



FIGURE 1. Solange performing at *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*.
December 2, 2019. Screen grab.

Free Medicine

An Introduction

ALESSANDRA RAENGO

By May 2021, Ariel Brown is ready for some free medicine.

In her spare time, she has been recutting Barbara McCullough's film *Shopping Bag Spirits and Freeway Fetishes* (1981) to a track by Solange, interested in the way the McCullough's video "leans into an inherent Black energy that though not necessarily rooted in jazz, is still very much guided by improv and balances an energy of Blackness."¹

This creative engagement with the archive as something that, Jenn Nkiru insists, "should be allowed to be constantly creating and recreating, as opposed to being fixed in a specific place and time," feels healing to her and she wants to keep going.² She turns to an improvised performance by esperanza spalding titled "free medicine" (2020)—free, because, the musician sings, "I don't know what it is," and ultimately, she concludes, "it's medicine for me."³

Formally and (in)formally free, spalding's improv was live streamed on December 31, 2020, as a way to give back to, cope with, and mourn at the end of a most traumatic year. Running for forty-eight minutes, it is another instance of spalding's endurance art of improvisation, with her work *Exposure* (2017) (an entire album recorded in seventy-seven hours, a process entirely live streamed on Facebook) as the primary and most radical example. "free medicine" also fits with her ongoing interest in the therapeutic possibilities of music she has more directly explored through her Songwrights Apothecary Lab.⁴

"free medicine" moves through a variety of

moods and musical themes that range from querying (“when it’s in mind, why can’t I make it go?”), to urging (“many have left and gone . . . but there is work here”), to pleading and questioning (“let me breathe to make sure I’m alive and this ain’t just some crazy-ass dream”), to offering a meta-commentary on the power of music-making (“heat and pressure, and all the forces that I make”) and on the conditions of production of the very “thing” her improv is engendering. Spalding repeats “live streaming” for several minutes, creating a call and response between these two terms, which both estranges and endears each, while highlighting the contradiction between this very nomenclature and the way, during the first year of the pandemic, “live streaming” ended up indexing its opposite, that is, immobility, stagnation, and isolation.

Ariel cuts the improv down to about six minutes and fills it with her own image archive, both personal and public, legible and not, opaque and generous. She gathers hundreds of stills and clips to expand on spalding’s creation of a musical space of healing, where she can “just be”—unperturbed and undisturbed.⁵ This, she writes, is what makes it blacker.⁶ Ariel’s montage of stills and short clips supports spalding’s vocal intonation, the pace of her breathing, holding space for it, in suspension. Recalling the space-making gesture of Amiri Baraka’s “It’s Nation Time”—where the elongation of “time” into “ti-eye-ime” harnesses the possibilities of stereophonic space to call on the nation to come⁷—spalding

ARIEL’S MONTAGE OF STILLS AND SHORT CLIPS SUPPORTS SPALDING’S VOCAL INTONATION, THE PACE OF HER BREATHING, HOLDING SPACE FOR IT, IN SUSPENSION

conjures up what Elissa Blount Moorhead would call feminine energy’s connective tissue to release its congregational impulse.⁸ As Ariel told me, “Cis-male energy has never been how I live my life.”⁹

Ariel titles her piece *history | alchemy | evolution* (Ariel Brown, 2021, Video 1). At first, her cuts appear entirely focused on spalding’s vocal intonation, but soon the editing begins to follow the bass line, calling attention to how intonation is shared between instrument and voice. Ariel agrees with Arthur Jafa that the power of black music relies on the black voice and that its fugitivity is profoundly imbricated with the poliventionality of black movement, which is not an exclusive attribute of bodies but extends also to the radical possibilities of montage, especially when it is practiced as “the arrangement of . . . fragments that refuse to be measured, [in] the attempt to create a relationality beyond value,” as Domietta Torlasco

**IN HISTORY | ALCHEMY |
EVOLUTION TOO,
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SUBJECT: INTONATION
WITHOUT INTONATOR**

describes John Akomfrah's *Vertigo Sea* (2015) in this issue.¹⁰ Similar to Akomfrah's montage, Ariel invites us "to experience a memory that does not find anchorage in a subject, let alone a human one."¹¹ In *history | alchemy | evolution* too, intonation explores and expands the possibilities of the black voice unencumbered by subjectivity: intonation without intonator. Indeed, it suspends each image or clip's tethering to a singular note and, instead, follows intonation's lines of flight and the beat's potential to build an escape velocity regardless of whether it is matched to a still or moving image. This is a private space, for Ariel, but not a self-possessed one.

