

The Reparative Imaginary in the Contemporary Afrofuturist Art of  
Mohau Modisakeng and Ayana V. Jackson

Ashley Raghubir

A Thesis  
in  
The Department  
of  
Art History

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts (Art History) at  
Concordia University  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

April 2021

© Ashley Raghubir, 2021

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY  
School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By: Ashley Raghubir

Entitled: The Reparative Imaginary in the Contemporary Afrofuturist Art of  
Mohau Modisakeng and Ayana V. Jackson

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**Master of Arts (Art History)**

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Signed by the final examining committee:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. May Chew Examiner

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Alice Ming Wai Jim Thesis Supervisor

Approved by \_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Nicola Pezolet, Graduate Program Director

\_\_\_\_\_  
2021 \_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Annie Gérin, Dean, Faculty of Fine Arts

## ABSTRACT

The Reparative Imaginary in the Contemporary Afrofuturist Art of  
Mohau Modisakeng and Ayana V. Jackson

Ashley Raghbir

This thesis examines Black South African artist Mohau Modisakeng's three-channel video *Passage* (2017) and Black American artist Ayana V. Jackson's photographic self-portraiture series *Take Me to the Water* (2019) as contemporary Afrofuturist reimaginings of the Middle Passage of the Transatlantic slave trade. In this thesis, I draw on Trinidad-born poet and writer Dionne Brand's concept of ancestral Black water, understandings of symbolic dress, and Black American poet and writer Alexis Pauline Gumbs' notion of submerged perspectives to suggest that Modisakeng and Jackson foreground repair, or healing, in their Afrofuturist contemporary art. The artists' reimaginings of the Middle Passage are examined in relation to the scholarship of Black geographies and women and gender studies scholar Katherine McKittrick and what I call the "reparative imaginary," a framework that enables a reading of *Passage* and *Take Me to the Water* as works that hold the potential towards healing from intergenerational cultural and historical trauma. This framework is informed by British Ghanaian writer and Afrofuturist theorist Kodwo Eshun's conceptualization of chronopolitics, or Afrofuturist historical intervention, Black diaspora literature and culture scholar Christina Sharpe's concepts of brutal and liberatory imaginations, and ethical considerations offered by Black American literature scholar and historian Saidiya Hartman and Black diaspora and culture studies scholar Rinaldo Walcott. Modisakeng and Jackson foreground submerged perspectives in their Afrofuturist reimaginings of the Middle Passage and in doing so imagine freedom, or an otherwise futurity, from increasing anti-Black racism and violence, for African or Black diasporic persons.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am thankful for the many people whose support has enabled me to pursue graduate study at Concordia University. I express sincere appreciation and gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Alice Ming Wai Jim for her thoughtful and attentive supervision throughout the research, writing, and editing stages. This thesis has benefited from Dr. Jim's academic rigour, criticality, and ongoing support. I am very thankful for the breadth of experience gained through various co-curricular opportunities supported by Dr. Jim. Thank you to Dr. May Chew for her meaningful contributions as the examiner during the final stages of this thesis. I am also grateful for Dr. Chew's teaching and guidance which greatly informed my decision to pursue doctoral studies. I look forward to building on the concepts examined in this thesis, including what I call the "reparative imaginary," as I begin a doctoral program this Fall.

I also wish to thank Dr. Johanne Sloan and Dr. Maya Rae Oppenheimer for their leadership and teaching which have enriched my broader experience at Concordia University. A sincere thank you to the Department of Art History for the supportive environment created for students.

To my peers in the Art History program, thank you for your kindness, intelligence, and care. A special thank you to Madeline, Toni, and Robin who greatly enriched the past two years in Montreal. To my family and friends, thank you as always.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures .....	vi
Introduction .....	1
Defining Afrofuturism: To Imagine Freedom.....	16
The Politics of Afrofuturist Aesthetics: The Chronopolitical Intervention .....	20
SECTION ONE: The Middle Passage: Mapping “The Rupture” of Modernity .....	22
Contextualizing the Trauma of the Middle Passage in Recent Scholarship .....	22
The Black Atlantic: Beyond the Metaphorical.....	25
SECTION TWO: On the “Reparative Imaginary”: The Potential Towards Healing .....	31
Situating the “Reparative Imaginary” Within Afrofuturist and Black Diasporic Discourses....	31
Defining the “Reparative Imaginary” .....	33
SECTION THREE: The Submerged Histories Within Modisakeng’s <i>Passage</i> .....	37
Articulations of Ancestral Belonging and “Unbelonging” .....	38
Ancestral “Black Water”: Oceanic Materialities.....	40
Cape Colony “Dress Regimes,” Enslaved Resistance, and Black Female Subjectivity.....	45
SECTION FOUR: The Subversive Frequencies of Jackson’s <i>Take Me to the Water</i> .....	50
The Drexciya Myth as Afrofuturist Refusal .....	50
Jackson’s <i>Black Rice</i> as Self-Fashioned Dress and African Agricultural Technology .....	55
Drexciyan Regal Adornment: Jackson’s <i>Consider the Sky and the Sea</i> and <i>Sea Lion</i> .....	59
Conclusion: Ethics and the Case for the “Reparative Imaginary” in Theory and Practice .....	61
A Reflection on the “Inevitable” Reproduction of Violence .....	61
The “Reparative Imaginary”: “Radical Incompleteness” and the Imperative of Imagining Otherwise .....	62
The Case for the “Reparative Imaginary” in Theory and Practice .....	63
Discography .....	88
Bibliography .....	89

## List of Figures

- Figure 1. Mohau Modisakeng, *Passage*, 2017, three-channel HD video, 18:49 min. Installation view in the Sale d'Armi, Arsenale, Venice, part of the 57<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale International Art Exhibition: *Viva Arte Viva*, 2017. (Source: <http://www.mohaumodisakengstudio.com/passage-2017>).....67
- Figure 2. J.M.W. Turner, *Slave Ship* [originally titled *Slavers Throwing overboard the Dead and Dying – Typhoon coming on*], 1840, oil on canvas, 36 x 48 in. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts Boston. (Source: <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/31102>).....68
- Figure 3. Sondra Perry, *Typhoon coming on*, 2018, video. Installation view at The Luma Foundation, Zurich, part of the *Luma Westbau: Sarah Morris, Arthur Jafa and Sondra Perry* exhibition, 2018. (Source: <https://sondraperry.com/Typhoon-coming-on-at-The-Luma-Foundation>).....69
- Figure 4. Sondra Perry, *Typhoon coming on*, 2018, video. Installation view at The Luma Foundation, Zurich, part of the *Luma Westbau: Sarah Morris, Arthur Jafa and Sondra Perry* exhibition, 2018. (Source: <https://sondraperry.com/Typhoon-coming-on-at-The-Luma-Foundation>).....70
- Figure 5. Victor Ekpuk, *Slave Narrative*, 2008, graphite and pastel on paper, 42 1/4 x 65 in. Washington D.C., Smithsonian National Museum of African Art. (Source: [https://africa.si.edu/collections/view/objects/asitem/items\\$0040:18632](https://africa.si.edu/collections/view/objects/asitem/items$0040:18632)).....71
- Figure 6. John Akomfrah, *Vertigo Sea*, 2015, film still, three-channel HD video, 48:30 min. Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada. (Source: <https://macm.org/en/exhibitions/john-akomfrah-vertigo-sea/>).....72
- Figure 7. Ayana V. Jackson, *The Rupture Was the Story*, from the series *Take Me to the Water*, 2019, archival pigment print on German etching paper, 25 5/8 x 42 7/8 in. (Source: <https://marianeibrahim.com/artists/27/series/take-me-to-the-water/1852-ayana-v.-jackson-the-rupture-was-the-story-2019/>).....73
- Figure 8. Mohau Modisakeng, *Passage*, 2017, three-channel HD video, 18:49 min. Installation view in the Sale d'Armi, Arsenale, Venice, part of the 57<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale International Art Exhibition: *Viva Arte Viva*, 2017. (Source: <http://www.mohaumodisakengstudio.com/passage-2017>).....74
- Figure 9. Mohau Modisakeng, *Passage*, 2017, film still, three-channel HD video, 18:49 min. (Source: <http://www.mohaumodisakengstudio.com/passage-2017>).....75
- Figure 10. Mohau Modisakeng, *Passage*, 2017, film still, three-channel HD video, 18:49 min. (Source: <http://www.mohaumodisakengstudio.com/passage-2017>).....76

- Figure 11. Mohau Modisakeng, *Passage*, 2017, film still, three-channel HD video, 18:49 min. (Source: <http://www.mohaumodisakengstudio.com/passage-2017>).....77
- Figure 12. Stowage of the British slave ship *Brookes* under the regulated slave trade act of 1788, c. 1788, etching. Washington, D.C., Library of Congress Rare Book and Special Collections Division. (Source: <https://www.loc.gov/item/98504459/>).....78
- Figure 13. Image of liner notes, *The Quest*, Drexciya, 1997. (Source: <https://daily.redbullmusicacademy.com/2017/06/drexciya-infinite-journey-to-inner-space>).....79
- Figure 14. Ayana V. Jackson, *Sighting in the Abyss II*, from the series *Take Me to the Water*, 2019, archival pigment print on German etching paper, 39 3/8 x 59 1/8 in. (Source: <https://marianeibrahim.com/artists/27/series/take-me-to-the-water/1849-ayana-v.-jackson-sighting-in-the-abyss-ii-2019/>).....80
- Figure 15. Ayana V. Jackson, *Black Rice*, from the series *Take Me to the Water*, 2019, archival pigment print on German etching paper, 42 7/8 x 41 7/8 in. (Source: <https://marianeibrahim.com/artists/27/series/take-me-to-the-water/2221-ayana-v.-jackson-black-rice-2019/>).....81
- Figure 16. Ayana V. Jackson, *The Self-Forgetfulness of Belonging Would Never Be Mine*, from the series *Take Me to the Water*, 2019, archival pigment print on German etching paper, 59 1/8 x 56 7/8 in. (Source: <https://marianeibrahim.com/artists/27/series/take-me-to-the-water/1851-ayana-v.-jackson-the-self-forgetfulness-of-belonging-would-never-be-mine-2019/>).....82
- Figure 17. Ayana V. Jackson, *Double Goddess...A Sighting in the Abyss*, from the series *Take Me to the Water*, 2019, archival pigment print on German etching paper, 55 1/8 x 59 1/8 in. (Source: <https://marianeibrahim.com/artists/27/series/take-me-to-the-water/1854-ayana-v.-jackson-double-goddess-...-a-sighting-in-the-abyss-2019/>).....83
- Figure 18. Ayana V. Jackson, *Sighting in the Abyss III*, from the series *Take Me to the Water*, 2019, archival pigment print on German etching paper, 39 3/8 x 59 1/8 in. (Source: <https://marianeibrahim.com/artists/27/series/take-me-to-the-water/1850-ayana-v.-jackson-sighting-in-the-abyss-iii-2019/>).....84
- Figure 19. Ayana V. Jackson, *Consider the Sky and the Sea*, from the series *Take Me to the Water*, 2019, archival pigment print on German etching paper, 46 7/8 x 42 7/8 in. (Source: <https://marianeibrahim.com/artists/27/series/take-me-to-the-water/1847-ayana-v.-jackson-consider-the-sky-and-the-sea-2019/>).....85
- Figure 20. Ayana V. Jackson, *Sea Lion*, from the series *Take Me to the Water*, 2019, archival pigment print on German etching paper, 61 3/8 x 39 3/8 in. (Source: <https://marianeibrahim.com/artists/27/series/take-me-to-the-water/1853-ayana-v.-jackson-sea-lion-2019/>).....86

Figure 21. *'Ermine' Portrait of Queen Elizabeth*, attributed to Nicholas Hilliard, c. 1585, oil on panel, 95.2 x 86.4 cm. Hatfield, Hatfield House. (Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Elizabeth1England.jpg>).....87



## Introduction

This thesis examines two contemporary Afrofuturist artworks that reimagine the Middle Passage of the Transatlantic slave trade. *Passage* (2017), a three-channel HD video, by Black South African artist Mohau Modisakeng (b. 1986, Soweto, South Africa) and *Take Me to the Water* (2019), a photographic self-portraiture series, by Black American artist Ayana V. Jackson (b. 1977, Livingston, New Jersey, United States) exemplify a conscious foregrounding of Black American poet and writer Alexis Pauline Gumbs' concept of "submerged perspectives" in Afrofuturist contemporary art.<sup>1</sup> On each of *Passage*'s three channels a figure is represented alone in a white rowboat on an expanse of black-coloured water. The video is approximately 18 minutes in length and was commissioned by the Republic of South Africa's Department of Arts and Culture and curated by Lucy MacGarry and Musha Neluheni for the South African Pavilion at the 57<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale International Art Exhibition: *Viva Arte Viva* (May 13 to November 26, 2017) curated by Christine Marcel (fig. 1).<sup>2</sup> Jackson's *Take Me to the Water* totals eleven archival pigment prints on etching paper and depicts Jackson in elaborate dress surrounded by a

---

<sup>1</sup> Alexis Pauline Gumbs, *Dub: Finding Ceremony* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), xii. Modisakeng is based between Johannesburg and Cape Town, South Africa and completed undergraduate and graduate Fine Arts degrees at the Michaelis School of Fine Art in Cape Town. *Passage* is an editioned three-channel HD video which following its premiere in the South African Pavilion at the 57<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale in 2017, has been exhibited at various sites including the What if the World Gallery (Cape Town, South Africa) from September 13 to October 21, 2017, the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art at the University of Oregon (Eugene, Oregon) from May 11 to August 4, 2019, and Fotografiska (Stockholm, Sweden) from October 26, 2020 to February 28, 2021. *Passage* is also included in the permanent collection exhibition *Arts of One World* in the Stéphan Crétier and Stéphanie Maillery wing at the Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal (Montréal, Québec) which opened November 9, 2019. Jackson is based between New York, Paris, and Johannesburg and completed a Master of Fine Arts at the historically Black Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia, United States. *Take Me to the Water* premiered in the exhibition *Take Me to the Water* at Mariane Ibrahim Gallery (Chicago, Illinois) from September 20 to October 29, 2019 and was also presented by Mariane Ibrahim Gallery at Paris Photo 2019 (Paris, France) in the exhibition *Ayana V. Jackson and Zohra Opuku* from November 7 to November 10, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Mohau Modisakeng, *Passage*, 2017, three-channel HD video, 18:49 min., installation view in the Sale d'Armi, Arsenale, Venice, part of the 57<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale International Art Exhibition: *Viva Arte Viva*, 2017. Mohau Modisakeng, accessed November 10, 2020, <http://www.mohaumodisakengstudio.com/passage-2017>.

black-coloured background. The main research questions of this thesis consider whether *Passage* and *Take Me to the Water* hold a reparative potential for healing from intergenerational cultural and historical trauma through the reimagining of untold histories – the “submerged perspectives” – in the aftermath of the Transatlantic slave trade, and if so, how?<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, the term “Afrofuturism” is situated within a Pan-African Afrofuturist framework offered by Afrofuturist theorists Reynaldo Anderson and Charles E. Jones in their 2016 volume *Afrofuturism 2.0: The Rise of Astro-Blackness*. Anderson and Jones situate the Black diaspora as part of the African Union and argue that Afrofuturism is a Pan-African project.<sup>4</sup> Afrofuturism, in this thesis, is also understood to be an imagining of Black futures that holds a liberatory potential, or otherwise futurity, for livable and thriving Black lives. This thesis further contextualizes Modisakeng and Jackson’s work in relation to the Black geographies and Middle Passage studies scholarship of British historian and writer Paul Gilroy and women and gender studies scholar Katherine McKittrick. Gilroy and McKittrick’s foundational work provide an understanding of how the Middle Passage is conceptualized as the “rupture” of modernity throughout Black diasporic scholarship.<sup>5</sup> I conclude that Modisakeng’s *Passage* and Jackson’s *Take Me to the Water* critically intervene in the submerged histories of the Middle Passage of the Transatlantic slave trade by exemplifying what I term the *reparative imaginary*, defined as an African or Black diasporic interventionist collective imagining of freedom, that works towards repair, or healing, from intergenerational cultural and historical trauma. I propose that the reparative imaginary is a critical artistic and historical intervention that draws from British

---

<sup>3</sup> Gumbs, *Dub*, xii.

<sup>4</sup> Reynaldo Anderson and Charles E. Jones, *Afrofuturism 2.0: The Rise of Anti-Blackness* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016), x.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 187.

Ghanaian writer and Afrofuturist theorist Kodwo Eshun's formulation of "chronopolitics," or Afrofuturist historical intervention and foregrounds the "submerged perspectives" of African or Black diasporic persons.<sup>6</sup> Within the scope of this thesis, I focus on the potential for healing for African or Black diasporic persons and I briefly situate the reparative imaginary, and Afrofuturism more broadly, within a consideration of relations that prioritizes those between African or Black diasporic and Indigenous persons. The reparative imaginary is of critical importance because the imagining of Black futures is inseparable from demands for racial justice and acknowledges what Black diaspora literature and culture scholar Christina Sharpe refers to as the "ongoingness" of histories of systemic anti-Blackness and their contemporary formations.<sup>7</sup> I consider the reparative imaginary to be similar to Black American literature scholar and historian Saidiya Hartman's formulation of her speculative history writing practice, or what she terms "critical fabulation."<sup>8</sup> Hartman describes "critical fabulation" in the following statement which I include because it relates to the conceptualization and potential of the reparative imaginary in Modisakeng and Jackson's works: "It is a history of an unrecoverable past; it is a narrative of what might have been or could have been; it is a history written with and against the archive."<sup>9</sup> If to imagine freedom is an Afrofuturist act, then Modisakeng and Jackson's historical reimaginings contribute to a "liberatory politics," in the words of artist, curator, and critic Aria Dean, that insist on Black thrivance in and through what Black diaspora and culture studies scholar Rinaldo Walcott terms "the long emancipation."<sup>10</sup> In what follows, I briefly contextualize

---

<sup>6</sup> Kodwo Eshun, "Further Considerations of Afrofuturism," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 297, <https://muse-jhu-edu.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/article/48294>; and Gumbs, *Dub*, xii.

<sup>7</sup> Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 20.

<sup>8</sup> Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (June 2008): 11, <https://muse-jhu-edu.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/article/241115>.

<sup>9</sup> Hartman, "Venus," 12.

<sup>10</sup> Aria Dean, "Poor Meme Rich Meme (Aka Toward a Black Circulationism)," *Real Life Magazine*, July 25, 2016, <https://reallifemag.com/poor-meme-rich-meme/>; and Rinaldo Walcott, "The Black Aquatic: On Water, Art, and Black Movement" (unpublished manuscript, August 21, 2020), Adobe PDF file.

Modisakeng's *Passage* and Jackson's *Take Me to the Water* in advance of an in-depth examination of the works in sections three and four and I also define this thesis' key concepts, methodologies, and broader outline.

Modisakeng's *Passage* premiered at the 57<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale in the Sale d'Armi, Arsenale venue and received significant critical attention because of the artist's engagement with Black South African histories and the work's large three-channel installation. The Republic of South Africa's Department of Arts and Culture commissioned South African television company Connect Channel to organize the South African Pavilion with curators MacGarry and Neluheni. The 57<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale was the fourth instance of a South African Pavilion in the international exhibition and it was the first time South Africa presented sound and moving image works exclusively.<sup>11</sup> The South African Pavilion was conceived as a site for the artists' examination of the self in relation to marginalization, displacement, and migration within global structures of power.<sup>12</sup> MacGarry and Neluheni's curatorial interest in the "cinematic" reflects what media art and culture scholar Maeve Connolly characterizes as a "cine-material turn" in the sites and spaces of contemporary art in which artists employ narrative and production practices associated with cinema.<sup>13</sup> Connolly refers to this as "artists' cinema" and identifies a connection to sites such as the pavilions of the Venice Biennale as a particular form of "spectacular" architecture

---

<sup>11</sup> "The Venice Questionnaire #29 – Lucy MacGarry," ArtReview, accessed October 25, 2020, <https://artreview.com/2017-venice-29-lucy-macgarry-south-africa/>.

<sup>12</sup> "Candice Breitz and Mohau Modisakeng to Represent South Africa at the 57th Venice Biennale in 2017," Biennial Foundation, last modified November 2, 2016, <https://www.biennialfoundation.org/2016/11/candice-breitz-mohau-modisakeng-represent-south-africa-57th-venice-biennale-2017/>.

<sup>13</sup> Mohau Modisakeng, "Artist Talk: Mohau Modisakeng," Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, University of Oregon, recorded on May 24, 2019, YouTube video, 1:32:07, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=52TgFu6YQOg&t=7s>; and Maeve Connolly, *The Place of Artists' Cinema: Space, Site, and Screen* (Bristol: Intellect, 2009), 169, 9. For critiques of time-based works in biennials, see Hito Steyerl, Coco Fusco, and Supercommunity, "Remembering Okwui Enwezor," *e-flux Journal* 98, (February 2019), <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/98/260819/remembering-okwui-enwezor/>.

that rely on “‘cine-material’ structures” for the exhibition of moving image works.<sup>14</sup> The pavilion is characterized by the scale and materiality of the architectural space which facilitate biennial exhibition spectatorship and a spatial publicness comparable with the space of the cinema.<sup>15</sup> Connolly draws on visual arts, architecture, and media scholar Giuliana Bruno’s characterization of the biennial pavilion as a unique “architectural form” that functions like the cinema to produce a “quintessential public space” of sociality and spectacle.<sup>16</sup> *Passage*’s periodic use of an aerial vantage point on each channel emphasizes the rowboats’ creation of an architectural space framing the subjects within. The simple form of the rowboat mirrors the pointed arch of Gothic architecture and, in this way, the “‘cine-material’ structures” of the biennial pavilion reference another site of spectacular architecture and spatial publicness: the church.<sup>17</sup> The three subjects in *Passage*, regardless of their submerged positionalities, are thus canonized as saints through symbolic architectural form. Historically, the Arsenale in Venice was a large-scale production centre associated with construction of nautical fleets in the modern period.<sup>18</sup> In 1980, the Arsenale was opened to the public as a venue for the Venice Biennale. With the Arsenale’s history as a place of ship production, and as demonstrated in later work by Modisakeng, I suggest that *Passage* was initially a site-responsive work reflecting on maritime histories of mercantilism, colonization, and racial capitalism.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Connolly, *The Place of Artists’ Cinema*, 9, 165-166.

<sup>15</sup> Connolly, *The Place of Artists’ Cinema*, 166.

<sup>16</sup> Connolly, *The Place of Artists’ Cinema*, 167.

<sup>17</sup> Connolly, *The Place of Artists’ Cinema*, 166.

<sup>18</sup> “Arsenale,” La Biennale de Venezia, accessed October 25, 2020, <https://www.labiennale.org/en/venues/arsenale>.

<sup>19</sup> In 2019, Modisakeng presented the solo performance *No Serenity HERE* at Click Festival 2019: *death worlds* in Hensinør, Denmark (May 18 to May 19, 2019) in the festival’s venue which formerly operated as a Danish shipyard warehouse. For more, see “‘No Serenity Here’ - Interview with Dr. Uhuru Portia Phalafala,” Mohau Modisakeng, accessed January 6, 2021, <https://www.mohaumodisakengstudio.com/noserenity-interview>. Modisakeng continued to examine site-responsive maritime work with 2019’s performance *Land of Zanj* (2019) at the 14<sup>th</sup> Sharjah Biennale: *Leaving the Echo Chamber* in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates (March 7 to June 10, 2019). *Land of Zanj* was a choreographed performance wherein Modisakeng led a procession of approximately twenty dancers and musicians dressed in all black (except for ivory fabric weaved between thin sisal rope tied around the ankles of the women performers). The two-part processional took place in the city of Kalba approximately 70 miles from Sharjah

Jackson's *Take Me to the Water* self-portraiture series exemplifies the artist's practice of responding to the representation of Black female subjects in the history of photography. *Take Me to the Water* comprises eleven prints depicting Jackson in symbolic dress that combines traditional African dress, the dress of enslaved Africans, and the dress of European royalty.<sup>20</sup> The dress worn by Jackson throughout *Take Me to the Water* was created in collaboration with Senegalese designer Rama Diaw and Angolese designer Mwambi Wassaki.<sup>21</sup> Conceptually, *Take Me to the Water* was developed during Jackson's 2018 Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship in the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art (Washington, D.C., United States).<sup>22</sup> Jackson's fellowship focused on African water spirit mythologies and the Afrofuturist "Drexciya" Middle Passage creation myth imagined by Detroit techno producers of the same name.<sup>23</sup> In each self-portrait Jackson is surrounded by a solid black-coloured background which I

---

and culminated on Kalba beach on the Gulf of Oman which connects to the Arabian Sea ultimately leading to the Indian Ocean. Carrying a large wooden rowboat and oars, the procession crossed through a large wooden door frame installed on the beach. Like *Passage*, the simple form of the rowboat is used to represent movements of enslaved African persons, as well as commodities, across significant bodies of water. *Zanj* is a term that references the island of Zanzibar and, more broadly, the southeast African coast. With the Indian Ocean as its background, Modisakeng's *Land of Zanj* examines migration, mercantile, and slave trade histories connecting the Arabian Peninsula and the Swahili Coast. *Land of Zanj* also references the Zanj Arab slave trade rebellion of 869-883 which took place in Basra (present-day Iraq). For more, see Brendon Bell-Roberts, "Echoes of Empire, Space and Time," *Art Africa Magazine*, accessed December 5, 2020, <https://artafricamagazine.org/echos-of-empire-space-and-time-sharjah-art-foundation-biennale/>; Rahel Aima, "Productive Friction: An Incisive Sharjah Biennial Ponders the Untapped Histories of the United Arab Emirates," *ARTNews*, May 28, 2019, <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/reviews/sharjah-biennial-review-12605/>; and "Land of Zanj (2019)," Mohau Modisakeng, accessed January 6, 2021, <http://www.mohaumodisakengstudio.com/land-of-zanj-2019>.

