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Fugitive pedagogies: decolonising Black childhoods in the Anthropocene

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Abstract

The article addresses the concept of Black childhoods through an ontology of fugitivity that operates at the intersection of Black studies and feminist science and technology studies. An ontology of fugitivity thinks of Blackness as a performance of resistance to systems of knowledge that have persistently situated Blackness as placeless and outside sovereign power. The article elaborates this ontology of fugitivity with attention to two concepts, the Black outdoors and a recalibration of the senses. Focusing retrospectively on a series of classroom interactions and art created by one Black girl, Quvenzhané, the article examines how, through processes of art-work, Black childhoods articulate as complex compositions of bodies, images, sound, and non-binary relations of outside-inside. The article concludes with a discussion of how pedagogies that attend to fugitivity can contribute to sensorial and ontological reorientations demanded by the Anthropocene.

Keywords: Black studies; feminist science-technology studies; fugitivity; Anthropocene; learning outdoors; art education

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*Hear the chainsaw laughter. Hear the tree-killing parking lot
laughter. Hear the smoked-away resistance. Hear the tar stuck
the chocking laughter. Hear the domino razor's-edge laughter.
Hear the scratch ma's good table and destroy food forever
laughter laughter. Hear the sound that made her stop caring.
Hear the overworked husband ridicule his wife with all the
homeboys staring. Hear the cut through rings and sap and
everything laughter laughter laughter. Hear the dreams of our
mother fall to the floor and never get raised up after.*

(Alexis Pauline Gumbs, 2016, p.77)

Introduction

I read *Spill: Scenes of Black Feminist Fugitivity* (Gumbs, 2016), the collection that features the poem above, two years after I concluded an ethnography with a group of fifth graders on dwelling (Ingold, 2000), sensing (Ingold, 2013; Manning, 2008; Pink, 2009) and artmaking around a group of trees and tall grasses in the school block of a large city of the American Midwest. *Spill's* sonority, (a)rhythmicality, dark and fleshy ordinariness unexpectedly reverberated memories of conversations, written stories, drawings, prints, and videos created by several Black students as a result of their individual collaborations in the project.

As Gumbs affirms, a spill is like an unexpected affection such as the one I felt in the reading of this poem. *Spill* involves worlds that are more than what it is said and that continue coming back. *Spill* is something that 'flows over the edge of its container,

especially unintentionally' (p. xii). *Spill* is a performance of Black fugitivity, a work of counter-actualization located in everyday imaginative, resistant, enlivened actions that refuse capture (Campt, 2017; Spillers, 2003). Harney and Moten (2013) define Black fugitivity as the ontology of Blackness, in which Blackness is an 'irreducible performativity' (p. 48), 'a work still to do' (p. 50). Blackness is always on the move, refusing the technologies of colonial capture (Campt, 2017), refusing to be reduced to one thing (Moten, 2018), refusing to be kept in the hold (Sharpe, 2016) of the ship, the plantation, the ghetto, the school, the prison.

This ethnographic study with the trees began with a series of weekly outings where the children and I practised dwelling with the trees using artistic methods like rubbing, sketching, drawing and video-recording moments and states of/with the trees. This connected with Ingold's (2000) concept that dwelling in an environment necessitates embodied, sensuous practices of implication with it, in ways that disturb observational practices that make humans think of themselves as separated from place. It builds, as well, on ideas of sensory ethnography. More specifically, it experiments with media that has been considered as eminently visual (a print, a drawing, a rubbing, a video) to understand the media as embodied, multisensorial, and connected with affective and experiential dimensions of the worlds we inhabit (Pink, 2009). To activate many of these artistic methods, the children and I invented propositions for artmaking (Manning, 2008) such as 'move the camera in the direction of lines found in the tree until the line ends. Repeat process with a new line'; 'video-record a bunch of small, almost invisible things in and around the tree'; 'explore the many possible drawings, rubbings and graphics that you can produce with leaves of the same tree'; 'video-record as many possible colors of/around the tree', and so on. Records in the form of drawings, notes, footage derived from acting these

propositions were recomposed in further art projects, including the creation of science fictional stories and mono-prints of trees, and video-essays of trees.

