


Not/Too/Deep: T(h)inking Archipelagic Rhetorical Blackness

Louis M. Maraj

le monde entiere s'archipelise et se creolise
— *Traité du Tout-Monde* (Glissant, 194)

Archipelagic Cargo¹

Breathe chain-linked
to ocean floor; fragment “lodged
between cargo[/]being” (Sharpe 110-11); breathe
as/though/like remnant of what once
together , seeking spaces
for escape, “the dead ... yoked

Louis M. Maraj, reppin’ Trinidad and Tobago, thinks/creates/converses with theoretical black studies, rhetoric, digital media, and critical pedagogies. An award-winning author, he is an associate professor in University of British Columbia’s School of Journalism, Writing, and Media. Learn more about his work at loumaraj.com.

¹ This essay brings together technologies of Black redaction—highlighted in Sharpe (2016) as a kind of “wake work”; elements of “a-/poetics of subjection,” (Maraj, “Subject” 2023) that affectively/expressively engages “Black diasporic migrant work, some nowhere-ness” (48); and those that “mash up de place”: “a desire to revel while also denoting destruction, though sometimes the phrase might conjure one in the other” (Maraj, *Black* xiii). These flow along- and out-side standardized colonial spelling, punctuation, and grammars.

to the dying” (Sharpe, 36). In afterlives,
 [redacted], weather, slavery
 totalizing antiBlackness, [redacted]
 wake, means we can’t
 breathe, but we try—Only to have
 lifestyles suffocate language, only [redacted] turned
 (gone, past) criminal at deaths, at dead, deemed
 to causes of our own
 [redacted]. We pray re/ lease... pressure
 seeping between sss/lash
 [redacted] whip through air as semiotic
 construct—“I can’t breathe” but we
 tryin, we [], we tryin O
 struggle; O trauma, O
 mouthing another name
 dead; dead yoked to dying./.

Much work has been done in rhetoric and writing studies to theorize rhetorical situations, actors, and their environments via the metaphor of the ecology. Such scholarship ranges from early studies of writing situations containing discrete elements like Marilyn Cooper’s to later engagement with the affective and distributed matter of rhetorical situations (Edbauer).² Yet, there remains a fundamental

² See also: Coe, Richard. “Eco-Logic for the Composition Classroom.” *College Composition and Communication* 26.3 (1975): 232-237; Wetherbee Phelps, Louise. *Composition as a Human Science: Contributions to the Self-understanding of a Discipline*. Oxford University Press,

lack in these fields' use of the ecology metaphor as a framing mechanism for communicative scenarios with direct regard to racial capitalism, Blackness, and antiBlackness. This thought-project brings to bear on the rhetorical (1) notions of the ecological useful to analyzing anti/Blackness in theoretical Black studies alongside (2) the performativity of relational Black(ened) Caribbean diasporic poetics. See, the Caribbean islands (and its echoes) emerge as a generative site from which to theorize what political philosopher Malcom Ferdinand (2022) shows as "decolonial ecology" that might challenge interconnected, layered struggles against environmental degradation, settler-colonial domination, systemic racism, and gender-sexual violence. Here/hear we specifically study with Black feminist Christina Sharpe's (2016) notion of "the weather" as the totalizing climate of antiBlackness in the wake of Transatlantic slavery. This climate "necessitates changeability and improvisation" that routinely produces new ecologies to transform "Black being lodged between cargo and being" (Sharpe 106; 110-111). In mapping one such ecology to reveal the workings of that climate in such changeability, the proposal draws on Caribbean philosopher Édouard Glissant's (*Poetics* [1990] 2010) *Poetics of Relation* to re/shape meaning through an exhibitiv argument that tells, listens, and connects a consciousness paralleling a subject with surroundings. These approaches argue/show engaging the concept of deep rhetorical ecologies in Black thought as generatively unruly by theorizing ecological antiBlackness through creole(-ing) Black(ened), undisciplining, poetic means: Language be/getting environments, environments be/getting language, so how we go imagine Black language to weather antiBlackness?

Through these frameworks, this creative, purposefully fragmented study reverberates through the Black Lives Matter memetic "I can't breathe" as a deep

1998; Killingsworth, M. Jimmie and Jacqueline S. Palmer. *Ecospeak*. Southern Illinois University Press, 1992; Dobrin, Sid. And Christian R. Weisser, Eds. *Ecomposition: Theoretical and Pedagogical Approaches*. State University of New York Press, 2001; Blythe, Stuart. "Agencies, Ecologies, and the Mundane Artifacts in Our Midst." In *Labor, Writing Technologies, and the Shaping of Composition in the Academy*, Eds. Pamela Takayoshi & Patricia Sullivan. Hampton Press (2006): 167-186. Rivers, Nathaniel A. and Ryan P. Weber. "Ecological, Pedagogical, Public Rhetoric." *College Composition and Communication* 63.2 (2011): 187-218. Stormer, Nathan and Bridie McGreavy. "Thinking Ecologically about Rhetoric's Ontology: Capacity, Vulnerability, and Resistance." *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 50.1. (2017): 1-25; Gottschalk Druschke, Caroline. "A Trophic Future for Rhetorical Ecologies." *enculturation: a journal of rhetoric, writing, and culture*. 2019. <https://www.enculturation.net/a-trophic-future> ; Jones, Madison. "A Counterhistory of Rhetorical Ecologies." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 51.4 (2021): 336-352.

