



FIGURE 1. Kevin Beasley, *A view of a landscape: A cotton gin motor*, 2012–18. GE induction motor, custom soundproof glass chamber, anechoic foam, steel wire, monofilament, cardioid condenser microphones, contact microphones, microphone stands, microphone cables, and AD/DA interface. Installation view, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, December 15, 2018–March 10, 2019. Collection of the artist; courtesy Casey Kaplan, New York. Photograph by Ron Amstutz. New York, Whitney Museum of American Art. © 2021. Digital image Whitney Museum of American Art / Licensed by Scala.

A View of a Landscape and Other Church Problems

An Introduction

ALESSANDRA RAENGO

Blackness, precisely insofar as it is “merely” sensual, is not subject to the intersubjective validity of judgments of taste that it could be said to (under)ground.

As mere sensuality, blackness occupies and quickens a series; the stupid, the irrational, the deformed and/or deformative, the unfinished and/or disruptive, the driven and/or transportive, the irregular and/or anti- and ante-regulative, the blurred and/or blurring, the curved, the canted, the arabesque, the parergon, the outwork and/or mad absence of the work, the outlaw, the would-have-been-outside, the thing of nature that defies or defers, rather than presupposes, representation, the social whose life in exhaustion of the given has often been mistaken for death.

—Fred Moten, *Stolen Life*

The Subject of Every Artwork

If “there is no encounter with blackness that is not also an aesthetic encounter,” Fred Moten’s trilogy *consent not to be a single being* encourages us to also consider that there might not be an encounter with the aesthetic that is also not an encounter with blackness.¹ Blackness, he writes, “is the subject of every artwork.”²

Moten’s insistence on the irreducible vitality of black sociality has been both inspirational and aspirational to the theoretical foundation, the ethics, and the praxis that sustain this journal. His work and intellectual comportment are an ode to the incompletable

project of “thinking with,” as a mode of speaking from the blur and from the aesthetic sociality of blackness.³ As such, “thinking with” comes with a canted temporality: a preliminary and previousness attuned to blackness’s own anaoriginarity. The present issue participates in a similar generative incompleteness as it seeks to think alongside Moten’s aesthetic thinking and Kevin Beasley’s *A view of a landscape: A cotton gin motor, 2012–18*.⁴ Thus, it imagines the aesthetic as not only a “processing site” but also a potential site of congregation.⁵

As they contribute understandings of this canted temporality, the essays in this volume are preoccupied with informality, preliminary, incompleteness, sociality, ontological dehiscence, breath, air, love, friendship, cocreation, and quantum intentionality, while the Accent Marks section homes in on the extractive properties of whiteness.⁶ Throughout, we are given insights into modes of thinking, practicing, or witnessing “undercommonsense” in the making, which does not depend on the intersubjectivity of judgments of taste but, rather, takes place in the informality of the undercommons—the commonness of the improper of those who, situated within the looped temporality of their previousness, refuse what has been refused to them.⁷

A View of a Landscape

A view of a landscape: A cotton gin motor, 2012–18 hinges on the separation between the sight of a cotton gin’s motor enclosed in a soundproof glass chamber, and the motor’s sounds, channeled and pro-

cessed by modular synthesizers, and made audible in an adjacent “listening room.”

Beasley bought the motor, which had been in operation from 1940 to 1973, in 2012 on eBay from a farmer based in Maplesville, Alabama, about thirty miles from Selma. This was an initial response to the view of a cotton field he saw on his family’s property in Virginia during a family reunion in the late fall of 2011. He then exhibited the motor for his MFA thesis project at Yale University in 2012, knowing full well that this was just the beginning of a much longer process.⁸

Later he developed the idea that a proper exhibition of the motor would have to silence it. Hence, he commissioned the glass chamber from Goppion Technology, the same Italian company that builds protective cases for the *Mona Lisa* and the *Da Vinci Codex*.⁹ In the “viewing room,” the motor spins but you can’t hear it. In the “listening room,” you can hear and feel low-frequency sounds channeled directly from the motor, distributed throughout a dimly lit, contemplative space—so that “focus is directed to the forceful materiality of the motor’s vibration.”¹⁰

When Kevin Beasley purchased the motor, it needed maintenance but was still working. What one hears are the motor’s “original” sounds (in scare quotes) first gathered and then diffused at a remove from their source. Sitting on the benches—as vibrations emanate from underneath the seats—one is invited to become a sonic body, resonating with the relentless rhythm of the engine next door.¹¹

By moving, the motor fulfills its “entelechy,” its extractive and regulative purpose—originally to sepa-

“THINKING WITH” COMES WITH A CANTED TEMPORALITY: A PRELIMINARITY AND PREVIOUSNESS ATTUNED TO BLACKNESS’S OWN ANAORIGINALITY

rate seeds from fiber—which Beasley’s severance of sight from sound puts mercilessly on display. Part of a massive industrial management of production, the cotton gin invented in 1793 by Eli Whitney (a relative of Harry Payne Whitney, husband of the founder of the Whitney Museum, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney), violently regulated also the sphere of reproduction, that is, the reproductive labor of the enslaved or indentured population whose labor power was put in direct competition with the machine’s, a perverse symbiosis that eventually contributed to the endless disenfranchisement of postemancipation black people and to their Great Migration.¹² An immersive vibratory space connects one’s senses to the engine that secured the enduring of slavery as a mode of production beyond (the failed project of) emancipation.

An issue of previousness comes to the fore. In the “listening room,” ultimately, one has to decide where those sounds are really coming from but also what comes first: the machine or human labor? subjection or resistance? value or nonvalue? categorial regulation or aesthetic sociality?

A view of a landscape: A cotton gin motor, 2012-18 presents us with a question of (ana)originality as

well as a face-off between object and thing, the objectification of blackness—when value appears as such because labor power has condensed into some-*thing*—or its thingness. *A view of a landscape* lets us know that, in Fred Moten words, it is time to shift from “the resistance of the object to the insistence of things.”¹³

Fugitive Readymades

Even though severed from its industrial use, as a readymade spectacularly enclosed, the motor continues to extract art world value, thus prompting one to ponder whether the museum space is in itself an “extractive zone.”¹⁴ Considered alongside the *Mona Lisa*, an “invaluable” (priceless and unauctionable) art object par excellence, by virtue of sharing an encasement that abides by similar requirements, the motor’s exhibition explodes the contradiction of value: on the one hand, the nonvalued’s capacity to increase value (where their not having any value is measured by their having a price), and, on the other hand, the magnitude of an invaluableity, which is so because it is rooted in an aesthetic sociality that exceeds and escapes systems of valuation.¹⁵

The fugitivity of its sounds, and their movements,

locate *A view of a landscape* in the tradition of the readymade that Arthur Jafa has indexed to “black art in motion,” my shorthand for his adoption of Robert Farris Thompson’s reading of *African Art in Motion*, and the insistence that the political ontology of black object’s movement is generative of modern art, which, Jafa argues, would not exist as such had it not encountered black aesthetics.¹⁶ Thompson’s premise, which Jafa follows, is that the African artifact in its natal context was just as mobile as the subject that moved around it. Once brought to Europe as an art object—a black object in white space—the movement of the African artifact ushered in the revolution of cubism, which sought to approach a static object from the multiple points of view of a moving subject. In Jafa’s retelling of the story, it was ultimately Duchamp’s recontextualization of the readymade, prompted by the actions, movements, and behaviors of the alienated black subject, and particularly his “Urinal” (*Fountain*, 1917)—which put abject black matter on (virtual) display—that reset the black object in motion. “Black art in motion” invites a re-evaluation of the relationship between subject and object movement that not only blurs the distinction between the two but also sidesteps their very relation.¹⁷

Animated Materiality

In the “viewing” room, the “silent” motor spins, but tends toward the moving stillness of hummingbirds.¹⁸ Once ready-at-hand (till 1973, to be precise), the motor is now present-at-hand, and its motion can only

be contemplated in its futility: the motor speeds toward, and for, stasis.

The motor’s labor power and aesthetic work are temporarily muted, deferred, and held in suspension, until the rejoining of sound and image in the room “around the corner.”¹⁹ The motor’s sonicity is withheld, and desire for it mocked by the presence of multiple microphones inside the glass chamber, which now might appear as the aseptic scene of an autopsy (or is the motor on life support?). In reality, this ekphrastic work, which is prompted by a “view” and turned into a sound piece, does not really rejoin sound and image, because in the listening room the image of the preciously encased motor is, at best, only an afterimage, one that must be willfully recollected for this rejoinder to take place. In its hauntological nature, the motor might appear as a hologram.²⁰ At the same time, because of its delay, the sound in the listening room delivers a dimension of futurity that in the silence of the viewing room seemed tenuous at best. In its case at the center of the room, the motor is suspended between taxidermy and fugitivity, autopsy and vibrancy, visual and sonic apprehension, imposed stasis and improvised movement.

