

VICTIMS THEMSELVES OF A CLOSE ENCOUNTER: ON THE SENSORY LANGUAGE AND BASS FICTION OF SPACE APE (IN MEMORIAM)

— FEATURE ARTICLE —

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ABSTRACT

This text is written in memoriam to dubstep emcee and poet Space Ape (Stephen Samuel Gordon, b. June 17th, 1970; d. October 2nd, 2014). In his own words, Space Ape arose from the depths of the black Atlantic, on a mission to relieve the “pressure” through bass fiction.¹ My aim is to explicate Space Ape’s bass fiction at the intersection of material and imaginal forces, connecting Space Ape’s embodied concept to a broader Afrofuturist constellation of mythopoetic becomings. Memory and matter converge in the affect and sounding of Space Ape as the hostile alien, a virtual body shaped at the intersection of dread bass, riddim warfare and speculative lyricism. Space Ape set out to *xorcise* that which consumed him from within by embracing the “spirit of change”. Turning to process philosophy, I demonstrate how Space Ape’s bass fiction—his virtual body—activates the abstract concepts of becoming in the close encounter with the hostile alien.

KEYWORDS: Afrofuturism, dubstep, bass culture, race, process philosophy, becoming, affect theory

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“FOCUS UPON INTENSITY”: INTRODUCING THE VIRTUAL BODY OF SPACE APE



FIGURE 1. SPACE APE CONDUCTING XORCISM. PHOTO CREDIT: HIROO TANAKA (2012).

Lately there's been
A serious rise in the pressure . . .
We have to take serious measures
—Space Ape, Live at MUTEK 2007²

Serious measures taken. The weight of all that has passed, a past buried in the aquatic depths of the black Atlantic, seeks relief from the pressure through bass culture. The mission of Space Ape is to *xorcise* such *weight* through *bass fiction*. The pressures of the memorial depths are heavy: the traumatic memory of the Middle Passage and what Public Enemy call “Armageddon been-in-effect”—that black existence is already post-apocalyptic, that the end times already took place (Sinker 1993; van Veen 2015)—but also relief from pressures internal and individuated, localised to the cellular body of Space Ape. In Space

Ape's sensory language, bass fiction seeks relief from the pressure of white supremacist *signs* by pressuring black bass *sines*; bass fiction recombinates sign and sine in a radical black ontology of becoming the "hostile alien". Space Ape, hostile alien in process, crafts the concepts of bass fiction through sensory language lyricism, his emcee flow punctuating the subwoofer shakes of the haunted and minimalist London dubstep of Kode9, Burial and The Bug. In the process, language is shaken alike. New concepts flow from bass fiction; but also new becomings of the body, new sonic affects in the bass materialism of dubstep; new routes that trace the dub diaspora.

In this encounter with Space Ape, I will undertake an approach I call *speculative irrealism*, constructing a signifying series of concept formations that transgress the boundaries between fiction and philosophy by hinging upon the "real fictions" of irreal yet entirely material affects and becomings. In the following series of speculative postulates, constructed as echoes of Space Ape's sensory language, I will trace some of the irrealist affects Space Ape creates through his inventive becoming of a "hostile alien", by putting into conceptual motion the *signs* and *sines* of his sensory language—the imaginal materia of his bass fiction.



At first moving slowly, his eyes cast downwards, Space Ape begins accelerating his body into a frantic pace. In the video for "On the Run" (*Xorcism*, 2012), his body vibrates and stutters, shifts and jerks as if possessed by the samples of Haitian rhythm.³ The minutae of split-second video-editing accelerates the near in/human contortions; the moments of Space Ape's agitated motions are sliced and superimposed by the technics of the moving image. As the physical body of Space Ape appears to move faster than humanly possible, its intensity becomes ever the more counterpoised to the calm delivery of his lyrics. Space Ape is no longer but one static body represented on screen; the video's micro-edited accumulation of frames combine and contrast a multiplicity of gesturing body-images. The rapid, and rhythmic, accumulation of image and after-image in the retina effectuates the *superposition* of Space Ape from which the *virtual body* emerges. "On the Run" depicts the body becoming $n+1$; the virtual body renders its flesh as wave/form. The emergent virtual body of Space Ape approaches the undulation of effervescent audio, in which the body—which is to say, his body $n+1$, as wave/form—becomes a *bass fiction*. The virtual body, no longer bound to its static self, undulates as a wave/form in which bass culture and the imaginal realms of Afrofuturism recombine. Another way to say how Space Ape's body becomes bass fiction is that it does so *in the break*—that $n+1$ trajectory where "syncopation, performance, and the anarchic organization of phonic substance delineate an ontological field where black radicalism is set to work" (Moten 2003: 85).

It is in the break between the audio delivery and the overaccelerated black body, in the blurred and cut multiplicity of body-images, that the *virtual* body of Space Ape emerges, not in its presencing, but through the sensation of its effects: the becoming of a hostile alien (see fig. 1).

Hallucinating senses individually, insidiously
 are in any combination, rhythmically
 Shifting gears, focus upon intensity
Wait—big people a talk, nobody try fuck with i-man clarity
 Mind starts slippin familiar tracks
 Bending warping, interfering with the facts
 Sensory language leaves us with no habit for lying
 We are hostile aliens, immune from dying.
 —Burial (feat. the Space Ape), “Space Ape” (*Burial*, 2006)

Space Ape’s declaration of immunity from death is an enunciation of his virtual body, of the life of black radical becoming that is hostile and alien towards classified ontology. Space Ape remains, always against the epidermal racism of white supremacy, supremely human when *forced* into the static ontology (or great chain) of being. But being is not where anything begins; it is where the stuff of becoming stops, where it is classified and ordered, policed and disciplined. “On the Run” amplifies Space Ape’s hostile alien becoming—hostile towards its static classification, hostile towards white raciology—through the “fleeting” appearance of the virtual as that ontological field of black radicalism. Space Ape’s body becomes virtual through its “multiplication of images” (Massumi 2002: 133) that distend and contort, accelerate and render transformative the static (and raciological) classification of the black body as the “tribal” body of the “primitive”. The body before us is not but one image, a static Thing—the monstrous primitive, the “superhuman” black body—but folds in and out of it/self, through what Space Ape calls a “bass fiction” of transformation. The virtual body is *signed* through a sampling of bass fiction; it is *inscribed* through its wave/forms. Like Space Ape’s sampladelia of riddims, the “images of the virtual make the virtual appear not in their content or form, but in fleeting, in their sequencing or sampling” (Massumi 2002: 133). Crucially, the virtual cannot be apprehended directly: only its effects can be felt, in the break/down of the affective sensorium.

By introducing the ontological field of black radicalism through the virtual body of the hostile alien, Space Ape focuses upon affective *intensity* in the convergence of affect and meaning, sign and sinewave, the imaginal and the material that characterises the “sensory language” of what Space Ape coins as *bass fiction*. “Sensory language” signifies not just lyricism, spoken or writ, but the technical inscription of *signs* as *sines*, of the warp of the voice interwoven with the woof of the bass. Far from unifying technicity and voice, or mastering the voice by way of technicity, the sensory language of bass fiction draws attention to their reciprocal and constitutive relation in the ceaseless production of affective becomings.⁴ The spoken sign, far from pure *phonē*, already signifies an originary technical apparatus (that *technical construct* of the “human subject”) in which, vocal chords activated, sinewaves emit; bass fiction lowers the register so that the voice collides with the amplified sinewaves of bass culture. Every singular enunciation of bass fiction encompasses the collectivity of bass culture; it arises not in isolation but as part of what Paul Gilroy describes as the

“call-and-response” of the black Atlantic (1993)—that communicative imaginary in which transactions take place across time and space through recordings and performances that activate collective enunciations of becoming. Gilroy’s concept of the black Atlantic describes the shared and ever-evolving imaginary constructed through the circulation of media, music and memory among the Afrodiaspora, that “non-traditional tradition, an irreducibly modern, ex-centric, unstable, and asymmetrical cultural ensemble” (1993: 198).

Bass culture names what Mykaell Riley describes as “the intersection between Jamaican and British popular music since the late 1950s”, a nascent concept that “came to life” in the title of dub poet Linton Kwesi Johnson’s 1980 album (2014: 101). Bass culture can be productively coordinated with what Paul Sullivan calls the “dub diaspora”—that network of peoples and sounds “closely following [but not reducible to] the Jamaican diaspora”, in which “dub’s role as a ‘meta-virus’” infiltrates “a host of mutant ‘strains’ and hybrids” of music, language and culture (2014: 11). Space Ape’s bass fiction, through its musical sounding and vocal styling, is tied to (or infected by) the dub diaspora, insofar as it articulates the colonial and postcolonial patterns of migration and imperial occupation to the dissemination of the bass culture genre of dub.

Space Ape’s creative invention of bass *fiction*, then, signifies the convergence of low-end sine waves with the speculative imaginary of bass culture, or what Kodwo Eshun calls in its Afrofuturist archetype across genre and culture, “sonic fiction” (1999). The point of convergence is the becoming of the virtual body to the unfolding ontology of black radicalism. It is in this *sense*—of sensory language that calls upon bodies to affectively respond—that Space Ape will come to chant that “you need bass fiction in your life”. Space Ape enunciates the collective *need* for the creative activation of becoming, for the imaginary manifest in material process, for that ceaseless shift across sign/sine toward the virtual body of the hostile alien.

BECOMING THE LIVING MYTH OF BASS FICTION

In the bass/fiction, the imaginal and memorial realm of the *sign* meets the material vibratory force of the *sine*. It is the imaginal and affective link of the physical body to the virtual body that connects Space Ape to Afrofuturism, that connects his body of work to the lineage of dub poetry, and that exposes Space Ape’s black body at the point where it actualises the virtual into a becoming-alien.

Such “black performances”—in their radicality, *qua* becomings—are “disruptive of the oppositions of speech and writing, and spirit and matter” (Moten 2003: 14). An entire Western metaphysics that separates mind from body (Descartes), and that excludes Africa from Europe and World History (Hegel), so as to justify violence toward racialised and enslaved (sub)humans, is held in the break, disrupted, and broken by becomings of the black Atlantic radical imaginary, by the force and affect, the wave/form, of bass fiction. Indeed, as Michelle Wright has argued, what 20th century “African diasporic counterdiscourses of Black subjectivity” have in common, besides a negotiation with “Western theoretical

formations”—and by proximity and intent Space Ape and this text negotiate with Gilles Deleuze and process philosophy—is a radical emphasis upon how “black subjectivity . . . *must negotiate between the abstract and the real* . . . between the ideal and the material” (2004: 3).

Coming to terms with Space Ape as a “living myth” that walks the Earth suggests a mythologising approach to the evidently impossible fact of Space Ape as a living hostile alien; yet such MythScience—Sun Ra’s term for the ideological truth/strategy of how myth informs reality and fiction builds fact—operates precisely at the level where the black fantastic becomes lived experience (van Veen 2013: 11). On the one level, MythScience questions the fundamental myths ingrained by raciology as truth: that (sub)humans are fit for slavery precisely because they are “truly” (in)human; that the white body is the imperial human from which all else are othered. On the other level, MythScience addresses such constituent false myths by creatively tapping into what Ra called “AlterDestinies”: the *potentia* of the *virtual* to elaborate impossible living myths in the speculative becoming of other worlds. In philosophies of process and becoming, namely those of Deleuze (1990), Whitehead (1978), and Massumi (2002), the concept of the “virtual” expresses the maximal degree of *potential*, of the unpredictable and transformative capacity for creativity at its most unharnessed. “If the alternative mode of abstraction into which perception extends is the possible”, writes Massumi—and by the *possible* we understand the domain of the logical, the rational, but also all that remains in the opposite and limit of this metaphysical binary, as expressed by the *impossible*—“the intense mode of abstraction into which sensation potentially infolds is, at the limit, the *virtual*” (2002: 98).

The virtual has particular significance for a black radical ontology, precisely because the latter is, to resample a phrase, an “activist philosophy at no remove from life’s immediacy” (Massumi 2011: 1). Attenuating process philosophy to black radical ontology has particular significance for approaches to electronic dance music culture (EDMC) that seek to understand how it is that various bodies materialise the transformative capacities of the speculative and radical imaginary through sound, rhythm and movement. This is especially the case for Afrofuturism, in which musical forms of Detroit techno and electro, Chicago acid house, UK jungle, Jamaican dub, hip-hop, and other such diasporic and electronic wave/forms already enunciate a collective black radical becoming.

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With black radical ontology in mind (and body), in this article I mobilise process philosophy through the speculative imaginaries and affective riddims of Space Ape, examining how Space Ape *becomes* the “hostile alien” by intersecting Afrofuturism and bass culture through the creative invention of bass fiction. Space Ape’s hostile alien becoming, through the rearticulation of sign to sine in bass fiction, can be coordinated to the concept of the *dread body*. Julian Henriques writes of the Rastafari dread body as a “voicing body, an echoic vessel”, one that exists as a doppelgänger, transiting “from an embattled relationship to authority to one incorporating the quality of endurance against its oppressive powers” (2014: 192, 195). The virtual body is not elsewhere or purely imaginal; it amplifies the

immediacy of black radical ontology as the figure of *dread*. Space Ape transits through becomings of the dread body, taking on the alien accents of Jamaican Rastafari and the Loa possession of Haitian vodou; as a hostile alien he voices dread of authority while at the same time becoming authority figures who dispense dread.

Such self-creation further transits through an inventive and mythological lexicon that, as the enunciation of bass fiction by Space Ape the dub poet and emcee, undertakes a speculative mode of concept production. It is in part my purpose here to amplify Kodwo Eshun's phrase that "producers are already pop theorists" (1999: 00[-004]) by accelerating and intensifying Space Ape's conceptual apparatus, investigating and exploring its many allusions and affects. I am also responding to Paul Gilroy's call to develop "political languages" in which "the future" can be discussed (2004: 335) by insisting that political speech, precisely to shape alternative futures free from raciology, must converse with concepts enunciated by the becomings of the black radical imaginary. In short, radical Afrofuturism requires "the experiences of the underground, the vagabond, and those constituencies marked as deviant" that constitute what Richard Iton calls the "black fantastic" (2008: 16).

The fact of life itself is an activity of change, of *becoming*. This is where the "hostile alien" forces mobilised by Afrofuturism begin: Space Ape's bass fiction body is already a creation, or becoming of self, constellated to a historical network of black Atlantic becomings that intersect machinic, organic, sonic and archetypal bodies. The bass fiction of Space Ape, as one of Gilroy's "imaginary effects" of the black Atlantic (1993: 102), intersects the virtual/physical body at the point where the speculative imaginary is actualised in becoming. Space Ape's bass fiction body enacts "process as becoming", which as Massumi reminds us, "is not just creative activity . . . it is *self-creation*" (2011: 2).

SINE OF THE HYPERDUB: SIGNS YOU NEED BASS FICTION IN YOUR LIFE

tobias c. van Veen: *What brought Space Ape up from the depths?*

Space Ape: Weight. It was a weight of pressure, you know what I mean? Vibrations. These are the things that you feel inside. Comes up, comes up, comes up, comes up, comes up, comes *out*—weight. It's about weight. That's like when you try to deal with the bass fiction. That's where a bass fiction is coming from. Coming from the need to expel this weight.⁵

The Space Ape arises from the depths of the black Atlantic, appearing under the codename of "Daddi Gee" on the first release of the Hyperdub label in 2004. The label was the sonic extension of a blog of the same name run by Steve Goodman, a.k.a. Kode9, which detailed the emergent genres of London's bass culture—the "hyperdub" of jungle, 2-step and dubstep.⁶ In the blog's first essay, *hyperdub* is defined as "an 'info virus' that 'replicates in both humans and machines'" (Metford 2000). The two signifiers in the portmanteau call upon an acceleration—the *hyper* activity of an expansion into speed and dimension—of Jamaican bass culture's *dub* practices of copying and versioning, practices that take place through bass fictions.

In its initial use on the Hyperdub blog, “hyperdub” appears as a term for what Simon Reynolds calls “the hardcore continuum” of the “rave virus” (2008). Metford writes that “‘hyperdub’, or simply ‘hardcore’ . . . transcends mere musical genre, being more usefully understood as a set of nomadic sub-cultural practices, to which a relentlessly deconstructive art practice is central” (2000). Understood as the skeletal framework of a deconstructive aesthetic praxis, *hyper/dub* transforms and accelerates the Jamaican studio practices of dropping out vocal and instrumental parts of reggae tracks to create a “version”—a riddim track that would be the basis for (over)dubs (Veal 2007: 52–54). Mark Fisher describes the versioning process as “dubtraction”—“the production of virtualities, implied songs all the sweeter for their lack of solid presence” (Fisher, in Goodman 2010: 159). Dub, as Ian Penman writes, “echoes like a phantom” (1995). During the creative peak of Jamaican dub production in the 1970s, its producers explored the soundscapes of echo, delay and reverb in the studio through the creative ab/use of analogue tape loop machines such as the Roland Space Echo (Veal 2007: 153–8). As they created dub versions, producers messed with the aural perception of time and space. As Paul Sullivan writes, such effects “can be used as a tool to transport listeners to the past”, provoking a “sense of Jamaica’s ancestral African roots, while at the same time invoking the infinity of the cosmos—and the future—by creating cavernous spaces within the music” (2014: 9–10). In the performance of space/time studio technics, and through its affective intensity that conjures imaginal realms, dub’s reverberations connect to, and construct, the collective memory of the black Atlantic, those “imagined pasts and futures animating the African diaspora” (Veal 2007: 197).

In the interstices and absences of dub, a multiplication of echoes and reverbs sound-out its haunted spaces: spaces that are felt, in the volume of the sound system, as the affects of a *virtual* space where cultural memory—of intergenerational trauma, the Middle Passage, but also of future transcendence, of Zion—meets sinewave matter in its bass vibration. It is this virtual space that speaks to dub’s imaginal forces, its ability to become hyperdub, to accelerate not just a specific riddim and bass patterning but a cultural mutation of matter and memory. As Erik Davis writes,

There is no original, no motherland outside the virtual, no roots that are not at the same time rhizomes remixed on the fly. Yet by improvising and mutating its own repetitions of prerecorded material, dub added something distinctly uncanny to the mix. Dub’s analog doppelgängers, spectral distortions, and vocal ghosts produced an imaginal space no less compelling in its own way than the virtual African Zion that organized so much of reggae’s Rastafarian longings (Davis 2008: 63).

Hyperdub as concept/practice widens the practice of versioning dubs to encompass not just riddim music, but cultural mutations as a whole.⁷ In Kode9 and Space Ape’s nexus of sound and lyrics, concepts and performance, bodies and hyperdub sinewaves intermingle in the fervour of a collective self-creation—a two-step becoming, “Kode9 + the Space Ape”, I and I.⁸ Afrofuturism, as the Afrodiasporic continuum in which Space Ape (and Kode9) operate, can briefly be described as black Atlantic futurism that challenges the exclusionary timelines

of white modernity through science fictional practices of the speculative imaginary (Fisher 2013; van Veen 2013; Womack 2013). Afrofuturism seeks to deconstruct reified myths of a future/past white hegemony with a multi-hued AlterDestiny. In its creative and critical capacities of temporal activism, known as *chronopolitics*, Afrofuturism reinvents the past—unearthing buried and excluded black histories—to accelerate and infiltrate powerful black futures and becomings into the present (Eshun 2003).

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Hyperdub would become known as one of the foundational record labels of dubstep—a 21st century reworking of London 2-step garage,⁹ itself an electronic versioning of African-American hip-hop and R&B, infused with the dancehall bass and organic tempo of Jamaican dub while at the same time overlaid with the angst and existential crisis of urban dread. It is telling that Hyperdub's first release, "Sine of the Dub", appears as a homage to, and extension of, the dub poetry tradition encapsulated by Lynton Kwesi Johnson and Benjamin Zephaniah.¹⁰

On "Sine of the Dub", Kode9 and Space Ape develop the intersection of dub poetry and dubstep that would mark a collaboration spawning some nine singles and two albums, lasting until the final release of the duo, "Ghost Town / At War With Time" (Hyperdub 013, 2015). The initial vinyl pressing of "Sine of the Dub" (Hyperdub 001, 2004) by "Kode9 & Daddi Gee" is titled "Sign of the Dub". When re-pressed in 2006, its titled changed to "Sine of the Dub", Daddi G had dropped his archetypal patronym to become "Space Ape"—a naming that has also been spelled on various releases with and without a spacing between the space/ape. In the two pressings, these slippages between signifiers suggest a passage from the Sign to the Sine, from the signifier of the concept to the material wave of the sounding. This passage, I suggest, ought not to be treated as a correction or a linear shift, but as a convergence of sine/sign as that of the infolding of the imaginary and the material, through the fundamental sounding-out of conceptual homophony. The process is also temporally recursive, the shift in Space Ape's naming undertaking a chronopolitics of revisioning the label's, and Space Ape's, origins. The deconstructive cultural practice of dub, in the process of versioning, is put to praxis in the shifting passage of the release titles.

On "Sine of the Dub", Space Ape's gravity-fed lyrics resound with dread, speaking of murder and spectacle, akin to the incisively epigrammatic yet hallucinatory style of a Nick Land performance/text, in which electronic music is punctuated by abstract readings of cybertheory that herald the rise of the nonhuman and the machinic.¹¹ Underneath Space Ape's dread verse, Kode9's minimalist bass pulse and dub echo rhythmically punctuate the flow: "People say / A man never truly happy / Unless a next man / Truly dies" ("Sine of the Dub", 2004). The Space Ape's lyricism appears to border somewhere inbetween the hip-hop Afrofuturist imaginary—the perverse yet spaced-out emcee flow developed by RAMM:ΣLL:ZΣΣ, Dr. Octagon and to an extent, RZA's urban black superhero Bobby Digital—and a cyberpunk theory-fiction reminiscent of the output of Nick Land and Sadie Plant's Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (Cccru), of which Kode9 was a graduate student.¹²

However, unlike Land's cyberpunk phuturism that sought to maximise intensity until "impending human extinction becomes accessible as a dance floor" (2011: 398), Space Ape's orality transits through the body—at the intersection of the black Atlantic's virtual body of the hostile alien to the individuated dread body—by way of dubstep's gravity-fed tempo and dread voicing that pings the sinewave depths of bass materialism. Dubstep, even in its deconstructive cultural framework as accelerated hyperdub, slows down the movement of the dance floor body, leaving its gestures as suspended in time as dubstep's echoes are in sounded space. Even as Space Ape may be "deprogramming the body" (Land 2011: 398) through a close encounter with an "alien virus" ("Space Ape", *Burial* 2006), Space Ape's body remains a dread body of bass fiction. Moreover, the body as such is not to be erased: it *remains*, not to be surpassed or discarded in favour of a machinic futurism, as in Land's accelerationist fantasy of superseding capital, but as an agent of the *mutatis mutandis*, a necessary force against all that *weight* that has constrained, lashed and racialised the human body. Even as Space Ape and Kode9's work engages with the futurist, horrorist and machinic tropes of accelerationism—in which "the only way out of capitalism is to take it further" (Noys 2014: x)—it operates like Detroit techno as a "critique of the 'smoothness' of acceleration, by a repetition that disrupts the future" (Noys 2014: 54). Space Ape's bass fiction interrupts the illusion of a predestined, whitewashed and accelerated future that would all too easily erase the blackness of the dread body, in part by reflecting in the dub aesthetics of its gravity tempo the equal horrors of stasis, in which despite all, too much remains the same.

2-STEP: TWIST THE LINES OUT OF ALL RECOGNITION

The Space Ape's incanted flow is at a crossroads with its content. Slowly does Space Ape speak of terrible things, sounding-out a Lovecraftian horroredub that likewise resonates with Wu-Tang Clan project Gravediggaz. Space Ape's exorcism of cybertheory and uncanny acceleration of the radical Afrofuturist imaginary above all evokes *dread*: a drawn-out bass drawl is pitched to Space Ape's voice, its timbre panned and EQ-ed until the nearly inhuman chant blends with the low-end frequencies of the bass riddim. *What* Space Ape says merges with (and is as significant as) *how* it sounds. The crossroads of the *sign* and the *sine* converge in its bass fiction, a phrase that resounded as a riddim chant at Space Ape's 2007 MUTEK performance in Montréal with Kode9, calling upon the crowd in a ritual invocation of the hyperdub imaginal that also recognises the potent force of the sound system: "you need bass fiction in your life / you need bass fiction in your life / you need bass fiction in your life..."¹³

At the level of the sonic *materia* of the voice—the emergent substrate in which the physical is perceived—and the *signifiante* of its content, as Barthes wrote of Kristeva's concept of the semiotic, where the subject is lost to the play of a deconstructive flow of signifiers (1977: 10), Space Ape, as the collective enunciation of the two, enters as the uncanny figure of the *crossroads*.

In Space Ape's flow over dubstep, he is speaking through the sonic materia of a genre derived from and haunted by 2-step, the late '90s London house/garage genre that in-itself is *haunted*—which is to say, samples as its influence, and thus incorporates its cultural memories, its transgenerational ghosts—by the “soul values” of African-American R&B (see Weheliye 2002: 32). What R&B remains haunted by—as recordings that today appear, in Weheliye's phrase, as “future-oriented artifacts”—are the “spirituals” that signify an “opaque and fragmented African American past” (Weheliye 2005: 96). Up through the depths of future dubstep, then, drift the spirits of a fractured Afrodiasporic past. What Fisher calls “sonic hauntology . . . ‘blurs contemporaneity’ with elements from the past, but, whereas postmodernism glosses over the temporal disjunctures, the hauntological artists foreground them” (2013: 46). Hauntology calls upon the past to reinvent it, wielding the transformed past as a temporal tool against the closed future avenues of a commodified and whitewashed present. Hauntology is thus a sonic tactic deployed by the Afrofuturist strategies of chronopolitics. Such strategically revised histories are often construed through what Eshun (1999) calls *sonic fictions*—the imaginal materia of sign and sine—that take on hyperdub specificity in bass fictions. Sonic hauntology likewise describes the “deconstructive art practices” of the Afrodiaspora that transmits the sonic materia of *past* futurisms—those embedded former soundings and visions of alternate futures that *remain* encoded in recordings, texts, media and memory, likewise inscribed in the material memory of bodies and becomings—through the “call-and-response” of the black Atlantic (Gilroy 1993: 102).

As a hauntological convergence of two genres *of* and *at* the crossroads, 2-step and dubstep signify not just a sine (a sound) but a sign (a concept). 2-step/dubstep meet on the crossroads as the imaginal materia of bass fiction. Space Ape sounds-out the concept in “Backward” (Hyperdub 004, 2006), in a track that calls forth the new—the very invention of poetic dubstep—at the same time that it rewinds genre and cultural memory in its “2-step”, as it were, backwards:

One step forward, watcha' 2-step
 One step forward, watcha' 2-step
 Twist the lines out of all recognition
 Understand this you have to make a decision
 Motional persisting without paraflexible (h)earing
 Fling this blasted sin thing away from my audio addiction
 The truth lies somewhere between a lie an a fiction
 There's no use blaming the haste we chase after
 Because all is fair an equal between servant and master.

2-step describes a movement in sound—a forward shuffle and back of the break-beat—that can be thought of not just as a genre descriptor but as a concept. Space Ape's lyrics call to attention how “2-step” signifies a chronopolitical movement forward into bass futurism yet, in the hauntology of its resonant memorial trauma often left unvoiced, backward. 2-step is reconstructed from past genres at the same time that it becomes the memorial signature of

future dubstep. 2-step is thus a temporal concept of double movement between past and future, memory and matter; it signifies the convergence of the shuffling movement of the physical body to the temporal register of the virtual body. Further, its chronopolitics of bass materialism take shape in the bass fiction becoming of the hostile alien who will come to enunciate 2-step *as* concept.

In “Backward”, Space Ape adopts as elsewhere the accent of a Jamaican Rastafari patois. This adoption suggests, however, a mutation rather than imitation. Space Ape’s voicing is already synthesized into a low-frequency sine wave. At the “materiality of the body speaking” against its “grain” (Barthes 1977: 182), Space Ape speaks against the grain of the body’s “mother tongue” by becoming-infected by an alien virus:

Victims themselves of a close encounter
 Desperate abductors, constructors become
 infected, vexed by an alien virus, so alien, so viral
 —Burial (feat. the Space Ape), “Space Ape” (*Burial*, 2006)

What is this alien virus? It is, in part, the virus of the alien in and of itself, the virus of becoming-alien; a trope that resonates in Afrofuturist work as an allegory for the (thematically) infectious yet dangerous attraction of blackness.¹⁴ Yet this becoming-alien takes on specific material effects in the hyperdub framework. Space Ape’s infection is 2-step: it operates at both the level of the sign and the sine, twisting both what is sounded and how it sounds, as it transits between past/future. Breaking down the 2-step reveals two vectors:

On the one level, Space Ape describes being infected or possessed by an accent, an inflected speech pattern that mutates the speaking of the sign. The close encounter with the alien signals dub’s infection of the physical body with the virtual body of dub’s hauntological memory—the encoded memories of a language virus that routes through the dub diaspora. Such becoming-infected is likewise suggested by Goodman’s description of hyperdub as an “info virus” that replicates in both human and machine (Metford 2000).

On the other level, becoming-infected by an alien accent is a form of sensorial possession: the boundaries of words are “twisted” around truth; and “the truth lies somewhere between a lie and a fiction” (“Backward”, 2006). Infected by the accent of the alien sign/sine, the Space Ape emerges as the figure of the crossroads, Papa Legba. Legba grants or denies human communication with the spirit world of the Loa; he is the great elocutioner and trickster who facilitates as well as hinders communication and understanding (Morris 2006). In the video for “The Devil Is A Liar”, Space Ape appears in black top hat, suit and sunglasses, his skin adorned with the white lines of Haitian Loa possession (see fig. 3). Space Ape is presiding at the crossroads as “the guardian of boundaries” (Morris 2006: 196) where knowledge/power intersect, where “truth lies”, where at the intersection of a decision, with lines (and genres and boundaries) twisted, “all is fair an equal between servant and master” (“Backward”, 2006). There are few places where all becomes “fair an equal” between the enslaved and the enslaver, where the “truth lies” somewhere between lie and fiction, and where the devil is a liar. The crossroads, the very place where Papa Legba grants decision, is one such place.

In this uncanny moment, Space Ape is not a human emcee flowing over an electronic music track, but becomes the Loa at the crossroads of the 2-step—sign and sine—in which the doppelgänger of the two produce a machinic enunciation. “There are no individual statements”, write Deleuze and Guattari, “every statement is the product of a machinic assemblage, in other words, of collective agents of enunciation” (2000: 37). In every enunciation, the otherness of language and its multiplicity of delaying-and-deferring components voice multiple meanings in the individuated utterance. The Space Ape’s collective enunciation of bass fiction take shape at the 2-step convergence of hyperdub’s sign/sine, as he speaks with the infected alien voicing of inflected Jamaican Rastafari patois, in the appearance and utterance of a Loa possession. Space Ape voices the 2-step chronopolitics of collective trauma, navigating the memory of the Middle Passage through the futurity of bass fiction. As hostile alien, Space Ape presides at the crossroads of death and life, past and future, as the figure whose task it is to relieve the *weight* of all that has been buried below in the black Atlantic.

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But such enunciation also operates through the machinic phylum of the electronic music studio. Dub has long considered the vocalist as but one component of the studio’s cybernetic machine, where technologies of feedback transform noise into signal. As Erik Davis writes, “dub created room within Afrodiasporic culture for a cyborg mythology grounded in technical practice” (2008: 65). And as Goodman notes, “dub virologists”—of which he himself is a viral version, *qua* Kode9—“open up this key dimension of machinic orality in the understanding of black music” (2010: 164). What speaks *through* the machinic orality of Space Ape’s bass fiction resounds as an archetypal chant that relieves the “pressure” of the deep and all of its *weight* (of all the pressures: the weight of history, struggle, white supremacy). Bass fiction is a convergence of the speculative imaginary and bass materialism that “comes up and out” and *expels the weight of pressure* through a collective and machinic enunciation.¹⁵

SPACE APE: AS ABOVE SO BELOW (THE QUEST FOR DREAD MUTANTS)

The first clue as to their becomings is in the names themselves. Kode9, an elusive moniker that Goodman has yet to explicate, hints of the “K” as signifying a “Germanic language virus” that “turns a soft sound into a hard sound”.¹⁶ Space Ape presents a rich imaginal signifier. The Space Ape in name transforms the title of the seminal Lee “Scratch” Perry album *Super Ape* (1976), in which the title track softly chants: “this is the ape man / trying to creation / are you ready to step with I, man?”. The “ape man” signifies the black body, enslaved as subhuman, as but ape, transformed by its moniker of “super” into a towering and vengeful beast of Zion, bringing the revolutionary creation to Babylon: the Island Records cover features a King-Kong-like ape uprooting trees in simian rage. The moniker of the “Space Ape” suggests at first a supersimian from outer space—but Space Ape claims that he

arises from the deep, an affinity with what Davis calls “distinctly aquatic surroundings [of dub] . . . a kind of ‘out’ inner space, a liminal womb” (2008: 64).

Though Space Ape’s nomenclature likewise suggests an affinity with Afrofuturist performers who originate on other planets—Sun Ra from Saturn; Dr. Octagon from Jupiter—Space Ape arose from the depths of the black Atlantic.

Space Ape: That’s the Space Ape innit, really. That’s this thing—the alien beneath the sea, it comes up, it’s a hostile alien.

Kode9: So it’s beneath the sea and not outer space?

Space Ape: Yah. Beneath the sea.

Why beneath the sea and not outer space? If Sun Ra is coming from Saturn, where is the Space Ape coming from?

Space Ape: The Space Ape is part of the whole tribe left adrift, man. That’s where it is. That’s where it’s coming from.¹⁷

Space Ape arises from below—a super ape descendent of the overthrown “black animalia” of the Middle Passage, grown large in the deepness of black aquatic space, emerging as the vocal signwave of a massively *dread body*. But this dread body is powerful precisely in its sounding. The bass fiction of Space Ape resonates at the low-end frequencies of affect, in which voice and bass materialism converge in the act of bringing-forth the novel into becoming through the act of naming. “This is the creative power of sound,” writes Henriques of the Rastafari process of the I-and-I, “the generative performance of sonic embodiment” (2014: 196). In Space Ape’s lyricism, the power/knowledge of the I-and-I is signalled in the ambiguity of his deployment of “you”. In the above exchange with Kode9, Stephen Samuel Gordon speaks of Space Ape in the third person, as an “it”, a “hostile alien”—the figure of the crossroads—that arises from the aquatic deep as if to possess his creative self. The way in which Space Ape reinvents his selves calls to mind Fred Moten’s observation of blackness as “an ongoing event of an antiorigin and an anteorigin, replay and reverb of an impossible natal occasion, the performance of a birth and rebirth of a new science, a phylogenetic fantasy that (dis)establishes genesis, the reproduction of blackness in and as (the) reproduction of black performance(s)” (2003: 14).

The depths are not alone of dread bodies. In the Afrofuturist mythology—sonic fictions of the black Atlantic—another electro-aquatic species arises from the deep to “deprogram the programmers” of Babylon: the Drexciyans, mutated descendants of enslaved Africans thrown overboard during the Middle Passage. The Drexciyans infer their heritage in part from the Zong massacre, whose Captain Collingwood drowned some 142 enslaved Africans in 1781—so as to collect the insurance on his (sub)human “commodities” (see Baucom 2005). From the liner notes of Drexciya’s *The Quest* (Submerge, 1997):

Are Drexciyans water-breathing, aquatically-mutated descendants of those unfortunate victims of human greed? Have they been spared by God to teach us or terrorize us? Did they migrate from the Gulf of Mexico to the Mississippi river basin and to the great lakes of Michigan? Do they walk among us? Are they more advanced than us? How and why do they make strange music? What is their quest? (In Williams 2001: 168)

Formed in 1989, the techno and electro duo Drexciya have become central to the Afrofuturist cyborg and aquatic sonic fictions of Detroit techno collective and label Underground Resistance.¹⁸ Their debut 1992 release, “Deep Sea Dweller” (Shockwave Records), develops the template for the sonic fictions that followed: often mystical but also militaristic missives into aquatic riddims. These “monsters from the low end”, writes Kodwo Eshun, “submerge you in liquid dystopia” (1999: 06[083]). But unlike the bass fictions of Space Ape, the harmonic chords of Detroit appear throughout Drexciya’s “aquatic” electro riddims, suggesting that the Bubble Metropolis—the name Drexciya give for their underwater urban lair—is also a sea space of some peace and tranquility. Like dubstep—particularly the work of Hyperdub artist Burial, whose releases sound-out a convergence of South London’s council estates with the memorial remembrance of rave’s warehouse echoes and late-night pirate radio sessions filled with static—Drexciya’s sonic fictions evoke the imaginal materia of space. And like dubstep, aquatic space provides the coordinates: sonar pings, seabed reverbs and underwater echoes resound throughout Drexciya’s broken beat electro and techno that, in Eshun’s words, “militarizes Parliament’s 70s and Hendrix’s 60s Atlantean aquatopias” (1999: 06[083]). Indeed, both Drexciya and Space Ape are, in their own ways, mutations from the deep that escape the confines of the imperial human, creating a shared speculative imaginary of the black Atlantic that seeks to process the generational trauma of the Middle Passage. The spatial coordinates of these haunted aquatic depths are signed through the technology of the sine, and its waves of reverberation and echo. Yet Drexciya’s more frenzied moments of intensified riddim provide a stark contrast to dubstep’s bass fiction. Drexciya’s angular and striking sounds, pitched towards the relentless rhythms of techno (120~150 BPM) at often twice the tempo of dub (50~90 BPM), call to mind an aquatic invasion, or sea storm summoned by Drexciyan technology, ready to take the shore with hurricane force. Though the sonic fiction of Drexciya finds cultural comradeship with the bass fiction of Space Ape, nonetheless their respective sine-waves diverge at the point of riddim. Between Drexciya and Space Ape may be differentiated two distinct enunciations of collective becoming from two nautically distant shores of the black Atlantic; two different sonic fictions with different materialisations of the transit through sign/sine. Yet, in both cases collective becoming passes through the depths of the aquatic—that deep sea space of the haunted past.

Living in their “Bubble Metropolis” (12-inch, Underground Resistance, 1993), the Drexciyans craft electro and techno music for the sonic arsenal of an “Aquatic Invasion” (12-inch, Underground Resistance, 1995). They also map a future “Journey Home” to the African continent in the liner notes to *The Quest*. The means of the return are further

explored in Underground Resistance's 1998 LP, *Interstellar Fugitives*, which features a rap sheet of its cyborg, alien and aquatic Afrofuturist artists/entities. The liner notes, or fugitive "report" issued by the Intergalactic Bureau of Investigation, reveals the existence of a mutant R1 strain of African American genes that have crafted the dread bodies of historical "warrior" figures such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Nelson Mandela, referring to them as "digital Ebola guerilla operatives with reinforced rhythm awareness capabilities". Steve Goodman summarizes the report: "Combining a revisionist black history with science fiction, genetic theory, and ethnomusicology, UR produced a kind of 'dub fiction', where history is versioned into an occulted vibrational battle of cosmic proportions that parallel Ishamel Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*" (2010: 157). Space Ape would certainly qualify as an R1 mutant on the rap sheet of Underground Resistance, voicing the aquatic and alien dread of the black Atlantic.

THE AQUATIC CTHULHU CULT OF THE DREXCIYANS

'They had come from the stars, and had brought Their images with Them.'
—H.P. Lovecraft, "Call of the Cthulhu Cult" (2008: 221)

The Space Ape is "part of the whole tribe left adrift"—one can speculate upon an undiscovered island, a "lost continent" of mutant descendants who, in league with the Drexciyans, accelerated their R1 genes to become super/space ape. The Afrofuturist constellation of Space Ape and the Drexciyans offers a shared speculative imaginary for destabilising the present with mutant black becomings that address the traumatic history of the black Atlantic. In the continuation of "Backward" (Hyperdub 004, 2006), Space Ape offers a warning for mutants seeking recognition from their former masters: "Watch how the mutants fight and struggle / Pushing up themselves to find space inna the middle / To be scene (seen) is what it all seems to mean". Despite a long history of anticolonial and antiracist struggle, Space Ape observes how much remains the same in the "equal" politics of recognition between "servant and master": "Strange how things seem to remain the same / When all the while we a try to make change". Space Ape attributes such persistent sameness, in part, to religion "filling up you head with all these quotes from the scripture / to rupture a structure don't want to make this thing corrupt ya". In this respect, Space Ape marks out his bass fiction differences from the theological scriptures of, one would suspect, dub's Rastafari. In this case, despite bass fiction's resonance with Rastafari dub's low-end sine, the speculative sign finds itself split over the governing structure and its contested ontotheology. But he also names a second force. "Backward" signals the listener (and enunciator) in the ambiguity of its *you*, where: "understand this *you* have to make a decision". The decision is marked out between religion (which we might understand as alluding to what Lisa Amanda Palmer describes, after Carolyn Cooper, as the "conservative values within Rastafari culture" (2014: 127)) and this second force—a force "creating biological patterns more mystical than Saturn", this "abstract black hole laughing after you". The choice is not between myth and science, but rather between two sonic fictions, two MythSciences: between received scripture—the

truth-structure of ontotheological signs—and the mystical yet biological and extraplanetary force of what Sun Ra called the Outer Darkness. That the abstract black hole is more mystical than Saturn also appears to signal a challenge to Sun Ra—who declared himself from the ringed planet—or rather Ra’s complex allegiance to Christianity, though the latter is thoroughly transformed and in its own way abstracted by way of a unique rereading that intersects the Nation of Islam, Afrocentric Kemetian mythosophy, occult Qabbalah, alien abduction, and the Nation of Islam offshoot, the Five Percent (see Szwed 1998). I do not have the space to attend to Ra’s Afrofuturist reformulation of Christianity here, save to note that Ra undertook his own creatively qabbalistic rereadings of the Bible, inverting (like Nietzsche) much of its Roman power structures, so as to reveal how white supremacy had contaminated its messaging (see Ra 2006).

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What I do wish to emphasise is how such Afrofuturist mythologies are *operative*—they work in the realm of sonic fictions, converging sine with sign by sounding-out MythScience. As Ben Williams writes, the mutational mythologies of Afrofuturism “imagine an origin of a blackness that, since it is characterized by the concept of mutation rather than that of skin color, cannot be reduced only to blackness” (2001: 171), an argument also found in Sean Albiez’s discussion of racialised identity in Detroit techno (2005). A critical reading here of Williams must remain suspect of the “only”—to reduce blackness to skin colour is to epidermalise the *qualia* of mutation itself; the individuated instance of “what kind” that designates a particular Afrofuturist becoming remains nonetheless infused with blackness, precisely because the heritage of blackness is not a skin that can be shrugged off under white supremacy. The mutant dread body is just as likely to be overdetermined (and feared) by white supremacy for its apparently “superhuman” (or “superape”) powers, labelled and exterminated upon sight due to the threatening condition of its “black superiority” (Gilroy 2004: 258). This is why there is one other mythopoetic figure that becomes dredged from the black Atlantic by the Space Ape: Cthulhu.

What if—and here the speculative philosophical shaping of the imaginary takes shape—the Drexciyans discovered—or *invented, as biological kindred*—Cthulhu, that “monster of vaguely anthropoid outline, but with an octopus-like head whose face was a mass of feelers, a scaly, rubbery-looking body, prodigious claws on hind and fore feet, and long narrow wings behind”, in which consciousness manifested “in shapes and forms long since withdrawn before the tide of advancing humanity”? (Lovecraft 2008: 209; 201).¹⁹ The horror-dub of Space Ape *naturally* approaches the monstrosities of Lovecraft’s horrorfiction; as Space Ape iterated during an interview, “we is fishes... we did not come up on water on two foot”.²⁰ With riddim chants and bass fiction, Space Ape and the Drexciyans appear in league to uplift Cthulhu from his underwater city of R’lyeh, a city where “one could not be sure that the sea and the ground were horizontal”, a city that Lovecraft’s narrator describes as “close” to the architecture of “futurism” (2008: 222–23). Space Ape’s notion of an “abstract black hole” comes close to naming this horror. But his seminal description of Space Ape as entity,

in collaboration with Burial on the latter's debut album, makes the connection tantalisingly explicit, as if combining in one moment of speculative irrealism the Drexciyans ("victims themselves of a close encounter / desperate abductors") and Cthulhu ("Living Space Apes, creatures, covered, smothered in ripe tentacles"):

Victims themselves of a close encounter
 Desperate abductors, constructors become infected, vexed
 By an alien virus, so alien, so viral
 Living Space Apes, creatures, covered, smothered in ripe tentacles
 Stimulating the audio nerve directly
 You wanna come flex with me?
 — Burial and Space Ape, "Space Ape" (*Burial*, 2006)²¹

There is an intriguing further connection to be made in this moment of speculative fiction that processes philosophy—a point where the intertextuality of Space Ape and the Drexciyans is allowed to roam the radical imaginary. Such a moment, here, suggests an Afrofuturist reading of H.P. Lovecraft's tale of the Cthulhu Cult, "The Call of Cthulhu", where indeed, race plays a peculiar (though on some levels predictable) role. In retelling this tale, we apply the bass fictional imaginary hitherto described to points of intersection in Lovecraft's narrative between horror and race; the result is a monstrous crafting that attempts to relieve pressure from the deep by amplifying the shared speculative imaginary of the black Atlantic in Lovecraft's text.

The various characters of Lovecraft's tale who are all *in the know* concerning the Elder God Cthulhu all appear as racialised subjects, most with aquatic connections. From the beginning, the professor whose research uncovers the Cthulhu Cult (that is, for white people) mysteriously dies "after having been jostled by a nautical-looking negro" (Lovecraft 2008: 202). The sculptor whose dreams catalyse him to craft totemic Cthulhu objects is described as a "thin, dark young man" (2008: 204). Further dream patients describe "a dread of something abnormal" while "Voodoo orgies multiply in Haiti, and African outposts report ominous mutterings" (2008: 207). But crucially, the first climax of the tale appears in the Louisiana swamps of New Orleans, where a Cthulhu cult is discovered, "infinitely more diabolic than even the blackest of the African voodoo circles" (2008: 208). These "Louisiana swamp priests" are linked to "Eskimo wizards" worshipping similar totems of a tentacled, giant and winged Cthulhu (2008: 210). The Louisiana cult is discovered in "black haunted woods", a territory "substantially unknown and untraversed by white men" (2008: 211), where the Cthulhu cult members are found dancing and drumming, having conducted a ritual murder of local white "squatters" (who though they live in the same "black" woods, are described by the white narrator as "mostly primitive but good-natured descendants of Lafitte's men" (2008: 211)). Nearly all the members of the Cthulhu cult are racialised as Afrodiasporic; the one exception is the reference to its "Eskimo Wizards", who in the narrator's raciology are likewise typecast as racialised "primitives". A further clue, in

this respect, to Space Ape's connection to the Cthulhu cult is in the choice of his musical sample matter for his solo album *Xorcism* (2012), which utilises Haitian and Kamchatkan Siberian (northeastern Russian indigeneous) rhythms and chants. Such sampling, as Tricia Rose points out, is "not unlike versioning practices in Caribbean musics", insofar as it is "about paying homage, an invocation of another's voice to help you to say what you want to say", through a "process of musical and cultural archeology" (1994: 79). Space Ape's sonic archeology of Haiti and Kamchatkan rhythms intensifies the usual processes by which sampling undertakes homage through invocation, insofar as it invokes the other's alien voicing through a process of hauntological possession. Space Ape becomes-infected by the ritual music makers attributed by Lovecraft to the Cthulhu Cult; knowingly or not, his bass fiction is already shaped by Cthulhic signs, sampled as the sine-waves of indigeneous Kamchatkan riddims.

Not only are the black woods and seas of the Cthulhu Cult unknown to white men, but the entire alien cosmogony of the Elder Gods—those "abstract black holes laughing at you", in Space Ape's verse—hint at an interstellar and aquatic realm of nonhuman Elder mutants known solely through the ritual and musical traditions of the black Atlantic. Lovecraft's tale is already a sonic fiction, relying on its riddim chants to awake Cthulhu from sea slumber; in this slippage of signs to sines, it encompasses the collective enunciation of a bass fiction, as its horrific alien entity slumbers under the unfathomable weight of undersea pressure. Bass fiction, in this sensory language, also allegorises the upwards momentum of what has been buried: in its uncanny return, Cthulhu embodies the very mechanics of horror, individuating the becoming of that which horrifies, as that which is dreamed crawls up from the deep, emerging *qua* becoming, refusing to remain pushed down, refusing to remain erased from memory and history alike, under the sea and submerged into myth. Cthulhu, as collective enunciation of the erased and submerged black Atlantic, returns.

Lovecraft's unreliable narrator, steeped in white supremacy and blinded by racism, cannot see the mutant R1 Cthulhu for what it is: an aquatic alien war machine, communicating through dreams and riddim, biding its time to arise from the deep. Like Space Ape, Cthulhu arises when the collective enunciation of its Afrodiasporic followers call it forth through chants and riddim rituals in the dance; and like how the Drexciyans seek to exact vengeance for the trauma of the Middle Passage by unleashing sonic storms from above and below, Cthulhu arises to avenge its aquatic burial. Indeed, Cthulhu arises only when its Afrodiasporic followers undertake the necessary alignment of their machinic orality with the precession of the stars to relieve the pressure. Cthulhu is not just a horrific figure, but the arising of an Elder God, an ancient telepathic mythos incarnate, a pre-Western and pre-Christian figuration that "is fishes" and yet vaguely anthropoid—a virtual body of hostile alien becoming, descended from the stars yet buried in the aquatic deep. The spatial orientation of Cthulhu is often signalled as an "occult" aspect of Lovecraft, but it is properly Hermetic, which is to say, an axiom of Kemetian MythScience visible in the architectural alignment of Egyptian artifacts: *as above, so below*.²²

Reading anew the anthropic fish-shape of Cthulhu, it also calls to mind the ancient Dogon beliefs in the fish-like Nommos of Sirius that are often referenced in Afrofuturist myths; Sirius plays a predominant role in Egyptian/Kemetian star science (see Griaule and Dieterlen 1986). Reread again, Cthulhu appears as *already* an Afrofuturist figure, an infection of the hostile alien virus in Lovecraft's text. From space, from that distant continent of the Outer Darkness, Cthulhu arises from its Middle Passage sea burial, from the groundless ground of traumatic memory. The troubling dreams of the tale's white characters, foreshadowing the outer space alien's aquatic emergence, allegorise white fears over the rise of the black Atlantic, and its return of the repressed, and hostile, alien.



The timing is crucial, the stars must be right; the *alien* arrivals of interstellar Afrofuturists suggests a coordinated attack in dreams and from water, land, and outer space:

When the stars were right, They could plunge from world to world through the sky;
but when the stars were wrong, They could not live. But although They no longer
lived, They would never really die (Lovecraft 2008: 214).

The great underwater city of R'lyeh, "with its monuments and sepulchres", where Cthulhu and his cohorts wait entombed for the stars to realign, is already part of a dread black imaginary that connects the aquatic to the alien, outer space to the depths of aquatic and inner space. Like Drexciya's Neptune's Lair, R'lyeh awaits resurgence from the depths; its technical construction as monumental architectural likewise signals its intended design as a space for collective becomings through the future chants of riddim science. And like Space Ape's virtual body of the hostile alien, "immune from dying", *They* would never really die. The Afrofuturist alien-aquatic becoming lives-on: it infiltrates and survives even the horrors of white mythology.

LIVING OUT MY LIFE LIKE I'M ON THE RUN (REPRISE)

I'm keeping all the scars you gave me
I'll show them to you indirectly
I'm scratching at the pain within
Let me show you how the world begins.
— The Space Ape, "On the Run" (2012)

The last blog post for London-based dubstep poet Space Ape is dated October 29th, 2012, just two years shy of his death on October 2nd, 2014. The post features but a single video, for a track entitled "On the Run", self-released as part of his 2012 solo album, *Xorcism*. Press play and the black body of Space Ape appears, the darkness of his skin contrasted by painted white lines—or lashes—that criss-cross his face, back and arms. Even as Space Ape is on the run—hunted, and haunted—he faces the camera as if to challenge his persistently

ambiguous interlocutor, the “you” of his lyrical direction. Facing the onset of cancer, in *Xorcism* Space Ape confronts the analogical, yet autonomous and arbitrary, relationship of the sign to the sine, of the bass fiction mapped to the becoming of a singular and individuated body that will, through its sonic fiction, exceed its Earthly existence. *Xorcism* maps, in flesh and blood, the sines of bass fiction through signs scrawled across his body, while confronting, and yet celebrating, the immunity of his virtual body to death.

Staring at the camera underneath hooded and shadowed eyes, Space Ape evokes the very mythologised image of the urban primitive, his bare-skinned black body marked by white scars—scars that can likewise be perceived as the sacred geometry of Haitian vodou, signs cut upon flesh that reflect the sines and sounds of the Haitian drumming, chanting and ritual music that Space Ape samples throughout *Xorcism*. Space Ape’s white scars suggest the x-raying of the skeletal, and the tracing of an internal scarification; they likewise suggest the scars of bearing the burden of whiteness upon the lashed and hunted skin of a singularly alien, black body. A body at the crossroads, marked by white crosses (see fig. 2).



FIGURE 2. SPACE APE, *XORCISM* (2012). PHOTO CREDIT: HIROO TANAKA (2012).

Materialised as white signs inscribed on the flesh, these visual metaphors, like white phosphorous, set fire to his “burnt charcoal skin” (“Spirit of Change”, *Xorcism*, 2012). As he writhes in spastic motion, Space Ape makes immediate mention of his scars in the first line of “On the Run”. These burning white lines appear to memorialise the “scars *you* gave me” (and once again, the ambiguous *you*, a “you” that is at once both us and them, him and you, becoming and being, sign/sine): scars upon the liminal skin lashed by forces that blur the internal and external, from a “you” that fluctuates between the within/without. “On the Run” is the second track, or rather, ritual, of Space Ape’s “Xorcism”. The album as a whole appears as an *xorcism* of a thing that possesses, or haunts, Space Ape. Each of seven tracks is no longer than just over two minutes; each ritual is brief, to the point, and dense with affect and signification. The erasure of the letter “e” in the album’s title draws attention to the graphic mark of the letter “X” as it fronts *Xorcism*: the intersection of two lines, two lashes, two scars, in a cross. Space Ape/Papa Legba. That the “e” has been removed suggests that the xorcism is not of an e/xtornality that has come to reside within, but of a thing that possesses the liminal state of transgressing inside to outside, of being of both and yet neither. Possessed by the hostile alien within; a hostile becoming of the otherwise autonomous alien.

BLACK SKIN / WHITE SCARS

White supremacy has long lashed its scars upon the thin epidermal layer of the flesh, in a process that Frantz Fanon called “epidermalisation”, whereby the epidermis is the site of an ontological fissure between the human and the inhuman (2004: xv). The skin is a battleground; it encloses selves that are viewed by white supremacy as but dread bodies. Space Ape’s bass fiction enters into a becoming of the body that writhes against yet with its scars, that challenges its interlocutors, that looks *you* in the eyes while it is eaten from within. The album of *Xorcism* arises, in this space, as the horrific bass fiction soundtrack for the tale of hostile alien becoming, in which black radicalism arises from the deep, from the Drexciyans to Space Ape, to relieve the *weight* of all that burdens.

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White supremacy declares black bodies *subhuman* by dint—in part—of their darkened epidermis. But Space Ape has preemptively abandoned what Kodwo Eshun calls the “treacherous category” of the human (1999: 00[-005]). Space Ape is a “hostile alien, immune from dying” (“Space Ape”, *Burial*, 2006). Like the Drexciyans, Space Ape is an R1 mutant. But *Xorcism* signifies the threshold of bass fiction becoming nonfiction: it is the virtual body confronted with the becoming-death of its earthly source, with the fragility of its flesh. *Xorcism* marks the crossroads of the sign/sine, of the non-fictional becoming though which we all must pass.

• • •

Yet the body is now confronted by the hostile alien within; Space Ape is confronted with the materialisation of a deadly becoming run amok. For these scars are also of a cancer. In the “razor-like” rain from a “wretched sky”, Space Ape tries to “wipe clear a memory of an internal enemy / siphoning his energy” (“Spirit of Change”, *Xorcisim*, 2012). As his music samples the sound and spirit of vodou (*vodouisant*, to be a “servant of the spirits”, in a sound/space where “all is equal between servant and master” (Space Ape, “Backward”, 2006)), Space Ape must “trust in this spirit, the spirit of change”. By embracing the “spirit of change”, the deacon of becoming, Space Ape sets out to “xorcise” that which consumes him from within. Such an xorcism is not a rejection, an irradiation or exorcism proper; rather, it seeks to separate the spirits from the cells through the brave affirmation of what comes to pass, in the affirmation of what Amiri Baraka called the “changing same” (1999). An affirmation, even, in the giving of his body over to science—a giving over that is inflected with all the horrors of Tuskegee—in which he will be “compliant” (“He Gave His Body Over to Science”, *Xorcism*, 2012).

Xorcism at the intersection of forces external and internal (see fig. 3). Space Ape’s later lyrics, in *Xorcism* above all, but also the dread dubstep of “The Devil is a Liar” on *Killing Season* (Hyperdub 012, 2014)—a title that darkly anticipates the transformation of worlds



FIGURE 3. SPACE APE AS THE DEVIL (IS A LIAR). PHOTO: GUSTAV NEWBY (2014).

and bodies that is to come—reflect a convergence of disenchantment, in which the structural racism of the body politic materialises in the cancer of his black body. Space Ape rhymes with the cool yet fierce clarity of an emcee who, as *Dummy Magazine* observes, expresses “his deep dissatisfaction with contemporary Britain” (Cliff 2012). In the same gesture, as the press release of label Hyperdub reveals, Space Ape channels his personal experience of “coping with a rare form of cancer, Neurolymphomatosis”:

I’ve been dreaming of a wonderful life
 in peace with a child and a beautiful wife
 but life’s a liar baby life’s a cheat
 making promises it cannot keep
 —The Space Ape, “On the Run” (*Xorcism*, 2012)

• • •

As he twitches and writhes to saxophone reminiscent of Ornette Coleman, Space Ape’s black skin fades into the black background, leaving the scars of whiteness vibrating in the dark, his fervent lyrics appearing all the more urgent given the brevity of the becoming, some two minutes and twenty-three seconds.

• • •

The Space Ape’s human body, in the name and father of Stephen Samuel Gordon, was consumed after a five-year battle with cancer. I write in memoriam and reverence to Stephen—an inspiring force whom I met but once, but saw perform as Space Ape twice.²³ I write in the spirit of the changing same, the spirit Space Ape embraced in his xorcism of the alien within. I marvel at his bravery for undertaking an xorcism that signalled acceptance of all that may come. And I write to memorialise how it is that the Space Ape, the hostile alien, this bass fiction of the virtual body, *is* immune from dying—the Space Ape as Afrofuturist becoming, as the “self-creation” of an inventive life that knew no bounds, as a *virtual* body that intersects the earthly and the unearthly, a speculative and singular radical imaginary that once walked the earth, can never die, and can be activated again to xorcise all that has confined, marked, lashed and scarred the becoming of a body. Space Ape resonates still in the bass fictions of the deep; he arises from the black Atlantic to relieve the pressure every time the record is spun.

Rest in the depths and shake loose the stars. For Stephen Samuel Gordon, The Space Ape, 17 June 1970—2 October 2014.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I give my most humble thanks to the spirit of Stephen Samuel Gordon, who inspired countless others to seek out their own becomings. Rest In Power. To Steve Goodman and Luciana Parisi, my deepest respects. Boundless gratitude to Hillegonda Rietveld, and kind thanks to the anonymous reviewer.

NOTES

- 1 Interview with the author, June 2007. See “kode 9 & Space Ape @ MUTEK 07 _ [tV]”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0MYajFs3UQ>.
- 2 See “kode 9 & Space Ape @ MUTEK 07 _ [tV]”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0MYajFs3UQ>.
- 3 According to *Clash* magazine (Murray 2012), samples for the album were taken from the following tracks, mostly of Haitian origin, though some from the traditional music of the Siberian peoples of Kamtchatka:

Anastasija Vasilevna Gitorovka. 1999. “Chant et Tambour sur Cadre Jajar” (Track 4). *Sibérie 4. Korjak Kamtchatka: Tambours de Danse de L’extreme-Orient Siberien*. Buda Musique (CD): 925982.

Artibonite\Archaie. 1995. “Rara\Bizango” (Track 2). *Rhythms of Rapture, Sacred Musics of Haitian Vodou*. Smithsonian Folkway Recordings (CD): SF 40464. <http://www.discogs.com/VariouS-Rhythms-Of-Rapture-Sacred-Musics-Of-Haitian-Vodou/release/1731052>.

Drummers of the Societe Absolutement Guinin. 2001. “Contredance” (Track 1), “Afranchi” (Track 3). *Voodoo Drums*. Universal Sound (CD): US CD 16. <http://www.discogs.com/Drummers-Of-The-Societe-Absolutement-Guinin-Voodoo-Drums/master/171133>.

Irina Khristoforovna Kolegova. 1994. “Accapella” (Track 5). *Sibérie 4. Korjak Kamtchatka: Tambours de Danse de L’extreme-Orient Siberien*. Buda Musique (CD): 925982.

Premye Nimewo Group. 1995. “Lasereal” (Track 7). *Rhythms of Rapture, Sacred Musics of Haitian Vodou*. Smithsonian Folkway Recordings (CD): SF 40464. <http://www.discogs.com/VariouS-Rhythms-Of-Rapture-Sacred-Musics-Of-Haitian-Vodou/release/1731052>.

Street Music of Haiti. 2010. “Vaksin Mix / Madolfe / Neg Yo Rele / Pa Blie / Map Navigue” (Track 6). *Rara in Haiti*. Soul Jazz Records (CD): SJR CD230. <http://www.discogs.com/No-Artist-Rara-In-Haiti-Street-Music-Of-Haiti/release/3017027>.
- 4 Yet such technicity does not produce a *unity* of the sign with the voice, but rather signals its constitutive *différance* with itself, its differal/delay/deferral precisely because of such “supplementary” technicity at the origin (which is to say, technicity is that which is added on after to make the origin complete to begin with). I admit an aside here that will have to be taken up elsewhere, following up on Derrida when he writes, in *Speech and Phenomena*: “In order to really understand where the power of the voice lies, and how metaphysics, philosophy, and the determination of being as presence constitute the epoch of speech as *technical* mastery of objective being, to properly understand the unity of *technē* and *phonē*, we must think through the objectivity of the object” (1973: 75), a point that ought to resonate with speculative realism, save that such a thinking through aims precisely at the speculative distinction of subject/object, of the *différance* between the *what* and the *who*, in this case, as that *différance* between the human and the alien. It is because of the constitutive technicity of the *différance* between the what/who that there lies the potential for the human to *become* the virtual body of the alien; thus the speculative technicity or MythScience of speculative *irrealism* becomes necessary.
- 5 Interview with the author, June 2007. See “kode 9 & Space Ape @ MUTEK 07 _ [tV]”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0MYajFs3UQ>.

- 6 The Hyperdub blog is now archived at <<http://riddim.ca>>.
- 7 “Hyperdub” appears as a passing descriptor in Goodman’s *Sonic Warfare*, in one of two chapters on Afrofuturism, where it appears to signal the rave virus of the hardcore continuum (2010: 165).
- 8 The recombinatory invention of their personas and proper names, as constellated becomings of an Afrofuturist speculative imaginary, will be attended to below. Space Ape’s designation of himself as “i-man”, a reference to the Jamaican Rastafari patois, appears above in the lyrics to “Space Ape” (on *Burial*, 2006).
- 9 Simon Reynolds writes that 2-step “is a general rubric for all kinds of jittery, irregular rhythms that don’t conform to garage’s traditional four-on-the-floor pulse” (1999a). 2-step is a breakbeat genre that developed first in London from a cross between the deep and soulful sounds of New York garage house (named after the Paradise Garage) and UK drum ’n’ bass.
- 10 See Zephaniah’s collaboration, “Illegal”, with UK minimalist house duo Swayzak, on *Himawari* (2000).
- 11 For example, see Nick Land’s “Meltdown” (circa 1997): <<https://soundcloud.com/virtualfutures/meltdown-nickland>>. Land’s work may be situated as an influence for Space Ape’s verse, insofar as Stephen Samuel Gordon was closely affiliated with members of Land’s Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (Ccpu), including Steve Goodman (Kode9) and Luciana Parisi (see below).
- 12 Goodman is a former member of the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (Ccpu), an exiled arm of Warwick’s Philosophy Department run first by Sadie Plant (before she abandoned academia) and then Nick Land (before academia abandoned him). The Ccpu (infamously) never did officially exist from approximately 1995 through 1997. In Simon Reynold’s words, the Ccpu was “striving to achieve a kind of nomadic thought” through its multimedial pastiche of Deleuzian philosophy, cyberpunk science fiction, numerology and chaos magick (1999). Its grad students included cultural theorist Mark Fisher (k-punk) and *Abstract Sex* feminist scholar Luciana Parisi, Afrofuturist theorist and Otolith Group filmmaker Kodwo Eshun, Hyperdub label founder, dubstep producer and academic Steve Goodman (Kode9), as well as speculative realist philosophers Ray Brassier and Iain Hamilton Grant. Parisi was the life partner of Stephen Samuel Gordon. It is worth taking a moment to realise the incredible contribution of the Ccpu to modern thought and artistic practice.
- 13 See “kode 9 & Space Ape @ MUTEK 07 _ [tV]”: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0MYajFs3UQ>>.
- 14 For example, in Octavia Butler’s *Clay’s Ark* (1984), an alien virus is brought back to Earth by an astronaut (Eli) that remakes human bodies into catlike creatures with improved sight, hearing and reflexes. Though not overtaking human consciousness entirely, the virus instills the urge to infect others and breed ever-more alien children. Thematically, the virus from Alpha Centauri allegorises popular culture’s “superhuman” tropes of blackness (and fears of “black breeding” and miscegeny) while exploring the question of what it means to be human (and become-alien).
- 15 Interview with the author, June 2007. See “kode 9 & Space Ape @ MUTEK 07 _ [tV]”: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0MYajFs3UQ>>.
- 16 Interview with the author, June 2007. See “kode 9 & Space Ape @ MUTEK 07 _ [tV]”: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0MYajFs3UQ>>.

- 17 Interview with the author, June 2007. See “kode 9 & Space Ape @ MUTEK 07 _ [tV]”: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0MYajFs3UQ>>. I have here corrected my interview question, which (incorrectly) identified Sun Ra as from Jupiter.
- 18 Until the death of James Stinson on 3 September 2002, the identities behind Drexciya remained (all but) unknown. Gerald Donald continues to produce music under other heteronyms (including Dopplereffekt and Arpanet), as well as re-releasing Drexciya material (and unreleased material) via the *Journey of the Deep Sea Dweller* series (I–IV) on Clone Classic Cuts.
- 19 In turning to Cthulhu, I nod to recent work in speculative realism (and other Thingly approaches) on H.P. Lovecraft, particularly texts from Eugene Thacker, Graham Harman and Dylan Trigg. Because of the space it would require, I must set aside a possible encounter, other than to propose here a very different kind of *speculative irrealism*, one in which the objective certainty of speculative realism’s unknowable “thing” (or “object”) remains constitutively undecidable (insofar as it is purely object, not subject), *in part* because the ontological differentiation of the *who* from the *what* encodes an unequal relation of power in its *différance* that tends to serve the *who*.
- 20 Interview with the author, June 2007. See “kode 9 & Space Ape @ MUTEK 07 _ [tV]”: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0MYajFs3UQ>>.
- 21 This track exists in two versions, by Burial and Kode 9 respectively.
- 22 I am here referring to Robert Bauval’s well-argued hypothesis—and also encoded in Hermetic and Kemetic occult tradition—that the pyramids of the Giza plateau align to the stars of Orion’s belt, with other Egyptian architectural monuments (such as Heliopolis) likewise aligning to specific star positions of and around Orion; see also the ancient Kemetic/Nubian star monuments of Nabta Playa that demonstrate knowledge of astronomical precession, predating the Dynastic-era pyramids by thousands of years (if indeed that is when the pyramids were built; see Bauval 2010).
- 23 At MUTEK Montréal, with Kode9, in 2007 and 2008, respectively. See “kode 9 & Space Ape @ MUTEK 07 _ [tV]”: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0MYajFs3UQ>>.

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