

Chocolate Spectral Resonances

Calling Mr. Sun Ra, Calling Mr. Alton Sterling

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FATHER, SON, PARTNER, lover, comedian, and neighborhood CD salesman, Alton Sterling was forced into premature ancestralhood on July 5, 2016. Sterling's ascendance was due to the always endemically violent appendages of the police state, formulated in this context as the Baton Rouge police department. However, I struggle with the very way I engage in memory of Sterling, generally, and with Sterling's memory being solely connected with his death, specifically.

In many ways, Sterling's memory did not become present until I and many others, in my case accidentally, witnessed his lynching through murder porn cesspools of social media and various other news veins that have become matters of course about how people regularly are consumed by media. I cannot unsee the image of Sterling being treated as target practice for the Baton Rouge police department. Instead, I want to and fight to re-orient myself to witnessing Sterling as the father, son, partner, lover, comedian, and neighborhood CD salesman. Additionally, these words ring true in non-linear desires when I reflect on the premature ancestralhoods of Tamir Rice, Trayvon Martin, Breonna Taylor, Remie Falls, Daunté Wright, and so many other beautiful chocolate souls.

In my attempt to challenge a public discourse equating Blackness to death, I have begun to use phrases like "premature ancestralhood" to remind myself that their souls forever live within me and around us. Yet, like any bad habit, breaking this habit of over attentiveness to the drone of Blackness as being equated to death is difficult.

However, I am always lodged in a peculiar space of simultaneity in which I am constantly fighting to dampen the ways that the Enlightenment project bifurcates—Cartesian logics situated as the mind, body, soul within myself—to feel and hear those and many other ancestral voices. While I utilize "premature ancestralhood" to counter erasures of Black subjectivities, the phrase and first part of the paper's title, "Chocolate Spectral Resonances," pertains to the vibrancy of life in Blackness in spite of carceral predicaments that local, state, and nation attempt to apply (Dillard, 2012).

My discussion utilizes pianist, composer, band leader, and sound scientist Sun Ra, and his ensemble the Arkestra, to address sonic ethics in two ways: first to re-examine the treatment of

Alton Sterling and then to consider broader possibilities of how Afro-surrealist ethics, situated as sonic pedagogies, provide additional trajectories for action in ways that are simultaneously formal and informal educational spaces/places.

The discursive trajectory of this paper begins by addressing the contexts that inform the first part of the title, “Chocolate Spectral Resonances.” In order to better unpack these in-depth meanings, I present my situatedness in addition to considering how George Clinton (aka Dr. Funkenstein, Clinton et al., 1975) and Dr. Cornel West (2014) form the foundation and gesture of this title. I continue looking to scholarship from David Marriott (2016), Christina Sharpe (2016), and Katherine McKittrick (2014, 2021), whose work is rich with possibilities to discuss and problematize the material and existential constructions of Blackness with death. This is not to say that Marriott, Sharpe, and McKittrick offer a clear way out. However, I do think they offer powerful ways to hold discursive spaces in re-imagining Blackness as living, regardless of acts that police states impose.

Following this discussion, I look to Sun Ra and the Arkestra to frame what I refer to as his “sonic ethics.” I situate this framing in the parameters of the musical and extramusical. I continue with Sun Ra in relation to D. Scot Miller’s (2012) *Afrosurreal Manifesto: Black is the New Black*. With awareness that my paper is in communion so much of the beautiful and robust scholarship from the fields of Afro-pessimism (Hartman, 1997; Wilderson, 2021) and Afro-futurism (Drew & Wortham, 2020; Womack, 2013), I focus extensively on having this discourse through Afro-surrealism. This is in no assertion of hierarchical relations. Instead, Afro-surrealism is more fruitful for me in this argument than Afro-pessimism and Afro-futurism, due to what I think of as its looser polarity of analysis. It is this aspect that describes the philosophical leanings of Sun Ra in the context of this paper. Following a definition of Sun Ra’s sonic ethics, I place Sun Ra and Arkestra in relation to Afro-surrealism with a brief historical situating of André Breton’s (1929/1992) surrealism and its chocolate center before unpacking aspects of the film, *Space is the Place* (Smith & Ra, 1974), and the latter live performance of “Face the Music” (Ra, 2012) from that film. Altogether, witnessing Alton Sterling and his lynching via the police state are situated as an analytical meditation to challenge and dethrone the death ideologies in re-imagining him and overall Blackness as being equated with life.

