

PATHOLOGIES
OF THE
MARGIN:
A study in dissipation

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A Preemptive Apology

I would like to in advance make an apology that may not need to be made. A more direct action, but still akin to the apologies made by those embarrassed admirers of Keats. Sorry as a way of preempting a presumed foreclosure of the text through my act of printing this book. In this way the apology is to follow John Bayley's reading of Keats that Joseph Grigely remarks on in the chapter Textual Eugenics in his book Textualterity: Art, Theory, and Textual Criticism, and to recognize that in these moments for me to avoid an apology would be counterintuitive to all that makes this text what it is. This book is a beginning, and it is wholehearted in that attempt, but as I turn 27 in the process of this creation, I wish to set a stage, to wind up to the pitch, and recognize that like Zeno's arrow, the ball may never reach the plate (or even leaved the mound for that matter). That is to say, I am sorry I could not reach the full potential of this book, and I am not sorry because I am excited to see what is able to be done with it after. I am sorry about the extravagance of my claims and the excess of my joy in writing, and I am also sorry for my overly intense declarations about justice and revolution and the inequities of our society. I am sorry for calling for the end of the world and asking us to think otherhow even as that seems impossible. I am sorry that I exist here in excess and not enough. Please enjoy.

An Amateur Pathological Study: I evoke my body when I read

The first and what seems to me the most obvious objection to this term [the body] is that it generalizes across bodily difference. Insofar as it does not refer to a plurality, it creates one body as a stand-in for all of us. Depending on the specifics of where this term is used, this singular body is usually one that walks, is of a standard vertical adult height, and that sees and hears and senses in “normal” ways...

My second objection to the term “the body” is that it implicitly sets up a binary between bodies and other capacities, qualities, or modes of experience. To speak of “the body” is to distinguish it from what it is not: “the soul,” “the spirit,” or, most commonly, “the mind.”...

My third objection to “the body” is that it tends to situate our bodies as perceptual tools that operate according to established rules that are prior to ideology and interpretation. In this version our bodies are the keepers of our basic needs and the tool through which we perceive the world. But even if we agree that most bodies have the same basic needs and functions, this does not foreclose the reality that these needs and functions are also historical, cultural, and constantly changing. - Gordon Hall

Some may object that I am perhaps overstating my case—that to claim the Anglo-American tradition of eclectic editing [a form of editing that looks at a large swath of witnesses in order to arrive at the most definitive and authoritative form of a text] has been a eugenic tradition overlooks the simple fact that texts are not humans and that, as a consequence, it is unfair to judge the history of editing in the same way that we judge the history of social thought. But my objection to the objection that texts are not people is the following: that texts are made by people, that they are continuously (even by editors) remade by people, and this remaking reflects the overlapping structures of individuals and societies and the tensions concomitant with the imbrication of gender, race, and social and economic practices and the thing we call a “text.” The relation between human actions and the agents of those actions is not something a cultural historian can ignore. The filiated relationship between cause and effect is of course a complex relationship, but it is precisely this complexity that ontologically anchors the entire history of human cultural activity. It is, I think, not so much the “pure” texts of authorial intention that reveal to us the heart of this cultural activity, but the ways in which texts are ultimately reconfigured and remade in the process of diachronic cultural creation. - Joseph Grigely

I evoke my body when I read, and not just I, but you, us, each. In the past when one read, they were (more often than not) reading aloud. It wasn't until the advent of (European) conventions such as punctuation, spacing, the printing press and moveable type, and with them greater access to books and literacy that the process became a silent and interior one. Reading was a social phenomenon.¹ Even still the interiorization of our literary lives didn't simply reduce them to the asocial. To read a book is to engage in a small subset of the social. In this space there are moments, events; complex interplays of the senses and meaning that move in and out of possibility. Texts and bodies intermingle and coalesce towards a desire for understanding within those swirls. The imaginative and the somatic are themselves an intertwining, a chiasm. Maurice Merleau-Ponty (in one of the last things he wrote before he died of a sudden stroke while preparing a class on René Descartes) speaks of this in regard to his ideas of the flesh, and our relations with the world, the interdependence of the visible and the invisible, “The meaning is not on the phrase like the butter on the bread, like a second layer of ‘psychic reality’ spread over the sound: it is the totality of what is said, the integral of all the differentiations of the verbal chain; it is given with the

¹ Ha, Thu-Huong. "The Beginning of Silent Reading Changed Westerners' Interior Life." Quartz. November 19, 2017. Accessed May 09, 2021. <https://qz.com/quartz/1118580/the-beginning-of-silent-reading-was-also-the-beginning-of-an-interior-life/>.

words for those who have ears to hear.”² Our physiological and textual concerns that we will be pursuing exist within this chiasm.

But we are not here to build up a new science, this is a project of the pathological, of an opaque difference, of breakdowns, dysfunctions, reconfigurations of and against the normalized. The objective and the rational eclipse complex and permeable surfaces of discourse which call out for desire, beauty, perception, difference, and opacity. Our dysfunctional pathologies herein search for that which they call out for, and through this find so much more. I look into the face of another, that ethical face that moves beyond the sensual, and I attempt to be with. And in that being with I push up against the very limits of all that is rational. I can fall in love and nothing can explain that. I wish to be close to another body. I wish to read that other body. “You need that space, you need that lifting up, you need that traveling in your mind that love brings, transgressing the limits of your body and imagination.”³ If war is an exploit perpetrated by rational men then perhaps what I am doing here is a romantic exploit. Not the individualist Romanticism of the late 18th century, but a collective romantic spiral towards a loss of control. Love and violence existing as romantic extremes. The *liebestodt*, the love death. The collapse of time and space. Linguistic collapse, the Tower of Babel. Difference in opacity, that difference we cannot come to understand and which becomes all the more uniting because of it. Sadness; existential crises in the face of definitive meaning’s collapse. Alternative histories of knowledge. Immunological paradoxes of border denaturation. Absolute lysis of morbid bodies and universes towards an end of the world. Discourse in the margins of the book. Writing and reading that occurs in that forgotten zone of marginalia and exteriority brings together an acceptance of materiality, performance, cultural activity, difference, discourse, multiplicity. It is embodied in the note at the front of my copy of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet*, written in a pink pen, “FOR MY LOVELY QUEER FRIEND ♥ A.P.” with the date at the bottom SEPT ’13 (see p. 37). Or the question found in my copy of Dore Ashton’s *The New York School: A Cultural Reckoning* that asks, “What does it mean to be an American?” sitting just above the biography of Ashton on the very first page of the book (see p. 44).

In the cacophony that is culture and cultural difference something moves into our space. Something that challenges our ability to *put into words*. Or perhaps it’s the challenge of our *parsing out of words*, or *finding the right words*. And yet we try anyway. Creating vast landscapes of language trying to articulate some kind of larger possibility, something more than the incompleteness of our world. In these constant struggles there are texts that are generated, many texts overlaying and intersecting with each other on top of that which the texts exist upon. Even still this “upon” is inadequate, text/work/object/body are one, they cannot be pulled apart. This is a process of reading, a phantasmagoria of marginal possibility. What is contained here are all of the overflowing textual residues which seep into the empty spaces of the margins. Reading here is akin to writing, speech engaging with material. Douglas Dunn said dancing is talking, and talking is dancing. The performance coincides with the writing about it. Book overlaps with body. We are in the social, together, and excited about it. Even in failure and misrecognition of the world I can

² Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *The Visible and the Invisible*. Edited by Claude Lefort. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1992. 155

³ Fleischmann, T. *Time Is the Thing a Body Moves through*. Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2019. 32

still read expansively, I can still fall in love, I can still be *with* others. We are each the other's queer friend.

To *read* in all of the possibility I wish to lay out here is to be ethically with others. And not only that, but to *re-read* that which comes before and then concurrently *read* toward something more. The crisis which appears for many in misrecognition and misreading is our general ambivalence towards and simultaneous fear of it. In the crafting of not dialectics, but binaries, we subsume into ourselves dominative absolutes. This book is a heuritic, the attempt to—through the assemblage of art and theory—invent possibility, if not now, later, if not in your reading of this, perhaps in my reading of this, or our reading of each other. This word “heuritic” is also close to heuristics, or a pedagogical mode which encourages the discovery of solutions by those being taught. That is, the process by which something otherwise or otherhow comes to be is found within the spaces placed between words, ideas, the margins and blank spaces found within our reading. That which resides within a phantastical body. Our body, with and as the textual body, the opacities of our selves and others contained within what Édouard Glissant would call a poetics of relation. An immanence of our textual bodies in conversation. This is a readerly performance as you dance in this textual space; dance being that which Adrian Piper articulates as “a collective and participatory means of self-transcendence and social union in black culture along many dimensions...”⁴ and which Gordon Hall articulates as “[treating] each other like objects in profound affirmation, to learn to see each other, to look at one other as bodies and say YES.”⁵ both processes by which we counteract subjection and individuation, and lean instead into collective manifestations of being. Proprioceptive being as textual/material body-objects scribbling furiously in the margins of larger cultural structures of architectures of domination and bio/necropolitical administration. That is to say we are made to inhabit the margins and are considered pathological because of it. Difference in transparency tolerated only as far as it can be assimilated, packaged, and sold.

These *pathological margins* is that excess within a biopolitical sphere outside of the “curable” pathological, that temporary departure from normativity. Which is to say those who are pathologized are only ever accepted insofar as they can mask, they can operate within “normal” society, either through cure, mimicry, or isolation. Operating as success story, hidden secret, or inspiration porn. In no way can a pathologized person be tolerated if they challenge the bodily stasis of those deemed normal. Those who are temporarily-abled, able to pass, able to produce, able to reinforce—even in certain kinds of sanctioned difference—that which is seen as acceptable. What I am attempting to formulate then is that inherent in that which is pathologized there is the possibility to embrace this pathology as something alternative to established ways of being. In slightly more concrete terms it is that if a racial capitalism steeped in neoliberalism and eugenics can find ways to integrate the pathologized into its body through a normalization—either through a conforming of the “pathogen” or an eradication of it to secure the health of the body politic—then it is in a contingent denial of the normative that we can find pathological power. To recognize in what ways methods of transformative politics have been subsumed by the state so as to guarantee

⁴ Piper, Adrian. “Notes on Funk I–IV,” in *Out of Order, Out of Sight*, 1:195–216. 195

⁵ Hall, Gordon. “Party Friends.” In *Platforms: Ten Years of Chances Dances*, edited by Aay Preston-Myint, 149–55. 154

a business as usual conformity is to orient ourselves around and away from that towards what is seen as unacceptable by state and corporate powers. To resist the making transparent, the denaturing, the lysis of that which constitutes difference, and instead to embrace Glissant's opacities. If we understand this dialectics of the pathological and the normative as what constitutes a certain dimension of the management of difference and its assimilation then to work against and within the pathological delineation is to find alternative worlds and ways of life. As Georges Canguilhem lays out in his book *The Normal and the Pathological*,

... how can we then explain that the modern clinician more readily adopts the point of view of the physiologist than that of the sick man? It is undoubtedly because of this massive fact of medical experience, namely that subjective morbid symptoms and objective symptoms rarely overlap. It is simply capricious for a urologist to say that a man who complains of his kidneys is a man who has nothing wrong with his kidneys. For the sick man the kidneys are a cutaneous-muscular territory in the lumbar region, while for the physician they are vital organs connected to others. The well-known fact about reported pains, whose multiple explanations have been very obscure up to now, prevents one from thinking that the pains experienced by the sick man as major subjective symptoms bear a constant relation to the underlying organs to which they seem to call attention. But most of all, the often prolonged latency of certain degeneracies, the inconspicuousness of certain infestations of infections lead the physician to regard the direct pathological experience of the patient as negligible, even to consider it as systematically falsifying the objective pathological fact. Every physician knows, having learned it occasionally to his embarrassment, that the immediate sensible awareness of organic life in itself constitutes neither a science of the same organism nor infallible knowledge of the localization or date of the pathological lesions involving the human body.

Here is perhaps why until now pathology has retained so little of that character which disease has for the sick man—of being really *another way of life*... Perhaps his feeling is the foreshadowing of what contemporary pathology is just beginning to see, namely that the pathological state is not a simple, quantitatively varied extension of the physiological state, but something else entirely.⁶

In considering Canguilhem's idea of disease as another way of life and one that is not simplistic in its presentation, then that which is marked as defective, deviant, and pathological constitutes that very possibility of alternative outlook (although we must keep in mind the risk here of crafting disease as pure metaphor in our study, and accidentally discarding the lived, pathologized realities of those who live with illness and disease as daily realities, as well as reducing pathologization to simply bodily disease).

What I am attempting to write strains at the limits of my language. In this creative space we consider the physiological and the textual coterminously and by considering the text as *that which can be read* as my sole requirement for a definition of a text I thereby place myself in a generative bind of conflating the body and the text. The complexities of this conflation of body/text and artwork/theory draw the impetus of this work towards its possible implosion. Reading as the process by which we parse out alternatives can here be understood in an expanded way; as a practice. Reading an image, reading a book, reading other people, reading movements. It is a kind of reading that emphasizes community, an engagement with others. It is highly empathetic, and bonding. This form of reading is as much a textual reading—a writerly reading—as anything else. It's a collective process which understands itself as a part of a cultural continuum that is in constant flux. It is to see the body as text and text as body while understanding that the textual body here does not contain a pure and authoritative meaning as much as those progenitors of eclectic editing and eugenics would have us believe or desire. For here we look not for localized,

⁶ Canguilhem, Georges. *Normal and the Pathological*. Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2015. 88-89

univocal meaning, but rather for this chiasmic (im)possibility of a ripping apart of the textual body in the singularity of its own deferment of its constitution and construction. This deferment as a social debt, as Fred Moten and Stefano Harney would say, that has us always in the processes of becoming and unbecoming. An unbecoming becoming in bad social debt to each other, debt as that which can't be paid and forgets, which is our bad debt to each other, "which is to say real debt, the debt that cannot be repaid, the debt at a distance, the debt without creditor, the black debt, the queer debt, the criminal debt. Excessive debt, incalculable debt, debt for no reason, debt broken from credit, debt as its own principle."⁷

What this means for these pathologically marginal heuristics this book is hoping to participate in is that no meaning will be foreclosed, no possibility denied, and those two declarations will fail! To consider and reconsider here the art object, the art-work, the art as text, is to reinvest within an experiential and experimental mode, finding it as a part of our culture, our world, and to follow them in certain interventions into that world. This is the text as an experience; an event as Jean-François Lyotard would have it:

An artist, a postmodern writer, is in the situation of a philosopher: the text s/he writes, the work s/he accomplishes are not in principle regulated by established rules, and they may not be judged by means of a conclusive judgement, by application to the text, to the work, of known categories. These rules and these categories are what the work or the text seeks. The artist and the writer work thus without rules, and to establish the rules of what will have been made or done. Thus it is that the work and the text have the properties of an event, and thus also that they come too late for their author, or, what comes to the same thing, that their setting down always begins too soon.⁸

In this way we are the *theoria*. We bear witness to an occurrence, an event, so as to affirm that it did in fact happen and report as to what it is that occurred. *Questioning is always*, and we are there to answer those questions (in our own contemporary mode) with more questions. And it is to be a witness, with the constant anxiety that it be easy to become the spectator. We have an indebted role, even on the margins, and we can only hope to intervene upon the contemporary landscape. To follow Christian Boltanski in saying that, "the idea is that a piece of art is always made by the person looking at the art." And then exceed him by saying that the idea is always that possibility of something more, a glimpse towards what we cannot ourselves grasp in the moment that we witness it, but are indebted to for having momentarily been it.

The pathological margin is at its most pathological when we inhabit together in our social debt and abide by an intersubjective interdependence. That is to say a complex space where we begin to lay with each other. Historically all of the blank space that could be said to be the margin of the book (if we take margin to loosely be wherever there is empty space for writing) has been one not only of ideas about the book, but a space of study, of record keeping, of sociality, of owner-

⁷ Moten, Fred, and Stefano Harney. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*. NY: Minor Compositions, 2013. 61

⁸ Jean-François Lyotard quoted in Ulmer, Gregory. L. "The Heuristics of Deconstruction." In *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts: Art, Media, Architecture*, edited by Peter Brunette and David Wills, 80-95. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. 84

ship, of doodling, of declarations of one's beauty and other's agreement⁹, records of legal disputes¹⁰, our final mathematical epiphany¹¹, of complex conversation, of dedication. To consider the marginal, the marginalia, is to consider all of those intersubjective/dependent details about the act of reading which at one moment may seem individual, tendentious, and partial in a postmodern sense of reading, and at other times like the greatest moment of interface with the world beyond.¹² A dialectic of the margin which is constituted through a yearning towards others, towards not just reading, but being read. The gap of subjection bridged in the simple act of sharing a book, a smile, a gesture. To think it as the immunological permeability of intimacy through Gregg Bordowitz and his writing around his work *Habit* (fig. 1), "...I came to understand the notion of the subject, or individual, as a threshold, a limit-point, a boundary where contact and exchange between the inside and outside of experience meet."¹³

What follows here in the moments of this book are a series of peregrinations, journeys all around, towards others. An attempt to think differentially through the incomplete and opaque engagement with others and others with others.

These movements towards and with others is momentarily constituted in the pathological margins. To think the margin is also to think all that has been removed from the margin through certain eugenic ideologies of what constitutes the pure text(ual)/bod(ies). The history of marginalia solely within the form of the book is both a history of its importance as pedagogical and discursive tools, but also in later centuries its removal and the demarcation of its nature as tainting and damaging. Stephen Orgel thinks marginalia as culturally telling graffiti, here I think it as the generatively pathological always already opposed to and made to constitute the normal. Historically the pathologization of differential and marginal bodies has called through eugenic practices for

⁹ Orgel, Stephen. *The Reader in the Book: A Study of Spaces and Traces*. 1st ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. 18

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 20

¹¹ This point refers to Fermat's Last Theorem which Pierre De Fermat wrote into the margin of a copy of Diophantus's *Arithmetica*. It took mathematicians 358 years to prove it, due to Fermat never leaving a proof with the theorem to do margin size constraints.

¹² Orgel, Stephen. *The Reader in the Book: A Study of Spaces and Traces*. 1st ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. 11

¹³ Bordowitz, Gregg. *The AIDS Crisis Is Ridiculous and Other Writings, 1986-2003*. Edited by James Meyer. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004. 280

the extermination (both implicit and explicit) of those bodies.¹⁴ In this culture of eugenic pathology the different body of the other is made to be a *pathogenic body* weakening the constitution of the general body-politic. “That is, the immune system is a plan for meaningful action to construct and maintain the boundaries for what may count as self and other in the crucial realms of the normal and the pathological.”¹⁵ Within this immunological context an importance of the textual dimensions of bodies *writ large*—that is to say also the ideological and cultural dimensions—begin to materialize. Our bodies are never simply allowed to be our own, and while this is itself not in-

¹⁴ In considering contemporary examples of this we can turn towards anti-trans policies, of which the most recent as I am writing this is the Arkansas Save Adolescents from Experimentation Act which is only one of 60 which are currently being considered across the country; we can also think about the COVID-19 pandemic public health measures and the way that the pandemic itself is socially constructed as crisis through state declaration allowing it to create the parameters by which we understand it as occurring, as opposed to looking at deaths and infections. (In a revisit of this footnote many months later, this point has only been reinforced through the persistence of governments to open up businesses, while deaths are at an all time high, simply because vaccinations are up and we do not wish to backpedal on declaration of the pandemic being “over”.) By this I mean that as we continue to vaccinate more and more people the restrictions which had helped to slow the spread of the disease through public health measures are being lifted. This is leading to people continuing to die all the while many people still do not have access to the vaccine, or do not have access to the time necessary to get the vaccine. What this does is leave behind those who are within the at risk groups in favor of those who have access to the biomedical means necessary to return to a certain sense of “normalcy”.

In the time of writing this book Governor Asa Hutchinson chose to veto House Bill 1570, the bill I was discussing above. While this is a small victory we must understand it still within our critical context. In the speech illustrating his decision he points out that minors who “experience gender incongruities or gender dysphoria” are an “extreme minority” and goes on to say that however, “they deserve the guiding hand of their parents and the healthcare professionals that their family has chosen.” He contextualizes the failure of the bill in its “vast government overreach.” This is an inadequate response, and one that reinforces the very ideologies which allowed it to be brought forth in the first place. As Jules Gill-Peterson discusses on the episode of Death Panel she was on to discuss these bills, *A Political History of Trans Children*, as well as in her 2018 book *Histories of the Transgender Child*, she articulates how these laws and the ways in which we pathologize the trans child reinstates patriarchal dominance over the child. That is to say the historical child as Lee Edelman would put it as opposed to his conception of the heteronormative Child. Although as Alison Kafer points out through an engagement with the works of José Esteban Muñoz, Anna Stubblefield, and Sarah Horton and Judith C. Barker, “Queer kids kids of color, street kids—all of the kids cast out of reproductive futurism—have been and continue to be framed as sick, as pathological, as contagious.” And to follow from what Dean Spade says about rights based legal work and the warnings he elucidates about them in *Normal life: administrative violence, critical trans politics, and the limits of law*, “we need to avoid neoliberal rhetoric about the ‘privacy rights of hard-working, tax-paying trans Americans.’” And I’ll add we need to avoid the reinstatement of the dominance of the parents and transphobic healthcare providers in the decisions about their child, relegating certain decisions about what is normal to behind the closed doors of the domestic sphere and out of the hands of children as agents of their own bodily autonomy.

This idea that trans children are new or that they don’t truly know what they want or who they are reinstates the pathologized notion of transness as an othered identity, and disallows for alternative epistemologies that can be given to us by children, especially those that aren’t already figured by eugenic ideas about the pathological and nonnormative. And the knowledge and beauty that comes from the minds of children is important, as T Fleischmann points out in a section from their book length essay *Time is the Thing a Body Moves Through*,

As I walk by, the kid turns to me and says, “Hey, are you a girl?” and I smile and say, “No,” and then the kid says, “Are you a boy?” and I smile and say, “No,” and then the kid seems to think very carefully and says, “So you don’t have to be a boy or a girl?” and I say, “That’s right, you got it, you don’t,” and I smile again but start walking even more quickly because there are five adults with this kid and a lot of adults don’t want you to tell their kid to be a transsexual.

What matters though is that as I am walking ahead more quickly the kid yells out after me, “Hey! I live in a house with a door!” The kid says it with a lot of confidence and a lot of happiness, really wanting me to know this. And I turn around and say, “Hey, me too!” and we both laugh and then I walk down the block.”

Isn’t that so beautiful? “Hey! I live in a house with a door!” I’m hungry for truth and kids are just spouting facts up and down the street. I tell Avory about it and they immediately understand what the kid is talking about, nodding a lot as we pass the a blunt. The next day Jackson’s friend from Australia, who is in town performing monologues about sex work, comes to my apartment, and men on the street have just yelled at her. I change course and tell her the story about the kid and start rambling about all this, metaphors, and whatever. She says to me that she actually thinks what the kid said is more beautiful if it isn’t metaphor, anyway. I had shared some information about the world, and if I get all loppidy-doo about what the kid said, I’m probably missing the whole message, which is just, “Hey, I live in a house with a door.” And really, she reminds me, isn’t some information about being alive beautiful enough? That we dry forks and touch hair and throw away a sock?

A second addition to be made is that in addition to what I’ve said already, the bill had such widespread support that Hutchinson’s veto was overturned. I really couldn’t say that I have much more to add than that.

Kafer, Alison. *Feminist, Queer, Crip*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013. 32

Spade, Dean. *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015. 158

¹⁵ Haraway, Donna. “The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies: Constitutions of Self in Immune System Discourse.” Edited by Timothy Campbell and Adam Sitze. In *Biopolitics: A Reader*, 274-309. Duke University Press. 275

herently devious or wrong (we are always ourselves permeable beings) it is in the dominant cultural markings of deviance, the pathological, that death is seen as a possible solution, if not a necessary one for this pathologically pathogenic bodies.

