5

"World Galaxy"

Throughout this book, I have considered examples of artists and other intellectuals who engage primarily with aspects of Black American culture and/or with Black American history, thought, and/or politics. In addition, I have worked with Herman Melville, a canonical figure in American literature. From this decidedly American focus, *Queer Times, Black Futures* tries to reach, however clumsily, beyond national formations, to touch a cosmic perspective.

Such a "cosmic perspective" has been a dimension of various cultural imaginaries for a long time. Science is catching up with our collective imagination. Many physicists, technologists, and other scientists have been inspired by speculative fictional scenarios, and many of us in the humanities are beginning to incorporate in systematic ways the new insights scientists have gained from their glimpses into a cosmic perspective. Doing so is challenging how we approach several of the concepts long considered foundational to Western thought, including "time," "temporality," "subjectivity," "the human," "the Other," and "agency." Working with and through scientific and technical knowledge in the service of humanistic inquiry is a challenge of world historical significance. I believe that if the species life that has enabled a book such as this to be written is to continue on this planet, the inequities "the human" has fostered and maintained over time must be redressed. A cosmic orientation can underscore the profound interrelatedness of matter(s) presently governed by race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, nationality, and so on, with other urgent material questions posed to, for, and in our times, such as global climate change, the Anthropocene, artificial intelligence, big data, computation, the potential and dangers of and in the human genome, epigenetics, and CRISPR (Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeat), space travel and the colonization of other planets, cryptography, cryptocurrency, and other technology used in societies of control.

"In the Dark"

With these world-historical entanglements in mind, a cosmic imagination is possible today, one that embraces what Édouard Glissant has called the "poetics of Relation": a mobile, fugitive perception of the interconnectedness of all things, which does not insist upon a universal system of commensuration, but instead allows for every thing's right to opacity. The "poetics of Relation" carries with it, indeed is fueled and enabled by, the violence of modernity and its characteristic contacts between groups of people. Yet, for Glissant, that poetics also allows for a fundamental transduction of selves, societies, and values into a multiplicity that, though open and changing, remains powerfully connected to the historical contexts of its production. Glissant does not call for a rupture in historical time (indeed, as I discussed in chapter 1, for Glissant, catastrophe has already occurred); rather, he calls for a sense of time as an opening up to, or, to put this another way, a caving in to another world we might feel is (im)possible now.[1] Though it may be imperceptible, that other world is accruing value (if there will be such a thing) here and now. "Contentless and simple," everything is.[2]

"At Home"

Glissant's formulation of the "poetics of Relation" hinges on the French word *relation*, as he explains: "To the extent that our consciousness of Relation is total, that is, immediate and focusing directly upon the realizable totality of the world, when we speak of a poetics of Relation, we no longer need to add: relation between what and what? That is why the French word Relation, which functions somewhat like a transitive verb, could not correspond, for example, to the English term relationship."[3] In the chapter entitled "Poetics" in his book *Poetics of Relation*, Glissant narrates his "poetics of Relation" as part of a series of transformations within the French language made by poets who confronted or encountered various Others along their journeys from their native lands. These poets were distinguished by the ways in which they registered "the shock of elsewhere"—the impact of their travels and geographic wanderings—in their work.

"Toward the World"

Glissant claims that the earlier movements of Relation that accompanied the journeying of European language, as part of the European territorial expansion into other parts of the world, operated according to a series of arrow-like trajectories, which "link the places of the world into a whole made up of peripheries, which are listed in function of a Center."[4] What he calls the first "itinerary" led from the Center toward the peripheries and included "all those who, whether critical or possessed, racist or idealist, frenzied or rational, have experienced passionately the call of Diversity."[5] After that, "a second itinerary then began to form, this time from the peripheries toward the Center." This movement included "poets who were born or lived in the elsewhere" and "dream" of the Center as a source of their "imaginary constructs and, consciously or not, 'make the trip in the opposite direction,' struggling to do so."[6] Glissant continues, "In a third stage the trajectory is abolished; the arrowlike projection becomes curved" in such a way that the poet's word "abolishes the very notion of center and periphery."[7]

Glissant names exemplary French and Francophone poets from each of the three stages he identifies. After characterizing the third stage, Glissant explains:

> The time came, then, in which Relation was no longer a prophecy made by a series of trajectories, itineraries that followed or thwarted one another. By itself and in itself Relation exploded like a network inscribed within the sufficient totality of the world.[8]