The Contexts of Chocolate Spectral Resonances

The “Chocolate Spectral Resonances” in the title of this piece and the derivative references to chocolate utilized reside in my positionality as a Black, Queer, Non-Binary person, which is central to the discursive developments and connections I create in this discussion. I intentionally use Black to acknowledge the situatedness of myself and Black communities in global diasporas speaking across prescribed geopolitical borders. Additionally, “Chocolate Spectral Resonances” is inspired by a deep engagement and multiple decade love affair with Parliament’s 1975 album *Chocolate City*, from the opening track “Chocolate City,” which the narrator, George Clinton, abbreviates as “C.C.” In this song, he identifies and proclaims Black spaces throughout the United States as “C.C.s” due to their predominantly Black populations. Clinton’s prologue is prophetically poetic in his starting line:

A C.C. . . . they say you jivin' game and can't be changed, but on the positive side you're my piece of the rock, and I love ya C.C. Can you dig it? ... A yah, we didn't get our 40 acres and a mule, but we did get you C.C. ... yeah. (Clinton et al., 1975, n.p.).

In the spirit of prophetically speaking into existence, Clinton acknowledges that C.C.s speak into and hold spaces of and for Black subjectivity. His statement embodies a double-consciousness in his awareness of subaltern status assigned to C.C.s through scales of racism and classism (Dubois, 1903/1994). However, in spite of being well aware of the negative status assigned to C.C.s through outside hegemonic infrastructural discourse, the C.C. remains a radical space of Blackness, asserting Black folx reclamation and creation of home. My framing of Chocolate Spectral Resonances sits with the latter, attending to chocolated consciousness and Dr. Cornel West's (2014) very public reminder that inquiry into local, national, and global challenges starts "on the chocolate side of the tracks" (n.p.). Overall, the collective of my Black, Queer, Non-Binary subjectivity resides in variances of Chocolate Spectral Resonances inspired by the generative simultaneities characterized by both Clinton's and West's senses of the prophetic that I detail here and are threaded throughout this article. While both men situate variances of their prophetic process as residing in Black spaces, it is Clinton who identifies the C.C. as a space of reclamation that creates home. In contrast, West's discussion of the "chocolate side of the tracks" simultaneously offers a material space and place of a C.C. and a reflexive space rooted in the embodiment of his Blackness. This is the bedrock of inquiry when facing problems on local, national, and global scales.

Spectral Resonances, the latter part of the title, addresses both the spectrums and modalities of Black beingness (Hurston, 1937/1990; Morrison, 1992; hooks, 2001). In response to the death sentence assigned to Black communities through the police state, spectral resonances are the assertion of the impossibility of killing Blackness. While there is an incessant witnessing of lynching and forcing into premature ancestralhood, Blackness is not eliminated. Rather, it lives on in the spectrum of communal embodiment, cultural expression, and stories, among other facets of Blackness. Additionally, "resonance" denotes the unsettledness of Black souls post transition, while also acknowledging how the unsettledness lives through inhabitation and haunting (Hendry, 2011; Wozolek, 2023).

The next part of my discussion challenges the idea of Blackness as stillborn. David Marriott's (2016) discourse about the corpsing of Black subjectivities as social death develops a rich context to describe how, even in birth, police states still attempt to give Blackness a death sentence.

Christina Sharpe (2016), like Marriott, identifies the historical to present conditions of Black subjectivities' subsummations into literal and conceptual wakes created by the vessel. Thus, Sharpe's wake work is an engagement that births an awareness of the livingness Blackness presents, even when thrown from the literal and conceptual enslaving vessel to the wake. Altogether, Black individuals' and communities' forced transformations into fungible state materials still exist and live in spite of attempted applications of social death. Finally, Katherine McKittrick (2014, 2021) shares Marriott's and Sharpe's belief that Blackness is life affirming by framing the material condition of Blackness in light, working to witness it in archival communing while also reintroducing traumas (Hartman, 2019). Collectively, these authors deal with Blackness as living in connection with the navigations one must engage while disrupting the stillborn paradigm applied to Blackness.

