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Black Lyric Privacy

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For the Black person, there is no privacy to be had in the scene and instance of the racist act. That is, a defining terror of racist violence, at least as such violence is rendered in language or in non-physical actions, is its publicness, the fact that a racist happening —enacted by another—necessarily connotes a public domain. Moreover, the sheer publicness of the racist happening contrasts directly to the force of such happening which lives in the affective, intimate, psychic—*private*—being of the one who is Black. Antiblack violence, as Frank B. Wilderson III notes, is "prelogical;" it has no foundation indexable to the Black person.[1] This, too, heightens the dissonance between the racist thing and the one to whom it happens.

My thinking about racist violation and Black privacy could begin with a poem, a slightly long verse which holds two iterations of a terrible violence, Marilyn Nelson's "Minor Miracle":

Which reminds me of another knock-on-wood
memory. I was cycling with a male friend,
through a small midwestern town. We came to a 4-way
stop and stopped, chatting. As we started again,
a rusty old pick-up truck, ignoring the stop sign,
hurricaned past scant inches from our front wheels.
My partner called, "Hey, that was a 4-way stop!"
The truck driver, stringy blond hair a long fringe
under his brand-name beer cap, looked back and yelled,
"You fucking niggers!"
And sped off.
My friend and I looked at each other and shook our heads.
We remounted our bikes and headed out of town.
We were pedaling through a clear blue afternoon
between two fields of almost-ripened wheat
bordered by cornflowers and Queen Anne's lace
when we heard an unmuffled motor, a honk-honking.
We stopped, closed ranks, made fists.
It was the same truck. It pulled over.
A tall, very much in shape young white guy slid out:
greasy jeans, homemade finger tattoos, probably
a Marine Corps boot-camp footlockerful
of martial arts techniques.

"What did you say back there!" he shouted.
My friend said, "I said it was a 4-way stop.
You went through it."
"And what did I say?" the white guy asked.
"You said: 'You fucking niggers.'"
The afternoon froze.

"Well," said the white guy,
shoving his hands into his pockets
and pushing dirt around with the pointed toe of his boot,
"I just want to say I'm sorry."

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He climbed back into his truck
and drove away.[2]

The anecdote here swells with the assault that doubles through the poem, an assault first compressed in one husky stanza where the epithet is hyper-indented, then repeated in a slimmer one. Indeed, thinking about the poem's aesthetics, its shape and its style, is relevant to appreciating the manner of its engagement with violence and the matter of Black privacy. So, in addition to beholding the repetition (more on this shortly), we might notice the poem's three irregular stanzas, the first one domineering in shape and length when considered next to the second and third, each six lines, each consumed largely with unfolding dialogue. Then, we might notice the way the poem begins *en medias res*, on a fragmented and dependent clause. Or the superb repetition (polyptoton) in the fourth line which deploys the word "stop" as two different parts of speech (noun, past tense verb). This syntactical flourish inflects another, the noun turned into verb—hurricaned—as well as another, Nelson's sustained use of compounded adjective clauses to create extravagant noun phrases: "knock-on-wood / memory," "small midwestern town," "4-way / stop," "rusty old pick-up truck," "unmuffled motor, a honk-honking," and the extravagance of "stringy blond hair a long fringe / under his brand-name beer cap" and "Marine Corps boot-camp footlockerful / of martial arts techniques."

It is hard to love a poem that describes a racist assault, though I love all of these poetic features, all this sensitivity to syntax, this excess which imbues the poem with a vitality. The poetics here frame, even reframe, the poem's straightforwardness, configuring the quotidian (assault) as the spectacular (assault). These poetics crowd and qualify the scene of the racist happening; they also establish a speaker, a voice of subjective attentiveness and precision who experiences and narrates the racist happening, whose only action in the poem is to tell it stylishly. Said another way, all of these poetic flourishes attune us to the one in the poem, a Black speaker whose narrating is of the lyric condition.

Though "Minor Miracle" is not conventionally a lyric, its aesthetic excessiveness evokes a lyric voice of robust feeling. And thinking about the poem's vocality, its speaker's speakerliness, allows us to consider its achievement of privacy.