Ariel chose "free medicine" for its "freedom" and because she regarded it as a "secret history" within spalding's discography, inspired by Jafa's in-

terest in the centrality of "secret histories and visual riffs" in lineages of black audiovisual expression.¹² For example, the way that, through Flying Lotus, Alice Coltrane's music features in Kahlil Joseph's *Wildcat* (2013).¹³

Deliberately, Ariel's is an unruly archive that emphasizes its constant engendering, its own gathering and imagining, recollecting and projecting. As such, it sometimes outflows: when images cut to the rapidly moving bass line, they disappear too quickly or are too many to retain. Unseizable and unpinnable, they are seemingly destined to go to "waste." They are witnesses to the process but don't make demands. This *expenditure by design*, which moves "beyond measure,"¹⁴ and is perhaps a way to mark a space for the missing, turns the vanishing point of the images' too quick disappearance into a (virtual) negative space where different possibilities can be plotted.¹⁵

history | alchemy | evolution opens and closes on a still from Jafa's *Dreams are colder than Death* (2013). It's an image of the cosmos, yet we hear sounds of rain. After a few seconds, spalding intones,

When it's in my-i . . .
when it's in my-i-eye-i . . .
when it's in my-i-eye-i . . . mi-nd
why can't I make it go?

One might expect her verse to end with "away," but it doesn't, and remains suspended. Instead, spalding eventually chooses to land on "go now," a transition Ariel's editing ushers in with a two-second clip of Solange in concert, twirling the microphone above



FIGURE 2. Misty Copeland. Frame grab.

her head (fig. 1). The bass line moves underneath spalding's voice as if to support the singer's breathing, which, in turn, sustains the melodic line in their shared intonation. After a few repetitions, and almost imperceptibly, "go now" becomes "grow now," an "alchemical" transformation happening in real time: a refusal, or attempted distancing, turns instead into a clearing gesture both generative and futural.

Ariel's montage often pauses on figures of held or interrupted movements—dancers on pointe holding

a pose (fig. 2), arching their back, arms spread expansively (fig. 3), standing upside down or flying (fig. 4). Yet, *history | alchemy | evolution's* imaging of suspension does not require an uplifting movement: sometimes, instead, it is initiated by a quote, or the still image of a notebook page that visualizes an intricate intellectual movement (fig. 5). It can be underwritten by an emphatic gesture, or a lapidary statement (fig. 6), or by a more or less recognizable film clip (from *Moonlight* [Barry Jenkins, 2016], *Pariah* [Dee



FIGURE 3. Judith Jamison. Frame grab.

Reese, 2011], *Wildcat* [Kahlil Joseph, 2014], or *Losing Ground* [Kathleen Collins, 1982], figs. 7–9), but also by a screen grab from a Zoom lecture or a social media post (fig. 10).

Not only does *history* | *alchemy* | *evolution* exercise the same freedom (or productive disregard) toward the still image as Jafa's (or, more precisely, TNEG's) *APEX* (2013) arrhythmic beat does, but while *APEX* is almost exclusively comprised of still images, Ariel's engagement with "the appearance of synchrony" is simultaneously looser and generatively anachronistic.¹⁶ Indeed, if (ana)chronistically speaking, *APEX* is (ultimately) a collaborative experimentation with Black Visual Intonation (BVI) as a conceptual practice, one that eventually found its fuller expression in *Love Is the Message, the Message Is Death* (Arthur Jafa, 2016),¹⁷ Ariel's personal encounter with BVI is equally anachronistic: BVI found Ariel rather than the other way around. And it found her distinctly as a techno-poetics that has the potential to create a black feminine musical space—an anarchitecture of feminine creative energy.¹⁸

Ariel does not approach BVI as a formula or an algorithm, but rather as another—deeper—secret history within the black arts and black expressive culture: the *fact* of their liquidity, that is, the total disregard for rigid distinctions between art practices and a black aesthetics' uninhibited pursuit of its own creative genius.¹⁹ This is how she describes her previous project on *Shopping Bag Spirits*. She understands the film as

a variation of Black Visual Intonation, because of the way it leans into an inherent Black energy that though



FIGURE 4. FKA Twigs in *Cellophane* (Andrew Thomas Huang, 2019). Frame grab.

not necessarily rooted in jazz, is still very much guided by improv and balances an energy of Blackness. I was working on this non-academic compilation piece layering *Shopping Bag Spirits* with a Solange piece. I started thinking about more pieces of music that I'd want to create something to, some of which involved esperanza spalding and the band Parliament. And then a week later we learned about Black Visual Intonation in class, screened *Love is the Message, the Message is Death*, and it all came together in a very interesting way.²⁰

To BVI's own secret histories Ariel adds her own: the real and most valuable secret, she writes, is "the existence and sustenance of the community itself," which "will be reflected in my work with artists and works known and unknown."²¹

"Free Medicine . . . for Me."

