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# Brown Punk

## Kalup Linzy's Musical Anticipations

*Tavia Nyong'o*



*Thinking thought to be a body wearing language as clothing or language a body of thought which is a soul or body the clothing of a soul, she is veiled in silence. A veiled, unavailable body makes an available space.*

—Harryette Romell Mullen (2006:62)

*What does it mean to think of history not as a mother, that is, not as a container that holds subjects as part of its contents, but as an internal object that lives the subject as the double of another?*

—Joan Copjec (2002:104)

## Introduction

### Feeling Punk

Kalup Linzy slinks onto the stage, hesitant and unassuming. Even as he grabs hold of a microphone, or sits at a piano, his gaze is downcast, demeanor painfully shy. Audiences braced for the extroverted exuberance of drag are pulled into a private world more commonly associated with certain singer-songwriters—who make their fans feel somehow ashamed for putting

them through the exquisite torture of public performance. Like those singer-songwriters, Linzy shares his feelings, but on terms that are not quite confessional. Instead, through a series of stage personae that almost imperceptibly shade into each other, Linzy slowly and deliberately produces across the surface of his body an intimate presence that evades, in its roving and restless appetites, its capture as spectacle. In his songs we encounter “a body wearing language as clothing,” but one which is nonetheless, as the poet Harryette Mullen notes in her enigmatic poem, “veiled in silence” (2006:62). The poem arranges its vocabulary of “body-language-clothing-soul” into a black feminist topos that has everything to do with Linzy’s black queer personae. In my second epigraph, psychoanalytic critic Joan Copjec proposes we dispense with traditional historicism (which she here aligns with regressive depictions of femininity yoked to reproduction) in order to posit a subject stirred from within by history as a dividing object. Mullen’s topology of language and silence, together with Copjec’s positing of history as an internal other, supply the principles I bring to bear in my interpretation of Kalup Linzy’s performance aesthetic. The particular history that lives the performed subject as the double of another is song.

Sitting on the edge of my couch,  
 I’ll be sitting till the evening comes.  
 Waiting for my piece of trade,  
 Oh, I hope he isn’t late.  
 Cause I’m sitting on the edge of my couch,  
 Watching the time tick away.  
 Yes, I’m sitting on the edge of my couch,  
 Passing time. (Linzy 2008)<sup>1</sup>

These lyrics from “Edge of My Couch,” bringing the listener into the Brooklyn-based artist Kalup Linzy’s 2008 video song cycle *SweetBerry Sonnet*, are carried by a melody that is instantly recognizable, even from a scan of words on the page.<sup>2</sup> But “Edge of My Couch” is not a cover of that original song. It is an uncovering, an iteration beyond interpretation wherein, as Gelsey Bell puts it, “song is no longer theorized as an ideal to interpret but an *activity of carrying* to be performed” (2008; emphasis added). Using just the minimal accompaniment of an electronic keyboard to support his voice, as one might hear in a modestly equipped contemporary black church, Linzy’s earnest and throaty singing skirts the lyrical and stylistic edges of a song it never fully arrives at. Drawing on gospel, soul, and R&B influences, his queer approach produces African American musical history as “an internal object” that sounds “the subject as the double of another.” Does this technique give us another means of hearing the archive in performance? And if it does, what is at stake politically in such an “activity of carrying”—such a “doubling of another”—for the vexed social subjects we call “black” and “queer”?

1. All lyrics are by Kalup Linzy from *SweetBerry Sonnet* (2008).

2. For those to whom it is not instantly recognizable, the song is identified and discussed at the conclusion of this essay.

*Figure 1. (previous page) Kalup Linzy as Taiwan in “All My Churen” (2003). (Video still courtesy of Kalup Linzy)*

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In the video song cycle<sup>3</sup> *SweetBerry Sonnet*, audiences are drawn into the ongoing drama of Linzy's performance persona Taiwan, a black gay man—a punk<sup>4</sup>—who has just turned down his boyfriend Harry's proposal of marriage, a decision that leaves him emotionally drained and psychologically rudderless. Like the delicate flower he often wears in his hair, and like his very name—which conjures up an Orientalist imaginary—Taiwan is exotic to his environment, its language, and its institutions. Fittingly, his lament takes a hybrid form. *SweetBerry Sonnet* extends characters and plots set out in Linzy's videos, forming a DIY soap opera featuring art star Katonya, Labisha the diva, and Taiwan's mother, brother, and grandmother. Using little more than wigs, makeup, and attitude, Linzy portrays many of these characters himself, and, employing an electronic voice changer, dubs in almost all the other voices. *SweetBerry Sonnet*, with its foregrounding of Taiwan's sincere, unadorned singing voice (mostly unadorned: some songs do employ audible "pitch correction" technology to obtain vocal effects), initially seems a departure from the comical and bawdy use of the voice in his videos. Within this development, however, is a continued engagement with the alienation effects achievable in the era of the voice's mechanical reproducibility. Like the contemporary popular culture it doubles, the song cycle is iterated across media: it can be listened to on CD or MP3, viewed on YouTube and as a video installation, or experienced live, with Linzy performing against a video backdrop, often turning from his audience to interact with the characters onscreen. The hesitancy of Linzy's live performance produces an effect neither intimate nor remote. It is rather *extimate*, insofar as it brings the auditor into a scene palpating with the felt absence of connection. This extimacy, which employs "available space" to make an "unavailable body," represents *SweetBerry Sonnet*'s indirect commentary on the prospects for assimilating the minoritarian subject, black and queer, to the dominant and symbolic order, represented here by the institution of marriage.