If the organological metaphor is at the heart of political treatises, at the heart of the metaphor lies disease. True, the point of intersection between political knowledge and medical knowledge is the common problem of preserving the body. But this preservation takes on a central role precisely from the perspective opened up by disease. Of course, logically speaking, the physiological—or morphological—determination of the body precedes its pathology. But, in point of fact, its physiology and morphology derive their meaning from the layout of the pathological condition: what is healthy is only defined through contrast by the "decision" about what is diseased—the origin, development and outcome of the illness. If, for example, the ultimate evil is identified in the threat of insurrections and rioting, the health of the State will be viewed as residing in an order guaranteed by the control of the head over the other parts of the body. If, on the contrary, what we fear instead is the tyranny of a despotic ruler, the salvation of the body politic will be located in a balanced equilibrium between its different members.¹⁶

What Robert Esposito articulates here—following Canguilhem’s work articulating the relationship between the language of pathology and the language of the social and the political—is that it is precisely what we mark as the pathological which allows for the proliferation of the normative. The normal and the pathological are contained within a co-constitutive relation by which the normal becomes normative and is able to through this create new norms. That is within this paradoxical consideration of the immunological constitution of the norm, we can find within it a certain pathology in the other direction. This pathological normative thereby constitutes the pathological margin while also subsuming through neoliberal assimilation all difference which furthers capital. That is to understand the pathology of the pathological normative in the sense of Frantz Fanon’s notion of “how pathological white behavior breeds or fabricates a kind of pathological black behavior.”¹⁷ To increase our register it is to recognize the discontinuousness of these pathologies, but to also recognize the words we have here are limited. These differences of our pathologies are in kind, not degree, but also that they are again co-constitutive and we must acknowledge the ways in which the pathological normative crafts the pathological margins so as to make way for the possibility of seeing it’s pathologies.¹⁸ This is to follow the work of Canguilhem in registering that it is the normal which constitutes and constructs the pathological in order to constitute itself, to imbue itself with the power to constitute the pathological. The allowance of LGBT peoples into the military; the legalization of gay marriage while those who rely on social

¹⁶ Esposito, Robert. “Biopolitics.” Edited by Timothy Campbell and Adam Sitze. In *Biopolitics: A Reader*, 317-349. Duke University Press. 326

¹⁷ Moten, Fred. *Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)*. *South Atlantic Quarterly* 1 October 2013; 112 (4): 737–780. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-2345261>. 761

¹⁸ As Fanon points out in a footnote in his chapter *The Black Man and Psychopathology* in which he refers to the work of Canguilhem I have previously addressed and refers to it as instructive in regard to our understand of normal and its problematics, while following that with, “Let me just add that in the psychological field the abnormal is he who demands, appeals, and begs.” Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated by Richard Philcox. New York, NY: Grove Press, 2008. 121

security benefits can still lose them once married¹⁹; uptick in media representations of trans people, all the while hate crimes against them increase each year²⁰; the use of languages of accessibility and trauma towards the end of seeming, but not being, inclusive and accessible. Yet it is in the recognition of this co-constitutive dialectic that the possibilities of the pathological margin's effects upon the dominant socioeconomic order begin to appear. That is, this act of assimilating difference acknowledges the problematics that difference instantiated within that dominant system which wished to assimilate the difference, as well as the bi-directionality of that relationship. The norm creates the pathological to imbue itself with the power of the normative, while simultaneously subduing the pathological. But this also means that the pathological has a definitional power which threatens the very stability of the normal. If this is the case and if we do take seriously Canguilhem's elucidation that disease is another way of life, then we find the possibility of an epistemologically tectonic shift here, "At stake, now, will be what the difference is between the pathogenic and the pathological, a difference that will have been instantiated by what we might think of as the view, as well as the point of view, of the pathologist. I don't think I ever claimed, or meant to claim, that Afro-pessimism sees blackness as a kind of pathogen. I think I probably do, or at least hope that it is, insofar as I bear the hope that blackness bears or is the potential to end the world."²¹ It is this quote of Moten's that imbues my thesis with the idea that the pathological and what constitutes the margins could bear the potential to end the world as we know it.

Finding in the pathological margins these alternative modalities is crucial. Following Moten into the undercommons which is also the general antagonism which is also these pathological margins. And which includes acknowledging perhaps the most extreme of our normative majoritarian modes that structures our contemporary meaning-making ideologies i.e. white supremacy and anti-blackness. With this in mind we must consider then what that means for understanding the crises of our time. Global disease, climate catastrophe, anti-blackness, financial domination by classes, and a general disregard for anyone who could be contained within the subaltern, the minoritarian. In walking among the margins we go against ideals of modernity that arch overhead and lay the foundations of our contemporary architectures of meaning-making. And it is necessarily within these alternative undergrounds that this book attempts to forage for potential. Against a racial capitalism trafficking in eugenics which wishes to see the death of all those who have been already delimited by its financialized state-sponsored austerity policies.

To consider the pathological margin as a vast landscape within which we now find ourselves traversing is to consider this book as our starting point if there ever was one. While I am not interested in crafting an originary point of departure for some theoretical project, I do consider this book as a resource for the beginning of something generative, both for myself and you the reader.

¹⁹ While this is an op-ed, it elucidates what the actual realities of this bind of having to choose between marriage or social security benefits are. Davis, Jordan Gwendolyn. "Op-ed: Why, No Matter What, I Still Can't Marry My Girlfriend." *Advocate*. June 29, 2015. Accessed 2021. <https://www.advocate.com/commentary/2015/06/29/op-ed-why-no-matter-what-i-still-cantmarry-my-girlfriend>.

²⁰ Lang, Nico. "2020 Was the Deadliest Year Ever For Anti-Trans Violence. 2021 Could Be Worse." *Them*. February 25, 2021. Accessed May 09, 2021. <https://www.them.us/story/anti-trans-homicides-increased-300-percent-2021>.

²¹ Moten, Fred. *Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)*. *South Atlantic Quarterly* 1 October 2013; 112 (4): 737–780. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-2345261>. 739

We shall begin and then begin again, remembering that these following chapters are peregrinations as I pointed out earlier, long and meandering as they are, but hopefully fruitful in the way that finding edible food on the path is fruitful. This book is a practice in political and social thinking against that which is the political and the social. It is a breakdown and lysis of the very possibility of a cohesive and coherent textual body. It revels in that which allows it to fail, and attempts to build something within that, like a child in the mud before they knew a fear of it. I am not attempting to make excuses for a book you haven't read yet, but am rather stressing the possibility of otherwise and otherhow modalities found in these pathological failures, impossibilities, and disturbances that are necessarily part of the book. I am an untrained pathologist, philosopher, theorist, textual critic, politician, sociologist attempting an intervention on this morbid scene and it will be in its way a manifestation of creative dissipation.

An abdication of political responsibility? OK. Whatever. We're just anti-politically romantic about actually existing social life. We aren't responsible for politics. We are the general antagonism to politics looming outside every attempt to politicise, every imposition of selfgovernance, every sovereign decision and its degraded miniature, every emergent state and home sweet home. We are disruption and consent to disruption. We preserve upheaval. Sent to fulfill by abolishing, to renew by unsettling, to open the enclosure whose immeasurable venality is inversely proportionate to its actual area, we got politics surrounded. We cannot represent ourselves. We can't be represented.²²

²² Moten, Fred, and Stefano Harney. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*. NY: Minor Compositions, 2013. 18

“This Time is Out of Joint”; Publick Universal Friend

What a silly and violent idea, to think that someone could leave the world, and in that leaving could make a new one. Don't you know? You're always making the world you live in, friend, right up until the moment you die. And then after that, too. - T Fleischmann, *Time is the Thing a Body Moves Through*

The Publick Universal Friend (fig. 15) also known as The Friend, The Comforter, The All-Friend, etc. was a religious figure who lived from 1752 to 1819. A preacher who founded the Society of Universal Friends, it was at 24 that they became The Friend. Having supposedly succumbed to what may have been typhoid, but at the time was referred to as “Columbus Fever” (named for a nearby ship carrying British prisoners of war, as this was in 1776), The Friend was “resurrected” and upon their revival declared that Jemimah Wilkinson was dead, in her place was The Friend and it was said that the archangels

*putting their trumpets to their mouth, proclaimed saying,
Room, Room, Room, in the many Mansions of the eternal
glory for Thee and for everyone, that there is one more call
for, that the eleventh hour is not yet past with them, and
the day of grace is not yet over with them.*

For The Friend time was always on the mind. It was only a matter of time that the world would succumb to death and darkness in the apocalypse they declared would happen on April 1st, 1780. The apocalypse was simply late, as many months later a mixture of fire smoke and weather patterns would blot out the sun and sky, causing people to light candles and pray at 12pm.

In this Society of Universal Friends, if one was alive, they were “yet in time.” When someone died, they had simply “left time.” In the Death Book of the Society, all the times of follower's deaths were recorded. The Publick Universal Friend's death was marginalia inscribed behind the front cover of the book remarking, “25 minutes past 2 on the clock, The Friend went from here.” And as T. Fleischmann reminds us time and time again throughout their writing on The Friend in *Time is the Thing a Body Moves Through*, this society, this group, this holy genderless spirit inhabiting the body of a preacher, are not separate from what the United States at the time was doing. The Friend's family had a history of taking land from the Indigenous people who lived there before, and this didn't change when the society was formed. Later land acquisition for the society impinged upon certain treaties that the United States had with the Haudenosaunee people. Holy gender and a preoccupation with time and apocalyptic salvation does not automatically place someone above the horrors committed by others.

Time is the thing a body moves through, and for these friends it was a waiting game until that final end which would bring those closest to God back to him. The apocalypse. The end of the

world. Eventually the end would come for each of these individual worlds and the world the Comforter wished to build for their friends. In time it would dissipate.¹

¹ Much of this comes directly from T Flesichmann's part of *Time is the Thing a Body Moves Through* on the Publick Universal Friend which dives more deeply into their history as well as their work against and within the societal norms that structure pre and post revolutionary America. Perhaps most explicitly they point out the ways in which the Society of Universal Friends and the Publick Universal Friend participated in colonial practices of land ownership and seizure.

The End of the World; Textuality for the Pathology of Future Revolution

What emerges in the desire that constitutes a certain proximity to that thought is not (just) that blackness is ontologically prior to the logistic and regulative power that is supposed to have brought it into existence but that blackness is prior to ontology; or, in a slight variation of what Chandler would say, blackness is the anoriginal displacement of ontology, that it is ontology's anti- and ante-foundation, ontology's underground, the irreparable disturbance of ontology's time and space. This is to say that what I do assert, not against, I think, but certainly in apposition to Afro-pessimism, as it is, at least at one point, distilled in Sexton's work, is not what he calls one of that project's most polemical dimensions, "namely, that black life is not social, or rather that black life is lived in social death" (Sexton 2011b: 28). What I assert is this: that black life—which is as surely to say life as black thought is to say thought—is irreducibly social; that, moreover, black life is lived in political death or that it is lived, if you will, in the burial ground of the subject by those who, insofar as they are not subjects, are also not, in the interminable (as opposed to the last) analysis, "death-bound," as Abdul JanMohamed (2005) would say... In this, however, I also agree with Sexton insofar as I am inclined to call this burial ground "the world" and to conceive of it and the desire for it as pathogenic. At stake, now, will be what the difference is between the pathogenic and the pathological, a difference that will have been instantiated by what we might think of as the view, as well as the point of view, of the pathologist. I don't think I ever claimed, or meant to claim, that Afro-pessimism sees blackness as a kind of pathogen. I think I probably do, or at least hope that it is, insofar as I bear the hope that blackness bears or is the potential to end the world. - Fred Moten, *Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)*

Mirror image, see no damage / See no evil at all / Kewpie dolls and urine stalls will be laughed at / The way you're laughed at now / Now, something meets Boy, and something meets Girl / They both look the same, they're overjoyed in this world / Same hair, revolution / Unisex, evolution / Tomorrow who's gonna fuss - The Replacements, *Androgynous*

Wars are fought, not just on the field of battle, but in the rhetorical strategies of the major powers involved. These include not only naming wars after the native peoples that are engaged and usurped by the colonial powers who initiate the wars, but in the claiming of land, the imposition of cultural ideologies, and the decimation of existing cultures. Occurring off and on in the latter half of the 19th century the British engaged in war against the native peoples of New Zealand. Originally referred to as the Māori War (following the aforementioned naming conventions) and later referred to as the New Zealand War—as well as Ngā pakanga o Aotearoa "the great New Zealand wars" and Te riri Pākehā "the white man's anger" by the Māori—I want to begin our discussion here, specifically near to a newspaper publishing office. What occurred in this time and space was a momentary reversal of the textual means by which war is fought. Newspapers historically assist in the social reproductions of war, helping to justify and bolster the war effort. However, if only for a moment, the means by which the newspaper assisted the war effort for one side became literal ammo for the other. According to a newspaper article in the *Daily American Citizen* from 1900 (fig. 2), "During the struggle the Maoris ran out of ammunition for their guns, and, raiding the newspaper offices, charged their guns with type and stereo blocks." The reporter goes on to write, "This novel ammunition proved very effective. One of the white invaders was severely wounded with a patent medicine advertisement and another was crippled for life by a church bazaar announcement, and the editor, who had taken refuge with the British troops, had a narrow escape from being hit with one of his own poems."¹

¹ <https://twitter.com/jonathanjsreyes/status/1372755136062189570/photo/1>

Clearly the play of language here is for the enjoyment of the writer and the readers of this small news clipping. Yet, it draws attention to the violences which occur by linguistic means and assist in the efforts of war, as well as the work against it. Consider the work that Alan Turing did in cryptanalysis which helped break the Enigma code, which according to some historians shortened the war by two to four years. And the papers Turing wrote on the subject were not released to the public for 70 years after, as they were far too valuable to the British military. By starting here with rhetoric and language and the integral parts they play in war we can consider more intently the charge that the pathological margin, that textual space of alternative difference, “bears or is the potential to” end the world. Consider the fact that even though Turing was a war hero, his “pathological” tendency towards homosexuality marked him a criminal, leading to the administering of hormones as punishment, which eventually led to his death by suicide (which of course was really a roundabout form of homicide by the government). Just as the government could not tolerate the possibility of Turing’s valuable cryptanalysis work from getting out into the world, they could not tolerate Turing’s homosexuality. The leakage or allowance of either would weaken their authoritative power.

I want to take seriously these realities crafted by discourse and linguistics, including and especially those realities which glide below detection but whose effects are felt nonetheless. How these undercover realities intertwine with war (and as we will see illness and disease, by ways in which we manage and administrate life and death), and in what ways these ideologies and rhetorics of the larger culture have a body count and assist in the exercising and demonstration of power. In our current example, legislation and land sale were necessary tools in the colonial British and New Zealand government’s war efforts (land sales in particular as they funded the very war effort that allowed for the taking of said land). And if that’s the case why wouldn’t the Māori use colonialism’s own language against it. Literally. As Homi Bhabha writes in his essay *Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation*,

A different note of liminality is struck in Baker’s description of the ‘radical maroonage’ that structured the emergence of an insurgent Afro-American expressive culture in its expansive, ‘national’ phase. Baker’s sense that the ‘discursive project’ of the Harlem Renaissance is modernist is based less on a strictly literary understanding of the term, and more on the agonistic enunciative conditions within which the Harlem Renaissance shaped its cultural practice. The transgressive, invasive structure of the black ‘national’ text, which thrives on rhetorical strategies of hybridity, deformation, masking, and inversion, is developed through an extended analogy with the guerrilla warfare that became a way of life for the maroon communities of runaway slaves and fugitives who lived dangerously, and insubordinately, ‘on the frontiers or margins of all American promise, profit and modes of production.’ From this liminal, minority position where, as Foucault would say, the relations of discourse are of the nature of warfare, the force of the people of an Afro-American nation emerge in the extended metaphor of maroonage.²

A couple decades later in 1955 the Spanish anarchist resistance activist Francesc Sabaté would take a modified mortar that he could collapse into a suitcase into a taxi in order to distribute anti-regime leaflets out of the sun roof during a visit by the Dictator-General Francisco Franco. And when he saw that the driver of the taxi was worried he reassured him that, “I work for the gov-

² Bhabha, Homi K. “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation.” In *The Blackwell Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*. Edited by Anthony Elliot. Oxford: Blackwell 1999. 214

ernment and I am distributing informational materials.”³ Alternative forms of leaflet, pamphlet, and book distribution are not themselves necessarily uncommon. Many years earlier Filippo Tommaso Marinetti distributed anti-romanticist leaflets from the clock tower in Venice denouncing the romantic tendencies of the government. Samizdat was a movement in Soviet Russia which used the typewriter and the mimeograph to produce small runs of banned books and that which articulated political dissent. It operated on the idea of readers as simultaneous scribes/publishers pulling from past forms of book making in order to ensure a future for what they distributed.⁴ In Italy in the 1970s a network of a few dozen bookshops formed the *Punti Rossi* (Red Points) organization, setting up collective distribution and storage facilities, and using exchange as a way to distribute the books more widely and without costly opening inventories. Profits were shared among the community, and allowed for a freer model of what could be published.⁵ Models of distribution for polemic declarations against reigning ideologies can always find alternate routes through the creativity of those incensed enough. Whether it be the Industrial Workers of the World declaring the mimeograph their union printer, or Prager U utilizing Youtube Ads to distribute their alt-right rhetoric. By placing these two extreme examples side by side I want to emphasize the multi-partisan nature of these forms so as to understand the ways in which alternative means of cultural distribution do not on their own constitute radicality, it is still the content of what is distributed that matters at the end of the day. This is all to say that forms of discourse and forms of war seem to coincide at definitive moments. Consider those ideological forces of propaganda in the encouragement of a populace to support their government in war. The use of warlike metaphors in the engagement with illness and disease. The War on Drugs, the War on Terror, the War on Poverty, the Culture Wars, the War on Christmas, War Games. In what ways can we understand that which occurs on the margins of these efforts creatively so as to ascertain certain ways of reinvigorating the power of the linguistic measures by which we think the world differently? Or to think it slightly otherwise, how do we deterritorialize the means of linguistic power in a way that allows us to think its possibilities outside of the hegemonies it institutes? That is how do we get it to attack itself from the inside?

To consider the margin is to consider all of those marginal moments in histories, cultures, and societies. All of those ways in which it opens up definitionally. A margin is at its most basic an edge. The limits, the profit margin, the page margin, ways to account for error. The marginalized, the marginal, the overlooked, the meek, the violently discriminated against. But, when we probe closer to this margin, the space opens up as if a fractal. Technologies of subjection/subjugation and identity operate on tight margins in the streamlining of their control and grasp upon life and death. What better representation of upending these dominant modes than the image of a “patent medicine advertisement” severely wounding a colonial soldier?

As Edward Said puts it at the end of his chapter *Criticism Between Culture and System* in his book *The World, The Text, and The Critic*, “For if texts are a form of impressive human activity, they must be

³ https://www.instagram.com/p/CFloI64oud_/?igshid=1jucqi3l4zrni

⁴ Parisi, Valentina. "Scribes, Self-Publishers, Artists: Performing the Book in the Samizdat Writing Scene." In *Publishing as Artistic Practice*, edited by Annette Gilbert, 154-69. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016.

⁵ Ludovico, Alessandro. *Post-digital Print: The Mutation of Publishing since 1894*. Eindhoven: Onomatopoe, 2018. 142

correlated with (not reduced to) other forms of impressive, perhaps repressive, and displacing forms of human activity.”⁶ And as Dean Spade lays out in their chapter *Trans Law and Politics on a Neoliberal Landscape* in *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law*, the rhetorics of the War on Drugs and the War on Terror in the context of Neoliberal policies and posturing, led to greater administrative violences legislated by the state upon those already made most vulnerable by administrative policies in general. “Fueled by racist, sexist, and xenophobic scapegoating, the last four decades [now five] have seen simultaneous slashes to social services and massive growth of state capacities to surveil, police, and imprison...”⁷

In following what Said sets out in the introduction (*Secular Criticism*) to the previously named book, that texts are themselves worldly, and “to some degree events” we cannot do what has been done by both Left and Right literary theory and simply turn our backs upon these realities. He goes on to write, “...it is no accident that the emergence of so narrowly defined a philosophy of pure textuality and critical noninterference has coincided with the ascendancy of Reaganism, or for that matter with a new cold war, increased militarism and defense spending, and a massive turn to the right on matters touching the economy, social services, and organized labor.” And for context Said died in 2003, this book of his was published in 1983. Yet the concerns he lays out have only ballooned outward from there. I think of the ideological impositions that came in a post 9/11 America where those who constituted the margin became the absolute and unseen enemy, an invented guerrilla warfare. This was not new, the idea propagated of a supposedly violent or ideologically differentiated minority has always been what propelled America’s immigration policies from the beginning, it’s “tough on crime” policies, its prison systems, its Indian Boarding schools, and its Japanese internment camps. We can also consider the enunciative properties of the post 9/11 wars sprung from the purely rhetorical contention that Saddam Hussein had “weapons of mass destruction.” While these are a horrifying class of weaponry the actual weapons didn’t exist, and the declaration simply became an empty signifier waiting to be filled by whatever it was that the government wanted. Think of the “Mission Accomplished” banner that was flown not long after the invasion efforts. It simply was not true, the war and its aftermath still rage on, but the ideological effects of that rhetoric were indeed felt throughout. Similar rhetorical moves are beginning to be made (and arguably have been made) during what is still currently the COVID-19 pandemic as a crisis dependent upon its social construction as such. The pandemic is very much real, with a staggering amount of deaths continuing to mount, but as far as the governments are concerned it is only a pandemic for as long as that framing continues to serve its social function of control, as opposed to the recognition of an actual crisis. Mask mandates are being repealed, max capacities for restaurants and bars are being relaxed, discussions of reopening abound, but yet people still die. There was just a large resurgence in cases in India following the government’s relaxation of their public health measures, all the while Western reporting on the issue points to COVID fatigue and a paternalistic view of a country unwilling to protect itself. And when we take a historical perspective a lot of work during the AIDS crisis hinged on getting the government to acknowledge it as a crisis. Without that declaration, aid is not given, research is not done. Another example are orphan diseases and how they are addressed, or rather how they are not

⁶ Said, Edward W. *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983. 225

⁷ Spade, Dean. *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015. 57

and often stay off the radar of medical research due to their small patient populations, and a lack of financial support necessary to engender the research. War begins with a declaration; mass disease ends if *you* want it to.

In thinking on the accumulations of texts within a specific textual body, and the ways in which histories, social contexts, violence, discriminations, etc. are mapped onto it, I want to touch upon Joseph Grigely's concept of textualterity which understands change and difference as necessary parts of the textual process. Specifically thinking on his discussion after the work of George Kubler around linguistic "drift", I follow in his consideration of the continuous and discontinuous transiences ("Continuous transience involves slow, linear change of either decay or accretion, whereas discontinuous transience is characterized by ruptures and implosion, or what in pathological discourse is more explicitly described as 'trauma.'")⁸ that he talks about as the effects that shift the meaning around texts as time continues to move. What this way of looking at the work underscores are all of the elements that both materially and conceptually shift the meaning and understanding of a work of art. Grigely himself focuses in the second chapter of his book on those artworks which suffered certain kinds of iconoclastic violences and subsequently incorporated them: Michelangelo's *David*, Barnett Newman's *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow, and Blue III*⁹ (fig. 3), Auguste Rodin's *The Thinker*, David Hammon's *How Ya Like Me Now?* (fig. 4), Sergei Paradjanov's *The Colour of Pomegranates*, Eric Gill's *Prospero and Ariel*, the Lear House and a few assorted others. Grigely's wide-reaching grasp is interested in what happens in the space between the damage, the restoration, and the re-presentation of the work and how in these discontinuous (but not always) transiences the works' meanings blossom.

Grigely's writing through the extratextual realities of these works articulates concerns of censorship, iconoclasm, race, public space, conservation, historical preservation, war, and in certain cases a kind of pathologizing of those who perpetrate the more violent iconoclasms. For Grigely these externalities constitute the spatial, temporal, and textual realities of these objects as they

⁸ Grigely, Joseph. *Textualterity: Art, Theory, and Textual Criticism*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1995. 71

⁹ This piece in particular Grigely only remarks upon in passing, however I find the situation quite fascinating. Newman's work in general is no stranger to vandalism. But in 1986 a man named Gerard Jan van Bladeren walked into the Stedelijk Museum and using a boxcutter slashed long ways across the canvas with a few other shorter cuts in order to "take revenge on abstract art." When the work was later restored there was intense backlash stating that the man who has restored it had sapped the life from it, having used improper techniques to restore the work. When vandalism is understood by the general public it is often reduced to pathologized notions of the "deranged individual". Gridley McKim-Smith draws attention to the insufficiencies of these characterizations, and how it relates to discussions of sexual assault in *The Rhetoric of Rape, The Language of Vandalism*. "Until recently, published discussions tended to describe attacks on works of art as isolated acts of individual derangement, as when the Director of Public Relations at the Rijksmuseum responded to the slashing of Rembrandt's *Nightwatch* (1642) in 1975 by stating that 'one cannot apply normal criteria to the motivations of someone who is mentally disturbed.' More thoughtful critics, from [David] Freedberg to Pieter Moritz Pickshaus, have pointed out elements that are shared by 'normal' viewers, and Dario Gamboni's balanced and meticulous discussions also avoids oversimplifying the 'multiplicity of factors' that are involved in attacking, altering, or suppressing art. This enlightened shift in perspective does not alter the fact that when the attacker is not dismissed as insane, the activity is still often confined to a mental niche that limits rather than expands serious understanding of what has happened." Following through the parallels of rhetoric between sexual assault and vandalism she concludes that this is insufficient and is rather an attempt to take control of the unruliness of this iconoclastic act. McKim-Smith, Gridley. "The Rhetoric of Rape, the Language of Vandalism." *Woman's Art Journal* 23, no. 1 (2002): 29-36. Accessed May 9, 2021. doi:10.2307/1358965.

exist in the world, as opposed to the purely and ideally imagined original and authoritative text. “Traditionally, then, the position is one of power and authority, and when this authority is challenged, we see more than just a challenge but an operation by which subversive access is granted to the authority.”¹⁰ It is within these marginal occurrences—cultural interventions—we get both a privileged look at the subtexts of these examples, and the authorities that make their meanings.

Around the early 1820s Francisco Goya created some of his most famous works commonly referred to as the Black Paintings (a name which didn’t come into use until the 20th century) after having just suffered great illness that left him mostly deaf, dealing with the death of his wife years prior, and living within the tumultuous Spain directly following Napoleon’s invasion and its aftermath. These dominant autobiographical means by which we contextualize Goya’s works as *necessarily* related to his illness, his wife’s death, and the war in Spain are prescriptive reads on the text that I cannot adequately bear out. Although, as these works were never quite discussed during his lifetime, not found until after, intervened upon by restorers, and only later historicized within “possible” authorial intentions, these are works which resist any and all attempts at authorial and eclectic kinds of editing and historicizing that are usually performed on works of art. In this way, the personal and presumed exigencies of the text are exposed as not the final arbiters of its meaning. As is the case when dealing with the history of “authoritative” Shakespeares, a definitive authority upon a text is never as borne out as we are led to believe. Yet here with Goya’s paintings we are given an even more direct chance to see this fact a bit more clearly. In this conspicuous absence of authoritative meanings for the Black Paintings—everything written or decided about them coming after their physical deterioration and Goya’s death—we can begin a deconstruction of this supposed “authoritative reading”. How, then, should we begin to approach these paintings? What do these peculiar texts open up to us once we remove the imposed baggage? And what happens when we begin to slowly reintroduce back all that we skimmed off to see more clearly?