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Harsh as it is, read the poem again and focus, this time, on its Black-world quality. That is, notice how the speaker and her friend—I say "her" because in lyric convention, the speaker is the poet's persona—are not explicitly described as being Black though the assailant is named as white: first "blond hair" then "white guy," three times, as well as all the other coded metalanguage cues that articulate his whiteness as a cohered sign of social, political, gendered meaningfulness.[3] This difference is crucial, since it establishes the poetic scene as one being told from the perspective of a Black speaker, such that her Blackness is taken for granted, unmarked … the speaker and her friend are ordinary humans in the world. Of course, the speaker's Black world exists in, or in regard to, an

antiblack world—and in an antiblack world, assaults like this one are so commonplace and commonsense that the marking of Blackness is not necessary. Indeed, the epithet—the possibility that the epithet could be hurled—marks the unmarkedness.

And still, the small ("minor") orienting effect of Nelson leaving Blackness unmarked, can be read as a *righting* of Black being, where in a Black world imaginary, the Black one is a one, differentiated not by the logics of racist ideology but by the differentiation of being from being. The fact that this gesture of rightness happens in a poem which narrates an instance of racist violence is all the more profound: the speaker and her friend are centered as *ones* in the poem, the poem is oriented toward them even in the midst of a terrible violation.[4] Notice, for example, how the speaker and her friend acknowledge the happening, and then:

> We remounted our bikes and headed out of town.
> We were pedaling through a clear blue afternoon
> between two fields of almost-ripened wheat
> bordered by cornflowers and Queen Anne's lace

If we think of the hyper-indented epithet as a caesura in the dense first stanza, as a break or pause in the middle of things, then these four lines are something of a second caesura in the way they sanction a pause that descends the poem back into the subjective being of the speaker and her friend. They are not aloof to or immune from the threat of (more) violence, but the threat exists alongside the afternoon, the fields and petal-soft flowers. Here, the simple past tense of "remounted" and "headed" gives way to the past progressive continuity of "We were pedaling," shifting time slightly so that the speaker and her partner are suspended before us. That suspension, the continuity of their pedaling, returns them—treacherously, mercifully—to the quotidian, as the past progressive tense cinches our poetic attention to the speaker, her doing and feeling, her condition of being a lyric subject in the world of the poem.

Of course, the assault happens again, and with an enhanced perversity as the speaker's friend is called to re-narrate the incident and someone (the speaker or her friend, since the speech is untagged) repeats, at the white antagonist's prompting, the violent epithet.

> "And what did I say?" the white guy asked.
> "You said: 'You fucking niggers.'"
> The afternoon froze.

With this fantastical image of the afternoon freezing, Nelson's poetics establish a breathing moment, stillness as both release and trepidation.[5] And then the poem concludes with an apology, the leaving of the white actor, and a pocket of silence from the speaker or her partner:

> "Well," said the white guy,
> shoving his hands into his pockets
> and pushing dirt around with the pointed toe of his boot,
> "I just want to say I'm sorry."
> He climbed back into his truck
> and drove away.

Notice the propulsion of action here—"said" and "shoving" and "pushing," as well as

"climbed" and "drove," all verbs of expressivity and motion, all ascribed to the white man in the scene. And it is here the poem ends, on this *vacuum* of action which I call a vacuum because of the notable absence of a response from either the speaker's friend who, thus far, has been an active counterpart in the poem or, more compellingly, from the speaker herself.

I love that the poem leaves this moment open, such that the speaker doesn't reckon with the apology (she neither accepts nor refuses it) nor offer a lesson. The racist thing happened, then happened differently, and then there was nothing. This aporia might seem as if the poem is incomplete, but what the opening offers is the speaker's right of feeling, right *to* feeling. There is no expectation that the speaker should be outside of herself so as to philosophize or resolve the happening. The poem leaves her in a perfect state of incompleteness, "perfect" as in the grammatical connotation of completeness. Said another way, this complete incompletion floats past the poetic frame as it evacuates the ending and also evacuates the speaker from the scene that needs an ending.

Nelson's poetics, in that regard, are superb.

The poem's ending executes a rare instance of privacy in the midst of a racist attack as the speaker gets to be unresponsive, in-thought and in-wonder, in regard to the ever-public scene of racist assault. And since feeling can't properly be approximated on the page, the poem ends in a superlative lyric enactment: the inconclusiveness of severe feeling. Via the repetition of the racist event, we have been set up to want a transformation and a reconciliation, something to fulfill what is implied in the white man's return and the happening's replay. Certainly, there is a completeness for the white actor, at least as he exists in the poem as one who does and then redoes and then tries to undo a violence. But that completeness is neither the end of the poem nor the end of the racist act's affective register for the poem's speaker.

