of avoidance of the aversion to and for blackness and the embodiment of such a concept in the figure of the black, raced, Negro is what I seek to perform.

Shouts — Afro-Arabic, Sea Coastal Ring and BlackPentecostal — are the itineraries for the lines of force animating and architectonics of resistance; they perform protocols for movement that always counter and intuit; they are intentionally agitational and nuanced. Barely perceptible auralities of the body, given by the jerked movements and the feet scarcely lifted off the ground, given by spin and twist, what I call black torque. Gotta listen and look closely. Shouting can be whispered, shouting can be screamed: laminated plea, escaped rapture. To arrive at an analysis of twentieth century BlackPentecostal shouting as dance tradition that carries the vital acts it transfers, I would like to begin with Afro-Arabic saut, of which one such possibility for pronunciation in New World English is “shout,” though it’s a bit difficult to determine.

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This resistance to determination, it turns out, will be the rickety bridge upon which blackness and performance converge.\textsuperscript{21}

*Saout* provides for us a bridge between Sea Costal Ring Shout and Pentecostal Shouting, though it exists prior to Middle Passage’s situation, a bridge of desire for avoidance of such marginalizing practices of transatlantic stolen love, life. That bridge is choreosonic, echoed by way of an irreducible indeterminacy for and refusal of meaning, a translational hesitance that compels our own relation to the apprehension of such a word, such a performance; of any word, of any performance. Lorenzo Dow Turner insisted that the term *saut*, when imported to the Georgia/South Carolina seacoast, referenced the Afro-Arabic circumambulatory movement for Islamic practices, the dance around and about the Kaaba.

“Dr. L. D. Turner has discovered the Arabic word *saut* (pronounced like our word ‘shout’), in use among the Mohammedans of West Africa meant to run and walk around the Kaaba.” Turner’s remark concerning the term is particularly interesting owing to his association of the ring shout with the ritual in which hundreds, tightly assembled, move around the Kaaba in a counterclockwise direction.\textsuperscript{22}

Turner linked this *saut*, with its counterclockwise circularities, to Ring Shouts, that he noticed in Sea Coastal Georgia and South Carolina in the continental United States. Though there was contention about the pronunciation of *saut*, what intrigues here

\textsuperscript{21} Mackey, *From a Broken Bottle Traces of Perfume Still Emanate*, p. 31.
is the notion of velocity and repetition. In Islamic tradition, if one is able to make the journey to Mecca where the Kaaba – the cubed, most sacred site of Islam – is located, the circumambulation is to occur seven times. Turner briefly noted how one could either walk or run in order to perform this sacred movement, and how the spatial organizing of bodies – tightly assembled flesh, objects among other objects, together – are of import. Implied is that the sociality that emerges by performing this circumambulatory movement together with others is dependent equally upon the uniqueness of individuals choosing both to enter into claustrophobic conditions as an act of praise as well as the pace, speed, rhythm with which they would perform such sociality.

The presence of Islam as theo-ethical and political formation of social life on the Georgia and South Carolinian seacoasts resulted from the reverberation and echo of choreosonic stolen life, the importation of enslaved peoples who were Muslim. In fact, “slightly over 50 percent of Africans imported to North America came from areas in which Islam was at least a religion of the minority.”23 Even if notions of confessional faith and doctrine were not practiced, it is certain that the energy and vitality of Islam would have been felt as a fundamental resource for resistance of the object of black social life. There is convincing evidence that the Muslim presence among African slaves was particularly evident on the Eastern Seaboard, including Georgia. Not only

was the Muslim presence evident among new slaves — however secretive the practices might have been — but during the period 1730-1860 proof of the Islamic presence is documented...However small their number, the fact that Islamic converts had lived in the ancestral West African regions before the slave trade to the Americas lends some credence to the influence, not origin, of the saut (Arabic-Islamic) theory behind the ring shout...Were one to assume that elements of Muslim musical practice entered the highly syncretistic nature of counterclockwise religious ritual dances of slaves, and that remnants of such a practice are still evident in the coastal regions where the ring shout survived, examining the influence of Islamic practices might be a logical step to take. Upon closer examination, the term saut presents problematic etymological description. The common use of this term today simply is to mean “sound.”

This passage compels a journey into the “cut” between sound and ground given with each enunciation of saut. The “cut” of saut is the phantom bridge of desire, of an excessive force that constitutes the very possibility for meaning. The “cut” given as saut’s enunciation is the bridge – the possibility for movement, crossing, leaving and arrival. The bridge with which we begin – saut – forces the consideration of the ongoing relation between sound and ground, particularly when saut is understood as the rhetorical designation for a protocol not reducible to neither choreography on the one hand nor sonicity on the other. Simply, there is an indeterminacy – which is the business of translation – at the heart of the matter for the meaning of saut as performance and performative.

Anne Taves discusses “Shouting Methodists” as a precursor to twentieth century shouting tradition. Weaving together the various ways in which “shout” was used and critiqued, particularly as a Methodist theological practice, it becomes apparent that many of the injunctions against shouting were, in fact, not about choreography but regarded falling out, fainting, swooning and loud vocalizations. John Fanning Watson noted as much in his anonymously written *Methodist error; or, Friendly, Christian advice, to those Methodists, who indulge in extravagant emotions and bodily exercises.* He said of black noise that “At the black Bethel church in Philadelphia, it has been common to check the immoderate noise of the people” and of the performance of enthusiastic public worship generally, “It began in Virginia, and as I have heard, among the blacks.” The choreosonic interplay is a black thing – Fanning Watson just wouldn’t understand – as this black choreosonic brought with it a fundamental indeterminacy. Taves writes about how people would lose strength, restrain from leaping, would melt into tears, weep aloud or appear concerned. The indeterminacy of meaning blacks carried with them about the meaning of *saut* and shout, it appears, was a vivifying impetus for the “Methodist error”; black participation in Methodist prayer meetings and Awakening revivals necessarily forced a critique of bodily extravagance.

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26 Watson, pp. 22, 27.
Saut, as bridge, illustrates the fact that directionality matters. The dance around the Kaaba is a counterclockwise counterclaim for counterinsurgency that is always and at every performance the possibility for social ecstasy, of being beside oneself together with others, wherein the besides are, phonographically we might say, the B-sides of the record, the underside and the underground of the emergence of an emptying of oneself out toward others. Social ecstasy is not about the becoming undone of the subject when confronted with an Other that assumes that doneness is what exists “naturally.”

Rather, social ecstasy is the conception that the condition of possibility for life is undoneness as ontological priority. The emptying of oneself through spiritual performance of peregrination elucidates the capacity to give and receive, to disperse and hold, and lays claim to this undoneness as a way of life. To say that direction matters is not merely to make an assertion about the spatial organizing of movement from one point to another as if following an arrow from bow to target. Rather, it is about the recognition that that which we call “path” is an after-the-fact effect of one possibility being taken out of many; it is the recognition that previous to situation, infinite possibility is a fact of life. Social ecstasy as the emptying out of oneself toward a social produces and is produced by infinite possibility.

Direction as a choreographic protocol and itinerary for New World otherwise

than, but deeply bound up in, Islamic-Christian performance and performativity takes us to sea coastal South Carolina and Georgia generally and to Sapelo Island, GA, the home of Bilali particularly. This latter island and this figure are both important for our understanding of a politics of avoidance found in the performance of the shout traditions when we consider the purposiveness of directionality on such a small piece of land just off the coast of Georgia. Born approximately 1760 in Timbo, Futa Jallon, Bilali was stolen into laborious conditions as a teenager and taken to Middle Caicos before being sold to one Thomas Spalding of Sapelo Island in 1802. A collection of writings, known as Ben Ali’s Diary, was at least partially written by Bilali in Arabic script. On a general level, the movement of Arabic scripting is a counter-western orientation towards the word, the statement, the phrase, the sentence. Writing occurs from right to left, which may share some resonance with the counterclockwise movements of Kaaba circumambulation. If directionality matters is the foundational claim regarding the politics of avoidance, let the direction of script serve as one such alluvial element.

Sapelo Island residents even today show the influence of Bilali that resonates through the performance of direction even in decidedly Christological spaces. Of note is

28 There is contention as to the attribution of authorship of this collection of writings, though. Ronald Judy argues that authorship may be multiple and that, perhaps, only sections of the text may have been authored by Bilali himself, though this is difficult to determine. See Judy, (Dis)forming the American Canon, p. 271.
the following passage of Cornelia Bailey, a woman born and raised on Sapelo Island who cherishes the traditions of the land:

When I’d go to say my nightly prayer, I’d better not, I repeat, I’d better not let Mama catch me with my head turned to the West. I was up for a good fussing at if she did. (...) The first thing I learned when it came to directions was East and West. Forget the South and the North. I knew at an early age that the sun rose in the East, so it was easy to pinpoint, and I knew the West, because the sun sets there and the darkness begins. So I knew my directions and who I was supposed to be praying to and who I was supposed to be avoiding. It was god resides in the East. Pray to God, not the devil. 29

Directionality matters and it carries the material trace of the purposiveness of movement – turning, tuning, torque – toward social ecstasy. The posture of spiritual and spatiotemporal vector, and has particular force when engaged with a social choreography. And the politics of avoidance is enacted at the level of this social choreography that is the reservoir of memory and dissent. We might even consider how the eastward orientation, in prayer and praise, in the New World after the fact of Middle Passage became a moment of acknowledgement for the ancestry of stolen love, life. The western world – the direction towards which the enslaved were brought and newly inhabited – was animated by the theological and philosophical aversion for the objects, for the materiality of things, for the persons found in the East. Eastward orientation speaks before, anti- and ante-, this rupture.

29 Bailey and Bledsoe, p. 157.
Thus, directionality serves as memorial. As the first of her ancestors that she can name, Bailey utters Bilali and his posture towards the east as an important fact of memory. That memory is a fact of the materiality of the body; memory is embodied and remembrance is prompted at each performance of the turn to the east. Sapelo is the ground upon which the convergence of influences occurs but is there a relationship between the circumambulation around the Kaaba and the Ring Shout that Bilali and his descendants index? The relationship might just be borne out on another excess, another accouterment, another throw-away material trace: the Turkish fez. I want to consider the efficacy of the performance of sartorial stylings as bound up with a more general religiocultural way of life. The fez or hat, always remembered as Turkish, functions as a link not only to Islam in general, but Sufi Islam in particular and the circular dance of Dervishes, whirling or spinning.

Sufism is described as “a science whose objective is the reparation of the heart and turning it away from all else but God” and this turn and turn away is evident with Bilali and his descendants’ eastward prayers, as well as the counterclockwise moves of the Ring Shout. Sufi whirling or spinning is meditative and Sufi Islamic practices

30 Also see the quote on page 4 above regarding Bilali and “day clean.”
31 This Turkish fez has been remembered – but not discussed at any length – in film representations such as Julie Dash’s Daughters of the Dust as well as in historic, nonfiction accounts in excess of Cornelia Bailey’s account. See Gomez “Muslim Slaves” (232) and Adisa Anderson and others, Daughters of the Dust [videorecording], Digitally remastered, letterboxed version (New York, N.Y.: Kino International : Kino on Video [distributor], 1999).
reached Timbo, Futa Jallon by the seventeenth century. It is probable that Sufism at least in part influenced the Islamic practices of Bilali. Sufism is defined by its doubled choreographic: to draw close to and experience the presence of Allah most intimately in this life as well as to experience tawhid (Divine Unity). The aesthetic practice of whirling or spinning allows one to experience this intimacy and presence of divinity and this experience is prompted by a circularity that is counterclockwise, enacted by the individual but performed as, and is the creation of, a social. Sufi whirling or spinning shares in a more general conception of the efficacy of intentional direction.

Importantly, I am not making an argument about linearity or causation that leads us from whirling to saut to ring shout to BlackPentecostal shouting, as that would present a simple teleology created by a unidirectional path toward a proper, normative ecstasies and response. Rather, I argue that BlackPentecost’s energetic field set loose in twentieth century US existed before that historic 1906 Azusa Street moment in various commons, various histories and performances of sharing, of being together tightly in space and moving together. So, yes, there is a BlackPentecost of middling passages of violence established through the pidgin languages and modes of sociality that emerged on violative boats;32 as there was a BlackPentecost in Karl Marx’s home where children

32 Linebaugh, ‘All the Atlantic Mountains Shook’.

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sat on the knees of communist fugitives, his home as a gathering space for thought;\textsuperscript{33} as there was a Black Pentecost of the communing, talking and praying in a home on North Bonnie Brae Street in 1906’s Los Angeles “seeking” for divine encounter. Bilali and his descendants’ performances of the ring shout on Sapelo Island, GA – called simply “shouting” in the religious context or the Buzzard Lope as a “secular” example – allow for a more robust analysis of this antebellum practice generally. This dance tradition, performed on the seacoasts of South Carolina and Georgia present the convergence of sacred practices on the ground, a choreographic itinerary and protocol that rose to the occasion of enslavement’s desire to make of them socially dead subjects, without honor, alienated through natal practice.\textsuperscript{34} Where social death privileges “natal alienation,” I think through processes as generative, as promptings toward desire. The following descriptions give a general architecture for understanding this particular New World shout tradition:

“The foot is hardly taken from the floor, and the progression is mainly due to a jerking, hitching motion, which agitates the entire shouter, and soon brings out streams of perspiration” (William Francis Allen, 33).

“A space is cleared by moving the benches, and the men and women arrange themselves, generally alternately, in a ring, their bodies quite close. The music starts and the ring begins to move. Around it goes, at


\textsuperscript{34} The conception of ‘social death’ is Patterson’s, though it has been taken up in Black Studies since his writing. See Orlando Patterson.
first slowly, then with quickening pace. Around and around it moves on shuffling feet that do not leave the floor, one foot beating with the heel a decided accent in two-four time. The music is supplemented by the clapping of hands. As the ring goes around it begins to take on signs of frenzy. The music, starting, perhaps with a Spiritual, becomes a wild, monotonous chant. The same musical phrase is repeated over and over one, two, three, four, five hours. The words become a repetition of an incoherent cry. The very monotony of sound and motion produces an ecstatic state. Women, screaming, fall to the ground prone and quivering. Men, exhausted, drop out of the shout. But the ring closes up and moves around and around.” (James Weldon Johnson, 41).

“The line between shouting and dancing was strictly held. Shouting could be indulged only while singing a spiritual. Under no circumstances might the feet be crossed. These two rules were universal and inflexible. In addition, the older and stricter church members held that the foot should never be entirely lifted from the floor” (Robert W. Gordon 43).35

Higginson’s example requires emphasis.36 The formation of the circle occurred by way of a general – social – excitement spreading with some performing a heel-toe maneuver with tumult, others trembling with staggered movement, others still stooping and rising, some whirling, some twisting side-to-side. These variegated movements produced the circle in which the performance occurred. The variegation did not only occur on the level of the movements. Though the movements produce sonicity – a trembled foot upon the ground vibrates, and thus sounds out, differently than a heel-toe tumult – the “snap” of the spell produced a sonic dissent as well. The sighs and laughs are both audibly breathed responses to such movements and motives, sounding out

35 All quotations are taken from Rosenbaum and Buis.  
36 See the full quote on page 5.
together while simultaneously marking the individual’s embodied performance of sociality as dissent.

To declare, then: the Afro-Arabic *saut*, Sufi whirling and the ring shout descriptions above are all instantiations of *black torque*: within the circumambulatory counterclockwise movements as a social form, individual twists and turns of individual bodies. These *saut* and shout formations illustrate the assertion of uniqueness and difference – dissent and descent – as the grounds for a social gathering of thought. The possibility for social form here is dissent, dissent that is originary. Each *saut*-er, each dervish, each shouter intentions their own motives and movements in concert with and as difference against the social form in which they are creating at the moment of danced encounter. Perhaps this is an Enlightenment grounded in difference, where what the dancers escape into is the social world against the conditions of being shored up against sensory deprivation, where they enter into the social space in order to aphilosophize a politics of avoidance. But more on that soon. These persons moved their bodies with

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37 I take this idea from Adrian Piper’s *Untitled Performance at Max’s Kansas City* wherein she deprives her senses in the “artworld” in order to be noncollaborative with this world that would so absorb her. She wants to move through the artworld unpetered by their apprehension of her as a performance piece of art. She desired to “withdraw into the external world,” and this withdrawal is a counterclaim for countermovement, against normative directionality. For Piper, however, this noncollaborativity was an impossibility because her desire – the desire of the object – was collaborative with the artworld itself. However, the ring shout, I believe, puts forth a different set of possibilities at its performance where what is desired is not noncollaboration but, rather, there is nonchalance regarding onlookers where nonchalance indexes a coolness, a casualness. It is not that the enslaved who would so perform the ring shout did not care if they were caught in the act, so to speak, in the brush harbors, particularly if they were “stealing away” in order to worship and praise together. Rather, nonchalance indexes the moment when they decide to steal away,
intentionality of the social form they were in process of creating in mind; they had to
*think* the social to make the social.

Whether whirling, *saut* or ring, shouting occurs in the circle – a geometric, spatial
form that allows the irruption for black torque while concurrently being such an
irruption; the corporeal-mechanical, animateriality\(^{38}\) – dispersing vitality such that the
individuals could reach fatigue. Between the recounting of Higginson’s *snap*, Allen’s
*perspiration* and Johnson’s *exhaustion*, what becomes apparent is that fatigue might be the
most desired and sought after result of such social ecstasy. This is particularly striking
for the enslaved, many of whom after having worked sunup to sundown, would steal
away and perform such dances into the early hours of the morning. The geometric circle,

\[^{38}\] ‘Animateriality’ is described by Fred Moten as ‘the material reproductivity of black performance’ and that
this is ‘an ontological condition.’ Moreover, ‘This is the story of how apparent nonvalue functions as a
creator of value; it is also the story of how value animates what appears as nonvalue. This functioning and
this animation are material. This animateriality – impassioned response to passionate utterance - is painfully
and hiddenly disclosed always and everywhere in the tracks of black performance and black discourse on
black performance.’ See Moten, *In The Break*, p. 18. What I would like to do, however, is think nonvalue and
excess together, particularly when we consider that that which is excessive functions as both more and less
than (and thus, the negation of) value. When we consider the aesthetics of Pentecost as excessive, as
nonpurposive for theological reflection, for philosophical thought, by way of black torque, refracted through
Moten’s theory of nonvalue, we can begin to think about the apparent relation of the philosophy of
aversion that choreographically turns away from the materiality of such black objects and the politics of
avoidance that voids such aversion previous to its turn and turn away. That is, black torque is a decisive
factor in the possibility to “think philosophically” for a figure like Kant and it may, in fact, animate that
thinking. It is the nonvalue, and the excess of such movable objects, that create his enlightened thoughts.
the spatializing loci of such dance, lays bare the ways in which black torque is the desire for spontaneous, spirited dispersal of love, life, after the point of possibility, when possibility has been fully realized and exasperated.\textsuperscript{39} These performances of ring shout were figurations of sociality: that what occurred by way of sighs, laughter, perspiration, and exhaustion while being together, in one place, on one according, waiting for, while at the same time producing, the sound of a rushing mighty wind of change and dissent with each jerked foot, snapped body was a politics, a form of life, an critique of the given, violent, violative world. The ring shout as a social form of black torque carried the indeterminacy of meaning, and this indeterminacy was the condition of its possibility.

\textbf{2.2 Pentecostal Shouting Choreographics}

At the turn of the twentieth century, two black men, William Seymour and Charles Harrison Mason\textsuperscript{40} – both key figures of twentieth century BlackPentecostalism –

\textsuperscript{39} Gilles Deleuze says, ‘The tired no longer prepares for any possibility (subjective): he therefore cannot realize the smallest possibility (objective). But possibility remains, because you never realize all of the possible, you even bring it into being as you realize some of it. The tired has only exhausted realization, while the exhausted exhausts all of the possible.’ See Gilles Deleuze, ‘The Exhausted’, \textit{SubStance}, 24, No. 3 (1995), p. 1.

\textsuperscript{40} William Seymour was founder of the Azusa Street, Apostolic Mission church where the global Pentecostal twentieth century movement was “birthed” in 1906. Previous to his arrival in Los Angeles, he traveled the country continually seeking a deeper, more profound, material experience of God. Charles Harrison Mason, founder of the Church of God in Christ also traveled the country seeking a divine encounter, an encounter of experience. Having met Seymour previously in Mississippi, Mason traveled to the Apostolic Mission in 1906 to learn more about the Holy Ghost experience people were proclaiming and likewise had the “baptism in the Holy Spirit” with the evidence of glossolalia. See Alexander, David Douglas Daniels, \textit{The Cultural Renewal of Slave Religion}. See also Robec.
began peregrinations and a holy vagrancy of sorts in order to find experience, and “an experience is something you come out of changed.” The varied directions – from Louisiana to Indiana, Ohio, Mississippi, Texas and California in the case of Seymour; and from Tennessee to Arkansas, Mississippi, California for Mason – set the grounds for a multimodal aesthetic practice. Seymour and Mason were continually on the search, involved in seeking out, through extension and critique, John Wesley’s “experimental religion.” And the experimental had everything to do with the experiential. Seymour and Mason went on search for experience, and that search was an inventiveness, though the privilege of gender at least partially allowed for an unsullied set of movements. What they discovered, perhaps most profoundly, was an ongoing need for discovery: the continual invocation of dissent as descent, further below, deeper, underground. They knew that they wanted something deeper and more profound than Wesleyan-Holiness sanctification. They literally traveled all over the country in search of experience, seeking something through which they would enter, and come out, changed. This search was generative and profound.

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41 Michel Foucault and Duccio Trombadori, Remarks on Marx: Conversations with Duccio Trombadori (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991), p. 27.
42 This was a phrase used to discuss the “enthusiastic” Wesleyan Holiness movement.
43 Koerner.
44 Women would leave children behind in search for the experience of Pentecost as well, but were often encouraged not to do so if they had children and/or husbands. Though the Pentecostal movement gave many women latitude to assert that their itinerancy was prompted by the Holy Ghost to spread the gospel, the fact of the necessity to justify such movement sets at relief the differences of gendered experience.
Zora Neale Hurston performed anthropological, sociological studies of Seymour’s movement and the subset group based on Mason’s subsequent encounter with Black Pentecost in her work. She understood the class struggle that this seemingly new religiocultural movement articulated: “The Sanctified Church is a protest against the high-brow tendency in Negro Protestant congregations as the Negroes gain more education and wealth.”45 She stated that this sect was “a revitalizing element in Negro music and religion” and that this collection of groups was “putting back into Negro religion those elements which were brought over from Africa and grafted onto Christianity.”46 Grant Wacker corroborates these pronouncements, stating, “pentecostal worship oscillate[s] between antistructural and structural impulses. Planned spontaneity, we might call it.”47 Hurston noticed and extended a discourse regarding this revitalizing element in Negro religiosity, the choreographies of such a movement, the ways dance enunciate a way of life:

There can be little doubt that shouting is a survival of the African ‘possession’ by the gods. In Africa it is sacred to the priesthood or acolytes, in America it has become generalized. (…) Broadly speaking, shouting is an emotional explosion, responsive to rhythm. It is called forth by: (1) sung rhythm; (2) spoken rhythm; (3) humming rhythm; (4) the foot-patting or hand-clapping that intimates very closely the tom-tom.

[...]

46 Hurston, p. 106.
47 Wacker, p. 99.
There are two main types of shouters: (1) silent; (2) vocal. There is a sort of intermediary where one stage is silent and the other vocal. The silent type take with violent retching and twitching motions. Sometimes they remain seated, sometimes they jump up and down and fling the body about with great violence. Lips tightly pursed, eyes closed. The seizure ends by collapse. The vocal type is the more frequent. There are all gradations from quiet weeping while seated, to the unrestrained screaming while leaping pews and running up and down the aisle. Some, unless restrained, run up into the pulpit and embrace the preacher. Some are taken with hysterical laughing spells.  

Class struggle internal to black social life was aestheticized and shouting was one such articulation to the resistance for certain social forms. What showed up for Hurston as “survivals” of African forms of “possession,” BlackPentecostal shouting – after the ring shout had all but been stamped out of most communal practices – rose to the specific occasion of its occurrence, enacting black torque – the force necessary to produce multiple movements that have within them the capacity for fugitivity and dissent, what Frantz Fanon called the refusal of positionality wherein “no strategic position is given preference” as the creation of social form.  

BlackPentecostal shouting creates a social and though it can be performed alone, it is the being together with others at the moment of such performance that is privileged. The individual shouter creates social form by mixing in an irreducibly already available individual styling. It makes the kids laugh

48 For another of Hurston’s quotes, see page 28 above. Hurston, p. 91.
49 We might even, because of Fanon, consider the shout traditions as guerilla warfare, a particularly violent intervention into emergence into the normative subject position. See Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (New York: Grove, 1968,c1963.), p. 85.
and learn. It makes the elders happy to see spiritual change. This feeling of joy disperses through the congregation.

Moreover, rhythm is centripetal force – hovering overhead, in ears, vibrating within flesh – pulling towards its sonic, resonant center; but while it pulls others in, rhythm must act as its antithesis, centrifugally sending out signal from its varied centers. And as with the ring shout, exhaustion after the *snap*, after the break, might be what is most desired with BlackPentecostal shouting. In Hurston’s description, one sees the ontological edge she gave to the shout traditions. They are emotional explosions that are responsive to conditions of their possibility; but they are, likewise, called forth from some such submerged underground, inexhaustibly dense space. Called forth and responsive to, the shout traditions of our concern exist prior to their being hailed, they are not just hallucinatory of sadness or melancholy but were used during enslavement to occasion resistance as well as create new words, new worlds, in their present realities. BlackPentecostal shouting, then it seems, is what Hurston would describe of Negro Expression generally as variation around a theme.50

Charles Harrison Mason, founder of the Church of God in Christ (COGIC), is one of the prominent figures of modern Pentecostalism and had much to say about “dancing.” In his pamphlet “Is It Right for the Saints of God to Dance?” he answered

50 See ‘Characteristics of Negro Expression’ in Hurston.
with an emphatic “yes.”51 But it is the extrapolation, the explication, the experience that moves beyond the “yes” that is moving:

“The children of God dance of God, for God, and to the praise and glory of his name. They have the joy of the spirit of the Lord in them, they are joyful to their King – the Christ. At times they may be dancing Christ is all, or none but Christ. How sweet it is to dance in Him and about Him, for he is all. So to dance in the Spirit of the Lord expresses joy and victory.”52

Mason’s description of shouting intrigues because of the way a circumambulatory architectonics structures his rendering of the dance within this BlackPentecostal sect. This circumambulatory structure occurs at the level of rhetoric, particularly the prepositions of, for and to God. This tripartite preposition sets up, and maybe steals away, the atheological “space” in which the BlackPentecostal choreographic not only took its place, but also thrived and flourished therein. Mason’s rhetoric was consistent with ring shout practices insofar as fugitivity was the grounds for making a way out of no way, grounds upon which sounds could emanate needed clearing.53 But also with his

51 Mason, p. 53.
52 Mason, p. 53.
53 Mason, of course, was involved in post-emancipatory, reconstruction battles about the meaning of the divine, of the spirit, of the prayers of his ancestors. The black holiness movement of which Mason was a part spanning roughly 1896-1906 contended with the black Baptist movement, making claims that the theology of the very rhetoric of being a “Baptist Church” was not a biblical precept and, thus, should be done away with. For a robust treatment of this history, see David Douglas Daniels, The Cultural Renewal of Slave Religion For example, Daniels describes the various schisms that took place at the now historic Mt. Helm (Baptist) Church, its various renamings such as the Church of God and the Christ’s Tabernacle that they desired in order to be more consistent with what they believed to be biblical mandates. The church specifically wanted to separate from ‘Baptist’ churches and ‘from all creeds, denominations, associations and
rhetoric is the re-instantiation of directionality. Prepositions are “pointing” terms; they bespeak spatial orientation and positionality. At the moment of the enunciation of the dance of, to and for God, Mason also rehearsed a particular hesitance with positionality that would have him stilled. No position is privileged but each had the capacity to be broken and breaking. With the tripartite prepositionality – with each motor behavior – the of, to and for were resourced simultaneously. Mason’s tract gave an atheological-philosophical response to folks who deemed enthusiasm too moving and dance too erratic. He was cognizant of the critique of shouting as “dance,” and rose to the occasion of its response. This simultaneous enunciation of terms that point are the rhetorical enactment of black torque, where the gathering is made possible by dissent.

But there is more, of course. There is the word itself, “shout/ing” and the problematics that come with its enunciation. The performative utterance shout/ing carries the trace of saut’s resistance to meaning. When one declares “the people were shouting today at church,” for example, one would do well to seek clarification: were these vocal utterances or movements of the body? Reading through several turn of the twentieth century Pentecostal periodicals – The Apostolic Faith for example – when confronted with

conventions...because of the evils in them’ (32). This was the theological ground in which Mason found himself making a space.
the word *shouting*, I each time wondered what was the nature of the shout. Was it the
vocable or the choreographic? For example, *The Apostolic Faith* records the following:

Holy quietness does not mean to hold your mouth shut and not praise
God. It means that the spirit hushes all the flesh. The Lord is in His holy
temple and let all the flesh be silent before Him. This quietness will let the
Spirit speak out in praises and shouts and song. It is holy quietness in
heaven, when the praise is like the voice of ‘many waters’ and ‘mighty
thunderings.’ (Rev. 19:6) We want this holy quietness all the time, so we
will get used to heaven before we get there.\(^5^4\)

What were the “shouts” about which the preacher briefly testified? Were they the
choreographic or the sonic? We will not, unfortunately, ever know and it is this
indeterminacy of meaning that undergirds such testimony. One would need to go there,
experience there, feel there, hear there in order to have knowledge of such a field, such a
moment. This is knowledge that is produced through the materiality of dwelling
together with others, awaiting sounds and movements as the spirit gives utterance. The
article from the Los Angeles Daily Times also gave a clue as to how shouting was first
performed in this earliest moment of the movement:

Undismayed by the fearful attitude of the colored worshipper, another
black women jumped to the floor and began a wild gesticulation, which
ended in a gurgle of wordless prayers which were nothing less than
shocking.\(^5^5\)

\(^{5^4}\) ‘A Minnesota Preacher’s Testimony’, *The Apostolic Faith* (Los Angeles, CA, 5 March 1907), Feb-March
edition.

