
Introduction - Anticolonial Dreaming: The End of an Aura and the Persistence of Dub

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This *JWIL* special issue, “Dub Poetry: On Movements and Moments,” developed out of a few desires: first, to foreground what this Caribbean and especially Jamaican diasporic art form that receives little scholarly attention has to teach us about the increasingly urgent issues resounding in our ecological and political moment; second, to meditate on the ways in which the creative and political traditions of dub poetry express and renew themselves in the transnational movements of black art in the post-war period; and third, to ask what it would mean to dream, together, intentionally, of a better world as dub poets do in a moment when we appear to be living without alternatives to the colonial and racial violence directed towards black life. As the essays in this special issue insist, dub poetry offers what David Scott might call “conceptual resources” with which we can “begin to extract a new horizon of possibilities from within the moral and epistemic contours of” today’s global neoliberal formations, formations which are often characterized by the discouragement, degradation and dismissal of the dreams of the oppressed (3).

Since its acknowledgement by the global literary scene in the 1970s, dub poetry has made several radical political interventions. We can think of its emergence as part of several anti-colonial moments and amplifying post-independence movements of Caribbean nations and the crumbling of the British empire; increasingly, we might also attend to the community-mobilizing focus of its practice. Celebrating the “nation language” demonized by the colonizer, dub poets have shifted the balance of criticism in favour of seeing Creole language registers as linguistic innovation, as art form, as anything other than unacceptable English, the predominant judgement of the colonial education system. As an artistic movement, then, dub poetry problematizes the terms on which our politics and the literary are negotiated, troubles demarcations between high and popular culture, and contributes to the musical, literary, visual, technological, and dance movements of a “transnational Jamaica” (Thomas 20). The collective imaginative work that produces these horizons is the work of dreaming, I argue. Blackness, as we see in Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*, is an experience that is dreamt of by others who, armed by the structures of white supremacy and a world shaped by slavery and colonialism, imagine black life as a certain array of signifi-

cations and then makes that horrifying dream a reality. The practice of collapsing the line between dream and reality, then, has already happened as catastrophe, as a nightmare, as world destruction rather than world building. Dub poetry as well as dub dreaming as world building emerges out of and as a resistance to that dehumanizing dreaming pattern. I want to read dub poetry as offering us a method for anti-colonial dreaming, and to do so, I frame it as part of a tradition of Caribbean movements where dreaming, as a source of form and creative impulse, abounds: from reggae to the Rastafari movement to surrealism.

When we think about the Caribbean's relationship to surrealism, we often trace this movement to the French Caribbean. We mark the now famous account of the group of Martinique students at the Sorbonne, forming the Caribbean Surrealist Group, *Légitime Défense*, in 1931, as a key moment. While the surrealism of this group was, as far as Aimé Césaire was concerned, "a little too assimilationistic," he goes on to acknowledge in an interview with Charles H. Rowell that the group

brought us a 'plus' of liberty, a greater audacity to ascertain ourselves beyond the conventional and rigid forms of literature. We all had the fervent desire to see this oppressed, confined, isolated people express itself in the strongest meaning of this word, with something that came from its gut and was hurled in the daylight. (993)

If surrealism is linked to this francophone region, then why am I connecting it to dub poetry, a predominantly anglo art form? I do so not simply to open up a line of research that considers the historical continuities and divergences between artistic movements across the Caribbean. The list of Caribbean artists, philosophers and thinkers whose work sits comfortably with the surrealist movement in the French Caribbean and also played a significant role in the anti-colonial movement in the whole region, a movement that has become a hallmark of dub poetry, is long and distinguished, encompassing Frantz Fanon, Suzanne Césaire, Aimé Césaire, and Édouard Glissant among others. What might it mean to listen for a long hurl of fervent desires stretching from Césaire's moment to those of the dub poets? In addition, I see in dub poetry what Aaron Kamugisha sees in Caribbean thought: "its existence as a tradition of thought [is] both independent and enmeshed in so many global traditions of the last two centuries" (190). If surrealism's enmeshment with Caribbean thought exposes how Europe refreshed its artistic traditions via other worlds, it remains to be seen what dub poetry's enmeshment with surrealism might expose. In the interview with Rowell, Césaire notes that, "[i]n spite of our imperfect knowledge of English, we had read people like Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, later Sterling Brown and other people of the Black Renaissance collected in Alain Locke's anthology [*The New Negro*]," foregrounding the conversations between French Caribbean surrealism, the Harlem Renaissance and, through McKay, internationalist communism, touchstones of the movement Césaire and Léopold Sédar Senghor theorized so powerfully as Négritude (Rowell 990).¹ (Let us not forget Négritude's debts to English-language works like the Jamaican McKay's 1929 novel *Banjo*.) Conversely, a whole generation of dub poets grew up during a moment where the

school curriculum would have trained them in the Romance languages, not just Latin and English. Given the encounters and exchanges that have long connected these intra-Caribbean and black transnational movements (of art, ideas and people), it is not farfetched to imagine dub poets reading Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon alongside Marcus Garvey and Wilson Harris. I imagine Anglo Caribbean dub poets engaging with the French Caribbean surrealists to continue a conversation begun long before, whether in spite of their imperfect knowledge of French or through the work of translation, a concept that has become synonymous with the Caribbean (Akai 1997; Forsdick 2015). In other words, as scholars of dub poetry continue to attend to the particulars of local contexts, we would do well to remember that movements call and respond to other movements. In other words, dub's ability to respond to local conditions is, in part, because of how it is in dialogue with other movements. Here, we might learn from the dialogic methodology evident in the work of critics like Sylvia Wynter, Michael Dash, Jason Allen-Paisant and Njelle Hamilton, whose *Phonographic Memories* is reviewed in this issue. Hailing from different generations, these critics demonstrate what is possible when we refuse the colonial linguistic divide in our scholarship, emphasizing a longer inheritance of thinking across such divides in Caribbean movements and studies.

