

OF UNEXPLAINED PRESENCES, FLYING IFE HEADS, VAMPIRES, SWEAT, ZOMBIES, AND LEGBAS

A Meditation on Black Queer Aesthetics

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The numerous absences and silences within formal archives, reflected in scholarship on black queer cultural productions and the contributions by black queer artists, impel us to parse the characteristics and genealogy of black queer aesthetics and art.¹ At the same time, however, there is a lack of language to define what is, ultimately, a vast and various field of practices and influences that cannot be pinned down to essential identities. Here I understand “black” and “queer” as nonstatic, strategic identities that mark community and erotic practices. For the purposes of this meditation, the work I discuss is marked by (1) its presence in defined black queer spaces and/or (2) the claiming of questions of the body and queer states of being by the artists. This meditation is a review of two temporally bound art events—*DASH: Metaphor and Connection* and the Ghetto Biennale—that took place in two disparate locations in 2009. In discussing these events, I am also meditating on questions of black queer aesthetics.

Discussions of black queer aesthetics are often grounded in analyses of historiographical methods—in other words, what artists *do* with history in the making/remaking/performance/reperformance of the self; discursive analysis, where all modes of artistic production are rendered as text and can include written language, visual language, or the body in performance; and an expansion and refashioning of the parameters of what is queer and black through examinations of the identity politics and practices.² However frustrated by the dangers of essentialism inherent to them, these modes of theorizing black queer aesthetics can also

prove a useful and fertile ground for uncovering how artists intentionally perform and transform the meanings of identities for social critique and social change. The artists—and the art spaces—I discuss here are not directly engaged in questions of identity politics in their work. Rather, they take identity as a given background to their questions of how memory functions in consideration of what it means to be human.

I have also chosen to read these two events and some of the presented works within a larger framework of what I call Vodoun aesthetics. Within Vodoun, resurrections are the conceptual mapping of time and space onto material bodies for the reperformance of history, in the present, as the present. In Vodoun ritual, the *lwas* (the term given to the life force when represented anthropomorphically) are the forces that permit the transmutation of time through the vehicle of blood and flesh for changing space, history, and memory. Maya Deren writes, “In Vodoun, neither man nor matter is divine. A *lwa* is an intelligence, a relationship of man to matter.”³ History is the present-future-past, and its enactment in the material realm reinscribes space with new possibilities and meanings. Art grounded in Vodoun aesthetics participates and works in the construction of history by employing the practices of embodiment and rupture, where embodiment results from repeated gestures, acts, and interactions that reinscribe intangible beings into physical bodies and multiple layers of meaning into confined space, and rupture is the primary methodology of ontological reorientation in both time and space. Rupture and embodiment can be conceptualized in what Rachel Beauvoir-Dominique has identified as the “deconstruction of emotion, rhythm, space and time.”⁴ By anchoring memory and imagination in the material (the body, found objects, etc.), the artist renders history and its detritus—the waste (“refusé,” as LeGrace Benson calls it) generated by what is no longer meaningful or necessary.⁵ This anchoring in the materiality of art is a process of inscribing memory through form. It is also a process that ruptures the temporality of ritual: the sacred time that expands and contracts through song, dance, prayer, and evocations is marked by material forms that live beyond what the body and the breath contain.

The focus of this meditation centers the discussion that follows within a framework in which the alteration of time and space are necessary givens. It is not possible to discuss *DASH* and the Ghetto Biennale as black queer texts/spaces/performances/projects without understanding that time and space are already different within the construction of these events. This is especially significant because of what takes place in the minds and bodies of the participating artists as articulated by them directly or exemplified by the art they create. All of the works

I discuss here are made by artists, by what James Baldwin has defined as those whose “role . . . is to illuminate that darkness, blaze roads through that vast forest; so that we will not, in all our doing, lose sight of its purpose, which is, after all, to make the world a more human dwelling place.”⁶ These artists use a range of materials to transform space and, in particular, to transform the possibilities for black queer bodies within space. They do so, as many of them will tell you, because they must. They do so because art is an act of creation and a vehicle for resurrecting memory, future potentialities, *refusé*, and the human self.