\(^{5^5}\) ‘WEIRD BABEL OF TONGUES.: New Sect of Fanatics Is Breaking Loose; Wild Scene Last Night on Azusa
Street; Gurgle of Wordless Talk by a Sister’, *Los Angeles Times* (1886-1922) (Los Angeles, Calif., 18 April
1906), section Editorial, p. III.
She jumped to the floor and gesticulated. This was an eruption and irruption into the service itself. Though someone had fallen out, “slain in the spirit” BlackPentecostals might say, previous to her, she was, as the story recounts, “undismayed” and continued with her worship. The dissent apparent with the “undismayed” attitude was the yielding for others to worship “in their own way,” originally differentiated, as the formation of the ring, of the circle, of the social way of life. Shouting no longer takes place within the circle but the energy of saut and ring shout are dispersed, generalized, made available to all. All this from walks and runs and journeys in small compact spaces, on streets, across the country. Shouting is, then, but one choreographic atiological-aphilosophical way of life. But what then can we say of theology and philosophy as abstractions against which BlackPentecost responds?

2.3 Kant’s Choreographic and Enlightenment Thought

To go for a walk everyday. For this walk to bespeak something of desire for knowledge, to think, to breathe, to get fresh air. Immanuel Kant’s place in Western philosophy, his residence in Enlightenment thought, cannot be understated. His place, his residence, can be thought by way of the walking he did everyday as another choreographic protocol and itinerary.

When he had a house of his own, he had every day a few friends dine with him. He liked to have a mixed company – merchants, professional men, and especially a few younger men. After dinner followed regularly his daily walk for an hour or more, along what was from him named ‘The
Philosopher’s Walk,’ until he was driven from it by the number of beggars whom his habit of almsgiving had attracted there. Even the severest weather did not interfere with this daily walk, in which his earlier years he usually had companions; after sixty years of age he walked alone, for the reasons already mentioned.56

Offered here by Kant’s daily programmatic is not an argument that choreographic, spatial language is used merely to metaphorically think about concepts, logic, reason and judgment. Rather, this is an argument that what Kant calls philosophy is made possible by the choreographic as a field of place and movement, his own quotidian peregrinations as an example of such philosophizing.

A desire to shout, to be part of shout traditions that run in him, though the sociality of such emergence was repressed. This desire is evinced by his sociability, his invitation of having others come to his home – as a gathering space for thought – in order to ruminate a variety of topics. But where Kant falls short of shouting, while moving in its direction against his intentionally pronounced choreographies, is by his aversion to beggars. Beggars are those in need, those who make a request consistency and urgency. Intriguingly, what drove Kant away from the walkway he so named after his quotidian journeys was an aversion, not for the capacity of the street to carry, but the materiality of this fact: so many beggars. It is not that beggars were an impossibility for

his thought; indeed, he was an almsgiver. But it was the number that surprised him and this number was made possible by the street as a different, likewise as his home, space of social gathering where all types of unavoidable, improvisational choreographies philosophies relay and interplay. To engage in walk at the same time each day along the same route is nothing other than to have a choreographic itinerary and protocol for movement. The very thing that drove him from the daily journey is the thing that drove his philosophic engagements: worry over the materiality of the object. The aversion to beggars is simply the presencing of aversion as general philosophic performance. Not a ruse nor a metaphorical flourish, aversion was a material way to be, and thus to think about being, in the world. If only those objects of aversion would move out the way:

[T]he knowledge of bodies as substances, and as changeable substances, is transcendental when it states that the changing must have a cause; but the principle is metaphysical when it asserts that the changing must have an external cause. In the first case, bodies need only be thought in terms of ontological predicates (pure intellectual concepts), i.e., as substance, for the proposition is to be understood a priori. In the second case, the empirical concept of a body, as a movable thing in space, must be introduced to support the proposition; although once this is done it may be seen quite a priori that the latter predicate, movement only by means of an external cause, applies to a body. \[57\]

A body is a moveable thing in space, in time. But this body, as a material thing, is diminutive to the enterprise for philosophy. Kant preferred the amateriality of the

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physical object, as its realness had the capacity to be the very hindrance of thought. Perhaps he had an antitheatrical prejudice. In Kantian aesthetics, the materiality which prompts aesthetic thought is submitted to its theorizing. Pure judgment relies upon the dematerialization of the object while also proffering that the very material was never necessary; the materiality is not an a priori principle. Rather, aesthetic judgment is a detachment, which can be organized, choreographed, without bodies. Kant’s encounter with the overwhelming presence of beggars on the street, relinquishing his walk because of their bodies, is an anti-corporeal choreographic itinerary. Materiality – any object itself – must be choreographed (placed to the side, set at remove) as an impenetrability (as that which can be both grasped, held and captured) in order for its contemplation for the possibility of it as beautiful to be enacted. The object of concern must be set at remove for pure judgment. The materiality, then, is the impurity previous to choreographic philosophy. How to recovery the utility of impurity is our task.

If aversion is a corporeal-ideational turning and turning away from objects that do not cause the unique sensation of beauty, the resistance to the object is not found in the object but in the one refusing such engagement. The aversion that leaves a space – a zone of choreographic possibility – open is a reflection of the one enacting such a turn.

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59 Kant and Wood, p. 294.
60 For a discussion about ‘impenetrability’ as the basis for Enlightenment thought, see Michel Foucault, The Birth of the Clinic, 3rd edn (Routledge, 2003).
The disgust that the subject feels is the disgust of and with the self, not with the object. The object becomes the ruse of philosophizing, it is the scapegoat.61

Enlightenment, Kant answers the question in 1784, is “the emergence from (one’s) self-incurred minority” and minority, accordingly, is the “inability to make use of one’s own understanding without direction from another.”62 Kant’s Enlightenment thought, it seems, is the aversion to social choreography; it is movement of the mind, of the faculties, of one’s own accord without considering the space placement of another. Enlightenment is the emergence – the becoming, the bursting forth and free – into an anti-social, amaterial, antitheatrical way of knowing, thinking, doing, moving. Of course, to become, to burst forth and free are not, of themselves, the problematic. This is not a critique of movement, emergence nor escape. Harriet Tubman burst into New York, having escaped by herself only to find her freedom anything but sweet because she was lonely. She returned to Maryland in order to have others abscond with her; freedom was a social thing.63 Enlightenment thought’s desire is to dance by oneself on the dance floor and not be bothered by the sweat of another, nor their rhythms, nor smells. It is a retreat from the social in order to produce knowledge. As retreat, it is a move and move away from that which makes possible movement.

62 Kant and Wood, p. 133.
63 Sarah H. (Sarah Hopkins) Bradford, Harriet Tubman, the Moses of Her People, American Experience Series. (Gloucester, Mass.: P. Smith, 1981.).
In order to think Enlightenment philosophy, we must consider its general field of choreographies of bodies, of objects, of things as well as the enactment of aversions in particular. For Kant, thinking is the enterprise of the individual; he does not allow for the masses to be thinking together, for there to be social thought. However, what are some figurations of possibilities for a freedom that is not about the emergence from a social into a particular transcendental subjectivity? That is, what type of freedom can exist as a function of sociality? The beginning of Kant’s Enlightenment thought is found in the averted posture toward, and thus against, the social. The choreographic is the heart of aversive matters. To avert is to engage in corporeal, or what I argue here, a corporeal-ideational, choreographic exchange. Aversion, as the foundational claim for such movement, is a choreographic philosophy while likewise it is a philosophical choreography. To avert is to turn away, it is to withdraw, it is to alienate and estrange. To avert is to refuse to see an object by the impulsive recoil away from that object, leaving the object intact. The issue for Enlightenment philosophy, though, is how it theorizes the object from which it averts its gaze, its ear, rendering the materiality and material reality of such an object inconsequential.

Denise da Silva, when writing about Kant’s relationship to epistemology said the following:

[B]y locating the conditions of possibility of knowledge before and beyond sense perception, postulating that terms such as time, space, substance, totality, and so on are the tools ‘pure reason’ provides to the
understanding, (Kant) establishes that now scientific knowledge could progress independent of subjective (psychological) and purely empirical concerns and without principles derived solely from either of them.\textsuperscript{64}

Thus epistemology, knowledge of reason, knowledge of purity, are the before and beyond; an assertion of its being otherwise than sensual perception. This before and beyond is spatial, the choreographic itinerary of aversion itself. To know “before and beyond experience” is to have philosophical aversion for experience. Experience is a problem. Du Bois’s now infamous question – how does it feel to be a problem? – carries within it the trace of other attendant queries: how does it feel to be experience; and specifically experience that bodies forth averted gazes of and for philosophy? And when inflected through the Awakening revivals that were occurring at the same time of Kant’s writing, participating in a similar configuratory project of averting blackness, we might ask: how does it feel to be enthusiasm?

And so we shuffle and leap toward Kant’s theorizing of aesthetics, time and space because of his influence, both in assisting to constitute and understanding of Enlightenment thought but also because of the ongoingness of his status within the history of the western philosophic tradition. In his \textit{Critique of Judgment} in which Kant writes explicitly about aesthesis, he gives us a way to consider the type of reflection that

\textsuperscript{64} Denise Ferreira da. Silva, p. 59.
makes Enlightenment philosophizing possible as a set of choreographic itineraries and protocols.

Hence philosophy is properly divided into two parts quite distinct in their principles; a theoretical part, as Philosophy of Nature and a practical part, as Philosophy of Morals, and this last is what is called practical legislation for the reason based upon the concept of freedom. However, up till now these expressions have been grossly misused in dividing the different principles, and through them, philosophy ... Now, in the division of a science of reason, everything turns on the difference between objects requiring different principles for understanding.65

Evident are the divisions, the splits, the displacements that make the possibility for the discovery of rationality. For Kant, “everything turns on the difference between objects,” and this turning is a turning away, an aversion for the materiality of objects, of things in general and an averse corporeal-metaphysical reaction to certain anthropological bodies, objects in the particular. Kant’s epistemic production was necessarily divisional among space and time, among concepts, among objects. This is choreographic in that it is about the division of labor, about the transformation of potentia to kinesthesia of the theoretical, of the concept, that made the material body inconsequential. The interior thought processes yield a certain ordering of the world, of experience. And if philosophy can be (im)properly divided – sectioned, cornered, moved – we must consider the objects of such divisional labor.

There is another possibility in Kant, though, and it is that of the sublime. But this

65 Kant and Wood, p. 275; 276.
likewise choreographic field is sullied by an aversion for objects, which is the likewise and always consistent aversion for materiality and sociality coterminously. The sublime – a fact of quantity – in Kantian philosophy, leads to “an outrage of the imagination” because it refuses apprehension, though it can certainly be contemplated.\textsuperscript{66} This refusal of apprehension, by way of quantitative fact, is overwhelming to the possibility for thought, though it can certainly produce pleasure. The sublime presents infinite possibility as it cannot be “contained in any sensuous form.”\textsuperscript{67} Its irreducibility and originary displacement is a problem for philosophic thought. The apprehension in the mind as sublime is a ruse since the sublime is the resistance to apprehension, existing as contra-final, and thus, the impossibility of the object’s material existence. But the objects of sublimity that resist such apprehension are still those which Enlightenment philosophy tries to “know” and this knowability is based upon what Foucault believes is the Enlightenment’s assumption of the impenetrability of objects. This impenetrability becomes the occasion for the assumption of the possibilities for any object by way of the lack of interiority of some objects.

Enlightenment as the staging \textit{par excellence} of rationalist discourse assumes the impenetrability of objects as the foundation for knowledge.\textsuperscript{68} Impenetrability as a

\textsuperscript{66} Kant and Wood, p. 306.
\textsuperscript{67} Kant and Wood, p. 307.
\textsuperscript{68} Foucault, \textit{The Birth of the Clinic}, p. xiv.
concept is the preclusion of the possibility of solicitation and invite. Kant’s judgment of taste elucidates the impenetrability of objects: “The judgment of taste does not depend upon a concept (namely that of a general ground of the subjective appropriateness of nature for the power of judgment), but one from which nothing can be known of the object, and nothing proved, because it is in itself indeterminable and useless for knowledge.”

How does one have a knowledge of that which is useless for knowledge; what extends outward from such an object of impossible epistemic possibility? Impenetrability functions as telos, as the grounded assumption of the object that allows for the grasping or aversion of, to and for things. Impenetrability of the object is transformed through rationalist discourse from the circumstance of lacking of knowledge to the condition of possibility for having knowledge. Rationalist language of the Enlightenment as a posture towards the ground and production of knowledge, by positing the impenetrability of the object (and quite possibly a more general anti-feminist, anti-queer, worry over the penetrability of things, where what is supposed of penetration is denigration rather than the possibility of and for pleasure), posits that the object must be assumed – taken up into our grasp, captured, stolen; but this belief in impenetrability assumes likewise that the possibility for discovery has been exhausted, exhaustion as an endpoint rather than a place from which to begin. That is, how is it

69 Kant and Wood, p. 312.
possible that that which is “contra-final” and thus, resistant previous to thought, be thought? The mind must exceed its only capacity for thought and exist – think, dance, leap – in that otherwise spatiotemporal zone.

But it is in Kant’s theorizing of the Transcendental Aesthetic that he specifically thinks about spatiality and temporality. Written (1781) before Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment (1784) and Critique of Judgment (1793), it is Kant’ writing about the Transcendental Aesthetic that literally clears the spatiotemporal ground for the dance and play of his philosophical reasoning.

The effect produced by an object upon the faculty of representation (Vorstellungsfähigkeit), so far as we are affected by it, is called sensation (Empfindung). An intuition (Anschauung) of an object, by means of sensation, is called empirical. The undefined object of such an empirical intuition is called phenomenon (Erscheinung). In a phenomenon I call that which corresponds to the sensation its matter; but that which causes the manifold matter of the phenomenon to be perceived as arranged in a certain order, I call its form. Now it is clear that it cannot be sensation again through which sensations are arranged and placed in certain forms. The matter of all phenomena is given us a posteriori; but their form must be ready for them in the mind (Gemüth) a priori, and must therefore be capable of being considered as separate from all sensations. I call all representations in which there is nothing that belongs to sensation, pure (in a transcendental sense). The pure form therefore of all sensuous intuitions, that form form in which the manifold elements of the phenomena are seen in a certain order, must be found in the mind a priori.\textsuperscript{70}

\textsuperscript{70} Kant and Wood, pp. 42–3.
The materiality of objects correspond to sensation and are only felt after the fact of encounter; but the form of the object exists erstwhile situations, form is always already “ready” in the mind, waiting for objects to be assumed – taken up in, subsumed and captured – in thought. There is not only the hint of spatial organizing for thought here, a choreographic itinerary and protocol for the ordering and movement of, to and from representation, sensation, intuition and phenomenon. It is the grounds of thought, the matter, that becomes unnecessary for philosophical pondering, as it is form which, for Kant, exists a priori. The order for thinking objects, then, is an ordering that seeks out verification for some preexistent arrangement. Sensation is “arranged and placed in certain forms” and this choreography of sensation is an interplay of movement that produces sensible, pure knowledge. The ordering of form “must be found in the mind a priori” as an irreducible purity. But this purity is the aversion to thinking the impure. Philosophical choreography of turning away from the object is the way to produce the proper intellectual, scholar, thinker, philosopher, the subject. Alas, Kant shores up against materiality and ends up with a theory of thinking the self, himself, the human subject as the reflection of an a priori fear of the matter of things. But …

Shouting is a community thing. It thrives in concert. It is the first shout that is difficult for the preacher to arouse. After that one they are likely to sweep like fire over the church. This is easily understood, for the rhythm is increasing with each shouter who communicated his fervor to someone else. It is absolutely individualistic. While there are general types of
shouting, the shouter may mix the different styles to his liking, or he may express himself in some fashion never seen before.\textsuperscript{71}

In Kantian philosophy, space is not a thing of itself, but the displacement created by the movement of an object.\textsuperscript{72} Space confers upon objects form, size and position, but elsewhere Kant’s philosophy of the beautiful and the sublime depend upon the abstraction and discardability of the materiality of the object. So what type of object takes up space for Kant? It appears that they are objects of the mind, they exist as \textit{a priori} concepts and, I argue, reflections of the anti-sociality of thought, the escape from self-incurred minority into the release of seclusion and aloneness that is productive of the scholar, of the thinker. Kant produces his argument about the non-necessity of the materiality of objects by stating that difference, and difference as placement, emerges previous to the actual arrangement and placement. The arrangements and placements of representation occur in the mind of the philosopher and \textit{produce} the objects of concern.

The representation of the object by the displacement of materiality before encounter is constitutive of philosophic thought. Most intriguingly, though, is how Kant grounds the possibility of space in the concept of the subject, that only the subject can have a sense of space. The subject, properly, is the thinking one who adheres to the separation of the materiality of the object from thinking its ground of possibility. The possibility of

\textsuperscript{71} Hurston, p. 91.
\textsuperscript{72} See specifically Kant’s writing about the transcendental aesthetic of space in Kant and Wood, pp. 44, 45, 47.
subjectivity is given by the multiple shifts, movements, and displacements of materiality. The very concept of the subject, grounded in the Transcendental Aesthetic of space, is a displacement and, as such, articulates the choreography animating Enlightenment philosophy.

A space is cleared by moving the benches, and the men and women arrange themselves, generally alternately, in a ring, their bodies quite close.73

Of the Transcendental Aesthetic of Time, Kant says: “Time is not an empirical concept deduced from any experience, for neither coexistence nor succession would enter into our perception, if the representation of time were not given a priori. Only when this representation a priori is given, can we imagine that certain things happen at the same time (simultaneously) or at different times (successively).”74 However, this a priori necessity establishes for Kant that, “Time has one dimension only; different times are not simultaneous, but successive, while different spaces are never successive, but simultaneous.”75 Though Kant can imagine that things can happen concurrently, simultaneously, at the same time he almost immediately qualifies his statement saying that after the a priori principle of time as representational is established, that time cannot exist in simultaneity. Thus, time as a philosophical concept for Kant is the gathering and

73 Rosenbaum and Buis, p. 41.
74 Kant and Wood, p. 49.
75 Kant and Wood, p. 50.
discarding of the excesses of imagination; imagination is that which makes simultaneity possible and also that which is ungrounded.

However, the simultaneity, which is the sociality, is what makes polyrhythm possibility. *Ekstasis* is the enraptured being beside oneself that is a spatiotemporal disruption. The choreographic that informs the grounds of Enlightenment philosophy is the likewise discardability of imagination and the privileging of time as succession, as teleology. But what of the sociality of polyrhythmia? Afro-Arabic *saut*, South Carolina and Georgia sea coastal ring shout and twentieth century BlackPentecostal shouting offer something of a rejoinder to such choreographic itinerary and protocol; they offer an intentionality of thought that is likewise philosophical but avoids the anti-sociality of Enlightenment philosophy.

### 2.4 Aversion as the Choreographic Philosophy of Race

Kant used a general logic that *dances around the subject* by an insistent centrifugal force that created distance – space – between the subject of philosophy, and the thinker who begs, and the thinker who dances. What Kant desired was a choreographic itinerary and protocol for thought protected from external obstructional circumambulation but he encountered the noise of beggars, with their constant pleas and complaints. There was an arrhythmia at the heart of his initial movement – a resistance to the materiality, his escape from self-incurred vibratory force – where what he dispensed with was a sociality that would balance, centripetally recalibrating his
position. Turns out, further still, that the “subject” of philosophy is the reflection of the “thinker” of philosophy. Through a choreographic analysis, we will find by way of his anthropology of race, that Kant does not think Africa or the Negro or the black; rather, he thinks his relation to Africa and the Negro and the black that turns out to be the choreographic, forceful turn and turn away from the possibility of sociality, from the production of knowledge that would not only endure but desire to deepen self-incurred minority. His relation to Africa, the Negro and the black is his relation to the grounds of dancing around a subject that sets into motion his anti-sociality as the production of the concept of subjectivity and himself as subject. His aversion, as racialization, is an aversive reaction to himself as subject, choreographically displaced into an othered spatiotemporal field and body, of dark continents.

Polyrhythmia contradicts the philosophy of aversion through a politics of avoidance, it voids time as a succession with purposive “ends.” Kant’s subject, when refracted through an understanding of its choreographic underpinnings, is a produced through “bad timing,” by the desire of simultaneity that is achievable spatially but not temporally, a problem because the kinesthetic force that produces the subject in Kant’s Transcendental Aesthetic is centrifugal, making the subject a spatiotemporal movement away from itself. The very concepts of time and space, temporality and spatiality, are split and ordered according to a choreographic arrangement in the service of placement and constraint, grounding the very possibility of thought and its utility.
The field for observations of these peculiarities of human nature is very extensive and still conceals a rich lode for discoveries that are as charming as they are instructive. For now, I will cast my glance only on several places that seem especially to stand out in this region, and even on these more with the eye of an observer than of the philosopher.76.

To glance is to avert the gaze previous to encounter with an object, with a thing. This glance, this averted gaze, carries with it the material content of the phonic – and I would add, sonic – politics of avoidance which blackness employs.77 The fourth section of such “observations” is where Kant explicitly speaks about race and racialization, of the black, in some consistently problematic – but certainly, programmatic, choreographic – ways.

The Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the ridiculous. Mr. Hume challenges anyone to adduce a single example where a Negro has demonstrated talents, and asserts that among the hundreds of thousands of blacks who have been transported elsewhere from their countries, although very many of them have been set free, nevertheless not a single one has ever been found who has accomplished something great in art or science or shown any other praiseworthy quality, while among the whites there are always those who rise up from the lowest rabble and through extraordinary gifts earn respect in the world. So essential is the difference between these two human kinds, and it seems to be just as great with regard to the capacities of mind as it is with respect to color.

[…]

In the lands of the blacks can one expect anything better than what is generally found there, namely the female sex in the deepest slavery? […]

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77 See, for example, ‘Black Mo’nin’ in the Sound of the Photograpgh’ for a discussion of the ‘glance’ in Moten, In The Break.
Indeed, Father Labat reports that a Negro carpenter, whom he reproached for haughty treatment of his wives, replied: You whites are real fools, for first you concede so much to your wives, and then you complain when they drive you crazy. There might be something worth considering, except for the fact that this scoundrel was completely black from head to foot, a distinct proof that he said was stupid.  

The capacity of Kant’s Enlightenment thought to understand anything about the Negro, anything of the black, is immediately inhibited by the aversion, the choreographic gathering and placement to the side, of thought that undergirds Kant’s rendering of some others’ thoughts. Kant first acquiesces to Mr. Hume and then to Father Labat, and they act as the verifications for and the grounds of his philosophic thought. But what is coordinated here, in time, in space, as a choreographic arrhythmia at the heart of his theorizing? Though stated a few years later from his writing about these Observations, Kant’s theory of Enlightenment is the escape from sociality and sociability in order to think oneself alone; the scholar, the philosopher, the subject emerges when that individual thinks for himself without the aid of others. Throughout the whole of his observations, Kant’s glance alone was enough to think the various peoples of the world, prejudicial though his thoughts may have been. But when it came to the Negro, to the black, to the concept and ground of thinking such Being, Kant deferred to others, he entered into the very conditions which Enlightenment would escape.

\[ 78 \text{ Kant, Louden and Zöller, pp. 59, 61.} \]
Color comes to stand in for the set of mental incapacities of the black. The incapacity to think, the inability to be anything otherwise than stupid, Kant would find on the epidermis. The epidermis was useful insofar as it made it acceptable and expedient to necessitate a social project of thought in order to declare a truth, a social project that was the antithesis to the formation of the scholar, of the philosopher, of the subject. Kant’s thought here about race was constituted by the fundamental incapacity to think a certain set of objects as a function of enlightened, aversive choreographies. Enlightenment thought, we might say, is not yet begun. An enlightened philosophy of blackness was not achievable for Kant. As the skin stood in for a certain incapacity to think, this philosophical tradition was constituted by that impenetrable incapacity. But lingering is a question of the meaning of the object that resisted the glance, the object that required socially thought. The “logical” possibility for Enlightenment and for a universalism is broken down before its enactment by the concept of blackness, the figure of the black, the Negro. To establish an Enlightenment depends upon a glance at, which is at the same time an aversion for, blackness wherein the object of the glance, of the averted gaze is placed off to the side – the periphery – of thought.

Enlightenment is the coordination of such displacement, it is the choreographic itinerary and protocol for claiming an object by refusing its counterfactual. We must think the grid created by such thought and what slipped through the cracks. This grid is the zone of articulation for the irreducible unrepresentability of blackness as “proper”
and property. This zone lays bare blackness as “irreducibly disordering,” as the resistance to being owned even in the place of the mind. Blackness and subjectivity are constantly at odds and Kant rightly stumbled upon it as an emergence of a social. His vulgar dismissal of blackness still displayed the constitutive nature of blackness: the production of a sociality. This is not to claim that sociality, of itself, produces only good things but rather to highlight the inescapability of sociality.\textsuperscript{79} The Negro as character and the black skin as color serve as the giving of general, natural purpose in the world. The confrontation with the Negro, with blackness, produces a compulsory consideration of the meaning of things having a purpose grounded in nature. This grounding is organizational, it bestows a general understanding of difference. But if, as I have attempted to demonstrate, Kant has an aversion for Negroes, for blacks, for blackness as a concept, this aversion operates as a natural and generalizable aversion for things.

2.5 Aversion as the Choreographic Theology of Race

\textsuperscript{79} “The \textit{purposive character} in an organization is surely the general reason for inferring a preparation that is originally placed in nature of a creature with this intent, and for inferring created germs, if this end could only be obtained later on. Now with respect to the peculiarity of a race, this purposive character can be demonstrated nowhere so clearly as in the \textit{Negro race}...Thus it was an arrangement very wisely made by Nature to organize their skin such that the blood, since it is does not by far sufficiently remove enough phlogiston through the lungs, could depholistize itself much more strongly through the skin than is the case with us. It thus had to transport a lot of phlogiston into the ends of the arteries, thereby becoming overloaded with it in this location, that is, under the skin itself, and so shine through black, although it is still red in the interior of the body. Moreover, the different organization of Negro skin from ours is already noticeable through touch. – As far as he purposiveness of the organization of the other races is concerned, to the extent that it can be inferred from their color, it is indeed not possible to demonstrate it with equal probability.” See Kant, Louden and Zöller, pp. 156–7.
Kant’s purposiveness of Negroes shared a conception of the purpose of the other during the Great Awakening revivals. A racial/ist logic – based on New World subjectivities of discrete purity of difference – was the lifeblood of much of the preaching during the Great Awakening revival moments. “Indians” and “Blacks” were utilized as the most marginal test case scenarios for the possibilities of God’s saving grace, linking Awakening to Enlightenment if we loop through Kant’s “purposiveness” of Negros as the grounds for thinking about the nature of objects and teleology. Dreadfulness, sadness and fear (particularly, of death and hell) were foundational claims for prompting majorities towards salvation with the Awakening revivals. Salvation, as a “new and living way,” was a gathering around the concepts of scarcity rather than abundance, terror rather than pleasure, contempt rather than joy (to be sure, people converted through these revivals spoke of pleasure and joy; but the grounds for such possibility were only after-the-fact of such theologically otherwise claims).

Jonathan Edwards is important for this discussion because of the legendary place he holds in an American imaginary of religious intrigue. Particularly, his famous sermon

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80 Ann Taves, Fits, Trances, & Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999) notes how many conversions, particularly that occurred as a result of Methodism, were due likely to the the ‘small group’ nature of their meetings. Methodists had a different ecclesial structure that gave ‘exhorters’ - those who were not trained as clergy - much latitude in leading services. These services often were not about preaching but unified experience. The Separate Baptist tradition was similar.
“Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” \(^81\) preached in response to the “New York City Plot” wherein Negroes charged with setting fires in the city and burglarizing in 1741, is productive for larger claims about theology and aversion.\(^82\) Though preached before Kant’s critical writings, the Awakening revivals spanned a temporal measure that was both in response to the beginnings of Enlightenment thought and was a residue of its aftermath. Edwards participated in a similar conception of anthropology and theology of blackness, this particular sermon as symptomatic. Not only was the sermon’s imagery and force constituted by the revolutionary insurrectionist fugitivity of slaves and poor whites in Manhattan, but the sermon was a direct reflection of the a general paranoia and worry about the capacity for black radical resistance to enslavement practices, given the fact that no white person was killed during the insurrectionist episode. The disproportionate response to the “plot” has been compared, in magnitude, to the Salem Witch Trials of 1691, given the fact that 150 persons had to stand trial between April and July 1741 and because 32 persons were convicted and sentenced to death.

In the sermon, Edwards pontificates:

There is nothing that keeps wicked men, at any one moment, out of hell, but the mere pleasure of God. By ‘the mere pleasure of God,’ I mean his sovereign pleasure, his arbitrary will, restrained by no obligation,

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hindered by no manner of difficulty, any more than if nothing else but
God’s mere will had in the least degree, or in any respect whatsoever, any
hand in the preservation of wicked men one moment.