rhetorical ecology (Maraj, *Black*) within the movement to consider the operations of *rhetorical asphyxia* and its distinct expressive symptoms of antiBlack institutional power-structuring. Rhetorical asphyxia enacts the specificity of “the hold”—as Sharpe imagines the afterlives of the belly of the slave ship—under which antiBlack sentiment, like that cop knee to the neck or stereotypes of criminality, stifles the rhetorical capacities of Black subjects—questioning their very subjecthood. In such instances where Black people deploy “I can’t breathe” to protest their own literal deaths (most infamously) of Eric Garner, George Floyd, and, as the *New York Times* reports, at least seventy victims of police brutality (Baker et al), the phrase rhetoricizes conditions under which signification fails to stick (Sharpe 152) in Black rhetoric. That utterance gives us ways to read moments of rhetorically asphyxiative victim-blaming-like antiBlack eco-logical power-mechanics that characterize social dying/death. Reading to ██████████ *space* might mean laying bare how antiBlackness runs deep through language, culture, lifestyle, science, and what we perceive as conditions by which “Human” life *exists* in the Western world. But could it?

O, as we meditate on breathing as normative processing of antiBlack air, we not goin an work through no alternate re-figuration of breath, aspiration, or means to inhale otherwise. No, through performances, movement in, across, outside prose to poetry to fragment to slash, we might g(r)asp no whe’e/way particular instead. Reaching quite dey/beyond/para *con* meeting *spirare* to plot (*New Oxford English Dictionary*) a particular kind of mixing where language defies by dances with its outsides, we go mix and mash up and make imag██████████ the room to play along, across, frames. By way of *creolizing* language³—in troubling sediment groundin██████████g linguistic ocean floors—we could move to something ██████████ illegible,

³ Language, its contexts, and its politics inherently function as elements of social power and knowledge-making. As Sylvia Wynter reminds, “Cultural conceptions, encoded in language and other signifying systems, shape the development of political structures and are also shaped by them. The cultural aspects of power are as original as the structural aspects; each serves as a code for the other’s development. It is from these elementary cultural conceptions that complex legitimating discourses are constructed” (“Beyond” 65). So, to think with creolizing language necessitates thinking with creolizing theories, the latter a frame that political scientist Jane Anna Gordon’s (2014) work has sought to promote. In Glissantian approaches, these components of creolization—from everyday utterances to lenses through which to grasp larger cultural phenomena—blend concurrently and fluidly in dissolution of system-thought altogether. As language/s meld/s with sound, environment, speech, context, history, race, gender etc. it/they invite us into performance as rhetoric and rhetoric as performance (Conquergood 1992; Senda-Cook et al. 2018)—each break-making the other and their respective vestiges.

divorced of antiBlack ecologies and breathing constructed for the Human and those in its bonds. Come [redacted] trip [] [] where “no words” glance vex, vex, so at/in ecological containment.

Not/[redacted]/[]

New materialist and posthumanist frameworks in rhetorical theory augur the ecology to give primacy to non-human actants and their rhetoricity. Sure, think of the thing, the environment, and how powerful climate change/s impinge/s on our twenty-first century lives.

Dey levees they breaking, ground

quake, flood, making “allyuh done forget Katrina?” land sea, [redacted] folly

[redacted] owning (self) each [] gerunding- proper [redacted]

As Thomas Rickert expands “the subject/object dichotomy remains problematic for rhetorical theory... the world is involved in human activity not as setting but as participant” and “Rhetoric is ambient in that it brings into its work elements beyond the human, and these elements always stand in complex relations” (220). But what of the way in which antiBlackness acts as the means by which the human, whose ontological centrality Rickert and others (Rice, Gries, Barnett and Boyle, etc.) intend to disturb, is produced, rendering Blackness, as Black feminist interdisciplinarian Zakiyyah Iman Jackson contends “in the space of the unthought”? Blackness troubles equalizing construction [redacted] human which offers new materialist departure. These epistemological orientations “therefore are not sufficient grounds for theorizing blackness” (Jackson 17). Drawing from the latter orientation, with Jackson, and other Black feminist thinkers, but specifically from Sylvia Wynter (“Unsettling” 2003), understand the sentient Black as not simply excluded from/denied by ideas of Western Man and their overrepresented constructs but as fundamental to the construction of “humanity” “as its antipodal figure” (Jackson 2020). *Lewwe try a thing* and not think, then, from a-(p)-position of positional denial of what Denise Ferreira da Silva (2007) calls the “transparent I” foreclosed to Black peoples by dominant modern thought. In other words, the “I” of “I can’t breathe” moves with the totalizing conditions of antiBlackness against which the “human” materializes. *Lewwe t(h)ink*, with Blackness, along

with Sharpe (30), with and from what Saidiya Hartman calls the “position of the unthought,” (Hartman and Wilderson 2003) some nutha [].

