



Fabulous Musics

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20/20 is an ambitious three-year programme that engaged 20 emerging or mid-career ethnically diverse artists of colour and 20 public art collections across the UK, resulting in 20 new permanent acquisitions.

Generously supported by Arts Council England, Freelands Foundation and UAL, 20/20 combined artist residencies and commissioning at scale, with the aim of catalysing artists' careers and fostering meaningful change in collections - not only through the artworks that will ultimately enter the collections but also through a peer network of artists and curators, and the critical interrogation of collections practices.

, and I would have to reread Glissant:

tremblement is thinking in which we can lose
time, lose time searching, in which
we wander

[...]

. An instinct, an intuition
of the world that we can't achieve with
imperial thoughts, with thoughts of
domination, thoughts of a systemic path
toward a truth that we've posited in advance.¹

(I always assumed the translation of losing time
came from *perdre du temps*, also used for wasting time,
but I can't be sure)

, and Graves:

we're taught about measures,
we'll talk about pulse beats, alright

so we can count one! two! three! four! and so on
but I know some people who've said—

“well you know,
the best way to play in tempo is to get a metronome!”

oh my gracious, forget about atomic clocks now—
too exact! too exact, but you know what,
the body, the heart
doesn't have the same time length

you understand?

between each, each —
contraction and relaxing of the heartbeat : ba-
BUM and the next

, ba-
BUM

if they are the same, that is extremely dangerous,
and that's what they were missing before,
they weren't counting the time difference between there

so if the doctor heard that, and everything seemed to be clean—
the more exact the time measures, the more dangerous it is

in other words if you felt your pulse rate at your wrist,
or any other place other than listening to your heart,
you'll hear that buh — ,
 buh — ,
 buh — , they should be different!

that's a healthy heartbeat, they can call that the chaos heartbeat
they can call that heart rate variability,

that means the rate constantly varies!

and all that people have to do is feel they pulse
and all of a sudden they count, and they notice

, then they counting a lil faster , they counting slower at one point

that's great —

but if you're counting like a metronome, and everything is like

BUP ! BUP ! BUP !

just like the second hand, that is extremely dangerous

that means your body is not responding,

it must respond! ²

, and:

this response, or orientation towards responsiveness (called to respond before the bodily), comes with its own inverted appropriations: the artist must respond. to the call (open, closed), to the collection (held [suspended, captured, maintained]), to the image of sustenance, to play the phrase 'sostenuto', at (and as) its prolonged event.

the call: to decolonise: to decoloniality: to decolonisation: to proliferate suffixes, pushing more air between the walls, a draft or breeze that moves through the latinate automation of the programme, extending the pressure, encouraging the rehearsal to unfold in deliberate stalling of breath. a non-event of instrumentalisation : to hold it (off) for this long, to delay.³

the performance is fraught by the demands of its own draft, a toll exacted by the object's arrival. something precedes the ear, the eye perhaps? - or something else: a role. what is it that the artist should do? go out, find, take, tick, speak (but recall the track: the instrumental has had the voice removed !). Graves gets it: we're taught about measures, a calculability that reminds the music of what it is: a measuring of sound, or worse—

the measures taken against sound, as if something can be shored up against its vibrational potency (in favour of pote n t i a l... i t y..., of filling up the emptying museum)

, or any other place other than listening to your heart. so, the artist keeps her ears peeled for those metronomic distortions, against glass panes for the unclearable, untouchable stories. percussive, but imperceptible - although the bigger problem is perhaps to do with permissions, privacy, grief. watching the glass think itself into mediated oblivion, taking for granted its own narrative constitutions [agreements, contracts, substantiations].

art history turns towards us, a figure deep inside the surface of the glass. it burdens the objects with a kind of negative duration⁴, no longer a reflection of the flash (an inspirational [which is a kind of breath] instant, an image whose meaning emerges from its fidelity to disappearing), or the tumbling virtuosity [which is a kind of intimacy] of orality, but is condemned to the situation of the aura: scarce and hurtling towards foreclosure. a glare, a site that has not only paused, but begun to peel off entirely. not just delayed, but penetrative in its decay.

we could give space to looting, to the impression left by the colonial line, that imperial desire path. desire coming from stars (maybe, de sidere), tramples us into the remains of that cartographic bombardment. we are left to navigate (as they did), incited to constitute (as they did), to chart the bibliographic enlisting of who took what from where. we might even lute this: string it together, and pluck. but this would still be to grant valence to tonality, a metrically enclosed sequencing of tension [digits]. extremely dangerous !

let's leave the intervals behind and favour [resemble] our first instance of movement. let's feel around, tonguewise, for Glissant through Hartmann:

By playing with and rearranging the basic elements of the story, by re-presenting the sequence of events in divergent stories and from contested points of view, I have attempted to jeopardize the status of the event, to displace the received or authorized account, and to imagine what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done. By throwing into crisis "what happened when" and by exploiting the "transparency of sources" as fictions of history, I wanted to make visible the production of disposable lives (in the Atlantic slave trade and, as well, in the discipline of history), to describe "the resistance of the object, if only by first imagining it, and to listen for the mutters and oaths and cries of the commodity."

