

Introduction

Myron M. Beasley and Anwar Uhuru

I went from Lower Manhattan, I think I got as far as Wall Street,... the famous picture of me at Wall Street was the slave market. So it's site specific, and it's where I'm using my body as a memorial. I'm standing in tribute to those people who actually built the city and urging the city, in a way, to mark these sites.

Nona Faustine¹

Underneath the terror of the sacred, there are missing bones, which are constantly being unearthed

Achille Mbembe²

Myron M. Beasley, Ph.D., teaches in the areas of American Studies and Women and Gender Studies at Bates College. He is also an international curator and cultural critic. He is the author of *Performance, Art, and Politics in the African Diaspora* (Routledge Press). His research explores the intersection of cultural politics, art, and social change. He has garnered distinguished awards and fellowships from the Andy Warhol Foundation, the Whiting Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Davis Family Foundation, the Reed Foundation, and the Dorathea and Leo Rabkin Foundation. Most recently, he was awarded the Constance H. Carlson Public Humanities Prize. Website: myronbeasley.com. **Anwar Uhuru** is an Assistant Professor of African American Studies and Philosophy at Wayne State University. Their work is primarily concerned with social power regarding gender, class, sexuality, and ableism and how it intersects with state-based violence due to social hierarchy. Their research interests include Black Existentialism, Gender and Sexuality Studies, Queer of Color Critique, Black Intellectual Thought, and Aesthetics. They have publications in the *Journal of Hip Hop Studies*, *The Journal of Philosophy and Global Affairs*, *APA Studies*, *Journal of World Philosophy*, *Philosophy Compass*, and *Radical Philosophy Review*. Their forthcoming book, *The Insurrectionist Case for Reparations: Race, Value and Ethics*, will be published through SUNY Press.

¹ Interview with Myron Beasley, May 21, 2021.

² Mbembe, Achille and Steve Corcoran. *Necropolitics*. Duke University Press, 2019. Pg. 80.



'From Her Body Came Their Greatest Wealth,' from *White Shoes*, Nona Faustine.
Used with permission of the artist.

The *White Shoes* photography series documents a set of performances where Nona Faustine memorializes sites “of slavery in New York where the enslaved lived, died, and are buried or worked.”³ The collection of self-portraits marks the unmarked spaces of black life across the cityscape of New York City. Through marking, Faustine participates in a discourse of truth-telling to memorialize the dead and to prevent erasure of sites rendered invisible. “I started in Brooklyn on the beach, the coastline faces the Atlantic, and that connection to the slave trade, the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. But also, they used to smuggle slave ships up the coast of what was then called Long Island. Even after the New York embargoed slavery.”⁴ The image titled, “Like a Pregnant Corpse the Ship Expelled Her into the Patriarchy,” Faustine rests on her back, nude, atop the black rocks of the Long Island shoreline, wearing the white pumps. In another image in the series titled “From Her Body Came Their Greatest Wealth,” Faustine stands atop a wooden box in the middle of the intersection of the Financial District (Wall Street between

³ Interview with Myron Beasley, May 21, 2021.

⁴ Interview with Myron Beasley, May 21, 2021.

Water and Pearl Streets). Her hands clasped under her stomach, breasts exposed, she fearlessly gazes forward. As cars crisscross around her, she marks the site of a slave market. Through her black body, Faustine, shifts the geography of the cityscape to make known what is in plain sight and unspoken—that Wall Street, the symbol of American economic imperialism, began by selling enslaved Africans. Faustine explicitly performs and labors to make known what McKittrick astutely articulates, that geographies and cartographies in the new world exist on white supremacist patriarchal epistemologies. However, Faustine's performances also remind us of Mbembe, who suggests that modern democracies are built on mythologies that actively participate in the erasure of history to create a dominant narrative.⁵ Like the Confederate monuments that emerged in the United States after Reconstruction, the antebellum mansions are reminders that signal the perpetuation of white violence. Harriet Jacobs's loophole of retreat, a garret, a small space where she hid for several months until she escaped for freedom; The room in an old house, infested with insects and rats, as she suffered from frostbite and fever—her misery is compounded by witnessing her children daily through a small hole in the wall. Her story is one of physical concealment, but then there are the narratives of People of African descent in the United States who are confined to circular pathologies of “dehumanization, fragmentation, and madness because of their relegation to white supremacist patriarchal grids and domiciles.”⁶

