

First, secure the milk
then quick I must show you
my body's inventing itself
that my body should make herself
ground for the great shock of suck
that, I
quaking metal in fixed
ground, I
site of infection,
I, arrowroot cookie
Taste is the true prophetic word

Secure the milk
and I'll tell you
grammatical properties
of the pronoun
motherfucker

Secure the milk
and we'll talk about
"Marxism Leninism Mao-Tse Tung Thought"
which is milk thought
which is what I believe

FOR FLOSSIE

You won't remember the first time it was 1989 you were flanked by an Ankh and person I would learn to call your woman very soon and this would be things there would be a woman and I was something else other than early memory which is now perhaps memory of not having been noticed therapist would say of an invented hardship in long time of never mattering enough and seeking out long time of not mattering by finding in first moment definitive sensation of a given desire's co-existence within erasure. Possibly of a certain age body of a nineteen year-old wincing quality of woman who will never be presence of your body exactly in cinematic "past" the body which in 1989 began to be yours and became body of your woman became also body of the changing year I remember 2:17 am. Expectation is a curious thing to develop around the problem of not having been noticed or been absent or been without yet this was your hour to begin to expect you one or two minutes prior is expectation was. Once your woman within hearing you were gone teenaged gossips you know how you know the sex will be good or great or excellent none of these I remember what'd she know about it having any idea what good or great or excellent as at that time of being seventeen happily blundering into some truly excellent fucking arrogance and having at least sense to know 1990 it wouldn't happen unless you could relax a little about you know Kenneth Clark's bougainvillea trellis or fingerbanging whatsit out of doors I remember that. There was correspondence Bronx were there horses at that time or twenty years later riding lessons baseball hats I could be the kind of woman mothers love then now hard around the mouth set to trials over being without several places to live later a white cat and another woman same one you loved her deservedly what was I wearing skinnier so many boys I sort of loved at twenty-two when bourbon law review

snuff bourbon and soda god a lot of bourbon where were you you called from maybe Ghana dunno next thing I knew you were in my bed so Ghana so few surprising number of nights this was never your way pancakes I imagine you were heartbroken which I was too stupid to know can't remember. More night visitation in Ft. Greene. Reluctantly one admits to having had a great deal of good or great or excellent sex but east coast apartments one is never *away* one is never one. One's mother is often correct. Several realms of protection averrals won't take I believe in the god of open mouths and the Sherwood Forest. I remember our only fight means nothing about money as to why to "make love" all night not sleep. Assuredly it was not possible not to persist hi Candace thanks to take advice at thirty after the breakdown although I had never felt better you don't stay. Several hotels. Once we fuck and I don't come. You are heartbroken and then you have a son and I was cooler than that I remember I know now it is possible to deny even how I have loved you and for how long for how very little indeed it costs except what is out of the flesh once is out forever and then we are forty and forty-two and forty-four and I have a son.

MOTHERHOOD IS A STATE OF HYPERVIGILANCE

Open arms gathering all so wide to hold everyone horizontally
growing, this way, flat in this way capturing each

pellet stream

danger, failure to possess
holding what cannot be held
natural, weightless impact of pressure in tons

separate, prostrate time
the weather of wails
appetites

a thin sliver of wax or wood between one time and another what is
 the impact
between one time and another more time and more succeeding
 separations
caroling he is coming

STATE

It is a fish It is a whale the only food I have eaten

is from the floor as not from the floor

The wicked carport, it is hell, it is hopscotch

It is a gash It is forever falling on your right knee It is smooth It is

white and glossy with pure bright blood

It shines on the lip of a milk-sated infant soft like a kitten

white kitten soft baby It is a fish It is a whale It is cold

It wants to be touched like you It is soft you cannot imagine

Imagine I am saying do it

Fish, whale, ship

Caducity, the falseness of TV, the food I could still eat in Casablanca

It is a truck, it is a grain

It is a fish, It is a whale, It is a garbage truck the only word I know

is *garbage*, ice cream, gorilla

You are, baby

the fish the whale the skylark

you you

you

You have

It is

The naturalized beast

The scar

We are

It is

soft

do it

I am telling you

I announce

It is

Quo Vadis?

We are casting around somewhat desperately for an approximation of the human qualities which, for us, form the basis of true connection or near miss. We are cast about or away and must use a sense of qualities as belonging to ourselves and others to make an assay.