By flattening the levels of narrative discourse and confusing narrator and speakers, I hoped to illuminate the contested character of history, narrative, event, and fact, to topple the hierarchy of discourse, and to engulf authorized speech in the clash of voices. The outcome of this method is a "recombinant narrative," which "loops the strands" of incommensurate accounts and which weaves present, past, and future in retelling the girl's story and in narrating the time of slavery as our present.

Narrative restraint, the refusal to fill in the gaps and provide closure, is a requirement of this method, as is the imperative to respect black noise—the shrieks, the moans, the nonsense, and the opacity, which are always in excess of legibility and of the law and which hint at and embody aspirations that are wildly utopian, derelict to capitalism, and antithetical to its attendant discourse of Man.⁵

Shenece Oretha [artist, wait], lies on the tongue of the glass her critical, musical fabulations. she lingers at the sully of the glass, no— more generative still, she adds voices to it [confuses, jeopardises, engulfs authorisation]. at the crisis of caption, there is noticing. an attentive plurality that passes through the state of its own captivity, dealing first-hand (or hand first) with the encalculating designations of “world”.

Oretha works awake to an open mouthed, resonant and recumbent attention. in reclining interrogations of the situation at (her) hand, having wandered earwise through the collection.

ear to the ground then, following her leads, we are not so far from that initial flash [breath]: the sculptor is one who is awake to the currents that traffic between interior and exterior landscapes, and rather than describing this comportment, inscribes it back into the material world. she insists on those immutable dimensions proper to life; distance, space, rhythm, and reassembles their distortions. but not without risk— in imbuing the object, marking it with witness, she, too, is imbued by and with that presence. she inhales it, and yes— is inspired by it.

Oretha [artist, agape] breathes and enters the breath of this archival consequence, a mutuality of breath, an arrivant vascularisation. the auratic glare against the glass, a projection [calculation, insurance] that is ignited at the level of frequency, some of its suffixes knocked-off, no longer the objectifying field, but an object among objects. the flash [breath] does this work of revelation, looping in the surveillant figure as an ear, a quiet participant to the chorus, like you or me.

Hartmann insists on restraint as key to critical fabulation, a refusal to fill in the gaps: we must finally relay the instrumental beyond instrumentalisation. the collection (held) is also withheld in the aggravated edifice of the public-private boundary. these gaps return us, unwillingly, to our intervals, to the forging of the key, and the second hand that turns it in the lock.

a toll must still be exacted, and so Oretha sounds it from the objects themselves. refusing the key as her primary tool, she reaches for the soft-faced mallet, the microphone, inspired by the reclining, attendant figures, their tiny, watchful ears listening from within the hold of the archive. life has been deferred here, too far beyond the museum's remit and constitution to pull it back into the flash—

but through listening to sculpture's unexpected sound, the resonance of their untouchable stories, in her words: to know the sculptures by ear and soft-striking these debtful gaps, Oretha [artist, sculptor, agape, awake] makes something anew: an arrangement, an assembly, an enlivening —! : a music of such fabulation [wild, antithetical, derelict] it is imprecisely more and less than a sound: it sounds —!

, (and

on imprecision: Glissant's tremblement which never landed on my ears in French, nor in English. no matter. they still twitch attentively for the loss of time, to know this loosening by ear, a parenthetical, mistranslated loser interjecting from just outside the group. timewaster, with an eye to the other side of the flashing surface of the glass).

Endnotes

¹ Glissant, Édouard, and Hans Ulrich Obrist. 'The Archipelago Conversations'. Translated by Emma Ramadan, Common Era Inc., 2021.

² Milford Graves in 'Full Mantis' (2018). Directed by Meginsky, Jake and Neil Young

³ And here I (re)wind, one more time, the automatons of Büchner's 'Leonce and Lena' which Celan describes as being at home somewhere that takes us "...beyond what is human, stepping into a realm which is 'turned toward' the human..."

Celan, P. 'The Meridian Final Version - Drafts - Materials' ; Paul Celan. (P. Joris, Trans., B. Böschstein, Ed.). Stanford Univ. Press, 2011

⁴ Glissant, Édouard. 'Poetic Intention'. Translated by Nathanaël and Anne Malena, Nightboat Books, 2018.

⁵ Hartman, Saidiya. 'Venus in Two acts.' in 'Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism', vol. 12, no. 2, 2008, pp. 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.1215/-12-2-1>.



Figure 4, 2023, Shenece Oretha.

<https://2020.arts.ac.uk/>

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