In Kathy Acker’s *Realism for the Cause of Future Revolution*, she performs an at once enunciative—and at other times sexual—reading act upon the works of Goya and Caravaggio. Paintings become open texts for larger sociopoetic concerns to flourish in a game of free association. Two of the painting she examines are *The Fates and Their Creation*, and *The Witchy Brew* from the Black Paintings and edges along the peripheries to enact a read of the work as if bewitched herself. Acker is not reliant upon authorial intent, greater historical context, or cross referencing. She relies instead on the material information, and social and political information pertinent to her own life. And this articulation of life otherwise and otherhow becomes a deconstruction of *life in general*. In her hands these become experimental and experiential texts allowing articulations beyond the pale. Goya in this way comes to life again, bound and free. This is the Goya—these are the Black Paintings—I begin from.

The Reading (fig. 5) consists of a group of men in a spaceless place, reading. Or three read, one lurks behind, and the last looks up towards G*d? It is often considered in accompaniment with *The Ministration* (fig. 6) which depicts a group of people laughing, supposedly at masturbation originally, although that can’t be confirmed. Back and forth, back and forth, joy and study are in

¹⁰ Grigely, Joseph. *Textuality: Art, Theory, and Textual Criticism*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1995. 75

a ping pong game between them. Study a much less sturdy and representable act. The men peer, we cannot see their eyes, do we trust them? Reading is a collective act that allows us to cross the bridges created in the act of writing. Reading being a form of an attempt at writerly completion. Juxtaposed to a painting where presumably whoever was masturbating couldn't. Perhaps this is a way to understand the political, somatic, textual, rhetorical, controlling dominations placed upon the *potentia gaudendi* (orgasmic force) that Paul B. Preciado writes around. Perhaps reading is itself always something more than what we intended or knew from the first.

These are long skinnier paintings done by Goya upon the walls of his own house. What then could it mean to think discontinuously about those previously stated biographical elements that surround the gossip of the painting? Perhaps that they typify the ravings of a mad man? the desperate artistic cries of a renowned artist in pain? attempts at ritualistic depiction of social, theistic, and mythological images in order to call upon magics long forgotten in order to bring back some semblance of happiness to his life? All fair, sure, but they lose the crucial reality of the fact that these psychoanalytic attempts to get into the mind of Goya only succeed in doubling down upon certain pathologizing notions of how we see illness and disability as constitutive of a less fulfilling or darker life. War here also stands out as that which creates and exacerbates these lived realities in the shadow of death. The two states become intimately intertwined. These are works existing within the pathological margins of Goya's career. They are works which by the time they were discovered had already suffered great amounts of continuous transience in the form of decay and degradation lending to the ways in which this loss of material integrity was read on to the intentions at one point held by the artist. The degradation of the painted body is mirrored onto the degradation of the painter's body.

I read *The Reading* and consider the material of the painted forms that coalesce into bodily approximations. Clustered together these figures blend and shift into each other as if in the act of reading they become collective body, a textual body. Those who look away or are placed behind are themselves reading, and yet all eyes have dissipated. Obscured by shadow and skin, the very ocular means by which one normatively reads no longer determine that which is procured through the textual state. I continue to think of the man in the back looking to G*d, seeming almost on the verge of ecstasy. A calm and quiet inner ecstasy not otherwise seen, but grasped through the ethical face. The single man who talks has been stopped by the paint mid sentence. An idea present in its formative moments, always hanging in the air to never be grasped. The bodies take up the whole space, dominate the conversation. Another common title for this work is *Politicians*. At one time the man with the beard had horns, and they have dissipated. There is a sixth man, merely a face, that I neglected before. Obscured by the paint to almost disappear. Do we shudder with disgust at these political animals so absorbed by their own concerns? Do we marvel at the disruptions that each body performs on the others? Do we look on with disdain at the interarticulations of the image's melting? Do we connect this up with the world, as they plot within it, or disassociate as that world seems to fall away? Could these men, these politicians, be the ones laying out what is and is not normal?

To parse out further what I mean by, and understand as, the normal and the pathological it is necessary to turn to the historian of science Georges Canguilhem. In *The Normal and the Pathological* he seeks in the epistemologies of life sciences ways in which to interrogate that which is to be taken as truth and the understanding developed from—and taken for granted through—it. To

operate not in terms of a present which has that which is true to work back from, it is instead to investigate the means by which we understand these things to be true for our time. He excavates the work of René Leriche to articulate a formulation of pathology not as a quantitative leap from the normal, but rather a qualitative one. He quotes Leriche, “By contrast, Leriche thinks that physiology is the collection of solutions to problems posed by sick men through their illnesses. This is indeed one of the most profound insights on the problem of the pathological: ‘At every moment there lie within us many more physiological possibilities than physiology would tell us about. But it takes disease to reveal them to us.’”¹¹ Canguilhem goes on to write, “Diseases are new ways of life.”¹² What this insight allows is an epistemological shift in how we understand the pathological and its constitutive powers. That is it gives to patients—especially along racial and gendered lines—a greater role in the articulation of their symptoms, within the knowledge of their own bodies, who may not otherwise get the treatment they need due to a dismissal of those knowledges. It is also to say that when considering the problematics of illness and disease they are not so simple of things that a balancing out of the body will fix them. When we consider instead and take seriously Canguilhem’s declaration that diseases are new ways of life, we can reorient the dominant perspective on ill and diseased—and due to the popular conflation, disabled—bodies, especially those for which it is chronic or terminal. We can think anew about what we consider to be fulfilling and fruitful lives. Much of our understanding of that life is based on the productivity of the worker, and whether or not a body can produce value. To consider illness and disease as shifts in living, the emphasis is no longer placed on productivity, but on the value of the life. An illness that cannot be cured is no longer an excuse for the abandonment and excision of a person from the world. That is bullshit eugenic ideology. What we find when we reorient our view and extrapolate how that eugenicist ideology is interwoven into the larger world, leading to austerity policies and the purification of cultural ideals, larger understandings of what is constituted as pathological and how these are placed upon what we see as the health of the larger body politic start to appear. As well as how the pathological in these cases is always placed in relation to a dominative norm.

To read itself can be a violent act of recognition, pathologization, and cooptation, allowing for the reinstantiation of certain normative ideas. In this process of reading it is as much what one brings as what could be said to be already there that results in our attempts at finalized formulations. Who gets to be that authoritative reader? Who gets to decide what something means, and how that meaning is then touted out as an instrument in the world? Who crafts titles? Who dictates proper restoration techniques? Who writes the books and the reviews and the analyses? And what would it mean to think of the act of reading as pathological and thereby a process which can find the tools of revolution in the larger culture?

If following Canguilhem there are certain epistemological formulations that are contingent upon analysis in the life sciences then how can we increase our register so as to follow those teachings elsewhere? What would it mean to consider the alternating currents of the major discourses of war, health, culture, art and how they inform and build up each other’s rhetorics? What does it

¹¹ Canguilhem, Georges. *Normal and the Pathological*. Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2015. 100

¹² *Ibid.* 100

look like to consider the health not just of a dominant body politic, but also of its pathological margins and how that gets talked about?¹³

In 1880 a Crow Peace Delegation consisting of six Apsáalooke chiefs (Peelatchiwaaxpáash/Old Crow (Raven), Ichiúilachkash/Long Elk, Alaxchiiaahush/Plenty Coups, Bia Eélisaash/Large Stomach Woman (Pregnant Woman) aka Two Belly, Déaxitchish/Pretty Eagle, and Peelatchiwaaxpáash/Chief Medicine Crow (Raven)¹⁴) went by carriage and by train to Washington D.C. to participate in discussions surrounding the use of their land for the Pacific Railroad, which ultimately ended in its sale. The journey itself took them from Absarokee, Montana to Utah then on to Chicago and, finally, to Washington D.C. after months of travel. Once they arrived the proceedings themselves took another couple of months so as to give the United States government time to show their own military might as well as to attempt to induce a homesickness that would lead to more favorable outcomes for their side of the dealings. While the US's shows of might took the form of direct presentations of their armies, the Apsáalooke chiefs shows of military prowess came in the form of their cultural regalia which represented their achievements and histories which led to them being given the honor of becoming chiefs. While there, the photographer Charles Milton Bell photographed each of the chiefs sitting against blank backgrounds. Bell was notorious for photographing indigenous peoples and neglecting to identify their lineage or names or anything substantial at all. Photographs of five of these chiefs became the basis for the Crow/Apsáalooke artist Wendy Red Star's 2014 work *1880 Crow Peace Delegation* (fig. 7, fig. 8) which is a part of her practice of inscribing hand written and drawn annotations directly onto photographs to reintroduce context into ethnographic photographs which otherwise flatten the people they depict. In the Fall 2020 issue of *Aperture* that Red Star co-edited, Julia Bryan-Wilson writes about Red Star as a "theorist of skin." Discussing another of her works that utilize this practice of annotation *Um-basax-bilua*, "Where They Make the Noise," 1904-2016 from 2017 Bryan-Wilson writes

Red Star is also keen to give visibility to moments of defiant Apsáalooke self-representation and shed light on neglected documents that evidence ongoing processes of community formation. In *Um-basax-bilua*, "Where They Make the Noise," 1904-2016 (2017), she stitched together an array of found images of the annual Crow Fair—some taken by her Apsáalooke father—annotating the images with a graphite pencil to give names to these figures and to scramble linear Euro-American temporalities, highlighting continuities across time. She frequently draws on the photographs she creates, treating the print like a skin to be embellished, tattooed, and marked; she also plumbs archives around Native histories as she explores how her own body interacts with places both real and imagined.¹⁵

¹³ In more concrete ways we can look at this study <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK220337/> which analyzes disparities in diagnosis and treatment for racial and ethnic groups. And as for another outlook on the binaries of health and sickness, I would point towards Carolyn Lazard's essay *The World Is Unknown* which gets at the more nuanced realities of treating illness under capitalism, and what recourses to different forms of medical knowledge could look like. The essay can be found here: <https://www.canopycanopycanopy.com/contents/the-world-is-unknown>

¹⁴ "University Communications and Marketing." MSUB Presents, The 1880 Crow Delegation to D.C.: Cultural Identity, Representation, and Legacy - MSU Billings | MSU Billings. October 3, 2016. Accessed May 09, 2021. <https://www.msubillings.edu/urelations/releases/2016/2016Oct03CrowDelegation.htm>.

¹⁵ Bryan-Wilson, Julia. "Wendy Red Star: Crow Hands, Crow Objects." *Aperture*, Fall 2020, 130-33. 130

Red Star's annotated photographs reenact alternative epistemologies of her culture, highlighting a part of the larger constellations of neglected and forgotten histories. She recognizes that even as neglected and forgotten seem to be passive in their connotation they are active processes by which violence is brought by dominant cultures upon societies deemed as other, savage, primitive, deviant, pathological.

In *1880 Crow Peace Delegation* Red Star reinvigorates the cultural specificity built into the chief's attire in the first place, while adding extratextual details, notes, and histories into the fold. Some of the "quotes" she has written in these annotations include: "Hair Bow's represent physically overcoming an enemy and slitting their throat. I killed two." "I shook hands with prince Albert of Monaco. He was lucky to shake my hand." "I am a warrior, I led a party, I went to war, I found a camp, I told the young men to charge. I have done so many times. I always do what I set out to do." For Red Star there is an importance to be found in the cultural details of the photographs, and the reintroduction of the enunciating voice. A defiance which comes through in how it was they sat for these portraits. While the photographs attempt to function as a way to classify and document a living person, the attire of the chiefs resists simplistic classification within its cultural specificity. By excavating the information she has and reinscribing it on these photographs (some of which have been used for the express purpose of advertising products) Red Star ties up the significance of these histories as part and parcel with the dominant ones we more easily recognize. Dominant cultures are themselves built and leveraged through a multiplicity of intersecting subaltern cultures that provide the very basis of survival for this larger organism. As Bryan-Wilson remarks about Red Star's work *The Maniacs, We're Not the Best But We're Better Than the Rest* (2011) in which she showcases images of her father's rock band, she, "[upends] normative assumptions about Native cultural production as isolated from the fabrics of U.S. society rather than an integral part of it."¹⁶

Who produces these cultural histories is just as important as what cultural histories are remembered. Around the same time as the delegation there were simultaneous efforts to photograph (of which the Crow Peace Delegation photographs were a part) the "vanishing Indian" which "tended to be propelled by the impetus either to promote a revisionist narrative, one of noble savages and well-meaning colonists, or to preserve the cultures colonists had aided in destroying."¹⁷ This ambivalence is embodied in the photography of Edward S. Curtis who, with funding from J.P. Morgan, embarked on that very kind of project with *The North American Indian*. I recognize for only a moment this project for its contrast to the work of Richard Throssel, who was of Manitoba Métis descent (Canadian, Cree, English, and Scottish) and who was made a member of the Crow tribe by Chief Plenty Coups at a time when U.S. land seizure was rampant. Chief Plenty Coups invited new members into the tribe as one of many ways to fight back against these practices, especially the Dawes Act of 1887 which saw communal tribal lands subdivided into allotments.¹⁸ A culture of individualism imposed upon a communal culture, all the while documentation reinforced it as a disappearing one. Throssel's work was explicitly within the culture it was

¹⁶ Ibid 130

¹⁷ Bengal, Rebecca. "To Walk in Both Worlds." *Aperture*, Fall 2020, 32-41. 34

¹⁸ Ibid. 33

depicting. Not superficial but embedded, documenting that which was deemed important which is so often in contrast to what an outside perspective would see as the case. However, it was the work that Throssel did as a part of the Office of Indian Affairs that was most remembered, documenting “correct” behaviors necessary in order to curb traditional practices which were supposed to have contributed to outbreaks of tuberculosis and trachoma. The scholar Rebecca S. Wingo writes of the lectures that these photographs were a part of, “It was a traveling lecture that left cultural devastation in its wake.” Health regulations imposed upon a culture in order to “save it” from disease, all the while devastating diseases had historically been brought by colonists.¹⁹ The pathologization of cultural practices aided in the very practice of destroying them. Cultural violence visited through the paternal practices of a biomedical establishment which knew only its own methods as true medicine. Throssel would go on to frustratedly quit the project in 1911. Ultimately, it was the intimate work he did which was relegated to the margins which would be the most culturally lasting work for the people whom it depicted and was for. As Rebecca Bengal writes in her *Aperture* article *To Walk in Both Worlds* of which this paragraph’s information comes to us from, “On the Crow Indian Reservation, Throssel’s legacy has endured for decades through the studio portraits and candid pictures he made of women and children. The strength of his images resides in everyday, unguarded moments that feel inherently modern, freed from the dominant narrative of the ‘vanishing Indian’ advanced by Curtis’s vision. ‘Whether they were aware of the photographer’s name or not, a lot of Crow people have been living with Throssel’s pictures in their homes and in the community for years,’ says [Timothy] McCleary. ‘They become family treasures.’” (fig. 9)

In the pathologizing marginalization of cultures and their practices, what is deemed as necessary in its inclusion in contemporary life is that which is seen as compatible or assimilable. Curtis would go on to include some of Throssel’s photographs in his own project due to their merit, but only insofar as they could contribute to the overall project of documentation and the message it was trying to argue. And I would extrapolate that what Curtis saw in these photos was the kind of trust Throssel was able to cultivate, leading to greater access to what Curtis could never see, that led to the choice of inclusion. What Red Star and Throssel’s work clues us into are the ways in which it is not the broad swath of cultural acceptance and engagement that has the lasting impacts on how we view ourselves and others, but rather the intimate and permeable moments of exchange and celebration. If the pathological normative operates within discourses of war and assimilation, then the pathological margins finds its power of viral proliferation in the overlooked, the communal, the intramural.

Fred Moten’s work explicitly exists within the discourses of the intramural, the thing, objecthood, and that which is considered nothing. Theoretical practices of thingly nothingness. I opened this chapter with a quote from Fred Moten’s *Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)* and a few lines from The Replacement’s song *Androgynous*. Revolutionary unstructured androgyny, and the idea of blackness as pathological as world ender. In rereading Moten’s essay for this book, and listening to The Replacement’s song on a bike ride, I was struck doubly in different times and places. First with Moten’s work, it was curious for me to find in all the ways that this book is an attempt to live within what Moten set out as possibility in that essay: the pathological as bearing the potential to end the world. Second, is that The Replacements song is a love song. And it

¹⁹ Ibid. 34

chooses to implicate the other than normative in the decision to write “something meets Boy, and something meets Girl”. They explicitly create a relation built with love and then reinforce the ambiguity of affective possibility through this introduction of “thingness” not bound by that which reaffirms heteronormative love or more generally normative reproduction. A love song for things is the backdrop to our study here. This is the soundtrack to the end of the world.

Moten’s essay works within the oppositional arrangement of an Afro-Pessimistic/Black Optimistic exhaustion in order to articulate a generative sociality of nothingness. His formulation (which has at times been characterized as a kind of black optimism, hence the dualistic arrangement which arrives from the essay) articulates that it is not social death that blackness is relegated to, but “rather *it is the field of the political*, from which blackness is relegated to the supposedly undifferentiated mass or blob of the social, which is, in any case, where and what blackness chooses to stay.”²⁰ Moten goes on to write,

This mass is understood to be undifferentiated precisely because from the imaginary perspective of the political subject—who is also the transcendental subject of knowledge, grasp, ownership, and self-possession—difference can only be manifest as the discrete individuality that holds or occupies a standpoint. From that standpoint, from the artificial, officially assumed position, blackness is nothing, that is *the relative nothingness of the impossible, pathological subject and his fellows*.²¹ [emphasis mine]

The text itself is a response to Jared Sexton’s *The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism*. An attempt in friendship to show “what we’ve been working on, this under-riff we’ve been trying to play, to study, to improvise”²². This articulations comes out of their “non-meeting...part of an ongoing manic depressive episode called black radicalism / black social life.”²³ In attempting this examination, this ana-lysis, we can play out a possibly explicit understanding of the pathological margin as itself constituted as a pejoratively pathological through that which could be called the pathological norm. That is that in this nothingness, Moten finds far more than no thing. Articulating what he sees as celebration coming from the work of Frank B. Wilderson III and Sexton, and their articulations of the relationship between blackness and nothingness, he works against certain desirous impulses to simply affirm against that nothingness, and instead sets down study within that nothing. And in our case it means to take up non-position within the pathological margin. That is to say the general antagonism as Moten would put it, to consider this not as position or standpoint, but as its own “absoluteness of... generative dispersion of a general antagonism that blackness holds and protects in as critical celebration and degenerative and regenerative preservation.”²⁴ Moten plans to stay a believer in blackness. In blackness even in its “(absolute) nothingness”, in its thingliness. Something meeting something. Marginal solidarity in opposition to a transcendental individual pathology which dictates norms and eradi-

²⁰ Moten, Fred. Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh). *South Atlantic Quarterly* 1 October 2013; 112 (4): 737–780. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-2345261>. 740

²¹ *Ibid.* 741

²² *Ibid.* 778

²³ *Ibid.* 778

²⁴ *Ibid.* 741-742

cate that which is said to both infect and constitute those norms. For that is the normative function placed upon the pathological margin, to reiterate the stability and correctness of that pathological norm. It is to recognize Structuralism's ideas of marked and unmarked terms as deadly serious. We operate within this field of study, where as Sexton puts it in his article following in certain critical steps of Moten,

...[he] is concerned with a strife internal to the field formation of black studies, internal, moreover, to the black (radical) tradition that black studies is or seeks out as institutional inscription, a "strife between normativity and the deconstruction of norms" that he argues, persuasively, "is essential not only to contemporary black academic discourse but also to the discourses of the barbershop, the beauty shop, and the bookstore" (Moten 2008: 178). Put slightly differently, there is a strife within the black (radical) tradition between "radicalism (here understood as the performance of a general critique of the proper)" and a "normative striving against the grain of the very radicalism from which the desire for norms is derived" (Moten 2008: 177). If radicalism gives rise to the very desire for norms, like a river from source water or a tree from roots, and if the general critique of the proper gives rise to the desire for propriety (in the fullest sense of the term) and not vice versa, then our prevailing notion of critique—and the forms and sources of our critical activity—is put profoundly into question, and, I think, rightly so.²⁵

This is how we can come to understand an evaluation of the epistemologies of these larger intertwined pathological systems, as they all give birth to each other. Even still, it is necessary to recognize in what ways it is in the pathological margins, that general antagonism and undercommon space that we can really set up shop, and get to work thinking otherwise and otherhow. I believe in a certain creative possibility, by which we find not just the despicable in the normal, but also the possible and potential in the pathological. That is, how we say something constitutes what is heard, and what growth could be said to sprout. What can or will follow then is in celebration of that pathological margin and all the multiplicities which it contains and nurtures.

That's the mobility of place, the fugitive field of untwining, in and from which we ask, paraontologically, by way of but also against and underneath the ontological terms at our disposal: What is nothingness? What is thingliness? What is blackness? What's the relationship between blackness, thingliness, nothingness and the (de/re)generative operations of what Deleuze might call *a life* in common? Where do we go, by what means do we begin, to study blackness? Can there be an aesthetic sociology or a social poetics of nothingness? Can we perform an anatomy of the thing or produce a theory of the universal machine? Our aim, even in the face of the brutally imposed difficulties of black life, is cause for celebration. This is not because celebration is supposed to make us feel good or make us feel better, though there would be nothing wrong with that. It is, rather, because the cause for celebration turns out to be the condition of possibility of black thought, which animates the black operations that will produce the absolute overturning, the absolute turning of this motherfucker out. Celebration is the essence of black thought, the animation of black operations, which are, in the first instance, our under common, underground, submarine sociality.²⁶

²⁵ Sexton, Jared. "The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism." *Intension*, No. 5. doi:10.4324/9781315883700-4.

²⁶ Moten, Fred. *Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)*. *South Atlantic Quarterly* 1 October 26 2013; 112 (4): 737–780. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-2345261.742>

“This Time is Out of Joint” ; Birth to Death

The structure of the present work is grounded in temporality. Every human problem cries out to be considered on the basis of time, the ideal being that the present always serves to build the future. - Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

I was born March 27th, 1994. For much of my life I always understood my birth in relation to my paternal grandmother’s death only a few months before I entered. Catherine Elizabeth Del Guidice Fusco left time due to Lou Gehrig’s disease, also known as ALS or amyotrophic lateral sclerosis. It is a disease which weakens the muscles through the break down of nerve cells. There are treatments, but there is no cure. There is also no clue as to what causes it. What I know of my grandmother is that she was an incredibly doting and caring mother. I’ve spent a lot of time thinking of my maternal grandparents and my relationship to them, but not as much for my paternal, and I owe this to time spent.

24 years prior to my birth Alighiero E Boetti created a piece titled *Today is Friday 27 March 1970* in which he wrote the title on the wall with both his left and right hands, one side mirroring the other. An act in time, writing time. Another work of his titled *11 July 2023 - 16 December 2040* consists of two embroidered images with floral accents that includes those dates in the center. They are the date of his predicted death, and the date of the 100th anniversary of his birth. The second date is a declaration that would and could not be wrong. The first date did not come to pass, as he left time less than a month after I was born on April 24, 1994.

Time is itself a curiosity as it continues to move in and out of us, slowing and speeding up. We keep time with our heart beats, and it is special when we can hear another person’s time keeping mechanism. There is much that can throw them all out of whack.

I use “subjection” because it indicates that power relations impact how we know ourselves as subjects through these systems of meaning and control—the ways we understand our own bodies, the things we believe about ourselves and our relationships with other people and with institutions, and the ways we imagine change and transformation. I use “subjection” rather than “oppression” because “oppression” brings to mind the notion that one set of people are dominating another set of people, that one set of people “have power” and another set are denied it... If we seek to imagine transformation, if we want to alleviate harm, redistribute wealth and life chances, and build participatory and accountable resistance formations, our strategies need to be careful not to oversimplify how power operates. Thinking about power only as top/down, oppressor/oppressed, dominator/dominated can cause us to miss opportunities for intervention and to pick targets for change that are not the most strategic. The term “subjection” captures how systems of meaning and control that concern us permeate our lives, our ways of knowing about the world, and our ways of imagining transformation. - Normal life, Dead Spade 25

As glitch feminists, this is our politic: we refuse to be hewn to the hegemonic line of a binary body. This calculated failure prompts the violent socio-cultural machine to hiccup, sign, shudder, buffer. We want a new framework and for this framework, we want new skin. - Glitch feminism p 11

The forward slash (/)—originally called the upright virgule—was first crafted by the 12th century Italian Scholar Buoncampagno da Signa, and was used to indicate a brief pause in a sentence. Contemporarily, we most often see it used as a joiner punctuation, bridging that which is related and/or oppositional. That ambivalence of relation creates an interesting role for the /. Colloquially, we mostly see the punctuation used in social media bios and email footers between one’s identities or pronouns. It’s a useful tool when character count matters and simplicity is key, and allows for better articulations of more complex identities, which incorporate cultural and combinatory gender modes (she/they and he/she). And we often see it in literary settings where the use of “and” or “or” may be too easy of a dividing line between two modes, or punctuation is necessary to articulate a new formulation. For example: In a writing by Critical Art Ensemble titled *Flesh Machine* they stylize a more expansive set of pronouns as he/rself and he/r. In *The Fives Sexes: Why Male and Female are Not Enough* Anne Fausto-Sterling when writing about Levi Suydam states, “Western culture is deeply committed to the idea that there are only two sexes. Even language refuses other possibilities; thus to write about Levi Suydam I have had to invent conventions—s/he and his/her—to denote someone who is clearly neither male nor female or who is perhaps both sexes at once.”¹ In *Becoming intelligible woman: Gender, disability and resistance at the border zone of youth* written by Jen Slater, Embla Ágústsdóttir, and Freyja Haraldsdóttir, they clarify in a footnote that, “When we use dis/ability (with a forward slash) we are acknowledging the co-constituted relationship between “ability” and “disability” – troubling the binary, yet hierarchical, relationship between the two (the prioritisation of “ability”), and highlighting that both are terms constructed by unequal societies which, through ableism and disablism, prioritise certain ways of being and doing...”² In Paul B. Preciado’s book *Tésto Junkie* he articulates binaries using the / as a way to mark, mine, and mind the fruitful gap, “Today, the situation seems a lot more complex—

¹ Fausto-Sterling, Anne. "The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female Are Not Enough." *The Sciences*, March & April 1993, 20-24. <http://capone.mtsu.edu/phollowa/5sexes.html>.

