


Hearing the Cry in Black Diasporic and Latina/o Poetics

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**Rachel Ellis Neyra,**  
**"Hearing the Cry in Black Diasporic and Latina/o Poetics"**  
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**Abstract:** In her article "Hearing the Cry in Black Diasporic and Latina/o Poetics" Rachel Ellis Neyra expands upon Edouard Glissant's notion of "the cry of the Plantation" and shows how to listen for it in a literary arrangement of Derek Walcott, Piri Thomas, Pedro Pietri, Ralph Ellison, Miguel Algarín, and James Baldwin. Ellis Neyra also reads musical lyrics by Oscar D'León and Billie Holiday and the melodic nuances of salsa, jazz, the blues, and *bomba* for how they sound out what she calls the New World Cry, a mnemonic figure of the Plantation of the Americas and a metaphor for how estrangement can conjoin the desires of (im)migrant and diasporic peoples. In doing so, Ellis Neyra shows that modernity is constituted by aurally sensible, visible, and legible forms which emerged from the Plantation, and that chattel slavery's breakdown in the Americas did not mark the Plantation's erasure from earth, but fermented remainders which carried out its tropological and physical exportation, its re-presentation elsewhere.

**Rachel Ellis Neyra**

### **Hearing the Cry in Black Diasporic and Latina/o Poetics**

After the enthusiastic introduction by the club's presenter of the performing artists, after the singer joins the band in the blooming light on stage, the cry "¡Para la historia!" is sometimes sung to open into a live musical performance of salsa. We could write this off quickly with the wave of the singer's hand and the wooden clave clap that initiates the beat ridden by congas, bongos, and timbales, with which, depending on the arrangement, other instruments orbit: the piano's keys, the horns' blasses, and the bass' stringed thump join in the trance. The cry to history, then, would merely mark the moment of the opening song being sung in concert, or an event in the history of concerts, perhaps in a special venue. But here we will slow down to both draw some historical lines through this cultural scene and imagine the poetics of this cry "¡Para la historia!"

The Venezuelan singer and bassist Oscar D'León sang this cry to history into the *En Vivo* recording of a performance at The Copacabana in 2000 which opened — after the club hype-man's introduction — with his audience-adored 1975 song, "Llorarás." Not for "Llorarás"'s familiar narrative of the feminine figure as heartbreaking is it featured here — although great lyrical pleasure is taken in singing to the female apostrophic "traitor" (*traicionera*) and "liar" (*mentirosa*), which recycles the hyper-hetero-masculinity of many salsa lyrics, as discussed by Frances Aparicio in *Listening to Salsa*. Here, I call attention to two of D'León's interjections that interrupt "Llorarás"'s narrative flow in this recording to then think towards a signification of the Plantation in Black diasporic and Latina/o poetics. While the Plantation cannot be thought apart from its centuries-long pervasiveness as one site of chattel slavery throughout the Americas, it is nevertheless a space out of which art was, and continues to be, made. Additionally, chattel slavery's breakdown eventuated the Plantation's exportation and persistence into the present through global variations. Which is to say, the Plantation is not a stable signifier (see López). I explore this instability by hearing the Cry in various sensual, sonic, and graphic imaginings of the Plantation as a trope in Black diasporic and Latina/o poetics beginning with a specific salsa recording of a live performance and then moving to what Angel Quintero Rivera calls "tropical music's" including salsa's "historical trajectory" as an urban musical form with a vast, and at times rural, imaginary (15).

D'León's release of "¡Para la historia!" before beginning the lyric could be thought of as an invitation to the audience, wallflowers and dancers alike, to join in the music's making. A fusion form that varies its structural and lyrical combinations of *guaracha*, *mambo*, *plena*, *bolero*, and whose spine it could be said is *son montuno*, salsa turns call-and-response into an insistence on bodily movement. Salsa's successful marketing berthed its popularity in the early 1970s in New York where it reined in Latin dance clubs thereafter in no small part because of Johnny Pacheco's collaborations with Fania Records (see Calvo-Ospina; Flores). Contemporary re-workings of salsa pump today on radio stations like New York's La Mega for and beyond Latina/o listeners, but the orchestrations of Willie Colón and Eddie Palmieri and the voices of Hector Lavoe, Ray Barreto, and D'León broke new ground (see Morales). Paragons of the form, their songs flood listeners' ears with an aggressive deployment of brass, especially the trombone, lyricize urban constriction, and articulate a sense of conflicted belonging through a pan-Latino register (see Calvo Ospina).