To have already rejected the qualities of being Mickey Mouse—feeling surpassing the armaments of liquid masculinity—and never to have had the products with which to build. Black radio leaps by decade when we go to it in terms of memory. We make culture this way, entirely in retrospect. What must be delineated is primary revulsion; to see outside the apparently open book and at the same time to read it: “As for reminiscing, this is a phenomenon more strongly marked by activity than reminding; it consists in making the past live again by evoking it together with others, each helping the other to remember shared events or knowledge, the memories of one person serving as a reminder for the memories of another”

In reverse of rejection revulsion reversion retrospection redrawing
review remind recognize reminisce remembrance recollection

stubbornly persistent contextual negativity beginning knowledge of
consistently pleasing immemorial connection

staging or reconstructing the human qualities which, for us, form the
basis of what has been considered the same as

“it is super R&B and you won’t like it because it is too slow and a tad boring.”

Because it is too slow, you won’t like it, and boring. You won’t like a very abbreviated list informed by a book I’ve been reading on the way sounds come to stand for existence, for the commonly drawn

marks that show togetherness as if we are—because we are—still required to make marks that remind us of the basic animal nature of our complex form of life.

As: up a cave without a piece of fucking charcoal.

An abbreviated list to make soft, to undo the R&B of my mind today. A set that sets a soft disgust. Steering clear and what's not to like in open access (to what has yet to be established as a philosophy of *sortie*). R&B establishes a spread for affective recon, where everybody is pressed together and recovering from pressing, as if that is the world.

Smokey Robinson, Tears of a Clown

James Brown, Get Up Offa That Thing

The Time, 777-9311

Prince, Adore, If I was Your Girlfriend, Darling Nikki, Bambi, I

Wanna Be Your Lover, When You Were Mine, Do Me Baby,

Anna Stesia, Ballad of Dorothy Parker

Rufus/Chaka Khan, I know you, I live you, Sweet Thing

R Kelly, More and More

Aaliyah, Rock the Boat, One in a Million, Come Over, Are You

That Somebody?

Isley Brothers, For the Love of You, Groove with you, Footsteps in

the Dark, Voyage to Atlantis, Brown Eyed Girl, Summer Breeze

Rick James, Dance With Me

Teena Marie, Square Biz

Mary Jane Girls, Candy Man

Cameo, Candy

Zapp, Computer Love, Dance Floor

Patti Labelle, If Only You Knew

Luther Vandross, A House is Not A Home, Never Too Much

Madonna, Lucky Star

Kleer, Intimate Connection
Al Green, Simply Beautiful
Bobby Caldwell, Open Your Eyes
Bobby Womack, You're Welcome
Womack & Womack, Baby I'm Scared of You
Guy, I Like
702, Steelo
Total, Sitting Home
Carl Thomas, I Wish
Rell, Love For Free
LaToiya Williams, Fallen Star
Mariah Carey, Breakdown
Hall & Oates, Can't Go For That
Ike & Tina, Proud Mary
Phyllis Hyman, Living All Alone
Terrence Trent D'Arby, Wishing Well
Harold Melvin & The Blue Notes, *Wake up Everybody*
Teddy Pendergrass, I Don't Love You Anymore, Turn off the
Lights, Love T.K.O., The More I Get, The More I Want
Donny Hathaway, A Song for You
Spank Rock & Big Freedia, Nasty
Marvin Gaye, *Here, My Dear, What's Going On*, Inner City Blues
Roberta Flack, *First Take*
Howlin' Wolf, Smokestack Lightening
Jimi Hendrix, Killing Floor
Al Green, Simply Beautiful
Parliament, *One Nation Under a Groove*
Grace Jones, Pull Up to the Bumper, Nightclubbing, Walking In
the Rain, My Jamaican Guy, La Vie en Rose
Nina Simone, House of the Rising Sun
Rose Royce, I'm Wishing on a Star
Richie Havens, Freedom
TV on the Radio, You

The Chambers Brothers, Time Has Come Today
Ann Peebles, I Can't Stand the Rain
Isaac Hayes, Hyperbolicsyllabicsesquedalymystic
Curtis Mayfield, *Superfly*
Deniece Williams, Silly
Joan Armatrading, *Joan Armatrading*
Minnie Ripperton, *Perfect Angel, Adventures in Paradise*
The Spinners, I'll Be Around
Fishbone, *Truth & Soul*
Cody Chestnut, Bitch, I'm Broke
Trey Songz, Put My # in Yr Phone
The Temptations, Just My Imagination
Erykah Badu, *Baduizm*
Sam Cooke, Cupid
Estelle, Shine
Otis Redding, Mr. Pitiful, Sitting on the Dock of the Bay
Aretha Franklin, I Never Loved a Man
John Legend, Ordinary People

It is super R&B and you won't like it because it is too slow and a tad boring.