² Slater, Jen, Embla Ágústsdóttir, and Freyja Haraldsdóttir. “Becoming Intelligible Woman: Gender, Disability and Resistance at the Border Zone of Youth.” *Feminism & Psychology* 28, no. 3 (August 2018): 409–26. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959353518769947>.

the individual body functions like an extension of global technologies of communication. ‘Embodiment is significant prosthesis.’ To borrow the terms of the American Feminist Donna J. Haraway, the twenty-first-century body is a technoliving system, the result of an irreversible implosion of modern binaries (female/male, animal/human, nature/culture).”³ in Kara Keeling’s *Looking for M—* she uses the slash when writing out the titular M—’s pronouns so as to highlight the ambivalence inherent in any use of them, “Peddle’s documentary follows several ‘aggressives,’ who identify as female and/or as women and present themselves as masculine or male. The complexity of this mode of self-identification is highlighted by M—’s claim at the beginning of the film that s/he lives life as a man, but that doesn’t change the fact that s/he is a woman.”⁴ In *The Normal and the Pathological* when Georges Canguilhem is writing of humoral theories of the body he uses the slash to indicate the fluidity of humoral opposites, “In this case [harmonic ideas based in Greek medicine], disease is not somewhere in man, it is everywhere in him; it is the whole man. External circumstances are the occasion but not the causes. Man’s equilibrium consist of four humors, whose fluidity is perfectly suited to sustain variations and oscillations and whose qualities are paired by opposites (hot/cold, wet/dry); the disturbance of these humors causes disease.”⁵

/ becomes a negotiator, the joiner, that which brings together identities and ideas while reflecting their co-constitutive relationship, a marker of the textual body for better or for worse.⁶ To return to the practice of placing one’s pronouns using / as a joiner in bios and email footers, it has become a practice whose goal is the saturation of that space with pronouns so as to normalize their elucidation. In this case the normalizing tendency is precisely to avert possible identifications of who is and is not trans (based upon the disclosure of one’s pronouns) in order to avoid transphobic backlash. In essence, removing pronoun specificity as a marker of transness, while simultaneously divorcing gendered pronouns from a direct and visual assumed gender appearance. But in texts in general the / is acknowledged by some as inadequate at times due to its effect on *readability*. In the gender-inclusive language guidelines published by UN Women they write, “Because this strategy [the use of /] has a negative impact on readability, it is advisable not to overuse it... Generally, the use of this strategy should be avoided in public information products such as web features, press releases, or narrative texts.”⁷ More formal literary guides such as the APA and the

³ Preciado, Paul B. *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*. New York, NY: Feminist Press, 2019. 44

⁴ Keeling, Kara K.. “Looking for M—: Queer Temporality, Black Political Possibility, and Poetry from the Future.” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 15 (2009): 565 - 582. 572

⁵ Canguilhem, Georges. *Normal and the Pathological*. Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2015. 40

⁶ In 2007 Marci Alboher wrote the book *One Person/Multiple Careers: A New Model for Work/Life Success* which characterizes certain people as “Slashes” who in the contemporary economy work multiple kinds of jobs because it is possible. Pre-2008 crash, the book articulates as a positive what is a simple fact of life for many people today. And it articulates what is increasingly becoming the negative aspect of what it means to make ends meet in a world of /.

⁷ <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/gender-inclusive%20language/guidelines-on-gender-inclusive-language-en.pdf?la=en&vs=2129>

MLA caution against its use in literary forms and it is also often eschewed by editor's in favor of other forms of articulation. While the / was used in place of commas in medieval manuscripts, and is generally accepted as indicating a line break when reproducing or quoting lines of poetry, contemporarily it tows a line between useful and disruptive.

In many ways the / allows difference to proliferate. If we think of the / as an interstitial space between these words then a veritable cacophony of possibilities begin to appear in this small space of extrapolation. While the / allows for more explicit difference in the listing off of possible pronouns, or in the case of dis/ability allowing for a discourse to take place in the stylization of the word, I am more interested in what it does for difference in its inherent opacity. In its disruptive readerly state. That is if we consider that space of / as being intersubjective and inspiring interdependence within its opaquely disruptive qualities.

While punctuation has its various duties to the text that it resides in, there are certain digressions that the punctuation can take in a creative sense. ASCII text art using text to create image more explicitly than simple description, or our use of punctuation to create text emojis such as :), >:(, and :/, and its vernacular use in text messaging to portray something more simply. What I am attempting to → towards is that perhaps the frustration of readability in the use of erratic punctuation is not itself to be discouraged, but rather has creative ramifications in our disruptions of the text, and therefore may allow us to expand the possibilities of what we say. Take for example this small intervention I have placed in the form of a directional arrow. While you may be able to understand that it most explicitly means point, the symbolic form it takes expands possibility for interpretation. Here, it points toward towards, but also towards the margin, toward the outside of the book. Symbols, glyphs, and punctuation always do more in *a behind* than one would expect. They are icons of extratextular meaning, operating in the margins of our meaning-making processes. And in particular I am interested in the / and its ability to craft a theoretical space in between words where the construction of intertwined realities of meaning become the expectation and allow us to recognize how that intertwining is itself much more common of a phenomena.

This returns us to the possibility of difference in its opacity addressed in earlier chapters, and with that I want to engage with the work of Édouard Glissant. In the chapter *For Opacity* found in his book *Poetics of Relation* he argues for this more opaque vision of difference. Not as something to be reduced and subsumed, to only accept the Other through our understanding of the Other, but a recognition that it is difference that allows for a more expansive (and not so western centric) worldview.

Accepting differences does, of course, upset the hierarchy of this scale. I understand your difference, or in other words, without creating a hierarchy, I relate it to my norm. I admit you to existence, within my system. I create you afresh.—But perhaps we need to bring an end to the very notion of a scale. Displace all reduction. Agree not merely to the right to difference but, carrying this further, agree also to the right to opacity that is not enclosure within an impenetrable autarchy but subsistence within an irreducible singularity.⁸

⁸ Glissant, Edouard. "For Opacity." In *Poetics of Relation*, translated by Betsy Wing, 189-94. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press. p 190

Glissant finds in opacity a poetic force for forms of relation that do not rely on epistemologies of scientific thought as the arbiters of understanding that would structure our difference in relation to norms. In other words, it rejects eugenic/genetic⁹ structuring of race, gender, sexuality, ability as deterministic of certain factual truths about a biological basis for difference. It's to (as he puts it) give up desires to see what's at the very bottom of natures. It is in opacity that we find a renewed realization of this relation. Like the / which crafts the possibility for discourse between words in an opaque space where multiplicitous meanings arise and are cultivated. This follows from his notion of *mondialité* or globality which in distinction to *mondialisation* or globalization allows "for a form of worldwide exchange that recognizes and preserves diversity and creolization."¹⁰ That is to say, we do not section off in order to preserve difference, but rather find in our methods ways by which we allow difference to proliferate and grow in a cultural exchange that does not see a dominant mode begin to structure all that it subsumes.

If we remember Moten's note about the pathological—which he acquires from Frantz Fanon—it is in that acknowledgment of the pathological that we can reorient our scientific view away from differential "morbid bodies" and towards what Fanon calls a morbid universe of which we attempt to perform a complete lysis (related to—as we will see—Donna Haraway's consideration of the denatured body) in our pathological demands against transparency. Or rather, as morbid body/morbid universe are both the "words" of Fanon just different translations, it is in the mean-

⁹ As Lennard J. Davis remarks in *Bending Over Backwards: Disability, Dismodernism & Other Difficult Positions* "We now openly repudiate eugenics, mainly because of the Nazis' use of 'negative eugenics,' that is, the direct elimination of 'defectives' from the human race. This seems so horrendous to us that the term is no longer used. But organizations in the United States and England have simply morphed their names into ones that use the term 'genetics,' preserving the Latin linguistic root in both eugenic and genetic. Now eugenics (or genetics) is carried out through two avenues—prenatal screening, which works some of the time, and genetic engineering, which has not worked on humans so far." P 20 Davis is concise in his remarks against the ways in which certain structures have continued to live on by different names. Although with that in mind we must still read Davis with a grain of salt in his analysis of the general problematics of a certain strain of identity politics in which his critique sees him creating a new hierarchical structure with disability as the looming over-structure of meaning as Alison Kafer remarks in her book *Feminist, Queer, Crip* following the critique put forward by Robert McRuer in his book *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*.

Davis, Lennard J. *Bending Over Backwards: Disability, Dismodernism, & Other Difficult Positions*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2002. 20

¹⁰ Obrist, Hans Ulrich, and Édouard Glissant. 100 Notes - 100 Thoughts / 100 Notizen - 100 Gedanken No038: Édouard Glissant & Hans Ulrich Obrist. Germany: Erscheinen Im Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2012. 4

ing created between differing translations that we shift our focus.¹¹ If we consider that for Fanon what was pathological in one instance was the determination of the subject to “speak good French” which in his formulation was a black pathology brought on by a white pathology, we can see certain psychosocial realities determined by linguistic/epistemological constructions. To again quote Moten, “Fanon’s concern with the pathological desire to speak good French, seen in its relation to the normal desire to be spoken to in good faith, understands the speaker’s being absolutely for the other to imply reciprocity within the shared possession of a language. Speech in bad faith moves in the wake of not listening, of neither acknowledging nor recognizing the speaker’s capacity to be for or with the one to whom he or she speaks.”¹² This double edged, pathological sword (or /) which dictates in what ways an opacity is possible or foreclosed. In an acknowledgement of certain forms of gender discovery which occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic in the absence of a proliferation of normative social situations—most clearly articulated outward on the social media app Tik Tok—there is a recognition of how the norm is crafted by explicitly delineating in the space of the social that which is deviant. A desire to speak good French becomes a desire to present gender properly.

Yet even still Tik Tok begins to show us ways in which desires for solidity in identification—certain cause and effect corollaries between identity and personality—always return when adequately challenged. One extreme example is the creation of Transtopia, a discord server and Tik Tok account, which wished to create a space in which trans people could come together and have a distinct online community. To watch the original video is a bit eerie. A series of trans people flash across the screen explaining what Transtopia is and who it includes. There was immediate backlash from the communities that were “inadvertently ignored”. Primarily this occurred along racial lines, with an inadequately racially diverse administration team, as well as in who was included in the video. Primarily the diversity that was reinforced in the original video advertising

¹¹ “In a paragraph that begins by asserting the necessity of psychoanalytic interpretation for revealing the black man’s affective disorders/anomalies we note this movement between consciousness and the unconscious, cut and augmented by commitment to the trajectory of self-consciousness, wherein ‘an individual must endeavor to assume the universalism inherent in the human condition’ (Fanon 2008: xiv). Edmund Husserl, G. W. F. Hegel, and Sigmund Freud are present—but in a kind of Sartrean light, or frame—beginning with that fateful, fatal interplay between the miraculously self-positing individual and the uncut givenness of the standard. But analysis is then cut by something, a natural process if not attitude: corrosion, compromise of the cell’s integrity. ‘*Nous travaillons à une lyse totale de cet univers morbide*’ (Fanon 1952: 8). ‘We are aiming for a complete lysis of this morbid universe’ (Fanon 2008: xiv). ‘I shall attempt a complete lysis of this morbid body’ (Fanon 1967: 10). The two translations, one in its literalness, the other in its avoidance of the literal in the interest of greater idiomatic precision, allow us to linger in and consider the relation between the universe and the body, between the transcendental aesthetic and the body that it makes possible and that makes it possible. It is as if both are, in their morbidity, to be submitted to a radical breakdown.” Moten, Fred. *Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)*. *South Atlantic Quarterly* 1 October 2013; 112 (4): 737–780. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-2345261>. 765-766

¹² *Ibid.* 759

Transtopia was one of points in one's transition or opinion on transition, as well as different categories of transness. The very basis by which these communities appear rely on an explicit idea of who is or is not trans, and the implicit biases that come with that. It is to create an inside and an outside, and to craft in some way a monolithic idea of what it is to be trans and therefore demarcate and solidify that category. Transness became an identity spectrum structured in relation to whiteness. While the intentions themselves were supposedly good, these forms of community building which try and cast their net across a wide swath of people is to (in an odd reversal) lose the trees for the forest. This larger scale situation is mimicked by the trends that individual users use to solidify and construct their identities in relation to others they see. Trends here explicitly meaning the tendency for content creation on the app to be a process of mimicry through trending audios and bits. What people articulate through these trends is how they feel about their own divergent identity categories so as to allow themselves to be an individual thereby further reinforcing new ideas about what solid identities we have to choose from, and as always happens, inadvertently dictating what gets eliminated.¹³ This implicit bias of what is and is not shown through Tik Tok as a space for community building inevitably showed up in Transtopia's attempts to create a "safe space" for trans people of all kinds. They are attempting a project which is doomed to fail. Inclusion necessitates exclusion. Categories of inclusion fail at the moment they have to articulate their limits, their borders. As Dean Spade remarks in relation to administrative regulatory programs that attempt to intervene on the population level,

One way to think about these population-level programs is that they are created as care-taking programs. They are invented to address perceived risks to the national population and to distribute resources across the population in ways that aim to address those risks. They are aimed at increasing health, security, and well-being—access to food, transportation, public safety, public health, and the like. Because they mobilize the idea of the population (sometimes "society" or "the nation" or "the people"), they are designed in ways that reflect and amplify contemporary understandings of who is "inside" and who is "outside" of the group whose protection and cultivation is being sought, which means they always include determinations of who deserves protection and who is a threat. Norms regarding race, gender, sexuality, national origin, ability, and indigeneity always condition and determine who falls on either side of that line.¹⁴

Transtopia failed because it did not take into consideration the ways in which their project mimicked the very structures it wished to act in opposition too. In creating an administrative model of community creation through pre-built online means, the norms and biases of the dominant cul-

¹³ And irony in these trends never fully mitigates the problem. In a recent trend started by Tik Tok user @joeycassanova he uses an audio with gunshot noises paired with an overlaid text that says, "If only you knew what I've been through." As the gunshots go off, different traumatic moments in his life appear in overlaid text on the screen. Without any credit to the original user, the general structure of the trend has been coopted by a wide swath of people across the app. The trend has instead become one which (intentionally or not) mocks the original video as more and more popular users contribute to the trend in a way that uses irony and humor to make jokes about what has "been traumatic for them." At best it ignores Cassanova's original video, at worst it mocks the general message of the original. He has acknowledged these videos and while many may say there is no intent to mock him, it is very clear the feelings that he has about seeing these videos all over the platform he turned to for some form of catharsis.

¹⁴ Spade, Dean. *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015. 139-140

ture were invariably going to appear as they did. When crafting alternatives to the subjection of a dominant socio-economic order it won't be so simple as crafting a space along the same transparently differentiating lines.

In her essay *The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies: Constitutions of Self in Immune System Discourse* Donna Haraway charts the understanding of the immune system as a discursive space of meaning making as it relates to our understanding of the self and other dichotomy. She writes at the beginning, "My thesis is that the immune system is an elaborate icon for principal systems of symbolic and material 'difference' in late capitalism. Preeminently a twentieth-century object, the immune system is a map drawn to guide recognition and misrecognition of self and other in the dialectics of Western biopolitics."¹⁵ And I follow Jorge Luis Borges to go so far as to say that this is a map which has exceeded its territory, even as Western biomedicine seeks to wrangle said immune system in a way which utopically strives towards domination of it, and as the consequences are themselves dystopic. For example, the over reliance of antibiotics, which results in bacteria that have become immune to the very means meant to eliminate them.¹⁶ This is a crisis of imagination, as well as a crisis exacerbated by border ideology. "When is a self enough of a self that its boundaries become central to entire institutionalized discourses in medicine, war, and business? Immunity and invulnerability are intersecting concepts, a matter of consequence in a nuclear culture unable to accommodate the experience of death and finitude within liberal discourse on the collective and personal individual. *Life is a window of vulnerability. It seems a mistake to close it.*"¹⁷ [emphasis mine] In the first footnote of her essay Haraway articulates the importance that immunological discourse and its artefacts have had. She discusses its relationship to medical, pharmaceutical, and other industrial practices through the example of monoclonal antibodies (fig. 10) and its myriad uses in food flavoring technology, the design and manufacture of industrial chemicals, and chemotherapy delivery systems to the point where various Federal departments saw immunology (among others) as one of the fields which would have the greatest return on investment.¹⁸ In terms of its effects internationally she writes, "Immunology will be at the heart of global biotechnological inequality and 'technology transfer' struggles. Its importance approaches that of information technologies in global science politics."¹⁹ And the importance of this insight cannot be overstated as conversations around Intellectual Property rights in regard to vaccine production continue to prevent the sharing of resources during our current pandemic, all the while other countries still don't have the means to vaccinate their populations, and India is seeing

¹⁵ Haraway, Donna. "The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies: Constitutions of Self in Immune System Discourse." Edited by Timothy Campbell and Adam Sitze. In *Biopolitics: A Reader*, 274-309. Duke University Press. 275

¹⁶ "Antibiotic Resistance." World Health Organization. July 31, 2020. Accessed May 09, 2021. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/antibiotic-resistance>.

¹⁷ Haraway, Donna. "The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies: Constitutions of Self in Immune System Discourse." Edited by Timothy Campbell and Adam Sitze. In *Biopolitics: A Reader*, 274-309. Duke University Press. 297

¹⁸ *Ibid* p 304

¹⁹ *Ibid* 305

an extreme spike in Covid cases leading to massive death in the midst of Governmental violence.²⁰ And perhaps the most apt effect Haraway illuminates of these immunological discourses is that they help to determine what diseases and interpretations “will prevail in courts, hospitals, international funding agencies, national policies, memories and treatments of war veterans and civilian populations, and so on.”²¹ The immune system becomes a master text which guides our understandings of the body as object-text reinforcing western myths of independence. All the while who is or is not deserving of aid continues to be legislated in a way determined by that master text. The pathologized of the pathologized.

What I mean here is that the immune system functions based on an ability to recognize the other (a biologically foreign invader) and build up its defenses against it. An absolute immune system cannot tolerate an outside, it cannot tolerate difference. A nation-state cannot accommodate that which does not assimilate or die within its borders. This opens the door for austerity policies and implicit eugenic ideologies. In understanding the hostility to difference, it’s almost easy to course correct towards perhaps an autoimmune system, but unfortunately that *is* our current state. It would be wrong to assume that in this structuring of the immune defense system that it ultimately does not attack itself when it attacks what is deemed as foreign. There is no opposition to the immune system within the autoimmune as an alternative structuring ideology, because what we are experiencing as we continue to see an uptick in autoimmune diseases is a concurrently self-destructive body politic ravaged by climate disasters, global pandemics, economic uncertainties, and vast class disparities and racialized and gendered hate crimes by the negligence of the “head of state”. Perhaps it’s to begin to think through Glissant’s opacity as constitutive of the immune system, which is itself replete with difference. That is the other side of immune system discourse Haraway writes about; its dialectical nature of ideological construction. Our bodies are not solely our own; 2001’s *Osmosis Jones* begins to elucidate that multiplicity, but it’s far greater than even it images. Called the human microbiota we are host to million of tiny living organisms, constituting upwards of 10,000 different species. While the dominant ideological immune system is perfect for

²⁰ India itself was a massive exporter of vaccines, however the uptick in cases has resulted in a shutdown of those exports due to the vaccine prices, a certain positive idea about COVID-19 realities, and poor infrastructural measures to administer the vaccine. Much of the reporting puts this blame on India’s population itself and the individual choices and reopening policies, without interrogating the effects that Western hegemonic practices have had on these outcomes, and ignoring ways in which India is simply an extreme as opposed to unique case. <https://www.ny-times.com/article/india-coronavirus-cases-deaths.html>

In the Guardian article, *‘We are witnessing a crime against humanity’: Arundhati Roy on India’s Covid Catastrophe* Roy outlines quite concisely the human toll of the Modi Government’s atrocities, pointing towards the hollowing out of public health, vaccine price-gouging, and the government’s focus on consolidating and staying in power through islamophobia, fear mongering, and total informational control, as opposed to stopping the spread of the virus. <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2021/apr/28/crime-against-humanity-arundhati-roy-india-covid-catastrophe>

²¹ Haraway, Donna. "The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies: Constitutions of Self in Immune System Discourse." Edited by Timothy Campbell and Adam Sitze. In *Biopolitics: A Reader*, 274-309. Duke University Press. 305

the reaffirmation of borders, the actual realities of our bodies are that we are in constant interface with the world around us. The greater problem is what Paula Treichler calls the “epidemics of signification” in relation to the AIDS crisis, and what Haraway refers to as the “lumpy discourses of immunology” which both figures and represses the problematically multiple postmodern selves. It is in an embrace of difference both in body and in text that we can begin to combat this aversion to difference. “Immunity can also be conceived in terms of shared specificities; of the semi-permeable self able to engage with others (human and non-human, inner and outer), but always with finite consequences; of situated possibilities and impossibilities of individuation and identification; and of partial fusions and dangers.”²²

It’s an inversion of the dominant mode. A reworking of our understanding of difference, and its operations. A new imaginative perspective. In 1988 Laurie Parsons had her first “full-gallery” exhibition at Lorence-Monk Gallery in which she showed 29 works which were fully contingent upon each other for their relational meaning. These works were titled *V*, *tree with wire*, *hanging things*, *suitcase*, *black log*, *bicycle seat*, *double poles*, *black carrier*, *bunch of dogwood*, *green cushion*, *twin things*, *black mat*, *tree stump*, *black + red top*, *rope*, *bench*, *white cloth*, *tar block*, *umbrella*, *preacher’s rock*, *branches*, *knotted string*, *bag*, *dirty log*, *stone*, *charcoal*, *broken container*, *yellow rope*, *pile of stones* (fig. 11-12). This listing comes from Maxwell Graham’s essay *It is hard to find the meaning of a work of art. It is hard to find the work of art*. He goes on to describe the works as such,

Every work of art was worn and weathered and worked. There is barely a trace of color beyond grays and browns and dulled blacks and bruised whites. *green cushion* is faded. *black and red top* is more rust than paint. Even the works presumed natural are all wrought. *pile of stones* contains glass and metal. *charcoal* contains metal and plastic. The dirt on *dirty log* is more dirty than dirt. *branches* are sawed off. *tree stump* is sawed off. *preachers rock* is concrete. *bunch of dogwood* is bound together with a string. *black log* is milled lumber. *tree with wire* is knotted with telephone wire and rooted in a plastic trash bin with the labels facing forward. Most of the other work are meant to hold to contain to cover and to carry. *hanging things* is a display rack holding a display rack holding a display rack holding a bundle of metal foil. *yellow rope*, *rope*, *knotted string* are actually all knotted and all been tied before. *suitcase*, *bag*, *broken container* are all soiled from their cargo. *black carrier* is a hand truck. *black and red top*, *twin things* are lids. *bench*, *green cushion*, *bicycle seat* have been sat on many times and *black mat* has been stood on many times. *V* is a special piece. *V* is the first work of art in the exhibition and is apart from the others. *V* is the only work that is capitalized. *V* is a used bedframe.

Not one of these objects had been meant for distanced beholding or viewing. Everything has been used. Their appearance in the exhibition as works of art is not the result of having been discarded but as having endured.

It was an interdependent art exhibition. Only one of the works hung on the wall, the others leaned against it or simply laid down. As Maxwell Graham describes, these works had to endure to be in this space of exhibition and we could think of this space as a necessary rest stop for these objects. It is as much this interdependence as the manifestation of difference that constructs the meaning within these works. Objects that depend on their context and relation to exist as they do. Semi-permeable dependent textual bodies in community with each other. In her essay Haraway goes on to discuss the work Terry Winograd and Fernando Flores did around computing and representation as it relates to her discussions of immunological discourses. Specifically the importance they place on the “interdependence between interpreter and interpreted”. Winograd

²² Ibid. 299

writes, “Interpretation, that is, arises as a necessary consequence of the structure of biological beings.” Haraway follows,

Winograd conceives the coupling of the inner and outer worlds of organisms and ecosystems, of organisms with each other, or of organic and technical structures in terms of metaphors of language, communication, and construction-but not in terms of a rationalist doctrine of mind and language or a disembodied instrumentalism. Linguistic acts involve shared acts of interpretation, and they are fundamentally tied to engaged location in a structured world. Context is a fundamental matter, not as surrounding 'information', but as co-structure or co-text. Cognition, engagement, and situation-dependence are linked concepts for Winograd, technically and philosophically. Language is not about description, but about commitment. The point applies to 'natural' language and to 'built' language.²³

Parsons exhibition then is a situation in which elements of context are shown as part and parcel with the textual bodies that interface in this sociopoetics of relation. Parson's objects operate in a space of intertextuality with the artist as reader, and then the exhibition goes as reader. Aesthetic values of the work impart a visual knowledge to the reader in a way that embodies these relations of time, use, entropy, engagement, etc. Maybe more accurately we could say Parsons crafts a textual space in which the spectator becomes witness.

