

Embarkation: A Meditation on Making Sanctuary at the End of the World

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In this meditative essay, I performatively read French educator Fernand Deligny’s inspiring post-war guerrilla anti-asylum politics together with the bacchanal embarkations of Èsù, a Yoruba trickster-god who teaches us that loss is the condition of life; along with the resuscitated concept of “making sanctuary” as a heuristic for creating political imaginaries for end-of-world art; through the meandering spiritualities of my fatherhood and relationship with my autistic son, Kyah; and, through the dense transversality of postactivism, to trace out the fragile contours of a humbling vision for an end-of-world network dedicated to transformative change that goes beyond justice, reform, cures, and fixes. This politics—an autistic politics—embodies the Yoruba wisdom that suggests that to find one’s way, one must lose it generously.

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The Hidden Life of Loss

Like eddies of dust raised by the wind as it passes, the living turn upon themselves, borne by the great blast of life. They are therefore relatively stable, and counterfeit immobility so well that we treat each of them as a thing rather than as a progress, forgetting that the very permanence of their form is only the outline of a movement.

—Henri Bergson (1911)

Every year, across the Atlantic Ocean, a prestigious procession of siliceous shells or frustules belonging to dead and ancient freshwater diatoms, whipped up by fierce Saharan winds in North Africa, travels westward from the Bodélé Depression (considered the driest and dustiest place on earth) to the Americas. This ghostly river of dust—visible from space—curls around the planet like a brown sequined pashmina shawl stretched across a glowing blue orb, eventually depositing its nutrient-rich contents in the hungry Amazon rainforest.¹

The stunning implication of this planetary exercise isn’t lost on climate scientists and atmospheric chemists who study this yearly ritual closely: without this migrant sea of precious dust spilling from the shores of Africa, from the dead womb of the carcass of the once mighty Lake Mega Chad, the Amazon—a leaching system characterized by the constancy of heavy rainfall that washes away nutrient-rich soil—cannot supply the planet with oxygen. These silicon coffins play an enormous role in the world’s photosynthesis, shaping our lives whether we notice or not. Coming to think about this delicate (and largely invisible) work takes *one’s breath away*: we cannot breathe without the prolific generativity of the dead. Perhaps no other planet-wide vocation strikes such an immaculate balance between loss and generosity, between desolation and abundance, and between death and life. *This is the stuff of worship.*

¹ Richard Lovett, “African dust keeps Amazon blooming,” in *Nature* (August 9, 2010). www.nature.com.

It would seem then that even death has an afterlife, and that even desolation is not completely itself *all by itself* in a processual, relational world. Boundaries migrate; essences flail and become threadbare in the fierce kino-political winds of movement; continents break and spill into each other, carried by counterhegemonic forces that mock neat borders and stable identities. Home is always bleeding, losing its way. Everything *embarks*. Everything *besides* itself.²

Perhaps, the liminal text of other transatlantic voyages can be read along with and through these stories of geologic loss and revitalization, these strange deterritorializations of identity. The Middle Passage, which saw the capture and forced migration of approximately eleven million Africans, fleshly bags of black dust carted away in vessels blessed by westward winds, was also the context of strange plot twists.

At first glance, the 400-year transatlantic slave trade is a binary composition, a socio-political arrangement chiefly defined by human actors: on one side, the white slave masters and the institutions that supported their heinous economic imperatives; and, on the other side, the black slaves, stolen and sold off by local conspirators. Today, the history of these voyages haunt conversations about reparations, about forgiveness, reconciliation, and justice. In the United States and elsewhere, an identitarian politics dedicated to the alleviating the plight of minorities and to dismantling white claims to superiority and exclusivity has inspired an activism that seeks equal representation, inclusivity, and recognition for the oppressed in the face of generational loss. In more recent times, the American event involving the public execution of George Floyd by an officer of the law has become a flag point in the conversation about the urgency and inadequacy of justice.