And

The misery you are exposed to is that which God will inflict to that end,
that he might show what that wrath of Jehovah is.83

When thought about with relation to the rebels in New York, it appears that Edwards’s
concerns were peculiarly quickened by the prospect a becoming black of the unconverted,
when considering the material, corporeal embodiment, the what-it-looks-like-ness of
remaining sinners at the hand of a sovereign who can at will put to death those who
may rise against the divine figure. This was the condition of enslaved folks as a juridical,
thecomological and philosophical preoccupation. The hearers of Edwards’s sermon were
cognizant of the happenings in New York and, thus, had the example of what was done
to the enslaved as a matter of material fact and historic condition. The 32 were hanged
for their purported capacity to kill, for a general insurrectionist philosophy, their feet
were on slippery ground as they existed in a situation and institution that could, at will,
choose a variety of aesthetic productions for death.

The theme of fire that Edwards invokes is notable given the fact that poor whites
and slaves conspired together to perform a series of fires throughout the city and those
sentenced to death were burned at the stake. Sinners in the hands of an angry deity

83 Edwards.
could just as well be paralleled to consider slaves in the hands of an angry state. And perhaps that was the point. We must consider the pleasure of the sovereign – both a deity and the state – and how that pleasure comes about. Edwards's deity had the power to condemn and kill at will but exercised restraint as a mode of pleasure and enjoyment because, according to him, the sinners deserve their demise. This was Calvinist philosophy and theology and the institution of enslavement bore that out. The slaves and poor whites that incited insurrection in 1741 against the capitalist class struggle and enslavement were sinners by way of birth, through the choice of the all-wise sovereign of the heavenlies and of the state. They were, already, upon slippery ground and at the mercy of a kind and restrained deity. The ends that these sinners of a motley crew met, of course then, was divine justice. But this justice depended upon a system already set in place wherein they would not be able to ever win, an inequitable situation wherein they would always be cast as other, as material representation of objects of knowledge, similar to Kant’s transcendental aesthetic of space, this is an ordering of the divine world a priori. However, the velocity of such sermonizing against sinners is set by the sinners themselves; they were generative insofar as they set the pace of his rejoinder; there is, then, blackness running through and animating the very grounds of his critique, a
blackness that he must necessarily disregard by way of glancing away while glaring in that other direction: the metaphysical “elect.”  

The marginalizing excesses and flourishes, excesses that according to a Calvinist Christology separates humanity from the divine figure, are that which make and form this Christologically converted subject position. The “elect” as a community, as those predestined according to this racial/ist logic function both as an amorphous mass that is nothing other than a grouped articulation of what Denise da Silva calls “transcendental poesis” that depends upon coherence, regulation and removal of difference. Calvinist doctrine, which was the quickening power for the Awakening revivals, was the actualization of whiteness against enthusiasm, embodiment, experience. To actualize a set of behaviors – including spatial

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84 See the discussion of fugitivity setting pace in Koerner. She writes about George Jackson’s prison letters as an enactment of a “line of escape.” She discusses a character “running for my life” that puts into question Althusser’s structuralist account for subjectivity as a hailing from the state. With a young man on the run: “A series of fugitive clauses takes flight from what would otherwise be a relation of subordination…Detached from these relations – detached in fact from ‘the subject’ whose escape these clauses express – each prepositional phrase functions to intensify and make perceptible how the ‘thing in the street’ escapes capture…We might say that the cop who chases someone moves with relative speed…the movement of the policeman is animated and determined by external factors…But the speed invented by the one who is chased (or, more precisely, the one who escapes) is not, as we might imagine, determined by the body that chases it. There is a moment when a body that runs crosses a threshold and, propelled by an intrinsic velocity, becomes an active force released from external determinations” (173). This passage has been very important for the ways I think about insurrection as setting the pace for response. Fugitivity is not determined by an external set of values but sets the necessity for response to it. Edwards sermon, it appears to me, is in the tradition of the desire to capture for the sovereign. Even the language of being in the hand, captured, is most pronounced for his congregation. But the insurrection in which people partook was in a long tradition of fugitivity against the state and against the divine sovereign’s hand, set free by way of choosing another way to live. Simply, Edwards sermon attempts to chase and capture the fugitive spirit of blackness, to repress this fugitivity in the service of a proper religious subjectivity. There is no wonder, then, that he was radically against enthusiastic, embodied, response to the divine.
arrangements – in the service of a normative striving that was regulative of difference, born out of fear and loathing, is the process of transcendental poesis, even as sometimes the rhetoric of community is used, violently replacing the anoriginal difference, marking community through a purity, that is, the static “I.” There is an excess of thought as (theologic, philosophic) thought that is the spatiotemporal relay between Calvinist predestination and the status of the Negro, the slave, the black. This excess is the problem of thought that blackness occupies in the theologic, philosophic mind and is quite simply marked by an incapacity to think: what to do with a seemingly justice-oriented deity when the material condition of negroes, an effect of the sovereign's pleasure, seems to go unnoticed? What when there are recognizable zones from which this sovereign seems to insist averting? The question of the Negro and salvation is the problematic of relationship to a sovereign, and an atheism must lie at the heart of such problematic thought.

Black bodies, in this theological-philosophical economy that was critical of enthusiasm, came to be the periphery and served the purpose of millennialism’s potentiality. The conversion of slaves and Indians were noted by figures like Whitefield and Edwards because of the general assumption of their fundamental difference. Nahum Chandler puts forth a set of concerns that are useful for thinking the “place” of the Black in theological thought:
At its infrastructural core, the eighteenth-century discourse was organized around one titular question: are Negroes human, and, if so, are they “fully” human? On the basis of what criteria should their status in relation to (other) humans be judged? And, is that relation one of fundamental, or relative, sameness or difference? And, of course, the question, what is human? (or, what is man?) is always and everywhere at issue, even if only implicitly. This question was especially articulated as a discourse concerning the humanity of Negro slaves. [...] Yet, hidden within both of these questions, and essentially the corollary of the question concerning the humanity of the Negro, even as it is in all truth not less fundamental, was a question about the status of a putative European American or “White” identity.85

The problem of “full humanity” was not limited to the domain of the philosophical or the juridical but found its own vivification in theological discourse and material practice as well. There is a parallel set of concerns about the capacity to be human, notions of nature and whiteness in which Calvinist doctrine participates; but it also extends those concerns to questions regarding the nature of God as all-knowing and justice-oriented, the concern about theophany. The Negro as a category of thought, enthusiasm86 as a category ecstasies and bodily movement, and the Black body as the “natural” materiality of such pondering are exemplary for the articulation of these concerns. On the one hand, there is an assumption that “black bodies” have a natural inclination toward movement that refuses repression. The surprise with figures Whitefield and Edwards spoke about

86 The idea of “enthusiasm” will be explicated in Chapter 3, based on Rosenberg’s historical analysis of the concept. See Jordana Rosenberg, Critical Enthusiasm: Capital Accumulation and the Transformation of Religious Passion (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).
the Indians and Negroes conversion as evidence of the coming of the kingdom of God, as a millennialist orientation is notable, as it seems to imply that Negroes, black bodies and state violence should be articulated together as a relation of continual violation against those bodies. Those bodies come to stand in for a general capacity of the state and God to inflict harm on the one hand, and the general capacity to receive harm of the state and God on the other. Blackness – as the history of any object’s capacity to resist, a resistance inherent to object – calls into being the violence of the state, of the divine. This calling into being the violence of the state and of God radically calls into question the concepts of nationhood and a divine world. The focus on the presence or absence of black bodies conceptualizes a specific relation of blackness to the state, to citizenship and to violence.

The desire for particular bodies seems to run rather consistent with both theological and philosophical notions of purposiveness, where particular marginalized figures come to stand in for the limits of availability for conversion theologically or nature philosophically. George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards, again, are exemplary: both owned slaves but were “encouraged” by the fact that their blacks received “salvation” by their powerful preaching on behalf of the sovereign figure. And though Taves questions the efficacy of preaching, as opposed to small group meetings, for
conversion, it is the narrativity of the relation of preached word to conversion of the marginalized, racialized others that is of intrigue. Whitefield’s and Edwards’s ideas about the purposiveness of these marginal characters set into motion their astonishment, shock, and eventually, pleasure gained from the “even these” being converted. What leaps out is how the conversion of Indians and Negros verified the rightness of the sovereign. And for Kant, the color of blacks verified the rightness of nature and her hierarchizing. Kant is important given his anthropology that was spatially organized because his theorizing elucidates the way that the theology of the Awakenings were foundationally anthropological. Not a theological anthropology but an anthropological project that became theologized, justified (through faith, even) by a comparison and scientism of racial/ized peoples and their capacities for relating to a divine world.

Methodist Error or Friendly Advice specifically linked the anthropologic to the theologic by bespeaking the blackness of enthusiasm.

2.6 Ontology of the Bridge Towards Shouting Translation

The day of Pentecost has fully come; Pentecost, as it were however, is still coming. The aesthetic practice prompted by tightly being together in one space –

\[\text{\textsuperscript{87}}\text{ For example, ”Viewed locally, the prayer meetings of the classes appear to have been the engine of the revivals. Conversions apparently proceeded apace even in the absence of preachers, and prachers seemed to have particular difficulty silencing congregations when their sermons had been preceded by a successful prayer meeting. See Taves, p. 90.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{88}}\text{ Watson.}\]
enacting difference transferring vitality – is perpetual and everywhere around us. To be sure, shouting in Black Pentecostalism at the turn of the twentieth century is not the same as the *saut* nor the peregrination around the Kaaba in Mecca; neither is it the same as the ring shout dance that was prominent on the seacoasts of Georgia and South Carolina. But is there a vitality that was transferred, a way to create a social form that was carried to and then dwelt within this particular religiocultural movement? What sorts of injunctions existed against certain modes of social life and how were the aesthetic dances of Black Pentecostalism in response to such injunctions? Is Black Pentecostal shouting but one other example of *stealing a-way* to produce an old new form? Possibly. Exhaustedly. Certainly.

Edwards’s “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” is exemplary of the type of sermonizing that the Great Awakening Calvinist preaching were known for: hell, brimstone, dread, fear, loathing. The itinerant movements and motivations to cross the Atlantic and to travel the colonies were to spread a particular fear of God in order to convert. The converted responded to *these* theological proclamations and if there was joy to be found in life, it would come *after* the enthusiastic, embodied tears, swaying and vocal shouting *as prompted by terror*. But what if there were a gathering around abundance, around pleasure, around joy? I have specifically used the word “itinerary” to discuss the choreographic nature of aversion; itinerary is useful in that twentieth century Black Pentecostalism was prompted by itinerancy, wandering, what Louisiana
law at the same time would call vagrancy.\textsuperscript{99} Whereas Whitefield and Edwards both itinerated as a way of theological life, the direction of such itineration was clearly to continue a pronouncement of dread.

Margaret Washington Creel writes that participation in the Gullah ring shout was limited to those persons that joined the local praise house, those that were baptized: “Only members of the Praise House could join in the ring shout. Children were taught the shout at a very early age but never allowed to participate in or attend religious gatherings where the shout was performed until they became Praise House members.”\textsuperscript{90} However, Charles Harrison Mason had a much more expansive understanding of the possibilities for shouting. Mason’s shouting was voluntary, an act of worship that did not necessitate conversion, democratized and made the aesthetic practice available to all without secularizing it.\textsuperscript{91} Shouting functioned as an “inculcation” of piety, the performance of shouting allowing the congregant to go further and deeper still in a possible encounter with the divine.\textsuperscript{92} This inculcation also presented the possibility of repetition as a means to having the “Pentecostal experience.”

\textsuperscript{91} See Anthea D. Butler, \textit{Women in the Church of God in Christ}.
One difference between the ring shout and Black Pentecostal shouting is that the ring shout was explicitly relegated to a specific time – after the “official” (in whatever capacity decided upon by the congregants) service, a specific space and time or during a prayer meeting – benches was pushed to the walls. An area, literally, was cleared in order for shouters to dance during antebellum practices. This, no doubt, was at least in part related to the necessity for shouts to occur as clandestine events, many times in the woods far away from plantations and earshots of those who sought to inflict violence upon the shouters. But even with the more official praise houses – small, compact spaces sometimes constructed, other times the home of a particular individual – the space in the center would be cleared in order for shouters to dance. This was not the case with Black Pentecostalism. Interruption was aestheticized, the moment of encounter with the divine could occur at any moment during (and sometimes even before, and after) the service and if one so felt led, they could erupt in corporeal praise, shouting.

With many descriptions of the ring shout as well as those regarding Black Pentecostal shouting, longevity is a main feature: the ability to shout all night long, into the early morning. Bishop Payne critiqued the shouters he encountered because they would be fatigued and, thus, ineffectual during their work hours. The Los Angeles Daily Times article also noted, “One of the wildest of the meetings was held last night, and the highest pitch of excitement was reached by the gathering, which continued to ‘worship’ until nearly midnight.” This to note that shouting can take place for hours and
move about the congregation from member to member, energy flowing until each one reaches a level of exhaustion. But for this exhaustion to be reached, there must be – as a sociality – inexhaustible breath, inexhaustible spirit.

Shouters continually draw from breath – in their flesh – as a resource from which to continue to move. Gone are the formal, organized rings, though one shouter may be held within a small ring of a few persons to ensure their safety. But instead of shuffling the feet across the ground in a ring formation, a BlackPentecostal shouter may jump up and down; or hold arms up, bent at the elbow with feet moving to the rhythm of a repetitious song or chant; or they may bend their body – rather than at the kneebone, prominent for ring shout dance – at the waist, hunched over just a bit, arms bent at the elbows and the fronts of their hands resting on their lower back. Moving to the rhythm: of the drum, of the clapping hands, of their hearts.

It is the flesh that enacts saut. It is the flesh that performs ring shout. It is the flesh that shouts BlackPentecostal. The capacity to transfer vitality occurs in the flesh, carries memory and memorial as a directional trace and hallucination of various, conflictual and consistent pasts, paths. What is transferred in the rhetoric of saut and shout/ing is the indeterminacy of meaning, the politics of avoidance, an irreducible disagreeableness, the generativity of blackness. The nature of philosophy, specifically for translation, for the words saut and shout/ing, because of their inherent refusal of “the” meaning, gives us the gift for thinking black social life and the status written narrativity. “Words don’t go”
there, and they may not have the capacity to explain any there either. Performance matters. Kant, to return, was right: these performances are beautiful objects but for social thought. They are beautiful because they make a demand of avoidance without awaiting approval that aversion would assume.

One such form of Enlightenment thought is about the incapacity to delve more deeply, about the impenetrability of the object. This impenetrability becomes the occasion for graspability, for assumption, for the literal taking objects up into the hand and placing them off and to the side. Impenetrability might be the animating underside of the philosophy of aversion. But there is the other choreographic itinerary and protocol that does not assume impenetrability, but irreducibility, a celebration of a general agnosticism that causes one to go further and further deeper still. This is an agnosticism, a black agnosticism that is at the heart of blackness atheology: even in the situation and condition of not knowing, one still searches, one still travels to California for experience, one still shouts for joy, with joy, as joy. This is a social dance, a social project. Another Enlightenment, given as the constant and ongoing performance of escape into the secret, the secretion into the interior, the interior of the underground. They are dancing there. They are shouting there. Vocally. Choreographically. Ontologically.

\[93\] Mackey, *From a Broken Bottle Traces of Perfume Still Emanate.*

Yes.

The sound of Pentecost, its sonicity, is the articulation of pure capacity, pure energy, pure openness against enclosure. What follow will seek to explain this claim. An extension of Chapter 2, in this chapter, I am concerned with the critique of the atheologics and aphilosophics of aversion, the vivifying force, the quickening power of a “politics of avoidance” as the performance and performativity of a theology of blackness, aestheticized in and through a specific kind of singing and praise noise that takes place during two particular moments of the BlackPentecostal church service: Testimony and Tarrying. I connect these two moments of sonic production with another animatory force that privileges an anti-pentecostalist worldview, one that Zora Neale Hurston picked up on in her writing about the characteristics that are foundational of Negro expression.¹ If, as Chapter 2 contends, BlackPentecost is the “irreducible density” of being together in one place that responds with aesthetic vitality to historic, metaphysical and material moments and movements of violence and violation,² BlackPentecostal sounds during Testimony and Tarrying manifest resistance that exists,

¹ See, specifically, ‘Characteristics of Negro Expression’ in Hurston.
² Glissant, Caribbean Discourse, p. 133.
as it were, primary to the power and force of aversion.\textsuperscript{3} This singing, this praise noise, is fundamentally a critique of the given world, a political economy of austerity and exploitation. Three Jennys – an enslaved woman, Jenny von Westphalen (Marx) and Jenny Seymour – will move us toward the critique of capital embedded in such BlackPentecostal sonicity.

This chapter is concerned with the dynamics sound production, of sonicity, from within a Black Pentecostal context, the sonic aspect of the choreosonic analyzed in Chapter 2. BlackPentecostals are sounding out a way, rehearsing a mode of sonic production that refuses origin and purity, utilizing melismatic, melodic irruption toward historicity, a historicity of blackness given as performance. I use the portmanteau BlackPentecostal to index the “resistance of the object”\textsuperscript{4} as blackness, as an attendant force of Pentecostalism, of commons, of being together in one place. Following from Chapter 2, this chapter attempts to theorize an apposite relation to the theological-philosophical force of aversion, given in choreosonics of singing and praise noise, given in and as the “politics of avoidance” that blackness – when articulated through Pentecostalism – both anticipates and performs. Listening to the sound of singing of testimony service and praise noise of tarrying makes the atheological-aphilosophical force of avoidance audible. I will

\textsuperscript{4} See particularly ‘Resistance of the Object: Aunt Hester’s Scream’ and ‘Resistance of the Object: Adrian Piper’s Theatricality’ in Moten, \textit{In The Break}. 
consider testimony singing – culminating in the chant “Yes, Lord,” – and the praise noise and noisiness of tarrying.

To consider the onhearers – those who would overhear, mishear, hear into – the theologizing of Calvinism and philosophizing of Enlightenment thought obliges an attention to the sonic aspect of the choreosonic. There is an impurity that runs through the hearing and listening practices of theology and philosophy, an impurity that deems discardable certain social formations, though the socialities thus discarded are the very grounds for such thinking. Leigh Eric Schmidt discusses how Natural philosophy desired a purification of listening practices – what we might think of as the removal of grit and noise – which would represent “the end of the credulous acceptance of all the hearsay about the miraculous, the marvelous, the revelatory” and that this would ultimately mean philosophy would have achieved “the quieting of all those heavenly and demonic voices by which ‘superstition’ had for so long impeded the advancement of knowledge.” And the category of “enthusiasm,” criticized by both sacred and secular theorists, regarded the possibility of hearing God with immediacy. Thus, the achievement of Calvinism and Enlightenment would not only depend upon, as Ronald Judy would have, the writing of culture on paper as a mimetic device, but it would

5 Schmidt, pp. 4–5.
likewise depend upon the removal of a certain sonic substance that was cathected to the religious, the spiritual.

Enlightenment philosophy was averse to hearing and listening practices in general. The invention of the stethoscope, a device that made hearing the interiority of the body more pronounced, first philosophized by Robert Hooks during the Enlightenment though realized in the early nineteenth century. The intention of this device was the scientizing of hearing, of hearing’s being made precise and not given to the quasi-religious. It’s what Schmidt described as the mediation of sound by way of “penetrative discernment that embodied reasonable ways of hearing, the trained ear with its careful acquired perceptions” (emphasis mine).⁶ A purported lack of reasonableness and training, is what the Fisk Jubilee Singers attempted to correct in their singing practices; their training was the sonic evincing averted hearing and listening practices. Zora Neale Hurston criticized the Singers, stating, “The real spirituals are not really just songs. They are unceasing variations around a theme.”⁷ Moreover,

The jagged harmony is what makes it, and it ceases to be what it was when this is absent. Neither can any group be trained to produce it. Its truth dies under training like flowers under hot water. The harmony of the true spiritual is not regular. The dissonances are important and not to be ironed out by the trained musician. The various parts break in at any old time. Falsetto often takes the place of regular voices for short periods. Keys change. Moreover, each singing of the piece is a new creation. The

⁶ Schmidt, p. 3.
⁷ Hurston, p. 79.
congregation is bound by no rules. No two times singing is alike, so that we must consider the rendition of a song not as a final thing, but as a mood.⁸

Jubilee Singers, it seems, stethoscopized black song, black sorrow, in order for it to be made available and palatable to a wide, mostly European, audience.⁹ This agreeableness of sound was mired in the reduction of the very sonic resources that made the songs generative of resistance for folks who performed them on plantations. This scientizing of black song, black sound, sonically demonstrates a desire for upward mobility and assimilability. The soniferous world of BlackPentecost, I argue, is a likewise critique of this class aspiration, it avoids stasis of training though still it yields the transfer of vitality through performance.

Karl Marx’s “On the Jewish Question” is a useful means to anchoring the relation of class aspiration to religiocultural aesthetic performance. It is in this piece that I find a helpful way to think a Black Studies that does not need to leave behind the performance practices, nor the modes of sociality in which they emerged, in order to yield an epistemic force of radical critique. Marx wrote in reply to Bruno Bauer, resisting Bauer’s claim that, for Jews, “You cannot be emancipated politically without emancipating yourselves radically from Judaism,”¹⁰ because, implied in such a claim is the idea that

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⁸ Hurston, p. 80.
⁹ I will have an extended discussion about the Fisk Jubilee Singers in Chapter 4.
there exists persons whom are “more capable of emancipation”\textsuperscript{11} than others. Marx’s concern about the possibility of emancipation for the Jew takes a more general form as the possibility for emancipation for the person through politics, through the state, through the performance of propriety, normativity, in the service of the state. The refusal to perform religiosity in order to gain political freedom is a ruse, and the scientizing and stethescopizing of – which is to say, the training of voices for – the Spirituals is a similar desire for the production of the proper black citizen-subject. One would need leave behind their primitivity, always interarticulated with a backward superstition and cultic behavior, in order to be secular and, thus, enlightened. But Marx demonstrates how this leaving-behind is no emancipatory process at all, but a new submission that radically buttresses the inequitable distribution of power that the state needs for its ongoing operation. I think Marx would perhaps think something like a politics of avoidance would produce abolition and emancipation in excess of, and as an antagonism to, the state, to political emancipation.

So what would it mean to hear a politics of avoidance for a philosophy of aversion? It means giving attention movement and sound, thought conceptually together. Enlightenment thought, following Judy’s analysis of the separation between theory and aesthetic – where the aesthetic is the discardable immateriality, the excess

\textsuperscript{11} Karl Marx, ‘On The Jewish Question by Karl Marx’, p. 21
that is not only unnecessary but a fundamental flaw in the history of thought and Being – was a problem of the literary, by way of representation of verifiability and reliability.\(^{12}\) That is, it sought to create and understand the notion of culture by way of the written word. But I would like to extend Judy’s analysis of the rupture of theory from aesthetics by considering the separation as a moment of the enactment of the aversion that I believe blackness, as a resistance that is prior to power, calls into being: we might think of the atheological-aphilosophical sound – sound that is unreasonable for the untrained ear; sound grouped under a general heading as “noise” – as excess, and thus, theologically enthusiastic, philosophically aesthetic. I consider the excess – song during Testimony Service, praise during Tarrying – as resisting the spilt between theory and aesthetic. The split and subsequent opposition of theory to aesthetic, wherein theory was privileged as dematerialized and the result of the process of thought, the aesthetic is that which is so averted. Enthusiasm found a similar split and critique as a bodily manifestation. The enthusiastic and aesthetic, then, were victim to the aversion, a choreographic turn and turn away, a shift and displacement, a split, divide and shake up.

**3.1 Testimony Service**

Yes. (http://youtu.be/drsXBOkA3BM)

\(^{12}\) Judy, *(Dis)forming the American Canon*, p. 33.
Reverend Ford Washington McGee recorded various live albums produced by Okeh Records and Victor Records, spanning the years between 1926 and 1930. Born in Tennessee, McGee joined the Church of God in Christ in 1918, a group that was at that time 12 years old, in its adolescence. In his various recordings are sermons, exhortations and testimonies of saints interspersed with song. Titles such as “From the Jailhouse to the Throne,” “Shine-Drinking,” “Women’s Clothes (You Can’t Hide)” and “Everybody Don’t Know Who Jesus Is” give a round picture of the types of things he was wont to discuss in his sermonizing.13 But there is one recording in particular that is useful for thinking about the sonic atmosphere created by Black Pentecostal testimony service.

In the recording titled “Testifyin’ Meetin’,” one is immediately drawn in by the sonic environment the saints created for critical reflection on life, a space for praise. McGee begins the first song, low voice full of gravel and conviction, along with the strum of a guitar and the sound of women saints follow after. He asks, then, for Sister Griffin to “give us a good testimon-ay!” and I imagine her jumping up from her seat, because, as she says, she “thanks the Lord for Jee-suuus! And the power of the blood!” The excitement of her voice, no doubt, was matched with a choreographics of the body, the animation of praise. She continues, briefly, until she sits and McGee begins a rousing chorus of Johnson Oatman’s 1903 hymn, “Lift Him Up.” And after they sing one round

of the chorus, McGee calls on Mother Hooks to testify about the goodness of the Lord. And she’s simply happy for “this wonderful way of salvation!” Following her testimony, yet another song, “I found Him, and I’m glad!”

I will not, of course, rehearse the entirety of this “meetin’” but I want to point out how the testimonies are song’s punctuatory irruption. The testimonies do not necessarily interrupt but introduce a new path by which the saints could flow, they are integral to the improvisational structure. The testimony serves as a point of transition between songs, between affective moods, where rhythm and intensity ebb and flow. Each testimony – between song and sentiment – is both cutting and being cut, is both grounding and being grounded, by the Spirit. Jon Michael Spencer explains the testimony song as such:

[Testimony songs] are used by the “saints” to commence their testimonies during testimony services. Opening one’s testifying in this way is a longstanding tradition that flourished in the postbellum black Protestant and Holiness churches, later finding its way into Pentecostalism. In testifying, a worshiper stands, sings a verse or two (of the chorus) of a favorite hymn, and then gives her or his spoken testimony using the theme and language of the song. The fact that testimony typically begins with and is built thematically upon a hymn illustrates what an essential source of theology these songs have been for laity over the years of struggle.¹⁴

The praise song and chant “Yes, Lord,” is a primary example of what Black Pentecostal sound can do, what it can produce (http://youtu.be/vuisScVJphg).

A point that produces transition while also being the transition itself, a seven-line song that cuts and is being cut, that grounds and is being grounded, this song, this chant, is an opening and rupture through a word, yes. “Yes, Lord,” has a storied and murky history. The authorship of the song often is attributed to Charles Harrison Mason, and it is certainly true that Mason, founder of the Church of God in Christ, was known to say, and to enjoy such saying, variations of the theme “yes Lord!” often in his praying and preaching.15 Though he never claimed to first sing this song, many in the Church of God in Christ consider it his writing and melodic pattern. However, biographer for Arenia C. Mallory claimed that she was the first to sing the praise in New York City as a means to public repentance for what the saints conceived to be her act of “sin” – divorce.

Certainly, the Lord was with Arenia Mallory on that day as she stood before the congregation in New York City. When she rose to speak, she repented and confessed her sin according to Acts 3:19. The presence of the Lord came upon her as she lifted her hands to God. Suddenly, the Lord spoke through her with a praise of “Yes, Lord.” The whole church caught on fire and started singing the praise – “Yes, Lord” – speaking with others tongues as the spirit gave them utterance according to Acts 2:4.16

15 See particularly Chapter 8, ‘The Church of God in Christ’ Spencer.
16 quoted from Down Behind the Sun: the Story of Arenia Cornelia Mallory in Spencer, p. 159.
So what we have, even at the level of the narrative about this chant that has come to stand in for the sound and anthem of COGIC, is an incoherence at the heart of the rehearsal of the song. What is not important, however, is who wrote it but the fact of its being sung in such a way that it spread throughout not only the COGIC group, but several BlackPentecostal groups. The “Yes, Lord” chant is but a crystallization of thought, of an atheology-aphilosophy grounded in a politics of avoidance. The chant “yes” is the kernel that has within it the whole and hull of the testimony song and tarry praise noise in its intensity and repetition. It is choreasonic in its concurrently centripetal and centrifugal force, culmination and commencement, agreement and dissent in the same tonal breath, harmonic utterance, polyrhythmic hush. It is a sonic enactment of black torque.

Seven lines that are repetitiously chanted, saints begin, usually with singing the single word “yes.” As the saints continue, they add to “yes” with “yes, Lord,” and sometimes sing vocables “oh!” or “mm!” They can also make earnest pleas, “have your way!” “in this place!” All these words, all these varied themes are crystalized in the one word, the rupturing “yes.” Saints might sing this song for varied lengths of time, from two minutes to twenty, according to the feeling trying to be achieved when singing. The point of it all, I think, is that the “yes” is not reducible to the words, to the lyrics, but the ways with which the singing occurs. The song “Yes, Lord” is a critique of the exploitation that is foundational to capitalism; it is the refusal of abstraction and
alienation by the proclamation of a “yes” found in another world. The world, oft, is religious and cultural and this world is generative of the resources necessary for the constant pursuit against marginalization. The “Yes” functions as a “no” to present conditions, accretional towards a new directionality, a different positionality, a queer way to be. “Yes” is holy.

