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BLACK ATLANTIC, QUEER ATLANTIC

Queer Imaginings of the Middle Passage

Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley

Ships were the living means by which the points within that Atlantic world were joined. They were mobile elements that stood for the shifting spaces in between the fixed places that they connected. . . . For all these reasons, the ship is the first of the novel chronotypes presupposed by my attempts to rethink modernity versus the history of the black Atlantic.

—Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*

Water is the first thing in my imagination. Over the reaches of the eyes at Guaya when I was a little girl, I knew that there was still more water. All beginning in water, all ending in water. Turquoise, aquamarine, deep green, deep blue, ink blue, navy, blue-black cerulean water. . . . Water is the first thing in my memory. The sea sounded like a thousand secrets, all whispered at the same time. In the daytime it was indistinguishable to me from air. . . . The same substance that carried voices or smells, music or emotion.

—Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*

And water, ocean water is the first thing in the unstable confluence of race, nationality, sexuality, and gender I want to imagine here. This wateriness is metaphor, and history too. The brown-skinned, fluid-bodied experiences now called *blackness* and *queerness* surfaced in intercontinental, maritime contacts hundreds of years ago: in the seventeenth century, in the Atlantic Ocean. You see, the black Atlantic has always been the queer Atlantic. What Paul Gilroy never told us is how queer relationships were forged on merchant and pirate ships, where Europe-

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ans and Africans slept with fellow — and I mean same-sex — sailors. And, more powerfully and silently, how queer relationships emerged in the holds of slave ships that crossed between West Africa and the Caribbean archipelago. I began to learn *this* black Atlantic when I was studying relationships between women in Suriname and delved into the etymology of the word *mati*. This is the word Creole women use for their female lovers: figuratively *mi mati* is “my girl,” but literally it means *mate*, as in *shipmate* — she who survived the Middle Passage with me. Sedimented layers of experience lodge in this small word. During the Middle Passage, as colonial chronicles, oral tradition, and anthropological studies tell us, captive African women created erotic bonds with other women in the sex-segregated holds, and captive African men created bonds with other men. In so doing, they resisted the commodification of their bought and sold bodies by *feeling* and *feeling for* their co-occupants on these ships.

I evoke this history now not to claim the slave ship as the origin of the black queer Atlantic. The ocean obscures all origins, and neither ship nor Atlantic can be a place of origin. Not of blackness, though perhaps Africans first became *negros* and *negers* during involuntary sea transport; not of queerness, though perhaps some Africans were first intimate with same-sex shipmates then. Instead, in relationship to blackness, queerness, and black queerness, the Atlantic is the site of what the anthropologist Kale Fajardo calls “crosscurrents.”

Oceans and seas are important sites for differently situated people. Indigenous Peoples, fisherpeople, seafarers, sailors, tourists, workers, and athletes. Oceans and seas are sites of inequality and exploitation—resource extraction, pollution, militarization, atomic testing, and genocide. At the same time, oceans and seas are sites of beauty and pleasure—solitude, sensuality, desire, and resistance. Oceanic and maritime realms are also spaces of transnational and diasporic communities, heterogeneous trajectories of globalizations, and other racial, gender, class, and sexual formations.¹

Conceptualizing the complex possibilities and power dynamics of the maritime, Fajardo posits the necessity of thinking through transoceanic crosscurrents. These are theoretical and ethnographic borderlands at sea, where elements or currents of historical, conceptual, and embodied maritime experience come together to transform racialized, gendered, classed, and sexualized selves. The queer black Atlantic I discuss here navigates these crosscurrents as it brings together enslaved and African, brutality and desire, genocide and resistance. Here, fluidity is not an

easy metaphor for queer and racially hybrid identities but for concrete, painful, *and* liberatory experience. It is the kind of queer of color space that Roderick Ferguson calls for in *Aberrations in Black*, one that reflects the materiality of black queer experience while refusing its transparency.²

If the black queer Atlantic brings together such long-flowing history, why is black queer studies situated as a dazzlingly new “discovery” in academia—a hybrid, mermaidlike imagination that has yet to find its land legs? In the last five years, black queer and queer of color critiques have navigated innovative directions in African diaspora studies as scholars like Ferguson and E. Patrick Johnson push the discipline to map intersections between racialized and sexualized bodies. Unfortunately, Eurocentric queer theorists and heterocentric race theorists have engaged their discourses of resistant black queerness as a new fashion—a glitzy, postmodern invention borrowed and adapted from Euro-American queer theory. In contrast, as interventions like the New-York Historical Society’s exhibit *Slavery in New York* demonstrate, the Middle Passage and slave experience continue to be evoked as authentic originary sites of African diaspora identities and discourses.³ This stark split between the “newest” and “oldest” sites of blackness reflects larger political trends that polarize queer versus diasporic and immigrant issues by moralizing and domesticating sexuality as an undermining of tradition, on the one hand, while racializing and publicizing global southern diasporas as threats to the integrity of a nation of (fictively) European immigrants, on the other. My discussion here proposes to intervene in this polarization by bridging imaginations of the “choice” of black queerness and the forced migration of the Middle Passage. What would it mean for both queer and African diaspora studies to take seriously the possibility that, as forcefully as the Atlantic and Caribbean flow together, so too do the turbulent fluidities of blackness and queerness? What new geography—or as Fajardo proposes, oceanography—of sexual, gendered, transnational, and racial identities might emerge through reading for black queer history and theory in the traumatic dislocation of the Middle Passage?⁴

In what follows, I explore such queer black Atlantic oceanographies by comparing two narrative spaces. One is a site where an imagination of this Atlantic struggles to emerge: in academic theorizing, specifically in water metaphors of African diaspora and queer theory. The second is a site where such imaginations emerge through struggle: in Caribbean creative writing, specifically in Ana-Maurine Lara’s tale of queer migration in *Erzulie’s Skirt* (2006) and Dionne Brand’s reflections on the Middle Passage in *A Map to the Door of No Return* (2001). I turn to these literary texts as a queer, unconventional, and imaginative archive of the black Atlantic.⁵ And the literary texts turn to ocean waters themselves as

an archive, an ever-present, ever-reformulating record of the unimaginable. Lara and Brand plumb the archival ocean materially, as space that churns with physical remnants, dis(re)membered bodies of the Middle Passage, and they plumb it metaphorically, as opaque space to convey the drowned, disremembered, ebbing and flowing histories of violence and healing in the African diaspora. “Water overflows with memory,” writes M. Jacqui Alexander, delving into the Middle Passage in *Pedagogies of Crossing*. “Emotional memory. Bodily memory. Sacred memory.”⁶ Developing a black feminist epistemology to uncover submerged histories—particularly those stories of Africans’ forced ocean crossings that traditional historiography cannot validate—Alexander eloquently argues that searchers must explore outside narrow conceptions of the “factual” to get there. Such explorations would involve muddying divisions between documented and intuited, material and metaphoric, past and present so that “who is remembered—and how—is continually being transformed through a web of interpretive systems . . . collapsing, ultimately, the demarcation of the prescriptive past, present, and future of linear time.”⁷ While Alexander searches out such crossings in Afro-Atlantic ceremony, Lara and Brand explore similarly fluid embodied-imaginary, historical-contemporary spaces through the literal and figurative passages of their historical fictions. The subaltern *can* speak in submarine space, but it is hard to hear her or his underwater voice, whispering (as Brand writes) a thousand secrets that at once wash closer and remain opaque, resisting closure.

