In an article about the Roland TR-808, discontinued by Roland in 1984, Kurt James Werner, Jonathan S. Abel, and Julius O. Smith III, write that the drum machine was “considered somewhat of a flop—despite significant voice design innovations, disappointing sales and a lukewarm critical reception seemed clear indicators that digitally-sampled drum machines were the future.” Centralizing an analysis of the circuits, sub-circuits, and software of the Roland TR-808, the authors suggest that, since its discontinuation there has been an inability to digitally replicate the analog sounds of the Roland TR-808. The authors take the machine apart, break it up, and think about abilities, noting that misinformation and misconceptions about the sound, the beats, the bass of the original 808s has led to the inability to emulate it. They find remnants of Ace Tone’s 1964 R1 Rhythm Ace. They write, “A bass drum note is produced when the μPD650C-085 CPU applies a common trigger and (logic high) instrument data to the trigger logic.” They pay close attention to the circuit behavior of the 808. They emulate.

The authors dive into the mechanic circuitry and deep beats and bass of the Roland TR-808 drum machine, but say little about its significance for the musical, sonic, and textural sciences that are imagined alongside the unit. We thus consider the insights developed in “A Physically-Informed, Circuit-Bendable, Digital Model of the Roland TR-808 Bass Drum Circuit,” and overlay them with the mathematics of Black life, in order to think through the mechanics of emulation with and outside of itself. This is especially meaningful, since a “lack of interest drove second-hand prices [for the TR-808] down and made it an attractive source of beats for techno and hip-hop producers.” Emulation, in this sense, honors black creative labor and invention—the boom-bap-blonk-clap of 808s—as diasporic literacy, yet also understands this work as a series of inaccurate repetitions that disclose the awful, the hurtful, and the intrusive. Emulations, like 808s, are injuriously loving. We situate the 808s as one of many enunciations of black studies, as heavy waves and vibrations that intersect with and interrupt black life discursively and physiologically, as heartbreak.
Heartbreak captures, at least a little, those injuriously loving emulations of what it means to be Black and human within the context of white supremacy. Heartbreak works with and in excess of the bio-mythological heart, the hollow muscular organ and its narratives of affectively variegated tenderness and loss. Heartbreak represents the reverberating echoes of our collective plantocratic historical pasts in the present. Heartbreak elucidates how the violence of racial capitalism inaccurately reproduces black life. Heartbreak bursts apart. Heartbreak is feeling outside of oneself. Heartbreak is the demand to feel outside of ones’ individuated self. Heartbreak cannot be recuperated. Heartbreak waits. It sounds. It envelops us like the thumping bass of the TR-808. Heartbreak cannot be repaired or resisted. It emulates but defies emulation.

Boom.

Before House and Techno musics, before Hip-Hop, before Miami Bass, before Electro, I hear and feel R&B group Blaque’s 1999 song “808.” Before getting to the song’s historical significance, I want to emphasize how the track’s music and lyrics amplify the pleasure and joy of feeling the thump of the 808-machine, of sensing its meta/physical reverberations around and through the flesh:

‘Cause I’ll be goin’ boom like an 808
Be makin’ circles like a figure 8
You know it feels good from head to toe
Now hold on to me baby here we go
You’ll be goin’ boom baby boom baby boom
And I’ll be goin’ ooh baby ooh baby ooh
(check it out)

Blaque’s song encodes the flesh-memory of the innumerable hours I’ve spent listening to music made with the TR-808 in clubs, in living rooms, on headphones while walking, hearing/feeling the 808s boom from passing cars, etc. and the sheer enjoyment derived from it in a way that is difficult to cordon off into words on the page. Blaque’s song achieves this feat by analogizing the fleshy neural feelings set off by the boom of the 808, because “it feels good from head to toe,” and the internal neuro-viscous reward system derived from love and sex. By conjuring the power of Blaque’s superlative skills at moving their audience, the song also imagines a different kind of physical sensation:

See what I believe is
We was granted the power
What’s that? Power, wha…
Ha, the power to make you dance
Like this
Like this? Like what, though? Like wo? Like a Sssshhh?  

Love and sex are always knotted to broken hearts, because the throb of feeling good, from dome to foot, has a painful musicological history. The heart (muscle) and its narratives of loss and tenderness—tender losses—move to, stop with, pause on, slide across the boom of racial-sexual violence. Heartbreak, then, is always already part of the 808s Black circuitry, boomingly amplifying joy and pain, sunshine and rain.  
The thump, the boom, create shivering circuits of pleasure laced with damage, loss, sorrow.

“808” was written by Robert Sylvester Kelly, who preyed on young Black girls from Chicago’s South Side and secretly married his protégé Aaliyah Dana Haughton when she was a teenager. The members of Blaque were very young when this song was released, the youngest member being sixteen. While Kelly appears in the music video for “808,” it is not clear how much interaction occurred between him and the members of Blaque. The bitter irony of Kelly’s predatory ways is that as an artist, he has been extremely adept at writing songs from “female perspectives”—for example, his duet with Sparkle “Be Careful,” Nivea’s “Laundromat,” several songs for the Changing Faces, or his own “When a Woman’s Fed Up.” How does being a sexual predator, who referred to himself as the pied piper of R&B, correlate with Kelly’s adeptness for writing songs for Black women performers? Rather than thinking that this cross-gender groking is something that supersedes or mitigates Kelly’s predation, we want to insist that this tendency contributes to R. Kelly’s continued violation and sexual assault of numerous Black women and girls. It is tantamount to not shush the many different forms of violation in this context, since they represent the structural conditions of possibility for sexual violence but also remain significant in their own “right,” even while they are too often drowned out by the focus on the physical aspects of violence, sexual and otherwise. What structures and repertoires must be in place in order for acts of sexual violence to occur and what acts of violation (of trust, of corporeal boundaries, of confidence, and so on) precede physical/sexual violence? What modes of violation follow the brutalizations, for instance, when family members and friends refuse to believe victims, or when state apparatuses vilify and criminalize survivors? Where do broken hearts go? They probably cannot find their way home.

For black girls, home is both refuge and where your most intimate betrayals happen. You cannot turn off that setting. It is the dining room at your family’s house, served with a side of your uncle’s famous ribs. Home is where they love you until you’re a ho.

Kelly’s musical ability for cross-gender identification feeds into and cannot be disentangled from his predatory actions. It is not per chance that Kelly would often
prey on young girls after Lena Mae McLin’s gospel choir classes at Kenwood Academy in Chicago, his alma mater, playing the role of musical mentor in order to gain favor and groom his victims. This raises the general question we are uncomfortably left with: in what ways do desire, sexuality, violence, and ungendering coexist in (Black) life and in relationship to the TR-808? Kelly’s oeuvre also includes several cuts besides “808” that deploy machinery and technology within the context of love and sexuality (“You Remind Me of My Jeep,” “Ignition,” etc.) that extend the tradition of sex machines or feeling computer blue, because there must be something wrong with the machinery.

Considering that Kelly, like many other Black celebrities, claims that he himself was a victim of sexual violence, are there ways to think about racism as not only being engulfed by increased “group-differentiated vulnerabilities to premature death,” but also the extreme susceptibility to many different forms of sexual violence and violation. Perhaps not being able to elude sexual violence is the ghost in the machine of this particular version of kinship, to emulate Saidiya Hartman’s memorable aphorism.