Whether McGee’s “Testifyin’ Meetin’,” Oneness Pentecostal refrains of “I’ve Been Down in Jesus’ Name,” or COGIC’s “Yes, Lord,” repetition during testimony service – of lyrics, of song patterns (AABA and 1-4-1-5 major chord progression, as examples), of sentiments – is of necessity. Repetition elucidates the catechismal nature of the sonic environment of Black Pentecostalism; this catechismal nature is also, at the same time, a disruption of grammar, of an enclosure of catechismic form. During the antebellum period, scripture catechisms were written specifically for Negroes, for those enslaved – Cotton Mather’s pamphlet “The Negro Christianized. An Essay to Excite and Assist that Good Work, the Instruction of Negro-Servants in Christianity”\(^\text{17}\) and Robert Ryland’s *The Scripture Catechism for Coloured People*\(^\text{18}\) as two examples – encouraging white owners to care for the souls of these pieces of property. What intrigues in these

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catechisms is their grammatical nature, the ways in which there is a call and response that refuses extemporaneous utterance, that resists improvisation.

Catechisms written by missionaries for the instruction of slaves were adaptable to use in the teaching of reading and were used in that way, despite the claim that they were written for oral instruction. Most were prepared in simple, clear, short questions and answers, a method also used in primers. [...] The content of the catechisms emphasized salvation, not subordination, though most did include lengthy sections on duties of slaves to masters – after all, they had to be approved by masters in order to reach the slaves.¹⁹

The person is supposed to respond to queries with a learned affirmation or negation, and then the correct scriptural justification for such a position. Catechism is a rote exercise, not about the change in heart and mind, but about the ability to respond correctly within the strictures of normative form. Peter Linebaugh in *Ned Ludd & Queen Mab: Machine-Breaking, Romanticism, and the Several Commons of 1811-12* wrote about “enclosure” of land, of family and of language as a problem of wealth and resource distribution: “The world was being enclosed, life was being closed off, people shut in. In 1795 before he was silenced by government the English Jacobin, John Thelwall, referred to ‘the inclosing system’ which he defined as ‘that system of enclosure by which the rich monopolize to themselves the estates, rights, and possessions of the poor’” and that “the

system of enclosure applied to land where enclosure became commodification.”

Inclusive in this ideation of enclosure was not merely land, but also the division of labor, transportation and, “In cultural expressions, too, we find several forms of closure, such as the dictionaries and grammars of language, the censorship of press and speech, and the silencing of Thelwall, who spent the rest of his life relieving stammerers by teaching ‘elocution.'”

I consider catechresis to enact the same logic of enclosure, the reduction of phonic substance, the gathering up and discarding of speeched difference for the enunciation of spiritual coherence. Stethescopes. Scientizing. Training.

These Negro catechisms, we might say, were to be performed through repetition in such a way as to inculcate a certain reflexivity, as to reduce the possibility for excess movement, excess thought. The catechisms, with their inclusive exhortations for slaves to obey masters, were a solicitation of acceptance of lot and station in life. They were not to allow for the flourishing of theological-philosophical thought but its removal. In Ryland’s catechism, one finds the breakdown from Standard English in the queries, beginning questions with the word “and” from one declarative idea to the next:

9. Does the happiness of the righteous consist in freedom from sin? – …
10. And in a discharge from all sufferings? – …
11. And in a state of perfection? – …
12. And of complete glory? – …

21 Linebaugh, *Ned Ludd & Queen Mab*, p. 11.
13. Are they admitted to a glorious abode? – …
14. And to a glorious employment? -- …  

This “and” operates as a rupture, as an opening, similar to the “yes” that COGIC saints would sing almost a century later. That is, the “and” in Ryland’s catechismal rubric is a point of transition, it breaks down standard and form even while purporting to create standard and form. His catechism breaks its own theological-philosophical rules at the level of rhetoric, at the level of grammar. And that is but the gift of black performance, of Black Pentecostal sonicity. Thus, within the “Yes, Lord” chant is the resistance to such catechismal desire of form. Though it produces a catechismal affirmation, the chant at the very same moment of sung, moaned, breathed utterance, is the straining and striving against such normativity and form. The seven-line plea of “yes” with its variants are arrhythmic and the saints decide together at the moment of its singing how long the “yes” will stretch. Once “yes” is given over to melismatic disruption and elongation, to falsetto and yodel, over to growling and howling, the word both is and exceeds the bounds of its linguistic enunciation. As such, the singing of the “yes” is about desire, desire for a new and living way, desire for a “new word, new world.”  

3.2 Tarry Service Praise Noise

Yes. (http://youtu.be/USS5WuaFDws)

22 Ryland, p. 93.
23 Mackey, From a Broken Bottle Traces of Perfume Still Emanate, p. 52.
What the congregants enunciate through voice, through body – screams and yelps, orations of “Jesus!” and “Hallelujah,” the handclapping and murmuring – is anything but easy to bespeak. This noise, this tarrying praise, is not fully representable through writing; it is avoids its own representation. Lindon Barrett asserts that within Western figurations for what it means to be human – and this would necessarily include theological-philosophical renderings of the question of humanness – that, “Those who master literacy defined in the Western terms stand within the circle of language-consciousness and, accordingly, full humanity. Those who do not, stand without.”24 This is consistent with the lettered accumulation that catechism was supposed to produced in the enslaved, the ability to “read my title clear,”25 that they would learn the Word by rote, that they would learn the Word and allow for the theological-philosophical question about the limits of humanity to be tested upon them. There is an excess that the noise produces, another humanity that is not reducible to language-consciousness but one that, rather, abandons such easy representational politic. Of course, the possibility of the enslaved achieving “full humanity,” according to Western theological-philosophical constructions, would always be a question, never answered. Some scholars believe that Africans quickly acknowledged the necessity of learning letters as a means to freedom:

25 Cornelius.
Africans who were enslaved quickly recognized the value of reading and writing – not only for their practical uses (from the beginning of slavery, slaves used reading and writing skills to run away) but because literacy, especially the ability to write, signified an establishment of the African’s human identity to the European world.26

However, this assertion assumes that the “African” wanted to establish something called “identity,” and that to the “European world.” The foundational principle to such a claim is that whatever would come to be called a Europe/an, an Africa/n, an America/n was not in flux at the time of the stealing of flesh for capital trade; it presumes that not only was a Europe/an a coherent idea but that that called Africa/n was also, at the very same time, coherent and that the African would recognize such coherence and aspire towards that identity. Lettered accumulation would amount to nothing other than an aspirational tendency towards whiteness, the desire to own property.27

What praise noise of tarrying highlights, it seems, is the intentional refusal to produce coherence, the intentional standing outside the circle of language consciousness, the intentional celebration of Spillers’ vestibularity. This necessarily means, then, that the sonicity of BlackPentecostalism is always a critique of gender, sexuality and whiteness in its deployment, in its dispersement of song and sound. It is

26 Cornelius, p. 16.
27 This idea was wonderfully written about in Spillers, ‘Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book’.
the sounded resonance and reverberation of being “vestibular to culture,” wherein this condition is not denigrated but celebrated as yielding the possibility to see, feel, experience and know worlds, to see both within and beside Du Boisian veils, varied consciousness that are produced through choreosonic sociality.

The possibility for writing the praise noise of tarrying will be interrogated in a subsequent chapter through analyzing speaking in tongues, but for the present moment I will consider that what is heard during the tarry service is not easily translatable, that one can write about – which is to say, around – it, but writing it would necessitate a different, and I posit a BlackPentecostal, relation to language, to literacy, to linguistics. Tarry praise is unlike the “Yes, Lord” chant in that the praise noise is not reducible to linguistic representation; even when one hears exclamations of “yes!” and “Jesus!” and “oh!,” apparent is how there is a “noise under the noise,” how there is a hum, a persistence in intensity that is dynamic – at once loud, at once quiet, always reflective. David Daniels has this to say about BlackPentecostal sonority: “The syntax of early Pentecostal sound contained ‘more non-verbal sounds’ than its Protestant counterparts on the American religious soundscape. There was a place for ‘sporadic, unpredictable’

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28 This is what my colleague Rochelle Wright-Jones stated about BlackPentecostal noise in a personal communication (July, 2012).
sounds.” And there is, according to him, a liturgical role that silence enacts:

“According to various accounts the early Pentecostal soundscape privileged silence, especially in tarrying and other forms of prayer. Silence was more than a gap in worship; silence played a liturgical role.”

Pentecostalism of the twentieth century has often been thought about as a loud, noisy enterprise. The Los Angeles Times 1906 article that “announced” the first sounds of this movement on Azusa Street made this audible:

Breathing strange utterances and mouthing a creed which it would seem no sane mortal could understand, the newest religious sect has started in Los Angeles. Meetings are held in a tumble-down shack on Azusa Street, near San Pedro Street, and devotees of the weird doctrine practice the most fanatical rites, preach the wildest theories and work themselves into a state of mad excitement in their peculiar zeal. Colored people and a sprinkling of whites compose the congregation, and night is made hideous in the neighborhood by the howlings of the worshippers who spend hours swaying forth and back in a nerve-racking attitude of prayer and supplication. They claim to have “the gift of tongues;” and to be able to comprehend the babel.

The utterances were not spoken but breathed, and the energy the congregants accessed and produced worked them into a frenzied state. The noises of “howlings” interrupted the restfulness and quietude of Azusa Street as well as the entire neighborhood.

29 David D Daniels, “‘Gotta Moan Sometime’: a Sonic Exploration of Earwitnesses to Early Pentecostal Sound in North America’, Pneuma, 30 (2008), 5–32 (p. 12).
30 David D Daniels, ‘Gotta Moan Sometime’, p. 17.
31 ‘WEIRD BABEL OF TONGUES’.
Consistent with the Acts 2 accounting of Pentecost, there were sounds that changed the soundscape of Los Angeles so much so that everyone took notice.

But if Daniels is correct in his assertion about the liturgical role of silence during tarrying, it becomes important to note that the aesthetics of Black Pentecostalism are not merely about loudness but are about the use and deployments of volume, the leveling and leveling off of such vibrational sonic velocities. With the testimony given of “holy quietness,” the word “flesh” serves as substitution for the word “earth” in the scripture, which goes unnoted (Hab 2:20 that says “But the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him”). What occurs when we think about the above statement regarding “holy quietness” if refracted through the distinction Hortense Spillers makes between flesh and body, where the distinction she makes is that the “body” is defined or informed by its capacity to be capturable and captive, but the “flesh” is defined by its liberational tendency. Flesh is “before the ‘body’” as it were, it is the “zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse or the reflexes of iconography.”

With “holy quietness,” the testimony makes the distinction, through substitution, between earth and flesh. Perhaps the Black Pentecostal desire for the flesh to be “quieted” was a way to recuperate the historic condition of being relegated to and

theologized and philosophized as *only* body, an earthly, grounded, primitivist condition. To be only body is to also be only noise and to be noise is to be the antithesis of the refined, pure hearing that Enlightenment thought would so produce by way of stethoscopes and other hearing mechanisms. What the praise noise of tarrying and the song of testimony service both encompass within these sounds are the reunification of *aesthesis* and *theoria*, the performance of an inexhaustible inseparability.

Black Pentecostalism uses its own noisiness to critique Spillers’s “vestibularity” of blackness as the reflection of all that the human was *not*. The preacher testifies to the fact that quietness is enacted through noises of praises, shouts and songs. What this testimony bespeaks is, rather than the abandonment of the flesh for a politics of respectability and a shoring up that would move such congregants into closer proximity to a normative center, a religiocultural choreosonics that decidedly pronounces the sacredness of the flesh. And that the flesh, so relegated – historically ripped apart, severed, disregarded – still allowed access to heaven on earth.

Of tarrying particularly, Daniels states that

Tarrying parallels contemplative prayer forms that seek communion with God rather than those that seek union with God. It agrees with the forms that stress verbalizing the word-prayer rather than silently meditating. Tarrying freely employs a short list of prayer-words as opposed to a limitless list and restricts the prayer to one word or phrase. While most contemplative prayer forms limit bodily involvement and movement,

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tarrying incorporates active, bodily participation. Finally, tarrying is not a private experience of an individual directing him- or herself; it is a communal event with the encouragement of altar workers and a prayerful congregation.\textsuperscript{34}

Daniels points in the direction of the present writing; he begins to theorize the interrelation between BlackPentecostal tarrying and the ring shout. If the ring shout is an enactment of black torque with its centripetal and centrifugal force at each turn in ways that BlackPentecostal sounds are likewise, then there is ample ground upon which to begin thinking about the sound of tarrying and testimony service singing, the sonicity and its historicity. This sound, this intensity we find in the soundworld of BlackPentecostalism has its historicity grounded in the “resistance of the object” – which turns out to be nothing other than the resistance of the analog-organic machine through voice, through song, through breath – to marginalization and oppression, to being stolen and sold as chattel. We turn to the soundworlds of the enslaved during the antebellum period.

\textbf{3.3 Work Songs and Labor Power}

Yes.

It may appear a bit strange to connect the BlackPentecostal testimony service song and the praise noise of tarrying to the seemingly secularized work songs

performed on plantations during the antebellum era, but the historicity of the sounds, of
the sonicity, is what I believe make the relation something other than tenuous. Samuel
Floyd states that work songs “were characterized by regular meters and rhythms,
contained grunts and moans as part of their expressive vocabulary, and made use of
overlapping call-and-response constructions.”\textsuperscript{35} Moreover, Shane and Graham White’s
research into the sonic environment of New World slavery assert that calls and hollers
could be used to enunciate “loneliness, pain, or despair,” and that these sounds at times
were used to measure distance.\textsuperscript{36} Some utterances were “pure sound rather
than…vehicles for the conveying of information.”\textsuperscript{37} Also included were “vocal leaps,
glides, moans, yells, and elisions”;\textsuperscript{38} a “tendency of black singers (and instrumentalists)
to ‘play’ with pitch, to worry, for example, the third and seventh degrees of the scale”
and the “practice of extending the number of syllables in a sung word in order to give
greater scope for melismatic play.”\textsuperscript{39}

These various sounds – found at the plantation – are themselves a form of labor,
they are work produced in excess of the chopping of wood, the hoeing of crops, the
suckling of children. These sounds are a practice that both allowed for the persistence of

\textsuperscript{35} Samuel A. Floyd, \textit{The Power of Black Music: Interpreting Its History from Africa to the United States} (New
\textsuperscript{36} Shane White and Graham White, \textit{The Sounds of Slavery: Discovering African American History Through Songs,
\textsuperscript{37} Shane White and Graham White, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{38} Shane White and Graham White, p. 24.
\textsuperscript{39} Shane White and Graham White, p. 31.
the object, of the analog-organic machine to live – which, also, was the capacity for the analog-organic machine to produce work for another – while concurrently are sounds that critiqued the conditions under which such labor was produced. The sounds are a sonic Luddism, both breaking the machine while allowing for its perseverance. Enslaved persons were to be machines, analog-organic cyborgs that were to merely produce labor – the harvesting of cotton, coffee, sugar and tobacco, for example – and anything in excess of that production was discardable. The work, the labor, functioned as catechismal, it was to inculcate a “pious disposition” towards the rote exercises of chopping, planting and hoeing. But this sonicity, this excess, was hallucinative of another life, another spatial place upon which to theologize and think; sounds broke – while giving – form. New form, new forum.

They could send a signal through drums…and they used to holler to each other through codes […] They would holler. And even the ladies, when they would be going to work, they would signal each other. Just holler, tell’em we ready … They had strong voices, their voices just carried. I don’t know why your voice don’t carry like that now. But they could holler.41

40 I get the idea of “pious disposition” from Saba Mahmood’s For example, she says, “The process of cultivating and honing a pious disposition among the mosque participants centered not only on the practical tasks of daily living…but also on the creation and orientation of the emotions such a disposition entailed” (140, emphasis mine). What I think happens with the various sonic resources utilized during the production of work songs is the creation and orientation of emotions antithetical to the work that is being produced.
41 Rosenbaum and Buis, p. 66.
The vocable, the rhythm: both audible, both resonant, both vibratory, felt in the body, heard. The sound of the drum, the sound of the voice, the sound of the body when clapped, slapped, carries. But what is being carried, carried underneath and above the vibratory frequency that can be heard? Is there a presence in the sound that bespeaks the condition of life, abundant life, that emerges within the crucible of enslavement, that is not created but rather rises to the occasion of marginalizing practice? What is carried, it seems, is the sociality of a new form, new forum, grounded in the reality of its present moment, open to the possibility through the improvisatory use of imaginative faculty.

This imaginative faculty was integral to the critique of the economic system of exploitation that needed their analog-organic bodies.

It is important here, for precision, to have a brief explication of what labor and labor power are. For Karl Marx,

*Labour* is the activity of the worker. It creates all value, and is itself invaluable; its only measure is time. The commodity the worker sells the capitalist is his power to labour, or, yet more accurately, the “right of disposition” over his (or her) labour power... that is, the right to determine how this power will be used. The sale of disposition over labour power is therefore not only a ‘purely economic’ but also a political act. During the period of work, the worker does not have the right of self-determination, but becomes an unfree person, little distinguishable from a slave. With this concept of what it is the worker sells the capitalist, the term ‘political economy’ acquires its full meaning.42

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Cedric Robinson’s extension of Marx through the consideration of blackness is instructive.

The creation of the Negro was obviously at the cost of immense expenditures of psychic and intellectual energies in the West. The exercise was obligatory. It was an effort commensurate with the importance Black labor power possessed for the world economy sculpted and dominated by the ruling and mercantile classes of Western Europe.\textsuperscript{43}

This “Negro” was a wholly distinct ideological construct from those images of Africans that had preceded it. It differed in function and ultimately in kind. Where previously the Blacks were a fearful phenomenon to Europeans because of their historical association with civilizations superior, dominant, and/or antagonistic to Western societies (the most recent being that of Islam), now the ideograph of Blacks came to signify a difference of species, an exploitable source of energy (labor power) both mindless to the organizational requirements of production and insensitive to the subhuman conditions of work.\textsuperscript{44}

African labor power as slave labor was integrated into the organic composition of nineteenth-century manufacturing and industrial capitalism, thus sustaining the emergence of an extra-European world market within which the accumulation of capital was garnered for the further development of industrial production.\textsuperscript{45}

If the commentary on Marx’s \textit{Grundrisse} is correct, then work-time makes an individual unfree, work-time is the condition of enslavement. If this is correct, then enslaved Africans were, of necessity, constantly “at work,” “on the clock,” punching perpetual timecards without any relief. That is, since enslavement and work-time are coterminous,

\textsuperscript{43} Robinson, \textit{Black Marxism}, p. 4.  
\textsuperscript{44} Robinson, \textit{Black Marxism}, p. 82.  
\textsuperscript{45} Robinson, \textit{Black Marxism}, p. 113.
one whom does not have the ability to “own” one’s labor power is in a continuous mode of work. Planting and hoeing? Work. Sleeping and praying? Work. Enslavement is the condition that eliminates the possibility of non-work-time, it is an attack on temporality. And there is nothing to sell, all produced seemingly belongs to the one for who sets the clock. It would appear that work-time as enslavement is totalizing but there is an excess, an excess in and as sound, an excess that not only resonates – vibratory frequency – as dissent, this audible dissent, this choreosonic protocol and itineration is a critique of the very conditions under which work-time as enslavement emerges.

What materializes in the sonicity of BlackPentecost and its historicity is the breaking of the concept of “self-determination” integral to Marxian thought about work-time as enslavement. Within this break is a critical space of exploration to reconsider if effects of work, of slavery, on the person that works, on the person that is enslaved, are totalizing. I draw on Denise Ferreira da Silva who engages and analyzes the very quicksand upon which the idea of self-determination is built. She finds that self-determination is a concept that metastasizes in Western philosophic tradition to account for, and theorize about, the ones presumed to be “without thought, will, or volition” and this is most assuredly a racial/ist category. Self-determination, conceptually, is the assumption of European man as a thinker, with will, with volition and both the

46 Denise Ferreira da. Silva, p. 53.
indigenes of the Americas and the black/Negros of Africa are without such possibility. Though she writes specifically about the creation of race, because of Spillers’s “vestibularity” – always about the interarticulation of gender, sexuality and race – we can extend da Silva towards how gender is a figuration of the same problem of self-determination.

What da Silva writes as the “others of Europe” would, by way of the problem of self-determination, assume a “Europe” a “man” and its “others,” all configured through stasis and coherence, with the “others of Europe,” always lacking will and volition. With reviewing da Silva, self-determination becomes the aspirational ruse – as moth’s powder once grasped, disintegrated – though the concept is proselytized in the service towards political emancipation. And Marx offers a critique of political emancipation in “On the Jewish Question” that also serves as a likewise appraisal of the concept of self-determination.47 For Marx, the political emancipation of humankind would come by the reduction of difference, the removal of accent, the resistance to improvisation: “The state abolishes, in its own way, distinctions of birth, social rank, education, occupation, when it declares that birth, social rank, education, occupation, are non-political distinctions, when it proclaim, without regard to these distinction, that every member of the nation is an equal participant in national sovereignty, when it treats all elements of the real life of

47 Karl Marx, ‘On The Jewish Question by Karl Marx’.
the nation from the standpoint of the state."\(^{48}\) Political emancipation is no abolition at all, it is life subsumed under the state, it is the diminishment of abundance. Self-determination, then, is likewise in the service of the gathering up and removal of difference, in this case, of sociality, of commons. What one gives up through the political emancipation in order to gain citizenship is what one effectuates as self-determination.

To return to the beginning: the sound of BlackPentecost, its sonicity, is the articulation of pure capacity, pure energy, pure openness against enclosure. Cedric Robinson elucidates the ways in which the transformation from African to Negro as a descent into enslavement, made a new species, one of an “exploitable source of energy,” energy which is its “labor power.” But the sonic resources of BlackPentecost are “pure energy,” and in this sonorous form and forum is the resistance to such desired descent, for such desired degradation. This “exploitable source of energy,” this labor power, was necessary for the making of the circum-Atlantic world, for a world capitalist system, for the movement of industry. But in the very emergence of such a system of exploitation was the kernel, the seed, the “yes” of the new form, the new forum, that emphatically said “no” to such conditions of marginalization, the breaking of machines.

“Ned Ludd,” a mythical character, at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution picked up a hammer and began to smash machines that were replacing person power

\(^{48}\) Karl Marx, ‘On The Jewish Question by Karl Marx’. 

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with automation. Though mythical, several peoples worldwide took up the cause of Ned Ludd, as they believed the Industrial Revolution was an attack on the commons, a desired obliteration of communal land, part and parcel of the enclosure process. Picking up hammers, Luddites “helped make it possible to see machine-breaking as a means of defending the commons ... The Luddites were machine-breakers of the north of England who differed from tool-breakers of the past or of other countries by giving themselves a mythological name, Ned Ludd, or Captain Ludd.”\(^49\) It was not important only for them to take up the cause of machine-breaking but to have for themselves a name by which they could be known. And so named, “Ned Ludd” became not merely a practice of smashing things, but an aesthetic performance, one that was taken up in poetics and visual arts.

Luddism according to Peter Linebaugh, should not be relegated to actions taking place in England. Importantly for the present discussion, Peter Linebaugh thinks of the Luddite tradition of the plantation in the Americas: “The destruction of farm implements by those working them on American plantations belongs to the story of Luddism, not just because they too were toolbreakers, but they were part of the Atlantic recomposition of textile labor-power. They grew the cotton that was spun and woven in Lancashire” and at least in part thinks of enslavement resistance as part of the story of

\(^{49}\) Linebaugh, *Ned Ludd & Queen Mab*, p. 8.
Luddism because the plantation was foundational to and part of the political economy to which Luddites in England were responding. But does machine-breaking need only occur through the hammer against the machine? If, as Linebaugh contends, “Slavery and the machine produce the person as automaton,” a Luddic relation to the enslaved-as-machine would mean the breaking of oneself, the hammering of one’s body. Though there are examples of enslaved persons mutilating their own bodies in the service of this very possibility of inhibiting work, were there other options?

[Call] alls, cries, and hollers; call-and-response devices; additive rhythms and polyrhythms; heterophony, pendular thirds, blue notes, bent notes, and elisions; hums, moans, grunts, vocables, and other rhythmic-oral declamations, interjections, and punctuations; off-beat melodic phrasings and parallel intervals and chords; constant repetition of rhythmic and melodic figures and phrases (from which riffs and vamps would be derived); timbral distortions of various kinds; musical individuality within collectivity; game rivalry; hand clapping, foot patting, and approximations thereof; apart-playing; and the metronomic pulse that underlies all African-American music.

This is an exhaustive listing of the “pulse that underlies all African-American music,” according to Samuel Floyd, consistent with what Shane White and Graham White underscore about the sonic world of the enslaved during the antebellum era. I

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51 Floyd, p. 6.
want to consider these various sounds, this created sonorous world, as using the verve of voice and noise to break the analog-organic machine, to break the automaton, through evidence of life, by improvisatory performance. What if these varied sounds acted as hammer against the condition under which such exploitive labor practices are produced? In this way, the hammer both smashes the ruse of the performer existing only for the service and production of the owner, and the idea that the performer has no will, volition or thought since the latter comes out, quite literally, through the utilization of sonic resources.

It is not surprising to find whites describing such sounds as “wild and barbarous,” “uncouth,” “a dismal howl,” or “hideous noise.” The African and African American practice of weaving a variety of wordless intensifiers – shouts, cries, yells, groans – into a melody, translating, thereby, these strongly felt emotions into sound, can only have increased whites’ sense of alienation.\footnote{52 Shane White and Graham White, p. 30.}

Marxist alienation “is conceived of as fundamentally a particular relation of property, namely involuntary sale (surrender of ownership) to a hostile Other...\footnote{53 Karl Marx, Grundrisse, p. 50.} What White and White stumble upon, it seems, is the “sense of alienation” that the sonorous world of BlackPentecost and its historicity could induce with its listeners who had a relationship to property and ownership grounded in coercion and hostility. But whereas alienation it typically conceived as that which the worker as slave experiences – because
work-time is enslavement and enslavement is the perpetual lack of non-work-time, is continuous work-time – here with the sonicity of African America, we find that whiteness as property produces its own virulent strain of alienation against itself, here, a hostility befuddled by the inexhaustible resource of resistance found in (black) sound. That is, when at the moment of performance of the various sounds of African America, phrases such as “uncouth,” “wild and barbarous,” and “hideous noise,” are used, these descriptors come to stand in rhetorically for a sense perception of what the voluntary purchase – through coercion as theft – of a resistant Other feels like. As with Kant’s dancing around the subject that was himself in Chapter 2, what the rhetorics reveal is how alienated the speakers feel about their own desire to degrade through ownership.

3.4 Averted Things and the Politics of Avoidance

Yes.

To desire that one “might be used as an instrument,”54 to objectify oneself for the use of another: can this making of oneself into an instrument be a critique of being made enslaved to a political economic system of exploitation? In the words of the testimony given by the “brother” at Rev. F.W. McGee’s “Testifyin’ Meetin’” was a desire to choose whom he would serve, and to be made an instrument in the service of that direction, not

54 From McGee; for the specific testimony, link here http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=drsXBOkA3BM&t=2m20s.
for the purposes of “the world” but as a critique of the world in which he found himself.

There is something about the desire to be made an instrument, to be fashioned into
something that would sound and sound out, speak and speak against conditions in
which one was forced to exist. Black Pentecostalism, if anything, is an open-ended
question, concerned fundamentally with how to strive against “the world.” And the
sonic world of blackness is necessarily an affirmation, a “yes” to the sociality that
furnishes forth against the proper and individuation. Rhetorics of the barbarity and
wildness of these sounds are a whiteness witness to the sense of estrangement that is
produced by property ownership and choreographic movements toward self-
determination. Such that what is generally deemed, from the side of ownership and
propriety as “uncouth,” “wild and barbarous” noise, is but the gathering and dispersal
of theological-philosophical blackness thought. These sounds, at once considered
discardable and excessive, though they also, on the underside of such rhetorical
dismissal, were considered moving, is the enunciation of a new world, a world that
critiques the inequities of the one in which labor exploitation exists. What if noise
bespeaks a sociality, a togetherness, that moves oneself and others towards that other
world?

The phrase “crisis averted” is useful here. When this phrase is invoked, is the
thing-in-itself any longer – and had it ever been – a “crisis”? Pondering aversion and the
(social life of the) thing averted, if theorized as a crisis – a car accident, a slip-and-fall,
the lack of structure for Moynihan’s Negro family – once averted, what does that mean for the would-be crisis? Is the thing itself a crisis or is the set of capacities to be crisis, to be engaged in crisis as process, as an accrual of those breaks, cracks and fissures that make something crisis? For something to be an averted crisis, as a category, is to make a normative claim previous to situation, prior to event. Aversion, thus, names by way of negation, by way of that which is – quite literally – not, what has been obscured, what has slipped away. And when conceived as a making, as a process of accrual, then one would have to think about the structures and forces that go into such making, such creating. If the thing is the set of capacities to be made or created into crisis, we must pause to think about the historical forces that attempt such fashioning. This making, this creating, thus, is aesthetic, it is about a way to make, a desired form through which analyses occur. Aversion of the thing is about the effects, the affect, of the capacity to be infinity possibility and to quell such energy.

A philosophy of aversion forestalls possible futurity, making normative claims on what any set of behaviors, or what any group of people, could and should possibly be. The “crisis” as the thing so believed to be the only future is but one possibility. To name the thing as crisis averted is to strip away the fact that the infinite set of capacities to be otherwise exists alongside the possible crisis; but it is also to refuse the fact that the infinite other possibilities cannot ever be fully named, claimed or thought. This phraseology lays bare the fact of normative claim and stance of the very consideration of
a thing as crisis. Moynihan looked at the Negro Family, wrote about its non-normativity, its resistance to patriarchal structure, as “crisis” that is enmeshed in a “tangle of pathology.”