But is justice all that is available? Isn't justice a form of management and abstraction secreted and maintained by what Erin Manning calls "the clearing"? Are there no worlds beyond this fishbowl? At least one pattern produced by a diffractive reading-together (or reading-through-each-other) of the rapturous Saharan-Amazon dynamic I have just described, and the Middle Passage, is the speculative possibility of *excess*. Surplus. Something *extra* is at work even in the most desolate of places and circumstances. Plumes of dead dust and dormant diatoms captured by compelling winds become life; black bodies, supposedly without agency, shackled and useful only within the systems of instrumentality traced out by imperial settlement, somehow refuse this categorization, and become part of an unintended project of ontological expansion by co-producing creolized worlds and practices. Both migrations—diatom dust and black dust—are instances of *something else* that haunts death and capture. A freshness from desolation. *Out of the bitter, something sweet*. A miracle. Blackness becomes an involution of colonial settlement; a geophysical anarrangement or "deformation" of stable lines; a refusal to fit in as contained object to the white subject; a spilling away; a cartography of loss and *wander lines*; a fugitivity that escapes containment; a testament to life in the cracks of displacement.

Trinidadian novelist Earl Lovelace marks this queer subterranean life with his "bacchanal aesthetics," an unexpected cultural vibrancy amidst the realities of enslavement. A Caribbean party in the hull of the slave ship. Kathryn Yusoff, in her reading of Dionne Brand, recomposes

² Here, I use *besides* as a verb much in the same way I am learning to think of embarkation as spillage. To beside oneself is to spill away from being identified; it is to be de-formed and fall away from the stasis of subjectivization in molecular modes of social production.

blackness as a “material vector that opens out new geographies of space and time that make fierce departures from the subjugating cuts...exorcised by imperial conditions.”³ That death *exceeds* itself and *besides* itself disrupts the activist algorithms of *getting even* and goes beyond resistance.

There’s more to captivity than even the captive and the captor know or could know. There’s a strange beauty in the crack that the algorithms and logistics of containment cannot articulate.

An apocryphal story whispered by those who know, a shocking tale of a seditious trickster-god from Yorubaland in present day Nigeria, brings together these musings on the hidden life of loss. Formulated in Nigerian playwright Femi Euba’s *The Gulf*, it involves Èsù, the decadent òrìṣà who inhabits the monstrous crossroads, who wields agency at the site where bodies spill into each other, who tuned Robert Johnson’s guitar, who was so troubling to those who heard of his exploits that an Anglican Bishop and linguist rechristened him “Satan,” and whose renown stretches from the drunken pantheon of old Kemet to the phallic monument that pierces the sky in Washington, DC. It is said that the other òrìṣàs, Èsù’s archetypal super-human siblings, mounted an insurgency against the transatlantic slave trade when it began to steal away their worshippers. Ogun, the spirit of metal and victory, rushed in his fury to the shorelines with battle-axe awchirl. But on the way, he was intercepted by Èsù, who drugged him with palm wine, sending him to a deep sleep.

Seeing his opportunity, Èsù stowed away aboard the ships, tucking himself between the creases of the imperial, the devil in the details. Instead of closing the transversal crack of imperial trade or freeing the slaves, he sailed with them to the New World.

In this story lies the kernel of a different politics, a posthumanist/postactivist panentheistic animism that constitutes a fragile invitation to new modes of responsivity in troubling times, a signal from the intimate distance calling for errancy. At issue in this essay is what an animist politics calibrated to loss might make possible in a time when minoritarian efforts and countercultural attempts to address white capture only seems to reproduce this incarceration. Contemporary activism’s efforts at achieving racial justice (which is already also a matter of the Anthropocene and therefore climate justice) seem like an attempt to trace sturdy nautical lines back to the point of embarkation. Back to the Bight of Benin, if you will. That is, it seeks a disembarkation. A stable home. To correct history’s mistakes, to heal or seal the cracks of displacement, to correct the *mispronunciation of bodies* wrought by extractive tongues, to topple imperial regimes, it reignites a colonial cartography—deploying the usual maps for its odyssey. But there is no “Africa” to return to, no home with determinable boundaries awaiting its lost children. Even home is spirited away in orchestral clouds of dust.⁴

Èsù’s unsettling villainy glistens darkly as a potent figure in times of political stuckness when contemporary activism and the politics it critiques both reinforce the conditions of the

³ Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 9.

