

# Wildness, Loss, Death

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Jack Halberstam

Wildness also raises the specter of death of the symbolic function itself. It is the spirit of the unknown and the disorderly, loose in the forest encircling the city and the sown land, disrupting the conventions upon which meaning and the shaping function of images rests. Wildness challenges the unity of the symbol, the transcendent totalization binding the image to that which it represents. Wildness pries open this unity and its place creates slippage and a grinding articulation between signifier and signified. Wildness makes of these connections spaces of darkness and light in which objects stare out in their mottled nakedness while signifiers float by. Wildness is the death space of signification.

—Michael Taussig

The untimely death of one you did not expect to lose so soon can propel you to spin wildly, sink quickly, sigh deeply, become inert, stop loving, drive fast, sleep too long or too little, cry in airplanes, take stock, lose hope, exhaust friends, fear nothing, risk all. It can also make you write madly, write with and through the thinking of the one you did not expect to lose so soon. Death makes us wild. In the spirit of “being with” José Esteban Muñoz, I offer this meditation on wildness with and through and alongside his published work and his wild work to come, and I recognize that, for him as for us, wildness also may have raised the specter of death.

Obviously, we are all mourning the loss of José, but this issue in particular is about “being with” José and continuing a connection to his work that is at once melancholic, sad, grateful, celebratory, and indebted. As the editors of this issue remind us: “Indeed, the inescapable, hard fact is that this issue exists because of this loss.” Just one of the many contradictions that José’s death leaves us with is that we are now a community of mourners, united in our loss while we remain disconnected in all kinds of other ways. To try to remain in José’s orbit while accepting that he is gone

is the task we have all agreed to here and whether that means that we rage against loss or think it through the concept of “queer temporality,” we are nonetheless, all of us, in this, in this loss, loose in the forest, encircling the city and unable to find our way out.

### **Wildness Also Raises the Specter of Death**

As I was developing some ideas for my project on “wildness” in the last year or so, I became quickly aware of the fact that Tavia Nyong’o and José Muñoz were also, together and separately, exploring some similar questions about queerness, new materialism, and alternative political imaginaries also under the rubric of *wildness*. Indeed, in the fall of 2013, Nyong’o and Muñoz taught and curated a class titled Wildness. This class, and I quote from its syllabus, proposed to “employ wildness and the wild as critical tropes that potentially open a conversation across queer studies, ecology, aesthetics, animal studies, disability studies, and critical race studies.” The syllabus is an inspired mix of readings on new ecology, animal studies, and queer theory, and they supplemented the readings with walks around the city accompanied by invited guests.

While I was invited to visit the class, I never did make it to New York City that fall, and the conversation that Muñoz, Nyong’o, and I wanted to stage about cohabiting the critical terrain of wildness was constantly and fatally deferred. Muñoz, Nyong’o, and I had hoped to create a small book out of these conversations titled “Three Paths to the Wild,” which would cover some common interests we share on race, anarchy, punk, sexuality, desire, animals/pets/children, music, high and low theory, *Wildness* the movie, *wildness* the new term for queer vitality, and wildness as a kind of queer-eco-critical endeavor. In “Three Paths” we wanted, separately and passionately, to do something that would not exactly introduce a project as much as immediately occupy it, inhabit it, and begin to live with and in it. We wanted to experiment with writing styles, write in and out of each other’s chapters, and yet still hold on to those chapters as individually authored but multiply rewritten. All of us had turned to a critique of state politics in the wake of financial meltdown; we were reading Thoreau, Harney and Moten, James Scott, Lucy Parsons, Shelley Streeby, Jodi A. Byrd, and others for nonlibertarian models of anarchy, and we were all thinking about “wildness” as a space/name/critical term for what lies beyond current logics of rule.<sup>1</sup> In lieu of the deferred conversation with José and Tavia, I use Taussig here to reach into the space of death (of meaning, of conversations deferred, of José) and find the threads of discourse delayed and a collaboration that continues to allow me (and Tavia) to be with and think with and read with the rich, eccentric, and lasting legacy of Muñoz’s body of work in the wake of his devastating loss.

