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Agitation

Is it not, then, the case that the hunchback suggests the appearance of a person who holds himself badly? His back seems to have contracted an ugly stoop. By a kind of physical obstinacy, by rigidity, in a word, it persists in the habit it has contracted. Try to see with your eyes alone. Avoid reflection, and above all, do not reason. Abandon all your prepossessions; seek to recapture a fresh, direct and primate impression. The vision you will reacquire will be one of this kind. You will have before you a man bent on cultivating a certain rigid attitude whose body, if one may use the expression, is one vast grin.

—Henri Bergson, *Laughter*

What acts, movements, gestures does an embodied archive of political agitation comprise? What are the forms and modes of embodiment that can be counted? What might it mean to focus on the embodiment of agitation as a form of living presence (and without prioritizing moral judgment as to its provenance or intention), rather than on the strategies used to kill it? These are admittedly abstract and enormous questions, but I wish to sketch out a broad range of imaginative possibility. Henri Bergson's musings about the disabled embodiment of a "hunchback," in his book *Laughter*, at first seem to have little in common with

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these questions, and yet they propose an intriguing, and demanding, theatrical set of conditions about durability, disabled appearance, and response—in particular, habitual or sedimented “contraction,” “rigid attitude,” “physical obstinacy,” and, in this case, the primally, unreflectedly, comic.

Wildness and agitation are something like kissing cousins. Wildness, for instance, can be associated with an excess of emotion (“an agitation of the soul”), which can itself be counterposed to notions of cultivation (Bergson’s gesturally controlled comic). At the same time, some versions of agitation have the appearance of gestural repetition, suggesting to some observers the machinic over the natural. The term *agitation* has broad use and a broad range of value, crossing domains such as medical pharmacology, securitized educational and child developmental spheres, and political movements, where it is seen as a fundament of revolution. Agitation appears regularly in dramatic, individualized stories of contemporary drug scourges in the United States and elsewhere, which may not be unrelated to the fervor for cultures of resistive contamination seen in contemporary zombie shows.¹ Most importantly, however, by its simplest movement definition, it is simply a part of everyday movement for a diverse number of people.

Does the term’s nonmetaphorical reach across pharmacology and political movements signal a relation other than homonymy? I believe there are connections, in practice. The focus I develop in these pages moves from a brief assessment of the nominative and conceptual hold that agitation has in contemporary American/US life to an etymology, followed by reflections on agitation’s role in contemporary security discourses broadly construed (and they are indeed broadly implemented). Throughout my argument runs a justified abandonment of body-mind divisions such that it is, of course, legitimate to discuss both interior and exterior, incidental and historical, neurochemical incitements within and across bodies. The disciplinary encounter staged here could be described as ranging between gesture studies, critical race theory, medical humanities, and disability studies. I stage this modestly, however, as I come at gesture studies from a combination of linguistics and animacy scholarship, rather than dance or theater and performance studies. This is necessarily a glancing and stubbornly (despite my efforts) ambiguous piece that cannot do full justice—bibliographic, critical, or even textual—to the many sites it visits. This glancing is partly my failing of maximal synthesis as a scholar and is also a feature of an attempt to carve a path across a number of traceable critical domains. It bears the marks of my own intellectual agitations, perhaps.

The Racial-Disabled Theater of Security

In medical sciences, *agitation* is broadly operative in manuals of toxicology, psychiatry, and pharmaceutical reference. In such contexts, the term commonly refers to psychomotor or neuromuscular movement (“excessive motor activity associated with a feeling of inner tension,” whether or not “influenced by external stimuli” [American Psychiatric Association 2013: 827]) or conditions or states; one form of agitation, muscular spasms, can result from either “mental disturbance” or nerve stimulation. The term also arises in the discussion of various stimulatory substances, and in pharmaceutical reference it can be a sign that a drug is not well tolerated. Its mention is opposed to the calmer patterns resulting from another set of drugs, such as sedatives.