What if the kind of heartbreak Kelly violently enacted cannot be resisted or repaired? What if it just settles in, awful, hurtful, and intrusive? Receding at certain moments, like the driving away of a car with an elaborate booming system, only to abruptly reappear at the most inopportune situations, its reverberations shaking you up to core when you least expect it. What do we do with that? Can the 808s and the mechanics of the deep boom, signal—at least in a small way—something else? This is sexual violence writ large. This is violence that is purposefully enacted within the context of longstanding intelligible plantocratic logics, where multiple affective and structural registers of Black love are always dragged through and into and across the sexual trauma of racial capitalism. I don’t want this. We don’t want this. Can the 808s and the mechanics of the deep boom, signal something else without losing the messed up vicious stagnancy of the predation (or the sinister twin practice of forgetting and/or excusing the violence either in the name of art/musical genius or racial solidarity)? Perhaps this is where we learn, at least momentarily, that black life and love are not something you can have, but something you do and can never get. Perhaps that which is awful and hurtful and intrusive, as unresisted heartbreak, should stand alone (un-flee-able), in plain sight and as negative affect, with the difficult knowledge that the act of naming violence does not engender the kind of reparation sexual violence requires, particularly if we take into account the countless acts of violation that precede, accompany, and follow sexual violence. Thus, predation represents a brutality in itself, unrepaid, intelligibly negative, and with a booming soundtrack—even in the unspeakability...like a ssshhh. How do we, who watch this and narrate this and hear this and live this, come to terms with the irreparable? Coming to terms with the unrecoupable means, above all else, having to exist with it and necessarily going on living. What cannot not be possessed does not follow the laws of redemption, instead it lingers as living in and with the after-life of the TR-808’s sonorous echo. Living in and with. Something you do and can never possess.
Blaque have stated that their name is an acronym for Believing in Life and Achieving a Quest for Unity in Everything. Blaque member, Natina Reed, was killed when a car hit her as she was crossing the street on October 26, 2012. In addition, the group was mentored by Lisa “Left Eye” Lopes, who was tragically killed in a car accident in 2002 and who had set her boyfriend’s Atlanta mansion on fire in 1994 after a violent dispute, which had its basis in Lopes’s heartbreak. Is it possible to believe in (Black) life when surrounded by death and violence? Blaque are now also signifiers for the disappearance of R&B singing groups, or the last great flowering of R&B singing groups at the turn of the millennium (Destiny’s Child, 3LW, 702, B2K, 112, and more—many with abbreviated band names wherein the numbers signify a particular history, place, or identity). While much of this is the consequence of “simple” economics—it is cheaper for R&B singers to multi-track one voice instead of paying several group members to sing harmonies; it is less expensive for rappers sing their own hooks through Auto-Tune rather than paying an R&B singer to do so—it also highlights the continued devaluation of R&B music as an art form, especially Black women’s creative and affective labor, which are so central to this genre. Where is the appreciation for Black women R&B singers’ sounding of the strenuous labor of both love and heartbreak? How does the Black female voice carry out the care work of Black women’s labor, which cannot be recognized as such, as Saidiya Hartman argues? Where is the love for that something you do?

The importation of the TR-808 sound into Black musical cultures is often attributed to Afrika Bambaataa’s “Planet Rock” (1982), which replays and emulates two different Kraftwerk tracks (“Numbers” and “Trans-Europe Express”). In 2016, several men came forward to state that Bambaataa had sexually molested them when they were as young as thirteen. As young boys, all of the men told of difficult family circumstances and declared that Bambaataa had taken on a parental role in their lives and served as their mentor before he began to sexually abuse them for extended periods of time. The narrative of these survivors becomes part of the computing that structures the boom of the TR-808s; desire and pleasure are qualified by the significant yet variable expression of sexual violence/violation as and with technology. Names are fading…Aaliyah, the unnamed young girls from Chicago’s Southside, Bambaataa’s awful and injurious sonic boom, and the unlisted and untenderness.

Rewind and come again, re-rewind. Marvin Gaye’s 1982 “Sexual Healing,” was one of first songs that featured the TR-808 drum machine. It was also Gaye’s last hit before he was shot by his father, with whom he had a contentious relationship, with a gun that he had given to his father as a present in 1984.

“My father,” Marvin told me in Europe in 1982 during a discussion of “Sexual Healing,” “likes to wear women’s clothing. As you well know, that doesn’t mean he’s homosexual. In fact, my father was always known as a ladies’ man. He simply likes to dress up. What he does in private, I really don’t know—nor do I care to know. You met
him at a time when he was relatively cool about it. There have been other periods when his hair was very long and curled under, and when he seemed quite adamant in showing the world the girlish side of himself. That may have been to further embarrass me. I find the situation all the more difficult because, to tell you the truth, I have the same fascination with women’s clothes. In my case, that has nothing to do with any attraction for men. Sexually, men don’t interest me. But seeing myself as a woman is something that intrigues me. It’s also something I fear. I indulge myself only at the most discreet and intimate moments. Afterward, I must bear the guilt and shame for weeks. After all, indulgence of the flesh is wicked, no matter what your kick. The hot stuff is lethal. I’ve never been able to stay away from the hot stuff.”

Gaye was heartbroken for most of his life, in part, due to his father’s visible ungendering, so much so that he added an “e” to his last name. The extreme physical violence meted out to him by Marvin Pentz Gay Sr. resulted in Gaye suffering from extreme anxiety and stage fright and also in Gaye extending the abuse in different forms to the relationship with his much younger second wife, Jan Gaye.

Perhaps 808s soundtrack black studies and provide a technology, or boom, of blackness that organizes itself through heartbreak—actuating both heart muscles and a kind of ongoing hurtful tenderness engrained in the flesh. With this, 808s provide aural glimpses and moments of heartbreak that cannot be forgotten—they are plain in sight, harmfully—and situate sexual violence as a terrain that demands a response that is not invested in prior injured states. Responses and alternatives to injury are awful and difficult and forever; they emerge as song, story, grooving, crying, fight, jumping, quietness, laughing, poem. And more. Always more. This is living, necessarily living, and finding our way through earlier modes of heartbreaking damage that comprise the mattering of Black life, though not exclusively so. Where is the love?

Shhhh.

808s are one way to think about black life as an invitation to listen. The book *Phonographies* provides a way to imagine how technology—most crudely, machines—are enunciations of black life. The book uses sonics, or flows, to delineate this enunciation of life within the context of racial violence and modernity. These ideas also emerge in relation to vocoders, drum kits, LinnDrums, 808s, clap machines and other VSTs. How do these sounds, vibrations, and machines offer us a genre of being human that does not begin with objecthood? Heart///break. What do 808s do to us? And how do mechanics-machines refuse black humanity (the logics of the middle passage and plantation slavery did and continue to roboticize black people) while demanding that objectification cannot/should not define black life (I can never be your robot). These questions are not exactly new, of course—there is a really long
and comprehensive list of scholars who think about the mechanization, objectification, and commodification of black and other marginalized people and longstanding resistances to practices of dehumanization. But the sounds and vibrations can also engender “flesh memory”—and this overlaps but is very different than what M. NourbeSe Philip calls bodymemory, right?—which interrupts the objectification-resistance dualism by asking how sound or vibrations, the 808s and the clap machines, are not simply extra-human devices or technological appendages that refine or degrade humanness as cyborg. Instead the 808s narrate life, Black life. So, the VSTs—the sounds and beats and grooves they make—are not outside us or of us, but praxis. The story—the stories told above—cannot be told without the deep boom, clap, unspeakable yet audible heartbreak. Like a sssshhh—eviscerated, ear-piercing silence.

Avoiding a linear-afro-future-post-humanist territory—by giving technology as purely embodied by machines too much clout—how do we talk or write or think about loving, desperately, the unspeakability of music and the loudness of heartbreak. The 808s are not the answer but they might help us sort this through. With this, we must refuse disciplinary and epistemological bifurcations (the tendency to analytically separate the sciences, for example, from poetics), to study autopoeisis and self-replicating systems, and to think about the mechanics of blackness outside corporeal black politics, where our broken flesh or our degraded bodies are either liberatory devices or signifiers of anti-blackness. Heartbreak. So, to rephrase: what do 808s do to us, physiologically, psychically, poetically? In what ways do the 808s contribute to the mattering forces of Black life?

Jumping.

Sylvia Wynter. Her first use of the term “the science of the word” appears (I think) in her 1999 essay “Towards the Sociogenic Principle: Fanon, The Puzzle of Conscious Experience, of ‘Identity’ and What it’s Like to be ‘Black.’” In this essay Wynter thinks through how Fanon’s understanding of selfhood disrupts a teleologically biocentric, and fundamentally anti-black, understanding of the human, and how his writings open up the entangled workings of physiology and narrative. While Wynter explores these entanglements in most of her writings—she writes, often, that humans are hybrid beings, simultaneously bios and mythois—“Towards the Sociogenic Principle” offers a sustained discussion of the ways in which practices of racism and anti-blackness are narratively connected to the physiological and neurobiological sciences. This is to say that the larger symbolic belief system (what we might call our Eurocentric origin stories or cosmogonies, whether theological or Darwinian or both) of which anti-blackness is a part, is constitutive of, not separate from, the naturally scientific (what we might call flesh and blood and brain) aspects
of humanness. We reflexly experience the knowledge system we are part of. Remember, too, this belief system is lawfully instituted: how we know our selves and each other, how we believe in, how we reflexly respond to the world around us, functions to stably reproduce the existing order; we navigate that order as though it is natural and outside of our selves and outside our story-making abilities...but it is we who make the world what it is, it is we who believe in, desperately, (and thus naturalize) the prevailing biocentric belief system.\textsuperscript{29} However, this world-making only occurs within and against the constraints of our current biocentric order.