The twin questions of the emergence of a "post-racial America" and the legalization of gay marriage provide the relevant historical-political backdrop to such a performed disidentification. This context to Linzy's art seems crucial to acknowledge, as recent reviewers have noticed, including Karen Rosenberg (2009), who begins and ends a review in the *New York*



Figure 2. Kalup Linzy, live performance still, *SweetBerry Sampled*, Imperial Theatre at CZAR, Tampa, FL, May 2009. (Photo by J.M. Lennon/Lennon Media)

3. I term *SweetBerry Sonnet* a "video song cycle" because it exists in three media—music video, a separate audio recording, and live performance accompanied by music video or live backing band—and this phrase seems to best capture these multiple permutations.

4. African American vernacular for a gay man.

*Times* of Linzy's 2009 Studio Museum of Harlem retrospective, *If It Don't Fit*, with a discussion of Harry's proposal of marriage. And yet to approach the work solely from such a perspective—the logical extension of which would be to hold it in some direct way accountable to this immediate context—would yield as unsatisfactory a result as when such an approach is applied to the work of another alchemist of racial abjection, Kara Walker.<sup>5</sup> If it is possible that the politics of aesthetics reside elsewhere than in their heroic adequacy to their current moment, then there is something worth lingering over in the weepy, bitchy, and manifestly unheroic songs of Taiwan. They hold a history that splits the subject precisely where progressive inclusion promises to make it whole. The most abject of the performance doubles that Linzy has so far invented, Taiwan possesses both the closest resemblance to Linzy in terms of the social diacritics “black,” “gay,” “male,” and at the same time, through his splitting, veiling function, he also anarranges the autobiographical personality onstage. Taiwan's masochistic displays enact what Joan Copjec terms an ethics of sublimation, one that is attentive, even devoted, to the residues that are ordinarily excluded from our brisk, officious, and progressive conduct of personhood. If becoming a person entails a certain minimum of unbecoming—of dejection, dysfunction, and disarray—then Taiwan's unavailability unravels the skein of sociality within which performances of self remain moored. But rather than directly resist that obligatory personhood, as represented by the prospective inclusion through marriage into the symbolic order, Taiwan rocks and even wriggles under the erotic, dramatic weight of that order's burden. Although seemingly passive, Linzy's performance of Taiwan reveals how limiting the notion of passivity is in the face of his more uncompromising withdrawal.



Figure 3. Kalup Linzy production still “Sit Down, Child,” 2010. (Courtesy of Kalup Linzy)

Copjec's reading of Lacan goes a long way in overturning the received view of sublimation, which sees it always as the repression of the sexual and aggressive appetites of the Id and their reappearance, in transformed form, as high-minded ethical ideals or artistic vision. Such a view of sublimation, as Copjec shows in her reading of Kara Walker, is inadequate to a black queer or feminist artwork that is highly explicit in its encounter with sexuality and aggression. The exuberant profanity and humor (both of which Freud links to aggression) and sexual frankness of Linzy's art defy this received view of artistic sub-

limination. These features are made more explicable if we follow Copjec's suggestion that what sublimation detaches thought from is not sex but the symbolic order that would clothe the body in the language of its institutions. Sublimation is thus not a direct resistance to the symbolic order, but as Mullen's poem suggests, a process whereby the language a body wears as clothing becomes itself “a body of thought which is a soul.” That is to say, in sublimation the dominant order encounters an internal object, a song, that divides it, making an available space.

5. And indeed, I draw my epigraph from an essay by Copjec on Walker (2002:82–107).

The topology of Mullen's poem, which rotates thought-language-clothing-body-soul through a specific constellation, describes and enacts a poetic sublimation of histories of racial and gender domination that I wish to link to Linzy's comparable impulse to displace the institutions of symbolic order with a rotating series of illicit contracts or "trades."

To get at this relation between the rhythmic, doubled movement of poetry and the unheroic conduct of the punk, we must join Harryette Mullen in "sleeping with the dictionary," taking the vagrant, vernacular language that always lacks a proper etymology and provenance, and tracking its accrual on the unconscious tongues of history (2002). As a turn to the Oxford English Dictionary will reflect, "punk" is an intrinsic malapropism (OED 1989). Its derivation is obscure, the distinctions between its various meanings are blurred, and even whether it is a single word with multiple uses, or several homonyms, is difficult to resolve. "Punk" has referred to prostitutes, female and male; to the young, abused companions of hobos; to circus runaways; to those feeling ill or out of sorts; to cheap bread and decaying wood; to moral spinelessness; to a particularly amateurish and anarchic musical style; to juvenile delinquents; to the male victims of prison rape; and, particularly in the African American vernacular, to "passive" male homosexuals.<sup>6</sup> "Punk" gathers to it the outside or underbelly of society, less through a specific semiotics than through what is frequently, if amorphously, termed an *attitude*. Punk attitude presents a hole or aperture in the symbolic order, through which history gleams.

