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Mikey the Rebelator

STEFANO HARNEY & FRED MOTEN

Daughter of Zion, Judah the Lion
He redeemeth, and bought us with his blood ...
John the revelator, great advocator
Gets 'em on the battle of Zion
(Blind Willie Johnson, 'John the Revelator'¹)

THE REBELATOR

In Upon Westminster Bridge, Mikey Smith is jay-walking through the language.² It's 1982, the beginning of logistical capitalism. The assembly line is snaking out of the factory and into his mouth. And he can't believe it. He won't believe it. He won't go to work. He comes from the property. He's been there before. He's come to undo. He's moved to dissemble. The gathering in his mouth is out of line.

With the rise of logistical capitalism it is not the product that is never finished but the production line, and not the production line, but its improvement. In logistical capitalism it is the continuous improvement of the production line that never finishes, that's never done, that's undone continuously. The sociologists caught a glimpse of this line and thought that they were seeing networks. The political scientist called this line globalization. The business professors named it and priced it as business process re-engineering. Mikey knew better.

Mikey veers back across the street to where Louise Bennett sits, talking about how she inspired him. We can see her in a clip, wronging rights with her words, advocate of an undone language open to respecting what you like, and liking what you respect. Now her words are everywhere, like whispers from a cotton tree, and they have to be. And logistics, which is to say access, is everywhere – again, because it wants to be.

But not just logistics; and not just any kind of access. The capitalist science of logistics can be represented by a simple formula: movement + access. But logistical capitalism subjects that formula to the algorithm: total movement + total access. Logistical capitalism seeks total access to your language, total translation, total transparency, total value from your words. And then it seeks more. At Queen Mary, University of London, before the counter-insurgency, we called this postcolonial capitalism. How does it feel to be a problem in someone else's supply chain? What else is a colonial regime but the imposition of psychopathic protocols of total access to bodies and land in the service of what today is called supply-chain management? The problem of the twenty-first century is the problem of the colour line of assembly.

This logistical capitalism, this postcolonial capitalism, uses the stored, stolen, historical value of words to press its point. But Mikey would not speak that way. He saw what was coming by misremembering what had come to pass. Mikey jay-walked through his audience as they listened the wrong way across his words. Mikey put his hands up to fight one night and surrendered to us. He fought, and by fighting surrendered, to what M. Jacqui Alexander called our 'collectivized self-possession'³, to our hapticality, which is at the same time our collectivized dispossession. Because a rebelator defends our partiality, our incompleteness, our hands dispossessed to hold one another up in the battle of Zion. Mikey was a rebelator in the battle of Zion. Mikey the rebelator sabotaging a line of words(worth).

Mikey is talking to C. L. R. James on a bed in Brixton in South London, in an unsettled room,

¹ Blind Willie Johnson, 'John the Revelator,' Columbia Records 14530, 1930

² Anthony Wall, Upon Westminster Bridge, BBC Television, 1982. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=NE3kVwyY2WU accessed 18 May 2015.

³ M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations of Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred*, Duke University Press, 2005, 328.

Linton Kwesi Johnson standing to the side. You have to move across the language because the language moves the line through you. The line moves now, the assembly line, the flow line, the high line, and that means you. You're moving to work like you always did but now you're working as you're moving, too. James is telling them he used to love Wordsworth and still does, but it was only when he got back to the Caribbean that he realized what was missing in that poetry because something else in that poetry was everywhere. James is talking about language as domination; Mikey is already having to deal with language as forced improvement in production, on the new and improved line, where the Man gives orders to His men. Mikey's working on an old new open secret logisticality, born in the hold, held together in loss and in being lost, and James is giving him some uncoordinates, a sea captain like Ranjit's father, high on the land now, low, shipped, stranded on a bed in Brixton, in an unsettled room. Mikey's not working on improving the English language. He's working on disproving it.

