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Afrofuturism and Transindividuation

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“It’s after the End of the World (Don’t You Know That Yet?)”

*Afrofuturism and Transindividuation*

Finally, one opens the circle a crack, opens it all the way, lets someone in, calls someone, or else goes out oneself, launches forth. One opens the circle not on the side where the old forces of chaos press against it but in another region, one created by the circle itself. As though the circle tended on its own to open onto a future, as a function of the working forces it shelters. This time, it is in order to join with the forces of the future, cosmic forces. One launches forth, hazards an improvisation. But to improvise is to join with the World, or meld with it. One ventures from home on the thread of a tune.

—Gilles Deleuze and Feliz Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*

“In the Dark”

Somewhere in the middle of the 1974 film *Space Is the Place*, Sun Ra’s band, The Arkestra, begins to play a tune called “It’s after the End of the World.” That tune launches forth with a few bars of tentative tones and sounds. Then come lyrics—a refrain sung and shouted in a voice that we recognize today as feminine, if not female, by its quality. Over and again, this voice insists, “It’s after the end of the world. Don’t you know that yet?”<sup>1</sup>

This refrain—“It’s after the end of the world. Don’t you know that yet?”—asserts another temporality and coordinates, which exist within, but are incommensurate with, those taken as the dominant logics of existence of a world (only one) characterized by statistical predictability, control, temporal continuity, and coherence. The feminine voice cre-

ates a "calming and stabilizing, calm and stable, center in the heart of chaos," which insists that it is "after the end of the world." This voice "jumps from chaos to the beginnings of order in chaos and is in danger of breaking apart at any moment."<sup>2</sup> This refrain opens a marvelous (im)possibility: "the world" does not cohere as such. If it once did, it no longer does. Already, it has ended. Whatever existence "we" can claim, wherever that can be claimed, and however it can be characterized, cannot take the continuity and stability of a world as axiomatic.

Soon after it begins, the refrain in *Space Is the Place*—"It's after the end of the world. Don't you know that yet?"—is overtaken by other sounds, another attempt to organize chaos. Perhaps the limited space organized by these sounds is not music but a wall of noise, loud yet fragile. It collapses and . . .

### "At Home"

. . . leaves "us" homeless. Homelessness is our home. We carry the abyss that Édouard Glissant characterized so well. For Glissant, the Middle Passage of the transatlantic slave trade and the formation of "the new world" mark an apocalyptic catastrophe. We are forged in its wake. With specific reference to those who can be identified as Caribbean, Glissant explains, "The abyss is also a projection of and a perspective into the unknown. . . . This is why we stay with poetry . . . We know ourselves as part and as crowd, in an unknown that does not terrify. We cry our cry of poetry. Our boats are open, and we sail them for everyone."<sup>3</sup> At home in open boats and spaceships launching for the unknown, we hum the refrain, "It's after the end of the world. Don't you know that yet?" Homeless at home. We improvise.<sup>4</sup>

### "Toward the World"

The soundtrack of *Space Is the Place* segues into "Under Different Stars." Here, cosmic forces are perceptible even as the earthly forces of the abyss linger and are transduced into another world, here, now, in the world some believe is (a) just one. The sound and image tracks of *Space Is the Place*, the matter on which they are recorded, and the discourses that circulate about it—in other words, all that constitutes *Space Is the*

*Place*—melds with that world, which is not (a) just one, opening that world all the way, to a point where we can believe in it again. And it leaves us with only a belief in this world.

Now. Where to begin?

In response to that question, Meaghan Morris starts—in the middle of the chapter in *Identity Anecdotes* entitled “Crazy Talk Is Not Enough: Deleuze and Guattari at *Muriel’s Wedding*”—with the first paragraph of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s plateau “Of the Refrain,” found in the middle of their book *A Thousand Plateaus*. Morris explains, “The paragraph itself can be read as a little song, a nocturnal creation myth or ‘sketch’ in the middle of the book; it is not a genesis story of the logos and light, but a song of germination in darkness.”<sup>5</sup> Although, as Morris points out, “there is no special analytical virtue in emphasizing ‘Of the Refrain’ over any of the other plateaus in *A Thousand Plateaus*,” I begin with it because doing so calls attention to the improvisational elements of any beginning, which always happens in the middle of other things, and because it makes Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of “the Refrain,” “Milieus and Rhythms,” “the Cosmos,” and “the Unequal or the Incommensurable” available to this book as heuristics and technologies through which to encounter the space-times at the intersection of contemporary formulations of “queer” and “Black,” which we can grasp, here at the beginning anyway, as schematically structuring antagonisms of our present social and ontological systems, respectively.<sup>6</sup>

With this metaphorical use of the musical refrain, Deleuze and Guattari offer a method of creative production that also offers insight into what, as I discuss later in this chapter, Gilbert Simondon refers to as processes of collective individuation. Deleuze and Guattari explain that the Refrain consists of three aspects which Morris describes using Deleuze and Guattari’s formulation in the “Contents” section of *A Thousand Plateaus* as “in the dark, at home, toward the world.” Deleuze and Guattari state: “The refrain has all three aspects, it makes them simultaneous or mixes them.” One sketches an uncertain “center in the heart of chaos” in order to “organize a limited space” that can protect “the germinal forces of a task to fulfill or a deed to do.” One “launches forth, hazards an improvisation.” As in music, the refrain offers an anchor to which we return after any improvisation.

Alondra Nelson points out that it has become a habit to start projects about Afrofuturism with Sun Ra.<sup>7</sup> Later in *Queer Times, Black Futures*, I will start again elsewhere. Here, however, I sketch an uncertain center via a refrain from Sun Ra, a musician best known as an innovator of free jazz. I start with Sun Ra because he created his own cosmology, eschewing his given name and place of birth, Herman Blount, born in 1914 in Birmingham, AL, and taking the name Sun Ra, claiming to be from Saturn. I understand this to be a generative act of (re)creation that, as I have suggested in reference to his film *Space Is the Place*, posits an alternative imaginary of extant space and time, and the set of possibilities that reside therein. Although he was an eccentric jazz musician, his interest in outer space and unconventional musical expressions influenced later musical groups, such as George Clinton and Parliament Funkadelic, Digable Planets, Public Enemy, and Shabazz Palaces, among others. It also finds a filmic expression in *Space Is the Place*.

