

## Chapter Seven

# “WE WILL EXCHANGE YOUR LIKENESS AND RECREATE YOU IN WHAT YOU WILL NOT KNOW”: TRANSCULTURAL PROCESS PHILOSOPHY AND THE MOVING IMAGE

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*And you see the mountains, considering them solid, but they are passing by like the floating of clouds.*

—Qur’an 28:88

*Viewing a thing from the outside, considering its relations of action and reaction with other things, it appears as matter. Viewing it from the inside, looking at its immediate character as feeling, it appears as consciousness.*

—Charles Sanders Peirce<sup>1</sup>

*The triumph of consciousness comes with the negative intuitive judgment [...] a conscious feeling of what might be, but is not.*

—Alfred North Whitehead<sup>2</sup>

This essay invites those of us who think with cinema to try on a process approach. Let’s try seeing the world as an open, ever-changing whole, a matrix of motile relations from which all kinds of entities take shape, differentiate and create new relations. This is what we see when we switch from a metaphysics of substance to a metaphysics of process.<sup>3</sup> As we’ll see, film theory is already doing process philosophy, avowedly or not. I will introduce some concepts from process metaphysics that show how objects crystallize from processes; characterize becoming as an interrupted flow; privilege relations over fixity; treasure singularity; and critically examine how entities individuate in a milieu. All these concepts lend well to thinking alongside movies. The essay will draw on European and North American process thinkers, highlighting the work of Alfred North Whitehead. I will also bring in the thoroughly modern thought of the seventeenth-century Persian philosopher Sadr al-Din al-Shirazi, or Mulla Sadrā, and the relational philosophy of Martinican philosopher-poet Édouard Glissant.

My cinematic thinking companion, two works by African American filmmaker Arthur Jafa, test the possibility of viewing someone or something—in particular, Black people and Blackness—as not a figure, subject/object or thing but as a process of becoming. Jafa’s 2013 documentary *Dreams Are Colder Than Death* both witnesses and elicits creative individuations, within and despite a murderous milieu. Jafa’s film draws in arguments

from Black intellectuals, including Saidiya V. Hartman, Hortense Spillers and Fred Moten, which enable me to test and hone the aptness of process concepts of singularity, individuation and relation. All these ingredients, refined with cinema's unique process capacities and seasoned with a dash of neo-Marxism, will finally give rise to some process-based concepts of radical social creativity, which will constitute—to use a term of Whitehead—this essay's satisfaction.

### **Cinema Studies and Process Philosophy**

In his enjoyably curmudgeonly manner, Graham Harman writes, “The current fashion is to view substances as rigid, static, reactionary, patriarchal, and oppressive, while dynamic fluxes and flows strike the educated public as innovative, liberating, interactive, holistic, and fresh.”<sup>4</sup> This remark suggests that cinema studies, if it hasn't already embraced and surpassed process philosophy, is thoroughly behind the curve. Nevertheless, a default substantialism, the belief that the basic entities of being are substances, still populates many of our movies and methods. As Nicholas Rescher points out, thinking in terms of substances raises all kinds of problems. How do you explain the way an acorn becomes a tree? How can you determine whether a sock that has been mended until it's all new material is still the same sock? Process metaphysics considers that processes, not substances, are fundamental: substances are just effects of processes. So the fundamental stuff of the universe consists not of substances—acorn, tree, sock—but of the processes by which an acorn becomes a tree, the process of mending by which a sock becomes a different sock.<sup>5</sup>

Cinema studies' substantialism is easy to understand, as most movies are about people who do things in places—a chain of discrete entities, or substances. Yet it's easy to acknowledge that processes are real when we ask how people change, what constitutes a place, how things come to be and pass away. In this simple shift of perspective, the focus changes from objects to processes, “figure” to “ground.” Movies fall into a fascinating new relief. Our most time-honored approaches, looked at from this angle, can be seen as studies of process. And the Process Studies Institute in Claremont, CA, has been holding a film festival since 2001. Given the radically interdependent nature of all that exists, the festival organizers point out, “We are each responsible for contributing as much as we can toward the common good.”<sup>6</sup>

All art forms can fruitfully be considered in terms of process. Recorded, time-based media have special vocabularies to trace the processual lives of things, for they suggest in time both how individuals become completely singular or realized and how they break down and give rise to other individuals. Cinema and its theories have mostly dwelt on the separateness and otherness of individual entities, especially human individuals. But cinema as a time-based medium also shows the processes that give rise to individuals, the ways they are formed by their milieu and how they become part of the milieu for others. And cinema also turns away from humans to show processes in nature, industrial processes, ecological change, the fantastic becomings of animation and any number of other processes of transformation.

In fact, cinema studies has been doing process philosophy for years without specifically acknowledging it. Moving images by their nature partake in processes, collapsing the wave into a particle, teasing the particle into a wave. Narrative theory, for example, shows its process roots in Hegelian dialectics, a ceaseless dynamic of confrontation and synthesis between opposed entities. Psychoanalytic film theory examines the struggle, often violent, between a self and the disavowed others that constitute it. Phenomenology pays as much attention to the relationships that give rise to perception and meaning as it does to perception and meaning themselves. Feminist film theories draw attention to the relations and processes that generate meaning and subjectivity. Similarly, queer, postcolonial and race-critical theories critique the fixity of representation and put figure-ground relationships into process; for example, to disrupt movies' reliance on solo heroes by showing the relational web that engenders and supports individuals. Critical race theory, as this essay will show, dissolves the fiction of the sovereign subject and replaces fixed identity with relationality. Sometimes it appears that new fashion for process philosophy, and other philosophies that turn away from the human, is appropriating the findings of these identity-based critical theories. My method in what follows works against that tendency.

Process philosophy “proper” has sprung up all over the humanities in recent years. Film and media scholars are drawing from the minor but deep process strand of Western philosophy, a strand that includes Gilles Deleuze, Gilbert Simondon, Whitehead, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz and Baruch Spinoza. Deleuze and Deleuzian film scholars describe cinema as the intensifying counterpart to a flowing, individuating world, the closest approximation of the universe according to Bergson. Peirce's semiosis, a world of swirling signs in constant communication and transformation, also contributes to the process nature of Deleuze's cinematic philosophy.<sup>7</sup> The theory of affect, which has inspired and been developed by cinema scholars too numerous to cite, is also a theory of process, analyzing the field of affective relations that remake and recombine bodies, human and nonhuman, filmic and spectatorial. Phenomenologies of cinema and media pay attention to how the apparatus perceives, or “prehends,” to use Whitehead's term, the pro-filmic reality.<sup>8</sup> We can also think of editing and postproduction as prehensive events resulting in satisfaction. A number of film scholars have moved along a trajectory over the years from Deleuze or phenomenology to theories of affect to process philosophy.<sup>9</sup>

Ecological film theory too recognizes the usefulness of process philosophy. Most process philosophies hold that every entity in the universe—human, molecule, tree, civilization—is ontologically equal, even if some are more complex than others. This recognition shifts the focus from humans to honor the life of every entity and recognize the relations among all beings. Studies of the material ecology of cinema itself, the carbon footprint of filmmaking, exhibition, distribution and archiving, take seriously the ecological relationships incurred at every stage of the cinematic event.<sup>10</sup> A process-ecological approach, such as that developed by Adrian Ivakhiv, allows us to study not only how movies represent ecology, but the interdependency of humans and the natural world and the processes, at scales larger and smaller than the human, through which our relationships unfold.<sup>11</sup>

In my use, the word *cinema* keeps intact the definition of recorded moving images, and it denotes any kind of time-based, moving-image media, recorded or rendered, from large-screen films to digital video to smartphone apps. Cinema is always live, and therefore, an event and a process, occurring in time in an assemblage with place and audience.<sup>12</sup> Numerous media theorists draw on process philosophy and actor-network theory to redefine media in terms of relations and assemblages rather than specific mediums.<sup>13</sup> For my purposes in this essay, the assemblage engendered by the single-channel audiovisual moving image, the world it encounters, and the beholders who receive it abundantly rewards a process analysis. Process philosophy does, however, have a particular appeal for analyzing non-theatrical digital media. Timothy Scott Barker draws on Whitehead, Deleuze and Michel Serres to emphasize the multiple temporalities and performative encounters of interactive media.<sup>14</sup> Azadeh Emadi brings Sadrā and Deleuze to understand the intensive, non-chronological temporality of the pixel, arguing that digital video has the potential to render the reality of existence more truthfully because its pixels, as a unified internal multiplicity, change and move in infinite time, forming a perceptual unit of moving image.<sup>15</sup>

### **A Note on “Western” and “Non-Western,” Philosophy and Theory**

Whitehead writes that his “philosophy of organism” has stronger links with Indian and Chinese thought than with European or West Asian (by which I think he means Arabic) philosophy.<sup>16</sup> Harman rather sarcastically dismisses the legacy: “Non-Western cultures are frequently praised for being less beholden to petrified enduring substances and their ostensible counterpart, subject-predicate grammar.”<sup>17</sup> Ivakhiv notes that process-relational thought has a deep and global history: “in the pre-Socratic Greek philosopher Heraclitus and in the later Hellenistic Stoics, in Nagarjuna and the Madhyamika philosophers of India, and in Shuang Zhu and the T’ian-t’ai and Hua-Yen Buddhists in China,” as well as a long list of European and North American thinkers beginning with Giordano Bruno, Spinoza, and Leibniz.<sup>18</sup> Yet while opportunities for intercultural concept-making often get mentioned in passing, they are rarely explored.

