Two Undecidable Non-Points
/
Textual Flesh

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No Knowledge Is Complete Until It Passes
Through My Body. Nightboat Books, 2021.

Brent X.

2022

TPRI 2022

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> *"Heard, seen, tasted, felt, and lived in the ethereal shadows of Man's world, however, a habeas viscus unearths the freedom that exists within the hieroglyphics of the flesh. For the oppressed the future will have been now, since Man tucks away this group's present in brackets. Consequently, the future anterior transmutes the simple (parenthetical) present of the dysselected into the nowtime of humanity during which the fleshy hieroglyphics of the oppressed will have actualized the honeyed prophecy of another kind of freedom (which can be imagined but not [yet] described) in the revolutionary apocatastasis of human genres."*

> Alexander Weheliye,
> *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics,*
> *and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*

The first thing that struck me about Asiya Wadud's *Syncope* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2019) and *No Knowledge is Complete Until it Passes Through My Body* (Nightboat Books, 2021) was repetition. While I read I began writing down phrases that repeat in *Syncope*, Wadud's reckoning, recitation, dirge, and imprint of the 2011 catastrophe the media came to name the "left-to-die boat." To briefly quote the epigraph of the book from Forensic Architecture's 2012 *Report on the "Left-to-Die Boat"*:

> *"On the morning of March 27th, 2011, 72 people fled Tripoli on an inflatable boat...their boat ran out of fuel and rather than being rescued by one of the many vessels in these highly surveilled waters, the boat drifted for 14 days until all but 11 of the passengers perished."*

11 initially survived. 2 died later. Leaving 9 of 72. 9.

Some of the repeated phrases in *Syncope* I wrote down were:

they came to photograph us
time ruptured and folded
sight is for seeing
naming is for subjugation
they were all ocular if they chose to be
our bodies merely deadweight
the asphodels still blossom
we started to doubt that we were human

It feels appropriate to repeat these phrases, though I will do so in reverse:

we started to doubt that we were human
the asphodels still blossom
our bodies merely deadweight
they were all ocular if they chose to be
naming is for subjugation
sight is for seeing
time ruptured and folded
they came to photograph us

I will return to repetition, but first I want to say that another repeated feature of Wadud's poetry and interviews is their tendency to take interrogative flight, asking question after

unanswerable question, like those that begin "on the structure of birds" from *No Knowledge is Complete Until It Passes Through My Body (Nightboat Books, 2021).* As if ventriloquizing a hard-nosed detective interrogating migrating birds, the speaker implores, wildly enough or tenderly enough to be expecting an answer:

"Can you read a map? Who taught you that the good north was that? Can you spell *fatal* to map an abiding passage?...who taught you to read a map like that? Can you see the map?"

Can you see the map? I wonder if Wadud's poetry offers not a map in the conventional sense, but an idiosyncratic un-mapping of signification that gives way to the levity of flight, to the occasional fruit of poetry, a fruit that is, paradoxically, one that yields, as she says, "a space to sit with the silence of the no reply." Questions with no reply, perfectly formed.

Sight is for seeing. Naming is for subjugation.

"What cues are relayed in calling the dozens of people "migrants" instead of "people"? Is this a kind of shorthand?" (Wadud)

In a 2020 interview with Emily Skillings published in BOMB Magazine, Wadud responded to a question about documentary poetics in her characteristic interrogative mode: "I am interested in the fissures and the breaks, what happens just beyond the frame of the official record...What is worthy of the news? If the news tells us repeatedly that it will write only stories of black death, what then, can we surmise about its value on black life? What is the long afterlife of a photo that shows dozens of African people drowned as they make a failed attempt to Lampedusa?...What is that place where the news, the laws governing us, and our own ethics interact? I think that's a place I try and return to." Later in the interview she begins three questions anaphorically, emphatically, curiously, desperately, genuinely, unanswerably: "What does it mean…" "What does it mean…" What does it mean…" —

What does it mean?

Recalling and inverting M. Nourbese Philip's naming of those stolen people aboard the *Zong* that were cast overboard as "deadweight" for insurance money, and Claudia Rankine's ever-increasing accumulation of the names of African American people murdered by USAmerican police in each new printing of *Citizen*, *Syncope* ends with a list of the names of 9 out of the 72 people that boarded the "left-to-die" boat: those that survived. Why not name the dead? Perhaps the absent names signify the unsignifiable and unnameable graveless burden of this crime against humanity, a burden we cannot access, or recover. The names invisibly float in a sea of blank page space, space these names' referents can no longer take, space irretrievably lost to the necropolitical war-machine of the contemporary, the negative space of those not just "left-to-die" but murdered outright.

What does it mean?

Left-to-die.