The entanglements Wynter explores do not situate the human on a biocentric frame (which is one of natural selection wherein some people are more evolved than others, some people are more human than others, some people are closer to humanity than others; where the sciences are neutral and stories and poetics are not neutral, and so on). In Wynter's formulation of the human, an extension of and mashing-up of Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon, we are biologic-storytellers. We did not, to give an obvious example, evolve from prelinguistic to linguistic beings; humans have always been storytellers. In the long conversation in On Being Human as Praxis, she thinks about this in relation to the markings in Blombos Cave—clearly written 77,000-year-old linguistic communications scribed by humans.\textsuperscript{30} The conceptual leap Wynter offers calls into question our entire order of being: the crude and longstanding commitment to the biocentric belief system that naturalizes black people as unevolved and less-than-human is totally undone if humans are not absolutely sutured to an evolutionary apes-to-Aryan system of knowledge. The science of the word thus underlines two overlapping analytics: the deep connections between narrative and neurobiology and physiology (reflexly); the disruption of biocentric systems of knowledge (we are not what they say we are).

Working with Wynter's conceptualization of the science of the word, 808s and other music inventions and reinventions evidence and enunciate black life. The practice of loving, desperately, the unspeakability of music, is found, in part, in our neurobiological and physiological and intellectual response to that music and music makers. Our neurobiological and physiological and intellectual response to the deep boom, clap, blip, which is untracked and everywhere and seeping into us and emanating outward and beckoning friendships and starting fights and teaching and storying and moving and keeping a beat (offbeat) and heartbreak. The science of the word imagines a different beginning from which to think through black music and technologies as well as other analytical questions. It is a total refusal of objecthood (as our black origin story, as our archive, as our future, more heartbreak, “the suffocating reification,” Fanon wrote) and, therefore, provides a pathway to imagine black life as human cosmogony:

\begin{quote}
I feel my soul as vast as the world, truly a soul as deep as the deepest of rivers; my chest has the power to expand to infinity. I was made to give and they prescribe for me the humility of the cripple. When I opened my eyes yesterday I saw the sky in total revulsion. I tried to get up but
\end{quote}
Wreckage.

It has been argued that music shapes and moves and repairs our neurosystem. With music, memory and language and words are built and rebuilt. With music, neurons are strengthened and reattached. With music. I have argued elsewhere, working with Wynter’s *Black Metamorphosis*, that the connections and wires and threads, between music and self and environment and others, not only conceptually subverts plantocratic and white supremacist (market) systems, but they also provide a way to track black life as livingness (and thus outside narratives of dysselection). More specifically, music, music making, music sharing, music dancing, music jumping, music singing—the act of loving music deeply, the act of feeling and loving music intensely—is one way black communities physiologically and neurobiologically navigate racist worlds. I do not think there is specificity of or to black neurobiologies and physiologies. I am not suggesting that. But I do think that the conditions of being black—the experience and living memory of the abyss, to borrow from Édouard Glissant—has opened up attachments to musical narratives—genealogies—sounds that we should pay attention to. For me, this is a radical reinvention of the self and our embodied knowledge! It is humanizing. So, if music shapes and moves and repairs our brains and bones and blood and nerves, if the boom of the TR-808 breaks our heart and jumps and moves us as we love music deeply and intensely, is this not a kind of neurophysiological resistance, refusal, or fugitivity within the praxis of Black life, at least fleetingly? What do we learn from and about each other in these moments of heartbreak and love? What do we pass on, what do we keep to ourselves, in order to practice black livingness in a world that refuses black life? How do we share fugitivity and waywardness?

With all of this in mind what we want to notice is not solely the consequences of violence—the fucked up predatory acts and stunningly quiet (as I see it) wreckage of violation experienced by those violated. The consequences and wreckage matter, deeply. But we must also ask ourselves, at the same time, without throwing that wreckage in the bin, under what conditions does human life become victim-wreckage and, as well, how do we tell this story by centralizing the ways in which our present system of knowledge rewards—physiologically! Socially!—violation. What is it about our colonial plantocratic system of knowledge that enacts violation as an articulation of black masculinity (not black men, black masculinity), and how does this interface with black masculinity’s ungendering in relation to white supremacy? And how, in this wreckage that is, in fact, black life, do we find enunciations of humanity and the
unmet promises of freedom. Heartbreak is not, then, a signifier of racial oppression or love lost. It is not a noun. Heartbreak is an aesthetic-physiological practice. It is sorrow song. It untangles that violence, it does not describe violence for profit. Because in order even begin to do justice to this physio-aesthetic praxis, to Black life, it must exceed and unsettle the accumulative logic of cis-heteropatriarchal racial capitalism.

We have to ask ourselves: how do we want to know this—sexual violence, racist sexual violence—differently and in a way that does not replicate the violence. This is what I want to get to. This is very hard for me. I don’t know. I still feel the alibis piling up. How do we tell the story outside of the splash of sexual violence (and thus anti-blackness), since summoning the violence encountered by Black folks is so often bullied into doing the psychic, physiological, and affective dirty work for white supremacy? Whenever there is some type of crisis around “intimate” violences in particular, Black folks are summoned as ciphers through which that labor is accomplished without it having to affect the actual structures of white supremacy. Instead of confronting the many violences, sexual and otherwise, white men and women committed against Black female persons (“high crimes against the flesh,” Spillers calls it), the broken and torn black person, lynched, stands in as representative-knowable-enclosed-locked-down violence. Rather than reproducing the violence or accumulatively enumerating it, we seek to “tell a story about degraded matter and dishonored life that doesn’t delight and titillate, but instead ventures toward another mode of writing...,” other modes of being, other modes of living in and living with.37 Living on.

**We Don’t Have Much of a Relationship Now.**

Robyn Rihanna Fenty embodies a number of admirable qualities as a performer and public figure, however, none are as “savage” and awe-inspiring as the way she navigated the public scrutiny after Chris Brown brutalized her within an inch of her life in 2009 and the photos of her badly bruised and swollen face and body were leaked to TMZ by the LAPD.38 Fenty was 21 at the time. She shouldn’t have had to do this. Like a shhh: eviscerated silence. Fenty refused again and again to become the proper and respectable poster child for victims of intimate partner violence, even though she was continually vilified as a “crazy Island woman” and confronted with her violated past and the images thereof as incontrovertible proof. In other words, the mainstream media demanded that she publicly provide the affective labor of being a violated Black woman by performing victimhood in very specific ways that would vilify Brown; she did neither. Fenty’s broken face and her broken heart—violence and violation => violation as violence, and vice versa—did not drive the invasive media queries and publicity. Rather, as we know and is so often the case, her (awful, hurtful)
story of violence served as an occasion to discuss the larger problem of intimate partner violence, and, of course, to prove the pathology of Black folks and Black life. Violation.