<sup>20</sup> Robert S. DuPlessis, *The Material Atlantic: Clothing, Commerce, and Colonization in the Atlantic World, 1650-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 20; and Ayesha Sohail Shemir Shaikh, "Through the Lens of Humanity with Photographer Ayana V. Jackson," *Harper's Bazaar Arabia*, September 23, 2019, <https://www.harpersbazaaraabia.com/art/artists/through-the-lens-of-humanity-with-photographer-ayana-v-jackson>.

<sup>21</sup> Emma Gilhooly, "Ayana V. Jackson," *Nataal*, accessed August 1, 2020, <https://nataal.com/ayana-v-jackson>.  
<sup>22</sup> Gilhooly, "Ayana V. Jackson"; and Ayana V. Jackson CV," Mariane Ibrahim Gallery, accessed October 15, 2020, [https://marianeibrahim.com/usr/library/documents/main/artists/27/ayana-v.-jackson\\_cv.pdf](https://marianeibrahim.com/usr/library/documents/main/artists/27/ayana-v.-jackson_cv.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> Techno in this context refers to 'Detroit techno,' a genre of electronic dance music that originated in Detroit, Michigan, United States in the mid-1980s. Detroit techno is characterized by a repetitive beat designed for a continuous DJ set and robotic and futuristic sounds created by electronic instruments such as synthesizers, drum machines, and sequencers. The genre was originated by Detroit-based producer Juan Atkins (b. 1962, Detroit, Michigan) in the group Cybotron in response to the city's 1970s racial protests and declining automotive industry. The first wave of Detroit techno was created by Black electronic dance music producers and the genre is an example of the global influence of Black American musical practices. For more, see DeForrest Brown Jr., "Techno is Technocracy," *FACT Magazine*, December 17, 2019, <https://www.factmag.com/2019/12/17/techno-is-technocracy/>.

view as underwater depths. The title of Jackson's series references an African American spiritual "Wade In the Water" published in a 1901 songbook by the Fisk Jubilee Singers – a touring act whose performances included spirituals – as well as a Christian hymn titled "Take Me to the Water."<sup>24</sup> With origins in chattel slavery, African American spirituals, or Negro spirituals, refer to music sung in groups, often unaccompanied by instrumentation with lyrics referencing biblical narratives, particularly those of liberation. According to music historian Danielle Fosler-Lussier, singers of African American spirituals combined choruses from Christian hymns with other Black creative musical expressions such as antiphony and improvisation resulting in the articulation of "entirely new statements of faith."<sup>25</sup> The title *Take Me to the Water* also references the name of a 1967 song by Black American musician Nina Simone (1933-2003) on her acclaimed studio album *High Priestess of Soul* (1967), among other references throughout popular Black musical expression.<sup>26</sup> The three musical pieces discussed in relation to the title of Jackson's series can be characterized as self-liberatory "musics" in the words of Paul Gilroy and Katherine McKittrick.<sup>27</sup> The three musical works demonstrate a connection between Black

---

<sup>24</sup> "Songs: Wade in the Water," Negro Spirituals, accessed November 3, 2020, <https://www.negrospirituals.com/songs/wade-in-the-water.htm>. The lyrics of "Wade in the Water" are as follows: "Wade in the water / Wade in the water, children / Wade in the water / God's a-going to trouble the water / See that host all dressed in white / God's a-going to trouble the water / The leader looks like the Israelite / God's a-going to trouble the water / See that band all dressed in red / God's a-going to trouble the water / Looks like the band that Moses led / God's a-going to trouble the water / Look over yonder, what do you see? / God's a-going to trouble the water / The Holy Ghost a-coming on me / God's a-going to trouble the water / If you don't believe I've been redeemed / God's a-going to trouble the water / Just follow me down to the Jordan's stream / God's a-going to trouble the water." For more on spirituals and the Fisk Jubilee Singers, see Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*.

<sup>25</sup> Danielle Fosler-Lussier, "The African Diaspora in the United States: Appropriation and Assimilation," in *Music on the Move* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020), 83, 87, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3998/mpub.9853855.10>.

<sup>26</sup> "Take Me to the Water," Apple Music, track 6 on Nina Simone, *High Priestess of Soul*, Philips, 1967.

"Take Me to the Water" appeared on the musician's album *High Priestess of Soul* (1967). The lyrics are as follows: Take me to the water / Take me to the water / Take me to the water to be baptized / So, none but the righteous / None by the righteous / Non but the righteous shall (See God), yeah / So, take me to the water / Take to the water / Take me to the water to be baptized / I'm goin' back home, I tell ya, I'm goin' back home, now / Goin' back home / Can't stay here no longer / So I'm goin' back home / Goin' back home, now / Goin' back home to be (Goin' to be), to be (To be) / To be baptized (Oh).

<sup>27</sup> Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 75; and Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xxi.

diasporic musical expressivity, spirituality, religion, and imagining freedom. I include Gilroy and McKittrick's pluralized "musics" in recognition of the diversity of rebellious and influential musical expressions originating from the African continent and throughout the Black diaspora.<sup>28</sup> Two primary concepts are deployed in the analysis of *Passage* and *Take Me to the Water* in sections three and four: Trinidad-born poet and writer Dionne Brand's concept of ancestral "Black water" and understandings of symbolic dress.<sup>29</sup> Brand's ancestral "Black water" is present in both works, although this study focuses on *Passage* primarily in discussion of Brand's concept.<sup>30</sup> Ancestral "Black water" holds several meanings however my analysis and discussion concentrates on two key aspects: Black diasporic belonging and "unbelonging" to the Atlantic Ocean as a place of origin, as formulated by Brand, and oceanic materialities, or material relations of African or Black diasporic persons to waters traversed during passage, as conceptualized by Christina Sharpe.<sup>31</sup> For example, Black belonging and "unbelonging" is examined as an outcome of the Middle Passage and the material presence of the bodies of enslaved African persons in oceanic "residence time" to quote Sharpe.<sup>32</sup> Both meanings of ancestral "Black water" are considered in section three on Modisakeng's *Passage*.<sup>33</sup> The concept of symbolic dress is present in both *Passage* and *Take Me to the Water*, although I focus on *Take Me to the Water* in discussion of dress as primarily a reparative "self-fashioning" by enslaved persons as described by material culture historian Robert S. DuPlessis.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 75; and McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xxi.

<sup>29</sup> Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2011), 61.

<sup>30</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 61.

<sup>31</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 7.

<sup>32</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 61; and Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 41.

<sup>33</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 61.

<sup>34</sup> DuPlessis, *The Material Atlantic*, 13, 20.



This thesis' understandings of symbolic dress as reparative "self-fashioning" and transcultural exchange draw on DuPlessis' work on the material and racial economies of Atlantic trade during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>35</sup> Within this thesis, the concept of symbolic dress considers a hybridization of traditional African or enslaved African persons' dress with European colonial and Tudor English royal dress to represent retained dress customs, transcultural exchange as well as reparative "self-fashioning."<sup>36</sup> My use of the term, "dress" also references more than clothing: it is everything worn on the body or used to alter the body including hairstyling, jewelry, headwear, and footwear. This thesis further extends dress to include expressions of identity as DuPlessis describes in the following terms: "With few exceptions, dress incorporates personal expression and social standard, individual statement and collective convention."<sup>37</sup> I include DuPlessis' words to emphasize the complexity of dress as both repressive apparatus and self-liberatory proclamation as examined in section three on Modisakeng's *Passage* and section four on Jackson's *Take Me to the Water*. Modisakeng and Jackson redress themselves, and in the case of Modisakeng his subjects as well, in items symbolic of repair to prioritize a reparative "self-fashioning."<sup>38</sup> Redress in Modisakeng and Jackson's usage holds a double meaning: re-clothing and remedying injustice. Etymologically, "redress" is derived from the Anglo-Norman word "redresse," or "reparation or compensation for a wrong or loss."<sup>39</sup> Symbolic dress additionally collapses temporal and spatial distinctions through the incorporation of both historical and contemporary dress which is examined in section four on Jackson's work. Multiple and non-linear temporalities are an important aspect of

---

<sup>35</sup> DuPlessis, *The Material Atlantic*, 13.

<sup>36</sup> DuPlessis, *The Material Atlantic*, 13.

<sup>37</sup> DuPlessis, *The Material Atlantic*, 4.

<sup>38</sup> DuPlessis, *The Material Atlantic*, 13.

<sup>39</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "redress," accessed March 20, 2021, <https://www-oed-com.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/view/Entry/160455>.

Afrofuturist theoretical frameworks including Kodwo Eshun’s formulation of “chronopolitics” detailed later in this introduction on the political and interventionist motivations of Afrofuturist aesthetics.

Methodologically, this thesis utilizes the following research methods: historical research, visual analysis of online textile and portrait collections, critical discourse analysis, and artist research on Modisakeng and Jackson. Theoretically, this thesis draws from Afrofuturist, Black diasporic, Black geographies, art historical, and feminist ethics of care theoretical frameworks. A main research method is historical research about the Middle Passage and the Transatlantic slave trade more broadly, including researching the multisource open-access online Trans-Atlantic and Intra-American slave trade databases within the larger Slave Voyages Database.<sup>40</sup> Visual analysis of online textile and portrait research include the collections of the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art (Washington, D.C., United States), Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture (Washington, D.C., United States), National Portrait Gallery (London, United Kingdom), and the Royal Collection Trust (London, United Kingdom) with a focus on African, enslaved persons’ and colonial dress in present-day South

---

<sup>40</sup> The online Slave Voyages Database is comprised of the Trans-Atlantic, Intra-American, and African Names Databases. The database draws upon independent and collaborative slave trade research in transnational library and archival collections from Europe, Africa, South America, and North America with contributions from historians, librarians, cartographers, computer programmers, and web designers. In 2006, funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities enabled Emory University (Atlanta, Georgia, United States) to construct the present-day multisource open-access database. For more, see “Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade - Understanding the Database,” Slave Voyages Database, accessed September 28, 2020, <https://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/about#methodology/introduction/0/en/>; “Intra-American Slave Trade - Understanding the Voyage,” Slave Voyages Database, accessed September 28, 2020, <https://www.slavevoyages.org/american/about>; and “African Names – Understanding the Database,” Slave Voyages Database, accessed September 28, 2020, <https://www.slavevoyages.org/resources/about#african-names-database/0/en/>.

Africa and the southern United States, as well as Tudor English royal dress.<sup>41</sup> An additional research method is critical discourse analysis of Middle Passage narratives in Black speculative fiction, poetry, and music. I also compile a data archive of primary and secondary sources on Modisakeng and Jackson's works including contemporary press, critical reviews, artist interviews, and exhibition material.

This thesis is situated within several interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks including the scholarship of Afrofuturist theorists Kodwo Eshun, Reynaldo Anderson, Charles E. Jones, tobias c. van Veen, Henriette Gunkel, and kara lynch. I also situate this thesis within the significant Black diasporic theory and cultural studies scholarship of Dionne Brand, Saidiya Hartman, Christina Sharpe, and M. NourbeSe Philip. This thesis' examination of the Middle Passage is possible because of the foundational Black geographies scholarship of Paul Gilroy and Katherine McKittrick. Charmaine A. Nelson's significant scholarship on historical art and the visual culture of Transatlantic slavery provide an important art historical framework.

A feminist ethics of care informs this thesis' selection of case studies, the formulation of the reparative imaginary framework, as well as the language used to write about the Middle Passage, the Transatlantic slave trade, and contemporary traumas. The intent is healing and not retraumatization of African or Black diasporic persons. This care extends to myself as a Black researcher and writer who offers this work to communities of which I am part and those with which I am in otherwise relation. Primarily attributed to American ethicist and psychologist

---

<sup>41</sup> The Textiles, African Art, Historical Painting, and Sculpture collections of the South African Museum and South African National Gallery are not accessible online and as such it was not possible to consult the institutions' textile and portrait collections for the purposes of this thesis.

Carol Gilligan and American educator and philosopher Nel Noddings, a feminist ethics of care prioritizes empathy, relation, and responsiveness.<sup>42</sup> This thesis' use of an ethics of care, however, draws from Saidiya Hartman and Rinaldo Walcott's scholarship on the ethical considerations of representing traumatic histories. Hartman writes about the ethics of speculating about the experiences of enslaved persons which are often only briefly alluded to in the archive of the Middle Passage. Hartman raises a key question for my research in relation to the ethics of an interventionist reparative imaginary. Hartman asks: "How does one revisit the scene of subjection without replicating the grammar of violence?"<sup>43</sup> Hartman's question prompts me to consider whether the contemporary Afrofuturist works by Modisakeng and Jackson examined in this thesis replicate trauma.<sup>44</sup> Walcott similarly reflects on artistic and cultural representations of the Transatlantic slave trade, and argues that the "Middle Passage cannot be pluralized," meaning it should not be represented so as to reduce the "particularity" of its terror and resulting trauma.<sup>45</sup> Walcott asserts that the Middle Passage's "extension" into the present within "the ongoing project of coloniality" requires an "ethical intention" with regard to representation.<sup>46</sup> I reflect on the ethics of reparative imaginary in relation to Modisakeng's *Passage* and Jackson's *Take Me to the Water* in the conclusion.

---

<sup>42</sup> For more on foundational feminist ethics of care scholarship, see Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), <https://hdl-handle-net.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/2027/heb.32978>; and Nel Noddings, *Caring: a Feminine Approach to Ethics & Moral Education* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

<sup>43</sup> Hartman, "Venus," 4.

<sup>44</sup> Hartman, "Venus," 4.

<sup>45</sup> Rinaldo Walcott, "The Black Aquatic: On Water, Art, and Black Movement with Rinaldo Walcott, Flagship on Critical Thought in African Humanities, recorded on August 21, 2020, YouTube video, 1:52:36, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uQHtgJUnAtg>.

<sup>46</sup> Walcott, "The Black Aquatic."

In the introductory paragraphs that follow, I contextualize Afrofuturism as a politicized imagining of freedom within existing Afrofuturist discourse. Following are this thesis' four sections: in section one, I examine the Middle Passage's theorization as the rupture of modernity with a focus on the foundational Black geographies scholarship of Paul Gilroy and Katherine McKittrick; in section two, I introduce the reparative imaginary and contextualize the concept within the work of Christina Sharpe and Afrofuturist theorists tobias c. van Veen and Reynaldo Anderson; in the third and fourth sections, I analyze Modisakeng's *Passage* and Jackson's *Take Me to the Water* in relation to the concepts of ancestral "Black water," symbolic dress, and "submerged perspectives."<sup>47</sup> In the conclusion, I reflect on the ethics of a reparative imaginary in contemporary artistic representations of the Middle Passage and examine Afrofuturism's generative oppositionality to Afropessimism, the latter defined in this thesis within the formulations of Afropessimist theorist Frank B. Wilderson III as a theory that positions Black peoples outside of the category of the Human within an ontology of "social death" due to an irreparable conflation of Blackness with enslavement.<sup>48</sup>

Modisakeng and Jackson engage with histories of the Middle Passage and the Transatlantic slave trade by presenting themselves as subjects within their works. Self-portraiture is a defining aspect of both artists' broader practices, as are critical interventions into African or Black diasporic histories and the colonial archive. By prioritizing African or Black diasporic histories both *Passage* and *Take Me to the Water* examine what Alexis Pauline Gumbs describes as "submerged perspectives" in relation to the metaphorical, material, and ancestral.<sup>49</sup> Modisakeng

---

<sup>47</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 61; DuPlessis, *The Material Atlantic*, 20; and Gumbs, *Dub*, xii.

<sup>48</sup> Frank B. Wilderson III, *Afropessimism* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2020), 15.

<sup>49</sup> Gumbs, *Dub*, xii.

and Jackson's work also engage with the "submerged" in relation to African or Black diasporic histories "from below," or the foregrounding of individual and collective acts and experiences of marginalized persons in the Global South rather than dominant historical narratives of colonial nation-states and their ruling elites.<sup>50</sup> Haitian anthropologist and historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot describes the intentional omission of histories "from below" as a purposeful silencing that aids in the production of colonial power.<sup>51</sup> Importantly, the "submerged" in Modisakeng and Jackson's work is more than a position of subjugation, it is also African or Black diasporic subversive rebellion against oppression. This thesis' main research questions are whether the contemporary Afrofuturist works *Passage* and *Take Me to the Water* hold a reparative potential for healing from intergenerational cultural and historical trauma through the reimagining of untold histories – the "submerged perspectives" – in the aftermath of the Transatlantic slave trade, and if so how?<sup>52</sup> Examples considered in this thesis include *Passage*'s engagement with the submerged histories of Black South African, or Black African, labourers' twentieth century oceanic passage to Europe during World War I under British colonial rule as well as the refuge of the coastal Cape Colony maroon community of Hanglip that nurtured an enslaved community in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>53</sup> Additional examples include *Take Me to the Water*'s attention to the submerged histories of terror and brutality experienced by enslaved African women during the Middle Passage as well as the "Black self-fashioning," in the words of Black visual culture theorist Tina Campt, of enslaved persons' special occasion dress on South Carolina

---

<sup>50</sup> For more on 'history from below,' see Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, "'History from Below,'" *Social Scientist* 11, no. 4 (April 1983): 3-20, <https://doi-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/10.2307/3517020>; and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," Abahlali, accessed January 5, 2021, [https://abahlali.org/files/Can\\_the\\_subaltern\\_speak.pdf](https://abahlali.org/files/Can_the_subaltern_speak.pdf)

<sup>51</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015), 49.

<sup>52</sup> Gumbs, *Dub*, xii.

<sup>53</sup> Gumbs, *Dub*, xii.

rice plantations.<sup>54</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, I use “Black South African” in reference to Modisakeng to align with the specificities of South African language of Black identification. In the South African context, “Black South African” and “Black African” are used interchangeably to denote the majority racial population of Indigenous peoples from the southern African region, as well as Indigenous peoples of other African nations. In the American context, the terms “African American” and “Black” are used interchangeably for people of African descent. I use “Black American” to refer to Jackson as well as other theorists, writers, and artists born or working in the United States. More broadly, I use “Black,” “Blackness,” and “Black diaspora” throughout this thesis in relation to diasporic persons of African ancestry such as myself whose diverse histories and present-day realities are defined by complex entanglements of subjection, resistance, interiority, joy, and an insistence on livable Black futures. I view the black background in *Take Me to the Water* as what lies below the black water of Modisakeng’s *Passage*. Modisakeng and Jackson’s works take place within an ambiguous oceanic spatiality that literature and visual culture scholar Ruth Mayer associates with the speculative: “in-between and nowhere at all.”<sup>55</sup> Both *Passage* and *Take Me to the Water* depict their subjects’ freedom in such “in-between and nowhere” spaces and yet engage with material Black geographies and as such present Afrofuturist reimaginings the Middle Passage of the Transatlantic slave trade.<sup>56</sup> Both works serve as examples of contemporary Afrofuturist art conceptualized within a reparative imaginary that prioritizes repair, or healing, for African and Black diasporic persons.

---

<sup>54</sup> Gumbs, *Dub*, xii; and Tina Campt, *Listening to Images* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 50.

<sup>55</sup> Ruth Mayer, “Africa as an Alien Future”: The Middle Passage, Afrofuturism, and Postcolonial Waterworlds,” *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 45, no. 4 (2000): 556, <https://lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/login?url=https://www.jstor.org/stable/41157608>.

<sup>56</sup> Mayer, “Africa as an Alien Future,” 556.

## Defining Afrofuturism: To Imagine Freedom

In addition to ancestral “Black water,” symbolic dress, and African or Black diasporic “submerged perspectives,” this thesis’ study of Modisakeng’s *Passage* and Jackson’s *Take Me to the Water* foregrounds the Afrofuturist theoretical framework of “chronopolitics” conceptualized by Kodwo Eshun.<sup>57</sup> To examine Modisakeng’s *Passage* and Jackson’s *Take Me to the Water* as Afrofuturist contemporary artworks necessitates a contextualization of Afrofuturism within existing scholarship. Key Afrofuturist texts include Afrofuturist theorists Reynaldo Anderson and Charles E. Jones’ *Afrofuturism 2.0: The Rise of Astro-Blackness* (2016), Ytasha Womack’s *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture* (2013), literature scholar Isiah Lavender III’s *Afrofuturism Rising: The Literary Prehistory of a Movement* (2019), tobias c. van Veen and Reynaldo Anderson’s “Future Movements: Black Lives, Black Politics, Black Futures” (2018), and Black feminist abolitionist scholar-activist Robyn Maynard’s “Reading Black Resistance through Afrofuturism: Notes on Post-Apocalyptic Blackness and Black Rebel Cyborgs in Canada” (2018).<sup>58</sup> The term “Africanfuturism” was coined by cultural writer Mark Dery in 1994 and although it only briefly references the African continent and excludes the broader Black diaspora outside of the United States, it remains the commonly cited definition when introducing Afrofuturism and contextualizing its expansion within popular culture:

Speculative fiction that treats African-themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of twentieth-century technoculture – and, more generally, African American

---

<sup>57</sup> Gumbs, *Dub*, xii.

<sup>58</sup> Anderson and Jones, *Afrofuturism 2.0* (2016); Ytasha Womack, *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2013), <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/lib/concordia-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1381831>; Isiah Lavender III, *Afrofuturism Rising: The Literary Prehistory of a Movement* (Columbus: Ohio State University, 2019); tobias c. van Veen and Reynaldo Anderson, “Future Movements: Black Lives, Black Politics, Black Futures,” *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* 39 (Spring 2018): 5-21, <https://muse-jhu-edu.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/article/706955>; and Robyn Maynard, “Reading Black Resistance through Afrofuturism: Notes on post-Apocalyptic Blackness and Black Rebel Cyborgs in Canada,” *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* 39 (Spring 2018): 29-47, <https://muse-jhu-edu.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/article/706957>.



signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future – might, for want of a better term, be called “Afrofuturism.”<sup>59</sup>

In the introduction to *Afrofuturism 2.0: The Rise of Astro-Blackness* Reynaldo Anderson and Charles E. Jones examine Afrofuturist critical discourse to date, its relation to other disciplines, and critiques of the term “Afrofuturism.” Anderson and Jones define “Afrofuturism 2.0” as:

Afrofuturism 2.0 is the early twenty-first century technogenesis of Black identity reflecting counter histories, hacking and or appropriating the influence of network software, database logic, cultural analytics, deep remixability, neurosciences, enhancement and augmentation, gender fluidity, posthuman possibility, the speculative sphere, with transdisciplinary applications and has grown into an important Diasporic techno-cultural “Pan-African” movement.<sup>60</sup>

Since this thesis examines contemporary artistic production from South Africa and the United States, I view Anderson and Jones’ definition as a generative offering due to its transnationalism and transdisciplinarity. “Afrofuturism 2.0” stands in opposition to Dery’s formulation which does not extend “Afrofuturism” to artistic production outside of the American context.<sup>61</sup>

Critiques of regionalism remain a point of contention within Afrofuturist discourse and this thesis would be remiss to exclude those perspectives. I agree with visual cultures scholar Henriette Gunkel and artist and media art studies scholar kara lynch’s assertion that it is important to acknowledge that North American – and particularly Black American – associations remain central to understandings of Afrofuturism.<sup>62</sup> Kodwo Eshun and artist, experimental

---

<sup>59</sup> Dery, “Black to the Future,” 180.

<sup>60</sup> Anderson and Jones, eds., *Afrofuturism 2.0*, x.

<sup>61</sup> For more on the 1994 coining of “Afrofuturism” and later reflections on the term, see Dery, “Black to the Future”; and Tiffany E. Barber, Reynaldo Anderson, Mark Dery, and Sheree Renée Thomas, “25 Years of Afrofuturism and Black Speculative Thought: Roundtable with Tiffany E. Barber,” *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* 39 (Spring 2018): 136-144, <https://muse-jhu-edu.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/article/706962>.