At first glance it is not hard to think of the motor as a speaking commodity, given how meticulously its “original” sound is captured and channeled.²¹ Yet the work’s devotion for precisely “capturing” the motor’s sound while enclosing its movement conjures up the commodity form only after that form’s extractive objecthood has been placed on both a taxidermic dis-



FIGURE 2. *A view of a landscape: A cotton gin motor, 2012–18.* Custom speaker system, subwoofers, amplifiers, AD/DA interface, ethernet switch, mixer, modular synthesizer, equipment racks, and wood table. Installation view, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, December 15, 2018–March 10, 2019. Collection of the artist; courtesy Casey Kaplan, New York. Photograph by Ron Amstutz. New York, Whitney Museum of American Art. © 2021. Digital image Whitney Museum of American Art / Licensed by Scala.

play and a runaway path.²² Through sound capture and displacement, *A view of a landscape* builds futurity by both augmenting and diffusing dispossession. Its operation echoes Fred Moten’s comments that “insofar as blackness is and comes, rather, from absolutely nothing it is, indeed, something after all, namely, the commonness of the improper; . . . blackness is exchange, the dispersive gift of an original dispossession.”²³

A view of a landscape diffuses (that is, it distributes, as in “disbursal,” more than “dispersal,” Moten clarifies) Aunt Hester’s scream into sonic materiality—the animateriality of black thingness, which, he claims, is both the subject and object of art, despite an art discourse still too preoccupied with securing the sovereign position of both the object and the subject.²⁴ *A view of a landscape* is “animated thingliness, to which blackness corresponds.”²⁵

In its case at the center of the room, the motor is surrounded by inquisitive microphones:

“What are you talking about?”

“Nothing.”²⁶

“But the thing is,” Moten continues, “things speak the nothing that is.”²⁷

Insurgent Instrumentality

If, with Kevin Beasley’s *A view of a landscape*, we “are listening to an ontological problem, a problem with memory and presence,” by “sending” sound off from its material and mechanical source *A view of a landscape* stages also a question about the (pre)conditions of fugitivity or what in *Stolen Life*, Moten approaches as the “knowledge of freedom.”²⁸

During a talk at the Whitney Museum associated with the exhibition, Daphne Brooks discussed the nineteenth-century piano virtuoso Blind Tom Wiggins (1849–1908) as a way to think about *A view of a landscape*’s insurgent instrumentality.²⁹ Blind Tom remained enslaved beyond emancipation, and his ability to seemingly reproduce any piece of music upon hearing it turned him, in some way, into an *animaterially* recording thing. As Stephen Best’s analysis of the legal discourse that attempted to make sense of, and regulate, his performances show—a discourse constantly wavering between imitation and duplication, production and reproduction—ultimately Blind Tom “accrued the prophetic and annunciatory signs of a ‘mechanical reproduction’ *avant la lettre*.”³⁰ As both

BY MOVING, THE MOTOR FULFILLS ITS “ENTELECHY,” ITS EXTRACTIVE AND REGULATIVE PURPOSE

fugitive property and tool for mechanical reproduction, Blind Tom was at the center of an emerging legal discourse about intellectual property rights.

Alongside performing a classic repertoire, Brooks reminds us, Blind Tom also created compositions that reflected his surroundings, imitating environmental sounds such as rain or a sawing machine. His ekphrastic compositions allow us to listen to his listening.³¹ His “acoustic metamorphoses,” might attune us to “the moment when his persona transforms from ‘thing’ into sound.”³² At the same time, as a recording instrument, Blind Tom’s particular “automatic art” became a living archive of “‘the thing’ who is a man ‘exhausting’ the instrument and thereby becoming an instrument, ‘a kind of meditative medium, a conduit’ and ‘a means to the long history of being an instrument.’”³³ Because of his “uncanny ability to become both art subject and object,” we might think of *A view of a landscape* as Blind Tom’s reembody avatar.³⁴

Just like *A view of a landscape*, Blind Tom raises the question of aesthetic generativity and its legitimacy, which is intimately bound to their relationship to the law. As Moten puts it in his assessment of the

role of blackness in Kant's aesthetic philosophy, "in studying the criminalization of anoriginal criminality, one recognizes that the jurisgenerative principle is a runaway."³⁵

Generativity

Brooks argues that Tom is a captive who acquires agency as recorder, and, as such, alongside Kevin Beasley's work, he is part of a black radical tradition as a conspiracy to come.³⁶ In both cases blackness appears as the runaway jurisgenerative aesthetic principle that it always is: it is present as a fugitive thing and "present at its own making."³⁷

In *Stolen Life*, Moten approaches the question of the anaoriginality of blackness by engaging with Kant's formulation of aesthetic philosophy against what he calls the "knowledge of freedom"—a question of "paraontic resistance that is essential matter for a general theory of the generative or, to be more precise, a theory of blackness."³⁸ Blackness is invaginative to Kant's aesthetic project, insofar as he deploys race "as the exemplary regulative and/or teleological principle."³⁹ Blackness is exemplary of the regulative principle because of its connection to non-sensical flights of the imagination. Following Winfried Menninghaus, Moten shows how Kant's need to discipline and regulate nonsense prompts a politics of curtailment (the wings of the imagination have to be clipped to avoid nonsense).⁴⁰ Blackness is also exemplary of the teleological, because as Robert Bernasconi shows, "The blackness of Blacks provided Kant with one of his most powerful illustrations of purpo-

siveness within the biological sphere," one that in *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* eventually leads to Kant's statement that if someone is black from head to toe, one must be stupid.⁴¹ Blackness, therefore, is "the sensible instantiation of the principle of the supersensible, which in turn grounds what Paul Guyer calls 'the intersubjective validity' of judgments of taste."⁴²

The scandal of Kant's project is that despite its sensuality, blackness operates at the transcendental level.⁴³ Thus, it is (always already) common sense, and yet systematically disavowed as such because acknowledging this commonness would reveal the sociality of the imagination—otherwise how would one tell sense from nonsense? Both premature and postexpectant, in Nathaniel Mackey's characterization, blackness, Moten writes, "is (in) common. Blackness is (in) universal exchange."⁴⁴

The philosophical project of aesthetics is entangled in the relationships between the legal and the paralegal; law and lawlessness; sensibility and sensoriality; nonsense and common sense; exclusion and invagination, as well as the previousness, prematurity and postexpectancy of (black) generativity—their "originary displacement."⁴⁵

Blackness Names What Is Not (There)

Later, still in "Knowledge of Freedom," Moten approaches Olaudah Equiano as an (ana)originary figure of displacement.⁴⁶ To begin, his own origin is not clear, as Vincent Carretta has shown after he uncovered published insinuations that Equiano was in fact

not born in Africa at all.⁴⁷ But for Moten this adds to a reading of Equiano's *Narrative* as the autobiography of an "arrival" to the form of the subject, as general equivalent and money-form—and therefore as endless movement and exchange—as well as its invaginated other—absolute stillness and not-thereness. Equiano, Moten writes, "has no place in the place he is supposed to be found. Equiano does not take place."⁴⁸

Like Beasley's cotton gin motor, Equiano is perpetually mobile. By engaging in mercantile economy, he gained access to the abstract form of the subject and therefore its exchangeability and constant exchange.

Yet Equiano is also perpetually still. Moten says Equiano does not have to move because he is already a figure for blackness as "law of motion." He figures both mercantilism *and* the mercantile, that is, both the economic policy that formalizes a supranational formal subject in contractual engagements with other formally equal supranational subjects *and* the actual negotiation of the logistics of motion, that is, the way in which mercantilist discursive practices were "increasingly systematically, and ritually barr[ing] subjects of color from the formal and abstract equality of mercantile capitalism."⁴⁹

Ultimately, Equiano is the beginning and the end of the "general equivalent . . . because he operates such that he can never be rendered as the privileged example of the emptiness of equality or universality in general." In his impossible moving stillness and having "no place in the place he is supposed to be

found," Equiano is a general equivalent, but an *unequal* one.⁵⁰ As such, he is a figure for blackness (in) common; blackness (in) universal exchange.

We can think of Equiano's immobility in conjunction with Beasley's motor's "still act," and specifically the way in which it is forced to perform stillness by spinning in place.⁵¹ Suspended between severance of sight and sound and their spatial redistribution, the motor is not (where) it is supposed to be.