I underscore that salsa, like *son* and *bomba*, requires (the idea of) public dancers' bodies and responses to calls as much as it does the singer and his/her band. The lyrics call to you, the listener, or an apostrophic placeholder summons "you" using the familiar *tú* form of intimate address. The salsa singer often laces warmly into the lyrics that a gift is wrapped into the song and pends exchange with listeners. Ray Barreto sings in "Salsa y Dulzura": "I bring you salsa to enjoy" ("Te traigo salsa para gozar"). Some notion of a "we" emerges in the intervals of lyric utterance and record distribution. Yet, while the practice of call-and-response is bound inside many salsa lyrics, D'León's "¡Para la historia!" is not call-and-response. Although the singer is performing for his audience already, "we" are overhearing this cry and its trajectory is not the line of the invitation awaiting answer even if that answer were to come at a great temporal delay or a temporal delay on repeat. This cry that evokes history — something seemingly behind the moment of the call — only to send it outward — seemingly towards a future-space — in a live, but knowingly recorded

performance suspends the notion of the performance as origin and the recording as inferior representation of a pure moment: it mixes temporalities to constitute its own (I am channeling Alexander Weheliye's *Phonographies*). Which is to say that this call to history summons the idea of art's other-than-mimeticness. D'León's call to history carries what I call the New World Cry and its excess that invokes the Plantation as spatial synonym of imperialist reason and as re-imaginable trope.

The *En Vivo* recording of "Llorarás" also captures a shout-out by D'León that interrupts the lyric's narrative flow midway. This interruption creates space for a conjunction between differently moving yet imaginatively bound Latinoamericana/o and U.S. Latina/o bodies. Following the Cry to history, this call to Latinos marks the music's performance as a happening conscious of displacement and the desire to create again out of that rift in an imagined collectivity. It reminds us that New World musical forms turn in the broken yet conjoining space of orality, writing, and sounding, of being cut from (the philosophizing of) history, and re-thinking that cut in a form. Cuts can make space for joints: D'León's interruptions of his lyric to call to history and then to one part of his audience, Latinos, perform breaks that can conjoin members of diasporic and multilingual imaginaries. D'León's musical cry to history becomes even more consequential when thought through Edouard Glissant's re-mapping of the Plantation's shape, design, and breakdown in his 1990 *Poétique de la Relation*. He writes that throughout the new world, the Plantation's systems produced an "autarky" that functioned within a seemingly "closed circle" (64). Revealing the holes in this fantasy geometry, Glissant argues that the Plantation's autarky operated through dependency on the outside, debt, and a mode of production that later learned to re-constitute itself outside of the practice of chattel slavery in spaces organized by the "creative" racial demographics that accompanied the changing rhetoric of (whitened) citizenship in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Glissant wrote that the Plantation is where "present-day modes of Relation" and "our modernity begin to be detectable" (65). With "our modernity" he invokes the Caribbean and the rhetorical parameters of José Martí's *Nuestra América*, yet he graphs beyond them to show the Plantation as a supple figure of the imagination throughout the Americas. There is a range of fictional and musical works from the late nineteenth to the twenty-first century that deconstructs the tricky image of the Plantation's "closed circle" as effecting its total insulation, an image which feeds into the notion that when the Plantation collapsed, it ended as a system of social relations. In Alejo Carpentier's 1949 *El reino de este mundo*, Toni Morrison's 1987 *Beloved*, Gabriel García Márquez's 1994 *Del amor y otros demonios*, and Junot Díaz's 2007 *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* we read not only characterizations of the public's complicity in and the technical irresponsibility of an idea of the historical Plantation, but also of this signifier's instability in at least two ways. One, the art that was and continues to be made of the Plantation sets it into tropological motion. Two, the site's design and labor practices regenerated after slavery's collapse, whether thinking of large agribusiness in the U.S. southwest or the banana Plantations of Guatemala. After "three centuries of constraint" something had fermented, and remained. Something today "still remains," Glissant writes that "the cry of the Plantation, transfigured into the speech of the world" (73). From racialized, chattel slavery's collapse into the margins of cities — "cities of destruction" as E. Franklin Frazier named them in *The Negro Family*, cities of being worked to death as Pedro Pietri eulogizes in verse in "Puerto Rican Obituary" — and new modes of expanding agricultural exploitation, what I capitalize as the Cry of the Plantation was carried throughout the world. For if the Plantation was not closed, then this Cry formed in another strange "open" of modernity.