Throughout the life of this ethnographic project, a group of Black children refused to come outside with others in their class. Like Gumbs' (2016) *Spill*, their work felt overflowing and resisting capture. It had something new to add to the ideas of dwelling and sensing driving the project that I had not been capable to articulate by the end of my collaboration with them. Reading *Spill* resurfaced the urgency of thinking with these Black children's work. This relation of attraction and difficulty, reminded me of Maclure's (2013) discussion around *data that glows*. This is, data that challenges 'our conscious or intentional control as analysts' (p. 662) while at the same time 'arrests our gaze and make us pause' (p. 662). Possibly, the language and understandings that I had utilised thus far to construct and develop the project had befallen me in the task of making sense or sensing these works. I was stuck in my own epistemological bottleneck. To move, I had to engage with the limits of my own knowledge by approaching other forms of knowing and animating these data.

Following the door opened by *Spill* (Gumbs, 2016), I began exploring the field of Black studies, with a specific interest in scholarship of place, the outdoors, and the senses. The philosophical frameworks that I encountered offered a space to think in ways in which Black bodies and senses grappled with the complexities that characterized the work of the Black children in my project. This article emerges as a result of this journey. In it, I render myself as an affected researcher in an effort to listen and attune to the conversations, interactions and art-work by one of these Black students, Quvenzhané. I do this in order to arrive somewhere else, somewhere that refuses the repetition of narratives of deficit, dispossession, or lack of place connected to Black bodies in the city (McKrittrick, 2011), and Black children attending public schools. I am particularly interested in how my

narratives about Quvenzhané's artwork and aesthetics might encourage others in education and childhood studies to refuse to think of Black life as already-known.

My thinking follows Nxumalo and Cedillo's (2017) decolonising efforts around understandings and uses of place in childhood studies. Their efforts are informed by Black feminist geographies (e.g. King, 2016; McKrittrick, 2011) that mobilise Black environmental imaginaries beyond dispossession and towards a new poetics of place. In turn, Nxumalo and Cedillo's work aligns with other decolonising efforts in childhood studies, and education at large that call for the dismantling of universal and anthropocentric understandings of place (Duhn, Malone, & Tesar, 2017; Malone, 2016, 2018; Pacini-Ketchabaw, Taylor, & Blaise, 2016; Snaza, 2015; Taylor, 2013, 2017; Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2015; Tuck et al., 2013; Tuck & Yang, 2014; McCoy, Tuck & McKenzie, 2018). This critical work centres on situated knowledges, ontologies and stories of the land that recognise environmental injustices, vulnerabilities and damage associated with histories of colonialism, conquest, and proprietary regimes, while offering alternative insights into more-than-human multispecies relationalities.

Indebted to this scholarship, my interest is in exploring an ontology of fugitivity at the intersection of Black studies (Campt, 2017; Hartman, 1997; King, 2016; Moten, 2003; 2016; 2017; Sharpe, 2016) and feminist science and technology studies (STS) (Haraway, 2016; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; Tsing, 2015). Working at this intersection, I am trying to think about feminist STS's interrogation of the divide between human and natural history that is central to the discourse of human exceptionalism, alongside Black studies' interrogation of how Western political, spatial and aesthetic thought depicts Blackness as an outside to sovereign power and the concept of the human. Working at this intersection to re-theorise and re-interrogate the composed concept of *childhood and the Anthropocene*, is important for two reasons. First, because the attention to Black childhoods, and

Blackness as an ontology, has been fairly absent from the existing scholarship about the Anthropocene developed in childhood studies, childhood geographies, and childhood environmental studies. And second, because one of the challenges that the Anthropocene poses is to not succumb to an analysis of Blackness that is solely organized around narratives of loss and death, or what McKrittick (2011), in reference to urban geographies, describes with the concept of *urbicide*. Urbicide refers to institutional, environmental, social, mediatized techniques that seek ‘to wipe out different facets of urban life’ (p. 952). Black studies scholars have interrogated the excessive focus on death, killings, and other techniques of subjugation that spatial concepts such as urbicide articulate (e.g. King, 2016; McKrittick, 2011). Their work examines how such concepts depend on a system of knowing that situates Black bodies as less-than-human and dispensable, reifying the structure of colonialism. Urbicide flattens all social and spatial Black deaths to the same story. Therefore, it neither permits a grappling with the spatial specificities that bring and resist death, nor does it allow seeing these specificities as being connected to everyday processes of making and re-making life affectively, poetically, and politically in the struggle of living as a Black body in the city. In my opinion, the work of these Black studies scholars resonates with Haraway’s (2016) concept of *staying with the trouble*, which involves practices of neither giving up to despair, nor embracing hope, but engaging with others in situated, vulnerable and unforeseeable ways in multispecies justice through *making kin*. In elaborating and practising this concept of *making kin*, the ontology of Blackness as refusal to be a single thing has much to contribute. Black refusal is an affirmation that Blackness is always a *more-than*, ‘more than politics, more than settled, more than democratic’ (Moten, 2018, p. 19). This more-than already-known Blackness permits working with Haraway’s (2016) idea of ‘stories for living in the Chthulucene [that] demand a certain suspension of ontologies and epistemologies’ (p. 89), but with an