I, and my lesbian sisters and gay brothers . . . are not a new fashion. . . . We return to the sea and the shores and once upon a time, which transposes into this time, which it always was. . . . the past simultaneously forever embedded in the present, in the pain and inevitable horrors confronted by conscientious unblinking memory, in the tragedies and occasional triumphs of history always raveled by so much needless suffering, by the unbearable human misery that we must not, for our collective sakes and the continued growth of this body we call “humanity,” ever be denied.

—Thomas Glave, *Words to Our Now: Imagination and Dissent*

In the past fifteen years postcolonial studies effected sea changes in scholarly images of the global south, smashing and wearing away essentialist conceptions of race and nationality with the insistent pounding force of ocean waters. Rigorously theorizing identities that have always already been in flux and rethinking black “insularity” from England and Manhattan to Martinique and Cuba, imaginative

captains of Atlantic and Caribbean studies have called prominently on oceanic metaphors. Their conceptual geographies figure oceans and seas as a presence that is history, a history that is present. In the watershed *The Black Atlantic*, Gilroy evokes the Atlantic as the trope through which he imagines the emergence of black modernities. A past of Atlantic crossings underpins his engagement with contemporary multiracial Britain, where the black in the Union Jack is no novelty introduced by recent immigrants but a continuation of centuries of transoceanic interchanges. Calling on the ship as the first image of this black Atlantic, Gilroy begins by stipulating that ships and oceans are not merely abstract figures but “cultural and political units” that “refer us back to the middle passage, to the half-remembered micro politics of the slave trade.”⁸ He underscores that seminal African diaspora figures like Olaudah Equiano, Frederick Douglass, Robert Wedderburn, and Crispus Attucks worked with and as sailors (why omit Harriet Jacobs, Mary Seacole, and other sailing women?), and notes that the physical mobility enabled by the ocean was fundamental to their intellectual motility. Yet while many of these masculine sailor-intellectuals resurface in Gilroy’s later discussions, the history of their sea voyages does not. Both ships and the Atlantic itself—as concrete maritime space rather than conceptual principle for remapping blackness—drop out of his text immediately after this paragraph. Neither the Middle Passage nor the Atlantic appear in the index, remaining phantom metaphors rather than concrete historical presences. Gilroy’s ghost ships and dark waters traverse five memorable pages of his introduction, then slip into nowhere.

In the equally influential *The Repeating Island*, Antonio Benítez-Rojo navigates contemporary Caribbean identity through a postmodern theorization of the sea as the ultimate space of diffusion, a watery body whose history continually splashes into the present. The “geographic accident” of the Antilles—situated where Atlantic meets Caribbean and migrants from Africa, Europe, Asia, and the Americas cross and converge—beats out the rhythm of repeating histories, repeating islands. Mining the metaphoric possibilities of the sea, Benítez-Rojo finds that it

gives the entire area, including its continental foci, the character of an archipelago, that is, a discontinuous conjunction (of what?): unstable condensations, turbulences, whirlpools, claps of bubbles, frayed seaweed, sunken galleons, crashing breakers, flying fish, seagull squawks, downpours, nighttime phosphorescences, eddies and pools, uncertain voyages of signification.⁹

Ocean and sea remain at once insistently present and insistently abstracted as he flourishingly, intriguingly bypasses “real” migrant trajectories to chart figurative marine confluences, alternative trajectories of globalization that pass through Caribbean history to connect “the Niger with the Mississippi, the China Sea with the Orinoco, the Parthenon with a fried food stand in an alley in Paramaribo.” Spiraling maps where the pre-, trans-, and postnational intersect, Benítez-Rojo’s voyages are shipless crossings where “the peoples of the sea, or better, the Peoples of the Sea proliferate incessantly while differentiating themselves from one another, traveling together toward the infinite.”¹⁰

Appearing and disappearing as briefly as the ship, sexuality also surfaces in Gilroy’s concluding discussion of music in the black Atlantic. But here again, sexuality (like seafaring) is not so much an embodied experience as a metaphor. Sex, it turns out, is almost as omnipresent in black Atlantic storytelling as salt water on an island. Initially, Gilroy places narratives of sexuality in competition with histories of race, as he notes that “conflictual representation of sexuality has vied with the discourse of racial emancipation to constitute the inner core of black expressive cultures.”¹¹ But later, tension between these two melts away as Gilroy concludes that, actually, talking about sex is another way to talk about race. Black love stories in popular songs and elsewhere, he writes, are “narratives of love and loss [that] transcode other forms of yearning and mourning associated with histories of dispersal and exile.”¹² Sex is not about sex, then; it is about pain. While the Atlantic—rather than remain primarily a site of diasporic trauma—is optimistically metaphorized as space that expands the horizons of black consciousness, sex is pessimistically metaphorized as a sorrow song that never yields deep pleasure. Gilroy’s black Atlantic seems equally resistant to victimizing and sexualizing its mariners, as if both impulses were too much part of colonial discourse to warrant sustained attention.

If Gilroy’s Atlantic is frigid, Benítez-Rojo’s Caribbean overflows with hyperfeeling female sexuality. Recentering the resistantly nonphallic Peoples of the Sea, Benítez-Rojo foregrounds a vaginalized Caribbean as he proclaims:

The Atlantic is today the Atlantic (the navel of capitalism) because Europe, in its mercantilist laboratory, conceived of the project of inseminating the Caribbean womb with the blood of Africa; the Atlantic is today the Atlantic . . . because it is the painfully delivered child of the Caribbean, whose vagina was stretched between continental clamps. . . . After the blood and salt water spurts, quickly sew up torn flesh and apply the antiseptic tinctures, the gauze and surgical plaster; then the febrile wait through the forming of a scar: suppurating, always suppurating.¹³

Here sexual violence and painful reproduction are simultaneously abstracted and reinscribed in regional imaginations; projected onto the water by which Caribbean women arrived in the archipelago, they conceive a disturbing image that spreads women's metaphoric legs in unsettling ways. Yet the suppurating wound can heal, almost magically. A few pages later, the vaginal sea opens into a metaphor for liberatory pleasure and pleasurable liberation as Benítez-Rojo imagines the region's femininity as "its flux, its diffuse sensuality, its generative force, its capacity to nourish and conserve (juices, spring, pollen, rain, seed, shoot, ritual sacrifice)."¹⁴ Bleeding, orgasming, or both, Benítez-Rojo's cunnix Caribbean overexposes the sexualized bodies that Gilroy denies. Like the sea, the space between women's legs is at once insistently present and insistently ethereal; like the sea, the space between women's legs becomes a metaphor to mine.

