The School-Prison Trust

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3. Slipstream Shuffle

The outer bands of the hurricane were moving in over all of us. Beautiful white feathers from a satellite, they were in reality gusty scouts, marking a path for decimation, alerting everyone on the ground too late.

Inside the prison social studies classroom, no one was the wiser. The unpredictable, angry banging of the radiator hoarded the soundwaves for itself. The windows, set back behind metal bars and full of whistling leaks, were also covered with a jaundiced, chipping layer of metal mesh veneer. The veneer’s small, peeling apertures onto the Outside were grimy and no match for the scope required to see the enormity of a coming hurricane.

The social studies teacher, Roy, got excited by the memory of the morning news and interrupted a fierce chess match to boyishly exclaim, “Guys! So, guys, there’s a hurricane making landfall tonight. I’ll be at home watching the game, but you will all be here.” He was the worst kind of coward.

The young men turned from their match, almost as one, and stared at him, in collective wonder about what even to say or not.

Then, possessed by his indomitable wit, Jakes jumped up and assumed the open space in the classroom, right in front of Roy’s desk. (A large, heavy, metal bureau Roy almost never left. Whether sitting behind, leaning against, standing in front—it was his base in a game of white-teacherman-scared-of-the-young-men-of-Color.)
His teacherdesk: his lonely, spiteful circle of wagons; his plantation and his fortress and his frontier; his panoptic lookout.)


Jakes spread his feet, in knock-off Nike slides, easily three feet apart, his too-big, white socks hanging off his toes and heels. He shook his long, gangly legs as if loosening up and situated his pants. “Roy, I got a dance for the hurricane.”

He turned to us. “Yo, Game, hit it.” And Game, who was always slow to catch on, for some reason caught on right away and began air-DJing, moving the record back and forth on the invisible turntable. We could all see it, clear as day.

Jakes started with his arms, then his feet. And we all started laughing. Amani, cry-laughing and nearly doubled over, said, “Dude, that’s the dopest, funniest shit I seen in for-ever.” It was a moment of uncontainable joy.

Roy, ever uncomfortable, asked, “What is it?”

Quickly, Jakes paused, legs in position. He stared wide-eyed at Roy. Solemnly, he placed his hands in an X across his chest, lowered his brow as far as possible, and lifted his chin slowly and slightly. “My ancestor, Squanto, invented it special for the pilgrims, to help them fight hurricanes.” Jakes paused for emphasis and flickered his eyebrows up as he set his eyes in an even deeper lock with Roy’s.

“He called it ‘The Cupid Shuffle.’”

And then, to the joyous chorus of unstoppable sobbing laughter and lyrics, he broke into the best Cupid Shuffle I’ve ever seen, before or since.

Squanto and the Dance-Off

“Refusal is a symptom, a practice, a possibility for doing things differently, for thinking beyond the recognition paradigm that is the agreed-upon ‘antidote’ for rendering justice in deeply unequal
scenes of articulation.”¹ Jakes did not seek himself in Roy’s gaze. He blurred Roy’s gaze. And then directed it into crisp focus. Certainly he refused the unequal lock of Roy’s cowardice and of Roy’s threat. He refused fear of the imminent and inevitable, guaranteed in the coming of the behemoth storm and life in the school–prison trust. And he refused Roy’s authority over those. Powerfully, he refused Roy’s conquest assumption that he alone could shape truth and feeling, knowledge and its denial. That he could determine the terms of the debate,² or that there would even be a debate.

Jakes made Roy a pitiful, weak, and frightened pilgrim, a foolish audience, and a total outsider. Counting coup on Roy, Jakes turned Roy’s gaze back on himself. Roy was the subject of his own derision, a subject that withered against the Cupid Shuffle. He did not ask Roy to recognize him, or Squanto, or Indigenous life. “An enemy has to be defeated in battle, but an adversary’s different. You must outwit an adversary. So you do have to know them very well.”³

In the Cupid Shuffle, the pilgrims and plimoth plantation cower, if even for a moment. Jakes creates community—of joy, expression, knowledge—and banishes Roy from it. He recognizes himself, and Squanto, Game, and the other young men, and refuses Roy, an agent of the carceral conquest state.

