

Entering the *Beyond

Artist Statement

RAI TERRY



Figure 1.
Screen capture from *Entering the *Beyond* (2021).

*E*ntering The *Beyond begins with a close-up of Abbey Lincoln’s mouth opening as she raises her voice from non-lyrical singing into a controlled frenzy of hollers and screams. This clip from her 1964 performance of “Triptych: Prayer, Protest, Peace,” along with the image of a person being dipped into baptismal waters, is repeated throughout the work. It was my intention in placing these directional anchors throughout the piece to have them remind the viewer of the stakes as they are swiftly transported through various modules of a vibratory network. It is this network through which Black culture is constantly moving back and forth across the diaspora. Similar to how information travels throughout the brain and body through synapses, this network functions like an ecstatic nervous system and briefly opens a space for realities *beyond what can be known in the colonial present, and which run counter to the historical evidences found in Western archives.

In her 2018 essay of the same title, Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman outlines “The Black Ecstatic” as “an aesthetic performance of embrace, the sanctuary of the unuttered and unutterable, and a mode of pleasurable reckoning with everyday ruin in contemporary Black lives under the strain of perpetual chaos and continued diminishment.” (2018). As Abdur-Rahman describes them, these necessarily communal moments of rupture begin to tear at the very fabric of the spatial



Figure 2.
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and temporal ontology of the West. This ontology has been primarily upheld by archives which, while often thought of as neutral and universal repositories of legitimized information, are actually designed to keep certain histories in, while keeping certain people out. In doing so they greatly lend themselves to endorsing the dichotomy between Black peoples and the enlightenment definition of humanity. However, the vibratory network of Black culture is a counter archive that has always circulated outside and in excess of these definitions. Following Abdur-Rahman, I illuminate a microcosm of ecstatic moments that come in the space between the synapses through which Black culture travels, and which open a space *beyond what can be known in the colonial present.

The film overlays numerous coded gestures which are immediately recognizable to those engaged in the communal activities that have been outlawed; they disrupt Western society, and so they are marked as indications of a non-humanness. These moments are part of a choreosonic performance which is made up of an erotic grammar which cannot simply be known, but must also be felt. It is in these moments, free from the constraints of surveillance and immediate risk of arrest or death, that the fundamental queerness of Blackness can become apparent. Stepping, shouting, winding, juking are portals to realities where Black pleasure is paramount, where a common vibration arises across spaces that are marked as queer or not queer, and across all socioeconomic and geographic boundaries. Rapturous moments drawn from the church, the ballroom, the cypher, the dancehall, the moshpit, the houseparty, the carnival, and the sidewalk form an embodied archive that sustains the everyday moods, sensations, and performances of Black life outside of what can be captured by traditional Western archives.

Much of the footage used in the work is gathered from YouTube, with some footage acquired from the South Side Home Movie Project and the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C. A major aim of the project was to explore the ways that Black life is largely excluded from, and impossible to be contained within, the textual documents that fill colonial archives. There is no index or catalog that marks these musics, dances, practices, nor are they keyword searchable in digital repositories. Many of the videos utilized in the film were originally recorded on videotape, with some born-digital videos likely recorded on cell phones. It is important to note that from the 1980s through to the 2000s, videotape and digital media have been more accessible formats for Black people in lower socioeconomic classes, making it so that large portions of Black communities could record the interior lives of themselves and their families for the first time. This footage remains almost entirely uncollected by archives, despite the format's instability and imminent obsolescence. While the textual documents that disparage Black life as "other" and uphold white supremacy remain under heavy guard within the walls of the archive, decades of self-reflective materials and footage of quotidian Black life have been recorded over and disappeared.

As audiovisual technologies continue developing rapidly, and archives turn to synthetic DNA as brick and mortar buildings run out of space, one must wonder where the impulse to compulsively collect and hold items comes from, and what its ramifications are for the environment. To consider stepping out of the Eurocentric archive is to turn toward a different, more organic informational architecture; a network of shared cultural knowledge that surpasses the geographical and generational boundaries imposed by the colonial order. The film mimics the choreosonic performance in the speed and formatting of the footage in order to simultaneously signify to the Black queer diaspora while subverting the colonial gaze. Just as the vibrational network moves quickly and without regard for ideals of decency in order to remain outside the detection of those who would denigrate it, the film cross-references ecstatic moments based on their erotic register. One such instance in the film is what appears to be a dance battle between a Chicago juke dancer in a basement and a little boy doing a praise dance in a church. As the clips transition back and forth across the synapse, a commonality arises. Junctures such as these are not representative of equivalencies, but are indexes of an ecstatic vibrational frequency upon which valuable information can flow outside of, and undetectable to the colonial order.

Expressions of unfettered Black subjectivity cannot be contained in archives of textual depiction, nor in traditional Western archives which seek to hold history in stasis. Black culture exists *beyond what can be captured by the humanist projects that adhere to the colonial definition of humanity, what Sylvia Wynter describes as "Man." (1984). These will always cast Black bodies, Black movement, Black sound as excessive, disruptive, in need of being tamed or destroyed. Where the humanity of "Man" has relied on textual evidence to uphold its supremacy, Black people have relied upon the vibratory network, the space between the synapse, a space both present and *beyond the realm of Western humanity. This



Figure 3.
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embodied archive is a momentary interruption of the humanist project, of white supremacy, of the colonial order.

This film offers a new kind of evidence, that there can be another kind of archive, one which is not constrained to the violence of description, but rather engages the fleeting expanse of ephemeral life.

*: The asterisk placed before the word beyond is meant to gesture toward the chaos which is always attendant to Black life, and which the space created beyond still lies on the premise of.

*Entering the *Beyond* (2021)

Duration 14 mins.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ewybJp8gZPk>

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