These tropes of the black Atlantic, of Peoples of the Sea, do call to me as powerful enunciations of crosscurrents of African diaspora identity, and I evoke them in respect and solidarity. And yet as Gilroy, Benítez-Rojo, Édouard Glissant, and others call on maritime metaphors without maritime histories and evoke sexualized bodies as figures rather than experiences, their writing out of materiality stops short of the most radical potential of such oceanic imaginations.¹⁵ There are other Atlantic and Caribbean histories that these scholars could have evoked to make sense of the present, other material details of maritime crossings they could have drawn on to make their metaphors richer conceptual tools. As Africans became diasporic, Atlantic and Caribbean, sex and sexuality did not only impact imaginations; they impacted bodies. Not at all an opening to infinite possibilities, the sea was initially a site of painful fluidities for many Africans. The first sight of the ocean was often a vision of fear, as Equiano remembers when slave traders marched him to the coast:

I was beyond measure astonished at this, as I had never before seen any water larger than a pond or a rivulet, and my surprise was mingled with no small fear. . . . The first object which saluted my eyes when I arrived on the coast was the sea, and a slave ship, which was then riding at anchor, and waiting for its cargo. These filled me with astonishment, which was soon converted to terror.¹⁶

Once loaded onto the slave ships, Africans became fluid bodies under the force of brutality. Tightly or loosely packed in sex-segregated holds—men chained together at the ankles while women were sometimes left unchained—surrounded by churning, unseen waters, these brutalized bodies themselves became liquid, oozing. Ship's surgeon Alexander Falconbridge records days when "wet and blow-

ing weather having occasioned the portholes to be shut and the grating to be covered, fluxes and fevers among the negroes ensued. . . . The deck was so covered with the blood and mucus which had proceeded from them in consequence of the flux, that it resembled a slaughterhouse.”¹⁷ Lara adds to this imagination in a character’s vision of a slave ship: “Women’s menstrual blood stained the floor around her, pus crusting at the edges of the chattel wounds. . . . She could feel her body rise in a wave of urine and blood, the stench so wretched as to make her choke on her own breath.”¹⁸ On this Atlantic, then, black body waters, corporeal effluvia, and the stains of gendered and reproductive bodies were among the first sites of colonization.

But this bloody Atlantic was also the site of collaboration and resistance. In the early eighteenth century, ship captains like John Newton and James Barbot repeatedly record with horror how despite such conditions slaves conspired to rebel against captors. At the same time, unnamed rebellions took place not in violent but in *erotic* resistance, in interpersonal relationships enslaved Africans formed with those imprisoned and oozing beside them. Sally and Richard Price’s research on Saramacca maroons documents *mati* as “a highly charged volitional relationship . . . that dates back to the Middle Passage—*maties* were originally ‘shipmates,’ those who had survived the journey out from Africa together . . . those who had experienced the trauma of enslavement and transport together.”¹⁹ Colonial chronicles suggest that shipmate relationships were prominent in other parts of the Caribbean as well. Médéric Moreau de Saint-Méry reports *mati*-like partnerships between enslaved women in prerevolutionary Haiti in his *Description . . . de l’Isle Saint Domingue* (1797), and in *The History . . . of the British West-Indies* (1794) Bryan Edwards remarks: “This is a striking circumstance; the term *ship-mate* is understood among [West Indian slaves] as signifying a relationship of the most endearing nature; perhaps as recalling the time when the sufferers were cut off together from their common country and kindred, and awakening reciprocal sympathy from the remembrance of mutual affliction.”²⁰ Expanding these observations, the anthropologist Gloria Wekker notes the significance of bonds between shipmates throughout the Afro-Atlantic:

In different parts of the Diaspora the relationship between people who came over to the “New” World on the same ship remained a peculiarity of this experience. The Brazilian “malungo,” the Trinidadian “malongue,” the Haitian “batiment” and the Surinamese “sippi” and “mati” are all examples of this special, non-biological bond between two people of the same sex.²¹

As fragmentarily recorded here, the emergence of intense shipmate relationships in the water-rocked, no-person's-land of slave holds created a black Atlantic same-sex eroticism: a *feeling of, feeling for* the kidnapped that asserted the sentience of the bodies that slavers attempted to transform into brute matter.

This Atlantic and these erotic relationships are neither metaphors nor sources of disempowerment. Instead, they are one way that fluid black bodies refused to accept that the liquidation of their social selves — the colonization of oceanic and body waters — meant the liquidation of their sentient selves. Some *mati* and *malungo* were probably sexual connections, others not. Yet regardless of whether intimate sexual contact took place between enslaved Africans in the Atlantic or after landing, relationships between shipmates read as queer relationships. *Queer* not in the sense of a “gay” or same-sex loving identity waiting to be excavated from the ocean floor but as a praxis of resistance. *Queer* in the sense of marking disruption to the violence of normative order and powerfully so: connecting in ways that commodified flesh was never supposed to, loving your own kind when your kind was supposed to cease to exist, forging interpersonal connections that counteract imperial desires for Africans’ living deaths. Reading for shipmates does not offer to clarify, to tell a documentable story of Atlantic, Caribbean, immigrant, or “gay” pasts. Instead it disrupts provocatively. Fomented in Atlantic cross-currents, black queerness itself becomes a crosscurrent through which to view hybrid, resistant subjectivities — opaquely, not transparently. Perhaps, as Brand writes, black queers really have no ancestry except the black water.²² But diving into this water stands to transform African diaspora scholarship in ways as surprising as Equiano’s first glimpse of the sea.

Lara’s debut novel, *Erzulie’s Skirt*, collects gear to take this dive. Like Gilroy and Benítez-Rojo, Lara imagines how the history of the Middle Passage overflows into Atlantic and Caribbean presents; like Edwards or Moreau de St. Méry, she traces a self-consciously fragmented history of the relationships forged in diaspora’s cauldrons. But she does so with a difference, *queerly*. The novel narrates the travels of two women lovers, Haitian Miriam and Dominican Micaela, who meet in Santo Domingo and disastrously attempt to immigrate to Puerto Rico on a *yola* crossing the Mona Strait. Water that defies abstract, passively feminized figuration, the shark-infested Mona passage is an active seismic area rocked by enormous waves that tens of thousands of immigrants confront each year in small wooden boats. Dominican maritime migration to Puerto Rico fosters ever-growing informal businesses, headed by organizers and captains who overcrowd fishing boat-sized crafts with hundreds of people desperate for economic opportunities in the global northern territory across the strait. Ten thousand Dominicans arrive

in Puerto Rico by *yola* each year; many others die in the process. Because of the earthquake-rocked roughness of the waters and the tight packing of boats, migrants routinely perish when *yolas* capsize, passengers are thrown out to lighten loads, or unexpectedly long trips lead to dehydration or starvation.²³ For Lara these hellish conditions constitute a contemporary Middle Passage whose stories are drowned out, and her novel's inspiration arises from this. "My own connection to this story—it's deep and personal," she states in an interview with Naomi Wood. "Slavery and the trafficking of people . . . are still very real circumstances for many Dominicans today. . . . I did not make the journey across the water from the D.R. to Puerto Rico. I know many people who have tried—and never made it. Or were turned back."²⁴