In the study at hand, I show how select Black diasporic and Latina/o writers and singers compose a Cry of the New World as speech, word, and as sound. These artists, or the peoples that their writings re-compose, entered the discourse of US-citizenship surrounding the time of the Plantation's layered collapse, and are parts of groups historically displaced by imported colonialism, including Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans, and internal colonization within the U.S. after imported colonialism, such as African Americans (see Ngai). Since at least 1848, the racial and spatial logics of the Plantation in the southern U.S. bled into southwestern farming and later agribusiness' re-arrangements of space and labor (see Menchaca). In the other direction of manifest destiny, the racialized logic of citizenship of *fin-de-siècle* U.S. paused on the newly seized island of Puerto Rico which was comprised of an undesirably Black population whose assimilability,

its capacity to "whiten" and function as "reasonable" citizens was unknown (see Duany). With this in mind, I argue that the prose, poetry, and musical lyrics express their formative relations to the Plantation and its violences, which were, in turn, constitutive of modernity (see Hardt and Negri; Saldaña-Portillo). It is the sounding of a shared Cry that we will hear loudly and quietly in the texts brought together here.

One way of performing the expansion of Glissant's figure of "the cry of the Plantation" is by releasing D'León's cry "¡Para la historia!" to float as a motif and direct us to the work of Derek Walcott, Piri Thomas, Pedro Pietri, Ralph Ellison, Miguel Algarín, and James Baldwin. Further, my arrangement of specific musical forms (salsa, jazz, blues, and *bomba*) alongside literary forms shows the importance of the Cry of the New World within what I call the "conjoining break" between orality, writing, and sounding that recurs in Black diasporic and Latina/o poetics. While I cannot expound here on the exact node of connection respective to each scholar and artist, my phrase, "conjoining break" emerges from a constellation of metaphors for creative expression emergent from communal rifts: Jay Wright's "central fact of excision," Brent Hayes Edwards's *décalage*, Nathaniel Mackey's "whistling fissure" of undaunted estrangement, Fred Moten's writings "in the break," Chavela Vargas's time-torn voice, Manthia Diawara's filmic thought in *Rouch in Reverse* made of the split between ethnographer and subject, Eduardo Corral's poetic deconstruction of "hyphenated," assimilative Latina/o identifications with the appellation, "Illegal-American." The (im)migrant and diasporic singers and writers gathered here present unromantic states of belonging to split subjectivities, mixed feelings, and fragmented kinships. What this meditation on the Cry participates in imagining through their work is a heterotopic place with outright poetic capacity to account for its displaced and vulnerable members, which trumpets multiplicity and creative memory, and values fragmentation over an impossible coherence (see Muñoz).

Listening for sound and the Cry, let us begin to bridge between music and literature. Glissant wrote of the preponderant night in the Plantation cabins of slaves who "gave birth to this other enormous silence from which music, inescapable, a murmur at first, finally burst out into this long shout — a music of reserved spirituality through which the body suddenly expresses itself. Monotonous chants, syncopated, broken by prohibitions, set free by the entire thrust of bodies, produced their language from one end of this world to the other" (73). Voice and body manifest shouts as music and language, sending them out into the world. There is an extensive list of musical forms that share this common historical night, the same silence, and thereby envision a map of the Plantation's breakdown and opening into various rural and metropolitan settings. Born of the Plantation's oppressive silence, forms of memory and imagination assembled "to tame time" and include "Negro spirituals and blues, persisting in towns and growing cities; jazz, *biguines*, and calypsos, bursting into barrios and shantytowns; salsas and reggaes" (Glissant 71, 73). The Cry manifests through multilingual speech, the musical forms, and literary bodies of African American, Black diasporic, Caribbean, Latin American, and Latina/o poetics.