A Church Problem

Moten posits the aesthetic as the site of generativity, but not its precondition. Rather, the aesthetics of the black radical tradition is a previousness without origin and a refusal of what has been refused to you.⁵² Importantly, for aesthetic theory, the "paraontological difference" of blackness is not only "an irreducible dehiscence" but also "a sociopoetic activity," so that at stake here is the displaced anaoriginarity of blackness, its essential sociality.⁵³

In "Knowledge of Freedom," Moten offers Uncle Toliver as an example of such sociopoetic activity and an "autobiography of the ensemble." As recorded in Leon Litwack's *Been in the Storm So Long*, Uncle Toliver prayed for the Yankees until he was whipped to death by his masters. Uncle Toliver's improvised voice both exemplifies and puts pressure on what Moten describes as the distinction between "knowledge of language" and "knowledge of freedom"—a distinction that also raises the question of how Uncle Toliver *got there*, that is, how he *arrived* at his specific prayer.⁵⁴ Uncle Toliver's improvised, indiscreet, and

A VIEW OF A LANDSCAPE'S LISTENING ROOM RESHAPES A COTTON GIN MOTOR INTO A TRANSMISSION AND AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF THE ENSEMBLE: A CHURCH PROBLEM

dissident voice, given as a passage that is “more than a subject and more than a text,” is the black radical tradition’s autobiographed ensemble. *Uncle Toliver* is a transmission: “The mediated and reconstructed voice of a man held as property arrives to us as a critique of Property.”⁵⁵

A view of a landscape’s listening room too reshapes a cotton gin motor into a transmission and an autobiography of the ensemble. Just as *Uncle Toliver* arrives, so does the motor’s sound: it is sent from its encasement, and it arrives at a gathering place. If “Blackness puts pressure on ontology and relation,” both *Uncle Toliver* and the motor pose also a question about ethical comportment toward the ensemble—understood as the “improvisation of and through the opposition of totality and singularity,” “the possibility of a nonexclusionary whole,” “everything and nothing”—and how to protect it.⁵⁶ This,

Moten might say, is a “church problem,” that is, a problem of *how stuff goes together*, “a way of existing in a world which is predicated on separating things, codifying things, categorizing things, in the interest of the elimination of most of those things or the accumulation of other of those things.”⁵⁷

A Soloist Who Refuses to Be One

Standing alongside Arthur Jafa, her partner (alongside Malik Hassan Sayeed) in the TNEG production company, for a presentation at the 2016 Creative Time Summit, titled “The Case for Nonsense,” Elissa Blount Moorhead announces: “I/we/us want to be things—meaning not geniuses, not producers of masterpieces, but producers of conversation pieces. In fact, not producers at all, but products, manifestations, or emanations of black culture. And I/we are interested in the life of things. Things are interesting. We were the things. Not people. Not subjects, but objects, when we were brought to these shores.”⁵⁸

Church problems are problems about the togetherness of things—“how stuff goes together,” where “stuff” is a way to think about things without insisting on their individuation—and Blount Moorhead has described herself as someone who “makes things.” In her introduction to her conversation with the artist, Michele Prettyman describes Blount Moorhead as someone who is “doing it, *fluid*,” and draws black (unindividuated) things together at all times, across and beyond any analytical distinction we might attempt to make between practice and praxis.⁵⁹

Blount Moorhead’s collective identification, her

conjuring up of the ensemble— “I/we/us— channels her comportment toward horizontal and reciprocal creative processes, driven by, and infused with, what she calls a “feminine energy,” a non-gender-specific rejection of capitalist and patriarchal structures of making and of accounting for that making (i.e., industrial practices of “creditation”), and an understanding of the power of cocreation as “being able to be vulnerable together.”⁶⁰ Perhaps she is a “soloist who refuses to be one.”⁶¹

At the teach-in the *liquid blackness* research group organized to prepare for her virtual visit in November 2020, I stated that Blount Moorhead’s work presents an archival challenge: her solo voice is constantly disappearing in the chorus because of her refusal of the very terms by which it would canonically appear, for example, as an individuated credit line, or, most often, under the idea of the “singular genius.”⁶² Blount Moorhead identifies instead with the B-side of things, or, channeling her father’s words, with the “Bliles Blavis” of the world—hypothetical cousins of Miles Davis, who might have been equally talented but did not attain the same visibility and became instead part of a “splintering” of black cultural pasts that have to be put back together.⁶³ She has explained how her focus on black “mundaneity,” that is, the quotidian subtleties and sublime qualities of black lives, becomes available when one is not preoccupied with “someone’s identity politics” but, rather, nurtured in an environment that encourages “thinking about thinking.”⁶⁴ Coming from a proud lineage of self-determination, Blount Moorhead said that, as

a child, she could look at black art and “focus on the details, the nuances and their otherworldliness”—a particular attention to black aesthetic history, regarded as an open set of informal solutions to questions of personal and collective fulfillment.⁶⁵

Thinking about Blount Moorhead’s particular mode of archival practice as an investment in remembering and reassembling variously displaced black pasts and communities, and channeling rhythms of lineages of black knowing as they are passed through and passed on, Okwui Okpokwasili’s formulation “What do you carry that carries you?,” explored in issue 5.2, comes to mind again.⁶⁶ Blount Moorhead’s twist to this question shapes her understanding of intentionality in terms of quantum physics: atoms that can be transported through time and space, energy that accumulates, people and things that become vessels for the “ontological totality” of blackness.⁶⁷ The church problems she addresses with her “fluid” understanding of *making* (creative work, advocacy, community-building, parenting, cooking, babysitting her friends’ kids, you name it—doing it, *fluid*) are all spaces where the “quantum intentionality” of the ensemble plays itself out as the awareness that “every time that energy [DNA] gets passed around, it gets ignited.”⁶⁸ In Moten’s words, Blount Moorhead shows that “at stake . . . is a matter of (is the *materiality* of) relation—between things and thinginess, blacks and blackness—and study, determined by the protocols of improvisation and review, invention, and inventory.”⁶⁹ As Prettyman puts it, building on our own ensemblic *liquid blackness* praxis, which she

both inspired and propelled forward throughout the years, Blount Moorhead's "practice is a fluid way of being—not singular or of her own making—that embodies how the black imaginary shapeshifts, how its energy moves, expands, accommodates, and creates space."⁷⁰

If the ensemble "is given through the object, the thing, the artwork, as the rebellion of its laws of motion," Blount Moorhead's centeredness-in-disbursement, her commitment to "face her own band," echoes the architecture of *A view of a landscape*: her feminine energy moves not toward product but toward process, not toward individuation but toward "the lineaments of an aesthetic sociology."⁷¹ This chorality, as well as their common attachment to Baltimore's black roots, are some of the reasons Prettyman recognizes in Blount Moorhead a "kindred spirit," which, in turn, informs her contextualization of the artist within both Baltimore's "televisual imprint" and what Prettyman calls the "Baltimore Arts and Image Renaissance"—a thriving and tightly knit group of artists and filmmakers who have consciously chosen to build community in Baltimore, where each member is exposed to, and draws from, "the bounty of black life"—within which Blount Moorhead functions as a centripetal force and a "connective tissue."⁷² Understanding her aesthetic praxis through their shared musical roots, Prettyman suggests that Blount Moorhead's "doing it, fluid" is a mode of black care for the unmolested creativity of unmolested blackness.⁷³

Blount Moorhead knows she is "sent" and knows

how to do her own sending.⁷⁴ She speaks in medias res, from the midst of the unpayable debt that black sociality is, from a radical option for sharing and the shared, and with a deliberate composure toward both previousness and futurity. She turns toward the generativity of gathering—we want to be "producers of conversation pieces"—to harness past linages while ushering in "lineages to come," without being preoccupied with her own individuation: I/we want to be "emanations of black culture"—she draws loops without beginning—open sets of anaoriginary relations propelled across generations by quantum intentionality.⁷⁵

Undercommonsense in the Making

Moten's church problem, as articulated by *A view of a landscape* and Blount Moorhead's way of doing things, inspires how I approach all other contributions to this issue: as a collective effort toward (under) common informality, invested in incompleteness and previousness.

