

NO JUSTICE, NO PEACE:
AN ETHICAL RE/ORIENTATION
TOWARDS A GRAMMAR
OF JUSTICE

NINA FRIEDMAN (6965784)

SUPERVISED BY: DR. KATHRIN THIELE

SECOND SUPERVISOR: DR. ORIANNA CALDERÓN

SUBMITTED: AUGUST 15, 2021

GENDER STUDIES, FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

UTRECHT UNIVERSITY, UNIVERSIDAD DE GRANADA

Abstract

No justice, no peace. In the late spring and early summer months of 2020, the chant shook the streets of cities across the United States and the world. *No justice, no peace.* Screamed in outrage and pain, the chant demanded a response to the question of *justice*. The goal of this thesis is to interrogate what justice has meant, what it continues to mean, and what it might mean. Through examining the 2020 uprisings in the U.S. against racial violence and police brutality, and accompanying calls for justice, this thesis argues for an ethical re/orientation to towards a grammar of justice. Concerned that contemporary cries for justice occur only following violence, in worst case death (e.g. in the wake of police murders), this thesis begins by interrogating when justice is invoked today, how it still depends on violence, and why it can only signify death when articulated through *the Modern Grammar of separability, sequentiality and determinacy* (Ferreira da Silva, 2016; 2017; 2018). I examine two protests in the state of California, both of which occurred during the spring and summer of 2020, and explore how each demand justice in respectively distinct registers. The first register articulates this moment in the US as one of *emergency*, suggesting the question of *justice* can be resolved by the indictment of murderers in blue. The latter protest evades the trappings of this carceral logic, understanding justice within the register of abolition. Ultimately, rather than providing an answer to the question of justice, this thesis aims to stay with the *emergence* of coalitional possibilities and culminates in an experimental poetic endeavor of ‘hacking’. With this, I hope to excavate a *relational justice*, a justice oriented towards *liberation*.

This thesis is dedicated to Patrick George Zaki, who did not have the privilege as I to complete the GEMMA program.

In loving memory of Terrence

Table of Contents

Introduction

i.	Situating Justice	6
ii.	Key Terms & A Note on Form.....	8
iii.	The Agenda	10

Chapter 1: Excavating the Modern Grammar: Justice Within the Register of Carcerality

i.	The Itinerary.....	14
ii.	A Brief History of Justice in the U.S.	15
	a. “Upholding Justice”	15
iii.	Justice Within U.S. Liberal Thought.....	18
iv.	Justice at the Limits of the Human (Man)	20
v.	The Three Pillars.....	24
	a. The Equation of Justice.....	25
vi.	Opening up the Path	29

Chapter 2: 2020: A Moment or a Movement?

i.	Introduction.....	30
ii.	Moment (emergency) & Movement (emergence)	32
iii.	2020: A Moment of Emergency?	33
iv.	2020: An Emergence of Movement.....	36
	a. Contextuality Destiny Arts Center.....	37
	b. 2020: The Black (W)hole- <i>ain't no power like the power of the youth cause the power of the youth don't stop</i>	38
v.	Movin' and Refusin'	42

Chapter 3: Towards the Horizon of Liberation

i.	“Possible & Allowable”: The Logics of Carcerality.....	45
----	--	----

ii.	Abolishing the Logic: Imagining the “Impossible”	48
	a. Emancipatory ‘possibilities’	49
	b. Liberatory ‘impossibilities’	51
iii.	Imagining as Worlding: the imagination as a tool	53
iv.	Hacking the Master’s Tools	56

Chapter 4: Justice Re/Oriented

i.	hacking as a poetic performative experiment.....	60
ii.	the itinerary.....	63
iii.	diffracting justice.....	64
iv.	the “/” as a tool for thought.....	66
	a. hacking, agential cuts, and the “/”.....	67
v.	/ hacked justice.....	68

	<i>No justice, no peace: a final note on being in/justice</i>	73
--	---	----

	References	75
--	-------------------------	----

Introduction

“The imaginary does not bear with it the coercive requirement of idea. It prefigures reality, without determining it a priori”- Édouard Glissant 1990,192

i. Situating Justice

Echoes of *no justice, no peace* ripple the streets of downtown Philadelphia, Louisville, Minneapolis, Portland, Oakland, of cities across the United States and the world. *No justice, no peace*, reverberating calls, rhythms ricocheting, temporally borderless beats rooted in refusal—1968, 2014, 2020. Justice for Ma’Kahia Bryant, justice for Daunte Wright, justice for James Lionel Johnson, justice for Adam Toledo, justice for Walter Wallace Jr., justice for Breonna Taylor, justice for George Floyd, justice for Dominique Williams, justice for Layleen Polanco, justice for Vincent Belmonte, justice for Robert Howard, justice for Aiden Ellison, justice for Kevin Peterson Jr., justice for Quawan Charles, justice for Tamir Rice, justice for Casey Goodson Jr., justice for Bennie Edwards, justice for Iyonna Dior, justice for Fred Hampton, justice for Ahmud Arbery, justice for Tony McDade, justice for Sean Reed, justice for Gladys Bentley, justice for Rayshard Brooks, justice for Yassin Mohamed, justice for Atatiana Jefferson, justice for Aura Rosser, justice for Stephon Clarke, justice for Botham Jean, justice for Philando Castille, justice for Alton Sterling, justice for Michelle Cusseaux, justice for Johana Medina Leon, justice for Jacob Blake.

What does it mean that each time justice is invoked it follows the occurrence of violence? What is the stately grammar authorizing this causal equation? During the spring and summer months of 2020 I began to notice a pattern in the rehearsed recital of calls for justice. The pattern seems to follow an equation that goes something like this: violence (injustice) + reckoning = demands for justice. In the global demands for justice heard at an all-time high in summer of 2020, the justice hereto spoken of was predicated on the inevitability of violence, of death, specifically of Black death. I am concerned that the optics of this equation – violence (injustice) + reckoning = demands for justice – are negated and go without question, nominalizing justice into something containable, such as a succinct definition that might be found a grammar book. I am even more concerned that this pattern, which necessitates violence as a priori to justice, will continue, should it go uninterrogated. Why is it that the invocation of justice is predicated on an equation that always already depends on violence? Why is it that

this pattern reliably continues? Why does it seem like justice is not working? And more so, *what is to be done?*

Situated in/through/with/alongside radical black feminist, trans*feminist, and abolitionist thought and theory, this project is an attempt to attend to this concern, an attempt to attend to this pattern, and to the equation of justice as I see it now. The goal of this thesis is to unravel the logic present in this causal pattern, a logic reiterated and upheld in both modern systems and modern thought which cannot but write justice as always already predicated on violence, in worst case death, more specifically, black death. By interrogating and refusing the logic writing justice as antecedently reliant on violence, on injustice, this project is guided by an unwavering desire in search for an ethical re/orientation towards a grammar of justice. The question guiding this project is: how does the Modern Grammar of justice rely on violence, on injustice, and how can radical black feminist, trans*feminist, and abolitionist scholarship bare potential to think-practice justice differently?

My inquiry in exploring an ethical re/orientation towards a grammar of justice leads me in and out of past personal experiences of protest; it also leads me to U.S. political theory, to black feminist poetics, to trans*feminist notions of refusal and impossibility, to the history of policing in the United States, to the streets of my California Bay Area upbringing in the summers of 2020 and in 1993, to abolition feminism, to black optimist thought, to music theory, to the poetics of relation, to hacking, and to quantum understandings of physics. By combining various schools of thought and theory with personal experience, my approach in this project allows me to ask questions from a non-hegemonic entry point that does try to discern a succinct, legible ‘solution’ or straight orientation towards finding an ‘answer’ for the question of justice. Rather, both the form and method of my approach intentionally stays with and in the messiness in a quest towards re/orienting justice. By weaving together these distinct strains of thought present throughout the field of gender studies, I employ a diffractive approach in my own inquiry into justice. Such an approach allows me to attend to new patterns created at the points of intersection of these respective theories and thoughts. New and off beat patterns, that just might help re/orient justice.

Diffraction, as it has become known since feminist physicist Karen Barad’s *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007), offers a key apparatus and concept for the proposed project at hand. Because diffraction, as understood in Barad’s project of Agential Realism, is at once a concept, method, and an ethico-political call for engaging with the world differently, it is challenging to succinctly explain the complexity of diffraction and what it is capable of doing as an onto-epistemological tool. In some ways, the complex and opaque nature of diffraction

is both its purpose and power. Feminist philosophers Birgit M. Kaiser and Kathrin Thiele contend that diffraction allows for imagining new “patterns, constellations, and relationalities” (2018, xii). Inspired by the potentials and possibilities that diffraction opens up and for world, more specifically for the equation and pattern of justice, in this thesis I employ diffraction as both an apparatus, that understands and plays with the entanglements of texts in their relationality, and as an ethico-political move in my inquiry into justice.

As an apparatus, I employ diffraction in my reading of texts and theories. According to Barad, a diffractive reading does not read one text or set of ideas against one another (2007, 30). Rather, diffraction involves “reading insights through one another in ways that help illuminate differences as they emerge” (ibid). A diffractive approach to reading therefore does not position the aforementioned theories as discretely opposed to one another, but rather allows me to affirmatively attend to their entanglements and points of connection and relationalities.

My decision to mobilize diffraction as a guiding move in my inquiry for justice is inspired by what Thiele names as the “ethos of diffraction” (2014). According Thiele, “the ethos of diffraction” is a political ethical project that does away with Western dualisms writing difference as oppositional, and goes beyond binaries in ‘think-practicing’ concepts differently (2014, 202). This project is heavily inspired by Thiele’s understanding of the “ethos of diffraction”, namely her ethico-political call to “*think-practice* this world differently” (2014, 202, emphasis in original). Because, “thinking”, as Thiele contends, “*is an active force within-of this world*” (ibid, emphasis in original), this project aims to attend to the ethico-political stakes of what it might mean to ‘think-practice’ justice differently. In summary, this project employs a diffractive approach as both method and concept, affirming an affiliation between the fields of radical black feminism, trans*feminism, and abolition feminism in my search towards ‘think-practicing’ justice differently, towards an ethical re/orientation of a grammar of justice.

ii. Key Terms & A Note on Form

Throughout this thesis project I use italics when referring to key terms. Some key terms are very similar and might even be used interchangeable. An example of terms which I use interchangeably are: *the Modern Grammar*, *the register of carcerality*, *the logics of carcerality*. Though each of these terms serves a respective and specific purpose, I want to clarify here in the introduction the general gist of these terms.

The Modern Grammar might best be defined as what black feminist theorist and poet bell hooks (2009) refers to as the symbolic order, that is “the current white supremacist, heteropatriarchal, neoliberal, neocolonial state of the world” (2009, 29)¹. My specific use of the term ‘Grammar’ is inspired by what Hortense Spillers names the ‘American Grammar’, that is, the symbolic code dictating the undercurrent rhythm from which U.S. society makes sense of the World through discursively produced rules and structures (1987, 68).

I follow abolitionist and critical race studies scholar Dylan Rodriguez (2009) in my definitions of *the register of carcerality* and *carceral logics*. Rodriguez identifies *carcerality* as both a regime and an institutional logic that follows hegemonic paradigms including but not limited to “patriarchy, coloniality, racial chattel, racial capitalism, and heteronormativity” (2019, 1612). *Carcerality* therefore operates through the same hegemonic paradigms as *the Modern Grammar* and because of this the terms can be thought of as interchangeable. Still, I choose to use the specific terms *the register of carcerality* and *the logics of carcerality* in this thesis project because of the particular material and symbolic historical and contemporary meanings in the United States, with regards to justice, which will be explored in chapters one, two, and three.

Furthermore, and importantly, all of the aforementioned key terms- *the Modern Grammar*, *the register of carcerality*, and *the logics of carcerality*- operate by and through what black feminist philosopher Denise Ferreira da Silva identifies as the ‘onto-epistemic pillars’ sustaining the violence of Modern Thought. Ferreira da Silva identifies these pillars as *separability*, *sequentiality*, and *determinacy* (2016; 2017; 2018). I refer to Ferreira da Silva’s three pillars throughout this thesis and attend to how each function to contain justice within the equation and pattern of violence, as I see it now. Ferreira da Silva’s various projects, *Towards a Global Idea of Race* (2007), “To Be Announced: Radical Praxis or Knowing (at) the Limits of Justice” (2013), “No-Bodies: Law, Raciality and Violence” (2014), “Towards a Black Feminist Poethics: The Ques(ion) of Blackness Toward the End of the World” (2014), “On Difference Without Separability” (2016), “1 (life) ÷ 0 (blackness) = ∞ – ∞ or ∞ / ∞: On Matter Beyond the Equation of Value” (2017), “Hacking the subject: Black feminism and refusal beyond the limits of critique” (2018) and “Corpus Infinitum” (2021) have heavily inspired and influenced this project, both with my respective concerns for justice (now) and with the poetic

¹ See also Audre Lorde’s definition of the symbolic order, that which she identifies as the ‘mythical norm’ as that which our identities are always defined against: white, young, able-bodied, heterosexual, Christian, male (Lorde 1984, 116).

approaches I perform to re/orient justice, specifically my ultimate experimental move to ‘hack’ justice.

iii. The Agenda

In order to explore an ethical re/orientation towards a grammar of justice, this project begins by attending to justice as I see it now. Chapter one is therefore occupied with tracing the encapsulation of justice within the trappings of *the Modern Grammar*, dedicated to decoding that which I am concerned currently contains justice within the equation predicated on violence, on death. In order to unravel the impasse of this grammar, this chapter takes its time with the question: what is the problem with (contemporary) invocations of justice? Hence, I begin by mapping the theory and practice of justice in the United States beginning with the colonial arrival in 1492. I chart how the history of justice in the United States is wedded to the history policing and operates through *carceral logics*. Concerned that this history continues to inform and contain present conceptions of justice, I then move to address more contemporary understandings of justice, specifically within the political tradition of U.S. liberal humanism. Through briefly reviewing “The Theory of Justice” (1971), put forth by U.S. political philosopher John Rawls, I identify two ‘principles of justice’ present throughout the contemporary context of the United States: *equality* and/as *inclusion*. I explore why these rights and reform-based strategies- *equality* and/as *inclusion*- are not working. I do this by reading the work black feminist philosopher Sylvia Wynter, namely her seminal project “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human After Man— An Argument” (2003) and discover that a justice reliant on conceptions of ‘human rights’ or calls for ‘humanity’ cannot but always fail to serve those who do not fit into what Wynter names as the genre of *the Human* as ‘Man’. Lastly, and in order to fully explicate the relationship between invocations of justice and violence, I turn to various projects by Denise Ferreira da Silva (2007; 2016; 2017) in order to provide an in-depth account for when justice is invoked, why it always will depend on violence when articulated through *the Modern Grammar*. Following Ferreira da Silva, I argue that the triad of modern thought —*separability, sequentiality, and determinacy*— constitute the ethical indifference with which racial violence is met, and further, that contains justice within *the register of carcerality*. Determined to move away from this logic, to stay with the question of justice, the following chapters aim to provide different entry points to the question of justice.

Chapter two travels to California to provide two empirical examples of calls for justice, both of which were demanded in the immediate wake of police murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. This chapter explores what came in this moment asking: how to stay with the urgency that emerged in the spring and summer months of 2020? I argue that the first protest, which occurred in downtown Los Angeles over the course of the late days of May and early June reveals the insidious workings of *the Modern Grammar* that seek to condense justice within *the register of carcerality*. In this register, justice was invoked from a place of *emergency*. Murders were committed, justice was invoked to indict the murderers; once this was achieved, the protests ceased, as did this moment of *emergency*. Following the canonical machinery explored in chapter one, I demonstrate the incessant operatives of *the logics of carcerality* that condense justice into a singular *moment*, as present in the example of this protest. The second example of protests led by youth activists in the Bay Area did not offer an answer to the question of justice, therefore evading the logic governing modern thought, but also did not shy away from the question. Rather, these protests treated this *moment* in global uprisings against police brutality as one of *emergence*, and stayed with the question of justice, orienting it as a process, as *movement*.

Following this exploration, chapter three stays with the *emergence* of demands made for justice in 2020 by attending to the project and praxis of abolition feminism in the context of the United States. I read the abolitionist project by way of what Denise Ferreira da Silva identifies in her project “Hacking the Subject” (2018) as “refusal as a mode of engagement” (22). Refusal as a mode of engagement, like the project of abolition is not only about negation, dismantling, or destruction- it is about re/envisioning anew, mobilizing the imagination to generate into existence that which might be considered ‘impossible’ (Davis, 2020). My charting in this chapter leads me to abolitionist organizations, activists, and theorists who activate Ferreira da Silva’s mode of engagement, galvanizing the imagination as a tool in the desire for *more*, for *liberation*. Ferreira da Silva identifies this troubling refusal and activation as the gift and tradition of radical black feminism. More specifically, she identifies this tradition and praxis as ‘hacking’, which in my understanding is a productive mode of manipulating that which is ‘taken as such’ in order to imagine and practice different ways of thinking, being, and existing with one another. This mode and praxis I employ in my own exploration of justice in the following and ultimate chapter.

The final chapter of this project mobilizes Ferreira da Silva’s “refusal as a mode of engagement” (ibid) and Karen Barad’s quantum figuring of diffraction in a poetic experiment to ‘hack’ justice. My goal in this experiment returns to my unremitting desire for an ethical

re/orientation towards a grammar of justice. I mobilize the poetic descriptor of the “/” in re/orientation, as a guiding tool for and in this experiment and ask: how might diffraction as a methodology and the poetic descriptor of the “/” hack the wor(l)d of justice? A diffractive approach allows me to rework the equation of justice as I see it now, an experiment endeavor that ultimately might change the way we think and practice justice and its relation to injustice. In dedicated desire for a justice that is not predicated on its inverse, injustice, that a justice not predicated on violence, this project culminates by re/turning to that choral cry, *no justice, no peace*, attempting to tune into the im/possibilities of a justice (yet) to come.

Chapter One: Excavating the Modern Grammar: Justice Within the Register of Carcerality

The history of justice within Western philosophical and political thought, most broadly, is a history that contends concern for the ethical. From Plato to Aristotle to Kant, long have philosophers and critical thinkers alike been occupied with the desire to discern a logical answer to the question: *what is to be done?*

The weight of this question has emerged thick, heavy in the palpable present of the now. The density held by these five words solidly informs the texture of this chapter, which I write listening to the trial of former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin, listening as much of the United States waits for the verdict, waits in suspended anticipation for an answer to the question of justice.² The concern clutching this chapter is the very idea that this question can be answered, for to provide an answer risks reproducing the very violences, thick, heavy, viscous, in the present that currently contains justice.

This first chapter thus begins by trying to “open up the path” that goes “deeper into the investigation of how we come up with answers to the question” of *what is to be done* (Ferreira da Silva 2014, 104). Concerned with the unethical canons orienting justice towards logics, or patterns, and the violence such logics presume, this project begins by asking: what is the problem with (contemporary) invocations of justice?

Far from a philosopher, political theorist, or legal expert, this inquiry at best aims to break open personal preconceived notions of justice with/in/through a larger desire to “think-practice” (Thiele 2014, 202) differently. Feminist theorist Kathrin Thiele attests that “thinking is active force with-in-of this world” (ibid); the way we think and theorize is therefore always already implicated with the ethical and political (ibid). In view of this, and motivated by a desire to ‘think-practice’ differently, this thesis begins by attempting to disorient the logic present in political and theoretical thought and practice currently containing justice in the equation as I see it now— violence (injustice) + recognition = demands for justice.