In his 1970 *What the Twilight Says* Walcott presents an analogous sequence regarding the transitive expressiveness between spoken dialect, music, and narration:

What would deliver the [New World Negro] from servitude was the forging of a language that went beyond mimicry, a dialect which had the force of revelation as it invented names for things, one which finally settled on its own mode of inflection, and which began to create an oral culture of chants, jokes, folksongs, and fables; this, not merely the debt of history, was his proper claim to the New World. For him metaphor was not a symbol but conversation, and because every poet begins with such ignorance, in the anguish that every noun will be freshly, resonantly named, because a new melodic inflection meant a new mode, there was no better beginning ... The only way to re-create this language was to share in the torture of its articulation. This did not mean the jettisoning of "culture" but by the writer's making creative use of his schizophrenia, an electric fusion of the old and the new. (15-6)

Walcott links the meaning of metaphor in Black oral cultural forms to the schizophrenic poetic urgency of re-imagining the world; but in his emphasis on the word, the body and sensuality are not lost: anguish, melodic inflections, electric fusions invoke the physicality of making a new mode. Reading Walcott's electric sense of New World articulation on Glissant's re-mapping of the Americas, we see: as the (dis)organization of bodies changes form, as the Plantation breaks and

extends outward, a poetics forms to cope with these changes. To speak through this great rupture into unfamiliar space, memory and imagination pull together. We have read a list of the musical forms that carry this Cry of the Plantation, but let us look briefly to two Latina/o, and specifically Nuyorican, literary concatenations of the Cry before we elaborate further on the musical.

In the short lyric poem "do not let" by the Nuyorican poet, Pedro Pietri, we read a modern milieu of a displaced (im)migrant, minor subject. We read a quiet angst in the speaking voice. In this twenty-one line lyric poem, the Cry does not roar out as it does in the Prologue of Piri Thomas' 1967 novel, *Down These Mean Streets*: "YEE-AH!! Wanna know how many times I've stood on the rooftop and yelled out to anybody: 'Hey, World — here I am. Hallo, World — this is Piri. That's me. I wanna tell ya I'm here — you bunch of mother-jumpers — I'm here and I want recognition, whatever that mudder-fuckin word means ... This is a bright *mundo*, my streets, my *barrio de noche* ... YEE-AH!! I feel like part of the shadows that make company for me in this warm *amigo* darkness" (ix). Born of the *barrio*, this bilingual cryer is caught between a Puerto Rican identification he cannot fully embody as a child of displacement and an emergent African American Blackness in the U.S. that is dangerously monitored and qualified. He later finds conflict in these urban shadows and will act upon the need to go "down south" in order to better understand the nuances of racial, cultural, and linguistic differences in the post-Depression U.S. We read here that the narrator also finds a familiar feeling of belonging as a voice amidst silhouettes as his voice breaks out not above their silence, but through quotidian noise and seemingly constant bodega and apartment music to draw a steady line. Speaking out to both the world and himself, the narrator calls for space to assemble his being and make it legible. This "YEE-AH!" rhymes with the "-ia" of D'León's "¡Para la historia!" and also invokes Aimé Césaire's repeated "Aya" in *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, which marks the rising wind. It is apt at this moment to note that the standard French definition of *le cri* marks it is an inarticulate sound that emerges from spontaneous feelings of vigor, whereas in standard Spanish, *el grito* is defined as a vehement expression of general, even organized, sentiment. The French definition recycles Aristotle's and Rousseau's logo-centric renderings of the cry as animal and inadequate because not-voice, and so never-writing, which is precisely what Glissant diverges from in his deployment of "the cry of the Plantation" and I am swerving from even farther. The Spanish definition, however, summons the historical cries that launched the Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban revolutions against Spain (Grito de Dolores, Grito de Lares, and Grito de Yara, respectively), which I translate to Thomas's release, as well as D'León's to retrace a kind of revolutionary desire therein.