Under the overarching framework of Vodoun aesthetics, I am also discussing the intersections between *refusé* and *afro-futurism*—a term originally coined by Mark Dery and expanded on by many, but greatly by Alondra Nelson.⁷ Both frameworks come together in this meditation through the practice of collapsing metaphorical and material time in bodies and specified spaces. This collapse of time, if considered under the rubric of Vodoun aesthetics (which, I should clarify, is my choice to engage, rather than the underlying assumption of any of the works presented in either *DASH* or the Ghetto Biennale), generates the possibility of a common language between artistic practices across the (queer) (black) diaspora. Though common language may not be of interest or serve the purposes of any artist, I believe there is merit to generating recognition in the face of invisibility.

I begin with how queer black artists attempt to grapple with the invisibility generated by the lack of clearly marked spaces that reflect their embodied erotic or social experiences; spaces that visibly and tangibly welcome, respect, or celebrate divergent and nonnormative erotic orientations; or bodies that move outside class- and racially bound heteronormative expectations. This invisibility and silencing that marks the majority of experiences for black queer artists is also the impetus for the creation and re-creation of the self and of worlds that will sustain the self. This invisibility, as much as it denies what exists, also creates the space for the unexplained: perpetual possibilities in which the gaze, the desire, the subject can be revealed as queer, or even as black.⁸ Black queer artists reconfigure the relationship between history and the self, between the self and the future. The future also serves as a tool for defining the present; envisioning queer futures allows for “alternative worlds” or, as Judith Halberstam has theorized, an ever-expansive rendering of “the time at hand.”⁹ Considering invisibility and temporality as simultaneous conceptual structures, it is possible to say that black queer aesthetics is informed by the creation of time out of nothing as much as the creation of memory out of the unexplained.¹⁰ Without robbing Vodoun rituals or artistic processes of their power, this meditation aims to facilitate an expansive

engagement with questions of aesthetics in discussing witnessed performances of blackness, queerness, and art.

DASH

Torkwase Dyson, the curator of *DASH: Metaphor and Connection* dedicates her own work to “preemptive art”—art that answers questions we have yet to imagine. She intentionally pushes her own creative process to procure sounds, smells, tastes, textures that, as of yet, have not even existed, and, in so doing, inherently engages with the question of what existence *is*. Her interest in curating *DASH* arises from a desire to explore what can exist through the vehicle of collaboration between artists and writers. What, she asks, can come into existence that has never before existed? What are the material manifestations of conversations, new systems of information, and interdisciplinary cultural production? Dyson’s chosen sites include conferences and other impermanent and transient spaces that provide an intellectual and shifting frame for producing new work. This shifting ground reveals the fissures inherent to artistic processes that are often concealed by the bound spaces of galleries. In *DASH* there is not one landing place but interstitial scapes that artists must grapple with through their material, intellectual, and affective selves. These transient spaces are counterpoints to the usual “locations” of artistic collaboration: galleries, performance spaces, bienniales, exhibits, shows. In *DASH* there is no solid ground other than the one created by the artists themselves for the moment of time in which they are working.

The primary organizing principle for *DASH* was an orchestrated collaboration between pairs of artists: one writer and one visual artist or filmmaker. For the 2009 rendition of *DASH*—which took place during the conference “Fire & Ink” in Austin, Texas—Dyson chose three pairings: Ronaldo V. Wilson (writer) and Carl Pope (visual artist), Nalo Hopkinson (writer) and M. Asli Dukan (filmmaker), and Tisa Bryant (writer) and Wura-Natasha Ogunji (visual artist).¹¹ Each pair was asked to develop a new piece of work that engaged the aesthetics and primary artistic inquiries of each artist in the pair. In one evening, we were privy to a flying Ife head, black vampires, the tearing back of black flesh to expose the pink tendons of an arm, and a body made malleable and vulnerable through the purposeful generation of sweat, dirt, and tears.¹² What was surprising to me as an audience member was that artists whose approaches, forms, and questions are so different generated conceptual overlaps. These included temporal dislocations, reembodied blackness (black bodies flying, reappearing/disappearing, melting into words, sweating, crying, becoming), yearnings for memory and language with

which to illuminate notions of human experience as of yet unexposed, and a bending or breaking of the rules of this world to expose what could be possible. The implications of this overlap, of course, are contradictory—as well they should be. All of the bodies presented in the works of art transcended their material limitations as a way to reconfigure the material limits of space and render it impotent, and to resurrect the self through notions of spirits, other beings, and deterioration.