Such a desire leads me to the material historical genealogy of justice in U.S. systems, and the contemporary symbolic genealogy of justice in liberal humanist thought. In my mappings I argue that both genealogies understand and situate justice within an unethical

² On May 25th 2020 Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin murdered George Floyd during an arrest after a store clerk suspected Floyd may have used a counterfeit \$20 bill. Chauvin, one of four officers who arrived at the scene, knelt on Floyd’s neck and back for 9 minutes and 29 seconds. On April 20th, 2021 Derek Chauvin was found guilty on all accounts: second degree murder, third-degree murder, and manslaughter.

register. I name this register *the register of carcerality* and identify specific *technologies* which constitute and sustain a-temporal invocations of justice as predicated on an equation that necessitates violence. Such technologies are 1) *equality* and/as *inclusion*, 2) *the Human* as ‘*Man*’, and 3) *sequentiality*, *separability*, and *determinacy*. Each of these operatives are part of what I name *the Modern Grammar*, or the official script currently delimiting justice within *the register of carcerality*. My employment of this terminology is inspired by what Hortense Spillers names the ‘American Grammar’, that is, the symbolic code dictating the undercurrent rhythm from which U.S. society makes sense of the World through discursively produced rules and structures (1987, 68). As such, I use *the Modern Grammar* to refer to presuppositional prescriptions forming the onto-epistemological pillars of post-Enlightenment thinking. Concerned by the insidious operatives of this order, at both the level of the symbolic and material, this chapter takes its time attempting to excavate the technologies governing and sustaining the code and pattern which write justice within the equation as I see it now, within *the register of carcerality*,

i. The Itinerary

Section ii contextualizes the political landscape of justice today by providing a short overview of the history of justice within the contemporary United States. In this overview I introduce and identify *the logic of carcerality* or that which I am concerned currently contains justice within *the register of carcerality*. Following this, section iii moves to confront personal internalized notions of justice, the analytics of which have conditioned my understanding of when, why, and how to invoke the term. I briefly review *The Theory of Justice* (1971) put forth by U.S. political philosopher John Rawls and identify the justice present throughout Rawlsian theory as dependent on the notions of *equality* and/as *inclusion*, two central technologies containing justice within *the Modern Grammar*. Section iv attends to how these technologies—which operate through the false promise of epistemological correctives, or rights-based logics—are articulated through the presumed figure of *the Human* as ‘*Man*’. I read such a figure through the works of black feminist philosopher Sylvia Wynter, namely her seminal project “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human After Man— An Argument” (2003) in order to discern why demands for justice as ‘human rights’ or calls for ‘humanity’ fail to serve those who do not fit into what Wynter names as the genre of *the Human* as ‘*Man*’. Finally, in section v I move to confront the equation of justice as I see it now as existing, operating and upheld by modern thought. I follow black feminist philosopher Denise

Ferreira da Silva, and argue that ‘the triad of modern thought’ - *separability, sequentiality, and determinacy*- constitutes the ethical indifference with which racial violence is met, and further, always already situate a justice within *the register of carcerality*. Motivated by a deep desire to get away from this logic, to disorient this pattern, and to stay with the question *what is to be done*, this chapter is committed to decoding *the Modern Grammar*, dedicated to finding slippages within its logic.

ii. A Brief History of Justice in the U.S.

This chapter opens by considering a-temporal and contemporary invocations of justice in the United States. Using resources provided by grassroots-based organization Critical Resistance, this first section maps a very short historical overview of the concept of justice in the U.S. Beginning with the colonial arrival in 1492, my goal in briefly tracing the history of justice in the U.S. is to attend to “the systemic violence and racialized onto-epistemological order that ‘1492’ put in place” (Kaiser and Thiele 2017, 404). As I am concerned that the operatives of this order remain extant in contemporary invocations of justice, this section charts the direct relation between justice and the establishment of capital and policing. In this charting, I identify the operative code of these interlocking and overlapping systems of policing and justice as *the logic of carcerality*. This section concludes by considering how this logic continues to contain invocations of justice within what I name as *the register of carcerality*, or that which writes justice as predicated on violence.

a. ‘Upholding Justice’

In 1492, when European militia forces attacked indigenous peoples of the Americas, they brought with them a European system of Justice³ (Critical Resistance, “History of Policing”). Dating back to the 1100’s, the use of “night watches” and “shire reeves” (sheriffs in England) served as designated groups meant to enforce the law, or “*uphold justice and peace*”; this system of sheriffs and night watches came with the colonization of the Americas (ibid, emphasis added). During the transatlantic slave trade, which began during the 1600s,

³ This imposition did not account for indigenous systems of justice. Importantly, contemporary movements for restorative and transformative justice come from Indigenous communities. Unfortunately, this thesis project does not have the space to attend to the history and specifics of American indigenous practices of justice. For further reading of American indigenous systems of justice I recommend: *U.S. Colonization of Indian Justice Systems: A Brief History; Restorative Justice Practices of Native American, First Nation and Other Indigenous People of North America: Part One*; and work by Gladys Tzul Tzul (2019).

such forces were deployed to control and police black and indigenous bodies. In the latter half of the 17th century the figure of ‘the sheriff’ and ‘nightwatch’ was replaced by the ‘slave patrol’. Such patrols were composed of individual citizens. Suddenly formal figures were no longer the only individuals tasked with policing, tasked with ‘*upholding justice*’; the greater force of white supremacy, enacted by individuals and supported by law makers, began to fill this role. Still, official configurations of police systems continued to develop. The start of the 1700s brought with it the first legible form of organized patrol, which most closely mirrors that of the contemporary police force. By merging sheriffs, night watches, slave patrols and militias, these groups were designated with the job of ‘protecting and serving’, their task still, to ‘*uphold justice and peace*’. In 1854 the first ‘official’ uniform police force was established in New York City, with Boston and Philadelphia shortly following suit (ibid).

At the same that the police force was developed the movement to abolish slavery was well under way. In 1865 congress approved the 13th amendment, which abolished slavery and involuntary servitude *except as punishment for those convicted of crimes*. The price of this emancipatory project resulted in the passing of laws that sought to control black people’s public movement and work. Commonly known as ‘black codes’, these laws created an incentive for the arrest of black bodies, for under the 13th amendment slave labor was still legal for those convicted of a crime⁴. The abolition of slavery enabled the establishment of the carceral system, or that which authorized the ongoing project of free black labor and consequently U.S. national and global imperial expansion (Davis 2003, 9-60). Charting this history makes clear the connection between colonization, policing, and capital production at the exploitation and expense of black bodies (ibid). My concern is the way in which the concept of justice, in both carceral systems and thought, is intertwined with this history. In other words, I am concerned that the very idea of justice in the U.S. is wedded to the development and evolution of policing, the rise of the carceral system, and the legacy of white supremacy. Worse, I am concerned that this polyamorous matrimony (justice to carcerality to white supremacy) continues to inform the ways in which justice is presently understood and enacted, both within and beyond the structure and system of the policing. That is, I am concerned that this systemic matrix, which weds justice to policing by way of white supremacy, operates beyond the police force. As noted, dating back to the 17th century, the figures of the ‘sheriff’ and ‘nightwatch’ transformed

⁴ This clause is still present in the 13th amendment. In June of 2021, Oregon Senator Jeff Merkley and Georgia Congress Member Nikema Williams introduced the “Abolition Amendment” to eliminate this “loophole” (Williams, Renaud, DemocracyNow!). As of August 2021, the amendment has yet to be signed by current U.S. president Biden.

into the ‘slave patrol’— a figure which called on individual citizens to ‘*uphold justice*’ (idib). In the historical context of the 17th century Southern United States, this figure was assumed to be a white male whose objective task of *upholding justice* was predicated on surveilling and policing black bodies.⁵ This figure did not end with the turn of the 17th, 18th, 19th, or 20th century. This figure is alive and well — a figure whose presence manifested in the vigilante murder of Ahmaud Arbery whose life was taken in Georgia on February 23rd 2020 by three white men⁶ who, after stalking Arbery in their car, fatally shot him. Demands for justice in the wake of Arbery’s murder attest that his murderers committed a hate crime. Clearly, this was a sickening and violent act of hate. And still, the horrific murder of Arbery was enabled by the logic of policing⁷, what I am naming as the *logic of carcerality*: a logic wedded to “the systemic violence and racialized onto-epistemological order that ‘1492’ put in place” (Kaiser and Thiele 2017, 404). The history of this logic, that which coalesces justice with-in carcerality, continues to haunt the contemporary geopolitical landscape of the United States, its ghostly presence manifesting in sickening incidents of violence.⁸

What is revealed by reviewing the history of justice and policing in the context of contemporary U.S. is the close relationship between conceptions of justice and systems of carcerality. In summary, the present systems of justice and policing are a colonial imposition, which in the context of the United States is very close wedded to the history of chattel slavery and the white colonizers unrelenting concern for controlling black and indigenous bodies. At both the level of the discursive and symbolic, this paradigm operates through the *logic of carcerality* and situates a specific kind of justice: a justice predeterminedly predicated on violence, on death. The final section of this chapter, attends to this notion of *determinacy*. For now, the following section explores how *the logic of carcerality* persists throughout calls for

⁵ Mostly recently this figure has taken the popular culture form of a ‘Karen’—a white female civilian who, in the presence of racialized people, takes it upon herself to call the police. See April 29th 2018 in Oakland, when a ‘Karen’ called the police on the black community for barbecuing; July 7th 2020 when a similar incident occurred in New York City central park when white female Amy Cooper called the police stating her “life [wa]s being threatened by an African American man.” There are so many incidents like this, these two just happened to be recorded. The very ability to call the police, in some ways, makes deputies of us all.

⁶ Greg McMichael, a 65 year old *former police officer*; Travis McMichael, his 35 year old son; and William ‘Roddie’ Bryan.

⁷ See Ferreira da Silva “No-Bodies: law, raciality and violence” (2014); “To Be Announced: Radical Praxis or Knowing (at) the Limits of Justice” (2013).

⁸ Here I am directly referencing Avery Gordon’s *Ghostly Matters* (1997) in which she articulates the a-temporal realities of past structural violences through the notion of ‘haunting’. ‘Haunting’ is the framework that acknowledges the social forces of oppression present in daily life.

justice today. This exploration takes me to a second genealogy, one which begins with how I personally came to know and understand justice.

iii. Justice Within U.S. Liberal Thought

I have long since been occupied with the desire to discern an answer to the question of justice. Growing up in Berkeley California my adolescence was filled with gatherings in demand of social change, filled with acknowledgement of realities of oppression, histories of violence, and the contemporary and a-temporal fight for justice. Photographic evidence suggests that I attended my first demonstration at eight months old, strapped to my mother's frontside, eyes wide open, taking in the synchronous cacophony of chant in protest against California's prop 184⁹. Like many young people in my area, the need to fight for justice filtered through the Bay Area air and like oxygen to blood, took to me. Not unlike chants in the street, succinct and powerful, I came to understand justice as many did in the United States— as based on *equality* and *inclusion* for all *Humans*, and as predicated on a subjugation process that situates the term as afterthought.¹⁰ The first part of this understanding, which I have been invoking since 1993, elicits a very specific kind of justice, one that is exemplified by the “relentless focus on epistemological correctives that tend to dominate political interventions” (Puar 2017, 55) within the liberal humanist project. Concerned that the epistemological mechanics of *Equality* and/as *Inclusion* both do not address the violent ontological grounds upon which justice currently resides and further present false promises that reproduce said violence, this section seeks to explicate this ‘rights and reform’ based logic.

The notions of *equality* and *inclusion*, present throughout United States history with regards to systems of justice, are most notable through the work of U.S. political philosopher and theorist John Rawls. Rawls' foundational text *A Theory of Justice* (1971) cast a long shadow over modern political philosophy, thought, and practices of justice in the United States. Such line of theory, which asserts an ethically, equal, fair and just society can exist (3-10), infiltrated my liberal educational upbringing, priming the pedagogical pillars and ideological notions concerning the question of justice, seeping into the streets in which I have been demanding a response to the question since I was old enough to march through them on my own.

⁹ Proposition 184, colloquially known as the ‘three strikes law’ requires a minimum sentence of 25 years to life for three-time repeat offenders.

¹⁰ That is, I came to understand justice as *determinant*.

A move away from Utilitarianism, more specifically from 19th century political theorist John Stuart Mills¹¹, John Rawls first wrote *A Theory of Justice* during a time of political and historical reckoning in the United States. Not dissimilar to the contemporary moment, the confluence of war and violence coupled with demands for racial justice, civil rights and accompanying protests marked the late 1960s and early 1970s as a striking moment in the United States. It then only makes sense that Rawls' theory is concerned with a particular subject of justice, that of "social justice" (4). In order to achieve the ethically just society Rawls posits as 'possible', he asserts two principles of justice which he argues must be achieved in lexical order (13); the first holds that society should be structured in a way that best positions each person to have "equality in the assignment of basic rights and duties"; the second holds that social and economic opportunities are to be arranged to achieve fairness (ibid). These two principles, which I identify as *equality* and/as *inclusion*, can be identified as primary tenets to rights-based rhetoric. Consider again the moment in which Rawls wrote his seminal theory. In many ways, the 1960s and 1970s revealed the interlocking systems of capitalism, imperialism, and racial violence in the context of the U.S. The arsenal of this matrix was addressed head on through activist groups such as The Black Panther Party for Self Defense (BPP), The Young Lords (TYL), and Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR), each of whom called for coalitional and community-based approaches toward tackling this machinery of modernity. However, and despite my supposedly liberal upbringing, California school curriculum situated this moment as simply a fight for rights. Such a white washed history thus rendered this moment as limited to and concerned only with *equality* and/as *inclusion*. These technologies, identified in Rawlsian based thought and theory, remain ever present in contemporary demands that delimit justice within the project and praxis of liberal humanist thought.

United States political theorist Wendy Brown identifies rights-based discourse as a logic of reform-based strategies (1995, 96). Writing in the mid 1990s, Brown distinguishes this discourse of rights and reform-based strategies as operating through neoliberal taxonomies. More specifically, she contends that liberal capitalist culture "converts social problems into matters of individualized, dehistoricized injury and entitlement, into matters in which there is no harm if there is no agent and no tangibly violated subject" (124). Such mechanics operate through the promises of correctives or reforms, which exist within punitive logics, carceral logics. Consider, for example, present calls for justice through the 'Until Freedom' campaign

¹¹ Utilitarianism situates a form of distributive justice based on universality. Rawls intentionally turned away from a utilitarian understanding of justice because he felt unethical and immoral (1991, xvii). For more on utilitarianism see: John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*.

whose focus is concerned with the indictment of police officers Johnathan Mattingly, Brett Hankison, and Myles Cosgrove and with police and criminal justice reform.¹² The campaign's fight for justice for Breonna Taylor overemphasizes the very rhetoric Brown identifies; that is, the individual indictment of police murderers as the solution or *answer* to the question of justice, an answer which is contingent upon the violence inflicted on Taylor as the "violated subject" in question, and calls to reform the carceral system of policing.¹³ This genre of policy and thought promotes the idea that violences, regardless of identified systematic patterns, are individual incidents which can be remedied through policies of reform.¹⁴ More so, this line of liberal humanist politics and discourse purports the idea that reform and rights can provide a 'solution' to the question of justice. That is, justice can be achieved through efforts towards *equality*, and/as *inclusion*. Importantly, the principles of sameness (*equality*) and difference (*inclusion/exclusion*) are the script always already dictating *who* is entitled to demands often made in defense of social justice. The following section attends to this *who*, addressing the figure of the Subject in question in rights-based logic, the figure of the Subject in question for justice as *equality* and/as *inclusion*.

iv. Justice at the Limits of the Human (Man)

"The essence of the life world of the human subject in the idea of Europe is the ontological triad of liberty, justice, and equality. Of course, this is the ontological privilege that can be enjoyed by human subjects to the exclusion of the colonial subjects, who are deceived into believing that these ontological privileges are extended to them, while they are actually not." - Tendayi Sithole 2020, 73

"Humanity and raciality jointly governed the political architecture of the twentieth century, in which both figurings of the human served as basis for

¹² The 'Until Freedom' campaign, funded by U.S. celebrity and philanthropist Oprah Winfrey, is the leading campaign demanding the arrest and indictment of the police officers who fatally shot Breonna Taylor in March of 2020. Demands include the "fight for justice with focus on police accountability and criminal justice reform" ("UntilFreedom").

¹³ *Determinacy*, but I will get there in the final section of this chapter. For now, I feel it is very important to acknowledge that any means to bring feelings of accountability or justice to the family and community of Breonna Taylor needs to be honored.

¹⁴ I should point out that I support the arrest of these officers, not as the answer to justice, but as the indictment of police officers in some cases fit within the largest abolitionist project. For more see Mariame Kaba (2021, 132) #FireServinCampaign.

juridical domination and economic expropriation, *but also for denial of and claims for justice.*” - Denise Ferreira da Silva 2020, emphasis added)

The conceptual framework evident throughout many global and local demands for social justice relies on the capacious category of *the Human* as the *who* entitled to rights, justice, and liberty. The UN Human Rights Organization, for example, asserts that “every human being” is entitled to rights, justice, and liberty, “no matter who we are, where we live or where we come from” (UN Human Rights Organization). If every human is entitled to rights, justice, and liberty, why is it that, “in so many places found in every corner of the global space, so many human beings face that which ‘no one deserves’?” (Ferreira da Silva 2014, 120). In order to respond to Ferreira da Silva’s inquiry, what follows is an explication of how demands for ‘Human rights’ with regards to (social) justice (movements) presume a particular genre of *the Human*, that which black feminist philosopher Sylvia Wynter names as the figure of ‘*Man*’.

In her project, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Toward the Human, after Man— An Argument” (2003), Sylvia Wynter confronts the naturalization of the figure of *the Human* produced by and through European philosophical, religious and scientific developments. Her project maps the onto-epistemological shifts within Western worlding through a specific genre of *the Human*, which she names as the figure of ‘*Man*’. Playing on Michel Foucault’s “The Order of Things” (1966), more specifically his ‘invention of man’ (238), Wynter exposes patterns of differentiation in three major moments of European thought. However, she identifies a dimension Foucault failed to attend to: race (Ferreira da Silva 2014, 96-99). In her tracing she identifies each of these three figures, or genres, of *the Human* as understood through the oppositional logic of difference. These genres are: the figure of the ‘Christian’ (until the sixteenth century), ‘Man1’ (Renaissance to the eighteenth century), and ‘Man2’ (late eighteenth century until now). Note that each of these three figures, named through oppositional logic, have geopolitical relevance: the figure of the Christian as the “True Christian Self/Members of the Church vs. “the Untrue Christian Self/The ones lost to the passions of the flesh”; ‘Man1’ as the “Self Authorized Self Subject” vs. “the Indian, Negro Other” (in relation to Man1); ‘Man2’ as “the Human” vs. “the native Other or n-word”. Though respective to chronological time, each of these figures overrepresent the genre of *the Human* as ‘*Man*’, dominating conceptions throughout the history of Modern Thought (Wynter 2003, 261).

As Wynter’s project is concerned with the operatives driving decolonial struggles, she contends that in order to unsettle the coloniality of power (Quijano 2000), we must contend

with the overrepresentation of *the Human* as 'Man' (268). For Wynter, the struggle of our times therefore lies in our ability to realize that the current formulation of *the Human* ('Man2') is a "globally hegemonic" descriptor based on an "ethnoclass regime" (264). The colonial onto-epistemic legacy of *the Human* as *Man*, upholds that only those who fit into the category of whiteness and masculinity are entitled to the privileges experienced by *the Human*, for example, 'Human Rights'. Following Wynter, in order to disorient the logic governing the colonality of Being, we must abolish the onto-epistemological constructions and operatives that make 'Man' the only possible social reality of the human.¹⁵ For the figure of *the Human* as 'Man' is the central subject governing the matrix of the ongoing project of colonality, a figure which according to Wynter, institutes the "code of symbolic life and death" (316).

As Wynter has shown in one of her most widely-read articles this code of "life and death" operating through the figure of *the Human* as 'Man' extends beyond symbolics. Perhaps one of the most evident materializations of the operatives of this code can be found in the 1980s and 1990s United States police force use of 'N.H.I.'—a "code-word" classification to describe a series of murders and sexual assaults "referring to any case involving a breach of the rights of young Black males who belong to the jobless category of the inner city ghettos. *N.H.I. means "no humans involved"*" (Wynter 1994, 42 emphasis added). The liberal humanist agenda which calls for 'rights for all humans', for *inclusion/equality*, cannot but always fail as an ethically just project because the assumed figure in question (e.g.: the *who* entitled to rights, inclusion and equality) is always based on the overrepresentation of genre of *the Human* as 'Man'. When a figure outside of this genre enters into the scene, the symbolic code denies them the rights to which "every human being, no matter who we are, where we live, or where come from" (Human Rights Watch) is entitled. Over twenty years ago Wynter asked:

What are we to do as the grammarians by means of whose rigorous elaboration of the "prescriptive categories" of our present epistemological order, and therefore of our "local culture", "Inner eyes", the collective behaviors which bring the present nation-state order of the United States into being as such a specific order of reality are oriented, now that we are confronted with the price paid for the putting in place of this order of reality? (1994, 56).

¹⁵ Her project proposes a move away from the categorical overrepresentation of *the Human* as 'Man', towards what she identifies as being human as praxis. For more see: Kathrin McKittrick *On Being Human as Praxis*

Wynter's provocation was written in direct response to the Rodney King beating, the jury acquittal, and the subsequent uprisings in 1992 Los Angeles and across the United States. The scope of her provocation, however, extends beyond this moment. Her words, thick, heavy, and poignant in the present of the now demand a response, *not an answer*, that call on the role of the theorist, the academic, to confront the ethical implications of *how we theorize* and approach questions such as *what is to be done in the face of in/justice*.