If, as Foucault argued, biopolitics signaled a political shift wherein sovereignty began to "make live" and "let die," rather than "take life" or "let live," we might want to think more finely about what that "letting" in "let die" really *means.* We might even think of it in terms of the now archaic early meaning of "let" as in block or hindrance. Perhaps what biopower does is not just administer life, but block the possibility of death to entire swathes of humanity, precisely by never affording them the status of life to begin with. This is murder in advance, where murder's legal signification will never come to pass, something like Orlando Patterson's theorization of slavery as social death that renders the slave, "imprintable and disposable." To be sure, to let die is to kill by other means, by justifying genocidal administrative action with rigged bureaucratic statistics, that is, using biopower to enforce the vitality of one particular abstract massified group (population) at the expense of another abstract massified group (population). It is to kill by not counting, softly, brutally and mathematically, cruelly and statistically by way of silent calculation so as to retain the plea of plausible deniability, to appear as fate, to kill unspeakably and without conversation, without recognition. This monstrous silent killer ignores unto death massified

racialized assemblages consigned to the status of what Hortense J. Spillers names *flesh*, a non-biological extra human non-category that allows passive killing, as if one *can* "passively kill." (It is in this way that causality should never be excluded from the biopolitical theoretical conversation, because delimiting causes and effects is the precondition for the statistical). In order to kill this way there cannot even be a body to kill. Killing must be voided. Hence the non-body of *flesh*. This concept is worth fleshing out. Could there be textual flesh?

"Flesh," writes Alexander Weheliye in *Habeas Viscus*, is a non-biological "temporal and conceptual antecedent to the body." Drawing from Hortense J. Spillers in chorus with Sylvia Wynter, Weheliye suggests "flesh" might fill the theoretical gap in biopolitics discourse between human, body, and the "biological substance" that biopolitics ostensibly takes for granted (as Spillers writes: "before the 'body' there is 'flesh,' that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse or the reflexes of iconography…"). According to Weheliye, the concept of flesh allows us to better examine how "sociogenic phenomena, particularly race, become anchored" in social-material ontogenesis. Power perceives flesh, a racialized liminal state between the biological and non-biological, between life and death, as already dead, so unkillable, even when it is "left to die." Flesh is a vector produced by what Weheliye calls "racializing assemblages" (rather than, say, hegemonic power), a kind of war-machinic counter-theoretical riposte to biopolitics' failure to "transcend racialization via recourse to absolute biological matter." "Bare life and biopolitics discourse," Weheliye continues, "not only misconstrues how profoundly race and racism shape the modern idea of the human, it also overlooks or perfunctorily writes off the theorizations of race, subjection, and humanity found in black and ethnic studies, allowing bare life and biopolitics discourse to imagine an indivisible biological substance anterior to racialization." By contrast, Weheliye argues that "Wynter's and Spillers's thinking provides alternate genealogies for theorizing the ideological and physiological mechanics of the violently tiered categorization of the human species in western modernity, which stand counter to the universalizing but resolutely Europe-centered visions embodied by bare life and biopolitics." The ghostly

hauntology of the flesh, finally, refuses a "vacant, uniform, or universal future," producing instead "the future as it is seen, felt, and heard from the enfleshed parenthetical present of the oppressed, since this group's NOW is always already bracketed (held captive and set aside indefinitely) in, if not antithetical to, the world of Man." Thinking this way requires ocularizing epistemologies of vision, that is, *seeing seeing,* a process quite opposed to the reductive idea that "race" is simply a self-evident "visual" or "biological" category.

Paradoxically, part of the power of the flesh is its precarity and undecidability. "Flesh" is what not even the law can kill, because it never enters into the law's matrix as living. It is what receives violence before and after death, and in that sense, it can withstand infinite violence. It is like the biological as pure matter, inhering in but not reducible to the biological. That, too, is its power, because it evades in total, and finally, the biopolitical juridical regime of Western power, thus it might open thought onto a different field that can transform our relationship to the law, ourselves, and the world, down to our most intimate sensual experience. "Heard, seen, tasted, felt, and lived in the ethereal shadows of Man's world…a habeas viscus unearths the freedom that exists within the hieroglyphics of the flesh. For the oppressed the future will have been now, since Man tucks away this group's present in brackets. Consequently, the future anterior transmutes the simple (parenthetical) present of the dysselected into the nowtime of humanity during which the fleshy hieroglyphics of the oppressed will have actualized the honeyed prophecy of another kind of freedom (which can be imagined but not [yet] described) in the revolutionary apocatastasis of human genres."