Christopher Law's essay "'Common Informality': Aesthetics, Renomination, Philology," homes in on Moten's comment that if *In the Break* was a "preliminary report" on the aesthetics of the black radical tradition, *Black and Blur* is "more preliminary still." This is not a spatial *stillness* but, rather, a temporal marker for a previousness that announces programmatic incompleteness. Preliminary "ruptures the time of aesthetic experience . . . from the various uses to which 'aesthetics' has—in its famed uselessness, or 'purposivelessness'—historically been put," and par-

ticularly “the model of temporal progress that has determined the relationship between aesthetics and politics since Immanuel Kant.”⁷⁶ For Law, it expresses Moten’s option for “common informality,” that is, the forms that informality might assume (rather than the form that supposedly precedes it, especially the form of the subject, or the subject as form), for which “the graphic materiality of writing functions as a privileged index.”⁷⁷ He shows how “Moten argues for a black radical tradition whose *informal* expressions risk, again and again, the intractable possibility of invisibility,” perhaps “a result of expression’s submergence into an already existing, intentional social life.”⁷⁸ Law focuses on Moten’s option for incompleteness and flow, which he ultimately describes as a philological project that rejects the future-oriented temporality of the aesthetic and expresses reluctance to the creation of new concepts in favor of renomination and interpolation. Yet he also calls attention to black radical aesthetics’ looped temporality, one based on “interpolation,” in which every form is “the revelation of a content, and so—because that content is ceaselessly interpolating—remains open to further interpolations”: “‘Speak, so you can speak again’ is the banner that hangs over this work, and at the same time trips it up and enfolds it.”⁷⁹ Ultimately, Law concludes, “if aesthetics means anything for Moten, it is not the hierarchization of matter into form, but the multiplication and dispersal of content, beyond the confines of interpretation and the demand for political effectivity.”⁸⁰

While Law attends to the common informality of

BLOUNT MOORHEAD KNOWS SHE IS “SENT” AND KNOWS HOW TO DO HER OWN SENDING

language, fahima ife practices undercommonsense as an *ars poetica sin remedio*, a “double black study of eroding and composing a new sentence, a new sentence sounded in refusal (of the social pact of writing, of grammar), a new sentence forged in friendship (of thinking with, of writing with).”⁸¹ This practice of black study is perhaps “double” in seeking what Harney and Moten describe as the “intra-action of black study and black studies.”⁸² Titled “Grief Aesthetics,” ife’s contribution “plays with the pronouns you and we to . . . practice thinking as a common poetics.”⁸³ This is a strategically *incomplete* mode of creating *in* commonsense, in the space of shared “remains of stolen life,” a common “longing in black art, black sense, without meaning, without value, without property.”⁸⁴ Here aesthetics is not dependent on intersubjectivity or the legibility of its outcome but is a common generative informality: “*What if the thing whose meaning or value has never been found finds things, founds things?*” asks ife, channeling Moten’s words. And answers, “Finds and founds things in nothingness. As in the case of blackness, love, affiliation, our common gathering.”⁸⁵

Thinking (primarily) with Terence Nance’s *An Over-*

simplification of Her Beauty (2012) and *Swimming in Your Skin Again* (2015), directly addressed in a shift to epistolary format, “Grief Aesthetics” is “preoccupied with the poetic line, the sentence (thinking about sentences), the space in writing, the mundane moments in between the emergence of a line or series of lines and declension as it occurs in the gaps,” and with the seriality of loss, love, and friendship.⁸⁶ Thus, writing itself, as it is for Moten, becomes a chapel—one that Nance has already built with his films. “Tell your story to soften my story. . . . Tell your story to signify my story. . . . Tell your story until the line summons me again. . . . Tell your story until the line touches me again. . . . Tell your story to escape my story. . . . Tell your story until the sentence troubles me again.”⁸⁷

When ife asks, “How can I love you Black, black as I am, when what we hold in common is grief?” in the sonic wavering between “Black” and “back” one might also hear the syntactical challenges to an uncommon friendship that refuses the distinction between subject and object.⁸⁸ Thinking *with* (peoples, artworks, sounds, colors; with always already looped and shared memories and recollections—and vectors of quantum intentionality), “speaking in communion, fluidly, and uninterrupted, as more than one, a many-tongued chorus, a procession, *semi-sung/semi-wept*, semi-danced,” as ife does in this essay, is a mode of critical vulnerability that eschews individuation and the ruse of completion. “Loop it as our pasts meld, mettles us in common. Loop it with no intention to name it,” they write.⁸⁹ As it happens in Blount Moorhead’s work, the temporal structure of anaoriginality

can be harnessed as a mechanism for disbursement of the given—or Moten’s “being sent”—that turns anaoriginal dispossession into the bounty of black life.

I find a similar formal mechanism at work in C.C. McKee’s essay “Staging Mirrors: Deborah Anzinger’s Eco-aesthetic Syntax of Dehiscent Being,” which approaches Anzinger’s use of mirrors under the twinned rubric of sociopoetic activity and “irreducible dehiscence” by tracking how dehiscence’s many meanings are held concomitantly by these mirrors as a way to get at “the generative porosity of dehiscent being”: from Lacan’s usage to signal the incoherence of the subject, to its botanical and surgical meanings. Anzinger’s work addresses the problem of the black mirror stage by *disbursing* the negated subject through an ecological undercommons that acts as a rejoinder to the inane presumption of autonomous selfhood in Lacan’s theory. The mirrors *extend* “negation’s role as a logic of manifold opposition” so that, differently from Lacan, “negativity operates as generative ontological possibility.”⁹⁰

Anzinger’s mirrors, McKee shows, function both centrifugally—in a way that reflects a whole “ecology of things” (in this case, various combinations of paint, clay, synthetic hair, and *Aloe barbadensis* plants, which the artist understands as “performers” and are variously reflected in the exhibition space)—and centripetally, as orificial mirrors, a form of invagination which institutes an “orificial eye/I” that replaces “the narcissistic illusion of autonomous subjectivity . . . with a relational selfhood constituted by Black feminine



FIGURE 3. Kevin Beasley, *Rebuilding of the cotton gin motor*, 2016. Photograph by Carlos Vela-Prado. Courtesy of the artist and Casey Kaplan, New York.

**THE TEMPORAL
STRUCTURE OF
ANAORIGINARITY
CAN BE HARNESSSED
AS A MECHANISM FOR
DISBURSEMENT OF THE
GIVEN—OR MOTEN’S
“BEING SENT”—THAT
TURNS ANAORIGINAL
DISPOSSESSION INTO THE
BOUNTY OF BLACK LIFE**

otherness.”⁹¹ Anzinger’s porous undercommon ecology of the Black queer feminine self is made of living, nonliving, generative, and toxic things. By inserting “in the intervals between [Lacan’s] irresolutions” an eco-aesthetic syntax that experiments with black plasticity and porosity, Anzinger shows how “Black aesthetics interrogate ontology from the position of the Thing excised and held in intimate proximity to the category of Man it was meant to prop up.”⁹² Further exploring Moten’s holding open of the dehiscent wound, Anzinger transmutes “its negated void as an act of efflorescent becoming.”⁹³ As McKee claims, “Riven being is necessarily intersubjective in its most capacious sense, an ecological network of flows into, outside of, and beyond the human.”⁹⁴

In their essay, “Aesthetics of (Black) Breathing,” Jessie Cox and Isaac Jean-François attempt to think ethically about the spectrality of Black breathing to resist its failure to index itself in art objects, sheet music, or instrumental practice, even though it is spectacularly and brutally exposed at the moment of its violent cessation. Thus, they ask, Is this blackness a color? What does it mean to bring the color of sound to bear upon the unseen and unheard breathing that sustains it? By way of answer, they approach it through its musicality, its color, and its hauntological nature, conceptualizing the spectral location of the blackness of Black breathing as “the nonplace where we have to improvisationally make mattering anew, not from nothing, but from colored ‘nothingness.’”⁹⁵

Cox and Jean-François’s strategic use of parentheses—(Black) breathing—signals both attempted

suffocations and the constitutive invisibility of black aliveness, as “black” teeters between color and being, while breathing teeters between the singular and the plural, call and response, aesthetics and aesthesis. As they write, “Breathing demands that we question how bodies and instruments enembleatically aspirate: expand and contract through the liquid fascia of time, intimacy, and flesh.”⁹⁶ In this way, the musicality of Black breathing, which “moves alongside the ensemble, the whole, and the relational, all at once, as a multidimensional (w)holeness,” reflects on the sonic ontology of the ensemble.

As Cox and Jean-François remind us, “In music, color and spectrality are matters of timbral quality, timbral perception, and timbral manipulation.” Yet the blackness of Black breathing cannot speak its name. Their analysis of the “shouts, moans, laughter, and shuffling of the feet” featured in Julius Eastman’s *Colors* (1973), for “fourteen women’s voices and tape,” shows how (Black) breathing is only spectrally present since “not even the echoes of those sonic markers can capture the breath required to produce them.”⁹⁷ Black aliveness remains unseen in sheet music; it does not index itself in the objects it brings to life and continues to be a foreclosed acoustic event within the carceral state.⁹⁸ It resists semiosis and is consigned to illegibility, ephemerality, and disappearance. Yet perhaps their emphasis on its hauntological nature is a way to call attention to its anaoriginal disbursement: both its “sentedness” and resilient “sending.”

