

## Onto-fugitivity: Grounding Sanctuary in the Cracks

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*Onto-fugitivity—a recurring theme in Bayo Akomolafe’s writings—is closely related to the idea of sanctuary. More than a concept, onto-fugitivity is a gesture towards a processual/relational ontological position, an invitation to sense beyond ethical monocultures—an invitation to meet and “become with” the multiple agencies at work on this planet. I also argue that Bayo Akomolafe’s “methodology of exile” draws from the historical diasporic response to trauma calling for a radical sensorial healing of the rift between “world”—anthropocentric social organization—and “earth”—the metabolic assembly of human, non-human and more-than-human agencies. Akomolafe queers and “composts” previous theological traces, rewiring their deep intuitions with contemporary cutting-edge critical thinking. Historical examples of fugitivity include enslaved people’s practices of marronage, fleeing to the mountains or starting autonomous quilombos. Another way they resisted assimilation was through the adoption of mimetic attitudes, hiding diasporic spiritual practices in the colonizer’s own rituals, furthering creolization and new relational contexts while keeping alive and renewing an “Afrocentric” ethos. Such fugitive sanctuary “at a standstill”—this sort of “generative incapacitation”—dances open a portal out of the new carceral dimensions of surveillance culture rather than reinforcing its status quo by adopting the same linguistic architecture of power. In order to give refuge to generative fugitivity in the current neo-liberistic regime of securitarian hyper-visibility, we shall need to awake exiled capacities. If dreams often gesture towards knowing otherwise, Akomolafe’s post-activist compass brings down to earth the idea of tracing a post-human “sanctuary in the cracks.”*

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May this decade bring more than just solutions, more than just a future—may it bring words we don't know yet, and temporalities we have not yet inhabited. May we be slower than speed could calculate, and swifter than the pull of the gravity of words can incarcerate. And may we be visited so thoroughly, and met in wild places so overwhelmingly, that we are left undone. Ready for composting. Ready for the impossible. Welcome to the decade of the fugitive.<sup>1</sup>

—Bayo Akomolafe

Bayo Akomolafe’s concept of onto-fugitivity is itself “fugitive.” It entails honoring “worlding” rather than “wording.”<sup>2</sup> I sense the danger of using words and hermeneutics in an explicatory manner that would dim the impact of Akomolafe’s own creative diffractive speculative fabulation, his trickster ability to use words to crack and queer established meanings. As a fact, he has written and spoken a lot about sanctuary but I have not found a single specific article or webinar on onto-fugitivity, *the hidden multi-layered dimensions of metabolic reality escaping our grasp*, though his whole work points towards it.

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<sup>1</sup> Bayo Akomolafe, “Welcome, Traveller”—landing-page essay on bayoakomolafe.net.

<sup>2</sup> In saying this, I am following Mika, et al.: “We propose a distinction between two onto-metaphysical orientations: one that reduces being to discursive practices, which we call ‘wording the world’; and another that manifests being as co-constitutive of a worlded world, where *language is one amongst other inter-woven entities*, which we call ‘worlding the world.’” From Carl Mika, Vanessa Andreotti, Garrick Cooper, Cash Ahenakew and Denise Silvax, “The Ontological Differences Between Wording and Worlding the World” in *Language, Discourse & Society*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2020): 15.

The idea that reality itself is metabolic is a closely related to the idea of onto-fugitivity as an augmented portal of perception. I speak of metabolism beyond the technical explanation of how chemical body activities transform food into energy. Much research is being now done on how *metabolic evolution* shaped and organized the ecosystem. And enquiry on *social metabolism* has been a sociological and even historical field of research. My use of the word refers to the idea present in many indigenous cultures of a continuum, a *relational emerging ongoingness beyond the human/non human; life/death; nature/culture binaries* and as an emerging intrinsic fugitive Rhythm of Being.

The references to *being* as infinite *becoming* can be found both at the core of pre-Socratic Greek philosophy as well as in many indigenous traditions. Contemporary critical thinking both in French and German philosophy sustain that words and concepts may be used with creative “assemblages” rather than to index or categorize the world. Gilles Deleuze, with his lines of flight, and Adornoc, with his critique of Illuminism, are important sources.<sup>3</sup> If language itself may imprison human experience, its use in many traditions and rituals implies a more creative relationship with reality than the linear logical exploration of “things” within the Cartesian tradition of a subject/object split.<sup>4</sup> Prayer may be an example of this.

We might be getting a glimpse of this as we groan and stutter with what *is/isn't*, as we sit with the silent language of trees, with the loud roars and smells of our concrete cities, with the current heat wave, with the uncanny materiality of things. I intimately resonate with Akomolafe’s call for “a posthuman and post-humanist, *liberation theology*” where *all* are invited discussants, “even trees and desks.” Trans-disciplinarity thus takes an altogether yet-to-be-conceived nuance. So with the furniture in my room, my books, my drawings, the walks I take daily in my city’s outskirts, I will try to honor my own longing in gesturing towards a different kind of “sanctuary” in cracks. Akomolafe often refers to Edouard Glissant’s “right to opacity” as an antidote for the linear modern algorithms of variables’ control. Diving into the riches of his transcultural and transdisciplinary heritage may appear confusive or even overwhelming and might require a somewhat active processing—what Akomolafe calls “losing your way in order to find it”—but is never lacking intellectual rigor.

The wealth of references might either discourage or lead to active study. I have tried to hint at some of the sources on metabolic thinking through an inter-religious philosophical approach. However, it is Akomolafe’s use of language that I find refreshingly generative in re-opening to insight, rather than mere “understanding,” as we face our current critical eco-systemic and political existential predicament.

I have chosen, in my exploration of onto-fugitivity, a methodology that Carl Gustav Jung called *amplification*, or *circumambulation* of a theme, multiplying resonances and narratives and provisional assemblages. This, rather than teleological clarity, would be the best compass I can offer to explore Akomolafe’s own writing. I trust in the reader’s own engagement in what is

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<sup>3</sup> French philosopher Deleuze’s “lines of flight” “cracks” (*ŕelures*) “assemblages” and “rhizomes,” rather than roots, seem to inform much of the contemporary attention to deep mycelian relationality and biologically entangled processes.

<sup>4</sup> According to another French philosopher Glibert Simondon, being *precedes* individual differentiation as an “entangled dimension of reality” that quantum physics has also amplified. Thus human knowledge would be relational, “emerging,” provisional, and analogical, rather than merely dialectical.

emerging in her or his resonance in approaching paragraphs that might resemble analogical fractals rather than a clear directional map.

I am very much comforted by the thought that Buddhist Zen also stressed the importance of a different *perceptive* awareness of our relational rather than rational entanglement with reality. A way to engage with a different relational approach to being is also found in Akomolafe's definition of *post-activism*:

. . . this is posthumanist work, not citizen work. It is neither therapy nor the violently normative practices that premise transformation on inclusion. (...) it is roaming. It is a meeting in the between-places. One must dance, twist, turn, bend, fall, roll, and be possessed. The right thing to do is exactly what not to do.<sup>5</sup>

The very idea of *opacity* may also point to the way fugitivity might need to activate exiled capacities and creative resources beyond immediate *visibility* in our contemporary surveillance culture in order to explore the shapeshifting forms of a more-than-human sanctuary.