Fenty has, instead, addressed the thorny complexities of the imbrication of sexuality and violence through her music and music videos (“Man Down,” “S&M,” “Love on the Brain,” and “Bitch Better Have My Money” are only the most prominent). Retrospectively, Fenty said the following about her relationship with Brown after she was violently violated:

[I thought] maybe I’m one of those people built to handle shit like this. Maybe I’m the person who’s almost the guardian angel to this person, to be there when they’re not strong enough, when they’re not understanding the world, when they just need someone to encourage them in a positive way and say the right thing. [I thought I could change him,] a hundred percent. I was very protective of him. I felt that people didn’t understand him. Even after...But you know, you realize after a while that in that situation you’re the enemy. You want the best for them, but if you remind them of their failures, or if you remind them of bad moments in their life, or even if you say I’m willing to put up with something, they think less of you — because they know you don’t deserve what they’re going to give. And if you put up with it, maybe you are agreeing that you [deserve] this, and that’s when I finally had to say, ‘Uh-oh, I was stupid thinking I was built for this.’ Sometimes you just have to walk away. [Now,] I don’t hate him. I will care about him until the day I die. We’re not friends, but it’s not like we’re enemies. We don’t have much of a relationship now.\(^{39}\)

Slowly jumping from believing that she was “one of those people built to handle shit like this” to realizing that she “was stupid thinking I was built for this,” Fenty refuses being (and thus cannot be) conscripted into the longstanding narrative of the Black-super-woman-machine, who feels no pain, who does all the care work, who labors on behalf of everyone except herself. Instead, she implicitly states, “I can never be your robot.” She sits with and lives on and with the heartbreak, moving on but never completely leaving the scene. Sorry. At this time, we are no longer accepting repair jobs. Heart////////Break. Over the years Fenty has emphasized both her own heartbreak and her heartbreak over the way Brown, someone she loved, was rendered monstrous by the mainstream media. Her insights and struggles are meaningful, especially considering how white men—the Afflecks and the Polanskis and the rest—who exhibit similar violent behavior in a range of their heterosexual relationships, are seldom treated the same way. Bringin’ on the heartbreak, I repeat softly under my breath: she shouldn’t have had to do this, she really shouldn’t…. Are you ready to be heartbroken?\(^{40}\)

In 2010 there was a huge poster in the halls of my department at Queen’s University. The huge poster was of Fenty’s broken face. After seeing the poster the first time, I did not return to it; Fenty remained in my pathway but I did not look at the poster or read the text that narrated and explained her brokenness. Other posters
about “Gender Studies,” such as indigenous activism, fat shaming, queer cultures, Muslim women and feminism, accompanied the Fenty poster. The posters were part of a big class project wherein, from my understanding, the students pick a topic related to the course, highlight important images and ideas about that topic, and place all this information on a huge poster. My knowledge of poster assignments and projects comes from the discipline of geography. The Association of American Geographers has poster guidelines that the posters in the hallway, in my view, emulated: posters make a unified, coherent statement; materials, both textual and visual, should be of professional quality and be clearly legible from a distance of four feet (4’); text should be limited to brief statements; graphic materials will be displayed on a 4’ x 8’ poster board (landscape-oriented only). The only poster that depicted black women featured Fenty’s damaged, bashed in face. Fenty’s encasing and entombment in the hallway poster serve as synecdoches of these broader currents, since her public image is wedded to violence and violation, we and she are not allowed to forget, there’s no reprieve from this ongoing heartbreak. What gets lost in the shuffle is the labor of heartbreak that the poster and Fenty are forced to perform, all without her consent.

As quiet as it’s kept, we continue living, regardless of whether we found love in hopeful place or not, intensely feeling the thumping boom of heartbreak (flesh encasing that hollow organ, un-flee-ing, Jump).

The chorus of Fenty’s “We Found Love” repeats the following line over and over: “We found love in a hopeless place.” The bass drum does not appear until one minute and eight seconds—zeroes, ones, and eights—into the song, and its booming entry is preceded by crescendo of cascading keyboards as well as a drum roll, so central to House music. All these factors combined generate intense sonic tension so that the arrival of the bass drum registers as both like relief and like punishment. In this way, the structure of “We Found Love” approximates finding love: the flowing discharge of endorphins and resulting euphoria but also evokes the violence of being thumped by the beat in a hopeless place. Heart////Break. Add to this Fenty’s voice, which remains almost impassive, displaying a “cool affect” that sounds like it is resisting the booming rush of the song structure/instrumentation. It is as if Fenty’s vocalizing is physically/physiologically refusing the unacknowledged care work demanded from the Black female voice in popular music. The track’s music video features scenes from a volatile heterosexual intimate relationship in which the lovers are portrayed by Fenty and a model/actor (Dudley O’Shaughnessy, who has an uncanny resemblance to Chris Brown). In addition to the unmistakable timbre of Fenty’s voice, the alarm bells, the central keyboard riff—which resembles a siren—and the stark contrast between Fenty’s vocals and music on this track amplify the joy and the heartbreak of living, continuing to exist and subsist. I was always struck by the following line: “Feel the heartbeat in my mind.” Does this mean that the neurological system emulates, synthesizes the beat of the heart, the thump of the bass? Is it a heartbeat of pleasure (we found love; living) or the throb of pain (hopeless place, fear, trauma)? Most like likely it’s both, mixed and engineered at
different volumes and intensities, depending on the time of day, not overcoming but surviving, living with, breathing in, subsisting through. Boom, like an 808.

Rachel Kaadzi Ghansah has observed how young Black female fans of Beyoncé relate to Fenty in the aftermath of the visible violence she experienced. She writes:

I’m not certain they really hate Rihanna, or find joy in her hurt — instead I think what they really hate is that Rihanna knows firsthand, like so many women and girls, and perhaps like so many of them, that being violently hit by a man doesn’t ever feel like a kiss. It feels the opposite. It is a humiliation that is impossible to forget. So what I think the Hive hates about Rihanna is that there is no fun, no fantasy in that kind of knowledge of womanhood, just a reflection of the real but all-too-often silent life they too must wade through as young women of color in America.\textsuperscript{44}

These reactions to Fenty underscore yet another layer, dimension, facet of the labor demanded of her: transcending, overcoming violence, violation and heartbreak. The way Fenty was treated in the aftermath of her brutal violation—Chris Brown’s assault, the leaking of the photos by the police, and the way she was treated by the media—forms a part of ungendering, given that Black women are thought to be inured to pain, deserving of violence, and thus not qualified for protection in the same way as white women. As Beth Richie writes:

Black women in vulnerable positions within disadvantaged communities fall so far from the gaze that is now sympathetic to some women who experience violence that they have virtually no right to safety, protections, or redress when they are victimized. At best, they are relegated to the status of undeserving. More often, those Black women with the least privilege, who live in the most dangerous situations, are criminalized instead of being protected or supported.\textsuperscript{45}

But care work is still violently expected, injuriously demanded. There is a beautiful and heartbreaking part in the 2014 film Girlhood (Bande de filles) that centers around Fenty’s song “Diamonds” that highlights the joy and pain of Black livingness.\textsuperscript{46} While much of the film adopts an anthropological lens on the Black life of French teenage girls, residing on the outskirts of Paris, this scene imagines a momentary and clearly limited instant of free livingness. With her new friends Lady, Adiatou and Fily, the film’s protagonist, Marieme, rents a hotel room in Paris so that they can escape for a night the strictures of anti-Black racism, misogyny, family, work, and school that govern their lives. At one point during the evening, Lady, Adiatou and Fily begin listening, dancing, and lip-syncing to Fenty’s song, while Marieme sits on the bed and watches them. Marieme then joins the other three girls, as they all joyously dance, embrace each other, and mime the words: “Shine bright like a diamond/Shining bright like a diamond/We’re beautiful like diamonds in the sky.”\textsuperscript{47} The scene is bathed in gorgeous blue light, which serves to heighten the boom and rush of pleasure of the moment, and to visually distinguish it from the heartbreak of the
characters’ everyday lives, the specters of violence and violation. Finally, as the song and scene move towards an ending, viewers not only hear Fenty’s voice on the soundtrack but Lady, Adiatou, Marieme, and Fily singing along with the song’s English language lyrics with audible French accents: “Feel the warmth, we’ll never die. We’re like diamonds in the sky.” Living on.

**LinnDrums.**

Prince did not like Roland TR-808 drum machines. He preferred LinnDrum machines.

“Flesh memory” can be linked to and interfaced with NourbeSe Philip’s “bodymemory.” The flesh, though, does something different than the body conceptually: it marks the specificity of Black human life in its entanglements with the various forms of matter. Hortense Spillers distinguishes between body and flesh, and, initially, for Spillers, the flesh was primarily the space of objecthood and the abject. In *Habeas Viscus* and Spillers’ more recent writings, the flesh emerges not as a utopian zone or even an exclusively positive one, but as a realm of possibility, she calls it empathy, for Black life that is not beholden to inclusion into the category of the Man-as-human (to use Sylvia Wynter’s phrasing). So while the body remains an elusive mirage, an unattainable abstraction for those situated in the shadows of freedom, the flesh offers a liminal domain not beholden to inclusion in discourses and institutions designed to kill us. The flesh rescued the TR-808 from obsolesce.