I want to suggest that *Syncope*'s poeticization of the "left-to-die" boat is poetry that makes textual flesh of what has ontogenetically perished, but that can never be killed. This will return us to repetition.

we started to doubt that **we** *we*re human

The book's haunting repetitions repeat, I think, in order to conjure an image of physio-material-social patterns, those racializing assemblages that kill who we callously call "left-to-die." In this sense the repetitions are refrains

of the infra, intra, and inter assemblages that eventuate this killing beyond murder. The "doubting" expressed by these lines sounds like what we might try and fail to imagine as the voiced silence of what has been consigned to flesh, locked out of the realm of Man. The second "we" of the line is a repetition become textual flesh, precisely because if the first "we" is spoken by non-human flesh, *but* we have taken it as a human subjective "we," by the second "we" (the first time through), we are left to wonder what *we* were (are, i.e. the human); that is, **we** have now doubled the deictic void of the pronoun that **we** have not been given a referent for. This empty **"we,"** a double negation made positive, becomes a mise en abyme when w e finally come to read the line as "a whole" (beyond the two pronominal holes), that is, when   w
e understand that the line factually negates itself as a proposition, becoming something like what J.L. Austin might call the "hollow" and "void" non-statement of poetry. This is because if that first

"w

e"

is not human, then its referent cannot really be a subject of discourse other than in the most fictitious sense of discourse as such instantiated by that nebulous degree zero of socialization necessary for language; instead, I would call it a magical realist entity, a creature void of form, a non-human speech speaking *as if it were* a "real" human referent, like a chorus of birds whose speech is taken to be language. It is the speech not of the dead, but of the radically extrahuman, the zero degree of any figuration, the grounding groundless ground. In this way these repetitions are the repeated haunting of the textual flesh that can never die, because it was never allowed to be

"w   e"

in the first place; it was, at first, and finally, bodiless, and without a subject: pre- or anti- subjective (non-subjective). Here, our phenomenalization of

"**w**

e"

into a human referent short-circuits itself precisely because of the line's undecidable anti-statement of identity, a counter-logical not-quite-counterfactual that persists as linguistic material

w

e

can never make sense of, because the "doubt" never resolves. We never "find out" if the voices are "actually" human or not. This is not an indeterminacy asking for "participatory" readerly completion, where the rejection of closure comes to signify each reader's meaning-making process. Instead, this is an utterly foreclosed completion (from rejection to refusal), a radically opaque undecidability. When confronted with the choice, we do not finish it, instead, we must come to examine our own hypostatized epistemological truth procedures that we apprehend as our reading — here, we might glimpse a fidelity we did not know we had. At this evental point we must read our reading coming into phenomenal apprehension as human speech or non-human "language material" (poetry), just as we recognize that this phenomanalization occurs only in the space of fantasy, and nowhere in the real, as we fill in the syntactic gap language always leaves as virtual flesh, here represented by the pronominal lack of the two missing referents, where multiplicity breaks through the phrase twice, as "we" and "we."

In this way, the book makes "Phenomenological perception…don the extravagant drag of physiology" in order to "turn theory into flesh…[into] codings in the nervous system," so as to signal the extra human instantiation of humanity." This undecidable textual flesh's donning of meaning (extravagant drag) to unmean makes us see our perception *of* "physiology," or "the natural attitude." Here, language's extrahuman instantiation of humanity becomes visible, because the virtual inhumanity of all language emerges, despite our humanity. It is language that we would not "listen to" or obey or even try to make meaning from. In Austinian terms,

we do not expect the locution to yield illocutionary or perlocutionary consequences, nor constative nor performative.

This might bring to mind language's terrifying persistence without us, its radical material indifference, and its ultimate passivity (as Maurice Blanchot might have it) — language's virtual omnicide. If not as language qua language, this language would persist as the beyond of language after the extinction of the human. This language endures as etched gravestones, scattered papers, eroding books, obsolete server farms, inscribed jewelry, and formed rocks. Biological life or no, this inorganic language aligns on the side of the sublime as part of a power that exceeds the human's ability to cognize it, while reflecting that strange (in)human ability to formulate the unformable. So the undead textual flesh, the anti-ontologically vanquished word, and the haunting non-life of a non-living language as unrendered signaletic material reaches out in these undecidable not-quite-counterfactuals, grasping us by the throat, challenging the reality-effect of propositions without referents, lambasting us with correct syntax void of a speaker — mere being — neither machine nor human — regardless — dead nor living, extra-categorical: an unprocessable force-field.

In *Syncope*, the extrahuman instantiation of humanity is given voice by these repeated refrains, reminding "us" of what we ignore:

we started to doubt that we were human.