Mikey Smith deregulates the Queen's English in *Mi Cyaan Believe It* and he's not worried about being incomplete. He's jay-walking through the Queen's English, instituting a sound system to which her standard submits, right across down there so. He's walking across to it right now, on the gully side. Mikey the rebelator. He says that those have 'been restless a full time, dem go get some rest'. But there's no rest with access; access troubles the unrest it came to steal, and still. This is the early moment of logistical capitalism, with James on the bed aged from industrial capitalism, and all that settler capitalism sedimented underneath them in London in the hard red earth. In an unsettled room they institute. They're the offline institute of the new line, the new poetics of the anti-line, the antillean, multi-matrilinear dispersion of drum and bass and grain against the grain of organized saying, catching logistics in logisticality's crosstown traffic, in crosstown traffic's constant violation of the crosswalk, the sanctioned intersection, the settled, hegemonic term. Mikey's more and

less than perpendicular swerve cyaan believe that managed disturbance and keeps on fucking it up as a field of hypermusical staying, crossed between crossing and forgetting, contradicting and misremembering, revealing and rebelling, refusing to believe. Look the wrong way before you cross. Move the wrong way when you cross. That's how we semble.

When we move we move to access, which is to say we assemble and disassemble anew. And in logistical capitalism the assembly line moves with us by moving through us, accessing us to move and moving us to access. We can't deny access, because access is how we roll, and roll on, in and as our undercommon affectability, as Denise Ferreira da Silva might say.⁴ But we make access burn and we love that, the line undone in the undoing of every single product, our renewed assembly in the general disassembly, our dissed assembly offline on the line, strayed staying, stranded beneath the strand, at rest only in unrest, making all the wrong moves, because our doing and undoing ain't the same as theirs.⁵ They know, sometimes better than we do, that to move wrong, or not to move, is now no longer just an obstruction to logistics or an obstacle to progress. To move wrong or not to move is sabotage. It is an attack on the assembly line, a subversion of logistical capitalism. To move wrong is to deny access to capital by staying in the general access that capital desires and devours and denies. To move nought, is to have our own thing of not having, of handing and being handed; it is our continuous breaking up – before, and against that, we were told – of our continuous get together. But with the critical infrastructure that is the new line, and with the resilient response that protects it, the jay-walker becomes no longer just a rube in the way of logistics, a country bukee in traffic, but a saboteur, a terrorist, a demon. Jay-walkers do not sabotage by exodus or occupation as once a maroon, or a striking miner, or a ghost dancer may have. Jay-walkers disturb the production line, the work of the line, the assembly line, the flow line, by demanding inequality of access for all. When the line don't stop to let you catch

⁴ See Denise Ferreira da Silva, 'No-Bodies: Law, Raciality and Violence,' Griffith Law Review 18, 2009, 214.

⁵ When we speak of renewed assembly we do so by way of Manolo Callahan, Gustavo Esteva and their comrades at Universidad de la Tierra. For more on their work and on they living they are making in and as "convivial research and insurgent learning" see <http://cril.mitotedigital.org/>

your breath, jay-walkers stand around and say this stops today. Jay-walking is dissed assembly for itself. Such sabotage is punishable by death. It's hard to know what we institute when we don't institute but we do know what it feels like.

Total value and its violence not only never went away, but as da Silva says, they are the foundation of the present as time, the condition of time, of the world as a time-space logic founded on the first horrible logistics of sale, the first mass movement of total access.⁶ Now continuous improvement drives us toward total value, makes all work incomplete, makes us move to produce, compels us to get online. We are liberated from work in order to work more, to work harder. We are violently invited to exercise our right to connect, our right to free speech, our right to choose, our right to evaluate, our right to right individuality in order that we may improve the production line running through our liberal dreams. Freedom through work was never the slave's cry but we hear it all around us today. Continuous improvement is the metric and metronomic meter of uplift. Those who won't improve, those who won't collectivize and individuate with the correct neurotic correctness, those who do the same thing again, those who revise, those who tell the joke you've heard and cook the food you've had and take the walk you've walked, those who plan to stay and keep on moving, those who keep on moving wrong – those are the ones who hold everybody back, fucking up the production line that's supposed to improve us all. They like being incomplete. They like being incomplete and incompleting one another. Their incompleteness is said to be a dependency, a bad habit. They're said to be partial, patchy, sketchy. They lack coordinates. They're collectively uncoordinated in total rhythm. They're in(self)sufficient.