emphasis on situated knowledge of a Black sense of life and place. Making kin is a practice of relationality, ongoingness and commitment ‘to finicky, disruptive details of good stories that don’t know how to finish’ (Haraway 2016, p. 125). It resonates with the idea of Blackness as a paraontologic, resisting form, similar to a ‘swarm [that] has no standing, troubles understanding’s proper subjects and objects, even when both are radically misunderstood as things’ (Moten, 2018, p. ix). In this sense, a possible outcome of playing at the intersection of Black studies and feminist STS could be the production of unexpected stories, art, performances that are not organized around ‘the stable, autonomous, bounded and separate from nature’ (King, 2016, p. 1034) image of the human that has been perpetuated by the orders of Enlightenment humanism, settler colonialism, and Capitalocentric economies.

Prior to my discussion of research events connected to Quvenzhané’s performance of fugitivity, in the sections that follow I discuss two interrelated concepts that assist me in offering further arguments on ways to think at the intersection of Black studies and feminist STS. These concepts are the Black outdoors, and a recalibration of the senses.

The Black Outdoors

The Black outdoors connects to the production of an alternative imagination of space, which activates Blackness beyond the confines of the settler spatial order, while being inside this order (Hartman, 1997; King, 2016; McKrittrick 2011). It is a difficult concept because it disrupts the outside-inside binary around which modernist nature pedagogies are organised (Nxumalo & Cedillo, 2017; Taylor, 2013). It disrupts this binary by suggesting that in Black history and experience the outside and inside have a co-productive correspondence, and do not function as two separated spaces.

I utilise the concept of Black outdoors that was discussed during a series of lectures, conversations and poetic interventions at the Franklin Humanities Institute in Duke University during 2016-2017 (Cervenak & Carter, 2018), which problematized the formative roles of settler colonialism and slavery in defining modes of life connected to land and property. In a conversation between Saidiya Hartman and Fred Moten (Duke Franklin Humanities Institute, 2016) during this event, Hartman expressed how one of the central characteristics of Black abolitionism was the production of thought of the outside from the inside of the brutal enclosure of slavery. This is consistent with Hartman's (1997) earlier and influential work, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America*, where she defends an analysis of Blackness based on an understanding of subjected Black bodies as being in flux, and not fully objectified. Hartman demands modes of analysis capable to attend to the movement of life still happening within abject scenes of subjection. This is a call that contemporary Black studies and Black geography scholars have pursued (e.g. Campt, 2017; King, 2016; Moten, 2003, 2016; 2017; 2018; Sharpe, 2016).

In the same conversation, Moten approached the concept of Black outdoors not as a given place, but as a space one needs to move through in practices of Black study¹ (Duke Franklin Humanities Institute, 2016; see also, Cervenak & Carter, 2018). Black study is a philosophical, political and aesthetic exercise that (following Hartman's dual analysis of Blackness) carries the weight of anti-Blackness critique and the idea that Blackness is a performance of fugitivity (Moten, 2017). Fugitivity expresses a refusal to be named, predicated or mastered. Fugitivity refuses to have a single form, and conveys 'a devoted defence of the irregular' (p. viii).