I recall this complex field of collaboration, continuities, and influences in order to foreground the connective tissue of dreamscapes that inform the social, political, artistic movements of not just surrealism and dub poetry but reggae music and Rastafari as well. As a transnational popular music form that facilitates cultural dialogues between “legacies of black-on-black transnational politics” (Chude-Sokei, "When Echoes Return" 76), reggae music tuned the world's ears to the sociocultural realities and socio-political dis-ease of the postcolonial moment and worked to rupture the logics of dominance. In their lyrics and sonic architectures, reggae artists, ranging from Bob Marley, Garnett Silk, to the Wailers, variously dreamt an anti-capitalist and anti-colonial world different from the oppression of injustice. In this way, reggae music refuses institutional and colonial authority (Gilroy 84-145). Keeping in mind that reggae music and dub poetry co-emerged in the 1960s and 70s, it is not surprising that reggae music's commitment to be heard and felt reverberates through dub poetry's remix practice of crossing genre. As they revise what we know, turning their revisions into ways of knowing (we know reggae music is committed to challenging the song form and dub poetry is committed to reanimating poetic conventions), not only did both popular art forms engineer a vibe so as to steer the world to think and move through sound, but also, to think with Jacques Attali's work on noise, the sound in which they immersed the world held prophetic qualities (Attali), offering us another way to “rais[e] questions about the world as distinct from the way the trope of the visual image is often used to settle them” (Henriques xviii). While I agree with Henriques about the role that these art forms play to challenge the oppressive “vision” of the world as we know it, I am not ready to set the sound and the visual image far apart when it comes to dub poetry. Thinking through the work of Louise Bennett for example, Susan Gingell foregrounds the visual compositional features of dub poetry with what she calls “a see-hear aesthetics,” the strategies dub poets devise to offer sound portraits of place. With “see-hear aesthetics,” Gingell not only “en-

codes through a pun on ‘see here’”, she also highlights the relations between the oral and print mediums, showing the compositional decisions that shape audiovisual performance (34). Carolyn Cooper, thinking with Gordon Rohlehr’s work in *Voiceprint*, calls this strategy *oraliteracy* – “a recognition of the capacity for abstraction and subtlety of feeling and expression on the part of speakers/writers in Jamaican; but it may also require a de-privileging of abstraction” (*Noises* 82). For Cooper, “poetry, whether performance or not, is not a language of generalities. It is a celebration, in the making, of particulars” (*Noises* 82).

I am interested in the particular ways that the insurrection of dub poetry invites us to consider its relation to the insurrection and anti-establishment spirits of surrealism. Michael A. Bucknor teaches us that dub poetry is influenced by “various ideological, counter-discursive pressure points from black consciousness, decolonization, Garveyism, Rastafarianism, Marxism/socialism, to anti-colonial nationalism” (265-66). And Peter Manuel, Kenneth Bilby and Michael Largey describe the dub process as “the surrealistic deconstruction of familiar songs, now presented as perpetually mutating rhythm tracks” (198). I add surrealism to these pressure points because, from André Breton’s first manifesto on surrealism, this movement initially concerned itself with poetry and philosophy (visual arts would later follow); and also because it concerned itself with the aspirations of the working class, and, as such, rejected conventional rhyme and meter in poetry. This rejection informs dub poetry, too. Dub poets find joy in the rhythmic freedom of nation language. Kamau Brathwaite sums up this rejection when he writes that “the hurricane does not roar in pentameter” (265). Oku Onuora understands dub poetry to constitute “dubbing out the little penta-metre” (qtd. in Morris 38). Dub poets roar in a tetrameter of the popular expressions that come out of/as nation language. Bucknor identifies this compositional freedom as a “revolutionary approach to literary orthodoxies” (258). Revolution, here, is born out of a dream. Louise Bennett’s dream of legitimizing Jamaica’s popular nation language which dub poetry uses is realized and, as Janet Neigh points out in *Recalling Recitation*, “most Jamaican...children who grew up in the 1960s and 1970s...can recite at least a part of a Bennett poem by heart because they were assigned to memorize her work in school” (93).

When Lillian Allen points out that “Bob Marley appeared on the heels of Louise Bennett”, she is also saying that Miss Lou’s dreams made Bob Marley’s possible (14). And, without Bob Marley, “[w]ithout reggae, dub poetry could never have existed” (12). Allen drums this point home when she writes, “without two remarkable figures of the twentieth century, Louise Bennett [...] and Bob Marley [...], there would be no dub poetry” (12). This consideration is important because it allows us to account for the influence of different artistic movements on dub poetry. Here, I am thinking about how, in the figure of Bob Marley, we get reggae music, and through his religious faith, Rastafarism, two movements that are committed to dreaming. We see what Bucknor means when he identifies Rastafarism as a pressure point of dub poetry.