But, and of course, the notions of crisis and pathology are thought as such because of the centering of regulative narrative and behavior that seeks to refuse the flourishing of life and love, kin and kith bonds that do not seek to merely mirror hegemonic priority. Concern with how the thing-in-itself avoids the claim that aversion produces, the claim that aversion bodies forth, occurs by way of performance, by way of event, that is at once resistant to any normative claim but also a general flow, a general directionality that vibrates, choreosonically moves and sounds out volitionally, with intention, with thought, without regard to the one averting. A politics of avoidance for the theology-philosophy of aversion makes possible the terms of thought, the terms of refusal by and in which the thing, the thing-in-itself, the object, the resistance of the object – which is to say blackness – operates.

We might, for example, contend that there was a particularly classist articulation of the normative behaviors and comportments for black religiosity that were not merely post-emancipation, social uplift ideologies. Daniel Payne, bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal denomination was very much a critic of the choreosonics of the

ring shout because it was an embarrassment and the improper way to be Christian.

Rather, he felt the dance was primitivist. I quote him at much length:

About this time I attended a “bush meeting,” where I went to please the pastor whose circuit I was visiting. After the sermon they formed a ring, and with coats off sung, clapped their hands and stamped their feet in a most ridiculous and heathenish way. I requested the pastor to go and stop their dancing. At his request they stopped their dancing and clapping of hands, but remained singing and rocking their bodies to and fro. This they did for about fifteen minutes. I then went, and taking their leader by the arm requested him to desist and to sit down and sing in a rational manner. I told him also that it was a heathenish way to worship and disgraceful to themselves, the race, and the Christian name. In that instance they broke up their ring; but would not sit down, and walked sullenly away. In some cases all that I could do was to teach and preach the right, fit, and proper way of serving God. To the most thoughtful and intelligent I usually succeeded in making the “Band” disgusting; but by the ignorant masses, as in the case mentioned, it was regarded as the essence of religion.\footnote{Daniel Alexander Payne and John Hope Franklin Research Center for African and African-American Documentation, \textit{Recollections of Seventy Years.} (New York, Arno Press, 1968.: Arno Press,, 1968), p. 254.}

I suppose that with the most stupid and headstrong it is an incurable religious disease, but it is with me a question whether it would not be better to let such people go out of the Church than remain in it to perpetuate their evil practice and thus do two things: disgrace the Christian name and corrupt others. Any one who knows human nature must infer the result after such midnight practices to be that the day after they are unfit for labor, and that at the end of the dance their exhaustion would render them an easy prey to Satan. These meetings must always be more damaging physically, morally, and religiously than beneficial. How needful it is to have an intelligent ministry to teach these people who hold to this ignorant mode of worship the true method of serving God.\footnote{Payne and Documentation, pp. 255–6.}
Aversion is not only evident in the Enlightenment thought of a figure like Immanuel Kant but also a theology of aversion undergirds the resistance to choreosonic social forms such as the ring shout. The words of Payne rather emphatically illustrate the ways in which a theology and philosophy of aversion is necessarily a choreosonic protocol and itinerary regarding economic and mental objects (of exchange). Payne used his preaching in order to prompt into the hearers notions of disgust with their aesthetic practices. Payne gave us much grist for the mill: the dances, clapping, singing he saw – and, no doubt heard, because of vibrational resonance, no doubt felt in his body – were “ridiculous” and “heathenish.” These choreosonics were not rational and lacked grace and composure. They were performed by the “ignorant masses,” those who refused to enter into something called “intelligence.” As well, because of the exhaustion that arises from such midnight dancing, the shouters would be “unfit for labor.” And James Weldon Johnson corroborated this line of reasoning, stating that it was the “educated” of the ministry, of the church, who endured the primitivity of such choreosonics, such motives, eventually banning the practice altogether. But the ring, with its choreosonics, with its movement and attendant sonicity, is work, it produces labor, it is a new form and

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58 Rosenbaum and Buis, p. 41.
new forum through which the theological-philosophical performance of blackness can be enacted. As was said to Payne, “Sinners won’t get converted unless there is a ring.”59

Based on these articulations of aversion for particular social formations, I argue that the theology-philosophy of aversion is animated by economics and the assumption of the very possibility for mental facility of the individual as conditions for entry into subjectivity. The economic condition is by way of abstraction and equivalence; it is an articulation of the forces of capitalist thought. This theology-philosophy is about positionality, about particular ways of (not) seeing, of (not) hearing. And mental facility is only possible for those who can be citizen-subjects, borne out in a space like the university. Subjectivity, then, is what one has when the excesses, the flourishes, the accent has been gathered and removed. Entry into subjectivity is violence and violative. Maybe the worry Payne articulated is foundationally a claim about, and thus against, the efficacy, productivity and creativity of black torque – choreosonic the ability to twist and spin and dip, to vocally glide, leap and yodel – and utilize dissent as a form of life. Crisis, indeed.

To name as crisis averted, is to bespeak the knowledge of the one naming, the one glancing, the one refusing to gaze, the one turning away attention. But this knowledge is purport: it assumes the position of the omniscient figure, of the sovereign;

59 Payne and Documentation, p. 254.
it is the materiality and bodying forth of a melancholy (loosely?) associated with a
general, more fundamental, more foundational agnosticism (where agnosticism here
indexes the fact of unknowability; where agnosticism indexes the fact of infinite
possibility that cannot even be fulfilled, cannot be fully considered); this agnosticism, it
seems, antagonizes. Thus: the assertion of aversion is to name or claim a thing by way of
lack, by way of what withdraws; this assertion is an assumption that forecloses of
capacity – of infinite possibility – of any thing to be; this foreclosure is a general
antagonism against the worry of a general agnosticism; as such, the one averting places
oneself in the position of one who has liquidated all plurality, has found essence, knows
it, has stripped infinite away from possible; but not only the one who has liquidated, but
who has created only one possibility.

For performance artist and philosopher Adrian Piper, aversion and xenophobia –
fear of an object previous to encounter – go hand in hand:

Xenophobia interests me because I am the object of it; self-transcendence
interests me because I want to understand the subject of it, namely you,
there, near the center, in the mainstream. I want to understand what it is
about certain kinds of subjects, as well as about certain kids of objects,
that makes you flinch, withdraw, or pour forth defensive rationalizations
of your impulses to ignore, reject, or annihilate those you perceive as
intruders, those who offend and threaten you by their very existence. I
want to understand what it is like to be you. I want my work to transcend
the limitations you impose on me, so I can better understand those you
impose, doggedly, on yourself. I try to do this in my work by voicing you
-sometimes unspoken and often unspeakable-thoughts, by depicting
your visions and nightmares, by entering into your psyche, in all its
variations, and inviting you to consider its contents-our contents-with
me, together.... I want you to be able to understand the experience that saturates so much of our lives in this society, of being held at a distance, examined, analyzed, and evaluated.⁶⁰

Piper's theorizing of xenophobia and aversion yield the ways in which self-regulation – perhaps an attendant process to self-determination? – is necessary for the aversion to things, to objects, to subjects as objects, to circumstance. Aversion to objects is the buttressing against a possible encounter and what is thus enunciated about the object from the one who has the faculties to judge normative taste is the refusal to think with the object. Piper’s performance and philosophy of aversion, by “voicing” stereotype publicly, forces the viewer, the hearer, the one who engages Piper's work to dance around the subject, to choreographically arrange and place thought by forming a way around those stereotypes in order to sustain their attention to the art/work.

So what is this thing so averted? And what can we claim of such a thing? A politics of avoidance is that which exists previous to the claim aversion attempts to make – as a particular sort of crisis – on a thing is undone by the avoidance of such a claim. Philosophical aversion attempted to name as crisis previous to situational encounter – the Negro, the black, blackness, for example – as the averted thing, made an impenetrable counterclaim and counterfactual, the thing enacted a disposessive force on the scene that would so subject. Thus, with the politics of avoidance, we see the

⁶⁰ Piper, pp. v2, 130.
performance and performativity of the refusal to reduce personhood to subjectivity.\(^{61}\) It is a politics, simply, because it is a form of life, it is a form life takes; it is a forum for life and it is the forum in which life occurs. Where the theology-philosophy of aversion privileges space and time as abstractions – both theoretical and physical – through the dematerialization of the object creating the possibility for intellectuality and subjectivity, the politics of avoidance privileges deepening and gettin down together as the production of social intellect, the constant escape into “irreducible density” of and into others.\(^{62}\) As a politics that avoids its own being stilled, stolen, stultified, the generalizability is at the same time the refusal of universality that extracts and abstracts from and discards of materiality, enthusiasm, experience. Sonicity registers difference with each movement and vibratory enactment on the ground, even while being collective, social resistance to aversion. The politics of avoidance of blackness instantiates the choreosonic “stealing away” because one doesn't have long to stay any “here.” The politics of avoidance is the perpetual and ongoing rupture of frame, it is the enactment of fugitivity and constant escape from being stolen and stilled.

This politics is the aestheticization of escape, flight, motion and movement as celebratory, even when prompted by such racialist and racist fantasy as an aversive desire for enlightened thought. This aestheticization of the politics of avoidance are the

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\(^{61}\) Moten, In the Break p.1
\(^{62}\) Glissant, Caribbean Discourse, p. 133.
plot points and bent notes of choreosonic atheologies-aphilosophies of what Pentecostals would come to call themselves, “peculiar people,” people both in and out of place, in and out of time, here but there. The same sociohistorical ability to aestheticize escape by the claim of being a peculiar people is urgently needed today, where escapism from the world takes its place in the choreosonics that produce a sociality, movements and soundings of breath, song, dance in this world. Escapism is a bodily, corporeal thing where the given critique is against the theologic-philosophic aversion that turns away from material condition as the grounds for thinking enacted by the politics of avoidance. This is not a claim that a confessional theology is unsullied by its own deployments of aversive philosophies; this is no romantic encounter of the historicity of sociality wherein these aesthetic practices transfer. Rather, I claim that the very possibility to resist aversion and its attendant theology-philosophy exists previous to its deployment shuddering against certain formations of life, as a function of the politics of avoidance the aesthetics of ecstatics refigure and recenter with each performance.

3.5 Awakenings and Aversions

Yes.

The Great Awakening revivals – looked at as a series of interconnected spirited protocols regarding movement of the Spirit through “enthusiastic” corporeal motor
response – was concerned with one’s capacity for salvation. I briefly turn to these revivals because they share in a genealogical relation to Black Pentecostal aesthetics, particularly given the critique of the choreosonic “enthusiasm” such as “shouting” and inspired singing. The critique of enthusiasm was grounded in, and extended, a conception of economy. With the Awakening revivals there was a general concern about the ability to be saved, articulated as the expressed predestined will and desire of the sovereign, was bodied forth through a general problematic regarding the Negro/African/black capacity for conversion. Predestination was equitably distributed – as resource, as an accumulation of capital – through including the Negro in the category of the possible, while remaining radically committed to a theological, philosophical conviction of Negro/African/black being-as-inferior.

As was noted above, for example, Cotton Mather’s catechism for Negro conversion did not allow for Negros to exist materially in equanimity; Mather never questioned Negro inferiority but was merely concerned about Negro capacity – as test, as “trial” – for conversion. Negro conversion was not even primarily for the Negro’s soul; it was to assure that the white owner was mindful of his property and his heavenly duties:

And such an Opportunity there is in your Hands, O all you that have any Negroes in your Houses; an Opportunity to try, Whether you may not be the Happy Instruments, of Converting, the Blackest Instances of Blindness and Baseness, into admirable Candidates of Eternal Blessedness.

63 See particularly the Introduction, in Rosenberg.
Let not this Opportunity be Lost; if you have any concern for Souls, your Own or Others; but, make a Trial, Whether by your Means, the most Bruitish of Creatures upon Earth may not come to be disposed, in some Degree, like the Angels of Heaven; and the Vassals of Satan, become the Children of God. Suppose these Wretched Negroes, to be the Offspring of Cham (which yet is not so very certain,) yet let us make a Trial, Whether the CHRIST who dwelt in the Tents of Shem, have not some of His Chosen among them; Let us make a Trial, Whether they that have been Scorched and Blacken’d by the Sun of Africa, may not come to have their Minds Healed by the more Benign Beams of the Sun of Righteousness.64

The conversion of Negro-servants in the houses of owners would allow owners to “try,” to become “happy instruments,” in the service of the King. The conversion of Negro-servants was the would-be extension, and grounding principle, of the general conversion of Christianity to whiteness; and this conversion would happen by the fruits that were borne – by doing the work of the Lord, the work of the ministry, by paying obeisance to the Matthews 28:19 “great commission.” The general conversion of Christianity to whiteness, of making whiteness and Christianity coeval, necessitated black servanthood, needed for blackness, blindness and baseness to be a trinitarian theological-philosophical means for thinking the Other of salvation. Mather’s is a theological self-determination rooted in the assumption of, on the one hand, white capacity for will, volition and thought, and on the other hand, an ongoing concern about a general incapacity for will, volition and thought with the Negro/Negro-servant as the incarnation of such concern. As with Kant’s general purposiveness, here in theology as

64 Mather and Royster, p. 1.
well, the Negro comes to stand in for a set of propositional worries about transcendence, the divine world and salvation.\textsuperscript{65}

Following the tradition of Mather, Great Awakening revivalists George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards aestheticized the general concern regarding capacity for salvation through injunctions against emotiveness and irrationality, utilizing the blackness of Negro skin, utilizing those “that have been Scorched and Blacken’d by the Sun of \textit{Africa},” as the always already appearance of the too “enthusiastic.” Enthusiasm was a category that concerned the theological, philosophical and juridical modes of thought, at least since the formative moments of Enlightenment thought. Anne Taves makes such an argument:

\begin{quote}
In the quest for an end to religious dispute, enthusiasm (along with superstition) held pride of place as the enemy of reason. All the moderate leaders of the early-eighteenth-century revival, therefore, took aggressive action to distance themselves from the threat of enthusiasm. Most of the moderates, including George Whitefield and Charles Wesley, actively discouraged bodily manifestations while they were preaching. Others, such as Jonathan Edwards in New England and James Robe in Scotland, not only discouraged these bodily manifestations, they joined with ministerial critics of the revivals, such as Charles Chauncy, and Enlightened skeptics, such as David Hume, in actively seeking to explain them.\textsuperscript{66}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{65} But what can we make of Mather’s tripartite declarative, “make a trial…let us make a Trial…Let us make a Trial”? Cotton Mather knew something of the conflation of trials with blackness, as his religious writings regarding the truth and existence of witchcraft were utilized during the Salem Witch Trials. That is, he was familiar with making “trial” and utilizing marginalized persons to test the possibilities and delimitations of “truth.”

\textsuperscript{66} Taves, p. 19.
Enthusiasm, as a denounced category, shared with other concepts such as “delusions,” “experience,” “madness” or pathological “religious despair.” And it becomes clear that these terms share in the rhetorics of dismissal for the sounds of Blacks above as “wild and barbarous,” “uncouth,” “a dismal howl,” or “hideous noise.” Such concepts were aestheticized as manifestations of choreosonic protocols and itineraries through the movements, spatial peregrinations and attendant soniferous productions of bodies in response to some divine call or encounter. What intrigues is that at the same time that the body becomes targeted as the site of regulation against religious enthusiasm, experience and despair, is the same historical moment that bodies were being refashioned from labor to capital.

Building upon the above discussion of labor power, capital, Luddism and alienation, I remark that the foundational grounds for capital accumulation is based upon African bodies, African workers, African labor that Cedric Robinson makes. He discusses how “The significance of African labor for the development and formation of the commercial and industrial capitalist systems can be only partially measured by numbers,” and that “First, African workers had been transmuted by the perverted canons of mercantile capitalism into property. Then, African labor power as slave labor was integrated into the organic composition of nineteenth-century manufacturing and

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67 Shane White and Graham White, p. 30.
industrial capitalism, thus sustaining the emergence of an extra-European world market within which the accumulation of capital was garnered for the further development of industrial production." This transformation of worker into property into labor power as creating the condition of possibility of capital accumulation was aestheticized and critiqued as a question of enthusiasm. Jordana Rosenberg enters the discussion given her critical analysis of the historical uses, the historicity, of "enthusiasm." Looping Robinson through the opening Rosenberg makes lets us then re-view the transformations from African worker to property to labor power.

Of enthusiasm, Rosenberg states that "the contradictions of capital accumulation" can be "clarified by reference to enthusiasm's mediation of the antipodean relationship between the constitution of the sovereign state and ideals of subjective freedom and autonomy on the one hand, and the transformation of the legislative apparatus to execute and regulate the extraction of profit from a work force compelled to wage labor, on the other." Enthusiasm, as a category of analysis and as a performance of transcendence and spirituality, enjoyed a transformation during the same time that African workers were being transformed. Enthusiasm indexes a secularist transformation, where secular here denotes the underside of the "work force compelled to wage labor," given in the fact of the "invention of the Negro" that "was

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69 Rosenberg, p. 4.
proceeding apace with the growth of slave labor,” thus, “Black labor was pressed into service.” Simply, though enthusiasm on its surface is about feasibility of capital accumulation through wage labor, it hides the fact that there was a force of non-wage labor undergirding even the wage labor system of exploitation.

Rosenberg discusses capital accumulation – a concern for Robinson’s analysis of the invention of the Negro – as a “secret” process, one that “takes place in hidden or occulted ways,” always “made up of a complex interweaving of financial, social, ideological, and structural transformations.” She further argues that accumulation, as secret, is “the complex manner in which profit is reinvested back into means of production” that necessitates “money’s apparent vanishing.” The focus on wage labor would compel one to ponder the apparent vanishing of money as the apparent vanishing of Black labor, the apparent vanishing of Black flesh. Curiously, secrets have to either be held or given away, so the withholding and dispersal of such knowledge is always a performative, aesthetic praxis. Holding both Rosenberg’s investigation of enthusiasm with Robinson’s attention to the invention of the Negro in tension bursts forth an analytics for thinking the interrelation of invention to vanishing, or what Peggy

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70 Robinson, *Black Marxism*, pp. 119, 120.
71 Rosenberg, pp. 15, 16.
Phelan considers as the disappearance and non-ontic nature of “performance.”\footnote{Peggy Phelan, \textit{Unmarked: The Politics of Performance} (Routledge, 1993). For example, Phelan states: “Performance’s only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance’s being, like the ontology of subjectivity proposed here, becomes itself through disappearance” (146). I am hoping to demonstrate that the relation of invention to vanishing applies necessary pressure on the assumption of performance’s disappearance because, we shall see, enthusiasm as a religious concept of contempt for figures such as Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield was scorned, at least in part, because of the temporal immediacy with which claims to divine encounter were posited.} But rather than disappearance, what we have is the constant vanishing of “apparent’s” appearance, causing us to plumb the depths below any surface, to submerge ourselves in the underwater and underground of black social life. Enthusiasm shares with blackness in terms of extraction and abstraction as the transformation of capital accumulation. This transformation – as the invention of Negros on the one hand, and the critique of \textit{spiritual, religious} enthusiasm on the other – forces an analysis of the ways in which enthusiasm was critiqued as an affect of the body. For my purpose, I am interested in how bodies that produced such enthusiasm within the context of the religious were \textit{thought}. Who took up enthusiasm as a force and who dismissed it?

Rosenberg finds that the critique of enthusiasm was enabled by disagreements regarding “direct experience” – was it attainable, how to verify such claims and who would desire such an experience? – with God. David Hume said as much: “enthusiasm arises from a presumptuous pride and confidence, it thinks itself sufficiently qualified to
approach the Divinity, without any human mediator.”73 Additionally, “religions which partake of enthusiasm, are, on their first rise, more furious and violent than those which partake of superstition; but in a little time become more gentle and moderate.”74 And though “enthusiasm is destructive of all ecclesiastical power” it is necessary in order to produce Enlightened thought, it serves a teleological ideology of proper development of subjectivity.75 Admittedly, Hume’s position regarding enthusiasm was not in order to support religion but to seek for its ultimate dissolution. Summarily, Hume deems the force of enthusiasm dangerous but because it cannot be sustained, it is not worrisome. He must assume that enthusiasm is a personal thing that belongs to individuals rather than an ongoing ontological force in which people share and participate. It is sustainable if it is shared; it is inexhaustible when it is breathed. His analytics of enthusiasm were refracted through the assumption of subjectivity.76

Hume critiqued the animatory force of Protestantism and for protesting itself. Hume could not conceive of enthusiasm as something other than “property” that self-possessed, self-determined individuals could repress rather than it being the vitality, the

74 Hume, Copley and Edgar, p. 40.
75 Hume, Copley and Edgar, p. 41.
76 This reconceptualization of the “belonging” of enthusiasm – with the populace, within the commons, as a general resource from which all can draw and participate coheres with Cedric Robinson’s critique of Max Weber’s ideation of “charisma.” For Robinson, charisma belongs to the people, not to the charismatic leader. See The Terms of Order: Political Science and the Myth of Leadership (Albany: State University of New York Press,, 1980).
flight and escape, of perpetual rebelliousness. To have enthusiasm as proper to
individuals, to the self-possessed transcendental subject (a concept that was in process of
becoming at Hume’s writing, by Hume’s writing) would be to impose and restrict the
radical potentiality of enthusiasm as transformational force. The enthusiasm Hume
critiqued would also be the derangement (de-arrangement, otherwise choreosonic) of his
philosophic thought. But he ingeniously shows us what it looks like, what thought acts
like, when it is inadequate to the to approach its object because of an imposition of
regulatory, normativizing, arrangement. He placed within the enthusiastic tradition
those organized, in process through refusing teleology, ecstatic socialities, commoners.
However, the tools he brought, a regulative protocol, could both detect the potency but
misread the potentiality.

There was, however, a critique of enthusiasm within decidedly theological
discourse. When articulated thusly, enthusiasm was still the figuration of a problem for
knowledge, capacity and historicity of the other, enthusiasm carried the weight of
racial/ist logic insofar as it indexes the essence of the purity, coherence and stability of
Islamic, Christian and Jewish identities.77 Anne Taves writes about the theological

77 Jordana Rosenberg argues that the resistance to enthusiasm was at least partially Islamophobic:
“eighteenth-century discourses about religion…often turned to Islam as an exemplification of the dangers of
enthusiasm.” As early as the seventeenth century, “conversion to Islam was represented…as an act that
involved the combination of seductive deception with some degree of force” (49). And The focus on Islam’s
relation to Christianity as a question of enthusiasm as a monotheistic religion “meant that enthusiasm had
become both a hermeneutical…as well as a historical” question (51). What I am thinking here is along the
critique of enthusiasm as critiques of enthusiasm’s “strange effects upon the body,” the “raptures,” “extasies, visions,” “trances” and “revelations.” Enthusiasm also produced “swooning away and falling to the ground” as well as shrieks and convulsions. These effects of the body had a transference currency. When shrieking during a camp meeting, for example, it was noted that they “catch from one to another, till a great Part of the Congregation is affected.” Though as a protestant and Calvinist, Jonathan Edwards argued that direct experience was both profound and possible, he repudiated the idea that those strange effects were resonances of such experience. Rather, he placed direct experience in the realm of the spiritual as opposed to the corporeal. And even in this placing, he “viewed the new sense as obscured by sin,” thus, “direct experience could

lines and in the same direction as the critique of nonessentialist discourse in Nahum Chandler, ‘Of Exorbitance’. He argues that African enslavement practices were a philosophical set of concerns that were always material. As a philosophical concern, “The question is an ontological one (even if it is not radical or rigorously fundamental): on what basis and in what manner can one decide a being, and its character of existence, as one kind or another? What emerges as decisive at the limit and in the conceptual and propositional sense is the problem of grounding, in some fashion that would be absolute, a socially observable hierarchy that one might wish to affirm. At this juncture, I can begin to name the philosophical appurtenance of the distinction in question, for the only manner in which such a claim could be made was to assume, in the ontological sense, that a distinction was absolute, oppositional, or pure, that in an analytical sense it could be understood as categorical. On that basis then, one could insist upon the categorical difference of the “Negro” (or African) and the European (or “White”) (355). I argue that the category of enthusiasm as marking the difference between the proper forms of religio-cultural constitutions of citizens is a symptom of the already emerging discourses of and philosophical considerations about blackness.

78 See all of Chapter One, ‘Explaining Enthusiasm’ for the full conversation. Taves, p. 22.
79 Taves, p. 31.
80 Taves, p. 38.
not be trusted to provide assurance of one’s salvation.” The critique of embodied manifestations of one’s conversion experience challenged proto-enthusiasts’ claims that direct experience with God was the condition of possibility for corporeal motor and audible response. He averted the very question of bodily motives by stating that the senses are inherently sinful and should be repressed and regulated. In order to critique the behaviors of the converted body, he danced around the very possibility of bodily, sensual salvation.

The politics of avoidance of Black Pentecostal choreosonics and its historicity was implied in each and every critical remark against the effects of the body as a response to a non-mediated encounter with divinity. As an immediacy of encounter, the critique of enthusiasm highlights a conception of blackness as totalizing experience. Talal Asad argues that secularism is a product of modern Euro-American thought, that secularism “presupposes new concepts of ‘religion,’ ‘ethics,’ and ‘politics.’” There is a non-secular resonance of the interarticulation of blackness, experience and imagination that echoes the volume of the noise before repression and regulation. The critique of enthusiasm is the aversion for – choreographic movement away from, sonic regulation of improvisation – the theological-philosophical force of blackness.

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81 Taves, p. 39.
82 Asad, p. 2.
The circum-Atlantic trade that Joseph Roach writes about as the trading of coffee, sugar and – most vulgarly – human flesh (all as cargo) was foundational to a global capitalist system that bore the necessity to reconceive choreographies by way of geographies, cartographies and topographies, or simply, the “New World Project.”83 Both Denise Ferreira da Silva84 and Willie James Jennings85 discuss the necessity of a spatial logics in the process of racialization, the way the ground upon which imperialism was enacted was intentionally – even when subconsciously – conceptually theologized and philosophized as chaste, as available for missionizing, exploring and exploiting. This spatial logic is within the cleavage where there was likewise a necessity for a hearing logics that would similarly racialize-as-Other those would-be abductees. These lands, and their peoples, were available because of the purportedly lack of civility, lack of “true” religion and, thus, lack of the proper means toward Christian civilization (thus they would need to be compelled by violent force). The New World Project was always and everywhere the interarticulation of religious, economic and racial/ist logics by means of a dissociative violent force. The New World Project was enlivened by the concern for articulating this self-determination, this ability to be Enlightened, to think

84 Denise Ferreira da Silva.
for oneself. And it is not the “determination” that is of import but the concept of “self” that is nothing other than a racial/ized category of coherence, stasis.

Da Silva and Jennings also think about displacement as philosophic in the former and theologic in the latter, as matters of the mind that produce the material engagements with Blacks and indigenes. Jennings demonstrates the relationality of different non-western peoples to the ground, to their environs: from the ways land inhabits the theo-ethical sociality through veneration of ancestors, to the ways a divine energy may be said to infuse peoples, places and things, to the ways land is remembered as holding memory. The arrival of Europeans into the now New World, bringing along with them disease, foliage and Christ, displacing indigenes and forcing them to work in mines (as only one such example), introduces a radically different relation to the land upon which one stood and, thus, a different theological vision. On the other hand, uprooting millions from various nations and bringing them to climes and work

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conditions different from which they departed is part and parcel of this project of new theological violence.⑧

Bodies uprooted, transferred, displaced. Ways of life uprooted, transferred, displaced. Bodies and ways of life as the material configuration of theological-philosophical choreonics of aversion. It is no wonder that enthusiasm – that concept which easily slipped, for the self-determined ones, into notions of experience, madness and pathology – was targeted as the stumbling block to self-determination, to universality. It is no wonder, then, that enthusiasm had to have its material resonance as a manifestation on the exteriority of the body and that manifestation – so easily thought to belong only to those who lacked self-determination (thought, will, volition) – was radically critiqued as in need of regulation. The choreonics of BlackPentecostalism, and its historicity, was the constant and radical contestation of such displacement. Three Jennys are the final destination, the articulation of pure capacity, pure energy, pure openness against enclosure.

3.6 Three Jennys

Yes.

By October 18, 1821 at “nearly 70 years old,” an enslaved woman named Jenny was the mother of “several” children, though the one news report does not tell readers

⑧ See all of ‘Part 1: Displacement’ in Jennings for a detailed discussion of ground and uprooting as necessary for the theological project of imperialism.
how many she indeed had. At nearly 70 years old, Jenny was accused of both thefts from, then the murder of, one Sidney/Sydney with her daughter Ritter as a possible accomplice. Though she never admitted to neither of the charges, blood was found on her hat and tracts leading from Sydney’s dwelling to Jenny’s were found, giving new meaning to the idea that “if the shoe fits,” so the news report intimates, she had to “wear” the guilt of such crime. What intrigues many about this particular news item is not the murder, nor the fact of her children’s melancholy at the event of their mother’s murder, but the sonic environment that other “colored people” produced in response to the hanging of Jenny at the gallows:

[F]ew remained unmoved by the wild grief of Jenny’s children, several of whom were present, and whose feelings on this trying occasion it is easier to imagine than to describe. Their sorrow seemed contagious. When the awful moment arrived in which the sheriff proceeded to the execution of his duty, numbers fled from the spot, and several hundreds of the colored people, squatted on the ground with their backs turned to the gallows, covered their faces with their hands, and uttered a simultaneous groan, which while it expressed their feelings, added not a little to the horror of the scene.