Who are "we" when "we" cannot be said to be "us" or "them," or, perfectly, anybody at all? If, indeed, "they," as "we," are "not human," suddenly, in a puncturing evental point, *they will have never been "we,"* and so, with this same transreal magic, could never have been "they" either; that is, the they that is we could never have been consigned to the foreign, fleshly other that would allow its death without killing. It never will have been, so can't be "were." In other words, the phrase futilely conjugates the unconjugatable subject/activity of the flesh. That hypostatized non-zone of undecidable humanity/non-humanity, "where flesh is touched," as Weheliye might put it, is the brutal point of infinite violence, *and* a transreal point of excessive possibility beyond signification's limit,

what Anthony Reed might call a "plural instant." This extrahuman, anti-pronominal unnamed that nevertheless carries force to structure is our present, the moment-to-moment death that never obtains to being, and that ever carries a future/historical *apocatastasis*.[1] The textual flesh masquerades as a substitute for a referent buried some sentences ago (what "we" refers to), hence as the past or elsewhere, but if the reader tries to remove this mask, what appears is only a gaping void that lets multiplicity in, causing us to see in it a "we" that is yet-to-come, when "we" will all be saved, and in no need of reference, maskless.

"letting die" contemporary's bloodletting

they were all ocular if they chose to be

We should by now, in the context of this essay, be reading this "they" quite differently than we usually do. Who were "they"? Without context, it is only possible for each of these pronouns to suggest a sort of indeterminate set of possibilities. This possibility space within the situation of the book sketches a drafty topology with undefined limits set just beyond what the pronominal referent might be. We may understand the referent as those left to die, or those few that survived. But immediately this "they" is undermined by attempting to force the sentence into sense: how does one "choose" to be seen or not, or bear witness or not (especially those that were so surveilled)? We know, for certain, that the tragedy of "the left-to-die-boat" was precisely that it was seen. It was seen on the world stage by the Apollo's eyes of satellite

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[1] Weheliye draws his use of "apocatastasis" from Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project*. Here, I mean it with an emphasis on total unification, absolute liberation, non-negotiable universality at the physical, spiritual, cosmological level. This might not be the sense Weheliye's more specific use of the term intends. From *Habeas Viscus*: "Consequently, as opposed to the constraints of the traditional dialectical form in which "every negation has its value solely as background for the delineation of the lively, the positive," Benjamin's versioning of the dialectic emphasizes that "a new partition be applied to this initially excluded, negative component so that, by a displacement of the angle of vision (but not of the criteria!), a positive element emerges anew in it too—something different from that previously signified. And so on, ad infinitum, until the entire past is brought into the present in a historical apocatastasis." Benjamin is after the transubstantiation of the originally discounted, negative factor (the oppressed/revolutionary classes or the flesh), for it is in this prehensive shift that the echoing omen of revolutionary redemption can be found. As Benjamin writes, the oppressed class (the flesh/Man's others) appears in this dialectical drama as "the avenger that completes the task of liberation in the name of generations of the downtrodden" ("On the Concept of History," 394).

surveillance. But who, or what, could *see* such a thing and not take the proper action? Perhaps this is the more proper question. Who could see this happen ("were ocular") and not save them (they)? Only the necropolitical racializing assemblage of the geopolitically genocidal present, a technical situation that lets die while the world becomes witness to its own negligence — no, not the world, but precisely only those same that have access to these extrahuman ocular senses that are part of the technical infrastructure that would have allowed them to save the stranded passengers: helicopter and satellite vision, blades, motors, rays. So, again, who is "they"? Who are my "them"? Like the "we" of the previous counter-statement, the "they" here distends in its doubling, *as if* these two theys possess different referents (a grammatical problem), rather than the same multiplicity. Thus the theys retain identity because each is undoubtedly "they," but they also call forth without summoning the image of a subtextual non-relation, a submarine incommensurability. From a "proper English" standpoint, this is a grammatical ambiguity that intro composition and rhetoric ought to have written out of your prose. For poetics, it is the flower absent every bouquet. These strange refrains achieve a difficult, simultaneous intentional surface identity at the level of the word and an undecidable subsurface incommensurability at the level of the referent, up to and including *there being no referent*.

But let us assume for a moment, for the sake of poetics, in an artificially limited set that the "theys" might be either the "left-to-die" passengers, and/or those "witnessing" the tragedy.

they were all ocular if they chose to be

A few different meanings emerge from this matrix. The second "they" redounds to the first, so that it is not who we at first thought it was; i.e. not the passengers, but the voyeurs, Apollo's Eyes, the anti-saviors that become perverse spectators of the brutality their systems enact "without them." They are the ones who can be "ocular" if they want to be. That "they," indeed, is the one who turns a blind eye from what they undoubtedly see. The choice to refuse to bear witness to what one sees reflects, at a superpositional level of identit*ies*, what a sensing reader *might come to be*. *Undecidable referents* bounce like refracted light through the prism of

antifactual possibility while never resting on a particular meaning other than the one at the given moment that becomes determined for however brief, ephemeral, and fleeting the plural instant allows, a fantastic moment where chaos feels defeated, but is only artificially arrested.