In the opening sequence of *Space Is the Place*, Sun Ra's character announces that he wants to set up a colony for Black people on another planet to "see what they can do on a planet all their own, without any white people there." About that utopian aim, he states, "Equation-wise, the first thing to do is to consider time as officially ended. We'll work on the other side of time. We'll bring them here through either isotopic teleportation, transmolecularization or better still, teleport the whole planet here through music."<sup>8</sup> The rest of the film involves Sun Ra's character playing a game of cards with a character called "The Overseer" to win a bet for control over the destiny of Black people, and traveling between 1943 Chicago and 1969 Oakland, California, to convince Black people to travel to that planet with him. The film ends with Sun Ra defeating "The Overseer" and setting into motion an "altered destiny."

As Sun Ra surveys the planet he discovered at the beginning of the film, he announces, "The music is different here. The vibrations are different. Not like planet earth." The idea that music might affect vibrations and energy patterns and, hence, consciousness aligns with the ideas of other avant-garde artists of the 1950s and 1960s, who used aesthetic techniques of "plastic dialogue" to articulate what was then perceived to be "a new relationship between individuals, society, and the environment."<sup>9</sup> Sun Ra's innovations within jazz and Big Band improvisation were part of a larger subcultural preoccupation among avant-garde art-

ists with then-emergent metaphors of "energy, spirituality, metaphysic-ality, and freedom" and "new definitions of improvisation."<sup>10</sup> Various conceptualizations of Afrofuturism have drawn on the temporality of, or the organization of time within, Sun Ra's particular version of plastic dialogue and the politics it supports.<sup>11</sup>

Music offers an especially rich terrain for Afrofuturist expression because it imbricates sentient bodies with technology, such as micro-phones that amplify and project a singer's voice, or the tools of music production, recording, and dissemination, such as mixing boards, syn-thesizers, musical instruments, radio, television, the Internet, and so on. Increasingly, music and audio culture are inseparable from digital tech-nology, as Alexander Weheliye and others have reminded us.<sup>12</sup> A bur-geoning interest in a serious critical engagement with music and aurality has emerged at the end of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first as one of the richest and most dynamic areas of intellectual cultural production today. From within African American Studies, for instance, thinkers such as Weheliye, Lindon Barrett, Daphne Brooks, Fred Moten, and Paul Gilroy, among others, have called our attention to the convergence of "Blackness" and "sound" and "music" in order to complicate the hegemony of vision in the epistemologies of race.

The timing of this reemergence of a sustained and dynamic schol-arly interest in music and aurality in Black studies is significant. In *The Witch's Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Com-mon Sense*, for example, I begin by noting the historical coincidence of the invention and dissemination of moving image technologies with W. E. B. DuBois's prescient statement that "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line."<sup>13</sup> Working with and sometimes against Deleuze's writing on cinema, *The Witch's Flight* explores the ways that the ontologies and epistemologies that cinema makes perceptible and organizes—especially those informing social relations ordered along lines delineated by commonsense understandings of race, gender, and sexuality—have become imbricated with how capitalism exploits labor power, enabling it to reach into even our leisure time and make it productive for Capital.<sup>14</sup>

*The Witch's Flight* has a soundtrack that provides a way to mark both the importance of sound to "the cinematic" and how music might offer an epistemological, and, as Fred Moten's work suggests, ontological, reg-

ister within the cinematic that (perhaps) allows one to sense what does not appear or resists appearing through its currently available logics. Yet, in film, the soundtrack is customarily secondary to the image track in terms of eliciting a commonly available perception of present images; as such, it is available in *The Witch's Flight* and in the cinematic more broadly as a reservoir of uncommon sensibilities and subterranean knowledges at the same time as it becomes part of the cinematic's workings, perceptible as what Deleuze refers to in his work on cinema as "sound situations" or "sound-images."

In chapter 1 of Deleuze's *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, "Beyond the Movement-Image," Deleuze identifies Italian Neo-Realism as the mode of filmmaking through which a new cinematic image, the time-image, becomes perceptible. This image is constituted through "the purely optical and sound situation which takes the place of the faltering sensory-motor situations" after World War II.<sup>15</sup> The increased significance of the time-image in filmmaking after World War II marks a historical transition in which what Deleuze calls "the soul" of cinema shifted away from the regime of the movement-image, which was characterized by its reliance on sensory-motor situations. As the sensory motor image—the movement-image—collapses, a "pure optical-sound image" emerges, "any-space-whatevers" proliferate, and another regime of the image makes itself felt: that of the time-image. The time-image makes "time and thought perceptible" by making "them visible and of sound."<sup>16</sup> The relationship between the movement-image and the time-image is important in Deleuze's work on cinema because it allows for a range of expressions, perceptions, and possibilities within the cinematic while pointing to what Deleuze calls "an outside more distant than any exterior," or a radical Elsewhere that does not belong to the order of the cinematic, yet invests in the cinematic in order to rip it open from the inside.

The last sentence of the final chapter before the "Conclusion" of *Cinema 2* reads: "What has now become direct is a time-image for itself, with its two dissymetric, non-totalizable sides, fatal when they touch, that of an outside more distant than any exterior, and that of an inside deeper than any interior, here where a musical speech rises and is torn away, there where the visible is covered over or buried."<sup>17</sup> *The Witch's Flight* ends with Deleuze at this point, with a provocation that reads like

an (im)possible, perhaps fatal, promise.<sup>18</sup> Deleuze seems to suggest that the cinematic movement-image and the time-image, regimes that organize the hegemony of vision in modernity, orchestrating their service to money's interests among other things, come under pressure from sound and music, which Deleuze refers to at the end of *Cinema 2* as "musical speech."<sup>19</sup>

One of the intellectual projects that Afrofuturism, with its interest in technology, asks us to engage involves exploring what the digital regime of the image, sound, and/or perception makes available to thought. Throughout the present project, therefore, I take seriously the ways that the rise and tearing away of what Deleuze calls "a musical speech" might mark a third passage from one regime to another within the cinematic.<sup>20</sup> Although toward the end of *Cinema 2* Deleuze considers what he refers to as "the electronic image" in ways I will explore throughout *Queer Times*, *Black Futures*, the digital regime of the image is a component of what Deleuze elsewhere refers to as "societies of control." The digital regime of the image facilitates the phase of racial capitalism Jodi Melamed has called "neoliberal multiculturalism."<sup>21</sup> The growing significance of sound and audio culture is among the many important transformations one might trace with(in) the digital. Eccentric jazz musician Sun Ra and other avant-garde jazz artists likewise situate sound and audio culture as central to technological transformation.<sup>22</sup>