*“The cry of the forest”*—pastels on velvet paper.  
A personal exercise in nonverbal metabolic language.

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<sup>5</sup> From a Facebook post by Bayo Akomolafe.

## A Theology of Incalculability

In my tentative exploration of *Onto-fugitivity*, I had considered dancing first with fugitivity and then focus on its “ontological” dimensions.<sup>6</sup> However, I have realized that such neat division does not work, since both are so deeply related. Better to introduce from the start the diffractive rewinding of the concepts of Being, Self and Identity that the very idea of fugitivity implies:

One might say fugitivity is the theology of incalculability and hopelessness. The fugitive rejects the promise of repair and refuses the hope of the established order. By clinging to outlawed desires, barely perceptible imaginations, alien gestures, the fugitive inhabits the moving wilds (...) in the tense betweenness of things. God, surprisingly in love with the fugitive, often meets the fugitive in that space between stories to break him open, to show him a burning bush, to rename him, to gobble him up with mouth as wide as a whale’s, and then perhaps to spit him out again. Fugitivity is the site of hopelessness, of so-called defeat, of modest bearings and whispered songs. For citizens of the Anthropocene, who must meet the incomprehensibility of the moment, the fugitive’s path glows in the dark. There, where the path in the call to defeat leads, we might come face to face with something deeper than solutions. Something too sacred for words to embrace.<sup>7</sup>

Further on I will touch on Bayo’s reference to such theology of “hopelessness”. For the moment I will dwell on *incalculability* since it is one of the threads that informs Bayo’s work especially in relation to Karen Barad’s own work. Barad’s vision of “agential realism” stems from her feminist refusal of fixed essentialisms but also from Bohr’s “ontological indeterminacy.”<sup>8</sup> Reality is not the sum of discrete pre-determined objects neutrally observed by a distancing mind but emerges from queer entanglement and participation in ongoing co-creation from a *hidden onto-fugitive quantum source*. Descartes old map, the binary ontological order of mind and matter, told us that the world “out there” was objective, independent, motionless. With the mind’s analytical eye moving “above the waters.” Barad’s map, on the contrary, tells us that reality can never be grasped once and for all, *it is a non-binary fugitive becoming-with. It is and it is not*. Onto-fugitivity—the indetermination at the heart of reality—is the continuous relational emerging of relative reality, in constant process at any given moment, in converging transformation and co-becoming. In Barad’s own words:

Emergence does not happen once and for all as an event or as a process that takes place according to some external measure of space and of time but rather that

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<sup>6</sup> The very concept of ontology is neither universal nor univocal, though it deals with the *reality of being* (however we might consider *reality* and *being*). The question at its core might be “what is the *ground* or the *un-ground* (the “crack” if you wish) on which *reality* stands?” All these italics stress the polysemic uncertainty that challenges mono-linguistic wording. People ignoring ontology as a concept may be deeply in touch with it in their lives. “It is not understood by those who understand. It is understood by those who do not understand” *Kena Upanishad* II, 3. For the unpacking of this sentence, see Raimon Panikkar, *The Vedic Experience* (Delhi: Motilal, 1977), 671 ff.

<sup>7</sup> Bayo Akomolafe, “*Coming down to earth*,” at <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net>.

<sup>8</sup> Karen Barad is a physicist and feminist theorist. Her emphasis on “nature’s *queer* performativity” widened the use of the word queer beyond its use in describing sexual and gender identities, using the concept as a post-binary post-human inclusive invitation to move beyond the nature/culture divide. It is widely used by Akomolafe in this sense. The Nobel Prize-winning physicist Niels Bohr gave a fundamental contribution to quantum mechanics, and also explored its philosophical implications.

time and space, like matter and meaning come into existence (...) through each intra-action, making it impossible to differentiate in any absolute sense between creation and renewal, beginning and returning, continuity and discontinuity, here and there, past and future.<sup>9</sup>

And Bayo Akomolafe adds:

Ontology is nonessential. It's very strange, actually (...) This fact is demonstrably compelling for very little things, but it queers the line that supposedly locks away this strangeness to the quantum world, for if everything spills through, if bodies are not stoic mannequins with glossy exteriors and hard ontologies, then everything is entangled. Man and woman. Tree and mountain. The chemical secretions of a virus and the market price fluctuations of a commodity (...) The world is a mangle of streams, a constantly unceasing, unfolding flow of co-emergent practices and co-enactments that does not privilege ontology over epistemology or the other way around.<sup>10</sup>

To quote the intercultural Catholic theologian Raimon Panikkar, nonessential ontology is “the universal metabolism that lets Life (be)come alive, and by which the entire reality subsists.”<sup>11</sup>

Such reflection on the metabolic nature of reality has deep roots both in pre-Socratic Greek philosophy and in a variety of spiritual traditions.<sup>12</sup> The *sarvam sarvāmakam* (“all is related to all”) of Kashmir Shaivism is a good example of this.

Although an essentialist and substantial “concept” of ontology has long prevailed in Western philosophical tradition and theology, a different relationship with what “is/isn't” can be found in cultures that do not conceptualize ontology as such. Storytelling, fabulative imagination, and rituals have been manifesting this relationship all over the planet. Any ritual or contemplative relationship with the “other-than-human” and the “more-than-human” relates to “being” in ways beyond explicit theoretical discourse. In the Vedic-Upanishadic culture, for example, rather than analyzing what things *are*, the stress is on how things feel.<sup>13</sup> A complex articulation of knowing “otherwise” may be deeply embedded in ritual practices. Some traditions may appear poor in ontologies (“discourses on being”), but are much richer in onto-fugitive ritual

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<sup>9</sup> K. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Half Way: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007). Previous avatars of such transdisciplinary de-ontologization of ontology can be found in theoretical physics. See, for example, Raimon Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience: Emerging Religious Consciousness* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1993). Pioneer work in psycho-physics can be found in the dialogue on synchronicity between C. G. Jung and Nobel Prize winner W. Pauli. See C. A. Meier, ed., *Atom and Archetype: the Jung-Pauli Letters 1932–1958* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, N.Y. 1992).

<sup>10</sup> Bayo Akomolafe, *These Wilds Beyond Our Fences* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2007), 110–11.

<sup>11</sup> Raimon Panikkar, *The Cosmotheandric Experience*, 137.

<sup>12</sup> The relative/relational/contextual Buddhist concept of *pratityasamutpada* is an equivalent of this idea. It has been translated as “co-dependent co-origination,” “converging production,” “co-emergence,” “conditioned generation,” “relational origination,” “universal concatenation,” “conditioned genesis.” Rooted in *sunyata* (the void) such “radical relational relativity of all reality” resonates with Akomolafe’s take on “generative incapacitation.” See Raimon Panikkar, *The Silence of God, the Answer of the Buddha* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989).