That Glissant uses a metaphor of the network here reminds us of the centrality of "networks" to the logics of social connection and communication prevalent today, and it brings to mind the importance of computational media technologies in producing and sustaining those networks. Within the repetitions and circularity of the totality in which a "poetics of Relation" inscribes itself, the dispersed mobile agent of interest to Beth Coleman through her reading of James A. Snead (discussed at length in the previous chapters) is also perceptible here. Glissant writes, "Every expression of the humanities opens onto the fluctuating complexity of the world. Here poetic thought

safeguards the particular, since only the totality of truly secure particulars guarantees the energy of Diversity," where "Diversity" can be understood, according to Glissant, as "the quantifiable totality of every possible difference."[9]

In the third stage, Relation, no longer journeying and future-facing, explodes "like a network inscribed within the sufficient totality of the world" and reveals its depth, a dimension within ourselves that may be approached through duration. It signals a spatiotemporal shift experienced in common. Again, Glissant explains:

> We no longer reveal totality within ourselves by lightning flashes. We approach it through the accumulation of sediments. The poetics of duration (another leitmotiv), one of the first principles of the sacred, founding books of community, reappears to take up the relay from the poetics of the moment. Lightning flashes are the shivers of one who desires or dreams of a totality that is impossible or yet to come; duration urges on those who attempt to live this totality, when dawn shows through the linked histories of peoples.[10]

For Glissant, then, the ethical challenge of duration involves attempting to live the totality of the world as a temporal layering of the "linked histories of peoples." Over time, knowledge, including intuition, reaches into the sediment that has accumulated in time to assemble a living poetics that strives toward a totality comprised of Diversity. This is no longer a poetics of the moment in which a perception of the Whole arrives in quick flashes through which we dream of what yet, still might be one day. It is a poetics of duration in which the Whole is perceptible as an opening in which we live, here and now.

Relation anchors us in the queerness that is autochthonous to time. The "poetics of Relation" is a method of transduction, in Simondon's sense of "the operation whereby a domain undergoes information."[11] Stubborn forms, such as nations and peoples, can be transduced into different forms, perhaps unrecognizable as such, through errant and unanticipated connections with other sediment. Glissant states: "In addition, the poetics of Relation remains forever conjectural and presupposes no ideological stability. It is against the comfortable assurances linked to the supposed excellence of a language. A poetics that is latent,

open, multilingual in intention, directly in contact with everything possible."[12] An upheaval within language, with material force.

The "poetics of Relation" is speculative. The spatial logics of "trajectory" no longer apply. Instead, "this poetics of Relation interweaves and no longer projects."[13] The "poetics of Relation" acknowledges the dense entanglement of matter(s). A modulation within Black culture, the "poetics of Relation" thrives on surprises and accidents as it "safeguards . . . the totality of truly secure particulars." It is antifragile.[14]

"World Galaxy"

As I mentioned in chapter 1, the first chapter of *Poetics of Relation* provides an impressionistic rendering of the experience of the Atlantic slave trade linking Europe, Africa, the Americas, and the Caribbean, which evokes something of what must have been the horrors of experiencing what Glissant calls "the abyss." Glissant characterizes the experience of the abyss that was the slave's journey into the European's "new world" as an "asceticism of crossing" in a closed boat (as opposed to the open boat, which Glissant says characterized an African politics).[15] Glissant asks his reader to imagine "the land-sea that, unknown to you, is the planet Earth, feeling a language vanish, the word of the gods vanish, and the sealed image of even the most everyday object, of even the most familiar animal, vanish."[16] Offering a poetic rendering of an experience of forced crossing, Glissant argues that Africans, especially those in the Europeans' "new world," carry a dimension of the abyss within.

Glissant understands "being" as in a constant process of change, a permanent process that he refers to as "creolization," which he identifies specifically with the Caribbean, but in such a way that it becomes "valid" for everybody. Glissant explains that he sees the history of the Caribbean as exemplary of this creolization: "What took place in the Caribbean, which could be summed up in the word 'creolization,' approximates the idea of Relation for us as nearly as possible. It is not merely an encounter; a shock . . . , a *métissage*, but a new and original dimension allowing each person to be there and elsewhere, rooted and open, lost in the mountains and free beneath the sea, in harmony and in errantry."[17] According to Glissant, the history of the Caribbean takes "into account the history of the world, because in this very moment the

whole world is creolizing itself, and there are no longer nations or races that are untouched by others."[18] I think of a world that is creolizing itself as a "World Galaxy," a phrase I take from the title of a 1972 album by Alice Coltrane.