One way to understand Black culture’s relationship to technology is through the way that especially Black music/sound humanizes by enfleshing supposedly discrete, abstract, rigid, inhuman machines by making them usable in heretofore nonexistent modalities, whether this is the turntable, the player piano, or the 808. Take the way that Brandy intonates the 808 on this particular track that she recorded with Timbaland in 2011:

> You hear me from a block away, I still got getaway
> Baby can you hear me now, can you hear me now?
> Baby can you hear me now, can you hear me now?

Not one of the many Internet lyric sites provides transcriptions of Brandy’s rhythmic harmonic ad-libs: eeightt-ohh-eeightt—eeightt-eeightt, sung in her unmistakable husky tone and reoccurring for the duration of the song; they only archive the alphabetic words. Clearly, this is not the science of the word as imagined by Wynter’s elaboration of Césaire—but it does allow us to think about the mechanics of voice and how Brandy’s “eeightt-ohh-eeightt—eeightt-eeightt” parallels and is purpose for
non-linguistic beats. The tone of Brandy’s voice and her intonation are fundamental to how the song works, how it achieves its effects in the flesh. It is also fundamental to shifting the signification of the machine and envisioning what the machine can and cannot do. Emulating the sensation of the TR-808, Brandy’s vocal apparatus, like Blaque’s, undertakes the care work of humanizing the technology. This can be likened to, but does not twin, how current mobile technologies become and are incorporated into humanness via their use in Black popular music.\textsuperscript{9} Jayson Greene’s recent commentary seems to willfully misunderstand Fenty’s use of Bajan Creole while also pointing to her singing voice (known as “Rihanna Voice”) as technology: “Rihanna Voice has become an industry-wide idea, a creative property like the Korg synth or LinnDrum, that the quick-working line cooks of the pop industry daub onto tracks like hot sauce from squeeze bottle” (emphases added).\textsuperscript{52} Comparing “Rihanna Voice” to using hot sauce feeds too easily into the “crazy Island woman” trope mentioned previously. Calling up other condiments in this context—soy sauce, mayonnaise, whatever—would be wisecrack; these are inventions only ingested, seemingly, by non-black people. The hot sauce squeeze bottle so perfectly recalls that crude Fanonian moment (good eatin’, zone of non-being) by refusing Fanonian subtleties (upsurge, we are not, actually, zones of non-being!). There are, too, altogether different registers of analogy available by imagining the use of “Rihanna Voice” as adding flecks of gold or glitter to the mix, for instance...or grasping for but not reaching a kind of shimmering poetics. Shine bright like diamond. In addition, besides conjuring histories of Black enslavement, the description of “Rihanna Voice” as a “creative property” in the vein of LinnDrums and Korg synthesizers disregards that the latter technologies are ownable and owned objects from which the Linn Electronics and Korg corporations derive substantial pecuniary profit whereas Fenty does not. Boom like an 808. Here, too, we take Black women’s creative imagining of space—the beat, intention of Brandy’s eeightt-ohh-eeightt and “Rihanna Voice”—to undo the supposedly empty and/or inhuman Black geographies of sound.\textsuperscript{53} In this way, both spheres facilitate the imagining of the flesh or Black life “as cosmogony.”

\[(\text{human + machines + human heart} \times \text{rhythm}) \oplus \text{technology}\]

\textit{Heartbreak.}

\textit{Spreading fast and there’s no cure (and there’s no cure)}
\textit{No need to run from heartache (It’s gonna get ya)}
\textit{It’s gonna get you, get you for sure}
\textit{(Everybody, everybody sing it, yeah)}\textsuperscript{54}
Openness and messiness and incompleteness are a pleasure, especially when theorized alongside the inflexible and thick category of race, but it is awful and painful to live open and undone. I had an exchange with two black poets about two very different things. And these exchanges made me think about the many ideas I have gathered to learn about race and theorize about race and live as racialized, in day-to-day (scholarly and non-scholarly) contexts. These terms. I remember them mostly from graduate school. They were sometimes coveted, sometimes rejected. But they all sought to “destabilize” race and/or blackness. It goes something like this: race is fluid and third space and liminal, and blackness is fragmented and unfinished and on the threshold, and race is hybrid-on-the-border-messy and black is fractured, incomplete, flexible. And I thought: it is painful and harmful to live like that, isn’t it? It hurts to live always undone and unfinished. It is heartbreaking. It is heartbreaking even when the impossibility is joyful or you catch a glimpse of a life outside that inflexible weight.

Afro-Scottish poet and novelist Jackie Kay writes about this perpetual state of destabilized unbelonging in a poem from her 1993 collection, Other Lovers, entitled “In my Country.” A video of Kay reading this and another poem provide context, wherein Kay, who was adopted in the 1950s by white Scottish parents, narrates several stories of white people relaying to her that being Black and being Scottish are a contradiction. For instance, a white woman asking her mother “Is that your daughter?” and demanding to know from Kay: “Where do you come from?” As a Black person in Scotland, Kay is an interloper, always already undone and unfinished:

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a woman passed round me
in a slow watchful circle,
as if I were a superstition;
or the worst dregs of her imagination,
so when she finally spoke
her words spliced into bars
of an old wheel. A segment of air.
Where do you come from?
‘Here,’ I said, ‘Here. These parts.’
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My former graduate student, Kara Melton, calls this “moving through.” She explores black mobility as a kind of constrained possibility with “moving through” underscoring the physical cost of navigating the geographies of racism and antiblackness. What is the physiological cost? Is the claim to or of “these parts” possible for black people? What other geographic options are there? No return. Heartbreak.
The flesh is struggle for me. Why is that? Spillers gave us the flesh newly. The flesh in her well-known and well-cited important essay, “Mama’s Baby,” is an undoing of the captive (enslaved) body. Reading that essay, I remember thinking, unlike the body, flesh “does” something outside of captivity, outside the terms of plantocratic commodification. This is memory work for me, as I have only recently read work on Spillers, rather than Spillers herself (perhaps I am a heretic for not returning, just as I am a heretic for not adoring James Baldwin—who I respect but do not adore). Of course, you explore the work of flesh and enfleshment deeply in *Habeas*. I am not afraid to share that I struggled with this book; it was difficult for me to teach, to be very specific, and I had some difficulty connecting Wynter to Spillers (my confession is that perhaps my overinvestment in the former has displaced the latter). That aside, I keep thinking about the flesh that encases the body and, as well, what is at stake in understanding the body and flesh as, analytically and theoretically, connectedly disconnected. I guess I worry about privileging the flesh. When I read Wynter on flesh, I connect it to ritual and rites—gendered storytelling practices that reify humanity in genre specific terms. So the flesh is marked by knowledge, yet it is not, in its entirety, knowledge itself. Instead, Wynter asks (me) how flesh has been folded into prevailing systems of knowledge (291vy29ateing Spillers’ inventions) as it elicits a purely biocentric system as the fiction through which a new worldview
must be engendered. The flesh, then, tells a story, but it must not be the story. I want more praxis, and I am uncertain the flesh can provide that praxis outside of the biocentric codes that render it so richly meaningful. I have come to despise the body, as an analytical site—and I am repeatedly disappointed and terrified because it is always present in my refusal. I do not think the flesh and the body are the same, but I keep seeing bodies thrown everywhere, all over the page, without anything in them, not even eyes or throats or muscles or blood or bones, just empty bags of flesh. No hearts! Heartless! Too many times analyses of the body, the black body, replicate that singular Fanonian crisis (look, look, look! Look at blackness! Look! LOOK!) without using the lens he begins Black Skin with (our genetic and social development are shaped by prevailing systems of knowledge, beside ontogeny and phylogeny stands sociogeny, black-skin-white-masks, there is no singularity). This is why your discussion of intonation matters to me, a lot—because intonation is not just the enunciation and performance of “look!”; intonation (“look!”) is reflexly felt (heartbreak) (which is not exactly affect, is it, but can be studied as such?) Fanon centers the biologic without privileging it as the only way to be or know or live black. Reading him with Wynter allows us to notice how he does something really fantastic with the social production of race precisely because he does not lean on biology (skin) to wholly understand blackness, but rather understands sociogeny as constituting and thus relational to the biological story Spirit” and the non-celibate laity “as the embodiment of the Fallen Flesh” during the European Middle Ages. Later this master code transmutes into “reason/sensuality, rationality/irrationality in the reoccupied place of the matrix code of Redeemed Spirit/Fallen Flesh...thus creating “the new ‘idea of order’ on whose basis the coloniality of being, enacted by the dynamics of the relation between Man—overrepresented as the generic, ostensibly supra-cultural human—and its subjugated Human Others (i.e., Indians and Negroes).” For Spillers the divergence between body and flesh represents “the central [distinction] between captive and liberated subject-positions” in the aftermath of the Middle Passage and plantation slavery in the Americas. She also adds the dimension of ungendering to the concept of the flesh, writing “this materialized scene of unprotected female flesh—of female flesh ‘ungendered’—offers a praxis and a theory; text for living and for dying.” Finally, “the flesh” moves us away from debates about “dehumanization” and all the insufferable body blah-blah-blah in academic discourse. The flesh is not merely inert violated matter but praxis incarnate. In several writings, Wynter uses flesh in this way, describing hybrid bios-mythoi humaness as theory made flesh, for instance, when she writes: “The positive verbal meanings attributed to their respective modes of kind are alchemically transformed into living flesh, as its members all reflexly subjectively experience themselves, in the mimetically desirable, because opiate- rewarded, placebo terms of that mode of symbolic life prescribed
of our skin. This, for me, provides a different way of thinking about race and blackness, because the body in itself, by itself, (heartless), cannot sustain Fanon’s and Wynter’s nuanced worldviews. We can thus demand a different humanity that is already here, relational to but not of the prevailing biocentric order… black life is the praxis of refusing such an order. Heart-full and heartbroken. Look! Blap. Squonk.