Process philosophy’s transcultural siblings include cyclical ontologies, such as those of Zoroastrianism, Taoism and Buddhism.<sup>19</sup> They include thought systems that emphasize interconnectedness across time and species, which Aboriginal philosophies exemplify. Interestingly, theological process studies—which was developing Whiteheadian ideas while film scholars were still trying to get their heads around Lacan’s *objet petit “a”*—has a history of addressing non-Western approaches in pursuing Whitehead’s positioning of God as the entity that incorporates all actualizations.<sup>20</sup> Some in media studies are making good on Whitehead’s casual observation; for example, Sha Xin Wei, in his process model of interactive media art, identifies the philosophical roots of process philosophy with Laozi and Zhuangzi as well as Heraclitus, Marx, Foucault and Whitehead.<sup>21</sup> Process philosophy also has strong meeting points with panpsychism, the belief that some kind of soul or mind is in everything, whether because everything has spirit, as in many Aboriginal philosophies, Jainism and Shintoism, or because the universe is a single entity from which all things emanate or differentiate, as in the somewhat more Western views

descended from Neoplatonism. Sadrā, for example, is a panpsychist because he equates being and consciousness.<sup>22</sup>

Though he is by no means alone in such omissions, Ivakhiv’s list cited above neglects the transformative contribution of Arabic and Islamic thought to process philosophy, let alone the conceptual bridges it built between Greek and European thought.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the source from which both Arabic and European philosophy diverged, eventually (sooner in the Arabic case) to rediscover process philosophy, is a single thinker, Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā). Western philosophy is only recently devising concepts of becoming, individuation and intensity that resemble those developed by Islamic systematic philosophies of process centuries ago. Therefore, while I’d like to see all kinds of intercultural work on process philosophy, the one I will take up has not only conceptual resonance but a strong historical foundation.

The most fully developed of these is the work of seventeenth-century philosopher Sadr al-Dīn Muhammad al-Shīrāzī, or Mulla Sadrā (1571–1640). Sadrā’s process philosophy developed the Peripatetic (Greek-Islamic) synthesis of Avicenna, Sunni and Shi’a rationalist theology, the Illuminationism of Suhrawardi and the Sufism of Ibn ‘Arabi. These shared concerns of modern Euro-American and modern Islamic philosophy with conceptions of being as a process are gradually being recognized.<sup>24</sup> Eastern Islamic thought continued in a process vein after Sadrā, for example, in the work of Shi’i philosopher and mystic Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā’ī (1753–1826), whose thought Farshid Kazemi is working to bring into contact with cinema.<sup>25</sup> I wish to incorporate Islamic process philosophy with a minimum of fuss, given that it constitutes part of the expanded Western philosophical legacy.

The Martinican poet and philosopher Édouard Glissant argues, inflecting concepts of Deleuze and Guattari, that identity is inextricably relational, a rhizomatic process of becoming. Glissant’s *Mondalité* or worldliness is an avowedly fragmentary knowledge, based on irreducible difference and open to the outside. He argues that Caribbean-style relational thinking must replace the Mediterranean-based thought systems based on origins, filiation and legitimacy.

Both Sadrā and Glissant respond directly to the Greek sources claimed by Western philosophy. Their thought gives us an opportunity to reconsider the category of Western philosophy and to either expand it, to include Islamic and African-diasporic philosophy, or to suspend it as a category. Arabic and Islamic philosophy tends to be excluded from non-Western philosophical surveys because they are not exotic enough, and from Western surveys because, although modern European philosophy is in large part founded on Arabic philosophy, this connection is usually minimized or repressed. Glissant’s philosophy of relation is a truly “American” philosophy, arising from the history of the Americas: the survivors of slave ships and plantations attained relational epistemology, an understanding of the totality by way of the part that is denied to those who think in generalizations.

Glissant would refuse to be categorized a systematic philosopher, even along the anti-discursive lines of Whitehead and Sadrā. He rejects “theoretical thinking” for its tendency to reduction and dogmatism and cautions that methods lead to laziness. Instead of examples, he gives long, poetic lists. Glissant’s thought regrounds (I would write “re-racimates,” were he not so opposed to roots) the process philosophies of Whitehead and

Sadrā, examining “Relation” on social, political and ecological scales that center on the Caribbean and relate to the totality. Alexander Weheliye points out that white European thinkers get “conceptual carte blanche” while the same arguments coming from minorities are relegated to their ethnographic locality. For example, Giorgio Agamben’s concept of “bare life” is based on the extreme example of the concentration camp, rather than the more “ordinary” slavery, and then elevated to a concept neutral of any racial or ethnic history.<sup>26</sup> By such sleights of hand, certain thinkers are elevated as philosophers, while others are considered local, partial theorists.

### Arthur Jafa’s Process-Relational Cinema

Arthur Jafa, whose works will singularize this essay’s thought process, is the acknowledged master of African American cinematography, who has filmed for Black auteurs including Julie Dash, Spike Lee and John Akomfrah. Throughout his oeuvre, Jafa has developed means to show Black figures in states of emergence and relation, often by making the “background” alive with movement, vibration and presence. For example, to shoot some scenes of Dash’s *Daughters of the Dust* (1991), which portrays an African American extended family in the late nineteenth century, Jafa used a hand-crank camera, which allows the frame rate to vary. As the scenes of the family moving together on the beach gently quickens and slows, the film suggests an intensive temporality. For this innovative and stunning work, he won Best Cinematography at Sundance. Jafa wrote in 1992 that the hand-crank camera is “a more appropriate instrument with which to create movement that replicates the tendency in Black music to ‘worry the note’—to treat notes as indeterminate, inherently unstable sonic frequencies rather than the standard Western treatment of notes as fixed phenomena.”<sup>27</sup> Through cinematography and digital editing, Jafa continues to develop what he calls “black visual intonation.”

Many Black scholars critique visual media for their tendency to objectify what it sets before our eyes, and hence to commodify and fetishize. They look instead to Black sonic experimentation for liberatory aesthetics. The critique certainly holds for representations that manage Blackness into that which can be safely consumed as an object or unproblematically “identified” with.<sup>28</sup> By contrast, the effect of Jafa’s visual experiments is to emphasize that images, like people, arise from a relational field that draws in both history and the viewer.

Jafa made *Dreams Are Colder Than Death* (2013) for German television company ZDF on the fiftieth anniversary of Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech. Black intellectuals and artists in the United States, talking with Jafa and Greg Tate, respond in many ways to the question of what Blackness means, with recurrent themes of the still-volatile inheritance of slavery; Black community and creativity; the constant threat to Black life. We do not see their faces as they speak, and the camera does not look into their eyes. Instead, it approaches them askance, caressing the skin of fingers, the silhouette of eye and eyelid, a burst of hair. The figures are often backlit, illuminated by lens flares; lens flares transfigure the silhouette of filmmaker Charles Burnett’s silhouetted head in a burst of shimmering rose-gold hexagons. When Jafa does show the faces of his interlocutors, they are silent and statuesque. In these ways, the cinematography defers

subjectifying the speakers, in the sense of identifying their being with their psychic interiority. Instead, it suggests that their ideas cannot be separated from their living bodies and the atmosphere in which they are immersed.

*Dreams Are Colder Than Death*, as I will describe, is full of life, in large part through its seemingly casual documentary sequences. Historical photographs, including documents of foulest violence, accompany the speakers—and so do renderings of distant planets, galaxies and spacecraft. Melvin Gibbs’s minimalist score, a low, pulsating drone occasionally punctuated with a soft resonant beat, underscores feelings of latent energy—and latent threat.

