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Michael Brown

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settler colonial) state and its seizures, especially its seizure of the capacity to make (and break) law. Against the grain of the state's monopolization of ceremony, ceremonies are small and profligate; if they weren't everywhere and all the time we'd be dead. The ruins, which are small rituals, aren't absent but surreptitious, a range of songful scarring, when people give a sign, shake a hand. But what if together we *can* fall, because we're fallen, because we need to fall again, to continue in our common fallenness, remembering that falling is in *apposition* to rising, their combination given in lingering, as the giving of pause, recess, vestibular remain, custodial remand, hold, holding in the interest of rub, dap's reflex and reflection of maternal touch, a maternal ecology of laid hands, of being handled, handed, handed down, nurture's natural dispersion, its endless refusal of standing. Hemphill emphatically announces the sociality that Luther shelters. Fallen, risen, mo(u)rnfu! survival. When black men die, it's usually because we love each other, whether we run, or fight, or surrender. Consider Michael Brown's generative occurrence and recurrence as refusal of the case, as refusal of standing. You can do this but only if you wish to insert yourself, and now I must abuse a phrase of Ah Kee's, into black worldlessness.⁴ Our homelessness. Our selflessness. None of which are or can be ours.

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The state can't live with us and it can't live without us. Its violence is a reaction to that condition. The state is nothing other than a war against its own condition. The state is at war against its own (re)sources, in violent reaction to its own condition of im/possibility, which is life itself, which is the earth itself, which blackness doesn't so much stand in for as name, as a name among others that is not just another name among others.

That we survive is beauty and testament; it is neither to be dismissed nor overlooked nor devalued by or within whatever ascription of value; that we survive is invaluable. It is, at the same time, insufficient. We have to recognize that a state—the racial capitalist/settler colonial state—of war has long existed. Its brutalities and militarizations, its regulative mundanities, are continually updated and revised, but they are not new. If anything, we need to think more strategically about our own innovations, recognizing

4. I want to thank Rachel O'Reilly for bringing Ah Kee's work to my attention. See her "Compasses, Meetings and Maps: Three Recent Media Works," *Leonardo* 39, no. 4 (2006): 334–39.

that the state of war is a reactive state, a machine for regulating and capitalizing upon our innovations in/for survival.

This is why what's most disturbing about Michael Brown (aka Eric Garner, aka Renisha McBride, aka Trayvon Martin, aka Eleanor Bumpurs, aka Emmitt Till, aka an endless stream of names and absent names) is our reaction to him, our misunderstanding of him, and the sources of that misunderstanding that manifest and reify a desire for standing, for stasis, within the state war machine which, contrary to popular belief, doesn't confer citizenship upon its subjects at birth but, rather, at death, which is the proper name for entrance into its properly political confines. The prosecution of Michael Brown, which is the proper technical name for the grand jury investigation of Darren Wilson, the drone, is what our day in court looks like and always has. The prone, exposed, unburied body—the body that is given, in death, its status as body precisely through and by way of the withholding of fleshly ceremony—is what political standing looks like. That's the form it takes and keeps. This is a Sophoclean formulation. The law of the state is what Ida B. Wells rightly calls lynch law. And we extend it in our appeals to it.

We need to stop worrying so much about how it kills, regulates, and accumulates us, and worry more about how we kill, deregulate, and disperse it. We have to love and revere our survival, which is (in) our resistance. We have to love our refusal of what has been refused. But insofar as this refusal has begun to stand, insofar as it has begun to seek standing, it stands in need of renewal, now, even as the sources and conditions of that renewal become more and more obscure, more and more entangled with the regulatory apparatuses that are deployed in order to suppress them. At moments like this we have to tell the truth with a kind of viciousness and, even, a kind of cruelty. Black lives don't matter, which is an empirical statement not only about black lives in this state of war but also about lives. This is to say that lives don't matter; nor should they. It's the metaphysics of the individual life in all its immateriality that's got us in this situation in the first place. Michael Brown lived and moved within a deep and evolving understanding of this:

if i leave this earth today atleast youll know i care about others more
then i cared about my damn self. . . .