I read Wynter's words as a beckoning invitation, one that begs us to 'think-practice' differently; I read her words as an urgent call to disorient the logic of *the Modern Grammar*, that which figures a justice based on *inclusion* and/as *equality* through the figure of *the Human* as '*Man*'. For "the price paid for putting in place this order of reality" (56), what I have identified as *the Modern Grammar*, is nothing short of the violence which Wynter responded to in 1992, the violence which the world responded to in 2020. The grammar of this prescriptive category and accompanying technologies dominating the current onto-epistemological grounds in both the material and the symbolic, demand response. For such technologies cannot but always already operate and perpetuate the logics of dichotomous difference governing what Denise Ferreira da Silva refers to as Modern Thought, the "ontological referent to the juridical architectures, such as the human rights framework" (Ferreira da Silva 2014, 102) of which such ontological privileges such as justice "can be enjoyed by human subjects to the exclusion of the colonial subjects" (Sithole 2020, 73). In other words, this logic which functions through 'the arsenal of raciality'¹⁶, can only ever locate a justice for those who fit into the ontological category of '*Man*': those marked by whiteness and masculinity. Wynter's wor(l)ding demands a response to the ethico-political Grammar governing justice, which, in the words of activist Jaylani Hussein regarding the horrific recent police murder of 20-year-old Daunte Wright, was killed by another white police officer "*because she did not see his humanity*" (DemocracyNow!, 2020). If, following Ferreira da Silva, "humanity and raciality" serve as the "juridical domination and economic expropriation but also for the denial of and for claims for justice" (2020) then Jaylani Hussein's words expose the logic of the liberal humanist framework: there can be no justice for those who do not fit into the genre of *the Human* as '*Man*'. What, then, is to be done regarding the question of justice? How to attend to the path that Wynter opens up, all the while paying careful attention to the logics of dichotomous difference that she so carefully excavates? In other words, how to 'think-practice' justice

¹⁶ For more see Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Towards a Global Idea of Race* (2007).

differently without risking reproducing the logics of modernity?¹⁷ This is part of the task of *what is to be done*.

To disorient this logic which cannot but always be predicated on violence is to stay with Wynter's tenacious work, to unravel the persistent operatives of *Inclusion* and/as *Equality* through the figure of *the Human* as 'Man'. Such a disorientation demands a move away from the liberal humanist tradition that recuperates justice within rights-based and reformist-based logics. It demands a disorientation from the "master code" of *the Modern Grammar* whose materialization is literally killing people each day¹⁸. This is the work of abolition.

Abolition is not only about dismantling; it is about envisioning anew, imagining and enacting that otherwise im/possible (Davis, 2020, DemocracyNow!). Chapter three and four stay with this imagining, going with/in/deeper/through/beyond¹⁹ the usual analytics orienting justice, grooving in the void "teeming with the desires of what wouldbe" (Barad 2012, 13) that Wynter and Ferreira da Silva open up. For now, the present chapter continues with the first step of abolition—mapping the matrix in order to deconstruct *the Modern Grammar* currently containing justice within a *register of carcerality*.

v. The Three Pillars

So far I have addressed the history of justice and policing in the context of the contemporary United States, with specific attention to how such a history operates through *the logics of carcerality*. I then moved to attend to how rights and reform based rhetorics limit justice to calls for *equality* and/as *inclusion*, privileges of which only the figure of *the Human* as 'Man' is entitled to. In this final section I return to personal and preconceived notions of justice. For I am utterly preoccupied that, since 1993, I have subconsciously been invoking a justice within the onto-epistemic grammar of modernity, within the *register of carcerality*, within the equation of justice.

¹⁷ The task, in part, is to work towards dissembling the Human universal, "one which, as Wynter hopes, will not be just a refiguring of one particular "descriptive statement of the human" as the global norm and thus a replication of the present role played by the notion of humanity, as overrepresented by Man, in the global present" (Ferreira da Silva, 2014, 102).

¹⁸ During the time that I have written this thesis there have been 944 people murdered by the police in the United States (The Post, 2021). I hesitate to include this statistic because it reflects mere numbers, not lives of those whose lives have been taken by violence.

¹⁹ This is a direct reference to Denise Ferreira da Silva's *I (life) ÷ 0 (blackness) = ∞ - ∞ or ∞ / ∞: On Matter Beyond the Equation of Value* in which her attention to the artist Otobonga Nkanga's work *In Pursuit of Bling* by takes her "on/in/through but beyond" the "usual analytical path" (2017, 5), as a way to expose the analytics of modern thought constitute the ethical indifference with which racial violence is met. Inspired by Ferreira da Silva's wor(l)ds, chapter four stays with the "/" she presents.

What is the force authorizing the pattern of justice? How is it that the violence put in place by 1492 continues to prevail and delimit invocations of justice over 500 years later? Perhaps, because such onto-epistemic violence is sustained at the level of modern thought. Denise Ferreira da Silva identifies three ontological pillars maintaining the violence of such thought: *separability*, *sequentiality*, and *determinacy* (2018, 60). More specifically, these three pillars make up the triad constituting the ethical indifference with which *racial* violence is met (2017, 4). My theory is these three pillars - *separability*, *sequentiality*, and *determinacy* - are the ontological anchors containing and retracting justice within the *register of carcerality*. Using Ferreira da Silva's three analytic tools combined with the path that Wynter opens up, I conclude this first chapter by attending to the final technologies containing justice with the equation of violence, of death: *separability*, *sequentiality* and *determinacy*.

a. The equation of justice

My first memories of learning about justice take me back to my (pre)pubescent years. I remember the walls of my 9th grade classroom, the dank stench of a converted old theater storage room harsh basement lightening and black metal orchestra stands still crowding the corners of the walls, then covered in posters of Martin Luther King Jr., Claudette Colvin, and the 4 principles of social justice: equity, access, participation, and rights. Each day, 14 and impressionable, I stared at the crowded walls, tracing the four bullet points with my eyes, etching an affiliative and effective causality to my understanding of justice. This subconscious repetition resulted in my coming to understand justice as something that someone or a society owed to someone else, a repenting reparation for wrong-doing, not completely perpendicular to an apology, in some ways, a tangible 'I'm sorry', here take this, it will make it right so we can all move forward. Disciplinary power in biopolitical control societies, such as the United States, works insidiously to colonize understandings of concepts such as justice. The covert nature of such power attached itself to all vectors of my development, including and beyond the walls of my 9th grade classroom. At the level of subconsciousness, 'justice' planted itself as a causal effect, a contained condensation stagnant in my cerebrum, seven letters made legible only at the end of an equation. Predicated on a subjugation process that situated the term as afterthought, I came to understand 'justice' as *determinant*, invoked only following a *sequential* pattern.

The sequence of this pattern goes something like this: word becomes known of the scene- yet again a rehearsal of violence occurred; in haphazard rhythmic organization we

gather, inciting energy, calling chant, commanding response, not resolution, to the scene of violence, calling for justice. Calls made in Chicago in 1969, in New York City in 1999, in Oakland in 2009, in Florida in 2012, and across the United States and the world in 2020. But what comes before the calling cry for justice? What is the causal relation that occurs prior to the actual demand? The variable enabling this call? That variable, I argue, is violence. In this register, violence must occur in order for justice to be demanded. The murder of Fred Hampton, the murder of Amadou Diallo, the murder of Oscar Grant, the murder of Trayvon Martin, of George Floyd. The horrific violence that took these young lives is the first variable in the equation of calls for justice.²⁰ Each time justice is invoked in this register it is always a response, an echoing cry heard *only after the cause and effect of violence*. The equation of this justice (violence + reckoning = demands for justice) abides by the master code of *the Modern Grammar* and thus follows *the logic of carcerality*. The underwriting sequence authorizing this code? The third pillar: *determinacy*. Denise Ferreira da Silva identifies *determinacy* by way of what she names ‘the Kantian program’:

Determinacy as deployed in Kant’s knowledge (scientific) program remains the core of modern thought: it is presupposed in accounts of the juridical and ethical field of statements (such as the human-rights framework) which (a) presume a *universal* that operates as an a priori (formal) determining force (effectivity) and which (b) produce *objects* for which “Truth” refers to how they *relate* to something else—relationships mediated by abstract determinants (laws and rules) that can only be captured by the rational things’ (including the human mind/soul) “principles of disposition.” (2017, 8, emphasis in original)

I understand *determinacy* as an outcome that functions through and by both *sequentiality* and *separability*. With regards to justice, *determinacy* “presupposes” the outcome of justice through a writing of causality, or *sequentiality*. We can understand this causal equation as: justice (determinant) = contingent upon the cause that comes before justice (violence). Put differently, this causal relation is that of *sequentiality*. Past wrongdoing (injustice), needs to be rectified in the present moment (justice). Importantly, *sequentiality* writes justice as following *injustice*. Operating through the logic of *sequentiality*, justice is therefore always too late.

²⁰ This, of course, is a justice invoked within the register of *The Modern Grammar*, within a register of carcerality.

Through its reliance and interrelatedness to *sequentiality*, *determinacy* writes the possibility of justice as always already dependent on the a priori effect of violence. Justice is therefore the ‘effect’ of the ‘determining force’ of violence.

Moreover, *determinacy* presumes (and *predetermines*) the figure eligible for justice. This figure (‘rational’) is maintained and established by *separability*. Ferreira da Silva identifies *separability* as a philosophical principle that articulates discourses of geographical, historical, and spatio-temporal order (2016, 63). Beginning in the post-Enlightenment era, *separability* became an inherent organizing principle for the ordering of the world (2007). For example: physical space as separate (here vs. there), time as separate (past vs. present vs. future), and individuals as separate (us vs. them, self vs. other). In other words, this organizing principle understands space, time, and matter as, true to its name, separate. With regards to justice, *separability* works two fold. First, to organize moments of injustice as distinctly disconnected from one another- 1965, 1992, 1999, 2012, 2020. In the context of the United States, this then allows for the liberal humanist project and accompanying calls for reform and rights based rhetorics to take center stage. Such epistemological remedies present an amendment, an ‘I’m sorry, here take this, it will make it right so we can all move forward’. However, this “cosmetic change” (Sithole 2020, 29)²¹ does not attend to the fact that *separability*, as a technology based on dichotomous difference, *always already writes the subject entitled to justice*. That is, *separability* is more dangerous than simply separating moments of injustice as past vs. present.

As noted, *separability* works to understand individuals as separate- ‘us’ is understood in opposition to ‘them’, ‘self’ is understood in opposition to ‘other’. Ferreira da Silva, in her groundbreaking book *Towards a Global Idea of Race* (2007), identifies the force creating this opposition as that of the “arsenal of raciality”. For Ferreira da Silva, raciality is that which underwrites understandings of difference as separate (2007; 2016), the arsenal which purports ‘self’ as opposed, separated by difference to ‘other’. Her seminal book charts developments of Western philosophical thought, attending to how science and historicity created and delimited the mapping of the world through what she identifies as “transparent I’s” and “affectable others”. The former, who I read as the white European male, is the Subject, the ‘rational thing’ entitled to the notion of ‘self’. Ferreira da Silva’s project is concerned with the figure of this subject, more specifically how its ghost haunts modern philosophy and governs demands and

²¹ I borrow this idea from Tendayi Sithole’s *The Black Register* in which he attests “cosmetic changes” as a reference to how epistemological remedies in the anti-black world always reproduce the violence of anti-blackness.

imaginings for social justice. As such, her ideological unveiling of *separability* is crucial regarding contemporary calls for justice, specifically those of the liberal humanist approach. For liberal humanist discourse and accompanying attitudes of inclusion fail to articulate a justice which can ever include those who do not fall into the realm of ‘self’, those who fall outside of the figure of the ‘rational thing’. Put differently, if ‘self’ is understood as always in opposition to ‘other’ and if the variable creating this separation is that of the arsenal of raciality, then ‘self’ can never represent a subject that falls outside of the parameters of whiteness. Think of the acquittal of officers in the case of police murders of Amadou Diallo, of Trayvon Martin: two obvious examples in which the system of justice ‘failed’. Each of these officers was acquitted on the premise of ‘self-defense’²². Why, in these cases, did justice ‘fail’? Not because of the jury, not because of the judge, but because of *separability*. *Separability*, because it understands difference as dichotomously operating through ‘the arsenal of raciality’, predetermines *who* is entitled to justice. *A predetermined equation* of which only the figure of *the Human* as ‘*Man*’ can ever be entitled to justice. *Separability* is that which upholds the dangerous technologies of liberal humanism such as *equality* and/as *inclusion*, which promote the false promise that anyone can be entitled to the four bullet points of justice – equity, access, participation, and rights – when really only those who fit into the category of ‘self’ ever can²³. This is the logic that has always written justice in the context of the United States, that which wrote ‘*upholding justice*’ as the task of the police, as the task of the sheriff, as the task of the white male slave owner. To be clear, this logic is such a notion is nothing short of immense violence.

The ontological pillars of post-Enlightenment thinking combined with the history of policing and the liberal humanist agenda of rights and reformed based approaches to justice, constitute what I have named in this project as *The Modern Grammar*.²⁴ These technologies are the code writing justice within *the register of carcerality*. Predicated on a causal and *sequential* relation that necessitates injustice as a priori to justice, this code *determines* an equation of justice as always already predicated on violence, and as always already set up to

²²Again, the ‘self’ entitled to justice in this equation is always *predetermined*, not as Diallo, not as Grant, not as Martin, but as the white officer. For more see Butler’s most recent work *The Force of Nonviolence*: “The “self” who is defended in such cases [of police brutality] is one who identifies with others who belong to whiteness”, contends Judith Butler (2020, 28).

²³ This is a very similar argument that I recognize in Sylvia Wynter’s figure of *the Human* as ‘*Man*’.

²⁴ Following Ferreira da Silva, “the critique of racial subjugation should target the very delineation of the territory of justice— that is, the ethical text sustaining our demands for recognition and legal redress should become the object of radical critique” (2014, 159) .

fail those who fall outside of the parameters of whiteness. How, then, to disorient these logics, or that which writes justice in an equation of violence? *What is to be done?*

vi. Opening Up the Path

To stay with the question of justice, to listen to that a-temporal, choral cry, *no justice, no peace* in its own beat, demands attention to the ‘killing rhythm’ (Moten & Harney 2014, 187-188), to that which condenses justice within the *register of carcerality*, within *The Modern Grammar*. It is only through such attention that this project might ‘open up the path’ to ‘think-practice’ justice differently. In a dedicated desire to stay with, not answer, the question *what is to be done*, this first chapter attempted to decode the logic writing the equation of justice as I see it now. More specifically, this chapter was guided by the questions: what is the history of justice in the United States and how does this inform both contemporary material and symbolic practices of the term; why does a justice predicated on rights and reform (*equality* and/as *inclusion*) not work?; what notions of humanity does this justice presume?; and what is the onto-epistemic code authorizing the pattern of justice, the equation as I see it now?

The following chapter travels to California to provide two empirical examples of calls for justice, both of which were demanded in the immediate wake of police murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. One of these protests exemplified how the *logic of carcerality* is deployed in the context of protest. The other situates a different kind of justice, that which I identify as a *relational justice*. After exploring these two examples, I will be able to move to the third chapter in which I explore how the frameworks of abolition, radical black feminism, and trans* feminisms might allow for an ethical re/orientation to the question of justice. This allows me, finally, to tune into a different kind of justice, a *relational justice*.

Chapter Two: 2020: A Moment or a Movement?

The previous chapter attended to how reform and rights based rhetorics contain justice within *carceral logics*. I explored how elements of the liberal humanist project in both practice and thought situate and sustain a *determinant* justice, a justice predicated on violence, that will always fail those who into the figure of *the Human* as ‘*Man*’. As this thesis project is concerned with both the operatives and potentials of justice, especially those that emerged during the global uprisings against police brutality in 2020, this chapter moves to California to discuss how justice has been and can be articulated through social actions.

i. Introduction

“The murder of George Floyd launched a summer of protests we hadn’t seen since the civil rights era in the sixties. Protests that unified people of every race and generation with peace and with purpose to say enough, enough, enough of this senseless killing. Today’s verdict [indictment of Derek Chauvin] is a step forward... a giant step forward in the march towards justice in America.” - Joe Biden, April 20, 2021

The late spring and summer months of 2020 were fraught with urgency regarding the question of justice. Amidst a global pandemic, during which all were recommended to stay inside, people streamed to the streets to demand justice following the immediate wake of police murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Rayshard Brooks²⁵. Many protestors were met with police violence, including the use of tear gas and rubber bullets, a force authorized by then President Donald Trump²⁶ who directly deployed the U.S. national guard to over 200 cities. This moment, filled with demonstrations and professions of outrage and urgency, was declared a “national state of *emergency*” (Goodman, 2020, Democracy Now!).

This chapter travels to southern and northern California to provide two empirical examples of demands for justice made during this time. Some protests during these months

²⁵ And justice for so many more: Tony McDade, Layleen Polanco, Iyaonna Dior, Sean Reed, Yassin Mohamed, Atatiana Jefferson, Stephon Clarke. I name Floyd, Taylor and Brooks as the three people who most received national attention during this moment, with specific calls for justice.

²⁶ During this moment Donald Trump famously tweeted: “When the looting starts, the shooting starts”, to refer to the authorized imposition of police violence on protestors who were framed as ‘looters’. The phrase’s racist origins date back to the civil rights era.

focused on the immediate *moment* of *emergency*, demanding the indictment of police officers Derek Chauvin, Myles Cosgrove, and later Garrett Rolfe²⁷. Others rendered the fight for justice beyond calls for indictment, emphasizing the spring and summer months as a moment of *emergence*, an opportunity for a larger *movement* in ongoing efforts towards justice. Whereas chapter one is dedicated to explicating what *the Modern Grammar*- that which I am concerned currently contains justice within *the register of carcerality*- the goal of this chapter is to gesture towards potentials for “think-practicing” (Thiele 2014, 202) justice differently. I aim to do this by situating examples of organizing and protest that occurred during the historic months of 2020.

The first half of this chapter explores a protest in Los Angeles, California which specifically demanded the indictment of officer Derek Chauvin. I situate the justice demanded in this Los Angeles protest as one that in trying to provide an answer to the question— *what is to be done*—nominalized demands for justice to the specific *moment* of *emergency*. I explore how the demands made in this protest followed the logic of *sequentiality*, or the equation of justice predicated on violence, the very *logics of carcerality* that chapter one sought to expound by way of Sylvia Wynter and Denise Ferreira da Silva. Murders were committed, justice was invoked to indict the murderers; once this was achieved, the protest ceased, as did this *moment* of *emergency*. This temporal understanding suggested justice and *accountability* as based on punitive logics, and as absolute.

The second example of protests, led by youth activists and members of Destiny Arts Center in the northern California Bay Area, I will show do not fall trap to *the logic of carcerality*. Rather, the coalitional approach celebrated throughout these protests stayed with and attended to the question of justice as a *movement* versus a *moment*, situating the 2020 global uprisings against police brutality as one of *emergence* versus *emergency*. The intersectional demands made by these youth acknowledged the overlapping and ahistorical operatives of the colonial matrices of power. Further, they stayed with the question *what is to be done* by imagining a different kind of *accountability*, one not predicated on punitive logics, but rather oriented towards a praxis of communal care and healing. My attention to these protests, which I will show manifest a praxis *through* and *beyond the logics of carcerality*, reveal the ways in which transformative forms of justice can be and already are being practiced.

ii. Moment (emergency) & Movement (emergence)

²⁷ The main officers involved in the killings of Floyd, Taylor, and Brooks, respectively.

Central to this chapter are the uses of *moment* and *movement*. The etymology of the personal prefix ‘mo’ is defined as either “possessive”, used to form the second-person singular possessive of nouns, or as “reflexive”, indicating reciprocity among the plural person (Cambridge Dictionary Online, “Mo”). The first exploration of this chapter situates the Los Angeles protest within the former ‘mo’, one which nominalized justice within the telos of rights and reform-based logics as a contained *moment*. This static understanding of justice as noun reflects the disciplinary apparatuses of *the Modern Grammar*, which contain justice within carceral logics. I explore how the rhetoric employed in this first protest quelled the possibilities for justice by containing them within this *moment* of national *emergency*. Further, I attend to this figuring of justice, which situates a very specific understanding of *accountability*, one that as this chapter will show is only focused on the punishment of the harm-doer rather than the healing of the person or community harmed. In the case of the police murder of George Floyd with regards to the question of justice, *accountability* in this register was actualized through punitive logics of punishment, more specifically through the indictment of Derek Chauvin. A linear and causal justice that follows the equation as I see it now. Justice, as reflected in the opening quote by U.S. president Biden.

Following the exploration of this protest, the second half of this chapter moves to northern California, tuning into three actions organized by California Bay Area youth. I explore how these actions, orchestrated in the summer of 2020 by youth from Oakland based Destiny Arts Center, occurred within the second definition of ‘mo’: *movement* as that which indicates reciprocity among the plural. I thus attend to how the actions and demands made by Destiny Arts Youth gesture towards different kind of *accountability*, one which abolitionist think-doers Mariana Kaba and Josie Duffy Rice figure not as predicated on punitive logics—the wrong-do-er must be punished—but rather as oriented towards community healing and care (2020). That is, an *accountability* that is not predicated on *sequentiality*, but rather that is focused on reciprocity, responsibility, and relationality. Such a figuring rejects the onto-epistemic temporal pillar of *sequentiality*- that which currently contains justice within *the register of carcerality*- and opens way for ‘think-practicing’ a *relational justice*²⁸. Key to my reading on this kind of *accountability* and justice is the temporal modality put forth in the work of queer and feminist theorists Elizabeth Grosz (2015), José Esteban Muñoz (2009), and Kara Keeling (2019) who respectively mobilize ‘queer time’ as a way to refigure a relationality outside of

²⁸ This idea of a *relational justice* will be further fleshed out in chapter four.

linear narratives of time which figure ‘past-present-future’ as *separate* and *sequential*. Through adopting the framework of queer uses of time, this chapter asks: how to stay with the rupture that 2020 opened up?

iii.2020: A Moment of Emergency?