This attitude can be considered topologically. The definition of punk as a hole (as someone who can be used "as" a hole) itself has a hole in it, insofar as its "rare" and "obsolete" meaning can indicate an absence as much as a presence (or better, an absence attached to a presence as its constitutive inside). Punk as hole or absence is hinted at in the possible etymological link to "puncture," but it also emerges out of the very structure of punk's presence as a "decayed or rotten [...] protuberance" and the space left behind when decayed wood falls out or is pulled out of a trunk (OED 1989). If this usage of "punk" as soft, decaying matter supports the vernacular analogy between the nutritional value of dead wood and cheap bread, it also turns the topology of punk into a torus, the donut or inner tube shape whose center of gravity lies outside its volume, whose inner exterior is topologically continuous with its outer exterior, whose shape is for both of these reasons ex-centric to itself, neither phallus nor vulva, but a veiled, unavailable body that makes an available space.

This topology of the punk enables a running through and out of the shit the world throws at its most vulnerable. Even as it makes an available space, it fails, in its very passivity, at being called into service as a container. Reading a performer like Kalup Linzy into the genealogy of punk shows how punk itself cannot be identified solely by a semiotics of three-chord wonders or day-glo Mohawks. Punk attitude is productive of a range of affect; Johnny Rotten yes, but Billie Holiday too. Punk lives the subject as a double of another, and because this is so, its musical iterations proceed less through historical resemblance than through perpetual transfiguration. Punk passivity, its masochistic drive towards unbecoming, is not the acceptance of social exclusion or stigma, but a withdrawal from the constraints of an affirmative culture.

## Da Young and Da Mess

### Extolling the Interpassive Subject

If punk feelings help specify a radically passive and even masochistic orientation to the world, what are we to make of the frenetic social and technological interaction that also surfaces in Kalup Linzy's art, an interactivity that overflows the boundaries of the content of his works to partially determine the form of their making, distribution, and display?<sup>7</sup> Linzy's work fits into an idiom of "socially networked art," one in which websites like MySpace, YouTube, and Facebook serve as

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6. For more on punk as a vernacular keyword, see Nyong'o (2005).

7. On the anti-heroic queer and "radical passivity," see Halberstam (2009).



Figure 4. Kalup Linzy, after *The Birth of Venus*. A 2009 collaboration with fashion designers Lazaro Hernandez and Jack McCollough of Proenza Schouler. (Courtesy of Kalup Linzy)

key staging grounds for work, supplementing or even replacing more traditional gallery, museum, and performance venues. Linzy has embraced the cross-platform star system with guileless ingenuity, collaborating with pop musicians, Hollywood actors, and even fashion designers Lazaro Hernandez and Jack McCollough of Proenza Schouler. Is this not the aim of the dominant order at present: to unveil all the innermost feelings and subject them to a technological and capitalist rationalization? And yet, we should not be too quick to equate what might be a mode of critical immanence with an uncritical indulgence in what Michael Wang terms “new euphorias of the digitized subject” (2007:101–2). Instead, we might approach the language that Linzy’s personae wear as clothing with an attentiveness to the interpassivity at the heart of social interactivity, a passivity that Linzy’s interest in the media technologies approaching their obsolescence helps illustrate.

Young, messy, and urban though they may be, Linzy’s performance personae are linked through bonds of family and sentiment to a rural, regional lifeworld held together by strong, black women. Linzy’s videos hone in on the ambivalent meanings that traditional daytime soaps like *As the World Turns*, *The Young and the Restless*, and *Days of Our Lives* held for these older women in the Southern, working-class, black community where he grew up. This ambivalence rests in the disparity between the wealthy, white

world of many soap operas and their working-class, African American viewers, upon whom television’s white fantasies of the good life, it might be thought, could only possess a distorting effect. Linzy’s adoption of soap opera form approaches it with the historical affect of its rural, Southern black female audience, which he refuses to relinquish for an affirmative vision of television in which minorities are adequately represented. Similarly ambivalent are the effects of the filaments of telephone wire that hold Linzy’s social universe together. Often an intergenerational link between mothers and children, the telephone is also a promiscuous device: a device of promiscuity—as when Taiwan watches it, waiting for his piece of trade to ring—and a device that is itself promiscuous, assisting with unwanted intrusions upon the intimate life of the artist Katonya: from nosy survey companies, as in *KK Queens Survey* (2005), or from her boss wondering why she is not at work, as in *Conversations wit de Churen IV: Play wit de Churen* (2005). As a conduit of sentiment and relationality, the telephone is also as potentially disciplinary as the television: both technologies threaten to regulate and dominate in the guise of enabling their users to connect, attach, and identify.

What both communicative media also share is a relation to what Žižek terms “the interpassive subject” constituted by forms of interaction that are actually, he suggests, a displacement of passivity.