Though Vodoun was not explicitly present in the works of the *DASH* artists, analyzing the bodies of works through a framework of Vodoun aesthetics allows for the rendering of common language and conceptual landing points. For example, in Ogunji's work, when the Ife head—a birdlike creature embodied by Ogunji—flew through the air, a ripple of laughter passed through the audience. Ife's flight mimicked the descent of the Yoruba gods into the material world, and in a moment of recognition, the audience also took flight, imagining ourselves descending into being, becoming what was not existent just before, our laughter a soundtrack marking the creation of time in artistic space: like drums marking time in ritual. As Tisa Bryant responded, "She enters the world on cue, in her favorite clothes, undeniably in her body, watched by everyone, by no one but God, only seen through her own eye. She projects herself onto the world, in her mind, that cinema that must include her."¹³

In their dyad, Dukan's black vampires were also put in conversation with Hopkinson's duppies, wolfies, and other "skin folk"—"people who aren't what they seem. Skin gives these folk their human shape. Peel it off, and their true selves emerge. . . . And whatever burdens their skins had borne, once they remove them, they can fly."¹⁴ The audience members murmured, moaned, and clicked their tongues, again in recognition of all those who "done seen dat," or "be dat" themselves. Dukan's engagement with black vampires was not just an allusion to and eliciting of racialized and racist renderings of black female sexuality in cinema, of the "bloodsuckers" who steal people in the night. Her reading, next to Hopkinson's skin folk, was also a marking of the alternative ways in which sexually deviant racialized bodies alter the terrains of heteronormative narrative structures. Together with Hopkinson, Dukan was making the tensions between sex and violence visible, specifically as they manifest on sexually deviant (black) bodies. To imagine ourselves as skin folk, to consider the dangers of our individual and collective desires, is to recognize the potential of our desires to unmask the violence historically and materially enacted on our bodies. To imagine the possibility of our flight is to create the possibility of alternative material realities in the now and the future.

In the dyad between Pope and Wilson, there was the ritualistic centering

of a black gay man as he confronted his own physical limits in front of another black gay man's unyielding gaze. How often is there public witness to this vulnerability between black (gay) men? Wilson stretched and bent, turned and folded in front of Pope's camera. They were in the grungy darkness of a garage. We, the audience, watched Wilson's body break down into sweat, into filth, until he could do nothing more than melt onto the garage floor, crying. He exhausted himself in the ritual of becoming, offered his body as a path—a moving, shifting *vèvè* (ritual markings made on the ground that serve as paths for the descent of the *lwes* into ritual space) so that we could learn the weight of our (collective) breath. This ageless ritual, reminiscent of Damballah's dance around the *poto mitan*, was, in this case, enacted in front of Pope's camera. This dance, transformed and transposed, remade the world.

My choice, then, to consider the works generated and presented for *DASH* alongside the works generated for and as a result of the Ghetto Biennale, comes out of a desire to expand the fields in which we discuss black queer aesthetics to explicitly delineate their transnational context. To do so, I use the metaphor of the *poto mitan*—the ceremonial center pole—to locate how my body connects two spaces that, put into conversation with each other, reveal new insights into black queer aesthetics. The fact of my witness to these two artistic engagements means that I can make visible and mark—in the languages of history, memory, and inquiry—the desires, the gazes, the subjects, and the possibilities of black queer existence. My own crossing of space through time puts the shifting grounds of “Fire & Ink” in relationship to the shifting grounds of the Ghetto Biennale.