What was it that this Jenny was guilty of doing? The enslaved Jenny allegedly broke a machine, the capacity for the furtherance of capital accumulation: the political economy of slavery would have that she was guilty, not of stealing the capacity to breathe from

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89 ‘Public Execution’.
another being, but because she damaged property, she quelled the capacity for a machine to produce labor.

The simultaneity of the groan is what resonates, it leaves the story of this particular Jenny perpetually open-ended, left at the moment of transition, unfinished. That is, the simultaneous groan, the historicity of Black Pentecostal sonicity opens questions regarding the effects and affects of such sonicity: what did it produce in the hearers as well as what was generative about such soniferous sociality for the squatters? Adding to the horror was an intensification of the feelings of displacement, it appears, that was witnessed by the “several” children that watched the murder of a mother. “Is not the individual force of anarchy inevitably weaker than the collectivized force of social authority? How could a movement against the state succeed without creating, in the very imprint of its coming into opposition, counter-responsive political associations or counter-revolutions?”

What this simultaneous groan enacts, it appears, is but another example of black torque – coterminous centripetal and centrifugal force – but beyond that, it is the choreosonic action of a collectivity, refusal of individuation. This collectivized response to horror is in potentia, it is never engulfed, never fully representable but is excessive in its force. This excess turns out to be constitutive of the

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resistance to such degradation. It is collectivized, a new form and new forum of life, a politics of and as avoidance of “sense” and enclosure. Yes, Lord.

Jenny von Westphalen was seven years old and, quite literally, thousands of miles away when the enslaved Jenny above was murdered by the state of Maryland. And four years his senior, Jenny would quickly become a childhood playmate, teenage friend and early 20s lover before a marriage to Karl Marx would take place years later. Though their lives could be no more different, it seems – as von Westphalen was born to Prussian aristocracy – the connection between Westphalen and the enslaved woman in Maryland is not reducible to, nor as tenuous as, their first names. What the news story in 1821 recounts is that Jenny refused to admit to any wrongdoing and that there was no confession before her being hanged. That is, she held conviction even beyond the point of death, even in the theater that would be her public demise. She was unrelenting. Not because she did not care for her children, it seems, but because “a good name” was her choice, she could not “give the consent that, nevertheless, she [could] withhold” to the conditions under which she was held and, ultimately, in which she died.91

Jenny von Westphalen was similarly convicted, in her case, about the cause of communism, the redistribution of wealth, the rise and revolution of the working class and, not unimportantly, the love she had for the man who would start a movement. Her

91 Moten, ‘Preface for a Solo by Miles Davis’, p. 218.
father – Baron Ludwig von Westphalen – so impressed with the teenaged Karl, would talk to him often about politics, religion, philosophy and the cause of socialism on walks in parks and through neighborhoods. However, Ludwig was not merely impressed with Karl’s acuity for knowledge; he also invited his daughter Jenny along for many of these conversations and she, without a doubt, registered her thoughts, feelings and personal resistances within the conversations as well. That to say, she was treated as an intellectual of equal standing, not only to her father, but to Karl as well. This equanimity emerged through the implication of her allowance on these peregrinations: that she had the capacity for knowledge, for thought. Jenny von Westphalen quickly grew accustomed to such conversations with Karl and it was then that the seeds were planted for a lifelong love relationship full of itinerant living, communing and commotion.

Married in 1843, Karl Marx, we might say, itinerated because of his “radical” writings that were being censored in various nations. Because of such censorship – most undoubtedly, however, not only of Marx – he and Jenny moved around Europe several times and even considered a move to the Americas. What remained consistent throughout their movements, with their forced itineration, was the refiguration of the domestic sphere. Simply, the Marx household was a gathering space for fugitives and revolutionaries. Babies bounced on the knees of Friedrich Engels, cigar smoke from Karl

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92 Gabriel.
wafted in the noses of friends and refugees. Karl and Jenny enacted a sociality of the commons by the refusal of the home to be a domestic, private space. Karl’s and Jenny’s lives were characterized by nomadism and exile, a type of marronage, of being on the outside in order to build a new world based in, an as the critique of, the world from which one escapes? What is important is that the Marxes were enacting communism and that performance was a necessarily social engagement with others.

But to return to Jenny: I want to point to a passage from one letter, written before their marriage, which elucidates another aspect of the BlackPentecostal politics of avoidance to which I am interested:

Often when I thus suddenly think of you I am dumbstricken and overpowered with emotion so that not for anything in the world could I utter a word. Oh, I don't know how it happens, but I get such a queer feeling when I think of you, and I don't think of you on isolated and special occasions; no, my whole life and being are but one thought of you. Often things occur to me that you have said to me or asked me about, and then I am carried away by indescribably marvellous sensations. [...] Oh, my darling, how you looked at me the first time like that and then quickly looked away, and then looked at me again, and I did the same, until at last we looked at each other for quite a long time and very deeply, and could no longer look away.93

What von Westphalen illustrates is the resistance to the averted gaze, and that resistance has within it the kernel, the seed, of erotic, libidinal desire. Each tried to instantiate a

looking away from the other, each tried to allow the quickened image to linger in heart, in
mind, without perpetual contact from the eyes, without sustained attention.

Importantly, according to Jenny von Westphalen, this was not a one-directional look
askance; they both participated in this choreosonic look and look away until both,
gripped by the view of the other, could no longer stand to look any elsewhere again.
They were engaged, it seems, in reciprocal sound and sentiment, quickened by
butterflies and nervous, youthful flights of fantastic fancy. Such that, at the time of her
writing, von Westphalen’s entire body would feel “marvellous sensation” at the very
thought of Karl Marx.

Jenny von Westphalen’s pondering him mentally caused within her an
enthusiastic response, a complete union of mind and body, engulfed, as it were, in the
desire for love, for fulfillment of such longing. No self-determination but, rather, a
sought after sociality. Such that she would be without words, where words bespeak the
limit of emotion; what she needed, it seems was a moment of “speaking in tongues,”
sitting, perhaps, next to Jenny Evans Moore. But more on her soon enough. What von
Westphalen’s letter contains is an instance of the politics of avoidance and this politics,
this way of life, this new form, new forum, is a declarative “yes.” The sustained,
enduring look – the refusal to look away – is an affirmation of life, resisting the
choreosonic itinerary and protocol for the theology-philosophy of aversion. That is, the
politics of avoidance is all about love.

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The “fire fell,” finally after waiting, after tarrying, after praying fervently and consistently in the home of Ruth and Richard Asberry, 214 North Bonnie Brae Street, April 9, 1906. The various seekers in the house that day – the Asberry’s Edward S. Lee, Jenny Evans Moore, William Seymour, for example – could not have known that their prayer and supplication would lead to a worldwide movement. All they knew is that they were seeking experience. And it is the enthusiasm, the experience of one Jenny Evans Moore that very night who closes this exploration of the choreasonics of Black Pentecostalism and its historicity. Moore, who would eventually marry the leader of the movement, William Seymour, had this to say in *The Apostolic Faith* newspaper in their May 1907 edition:

On April 9, 1906, I was praising the Lord from the depths of my heart at home, and when the evening came and we attended the meeting the power of God fell and I was baptized in the Holy Ghost and fire, with the evidence of speaking in tongues. During the day I had told the Father that although I wanted to sing under the power I was willing to do what ever He willed […] [I]t seemed as if a vessel broke within me and water surged up through my being, which when it reached my mouth came out in a torrent of speech in the languages which God had given me. […] I sang under the power of the Spirit in many languages, the interpretation both words and music which I had never before heard, and in the home where the meeting was being held, the Spirit led me to the piano, where I played and sang under inspiration, although I had not learned to play. In these ways God is continuing to use me to His glory ever since that wonderful day, and I praise Him for the privilege of being a witness for Him under the Holy Ghost’s power.94

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Like von Westphalen, Moore felt similarly “dumbstricken and overpowered with emotion,” however, this moved Moore not to speechlessness, but to broken speech, broken sound, broken voice through improvisational choreosonics. I will analyze “speaking in tongues” in a subsequent chapter; here, I want to think about what it means to have a vessel that dwells within that is broken, and that brokenness yields pleasure and joy, through choreisonic performance. What Moore bespeaks is that the fact of a something being in her previous to encounter with Pentecost; this something broke as a result of her desire, and this brokenness was a rupture toward fulfillment of immediacy of encounter with the Lord.

This Pentecost also allowed for Moore to sing “under power…words and music which” she had never heard before, which she had never, thus, rehearsed or prepared for the congregation. What she illustrates about the politics of avoidance that is foundational to BlackPentecostal choreosonics is what it means to become an affirmation, what it means to become, to enter and descend into something like an affirmation. That is, and to for a third time return to the beginning of this exploration, if BlackPentecostal choreosonics are pure capacity, pure energy, pure openness against enclosure, Moore’s singing not only made of her an instrument but gave her a new way to become an analog-organic machine against the brutal conditions of enslavement, of capital exploitation. She was led to the piano by the Spirit and played thereupon, though never
having done such previous to that situation. Her ability to contribute to the soniferous environment rose to the occasion of its occurrence and did not precede its necessary utilization.

What I have attempted to demonstrate is, extending Karl Marx’s suggestion that “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles,”\(^{95}\) that the choresonics of BlackPentecostalism document – through movement, through sound, an ongoing class struggle; the aestheticization of class struggle happens with the yodel and the melismatic break, with the movement to the piano and singing in tongues. In order for this to happen, in order for the critique of the systems of marginalization and oppression to be generative, one must be open, one must be able to say, to sing, to seize upon a “yes,” an ongoing affirmation of life against desired physical, emotional, psychic death. This “yes” emerges through a sociality and testifies to the limits and violence of normativity, of subjecthood grounded in western theological-philosophical constructions of the self-determined, affectable thing.

4. Speaking In Tongues, Black Studies and the Language of the University

Fisk University was in the thicket of dire financial straits in 1871 when George L. White thought it his mission to organize a group of singers from the university for a fundraising tour. Dilapidated buildings and facing bankruptcy, White gathered nine singers and a pianist to sing throughout major cities with the hopes of averting the looming closing of the school. White so very much believed in the mission of the school that he was willing to risk his reputation and personal finances to journey to various cities with this unusual motley crew. Unusual insofar as these were no mere minstrel singers, no blackface performers, but were the true, real, authentic thing: black folks on a stage singing music from plantations, some of Stephen Foster’s melodies, anthems and concert standards, so various newspaper articles recorded:

During the early days, the company had yet to establish the Negro spiritual as the main staple of its programs, performing instead “white man’s music,” mostly popular tunes, sacred anthems, and patriotic songs. White interspersed a few spirituals at times throughout the evening, but they were hardly the featured items.¹

Organized five years previous to the first tour in 1871, Fisk University was formed through the philanthropy and religious beliefs of the American Missionary Association, a group that worked tirelessly for the abolition of the enslaved in the United States. Fisk University, thus, was for the education of colored people, men and women that envisioned educational achievement as necessary for integration into civil society.

Fisk University was a higher education institution committed to the principles of a classical education; its instructors strived to create well-rounded scholars with an appreciation for and keen understanding of what constituted beauty. [...] Fisk University sought every means possible to convince white Americans that African Americans were their equal.2

And it was the group that would eventually be called the Fisk Jubilee Singers that saved the school from possible bankruptcy, performing on national and international stages beginning with their first performance in Ohio, October 6, 1871. After months of training and only little public praise in the media, White decided to take a chance with the company, utilizing spirituals as the mainstay. It was the spirituals that so-moved audiences, more than any of the other songs. Imagine, then, genuine Negroes singing genuine plantation music, a spectacle unheard of before the Jubilee Singers’s tours. But the music that they performed had to be radically changed for wide audiences, for economic benefit to the school. Historian Mary Spence noted, “the

2 Toni P. Anderson, p. 98.
spirituals sung by the young Fisk students needed altering – refinement or polishing, if you will – before presentation for audiences if they were to meet prevailing standards of ‘culture.’” Moreover,

It is clear that White and his contemporaries felt that the performance of spirituals needed to conform to a shared set of rules that governed Western European music making before they could be worthy of consideration as art. Therefore, he engaged Ella Sheppard to arrange choral versions of spirituals, and together the two rehearsed the ensemble, aiming for precision and flawless choral blend...

It was the space of the university that such training took place, where such learning of performative acumen was garnered. What is evident is that for the spirituals to become acceptable on the world stage, there had to be a reduction of the vulgarity, of the wildness and rudeness of voices. Such training, however, was not merely about the voice; such training was about the aspiration and movement toward becoming a subject, becoming a proper citizen against declarations and ideologies about the incapacity for blacks to be human. Such training, in other words, gathered up and discarded the seemingly disrespectful aspects of black singing, of singing in blackness, in the service of white acceptance. For example, a review of their October 6, 1871 performance stated,

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4 Toni P. Anderson, p. 102.
The unaffected simple fervor breathing forth the soul were remarkable and touching qualities of the performance. What might be done with such voices, subjected to early, thorough, and skillful culture, the singing of last night afforded a faint intimation.5

This is important to consider: that the reviewer utilized the word *subjected* is formative for thinking about training of voices as the movement toward subjectivity. Their performances on stages were, in other words, scenes of subjection and the sound of subjection would be gained through training, through enculturation. What they sounded like previous to such training and culture were mere intimations of that which would come through learning. This is a becoming-subject through the sonic, utilizing breath and voice to cohere. The training of voices set the foundation for a general pedagogy of one version – which is an *aversion* for black social life – of black studies, of a teleological principle for becoming a proper black subject.

Perhaps it seems odd to begin a chapter about speaking in tongues as a BlackPentecostal aesthetic performance by lingering with the training of voices in universities for the political economy of black aspirations. Or, perhaps not. I opine that this movement in the direction of training, culture – which is to say, subjectivity – is a fundamental feature of the debate regarding the *nature* of speaking in tongues that was

set loose in the twentieth century Pentecostal group. I do not denigrate nor dismiss training, learning and pedagogy generally; rather, I am interested in the way training, learning and pedagogy occur, and what the objects of such desired affection are. There is a radical difference, it seems to me, between learning spirituals on plantations during working hours or whilst stealing away in brush harbors and praise houses on the one hand, and learning them in private classrooms with the goal of perfecting through rehearsal away from the social world on the other. This latter mode of training, learning and pedagogy is the condition for the emergence of the Kantian enlightened scholar discussed in chapter 2, the emergence of the learned individual. This distinction has everything to do with the question about the nature of tongues, and, I argue, is an operating distinction in the university generally, and black studies particularly.

4.1 Xenolalia and Glossolalia

So to begin: “When early pentecostals wanted to explain themselves to the outside world – indeed when they wanted to explain themselves to each other – they usually started with the experience of Holy Ghost baptism signified by speaking in tongues.”\(^6\) BlackPentecostalism is the “irreducible density” of being together in one place that responds with aesthetic vitality to historical-material moments and

\(^6\) Wacker, p. 35.
movements of violence and violation and speaking in tongues, as a mode of contemplative performance, is foundational for a Pentecostal imagination. Speaking in tongues is but one example of the Black Pentecostal capacity to give away that which one has received – utterance – in order to receive, and thus give, more. But “speaking in tongues” is a rather broad category and at the time of this writing, there have been no extended analyses about the difference of desire that the phrase “speaking in tongues” encapsulates.

The initial Azusa Street movement – along with predecessors such as Charles Parham’s studies in Kansas and Texas – was founded upon the belief in the “third work” of grace in the life or believers, in the manifestation of speaking in tongues as foundational for empowerment in the world. Given the fact that many of these varied folks were marginalized based on race, class and gender, the ability to speak – with boldness, with measured volume – from such a station, from such a configuration of lot and life, is to speak from the position of those assumed to have no relevant thought. And in so speaking from such a position, what is announced is a “disruption rather than the condition of a given epistemological line or chord.”

7 Glissant, Caribbean Discourse, p. 133.
8 Moten, ‘Preface for a Solo by Miles Davis’, p. 217; 218.
described variously as “a special language gift which is used in praise and prayer, which can approximate to prophecy when interpreted” and as “unlearned human languages (xenolalia), heavenly/angelic languages or some spiritual language which defies description.” Vern S. Poythress produced a linguistic and sociological definition of speaking in tongues as follows:

Free vocalization (glossolalia) occurs when (1) a human being produces a connected sequence of speech sounds, (2) he cannot identify the sound-sequence as belonging to any natural language that he already knows how to speak, (3) he cannot identify and give the meaning of words or morphemes (minimal lexical units), (4) in the case of utterances of more than a few syllables, he typically cannot repeat the same sound-sequence on demand, (5) a naive listener might suppose that it was an unknown language.

Though Pentecostal historians and theologians know of the distinction between xenolalia and glossolalia, few make much of the distinction. I believe that much more is at stake. Concerned with two minuscule but inassimilable concepts of personhood that vitalize strains of Black Pentecostal Christianities at the turn of the twentieth century, this chapter slips in between nuances about unknown language as the spirit gives utterance, thinks through the initiatory debates about, and often frustration regarding, speaking in

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tongues as one’s openness to the spirit. But before we get to such speaking, some markings on a page.

Figure 11 - The "Unknown Handwriting" of Elder W.G. Johnson

This is an example of “spirit writing.” The written note attached states “THE ‘UNKNOWN HANDWRITING’ OF ELDER W.G. JOHNSON WHICH WAS INTERPRETED BY BISHOP C.H. MASON AS A ‘CALL TO MICHIGAN’”,11 What we

have with this glossographesis are markings for an emancipatory, liberatory project that privileges movement – of the spirit, by the spirit – towards the unknown. This unknown is elevated to the level of a general critique of modernity, similar to what Ronald Judy declared about the incoherence of portions of the Islamic *Ben Ali’s Diary*: “this emancipation is achieved in a manner incomprehensible for the framing of what is supposed to be modernity’s privileged discursive mode: subjectively grounded narrative writing.”\(^1^\)\(^2\) *Glossographia*, also known as *grapholalia*, are the markings of incoherence and the irreducibility of discovery, markings of a general agnosticism at the heart of the BlackPentecostal prompt towards insprited experience. From at least this critic’s standpoint, BlackPentecostalism and agnosticism both share in the negation of stasis and stillness, a rejection of objects as impenetrable, of knowledge as exhaustible, the potentiality for further discovery expired. No. These writings “in tongues” serve as the model for black *glossolalia* – for a speaking, talking project – in that it sets the grounds that yield a productive way to think about the potential deformation of subjectivity that blackness as Pentecostalism elucidates.

The caption states that Charles Harrison Mason “interpreted” such markings, important given Mason’s prominence in the movement of Black Pentecostalism. He

\(^{1^2}\) Judy, *Dis)forming the American Canon*, p. 24.
articulated – through the interpretation of the unknown while never claiming to “know” what each marking meant – a mode of Black Pentecostal reflection that has blackness at the core. Mason stated in his auto/biography (1924) that prayer was “given” to his mother to speak against the “baneful” nature of enslavement. Mason recalled that he entreated for God to “give him a religion like that he had heard the old folks talk about and manifest in their lives.”\(^{13}\) For Mason, tongues, as a result of spirit baptism, was but another manifestation of the spiritual resource necessary for resistant life and love during enslavement: spirit baptism, tongues as a performative enunciation of such immersion, rose to its moment’s occasion. Mason never denigrated the omens, visions and other folk habits but celebrated them as likewise divine workings. But more, where omens claim “knowledge,” Mason, through his daughter’s recall, asserted that spirit baptism plumbed the depths of the unknown: “The spiritual omens seemed to have given place to the power and mysterious working of the Holy Ghost.”\(^{14}\) Mystery – “Notes is good enough for you people … but us likes a mixtery”\(^{15}\) – is elevated to celebration. The mystery of black performance, the mixery of glossographia rehearses the generativity of agnosticism. This mode of spiritual reflection privileges the unknown,

\(^{13}\) Mason, p. 14.
\(^{14}\) Mason, p. 24.
\(^{15}\) Shane White and Graham White, p. 51.
the non-sensical and non-rational; this mode of spiritual performance privileges incoherence.

But what are tongues? Curiously, in an exposition about the capacity for tongue-talking to be a philosophy, a hermeneutic, a way of life, James KA Smith in *Thinking in Tongues* spends very little time discussing a general distinction at the heart of the very idea of tongues as spiritual experience.\(^\text{16}\) What sets his work in motion is the very thing that is repressed in his reflections about Pentecostal experience generally: a question of meaning. Tongues serve as exemplar for a specific uniqueness, uniqueness given as experiential knowledge in, of and for the world. But we are left to wonder: what is this thing, how does one receive – or how can one be open to – this process? And if we learn anything from historiography on the matter, why is there a black method, called tarrying, for such divine encounter? Smith brackets what he thinks as a merely theological question regarding tongues-speech but, as I will discuss below, the bracketing is an important and productive space of thought about subjectivity and personhood, performance and politics.

This issue, the question, the problematic of tongues lets us travel curiously to the conceptual domains of essentialism and authenticity. And these categories have been played out in the crucible of Black Studies: assertions that “such-n-such is not black because I did it too,” ostensibly taking some experiences off the table for thinking blackness. These declarations, these critiques of authenticity, end up being a critique of what some black folks do, implicating while simultaneously veiling, the classism that marks such stances. Something on the order of reducing “the black church” to a static entity for example, Black Methodists and Baptists claiming that Black Pentecostal aesthetics were performed everywhere, not just in the walls of storefronts, dismissive of the historical, rhetorical injunctions against such behavior, where speaking in tongues was uncouth and unacceptable behavior. People were excommunicated from families, had church memberships revoked and were lampooned in news media for being tongue talkers. If such behavior occurred in non-pentecostal spaces, what is elided is the atheological-aphilosophical thought inhering and emanating from those non-Pentecostal spaces. Black Pentecostals made a claim for, while others merely allowed or dismissed, such irruptions, such surreptitious moves of the spirit.

Further, Smith “suggest[ed] that, at least on a certain level or from a certain angle, tongues-speech could be seen as the language of the dispossessed – or the
language of the ‘multitude.’” I am sympathetic to such an understanding of tongue-speech but his assertion rings problematic to me, not least because of the bracketed questions regarding the theologies of folks who speak in tongues from his general discussion. In his notes, he states that he is against any understanding of “initial evidence” but rather believes that glossolalia is but one spiritual gift among others. This theological assertion has resonance for the meaning of the practice, and also the meaning of philosophizing from such a practice. An even more fundamental, but likewise bracketed question is this: is tongue-speech xenolalia or glossolalia?

The Holy Spirit then used [A.J. Tomlinson’s] “lips and tongue” to speak the language of the Indian tribes of Central America. After a little rest, the Lord directed his eye to Brazil, where the sequence of extreme suffering and speaking the native tongue repeated itself. The cycle continued, fixing next on Chile, then Patagonia, Africa, Jerusalem, Japan, northern Canada, back to his present home town of Cleveland, Tennessee, on to Chattanooga, then over to his natal town of Westfield, Indiana, and finally to the Indiana villages of Hortonville and Sheridan.18

My reading through many first-hand accounts of those early pentecostals in the twentieth century reveals an interesting distinction, nuanced though it may be and this distinction falls within a racialist logic. Xenolalia is the ability to speak a foreign language – Spanish, French, Hindi, for example – without any knowledge of the language;
glossolalia, on the other hand, is the eruption and enunciation of irreducible, non-linguistic, non-representational vocalizing. A.J. Tomlinson, according to the recounting, spoke in languages he had never heard nor experienced previous to such divine encounter. He was taken on a journey through the world where language enunciation, without experience, was privileged as a mode of reflection and proselytizing.

Tomlinson’s recounting is of xenolalia, and is foundationally about spatial organization, a means to conquering the lands of others. Xenolalic utterances seem to share a general relationship with imperialist impulses, possibly interrupted by BlackPentecostal aesthetics. That is, the conversation regarding tongues as xenolalia or glossolalia is an important set of considerations.

Historian Grant Wacker calls these xenolalic utterances “missionary tongues”:

Belief in missionary tongues dated from the 1830s in Scotland, and continued a minor though persistent element of radical evangelical missionary strategy on both sides of the Atlantic throughout the late nineteenth century. But the concept came to serve as a veritable cornerstone of Charles Parham’s theological system, for he taught his followers that all authentic tongues involved extant foreign languages.19

Charles Parham, a prominent figure in modern Pentecostal history, believed tongue-speech was xenolalia, foreign language. Responsible partly for teaching William

19 Wacker, p. 45.
Seymour, the black pastor of the important Azusa Street Mission and the leader of the several years revival that spread worldwide from Los Angeles, Parham still believed that Africanisms were a general problem for Christian reflection. After visiting the Azusa Street church, Parham found “the disturbing sight of white people freely associating with blacks and Latinos in ‘crude negroisms’ [which] sickened him; and he left the revival insisting that most of those claiming Holy Spirit’s baptism were subject to no more than ‘animal spiritism.’”

His thoughts about primitivism and Africanisms seem to be rooted in an ideological disposition that could not cognize negro capacity for thought and he never fully committed to even the idea that blacks could be saved, much less filled with the Spirit. On the other hand, it seems BlackPentecostals were willing to allow unknowability at the heart of the practice, were much more willing to think about tongues-speech as glossolalic, as incoherent. Henry Fisher, for example, stated: “The saints are being baptized with the Spirit. I too have received Him and have spoken in some kind of language, I know not what.” Mason, of his experience at Azusa, stated, “I saw and heard some things that did not seem scriptural to me, but at this I did not
stumble I began to thank God in my heart for all things for when I heard some speak in tongues I knew it was right, though I did not understand it.”

At issue is the question of epistemology, the question of knowledge, that inheres to such declarations about speaking in tongues as xenolalic performance. “Though the evidence remains sketchy, there are good reasons to believe that between 1906 and 1909 more than a dozen zealots journeyed to remote outposts on the mission field armed only with the conviction that they would be empowered to speak the native language when they arrived.” A.G. Garr and his wife believed so much in missionary tongues and the possibility for xenolalic utterance that they traveled – as many did – to foreign lands with hopes of converting non-believers.

[A.G.] Garr felt certain the Holy Spirit was calling him and [his wife] Lillian to India as missionaries. He also felt certain that the Holy Spirit had miraculously enabled him to speak Bengali and Hindustani and Lillian to speak Tibetan and Chinese. [...] A resident missionary [in Calcutta] who knew Hindi told him that his gift of Bengali (a cognate language) was unintelligible. Garr refused to believe him and proceeded to preach to the Bengalis anyway. Failing, presumably after several tries, the couple moved to Hong Kong in October 1907, where they buckled down to the arduous task of learning the language the hard way.

22 Mason, p. 17.
23 Wacker, p. 45.
24 Wacker, p. 49.
Of course, I am not simply trying to set up a bad “white people do this, black people do this” kind of punch line. No. I am interested in the theological-philosophical underpinnings regarding such distinction. At the heart of the matter – between xeno and glosso – is a question, a Du Boisian problematic, about the foundational claims of and for identity: is there a stable entity that is the locus of identity or is identity irreducibly incoherent, refusing stasis and stillness? Attendant to those concerns, just how to articulate a mode a personhood from those two ideations is of radical importance, an atheological-aphilosophical matter enlivening the humanities from anthropology to sociology, from ethnomusicology to literary theory. Parham’s ongoing misrecognition of negro capacity for knowledge and his aspirations toward xenolalia both articulate a general desire to, even when led by the spirit, fully cognize, fully know, fully conquer. It seems that an antithetical, counterfactual Du Boisian question, “how does it feel to be a solution” was taken up in BlackPentecostal aesthesis, rehearsed through the claim that tongue-speech enunciates a core stability.

This coheres with another oppositional distinction, between that of theoria and aesthesis, xenolalia taking up and literally enunciating the position of the former and glossolalia assuming and exhaling the position of the latter. “With Aristotle, theoria became abstract and cognitive contemplation of invisible, indivisible Being. It was the
order of a rational discourse built on the principle of noncontradiction, of identity; *aesthesis*, on the other hand, became the locus of deceptive perception ... The final occultation of the sociopolitical dimension of *theoria* was achieved by the ontological move that placed it into the field of the real as the ideal, and *aesthesis* into the field of the sensible as illusion.”

Xenolalia is about the possibility for the discovery of pure being, enunciated through the mastery of the language of the Other. Nahum Chandler theorized the assumption of “the question concerning the humanity of the Negro,” as a general problem for philosophical thought, of whiteness, of Americanness. The possibility for pure being finds its announcement through the sonic choreographies of a spatial logic that conquers the language of the Other – those in India, South Africa and China, for example – quickened by God. The frustration to the achievement of xenolalia aside, what the aspiration for xenolalia as tongue-speech unveils is a mode of subjectivity that depends upon the ever expansive capacity to speak, while denying the cognizing value of such, linguistics. Simply, with xenolalia one could speak in, without having to think in – and thus, think *about the value* of the persons that think in – the language of the Other.

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25 Judy, *(Dis)forming the American Canon*, p. 46.
Tongues-speech – *xeno* or *gloss* – is ostensibly beyond normative linguistic thought but in its very articulation, organizes American studies or critique. In other words, tongues-speech is a meditation on what it might mean to be American through lingual form as poetics, is meditation given in the not readily apprehended. The desire for *xenolalia* with Parham’s disdain of negroisms in mind performs “an apparently small but ultimately decisive formulation” Du Bois proclaims, “the problem at [the] root [of the question of America and the Negro] is one of ‘understanding.’”

I want to argue for the position of *glossolalia-aesthesis* position as irreducibly incoherent and productive of a BlackPentecostal radical imagination; not the recovery of nonsense but the refusal of sense having the final say, the movement into incoherence as a choreographic itinerary and protocol toward praise, toward divine encounter. Impurity is the grounds for such atheological-aphilosophical speechifying, incoherence allowed as praiseworthy. And to speak in favor – and on the side – of *glossolalia* is also to favor interpretation over and against translation, about which more soon.