### **Subjects? Objects? in a Relational Field**

The subject of Jafa’s films, what it is and how it feels to be Black in the United States, immediately raises questions about the aptness of process approaches, the vogue for which constitutes part of the larger nonhuman turn in contemporary critical theory. The general eclipse of theories of the subject has a weightlessness that smacks of disavowal. With object-oriented philosophy, the psychological interiority that people are no longer supposed to have has been transferred to nonhuman entities. A whiff of disavowal extends to process philosophy too, in which humans have no special privilege over other atoms jostling around in the universe. It seems weird to celebrate a flattened ontology, be it the relational one of process philosophy or the object-oriented one, when the Western liberal notion of the subject endures not-quite-deconstructed, legal systems based on it remain intact, and Black people continue to be treated as objects in the American law enforcement, prison and entertainment industries. Yet, modern liberal individualism’s theory of the free and self-determining subject relies on a fictional substantialism produced by disavowing material and economic relationships.<sup>29</sup> Saidiya V. Hartman shows that after Emancipation, freed slaves were required to adopt the responsibilities of the liberal individual, “displac[ing] the nation’s responsibility for providing and ensuring the rights and privileges conferred by the Reconstruction Amendments and shift[ing] the burden of duty onto the freed.”<sup>30</sup> In short, modern American law constructs subjects by disavowing the economic, social and historical relations that actually constitute them.<sup>31</sup> Treated as objects, not yet subjects, why would Black people be interested in a philosophy that dissolves both object- and subjecthood in a field of relational processes?

Jafa’s short film *APEX* (2014) consists entirely of hyper-volatile figures. In this devastating seven-minute high-speed montage with pounding electronic dance music, still images flash by in a half-second, just enough to brand themselves on a viewer’s eyeballs. Some of them touch the most painful wounds of African American history, including the infamous photograph of a lynched Black man tied to a tree, and a woman lying on a bed with her arms cruelly bound behind her. Also flashing by are— a futuristic Grace Jones; a satanically grinning black Mickey Mouse; a man with a gleaming grill on his teeth who looks psychotic but (if the viewer pauses the video to check) is just wall-eyed. These pictures alternate with creepy extreme close-ups of microscopic insects. *APEX* feels dangerous to watch, as though the images have the power to infect the viewer, or as though they already have.

The violence and uncanniness of *APEX*'s hyper-objectified images explode the categories of figure and object. They show Black people spectacularized in their reduction to things, that is, fetishized. A fetish is a seeming object that is volatile because it is composed of relations to entities and events from the past, its "outside." Fetishism disavows relations—sexual, economic and historical—by pressing them into the object. There the relations threaten to remanifest, to show how you the viewer are connected to the thing you are beholding. This is why fetishes feel so threatening.

Black philosophers, including some who speak in *Dreams Are Colder Than Death*, ask what kind of interiority a human object, the chattel slave, might possess. Moten compares the slave to Marx's impossible notion of a commodity that speaks—or more precisely, screams. A chattel slave is a being consigned by law and language to the status of a thing, but whose living voice corrodes those systems from within. What appears to be objects maintain a private reserve that is effectively performative.<sup>32</sup> In the same way, Jafa's images in *APEX* embody a radioactive agency that will destroy any safe, separate, "positive" figurations of Blackness.

The nonhuman turn needs a shot in the arm from Black anti-humanism, which critiques ideals of humanity and individuality that have never fully admitted Black and other people. If the theory of the subject be cast aside, let it be with the contemptuousness of Afrofuturism. To appropriate Kodwo Eshun's words, Blackness now "deliberately fails all these Tests [of humanity], these putrid corpses of petrified moralism; it treats them with utter indifference; it replaces them with nothing whatsoever."<sup>33</sup> Given this context, process philosophy's treatment of relational becoming can be adequate to thinking with and through apparent objects that tremble with potentiality, without lapsing into what we could call ontological flatness. Every object, seen from inside, is a subject, and the heart of every subject pulses with relations. We'll see that for Whitehead, Sadrā and Glissant—with differences, of course—things connect internally to the entire universe. A seeming object has potentially infinite internal connections to the universe that other entities may or may not recognize. What appear to be objects are processes of relation.

## Saccadic Flows

Some worry that process implies "going with the flow," a mushy world in which everything blurs with everything else, incapacitating the conflict and confrontation that politics necessitates.<sup>34</sup> However, process philosophy has a saccadic side, in which flow takes form and requires conflict. Processes consist not of mush or the *informe* but saccadic, completely actualized steps. Harman divides process philosophy into schools that dissolve all into flows, including Gilbert Simondon and Deleuze, and those that retain objects, like Whitehead. However, even in those approaches that radically de-emphasize the object, processes have their own structures, including likely outcomes, while they remain open-ended.<sup>35</sup> They are becomings that cannot be reversed. Keith Robinson argues that Whitehead and Deleuze differ most fundamentally in their understanding of the relationship between creativity and continuity. For Whitehead, creativity gathers, synthesizes and unifies. "In this activity the actual occasion is produced, the new is disclosed, and its achievement becomes objectively immortal, 'saved' by passing into the

‘consequent nature’ of God. For Deleuze, in contrast, the essential movement of time in creativity breaks and disrupts any gathering, disjoins synthesis, and opens thought to an unknown future.<sup>36</sup> It’s possible to dispute this assessment by pointing to Deleuze’s career-long interest in the univocity of being, the force of differentiation that is itself a form of continuity (which, we will see, closely resembles Sadrā’s concept of Being).<sup>37</sup> But for both philosophers, as Robinson emphasizes, creativity works through continuous actualizations, quantum breaks in the flow of becoming.

Cinema studies already deploys the quantum-like steps of process approaches in triadic systems based on Charles Sanders Peirce’s semiosis. Deleuze characterizes the cinema in terms of Peirce’s triadic structure of experience, which he translates as affection, action and reception. Cubitt himself proposes that cinema consists of the triad pixel, cut and vector, which he synthesizes from Deleuze’s Peircean triad and Lacan’s triad of the unconscious, namely imaginary, symbolic and real.<sup>38</sup> Ivakhiv’s process-relational analysis of cinema is grounded in the interrelated triad of social (anthropomorphic), material (geomorphic) and perceptual. The model of enfolding-unfolding aesthetics that I propose analyzes perceptibles as nodes in a process whose sources is the immanent infinite.<sup>39</sup> In this triadic process, the images our bodies receive unfold from information, which, in a given manner of enfolding, enfolds the infinite. In what I call the “affect of unfolding,” when a change of state occurs, you feel it.

### **Whitehead’s Process Universe: Intensifying Atomistic Becomings**

Whitehead’s universe is an interconnected, open whole in a constant, atomistic process of transformation.<sup>40</sup> At the simplest level, these processes are undergone by things he terms both *actual entities* and *actual occasions*, depending on whether one focuses on the thing in space or in time. In the process of its own coming together, an entity selectively feels (prehends) the sea of data in which it swims, privately synthesizes these feelings, transforming them into a coherent, complex feeling, or *satisfaction*, and passes into immortality, in turn becoming new data for other entities in the universe.<sup>41</sup> At the same time, other entities in the vicinity are coming into being by responding differently to the data.

Echoing Peirce, quoted in the epigraph of this essay, Whitehead argues that every experience has two poles: how it feels from the inside (the subjectivating pole), and how it appears from the outside (the objectivating pole). The process of coming together begins with the subjective experience of the universe’s infinite, swirling data and of the pure potentials or *eternal objects* that can be activated (in Whitehead’s term, *ingress*) in one of these comings-together. Thrillingly, Whitehead asserts that every entity in the universe prehends every other entity. The catch is that this prehension can be positive or negative. For example, I negatively prehend the color of the socks of my next-door neighbor. How, then, does the emergent entity “decide” what to take in? First, though causal efficacy, a feeling of influence related to self-preservation, such as plants feel when they grow toward the light or people feel when they hear vague noises in the dark. Causal efficacy determines what data will be felt and taken up as the entity comes together. Then a more disinterested observation, which Whitehead calls presentational immediacy, kicks in to assess the data.<sup>42</sup>

The actual occasion then privately unifies the diverse data into a single, cohesive and determinate entity. This involves what Whitehead calls the *aesthetic supplement*.

There is an emotional appreciation of the contrasts and rhythms inherent in the unification of the objective content in the concrescence of one actual occasion. In this phase perception is heightened by its assumption of pain and pleasure, beauty and distaste. It is the phase of inhibitions and intensifications. It is the phase in which blue becomes more intense by reason of its contrasts, and shape acquires dominance by reason of its loveliness. What was received as alien, is recreated as private.<sup>43</sup>

As the emergent entity or occasion is still choosing how toprehend the data that will determine its final form, it undergoes a private process of testing, intensifying some contrasts and inhibiting others. Like going on a date or cooking soup, the emergent entity privately feels, tastes and adjusts what it is becoming.

The process of coming together concludes in satisfaction, a state in which the actual entity has (positively or negatively) prehended every item in its universe and is ready to become an objective element of the universe, completely singular, for others to enjoy.