Ghetto Biennale

André Eugène, Jean Hérard Celeur, Myronn Beasley, and Leah Gordon, artistic and scholarly collaborators, framed the Ghetto Biennale around the question: “What happens when first world art rubs up against third world art? Does it bleed?” They intentionally created a “contact zone”: a “social space where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical conditions of domination and subordination,” with the self-conscious mission of uprooting and examining traditional relationships of power through artistic practice and production.¹⁵ The Ghetto Biennale, the organizers argued, was about reclaiming the biennial model for artists traditionally marginalized by globalized market forces. Bringing together twenty-one international artists with thirty-nine Grand Rue artists (including four master artists) in December 2009 in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, the Ghetto Biennale led to the creation and exposition of numerous

major works based in and engaged with the material and social context of the Grand Rue—one of Port-au-Prince’s poorest areas, characterized by the massive influx of people occupying public buildings, what Barbara Prézeau-Stephenson has termed a “‘theater of the atrocious’ . . . a matrix, a home, a workshop and a bearing.”¹⁶ The emergent relationships and artistic productions of the Ghetto Biennale generated new “translocal circuits of exchange that subvert[ed] the nation-state through connective flows that translate across cultural differences.”¹⁷ These artistic, cultural, and economic exchanges included materials, gestures, sounds, languages, and desires.

On December 16, 2009, I made my way from the Hotel Oloffson down to the Grand Rue; I was accompanied by several of the international artists who were staying at the Oloffson for the ten days of the Biennale. The first thing I saw as I stepped out of the car was an enormous statue, which Richard Arthur Fleming best describes as “a twenty-foot figure of rusted, welded iron, part abandoned bedspring, part truck chassis, sprouting an immense vibrating phallus made from a length of log fixed into the coil of a big rig’s shock absorber.”¹⁸ I immediately recognized this sculpture as Papa Legba by the telltale hat on his head, the large “cane” that he held, and his placement at the entrance to the Grand Rue exhibition area.¹⁹ Right in front of him was a structure resembling a Haitian country house, only instead of the usual palm wood sideboards and tin roof, it was made completely out of discarded water bags that held potable water, soda bottles, and other trash that is habitually strewn across the city. The front of the church was decorated with a mask made out of an old bleach container, painted over and decorated.

The Ghetto Biennale was launched with rara music and dancing, the animation of bodies in the public space of the open-air galleries: crumbling walls of old, abandoned buildings that had been transformed into exhibit space. Soon after I crossed the threshold, I was lost in the intense maze of metal, rubber, and refuse that was piled across the space, my eyes confused by what Kobena Mercer has described as “African Diasporic Baroque—the classical falling away of simplicity, the artificiality of stylistic excess, and the covering of loss of control through the rendering of spectacular surfaces.”²⁰ Among the assemblage of cybernetic limbs, iron phalluses, tin jaws, and oil drum hauntings were the works of other artists: a tattoo parlor, photographs in the style of Malik Sidibe, paintings, Vodoun flags, murals, and sculptures of other materials.

Of the Ghetto Biennale artists who worked within the bustle generated by Eugène, Celeur, Loko, and Dodi, there are two works I focus on: the bodysuit by Jacquenette Arnette, an African American visual artist, and the flags made by

Ebony Patterson, a Jamaican visual artist. I am choosing to focus on the work of these two artists because of how the content engages not only the material context of the Grand Rue but also the larger question of black queer aesthetics to which this essay speaks.

Arnette's piece most closely approximated the tearing of flesh. That bleeding that the Ghetto Biennale organizers referenced became visible not just in metaphorical terms but also within the materiality of the piece itself. For the Ghetto Biennale, Arnette constructed a full-length bodysuit (approximately six feet), its shell made out of plastic shopping bags from stores in Miami (where she lived). She had worn the bodysuit on the airplane from Miami to Port-au-Prince, and when she arrived, she cut it off, immediately exposing the body's interior and vulnerability. She proceeded to stuff the bodysuit's shell with plastic garbage she found on the street on or near the Grand Rue. She then knit a host of organs for the bodysuit out of yarn she had brought with her. Days before the Ghetto Biennale opening, she was in the lobby of the Hotel Oloffson, knitting a uterus. When I asked her why a uterus, she said, "Because I want to create a balance to all the male energy at the Grand Rue."²¹ When she was done with the uterus (complete with vagina and clitoris), she chose to hang the bodysuit in the air, off the side of a building behind the big Legba sculpture.