Interpassivity delegates thoughts, beliefs, and enjoyment to a designated other, who enacts them on our behalf. Through interpassivity Žižek detects a “subject supposed to believe”:

There are some beliefs, the most fundamental ones, which are from the very outset “decentered,” beliefs of the Other; the phenomenon of the “subject supposed to believe,” is thus universal and structurally necessary. From the very outset, the speaking subject displaces his belief onto the big Other qua the order of pure semblance, so that the subject never “really believed in it”; from the very beginning, the subject refers to some decentered other to whom he imputes this belief. (1998)

Rather than oppress us with sentiments we feel obliged to support despite our conscious disbelief in them, interpassivity relieves us of the obligation to feel, know, or believe, but upon the condition that someone else really do so in our stead. It is thus a virtual logic of affective doublings, which makes it so suggestive for performance analysis. And where Žižek focuses on interpassivity as a post-ideological mode of self-deception, I would suggest that the doubling it enables in Linzy’s work affords more positive implications.

Saliently, sentimental “women’s” genres have long been held as prime examples of interpassivity, pejoratively construed. In James Baldwin’s scathing indictment, which makes an argument parallel to Žižek’s, the delegated feeling of interpassivity masks a real indifference, even cruelty:

Sentimentality, the ostentatious parading of excessive and spurious emotion, is the mark of dishonesty, the inability to feel; the wet eyes of the sentimentalist betray his aversion to experience, his fear of life, his arid heart; and it is always, therefore, the signal of secret and violent inhumanity, the mask of cruelty. ([1955] 1984:14)<sup>8</sup>

Sentimentality may mask a hidden, arid core of cruelty, but in so doing, it also exposes a decentered subject, whose affects reside elsewhere than the interior from which they are supposed to emerge. Baldwin’s language of insides and outsides, reflecting the modernist depth psychology of his day, can be re-read topologically, as indicating continuous surfaces rather than static binaries. This opens out the question of what sentimental subjects gain from the false emotions they ostentatiously parade. The “excessive and spurious” affect that lives the subject as the double of another is indeed yoked to a masked cruelty. However, it is not a cruelty of the subject, but of the symbolic order within which the subject is positioned.

8. While Baldwin refers to the sentimentalist as “he” in this quotation, the essay is directed largely at women’s literary culture and, in particular, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, which is the titular “protest novel” in question.



Figure 5. Kalup Linzy as Taiwan in “Conversations with the Churen III” from Da Young and Da Mess (2005). (Video still courtesy of Kalup Linzy and Taxter and Spengemann)



As Linzy's characters consume and reenact sentimental, melodramatic scripts, they challenge us to understand what, if anything, they gain from being a captive audience to a narrative form that is so commodified it was named after its original sponsors (soap manufacturers). Excluded in terms of race, region, and class from the images on the television screen, his characters' lives are nonetheless mirrors of its melodramatic scenarios. And yet, as I will show, their mimesis drains those very dramas of their power, precisely through an interpassivity that displaces onto designated others a fundamental stake in the symbolic order within which racial, gender, and class domination is reproduced.

What identitarian perspectives on minoritarian fandom miss is precisely the means through which, in assigning one's passivity to formulaic narratives of sentimentalized whiteness, wealth, and unscrupulous behavior, the black female viewers of soap operas may actually have relieved themselves of the burden of actively caring about and investing in the symbolic order that positions them subordinately. It is this disinvestment-through-passivity that Linzy registers in the slack denotation wherein *The Young and the Restless* becomes *Da Young and Da Mess* and *As the World Turns* becomes *As Da Art World Might Turn*. Like performance art legend Jack Smith's attraction to "moldy" genres, Linzy's use of the soap operatic topos of a recursive, even hollowed-out passage of time ("Like sand in an hourglass...these are the days of our lives") to tell his young and messy narratives sidesteps linear and progressive time, and the developmental ideal of identity that accompanies it.

If television provides Linzy with one interpassive framework, the telephone provides another. From early short, skit-like videos like *Ride to Da Club* to longer narrative videos like *As Da Art World Might Turn* to music videos like "Ignorant Oil," telephone conversations figure as a crucial building block of subaltern sociality. But Linzy's videos disorientate and estrange the quotidian act of talking on the phone. We see this in the congruence between the affective mapping phone conversations perform in these works and the alibi they afford for Linzy to play multiple characters.<sup>9</sup> Through montage, Linzy populates his world with as many copies of himself as needed. Personae are lightly, but never over-attentively, distinguished from each other through costume, speech, and gesture. His use of video in live performance also repeats this tactic. There is an observable continuum of Linzy's staged personas, scored by a series of almost imperceptible gaps between actor and role that become less a matter of difference between appearance and reality than a difference *within* appearance. We hear this in the soundtrack of the videos. While most of his works continue to depend upon on-camera interplay with other actors, Linzy dubs almost all the dialogue in with electronically tweaked iterations of his own voice. The seeming narcissism of such a gesture of omni-ventriloquism draws out the interpassivity of mediated social interactions. Linzy's characters are made to interact less with the voice on the other end of the line, than in relation to an order of pure semblance (appearance) and its "subject supposed to know" (Lacan [1973] 1997:230–45). I would even posit that dubbing in ersatz voices is, perhaps unexpectedly, a technique for veiling the body in silence: in this case, prerecorded language is the veil, clothing a body in its discourse. This supposition is born out in the contents of what Linzy's characters tell each other over the phone. Their speech is thickly encrusted with platitudinous language, slow and overly enunciated dialogue giving it the cadence of rote speech. A composite and anonymous subject, rather than an individual, emerges. In order to feel like themselves, Linzy's characters have to speak, think, and even be embodied by another.