Theories of dreaming are foundational to the aesthetic, ethical, philosophical and spiritual practices associated with the Rastafari movement. Its political project of engineer-

ing, to quote Erna Brodber, a “Blackspace” memorializes Zion, the place and meaning of Africa (Ethiopia in particular), as its model for anti-colonial black struggle, in order to mark a defiant retreat out of sufferation as well as to insist on a conscious refusal of the inequalities designed to contain black social life in the place they call Babylon; the creation of this Promised Land signals a work of dreaming. Meanwhile, Brodber’s Blackspace is a seminar space held each summer before Emancipation Day, in Woodside, Jamaica. Blackspace is understood as a gathering space where black people meet to be with one another and work through differences through workshop sessions called “Blackspace reasonings.” What would it mean to consider the anti-colonial dreaming central to the Rastafari project of focusing on Africa and revaluing blackness outside the regimes of European modernity as offering us practices of Blackspace reasonings?

Putting the responsibility in a request made of her onto us (especially intellectuals, among whom I include Rastafarians), Brodber “give[s],” in her words, black people and “youth more than the [legacies of] slavery with which to carve out a black space in this white world” (80). Anti-colonial dreaming, with its emancipatory processes and tasks, offers blackspace reasonings, offerings that the Rastafari movement gives to us. Take, as an example, one of its central philosophies, *I-tal*, the “commitment to using things in their natural or organic states,” a commitment that celebrates the harmonious intimacy (dialogue) between humans and nature (Edmonds 60). This commitment has environmental, ethical, and health implications: one being a *plant*-based diet (vegetarian), with an avoidance of alcohol and drugs. I emphasize ganja as a plant so that I can also “plant” how this crop’s ecological, herbal, and medicinal systems of knowledge inform the Rastafari movement’s systems of knowledge. Notwithstanding the racialized condemnation of this sacred herb, the criminalization of black people who recreationally use it, I want to focus on the rituals of smoking ganja as part of a rasta dreaming practice. For many Rastafarians, smoking (the elements of fire and wind) ganja, an element of earth, can be part of an elemental practice of convening harmonious possibilities into the universe; because of the altered states that visit smokers under the influence of ganja, one can at once harness and conjoin the power of each element and, as a result of the sensorial exchanges and transfers that happen within these elemental interactions, stimulate a (psychedelic and therapeutic) state of consciousness that, for some, leads to growth and healing. Regardless of how one chooses to rationalize this altered state of consciousness, it is worth noting that ganja, used as a vehicle to enter different realms, “dub[s] out the isms and schisms...to dub consciousness into the people-dem head” (Onuora quoted in Morris 38). And, by this, I mean the smoke from the burning becomes a technological and spiritual medium that carries messages between dimensions, “dubbing out...the little highfaluting business and dubbing in the rootsical, yard, basic rhythm that I-an-I know” emancipating one from one’s current place in the Babylonian world (Onuora quoted in Morris 38).² Like many Rastafarians, I too am interested in this herb’s emancipatory possibilities not only for the revelations to anti-colonial dreams but also for how its usage, as a herbal medicine which connects one’s body to the harmony of the physical and social land, micropolitically challenges the biopolitical role of pharmaceutical and clinical medicine.

In the hope we hear in the back to Africa philosophy that the Rastafari movement adopts, in its emergence, in Jamaica, in the 1930s, lies a dream.³ I say adopt because, at the start of the twentieth century, during the 1910s and early 1920s, Marcus Garvey was promoting repatriation to Africa as a hope for black liberation. Claude McKay, in his essay “Garvey as Negro Moses,” describes Marcus Garvey as “[a] weaver of dreams, he translated into a fantastic pattern of reality the gaudy strands of the vicarious desires of the submerged members of the Negro race” (143).

When I describe dub poetry as offering a method of inquiry and a poetics for anti-colonial dreaming, and to do so in relationship to surrealism and to reggae and Rastafarism via Marley, I am thinking of dreaming as a practice undergirded by the political tension between reality and dreaming as well as the ecological and revolutionary world-making these anticolonial movements inspire. This dreaming requires, for example, that we heed Cooper’s critique of how consumer and popular culture cleanses Marley’s image to frame him “as the epitome of pacifist reggae consciousness” (*Sound Clash* 180). It requires us to remember songs like “Babylon System,” where Marley sings, “Babylon system is the vampire / Sucking the blood of the sufferahs / Building church and university / Deceiving the people continually” (Bob Marley and the Wailers). The anti-colonial dreaming practice I am talking about here utters, to again quote Cooper quoting Mark Fineman, “incendiary incantations” (*Sound Clash* 187) and is critical of institutional violence. Like surrealism, or Rastafarism’s utopic engagement with Africa through reggae, the revolutionary-surrealistic tone of dub poetry can be read, in Anthony Bogues’s terms, as “a *prophetic redemptive tradition* within the black radical political tradition” (20; emphasis added). In saying that dub poetry rides on movements that are critical of a dream world of complacency, movements that rejected the status quo politics of their time, I am saying that dub poetry drives dreams. Here, to return to Cooper’s thinking on orality, we see that dub dreaming has the “capacity for abstraction and subtlety of feeling and expression” at the same time that it “require[s] a de-privileging of abstraction” (*Noises* 82). Like the surrealists of André Breton’s famous first manifesto, dub poets “believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a *surreality*” (14; emphasis in original). In other words, dub poetry is fused with images of reality and dream. Through attending to dub’s conversations with other artistic movements, it becomes possible not just to situate dub poetry as part of the black radical tradition, but to situate this black radical tradition in turn as a tradition of dreaming. Within this tradition, dub poetry dreams into practice creative portals for the elaboration of an alternative world/view and dub poets, as social dreamers, engage with the dream of the not-yet, and, offer different lifeworlds within which black life happens, along with alternate ways of how to dream futures.