There is a shared awe, in the music world, of spalding's proficiency with a variety of musical instruments and, even more, with her ability to play, sing, and improv

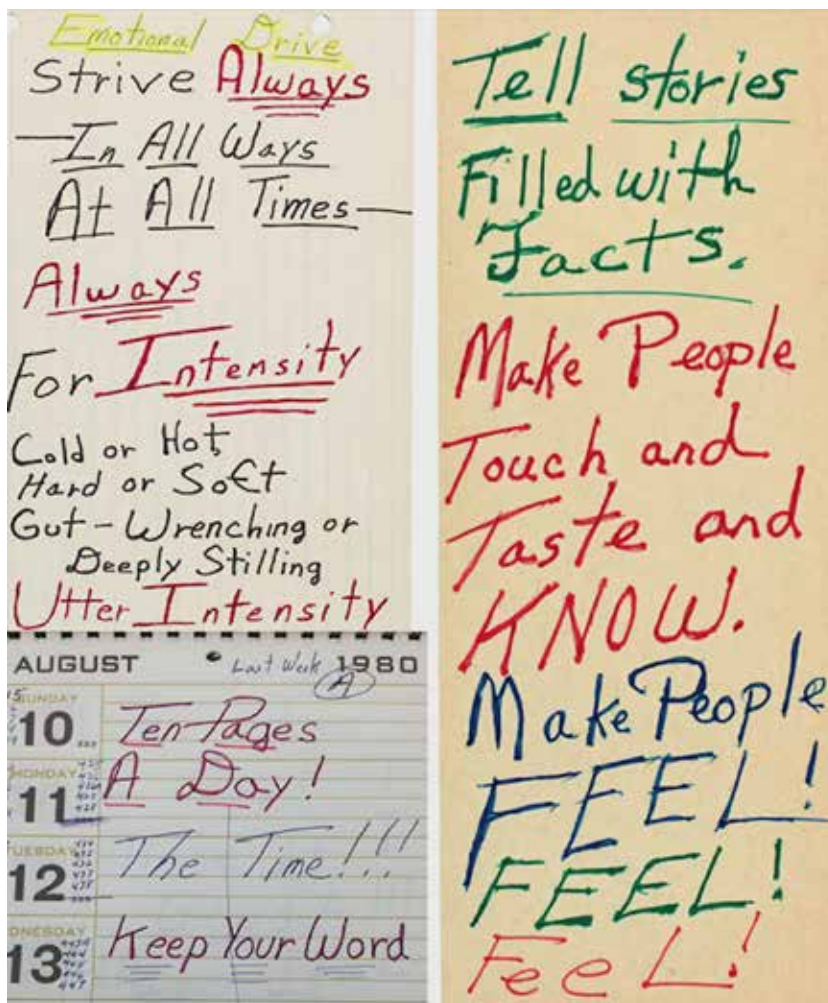


FIGURE 5. Octavia Butler's notebook.

lyrics at the same time.²² Even then, when Questlove asked spalding about her instrument of choice during a January 2020 podcast, she answered “my life”: “the practice, to me, is polishing the instrument of my humanity because everything emerges from there.”²³

Although, technically speaking, when she performs alone her musical instruments are only two, bass and voice, her “small band”²⁴ is obviously much more capacious and internally differentiated: she becomes her own ensemble, one in which bass, voice,

AN ANABASIS, A JOURNEY UP AND BACK, WHEREBY IMPROVISATION IS NOT ONLY A PROCESS OF VALUE-CREATION, BUT IT ALSO RETROFITS THAT VERY PROCESS SO THAT WHATEVER VALUE IS PRODUCED, AND ITS BENEFICIARIES, REMAINS UP FOR GRABS

and lyrics can articulate complicated calls and responses and, in the process, create their own space of congregation.²⁵ In “free medicine,” for example, her vocals hold ground and take flight, beckon and soothe, taunt and restore. She further told Questlove that she is “trying to hold [her] interfacing with people as the *instrumental* exchange,” and has been asking herself: “what is the practice to make any sound that I make, and any interaction that I have, a beautiful [musical] performance?”²⁶ That is, she insists on a type of instrumentality whereby her life practice is *the* instrument for music making, and music making is radical space making for black sociality: making a way out of no way, making spaces for gathering.

Channeling the late Wayne Shorter, spalding says that she is drawn to improvisational practice because “you get to create value out of anything.”²⁷ Yet, the concept of instrumentality itself is here held in suspension. She does not deploy it simply as a concept for her praxis, but rather as the “undercommons” of the concept so that improvisation, as Fred Moten de-

scribes it, is at the same time the making of *nothing* out of *something*.²⁸ Ariel’s *history | alchemy | evolution* follows this lead and interprets spalding’s statement as an anabasis, a journey up and back, whereby improvisation is not only a process of value-creation, but it also retrofits that very process so that whatever value is produced, and who its beneficiaries might be, remains up for grabs. Anarchic and anaoriginal, Ariel’s anabasis values the refusal of what has already been refused and aligns with spalding’s concluding question, one that Shorter once posed to her: “if you are not practicing that, what’s practicing you?”²⁹

The Work of “Ana”

While the possibilities of suspension—as a hermeneutic, as an aesthetic practice, or as the ethics of an intellectual praxis—have been a preoccupation of the *liquid blackness* group for quite some time,³⁰ and remain provocatively and productively unanswered in this issue, Ariel’s work and the issue’s contributions compel me to focus on how the prefix *ana*’s function



FIGURE 6. Toni Morrison.