The conceptual grounds running through Smith’s declarations about tongue-speech is structured similarly to the conceptual grounds about revolution of the

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<http://escholarship.org/uc/item/8q64g6kw?view=search> [accessed 10 March 2012].
“American” variety, rehearsed through the refusal to think the likewise xeno-glosso distinction of the documentation of declaration, an initially spoken thing. The question about the possibility for the discovery of speech that would have utterance be distinguished as the pure language of the Other mines the curious “American” mind and misrecognizes that the nature of philosophy, and we could add theology, is translation, that though the Acts 2 narrative had people hearing in their “own” language, the question of drunkenness sets loose the necessity for interpretation. For example:

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.28

28 ‘Declaration of Independence - Transcript’
This set of assertions was “a script written to be spoken aloud as oratory.” And Jay Fliegelman states that “In the eighteenth century [the] world was revolutionized by an intensified quest to discover (or theorize into existence) a natural spoken language that would be a corollary to natural law, a language that would permit universal recognition and understanding” and rhetorically, “that new language was composed not of words themselves, but of the tones, gestures, and expressive countenance with which a speaker delivered those words.” I mention the Declaration of Independence for the American project because in it, the performance of utterance as surface is assumed; the co-articulation of language and law enunciated through the declaratives within the statement. That to say that the Declaration purports toward a xenolalic understanding of itself, that it is axiomatic and that one only need understand the words themselves – those units of sentence measure – in order to make sense. What the Declaration as the performance of utterance produces is a way to think America: by speaking into existence without need for interpretation but simply translation. But, of course, the breakdown. When this set of declaratives is orated from the crucible of circum-Atlantic performance of the trade in coffee, tea, sugar and flesh, not a few of the words in the declaration need

more than a mere translation, more than a simple xeno-logic. Who, for example, is the “we” and what does “men” encompass. Just how might one pursue happiness and what is a people? The conceit of xenolalia is not merely that one could speak the language of the Other without thinking in that lingual form; it is also, and even more fundamentally, a conceit – even the American conceit – because it does not cognize the relationship between any utterance and generativity of interpretation as irreducible. It is almost a resistance to thinking any utterance as a likewise materiality, but rather proposes that meaning is only surface deep and such surface is translatable.

Two notes on breath: Charles Olson says, “And the line [of the poem] comes (I swear it) from the breath, from the breathing of the man who writes, at the moment that he writes, and thus is, it is here that, the daily work, the WORK, gets in, for only he, the man who writes, can declare, at every moment, the line its metric and its ending - where its breathing, shall come to, termination.”31 And Jean-Christophe Bailly says, “It is fitting that the verbs for respiration’s double movement introduce the oldest sense pertaining to this opening, ‘inspire’ and ‘expire’: on the one hand there is dilation, and its respiration is the bow that brings it into harmony. The space of breath is this coming and

31 Charles Olson and Robert Creeley, Selected Writings of Charles Olson ([New York]: New Directions,, 1966), pp. 18–9.
going through which the outside and inside communicate.” 32 Glossolalia and
glossographia are aesthetic uses of breath – as speaking, as writing – and point us towards
life – irrepressible and inexhaustible modes of being in the world with others that
Parham and his desire for xenolalia could not cognize. What Olson gives us is a poetics of
breath as writing practice – glossographia and not xenographia – that does not purport to
be coherent or pure but that has the impurity of dilation, of respiration, of animus.
Glossographia is not the language of the Other but a prompting toward more utilization
of breath, whether great or slight. To be between the glosso’s – between lalia and graphia,
between speech and script – is to aestheticize breath as a way of irreducible, irrepressible
life, in and as love, in and as Spirit. The blackness, the tongue-speech, the tongue-script,
the agnosticism, is a mode of life, a way of movement that takes the most mundane of
resources in and around us for inhabitation, for the making of art. Breath as the space
between script and speech: imagine that.

4.2 Between Translation and Interpretation

The university speaks in tongues. From Schelling to Nietzsche, from Du Bois to
Derrida, concerns about the pedagogical processes of the university are grounded in
concerns over language, over translation – as acts of displacement – on the one hand and

32 Bailly, p. 4.
interpretation – as acts of expounding – on the other. This distinction parallels Hortense Spillers’s distinction of body from flesh and, as elaborated above, xenolalia from glossolalia. Whether understood as xenolalia or glossolalia, the purported gibberish that was speaking in tongues, particularly for the early Black Pentecostals during the twentieth century, was an object of ridicule and scorn. The various media accounts made claims regarding the backwardness, the primitivism, the hullaballoo of these incoherent speakers. Speaking in tongues was a major disruptive force, interrupting and interrogating through performance modes of communicative efficaciousness, of linguistic coherence and grammatical rule. I want to claim that the university, as a material and imagined space of thought, is enlivened and quickened by the Black Pentecostal aesthetic force of speaking in tongues. I want to further claim that there are ways to approach an object of study, and the choice of approach inheres social and political weight. I want to claim, that is, that there are both xenolalic and glossolalic means to thinking objects of study; the university is animated by the debate over the efficaciousness of xenolalic and glossolalic utterance. Xenolalia and glossolalia are means to approach an object. In the biblical tradition, Apostle Paul wrote specifically that if one speaks in tongues publicly within a congregation, that he desired there to be someone to “interpret” such speech. But the falling of the Holy Spirit in the book Acts of the
Apostles demonstrates that people heard “in their own languages” what people were bespeaking. So between xenolalia and glossolalia are concerns about translation and interpretation. Between these two concepts, in other words, is a critical stance, a critical inquiry, a critical analysis of objects.

“The imposition of a State language implies an obvious purpose of conquest and administrative domination of the territory, exactly like the opening of a road...”

Xenolalia operates by a peculiar conception of self and Other, and the conceit of xenolalia is in that it does not impose the state language – of the Americas, for example – on the Other. What it does is, perhaps, more insidious: it imposes the logic of a State language – through the refusal of linguistic difference, through the non-acknowledgement of idiomatic expression internal to the languages of the Other; it assumes that all one needs is translation, rather than interpretation. Derrida is correct: the imposition of State language also is the imposition of a path, of forced entry into borders by allowing for the declaration of statehood on the one hand and then dispersing that statehood on the grounds of the Other. This is, perhaps, why missionary tongues – xenolalic utterances –

appear to me to be a distinctly western philosophical and theological construction.  

Missionary tongues were utilized as paths toward the proliferation of a religio-cultural nation state.

Tongues, particularly emphatic when enunciated through the force and conception of *glossolalia*, are sonic acts that stop short of being speech and with this refusal of speech, while giving utterance, a gift emerges: “What happens when such a speech act draws from the treasury of the linguistic system and, perhaps, affects or transforms it?”*Glossolalia* retreats from linguistic system through enunciating and elaborating vocables, aspirating sounded out breath without the need for grammatical structure or rule. *Glossolalia* produces affect and transformation. Through *xenolalia*, however, there is the disappearance of the Other. Catherine Malabou states the following: “[L]anguage begins by making things disappear since to speak is to reveal the possibility of naming things in their absence, while also naming the absence. To speak is to lose. But in this instance, to be able to lose is also to be able to see, to be able to see what one loses, and to be able to say that one sees it.” Moreover,

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34 Though the bible in Acts discusses *xenolalia*, the question remains: were the speakers speaking in various languages or were the hearers *hearing* in their own idioms. One is a question of translation, the latter of interpretation.
35 Derrida, *Eyes of the University*, p. 3.
There is, therefore, an originary violence at work in language, causing an irremissible schism between discourse and figure, sense and sensible, and idea and flesh. Given then, when we ask what it means to ‘see a thought,’ we must examine the distortion between the sayable as a gaping tear, rent at the edge of language, and sound out the power of the eye, which is both language and look, without being one more than the other.  

To seek an experience of speaking that stops short, literally, of violence is what the *glossolalic* attempts; it is to revive the flesh from having been rent into – having been forced into being – a body through the “brush of discourse” or the mutilation of the flesh. *Glossolalia* returns to the originary scene of the crime where flesh was forced to dwell together with other flesh – severed, however, from the possibility of linguistic communication (the separating out of folks through partitioning languages on ships, for example) – and at this site of originary violence, *glossolalia* speaks, not words, but the very stuff, the materiality, from which words come. *Glossolalia* speaks, enunciates, announces: originary difference, anoriginal brokenness from which words – as coherent little things – float.

Standing atop strange planks, in strange (otherwise-than-) land on the sea – floating, as it were, like a journey towards coherence-as-language – Olaudah Equiano put his ear to a book with hopes that it would talk to him:


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I had often seen my master and Dick employed in reading; and I had a great curiosity to talk to the books, as I thought they did; and so to learn how all things had a beginning: for that purposes I have often taken up a book, and have talked to it, and then put my ears to it, when alone, in hopes it would answer me; and I have been very much concerned when I found it remained silent.38

On a boat, a “nowhere” in suspended space and time, Equiano’s listening practice would be the foundations for a conversion experience grounded in the necessity for confession. But the “nowhere” was also a case for radical sociality, an enactment of the double-gesture of respiratory style. Peter Linebaugh analyzed how the history of the slave ship highlights important features for the performance of resistance through the creation of Pidgin English: “The ship was not only the means of communications between continents, it was the first place where working people from the continents communicated. All the contradictions of social antagonism were concentrated within its timbers” and, additionally, “European imperialism also created the conditions of the circulation of experience within the huge masses of labour that it had set in motion. People will talk.”39 But the transformation of flesh into bodies into ledger balances could not reduce the irrepressible life that the enslaved carried in them and dispersed. The breath, literally of life, was in them and emerged to counteract the occasion of brutality

and violence. The creative impulse was not murdered but targeted towards the object of abjection: the purported severing off from the capacity for communication. Linebaugh has this to say about the Pidgin English fashioned on the moving “nowheres”: “It was a language whose expressive power arose less from its lexical range than from the musical qualities of stress and pitch” and that “Pidgin became an instrument, like the drum or the fiddle, of communication among the oppressed: scorned and not easily understood by ‘polite’ Society.”

Language was instrumentalized, used for varied insurrectional practices and resistances aboard these many floating cargo transports.

This to argue that glossolalia not only enacts a disruption of grammar and lingual form but also enacts spatiotemporal incoherence, produces a “floating nowhere” for celebratory speaking, for ecstatic praise against the very history of violence and violation that animated, and still animates, our political economy. Glossolalia, in other words, is the surplus of language and a line of flight.

The surplus, then, is a place, the place, that at the same time is atopical (atopique), that is to say, without place, without possible localization. It is the pure possibility of the place that gives rise without itself occupying a space, without taking care of its own space.

And

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40 Linebaugh, ‘All the Atlantic Mountains Shook’, p. 111.
[O]ne can find ways to use the institutional space without being of the institution, without taking on the institution’s goals as one’s own. It is this dynamic of being within but not of an institutional space, to not institute itself as the hegemonic or representative form, that characterizes the workings of the nomadic educational machine. It is an exodus that does not need to leave in order to find a line of flight.42

Here, we brush up against the BlackPentecostal prepositional aesthetic that yields directionality for thinking, and inhabiting, new worlds within the constraints and limits of the given world. In chapter 2 of this work, I discussed how Charles Harrison Mason talked about shouting, how – for him – it is praise of, for and to God. Stevphen Shukaitis, in the latter quote, emphasized how one can inhabit space without being of it, how one can be within without succumbing to institutional practices or desires. Like Mason’s rendering of BlackPentecostal dance, Shukaitis participates in the BlackPentecostal aesthetic force of clearing space in, and against the grain of, constraint.

Further, Shukaitis wants “to disavow anarchism as an object of anarchist studies in favor of a politics of knowledge constantly elaborated within a terrain of struggle,” in the service of “the space of minor knowledges and experiences that do not seek to become a major or representative form, instead forming tools from discarded refuse and

remains.” The overarching argument of “Black Sacred Breath” has been that the
aesthetics of Black Pentecostalism are often relegated to the level of the merely aesthetic,
the merely ornamental and, as such, the necessarily discardable, the excessive that has
no material force or import. But what Shukaitis allows through his understanding and
rendering of anarchism is a way to interrogate the ways in which Black Pentecostalism
gets taken up as an object of study, but not as a mode of study itself. It is here, in the
minor mode, in the excessive epistemology, that offers a critical intervention into the
inequities of the university. Glossolalia – as opposed to, and in contradistinction from
xenolalia – refuses representation and form through its elaboration as “heavenly
language,” which is another way to say I don’t know what it is, but I will seek after it
anyway. It is a form of life that does not necessitate its ease of representation. It is a mode
of existence that does not aspire to “stay” any “here,” it is but another iteration of
stealing away. Rather, one arrives only insofar as one finds temporary inhabitation,
where one is always on the move. This is, in other words, fugitive speaking, criminal
knowledge. Fugitive speaking, refused grammar, this is the concern about translation
and interpretation.

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Beneath the seemingly literal and thus faithful translation there is concealed, rather, a translation of Greek experience into a different way of thinking. Roman thought takes over the Greek words without a corresponding, equally authentic experience of what they say, without the Greek word. The rootlessness of Western thought begins with this translation. [...] What could be more obvious than that man transposes his propositional way of understanding things into the structure of the thing itself?44

Heidegger gives us traction here by disrupting even the desires that inhere to xenolalic utterance. For though xenolalia aspires to be the language of the Other, necessitating a mere translation, Heidegger disrupts an easy conception of translation. With the act of translation, it is not simply that words are placed into their proper language but there is a displacement of meaning through the experience of the speaker. The way one understands the world, the way one engages and is structure by the world, is part and parcel of a translational project. It is the difference between you're welcome and de rien where the latter translates as, in one-to-one word fashion, of nothing. The space, the gap and fissure, between you’re welcome and of nothing indexes radically different approaches to the concept of gratitude, rooted in varied conceptions of personhood and other.

What one translates, in other words, is experience itself in all of its manifold capaciousness, in all of its irreducible agnosticism. *Xenolalia* has an allergic reaction to plurality, to irreducible agnosticism, through displacement of the figural in the service of the literal: “Literality or literal meaning emerges therefore as secondary effect. However it is a secondary effect that is never semantically pure. The consequence of this is that it denies to the literal the possibility of being prior and of having priority.”

*Xenolalic* utterance is a desire for pure being, for pure literality, that is the ground of meaning but this purity can only be a displacement of that which stands before, that which has ontological priority. *Xenolalia* is a claim on language whereas *glossolalia* is a disruption of language.

### 4.3 Languages and the University

The university speaks in tongues but the university was created for the concept and development of the scholar, for one to become a learned individual. Johann Fichte had much to say about the vocation of the scholar. Fichte says, for example,

> The skill in question is in part the skill to suppress and eradicate those erroneous inclinations which originate in us prior to the awakening of our reason and the sense of our own spontaneity, and in part it is the skill to modify and alter external things in accordance with our concepts. The acquisition of this skill is called “culture,” as is the particular degree of

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45 Andrew E. Benjamin, p. 38.
this skill which is acquired. Culture differs only in degree, but is susceptible of infinitely many gradations. It is man’s ultimate and highest means toward his final end qua rational and sensuous creature: toward complete harmony with himself. When man is considered merely as a sensuous creature, then culture is itself his final end. Sensuousness should be cultivated: that is the highest and ultimate thing which one can propose to do with it.⁶⁶

What does the concept of harmony – particularly given the discussion above about the training of voices of the Fisk Jubilee Singers, a concept that has much purchase in musicological thought – have to do with notions of skill? When refracted through the training of the Fisk Jubilee Singers’ voices, skill connects with class mobility, with aspirational qualities. The Fisk Jubilee Singers demonstrate the ways through which sound, cultivated through skill, is the grounds for the evidence of the capacity to be enculturated and for the cultivation of culture itself. Through Fichte we learn, however, that culture is the residue of that which has been suppressed and eradicated, the “erroneous inclinations which originate in us prior to” any awakening, great or small. Culture, then, is the result of suppression, it is the bringing together of sensuousness with rationality after-the-fact of the suppression of originary inclination. Culture is the translation of the object, culture is the desire for xenolalic possibility.

⁶⁶ Johann Fichte, ‘Some Lectures Concerning the Scholar’s Vocation’, in Philosophy of German Idealism: Fichte, Jacobi, and Schelling, ed. by Ernst Behler (Continuum International Publishing Group, 1987), pp. 8–9.
For Fichte, the profession of a scholar is to attain mastery through the reduction and removal of ornamentation, of excess, otherwise translated, irrationality: “Man’s final end is to subordinate to himself all that is irrational, to master it freely and according to his own laws. This is a final end which is completely inachievable and must always remain so...” Fichte, p. 9.

From where does the concept of irrationality emerge and what are the results of such an emergence? What has to be thought about thinking itself, about the capacities for cognition and the quivering of flesh, for any such declaration to be made about the necessity to repress that which stands before, that which emerges prior to, any such thing called rationality? Fichte would have that individuals work on themselves, as so many planks of wood in shops, to produce laborious habits of mind to manipulate the external world. Such that, for Fichte, the ensemblic motives of the senses – in all their vitality and openness to experience – should be cultivated, which is likewise to assert, should be cut, reduced through serrational edge. But Fichte also acknowledges that man fails at the stated goal but, “It is part of the concept of man that his ultimate goal be unobtainable and that his path thereto be infinitely long.”

Moreover, “it is not man’s vocation to reach his goal. But he can and he should draw nearer to it, and his true vocation qua man, i.e., insofar as he is rational but finite, a

Fichte, p. 9.
sensuous but free being, lies in *endless approximation toward this goal...perfection is man’s highest and unattainable goal. His vocation, however, is to *perfect himself without end.”*¹⁸

Fichte thinks the vocation of the scholar is not merely to be engaged in perpetual pursuits, but in the pursuit of a specific object: that of perfection, of purity, of pure being. To perfect oneself without end toward this object is to continually suppress and repress the originary “irrationality” of our creatureliness. Fichte recognizes, however, that this pursuit is productive of failure, of something that will never be realized. Pursuit becomes the inexhaustible. Like the Kantian desire for escape as the condition for emergence of Enlightenment, I am not interested in dismissing the critical force of ongoingness, perhaps as open-endedness, which Fichte posits is the work of the scholar. Rather, I am intrigued by the directionality of his claim. His is a pursuit of perfection but what if one is not after perfection but openness itself? What if the goal of endless approximation is not to reach any home, to stay any where, but to ongoingly approach, to move toward – through varied directions – *endless horizontal* (of and toward the horizon) thrust? The cool thing about horizons is that they move along with you; any way you turn, there the horizon finds you.

¹⁸ Fichte, p. 9.
The problem, it seems, is with how objects become – and are the foundation for – a set of problematics. It is a problem, it seems then, with how one sees, hears, tastes, touches, smells an object, how one senses and experiences objects. But this problematic of sensual experience is grounded in refusal to openness and availability, which on the lower frequencies we might say, is grounded in shoring up against. To extend philosopher Nahum Chandler for this discussion of irrationality, “[O]n what basis can one decide a being, and its character of existence, as one kind or another? What emerges as decisive at the limit and in the conceptual and propositional sense is the problem of grounding, in some fashion that would be absolute, a socially observable hierarchy that one might wish to affirm.”

Denise Ferreira da Silva analyzes the ways that the others of European man were necessarily deemed “irrational” and how the very notion of irrationality, as such, is a racialized concept. We know of the stories wherein European men would encounter Africans and indigenes in the Americas, for example, dressed climate-appropriately, but considered through theology and philosophy to be primitivist, bestial, because of sartorial adornment, because of the aesthetics of cloth and cover.

50 Denise Ferreira da Silva.
Looped through Heidegger’s notion that *translation* is about the evacuation and liquidation of experience into different terms, we might answer Chandler by emphatically asserting that the basis of the decision of being is what one allows to count as experience, always sensual. To follow Fichte in order to suppress and eradicate the erroneous is to translate certain sense knowledges and to *call* it – whatever the “it” here would come designate – erroneous. To suppress and eradicate the erroneous is to make a claim, previous to situation, that the object of reflection is available to *xenolalia*; it is to hear the sensualness of the object and to make a claim about what is and is not necessary in and of the object for its being understood, for its very existence. It is, then, to do violence to the object through the abstractions of theology and philosophy of the beholder, the behearer, of the object. The scholar is created through this universe – as the university – through the critical force given to the place of translation, the making of objects into *xenolalic* utterances.

Ralph Waldo Emerson thought the role of the scholar, particularly on these American shores, was to lead others after long periods of private preparation, absconded and away from publics:

The office of the scholar is to cheer, to raise, and to guide men by showing them facts amidst appearances. [...] In the long period of his preparation he must betray often an ignorance and shiftlessness in popular arts, incurring the disdain of the able who shoulder him aside. Long must he
stammer in his speech; often forgo the living for the dead. Worse yet, he must accept – how often! – poverty and solitude.\textsuperscript{51}

Emerson’s model for a scholar is founded upon the necessity of solitude, loneliness. In this way, the scholar in the university approaches its objects through a xenolalic desire. The university was never meant to be a place of refuge for minor life, minor language, which is to say, it was never supposed to be a place of glossolalic exchange. Glossolalia, indeed, could be an object of study but not a method for studying, certainly not an experience after which one seeks. Glossolalia is speaking in blackness, where one can consider blackness and the black as objects for study but not a collection of sensuous experiences that are life-altering, not a collection of sensuous experiences that are modes and models of intellectual practice. But is there a way to study with others, to have an intellectual practice grounded in the social? And what would be the consequence of such intellectual sociality? Perhaps against the grain even of Emerson himself, he opines that the scholar is, in actuality, a plurality: “The scholar is that man who must take up into himself all the ability of the time, all the contributions of the past, all the hopes of the future. He must be an university of knowledges.”\textsuperscript{52} The scholar is one that takes into oneself spatial and temporal measure, remakes it and gifts it to worlds. To be a

\textsuperscript{52} Emerson, p. 79.
university is to be capacious, to exceed the very borders and limitations of abstraction, of the body. But to take into oneself time past and future is to disrupt spatial and temporal coherence, it is to interrupt smooth, linear, progressive chronologies. To take into oneself and to give out this atemporality-aspatiality is to be foundationally and irreducibly open for such indwelling.

What if the university were constituted with minor language, with minor life, in mind? What if it were animated by an indwelling that was nothing other than an outpouring of spirit to the world? It would be an enactment of movement, of breath, in the service of reconfiguration of life. It would be, that is, an enactment of BlackPentecostal aesthetic vitality. “What would that mean? An artistic movement dedicated to the reshaping of art, life, and politics that did not announce this to as many who would listen, but rather went about affecting its method of transformation on a minor scale?” For Stevphen Shukaitis, what is necessary for a reconfiguratory project and process is a social intellectual practice of world-making, of recognizing that there is the capacity to produce “new word(s), new world(s).” This capacity to produce newness is rooted in ongoing openness, a spiritual-material, atiological-aphilosophical

54 Mackey, From a Broken Bottle Traces of Perfume Still Emanate, p. 63.
vulnerability. This openness and capaciousness, however, does not need to rise to the level of visibility, does not need to declare itself for its affects to be made nor felt in worlds. Indeed, visibility can be a problem.\textsuperscript{55} Shukaitis is attuned to the problems of visibility as the only mode and model of movement:

The problem is that by declaring openly intents and methods to reshape art, life, and the relations of production, the avant-garde has tended to give away too much, to let its hand be shown too early. In other words, to leave it open to processes of decomposition and recuperation, where radical ideas are put to service within forms of social control and domination.\textsuperscript{56}

Visibility, apparentness, desires for the \textit{xenolalic}, translation – perhaps it is possible to opine – all are submissions to ocularcentrism, to a world constructed based on the capacity to see, and to see clearly, and to have modes of ocular attention normativized as the most profound and meaningful way to affect change in the world. What is needed is a method of speaking that does not, even through its enunciatory force and elaboration, make itself apparent, make itself available for translational projects. \textit{Glossolalia}, indeed, is the hesitance of speech through speaking, it is the hesitance and resistance to meaning, through enunciation.

\textsuperscript{55} Phelan.
\textsuperscript{56} Shukaitis, ‘The Wisdom to Make Worlds: Strategic Reality & the Art of the Undercommons’, p. 2.
4.4 Towards the World (and) Sounds of Black Study

Black Study speaks in tongues. Institutional Black Studies is not coterminous with Black Study. The former indexes an historical process in the mid-twentieth century and the latter indexes a mode of approaching objects of study and a form of intellectual practice that resists the stilling and stasis of abstraction through language, and even numbers (statistics), for example. But more, Black Study – even in the nascent institutional form – has always been concerned with the world, with the destruction of inequity and the imagining and material realizing of new worlds. So a set of questions: How does aversion encapsulate the grounds for critique in and of institutional studies? How does what Derrida calls the “as if” – the unconditional university – function as a response “previous to situation” that is inherent in Black Study as a BlackPentecostal aesthetic? I turn to reflections on the modern university to think specifically about how a BlackPentecostal force can quicken institutionalization in the service of life, a life that

57 For a treatment of the ways blackness and statistics came to bear on one another historically, see Muhammad.
58 See, for example, Biondi. In this work, Biondi argues forcefully that the founding of Black Studies at university institutions was part of the Black Revolutionary impulse of the late 1960s not separate from it. And from its foundation, Black Studies was always concerned with questions of globality, of nation-states and citizenship, and, particularly, for the concept of diaspora through class alliance and solidarity.
could be, to speak about the university as if life, black life, life in blackness, is there (because such life is, is there, in the undercommons). As an enactment of atheological-aphilosophical force, Black Study is an institutional, proffered by (having) being together as the condition of emergence for a new world. Black Pentecostalism is fundamentally about having being-together as an irreducible plurality.

When considered as an an institutional mode of study, mode of social practice, Black Study compels an ongoing search through making of us all ongoing students. It would be like Apostle Paul telling new Christian believers that though he has not attained or seized the object of his affection, he would “press” toward such knowledge. This, of course, is consistent with what Fichte opined about the scholar: that the scholar is one in perpetual pursuit. However, disrupting the logics of the aspiration toward perfection, Fred Moten and Stephano Harney offer, instead of the role of the scholar, the role of the critical academic: “[T]o be a critical academic in the university is to be against the university, and to be against the university is always to recognize it and be recognized by it, and to institute the negligence of that internal outside, that unassimilated underground, a negligence of it that is precisely, we must insist, the basis

60 Philippians 3:14
of the professions.”⁶¹ The critical academic exists in the space of the university while troubling its frame, resisting its enclosure, breaking down the distinction between the inside and outside of the institution. The critical academic is a Black Pentecostal nomad, in search of experience, in search of ongoing experience, rich depth and sensuous movement. The critical academic speaks in tongues, in the glossolalic utterance against the grain of the university’s institutionalizing of xenolalia as a professional way of life. Such that glossolalia, which is to say Black Study, is the marking of unruly speech, unproprietous utterance, as the foundational soundings for celebratory praise, for change in the world. If “professionalization – that which reproduces the professions – is a state strategy,”⁶² we find Derrida again haunting our analysis: we can say, then, that State language is a professional aspiration, and the university seeking to professionalize is seeking to produce certain language.

Both James Baldwin and June Jordan begin conversations about black English, consistent with linguists and social historians. They both write about how black English is the mark of black community, how in the language itself is the speechifying of

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⁶² Moten and Harney, p. 106.
sociality, of being together as the evidence of the unseen worlds, the unseen vitality and force, of blackness. For example, Baldwin asserted:

Now, if this passion, this skill, this (to quote Toni Morrison) “sheer intelligence,” this incredible music, the mighty achievement of having brought a people utterly unknown to, or despised by “history” – to have brought this people to their present, troubled, troubling, and unassailable and unanswerable place – if this absolutely unprecedented journey does not indicate that black English is a language, I am curious to know what definition of languages is to be trusted.63

And June Jordan stated that,

White standards of English persist, supreme and unquestioned, in these United States. Despite our multi-lingual population, and despite the deepening Black and White cleavage within that conglomerate, White standards control our official and popular judgments of verbal proficiency and correct, or incorrect, language skills, including speech.64

In such an environment that conflates standard with white, it becomes no surprise that black language, language that exists on the other and under side of whiteness, is a force that deforms and disarranges the propriety of grammatical rule. Perhaps Baldwin was onto something: black English sets to question the idea of language itself. Just what is language if the communicative styles of the undercommons, the speechifying of black folks, the glossolalic utterances of BlackPentecostals are not considered language? Is the

concept of language just another abstraction of theological-philosophical thought?

Jordan’s detailing of how English is only standard when White compels the question: should we want language that purports to coherence and stasis, that is used in the service of building a radically marginalizing nation-state? Should we desire language? Or should we desire to speak the antithesis of language, social glossolalia? If we answer yes to the latter, we would acquire “language” skills that are not interested in the production of citizenship and statehood, but are enlivened by what Édouard Glissant describes as “rooted errantry,” which is “the knowledge that identity is no longer completely within the root but also in Relation.” Glissant goes on to call this errantry a poetics. So we can begin to think about the poetics of speaking in tongues, the poetics of glossolalia over and against the anti-poetic force of xenolalia. As black language, as BlackPentecostal enunciation, the glossalic makes a demand for “the right to obscurity,” as Glissant would have.