Coltrane, born Alice McLeod in Detroit, Michigan, in 1937, was married to and had four children with renowned jazz musician John Coltrane. A talented pianist, harpist, organist, and composer, she released seventeen albums between 1968 and 2004. In 1972, she founded a Vedantic Center. Later, she became a Hindu swami, established an ashram, and added "Turiyasangitananda" to her name, becoming known as Alice Coltrane Turiyasangitananda or A. C. Turiyasangitananda. She served as spiritual director of the ashram until her death in 2007.[19] Thinking about her life and work opens up another route through Afrofuturist concerns with "imagination, technology, the future, and liberation"[20] by acknowledging that intercultural sonic connections and mixings, in this case between African American and Asian cultural forms and practices, are a significant part of the prehistory of Afrofuturism.[21]

If Afrofuturist progenitor Sun Ra experimented with the tropes and sounds of space travel and imagined Black people colonizing other planets as a solution to the spatial restrictions placed on Black Americans during Jim Crow segregation and to the psychic and material toll anti-Black racism takes on the imagination and consciousness of Black people, his contemporary, Alice Coltrane, forged a line of flight out of American anti-Black racism via errant wandering to the East. Where Sun Ra claimed to be from Saturn, evoked the spiritual beliefs of ancient Egypt, and invested in presently impossible futures, Coltrane founded a spiritual community in the Santa Monica Mountains outside of Los Angeles, where she created a syncretic music out of the vibrant sonic traditions of African American gospel music and Indian devotional music in the Hindu tradition.[22] Sun Ra was preoccupied with how technology enables an exploration of outer worlds. Alice Coltrane forged sonic and spiritual technē to search for liberation within.

During the mid- to late 1960s, when Sun Ra, John Coltrane, Alice Coltrane, and other musicians were experimenting with form, jazz functioned as an engine of creolization. Many scholars have pointed out the influence of African music and traditions on the distinctly African American cultural form of jazz, but few have discussed the extent

to which Asian, particularly Indian and Japanese, musical forms and spiritual logics were also significant currents flowing into jazz during this period. A wide range of sonic material influenced John Coltrane's own original compositions.[23] In 1969, after John Coltrane's death, bassist Vishnu Wood, hoping to lift Alice Coltrane out of her grief and depression, introduced her to Swami Satchidananda, who had been giving lectures on Manhattan's Upper West Side. Swami Satchidananda's lectures in New York City were part of a broader cultural preoccupation in the United States at the time with what Jane Iwamura has called "the icon of the Oriental monk." Iwamura refers to how, between 1950 and 1975, television and film in the United States put into circulation an iconic image, "the Oriental monk," that was representative of "an otherworldly (though perhaps not entirely alien) spirituality that draws from the ancient wellsprings of 'Eastern' civilization and culture."[24] Alice Coltrane's turn to "otherworldly" Eastern musical and spiritual forms happened during the broader American Orientalist embrace of Eastern religions and philosophies of the 1960s. While these intercultural exchanges certainly involved cultural appropriation, there is a crucial difference in the case of Alice Coltrane from the kind of cultural appropriation in which the value that has accrued to the cultural innovations of one group of people are made to serve the interests of another group that is in a position of power vis-à-vis the innovative group.[25]

Alice Coltrane's embrace of the philosophical and spiritual teachings of the Vedas unsettles a unitary notion of African American selfhood, pushing it beyond the parameters of nation-state belonging and its structures of citizenship and into a terrain of belonging on the scale of what she refers to as a "world galaxy" and, in the title of another album from the same time period, a "universal consciousness." In her life and music, the errantry driving her entanglements with Asian musical, cultural, and spiritual forms was animated by a quest for liberation, the abolition of war, and dreams of different kinds of connection inconsistent with a simple will to arrogate the value of Asian culture for herself, for African Americans, or for another group with which one could claim she was affiliated. By forging generative, errant connections from those avenues available to her during the late 1960s, she created a new musical form.[26] It could be said that Coltrane's turn to Asian cultural forms is a type of "Black Orientalism." Following Helen Jun, I use the phrase

"Black Orientalism" to designate "a heterogeneous and historically variable discourse in which the contradictions of black citizenship engage with the logic of American Orientalism." In Jun's usage, Black Orientalism "is in no way an accusatory or reductive condemnation that seeks to chastise black individuals or institutions for being imperialist, racist, or Orientalist." It does not have "a singular meaning or manifestation." Here, "Black Orientalism encompasses a range of black imaginings of Asia that are in fact negotiations with the limits, failures, and disappointments of black citizenship."[27]

For Coltrane, the Orientalist elements of "world galaxy" tap into the way that "the Orient" historically constitutes a geopolitical and ontological position that serves as an alternative to, if not a contestation of, Western or European hegemonies. It is a way of working from within existing logics and structures in order to imagine another set of possibilities immanent to them. Coltrane's sonic Black Orientalism is inspired most directly by the Indian musical traditions popularized in the United States by Ravi Shankar, which also significantly influenced her husband John Coltrane, and, as I mentioned, by the relationship she established in 1969 with Swami Satchidananda, two years after John Coltrane's death.