Thus, the dub form, informed by the dreaming dimension of a dub philosophy and poetics, instills radical hope and opens up space for us to imagine courageously instead of drifting through the motions of creaturely existence: dub poets and their work encourage us to approach dreaming as an active, cooperative, rigorous and generative process with cre-

ative output. As a process-based art that continuously moves forward as well as backward, dub poets and their work root black creativity in dialogic practices that show how dreaming together, to cite Sharon Sliwinski's work on dreams, "can serve to reanimate a world that has been flattened by dark times" (19). For Sliwinski, "[d]reams have a way of compelling us to speak, and it is this later gesture – the drive to disclose the experience to someone – that transforms dream-life into a political matter proper" (xiii). The activism and protests that critics continuously associate with dub poetry have a lot to teach us about the collective work of dreaming together.

How better to illustrate dub's worldmaking capacity for dreamwork than by turning to "Dreamer," a poem by the late dub dreamer Jean "Binta" Breeze? In "Dreamer," Breeze introduces readers/listeners to a woman "roun a rocky corner / by de sea / seat up / pon a drif wood / yuh can fine she / gazing cross de water / a stick / eena her han / trying to trace / a future / in the sun" (15). In 2018, this poem was used by "Poems on the Underground," a project by the London Underground rapid transit network, to commemorate Windrush Day in England. The woman in Breeze's poem invites us, and the wider audience riding the London Underground, those to whom this project brings poetry, to consider the kinds of dreams that sent so many people from the Caribbean to board the *Empire Windrush* and other vessels like it. The hundreds of thousands of Caribbean people (the Windrush generation) who responded to the call of the British Empire's labour crisis were also dreamers, gazing across the water to the optimism of a place where, they were invited to believe, the sun doesn't set.

Other dreams haunt this "inward-looking, musing, quiet, reflective, tender, delicate, [scene that] register[s] a complexity of position [and] feeling ... [as well as a] subtlety of approach," features that Victor Chang says "we cannot often expect dub poetry to have" (qtd. in Morris 39). Breeze teaches us that a dream is as much a vehicle as it is a "transport for the expression of difficult desires, ideas and conflicts" (Sliwinski xii). The title tells us that this woman dares to dream (is a dreamer) and desires "a future / in the sun." The sun is not, for example, referring to the tourism that we have come to associate with the Caribbean. Nor is this imaginative dreamwork of "gazing cross de water" akin to the escapism of British Romanticism, in which we see writers and poets secluding themselves from the problems of the world so as to enter the otherworldly realms of the imagination. In fact, the methods of dreaming that Breeze and other dub poets offer is less about a Romantic aesthetics of liberation exemplified by the "distanced imagination" (Lee 32); for dub poets, rather, dreaming involves mutual aid and requires us crossing not just imaginative distances but physical ones so as to be involved in artistic movements of their times and in community struggles on the local and global fronts. I am saying that in addition to the tradition of dreams in the French Caribbean surrealist movement, this art form also extends our understanding of dreamwork traditions in the Anglophone world, including British Romanticism. On the metaphor and concept of dreaming, dub poets turn against the Romantic tendencies around dreams and imaginations.

The invocation of “de sea” invites us to imagine its location – its routes and resources (“drif wood” and “stick”); its turbulent histories: who and what it carries, takes, gives; we’re able to comprehend how the tangible features of the seascape also invoke a more abstract dreamscape. What I mean is that “by de sea” alludes to Island life, where the sea surrounds and the “insular” horizon of life there invites dreams of elsewhere, of the unknown and the yet-to-be known.⁴ The preposition “by” in “by de sea” marks the shoreline, where, much like the sacred place of “de sea”, encounters of all sorts take place. In the sound portrait of the woman sitting “by de sea,” “pon a drif wood,” “gazing cross de water,” we can see-hear the Vodou deity Ezili of the Waters, that enigmatic mermaid spirit of femininity and sensuality, who travels through space and time with treasures of wisdom, inhabiting the bodies of black women along the way, providing agency to them.