Stillborn Notions of Blackness

Blackness equated with expressions of being stillborn concerns me deeply. These stillborn modalities of Black folx are presented through lynching variances on local, national, and global scales. In my discussion, lynching exists materially in realms of the metaphorical and literal. Therefore, an example of metaphorical lynching would be rooted in bullying and spectacle, as witnessed in Black folx being enslaved and placed on auction blocks. In this situation, Black folx were subjected to nonconsensual stares, touches, and grabs of their bodies. Metaphorical lynching in context, among so many others, was the attack on the Black soul through white gaze and touch denoting dehumanization and fungibility of enslaved Black folx' bodies. Whereas, the literal lynching is exemplified in the attack on the physical presence of Black bodies resulting in maiming and/or premature ancestralhood as witnessed with the sodomization of Abner Louima by the NYPD officer's broken broomstick in 1997 (which he survived and due to which has been forced to endure numerous surgeries) and the 2020 murder of Breonna Taylor by Kentucky police officers. The metaphorical and literal lynching collectively advocate for the pushing of Black folx towards a stillborn status. The stillborn-ness of Blackness occurs through ranges of social media and/or news outlets, the erasure and silencing of Black existence through the discursive technologies. I can't help but reflect on the ways in which the Black communities and the public sphere are told Blackness is some variant of death. This is not to negate the material circumstances in which Black folx are presented with fates of premature ancestralhood. David Marriott's (2016) transposition and transferal of corpsing—the actor's loss of command of the character they are tasked with presenting, or as he would say, “the death of the theatrical artifice”—in relation to Black life, which further problematizes the social application of stillborn constructs (p. 31).

In Marriott's discussion, corpsing is in response to the social death prescribed to Blackness. Both in inquiry and response Marriott writes,

This, then, is what corpsing is: the knowledge and loss of the rules determining the subject. But what of those subjects whose rule of life is to endure life under the ownership of another and consequently are said to live as objects and are regarded as subjects dead to law and who live in a state of permanent threat of inquiry? I think this condition of the slave is what the theory of social death is meant to explain and therefore deservedly calls attention to as a black state of exception. Therefore, race is a means by which corpsing comes to be a metaphor for social life, insofar as the slave fails to perform any juridical understanding of the subject as alive or sovereign, because it is perceived as having been born symbolically dead (*partus sequitur ventrem*) and therefore is reduced to an object, or res, whose prime value (if we define sovereignty as ownership) is a rule of life defined by its symbolic fungibility, which also denotes the end of life in terms of its reproducible nonexistence. (Marriott, 2016, pp. 35–36)

Marriott's application of corpsing is a vehicle that addresses the social perception of Black life. His description presents the trajectories of raced subjectivities, in this case Black folx and the connection to the slave. Marriott addresses the social death of Blackness, which is reified through a series of carceral logics, more specifically slavery and the slave. This is not to say that Marriott has subscribed to this idea of Blackness. Rather, his utilization of corpsing presents a description of structural fungibilities that imprison Black folx' subjectivity while also rationalizing the reducibility of Black subjectivity to purchasable units. Black humanity is not seen as human

through social death and, therefore, is property, not an uncommon problematic ideal. Along the same lines, Christina Sharpe (2016) addresses applications of fungibility to Blackness (see also Spillers, 2003).

Sharpe's social death is rooted in the collective ascriptions of Blackness to subhumanity, which produces and sustains parallel economies like the insurance industry. Thus, the social death of Black folx that is instituted as objective death, non-existence, is entrapped in wake. The wake being both metaphorical and literal, whereby the contact of vessels of enslavers with Trans-Atlantic waters created additional below currents.

However, within these points of contact, enslaved Black folx were subsumed. This subsummation into the wake functions as those Black folx being thrown once entering premature ancestralhood or electing to jump in an act of granting their liberation. Yet, Sharpe's theorization does not situate Black folx subsumed into the wake as non-existent. Rather, her consideration is in service to emphasizing how Blackness in person and ideas exists in spite of the circumstances. Considering this discourse, Sharpe's acquaintance, a quantum physicist, reminds her that the matter of these Black souls continues to exist regardless of the hegemonic apparatuses of state, creating illusions of objectivity through social death. Collectively, through Marriott's utilization of corpsing and Sharpe's wake work, the inevitable avoidance of existential struggle is produced. That personal struggle for me is aligned with Katherine McKittrick's (2014, 2021) discussion about simultaneity of leaning into discourses of Black trauma to bring awareness and that act producing traumas as well.

