

Super Fluid/Super Black: Translations and Teachings in Transembodied Metaphysics

Ni'Ja Whitson

Breathe.

I'm here, but have come from far away. *Eu venho de longe.*
I'm going to put my palm into heat. Some liquid without wet.
Going to slice into a giant gaseous cosmic cluster.
Walk bridges that rise from swamps.
Say “fuck” three times. Now four times.
Glide us in something we can't retrieve without the back of the throat or stomach
lining.

While in my first full-time teaching position (at an institution who shall not here be named) I laid on my acupuncturist's table for the umpteenth time to treat back pain. I was experiencing debilitating spasms—daily, unrelenting. I was teaching between four and six classes a semester and was at the start of my transition away from using she/her pronouns. This time, at the head of the table, was my acupuncturist's partner, a magical energy worker and physical therapist who was called in to intervene in my treatment. She placed her hands under my head and said, “Hmmm, this isn't physical. What is it that you need to say that you are not saying?” After tears and consultations with wise ones (thank you to the Coalition of Diasporan Scholars Moving, to Onye Ozuzu, and Dear One, Omi Osun Joni L. Jones), I resigned from my position, committed to changing my relationships to academia and to my art, to reclaiming the latter as my priority. All of those healers, in their own ways, taught me about the injuries of blood stasis.

I'll return to the blood.
Healing on a quantum level
Healing on a quantum level
Has already happened

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Healing then
in the temporary temporal
Is that of repair
The journey of repair on this plane
Toward that which has actually
Already occurred

Healing then
Is *the* act, the future impacting a past
Where the choices we make in journeys of
Disillusioned repair
derails the healing we are to step into

You have to forgive me.
I have been dreaming in music.

Repair is implied in the words
“You have what you need”
“You can do this”
“Trouble don’t last always”

But repair and healing aren’t the same
Healing isn’t passive
Isn’t a witness in wait

It doesn’t reach around a traveled track
And pull along a believer
Weary from the beat up
And pulled down

I’m climbing over walls to write this
In the darkness of everything
Darkness meaning the seed and fruit
Black beginnings of life

Healing doesn’t wait
It is a future, however,
And there is no healed (a past tensed e-d)
There is a future where
The memory of the pain
Gets absorbed in sound
The looping has multiplied to so many roads
That its selves are too many to be recognized only as
The One
Rotten
Thing
that started it all

There isn’t a healed but there is a symphony
Healing is the journey of music
In your bones

The fabric of constellations of notes and pings
Creating walruses of times inside a body
It isn’t about dancing
Although it is a dance

When you get *in*
Then you leave this here
Proposal we call healing
to honey
or Jupiter
to a crashed recital of *my favorite things*

Because you can't occupy the future while walking to it
YET
But you do when you've claimed that future first
Then it is already gone
And you are walking somewhere it has not been

I don't really believe that you can't occupy
A future and a now simultaneously
Of course, you can

To ing a thing is to invoke a future
Heal
Ing
We go to a place that is not ever again.

I wrote this awakened from a sweat-filled colorful kaleidoscopic dream. The day before, I was in a House Sermon led by the legendary performance artist, writer, and ordained minister Marvin K. White, whose ceremony, titled "Housemology: The Theory of Ehvurething," was exactly that: *Ehvurething*.

He created a slippage in the waters House already is, he invited us to experience the collisions between the Praise House and sweat circle, a now internationally embraced culture started by Black gay men in Chicago in the 1980s. It was another way they were painting their lives back alive, documenting and jacking something that would live beyond the Warehouse or AIDS. Pastor White spread baby powder at the threshold of the entrances. Our footsteps created ghosts of we and us, of our befores—lest we let ourselves disappear.

So I say again.
I've been dreaming in music.
And seeing in the dark.

I

In the Ifá tradition, a "+1" invokes the infinite. The next. The Yorùbá cosmology reflects an awareness that there is a world to be, a knowing of ourselves to be and an earth to become.

Quando a maré vazá
Vou ver Juliana aé
Vou ver Juliana aé
Vou ver Juliana

I sat next to Mestre. On his left sat every inch of his age, present on the *bateria*. He listened to, listened in, with the time at his feet, at his eyes, and said, "*Canta*."

| *Quando a maré vazá*

I was transported to the waters I remembered of Bahia and the smells of fresh cheese grilled with oregano, skirts spinning in circles, palm leaves falling on my lap.

| *Vou ver Juliana aé*

The sound of samba drums still echoed themselves against the Pelourinho cobblestones, although we were in Harlem. And I thought of a woman.

Not only flesh, but too, a place. A sharpened blade.

Mestre said, “Stop. That is a song a man sings to a woman.”

| *Vou ver Juliana*

I kept thinking to the expanse of ocean against the corner that became me in that room. A dam that walled back the tides of my sexuality and my gender.