If we are reading on behalf of the Black female speaker—and there is no other way to read this poem, since it belongs to her human condition—then the poem's ending is an offering of privacy. We are made to bear the possibilities of what she might feel in the midst and afterlife of this event. Maybe she wants retribution, maybe she is sad, embarrassed, terrified. Maybe its occasion will cohere differently to her over time, warying and wearying her being or inciting some definitive doing. Whatever the case may be, we are left with the possibility forged by lyric aporia: a poem that ends but does not conclude, a poem that breaks into intense nothing.

All Black being is private as much as it is anything else, though this truth gets confounded by the ever-social reality of Blackness in an antiblack world. I love, then, that Nelson's "Minor Miracle" aestheticizes a scene of Black violation that declines away from the expectation that such instances have to be consonant with the public orientation of Blackness, and leans toward the possibility of an openness of feeling. I love the way the poem seems to allow the speaker's telling to levitate in and above and around the racist happening, as if this constellation is an act of being of privacy … a right to opacity … how it accounts for harm by not

accounting for harm … how it manages the inexpressible private quality of an inexpressible public thing.[6]

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Can the racist thing be private? Should the racist thing be private?

In *The Erotic Life of Racism*, Sharon Patricia Holland makes a call for us "to take care of the *feeling* that escapes or releases when bodies collide in pleasure and in pain," what she names the erotic or psychic life of racist encounters.[7] Holland's book conceptualizes racism as a phenomenological event of belonging and attachment, as fractures of relation between (Black) human and (white) human. And indeed, the matter of thinking about the ordinary affective dimensions of racism necessarily makes recourse to the political and the public, since racism is a legacy of collectivity and, as such, its incidences provoke reckoning with the legacies of anti-black modernity.

Said another way, the racist thing is an occasion for thought, where thought is construed as discourse, as that which leans toward argument, completeness, resolution, and reconciliation. And yet there is often (always?) an *ambivalence* in the Black writer's engagement with racist assault, a hitch which evidences something that surpasses the expectations of argument: a moment that reveals an inexpressible yearning. In Holland's *Erotic Life*, this entanglement is narrated via the opening incident in the Safeway parking lot where "an older (but not elderly) white woman" makes a request which, when unfulfilled, causes her to say indignantly, "And to think I marched for you." Notice the progression of Holland's speaker's response:

> I was stunned at first—when something like this happens to you, you see the whole event in slow motion. I recovered and decided that I had two options: to walk away without a word or to confront the accusation—to model for Danielle [a friend's fifteen-year-old daughter] how to handle with a modicum of grace what would surely be a part of the fabric of her life as a black woman in the United States.[8]

Here, the being "stunned" is quickly sequestered by resolve and the speaker makes two turns away from (or into) the happening, first throwing her voice through the projection of second person ("when something like this happens to you") and then in declaring an urgency to act as a model. In these moves, the charge of the racist event lingers unrepresentably, remains beyond the resolve and the clear delineation of a will to act: "The scene from the parking lot stays with me … The psychic violation of that moment in the parking lot haunts me still."[9]

We see a similar unfurling of chargedness in W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*, where the speaker describes the (white) schoolgirl's refusal of his card:

> It is in the early days of rollicking boyhood that the revelation [of being a problem] first bursts upon one, all in a day as it were. I remember well when the shadow swept across me. I was a little thing … In a wee wooden schoolhouse, something put it into the boys' and girls' heads to buy gorgeous visiting-cards—ten cents a

> package—and exchange. The exchange was merry, till one girl, a tall newcomer, refused my card,—refused it peremptorily, with a glance. Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil.[10]

This refusal is a racist thing and its affective register tingles in Du Bois's elevated language. But I am struck by the anecdote's conclusion, especially the way Du Bois's language moves from standard prose into vernacular:

> I had thereafter no desire to tear down that veil, to creep through; I held all beyond it in common contempt, and lived above it in a region of blue sky and great wandering shadows. That sky was bluest when I could *beat my mates at examination-time, or beat them at a foot-race, or even beat their stringy heads*. Alas, with the years all this fine contempt began to fade … [11]

The progression from an exam to a race to a fight escalates the relation between the speaker and his white peers. But notice also that the language intensifies via the energy of the vernacular idiom "beat their stringy heads," a speakerly eruption that contrasts Du Bois's overall diction. Even the "Alas" and the characterization of this recollection as "fine contempt" sharpen the distinction of "stringy heads" as an outlier, a radiant iteration that slips from the poise of argument. (Notice, too, that Du Bois does not have his speaker enact a response to the moment—that will become relevant later.)