I was in the Netherlands during the global uprisings against police brutality and racial violence that took place in May and June of 2020. As a requisite of my scholarship I was told that I could not travel back to the United States for at the time, due to the COVID-19 crisis, it was still unclear whether borders would remain closed. It was both confrontation and immensely challenging to not be able to respond to injustice the way I knew how to: on the streets. I spent most mornings waiting for the nine-hour time difference to align so that I could talk to my people in California to discuss how to support from afar, waiting for that moment of overlap between Central European and Pacific Daylight time to hear first-hand how protests were developing, to hear of the arrests of my friends, and the escalation of the absurd and violent treatment from police officers. My mornings during this month and a half were spent obsessively reading, watching, and listening to the news reporting on the experiences of people protesting in the United States.

I recall reading about a particular demonstration in the Southern California metropolis of Los Angeles. The demonstration took place on May 28th 2020 when celebrities and Angelinos alike took to the streets in the immediate wake of the police murder of George Floyd. Like many in this moment, the streets of downtown Los Angeles rippled with rifts in demands for justice. Reading about the protest then, (and now), and viewing accompanying images of folks marching through the metropolis, something stands out regarding the specifics of demands made. The valley roads appeared to be occupied with a cessation concern: the indictment of police officers Derek Chauvin, Alexander Kueng, Thomas Lane, and Tou Thao.



Image 1²⁹

Curiously, on May 29th, 2020 when Derek Chauvin was arrested the cry for justice from this particular protest ceased. Was the initial arrest of Chauvin taken as a manifestation of justice? And what now of the verdict pronouncing his indictment? Could this punitive act amount to *accountability*? My aim in posing these questions regarding *accountability* and justice is not to provide a simple answer - 'yes' or 'no' - just as my aim in this chapter is not to situate one protest as 'good' and another as 'bad'. Rather, my pausing attention to this particular protest considers how *the Modern Grammar* condenses demands for justice within a particular *moment*. To explain, let me recap the ontological pillar of *sequentiality*, explicated in chapter one section v.

Sequentiality posits a pattern predicated on causality (Ferreira da Silva 2016, 60). With regards to justice and *accountability*, this pattern follows an equation which goes something like this: violence occurs + recognition of violence = opportunity for *accountability* and/as justice. Importantly, the cause and effect of this sequence assumes a telos of linearity that culminates with an answer to the question of justice. That is, what happened in the past (injustice) and what is demanded in the present (justice), can be rectified by a singular and absolute answer in the future. In this register justice and *accountability* are thus situated as *moments* whose response is nominalized in the form of an answer. This sort of equational logic

²⁹ Image 1: Celebrities Machine Gun Kelly and Travis Barker protest in Los Angeles, May 28 2020

conditions *moments* of injustice into episodes of *emergency*, a logic clearly reflected in president Donald Trump's declaration of May 2020 as a *moment* of "a national *emergency*".

How were the demands made at the May 28th 2020 Los Angeles protest informed by this logic? The equation of justice invoked at the Los Angeles protest looked something like this: murder of George Floyd + protests in response to his murder = justice and *accountability* as answered by the indictment of Derek Chauvin. Image 1 reflects the logics underwriting this equation. The image captures the juxtaposition of celebrities Machine Gun Kelly and Travis Barker holding two signs in their march for justice. One reads: 'stop arresting protestors, arrest killer cops!', the other 'no justice, no peace'. As previously noted, in contrast to other demonstrations at the time, this particular demonstration did not continue throughout the summer, nor even into the first days of June. Rather, the demonstration ceased the *moment* the 'the killer cop' was arrested. Put differently, the demonstration ceased when the equation of justice was answered in the form of the arrest of Derek Chauvin.

This figuring of justice and *accountability* within the logic of *sequentiality* might best be understood as justice within punitive logics. U.S. grassroots-based organization Project NIA identifies "punitive justice" as that which "places blame on an individual person and not a systemic problem" (Kaba 2020, 20). The logics of this justice assumes that the removal of one person through the eyes of the law amounts to *accountability*. For example, punitive justice understands that the indictment of Derek Chauvin equated to *accountability*. Punitive justice then operates by and through *carceral logics*: the harm do-er must be punished through the legal system; such punishment equates to *accountability* and justice³⁰. Central to this kind of justice are the ordering operatives of time as causal and *sequential*. Harm is caused, after which the harm do-er must be held accountable. Thus, to interrogate the operatives of this logic is to interrogate narratives of linear time as separate and causal³¹, which condense calls for justice and *accountability* within understandings of a single *moment* of *emergency*.

The logic of time within a linear telos has long been confronted by feminist and queer theorists. From Jack Halberstam (2005) and Sara Ahmed's (2006) respective works on queer temporality in relation to spatiality and orientation, to Gayatri Gopinath's (2018) theorizing on the time and place of queer diaspora and perhaps most notably, to Jose Esteban Muñoz's (2009) activation of queerness as an anti-antiutopic investment in alternative figurings of the past and

³⁰ Project N.I.A. identifies this kind of justice as a justice defined from the outside by projected ideas of safety that ultimately divide and disempower communities by forcing a reliance on the state (Kaba 2020, 20).

³¹ Punitive justice further upholds the ontological pillar of "separability", a technology sustaining the Modern Grammar.

openings for the future, each of these theorists mobilizes a queer methodological approach which understands time as more than an equation predicated on linear *sequentiality*. For Muñoz specifically, a queer approach to time and temporality presents a performative opening and “an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world” (2009, 1). Following Muñoz, a queer methodological approach towards time and temporalities thus holds the potential to go beyond the usual optics or onto-epistemic pillars separating past from present from future, or an understanding of time predicated on the logics of *sequentiality* and *separability*. A queer approach to temporality might therefore enable a praxis of ‘think-practicing’ justice and *accountability* beyond the equation of *moment* and *emergency*, beyond punitive justice.

Feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz, in her work *In the Nick of Time* (2004), invites us to think “untimely” as a way to attend to the moments of rupture in the linear telos containing imaginations and dreams for justice as that which might be redressed or rectified. An untimely approach does not seek a “solution” to the question of justice, but rather delves into that which is made possible by these moments of rupture. An untimely approach might ask questions such as: was the murder of George Floyd simply a *moment* in the present reality of the U.S.? Does the indictment of Derek Chauvin address the underlying pattern and system that allowed for the murder for Floyd? Does the removal of this one officer address the rhythmic tick that supports the choreography of police brutality and racial violence?

Grosz’ invitation towards untimeliness and Muñoz’s mobilization of queerness as a performative opening take me beyond the equation containing May 2020 as a mere *moment* of national *emergency* in U.S. history. This queer praxis and politics of untimeliness, rather than provide a contained nominalized answer to the question *what is to be done*, goes deeper/down/in/through the *emergence* of calls for justice seen in 2020. Such an approach affirms and attends to the ruptural opening of this *moment*, relishing in *movement*.

iii. 2020: An Emergence of Movement

“I am seeking to understand the conditions of emergence of things and beings that may not yet exist; to imagine temporalities in which saying their names— Tamara&Amber&Kandis&Elisha&Blake&...—occur as ways to destroy the meanings those names have been accorded by states’ grammars.” - C. Riley Snorton 2017, xiv

“Movement resides in the interstitial shuttling— “the rupture moment in which to intervene”— between intensive multiplicity and its most likely recapture”- Jasbir Puar 2017, 61

To attend to justice and *accountability* within the rupture that 2020 created is to stay with an understanding of the prefix ‘mo’ as relational. Phonetically, I hear the ‘mo’ in *movement* as *mu*-vement. Poet Nathaniel Mackey regards *mu* as that which is open and unfinished, “a particular quality of sound that implies and encodes *movement*, restlessness, a kind of fugal and centrifugal desire and execution that he [Mackey] calls “fugitivity”” (Moten 2004, 963, emphasis added). *Mu* resists enclosure, or the attempt of the settler colonial to close the open, resists the optics of linear time, the onto-epistemic pillar of *sequentiality* that encodes justice within the equation of punitive logics, within the *register of carcerality*. Poet and scholar Fred Moten attests that this particular quality of sound, *mu*, exists in “sliding away from the proposed”, exists “in that space of tension or *movement*” (ibid, emphasis added). In this place of in-between, of ‘interstitial shuttling’, *mu* is that radical potential of an always already relational justice.

This section aims to stay with the *mu* in *movement*, or that which refuses the carceral logics writing what is possible for justice within the linear optics of time. I read the praxis of this fugitive gesture through actions organized by Destiny Arts Center youth. By attending to the a-temporal and untimely work done by Destiny Arts Youth, I intend to stay with the *emergence* of potentials for transformative justice that 2020 opened up.

a. Contextuality Destiny Arts Center

Since 1988 Destiny Arts Center has been making the connection between art and movement as a vehicle for self and community expression. Founded by black and queer dance and martial artists, the organization uses movement-based arts to empower youth voices, to open up avenues for young people to express themselves, to fight against systemic racism, and to advocate for justice (Destiny Arts Center, 2020). Unbounded by the physical parameters of the Oakland, California studio, Destiny provides space for youth to advocate for change and to fabricate vitality in their communities (ibid).

Such fabrication is attended to through the untimely praxis of *movement*. *Movement* might be understood as form or method, that is, as embodied in the mediums of dance and mixed martial arts. My focus in this section, however, aims to figure *movement* beyond an

understanding of the term as a noun and towards a figuring of the term as relational- *mu*, indicating reciprocity between the plural. That is, my intention lends itself towards a figuring of *movement* as a rupturing force, one that one that literally— through Bay Area dance moves like the Smeeze, the Thizzle Dance, and freestyle—sidesteps the ontological eight count containing invocations in defense of justice within punitive and carceral logics.

This mode of relation occurs within a queer understanding of temporality. Following black feminist theorist Kara Keeling, I figure this *movement* as a “mode of relation [that] 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” (2019, 176). I thus invite the reader to engage with the following analysis of projects and actions organized by youth at Destiny Arts Center not as mere examples of *movement*, but perhaps as a realization of the aforementioned optics, *mu* as an embodiment of that queer temporality, that mode of relationality, *mu* as a transformative alternative for justice that is always already being thought, being practiced.

- b. 2020: “The Black (W)hole” *aint no power like the power of the youth cause the power of the youth don’t stop*

Each year, the teen company of Destiny Arts culminates their annual collaboration in the form of a performance. Typically, this performance takes place in June. 2020 was no different; the dancers were preparing a feature-length expose called “The Black (W)hole”, a collaborative congruence of dance, poetry, and film in celebration³² and honor of six young people who lost their lives at the hands of the police in the East Bay. However, their plans for an in-person performance were forced to shift when California residents were told to ‘shelter in place’. Like many organizations and locales, the realities of the COVID-19 virus obliged Destiny Arts Center to pause all in-person gatherings, and reduce meetings and rehearsals to an online virtual format. The ‘shelter in place’ mandate resulted in the performance adapting to an all film format. But in the late weeks of May 2020, the performance pivoted once more when people streamed to the streets in demands of justice, in response to another virus: white supremacy.

The nation-wide reckoning of police brutality, the very content occupying the performance piece “The Black (W)hole”, caused the following events and demonstrations to

³²Take directly from Destiny Arts Center website: “The Black (W)hole is a healing celebratory experience which mourns and honors the lives of six young people who died in and around Oakland before the age of 32” (Destiny Arts Center, 2020).

occur. Sixteen-year-old Shayla Avery, member of Destiny and participant performer in “The Black (W)hole”, chose her school Berkeley High as the site for the first of many demonstrations to take place over the summer (Jacobs 2020). Organizing with her fellow comrades from the center, and in true Bay Area form, Avery orchestrated plans for a demonstration to take place following the immediate news that shook the United States in May of 2020. The plan was to march-dance-sing-chant their way from south Berkeley’s San Pablo Park up to their high school, where the speeches, dances, and song were to continue (ibid). Avery and other youth who organized these events attended to the a-temporal (dis)continuity of police violence. Their attention to such violences did not occur in a register that recognized Floyd’s murder in isolation, a register of *emergency*. Rather, their demands were and are multiplicitous, attending to this ruptural moment of *emergence* by resisting the forces of *the Modern Grammar*, whose recuperative inclination is to close that which has been opened.

While some protests, like the one explored in section ii, ceased following the arrest of Derek Chauvin on May 28th, the protests organized by Destiny youth continued throughout the summer. June 9th another demonstration took place, this time, against gentrification in Berkeley. Outside of the high school again, once more in demands for justice, performers danced Bay moves. Among them were 17-year-old Isha Clarke, activist³³ who in 2019 worked and organized relentlessly to persuade California Senator Dianne Feinstein to support the Green New Deal, and 16-year-old Ny’Aja Roberson. In an interview with the New York Times, Roberson explained her experience of participating in the action: “I was dancing for all of the young lives that couldn’t be with us right then and there. I felt like I was bringing in all the spirits from those people— George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Trayvon Martin” (ibid). Much like the previous actions organized, on June 9th, Roberson, Clarke, Avery and their fellow comrades held an open mic during which they read a list of powerful demands for the high school and for the city of Berkeley and their responsibility to care for the community. The energy was palpable, contagious— an urgent call to action, mixed through and with celebration.

³³ The term ‘artivism’ connotes the praxical intersection of arts and activism.



Image 2

July 13th they organized another protest, this one a march to camp out at the Downtown Berkeley police station. Similar to the previous actions, during the campout young people danced in free *movement* and spoke truth to power in spoken word. They demanded a reallocation of Berkeley Police funding towards mental health services, specifically referencing the police murder of Kayla Moore in 2013, a black trans* woman who was experiencing a schizophrenic episode when Berkeley Police were called for a mental health check, a call which ultimately escalated to her murder. They demanded police be removed from their high school campus, one block away. They demanded recognition of the Ohlone peoples land, specifically that the West Berkeley Shellmound, the earliest inhabited location in the Bay Area which was recently purchased for luxury apartment development, be honored as a sacred site. Pressing and boundless, the demands shared at these protests weaved together intersectional calls for freedoms, for liberation, and for abolition.

These demands, made through *movement*, gesture towards an/other kind of justice. Image 2, taken of Ny’Aja Roberson at the June 9th protest, reflects the energetic orientation of this gesture. The image centers on Roberson, performing in freestyle movement a praise dance. The faces in the foreground, masked and attentive, are all on her—the sway of her dress, the drift of her hair, her gaze hopeful, focused and oriented diagonally towards some dimension outside the frame. Her left arm is reaching, in a line of flight, motioning towards some-thing, some-where that cannot be seen in the image captured. “A line of flight”, a term coined by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* is that which indicates “transformative multiplicity” (1987, 12). Lines of flight are bolts of pent-up energy that *emerge* through, and “slide away” from, the proposed logics (Moten 2004, 963). In this *emergence*, lines of flight designate that “elusive moment when change happens, as it was bound to”

³⁴ Ny’Aja Roberson, performing in freestyle movement, a praise dance at the June 9th protest.

(Fournier 2014, 121). Perhaps the line of flight that Roberson gestures towards is an/other kind of justice, a justice unbounded by the optics and *logics of carcerality*, a transformative justice that is already here, that resides in that elusive moment between intensive multiplicity and its most likely recapture.

Abolitionist organizer Mariame Kaba regards transformative justice as a political commitment to healing (2020, 20). Whereas a punitive approach to justice and *accountability* asks, what rule or law has been broken, who is to blame, what is the punishment that they deserve, a transformative approach to justice and *accountability* asks how to address the circumstances which promoted the harmful behavior, how to foster healing (ibid). A transformative approach draws patterns in order to imagine the care that is needed for *accountability* and justice. Kaba attests that transformative justice as a process involves a willingness and commitment to deeply question the systems and status quos, to imagine beyond the current logics of reform which nominalize ideas of *accountability* as punishment within carceral systems of vengeance (21). This willingness thus requires the hard work of creating and cultivating new forms and orientations towards understandings of *accountability*. It requires a willingness to stay with/in a devoted praxis of thought, rather than fall prey to the comforts and violence of the logics of knowing.

Fred Moten reads the devotion of this praxis in Martinique theorist Édouard Glissant's "For Opacity". Moten writes, and I quote at length because it's just so good:

Opacity implies a sort of blurring or obscuring, a complication, but it also still implies the capacity to see through, to see through that complication, and to see through it even if that seeing through produces something that others might want to think of as a kind of distortion or a lack of clarity... what opacity implies is a kind of ongoing devoted thinking, but again, for me, it's not only a thinking of the object in question, but it's also a thinking that is, at the same time, *through* the object in question...within that context, knowing is a project, is an activity, that doesn't come to an end (2018, emphasis in original)

Opacity as a methodological modality thus offers an approach to justice and *accountability* that does not seek an end point but rather is focused on the process. It is dedicated to deeply questioning the status quo and imagining beyond the current system. Put differently, opacity demands a dedication to thinking, demands staying with the question -*what is to be done*- rather than trying to answer it. Adopting opacity as a methodological modality opens way to "unravel

a set of normative discourses” (Moten 2017, vii) which write *moments* of justice as *separate* and *sequential* and invites an approach to justice as process, as an activity that does not come to an end. An opaque approach to justice thus queers linear notions of time and in doing so orients a praxis of ‘think-practicing’ what I am identifying as *a relational justice*. Chapter four attends to this justice, continuing down the gratuitous and opaque path that Glissant and Moten open. For now, this chapter concludes by re/turning to the opening that emerged in 2020.

iv. Movin’ and Refusin’

When I analyze the actions organized by Destiny Arts Youth over the spring and summer of 2020, I do not think of them as three distinct *moments* in response to a national *emergency*. Nor do I think of them as simply protests that featured demands and dance. Rather, with Glissant, Moten and Mackey, I think of them as *movements*: *movements* that refuse the ontological grounds premised on *separability* and *sequentiality*, grounds which through *the logic of carcerality* retract and make sense of these actions as mere *moments*. I think of them as opaque coming-togethers in motion, as gatherings whose textures cannot be contained “within an irreducible singularity” (Glissant, 1990, 190). The youth organizing these actions are devoted to the process and praxis of thought, a kind of opaque thinking, that side-steps the usual onto-epistemic analytics governing and reducing justice into a grammar of nouns. The youth at these actions, and so many more actions before and surely so many more to come, demand not a universal model or answer to the question of justice. It is in their attention to police violence, to the green new deal, their acknowledgement of indigenous land rights, and the necessary (re)allocation of material monetary services away from punitive punishments and towards community care that these youth knit with nurture a transformative justice, a justice that in its constant *emergence* gestures towards “transformative multiplicity” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 12).

Tuning into the *movement* of justice is to tune into that contrapuntal note in the break, or Fred Moten’s theorizing on Nathaniel Mackey’s *mu*. *Mu* from the Greek *muthos* connotes a re-utterance, a pre-utterance that for Mackey is a linguistic and imaginative effect and affect of erotic allure, “mouth and muse, mouth not only noun but verb and muse likewise, lingual and imaginal process, prod and process” (Mackey, 2006, ix). *Mu* from the Japanese translation of the Chinese *wu* as “no, not, nought, nonbeing, emptiness, nothingness, nothing, no thing but which also bears the semantic trace of dance” (Moten, 2013, 750). The *mu* in *movement* dances in mystic dispersion, troubling the static metaphysical linearity in which nouns and answers

categorically reside as stable. “Repeatedly circling or cycling back, doing so with such adamance as to call forward and back into question and suggest an eccentric step to the side” (ibid), the choreography of such motion refuses *the logic of carcerality*, relishing in paraontological play, slyly smeezing in that proud Bay Area way.

The following chapter is dedicated to this praxis of refusal, or what Denise Ferreira da Silva names as “refusal as a mode of engagement” (2017, 22). I read Ferreira da Silva’s mode through the project of abolition feminism, the very work I see being gestured towards by Destiny Arts Center youth in their caring attention and dedicated regard to the a-temporal potentials of a justice focused on healing, responsibility, and relationality. This will ultimately allow me to re/turn to the optics of opacity opened up by Glissant and Moten and the potentials for a *relational justice* in chapter four.

Chapter Three: Towards a Horizon of Liberation

In “Hacking the Subject: Black Feminism and Refusal beyond the Limits of Critique”, Denise Ferreira da Silva begins with a quote from Audre Lorde’s *Sister Outsider*:

“What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy? It means that only the most narrow parameters of change are possible and allowable. Those of us who stand outside the circle of this society’s definition of acceptable women; those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference—those of us who are poor, who are lesbian, who are Black, who are older—know that survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to take our differences and make them our strengths” (Lorde 1984, 110).