Three agents of change, “de sea,” “de water,” and “the sun,” rub up together in Breeze’s “Dreamer.” These agents, with their elemental forces, transform a tree into “drif wood.” Breeze recodes this undervalued treasure of “de sea” into a valuable “seat” that holds the dreamer “up” in place as she dreams. At work in her recoding is the “techno-poetics” of dub (Chude-Sokei, *The Sound of Culture* 11). In this “drif wood,” Breeze urges us to note the echo of its other life: form. For example, what tree might this drif wood represent? And how might doing the work to learn about this tree be a form of activism against the ways that global economy is reshaping – i.e. endangering – the ecological world habitats of the Caribbean? If technology simply means the use of knowledge for creative and useful ends, then we can think of the sun (like the smoke of the ganja) as a technology that dries both the drif wood that the dreamer sits upon and the stick, which might also be a small drif wood, that she holds in her hand as some sort of charm or device to wave the future into being. This image of the dreamer with “a stick / eena han / trying to trace / a future” spells out the otherworldly space of dreaming at the same time that it foregrounds the necessary labour in dreaming. Given the elemental forces at work in this poem, the lines “trying to trace / a future” invites us to read “trying” not only in terms of labour (effort), as I just noted, but also in terms of law (risk, critique, and judgment). With this in mind, the word “fine” in “pon a drif wood / yuh can fine she” is not simply a homophony of “find,” directing us to the location of the dreamer; the dreamer, for one thing, is not lost since, from the opening of the poem, we know she is “roun a rocky corner / by de sea.” These words describe more than the specific geographical place of the “drif wood.” While this description evokes the backdrop against which the dreamer sits, with images of rocky shores, wave exposure, or rock types floating in our mind’s eyes, Breeze invites us to meditate on the delicate cost and labour of her dreaming. From this vantage point, to what kind of dream trace might Breeze be asking her audience, both in 1991 when the poem was released on her album *Tracks*, and now, as you are reading it, to attend? What might she be asking us to notice about dreams in terms of their costs, labour and risks? And, as a result, we need to return to that initial moment of the dreamer tracing a future so to reanimate the dream wedged in that mass migration of a generation that we now call the Windrush Generation. One way I try to return to that trace is to focus on “de drif wood.” While I know that drif wood can be used to mend boats, I turn to the sun for its heat and focus on a

different kind of repair: this stick, this possible drift wood washed ashore, waving back into the future, becomes firewood that the sun's heat will burn, and the smoke signal from it will foreshadow the fire of the dreamer as a new order of creation that the dreamer dreams. Repair, we see here, is not the domain of anti-colonial dreaming. After all, we see that the dreamer is neither disjointed nor estranged from the elemental forces in the poem; so, while we do not know the time of day that the dreamer traces a future in the sun, nor whether the future she traces in the sun is in the air or in the sand, we do know the sun has a cycle that can help us forecast future (seasonal) activities. Through drawing our attention to the atmospheric interactions between the air, de sea, the sand, and the sun, Breeze highlights the ensemble of elements the dreamer might be using to forecast the future. In highlighting the ecological and geologic aspects of Breeze's "Dreamer," the poem's natural history, I am foregrounding the technological tools that dub poets take up in their poems to reanimate a world that has been flattened by dark times in their efforts to transform dream-life into a political matter proper. Anticolonial dreaming, then, problematizes the very definition of dreaming. Breeze's dreamer emphasizes ways that dreaming is not just a night activity. We also dream when we are wide awake. Dreaming is not an individual activity. It is also an activity that is done collectively and at the cusp of consciousness and unconsciousness. Dub dreaming includes the process of collective visioning. To dream includes the performance (of the poem) and the utterance (of the poet). Dub dreaming problematizes these boundaries as well as the discursive limits that have been set up around dreaming by blurring and unpacking the boundaries between dream and reality.

The contributors to this special issue testify to dub poetry's possibilities as a method for dreaming. They show that dub poetry is not just about offering us a different dream of a different world of liberation. It also teaches us to dream differently by changing the very meaning of the verb, and, in so doing, contributors direct our attention to the many facets of dub poetry. The essays do not follow any existing pattern in dub poetry studies. They do not, for example, aspire to position dub poetry as an art form that transforms the world, although we can see in their analysis ways that the work dub poets do transform our understanding of the world. They avoid responding to criticism of dub poetry in totalizing, absolutist ways, ushering us to a radically different understanding of dub poetry. Klyde Broox's "Deja Voodoo: Literary Coup under the Influence of Dub" "is a 'performance essay' designed more for stage than page" (2). While the stage/page debate is not new in dub criticism, there is a vibrating transmission in his method (what he calls a "performative writing") that takes into account the complex performances of both orality and scribality, pushing us to think about dub poetry in the age of technological reproducibility (Benjamin). His refusal to disassociate the stage from the page, to think in dichotomies, underlines the influence of dread talk. Broox mobilizes the genre of the performance essay to foreground the art form's collaborative impulse as well as its propensity to transform itself constantly. Broox uses the unfinished event of performance as a way to interpellate the reader (performer) into the process of creation, thus inviting us to give new shape to his work. With performative writing, there is a need to listen where once there was only reading. There is however a danger in reading the "transcript" of this writing as a text. We miss the dexterity of the

writerly and speakerly writing that gives the poetics its self-reflexive gestures and its attendant performance practices.⁵ In this sense, dub poetry, as I argue elsewhere, is an unfinished project (Antwi 71), unfinished not only in the sense that it is ongoing (still in process) but also in the sense that it emerged because of a disruption in many structures. The audio version of Broox’s poem that can be heard on *JWIL*’s website shows ways that the movement of a dub poem does not offer a stable continuity – the poem’s beginnings, its endings, as well as its duration are undetermined, explaining its unfinishedness. It is unsurprising then that, for Broox, “[t]he dubpoetic text provides ‘*textimony*’” (3; emphasis in original). If questions of testimony are epistemological, ethical, legal and political in character, and if they raise intersubjective mediations, then Broox’s *textimony* encourages us to engage dub poetry as a literary phenomenon with layers of mediation and aesthetic relationships—of literature and performance, of textuality and subjectivity. Doing so situates the aesthetic frame as a medium for recording and documenting the transformation of events into texts.