In the most general sense, agitation has been something to treat or suppress from the point of view of a system of control—with the exception of those transitional exacerbations that may be anticipated in medical treatment. This can be problematic or nonproblematic, depending on the form of assessment. The medical industry creatively generates its own continuation, a constitutive problem receiving much due criticism, and yet it can sometimes offer genuine relief: in some therapeutic use, for instance, muscle relaxants may be prescribed to alleviate the constant muscle tension characteristic of many forms of cerebral palsy. In other medical foci, the gendered pathology of hysteria was defined symptomatically in terms of agitation of mind and body, and both condition and symptom were subject to correction. Psychiatric survivor and scholar Erick Fabris has written of a form of mandated chemical restraint (using largely sedating and constraining substances like haloperidol, used to treat diverse conditions such as psychosis and Tourette’s syndrome) of psychiatric outpatients in an era of post-1950s deinstitutionalization in neoliberalizing North America. Chemical restraint is intended to suppress agitation, which Fabris (2011: 40) reads as a pointer to the stereotype of the “aggressive” patient—yet, within this privatized, distributed institution, there is no more than a “hazy line that separates agitation from illness and drugging from treatment.”

While the widespread medicalization of cultural fields extends the meaning of *patient*, the discourses of security also expand the potential gestural field for what is called aggression. Indeed, apparently aggressive actions are those most obviously tied to the case for violent suppression, to the point of intentional killing, by state or security agents—most palpable today is the continuing sequence of viewable black deaths at the hands of police and repetitive police defenses narrating their perceptions of dangerous black

movement, in an era in which social media and readily available cameras have yielded a novel sense of immediacy, even if the deaths have been ongoing. We can note a fluid and overlapping, sometimes interdependent, interplay between what Fabris (2011) calls “chemical incarceration” and state murder of people of color and those with mental illness.

Looking across another cultural domain that has undergone significant medicalization, childhood, one finds that agitation is also used to describe the states of youth who evince disciplinary disturbance in schools or who are disruptive at home. In one simplified account of the racial orders of education, where children of color (who have not been diagnosed with disability) show agitation, responses align with the punishment of an intending perpetrator, and where white children evince agitation, responses open more generously toward the diagnostic: the assignment of a state of being “moved by” (see below) of a pathological agent called autism.²

Last but not least, *agitation* has a history as a political term, referring to activity opposing dominant forces and supporting change or to the collective shaping of dissent; for instance, Russian revolutionaries led by Vladimir Lenin considered “agitation” a key focal and inciting revolutionary tactic, to operate in partnership with propaganda. In communication theory, agitation has been opposed to control, such that one can analyze a rhetoric of the ongoing dance between politically resistive, system-changing agitation and repressive acts by those holding political power. However, agitation has not always been used according to surface expectation; one can see hints of the fascist exploitation of agitation strategies in the contemporary United States, where the Trump administration has been using the device of agitation to affect the masses.

If excessive motor activity associated with inner tension does not immediately correlate to the incitement to revolutionary action, there is nevertheless within both a sense of a relationship between action and actional potential. What links these approaches and subsumes potential, and which I explore below, is a question of gesture: gesture defined as movement that doubles as articulatory animation, though without necessary attachments to *clear* evidence of (for instance, nondisabled) human intention or agency—indeed, articulation itself includes all of the senses of expression, growth, and arrangement. This definition may seem to oppose the expressive exercise of political agency that is understood as characteristic of some forms of conscious agitation. But the diversity of many gestural ways of embodied living makes such an opening necessary. What strikes me as a critical mechanism for security’s theater is the line between intention and nonintention, respon-

sibility and nonresponsibility. In the theater of security, the uncertain *expectation* that a gesture be expressive (do security agents look for expression or for behavior?) is what stages this uncertainty, sometimes dramatically. Following critiques of humanist modes of inquiry, I thus choose here to consider gesture as both more and less than the simplest ideal of human agency. I'm interested in this question not because I wish centrally to reassert the presence of humanness or agency in certain scenes but because I wish to be able to point out the complicity of dubious agency in the formulations of racist securitization. The determinacy of life and death in the realm of animacy is very much conditioned by other factors. Who in a given instance is understood as being animated, or deanimated, or animated by disability or disabled intoxication, and how? What will be done with that animation?