Death, Michael Taussig offers, is a wild space of unmeaning and un/being where darkness and light, self and other, order and chaos slip out of their orderly opposition and the symbolic order of signification itself falters and collapses. And “wildness,” he suggests, is simultaneously the name for this systemic distress, the ever present threat of unmeaning, and the impact of death upon the system as a whole. In his monumental magical realist anthropology of colonial orders of terror in Colombia, Taussig pulls us into the dark and distressing struggle over the symbolic that is waged, on the one hand, against Indian bodies by mercenary colonial explorers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and, on the other, through a war of words in the metropole. Colonialism, Taussig proposed in this classic text, projects a wildness, a violence, and a savagery onto the other and then seeks to counter the senseless brutality that it imagines inheres to this other order of being with a senseless brutality of its own. Studying the disassembled representational order of empire through the mirrored shards that lay scattered across the occupied terrain, Taussig contests the binary of civilization and wildness and proposes to unleash the wild within knowledge production itself.

Taussig’s wild exploration of the unraveling of reality, representation, and rule under colonialism seems to break with conventional anthropology in that it fails to preserve the opposition between “them” and “us,” and indeed, the anthropologist contributes to the dissolution of conventional barriers between the scholar and his arena of study by taking drugs with shamans and writing a history of the Putamayo in Colombia as it appears to him in visions as well as in colonial records, in hallucinations as much as in rational explanation. Indeed, Taussig proposes, rational explanation is a centerpiece of colonial terror and so has no place in the dismantling of a colonial epistemology. He writes: “If terror thrives on the production of epistemic murk and metamorphosis, it nevertheless requires the hermeneutic violence that creates feeble fictions in the guise of realism, objectivity, and the like, flattening contradiction and systematizing chaos.”<sup>2</sup>

And yet, Taussig’s book cannot escape the binary it challenges, and too often Taussig himself, like so many other anthropologists who attempt to immerse themselves in the idiom of an imaginary otherness, actually reproduces the colonial terms of encounter within which a wild other embodies the unknown, the magical, and the antidote to the ills of Euro-American cultural values. But, even as Taussig disappears down the rabbit hole of colonial magical thinking, his experiment is instructive in that it reveals the structures in contemporary epistemologies that prevent us from thinking in new and interesting ways about alternative worlds and realities. Taussig cannot resist the call of the wild himself, but even as he pulls the wild into focus, it eludes clarity and fogs up his text and leaves us unsure as to whether we are back in the heart of darkness

with another colonial madman or on the edge of another reality where the wild obliterates sense.

In the last year of his brilliant career, José Esteban Muñoz flirted with “the wild” and considered the possibility that this term, even with its blighted colonial etymology, might be one of the building blocks of a new critical vocabulary for thinking race, sexuality, and the undercommons together. Drawn to Wu Tsang’s 2011 film, *Wildness*, and in dialogue with Jane Bennett’s *Vibrant Matter* and its “political ecology of things,” Muñoz extended his thinking on death, loss, and utopia from *Cruising Utopia* and began an investigation into a postcolonial rendering of the wild. And Muñoz’s interest in the disorderly histories of wildness placed him in conversation with an eclectic array of theoretical currents from new materialism to object-oriented ontology, from animal studies to new animism, from diasporic anthropology to new postidentity theories of self and other. Muñoz was also in a deep conversation with Tavia Nyong’o and myself about the potential of queer wildness, and like Nyong’o and me, he glimpsed potential in a terminology that has been represented as exhausted by its imperial function.

Wildness, Taussig proposes, is “the death space of signification.” It cannot mean because it has been cast as that which exceeds meaning. Wildness cannot tell because it frames telling as another tool of colonial rule. Wildness cannot speak without producing both the colonial order that gives it meaning and the disruption of that order through temporal and spatial and bodily excess and eccentricity. Any queer theory of wildness runs the risk of reproducing the stable binary of civilization and barbarity that, as Walter Benjamin proposed, nests one inside the other: “There is no document of civilization that is not at the same time a document of barbarity.”<sup>3</sup> But, any queer theory that avoids the category of wildness runs the risk of reproducing the norms it critiques and stabilizing the system it seeks to unsettle. Queerness without wildness is just white homosexual desire out of the closet and in sync with a new normal.