But what exactly or how exactly did Jakes do what he did? What does refusal feel like? We start with joy, because the mockery was at its apex a hilarious, creative celebration deliberately crafted for collective freedom that, in prison, is insurgen tally eruptive in character. It was a particularly dazzling mockery, because in it Jakes marshaled a caricature lodged deep in the colonial psyche, anticipating and recalling the worldmaking ideology of the school–prison trust.

“The indigenous inhabitants of North America,” states Louis Owens, “can stand anywhere on the continent and look in every

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² Lyons, “Rhetorical Sovereignty.”
³ Erdrich, Night Watchman, 276.
direction at home usurped and colonized by strangers who, from the very beginning, laid claim not merely to the land and resources but to the very definition of natives.\textsuperscript{4} As Jakes stands in a prison classroom and looks into the face of the teacherman, who, with Linda and myriad schooling others, lays claim to the very definition of Natives, he mocks Roy with the fatuousness of his own racism, his own fear, his own threat. He illuminates the banalities conquest agents inhabit. He frightens Roy in the full freedom of his comic joy and his command of us, who laughed and sobbed—then and now—in part by calling on ancestors, merging the real and the white imagination, and so stealing back what Roy thought he knew as a thief by trade and by tradition. Jakes’ refusal was a hurricane of force, irony, and humor.

In some instances, to command the attention of those in power, to resist, refuse, or convey, a Native person might step into the mask and enact the Indian constructed by America.\textsuperscript{5} Might pose as the fake, the Edward Curtis Indian. In this instance, Jakes interweaves the fake with the real, dancing an act of refusal that is both a “social mirror,” as artist Gregg Deal said to describe his own performance piece \textit{The Last American Indian on Earth},\textsuperscript{6} and a free expression.

\textbf{Multiplicities}

Jakes was also refusing-as-creating something else entirely. Everyone thought Jakes was Black. He was Black. And he was Native. And everyone thought so. At least, the young men did. He was Native and he was Black. And, a “lilbitta some kinda white somewhere in me.” That’s all nothing new or surprising or un-

\textsuperscript{4} Owens, “As If,” 14–15.
\textsuperscript{5} Shanley, “Love and Read”; Fanon, \textit{Black Skin}.
\textsuperscript{6} Deal, in “The Last,” suggests that in fact he had to do very little but walk around public places or stand wearing costume-like, Made-in-China fake regalia, and it was non-Native people who performed in relation to him. There is a rich, long conversation about performance and colonialism. Khubchandani, \textit{Ishtyle}; Muñoz, \textit{Disidentifications}; Mercer, \textit{Travel and See}.
usual. But there was a rupturing dimension to what he said. He was not seeking recognition from anyone and yet from many, but on self-determined terms: “Why I gotta pick? Like, why do these fucki— ooh, oops, sorry! Why everybody think like you Black with a Indian granny or you Indian and your people got up with some slaves or sup’m. Like, what is you, really?” And his really was multiple and synergistic. He described himself as recognizably physically and aesthetically “Indian” and, without contradiction, as similarly Black. He identified with communities, cultural practices, politics, ancestries.

“‘Race’ is not something certain bodies possess,” writes Deborah Thomas.

Race, here, is not an “elective identity marker” but a historical, structured, and relational experience. This experience, of course, is grounded in local landscapes of power and aspiration, themselves structured by the specific colonial histories that imbue these landscapes with significance.  