In contrast, the speaker of Pietri's poem reads in a lower tone of firm caution about the hazards of remaining a shadow, a figure who does not come to cry out and articulate her/his being, the hazards of forgetting that the immigrant who has become minor in this economically and spatially constricted urban space has a history and a future that exceeds the state's narrative of new citizenship: "you are now naturalized and ready to consume and suffer as prescribed to your station; your past begins right now; forget the rest." We read a voice that writes over a deeply contained Cry:

do not let  
artificial lamps  
make strange shadows  
out of you  
do not dream  
if you want your dreams  
to come true  
you knew how to sing  
before you was  
issued a birth certificate  
turn off the stereo  
this country gave you  
it is out of order  
your breath  
is your promiseland  
if you want  
to feel very rich  
look at your hands  
that is where



the definition of magic  
is located at (*Nuyorican* 151)

The dominant-nation's prescribed order of pleasure and meaning is "out of order," out of line. Instead of becoming a shadow of a person amidst development's false hopes, instead of giving into thinking through mythic US-America's false presentation of the dream, remember breath and voice as things that punctuate naturally, historically, and exceed the dictates of this particular place and moment. The bad grammar of lines nine and twenty-one — "before you was" and "is located at," the wrong conjugation and the preposition left at the end of the poem's last line — emphasizes being and place, respectively, in order to draw attention to the dangers of ontology: "Before you was" sounds like "in the beginning"; it stops the eye and voice from forgetting that the human body is the unique location on this earth of both praxis and poesis, for "valued" making, singing, and sensing. And "is located at" notes that we are more than the coordinates that nevertheless participate in contextualizing so much about us, and that, like the body trying to make sense of itself, words, too, appear in the wrong place; yet there is meaning made through this.

To present another image that sustains rather than closes the conjoining break of voicing, writing, and sounding, we could say that the Cry "fingers the jagged grain" that Ralph Ellison writes in "Richard Wright's Blues." Ellison notes that Wright's 1945 autobiography, *Black Boy*, belongs within a modern literary history and names Joyce, Nehru, and Dostoevsky among its cohort. That is, he places *Black Boy* in the company of modern fiction and away from socio-historical reportage. But the writer must name what else is present in this narrative as a critique of what history would aim to leave out, unnamed. For, as he says in language that retraces Walcott's, "In *Black Boy*, two worlds have fused, two cultures merged, two impulses of Western man become coalesced. By discussing some of its cultural sources I hope to answer those critics who would make of the book a miracle and of its author a mystery" (79). Ellison describes how *Black Boy* carries within it "the quality and tone" and sounds of "the Negro blues" (78), a form that offers no solution to agony, but still resists the "impulse toward self-annihilation" with its "will to confront the world" precisely through storied suffering (92). To keep Glissant's writings on the Plantation's musical forms and the metropolis close, we might also recall that the blues, as the trumpeter Wynton Marsalis has articulated and played, is the roux in the mixture of music that becomes ragtime, then jazz. So the blues recalls the Plantation, slave spirituals, and the call-and-response of Baptist music, as well as the burgeoning and strange early US-American and also Caribbean metropolis of New Orleans.

Emphasizing the term "blues" as plural, Billie Holiday sings, "She's got 'em bad./But now the world will know/she's never gonna sing them no more" in "Lady Sings the Blues." Her lyrics sing the blues as a set of feelings that, after the singer's confrontation with them and the world, can perhaps be left behind. However, they are only left behind inasmuch as one has crossed the arc of the song. Ellison describes the blues and renders them above with the verb "to be" in the singular. He describes the blues specifically as a form, a state that calls for ongoing narration: "The blues is an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one's aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism. As a form, the blues is an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically" (Ellison 78, 79). Note how the image of fruit is underwritten in his metaphor of the senses' encounter with the "jagged grain": "squeezing from it ... lyricism" which takes the mind to the lyric made famous by Holiday, "Strange Fruit," which takes us to another rendering of the Plantation.