That story, too, woke me out of a kind of sleep. In preparation for this keynote, I was thinking about Black Diasporic traditions, liquid or liquidity, where we have met each other. And the far too plentiful experiences of boulders and rough edges. I searched for another proposal.

Something fluid but not liquid. A Blackness with flow, yet free from water scenarios that position our conditions with drownings, murderous submerges, or the ocean nightmare of our way to Diaspora. The flow that honors transformation, the fluidity of the ocean floor shape-shifting to galactic space. Where Blackness births things.

The fluid for me in this moment is about the pressing against seeming invisibilities in order to call them homes, like Queer, Transgender, and Nonbinary, like bodies, like time, or music. About the examination of visibilities that are in the way of that which we cannot see. It isn't about seeing at all.

II

One and One as One and Two, the sacred twins, Ibeji. The force of two as one, enfleshed and spirit. We/Us.

I'm going to talk to you about the dark.¹

1929 The United States began its withdrawal from Haiti.² By 1934, it officially withdrew, yet its occupation had succeeded in creating lasting economic dependence *and* enduring imperial presence. (Thank you to my dear colleague Maria Firmino-Castillo for reminding me of this.)

1930 The Carnegie Corporation initiated a study on poverty: “The Commission on the Poor White Problem in South Africa.”³ The study was published in 1932 and became a foundation for the apartheid project. The recommendations this study made to address white poverty included segregating and delegating Black labor, along with directly taking land from Blacks and giving it to white farmers.

1932 Thomas Dorsey after losing his wife and newborn child authored “Take My Hand, Precious Lord.”⁴

In 1932, the forty-year Tuskegee assault, concocted by the US Public Health Service (with support from the American Medical Association and National Medical Association) began. Six hundred Black men were told they were being treated for “bad blood,” 399 were given syphilis, 201 were given nothing. Neither group received actual treatment for their real illnesses, nor the disease inflicted upon them.

In 1933, there were twenty-eight reported lynchings in the United States.⁵ Twenty-eight sorrows, missings. Twenty-eight times that white people dressed up and took photographs next to bodies as bonfires, or put on hoods, or simply stepped out of doors. Twenty-eight times that we know.

In 1933, Dark matter made itself known.

Dark matter wasn't discovered. Its unconcealment⁶ was calculated in response to global, accumulated attempts at Black erasure. Dark matter is invisible, indirectly observable, yet undeniably there. The astrophysicist who discovered a mass in 1933, having more volume than could be explained by its luminosity, noted an "unseen mass," Dark matter. This unseen, "there" was the only possible explanation. As I have written elsewhere, "Newton called it God."⁷ Its counterpart, dark energy, was unconcealed in 1998; even less is known about it beyond the fact that it repels gravity and it effects the rate at which the universe expands.

Recently, scientists have hypothesized that these two forces may not be two different elements at all but an invisible 96 percent co-composing the universe, but one dark "superfluid," an extremely cold substance with negative mass.⁸

I thought: superfluid and superblack.
A dark fluid.
#queerasfuck.
#transasfuck.

Dark matter and dark energy exemplify the great what-ifs? They say simply, "No thank you," and defy binary classification, demanding that language be invented, that imaginations and realities be stretched or abandoned, that paradigms be dismantled from simply knowing that it is here.

| #queerandtransasfuck.

The framework and languaging of the invisible co-compositional powers of the universe as a "dark fluid" or a "superfluid" *could* mimic the wrought histories of scientific racism or, as they do for me, could partner many elements of a Black Transembodied experience and Black experimental performativities. Many a scholar, a poet, an artist, a homey on the block have articulated the powers of Black being and of the performativities of "the cool." *And*, I believe, there is more to it.

The dark fluid/superfluid theory is evidence that our beingness-es are old and ancient, that the dark unconceals a cosmic evidence beyond some easy balance, either-or dichotomy, as it is understood that "inhomogeneities make the universe possible." The universe being composed, mostly of a fluid invisibility, unlocks both that fluidity is at the core of what keeps gravity and our universe in check, and that its invisibility suggests something of our Divine cosmologies at work. We simply know that it *is* because it is here doing its work.

I must make it plain that I am not suggesting that the invisibilization of any of us is something to try to make galactic or any other sense of. I *am* saying that we aren't (and neither is the superfluid) actually invisible, but that darkness is a sacred magic that requires something other than eyes, and a new seeing altogether, which Blackness has always demanded. A truth that Black Trans and Nonbinary-embodied experiences are, too, invoking of us.

And there is a danger when we accumulate unacknowledged invisibilities and make voids of ourselves or inside ourselves.

III

Esu

I'll return to the dark.

*Hear the sound of a caixixi
—the soft percussion reminiscent of a rain stick—
a Brazilian handheld shaker
woven like a small basket with an arched handle that
allows for the instrument to be cupped in the palm of the
hand*

The center of four intersecting lines. Surrounded by roads and directions. Cigar smoke coding the air coating the sky.