<sup>62</sup> Henriette Gunkel and kara lynch, eds., *We Travel the Space Ways: Black Imagination, Fragments, and Diffractions* (Verlag: transcript, 2019), 24, <https://doi-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/10.14361/9783839446010>. In *Afrofuturism Rising: The Literary Prehistory of a Movement* (2019) Afrofuturist literature scholar Isiah Lavender III argues that “African Futurism” is a more appropriate term for the cultural and artistic production from the African continent. Lavender III also notes American-born Nigerian speculative fiction writer Nnedi Okorafor’s preference for “African Futurism” which illustrates the term’s resonance with those in the Black diaspora. I would add Botswana-born and Johannesburg- and Ottawa-based artist Pamela Phatsimo Sunstrum’s use of “African Futurism” as another example. For Sunstrum’s distinction between “Afrofuturism” and “African Futurism” see,

filmmaker, and co-founder of the Black Audio Film Collective (1982-1998), John Akomfrah (b. 1957, Accra, Ghana) similarly consider critiques of Afrofuturisms's perceived "Americentricity" in conversation together from Black British positionalities.<sup>63</sup> In their exchange, Akomfrah expresses concern that "African Futurism" may be similarly susceptible to essentializing constructions of Black experience and culture, and furthermore, to the possibility of upholding an ideal against which to measure diasporic futurisms.<sup>64</sup> It is to avoid essentialization that I refrain from positioning Jackson's work as Afrofuturist and Modisakeng's work as African Futurist. An in-depth consideration of Eshun's and Akomfrah's provocations are beyond the focus of this thesis, however, they merit critical reflection if "Afrofuturism 2.0," and formulations that follow, are to continue to assert their relevance for cultural and artistic production from the African continent.<sup>65</sup> In my view, Gunkel and Lynch offer a definition of Afrofuturism which most strongly aligns with this thesis' focus on metaphorical and material oceanic geographies and the interconnectedness of past, present, and futures in *Passage and Take Me to the Water*: "[Afrofuturism] is black visioning that looks into outer-space, underground, and at sea... These visionary fictions reference the past in our present in order to claim a

---

Pamela Phatsimo Sunstrum, "Afro-Mythology and African Futurism: The Politics of Imagining and Methodologies for Contemporary Creative Research Practices," *Paradoxa* 25 (2013): 113-130.

<sup>63</sup> John Akomfrah and Kodwo Eshun, "The Secessionist Manifestos of Certain Received Wisdoms," in *We Travel the Space Ways: Black Imagination, Fragments, and Diffractions*, eds. Henriette Gunkel and Kara Lynch (Verlag: transcript, 2019), 368-369, <https://doi-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/10.14361/9783839446010>. The Black Audio Film Collective (BAFC) (1982-1998) was comprised of seven Black filmmakers and artists: John Akomfrah, Reece Auguiste, Edward George, Lina Gopaul, Claire Joseph, Avril Johnson, and Trevor Mathison. For more on the BAFC see, Kobena Mercer, "Becoming Black Audio: An Interview with John Akomfrah and Trevor Mathison," *Black Camera* 6, no. 2 (Spring 2015): 79-93, <https://muse-jhu-edu.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/article/583173>; Eshun, "Further Considerations"; and Erik Morse, "The Oceanic Ecologies of John Akomfrah," *ArtReview* 68, no. 1 (March 2016), <https://www.artreview.com/jan-feb-2016-feature-john-akomfrah/>.

<sup>64</sup> Akomfrah and Eshun, "The Secessionist Manifestos," 369.

<sup>65</sup> For artist and scholar Nettrice Gaskins' conception of "Afrofuturism 3.0" as an increasing engagement with information and new media technologies (such as data visualizations) see, Nettrice Gaskins, "Welcome to Afrofuturism 3.0," *Slate*, December 2, 2015, <https://slate.com/technology/2015/12/how-i-m-using-technology-to-create-afrofuturism-art.html>. The development of "Afrofuturism 2.0" and "Afrofuturism 3.0" within the same year (2015) demonstrate the framework's increasing relevance within popular culture and artistic production.

future.”<sup>66</sup> I prefer Gunkel and Lynch’s definition not as a term that attempts to encompass all Afrofuturist production but as a framework for reading chronopolitical intervention in Modisakeng and Jackson’s reparative reimaginings of the Middle Passage.

This thesis is premised on the position that “submerged perspectives” must be inclusive of both Black and Indigenous peoples.<sup>67</sup> While this thesis only briefly alludes to Indigenous Black Africans in what is now predominantly called South Africa as well as Black diasporic female water spirit mythologies in both Modisakeng and Jackson’s work, it is imperative to consider the relations between Black and Indigenous persons within the context of anti-Black and anti-Indigenous settler colonial states. According to Black studies and Indigenous studies scholar Tiffany Lethabo King and Indigenous studies scholars Jenell Navarro and Andrea Smith, the “political and ontological impasse” resulting from claims of “incommensurability,” between differing communities is in fact a productive “relationality” because it enables the development of “otherwise” relations.<sup>68</sup> By “otherwise” King, Nevell, and Smith posit continued Black and Indigenous engagement with and “through” impasse to challenge subjection by the settler colonial state via collaborative and creative rebellious practices, such as disruption and improvisation, to move towards greater relation.<sup>69</sup> King, Nevell, and Smith note the interconnectedness of Black and Indigenous “existence as resistance” within settler colonialism and position otherwise as liberatory praxis in the following terms: “To live an otherwise life, to

---

<sup>66</sup> Gunkel and Lynch, eds., *We Travel the Space Ways*, 22.

<sup>67</sup> Gumbs, *Dub*, xii.

<sup>68</sup> Tiffany Lethabo King, Jenell Navarro, and Andrea Smith, “Beyond Commensurability: Toward an Otherwise Stance on Black and Indigenous Relationality,” in *Otherwise Worlds: Against Settler Colonialism and Anti-Blackness*, edited by Tiffany Lethabo King, Jenell Navarro, and Andrea Smith (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 4,1,8.

<sup>69</sup> King, Navarro, and Smith, “Beyond Commensurability,” 8.

assert an otherwise being, or to create an otherwise world is to invest in decolonization.”<sup>70</sup> In this way, Afrofuturist reimaginings, including Modisakeng and Jackson’s work, can be read as representative of an otherwise futurity that envisions alternatives to subjection by anti-Black and anti-Indigenous settler colonial states. Afrofuturist contemporary art, in my view, is an otherwise envisioning of, and insistence upon, livable and thriving Black futures: it is an alternative to the systemic anti-Black racism and violence of our present realities. A discussion of “submerged perspectives” within this thesis’ examination of contemporary Afrofuturist representations of Middle Passage must address the entangled histories of dispossession and solidarities within and “through” impasse afforded by Black and Indigenous “otherwise ontologies” as conceptualized by King, Nevell, and Smith.<sup>71</sup> Afrofuturism is an otherwise futurity dependent on, rather than adjacent to, decolonization.

### **The Politics of Afrofuturist Aesthetics: The Chronopolitical Intervention**

In this introductory section I define “chronopolitics” to situate an examination of Modisakeng and Jackson’s works within Kodwo Eshun’s formulations on Afrofuturism. In doing so, the aesthetics of Afrofuturism are contextualized within an interventionist politics and reparative approach. Eshun situates contemporary Black diasporic ontology within a “cultural project of recovery” necessitated by the negation of Black subjectivity and the erasure of pre-colonial African history within Western European Enlightenment constructions of the human, or personhood.<sup>72</sup> Eshun argues that the racist absenting of African histories and cultures by European Enlightenment philosophers such as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831)

---

<sup>70</sup> King, Navarro, and Smith, “Beyond Commensurability,” 13.

<sup>71</sup> Gumbs, *Dub*, xii; and King, Navarro, and Smith, eds., “Beyond Commensurability,” 8, 13.

<sup>72</sup> Eshun, “Further Considerations,” 287.

requires the assemblage of Afrofuturist “countermemories” to challenge the colonial construct of a singular and linear History of modernity.<sup>73</sup> Etymologically, “chrono” is derived from the Greek word root “khronos,” or time, and “politics” is derived from the Latin “politicus,” or civil government and political.<sup>74</sup> The term “chronopolitics” was coined by French cultural theorist Paul Virilio (1932-2018) to describe time in relation to the acceleration of speed, modern warfare, and a distinction with space.<sup>75</sup> Eshun’s usage of “chronopolitics” differs from Virilio’s by problematizing global markets modelling and the detrimental effect such projections have on African futures.<sup>76</sup> Eshun’s “counter-futures” challenge future global scenarios which position the Black diaspora, and the African continent specifically, as sites of, and peoples, destined for a naturalized dystopia.<sup>77</sup> As an example, Eshun identifies Africa’s ongoing subjection to dystopian “futurist projection” in the following statement: “African social reality is overdetermined by intimidating global scenarios, doomsday economic projections, weather predictions, medical reports on AIDS, and life-expectancy forecasts.”<sup>78</sup> This thesis extends Eshun’s argument by adding that lived realities across the Black diaspora are similarly subject to dystopian predetermination including, but not limited to, reduced life-expectancy, predisposition to disease,

---

<sup>73</sup> Eshun, “Further Considerations,” 288. With the capitalization of History, I am referring to the hegemonic narrative of a singular and linear history resulting from a Eurocentric historiography.

<sup>74</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v., “chrono,” accessed March 20, 2021, <https://www-oed-com.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/view/Entry/366883>; and *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v., “politics,” accessed March 20, 2021, <https://www-oed-com.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/view/Entry/146885>.

<sup>75</sup> Eshun’s formulation of chronopolitics, unlike Virilio’s, is strongly connected to space and specifically, African geographies. Virilio argued that war and weapons technologies, rather than economics, determined socio-historical phenomena and that the modern era is defined by a management of time and a warfare logic wherein speed determines dominance. For more on Virilio’s chronopolitics, see Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dromology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); Ian Klinke, “Chronopolitics: A Conceptual Matrix,” *Progress in Human Geography* 37, no. 5 (2013): 673-690: <https://doi-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/10.1177/0309132512472094>; and Ian James, *Paul Virilio* (London: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>76</sup> Eshun, “Further Considerations,” 290.

<sup>77</sup> Eshun, “Further Considerations,” 301.

<sup>78</sup> Eshun, “Further Considerations,” 291-292.

and chronic illness forecasting.<sup>79</sup> In this way, to produce “countermemories” within African or Black diasporic histories is to effect “counter-futures.”<sup>80</sup> This challenge to a singular and linear anti-Black future forecasted by an industry of capital-generating commodification is a chronopolitical act.<sup>81</sup> The collapse of temporal distinction is the political, and historical, intervention of Afrofuturist chronopolitics; the imagining of Black futures is not conceived separately from the demand for equitable and thriving Black life today and acknowledges the “ongoingness,” to quote Sharpe, of unfolding histories resulting in present-day formations of anti-Blackness.<sup>82</sup> Chronopolitical reimaginings of the past hold a “revisionist logic” which, as Eshun argues, “may be understood as a series of powerful competing futures that infiltrate the present.”<sup>83</sup> The Afrofuturist chronopolitical intervention is simultaneously a rewriting of the past, present-focused, and futures-oriented. The historical revision, or chronopolitical intervention, present in both *Passage* and *Take Me to the Water* works towards the realization of liberation by prioritizing “submerged perspectives,” specifically, submerged histories of the Middle Passage.<sup>84</sup>

## **SECTION ONE: The Middle Passage: Mapping “The Rupture” of Modernity**

### **Contextualizing the Trauma of the Middle Passage in Recent Scholarship**

In this section, I contextualize this thesis’ examination of Modisakeng and Jackson’s work as Afrofuturist reimaginings of the Middle Passage within Transatlantic slavery studies and Black

---

<sup>79</sup> Eshun, “Further Considerations,” 291; and Sujata Gupta, “Why African-Americans May Be Especially Vulnerable to COVID-19,” *ScienceNews*, April 10, 2020, <https://www.sciencenews.org/article/coronavirus-why-african-americans-vulnerable-covid-19-health-race>.

<sup>80</sup> Eshun, “Further Considerations,” 301.

<sup>81</sup> Eshun, “Further Considerations,” 290.

<sup>82</sup> Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 20.

<sup>83</sup> Eshun, “Further Considerations,” 297.

<sup>84</sup> Gumbs, *Dub*, xii.

geographies scholarship.<sup>85</sup> The Middle Passage refers to the Atlantic maritime routes which transported captured and enslaved Africans from the African continent to what is now predominantly called the Americas. The first instance of forced migration, or more specifically, the first instance of capture and abduction, of African persons by Europeans took place in 1444 under the Portuguese monarchy.<sup>86</sup> Approximately 15 million African persons were forcibly taken from their homelands for chattel slavery between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries. Chattel slavery refers to the anti-Black racist legal and social system, or “racial logic” in the words of Robyn Maynard, that dehumanized enslaved Africans via categorization as property.<sup>87</sup> The Slave Voyages Database estimates that between the years 1501 to 1866 approximately 12.5 million captured African persons were forcibly moved during the Middle Passage.<sup>88</sup> Transatlantic slave trade historian Afua Cooper states an additional 30 to 40 million African persons died in sites of enslavement such as coastal dungeons, coffles, aboard slave ships, on plantations, mines, and in

---

<sup>85</sup> I limit this thesis to discourses of the Transatlantic slave trade from the last fifteen years, except for Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic*.

<sup>86</sup> Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods, eds., *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2007), 8; and Afua Cooper, *The Hanging of Angélique: The Untold Story of Canadian Slavery and the Burning of Old Montréal* (Toronto: Harper Perennial, 2006), 27. Forced migration is a geopolitical category of Black diaspora that includes the four centuries of the Transatlantic slave trade. McKittrick and Woods draw from the scholarship of African American literature and Black diaspora scholar Carole Boyce Davies and Black diaspora scholar Babacar M’Bow to identify additional geopolitical categories of diaspora; induced, or twentieth and twenty-first century migrations resulting from economic imbalances; and, voluntary, or migration of African peoples during pre-Columbian and Indian Ocean trades and explorations. This thesis extends the category of induced migration to include climate emergencies.

<sup>87</sup> Robyn Maynard, *Policing Black Lives: Violence in Canada from Slavery to the Present* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2017), 18. State-supported slavery existed in Canada for over 200 years. Olivier Le Jeune was the first African enslaved person to arrive in what is now predominantly called Québec in 1628. Indigenous peoples, or “Panis” as formerly called, were enslaved by French settler colonists in what is now predominantly called Canada (pre-Confederation). Enslavement was formally approved by French King Louis XIV on May 1, 1689 although it had been practiced for decades before. For more, see Maynard, *Policing Black Lives*.

<sup>88</sup> “Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade - Estimates,” Slave Voyages Database, accessed December 14, 2020, <https://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/estimates>. This thesis focuses on the Middle Passage of the Transatlantic slave trade and not the Intra-American slave trade which involved the transshipment of enslaved Africans within what is now called the Americas to other European colonies for enslavement. For more on the Transatlantic and Intra-American slave trades, see “Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade - Understanding the Database”; and “Intra-American Slave Trade - Understanding the Voyage.”

households.<sup>89</sup> The trauma of the Middle Passage, and its relation to the ongoing dehumanization of Black peoples, is examined in Christina Sharpe’s significant text *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016). For Sharpe, the analytic of “wake work” is the present-day encounter of a “past not yet past” with an “insistence on existing,” or “Black being,” that is positioned against pervasive anti-Black oppression, or “the weather” of inescapable racism that normalizes Black violence and death.<sup>90</sup> Sharpe’s conception of “the weather” is particularly relevant for this thesis’ examination of Afrofuturist oceanic geographies and the liberatory possibilities of – and desire for – reimagined aquatic spaces that nurture Black lives.<sup>91</sup> Black speculative narratives offer an alternative to the precarious conditions of “the weather” by transforming aqueous ecologies from inhospitable environments to refuges. To quote Tiffany Lethabo King, Jenell Navarro, and Andrea Smith in discussion of Black studies scholar and artist Ashon Crawley’s work, “otherwise ontologies are rooted in life, the simple capacity to breathe.”<sup>92</sup> In a March 2020 interview, poet and writer Nathaniel Mackey discusses his formulation “Black breath” – breath made by and for the Black body – and the “intentness and evidentness of breath” – produced by jazz horn players as rebellion within climates of anti-Black racism and violence that endanger Black lives.<sup>93</sup> Similar to Mackey’s conceptualization, I view the intentional emphasis on “Black breath” as an “insistence” on “Black being” in the words of Sharpe: it is to insist on Black lives.<sup>94</sup> Mackey’s thinking and writing is a response to the 2014 murder of Eric Garner (1970-

---

<sup>89</sup> Cooper, *The Hanging of Angélique*, 35. By the end of the fifteenth century Portugal was the leading maritime power in the world. Following a period of Portuguese and Spanish dominance, the Dutch emerged as the world’s maritime leader and traders of enslaved persons in the mid-seventeenth century. By the early eighteenth century, the British became the leading global maritime power and slave trading nation following the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714).

<sup>90</sup> Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 11-13, 20.

<sup>91</sup> Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 104-106.

<sup>92</sup> King, Navarro, and Smith, “Beyond Commensurability,” 13.

<sup>93</sup> Nathaniel Mackey, “The Art of Poetry No. 107: Nathaniel Mackey,” *The Paris Review*, no. 232 (Spring 2020): 148.

<sup>94</sup> Mackey, “The Art of Poetry,” 148; and Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 11.



2014) and Mackey’s March 2020 interview was published just several months before the May 25, 2020 murder of George Floyd (1973-2020) who would echo Garner’s last words: “I can’t breathe.” Floyd’s killing initiated the global mobilization of Black Lives Matter protests against anti-Black racism and violence, particularly policing practices. For many across the world, the summer of 2020 was an awakening to the pervasiveness of anti-Black racism and violence. For Black peoples, Floyd’s killing was – and remains – a painful and public tragedy that demonstrates the vulnerability of our lives which we always already understood to be ever-present. Importantly, Black resistance – such as global Black Lives Matter protests – and the fulsomeness of Black life in all its expressions and complexities persist in our “living in the wake,” to quote Sharpe, despite such contemporary traumas.<sup>95</sup> With repair, or healing, and ethics in mind, the following sections examine Modisakeng and Jackson’s works as Afrofuturist reimaginings of the Middle Passage. This thesis focuses on how Brand’s concept of ancestral “Black water,” understandings of symbolic dress, and the foregrounding of “submerged perspectives” are used within reparative reimaginings of the Middle Passage via chronopolitical intervention to connect the past, present, and futures.<sup>96</sup>

### **The Black Atlantic: Beyond the Metaphorical**

This thesis’ examination of Modisakeng and Jackson’s work demonstrates the increasing influence of Afrofuturism in discourse, the arts, and popular culture from the African continent and throughout the Black diaspora. The Middle Passage is a significant subject within

---

<sup>95</sup> Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 15. For more, see Robyn Maynard, “Police Abolition/Black Revolt,” *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* 41 (December 2020): 70-78, <https://doi-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/10.3138/topia-009>; Rodney Diverlus, Sandy Hudson, and Syrus Marcus Ware, eds., *Until We Are Free: Reflections on Black Lives Matter in Canada* (Regina: University of Regina Press, 2020); and Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016).

<sup>96</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 61; DuPlessis, *The Material Atlantic*, 20; and Gumbs, *Dub*, xii.

Afrofuturism and art histories. *Passage* and *Take Me to the Water* are two contemporary Afrofuturist examples of artistic engagement with the traumatic history of the Middle Passage. Historical works engaging with the Middle Passage include British landscape painter J.M.W. Turner's (1775-1851) *Slave Ship* (originally titled *Slavers Throwing overboard the Dead and Dying – Typhoon coming on*) first exhibited in 1840 at The Royal Academy of Arts in London, United Kingdom which depicts enslaved Africans as mere outlines gesturing in the air as they struggle in the violent wake of an unspecified slave ship (fig. 2).<sup>97</sup> Turner's depiction of the ill and deceased overboard represents the dehumanizing logic of the Transatlantic slave trade wherein enslaved Africans held the status of insured property not persons. In addition to *Passage* and *Take Me to the Water*, contemporary examples of Middle Passage artworks include Black American interdisciplinary artist Sondra Perry's (b. 1986, Perth Amboy, New Jersey, United States) video installation *Typhoon coming on* (2018) featuring a digital manipulation of Turner's *Slave Ship* and Nigerian American artist Victor Ekpuk's (b. 1964, Nigeria [city unknown]) illustration *Slave Narrative* (2008) which, like *Passage*, depicts an aerial view of a slave ship on a body of black-coloured water (figs. 3-5).<sup>98</sup> Contemporary Afrofuturist artworks preceding Modisakeng's *Passage* and Jackson's *Take Me to the Water* exemplify the expansion of

---

<sup>97</sup> For more on Turner's *The Slave Ship*, see Sam Smiles, "Turner and the Slave Trade: Speculation and Representation, 1805-1840," *The British Art Journal* 8, no. 3 (Winter 2007): 47-54, <https://lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/login?url=https://www.jstor.org/stable/41614774>; and J.M.W. Turner, *Slave Ship* [originally titled *Slavers Throwing overboard the Dead and Dying – Typhoon coming on*], 1840, oil on canvas, 36 x 48 in., Boston, Museum of Fine Arts Boston, accessed February 7, 2021, <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/31102>.

<sup>98</sup> Sondra Perry, *Typhoon coming on*, 2018, video, installation view at The Luma Foundation, Zurich, part of the *Luma Westbau: Sarah Morris, Arthur Jafa and Sondra Perry* exhibition, 2018, Sondra Perry, accessed February 7, 2021, <https://sondraperry.com/Typhoon-coming-on-at-The-Luma-Foundation>; and Victor Ekpuk, *Slave Narrative*, 2008, graphite and pastel on paper, 42 1/4 x 65 in., Washington D.C., Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, accessed February 7, 2021, [https://africa.si.edu/collections/view/objects/asitem/items\\$0040:18632](https://africa.si.edu/collections/view/objects/asitem/items$0040:18632). For more on Perry's *Typhoon coming on*, see Kelly Filreis, "On Three Works by Sondra Perry," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 61, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 47-56, <https://doi-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/10.13110/framework.61.1.0047>. For more on Ekpuk's broader artistic practice, see Chika Okeke-Agulu, "Contemporary African Artists and the Pan-African Imaginary: Skunder Boghossian, Kwabene Ampofo-Anti, and Victor Ekpuk," *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* 33 (Fall 2013): 56-69, <https://muse-jhu-edu.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/article/539541>.

Afrofuturism in contemporary art. An example is John Akomfrah's *Vertigo Sea* (2015), a 48 minute, three-channel installation, which premiered at the 56<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale International Art Exhibition: *All the World's Futures* (May 9 to November 22, 2015), curated by the late influential Nigerian curator Okwui Enwezor (1953-2019) (fig. 6).<sup>99</sup> *Vertigo Sea* features film and television archival footage sourced primarily from the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Natural History Unit alongside a fictional Victorian-era tableaux replete with the dramatical portrayal of the historical figure of abolitionist and writer Olaudah Equiano (1745-1797) in colonial military uniform.<sup>100</sup> Akomfrah connects histories of the Transatlantic slave trade, industrial whaling, conflict-induced twentieth century Vietnamese migration, and present-day Mediterranean migrations.<sup>101</sup> Perry's *Typhoon coming on*, Ekpuk's *Slave Narrative*, and Akomfrah's *Vertigo Sea* examine Atlantic "oceanic ontologies," to quote Akomfrah, and like Modisakeng's *Passage* and Jackson's *Take Me to the Water*, prioritize the submerged.<sup>102</sup>

"Submerged perspectives" are essential to an examination of the Middle Passage and the Transatlantic slave trade that prioritizes the voices of African or Black diasporic persons.<sup>103</sup> I

<sup>99</sup> John Akomfrah, *Vertigo Sea*, 2015, film still, three-channel HD video, 48:30 min., Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada, accessed February 7, 2021, <https://macm.org/en/exhibitions/john-akomfrah-vertigo-sea/>. For more on Akomfrah's *Vertigo Sea*, see Ian Bourland, "John Akomfrah: Multichannel Prehensions," *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* no. 45 (November 2019): 128-139, <https://muse-jhu-edu.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/article/738986>; and Anuradha Vikram, "Underneath the Black Atlantic: Race and Capital in John Akomfrah's *Vertigo Sea*," *X-tra: Contemporary Art Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (Spring 2019):18-33, <https://lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aft&AN=135911030&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

<sup>100</sup> "John Akomfrah: *Vertigo Sea*," Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, accessed December 1, 2020, <https://macm.org/en/exhibitions/john-akomfrah-vertigo-sea/>; and Morse, "The Oceanic Ecologies." Manumitted enslaved African and abolitionist Olaudah Equiano (c.1745-1797, born in present-day southern Nigeria) published his autobiography *The Interesting Narrative in the Life of Olaudah Equiano* in 1789. Equiano's widely known "slave narrative" was published within the context of the British abolitionist movement. The text details Equiano's experience of enslavement beginning in West Africa, continues with the terror of the Middle Passage, his study of nautical knowledge and practices, and later activism within abolitionist politics.

<sup>101</sup> Morse, "The Oceanic Ecologies"; Bourland, "John Akomfrah," 133-134; and Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 43.

<sup>102</sup> Morse, "The Oceanic Ecologies."

<sup>103</sup> Gumbs, *Dub*, xii.

view the presence of Modisakeng in *Passage* and Jackson in *Take Me to the Water* as more than self-representation; it is to foreground the perspectives and lived realities of African or Black diasporic persons. The word “rupture” is commonly invoked in Black diasporic and Black studies discourses in discussion of the Middle Passage and the Transatlantic slave trade. Dionne Brand begins *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging* (2011) with a personal account of the ruptural in an account of a childhood exchange between Brand and her grandfather in which a young Brand asks about the specific details of their African ancestry – a question her grandfather is unable to answer. Of this conversation and its greater significance in relation to the Black diaspora, Brand states: “It was a rupture in history, a rupture in the quality of being. It was also a physical rupture, a rupture of geography.”<sup>104</sup> Saidiya Hartman writes in *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2007): “For me, the rupture was the story.”<sup>105</sup> Hartman’s words reappear in the title of Jackson’s photograph *The Rupture Was the Story* in the *Take Me to the Water* series (fig. 7).<sup>106</sup> Paul Gilroy uses the words “catastrophic rupture” to describe modernity’s foundation upon the Middle Passage.<sup>107</sup> With the ruptural in mind, the following section’s brief examination of Gilroy’s meaningful contributions to the discipline of Black geographies provides an important lens with which to consider the forced movement of enslaved Africans in the time and space of the Middle Passage, Black diasporic cultural production’s origination within the containment of the slave ship, and the expansion of Gilroy’s conception of the Black Atlantic in recent scholarship.