Following Glissant, Alice Coltrane's experiments with(in) Asian musical forms, as well as her travels to India and Japan, can be understood as sonic and spiritual errantry. Glissant understands "errantry" as a way of refusing the specificity of a particular root or sense of an origin. When it shows up in African American jazz in relation to Asian musical traditions, it can work as a mode of critique that pushes beyond already existing analyses of forms of exploitation and domination and, through its structures of feeling, participates in a creolization that today can be understood metaphorically as the hyphen in Afro-Asian. Perhaps it also anticipates a more radical upheaval of the logics in which "Black" and "Asian" cohere as such.[28]

As in my discussion of Sun Ra, my focus on Alice Coltrane's music routes my analysis and arguments through jazz, a distinctly African American cultural form that has achieved an expressive validity and relevance well beyond the particularities of Black existence in the United States. During a discussion with Manthia Diawara, Glissant highlights the efforts of Black American jazz musicians in a way relevant to my discussion here of Sun Ra and Alice Coltrane, who were progenitors of

Afrofuturism.[29] Glissant argues that Africa's specific calling is to move from Unity to multiplicity, and that Africans have in part accomplished this through cultural and other forms of mixing. He explains that when African culture mixes with other cultures, what is produced tends to be "valid" for all. He gives jazz and reggae as two musical examples:

> The Africans had lost everything; they had nothing, not even a song. In jazz, black Americans had to recompose, through memory and through extraordinary suffering, the echo of what Africa had for them. Jazz came about not through a book but through a flight of memory. That's why jazz is valid for everybody, because it's a reconstruction within a distraught memory of something that had disappeared and had now been regained. It required a terrifying effort. That's why jazz at the beginning was so tragic. If you look at the faces of the great jazz musicians, they are very tragic, and that's something everyone can see. The same goes for Bob Marley and reggae: it's valid for everyone.[30]

In other words, jazz issues from the dimension of the abyss at the core of diasporic Black culture. Jazz musicians confronted the abyss and recomposed a past through it. From his specific location in the Caribbean, Glissant helps us to understand that, in the face of natal alienation and the psychic and other violent upheavals that characterize the abyss, jazz seeks to forge new modes of being that apply to everyone. In the case of Alice Coltrane, Black Orientalism was part of the "terrifying effort" required to create a new musical form that might call everyone into Relation.[31] The core impulse in Coltrane's mode of Black Orientalism is cosmic; that is, it seeks to re-Orient humanity toward and within a vast imagined universe. As Kodwo Eshun writes, "With Alice Coltrane, the jazz composer becomes the electric transmitter. In her Galactic Tetralogy, recording becomes a primaudial technology. The cosmos is an infinity of endlessly reverberating vibrations. The universe begins in sound. Therefore new sound engines can amplify new universes into resonance."[32]

Alice Coltrane's work after John Coltrane's death can be understood within the context of the transformations taking place in the social and political landscape of the United States and elsewhere after 1967–1968. Coltrane's errant turn to an Eastern spiritual tradition during this time

is part of a broader cultural turn inward to an exploration of self, fueled by American Orientalism. Coltrane's turn to inner worlds as a way to address the present limitations of American society takes its rationale and logic from within the jazz music that preceded it, and from within a trajectory of American thought consistent with the logics of liberal multiculturalism. Nonetheless, it also is a rejection of the dominant institutions in the United States during a time when they were increasingly allowing more access and recognition to Black people and people of color. Coltrane's creation of a sonic "world galaxy" was in the interest of producing a set of affective, if not entirely politically operational, conditions for a new humanism. It is a creolization between African and Asian that tends toward what I call "errant futures" because it brings together seemingly disparate logics and paradigms in relatively unpredictable ways.

Today, in a moment when the citizenship gains of the civil rights era are being rolled back, when Black life continues to be deemed negligible, when uprisings against neoliberalism are palpable and increasingly powerful worldwide, and when the representational paradigms that previously underwrote our political logics no longer or only tenuously apply, I purposively wander back to Alice Coltrane's Black Orientalism in order to explore the "world galaxy" she created with sound, listening for and within the hyphen between African and American and Asian that is part of our now.