But we have to consider how, and what it means that, his testament is transformed into an expression of mourning and outrage such as this upon the nonoccasion of the nonindictment:

Go on call me “demon” but I WILL love my *damn self*.

I suffer with but also through this expression of our suffering. For this expression of our disavowal of the demonic—however brutally the police and/or the *polis*, in their soullessness, ascribe it to or inscribe it upon us—is erstwhile respectability's voluntary laying down of arms, its elective demobilization of jurisgenerative force. Meanwhile, Michael Brown is like another fall and rise through man—come and gone, as irruption and rupture, to remind us not that black lives matter but that black life matters; that the absolute and undeniable blackness of life matters. The innovation of our survival is given in embrace of this daimonic, richly internally differentiated choreography, its lumpen improvisation of contact, which is obscured when class struggle in black studies threatens to suppress black study as class struggle.

How much has black studies, as a bourgeois institutionalization of black study, determined the way we understand and fight the state of war within which we try to live? How has it determined how we understand the complex nonsingularity that we know now as Michael Brown? It would be wrong to say that Michael Brown has become, in death, more than himself. He already was that, as he said himself, in echo of so much more than himself. He was already more than that in being less than that, in being the least of these. To reduce Michael Brown to a cypher for our unfulfilled desire to be more than that, for our serially unachieved and constitutionally unachievable citizenship, is to do a kind of counterrevolutionary violence; it is to partake in the ghoulish, vampiric consumption of his body, of the body that became his, though it did not become him, in death, in the reductive stasis to which his flesh was subjected. Michael Brown's flesh is our flesh; he is flesh of our flesh of flames.⁵

On August 9, like every day, like any other day, black life, in its irreducible sociality, having consented not to be single, got caught walking—with jurisgenerative fecundity—down the middle of the street. Michael Brown and his boys: black life breaking and making law, against and underneath the state, surrounding it. They had foregone the melancholic appeal, to which we now reduce them, for citizenship, and subjectivity, and humanness. That they had done so is the source of Darren Wilson's genocidal instrumentalization in the state's defense. They were in a state of war and they knew it. Moreover, they were warriors in insurgent, if imperfect, beauty. What's left for us to consider is the difference between the way of Michael Brown's dance, his fall and rise—the way they refuse to take place when

5. I'm thinking, here, of a collaboration between Theodore Harris and Amiri Baraka, *Our Flesh of Flames* (Philadelphia: Anvil Arts Press, 2008).

he takes to the streets, the way Ferguson takes to the streets—and the way we seek to take, but don't seem to take to, the streets: in protest, as mere petitioners, fruitlessly seeking energy in the pitiful, minimal, temporary shutdown of this or that freeway, as if mere occupation were something other than retrenchment (in reverse) of the demand for recognition that actually constitutes business as usual. Rather than dissipate our preoccupation with how we live and breathe, we need to defend our ways in our persistent practice of them. It's not about taking the streets; it's about how, and about what, we should take to the streets. What would it be and what would it mean for us jurisgeneratively to take to the streets, to live in the streets, to gather together another city right here, right now?

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Meanwhile, against the dead citizenship that was imposed upon him, the body the state tried to make him be, and in lieu of the images we refuse and can't have, here is an image of our imagination.



Michael Brown Sr. yells as the coffin of his son, Michael Brown, is lowered into the ground at St. Peter's Cemetery in St. Louis, August 25, 2014. Photo courtesy of Richard Perry/*The New York Times*/Redux.

This is Michael Brown, his descent, his ascension, his ceremony, his flesh, his animation in and of the maternal ecology—Michael Brown's innovation, as contact, in improvisation. Contact improvisation is how we survive genocide.

we didn't get here by ourselves. black takes
like black took. we were already beside our
selves, evidently. eventually, we were upside
ourselves in this wombed scar, this womblike
scarring open scream tuned open, sister, can
you move my form? took, had, give. because he
wasn't by himself he's gone in us. how we got
over that we didn't get here is wanting more
than that in the way we carry ourselves, how
we carry over our selves into we're gone in the
remainder. here, not here, bought, unbought,
we brought ourselves with us so we could give
ourselves away, which is more than they can
take away, even when its more than we can take.