<sup>13</sup> See Raimon Panikkar, *La porta stretta della conoscenza—Sensi, ragione e fede*, ed. M. Carrara Pavan (Milan: Rizzoli, 2005), 34.

practices of reconnection. Moreover, trees might have much to teach us about ontic reality beyond the photographic pleasure they give us. So, following Akomolafe's vision, we come to see that diffraction opens up a *methodology* of renewal and informs the crucial concept of fugitive post-activism which I will return to later:

The gift of this paradigm of diffraction, or this idea that things lose their edges, this relational ontology, is that it allows us to meet each other. (...) activism can become very industrial. The way we think about transformation is very categorical. You are an artist, you do artist stuff; you are a dancer, you dance into oblivion; you write about this and that, and it becomes an industry in itself, and modernity is quite happy with that. It's not scandalized about you doing your work. It doesn't care, so long as you stay in your place. What scandalizes modernity is when things spill. And facilitating spillage is good work. Diffraction allows me to read myth through quantum dynamics, through performativity. When we see things through each other, that is when the new has a chance to emerge. So that is what we need to learn today, to become citizens of diffraction, to become fugitives.<sup>14</sup>

"What scandalizes modernity is when things spill!" In the next paragraph I will try to show how such statement on the radical entanglement of reality (things that spill) is reworked by Akomolafe through the creative indetermination at crossroads of which Yoruba tradition is so rich. I submit that this might reframe poetically and enhance our understanding of a post-humanist critical approach in reclaiming the role of the world's agency in slowing down modernity's arrogant rush to quick-fix anthropocentric solutions.

### **"The times are urgent let us slow down"**

The idea of slowing down in times of urgency is one of Bayo Akomolafe's favorite traditional statements from his own heritage:

The idea of slowing down is not about getting answers, it is about questioning our questions. It is about staying in the places that are haunted. One of such haunted spaces is. . . the humanism that treats human beings as the center of the universe.<sup>15</sup>

Acceleration seems rooted in an apocalyptic archetype of disaster embedded in *history* as unending trauma. This vision calls for a different kind of post-apocalyptic *decelerated* answer. Walter Benjamin had seen this well when he wrote his famous IX thesis on the concept of history:

This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such a violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm

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<sup>14</sup> Bayo Akomolafe, *The bones of our ancestors speak to us*. <https://www.resilience.org>.

<sup>15</sup> Bayo Akomolafe, *A slower urgency*, [:https://www.bayoakomolafe.net](https://www.bayoakomolafe.net).

irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.<sup>16</sup>

Historicist dialectics adopted the “heavenly” comforting myth of a transcendent/anthropocentric solution projected onto a future always to come (progress, revolution, technospheres), to keep us from truly facing human wrongs. Thus, the call to “stay with the trouble,” “to descend,” or to “slow down”—to meet the trickster at the crossroad—ultimately reframes our relationship with time. Slowing down to the “just now” paradoxically transcends the present moment and queers time. Benjamin writes of a secret index awakening us to the perception of a mysterious *rendez-vous* among generations, where the sudden emergence of *unredeemed* past wakes us up—much like a frightening, paralyzing nightmare does.<sup>17</sup> Benjamin calls this sudden, unexpected connection a “constellation”—a true image resulting from dialectics at a standstill.

Bayo Akomolafe reframes such post-apocalyptic stance in post-humanist terms. It is the entanglement of visible and invisible agencies, the world kicking back that *slows us down* and reframes Benjamin’s “dialectics at a standstill” with the rich nuances of animistic celebration.

### “Slowing down is taking care of ghosts”

Another way to say this is that the bones of the unburied—their ghost—return to haunt us and show us the way that modernity developed on the momentum granted by slave trade and colonialism. Such spectral presence speaks of the darker side of geopolitical strategical thinking, of the overall triumph of financial capitalism under all political climates, of the growing class and cultural divides, and of the persisting *differential value* of human lives in our contemporary biopolitical post-democracies.

The “bones of Bakhita”—emerging from a mass grave in Brazil—speak for unmourned millions in Akomolafe’s own speculative imagination. They call for that *secret appointment between the generations of the past and our own* evoked by Benjamin, for whom true *dialectics* could take place only when the present diffracts entering into an unexpected *constellation* with unmourned/unthought heritages.

Benjamin called this *dialectics at a standstill*, a state of consciousness and response-ability drawing on the post-apocalyptic idea of redemption/reparation embedded in the haunting, paradoxically immanent, emergence of the past. This is what he called “weak messianism.” Akomolafe adds to this crucial stance a trickster streak of interreligious animism. In the Yoruba tradition, *slowing down* is necessary, in order to include in humble recollection the overall agency of matter, of the non-human, and of the more-than-human. Before exploring the idea of fugitivity, including such haunting presences in our sanctuary, I must share a brief excursus on

<sup>16</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt; tr. Harry Zohn (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 253–64.

<sup>17</sup> “There is a not-yet-conscious knowledge of what has been: its advancement has the structure of *awakening*. . . . The new, dialectical method of doing history presents itself as the art of experiencing the present as a waking world, a world to which that dream we name the past refers in truth.” I retranslate from the Italian edition of a selection of Walter Benjamin preparatory notes for his “Thesis on history:” Walter Benjamin, *Sul concetto di storia* a cura di G. Bonola, M. Ranchetti (Torino: Einaudi, 1997) 112, note K 1, 2.

how fugitiveness has become so relevant for contemporary decolonial thinkers in its paradigmatic connection to the history of marronage and the underground railroad.

### **Historical Traces of Fugitivity**

The notion of “fugitivity,” a clear reference to flight from the slaver’s plantation, has been reclaimed in a positive sense by black academics Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, as an attempt to escape hegemonic incarceration within academical studies.<sup>18</sup> Akomolafe, in his own extra-academic journey, developed the idea of *onto-fugitivity* as “sanctuary in the cracks”—both in terms of a refuge for research and of an existential posture within the ruins of capitalism. Before going into what today’s “lines of flight” might imply, I will meander for a while in the underground railroad of the past.

The theme of fugitivity recalls the heritage, known as *marronage*, when enslaved people fled plantations, creating fugitive communities and fortified villages—autonomous spheres of survival in inaccessible margins and cracks in the mountains, in forests, in swamps. From the *quilombo* in Brazil (where the Palmares community survived for a whole century)<sup>19</sup> to the Great Dismal Swamp, maroon communities survived between North Carolina and Virginia and also in the “Black Seminole” towns built by maroons who allied with Seminole (Muskogee Creek) in Florida.<sup>20</sup>

In Surinam, Panama, Cuba, Jamaica, Haiti—wherever the forced labor of slavery nourished capitalistic accumulation—marronage was a form of resistance and self-determination. From this, the *underground railroad* developed.<sup>21</sup> Maroon societies were probably the most vexing form of enslaved people resistance. In the Caribbean, bands of maroons descended at intervals from the mountains to attack settlements below.

Marronage began in the very first European Caribbean settlement, Hispaniola. Two years after the start of the slave traffic as early as 1503 the problem had become so great that the governor of the island urged the Spanish Crown to suspend the trade for a time. By the middle of the sixteenth century, runaways *outnumbered* Hispaniola’s white male population seven to one.<sup>22</sup> Maroons were also one of the crucial forces in the Haitian revolution.<sup>23</sup> Duke University has gathered an extensive database by collecting local eighteenth-century ads published to attempt tracing runaway maroons that listed their physical description, type of branding, place of purchase, slave ship and date of landing.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (London: Minor Compositions, 2013).