I am reminded of this struggle amongst many folx, especially those of the chocolate community when considering Katherine McKittrick's (2014) article, "Mathematics of Black Life," when she writes,

I hold close the technologies of slavery and the archives that produce the scourged back. I can't let go of the incomplete stories and brutal violence, in part, because letting go might involve not seeing how these violent acts are reproduced now. (p. 23)

McKittrick struggles with the reduction and myopic death lens applied to Black life. For her, the mathematics around Blackness refers to both the violent and murderous ways in which numbers occur in reference to Black bodies. Her analysis problematizes the intersection of Blackness and numbers continually being formulated to represent and reinforce narratively deficit lies about Black folx' existence. In considering McKittrick's direct statement, the white supremacist gaze does not reside exclusively with white folx. Rather, she is identifying how oppressive technologies founded in white supremacy also work through her as a chocolate entity. McKittrick, desires to relinquish these technologies. And yet, this position on relinquishing Black harm leads to another conundrum about how giving up a focus on violence against Black folx also produces a violent action of forgetting, forgoing, and silencing historic and present atrocities against Black peoples that, in turn, are foundational to sustaining lynching regimes (McKittrick, 2021).

The trifecta of Marriott, Sharpe, and McKittrick functions as disruptor of myopias applied to Black life. Marriott utilizes corpsing to address the objective death illusions and social conditions in which Black life is situated. Whereas, Sharpe enacts modalities of wake work to uncover the epiphenomenal liveliness of Black life in the face of fungibility (Spillers, 2003; Wright, 2015). Finally, McKittrick presents the aporia of the archive and trauma. Her discourse is

the gentle parameter gathering the thoughts of Marriott and Sharpe for me regarding the personal and lived embodiment of my Black life.

Like McKittrick, I am stuck as well in anger and frustration at the constant rationalizations I witness, second-to-second, minute to minute, 24 hours a day, of why it is okay to murder Black folk. Additionally, I echo McKittrick in a desire to shift away from Black mathematics and lean towards joy and the acknowledgement of the immense life occupied by Blackness in spite of witnessing so much Black life being pushed towards premature ancestralhood (Mitchell, 2022). While my first steps have been to think of the Black lives touched by the lynchings as ancestors, the continuation of my re-orienting from a lens of Black mathematics to Black life will be engaged from a sonic consideration. Through this inquiry about Alton Sterling's life, I turn to the sonic ethics of pianist, composer, and sound scientist, Sun Ra and the Arkestra.

Sun Ra, the Arkestra, and Sonic Ethics

Sun Ra and his relationship to sound, both musical and extramusical, constitute a type of sonic ethics—variants of ethics rooted in sound absent of binaries constituting right or wrong and more so based in inquiry regarding the dynamics of responsibility one incurs through their relations developed throughout the public sphere (Derrida, 1992/2008; Mitchell, 2018). In one of many discussions, Ra (as quoted in Szwed, 1998) discusses the aspects of his sonic musical ethics in saying,

in my music, there's a lot of little melodies going on. It's like an ocean of sound. The ocean opens up, it goes back, it rolls. My music always rolls. It might go over people's heads, wash part of them away, reenergize them, go through them, and then go back out to the cosmos and come back to them again. If they keep listening to my music, they'll get energized. They go home and maybe 15 years later they'll say, "Whoa, that music I heard 15 years ago in the park ... it was beautiful." (p. 123)

Ra sees his musical compositions as medicine to cure humanity. His metaphoric utilization of the ocean describes the way in which his compositions envelop the listener beyond a mere cochlear engagement. The non-bifurcated, mind, body, and soul of the engagers are situated as liberated agents after being washed over by Ra's music. Even further, Ra frames the engager's change being an epiphenomenal communing with time. In other words, in the spirit of Michelle Wright (2015), the epiphenomenal being the past, present, and future are simultaneously experienced as the present. To also be noted, when Ra speaks about one's rejuvenation through encounters with his music, he emphasizes the continual chance to be experienced after the event of individual encountering his music. Regarding extramusical ethics Ra (as quoted in Szwed, 1998) says,