Paolo Friere thought our incompleteness is what gave us hope.⁷ It is our incompleteness that inclines us toward one another. For Friere, the more we think of ourselves as complete, finished, whole, individual, the more we cannot love or be loved. Is it too much to put this the other way around? To say, by way of Friere, that

love is the undercommon self-defence of being-incomplete? This seems important now when our incompleteness is something we are invited and then compelled to address and improve, when we are told to be impatient with it, and embarrassed by it. We need to be intact. We're told to raise our buzz because we're all fucked up. But in our defence we love that we are complete only in a plained incompleteness, which they would have undone, finished, owned, and sent on down the line. We do mind working because we do mind dying.

THE CONSULTANT

The consultant is not here to provide solutions, innovation or even advice. The consultant exists to demonstrate access in the era of logistical capitalism. The consultant is not an ideologue. Ideology operates here only for the consultant himself. He is demonstrably the only one who believes his bullshit, but fortunately for him this is not the point, not his point. The consultant literalizes access to workplaces, demonstrating their openness by showing up in their midst, like a drone. One day you come to work and there he is sitting next to the boss. Nothing she says or does is as important as this demonstration of access. What the consultant introduces into the imposed, exposed workers' corp is the algorithm. The consultant bears the algorithm, which violates in the name of completion. When the consultant brings his algorithmic charge, the body of the workers, that undesired and constantly invaded enclosure, is finished. We are rendered complete, made free, by the work, in the work, of the algorithm. We are done, and done in by, the consultant's forced, aggressive incorporation of an undoing that was of and for itself, of and for ourself, the undoing we keep on making in the face of every sovereign invasion, every violent ascription of words and worth and (the) work. The consultant completes, so that he can access the private loop of a thwarted desire to be intact. It is not the product or even the organization that interests the algorithm of work. It is the production line's infinite curvature. The algorithm of work is

⁶ See da Silva, 'Toward a Black Feminist Poethics: The Quest(ion) of Blackness Toward the End of the World,' *The Black Scholar* 44:2, Summer 2014, 81-97.

⁷ Paolo Friere, *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage*, trans. Patrick Clarke, Rowman & Littlefield, 1998, 58.

⁸ Nahum Dimitri Chandler, *Toward an African Future – Of The Limit of the World, Living Commons Collective*, 2013, 81.

a demonstration within a demonstration. With access comes (the necessity of) improvement, which always takes the form of a demand for more access. As the introduction of the consultant inside the organization demonstrates access, so the introduction of the algorithm demonstrates improvement. The algorithm is the machine of self-improvement; as such, it is the only machine that makes new machines. There is a mirror – marking and instantiating self-envisaging's shared exclusivity, that scary, silly, Stuart Smalleyish binary solipsism – that stands between it and man, the other only machine that makes new machines and, in so doing, improves itself. The mirror between man, the mirror, and The Man, man's mirror, is the algorithm. Meanwhile, the inhuman, which is our fleshly inherence and inhabitation in the general mechanics of a general disregard for self-reflection, makes machines because it does not want to improve. Before the algorithm, machines came from strikes, from resistance, from sabotage. Machines made from the algorithm do not wait for the class struggle.

The algorithm of work subjects every labour process on the production line to undoing, disassembly and incompleteness, in order to demand it be completed better, assembled better, done better. It leaves behind not an improved organization but a metric to ensure the organization will never be satisfied. The metric measures everything against its last instance, ensuring that the last instance never comes. The metric demands more access, more measurement of access, more movement, more assembly, more measure of the last instance, which is given in and as enclosure. The consultant is still talking but it does not matter now what he says. The algorithm of work has arrived, algorithmic surplus has gone viral. If the settler could not be heard over the screams of primitive accumulation, and the citizen could not be heard over the noise of the machines, the consultant cannot be heard over the click of the metrics. Mikey heard this noise and walked the other way, another way, so the algorithm could not pass through, so we could hold him up and pass him along.