<sup>19</sup> Roger Bastide gives an exhaustive description of *quilombos* in *The African Religions of Brazil: Toward a Sociology of the Interpenetration of Civilizations*, tr. Helen Sebba (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), especially 85, where he stresses the feeling of kinship between enslaved people belonging to different ethnic groups, their imagining a community beyond soil and blood.

<sup>20</sup> K. Kris Hirst, *Maroons and Marronage: Escaping Enslavement: Towns for the Self-Liberated; Camps and African States in the Americas*, <https://thoughtco.com> (February 3, 2023).

<sup>21</sup> It is worth noting that new forms of underground railroading are at work in the networking of immigrant border crossing throughout the world.

<sup>22</sup> Mavis C. Campbell, “Maroons of the Caribbean,” (September 25, 2007): <https://nacla.org>.

<sup>23</sup> *The Haitian Revolution Timeline*, <https://thehaitianrevolution.org>.

<sup>24</sup> *Haitian Marronage: Voyages and Resistance*, <https://sites.duke.edu/marronagevoyages/>



The rich etymology of maroon and marronage is in itself a little journey into wildness. It was well established in French where it is still used to describe *feralization* the return of domesticated animals to the wild. One etymological trace leads to the Spanish *cimarron* (“fugitive, wild, feral”), from *cima* (“summit, peak”), referring to the unruly enslaved individuals and groups who escaped to seek refuge in the mountains. An alternative etymology points to the Caribbean *Taino* word *simaran* (wild—like a stray arrow), from *simara* (arrow). Other amplifications include “marooned,” which means “stranded on an island,” or “exiled as a punishment.” The “right of marronage” refers to selected French guides—the *marronniers*—who in the Middle Ages helped voyagers crossing the Alps on the very same routes taken today by African refuge-seeking immigrants who try to cross overnight into France, after surviving their perilous sea journey to Italy.

All in all, marronage introduces the theme of *psycho-social wilderness as sanctuary* and the Afro-american adoption of the Biblical *flight from Egypt into the wilderness* both as sanctuary and as “promise” of further liberation. But the institution of fugitive Sanctuary has a history of its own.

### **The Right of Sanctuary**

*Sanctuary* was a consecrated place giving protection to those fleeing from justice or persecution. In Greece the temple, altar, or precinct which gave such protection was called *Asylon*, meaning “free from violence or spoliation.” Recognized under Roman codes, the right of sanctuary obtained the Church’s sanction in 441. Violation of the protection of sanctuary was punishable by excommunication. The earliest mention of sanctuary in England was promulgated by King Ethelbert in 600. As an English institution, it disappeared in 1624, when Parliament enacted “that no sanctuary or privilege of sanctuary shall be hereafter allowed in any case.” In some cases there was a stone inside the church, called the “frithstool,” on which the fugitive had to sit to claim protection. In others, there was a large ring or knocker on the church door, the holding of which gave right of asylum.<sup>25</sup> Akomolafe often stresses that such door knockers bore monstrous, feral or hybrid gargoyle-like features hinting at a haunted/haunting dialectical confrontation between the arbitration of power and those turned monstrous and banned.

In recent years, several metropolitan cities have tried to form coalitions around the term “*cities of refuge*,” in a shared attempt to re-imagine the role of *local* governments “as human rights actors in a multilevel context.”<sup>26</sup> Narratives about the ambivalent processual definition of rights outline an age-old tension between juridical formulations and the un-juridical aspirations to justice.

We shall see how Bayo Akomolafe’s contemporary take on fugitivity is meant to usher in a *spiritual coming out into the otherwise* in what he calls a “*theo-politics of encounter* in times of trouble,” moving past the anthropocentric theologies of separation that have informed colonial modernity.

### **The Sanctuary of Opacity: Hybridized Refuge Beyond Binaries**

<sup>25</sup> For an excellent example, see the image of the Adel Church door knocker in the University of Leeds Digital Archives: <https://explore.library.leeds.ac.uk/special-collections-explore/15511>.

<sup>26</sup> For an example, see the Cities of Refuge research project at the University of Utrecht <https://citiesofrefuge.eu>.

In order to explore the way fugitivity might be forced to consider a different idea of refuge—a spiritual sanctuary well-hidden in plain sight, rather than a literal quilombo—I will briefly dwell on the story of a black Sicilian saint and his iconic adoption by enslaved people in South America to introduce the core question of *generative incapacitation as sanctuary*. The right to opacity, the disarticulation of legibility, the disavowal of carceral “humanization” are crucial dimensions of fugitive diasporic politics when the literal dimension of flight become impossible. We can see in such theatrical trickstery a fugitive crack opening to *other* places of power:

. . . the whole history of Santeria is based on people hiding their gods and goddesses under the nose of their masters. . . because they found out very quickly that brute force didn’t work . . . they found a way to insert their own paradigm and to allow it to just stay in the womb and the bellies of the colonial systems: they inserted Eshu in the name of Paul, they inserted Ogun and Yemoja in the name of Peter and Mary, they inserted the names of their gods when invited to worship the gods of their masters (...). In that hidden place of power, in that dark place of descent, into the fugitive cracks of rupture they found a way to keep alive their connection with the homelands.... I feel that’s what we are invited to do, not just to catch on with the streams of power as we know them, but to find places of rupture...<sup>27</sup>

In meeting the layered agencies beyond the human lies a *grounding* promise to heal the split between so called “world”—the partitioned terraforming of separability focused on human exceptionalism—and “earth” as living entanglement of an irreducible collective of human and non-human agencies.<sup>28</sup> Whereas the “humanism” that developed in the so called Enlightenment was coherent with the colonial project and its reduction of “the living” into a commodity, other narratives and modes of consciousness have been active in the world.

Achille Mbembe, the cutting-edge Cameroonian social scientist, considers that sharing the world with nonhumans was the original *obligation* upheld by indigenous cultures and ontologies. In its fundamental connection to a broader web of life, the very meaning of “being human” changes: “In opposing the world of non-humans, humanity opposes itself. It is ultimately in the relationship we have with the whole of ‘the living’ that we manifest the truth of what we are.”<sup>29</sup>

### **When a Shape-Shifting Orisha Hides and Speaks Through a Black Saint**

In his seminal work on Afro-Brazilian spiritualities, Roger Bastide describes how cultural resistance transformed the enslaver religion “into an instrument of ethnic solidarity and social

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<sup>27</sup> From the webinar *Where to go*, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=17-PF\\_0a2jQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=17-PF_0a2jQ)

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, the notion of “the house modernity built” in Vanessa Machado de Oliveira, *Hospicing Modernity: Facing Humanity’s Wrongs and the Implications for Social Activism* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2021).