Maybe one way to think race or Blackness is that it functions by making the biologic reflexly real in the domain of social production: Blackness enfleshes social production; Black life socializes the biologic outside the terms of dysselection. Trying to make it real but compared to what?

So, we are talking about relationality, and how extra-human devices and intense narratives of love allow us to notice what is beautifully human about those who have never been free. This sense of being, in relation to technologies—including technologies that are bound up in unpleasant stories, like the TR-808—adds a layer to what we know about black humanity. What we know, really well, is dehumanizing objecthood and innovative resistance and the complex navigation of the structural, gendered, colonial, plantocratic workings of racial capitalism. What extra-human devices and narratives expose is an analytical pathway that is in articulation with black humanity; that is, a lens or a framework or a worldview that is cognizant of, but does not seek results or answers that are beholden to either oppression or resistance. Put slightly differently, these extra-human devices and narratives expose navigation without dwelling on its oppression-resistance poles, they expose what kind of mechanisms and schemas and sounds and instruments (musical and not) help make this world navigable for those who are, in most instances, disciplined and surveyed and always imagined as static-in-place (look!). These extra-human devices are succor. Mark Campbell discusses these kinds of possibilities through his work on turntables and mix tapes. He argues, really beautifully, how the found objects and technologies, which inform and enhance black cultural production and music making, provide us with new ways of narrating humanity. This account does not split the 808s from the performer, it does not deny the disappointing and repurposed and sometimes awful and brutal history of 808s, it does not focus on the empty “body” that is manipulating or repurposing or playing the 808s. Instead this narration of humanity understands these moments, people, histories, beats, disappointments, as co-instituting each other which, in turn, reframes blackness outside existing calcified and superfluous and normative white supremacist guidelines (measured vis-à-vis Man-as-human). With this, we have to ask, how is the navigation made and how does...
the navigation feel? How does the succor offer relief or joy or sadness or heartbreak or anger or the intensely beautiful, physiologically? This is, for me, a mathematics of black humanity that already is; or the arithmetic of Black life that will have been.

*We gon keep it bumpin while the 808 is jumpin’.*

**Wicked Mathematics.**

*You + me’s not just arithmetic*
*it’s wicked mathematics*
*the combinations we could do*
*would make your maths look like ABC*

In some ways we are splitting and overlapping racial processes (enfleshment and navigation) in order to work out how extra-human technologies figure into black life and humanity. I have been working with mathematics and other number systems to try and think through these kinds of tensions and analytical difficulties. Mathematics is, for me, an unfamiliar system of knowledge. I am not a mathematician, but I am curious about how practices of categorization are not always, for the unfree, equated with knowable classificatory systems that capture and seal off their abjection. Mathematics underwrites multiple strands of Cartesian logics and positivism, and, in terms of time and place, the practice of slavery is situated firmly amidst European empiricism, various kinds of human and non-human data collection, and matters of fact. In many ways, mathematics enumerates commodification and dispossession through accounting and making black fact. As noted above, the economy of black objecthood is long studied and theorized. My question is, how do we think outside that system, if only transitorily, to draw attention to black life? How has the practice of counting numbers—not even mathematics, per se—fooled us into replicating black objecthood by rewarding (academic and otherwise) systems of accumulation? Here we can stack up a whole bunch of numbers: middle passage ledgers, the lashes and the cotton bails, counted the uncountable Black trans-sex-worker deaths, the ten or sixty or seven men and boys shot in the back in March 2014, the seven thousand, in 1998, women with broken faces, the red records. Why are we only noticing those accounts that cannot bear black life (the ledger)? We must, of course. We must unforget these numbers. But we also know, for example, that the field of mathematics is vast (algebra, calculus, geometry, logic, computation, graph theory, chaos theory, statistics, and much much more), so why attach black history and black experience and black bodies and black flesh only to a plantocratic accounting system that denies these other ways of knowing numbers? This is not, then, about refuting mathematics; it is about
imagining black life from the perspective of struggle. For me, the science of the word uses and dwells on that accounting system as a way to explode knowable mathematical solutions (noticing the hugeness of this system of knowledge and numbers, infinities and pi, the irresolvable), insisting that the word (poetics, narrative) is implicit to that how we count what we count (we are responsible for, we make and adore, the accounts and the accounting). At the same time, the science of the word interrupts that system by noticing how sometimes it cannot capture other ways of poetic relational knowing; the science of the word thus seeks out the ways black people have understood themselves in numerical and mathematical ways that are not so easily sutured to plantocratic and colonial accounting systems. Black life and love are not something you can have, but something you do and can never get. This returns me to the 808s or the LinnDrum machines or eeightt-ohh-eeightt-oneightt-eeightt—here are mathematics—measured and unmeasured bam, drop, eeightt—that reveal a new or different register of black life (I hope!): That, perhaps, is wicked mathematics.

Wicked mathematics. Trying to calculate the incalculable, that which cannot be captured by or in the sociogenic code of Man, but discloses and creates human life as Black life. Ida B. Wells-Barnett, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Sun Ra come to mind in terms of “wicked mathematics,” since they all use mathematics, numbers, calculations, tabulations, charts, tables with and against the master-codes of Man. Of course, on the other side, stand slave ship registers, or school teacher’s ledger in Morris’s Beloved, which lists in different columns the animal and human characteristics of the enslaved. And numbers are different from mathematics but they co-constitute one another to make meaning, to tell the story, to bend or calcify how we know the world. Du Bois and Wells-Barnett both deployed numbers to show how Black Life in the late 19th-century US was constituted by economic, political, sexual, and physical violence. In her autobiography, Wells-Barnett states that she uses “the statistics of lynching [to] prove that according to the charges given, not one-third of the men and women lynched are charged with assaults on white women, and brand that statement as a falsehood invented by the lynchers to justify acts of cruelty and outrage.” While we’ve now come to realize the futility of this particular numbers game, which is why there’s still the need to show that Black lives matter via the incessant cumulative enumeration of Black deaths, there is a inventiveness and enfleshed livingness to Wells-Barnett’s and Du Bois’s mathematics.