Thinking with Black studies and Black geographies it becomes apparent that the Black outdoors cannot be encountered directly by going outside in the school block to dwell with

trees and grasses. Such activity presupposes that the imaginary around urban spaces is the same for all children and that dwelling is a neutral innocent practice (Nxumalo & Cedillo, 2017). Black studies and Black geographies suggest that encountering the Black outdoors depends on speculative, aesthetic and lived acts of spatial re-readings that are decolonising. For example, in the aforementioned conversation with Moten, Hartman explains how Blacks escaped the plantation, remained in its limits, foraged, dwelled in the forest, lived inside trees, and moved leaving no trace of human existence (Duke Franklin Humanities Institute, 2017). Similarly, King (2016) writes about Julie Dash's (1991) film, *Daughters of the Dust*; she discusses the way in which this film focuses on the production of indigo ink and dying processes in the plantation to enact the Black female body as more than an objectified labouring body. Dash does this by portraying the chemical process going through pores of hands and flesh, entangling the Black body in complex ecological processes 'that exceed the humanist ontological boundaries that would separate plant, objects and human flesh from one another' (King, 2016, p. 1030; see also Nxumalo & Cedillo, 2017).

These two examples of anti-blackness critique and creation of alternative figurations of ecological relations, one through an experiment in living alternatively and the other through cinematic storytelling, resonate with feminist STS arguments around dismantling a western idea of Man, so as to make visible many other stories of life and death in the mess that has been created (Tsing, 2015). The exercise of Black study has a dual commitment to not forgetting the violence, and to sensing in the scream, and other gestures of resistance, a potential for an alternative to representation (Moten, 2017). This resonates with Tsing's (2015) argument about thinking ecologies in terms of polyphonic relations of harmony and dissonance. Ecology as a polyphonic assemblage entertains the idea that disturbance is not a limit but something that happens 'always in the middle of things' (p. 160), making it

impossible to think in terms of single things and their reduction to some form of human equivalence. Polyphonic assemblages are concerned with the interplays of many organisms in corresponding processes of life and death. As I rethink my ethnographic dwelling and art project with 5th graders and trees in the school, using concepts such as polyphonic assemblage and fugitivity, the Black children's refusal to go outside with the trees, while at the same time performing other peripheral forms of participation in the project, seems to require another form of sensitivity. Perhaps it requires one that listens to 'separate ways of being at the same time' (Tsing 2015, p. 158), and that considers thinking the outdoors from its absence, periphery or underground (Moten, 2016).

Recalibrating the Senses

In his book *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*, Moten (2003) argues that the project of fugitivity is one of animating a different kind of language materiality centered on the aurality of Black performance. He affirms that Black aesthetics is constituted as a practice of dissent from a tradition stemming from the Enlightenment and extending into modern linguistics in which the 'value of the sign' (p. 13) is constituted by a 'necessary relation to the possibility of (a universal science of language)' (p. 13). The sign must be reduced to 'phonic substance' (p. 13) so it can stand for something that is conventional, arbitrary and grammatical. Consequently, for modern linguistics sounded speech is not intrinsic to the sign, but something added from the outside that inflicts a risk of de-universalization and degradation of the values that constitute the sign. Moten's reclamation of sound as central to Blackness and as a dissent from modern linguistics is consistent with the dual analytics discussed earlier (Hartman, 1997; King, 2016; Moten, 2003, 2017). This is so, because Moten (2003) theorises Black aurality as connected to scenes of violence and abjection in which Blackness is both subjected and constitutes itself

as subjectivity, through the scream but also through song and music. Moten (2003) argues that Black sound's origin in rupture and break, but also in sensuality and lyricism, carries a surplus that turns Blackness into performance and improvisation, and a resistance towards the universalizing forces of the sign. Gumb's (2016) poem at the beginning of the article connects with this attention to 'musicked speech' that Moten (2003) argues for. It is composed by elusive lines of words, which refuse grammatic rules and that carry a harsh, broken and intermittent sonority when read aloud.

The centrality of sound in Black performance not only reveals and resists written language as form of dominance and exclusion. More broadly, this centrality seeks a rearticulation of the senses in which something else is added to hegemonic systems of vision and their connection with knowledge. For instance, photography historian Tina Campt (2017) defends a practice of listening at photographic images of the Black diasporic body. Campt writes –

the choice to 'listen to' rather than simply 'look at' images is a conscious decision to challenge the equation of vision with knowledge by engaging photography through a sensory register that is critical to Black Atlantic cultural formations: sound. (p. 6)

For Campt the sonority of photographs resides in their haptic or tactile qualities which function as an infrasound that cannot be heard but can be felt in the body of the beholder making it move and vibrate. Campt, like Moten, centres on sound as a reclamation of 'other affective frequencies' (p. 9) that allow us to sense motion in scenes and bodies that look quiet, mundane, subjected. Complementarily to Campt's theories, Moten (2003) affirms that sound as constitutive of Black fugitivity works as an oppositional force to the

centrality of the visual in modern aesthetics as purity and good form, and in politics as control and categorization.