Finally, that ocular decision, that "they" that chooses to be seen, might be the latent paragrammatic homophone *in* "ocular," but ironically unexpressed *in the visible*, instead obtaining in a scramble of sound: oracular. The oracular poet, here, transubstantiates language from its world-making function as determiner of referents and meaning using syntax that intends to represent reality into the set outside of language's possible function (reality) found missing within language, such as the aleatoric determinacy that folds ocular and oracular. That multiplicitous, unsettled, clamoring force of the vanquished that can operate as an undying wormhole through language is the flesh that returns with spectral power precisely because it can never enter the juridical matrix of power that would immediately have it arrested.

In a world of infinite surveillance, what becomes blindingly visible are those violences that are seen but unacted upon, and that are no less violent for that inaction, *making inaction itself violent*. For example, today the world news media "witnesses" Russia's invasion of Ukraine and stands by offering economic weapons in the face of immediate violence and bloodshed, a blood-letting the United States cannot so comfortably act opposed to, as if the catastrophe in Ukraine is not also the result of their own imperial struggle with Russia, a struggle that on either side leaves the deliberately weakened pawns of their vicious game to die all over again. However, what does the media's emphasis on this event, and the obviously Eurocentric (read: White Supremacist) response to

> *In a world of infinite surveillance, what becomes blindingly visible are those violences that are seen but unacted upon, and that are no less violent for that inaction.*

the "Ukranian Refugee Crisis" reveal? Of course, it reveals once again those uncountable "fleshly" wars of recent USAmerican historicism in the Middle East, Africa, Central and South America, Indochina, etc. The United States' historicity as heroic savior must always narrativize itself as *having intervened in* rather than *being the cause of*. Like the displaced people they produce, these wars don't finally "count" (because they were never started) nor do the possibly millions of civilians killed during their "not happening." This is not at all to disclaim the urgency of the situation in Ukraine and the real suffering of the Ukrainian people. Rather, it is to remind us of the false image of necessity autoencoded by USAmerica's linear media-narratology of heroic intervention, one that cannot ever tolerate what it refuses to see. Itself.

A space to sit with the silence of no reply.

We have identified in Wadud's poetry repetitions of unanswerable questions, and so a repetition of the silence of no reply. What is this silence?

Asphodels, sign of the afterlife, blossom regardless, continually blossom to remind us of those living the afterlife in us, without us. No "we." Birds repeat:
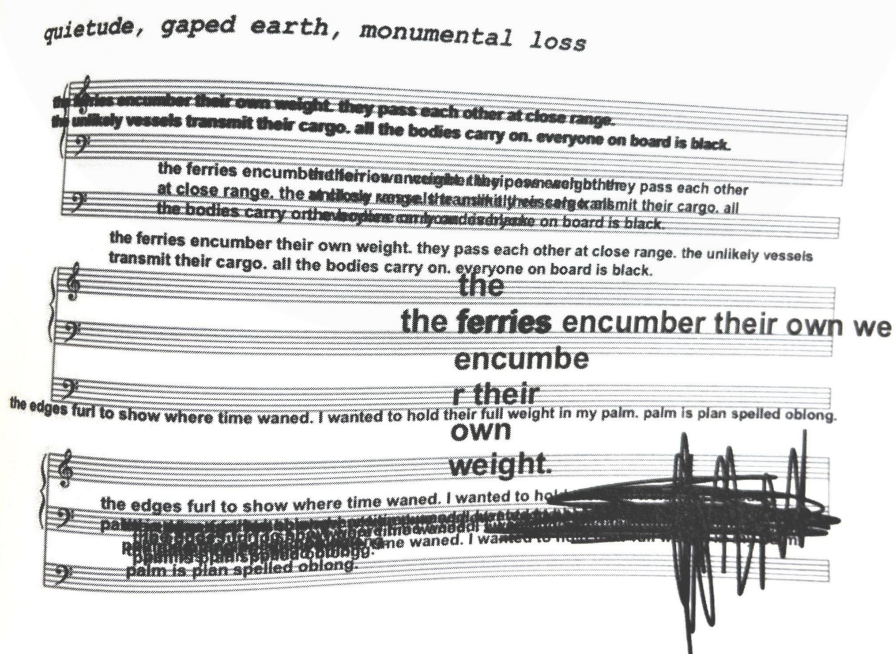
a frigate bird
a whetear
flight
the sacred
holy

"Can you read a map?"

"It's not a surprise but I believe it's noteworthy that rarely are names given to people who have lost their lives in Mediterranean crossings. There exists an erasure of identities in a heavy-handed way. The migration and the scale of deaths were housed in a language of anonymity and forgetting. What is the project of not naming someone?" (Wadud)

Sight is for seeing. Naming is for subjugation.