Speculations on Africa

Within this spatiotemporal catastrophe we call modernity, I also wander to narratives of Africa. Sometimes these offer an anchor for imagining reconnection. Other times, they posit "Africa" as a vibrant site of dispersal and contagion. As I discussed in the introduction, for Shell and other transnational corporations, "Africa" is a site of economic and geologic exploitation in the name of shareholders' profits and maintaining present forecasts for global energy futures. A formulation of "Africa" also figures centrally in Afrofuturism, whether as an anchor for a "Black Atlantic" or as a setting for speculative fiction. A formulation of "Africa" functions within corporate scenarios as well; as Kodwo Eshun points out, "If global scenarios are descriptions

that are primarily concerned with making futures safe for the market, then Afrofuturism's first priority is to recognize that Africa increasingly exists as the object of futurist projection. . . . Africa is always the zone of the absolute dystopia. There is always a reliable trade in market projections for Africa's socioeconomic crises. Market dystopias aim to warn against predatory futures, but always do so in a discourse that aspires to unchallengeable certainty."[33] In the introduction, I discussed the global scenarios of the type Eshun mentions here, taking as exemplary those produced by Shell Oil to inform their product development, planning, and assessments of risk and profits. In the face of corporate speculations on "Africa," the Afrofuturisms of interest throughout *Queer Times, Black Futures* narrate alternative, fantastic, unpredictable responses to potential futures for "Africa" and for peoples of the African diaspora.

To understand this valence of Afrofuturism, I turn to Wanuri Kahiu's short film *Pumzi* from 2009 and Nnedi Okorafor's third novel, *Who Fears Death*, published in 2010. The fantastic and irrational futures imagined in these cultural productions are animated by queer, unpredictable connections between things. Although there is much that could be said about both of these remarkable texts, I focus here on the way each of them depicts the active creation of dreams, myths, and stories as responses to the quotidian violence of their story's present. As I explained in the introduction and chapter 1, quotidian violence maintains a temporality and a spatial logic that is hostile to the queerness in time. In the speculative narratives of *Pumzi* and *Who Fears Death*, dreams, myths, and stories are precisely what must be managed by those in power so that present relations are rendered logical, viable, and sustainable. In order for existing relations to survive as such, dreams, myths, and stories must not accrue material force. As I discuss most directly in chapter 3, but have been arguing throughout *Queer Times, Black Futures*, the digital regime of the image facilitates a more widespread acknowledgment of the separation of indices from their material referents. Under these conditions, the stories we tell, the myths we believe, and the dreams through which, as Audre Lorde explains, insights and revelations, new knowledge, might enter and inform existing structures are some of the reservoirs for the transduction of present relations into another organization of things.[34]

In Wanuri Kahui's short film *Pumzi*, the protagonist's dreams provide access to insights capable of supporting radical transformations in the material world. In the film's speculative global scenario, set in the "Maitu Community, East African Territories, 35 years after World War III, the water war," the Maitu Community exists in a compound sealed off from the seemingly dead world outside. They make their own energy (the signs on the wall read: "One hundred percent self-powered community. Zero percent pollution.") and recycle all their bodily and other fluids, including their urine and sweat. Even their thoughts and dreams are monitored. Kahiu's film highlights the role of technology in the structures of control that characterize the film's speculations about a future "Africa," set in the cultural context of historical Kenya. This speculative scenario is the element of the film about which Kahiu receives questions; in interviews, she explains: "People ask if it's difficult to blend science fiction and Africa. . . . As far as I know, science and Africa have never been separate."[35]

The society *Pumzi* depicts is one of seemingly complete control; it is a closed system in which the community's collective energies and bodily expenditures are channeled back into the reproduction of the community itself. It is predictable and manageable. The mode of control presented in the Maitu Community relies upon a medical management of dreams and, it could be argued by extension, the imagination. The society proves to be actively hostile to the protagonist's success in the activity the society seems to be set up to help foster and discover—namely, the quest for water that would support plant and other life outside of the compound.

The film's protagonist, Asha, is a researcher analyzing soil samples for their water content.[36] She receives a sample with unusually high water content, but when she brings it to the attention of the authorities, she is told not to pursue it and is subsequently punished for trying to follow up on the evidence she has uncovered. Ultimately, she chooses to break out of the compound, with help from a cleaner who appears to be of a different racial and class background than Asha. After arduously navigating the rocky and dusty world outside the compound, which the governing council of the Maitu Community tells her is "dead," Asha sacrifices her own life in order to test her theory that the soil sample contains enough water to support vegetation. The film ends as Asha breathes her

last breath while sheltering the bulb she planted into the ground and nurtured with her own sweat and the last of her potable water. The camera pans out as a tree grows from the spot on which she died. The sound of thunder can be heard as the camera continues its pan, taking a bird's eye view of the terrain, and the film's title, *Pumzi*, is revealed on the screen.[37] As a wider view becomes apparent, it is clear that Asha died some distance from, but not a great distance from, what appears to be a dense forest.