An actual entity can be as large as a civilization or as small as a quark. Relatively enduring composites of actual entities are termed *nexûs* and *societies*; for example, a person is a society. It's tempting to say that the tiniest entities constitute the proper realm of inquiry, begging an infinite regress of explanation. But since actual entities, according to Whitehead, are any things that have experience, and that "function in respect to [their] own determination," this kind of infinite regress is not necessary.<sup>44</sup> We are free to characterize atoms, people and nations as actual entities, even if they are in turn composed of other actual entities.

While an actual entity can't detect the subjective process of coming-to-being of other actual entities, it does feel the final, "satisfied" form of their encounters with the world. In this way, each actual entity nests within it something of how prior actual entities experienced the world. This is the basis of interrelatedness in Whitehead's cosmology. "The plant sings of the glory of God," Deleuze writes in his gloss of Whitehead, "and while being filled all the more with itself it contemplates and intensely contracts the elements from which it proceeds."<sup>45</sup> As for Leibniz, a monad may potentially increase its "clear area" to infinity; in Whitehead, the aim is for ever-richer, mutually positive prehensions. He argues that this creative process tends toward order, or the heightened intensity that occurs when all the entities in a nexus are capable of feeling one another in all their complexity.<sup>46</sup> Yet there are always elements that don't come into in a given synthesis—negative prehensions linger at the threshold of actualization.

Whitehead's universe, an ever-differentiating sea of actualization, maps well onto movies. It accounts for the web of relations in which entities feel and respond to each other. It describes how interactions mutually and differently transform people and things. Whitehead's actualization-packed cosmology would be exciting to take a spin on psychological dramas, screwball comedies, action movies, mysteries, parallel-worlds films (in which the parallel courses of events result from divergent prehensions), and of course the genre of connected-universe movies that includes *The Red Violin* (François Girard, 1998),

*Syriana* (Stephen Gaghan, 2005) and *The Tree of Life* (Terrence Malick, 2011). The philosophy of organism also describes the unique encounters that occur within and with the cinema. As James Williams defines it, the Whiteheadian event is “a fragile and passing harmony of convergence and divergence. The event is then a disjunctive many that enters into harmony without losing the disjunctive processes relating to its emergence.”<sup>47</sup> This coming together can characterize any shot or scene, the film as a whole, or indeed the event of a given audience viewing a given film. A close-up concentrates and realizes the convergent and divergent potentials of a given moment. So does a car chase. So does the assemblage of a movie with a murmuring audience, a rioting audience, or an individual viewer’s aroused, transfixed or distracted response.

Jafa’s films are alive with Whiteheadian atomistic comings-together. Vibrating atmospheres, slight shifts of focus, many small elements coming together in the shot, all suggest a hypersensitive field of minute prehensions. In its attentive shots taken in Black neighborhoods and meeting places, *Dreams Are Colder Than Death* witnesses encounters that synthesize prehensions into fully actualized wholes. Almost all the shots are in rhythmic slow motion, which choreographically unifies seemingly unrelated movements. People are enmeshed in habitats of neighborhoods, city and country roads, bus stops, yards and curbs and trees stirring in the wind. Many shots are hazy, with lens flares and motes of dust catching the light. All these techniques make the space around people vibrate with palpable energy that seems to come from both within and without them, like a force field of potentials for prehension. Often Jafa uses a very shallow focal range so that only one plane of the image is in focus, and subtly shifts focus over the face or the space being observed. In contrast to the usual deployment of focus pull, I find the effect is to show people emerging, taking shape, as though there is always more to them that can be seen—concrecences that are not completed.

It is the voices we hear, thanks to Jafa’s editing, that make the images concrece into “satisfied” units by bringing the invisible—memory and knowledge—into prehension. At one point Hartman, whom we have seen in her Brooklyn neighborhood, is saying, “I know at any moment my life could end because of an act of gratuitous violence. I know so many people who have died. Almost all the boys who I had crushes on are like, all *dead*.” Her voice accompanies a shot from behind, on a verdant street, of a strong young man in a white T-shirt, who as he walks makes a casual flourish of gang-like hand gestures. Perhaps his gesture is for the camera’s benefit, but Hartman’s words touch on the precariousness of this young man’s life. Just as Hartman is saying, “Part of Blackness is that intimacy with death,” three skipping children cross the young man’s path. The slow motion captures the smallest child’s joyous leap in the air. Now, this unit of the film feels, to use Whitehead’s language, like a fully satisfied—actual and complete—entity, bringing together the threat, the bravado, the history of violence and the children’s care-free joy into a single complex feeling of life that is intimate with death.

### **Sadrā’s Universe: Individuation in an Intensifying Flow**

Sadrā, like the European Scholastics, inherited from Avicenna a sophisticated substantialist metaphysics in which a single “Being” can be predicated of the many without

losing its unity.<sup>48</sup> Sadrā submits this concept to a process critique, arguing that Being is predicated of all things through modulation.<sup>49</sup> He argues that Being, *wujūd*, is a unified reality graded in degrees of intensity, which encompasses all things in a transformative flow (*al-sarayān al-wujūd*, the flow of Being).<sup>50</sup> Existence is a process of modulation or individuation (*tashkīk al-wujūd*, the modulation of being; individuation, *tashakkhus*, from *shakk*, to doubt). God is the most real and most intense being, and everything else has degrees of intensity; but all beings, from humans to rocks, are capable of becoming more real and more intense. While for Avicenna and Aristotle substances are unchanging, Sadrā argues that substances undergo internal change, which he terms *substantial motion* (*al-harakat al-jawhariyya*).<sup>51</sup> Citing *Qur'an* 56: 60–61, “We will exchange your likeness and recreate you in what you will not know,” he argues that the divine source transforms individuals through substantial motion.

We saw that entities in Whitehead’s universe are singular, for no two actual entities have the same experience. In Sadrā’s universe, too, becoming is necessarily singular. We think of things as belonging to categories, such as rock, tree and animal, but, Sadrā argues, this is merely a mental convenience. In fact, Sadrā writes, anticipating Whitehead, things are “structures of events” that move from general and indeterminate to definite and concrete.<sup>52</sup> It’s easier to see the form than the becoming—because, as Sadrā argues, the form can be cognized, the becoming only intuited.<sup>53</sup> In his great untranslated work *Al-Asfar*, the *Four Journeys* (summarized in English by Fazlur Rahman), Sadrā explains how entities individuate, gaining reality and intensity and losing their names. Taking to the furthest degree, a long series of Arabic interventions in the Platonic essence-existence distinction and in Aristotle’s matter-form distinction, he replaces these with a genus-differentia distinction. Genus lacks reality; only the differentia that arise in the entity’s movement from potential to actual, are real.<sup>54</sup> The flow of being intensifies the specificity of a thing and makes it *more* like itself.<sup>55</sup>

Sadrā’s process philosophy shows the unreality of categories and abstractions, while the flow of being, which cannot be grasped conceptually but can only be sensed through experience, is real. “Existences are the principal realities,” Sadrā writes, “whereas quiddities [...] have never smelled the perfume of real existence.”<sup>56</sup> This preference for the non-cognitive feeling of becoming brings Sadrā’s thought close to Whitehead’s—and also to Jafa’s films, which fight the death-grip of clichés in order to witness the emergence of things too singular to name.

As *Dreams Are Colder Than Death* begins, King’s famous speech echoes under Spillers’s voice declaring emphatically, “Two hundred years ago Black people didn’t have a prayer” against brutality, lynching and rape at the hands of white people. We hear her over photographs of Black men who have been lynched and hanged, surrounded by the white perpetrators—and then over a mysterious picture of parallel, gleaming strands that call to mind cells of some kind. Now, Spillers says, Black Americans are “the head of international courts, president of the United States, CEO of American Express, you name it!” We see numerous outdoor shots of Black people, each preciously distinct: a woman wearily tosses her honey-colored hair as she walks; a father carries his daughter on his shoulders; a young man stands in a parking lot, carefully attired in gangsta getup of baggy clothes, bandanna and baseball cap, his long shadow cast on small figures moving

in the distance; spillers herself in her yard, embraced by hazy air and brilliant greenery. “But the price of that is to lose this precious insight that connects you to something human and bigger than black folk, white folk [...] We are losing that connection because we are buying this other shit.” Later Melvin Gibbs states, “We’re expected to play a role [...] we’re almost like computer code that way. We have this thing, like Black man X Y Z, and that thing almost operates by itself. Because there’s always the real you, and then there’s this puppet.” When Blackness gets reified into named forms, Spillers and Gibbs are arguing, even when they are forms of seeming success, this cuts off their connection to a source of life, drains their energy and makes them less real. What Spillers calls “this precious insight that connects you to something human” refers, in Sadrā’s terms, to presential knowledge, a knowledge beyond names—the grasp of the flow of being.