Though etymological compendiums don't have all the explanatory powers that they have occasionally been accorded in humanities scholarship, the historical span they record can still be instructive. For instance, in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2017) the first definition for *gesture* (n.), etymologically derived from Latin nominalized *gerere*, "to carry," is "manner of carrying the body; bearing, carriage, deportment," implying an agent with physical control. *Agitation*, however, has a mixed etymology of activity/passivity that includes both Middle French ("state or condition of being moved to and fro, public disturbance or unrest, action of shaking") and classical Latin ("violent moving, brandishing, shaking, disturbance, movement, practice or exercise, mental activity"). Each etymological contribution alone suggests that agitation is only the latest concretization of an even longer conceptual tangle between now-distant entities such as mental activity and violent moving or shaking and public unrest. By comparison, consider Adriana Cavarero's (2008: 4–5) tracing of *terror* to the Latin root *ter-*, "trembling," and to a verb relating to fear as a physical state. In Cavarero's analysis, the trembling movements as well as the flight attributed to fear are both etymologically linked to modern-day "terror." There is an "instinctual mobility associated with the ambit of terror" (5) that not only replicates the etymological ambiguity of action for *agitation* but also suggests its own modulating temporal scope.

My ongoing interest in animacy requires a careful look at such unsurprisingly blurred agencies to ask about *assignations* of humanity, agency, that cluster around certain human or inhuman entities such that only some, for instance, seem to be afforded a "theory of mind." Of course, simply by juxtaposing agitation and gesture, I am aware of the possibility for (hopefully productive) confusion. The question of uncertainly sourced agitation interrupts the question of agentive gesture.

Why take note of this? I am seeing a consolidation of security and medicalizing discourses around the racialization of disability and the disabling of race (two things ever materially entangled) that end up staging, animating as it were, something like agitation, in ways that simultaneously *deny* and *sublimate* its own history as linked to resistance or chemical exposure (or both), while failing to acknowledge the history of performance and gesture and indeed embodiment as one of undeniable and irreducible experiment constantly crossing the shifting lines of ability, debility, and disability. I have found it useful to think with the idea of racialized “ability” tuning—a form of dis/ability- or difference-soaked embodiment or a kind of gestural containment to which all are subject and whose entrainments can be biopolitically managed. Within this scenario, biochemistry and its agencies can be counted as active on the scene; debilities and their agencies can also be counted as actively on the scene. We might condition resistive agency simply as an immanent feature of Foucauldian power: where there is power, there is agitation. Regardless of the chosen analytic, there are specific dimensions deserving of further discussion, such as ways to locate arguably less expressive forms of gestural resistance and to revive discourses that allow for the participation of chemical histories of environmental injustice in a scene of an apparently different kind of violence.

Bergson’s Laughter

In the present essay’s consideration of the racial-disabled theater of security, I find Bergson’s treatment a fitting occasion to ask further questions.³ What becomes of the theatrical nonstage or semistage; the failures of legibility of the comic; the persistence of racialized-abled-classed-gendered bodies who are too negligently characterized by a “deep-seated recalcitrance of matter” (Bergson [1899] 1911: 13); or the implicit felicities that make successful Bergson’s form of “comic [encountered] readily enough in everyday life” (33)? Here lies a range of possible discussion about the performative objecthood of black and other nonwhite bodies, richly discussed by Saidiya Hartman and currently being imagined in a range of ways in the work of Tavia Nyong’o, Uri McMillan, Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, Jian Chen, Juana María Rodríguez, Eunjung Kim, and others. Using the figure of the avatar to read black women’s deployments of self-objecthood, McMillan (2016) identifies the explicit presence of disability in a number of gestures and “prosthetic” objects such as poultices that indexed the *white* avatar of a woman named Ellen Craft during her escape from slavery. McMillan’s analysis pointedly

announces disability and, in so doing, implicitly names the bifurcation in the structural privileging of disability over debility that in its simpler versions mirrors a racial divide, one a flag toward consideration and acknowledgment, much like what Tobin Siebers (2008: 96–116) describes as “disability masquerade,” and the other a flag toward the biopolitical zone of vital abandonment. But what McMillan makes additionally clear is the whiteness of this symbolic potency, its power to cultivate concerted actions of civil society that enable rather than curtail passing (through, by, or, in addition, as) and perhaps also fugitivity.

In *Laughter*, Bergson ([1899] 1911) identifies the participation of inhuman and human in the sharp affectivity of an apparent lapse of the agentive, yielding to the mechanical, to the rigid, to the matter within (and thus enabling comic reception); but, to depart from the proper scope of his work and the craft he attributes to the comic performance, we know that that point of affective intensity at the gap of agency does not yield only laughter. As suggested earlier, the scripts for gestural conduct are, and have been, racialized. I’m interested in how race, disability, and performance are made to work together in the everyday; I find this concert to be in itself troublingly generative. This is the unmarked everywhere of disability, disablement, debility, and occasional impairment, this contemporary situation in which so many people are, if not categorically disabled, then in intimately tuned relationships with chemicals, exogenous or endogenous ones, whose management in the body can be temporarily altering and temporarily impairing or disabling—but of these people, some number are further exposed to destruction not because of but in conjunction with them. I emphasize “in conjunction with,” because this is not a question of causality. The pervasiveness of these chemical encounters presents other gaps to explore that represent something of a departure from the virtuosically agentive performance—if we were to consider the possible legacy of the Middle French etymological contributor to *agitation*, “being moved.”