The closet itself marks distinctions between the domestic and the wild. As C. Riley Snorton’s work *Nobody Is Supposed to Know* on black sexuality, in/visibility, secrecy, and exposure shows, the closet continues to mark black bodies as duplicitous and tricky even as it marks white bodies as mysterious or heroic. The black gay man on “the down low,” accordingly, is in a “glass closet”—he is hypervisible and sneakily invisible all at once. The glass closet, according to Snorton, fixes, frames, and exposes black sexuality; it also holds in place a set of racialized logics that, as Snorton puts it, place “darkness and enlightenment and concealment and freedom in opposition to one another. These logics are put in crisis in the case of blackness, where darkness does not reflect a place from which to escape but a condition of existence. In other words, there can be no elsewhere

when darkness is everywhere. In the context of blackness, the closet is not a space of concealment; it is a site for observation, surveillance, and display.<sup>24</sup> The mechanics of knowledge production in the vicinity of black and brown bodies always partakes in the discourse of wildness—whether the wild enters as a kind of reiteration of sexual wildness or inheres to a darkness that is always the by-product of and the antithesis of enlightenment discourse, it necessarily produces racialized bodies as unknowable, as spectacles, as specimens, and as an undercommons that nonetheless escape colonial figurations and use signification for their own purposes. As Stefano Harney and Fred Moten put it in *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*: “Some people want to run things, other things want to run. If they ask you, tell them we were flying.”<sup>25</sup>

While, for Taussig, the wild lives very specifically in the spaces between representation and terror that a colonial order opens and administers, for Harney and Moten, as well as for Muñoz, wildness surely also inhabits all kinds of other regimes of knowing and being that form part of the making and unmaking of modern, racialized subjectivity. A queer inquisition into “wildness”—where we might understand wildness as the space that colonialism constructs, marks, and disavows, as well as a space of vibrancy that limns all attempts to demarcate subject from object, and a space of normativity that holds the deviant and the monstrous decisively at bay—was precisely part of Muñoz’s last work on what he called a “sense of brownness.” In the writing that Muñoz was doing on a “brown undercommons,” on feelings of brownness, and on queer new materialism, he focused upon what he thought of as “lives organized and disorganized by world forces of hope and harm.”<sup>26</sup> Muñoz also wanted to find spaces of encounter for this brown commons, spaces that were wild precisely because they were not prescribed by a colonial order of being that designated them as nonsensical or inconsequential. Gesturing to a haptic order of things where touch and randomness as much as analogy and determination gave meaning to bodies in space and time, Muñoz, with his characteristic ability to pull from seemingly incompatible theoretical sources, understood wildness as a staging of encounters between the many who remain many, and become a new entity in their multiplicity, and the brown who remain held within the warm embrace of a commitment to being together that preceded them finding each other in the first place.

### **Wildness Makes of These Connections Spaces of Darkness and Light**

“In the dark and in the shifts between the dark and the light,” Taussig narrates from within a yage-induced haze, “objects stare out in their mottled nakedness, while signifiers float by.” Recognizing the ways in which the wild has been ascribed to evil, to some colonial notion of primi-



Figure 1. Nick Cave, *Soundsuit*, 2008, mixed media, 94" × 35" × 35", inventory no. NC09.014. © Nick Cave. Photo by James Prinz. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

tive personhood and to a form of chaos that civilization comes to tame, Taussig offers a new relation to wildness that “tears through the tired dichotomies of good and evil, order and chaos, the sanctity of order, and so forth.”<sup>7</sup> Like Snorton’s sense of darkness that encapsulates a black relation to negative knowledge, or Moten’s understanding of black aesthetics as the noise that European and American high culture both violently produces in the other and designates as ugly all at once,<sup>8</sup> Taussig offers wildness as a form of connection between spaces of darkness and light. And once these dichotomies have been shredded, what remains “comes down on the side of chaos and its healing creativity is inseparable from that of taking sides.”<sup>9</sup> Queer theory, too, must come down on the side of chaos, must remain in productive tension with “the grotesque and the destructive,” and must stay monstrous. If queer theory refuses the monstrous and the dark, it threatens to reproduce orders of knowledge that, like the closet, mark freedom as an accessible space beyond secrecy and simultaneously mark certain racialized bodies as figures for that secrecy. Snorton again: “The closet as it appears in [progress] narratives about gay subject-making serves to draw on an implicit colonialist sensibility that figures the ‘dark secrecy’ of the closet with

the pre-modern and primitive and the subsequent open consciousness of an ‘outside’ of the closet with modernity and Civilization.”<sup>10</sup>

Art provides us with witnesses to the wildness of queer lives and the queerness of the wild. It does so by offering us utopic visions but also by joining those visions to madness, failure, and the temporality of the belated, darkness, and negativity. Take the work of Nick Cave, a black gay artist who builds what he calls Soundsuits from materials that others had cast off—buttons, cans, feathers, lost objects, and trinkets that he finds and “rescues” from thrift shops and antique sales. Cave actually builds the suits to be worn, whimsical and wild and impractical as they may be, and once

the body has been encased in the wondrous suit, Cave thinks of it as a kind of armor. Cave made his first suit in 1992 after the Rodney King beating and created the suits to encase, protect, transform the wearer, imagined here as a black male who requires a suit of armor in order to make it through the violent landscape of surveillance and profiling. Cave also classifies the suits, which make sound as they move, as a form of speech. He told the *Washington Post*: “I build this sort of suit of armor and by putting it on, I realized that I could make a sound from moving in it. It made me think of ideas around protest and how we should be a voice and speak louder.”<sup>11</sup>

Cave does not say we should “have a voice”; he says we should “be a voice.” This notion of speech as a mode of being, and sound as a form of protest, leavens the hypervisibility that marks the black male body for violence and marks it as violent all at once. Cave here deploys a wild and queer logic in that he covers over one form of vulnerable visibility with another form of spectacle—the suits are loud, literally, and colorful, full of joy and chaos. They amplify the black (gay) male body even as they encase it. Far from a closet marking off freedom from confinement, the suits represent a wild remaking of the surface that both hides the body and remakes it as part of a different universe, a utopian space of play and pleasure. “If they ask you, tell them we were flying.”

How is it possible for the wild or the space of utopia to appear through the resignification of the primitive and the animalistic in relation to the black body as it does in Cave’s work? How is Cave able to deploy the tropes that have limited the meaning of blackness and black queerness to other ends? Muñoz’s work has explained in many different ways exactly how, through mechanics such as “disidentification,” queer subjects are always involved in the process of “recycling and rethinking encoded meaning.” Muñoz continues: “The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded messages universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recruits its workings to account for, include and empower minority identities and identifications.”<sup>12</sup> There is, of course, a risk in these reconstructions of the encoded messages—the risk is that the replaying of racialized tropes of wildness and primitivism, of disorderliness and belatedness, will simply flow right back into the discursive machinery that produces bodies of color as perpetually out of line, out of time, out of whack, and out of work. But, as Muñoz’s work carefully showed, the risk is always worth taking even if and when it leads to failure.

### **Wildness Challenges the Unity of the Symbol**

Failure attends to all attempts to make wildness signify as either the opposite of modernity or simply its underbelly. Taussig therefore uses

wildness, exactly as Nick Cave's soundsuits do, to challenge the unity of the symbol and to fracture meanings that have coalesced around marked bodies. Taussig delves into the colonial archive—as constituted by colonial records, as well as by administrative briefs and imperial literature—in order to find a method for the madness and a madness with which to oppose the method. He loops around again and again, as so much colonial and postcolonial material must, to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. But he offsets Conrad's document of barbarity with attention to the briefs of Roger Casement.<sup>13</sup> Casement and Conrad offer weird place markers for the role of sexuality and madness in colonial savagery. And this is neither the time nor the place for a reckoning with the darkness that represents simultaneously Africa, colonial violence, and London in Conrad and sex, violence, and treason in Casement's purported "black diaries." But the twinning of Conrad's novel with Casement's diaries of his homo/sexual exploits in the Congo and the Amazon within a trope of "darkness" forces us to see the odd alignments that colonialism constructed within the trope of "wildness."<sup>14</sup>

When Marlowe descends into the heart of darkness, he finds the savage he went to confront in the form of Kurtz, the colonial administrator who has not simply "gone native" or wild but who has, in his managerial madness, transacted the precise terms of what Taussig calls "the colonial mirror of production." Taussig's analysis of the extreme violence meted out by colonists and rubber company employees in the Putamayo against native peoples whom they encounter there leads him to conclude: "The terror and the tortures they devised mirrored the horror of the savagery they both feared and fictionalized."<sup>15</sup> And time and again in *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man*, Taussig returns to Conrad to provide him with the narrative framework for this vexing and disorienting mirror effect by which colonizers carry out the violence against others that they have dreamed onto this landscape. While Marlowe in *Heart of Darkness* recognizes of London that "this too has been one of the dark places of the earth," still darkness comes to define not empire but the murky realms it seeks to redeem. Taussig identified in Conrad's novel a methodology for encountering myth within which the author uses "political artistry" to carry out "the mythic subversion of myth" and the imaginative penetration of "the political unconscious of the epoch."<sup>16</sup> Kurtz, accordingly, represents the failure of signification under the intense pressure of a colonial order that seeks to divide the dark from the light, the savage from the civilized, the good from evil. "Wildness," Taussig remarks, "challenges the unity of the symbol, the transcendent totalization binding the image to that which it represents." Wildness introduces the bureaucratic to other murky epistemologies that cannot be subjected to the rule of the pen and that will not submit to the moral clarity that seeks to cleanse it of contradiction.



Queer wildness, accordingly, inherits this ambivalence that inheres to the mirror of colonial production—it always runs the risk of reproducing the terms that it seeks to displace. Going wild might well propel us into another realm of thought, action, being, and knowing, but it could just as easily result in the reinstatement of an order of rationality that depends completely upon the queer, the brown, and the marginal to play their role as mad, bad, and unruly. In Muñoz’s late/early work on wildness (late in his life, early in his thinking on this topic), the wild or wildness functioned as a launching pad for a consideration of the “brown undercommons.”

### **It Is the Spirit of the Unknown and the Disorderly**

Wildness remains vital in its stubborn persistence, queerly vital. Can we use this “queer vitality” to navigate contemporary terrains of contradiction, confrontation, and complicity? These terrains are not the same as the spaces where Taussig confronted his demons, nor are they completely free of the contradictions that Taussig chased through the colonial archive; rather, the spaces of contradiction that fascinate us now within the economic, the cultural, and the social are studded with the shards of the colonial order that has been smashed but that lives on as small pieces of discourse embedded in the choices we make, the ways we relate or cannot, and the way we encounter otherness, success, and failure.

Let’s think with and through a film that Muñoz wrote about in the last year of his life and that lends its name to the project that José, Tavia Nyong’o, and myself embarked upon: “Wildness.” *Wildness* is the title of a remarkable documentary film directed and produced by Wu Tsang and written with Roya Rastegar. Like so much of the work that José and Tavia and I write about, *Wildness* shows how failure, as an alternative logic of being and doing, can lead us away from the appropriative mechanisms of neoliberalism. And it revels in contradiction and will not shy away from the theme of complicity.

In *Wildness*, Tsang and Rastegar document a year or two, from about 2006 to 2008, in the life of a queer club that Tsang created at a bar called the Silver Platter in the Rampart neighborhood of Los Angeles. This club or party happened every Tuesday for a while and began around midnight featuring local DJs, performers, and queer scenesters. The narrative arc of the film concerns the clash that occurs between the queers who show up for the party night and the mostly Latino and Latin American transgender women and sex workers who are there every other night. Ironically, as “Wildness” takes off and becomes successful, the (often undocumented) transgender women of color are made vulnerable by the attention that the party receives in local newspapers. As the hipsters flow in, the delicate balance that Wu was able to achieve between Tuesday nights and the other

nights in the bar tips; the transgender women feel exposed; the club draws a different, more tourist-like crowd; and the “wild” or aleatory aspect of “Wildness” fades as the mechanics of success in a neoliberal order prevail. And so, the improvised, surprising, collaborative, cooperative aspects of the party suddenly give way under the glare of visibility, credibility, custom, patronage, and recognition to regularity, cool, and the incipient force of gentrification.

In his response to the film, Muñoz wrote: “My analysis of the film is a launching pad for a more expansive consideration of a mode of brownness that is articulated not as a realist or empirical rendering of Latina or migrant experience, but, instead, a theory of brownness as a simultaneously singular/plural sense of the world. This paper makes the case that *Wildness* is a cinema of specularity that offers spectators an expanded materialist lens for a new consideration of the striving, conflicts and flourishing of people, spaces, objects and feelings that are vitally brown.”<sup>17</sup> The fact that the film gives the bar an identity and a voice—the voice-over in *Wildness* is from the perspective of the Silver Platter itself—allows Muñoz to claim this vitality as something that inheres to a “brown commons” and encompasses terrain, objects, relations, and feelings as much as it pertains to people and events. The voice of the bar is not simply the voice of the wild but emerges out of a terrain within which the terms of speech and meaning are not exhausted by the success of the club, and there is always room for a voice from elsewhere, from beyond, from the space of death.

*Wildness* ends with an aborted attempt to host an activist group to help the undocumented trans women of color to get legal representation while battling the forces of gentrification in the neighborhood. The party itself ends, and the bar owners and their customers and employees get embroiled in legal wrangling; some of the queens die. Tsang, looking back at the film and the party, recognizes that *Wildness* the film is a story about failure. In response to a question about safe space, Wu shrugs off the easy notion that the party was trying to create refuge for trans people or people of color or trans people of color and instead digs deep into the contradictions that the party created and revealed. While *Wildness* may have seemed like safe space to some, it actually made the space precarious for the *vestidas* who were regulars at the Silver Platter every other night. Part of the film’s purpose, Tsang suggests, is to explore the complex terrain of queer failure. He comments: “In an activist context there’s not really room to allow failure in the same way because people are really focused on trying to make improvements and really pragmatic about what needs to be accomplished. So I think that’s something I like about being an artist is that sometimes failure is the best part because it becomes so revealing of life lessons or something like that.”<sup>18</sup>

Queer failure, then, leads away from identity politics, simplistic

models of subversion, and idealized notions of safety and dives into the contradictory spaces of what Muñoz termed a “brown commons.” This space of the brown commons was not for him, or for Wu, an identity space marked by skin color, nor was it a safe space for collective expressions of well-being. The brown commons finds commonality in vulnerability, fallibility, contingency, refusal, the flawed, the damaged, the disappointed, the fabulous, the daring, and the desperate. I offer this meditation on queer failure and introduction to the queer wild with and through the legacy that Muñoz leaves precisely because, like him, I believe in the vitality of spaces, objects, and relations. And like Muñoz, I seek out a queer vitality that we might call *wildness* that skews toward collapse and works always on behalf of failure.

Wildness is this “spirit of the unknown and the disorderly,” and it is not a spirit that “belongs” to indigenous contexts and gets stolen by others for other purposes; rather, as we see in this film, it describes the space and the modes of knowing and unknowing that emerge in the encounter between capital and chaos, privilege and struggle, myth and countermyth. Queerness, Muñoz’s legacy instructs us, can quickly become a new vector for profit, accommodation, and appropriation unless, like the contradictory goals of Wu’s club, we keep adjusting the templates for change going forward. Let “wildness” stand here as part of the critical vocabulary that Muñoz’s work leaves behind, as a name for the faltering efforts of incorporation, as a name for all that quietly and in insignificant acts picks away at the fabric of hegemony. And let wildness speak not in the language of order and explanation but in beautiful, countermythologizing grammars of madness. Wildness is not the lack of inscription; it is inscription that seeks not to read or be read but to leave a mark as evidence of absence, loss, and death. Wildness must take us into its mottled embrace and press us to stare into those places of slippage between language and experience and life and death; wildness can give us access to the unknown and the disorderly, and we will enter there at our own risk.

## Notes

This essay on “wildness, loss, and death” is for, with, and about the passing of José Esteban Muñoz as much as it is about anything. I acknowledge the generous comments from the editors of this issue, Kandice Chuh and Tavia Nyong’o, as well as feedback from Macarena Gomez-Barris and Gayatri Gopinath. I take full responsibility, however, for all mistakes, bothersome formulations, and wild and unsubstantiated claims.

1. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Civil Disobedience* (New York: Signet Classics, [1854] 2013); Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013); James Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New

Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010); Lucy Parsons, *Freedom Equality and Solidarity: Writings and Speeches, 1878–1937* (New York: Charles H. Kerr, 2004); Shelley Streeby, *Radical Sensations: World Movements, Violence and Visual Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013); Jodi A. Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

2. Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 132.

3. Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History, VII,” in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Knopf, 1968), 256.

4. C. Riley Snorton, *Nobody Is Supposed to Know: Black Sexuality on the Down Low* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 29.

5. Harney and Moten, *Undercommons*, 51.

6. I take this phrase from my notes from a lecture Muñoz gave in dialogue with David Eng at UCLA on February 22, 2013.

7. Taussig, *Shamanism*, 220.

8. Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

9. Taussig, *Shamanism*, 220.

10. Snorton, *Nobody Is Supposed to Know*, 29.

11. Winyan Soo Hoo, “‘Soundsuits’ Sculptor Nick Cave Performs at the U.S. State Department’s Art in Embassies Fiftieth Anniversary Celebration,” *Washington Post Style Blog*, 28 November 2012, [www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/arts-post/post/soundsuits-sculptor-nick-cave-performs-at-the-us-state-departments-art-in-embassies-50th-anniversary-celebration/2012/11/28/ab97c740-39a1-11e2-a263-f0ebffed2f15\\_blog.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/arts-post/post/soundsuits-sculptor-nick-cave-performs-at-the-us-state-departments-art-in-embassies-50th-anniversary-celebration/2012/11/28/ab97c740-39a1-11e2-a263-f0ebffed2f15_blog.html).

12. José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 31.

13. See Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (New York: Penguin Classics, [1899] 2012). For Casement’s diaries, see Jeffrey Dudgeon, *Roger Casement: The Black Diaries with a Study of His Background, Sexuality and Irish Political Life* (Belfast: Belfast Press, 2002); but see also Brian Lewis for a queer account of the legacy of Casement, “The Queer Life and Afterlife of Roger Casement,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 14, no. 4 (2005): 363–82.

14. And so, while Casement was a major critic of both the English occupation of Ireland and the violent treatment of indigenous peoples by the rubber merchants in the Amazon, he was also, apparently, busily recording his sexual exploits with native men in his “black diaries.” Casement paid for many of these sexual favors and often recorded his encounters by noting the size and shape of the genitals of the young boys with whom he had sex. We have to read the legacy of Casement both as an activist against British rule and against the violence of colonial missions and as a colonial subject himself who saw brown bodies as erotic commodities. For more on homosexual erotic colonialism, see Eng Beng Lim, *Brown Boys and Rice Queens: Spellbinding Performance in the Asias* (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

15. Taussig, *Shamanism*, 133.

16. *Ibid.*, 11.

17. Advertisement for a talk hosted by the University of Texas at Austin titled “The Brown Commons: The Sense of Wildness,” 12 October 2012, [www.utexas.edu/cola/centers/cwgs/events/24513](http://www.utexas.edu/cola/centers/cwgs/events/24513).

18. Interview with Wu Tsang in Christina Von Messling, “Wildness: Between Reality, the Stage and Life,” *LA Record*, 21 July 2012, [larecord.com/uncategorized/2012/07/21/wildness-between-reality-the-stage-and-life](http://larecord.com/uncategorized/2012/07/21/wildness-between-reality-the-stage-and-life).