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## Fred Moten and Wu Tsang

### Sudden Rise at a Given Tune

Droning a drowsy syncopated tune,  
Rocking back and forth to a mellow croon,  
I heard a Negro play.  
—Langston Hughes, "The Weary Blues"

When I was very young, and was dealing with my buddies in those wine- and urine-stained hallways, something in me wondered, What will happen to all that beauty?

—James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*

That there are limits is shown by the rhythm in birth and death rates and the distribution by sex; it is found further in human customs and laws, the forms of government, the laws of trade, and even in charity and ethics. As, however, we rise in the realm of conduct, we note a primary and a secondary rhythm. A primary rhythm depending, as we have indicated, on physical forces and physical law; but within this appears again and again a secondary rhythm which, while presenting nearly the same uniformity as the first, differs from it in its more or less sudden rise at a given tune, in accordance with prearranged plan and prediction and in being liable to stoppage and change according to similar plan. An example of primary uniformity is the death rate; of secondary uniformity, the operation of a woman's club; to confound the two sorts of human uniformity is fatal to clear thinking; to explain them

we must assume Law and Chance working in conjunction—Chance being the scientific side of inexplicable Will. Sociology, then, is the Science that seeks the limits of Chance in human conduct.

—W. E. B. DuBois, "Sociology Hesitant"

# 1.

How can violence be such a balm? The criminal animation of a more than natural law, anajudicial movement in theater's interstitial space, an experimental acting out of anchoring cell and cause. The secret life of things is open—made plain, phenomenal ding-hiss, this thing we are, all these things we are that we keep trying to get to, that we can't get back to, because they're miles ahead in nothingness. Maybe the problem is simply looking at, which is to say listening to. How can you show the out circularity of that perception, its difficult pleasures of (re)turn and syntax, its embedded, imperceptible hesitations and miniature seismic events, its (dys + hyper) lexic scratches and scars?

# 2.

What is slave language? What's it mean to be published? Does displacement make me play the agent of my displacement? Or does it let me murder my ideal? What if lyric poetry regurgitates identity? Then Phillis Wheatley is fresh, and flesh, and fly as rumination's syndrome. Psyche is the residue of her (in)digestion, which is nurture. Rumination wanders, a resuscitative essay on the run, but you never get there, all that heavy Plymouth plantation peculiarity, voluntary, involuntarily on trial, on edge, over the edge and curved, scooped, sloped, depressive, manic. T is musical, a one-note/one-pulse percussive flight of emphatic dig like I ain't going anywhere. Authentic manic gesture is I and I ain't going nowhere. Who you looking at falls to where you looking from, when you looking. Ask and you can cut when and where. You can't remember where or when. You can trace the genealogy of Baldwin's eyes with a little piece of rough silk to get the tactile sense of something going on. It's like Chili cussing out Siri again. It's like when Hannah Arendt writes to Karl Jaspers (1992: 264): "I've begun so late, really only in recent years, truly to love the world." Within a certain relegation to the private, given in the form of rescue, this can only be expressed in a sealed envelope, or whispered, with deviant love, to your rose-gold avatar. There's "something ironic and violent and perpetually understated" in Chili's speech

(Baldwin 1998: 6). It's "something tart . . . authoritative and double edged" (311). Something you hear whenever you hear a Negro play like Langston. It's almost like being in love for those who have never been covered, or born in distress, have no topological hitch, no quantum sociological pause, no subatomic/subspace sliide.

# 3.

Feeling sweet feeling drops from my fingertips. They dance into the scene they set and the difference in dancing and seeing is inseparable. Hearing saves the space it makes by changing it. They prepare a table by bending, stretching, and crumpling. Gluing and tearing can't be excluded from remorseless workings. What it is to taste mass in the heart of eccentricity. What it is, celebration shot down, unburied, unrisen, listening and looking, hearing and seeing, till one another flies away, I wish I could caress. Turn myself off and go on down.

# 4.

I used to run into this kid, an undergraduate, at Doe. We'd be browsing the stacks on the top floor, looking at books that explore the frontier between mathematics and philosophy, circling ideas of mathematical existence, or notions concerning the "reality" of mathematical objects, courting black study, where continuity, compactness, connectedness, the active sounding of our spooky distancing, nearing, overlap, is a way of walking down the street in love. If there's that divinatory thinking that Oskar Becker calls "manic phenomenology," then maybe there's a manic disposition that puts the phenomenological consensus out on the floor, never to return. What's the relation between fugitive monasticism and the paradisiacal garden? What's the relation between the paradisiacal garden and a hard row to hoe? What's the difference between Moses the Black and Black Moses? What's the difference between Harriet Tubman and Isaac Hayes? Is the theft of stolen moments a kind of asceticism? Is there an aestheticism of the transubstantial feast? Our otious lingering was erotology by an ice-blue stream, sheaves brought like noise in curvature and recess, like the continual forming of a pit. When people move, they move topologically and topographically, mediating through the duet toward zero, the open cell. It's not that zero comes first; it's that it comes to fuck first up. Hey Tosh, hey Josh, form a pit of iterative presences in a field, grass cat-tapped down in swirled squares, little phantasmagoric

agoras of rubble. Earth makes space through world where we hold where study, strain through set logic, stack-cruising, till after thirty years he would whisper, "Zalamea."

# 5.

Rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. That's the communicability of the shoe. The violence of the whipping machine has its power to individuate. They kill him every day and grace is everywhere. The imposed asceticism of the shoe. Giving is everything. The coenobitic, exhausted and exhaustive communicability of the shoe. He was blessed and cursed with visitors. The terrible aestheticism of the shoe. They came with plates, and tea, in the name of the Crenshaw Legal Clinic. They came as violent, lonely mothers. The essential habit of assembly in a blue concert. The terrible imperative to rest in power. Primordially empty space is in the mix. Come levy rents here if you can. What harmonizes things and what's awry in them. The birthrate. The death rate. The woman's club. The sudden rise at a given tune. Sharing blurred distance in Zo's harmony. Just be making something all the time so you can use it to make something with somebody else. Maybe the distinction is between sympathy and empathy—one emerging from a point of view, the other occurring in the other occurring in shatter and embrace. There is no nonviolent way to look at somebody. The camera pans down, moves down, spiraling into the wine and urine-stained hallway. And what the camera moves toward, as eye, I a hand that somehow was and is the camera, the hand's gesture at and with and in all this beauty, being the camera's motion, its having fallen, its fallenness. What will happen to all that beauty?

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José Esteban Muñoz

## The Wildness of the Punk Rock Commons

Full accounts of the dire consequences of life in Ronald Reagan's America are only now being written, and there are very few historical narratives that tell the tale of what living in Reagan's America felt like. This is partly because that moment in the second half of the twentieth century was simply not knowable as an event that could be categorized or systemized in an easy way. Certainly events clustered around the election of the great hijacker of American populism, but living through that first decade or so of the shattering of the Great Society was experienced on the level of a scattered sense of desperation, one that was hard to put one's finger on. Let me try to flesh this out a bit by listening to the second song from X's second album, *Wild Gift* (1981): "We're Desperate." This song's speaker renders an account of a general sense of living life under a kind of spread-out duress. Certainly playing too hard when one ought to be asleep is a punk rock trope that we know so well:

I play too hard when I ought to go to sleep  
They pick on me because I really got the beat  
Some people give me the creeps  
Every other week I need a new address