I return to Bergson’s opening quotation to examine the logic of his exemplar more closely. This comic scene, whose baldness depends on a “primate” lack of language or cognition (only the visual register is allowed—“above all, do not reason”), relies on the apprehension of disability—the hunchback. It is a particular form of comedy, since not only does it rely on a relationship of the spectacle, but its reactivity borrows on the structure of othering (one can see traces of Raymond Williams’s [1976: 49–54] survey of intentional and extensional meanings of “culture” as drawing on “cultivation” and “civilization”). The function of removing cognition is to de- and

re-temporalize the form before the observer. From “His back seems to have contracted an ugly stoop . . . it persists in the habit it has contracted” one moves to “You will have before you a man bent on cultivating a certain rigid attitude.” The consolidation of sedimented time, with gradual effects on the body, to a moment where that sedimented attitude is presented *as* presentist attitude, transfers the articulation as growth to the articulation as expression and, in so doing, remaps (perceived) time. This telling may be too constrained for Bergson’s purposes; as Rebecca Schneider (2011: 90) observes of the striking of a pose within the flow of time: “A pose is a posture, a stance, struck in reiterative gesture often signifying precedent. . . . The pose articulates an interval, and so, in Henri Bergson’s sense, is given to multiple and simultaneous time(s).” Yet a consideration of the temporalities of disability invoked here, rather than an invocation simply of the machinic, puts an interesting pressure on the labilities of time in the reception of this moment.

Correlatively, the man’s body becomes another attitude altogether, the prescriptive attitude of the observer: “one vast grin.” And in cognition’s absence, the agency of the back and its habitual contraction has become the ugly willfulness of the man. Bergson suggests that the grinning charge of affect, temporalized and perhaps intensified, becomes transferable, sharable, or blurred, between observed and observer: a formal kind of *sympathy*. Furthermore, the attribution of disability, understood templatically as an accreted condition of *nonagency*, becomes inchoate: the audience, the judge, may no longer have to be seen as reactively laughing at the disabled man, even if one had to understand the idea of the disabled man in order to laugh. The stooped man alone, the comic, is responsible for making a mockery of the nonagency of the disabled, the fall, and sympathy runs between the comic and the audience, but not the hunchback.

What if the reflexive laughing were instead a reflexive act of condemnation?

By way of demonstration of the consolidation or attenuation of difference (not equivalence), consider three different scenes. The first asks of the reader an extended time in which to imagine the “reflex.” White male Brock Turner, in Stanford, California, was witnessed raping an unconscious woman in January 2015. He turned out to be drunk. One year later at trial, he was given a light sentence precisely because, to quote Judge Aaron Persky (quoted in Levin 2016), “it’s not an excuse but his intoxication is a factor that, when trying to assess moral culpability in this situation, is mitigating. There is less moral culpability attached to the defendant who is legally intoxicated.” The legal definition of intoxication served as exculpatory in Turner’s case:

Turner was so moved by intoxication, and the result was a relative evacuation of responsibility. The judge could not condemn, but laughing might have been more possible: Turner and his actions had effectively made a mockery of durative intoxication, perhaps even of cognitive disability, but/and in the theater of security he was not (so) responsible. If the judge were to have scanned the possibilities of disability, he would have found no comparator.

Korryn Gaines, a Maryland resident and a young black woman, filed a lawsuit in 2012 against two Baltimore landlords, alleging that the apartments they had rented her had “‘a sea of lead,’ which contributed to ‘neurodevelopmental disabilities or injuries’” (Linderman 2016); unlike in many lead toxicity claims on behalf of vulnerable children, she was an adult justifying her claim to vulnerability, suggesting that she had a high level of expertise about lead toxicity and exercised her agency in assigning responsibility for environmental harm. Gaines connected her claim to her diagnosis of neurocognitive impairment and her history of agitation and mood swings. Four years later, on August 1, 2016, in Randallstown, Maryland, Gaines was shot and killed inside her apartment by police after hours of standoff, with guns pointed from both sides. While the drama of the case focused on her own provocative use of firearms, her killing by police, and her status as a mother, the existence of the lawsuit filed four years earlier suggests that she had a much longer history of consciously embodied living as someone who understood herself as having been significantly affected by lead exposure. Unlike some intoxications, this chemical modulation was clearly one she had not desired and, by pursuing it in the juridical domain, had attempted to remedy. Here is a history of durative intoxication that, rather than working as a kind of attenuator of responsibility, functioned as aggressive debility.