---

<sup>104</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 5.

<sup>105</sup> Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 42.

<sup>106</sup> Ayana V. Jackson, *The Rupture Was the Story*, from the series *Take Me to the Water*, 2019, archival pigment print on German etching paper, 25 5/8 x 42 7/8 in., Chicago, Mariane Ibrahim Gallery, accessed November 10, 2020, <https://marianeibrahim.com/artists/27/series/take-me-to-the-water/1852-ayana-v.-jackson-the-rupture-was-the-story-2019/>.

<sup>107</sup> Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 187.

In his significant text on Black diasporic “intercultural” exchange, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), Gilroy argues against nationalist understandings of Black cultures by noting the transnational hybridity of African, Caribbean, and European cultures that intersected during the Transatlantic slave trade.<sup>108</sup> Gilroy uses the symbol of the slave ship in motion during the Middle Passage to metaphorically represent a cultural space outside of national and ethnic particularity.<sup>109</sup> Gilroy references the slave ship as a “living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion,” as “cultural and political units rather than abstract embodiments of the triangular trade.”<sup>110</sup> In *Passage*, the socio-political and cultural space that Gilroy describes takes the simple form of a rowboat, although the small vessel’s symbolic meaning carries the terror and containment of the slave ship. In *Take Me to the Water*, Jackson depicts, in my reading, a utopic space below the slave ship and routes of the Middle Passage. Importantly, Gilroy’s work has been expanded in recent scholarship with an emphasis on the materialities of the Black Atlantic as a space of human geographies constituted by lived social realities – sites of terror, resistance, and for some, survival.

The materialities of Brand’s concept of ancestral “Black water” is a significant concept within this thesis’ examination of Modisakeng’s *Passage* and Jackson’s *Take Me to the Water*.<sup>111</sup> I agree with McKittrick that conceptions of the slave ship and the Black Atlantic, must consider materiality. McKittrick and Black diaspora cultural studies scholar Clyde Woods identify a tendency in the humanities to incorporate “spatial metaphors” in relation to Black expressive

---

<sup>108</sup> Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 15.

<sup>109</sup> Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 19.

<sup>110</sup> Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 4, 27, 115.

<sup>111</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 61.

cultures without contextualizing within material geographies.<sup>112</sup> The risk in texts such as *The Black Atlantic*, writes McKittrick, is an “ungeographic” examination that erases “physical resonance” producing a “placelessness.”<sup>113</sup> McKittrick emphasizes that the materiality of water in relation to the Middle Passage is integral: the Atlantic Ocean is a material body of water and the Middle Passage references a duration of time upon that oceanic geography.<sup>114</sup> Following independent scholar Tapji Garba, gender and critical race studies scholar Sara-Maria Sorentino, and McKittrick’s formulations, I support the view that the metaphorical is not be replaced by material analyses in Black geographies. Rather, the conjunction of the metaphorical and material produces an understanding of the enslaved persons’ position that considers materiality in relation to socio-economic and political histories that produce space.<sup>115</sup> Spaces do not emerge from a void nor can spaces be conceived as “just is” to borrow from Garba and Sorentino’s citation of McKittrick.<sup>116</sup> This thesis examines water in relation to Modisakeng’s *Passage* and Jackson’s *Take Me to the Water* with specific attention to ancestry in both metaphorical and material terms. The black-coloured water in *Passage* and the solid black-coloured background in *Take Me to the Water* employ a spatiotemporal ambiguity which could be characterized as a void of “unbelonging” to quote Brand.<sup>117</sup> However, in my reading, the subjects in both works are represented to emphasize the materiality of their surroundings, the conditions of their subjection, and expressions of resistance. In discussion of the slave ship, McKittrick states that while the ship is a space of subjugation it is also a Black “oppositional place”: “a location of black

---

<sup>112</sup> McKittrick and Woods, eds., *Black Geographies*, 7.

<sup>113</sup> McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xxi, 4.

<sup>114</sup> McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, 18.

<sup>115</sup> Tapji Garba and Sara-Maria Sorentino. “Slavery is a Metaphor: A Critical Commentary on Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang’s ‘Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,’” *Antipode* 52, no. 3 (2020): 774, <https://doi-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/10.1111/anti.12615>.

<sup>116</sup> McKittrick cited in Garba and Sorentino, “Slavery is a Metaphor,” 11.

<sup>117</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 7.

subjectivity and human terror, black resistance and in some cases, black possession.”<sup>118</sup> The “Black possession” referenced by McKittrick informs the next section of this thesis which focuses on reimagining the rupture of the Middle Passage in contemporary Afrofuturist art.<sup>119</sup> The “ungeographic bodies,” to quote McKittrick, of enslavement are situated within Afrofuturist reimaginings of Black geographies and migration histories which foreground agency, or “oppositional” assertions of fulsome subjectivity, through resilience, resistance, and interiority.<sup>120</sup>

## **SECTION TWO: On the “Reparative Imaginary”: The Potential Towards Healing**

### **Situating the “Reparative Imaginary” Within Afrofuturist and Black Diasporic Discourses**

To examine the “submerged perspectives” within Modisakeng *Passage* and Jackson’s *Take Me to the Water* this thesis contextualizes the framework of the reparative imaginary within Black diasporic cultural and Afrofuturist discourses, specifically Christina Sharpe’s “brutal” and “liberatory” imaginations and tobias v. van Veen and Reynaldo Anderson’s “resilient imaginary.”<sup>121</sup> Beginning with Sharpe, in a 2019 lecture titled “Still Here,” the scholar borrows the term “brutal imagination” from the title of Black American writer and poet Cornelius Eady’s 2001 collection of poems on the experience of Black men in America.<sup>122</sup> Sharpe argues that the “brutal imagination” refers to a collective anti-Black racist imaginary that resulted in chattel

---

<sup>118</sup> McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, x.

<sup>119</sup> McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, x.

<sup>120</sup> McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xi.

<sup>121</sup> Gumbs, *Dub*, xii; Christina Sharpe, “Still Here,” *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* 41 (Spring 2019): 7. <https://muse-jhu-edu.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/article/751054>; and van Veen and Anderson, “Future Movements,” 6.

<sup>122</sup> Sharpe, “Still Here,” 7.

slavery and “involved the work of imagination – involved, in fact, the work of many imaginations, in the service of brutality.”<sup>123</sup> Sharpe also writes that the “brutal imagination” pervades present-day dehumanizing anti-Black racist narratives that endanger Black lives by conceptualizing Blackness as “terror”: the Black person embodies and enacts corporeal threat.<sup>124</sup> Sharpe offers the “liberatory imagination,” as a counter-imaginary to the “brutal imagination” of anti-Black racism.<sup>125</sup> According to Sharpe, Black peoples’ continued presence despite this brutality is a result of “thinking from Black,” or the imagining of Black futures as written on a page or lived in quotidian life.<sup>126</sup> I include Sharpe’s formulation of the “liberatory imagination” because the counter-imaginary she offers is one of repair.<sup>127</sup> Of the “liberatory imagination,” Sharpe states: “Our work is to imagine and inhabit otherwise that are already being lived; otherwise that allow for and sustain Black life.”<sup>128</sup> As articulated earlier in this thesis; Afrofuturism is an otherwise futurity that envisions thriving Black lives. Modisakeng’s *Passage* and Jackson’s *Take Me to the Water* reimagine the Middle Passage in reparative terms by positioning their subjects within spaces that allow for readings beyond subjection to include agential expressions of otherwise futurity.

I further contextualize the reparative imaginary within Afrofuturist discourse and specifically, the “resilient imaginary” conceptualized by tobias c. van Veen and Reynaldo Anderson.<sup>129</sup> In response to the present-day petro-capitalist “neoliberal imaginary,” which forecasts dystopian futures for the majority of the world’s population – as discussed by Eshun in relation to

---

<sup>123</sup> Sharpe, “Still Here,” 6.

<sup>124</sup> Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 79.

<sup>125</sup> Sharpe, “Still Here,” 7.

<sup>126</sup> Sharpe, “Still Here,” 12.

<sup>127</sup> Sharpe, “Still Here,” 7.

<sup>128</sup> Sharpe, “Still Here,” 12.

<sup>129</sup> van Veen and Anderson, “Future Movements,” 6.



“chronopolitics” – van Veen and Anderson state that the “resilient imaginary” is the counter-hegemonic response of the “other” against an imagining of the future wherein equitable and thriving futures are only foreseen for the wealthy, resourced, and white elite.<sup>130</sup> van Veen and Anderson argue that racism is foundational to neoliberal violence and describe the “resilient imaginary” as an Afrofuturist visioning of “reimagined, repurposed and remixed otherwise” futures irrespective of their perceived impossibilities.<sup>131</sup> In *Passage* and *Take Me to the Water*, the Middle Passage is reimagined in similar terms as Afrofuturist repair.

### **Defining the “Reparative Imaginary”**

In this section, I define what I term the reparative imaginary for this thesis’ examination of *Passage* and *Take Me to the Water* as Afrofuturist artworks. According to Saidiya Hartman, fictional narratives about the Transatlantic slave trade may approximate repair as a “form of compensation or even as reparations, perhaps the only kind we will ever receive.”<sup>132</sup> Like Hartman formulates in her discussion with Afropessimist Frank B. Wilderson III, I view appeals for material reparations as presenting an impasse due to their seeming impossibility and limitations.<sup>133</sup> As Hartman notes, material reparations will not address the intergenerational effects of systemic racism upon which present-day anti-Blackness is predicated.<sup>134</sup> In my view, scholars’, artists’, and activists’ historical contextualization of today’s systemic anti-Black racism are the generative, or healing, aspects of reparations discourses. Poet and cultural theorist

---

<sup>130</sup> van Veen and Anderson, “Future Movements,” 6.

<sup>131</sup> van Veen and Anderson, “Future Movements,” 7.

<sup>132</sup> Hartman, “Venus,” 4. The British Empire paid reparations totaling £twenty million in 1838 to former slave owners, rather than to formerly enslaved persons. For more, see Maynard, *Policing Black Lives*.

<sup>133</sup> Saidiya V. Hartman and Frank B. Wilderson III, “The Position of the Unthought,” *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 13, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 198, <https://doi-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/10.1215/quiparle.13.2.183>.

<sup>134</sup> Hartman and Wilderson III, “The Position of the Unthought,” 198.

Fred Moten echoes Hartman and productively characterizes appeals for material reparations as seeking “a form of recognition” which is problematized by the neoliberal system from which it seeks repair.<sup>135</sup> Writer and journalist Ta-Nehisi Coates argues for material reparations for Black Americans and a “national reckoning” for America more broadly in his 2014 article “The Case For Reparations,” originally published in *The Atlantic* and later included in Coates’ 2018 volume *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy*.<sup>136</sup> In his examination of intergenerational dispossession and subjugation resulting from enslavement, Coates calls for renumeration but also a collective recognition – similarly to Moten – of the white supremacist foundation of America and its ongoing aftereffects in systemic anti-Blackness.

I include Hartman, Moten, and Coates’ significant work on reparations to draw a distinction with my formulation of the reparative imaginary in relation to Modisakeng’s *Passage* and Jackson’s *Take Me to the Water*. I use the word “reparative” with a particular connotation that refers to the potential towards healing and not the obtainment of material reparations. By reparative imaginary, I refer to imaginings of freedom that hold the potential towards healing from the intergenerational cultural and historical trauma of the Transatlantic slave trade and its continuing present-day formations in systemic anti-Black racism and violence. By “imaginary” I refer to African or Black diasporic interventionist collective socio-cultural imagining rather than individual psychoanalytical imagining. I contextualize my use of imaginary within Martinican writer and theorist Édouard Glissant’s use of the term as a framing concept for his 1997 text *Poetics of Relation*. In Glissant’s usage, imaginary is the act of “thinking thought” which informs

---

<sup>135</sup> Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013), 151-152.

<sup>136</sup> Ta-Nehisi Coates, *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy* (New York: One World, 2018), 202.

a culture's collective perception and conception of the world.<sup>137</sup> Like media and Black cultural studies scholar Kara Keeling's formulation of the imagination in her text *Queer Times, Black Futures* (2019), I also consider the imaginary to be related to the ways in which thinking and imagining are integral to participation in "the collective production of shared senses of possibilities" and further – of shared imaginings of, and insistence upon, freedom from anti-Blackness.<sup>138</sup> The reparative imaginary resides in the artistic conceptualization – in the artist's thinking and imagining – of a chronopolitical intervention that ethically represents traumatic histories. Modisakeng's *Passage* and Jackson's *Take Me to the Water*, in my reading, are examples of reparative artistic conceptualization. The reparative framework offered in this thesis is not activated through particular motifs nor is it to be understood as an assured outcome for the artists themselves as subjects in these works.<sup>139</sup> Importantly, the potential towards healing begins with accountability to an Afrofuturist reparative imaginary's constituencies of African or Black diasporic persons. For the purposes of this thesis, accountability to Black peoples is the priority – it is the place from where I begin to conceptualize the reparative. In doing so I am not overlooking broader audiences with whom I am in otherwise relation, it is simply beyond the scope this thesis' considerations and a different discussion. My use of imaginary also draws from Moten's characterization in the following statement: "What is, I think most importantly, born

---

<sup>137</sup> Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), xxii-1. For psychoanalytic conceptions of the imaginary, see Jean-Paul Sartre, revised by Arlette Elkaim-Sartre, *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination* (New York: Routledge, 2004.) For Jacques Lacan's conception of the symbolic, real, and imaginary as three psychoanalytic orders as presented in various seminars in the 1950s, see Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink in collaboration with Héloïse Fink and Russell Grigg (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006). For sociological conceptions of the imaginary, see John B. Thompson, "Ideology and the Social Imaginary: An Appraisal of Castoriadis and Lefort," *Theory and Society* 11, no. 5 (September 1982): 659-681, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/657343>.

<sup>138</sup> Kara Keeling, *Queer Times, Black Futures* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 15.

<sup>139</sup> At the same time, representations of histories of Black subjugation and violence also hold the potential for harm, rather than repair, regardless of an artist, writer or other cultural practitioner's intention of critical historical intervention. An example, in my view, is Jackson's photographic self-portraiture series *Poverty Pornography* (2013) which includes lynching and abduction imagery.

and carried in Black art and in Black music is a kind of radical disruptive social energy that the open totality of that experience gives us a way of imagining how we might live otherwise.”<sup>140</sup> I view Moten’s imagining otherwise through Black expressivity as a reparative – and rebellious – gesture that disrupts systemic barriers, racism, and violence which impede equitable and thriving Black lives. Such a formulation is further supported by the rebelliousness of Black “musics,” in the words of Gilroy and McKittrick, as described this thesis’ introduction.<sup>141</sup>

The reparative imaginary holds the potential for healing in its simultaneous future-orientation and historical intervention. This framework involves the reimagining of histories wherein Black subjects are represented with agency. The figures in both Modisakeng’s *Passage* and Jackson’s *Take Me to the Water* agentially confront Black subjugation through expressions of Black resilience, resistance, and fulsome interiority. The reparative gesture, or the intent towards healing within and through the reparative imaginary, present in both *Passage* and *Take Me to the Water*, is historical contextualization of present-day anti-Blackness within African or Black diasporic histories, or what Hartman calls a “history of the present.”<sup>142</sup> This thesis does not claim that the reparative imaginary heals in definitive terms, rather this framework is to be viewed as a radically incomplete and ongoing process informing Black ontologies which are themselves informed by the “ongoingness” of “living in the wake” of enslavement as conceptualized by Sharpe.<sup>143</sup> Modisakeng and Jackson’s reparative Afrofuturist reimaginings of the Middle Passage are examined in the following two sections.

---

<sup>140</sup> “MacArthur Fellows Program: Fred Moten,” MacArthur Foundation, accessed October 8, 2020, <https://www.macfound.org/fellows/1067/>.

<sup>141</sup> Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 75; and McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xxi.

<sup>142</sup> Hartman and Wilderson III, “The Position of the Unthought,” 190.

<sup>143</sup> Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 20, 15. For more on “radical incompleteness,” see RAQS Media Collective, “How to Be an Artist by Night,” in *Art School (Propositions for the 21st Century)*, ed. Steven Henry Madoff (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009), 78.

### SECTION THREE: The Submerged Histories Within Modisakeng's *Passage*

*Passage* is a three-channel video work that prioritizes the concepts of “submerged perspectives,” ancestral “Black water,” and understandings of symbolic dress.<sup>144</sup> Modisakeng's work is accompanied by a melancholic and unsettling score by South African composer and sound artist Neo Muyanga.<sup>145</sup> Sounds of water such as rippling surfaces, lapping waves, forceful splashing, and submerged bubbling are sonically layered with Muyanga's composition. The loud sounds and darkened space of *Passage*'s installation contribute to the viewer's immersion in Modisakeng's watery environment. *Passage* begins with an aerial view of three figures in similar surroundings, each depicted alone in a small white rowboat surrounded by an expanse of black coloured-water.<sup>146</sup> The central channel features a male figure while the left and right channels depict female figures (fig. 8).<sup>147</sup> In researching this thesis, I realized that the central figure is Modisakeng (fig. 9).<sup>148</sup> The artist wades and turns within the partially submerged vessel. His movements are minimal and slow and expressive of a different emotional register than the other figures' large and rapid movements. I read the artist's presence in *Passage* as a reference to collective African or Black diasporic histories as well as the artist's own personal history as a Black South African. *Passage* is described on the artist's website as a mediation on “slavery's dismemberment of African identity and its enduring erasure of personal histories” with water symbolizing the living and dying of those who arrived and left South Africa “in trade, as

---

<sup>144</sup> Gumbs, *Dub*, xii; Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 61; and DuPlessis, *The Material Atlantic*, 20.

<sup>145</sup> “Mohau Modisakeng: Passage,” The Rooms, accessed October 23, 2020, <https://www.therooms.ca/exhibits/past-exhibit/mohau-modisakeng-passage>.

<sup>146</sup> The Rooms, “Mohau Modisakeng: Passage.”

<sup>147</sup> Mohau Modisakeng, *Passage*, 2017, three-channel HD video, 18:49 min., installation view in the Sale d'Armi, Arsenale, Venice, part of the 57<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale International Art Exhibition: *Viva Arte Viva*, 2017, Mohau Modisakeng, accessed November 10, 2020, <http://www.mohaumodisakengstudio.com/passage-2017>).

<sup>148</sup> Mohau Modisakeng, *Passage*, 2017, film still, three-channel HD video, 18:49 min., Mohau Modisakeng, accessed November 10, 2020, <http://www.mohaumodisakengstudio.com/passage-2017>.

cargo.”<sup>149</sup> In a 2017 conversation with artist Damien Davis, Modisakeng described *Passage* as a work primarily about “displacement” in the South African context but also inclusive of transnational historical and contemporary forced migrations that render Black South Africans as always already “out-of-place.”<sup>150</sup> The artist states: “With all my work there is a looking back, some sort of attempt to connect to the past, excavate and bring to the surface...And a great part of it is about redress. How does one account for the omitted voices in this long history?”<sup>151</sup> Modisakeng’s intent to redress submerged histories of the Middle Passage and the Transatlantic slave trade supports a reading of *Passage* as a work envisioned within the reparative imaginary. The artistic conceptualization of the work is a chronopolitical intervention that forefronts “submerged perspectives” to work towards healing from intergenerational historical and cultural trauma.<sup>152</sup> *Passage* is a work situated on an ambiguous body of black-coloured water yet it engages with metaphorical and material ancestry in relation to specific African or Black diasporic histories and geographies.

### **Articulations of Ancestral Belonging and “Unbelonging”**

Dionne Brand’s concept of ancestral “Black water,” in my interpretation, can be read both metaphorically and materially in Modisakeng’s *Passage*.<sup>153</sup> The work is visually striking in its cinematic contrast of black and white: the deep blackness of the work’s watery scenes, the austerity of the small white rowboats, and the subjects’ black and white dress. In *A Map to the*

---

<sup>149</sup> “Passage,” Mohau Modisakeng, accessed August 10, 2020, <http://www.mohaumodisakengstudio.com/passage-2017/2017/8/23/passage>.

<sup>150</sup> “New York Times w/ Damien Davis 2017,” Mohau Modisakeng, accessed December 5, 2020, <https://www.mohaumodisakengstudio.com/new-york-times-2017>

<sup>151</sup> Mohau Modisakeng, ““No Serenity Here”.”

<sup>152</sup> Gumbs, *Dub*, xii.

<sup>153</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 61.

*Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging*, Brand claims that the Black diaspora has only two forms of ancestry: “black water and the Door of No Return” referencing bodies of water, such as oceans and seas, as a “creation place” or the “place of emptied beginnings” resulting from forced migration.<sup>154</sup> The Door of No Return serves as both metaphor for diasporic “unbelonging” and also references material place; it was the final point at coastal dungeons prior to the forced departure from Africa for what is now predominantly called the Americas. Brand’s argument about the only two forms of Black diasporic ancestry can be complicated by considerations of additional migration histories, however, the poet and writer’s conceptualization of “Black water” as ancestral, of water as ancestry, is present in Modisakeng’s *Passage*.<sup>155</sup> I view the spatiotemporal ambiguity of the surround of black-coloured water in *Passage* as symbolic of ancestral “unbelonging” as conceptualized by Brand, or the trauma of unknown origins resulting from the violence of abduction, captivity, and enslavement.<sup>156</sup> Gunkel and Lynch argue that an outcome of the Enlightenment is the ongoing positioning of Africa and the Black diaspora as outside Western European spatiotemporality: “The colonial viewpoint renders Black people spatially static and outside of history.”<sup>157</sup> As *Passage* progresses, it becomes evident that the central channel featuring Modisakeng is moving in reverse order to the left and right scenes. Modisakeng’s rowboat slowly rises to the surface after beginning submerged. The left and right scenes depict rowboats slowly submerging after beginning on the water’s surface. Modisakeng exists in a different temporality to the female subjects; a time and place where the “happened is unhappening” in the words of Alexis Pauline Gumbs.<sup>158</sup> It is also possible that Modisakeng’s

---

<sup>154</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 61, 6-7.

<sup>155</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 61.

<sup>156</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 7.

<sup>157</sup> Gunkel and Lynch, eds., *We Travel the Space Ways*, 22.

<sup>158</sup> Alexis Pauline Gumbs, “Black Astrophysics: A Homemade Field of Love Dedicated to Clyde Eliot Gumbs,” in *We Travel the Space Ways: Black Imagination, Fragments, and Diffractions*, eds. Henriette Gunkel and kara lynch (Verlag: transcript, 2019), 17, <https://doi-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/10.14361/9783839446010>.

temporality is moving in a “backwards linearity” described by artist, author, activist, and co-founder of the Black Quantum Futurism collective Rasheedah Phillips aligning with “Indigenous African spatiotemporal consciousness” where once a future event occurs, time moves backwards to the present and past.<sup>159</sup> Offering an additional reading of water as ancestry, poet and writer M. NourbeSe Philip states that the Black diaspora’s “entrance to the past is through memory. And water.”<sup>160</sup> Philip describes this relationship to history in cyclical and spectral terms: a haunting resulting from repetition.<sup>161</sup> Modisakeng’s *Passage* engages with ongoing, underrepresented – if not entirely absented or submerged – histories of passage on waters, with special attention to Black South African experiences, through chronopolitical interventions that rely upon cultural memory.<sup>162</sup> In this way, Brand’s conception of the Door of No Return as a “creation place” is expanded to not only mean a metaphorical place of origin but a time and space of re-creation and repair.<sup>163</sup>

### **Ancestral “Black Water”: Oceanic Materialities**

---

<sup>159</sup> Rasheedah Phillips, “Future,” in *We Travel the Space Ways: Black Imagination, Fragments, and Diffractions*, eds. Henriette Gunkel and kara lynch (Verlag: transcript, 2019), 433, <https://doi-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/10.14361/9783839446010>. The Black Quantum Futurism collective is a multidisciplinary collaborative project between co-founders Rasheedah Phillips and Camae Ayewa. For more, see “What is Black Quantum Futurism?” Black Quantum Futurism, accessed January 10, 2021, <https://www.blackquantumfuturism.com/about>.

<sup>160</sup> M. NourbeSe Philip, as told to the author by Setaey Adamu Boateng. *Zong!* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), 203.

<sup>161</sup> Philip, *Zong!* 201-203.

<sup>162</sup> Modisakeng’s engagement with Black South African migration histories are beyond the scope of this thesis, although these migrations warrant continued critical examination in relation to *Passage* as well as the artist’s broader practice to honour the significance of those historical and contemporary movements and violences including the Apartheid era (1948-1994) and its ongoing aftereffects for Black South Africans. Both Johannesburg as a site of artistic production and Black South African migration histories will be addressed in subsequent research as part of a longer project. For more on South African history, see Iris Berger, *South Africa in World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.lib-exproxy.concordia.ca/lib/concordia-ebooks/detail.action?docID=430667>; and Saul Dubow, *Apartheid: 1948-1994* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/lib/concordia-ebooks/reader.action?docID=1685681&ppg=1>).