Perhaps (Black) breathing too, “does not take

place”—that is, it “has no place in the place [it] is supposed to be found.”⁹⁹

Not-There-ness

Nicholas Mirzoeff’s essay “The Whiteness of Birds” further fleshes out the “not-thereness” that all contributions, alongside Kevin Beasley’s motor, confront in some capacity: whether it is not-thereness of the subject, the object, the thing, sound, sight, color, knowledge, movement, practice, or praxis. Mirzoeff attends to the way in which the natural history of racial capitalism has yoked extraction to extinction and collection in the name of a not-thereness that has been variously conceptualized as *terra nullius*, or, when focusing on Audubon’s *Birds of America*, what Mirzoeff describes as *aer nullius*, effectively “a way of (un)seeing.”¹⁰⁰ Indeed, “Audubon’s doubled settler status enabled his seeing of birds as colonial accumulation and as part of the property interest of whiteness,” Mirzoeff writes.¹⁰¹ At the same time, it “made a certain kind of financial sense to kill everything in sight,” and adds, “But creating endangered species, human and other than human, was a more important component of the psychological wages of whiteness. Exterminating birds offered a particular form of violent pleasure by confirming and making visible the capacity of colonization.”¹⁰²

Mirzoeff’s essay and *A view of a landscape* share similar formal conceits: the idea of turning an engine of extraction/extinction/accumulation into an autobiography of the ensemble. The essay’s very title announces its formal *volte-face*, if not revolt. If, in the

eyes of the settler the birds—equated to runaway slaves—are “an index of whiteness as property,” for the enslaved population they instead model fantasies of flight as an embodied praxis of freedom.¹⁰³ Whiteness is not *of* the birds, but rather *of the view on the landscape*, that is, of the bird’s-eye view imagined in their absentia, which they nevertheless fill, visually and sonically, with their murmuration.¹⁰⁴ Diffused in between two different rooms, the genitive ambiguity of “a view of a landscape” mirrors the genitive ambiguity of the “whiteness of birds.”¹⁰⁵

Leveraging Harney and Moten’s mention of the “conference of birds” and their murmuration, as an analytic for common informality and rebellious ensemblic practices, Mirzoeff speculates that perhaps the wild jubilee of birds’ assembly is the “past future that awaits.”¹⁰⁶ Perhaps it’s the general strike. As depicted in *The Fall of Icarus* (1995) by New Zealand painter Bill Hammond, the birds appear to “create community, . . . strike against colonialism and the invasion of humans.” “They are waiting, not for Godot,” Mirzoeff concludes, “but for the end of whiteness.”¹⁰⁷

Thinking together Mirzoeff’s essay and *A view of a landscape*, I wonder if perhaps in the space between the viewing and listening room the motor is made to sing a different (bird)song.

Louis Ruprecht’s “Still Life” also hinges on a genitive ambiguity—“Stillness of Life/Life of Stillness”—but one that is suppressed in the blurring of the perceived distinction between living and sculptural

bodies he traces in an emerging aesthetic theory from antiquity to neoclassicism, as well as in the double meaning of stillness as spatial and temporal marker.¹⁰⁸ Ruprecht reads a series of contradictory statements about living and sculptural bodies caught in audacious exchanges as a specific disavowal of difference between them, one that privileges stillness over movement, law over lawlessness, and possession over fugitivity and yet reveals a complex circulation of illicit desires (desires for the “thing”) that are constantly misattributed and redirected away from the desiring subject and projected onto entanglements between surface and depth, stillness and motion, copy and original, liveness and death. He identifies three complex moments in which aesthetic theory fixates on sculptural bodies’ ability to convey movement: whether that describes the emotional attachment of the aesthete, the aesthetic qualities of the objects, their capacity to index liveness, or an imperial vision that imagines its own unbound extension. Here too we find a centuries-long complex dynamic between extraction, extinction, and collection. These moments involve Pliny the Elder’s privileging of the materiality of sculpture—and the Laocoön group in particular—over its aesthetic or emotional power; the excavation of Pompeii and the process that turned the exhumed corpses into plaster statues; Winckelmann’s foundational, yet misleading, description of the Laocoön group; the reception and exhibition history of the Aeginetan marbles, whose perceived monumentality was appropriated by Hitler in order

to project the ideological immortality of fallen comrades in arms, which he also exhumed and exhibited as sculptures.

"A statue, by definition, was soulless," writes Ruprecht, "Yet the Greek philosophers will regularly discuss their statues in apparent violation of that philosophical truth. In moving the viewer, these statues appear to usher in movement," which most commonly, is a desire that is uncertain of its referent and what it really wants.¹⁰⁹ Winckelmann, for example, described the Laocoön group through a quality that it conspicuously lacks, that of "noble simplicity and quiet grandeur," a description that belies the aesthetic properties of the sculpture which, instead, flaunts a view of the body in pain that anticipates its own death. Yet his assessment came to define the neoclassical aesthetics he almost single-handedly ushered in. As Ruprecht teases out, whether it is projected in the disavowed emotions registered on the Laocoön's sculptural surface, or in the frozen spasm of the bodies unearthed in Pompeii, or on the pristine exteriors of sarcophagi that held the exhumed Hitler fellowmen, in this tradition of aesthetic thinking a desire for difference flows through its disavowal; a rejection of unregulated movement unexpectedly becomes its very celebration.

Mirzoeff's and Ruprecht's attention to "still life" (think of Audubon's practice of painting dead birds held up by wires) shed additional light onto the taxidermic impulse evoked by *A view of a landscape*. They show how within aesthetic discourse object

**WHITENESS IS NOT
OF THE BIRDS, BUT
RATHER OF THE VIEW
OF THE LANDSCAPE,
THAT IS, OF THE BIRD'S-
EYE VIEW IMAGINED IN
THEIR ABSENTIA, WHICH
THEY NEVERTHELESS
FILL, VISUALLY AND
SONICALLY, WITH THEIR
MURMURATION**

movement can only appear once it has been incorporated and digested—said otherwise, embalmed, affixed, *extinguished*.

Ruprecht's essay concludes with a reflection on the academic suppression of ancient Greece's polychromatism, which was a known and critically discussed fact in the nineteenth century, since the exhumation of the Aeginetan sculptures. He indexes the way recent critiques have approached this perceived concealment as a suppression of ethnic and cultural diversity in the ancient world, to yet another confusion between living and sculptural bodies: "It can

often seem as if ancient Greek statues, treated once again almost as if they were real bodies, are being asked to carry more cultural weight and meaning than they can bear," he offers.¹¹⁰ Perhaps the "stillness" of the *still life* Ruprecht examines throughout these moments gestures toward the sterility of the regulatory function, which demands the intersubjectivity of judgments of taste. If, as Law observes, "one of the major achievements of *consent not to be a single being* is to decouple the pleasures of aesthesis (which Moten regularly affirms as 'lawless freedom,' 'imaginative criminality')" from the "intersubjective communicability . . . with which they are identified," then perhaps in this complex history of avowal and disavowal of movement, motion, and emotion it is the anaoriginary of lawlessness that is being played out over and over again.¹¹¹

The Liquidity of Blackness Is a (Black) Aesthetic Demand

Like the essays featured in this issue, *A view of a landscape* invests in "church problems"—the problem of how stuff goes together—but does so by tearing things apart: the motor is in one room, and its sound is in another one; frustrated sight is rendered through muffled sounds, movement as stasis. Yet it also shows the readymade becoming fugitive; the instrument staging an insurrection, and thingliness as animated materiality. As such, it "tends toward [liquid/ blurred] blackness."¹¹² That is, not unlike Moten's writing practice, and the essays gathered in this issue, it approaches black liquidity and blur as black aesthetic

demands: the knowledge of freedom is a knowledge of dehiscence, entanglement, and shared dispossession, one that cannot be explained by phenomenology (which fails to "intend" the object), or ontology (which cannot acknowledge black being), or vibrant materialism (which is disoriented by its own attempt to let go of a sovereign subject it still needs and demands). To say that the liquidity of blackness is an aesthetic demand is to say that this is how black anaoriginary displacement comes to us: that is how it is sent, and that is how it arrives. ■

ALESSANDRA RAENGO is professor of Moving Image Studies at Georgia State University, the founding editor in chief of *liquid blackness: journal of aesthetics and black studies*, and the founder of the research group on blackness and aesthetics that initiated the journal in 2013. She is the author of *On the Sleeve of the Visual: Race as Face Value* (2013) and of *Critical Race Theory and Bamboozled* (2016).

Notes

- 1 Raengo, "Black Study @ GSU," 16.
- 2 Insofar as "it's about the very idea of the thing being beside itself, touched in an absolute and enformational nothingness, blackness is the subject of every artwork" (Moten, *Black and Blur*, 202). On blackness as the subject and object of art see at least Copeland, *Bound to Appear*; and Aranke, "Blackouts," 5.
- 3 Moten, Harney, and Shukaitis, "Refusing Completion."
- 4 Kevin Beasley: *A view of a landscape* was on view at Whitney Museum of Art, New York, December 15, 2018–March 10, 2019.
- 5 Raengo, "Introduction: Blackness as Process," 6.
- 6 Arthur Jafa is most famously associated with the idea of quan-

tum intentionality, which he has discussed in countless talks, including “The Case for Nonsense” (with Elissa Blount Moorhead), which I will mention later. Here I am also thinking about what Stefano Harney describes as “black quantum life . . . the whole physical sociality that Denise [Ferreira da Silva] teaches us” (Moten, Harney, and Shukaitis, “Refusing Completion,” 8).

7 “Refusal of what has been refused to you” is a formulation that appears throughout Moten’s *consent to be a single being* trilogy.