I searched the messages for more 33s. 3s. 3s. 33s. 3s. 3s. 33s.

Between January 1, 2018, and September 30, 2019, 331 Transgender and gender diverse people were killed worldwide—those lost to us who we could name because their gender identities were honored, and their deaths reported.⁹

130 in Brazil
63 in Mexico
30 in the US
1 plus 3, 4 plus 6, 10 plus 3, 4. 4 plus 3 is 7.

3,314 Transgender and gender diverse people were killed globally between January 1, 2008, and September 2019.

At least 3 in the United States this year.

There is a danger when we accumulate unacknowledged invisibilities and make voids of ourselves or inside ourselves.

1933 (the year Dark Matter was unconcealed)—1 plus 9, 10 plus 3 plus 3, 6. 6 plus 1 is 7. Yemanjá—the great mother. Cool nourishing water and fierce protector.

*caixixi silences
hand falls empty*

To whose feet we are being called, to answer to the murder of her children.
And not only in the silences, but the dying from which there are no earthly returns.

We here, do not have an out.

We all, you all, too, have a responsibility to save and better the lives of the Black Queer, the Black Transgender, and Nonbinary students in your classrooms, those SuperFluid Walking Glories in your dance companies, in your auditions, in your lives. It is not enough to have Trans and gender diverse folk in the room without also disrupting the binary thinking, practices, and “traditions” that serve to further ostracize and injure.

Consider: How do lines moving across the floor divided by binary genders create a liberated space for all of the bodies in it? Whose line is it anyway if it serves to marginalize the Walking Glories in the room? Our traditions are not insulted by our revolutions.

Consider how binary changing rooms create spaces of potential anxiety, trauma, or violence.

Consider how heteronormative constructs of masculinity and femininity limit choreographic practices and forms, as well as performance opportunities and self-expressions.

Consider how funding, leadership, community building, and choreographic opportunities offered to women with an asterisk, are still only really invitations for cisgendered women. If Transwomen and Nonbinary people assigned female at birth are not named, it cannot be assumed that the constructs that undergird those spaces themselves are in turn made safe for us.

Black Trans and Nonbinary, Black Queer dancers, we, too, are of this Diaspora—and always have been—we're here needing a space in dance that feels as Black as our skins, something that belongs to the bones like our genders and our sexualities belong to us. We are trying to live and breathe and sweat on the floor, to lift we up from the 3s and 33s, the dying around us. Around the Black Trans women most vulnerable to anti-Trans violence. That space in dance, too, has to be made to be as superfluid as our genders and sexualities and darkness.

Pronouns, presences, and bathrooms only *begin* to unconceal what is there of who we are. And we keep on naming ourselves to stay alive. Our beautiful Diasporic community is no less a continent than the land from which we were seeded. We have always been a many. Our languaging of gender in fluidities, resists binaries that were never meant to hold our continents anyway, so why would we accept that somehow colonizers got gender or sexuality right but enslavement and genocide wrong?

Breathe.

IV

Super Black

400 +1 the infinite, a many.

I am a Black Queer Trans Nonbinary Artist, “flowing fluently like the memory of my” superfluid slipping ancestors and transcestors. As my elder, Iya Fakayode, often reminds me, “If *we* are then someone else in our line was. We are not the first.”

SA Smythe, (very much alive) scholar, translator, and poet, writes in their forthcoming article, “Can I Get a Witness? Black Feminism, Trans Embodiment, and Thriving Past the Fault Lines of Care,”: “What does it mean for a space to be open to trans, gender nonconforming, and Nonbinary folks other than just the ones we think we like or know? The problem of hypervisibility/invisibility is one that is incredibly salient for all Black people and a key feature of the antiblackness that makes this world. Black people are routinely unseen as themselves because they are seen through the metrics of threat or excess.”¹⁰

Through whose eyes are we seeing each other? What does it mean for the Superfluid of us to *actually* be invited to these spaces? What does this “practice of care” entail? Is the space, itself, the organizing accountables challenging binary thinking and positionalities? Having Transgender and Nonbinary folk in the room is, too, an invitation for us to evaluate and, if necessary, remake the room itself. But if it is a real invitation, that evaluation and labor can't wait on our arrival.

Breathe.

| *the Dark around you unconceals slightly*
| *suddenly*

One of the mythologies of the *caixixi* is that the first one was filled with the teeth of a murdered African woman, a powerful warrior whose call to liberation persists every time this instrument is played. I think we should also consider the ways this story amplifies the ongoing, often invisible labor of Black women, and the expected laboring of the Black body even in death.

There is a danger when we don't see us. When we accumulate invisibilities and make voids of ourselves or inside ourselves.