FIGURE 7. *Pariah* (Dee Reese, 2011). Frame grab.



FIGURE 8. *Wildcat* (Kahlil Joseph, 2014). Frame grab.

as a “wayfinding tool for radical spatio-temporality in Black Studies”—in Lauren McLeod Cramer’s beautiful phrasing—might indeed perform the suspension we have sought to clarify.³¹

From its Greek roots, *ana-* points simultaneously upward and backward, but it also means “against,” “again,” and “anew.” It refuses origins and landing points, clear trajectories and antagonisms. And although it is likely that, at times, Elissa Blount Moorhead and Jafa have given voice to each other’s thinking, at least since they started collaborating in the production company TNEG in 2013, it is Blount Moorhead who puts it plainly, when she describes

their collective desire to perform “anarchitectural interventions” in the language of filmmaking and the institutions of art making.³²

Anarchitecture, in turn, is the (very appropriately) anaoriginal name for Gordon Matta-Clark’s practice, since, as Mark Wigley’s “forensic” investigation shows, it remains unclear whether the term was first expressed by a collective art show, a reluctant soloist, or press coverage of Matta-Clark’s “cutting” of unexpected spaces from existing architectural structures. As he writes, “This polemically collaborative space of open-ended exchange and debate is paradoxically constructed around the figure of a soloist. Matta-



FIGURE 9. *Losing Ground* (Kathleen Collins, 1982). Frame grab.

Clark has become an 'Anarchitect' and ringleader of the 'Anarchitecture Group,' a group that is treated like a set of beloved ex-band members periodically invited to reunion concerts that inevitably restage the

rise of the soloist."³³ Ultimately, Wigley concludes, anarchitecture names more properly a question and a provocation, rather than a concept, and refuses to be deployed to describe someone's practice: is there

anything adequate to it? he asks; is there anyone who should be called an anarchitect? Perhaps, he offers, “the concept of Anarchitecture is [already] an artwork or, more precisely, a reworking of art via architecture,” and he suggests approaching Matta-Clark as a “theorist—not just in the sense of being a conceptual artist/architect, which he so emphatically was, but in the sense of being the architect/artist of concepts, especially the one of Anarchitecture.”³⁴

In other words, if we take the anaoriginarity of the anarchitectural lesson seriously, we should refuse to deploy it as a straightforward label for a set of works or an artist, just like we would/should refuse to call anybody a Black Visual Intonator. If we take Wigley seriously we would be compelled by his evocation of the ensemble, which is, in itself, an important anarchitectural intervention into dominant art historical and artworld narratives that always privilege the singular genius, precisely because it resists their relentless individuation. Looking at Ariel’s work one realizes that BVI itself is not only anarchitectural in this complex sense but also one of liquidity’s secret histories.³⁵

Central to Jafa’s conceptual practice since the early 1990s, BVI hinges also on his initial training in, and understanding of, architecture as a vehicle for the rendering of the radical insights of black music.³⁶ Approaching BVI anarchitecturally emphasizes, for example, how it rejects the way synchronization has been deployed in the cinema as a technology of (forced performance of) sovereignty, that is, the way the cinematic apparatus’s institutionalization of sound-image relations has been historically aimed at propping up the

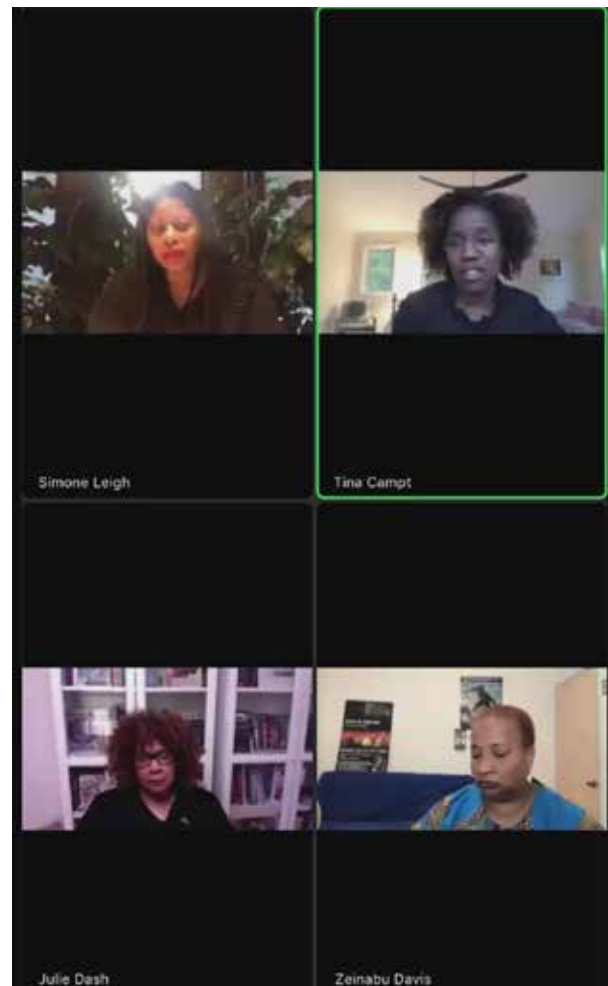


FIGURE 10. “Combahee Experimental: Black Women’s Experimental Filmmaking.” October 7, 2020. Zoom event. Screen grab.