⁴ If contemporary activism retraces colonial lines in its quest for disembarkation, then it reproduces imperial cartographies. And what are bodies if not cartographies nested within cartographies, milieus entangled in milieus, intensities swimming in intensities, in dense palimpsests of reproducibility and potential errancy?

critiqued and of capture. By joining the slaves, Èsù refused to seal the cracks. Instead of correcting this historical mispronunciation, he crawled into it, following signals to elsewhere, following zigzagging lines across the surface of the deep, touching the dark treasures of embarkation. Èsù didn't leave home per se; he travelled with home in its breathless liminality.⁵

This playful and experimental essay is about Èsù, about stuckness, about embarkation and about a politics it might summon, what it might ask of us in response: a *making sanctuary* together-with, a straying from neat lines, a tracing of wander lines like Saharan dust and Yoruba devils across the face of the bulbous blue. Getting lost together. By embarkation, I mean to name *Being's* indebtedness to *becoming*. I mean to say we are all *carried away* and that there is no arrival at the other side of this movement.

Embarkation is a black poetics of migrant dust, errant bodies, bacchanal displacements, and dense milieus that destabilize subjectivity as belonging to the subject and, instead, favour impermanent molecular movements over “fixed notions and representations of personhood.”⁶ Embarkation doesn't begin with a subject, with a getting on the boat. It is pre-individual, a field of gestures and thresholds and intensities—the movement that precedes (and enlists) the *I that moves*. However, it is tied to the ‘boat’ and its voyages in convening blackness—not just across the Atlantic Ocean but across the cobblestones and asphalted tarmacs of the civilization and citizenry it helped build and name. Embarkation names the counterhegemonic forces at work right now, the ‘great blast of life’, of which our forms and identities are only outlines of a movement. *Bodies without organs*. Perhaps one might recognize embarkation in those barely perceptible moments when the familiar feels strange, slightly off, beside itself.

Èsù too is beside himself. “He” takes on many forms.⁷ He is not singular, uniformly accessible, or reducible to an image. Èsù spills; this spillage is life-death. In my life, Èsù shows up as my five-year-old autistic son, Kyah Àbáyòmi. To think about a theology of embarkation and *making sanctuary* as a politics of crawling into displacement, I offer a narrative account of my vulnerable engagements with Kyah, our navigations of “his” autism, and how the revolutionary *black* work of French cartographer and anti-asylum visionary, Fernand Deligny, in the unforgiving and rocky regions of Cevennes in post-Second World War France, offers an example, a rehearsal, of *making sanctuary with/in embarkation*. As such, I hope to lightly trace an *autistic* politics that investigates the nonutilitarian gift of displacement and convenes a robust account of sociomaterial transformations in times of climate loss, racial injustice, and exhausted activisms. Through these experiments in thinking, I hold close (but—as Yoruba prayers caution—not too close!) the dark figure of Èsù and his troubling transatlantic voyage—returning again and again to this refusal to save as necessary to a different kind of power-with-the-earth.

⁵ I think of morality as the place-making interface that convenes bodies, racializes bodies, performs subjectivity, and enacts closures often in terms of articulated codes, laws, and punishments. That is, morality cannot be thought apart from ontology and epistemology, questions about what reality is and questions about how we come to know anything at all. In this sense, “good” and “evil” are immanently composed within assemblages while remaining open to transversal cracks. These cracks are morality's indebtedness to ethical flows. Èsù's trickster travels were a kind of trans-moral transgression, a stretching of the questions, morality in lines of flight. Home becoming fugitive.

⁶ Chantelle Gray van Heerden, “The Slightest Gesture: Deligny, the Ritornello and Subjectivity in Socially just Pedagogical Praxis,” in *Education as Change* 21, No. 2 (2017): 11. 6–24, at 11.

⁷ Èsù is popularly represented as a male figure with a phallic horn on his head. I elect to follow these traditions here for convenience. However, the genre-defying, gender-melting, binary-bursting cannot be fixed into one corporeal “location.”

A Theory of Stuckness

In a more popular account of Èsù's troublemaking interventions that is in keeping with the trickster's reputation, he overhears two moonstruck lovers swearing their undying love to one another. Finding out they are about to be married and, for the time being, live in two different villages on either side of a single road, Èsù decides to test their claims to purity. On the day before the rituals, when both villages are supposed to come as one in celebration of the marriage, he paints one side of his body with white paint and the other with black, and—in daylight—simply walks down the street. At the end of the road, he hides himself and waits to see what happens. Through the doorway of her hut, a woman greets a friend in the neighbouring village across the road, remarking about the white-looking man that just passed. Her friend, confused by this description, insists that it was obviously a black-skinned man. A fight breaks out between them; other villagers join in—including the lovers, now torn apart by their mutually exclusive assertions that the *other side* is wrong. Èsù grins and goes home.