Sun Ra's Afrofuturist interventions in *Space Is the Place*, as well as his performances and recordings of free jazz, are best contextualized within the broader sociocultural, political, and economic context of struggles against Jim Crow segregation, and for Black Power and pan-Africanism as they were innovated and expressed in the United States throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. In "Appropriating the Master's Tools: Sun Ra, the Black Panthers, and Black Consciousness, 1952–1973," Daniel Kreiss argues that *Space Is the Place* should be understood, at least in part, as Sun Ra's response to the performative politics of the Black Panther Party and especially their emphasis on organizing community programs as a way to undermine the authority of the United States government. In *Space Is the Place*, Sun Ra suggests that community programs and the aestheticized politics of the Black Panther Party and other Black radicals of the time go only so far in addressing the fundamental socioeconomic inequities that keep the souls of Black folk



from taking flight into the cosmos. What is necessary instead, Sun Ra argues, is a fundamental rupture in the vibrations through which Black peoples' consciousness has been constituted—a vibrational rupture in consciousness capable of creating a new world in a new spatiotemporal configuration. Sun Ra further argues that sound and music can spark that rupture and offers his improvisational compositions as a means to achieve an energetic transformation. Stripping Black folks of their belief that they are Black, of their investment in the ontological coherence of Black existence, whether as positive or negative, Sun Ra reveals an underlying condition of the historical existence of Black folks.

Sun Ra's project, as "far out" as it seems, is relevant to current conversations about the persistence of forms of social and psychic death (which can also be understood as forms of social life that are opaque as such within the system of signification through which they are deemed "dead"), such as those that arise from the relations that characterize the prison-industrial complex and from contemporary geopolitics that disproportionately target Black people and people of color, diminishing our life chances and rendering us vulnerable to premature death, even as theoretical interventions into the assumed coherence of racial categories, such as acknowledgments of the social construction of race, have become more widely accepted.<sup>23</sup>

Articulations of the social construction of race insist that "race" is a category that has accrued meaning and material force over time due to social, cultural, economic, and historical factors rather than immutable natural or biological ones. Sun Ra advances an argument along these lines in one striking sequence from *Space Is the Place*: Sun Ra visits a group of young adults in Oakland in 1969. In his "message to the Black youth," Sun Ra refers to Black people as "myths," asserting that Black people occupy a space of nonexistence and therefore unreality in the United States and, indeed, the world.

The sequence opens with an intertitle claiming the time and place as 1967, Oakland, California. The primary setting is a pool hall/recreation center for Black youth. Young people proudly wearing Afros, tight shirts, and bellbottom pants gather there, playing pool, listening to music, singing, and talking. The singing is melodic and pleasing, and the lyrics insist "that's the way love is." Posters of Angela Davis, members of the Black Panther Party, Frederick Douglass, and others are displayed

on the wall. Suddenly, a marvelous pair of gold boots materialize in the middle of the recreation hall. A jump cut frames them in the center of the screen. Quickly after that, Sun Ra's body materializes, his feet filling the boots. He says that he has a message for the Black youth of planet Earth. They ask how they can know that he is for real and "not some old hippy off of Telegraph Street." He tells them, "How do you know I'm real? I'm not real. I am just like you. You don't exist in this society. If you did, your people wouldn't be seeking equal rights. We are both myths. I do not come to you as a reality, I come to you as a myth because that's what Black people are. Myths." The Black youth of planet Earth nod their heads in agreement. Some laugh. Sun Ra explains, "I came from a dream that the Black man dreams long ago. I am actually a present sent to you by your ancestors."

The reverberations of "present" here are notable because they call attention to the way that Sun Ra's cosmology posits a continuity between the dreams of the ancestors and our present day, and it implies that Sun Ra has access to both. His statement, "I come from a dream that the Black man dreams long ago" describes that dreaming in the present tense, implying that the present coexists with "long ago" through the appearance of the myth that is Black people. That Sun Ra arrives in Oakland, California, in 1967 as a gift from the ancestors suggests that he appears to fulfill the terms of a long-ago dream, perhaps to redeem the freedom dreams of the ancestors—dreams of futures past.

Sun Ra continues his conversation with the Black youth, reminding them that white people already have been on the moon and chiding them: "I noticed none of you have been invited. How do you think you are going to exist?" A young man calls attention to the crystal ball in Sun Ra's hand as the sound and image tracks segue into a refrain: June Tyson singing, "Space Age. We are living in the Space Age." Through a dissolve from Sun Ra's crystal to June Tyson's face, the sequence's logics of space and time are suspended in her voice and image, which appear in an entirely different *mise-en-scène* than the recreation center where Sun Ra delivered his message to the Black youth of America. Sun Ra appears there, too, operating an audio control board, and a different geographic location, presumably still on planet Earth, is framed onscreen.

I describe this sequence to call attention to the strategies through which it sonically and visually destabilizes assumptions about the logics

of material reality in order to enhance Sun Ra's proclamation, "Black people are myths." In Sun Ra's statements, we can hear echoes of earlier Afrofuturists, such as W. E. B. DuBois in his short story "The Comet," which first appeared in his 1920 collection *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil* and was later anthologized by Sheree Thomas in *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora*. In "The Comet," DuBois suggests, as Lisa Yaszek points out, "not only that it will take a natural disaster to eradicate racism in America, but that without such a disaster there may be no future whatsoever for black Americans."<sup>24</sup> In DuBois's story, a natural disaster precipitates a temporary suspension of the terms through which present reality congeals, thereby creating the conditions under which a Black man and a white woman might acknowledge a shared humanity.

Sun Ra's appeal to Black youth anticipates, in the realm of scholarly inquiry into Black existence, theories of social death such as Orlando Patterson's analysis of the conditions characteristic of "New World" slavery (and Grace Kyungwon Hong's corrective to it in her book *The Ruptures of American Capital*).<sup>25</sup> The assertion that Black people are not real, but myths, also resonates with Frantz Fanon's analysis of the impossibility of Black being when he writes, for instance, "The Black is not."<sup>26</sup> Referencing the unreality of Black people, Sun Ra's statements index the myths, beliefs, and social constructions—in short, the feats of the imagination—on which the modern world relies for its coherence. For Sun Ra, an acknowledgment of the material force of the "myths" that animate modern life opens onto the possibility that things might be organized otherwise. If the terms of modern life have been constructed as such, they also might be de-created, making another organization of things possible. Such a world exists in Sun Ra's cosmology as an impossible possibility.