Gregg Bordowitz starts his lecture-performance *Gimme Danger* (fig. 13) by evoking the AIDS activist practice of not just bearing but *giving* witness, where one person would say I am a person living with AIDS and then ask—with the caveat that one should not risk their safety or security—if there was anyone else there who is also living with HIV/AIDS. This is a bearing witness which finds similarities in the stigmatized. Stigmata being those holy wounds that appear to bear witness to one's holiness or in an earlier use by the Greeks marks which were inflicted to show a slave, criminal, or traitor's moral status. A solidarity in difference; a violent difference made material. *Gimme Danger* addresses this dual position of love and violence which are so intertwined in their realities. They are relational positions of healing and damage, and are not easily pulled apart. Stigma as ambivalent marker of difference manifesting in relation. The *liebstdt*, the German word for the love-death, points to beauty in the possibility of dying together. Bordowitz does not resolve this problematic duality as it manifested in punk and the AIDS activist movement; one pulling from those Romantic and Decadent histories, the other stigmatized for assumed decadence in “some aspects of a shared lifestyle” all the while witnessing the deaths of friends and lovers due to governmental neglect. It is the very “epidemics of signification”, that binary of self and other that is traversed through sex, violence manifesting in stigmatized sexually transmitted diseases and governmental neglect and suppression. The vector as traitor, as saboteur. The vector becoming the ostracized like the pharmakos of Athens society: tolerated until expelled from the body-politic becoming symbolically useful in order for the society to avoid famine, invasion, or plague. These pharmakos were either “slaves, cripples, or criminals” bearer's of society's stigmas. Those whose difference could be pointed to. In bearing witness one's position as a bearer of stigma no longer had to be bore alone.

Theoria was the name given in Ancient Greece to the action of those who bore witness to certain displays in order to spread that event. They were not just spectators, but active participants in the manifestation of meaning which came from an event. An other who could give you the outside

²³ Ibid. 286

perspective. Theory derives its meaning from this greek base of *theoria* which also means to contemplate (to bear witness, to operate as spectator, neither position being the immediate default of an act). That is to say theory is nothing if not the ability for people to be witness to each other and say yes. A bridge between self and other across linguistic gaps.

The ties that bind the immunological ideologies of self and other are vast and often inscrutable. Each generation produces its pharmakos; neoliberalism uses integration/assimilation as a form of compromise to avoid this fate. In the medical/epistemological theater that produces these plays of self and other, meaning is constructed in the possibilities of understanding and dissection of difference. When transparency is not freely given, it is forcibly created. Looking at Parson's objects we can only know that they have endured, we do not know how or why. We have to be ok with that. Desires for understanding operate in a simultaneous state of love and violence. Consensual relation becomes the name of the game; respect for opacity, obscurity, and multiplicity is what can allow us to find navigations of this border dominating individualized immunological state of self and other; a recognition that we are ourselves always microbially and communally immunological. The paradigmatic act for this communal immunology is that of kissing. You obscure their face with your's and they your's with their's, and you exchange non-reproductive bodily fluids. There is only one function and that is the manifestation of non-productive pleasure in the absolute opacity of the facial-ethical space of subjective recognition.

To return to the /, that space which cannot be grasped in any definitively perceptual way, but can be felt as something full. The slash's name comes from its visual connotation of cutting through, and in many ways that's what it does, it makes multiple, makes possible in it's cutting through.

Bruce Nauman's work *John Coltrane Piece* (fig. 14) consists of an aluminum slab that lies down and only stands a few inches tall. The bottom surface is polished to a mirror sheen, but its ability to function productively is completely removed in this opaque action of lying quite literally "face" down. This isn't an antisocial act as many have described it after having viewed Nauman's work; it simply asks you to try a little harder to imagine. Quite like talking to someone who for one reason or another is not good at making eye contact with you. For some, recognition and acknowledgment work a bit differently. Nauman's piece asks for something which is self-evident and clear to the artist who did the making, but is taken on faith by those around him. It shifts the mindset required to be a witness to a work of art and that which constitutes it. What happens when we can no longer rely on the visual to give us a full understanding of the things around us? What I mean is that we live in a culture that privileges sight as the primary sense with which we move through the world. Sight is that which builds the primary bases for what Adrian Piper calls the visual and cognitive pathology of racism. It is first and foremost sight which determines whether or not someone passes. Thinking with the *John Coltrane Piece* in mind, it makes sense then, at least to me, why we may fall to the minutiae as a space for reexamining our engagement with others. It's about trying to sift through the perceptual detritus, trying to find that one thing which gets us to the mirrored surface, that surface which we cannot see, but know is there, on faith in another. Those visual and cognitive dominations which structure in what ways we give witness fall away in favor of a different kind of knowing process. What I would argue is this is an opportunity to think against what could be considered a "neurotypical" space of engaging with a work of art. It's an alternative epistemological basis, a "neurodivergent" one. It is to consider the normative ways of thought writ large as themselves inadequate for the very formulations we must

make. Rethinking what the immunological mirror does for us as self and other at the same time. As witnesses and spectators to the textual bodies which are written and rewritten again and again in an interdependent dance against a solid basis of that which is “known” to be normal or clear.

Regarding identity, things have changed. There’s an acronym. LGBT. The B still doesn’t get much cred, though it’s recognized and not so shameful. Let’s not get into who suffers more among the alphabet. Let’s just say that at fifty-three years old, the awareness of being dirty and tainted, sexual and promiscuous all mixed with the confusion of sex and death stirs a cocktail that sometimes sends me into a rage. Sometimes it leaves me melancholy, and still, still somehow “it” sets me apart from the bodies closest, literally closest to me. The disease, my infection, even gets between different versions of myself—no longer avoiding mirrors, getting my haircut in a shop like everyone else ...

Gregg²⁴

²⁴ Bordowitz, Gregg. "Wake to Dread." Triple Canopy. April 1, 2019. Accessed May 09, 2021. [https:// www.canopycanopycanopy.com/contents/wake-to-dread](https://www.canopycanopycanopy.com/contents/wake-to-dread).

“*This Time is Out of Joint*”; *Crip/Queer Time*

Such being for can be spoken of in terms of contemporaneity—implying not only joint ownership of a language but also a shared spatiotemporal frame, transcendental aesthetic, body schema, or home—but might be better elaborated in terms of the differentiation of any given spatiotemporal frame, the shared and social construction of an immanent aesthetic, within the constantly shifting schemata of a fleshly historicity in which language moves to connect a vast, differential range of unmoored unowning. - Fred Moten, *Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)*

The pathological explicitly disrupts temporal valuation. To be frank in our explanation we could say that the standard norm is 9-5 work days and a general reproductive progression, while the pathological is anything which disrupts one’s ability to work within that structure. Among that which this book thinks through, we can find a distinct productive temporality which is out of joint. This phrase has two origins. There is out of joint in Barnaby Rich’s *Rich his farewell to military profession (1581)* where he writes, “It could bee no other then his owne manne, that has thrust his nose so farre out of ioynte.” meaning to react with offense to someone else’s success. And there is its use in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* where he writes, “The time is out of joint: O cursed spite / That ever I was born to set it right.” This version of the phrase appears 28 years after Rich’s and has a slightly different meaning. Shakespeare’s use places this idea of a physical bone out of joint in relation to a problematic time; time meets the body. And this isn’t isolated, *Rich his farewell* had influence on Shakespeare. *Of Apolonius and Silla’s* (the second story of the book) narrative gives inspiration to *Twelfth Night*.

Twelfth Night and *Of Apolonius and Silla’s* plots play around with gender and its marker’s visual fungibility as well as certain societal disjunctures that come from its concealment or reversal. And we can return to *Hamlet*, a play that contains within itself a play, marking parallels that come in the relationship between life and life on stage. All plays mentioned calling upon certain aspects of theatricality as a way to interrogate certain ingrained systems. The theatrical play as a way to think and think again about relationships in time. Relationships built on certain processual interpretations of that which is placed in front of us linearly.

The body is what time moves through. Time’s logical conclusion being death. And death is that reality which is relegated to the pathological margin, where easy death is the simplest solution to the problems which arise. Or rather the relegation of death to the margins allows it to be forgotten, made trivial; a statistical probability that must come. Names of the dead from COVID-19 placed upon the front page of the New York Times, collected by those who enjoy having historically pertinent newspapers, and then relegated to the realm of the essential where those “heroes” on the front line, nameless, risk their lives to help us win back our time from the pandemic, our normative, straight time; linear, productive time.

Think time queerly, like a timeline running underneath our timeline. Or those bits of time that exist just on the edges of time, loose and fragile, but that seem to go on for days when it’s just a moment. Linearity begins to dissipate, a proper lysis of this whole morbid body/universe, to use Frantz Fanon’s words. As the linearity dissipates we find comfort and understanding that should have come at 12 come at 27. It’s that disruption of linearity that comes in Felix Gonzales-Torres’ instructions to replenish the depleting bodies of candy. This Queer Time is lateness, it’s to operate not with *chronos*, but *kairos*. That is not time writ large, or time linearly, but momentarily. For

this is time non-normative, not in regard to production or reproduction, but repetition, becoming as necessarily unbecoming. Stable identity from birth to death does not live here, it cannot live here.

I appreciate that “*Untitled*” (*A Portrait*) 1991-1995 doesn’t tell me what it’s a portrait of. It’s a portrait of what it’s a portrait of, I’d say, if someone asked me about it. The order of it means that sometimes the broader cultural and political problems align with the personal exigencies they create, like *a bounced check* followed by *a rise in unemployment*, but more often there’s an uneven rhythm to those connections, *a white blood cell count* and then *silver ocean* and then *a distant war*. Like I grew up thinking I was singular, but the world kept revealing itself to me, until I understood that I was not.¹ (fig. 16)

Or to think in terms of Crip Time, and for this I think of Ellen Samuels *Six Ways of Looking at Crip Time*: crip time is time travel; crip time is grief time; crip time is broken time; crip time is sick time; crip time is writing time; crip time is vampire time.

One could argue that queer time *is* crip time, and that it has been all along. Queer time is often defined through reference to illness and disability, suggesting that it is illness and disability that render time “queer.” Not only might they cause time to slow, or to be experienced in quick bursts, they can lead to feelings of asynchrony or temporal dissonance; depression and mania are often experienced through time shifts, and people with various impairments move or think at a slower (or faster) pace than culturally expected. These shifts in timing and pace can of necessity and by design lead to departures from “straight” time, whether straight time means a firm delineation between past/present/future or an expectation of a linear development from dependent childhood to independent reproductive adulthood. Glimpses of these possibilities can be seen in recent queer theory. Elizabeth Freeman, for example, begins the “Queer Temporalities” issue of *GLQ* with a hint that illness and disability might be catalysts to thinking time differently, or *queerly*; riffing on Shakespeare’s “the time is out of joint,” she links this description of “skeletal dislocation” to a queer asynchrony, an experience of time in, on, and across the body. Imagining time as “out of joint” allows the possibility that time’s “heterogeneity can be felt in the bones,” that time “*is*” a body. Just as quickly as she names this dislocation or disability, however, she moves away from it, focusing only on queer temporalities “beyond somatic changes like puberty, aging, or illness.” What happens, though, if we do not move “beyond somatic changes” but think about queer/crip temporalities *through* such changes, through these kinds of skeletal dislocations, or illness, or disease?²

Time is what we make of it, and more often it is what others make of it for us. The pathologized time of our margins here is wasted time. It is neglected as poor use of time. We move back and forth in time, we feel that time, and disrupt the usual timing. Time is our way of relating to death, a body’s relationship to death disrupted is presumed to be a broken body. “It means that sometimes the body confines us like a coffin, the boundary between life and death blurred with no end in sight.”³ and “Rigidity means death... [We] constantly ha[ve] to shift out of habitual forma-

¹ Fleischmann, T. *Time Is the Thing a Body Moves through*. Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2019. 142-143

² Kafer, Alison. *Feminist, Queer, Crip*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013. 34

³ Samuels, Ellen. "Six Ways of Looking at Crip Time." *Disability Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (Summer, 2017). doi:10.18061/dsq.v37i3.5824.

tions.”⁴ Shifting between Crip Time and Queer Time means to recognize in this pathological time, a far more multiplicitous reconfiguration of time that simply cannot be recorded on the clock. It’s stolen time, fugitive time. It’s to think otherwise and otherwhen. In *Looking for M—: Queer Temporality, Black Political Possibility, and Poetry From the Future* Kara Keeling talks about the film *The Aggressives* and discusses Sakia Gunn who the film was dedicated to, a young black lesbian who was murdered in Newark, New Jersey in 2003 at 15 for asserting that her and her friends were lesbians and trying to stop a group of men from flirting with them.

At age fifteen, she was out of time. But we still look for her in order to look after her. Out of time, she has become a figure of our time, one we invoke as a way to make palpably present the objectionable distance between, for instance, the contemporary focus on gay marriage by national lesbian and gay political organizations and an innovative, radical politics that looks after and therefore looks out for the lives of queer youth of color. As a figure, Gunn has been used by José Esteban Muñoz, for instance, to point to the present complexity of “the sensuous intersectionalities that mark our experience.” For Muñoz, Gunn serves as an example of the modes of existence that misogynist, transgenderphobic, and homophobic violences today cut off at the root. By inciting academics and activists to “call on a utopian political imagination that will enable us to glimpse another time and place: a ‘not-yet’ where queer youths of color actually get to grow up,” Muñoz also prompts us to ask the spatiotemporal question I am formulating here—when might Sakia Gunn be?⁵

This is the most deathly serious concern of our pathological temporality. Whoever is seen as a threat to dominating discourse around who is or is not abiding by the normative timing is taken out of time. Who do we look back toward in order to orient who we look out for? In what ways do we miss when we overlook the pathological margin, that space which is besides the point, out of joint?

⁴ McCallum, E.L., and Mikko Tuhkanen. "Becoming Unbecoming: Untimely Mediations." In *Queer Times, Queer Becomings*, edited by E.L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen, 1-21. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2011. 10

⁵ Keeling, Kara K.. “Looking for M—: Queer Temporality, Black Political Possibility, and Poetry from the Future.” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 15 (2009): 565 - 582. 578-579

Beautiful Pathologies to Otherhow; a lysis of our morbid language

11 Now the whole earth had one language and one speech.
12 And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there.
13 Then they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar.
14 And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."
15 But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.
16 And the Lord said, "Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them.
17 Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech."
18 So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city.
19 Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth. - Genesis, 11:1-9

He's interested, finally, in how pathological white behavior breeds or fabricates a kind of pathological black behavior. Fanon is interested in acknowledging, isolating, studying, and eradicating what Frederick Douglass (2000: 115) calls our "plantation peculiarities." Moreover, while this process may be initiated by way of a psychological or psychoanalytic discourse predicated on the notion of the inferiority complex, a discourse that might also be discussed as a kind of misfire, in language that anticipates that of J. L. Austin—an infelicitous speech act, one that fails, ultimately, to achieve an intention—ultimately, Fanon appeals to a different metaphoric, a different language, the language of the biochemistry and alchemy of nothingness, a language of and on the experiment's double edge. What if we conceive of the sold, old-souled child who utters the new speech as having been submitted to the most brutal forms of violent investigation: placed on a kind of endless trial, given over to an interminable testing, the brutality of the biological market in which the self-possession of a body is interdicted by fleshly dispossession, marking that condition where to be grasped/held/owned is also to be studied? But what if we simultaneously conceive of the child as a scientist, one engaged in experiments, and in a metaexperimental undertaking of and in research predicated on the embrace of precisely that dispossessive fleshliness that corresponds to the fullest possible understanding of what Fanon refers to as "absolutely nothing"—a nothingness without reserve, independent of the desire to show up in and for the conventional optics wherein somebody is delineated and identified? - Fred Moten, *Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)*

It was with the second fall, the fall of a tower, that G*d imposed linguistic differentiation, and it was the good news that came with the crucifixion of his only son that G*d then gave the gift of tongues. This was not a return of the universal, adamic language of old, but an act that bridged differentiation absent pure translation. In Christianity it is a dialectic faith that crafts new meaning through the reading of the old and new. It recasts the differentiation seen as punishment for the hubris of Babel as now a divine gift to assist in the rectification of hubristic dominance attempted by this one people. It is a paradoxical double edge. It is difference standing against the master race, the dominant language. The acknowledgement of difference as the greater force against the hubris of flying too close to the sun. And do we not see the evidence of this totalizing and colonial hubris in the politics of accumulation which drives our contemporary climate crisis

which leads to natural disasters¹, an increase in the possibility of infectious disease² and global pandemics³, and the disproportionate death of those whose difference is seen as death sentence⁴?

In his lifetime, Pieter Bruegel the Elder made three paintings of the Tower of Babel, one in 1563 (referred to as *The Tower of Babel, Vienna*) (fig. 17), one undated but made sometime between 1564-1568 (referred to as *The Tower of Babel, Rotterdam*) (fig. 18), both on wood panel, and then one now lost painted on Ivory.⁵ He was not alone, as the story of the Tower was a popular one for painters in the 16th century, especially in what is commonly referred to as the Low Lands (or Low Countries) which contemporarily include Belgium, The Netherlands, and Luxembourg. Often depicted before the fall of the Tower, these depictions were often positivist and aligned with a Renaissance humanism, an ideology Bruegel considered in his work, but not (according to some scholars) without a critical eye. As Edward Snow articulates in *The Language of Contradiction in Bruegel's "The Tower of Babel"* in the 1983 issue of *Anthropology and Aesthetics*, these paintings embodied certain paradoxical notions of the narrative's redeployment and its linguistic implications. He begins his article with a quote from Mikhail Bakhtin the Russian philosopher, literary critic, and scholar whose theories of linguistics emphasized the dialogic aspect of life, or in other words for our purposes the inclusion of difference as a necessary part of social life, "The new consciousness [of the Renaissance] was born not in a perfected and fixed linguistic system but at the intersection of many languages and at the point of their most intense interorientation and struggle." Snow locates this contradiction within the form and content embedded in Bruegel's paintings, both the image depicted and the paint itself. Most immediately in the Vienna version he points towards the simultaneous cultural imposition of the structure on the landscape and its embedment within the rocky natural formations which both house the structure and supply it with material. "We are thus encouraged by the painting to perceive the cultural project both as something incongruously imposed on nature and as something growing out of it in response to man's adaptive influence (though even as 'growth' it can suggest monstrous excrescence as well as natural process)."⁶ In Bruegel's contradiction is baked the textual and the physiological; the painting is at once inflected by the traditional narratives of the Tower and in its detailed depiction and use of paint (there are moments where patches of paint absent of verisimilitude appear) engages our more visceral and somatic engagements with elements of decay and natural reclamation. This Babel—whether it be the original, or a post-fall reconstruction—sits within an ambivalence of the contemporaneous cultural and linguistic project of humanism.

¹ PDF fact sheet can be found here: <https://www.nwf.org/-/media/Documents/PDFs/Environmental-Threats/Climate-Change-Natural-Disasters-fact-sheet.ashx>

² Lustgarten, Abrahm. "How Climate Change Is Contributing to Skyrocketing Rates of Infectious Disease." ProPublica. May 7, 2020. Accessed May 09, 2021. <https://www.propublica.org/article/climate-infectious-diseases>.

³ Thiele, Rebecca. "How Climate Change Increases Our Risk For Pandemics." WFYI Public Media. March 24, 2020. Accessed May 09, 2021. <https://www.wfyi.org/news/articles/how-climate-change-increases-our-risk-for-pandemics>.

⁴ The UN paper can be found here: https://www.un.org/esa/desa/papers/2017/wp152_2017.pdf

⁵ Mansbach, S. A. "Pieter Bruegel's Towers of Babel." *Zeitschrift Für Kunstgeschichte* 45, no. 1 (1982): 43-56. Accessed May 9, 2021. doi:10.2307/1482126.

⁶ Snow, Edward. "The Language of Contradiction in Bruegel's "Tower of Babel"." *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 5 (1983): 40-48. Accessed May 9, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.artic.edu/stable/20166687>. 42

Interestingly (as S. A. Mansbach draws us to in his essay *Pieter Brueghel's Towers of Babel* from 1982) years after the completion of these paintings (but worked on at around the same time as the second) Christophe Plantin published his *Polyglot Bible* (our gift of tongues to Bruegel's Tower). Working with some of the foremost theological minds and printing at the highest quality possible, Plantin crafted a Bible which would reproduce the sacred texts in their original languages with contemporary commentary and edits. Comprising eight volumes, and having parallel texts comprising Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac, Greek, and Latin, this text was an attempt to get as close as possible to the Divine Word.⁷ In Mansbach's words, for both Bruegel and Plantin this work was an attempt to "[return] to the atavistic sources of sacral language" in order to somehow reach a "harmonious and religious world" in the future.⁸ For all of those working in the humanist tradition of the time, the Tower of Babel was less a cautionary tale than an elucidation of the possibility of a universal good for the world.

Here through Snow and Mansbach we reach two different conclusions about the place of Babel in our current project. Snow articulates the necessity of recognizing Bruegel's critical eye towards the general use of the Tower as a guide towards a positivist project while Mansbach notes that the Humanist ideals of the 16th were conditionally fulfilled in 17th century Christian architecture which pulled from the Tower for its form. This realization of the ideals, as Mansbach notes, comes in the form of a reversal of the negative image of the Tower towards a positive one. Yet, for Snow, Bruegel's painting (at least the Vienna one) becomes a critical lens through which to understand the contradictions embedded in the form, specifically how in the first Vienna painting the very structure itself contained within its clear human touch is doomed to fail because of it. The leaning which is created by these intuitive workers—contrasted with the structural erectness of the Rotterdam painting—is precisely what Snow articulates as "humanly affirmative about it."⁹ And I would argue in Plantin's *Polyglot Bible* it is the very inclusion of so many languages and scholars that his project towards reaching the Divine Word is doomed to fail so successfully. Mansbach points out that one of the contemporary criticisms leveled against the Bible by Dr. Benito Arias Montano was that it was heretical precisely because it necessitated the consulting of original texts which would have put those who worked on it in alliance and friendship with "Jewish rabbis and Protestant heretics".¹⁰ The difference the project necessitated could not be tolerated by the theological ideas of the dominant state of Spain.

In a footnote, Snow challenges Mansbach's assertion of the "success" of the tower in Bruegel's paintings as an imagining of an ideal Utopian state as a counter-intuitive attempt at a positivism of the Tower itself. It is with that in mind I want to follow Snow's notion of what could be under-

⁷ Mansbach, S. A. "Pieter Bruegel's Towers of Babel." *Zeitschrift Für Kunstgeschichte* 45, no. 1 (1982): 43-56. Accessed May 9, 2021. doi:10.2307/1482126. 53

⁸ Ibid. 53

⁹ Snow, Edward. "The Language of Contradiction in Bruegel's "Tower of Babel"." *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 5 (1983): 40-48. Accessed May 9, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.artic.edu/stable/20166687>. 48

¹⁰ Mansbach, S. A. "Pieter Bruegel's Towers of Babel." *Zeitschrift Für Kunstgeschichte* 45, no. 1 (1982): 43-56. Accessed May 9, 2021. doi:10.2307/1482126. 53

stood as Bruegel's criticality of a dominant "author" which would have been championed by Renaissance humanism.

We have noted in passing Bruegel's complicity, as *artifex*, in the project he depicts in the Vienna *Tower of Babel*. There is, in fact, a sense in which the painting is "about" the act of creation as well as the project of civilization and the enculturated self; indeed, we are invited to view the tower as a site where these three themes necessarily converge. And at this self-reflexive level there is also the impression of something like a statement of value emerging from contradictory perspectives on the same phenomenon. At the lower left Bruegel has depicted a visit to the construction site by Nimrod, "author" of the project in the sense officially esteemed by Renaissance humanism (fig. 9). He embodies the sovereign will and intention behind the project: the tower is his inspiration, it is his power that the tower will express and his fame that it will bear witness to and enhance. Yet Bruegel portrays him derisively: stupidly vain and surrounded by sycophants, he is a temporary nuisance to whom the workers must pay homage until he passes and they can return to their tasks. (The four men lifting the marble slab haven't even waited for the rest of his retinue to go by.) On the other hand, the anonymous workers who swarm over the unfinished tower, functionally absorbed in the process of constructing it, elicit a comparably sympathetic response. In contrast to the isolated consciousness that oversees the project, they are integrated in a fabulously complex network of functions, activities, and devisings from which it would seem impossible (and superfluous) to extrapolate a transcendental author, subject, or intention (fig. 10). And though this network serves a compulsion to rise, what it implies is an instinct to take root. An entire life has grown up along the exterior ramp—its spiral form is an especially satisfying compromise between "vertical" energy and "horizontal" ongoingness—and though its ostensible purpose is to support the construction of the tower, the tower itself seems to have become primarily a support for this secondary world. One particularly captivating area of the ramp includes two window gardens flourishing with greenery, and underneath one of them a couple entering a doorway hand in hand (fig. 11)—a detail whose obvious tenderness is difficult to reconcile with any single-mindedly ironic interpretation of the painting.¹¹

In two footnotes Snow makes during the course of this quoted paragraph he remarks upon the curvilinear spiral as an invention and desire of Bruegel's found throughout his oeuvre which Snow attributes to a mythopoeic drive at the heart of his vision as well as a distinction between the tenderness apparent in the Vienna painting juxtaposed with an "(almost certainly Catholic)", rigid religious ritual taking place in the Rotterdam painting. As opposed to subordinating the work of Bruegel to the dominant socioeconomic order imposed by Spain or the liberal Humanist ideals shared by his compatriots (and by Bruegel himself), Snow prefers to find in these paintings contradictory possibility. If at this moment we wish to find through the work of Snow a through line back to the interests of this book, we can elucidate certain marginal and normative aspects of that which takes place in the Vienna Tower. Snow articulates this dialectic as an impossibility of deciding which ideology of the Tower is host and which is parasite. This double pathology of making home and ascending towards G*d embedded within Bruegel's depiction can perhaps return us to our complex problems of linguistic differentiation. For in this post-fall Babel where if at the very least the articulations of the participants desires is economically distinct, differentiation—the very result of that original hubris—is subordinated to the hubris. For the 16th century humanism this linguistic differentiation was not a divine irony (punishment as gift), but was rather a punishment meant to be overcome, even as the very realities of their moment were, as Bakhtin noted, a reality of interoriented languages.