Within the context of black performance, such a starkly denaturalized aesthetic technique stands in apparent opposition to a tradition that places such a premium upon self-expression that a central term of Western metaphysics, "soul," has been appropriated and radically redefined. Here, Linzy's work effects a subtle rearrangement of expected stylistics, bringing the

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9. On affective mapping, see the introduction to Jonathan Flatley's *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (2008).



Figure 6. Kalup Linzy as Taiwan in “All My Churen” (2003). (Video still courtesy of Kalup Linzy and Taxter and Spengemann)

soulful or sacred into scandalous proximity with the profane. The video “All My Churen” (2003) takes up the interpassivity of the telephone psychic, who, as a subject supposed to know, racks up per-minute fees by keeping callers on the line as long as the (im)possibility of a definitive answer to their queries can be kept dangling. In the video, Taiwan sits in a bubble bath, on the phone with psychic Lanita, whom he wishes to decide for him whether or not to accept Harry’s proposal of marriage. As he holds the tiny receiver to his ear, he confesses that he “can’t say yes *or* no” to the proposal. He wants Lanita to disclose the truth of desires that he himself cannot access. Lanita, however, performs the classic ruse of making her advice dependent upon what Taiwan can give *her*. The twist is that she asks not simply that he cross her palm with silver, but also vocally emote over the phone line. She demands he perform his request as a soulful moan, and he responds with a steadily increasing, masochistic moan — “Pleeeeeease tell meee” — as she urges him on to “give me some more soul.”

Lanita’s elicitation of a soulful performance from Taiwan bespeaks the role that the song as internal object can play in relation to the symbolic order. While Taiwan’s moaning fails to resolve his dilemma, his dirty trade with the telephone psychic (impassioned moans for filthy lucre) does leave, as its sublimation, a curious residue. Viewing the arc of Linzy’s videos, one discovers that the “sonorous block” of melisma — the quavering, over-the-top pleading that Taiwan improvises over the phone — is later reused as the hilarious climax to Linzy’s hokum song, “Asshole,” which appears on *SweetBerry Sonnet*.<sup>10</sup> “Asshole” is another of Taiwan’s songs of abject loss, in this case concerning a man who leaves him because, among other faults, he was “stingy with his asshole.” Linking these two songs through the repeated sonic motif profanes

10. On the “sonorous block” of music, see Bell (2008).

the sanctity of prospective marriage with an explicit account of carnal limitations. It is as if the sound that separates Taiwan from sacred union is the undertone of the sound that distances him from full sexual consummation. Both perform language as the division between body and soul, making an available space in the symbolic order. Or, as Taiwan laments at the end of the song: “Why did my asshole fuck it up for my soul?”



Figure 7. Kalup Linzy in music video for “Asshole” from *SweetBerry Sonnet* (2008). (Courtesy of Kalup Linzy and Taxter and Spengemann)

The sonorous melisma carried over from the sacred into the profane and back again provides a musical resource for anticipating an alternative situation for Taiwan. I say anticipates rather than imagines or constructs because the psychic fails to solve Taiwan’s small-town dilemma: how to marry his boyfriend without exposing himself to public shame in front of his family and community. She does not actually know how to revise or rescript the symbolic order. But in her failure as a “subject supposed to know,” she unwittingly succeeds as the vehicle through which Taiwan can invent/utter a musical “anticipation,” as José Muñoz describes it, of a different, as yet indeterminate form of life (2009). This inadvertent achievement is important for rethinking what the minoritarian subject gets out of interpassivity. If Taiwan is immo-

bilized between, on the one hand, a socially induced shame about going public with his queerness, and, on the other, the unresponsiveness of Lanita, who simply registers his complaint as the sound of an eternal return (“singing that same old song again”) without ever truly interpreting his desire, then what seems to be at stake is the almost indiscernible difference between an ordinary interpassive relation to the subject supposed to know and a more radical and uncompromising form of passivity that withdraws even from this delegation of feeling.

## The Queer Extimacies of Waiting

To get at this difference, we must return to the ex-centric topology of the subject as proposed by Lacan, and pursue the implications it holds for “The Pursuit of Gay (Happyness)” (2007)—to quote another Linzy video title—a pursuit that brings Harry and Taiwan together, and drives them apart.

When Harry left town  
 Delusional, broken hearted, bitchy  
 Relocated, shady, and confused  
 Determined to never let love  
 Slip away again

The relocation announced in the opening intertitles of *SweetBerry Sonnet* is both evocative and ambiguous. We may know what it means to feel confused or delusional, but what does it mean to “feel” relocated? A possible literal explanation (Taiwan has moved after breaking up with Harry) should not distract us from also encountering in the idea of relocation the process of splitting and decentering central to Linzy’s technique as both a video and a performance artist. Even as young, messy African Americans relocate from the historical situation of their childhood, in the process seemingly profaning the sacred purposes of the civil rights generation, historical memory relocates *them*, in songs that live them as the double of another. The seeming impropriety of Linzy’s transvested, sexually explicit, even vulgar scenarios, ones that “wash dirty linen in public” by mapping black narratives and concerns onto a multiracial cast of actors and

presenting them to a cosmopolitan world of art and fashion, is actually a way of inheriting this history, even an unexpectedly sincere fidelity to its as-yet-unfulfilled aspirations.