8 Beasley, Brooks, and Clayton, “Kevin Beasley in Conversation”; Beasley, “Talk with Renowned Artist Kevin Beasley.”

9 Goppion Technology, www.goppion.com (accessed November 2, 2021). See Beasley, Brooks, and Clayton, “Kevin Beasley in Conversation”; and Beasley, “Talk with Renowned Artist Kevin Beasley.”

10 Lew, “Low End Theory.”

11 Henriques, *Sonic Bodies*.

12 While it increased efficiency fiftyfold, Lew writes, instead of reducing the workforce, it only increased the demand for slave labor to match the increased rate of production (“Low End Theory”).

13 Moten, *Stolen Life*, 40.

14 Gómez-Barris, *Extractive Zone*, cited in Mirzoeff, “Whiteness of Birds,” in this issue.

15 See Moten, *In the Break*; and Beasley and Moten, “On Poetry and the Turntable.” See also Gunn, “Outside Meets the Institution.”

16 Thompson, *African Art in Motion*; Jafa, “My Black Death” and “Park Nights.”

17 “Black art in motion” also indexes Jafa’s claim that the transatlantic slave trade brought to the Americas not simply black objects but the makers of those very objects, who necessarily began producing culture in a freefall. Their challenge, which is the challenge Jafa still perceives, is “how to turn an immaterial concept—the black aesthetic—into a thing.” See Jafa, “My Black Death” and “Park Nights,” among many other talks.

18 Reid, “Hearing the Trauma.”

19 Weheliye, *Phonographies*, channeled by Brooks in “Kevin Beasley in Conversation.”

20 Redmond, *Everything Man*.

21 This is a reference to Moten’s engagement with Marx’s speaking commodities in *In the Break*.

22 Korman, “Historical Instrument.”

23 “In turn, dispossession is what we are and what we have in common; . . . it is the undercommons” (Moten, *Stolen Life*, 27). “This troubled interiority [that is, blackness as invaginated principle of the lawlessness of imagination] is either domesticated by way of a cycle of projection and importation; exoticized and eroticized as an object of irreducible difference, attraction, incorporation, and exilic hope; or theorized as an interdicted and invisible view, derived from the (ad)vantage from which it can neither see nor be seen, neither impeded not enhanced by whatever strange preoccupation . . . what I prefer to think of as the immanence of a radical informality that precedes the distinction between nature and culture” (Moten, *Stolen Life*, 5).

24 In the preface of *Black and Blur* Moten writes that he is interested in “how blackness bears what Hartman calls the ‘diffusion’ of the terror of anti-blackness” (viii). He claims that Aunt Hester’s scream is diffused but not diluted by black music and black art. “But if this is so it is because her rape, as well as Douglass’s various representations of it, is an aesthetic act. Evidently, the violent art of anti-blackness isn’t hard to master” (x).

25 Moten, *Stolen Life*, 11.

26 Moten, *Black and Blur*, 156.

27 See the “Nothing. Everything” chapter on Thornton Dial in Moten, *Black and Blur*, 152–57.

28 Brooks (in Beasley, Brooks, and Clayton, “Kevin Beasley in Conversation”) channeling Marina Rosenfeld and Julie Beth Napolin’s “Politics of the Musical Situation,” reprinted in the exhibition prospectus. Moten discusses the knowledge of language

and knowledge of freedom in the first chapter of *Stolen Life*, 1–95.

29 Beasley, Brooks, and Clayton, “Kevin Beasley in Conversation.” If “the conjunction of reproduction and disappearance is performance’s condition of possibility, its ontology and its mode of reproduction,” as Moten has written (*In the Break*, 5), then, like Blind Tom, the motor is made over to become a sound instrument which is simultaneously performing and recording, and thus challenges the ontology of both instrument and instrumentality. See also Capper and Schneider, “Black Performance and Reproduction”; Colbert et al., *Race and Performance*.

30 Best, *Fugitive’s Properties*, 59. Best further clarifies: “When imitating, Tom became, in the act of repetition, a creative subject however qualified that creativity and marginal that subjectivity might have been. When duplicating, repetitions made him a mere mimetic contrivance” (57–58).

31 Beasley, Brooks, and Clayton, “Kevin Beasley in Conversation.”

32 Brooks, ““Puzzling the Intervals,”” 397. Brooks indicates that Tom displayed what now we would describe as an ecological sensibility that shows he was in communion with nature.

33 Brooks, ““Puzzling the Intervals,”” 410 channeling Sacks, liner notes; Moten, “On Escape Velocity.”

34 Brooks, ““Puzzling the Intervals,”” 411; McMillan, *Embodied Avatars*.

35 Moten, *Stolen Life*, 7.

36 Beasley, Brooks, and Clayton, “Kevin Beasley in Conversation.”

37 Moten, *Universal Machine*, 43.

38 Moten, *Stolen Life*, 8.

39 Moten, *Stolen Life*, 2.

40 “Nonsense, then does not befall the imagination like a foreign pathogen; rather, it is the very law of imagination’s own ‘lawlessness.’ Kant therefore prescribes a rigid antidote: even in the

field of the aesthetic, understanding must ‘severely clip the wings’ of imagination and ‘sacrifice . . . some of it” (Moten, *Stolen Life*, 1). See also Menninghaus, *In Praise of Nonsense*.

41 Robert Bernasconi shows how Kant was responsible for producing the “scientific” concept of racism to maintain together a biblical account of humanity’s descent from an original couple with the “variety” of humans. Kant was a proponent of monogenesis but, building on Buffon’s theory of species (two animals are of the same species when they can procreate together, if their issue can also procreate, he writes), he theorized that the seeds of all the races were latent in everyone but developed purposively, thus applying teleology to biology. Bernasconi, “Kant as an Unfamiliar Source of Racism” and “Who Invented the Concept of Race?”

42 Moten, *Stolen Life*, 13, following Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*.

43 Moten, *Stolen Life*, 16.

44 Moten, *Stolen Life*, 21. Since “the scandal of the supersensible is that it manifests itself sensually,” “Black Kant” (pronounced “cant,” Moten insists), has accrued an unpayable debt toward blackness, which remains buried in the ground of critical thinking (*Stolen Life*, 30–40).

45 Chandler, “Originary Displacement.”

46 *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African. Written by Himself* was published in London in 1789 and became the prototype for the slave narratives that followed.

47 Carretta, “Olaudah Equiano.”

48 Moten, *Stolen Life*, 60.

49 Moten, *Stolen Life*, 59. As Kazanjian explains mercantilism was both an economic policy and “a set of discursive practices that articulated formal and abstract equality with the codification of race, nation, and gender in the North Atlantic during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” (Kazanjian quoted in *Stolen Life*, 73).

- 50** Moten, *Stolen Life*, 60. “The anxiety that structures racism as capitalization of difference and the justification of the derivation of inequality from difference by way of abstract equivalence is this: that race, insofar as it guarantees the field of equivalence that it supplements and thereby ruptures, anaoriginally endangers the inequality it is deployed—or, more precisely, nominated—to protect” (Moten, *Stolen Life*, 17).
- 51** For “still act,” see Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance*.
- 52** The black radical tradition reproduces “the political and philosophical paradoxes of Kantian regulation” at the same time as it “constitutes a resistance that anticipates and makes possible Kantian regulation by way of the instrumentalization to which such resistance is submitted and which it refuses” (Moten, *Stolen Life*, 3).
- 53** Moten, *Stolen Life*, 17.
- 54** See also Best, *None like Us*.
- 55** Moten, *Stolen Life*, 49.
- 56** Moten, *Stolen Life*, 49.
- 57** This is how Moten describes the “church problem” during the Q&A following *You are mine. I know now I’m a have to let you go*, “sampled” in *liquid blackness* 5.1 on “liquidity,” and further discussed in Raengo, “Black Study @ GSU,” 14.
- 58** Blount Moorhead and Arthur Jafa (TNEG), “Case for Nonsense.” This entire passage is cited also by Michele Prettyman in her interview with Blount Moorhead for this issue. Prettyman, “Doing It, *Fluid*.” I repeat it here precisely in the same spirit Jafa and Blount Moorhead express: as quantum intentionality.
- 59** Prettyman, “Doing It, *Fluid*,” TK. See also Harney remembering Moten’s formulation that “improvisation is making nothing out of something” (Moten, Harney, and Shukaitis, “Refusing Completion,” 4).
- 60** Blount Moorhead unpacks the idea of “feminine energy” in her interview with Prettyman in this issue. See also Raengo et al., “Teach-In.”
- 61** Moten, *Universal Machine*, x.
- 62** Raengo et al., “Teach-In.” Overall, the black ensemble resists archival *recording* and therefore tends to reproduce its own disappearance as ensemble. See Raengo, “Black Study @ GSU,” whose central ensemblic works are both the *liquid blackness* research group itself and Larry Clark’s film *Passing Through* (1977). But one could see this more clearly (and recently) by attending to the vicissitudes of Arthur Jafa’s *Love Is the Message, the Message Is Death* (2016), which, along with its mistakenly perceived “solo” maker, quickly became a coveted black object in white space: the ensemble that made it possible has failed to register its very presence in the way the work has become a *black object*. Yet the work’s roots are deep, complicated, and, more importantly, collective. I have discussed this in a presentation at the World Picture Conference on “Value,” University of Toronto in 2019, with a paper titled “Dope Shit and White Sublime: The Story of AJ.”
- 63** Discussed in Prettyman, “Doing It, *Fluid*,” 191–97.
- 64** This is how she puts it in Blount Moorhead, Cheon, and Heinemann, “Elissa Blount Moorhead,” which I take it to mean that identity politics is not necessarily her concern. Her point about “thinking about thinking” is made in conversation with Prettyman.
- 65** Blount Moorhead, Cheon, and Heinemann, “Elissa Blount Moorhead.”
- 66** Juarez, “Within the Whirlwind”; Raengo, “Introduction: Blackness as Process.”
- 67** Robinson, *Black Marxism*.
- 68** Prettyman, “Doing It, *Fluid*.” Arthur Jafa’s idea of “quantum intentionality” describes a sensibility that Blount Moorhead shares and seeks to enact in her practice.
- 69** Moten, *Stolen Life*, 11. For Moten’s approach to thingness see at least the *Black and Blur* chapter on Thornton Dial, “Nothing. Everything,” and the concluding chapter of *Universal Machine*, titled “Chromatic Saturation,” which reworks his seminal essay “The Case of Blackness,” among others.
- 70** Prettyman, “Doing It, *Fluid*,” 175. As I discuss in my introduction to issue 5.1, “Black Study @ GSU,” Prettyman was a pivotal