In counterpoint to these stories of agitation is what at first appears to be the seeming gestural *impossibility* of that of a “sleeping race,” Asian Americans. Their images benefit both from a presumptive automaticity (thanks to the legacy of early alien laws and Third World orders of labor) that suggests the deprivation of an alert presence and from a superficially expressive “sleepiness,” an immigrant stupor, as has been claimed of and by many women of East Asian descent who sought “Asian eye surgery.”⁴ Besides subterfuge, this persona does not beget securitized violence in the same ways. I believe that such an imagination underlies the reaction of surprise toward Asian-engendered gun violence, such as occurred at Virginia Tech (Seung-Hui Cho) and in Isla Vista, near the University of California, Santa Barbara, campus (Elliot Rodger) by men of East Asian descent, and the desire to “automatize” their subjectivity by way of attempting to ascertain a history of

autism—a mode of being that has been not only highly medicalized but also long haunted by pathologizations referring to inhumanity, automaticity, and lack.

Gestural Wrongs

An era of chemical experimentation, which is the stuff of medicine, consumer culture, built environments, and industrial commodity policy, is equally an era of bodily experimentation. In a gestural world already conditioned by unpredictability, what bodies will be made to pay doubly for that experimentation? And in these contexts, what becomes of “unruly,” “unrest”-ful conduct, bodily agitation? I want to take agitation seriously, in other words, not only as an ensemble of gestural cultures of nondisabled expression or choreographed resistance but also as the movement vocabularies of people living with diverse bodily experience, as well as with bodily intolerances—actively collapsing the apparently segregated domains that agitation has come to occupy, though not under the sign of any one of them.

This is a broad sweep, but I find it useful to think with an open sense of what might be defined as “bodily intolerance,” especially as I wish to suspend valuation or judgment or categorization. Consider that the expression “There is only so much you can take” could refer equally to the forced tolerance of environmentally inequitable ingestion and to the forced embodiment of docility, noninsurgency. And therefore it is relevant to consider what Jonathan Metzl (2010) describes in *The Protest Psychosis*, on a mid-twentieth-century clinic in Ionia, Michigan: that certain black patients’ “agitations” were motivated not so much by illness but by civil rights—that a new type of schizophrenia that interested white Michigan psychiatrists at the clinic was a performance of an idea of black pathology, part of a pattern of an attachment of African American bodies to specific nominal pathologies (this medicalized history ran wide, as Metzl demonstrates, noting that advertisements for the antipsychotic sedative Thorazine in the 1970s referred to Africanized figurations of the unruly “primitive”). We learn from Alondra Nelson (2013) how the Black Panthers actively contested the growing “biologization of violence,” the entrapments of medicalized pathology.

From another angle, Darieck Scott (2010) brilliantly explores in Frantz Fanon a metaphor that repeats throughout Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth* ([1961] 2004): that of “muscular tension” felt by Algerian colonial subjects living under conditions of colonial domination, a tension that engenders resistive value. Through the analysis, Scott (2010: 64) insists on tension’s

purely metaphoric value for Fanon as a psychic element, pointing in spite of itself to “powers in the midst of debility.” Scott writes, “Muscle tension is the state of flexure that has the appearance of movement but is in substance barely moving and static, in a state of attenuated atrophy” (66). Asking questions of embodiment that Scott precisely does not ask, I do wonder about the link between tension and agitation, one as the condition for the other, or where tension is the condition shared between a sedimented rigidity and the movement that is then dubbed insurgency.

To think further about the kinds of invisibilized and corporeal debility introjected by certain bodies in a time of environmentally disproportionate harm, what might it mean to think about these forms of chemical being together, so that pollution is rendered not simply a pan-species threat but a specific one decried by environmental justice, working in conjunction with existing structures that serve to intensify or double that harm (slow plus structural violence)? Is it to further, or rather acknowledge, the biologization of violence once we consider civil rights or anticolonial agitation, “muscle tension,” as itself more than metaphor, as biochemical process? Here I don’t want to supplant former forms of analysis with, or reject them for, what has been called “the chemical turn,” for there is no point in collapsing all social phenomena to a monolithic plane of explanation.