FIGURE 11. *liquid blackness, Third Measure* (Anna Winter, Josh Cleveland, Cedric Simmons, 2023), opening image. Frame grab.

integrity and self-determination of the subject.³⁷ Refusing what has already been refused, BVI instead foreshadows the possibility to usher in what Moten calls “anacinemantic” practices finally unhinged from the subject’s oscillation between the exaltation and shame institutionalized by cinema’s tension between movement and stasis, synchronized and alienated sound.³⁸

Negative Space and Relationality Beyond Value

In her contribution, titled “Rhythmic Refrains: Counting Time Through Duke Ellington and Fred Waller’s Jazz Shorts,” Ashley Hendricks gives us a possible lineage for the unsustainable demands of synchro-

nization by identifying audiovisual configurations in Waller and Ellington's collaborations that refrain from investing in questions of origin or destination and create instead virtual spaces for fugitive black audiovisual encounters, described as sonic phantasmagorias. Watching and listening closely, Hendricks realizes that they suspend the sound of taps at the same time as they experiment with complicated shadow plays and place synchronization in suspension, consigning its promised "suture" to an unspecified elsewhere. As she suggests, perhaps under the pressure of jazz's own internal (in)formal logic, "In the 1930s, synchronicity already seems, to Ellington and Waller, like a broken system."³⁹

In a different vein, Torlasco approaches John Akomfrah's *Vertigo Sea* as one entangled digitopic image that secretes its own duration and practices radical relationality: it cannot be mapped as a series of, however transtemporal, shot / reverse shot, and its affective proximities engender a montage that rejects logics of exchange; rather, images come together through what Akomfrah calls a "logic of persuasion" and Torlasco identifies as an acephalic demand: "a demand borne on the side of the images themselves, on the side of the ghosts. Except that there is no other side."⁴⁰

Memory without a subject, memory entangled in a vertiginous coiling of time, *Vertigo Sea* suspends individuation's demands in order to unfurl, instead, as the flesh (of the world) and its endless internal differentiation. If "we attend to the flesh, rather than the indi-

VERTIGO SEA SUSPENDS INDIVIDUATION'S DEMANDS IN ORDER TO UNFURL, INSTEAD, AS THE FLESH (OF THE WORLD) AND ITS ENDLESS INTERNAL DIFFERENTIATION

vidual body," Torlasco writes, "in retelling this history of unending violence, we also enter a domain—of thought, perception, care—in which the singular, the most intimate and untranslatable, is already made of relationality, irreducible to any entity that occupies a location, a given point in space at a given point in time."⁴¹ By refusing to give value or a fixed position to the ghost—understood here as the singular of the flesh—Akomfrah's "sublime vertigo" suspends measurement, halts the inexorability of valuation, and upends its temporal demands. As Torlasco insists, "There is no money for time underwater."⁴²

A similar (although perhaps less direct) critique of value-formation runs through all contributions to this issue, suggesting how suspension can become a useful rubric (or lever) for halting, pausing, or offering reprieve from the violences of valuation by acting

KALANI MICHELL FINDS SUSPENSION IN THE DISCIPLINARY AND PRACTICAL TILT PROMPTED BY ANTIGUAN ARTIST FRANK WALTER WHEN HE PAINTS ON THE VERSO OF (DISCARDED, FORGOTTEN, OR . . .?) PHOTOGRAPHS FROM HIS STUDIO

as their anarchic, acephalic, anachronistic anabasis.⁴³ While Henricks identifies a fugitivity of black sound and movement that engenders a complex, if perhaps unplanned, articulation of visual and aural phantasmagoria—which, by definition, are apparatuses and sensorial experiences that withhold both a clear point of origin and a landing place—Kalani Michell finds suspension in the disciplinary and practical tilt prompted by Antiguan artist Frank Walter when he paints on the verso of (discarded, forgotten, or . . .?) photographs from his studio. Although Walter's work was recently discovered and exhibited in European art venues (including at the 2019 Venice Biennale, in the inaugural Antigua and Barbuda pavilion), curatorial and disciplinary discourses have not yet addressed his multipronged intervention: first, the tilted media history his work forces us to address, one in which painting and photography are seen through one another as if through a thaumatrope, but also the way in which this dynamic two-sided approach extends to the vexed relationship between European