Where contributors engage existing criticism by rereading dub poetry’s archive to offer illuminating methods of inquiry, they challenge us to think about the art form’s many relations and the depth of its poetic entanglements. Janet Neigh’s essay raises questions of politics and the ethics of poetic indebtedness by reading the features of dub poetry in interlocking relation with the poetic tradition of elegy in particular and of Caribbean poetry in general. Staging a dialogue between Michael Smith’s “Me Cyaan Believe It” and Kei Miller’s *Nearby Bushes*, she offers a subtle and nuanced reading that examines how Miller’s work dialogues with the performative and poetic techniques that are commonly associated with dub poets to “re-map local geographies” through a praxis she calls “a poetics of witnessing.” There is irony in Neigh affiliating Miller’s work to dub’s poetic experimentations, especially given Miller’s premature mourning of the life of the art form in “A Smaller Sound, A Lesser Fury,” an essay Neigh describes as “controversial.” One thing that Neigh’s methodology brings to our attention is that influences are not immediately legible, even to the person being influenced, emphasizing the need for approaches that are attuned to the heterogeneity of black diasporic artistic and other genealogies. She turns to Christina Sharpe to frame the art form as “wake work.” When Neigh puts pressure on the genre and history of dub poetry, she moves it, in her words, “off the stage and off the streets” into the bush. Rather than juxtapose bush stories of violence to street stories, Neigh lays these stories alongside one another and invites us into responsive practices of witnessing as well as deep, rhetorical listening. In listening, we hear that more than violence takes place in the space and time these bush stories narrate, and that in the name “nearby bushes” itself is an elegy that masks competing desires. She invites us to witness ways that Miller foregrounds the unflinching vibrancy of queer intimacy in the nearby bushes. And like Breeze’s dreamer, we are invited to witness the risks that the cruiser courts. Neigh involves us in a collective and connective process of mourning that reminds us to consider how, under the influence of dub, cultural elegy is at once about witnessing and surviving.

Isis Semaj-Hall reads Lee “Scratch” Perry, the recently deceased singer and producer who innovated the sound of dub and reggae music as well as pushed their boundaries,

as a dubber of dub poetry. Framed as such, Perry's innovative techniques, which crossed musical genres and influenced styles from hip-hop to post-punk, begin to resemble dub poetry's mutable techniques: a poetics that crosses and navigates the boundaries between music, dance, theatre and visual art. Asked about his innovative techniques, Perry says, "The bass is the brain and the drum is the heart." Continuing, he explains: "I listen to my body to find the beat. From there, it's just experimenting with the sounds of the animals in the ark" (Bulger). The structured experience by which Perry produces work might be understood as what I have called "dub phenomenology" (Antwi 72). With her invitation to read Perry as a "poetry upsetter," Semaj-Hall signals the agility of dub poetry's generic and historical boundaries. Evidence of this agility frames the beginning of her essay: "Perry's pasted, warped, and excavated materials that were once dismissed by the Black Ark's visitors as manifestations of his madness were commissioned as art and displayed in the Swiss Institute's New York gallery for eight weeks in 2019" (44). Not only is animating and reusing once-dismissed objects to create new art forms an insurrection, a common force of surrealism, so too is insurrection a quality of dub poetry: through reverbs and echoes, dub poets reuse their colonial education to refuse the colonizer's authoritative pronouncements on culture. If we can accept Keith Richards of the Rolling Stones calling Perry "the Salvador Dalí of music" (Bulger), then, under Semaj-Hall's tutelage, surely we can call Perry the Salvador Dalí of dub poetry.

Perry is not the only dub poet to have had his work exhibited in metropolitan art spaces. In "Dub Poetry's Global Impact, Forty Years On," A. D. McKenzie and Tobias Schlosser tell us that Linton Kwesi Johnson's work was part of an exhibition held in Paris's Musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration (National Museum of the History of Immigration) in 2019. Titled *Paris-Londres: Music Migrations (1962–1989)*, the exhibition "explored 'the close and complex relationship between migration, music, anti-racism and political activism'" (70). The question of how dub poetry has changed our understanding of art is still unfolding. In their contribution, McKenzie and Schlosser ask us to attend to the recordings of dub poetry. They do so by paying attention to the transnationalism of Linton Kwesi Johnson's career. In recalling the volume of recordings that make up Johnson's oeuvre, McKenzie and Schlosser invite us to return to the language of sound, not only for "an excavation of the material and energetic qualities of sound" (Henriques 197), but also for their historical and social echoes (memory). As Allen reminds us in the preface to *Women Do This Every Day*, "I have published extensively in the form of readings, performances and recordings" (9). McKenzie and Schlosser's contribution provides an important reminder of how actually listening to dub poetry recordings can facilitate our understanding of the ways dub poets understand and take up publications as forms of social practice. As a result of dub poetry's many emergent locations at different historical moments, no comprehensive account is possible without attending to these records; the textual archive is hardly the singular holder of truth. Orienting our studies to these audio and audiovisual recording archives results in a provocative rethinking of dub poetry's historiography and hermeneutics, one that should permanently undo the tendency that privileges the printed life of this unfinished art form.