Building on recent work in *Black or Right*, recall that deep rhetorical ecologies remain “networks of interconnected relationships consist[ing] of evolving series of rhetorical situations in which communication occurs, which are interrelated through bodies, spaces, cultures, and contexts with specific regard to power dynamics and race relations” (Maraj, *Black* 7). By looking at modes in which fatally racialized restriction occurs, consider uneven *relation/ships* between property, Blackness, and causes of death in the victim-blaming potentials of rhetorical asphyxia. T(h)ink, in particular, about the literal and metaphorical slave ship [Transatlantic] transporting, transposing, ma(r)king Black bodies relative to race, gender, sexuality, space, place, ability, language, to cargo, to undo it. T(h)ink, again, with/in Indigenous rhetorician Tiara Na’puti’s notion of “archipelagic rhetoric,” where islands doh simply represent tiny individualized territories for colonial, geopolitical control. Enacted through a Chamoru sense of place, Na’puti emphasizes dynamic relational connections between oceans, peoples, and land in “re-mapping.” Unshoring border, at the peripheries as “Quite here you reach”:

T(h)ink para the usual, verb: meditate, study—as in “you feel is you me have to study?”; sit with and through *think* as in process by which each stitch becomes undone, unfurled to fray. T(h)ink with apposite *tinker* fiddling to no particular end, often, in Black study as Harney and Moten offer, “Study, a mode of thinking with others separate from the thinking that the institution requires of you” (Halberstam 11), but in the mobilized expression of Trini *study*, which signals a deeper care affected often in bother, a “you stud-yin’ them still?” “doh study dat, man!” “all that yuh studying? Is tabanca yuh have?” (Maraj, “Quite” footnote 4, 48)

In the wake of these movements, this *study* extends work on lynching as a “performance complex” by Kirk W. Fuoss, of lynching as epideictic U.S. citizenship by Ersula Ore, how lynching as trope functions as hegemonic temporal rhetoric by Matthew Houdek, and the racialization of stoppage by Lisa Flores. From this overarching perspective, zero on the idea of asphyxia and its connection to weather, conditions that shape the relation/ships between Blackness antithetical to Western Man. This weather, “is the totality of our environments; the weather is the total climate; and that climate is antiblack” (Sharpe 104). How language does move or not move in conjunction with this weather, these environments, the non/being of cargo in the hold of the wake? Tryna breathe, still?

Rhetorical asphyxia traverses multiple forms of “asphyxia in forensic context” as mapped by forensics scientists Anny Sauvageau and Elie Boghossian (1264). In their argument for standardized language to categorically account for deaths attributed to asphyxia, these scientists propose “suffocation,” “strangulation,” “drowning,” and “mechanical asphyxia,” as umbrellaed means to define similar cases (Sauvageau and Boghossian, 2010). And while rhetorical asphyxia might describe the workings of communication for several ends and across these categories, lewwe focus in on latter. The idea essentialized as “mechanical asphyxia” results from pressure outside the body restricting breathing (DiMaio and DiMaio), where, in rhetorical asphyxia, that pressure sustains as the communicative weather of U.S. race relations. This climate of antiBlackness renders Black rhetoric in/through ecologies as “positional asphyxia” (Sauvageau and Boghossian 1264) for Black subjects. “Positional asphyxia also called postural asphyxia” can result:

- “from fatal condition owing to the body being oriented in an unusual position”;
- when “Individuals become trapped in restricted spaces where, because of the position of their bodies, they cannot move out of that area or position; restriction of their ability to breathe” (think here, *O, of the hold, that holding(, still)*);
- “situations where the position of an individual interfered with [their] ability to breathe”
- “When a person remains in a certain position for an extended time, either because of being trapped, or being in a drunken or drugged state; impeding to adequate respiratory movements” (the “hold still” stop, frisk, “hands up!” still holding [us] still)
- “A form of smothering, when an individual is incapacitated”
- “When an individual acquires a certain body position in which their breathing is compromised” (Sauvageau and Boghossian 1264)

Through inter(con)textual reading—a Black rhetoric that “points to and provides conditions for interconnections not readily noticeable between bodies, identities, movements” to find means to question co-constitutive meaning in deep rhetorical ecologies (Maraj, *Black* 19)—dis next section will t(h)ink carefully ‘bout how language along/side antiBlack conditions in the wake of slavery enacts asphyxia rhetorically.

██████/Too/██████

Though first popularly associated with the death of Eric Garner in 2014, the appropriation of the phrase “I can’t breathe” as a Black Lives Matter memetic picked up much steam in 2020, following the police killing of George Floyd in Minnesota. Throughout both Floyd’s interrogation by police and his literal asphyxiation, he says/screams “I can’t breathe” numerous times, pleading for his life. From protestors’ chants of both “I can’t breathe” and “we can’t breathe,” to June 2020 tracks by R&B artist H.E.R. and rappers Dax and Lil Baby that use the phrase heavy, “I can’t breathe” now represents an easily recognizable ma(r)ker for the movement. And though

we might

believe this move

from “I” to “we” as

some

██████ solidarity

that transports the unheard

cries []

dead peoples ██████

something

more—an animation

through collective

energy—the means by

which we “we”

demands

attention. “Starting a war, screaming, ‘Peace’ at the same time/ All the corruption, injustice, the same crimes/ Always a problem if we do or don’t fight/ And we die, we don’t have the same right,” sings H.E.R., contradictions exposed and paradoxically made barren in DuBois’ still resonant “how does it feel to be a problem?” (1)—“Peace!”, “Deuces!”, the goodbye somehow both forestalling but predicting H.E.R.’s “war.” But what does shedding light on difference—here set against humanist ideals like innocence, the “same rights” as constituted by those who can and do breathe—offer Black peoples but (eco)logical conflict? The paradox animated positions Black peoples *under or in search of* something denied, in positional asphyxia, a smothering form. The songstress moves through comparison across

emotion (the politics of empathy), interrogates American nation, appeals to belief (read Christian, at the very least monotheistic), and finally pushes against racial colorblindness with “When you see us, see us/ We can’t breathe.” These appeals to humanity, universalized ways of ■■■ing, or affects offer “we can’t breathe” as insisting entry into the human by means of group comparison. But what *we* go do when the very air H.E.R. pleads for poisons? When “we” prompts ‘well you can’t speak for us’? Or when a division marks Black peoples as collectively “God-fearing” or against revenge (H.E.R.)? The ecologies of clusivity, a chaos in and of itself, enchants.