Black studies advocacy for an aesthetic-politics built around the aural, haptic and embodied, connects with feminist STS interest in touch and the haptic as a sense-thinking-knowing dimension. For instance, Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) asserts that this dimension ‘holds promises against the primacy of detached vision, a promise of thinking and knowing that is in touch with materiality, touched by touching’ (p. 95). She sees the haptic and aural as central to problematising the epistemological distance created by what Haraway (1997) has described as an objectivist view from nowhere, that aspires to absolute scopic power. The haptic and the embodied pushes research, art, pedagogy to attempt a different attunement, a transformation of perception, a honing into what Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) calls ‘imperceptible politics in everyday practices in which another world is here, in the making, before “events” become visible to representation’ (p. 117).

Black studies and feminist STS coincide in attending to other affects in images and world-matterings that do not yield to the imperial, capitalist and governance aesthetics of the Enlightenment and modern science. Both contribute to the possibilities of thinking of the Anthropocene as an aesthetic phenomenon that demands a recalibration of sensory experience (Davis, 2018; Davis & Turpin, 2018; Mirzoeff, 2014; Rose, 2013). In the frames of racializing visibility (Mirzoeff, 2011), the presence, sounds and stories coming from Black bodies can be hard to really see, touch, hear. There is a risk that Black bodies only appear as senseless occurrences outside the logic of dominating narratives and practices. A pedagogy of fugitivity happens in the space where as beholders we are moved to care for different optics and sensibilities that open bodies, art, images to a life of their own however precarious this life may be (Sharpe, 2016).

A Story of Fugitive Artmaking

This is a story that I have written retrospectively in the context of thinking data emerged from the project with the concepts of the Black outdoors and recalibration of the senses that I have discussed in the previous sections. It begins at a point in the project when we stopped going outside with the trees. The Midwest winter with its freezing temperatures had arrived and many children did not have the appropriate gear to be outside. For a period of four months we moved inside to continue working with the data collected through rubbing, printing, sketching, video-taping with the trees. One of the first activities we engaged with was around *The Night Life of Trees* (Bai & Shyam, 2006) a large picture book created by Gond artists, which displayed original block prints of trees alongside stories about what happened to them at night. Gonds are an Indigenous group from the forest of Chennai, India. Tree species, animals, foods, matter, and crafts specific to the biodiversity of the Gond forest are featured in the stories not as brute facts but as elements that make the stories appeal to the powers of the imagination. The tactility of the book along with the fibrous qualities of the paper and the aromas of the organic inks, evoked the materials and labour that has gone in its creation. After leaving the street, I thought that the rich and reminiscent qualities of *The Night Life of Trees* could offer an alternative place in which to reanimate the trees with both senses and imagination in the space of the classroom.

I sat with the children and did small group readings and conversations in my next visits to the classroom. During one of these readings one group of children began to talk about what pictures they liked best. After few interventions, Quvenzhané, a Black girl who had never come outside to do art with the trees, joined the conversation. She pointed at the story and print *Snakes and Earth*, and initiated the following conversation:

Quvenzhané: I like the snakes, how they are put together, I guess. I also like that the snakes are Black.

Laura: Yes, they are all Black with different colour patterns! What is that you like about the fact that they are Black?

Quvenzhané: I do not know, but I like it.

This was the first time that Quvenzhané had contributed to the project. She did this without being asked, which made me think that what she had to say was important. Since I did not expect to hear what she said, and she couldn't/wouldn't explain what she meant, silence followed. Days went and I remained touched by Quvenzhané's words. In *liking-the-snakes-being-Black* and Quvenzhané's subsequent silence, there was something trying to come into being. There was something that I needed to listen in the caring sense described by Sharpe (2016) to think that there was *more than* what was said and what was seen in *liking-the-snakes-being-Black*, something that functioned in excess.

The life of *liking-the-snakes-being-Black* continued articulating in the weeks that followed. I noticed Quvenzhané returning to the book, reading the stories and looking at the images. Eventually, she asked me for art supplies to sketch her own tree at night. Using the book as a reference, she drew a tree that mimicked the aforementioned print *Snakes and Earth*, featuring a handful of snakes whose heads and upper bodies were branches and their tails and lower bodies roots. Quvenzhané joined other children in the class and, as result of being exposed to *The Night Life of Trees* (Bai & Shyam, 2006), expressed a desire to learn block printing. She transferred her drawing into a block plate and produced a number of prints.