Breathe.

| *the Dark around you*
| *fully unconceals*
| *it is Black*

The Dark is not a mistake.
Now, I return to the blood.

An invitation to be in the flow. To acknowledge the shape-shifting liquidity of Blackness, which has always been anyway, is to be confronted with the ways the internalized terror known as white supremacy enables stasis. In Eastern medicinal and spiritual traditions, blood stasis speaks to blockages of flow inside us that are caused by physical, emotional, or energetic traumas. Blood stasis causes pain, disease, dis-ease, and illness, requiring us to examine every road in our lives.

Whether it be from pigeonholing our fullest explorations of "tradition" or supporting only the most "respectable" of Black performativity with our witnessing or our dollars, we create a stasis in our blood. These erasures don't just resolve themselves "up there" so can therefore be tolerated, they are ruptures here, now. Beyond and including this room, this context. Blood stasis muddies the blood memory our ancestors have gifted us along with that which we serve to pass on to our next ones. And haven't we inherited enough traumas? The embrace of our dark capacities expands the possibilities of flow to being beyond salt-watered absorption and coagulated stillness. As the dark teaches us, we were meant to move, cool, fluid, Black.

Breathe in the dark with me for one more moment.

*A Ritual for the Flying*¹¹

We are already ourselves
becoming.

Or refusing to be.

Whole,
in our
un

arrival.

We'll live adrift in the cosmic trails by which our bodies are threaded. Maybe
our lives will pass each other in the ether. Maybe
they will forgive each other for every time they forgot that they could
see stars up close, witness each other in past/future of them/we/selves.

Even if on the tongue
of a sharply evaporating second.
Maybe.

On the underside of our brownness is a meandering chameleon.
It creeps with black, a tiny solar system descends its spine.

Beneath
It licks at we.
Shifts
hue in slithering consonants
marks into we
and we change with it.
We slip
through selves together,
dividing supernova.
Make we a crescent moon.
I'd like to see the possibility our dark made.

The body reaches itself in spirals through gender. It transposes galactic light. It carves vertiginous densities. Every time a splendid arrival, turns afoul vile expectations of ordinariness. Each fractal reflection inhabits the preciousness of a breathing ghost, with swells of purple particle lassos dusting what once held the quiet of a start. We've inherited and shepherd these rotations. To access the yes in our Queer skins is to invoke a portal to ancestral intelligences. To un gender is to conduct the magic of living. We fly, real winged journeys. And we must.

Notes

1. In this section, I looked to sources that were accessible and readily available online in order to evaluate the developing ways that histories of Diaspora are disseminated and collected in the cyber global sphere.

2. Edwidge Danticat, "The Long Legacy of Occupation in Haiti," *New Yorker*, July 28, 2015, accessed February 2, 2020, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/haiti-us-occupation-hundred-year-anniversary>; "U.S. Invasion and Occupation of Haiti, 1915–34," Office of the Historian, Foreign Service Institute, accessed February 5, 2020, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1914-1920/haiti>.

3. "Carnegie Corporation Oral History Project," Columbia University Libraries Oral History Research Office, accessed February 2, 2020, www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/digital/collections/oral_hist/carnegie/special-features/.

4. *How Sweet the Sound: Gospel Music in Los Angeles* (exhibition), February 8–August 26, 2018, California African American Museum, Los Angeles.

5. It should be noted that, as the passage suggests, this number is noted with as few as twenty-four and as many as twenty-eight. I elected to quote the higher number given the understanding that these crimes went largely undocumented. Francis Jacobs, "Chilling Maps of Lynchings in 1930s America," Big Think, April 16, 2018, accessed February 2, 2020, <https://bigthink.com/strange-maps/chilling-maps-of-lynchings-in-1930s-america>.

6. Concept introduced by Martin Heidegger's *On Time and Being*.

7. From my unpublished manuscript, "The Unarrival Experiments."

8. Jacob Williamson-Rea, "Physicist Theorizes that Dark Matter is Superfluid," Penn Today, September 17, 2018, accessed November 12, 2019, <https://penntoday.upenn.edu/news/physicist-theorizes-dark-matter-superfluid>; Michael Irving, "Dark Matter and Dark Energy May Really Be One 'Dark Fluid' with Negative Mass," New Atlas, December 6, 2018, accessed November 12, 2019, <https://newatlas.com/dark-fluid-theory-matter-energy/57540>.

9. "TMM Update Trans Day of Remembrance 2019," Trans Respect Verus Transphobia Worldwide, November 11, 2019, accessed January 18, 2020, <https://transrespect.org/en/tmm-update-trans-day-of-remembrance-2019/>.

10. SA Smythe, “Can I Get a Witness? Black Feminism, Trans Embodiment, and Thriving Past the Fault Lines of Care” (unpublished article), used with permission of SA Smythe.

11. From my unpublished manuscript, “The Unarrival Experiments”, 2019.

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