The physicality of working through the blues is re-inscribed as part of its lyrical process of making meaning. The music of the blues is a process of fiction: it is the reiteration of the literary as always also oral, aural, and corporeal in the New World. The blues is caught in Ellison's terms within the tension of transcendence and immanence. He notes a (religious) potential for overcoming, getting to a possible smile by the song's end, while grounding the singer and listener lyrically inside of constant returns to the "jagged grain" as a way of feeling. The blues, however, offers no transcendence; it is a form that haunts, reappears, and never altogether dissolves, nor solves the sung list of problems. The blues is the only balm for the blues.

We must dwell for a moment on the European historical tendency to settle the written and the oral into a binary relation as it is relevant to my argument that the New World Cry rubs in the conjoining break of the graphic and sonic. As Brent Hayes Edwards shows in "The Seemingly Eclipsed Window of Form: James Weldon Johnson's Prefaces," the written and the oral mark the desire for resolute divisions of the timeless from the historical, the abstract from the particular, respectively (584). Here, we are not reading for this insistent dichotomy, but for the conjoining break that touches the written and the oral, and additionally emphasizes the sensuality of sound, even when it is sounded in writing. The frequent turn to music in US-American letters marks a turn to the human body, as in Pietri's "do not let," and in my description above of the triangulation of the salsa concert. This turn to music reminds readers of the individuated members, congregated members, and disrupted members that form a communal body and its sense of history, and both Glissant and Edwards see eye to eye that "the figure of music" not only "mediates between forms" — oral versus written, immediate versus delayed — but also "describes the similarly elusive nature of both forms from the perspective of the listener/viewer or reader" (595).

At this point, I recall the floating Cry "¡Para la historia!" and pull from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari to ask a question of the Cry's formation: "What is a cry independent of the population it appeals to or takes as its witness?" (239). I suggest we can answer the question through Algarín's work on *bomba*. Like salsa, *bomba* can be punch drunk on lost love; men can weep publicly to tell their stories of being punished by beauty's uncertain cleaving of the heart. Sonorous voices cry out for failing to have provided enough affection, and so, losing the muse to another, or failing to have seen her seductive, unsentimental ways from the beginning, and so, losing pride in front of other men. *bomba* emerged from Plantation life and so its lyrics often re-imagine the verdant landscape, frequently using Yoruba and Akan terms intermixed with Spanish syntax, as *poesía negra* would come to do in the 1930s. But the rhythm is more determining here than the lyrics, and that the song's longevity is driven by the interplay of drummer and dancer.

Algarín writes in the introduction to the 1975 *Nuyorican Poetry* anthology that "[t]he poems in this anthology ... are delivered in a new rhythm. It is a *bomba* rhythm with many changing pitches delivered with a bold stress. The pitches vary but the stress is always *bomba* and the vocabulary is English and Spanish mixed into a new language" (15-16). But in what way is *bomba* new? *bomba* may have fused as a form in Ponce (Puerto Rico) in the seventeenth century, but its fundamental rhythms trace to those played in West and Central Africa carried through the trade of slaves and raw and industrial goods, and reformed amidst the daily rhythms of Puerto Rican Plantation life. When played live, the drummers' interplay with dancers is distinctive in that the drummer takes cues from the dancer's body and stamina. *bomba*, therefore, is a form not only attentive to the body's capacity to move incomparably, but also to wear down and tire. With the waves of Puerto Rican immigrants to New York in the 1940s, the form was carried, undergoing a new popularity by the 1960s, as Nuyoricans resisted total *norteamericano* consumer-baptism and cultural loss (see Flores). Nuyorican poetry of the 1970s intensifies the form yet again by writing it from and back into U.S. urban spaces of poverty and the rhythms of life established therein. Nuyorican poetry recasts the music's function on new ground to create a layered poetics of place that values the human body: of habitation in New York, in the English language, and in continued relation to Puerto Rico, which was a signifier in flux in its changing relation to the waves of emigrating workers who continued to claim belonging and the folds of new arrivals.