Lil Baby’s bigger picture activates, likewise, the tussle of Black signification, when he find “the police’ll shoot you and know that you dead/ But still tell you to freeze,” because, like Floyd, as/though/like others, the grip of rhetorical asphyxiation “mean [’]hold him down[’] if he say he can’t breathe.”⁴ The track, like H.E.R.’s dips in and out of “I,” “you,” “we,” to at once dismiss racial essentialization and make antiBlack racism a matter of personal prejudice or moral lapse, while encouraging youth to vote—to work within a racist system as “I” a single(? transparent?) subject, splatters out into some “we” on common grounds with Man. “To speak against”—from Latin *contradicere*, asserting the opposite in order to deny truth (*New American Oxford Dictionary*)—belies any attempt to communicate triangulated via the nexus of the “human” or via “the same right” that H.E.R. highlights. No transparent “I” here (Ferreira da Silva, 2007). NHI!: No humans involved (Wynter, “No”). The message, *O*, that ol noise these youth be listening to.

But what does it ~~mean~~ to ■■■ “I can’t

breathe” in [] where breath leaves

finally?

How does

⁴ Emphasis author’s

the phrase search as communicative mecha-
 nism
 to lay bare [] ██████████ ██████████ processes of stifling
 Black ██████████ cargo [] hold (still of
 the slave [])?

Watch, though, how it work through an ecologic of—as Texas Deputy Mechelle Denton involved in the 2011 death of Willie Ray Banks explains in re-tort—“If you’re talking, you’re breathing. I don’t want to hear it.” Neighbors call police in ‘cuz Banks, at home, according to journalists, “In the early morning of Dec. 29, 2011, ...was *speaking nonsense*, but was calm and polite, reports and video of the incident show” but cops ask him hospital or jail? When Banks wanted neither, “Records show (Officer) Inman shocked Banks continuously [with a taser] for three and a half minutes, with only an occasional one- or two-second pause” (Dexhiemer, emphasis mine). “I’m going to die,” then “I can’t breathe”—yawps Banks, and there are tapes to prove it. Public intoxication the charge, Banks’ body forced public on his “own” “property,” made again in/to cargo. Let records, plantation ledgers, Black back as history show. Reflect with Audre Lorde how “A policeman who shot down a ten-year-old in Queens/ stood over the boy with his cop shoes in childish blood/ and a voice said ‘Die you little motherfucker’ and/ there are tapes to prove it” too (142). 1973, 2011, 2020, out and []side of time (un)ma[]king us b(l)ack. In slavery’s wake, [] ██████████ Black becomes publicly ow(n)ed by violence—the capture and containment of Banks, aligned with the (white) community-making capture of escaped slaves—spacing an object out of place producing “nonsense.” Later cops on the tape can be heard: “He is not dying, I will give a damn trophy out if he does.” Officer Denton claims “it put him to sleep” (Dexhiemer). The “it” not her, not the taser in her hands, but the ██████████ choke-slave-ship hold of white racial formation, “brutal imagination” (Eady 2001), weather of antiBlackness, that pressure outside the Black body, O, pressing, [] the neck, / of cop knee on Black back. The trophy given ██████████ flesh,

that stat, name

of stopping/crime

where “stopping/crime” *is*

Black █████.

The deep ecological connections rend open antiBlack ecologies, those communicative workings, for instance, across the allegedly counterfeit bill used by George Floyd to flag criminality to police that led to his death and between Banks' arrest for public intoxication on "property" deemed *public* in police brutality—Black: gerund, Black['n]ng that(,) perhaps(,) █████ putted for human purposes. Before Floyd became the unfortunate source of worldwide attention, an attempt to purchase cigarettes, according to a Cup Foods employee, involved "fake bills," while Floyd was "awfully drunk" and "*not in control of himself*" (Hill et al, emphasis mine). In the later exchange with police, Floyd █████ "I can't breathe" even before Officer Chauvin's infamous knee on his neck, and explains he's recovering from COVID-19, █████ claustrophobic, and suffers from anxiety (Haworth et al.). Under that persistent knee, however, as Floyd yelps "Please" and "Mama" and insists that "I can't breathe," one witness pleads that "he's not even resisting arrest now." But Officer Thao counters that he's "talking, he's fine" (qtd. in Dakss). Similar to Denton's claim in the case of Banks, to say "I can't breathe" means that one breathes (*nonsense!*); this [] [] hold, where signification in Black rhetoric fails to stick.

The alleged crime [forgery] producing an illegitimate mode of currency operates much like/as/though/if "I can't breathe"—where, exchange according to the schematics of (racial) capitalism and/or antiBlack (eco-)logics of language cannot happen. Black language appears counterfeit in appeals to spirit—breath from *pnuema*, soul, spirit, creative force, from the Greek "that which is breathed or blown" (*New Oxford American Dictionary*). As James Baldwin shares, "No true account, really, of black life can be held, can be contained in the American vocabulary. As it is, the only way that you can deal with it is by doing great violence to the assumptions on which the vocabulary is based. But they won't let you do that" (179). Floyd's great violence insisted himself animated through crying [] help █████ positioned cargo. The stoppage in normative routine function of the exchange leads to Floyd's body, like the trophy that one officer promises for Willie Ray Banks' 2011 death, becoming non-signifying locked-up stock of the hold—fuel to keep dat debt/death drive alive. Likewise, the loosies, or single cigarettes, that Eric Garner was claimed to be selling untaxed was paid for with Black flesh, as weather antiBlack punctuates the sentence for unproven petty crimes with back slashes 'roun' its full stop

./.

