

PREFACE: FRAGMENT FROM THE *SENSE* *OF BROWN* MANUSCRIPT

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*B*rown Commons is meant to signify at least two things. One is the commons of brown people, places, feelings, sounds, animals, minerals, flora, and other objects. How these things are brown, or what makes them brown, is partly the way in which they suffer and strive together but also in the commonality of their ability to flourish under duress and pressure. They are brown in part because they have been devalued by the world outside their commons. Their brownness can be known by tackling the ways that global and local forces constantly attempt to degrade their value and diminish their verve. But they are also brown insofar as they smolder with a life and persistence, they are brown because brown is a common color shared by a commons that is of and for the multitude. This is the other sense of brown that I wish to describe. People and things in the commons I am rendering are brown because they share an organicism that is not solely the organic of the natural as much as it is a certain brownness, which is embeddedness in a vast and pulsating social world. Again, not organic like a self-sufficient organism, but organic in that objects within that world touch and are copresent. The Brown commons is not about the production of the individual but instead about a movement, a flow, and an impulse, to move beyond the singular and individualized subjectivities. It is about the swerve of matter, organic and otherwise, the moment of contact, the encounter and all that it can generate. Brownness is about contact and nothing like continuous. Brownness is a being with, being alongside. The story I am telling about a sense of brown is *not* about the formation of atomized brown subjects but, instead, about the task, the endeavor, not of enacting a brown commons but, rather, about knowing a brownness that is our commonality. Furthermore, the brownness

GLQ 24:4

DOI 10.1215/10642684-6957730

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that we share is not knowable in advance. Brownness is not reducible to one object or a thing, so the commons of brownness is not identifiable as any particular thing we have in common.

While I am narrating an expansive brown commons that traverses the regime of the human, the politics that organize this thought experiment are primarily attached to the lives of human actants in larger social ensembles. I am drawn to the idea of a brown commons because it captures the way in which brown people's very being is always a being-in-common. The brown commons is made of feelings, sounds, buildings, neighborhoods, environments, and the nonhuman organic life that might circulate in such an environment alongside humans, the inorganic presences that life is so often attached to. But first and foremost I mean brown as in brown people in a very immediate way, people who are rendered brown by their personal or familial participation in south-to-north migration patterns. I am also thinking of people who are brown by way of accents and linguistic orientations that convey a certain difference. I mean a brownness that is conferred by the ways in which one's spatial coordinates are contested, the ways in which one's right to residency is challenged by those who make false claims to nativity. I also think of brownness in relation to everyday customs and styles of living that connote a sense of illegitimacy. Brown indexes a certain vulnerability to the violence of property, finance, and capital's overarching mechanisms of domination. Also, things are brown by law insofar as even those who can claim legal belonging are still increasingly vulnerable to profiling and other state practices of subordination.

People are brown in their vulnerability to the contempt and scorn of xenophobes, racists, and a class of people who are accustomed to savagely imposing their will on others. Nonhuman brownness is only partially knowable to us through the screen of human perception. But then *everything* I am describing as being brownness is only partially knowable. To think about brownness is to accept that it arrives to us, we attune to it only partially. Pieces resist knowing and being knowable. At best we can be attuned to what brownness does in the world, what it performs, and the sense of the world such performances engender. But we know that some humans are brown in that they feel differently, things are brown in that they radiate a different kind of affect. Affect, as I am employing it in this project, is meant to address a sense of being-in-common as it is transmitted, across people, place, and spaces. Brown affect traverses the rhythmic spacing between those singularities that compose the plurality of a brown commons.

Note

This text is excerpted from Muñoz’s “The Brown Commons,” a chapter from the *Sense of Brown*, edited by Joshua Chambers-Letson and Tavia Nyong’o, forthcoming from Duke University Press, by permission.