In “Dub Theatre and Storytelling: A Conversation with ahdri zhina mandiola (in Eight Movements),” Ronald Cummings and Nalini Mohabir remind us of the important innovation of dub theatre, and how this underexamined practice has a lot to teach us about the “possibilities of dub in relation to the question of performance” (85). The performance possibilities that rest in dub find echoes in McKenzie and Schlosser’s call to attend to dub’s audio and audiovisual recording archives. Their conversation, modelled around the conceptual backdrop of operatic movements, uses the interview form to stage the relational practice of the opera form. Cummings and Mohabir’s introductory note, for example, takes the form of an operatic overture, positioning the interviewers as the orchestra, preparing the readers (or audience) for what is to come, and foreshadowing the plot (movements) and mood of the interview (opera). When we think of it as an extended performance art work that blends physical and dance theatre, dub theatre not only makes creative use of the medium of dub poetry, it also amplifies dub poetry’s practice of blending artistic traditions. mandiola describes her art as coming “from different corners of the diaspora” (92) and, given that she identifies the 1980s and 1990s in North America as part of her formation, it is unsurprising that, in all her works, she engages many different kinds of experimental and improvisational music from the black diaspora, including hip-hop and RnB as well as reggae, situating dub in a transnational black sonic world. In *Who Knew Grannie: a dub aria*, where mandiola overlays the felt state of each movement by combining the sounds that the symphony orchestra and the reggae band make together, she expands this transnational black sonic world by dubbing in other musical genealogies.

We round out the issue with Natalie Wall’s “Catching Bullets with Her Ass: Matrilineality and the Canadian Dub Poetry Tradition in the work of d’bi.young anitafrika,” an essay that invites us to attend to the distinctiveness of dub poetry in the Caribbean diaspora when compared to the masculinist bent of Jamaican dub, while building on Cummings and Mohabir’s thinking about performance and the possibilities of adapting dub to the stage. Working with anitafrika’s monodrama *blood.claat*, Wall zooms in on the play’s rewriting of the slackness-civility debate by focusing on the “matrilineal inheritances” that frame and shape the feminist practices and queer dimensions of anitafrika’s body of work. In an essay that focuses on what he calls “women’s dub traditions” in Toronto, traditions that “challenged and queered Canadian and Caribbean theatrical and performance forms,” Ric Knowles notes how anitafrika contributes to the automythobiographical nature of mandiola’s dub theatre (78). He notices that “anitafrika re-adapts mandiola’s ‘automythobiographical’ to ‘biomyth monodrama,’ a subtitle that has replaced ‘dub theatre’ for all of her recent plays [The Sankofa Trilogy]” (92). What is evident is the eco-system within which dub poets work. Wall’s and Cummings and Mohabir’s contributions, then, return us to an important feature of dub poetry: a reminder that many of its earlier architects were trained in the Jamaica School of Drama. As practitioners with commitments to queer stories and storytelling, mandiola and anitafrika invite us to queer the narratives that circulate in the historiography of dub poetry. We must note the weight in their challenge. Because the public face of the conversation between the movements I map out above focus on the leadership of men, it is important to hear mandiola and anitafrika’s call for us to queer dub historiography as them

also asking us to queer the historiography of these black transnational movements.

Together, the essays in this special issue engage in an archeological project to help us see and grapple with the heterogeneity and multiplicity of this art form. By archeology, I do not mean to suggest that the contributors do not have excitingly new things to say about dub. What I mean to say is that I know, à la Michel Foucault, that

[a]rcheology is not in search of inventions; and it remains unmoved at the moment (*a very moving one, I admit*) when for the first time someone was sure of some truth; it does not try to restore the light of those joyful mornings. But neither is it concerned with the average phenomena of opinion, with the dull grey of what everyone at a particular period might repeat. What it seeks . . . is not to draw up a list of founding saints; it is to uncover the regularity of a discursive practice. (144; emphasis in original)

The contributors to this special issue uncover the regular practice of our criticism; they expand the discursive borders of this art form and critique ideas that have come to understand it as a movement of the past, thereby opening up the field for exciting research. By engaging dub poetry in the form of dub theatre, monodrama, audiotextual and audiovisual recordings, exhibitions, the contributors move this art form into spaces outside of its original contexts. In this displacement, I am reminded of the reproducibility and the aesthetic aura of an art work that Walter Benjamin talks about in “The Work of Art in the Age of its Mechanical Reproduction.” There is not enough space for me here to continue thinking through ways dub poetry, as a cultural and ideological reproductive technology, not only alters our mediums of perception but also our perceptions of literary technologies. With Breeze’s dreamer as an example, I want to note its reproducibility, its continual condition of possibility, and as Benjamin does in his essay, note that the change in modes of production leads to transformation in modes of cultural production, and this change transforms our perception of the world. Benjamin writes: “that which withers in the age of mechanical reproducibility is the aura of the work of art” (221). From this, we have come to understand that the “aura” of the work recedes when it is technologically reproduced. And yet, what Benjamin teaches us about aura, as well as what the contributors in this special issue teach us about the aura of dub poetry, is “the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be” (222). Aura, a form of fetish, obscures the kinds of development we are seeing in dub poetry. For Benjamin, works of art are made to be reproduced: “To an ever greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility” (224). The question of reproduction, then, is also a question of persistence and not an end of aura/era.