Our role here isn’t to interpret identity—to say what Jakes is or what anyone is, a condition some think is the purview of a nation, others the purview of a cultural community, yet others the dominion of science and biology, and still others the domain of our relations with a divinity or our ancestors. And it is not ours to say what and

7. Under U.S. law, Indian is defined as any person who is a member of a federally recognized tribe, 25 U.S.C. § 479. For federal recognition as an Indian Tribe, federal law requires showing a history of recognition: “a body of Indians of the same or a similar race, united in a community under one leadership or government, and inhabiting a particular though sometimes ill-defined territory.” Montoya v. United States. These elements of ethnicity, territoriality, continuity, and leadership (Canby, Nutshell) define the contours of Tribal Nationhood under federal law, requiring a fictitious racial purity, centralized authority, and geographic stability that white supremacy prioritizes for its own citizens and works tirelessly to make impossible for anyone else—American democracy is by definition exclusive and singular.

8. Thomas, Political Life, 42.

9. Roberts, Fatal Invention; Zuberi, Thicker than Blood; TallBear, “DNA Politics.”
who is Indigenous and not—that would be to take up Trust logics. We can identify what we understand as some of the limits: race and property no more make or negate Indigeneity than do firstness and diaspora. Removals, migrations, and movements—forced and chosen and in between—should not serve to vacate people of their relationships to place. And as we’ve said before, ways of relationships to place, to its life, are central to our thinking: “what the land as a system of reciprocal relations and obligations can teach us about living our lives in relation to one another and the natural world in nondominating and nonexploitative terms.”

But this is also not a rubric. To be clear, we’re not offering Venn diagrams of race and Indigeneity or consenting to any new, progressive colonial mathematics of being. Rather, here we consider the broadly complex vectors of refusal, relation, and self-determination. Moreover, we are considering what Jakes’ particular praxis reveals about possibility in the context of Trust. In the Cupid Shuffle appears an invocation that says Indigenous does not have to be boundaried and also does not have to be all things and so nothing. Indigenous refuses conquest colonization and refuses historic purity forged through historic and historical lies.

Jakes, Black Squanto—not simply phenotypically, archivally Black but culturally, actively, politically, historically, presently Black—commands consideration and authors new histories. Jakes’ identification is anti-imperial practice. In it, Jakes invokes Squanto in name and Fanon in practice: “what Fanon alerts us to is how the act of disciplining of thought (the process of habitually delimiting what we know about blackness according to colonial perimeters) stabilizes race and perpetuates anti-blackness.” And the process of habitually delimiting what we know about Indigeneity through conquest parameters achieves anti-Indigeneity. And those two are interknit through multiple threads, some of which are the same thread.

11. Coulthard, Red Skin, 13, italics original.
Those disciplined thought perimeters and parameters regularly iterate as deterministic control—over myths of purity and their instantiating materialities. Jakes’ self-determined habitation of identity, his wholeness-as-plurality, is an affront to that puritanical and ethnonationalist control. Across his refusals, he defies fragmented, fractionalized notions of race and descent, of what it means to be a person and so free.

What is you really? is the anemic lifeblood of trusteeship, conquest life-support nursed along by coerced and collusive transfusions: quantums and one-drops and enrollments and recognitions and missing and murder. Purity and its antitheses—dilution, fractionalization, contamination—are imperial fictions that have long been embedded in the legal structures of the United States and the concomitant ideas of peoples. Less than whole. Reduced to a hand. Dismembered. These disciplining forces of thought pump the very heart of Trust and are parts of its desperate invention. They write the DNA of unfreedom. But dilutions and fractions are diasporic conditions, and diaspora is not simply a condition of having been scattered but rather one of possibility, generativity, invention, and freedom.

Lifeblood—tainted, fractional—is in fact water, and whole. “Water is about the movement and form of when and how and with whom we know, and not merely what we claim or make claims on.” Stalked by the claim-staking interrogative What is you really? Jakes undresses the entrapping, regulatory performativity of it all, laying bare a possibility through active radical refusal: joy. In this refusal, Jakes unfurls frail plantation cartographies that link Plimoth to the Mississippi Delta to the hills of Rome, thanksgivings to slave codes to papal bulls, 1492 to 1619 to 1865 to 1924 to 1954, and Squanto to Luther Standing Bear to Jakes to the Sabines.