Jafa’s film participates in substantial motion by seeing and hearing beyond what is physically present and beyond clichés, in what we could call imaginal perception. In a piquant challenge for contemporary materialist thought, in Sadrā’s philosophy matter is nothing in itself. Matter is pure potentiality, actualized at every moment by the flow of being.<sup>57</sup> “Every body and every bodily thing whose being is in any way connected with matter is constantly renewed in its ipseity and impermanent in its being and its individuality.”<sup>58</sup> However, perception can see *through* matter to its becoming.

For Sadrā, as for Whitehead, perception is partial, since every entity only perceives some aspects of other entities. And like those thinkers, Sadrā emphasizes that the more spiritually advanced a being is, the better it can perceive the flow of being as it differentiates in all things. Presential knowledge (*‘ilm hudūrī*), or knowledge of things in their extreme singularity, comes closest to the flow of being.<sup>59</sup>

### **Glissant’s Relational Synthesis**

Like Whitehead and Sadrā, Glissant in his later work insists that things are most real, and most active and actualizing, in their singularity, arguing that generalization, the bad habit of Mediterranean thought, blocks the world’s only real energy source, singular entities, which he terms particulars. And as in their process philosophies, in Glissant’s entities, both are irreducibly singular and enmeshed in relations. “Relation exists, especially as the particulars that are its interdependent constituent have first freed themselves from any approximation of dependency.” The unattainable horizon of the Whole beckons in Glissant’s philosophy, as in Sadrā’s and Whitehead’s, “the finally realized totality of all possible particulars”—a totality that is constantly changing because it consists of changing relations.<sup>60</sup> The more that it is singular, the more an entity can activate potential relations. Glissant’s terms “participation and confluence” resonate with Whitehead’s language of prehension, ingression and concrescence. While the entities analyzed in Whitehead’s philosophy can be any size—particles, civilizations—Glissant gives preference to a social and political scale: the community, the culture, the plantation.

Glissant celebrates opacity, for it safeguards the singularity of every entity and guarantees the fruitfulness of their encounters. “The more the other resists in its thickness or fluidity [...], the more its reality becomes expressive, and the relation fruitful.”<sup>61</sup> Western thought, Glissant points out, can no longer claim that knowledge is transparent; but it

is not able to deal with the new opacity of knowledge. Now, he writes, that mirror is clouded by “a whole alluvium deposited by populations,” inscrutable, more often than not despised, yet insistently present. The motif of silt, which recurs in *Poetics of Relation*, indicates deeply deposited knowledge, especially that possessed by those who have been torn away from their ancestral culture, which forms the ground of relational knowledge of the entire world. Like Leibniz’s monad, Glissant’s relational thinker has only the dimmest awareness of things beyond its immediate environment, with which it is nevertheless inextricably connected. Thus, thought must begin with the world at hand: the wandering thinker who strives to know the totality of the world “plunges into the opacities of that part of the world to which he has access.”<sup>62</sup> From a node in an ever-changing network, an individual is able to detect relations to the whole: Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of nomad and rhizome resonate in Glissant’s writing.

In its historicity, Glissant’s philosophy provides a truthfulness that systematic philosophy lacks. Glissant argues that the African diaspora originated not only in Africa but also in the terrible and transformational abysses that the millions of slaves deported from Africa underwent: the “womb-abyss” of the slave ship, the depths of the sea. These abysses remain as unconscious knowledge, the basis for a knowledge of the whole and relation within the whole. Movingly, Glissant argues that this openness need not be fearful, perhaps because enslaved people have already undergone a dreadful encounter with the unknown, “We know ourselves as part and as crowd, in an unknown that does not terrify.”<sup>63</sup> The historicity of his thought is also the reason for Glissant’s measured optimism: after slavery, colonization, decolonization and the initial disappointment of the United Nations, he observes the increasing durability of creole cultures, “whose very nature is to vary tremendously within Relation.”<sup>64</sup>

This relational philosophy, and the privileged position it ascribes to enslaved and creole people, describes the universe of *Dreams Are Colder Than Death*. Resonating with Glissant’s characterization of the slave ship as a womb-abyss, Moten refers, rather, to Kant, “The fantasy of flight produces a radical disruptive imaginative capacity. The hold of the ship was a language lab. The reason we think it was iconic of brutality is not because it shut down our capacities of reason, imagination, erotic, but because all those were still online.” Over a shot of cold-looking waves breaking on a rocky coast, Spillers reminds listeners that Africans were involved in the slave trade: the elders betrayed the youth by selling them into slavery, “an Oedipal crisis buried in the Middle Passage.” Through montage, Jafa folds these histories into the present being of the people his film cherishes, volatilizing the relations to the past and the whole that are latent within them. The unafraid openness that Glissant advocates resonates with these words of Rich Blint, “I think there’s something about the end of safety that Black folks have to court.”

## Individuation and Milieu

For the same reasons, those relations singularize the entity. All process philosophies conceive of a force of differentiation that flows through individuals from the universe, or at least the larger milieu. Things transform from within in response to a pull from without. At the objectless end of process philosophies, Simondon holds that individuation is

ontologically prior to individuals, and individuals are simply effects of individuation, the way a wave is the result of the movement of the sea.<sup>65</sup> In Whitehead, the actual entity has a lot of choice about how it will concreate from its milieu, though it doesn't last long after the process has completed. Glissant's particularities connect from within deeply interrelated milieus. “Things of the community, without being diminished, [...] would be the initiation to totality without renouncing the particular.”<sup>66</sup> In Sadrā, substantial motion, a flow of divine energy, transforms individuals from within, making them more real *and* more like themselves.<sup>67</sup>

In his work on cinema, Deleuze characterizes the action-image in terms of mutually transformative relations between action and milieu. In milieu-driven genres like the Western (the “large form”), the milieu expands and contracts as though breathing, inspiring the characters. In action-driven genres like the comedy of manners (the “small form”), tiny differentia in the action produce vast differences in the situation.<sup>68</sup> Deleuze emphasizes the completeness or satisfaction of these events, “Everything is individuated: the milieu as a particular space-time, the situation as determinate and determining, the collective as well as the individual character.”<sup>69</sup> This model, enriched by our other process thinkers, effectively characterizes cinema's capacity to explore the mutually creative relations of individual and milieu.

In *Dreams are Colder Than Death*, individuations take place in two milieus, framing and internal. In the framing milieu, especially in public places, constant danger assumes causal efficacy, in Black people's prehensions of the world. The film demonstrates that historical threats of lynching and murders of civil rights leaders such as King and Fred Hampton continue in the American epidemic of murders of unarmed Black people: it documents a protest of the 2013 murder of Trayvon Martin, the event that instigated the Black Lives Matter movement. In the internal milieu, throughout the film, Jafa creates African American-only spaces for his subjects. The speakers are framed by their homes, the interiors, yards and the streets of their neighborhoods. Other shots come from Black neighborhoods with nary a white (or other non-Black) person in sight: busy streets, parks, a basketball court, a parking lot, someone's front yard. The effect, I find, is to temporarily create the world of which Malcolm X dreamed, in which Black communities maintain economic and social autonomy. In these mini-utopias, there are no police, no imposition of government force. The people we see come together in a relatively free space.

Thus the temporary free spaces Jafa carves out in the film witness a greater openness to the world, including the luxury of perceiving for the pleasure of it, Whitehead's presentational immediacy. Not without tension and sadness, these scenes reveal the opulence of potential becoming when immediate dangers are absent and experience can embrace more of the world. Jafa and his apparatus are part of the milieu: his mobile camerawork and use of variable slow motion enhance its breath-like quality.

Spillers's first words accompany a scene of boys jumping not into but out of a swimming pool, spinning backwards, in sheaves of droplets, and landing on their feet. Jafa's virtuosic postproduction, reverse motion at variable slow speeds, intensifies their pleasure to joy and impossible athleticism.<sup>70</sup> In one brief scene, as Moten is speaking of the distinction between Blackness and Black people, the camera comes into a backyard where a seated woman is laughing at two pretty dogs that have leapt up on the table. In

the next shot, this woman, who has light skin, blond hair and blue eyes, looks toward the receptive camera in calm, supremely composed self-recognition as Black.