Ferreira da Silva reads Lorde’s provocation as an invitation of the radical black feminist regard, an invitation to trouble the categories of ‘otherness’ or ‘objecthood’ by way of *refusing* them. Refusal, as Ferreira da Silva presents it, is more than purely a negation, a hard ‘no’. Rather, refusal is a process and praxis that opens way by troubling. More specifically, “refusal [is] a mode of engagement” (2018, 22).

This chapter is dedicated to Ferreira da Silva’s ‘refusal as a mode of engagement’, the very praxis of which I consider to be present in the project of abolition feminism. Scholar and activist Angela Davis attests that abolition feminism connotes processes of transformative reckoning, processes rooted in demands for revolution (Davis 2020, DemocracyNow!). Abolition feminism, henceforth referred to as just abolition, is not strictly about dismantling—it is about (re/en)visioning from a place of imagination (ibid); abolition is a generative praxis and a creative modality that by way of rejection affirms other worlds. In this chapter I will read the praxis of abolition by way of Ferreira da Silva’s refusal as mode of engagement. More specifically, I will argue that abolition provides a necessary tool for re/orienting a justice not within the “narrow parameters” of what is “allowable” or “possible” (Lorde 1984, 110) but rather a justice that might be considered *impossible*, re/oriented towards a *more*, towards *liberation*. For abolition, as so eloquently expressed by writer and archivist Che Gossett, “is a life-making principle: one concerned with creating new practices, spells and rhythms that make planetary life habitable for all. Abolition is the desire for *more*” (Gossett 2020, SilverPress, emphasis in original). In dedicated desire, this chapter tunes in to this open perennial invitation, or what Ferreira da Silva names as “the ethical mandate to challenge our thinking” (2018, 22),

and summons by way of the imagination a re/orientation of justice towards a *more*, towards *liberation*.

In order to listen and attend to the abolitionist imaginary, this chapter begins by briefly re-visiting the grammar of modernity governing contemporary thoughts and practices of justice. As explored in chapter one and two, in this register justice is encoded within the *determinant* equation of *separability* and *sequentiality*, which writes *moments*, such as spring and summer of 2020 as *emergencies* and nominalizes justice and accountability within punitive logics. I revisit the *logic of carcerality* in this chapter with specific attention to how such logic exists even at the level of the imagination. I identify this as *the carceral imagination* and explore how such a force delimits potential imaginings for justice within the ‘narrow parameters’ of ‘possible’ and ‘allowable change’ that Audre Lorde references in the epigraphic quote.

Following this, the latter half of this chapter tunes in to the abolitionist desire for *more*, and attends to how the project of abolition refuses these narrow parameters of ‘possibility’ and orients an *impossible* justice towards a horizon of *liberation*. In both practice and thought, I situate the genealogy of the contemporary abolitionist project in the United States in the broader context of the tradition of radical black feminism. Through resources provided by think-doers Angela Davis, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, adrienne maree brown, Marquis Bey, Mariame Kaba, and Dylan Rodriguez, I attend to how abolition, as a project mobilizing the force of the creative imaginary, presents a praxiological paradigm for “think-practicing” (Thiele 2014, 202) justice differently. My goal is to attend to the force of the imagination as a powerful tool for worlding. I identify this as the *abolitionist imagination* which, beyond an abstract intervention, ruptures in refusal that which currently contains ‘possibilities’ of justice within *the register of carcerality*.

Lastly, by revisiting Ferreira da Silva’s “Hacking the Subject” (2018), specifically her invitation to ‘hack’, I aim to activate the *abolitionist imagination* as a tool that just might help re/orient justice. This allows me to explore the transformative and relational potentials for justice, which I began to examine in chapter two, and which I will continue to investigate in chapter four.

i. ‘Possible’ and ‘Allowable’: The Logics of Carcerality

“The very systems we’re trying to dismantle live within us” - Mariame Kaba

While I have addressed *the logics of carcerality* in both chapter one, with specific regard to the history of policing and justice, and in chapter two, with regards to the optics of linear time and punitive logics, I feel it is important to begin this chapter by attending again to the operatives of these logics in both systems and thought. For, as abolition activist and organizer Mariame Kaba warns, these logics are persistent and insidious and often exist deep within the level of our subconscious. Since this chapter aims to attend to the force and potential of the imagination as a tool for hacking and re/orienting justice, this first section thus returns to *the logics of carcerality* and addresses first how these logics manifest at and through the level of systems, and the level of thought.

Abolitionist scholar Dylan Rodriguez refers to *the logics of carcerality* as “both the spatial method and preferred conceptual apparatus for the distended, ongoing New World/Civilizational project and its preeminent modern iteration in U.S. nation-building” (2019, 1606). Following Rodriguez, carceral logics are thus a methodological approach to worlding, the preferred method of the colonizer³⁵. In the context of the United States, such a method operates by and through overlapping systems of power which generate differently scaled carceral regimes such as, but not limited to: the plantation, the police, segregated cities/towns (red-lining). Trans* and black feminist theorist Marquis Bey attests that *the logics of carcerality* are the “penchant to proliferate capture and expropriation along racist and sexist axes... via assumed ownership over racialized and/or non-masculinely-gendered subjects” (2020, 94). In a U.S. context, the ‘capture and expropriation along racist and sexist axes’ that Bey refers to is reflected in the prison industrial complex, where 56% of the prison population is represented by African American and Latinx identified individuals, despite the fact that African American and Latinx people only make up 32% of the U.S. population³⁶ (NAACP). It is also reflected in the 2015 U.S. transgender survey report, which revealed that 58% of respondents who interacted with a law enforcement officer who thought or knew they were trans*³⁷ were harassed, physically or sexually assaulted (TransEquality, 187). These punitive

³⁵ More specifically, the logic of carcerality includes but is not limited to forms of power constituted by “patriarchy, coloniality, racial chattel, racial capitalism, and heteronormativity” (Rodriguez 2019, 1612).

³⁶ The imprisonment rate for African American women is two times that of white women (naacp.org).

³⁷ I use trans* to refer to an umbrella of identities that fall outside of the cis-binary understands of male-female. However, as a trans* non-binary person myself, I adopt a radical transfeminist understanding of trans*, not as an identity marker, but as “a radical praxis of refusal” concerned with “changing ethics and the analytics through which these operate”. Unfortunately, I do not have the space here in this project to attend to this more. For more on radical transfeminism see: Mijke van der Drift and Nat Raha: “Radical Transfeminism: Trans as Anti-static

parameters thus create systems which function to assert violence over those who fall outside of the ‘understandable’ axes dictating race and gender (white, cisgender male)³⁸. The operatives of this logic, present throughout state systems in the United States, are also present in thought.

In *Anarcho-Blackness: Notes Towards a Black Anarchism*, Marquis Bey identifies *the logics of carcerality* as the grammar of the state, “the very grammar by which things are expressible and understandable, and indeed *possible*” (ibid, emphasis added). How does this grammar- which in chapter one I identified as *the Modern Grammar*- work as a method to limit the imagination within the ‘narrow parameters’ of ‘possible and allowable change’? Following Bey, I am concerned that the conditions of this stately logic retract imaginative potentials for justice within the racist and sexist ‘parameters’ of ‘possibility’. For since the grammar writing what is ‘possible’ is the grammar of the state- *the Modern Grammar*- the conditions of ‘possibility’ will always be imagined within the ideological operates of state backed hegemony, the very operatives that ‘proliferate capture and expropriation along racist and sexist axes’ (ibid). I am identifying the force writing these ‘parameters’ of ‘possibility’ as *the carceral imagination*.

The carceral imagination works insidiously at the level of thought and is ever present in contemporary invocations for justice, such as those heard in 2020. For example, *the carceral imagination* might work to delimit possibilities for justice within the ‘allowable’ framework of accountability as punitive. In this framework, justice is imagined as punishment for the harm-doer. The imagination for justice as reflected in the Los Angeles protest, justice for George Floyd as answered by the indictment of Derek Chauvin. ‘Of course Derek Chauvin’s arrest equates to justice and accountability’, taunts *the carceral imagination*. This ‘of course’, of course, is predicated on the notion that arrest and punitive logics are ‘allowable’ and ‘possible’. *The carceral imagination* works to draw boundaries for ‘possibilities’ for change, and in doing so often gestures towards reform³⁹. For example, in the case of systems of policing the *carceral*

Ethics Escaping Neoliberal Encapsulation” (2019); Eva Hayward and Che Gossett “THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF THAT” (2017); Karen Barad “TransMaterialities: Trans*/Matter/Realities and Queer Political Imaginings” (2015) and Marquis Bey “Trouble Genders: LGBT Collapse and Trans Fundamentality” (2021).

³⁸ Unfortunately, again, I do not have the space in this project to go in to depth on how these operates work at the intersections of what Marquis Bey so brilliantly refers to as ‘trans*-ness’ and ‘blackness’. For further reading, see Bey: “The Trans*-ness of Blackness, the Blackness of Trans*-ness” (2017), and *The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Gender* (2020).

³⁹ For the case of this chapter I chose to use the umbrella term ‘reform’. However, abolitionist Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Angela Davis, Mariame Kaba and Dean Spade distinguish between two types of reform: ‘reformist-

imagination proposes the mandate of police body cameras, or of diversity and inclusion trainings, as the answer to police brutality and racial injustice. Put differently, *the carceral imagination* suggests reformist methods as a means to address violence. ‘The police system could never be abolished entirely’, says the *carceral imagination*, it is simply *impossible*. In summary, by drawing boundaries for ‘possible’ and ‘allowable change’, *the carceral imagination* works as a method to limit imaginatory potentials of justice within the ‘narrow parameters’ of hegemony, all the while reproducing spatial and ideological violences that continue to enable the project of the United States and its ongoing prerogative of global colonial power.

In direct opposition to carcerality, abolition says ‘no’ to this method, to this stately grammar. Working by way of refusal to generate forms of being with one another that are not based on the carceral regime, abolition “seeks (as it performs) a radical reconfiguration of justice, subjectivity, and social formation that does not depend on the existence of the carceral state” (Rodriguez 2019, 1516). As Fred Moten and Stephano Harney attest in their well-known book *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*, the object of abolition implies “[n]ot so much the abolition of prisons but the abolition of a society that could have prisons, that could have slavery, that could have the wage, and therefore not abolition as the elimination of anything but abolition as the founding of a new society” (2013, 42). Refusing the conditions of ‘possibility’, abolition is a generative modality that calls on the creative to imagine beyond the optics of ‘allowable change’, to refuse the *carceral imagination*. The next section situates the project of abolition in the historical and contemporary context of the United States and attends to the power of the *abolitionist imagination* as a key tool for re/orienting justice.

ii. Abolishing the Logic: Imagining the *Impossible*

Demands for abolition in the United States took center stage during the spring and summer months of 2020 (Kaba 2020, New York Times). Whereas the 2014 national uprisings against police brutality and racial injustice in the wake of the murders of Michael Brown, Eric Garner

reform’ and ‘non-reformist reforms’ (Critical Resistance, 2020). ‘Reformist-reforms’ “solve a small part without considering whether the outcome strengthens or weakens the big problem’s hold on the world” (Berger, Wilson Gilmore, 2014, 13). ‘Reformist reforms’ allege efforts towards change but actually proliferate violence (ibid). ‘Non-reformist reforms’, however, trouble the ontological ground of capital racial, patriarchal control. An example of a ‘reformist-reform’ would be the proposition of police body cameras; an example of a ‘non-reformist reform’ would be the demand to prioritize local government spending on community, health, education and affordable housing. For more see: Critical Resistance ‘What is the PIC? What is abolition?’

and Trayvon Martin were quelled with the conditional comforts and suggestions of reform⁴⁰, there seemed to be a national reckoning in 2020 that the method of the reform is not working. In wake of this recognition, the volume was turned up to an all-time high in acknowledgment for the need to abolish systems of policing, for the need to make such systems obsolete, for the need for *liberation*. This section contextualizes the project and praxis of abolition in the context of the United States, within the genealogy of the radical black feminist tradition and clarifies some key tenets of the abolitionist project. In order to attend to the history and radical potentials of this praxis, I first talk about how I came to understand abolition, specifically in relation to the notion of *emancipation*. Such inquiry takes me back, again, to that Berkeley high school classroom.

a. Emancipatory ‘possibilities’

In the context of the U.S., abolitionist demands are far from new. Ruth Wilson Gilmore, one of the founding activists and scholars in the abolitionist movement, asserts that “abolition”, as a word, is an “intentional echo of the movement to abolish slavery” (2019). I first learned about the abolitionist movement in eleventh grade U.S. history class and came to understand the roots of the movement as closely related to Abraham Lincoln’s 1863 Emancipation Proclamation. I recall reading and subsequently rehearsing the facts: the 1863 announcement of then president Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation, the executive order which issued “that all persons held as slaves” within the rebellious states “henceforward shall be free,” was an order that resulted in the passing of the 13th Amendment in 1865, or that which ‘officially’ ‘abolished’ slavery⁴¹. Put succinctly, I came to understand the movement for abolition as wedded to the idea of *emancipation*.

The discreet discrepancy between *emancipation* and *liberation* is crucial, specifically with regard to the abolitionist project. *Emancipation*, though often conflated with *liberation*

⁴⁰ To be clear, the demands made in this moment *were abolitionist demands*. Unfortunately, such demands were met by the state in the form of the reform, which amounted to more funding being allocated to the police system. Specifically, the allocation of additional funds to the police force for body cameras, to address police civilian accountability, and diversity and inclusion trainings, to address racial and gender based bias (Friedersdord, 2014, The Atlantic)

⁴¹ As noted in chapter one, the 13th amendment abolished slavery *except in the case of convicts*. This subsequently led to the era of ‘Black Codes’ and to the mass development of prisons in the Southern United States. For more on such history see Kim Gilmore (2000) ‘Slavery and Prison—Understanding the Connections’ In: *Social Justice* 27(3) (81) Fall 2000, pp. 195-205. Additionally, and as also noted in chapter one, this clause in the amendment still holds. The 2021 proposition of the “Abolition Amendment”, proposes the elimination of this constitutional loophole that allows forced labor in U.S. prisons. As of August 15, 2021, the amendment has yet to be signed by President Biden.

(Sithole 2020, 104), implies the freedom of the subject in relation to the oppressor. These logics are quite evident in the Emancipation Proclamation, for example, which puts forth that persons held as slaves were to be freed from their masters. This hegemonic relationality reflects the underworkings of the onto-epistemic pillar, *separability*. To quickly recap, *separability* works to understand difference as dichotomous through oppositional logic. According to Denise Ferreira da Silva (2007) such logic operates through the “arsenal of raciality” which creates and maintains ‘self’ from ‘other’, ‘us’ from ‘them’. Importantly, a key function of *separability* is that it writes the figure of the ‘other’ as always understood in relation to the figure of the ‘self’— a figure who, both Ferreira da Silva and Sylvia Wynter (2003) reveal, is best understood as the white European male. *Separability* thus creates an understanding of relationality that is always in reference to the figure of the white European male. In the case of the Emancipation Proclamation, *separability* writes an understanding of ‘freedom’ as conditionally imagined and understood as always in relation to the white master. That is, *emancipation* situates an understanding of the project of the abolition of slavery as always in relational reference to the master and further as always in relation to the State, because of the aforementioned association to the State approved Proclamation. Emancipation thus contains an understanding of abolition within the grammar of the State. Marquis Bey attests that it is imperative “to understand the State not merely as an institutional entity; it is a relation” (2020, 94). Following Bey, ‘the State’ therefore refers to both systems *and thoughts* that exist through a relational understanding- a relational understanding predicated on *separability*, which imagines notions such as ‘freedom’ and ‘abolition’ as predicated on the approving nod of the hegemonic force of the State. An *emancipatory* understanding of abolition, or what I learned in my junior year of high school, because it upholds the onto-epistemic pillar of *separability* operates through the grammar of the state, “the very grammar by which things are expressible and understandable, and indeed *possible*” (ibid, emphasis added). While the grammar of the state, what I have named *the Modern Grammar*, seeks to condense an understanding of the history of abolition within a register of *emancipation*, the abolitionist project does not desire the ‘narrow parameters’ of ‘possibility’. The radical revolutionaries who refused and fought against the horrors of chattel slavery, revolutionaries such as Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, John Brown, Sojourner Truth, Mary Church Terrell, and Harriet Jacobs did not imagine ‘allowable’ or ‘possible change’. They did not ask for permission from the State. They did not imagine ‘freedom’ in relation to the master; they rejected the catastrophe of racial capitalist State power and opened up the space for articulation by way of *refusal*; they imagined and insisted on *more*. The historical roots of contemporary abolitionist movements are

grounded in this radical black feminist tradition of refusal, roots whose arborescent growth have been nurtured through the life-affirming praxis of care and creativity, driven by desire. Abolition, as a project long rooted in the yearning desire for *liberation*, not *emancipation*, refuses the conditions writing what is ‘possible’ within the ‘narrow parameters of change’, and imagines into existence the *impossible*. The following section attends to the *impossibility* of the creative force of the imaginary.

b. Liberatory ‘impossibilities’

In their article *THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF THAT* (2017), trans*feminist authors Che Gossett and Eva Hayward attend to the idea of *impossibility*. They do this by taking an anti-colonial approach towards distinguishing between “this” and “that”. For Gossett and Hayward, the term “this” signifies hierarchical order in Western systems of classification⁴² (15). Like the notion of *emancipation*, “this” operates by the logic of *separability* because it upholds a hegemonic understanding of relationality. “This”, because it implies ownership purports a relation understanding that Hayward and Gossett attest is “colonial/slave making logic” (18). An anti-colonial “that”, however, resists the classificatory certitude of mastery and indicates a provocation beyond (ibid). Always on the move, “that” signals a force that refuses the onto-epistemological optics which define the conditions of ‘possibility’: it escapes the grammar of the State. Because it falls outside of the definition of what (‘we’ ‘know’) exists, “that” is considered *impossible*. Put differently, “that” performs a mode of refusal that desediments⁴³ the technologies of colonial racism writing what is considered “possible” and “offers up and for the world a radical vision of planetary relation” (22, emphasis in original). “That”, by refusing conditions of ‘possibility’, the onto-epistemic violences of the world, employs an affirmative and agential refusal and gestures towards other horizons.

I want to suggest that the shifty relationality of “that” is motivated by a liberatory, not emancipatory drive. *Emancipation* situates “that” as always in relational negation to the figure of the master; in other words, *emancipation* condenses “that” into “this”. But because “that”

⁴² Specifically, they follow Michel Foucault’s *The Order of Things*, attending to his assertion that perhaps what lies outside of *this* order is “the stark impossibility of thinking *that*” (Hayward, Gossett, 2017, 15). Foucault’s assertion leads them to ask: “what would an anti-colonial *that* be?” (17). This embark this query by attending to the “charge” and “provocation” that is the force of trans*.

⁴³ See Marquis Bey *The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Gender*.

refuses to be (con)(de)defined by the hegemonic ways of the World (capital W)⁴⁴, by the grammar of carcerality writing the conditions of possibility, “that” inherently gestures towards an otherwise that does not abide by the logics of modernity and coloniality. And it is because it rejects the writings of the World, that “that” is considered *impossible*. Importantly, this rejection is an *affirmative negation* which gestures towards realizations of relationalities that evade the onto-epistemic violences of *separability*, *sequentiality*, and *determinacy*. For me, Hayward and Gossett’s theorizing on the *impossibility* of “that” invites a different kind of thinking, one that is disinterested in the narrow optics of ‘possibility’, one that activates an imaginative inquiry that just might orient an abolitionist justice towards a horizon of *liberation*. For abolition, contrary to my high school conditioning, is a project that in its yearning desire for *liberation* refuses the conditions of ‘possibility’ and imagines into existence a *more*.

Despite last summer’s intensifying abolitionist outcries, critiques of the abolitionist project continue to appraise the project as *impossible* (Akbar 2020, Bell 2021, Carrier, Piché 2015, Prevas 2020, Purnell 2020). That is, there appears to be tension between the acknowledgement of the need to abolish systems of carcerality, in both practice and thought, and the notion that abolition as a project is *impossible* because it is too reliant on the abstract *imagination*. What would it mean to stay with this critique, to, in the words of Audre Lorde, ‘take it and make it a strength’? What would it mean to proliferate the *impossible* by way of the imagination? The following section explores these questions and unravels some of the critiques writing the imagination as merely abstract, by attending to actualizations of both *carceral* and *abolitionist* imaginations. Through proliferating the *impossibility* of the *imagination* as a worlding force, the section culminates by attending to Denise Ferreira da Silva’s call to “heed the ethical mandate to challenge our thinking” (2017, 22) and aims to mobilize the imagination as a tool for hacking justice.

iii. Imagining as Worlding: the imagination as a tool

“Don’t for a minute think that there are no material effects of yearning and imagining” - Karen Barad 2012, 13

⁴⁴ The use of the capital in World refers to what bell hooks identifies as “the current white supremacist, heteropatriarchal, neoliberal neocolonial state of the world” (2009, 29)

I read feminist physicist Karen Barad’s assertion both as an opening and something of a warning. On the one hand, the imagination is a powerful tool with the capacity to materially manifest ways of ‘think-practicing’ that might not be predicated on the current logics of carcerality. On the other hand, as true with most things powerful, this tool could easily be abused. Both of these considerations are predicated on the assumption that one accepts the imagination as a force capable of galvanizing material effects. Just as abolition is so often critiqued as an unrealistic project, too reliant on the abstract imaginary - “imagining a world without police seems impossible!” (Prevas 2020)- this section asks: how could yearning and imagining have material effects?