Never evaporating metaphors, turbulent marine waters are an overwhelming physical presence in her novel. They spill into the *yola* and threaten to sink it; bluely reflect the sun's glare until heat almost drives raftgoers mad; crust thirsty, cracked lips with salt; instantly swallow those who fall overboard; and make terrified passengers urinate on themselves at the sight of bodies sinking. As it describes this dangerous passage, *Erzulie's Skirt* navigates an oceanic crosscurrent: the Mona Strait is where the Atlantic and Caribbean come violently together. The raft crossing also opens a temporal crosscurrent: Lara thematizes the repeating history of the Middle Passage through ancestral memories of transit from Africa that surface in Micaela's *yolaboard* dreams. As they survive rafts, plantations, and coerced sex work together, Miriam and Micaela become not only lovers but literal and figurative shipmates. "How I have loved this woman," Miriam thinks to herself near the end of the novel. "This woman who has helped me through the darkest hours. . . . The tenderness between them had helped them survive their slavery."²⁵ This survival of twentieth-century captivity is framed and given meaning by its connection to a history of transoceanic slavers. Lara imagines the choppy surface of the Mona Strait as a window through which the "other side of the water"—the liminal space where ancestors and spirits reside in Vodoun cosmology—touches the realm of the living, mirroring the protagonists' journey from the bottom of the ocean and through the lens of Micaela's psychic visions.

As Miriam and Micaela wait to board the *yola* in Santo Domingo, the sea before them is the kind of memory Alexander imagines: frightening and promising, past and future, physical and psychic. The water speaks to Micaela:

Micaela looked out at the ocean, at the churning waters at her feet, closing her eyes to the cool night air. La Mar had always been there. She knew from dreams that it was from there that she had arisen. That sometime

long ago she had entered her waters and emerged on this side, whole and broken. That somewhere in her depths was the key to her death and to her living. As Micaela prayed, La Mar appeared before her dressed in silver and jewels and the rosy shells of *lambí*. She lit up the sky so that even the moon hid behind Her brilliance. She came and She sang to Micaela about everything: the *mètros*, the *vêvés*, the children, the hunger of suffering, the distance between her land and her destiny. She pulled Micaela from the hungry depths of exhaustion and gave her food, sweet water and love. Her sweet voice sang through the waves:

Hubo un lugar donde los dos desaparecieron
 Donde susurraban los secretos de su deseo
 Se miraban a través de la oscuridad
 Se admiraban y en silencio se decían:
 Amor te quiero
 Sabes que te deseo
 Amor nos iremos de aquí un día
 La pesadilla que nos ata desaparecerá

La Mar told her of a place where two people lay with irons on their ankles. They gazed at each other across the darkness, despite the darkness, and their eyes shone like the stars. In the unending blackness that covered them, that suffocated them, they spoke: “Amor, I long for your kisses, your arms around me, along my hips. Amor, I love you.” All this they whispered without moving their lips, in languages that escaped the trappings of sound.²⁶

La Mar is the black Atlantic in iridescent *lambí* (conch), embodied and queer. This figure that eclipses moon and stars and brings women sweet water and love is the novel’s most eroticized character—a material body who whispers in Micaela’s ear, whose waters she enters, whose depths she longs to explore, whose sexuality is neither overexposed nor hidden. I see her as an image of the queer black Atlantic not primarily because she arouses the sensuality of another feminine character, though, nor even because her appearance to Micaela performs a femme desire that needs no masculinist gaze (à la Benítez-Rojo) to validate its apparition. Instead La Mar’s queerness churns silverly in her *overflow*, in the sea-like capacity to desire beyond the brutality of history, nationality, enslavement, and immigration that she models for drowned shipmates and endangered *yola*-mates. Neither disembodied metaphor nor oozing wound, her fluid desire becomes

a resistant, creative praxis that, as Brand describes diasporic art, experiments with being “celebratory, even with the horrible,” flowing together unexpected erotic linkages even, *especially*, in spaces of global violence and inequity.²⁷ No matter what devastation she traverses La Mar keeps desiring, and this is the queer feeling that metaphorically and materially connects her to African diaspora immigrants past and present.

La Mar as she appears here is not only a mirror for black Atlantic queerness; she is a black Atlantic that mirrors queerly. Her song creates figures of comparison where terms are not equated but rather diffracted and recomposed, reflected in a broken mirror whose fractures are part of their meaning-creation. Let me point to two examples of “mis-mirrored” terms in this passage: languages (Spanish/English) and couples (*yolabound*/shipwrecked). In the second paragraph a centered, italicized Spanish-language poem—whose distinct visual arrangement recalls the *vêvés* (figures drawn on the ground in Voudoun ceremonies) that La Mar sings of—interrupts standard English prose; although the next paragraph offers an indirect, still bilingual translation (“Amor, I long for your kisses”), this translation remains notably inexact. Amplifying this chain of repetition with difference, the words of the poem are then revealed to be “really” spoken in the drowned slaves’ unrepresentable “languages that escaped the trappings of sound”: instead of speaking two languages that mirror each other, La Mar’s song contains three intertwined yet unequatable *lenguas*, proliferating and connecting across difference with each translation. Similarly, the star-eyed lovers at the bottom of the sea—those thrown overboard during the Middle Passage without their presence being definitively liquidated—do “twin” sea-crossing lovers Miriam and Micaela, but also do not. Miriam and Micaela remain on the waters’ surface while the iron-clad lovers remain submerged and the love of the former helps them stay afloat while the *amor* of the latter comforts them in their sinking. The present repeats the past with a difference, and the spectacular figure of La Mar that joins them appears as the surplus—the overflow, the temporal and cultural gap that cannot be dissolved by their connection.

La Mar whispers this in our ears, too: in queer diasporic imagining, the gap—the material difference—*always matters* and must be part of any figuration that makes meaningful connection possible. The maritime metaphors of Gilroy and Benítez-Rojo move toward a kind of closure, the Atlantic transmuting into a horizon of hybridity and the cunnic Caribbean healing orgasmically in order to become the vehicles these authors desire for diasporic and regional identities. Yet such closure is made possible only by washing over important materialities and multiplicities in visions of diaspora and region. La Mar’s unclosable, untranslat-

able language of beauty and pain churns differently, crossing instead in turbulent, excessive currents of diffracting meanings. As Micaela floats literally suspended in water between Africa, the Caribbean, and North America, La Mar's queer mirroring provides a medium for conceiving what it means for diasporic Africans to emerge from her waters "whole and broken": brutalized and feeling, connected to the past and separate from it, divided from other diasporic migrants and linked to them. To think the black queer Atlantic, not only must its metaphors be materially informed; they must be internally discontinuous, allowing for differences and inequalities between situated subjects that are always already part of both diaspora and queerness. They must creatively figure what Rinaldo Walcott imagines as "a rethinking of community that might allow for different ways of cohering into some form of recognizable political entity . . . [where] we must confront singularities without the willed effort to make them cohere into oneness; we must struggle to make a community of singularities."²⁸ The black Atlantic is not just any ocean, and what is queer about its fluid *amor* is that it is always churning, always different even from itself.