The bodysuit was as eerie as a vampire: it was a large, hanging female body devoid of head, hands, and limbs, suspended by ropes and on which the organs sat, exposed, red, and raw. Within two hours of hanging the suit, the knitted clitoris inverted itself, undoing a clear reading of sex onto the attenuated body on top of which it rested and firmly placing the piece within a Vodoun lexicon. Many Vodoun lwas are said to be of both sexes, but specifically Legba is said to carry the sexual organs of males and females. Therefore it was quite apropos that the bodysuit, hanging behind Legba, would transform itself in this way and thus render a marked, singular sex untenable. The bodysuit marked the location in which expected notions of sexual normativity were ruptured by the instability of materiality that transformed the moving, hanging body into a new kind of being.

In contrast to the bustle behind Papa Legba, turning the corner through a narrow alleyway, I encountered a small square room that had been converted into an altar by Ebony Patterson. On the walls were five delicate silk scarves on which had been printed images of well-known Jamaican gangstas. Each gangsta was dressed and transformed into a female lwa (and child lwa). There was Madame Brigitte, the two Erzulies (Freda and Dantò), Ayida Wedo, and the Marassa. Each gangsta-turned-lwa was decorated with sequins, boas, and bling: flashy silver and gold jewelry that stood out against the flowery background on which their images

had been printed. Along the ground, piles of flowers, toys, candies, and candles were set out in their honor. These pieces riff on Kehinde Wiley's heroic portraits of contemporary black men set in the postures of European saints but redirect our gaze to a specifically Caribbean pantheon of gods and artistic ancestors. Patterson's pieces are based in and incorporate the tradition of Vodoun flags, sequined portrayals of the lwas.

When asked why she chose to make these pieces, Patterson responded that she was curious, as a Jamaican, about the fluidity of gender in Haitian Vodoun and wanted to understand how it might be possible to make men known for their extreme masculinity into more feminine beings. She also expressed her desire to make goddesses out of men who are more often portrayed as criminals, as a way to rehumanize them.²² Patterson's assertion that the deviant black body must become divine to once again become human exposes the rigid cartographies that black queer beings encounter. Her pieces highlight the notion that we are not inherently human or divine but must become so through a self-creation fashioned through artistic processes. These artistic processes expose the relationships between bodies and matter, between time and materiality, and render the metaphorical bodies of the gods/other beings into material avenues for resurrecting the black queer human. For Patterson, the metaphorical bodies of gods transform the material bodies of criminalized men into human beings who are fully constituted by their specifically feminized masculinity and, thus, become whole.

The Future of the Present Past

In a context where the future is constantly in battle with the present, primarily because of precarious life circumstances, making life out of death is what one does. Yet the assemblage of materials utilized by the Grand Rue artists is a radical critique of what the future portends. The future, much as the present, and much as the past, is materially and metaphorically located in the remains of the dead. The forces of life above ground require a firm rooting in the grounds where the dead reside. Art in this context is a grappling with the *refusé* in all of its potential for giving life: affective, spiritual, and material.

In Vodoun, life and death are embodied in the *Gédé*—the *living* spirits of the dead, the mediators between death and the erotic generation of life. LeGrace Benson writes, “The *Gédé* are not an extinct family who left some garments for latterly others to wear at Halloween. They are the lively, antic spirits of death and sex, conductors of the passages into and out of this visible life. *Gédé* lives.”²³ Like Wilson's dance into deterioration, like the Ife head's flight or like the vampires

and skin folk from *DASH*, the Gédé act as “antic spirits” that dance between the realms of the dead, in the erotics of sex that reproduces life not by creating other life but by resurrecting the self into a visible erotic being capable of desire, pain, and flight. In Vodoun it is the embodiment of the gods by the living that queers gender and sexuality. In black queer aesthetics, the queer erotics of artistic practices make the gods visible so that the living may be reclaimed from the dead. Memories and bodies are ruptured by the Gédé, by artists—who transform infertile grounds into gardens and bring the invisible into sharp focus.