Moments like these are common in writing about the racist happening. Indeed, we might read Claudia Rankine's deployment of a lyric second person in *Citizen: An American Lyric* as an attempt to mimic the confounding and excessive logics of narrating racist encounters.[12] These rhetorics display the tension between the drive to describe—expose—the nuances of racist events, and the lingering materiality such events constitute for their Black subjects: the impossible matter of privacy embedded in racist violence. If the racist thing is an occasion for thought, then thought has to be imagined awry of the terms of publicness, more akin to the phenomenology of feeling. Not argument or resolution, not exposure and certainly not reconciliation: feeling, the unresolved and unclear interface with the openness of being of experience.

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First, a bit on the vocative of racism and then the vocative of the lyric: In *Martin Heidegger Saved My Life*, Grant Farred explores a racist encounter by thinking with Heidegger's provocation about thinking, speaking, and being: "The white woman asked me, 'Would you like another job?,'" his speaker begins, describing the moment when he is doing yardwork at his own home and is misrecognized in a white couple's limited imagination.[13] Farred's prose and thinking is stylish and nuanced, and he stretches the gap between this terrible question and his response for pages, setting a scene that introduces himself as a Black South African immigrant, a professor of Africana Studies and

English at Cornell University, a father and husband living in Ithaca. He describes growing up within Apartheid, being legible as a Black man in the US, and the overlapping consciousness of diminished regard in being addressed by someone white, even (or especially) a stranger. This set-up dramatizes his dramatic response: "I responded, without missing a rhetorical beat, 'Only if you can match my Cornell faculty salary.'"[14] He attributes this response, its think-fullness, to having studied Heidegger, not exclusively Heidegger (Fanon, Du Bois, Foucault too) but especially and ironically Heidegger given the racist exclusion and Nazi sympathizing in Heidegger's writing and life.

I'll come back to the adroit "without missing a rhetorical beat," but first I want to consider Farred's terrific explication of racism as a call of voice:

> The voice erupts; her voice has erupted, rudely, into the solitariness of my labor; it jolted me out of my contemplations and my physical enjoyment. The power of the voice is that it impels us, sometimes whether we want to or not, to listen. The voice draws us to it. The voice draws unto worlds that are not ours, calls out to us, giving us, as Heidegger says, "food for thought." The voice becomes the stuff of our thinking because the voice makes us think about what it is that calls us. The voice makes a political difficulty of how it is that we are called—how a voice, here or there, from today or long ago, calls out to us. How the voice *calls to us, calls other voices, other sounds, other resonances, other inflections to us*—every voice has the potential to animate other voices. It seems possible that a single voice, with the smallest calling out, can make every other voice present to us.[15]

This passage characterizes the racist invocation via a phenomenological materialization of voice, not just the voice of the racist actor, but the relational pull of the encounter. And in addition to Farred's move from first-person singular ("my labor") to the first-personal plural, the us that energizes the passage, I am struck by his description of the trouble and awe of being interpellated: "the voice calls to us, calls other voices, other sounds, other resonances, other inflections of us—every voice has the potential to animate other voices." There is a tension here between the specific horror of the racist hail, and the general call that is being in the world; there is tension as Farred's speaker navigates between Black subjection and relational subjectivity. In this tautness, the speaker highlights the difficulty of talking (publicly) about the racist violence.

In his argument about thinking, Farred uses voice to showcase how complicated the racist encounter is for Black thought, including how nonrelational the racist event is as a moment of interpellation: the Black person is called into speech by speech, and is expected to speak (back), even as none of the occasion regards the Black person as a human. In truth, the expectation of Black speech here is un*reason*able. And yet, because Farred narrates such a crisp response, he seems to imply that a non-response to the white couple's racist call would be the equivalent of non-thinking.[16]

This implied conclusion is unintentional, since we know that thinking is not easily displayed or performed.[17]

How, then, to represent the perplexity of thought, of voice-as-experience, of the one in a racist encounter? Perhaps an answer might be in considering the vocative of the lyric.