And larger and larger and ever larger than me, O sea: water: waves
and foam. . . . How the sea would take I and wrap I deep in it. How
it would drown I, mash I up, wash I into bits. . . . And so I does say
now that I know the sea this same sea like I does know the back of me
hand, says I: these currents, these waves, these foams. . . . Let this
sea not take I, but let it talk to I. Let it sing. The sea, the sea. Yes,
water. Waves. Wetness, poundsurf, that I does love.

—Thomas Glave, *Words to Our Now*

And in the last fifteen years queer theory has harnessed the repetitive, unpredictable energy of currents, waves, and foam to smash and wash into bits many I's—from the gendered self to the sexed body, from heterocentric feminist speech to homonormative gay discourse. In this field where groundlessness is celebrated, writers also explicitly or implicitly rely on metaphors of fluidity, which provide an undercurrent for expanding formulations of gender and sexual mobility. Judith Butler's praise of the resistant power of drag's fluid genders and sexualities in the pivotal *Gender Trouble* is echoed by many a queer theoretical text: "Perpetual displacement constitutes a fluidity of identities that suggests an openness to resignification and recontextualization; parodic proliferation deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the right to claim naturalized or essentialist gender identities."²⁹ This proliferation multiplies the genders and sexualities explored by

queer theory beyond women and men, gay and straight. They soon include, as Eve Sedgwick puts it, “pushy femmes, radical faeries, fantasists, drags, clones, leather folk, ladies in tuxedos, feminist women or feminist men, masturbators, bulldaggers, divas, Snap! queens, butch bottoms, storytellers, transsexuals, aunts, wannabes.”³⁰ No deviant is a desert isle here, but part of an archipelago rushed together by a common sea of queerness.

Does this queer sea have a color, though? As the cascading, un-color-coded sentences of Butler and Sedgwick suggest, in the early 1990s prominent queer theorists denaturalized conventional gender and sexuality while renaturalizing global northernness and unmarked whiteness, initially unreferenced as if they were as neutral as fresh water. In both theorists’ early genderscapes, the bodies and selves rendered fluid are first and foremost gendered and sexualized, only faintly marked by other locations—only secondarily racialized, nationalized, classed. When Butler acknowledges that codes of (presumably white) racial purity undergird the gender norms disturbed in her initial consideration of “fluidity of identities,” she does so belatedly and between parentheses (as part of a long list of clarifications to her discussion of drag in the 1999 preface to *Gender Trouble*).³¹ Sedgwick’s list, somewhat differently, momentarily parts the waves of queer theory’s un-commented whiteness as race fades in subtly with the African American—associated terms *bulldagger* and *Snap! queen*. Not only is this faint racialization limited to the black-white landscape of the contemporary global north, keeping terms like *mahu*, *mati*, *tomboy*, *tongzhi* unlistable, but the particularities of this possible racialization remain as unspecified as the color of the leather favored by “leather folk” or the jacket cut of the “ladies in tuxedos.” The list’s sheer heterogeneity sweeps the bulldagger’s racial particularities into the same washing currents as the butch bottom’s sexual particularities.

These queer theorists are innovative, rigorous scholars whose work focuses on a predominantly white global north but who do—often in introductions—acknowledge how racialization intersects the construction and deconstruction of ossified genders and sexualities. Shortly after her list in *Tendencies*’ introduction, Sedgwick contends that “a lot of the most exciting recent work around ‘queer’ spins the term outward along dimensions that can’t be subsumed under gender and sexuality at all: the ways that race, ethnicity, postcolonial nationality criss-cross with these *and other* identity-constituting, identity-fracturing discourses.”³² This is not *her* work in a text that goes on to deftly engage Jane Austen and Sigmund Freud, but she does gesture toward the importance of “other” scholars taking it up. Similarly, in the preface to the tenth anniversary edition of *Gender Trouble*, Butler remarks that “racial presumptions invariably underwrite

the discourse on gender in ways that need to be made explicit” and concedes that if she rewrote the book she would include a discussion of racialized sexuality. In thinking through performativity and race, she suggests that “the question to ask is not whether the theory of performativity is transposable onto race, but what happens to the theory when it tries to come to grips with race.”³³ But of course there is not just one question to ask of the meeting point between Butler’s theory and race, and those I would pose would be different still. Namely, what happens when queer theories start with explicit formulations of racialized sexuality and sexualized race, rather than add them in after theories like performativity have already been elaborated? How does this change in point of departure change the tidal pattern of queer theory? How might it shift the field’s dominant metaphors, decentering performativity’s stages and unearthing other topoi?

“Metaphors lose their metaphoricity as they congeal through time into concepts,” Butler aptly remarks in this preface. And in a rare autobiographical moment, the short text offers one image of literal liquidity that informs the metaphoric fluidity (threatening to congeal into a concept) in this foundational text of queer theory. Just after her discussion of performativity, Butler provides an insight into the literal starting place for *Gender Trouble*. Explaining how her involvement in lesbian and gay politics on the East Coast of the United States informed her writing of this academic text, she recounts: “At the same time that I was ensconced in the academy, I was also living a life outside those walls, and though *Gender Trouble* is an academic book, it began, for me, with a crossing-over, sitting on Rehoboth Beach, wondering whether I could link the different sides of my life.”³⁴ Meaning “place for all,” Rehoboth is an Atlantic resort town that boasts beautiful, Caribbean—bright white sand beaches and has become one of the Northeast’s premier gay and lesbian summer getaways. As Butler suggests, it is situated at a crosscurrent: “Water, water everywhere. . . . Bounded on the east by the mighty Atlantic Ocean, and on the west by Rehoboth Bay and Indian River Bay,” gushes a promotional Web site.³⁵ This crosscurrent has a black Atlantic history, from the eighteenth-century docking of slave ships in Delaware’s harbors to a maritime version of the underground railroad that passed through the state’s waters in the nineteenth century. But by the late twentieth century that history had been largely washed out of sight. Over 98 percent of the city’s population is now white and, as Alexis Pate’s *West of Rehoboth* depicts, people of color remain semi-invisible, concentrated in segregated neighborhoods.³⁶ So when Butler sits at the “crossing-over” of Rehoboth Beach, the difference that prominently marked its shores would be that of sexuality—the beach-combing gay and lesbian tourists who make the resort what it is, a site of play and mobility for sexual rather than racial “others.”