In the contemporary animation of security, there seem to be two modes of inhumanism. The first works along the lines of ability’s consolidation with agency, intoxication, the workings of an inhuman chemical inside of or through you, Bergson’s mechanical encrusted upon the living; the second, raciality, runs through the first mode, but also contributes to delineated gestural economies. These work together such that there exist, on the one hand, a category of the gestural “mundanity of whites” (or, to refer to Bergson’s comic, a kind of white slapstick broadly construed, without durative effect), which bears a history of the autonomic, the mechanical, the suprasession of human agency, and, on the other hand, the gestural “monstrosity of others,” which bears its own history of the autonomic, the mechanical, and the absence of human agency. I contend that these bifurcations of agitative motion feed into contemporary security states in ways that, given their histories, are unsurprising (both to historians of gesture, perhaps, and to communities and individuals forced to engage in lifelong gestural entrainment).

The systemic encoding and legitimation of murder by police is made most stark given the standard police injunction “Don’t move” (understood in movies, perhaps no less accurately, as “Freeze”), such that movement itself becomes an act of resistance or aggression. To some observers, the

accusations of aggression after the fact only legitimate a preexisting judgment of racial insurgency (especially if the ordinary histories of police forces as slave patrols have a legacy). Consider the case of Keith Lamont Scott, who had a motorcycle accident in 2016 and suffered a traumatic brain injury (TBI). He was killed by police in his car in front of his wife, who was on the scene and called out to police that he had a “TBI” and had just taken his medicine; she later stated that she knew he was “sitting there, looking forward. . . . He’s confused” (CBS News 2016). What is this, if not at least partially about gestural wrongs that violate rules of racial attunement? Security discourses run deep and wide, and such is their holistic threat; gestural improprieties can occur anywhere and at any time. Khairuldeen Makhzoomi, an Iranian student who had attended a United Nations meeting, was removed from a Southwest Airlines flight for speaking to his uncle in Arabic on a cell phone call while waiting for the plane to depart. During the conversation, he said that he hoped, “inshallah [God willing],” to be able to return for another meeting. According to a flight staff member of Middle Eastern descent who scolded him for speaking Arabic on a plane, he had essentially committed a gestural wrong.

The tracks of state guidance, abandonment, entitlement, and criminalization that have been described as “pipelines”—from school to prison (the most cited), but also to class elite, to technocracy, to death, to gendered service, and they are multiple—are resilient. As these pipelines are disentangled from the trajectories they feed, within these pipelines we must be alert to the possibilities of being disabled, being crip—because we also know how disability is attached, sometimes as a central mechanism of racism and sometimes as a result of such racism, and furthermore how this latter disability is, rather than acknowledged, made strangely imperceptible by a strikingly narrow framework of recognition and entitlement and by a broad framework of expulsion and what we could call “environmentalization,” which collapses people and environments such that health, on the one hand, or malignancy, on the other, becomes a fixed feature of a neighborhood and the people who populate it. That is why I feel suspicious of what is the desired endpoint of the rehabilitation at work, or attempting to work, in Flint, Michigan, and I cannot fail to be struck by the relevance to activists of the chemical materiality of the pipelines in Flint and in Standing Rock.

In my last case, Charles Kinsey, a therapist, was treating an individual diagnosed with autism, named Arnaldo Rios. In Miami, on July 18, 2016, Rios had attracted the attention of someone, who then alerted the police, and when they arrived, Rios kept rocking and moved “agitatedly,” while Kinsey

attempted to calm the situation, explaining that he was a therapist. It was Kinsey who was shot in the leg by police and survived. The police had been notified of a dangerous person carrying a gun (Rios had been carrying a toy car). Kinsey held his hands up over his head and lay down on the ground. The police officer shot him anyway and later claimed that it was an accident, saying that he actually intended to shoot Rios.