This special issue interrogates corporeality, migration, and performance, specifically how performances reveal the dormant and silenced histories of the Black experience in the United States and the Diaspora. Believing that history sits in places, this issue labors to acknowledge the racialized and gendered narratives surrounding localities and interrogates the "other histories" and traumas that linger. Essays in this issue interrogate corporeal migration and performance and reveal, not obscure, the hidden and silenced narrative of historic domestic and public spaces. The issue consists of two segments. The first is a collection of pieces that span from the personal to acknowledging the ecological, historical, and communal spaces we occupy while performing quotidian aspects of living. The segment opens with Biba Bell's essay, “Becoming Epiphyte: Tree sitting, hypermingling, (para)sitism, and abolition Ecologies,” which contem-

⁵ Mbembe, Achille and Steve Corcoran. *Necropolitics*. Duke University Press, 2019.

⁶ McKittrick, Katherine. *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*. University of Minnesota Press, 2006 P. 3.

plates ecocriticism and activism in what Bell theorizes as *epiphytic choreographies*. Dianne Smith's essay, "Between Harlem and Me," in her words, is a "palimpsestic performance that memorializes Harlem and positions the community as a site of resistance against ongoing social and spatial transformation." In "Maria W. Stewart, Alive!: Politics, Place and Performance," Gregory Doukas situates Maria W. Stewart as both philosopher and her rhetorical performances of free Black life in post-revolutionary war New England. Devon R. Johnson reads "performativity of contemporary Black adult Hip-Hop culture as inherently nihilistic" in his essay. And Ricky Weaver thinks through performance and photography and offers a modality to analyze corporeality, fugitivity, and the artist as theorist.

The second is a segment of responses that interrogate the performance *Migratuse Ataraxia* by Wideman Davis Dance. A curated multidisciplinary event staged in Antebellum mansions throughout the South to mark narratives of the enslaved, whose stories are rarely acknowledged in such spaces. "*Migratuse Ataraxia: Race, the Antebellum South and Critical Fabulation*", Myron M. Beasley contextualizes the performance historically, culturally, and intellectually. However, in "Acts of Memory: Performance in Black Artmaking," Anwar Uhuru weaves artmaking, choreography, and memory as a philosophical praxis. Tony Stori provides a robust sonic tour of *Migratuse Ataraxia*. Brian J. Evans's essay, "There Was Love," reminds us "to reimagine ourselves through the embodied arts to make the unseen visible and our untold collective stories heard." "Torn," a video contribution by Thaddeus Davis—a co-founder of Wideman Davis Dance—takes us to his birthplace, Montgomery, Alabama, throughout which he explores the geography, the continued struggle for justice and equity, and the importance of telling one's story. In the final essay "Black Dance: A Collage of Embodied Language Systems," Winston Benons Jr., probes the performance of how the body synthesizes the language of sonic affect.

The themes of this issue are corporeal migration, race, and performance. Within this issue, scholars and artists encapsulate the intersection of the body, memory and rememory, movement through space and place, with the brevity of performance. Faustine's fearless gaze confronts and reminds the viewer of the history of forced migration of black bodies and the continued efforts to erase their presence in the mere design of cities and the contemporary efforts of gentrification. Just like the significance of loss and the acts of rememory and holding wake. On March 20, 2025, Nona Faustine died at the age of 48. It is appropriate that this issue of *Liminalities* be dedicated to her profound and

inspirational work that attends to the very concerns and challenges this issue addresses.



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