In almost every song in the cycle, Taiwan is waiting: at home, in a bar, in a fantasy. Taiwan's waiting is divided between something that is essentially tardy, most commonly a piece of rough trade, and something on which depends the speeding up of an awaited object. Sped up and thereby rocked between an imminent sexual intensity and the spiritual fuck always just beyond his reach, Taiwan is abjected in relation to institutions homo- as well as heteronormative.

Linzy's apartment is the location of most of the video shoots, permitting him to stage a claustrophobic counter-domesticity. The videos resemble both the popular culture Taiwan consumes and the kind he might make if, by chance, a queer black subject like himself were represented on BET or MTV. This dialogic relation is enhanced in performance, when Linzy performs against the backdrop of the videos. If this performance technique repeats the filmic device of the overdubbing voices, its effect is less to insist upon the alienation of the subject, than what I am thinking of as a specifically masochistic relation. I draw here upon Deleuze's thesis that one thing that distinguishes masochism is a preference for contracts over institutions ([1967] 1991). Here the etymology of the word "punk," with its specific associations with sex work, assumes critical importance. The song "Dirty Trade" stages a masochistic suspicion of institutions, even or especially radical ones. An uneasy tribute to the hustler who stands in less for the abandoned boyfriend than for the unrepresentable promise of true reciprocity, "Dirty Trade" certainly does not idealize the illicit contract between john and hustler. Rather, it fantasizes an anti-institutional route to the sentimental outcomes marriage proffers. And it identifies as the punk's complement not another soul desiring union, but another dominated body whose differently configured attitude of antagonism makes a temporary contact. Extolling the aggressive friction between the two, Taiwan sets himself up masochistically as a scapegoat for his rough trade's social animus:

Grudge fucking like no other  
The world made him mad  
That's why I stay glad  
I need it when I feel sad

Through the "grudge fuck" we obtain insight into what Lacan ([1973] 1997) calls "extimité" (extimacy) or a turning inside out of the conventional narrative of intimacy. This perpetual folding of outsides into insides, and insides into outsides, produces a sexual ecstasy not through the dissolution of self and other, public and private, but through their continuous exchange. Linguistically, Taiwan continuously inverts and exchanges the languages of the sacred and the profane, expressing this extimacy. "He fucks me unconditionally," Taiwan sings, "I wish it were spiritually."

Recurrently, Taiwan is suspended in an interior monologue over the aching need to be somehow "filled" and an afro-baroque dialogue with the divine, a cruel superegoic voice who reproves him for trading love for dirty sex. In "Hot Mess" Taiwan sings:

I need some dick, I need it real thick  
I am hell bound, yes I'm going down  
I should be searching, instead I'm hurting  
I should be looking for love  
Instead I'm on the prowl, trying to sleep around

At this point the voice of God (yet another electronically distorted version of Linzy's own) interrupts to respond:

I thought you found love, I thought you *were* love  
You are not love, you are just a good fuck  
You're just a hot mess

God, as the ultimate big Other, reminds Taiwan that he disrupted his own quest for fulfillment, preferring “dirty trading through the night.” Unlike the clean trade of capitalist commerce, Taiwan’s trades generate a sticky residue, leaving him a hot mess. Being a hot mess is a state of excitation, confusion, and disarray. But it is also, Linzy shows, a state of masochistic waiting in which the institutions of uplift and normativity are shunned, not because the pleasures of love, reciprocity, and fair treatment they promise are unwanted, but because they exist less as realities pursuable through upstanding politics than as virtualities arrived at through sublimation. Dirty trading suspends the allure of a clean commerce, of uptake into the normative institutions like marriage, the church, and even, as in the exchange with God, heaven. In its place, Linzy stages intimacy and extimacy, love and eroticism, as an endless loop, each perpetually turning the other inside out. Even as Taiwan masochistically assents to his depraved status—“I’m hell bound, Yes I’m going down”—his accompanying movement, the familiar “drop down low” of black social dance, endows that last phrase with an unmistakable sexual connotation. The double entendre is a mainstay of the African American musical hokum tradition Linzy draws on. What is so fascinating about his use of it is his ability to extend its use beyond comic effect, so that any laughter it causes always catches a bit in the throat.

Taiwan’s brown punk masochism is not a political negation of the normative so much as a radical interpassivity. It estranges through a hystericizing overinvestment. Here my taking of Mullen’s silent woman as muse is appropriate insofar as Linzy’s performances of black femininity are not a parody of women (or of gender), so much as an unbecoming overidentification with a body clothed in language “which is a soul.” In the song “If I Were Your Woman,” for instance, Taiwan belatedly promises Harry, “If I were your woman, I’d legally marry you.” What are we to make of this abject, conditional, and infelicitous performative? While the reference to “legal marriage” here might refer to opposite sex marriage, the emphasis Taiwan places on the word “legally” as he sings it and the redundancy of the qualifier (if he *were* a woman, would he need to specify the legality of his marriage to a man?) hint that “legally” has here become a queer modifier. Taiwan’s shy unwillingness to access the privileges of marriage as a gay man, and his agonized hesitation over transforming his reciprocal sexual and romantic contract into a public spectacle for his community, produces a fantasy in which he could be *actually* a woman and yet *legally*—that is to say, *queerly*—marry. One might even say that Taiwan wishes to marry virtually rather than to marry in reality, to possess the contract without submitting to the institution. And who among us has not felt that particular fantasy’s pull?