Now, if this is where one of queer theory's most influential texts emerged and a site that (Butler suggests) has metaphoric valences, I want to extend that metaphor by saying: frequently, prominent queer theorists continue to work from Rehoboth Beach. This is an important place from which to work, certainly, a site steeped in possibilities for meaningful confluences between thinking sexuality and thinking race. But theorists have a tendency to wait (figuratively) for queers of color to arrive on Rehoboth's shores in the hopes that they will join the sexuality-centered signifying games already set up . . . in the hopes they will take up theories of performativity and rework them through race, for example. And they wait rather than seriously engage how some of queer theory's fundamental premises—including its emphasis on abstract rather than concrete crossings-over, its references to places like Rehoboth without engagement with their geographic and cultural specificity—need to change in order to make possible deeply productive meetings between sexuality and race. That is, they welcome the appearance of queer of color scholarship without rigorously confronting the exclusionary practices that marginalize queer global southern experiences. To become an expansively decolonizing practice, queer theory must adjust its vision to see what has been submerged in the process of unmarking whiteness and global northernness: the black Atlantic, New England Bay, and Indian River of queer crossings-over, the intersecting beach topoi of slavery and liberation, coerced work and unconventional play, unmarked whiteness and invisible blackness, flesh exposed for vacation and for auction. Rehoboth's layered present and past exemplifies the need to engage specific, situated histories and the difference they make. Water is only literally transparent, and the imagination of fluidity inspired by the Rehoboth or the San Francisco bays may not be the same as that inspired by the southern Atlantic or the eastern Caribbean. Nor may its metaphors be as playful as waves of punk bands, snap! queens, butch bottoms. . . . Just as travel does not offer the same image of freedom to the gay undocumented immigrant that it does to the queer cosmopolitan, conceptualizations of the fluid change when we approach islands where the sea simultaneously carries the violent history of the Middle Passage, a present of *yolas* and tourist cruises, and a possible future of interisland connections.

Also composed at the turn of the century, Brand's *Map to the Door of No Return* charts space to explore these complexities. The thirty-year literary career of this Trinidadian-born, Toronto-resident poet, novelist, essayist, filmmaker, and activist narrates continual migration among Atlantic and Caribbean seascapes, crossings-over that connect sites like Delaware's Rehoboth or Toronto's Bathurst to Cuba's Santiago and Trinidad's Blanchisseuse. The chief landing points of her work

transmigrate between Grenada, then Trinidad, now Ontario. Brand's writing in the 1980s is propelled, haunted by her vision of the Grenadan shore stormed by U.S. troops in 1983, walking distance from the office where she worked as an information officer for the People's Development Agency under the New Jewel government. Her work returns again and again to waters that absorbed the bloodshed of this invasion, combing Caribbean beaches to attempt to put many sides of her political life together: tidal scenes of revolutionary hope, invasion, betrayal, death, eroticism, and possibility. These last wash in prominently when, in 1990—the same year that *Gender Trouble* and Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* revolutionized sexuality studies—Brand publishes *No Language Is Neutral*. This award-winning collection of poems is heralded by Michelle Cliff as the first anglophone Caribbean text to explore fully love between women in a West Indian setting, the black queer Atlantic of Trinidad's north coast.³⁷ But, resistant to being caught in the nostalgia of a return to her native land, by the late 1990s Brand's geographic and thematic focus moves yet again to the shores of Lake Ontario, where she now lives in the sea of West Indian and other diasporics that has become Toronto. This northern migration further complicates the crossed currents she witnesses, as the Canada cycle reflects gathering discomfort with writing from *any* identity—whether revolutionary, activist, black, lesbian, or otherwise. As she explains in an interview, “The book is a map . . . [to] a new kind of identity and existence” that challenges isolated, nationally or otherwise bounded constructions of racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual identity. Its trajectory answers her post-Grenada, post-homeland question: “So now, who am I? I really want to think about that. My objections lie with the people who hang onto what they call identities for the most awful reasons, and those are the reasons of exclusion. I'm trying to be very careful how I say it. I don't want to say that we don't have a history, but what we hold onto has to be part of a much larger terrain.”³⁸

As it explores this terrain, her *Map* does not emerge as a text as immediately given to queer reading as either *Gender Trouble* or *No Language Is Neutral*. Yet its oceanography queers many crossings-over, and indeed Brand once generously thanked me for reading “that book that way.”³⁹ Instead of foregrounding fluxes of gender or sexuality this work rushes into larger bodies, larger openings. The text is a tactile, shifting oceanography of African diaspora experience imagined at an unremitting intersection between maritime materialities and metaphors. This intersection is physically dominated by the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean Sea, those waters from which blacks emerge whole and broken, and psychically dominated by the Door of No Return, the “real, imaginary, and imagined” portal through which Africans left the continent in slave ships' holds.⁴⁰ Brand's

Map through the “sea in between” is fluidly genred writing that moves between childhood memories and family stories, ships’ logs and colonial maritime chronicles, and contemporary echoes of the slave trade in the conflux of immigrants from the Caribbean, North America, Europe, and Africa that form their own human sea in Toronto.⁴¹ Its creative project is one Brand identifies as always underway in diaspora: to record disruptions that continue on the other side of the door and “reclaim the black body from that domesticated, captive, open space” it has become.⁴² This project is fundamentally queer, in a black Atlantic, crosscurrents way. Rather than eroticize individual bodies, it offers what Chela Sandoval calls a “social erotics”: a compass that traces historical linkages that were never supposed to be visible, remembers connections that counteract imperial desires for global southern disaggregation, and puts together the fragmented experiences of those whose lives, as Butler writes, were never supposed to “qualify as the ‘human’ and the ‘livable.’”⁴³

Like the texts of Butler and Sedgwick, Brand’s work also generates lists that crash onto her pages like waves—but join unexpected terms in concatenations that recall the chains of slave ships more than those of sexual play. Toward the end of her *Map*, Brand imagines the continued haunting of the black Atlantic by those literally and figuratively drowned in the Middle Passage, those she calls the marooned of the diaspora. For these marooned she writes a *ruttier*: which is, she explains, “a long poem containing navigational instructions which sailors learned by heart . . . the routes and tides, the stars and maybe the taste and flavour of the waters, the coolness, the saltiness; all for finding one’s way at sea.”⁴⁴ Reconfiguring these colonial maritime lists, her *ruttier* traces how misdirections become the way for diasporic Africans—always painfully, always partially. She describes the marooned as unsexed, irreducibly opaque figures who at once refuse to stay submerged and refuse to appear in clearly recognizable bodies. Like many ghosts, their bodies seemed waterlogged, distorted beyond naturalizable gender and other identities:

Desolation castaway, abandoned in the world. They was, is, wandered, wanders as spirits who dead cut, banished, seclude, refuse, shut the door, derelict, relinquished, apart. . . . And it doesn’t matter where in the world, this spirit is no citizen, is no national, no one who is christened, no sex, this spirit is washed of all this lading, bag and baggage, jhaji bundle, georgie bindle, lock stock, knapsack, and barrel, and only holds its own weight which is nothing, which is memoryless and tough with remembrances, heavy with lightness, aching with grins.⁴⁵

“This spirit . . . is no sex”; this spirit is a singular, plural, and genderless *they* that “was, is,” in a grammatical unmarking that parallels the absence of gender in Creole third-person pronouns. This genderlessness is perhaps an ocean reflection of the negative equality of sexes experienced in plantation labor that brutalized men and women without discrimination—a gender queerness that calls into question facile linkages between gender trouble and liberation.