Ronal Judy in “Untimely Intellectuals and the University” is interested in how Black Studies became institutionalized as part of a neoliberalist project:

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66 I consider xenolalia to be an anti-poetic force because it is not grounded in a relation of errantry and rootlessness, but in the capacity for pure representation, pure displacement from one language into another.
What was needed was more civilization than science. This brings us back to understanding Black studies as originating as an extension of the university’s intellectual project beyond the university. The research universities that so concerned Chapman with their vital administrative science took an interest in the newly freed slaves as objects of scientific research. [...] These early “scientific” studies of slavery rationalized the emerging socioeconomic order in which commercial growth was consistent with Blacks being categorized as essentially surplus labor. The rationalization was articulated in the scientific study of the inherent lack of civilization among Blacks. The scientific universities were concerned with Blacks only as objects of analysis and not as thinking, cultured subjects. It was in opposition to this scientific study of the Negro, and the progressive professionalization of science in the universities, that Black studies was first launched in Black cultural organizations...68

We might call this translational project “the study of black objects,” Black Study, given the modes through which this scientizing of civilization was a xenolalic othering of black people. This xenolalia was utilized in ways to justify the marginalizing and oppressing of black people through economic structures. Much like the Fisk Jubilee Singers’s need to repress accent, repress the unruly speech of plantations in order to produce an economically viable stage show, the university’s scientizing was entangled with an Africanist presence of American, of western, society. Judy moves us further still: “The academy’s program of establishing the Negro’s contribution to civilization is idealist in that it presumes that scientific contemplation of the Negro will reveal Negro thought

68 Judy, ‘Untimely Intellectuals and the University’, p. 127.
self-knowingly manifesting itself in the world as World History.”

This study of black objects is grounded in xenolalic displacement rather than interpretation of experience. It attempts to bespeak the nature, the structure, the value of the black object without ever considering the capacity for the object to speak, without ever thinking in the cognizing glossolalia of the undercommons. These utterances from the underground only show up as chatter, endless chatter in need of dispelling through the making and marking coherent of speech. Xenolalic speech is the grounds and basis for abstraction, the modal enunciation that makes blackness into the object of aversion for the beholder with such desires.

Black Study, grounded in glossolalic search, is a general agnosticism that does not dismiss the journey, is a structure of belief, belief in the necessity of new beginning, in other beginnings: “The wholly other has to do not only with the future of waiting but also with the possibility of a wholly other beginning. Belief – for such is the transcendental horizon of faith – always contains faith in another source: that everything could have been otherwise, that history could have happened otherwise.”

To be a student in such a study, in such an intellectual practice, would have individuals in the

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69 Judy, ‘Untimely Intellectuals and the University’, p. 131.
70 Malabou, ‘Another Possibility’, p. 117.
posture of *sankofa*, an idealizing of what it means to “go back and get it,” where “it” here indexes the always possible other beginning. Such that in the originary grounding of experience, what one has is always the capacity for plurality. That is, *other* beginnings, *another* source always exists in the originary. The black student practicing *glossolalia* continually returns to the source of language, the source of speech, to find that any utterance has within it the capacity for difference, for originary displacement. To speak in *glossolalic* tongues is to believe in the plurality of experience itself, to perform and live into the otherwise. Black Study, here then, is a belief in an *atheological-*aphilosophical mode of being in but not of the world. And this Black Study, a minor black studies, an *aninstitutional* black studies can exist within the space of the university. “[T]o utilize the space provided by the university, not as a goal in itself, nor to assert one’s right to such a space, but to accomplish something within this space. [...] It is what one does with this space that is the core politics within the university more so necessarily than the specific content. [...] It is a politics based more on process and ethics of transformation than the claiming of territory.”71 (168). This minor black studies, this *aninstitutional* black studies, speaks out from cramped space, stuttered time, like Harriet Jacobs’s habitation in a crawlspace. It makes of constraint capaciousness through imagination, through the

material movement against the desires for propriety and private property. This black studies is glossolalic utterance, it is in flight, is in exodus, is in the performance of marronage: modes of preparation that are always aesthetic.

Glossolalia, in other words and as opposed to xenolalia, is the speech of the undercommons. Glossolalia is capacious and expansive, open and irreducible, returning to originary grounds to find other possibilities, another way. “Once the question of the university is posed in these terms it becomes clear that the position of the individual student or academic and thus their relation to the university cannot be thought other than in relation to the broader considerations of human being as such, a concern that would then come to be re-expressed today in terms of citizens and, in the end, citizenship.”  

So we are thinking about an intellectual practice, a mode of study, that is not reducible to concepts of citizenship. 73

For C.L.R. James, black studies is the history of western civilization itself:

[T]o talk to me about black studies as if it’s something that concerned black people is an utter denial. This is the history of Western Civilization.


73 Yes, even against the grain of Robyn Wiegman’s argument about refusal because it is not merely refusal that comes and befalls as an after effect of and response to power but, as Hardt and Negri affirm, a resistance – a refusal, through the politics of avoidance – that is prior to power, it is ontic in its force. See Wiegman, Object Lessons; Hardt and Negri.
I can't see it otherwise. This is the history that black people and white people and all serious studies of modern history and the history of the world have to know. To say it's some kind of ethnic problem is a lot of nonsense.74

And if it is concerned with history, it is concerned with the language in which history is told. Black Study, in other words, posits a particular historicity against the historicizing projects grounded in Newtonian physics of smooth, linear, progressive time. June Jordan offers a critical analysis of western history.

Black American history prepares black people to believe that true history is hidden and destroyed, or that history results from a logical bundling of lies that mutilate and kill. We have been prepared, by our American experience, to believe that civilization festers between opposite poles of plunder and pain. And still the university waits, unavoidable at the end of compulsory education, to assure the undisturbed perpetuity of this civilization.75

Black Study is a performance, is the performance of BlackPentecostal aesthetics. It is not merely an ethnic notion, but a way to critically analyze the social forms, the economic conditions, that produced something called western civilization. Black Study, to return and produce another possibility, is the study of worlds, of world-making. It is not neutral nor objective, it is not dispassionate nor unconcerned. As Nathan Hare warned, “To remain impartial in the educational arena is to allow the current partiality to

74 James and Grimshaw, p. 397.
75 Blassingame, p. 30.
whiteness to fester. Black education must be based on both ideological and pedagogical blackness." Indeed, the *an*institutional black studies shows up in Harriet Jacobs’s crawlspace, wherein she heard the voice of her children and those voices, those noises, was generative for a mother’s care and concern. This *an*institutional black studies was enacted by BlackPentecostal Mamie Till-Mobley, deciding that the world would see what was done to her son, Emmett, deciding that an open casket – perhaps like her openness to the Spirit – was what was needed to quicken a movement for civil rights in the mid-twentieth century. Till-Mobley did not seek to translate her experience for newspapers and magazines; rather, she sought to show it, to speak it, to utter it with exuberance, to show, speak and utter her love through the horrible scene of Emmett’s destruction. Hers was a *glossolalic* form. The university was always in ruins. The aesthetic vitality of BlackPentecostalism, the sociality of the undercommons, the *glossolalia* of the underground, made the university a ruinous place because the university never understood its objects of study as objects *that* study, objects that have and produce a mode of intellectual practice.

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26 Blassingame, p. 3.
Anticipation: the sound of the Hammond B-3

The wind had been whipping for about five days when October 29, 1929 rolled around, winds at 53mph making waves crash on the lakeshore of Chicago plentiful with fatal results. But there was also change coming to Wall Street that would affect the whole of the nation: October 29, 1929 also marks Black Tuesday, the beginning of the Great Depression. Violent wind, we might say, was blowing over and economically destabilizing the country and Chicago was hit hard. Imagine, then, the resolve necessary to organize a choir during that fateful period in the face of such economic and ecological tumult. The First Church of Deliverance’s choir – which would go on to international fame – held its first meeting that very day. And at 6:00am in 1934, First Church of Deliverance aired their first radio broadcast, becoming the second radio broadcast of a “colored” congregation in Chicago. And the same year of this first radio broadcast, a few miles up the road in Evanston, Laurens Hammond was busily putting together the plans for a cheap organ that churches and novices could purchase, not because he was a religious man but because he was industrious, because he wanted to make money. He and his lawyers walked the patent to the office themselves, him promising that – during the economically disastrous period – he was ready to put hundreds of people to work,
manufacturing the instrument that would come to bear his name. The patent was approved that very day and they went to work.

Then there was Kenneth Morris. Maybe he had an imagination for sound and its generativity toward spiritual transcendence. Maybe he wanted to be a first-mover in the very nascent gospel music world. Or maybe he simply considered the cheap cost to be persuasive enough. Whatever cause we might attribute, because of the spiritualist First Church of Deliverance’s need for a new organ in 1939, Kenneth Morris conferred with First Church’s pastor – Father Clarence Cobb – Cobb agreeing to the purchase of the Hammond organ. “No church had had a Hammond organ prior to this, and people came from everywhere to hear First Church’s revolutionary new instrument.”¹ Because of the radio broadcast that already garnered popular appeal by 1939, with the sounds of the Hammond organ, people came from far and wide to see what they experienced sonically: just what was this instrument with its, at times, “human-like” voice?² “Cobb was able to attract to his congregation people from the ranks of the city’s black middle and even elite classes because of his flashy personal style and promises of prosperity,

² http://www.chicagofestivals.net/music/gospel-music/chicago-gospel-music-timeline
but it was the emotionally demonstrative worship of his live radio broadcasts that made him a ‘mass hero’ among Chicago’s poor and working class.”

But lest we think that it was only the sound of the Hammond and the demonstrative mode of worship that attracted visitors, “Former members of the First Church of Deliverance on Wabash Avenue remembered it as a major stop on the gay nightlife circuit in the 1930s and 1940s. The church welcomed gay people and Reverend Clarence Cobbs, along with many of his staff, was rumored to be gay” and “After attending the live broadcast at the church, which ran from 11:00 P.M. to midnight, club goers would simply walk from First Church of Deliverance to one of the area nightspots, usually the Kitty Kat Club, the Parkside, or the 430.” Eventually, the convergence of sound, subjectivity and sexuality as a force of BlackPentecostalism would become a contentious, contestable debate. But even as late as 1971, Anthony Heilbut wrote about how it was generally noted and accepted that, “most immediately striking about many of the larger Holiness churches is the inordinate number of male and female homosexuals. As one singer bluntly put it, ‘There’s more sissies and bull daggers in the Sanctified churches, and they all think they’re the only ones going to Heaven.’”

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4 Best, p. 188.
Heilbut otherwise noted that “the Holiness church maintains a discrete and at times impenetrable mystique. It may be the blackest of institutions…” The proliferation of the sound of the B-3 in BlackPentecostal spaces emerged from a queer sociality, from underground and otherworldly friendships and erotic relationships. Were musicians visiting the church before going to the Kitty Kat down the street, then telling their pastors about this object and the way it moved congregants?

**Organ and Organization**

In “Black Sacred Breath,” I have attempted to demonstrate the various ways that aversion structures normative modes of theological and philosophical thought. The Hammond B-3 organ has been taken up in BlackPentecostal spaces as the instrument, as the sound, of the movement. The Hammond B-3 organ’s sound is an instance of BlackQueer sonic presencing and enacts the politics of avoidance when the musician and instrument come together, sounding out in the space of congregations. The Hammond instrument is known as a “tonewheel organ” and tone wheels are “a system of spinning, steel, silver-dollar-sized” discs with “notched edges,” resulting in “output

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[that] is more alive [and] organic...than what electronic organs can produce.” Though the Hammond instruments have sound presets that change the timbre and quality of the organ sound, there are also drawbars that allow musicians to instantly change and control sound quality. Drawbar settings affect the loudness, the tones, the percussiveness of the instrument. “By pulling or pushing their drawbars, you could instantly sculpt your sound. If you want more high harmonics, just tug on the upper drawbars. To deemphasize the fundamental, shove in the white drawbars” (35). But the manufacturer warned against pulling out all the drawbars as a setting musicians should never use. However, in much Black Pentecostal performance with the B-3, particularly during moments of intense emotionality in church services, musicians often use that very setting, pulling out all the stops, so to speak, in order to be as voluminous as possible. Though Laurens Hammond had specific desires for the decorous use of the instrument, Black Pentecostal aesthetics not only obscured but popularized the unwanted. Drawbars “offer real-time control of the sound” and that real-time is generative for reconceptualizing temporality and spatiality.

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To amplify the B-3 model, an external speaker cabinet has to be utilized. Though the Hammond Organ Company manufactured their own model, it was Don Leslie and the Leslie Company that had the best “fit” for the sound the Hammond attempted to produce. “The most popular Leslie speaker cabinet contains a high-frequency horn driver and a bass woofer, both of which are combined with rotating components. […] The rotary components can rotate at high and low speeds, which adjustable ramp-up and –down times” (12). At the level of the machine itself, there is a necessarily sociality: for the machine to be heard, it necessitates some outside object to make the chord changes and progressions audible.

Most fundamentally, the Hammond instrument differs from pipe organs because “the pipes themselves are spread out across a fairly wide range when constructed” (13). Pipe organs, in other words, are fashioned by the amount of room they require from any given space. For this reason, there are no pipe organs in domestic spaces; one would need cathedral-like space for such an instrument. In contradistinction, the Hammond organ was able to be compact and, in a way, portable (at 400 or so pounds), such that the achievement of the Hammond organ with the attendant Leslie speaker, we might say, is spatiotemporal compression, about which more soon. As a substitute for the pipe organ – because of the drawbars, the Leslie speaker cabinet and the touch-to-response ratio –
the Hammond’s “fast attack” made it a poor substitute (14) but this failure, as its quick response to touch, would be its crowning achievement, making it perfect for the intense and quick “movement of the Spirit” in BlackPentecostal spaces. In the following clip, you will hear the changes in volume, quality of sound and the varied speeds of the Leslie speaker.

The sound of the Hammond organ, particularly the B-3 model, would come to be the sound of BlackPentecostalism particularly and how the Black Church as an institution with historical force is imagined. (For example, play 0:00-1:40 http://youtu.be/OpaVcZ1Megw) Described as sounding human, the Hammond organ offers a way to think about the breakdown between human and machines. In a Testimony given at Rev. F.W. McGee’s BlackPentecostal church, January 28, 1930, one brother asks the saints to pray, “that I may be used as an instrument in his hand.” This desire for instrumentality, I argue, structures the BlackPentecostal imagination such that any object can be sacrelized, made holy. People not only beat tambourines and stomp feet, but play washboards with spoons and blow whistles. The Hammond organ is in this tradition, the utilization of any object for sacred possibility. And in such making sacred of objects, the instrument is not the Hammond on the one hand or the musician on the other: the instrument is the sociality of the Spirit Filled musician with the musical
object working together. This sociality of instrumentality is a respiratory performance. Listen as it breathes. The Hammond organ breathes on multiple levels: at the level of the musical object, the Leslie speaker gathers up and displaces the air within space in order for the object to be audible; it literally inhales and exhales air; it is, in other words, a breathing machine. The changes in speed of the Leslie speaker make such mechanical respiration audible; listen closely and you can hear the chop-chop-chop smooth out and speed up again. And on the level of the human and machine breathing together, what is it to be Spirit Filled? It is to be filled with breath, filled with air, filled with wind. The Greek word for Spirit is Pneuma and Spirit Filled musicians utilize the air within and exterior to the flesh in order to translate such respiratory process into audible praise.

Musicological history informs that an organ is a wind instrument, such that an organist is one that literally organizes wind for specific purposes. Most fundamentally, then, the organist is an organizer of air, of wind, of the presence of seeming nothingness.

Musicians often debate the merits of replacement instruments: can digital organs sound as good as Hammond tone wheel instruments? Can a synthesizer replace this sound? Can the Diversi digital organ perfect the imperfections of the Hammond? At stake in this set of concerns about the capacity for replacement is one about fungibility and sociality. Many musicians in the BlackPentecostal tradition lament digital reproductions,
synthesizers and new electronic organs that attempt to sound better than the Hammond organ; one recurrent dissent is that the new reproductions “sound too clean.” Zenph Sound Innovations creates software wherein, “data describes how musicians play the individual notes that comprise a piece. This lets you directly control music in unprecedented ways.” Known for their reproduction of Art Tatum’s pianistic work, Zenph “used great software, great skill and keen musical sense to convert the original performance into a … document which perfectly mimics the mechanical details of the performance itself: tempo, attack, touch and so on. While they were at it, they retroactively repaired some tiny errors caused by tape transcription to vinyl – incorrect speed, missing segments and the like.” BlackPentecostal musicians utilizing the B-3 complicate the illusion of such easy reproduction, such easy perfection, such easy correction. The desire to reproduce, and to do so perfectly, operates out of the epistemological center that would have perfection as the sought-after goal of musical performance. But does one ever breathe perfectly? Though one can control breath, one certainly is not seeking its perfection. Breathing during running is quite different than breathing during sleep; what one has, then, is respiratory processes that rise to the
context of any occasion. What BlackPentecostal musicians’ desires for instruments that
do not “sound too clean” underscores is the sociality necessary for the emergence of any
sacred sound. But for perfective aspirations, sociality becomes the problem for the
emergence of perfection itself. So there is a reduction of the social as the grounds for the
possibility of perfect replacement, what in another register and key we call fungibility.
But organists don’t want just any organ; they want one that sounds dirty, that has
aliveness, that sounds good in the space.

Given its prominence in the sound culture of Blackamerica, given its ubiquity,
given the debates about authenticity and sound musicians have about the instrument,
given the language used to describe its sounds, it is not merely odd that there is nothing
written about this mechanical device. The omission seems to be audibly deafening, an
aversive modality of thought that is the grounds for theology and philosophy. I opine
that normative theology and philosophy are produced through aversion, through a
shuddering look and look away, a deafening listen and listening away from
BlackPentecostal aesthetic performance. Refusing to listen, refusing to give attention to,
refusing to hear is mobilized, concretized as the foundation for the production of

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abstraction that produces – not difference – but difference-as-deficiency, difference-as-deviance, difference as an inherent flaw in the one that comes to bear the trace, the mark, of otherness.

William Faulkner and his relation to sound is exemplary of the kind of aversive logic that is ever present in various modes of thought I investigate. Karl F. Zender tracks Faulkner’s growing and increasingly antagonistic relationship to the power of sound in his writing.¹⁰ “[I]n the middle phase of his career he begins to tip the balance in favor of images of sound as an invasive force” (91). And “To Faulkner’s dismay, Americans appear[ed] willing to assist in their own mental invasion, [because of] the eagerness with which they [sought] out the sound of ‘radios . . . jukeboxes . . . and . . . bellowing amplifiers on the outside walls . . . of . . . stores’…” (96). But were the sounds Faulker heard on radios and jukeboxes new or were they merely sounds that were always present but not instantiating a mode of attention to which he needed to be accountable? What Faulkner heard, it seems, was not difference, but difference-as-deficiency, difference-as-deviance, and the abstraction of deficiency and deviance is the general antagonism for his writerly thought. Whereas in his initial works, the soundscape would serve as mode of escape for him to think because of its figuration as quiet, as tranquil, as

noiseless, with the postwar boom of technologies, Faulkner escaped to inward thought as a means to shore up against the constant threat of the sonic outside that would so befall him. Faulkner sought a “Sabbath of thought,” a similar respite from the noise of perceptually new sounds.\textsuperscript{11}

The trajectory of Faulkner’s thought that compelled a material, physical move to the inside away from noise; the refusal to bespeak the intimacy of the relation between the sound of the Hammond organ and a BlackQueer space of potentiality and sociality; these underscore the aversive logic at the heart of theological and philosophical historicist projects. There is aversion to noise-ially, to potentiality, to sociality as the condition of emergence for certain privileged modes of critical reflection and intellectual practice. I anticipate your question, I think: so what do all these aversions mean?

**Sonic Presence**

J.L. Austin’s now famous formulation that certain words under certain conditions are generative for certain results – what he calls the performative utterance – can revise the question about the relationship of sound to the literary: how can we do

things with sound, with the sonic? What is merely on edge in and, thus, what we anticipate from Austin’s claim about the performative utterance is how the utterance is a rupture in the everydayness of behavior, how there are words invoked as ritual in order to affect change in the world: change of condition, status, or station. The performative utterance is a technology, it has specific use and currency. Salim Washington opines that the technological is a main figuration of music in the Black Pentecostal tradition: “Music in the Holiness churches can be used simply as a transformation of the mood and/or mind-set of the participants, but in the case of the ‘shout,’ music is used as a technology, through which a direct cause and effect takes place.” Technologies can be used as outlined in user manuals or, as was heard in both clips, can be used otherwise to create new moods, new meanings, with the same apparatus. The sound of the B-3 is ever present, and with the musician, complicates the generally accepted notion that Pentecostals are simply loud. The virtuosity of the musician allows us to overhear the ways the space is dynamic, that there are moments of quietude and others of cacophony, but always intense. The seeming omnipresence of the sound of the B-3 during church

12 Austin.
services, then, draws attention to what Avery Gordon calls the “seething presence” of all matters ghostly, the force of “the seemingly not there” that is perceptible, that is felt, that animates and is the foundation for movement, for behavior, for life and love. The seemingly there and not there, faith as the substance of hope and as the evidence of things not seen – so the biblical book of Hebrews says – is on the edge. We wait and anticipate that something will happen, some mode of relationality enacted, some music played. I listen, I incline my ear towards the sounding and sounding out – from the first note to the last chord – of the B-3, “setting the atmosphere” for a particular kind of knowing, a certain modality for experiencing the world.

What does listening to the Hammond B-3 allow, what does listening to it generate, which is also and likewise to ask, what does Sound Studies do for Literary Studies? Is not the literary another mode of interpreting noise, of gathering up and dispersing what Victor Zuckerkandl describes as the “dynamic quality of a tone,” the ways tones lean toward other tones begging our attention to resolution, to completion? Zuckerkandl is correct, I think, when he says, “We are always between the tones, on the way from tone to tone; our hearing does not remain with the tone, it reaches through it

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15 Zuckerkandl, p. 137.
and beyond it” (137). Attention to Black Pentecostal uses of the B-3 moves us further still by stopping short of Zuckerkandl: what if tones weren’t reaching for resolution or completion but were perpetually, ongoingly, open? What if tones are on the way to varied directionality – not simply in a linear, forward progression but also vertically, down and up, askance and askew? What if, as open to openness, the sounds of the B-3 prompt in its hearers an intellectual practice of a reaching toward the beyond? Would not this reaching, this movement toward without ever seizing the beyond, instantiate ongoing anticipatory posture, an affective mode of celebratory waiting?

What is inherent to the sound of the mechanical object – throwing around its organic quality, converging with and putting to question the relation between the human and the machine – is the conception of Being as irreducibly, an originally anticipatory. As a concern about being, about existence, the B-3’s sonic throwness – through the centripetal and centrifugal spins of tone wheels and drum speakers – whether reaching toward the high ceilings and spacious layout of formerly Jewish synagogues in neighborhoods like Newark, Detroit and Brooklyn or in the tight quarters and suffocating walls of storefront churches like those in which Helga Crane in Quicksand hearing congregants sing “Showers of Blessings” or John, Elizabeth and Gabriel in Go Tell It on the Mountain find themselves, allow us to reconsider the concept
of origin. In James Weldon Johnson’s *The Books of Negro Spirituals*, Johnson outlines the ways in which the authorship of Spirituals was constantly queried: just who came up with such musical genius; who authored such songs? Implicit in such a question about authorship is the concern about ownership that is grounded in the textual, in a worldview wherein reading is coeval to literacy, and textual-grammatical literacy is the privileged mode of thought and communication. This question of authorship, in other words, emerged in the same world that touted reading as the privileged practice toward freedom. Thus, when Spirituals could be transcribed and written are the moments when concerns of authorship emerged as a concern with urgent force. But what at times is called “soft chording,” “padding,” “talk music” or – most intriguingly for me here – “nothing music” dislodges notions of authorship and genius as individuating and productive of enlightened, bourgeois, liberal subjectivity from the capacity to create, to carry, to converge, to conceal. The music in this clip will demonstrate “nothing” to which I attend: [http://theregen.net/music/bilprayer.mp3](http://theregen.net/music/bilprayer.mp3).

Nothing music is the connective tissue, the backgrounded sound, of Black Pentecostal church services heard before and after songs, while people are giving

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weekly announcements, before the preacher “tunes up” and after the service ends. Ask a musician, “what are you playing,” and – with a coy, shy smile – they’ll say, “nothing.” These are examples of what Samuel Delany says about words: “The word generates no significant information until it is put in formal relation with something else.”\(^\text{17}\) Delany also argues that with the introduction of each new word in a sentence, it acts as a modifier of everything that came before; such that meaning is emergent, horizon-al (that is, of and toward the horizon). Meaning is made through relationality such that what Delany says about words in a sentence is consistent with what Zuckerkandl contends about tones in a sonic statement: to make meaning is to be in-between, in the interstice. But more, meaning is made through the inclined ear, through the anticipation of the more to come that has not yet arrived; this more to come is ever in relation to that which is now and that which has passed “into the ago” (perhaps Heidegger would say). And we hear this in the musician’s virtuosity: he upholds, he carries, he anticipates, through the performance of “nothing” – it is not a song, it is not a melody; we might call it improvisation, though that implies a structure upon which he is building; it’s not like rhythm changes – the difference between “I Got Rhythm” and “Flintstones...meet the

Flintstones*: perhaps we can call it playing. I think the difference – musically – between playing “nothing” and improvisation, jamming or noodling is that perhaps with the playing of “nothing,” there is a certain lack of attention, a sort of insouciance with which one plays, a holy nonchalance: being both fully engaged in the moment while concentration is otherwise than the music, a nonchalance that is part of, while setting, the mood of the service. Playing as a performance of conviction that is not reduced to the serious, decorous or pursuit of perfection. Playing is to anticipate change.

In this playing of “nothing,” it is not that nothing is played, that nothing is heard, it is that what appears is the sound of the gift of unconcealment. Heidegger’s understanding of Being and Time, perhaps through the theorizing of a gift, is animated by a BlackPentecostal anticipation of a sonic sociality. Anticipation is a sort of Heideggerian gifting that always retains – in its enactment – its force of foresight, foreboding. Heidegger says, “the gift of unconcealing…is retained in the giving.”¹⁸ Musicians unconceal – and uncompress – the play and the playing of nothing but retain, in the very playing out, the nothing from which the sounding out emanates. And when the drawbars are fully extended, perhaps we have a moment of “uncompression,” decompression. What one hears, what one anticipates, with each new chord and arpeggio

is the movement toward the next chord and arpeggio, one hears the meaning of “I ain’t got long to stay here,” what it means, in other words, to “steal away.” This is fugitive performance, criminal displacement of the concepts of genius and scholar because what these musicians play – and what we hear – they, and we, do not know though we certainly feel it, feel it pulling and tugging on us, at us, feel it attempting to move us toward some other mode of relationality.

Toni Morrison has written about playing in the dark, how there is an Africanist presence in American literature;¹⁹ and Judith Butler began her discussion of gender performativity in Gender Trouble by bespeaking how kids play and in such playing get in trouble:²⁰ So what is the relationship of play to presence, of play to performativity, that the organist, that the organ itself, furnishes forward for our consideration? To uphold, to carry, and to anticipate and move, These musicians organize sound in space in such a way as to produce three-dimensionality. Aden Evens would, I think, agree:

[E]very sound interacts with all the vibrations already present in the surrounding space; the sound, the total timbre of an instrument is never just that instrument, but that instrument in concert with all the other

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²⁰ Judith. Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, c1999.).
vibrations in the room, other instruments, the creaking of chairs, even the constant, barely perceptible motion of the air.21

They are playing the air, gettin down with the handclaps, gettin into trouble with the talking preacher, they gather the varied vibrations and channel them out through the sound of the B-3. But the thing they play, the thing with which they move congregants, is nothing at all. The musicians construct a narrative about and from nothing, through the available air compression and changes in the environment. No tone is excess, no harmony too egregious; each allows for discovery. If the presence that figures itself as “nothing” has the ability to move, to undergird, what does this mean about the ontological status of the claim for being, for coming from, nothing? Perhaps lacking spatial and temporal coherence is a gift. It is to anticipate that there is, even in nothing, a multitude, a plentitude, a social world of exploration.

Nothing is really distinguishable between 1.1 and 1.2 unless we slip down between the crack of these two seemingly close numbers with the Fundamental Theorem of Mathematics: that between any two rational numbers is a world of difference:

Aden Evens says, “To hear a chord instead of isolated notes, to hear a progression instead of a bunch of chords is to hear the implicated” (19). What is implicated at the outer limits of 1.1 and 1.2 is the anticipation for a gettin down and diggin deep, a movement away from the surface of things wherein one discovers a world ready for exploration. Even on a page, we detect a space made.
“[T]o hear a pitch that does not change is to hear as constant something that is nothing but change, up-and-down motion. To hear is to hear difference.”

If what one hears is difference itself, then what one anticipates is the means through which difference shows itself, the routes through which difference announces itself, not as a moment for denigration but as a showing, as an appearance, worthy of celebration, praise. And this difference that is felt, that is heard, through anticipation, calls forth a sociality. Thus, the sound of the B-3 participates in a relationship with the other sounds in the space, that the musician enacts – along with the architectonics, the noise and murmuring, the conversations and glossolalia, the foot stomps and vocable expirations – and this participation is the horizon-al emergence for, and the grounds of, queer relationality, Foucault’s friendship as a way of life, an inventional A thru Z mode of coming together in new, uncapturable, anti-institutional configurations with each sounded out chord.

What is desired from the playing of chords, I think, is to have the congregants scream in ecstasy, to yelp in pleasure, because of the anticipated but unexpected, anticipation as surprise and astonishment. What the sound of the B-3 us hear, then, is that BlackPentecostal aesthetics, black pneuma, the politics of avoidance, are

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22 Evens, p. 1.
23 Foucault, Hurley and Rabinow.
all illustrative of the anoriginal density, un-compressed compression, that is fundamental to any creative practice, any form of life.
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