<sup>163</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 7.



Brand's concept of ancestral "Black water" in *Passage* can be further extended to an examination of oceanic materialities. In addition to Brand, scholars and writers such as Christina Sharpe and M. NourbeSe Philip examine the material presence of Black persons in waters such as oceans and seas. In discussion of Philip's 2008 text *Zong!* which critically intervenes in the colonial archive's account of the 1781 massacre of enslaved Africans aboard the slave ship *Zong*, Sharpe considers the materiality of the bodies of the enslaved African persons who either jumped or were thrown overboard by asking: "What happened to the components of their bodies in salt water?"<sup>164</sup> Sharpe consults Tufts University scholar Anne Gardulski who explains that the victims were likely consumed within an oceanic ecosystem of organisms consuming organisms as part of an ongoing "cycling" resulting in the atomized presence of those Africans in today's oceanic waters.<sup>165</sup> Gardulski contextualizes her claim in the concept of "residence time" which refers to the duration of a substance in the ocean from entry to departure.<sup>166</sup> Human blood is rich in sodium and Gardulski notes that the mineral possesses a "residence time" of 260 million years.<sup>167</sup> The ecology of the ocean is also evoked in the dub poetry of Alexis Pauline Gumbs who foregrounds the "submerged perspectives" of ancestral kin.<sup>168</sup> Gumb's poetry is an outcome of the writer's personal practice of "interspecies ancestral listening" of the voices from below the surface including enslaved and Indigenous human, whale, and coral relations.<sup>169</sup>

---

<sup>164</sup> Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 40.

<sup>165</sup> Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 40.

<sup>166</sup> Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 41.

<sup>167</sup> Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 41.

<sup>168</sup> Gumbs, *Dub*, xii.

<sup>169</sup> Gumbs, *Dub*, xii-xiii.

On *Passage*'s left channel, a female figure lies motionless holding a silver sceptre (fig. 10).<sup>170</sup> The figure wears men's dress: specifically, a long heavy black coat, white-collared shirt, black vest, wide-brimmed black hat, and black boots. In a 2019 artist talk, Modisakeng indicated that the dress of the figure on the left references the military uniform of the South African Native Labour Contingent, a British army corps of Indigenous southern African non-combatants who were recruited to work in French labour camps during World War I.<sup>171</sup> On February 21, 1917, the British ship the SS *Mendi* collided with the British ship the SS *Darro* in the English Channel. Aboard the SS *Mendi* was the last detachment of the South African Native Labour Contingent totaling 882 men, of which 615 died during the shipwreck. There were no efforts to recover the remains of the deceased men. I view *Passage* as a reference to the materiality of those persons in the oceanic "cycling" processes – to use Sharpe's words – of the English Channel in the early twentieth century.<sup>172</sup> Modisakeng's *Passage* is an Afrofuturist retelling of this absented Black South African history that prioritizes "submerged perspectives."<sup>173</sup> Given Modisakeng's historical contextualization within the submerged history of Black South African men's labour in the British military, the question remains why a female figure wears the contingent's uniform. In my interpretation, Modisakeng's inclusion of a female figure in men's uniform symbolizes an act of resistance: either as an expression of Black South African queer identity or as a reference to enslaved persons who escaped, or "freedom seekers" to use sociologist and Black Canadian historian Daniel Grafton Hill's preferred term, as cited by Maynard, over criminalizing language

---

<sup>170</sup> Mohau Modisakeng, *Passage*, 2017, film still, three-channel HD video, 18:49 min., Mohau Modisakeng, accessed November 10, 2020, <http://www.mohaumodisakengstudio.com/passage-2017>.

<sup>171</sup> Mohau Modisakeng, "Artist Talk; and Charmaine A. Nelson, "Black Body Politics and Self-Care: Slave Dress as Resistance in Caribbean and Canadian Slavery" (presentation, Department of Art History Speaker Series, University of Toronto, Toronto, ON, January 22, 2021).

<sup>172</sup> Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 40.

<sup>173</sup> Gumbs, *Dub*, xii.

such as “runaways” or “fugitive slaves.”<sup>174</sup> “Freedom seekers” strategically used clothing to not only escape from enslavement and avoid re-capture but, as art historian Charmaine A. Nelson argues, to transform their identity from enslaved to free person.<sup>175</sup> Jewelry, as a specific form of symbolic dress, is examined with regard to ancestral spirits in the below section’s discussion of *Passage*’s right channel.

The figure on the right channel lies down under a strong but different light observable in the reflection on the water. The figure wears a full black skirt, white petticoat, fitted jacket, and her ankles, wrists, and neck are adorned with white beads which in South African spirituality represent communion with ancestral water spirits through rites of passage (fig. 11).<sup>176</sup> American historian Iris Berger’s scholarship on South African history includes an examination of Black South African women’s role as spiritual leaders. As “diviners,” women communicated with deities to affect individual and collective harmony within the communities of small states or chiefdoms which remained unchanged until an increase in European trade began in the seventeenth century.<sup>177</sup> In a 2018 interview, Modisakeng describes matrilineal divination within his family, with specific reference to his mother who relies on dreams and visions in her work as a spiritual healer.<sup>178</sup> The figure on the right channel holds a whip, or “sjambok” as it is called in South Africa, while the small white rowboat slowly fills with water.<sup>179</sup> The whip can be read as

---

<sup>174</sup> Hill cited in Maynard, *Policing Black Lives*, 29.

<sup>175</sup> Nelson, “Black Body Politics.”

<sup>176</sup> Mohau Modisakeng, *Passage*, 2017, film still, three-channel HD video, 18:49 min.; Mohau Modisakeng, accessed November 10, 2020, <http://www.mohaumodisakengstudio.com/passage-2017>; and Modisakeng, “Artist Talk.”

<sup>177</sup> Berger, *South Africa in World History*, 7-16.

<sup>178</sup> Shannon Manuel, “Material, Metaphor, and the Black Body,” *Black Business Quarterly*, 77 (2018), <http://mags.capemedia.co.za/bbq/77/>.

<sup>179</sup> Modisakeng, “Artist Talk.”

references to the violences of the Transatlantic slave trade and South African policing.<sup>180</sup> The figure is wrapped in a Basotho blanket which is associated with Lesotho, a small country and former British colony within South Africa.<sup>181</sup> The Basotho people follow traditional customs such as herding, chieftaincy, and belief in ancestral spirits.<sup>182</sup> As *Passage* progresses, the figure on the right channel begins to violently thrash her body in the restricted space of the small rowboat as it sinks further below the surface. She circles the whip overhead, extending the weapon's reach beyond the confines of the rowboat into the surround of what I view as "Black water" to use Brand's concept.<sup>183</sup> The figure's movements are accentuated by the corresponding disturbance and motion of the surrounding water. In this way, *Passage* emphasizes water's materiality via the figure's embodied resistance to the circumstances of precarious forced passage. To return to McKittrick's earlier discussion of the water in relation to geographies of the Atlantic Ocean: to situate the Middle Passage upon a body of water is to consider its materiality, temporality, and the lived realities of those who experienced it thereby avoiding a solely metaphorical analysis.<sup>184</sup> *Passage* concludes with the figure on the right submerged below water, with the whip in hand, and swimming towards the light of the water's surface. As the figure approaches the light she suddenly turns and swims towards the water's depths. Using Brand's concept of ancestral "Black water," I view the figure's departure as a metaphorical and

---

<sup>180</sup> Modisakeng, "Artist Talk."

<sup>181</sup> Thom Pierce, "Riding the Southern Wilds: the Horsemen of Lesotho in Pictures," *The Guardian*, October 17, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2016/oct/17/riding-southern-wilds-horsemen-semonkong-lesotho-in-pictures>.

<sup>182</sup> Rhoda Levinsohn, "Lesotho Silkscreens and Block Prints," *African Arts* 13, no. 4 (August 1980): 57, <https://libezproxy.concordia.ca/login?url=https://www.jstor.org/stable/3335785>. For more on the Basotho blanket and traditional Indigenous southern African dress, see Pierce, "Riding the Southern Wilds"; DuPlessis, *The Material Atlantic*; and Andrew Unsworth, "How the Basotho Blanket Became the Brand Identity of a Nation," *Wanted*, February 1, 2017, <https://www.wantedonline.co.za/art-design/2017-02-01-how-the-basotho-blanket-became-the-brand-identity-of-a-nation/>.

<sup>183</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 61.

<sup>184</sup> McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, 18.

material return to submerged ancestors.<sup>185</sup> Within an Afrofuturist framework, oceanic ambiguity is transformed into a site of liberatory potential. In this way, *Passage* eschews a singular depiction and can be read as a work that represents an alternative representation of the Middle Passage conceptualized within the reparative imaginary.

### **Cape Colony “Dress Regimes,” Enslaved Resistance, and Black Female Subjectivity**

An examination of *Passage* necessitates a brief contextualization of subjugation and resistance within histories of enslavement in the Cape Colony. In 1492, Portuguese conquistador Bartolomé Dias arrived at the Cape of Good Hope, a rocky promontory on the Atlantic coast of the Cape Peninsula in present-day South Africa.<sup>186</sup> Beginning in the late sixteenth century, Dutch and British sailors began to establish colonial outposts as “points of passage” while travelling to the Indian Ocean.<sup>187</sup> On April 6, 1652, Vereenigde oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC, Dutch East India Company) merchant Jan Van Riebeeck arrived at the Cape along with 82 men and 7 women to establish a permanent VOC settlement. The dispossession of Indigenous southern African Khoikhoi (or Khoekhoe) peoples, their land, and livestock followed as well as the beginning of colonial spatial exclusion.<sup>188</sup> In 1659, the Cape Colony Dutch colonial government institutionalized slavery and indentured servitude to address a labour shortage. Persons from India, Indonesia, Madagascar, and East Africa were enslaved or indentured at sites ranging from

---

<sup>185</sup> Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, 61.

<sup>186</sup> Cooper, *The Hanging of Angélique*, 28.

<sup>187</sup> Berger, *South Africa in World History*, 24. The Dutch and British engaged in trade with the Khoikhoi peoples in order to resupply their ships exchanging iron, copper, and tobacco for sheep and cattle. For more, see Berger, *South Africa in World History*.

<sup>188</sup> The VOC banned Indigenous enslavement however within the racial hierarchy of the VOC’s white supremacist settler society the Khoikhoi were categorized below enslaved Africans. Berger, *South Africa in World History*, 24, 36.

plantations to ports.<sup>189</sup> The Cape Colony had fewer number of enslaved persons compared with the Caribbean and the United States because Cape Town's vineyards, wheat, cattle, and sheep farms required less enslaved labour than cotton and sugar plantations.<sup>190</sup> Between 1690 to 1795, the number of privately-owned enslaved Africans in the Cape Colony grew from 350 to 16,839 persons and by 1798 to 25,754 persons.<sup>191</sup>

With this thesis' examination of symbolic dress in *Passage*, it is important to contextualize Cape Colony enslaved dress within a colonial "dress regime" of regulations and discourses as described by Robert DuPlessis.<sup>192</sup> Colonial "dress regimes" often restricted enslaved person dress through sumptuary laws – or laws regulating consumption, with a particular focus on "excessive display," or extravagance, through clothing as examined by cultural historian Rebecca Earle.<sup>193</sup> Emerging in the fifteenth century under Edward IV King of England (1442-1483, reigned 1461-1483), sumptuary laws were first enacted in response to royal courts and metropolitan centres.<sup>194</sup> The laws were later extended to colonies to mark the enslaved body and the body of free Black persons via particular fabrics or the refusal of objects such as shoes and hats.<sup>195</sup> Enslaved persons in the Cape Colony were often only provided a shirt and pants while some possessed only rags to clothe themselves.<sup>196</sup>

---

<sup>189</sup> Mohau Modisakeng, "Passage"; Berger, *South Africa in World History*, 32; and "Mohau Modisakeng," Art Breath, accessed January 7, 2021, <http://artbreath.org/interviews/mohau-modisakeng>.

<sup>190</sup> Berger, *South Africa in World History*, 31-34.

<sup>191</sup> Berger, *South Africa in World History*, 31-32.

<sup>192</sup> DuPlessis, *The Material Atlantic*, 19.

<sup>193</sup> DuPlessis, *The Material Atlantic*, 19; and Rebecca Earle, "'Two Pairs of Pink Satin Shoes!!' Race, Clothing and Identity in the Americas (17th-19th Centuries)," *History Workshop Journal* no. 52 (Autumn 2001): 187, <https://libezproxy.concordia.ca/login?url=https://www.jstor.org/stable/4289752>.

<sup>194</sup> Janet Arnold, *Queen Elizabeth's Wardrobe Unlock'd* (Leeds: W.S. Maney & Son, 1988), 158.

<sup>195</sup> DuPlessis, *The Material Atlantic*, 32.

<sup>196</sup> Berger, *South Africa in World History*, 25.

Enslaved persons were forcibly undressed at various sites and stages within the Transatlantic slave trade.<sup>197</sup> The aerial view of *Passage*'s subjects within rowboats not only references architectural forms, as mentioned earlier in discussion of “‘cine-material’ structures” of biennial pavilions and Gothic churches, but also the vantage point of the stowage diagram of the Liverpool slave ship *Brookes*’ published circa 1788 by the British abolitionist group the Plymouth Chapter Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade and widely-reproduced thereafter (fig. 12).<sup>198</sup> Nigerian American artist Victor Ekpuk’s illustration *Slave Narrative* (2008), mentioned earlier in discussion of additional Middle Passage contemporary artworks, similarly presents an aerial view of a slave ship with enslaved Africans contained in the hold. In *Passage*, a barefoot Modisakeng wears a long black apron typically associated with South African widowhood and mourning.<sup>199</sup> Modisakeng has characterized South Africa as “caught between trying to remember, forget” the violences of South African history.<sup>200</sup> With this thesis’ focus on a Middle Passage reading of Modisakeng’s work, it must be acknowledged that enslaved persons were forced to undress during capture, confinement in coastal dungeons, pre-shipment examinations, and captivity aboard the slave ship.<sup>201</sup> DuPlessis characterizes such dehumanizing processes as a rupture of “enslaved individuals’ principal material link to their families, communities, and cultures of origin.”<sup>202</sup> If as DuPlessis argues, the enslaved were

---

<sup>197</sup> DuPlessis, *The Material Atlantic*, 128.

<sup>198</sup> Connolly, *The Place of Artists’ Cinema*, 166; and Stowage of the British slave ship *Brookes* under the regulated slave trade act of 1788, c. 1788, etching, Washington, D.C., Library of Congress Rare Book and Special Collections Division, accessed February 7, 2021, <https://www.loc.gov/item/98504459/>. The *Brookes* slave ship launched in 1781 and made eleven voyages from Liverpool to the West African coast and to Caribbean islands during the Transatlantic slave trade. The diagram depicts the hold of the slave ship in which 454 persons could be forcibly moved. For more on the *Brookes* diagram, see “Collection Items: Diagram of the ‘Brookes’ slave ship,” British Library, accessed January 10, 2021, <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/diagram-of-the-brookes-slave-ship#>. For Modisakeng’s discussion of the aerial view used within *Passage*, see Modisakeng, “Artist Talk.”

<sup>199</sup> Modisakeng, “Artist Talk.”

<sup>200</sup> Liduduma'lingani Mqomboti, “Probing Subliminal Violence,’ Africa is a Country, accessed December 5, 2020, <https://africasacountry.com/2014/06/82023>.

<sup>201</sup> DuPlessis, *The Material Atlantic*, 128.

<sup>202</sup> DuPlessis, *The Material Atlantic*, 130.

“sartorially signaled by omissions: by what fully dressed slave bodies would lack,” then *Passage* redresses its subjects – including Modisakeng himself – in the clothing and accessories the enslaved were denied as a rebellious gesture of resistance and Camp’s “Black self-fashioning.”<sup>203</sup> Modisakeng’s redressing represents what Charmaine A. Nelson characterizes as an assertion of the enslaved’s humanity and dignity thereby resisting status as movable chattel.<sup>204</sup>

Acts of resistance by enslaved persons in the Cape Colony ranged from escape by “freedom seekers” to refusal of work and burning of property.<sup>205</sup> A specific example of a submerged history of enslaved resistance in the Cape Colony is the maroon community of escaped enslaved persons living at the nearby coastal mountain peak of Hanglip. Discovered by the colonial authorities in 1736, Hanglip was led by formerly enslaved Leander Bugis and primarily comprised of women.<sup>206</sup> It is estimated that the community approximated fifty persons in total, with likely no more than ten at a time, and existed in secrecy for up to ten years.<sup>207</sup> Despite the violent raiding of the maroon community, the corporeal punishment, and return to enslavement that followed, several Hanglip members avoided re-capture. Iris Berger’s scholarship on South African history notes the importance of the Hanglip refuge which remained a haven for the formerly enslaved until the nineteenth century.<sup>208</sup> Maroon histories in the Cape Colony could extend an interpretation of *Passage*’s subjects as enslaved persons seeking their freedom along

---

<sup>203</sup> DuPlessis, *The Material Atlantic*, 131; and Camp, *Listening to Images*, 50.

<sup>204</sup> Nelson, “Black Body Politics.”

<sup>205</sup> Hill cited in Maynard, *Policing Black Lives*, 29; and Berger, *South Africa in World History*, 36.

<sup>206</sup> Berger, *South Africa in World History*, 31. “Maroon” refers to an enslaved African who escaped, often to form and settle in community with other escaped enslaved persons. “Marronage” is the act of escaping enslavement whether temporary or permanent.

<sup>207</sup> Berger, *South Africa in World History*, 31.

<sup>208</sup> Berger, *South Africa in World History*, 31. In 1807, the slave trade was abolished by Britain although the practice of enslavement continued throughout the empire including Cape Town and its surrounding farmlands. On December 1, 1834 enslavement was abolished by the British. In the Cape Colony, 38,000 enslaved persons’ status changed to “apprentices” which required those persons to work throughout a four-year transition period before “emancipation” was granted on December 1, 1838. For more, see Berger, *South Africa in World History*.



coastal waters. Berger details an additional account of a man named Louis who worked as an enslaved tailor in Cape Town and led a rebellion in 1808 – one year after the trading of enslaved persons was banned by the British – by posing as a Spanish sea captain.<sup>209</sup> According to Berger, Louis wore Spanish military uniform and visited farms falsely declaring that the enslaved were emancipated and that lands were to be redistributed.<sup>210</sup> Hundreds of enslaved persons joined Louis on his march to various farms although he was ultimately captured by colonial officials.<sup>211</sup> Louis' strategic use of colonial uniform while seeking freedom could similarly extend a reading of the military dress worn by the female figure in *Passage's* left channel as noted earlier.

Returning to the figure in *Passage's* left channel with enslaved resistance in mind, we witness the figure's vigorous kicking of the water in the rowboat. The figure on the left stands in the sinking vessel and spins the sceptre in a circular motion before returning to a seated position to rebelliously kick the water once again. Unlike the figure on the right channel, the gaze of the left figure is fixed on the camera, and thereby the viewer, with an expression I read as resistance – and more specifically, anger. I argue that the left figure is inverting what Charmaine A. Nelson describes as the “white vision” of colonialism which uses what Nelson terms the “white eye of science” to claim an objective position with regard to surveillance and representation of colonial subjects.<sup>212</sup> Nelson contextualizes “the differencing of bodies and the *production of marginalization*” within colonial racial logic dependent on aesthetic and scientific constructions of anti-Black racism.<sup>213</sup> This representation includes the production of visual knowledge as it

---

<sup>209</sup> Berger, *South Africa in World History*, 39.

<sup>210</sup> Berger, *South Africa in World History*, 39.

<sup>211</sup> Berger, *South Africa in World History*, 39.

<sup>212</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, *Representing the Black Female Subject in Western Art* (Routledge: New York, 2010), 180, <https://doi-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/10.4324/9780203851241>.

<sup>213</sup> Nelson, *Representing*, 4.

relates to the Black subject, and specifically, the Black female subject in hypersexualized imagery of the body that pathologizes through associations with deviance.<sup>214</sup> I view the left figure's gaze as an agential assertion conceptualized within a reparative imaginary that refuses the brutal coloniality of "white vision."<sup>215</sup> As Nelson states: "what the white colonial eye refuses most violently is the possibility of being the *object of vision* by the very body it is attempting to discipline."<sup>216</sup> In this way, the left figure's gaze emanates what Tina Campt describes as a "frequency of refusal."<sup>217</sup> Citing cultural and Black studies scholar Stefano Harney and Fred Moten's "refusal of what has been refused," Campt argues that such resonances can be understood in ontological terms: "a refusal of the very premises that have reduced the lived experience of blackness to pathology."<sup>218</sup> Refusal is further examined in the following section on Jackson's *Take Me to the Water* wherein both "musics" and dress are read as rebellious practices conceptualized in the reparative imaginary.<sup>219</sup>

#### **SECTION FOUR: The Subversive Frequencies of Jackson's *Take Me to the Water***

##### **The Drexciya Myth as Afrofuturist Refusal**

Jackson's *Take Me to the Water* series is partially inspired by Black musical expression from a range of genres and historical contexts, or musical "practices of refusal," in the words of Campt.<sup>220</sup> Jackson's *Take Me to the Water* references the Drexciya myth – an alternative

---

<sup>214</sup> Nelson, *Representing*, 180, 6.

<sup>215</sup> Eshun, "Further Considerations," 180.

<sup>216</sup> Nelson, *Representing*, 181.

<sup>217</sup> Campt, *Listening to Images*, 32.

<sup>218</sup> Campt, *Listening to Images*, 32; and Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons*, 11.

<sup>219</sup> Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 75; and McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xxi.

<sup>220</sup> Campt, *Listening to Images*, 32.

narrative of the Middle Passage – conceptualized within the Black musical expression of Detroit techno producers Drexciya. Jackson’s *Take Me to the Water* frames the submerged as subversive and incorporates a uniquely Afrofuturist musical – read rebellious– framework informed by a “liberatory politics” in the words of Aria Dean.<sup>221</sup> McKittrick writes of Black musical invention as a “rebellious political act...a pronouncement of Black life” reproduced in response to the lived experiences of the Middle Passage and plantation enslavement.<sup>222</sup> The invention of Black “musics,” or “recoding Black life,” as described by McKittrick, is a key element of rebellious practice against anti-Blackness and linear temporality.<sup>223</sup> McKittrick writes of “musics” as subversion: “music, music making, and music listening, together, demonstrate the subversive politics of shared stories, communal activities, and collaborative possibilities wherein “one *must participate* in knowing.”<sup>224</sup> Transtemporal travel is manifest in Black musical reinvention, or remixing, which collapses temporal delimitations.<sup>225</sup> By tracing the musical genealogy of African American spiritual “Wade In the Water” through its reinvention as Christian hymn to Nina Simone’s 1960s soul recording we participate in the knowledge of how each expression responds to the particular sociopolitical context of its production while also reinventing, or “recoding,” the rebellious musical acts upon which they are cumulatively formed.<sup>226</sup>

Drexciya refers to the name of Detroit techno producers Gerald Donald and the late James Stinson and the name of their mythological aquatopia. According to the liner notes of Drexciya’s 1997 double album *The Quest*, Donald and Stinson are the descendants of pregnant, enslaved

---

<sup>221</sup> Dean, “Poor Meme Rich Meme.”

<sup>222</sup> Katherine McKittrick, “Rebellion/Invention/Groove,” *Small Axe* 20, no. 1 (March 2016): 81, <https://doi-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/1.0.1215/07990537-3481558>.

<sup>223</sup> McKittrick, “Rebellion,” 87-88.

<sup>224</sup> McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xxi; and McKittrick, “Rebellion,” 88.

<sup>225</sup> McKittrick, “Rebellion,” 87.

<sup>226</sup> McKittrick, “Rebellion,” 87.

African women who were thrown overboard during the Middle Passage for being “sick or disruptive cargo,” as described by Eshun, who then populated the Drexciya underwater world (fig. 13).<sup>227</sup> The Drexciya myth is an Afrofuturist, survivor-oriented – thus, reparative – reimagining of the Middle Passage. The women and their Drexciya descendants are not alien, rather they are adaptive and resilient humans. In my view, the metaphor of life sustained – of breath sustained – underwater in concert within an oceanic ecology, is more constructive than Afrofuturism’s alien metaphorical tendencies since the former largely avoids ongoing Western humanist discourses in relation to Black subjectivity. Returning to Mackey’s conceptualization of “Black breath” and its similarity to Sharpe’s “insistence” on “Black being”: in Drexciya, Black lives are sustained underwater in collaborative relation with, rather than endangered by, environment.<sup>228</sup> Discourses of the less than human Black subject become one of the “more-than-human,” to quote scientist and feminist theorist Donna J. Haraway, once submerged underwater within a multispecies aquatopia.<sup>229</sup> The Drexciya myth and the late Black American legal scholar and author Derrick Bell’s short story *The Afrolantica Awakening* (1992) are two such examples of Black speculative narratives of Atlantic underwater thrivance within multispecies ecologies supportive of only Black human life.<sup>230</sup> In *The Afrolantica Awakening*, a non-Black explorer describes the inhospitable environment as comparable to “trying to breathe under the burdens of all the world...”<sup>231</sup> I include this quotation from Bell’s *The Afrolantica Awakening* to

---

<sup>227</sup> Eshun, “Further Considerations,” 300; and Image of liner notes, *The Quest*, Drexciya, 1997, accessed August 25, 2020, <https://daily.redbullmusicacademy.com/2017/06/drexciya-infinite-journey-to-inner-space>.