figure in the founding of the *liquid blackness* research group. The Prettyman–Blount Moorhead interview featured in this issue, in turn, imbued with the very ensemblic processes that brought me to approach Blount Moorhead in Philadelphia during an event dedicated to *Back and Song* (2020)—the four-screen installation she codirected with Bradford Young and an ensemble of collaborators, which, she insists, include editor Stefani Saintonge— and prompted her to welcome me into “the family,” i.e., the artists who had been the focus of previous *liquid blackness* events: Arthur Jafa, Kahlil Joseph, Bradford Young, and Jenn Nkiru. It is also inspired by the recognition that we who have been there since the beginning—Lauren McLeod Cramer, Michele Prettyman, and Charles “Chip” Linscott, among many others—cannot not hear each other’s voices when we study, while Blount Moorhead challenges us to think about the form of an engagement with an “object” that constantly dissolves its own contours. Quickly, then, research on Blount Moorhead becomes *study*—a church problem about the togetherness of stuff. The *liquid blackness* event was titled “Facing the Band: Elissa Blount Moorhead and the (Ana)Architectures of Community Ties,” November 19–20, 2020 and was co-organized with AMPLIFY: media arts for collective strength, founded by Susan Sojourna Collier, Aggie Ebrahimi Bazaz, Jade Petermon, and myself.

71 Moten, *Stolen Life*, 60, and *Universal Machine*, x.

72 Prettyman, “Doing It, *Fluid*,” TK; Blount Moorhead’s personal conversation with the author.

73 Prettyman, “Doing It, *Fluid*,” TK.

74 I briefly discuss how the knowledge of “being sent” permeates Bradford Young and Common’s *Black America Again*, and her place within this collaboration, in my contribution to the 2020 transmission of *Black One Shot*. See Moten, *Black and Blur*, 66–87, and *Stolen Life*, 241–68.

75 Blount Moorhead and Jafa, “The Case for Nonsense.”

76 Law, “‘Common Informality,’” 34.

77 This quote is from the abstract for Law’s essay: <https://doi.org/10.1215/26923874-9546552>.

78 Law, “‘Common Informality,’” 35.

79 Law, “‘Common Informality,’” 48, citing Moten, *Black and Blur*, 152. Philology, Law offers, “may help us to navigate or simply appreciate the ‘unacknowledged grapho-spatiality of material writing’ as it punctuates Moten’s conceptual, or rather ‘underconceptual,’ vocabulary” (39).

80 Law, “‘Common Informality,’” 41.

81 Ife, “Grief Aesthetics,” 86.

82 Fred Moten, using Karen Barad’s terminology, in Moten, Harney, and Shukaitis, “Refusing Completion,” 9.

83 In this, ife echoes Harney’s assessment of friendship as something that comes “before knowing one another and it survives knowing one another. It survives the rules of individuation that incarcerates the difference that actually make friendship possible . . . by giving the lie to the idea that difference comes in individual units . . . rather than forces” (Moten, Harney, and Shukaitis, “Refusing Completion,” 8).

84 Ife, “Grief Aesthetics,” 87.

85 Ife, “Grief Aesthetics,” 87. The last question is a “bent” citation from Moten, *Black and Blur*, viii.

86 This quote is from the abstract for ife’s essay: <https://doi.org/10.1215/26923874-9546572>.

87 Ife, “Grief Aesthetics,” 91.

88 In the interview with Shukaitis, Harney says: “You can’t love something or someone by yourself. To do that is really to abandon that someone or something to the subject/object relation, to purity, to separation. We have to love commonly, collectively, entangled in what we are doing.” Moten, Harney, and Shukaitis, “Refusing Completion,” 6.

89 Ife, “Grief Aesthetics,” 94.

90 McKee, “Staging Mirrors,” 52.

91 McKee, “Staging Mirrors,” 58.

92 McKee, “Staging Mirrors,” 64, also channeling Jackson, *Becoming Human*; King, *Black Shoals*; and Musser, *Sensual Excess*.

- 93 McKee, "Staging Mirrors," 71.
- 94 McKee, "Staging Mirrors," 67.
- 95 Cox and Jean-François, "Aesthetics of (Black) Breathing," 99.
- 96 Cox and Jean-François, "Aesthetics of (Black) Breathing," 100.
- 97 Cox and Jean-François, "Aesthetics of (Black) Breathing," 103.
- 98 My use of the term *black aliveness* is a nod to Quashie, *Black Aliveness*.
- 99 Moten, *Stolen Life*, 60.
- 100 "Under the gaze of extinction, those colonized should also be collected" (Mirzoeff, "Whiteness of Birds," 122, 124). On racial capitalism as a natural history see at least Robinson, *Black Marxism*; and Yusoff, *Billion Black Anthropocenes*.
- 101 Mirzoeff, "Whiteness of Birds," 125.
- 102 Mirzoeff, "Whiteness of Birds," 122.
- 103 Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, referenced in Mirzoeff's essay in this issue.
- 104 We could think here also about the "emptiness" Blount Moorhead's *As of a Now* (2018)—an augmented reality installation that reimagines the lives of three generations of black inhabitants of a "vacant" rowhome in Baltimore—refuses. Blount Moorhead's *As of a Now* shares similar formal conceits: the idea of turning an engine of extraction/extinction/accumulation into an autobiography of the ensemble. The impulse behind *As of a Now*, discussed in Prettyman's interview with Blount Moorhead, can also be seen as an attempt at reconstructing a murmuration that a specific view of the (urban) landscape would rather imagine has never been there.
- 105 I take the expression "genitive ambiguity" from Christopher Law, who emphasizes it, in a manner that would be entirely appropriate here, to Moten's idea of "predication of blackness."
- 106 "Unlike humans, except in opera, there's no need for them to speak one at a time" (Mirzoeff, "Whiteness of Birds," 133). Fred Moten: "Murmuration is a cool word because it bears the trace of

the sound. It's beautiful when you watch those movements, but it's even more beautiful when you hear them. The internal differentiation of the swarm is absolute wealth" (Moten, Harney, and Shukaitis, "Refusing Completion," 6).

- 107 Mirzoeff, "Whiteness of Birds," 134.
- 108 Considered in relation to Jafa's approach to "black art in motion," Ruprecht's essay helps us think about a desire for stillness that precedes the introduction of African artifacts in European collections and museums at the turn of the twentieth century.
- 109 Ruprecht, "Still Life," 141.
- 110 Ruprecht, "Still Life," 155.
- 111 Law, "'Common Informality,'" 36.
- 112 Copeland, "Tending-toward-Blackness." See also how it has been discussed in my introduction to 5.2, "Introduction: Blackness as Process."