What is black boredom? Out of curiosity, granting the possibility of the neurotic, the slow, unwieldy and short; the being of black rejection or seeking outside the previously elaborated book of making as black; the slipshod and inelegant black, the tuneless and impotent, the smeared boot-black pooling at our pretty neck.

Ne te quaesiveris extra.

Music is a huge therapeutic vehicle for me.... Spiritually metabolizing these things, I've come to realize that I need to practice openness like it's a sport. I think it would be such a shame to feel life as a burden the only time I get to live it. For me, the openness of my live show is a symbol of and a really important site of my work to fight negativity and depression and self-enclosedness, and really fight for intimacy and community.

— Tom Krell

R&B feeling's doubling proposing (I am open I am open to you I am available I am available to you my body is yours I am available to be stolen) is characteristic slippage between human qualities as America. Characteristic slippage on memory and marks, as simultaneously an act of gauging and erotic softness or exchange and of being inside the felt pleasures of others. You don't like it; it's not for you; yet nothing is wrong with it—R. Kelly peeing on people. No one objects to taking up the desire of one who always feels like making love: that is only making more and more blackness to sing, to shuffle and break down.

Contradict: to establish some primary hatreds, head off the radicalization of black feeling by way of black music; by way, in particular, of perceived dramatic changes in the present time's attitude toward it. To contradict, then, the absolute status of what black music is presumed to come from, to describe what cannot presently be described by going with the feeling of unwanted feeling, feeling boredom, feeling mistake, feeling mis- or manhandling, feeling isolation, feeling revolt, feeling targeted, feeling serious attraction to the claim of some unreconstructed bigot (notwithstanding the jolt he himself pulses through "My Black Ass," doubling proposing) that we have been weirdly loving toward "two splats of an old negro junkie's

vomit,” feeling (flowering, ambivalent) that this love can come to an end, that it might be over.



Throw on another goddamned Phoenician!

I cannot get off the first page of Amiri Baraka’s *Digging*. Like his “Dark Lady of the Sonnets,” this small text exemplifies the intensity of Baraka’s prose exertions over the philosophy of feeling black through the related experiences of playing and hearing (calling out through and being called to respond through) music, the poetics of which has dominated for quite some time (since it happened) the space we speak of when we speak of “the Music” today. To trouble any aspect of feeling black, in part because of the Music, I need to deal with this page as an image—graph or map, notations indicating the terrain or shape—of the territory.

Look at this page:

Introduction

A great song arose, the loveliest thing born this side of the seas. It was a new song. It did not come from Africa, though the dark throb and beat of that Ancient of Days was in it and through it. It did not come from white America—never from so pale and hard and thin a thing, however deep these vulgar and surrounding tones had driven. Not the Indies nor the hot South, the cold East or heavy West made this music. It was a new song and its deep and plaintive beauty, its great cadences and wild appeal wailed, throbbed and thundered on the world's ear with a message seldom voiced by man. It swelled and blossomed like incense, improvised and born anew out of an age long past, and weaving into its texture the old and new melodies in word and in thought.

W.E.B. DuBois

One of the most beautiful explications, as analysis and history, of "the Music" comes from Du Bois, in his grandest work, *Black Reconstruction in America*. So, because the good Dr. combines the material social world with and as the origins of Art. The Earth & the Sky.

So *Digging* means to present, perhaps arbitrarily, varied paradigms of this essentially Afro-American art. The common predicate, myself, the Digger. One who gets down, with the down, always looking above to see what is going out, and so check *Digitaria*, as the Dogon say, necessary if you are to dig the farthest Star, *Serious*.

So this book is a microscope, a telescope, and being Black, a periscope. All to dig what is deeply serious. From a variety of places, reviews, liner notes, live checking, merely reflecting, the intention is to provide some theoretical and observed practice of the historical essence of what is clearly American Classical Music, no matter the various names it, and we, have been called.