In his appeal to Black youth, Sun Ra points toward the ways that whatever escapes or resists recognition, whatever escapes meaning and valuation within our commonly crafted structures of valuation and signification, exists as an impossible possibility within our shared reality (however that reality is described theoretically) and therefore threatens to unsettle, if not destroy, the common senses on which that reality relies for its coherence. Karl Marx's phrase "poetry from the future," which I discuss in more detail in the following chapter, points to just such an

impossible possibility. "Poetry from the future" is a formal ("poetry," with its associated lyricism and fragmentation) and temporal ("from the future") material disruption, which functions primarily on the level of affect to resist narration and qualitative description. "Poetry from the future" is a felt presence of the unknowable, the content of which exceeds its expression and therefore points toward a different epistemological, if not ontological and empirical, regime. "Poetry from the future" indexes a surplus of meaning and valuation, unconfined to the terms through which poetry is legible today.<sup>27</sup> It is wealth held in escrow.

We can perceive "poetry from the future" in Sun Ra's interest in using otherworldly sounds throughout his musical oeuvre. In particular, the sounds we associate with outer space work as audible means through which to disrupt the habituated reception of music and to disturb (and redirect) the sensorium and its vibratory patterns. The title of Sun Ra's song "Music from the World Tomorrow," from the album *Angels and Demons at Play*, posits a "tomorrow" and hence a future. Yet, it does so by making of tomorrow not so much a time (as in the future), but another world ("the world tomorrow").<sup>28</sup> Like most of the Afrofuturism of interest to *Queer Times*, *Black Futures*, this song's title functions to critique the present through the production of an alternative history of its past, while making a set of claims on an (im)possible future or fashioning a cultural praxis through which to open alternative futures. This is consistent with the method Sun Ra's character announces in the beginning sequence of *Space Is the Place* when he says, "The first thing to do is to consider time to be officially ended."<sup>29</sup>

For Sun Ra, the official end of time is just the beginning of what Graham Lock refers to as "Blutopia."<sup>30</sup> Lock borrows the term "Blutopia" for the title of his book *Blutopia: Visions of the Future and Revisions of the Past in the Work of Sun Ra, Duke Ellington, and Anthony Braxton* from "Blutopia," the title of a song by Duke Ellington. Lock uses the term to refer to what he identifies as "a crossroads in the creative consciousness where visions of the future and revisions of the past become part of the same process, a 'politics of transfiguration,' in which accepted notions of language, history, the real, and the possible are thrown open to questions and found wanting." This crossroads, Lock explains, is formed when two major impulses fuse: "a utopian impulse, evident in the creation of imagined places (Promised Lands), and the impulse to remember, to

bear witness, which James Baldwin relates to the particular history of slavery and its aftermath in the United States.”<sup>31</sup> In Lock’s study, these impulses, often regarded as antipathetic, point to a “Blutopia,” which Lock describes, with specific reference to Ellington’s song, as a “utopia tinged with the blues, an African American visionary future stained with memories.”<sup>32</sup>

Like much of the written work produced around the beginning of the twenty-first century either explicitly formulated in terms of “Afrofuturism” or addressing concerns that have now come to be associated with Afrofuturism, Lock’s book focuses on music and musicians. For practitioners and scholars of Afrofuturism, music and sound have been accorded a primary place because they are the vehicles through which, as Kodwo Eshun put it in his seminal 1998 book *More Brilliant than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction*, “postwar alienation breaks down into the 21st C alien.”<sup>33</sup> Musicians such as Sun Ra, John Coltrane, Alice Coltrane, Duke Ellington, Eric Dolphy, and others experimented with jazz music to push it far out, into other worlds, new worlds—outer and sometimes inner space. These artists offered theorists and critics of Afrofuturism a great deal of conceptual material on which to draw.

Yet, during the 1980s and 1990s, creative energy was also expended on the production of literature, film, and video, cultural forms that open up a different set of questions from within what might still be called Afrofuturism—questions about gender, sexuality, potentiality, speculation, technology, and liberation. Insofar as writers such as Octavia E. Butler, Nalo Hopkinson, Samuel Delany, and others were innovating within science fiction and speculative fiction at that time, literature was the medium through which to forge new ideas and speculative possibilities for gendered beings, alternative sexualities, and technologically enhanced futures.

In these authors’ work, Afrofuturist expression is a profound critique of those existing conditions that limit the lives of Black folks. Octavia Butler, a speculative fiction writer whose work provides another influential example of Afrofuturism, offers a space colonial vision similar to Sun Ra’s in *Space Is the Place* in her 1993 novel *Parable of the Sower* and its sequel, the 1998 *Parable of the Talents*. The premise of Butler’s *Parable* novels is that capitalism in the United States has progressed unchecked by government regulations to such a degree that jobs are scarce and

commodities, including necessary items such as food, clothing, water, and housing, are unavailable to all but the wealthy few. Under the aegis of making America great again, politicians rely upon the perpetuation of this situation of scarcity to stay in power. Crime, addictions, and violence undergird existing modes of sociality, making it difficult to trust others, while simultaneously rendering it necessary for people to forge alliances.

The narrator and protagonist of *Parable of the Sower*, Lauren Olamina (often referred to simply as "Olamina"), has analyzed her situation, her own responses to it, and everything she could "read, hear, see, all the history" she could learn. Founded on this analysis, she has formulated Earthseed, a new religion based on a fundamental understanding that "God is change."<sup>34</sup> At one point in the story, while traveling across California with a small group of other people from her home (which was destroyed in an attack by people addicted to a popular drug), Olamina presents herself as a man in order to ward off those who target women for violence and exploitation. During a conversation with one of her traveling companions, a male character who will eventually become the first convert to Earthseed, Olamina states:

God is Change, and in the end, God prevails. But there is hope in understanding the nature of God—not punishing or jealous, but infinitely malleable. There's comfort in realizing that everyone and everything yields to God. There's power in knowing that God can be focused, diverted, shaped by anyone at all. . . . God will shape us all every day of our lives. Best to understand that and return the effort: Shape God.<sup>35</sup>

Over the course of *Parable of the Sower*, Olamina begins to plant Earthseed communities, with the understanding that, as she puts it later in the conversation referenced above, "the Destiny of Earthseed is to take root among the stars." The ultimate aim of Earthseed is to settle other "living worlds" in "other star systems." Olamina explains, "The Destiny of Earthseed is to take root among the stars. . . . That's the ultimate Earthseed aim, and the ultimate human change short of death. It's a destiny we'd better pursue if we hope to be anything other than smooth-skinned dinosaurs—here today, gone tomorrow, our bones mixed with the bones and ashes of our cities, and so what?"<sup>36</sup>

In Butler's work, an engagement with Black existence (that is, the material and cultural realities and expressions indexed by the persistent presence of those we call "Black people" over time) is anchored in an understanding of its entanglements with various modes of human existence. The group with which Olamina travels is racially and ethnically heterogeneous, a characteristic of the social world of many of the characters across Butler's oeuvre. Another of her novels, *Wild Seed*, for example, is part of a trilogy that starts with two main characters, Doro and Anyanwu, who can change physical form: Doro takes over bodies, effectively killing whatever animated those bodies previously by replacing it with himself, and Anyanwu is a shape-shifter who can change her physical composition and appearance at will. *Wild Seed* begins during the transatlantic slave trade, with Doro searching for the African communities that he had been developing by selectively breeding people with special abilities. He is upset because his careful work is being undermined by slave traders, who keep raiding his carefully cultivated villages, when he chances upon Anyanwu, whose special abilities are unlike any he has seen.