The law, race, progressive conquest time, rape, numbers, and the plantation and reservation draw us back to our apogee questions of what it means to be self-determined, to be human, in the school–prison trust. What it means to consider refusal, humor, music, dance, laughter—the affective dimensions of experience. We have suggested that self-determination is an enactment of sovereignty, and perhaps an umbrella for what sovereignty feels like. Jakes’ self-determination here is a convergence and a disruption of the determined alignment of individuals, communities, nations, and race. He mobilizes identity not as a coagulated claim to disciplined purities but rather as a relational practice of difference.

As Stuart Hall writes, identity occurs in discursive relationship—through an always-ongoing, uneven process of identification—is never whole, and is unsettled in character:

> Identities are never unified and ... increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices and positions. ... We need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites. ... Moreover, they emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally constituted unity. ... Above all ... identities are constructed through, not outside, difference.  

Complex processes of identification and disidentification have offered us dynamic anticolonial understandings and possibilities.

17. Mercer, Travel and See; Hall, “Who Needs ‘Identity.’” “Identification is, then, a process of articulation, a suturing, an over-determination or a lack, but never a proper fit, a totality.” Hall, 17.
18. Muñoz, Disidentifications. “The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message’s universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications” (31).
19. Many cultural studies scholars have examined the concept of hybridity. Muñoz, for example, writes, “Hybrid catches the fragmentary...
particularly as we think about the *historical and institutional sites* of the school–prison trust. At the crux of these processes is imperialism.

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said writes, “New alignments made across borders, types, nations and essences . . . now provoke and challenge the fundamentally static notion of identity that has been the core of cultural thought during the era of imperialism.” 20 We take seriously the identity-based disciplining of thought that entrenches conquest power and stalls insurgent freedom. As Said writes, identity was imperialism’s “worst and most paradoxical gift.” 21

Its worst and most paradoxical gift is also, instructively, one of imperialism’s vulnerabilities. In *Forgeries of Memory and Meaning*, Robinson connects imperialism’s identity forces to racial regime decay:

> With respect to the social terrain, the degeneration of racial regimes occurs with some frequency for two reasons. First, apparent difference in identity is an attempt to mask shared identities. . . . A second source of regime entropy ensues from the fact that because the regimes are cultural artifices, which catalogue only fragments of the real, they inevitably generate fugitive, unaccounted-for elements of reality. 22

As he wrote in *Black Movements*, it was indeed the grand lie of white racial solidarity (a solidarity imagined to trump class and all other powered dimensions of societal life but which shatters at the moment it encounters those dimensions), and ongoing white collusion with it, that masked shared identities around other domains of human life. 23

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This grand lie is as evident in the continuous making of the school–prison trust as anywhere, and it is as tied in that Trust context to the imperialist union of identity and nation expressed in national identity as necessary for upholding supremacist destinies. In his invocations and performances of identity as dis/identification, we understand Jakes’ joyful, angry, incisive refusals as processes of anti-imperialism, movements against the identity–nation–destiny circuitry of the governing ideas of Trust. To be self-determining, to shrug off the colonial naming mechanisms (via contamination or dilution or fractionation), to counter imperialist disciplining through identity and nation, is to point to free futures.

**Futures**

Prompted by Jakes’ praxis of multiplicity in this imperial context, we circle back to wonder how an attention to time, race, and western monastic capitalist epistemologies might reveal brittle apertures through which free futures burst forward. Together.

Futures don’t exist only in some dreamy horizon-time. They aren’t solely far off or fantastical or the stuff of destinies, even though they are of those things too. Futures were also made in and by the near and very distant past. And futures are made not only by people but also by the agentive and constrained force of the cosmos and all creation. Futures are also being made now. By us, growing from the present as we actively make them. As we see it, there are multiple possible futures being made right now, and the juridical, militarized, temporal, doctrinal, gendered, terrortorial, self-determined, refusal, racialized, propertied, eschatological, maternalist, sovereign, and memoried dynamics of the school–prison trust provide a porthole and a portal to futures we have to grapple with now.