Life, here a decidedly social life—articulated as Snow points out by a single raft approaching the pier in the painting containing only a man steering and a worker relaxing in front of a house on

¹¹ Snow, Edward. "The Language of Contradiction in Bruegel's "Tower of Babel"." *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 5 (1983): 40-48. Accessed May 9, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.artic.edu/stable/20166687>. 46-47

the raft—operates on the margins of the image. All of the complexities of this social life as they are depicted are nuanced and opaque (we do not get an absolute view of the whole of the lives being lived as we do of Nimrod and his posse) and constituted by these peoples relation to each other. Hand in hand. If there is perhaps any utopic sense of the image it is that among the people here on the margins there is interdependence and cohabitation. Life here is pathological in the sense that it does not desire the great heights of the tower, but simply to inhabit closer to the earth.

Here it is precisely difference which is unceremoniously propped up as *the life* which occurs in the margins of this towering monument to a culture of domination.

Approximately 400 years later in a café in Paris the fledgling curator Hans Ulrich Obrist is having a conversation with the artists Christian Boltanski and Bertrand Lavier. It is late morning in the springtime, and the conversation is circling around their shared interests in instruction based art, what they all saw as (analogously perhaps to Snow's belief about Bruegel's Tower) challenging notions of authorship, creativity, and the possibility for difference within the creation of artworks. This kind of work had the museums, art handlers, and viewers complete it. Life was imbued in the engagement with artworks, not allowing the engagement to simply stop at a silent contemplation. This is the art of the workers of the Tower, not of Nimrod. But perhaps I shouldn't be so quick to draw such a through line between this curatorial idea of Obrist and the paintings of Bruegel. Where Bruegel's paintings either recalled or imagined a grand cultural project on the scale of humanity, Obrist's project—thought up in communion with these artists—would go on to a truly global scale, seeing his cultural project not as a renewed Tower of Babel, uniting through the grace of the “author”, but rather much more like the gift of tongues in Acts. Following the work of Glissant, Obrist wished to create an exhibition which encouraged local difference. An exhibition of globality (*mondialité*) not globalization (*mondialisation*).

The first exhibition following this idea was executed in 1994, and it would be called *do it* (following the name given to it by Boltanski and Lavier). Obrist here is the facilitator, the artists the instructors, and ultimately the audience and the museums were the artists, the workers, crafting what amount to events of artistic occurrence. This is an exhibition that can travel indefinitely, shifting as it goes, learning from its local context, as opposed to impinging upon that context with a master narrative. This linguistic exhibition pulled from the histories of instruction based artworks of the 20th century such as *Grapefruit* by Yoko Ono, Marcel Duchamp's instruction piece sent from Argentina to his sister in Paris as his wedding gift titled the *Unhappy Readymade* in which her and her new husband would leave a geometry text on the balcony to be blown by wind and “choose its own problems”, Seth Siegelaub's xeroxed book exhibition *January Show*, and the list goes on. Where this exhibition crafts a new rule is in it consisting entirely of these instructions, and shifting every time, never allowing the creation of original artworks, documenting the events for the artists, but never allowing them to enact the artworks in the exhibition. Any physical embodiments of the instructions sent to museums which could be privileged as art objects were always destroyed, and where the exhibition travels to they must commission and add to the archive of instruction works so that the local always intercedes upon the global reach of the exhibition format. It is this globalized network where difference arrives. As Obrist puts it in a conversation nearly 20 years on discussing the book collection of the *do it* exhibitions,

The book is a history, a story of all these different learning experiences, because wherever the exhibition went, it learned. I think it's a very arrogant thing for an exhibition to go out into the world and claim to know, to impose its knowledge to the world; it's important to learn from different contexts. And that's where, in this conversation with Lavier and Boltanski, early on, we were inspired by Edouard Glissant, the French philosopher, poet, critic, and writer, who said in globalization, it's important to not, somehow, enhance globalization as a homogenized force, but what he calls "Mondialité", and "Mondialité" for Glissant, in English you call it "Globality". "Mondialité" is a difference enhancing global dialogue.¹²

This engagement with difference is for Obrist the crux of the exhibition as it exists. No two enactments of the instructions are ever exactly the same. For him this was self-evident, but *do it* made it an integral part of the larger structure of meaning-making, of the communicative aspects of the show. In his chapter on this exhibition in his book *Ways Of Curating*, Obrist remarks at the end of the chapter about the work of J.L. Austin whose work pioneered the idea of "performative speech acts" wherein language is not simply a passive descriptor of the world, but an active participant in its shaping. *do it* as a space for instructional experimentation epitomizes this zone of words enacting action, and we also see Austin's idea at work in the theories of performativity put forward by Judith Butler, and earlier than that, taken to their (il)logical conclusion by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari who assert that all language consists of speech acts, what they refer to as order-words,

For even at the moment when the two planes are most distinct, as the regime of bodies and the regime of signs in an assemblage, they are still in reciprocal presupposition. The incorporeal transformation is the expressed of order-words, but also the attribute of bodies... It is by virtue of this type of relations that linguistic and nonlinguistic elements are inseparable from the start, despite their absence of correspondence. The elements of content give the interminglings of bodies clear contours at the same time as the elements of expression give the non corporeal expresses a power of sentencing or judgement.¹³

This is language and bodies as an inextricable dialectic, in which what is understood and derived is always *at odds* through a smoothing out of difference. This *at odds* is what Obrist is calling attention to in this alternative exhibition model. Or as he puts it, borrowing from the work of anthropologist James Clifford, *zones of contact*, which in Clifford's original formulation was a way by which museums would work with the actual people they were representing through their collections, having them take the lead by proposing the alternative forms of exhibition making. Within all of these mobilizations of Austin's theories and what we glean from Obrist's exhibition practice, is again this notion of the textual body, or this relationship between the textual and the physiological. Discourses shaping life. Obrist asserts in an interview quoting the artist Leon Golub, "Yes, I think art, as Leon Golub said, is a gateway to possibilities, and so clearly it has a huge transformative potential. It can transform us. It can lead to transcendence."¹⁴ Although I do take issue with this idea of it leading to transcendence. I'm much more invested in a certain kind of

¹² Cashdan, Marina, and Hans Ulrich Obrist. "'do It' with Hans Ulrich Obrist: The World's Busiest Curator Talks About the Latest Iteration of His 20-Year Project." *Artsy*. July 03, 2013. Accessed May 09, 2021. [https:// www.artsy.net/article/editorial-do-it-with-hans-ulrich-obrist-the](https://www.artsy.net/article/editorial-do-it-with-hans-ulrich-obrist-the).

¹³ Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987. 108

¹⁴ Burns, Charlotte, and Hans Ulrich Obrist. "Transcript: Art Can Change the World, with Hans Ulrich Obrist – Art Agency, Partners." *Art Agency, Partners*. August 03, 2017. Accessed May 09, 2021. [https:// www.artagencypartners.com/episode-13-how-art-can-change-the-world/](https://www.artagencypartners.com/episode-13-how-art-can-change-the-world/).

bodily immanence in which art engages us. For example, Joseph Grigely's contribution to *do it (home)*, *Instruction (2002)* "Watch TV without sound for an hour". What itself is read as a passive action, requires heightened levels of sensual labor, pushing us past a passive experience of the sense and towards a recognition of its active reality. We are further engaged and rooted in our bodies as sensuous meaning making apparatuses.

Impositions on the textual body as a dialectical intermingling is perhaps nowhere clearer than in legal and administrative systems. This is the negative plane of what we've been calling the pathological margins. While throughout this book I have attempted to elucidate the ways in which these margins constitute alternative ways of viewing the world, it cannot be understated the ways in which this difference is legislated. Where the legal discourses material effects become clear in the ways that difference is not, and cannot, be accommodated within our current structures.

In her essay *Supreme Injustice: Disability and the Judiciary* Marta Russel writes about some of the legal decisions made by the Supreme Court in the early 2000s which helped to weaken the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) and its protections of disabled workers: *Barnes v. Gorman*, the Sutton trilogy (*Sutton v. United Airlines*, *Murphy v. United Parcel Service*, and *Albertsons, Inc. v. Kirkingburg*), *Toyota Manufacturing, Kentucky, Inc. v. Williams*, and *Chevron USA, inc. v. Echazabal*. She writes, "Instead of competent government regulation we have civil litigation."¹⁵ As opposed to enforcing laws, the ADA set up a process for this litigation that hinged specifically on what we define as "disability" and "reasonable accommodations". The meaning of the word reasonable was of special importance here as what is considered reasonable shifts depending on who is defining it. This allowed employers to participate in what could be called "rational" discrimination based upon what they considered reasonable.¹⁶

She starts the chapter by discussing the *Gorman* case. Jeffrey Gorman who is a paraplegic was injured when arrested by the Kansas City Police who, in lieu of an ADA compliant vehicle, opted to remove him from his chair and tie him with his own belt to the side of the police vehicle. In defense of these actions, Kansas City lawyers used an argument that because he was mobile through the use of a chair he was not technically disabled under ADA, itself not an uncommon or isolated incident in ADA cases. And it was ultimately decided that Gorman could not pursue

¹⁵ Russell, Marta. *Capitalism and Disability*. Edited by Keith Rosenthal. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2019. 74

¹⁶ As Grigely writes in a footnote of his essay *Beautiful Progress to Nowhere*, "Part of the problem – and this is often forgotten by legislators, lawyers and disabled people themselves – is that ADA is not a civil rights statute, but an 'accommodations' statute. Unlike the Civil Rights Act of 1964, ADA requires that disabled people need to be accommodated only when the accommodation is deemed 'reasonable'. Justice Rehnquist stated in the case of *Alabama v. Garrett* in 2001 that, in passing ADA, Congress had not proven that states regularly and repeatedly engaged in 'irrational' employment discrimination against the disabled. Justice Rehnquist explained that: 'It would be entirely rational (and therefore constitutional) for a state employer to conserve scarce financial resources by hiring employees who are able to use existing facilities.' The problem here is that the term 'rational discrimination' euphemizes discrimination by implying that, although discrimination may be bad, it is not so bad as to be unjustifiable. No other American group is subject to such a contingency clause, where one's equality is based on arbitrary fiscal factors, as Rehnquist further stated in his dissenting opinion in *Tennessee v. Lane* in 2004." I would also recommend looking at the work of Stephen Lapthisophon, specifically his show at Gallery 400 at the University of Illinois, Chicago from 2002 titled *With Reasonable Accommodation*.

punitive damages under the ADA in private cases such as these, with Justice Scalia arguing that it “could well be disastrous” if allowed to occur, citing that the ADA when passed didn’t specify punitive damages explicitly. This follows with what occurred in the Sutton trilogy in which it was “ruled impairments aren’t disabilities if they can be mitigated by lifestyle, by devices, or by medications.”¹⁷ And again in the *Williams* case it was asserted that Ella Williams’ carpal tunnel syndrome did not count as a disability (even though she was unable to do her job because of it), as she could still do other life tasks such as brush her teeth, or bathe. As if the completion of one’s job could not count as a major life task under the ADA. And then in *Echazabal* it was ruled on the side of the employers that businesses could decide to remove someone from a position if they constituted a “threat to self” by not stepping away from what the business determines as a dangerous position due to their analysis of someone’s underlying health conditions. As opposed to allowing the employee to determine what was or was not a safe environment for themselves in conjunction with their healthcare provider, the employer could now make that decision if illness or disease was something they were aware of. And in this case specifically there was no absolute proof that what the employer said was true about the conditions having adverse health effects on this worker.

While many positives have been gained from the ADA, through its defanging over the years by these—what Russell calls—corporatist decisions by the Supreme Court those who most need the law to work for them are disqualified from accessing it. These cases draw our attention to disabilities status not as a stable identity, but what Grigely refers to as a legal ontology in his essay *Beautiful Progress to Nowhere*. And as his legal case-cum-artwork *United States of America v. GPH Management*—a 15 year process in which he filed an ADA complaint with the Department of Justice and the New York Human Rights commission after two instances 10 or so years apart in which there were no TDD’s (telecommunication device for the deaf) provided by a hotel he was staying in—highlights, the actual processes for the use of ADA as a tool to create more accessible spaces are lengthy and draining. Eventually, the Hotel was forced to do something about it. A consent decree was signed allowing them to deny liability but still having to follow through on the renovations, which they said were going to happen anyway because it was an old hotel. The first ADA inspection had found about 50 or so violations beside the one Grigely originally called attention to, yet when the renovations were done there were ~20-30 new ones, which then had to be rectified.¹⁸ Justice is not a linear path, and as a guiding principle it requires a reorientation of possibility away from strictly linear ideas of progress as that which can constitute it.

With this artistic legal case as an example of the work Grigely does it should be no surprise that when asked who his favorite artist is he answers Thurgood Marshal, citing as why the fact of “how he did seemingly impossible things, like trying to get people in *Brown v. Board of Education* to see a fundamental human issue in a very different way. In a certain sense, that’s what a lot of us try to do as artists—get people to see and imagine the world in a fundamentally different

¹⁷ Russell, Marta. *Capitalism and Disability*. Edited by Keith Rosenthal. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2019. 77

¹⁸ Much of this information about the work of art and the legal case comes from talks of Grigely’s and anecdotal conversations in my time as his friend and student.

way.”¹⁹ To cite Marshall is to recognize the ways in which radical legal shifts have a similar relationship to artistic projects, in that its not about doing what has been done, but radically reorienting the views of those around you who are at the moment incapable of seeing any other way. As it stands currently legal discourse has fallen away from this creative possibility, and has instead become a process by which justice is deferred, and only later does it come in a way that does nothing for who comes after. Take for example the case against Derek Chauvin for the extrajudicial murder of George Floyd. Chauvin was indeed found guilty on all counts, but in a study done from 2005-2019 only 35 officers had been convicted of murder or manslaughter and only 104 were arrested for those charges. However, in that same timeframe of ’05-’19 there were 13,000 deadly police shootings. Without even bringing in the problematizing and disconcerting ways in which the trial itself serves only to reify the supposed solutions of a carceral state, there are still problems with the ways the law as it is written holds police officers accountable for breaking the law in the first place. And as opposed to using the Chauvin case as a first step to properly interrogate the problematics of a system which disproportionately effects black, indigenous, and people of color²⁰ (especially those with disabilities who constitute half of those killed by the police²¹) the case itself hinged upon whether or not Chauvin’s improper use of a chokehold was what killed Floyd. The defense created a sense of Floyd as a failing and pathologized body who’s enlarged heart—as well as the presence of fentanyl and methamphetamine in his system—was at fault for his death. And again the word “reasonable” comes up, in regard to police officers testimony about whether or not Chauvin’s excessive restraining force would be considered reasonable by their standards. The defense made a point of consulting the retired forensic pathologist Dr. David Fowler who argued that due to the number of factors at play (including what I have already mentioned, plus car exhaust from the patrol car, and the restraint and neck compression by the officer) that really Floyd’s death should have been labeled as undetermined. This flagrancy about Floyd’s life due to these underlying health conditions and supposed ideas about drug use on the part of the defense’s argument feels like arguing that his “death was pulled from the future” as many argued about the deaths of those from COVID-19 and “whether the pandemic had simply taken the lives of people who were already in ill health.”²² This justification of death due to pathologized notions of the other are quite evident in this case, but add on the racial motivations of this extrajudicial killing and the impetus being a fake 20 dollar bill, and the ways in which people are construed as disposable takes on a complexly horrifying light.

This disposability is made manifest in certain administrative and paternalistic realms as well. Beatrice Adler-Bolton writes succinctly about this in her guest substack post for the writer Libby Watson’s newsletter *Sick Note*, discussing her experience navigating SSDI with an orphan disease in a system that is already designed to weed people out and determine who is or is not deserving of care. Epitomized most clearly in her story of going in person to the Social Security Adminis-

¹⁹ Obrist, Hans Ulrich, and Alison Cuddy. Creative Chicago. An Interview Marathon. Chicago: Terra Foundation for the Arts, 2019. 54

²⁰ This was instead done on the streets and by many outside of the legal discourses, with many risking their wellbeing to make their grievances known.

²¹ “NAMI Illinois.” NAMI Illinois. May 02, 2021. Accessed May 09, 2021. <https://namiillinois.org/half-people-killedpolice-disability-report/>.

²² This article can be found here: <https://healthandcapital.substack.com/p/pulling-deaths-from-the-future>

tration offices to see if she was eligible for expediting her application, and when she was told it wasn't possible, the agent said to "Call me back if you get the Big C". And as Adler-Bolton notes, this was not some callous and backhanded remark, but "quite kind and sympathetic advice about what to do if my condition suddenly worsened."²³ The agent wasn't herself designating who was deserving, but rather elucidating the realities of a system that is built around a hierarchy of deserving illness and disease. And this is not an isolated incident, as the other articles Watson writes for *Sick Note* point out. Such as: a man with Type 1 Diabetes who often has trouble accessing and paying for his life-saving insulin²⁴, an emergency room nurse who's newborn baby got a random infection which lead to Toxic Shock Syndrome which lead to a hospital staying and ultimately ended in a \$6500 dollar bill due to the hospital being out of network even for a healthcare professional²⁵, and a woman who had black mold and rat infestations in her DC public housing—a known and rampant health issue—which triggered her asthma and allergies creating debilitating health issues.²⁶

The list of these legal and administrative burdens and violences could continue on and on. And by listing off these stories, failures, and injustices I do run the risk of simply checking off shocking incidents which lose their connection to the human tolls they take. I find in these moments the limits of my language, although I do find it necessary that these do exist within the piece to anchor it, as these are issues I think of daily, not just in the act of writing. I state this so as to not let pass these constantly nagging thoughts which pierce through the act of writing. To speak of many problems at once in the same breath as artworks, historical and contemporary, while elucidating the interdependence of these cultural realities does contain the possibility of a flattening out, a simplification. Anger and grief and pain cannot always come through adequately. But I still hold a certain kind of hope that in writing there is a model for being-for-others which necessitates sometimes being a witness to these traumas, especially as they make very real the concerns at the heart of a theoretical project like this one. When I speak of the pathological margins it is not simply a space of ideological fantasy and utopic hope. It is a real place where people are made to inhabit due to racial capitalism which still harbors eugenic ideas about what difference can and cannot be tolerated in a world structured by cost-benefit analysis. This kind of analysis does consider alternatives, but it does so in a way that puts the bottom line and economic possibility above the lives it legislates, administrates, and ignores. I want to here include the final paragraph of Dean Spade's chapter *Administrating Gender* of their book *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of the Law*,

We must return for reflection frequently and look out for the common traps—building and legitimizing systems of control, dividing constituencies along the lines of access to legal rights, and advancing only symbolic change. We must not only refuse reforms that require dividing and leaving behind more vulnerable trans populations, but also try to assume that the most easily digestible invitations to be included are the very ones that bring us into greater collusion with systemic control and violence. It is not surprising that the first federal legislation formally to address harm against trans people was the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Act—a hate crime bill that would bring enormous resources to the criminal punishment system and do

²³ This article can be found here: <https://www.sicknote.co/p/guest-post-fighting-for-disability>

²⁴ This article can be found here: <https://www.sicknote.co/p/the-diabetic-who-ignores-his-debt>

²⁵ This article can be found here: <https://www.sicknote.co/p/a-babys-6500-infection>

²⁶ This article can be found here: <https://www.sicknote.co/p/mice-and-mold-in-dc-public-housing>

little or nothing to prevent trans death. To the extent that the mobilization of trans people and our allies begins to expose the crises of coercive and violent gender systems, those systems will respond, at least in part, with solicitation to join their projects and expand themselves in our names—and then tell us we have won victories, that enough has been done. In the face of that trend, we must think deeply and critically about how law reforms can be part of dismantling violent regimes of administering life and death and forgo them when they cannot.²⁷

To end this chapter I want to return to Moten's essay *Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)*, specifically its section *Lysis and Le Petit Nègre*. As I have noted elsewhere, this essay has been foundational in my thinking. It is precisely by way of Moten that we can understand what is a doubled refusal of these normative spaces. To not simply take accommodation and normalization as a paternalistic imposition, but rather to refuse that which is barely given as well as that original refusal, as he would put it. It is in his articulation in the lecture version of this essay at the University of California Irvine that in this acceptance of nothingness, of the fantasy in the hold, of a generalized antagonism, and in my words a pathological margin, that a place of study is opened up to articulate that which is fucked. To give nothingness and dispossession against an absolute possession that comes with transcendental selfhood; a social debt against an imposed social death, that is combatted with what is really the pathological social life, that life given in and through blackness as Moten would have it, in the "zone of the alternative, the zone of nonbeing".²⁸

Insofar as I am concerned, by way of a certain example to which Sexton appeals in order to explain (away) the difference that lies between us, with what surrounds, with what the nature is of surrounding and enclosure, I am also, of necessity, concerned with the relation between the inside and the outside, the intramural and the world. The difference that is not one is, for Sexton, a matter of "ontological reach." Perhaps he thinks of that difference as set-theoretic, a matter of calculating over infinities with the understanding that the infinity of social death is larger, as it were, than that of social life; that the world is bigger than the other world, the underworld, the outer world of the inside song, the radical extension and exteriority that animates the enclosed, imprisoned inner world of the ones, shall we say, who are not poor in world but who are, to be more precise, poor-in-the-world. Black people are poor in the world. We are deprived in, and somehow both more and less than deprived of, the world. The question is how to attend to that poverty, that damnation, that wretchedness.²⁹

In this section of his essay which I am following here, he articulates Fanon's disavowal of pidgin as carceral, within Fanon's idea "that to speak is to exist absolutely for the other."³⁰ And that furthermore, "To speak means being able to use a certain syntax and possessing the morphology of such and such a language, but it means above all assuming a culture and bearing the weight of a civilization."³¹ What is at stake here is Fanon's recognition of a certain imposition of pidgin and a refusal of that imposition, but also what Moten articulates as pidgin is an improvisatory refusal

²⁷ Spade, Dean. *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015. 161-162

²⁸ Moten, Fred. *Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)*. *South Atlantic Quarterly* 1 October 2013; 112 (4): 737–780. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-2345261>. 777

²⁹ *Ibid.* 775-76

³⁰ Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated by Richard Philcox. New York, NY: Grove Press, 2008. 1

³¹ *Ibid.* 1-2

in its “construction, rather than assumption, of a culture”³² and as Moten points out in a Q+A conversation after the lecture, Fanon is precisely setting up the possibility of a refusal of the refusal. If it is the linguistic demand and appeal that for Fanon constitutes the abnormal (or pathological) in psychology, but that also it is the pathology of the normative to refuse to even hear the demand, then it is precisely the acceptance of that pathology and refusal of the refusal that constitutes a possibility of inhabiting the general antagonism of the pathological margin. It is in this that lyric and lysis “converge in mutual submergence”³³.