This story supports widely held perceptions that Èsù is neither good nor bad, *just* transversal. His duplicity *cleaves apart* and *cleaves together*. With an eye fixed on the new, he navigates and texturizes the hidden tensions in any given arrangement, and cuts through binaries that feed each other. And perhaps nothing else describes “stuckness” as well as the phrase, “binaries that feed each other.”

In my formulation of postactivism as coinciding with the cracks of displacement, and characterized by a transversality and radical redistribution of desire, agency and response-ability, I cradle a potent question that touches today's very crucial attempts to make sense of and address climate chaos, racism, and other civilizational ills: *what if the ways we are in response to a crisis are the crisis?* What if our attempts to *heal* only reproduce the body-paths that are available to and sponsored by surveillance apparatuses? In what ways might we say along with Jean Oury that “the hospital is ill”?⁸ How does the *therapeutic* reproduce the familiar? How do our solutions leave us trapped within cycles of sameness?

In recent times, climate activists, for example, have learned to articulate different iterations of the question above, even as the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change broadcasts alarming trends that do not portend well for the future.⁹ As global average temperatures increase, so do warnings that we are approaching a point-of-no-return from which it might be impossible or extremely difficult to address the runaway effects of warming on the environment. We are being urged to heed the call of science and create solutions to this life-ending crisis.

It seems, however, that we are in a situation in which popular “solutions” affectively leave human subjects “intact” and seek to manage or reform a world that has erred from normalcy—or the logistics of “the clearing” or modern settlement. From an animist perspective, climate

⁸ David Reggio and Mauricio Novello, “Interview: Jean Oury: ‘The Hospital Is Ill’” in *Radical Philosophy* 142 (May/June 2007): 32–45.

⁹ *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Working Group II Contribution to the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report*. <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report-working-group-ii/>

chaos marks a breach in the clearing, in flattened settlement, in the onto-epistemological conditions of industrial life, where something else beyond the colonial logic of the clear asks something of us that climate science and justice cannot address.

As such, most of what we throw at climate chaos only emphasize our stability as alienated subjects, a yearning for permanence, deepening the metabolic rift that performatively delinks us from the material flows of “nature.” A sensorial monoculture thus becomes entrenched, keeping us anchored to dopaminergic networks, troubling practices, and modes of thinking that reproduce alienation and homogenization.

In the thick of the Second World War, psychiatric care facilities in the Nazi-occupied collaborationist Vichy regime of France lost approximately 40,000 patients.¹⁰ These deaths were due in part to starvation, malnutrition, and abandonment—though there are suggestions that the Vichy government pursued a Nazi-inspired policy of extermination to get rid of the disabled. One psychiatric hospital at Saint-Alban-sur-Limagnole was reportedly the only institution of care that thrived when tens of thousands of in-patients around the country died. Leaders at the facility, especially François Tosquelles, recalibrated the hospital as a communal project in which patients, doctors, dissidents, and the surrounding neighbours participated. They believed that to counter the forces of fascism, they had to reject strands of alienation that also treated patients as isolated subjects to be fixed.

It was here that a movement, later named Institutional Psychotherapy, took root. The practitioners of this counterhegemonic, guerrilla-styled project understood that an exclusive focus on the subject/client was a risky invisibilization of the milieu (the atmospheres, political conditions, and totality of relations and considerations that spilled beyond the “client,” which Oury named “architectonic”) that produce bodies.¹¹ The political could not be divorced from the psychiatric any more than the wellbeing of the patient could be conceived outside of the goings-on outside the hospital and the theoretical contributions that imagined patients to be candidates for extermination. The hospital named the patient, but in order to be responsive-with the “patient” it had to become something different.

To meet “clients,” one must be responsive to the ways that the client *is* a politics, already an interstitial phenomenon of cross-cutting sociomaterialities, a field, not an isolated atom that is separate from a field. In similar ways, if climate action is limited to technobureaucratic solutions defined by managing loss, a cartography of disembarkation, it inadvertently commits itself to the ideological perpetuity of human centrality—which seems to be the issue at the heart of the Anthropocene.