A few weeks later, I asked Quvenzhané if she wanted to participate in the editing of the images that we had of the different trees. I had invited children to review their footage,

along with their drawings, notes, prints and stories collected in the field, and to choose one piece to present in front of the camera. This idea followed Deleuze's (1989) argument that the cinematic image is not one that represents the world, but rather one to think about what does not exist in the world, yet but can articulate itself to exist cinematically. Deleuze's cinema theory has been highly influential to Black studies and feminist cinema scholar Kara Keeling (2007), who argues that cinema is a space where the Black female, as a figure that is in the threshold of invisibility, can articulate herself as a problem for thought. Keeling writes –

... because she [the Black female] often is invisible (but nonetheless present), when she becomes visible, her appearance stops us, offers us time in which we can work to perceive something different, or differently. (p. 3)

This is an important idea to consider when thinking about Quvenzhané's quietness and virtual invisibility for most of the project, and then her lively involvement in the creation of a series of video-images that I discuss in the passages that follow. Thinking in Keeling's conceptual terms, the production and existence of Quvenzhané's images introduced a different visibility, sonority and corporeality in the project transforming the ecology of relations and sensations.

Initially, Quvenzhané told me that she did not want to participate in the making of the video. I showed her different footage that had not yet been edited, as well as pieces of unfinished video-essays made in collaboration with some of her peers. The images showed children talking about sensorial qualities of trees, improvising stories that the footage elicited, showing pages of their journals, reading. Quvenzhané affirmed that she did not want to use any of the existing footage. In turn, I proposed that she used the drawing that

she had produced about her tree at night to create a new image. She clarified that she had a drawing but had not written an accompanying story, as other children had done. I suggested that perhaps the video could be a good opportunity to write it. This is the story that Quvenzhané wrote and performed in front of the camera:

One day a dude came from out of town. He was a mean person. He hated trees because a tree had fallen on his house and hurt it badly. So, he saw a beautiful red maple tree, as red as the bricks of his house and cut it down with a big and noisy chain saw [few seconds of loud engine noise]. It was so noisy that all the snakes in town came by. The snakes were sad that the tree had lost everything including the leaves. It was hot and the snakes were hoping for a nice and good shade. So, the snakes put the leaves back and their bodies became branches and roots. And now every time that the wind blows everybody can hear some rattling coming out from the tree. [Few seconds of rattle noise.]

Quvenzhané's story is reminiscent of Black fugitivity. The arrangement of dude, house, tree, chainsaw enact a mix of mundanity, violence and ecological disturbance, recalling what Sharpe (2016) calls life *in the wake*, or the awareness of Black life as a life of precarity. However, Sharpe insists that precarity is a way of inhabiting that can articulate ruptures and produce resistant images. I think of the emerging collaboration of snakes and tree in the midst of the disaster and the displacement of the human as 'the Species Man [who] does not make history' (Haraway, 2016, p. 49) as one of these resistant images.

In the video, we see Quvenzhané looking at the camera and holding her drawing. But more prominently, we listen to a soundtrack edited over the image of her voice reading. As the story progresses, Quvenzhané moves the drawing closer and closer to the camera until

her face is completely obscured by it. Her Black urban vernacular accent punctuated by a congested nose, along with the sounds of the chainsaw engine and the snake rattling, embody the force of the musicked Black speech that Moten (2003) describes as carrying a surplus that is rupturing. The fact that her face disappears behind the drawing of the snake-tree increases this rupturing effect of resisting capture. Quvenzhané inserts a singularity not visible in the images produced by her peers. Her speech-image refuses to go along with a celebratory sensual and narrative experience of the trees as conveyed in most of the images that she had seen from her peers. In terms of Moten's (2003) assertion, Quvenzhané's earlier disengagement with the sensory experiments outdoors with the trees, enables her to act here as a disruptive force that produces a re-materialization and a re-visualisation of the outdoors by means of sound (speech and noise).