An engagement with Black existence in these novels can be found in their references to the disruption caused by the world historical transformation initiated by the transatlantic slave trade; since neither Doro nor Anyanwu is bound within recognizably Black bodies, the novels generate what we might perceive as "Black existence" as a historical sensibility anchored in the ongoing transformation of the world, related but not bound to genetic or otherwise biological categories premised on the continuity of specific bloodlines. "Black existence" confounds the epistemological certainty vis-à-vis race that presently is widely assumed to be guaranteed by specific phenotypical and other perceptible cues.

For Sun Ra, a serious engagement with Black existence leads, on the one hand, to vital articulations of music and sound in the face of various forms of death and, on the other hand, to the quotidian violence that authorizes and reproduces present social relations. In both Sun Ra's *Space Is the Place* and Octavia Butler's *Parable* novels, space exploration and settlement in outer space provide an opportunity to forge new relations by radically disrupting existing relations and the logics and violences through which they are held in place. To the extent that space exploration seeks to find another place to escape a catastrophic situa-



tion on earth, it should not be surprising that it is a recurring theme of Afrofuturism.

Yet, in Sun Ra's articulation of the utopian impulse of Afrofuturism, which for him involves the colonization of another planet, the quotidian violences of settler colonialism characteristic of modernity are simply transposed—transmolecularized, teleported—elsewhere to "another place in the universe, up in the different stars." Rather than Édouard Glissant's imagined and still parenthetical "(at long last communal) land" or Octavio Paz's yearning, while "Reading John Cage," that "the U.S.A. may become just another part of the world. No more. No less," Sun Ra's solution in *Space Is the Place* to the violence and humiliation of US race relations is to give Black folks a world they can own. Sun Ra seems unconcerned about the specter of African American and Black complicity in a settler colonial project when he advocates for a spatio-temporal rupture in Black consciousness sparked by his musical vibrations and profound enough to transport Black people to another planet. Afrofuturist narratives that advocate for colonizing another planet raise (and less often consider, and/or offer, speculative strategies and solutions to) the ethico-political issues that have attended anti-Black settler colonial societies.<sup>37</sup>

Sun Ra's political vision in *Space Is the Place* is impossible: predicated on the (non)existence of a cheesy psychedelic planet, we might say that Sun Ra's futuristic vision is one with no future. Yet, this does not mean that its assumed complicity with the logics of settler colonialism ought to be excused. On the contrary, perceiving its impossibility ought to authorize further flights into and imaginations of the impossible that might address the complicity of Sun Ra's vision with settler colonialism. As in DuBois's "The Comet," Sun Ra's quest to send Black people to another planet is an impossible alternative to a spatiotemporal order in which there is no desirable future for Black people. From within the logics of existing possible worlds and the range of possible trajectories into the future that they currently make perceptible, a Black future looks like no future at all.

Speculation on the impossible and what Agamben calls the "impotential" characterizes those Afrofuturist cultural productions that invest in a future where "Black lives matter" because such a future radically breaks with existing timelines and historical logics so that the subter-



anean energies of past freedom dreams might be re-released and gain material force. For Lauren Olamina, Butler's protagonist in *The Parable of the Sower*, one of the technologies that might achieve this is poetry. The spiritual text Olamina writes, "Earthseed: The Books of the Living," consist of a series of short poems, aphorisms, and brief statements, such as:

FROM EARTHSEED: THE BOOKS OF THE LIVING

*By Lauren Oya Olamina*

Here we are—  
 Energy,  
 Mass,  
 Life,  
 Shaping life,  
 Mind,  
 Shaping Mind,  
 God,  
 Shaping God,  
 Consider—  
 We are born  
 Not with purpose,  
 But with potential.<sup>38</sup>

While Butler's speculative fiction (novels and short stories) imagines scenarios wherein the relations that animate her present might seem strange and perhaps even malleable within her own time, Olamina's poetry crystalizes insights and intuitions that can reshape the novel's speculative fictional world, thereby allowing the characters to grasp how what seems intractable might be resisted, shaped, transduced into something else entirely. Moreover, we can read Olamina's claim about "potential" as also including a claim about "im-potential," or the potential not to do something.<sup>39</sup>

For Sun Ra, sound and music carry a capacity to transduce the qualities of consciousness holding present relations in place into something qualitatively different. For Butler and Sun Ra, the technologies employed—sound, music, poetry—formally disrupt habitual responses and perceptions. The challenge in these speculative fictions is to create

another world by spreading things and phenomena, including ideas and modes of embodiment and living, which are not recuperated into the familiar ones undergirding property, ownership, dispossession, white supremacy, and misogyny, as well as their attendant modes of propriety.<sup>40</sup>

When we sit with avant-garde music, expressed most deliberately in free jazz, as a means through which to transform consciousness, when "we stay with poetry" as a collective, formal disruption, something else with a capacity for movement opens up.<sup>41</sup> Perhaps what Afrofuturism offers to thinking, with its yearning for another world, another planet that operates according to the space-time of Black liberation, is a way to enter into relation with an autochthonous space of and for Black existence. Such a world is not premised on dispossession, ownership, property, and exploitation. As I will suggest in the "Intercession: The De-American Bartleby," this mode of relation can be conceptualized as a creative, eccentric way of sinking deeply into the space held open in music and engaging with what is always there already.

Drawing our attention toward sound, affect, music, and silence, Afrofuturist sonic culture, like Herman Melville's character Bartleby, brings language to its outside. At its most compelling, Afrofuturist music is a nonlanguage; it "evokes the future without predicting it."<sup>42</sup> Such Afrofuturism musically invokes a "new world" that does not appear as expansion, immigration, and nations—indeed, it does not appear as such; it is presently impossible. Yet, the sonic, including the poetic, Afrofuturisms of interest here are generative. They posit autopoietic and autogenetic transindividual being, stubbornly insisting on a capacity for self-creation within the languages they constantly push to their outsides even as they remain tethered to the collective projects through which they emerge. These Afrofuturisms' investments are not in the future, or even *a* future, but Now—a now that Afrofuturism constantly destroys through its insistent discordance with it, unleashing presents with pasts that never were and will be.