What’s at stake, here, is the priority of aboriginally insubordinate, jurisgenerative, as opposed to juridically systemic, linguistic experimentation. Speaking “gobbledygook” to a black man is insulting if it takes pidgin for gobbledygook, if such a sclerotic understanding, and the imprecision that follows from it, imagines pidgin to be something other than a language of study. Fanon bristles at the casualness of such a form of speech, the easy way in which the informal is understood to be the occasion for a kind of brutal informality on the part of the one who arrogantly deigns to understand it. The absence of any intention to give offense is no defense, in his estimation, for the absence of any intention not to give offense. One takes no care to avoid the incidental or accidental suffering of the thing. And this is, finally, evidence of a flaw, a moral defect; such lack of concern is rightly understood to be pathological. But what must be clearly understood is that it is not pidgin or *le petit nègre* that instantiates imprisonment at an uncivilized and primitive level: it is, rather, the inaccurate, imprecise, and, for all intents and purposes, absent reflection—wholly outside of any protocol of study, wholly outside of the experimental social, aesthetic, and intellectual modalities that determine the making of the language in the first place—of pidgin that constitutes this particular prison house of language. This means that we must then discuss the no less carceral effects that attend the disavowal of pidgin that often attends the righteous refusal of its less than vulgar imitation. Some might say that such imitation is merely an extension of pidgin’s experimental force, but I would argue that it is more precisely understood as always in service, always enacting the exaltation, of the standard. In this instance imitation is the sincerest form of brutality.³⁴

This is a movement against that which is precisely considered as the standard; as the normative norm. Pidgin as a poetics, even as it is the refusal in its subsumption by the standard as a demonstrative imposition. This is where Moten finds in the Afro-Pessimistic project a space for optimism in an oppositional cohabitation of the two throughlines. Skipping ahead in this text, so as to not assume an absolute recitation of it as it stands, I will go to where Moten, through quoting Jared Sexton’s interpellation of Louis Gordon, allows for an examination of the generative difference in pessimism and optimism, that will also allow us to understand precisely that power of the negative refusal and acceptance of the pathological margin as our place of study,

And yet, this is precisely what Gordon argues is the value and insight of Fanon: he [Fanon] fully accepts the definition of himself as pathological as it is imposed by a world that knows itself through that imposition, rather than remaining in a reactive stance that insists on the . . . heterogeneity [or difference] between a self and an imago originating in culture. Though it may appear counterintuitive, or rather because it is counterintuitive, this . . . affirmation [of the pathological] is active; it is a willing or willingness, in other words, to pay whatever social costs accrue to being black, to inhabiting blackness, to living a black social life under the shadow of social death This is not an accommodation to the dictates of the antiblack world. The affirma-

³² Moten, Fred. *Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)*. South Atlantic Quarterly 1 October 2013; 112 (4): 737–780. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-2345261>. 759

³³ Ibid. 760

³⁴ Ibid. 762

tion of blackness, which is to say an affirmation of pathological being, is a refusal to distance oneself from blackness in a valorization of minor differences that bring one closer to health, to life, or to sociality.³⁵

This passage is reproduced as it was in Moten's text, which he follows with the statement "A complete, which is to say a lyric, *lysis* of our living flesh and earthly sociality, which is often taken for a morbid body or a morbid universe, requires us to recognize that blackness is not reducible to its social costs; it is also manifest in a set of benefits and responsibilities."³⁶ This is an ethical position for Moten that in choosing to be black, choosing to be pathological, you are paying the cost and claiming the dispossession and nothingness that comes with it, but in his optimist's turn it is with the belief that the study of nothing is precisely where the alternative possibilities of sociality lay "': blackness as black study as black radicalism"³⁷.

In opposition to a simply positivist project where affirmation and representation reign as the soothing balms by which a reformist position will persevere, we opt instead for pathological refusal in our demands. It is the demand for universal healthcare against that which is served to us as good enough, the demand that a racial capitalism steeped in eugenics—that knows nothing of life except its management through controlled death—cannot be allowed to stand; the demand that we be for others and not simply for ourselves. To exist within this dispossessive notion of the pathological margin is to be steeped within our linguistic differentiation. To live within the spiral of the Tower, to pay mind to the workers whose sociality we live through. Thornton Dial's *Monument to the Minds of the Little Negro Steel Workers* (fig. 20) and Beverly Buchanan's small cairn of her sculptures to the newly hired Black Men down in Georgia.

There is an ethics of the cut, of contestation, that I have tried to honor and illuminate because it instantiates and articulates another way of living in the world, a black way of living together in the other world we are constantly making in and out of this world, in the alternative planetarity that the intramural, internally differentiated presence—the (sur)real presence—of blackness serially brings online as persistent aeration, the incessant turning over of the ground beneath our feet that is the indispensable preparation for the radical overturning of the ground that we are under.³⁸

³⁵ Sexton, Jared. "The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism." *Intension*, No. 5. doi:10.4324/9781315883700-4.

³⁶ Moten, Fred. *Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)*. *South Atlantic Quarterly* 1 October 2013; 112 (4): 737–780. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-2345261>. 774

³⁷ *Ibid.* 774

³⁸ *Ibid.* 778-79

“*This Time is Out of Joint*”; *Theatre of the Object*

To think Aunt Hester and [Adrian] Piper, individually and together, is to think not only what it means to recognize and deny, protect and risk, the complex interiority of the object, but also what it means to re-objectify the work of art, to revisualize it by way of an old recording, to rematerialize its optimality by way of a sound and song of what Marx couldn't even imagine, the commodity who shrieked, by way of what Fried couldn't even visualize, the object whose infusion with the resistant aurality of a tradition of the politico-economic aspiration and who concomitant and necessarily theatrical personhood bound to whatever lies before her own troubled self-making, made her art making art. - Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*

Michael Fried's polemic *Art and Objecthood* against what he calls Literalist Art (and which we would know today as most commonly referred to as Minimalism) decries the *new* art as embodying theatre and theatricality. It is proprioceptive (my word, as Fried does not use it) and constitutes the relational situation that one has with a work of art. The viewer experiences their body and its proximity to the object, that is, it is an art experience “yet in time.” Fried's conception of art is one that is pure, anchored to the past for its valuation, and is experienced immediately and totally by the viewer of the work. This purity itself could be understood as another coterminous ideology within that cultural milieu of eugenics and eclectic editing that was remarked upon in the epigraph to the introduction of this book by Joseph Grigely. For Fried, it is the very immediacy of an artwork's totality that marks its status as art. He ends the essay with “Presentness is grace” and begins with a theological quote that states (essentially) that what assures us about the world is that at every moment, even in change, it is made known that God does in fact exist as if we had witnessed him make the world first. While, for Fried, his essay is about acknowledging what the true art is—as well as its function—it is not to disparage, as he says, this other work, but simply to acknowledge that we must be certain in our convictions of what it is that constitutes art. A bodily knowledge is distinct from an instantaneous conception of the work in all of its glory. A bodily knowledge that does not remove us from the base conception of the world towards something higher is grotesque. One could go so far as to say that to not desire that presentness which art can bring is pathological. But, at the same time it is that very removal from the norm of our literalist lives that characterizes proper Modernist Art. So then Modernist Art is also pathological, that is pathological in its instantiation of a norm of art, a norm that aspires to everything in normativity.

The literalist preoccupation with time—more precisely, with the *duration of the experience*—is, I suggest, paradigmatically theatrical: as though theatre confronts the beholder, and thereby isolates him, with the endlessness not just of objecthood but of *time*; or as though the sense which, at bottom, theatre addresses is a sense of temporality, of time both passing and to come, *simultaneously approaching and receding*, as if apprehended in an infinite perspective...¹

This time of the theatre, of approaching and receding, of an *unbecoming* becoming, is both Queer Time and Crip Time. It is the denial of production, and reproduction, in favor of repetitious experience of one's own bodily moment that unites the mind and body, against any kind of presentness which would allow us a moment of transcendental subjectivity. Or as Moten puts it in the final chapter of *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*, “The accessory or augmentation that cuts, an invaginative foreign guest one is obliged to welcome on the border, a

¹Fried, Michael. "Art and Objecthood." In *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Gregory Battcock, 116-47. NY: E.P. Dutton, 1968. 145 145

boarder, the exteriority that interiority can't do without, the co-operator."² The absolute lysis of the dominative self, against the self-consciousness that comes from art-consciousness. Minimalist time-frames despite their reification into normative historicization, mark a break in the normative temporalities as laid out by Fried. It acknowledges the permeability of the skin, the immunological realities of a life lived in the world and of the world. A dissolution or denatura(liza)tion of the us and them capacity of the immune system discourse that Donna Haraway discusses in *The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies: Constitutions of Self in Immune System Discourse*.

Or to think it another way through Judith Butler,

What I would propose in place of these conceptions of construction is a return to the notion of matter, not as site or surface, but as *a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter*. That matter is always materialized has, I think, to be thought in relation to the productive and, indeed, materializing effects of regulatory power in the Foucaultian sense. Thus, the question is no longer, How is gender constituted as and through a certain interpretation of sex? (a question that leaves the "matter" of sex untheorized), but rather Through what regulatory norms is sex itself materialized? And how is it that treating the materiality of sex as a given presupposes and consolidates the normative conditions of its own emergence?

Crucially, then, construction is neither a single act nor a causal process initiated by a subject and culminating in a set of fixed effects. Construction not only takes place in time, but is itself a temporal process which operates through the reiteration of norms; sex is both produced and destabilized in the course of this reiteration. As a sedimented effect of a reiterative or ritual practice, sex acquires its naturalized effect, and, yet, it is also by virtue of this reiteration that gaps and fissures are opened up as the constitutive instabilities in such constructions, as that which escapes or exceeds the norm, as that which cannot be wholly defined or fixed by the repetitive labor of that norm. This instability is the Reconstituting possibility in the very process of repetition, the power that undoes the very effects by which "sex" is stabilized, the possibility to put the consolidation of the norms of "sex" into a potentially productive crisis.³

That is to say that in what Butler calls—in the footnote to the end of this quote—“sedimentation” we have ways in which moments and experiences accrue one on another, materializing this notion of constructed self, but also to say moments and experiences as discrete points on a spatialized timeline is itself a faulty framework. She points out that what is not included is as constitutive as that which is. Everything which is outside the norm is as constitutive of that norm as what is the norm. And it is in the very acts of the repetitions of norms that the very fissures which disrupt those norms can appear. The confusion of love and gender amongst Viola/Cesario, Duke Orsino, and Countess Olivia in *Twelfth Night*. These sedimentations and fissures are why I have at times remarked upon the normative as pathological just as I have referred to the pathological as pathological. What is pathologized cannot simply be understood as structured by its deviance, but rather (and if anything) we must recognize the ways in which the norm is constructed off of that which is seen as deviant, pathologized, immoral, out of joint, and itself becomes these things in its attempts to reify itself.

If we think again this theatrical possibility given to us by Fried by accident as a way to think time differently against preferred time, then maybe we can find its companions in Shakespeare and Rich's *Twelfth Night* and *Of Apolonius and Silla*. That is that while everything at the end of the play's gendered hi jinx is corrected, and correctly gendered partners go off with correctly gen-

² Moten, Fred. In *The Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*. Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 2003. 247

³ Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "sex"*. Routledge Classics, 2011. xviii-xix

dered partners, there is still a crack that happens. All of those sedimented moments of gender incongruity and farce throughout the play which present an affront to a coherent and continuous stability linger. Gender and sex's stabilization is a question of time, and of happening within normative time. If only a crack, it still exposes the foundations. It provides the openings for pathologies of the margin to perform their lysis of this morbid body/universe.

The Pathological Margins as Performance: knowledge's behind

"I advise students interested in performance then, to methodically stage 'an observation of the periphery'—to look to the edges of a piece of art to grasp and deploy its wider impact and intent." - Aaron Williamson, *The Collapsing Lecture*

We're gonna tear the roof off the mother sucker / Tear the roof off the sucker / You've got a real type of thing goin' down, gettin' down / There's a whole lot of rhythm goin' round ... We want the funk, give up the funk / (We're gonna turn this mother out) - Parliament, *Give Up The Funk (Tear The Roof Off The Sucker)*

The revolution will not be brought to you by the Schaefer Award Theatre / And will not star Natalie Woods and Steve McQueen or Bullwinkle and Julia / The revolution will not give your mouth sex appeal / The revolution will not get rid of the nubs / The revolution will not make you look five pounds thinner, because / The revolution will not be televised, brother - Gil Scott-Heron *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*

The year is 1964. The lights dim as a man walks out dressed in a suit and tie and approaches the podium. He begins to speak his lecture. It is a reciting of the well known text *Iconography and Iconology* by the German art historian Erwin Panofsky which—with the gesture of greeting and using the example of a man raising his hat to another on the street—takes “iconology, the genealogical research of cultural forms” as the beginning point to better understand seemingly mundane forms of communication. However, this man who gives the lecture is not Panofsky or a lecturer per se, but the artist Robert Morris. And this is no art history lecture, but a performance for the Judson Dance Theatre. The piece is titled *21.3* (fig. 21), the course number for a class Morris taught at Hunter College, which would have most likely assigned the text that he now performed. And this was no straightforward lecture, or even recontextualization of the lecture *as dance*, but rather the lecture *as material for dance*, and therefore lecture as performance. The lecture itself was prerecorded by Morris up to and including the rustling of papers, the drinking of his water, and the shifting of his body, which was then meticulously choreographed in his lecture notes. And through these notes Morris, almost imperceptibly at some times, and quite clearly at others, placed his in-person performance out of sync with the prerecorded version that everyone listened to. He would go to take a sip of water and then, in the middle of sipping, you would begin to hear it. As Gordon Hall puts it in *Read me that part a-gain, where I dis-inherit everybody*, “The lecture was a dance of a lecture—an exercise in embodied speech and gesture, the disjunctures in his lip (and body) synching were mechanisms for drawing attention to the performed aspect of public speech.”¹ The visual and the auditory disjoined from their physiological markers in a somatic unbecoming processed through the viewer's sensory absorption. Disjuncture as that which constitutes the behind of knowledge and its rigidities.

Performance-lecture as a medium—as a type of performance—could be said to have many points of beginning, and I have always been fond of its history as an anoriginal space of possibility which shifts and changes depending on where you go and how you start. I always like to begin my writings around it with this piece by Morris, because of his relationship to object making, and how we can think the performance-lecture always in proximity to certain object-bodies (and in our context here, textual bodies) which can restructure the way we think relationally with each other. Although I could have also started with Adrian Piper's Funk Lessons, the practice of soap-

¹ Hall, Gordon. "Read Me That Part A-gain, Where I Dis-inherit Everybody." In *Over-Beliefs: Collected Writing 2011-2018*, 38-42. Portland, OR: Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, 2019.

boxing, John Cage's non-traditional lectures in the 40s, Plato's dialogues, Medieval plays, or many of the other distinct cultural forms of enacting knowledge including the role of the griot in many West African cultures (whose job it was to preserve the oral traditions and cultural heritage²) and the Māhū in Native Hawaiian and Tahitian cultures (who were third gender persons whose job it was again to preserve cultural practices³). That is not to contextualize these all as artistic practices, or even to say that they are all connected, but that concerns of knowledge preservation and presentation are themselves how we build up culture, and the norms that pervade it.

There are certain biopolitical stakes that permeate what it is that we consider as our constitutive knowledge bases of science, religion, philosophy and how these structure not only our social and political lives, but how we distribute life chances and "human rights". As Thomas Keenan puts it in his essay *Or Are We Human Beings*, what we structure as "human rights", and who is considered as a part of that category of human, is a problematic and always contested space. The general state of rights is one which is structured within a linear understanding of progressive human history which is supposed to, in the long view, tend towards justice and equity. That eventually it will be ironed out. But that's not true, it simply can't be, because the idea of the universal is predicated on the idea of what is normal, what is constitutive of a humanity. Keenan ends the article by writing,

Claims, in other words, require evidence, and the consideration of that evidence is always the task of others. I began with a pair of examples of apparently obvious statements of the sort "I am a human being," claims that, I've argued, are actually far from obvious. In fact, in some cases it's a wonder that we can hear them at all: how do those who have no standing, whom we do not recognize as one of us, who do not count and do not even appear before us as fellow political subjects, how do they make themselves heard and attended to? These are not rhetorical or overly-dramatic questions: think of how long it took for slaves to be registered or recognized as human beings, a struggle that has still not been definitively accomplished, or for torture to be abolished, also not exactly a done deal. And for good reason, as it were: if membership in the community is premised on the exclusion of others from it, then the identity and self-understanding of those who do count depends precisely on not being those who don't. So when the excluded say, "count us, we are humans (or French, or whatever) like you," they are not asking simply to make the space of the community bigger, to add some extra chairs to the table, as it were. They are asking for a new space, a new table, and a new definition of who it is that sits at it. When they are recognized, heard, admitted, the definition of who we all are undergoes a shift. It's no wonder that these matters are so strongly contested, and that people have to keep contesting them.⁴

² "The West African griot is a troubadour, the counterpart of the medieval European minstrel... The griot knows everything that is going on... He is a living archive of the people's traditions... The virtuoso talents of the griots command universal admiration. This virtuosity is the culmination of long years of study and hard work under the tuition of a teacher who is often a father or uncle. The profession is by no means a male prerogative. There are many women griots whose talents as singers and musicians are equally remarkable." Bebey, Francis (1969, 1975). *African Music, A People's Art*. Brooklyn: Lawrence Hill Books.

³ "Māhū were particularly respected as teachers, usually of hula dance and chant. In pre-contact times māhū performed the roles of goddesses in hula dances that took place in temples which were off-limits to women. Māhū were also valued as the keepers of cultural traditions, such as the passing down of genealogies. Traditionally parents would ask māhū to name their children." Kaula'i Iki, quoted by Andrew Matzner in 'Transgender, queens, mahu, whatever': An Oral History from Hawai'i. *Intersections: Gender, History and Culture in the Asian Context* Issue 6, August 2001

⁴ Keenan, Thomas. "'Or Are We Human Beings?'" *Superhumanity*. <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/superhumanity/68719/or-are-we-human-beings/>.

And if we remember what Frantz Fanon said (in another of these chapters) that it is precisely those who make the demand (the claim) who are considered abnormal (or in our words pathological) then we can find the problems built into our structures of knowledge through those who make the demands, or rather those who make the demands and are subsequently ignored. As Fred Moten says in a Q+A after his lectures at the University of California Irvine of an early draft of *Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)*, it is not just that those who make the demand have no standing in a juridical sense, but that the system is predicated on not being able to hear the demand in the first place. It necessarily requires that denial of the other to constitute itself. Michel Foucault writes in his essay *Right of Death and Power over Life* that these claims and their denial are necessary parts of the state's use of bio-power in regard to its management of life. That it is the very management and administration of life that sets up hierarchies in such a way that what is given *can be given* and that what structures power is the ability to give it. In the turn from the sovereign rule of death towards the power which takes charge of life, "the law operates more and more as a norm, and that... judicial institution is increasingly incorporated into a continuum of apparatuses (medical, administrative, and so on) whose functions are for the most part regulatory. A normalizing society is the historical outcome of a technology of power centered on life."⁵ Foucault goes on to write concerning this question of rights,

The "right" to life, to one's body, to health, to happiness, to the satisfaction of needs, and beyond all the oppressions or "alienations," the "right" to rediscover what one is and all that one can be, this "right"—which the classical juridical system was utterly incapable of comprehending—was the political response to all these new procedures of power which did not derive, either, from the traditional right of sovereignty.⁶

Rights and life management begin to grow out of those implicit biases built into knowledge bases, and they structure the creation of norms and bio-power's normalizing distributions of life chances. It is no coincidence then that eugenics is tied up with Darwinian ideas of natural selection, twisted so as to favor man's ability to artificially select that which is considered best for "the more suitable races or strains of blood" as Francis Galton (who coined the term eugenics) would put it. And this connection between eugenics and Darwinism, while not perfect, is not a stretch when we consider that the 1926 book *The Need for Eugenic Reform* was written by Major Leonard Darwin, the son of Charles Darwin, and was published by the same person who published his father (with one edition having an advertisement for Darwin's books at the back (see p. 42)). This is elucidated in Joseph Grigely's book *Textuality: Art, Theory, and Textual Criticism* which is foundational for my ideas here. What is important, Grigely notes, is that the intertwining of social and scientific knowledges are not accidental, and the permeation between what is considered as the normal and the pathological is diffuse among a culture's prevailing ideologies. In what ways then could we think of the pathological as the behind of those norms? And more than that, in what ways could certain reorientations of knowledge allow us to find that which sits behind those norms as that which is administrated away so as to follow implicit eugenic ideologies which dictate who is made or thought of as normative?

⁵Foucault, Michel. "Right of Death and Power over Life" Edited by Timothy Campbell and Adam Sitze. In *Biopolitics: A Reader*, 274-309. Duke University Press. 48

⁶ Ibid. 49

In many ways that is what is at the core of this book, if we wish to be so reductive, and is also what structures my interest in the performance-lecture as an artistic format. This kind of performance takes certain givens about knowledge, and the structures which disseminate it, as malleable forms by which we can rethink what possibilities will inherently spring from the restructuring. As Jack Halberstam puts it in the introduction to *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* by Moten and Stefano Harney,

The coalition unites us in the recognition that we must change things or die. All of us. We must all change the things that are fucked up and change cannot come in the form of what we think of as “revolutionary”—not as a masculinist surge or an armed confrontation. Revolution will come in a form we cannot yet imagine. Moten and Harney propose that we prepare now for what will come by entering into *study*. Study, a mode of thinking with others separate from the thinking that the institution requires of you, prepare us to be embedded in what Harney calls “the with and for” and allows you to spend less time antagonized and antagonizing.⁷

Book as performance-lecture as pathological margin as knowledge’s behind. It is to think the book as a creative space in which we perform the very thing (knowledge) we wish to investigate here.

Take for example the writings of David Wojnarowicz, who, using the form of writing, was always deconstructing the very modes by which meaning was given to the reader through that writing. Whether it be the inclusion of it in works of art which operated as both painting and text, or his use of pseudo-autobiographical modes which operated in worlds of fantasy and reality, without ever conceding the fantasy. The very basis of what he would call the “preinvented” world was turned on its head as he creatively invented the world around him, while elucidating the basis by which certain system of bio-power created horror in their dismissal of the AIDS crisis. In this way his writing is perhaps paradigmatic in its inhabitation within the pathological margin(s), finding possibility in this space, all the while holding on to the anger and grief and sadness as important and necessary in calling for the end of a world.

To make the private into something public is an action that has terrific repercussions in the preinvented world. The government has the job of maintaining the day-to-day illusion of the ONE-TRIBE NATION. Each public disclosure of a private reality becomes something of a magnet that can attract others with a similar frame of reference; thus each public disclosure of a fragment of private reality serves as a dismantling tool against the illusion of ONE-TRIBE NATION; it lifts the curtains for a brief peek and reveals the probable existence of literally millions of tribes. The term “general public” disintegrates. What happens next is the possibility of an X-ray of Civilization, an examination of its foundations. To turn our private grief for the loss of friends, family, lovers and strangers into something public would serve as another powerful dismantling tool. It would dispel the notion that this virus has a sexual orientation or a moral code. It would nullify the belief that the government and medical community has done very much to ease the spread or advancement of this disease.⁸ (see p. 34)

To turn to an example that Edward Said uses in the introduction (*Secular Criticism*) to his book *The World, The Text, and the Critic* of Erich Auerbach’s writing his book *Mimesis* in exile, a book which is considered to be one of the most influential books of literary criticism. Auerbach wrote in exile

⁷ Moten, Fred, and Stefano Harney. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*. NY: Minor Compositions, 2013. 11

⁸ Wojnarowicz, David. *Close to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration*. 1st ed. New York: Vintage Books, 1991. 121

from not only Europe, but all of those pre-invented modes of knowledge production: the library, the periodicals, contemporary accounts of his area of study, and critical editions of the texts he referred to. He was a Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany, and in the stroke of irony that can only exist (it seems) in historical accounts he was a scholar of the old tradition of German Romance. But it's what he says in the epilogue of his book about the process and context of its writing—which took as its subject “the representation of reality in Western Literature”—that I find pertinent here, “If it had been possible for me to acquaint myself with all the work that has been done on so many subjects, I might never have reached the point of writing.” That is to say knowledge bases are not the stuff of nature, they do not have an innate point of creation. It was because Auerbach was in Istanbul that he did not have the “knowledge” he needed, because in this other place—which Said points out was in “medieval and renaissance Roman literatures... [the ultimate representation of] the terrible Turk, as well as Islam, the scourge of Christendom, the great Oriental apostasy incarnate... The Orient and Islam also stood for the ultimate alienation from and opposition to Europe...”—he was alienated from the knowledge, and the built in biases and the parameters of his project precluded the use of these other knowledges which surrounded him in this project. And I bring this up because what performance-lecture as a practice does best is expose these formulations of knowledge, the cultural constructions of disciplines and ideologies which structure where we come from. So to point out where I start my history (as I did before), but also where other people could start their's is to preclude any possibility of origin point as constructive of this practice, but rather a happenstance time and space which I begin from so as to formulate my thinking, to allow myself to reach the point of writing, if only to then (in this case) collapse what that could mean. To write to be pathological. To write to fail. To write to perform publicly. To write to make known. To write out alternatively.

Talking is Dancing, and Dancing is Talking...⁹ The performance-lecture positions us to think through the greater relationships between writing, moving, thinking, talking, reading, producing, subsuming, constructing, dancing, speaking, expressing, explaining; verbs which constitute the modes by which we exist in relation to others, which necessarily includes the harmonious, the neutral, as well as the oppositional. To start from Robert Morris's performance is to start from a place where the very ways in which we communicate, gesture, and create knowledge are the mediums by which we critique normative versions of those mediums.

To think this idea of the normative in regard to communication, gesture, and what we know is to also say the normative in the context of the social. Lectures are themselves highly specialized and regimented version of general communication between two people, scaled up and then made to deliver the information more coherently and concisely to a now large group of people. However, this is not without a layer of obfuscation inherent in the medium so as to limit who can understand—deliberately or otherwise. An example I will give is that of the all-faculty meeting at the institution I work for. In these meetings (now held over zoom) there are mechanisms for the sharing of information in place so as to concisely and coherently present said information. One of these are the use of percentages to describe growth and decline as it relates to budgets and the

⁹ These words come from Douglas Dunn's poem *Talking Dancing* which interrogates the relationship between the two. As will become clear what he performs in the poem is constitutive in this relationship I am drawing between dance, objects, and the performance-lecture.

allocation of money. To use the percentage as opposed to the numbers written out allows those viewing to more quickly grasp the ways in which money is moving or shifting in abstract terms. If, for example, we saw the exact numbers instead, we would need more time in that moment to parse the data, but we would have a much more exact idea of where the money goes. However, when we use percentages numbers start to lose precise meaning. If administration sees a 2% increase in their pay and part-time staff sees 10% then all in all it looks pretty good for those part-time faculty right? Percentage-wise part time staff saw a larger margin of growth relative to what they started with. However, if administration is in the hundreds of thousands of dollars (sometimes even more) and the part-time is in the thousands, there really isn't much of a difference, and the administration is still making far more money than those part-timers. Sure the percentages are much more efficient, but they are much more prone to obfuscation of the material realities of payment. And this isn't to say that these are purposeful tactics on the part of the administration, but that certain bases for optimization and specialization produce a result which obfuscates in its attempt to speak more clearly.