The ambivalence of the name is that it signifies what is not present, subjugating reality to the artifice required for signification and communication. It threatens to totalize its referent into its artifice, becoming a hollow mask of what it hopes to name. And yet, the names of those that have perished must be repeated, just like the silent repetitions of Wadud's *Syncope*, that hypostatize the omissions of the news media by naming the living and leaving silent asphodelic space for the dead.

quietude, gaped earth, monumental loss

the ferries encumber their own weight. they pass each other at close range. the unlikely vessels transmit their cargo. all the bodies carry on. everyone on board is black.

the ferries encumber their own weight. they pass each other at close range. the unlikely vessels transmit their cargo. all the bodies carry on. everyone on board is black.

the ferries encumber their own weight. they pass each other at close range. the unlikely vessels transmit their cargo. all the bodies carry on. everyone on board is black.

the
the ferries encumber their own we
encumbe
r their
own
weight.

the edges furl to show where time waned. I wanted to hold their full weight in my palm. palm is plan spelled oblong.

the edges furl to show where time waned. I wanted to hold their full weight in my palm. palm is plan spelled oblong.

Negative names.

In "*quietude, gaped earth, substantial loss*" Wadud meditates on the tragic deaths of 77 people that were killed when a ferryboat capsized in Bangladesh, 2009. This ferry crossing, with its reference to Charon's ghastly boat, where "palm is plan spelled oblong," cannot even be brought into the space of poetry. Instead, it must tear through it. The poem begins in standard prose blocks. This prose section ends: "the crisp cutting siren of a day delivering. the shoreline with its subtleties and the alkaline duty, equally of self and of a distant progeny," suggesting the need for an aspirational love at a distance to counter the conventional out-of-sight-out-of-mind disposition of contemporary infrastructures of death. Straining to find this sufficient love at a distance, the poem then leaps across the gutter and becomes a musical staff (above) splattered with shards of language from the previous page, repeated as if straining to become music, clustering around bars and lines, crowding each other into illegibility, and finally succumbing to a large black scrawl that completely covers the staff, the words, and everything; ink scream, torn silence.

We might see this tendency of ambivalent resignification as part of a recent history of black aesthetics that insists upon a continuous rupture of signification where no reply is possible, where "we are ruined but we are not ruined," where the stutter of speech and creaking of the word, as Nathaniel Mackey has put it, opens onto a liminal otherworld of possibility, where the waywardness of language drawn from an archive full of silences, as Saidiya Hartman reminds us, might require imaginative reconstructions of the irretrievably lost, and where taking flight like birds do in absolute disregard for human boundaries becomes a way to *something else* where in the power of the glitch, to fold in Legacy Russel's recent work on *Glitch Feminism*, a future opens. As Wadud writes, "peel back the fixed border, another world can radiate. But sometimes it is not within our ability to see that other world." *It may not be ours to see.* Perhaps it is in the vexed relationship between repetition and the unanswerable question, thus the repetition of silence, that we peel back fixed borders, like birds do. Doing so, we might also reveal a fundamental opacity that we have yet to be able to see. That **"we"** may never see. Something impossible to locate. Something impossible to map — a non-cartographic non-place, then, unrealizable and unlocalizable, like the idiosyncratic map I

mentioned above whose singular way is toward the proliferating chorus of poetry's repetition of silences yet to be (never) heard.

Of resignification and repetition Fred Moten writes in *in the Break*: "...think the relation of convention to repetition, think the way convention's dependence upon repetition is the condition of its in/security. So that if we imagine a space between repetitions then we imagine something impossible to locate. The moment between moments presents massive ontological problems, like the attempt to establish the reality of pure mathematical objects (for instance, a set, an ensemble). Perhaps political upheaval is in the nonlocatability of discontinuity...omnipresent queerness."

Wadud's poetry is also invested in the signifying processes of mathematics, such as the abstracting delimitation inherent to number. While this unitizing procedure has clear pragmatic use, it is one that only works by abstracting what it makes into a unit (unicity as such, as well as whatever is "counted"). Thus it always loses part of what it claims to represent, not unlike the delimitation of space via mapping, or time via measurement. "We are 72 human / we are 72 oil and slick and black still...every 4 hours / for 10 days..."*...as if* a count or number might ever substitute for the agonizing durational torture of being left to die, killed. "for 1:00 pm to become itself, first we have to pass through 12:59. We do. Inside of it, 60 / seconds accrue. Small acts pass inside the seconds. [How to get *inside the seconds?* Author: cannot.] The acts cluster. Second-long acts / become ten-second acts, [Did you?] and in according, the entire minute builds."