Algarín and other critics of Latina/o literature insist on the street-rootedness of Nuyorican poetry, but he gives a peculiar description to the street that inscribes not just synchronic significance or reduction: the street is comprised of social relations and histories that retrace elsewhere. In the same introduction, he writes that "The poet blazes a path of fire for the self. He juggles with words. He lives risking each moment. Whatever he does, in every way he moves, he is a prince of the inner city jungle" (10). Algarín continues to shift imagery about the Latino poet: "He is the philosopher of the sugar cane that grows between the cracks of the concrete sidewalks ... The past teaches the poet to juggle all the balls at the same time" (*Nuyorican* 10). The poet in this milieu of an uncertain home is the philosopher-prince, or princess, of language, and has the poetic power to rethink and make demands of memory of the past within the present, where it anyways



is, and to highlight not temporal continuity thereby, but a rupture's power to re-assemble remainders rather than opening into the swallowing idea of absolute loss.

The sugar cane that bursts metaphorically and becomes writing on urban cuts of cement crops-up in another conjoining break. Instead of a play on the natural image of leaves as a metaphor for writing, the Nuyorican poet names the blocks of cement as spaces on which a "natural" mode of writing happens in the barrio. But he also complicates this with an image of the Plantation, a signifier of Puerto Rico and the Caribbean; the sugar cane image invades and undercuts forgetting. Here, one observes the conjunction between balladeer and community of listeners, and how the writer desires something of this relation, while simultaneously re-inscribing distance from it in being a creature devoted, above all, to the page — to a slower kind of time. It is notable that these musical and poetic examples do not go from the individual toward a collective, but are made within a collective that shares in the sounds of pain and allows the individual to cry out in the first place. The Cry, then, does not convey private or individual longing, but is located within and delimited by the public arrangement of signs. Whatever story the song tells, with "¡Para la historia!" as an opening Cry, the singer calls attention to the space of the immediate moment only to surrender it to being but one more moment in musical time, and thereby calls upon the gods to see and engage in the event, joins the company of ghosts, communes as a voice in an imaginary panoply of voices, and participates in a cultural tradition as his/her self is given over through song to a people. A Cry to history, into a scene of its live musical reconfiguration, arranges an exchange at a particular place and time: the singer's nominal self for communal desire's sound. The sound is not pure, but one that the group may be disrupted by and, perhaps, differently reorganized around.

When D'León sang two fragments into the *En Vivo* recording of "Llorarás," "¡Especialmente para el mundo! ¡Arriba los latinos!," he exited the script of the song and named his addressees, witnesses, bodily participants: *los latinos*. But the context is broad and works as a non-generalizing universal, as Glissant says of the musical forms that emerged from the Plantation's silence: they are part of the Cry swelling toward everyone, *para el mundo*. In its history of racial mixture and in its burst amidst modernity, it could only be a Cry at and for everyone. Yet there is still the named community, a maintained if frayed tight rope of connection to the heterogeneous signifier, *Latinos/as*.

To re-mix the question posed in *A Thousand Plateaus*, does "a cry independent of the population it appeals to or takes as its witness" fall something like a tree in an uninhabited forest (239)? Is there sound, and is there voice, where there are not trained ears to hear, identify, and join in? One can answer that where there are not a population's senses to make something of the Cry, it would complete its organic course into silence without finding plurality in other voices of bodies. But one can also say that music, poetry, and narrative forms press listeners/readers to contemplate whether such a situation could compel a Cry to form at all as a Cry is metonymic of a people. As a "native son" and most unromantic national, James Baldwin, wrote in 1962 of the moving experience of music in the Harlem black church of his youth, and then later, having left the church, how its feeling continued to imbue the vibrancy of "rent and waistline parties": "We had the liquor, the chicken, the music, and each other, and had no need to pretend to be what we were not. This is the freedom that one hears in some gospel songs, for example, and in jazz. In all jazz, and especially in the blues, there is something tart and ironic, authoritative and double-edged" (41-42). As with Algarín's *bomba* Latino troubadour, the constellation that Baldwin describes here forms because there are equipped ears, readers, and players around him that trade in sound and word. The music in his prose — the index of hymns in *Go Tell it on the Mountain*, Billie Holiday and Mahalia Jackson swaying in *Another Country* — carries the Cry, the crucible of voice, sound, and word.