¹⁰ Camille Robcis, *Disalienation: Politics, Philosophy, and Radical Psychiatry in Postwar France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021).

¹¹ An example of this stuckness was reported in November 2021 with a story that described a Danish municipality’s attempts at responding to an environmental situation at their beaches. The authorities spent a reported sum of \$150,000 every year to clean up the shores littered with seaweed, plastic, and trash – only to have the tractors dump the matter back into the water. In this case—as with many other well-intentioned climate solutions—the hidden curriculum is to maintain “the clearing.” Response-ability is framed in terms of what well-informed, sentient beings with agency are doing *for* a dumb, mute, unintelligent world without history, sociality, and agency. Responsibility is an internal human affair instead of the dynamic of mutual entanglement that conjures “humans” and the ecologies they are indebted to.

Herein lies the challenge of *stuckness*.

It is when the manifold relations, practices, gestures, intensities, thresholds, exclusions, tensions, imaginations, and body-subjectivities—summoned and partially articulated or territorialized by morality—have a summative effect of convergence, reproducing troubling dynamics, orientations, and sensorial imperatives. It is when the critique and the critiqued both feed each other and are sustained by a mutual indigestibility that stabilizes the “other” in perpetuity. It is when climate action ignites a field of practice whose circuitry retraces the outlines of an anthropocentric imperviousness to impermanence, to demise, to the vibrant animacies of a world not entirely available for our comfort or survival. It is when an identity politics arises in response to painful colonial infractions by insisting on a seat at the table of power constructed with technologies of dissociation. It is the torturous cyclicity of a shackled Prometheus facing the wrath of Zeus, his divine liver healing spontaneously only to be eaten again and again by the terrifying eagle that prompted the regeneration in the first place.

Stuckness is when healing produces bodies that are resources for surveillance and subjectivization.

When things get stuck, the morality that organizes the constituents of this carceral dynamic has come to the limits of its world-making rituals, and itself yearns to travel. This is how the trickster’s villainous apostasy comes to be. This is how the trickster refuses to heal displacements. This is how the world moves.

This riddle of stuckness is not dismissed by solutions as such; it doesn’t have an answer. Not anyone it can recognize. The riddle is its own undoing. It asks us to come in touch with how our bodies are cracked open by the new. It articulates a call to accountability—not the accountability that collapses at the feet of a staid objectivity, but one that is a coming alive to the generosity tucked into the uncertain, into loss. This accountability asks us to come undone, to travel, to think. And what is it to think if not to become something monstrously different?

Becoming a “Real Boy”

When my son Kyah was just about to turn two, he would retreat to a corner of the room and stack things on top of each other or run them straight in an unending line. He didn’t answer when we called him, and he very often looked like he was going to run into a wall, hit his head, and continue along his silent way as if nothing happened. He slept very little, walked around in circles on his toes, avoided eye contact, cried with every sigh of molecules around him, had “strange” gestures, hardly followed instructions, said no in response to everything, and slowly lost his appetite for everything we took great joy in feeding his older sister.

I had strong suspicions. We soon verified he was on the spectrum. The diagnosis hung like a slow-release poison in my flesh, killing me softly. Something ultimately died in me: the hope that I might have a meaningful father-son relationship with him. In the place of the intimacy I had hoped to cultivate with him, there lived a wild god whose primal name was “Why?” He haunted me every time I looked at Kyah, every time his inexplicable tears paralyzed the rest of my family, announcing his name as if to remind me he was still there. *Why? Why me?*

My fears got the better of me, whispering horrid tales about what might yet be. Somewhere in the terrible midst of these voices, a proposal leaked through the soil with a gripping instruction: fix him. Cure him. Something is wrong here. *This wasn't how it was meant to be.* These voices didn't belong to some gravelly demons. They were mine. And so, against my own training, against my politics and my once convenient views on *the autistic* and its emancipatory potentials for dislodging ableist notions of normalcy and subjectivity from their central positionings, I read hundreds of papers and articles on the subject—looking for that modality, that new insight in neurobiology, indigenous knowledge systems, homeopathy, *anything* that could help him.