Outside biocentric ledgers and coloniality, there is also the long tradition playing the numbers in Afro-diasporic and other communities (Italian lotto, policy, bolita, playing the bug, and so on). In The Philadelphia Negro, Du Bois writes: “Gambling goes on almost openly in the slum sections and occasions, perhaps, more quarreling and crime than any other single cause...” He then goes on to quote at length an article from the Public Ledger:
Hundreds of poor people every day place upon the infatuating lottery money that had better be spent for food and clothing. They actually deny themselves the necessaries of life to gamble away their meagre income with small chance of getting any return.... Many children go hungry and with insufficient clothing as a result of policy playing...The policy evil is, to my mind, the very worst that exists in our large cities as affecting the poorer classes of people.\textsuperscript{73}

Clearly, these numbers perturb Du Bois, but he also states in another context: “history writes itself in figures and diagrams,” for which one needs numbers, for sure. Such a shame Du Bois could not see the history being written in the numeric playing of the bug. Or is the playing the bug in the system, the conjuring of other a-systems, maybe they’re eeightt-ohh-eeightt—eeightt-eeightt wedged between Black Life as world-mattering and Black Life as world(de)forming? Racial capitalism draws a line between sorting and playing, accounting and gambling, the (ledger) books and the (scoreboard) books. The numbers are inhabited; mathematics provides a method that determines the outcome. Heart//////Break.

\textbf{Cardiomyopathy.}

\textit{Something's Jumpin' in your Shirt.}\textsuperscript{74}

I read somewhere that you can die from heartbreak. You can die of a broken heart. Heartbreak can lead to depression, mental health struggles, and heart disease just as they can and do often produce irreparable heart////break. The American Heart Association calls this “broken heart syndrome.”\textsuperscript{75}

Broken heart syndrome can lead to severe, short-term heart muscle failure.
Broken heart syndrome is usually treatable.
The most common signs and symptoms of broken heart syndrome are chest pain and shortness of breath. You can experience these things even if you have no history of heart disease.
In broken heart syndrome, a part of your heart temporarily enlarges and doesn’t pump well, while the rest of your heart functions normally or with even more forceful contractions.

I have always known we could die from a broken heart. We may not go the way of all flesh by and through and because of heartbreak. We may just die a little—those moments when our heart doesn’t pump well, the shortness of breath, the constricted, stifling circuits of chest pain. I realized, too, I cannot sufficiently work through contradictory workings of love and anticipatory loss and so I get stuck, mid-heartbreak. My heart keeps breaking, over and over, every single day. I can only
explain the feeling as cold air being shot through my upper chest. Freezing cold air moving through my chest, day after day. It is not simply sorrow. It opens up, too, with possibilities. Last summer, I woke up in the middle of the night with excruciating pains in my chest. My first thought was: heart attack (family history, predisposition, stress, and alla that) rather than heart///break, because the purely physical is more readily available as a diagnosis in a biocentric world. The throbbing aches got worse whenever I tried to lay down. I waited to call the doctor’s office until the morning, because I didn’t want to wake my sleeping daughters and subject them to the potential heartbreak of having to worry about the health of their parent at such a young age. After many hours of agony and speculation via numerous medical websites, my physician confirmed to me that I was afflicted with was an acute case of heartburn. Since heartburn is not a direct result of that particular hollow muscle, it was always a mystery to me why it was called that in English. As consequence of experiencing its painful boom so intensely in and around my heart, I finally understood viscerally why this condition was named heartburn, and how it differed from yet may be related to heart///break.

Can I get another take?

I wasn’t being honest in the last paragraph, taking an easy way out and not truly resting with heart///break. My full armor was still on, it’s dazzling and beautiful.76 My heartburn was related to heart///break. It has been almost ten years now: Lawyers. Department of Children and Family Services. Police. Doctors. Custody evaluators. Therapists. More lawyers. At some point, I am forced to justify to Them why my experience of sexual violation/violence and my queerness do not make me an unfit parent…Eviscerated silence. Boom. Heart///break.

This why I write and speak about ungendering/Blackqueerness and sexual violence/violation in detached, hushed scholarly tonalities—armor on, decked out in those gorgeously abstract gold fronts, like a shhh—, while knowing that I do so because they mark the core of who I am. There I is, living in, living with.77 I try to strip off the armor slowly, carefully but it’s difficult. The armor has merged with my “natural” body, blanketing my flesh, enshrining my psyche, encasing that hollow muscle. Fuck a cyborg, though, really. Boom...Like What?

Sitting on an airplane, I pause watching Moonlight for what must be the tenth time; it reduces me to not just tears but abject bawling face and all the emotions associated with it.78 As opposed to Mary J., I can’t even pretend that I’m not gon cry.79 Granted, I sob at many things: everything from Black Ink Crew, to Hortense Spillers’ sentences, to the worst manipulative Disney movies; and I still haven’t been able to listen to Prince’s “Conditions of the Heart” or “Sometimes It Snows in April” since his passing almost 18 months ago. Simply thinking about these songs brings tears to my eyes. Still. And, while I have many intellectual reservations about Barry Jenkins’s film and its reception, my critical shield washes away with blubbering, messy, tears whenever I enter the world of this film. Undone every time, Moonlight hits me like the full weight of twenty 808s; booooooom; heart///break. The film shatters my heart,
for myself, for all sensitive femme/feminine Black boys and splinters at a world so intent on violently destroying our too–muchness, on paralyzing our wings, brutally overseeing how our softness congeals into a tough, protective veneer. Where do you go when your being is too much for this world? Where? Where is our love?

Though supremely frustrated that we do not see an adult version of the Chiron played so brilliantly by Ashton Sanders in the second part of the film’s triptych, I understand why the Trevante Rhodes’s Chiron in the third part must so fiercely don his thick sheath of masculinity. For some of us it’s not protuberant triceps and gold-plated grills but intricate theoretical vernaculars, themselves extensions of necessary-for-survival-street-corner-verbal-dexterities, tumbling out our mouths and dripping from our fingers, that are supposed enshrine us like intellectual superpowers. Still the same function. We were never meant to survive into adulthood, at least not as sensitive femme/feminine Black boys. How do you inhabit a universe, where you can’t even be imagined utopically (like a grown Chiron portrayed by Ashton Sanders), let alone tenderly, lovingly?

So, I began to weep for myself and all the Black boys like me, reflexly re–collecting palpably, physically, physiologically, what it felt like, what it still sometimes feels like to spend hours assembling and wedging into your armor just to walk down the block, or to simply enter a room full of strangers, because something between Infinity and Nothingness might pop off, sometimes a word, other times a look or a slight bodily movement. I inspect my armor again, now roughly four decades old, sensing that it has become a little too tight, a bit itchy, ripped there, chipped here, and worn out all over. Living in, living with...heart/////break, possibilities, openings:

This is why you and I and we dance. We’ll go out to the floor.80

Loving intensely and then monumental loss. Loving quietly, consistently and then booming hurt. We can also go the way of the flesh. We can die from a broken heart. This is terrifying, particularly if understood in relation to the heartbreaking history that underlies TR-808s. 808s break hearts. Boom. Jump. Succor. This is part of what we want to understand and patiently learn. The long histories of racial violence, the looming and real violations, the heart and the 808s, the mathematics and the flesh, the science of the word—these are sites that may not ordinarily understood or thought together, but when they are, they reveal black life and black livingness as shifting locations enfolded by the arteries of endurably heartbreakingly and joyful routes and roots. The hollow muscular organ filled up.


6 Kelly Rowland, “Like This,” from Ms. Kelly: Mya, “My Love Is Like Wo,” from Moodring; Something for the People, “My Love is the Shhh!,” from This Time It’s Personal.


8 Sparkle’s niece was one of the first girls to accuse Kelly of sexual abuse and Sparkle later testified against Kelly during his 2008 trial for child pornography charges.


This is in contradistinction to Oliver Sacks, Frantz Fanon, Sylvia Wynter and Katherine McKittrick. “Unparalleled Catastrophe for Our Species? Or, to Give
See Jan Gaye and David Ritz.

David Ritz, Dan Rys, “Afrika Bambaataa Sexual Abuse Allegations: What
See also: David Scott

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Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle


Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks (119). On “suffocating reification” see pp. 89.