:Black

body,

period cage■

[] meaning [?]

What thing shall we transfigure to today when shaped for profit? A cigarette, a CD, literal money made fake by means of atmosphere, the Black hand that offers it suspicious? The object signifies, culling its power across racializing tropes located via the human particularly, to deny that class distinction to Black peoples. It morphs to chemical properties aligned with its environmental conditions in which Blackness renders inanimate. In exchange for continuing dis life, dis shiv precarious at whims of antiBlack states, sentences shape Black bodies [] verbs into nouns that once ■■■.

Amidst the toxic climate of criminality and health disparities (that intensified in the COVID-19 pandemic), the inter(con)textual relations in listed causes and contributing factors of death in the murders of Floyd in 2020, Banks in 2011, and Garner in 2014—also, like the distorted understanding, the contradiction, that to utter that one can't breathe means they can—blame victims for their own demise through claims of drug use and/or lifestyle diseases in death reports. Four months after Banks' murder, an autopsy blames "combined effects of methamphetamine intoxication and restraint procedures" eerily similar to "fentanyl intoxication and recent metamphetamine use" which allegedly increased George Floyd's likelihood of death by "cardiopulmonary arrest complicating law enforcement subdual, restraint, and neck compression" according to a final, June 1, death report (BBC). The cop knee to neck *complicates* a lifestyle. Derive from Latin *complicat-* "folded together" (*New Oxford English Dictionary*): Black, a life styled criminal by physical, social, cultural antiBlack eco-logical [positionally asphyxiative] violence. An initial autopsy on Floyd had seen "no physical findings that support a diagnosis of traumatic asphyxia or strangulation." (qtd. in Romo). Eric Garner's death report claims asthma and heart disease as contributing factors to positional asphyxia (Pearson). *Life/style legitimizes murder*: language be/getting environments, environments be/getting language. In weather antiBlack, systemic relations between the Black body, the "illegally" sold cigarette, a "fake" \$20 bill, and "talking nonsense" merge with brutal imagination (Eady, 2001) to restrain Black cargo marked out

of place through the ecologies of self-inflicted wounds, *O*, the ol' "Black-on-Black-crime" tune.

As Lil Baby spits in his appropriation of the "I can't breathe" meme: "We just some products of our environment/ How the fuck they gon' blame us?" Rhetorical asphyxia, Lil Baby, *das how*. Under the guise that restraint helps Blackness and Black peoples to function capitalistically—in schools, in prisons, in housing segregation, in cites with no potable water, through racializing tropes—the ecologies of Transatlantic plantation production blame victims for their "product-hood" in environs auguring their demise. Products, after all, [] contained, packaged, consumed. Exploring the ecology metaphor in this way, *dis project* projects its argument for undisciplined Black(ened) creole Caribbean *t(h)inking in study*. *T(h)inking archipelagic*, it asks, how we go breathe from ocean's floor chained-linked, fragments "lodged between cargo and being" (Sharpe 110-11)? *Is study you studying it(.) still?*

Lewwe bring in an example for the academy, to conjure everyday workings of rhetorical asphyxia as inherent to how antiBlackness breeds new life individual into system, to complicate ■■■ dis author dis-cohered from ■■■■■ subject:

It's April 9, 2019, deep into the spring semester when the usual open door to my graduate seminar on Black Rhetorics, jus so, locked. So, I ring Classroom Services: this "isn't our thing," they say, I should go to the gift shop on the first floor of the Cathedral of Learning because they have access to all rooms in the building. They give me a number, also, for someone in Facilities who doesn't pick up. The gift shop (of course) closed, I circle the first floor frantic, class already late where I see two cops talking to a Black custodian and ask him—the latter—to point me in the direction of Facilities, when the officers ask "can we help you?" One cop explains a locked room as (a) police matter, readily taking off with me to go open the door. The other, nervously jokes, "how's that for service, for ya?" The officer accompanying me, overly, affectedly friendly, trying with his lil small talk, follows me up to the fifth floor, and sees the whole group of grad students in the main lobby. Now at the door, the group huddled behind me, though, he asks, "can I see some ID?" Dressed in joggers and a tee, do I tell him how I feel or asphyxiate my affects and just let shit be?

When I take this story to white departmental admin, simple, simple, for a key to the classroom door, my senior colleague want to gimme a whole longstory of why this is jus' all standard operating procedure... same thing happened to him. They gotta protect the building, blah, blah, blah, from white nationalists gathering in 2016, a whole three years later—white time spanning a universal forever.

~~out~~ of air, toxic atmosphere strangling what they can
 and move to a next fruit to squeeze, *O*, oil to well, *O*, object
 to find more valuable, deserving equal
 ontological
 footing[.]

[]/Deep

Literary scholar Sherraine Jones explains that “affective asphyxia” shows how

black emotional expression is heavily policed, producing a sense of emotional suffocation, whether self-imposed or externally inflicted. Affective asphyxia results from the expectation that black people must choke down the rage, fear, grief, and other emotions that arise when confronted with racism and racial microaggressions (38).