<sup>29</sup> Achille Mbembe, *Critique de la raison nègre* (Paris: La Découverte, 2013), 258. See also F. O. Dubosc, “Co-individuation as an open mandala,” in *Narratives of Individuation*, Raya A. Jones and Leslie Gardner, eds. (London: Routledge, 2019).

justice.”<sup>30</sup> The *Orishas* of Yoruba tradition were *hidden* in plain sight under the guise of Catholic saints in the processions called *Congadas*.<sup>31</sup>

In this specific example, a Catholic monk—a Franciscan cook known variously as Benedetto da San Fratello or Saint Benedict the Moor or São Benedito from Palermo—was adopted as kin and recognized as an *Orisha* by the congregations of the enslaved. Benedito, the first canonized *Black saint*, was born in Spanish Sicily in 1524, to Yoruba parents who were enslaved. When he was canonized by the Church in 1807, he had already been the patron saint for multitudes of African who had suffered the “middle passage” for a couple of centuries. The cult of Benedito was, and is still, extremely popular in Brazil, and elsewhere.<sup>32</sup>

As a child, Benedito had been devoted to the Rosary (possibly a mimetic trans-fabulation of the Yoruba divination Ifà rosary or *ofele*). He had been a shepherd and then a member of a community of hermits until such fugitive congregations were dismantled by the Pope. His wisdom, healing miracles, and growing popularity eventually led him to join a monastery in the city of Palermo where he could be more easily reached. He could not read or write; but his discernment was so keen that he became the advisor of high-ranking clergy and nobility and a close friend to Marcantonio Colonna—the Viceroy of Sicily (the winner of the Lepanto battle). He was often represented in the original iconography as carrying a basket full of flowers. This echoes the legend of a *composting miracle*: as the saint swept the dormitories one day he gathered *the trash* in his tunic. The Viceroy happened to be visiting at the time so he asked to see what he was hiding there and Benedito showed him: he had turned the trash into a bunch of roses.

Bastide provides interesting information on the cult of Benedito during the *congadas*. The *congadas* of the enslaved celebrating their orishas/saints are occasions for theatrical representations called *cucumbi*. A historical record describes one of these *cucumbi* where a gendered conflict among black nations (a King Congo and a Queen Njinga) resulted in the death of their son.<sup>33</sup> In the play, a *feticeiro* (medicine man) carrying a snake around his neck, resurrects the Prince. This is his dialogue with the theatrical chorus as he expresses the more-than-human source of his power:

<i>Feticeiro:</i>	Who can do more than that?
<i>Chorus:</i>	The sun and the moon!
<i>Feticeiro:</i>	An even more powerful god?
<i>Chorus:</i>	Saint Benedict!

<sup>30</sup> I like to stress how Bastide’s wonderful observations about African and Afro-Brazilian ethos and spirituality help us to move towards an ontological turn recognizing the coherent *echo-spiritual* pattern in those cultural structures. See Roger Bastide, *The African Religions of Brazil*, 114.

<sup>31</sup> I love the etymology of *orisha/orixa* (òrìsà) suggested by the Santeria scholar James Mason, which recombines the word *orí* (a physical/spiritual head, also a specific capacity or “genius”—an inspirative daimon) and the word *sà* (a verbal root meaning “choosing with adequate reflexivity”). The *orishas* are either “well chosen” heads or heads that choose well. They are entities chosen by the elusive creator Olódumare to manifest and transmit spiritual traditions. See Ócha’ni Lele, *Sacrificial Ceremonies of Santería: A Complete Guide to the Rituals and Practices* (Rochester, NY: Inner Traditions, 2012).

<sup>32</sup> For a portrait of San Benedetto the Moor, see [https://www.traditioninaction.org/SOD/j283sd\\_Benedict\\_4-4.htm](https://www.traditioninaction.org/SOD/j283sd_Benedict_4-4.htm). For an example of street art in his honor (plus other images), see <https://www.franciscantradition.org/blog/118-saint-benedict-of-palermo-spiritual-guide-and-healer>.

<sup>33</sup> Bastide, *The African Religions of Brazil*, 119–23.

The implication is that the resurrecting power of ancestral heritage *lies in the shape-shifting composting power of a Saint turned Orisha*.<sup>34</sup>

Bastide also stresses the strong identification that enslaved Africans had with the Saint and its queering shape-shifting identity. The feeling of *kinship* is well described by what a black man confided to a Methodist missionary in Brazil during a procession where the statue of Benedito was carried: “La vem o meu parente!” (“There comes my kin!”)

The shape-shifting humorous and trickster aspect of the relationship with the saint was well expressed by a local ditty with an explicit wink to the practice of pouring alcoholic libations on the statues of saints during *congadas*:

Saint Benedict’s a saint,  
Whom every black adores  
He drinks brandy,  
And when he sleeps he snores.

His feast is a crucial moment in which sacred and profane mingled. Thus, in spite of hiding the invisible in the visible religious cloak of the oppressor, something percolated through the cracks. There are numerous accounts by outraged white colonial clerics concerning the spiritual queering of Catholic tradition during the *congadas*. For example, “When Father Correias visited Bahia in 1689 he was astonished to see in a procession a float depicting the Holy Virgin arguing with Saint Benedict who was behaving ‘in a most indecent fashion.’”<sup>35</sup>

Even for some of the Franciscans the *congadas* these celebrations were hard to stomach. They complained of seeing “people of color sneaking into white churches through the backdoor to hold the celebrations with guitars and drums (as a complaint to Lisbon put it) or participating in religious processions ‘with their misdeeds and prostitutes, just as though they were not different from honest white people.’”<sup>36</sup>

In the cult of the saint/orisha we can discern the seeds of a dualistic post-humanist and pre-humanist spirituality, its holy/promiscuous entanglement with life and the world—even when all seems lost—turning shit into flowers, turning “monsters” into saints, as much as turning the saint into a monster in the eyes of the colonial uncomposted religiosity.

## **Theological and Indigenous Traces of Onto-fugitivity**

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<sup>34</sup> Another amplification of this creolization can be observed in the Venezuelan *congadas* celebrated every year in honor of San Benedito when the invocation of the *Capitan de lingua*: “Ajé, Ajé, Ajé, Ajé, Benito Ajé” is devotionally repeated by the crowd. According to Bastide the Dahomey Yoruba had associated Benedito with Ajé, the hereditary son of the King of Dahomey. According to legend, Ajé was seeking his mother who had refused polygamy. Along the way, Ajé nourishes the hungry and heals the sick, but dies before finding his mother. He is incorporated in the Yoruba pantheon. As a god he is associated to the blessing of rain and the fertility of waters, rivers and lakes. The Yoruba word *Ajé* indicates the generative power behind wealth and food. I find of great interest the fact that gender conflict and its resolution has its place in such narratives of care and transformation.

<sup>35</sup> Bastide, *The African Religions of Brazil*, 116ff.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

I submit that “composting”—the metabolic theme—has always been crucial in religious narratives and myths. What is hidden, disregarded, invisible, fugitive, the stone that was rejected, the prodigal son, the prince turned beggar. Isn't there a recurrent tale about a necessary posture? In order to face our predicament in this life we do need narratives dealing with death and resurrection, suffering and transformation, knowledge and unknowing, action and non-action, being and unbeing, beyond binaries.

In Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism and especially in their mystical and esoteric strains there are infinite traces of a “hidden treasure” calling seekers on a spiritual quest.<sup>37</sup> A treasure that cannot be defined univocally. Ibn 'Arabi makes an amazing paradoxical statement: “if things do not have *existence* how can they cease to exist?”<sup>38</sup> What if our dualistic cognitive take on *existence* ends up cloaking the hidden continuum beyond the binaries of life and death? What if reality *does not* reinforce our way of equating *being* with existence? Rūūzbehān spoke of this when he talked of aspiration as the “language of nothingness,” ravishing seekers through beauty “beyond the peak of Being, where neither fullness nor emptiness reign.”<sup>39</sup> In Sura 18 of the Quran, Khidr tries to teach Moses paradoxical trust. Its Sufi interpretations resonate with many Zen Koans on the immanent unfathomable mystery of reality. Spiritual perception seems to consider immanence and transcendence as a constellation opening onto multilayered aspects of reality rather than as binary opposites. Frithjof Schuon—who had been initiated into the Sufi Shādhilī order, and in later life was also adopted into both a Lakota tribe and a Crow tribe—wrote:

The divine essence includes in its infinite potentiality a principle of indetermination, the first and foremost of all indeterminations... the function of Being is to express its infinity in the direction of ‘nothingness’ or towards ‘illusion’ which can thereby be transformed in ontological and existential possibilities.<sup>40</sup>

Buddhism has given yet another turn to the epistemological cloud of unknowing of the Western mystical tradition: “Whereas Western apophatism is mostly epistemological, in Buddhism apophatism has an ontological dimension.”<sup>41</sup> Such confluence of different sources may be seen as an arbitrary Deleuzian assemblage of heterogeneous material but it is towards this diffractive methodology of dis/inquiry that Akomolafe challenges us. In this process, indigenous wisdom might have much to tell us to enrich what is now called “new” materialism.

Multiple kaleidoscopic facets of reality might be hidden by the cloak of beliefs and human cognitive metaphors. The Rauto of New Britannia consider, for example, the open expression of a metaphor (“it’s as if...”) as a childish trick unworthy of attention. Thomas Maschio describes

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<sup>37</sup> See the famous *hadith qudsi*: “I was a hidden treasure and I wished to be known.”

<sup>38</sup> From the *Treatise of Unity* (Risālat-el-Ahadiyah), attributed to Ibn Arabi and quoted by F. Schuon in *De l'Unité transcendante des religions* (Arles: Sulliver, 2000), 52.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Abū Muḥammad Rūzbahān ibn Abī Naṣr al- Baqlī al-Fasawī, *L'ennuagement du coeur: suivi de Les éclosions de la lumière de l'affirmation de l'unicité* (Paris: Seuil, 1998).

<sup>40</sup> F.Schuon, *Comprendre l'Islam* (Milan: SE, 1998), 69.

<sup>41</sup> In other words relating to indetermination through unknowing is not only an epistemological necessity (a methodology for understanding), but is a portal to an intrinsic creative dimension of reality. See Raimon Panikkar, *The Silence of God; the Answer of the Buddha*, Orbis (Maryknoll, NY: 1989).

the Rauto concept of *makai* in which a responsible adult must resist the temptation to transform a sudden insight into a metaphor. The challenge is to place the insight into a wider network of thought-perceptions until the insight itself finds its place. The interesting result of this process counters the drive to dissociation allowing us “to remember the faces of the dead.”<sup>42</sup> Again, slowing down our metaphoric angst and staying with what “is”—whatever it may be—seems to reconnect us to the fertile mycelian haunting of ongoing kinship, with an uncanny “house of many mansions” already present in deep time. In his book *These Wilds Beyond Our Fences*, Bayo Akomolafe shares extensively his own struggles with mainstream literal interpretations focusing on transcendence and promises of reparation in the future rather than in the meanwhile.

### **“of the earth/not of *this* world”**

Bayo Akomolafe tells us how his early experience of evangelical Nigerian Christianity culturally informed what was later perceived as a rich but insufficient theological layer. Akomolafe describes himself as a “recovering Christian as well as a recovering psychologist.” His rich speculative storytelling draws from Biblical narratives, Yoruba and Greek mythology, philosophy and science, exploring spiritual/material lines of flight, engaging the reader or listener, and reworlding a prophetic perception of the inherent paradoxes of spiritual embodied experience.

Honoring his own contribution to the composting of Christian heritage, I would like to point to ways onto-fugitivity may re-emerge in our reading of the Gospel narrative. The Gospel’s tale begins *on the road* with Mary and Joseph on their way to the mandatory tax census. Not much later baby Jesus is led into an Afrocentric flight into Egypt. He remains set on a non-conforming path where the promised sanctuary, mistranslated as “kingdom,”<sup>43</sup> has nothing to do with the forms of imperial power nor the securities of home. Yeshua considers himself more maroon than a wild animal: “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” (Matthew 8:20). There are a number of logion on fugitivity and sanctuary (“kingdom”) as *invisibility*, *incalculability*, *exile* and even *persecution*. As for the popular Christian mantra “in the world but not of this world”: it needs unpacking. If we look at many of Jesus’s statements—in particular, in the Sermon on the Mount—we might reconsider this logion in these terms:<sup>44</sup> “you are not of *this* world (the systemic destructive imperial mode of socio-economical-ecological domination) *but although exiled you are of this Earth*; and although entangled in this world, you have been granted a wider mycelian connective perception of what the kingdom already is and of what the “world” itself might mean and become “on Earth,” as it is in the wider metabolic invisible “groundless (heavenly) ground” of reality.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> In T. Maschio, *To Remember the Faces of the Dead: The Plenitude of Memory in Southwestern New Britain* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994).

<sup>43</sup> Sophie Strand is bringing forth a lot of material on re-rooting and rewilding the Gospel away from the Roman imperial distortion of a message suggesting an embodied relationship to the Earth as the present ongoingness of a “Kingdom,” both hidden and constantly revealed to imaginative discernment. See her forthcoming books.

<sup>44</sup> In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5, 6, 7), what is hidden to humans and to their traumatic heritage is the perceptive imaginative *body*, “Is not life more than food and *the body more than clothing?*” (Matthew 6:25). Not just literal clothing, but the way we dress reality, the paradox of what is hidden to our sight and yet remains fully visible, the trees the flowers, the birds. There is a great emphasis on ethical aesthetics rather than on the representation of power since the glory of King Solomon does not compare with the beauty of lilies (Matthew 6:28).

<sup>45</sup> Akomolafe already speaks of “world” in non-binary terms, including all agencies—human and not-human—at work.

I suggest with Sophie Strand that many of Jesus' parables and miracles are not mere metaphors, but point to onto-fugitivity as the *hidden*, metamorphic "leaven" dimension of *being*.<sup>46</sup> Imaginative *perception* of this dimension may be portal opening onto a wider immanent instantaneous reconnection of *longing* and *belonging*, revealing a layered reality. ("In my house are *many* mansions" is a verse Bayo Akomolafe often revisits.)

### **Icarus Grounded (a Dream)**

There is, however, in many religious formulations, the danger of idealizing fugitiveness as the promise of future redemption and purification, with mansions yet to come: the windy and seductive promise of Paradise as a disembodied, transcendent home in the distant forever, blowing the angel of history away from *just now*.