That is, the lyric makes possible a beholding of the subject's subjectivity and subjection, the enactment of voice that belongs, volatilely, to the one who speaks. In the lyric, the speaker speaks as the "I" publicly without surrendering the intimacy of the "I." This is the case that Jonathan D. Culler explicates in *Theory of the Lyric*, describing the form as a "mode of enunciation, where the poet speaks *in propria persona* … the subjective form."[18] Moreover, in the lyric, the "poet absorbs into himself the external world and stamps it with inner consciousness, and the unity of the poem is provided by this subjectivity."[19] We might think of the lyric as a theater of subjective consciousness, a text of feeling that marries interior and exterior. As such, the lyric dramatizes a scale of feeling, and its force manifests through the voice of its speaker whose intensity and expressiveness represent the right to be unsettled by experience. And if we misread the lyric via "the assumed solidity of the speaking, universal 'I,'" then we will miss the ways in which lyric poetics have evolved, especially in regard to Black writing.[20] This claim is from Anthony Reed's *Freedom Time*, which argues for a Black postlyric in which the self is "extinguished of person," where voice is inflected with saturation, maximality, even avant-garde or experimental complexity. I am roused by Reed to use lyric terms to study the capacities of Black poetic thinking.[21]

*

Which brings me back to "Minor Miracle," its case of the speaker's voice, and the matter of privacy in regard to the racist assault: I am struck, again, that the poem authorizes the voice of its speaker, the Black female one who experiences and witnesses the racist thing, and who narrates it without response—that the speaker doesn't have a comment about the incident (maybe the poem is the comment), that the poem ends without concluding. "Minor Miracle" doesn't poeticize the racist happening as an occasion for the Black one to exhibit preparedness of response, since how could one be prepared for the horrible? Even if one has experienced the horrible before, as is the case with the regularity of racism, each horrible is its own intense horrible, each occasion an experience onto its own.

Both Du Bois, in the earlier citation from *Souls*, and Nelson decline to characterize their speakers *in response to* the racist incident—with Du Bois we get a narration of the speaker's processing of the happening contemporaneously ("Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness") and then reflectively ("I had thereafter no desire to tear down that veil," "all this fine contempt began to fade"); with Nelson, the speaker speaks the scene as an emphatic presence but without any account of her deliberation, save maybe in the immediate aftermath of the first assault: "My friend and I looked at each other and shook our heads." The poetic choice Nelson makes in aestheticizing silence—here, and in the moment prior to the

second assault: "The afternoon froze"—shouldn't be dismissed as if the poem is merely a transcription of an incident. Yes, Nelson tells us that "Minor Miracle" describes a happening from the 1970s, but surely the poem is a poem, shaped into specific articulation to exemplify a specific feeling. As such, the recourse to an absence of speech, especially in a poem so full of speakerly moves, emboldens my interest in considering how privacy is organized in regard to a racist thing.

I am compelled by the poetic aporia in "Minor Miracle," the work it does to approximate Black privacy. I am compelled by the way Nelson enacts a kind of radical openness, a relationality even, for the Black one in a scene of racism—radical, because the racist happening is profoundly anti-relational, because response to such happening almost, by definition, cannot be relational. The poem leaves the speaker's consciousness and beholding open. Nelson's aesthetic recalls Patricia J. Williams's achievement in *The Alchemy of Race and Rights*, a memoir where the Black speaker exists as a "floating signifier" in a first-person speech act:

> I pause for a moment and gaze out the train window. My life, I think, has become one long stream of text, delivered on the run to gatherings of mostly strangers. *It is a strange period in my life, watching the world whiz by, these brazen moments of intimate revelation to no one in particular in my declared challenge to the necessary juxtaposition of the personal with the private.*[22]

Williams's book, subtitled as a "dairy of a law professor," dislocates the lyric "I" such that the speaker can watch herself in scenes of contingency. Hers is a remarkable fidelity to privacy in the midst of a book about law and social history, a book which cautions about privatizing public matters. *Alchemy* conceptualizes a speaker who stays with her thinking and its process, who ponders and theorizes violent doing but whose response to specific perpetrators is often an alcove of non-response.

In the poem "the times," Lucille Clifton uses the verb phrase "to remain human" as a way to invoke the cautious necessity of being open in a terrible world.[23] I read Williams's diary and Nelson's poem as attempts to invite an instance of Cliftonian *remaining*.

Poetic aporia: The aesthetic miracle of Nelson's poem is the way it exemplifies a right of being for the speaker who is left with the recounting of the incident and whatever tinglings that recounting might constitute. The speaker is at once there, present, and is also harbored in the distance of her telling. And then, just like that, she is done and stops. The poem almost executes an exclusion in terms of what it is to read it. Such exclusion is a will to privacy, where privacy is not a zone immune to the harm of social or public world, but instead a force of inhabitance that regards what is ineffable about being Black and being alive.[24]

Acknowledgments

This essay extends a glimmer of an idea in a brief meditation on Toyin Ojih Odutola's Last Portrait of the 18th Marquess; see Kevin Quashie, "Double Take," *Manual: a journal about art and its making* 14 (Fall/Winter

2020): 82. Thanks to John Casey and Dorin Smith for company in thinking.