In one of *Dreams Are Colder Than Death's* moments of saccadic becoming, the camera, peering through leafy branches, observes an encounter while we hear Gibbs is explaining “playing the puppet.” A teenaged girl wearing a Wendy’s uniform passes through a group of boys on a basketball court. In movements whose precise choreography the slow motion reveals, two of them get into her space, she slaps one boy’s hand away, but he insistently taps her arm and reaches for her ass. A taller, bearded youth reaches to touch her, and as in that brief moment she continues to resist, the boys all turn away, laughing. A second later, the girl is moving on, toward the camera, a flutter of recomposure on her face as she puts her earbuds back in. She passes her hand over her face, perhaps to protect it from Jafa’s camera, which finally observes her from a distance as she crosses the street. Gibbs is saying, “That’s always the psychic drain—time to deal with the puppet.” The actions of the girl, the boys, the basketball court, the trees and Jafa’s observing camera come together into a single unit. In Sadrā’s terms, all the parties in the encounter undergo substantial motion, subtly differentiating and becoming more real. Jafa’s use of slow motion emphasizes the interconnected energy of the whole group, the milieu of neighborly sexual aggression they create. It draws attention to the occasion’s aesthetic supplement, its phase of inhibitions and intensifications: the infinitesimal decisions each participant, including the camera, makes as to how the encounter will play out.

Through these and other shots, Jafa suggests a kind of creative coming from within, not just within individuals but with the community. It is the “precious insight that connects you to something human” that Spillers asserts is African American people’s most powerful possession, a force of individuation from within that connects to the widest possible milieu without. As Glissant argues, the more the particulars are free from dependency, the more relation exists.

## **Creativity and the Great Refusal**

For those who study cinema and other creative forms, it’s especially intriguing that all three philosophers privilege art as the best means to feel the universe’s flow of differentiation—where art is the capacity to cultivate unnamed diversity and connectivity. Sadrā argues that while the intelligence is best at gaining a sense of the universe as One, the imagination best at attaining a sense of the universe as infinite: thus art is best at touching the delicate singularities of the world without crushing them.<sup>71</sup> “What are perceived by the five senses,” Sadrā wrote, “are luminous hidden images existing in another world.”<sup>72</sup> Art is able to perceive these luminous images that are more real than matter. For Glissant, the world’s endless, unpredictable differentiation constitutes the motor of universal energy, and poetic thought safeguards this diversity.<sup>73</sup> The poetics of relation, as Sheila Petty points out, produces an aesthetics that values interactions within the work and intersections with the outside influences of its time.<sup>74</sup> Glissant celebrates works of art, from William Faulkner’s novels to Bob Marley’s music, which draw together reverberations from the entire world, in what he calls *echos-monde*.

The most compelling actualizations of Black process and individuation in *Dreams Are Colder Than Death* occur in Black-only spaces. But individuation draws from the larger milieu as well, from the dangerous spaces defined by American law and the dominant white imagination. The danger of being turned into a thing, or a puppet, is ever present. In the face of this threat, Blackness may cohere as the “representing” subject of the politics of identity.<sup>75</sup> Or it may take the risk of continuing to individuate in the expanded milieu. As Moten argues, Blackness constitutes a radical creativity that corrodes racist deep structures that both rely on and disavow it.<sup>76</sup>

Differentiation in the presence of danger gives rise to seeming monsters, freaks, uncategorizable performances. In the film, Hartman recounts that in the early days of Emancipation, Black leaders tried to quell the anarchic energy of Black people, condemning them as fallen women or thugs.<sup>77</sup> But now as well, she argues, Black people are producing modern forms of culture that appear initially as “monstrous.” Hartman’s words are heard over shots of a man gyrating, holding a bottle in a paper bag, his head not visible in the frame, and a close pan of a stripper’s body prone on the nightclub stage, deftly twitching her rump in sequined G-string. Twerking, of course, has thoroughly entered the clichéd cultural lexicon, but throughout the film, Jafa’s montage of words and performances emphasizes Black creativity and inventiveness in the face of threat. What appear to be “freaks” and “monsters” are truly novel actualities.

The film suggests that it is possible to draw on a deep energy source beyond local intimacy and beyond the murderous milieu. Artist Nicole Fleetwood, whose troubling collages of Black figures we see, delightedly recalls what went on at her grandmother’s one-room church. “They knew how to *generate energy*.” If an old woman started to go into a trance, the congregation would interrupt the sermon, her grandmother would go to the piano and someone else to the drums, and “they would rock out for another hour! One of my aunts would start speaking in tongues.” Jafa matches Fleetwood’s story with pictures of a little church, Black congregations—and distant galaxies. These, and the spaceship-like animations that flash into the film a couple of times, evoke the Afrofuturist idea that since the Middle Passage, which constituted a kind of alien abduction, African-diaspora people came from and belonged to somewhere else than the present.<sup>78</sup>

Beyond the *écho-monde* Glissant describes, these images reach to other universes. Jafa’s montage suggests that the ladies at Fleetwood’s grandmother’s church were making contact with some extraterrestrial energy source. This evocation of a place beyond Earth, as well as Hartman’s and Moten’s statements on creativity, resonate with a rather odd definition of evil that Whitehead proposes. Evil, he writes, is novelty that arises at the wrong time or place, so that the responses to it consist mostly of inhibitions. “Insistence on birth at the wrong season is the trick of evil.”<sup>79</sup> This definition characterizes acts that are so creative their milieu cannot sustain them. “But,” Whitehead writes, “the advance, when it does arrive, will be richer in content, more fully conditioned, and more stable.” The great leap, the apparently unsustainable “break,” makes contact with a reality that is truer than the present actuality. Sadrā terms this reality the imaginal world, which is glimpsed in prophetic visions.

Refusing present actuality in favor of an unlikely but truer reality is a heroic act. A process basis for critical theory arose when neo-Marxist critical theorist Herbert Marcuse took

up and ran with a concept of Whitehead's, the "great refusal."<sup>80</sup> When an entity refuses the most evident prehension, refuses to take up the most evident data in its environment in favor of a more rare and unlikely one, its creativity increases and it attains a more vital truth. Actualizing just a hint from the environment leads to more powerful novelty. A negative prehension negates the immediately present and opens to the possible.

The great refusal attempts the riskiest actualizations. Marcuse argued it is capable of overthrowing the status quo, which relies on what he called the "Performance Principle," a self-sustaining mimicking of reality that represses novelty.<sup>81</sup> Developing Guattari's work in his process revision of Marxism, Franco Berardi argues that proliferation of singularities replaces dialectical revolution as the new political task. To support them, he argued, we must create nontemporary autonomous zones, even in the face of racist and fascist aggression.<sup>82</sup> These statements by neo-Marxist theorists become individuated and actualized in Black life and Black philosophy. In the African American experience, the great refusal draws on powers that contradict the oppressive majority of experience, to create something really new that has the potential to endure.

In *Poetics of Relation*, Glissant returns twice to the figure of a silent man who walks, seemingly without end, on the black beach. He "exhausts no territory; he sets roots only on the sacred of the air and evanescence, in a pure refusal that changes nothing in the world."<sup>83</sup> The man who walks is Glissant's most radical image of one who will have no part of the compromised relationships of the present, who cultivates the as-yet-unconsidered meanings deposited like silt in the sand. Drawing on Glissant's celebration of errantry, a rhizomatic creative path that rejects filiation, Hartman advocates waywardness, "the refusal to be governed. It is the next phase of the general strike, the flight from the plantation and refusal of slavery and the demeaning conditions of work, this time it happens in the slum. It is a social experiment and an effort to elaborate new forms of existence."<sup>84</sup>

The great refusal enacts the most difficult and most powerful actualization because it prehends what is most distant. The difference between the "evil" of failed becoming and the creativity of successful becoming is that the individuating entity is able to draw enough energy into and through itself, from that distant source, to actualize it. In cinema, the great refusal has its moment of total negative prehension—refusing to recognize any of the habitual signs in its milieu. It dwells in the virtual, in the moment before satisfaction is possible. But the great difference is that it *does* recognize some rare, unlikely sign, far-flung in its environment—and it is around that prehension that the occasion actualizes. Jafa witnesses this moment of the great refusal and its satisfaction in the emergence of singular figures that hum with the presence of an unseen community.

## Notes

- 1 Charles Sanders Peirce, "Man's Glassy Essence," *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1960), 6, 268.
- 2 Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*. Corrected edition, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: Free Press, 1978), 273.
- 3 One can say "substance ontology and "process ontology," but I use the term "metaphysics" with the Deleuzian motivation to avoid the fixity of ontology.