Similar to accruing seconds (there is no *one* as a number without *two*, and therefore all infinities, if not all multiplicities) a swarm of bees takes over a church in the poem "in the order was the hour of our worship." This honey-producing swarm is incapable of being counted, gathered, or ordered, yet it nevertheless offers the fleeting flying sweetness of dissolving presence, the sacred, and the holy, even if it is only an aftertaste.

In Greek mythology "The Eyes of Apollo" refers to a view of the Earth from the heavens, where Apollo could see the entire world. These Apollonian eyes posit, as Sylvia Wynter writes, "the Greek premise of an ontological difference of substance between the celestial realm of perfection

(the realm of true knowledge) and the imperfect realm of the terrestrial (the realm of doxa, of mere opinion)." This nonhomogeneity between the celestial and the Earthly persists today in our medial fantasies about the "totalizing" surveillance state, the Deleuzian dividual identity composed of "all of our data," and in the perverse belief in something that actually exists called "the market." The still present over representation of Man can be glimpsed in the fact that the technically aided human seeing that saw the left-to-die boat also *did not see it*, or at least, did not make it ocular. Certainly such an event cannot be "humanely seen" without intervention. Seeing it only to abandon it is to see it *inhumanely*. This is because, from a certain perspective, that is, from the perspective of the force of power that *could* intervene in the situation, those seen could not be *recognized*. "They did not count," in the way meant by Fanon that the subjugated racialized colonial Other can not be recognized in the Hegelian sense by the colonist.

This is not at all to disclaim the urgency of the situation in Ukraine and the real suffering of the Ukrainian people. Rather, it is to remind us of the false image of necessity autencoded by USAmerica's linear media-narratology of heroic intervention, one that cannot ever tolerate what it refuses to see. Itself.

Today, we insist on believing in the neutral function of our calculative Appollonian Eyes that all over the world tell us about what we cannot see. These special oracular pronouncements we read as statistics, rates, stock prices, interest rates, and numbers that organize the large majority of economic activity on the planet. I want to make it very clear that I am not rehearsing the often repeated caricature of Heidegger's views on technology. This is not a critique of number, science, or technology. It is a critique of the failure to properly use these technologies humanely. I am proposing a simple immanent sociological poetics, using Wadud's poetry as proof. I've often thought that poetics is philosophy or argumentation that can only rely on poetry for evidence. This makes it a troubled transrational discourse because it uses what Bataille calls the suicide of language (poetry) for evidence. Another way to say this is that poetics uses textual flesh seriously, even as it understands that the nature of flesh makes it "unusable." That the textual flesh of poetry is not a reliable witness is all to the point, precisely because it allows us to see twice, should we commit to it, those apprehensions that otherwise present as given.

Poetry allows us to see language in the same way that we receive certain technical facts. Consider a mercury thermometer. When we read the temperature on this apparatus we understand, if we look hard enough, that we are not seeing "a number," but a technical fact emergent from the apparatus's construction, i.e. that the mercury has moved up or down the glass tube. We trust the numerical reading only because it is verified by the position of the liquid in a system we have been taught functions a particular way. So we see many things in a thermometer: glass, mercury, the shape of the device, a numerical reading, the temperature, and our socialized understanding of fact. Similarly, with poetry we learn to see language not as mere illocutionary content, but also as a structured device (pronouns, verbs, articles, syntax) that in turn structures our reality not just at the level of content, but also at the level of its technical affordances and technical limits. While the numerical reading on the thermometer might be *right*, in the same way that we can in a pragmatic sense know a statement's meaning, poetry's reflexive hypostatization of the formal structures of language (and language's beyond) teaches us that our most obviously received "meanings" are not free from the threat of ideological hijacking, and, to a certain extent, it shows us how, structurally, meaning is already so hijacked by language's limits. Indeed, poetry might show us a limit point that we may understand constitutes the limits of our language. That limit point shows us the fragility of our reliance on certain organizations of fact because it shows us that we frequently rely on what is essentially nothing more than a tacit social agreement. These agreements can become heinous, like the one made in the case of the "left-to-die boat" *that there was nothing to be done, and no one is responsible*. This agreement is precisely inhumane, and we should denounce it. In

its inhumanity poetry helps us denounce the inhumane in humanity.