Patrisse Cullors, co-founder of the Movement for Black Lives⁴⁵, helps in confronting the constraining logic writing the imagination as merely abstract. “Everything you see in the world”, she attests, “somebody thought of it first... somebody had to actually first *imagine* prisons and the police themselves *in order to create* them.” (Cullors in Kaba, 2020, 94, emphasis added). Put differently, the very systems of prisons and policing are an actualized effect of an imagination. Black feminist author and activist adrienne maree brown speaking on abolition and futurity attests that “there was *one imagination* that was supposed to outsource and cover the entire world and everything is meant to be the same based on that imagination” (2020, emphasis added). This is the same imagination which imagined the prison, which imagined the police, and that which continues to imagine and propose the reform. These material effects – the plantation, prisons, police— are that of a single imagination, that which I identified as *the carceral imagination*. Like an emancipatory understanding of abolition, *the carceral imagination* is not oriented towards a horizon of *liberation*. Rather, *the carceral imagination* is that which writes the script of determinant violence, of which justice can only ever be served at the receiving end of. What would it mean to refuse *the carceral imagination*? adrienne maree brown attests that the paths towards “disrupting the single white male hetero narrative” must come by way of imagining (2017, 90). “Imagination”, she proffers, “is one of the spoils of colonialism” (ibid). I would like to suggest that this imagination, as a tool capable of spoiling colonization, is that of an *abolitionist imagination*. In its yearning desire for *liberation*, the activation of an abolitionist imagination both rejects the ongoing project of coloniality and opens way for a path towards a *more*.

⁴⁵ The Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) is a coalition of more than 50 groups representing the interests of black communities across the United States.

Importantly, such a praxis- generation into existence by way of refusal- is far from abstract. Rather, the activation of an *abolitionist imagination* is present in aforementioned projects such as grassroots-based organization Critical Resistance. Formed in 1997 by Ruth Wilson Gilmore and Angela Davis, Critical Resistance is dedicated to the abolition of the prison industrial complex (PIC)⁴⁶, dedicated to the global struggle against the regimes of racial capitalism, hetero-patriarchy, and the ongoing project of colonial modernity. The organization works not to improve the System (reformist-reforms), but rather to build self-determined communities equipped to respond to harm through intentional practices of healing and care, versus punishment and carcerality. From available online toolkits, reports, and guides of steps towards abolition, to mutual aid projects working to provide direct housing cost support, medication, healthcare supplies, and food for California Bay Area members coming home after prison, Critical Resistance is a national organization structured through local autonomous chapters whose shared mission is that of an abolitionist imaginary. Project N.I.A. is another such example of this abolitionist imaginary. Spearheaded by abolitionist Mariame Kaba, the project partners local activists and organizations to create alternatives to the criminal legal process, working to end the arrest, detention, and incarceration of children and young adults in Chicago. From trainings structured around skill building for ending violence, to reports revealing the Chicago school to prison pipeline, to initiatives providing books to young people in Illinois prisons and juvenile detention centers, to hip-hop infused community programs led by and for young people affected by violence, Project N.I.A. is concerned with actualizing those “life making spells” (Gossett, 2020). There are so many more wonderful organizations in the U.S. that historically have actualized an abolitionist imaginary. Organizations such as The Young Lords, Gay Liberation Front, the Black Panther Party for Self Defense (BPP), and Street Transvestite Action Resistance (STAR).

Present day calls for abolition ride on the waves of these think-doers, like Angela Davis, like Marsha P. Johnson, who dedicated their lives to rejecting the violence of racial, patriarchal capital control and to galvanizing an *abolitionist imaginary* in forming ways of being with one another that do not abide by carceral logics (a relational understanding which I will further explore in chapter four)⁴⁷. Abolitionist organizations today, #8toabolish, People’s Breakfast

⁴⁶ Critical Resistance identifies the prison industrial complex (PIC) as a term used to best describe the overlapping interests of government and industry that use surveillance, policing, and imprisonment as solutions to economic, social and political realities. Further, the PIC operates through systematic and ideological technologies that work to maintain racial, economic, and gender power imbalances.

⁴⁷ As Saidiya Hartman attests “there’s been a movement unfolding for decades, an analysis *that has been* in place—building on the work of Angela Davis, Assata Shakur, The Combahee River Collective, Marsha P.

Oakland (PBO), Movement for Black Lives (M4BL), The Marshall Project, Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee (IWOC) as well as abolitionist theorists within academia Marquis Bey, Che Gossett and Eva Hayward, Dylan Rodriguez, Mijke Van der Drift and Nat Raha, Dean Spade, Eric A. Stanley, Tourmaline, and the journal *Abolition: A Journal of Insurgent Politics*, mobilize an abolitionist imagination as a tool, a tool oriented towards *liberation*⁴⁸. Each of these think-doers responds to the echoing admonition and potential of Karen Barad's words, generating the *impossible* into material affect by way of thinking and practicing differently. In both systems and thought, these thinkers gather in rejoining response to Barad's words, gather in that fugitive undercommon study kind of way, imagining into existence from a place of yearning desire for *more*. This is the abolitionist legacy—one which by way of refusal side steps the narrow parameters of 'possibility', generating practices of solidarity and care that disrupt the single white male hetero narrative, or the preferred method writing the logics of carcerality, generating into material effect that which is deemed *impossible*.

As such, *abolitionist imaginaries* are only *impossible* in the sense that the condition of 'possibility' is defined by *the carceral imagination*. Rather, an *abolitionist imagination* presents a tool, a tool whose desire to build heeds what Denise Ferreira da Silva refers to as the political "ethical mandate to challenge our thinking, to release the imagination, and to welcome the end of the world as we know it, that is, *decolonization, which is the only proper name for justice*" (2017, 22). A tool for thought, a world making paradigm and spell and a rhythm, the 'impossibility' of the abolitionist imaginary is oriented towards *life*.

I want to explore how this tool, as a mode of engagement, can help affirmatively dismantle the systems currently containing and writing possibilities for justice. In order to embark on this exploration, I will revisit Denise Ferreira da Silva's "Hacking the Subject" (2018). Inspired by Ferreira da Silva's call to 'hack' and by the abolitionist tradition of imagining the impossible, the final section of this chapter begins to explore interventions and re/orientations towards an ethical grammar of justice.

iv. Hacking the Master's Tools

Johnson, Audre Lorde, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Mariame Kaba, Patrisse Cullors, Opal Tometi and Alicia Garza, Michelle Alexander, Keeanga Yamahtta Taylor" (2020).

⁴⁸ Just to name a few. I surely could never do justice to all of the wonderful organizations and brilliant theorists striving for liberation and doing the work of abolition.

Ferreira da Silva begins her project “Hacking the Subject” by accepting Audre Lorde’s invitation of the abolitionist regard- to “take our differences and make them strengths”-demanding *more* by way of refusal. Beyond negation, the long tradition of this black feminist mode calls on the creative to invent into existence that *more*, that which is deemed *impossible*. ‘Refusal as a mode of engagement’, I am attesting, is inherently an activation of the *abolitionist imagination*- an affirmative negation 'concerned with making new spells and rhythms'. Precisely what this project of justice is after.

Curiously, though Ferreira da Silva begins her project with Audre Lorde’s words, she chooses to cut short Lorde’s more commonly quoted phrase that immediately follows: “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house”. I do not recall the first time I engaged with Lorde’s well-known declaration, though her avowed assertion has been present throughout my upbringing. Nine words that I continue to recite in endless rehearsal. I have somewhat appropriated them over the many years, adapting the mantra to best fit what I understand in the moment. They presently go something like this: the violences of the World will not end should we continue to replicate them in propositions and enactments of an ‘otherwise’; we must think and practice differently. I repeat these sentences to myself, often. I understand that Lorde’s words hold the historically backed and properly checked argument that abolitionists make regarding reform-based strategies. I firmly believe that reform does not work and in fact causes more harm and violence, by perpetuating the logic of carcerality (Rodriguez 2019; Kaba 2021; Davis 2003, 2005, 2016; Bey 2020). *Carceral logics*, of which this chapter began by addressing, are merely reflections of the master’s tools trying to dismantle the master’s house. And so, I repeat to myself, we cannot reproduce the violences of the World in our propositions and enactments of an ‘otherwise’. The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. We must think and practice differently...

In my heeding acceptance and subsequent ingraining of this mantra I never once paused to think how to approach Lorde’s popular provocation as an *invitation to invent into existence by way of refusal*. Ferreira da Silva’s mode of engagement, her invitation to trouble by way of refusal, opens way not for an *answer* to the question *what is to be done* regarding justice, but rather asks for a different orientation, a re/orientation, to Lorde’s invitation. How might activating the *abolitionist imaginary* take me deeper/in/down/through the path that Ferreira da Silva opens up?

Ferreira da Silva identifies her methodological modality, “refusal as a mode of engagement”, as “hacking” (2018, 22). “Hacking”, she attests, “is de\composition, or a radical transformation (or imaging) that exposes, unsettles, and perverts form and formulae. It is an

active and purposeful mis-understanding, mis-reading, mis-appropriation. Hacking is a kind of reading, which is at once an imagination... and a composition (as description of a creative act), *but also recomposition of elements*" (2018, 27, emphasis added). A decomposition, a misunderstanding, misreading, or misappropriation, hacking is that which troubles, that which recomposes by way of playful manipulation. Not a means to an end, but both an end and a means, hacking in its concern with radical transformation, harkens the abolitionist imaginary in figuring the *impossible*.

Motivated by the destabilizing radical transformative power of hacking, how might I purposefully 'mis-read' Lorde's famous words? My move here, driven by curiosity, does not ask what the symbolics of 'the tools' or 'the house' represent. Nor does it seek to imagine some 'outside' 'otherwise'- that which for years, I am afraid, has been limiting me toward thinking of 'new tools' to build a 'new house'. Rather, my move asks how might 'mis-appropriating' Lorde's words open up the opportunity to 'recompose' 'the elements' of this nine-word sentence? Slyly seeking to sneakily trouble, to 'think-practice' differently, what does hacking open up? What a better way to begin this (in)quiry than asking: what is there to play with/in Lorde's nine words?

"The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house". After years of repeating the sentence out loud to myself, I notice something rereading and rewriting it down. The apostrophe. The apostrophe signifies ownership, the property of the personal proper noun, in this case the master. This is commonly understood by grammarians, even mere masters students such as myself. The apostrophe thus holds the capacity to mark as a signifier of difference. How then, to take this signifier of difference and 'make it a strength'? Perhaps placing emphasis on the apostrophe might allow for a way to 'expose, unsettle, and pervert' its form. Emphasizing this small spunky punctuation mark leads me to the next question: what does moving the apostrophe do?

This might look like:

- a. 'the masters tools' can never dismantle the masters house

Or quite similarly:

- b. the masters tools can never dismantle 'the masters house'.

Again, manipulating the apostrophe does not provide a metaphor for Lorde's sentence (e.g.: the master's tools=money; the master's house=the White House). That is, playing with the apostrophe does not seek a dialectical symbolic explanation for what the master's tools or

house “are”. Rather, playing with the apostrophe ‘perverts’ the very idea that the tools or the house could ever belong to the master, ‘exposes’ in manipulatory mockery the very idea of ownership. The exercise in hacking the apostrophe reveals by way of troubling, of unsettling, *what might become possible when we heed the ethical mandate to challenge our thinking and praxis*. Hacking enacts the *abolitionist imagination* as a purposeful and active force of de/composition and radical transformation. It is a way to play with/in that which might be considered the ontological confines of the world, or that single *carceral imagination*. The objectives of this exercise are abolitionist, in the way that Moten and Harney define the object of abolition: “not so much abolition as the elimination of anything but abolition as the founding of a new society” (2013, 42). Not a means to an end but both an end and a means, hacking is about the founding of new worlds.

Ferreira da Silva names the hack as a way to “assemble tools with which to think and live in the world otherwise” (38). Often, when asked to think about the creative potentials of the force of imagination, the popular call to ‘think outside of the box’ is invoked. To think of new tools. But what would it mean to play within the box? What is there to play with, in the box? What tools are already available or at our disposal for manipulation? What might we refuse or trouble? What might we *hack*? In “Hacking the Subject” (2018) Ferreira da Silva identifies the hack as “/”. Using mathematical poetics, she mobilizes the “/” *as a tool*. The “/” is a means for purposeful transformation, “a mark that has the ability to cut through forms and to suspend the usual meaning of anything following it” (35). A mark that has the ability to attend to the *impossible*. Inspired by Ferreira da Silva, and by way of Lorde, Kaba, brown, Wilson Gilmore, Hayward, Gossett, Bey, and Barad, the final chapter of this thesis aims to hack justice by way of the “/”.

Chapter Four: Hacked Justice

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere”- Martin Luther King Jr.

“An ethico-political program that does not reproduce the violence of modern thought requires re-thinking sociality from without the modern text... This requires that we release thinking from the grip of certainty and embrace the imagination’s power to create with unclear and confused, or uncertain impressions”- Denise Ferreira da Silva 2018, 58

I began this thesis project with an inquiry into justice. An inquiry sparked by tuning in to the cantor of the chorus corralling in the city streets of my childhood upbringing, of my present, and inevitable of my future. *No justice, no peace*. In reprising reiteration, the recital of this choral cry haunts this project. The echoing enticement of the question that occupies my waking mind- *what is to be done regarding the question of justice*- begs, taunts an answer. Ideally, this answer can be actualized and therefore exists within the frame of reality. Ideally this answer is possible, is it not? The point of concern that this thesis has tried to address thus far is that the very conditions of ‘possibility’, of ‘reality’, are predicated on the violence of modern thought- *sequentiality, separability, and determinacy*- that which cannot help but situate justice in violence, in death. Why is it that every time justice is invoked, it is at the receiving end of violence, of injustice? What does it mean that since embarking on this thesis project each cry for justice is heard in the same breath as the call to ‘the say their names’⁴⁹? This final chapter is an attempted response, not answer, to these questions; an attempt to activate what I have named as an *abolitionist imaginary* in helping “release thinking [justice] from the grip of certainty” (Ferreira da Silva 2018, 58), an attempt to figure a re/orientation towards an ethical grammar of justice.

What will be proposed is nothing new, no thoughts outside. By way of what Denise Ferreira da Silva refers to as “refusal as a mode of engagement” (2018, 22), this final chapter rejects punctuation, the doctrines of which have come to follow questions such as *what is to be done* through the determinant analytics of cause and effect. Put differently, this final chapter does not culminate with a proposal for some ‘other’ or ‘new’ kind of justice, nor does it propose a theoretical intervention or some offer an ‘alternative ontology’. For as I have tried to show

⁴⁹ “Say Every Name”

throughout this thesis project, to propose an ‘alternative’ ontology risks reproducing the violences of the World (capital W), the classifications of which delimit the word (justice) within the grammar of coloniality and the equation of justice as ‘we’ know it. Guided by desire, this project culminates in an experimental endeavor informed by those of Denise Ferreira da Silva. This experiment is one that can be infinitely replicated and thus this thesis ends in an invitation, in a line of flight that perhaps escapes the confines and pages of this thesis entirely, one which can be picked up by anyone, or perhaps by no one. Inspired by Denise Ferreria da Silva (2017, 2018, 2020), my final move in this project is to ‘hack’ justice.

i. hacking as a poetic performative experiment

Ferreira da Silva identifies “refusal as a mode of engagement” as ‘hacking’. As she develops in “Hacking the Subject” (2018) and “ $1 \text{ (life)} \div 0 \text{ (blackness)} = \infty - \infty \text{ or } \infty / \infty$: On Matter Beyond the Equation of Value” (2017), hacking allows her to go “further in/down/through but beyond the observed divisions” (2017, 2); that is, hacking opens ways to go beyond the three onto-epistemic pillars governing *the Modern Grammar*. In various projects (2017, 2018, 2021) Ferreira da Silva employs hacking through the use of mathematical poetics to help the imagination break away from the enclosures of *the Modern Grammar*.

In her pursuit of justice, mathematical poetics allow her to both disclose what lies at the limits of justice ‘as we know it’ and also open the way for potentials of living together differently (2017). In her project $1 \text{ (life)} \div 0 \text{ (blackness)} = \infty - \infty \text{ or } \infty / \infty$: *On Matter Beyond the Equation of Value*, for example, Ferreira da Silva refuses the formulation of Hegelian Universality⁵⁰ governed by formalized syntax and activates the disruptive force of “blackness” in what she names as “the Equation of Value” (4). Her project begins by revealing how the triad of modern thought – *separability*, *sequentiality*, and *determinacy*- constitute the ethical indifference with which racial violence is met (ibid). In order to expose this triangulation, she revisits genealogical constructions of Western/European thought, specifically that of Bacon, Descartes, Aristotle, Hegel and Kant; she needs to revisit these dead white male thinkers in

⁵⁰ Put very succinctly, Ferreira da Silva understands Hegelian universality as “the very arsenal designed to determine and to ascertain the truth of human difference” as that which “already assume[s] Europeaness/whiteness as the universal measure” (2017, 8). Universality is the actualization of what she refers to as the Kantian program, a dialectical method that actualizes the notion of Hegel’s figure of Spirit as rational and free, and introduces a temporal figuring of cultural difference in relation to Spirit, which as result postulates post-Enlightenment European social configurations as the fullest development of Spirit- as the Universal subject (2016, 60).

order to rupture the onto-epistemological ground upon which modern economic, juridical and ethically indifferent scenes lay (5). For it is because of these philosophical contributions, (Bacon, Descartes, Aristotle, Hegel and Kant), that “Europeanness/whiteness” is assumed “as the universal measure” (8). Following her charting, her project turns to the force of blackness. Blackness, she contends, is not excluded per se within this figuring of Universality, for the category of “Europeanness/whiteness” is created and maintained through a separate and oppositional relationality to blackness. Rather, as Ferreira da Silva reveals, “blackness *occludes* the total violence necessary for this expropriation, a violence that was authorized by modern juridical forms—namely colonial domination” (8, emphasis in original). That is, blackness holds the potential to disrupt the violence authorized by the colonial order, the violence authorized by *separability*, *sequentiality*, and *determinacy*. As a negation to this (un)ethical program, blackness both has the capacity to unsettle the equation of colonial modernity and do so “*without reproducing the violence housed in knowledge*” (9, emphasis added). Ferreira da Silva affirms this negation by way of mathematical poetics. She identifies blackness as the variable of ‘0’ [zero] and moves to expose what happens when these variables interact, in what she names as “The Equation of Value”⁵¹. What is revealed is not that blackness as a negation is non-existent, but rather that blackness is actually infinity⁵². Proliferating the poetic potential of blackness as a negation, Ferreira da Silva claims “a radical praxis of refusal to contain blackness in the dialectical form” (11). Her experiment obliterates the three pillars governing modern thought and gestures towards “that which exists without time and out of space, in the plenum” (*ibid.*).

This entire thesis project is at once a tracing and response to Ferreira da Silva’s wording and worlding. The structure alone mirrors in meek mimicry the structure of her project “1(life) ÷ 0 (blackness) = ∞ – ∞ or ∞ / ∞: On Matter Beyond the Equation of Value” (2017). I began chapter one by revealing my personal preoccupations with how I came to understand justice, in the liberal humanist and racial colonial context of the contemporary United States. I then moved to attend forms of protest that came to the forefront in the spring and summer months of 2020, some of which offered up and for justice a figuring of accountability predicated not on the universal measure of punitive logics, but on community caring and healing. Following this, I aimed to stay with the *emergence* of demands made in 2020, tuning in to the question of

⁵¹ I should note that this is a very shoddy attempt to explain the radicality and poetical force of her project, to which I can never do justice.

⁵² The Equation of Value reveals that: 1(life) ÷ 0 (blackness) = ∞ – ∞ or ∞ / ∞. “Blackness as *matter* signals ∞, another world: namely, that which exists without time and out of space, in the plenum” (2017, 11).

justice from a place of *abolition*. More specifically, I read the project of abolition feminism as one which refuses that which is 'taken as such' and began to ask how Ferreira da Silva's "refusal as a mode of engagement" (2018, 22) opens way to proliferate the 'impossible', and perhaps gesture towards a *relational justice*. Finally, now in this chapter, I have set out to 'hack' justice by way of the "/".