As Arundhati Roy entreats, “the urge for hegemony and preponderance by some will be matched with greater intensity by the longing for dignity and justice by others. Exactly what form that takes, whether it’s beautiful or bloodthirsty, depends on us.”

Confiscated Time, and One Futurity

“When we ask ourselves whether it’s inhumane to inflict a certain technology on someone, we have to make sure it’s not just the unfamiliarity that spooks us.” Thus is framed the philosophical question that guides one devastating experiment in carcerality.25

Western philosophical thought can ask, without being instantaneously disintegrated by the horrifically impossible contradiction of moral atoms colliding, if inflicting something on someone can be understood as humane (to the inflictor, we assume). There’s this received convention in critical circles that power doesn’t get decided around a table in smoky, windowless rooms. But actually that’s sometimes precisely how it gets decided. Often in the case of western philosophical thought, it is as if its philosophers sit at their pleasant, liberal, genocidal dinner table swirling Bordeaux, discerning types of humans and their therefore relative experience of humanity in the same breath as shoes or vacations or vapid politics or whatever it is they discuss.

At one such table, the hors d’oeuvres have been served and “a team of scholars [is] focused upon the ways futuristic technologies might transform punishment”—specifically, how they might make it “worse.”26 How delightful. Along with the carpaccio. The delicious rawness of it all.

And the specific topic of their deliberative attention? Time. It seems that drug or computer intercession on the mind could modify the imprisoned person’s experience of time, converting hours into years, or a millennium. This is no hyperbole on our part. In an interview, philosopher Roache explained,

If the speed-up were a factor of a million, a millennium of thinking would be accomplished in eight and a half hours. . . . Uploading the mind of a convicted criminal and running it a million times faster

25. Williams, “Prisoners Could Serve.”
than normal would enable the uploaded criminal to serve a 1,000 year sentence in eight-and-a-half hours. This would, obviously, be much cheaper for the taxpayer than extending criminals’ lifespans to enable them to serve 1,000 years in real time.  

There is utility here, they might imagine, joyriding one particular western philosophical tradition. But it alone does not answer nagging ethical considerations, particularly in the empire progenitor context, where this question is being taken up (and funded).

Time, its making and unmaking, its assignation of beginnings, its geometric flattening into lines, has always been an implement of conquest. This philosophers’ torture party reveals ways in which western conquest is innate to liberal western thought and inimical to any freedom. The confiscation of human time as a sustained act of conquest is warcraft. It works in cosmic and intimate scales to pillage a future.

This future-plunder is of the most barbaric sort. The proposition is simple, and in it the zenith and nadir of conquest terror meet. By speeding up time, these philosophers, these lovers of pure form, are suggesting removing the possibility for relationality. They are in fact describing a kind of solitary confinement previously unimagined—one that guts what it means to be human with a jagged paring knife. Prisons, for all their horror, are still places where people form and forge reciprocal, refusal relationships, where disciplining of thought—for all its architectural, psychological, panoptical industriousness—is still very much contested, resisted, negotiated. Where—for all the efforts at spirit murder and its agnates—human beings can still dream self-determinedly. What these thought conquerors suggest is to kill the dream in him and leave a placeless, relationless carcass with only a mind to observe that total terror.

“And a man without dreams is just a meaty machine with a broken gauge.”

27. Williams.
28. Williams, Alchemy.
29. Dimaline, Marrow Thieves, 88.
“Movement and Form”

The fervor in the goal to make carcasses of humans mimics the western zealotry for gutting memory and the metaphysical in the social realm. Yet, humans are never simply the entrails of regimes and their massacres. Other futures are being made right now, and it is all of ours to nurture those, not simply stop the philosophers’ future. Possible militancy, or refusal, or radicalism, or resistance, or resurgence, does not emerge solely from the abject condition of oppression. As Cedric Robinson argues,

the social cauldron of Black radicalism is Western society. Western society, however, has been its location and its objective condition but not—except in a most perverse fashion—its inspiration. Black radicalism is a negation of Western civilization, but not in the direct sense of a simple dialectical negation. It is certain that the evolving tradition of Black radicalism owes its peculiar moment to the historical interdiction of African life by European agents. . . . This experience, though, was merely the condition for Black radicalism . . . but not the foundation for its nature or character. Black radicalism, consequently, cannot be understood within the particular context of its genesis.30