In the epigraph to this chapter, Aaron Williamson comments on the importance of the periphery when it comes to understanding not only art and performance, but the ways in which its content is constructed. Much like you would perhaps look at someone's hands, shoulders, and mouth when they talk to you in order to construe the entirety of their meaning. Or how you would look at the actions of a presidential administration and not just what they say. "As a deaf student I sat through much of my education without the provision of a sign interpreter and to counter boredom I would spend the hours observing *peripheral distractions* such as the lecturer's body language, attitudes and interactions with their lecturing apparatus. [emphasis mine]" Williamson points to these extratextual body and knowledge apparatuses as peripheral distractions, and it is precisely these distractions which epitomize a certain marginal view, or rather those marginal details which are hidden from view by virtue of their seemingly ubiquitous status.

Williamson's critical response to the lecture format comes in the form of its meticulously planned collapse. In the essay that I've taken the quotes of his from, *The Collapsing Lecture*, he lays out three of his collapsing lectures that had occurred (two more would later be performed) in which he slowly collapsed¹⁰ this lecture format so that the performance-lecture was the deferral of a lecture to come. Delay as lecture, a lecture whose collapse shifted what knowledge came and what we then could understand as knowledge. And importantly while the modes of failure were themselves ubiquitous to the lecture format (dropping notes, projector failures, loud doors, coughing fits, spilling water, etc. and we've all seen these happen) they constituted the performance-lecture precisely because of the modes of difference they proposed through a focusing in through excess. Lectures work because we know what to expect, we know how it will go, and we know how to glean information from these modes. But also because of the ubiquity of failure and our assumption of its inevitable elimination, the failures aren't questioned either. It's why the percentages stay, why the tables and charts make sense as containers of information, why a beginning, middle, end, and thesis are necessary, and why we as the audience sit still and allow ourselves to absorb what is occurring. These lectures of Williamson's are not just failure, but its prolonged existence

¹⁰ I use collapsed here as opposed to perfected, because while he was slowly improving the Collapsing Lecture as a form of making, to call it perfected by the end is counterintuitive to the process.

as another way to be and know. But here the very notion of differential activities on the stage which are part and parcel with the lecture format expose the ways one can see the periphery or the margins in all lectures, and by extension in all forms of knowledge dissemination. I will make the distinction though, while we can view Williamson's playing up of these "failures" as the point, it is rather that these failures are non-productive. It doesn't necessarily have to be a failure, but it does need to go against what we believe to be productive: as a use of our time, as a way to get information. And not just against productivity, but efficiency.

In Hall's performance-lecture *Read me that part a-gain, where I dis-inherit everybody* (fig. 22), which I quoted from earlier—and which lays out a version of a possible history and theory of the performance-lecture—the body and its positioning is understood as necessarily constitutive of our knowledges and how we attain them. My work is indebted in many ways (including friendship) to the work Hall has done. At their solo show at Document Gallery in 2019 they showed me that there was a small hole on their sculpture OVER-BELIEFS that was attuned to their finger, like a bodily key in a lock. They showed me during the opening, and I received this small secret amongst a crowd of people immersed in the work. This act of generosity¹¹ with me is paradigmatic of what I am trying to get at, and what their performance-lecture nods towards.

During the course of Hall's performance-lecture they move around the stage containing props that had been built specifically for it. Hall sits, leans to the side and back, stands, climbs, delivers at the built podium, and relaxes. Some of the objects do double duty in acting as projector screens, holding different images that relate to the talk given. The text itself is read from a set of cards made perfectly to be held within Hall's hands, this specificity signaling to us the audience that this text could have other lives. Moving around the space Hall alerts us to the spatial components of thought. That is to say that there is not a strict divide between the mind and the body, but rather they are themselves always intertwined. Sitting on the tallest structure is where the letter to Jan Verwoert was recited, I assume to make sure the sound waves traveled far enough. They speak on public lectures from behind the podium. They leaned against a structure that allowed some part of them to be obscured when they leaned back to listen to George Benson's *Give Me The Night* during the intermission. And in the very beginning of the talk they situate us in a time and space years before this lecture where this thinking began,

A decade ago I am sitting at a desk in the library of my college. It is a carrel desk, the kind with short walls on three sides, to close you in and minimize distractions. There is a window to my right, out of which, if I lean back in my chair, I can see the campus green and buildings, and beyond the mountains of Western Massachusetts. I am spending a lot of time in the library that year. And a lot of time in my studio, across campus. Most days are long and halved between the library and the studio, separated by a curved path.¹²

During the course of this beginning contextualization, Hall sits in the front of their constructed space, and gesticulates as if while reading this description they were themselves transported back to the very space they described. The quality of writing about the place of the body is to place the body in that space of writing. Shortly after in this performance following a further elucidation

¹¹ If I remember correctly they said something along the lines of "I want to show you this detail of one of my sculptures, I think you're someone who would really appreciate it."

¹² Hall, Gordon. "Read Me That Part A-gain, Where I Dis-inherit Everybody." In *Over-Beliefs: Collected Writing 2011-2018*, 38-42. Portland, OR: Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, 2019.

of certain ideas of spatial violences and spatial resistances they articulate in regard to an idea of the intertwined nature of social change and the material they refer to something they recently said to their students, “POLITICS IS SOMETHING YOU DO WITH YOUR BODY!” When they deliver this line, they stand up and reenact themselves half-yelling it for the first time, moving their body in the articulation. This is something I have thought about and quoted many times. And I often think it in companion to Johanna Hedva’s *Sick Women Theory* alternatively titled in its lecture format *My Body Is a Prison of Pain so I Want to Leave It Like a Mystic But I Also Love It & Want it to Matter Politically*,

I started to think about what modes of protest are afforded to sick people – it seemed to me that many for whom Black Lives Matter is especially in service, might not be able to be present for the marches because they were imprisoned by a job, the threat of being fired from their job if they marched, or literal incarceration, and of course the threat of violence and police brutality – but also because of illness or disability, or because they were caring for someone with an illness or disability.¹³

In thinking in what ways politics is something done with the body, we must open up the ways in which the body enacts politics. All of those ways in which people live their lives, act in the world, are excluded from the world, all of this constitutes the ways to think and rethink and rethink again the body politic. Rethink the ways in which our language does not always allow for a more accurate understanding of the intertwining nature of body and mind. To think again the immune system as textual overlay onto the world. We are always in interface, we are permeable beings, mind and body.

And in considering Hall’s performance we need to think again about the objects contained within the performance. That relationship I first pulled out by starting this chapter with Morris the performer and sculptor. When I described them earlier, I referred to them as props. This is a holdover from earlier drafts of this essay, which I felt necessary to keep in as an example. Hall’s sculpture and performance practices are intertwined, and often they are not the ones who dictate the ways in which the performance is structured a priori, but rather it is the objects and Hall’s relationship to them which inspires the performance. As they would put it, it’s a reversal of causality, allowing the object to (if only for a moment) assist in a retraining of how one sees, and to get a small glimpse into another world, another way of being. In that way, these objects are not props, but rather partners, actors, directors, proxies, and companions. Hall is fond of saying that the act of making objects in the studio is an act of making friends. And friendship here is something I want to take seriously, in its reorientation of our inherent possibilities. Perhaps, for a moment, we can think this co-constitutive relation of friendship through Moten and his articulations in *Blackness and Nothingness* around the relation between Black Optimism and Afro-pessimism,

Black optimism and Afro-pessimism are asymptotic. Which one is the curve and which one is the line? Which is the kernel and which is the shell? Which one is rational, which one is mystical? It doesn’t matter. Let’s just say that their nonmeeting is part of an ongoing manic depressive episode called black radicalism / black social life. Is it just a minor internal conflict, this intimate nonmeeting, this impossibility of touching in mutual radiation and permeation? Can pessimists and optimists be friends? I hope so. Maybe that’s what friendship is, this bipolarity, which is to say, more precisely, the commitment to it. To say that we are friends is to say that we want to be friends. I want to try to talk about the nature and importance of the friendship I

¹³ Hedva, Johanna. "Sick Woman Theory." *Mask Magazine*. January 19, 2014. Accessed May 09, 2021. <http://www.maskmagazine.com/not-again/struggle/sick-woman-theory>.

want, that I would like us to have, that we are about to have, that in the deepest sense we already more than have, which is grounded in and enabled by that commitment even as it is continually rethought and re-played by way of our differences from one another, which is held within and holds together our commonness. The difference has to do with the proper calibration of this bipolarity.¹⁴

And perhaps it is in this way we can rethink what it is to be not relegated to the pathological margins, but to inhabit it, the general antagonism, the undercommons, that space of study, not as a solitary one, but as itself one which is inhabited in friendship. In being with others. But even still let's come at this *another* way.

Adrian Piper's *Funk Lessons* (fig. 23) which were made shortly after graduating from Harvard with a PhD in philosophy, was a space in which she would teach a mixed group of "mostly white art students about the histories of African American funk and soul music, and, with great specificity, endeavored to teach her participants how to dance to this music."¹⁵ Elucidated in her essay *Notes on Funk*, the aims of the Funk Lessons and the importance of the experiences it engenders, were how they allowed for a more nuanced navigation of difference for all those who participated.

I suppose that what finally vindicates the performance in my own eyes (as well as the effort to continue engaging with very different kinds of people in doing them) is the undeniable *experience* people seem to get, almost invariably, from participating in them, including me... For me what it means is that the experiences of sharing, commonality, and self-transcendence turn out to be more intense and significant, in some ways, than the postmodernist categories most of us art types bring to aesthetic experience...

But perhaps the real point of it for me has to do with the ways in which it enables me to overcome my own sense of alienation, both from white and black culture. As a Woman of Color (I think that's the going phrase these days; as my parents often complain, "What's the matter with 'colored'?" Or 'colored woman'? That was a good, serviceable, accurate description forty years ago!) who is often put in the moral dilemma of being identified as white and hence subject to the accusation of "passing," it gives me the chance to affirm and explore the cultural dimensions of my identity as a black in ways that illuminate my personal and political connection to other (more identifiably) black people, and celebrate our common cultural heritage. At the same time, the piece enables me to affirm and utilize the conventions and idioms of communications I've learned in the process of my acculturation into white culture: the analytical mode, the formal and structural analysis, the process of considered and constructive rational dialogue, the pseudoacademic lecture/demonstration/group participation style, and so on. These modes of fluency reinforce my sense of identification with my audience and ultimately empower all of us to move with greater ease and fluidity from one such mode to another. It also reinforces my sense of optimism that eventually the twain *shall* meet!¹⁶

For Piper this dual situation of a didactic approach to the explanation of Funk and the dancing components of it, as well as an enactment and practice of dance, allows for a situation in which people must engage difference and grapple with their preconceived—what she would call xenophobic—responses to it. Throughout *Notes on Funk* the problematics of context, the language we use, and the entrenchment of cultural difference (especially that which she sees embodied in white Americans who attempt to conform to whiteness and European precedents) are interrogated as malleable and learned concepts. In the video produced by Sam Samore around the Funk

¹⁴ Moten, Fred. *Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)*. South Atlantic Quarterly 1 October 2013; 112 (4): 737–780. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-2345261> 778

¹⁵ Hall, Gordon. "Read Me That Part A-gain, Where I Dis-inherit Everybody." In *Over-Beliefs: Collected Writing 2011-2018*, 38-42. Portland, OR: Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, 2019.

¹⁶ Piper, Adrian. "Notes on Funk I–IV," in *Out of Order, Out of Sight*, 1:195–216. 204

Lessons, Piper remarks in response to the question about why “whites can’t dance” that it is a “matter of practice”.¹⁷ For her there are practical ways in which, especially white people, can work against the ingrained cultural prejudices which contribute to racism and xenophobia, and *Funk Lessons* is an attempt to show that. Here this simultaneous performance-lecture/“GET DOWN AND PARTY. TOGETHER” event creates a space in which people were “LISTENING by DANCING” that is perceptual modes became intermixed. The peripheral and marginal effects that come from actually dancing allowed those who had never even thought they could dance before work against and within difference through dancing. Here, difference was not itself eliminated, but those cultural and seemingly transparent differentials which are manifest in stereotypes and assumptions melted away.

Dance as a text of difference. Textual bodies intertwined in a practice of being objects with each other. This relationship between text and the performing body is not a new one. In the chapter *Writing From the Stage* in his book *The Reader in the Book*, Stephen Orgel goes over the contested history of Shakespeare’s texts as they existed on the stage and on the page. Orgel takes us through readings of a great many theatrical and literary adaptations of Shakespeare that include additions, deletions, and edits from Sir William Davenant—who’s edits (including readerly as opposed to performative stage directions) are about making the text more authentic and more his—to the first folio found in the University of Padua (who’s provenance is unknown) which involves many cuts and seemed to insist that “That the essential Shakespeare here is action, not poetry.”¹⁸ In regard to these constant shifts, Orgel remarks, “Plays are by nature unstable, and the history of performance is a history of revision.”¹⁹ Shakespeare’s plays/writings become paradigmatic of the change that occurs through rethinking and reperforming. Additions are made which Shakespeare did not write, but were in his spirit, and things were removed which were what we would consider the most Shakespearean.

Orgel ends the chapter with an examination of a promptbook of Thomas Otways’ *Venice Preserv’d* in which production after production added in notations, descriptions, new lines, eliminations of other lines, and many elements which helps us understand the visual, auditory, and spatial realities of this as a play which was enacted. He writes, “Publication, in short, does nothing to fix the text of a play.”²⁰ And I would take that a step further in saying that the textual body as a performing body is necessarily in a constant state of flux and therefore is a container of difference. To think dance as that space of opaque difference is to understand what we glean from the margins of Otways’ play as paradigmatic of the cacophony that is the pathological margins. We arrive in the space through through dance as an object play in which we no longer are concerned simply with the other as a body, foreign or otherwise, that we can know, but rather with bodies

¹⁷ O’Neill-Butler, Lauren. "Lauren O’Neill-Butler on Adrian Piper’s Funk Lessons." Lauren O’Neill-Butler on Adrian Piper’s Funk Lessons - Artforum International. January 28, 2010. Accessed May 09, 2021. [https:// www.artforum.com/film/lauren-o-neill-butler-on-adrian-piper-s-funk-lessons-24753](https://www.artforum.com/film/lauren-o-neill-butler-on-adrian-piper-s-funk-lessons-24753).

¹⁸ Orgel, Stephen. *The Reader in the Book: A Study of Spaces and Traces*. 1st ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. 74

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 75

²⁰ *Ibid.* 83

plural as our constant state. In dance we are multiple in difference, like the overlaying notes in a margin.

In the beginning of an end, I want to turn back to the Judson Dance Theater, specifically the work of Yvonne Rainer, to think this kind of dance which sees change as that which produces the multiplicitous bodies of the pathological margins. From January 29 to February 5th, 1967 an artist-led Vietnam War protest called Angry Arts Week took place, in which over 500 artists participated and 62,000 people attended. During this week of arts programming which as “a spectacle intended to function as provocation and call to action”²¹ Rainer performed a rework of her famous dance *Trio A*. What was different here was that as opposed to three dancers, it was only herself, and she performed it after a year or so of “slow recovery from a serious illness.”²² The piece was retitled as *Convalescent Dance* and where the original interrogated the ways in which dance is constructed, opting instead for mundane, everyday movements as the basis for the choreography, this version took Rainer’s convalesced body as the beginning point for how the movements would occur displacing the interrogation of dance onto the belief of a “normal” body. Having just been rehospitalized a few weeks before the performance, Rainer both pushed and listened to her body in order to craft a performance which was against spectacle, against knowing. “Under its modified conditions, *Convalescent Dance* transformed *Trio A* into a statement of protest. But rather than the active instantiation of opposition, Rainer’s protest takes the form of a negative action, the withdrawal from engagement that characterized boycott and refusal.”²³

In her essay *Sitting Besides Yvonne Rainer’s Convalescent Dance* the curator Risa Puleo articulates Rainer’s work as a basis for rethinking one’s relationship to their own body, as well as their own body as something to be on display for another, especially another’s transparent knowing. In writing of her own relationship to the dance as a form of being with, Puleo writes,

The fact of my chronic pain, already invisible, is something that I show only to those with capacity to comprehend it, though I negotiate this tension I hold with autobiography by meditating on *Convalescent Dance*, and other works from this period of Rainer’s engagement with Judson Dance Theatre in which she incorporates an autobiography of illness and, literally, puts her ailing body on stage. I disclose here only partially, listing only one of my symptoms, and do so begrudgingly. This personal antagonism I feel toward disclosure stems, in part, from not wanting to be the subject of my own work. Disclosure is a trope of disability writing that asks us, the chronically ill and disabled, to repeatedly testify and give evidence for illness to maintain its validity. It puts one’s symptoms on a stage for a viewer to judge their severity or realness. This stage, already a precarious space for those of us who have been conditioned by internalized ableism—by not having the fact of our pain believed, amplifies doubt. The process of disclosure mirrors countless narrations I have given to countless doctors, and then to the therapists to whom they referred me when I wasn’t taken seriously, and to the psychics, astrologers, priests, and other spiritual healers I sought out after a fact of my body went unacknowledged for five years.²⁴

²¹ Puleo, Risa. "Sitting Beside Yvonne Rainer’s Convalescent Dance." *Art Papers*, Winter 2018/2019. <https://www.artpapers.org/yvonnerainer/>.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

It is in the very invisibility of an illness that precludes a knowing of it properly by those outside of the subjective knowledge of the body. But to engage in a politics of opacity, one in which I do not need to integrate you into my understanding to understand you, is to reconsider knowledges which are based on a privileged notion of the visual and the quantifiable. Puleo puts *Convalescent Dance* in relation to Rainer's *No Manifesto* from a year after which reads,

No to spectacle.
No to virtuosity.
No to transformations
and magic and
make-believe.
No to the glamour
and transcendency
of the star image.
No to the heroic.
No to the anti-heroic.
No to trash imagery.
No to involvement of
performer or spectator,
No to style.
No to camp.
No to seduction of
spectator by the wiles
of the performer.
No to eccentricity
No to moving or being
moved.

She goes on to discuss a work titled *Black Power Naps* staged daily by the artists niv Acosta and Fannie Sosa as a part of Jenny Schlenzka's *No series* which reimagined the *No Manifesto*, but with three "affirmative statements that underscore a politic of interdependency."²⁵

Being together
Caring for each other
Making something out of nothing

Acosta and Sosa's work recognizes the importance of rest, and the improper distribution of its possibility, especially as it is determined by race (people of color get less sleep on average than white people).²⁶ "Convalescing is reconfigured as a radical act."²⁷

In thinking this refusal against dominant productive structures, the possibility of existing in the pathological margins takes on the necessary dimension of not only a reorientation of knowledge, but sometimes finding that all that is behind that knowledge is a calm that allows for a small space to think, and to study. Not towards something, not in pursuit of a grand gesture, but for oneself and those around you. An interdependence upon each other that sees knowledges coming not

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ The artists' statement can be found here: <https://performancespacenewyork.org/shows/black-power-naps/>

²⁷ Puleo, Risa. "Sitting Beside Yvonne Rainer's Convalescent Dance." *Art Papers*, Winter 2018/2019. <https://www.artpapers.org/yvonnerainer/>.

from intensive insight, but in the conversation you have with a friend that allows for a single step towards trauma healing, towards friendship, towards celebration. And then finding that in this cohabitation of a space creative possibility grows from the very act of, as Emily Watlington puts it in her essay *Crippling Choreography*, “bulldoz[ing] barriers and ignor[ing] such stereotypes altogether”²⁸. The dancer’s in Watlington’s essay—from Jerron Herman and his work *Many Ways to Raise a Fist* (with a bench that says I’D RATHER BE SITTING. SIT IF YOU AGREE. made by the artist Shannon Finnegan) to the work of Kinetic Light (cofounded by Laurel Lawson, Alice Sheppard, and Michael Maag with Herman joining recently) to Antoine Hunter and his work *Deaf’s Imprisoned* to Rodney Bell’s *Te Kuuititaga*—all take their disabilities not as hurdles (as is usually imposed by ableist notions of disability) but as spaces for invention through a reimagining of what accessibility does in reorienting one’s relationship to creative possibility.

Many Ways to Raise A Fist takes as its basis forms of activism which are not predicated simply on the possibility that a body can head directly into the street in order to be heard. Pairing bold movements using his whole body and understated gestures with archival protest images projected behind him, Herman uses the fist as abstract form to consider what activism is on a larger scale than a simply Arendtian body in the streets formulation. Kinetic Light is a dance company that, unlike other “physically integrated” companies that feature disabled dancers, is run and led by disabled artists who also are at the forefront of the work’s creation. Their work *Wired* (fig. 24) which is currently in development and being worked on by Herman, Sheppard, and Lawson incorporates bungee cables as a prominent part of the dance movements and heavily features barbed wire as a visual metaphor. “*Wired* is an immersive dance experience that traces the fine line between ‘us’ and ‘them.’ *Wired* meditates in sound, light, and movement on the gendered, raced, and disability histories of barbed wire, showing how it shapes common understandings of who belongs.”²⁹ Hunter’s work *Deaf’s Imprisoned* looks at what it is to be deaf in prison, incorporating ASL, film, music, spoken text, and silence with the dance itself expanding the possibilities for the presentation of dance as multidisciplinary. Rodney Bell’s *Te Kuuititaga* used prerecorded video as a response to being unable to be there for the presentation of the dance to to an overstayed visa years prior. Access to space and the ability to travel great distances and pass through borders is challenged in this virtual duet, as Bell appears behind the dancer Katrina George as she creates a border out of sand, articulating frustration through verbal and physical cues, as Bell looks on from behind.

“As Herman put it in a September 2020 essay for *Dance/USA*, paraphrasing the activist Simi Linton, ‘dancing while disabled is a political act.’”³⁰ More than that, in this implosion of norms and otherwise accepted limitations built into dance, these artists—through what the art historian and writer Amanda Cachia would call “creative access”—dismiss these as irrelevant, thinking new possibilities not just through a reworking of old systems, but through a presentation of their own systems. It’s a bidirectionally, an otherwise and otherhow, interdependence and intersubjec-

²⁸ Watlington, Emily. "Crippling Choreography." ARTnews. March 09, 2021. Accessed May 09, 2021. <https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/features/disability-dance-1234586026/>.

²⁹ The description of their upcoming piece can be found on their website here: <https://kineticlight.org/wired>

³⁰ Watlington, Emily. "Crippling Choreography." ARTnews. March 09, 2021. Accessed May 09, 2021. <https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/features/disability-dance-1234586026/>.

tivity operating in a space that sees the norms not in what they allow, but actually as that which impedes. What Watlington's essay addresses, and what these artists works do, is recognize that acceptance, inclusion, and representation through dominant forms is not the only way to exist in the world. Rather, sometimes it is simply in celebrating one's own life and the life of those like them that a new kind of celebratory mode can occur. "Disability culture, [Sheppard] told Aimi Hamraie on their podcast *Contra**, 'is more than the constant arguing for justice and the constant explaining of disabled life.' It's about 'who [we] are . . . when we're not justifying our humanity to others.'"³¹

I began this book with an apology that allowed for its writing. Perhaps as a gesture it's heavy handed in how it precludes the possible success of the book as an articulation of the possibilities I tried to outline in it. Yet, I stand by the beginning of a book with an apology for the simple fact that writing's authoritative voice is counterintuitive to this project. This is a permeable text which has considered everything it cannot contain as still yet to come. As Be Oakley articulates in the description of *Genderfail: An Anthology on Failure* which they put out under their publishing project Genderfail, "This resulting collection might fail to articulate a cohesive interpretation of something as complex as failure, but will hopefully incite a collective consciousness that is as messy as it is thought provoking." In that way this book is an attempt at articulating the manifold realities of possible life in pathological margins, those spaces which are themselves constitutive of the supposed impossibility of life. I do not want to foreclose that impossibility simply to put forward a positivist project of possibility because of the very fact that it is in impossibility that momentary glimpses of what is considered impossible comes through. That is what occurs behind knowledge as we grasp it. Missing the mark to accidentally reach what was otherwise refused. A social debt to others which allows for this morbid scene I have articulated. This book dissolves at every moment I return to it. The possibilities I am trying to hold onto dissipate as soon as I try to strengthen my grip. A heretic book on art and theory considered in its own way as an artwork cannot come to the neat conclusions one would find in any other written project. Artistic practice is the practice of answering our questions with more questions, because progress is not the goal, interrogation is. The moment I declare the end of the world through this pathological project is the moment I stop considering more.

And now I am asking myself questions about various ways I might have gone about doing this, or how I might do it again. How would it be different if I wrote the lecture in the same space as the objects themselves, sitting on them, piling my books and papers on top of them, leaning against them? What might happen if I was somehow able to do all the work on it in this space where you are seeing it, and not in various different rooms in numerous different buildings, a dozen in all by my count, over the course of the last year?

I always reach the end wishing I could begin again, now changed by what I have said and done.

Thank you.³²

³¹ Ibid.

³² Hall, Gordon. "Read Me That Part A-gain, Where I Dis-inherit Everybody." In *Over-Beliefs: Collected Writing 2011-2018*, 38-42. Portland, OR: Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, 2019.

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