So, this is my view on the race for space. We'll never get it until we Americans, collectively and individually, get us a new sound. A new sound of harmony, brotherly love, common respect and consideration for the dignity and freedom of men. (p. 138)

Contextually, Ra's statement references the race for space between the U.S. and Soviet Union. For him, the U.S. will only achieve their goal of space travel with the development of new alternative sonic possibilities rooted in liberations to be extended to humanity, globally. The sonic variant to be created must incite a harmonization that is uprooted from rigid musical notions, instead focusing on how the extramusical heals humanity's fractures. This harmonization is not metaphorical. Rather, Ra relinquishes harmonization from music and instead utilizes the sonic to build connections amongst humanities many transcendental divides.

Collectively, Ra's engagement with the sonic presented in the prior two examples come together musically and extramusically to formulate what I would describe as his sonic ethics (Gershon, 2017), a type of ethics whereby the point of transport is sound that travels simultaneously, non-linearly and linearly, wrought with possibilities for emboldening humanity's consciousness. The emboldening for Ra is the development of love, connectivity, and liberation.

Furthermore, regarding Black folx as socially equated to being stillborn, Ra's sonic ethics are a tool to re-orient the focus of Blackness as livingness in spite of the ranges of lynching on local, national, and global scales.

Sun Ra and the Arkestra are an essential part of the sonic consideration I will be turning to in the following part of my discussion. Specifically, I will be addressing two sonic elements, one being from the cult movie classic, *Space is the Place*, and the second from the musical composition "Face the Music" (Ra, 2012). In these two elements, Ra's philosophy of Blackness as life and living are witnessed. Afterwards I will come back to Alton Sterling to consider what might it mean "to face the music" regarding the sonic ethics of Sun Ra.

Facing the Mythssss

Sun Ra straddles musicological and extramusicological series of ethics with his sonic engagements. His ethics resemble a Derridean existence in that Ra is elevating a discourse about responsibility that is never stagnant and, therefore, impossible to fully understand without commitment to continually convening with the ethically impossible (Derrida, 2002; Mitchell, 2018). Smith and Ra's (1974) cult classic film, *Space is the Place*, straddles or rather melts binaries between Blaxploitation, Afro-Futurism, and Afro-Pessimism, further presenting Afro-surrealism's fluidity amongst analytic polarities. The main protagonist, Sun Ra, played by himself under his name is most concerned with the realm's disenfranchisement ascribed to Black folx through White supremacy, as well as disenfranchisement inflicted through Black folx to other Black folx. The film is set in Los Angeles, California. Sun Ra and his musical ensemble, the Arkestra, have tasked themselves with disrupting these variants of Black disenfranchisement. The most powerful way to do so is through their use of music—more broadly, the sonic combinations produced by him and the Arkestra, which, if proper balance was able to be found, would heal the violence ailing the world. *Space is the Place*, situated as simultaneously a biopic and fictive depiction of Sun Ra's life, is linearly presented with the main goal of Sun Ra and the Arkestra of providing a musical performance to the LA community in order to bring consciousness to those in attendance and in turn create positive change. However, in the process of preparing for this concert Sun Ra must endure carceral gazes of the FBI and its informants, implemented in his and the Arkestra's day-to-day activities.

In an earlier segment of this film, Sun Ra is witnessed in all his beauty, sensuousness, and whimsicality through his magical descendance upon the youth center. In the 23:30–25:09 segment

Sun Ra appears in his intergalactic and cosmic best before the Black youth at the neighborhood center and introduces himself by saying, “Greetings ... Black youth and planet Earth. I am Sun Ra. Ambassador from the intergalactic regions of the council of outer space.” In the confused series of looks from the youth post examination of the extra-terrestrial Sun Ra, one young Black woman says, “How do we know that you fo’ real?” Sun Ra responds by saying:

How do you know I’m real? I’m not real. I’m just like you. You don’t exist in this society. If you did, your people wouldn’t be seeking equal rights. You’re not real. If you were, you’d have some status among the nations of the world, so we’re both myths. I do not come to you as a reality. I come to you as the myth, because that’s what Black people are, mythssss. I came from a dream, that the Black man dreamed long ago. I’m actually a presence sent to you by your ancestors. (Smith & Ra, 1974)

