

and reading; in its insistent worrying of the executive line—preserves what Foucault once called “the thought of the outside” so that the potential solipsism that autonomy and autopoiesis might be said to carry is given over to a desire for the informal, which will have been given, or will have been seen to have been instantiated, in every held, unheld, ruptured, ruptural social generativity that goes over the edge. Over the edge of the ship. Overboard. Thrown. Fallen. Inescaped. The touring machine is a diving bell, an instrument for sounding that becomes, at the end of exhaustion, ascent, accent, a certain songlike, sing-song quality, a sing sing sing kinda quality, a fugitive sing-sing kinda thing, an instrument whose forced movement in thinking the unregulated, the un-self-possessed, the un-self-concerned, its rubbed, performed, informal interiority, its flash, is flesh thought inside out.

chapter 8

Things Seeing

There's a more-than-critical criticism that's like seeing things—a gift of having been given to love things and how things look and how and what things see. It's not that you don't see crisis—cell blocks made out of the general meadow, all the luxurious destitution and ge(n)ocidal meanness, the theft of beauty and water, the policing of everyday people and their everyday chances that we call, in Cedric Robinson's brilliant shorthand, “racial capitalism.” It's just that all this always seems so small and contingent against the inescapable backdrop of constant escape—which is the other crisis, that is before the first crisis, calling it into being and question, that we might call, by way of Robinson and Nahum Chandler (and R. A. T. Judy and Hortense Spillers, who is the leader of that quartet), “the (para-)ontological totality.” The ones who stay in that running away study and celebrate its violently ludic authenticity, the historicity that sends us into the old-new division and collection of words and sets, passing on and through, as incessant staging and preparation. This necessity and immensity of the alternative surrounds and aerates the contained, contingent fixity of the standard.

The alternative, and the ones who stand (in) for it, can only be defended in what Mário Pedrosa calls its “experimental exercise,” which happens every day, and in the recognition of its exercise, which is what I think Karl Marx refers to when he speaks, in “Private Property and Communism,” of the everyday engagement in criticism that is an essential part of a communist way of life,³ and which sometimes he more than critically enacts when he engages in critique, in the elaboration of a general theory of crisis, and in the urgent address of specific instances of crisis. Questions concerning the theory and actuality of crisis are no less urgent now because crisis is always with us. Seeing things doesn't hide the crisis that critique discloses; rather, it locates it more precisely, within a general tendency for upheaval that it constitutes. Seeing things, the alternative seeing of things, the seen and

seeing alternative, which a certain deployment of crisis is meant to police, is the crisis of genuine disclosure and generative disruption.

The crisis of deprivation on a global scale is a function of policing that responds to a global ecologic of generation that regulative power brutally (mis) understands as a crisis of law. This is to say that crisis is not only a function of policing but that it has a policing function; it is also to say that crisis is an ongoing, generative resistance to the regulation, the policing, that it generates. This poor description of the interplay of policing and crisis is trying reverently to disclose a reversal that already animates *Policing the Crisis*, the classic attendance of Stuart Hall, Chas Crichton, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke, and Brian Roberts to the range and force of the generative social and aesthetic upheaval of the alternative in England since World War II.⁴ Hall and his fellows analyze the ideological manufacture of crisis as a mode of interpretive regulation. The racialization of already extant criminal activity allows its epidermalized "novelty" to be interpreted as crisis. But the criminalization of that activity, in its relation to the normalization of modes of appropriation whose brutality and scale dwarf any and every instance of "mugging," is the real problem because, in the end, it was never about this or that instance or collection of instances of law breaking; it was, rather, about the social self-defense of junsgenerative capacity of which mugging can be said to be a particular manifestation, noteworthy not because of its brutality or venality or degeneracy but only because of its enactment of self-defense through (re)propriative acts that are susceptible to a condition in which they reinforce the brutal axioms of ownership and exception.

Criticism, the capacity to see things in their branching and unfolding and generative differentiation, attends to generation while critique, as Marx deploys it, attends to the regulation and policing of generation; meanwhile, critique, which seems to be deployed almost everywhere in the normative human sciences to police generation, is so driven by its own implicit claims upon national identity or political subjectivity—which are themselves subject to a force, and have been understood by way of a logic, of dissipation implying a mystery of loss and of what was lost—has all but become degenerate. The neoliberal lament regarding "the crisis of democracy" (which was, according to Samuel Huntington and his fellows, a function of there being too much democracy) can be understood as the animating trace of certain folks claiming to be on the left, whose lament of the current loss of "our democracy" is driven by nostalgic fantasies of a privilege supposedly held within the structure of, rather than given in resistance to, American exclusion. It's not

coincidence that this convenient repression of American exclusion is usually accompanied by an assertion of American exception that either takes the form of an invocation of "our" best intentions or, more pragmatically, as the assertion of a right to do just about anything in the name of national defense, whose complete, completely delusional detachment from imperial aggression is sanctioned by the serial invocation of crisis.