Soon, it started to occur to me that I was constantly looking past him. I had learned in silent ways that my *real* son was just a few degrees obscured by the one I had. This became quite clear to me when, one day, when he was four, while shopping with my wife, our daughter and Kyah, he became terribly distressed. Holding his hand, I urged him to be quieter, to control himself, to “use your words.” Kyah’s refusal to be reformed, named, and tamed in the moment escalated into a full-blown “event:” he fell to the polished floor, thrashing and flailing, causing quite a stir. I could feel eyes burning into my skin—the color of which was already a matter of jokes to passers-by in the south Indian city of Chennai. If I were any lighter, the eyes that burned into mark would have left indelible scars. Kyah, oblivious to my deepening frustrations—or perhaps acutely aware of them—wept on the floor. He needed help. I wasn’t sure how to support him.

“Walk away,” my wife, EJ, said to me. She had closed the gap between us and hurried back to meet both of us struggling. Looking me straight in the eye, her voice was still, soft, unwavering, and grounded in a way that immediately assured me it was what needed to happen, she repeated herself. What happened was an understated demonstration of the politics I craved, the one I write about now. Kyah’s mother got on all fours and laid next to him in an accompanying silence that was the gestural equivalent of building an altar to a wild god. Between EJ and me, we painted wildly divergent accounts of Kyah’s autism. In my own portrait of things, Kyah was the wooden Pinocchio in Carlo Collodi’s and Disney’s versions of the story, where the marionette’s father-figure Geppetto longed for him to become a real boy. For EJ, Kyah was already miraculous. He didn’t need to become a “real boy.” He didn’t need reforms, a cure, or a fairy’s intervention. In this sense he was unlike Pinocchio, more like Buratino, Aleksei Tolstoy’s 1936 nonconformist reimagination of Collodi’s 1883 original in which the wooden boy doesn’t turn into a “real boy” but retains his wood subjectivity.

EJ’s courage called into question the centrality of “real” or “normal.” By accompanying him in his trouble, instead of seeking to close the flailing chasm that had yawned wide in that arena of eyes, she disputed the claims that Kyah’s autism was *his*. Instead, she asked, with the eloquence of her silence, “Why must there be relations of ownership behind autism? Must someone *own* autism for us to be enlisted, drawn in, and magnetized by autistic effects?” In what sense might we say autism is more-than-brain-based, more than chemicals, more-than-self? Milieu? Perhaps the immediate response to this might be that autism is not some metaphorical state or atmospheric condition; it is embodied in real lives and has been empirically supported by behavioural studies and clinical observations ever since science gained experimental maturity. At issue here is how personhood is rendered, and how individuals come to be. If we think of autistic

nonverbal children through the prism of stable selves, already made, each having (or failing to have) a master signifier in the interiority of the person, then we have already eliminated the stunning contingencies that bundle us up with material and molecular flows, technologies and conditions, secretions, and orientations, and animacies too strange to commit to language.

To leave out the world that is the condition of loss and becoming is to *counterfeit immobility* so well. As such, Deleuze and Guattari wrote about the Body without Organs to begin their multi-layered analyses not from stability but from movement. They might have understood autism as something ecological, a field not a property, a molecular-moral-material-territorial embarkation, where embarkation is the territorial dehiscence that sustains counterhegemonic relations with the colonial project of stabilizing the person against the fierce winds of loss and fade.

EJ's gesture of accompaniment inadvertently mimicked French visionary and mis/educator Deligny's *tentatives* in the early 60s leading all the way to his death in 1996. He probably would have laid next to EJ and Kyah, tracing a cartography that zigzagged and danced with territories, gesturing at elsewhere embedded in ordinary everyday practice. Like Èsù on a slave ship.