Lewwe reach after Jones’ idea through the totality of antiBlackness’ weather to t(h)ink archipelagic about communication, culture, lifestyle, science—‘bout how all these concatenate and inter(con)text together to snuff Black life [] boxed contained. These ecologies (again) human, what Sylvia Wynter calls “truths of power”—that govern [] and do not “pre-exist the cultural systems and institutional mechanisms, including the institution of knowledge, by means of which we are socialized *to be* human” (“A Black” 6-7)—offer positional asphyxia as orientation to Black peoples. Our languages with/in these environs, in concert with them and their affects, render signification according to normative ecologies [] in moments when it runs against its all-encompassing climate. So wah we go do? How might Black diasporic rhetoric find what RA Judy might call flight—poiesis in Black, t[h]inking in disorder (*Sentient* 2020), where “multiple semiosis at play,” have “inflecting iterations of fluidity,” which “[provide] for infinite dynamic possibilities of expression bound only by the limits of human imagination” (“The Unfungible” 35)? How we go make meanings, signs, significations, music, or expression amongst rising waters through which [] know to wade?

Some might think of alternative breathing, some form otherwise engaging air, inhale, exhale, aspiration otherwise. Rhetorician Ore urges in COVID times that we take Imani Perry’s instructive to learn from the past, to converse with death (Chirindo et al 4), to breathe not through “living defined by terror” (Perry

29). Houdek and Ore, likewise envision futures beyond extractive relations by “relearning to breathe in/as/through collective action, radical care, and mutual exchange” (86). With these concepts maybe we might imagine air, ecologies antiBlack— that atmosphere— offering life in some way? But what if dat weather so grim, so totalizing, infiltrates, infects, those visions once packaged? How we go converge, contend what Houdek and Ore through their invitation to conspire hold out, in “reject[ing] the pretense of knowing in some final sense” (89)? Or maybe we move to unlearn? To disavow, to refuse to let our bodies, our lungs succumb to toxic ecologies altogether? What particular (dis)formations of relation might apprehend antiBlackness material, aesthetic, to add to theorizations of breathing otherwise by Fanon, Crawley, and Indigenous peoples (Houdek and Ore 88-89)?

Black diasporic peoples, chain-linked together to ocean floors, have gotta remember, have gotta re/member that the dead yoked to dying, that dat ■ of “I can’t breathe” could never [] the “I” of individuated, breathing, human subjectivity, as truths of power or their sub-variants would have us believe. Through Afro-Caribbean Poetics of Relation, dis thought-project exhibits, critically, aesthetically, and inter(con)textually how unpacking deep rhetorical ecologies might offer glimpses of how that “I” for Black subjects could implode. As Glissant outlines, *creolization*, offers as close a version of Relation as any, where it proffers “a new and original dimension allowing each person to be there and elsewhere, rooted and open, lost in the mountains and free beneath the sea, in harmony and in errantry” (*Poetics* 34). How else we go cope with ecologies that kill us? Described through its “obvious symbol” that [] creole language, creolization— that turbulent and limitless mixing of cultures and its always openness in fluid travel— offers “what has burst forth from lands that are no longer islands” (Glissant, *Poetics* 34), chain-linked (not only) by geographies [].

One such ■, one departure from this “I can’t breathe” business, worth exploring then, the “No Words” project— led by Trini rhetorician Kevin Adonis Browne— sifts through somewhere [] moving between, across, with/out, before, and beyond aesthetic form and frameworks of breathing, to *try a thing*. So try a t[]ing with dat thing a(l)ready dear nah? *T(h)ink archipelagic of dis project(-)defying expression*. Work with what Glissantian Michael Wierdon marks as that philosopher’s archipelagic imaginary that “concludes nothing” rejecting “system thought” (6, emphasis in original). Begin [] throat constriction, with “only breaths in the shape of letters that call attention to themselves. Breaths and the spaces between words when they come apart” (note 1, 9), Browne tries to draw,

sound, paint, sculpt, utter no words like others, photos punctuating visions of a Black man with face caked underneath white paint. Each crack,

occasion, in

██████████ skin, like/as/ though some path try'n'an give
rise to mean[],

██████████ writes breath ██████████ as right, refusal, a silence not []
] silence "for a new everything" (17). Breathing undoes, not just by some
other(ed) course of action in perceived
harmony with others but fracturing mixing, a self [] "through
my people and the necessary noise of our Black, inarticulable
lives" (17). "No words" questions ██████████, thus, as projecting
some *thing* else. [] things dis ting "A tangible thing, untimely
and inconvenient, beautiful and terrible," a haunt[] that sets
in motion [/ships] across medium, media,
message.

"Installation" another form(ation) of "No Words" mobilizes its
written text's across, beyond, with its annotations
like/as/though images of ellipses, along/side black ██████████ white
photographs, audio recording disorients, fractures sensoria. The Black

[redacted] photos ~~speaks~~ in one frame, at times, reads, disturbs
 [redacted] [] cracks, as white paint
 drops reveal~~[ing]~~ another cracked
form. Black hands, sound of/and rain on pitch
 [redacted] fragment
 notions of text, or mourning, or
 breath, or breath's result or "natural
 resource, o[u]r energy appearing infinite[redacted]
 renewable" (Browne 10).
 In "Exhibition" (Pearce) Port-[]-[], [], coalesces
 as site project~~[]~~ again, dis time as more than physical. [redacted] not
 there, but if [redacted] could talk, what could we
 [] as/through/like [redacted] knocking? Dis mashup, dis errantry, dis
 archipelagic []?
 Shaky video capture of Black
 hand, not at bay, but palm upward in sand, the
 "Installation" narrates the prospect of "... in/across/ aside (ss)slash /./,
 and what we go make from ashen [redacted] face(d) in
 wake attempts at breath? Food imagined poems, for mouth *O-*
 ed to recipe manifesting echoes, like/as/though "Coursework"

(Martin et al). Invite to see: Black body form(ulated) undulant, ellipsis pulsating

as/though/like an [REDACTED], "Everything that, in a way, would defy certain metaphors" (Browne 11). "Black Life Drawings" (Jacelon et al)

volunteer, color, stroke, "... coagulating what nouns

c
o
u
l
d
l
o
n
g
e
r
v
e
r
b
.