The aerial shot at the end of the film recalls the establishing aerial shot of the compound at the beginning, which slowly pushes in until a cut to a close-up shot and a pan to reveal jars in a lab space inside the compound. These contain samples of seeds and other forms of plant life, as well as glass cases displaying newspaper clippings and other artifacts chronicling the scarcity of and quest for water. There is a close up of the descriptive title on one of the jars. It reads "Maitu (Mother) Seed. Kikuyu language. 1. Noun—Mother. Origin: Kikuyu Language from MAA (Truth) and ITU (Ours). OUR TRUTH." The word "Maitu" already is familiar to viewers from the opening text that references the "Maitu Community" in East Africa. This context situates the film within "a Gikuyu (Kikuyu) centric modern African feminist paradigm."[38]

In its first frames, *Pumzi* re-petitions the matrilineal origin story for the Agikuyu people (who speak the Bantu language Kikuyu), translating an oral tradition into film. In so doing, it anchors the science fictional society of its speculative future within a set of references to an ethnic group who presently exist in the nation we know today as Kenya. For those viewers who are familiar with Kikuyu and the myths and history of Agikuyu culture, *Pumzi* offers a futuristic heroine who resists the demand that she stop listening to her dreams and accept existing conditions. By the end of the film, she is associated with the mighty tree that she has been seeing in her dreams and that calls to her from across the desert once she escapes. This tree recalls the Mugumo tree, or Mukuyu tree, which "is central to Gikuyu culture as a sacred tree" and is used in this monotheistic culture "as a place of worship and communing with God and collectively."[39] For that segment of its audience who lack knowledge of Agikuyu culture, *Pumzi* provides a feminist vision of activism in the face of environmental devastation in East Africa, perhaps recalling the efforts of environmentalist Wangari Maathai, who

was Gikuyu, to found the Green Belt Movement and work to reverse the environmental destruction threatening rural Kenyans. In 2004, Maathai won a Nobel Peace Prize for this work, which she undertook even in the face of great danger to herself and those who worked with her. Around the time that she was making *Pumzi*, Kahiu directed a documentary film about Maathai entitled *For Our Land* (2009).[40]

Pumzi's speculation on "Africa" posits its future as dystopian, "after World War III, the water war," but its investments are in the risky actions of the main character, in fugitivity, and in errant connections, such as those between Asha and the cleaner. Before she knows she will find the fertile soil (and therefore before she has any clear motive to help the cleaner), Asha leaves some of her water for the cleaner in the restroom. Later, the cleaner helps Asha to escape in order to pursue her dream of finding the tree. *Pumzi*'s narrative hinges on the main character's action of withdrawing her consent from the terms of control and pilfering the soil sample (in which a seed she'd planted has started to grow) and water out of a structure and system that would control their circulation. She steals these riches so that they can be invested in a different project. *Pumzi* infuses a speculative scenario about future disasters in Africa with the unpredictability of fugitivity, errantry, and criminality, all of which are here efforts toward the freedom and survival of a collective, not of the society that exists in *Pumzi*, but of another, already held in escrow, that might grow out of work and other action undertaken today.

Pumzi's director, Wanuri Kahiu, was born in Nairobi, Kenya, and has a bachelor's degree of science from the University of Warwick in the United Kingdom, and an MFA in film directing from the University of California, Los Angeles, in the United States. Her first film, *From a Whisper* (2008), won five African Movie Academy Awards and helped to bring her to the attention of African American producer Kisha Cameron-Dingle while Cameron-Dingle was program director of the Focus Features Africa First Short Film Program. Cameron-Dingle's film production company, Completion Films, optioned the film rights to Nnedi Okorafor's novel *Who Fears Death* and signed Wanuri Kahiu onto the project as its director. Although that project never materialized, Okorafor and Kahiu have collaborated on several other projects since then, including short stories and an animated film entitled "The Camel Racer."[41]

Okorafor's *Who Fears Death* carries an epigraph by Patrice Lumumba, identified there as the "first and only elected Prime Minister of the Republic of the Congo." The epigraph begins with a salutation—"Dear friends,"—and continues with a question, "are you afraid of death?" "Dear Friends, are you afraid of death?" This question sounds like an invitation—a challenge and incitement to risk and revolution. While it begins with this epigraph from a hopeful, revolutionary, now dead and decaying past, *Who Fears Death* ends with an illustration of the material force of the stories we tell.