But more than this, the fluid identities of Brand’s black queer Atlantic simultaneously efface gender and nationality, ethnicity, citizenship, religion, their maroons “no citizen, no national, no one christened, no sex.” This is a lyric litany of negatives whose rhythmic, sonoric, and conceptual linkages speak a cross-current of dissolved and reconfigured black selfhoods . . . a tide where womanhood, economic status, motherhood, Yorubanness, (for example) are all disrupted from previous significations at the same time—black queer time. This kind of ongoing, multiple black Atlantic resignification is thematized and performed through these lists where words jostle against each other unexpectedly, breaking open and reconfiguring meanings. The conventional baggage of language is shuffled and shed as the spirit is washed of “bag and baggage, jhaji bundle, georgie bindle, lock stock, knapsack, and barrel.” At the end of this washing, maroons’ sexless and otherwise unmarked bodies emerge as the legacy of geographically and historically *specific* waters, the Atlantic of the Middle Passage. Their brown bodies are gender fluid not because they choose parodic proliferations but because they have been “washed of all this lading, bag and baggage” by a social liquidation that is *not* the willful or playful fluidity of Butler’s drag queens and Sedgwick’s butch bottoms. I am compelled by Butler’s growing insistence, from the 1999 preface to *Gender Trouble* to the engaging *Undoing Gender*, that gender theory should address more material concerns—issues of survival for the transgendered and others whose “unintelligible” bodies threaten their very lives.⁴⁶ But Brand’s embodied images of the black queer Atlantic remind us that such survival is not a concern that can be reduced to the present, that black gender queers are always already surviving a past of multiple, intersecting violences. The specificity of these waters, these images, this literary language is at once a map to the door of no return and a map to a black queer alternative to canonical gender theory.

Yet the route of un-Return is not only one of violence; it is also one of queer erotics. Just before the *ruttier* for the marooned, Brand includes another kind of *ruttier* titled “Arriving at Desire.” But just as Brand’s *ruttier* for the marooned never goes in expected directions, the desire she charts here never becomes sexual or even interpersonal. After a description of childhood reading experiences

that introduced her to desires both political and erotic, the narrator recounts how she came to write her novel *At the Full and Change of the Moon*. Like Butler on Rehoboth Beach, Brand conceived her text at a crossing-over between land and water, between experience of the real and vision of the (im)possible. Her inspiration came while contemplating maritime artifacts in a Port of Spain museum overlooking the sea, and her converging descriptions of the museum's inside and outside become the *Map*'s most erotic description:

As you crest the hill, there is the ocean, the Atlantic, and there a fresh wide breeze relieving the deep flush of heat. From atop this hill you can see over the whole town. Huge black cannons overlook the ocean, the harbour, and the town's perimeter. If you look right, if your eyes could round the point, you would see the Atlantic and the Caribbean in a wet blue embrace. If you come here at night you will surprise lovers, naked or clothing askew, groping hurriedly or dangerously languorous, draped against the black gleaming cannons of George III.⁴⁷

Before we ever come to these lovers, Brand at once gestures toward and leaves opaque two queer desires: the Atlantic's desire for the Caribbean it meets in a wet blue embrace, and the narrator's desire for the ocean she describes so erotically. This desire is queerly gendered, since ocean, sea, and Brand—rolling and writing in opposition to the black cannons—would all normatively be feminized. It is also queer in a black Atlantic way, since it ascribes feeling to bodies—of water and of African females—that, in colonizers' and slave traders' maps of the world, were never supposed to feel. The queerness of this sensuality is the drive Brand describes two paragraphs earlier: the diasporic search to “put the senses back together again,” a sensual re-membling that George III's cannons, the policing of sea and of diasporic bodies, cannot stop.⁴⁸

What puts together Atlantic and Caribbean, viewers and lovers in this passage is another list, a string of conditionals: “If you look . . . if your eyes could round . . . you would see. . . . If you come . . . you will surprise.” Like the *ruttier*'s litany of negatives, this conjunction of *if* . . . *would*, *if* . . . *will* traces some complexities of the black queer time the *Map* moves through. The embrace of Atlantic and Caribbean, of lovers in front of cannons, is not written as a present reality that narrator or readers *can* see but as past and future possibilities they *could* see if and when their consciousness and body move creatively to “find one's way at sea,” to arrive at a desire—for sentient pasts, livable futures—to which there are no ready maps. This desire promises to emerge at a site of oceanographic and

historical uncertainty and violence that the reader's eyes cannot quite reach ("if your eyes could round the point" you would see it, but can they?): the harbor where Atlantic meets Caribbean, where ships docked after a Middle Passage that did not end. Neither Atlantic nor Caribbean yet both, this unseen site is one where diaspora's radical blurring can also harbor new routes to being, routes neither shielded nor boxed in by doors of hegemonic space, time, and identity. It is the space for rewiring the senses that Alexander calls for, a crossroads/crosscurrents of "expansive memory refusing to be housed in any single place, bound by the limits of time, enclosed within the outlines of a map, encased in the physicality of the body, or imprisoned as exhibit in a museum."⁴⁹

One of Butler's important observations in *Gender Trouble* is that all subjects put together fictionally solid subjectivities from fluid, unstable experiences, and Brand's *Map* supports this idea. Earlier in the text she observes, "There are ways of constructing the world—that is, of putting it together each morning, what it should look like piece by piece. . . . Before that everything is liquid, ubiquitous and mute. We accumulate information over our lives which bring various things into solidity, into view."⁵⁰ What proves innovative in Brand's black queer Atlantic liquidity is how insistently she weaves these explorations of figurative fluidity together with poignant material engagements with the waters that shape raced, nationalized, classed, gendered, and sexualized selves in different moments and sites of diaspora. Understanding the particularity of the liquids that we put together daily is the project of *A Map to the Door of No Return*, a project that allows the marooned of the diaspora another kind of queer coupling: the possibility of *putting the world together* and *putting the senses back together* at the same time. As Wekker writes of her search for stories of women's sexuality in the African diaspora, finding these stories involves collecting the curving, chipped, conch shell-like "pieces of [black women's] conceptions of being human" that have been dispersed in the waters of forced transatlantic migrations and that individuals and communities rearrange in creatively transculturated ways.⁵¹ The key to making black queer sense of such self-pieces is not turning to race-, class-, or geographically unmarked models of sexuality and humanity—based in the European Enlightenment philosophy that justified slavery in the first place—but tracing as carefully as possible the particular, specific, always marked contours, the contested beachscapes of African diaspora histories of gender and sexuality. So in the black queer time and place of the door of no return, fluid desire is neither purely metaphor nor purely luxury. Instead—like the blue embrace of two bodies of water—its connections and crosscurrents look to speak through and beyond the washed lad-

ing, the multiply effaced identities of the Middle Passage. Finally, Brand's *ruttiers* chart how the marooned come to sail as maroons, continually stealing back the space where they live.

this is my ocean, but it is speaking
another language, since its accent changes around
different islands

—Derek Walcott, *Midsummer*

The ocean does speak many languages, and I am only a novice linguist. So I have tried to present academic writing that is fluid, that in some way explores what it would mean to perform the oceanness that it thematizes. I have tried to broach more whispered secrets than I could draw out and raise more questions than can be answered, to pick apart metaphors, put them together without closure. At this point, then, I do not want to conclude or pretend to. Instead, I want to end with thoughts on some of the challenges that the Atlantic offers the border waters of African diaspora, queer, and queer African diaspora studies.