<sup>228</sup> Mackey, “The Art of Poetry,” 48; and Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 11.

<sup>229</sup> Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 43.

<sup>230</sup> For Bell’s short story *The Afrolantica Awakening*, see Derrick Bell, “The Afrolantica Awakening,” in *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism* (New York: BasicBooks, 1992), 32-46, <https://hdl-handle-net.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/2027/heb.33001>. There is a compelling parallel between the impermanence of the “Afrolantica” environment in Bell’s story and the fleeting liberation within W.E.B. Du Bois’ short story *The Comet* (1920). For more, see W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Comet,” in *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920), 254-277.

<sup>231</sup> Bell, “The Afrolantica Awakening,” 34.

demonstrate two things: first, how Bell uses the metaphor of breathing to represent living; and second, how the experience of being unable to breathe (live) in an inhospitable environment (anti-Black racist society) is inverted so these conditions are imposed upon non-Black persons. In Black speculative narratives from the 1990s, such as the Drexciya myth and Bell's *The Afrolantica Awakening*, we see expressions of a desire to inhabit alternative worlds where we can breathe: they are refuge from Sharpe's concept of "the weather" of inescapable anti-Black racism."<sup>232</sup>

In the Drexciya aquatopia, the children of enslaved African women are born free rather than enslaved. The liberatory space of the underwater world disallows the matrilineal transfer of chattel status inherited at birth within the institution of slavery.<sup>233</sup> The Drexciya creation myth is a narrative that prioritizes enslaved African women and in doing so acknowledges a significant omission in the archive of the Middle Passage. As Hartman notes: "There is not one extant autobiographical narrative of a female captive who survived the Middle Passage."<sup>234</sup> Jackson's *Take Me to the Water* engages in the speculative imagining of the Drexciya aquatopia but begins with the real violence experienced by pregnant, enslaved African women who were thrown overboard. In this way, Jackson's reference of the Drexciya myth brings to the surface submerged histories of African women's captivity and terror aboard the slave ship. Similar to Philip's *Zong!*, Hartman's research leads to the British legal archive and an account of a June 7, 1792 trial in which British Captain John Kimber was indicted for the murder of two enslaved African women after repeated torture aboard the Bristol slave ship *Recovery*.<sup>235</sup> Kimber was

---

<sup>232</sup> Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 106.

<sup>233</sup> Cooper, *The Hanging of Angélique*, 40.

<sup>234</sup> Hartman, "Venus," 3.

<sup>235</sup> Hartman, "Venus," 7.

acquitted on both charges due to insufficient evidence despite two eye-witness testimonies from *Recovery* crew members.<sup>236</sup> In Jackson's *Sighting in the Abyss II* (2019), the artist wears a long black veil covering her face as well as a white fabric collar and long black skirt (fig. 14).<sup>237</sup> The suggestion of entrapment within the white netting of the photograph's foreground are direct references to the containment and terror of the Middle Passage. Jackson's veiled but naked upper torso and the white rope tied around her right wrist and waist extend a violent reading of *Sighting in the Abyss II*. The violence evoked within the work, however, is partially mitigated by the artist's description of the oceanic presence of ancestral water spirits. In a 2019 interview, Jackson describes how she conceptualized African or Black diasporic Yoruba-based water spirit mythologies in conversation with the Drexciya myth: "For *Take Me to the Water*, I decided to imagine that these [Drexciyans] were midwifed by the water spirits that already existed, looking over the Atlantic coast of Africa."<sup>238</sup> In the edited volume *Yemoja: Gender, Sexuality, and Creativity in the Latina/o and Afro-Atlantic Diasporas* (2013), scholars Solimar Otero and Toyin Falola examine the mythological origins and contemporary forms of the Black diasporic water deity Yemoja. As a Yoruba-based deity associated with bodies of water, fertility, and healing, Yemoja is commonly invoked as the primordial mother to fish, other water deities, and more broadly, to all living things.<sup>239</sup> One of the Yemoja origin stories is that of a woman who transcends into divinity following humiliation and tragedy to become the "eternal mother"

---

<sup>236</sup> Hartman, "Venus," 7.

<sup>237</sup> Ayana V. Jackson, *Sighting in the Abyss II*, from the series *Take Me to the Water*, 2019, archival pigment print on German etching paper, 39 3/8 x 59 1/8 in., Chicago, Mariane Ibrahim Gallery, accessed November 10, 2020, <https://marianeibrahim.com/artists/27/series/take-me-to-the-water/1849-ayana-v.-jackson-sighting-in-the-abyss-ii-2019/>.

<sup>238</sup> Ayesha Habib, "Q&A: Exploring African Mythic Worlds with Photographer Ayana V. Jackson," *NUVO Magazine*, September 20, 2019, <https://nuvomagazine.com/art/qa-exploring-african-mythic-worlds-with-photographer-ayana-v-jackson>.

<sup>239</sup> Solimar Otero and Toyin Falola, eds., *Yemoja: Gender, Sexuality, and Creativity in the Latina/o and Afro-Atlantic Diasporas* (Albany: University of New York, 2013), xix, <https://muse-jhu-edu.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/book/27398>.

submerged in rivers, lagoons, and oceans.<sup>240</sup> The reparative, or healing, origin story of Yemoja is present in Jackson's *Take Me to the Water* series which is inspired by both the Drexciya creation myth and African water spirit mythologies. In the following section, symbolic dress in *Take Me to the Water* is examined as a reparative redressing of enslaved women who survived the Middle Passage.

### **Jackson's *Black Rice* as Self-Fashioned Dress and African Agricultural Technology**

The reparative imaginary is depicted in *Take Me to the Water*'s incorporation of symbolic dress representing enslaved persons' agential "self-fashioning," or redressing.<sup>241</sup> DuPlessis' examination of homemade enslaved person dress in the American South supports a reparative reading of the symbolic dress in Jackson's work. In *Black Rice*, Jackson wears a dress made of coarse and wrinkled linen (which I read as a reference to enslaved labour), a handmade beaded corset, and panniers (or side hoop undergarments) while holding harvested rice grains (fig. 15).<sup>242</sup> Jackson holds the rice grains outwardly with her right hand as a further reference to the movement of the forcibly laboured body. Like the figure on *Passage*'s left channel, the Black female subject in *Black Rice* – Jackson herself – meets the viewer's gaze with a directness that I read as subversion of the colonial gaze. In *Black Rice*, Jackson forges an important connection between enslavement, land, and resources. By doing so Jackson not only references what Tapji Garba and Sara-Maria Sorentino refer to as the "materiality of place," but also the enslaved persons' centrality to "the very possibility for the settler to accumulate land and wealth."<sup>243</sup>

---

<sup>240</sup> Otero and Falola, eds., *Yemoja*, xxi.

<sup>241</sup> DuPlessis, *The Material Atlantic*, 13.

<sup>242</sup> Ayana V. Jackson, *Black Rice*, from the series *Take Me to the Water*, 2019, archival pigment print on German etching paper, 42 7/8 x 41 7/8 in., Chicago, Mariane Ibrahim Gallery, accessed November 10, 2020, <https://marianeibrahim.com/artists/27/series/take-me-to-the-water/2221-ayana-v.-jackson-black-rice-2019/>.

<sup>243</sup> Garba and Sorentino, "Slavery is a Metaphor," 5, 13.

According to estimates compiled by the Slave Voyages Database, between 1501 to 1866, approximately 210,000 enslaved Africans disembarked in the American regions of the Carolinas and Georgia after surviving the Middle Passage.<sup>244</sup> The title of *Black Rice* can be read as a reference to the prevalence of rice plantations in North and South Carolina which flourished due to chattel slavery.<sup>245</sup> Geography and agriculture scholar Judith A. Carney's scholarship on West African Indigenous knowledge of rice cultivation extends a reading of *Black Rice* as referencing an African plant variety and dietary staple that relied on African agricultural epistemes. *Black Rice* attributes rice plantations' production to what Carney terms an African "technology transfer," or the successful adaptation of an African plant variety in the Americas.<sup>246</sup> Enslaved persons, such as those in the state of South Carolina, engaged in special occasion dress, described by DuPlessis as "the stylish self-fashioning" involving a variety of materials and "supplementary and distinctive items, not only apparel, but adornments: ribbons, trim, lace, rings, bracelets, glass bead necklaces, fancy buttons."<sup>247</sup> As DuPlessis notes, enslaved "self-fashioning" was not merely material but a symbolic gesture of partial control over the body and, more significantly, over one's subjecthood.<sup>248</sup> In *Black Rice*, self-adornment works towards repairing forced undressing by redressing the enslaved within a reimagining of the plantation. The *Take Me to the Water* series, like Modisakeng's use of symbolic dress in *Passage*, can be read as a reparative "self-fashioning" of the enslaved.<sup>249</sup> In discussion of the retention of African

---

<sup>244</sup> "Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade - Estimates."

<sup>245</sup> For more on histories of enslavement within the United States, see Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); John H. Bracey, August Meier, Elliot M. Rudwick, eds., *American Slavery: the Question of Resilience* (Belmont: Wadsworth Publications, 1971); and Charles Joyner, *Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984).

<sup>246</sup> Judith A. Carney, "The Role of African Rice and Slaves in the History of Rice Cultivation in the Americas," *Human Ecology* 26, no. 4 (December 2008): 526, <https://lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/login?url=https://www.jstor.org/stable/4603297>.

<sup>247</sup> DuPlessis, *The Material Atlantic*, 156.

<sup>248</sup> DuPlessis, *The Material Atlantic*, 13, 163.

<sup>249</sup> DuPlessis, *The Material Atlantic*, 13.



practices such as agricultural production, Jackson notes – like Nelson in discussion of African dress – that retention is an act of refusal.<sup>250</sup>

In this thesis' examination of Jackson's *Take Me to the Water*, I align with Moten's characterization of the "entanglement" of joy and pain in Black being.<sup>251</sup> Jackson's *The Self-Forgetfulness of Belonging Would Never Be Mine* (2019), in which the artist wears a dress and headdress made of raffia palms and woven Kuba raffia cloth, is the closest approximation to an expression of joy within Modisakeng and Jackson's works due to its suggestion of dance (fig. 16).<sup>252</sup> Yet the work's title, Jackson's obscured face, and the positioning of her back to the camera complicate such a reading. Ashon Crawley writes about the importance of "thinking" Black sociality beyond what Frank B. Wilderson III terms the "Black grammar of suffering."<sup>253</sup> For Crawley, the intention is not to deny intergenerational trauma but to recognize commonalities outside of discourses of pain; it is to afford Black relationalities the complexity of full personhood.<sup>254</sup> I include Moten and Crawley here to argue that a reading of Jackson's *The Self-Forgetfulness of Belonging Would Never Be Mine* as "entangled" rather than definitively subjugating or exultant is more generative for "thinking" community and reading interiority,

---

<sup>250</sup> Habib, "Q&A: Exploring African Mythic Worlds; Nelson, *Representing*, 96; and Nelson, "Black Body Politics."

<sup>251</sup> "Macarthur Fellows Program."

<sup>252</sup> Gabrielle Bruney, "This Artist Brings Myths of the Black Diaspora to Life Through Self-Portraits," Artsy, accessed September 28, 2020, <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-artist-brings-myths-black-diaspora-life-self-portraits>; and Ayana V. Jackson, *The Self-Forgetfulness of Belonging Would Never Be Mine*, from the series *Take Me to the Water*, 2019, archival pigment print on German etching paper, 59 1/8 x 56 7/8 in, Chicago, Mariane Ibrahim Gallery, accessed November 10, 2020, <https://marianeibrahim.com/artists/27/series/take-me-to-the-water/1851-ayana-v.-jackson-the-self-forgetfulness-of-belonging-would-never-be-mine-2019/>. Kuba relates to the textile practices of the central African Kuba Kingdom, or Kingdom of Bakuba, in what is now called the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

<sup>253</sup> Ashon Crawley, "Stayed | Freedom | Hallelujah," in *Otherwise Worlds: Against Settler Colonialism and Anti-Blackness*, eds. Tiffany Lethabo King, Jenell Navarro, and Andrea Smith (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 33; and Frank B. Wilderson III and Tiffany Lethabo King, "Staying Ready for Black Study," in *Otherwise Worlds: Against Settler Colonialism and Anti-Blackness*, eds. Tiffany Lethabo King, Jenell Navarro, and Andrea Smith (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 66.

<sup>254</sup> Crawley, "Stayed," 34.

especially considering Jackson's *Take Me to the Water* is conceptualized within an underwater utopia populated by the descendants of enslaved African women and protected by African ancestral water spirits.<sup>255</sup>

In *Take Me to the Water*, Black improvisatory “self-fashioning” is both an act of resilience and agential expression.<sup>256</sup> Earlier, I mentioned that the symbolic dress present in these works produces a spatiotemporal ambiguity through the inclusion of historical and contemporary dress. In *The Rupture was the Story*, Jackson is wearing a dress made of silver spoons and contemporary mass-produced plastic flip flops; objects that could be found at the bottom of the ocean today thereby collapsing temporalities. If we are also to read *Take Me to the Water* as a present-day representation of the Drexciya aquatopia, then the series also serves as a commentary on global climate emergencies. Throughout the series, Jackson wears dress composed of detritus such as plastic netting and garbage bags. Consequently, works such as Jackson's *The Rupture Was the Story*, *Sighting in the Abyss II*, *Double Goddess...A Sighting In the Abyss* (2019), and *Sighting in the Abyss III* (2019) reference the extensive devastation of global oceanic ecosystems (figs. 17-18).<sup>257</sup> Jackson's reference to global climate emergencies further entangles histories of racial and extractive capitalisms dating back to their origination of the Transatlantic slave trade. In the following section the symbolic dress of *Take Me to the Water*

---

<sup>255</sup> Crawley, “Stayed,” 34; and “Macarthur Fellows Program.”

<sup>256</sup> DuPlessis, *The Material Atlantic*, 13.

<sup>257</sup> Ayana V. Jackson, *Double Goddess...A Sighting in the Abyss*, from the series *Take Me to the Water*, 2019, archival pigment print on German etching paper, 55 1/8 x 59 1/8 in., Chicago, Mariane Ibrahim Gallery, accessed November 10, 2020, <https://marianeibrahim.com/artists/27/series/take-me-to-the-water/1854-ayana-v.-jackson-double-goddess-...-a-sighting-in-the-abyss-2019/>; and Ayana V. Jackson, *Sighting in the Abyss III*, from the series *Take Me to the Water*, 2019, archival pigment print on German etching paper, 39 3/8 x 59 1/8 in., Chicago: Mariane Ibrahim Gallery, accessed November 10, 2020, <https://marianeibrahim.com/artists/27/series/take-me-to-the-water/1850-ayana-v.-jackson-sighting-in-the-abyss-iii-2019/>.

is further situated within a reparative imaginary of rebellious self-liberatory fashioning in the image of English royalty.

### **Drexciyan Regal Adornment: Jackson's *Consider the Sky and the Sea* and *Sea Lion***

In Jackson's *Consider the Sky and the Sea* (2019) and *Sea Lion* (2019), the artist's clothing, the styling of her hair, and the directness of her gaze reference traditional Western European portraiture (figs. 19-20).<sup>258</sup> In both images, Jackson is wearing the dress of English royalty – a subversive act when one considers that enslaved Africans were often transported and enslaved without apparel. Rebecca Earle writes that enslaved Africans, free Black persons, and Indigenous persons' copying of colonial elite dress were “subversive” “clothing acts” that undermined not only class distinction but also scientific racial categorization both of which were conflated with culture.<sup>259</sup> As Earle states, a leading motivation for restricting enslaved Africans, free Black persons, and Indigenous persons' clothing was the mitigation of clothing's “transformative potential of emulation” of colonial elites and corresponding assertions of “self-fashioning.”<sup>260</sup> The material of Jackson's black dress in *Consider the Sky and the Sea* and *Sea Lion* evokes the plastic of black-coloured garbage bags. This choice of material can be read as subversive both in its rejection of colonial “dress regimes,” to quote DuPlessis, and in the undermining of monetary and social value attributed to costly textiles.<sup>261</sup> In this instance, given the status communicated

---

<sup>258</sup> Ayana V. Jackson, *Consider the Sky and the Sea*, from the series *Take Me to the Water*, 2019, archival pigment print on German etching paper, 46 7/8 x 42 7/8 in., Chicago, Mariane Ibrahim Gallery, accessed November 10, 2020, <https://marianeibrahim.com/artists/27/series/take-me-to-the-water/1847-ayana-v.-jackson-consider-the-sky-and-the-sea-2019/>; and Ayana V. Jackson, *Sea Lion*, from the series *Take Me to the Water*, 2019, archival pigment print on German etching paper, 61 3/8 x 39 3/8 in., Chicago, Mariane Ibrahim Gallery, accessed November 10, 2020, <https://marianeibrahim.com/artists/27/series/take-me-to-the-water/1853-ayana-v.-jackson-sea-lion-2019/>.

<sup>259</sup> Earle, “Two Pairs of Pink Satin Shoes!!,” 186-187.

<sup>260</sup> Earle, “Two Pairs of Pink Satin Shoes!!,” 187; and DuPlessis, *The Material Atlantic*, 13.

<sup>261</sup> DuPlessis, *The Material Atlantic*, 19.

through regal dress and Jackson's direct and downward gaze, *Consider the Sky and the Sea*, not only asserts fulsome interior life but also immense authority insisting on deference. Jackson has stated that a portrait of Queen Elizabeth I of England (1533-1603, reigned 1558-1603) inspired *Sea Lion* and that her intention was to contextualize the image within the time of the Transatlantic slave trade.<sup>262</sup> Queen Elizabeth I held a cult status including the goddess figure of "Queen of the Sea," as described in the historical dress scholarship of Janet Arnold.<sup>263</sup> Jackson describes the reimagining of Queen Elizabeth I's portrait in the following reparative terms: "I imagined myself as Elizabeth Regina's undersea Black mirror figure. In this work, I am building a counter universe."<sup>264</sup> Jackson did not specify the portrait that inspired *Sea Lion* although the photograph strongly evokes a 1585 portrait known as the '*Ermine*' *Portrait of Queen Elizabeth I* most commonly attributed to goldsmith, miniaturist portraitist and English court artist Nicholas Hilliard (1547-1619) (fig. 21).<sup>265</sup> The portrait's surrounding black-coloured background, the wide centre-part hairstyling, the large "ruff" (or closely-set pleated collar), the pearl headdress, the black doublet's (or close-fitted padded sleeved jacket), gold toggle fastenings, and jewels are mirrored in Jackson's *Sea Lion*.<sup>266</sup> The positioning of the body in Jackson's *Sea Lion* is sideways and differs from the frontal view of Queen Elizabeth I in the '*Ermine Portrait*,' however, both figures are represented with their right arms folded at the waist and faces angled in three-quarter profile. The "ruff" present in Jackson's *Sea Lion*, *Consider the Sea and the Sky*, and the *Abyss*

---

<sup>262</sup> Bruney, "This Artist Brings Myths of the Black Diaspora." Queen Elizabeth I, a monarch of the House of Tudor was born to parents Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, arose to the throne following the death of her sister Mary I (1516-1558, reigned 1553-1558).

<sup>263</sup> Arnold, *Queen Elizabeth's Wardrobe*, 2.

<sup>264</sup> Shaikh, "Through the Lens."

<sup>265</sup> '*Ermine*' *Portrait of Queen Elizabeth*, attributed to Nicholas Hilliard, c. 1585, oil on panel, 95.2 x 86.4 cm., Hatfield, Hatfield House, Wikimedia Commons accessed February 7, 2021, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:ElizabethIEngland.jpg>. The '*Ermine*' *Portrait of Queen Elizabeth I* is in the collection of Hatfield House in Hatfield, Hertfordshire, England and is installed in the house's main reception room: the King James Drawing Room. For more, see "The King James Drawing Room," Hatfield House, accessed December 10, 2020, <https://www.hatfield-house.co.uk/house/the-house/the-king-james-drawing-room/>.

<sup>266</sup> Arnold, *Queen Elizabeth's Wardrobe*, 36, 15, 25.

self-portraits are particularly significant because, as Arnold writes, while many Elizabethan women are depicted in substantial adornment only Queen Elizabeth I wears a significantly-sized collar.<sup>267</sup> By adorning herself in the dress of the English monarch Jackson's *Take Me to the Water* uses symbolic dress as a reparative redressing of the enslaved.

## **Conclusion: Ethics and the Case for the “Reparative Imaginary” in Theory and Practice**

### **A Reflection on the “Inevitable” Reproduction of Violence**

Returning to an ethics of care as discussed earlier in relation to this study's methodological approach to examining Modisakeng's *Passage* and Jackson's *Take Me to the Water*, I take a different direction than Walcott who states in his formulation of the “Black Aquatic” that the Middle Passage should not be reimagined in artistic and cultural works.<sup>268</sup> I also problematize “spatial metaphors” of Atlantic geographies as discussed by McKittrick, and in doing so critically reflect on Walcott's “Black Aquatic.”<sup>269</sup> Walcott's analysis of representations of the Middle Passage raises critical questions in relation to Modisakeng and Jackson's Afrofuturist representations of the Middle Passage which aesthetically and conceptually employ spatiotemporal ambiguity via unidentifiable place and transtemporal symbolic dress. This thesis differs from Walcott's analysis regarding the ethics of the reparative imaginary in artistic and cultural representations of the Middle Passage by suggesting that such reimaginings hold a potential towards healing rather than retraumatization. I also question the singularity of the slave ship as metaphorical “chronotype,” to quote Gilroy, in the formulation of the “Black Aquatic”

---

<sup>267</sup> Arnold, *Queen Elizabeth's Wardrobe*, 34.

<sup>268</sup> Walcott, “The Black Aquatic.”

<sup>269</sup> McKittrick and Woods, eds., *Black Geographies*, 7.

because it risks prioritization of “spatial metaphors” over material geographies as cautioned by McKittrick.<sup>270</sup> I critically consider Walcott’s insistence upon singular, or “particular,” artistic and cultural representation because reformations of Black subjugation across temporalities, geographies, and cultures necessitates a chronopolitical – and not simply an “aesthetic” intervention as Walcott emphasizes.<sup>271</sup> I read chronopolitical intervention in both *Passage* and *Take Me to the Water* which reimagine the Middle Passage in reparative, or healing, terms. I also wonder whether Walcott’s assertion that “ships from Africa to Lampedusa; ships from the wealthy west to the Caribbean region are the same [slave] ships but with different cargoes...” might obfuscate particular spatial and economic circumstances informed by late modern and present-day racial and extractive capitalisms, political conflicts, climate emergencies, and the relations upon which they are all predicated.<sup>272</sup> Returning to Walcott’s discussion of artistic intention, I view Modisakeng and Jackson’s Afrofuturist reimaginings as reparative gestures that begin with a chronopolitical interventionist “ethical intention,” in the words of Walcott.<sup>273</sup> *Passage* and *Take Me to the Water* call attention to the cyclicity of anti-Black violence and racism which Hartman describes as the “incomplete project of freedom” and Walcott conceptualizes as “the long emancipation.”<sup>274</sup>

### **The “Reparative Imaginary”: “Radical Incompleteness” and the Imperative of Imagining Otherwise**

---

<sup>270</sup> Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 4; Walcott, “The Black Aquatic”; and McKittrick and Woods, eds., *Black Geographies*, 5.

<sup>271</sup> Walcott, “The Black Aquatic,” (YouTube video); and Walcott, “The Black Aquatic.”

<sup>272</sup> Walcott, “The Black Aquatic.”

<sup>273</sup> Walcott, “The Black Aquatic.”

<sup>274</sup> Hartman, “Venus,” 4; and Walcott, “The Black Aquatic,” (YouTube video).”

With concerns raised by Hartman and Walcott in mind, I argue that an Afrofuturist reparative imaginary of the Middle Passage in Modisakeng's *Passage* and Jackson's *Take Me to the Water* holds potential due to the pluralistic artistic and cultural representation of the Middle Passage that is commonly critiqued. The thesis concludes by underscoring that there is the possibility of representing traumatic histories without a replication of violence and with an incomplete colonial archive as exemplified in *Passage* and *Take Me to the Water*. The reparative framework I propose in this thesis holds the potential towards healing from intergenerational cultural and historical trauma because it does not claim achievement but proceeds in the spirit of a radically incomplete and ongoing participatory process.<sup>275</sup> In the words of Gunkel and Lynch, Afrofuturism enables a criticality “entangled with an excavation and confabulation of the archive in order to recognize and realize images of our past.”<sup>276</sup> The “excavation and confabulation” that Gunkel and Lynch describe is the Afrofuturist chronopolitical intervention, or the gesture of repair, that informs Modisakeng and Jackson's conceptualization of their works; it is to bring “submerged perspectives” to the surface.<sup>277</sup> The reparative imaginary in *Passage* and *Take Me to the Water* contributes to the fullness of Black life and expressivity – resistance, resilience, and interiority – in the past, present, and futures and in doing so honours ancestral and future kin.