This exchange with the youth presents Sun Ra as conceptualizing the myth as reduced to being synonymous with a lie and simultaneously as magic. On the front end of his response, Sun Ra acknowledges the historic and present reduction of Blackness to subhumanity in U.S and global contexts (Gordon, 2022). For him, Black folx’s fight for a seat at the table in the context of hegemony, deployed through white supremacy’s constant reformulation of impasse to Black folx’s access to being human and overall equitable conditions, is the myth situated in a reductionist paradigm of being a lie. However, within this statement, Sun Ra is also dealing with myth as magic and furthermore a variance of hyperreality (Baudrillard, 1994). Therefore, when Sun Ra explains that he and the Black youth are “not real” and completes the response by disclosing that he was a presence sent by their Black ancestors. Sun Ra is essentially framing the myth as hyperreality—a queered acknowledgement of the dreamworld, present moment, and Earthly existence. Thus, Sun Ra’s Afro-surreal project functions as a public disclosure of the chocolated hyperreality of the Black myth (Baudrillard, 1994; Kelley, 2002; Ibrahim, 2014).

More importantly, witnessed in Sun Ra’s extrapolation of spectral meanings, the myth encompasses his broader ethics of sound—an ethics of sound that is both musical and extramusical and overwhelmingly rooted in consciousness building (Thompson, 1984). This moves me to consideration of the stanza from Sun Ra’s (2012) musical composition, “Face the Music.” In the song “Face the Music” Sun Ra (2012) and the Arkestra inquire, proclaim, assert and sing, “What do you do when you know, that you know... that you know that you wrong? You got to face the music. You got to listen to the cosmos song.” The collective performance and aesthetic presentation of “Face the Music” is an Afro-surrealist “awe hell naw” in the sense that Black folx will not be erased or only represented through a death paradigm. This lyric poses the inquiry as to what responsibility looks like with awareness that the basis of Earthly belief systems are rooted in bullshit. “Face the music” is the call get open to a series of hyperrealities through becoming vulnerable to the “cosmos song.” The cosmos song holds a number of meanings. One is about getting vulnerable to ancestral ruminations utilizing Sun Ra and the Arkestra as mediums to raise Earthly consciousness via sonic healing. Another meaning is about how, through disruption of the Enlightenment project, humanity must re-assemble themselves, absent of Cartesian bifurcations, as a way to come back in compassionate resonance with the broader ecosystem and overall cosmos.

In the continuum of meaning from Sun Ra’s discussion around the myth of Blackness, *Space is the Place* to the stanza of “Face the Music,” he challenges himself and those around him to move beyond the surface. Altogether, this continuum framed by Sun Ra comes as an urgent

reminder to Black folx of the necessity to re-orient understandings of their Blackness to being life as opposed to the hegemonic conscripts of death.

In the following discussion, I will come back to ancestor Alton Sterling and will consider how to re-orient consideration of Sterling towards of life. Additionally, Sun Ra's sonic ethics will serve towards disrupting the death ascribed to Sterling's life, memory, and spirit.

Re-orienting Toward a Living Sterling

The chocolate spectral resonances never rest. They are always alive serving as vehicles, communicating the epiphenomenal presences of Black folx. The stillborn status assigned to Blackness is a falsehood. The responsibility and possibility in disrupting these falsehoods is of the utmost importance in continual development of awareness and inquiry into the oppressive, re-packaged, ideological conditions assigned to Blackness. David Marriott, Christina Sharpe, and Katherine McKittrick provide the guiding light to witness these ideological conditions. Marriott's identification of Black folx' social death as it enmeshes with Sharpe's wake analysis that focuses on the disembodiment of Black presence from social memory identify the agents that create illusions of Black non-existences. Additionally, McKittrick presents what is born from the impasse of avoiding trauma as it works in tandem with a sense of sociopolitical and cultural responsibility to Black archives. This creates a feedback loop of sorts where ideas and events rooted in pain simultaneously speak truths while always already being met with artifacts that can re-trigger traumas. Therefore, Sun Ra's sonic ethics—which are situated as an Afro-surrealist entity and existent in musical and extramusical contexts of the myth—become agents that antagonize attempts for one's consciousness to go stagnant and accept the idea that Black beingness is stillborn. Altogether, when the discursive contexts that frame Black death are identified, the chocolate spectral resonance rears its head and refuses silencing.