Quvenzhané collaborated in the creation of a second video-image with her friend Selena. Like Quvenzhané, Selena decided to work with the drawing and story of her tree. She placed the computer camera against the light coming from one of the windows, which rendered her body as a dark silhouette. Quvenzhané, who was still in the room, offered to block the light by standing in front of the window. As Selena recounted the story, Quvenzhané began to gesture, dance, and momentarily embody an iconic pose of girl-power with her fist elevated over her head. Selena noticed Quvenzhané's actions unfolding in the computer screen as she was reciting. She stopped and convinced Quvenzhané to perform this same pose from the beginning to the end of the story. The flow between these situations speaks of fugitivity as an ontology in which Blackness is movement and *more than* (Moten, 2018), and where art-work becomes the space-time where Blackness finds possibilities for re-routing, and re-problematizing (Harney & Moten, 2013; Moten, 2003). In this respect, art-work could be thought of sym-poetically. In Haraway's (2016) words –

‘as a carrier bag for ongoingness, a yoke for becoming with, for staying with the trouble of inheriting the damages and achievement of colonial and postcolonial naturalcultural histories in telling the tale of still possible recuperation’. (p. 125)

In composing unexpected connections, art-work presses towards other affects, attachments, and worlds. These involve living in the afterlife of difficult histories of Black life while engaging with decolonizing images and narratives that ‘(re)story places in ways that disrupt Black placelessness’ (Nxumalo & Cedillo, 2017, p. 106).

Refusals and Fugitive Pedagogy in the Anthropocene

In this article, I have outlined a conceptual framework at the intersection of Black studies and feminist STS studies that calls for a reconceptualization of the outdoors and a recalibration of the senses, as a way of listening to Black children’s creative and resistant acts of refusal. In the field of education, Tuck and Yang (2014) have discussed refusal as a practice that generates critical understandings in settler colonialist regimes. Refusal problematises the limits of what can be taught and learned with vulnerable others. It pressures educators to conceive place beyond rationales organized around pain and dispossession, where Black children are perceived in terms of deficit because the visual cultural framings that racialize these places are powerful and pervasive (Mirzoeff, 2011). To think beyond these colonial imaginaries that make us perceive Blackness as other, pedagogic practice needs to rely on ontologies and epistemologies that can think and sense Blackness as something not limited to the confines of the Black body. It requires new modes of sensing and thinking of Blackness as ecological, aesthetic, ethic and pedagogical compositions, or as King (2016) writes, as ‘entryways to larger non-human ecosystems’ (p. 1030) that ‘exceed humanist ontological boundaries’ (p. 1030). Black studies offer the

concept of Black fugitivity as an ontology where Blackness is conceived as movement, deferral, escape, refusal of being reduced to a single thing (Moten, 2018). Consequently, Black fugitivity demands that pedagogies are open to experiment with modes of relation, perception and attunement that are not yet thought of, and that they leave room for encounters with excess and free association. In this respect, an ontology of fugitivity offers a case for the recalibration of the senses demanded by the Anthropocene (Davis & Turpin, 2015).

In reflecting back on these research collaborations with children, working with an ontology of fugitivity has assisted me in recognizing, attending and elaborating on activities and events that looked minor, disorderly and contradictory at the time. It has also propelled me to consider fugitive pedagogical encounters as ways of ‘think[ing]-with and becom[ing]-with the uncanny sign of the Anthropocene’ (Davis & Turpin, 2015, p. 21), which is neither about finding a home nor about proposing a fix, but about sensing vulnerability, fragility, incommensurability, and the struggle for articulation.

From my reflections on this project, I have also learned that the being of fugitivity needs time, space and relations, where learning can be reconceived as a lingering with processes (Kind, 2018), and in which complicated and unknowable elaborations can expand our ideas of what practice is (Atkinson, 2018). Performances of refusal and fugitivity are ontogenetic; they pursue an existential transformation that carries with it the making of other worlds. A fugitive pedagogy needs sensory rich spaces, emboldened in smells, textures, graphics, gestures, performances. These are spaces that complicate thinking, experiencing, incarnating of what it is to be human, what it is to live the afterlife of violence and disaster, and what it is to inhabit place in ways that are decolonizing and sympoetic.

Note

1. In the article, I use the terms Black study and Black studies differently. With Black studies, I refer to the multidisciplinary field concerning Black experience and diaspora. More specifically, in this article I pay attention to geographical, spatial and aesthetic Black studies theory. With Black study, I refer to the concept, often used by Fred Moten, that describes a radical intellectual exercise of both critique and fugitivity that stems from abolitionist thought. I further discuss the practice in different sections of the article, most prominently in the passages that follow this note.

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