### **The Case for the “Reparative Imaginary” in Theory and Practice**

The reparative imaginary has been introduced in this thesis as a framework for reading Modisakeng's *Passage* and Jackson's *Take Me to the Water* as reimaginings of the Middle Passage. In this conclusion, I consider the reparative imaginary in opposition to the expansion of

---

<sup>275</sup> For more on “radical incompleteness,” see RAQS Media Collective, “How to Be an Artist by Night,” 78.

<sup>276</sup> Gunkel and Lynch, eds., *We Travel the Space Ways*, 27.

<sup>277</sup> Gunkel and Lynch, eds., *We Travel the Space Ways*, 27; and Gumbs, *Dub*, xii.

Afropessimist discourses to further assert the potential – and need – to work towards healing from intergenerational cultural and historical trauma. As an example of an Afropessimist formulation, Sharpe makes a distinction between imagining and inhabiting otherwise within Black expressive literature, performance, and visual culture and the “impossibility” of repairing the “ontological negation” of Blackness within or resulting from Black expressivity.<sup>278</sup> For Sharpe, the interest is in examining the aesthetic representation of the impossible resolution.<sup>279</sup> In this way, Sharpe echoes the Afropessimism of Wilderson III, who describes his disbelief in “a story to be told through which one could redeem the time and place of Black subjugation.”<sup>280</sup> Like King, Navarro, and Smith, I view Afropessimism as a framework that presents a “theoretical impasse” for conceptualizing Black subjectivities and liberatory futures.<sup>281</sup> Afropessimism’s absence of generative theory and praxis that advances Black futurity is in contradistinction to Afrofuturism’s chronopolitical reimaginings of the past as a means of realizing the potential for just and thriving futures.<sup>282</sup> Wilderson III uses the word “redemption” in reference to the reclamation of Human subjectivity for Black peoples and, in my view, Wilderson III’s language suggests a need for Black redemption where in reality it is the “brutal imagination” examined by Sharpe that is in “deficit” and in need of absolution.<sup>283</sup> If, as Sharpe argues, “we cannot afford to be hailed by that misreading and called into being by that deficit – that deficit is not of our imagining,” then I question the assertions of leading Black diasporic critical voices that presume that Black cultural expressions cannot hold the potential for some reparative healing through the act of imagining an otherwise futurity.<sup>284</sup>

---

<sup>278</sup> Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 12-14.

<sup>279</sup> Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 14.

<sup>280</sup> Wilderson III, *Afropessimism*, 15.

<sup>281</sup> King, Navarro, and Smith, “Beyond Commensurability,” 5.

<sup>282</sup> Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons*, 5.

<sup>283</sup> Sharpe, “Still Here,” 7-9.

<sup>284</sup> Sharpe, “Still Here,” 9.



\*\*\*\*\*

To conclude, this thesis examined Modisakeng's *Passage* and Jackson's *Take Me to the Water* as reimaginings of the Middle Passage conceptualized within an Afrofuturist reparative imaginary. With chronopolitical intervention as method both artists reparatively and ethically represented the "submerged perspectives" of African or Black diasporic subjects within traumatic historical contexts using Brand's concept ancestral "Black water" and symbolic dress.<sup>285</sup> Returning to this thesis' central questions: whether contemporary Afrofuturist artworks such as Modisakeng's *Passage* and Jackson's *Take Me to the Water* hold a reparative potential for healing from intergenerational cultural and historical trauma, and if so how: I view the reimagining of untold histories – the "submerged perspectives" – within a reparative imaginary as holding the possibility of repair from totalizing anti-Black racism and violence in our present and futures.<sup>286</sup> In my interpretation, Modisakeng and Jackson's artistic conceptualizations bring "submerged perspectives" to the surface through Afrofuturist chronopolitical intervention: this is the mobilization of the reparative imaginary and its potential to heal. It is to breathe above water within an ecology that is supportive of livable Black futurities on the African continent and throughout the Black diaspora.<sup>287</sup> The reparative framework I offer in this study is one of "radical incompleteness," or an ongoing and participatory process, as formulated by the RAQS Media Collective.<sup>288</sup> The reparative imaginary, chronopolitics, and Afrofuturism more broadly, bring to the surface the "submerged perspectives" of African or Black diasporic persons so that we may work towards healing.<sup>289</sup> Conceptualized within a reparative imaginary, Modisakeng's

---

<sup>285</sup> Gumbs, *Dub*, xii; Brand, *A Map to the Door*, 61; and DuPlessis, *The Material Atlantic*, 20.

<sup>286</sup> Gumbs, *Dub*, xii.

<sup>287</sup> Gumbs, *Dub*, xii.

<sup>288</sup> RAQS Media Collective, "How to Be an Artist by Night," 78.

<sup>289</sup> Gumbs, *Dub*, xii.

*Passage* and Jackson's *Take Me to the Water* use chronopolitical intervention and hold a self-liberatory logic for an Afrofuturist, or otherwise futurity, insistent upon equitable and thriving Black lives.

## Figures



Figure 1. Mohau Modisakeng, *Passage*, 2017, three-channel HD video, 18:49 min. Installation view in the Sale d'Armi, Arsenal, Venice, part of the 57<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale International Art Exhibition: *Viva Arte Viva*, 2017.



Figure 2. J.M.W. Turner, *Slave Ship* [originally titled *Slavers Throwing overboard the Dead and Dying – Typhoon coming on*], 1840, oil on canvas, 36 x 48 in. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts Boston.



Figure 3. Sonda Perry, *Typhoon coming on*, 2018, video. Installation view at The Luma Foundation, Zurich, part of the *Luma Westbau: Sarah Morris, Arthur Jafa and Sonda Perry* exhibition, 2018.

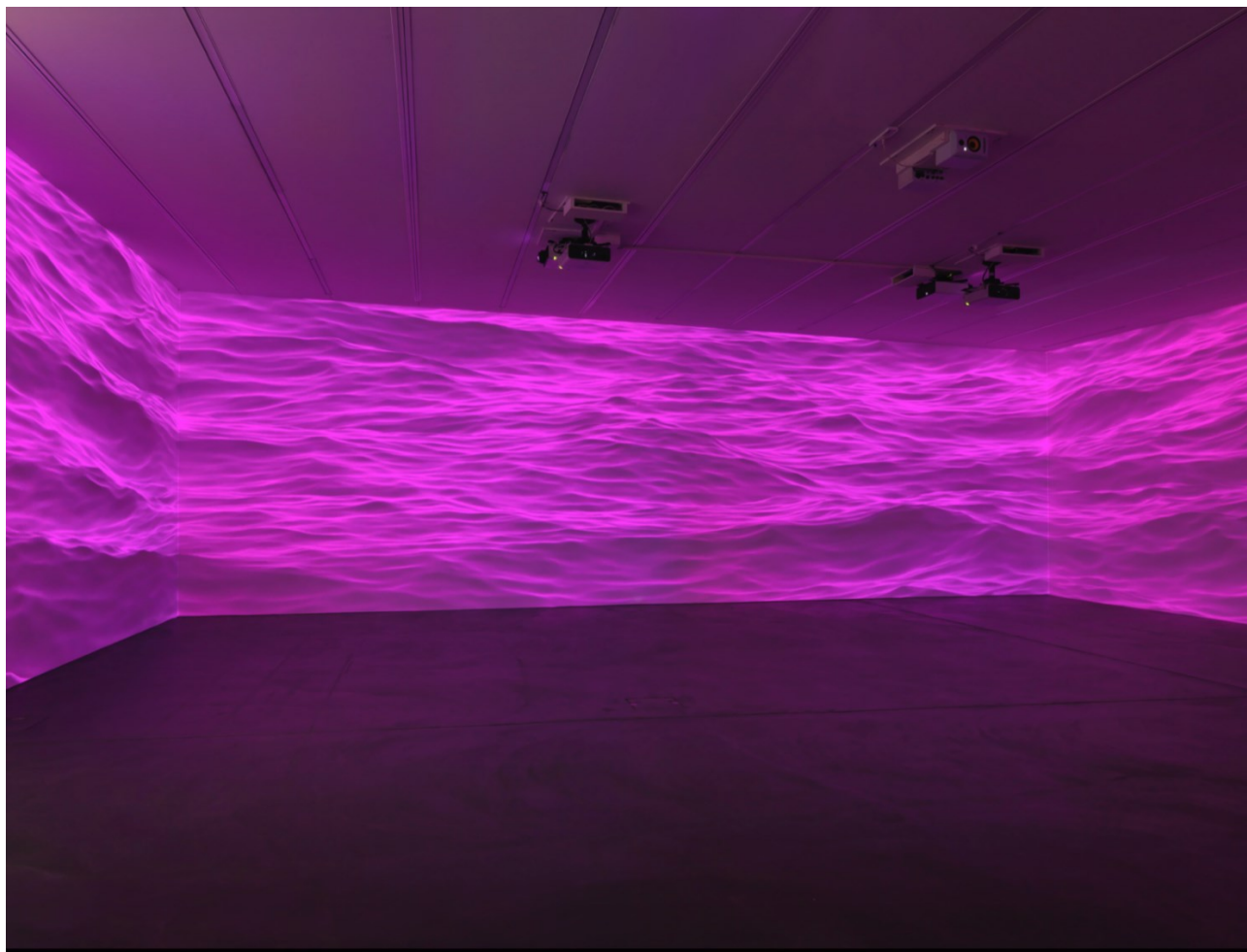


Figure 4. Sonda Perry, *Typhoon coming on*, 2018, video. Installation view at The Luma Foundation, Zurich, part of the *Luma Westbau: Sarah Morris, Arthur Jafa and Sonda Perry* exhibition, 2018.



Figure 5. Victor Ekpuk, *Slave Narrative*, 2008, graphite and pastel on paper, 42 1/4 x 65 in. Washington D.C., Smithsonian National Museum of African Art.

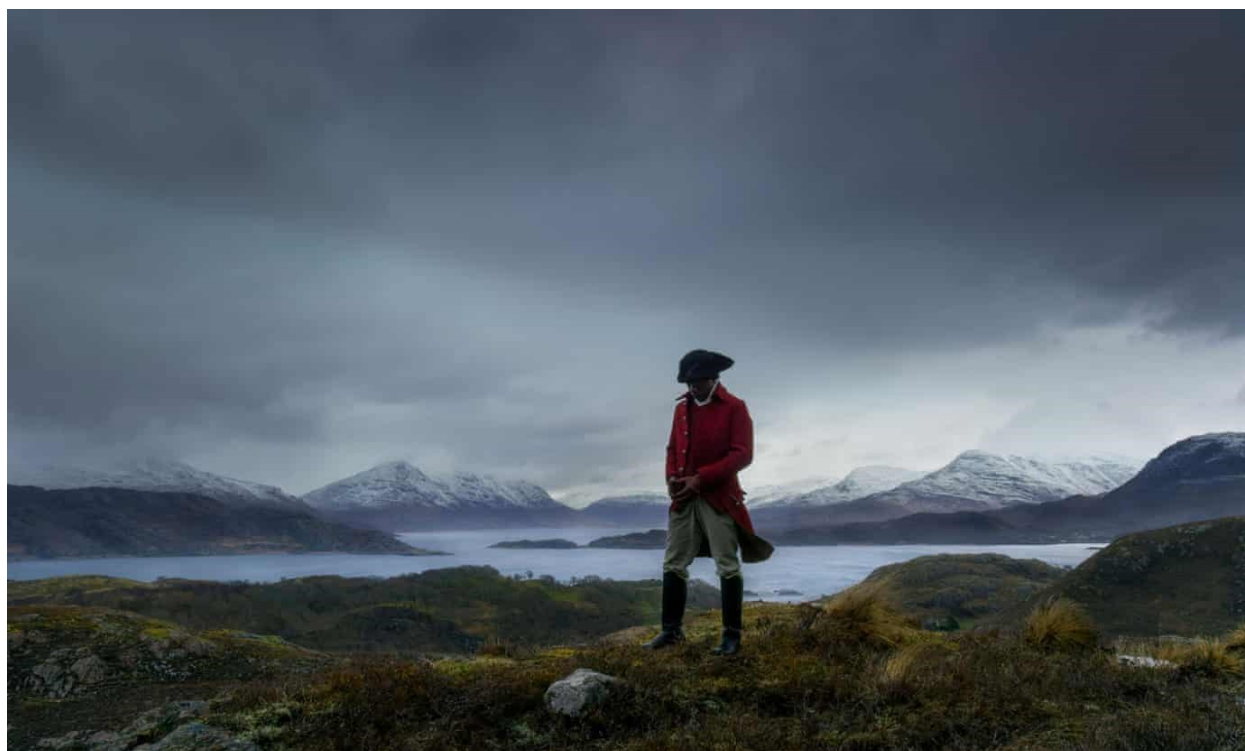


Figure 6. John Akomfrah, *Vertigo Sea*, 2015, film still, three-channel HD video, 48:30 min. Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada.





Figure 7. Ayana V. Jackson, *The Rupture Was the Story*, from the series *Take Me to the Water*, 2019, archival pigment print on German etching paper, 25 5/8 x 42 7/8 in.



Figure 8. Mohau Modisakeng, *Passage*, 2017, three-channel HD video, 18:49 min. Installation view in the Sale d'Armi, Arsenal, Venice, part of the 57<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale International Art Exhibition: *Viva Arte Viva*, 2017.



Figure 9. Mohau Modisakeng, *Passage*, 2017, film still, three-channel HD video, 18:49 min.



Figure 10. Mohau Modisakeng, *Passage*, 2017, film still, three-channel HD video, 18:49 min.



Figure 11. Mohau Modisakeng, *Passage*, 2017, film still, three-channel HD video, 18:49 min.

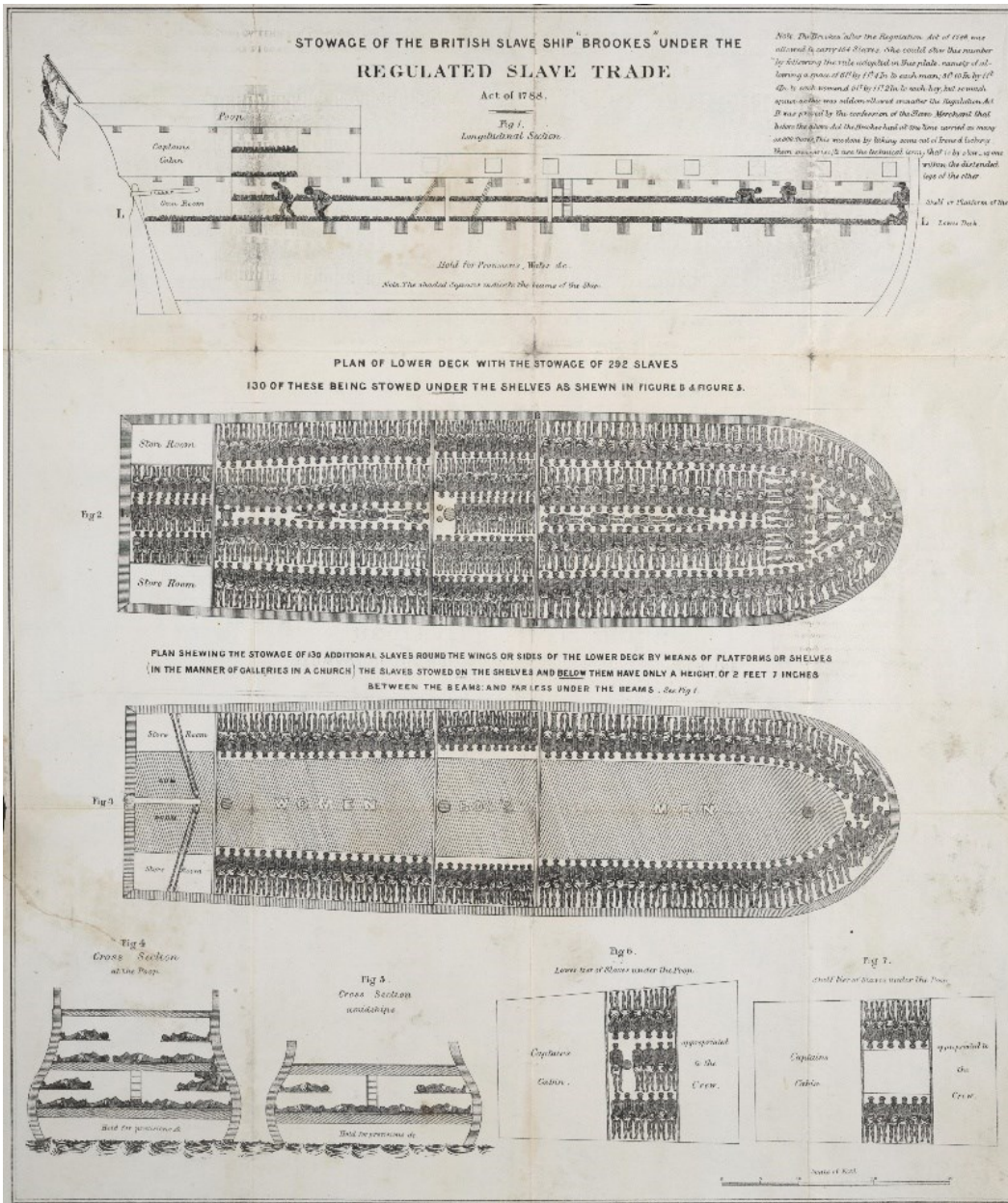


Figure 12. Stowage of the British slave ship *Brookes* under the regulated slave trade act of 1788, c. 1788, etching. Washington, D.C., Library of Congress Rare Book and Special Collections Division.

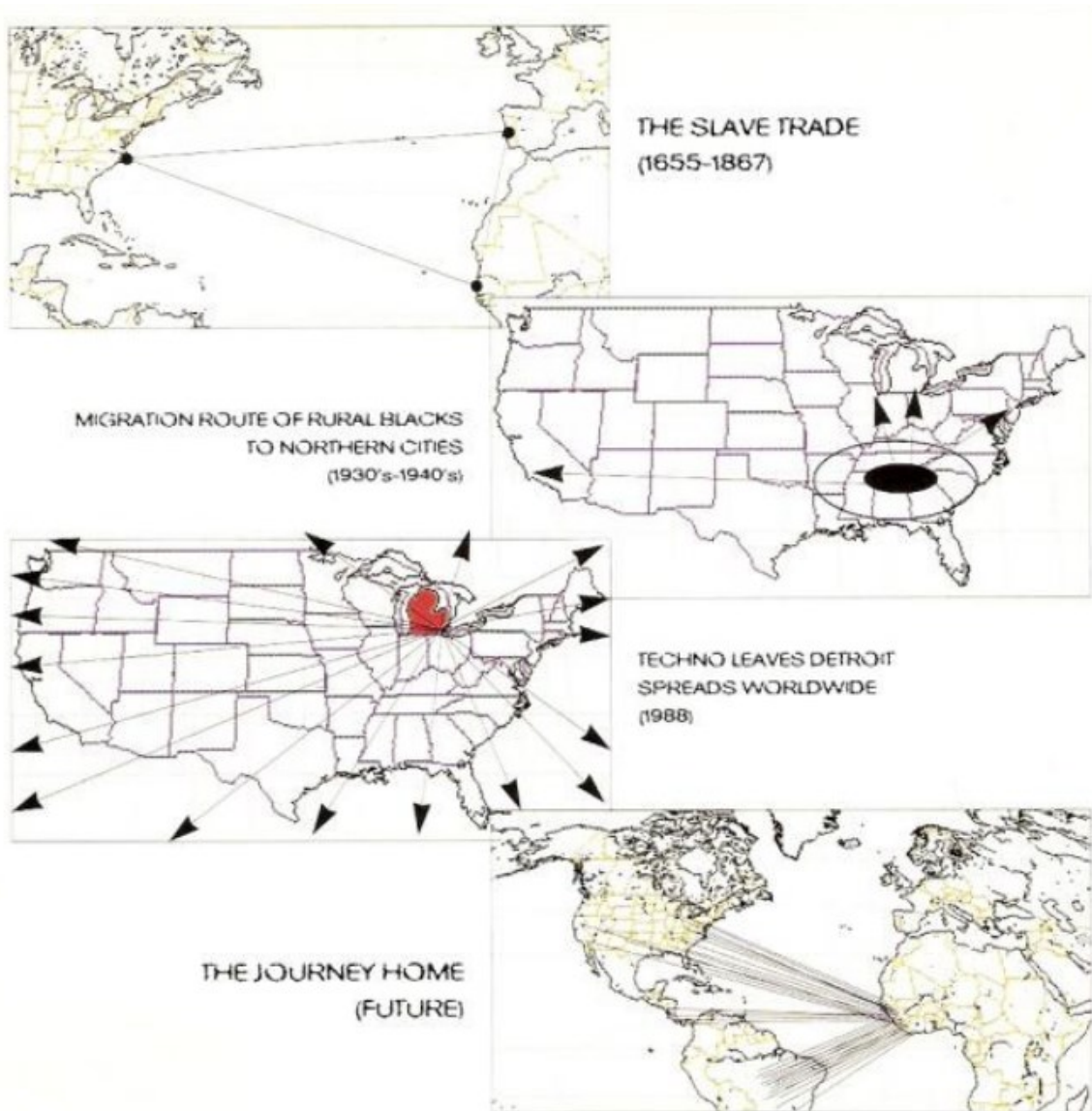


Figure 13. Image of liner notes, *The Quest*, Drexciya, 1997.



Figure 14. Ayana V. Jackson, *Sighting in the Abyss II*, from the series *Take Me to the Water*, 2019, archival pigment print on German etching paper, 39 3/8 x 59 1/8 in.





Figure 15. Ayana V. Jackson, *Black Rice*, from the series *Take Me to the Water*, 2019, archival pigment print on German etching paper, 42 7/8 x 41 7/8 in.



Figure 16. Ayana V. Jackson, *The Self-Forgetfulness of Belonging Would Never Be Mine*, from the series *Take Me to the Water*, 2019, archival pigment print on German etching paper, 59 1/8 x 56 7/8 in.

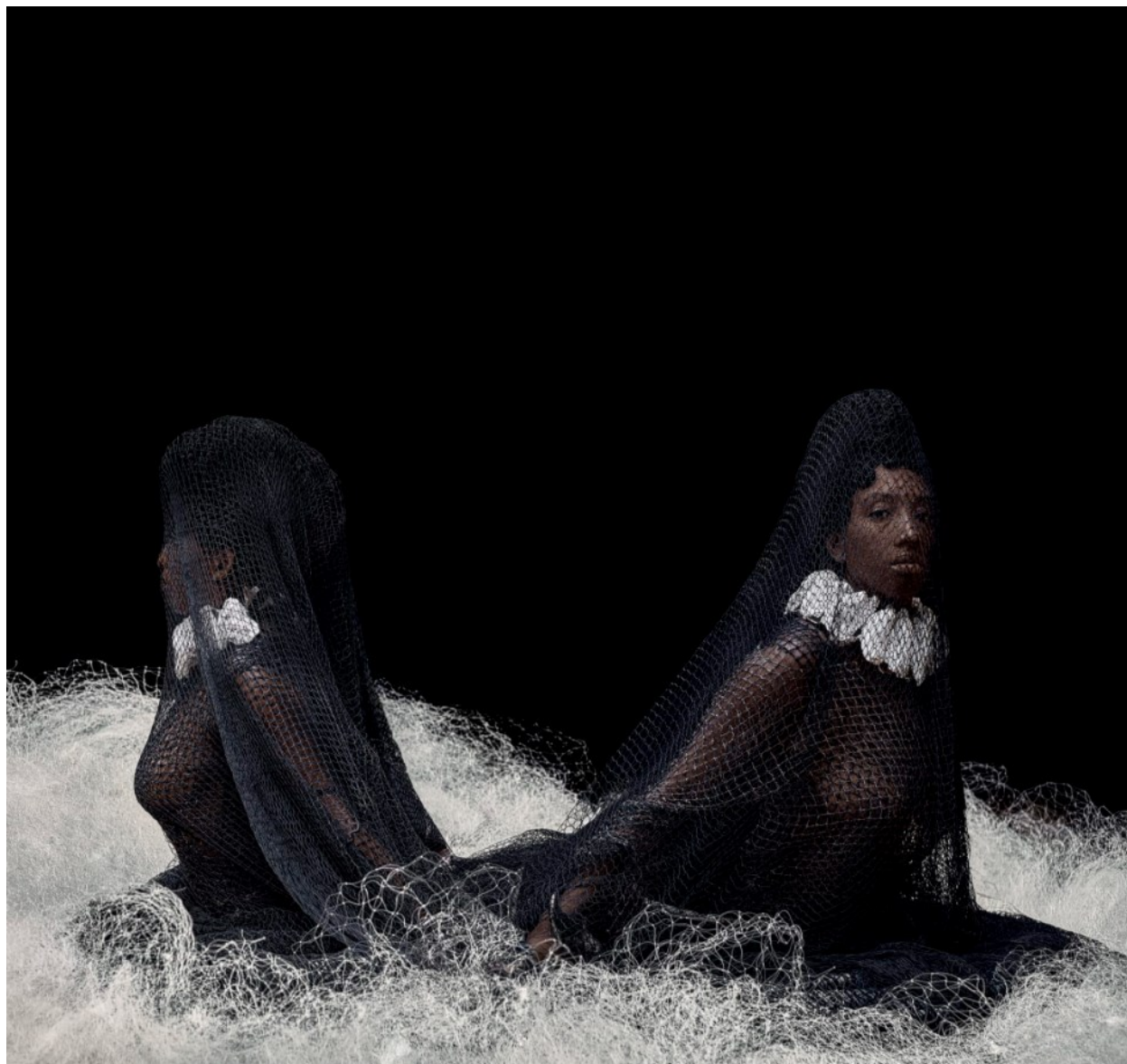


Figure 17. Ayana V. Jackson, *Double Goddess...A Sighting in the Abyss*, from the series *Take Me to the Water*, 2019, archival pigment print on German etching paper, 55 1/8 x 59 1/8 in.