Lignes d'erre

Fernand Deligny began cartographic tracing as a practice when an ally and friend, filmmaker Jacques Lin—among those he called “close presences”—working with the network of encampments he had established in the mountainous and desert terrain of Cévennes in 1965, complained about the self-harming habits of the autistic children and teens that lived together in the commune. Deligny reportedly advised Lin to trace maps of these gestures and daily routines, instead of falling into the language of assigning symptoms here and there. Soon, these nonutilitarian “maps,” composed by dense place-making lines that did not seek to explain, symbolically represent, reform, productize, or *interpret* the nonverbal autistic children that lived there, but was instead a form of place-making becoming-with and redrawing of the lines of the human, became the central work of Deligny's notable *attempt* to live in the hyphenating crack of nonverbal autism. He called these cartographic process “*lignes d'erre*,” French for *wander lines*—lines of errancy, lines of flight. These “maps” were not maps *to*, maps *of*, but *mappings with/in* that ignited the ordinary, and recalibrated the human to cartographies instead of stable subjects within territories.

Deligny was born in 1913, two decades before the Second World War broke out, but like most who would live through the time came to be heavily defined by it. Starting out as a schoolteacher, then later committing himself to working with disabled children, he joined Jean Oury and Felix Guattari in their post-war Institutional Psychotherapy project at La Borde, a psychiatric clinic at Cour-Cheverny in France. He worked with them for just two years, from 1965 to 1967, after which he branched out to create his experiments in living with autism.

Deligny was militantly anti-asylum, anti-institutionalization. He rejected the psychoanalytic categories of thought that alienated autistic children as requiring reform (or as was the case in hospitals during the Vichy era, extermination). I like to imagine Deligny as a Pied Piper figure, leading his children in the silence of melody out “to” worlds they would go on to

make together. Deligny's coordinates weren't exclusively spatiotemporal; they were autistic. Unlike the dominant psychologies of his time, he resisted beginning his questions from what his kids were missing by not being able to speak. Instead, he wondered, *what are we missing out by being able to speak? What does language obscure?* As such, language wasn't privileged in the camps; the children were not there to be helped and fixed. Instead, they were *accompanied*.

I started to accompany Deligny's radical politics after staying with the question of responsibility in crisis-ridden times and seeking to articulate a politics of the common that might activate a meandering "chasmagraphy" practice—a fugitive exile that deterritorialized heteronormative subjectivities and opened up *elsewheres* and *otherwise*s. Borrowing from the medieval practices of claiming sanctuary, in which a fugitive was granted access to the church grounds—a space of reprieve and rest from being pursued and potentially killed—on condition that such a person would participate in the Eucharist and proceed on exile, I began to imagine political imaginaries committed to "making sanctuary," in which the *fragile new* was the "thing" to be accompanied and embraced in radical acts of hospitality.

Reading Deligny's inspiring guerrilla politics along with the bacchanal embarkations of a Yoruba trickster-god who teaches us that loss is the condition of life, along with reframed medieval practices that accept the monster as an agency of social transformations, through the meandering spiritualities of my fatherhood and relationship with my autistic son, Kyah, and through the dense transversality of postactivism, offers a humbling vision of an end-of-world network of arachnean sanctuaries practicing a Cevennean politics of descent. This descent retraces the wanderings of proto-human communities that created cave art in times of polar shifts and deep uncertainty and embodies the kind of burrowing that Timothy Morton names as hyposubjectivity.

Most importantly, Deligny traces a squiggly abtherapeutic line—long after his death—that follows my Kyah's circles and releases him from the grip of my carceral reforms, the asylum that is my metallic grip, my nightly prayers to the stars to make him a "real boy."¹² In Deligny, like in Èsù, I find a promising opening for a partial, decentralizing politics that exists with/in the Anthropocene, but is not *of* it or reducible to the moralities of disembarkation, cure, and justice.¹³

Back to the question

The departing slave ship aroused Ogun's unrivalled fury—and has probably angered many who have heard the story of Èsù's treachery. However, through the passing-away of continents, the bleeding of home, I make the case that Èsù's villainous abscondence was an attempt at *making sanctuary*. Those ships became tentative, cartographical meanderings across the ocean, a making room for the new in "New" Worlds-to-come. As cracks of displacement ripple through our rituals of body-making and place-making, the trickster dances at the edges, decked with a seditious question that language cannot articulate.

¹² *Abtherapeutic* is a neologism of mine, from *abtherapy*—that is, *ab-* (away from) and *-therapy*.

¹³ I prefer to contextualize the work of postactivism, black studies, and embarkation as emerging within the Afrocene—a more robust account of agency and animacies that situates some of the practices I find deeply gratifying (such as "Vunja"; see www.emergencenetwork.org/vunja).



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