Throughout this project I have continued to reference the three pillars that Ferreira da Silva excavates in her projects *Towards a Global Idea of Race* (2007), "On life 1 (life) \div 0 (blackness) = $\infty - \infty$ or ∞ / ∞ : On Matter Beyond the Equation of Value" (2017), and "On Difference Without Separability" (2016). As has been routinely reiterated, I am concerned that these three pillars- *separability*, *sequentiality* and *determinacy*- currently contain and limit invocations for justice within *the register of carcerality*, within the equation of justice as I see it now. I am concerned that the reason these pillars limit invocations for justice is because they do not figure an understanding of justice as *relational*. I want to suggest that Ferreira da Silva's three pillars, which I critiqued throughout this project, are that which contain justice within a *poetics of non-relation*. In a direct bowing nod to Édouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* (1990), this last chapter proposes a poetic intervention, an experimental move that refuses the three onto-epistemic pillars, or the *poetics of non-relation*, and in doing so moves towards an ethical re/orientation of a grammar of justice, towards a *relational justice*.

The use of the "/" is central to the proposed exploration of a re/orientation towards an ethical grammar of justice. The "/" interrupts the syntax of the word, refusing to be (con)(de)defined by the grammatical realities of the English language. Beyond a metaphor for refusal, this syntactical structure allows me to conceptualize a paraontological praxis that relishes in the in-between, that goes 'in/down/through' the usual analytics writing the conditions of possibilities for justice. The purpose of the paraontological project is not to offer an 'outside' or 'new' ontology. Rather, it is a means to conceptualize ways of being with one an/other that are neither confined nor defined by the contemporary realities of coloniality, and the fixity of ontology that structures white supremacy (Black Study Group, 2015). Paraontology, like the "/", allows me to attend to the question of justice without risking providing a succinct answer to the question. In summary, I seek to employ the "/" as a troubling refusal, as a means to approach and to stay with the question of justice from a non-hegemonic entry point. In this chapter I want to investigate how the "/", as a poetic force, dis/rupts and dis/orients the current logics containing justice and opens way for attentive modes of being in

ethical relation with one an/other. Though I began to attend to the idea of relationality in chapter two, with regards to Destiny Arts Center’s coalitional focus on community care, and in chapter three, through attention to the history of the abolitionist project and liberatory imaginings, in this chapter I explore how the performative poetic praxis of hacking might help experiment towards figuring a *relational justice*. The “/” for me is therefore a poetic tool that allows me to hack justice as I see it now, a guiding compass in my search towards an ethical re/orientation of a grammar of justice.

ii. the itinerary

I mobilize a diffractive approach in my exploration of the relational potentials offered by the “/”. As such, the first section traces the method and concept of diffraction as it has become known since feminist physicist Karen Barad’s *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007). Section iv moves to explore the relational potentials offered by the “/” in language. I read the “/” as a tool in language and move to ask how this tool might help me hack justice. Following this, section v affirms an affiliation between Barad’s method of diffraction and Ferreira da Silva’s mode of engagement, which allows me to experiment with a diffractive understanding of the “/” as a poetic tool for hacking the equation of justice. Inspired by black feminist, trans*feminist and abolitionist traditions of generating the ‘impossible’ into existence, section vi employs the “/” as a way to go ‘in/down/through but beyond’ the usual analytics governing and containing justice within *the Modern Grammar*, as a way to experiment with the equation of justice as I see it now.

My goal in this final chapter is to “challenge the law that language lays down while taking advantage of the opportunity that language affords” (Moten 2004, 962). Summoned by Moten’s provocation and by way of Barad’s method of diffraction and Ferreira da Silva’s ‘refusal as a mode of engagement’, this chapter moves to explore further the “/” in my own consideration of justice. Much like its form, the “/” takes me into the void “teeming with desires” (Barad 2012, 13), teeming with the “the possibilities for justice-to-come” (17). In this place of, with and in justice, I invite you, the reader, to tune into a justice that refuses dialectics, a sort of angular invitation to dive down in and through by way of amplification, an invitation towards an ethical re/orientation of justice, towards a *relational justice*.

iii. diffracting justice

“Justice, which entails acknowledgment, recognition, and loving attention, is not a state that can be achieved once and for all. There are no solutions; there is only the ongoing practice of being open and alive to each meeting, each interaction, so that we might use our ability to respond, our responsibility, to help awaken, to breathe life into ever new possibilities for living justly... How to understand what is entailed in the practice of meeting that might help keep the possibility of justice alive in a world that seems to thrive on death?” – Karen Barad 2007, x

Karen Barad opens their seminal book *Meeting the Universe Halfway* by declaring their commitment to justice: “the yearning for justice, a yearning larger than any individual or sets of individuals, is the driving force behind this work”, they attest (2007, xi). Queering quantum physics, Barad galvanizes their drive for justice in their propositions and insights into the intra-active, entangled, and ethico-political, onto-epistemic relationalities of the world. Barad’s brilliance opened up and for the Western world tools to rethink classical epistemology and ontology (Thiele 2014, 205), to re-think linear time, the ‘innocence’ of Science, and most importantly for me, to rethink the ways in which we are response-able and account-able to each other and to the world in its on-going becoming.⁵³ For the purpose of this final chapter, I choose to focus on their method and concept of diffraction in my own exploration of justice.

Diffraction, as both method and concept, rethinks classical notions of duality as dichotomous and invites a praxis of think-doing differently. By refusing the binary logics governing Modern Thought that write concepts as separate in their differentiation, diffraction opens ways to explore a re/orientation towards an ethical grammar of justice. Far from a physicist, I am wary of attempting to write about diffraction, afraid that I will or already have misspoken on the technicalities of what diffraction is, or does. Still, it feels crucial to attend to diffraction because following Kathrin Thiele, diffraction presents an ethical insight into ways of “relating-in-difference” (2013, 203)—precisely what the “/” is after.

In *Meeting the Universe Halfway* Barad introduces diffraction as a quantum physical phenomenon that illuminates the complexity of material matter (2007, 207). Such a phenomenon comes into being when a multitude of waves encounter an obstacle in their path, or when waves overlap. This process of interference creates diffraction patterns. Thinking of

⁵³ I cannot come close to doing justice to the worlds formed and foraged by their words.

ripples in water helps me to understand diffraction further. So, when two sets of ripples undulate, the place where they meet is their interference. Or put differently, the point of collision, where the peaks of the waves overlap, is their interference. Diffraction, in the way Barad aims to translate it to the cultural theoretical field, both investigates the different patterns created at and beyond this point of interference *and* accounts for the different phenomena and movement of each respective ripple. In Barad's own words: "we can understand diffraction patterns- as patterns of difference that make a difference- to be the fundamental constituents that make up the world" (2007, 72).

In feminist theory diffraction is often used as a figurative means to critically attend to difference in consciousness and thought (ibid). For example, Trinh Minh-ha's (1988, 1997) philosophical approach towards identity might be figured as diffractive. Minh-ha refuses the Hegelian trope (self vs. other) and conceptualizes identity and difference not as static markers, but rather as *relational* (ibid). Donna Haraway too, directly adopting Minh-ha's 'inappropriate/d others', and attends to and employs diffraction. For Haraway, diffraction allows for "an optical metaphor" (1997, 16), an approach that embraces a "more subtle vision" than the binary optics of Science (capital S) which write the World (capital W) in nominalized oppositional terms- subject(ive) vs. object(ive). A diffractive approach allows Haraway and other post-humanist and new materialist feminist thinkers such as Vicki Kirby, Kathrin Thiele, Birgit M. Kaiser, and Iris van der Tuin to engage in an affirmative praxis of confronting dualisms, a critical mode of engagement concerned with breaking the logics of "binary dialectics" in attending to the ethico-political issues of our world (Parallax, 2014)⁵⁴.

Inspired by Barad's quantum feminist figuring of diffraction I want to re/engage with the current equation of justice as I see it now-as predicated on its opposite, injustice. A diffractive approach might allow me to side-step the classical notions of duality, writing injustice and justice as oppositional and therefore might allow me to attend to the equation of justice as I see it now, *differently*. I want to explore this thought with help from the "/". My inquiry asks: how might diffraction as a methodology and the poetic descriptor of the "/" hack the wor(l)d of justice? In order to attend to this inquiry, I begin with the "/" in language.

⁵⁴ I must note, as it is very important to my own discussion here, that diffraction is not merely a metaphor in Agential Realism. As a quantum concept, diffraction cannot be contained to the dialectic. Rather, as Barad explains in *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, diffraction is an ontological descriptor.

iv. the “/” as a tool for thought

“How is it that a work can bear content, have something to say, while not being wholly bound to the constraints and the requirements of making meaning?”- Fred Moten 2013, 961

How to write without being bound to the grammatical requirements of the word? What lies between that which is known, teeming in the perceived moments of silence, of separation? What is there to say? Better yet, how to begin on what to say? This is my challenge for justice: to put into words without violating the conditions of possibility that language- not words- might permit. Perhaps, to begin in this sense is to attend to that which is not considered a word but is employed as a tool in language.

In language, “/” is used as a tool to keep together terms that might be considered apart. For instance, it is often used when writing concepts considered oppositional, or dichotomous: this/that, self/other, black/white, trans*/cis. Additionally, the written “/” signals a sense of capaciousness for the categorical: friends/family/community. At times, it even motions towards an implied ellipsis: hey/hi/hello/whatsup, towards an implied unfinishedness, an indeterminacy⁵⁵ of sorts. “/” thus holds together that which might be seen as separate, or different⁵⁶. In other words, “/” marks a slippage in the constraining logic that writes difference as separate. A figuring of relationality as separate/together.

Let me return to the inquiry on how the method of diffraction and the poetic descriptor of the “/” might hack the equation of justice, the wor(l)d of justice. The other day I was discussing this thesis project with a friend. I explained my concerns with justice (now)- that it is predicated on an equation that necessitates violence, that situates the term as afterthought. We discussed potentials for justice, if there was hope for justice, if there could ever exist a

⁵⁵ I use indeterminacy as a direct reference to Karen Barad’s theorizing on Agential Realism and quantum indeterminacies. See: “Posthumanist Performativity: Towards an Understanding of how Matter Comes to Matter” or “Re-mem(ber)ing the Future, Re(con)figuring the Past-Temporality, Materiality, and Justice-to-Come: Affirmation and Negation in the Political Imagination”.

⁵⁶ Poststructuralist philosopher Jacques Derrida speaks on the slash (“/”) through his theory of deconstruction. Derrida is concerned with how concepts come into existence through oppositional reference to one another. For example: wet/dry, where wet is only wet because it is not dry. In attending to this binary opposition and construction of meaning, he proposes deconstruction as a way to erase the boundaries writing concepts as oppositional and reveal how concepts are both socially created, constructed and thus porous (1998). The slash is central to his theoretical exploration for it allows him to introduce a ‘third term’ and explore potential that exists beyond binary constructions. “The outcome of this deconstructive intervention is thus a displacement of the opposition, where the two original terms are shown to share a relation to a new “concept” that exceeds them both” (Haddad 117).

justice outside of this equation. At some point during the conversation I asked, “what is the opposite of justice?” My friend responded with confidence, “well, injustice of course”. Initially, I received their response with irritation- it felt reductive. Of course, injustice is the opposite of justice, I thought, scoffing in annoyance. Injustice and justice are two different, separate, apart, and *unrelated* terms, I thought, puffing in vexation. Writing this now, I am scoffing again, nodding my head in disapproval of the ‘narrow parameters’ limiting my imagination, limiting my desire for ‘think-practicing’ justice differently. My friend’s seemingly didactic response was actually an invitation: an invitation of the black feminist regard, to take these differences- injustice and justice- and make them a strengths (Lorde 1984, 110). What might affirming the negation, injustice, have to offer for justice? Or better yet, how even to affirm this negation? Perhaps, by hacking.

a. hacking, agential cuts, and the “/”

Hacking is defined two ways. First, hacking is understood as a verb that refers to ‘the gaining of unauthorized access to data in a system or computer’ (Cambridge Dictionary Online)- e.g. ‘my email account has been hacked’. For example, the international organization WikiLeaks uses hacking to publish and leak classified news and media. In this definition, hacking is an intentional move that defies the Stately forces writing the rules and boundaries of inside versus outside, of right and wrong. That is, hacking as a mode of engagement does not wait for the green light of approval before it makes its move. Hacking refuses to play by the rules⁵⁷. Sneakily sizzling its way into the system, hacking comes from the inside in to rupture in refusal the optics of the codes ‘taken as such’.⁵⁸ The second understanding of the verb hacking is ‘to cut with rough or heavy blows’. For example, hacking wood to make kindling for a fire. In this definition, hacking is understood as a *cutting*, or making an intentional *slash* in some thing.

I want to figure this second understanding of hacking by way of Barad’s theorizing on *agential cuts*. Barad attests that “agential cuts do not mark some absolute separation but a cutting together/apart” (2012, 46). In this defining quote, their use of the “/” can be seen in some ways as a poetic descriptor of the agential cut. ‘Together’ and ‘apart’ are terms thought

⁵⁷ Hacking might be best understood as, in the words of Marquis Bey, “going by them Goon Rules” (2019)

⁵⁸ Hacking is like diffraction in this way, for as Kathrin Thiele attests diffraction does “not merely address the need to think outside the box, beyond dialectics and binaries, but inherently connects to practicing and acting *with-in* this world” (2014, 204, emphasis added).

of as being opposites, separate, and therefore *unrelated*. But Barad's use of the “/” marks the two terms as both together *and* apart; in one move that little slashy scribble both separates and connects by way of *relating*. The agential cut is, according to Barad, a quantum ontological descriptor that characterizes the ongoing entanglements and intra-activity of the world.⁵⁹ Importantly, and true to its name, there is *agency* in where the cut is enacted. That is, and in their own words, “it's all a matter of *where* we place the cuts” (ibid, emphasis added). What ethico-political virtue does this assertion invite for justice? Perhaps, Barad's words invite a call to hack. That is, in the second definition of the word, to hack, understood as *to cut* or *to slash*.

v. / hacked justice

“In Relation the whole is not the finality of its parts: for multiplicity in totality is totally diversity. Let us say this again, opaquely: this idea of totality alone is an obstacle to totality”- Édouard Glissant 1990, 192

I want to visualize the hack, the agential cut, as the “/”. My move is inspired by Denise Ferreira da Silva's “Equation of Value ” and asks: How might hacking have the capacity to ‘unsettle’ the equation of causality currently determining a justice predicated on violence? More specifically, how might I mobilize the poetic capacity of the “/” and the method of diffraction in an experimental endeavor that side-steps the hegemonic ways of the world containing invocations and imaginations for *justice* as oppositionally oriented to *injustice*? How might I ‘expose’ or ‘transform’ the equation by proliferating the violence that is always already there (injustice), rather than searching for some outside answer (justice)?

To attend to this exploration, let me begin by revisiting the equation of justice, as I see it now. The equation is predicated on a sequence of events. In order for justice to be invoked, injustice must occur. We can assume that injustice refers to an act or occurrence involving violence. For example, the occurrence of the police murder of George Floyd was an act of injustice. The calls for justice in the case of the murder of Floyd were a response to the

⁵⁹ In their own words, the agential cut provides “a contingent resolution for the ontological inseparability with phenomenon” (2007, 348). Unfortunately, I do not have the space here to do justice to Barad's theorizing on the agential cut, a key part of Agential Realism. For more see their chapter on “Quantum Entanglements” in *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, (2007) and “Posthumanist Performativity: An Understanding of how Matter comes to Matter” (2003).

occurrence of this injustice, the act of murder⁶⁰. As such, and in direct quote to my friend, this equation figures “injustice as the opposite of justice”. Writing out this relationality might look like:

a. injustice/justice⁶¹

Because of diffraction, we can understand these two terms as more than opposites; we can understand them as both together and apart. A diffractive reading of this equation – injustice/justice- attends to the interconnectedness and innate relation between these two terms. Diffraction tells us that there is more going on than injustice being separate from justice and pays attention to the patterns created at the point of intersection of these two terms. Injustice overlaps with justice, justice overlaps with injustice. The undulating and multiplicitous waves of this cause and effect complexifies these two terms as more than simply being separate and linearly sequential. In summary, a diffractive read on this equation tells us these two terms are always already *entangled*. How might we visualize this entanglement through experimenting with the equation? Better yet, how might we attend to this entanglement by way of the “/”? Again, the experimental equation currently stands as:

b. injustice/justice

But diffraction tells us that these two terms are, in their relationality, neither separate, sequential nor determinant; we know these two terms are always already entangled. Why, then, not simplify the equation and write it as:

c. in/justice

What does this experimental move in hacking, this agential cut, do to both injustice and justice? Moving the “/” breaks up the logic writing justice as *separate* from injustice. Moving the “/” breaks up the *sequential* logic writing injustice as a priori to justice. Moving the “/” therefore dis/orients the logic of the equation of causality, or that which writes justice as always already *determinately* predicated on violence—the very concern carrying this thesis project. However,

⁶⁰ This equation can be applied to most calls for justice. The act of injustice is figured a priori to demands for justice. For example, in the case of calls for justice for indigenous land rights, the case of calls for justice for lives lost at sea in the Mediterranean, and now in the case for the unjust distribution of COVID-19 vaccines. Justice is always an afterthought to injustice. Operating through the ideological optics of linear time, justice is always too late.

⁶¹ It does not matter if you write this experiment as injustice/justice or justice/injustice; regardless of the order injustice will always be figured as antecedent.

the experiment with the “/” does not do away with violence. Quite the contrary, the experiment with the “/” writes justice *as always already inside injustice, as always already inside violence*. The experiment in hacking and cutting by way of the “/” is, in and of itself, an inherently violent experiment. That is, neither the move itself, hacking, nor the ‘outcome’ of the experiment do away with violence, with injustice. Rather, the experiment proliferates the violence I was so determined to get away from and in doing so *comes from the inside in to re/orient a relational figuring toward and in/justice*. Put differently, the experiment “prefigures [in/justice], without determining it a priori” (Glissant 1990, 192).

What does this relational figuring, not the totalizing ‘outcome’, offer up and for notions of accountability? What is the ethico-political demand of this re/oriented relationality in/justice? For me, the relational poetics of this justice figure an entangled sense of responsibility to one an/other and to the planet. For, to speak with Barad, “entanglements are relations of obligation” (2007, 265). The relational poetics of being in/justice call for a confrontation with the always already implicatedness of/with/in the world's ongoing becoming, and therefore our inherent entangledness with the world's ongoing violences. The praxis of being in this relationality - *in/justice*- means being in “an irreducible relation of responsibility” (ibid). A relationality inherently concerned with and for the ethical. For as Barad contends “ethics is not simply about the subsequent consequence of our ways of interacting with the world as if effect followed cause in a linear chain of events” (ibid). That is, justice can never be figured as ethical if it is invoked as an effect, following the cause of an act or occurrence of injustice. Because, as Barad continues, “ethics is about taking account of the *entangled* materializations of which we are a part, including new configurations, new subjectivities, new possibilities—*even the smallest cuts matter*” (2007, 384, emphasis added). An ethical justice, to speak with Barad, is about attending to the ways in which we are always already entangled with and in/justice. And in such attention, it is about finding those new community configurations not reliant upon the Stately grammar of carcerality, about caring for one an/other, taking accountability even and especially in and through occurrences and acts of violence. The poetics of this justice motion towards an always already entangled relationality, a relationality with and *in/justice*.

I set off on this project with the intention of figuring a re/orientation towards an ethical grammar of justice. My desire led me to “refusal as a mode engagement” (2018, 22), to attempting to activate *the abolitionist imaginary* in my yearning search for justice. The

activation of this imaginary I explored by way of experimenting with the hack. The hack is a sort of paraontological exploration, a move that does not do away entirely with the onto-epistemic violences of the world but somehow still finds a way to move ‘in/down/through but beyond’ them. Despite my unending desire to unravel the equation of justice as I see it now, to dis/orient justice from injustice, I experimented with the hack as a way to affirm this negation as a way to move towards (and) in/justice. More specifically, I mobilized the “/” as an agential cut. Kathrin Thiele attests that “which cuts are made, to speak with Barad, will make a difference” (2014, 204). This thesis project, this cut, might not make a difference. But maybe, just maybe, it will open way for the project that will.

I leave this project the way I began, by listening. Listening to that a-temporal chant, whose echoing cry I hear today again for the first time “break[ing] a rhythm whose tactile complexity must be maintained” (2008, 1745). Fred Moten regards this kind of listening as study, specifically the field and force and tradition of radical black study, or that which calls on “every last bit of texture, as an opening gambit held in reserve” (ibid). The tenets of this textural attention and arousal are what Moten identifies as “the paraontological distinction” (ibid).

The paraontological distinction brings the secrecy and openness of this gather into relief as well. All this—which was always so essentially and authentically clear in its wrought, inventive, righteous obscurity—now often suffers being revealed and reviled in critique that advances by way of what is supposed to be the closure of authenticity, essence, and experience (1746).

“The network that expresses the ethics”, to speak with Glissant, always risks being made transparent once again, risks being tidied up into amicable and neat, legible and possible answers. And still, in refusal to be closed, the paraontological project exists, resists.