Works Cited

- Aranke, Sampada. "Blackouts and Other Visual Escapes." *Art Journal* 79, no. 4 (2020): 62–75.
- Beasley, Kevin. "A Talk with Renowned Artist Kevin Beasley." Emory University. Streamed live on February 18, 2021.
- Beasley, Kevin, Daphne Brooks, and Jace Clayton. "Kevin Beasley in Conversation with Daphne Brooks and Jayce Clayton." Whitney Museum of American Art, February 1, 2019. YouTube video, 1:26:30. www.youtube.com/watch?v=VyTVblGzcUY&t=1s.
- Beasley, Kevin, and Fred Moten. "On Poetry and the Turntable." In *On Value*, edited by R. Lemon and T. Canopy, 123–47. New York: Triple Canopy, 2016.
- Bernasconi, Robert. "Kant as an Unfamiliar Source of Racism." In *Philosophers on Race: Critical Essays*, edited by Julie Ward and Tommy Lott, 145–66. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002.
- Bernasconi, Robert. "Who Invented the Concept of Race? Kant's Role in the Enlightenment Construction of Race." In *Race*, 11–36. London: Blackwell, 2001.
- Best, Stephen. *The Fugitive's Properties: Law and the Poetics of Possession*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

- Best, Stephen. *None like Us: Blackness, Belonging, Aesthetic Life*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019.
- Blount Moorhead, Elissa, Mina Cheon, and Lee Heinemann. "Elissa Blount Moorhead and Mina Cheon Moderated by Lee Heinemann." Baltimore Museum of Art, February 28, 2019. YouTube video, 1:08:02. www.youtube.com/watch?v=xOwqRCD4UuY.
- Blount Moorhead, Elissa, and Arthur Jafa (TNEG). "The Case for Nonsense." Presented at Creative Time Summit DC. Uploaded November 3, 2016. creativetime.org/summit/2016/10/25/elissa-blount-moorhead-arthur-jafa/.
- Brooks, Daphne. "'Puzzling the Intervals': Blind Tom and the Poetics of the Sonic Slave Narrative." In *The Oxford Handbook of the African American Slave Narrative*, edited by John Ernest, 391–414. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Capper, Beth, and Rebecca Schneider. "Black Performance and Reproduction: A Set of Four Essays in a Round (Introduction)." *TDR / The Drama Review* 62, no. 1 (2018): 160–62.
- Carretta, Vincent. "Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa? New Light on an Eighteenth-Century Question of Identity." *Slavery and Abolition* 20, no. 3 (1999): 96–105.
- Chandler, Naum. "Originary Displacement." *boundary 2* 27, no. 3 (2000): 249–86.
- Colbert, Soyica Diggs, Douglas A. Jones Jr., and Shane Vogel, eds. *Race and Performance after Repetition*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020.
- Copeland, Huey. *Bound to Appear: Art, Slavery, and the Site of Blackness in Multicultural America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013.
- Copeland, Huey. "Tending-toward-Blackness." *October*, no. 156 (2016): 141–44.
- Cox, Jessie, and Isaac Jean-François. "Aesthetics of (Black) Breathing." *liquid blackness: journal of aesthetics and black studies* 6, no.1 (2022): 98–117.
- Equiano, Olaudah. *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African. Written by Himself*. London, 1789.
- Gómez-Barris, Macarena. *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017.
- Gunn, Jenny. "The Outside Meets the Institution: The Carters' Apeshit Video." *Black Camera* 11, no. 1 (2019): 385–98.
- Guyer, Paul. *Kant and the Claims of Taste*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Henriques, Julian. *Sonic Bodies: Reggae Sound Systems, Performance Techniques, and Ways of Knowing*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2011.
- ife, fahima. "Grief Aesthetics." *liquid blackness: journal of aesthetics and black studies* 6, no. 1 (2022): 86–95.
- Jackson, Zakiyyah Iman. *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiracist World*. New York: New York University Press, 2020.
- Jafa, Arthur. "My Black Death." In *Everything but the Burden: What White People Are Taking from Black Culture*, edited by Greg Tate, 244–57. New York: Broadway Books, 2003.
- Jafa, Arthur. "Park Nights: Arthur Jafa." Serpentine Galleries, London, June 30, 2017. YouTube video, 1:08:46. www.youtube.com/watch?v=gEvW7KM_Vjo.
- Johnson, Walter. *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013.
- Juarez, Kristin. "Within the Whirlwind of the Encounter: An Interview with Okwui Okpokwasili." *liquid blackness: journal of aesthetics and black studies* 5, no. 2 (2021): 95–119.
- Kazanjan, David. *The Colonizing Trick: National Culture and Imperial Citizenship in Early America*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.
- King, Tiffany Letabo. *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Korman, Sam. "An Historical Instrument: Kevin Beasley at the Whitney, New York." *burnaway*, February 12, 2019.
- Law, Christopher. "'Common Informality': Aesthetics, Renomination, Philology." *liquid blackness: journal of aesthetics and black studies* 6, no. 1 (2022): 34–47.
- Lepecki, André. *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement*. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Lew, Christopher Y. "Low End Theory." Whitney Museum. whitney.org/essays/kevin-beasley (accessed November 2, 2021).
- Litwack, Leon F. *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery*. New York: Vintage, 1980.
- McKee, C.C. "Staging Mirrors: Deborah Anzinger's Eco-aesthetic

- Syntax of Dehiscent Being." *liquid blackness: journal of aesthetics and black studies* 6, no. 1 (2022): 50–83.
- McMillan, Uri. *Embodied Avatars: Genealogies of Black Feminist Art and Performance*. New York: New York University Press, 2015.
- Menninghaus, Winfried. *In Praise of Nonsense: Kant and Bluebeard*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999.
- Mirzoeff, Nicholas. "The Whiteness of Birds." *liquid blackness: journal of aesthetics and black studies* 6, no. 1 (2022): 120–37.
- Moten, Fred. *Black and Blur*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017.
- Moten, Fred. *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.
- Moten, Fred. "On Escape Velocity: The Informal and the Exhausted (with Conditional Branching)." Unpublished paper.
- Moten, Fred. *Stolen Life*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018.
- Moten, Fred. *The Universal Machine*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018.
- Moten, Fred, Stefano Harney, and Stephen Shukaitis. "Refusing Completion: A Conversation." *e-flux journal*, no. 116 (2020). www.e-flux.com/journal/116/379446/refusing-completion-a-conversation/.
- Musser, Amber Jamilla. *Sensual Excess: Queer Femininity and Brown Jouissance*. New York: New York University Press, 2018.
- Napoli, Julie Beth, and Marina Rosenfeld. "The Politics of the Musical Situation: A Response to Marina Rosenfeld." *continent* 5, no. 3 (2016). web.archive.org/web/20200716125040/http://www.continentcontinent.cc/index.php/continent/article/view/266.
- Prettyman, Michele. "Doing It, Fluid." *liquid blackness: journal of aesthetics and black studies* 6, no. 1 (2022): 168–204.
- Quashie, Kevin. *Black Aliveness, or a Poetics of Being*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021.
- Raengo, Alessandra. "Black America Again." In *Black One Shot 9.4*, edited by Lisa Uddin and Michael Boyce Gillespie, June 18, 2020. ASAP/J. asapjournal.com/b-o-s-9-4-black-america-again-alessandra-raengo/#easy-footnote-bottom-6-5678.
- Raengo, Alessandra. "Black Study @ GSU: The Album." *liquid blackness: journal of aesthetics and black studies* 1, no. 1 (2021): 5–25.
- Raengo, Alessandra. "Dope Shit and White Sublime: The Story of AJ." World Picture Conference, on *Value*. Toronto, November 8–9, 2019.
- Raengo, Alessandra. "Introduction: Blackness as Process." *liquid blackness: journal of aesthetics and black studies* 5, no. 2 (2021): 5–18.
- Raengo, Alessandra, et al. Presentation during "liquid blackness and AMPLIFY present: *Facing the Band: Elissa Blount Moorhead and the (Ana)Architectures of Community Ties—the Teach-In*." Streamed live October 23, 2020. Vimeo video, 1:21:03. vimeo.com/manage/videos/471737230.
- Redmond, Shana L. *Everything Man: The Form and Function of Paul Robeson*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019.
- Reid, Tiana. "Hearing the Trauma You Can't See." *The Nation*, February 13, 2019. www.thenation.com/article/archive/hearing-the-trauma-you-cant-see/.
- Robinson, Cedric J. *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.
- Ruprecht, Louis A., Jr. "Still Life." *liquid blackness: journal of aesthetics and black studies* 6, no. 1 (2022): 140–65.
- Sacks, Oliver. Liner notes for *John Davis Plays Blind Tom, the Eighth Wonder*. Newport Classic, LTD, 1999.
- Thompson, Robert Farris. *African Art in Motion: Icon and Act in the Collection of Katherine Coryton White*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974.
- Weheliye, Alexander G. *Phonographies*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005.
- Woods, Suné, Fred Moten, and James Gordon Williams. *You are mine. I see now, I'm a have to let you go*. Hammer Museum, University of California Los Angeles, YouTube, October 2, 2018. Video, 1 hr., 48 min. www.youtube.com/watch?v=g4Z5aPIEb5M.
- Yusoff, Kathryn. *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018.