The long-navigated Atlantic tells us that, like Brand's resurrection of the marooned, queer Africana studies must explore what it means to conceive our field *historically* and *materially*. Like Lara and Brand, as we navigate the postmodern we must look for the fissures that show how the anti- and ante-modern continue to configure black queer broken-and-wholeness. At the same time, the meaningfully multiblued Atlantic tells us that we must continue to navigate our field *metaphorically*. As Frantz Fanon contended in *The Wretched of the Earth*, metaphors provide conceptual bridges between the lived and the possible that use language queerly to map other roads of becoming. My point is never that we should strip theory of watery metaphors but that we should return to the materiality of water to make its metaphors mean more complexly, shaking off settling into frozen figures. The territory-less Atlantic also tells us that, like the song between Micaela and *la Mar*, black queer studies must speak transnationally. When black becomes only African American, black queer theory becomes insular; as the crosscurrents between Atlantic and Caribbean, Atlantic and Mediterranean, Atlantic and Indian Ocean are richest in marine life, so they will be richest in depth of theorizing.⁵² Most simply, our challenge is to be like the ocean: spreading outward, running through bays and fingers, while remaining heavy, stinging, a force against our hands.

Notes

1. Kale Fajardo, "Filipino Cross Currents: Histories of Filipino Seafaring—Asia and the Americas" (address, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, February 14, 2005).
2. See Roderick Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 4–10.
3. "Slavery in New York," New-York Historical Society, October 7, 2005–March 26, 2006.
4. See Fajardo's forthcoming manuscript, "Filipino Cross Currents: Oceanographies of Seafaring and Masculinities in the Global Economy."
5. On the importance of reimagining what constitutes an archive in queer studies, see Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 169–74.
6. M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 290.
7. Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 292.
8. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 17.
9. Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 2.
10. Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating Island*, 16.
11. Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 83.
12. Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 201.
13. Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating Island*, 5.
14. Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating Island*, 29.
15. A number of recent studies have reworked the concept and space of the black Atlantic to take class and materiality into serious consideration. These include the creative, groundbreaking work of Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker in *The Many-Headed Hydra: The Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon, 2001) and Ian Baucom's *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005). These imaginative materialist revisions, however—particularly the insistent heterosexualizing of romance (even among pirates!) in *The Many-Headed Hydra*—still continue some of the unqueered sexual politics of their predecessors.
16. Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*, in *The Classic Slave Narratives*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (New York: Penguin, 1987), 32.
17. Quoted in Charles Johnson and Patricia Smith, *Africans in America: America's Journey through Slavery* (New York: Harcourt, 1998), 72.
18. Ana-Maurine Lara, *Erzulie's Skirt* (Washington, DC: Red Bone, 2006), 173.
19. Sally Price and Richard Price, *Two Evenings in Saramaka* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 3, 396, 207.

20. Bryan Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British West Indies*, vol. 2 (1794; rpt. New York: AMS, 1966), 94. See also Médéric Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de l'isle Saint Domingue*, 3 vols., ed. Blanche Maurel and Etienne Taillemite (1797; rpt. Paris: Société de l'histoire des colonies françaises, 1958), 1:77.
21. Gloria Wekker, *Ik ben een gouden munt* (Amsterdam: Feministische Uitgeverij VITA, 1994), 145, translation mine. The original Dutch reads: "In verschillende delen van de Diaspora de relatie tussen mensen die op hetzelfde ship naar de 'Nieuwe' Wereld overgekomen waren, een bijzondere bleef. Het Braziliaanse 'malungo,' het Trinidadiaanse 'malongue,' het Haitiaanse 'batiment' an het Surinaamse 'sippi' en 'mati' zijn allemaal voorbeelden van die speciale, niet-biologische, symbolische band tussen twee mensen van dezelfde sekse."
22. Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2001), 61.
23. These details of Dominican migration to Puerto Rico have been reported widely in the press. For a sampling of such reportage, see the *Puerto Rico Herald's* collection of articles at puertorico-herald.org/issues/2004/vol8n07/DesperIslHop.html (accessed February 8, 2008).
24. Ana Lara, unpublished interview by Naomi Wood, October 2006.
25. Lara, *Erzulie's Skirt*, 233.
26. Lara, *Erzulie's Skirt*, 159–60. I choose not to translate the poem into English to maintain the opacity of the Spanish in the original. An indirect translation is contained in the following paragraph, as I discuss.
27. Dionne Brand, *What We All Long For* (Toronto: Random House Canada, 2005), 309.
28. Rinaldo Walcott, "Outside in Black Studies: Reading from a Queer Place in the Diaspora," in *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*, ed. E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 93.
29. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 176.
30. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 8.
31. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xvi.
32. Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, 8–9.
33. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xvi.
34. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xvi–xvii.
35. See Rehoboth's official promotional Web site, www.rehoboth.com/beaches.asp.
36. See Alexis Pate, *West of Rehoboth* (New York: William Morrow, 2001).
37. See Michelle Cliff with Judith Raiskin, "The Art of History: An Interview with Michelle Cliff," *Kenyon Review* 15 (Winter 1993): 69. While there are many other texts that undertake representations of female same-sex eroticism in the Caribbean before Brand's, including the work of Eliot Bliss, Ida Faubert, Mayotte Capécia, Michèle Lacrosil, Nadine Magloire, and Astrid Roemer, *No Language Is Neutral* does become a "breakout" queer text in the anglophone Caribbean.

38. Maya Mavjee, "Opening the Door: An Interview with Dionne Brand," *Read Magazine*, March 28, 2003, www.randomhouse.ca/readmag/page28.htm.
39. Dionne Brand, personal communication, Toronto, October 20, 2006, after hearing a paper in which I presented this reading of *A Map to the Door of No Return*.
40. Brand, *Map to the Door of No Return*, 19.
41. Brand, *Map to the Door of No Return*, 20.
42. Brand, *Map to the Door of No Return*, 43.
43. See Chela Sandoval, *Methodologies of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xxvii.
44. Brand, *Map to the Door of No Return*, 212.
45. Brand, *Map to the Door of No Return*, 213.
46. See Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
47. Brand, *Map to the Door of No Return*, 197.
48. Brand, *Map to the Door of No Return*, 195.
49. Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 288.
50. Brand, *Map to the Door of No Return*, 141.
51. See Gloria Wekker, *The Politics of Passion: Women's Sexual Culture in the Afro-Surinamese Diaspora* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 215.
52. I am inspired here by Rachel Carson's classic *The Sea around Us*, which explains: "Wherever two currents meet . . . there are zones of turbulence and unrest. . . . At such places the richness and abundance of marine life reveals itself most strikingly" (*The Sea around Us* [New York: Mentor, 1950], 50).