The aesthetics employed in the works of the Grand Rue artists are inscribed within a larger circulation of Vodoun and an aesthetic process that Donald Consentino terms *mélange*—where “taxonomies slip, roles reverse, ends become means” in a process of constant accumulation and transformation.²⁴ Beauvoir-Dominique describes the “magician artist [as] a centralizing figure, [who] directly regroups the latent violence of the community, diffusing charges amplified by the very fact of their immediate centralization.”²⁵ To understand an artistic process grounded in Vodoun, one must understand that death is necessary for life, that it is the body of the living initiate who brings the dead into a careful dance that allows for the continuation and regeneration of life. Therefore, to comprehend an artist’s assertion that his or her art has “made this man live again” is to acknowledge that the artist acts as a vessel between the worlds of ancestors and the forces of life and death, between the invisible world of the lwas and the material reality around them. And it is to understand that resurrection is an acknowledgment of the cyclical nature of time and that material reality is transformed by ruptures in the bounded yet porous systems of time and space.

Benson writes, “Nothing is ever totally discarded in Haiti. . . . Whatever defies disintegration becomes another state of being.”²⁶ What is also embedded in these sculptures, besides the human skulls, is the detritus of industrial production: scrap metal from cars, discarded glass jars and cans found floating in the trash amassing itself around the ghetto, old hats and shoes jettisoned from someone’s closet in the global North onto the (seemingly absorptive) shores of the global South. Gordon writes of the Grand Rue artists, “Their muscular sculptural collages of engine manifolds, computer entrails, TV sets, medical debris, skulls and discarded lumber transforms the detritus of a failing economy into deranged, post-apocalyptic totems.”²⁷ But here, in the Ghetto Biennale and *DASH*, there is no apocalypse, no final end point in time.

The art from the Ghetto Biennale addresses time through the accumulation of objects; *DASH* artists collapse time inside their bodies. Through accumulation or collapse, the ever-present now is the future is the past is the pres-

ent, is all at once. At the heart of all creation is the creation/re-creation of the self through creation itself. The Ghetto Biennale makes a point of giving meaning to the space of the Grand Rue through a logic of refusé, of remaking what has been deemed dispensable (waste, black lives and bodies) into objects imbued with meaning, power, history, and life force. In a similar way, the *DASH* artists give meaning to bodies as vehicles for the artistic process, as grounding mechanisms for articulating unforeseen possibilities. The Gédé dance between life and death, between what was not and what will be. The black queer aesthetics present in both spaces are multidirectional, moving inside the fissures of space and time, remaking cartographies in the images of what has always been, rendering visible what is invisible. In zones of discomfort, dystopia, detritus, black queer bodies and their imaginary potentials are recuperated and restored, made visible through the cracks. Within this, an articulated black queer aesthetics ruptures expectations of all that has been, is, and will be. The world takes a new form, again.

Notes

1. Zanele Muholi, *Mapping Our Histories: A Visual History of Black Lesbians in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, zanelemuholi.com/ZM%20moh_final_230609.pdf (accessed August 19, 2010).
2. On what artists do with history, see Matt Richardson, "Critical Reconstructions of History: Black Lesbian Literature and Film" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2005); Jennifer DeVere Brody, "Theory in Motion: A Review of the Black Queer Studies in the Millennium Conference," *Callaloo* 23, no. 4 (2000): 1–12; and Brody, "The Returns of Cleopatra Jones," in *Queer Studies: An Interdisciplinary Reader*, ed. Robert J. Corber and Stephen Valocchi (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 88–101. On discursive analysis, see Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); and Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003). On reformulating identity politics, see E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson, *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).
3. Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (New York: Documentext, 1953), 91.
4. Rachel Beauvoir-Dominique, "Underground Realms of Being: Vodoun Magic," in *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*, ed. Donald Consentino (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1995), 167.
5. LeGrace Benson, "Gédé on Grand Rue: Some Lines of Enquiry to Follow," *Journal of Haitian Studies* 10, no. 2 (2004): 2.