These aspects of Taiwan’s queer masochism—his distrust of the institutional route to the pleasures he carnally contracts, and his disavowal of reality through the fantasies of video, song, and performance—help place Linzy’s performance of him at the intersection of punk and queer. *SweetBerry Sonnet* can be placed in the context of a minor but definite recent trend in queer masochist songs like Grizzly Bear’s 2007 cover of The Crystals’ 1962 single “He Hit Me (It Felt Like a Kiss)” and Antony and the Johnsons’ 2005 “Fistful of Love.” Unlike those examples, however, *SweetBerry Sonnet* doesn’t simply convert pain into pleasure. Rather, it produces a temporal injunction that makes a painful waiting the condition for an imminent pleasure. The rhythm of this temporal delay, already audible in Taiwan’s anti-institutional impulse, links his work to another musical tradition audible on the Ellisonian lower frequencies.

So, what’s queer about waiting? There is certainly something familiar about it to queers, whether it is waiting for sex, love, reciprocity, freedom, justice, or any of the goods without which ordinary existence feels that much more precarious. The degree of willingness to wait is often the measure of the difference between pedagogic time on the one hand, deferred and differential, and performative time, insistent, repetitive, and filled with “the presence of the now,” on the other (Benjamin [1950] 1988:261).<sup>11</sup> And yet, the relation of the queer subject to wait-

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11. On the tension between performative and pedagogic time, see Homi Bhabha ([1994] 2005:209).

ing cannot cleanly be divided between refusal and acquiescence. Part of what's queer about waiting, the part queers seem to recognize in it, lies in its imaginative and even generative contours. Anticipation, for example, seems a fruitfully queer position, given its potential deviations from straight time.<sup>12</sup> This suggests that waiting can draw out an oscillating tension between the probable and the possible, disclosing behind its apparent inertia a rhythm and, even, a music.<sup>13</sup> Waiting can insert a pause between past and future, a pause in which the subject's relation to both can be, as it were, performed.

A critical and dramaturgical attention to waiting thus potentially gathers together two strands of contemporary queer theoretical writing: Elizabeth Freeman's on the "temporal drag" of queer history (2000), and José Muñoz's on the "performative utopias" of queer world making (2006). It does not however wrap them up in a grand theoretical synthesis.<sup>14</sup> Pure waiting is unequal to such an ambitious dialectical task. In its musical delays, waiting displays more of an affinity with the apparent passivity of masochism. Waiting is part of masochism's queer music. As Deleuze puts it: "Disavowal, suspense, waiting, fetishism and fantasy together make up the *specific constellation* of masochism" ([1967] 1991:72; emphasis added). Within this articulation of the "specific constellation" of an aesthetic and ethical procedure we find a warrant for speaking of masochism's *queer* and extimate itinerary.

## Conclusion

### So I Guess I'll Remain the Same

*Sitting in the morning sun,  
I'll be sitting when the evening come.  
Watching the ships roll in,  
Then I'll watch them roll away again.  
I'm just sitting on the dock of the bay,  
Watching the time roll away. Oooh,  
Sitting on the dock of the bay,  
Wasting time.*

— Otis Redding and Steve Cropper ([1968] 1991)

Is there anything black about waiting? It is certainly familiar enough, even in an era whose enigma is the arrival of the first US black president. The pedagogic time of the nation imposes a different imperative upon black freedom dreams than those available from radical traditions of black performativity. I began this essay by locating some of that performativity in the carrying of a tune beyond interpretation, what Fred Moten terms an "anarranging" of the melody (arranging beyond arrangement) in its persistent musical echo, heard less as a return to a

12. José Muñoz draws out the queer implications of Ernst Bloch's concept of "anticipatory illumination" in his "The Sense of Watching Tony Sleep" (2007). On the imperatives for a poststructuralist mapping of queer temporalities, see Judith Halberstam (2005:1–21, 152–87).

13. Here I gloss Alain Badiou's theory of the event, as when he comments, "If the event is erratic, and if, from the standpoint of situations, one cannot decide whether it exists or not, it is given to us to bet, that is, to legislate without law in respect to this existence [...] there is no other vigilance than that of becoming, as much through the anxiety of hesitation as through the courage of the outside-place [...]" ([1988] 2005:198). Queer anticipation, I suggest, makes this bet, performing a hesitant and anxious vigil for a possibility guaranteed nowhere within the laws of probability.