Sola, the narrator of "Chapter One: Rewritten," the novel's last chapter, has not previously served as narrator. Sola writes the story of what happens after Onyesonwu, the novel's protagonist, fulfills prophesy by rewriting the Great Book and being stoned to death for it. In "Chapter One: Rewritten," rather than dying from the stoning she endures after rewriting the Great Book, Onyesonwu rewrites the Great Book and, in the midst of the stoning, takes to the sky as a Kponyungo (a giant flying lizard that is thought to be mythical but that Onyesonwu and her mother, among other sorcerers, can transform into).

As Onyesonwu flies through the air to meet her lover Mwita, below her to the South, West, and East, a wave of change, unleashed when Onyesonwu succeeded in fulfilling her destiny to rewrite the Great Book, transforms relationships between people. Both Mwita and Onyesonwu are Ewu, the name given to the children of a Nuru and an Okeke parent. When the novel opens, the Nuru and the Okeke have been at war for a long time, and Nuru men regularly rape Okeke women as a weapon of war. Onyesonwu fulfills a prophecy to end the war. When she does, new abilities, such as the capacity for flight, are bestowed upon people. It is a historical rupture with spatial coordinates. It creates another world.

Yet, though change spreads throughout the rest of the world, "directly below" a mob still waits. At the end of the novel, this waiting is a bloodthirsty inertia. To conclude the novel, Sola writes:

> If Onyesonwu had taken one last look below, to the south, with her keen *Kponyungo* eyes she'd have seen Nuru, Okeke, and two Ewu children in school uniforms playing in a schoolyard. To the east, stretching into the distance, she'd have seen black paved roads populated by men and women, Okeke and Nuru, riding scooters and carts pulled by camels. In

> downtown Durfa, she'd have spotted a flying woman discreetly meeting up with a flying man on the roof of the tallest building. But the wave of change was yet to sweep by directly below. There, thousands of Nuru still waited for Onyesonwu, all of them screaming, yelling, shouting, laughing, glaring . . . waiting to wet their tongues with Onyesonwu's blood. Let them wait. They will be waiting for a long long time.[42]

The mob's waiting reinscribes the violent temporality of the present in which the mob waits. It is not normal waiting, nor is it lying in wait. Lying in wait is subterranean, indecipherable. This waiting is part of the old organization of things. It is waiting that seeks to anchor and perpetuate the logics and narratives of genocide, rape, and exploitation through which the characters in this novel have come to be who they are. The mob wants Onyesonwu's blood because in fulfilling the prophecy in which she rewrites the Great Book and thereby creates a new world, she also killed all the virile men within a Nuru town and impregnated all the women. And she killed their general, her father, the Nuru sorcerer named Daib, who raped Onyesonwu's Okeke mother and in that way fathered Onyesonwu.

The rupture narrated in *Who Fears Death* is, then, predicated simultaneously on a patricide and a radical interruption of social reproduction on the level of biological reproduction. Killing all the virile men and impregnating all the pregnable women, Onyesonwu sires a generation without fathers—a prophetic generation is coming. It arrives. Still, directly below Onyesonwu, surrounded by a new world that is breathing and becoming within the wave of change, the mob waits, impervious to that wave of change, seeking its own survival as such—brutal, genocidal, necropolitical, and authorized by the Great Book before Onyesonwu rewrote it.

Caught within the image of waiting that concludes *Who Fears Death* is an organization of time that resonates with the temporality of a variety of religious and religiously inflected systems of thought, among them the Jewish apocalyptic and rabbinic traditions about which Giorgio Agamben comments in *The Time that Remains*, his reading of the Apostle Paul's "The Letter to the Romans." For Agamben, the Pauline texts are "the fundamental messianic texts of the West." The invocation of messianic time in Okorafor's novel calls our attention to the fact that messianic and apocalyptic time have spatial implications, and it calls

attention to the spatial politics of the temporality that undergirds "the fundamental messianic texts of the West."[43] These spatial implications complicate how we might think the politics and possibilities for radical transformations in existing conditions. In *Who Fears Death*, there is a point at which the fictional land the characters inhabit is revealed to have a referent in the world of the reader of the novel in 2011. After Onyesonwu rewrites the Great Book and is stoned to death, her supporters, the witnesses to her death, burn her body on a funeral pyre. Sola mentions for the first time the name of the place in which the novel's action has unfolded: "It was the most we could do for the woman who saved the people of the Seven Rivers Kingdom, this place that used to be part of the Kingdom of Sudan."[44]