processes of value-creation—whether they concern Walter's mixed ancestry, his complicated relationship to European citizenship, mobility within the continent, or bureaucratic requirements—as well as the anachronistic relationship between his imagination and memory of Europe. As Michell argues, "Walter knew these images *before*, not *after*, he went to Europe."⁴⁴ Ultimately, I believe, Michell's reading identifies a vanishing point in the tilt that, similar to the way *history* | *alchemy* | *evolution* creates a fugitive negative space, manifests in Walter's work as a productive crypt, a site and vehicle for the incorporation of a foreign body—his European ancestry, the dependence of his citizenship status from the British Crown, for example—that upends the very requirements of the sovereign subject. As Michell writes, "The tilt resists either/or interpretive methods and scopic knowledge by endorsing the urge to repeatedly negotiate difference: noticing, verifying, doubting, discovering, pausing, suspending, imagining, deviating, rerouting. Recto/verso, back and forth."⁴⁵ Painting on the back of pho-

tographs and thus forcing an art historical tilt should not be read within a too comfortable framework of scarcity whereby the failed artist repurposes scraps he finds in his studio, but rather, again, as anabasis: moving backward, upward, again, against, anew. By enacting “a processual change in orientation,” Michell concludes, Walter’s practice of tilting “ultimately demands a reassessment of the value relation between transparency and opacity,” as well as figure/ground relations, and between creative expression and its supports—ultimately challenging the requirement for a sanctioned subjecthood as precondition for the recognition of one’s artistry.⁴⁶

Luke Williams’s engagement with Michael Richards’s *Tar and Feathers* (1999), which comprises six pairs of bronze wings and one bucket of tar hanging motionlessly, reflects on how the piece structures an asymptotic relationship between blackness and freedom. As a suspended sculpture that depends for its equilibrium on a system of counterweights between elements that index flight and others that index the gravitational pull of antiblackness, it “decouples the assumption that freedom naturally leads to, or springs from, social elevation.”⁴⁷ Uplift is not necessarily the way out, or even through, so Williams speculates on how, seen through his counterimage, that is, a free body diagram, which is meant to speculate unhinged bodily movements, *Tar and Feathers* might still strive to chart ways to reach an escape velocity. He finds this speculative possibility in the sculpture’s “plot”—appropriately understood, after Sylvia Wynter and Katherine McKittrick, as both a noun and verb—as

a way to seize the anarchitectural possibilities of the negative space that *Tar and Feathers’* asymptote charts with its own mechanical suspension.

Valuation’s anabasis, Williams’s reading suggests, often comes down to a question about the ontopolitics of movement, which all essays in this issue address as already imbricated in the idea of suspension, as a precarious equilibrium of forces that can break down, break apart, or break away, at any point. So does Marya McQuirter, in an essay titled, “yes. still. movement.,” which fabulates through and around what she calls a “bicycling photograph” (and, more precisely in this case, an anonymous tintype) she acquired at an online auction and narrativizes the steps two black diasporic photographic subjects undertook to leverage a new technology and immortalize their own relationship to movement, as a form of refusal of “the terms of a range of US systems, including the often-presumed desire of nineteenth-century photographic subjects for US citizenship, for liberal subjectivity, and for [recognition as] human being.”⁴⁸ With a close reading of the tintype’s details, such as the cyclists’ outfits, gear, posture, demeanor, McQuirter homes in on the negative space between the movement they could have easily experienced and felt through their own motion through spaces, as they rode to the photography studio, and the absence of an adequate visual representation for it. “For them,” she argues, “stillness is not the suspension or absence of movement; it is a form of movement: still movement.”⁴⁹ Her essay contributes to an established and growing body of work that insists in troubling ca-

nonical narratives of photographic fixation toward a greater attention toward the (il)legibility of agency, or refusal, and their ontopolitical implications.

Finally, Sampada Aranke's conversation with visual artist Ayanah Moor, "Reveal and Restraint: Ayanah Moor's Social Abstraction," hinges on what they describe as a practice of "social abstraction" that "creates a suspended space of interaction between formal considerations and their social activations."⁵⁰ Unfolding as a studio visit of sorts, they discuss works that suspend the antagonism between abstraction and black sociality—even when they lean on some of its more "canonical" sites in popular and commercial culture, by engaging, again, in an anabasis of their collusion with capital's relentless processes of abstraction and valuation, such as *Ebony* magazine—to attend to what the artist describes as the "complicity of the entrepreneurial drive in America that is also attempting to lift up or humanize black life and people."⁵¹ Aranke and Moor identify how the artist's multimedia work suspends clear distinctions between interior and exterior spaces, between protecting and luxuriating, encroaching and revealing, cutting and touching, spatial imaginations and timekeeping, evoking art historical references while refusing their normativity; between the purpose and desires of the advertising image and its art historical knowingness; between what a painting does and what it means. Ultimately, they conclude, Moor's work places in suspension the burden and demands of explanation and legibility, holding the "secret" of its own references

and modes of address as yet another exploration of intimacy.