6. James Baldwin, *Collected Essays* (New York: Library of America, 1998), 669.
7. Alondra Nelson, "Introduction to Future Texts," *Social Text* 20, no. 2 (2002): 1–15.
8. Tisa Bryant, *Unexplained Presence* (Providence, RI: LeonWorks, 2007). Bryant theorizes the presence of black (and often queer) bodies as indexes of ruptures in colonial and postcolonial logics. Here I use her notion of the unexplained as the rupturing potentialities of black queerness within spaces of invisibility.
9. Scott Bravmann, *Queer Histories of the Past: History, Culture, and Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 129; Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 2.
10. "As an international aesthetic movement concerned with the relations of science, technology, and race, Afrofuturism appropriates the narrative techniques of science fiction to put a black face on the future." See afrofuturism.net/ (accessed August 17, 2010).
11. "Fire & Ink 3: Cotillion" was a national conference for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender writers of African descent and heritage. It took place in Austin, Texas, in October 2009.
12. A flying Ife head is a spirit who inhabits the body of the artist Wura-Natasha Ogunji and, in doing so, accomplishes impossible feats. To see images of flying Ife heads, visit wuravideos.blogspot.com/. On black vampires, see M. Asli Dukan, *Black Vamps*, www.youtube.com/watch?v=T9IUG_8rONU.
13. Excerpt from Tisa Bryant's work *The Curator*, presented at DASH—"Fire & Ink," Austin, Texas, October 9, 2009.
14. Nalo Hopkinson, nalohopkinson.com/writing/fiction/books/skin_folk (accessed August 16, 2010).
15. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 4.
16. Barbara Prézeau-Stephenson, "Contemporary Art as Cultural Product in the Context of Haiti," *Small Axe* 27 (October 2008): 101.
17. Kobena Mercer, "Intermezzo Worlds," in *Art Journal* 57, no. 4 (1998): 44.
18. Richard Arthur Fleming, "Grotesquerie of Gargantuan Gargoyles, Part One," antarcticiana.blogspot.com/search/label/Grand%20Rue (accessed May 23, 2010).
19. Whether as cord or phallus, Legba—life—is the link between the visible, mortal world and the invisible, immortal realms. He is the means and the avenue of communication between them, the vertical axis of the universe that stretches between the sun door and the tree root (Deren, *Divine Horsemen*, 97): "Legba, then, is guardian of the sacred gateway, of the *Grand Chemin*, the great road leading from the mortal to the divine world." I include both of these descriptions as footnotes because I think it is significant that Legba is the guardian of the Grand Rue. In a sense, the Grand Rue artists are placing themselves on the *Grand Chemin* between life and death through literal means and spiritual metaphors, and Legba, who towers above all the buildings and artworks in the space, guides their path.

20. Kobena Mercer, "Allegories and Emblems: Hew Locke's Post-Colonial Baroque" (speech at Yale University History of Art Department, New Haven, CT, January 19, 2010).
21. Jacquenette Arnette, interview by author, December 16, 2009.
22. Artist panel, Ghetto Biennale, Port-au-Prince, Haiti, December 18, 2009.
23. Benson, "Gédé," 1.
24. David Consentino, "Introduction: Imagine Heaven," in *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*, ed. Donald Consentino (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1995), 39.
25. Beauvoir-Dominique, "Underground Realms of Being," 175.
26. Benson, "Gédé," 1.
27. Leah Gordon, "What happens when first world art rubs up against third world art? Does it bleed?" Gens de la Caraïbe Call for Proposals, April 22, 2009, www.gensdelacaraibe.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3752:what-happens-when-first-world-art-rubs-up-against-third-world-art-does-it-bleed&catid=112&Itemid=200102.