Figure 18. Ayana V. Jackson, *Sighting in the Abyss III*, from the series *Take Me to the Water*, 2019, archival pigment print on German etching paper, 39 3/8 x 59 1/8 in.



Figure 19. Ayana V. Jackson, *Consider the Sky and the Sea*, from the series *Take Me to the Water*, 2019, archival pigment print on German etching paper, 46 7/8 x 42 7/8 in.

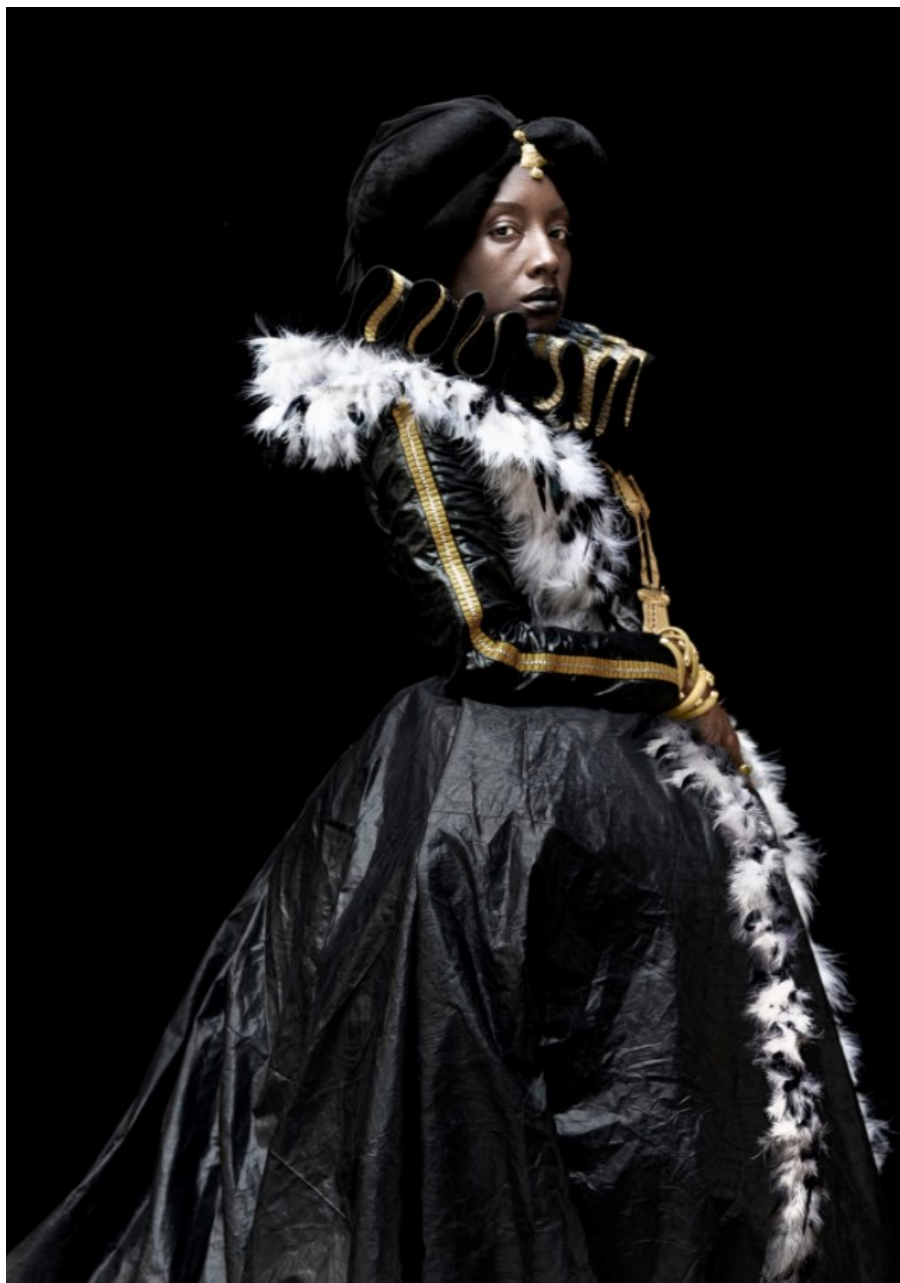


Figure 20. Ayana V. Jackson, *Sea Lion*, from the series *Take Me to the Water*, 2019, archival pigment print on German etching paper, 61 3/8 x 39 3/8 in.



Figure 21. 'Ermine' Portrait of Queen Elizabeth, attributed to Nicholas Hilliard, c. 1585, oil on panel, 95.2 x 86.4 cm. Hatfield, Hatfield House.

### Discography

Drexciya, *The Quest*. Submerge, two compact discs. Originally released in 1997.

Simone, Nina. "Take Me to the Water." Apple Music. Track 6 on *High Priestess of Soul*, Philips, 1967.



## Bibliography

- Aima, Rahel. "Productive Friction: An Incisive Sharjah Biennial Ponders the Untapped Histories of the United Arab Emirates." *ARTNews*, May 28, 2019. <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/reviews/sharjah-biennial-review-12605/>.
- Akomfrah, John and Kodwo Eshun. "The Secessionist Manifestos of Certain Received Wisdoms." In *We Travel the Space Ways: Black Imagination, Fragments, and Diffractions*, edited by Henriette Gunkel and kara lynch, 363-369. Verlag: transcript, 2019. <https://doi-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/10.14361/9783839446010>.
- Anderson, Reynaldo and Charles E. Jones, eds. *Afrofuturism 2.0: The Rise of Astro-Blackness*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016.
- Arnold, Janet. *Queen Elizabeth's Wardrobe Unlock'd*. Leeds: W.S. Maney & Son, 1988.
- Art Breath. "Mohau Modisakeng." Accessed January 7, 2021. <http://artbreath.org/interviews/mohau-modisakeng>.
- ArtReview. "The Venice Questionnaire #29 – Lucy MacGarry." Accessed October 25, 2020. <https://artreview.com/2017-venice-29-lucy-macgarry-south-africa/>.
- Barber, Tiffany, Reynaldo Anderson, Mark Dery, and Sheree Renée Thomas. "25 Years of Afrofuturism and Black Speculative Thought: Roundtable with Tiffany E. Barber." *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* 39 (Spring 2018): 136-144. <https://muse-jhu-edu.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/article/706962>.
- Bell, Derrick. "The Afrolantica Awakening." In *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism*, 32-46. New York: BasicBooks, 1992. <https://hdl-handle-net.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/2027/heb.33001>.
- Bell-Roberts, Brendon. "Echoes of Empire, Space and Time." *Art Africa Magazine*. Accessed December 5, 2020. <https://artafricamagazine.org/echos-of-empire-space-and-time-sharjah-art-foundation-biennale/>.
- Berger, Iris. *South Africa in World History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.lib-exproxy.concordia.ca/lib/concordia-ebooks/detail.action?docID=430667>.
- Bhattacharya, Sabyasachi. "'History from Below'." *Social Scientist* 11, no. 4 (April 1983): 3-20. <https://doi-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/10.2307/3517020>.
- Biennial Foundation. "Candice Breitz and Mohau Modisakeng to Represent South Africa at the 57th Venice Biennale in 2017." Last modified November 2, 2016.

<https://www.biennialfoundation.org/2016/11/candice-breitz-mohau-modisakeng-represent-south-africa-57th-venice-biennale-2017/>.

Black Quantum Futurism. "What is Black Quantum Futurism?" Accessed January 10, 2021. <https://www.blackquantumfuturism.com/about>.

Bourland, Ian. "John Akomfrah: Multichannel Prehensions." *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* no. 45 (November 2019): 128-139. <https://muse-jhu-edu.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/article/738986>.

Bracey, John H., August Meier, and Elliott M. Rudwick, eds. *American Slavery: The Question of Resistance*. Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing, 1971.

Brand, Dionne. *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging*. Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2011.

British Library. "Collection Items: Diagram of the 'Brookes' slave ship." Accessed January 10, 2021. <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/diagram-of-the-brookes-slave-ship#>.

Brown Jr., DeForrest. "Techno is Technocracy." *FACT Magazine*, December 17, 2019. <https://www.factmag.com/2019/12/17/techno-is-technocracy/>.

Bruney, Gabrielle. "This Artist Brings Myths of the Black Diaspora to Life Through Self-Portraits." Artsy. Accessed September 28, 2020. <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-artist-brings-myths-black-diaspora-life-self-portraits>.

Campt, Tina. *Listening to Images*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017.

Carney, Judith A. "The Role of African Rice and Slaves in the History of Rice Cultivation in the Americas." *Human Ecology* 26, no. 4 (December 2008): 525-545. <https://lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/login?url=https://www.jstor.org/stable/4603297>.

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy*. New York: One World, 2018.

Connolly, Maeve. *The Place of Artists' Cinema: Space, Site, and Screen*. Bristol: Intellect, 2009.

Cooper, Afua. *The Hanging of Angélique: The Untold Story of Canadian Slavery and the Burning of Old Montréal*. Toronto: Harper Perennial, 2006.

Crawley, Ashon. "Stayed | Freedom | Hallelujah." In *Otherwise Worlds: Against Settler Colonialism and Anti-Blackness*, edited by Tiffany Lethabo King, Jenell Navarro, and Andrea Smith, 27-37. Durham: Duke University Press, 2020.

Dean, Aria. "Poor Meme Rich Meme (Aka Toward a Black Circulationism)." *Real Life Magazine*, July 25, 2016. <https://reallifemag.com/poor-meme-rich-meme/>.

- Dery, Mark. "Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose." In *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*, edited by Mark Dery, 179-222. Durham: Duke University Press, 1994.
- Diverlus, Rodney, Sandy Hudson, and Syrus Marcus Ware, eds. *Until We Are Free: Reflections on Black Lives Matter in Canada*. Regina: University of Regina Press, 2020.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. "The Comet." In *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*, 254-277. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920.
- Dubow, Saul. *Apartheid: 1948-1994*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.  
<https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/lib/concordia-ebooks/reader.action?docID=1685681&ppg=1>).
- DuPlessis, Robert S. *The Material Atlantic: Clothing, Commerce, and Colonization in the Atlantic World, 1650-1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.
- Earle, Rebecca. "'Two Pairs of Pink Satin Shoes!!' Race, Clothing and Identity in the Americas (17th-19th Centuries)." *History Workshop Journal* no. 52 (Autumn 2001): 175-195.  
<https://lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/login?url=https://www.jstor.org/stable/4289752>.
- Eshun, Kodwo. "Further Considerations of Afrofuturism." *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 287-302. <https://muse-jhu-edu.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/article/48294>.
- Filreis, Kelly. "On Three Works by Sondra Perry." *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 61, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 47-56. <https://doi-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/10.13110/framework.61.1.0047>.
- Fosler-Lussier, Danielle. "The African Diaspora in the United States: Appropriation and Assimilation." In *Music on the Move*, 68-92. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3998/mpub.9853855.10>.
- Garba, Tapji and Sara-Maria Sorentino. "Slavery is a Metaphor: A Critical Commentary on Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's 'Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor.'" *Antipode* 52, no. 3 (2020): 764-782. <https://doi-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/10.1111/anti.12615>.
- Gaskins, Nettrice. "Welcome to Afrofuturism 3.0." *Slate*, December 2, 2015.  
<https://slate.com/technology/2015/12/how-i-m-using-technology-to-create-afrofuturism-art.html>.
- Gilhooly, Emma. "Ayana V. Jackson." *Nataal*. Accessed August 1, 2020.  
<https://nataal.com/ayana-v-jackson>.

- Gilligan, Carol. *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982. <https://hdl-handle-net.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/2027/heb.32978>.
- Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993.
- Glissant, Édouard. *Poetics of Relation*. Translated by Betsy Wing. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997.
- Gumbs, Alexis Pauline. "Black Astrophysics: A Homemade Field of Love Dedicated to Clyde Eliot Gumbs." In *We Travel the Space Ways: Black Imagination, Fragments, and Diffractions*, edited by Henriette Gunkel and kara lynch, 15-20. Verlag: transcript, 2019. <https://doi-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/10.14361/9783839446010>.
- . *Dub: Finding Ceremony*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2020.
- Gunkel, Henriette and kara lynch, eds. *We Travel the Space Ways: Black Imagination, Fragments, and Diffractions*. Verlag: transcript, 2019. <https://doi-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/10.14361/9783839446010>.
- Gupta, Sujata. "Why African-Americans May Be Especially Vulnerable to COVID-19." *ScienceNews*, April 10, 2020. <https://www.sciencenews.org/article/coronavirus-why-african-americans-vulnerable-covid-19-health-race>.
- Habib, Ayesha. "Q&A: Exploring African Mythic Worlds with Photographer Ayana V. Jackson." *NUVO Magazine*, September 20, 2019. <https://nuvomagazine.com/art/qa-exploring-african-mythic-worlds-with-photographer-ayana-v-jackson>.
- Haraway, Donna J. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.
- Harney, Stefano and Fred Moten. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*. New York: Minor Compositions, 2013.
- Hartman, Saidiya. *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007.
- . *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- . "Venus in Two Acts." *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (June 2008): 1-14. <https://muse-jhu-edu.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/article/241115>.
- Hartman, Saidiya V. and Frank B. Wilderson III. "The Position of the Unthought." *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 13, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 183-201.

<https://doi-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/10.1215/quiparle.13.2.183>.

Hatfield House. "The King James Drawing Room." Accessed December 10, 2020.

<https://www.hatfield-house.co.uk/house/the-house/the-king-james-drawing-room/>.

James, Ian. *Paul Virilio*. London: Routledge, 2007.

Joyner, Charles. *Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984.

Keeling, Kara. *Queer Times, Black Futures*. New York: New York University Press, 2019.

King, Tiffany Lethabo, Jenell Navarro, and Andrea Smith. "Beyond Commensurability: Toward an Otherwise Stance on Black and Indigenous Relationality." In *Otherwise Worlds: Against Settler Colonialism and Anti-Blackness*, edited by Tiffany Lethabo King, Jenell Navarro, and Andrea Smith, 1-26. Durham: Duke University Press, 2020.

Klinke, Ian. "Chronopolitics: A Conceptual Matrix." *Progress in Human Geography* 37, no. 5 (2013): 673-690. <https://doi-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/10.1177/0309132512472094>.

La Biennale de Venezia. "Arsenale." Accessed October 25, 2020.

<https://www.labiennale.org/en/venues/arsenale>.

Lacan, Jacques. *Ecrits: The First Complete Edition in English*. Translated by Bruce Fink in collaboration with Héloïse Fink and Russell Grigg. New York: W.W. Norton, 2006.

Lavender III, Isiah. *Afrofuturism Rising: The Literary Prehistory of a Movement*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2019.

Levinsohn, Rhoda. "Lesotho Silkscreens and Block Prints." *African Arts* 13, no. 4 (August 1980): 56-59. <https://lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/login?url=https://www.jstor.org/stable/3335785>.

MacArthur Foundation. "MacArthur Fellows Program: Fred Moten." Accessed October 8, 2020.

<https://www.macfound.org/fellows/1067/>.

Mackey, Nathaniel. "The Art of Poetry No 107: Nathaniel Mackey." *The Paris Review*, no. 232 (Spring 2020): 141-168.

Manuel, Shannon. "Material, Metaphor and the Black Body." *Better Business Quarterly* 77 (2018): <http://mags.capemedia.co.za/bbq/77/>.

Mariane Ibrahim Gallery. "Ayana V. Jackson CV." Accessed October 15, 2020.

[https://marianeibrahim.com/usr/library/documents/main/artists/27/ayana-v.-jackson\\_cv.pdf](https://marianeibrahim.com/usr/library/documents/main/artists/27/ayana-v.-jackson_cv.pdf).

- Mayer, Ruth. "Africa as an Alien Future": The Middle Passage, Afrofuturism, and Postcolonial Waterworlds." *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 45, no. 4 (2000): 555-566. <https://lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/login?url=https://www.jstor.org/stable/41157608>.
- Maynard, Robyn. "Police Abolition/Black Revolt." *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* 41 (December 2020): 70-78. <https://doi-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/10.3138/topia-009>.
- . *Policing Black Lives: Violence in Canada from Slavery to the Present*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2017.
- . "Reading Black Resistance through Afrofuturism: Notes on post-Apocalyptic Blackness and Black Rebel Cyborgs in Canada." *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* 39 (Spring 2018): 29-47. <https://muse-jhu-edu.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/article/706957>.
- McKittrick, Katherine. *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and Cartographies of Struggle*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.
- . "Rebellion/Invention/Groove." *Small Axe* 20, no. 1 (March 2016): 79-91. <https://doi-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/1.0.1215/07990537-3481558>.
- McKittrick, Katherine and Clyde Woods, eds. *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 2007.
- Mercer, Kobena. "Becoming Black Audio: An Interview with John Akomfrah and Trevor Mathison." *Black Camera* 6, no. 2 (Spring 2015): 79-93. <https://muse-jhu-edu.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/article/583173>.
- Modisakeng, Mohau. "Artist Talk: Mohau Modisakeng." Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, University of Oregon. Recorded on May 24, 2019. YouTube video, 1:32:07. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=52TgFu6YQOg&t=7s>.
- Mohau Modisakeng. "Land of Zanj (2019)." Accessed January 6, 2021. <http://www.mohaumodisakengstudio.com/land-of-zanj-2019>.
- . "New York Times w/ Damien Davis 2017." Accessed December 5, 2020. <https://www.mohaumodisakengstudio.com/new-york-times-2017>
- . "'No Serenity Here' - Interview with Dr. Uhuru Portia Phalafala." Accessed January 6, 2021. <https://www.mohaumodisakengstudio.com/noserenity-interview>.
- . "Passage." Accessed August 10, 2020. <http://www.mohaumodisakengstudio.com/passage-2017/2017/8/23/passage>
- Morse, Erik. "The Oceanic Ecologies of John Akomfrah." *ArtReview* 68, no. 1 (March 2016). <https://www.artreview.com/jan-feb-2016-feature-john-akomfrah/>.

- Mqomboti, Liduduma'lingani. "Probing Subliminal Violence." Africa is a Country. Accessed December 5, 2020. <https://africasacountry.com/2014/06/82023>.
- Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. "John Akomfrah: Vertigo Sea." Accessed December 1, 2020. <https://macm.org/en/exhibitions/john-akomfrah-vertigo-sea/>
- National Portrait Gallery. "People & Portraits - Collections." Accessed December 5, 2020. <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/>.
- Negro Spirituals. "Songs: Wade in the Water." Accessed November 3, 2020. <https://www.negrospirituals.com/songs/wade-in-the-water.htm>.
- Nelson, Charmaine A. "Black Body Politics and Self-Care: Slave Dress as Resistance in Caribbean and Canadian Slavery." Presentation at the Department of Art History Speaker Series at the University of Toronto, January 22, 2021.
- . *Representing the Black Female Subject in Western Art*. Routledge: New York, 2010. <https://doi-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/10.4324/9780203851241>.
- Noddings, Nel. *Caring: a Feminine Approach to Ethics & Moral Education*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.
- Okeke-Agulu, Chika. "Contemporary African Artists and the Pan-African Imaginary: Skunder Boghossian, Kwabene Ampofo-Anti, and Victor Ekpuk." *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* 33 (Fall 2013): 56-69. <https://muse-jhu-edu.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/article/539541>.
- Otero, Solimar, and Toyin Falola eds. *Yemoja: Gender, Sexuality, and Creativity in the Latina/o and Afro-Atlantic Diasporas*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013. <https://muse-jhu-edu.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/book/27398>.
- Philip, M. NourbeSe. As told to the author by Setaey Adamu Boateng. *Zong!* Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2008.
- Phillips, Rasheedah. "Future." In *We Travel the Space Ways: Black Imagination, Fragments, and Diffractions*, edited by Henriette Gunkel and kara lynch, 433-439. Verlag: transcript, 2019. <https://doi-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/10.14361/9783839446010>.
- Pierce, Thom. "Riding the Southern Wilds: The Horsemen of Lesotho in Pictures." *The Guardian*, October 17, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2016/oct/17/riding-southern-wilds-horsemen-semonkong-lesotho-in-pictures>.
- RAQS Media Collective. "How to Be an Artist by Night." In *Art School (Propositions for the 21st Century)*, edited by Steven Henry Madoff, 71-81. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009.

- Royal Collection Trust. "Explore the Collection." Accessed December 5, 2020. <https://www.rct.uk/collection/search#/page/1>.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. Revised by Arlette Elkaim-Sartre. *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination*. New York: Routledge, 2004. <https://doi-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/10.4324/9780203644102>.
- Shaikh, Ayesha Sohail Shemir. "Through the Lens of Humanity with Photographer Ayana V. Jackson." *Harper's Bazaar Arabia*, September 23, 2019. <https://www.harpersbazaararabia.com/art/artists/through-the-lens-of-humanity-with-photographeayr-ayana-v-jackson>.
- Sharpe, Christina. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.
- . "Still Here." *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* 41 (Spring 2019): 5-14. <https://muse-jhu-edu.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/article/751054>.
- Slave Voyages Database. "African Names – Understanding the Database." Accessed September 28, 2020. <https://www.slavevoyages.org/resources/about#african-names-database/0/en/>.
- . "Intra-American Slave Trade – Understanding the Voyage." Accessed September 28, 2020. <https://www.slavevoyages.org/american/about>.
- . "Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade - Estimates." Accessed December 14, 2020. <https://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/estimates>.
- . "Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade - Understanding the Database." Accessed September 28, 2020. <https://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/about#methodology/introduction/0/en/>.
- Smiles, Sam. "Turner and the Slave Trade: Speculation and Representation, 1805-1840." *The British Art Journal* 8, no. 3 (Winter 2007): 47-54. <https://lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/login?url=https://www.jstor.org/stable/41614774>.
- Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History. "Explore Smithsonian." Accessed December 5, 2020. <https://www.si.edu/explore>.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Abahali. Accessed January 5, 2021. [https://abahali.org/files/Can\\_the\\_subaltern\\_speak.pdf](https://abahali.org/files/Can_the_subaltern_speak.pdf)
- Steyerl, Hito, Coco Fusco, and Supercommunity. "Remembering Okwui Enwezor." *e-flux Journal* 98 (February 2019). <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/98/260819/remembering-okwui-enwezor/>.



- Sunstrum, Pamela Phatsimo. "Afro-Mythology and African Futurism: The Politics of Imagining and Methodologies for Contemporary Creative Research Practices." *Paradoxa* 25 (2013): 113-130.
- Taylor, Keeanga-Yamahtta. *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016.
- The Rooms. "Mohau Modisakeng: Passage." Accessed October 23, 2020. <https://www.therooms.ca/exhibits/past-exhibit/mohau-modisakeng-passage>.
- Thompson, John B. "Ideology and the Social Imaginary: An Appraisal of Castoriadis and Lefort." *Theory and Society* 11, no. 5 (September 1982): 659-681. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/657343>.
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston, Beacon Press, 2015.
- Unsworth, Andrew. "How the Basotho Blanket Became the Brand Identity of a Nation." *Wanted*, February 1, 2017. <https://www.wantedonline.co.za/art-design/2017-02-01-how-the-basotho-blanket-became-the-brand-identity-of-a-nation/>.
- van Veen, tobias c. and Reynaldo Anderson. "Future Movements: Black Lives, Black Politics, Black Futures." *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* 39 (Spring 2018): 5-21. <https://muse-jhu-edu.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/article/706955>.
- Vikram, Anuradha. "Underneath the Black Atlantic: Race and Capital in John Akomfrah's Vertigo Sea." *X-tra: Contemporary Art Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (Spring 2019): 18-33. <https://lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aft&AN=135911030&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.
- Virilio, Paul. *Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dromology*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.
- Walcott, Rinaldo. "The Black Aquatic: On Water, Art, and Black Movement." Unpublished manuscript, last modified August 21, 2020. Adobe PDF file.
- . "The Black Aquatic: On Water, Art, and Black Movement with Rinaldo Walcott." Flagship on Critical Thought in African Humanities. Recorded on August 21, 2020. YouTube video, 1:52:36. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uQHtgJUnAtg>.
- Wilderson III, Frank B. *Afropessimism*. New York: Liveright Publishing, 2020.
- Wilderson III, Frank B. and Tiffany Lethabo King. "Staying Ready for Black Study." In *Otherwise Worlds: Against Settler Colonialism and Anti-Blackness*, edited by Tiffany

Lethabo King, Jenell Navarro, and Andrea Smith, 52-76. Durham: Duke University Press, 2020.

Womack, Ytasha. *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture*. Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2013. <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/lib/concordia-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1381831>.