When people respond to the suppression of the alternative—and Hall and his fellows brilliantly illuminate how state interpretation of the alternative as crisis is a fundamental element of that suppression—the word *riot* is deployed in order to augment that suppression; but when suppression of the alternative is more (im)properly understood as a response to the alternative, it also becomes possible to understand that with regard to the insistent previousness of the alternative it is more accurate to say, over Sly Stone's growl or Joe Strummer's sneer, that there is, and already has been, a riot going on. This is about the anorinary force of tumultuous derangement, a generative sociopoesis given in and as everyday sensuality. To rise to the defense of this sacred, ordinary, generative violence—to protect it from the ongoing murder—is often to risk a kind of appropriation of the very appropriative force one seeks to combat with an otherwise animating fugitivity. Such uprising can take the form of burnin' and lootin'; but, even more easily, such appropriation can take the form of a critical account of the justificatory causes of burnin' and lootin'. Meanwhile, what always remains or, more precisely, what must be understood as the irreducible remainder that animates such physical acts as well as such critical accounts, are everyday and everynight things. It's not about the looting of loot or the assault of persons who take shape as shops and wares, or about the insurgents' loss of or exclusion from citizenship or belonging that supposedly makes the former inevitable; it is, rather, all about insurgence as the performative declaration of what we are and what we have and what we give. Put another way, the seemingly infinite production of crisis finds its limit in the infinite rehearsal of generative capacity, in the open field of a generative grammar, in the fecundity of a range of generative principles, all of which reveal the sclerotic constraints that are fostered by an empiricist attitude whose structuring force in the determination of Anglo-American intellectual identity can be traced back to a certain valorization of the grasp, and the philosophical nomination of the possessive individual to the office of manager of the enclosure, by way of the bloody fingerprints of a transcendental subject who is unable or unwilling to see things but who can neither let things go nor pass things on.

The riot that's goin' on is a party for self-defense. The question concerning its causes, its sources, shouldn't be left to liberal or neoliberal pundits and prime ministers, even when their more or less racist and ageist elitism leads them to say, with a kind of ignorant and imprecise accuracy, that the causes are cultural. What they don't mean is that *culture* is the imprecise word we give to regenerative resources of insurgent social life. There's another way of living that exhausts imposed arrangements. It's where and how people fight. When seemingly random and unorganized acts of self-defense erupt against the violence of the state and capital, the only important question is how to maintain their connection to the social field they are meant to defend. This is a question concerning the corrosive, reconstructive force of certain practices that Michael Herzfeld thinks of in terms of "cultural intimacy—the recognition of those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality, the familiarity with the bases of power that may at one moment assure the disenfranchised a degree of creative irreverence and at the next moment reinforce the effectiveness of intimidation."⁵ But what if we begin to consider, against the grain and over the edge of whatever combination of the critique of authenticity and the appeal to up-right, paralytic sovereign recitations of the citizen consumer, that the social poetics Herzfeld is after is an undercommon intellectual project that begins to emerge precisely when the distinction between insiders and outsiders breaks down, when a certain kind of communal claim is made in a certain kind of walking down certain city streets, and when that claim is given in and as an active disruption of the nation-state, in and as a kind of masque in which the very habits of the damned are taken on and, thereby, altered in their free, constant, and already given alteration. Meanwhile, we confront the emergence of new black acts—of the kind E. P. Thompson describes in *Whigs and Hunters*—now outlawing autonomous cybersocial organization for self-defense under the self-regulating cover of the ones who internalize the embarrassment they refuse, which is the generativity noncitizens claim.

The notion that crisis lies in the ever-more-brutal interdiction of our capacity to represent or be represented by the normal is as seductive, in its way, as the notion that such interdiction is the necessary response to our incapacity for such representation. Their joint power is held in the fact that whether abnormality is a function of external imposition or of internal malady it can only be understood as pathological. Such power is put in its accidental place, however, by the ones who see, who imaginatively misunderstand, the crisis

as our constant disruption of the normal, whose honor is given in and protected by its representations, with the anterepresentational generativity that it spurns and craves. This is the crisis that is always with us, this is the crisis that must be policed not just by the lethal physical brutality of the state and capital but also by the equally deadly production of a discourse that serially asserts that the crisis that has befallen us must overwhelm the crisis that we are; that crisis follows rather than prompts our incorporative exclusion.

There's a connection between poetry and violence that Amiri Baraka, among others, began to explore by way of these terms and which now needs to be re-explored in the full awareness that Baraka's movement extended, rather than disavowed, that antinomian opening of the field that can be traced back through Aimé Césaire, Charles Olson, and Sun Ra; Emily Dickinson, Harriet Jacobs, and Reyita; Nanny of the Maroons, Anne Hutchinson, and Tiuba, and beyond. The poetics of the open field, especially when performed in the padlocked cell, was always tied to the social poetics of riot, of generative differentiation and expropriative disruption as the non-selves' self-defense, their seeing things as a performed social theory of mind. Baraka took it out, and sometimes tried to take it home, which drove it through him and even further out, in the name of an informant poetics, spreading the news and the new in the giving and taking of form, as lemons, and people, piled on steps, disarrayed inappropriately against every propriative and counterpropriative intention that claims to have put them there. We still enact, because we desire and cannot live without, the immense poetry of war, by which Wallace Stevens meant and didn't mean a poetics of social pregnancy, the international, antinational, incognate embarrassment of seeing things and making things. The poetics of the alternative is funeral and veneral, surviving in denotative self-defense and the righteous distortions it enacts in rough advent. There's a This is England poetics, a Luv N' Haight poetics, moving without moving in and against the brutal smallness of imposed needs and nationalized histories with the kind of out lyricism that only comes from being constrained to be somewhere else, that will have already come from the other side to keep on going, that had already come with those of us who are the other things we see till we might be eased with seeing nothing.