Predictably, and consistently with its own anarchitectural and anachronistic impulse, suspension in this issue remains, once again, suspended. A conclusive "landing," in fact, was never our goal, and the task of thinking through it remains "all incomplete"—the very vanishing point of the inquiry it has also prompted.⁵² ■

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Notes

This article includes video content that may be accessed at <https://doi.org/10.1215/26923874-10658296>.

1 Brown, "Final Project Proposal."

2 Nkiru, "Jenn Nkiru's Panafrican Imagination." See also the *liquid blackness* video *Third Measure* (2023) compiled with contributions from *liquid blackness* current and past members and edited by Anna Winter, Josh Cleveland, and Cedric Simmons.

3 spalding, "free medicine." Note the current preferred capitalization for spalding's name, which, however, is not always reflected in the literature on the musician.

4 See spalding's *12 Little Spells* (2018), in which each song has a body part in mind. Spalding refers to this project also as speculative fiction, a "what if?": "What if music could physically and spiritually support the listener?"; Walecki, "esperanza spalding."

5 On the concept and practice of “musical space,” see Williams, *Crossing Bar Lines*.

6 *Of Love Is the Message, the Message Is Death*, Ariel wrote: “The images themselves depict Black life, but the editing style, free from white hegemonic filmic standards, makes the project that much more Black, as it not only resists the hegemony, but simply exists as Black out of what we naturally create. It is both resistant and just is. My project will reflect that same innate Black energy.” Brown, “Final Project Proposal.”

7 In Amiri Baraka’s *Nation Time* (1972), the recording itself, as Jessica Teague points out, is an institution—the site of the formation of a black nation to come: “Baraka’s stereophonic poetic allowed him to pry open new sonic spaces for poetic protest—a space in which a new Black Nation could be born.” Here, Teague concludes, “time is not just time, but the eye through which to look outward toward a new space and inward toward the ‘I.’” Teague, “Black Sonic Space,” 23, 33.

8 Blount Moorhead, “Facing the Band.” My understanding of the “congregational” is additionally influenced by Moten’s work and Ashon Crawley’s *Blackpenthecostal Breath*.

9 Ariel Brown, personal communication, January 2023.

10 Torlasco, “John Akomfrah’s *Vertigo Sea*,” 51.

11 Torlasco, “John Akomfrah’s *Vertigo Sea*,” 57.

12 Tate Modern, “Kahlil Joseph and Arthur Jafa.”

13 Linscott, “Secret Histories.”

14 Torlasco, *Rhythm of Images*.

15 See Williams, “Attempting Escape,” leaning on Wynter, “Novel and History,” and McKittrick, “Plantation Futures.”

16 Campt, “Visual Frequency of Black Life,” 37. See also Dean, “Worry the Image.”

17 See Jafa, “APEX_TNEG,” for his description of how *APEX*, which was conceived and assembled as an internal document, found its final public form once Kahlil Joseph and Malik Hassan

Sayeed put it on a timeline and added a techno track by Detroit DJ Robert Hood.

18 I retrain the term “feminine” rather than, let’s say, “feminist,” with reference to Elissa Blount Moorhead’s formulation discussed in Prettyman, “Doing It, Fluid.”

19 Liquidity here is understood after Morrison, “Abrupt Stops and Unexpected Liquidity.”

20 Brown, “Final Project Proposal.” Capitalization adjusted.

21 Brown, “Final Project Proposal.” Here Ariel built on the suggestion of what I call “futural archives of black intentionality” prefigured by the opening image of Larry Clark’s *Passing Through* (1977). In keeping with this sentiment, I have chosen not to identify some of the clips or stills mentioned in her piece, to allow her archive to remain to some extent “private,” even when it relies on what might be construed as “celebrity” images and/or references. Ariel was additionally inspired by Lauren McLeod Cramer’s essay on the total archive of black cinema (“Building the Black [Universal] Archive,” in turn prompted by Borges, “Library of Babel”). Not incidentally, Borges’s library too is an anarchitectural structure, which Cramer (partially quoting Borges) describes as a “labyrinthine shape that flattens and rearranges the past and the future to produce a paradoxical space where history itself becomes a ‘timeless time’” (“Building the Black [Universal] Archive,” 132).

22 See Beuttler, *Make It New*; Walecki, “esperanza spalding”; Hampton, “Esperanza Spalding.”

23 spalding, “Esperanza Spalding.”

24 This is a reference to Glenn Ligon’s installation by the same title and the way it embodies the liquidity of black arts, by channeling a complicated articulation between sound, color, space, speech, and vision in its engagement with Steve Reich’s *Come Out* (1966). See Raengo, “Small Band.”

25 My reading of “A Small Band” as a devotional space of congregation leans on a yearslong conversation between Glenn Ligon and Fred Moten on the concept of blueblack and its space-making capacity. See, at least, Ligon, “Black Light”; Ligon, “Blue

Black"; Ligon, "Blue Black, Black and Blue"; Moten, "Black and Blue."