The wave of change described at the end of *Who Fears Death* has material spatial implications. The transduction of one organization of things into another, however rapidly or gradually that occurs, involves an entanglement with existing matter(s). As in all mattering, ethical questions of evaluation, measurement, and adjudication are brought to the fore when chapter 1 of the Great Book is rewritten. As a fantastic speculative fiction, *Who Fears Death* invests in the impossible possibility that the geopolitics and historical conflicts that fuel the violence in Sudan might succumb to the logics of a different authorizing narrative shaped by a Black radical imagination invested in liberation.

Radical changes (whether in terms of the founding of new nations as in the case of the Americas I discussed in the "Intercession," where I considered Deleuze's reading of Bartleby, or of the imaginative positing of a colony for Black people "up under different stars" as in Sun Ra's *Space Is the Place*, or of other fundamental changes in the existing organization of things) raise ethical questions about spatial relations. *Who Fears Death* invokes "the Sudan" as that kingdom whose authorizing myths, legends, and stories Onyesonwu was prophesied to rewrite. In so doing, the novel imaginatively unmoors their capacity to shape reality, and it upends the quotidian violence holding that reality in place. Sola, an apostle, we might say, risks dreaming that the rapes, genocide, and exploitation that were taking place in 2010 in the Sudan in the material world familiar and accessible to the novel's readers might give way to a different organization of things, a different system of signification and value, another world there now, and that it might give way to this other

world through the power carried in stories, myths, and legends. This dream is dangerous and productive of many valences of risk in the time that remains between what Onyesonwu was (as anchored by the angry mob of the Kingdom of Sudan so far immune to the wave of change that is enveloping the space around them) and what she would become (the woman who saved the people of Seven Rivers Kingdom).

Yet, invoking a place, Sudan, which has an objectively verifiable existence in our world, *Who Fears Death* anchors its freedom dreams for another future in a here and now with complex geopolitical coordinates and stubborn historical entanglements. Released one year before the founding of South Sudan, *Who Fears Death* evinces no foreknowledge of that jubilant moment, or of the tragic disappointment that stains what it would mean in hindsight today (at the time of this writing, it is 2017) or in your today, dear reader. Still, *Who Fears Death* asks us to acknowledge the injustices and violence that have characterized a place in our world and the beliefs that authorize them. It provides a mythical hero, created by Okorafor and unmoored from tradition, but not unlike those saviors with whom we already are familiar. Although it does not provide a program for change, *Who Fears Death* calls attention to the roles that myths, beliefs, dreams, and imagination play in changing material conditions. Re-calling its readers to the violence in their world at the end of the novel, *Who Fears Death* establishes a connection between the world of the novel and the world of its readers. It calls attention to its readers' entanglements in existing matter(s) and to the stories, micro- and macro-, through which those entanglements have materialized.

Among the entanglements this move calls attention to, I would include Nnedi Okorafor, the author of *Who Fears Death*, and Wanuri Kahiu, the director of *Pumzi* and Okorafor's collaborator, as well as myself and perhaps you, because our biographies, known and hidden, might help to better map the sets of investments, mobilities, and interests that are brought to bear upon what was called "Sudan" in 2010 through the analyses we offer, the stories we tell about it, and the amount of belief we invest in those stories.

"In the Dark"

Still, within this here and now exist yearnings and openings, experiments, errant wanderings, radical refusals, and creative projects; here and now are echoes from a hopeful past—Patrice Lumumba addresses us as "friends," "Dear friends, are you afraid of death?"—and in our responses to him, are futures that fly in defiance of even the most scientifically sound speculations about them. The fantastic queer times of our lives support unpredictable alliances, theories, knowledges, and connections that might operate on a register that is incommensurate with the calculated risks speculative capital already assumes through its investments in existing relations, even as, perhaps, such unpredictable and random connections have been anticipated, domesticated, dominated, and conquered in advance.

Perhaps.

"At Home"

In the context of the algorithms and relations characteristic of finance, poetic knowledge returns the body to the living organism and upends the rationale for the violences of finance capital. It prefers not to. By introducing desire and the senses into knowledge production, it disrupts the common, habitual relations of signification that allow for prediction and reconciliation between things. It insists that how we come to know what we know is as significant as what we know, and, in these ways, it provides a queer way of knowing that flies in the face of calculation and commensuration—an empiricism that invites surprises.

"Toward the World"