Nahum Chandler reminds us of a term W. E. B. DuBois invented and employed; 'democratic despotism'⁸. When the consultant cannot demonstrate access, and therefore the algorithm cannot demonstrate improvement, the consultant calls for policy as once (and still) the citizen calls for heteropatriarchal nationalism or the settler for racist manifest destiny. Policy is past all that, even though all that's not past. Policy comes in to diagnose what's blocking access, and what's blocking access are 'those people'. What's wrong with those people in Detroit who want water, in British Columbia who want land, in Manila who want some place to stay? Policy says there is something wrong with those people that makes it so that the consultant can't get access. But it is the other way around. The consultant is denied access – those people deny him access – because they embrace the general access-in-antagonism that he denies. And so policy must be called. Self-defence becomes the disease. Love becomes the problem because love is the problem, the self-defence of the accessible. But, hey, maybe governance can help, which is to say maybe those practising self-defence may be willing to self-diagnose, self-reflect, self-improve! One way or another policy will proscribe, or policy will get posed – as democracy, as democratic despotism, where everyone is given the chance to say there is something wrong with those people. Democratic despotism is the imposition of policy and its violent possibilities and impossibilities on the wrong(ed).

Because the thing is, the consultant's not wrong, the algorithm of work is not malfunctioning, the policy hustler is not misdiagnosing. We're wrong, which is why we're wronged. We are incomplete. Moreover, they got the very idea of incompleteness from us! Another word for incompleteness is study, or more precisely, revision. The consultant gets this revision from us, from study, from our sumptuous revisions of one another out of existence, as existence. Study happens and it don't stop. In study, we are engaged consciously and unconsciously. We revise, and then again. This is not just about distinguishing

improvement as capitalist efficiency. That is too easy to dismiss. It is about improvement itself, the time-concept, the moral imperative, the aesthetic judgement, which is to say capitalist improvement founded in and on black flesh, its female informality. Revision has no end and no connection to improvement, never mind efficiency.

So the consultant does and undoes institutions but can't access instituted life, can't open black life, can't uncover queer life, can't expose feminist planning around the 'kitchen table' as Barbara and Beverly Smith called it and Tiziana Terranova calls to it again, all noting certain paradoxes of freedom and sequestration in little general intellects of surreal life.⁹ He can't access open secrets, can't incomplete what is already incomplete, can't deform what is always informal already and yet; they can't believe and this leads to the state emergency that goes under such names as resilience and preparedness. When democratic despotism fails, simple despotism in the name of democracy must be imposed. Resilience is the name for the violent destruction of things that won't give, won't return to form, won't bend when access is demanded, won't be flexible and (com)pliant. Stopping when you are told to stop and moving along when you are told to move along demonstrates resilience and composure; but broken, breaking, dissembled demonstrates itself openly, secretly, dissembling in captured but inaccessible glance, for us, to us, as incomplete and much more than complete. Its daimonic performance can't be individuated and won't be performed.

HOLD SHE

It's not about who's holding you down when you try to jay-walk; it's about who's holding you up. This is the question of hapticality. The police can't hold what's already held. At the same time, what's already held is all that we can hold. That's our haptic institution. Watching mama listen to a song, you're instituted. Here go that Michael Jackson song she turned up to teach me how to dance.

In the photograph, they containerize her but she is uncontained. They bend her because access and logistics strive to be one. The more she is captured by the police, the photographer, the viewer, the more she is shipped. But the more she is shipped, the more she is held, the more she is handed.

They can't see our hands, and this is demonic to them. The rebelators' hands are held not up to the cops, they are held up to us, holding us up. All hands, all those mouths, must look demonic to them, and queer. It's queer to put yourself in such hands as may come, to be held up by such hands as may reach you.

Just because there are no rules to our access doesn't mean we don't know what to do. We know how to follow a dancehall queen. We know where she study. We hold to where she study. We hold she.

⁹ See Barbara Smith & Beverly Smith, 'Across the Kitchen Table: A Sister-to-Sister Dialogue,' in Cherrie Moraga & Gloria Anzaldúa, ed. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, 2nd Edition, Kitchen Table/Women of Color Press, 1983, 123-40 and Tiziana Terranova, 'Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy' in Marc Bousquet & Katherine Wills, ed. *The Politics of Information: The Electronic Mediation of Social Change*, Alt-X Press, 2003, 99-121.