The contributors show us ways that dub poetry is up for play. The distinct but inter-related claims of the essays reanimate the scholarship of dub poetry not simply by returning us to the archives to look again; they ask us to reconsider works we have excluded from the dub poetry archives, including asking, as Neigh’s work on Kei Miller does, what else counts as dub poetry? In the end, the contributors foreground the variety of imaginative

ways that dub poetry transforms and revises itself to enable new forms to emerge, moving us beyond the assessment of dub poetry as a singular project of black resistant movement to an appreciation for its disalignment and disagreement. The contributors remind us dub poetry is an art form that asks us to listen as closely as we can to the moments in which we live because listeners, they underscore, develop the facilities to change. In this way, these essays give us a searchlight, activating our senses to direct our attention to what has always been there, reassuring us about the question of dub poetry's futurity, of its "tomorrow."

We close the pages of this issue with five book reviews. Safiya Sinclair's debut collection of poetry, *Cannibal* (2016), is reviewed by Lauren K. Alleyne. Ingrid Persaud's novel *Love after Love* (2020) is reviewed by Bastien Bomans. Two critical monographs, both on memories, are also discussed. Stephanie Pocock Boeninger's *Literary Drowning: Postcolonial Memory in Irish and Caribbean Writing* (2020) is reviewed by Ellen Howley, and Njelle Hamilton's *Phonographic Memories: Popular Music and the Contemporary Caribbean Novel* (2019) is reviewed by Dadland Maye. Emily Taylor's assessment of Jacqueline Bishop's *The Gymnast and Other Positions* (2015) closes the issue.

While the essays for this special issue were already collected by the time the news of Jean "Binta" Breeze's and Lee Scratch Perry's respective passing arrived, you will notice in this issue that their voices are present, and, as we know, the dead are with us. This is evidenced by the way the young Michael Smith is not forgotten; his contribution to dub poetry is so deep that he is constantly referenced in these articles. These dub innovators all keep us company. I look forward to their continuous guidance. I end my introduction by acknowledging the labour that so many people have done to bring this special issue into your hands. First, I want to thank Evelyn O'Callaghan, the recently retired *JWIL* editor in chief, and Lisa Outar and Michael A. Bucknor, two senior editors of the editorial committee, who, from the beginning of this special issue, enthusiastically welcomed me and the topic with interest, assistance and support. I particularly want to thank Michael A. Bucknor, who worked closely with me to usher this special issue into the assembly of essays you have in front of you. Doing this work during a global pandemic has been demanding for a host of reasons and his steady care and persistence to see this issue through to the end attest to his leadership and commitment to the field. I want to thank Antonia MacDonald, the book reviews editor, for ushering in these wonderful reviews. I want to acknowledge the work of the copy editor, Carla DeSantis, and the graphic designer, Ayrid Chandler, for their careful attention to details. I also want to acknowledge the visual artists whose works accompany the articles in this special issue and a special thank you to Bernard Hoyes whose work graces the cover of the issue. And then there is the invisible labour of the peer reviewers: to all of you, thank you for accepting my invitation to take on yet another work in a moment when we are already stretched thin. I am in your debt. Last but certainly not the least, I want to thank all the contributors in this special issue for the extraordinary work you have each done to help us dream into dub poetry another life.

Notes

- ¹ Here I depart from Michael Richardson's well-researched collection, *Refusal of the Shadows: Surrealism and the Caribbean*, which foregrounds French-Caribbean surrealism's connections with André Breton, unlike Césaire who shows how the French Caribbean surrealists were in conversation with black movements like the Black Renaissance. While I have learned a lot from Richardson's edited collection, one thing that troubles me is the way the essays center Breton, whitening the story of Caribbean surrealism.
- ² I cite Oku Onuora's vernacular of dub poetry not simply to associate the linguistic innovation in dub poetry to the multivocality of Rasta (dread talk (Pollard), but also to emphasize ways that dread talk expresses Rastafarians' heightened consciousness through the spoken word.
- ³ In fact, many of the transnational black-on-black resistant movements that inform dub poetry (Négritude, the Harlem Renaissance, French Caribbean surrealism) all rely on this dream of returning to Africa; Chude-Sokei points out that these movements positioned Africa "as a known quantity or knowable object," arguing that this idea about the continent "would all feed into roots reggae sound, ideology, and politics" ("When Echoes Return" 77).
- ⁴ In "Whose Caribbean?* An Allegory, in Part," a story about the child liberated from human, gender and sexual markings, Thomas Glave represents the Caribbean, particularly Jamaica, as "a region of dreamers" (671). Olive Senior's "Hurricane, 1951" uses the ocean as a site of dreaming to connect with family (a boy left behind in Jamaica and a mother in England) after the 1951 hurricane forces a dreaming of a better life in Windrush England. Perhaps the Olive Senior poem is too critical of empire to have been placed in the London Underground.
- ⁵ An audio version of this essay can thus be found on *JWIL's* website and as part of this issue.

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