That theories of autopoiesis, autogenesis, and the transindividual currently are being taken up and extended from within the traditions of Western philosophy points to the impasse at which the Western "human" presently finds himself. The relevance of these theories to analyses of Afrofuturism and vice versa (as argued above) lies in their offering alternative conceptualizations of being, which are consistent with

those that have been formulated from an engagement with the range of phenomena and other data associated with Black existence in the West. In other words, theories of autopoïësis and autogenesis have been generated through a sustained intellectual, theoretical engagement with Black existence and ways of thinking about being that are consistent with those coming to the fore in Continental philosophy to address a set of crises faced by the Western human. We might say, then, along with James A. Snead, that the Western human is heading toward where the Black already is.<sup>43</sup> Theories of ontogenesis and autopoïësis articulate how the order of being that we can perceive through analyses of Black cultural productions makes other ways of being available in a more generalized and dispersed manner than those that previously animated Western Being's white supremacist epistemologies and ontologies.

Gilbert Simondon's theories are of particular interest here because they systematically attempt to rethink the relationship between the individual and the collective within Western philosophy traditions with a particular emphasis on technics. Insofar as Black existence has challenged Western theories of "Being" to contend with what they exclude (in order to cohere "Being" as such), Simondon's challenges to those theories from within their logics are salutary. Concepts like Simondon's have been generated from within Western philosophy in a variety of Black diasporic thought, traditions, and practices in order to critique Western civilization and the assertions, assumptions, and habits of mind that have sustained and enabled it over time. The affinities between Simondon's work and that of Black Caribbean intellectuals such as Édouard Glissant and Sylvia Wynter remind us that those thinkers for whom Black existence has been a generative site of inquiry and experimentation have already challenged Western conceptions of Being from within organic formations of intellectual and artistic practice as well as offered viable alternatives, many of which resonate with those I discuss below.

Here, however, I stay with Simondon in order to take, along with Muriel Combes, "but one" of the pathways "within Simondon's philosophy," which runs "from preindividual to transindividual by way of a renewal of the philosophy of relation."<sup>44</sup> Combes notes in *Gilbert Simondon and the Philosophy of the Transindividual* that "it is possible to read all of Simondon's work as a call for a transmutation in how we approach

being."<sup>45</sup> The constitution of "Being" in Western thought has been one of the modes through which "the Negro," "the Black," "the African," as well as "the Oriental" and "the Native" and "the Primitive" have been excised from the sphere of the properly human. In this book, I engage with Simondon's transmutation of the Western philosophy of "Being," and put it in conversation with theories offered by Glissant, in order to suggest how we might think ontology, psychosociality, and collectivity in ways that do not rehabilitate a dying human but instead usher, peacefully, I hope, another being into the world of the Black radical imagination. To the extent that Black Studies has identified Western theories of ontology as part of the architecture that upholds and perpetuates white supremacy and anti-Black racism, philosophical attempts to transmute how Western philosophy approaches being can have significant implications for Black Studies, as well as, perhaps, offer ways to explode Western being such that what it violently disavows, yet still carries at its core—that is, what we now perceive as "Blackness"—might be unleashed.

Sylvia Wynter's significant intervention into Western philosophy offers a complementary framework for narrating how the present structure has been assembled and points toward other modes of existence beyond what we currently perceive as possibilities.<sup>46</sup> Technology and *autopoïesis* are of concern in certain of Wynter's work, and she has written about aesthetics and film.<sup>47</sup> Here, Simondon's theories help to flesh out this book's larger concerns with cinema and media in relationship to the Afrofuturist themes of "imagination, technology, the future, and liberation."<sup>48</sup> Simondon's theory focuses specifically on the implications stemming from relations between living beings and technology, with an emphasis on transduction. Additionally, Simondon's work, which influenced Deleuze, complements my analysis of the digital regime of the image and societies of control by offering a way to conceptualize their preindividual and transindividual dimensions.

Combes argues that Simondon's thought challenges two main tendencies for conceptualizing being in the Western philosophical tradition: atomism and hylomorphism. Atomism "posits the atom as primary substantial reality that . . . deviates from its trajectory and enters into assemblies with other atoms to form an individual," whereas hylomorphism "makes the individual the result of an encounter between form and matter that are always already individuated."<sup>49</sup> According to

Combes, Simondon's work navigates these two poles through which Western Being has been conceptualized by distinguishing being-as-such from being-as-individual. Combes explains:

A philosophy that truly wishes to address individuation must separate what tradition has always conflated, to *distinguish being as such from being as individual*. In such a perspective, being as such is necessarily understood in terms of the gap separating it from individuated being. And by the same token, we can no longer remain content to confirm the "givenness" of being, but would have to specify what properly characterizes "being as such," which is not only its being but also is not being one. In Simondon's thought, being as being is not one, because it precedes any individual. This is why he calls it *preindividual*.<sup>50</sup>

Rather than search for a principle of individuation, Simondon focuses on it as a process. The individual becomes "merely the result of an operation of individuation."<sup>51</sup> Simondon advances a novel concept of transduction to envision "the mode of relation obtaining between thought and being" anew. Combes quotes Simondon's first definition of transduction as "the operation whereby a domain undergoes information": "By transduction, we mean a physical, biological, mental, or social operation, through which an activity propagates from point to point within a domain, while grounding this propagation in the structuration of the domain, which is operated from place to place: each region of the constituted structure serves as a principle of constitution for the next region."<sup>52</sup> Transduction thus expresses the processual sense of individuation and "holds for any domain, and the determination of domains (matter, life, mind, society) relies on diverse regimes of individuation (physical, biological, psychic, collective)."<sup>53</sup>

Simondon's concept of the "transindividual," connected to that of ontogenesis, challenges existing understandings of "Being" and offers a way to conceptualize "being" in relation to a collective. Thinking "being" through Simondon's theory of the "transindividual," and alongside Glissant's "poetics of Relation," offers a way to conceptualize Black existence and indeed existence itself, as a transindividual relation. If, following Sun Ra, we can entertain a formulation of Black people as "myths," the understanding that ontology is an expression of a process involving

transindividual relation helps to elucidate the dimensions of Black existence that resist incorporation into an Enlightenment conceptualization of "Being" and its attendant formulations of "the human." As Combes puts it, "Simondon's approach entails a substitution of ontogenesis for traditional ontology, grasping the genesis of individuals within the operation of individuation as it is unfolding."<sup>54</sup> For those whose individuation must pass through the collective enterprises currently organized through identity categories, "ontogenesis" offers a conceptual framework for thinking collective existence, which posits what Simondon calls "an aperiodon," a "real preindividual potential," that tethers any collective category to a potential to be otherwise, including refusal and/or not to be as such. About this aspect of Simondon's philosophy, Combes explains:

Properly speaking, we would have to say that being is more-than-one, which is to say it "can be taken as more-than-unity and more-than-identity." . . . In such enigmatic expressions as "more-than-unity" and "more-than-identity," we see coming to light the idea whereby being is constitutively, immediately, a power of mutation. In fact, the non-self-identity of being is not simply a passage from one identity to another through the negation of the prior identity. Rather, because being contains potential, and because all that exists within a reserve of becoming, the non-self-identity of being should be called more-than-identity. In this sense, being is in excess over itself. . . . Before all individuation, being can be understood as a system containing potential energy. Although this energy becomes active within the system, it is called potential because it requires a transformation of the system in order to be structured, that is, to be actualized in accordance with structures. Preindividual being, and in a general way, any system in a metastable state, harbors potentials that are incompatible because they belong to heterogeneous dimensions of being.<sup>55</sup>

Combes points out that, for Simondon, being can be understood as a system containing incompatible potentials within the reservoir of being, which may become active following a "transformation of the system." If being is "constitutively, immediately, a power of mutation," containing "potential energy" that is actualized in accordance with structures, such as, for example, structural racism or heteropatriarchy, then it follows

that changing the structures of the system through which Being presently coheres might call forth new, currently incompatible potentials. In other words, systemic transformations might actualize other dimensions of being, presently harbored as potential within preindividual being. The dimensions of being through which white existence has historically cohered, and through which white supremacy continues to reassert itself globally, might not be actualized in a transformed system. Abolishing the systemic structures through which white existence reproduces itself might create conditions under which it becomes possible to be otherwise. Along the lines of how Audre Lorde and Franklin Rosemont conceptualize the power of poetry to carry dimensions of the unknown and the impossible into present reality, the Afrofuturist strategies I have discussed in this chapter so far—music, sound, and speculative fiction—can carry other dimensions of being into existing structures.<sup>56</sup> Simondon's formulation allows us to consider the role that forms of mediation like Sun Ra's free jazz and Octavia Butler's speculative fiction play in structuring present systems and selecting from the incompatible, heterogeneous potentials harbored within preindividual being and activating them within existing structures.

If being is "a power of mutation," and if the concept of "preindividual being" allows for heterogeneous, incompatible potentials, then the constitutive construction of "the Human" leaves energies as inactive potentials within "the Human's" governing structures. Although we might say with Fanon that it will require a "great leap" to break the system and actualize other structures, Simondon's theory of ontogenesis, transindividuation, transduction, and technics offers a way to conceptualize Western being as more-than-identity and to challenge the existing structures of signification through which the mattering of certain collective beings matters more than others.

The current shifts within Western philosophy to notions of ontogenesis, autopoiesis, and "sympoiesis" (a term Donna Haraway introduces to mean "making-with"), as well as to a variety of "new materialisms," signal, among other changes, a set of transformations in how racialization and engendering might be conceptualized.<sup>57</sup> In ways I will discuss in chapter 3, neoliberal multicultural formulations and deployments of "race" made available an understanding of "race" as *technē*, or, in other words, as a mode of revealing—a tool that might be put to use.<sup>58</sup> As

technē, "race" transduces potential energy within existing structures with an abiding capacity to organize collective being otherwise. It is "vestibular" to modern Western Being.<sup>59</sup> Reframed as a technology, race is a form of revealing, but only one potential activated from the reservoir of heterogeneous, incompatible, elements constitutive of preindividual being. Insofar as it is imbricated with truth claims concerning perceptible biological markers, with the logics that animate a global division of labor and capitalist exploitation, and insofar as it intercuts with those vectors that determine gender and nationality, race is a particularly stubborn vestibular entrance into existing social reality and the collective beings who constitute it.

Presently working within a system that is structured by and through "race," yet aware of the reservoir of potential energy available within preindividual being, we . . . improvise.

"It's after the End of the World. Don't You Know That Yet?"

At the beginning of this chapter, and in the spirit of improvisation, I offered the poetic formulation of the sonic refrain found in the middle of the film *Space Is the Place*—"It's after the End of the World. Don't you know that yet?"—because it makes perceptible a logic of futures and futurity that stymies conventional organization of time and space in which the present precedes that future for which it is destined to become the past. Today, this spatiotemporal organization is held in place by the processural capacities of race—that is, "racialization"—and gender—or "gendering" and "engendering"—along with other modes through which identity might be organized at various phases of collective individuation, such as, for example, class, sexual orientation, nationality, ability. Throughout the present project, I build upon the ways that this organization of time and space has been criticized, complicated, and reformulated by others. I do so by focusing on how conceptualizations of "race" and non-normative expressions of gender and sexuality make perceptible alternative organizations of space and time that do not conform to the "empty homogeneous time" that animates conventional conceptualizations and commonsense understandings of futures, futurity, and speculation, and the range of sociopolitical and economic possibilities those formulations support.



At the same time, the poetic formulation that opens this first chapter of *Queer Times, Black Futures* illustrates how Sun Ra's *Space Is the Place* invokes a set of spatiotemporal logics consistent with those animating Black existence in a world that is not (a) just one. The refrain "It's after the end of the world" anchors a present that is, as Joy James puts it, "the henceforward."<sup>60</sup> James references Frantz Fanon's statement in *The Wretched of the Earth* that "henceforward, the interests of one will be the interests of all, for in concrete fact *everyone* will be discovered by the troops, *everyone* will be massacred—or *everyone* will be saved."<sup>61</sup> For James, "The moment of *henceforward* is the moment of the transformation of the native intellectual, the "organic intellectual," into a revolutionary."<sup>62</sup>

Here, the concept of "henceforward" is a temporal anchor for the creation of what James describes as "the new being," who, through struggle and an internalization of the Other, also becomes "individual and collective, in overt and covert rebellion, alive because everyone has now become mechanized in its rebellion, with the spiritual force of freedom driving it—biological, mechanical, divine."<sup>63</sup> While James refers to this new creature as a "cyborg" in order to differentiate it from struggles attached to "the human," I embrace it here as a presently unintelligible assemblage of technology, flesh, imagination, and spirit. Consistent with the thoroughgoing critique of "the human" that is part of James's revolutionary project, James attributes the pronoun "it" to the new creature, explaining, "For when the 'one' solitary merges with others to become the revolutionary, he or she is no longer a conventional human. As . . . one/mass unified against the divine, mechanical, and biological terror of the colonizer, as its own biological, mechanical, and divine formation, a human being as a conventional being no longer exists (at least momentarily)."<sup>64</sup>