26 spalding, "Esperanza Spalding."

27 spalding, "Esperanza Spalding."

28 See Harney and Moten, *All Incomplete*, for an articulation of the desire to work with the "undercommons" of the concept, whereby "black study means you serve your concepts without a master(y)" (81). Moten's formulation about improvisation as making nothing out of something appears in several places, including "Come On, Get It!"

29 spalding, "Esperanza Spalding."

30 See *liquid blackness*, "Holding Blackness," as well as Raengo, "Black Study @ GSU," and Raengo and Cramer, "Editors' Notes."

31 Cramer offered this assessment in the context of an exploration of Elissa Blount Moorhead's anarchitectural praxis in her installation *As Of A Now*, which was directly influenced by her engagement with Gordon Matta-Clark's work as a way to retro-engineer gentrification's forced erasures of black memory. Overall, the installation's anarchival impulse manifests as a futural archive of black intentionality—quite literally projecting black futures already imagined in the past, through a life-size installation projected on a vacant building in West Baltimore. See *liquid blackness*, "Teach-In," and Prettyman, "Doing It, Fluid." See also the recent show at 52 Walker (in New York City), *Impossible Failures*, featuring works by Matta-Clark and Pope.L, <https://www.52walker.com/exhibitions/gordon-matta-clark-and-pope-l-impossible-failures>.

32 The immediate reference is Gordon Matta-Clark's anarchitectural practice, which she directly engages with her installation *As Of A Now* (2019). Blount Moorhead, "Elissa Blount Moorhead." See also Prettyman, "Doing It, Fluid."

33 Wigley, *Cutting Matta-Clark*, 20.

34 Wigley, *Cutting Matta-Clark*, 22.

35 In 1998, well before the Romare Bearden conference he organized where Toni Morrison presented her reading of Bearden's work through the concept of liquidity, Robert O'Meally had al-

ready published the influential and very consonant anthology *The Jazz Cadence in American Culture*. There, within the section inspired by Roy DeCarava's *The Sound I Saw*, O'Meally reprints Arthur Jafa's essay "Black Visual Intonation"; first presented with a different title at the 1991 Black Popular Culture conference organized by Gina Dent and Michele Wallace, it is arguably still the most explicit and articulate "manifesto" about black liquidity as an aesthetic goal for filmmaking practices.

36 As he has often mentioned, during his BA at Howard University Jafa approached architecture through black music and wondered, "If *Kind of Blue* was a house, what would it look like?" Famously, it was his encounter with Haile Gerima that pushed him to think about the musical possibilities of the black visual arts in a way that puts BVI in direct—although not explicit—conversation with Morrison's idea of liquidity, thus offering a provisional answer to the established creative practice of practicing an artform in terms of another and, specifically, to approach artmaking as an extension of the radical formal insights of black music. "One of the things Haile said to me was, 'We have to make black cinema' in a way that dovetailed with this ongoing ambition I had to make the house and now the film that was like black music." Jafa and Camp, "Love Is the Message," 3.

37 See also Raengo, "Blackness and the Image of Motility."

38 Moten, "Fred Moten, Cinematic Migrations." Moten's reformulation of some of the possibilities of BVI shares the same anachronistic and anaoriginal structure: is it already here or is it aspirational? To approach this question, as our own scholarly modes of engagement wrestle with questions of its legibility within institutional and disciplinary frameworks, is to attend to its anachronistic expressions—Ariel's video, for example—or to demand that practice-based theory generated by artists "be considered with the same rigor as more traditional scholarship," to conceptualize new frameworks, discourses, lineages of thought, and modes of care. Kristin Juarez, quoted in *liquid blackness*, *Third Measure* (fig. 11). Full video available at <https://vimeo.com/801778554>.

39 Hendricks, "Rhythmic Refrains," 35.

40 Torlasco, "John Akomfrah's *Vertigo Sea*," 51.

41 Torlasco, "John Akomfrah's *Vertigo Sea*," 54–55.

- 42 Torlasco, "John Akomfrah's *Vertigo Sea*," 51. This formulation is reminiscent of the critique of valuation offered by Kamau Brathwaite's tidalectics, discussed in McDougall, "Water is Waiting."
- 43 My understanding of the violence of valuation is partly informed by Ferreira da Silva, "On Matter Beyond the Equation of Value."
- 44 Michell, "Photography on Tilt," 76.
- 45 Michell, "Photography on Tilt," 74.
- 46 Michell, "Photography on Tilt," 79.
- 47 Williams, "Attempting Escape," 89.
- 48 McQuirter, "yes. still. movement.," 106.
- 49 McQuirter, "yes. still. movement.," 104.
- 50 Aranke and Moor, "Reveal and Restraint," 112.
- 51 Aranke and Moor, "Reveal and Restraint," 115.
- 52 Harney and Moten, *All Incomplete*.

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