Alton Sterling is one of many Black entities that comprise chocolate spectral resonances; always present, sounding out, similar to the tree falling in the forest (Yes!!!! It does make a sound). However, those of us in this dimension must acknowledge these sounds, even when we do not exist in the same space and place, when we do not sit directly with the falling tree's presence. Or, rather, we must turn toward “face[ing] the music.”

Alton Sterling was assigned a death sentence before he was ever physically lynched by the Baton Rouge police department. While Sterling had done some prison time, his release was with a shortened taut leash to the police state. Due to being designated a felon, tautness was continually added to this leash through significantly lowered employment availability. Additionally, Sterling was a Black resident in Louisiana, a state with the statistically highest imprisoned population in the entire world. Like all Black folx, he was trapped in a carceral predicament before ever stepping foot outside of the womb. Additionally, as Black folx are all-too-well aware, the carceral state only serves to feed federal, state, and corporate greed as the targeting of Black folx continues and reducing Black folx to subhumans only becomes further normalized. As a result, Black folx are positioned as raw, consumable materials, fed to greed-machines of the prison industrial complex. This was the reality Sterling endured, something that only intensified throughout his Earthly existence. Sterling's prescribed fate executed by the carceral state did not happen in isolation. It is shared by both Sterling and more broadly by Black folx across time and contexts. Because such fates are presented endemically, as part of one's existence, Sun Ra's sonic consciousness-building

project is even more important as it stands as a point of radical refusal to such endemic understandings of Black folx.

I circle back to McKittrick's (2014, 2021) inquiry about what it might mean to relinquish and refuse spirit murdering (Love, 2019). I agree that relinquishing these tools altogether provides a continued rationale of erasure—the ability to overlook and refuse to acknowledge anti-Black trauma as it occurred, occurs, and is occurring, both nationally within the United States and on global scales. However, there must also be a project of re-orienting Blackness so that it is synonymous with life and living—a re-orientation project whereby, even in the violence of the police state, Black folx and their communities of accomplices are able to engage in possibilities and the multiplicities of Black life, something Sun Ra presents through his sonic ethics.

Situating Sun Ra's sonic ethics presents possibilities to commune with Alton Sterling through ancestralhood. The issue, then, becomes a concern about what it means when, in Earthly physical existence, we cannot feel the presence of Sterling within and around us. I would say that this is an Enlightenment issue. In response to this Enlightenment issue, I find myself reflecting on my first engagements with Sterling, which occurred via community vigil when I, crying, made direct contact with his son, Cameron Sterling, also crying. At this ancestral service, I was reminded of how Sun Ra re-orientates me towards a Black livingness paradigm. As Sun Ra put forth in his Afro-surrealistic existence, acknowledging Black folx as myths is essentially the reminder of the magic he possessed, that Black folx possess, which Ra further embodied and emboldened through sound.

Sun Ra's call to face the music is a call to tear down the binaries imposed by the Enlightenment project through learning to listen empathetically and compassionately. Attending to Sun Ra's call and my engagement with it, I return to Sterling and find myself in deep reflection. In this reflection, there is a collapse of space, of time, of beings. I witness his homie, Abdullah Muflahi, who owned the Triple S Market where Alton was lynched. I hear them discuss how he and Sterling used to cut up and roast each other, something he mentioned at Alton's ancestralhood homegoing. I see the memorial mural of Sterling on the Triple S Market. He's smiling hard. I imagine the jams Sterling burned to CDs and sold to neighborhood folx in order to aid his family, and you know, I hear and feel Sterling's presence. This hearing and feeling are indications that perhaps I am becoming open to ancestralhoods, a re-orientation towards Blackness as unearthed from a death and murder complex. My engagement with ancestralhoods is enlivened through Sun Ra and his sonic ethics.

In conclusion, I am left with an inquiry: What does it mean for the overall pedagogical and educational project when Blackness is equated with life through re-orientation away from McKittrick's (2014, 2021) notion of Black Mathematics via Sun Ra's sonic ethics? All I can say right now is that, as I live with this inquiry and I feel the continual intertwining presences of ancestralhoods, Sterling lives with me and among us.

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