Lands no [] (is)lands, prancing shots of jab- [] (*jab molassie*), a flambeau
 foregrounds the scene, back in "Installation" before which no
 [] claimed, but instead "*the t[h]ing* itself: a [] life in perpetual
 []
 of itself" (Browne 11)⁵ . One cannot *self*
 believe,
 but instead experience across
 inter(con)text, affect, sea water meeting, (re-) shapes damp
 sand, the pregnant Black []
 embraced in/as/by/across/beyond voice
 [] a Black mother [] a tune[./.]
Iz dis yuh still studying?

⁵ Emphasis Browne's

Works Cited

- Baker, Mike et al. "Three Words. 70 Cases. The Tragic History of 'I Can't Breathe.'" *New York Times*. June 28, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/06/28/us/i-cant-breathe-police-arrest.html>
- Baldwin, James and Quincy Troupe, Ed. "The Last Interview: Interview by Quincy Troupe, St. Paul De Vence, France. November 1987." *The Last Interview and Other Conversations*. Melville House, 2014.
- Browne, Kevin Adonis. "No Words." *Brick: A Literary Journal* 106 (2020): 8-19.
- . "The Installation." *The No Words Project*. Ed. Kevin Adonis Browne. April 26, 2021. <https://nowordsproject.com/installation/>
- Boyle, Casey and Scot Barnett, Eds. "Introduction: Rhetorical Ontology, or, How to Do Things with Things." *Rhetoric, Through Everyday Things*. University of Alabama Press, 2016.
- BBC News. "George Floyd Death Homicide, Official Post-mortem Declares." *BBC News*. June 2, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52886593>
- Chirindo Kundai, Robert Gutierrez-Perez, Matthew Houdek, Louis M. Maraj, Ersula J. Ore, Kendall R. Phillips, Lee M. Pierce & G. Mitchell Reyes. "Coda: A Rupture in Time." *Women's Studies in Communication* 43.4 (2020): 459-70.
- "complicate, verb." *New Oxford American Dictionary*. 3rd ed. Eds. Angus Stevenson and Christine A. Lindberg. Oxford University Press, 2010.
- "conspire, verb." *New Oxford American Dictionary*. 3rd ed. Eds. Angus Stevenson and Christine A. Lindberg. Oxford University Press, 2010.
- "contradict, verb." *New Oxford American Dictionary*. 3rd ed. Eds. Angus Stevenson and Christine A. Lindberg. Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Conquergood, Dwight. "Ethnography, Rhetoric, Performance." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 78.1 (1992): 80-97.
- Cooper, Marilyn M. "The Ecology of Writing." *College English* 48.4 (1986): 64-375.
- Dakss, Brian. "Video shows Minneapolis cop with knee on neck of motionless, moaning man who later died." *CBS News*. May 26, 2020. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/minneapolis-police-fatal-arrest-officer-kneeling-neck-man-died/>
- Dexheimer, Eric. "A 3-minute Taser jolt, a quick settlement: Was justice served in Burnet man's death?" *Austin American Statesman*. May 20, 2017. <https://www.statesman.com/story/news/2017/05/20/a-3-minute-taser-jolt-a-quick-settlement-was-justice-served-in-burnet-mans-death/10387852007/>
- DiMaio Vincent J. and Domenick DiMaio. *Forensic Pathology*. CRC Press, 2001.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*. A.C. McClurg, 1903.
- Edbauer, Jenny. "Unframing Models of Public Distribution: From Rhetorical Situation to Rhetorical Ecologies." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 35.4 (2005): 5-24.
- Ferdinand, Malcom. *Decolonial Ecology: Thinking from the Caribbean World*. Polity Press, 2022.
- Ferreira da Silva, Denise. *Toward a Global Idea of Race*. University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