If this was a gestural wrong that violated rules of racial attunement, whose was it? Should we be asking questions about racial scripts here as well? At what point does physical agitation, racially improper gestural conduct, require questioning, and when might it so easily change hands in a police officer's own gestural imagination, as it magically did perhaps in the case involving Kinsey and Rios? When does time consolidate and agitation transmute from observed to observer in an encounter? For which bodies does the demand "Don't move" most directly lay out the terms of living and dying, rather than the beginning of a negotiation? When and precisely how is the school-to-prison pipeline not only ignoring disability but also *informed by it*, even as we must remember that the biologization of violence is so massive, so persistent? And how to pitch, for instance, the need for toxic remediation without notionally attaching that lead templatically to certain bodies on the basis of a partial, environmentalizing, truth?

A Direct and Primate Impression

What is virtuosity? Improvisation? What of gesture, agitated gesture, that lies between these two things? How to locate and value disruption, especially when that disruption is a violation of a racial-gendered script of embodiment and movement? Where does mildness go? How to replenish the rich sphere of gestures of life, of thriving, amid the violences that contain it? To want it, however, is to take full consideration of the full range of lives that must bear these gestures in an economy of movement and stillness, an economy whose different actors wield disproportionate powers of life and death, and within which the crip and the queer and the raced lose diagnostic clarity. Perhaps it is useful here to adopt a notion of "bodily insurgency" after Daphne Brooks's *Bodies in Dissent* (2006). She refers to the use of "opaque" performance in order to "defamiliarize" the narrow binds of racial expectation, in this case by black and racially ambiguous performers in the late nineteenth- to early twentieth-century United States, demonstrating the "insurgent power of imaging cultural identity" (8). Critically, Brooks records a proto-afterlife of black minstrelsy and its later whitened, deracinated, invocation within *Jekyll and Hyde*

productions as horrific, no longer comic, performative cultures. Again, the line between comedy and horror, as well as the absenting of a historical figure, surfaces. Could the mobility of harm and harmlessness in the endless translation of gesture enact something against the seeming recalcitrance of skin?

As for agitation, I argue that the contemporaneity and pervasiveness of rampant biochemical modulation (for some but not all, biochemical unwellness), the ongoing experiment of the industrial age, combined with the ongoing complicity of state and cultural imagination alike in the obscuring of perceptible and imperceptible forms of debility and disability integral to lived lives, does strange things to the reflexes proffered by the state in relation to its internally or externally acting bodies and minds, leading to clashes of systems—states as “immunitary” bodies, individuals and collectivities as neural actors subject to agitation. These clashes of systems, however, do not exacerbate willy-nilly, but all too often accord to certain coherences of racial segregation and racialized bodily order that themselves have fed extensive histories of chemical and environmental injustice that have ultimately kept no one from being affected. Some analysts may claim that the clashes are proper ruptures, proper violences, that precisely exemplify the ongoing subjection of a population or subpopulation to the state.

In this new midst, what to do, again, with Bergson’s urging for the reactive spectacle for an enhanced strength of example: “Try to see with your eyes alone. Avoid reflection, and above all, do not reason. Abandon all your prepossessions; seek to recapture a fresh, direct and primate impression”?

As for my last gesture:

A Fanonian resistive muscular tension, agitation as its release or its intensification, the muscle tensions of disabled movement, the trembling of intoxication. The geneses and timings are unambiguously different, yet their role in the theater of security is inchoate and somehow distantly kin.

Notes

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- 1 I have been pursuing the nexus of race, disability, and gesture from a number of angles in my work. On the nature of zombie movement in contemporary popular culture, and its relation to the implicit invocation of debility, disability, and political economy, see my short piece “Lurching for the Cure? On Zombies and the Reproduction of Disability” (Chen 2015).

- 2 There are surely also punishments by diagnostic, given the ways that pathologization can be imbricated in other dynamics of oppression.
- 3 Ulrika Maude (2016) closely studies the possible influence of Bergson's work (along with the life of disabled lexicographer Samuel Johnson) on the gestural and verbal repertoire of the plays of Samuel Beckett. In particular, she comments on the characteristic verbal and gestural acts that she believes were drawn from Beckett's interest in both automaticity and Tourette's, with possible influence from Bergson.
- 4 I am grateful to Vivian Fumiko Chin for sharing with me in the early 2000s an insight about an Asian character in a cultural production she planned to analyze—where every opportunity the character might have acted, he couldn't, because he was asleep again—and her meditation on sleepiness as a facet of Asian American racist representation. I may be misreading by attaching to her suggestion my own notions of “immigrant stupor” and my observations about “Asian eye surgery,” and therefore any errors are entirely mine.

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