In James's reading of Fanon, decolonization is an apocalyptic event of complete disorder effected by violence; the colonial world is held in place by violence, and violence will be a force of decolonization. In the meantime, "henceforward" stands as a revolutionary moment that must always be renewed. James writes (noting the religious resonances of Fanon's choice of the word "saved" in *The Wretched of the Earth*): "Part of the puzzle or challenge of being saved is how to stay alive and stay saved; that is, it is not a onetime achievement or acquisition but an

ongoing struggle. The revolution that must come the rebellion that precedes it and await the rebellion that will come means that *henceforward* is a war without end, movement without end. *Henceforward* is the name for the struggle that must always begin again."<sup>65</sup> The syntax of James's sentence here evokes the avalanche of experiences and the stalled temporality characteristic of "henceforward," a never-ending struggle to stay alive while also fighting for and through the ethics and vision of decolonization.

Advancing an argument that decolonization has not (yet) been achieved is not the same as arguing that nothing changes, that battles are not won along the way, and that things do not get better and worse and better and worse and worse and the same. It acknowledges that chattel slavery has ended and that African countries have achieved their independence. At the same time, it announces that we remain in the thick of things, on still-colonized land, in the midst of a long-haul effort toward liberation for all, in "the henceforward."<sup>66</sup>

Saidiya Hartman has referred to this as "the afterlife of slavery" and "the afterlife of property" as a way to formulate a present still suspended in ongoing violences of white supremacy and the socio-economic logics of racial capital put into motion by the transatlantic slave trade and the colonization of Africa, Asia, and the Americas.<sup>67</sup> Other scholars have turned to Freudian formulations of melancholia to conceptualize the structure of feeling in which a traumatic past (colonization, settler colonialism, enslavement) continually pervades our present. The temporality that Sun Ra's refrain "It's after the end of the world. Don't you know that yet?" invokes is consistent with these more recent formulations. But rather than linger there, after the end of the world, in the still fresh and powerful traumatic past though which "the world" ended, Sun Ra asserts that we must consider time as officially ended and should head up to another planet "under different stars."

Where to begin without a past? Because life goes on. Life is going on. How to begin anew after the end of time, when catastrophe is what lingers as time and *future* is what remains of temporality?

The refrain—"It's after the end of the world. Don't you know that yet?"—and Sun Ra's suggestion, in the wake of the end of the world, that we consider time officially ended might be thought in conjunc-

tion with Glissant's concept of "the Abyss," mentioned earlier. In an interview with Manthia Diawara, Glissant explains that Black people in the European's "New World" carry the Abyss inside of us because of the circumstances through which that "New World" was created. Glissant's notion of the Abyss is central to his theory of the temporality of the Caribbean. As John E. Drabinsky points out, for Glissant, the Middle Passage marked a radical rupture that has implications for the ancestors of the Africans who survived it. The trauma of the Middle Passage—the bodies of those newly enslaved thrown overboard to die an anonymous death at the bottom of the sea and then lost forever so that only their shackles remain, the continuity of languages and cultures and familial lines disrupted, the horror of living with the violences of subjection to white supremacy and in relation to its settler colonial project, and all of the other everyday micro-terrors that we do not or no longer imagine today, or that we have habituated ourselves to accept—severs roots and pasts and histories. Even "loss itself is stolen in the Middle Passage."<sup>68</sup> Drabinski explains:

For Glissant, the Caribbean is futurity precisely because of the abyssal effect and affect of loss. Impossible history is not the loss of what was. It is, rather, what it means to begin without even the memory of having once possessed. The Middle Passage is just this much violence, and yet life goes on. At the shoreline, then on the plantation (which Glissant calls "one of the wombs of the world" in *Poetics of Relation*), the future is a kind of facticity, not a project. The name *Caribbean* is itself inseparable from the openness of what is to come. The future, insofar as it can be taken up, offers less than nothing as wreckage within which a movement to the future can take root.<sup>69</sup>

When the future "offers less than nothing as wreckage within which a movement to the future can take root," a nomadic and multiple subjectivity emerges from the material conditions indexed by the name "Caribbean." But, as Drabinski states, "This is to say, nomadic is not the qualifier of subjectivity as the result of a critique of metaphysics, nor does it respond to various epistemological paradoxes" (as it does for Deleuze and Guattari's nomad). Drabinski continues: "Glissant's

nomad has another materiality and therefore another genesis."<sup>70</sup> To put this in Simondon's framework, Glissant's nomad emerges through different structures of transindividuation than Deleuze and Guattari's nomad.

"Abyss" names Glissant's formulation of the conditions of possibility for "Caribbean" as futurity, for "what it means to begin without even the memory of once having possessed."<sup>71</sup> This resonates with Sun Ra's admonition that we consider "time as officially ended" and points to the bifurcations and forks in temporality that have come to characterize Western modernity. We might say, then, using Fred Moten's terms, "Blackness" is another name for Black history, which is to say, "now." In his book *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*, Moten puts it this way:

One of the implications of blackness is that those manifestations of the future in the degraded present that C. L. R. James described can never be understood as simply illusory. The knowledge of the future in the present is bound up with something Marx could only subjunctively imagine: the commodity who speaks.<sup>72</sup>

As "new materialisms," including theories of "vibrant matter" and "thing power," "object-oriented ontologies," and other ways to rework and rethink spatiotemporal relations and their sociopolitical force and implications etch pathways through Euro-American knowledge production, I continue to take seriously James Snead's proposition that, within the spatiotemporal logics of our shared modernity, "the Black" is always there already. I return to Snead's proposition in chapter 3, where I consider what it has to do with a historical affiliation between race and technology. Here, however, I note that the transatlantic slave trade and the conceptions of the world that supported it pressed living beings into objects hundreds of years ago, and the epistemological and ontological legacies of that world historical transmutation are with us still today. The cultures, politics, and theories, among other elements, produced by those whose existence is objecthood and thingness offer stunning correctives and open onto remarkable possibilities in the newest theoretical turns. Opening ways to connect formulations of time and space

that are generated out of a sustained engagement with those contexts in which living objects and breathing things exist might advance an ethics through which to anchor the just world stirring beneath our feet. We can listen for the refrains of those living objects and breathing things, rehearsed, improvised, even those we perceive as just noise. Here and now. In these Black futures.

"It's after the end of the world. Don't you know that yet?"