- 4 Graham Harman, “Whitehead and Schools X, Y, and Z,” in *The Lure of Whitehead*, ed. Nicholas Gaskill and A. J. Nocek (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2014), 235.
- 5 Nicholas Rescher, *Process Metaphysics: An Introduction to Process Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).
- 6 Whitehead International Film Festival, home page and 2016 Selection Criteria page. Consulted July 27, 2016.
- 7 As John Mullarkey notes, Deleuzian film theorists tend to diverge between virtualist and actualist tendencies, depending on whether they rely more on Deleuze’s cinema books or other parts of his oeuvre. John Mullarkey, *Refractions of Reality: Philosophy and the Moving Image* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 107.
- 8 What Vivian Sobchack terms the film’s body accounts for how a given kind of camera or audio device is able to see and hear the world. This concept extends into an understanding of prehensive encounter of camera and world and its completion or satisfaction. Jeffrey Langille, “How is it that there is always something new?” MFA thesis, School for the Contemporary Arts, Simon Fraser University, 2014. I supervised Langille’s thesis.
- 9 One of the most interesting such trajectories is Steven Shaviro’s, who has moved over two decades from being one of the first to propose a cinema of the body, to develop theories of cinematic and post-cinematic affect, to a full-fledged philosophical encounter with Spinoza, Whitehead, Kant, and object-oriented philosophy Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); *Without Criteria: Kant, Whitehead, Deleuze, and Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009); *Post Cinematic Affect* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2010); *The Universe of Things: On Speculative Realism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).
- 10 See e.g., Matthew Fuller, *Media Ecologies: Materialist Energies in Art and Technoculture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005); Sean Cubitt, *Finite Media: Environmental Implications of Digital Technology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016); Kenneth Rogers, *Petromedia: Oil Culture and Media Culture*, in progress; and Hunter Vaughan, *500,000 Kilowatts of Stardust: An Eco-Materialist Reframing of Singin’ in the Rain*, in progress.
- 11 Adrian Ivakhiv, *Ecologies of the Moving Image: Cinema, Affect, Nature* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013).
- 12 On the film-audience assemblage see Kennedy, *Deleuze and Cinema*. On assemblages of film production, the film itself, and reception, see Janet Harbord, *The Evolution of Film: Rethinking Film Studies* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007); and Kjetil Rødje, *Images of Blood in American Cinema: The Tangler to The Wild Bunch* (London: Ashgate, 2015).
- 13 For example Siegfried Zielinski, *Deep Time of the Media: Toward an Archaeology of Seeing and Hearing by Technical Means*, trans. Gloria Custance (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006); Jussi Parikka, *Insect Media: An Archaeology of Animals and Technology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).
- 14 Timothy Scott Barker, *Time and the Digital: Connecting Technology, Aesthetics, and a Process Philosophy of Time* (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2012).
- 15 Azadeh Emadi, *Motion Within Motion: Investigating Digital Video in Light of Substantial Motion* (Ph.D. thesis, Auckland University of Technology, 2014); “Pixelated view: investigating the pixel in light of Substantial Motion,” in *Proceedings of the 19th International Symposium of Electronic Art*, Sydney, ed. Kathy Cleland, Laura Fisher, and Ross Harley (Sydney: ISEA International, the Australian Network for Art & Technology and the University of Sydney, 2013). I was one of Emadi’s doctoral supervisors.
- 16 Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 7. I think Whitehead excludes Arabic philosophy because of its Aristotelian lineage. However, Arabic grammar does complicate subject-predicate logic, partly because it uses the verb *wajada*, to be found, instead of a copula such as “is.”
- 17 Harman, “Whitehead and Schools X, Y, and Z,” 237.
- 18 Ivakhiv, *Ecologies of the Moving Image*, 42–43.

- 19 See e.g., Abe Masao's comparison of Whitehead's philosophy and Mahayana Buddhism in *Zen and Western Thought*, ed. William R. LaFleur (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989).
- 20 Masato Ishida, "The Sense of Symmetry: Comparative Studies of Whitehead, Nishida, and Dogen," *Process Studies* 43, no. 1 (2014): 4–34; Michel Weber, "A Process Interpretation of Aztec Metaphysics," *Process Studies* 44, no. 1 (2015): 48–62; Li Yijing, "Masao Abe's Dynamic Sunyata and Buddhist Thought," *Process Studies* 44, no. 1 (2015): 120–41.
- 21 Sha Xin Wei, *Poiesis and Enchantment in Topological Matter* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013).
- 22 Sajjad H. Rizvi, *Mulla Sadrā and Metaphysics: Modulation of Being* (London: Routledge, 2009), 85.
- 23 As Parviz Morewedge points out, Islamic philosophy from Shihab al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (1153–1191) on—which is to say, eastern Islamic philosophy—abandoned substantialism for process. Parviz Morewedge, "The Neoplatonic Structure of Some Islamic Mystical Doctrines," in *Neoplatonism and Islamic Thought*, ed. Parviz Morewedge (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992); see also Lenn Evan Goodman, *Avicenna* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 62.
- 24 See e.g., Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, ed., *Islamic Philosophy and Occidental Phenomenology on the Perennial Issue of Microcosm and Macrocosm* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006); Laura U. Marks, "A Deleuzian *Ijtihad*: Unfolding Deleuze's Islamic Sources Occulted in the Ethnic Cleansing of Spain," in *Deleuze and Race*, ed. Arun Saldhana and Jason Michael Adams (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 51–72; Rizvi, *Mulla Sadrā and Metaphysics*. Sadrā's thought profoundly influenced subsequent philosophy in the eastern Muslim world. It remains central to official philosophy in present-day Iran, though, as Seyyed Hossein Nasr notes, educated Iranians' interest began to turn to European philosophy in the early nineteenth century, due to Persians' "cultural inferiority complex vis-à-vis the West that still continues in many non-Western circles." Nasr, *Islamic Philosophy from Its Origin to the Present: Philosophy in the Land of Prophecy* (Binghamton: State University of New York Press, 2006), 251–52. Some of Sadrā's work began to be translated into Western languages in the late nineteenth century, and scholars in English and French have increasingly turned to his work since the 1980s, but only a few of his writings are translated, and very little of the work of thinkers who followed Sadrā in the eastern Islamic world has been translated. Thus, although I am championing Sadrā's work as an important contribution to process philosophy, a note of caution is necessary until Western scholarship can catch up with the philosophers who developed and critiqued his work.
- 25 Farshid Kazemi, "A Cinematic Cosmos in Process: Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥṣā'ī, *Hurqalyā*, and Cinema," in progress.
- 26 Alexander Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Raializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 5–12.
- 27 Arthur Jafa, "69," in *Black Popular Culture*, ed. Gina Dent (Seattle: Bay Press, 1992).
- 28 See e.g., Saidiya V. Hartman and Frank B. Wilderson III, "The Position of the Unthought," *Qui Parle* 13, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2003): 183–201; Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2003); and Alexander Weheliye, *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005). See also the classic work on female vocal resistance to fetishization, Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).
- 29 See Étienne Balibar, "Subjection and Subjectivation," in *Supposing the Subject*, ed. Joan Copjec (London: Verso, 1994).
- 30 Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 118.
- 31 To some degree the critiques of Hartman, Wilderson, Moten and others can be extended to other historical slave-based economies. But the African American situation is unique because of this concurrence of the slave economy and the rise of modern European philosophy.
- 32 Moten, *In the Break*, 9–12, 263n1. Moten is writing about a "commodity" that screams: Frederick Douglass's aunt Hester, screaming as her owner whips her, which Douglass writes about in