- Flores, Lisa A. "Stoppage and the Racialized Rhetorics of Mobility." *Western Journal of Communication* 84.3 (2020): 247-263.
- Fuoss, Kirk W. "Lynching Performances, Theatres of Violence." *Text and Performance Quarterly* 19.1 (2009): 1-37.
- Glissant Édouard. *Traité du Tout-Monde. Poétique IV*. Gallimard, 1997.
- . *Poetics of Relation*. Translated by Betsy Wing, The University of Michigan Press, 2010.
- Gordon, Jane Anna. *Creolizing Political Theory: Reading Rousseau through Fanon*. Fordham University Press, 2014.
- Gries, Laurie. *Still Life with Rhetoric: A New Materialist Approach to Visual Rhetorics*. Utah State University Press, 2015.
- Halberstam, Jack. "The Wild Beyond: With and for the Undercommons." *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*. Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, Minor Compositions (2013): 3-12.
- Hartman, Saidiya V. and Frank B. Wilderson III. "The Position of the Unthought." *Qui Parle* 13.2 (2003): 183-201.
- Haworth, Jon, Ella Torres, and Ivan Pereira. "Floyd Died of Cardiopulmonary Arrest, Tested Positive for COVID-19, Autopsy Shows." *ABC News*. June 3, 2020. <https://abcnews.go.com/US/george-floyd-protest-updates-arrests-america-approaching-10000/story?id=71038665>
- H.E.R.. *I Can't Breathe (Single)*. Tiara Thomas Music, Songs of Universal Inc., RCA, 2020. Transcript of Lyrics by Musixmatch.
- Hill, Evan, Ainara Tiefenthäler, Christiaan Triebert, Drew Jordan, Haley Willis, and Robin Stein. "How George Floyd Was Killed in Police Custody." *New York Times*. May 31, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/31/us/george-floyd-investigation.html>
- Houdek, Matthew. "Recontextualizing responsibility for justice: the lynching trope, racialized temporalities, and cultivating breathable futures." *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 18.2 (2021): 139-162.
- Houdek, Matthew and Ersula J. Ore. "Cultivating Otherwise Worlds and Breathable Futures." *Rhetoric, Politics & Culture* 1.1 (2021) 85-95.
- Jacelon, Simone, Sabrina Charran, Sundiata, and Maya Cross-Lovelace. "The Drawings." *The No Words Project*. Ed. Kevin Adonis Browne. 2021. <https://nowordsproject.com/the-drawings/>
- Jackson, Zakiyyah Iman. *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiracist World*. New York University Press, 2020.
- Jones, Shermaine. "I CAN'T BREATHE!": Affective Asphyxia in Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric*." *South: A Scholarly Journal*, 50.1 (2017): 37-46
- Judy, R.A. *Sentient Flesh: Thinking in Disorder, Poiesis in Black*. Duke University Press, 2020.
- "The Unfungible Flow of Liquid Blackness." *liquid blackness* 5.1 (2021): 26-37.

- Lil Baby. "The Bigger Picture." *My Turn (Deluxe)*. Universal Music Corp., Quality Control Qc Pro, Wolf Pack Global Music Publishing, 2020. Transcript of Lyrics by Musixmatch.
- Lorde, Audre. "Power." *The Black Unicorn*. WW Norton, 1995.
- Maraj, Louis M. *Black or Right: Anti/Racist Campus Rhetorics*. Utah State University Press, 2020.
- . "Subject to/flesh, object/to verb (:): the business of naming." *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 20.1 (2023): 47-53.
- . "'Quite here you reach: T(h)inking Language, Place, Extraction with Dionne Brand's *Land to Light On*.'" *Canadian Literature: A Quarterly of Criticism and Review* 251 (2023): 35-50.
- Martin, Leigh-Ann, Rinaldo Walcott, Tiffany-Anne Parkes, Dawn Cumberbatch, Kevin Adonis Browne. "The Coursework." The No Words Project. Ed. Kevin Adonis Browne. July, 2021. <https://nowordsproject.com/coursework/>
- Na'puti, Tiara. "Archipelagic rhetoric: remapping the Marianas and challenging militarization from "A Stirring Place." *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 16.1 (2018): 4-25.
- Ore, Ersula. *Lynching: Violence, Rhetoric, and American Identity*. University of Mississippi Press, 2019.
- Pearce, Marsha. "The Installation." *The No Words Project*. Ed. Kevin Adonis Browne. April 26, 2021. <https://nowordsproject.com/exhibition/>
- Pearson, Jake. "Autopsy: Police chokehold caused NYC man's death." AP. August 1, 2014. <https://bigstory.ap.org/article/medical-examiner-says-chokehold-police-officer-caused-death-nyc-man-ruled-homicide>
- Perry, Imani. *Breathe: A Letter to My Sons*. Beacon Press, 2019.
- "pneuma, noun." *New Oxford American Dictionary*. 3rd ed. Eds. Angus Stevenson and Christine A. Lindberg. Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Rice, Jenny. *Distant Publics: Development Rhetoric and the Subject of Crisis*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012.
- Rickert, Thomas. *Ambient Rhetoric: The Attunements of Rhetorical Being*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013.
- Romo, Vanessa. "County Officials Rule George Floyd Death Was A Homicide." *NPR*. June 1, 2020. <https://www.npr.org/2020/06/01/867219130/george-floyd-independent-autopsy-homicide-by-asphyxia>
- Sauvageau, Anny and Elie Boghossian. "Classification of Asphyxia: The Need for Standardization." *Journal of Forensic Sciences* 55.5 (2010): 1259-1267.
- Senda-Cook, Samantha, Aaron Hess, Michael Middleton, Danielle Endres, Eds. *Readings in Rhetorical Fieldwork*. Routledge, 2018.
- Sharpe, Christina. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Duke University Press, 2016.
- Wierdon, Michael. "On the Unfolding of Édouard Glissant's Archipelagic Thought." *Karib—Nordic Journal for Caribbean Studies* 6.1 (2021): 1-7.
- Wynter, Sylvia. "A Black Studies Manifesto." *Forum N.H.I.: Knowledge for the 21st Century* 1.1, "Knowledge on Trial" (1994): 3-11.

- . “Beyond the Categories of the Master Conception: The Counterdoctrine of the Jamesian Poiesis.” *C.L.R. James’s Caribbean*. Eds. Paget Henry and Paul Buhle. Duke University Press, 1992.
- . “‘No Humans Involved’: An Open Letter to My Colleagues.” *Forum N.H.I.: Knowledge for the 21st Century* 1.1, “Knowledge on Trial” (1994): 42–73.
- . “Unsettling Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument.” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3.3 (2003): 257–337.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike International 4.0 License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>; or, (b) send a letter to Creative Commons, 171 2nd Street, Suite 300, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA