

For a
Pragmatics
of the
Useless



ERIN MANNING

For a Pragmatics of the Useless

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Thought in the Act – A series edited by Erin Manning and Brian Massumi

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learn to hear the multiplicity in the thinking, in all thinking. This is what we teach each other on those long nights of reading aloud when we listen not only to the words but to how their saying composes improvisatory cadences of the life we texture into being. With love, in an ethos of a pragmatics of the useless, debt unrepayable.

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x Acknowledgments
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Fugitively, Approximately

Two phrases have haunted the writing of this book. The first comes from Fred Moten: *all black life is neurodiverse life*. It might also have been *black life is always neurodiverse*. The second is *approximation of proximity*. The feeling is that the ambiguity of memory in the first has a connection to the approximation of the second. Moten's words, written in a manuscript review before the publication of *The Minor Gesture* (Manning 2016), felt vitally important when I received them. But *The Minor Gesture* was already too close to completion to fully carry the force of the proposition, and so, while I did signal the alignment between whiteness and neurotypicality in the book, I decided to make Moten's words the fugitive force of the next one. I say "fugitive force" both to carry forward Stefano Harney and Moten's (2013) concept of fugitivity, everywhere at work in *For a Pragmatics of the Useless*, and to emphasize that this is how work comes into itself: with the quality of a reorientation moved by a spark that connects to an intensity already moving transversally across a work. This is what Moten's words did: their deep thinking-with exposed the stakes of what stirred as yet unthought in the thinking. It is this ethos of thinking-with I take into *For a Pragmatics of the Useless*, exploring Moten's words, words less his own now than a refrain heard in fugitive proximity. This fugitivity at the heart of thought is what I want to address here. For what Moten's words did at that singular moment of writing/thinking was create an opening for thought to travel in directions as yet in germ.

This kind of proximity is something else than citation. How can I properly cite Moten when I am no longer even certain which phrase it was that changed the path of my research? An approximation of proximity might be said to be an alliance with thought-in-the-making, an engagement with the edges of how thinking itself does its work. This is what I heard in Moten's gesture: that there was space for a thinking-alongside that could bring into relation the concept of black life and the claim that neurotypicality is nothing else than an articulation of whiteness at work—that there was in *The Minor Gesture* an incipient potential

for neurodiversity and black life to come into alliance in a way that would not reduce one to the other but generate a complementarity. The generosity of the thinking-with extended by Moten in his engagement with *The Minor Gesture* is what lured the writing-to-come into the proximity of black life, an approximation since there can only be a speculative engagement with a question as complex as the one of black life, especially when written from outside the culture of its sociality.

The task was gargantuan. It involved acquainting myself with decades of black studies to explore within this rich literature openings toward the complementarity of black life and neurodiversity. It also involved returning to the concept of neurodiversity to explore whether the terminology of the neurological was really where I wanted to situate the discussion. It had always been clear to me that the *neuro* in *neurodiversity* was not, for the most part, the site of my inquiry: my work has aimed to sidestep the neuroreductionism that I believe shuts down the political and social force of the movement for neurodiversity. While much of my work on autistic perception *does* emphasize neurological difference, and while I am certain that neurological difference is a formative effect in the variation designated by the term *neurodiversity*, my interest is in the *diversity in diversity*, locating the neurotypical not as the measure of an individual diametrically opposed to the neurodiverse but as the (unspoken) baseline of existence. I see neurotypicality as akin to structural racism—as the infusion of white supremacy in the governing definition of what counts as human. The assumption that neurotypicality is the neutral ground from which difference asserts itself (an assumption everywhere supported by the neuroscientific literature) suggests that there is still an urgent conversation to be had about how the human, and knowledge as a defining category of the human, is organized and deployed in the image of neurotypicality. The decision to continue to work with the *neuro* in *neurodiversity* is therefore less an alignment to the neurological *per se* than an engagement with the presuppositions of neurology as a science for and of the (neurotypical, white) human, a science that far too rarely calls into question the assumptions that underlie either its humanism or the categorical imperative to perform according to its normative expectations. To address this is to continue the work I began in *The Minor Gesture*, the work of questioning the volition-intentionality-agency triad at the heart of neurotypicality, that presupposition of (white) existence that places individual executive agency as the motivator of all experience. What of the *agencement* of forces that compose to facilitate an event's coming into expression? What of the being of relation, that quality of existence that “informs not simply what is relayed but also the relative and the related,” an “open totality rolling with its own movement” (Glis-

sant 1997, 192; translation modified)? A deep commitment to the sociality of a facilitation that begins in *the relation* is at work in my refusal of neuroreductionism, pushing back against the neurotypical presupposition that to do it alone, to do it individually, to do it at the pace of the volition-intentionality-agency triad, is to be truly human.

Writing diagonally across this question, Moten addresses that most baseline of neurological apparatuses: executive function. If executive function, the site of planning in the brain, is altered by a neurological twist, must the assumption always be that this results in a lack of capacity simply because the work at hand requires facilitation? What value system is at work here? What is formulated in this claim with respect to the value of independence? “Black study,” Moten writes, “moves at the horizon of an event where certain instruments, insofar as they can no longer either calculate or be calculated, are bent toward the incalculable” (2018a, 162). The incalculable here is the very question of value. “The assignment of a specific value to the incalculable is a kind of terror. At the same time, the incalculable is the very instantiation of value” (169). Across the thought of value and the incalculable I hear: what might be learned from the fugitive planning of neurodiverse modes of sociality, and how is this sociality allied to black study? What is planning’s approximation in that encounter? What are the consequences of even assuming that the form of planning we understand as executive function, that planning that defines human volition as lone contributor to existence, is a value (has a value) in itself? How does fugitive planning accommodate the kind of being of relation that not only supports facilitation but actively seeks it out?

Moten doesn’t lay any of this out the way I am doing it here—a too-quick read of the powerful chapter from *Stolen Life* (Moten 2018a) I am thinking-with would probably not reproduce, for most readers, the stakes I am outlining. The diagonality with which the issues are addressed is part of Moten’s project, however. To give in to an executive way of writing about executive function would be to support the value system it depends on.

A diagonal approach allows the unanswerable to remain unanswerable: neither in my engagement with executive function nor in Moten’s work is there the presumption that executive function does not have a vital place in existence—not only because executive function really is affected in autism and in certain other neurodiverse forms of life (schizophrenia, attention deficit (hyperactivity) disorder, Tourette syndrome, obsessive compulsive disorder), but also because, after being treated for decades as cognitively deficient, it is often a relief for those who are neurodiverse to map their difference onto executive function.¹ Nor does this engagement with executive function and black

study mean to suggest in any way that Black folks in general have impaired executive function—such a claim would be ludicrous. The proposition that *all black life is neurodiverse life* moves at another rhythm, one not of direct alignment but of approximate proximity, asking how the fugitivity of value composes with the being of relation while underscoring the complicity between executive function and whiteness in neurotypicality's adhesion to an unchecked narrative of superior functioning. It gestures toward how neurotypicality, as a largely unspoken category of existence that nonetheless undergirds every decision made in the name of normopathy, performs a continual selection of who is valued, of who is recognized as truly human. The aim is this: to inquire into how black life, or black sociality, practices a fugitive planning that is in alliance with neurodiverse sociality and to outline how this fugitivity upends the pre-suppositions executive function carries.

To write diagonally, to write approximately in proximity to an ethics always in the making, is the only way to write about this, and this is what I take to be Moten's orientation in tackling the assumptions that come with the positioning of executive function as that which makes us truly human. Continuing on the diagonal, I follow Moten's lead:

This is an enthusiasm. This is the new thing and a lot of what it's about is just trying to figure out how to say something. How to read. Not (or not only) how to offer a reading, or even an interpretation, but a performance of a text, in the face of its unintelligibility, as if one were forced/privileged to access some other other world where representation and unrepresentability were beside the point, so that the response to the terrors and chances of history were not about calculation, not bound to replicate, even in a blunted and ethically responsible way, the horrors of speculation, where new materialities of imagination were already on the other side of the logic of equivalence.

...

I'm trying to talk about zones of miscommunication + areas of disaster + their affective ground and atmosphere and terrible beauty. They're the same but really close to one another but unbridgeably far from one another, connected by some inside stories we keep running from, the way people flee a broken park when the island is a shipwreck. The crumbled refuge is a hold and a language lab. (2018a, 167–68)

The problem with neurotypicality as unspoken marker of how living and learning should be done is that there is no opportunity to ask how the conditions for knowing are laid within its scaffold. Autistic Ryan Boren writes:

The hardest part to navigate is not so much the teeming ambiguity; it's the assumption. It's the self-centering, automatic and unaware, that reduces ambiguity to an ethnocentric "right answer" or "right behavior" and leaves little room for autistic sociality. Instead of "foregrounding complexity as the baseline," we bury it with myths of normality that create structural barriers and exclude people. We pathologize and marginalize the minds and bodies that sense ambiguity and assumption the most deeply and feel their results the most acutely. So much is lost in the reduction. Acknowledging ambiguity, multiple literacies, and multiple socialities renders the terrain more passable rather than less. Ambiguity is actually something to be embraced rather than to be avoided. It is an inevitable feature of human discourse. Compassionately accepting our ambiguities and differing literacies means less masking and passing and burning out—and better communication.²

Neurodiverse socialities are lost in the count, in the assumption that the planning that doesn't quite plan according to the presumptions of what comes first is simply the mark of a deficiency. A lack of function. This is what Moten means, I think, when he speaks of the incalculable as both a kind of terror *and* the very instantiation of value. What is incalculable here is sociality itself. Sociality exceeds the count. It has no function. Its very existence depends on its never being valued in advance of its coming-to-be. Fugitive planning.

Executive function could be described as that singular capacity for subtraction those on the neurotypical edge of the spectrum take for granted. This includes a task like picking up a glass off the table. In order for planning to occur, there must be a subtraction from the environment, a backgrounding of all else: executive functions "share the need to disengage from the immediate environment to guide actions" (Hill 2004, 2). To pick up that glass involves actively unseeing all else. Zeroing in is not easy when the ray of light is catching the mirror and the smell of pancakes is luring a body toward the stove. But none of this means the glass *can't* be picked up. It just means that the process is felt as a process, whereas for more neurotypically spectrumed folks, the glass has already singled itself out from the welter. The richness of what is lost in the subtraction is what interests me here. What is at stake in the belief that parsing is the key to experience?

My aim here is not to dispute that many neurodiverse folks have affected executive function. Nor is it to suggest that the tasks that benefit from solid executive function—reading and following a recipe, tying your shoes, crossing the street—are unimportant. Rather, what I want to emphasize is how the narrative around planning foregrounded in executive function and its unbreakable tie to

neurotypicality exclude what I have elsewhere called *autistic perception*—a quality of direct perception that carries sociality into its excess of worlding. That is to say, I want to ask how neurotypicality, in its alignment to executive function, demands of existence that it conform to an existing map of procedural orientation that is, by its very operation, incapable of perceiving other modes of existence. And I want to suggest that these other modes of existence, what might be called *minor sociality*, are excluded from the neurotypical precisely because of its need to plan, to count, to organize, to select out, to evaluate. Neurodiversity's power is to feel the blur, the ambiguity, the fugitivity. What I am calling for is the *anexact*, that approximation of proximity that is heard, also, in the enunciation of black life or black sociality.

The assumption of a normative commonality as regards movement, knowledge, and interaction played out in the choreography of neurotypicality, excludes neurodiverse sociality and all the slanted forces that linger in its proximity. This is because neurodiverse sociality's mode of planning is oblique, an obliqueness so imperceptible to neurotypicality as to be easily excluded from any normative account of the social. This is what I hear in Boren's words, words that echo so many accounts of how autistics are considered asocial. "Autism is frequently storied as an epic in asociality, in nonintention. It represents the edges and boundaries of humanity, a queerly crip kind of isolationism" (Yergeau 2018, 11). Its mode of listening too askew, its glance too furtive in its avoidance of that frontal faciality that presupposes relation, neurodiverse sociality doesn't even register on the plane of neurotypicality. This is where I want to go with the words *all black life is neurodiverse life*, toward the undercommonness of sociality.

Approximation of proximity is a way of attuning to the fugitivity heard in the "otherwise" coming-into-sociality across black life and neurodiverse life (Crawley 2017). Approximation of proximity is a way of speaking about two divergent planes, not converging as though they could become one, but meeting at the differential of their potential for the approximate. For isn't sociality precisely that which sidles proximity differently, that which asks how else a coming-together-in-difference can be felt? Or, in Denise Ferreira da Silva's (2016) words, difference without separability?

For a Pragmatics of the Useless asks how, in the differential of black sociality, or what Laura Harris calls an "aesthetic sociality of blackness," aesthetic propositions for living otherwise are crafted, and carried. Harris defines an aesthetic sociality of blackness as "an improvised political assemblage that resides in the heart of the polity but operates under its ground and on its edge" (2012, 53). In this operation "under ground and on edge," black sociality *invents* sites of collective expression rather than simply inhabiting them. "Its resources, which can

never be fully accessed by the structures and authorities of legitimate political economy, are taken up by the politically and economically illegitimate in their insistence on living otherwise, in ways that resist repression, denigration, and exclusion and violate brutally imposed laws of property and propriety” (Harris 2012, 53). An aesthetics of black sociality grows in the between of ad hoc constructions for a life in the making, aesthetic in its commitment to a lived expression of perception’s differential, social in its consent not to be a single being in an ethos of what Édouard Glissant (1997) would call a poetics of relation.

There are of course as many articulations of black sociality as there are of actualizations of the fugitive undercommons they seed. I think here of Saidiya Hartman’s commitment to waywardness as it moves through “critical fabulation,” in her lifelong commitment to “displace the received or authorized account” (2008b, 11). I think of Tina Campt’s aesthetic contribution to “radical modalities of witnessing that refuse authoritative forms of visibility which function to refuse blackness itself,” a “practice of refusal” that “functions . . . through relationality and adjacency,” whose “power lies in its ability to engage negation as generative” (2019, 80, 83). I think of Tavia Nyong’o’s afro-fabulations experienced in the “vernacular power of funk as performance modality that disrupts heteronormative embodiment and straight time,” a “milieu filled with an angular sociality, a black social life of sharp elbows, raised eyebrows, rolling eyes, loudly sucking teeth, and, if the moment is right, collective ecstasy” (2018, 171–72). I think of Thomas DeFrantz’s black performance (and “black Joy”) that comes with the injunction “to be willing not to know,” attuning to blackwork’s “unexpected relationship and encounter,” its “bitter tongue” of unspeakability (to whiteness) and “resistant creative acts” (2017, 12, 18, 21). I think of Jaamil Olawale Kosoko’s *Chameleon* and its shape-shifting production of those phonic materialities that sound through the moving body, a body that performs its resistance to systemic oppression, a dance so profoundly affirmative that it remakes the very conditions of blackness. I think also of Rizvana Bradley’s curated days of black study, two of which I attended in 2018—one in Amsterdam as part of a collaboration between the Rietveld and the Stedelijk, the other in Paris, a collaboration between the University of the Arts and the Centre National de la Danse.³ In both these gatherings, what was curated was the gesture of sociality itself, activated through a dramaturgy that celebrated an ethos of coming into relation moved by an aesthetics of black sociality. In these encounters, a site for thinking-together was generated that truly allowed a coming into itself of thought through a coming out of its-self of the individual. This kind of emergent sociality is incalculably valuable, and it is this quality of the being of relation *For a Pragmatics of the Useless* gestures toward.

Jared Sexton's uncountable account of black sociality also moves through these pages. Echoing Nahum Chandler, Sexton asks, "What is the nature of a form of being that presents a problem for the thought of being itself? . . . How might it be thought that there exists a being about which the question of its particular being is the condition of possibility and the condition of impossibility for any thought about being whatsoever?" (2011, 6). Alongside, I hear the halting words of autistic DJ Savarese, then in eighth grade, in "Estimating Harriet Tubman Respectfully": "Pedestals rest on hurt, great, estimated dressed not great human beings deserted by frees" (Savarese 2005). Still uneasily coming to language through facilitated communication, Savarese turns to Tubman as a hero for neurodiversity, seeing her as practicing a mode of existence he so deeply wishes for his people. This brings into an approximation of proximity her freeing of slaves and his deep wish that neurodiverse existence be valued. Many years later, in a piece called "Coming to My Senses," Savarese returns to Tubman to make sense of this early identification. He writes:

When I was very young, my only safe haven in foster care was with a proud African American couple who exposed me to black church, culture and politics. Of course, my experience as the only visible nonspeaking student at my school is not the same as a slave's, but the fear of being identified as less than and "sent back" resonated with me. As a man, I know how that Tubman's peril far outweighed my own, but as a kid, she and Patterson most closely answered my need for mentors. That and my tendency to feel people's energy as if it were my own—to connect with others at a visceral level—amplified my identification with them. (2019, 92)

An echo of Sexton's painful words—"What can be said about such a being, and how, if at stake in the question is the very possibility of human being and perhaps even possibility as such? What is the being of a problem?" (2011, 7)—can be heard in Savarese's grasping toward identification: "If we're breaking the barriers, great freedom fearfully awaits. Harriet realized until freedom treated her people with respect, her intestines seemed unsettled, her heart beat resentfully, and her fear never disappeared. The challenges she faced each day were far greater than anything you and your people have ever endured; breathing resentful air, great very hard breaths, undermines heartfelt feeling and deeply effects the western world" (Savarese 2005).

Hearing Savarese across Sexton makes felt what is often missed in autistic accounts: the ache for a sociality that would allow for what Savarese at the time called "easy breathing" (in R. Savarese 2017), a mode of living that might facilitate a certain freedom from the horrors of neurotypicality. But, as Savarese

would later recognize, “the burdened individuality of freedom” (Hartman 1997, 116) always leans toward neurotypicality.⁴ Freedom remains too aligned to neurotypicality (and whiteness) to foster any kind of easy breathing. As Hartman writes with respect to the discourse of freedom in relation to slavery, “the fragile ‘as if equal’ of liberal discourse inadequately contends with the history of racial subjection and enslavement, since the texture of freedom is laden with the vestiges of slavery, and abstract equality is utterly enmeshed in the narrative of black subjection, given that slavery undergirded the rhetoric of the republic and equality defined so as to sanction subordination and segregation” (116).

In a logic of approximation of proximity, it is the being of relation that is at stake, not a version of freedom allied to the liberal individual. The being of relation is radically empirical, relation never a sum of its parts. A decade into the future, Savarese (2017) now writes, “For too long I have dreamed of independence. Again and again, I have spoken of getting free. I have envied the ease with which the non-disabled can walk on the moon or tie their shoes underwater. They are circus performers, talented chimpanzees. Tonight I will dream of being dependent, dependable.” Refuting the status of “self-made plant,” Savarese opts for the symbiotic vine, that abundant ecology that “[goes] deep and thus [does] not compete with the broader and shallower root systems of trees.” Lest the reader see the vine as innocuous, however, Savarese is quick to emphasize: “I had to learn to live with a vine that encircled my heart, at times nearly choking it. I had to think of the vine as needing help, wanting a relationship.”

Neurodiverse sociality lived as the being of relation, Savarese learns, is not synonymous with freedom as independence. It comes like a vine, attached both to (black) joy and to the suffering that comes with living deeply in contestation with neurotypicality’s obsession with individualist independence. The vine is a reminder: the being of relation is created in the undercommons of an existence deeply dependent on the ecologies that shape it. Perhaps this is also a definition of an aesthetic of black sociality. To quote Moten again: “Does black life, in its irreducible and impossible sociality and precisely in what might be understood as its refusal of the status of social life that is refused it, constitute a fundamental danger—an excluded but immanent disruption—to social life? What will it have meant to embrace this matrix of im/possibility, to have spoken of and out of this suspension? What would it mean to dwell on or in minor social life? This set of questions is the position, which is also to say the problem, of blackness” (2008, 188).

It is the incalculability of black sociality, of minor social life, that has resonated most in my engagement with black study, and it is this quality of resistance to the count that I cull from the refrain *all black life is neurodiverse life*, an

approximation I also hear in Terrion L. Williamson when she emphasizes the “irreducible sociality of black life,” an “eschewal and critique of the affliction of privilege that resides in the preoccupation with the individual self” (2017, 19). What is lived, what is carried over, in the gesture that refutes the standing-out of the individual as executive purveyor of existence? What is lived in the beyond of what neurotypicality upholds at all costs, the figure of the human?

An approximation of proximity is an opaque proposition. Opacity, for Glissant, is more than the contrary of transparency. It calls for another logic, another quality of valuation. “Produc[ing] every exception,” “propelled by every divergence,” opacity makes felt the other of thought, thought’s emergent outside, “an aesthetics of turbulence whose corresponding ethics is not provided in advance” (1997, 195, 155). In his account of the vine, Savarese opts for a logic of mutual inclusion over the burdened individuality of freedom, a mode of being of relation in which, in Massumi’s words, “two modes of activity . . . are so entwined as to be degrees of each other. Yet their differential remains. When they come together, they are performatively fused without becoming confused. This means that they can remix, when it occurs to them to come performatively together again” (2014, 33–34).

A concept does its work when it can no longer be separated from the movement of thought it provokes. In *What Is Philosophy?*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1994) propose the conceptual persona as the philosophical figure that directs, names, and dates a concept. In this book conceptual persona abound: Stefano Harney and Fred Moten for the undercommons, Félix Guattari for transversality, Alfred North Whitehead for nonsensuous perception, Marcel Duchamp for the infrathin, Tina Campt for phonic substance, Laura Harris for the aesthetic sociality of blackness, Denise Ferreira da Silva for difference without separability, Ashon Crawley for otherwise possibility, SenseLab for spaZe, Édouard Glissant for the being of relation, John Lee Clark for distantism, Gilles Deleuze for the power of the false, Michel Foucault for the outside, Fred Moten for phonic materiality, Arakawa and Madeline Gins for architectural procedure, Etienne Souriau for modes of existence, Saidiya Hartman for the afterlife of slavery, Isabelle Stengers for the ecology of practices, Lygia Clark for the relational object, David Lapoujade for merest existences, Henri Bergson for fabulation, Tavia Nyong’o for afro-fabulation, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari for desiring-production, SenseLab for the anarchiv, DJ Savarese for easy breathing, Goat Island for repair, Brian Massumi for the surplus-value of life, Félix Guattari for schizoanalysis, William James for radical empiricism, SenseLab for the free radical, Gilbert Simondon for the transindividual, Daniel Stern for vitality affect, Helio Oiticica for the suprasensorial. There are more, of course, each one propelled by a proper

name. Except one: the one with no name to carry it is black sociality. That concept is carried by a crowd, in a movement that remains fugitive, undercommoning. It is this quality that moves the book, this differential between the naming that sparks an orientation and the absolute impossibility of situating where the concept begins and ends, and how it fields existence in the making.

The conceptual persona is a way of gesturing toward the sociality of the concept, reminding us that despite the orientation that comes with a name and a date, the concept is never borne of an individual. Concepts are gathered in the sociality of existence: they are brought forth by a multiplicity. This multiplicity connects to a mode of existence already in germ. This is why concepts can never be considered “ready-made” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 5). Concepts are made in the activation of the ecology they gather forth.

Concepts are in and of a fugitive elsewhere. Whoever is named in the creation of a concept is a carrier. Their role is not to claim it but to see how its carrying into the world alters the place from which thinking moves. A concept shifts the conditions of existence by affecting everything around it, including the one who is named in relation to it. This is why Deleuze and Guattari emphasize that “a particular conceptual persona, who perhaps did not exist before us, thinks in us” (1994, 69). Spoken always in the voice of a third, the conceptual persona “is not formed but posits itself in itself—it is a self-positing” (11).

A concept is not a general category. It does not claim to encapsulate. It is not a metaphor. It cannot be debated. A concept is an intensive feature, an intercessor into thought. “The conceptual persona is not the philosopher’s representative but, rather, the reverse: the philosopher is only the envelope of his principal conceptual persona and of all the other personae who are the intercessors, the real subjects of the philosophy” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 64; translation modified).

In the writing, the philosopher is taken over, oriented by the forces of an intensity that calls forth a certain urgency of precision—*this* way, under *these* conditions—learning with the concept as it unfolds how to modulate what comes into contact with it. To find a concept is to touch on a nerve of experience, to catch the necessity of its naming. What is formed in this gesture is an operative proposition, an intercessor capable of catching in a word, in a phrase, experience moved. None of this is an individual’s work. The writing, the thinking-with, the sociality, is what brings the concept to expression. A concept is oriented by the path it draws forth. The concept is less ours to claim than ours to follow.

For a Pragmatics of the Useless takes the concept of black sociality, that concept moved by a crowd, that concept already too social to be carried by any one thinker, and explores what it can do in the sidling. Coming into approximations

of proximity with the question of value (a pragmatics of the useless), the question of how black life is neurodiverse life is asked *in practice*: what is captured, what is cut, what is deviated and detoured in the coming into relation of minor sociality? What is created? What is left behind? *How else?* is always a question. Always alongside Alfred North Whitehead, whose process philosophy proposes an account of life that refuses to place the human at the center, his radical empiricism everywhere palpable in the exploration of how a logic of mutual inclusion does its work. With Whitehead, we enter into a strange vocabulary for untethering any preexisting notion of subjectivity from the events that compose (with) it. With the *production* of subjectivity instead as the focal point, a production not excluded from rocks living it out in geological time, pragmatic accounts of what makes a difference become resolutely more-than human, reminding us at every turn that the question is not “who did this?” but “what ecology of practices fashioned the conditions for its doing?” And in the interstices, pocket practices—livingloving, ticcingflapping, backgroundingforegrounding, nestingpatching, schizzinganarchiving. What else to name those practices that we hold close, practices that orient everything we do but are rarely cited because impossible to fully subtract from the welter? How do we register that which lurks on the edges, that which is carried too close to be separated out from the bodying, from the living? The pocket practices might be seen as the transversality that diagonalizes the book, folding it with the force of the question of how the sociality of living can be experimented differently, less citation, more sidling.

To return to executive function once more before closing: “I want to suggest that it is something other than anti-intellectualism to think that what the executive excludes is a vast range of extrarational relations for which we cannot, strictly speaking, account; relations, which is to say things, that cannot be accounted for because they cut and augment inference; things like whatever occurs when believing P and believing Q is more or less and/or more and less than P and Q. All the things we are are more and less than selves” (Moten 2018a, 164).

For a Pragmatics of the Useless returns in a continuous refrain to the “vast range of extrarational relations for which we cannot, strictly speaking, account; relations, which is to say things, that cannot be accounted for because they cut and augment inference.” What remains incalculable for Moten is value itself, a value for modes of knowing unstratified, anexecutive. This is the core question of the book: what is value beyond use-value in the realm of what Brian Massumi calls the surplus-value of life? For the book cannot quite skirt the question of value. After all, the pragmatics of the useless is also a project for finance at the limit. The aim is never toward calculability, however. The aim is toward a practice that returns to the question of how the schizz cleaves experience to produce emer-

gent collectivities that value existence differently, and how these minor socialities in turn enhance the unaccounted-for. What must remain incalculable in *For a Pragmatics of the Useless* is the very question of the being of relation. What is produced in the interstices is not an account of how black life is neurodiverse, or how neurodiversity is black. It is the being of the relation itself that is prodded, not to create a count, but to better account for the uncalculability at its core.

In “Executive Dysfunction in Autism,” Elisabeth L. Hill writes, “Poor mental flexibility is illustrated by perseverative, stereotyped behaviour and difficulties in the regulation and modulation of motor acts. This indicates problems in the ability to shift to a different thought or action according to changes in a situation” (2004, 4). What is this mental flexibility bestowed so easily onto neurotypicals? Or, to put it differently, what is it that neurotypicals can’t see about the exquisite mental flexibility in an account of vines that at once strangle a heart and feed the ecologies they sustain? The deficit here is not one of executive function. The deficit is in the attunement to what else circulates across and beneath and around those strangling, proprietary structures that uphold the horror of violent exclusion.

If black life is “an exorbitance for thought,” as Chandler suggests, “the negro . . . an instance outside of all forms of being that truly matter,” what is called for can never simply be a question of rehabilitation (2014, 607–8). What is called for is not, as Harris might say, an inhabiting, but a continual remaking, an inventing from the edges, an undercommoning. This is what I learn from black study: that minor sociality is a way of thinking beyond rehabilitation, beyond any account that would represent black life as adjacent to, or simply against, whiteness. That would be to take on the structural weight of a racism that has shaped the very concept of whiteness: neurotypicality. Minor sociality does not compose existence according to the pathology of its planning. Black life is exorbitant thought, lived beyond the shape it knows how to take, lived through a living both flexible and fugitive, in approximation of proximity. This life, this thinking-with that writes itself into the world through sound, through movement and performance, through the care and love of mothering and grandmothering, is what drew Savarese to Tubman and to her life’s work. What he felt was the aesthetics of black sociality animating Tubman’s thinking, her living.

This is where *For a Pragmatics of the Useless* begins, in the exorbitance of thought. There is no certainty here—the is remains an approximation. SenseLab figures large: it has been the site of practice and experimentation most allied to these questions for me over the past seventeen years. The writing moves into a shift I sense at SenseLab, a turn toward different modalities. An undercommons is calling. We call it the 3Ecologies Institute. We dream of a parainstitutional

practice in excess of the university where the question of living and learning can be practiced otherwise. The university is in ruins. Many of us still do our work there, and some of that work is beautiful. But the exorbitance of thought requires that we ask hard questions at this neoliberal juncture, questions about debt and credit, questions about value and evaluation, questions about the call to order. These are questions I return to. Not because I can answer them, but because to stay alive and live well is to ask them again.

Practicing the schizz is another way of naming the fugitive force that runs through *For a Pragmatics of the Useless*. To do the work of crafting conditions for the minor sociality of emergent collectivity, to live the intensity of the more-than human interstices of collective work, to experiment with other modes of existence, is challenging. Guattari's schizoanalytic practice has been a beacon, and over the years SenseLab continues to explore how schizoanalysis might texture and nurture the minor socialities that compose us. To end the book on finance at the limit is to carry the schizoanalytic gesture from the artistic, political, and philosophical environments into the world of capital to ask: how else beyond property and propriety, beyond our settler dreams of owning the right to plan, can we imagine living, can living imagine us? What might the skewed count of the uncountable do to capital's hold on our imaginations? Neurodiverse mental flexibility will be necessary when coming into contact with the cephalopod.

DUKE

prelude. Fugitively, Approximately

- 1 Pathologizing only takes us so far, so I would always be careful with accounts of impaired executive function. Nonetheless, there seems to be a consensus that there are marked differences in the use of planning among those who are aligned to these categories, including those whose frontal lobes are damaged through stroke. Elisabeth L. Hill writes, "Executive functions are typically impaired in patients with acquired damage to the frontal lobes as well as in a range of neurodevelopmental disorders that are likely to involve congenital deficits in the frontal lobes. Such clinical disorders include attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), obsessive compulsive disorder, Tourette syndrome, phenylketonuria, schizophrenia and autism spectrum disorder" (2004, 2).
- 2 "Anxiety, Ambiguity and Autistic Perception," May 3, 2018, <https://boren.blog/2018/05/03/anxiety-ambiguity-and-autistic-perception/>.
- 3 The announcements of Bradley's days of black study are found at "Rizvana Bradley: Dag 3: Studium Generale Rietveld Academie, 23 March 2018," Stedelijk Museum website, [https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/events/studium-generale-rietveld-academie-4](https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/events/studium-generale-rietveld-academie-4;); and "Dancing Politics, Moving Performance: Conversations at the Edges of Choreography, June 18th–22nd 2018," Centre National de la Danse, University of the Arts, <https://www.uarts.edu/node/41511>.
- 4 The burdened individuality of freedom points to the "ambivalent legacy of emancipation and the undeniable truncated opportunities of the freed" (Hartman 1997, 12). Never losing sight of the lack of a "definitive partition between slavery and freedom," Hartman renounces any grand narrative of freedom, opting instead for "a transient and fleeting expression of possibility that cannot ensconce itself as a durable temporal marker (13). Freedom here is rightly connected to "an indebtedness of liberty to property and to an alienable and exchangeable self" (110). Hartman writes, "By examining the metamorphosis of 'chattel into man' and the strategies of individuation constitutive of the liberal individual and the rights-bearing subject, I hope to underscore the ways in which freedom and slavery presuppose one another, not only as modes of production and discipline or through contiguous forms of subjection but as founding narratives of the liberal subject revisited and revisioned in the context of Reconstruction and the sweeping changes wrought by the abolition of slavery" (116).