14. I am particularly indebted to Freeman's attention to what "the language of feminist 'waves' and queer 'generations' sometimes effaces: the mutually disruptive energy of moments that are not yet past and yet not entirely present either." Among the powers of "temporal drag," in her reading, lies a claim to "the word 'revolution' not as inheritance, but rather as a placeholder for possibilities that have yet to be articulated" (2000:742).

specific form than to that form's state of potentiality.<sup>15</sup> At a minimum, such anarranging of a melody suggests that we resist the temptation to read history "as a mother," that is, as a mythic source of lost plenitude, and that we instead locate, in its ongoing contemporaneity, the return of its ethical liveliness. If performance presents the past, it does not do so in a manner that is empirically accountable to the way things really were, but through the capacity of the past to split the present with the insistence of its own internal divisions, to infuse the now with an eternally recurrent spirit of antagonism. Where better to hear this than in the repetition, in the profanation of the sacred that *SweetBerry Sonnet* mounts, of a prior profane history, now sacralized, of "soul music," once itself criticized as the illegitimate carrying over into the secular realm of the spirit of the black church?

We hear in "Edge of My Couch" the eternal return of "Dock of the Bay," a hit single on pop and R&B charts from precisely 40 years prior. "Dock of the Bay" was the crossover single of Otis Redding, a performer who began as a bluesy "shouter," made his name as a soul singer, and was poised to conquer the pop charts. Its lyrical situation of regret, recrimination, and existential delay ("looks like nothing's going to change [...] so I guess I'll remain the same") is in exquisite juxtaposition to its location at a personal and racial threshold, as the very sweetness of soul music, in its sublimations, served as the fiercest indictment of the racism that ghettoized black music and choked black freedom dreams.

Written from an intensely personal, even singular standpoint, "Dock of the Bay" managed to articulate a universal discontent. It reached number one as the nation and world descended into the agon of "1968"—a year that instantly triggers recollections of the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy, the demonstrations at the Chicago Democratic Convention, as well as social upheavals led by students and workers around the world. "Dock of the Bay" is not however a militant protest song but a song of melancholic delay, doubly so insofar as its posthumous release has never ceased to arouse regret over the premature death of Redding, its gifted 26-year-old singer and co-composer, mere months before its release. Its lyrics compose a veritable shroud of mourning, which Redding's piercing voice tears through. "The Dock of the Bay" is a homeless song, an indigent and wastrel song, a song about being washed up before life has begun and thus as vivid an expose as one could want of disillusionment with the American dream as experienced "on the brother's side of midnight."<sup>16</sup>

What history might an intensely personal, ostensibly apolitical song like "Dock of the Bay" sum up, divide, and deliver into "1968" that might find itself carried into 2008 in anarranged form, to be used to brown punk purpose by the likes of Taiwan? Part of the answer lies in the refusal of affective engagement the song models, an orientation towards work and commitment that goes beyond apathy to a rousing, radical passivity. We hear such short-circuiting of the symbolic order when Redding complains, "I can't do what 10 people tell me do, so I guess I'll remain the same." The interior, imperfect rhyme between "remain" and "same" signals that this "sameness" is almost a repetition, and thereby, a rhythmic anticipation even as it is also a passive withdrawal. Such negations in soul presaged later ones in rock, punk, and beyond, precisely in terms of this rejection of a predictable future and a self-punishing insistence on holding out for an alternative.

Linzy's *SweetBerry Sonnet* may be heard as a radically passive refusal of the affective limits of homonormativity, one that reconnects the subject to more vagrant and disreputable resources of queer history. We hear in his re-sounding of Redding something other than parody. A read-

15. Here I draw on Fred Moten's definition of blackness as "the extended movement of a specific upheaval, an ongoing irruption that *anarranges* every line" (2003:1).

16. This expression was introduced to me in the book to the musical *Passing Strange* by Stew and Heidi Rodewald (2009). It is apropos of "Dock of the Bay" insofar as the dawn setting of the song indeed implies the singer has been up all night ruminating.

ing for parody would fixate on the descent from Redding's sublime and melancholic awaiting, allegorizing the deferred arrival of freedom and justice, to Taiwan's abject waiting "for my piece of trade." The existential proletarian male hero of "Dock of the Bay" disappears, in this view, replaced by the bitchy, shady, and depressed punk. And yet these songs converge precisely in terms of their shared technique of sublimation. To see this, we must see past "a commonplace misconception about sublimation, namely, that it substitutes a more socially respectable or refined pleasure for a cruder, carnal one" (Copjec 2002:30). To the contrary, Copjec points out, "sublimation does not separate thought from sex, but rather from the supposed subject of knowledge, that is, from the Other" (45). What the ethics of sublimation effect is not a transcendence of sex, but the puncturing of history at its core. She writes:

There is no history without an eternal limit within history itself, without an irreducible element, a negation that forbids the emergence of an outside of history. Again, this negation is able to be designated by its Lacanian name: the real. There is no arguing with the real, no negating it, since history itself depends on it. It is precisely because it cannot be negated that we say it eternally returns or repeats. This is to say that the real produces temporal anamorphoses within historical time [...]. (96)

Musical anarranging, as a means of carrying the song beyond its interpretation, admits such a temporal anamorphosis into a view of a history that, precisely *because* it is real, cannot ever be grasped "as it really was." The anticipation of eternal return—itself an antagonistic refusal of the breathless expectations of a post-racial world, or one where sexual difference will no longer matter—opens out both history and futurity.

So, what does it mean for history to serve as an internal object that lives the subject as the double of another? It is possible that the "Edge of My Couch," which holds "Dock of the Bay" as an internal object through which its subject, Taiwan, lives as the double of Otis Redding's anonymous, lamenting protagonist, sounds like an answer.

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