I have found Bayo's work extremely helpful in discerning the essential thread nourished by promises of exceptionalism and purity. Those beguiling promises of future reparation, hope, and justice may nourish a negative escapism as well as a normative spiritual inflation: the escape from our own entanglement with *both* the Earth and the World. I was particularly struck by the tale of Icarus as an example of this, hinted at in *These Wilds Beyond Our Fences*:

Icarus of old, seeking to escape his material imprisonment in Crete. . . is a psychic riddle that leaks into the sociopolitical, telling a story of dislocation and separation. . . . Being 'good'? Yet another flight of Icarus to escape the sensuous, unwieldiness, and ethical extravagance of the material world.<sup>47</sup>

The permanent dislocation generated by modernity is paradoxical: the drive towards centrality and dominion, the longing for the governance of process isolates us from the living and from our own exiled capacities. It is a sort of *Icarus complex*, a sort of omnipotent Spiderman fantasy for a teenager struggling as he deals with complex heritages. Young Icarus was prisoner in Crete along with his father Dedalus who was being punished by the local tyrant for having a hand in helping Theseus escape the Labyrinth that Dedalus himself had designed. Here the hero had killed a semi-human hybrid, the Minotaur, son of the unlawful coupling of the queen with a bull. To this monster were sacrificed the girls that the Athenians were forced to send to Crete every year. So many themes are combined in this myth: the quest for purity; desire and its demonization; the creation of monsters; the vilification of pre-Hellenic myths concerning the lady-goddess of animals, and also the pretense of solving or escaping these heritages. "Cutting off the Bull's head," as we still say in Italy means, "settling things once and for all."

Sons and daughters in Greek mythology generally do not fare very well. And so poor Icarus. Once again it is his ingenuous father, Dedalus, who finds a *solution*: in the prison tower where they are confined, he discovers a nest of bees and builds with wax and feathers the wings for their flight. However Icarus is not content with a mere fugitive solution: the ascent must be extreme, the solution must be "final," the aspiration to freedom unhinged from context, (Luciferian) heavenly drunkenness increases as he rises towards the Sun till the wax melts and Icarus falls into the sea and dies. Chagall's genius represents Icarus's fall as a psycho-social

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<sup>46</sup> Is this a good place to remember that being is actually a verb, declined as gerund pointing to ongoingness?

<sup>47</sup> B. Akomolafe *These Wilds*, 24, 229.

dissociative tragedy.<sup>48</sup> Even the unbearable lightness of being must be grounded in a collective metabolic narrative rather than in personal escape.

I had a dream about Icarus in a time in my life when I was wondering how to face, rather than avoid, conflict. After a number of personal events inviting me to “stay with the trouble,” a dream came. I don’t recall dreaming before about Greek mythology, but Akomolafe’s take on Icarus’ dangerous drive to ascent had stuck. This is the transcript of my dream:

*A dark night near a forest. I see Icarus. On the ground. He is dressed like a fighter. Feet on the ground. Alive. With some kind of weapon on his shoulder. Behind or near a barricade. On the lookout. I recall a feeling of pleased and puzzled surprise. “Oh, Icarus came down to earth”—I know nothing about his fight, or why he has a weapon. I am only called to take into awareness this event with no judgement. Icarus is here, grounded. In the cracks.*

Might this be a hint towards the grounding of the fugitive? Maybe finding a crack in the ground, enabling survival outside carceral paradigms, yet staying with what is, avoiding the flight to the sun, in the illusion of a better transcendent solution, or escaping into spiritual or political exceptionalism, away from the ever-present middle?

### **Onto-fugitivity in the Age of Tracing**

Thinking of the challenges we might face with such new posture “in the cracks,” I recognize the need to fully face and acknowledge traumatic heritages without getting stuck in paralyzing politics of resentment. Bayo Akomolafe talks about “open fugitivity” as a possible necessary mode of *touching trauma* without surrendering to the idea that building monuments to traumatic memory might heal it. As we face the colonial heritage of modernity we see emerging a deep underlying archetypal nightmarish pattern/fear/desire of total control spectrally embodied in the age of tracing, digital identities, biometrics.

The body itself is becoming the border that has to be guarded, a dimension extending from the African bodies to the whole world, also furthered by the global health crisis. So the question coming up as we move towards the end of this recognition on fugitivity would be “how can we be fugitives in a world that aims at total tracing and transparency?” Or could fugitivity itself become an altogether *different kind of tracing* into our relationship with the non-human? A way to develop new portals of perception? Such tracing might imply accessing exiled capacities: here we might have to turn to the trickstery of opacity and remember how enslaved people learned how to hide their *orishas* and their own agency under the cloak of the slavers’ Christian saints, bringing new hybridized life to the ongoingness of traditions. We might have no Saints to cloak our hidden strengths and even no recognizable Orishas. We might have to create new myths of resistance and new ways to clothe them.

Totalitarianism and total transparency have been a topos of literature from Orwell to Ben Okri. The most striking testimony of this is the collection of dreams gathered by Charlotte Beradt during the ascent of the German Reich up in the Thirties of last century. She writes:

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<sup>48</sup> <https://www.chagallpaintings.com/fall-of-icarus/>



The regulations, laws, and ordinances that act to prescribe both the actions and reactions of people living under totalitarian rule are the most conspicuous of its realities and thus the first to penetrate the dreams of its subjects. Its gigantic bureaucratic machinery is eminently suitable as a grotesquely macabre dream motif.<sup>49</sup>

In 1934, having lived one year under the Third Reich, a forty-five-year-old doctor had the following dream:

It was about nine o'clock in the evening. My consultations were over, and I was just stretching out on the couch to relax with a book on Matthias Grunewald, when suddenly the walls of my room and then my apartment disappeared. I looked around and discovered to my horror that discovered to my horror that as far as the eye could see no apartment had walls any more. Then I heard a loudspeaker boom, "According to the decree of the 17th of this month on the Abolition of Walls. . . ." So disturbed was the doctor by his dream that he wrote it down of his own accord the next morning (and subsequently dreamt he was being accused of writing his dreams).<sup>50</sup>

No fugitive has the right to opacity under totalitarian rule!

So, if distancing ourselves through physical marronage in some ideal community is no longer possible, how can we imagine a contemporary fugitive path? We are being fed stories that keep us from touching trauma—official accounts of what is happening and what we need to do to get back to normal, to restore the ideal of progress: the algorithm of business as usual. Contemporary geopolitical conflicts do not question the overall idea of governance of human bodies through the kind of dissociations that keep us adapted rather than questioning the *status quo*. We need new stories.