Notes

1. Frank B. Wilderson III, *Afropessimism* (New York: Liveright, 2020), 92.

2. Marilyn Nelson, *The Fields of Praise: New and Selected Poems* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 200. Reprinted by permission of LSU Press.

3. His whiteness is compounded in its meaning, akin to the way that Evelyn Higginbotham explores in "African American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," *Signs* 17 (Winter 1992): 251–74.

4. For more on unmarked, see Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993); for more on the idea of a Black world, see Kevin Quashie, *Black Aliveness, or a Poetics of Being* (Duke University Press, forthcoming 2021).

5. This section of the poem almost literalizes the case Judith Butler makes for speech's citationality, that the speech doesn't only belong to the speaker: see *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

6. The notion of a right to opacity is from Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997). Marilyn Nelson's sonnet "How I Discovered Poetry" is another verse that aestheticizes a racist incident; see *The Fields of Praise*, 66.

7. Sharon Patricia Holland, *The Erotic Life of Racism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 6.

8. Ibid., 1–2.

9. Ibid., 2. Holland's argument is about the intimacy, the relationality, indexed by racism; as such, she concludes this statement "but it is the intimacy of that moment that arrests me" (3). She goes on to explore this dynamic which is different than the question I am pursuing in citing her anecdote and arguments.

10. W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Terri Hume Oliver (New York: Norton, 1999), 10.

11. Ibid., 10 (my emphasis).

12. Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2014). Also see Andrew Gorin, "Lyric Noise: Lisa Robertson, Claudia Rankine, and the Phatic Subject of Poetry in the Mass Public Sphere," *Criticism* 61, no. 1 (2019): 97–131; and Claudia Rankine; "The First Person in the Twenty-First Century," in *After Confession: Poetry as Autobiography*, ed. Kate Sontag and David Graham (Minneapolis: Graywolf, 2001), 132–6. On the problem of thought, see Nahum Dmitri Chandler, *X—The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), especially his reading of Du Bois; and Jared Sexton, "The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism," *Intensions* 5 (2011), n.p.

13. Grant Farred, *Martin Heidegger Saved My Life* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 1.

14. Ibid., 19.

15. Ibid., 15 (my emphasis).

16. Ibid., 30.

17. Farred seems to imagine thought in absence of a response when he considers what possible feelings and reactions the white couple might have had to the encounter; see *Martin Heidegger*, 44 and 53–8. For more on thought and Black interiority, see Kevin Quashie, *The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012).

18. Jonathan D. Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 1–2.

19. Ibid., 2.

20. Anthony Reed, *Freedom Time: The Poetics and Politics of Black Experimental Writing* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 99.

21. Ibid., 100. In addition to Reed, my thinking about the lyric leans on Evie Shockley, *Renegade Poetics: Black Aesthetics and Formal Innovation in African American Poetry* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2011); Gillian C. White, *Lyric Shame: The "Lyric" Subject of Contemporary American Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); and Virginia Jackson, *Dickinson's Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

22. Patricia J. Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights: Diary of a Law Professor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 7, 16 (my emphasis).

23. Lucille Clifton, *The Collected Poems of Lucille Clifton 1965–2010*, ed. Kevin Young and Michael S. Glaser (Rochester, NY: BOA Editions, 2012), 545. Copyright © 2000 by Lucille Clifton. Reprinted with the permission of the Permissions Company, LLC, on behalf of BOA Editions, Ltd, boaeditions.org.

24. Privacy here is akin to the sovereignty Toni Morrison advances in the essay "Home": "From the beginning I was looking for a sovereignty—an authority—that I believed was available to me only in fiction writing," in *The House That Race Built: Black Americans, U.S. Terrain*, ed. Wahneema Lubiano (New York: Pantheon, 1997), 3. Also see Candice M. Jenkins, *Private Lives, Proper Relations: Regulating Black Intimacy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Karla F. C. Holloway, *Private Bodies, Public Texts: Race, Gender and Cultural Bioethics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); and Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), especially her articulation of the scene of regulation, 50–62. Thanks to Mike King for conversation here.

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