- his 1845 *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Moten resists placing too much hope in this performative agency, like Hartman, who calls attempts to celebrate the agency of oppressed groups “obscene.” Hartman and Wilderson, *Qui Parle*, 185.
- 33 Kodwo Eshun, “Operating System for the Redesign of Sonic Reality,” in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, ed. Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner (New York: Continuum, 2004), 157–59.
- 34 See e.g., Sean Cubitt, *The Practice of Light* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014), 12; Grant Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 54; and Peter Hallward, “Édouard Glissant between the Singular and the Specific,” *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 11, no. 2 (Fall 1998): 441–64.
- 35 Nicholas Rescher, *Process Metaphysics: An Introduction to Process Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).
- 36 Keith Robinson, “The Event and the Occasion: Deleuze, Whitehead, and Creativity,” in *The Lure of Whitehead* (2014), 207.
- 37 See e.g., Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 35–42, and “Twenty-Fifth Series on Univocity,” *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale, ed. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 177–80.
- 38 Sean Cubitt, *The Cinema Effect* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).
- 39 See e.g., Laura U. Marks, “Noise in Enfolding-Unfolding Aesthetics,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Sound and Image in Digital Media*, ed. Amy Herzog, John Richardson and Carol Vernallis (Oxford University Press, 2014); “Enfolding-Unfolding Aesthetics, or the Unthought at the Heart of Wood,” in *Technology and Desire: The Transgressive Art of Moving Images*, ed. Rania Gaafar and Martin Schulz (Karlsruhe; London: ZKM; Intellect Books), 151–61; *Enfoldment and Infinity: An Islamic Genealogy of New Media Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), chapter 1; “Information, Secrets, and Enigmas: An Enfolding-Unfolding Aesthetics for Cinema,” *Screen* 50, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 86–98.
- 40 To make the ideas more clear, I have occasionally rendered some of Whitehead’s specialized terms in simpler language. For his term *actual entity* I substitute *entity*; for *prehension* I substitute *feeling or taking in*; for *conrescence* I substitute *coming together*.
- 41 Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 26.
- 42 Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 176, 172. On causal efficacy and presentational immediacy, see also Pierfrancesco Basile, *Leibniz, Whitehead and the Metaphysics of Causation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) and Shaviri, *The Universe of Things*.
- 43 Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 213.
- 44 Indeed it constitutes both misplaced concreteness and the “bifurcation of nature” into what is experienced and what is “true,” that Whitehead critiques and Isabelle Stengers examines further in “A Constructivist Reading of *Process and Reality*,” *Theory, Culture, & Society* 25, no. 4 (2008): 91–110.
- 45 Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, foreword and translation by Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 78.
- 46 Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 83.
- 47 James Williams, “Event,” in *Gilles Deleuze: Key Concepts*, ed. Charles J. Stivale (Durham: Acumen, 2005), 84.
- 48 Many strains of Islamic philosophy emphasize that the universe unfolds from God and go to pains to identify different manners of unfolding, from the gradations of emanation in Islamic Neoplatonism to the occultations of Isma’ili Shi’ia theology.
- 49 Rizvi, *Mulla Sadra and Metaphysics*, 51.
- 50 The Arabic word *wujūd*, meaning “what is found,” is more suggestive than the English *being* or the German *Sein*, though some scholars carefully compare it to Heidegger’s *Dasein*, e.g., Alparslan Acikgenc, *Being and Existence in Sadra and Heidegger: A Comparative Ontology* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1993); Nader El-Bizri,

- The Microcosm/Macrocosm Analogy: A Tentative Encounter between Graeco-Arabic Philosophy and Phenomenology,” in Tymienicka, 3–23; Seyyed Mohammed Khamenei, “Time, Temporal, and Temporality,” in Tymienicka, 129–36; and Muhammad Kamal, *From Essence to Being: The Philosophy of Mulla Sadra & Martin Heidegger* (London: Islamic College for Advanced Studies Publications, 2010).
- 51 Chittick 122; also translated as transubstantiation, transsubstantial motion, and essential motion.
- 52 Sadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, *Asfār* 1, 14–19; cited in Fazlur Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mullā Sadrā (Sadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī)* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975), 97.
- 53 Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mullā Sadrā*, 30.
- 54 Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mullā Sadrā*, 50–51.
- 55 Mullā Sadrā, *The Book of Metaphysical Penetrations*, trans. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ed. Ibrahim Kalin (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2014), 45.
- 56 Sadrā, *The Book of Metaphysical Penetrations*, 37.
- 57 *Asfār* 1:3, Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mullā Sadrā*, 114. For more on substantial motion see Christian Jambet, “Essential Motion,” in *The Act of Being: The Philosophy of Revelation in Mullā Sadrā* (New York: Zone, 2006), and Emadi, *Motion Within Motion*, 50–56.
- 58 Sadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, *The Wisdom of the Throne* I §13, quoted in James Winston Morris, *The Wisdom of the Throne: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mulla Sadra* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 119–20. This statement refers to Qur’an 56: 60–61, “We will exchange your likeness and recreate you in what you will not know.”
- 59 *Asfār* III: 297–98; in Rizvi, *Mulla Sadrā and Metaphysics*, 89.
- 60 Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 142, 32.
- 61 Édouard Glissant, *L’Intention poétique* (Paris: Seuil, 1969), 23; my revision of Halliward’s translation.
- 62 *Ibid.*, 111, 190, 20.
- 63 *Ibid.*, 6–9.
- 64 *Ibid.*, 142.
- 65 Gilbert Simondon, “The Genesis of the Individual,” trans. Mark Cohen and Sanford Kwinter. In *Incorporations*, ed. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 296–319.
- 66 Glissant, *L’Intention poétique*, 55.
- 67 He wrote that *wujūd* “exists in all things according to that thing such that in the intellect, it is intellect; in the soul, it is soul; in nature, it is nature; in the body, it is body; in substance, it is substance; and in accident, it is accident.” Mullā Sadrā, *The Book of Metaphysical Penetrations*, 45.
- 68 Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 145–46, 160–64, 169–73.
- 69 *Ibid.*, 142.
- 70 I must note Billy Woodberry’s criticism of this shot, namely that it connotes the nasty fact that after desegregation, some southern whites poisoned swimming pools with bleach or ink. In conversation at the Robert Flaherty Seminar, June 2016.
- 71 Philosophy here corresponds to the intelligible realm, visions to the imaginal realm. Mullā Sadrā, *The Elixir of the Gnostics*, trans. W. C. Chittick (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2003), Part 1, §39, 9. See also Jambet, “Essential Motion,” 87, and Marks, “Noise in Enfolding-Unfolding Aesthetics,” 2015.
- 72 Sadrā, *The Wisdom of the Throne*, §3, in Morris, *The Wisdom of the Throne*, 134. For the relevance to cinema of Sadrā’s concept of the imaginal realm, see my essay “Real Images Flow: Mulla Sadrā Meets Film-Philosophy,” *Film-Philosophy*, 20, “A World of Cinemas” special issue, ed. David Martin-Jones (2015): 24–46.
- 73 Glissant, *L’Intention poétique*, 30–32.

- 74 Sheila J. Petty, “African Frameworks of Analysis for African Film Studies,” in *De-Westernizing Film Studies*, ed. Saër Maty Bâ and Will Higbee (London: Routledge, 2012), 76.
- 75 As John Akomfrah of Black Audio Film Collective says of the group’s emergence in the early 1980s in Britain, “We did not have the luxury to be hostile to a question of identity because our very moment of becoming is tied to the question and the politics of identity.” To avoid getting slotted, he says, the collective turned to the question of memory—another way to expand the milieu for individuation. “An Absence of Ruins: John Akomfrah in conversation with Kodwo Eshun,” in *The Ghosts of Songs: The Film Art of the Black Audio Film Collective*, ed. Kodwo Eshun and Anjalika Sagar (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), 132.
- 76 Fred Moten, “The Case of Blackness,” *Criticism* 50, no. 2 (2008): 212. Moten is writing of Frantz Fanon’s struggle, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, to defend Algerians against racist colonial stereotypes.
- 77 Hartman and Moten respond to W. E. B. DuBois’s anxious late-nineteenth-century exhortations that Black people conform to white, Christian and bourgeois respectability. See also Fred Moten, “Uplift and Criminality,” in *Next to the Color Line: Gender, Sexuality and W. E. B. Du Bois*, ed. Alys Weinbaum and Susan Gilman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 317–49.
- 78 Afrofuturism, a term coined by Mark Dery in a set of interviews with Tricia Rose, Samuel R. Delany, and Greg Tate in 1994, took form as a movement on a listserv founded by Alondra Nelson in 1998 and conference in 1999, though references to science fiction in African diasporic culture long predate these. The literature on the movement is voluminous: see e.g., Kodwo Eshun, *More Brilliant Than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction* (London: Quartet Books, 1998); Alondra Nelson, ed., “Future Texts,” special issue of *Social Text* 71, 20, no. 2 (Summer 2002); George E. Lewis, ed., “After Afrofuturism,” special issue of *Journal of the Society for American Music* 2, no. 2 (May 2008); André M. Carrington, *Speculative Blackness: The Future of Race in Science Fiction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).
- 79 Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 223.
- 80 Duston Moore, “A Whiteheadian Critical Theory,” in *Applied Process Thought 1: Initial Explorations in Theory and Research*, ed. Mark Dibben and Thomas Kelly (Frankfurt: Verlag, 2008), 172–76.
- 81 The concept compares to Félix Guattari’s “event-centered rupture,” a perilous moment of creative differentiation. Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, trans. P. Bains and J. Pefanis (Sydney: Power, 1995), 81–82.
- 82 Franco Berardi, *After the Future*, ed. Gary Genosko and Nicolas Thoburn, trans. Arianna Bove et al. (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2011), 118–20.
- 83 Glissant, *L’Intention poétique*, 208.
- 84 Saidiya V. Hartman, quoted at “Make a Way out of No Way,” event at Arika, Glasgow, September 2014. <http://arika.org.uk/events/episode-6-make-way-out-no-way>. See also Saidiya V. Hartman, “The Belly of the World: A Note on Black Women’s Labors,” *Souls* 18, no. 1 (2016): 166–73; and *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* (Norton, forthcoming).