The sun is what keeps this planet alive, including the Music, like we say, the Soul of which is Black.

In order to look at the page, before we begin to read the words, professionally or unprofessionally, of, first, W.E.B. Du Bois, then Baraka, what actions must we take or must we take part in? I mean this both somatically and in terms of thinking. What takes place when I do what I am invited to do by virtue of Baraka's assertion that Du Bois' image (all that he is) and some of his language must appear before us as a matter of establishing a point of origin and a standard of excellence? Before I read, I see a block of text, and the name, "W.E.B. Du Bois," which functions as a picture and a mode of transport toward a variety of ideas relating to the intellectual significance of black persons in the history of the idea of America. The picture that is made by setting the texts together, as Baraka has done here (as, I will show, Nathaniel Mackey does, as Fred Moten often does) proposes the long quotation as a visual/verbal bridge that shatters the isolation between the thinking and writing that is in front of us—before us—on the page *and* writing that is before us, figuratively, as the sum of what is in our minds now under the sign of reading *and* writing that has come before us in time. This is a manner/matter of composition and citation. We are moved, physically, by this manner of over-writing to place ourselves as readers, eye to eye with "the previous." Giorgio Agamben writes of the "strategic function" of disguised or hidden citations in Walter Benjamin's work:

Just as through citation a secret meeting takes place between past generations and ours, so too between the writing of the past and the present a similar kind of meeting transpires; citations function as go-betweens in this encounter. ... This work consists not so much in conserving but in destroying something. In [Benjamin's] essay on Kraus we read, "[Citation] summons the word by its name, wrenches it destructively from its context, but precisely thereby calls it back to its origin; at the same time it 'saves and punishes'."

I acknowledge a similar order of linguistic intimacy, similar insofar

as the characteristics of intertextuality remain human across time and facilitate our communications with all who have written before us, including the dead, and in that the intertextual is, as well, orthographically/aesthetically hybrid, so that words themselves speak of and to each other and become formation(s) and achievement independent of their agentic inscription. But I'm concerned with an historical order of aesthetic desire where, so unlike what Benjamin and Agamben describe, citation makes a visual/verbal bridge that implies a wish to lay or throw down with "the previous" by virtue of being fully given over to and in its presence, capitulating and recapitulating. The ocular and intellectual stress induced by attempting to read more than one text at a time—thick citation, big block, frequent repetition of the name of one's antecedent-interlocutors, archival or on-the-scene—intensifies textual interplay. Reader and text (must/do) draw close. I'm saying the order that constitutes the history of ideas as murmurings between Du Bois and Baraka, the masculine order of black writing, is an order that values being seen together: it is an order of claiming being together, not of hiding, not of disguise, not of suppression. The compositional assertion that the texts must be read together means something.

In *Nature*

... wise men pierce this rotten diction and fasten words again to visible things; so that picturesque language is at once a commanding certificate that he who employs it, is a man in alliance with truth and God. The moment our discourse rises above the ground line of familiar facts, and is inflamed with passion or exalted by thought, it clothes itself in images. A man conversing in earnest, if he watch his intellectual processes, will find that a material image, more or less luminous, arises in his mind, contemporaneous with every thought, which furnishes the vestment of the thought. Hence, good writing and brilliant discourse are perpetual allegories. This

imagery is spontaneous. It is the blending of experience with the present action of the mind. It is proper creation. It is the working of the Original Cause through the instruments he has already made.

Let's, therefore, take Baraka's construction of the first page of *Digging* as an incantatory act of textual image-making and declaration of alliance with [black] "Soul"—a remainder in persons of the Original Cause—that is also a rejection of a certain scholarly, and also philosophical, understanding of originality in general, even or especially philosophical understanding as it is pushed into a spiritual place via Agamben and Benjamin. Baraka, therefore, invites us to re-think certain questions of (black aesthetic) history as that which systematically explains the black original. That which is original is spiritually marked in the ways that Hortense Spillers has theorized, and also orthographically marked: these marks-become-writing fasten the original to the past and herald the possibility of, not separation from the antecedent, but mutual release from the antecedent's conditions of impossibility.



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The legal doctrine (also fiction) of *relation back* comes to mind when I try to unfold the way Baraka touches Du Bois by way of *Black Reconstruction*. Relation back establishes a structure that moves events that occur in the present, but ought to have occurred in the past,