Paraontological resistance requires a paleonymic relation. What Jacques Derrida (1998) refers to as the dedication to putting old words to work. To refusing to take things as such while being okay with not knowing in the sense of what Glissant refers to as “transparency”, of *knowledge*, but knowing in the sense of a commitment to “opacity”, knowing as an ongoing project that accepts the grave responsibility of what it means to be in relation to one another (1990, 190). Paraontological resistance requires what abolitionist activist Mariame Kaba refers to as “the disciplinary praxis of hope”, that is, “a community praxis of collectivizing care”

(2020). It is in this paraontological place that I figure *in/justice* as a praxis of caring for and with one an/other. It is through these *Poetics of Relation*, that I tune in to that syncopated synth *no justice, no peace*, tune in from a place of poetic study, from a place of imagination, motivated still by a desire for *liberation*.

No justice, no peace: a final note on being in/justice

I leave this project, or perhaps begin again, the way I began, by listening to that chant- *no justice, no peace*- this time, in poetic study. Trembling in its treble, tuning into the tactile complexity of this rhythm is challenging to put into words. Perhaps even, as Nathaniel Mackey and Fred Moten might say, “words don’t go there”. Where words don’t go, *no justice, no peace* went and goes, grooving in a sort of coalitional contrapuntal way. In poetic study, this syncopated beat grooves in/justice.

In music, syncopation refers to that off-beat, to a variety of rhythms that cannot necessarily hold a tune on their own but when played together make a piece of music.

Most Western music holds a beat that follows a 4 by 4 meter. A meter is a rhythmic pattern constituted by the grouping of basic beats into regular measures, or bars. You, the reader, can explore this beat by clapping in a continual series of 1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 4. This simple clapping in 4s is considered the ‘natural’ way of Western music. The pulse of this common pattern can be recognized in the common tune: ‘do, re, mi, fa, so, la, ti, do’. The notes in this song fall in abiding line with this ‘natural’ pattern. A pattern that seems to follow an equation. A pattern that writes notes which pulse, in rehearsed recital and repetition, in straight rhythmic time, as they should.

Syncopated notes, however, do not fall on that pulse. They exist within the meter, but they do not follow this ‘natural’ pattern. They refuse it, interstitially residing in that in-between space.

We expect the note to fall on the marked beat, but syncopation is out of beat. Side-stepping the metrical logics of Western music, syncopation refers to the sound before the note, the sound created “in the break” (Moten 2003), the murmurings that if you dare listen to, become “impossible to turn your back on, to carry on like the world is the same” (Hartman 2019, 447).

Syncopated notes do not and cannot stand on their own; they are tied together, inherently always bound, entangled to one an/other.

No justice, no peace is a syncopated chant. Somehow, some impossible way, the chant dares always to break the rules and laws of music, to proliferate a relational connection in its dedicated praxis of imagining, of refusing to be contained.

No justice, no peace, and we keep that synth sonic beat, chanting that quantum choral cry, that rhythmic undercurrent, buzzing even in moments of perceived silence.

References

- #SayTheirNames. “#Say Their Names” Accessed August 15, 2021. <https://sayevery.name/>.
- Akbar, Amna. “An Abolitionist Horizon for Police (Reform).” *California Law Review* 108, no. 6 (2020): 89-155.
- Barad, Karen. “Diffracting Diffraction: Cutting Together-Apart.” *Parallax*, 20, no. 3 (2017): pp. 168-187.
- Barad, Karen. “Feminist Theory Workshop Keynote—Karen Barad: Re-membering the Future, Re(con)figuring the Past: Temporality, Materiality, and Justice-to-Come.” Youtube video, 1:05:52. May 19, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cS7szDFwXyg>.
- Barad, Karen. “On Touching—The Inhuman That Therefore I Am.” *Differences* 23, no. 3 (2012): 206-223.
- Barad, Karen. “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter.” *Signs*, 28, no. 3 (2003): 801-831.
- Barad, Karen. “Transmaterialities: Trans*/Matter/Realities and Queer Political Imaginings.” *GLQ*, 21, no. 3 (2015): 378-422.
- Barad, Karen. “What is the Measure of Nothingness? Infinity, Virtuality, Justice.” *100 Notes—100 Thoughts/ 100 Notizen—100 Gedanken* 13, no. 1 (2012): 4- 34.
- Barad, Karen. *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2007.
- Bell, Marina. “Abolition: A New Paradigm for Reform’.” *Law & Social Inquiry*, 46, no. 1 (2021): 32-68.

Berger, Dan and Ruth Wilson Gilmore. "Foreword: Same Boat." In: *The Struggle Within: Prisons, Political Prisoners, and Mass Movements in the United States*, 11-20. Dexter: Kersplebedeb Publishing and Distribution 2014.

Bey, Marquis. "Together Again for the First Time." *Comfort Hive* (2021): 8-11.

Bey, Marquis. *Anarcho-Blackness: Notes Towards A Black Anarchism*. San Francisco: AK Press, 2020.

Bey, Marquis. *The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Gender*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020.

Bey, Marquis. *Them Goon Rules: Fugitive Essays on Radical Black Feminism*. Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 2019.

Bey, Marquis. "Trouble Genders: "LGBT" Collapse and Trans Fundamentality." *Hypatia* (2021): 1-16.

Bill Text – California Legislative Information.

https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201520160AB953

Black Study Group. "The Movement of Black Thought". *darkmatter: in the ruins of imperial culture* 10 no.1 (2015): 1-10.

Braidotti, Rosi. "Affirmative Ethics and Generative Life." *Deleuze and Guattari Studies* 13 no. 4 (2019): 463-481.

Brown, Wendy. "Rights and Losses." In *States of Injury*, 96-135. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995.

Carrier, Nicolas, Piché, Justin. "Blind sports of abolitionist thought in academia." *Penal Field*, 12 (2015): 1-24.

Critical Resistance. "Policing Timeline." Accessed July 26, 2021.

<http://criticalresistance.org/policing-timeline/>.

Critical Resistance. "Reformist reforms vs. abolitionist steps to end IMPRISONMENT."

August 4, 2021. http://criticalresistance.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/CR_abolitioniststeps_antiexpansion_2021_eng.pdf.

Critical Resistance. "What is the PIC? What is Abolition." Critical Resistance. Accessed

August 4, 2021. <http://criticalresistance.org/about/not-so-common-language/>.

Davis, Angela. "Uprising & Abolition: Angela Davis on Movement Building, 'Defund the

POLICE' & Where We Go from Here." Interview by Amy Goodman. Democracy Now! June 12, 2020.

https://www.democracynow.org/2020/6/12/angela_davis_historic_moment.

Davis, Angela. *Abolition Democracy*. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005.

Davis, Angela. *Are Prisons Obsolete?* New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003.

Derecka, Purnell. "How I Became a Police Abolitionist." The Atlantic. July 6 2020. Accessed

August 4, 2021. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/07/how-i-became-police-abolitionist/613540/>.

Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.

Destiny Arts Center (@destinyartscenter). "#STANDWITHBLACKYOUTH." Instagram,

Feb 1 2021. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CKw2NuWB21X/>.

Destiny Arts Center (@destinyartscenter). "The Black Whole. #theblackwhole." Instagram,

April 30 2021. <https://www.instagram.com/destinyartscenter/>.

Destiny Arts. "About Destiny." Accessed August 2, 2021. <https://destinyarts.org/about-destiny/>.

El-Hadi, Nehal. "Ensemble: An Interview with Dr. Fred Moten." *M,I,C,E. (4)* [open access at: <https://micemagazine.ca/issue-four/ensemble-interview-dr-fred-moten>.

Escobar, Bia (@biaescobar). "March to Camp Out, July 13, 2020. Youth organized @youthprotectthebay @shayayy__ performance by @destinyartscenter Youth Performance Company." Instagram, July 16 2020. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CCtW-JPhxmZ/>.

Fausset, Richard. "What We Know about the Shooting Death of Ahmaud Arbery." *The New York Times*. April 28, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/article/ahmaud-arbery-shooting-georgia.html>.

Ferreira da Silva, Denise. "1 (life) ÷ 0 (blackness) = ∞ – ∞ or ∞ / ∞: On Matter Beyond the Equation of Value." *e-flux journal #79* (2017) [open access at <https://www.eflux.com/journal/79/94686/1-life-0-blackness-or-on-matter-beyond-equation-of-value/>

Ferreira da Silva, Denise. "Hacking the subject: Black feminism and refusal beyond the limits of critique." *philoSOPHIA* 8 no. 1 (2018): 19-41.

Ferreira da Silva, Denise. "No-Bodies: Law, Raciality and Violence." *Meritum Belo Horizonte* 9 no. 1 (2014): 119-162.

Ferreira da Silva, Denise. "On Difference Without Separability." *Issuu*. (2018) [open access at https://issuu.com/amilcarpacker/docs/denise_ferreira_da_silva.

Ferreira da Silva, Denise. "The Future of Two Presents." *Social Text*. November 24, 2020. https://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_article/the-future-of-two-presents/.

Ferreira da Silva, Denise. "To Be Announced: Radical Praxis or Knowing (at) the Limits of Justice." *Social Text* 13 no. 1, 43-62. Durham: Duke University Press, 2013.

Ferreira da Silva, Denise. "Towards a Black Feminist Poethics: The Ques(ion) of Blackness Toward the End of the World". *The Black Scholar* 44 no. 2 (2014): 81-97.

Ferreira da Silva, Denise. *Towards a Global Idea of Race*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

Ferreira da Silva. "Corpus Infinitum". Vimeo video, March 25, 2021.
<https://vimeo.com/528873608>.

Foucault, Michele. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Humans Sciences*. New York: Routledge, 2002.

Friedersdorf, Conor. "The Case for Police Reform is Much Bigger Than Michael Brown." *The Atlantic*. November 26 2014. Accessed August 4, 2021.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/11/the-case-for-police-reforms-is-much-bigger-than-michael-brown/383210/>.

Geers, Evelien, Van der Tuin, Iris "—Diffraction & Reading Diffractively." *New Materialism*. July 27, 2016. <https://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/d/diffraction.html>.

Gilmore, Kim. "Slavery and Prison—Understanding the Connections." *Social Justice* 27, no. 3 (2000): 195-205.

Glissant, Édouard. 2011. "One World in Relation: Édouard Glissant in Conversation with Man- thia Diawara." *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, 28: 4–19.

Glissant, Édouard. *Poetics of Relation*. Minneapolis: University of Michigan Press, 1997.

- Gordon, Avery. *Ghostly Matters*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.
- Gossett, Che. "Revolution is not a one time event. WE SEE THE HORIZON: ABOLITION NOW!." *Silver Press*. September 13, 2020.
<https://silverpress.org/blogs/news/revolution-is-not-a-one-time-event-videos>.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. "Introduction: To the Untimely." In *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution and the Untimely*, 1-17. Crowns Nest: National Library of Australia, 2004.
- Gurman, Sadie. "U.S. Mandates Body Cameras for Federal Law-Enforcement Offices." *The Wall Street Journal*, Dow Jones & Company. June 8, 2021,
<https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-mandates-body-cameras-for-federal-law-enforcement-officers-11623110510>.
- Haddad, Samir. *Derrida and the Inheritance of Democracy*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013.
- Halberstam, Jack. "Queer Temporality and Postmodern Geographies." In *In a Queer Time and Place*, 1-35. New York: New York University Press, 2010.
- Haraway, Donna.
 "Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan©_Meets_OncoMouse™." In *Feminism and Technoscience*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Haraway, Donna. "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others." In *The Haraway Reader*, 63-124. New York and London: Routledge, 1992.
- Harney, Stephano, and Fred Moten. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*. Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2013.
- Hartman, Saidiya. "Saidiya Hartman on insurgent histories and the abolitionist imaginary." *Artforum*. July 14, 2020. <https://www.artforum.com/interviews/saidiya-hartman-83579>.

- Hartman, Saidiya. *Wayward Lives: Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women and Queer Radicals*. New York: Norton & Company, 2019.
- Hayward, Eva, Gossett, Che. "IMPOSSIBILITY OF *THAT*." *Angelaki*, 22, no. 2 (2015): 15-24.
- hooks, bell. *Belonging: A Culture of place*. New York: Routledge, 2009.
- Human Rights Watch. "US: 14 Recommendations for Fundamental Police Reform." August 12 2020. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/08/12/us-14-recommendations-fundamental-police-reform>.
- Hussein, Jaylani and Nekima Levy Armstrong. "Killed over a Car Air Freshener: OUTRAGE Grows over Police Shooting of Daunte Wright in Minnesota." Interview by Amy Goodman. Democracy Now!, April 13, 2021. https://www.democracynow.org/2021/4/13/daunte_wright_minnesota_police_killing.
- Jacobs, Harriet. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. New York: Dover Publications, 1861 [2001].
- Jacobs, Julia. "Making a Connection Between Movement and Social Movements." The New York Times. August 11, 2020..
- Kaba, Mariama, Josie Duffy Rice, and Reina Sultan. "Uncaging Humanity, Rethinking Accountability in the Age of Abolition." Bitch Media, December 8, 2020. https://www.bitchmedia.org/article/mariame-kaba-josie-duffy-rice-rethinking-accountability-abolition?utm_medium=email&utm_source=engagingnetworks&utm_campaign=Abolition+Interview+4.16.2021&utm_content=Abolition+Interview+4.16.2021+A.
- Kaba, Mariame. "Against Punishment: A Resource by Project NIA and Interrupting Criminalization." Open access at: https://issuu.com/projectnia/docs/against_punishment_curriculum_final.

- Kaba, Mariame. “Yes, We Mean Literally Abolish the Police. Because reform won’t happen.” *The New York Times*. June 12, 2020.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/12/opinion/sunday/floyd-abolish-defund-police.html>.
- Kaba, Mariame. *We Do This ‘til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transformative Justice*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2021.
- Kaiser, Birgit M. and Kathrin Thiele. “Diffraction: Onto-Epistemology, Quantum Physics and the Critical Humanities.” *Parallax* 20 no. 3 (2014): 165-167.
- Keeling, Kara. *Queer Times, Black Futures*. New York: New York University Press, 2019.
- Kushner, Rachel, Wilson Gilmore, Ruth. “Is Prison Necessary? Ruth Wilson Gilmore Might Change Your Mind.” *The New York Times*. April 17 2019. Accessed August 4, 2021.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/17/magazine/prison-abolition-ruth-wilson-gilmore.html>
- Legislative Analysts Office. “A Primer: Three Strikes - the Impact after More than a Decade.” *A Primer: Three Strikes: The Impact After More Than a Decade*. Accessed July 27, 2021. https://lao.ca.gov/2005/3_strikes/3_strikes_102005.htm.
- Lorde, Audre. “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House.” In *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, 110-114. Berkeley: Crossing Press 1984.
- Lujan, Carol Chiago, and Gordon Adams. “U.S. Colonization of Indian Justice Systems: A Brief History.” *Wicazo Sa Review* 19, no. 2, (Fall 2004): 9-23.
- Macias, Amanda. “Biden, Harris praise guilty verdict in Derek Chauvin murder trial, but say more must be done to fight systemic racism.” *CNBC*, April 20, 2021.
<https://www.cnn.com/2021/04/20/biden-harris-praise-guilty-verdict-in-derek-chauvin-murder-trial.html>

Mackey, Nathaniel. *Splay Anthem*. New York: New Directions, 2006.

maree brown, adrienne. "Happy Birthday Marsha!" Youtube, uploaded by Silver Press, September 8, 2020,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Du8eY2bLKzU&list=PLz2Q_jGG-LlGcAd2GaSuRtRuku8wbIIUC.

maree brown, adrienne. *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*. San Francisco: AK Press, 2017.

McKittrick, Kathrine. "Before *Man*: Sylvia Wynter's Rewriting of the Modern Episteme." In *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, 90-106. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015.

Melton, A.P. 1995. "Indigenous Justice Systems and Tribal Society." In *Judiacture* 79 no. 3 (December): 126-133.

Mill, John Stuart. *Utilitarianism*. London: Parker, son, and Bourn, 1863.

Minh-ha, Trinh. "Not You/Like You: Postcolonial Women and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and Difference." In *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*, 415-419. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988.

Mirsky, Laura. "Restorative Justice Practices of Native American, first Nation and Other Indigenous People of North America: Part One." *E Forum: Restorative Practices* (April 2004): 1-7.

Moten, Fred. "Black Op." *PMLA* 123 no.5 (2008): 1743-1747.

Moten, Fred. "Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)." In *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 112, no. 4 (2013): 737- 780.

- Moten, Fred. *In the Break: The Aesthetics of Black Radical Tradition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.
- Moten, Fred. *In the Break: The Aesthetics of Black Radical Tradition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.
- NAACP. “Criminal Justice Fact Sheet.” Accessed August 4, 2021.
<https://naacp.org/resources/criminal-justice-fact-sheet>.
- Plaza Pública. “Ocho Claves Para ENTENDER Un Poco Mejor La Justicia Indígena.” February 16, 2017. <https://www.plazapublica.com.gt/content/ocho-claves-para-entender-un-poco-mejor-la-justicia-indigena>.
- Prevas, Christine. “Police Abolition and the Possibility of Radical Transformation.” *Abolition Democracy* 13/13. October 27 2020.
<http://blogs.law.columbia.edu/abolition1313/christine-prevas-police-abolition-and-the-possibility-of-radical-transformation/>.
- Puar, Jasbir. “Bodies With New Organs: Becoming Trans, Becoming Disabled.” In *Right to Maim*, 33-61. New York: Duke University Press, 2017.
- Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice: Revised Edition*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971.
- Rodriguez, Dylan. “Abolition as Praxis of Human Being: Foreword.” *Harvard Law Review* 132 (2019): 1575-1612.
- Rowell, Charles H. and Fred Moten ““Words Don’t Go There”: An Interview with Fred Moten.” *Callaloo* 27 no. 4 (Fall 2004): 954-966.
- Ruggiero, Angela. “Judge throws out case of East Bay transgender woman’s in-custody death.”

East Bay Times, March 28, 2018. <https://www.eastbaytimes.com/2018/03/27/judge-throws-out-case-of-transgender-womans-in-custody-death/>.

Sithole, Tendayi. *The Black Register*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020.

Spillers, Hortense. "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 64-81.

Snorton, C. Riley. "Introduction." In: *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity*, 139-175. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017.

The Washington Post. "Fatal Force: Police Shootings Database." January 22, 2020. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/investigations/police-shootings-database/>.

Thiele, Kathrin, and Birgit M. Kaiser. "What is Species Memory? Or, Humanism, Memory and the Afterlives of '1492'." *Parallax* 23, no. 4 (2017): 403-415.

Thiele, Kathrin. "Ethos of Diffraction: New Paradigms for a (Post)humanist Ethics." *Parallax* 20, no. 3 (2014): 202-216.

Thiele, Kathrin. "Introduction: On Ethics and Poetics." In *The Thought of Becoming: Gilles Deleuze's Poetics of Life*, 9-28. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.

Thiele, Kathrin. "Quantum Physics and/as Philosophy: Immanence, Diffraction, and the Ethics of Mattering." *Rhizomes* 30 (2016): 1-7.

TMZ. "Celebs Join Protests in L.A... Support #BLM." June 2, 2020. <https://www.tMZ.com/2020/06/02/celebrities-protest-george-floyds-death-black-lives-matter-los-angeles/>.

Tzul Tzul, Gladys. "La Forma Comunal de la Resistencia" *Abya Yala Dossier* (Abril): 105-

Tzul, Tzul, Gladys. ““La Potencia Política De Lo Comunal Indígena’ CONVERSATORIO CON Gladys Tzul Tzul |.” *Traficantes de Sueños*, May 20, 2019.
<https://www.traficantes.net/actividad/%C2%ABla-potencia-pol%C3%ADtica-de-lo-comunal-ind%C3%ADgena%C2%BB-conversatorio-con-gladys-tzul-tzul>.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. “Why Promote Prison Reform?” Accessed August 4, 2021. <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/justice-and-prison-reform/prison-reform-and-alternatives-to-imprisonment.html>.

Until Freedom. “About Us.” Accessed July 27, 2021. <https://untilfreedom.com/about/>.

Van der Drift, Mijke, Raha, Nat. “Radical Transfeminisms: Trans as Anti-static Ethics Escaping Neoliberal Encapsulation.” *New Feminist Studies: Twenty First Century Critical Interventions*, (2020): 13-24.

Williams, Nikema and Jorge Renaud. “How the “Abolition Amendment” Would End Constitutional Loophole That Allows Forced Labor in Prisons.” Interview by Amy Goodman. *Democracy Now!* June 30, 2021.
https://www.democracynow.org/2021/6/30/abolition_amendment

Wilson Gilmore, Ruth, Kilgore James. “The Case for Abolition” *The Marshall Project*, The Marshall Project, June 19, 2019. <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2019/06/19/the-case-for-abolition>.

Wynter, Sylvia. ““No Humans Involved”: An Open Letter to My Colleagues.” *Forum N.H.I. Knowledge for the 21st Century* 1 no.1 (1994): 42-74.

Wynter, Sylvia. “1492: A New World View.” In: *Race Discourse, and the Origin of the Americas: A New World View*, 5-57. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995.

Wynter, Sylvia. "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument." *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3 no. 3 (2003): 257-337.