This is in contradistinction to “dysgraphia” (the inability to write due to brain damage or disorder, deployed by Christina Sharpe) and “aphasia” (a communication disorder that results from damage to the parts of the brain that contain language, a word deployed by Frank B. Wilderson III). Here, I think, Sylvia Wynter’s science of the word is especially helpful. In my understanding, dysgraphia-aphasia are mobilized by Sharpe and Wilderson as “literary” or “theoretical” terms that help them think about anti-blackness and other forms of oppression. These terms help the authors tease out how some people cannot see or write or imagine black humanity. These terms are applied to our existing biocentric system. These terms help the authors make sense of black dehumanization. These terms help the authors work out how when some folks see black, they can only enunciate it in relation to hegemonic white supremacist normative conceptions of humanity. Yet both terms, dysgraphia and aphasia, carry the heavy clinical weight that is
paired with learning disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, and other neuroatypicalities. In addition to the taxing weight laid on those who are cast, in these scholarly works, as neurologically damaged and imperfect (disabled)—a move which refuses human-impairment as an alternative form of humanity—I want to suggest that if they were informed in any way by Wynter’s framework they would have (perhaps) shied away from deploying-and-emptying these terms. Or, alternatively and definitely more interestingly, the authors may have understood these terms as simultaneously clinical-narrative. One cannot discount the clinical underpinnings of these terms—no matter how hard one tries! So, what is at stake, for (black and non-black) neuroatypical and non-neurotypical people, for (black and non-black) people with learning disabilities, for neurotypical (black and non-black) people when brain dysfunction, symbolically, explains racism or anti-blackness or the inability to “see” or “read” black “correctly”? What happens when “illness” or “disorder” explains why we, or why they, hate? How are race and disability—impairment as the embodiment of blackness or impairment as projection of anti-blackness—being analytically mobilized to understand racial violence? And how do we grapple with the unsettling numbers, the math, the accumulations, the reams of paper that read: black folks with impairments are more likely to be incarcerated, murdered by police, and so on? What of the story of violence resulting in brain damage, communication disorder, the inability to write? What Wynter taught me [Katherine] is that the bifurcation of science and poetics is a kind of disciplined brutality. I have spent a lot of time thinking about how the willful separation of the literary and the scientific does the work of colonial positivism—suggesting, explicitly, that there are kinds and types of discreet knowledge while also hiving off ways of knowing and being. So, dysgraphia-aphasia can never be simply symbolic or metaphorical or literary. They are deeply clinical, and they are lived, too, as clinically-poetic narratives within our prevailing system of knowledge that despises difference. If we trust Wynter’s formulation of bios-mythos [and I, Katherine, do]—it means these terms are always bios-mythos. Just as the 808s cannot be dislodged from that awful violence and be rendered “pure technology” and without history, the clinical-medical-neurological-and-poetic contours of impairment and neuroatypicality-non-neurotypicality cannot be dislodged from dysgraphia-aphasia. If this (a metaphorically impaired humanity) informs the analytical frame then, theoretically, it risks reflexly reproducing a dehumanizing law-like logic wherein ability and neurotypicality actualize what it means to be totally and fully human. This not only legitimizes biocentric corporeal categories in hierarchical terms, it also fails to imagine relational struggles across a range of corporeal and racial identifications. Singularity is required and Man-as-human restfully and stably reproduces itself at the apex of this formulation. With this, the trope of the “disorder”—which is being mobilized as a way to understand, say, racism or anti-blackness or scripts that degrade blackness—is locked into a biocentric frame, with disability, neurotypicality, illegibility, in fact, inadvertently positionig the authors of the symbolic-literary dysgraphia-aphasia as normally and normatively able, typical, legible, non-disordered! Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016; Frank B. Wilderson III, “The Vengeance of Vertigo: Aphasia and Abjection in the Political Trials of Black Insurgents.” *InTensions Journal* 5 (2011), http://www.yorku.ca/ent意/issue5/articles/pdfs/frankbwildersoniiiarticle.pdf. See also: Sylvia Wynter and Katherine McKittrick. “Unparalleled Catastrophe for Our Species? Or, to Give Humanness a Different Future: Conversations.” In *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, edited by Katherine McKittrick. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015, 9-89.


36 “No pain is forever.” Rihanna, “Hard,” feat. Young Jeezy, from *Rated R*.


38 Much of our thoughts on Fenty were inspired by Alisa Bierria’s “‘Where Them Bloggers At’: Reflections


41 Similarly, in 2014 a surveillance video of Janay Rice being brutally beaten by her husband, football player Ray Rice, in an elevator was made public by TMZ and circulated widely on social media.

42 Rihanna, “We Found Love,” from Talk That Talk.

43 cf. Prince, “Sex in the Summer,” on Emancipation. Several scientists and theorists have postulated that humans can not only discern lower frequencies better than high ones, but that this is partially a consequence of fetuses hearing the lower frequencies of the mother’s heartbeat and of her voice in utero, which is crucial for early neural development. See Michael J. Hove, et al. “Superior Time Perception for Lower Musical Pitch Explains Why Bass-Ranged Instruments Lay down Musical Rhythms.” Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 111:28 (2014): 10383-10388.


45 Beth Richie, Arrested Justice, 21-22. Similarly, Bierria remarks: “Black women who are victims of violence are not simply accused of bringing it upon themselves, they are dis-positioned as its perpetrator… Seemingly, when black women are violated, their experiences of it and testimonies of resilience and resistance are vulnerable to politics that define their actions as instigating the violence.” Bierria, 106

46 Though I’m not sure whether this is apocryphal or not, Fenty was so enamored with this scene that she did not charge a licensing fee for the film’s use of “Diamonds” in its entirety, as is customary. This is complicated by the fact that the director of the film is a white French woman, Céline Sciamma. I raise this primarily to bring into focus the labor requested of Fenty in this context.

47 Rihanna, “Diamonds,” from Unapologetic.


49 This is really different than the cyborg which is, for both of us, a figure that extends the colonial project precisely because it seeks to dislodge itself from the flesh, denies practices of black and non-black servitude, even if sutured to these enfleshments and embodied racial economies in abstract refusal.

50 Timbaland, feat. Brandy “808”


52 Jayson Greene, “Is Rihanna the Most Influential Pop Singer of the Last Decade? Turn Your Ear a Certain Way and You Can Hear Her Everywhere.” Pitchfork. While Fenty has spoken about feeling the need to ‘tone down’ using the inflections of her mother tongue, Bajan Creole, both in her singing and speech, it bears mentioning that she has consistently recorded songs (“Dem Haters,” “Man Down,” etc.), beginning with her 2005 debut single “Pon de Replay,” that have deployed Bajan Creole (and other Afro-Caribbean intonations). Fenty has also collaborated with Caribbean artists such as Dwane Husbands and Vybz Kartel

53 Katherine McKittrick, Demonic Grounds, 121-141.


This also points to mathematics that are not fully sutured. See: Mike Vuolo. "What Happens When a Language Has No Numbers?" *Slate* (16 Oct. 2013); Misty Sol, "Hidden Figure: A Meditation on Genius and the African Origin of Math." *Philadelphia Printworks* (26 February 2017).


This also points to mathematics that are not fully sutured to colonial accounting systems—African fractals or "anumeric" cultures, for example—which points to other ways of knowing. See: Mike Vuolo. “What Happens When a Language Has No Numbers?” *Slate* (16 Oct. 2013); Misty Sol, “Hidden Figure: A Meditation on Genius and the African Origin of Math.” *Philadelphia Printworks* (26 February 2017).


Malcolm McLaren and the Bootzilla Orchestra, “Something’s Jumpin’ in Your Shirt.”

American Heart Association, "Is Broken Heart Syndrome Real?" [http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/More/Cardiomyopathy/Is-Broken-Heart-Syndrome-Real_UCM_448547_Article.jsp#WNK56v21vY](http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/Conditions/More/Cardiomyopathy/Is-Broken-Heart-Syndrome-Real_UCM_448547_Article.jsp#WNK56v21vY). See also: Iain M. Carey, Stephen DeWilde, Tess Harris, Christina R. Victor, Derek G. Cook, “Increased Risk of Acute Cardiovascular Events After Partner

76 Dawn Richard, *Armor On*.


79 Mary J. Blige, “Not Gon’ Cry,” from *Waiting to Exhale (Original Soundtrack Album)*.

80 Kanye West, “Paranoid,” from *808s and Heartbreak*. 