As vessels of reproduction of neoliberal capitalism, the idea of healing as avoidance keeps us from noticing that trauma is how things get different. . . so how do we subvert that. . . ? We find other ways of telling the stories of what is happening to us through speculative fabulation, a fancy way of saying that the future is not still, that we can tell other stories about what is coming—I think of speculative histories and speculative pasts.<sup>51</sup>

More than ever we need to *approach* trauma and fugitivity in a quest for liberation. To highlight the relationship between successful fugitivity and *touching* trauma I will share a last personal/collective dream fragment:

*A bus is waiting to leave a dark ominous dystopic city. I am one of the passengers on the bus. All aboard are eager to leave this place.... Suddenly a ragged child, maybe 5 or 6 years old, comes*

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<sup>49</sup> Charlotte Beradt, *The Third Reich of Dreams* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1968), 21.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>51</sup> Bayo Akomolafe, *Where to go*: podcast for the Science and Nonduality network, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=17-PF\\_0a2jQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=17-PF_0a2jQ)

*running out of an alley and wants to join the bus.... He is obviously fleeing, either a concentration camp, a context of war or some kind of Covid-related forced confinement. The bus driver gruffly forbids him to climb onto the bus. We might have been granted the privilege to travel whereas the child is a high-intensity fugitive. However he/she smartly awaits for the right moment and dives into the bus from the middle door hiding under one of the seats, curled up in a fetal position. I quickly sit in front of him/her to further hide and protect him/her with my legs.... The other passengers are moved in solidarity and in the wish to hide the child. The bus leaves. The driver is no longer a threat, as the hidden child seems to have become the secret engine moving our collective journey. We drive past a border we move into dawn and daylight and eventually the bus stops in the open countryside and opens the doors. There is a feeling of liberation and deep relief as passengers begin to get off the bus.... Many gratefully rejoice at the child's successful escape. One of the passengers however acts with condescending unrelated cheer and superficial empathy as he congratulates the child. As a consequence he immediately gets sick with covid. Some of the passengers stand back wondering if the traumatic child may be the carrier of a viral disease. However we collectively realize that just a few moments before an older passenger with a terminal illness had reached out to the child she was instantaneously healed. The poisonous traumatic heritage can be a pharmakon. Our attitude is crucial.*

### **Post-Activism as Post-Human Activism**

I would like to close my circular exploration of onto-fugitivity by returning to the concept of *post-activism* as post-human activism in the age of algorithmic governance. Surveillance technology seems to be moving beyond cell phone, computer and social media control, past localization indoors through WiFi or established border biometrics provided by body scanners and facial recognition devices. Enhanced emerging behavioral biometrics include *gait video-recognition* (how you walk); *heartbeat, and breathing patterns* (through "laser doppler biometry"); and even tracing our bio-footprint, the unique individual emission of *microbial cells* in the air, as well as monitoring *scents*.<sup>52</sup>

The rationale behind these ongoing attempts is that only the unfreedom of total control with might protect society from chaos, from our own destructive drives towards each other, the rest of the living and the planet and protect privileged nations from ecological and political tsunamis. What kind of picture of humanity emerges from such limited ethnocentric perspective? And how many other human social and spiritual possibilities have been erased by this stance?

There may be some lesson in returning to the resistance of enslaved people, to how they hid their connection with the non-human and the more-than-human (their *orishas*) in the cracks of existing patterns. Creativity might find cracks through enhanced perception. And Reality itself might be too chaotic to be muzzled. Chaos plays its organizing and disorganizing game through technology as well. The world kicks back. And there is a growing emerging perception that social transformation may not be, after all, an anthropocentric concern disentangled from the play of other agencies.

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<sup>52</sup> See Elise Thomas, "New surveillance tech means you'll never be anonymous again," in *WIRED*, September 16, 2019. <http://wired.co.uk>

The real challenge is how to apply all of this to our present predicament. When Akomolafe tells us that a good journey is about dismembering rather than “arrival” he diffracts the mainstream psycho-social therapeutic compass into a ritualized metabolic reconsideration of our cosmological and existential “position.” He calls this new position *post-activism*: the kind of activism that may arise when we decenter the human after we have reached the end of our ropes, when things no longer fit.

We might need a cartography of *lostness* where “the things we name as obstacles are invitations to shapeshift” through emerging portals of perception:

*Post--activism is not the way I describe a superior form of being that guarantees solutions. It is not “post-” in the sense of being a successor narrative, a deeper truth, a surer track to utopian worlds, a formula for saving the world. (...)*

*Post-activism is not a way of dismissing contemporary activism as ‘not radical enough’; it is not a ‘sacred activism’ that often turns out to be a coupling together of eastern spiritualities with western plot points and objectives(...)*

*Post-activism is instead a reframe of activism, of agency (...) in allowing the objects we often think of as mere ‘things’ their due place in the worlding of the social, post-activism commits to a different performance of responsivity. It opens up room for other places of power. It seeks out wilder and wider coalitions of power-with-the-world by situating the human figure in a compost heap of other ‘equally’ powerful agencies.<sup>53</sup>*

Ultimately, Akomolafe points to the ultimate metabolic need: reframing modernity’s relationship with death. The final quote I will share reminds us to build both grief and celebration altars at the crossroads, rather than settling for quick fix denials that would structure compliance to the “new normal.” If we do, we might still learn to touch trauma, to hospice modernity, and to turn “the slave ship” into a vessel of generativity:<sup>54</sup>

*We think of death too strictly I think, as this absolute terminal point. I am interested in spaces in culture, for gatherings, where we touch the traces of our unbecoming and notice where we are falling apart. Where we reimagine death not as something down the line, but a paradigm,<sup>55</sup> a thick now, an immanent field of loss and creativity that is entangled with what we rudely tease out as ‘life’. Modernity is about putting things together neatly, proliferating still images, being coherent, noble, independent. Consider what might be produced if, instead of thinking of death strictly as a firm line or an isolated event, we find ways to experiment with how we are already falling away, and how, for example, your identity is dying, how you are nomadic, diasporic, constantly moving, even when the habits of my perceiving you compel me to see you as a white woman. If we had practices to notice the ways where our names, our bodies are changing and giving way to something else. How we are actually ghosts (...) This is what I mean by fugitive*

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<sup>53</sup> From *The Allegory of the Pit: Or the Irony of Victory*, <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/>

<sup>54</sup> Again, see Vanessa Machado de Oliveira, *Hospicing Modernity*.

<sup>55</sup> Two different examples of such emerging paradigmatic aspiration to incorporate quantum entanglement practices could be—among many—the work of the collective Black Quantum Futurism or the quantum anarcho-Zen-neomaterialist narrative delight on touching grief by Ruth Ozeki. See [www.blackquantumfuturism.com](http://www.blackquantumfuturism.com) and Ruth Ozeki, *The Book of Form and Emptiness* (New York: Viking, 2021).

*exile: leaving the plantation which reproduces images and instead helping us to see we are beyond static images. We are not as photographic as we think we are. We are abroad in ways that escape the 'Man', the head of the pyramid, of the capitalist structure. And that is the invitation of a constellation of processional relational ontologies.*

Thus, through the kind of hope that troubles easy “hopes,” through the failure of idealized activisms, in the incomprehensibility of the moment, in places of rupture and defeat, through individual and collective brokenness, new relational commons are emerging in worldwide networks. And although each local post-activist experience is certainly contextual, informed by a relationship with land and heritage, new transnational portals of intimacy and alliance emerge from the growing common awareness of living in diasporic cracks, re-tuning with the multiple agencies of an exiled planet kicking back.



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