Today, when the world is reduced to an inhuman and barbaric surveillance apparatus that counts and counts and counts but that we cannot, finally, count on for anything but the repetition of historical violences we would like to be free of, it is the difficult task of poetry to do the unwork of unfolding the infrastructural situational origami our technical apparatuses are never autonomous from, even if they occasionally appear to be so, down to the granular grammes of our apprehension of a pronoun's sense. In Wynter's and Fanon's language, we might use the centrifuge of poetry to understand the intercalation of the phylogenic, ontogenic, and sociogenic matrix of production and reproduction that poetry itself, and poems as such, emerge from, but can never be reduced to, in order to find in this *a poetics*, what I would call a poetic insufficiency, that hollows out and voids even such a writing as **this**. It is this *poetic insufficiency* that *poetics* interfaces with, and might even be glitched by. This essay cannot escape. Because, finally, my essay is not Wadud's poetry. It is not autochthonous to it but it is also not autonomous from it. I have no Apollonian view, and if this essay is a success, it should lead you to the poetry, and, perhaps, to that virtual aesthetic sociogenic non-point that does not let past pass, but that also helps us understand that passing, sometimes, must come to pass. This is essential. That we cannot name the future where these violences will dissipate does not mean poetry should not voice them, however impossible poems might sound to us, and however they resist the ambivalence of the proper name. All poems are against war, and they are never proper names. *They do*. Precisely. Only, it is impossible for "we" to hear "them." There is sweet unheard music present in the peeled back borders of our world that not even Apollo's brutalizing eyes can see. Between "we" and "we," and "they" and "they," between two undecidable non-points, the Outside plays in us, and chaos reigns. Can you find that non-locatable discontinuity in the swarm of bees?

One final thing that touched me about Wadud's poetry, especially after some twitter investigating, was its relation to her work teaching poetry to children and guiding conversational English classes.

"Early on, I fell in love with teaching this class—it gave me a new way of looking at English and of thinking about my own mother tongue; distancing myself from it and reflecting on my own vantage." (Wadud)

Of course, this leads Wadud to a question:

"And that was due to questions raised about the relationship between words that I had previously never considered, such as the aural quality of words: what is the difference between "selfish" and "shellfish"?" (Wadud)

Wadud's work engages the profound violence of our times, but it does so while also conjuring a playful paronomasiac music of variation, repetition, and close words, sonic misses so close that they reveal a submarine unity in the linguistic substance, one before, after, below, and above the semantic. It is in this choral, aleatoric, material-sonic relation that a different vantage onto language comes into view.

"I love this question. It says so much about the arbitrary possibilities and relationships between words, and how anything can relate to anything else. You can extend that question to ask about the relationship between any two ideas that would have been previously unrelated in your mind." (Wadud)

The unity is submarine
Kamau Brathwaite
The poem is a paradoxical producer of opacity
Édouard Glissant

Relating the unrelated might become a way to an archipelagic poetics, where, to parse Wadud elsewhere, nations and peoples that might think of themselves as islands and atolls come to understand that finally, as Kamau Brathwaite writes, *the unity is submarine*, archipelagic, tidalectic, and flung across distances that seem enormous but might only be a single letter away, as immediate and minimal as an accidental calypso-slip or skip in sound that changes *everything*.

"With these pieces, I was also interested in the small slippages of language that happen when writing. Sometimes when I am tired and writing,

these slips start to bring — *long* becomes *lounge*; *sway* becomes *sweigh*; *on* becomes won, *won* becomes *wan* — and on and on. If I settle into these slippages, eventually another voice emerges, a parallel practice and parallel voice. It is my own, but also has an immediate distance because of how the equivocations come to rest — their density creates something new." (Wadud)

The immediate distance between self and self, parallel selves, internal difference, where one becomes two, might be the space of a discontinuity where unnamed multiverse worlds exist, but remain opaque, a world Apollo cannot see and cannot count on succumbing to his enforced borders, where the Ocular itself becomes *seen*, maybe even before being *read*, where our expectations in the parafoveal space of reading open onto disrupted materiality that transforms the imaginative space of our rut-like phenomenology. Where the Ocular becomes Oracular (and vice versa). Wadud's repetitions bring us here before we even realize where we are, as we ascertain a repeated phrase or sound before re-cognizing its semantic content, as language becomes familiar and made strange in a vacillating play of signification, de-signification, and re-signification.

"Today one of my fourth grade students asked me for good 'O' words for a poem: optical,

Octagon. Octopus. Over. Oblong. Omniscient. Obvious. Omnipotent. Object. Ocular. Ocular, I told her, meant willing to see something, to give it your attention, which is not entirely true. It just means of or related to the eye. But, if we are talking about the eye, I want to know what it sees. If you will yourself to see something, then it's probably not long until you see the fault lines. If you see the fault lines, you acknowledge there is a fault field. If you avow the presence of the fault field, then you are open to the brokenness within you and everyone, and your own faultiness of logic, our misguided rectitude." (Wadud)

From a 4th grade poetry workshop:

How do you spell?

fanciful
evny
baton
ramekin
banister
bouquet
baguette
dim sum

they were all ocular if they chose to be

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