Baldwin describes a *pathos* he experienced in moments of communal musical whirlwinds, and, more than that, the sharing of historical pain, fever, and joy that opened distinctly with the merging of voices and bodies in one place: "Their pain and joy were mine," Baldwin says of singing in the church as a young minister with an intense voice, as his solos made their way out, "and mine were theirs — they surrendered their pain and joy to me, I surrendered mine to them ... until we all became equal, wringing wet, singing and dancing, in anguish and rejoicing, at the foot of the altar" (33, 34). "Until we all became equal": bodies rock into a democratic convergence. Baldwin remakes

this sensual experience through the page, and shares the benediction of the lived moment with readers.

For what another "native son," Roberto Márquez, calls the US-American Republic's "inescapably *Antillean*" citizen-inhabitants of a Harlem and Bronx that were more "linguistically varied, polynational, and culturally syncretic" in the 1950s than Baldwin's Harlem in the 1930s and 1940s, we read a "doubly-tension fraught" imaginary (462). Fraught, like the character of Piri Thomas, by linguistic and phenotypic racisms and by being citizens of the Republic that turned their parents' home into a commonwealth, the children of the displaced Puerto Rican population wrought remembering of the island's colonized green amidst the Bronx's neglected gray. Yet in Algarín's poem, "San Juan/An Arrest/Maguayo/A Vision of Malo Dancing," we again read a benediction on and a request to the reader: that you will, after reading, be in a still more sensible, sensitive, and (minimally) bilingual relation to place and language. But before this blessing, we read the movements of an exorcism by the "Malo dancer" (the Nuyorican "bad ass" in Puerto Rico). The Malo dance that becomes writing recalls the swing and sweat described by Baldwin:

... City of New York  
Malo tells the story of your  
factory slaving police  
intimidated working class  
Malo the tortured electronic  
sound of black America  
becomes apple-pie cheddar  
cheese wisdom to my eyes—  
I see you are high on moving  
faster than sight  
I see your right leg  
curl up to your waist  
as you spread both hands  
and sprint off your left leg —  
Malo do you see?  
that that's the position your  
factory-slave forefathers  
have held as they've worked  
the machinery of the city —  
spin into hysteria  
dance the working class roots  
of your muscles into telling  
the humiliation of your people  
through motion — dance  
...  
out our pain/your pain (*Nuyorican* 143)

The dance retraces the Nuyorican's difference, what his body has undergone along with his idiom and imaginary of self and nation. The body is formed in its work, and the dance intensifies the condition of that moving body. The term "Factory-slave" can be read as working class labor that is metaphorically enslaved to U.S. corporations through unlivable wages and insurmountable debts. But I think we should read the signifier "slave" with more historical guarding than just that. "Factory-slave" relocates the Plantation in the present's distinctly limiting conditions of the migratory working class labor of Puerto-Ricans becoming Nuyoricans. This Malo's dance is an embodied moment of signifying and storytelling made from the contemporary moment of the speaker, which is made from a history of migration, enslavement, and as part of "Black America." The narrative of pain in this portion of the poem, however, should not overshadow its elaborate, pleasurable lyricism. Having suffered irreparable displacement yields to the bodily arrest of creative forms — here, in dance and *poiesis* — which exorcise the violence done to the suffering body, and also disclose the joy that persists in, or can be made from, even the most extremely painful experiences of life.

The "dark side of this impossible memory," the "memory" of the Plantation that Glissant describes, its opacity that endures beyond sociological censuses or historiographic chronicles, is carried in the Cry that bursts through oral, musical, and literary forms (72). The Cry of the Plantation, which is of the (New) World, draws its force from a poetics working in the conjoining

break of voice and hand, sound and story. It is embodied, carried, turns, and rubs in the breach of the sonic and graphic. Breaks re-collected and re-set into motion charge language's dance with memory. The fragmented but bursting land- and cityscapes of the singers and writers gathered here sound out and re-inscribe the idea that "the people who endure in history ... are the imaginative ones" as Wright states quoting Martí: "Everything moves and rests in imagination's art, which consists ... in the ability to divine and compose" (20). To divine and compose you must know how to listen. The poetry, prose, and music of the Black diaspora and U.S. Latinos/as gather the Plantation's imaginary remainders and release a dark Cry for everyone to hear.

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