It is, as Robinson argues, the metaphysical—the greater ontological spirit not shaped in relation or reaction to westernness—that dialectically shapes Black radicalism. Likewise, Indigenous refusal finds as its cauldron, its location and condition, conquest colonization’s ideological materialization in Trust, but Trust is not its inspiration. Refusal is the negation of the ideology of Trust, but not as an antagonism, opposite, or antithesis. Rather, refusal is of the ontological, the metaphysical, of knowledges outside and unparallel to the narrow epistemes of conquest.

The spirit of radical imagination that is the ontological through-line of self-determination is engendered everywhere, in part through common cause. Decolonization or anticolonization and

30. Robinson, Black Marxism, 72–73.
abolition share such common purposes or cause and, in the case of the school–prison trust, suggest to us that we must at least be curious about the legal, doctrinal codifications that are the very real custom and command contexts of Trust. Even if fleeting or itinerant, are there possibilities or necessities toward freedom in the law?

This brief foray of ours takes place within what we hope is the long overdue disintegration of meliorism and its henchmen—and that tradition’s colossal structure: conquest capitalism’s democracy. James Boggs describes democracy as a global phenomenon of power that, at its best, allows occasional negotiation but preempts any “revolution” particularly through its reliance on majority rule.31 Along with numerous other scholars, Boggs situates it as endemic to capitalism and as a feature necessary to continued exploitation of labor and resources. Other scholars have considered its relationship to colonialism across numerous material, ideological vectors.32

As we witness and participate in the disintegration, we abide the complex insistence that freedom efforts must of course live in the tension of the contemporary world, and therefore painstakingly refuse to signify and secure the state’s authority to determine futures while simultaneously ministering structurally with the full resources available with, to, and for those people repressed and in captivity now. For the school–prison trust, then, we see tentative possibilities for sovereign futures, beyond Trust.

Notably, Dorothy Roberts observes that in the longue durée of Black abolitionism in the United States, incarcerated abolitionists and their legal advocates have used the constitution to “articulate and present the demands of people subjected to carceral punishment . . . even when they anticipate failure.”33 But as Joy James writes, “neither advocacy abolitionism nor state abolitionism can control or create freedom.” Indeed, at their best, they can only con-

fer “emancipation.” “Emancipation is given by the dominant, it being a legal, contractual, and social agreement. Freedom is taken and created.”

What, we wonder, might this mean for Trust, when its abolition is currently correspondent with termination—of Nations and individuals? What does this mean in the context of the school–prison trust as warcraft?

As Dylan Rodríguez lays out in *Forced Passages*, the U.S. prison regime is domestic war. The school–prison trust operates at the fiery collision point of domestic and conquest wars and their implements: domestic and international doctrine, law, and treaties; domestic and international self-determination and refusal; domestic and international ideologies and epistemologies. And that collision point is mapped onto global terrains of power. Moreover, it is mapped onto compounding complexities: schools have indeed been self-determinedly made and mobilized as sites for freedom work, whereas, while such work has been undertaken within prisons, prisons have never been made for freedom futures. Because the school–prison trust moves through peoples—and almost never in neat, analytic, structural separation, as it did in the boarding and residential school eras—and because multiplicity moves in and through peoples, free futures must be deeply overlapping and co-alitional even as they maintain richly distinct understandings, and they must contend with the complex collisional nature of sites and systems of unfreedom.

The futures without the warfare of the school–prison trust that might burst forth from the right-now necessarily come in some part from struggling with the conquest nation’s legal regime. They also come from collective, careful pedagogical and other knowledge praxes. They come from a radical resurgence of knowing together.

Dian Million, in her gift of an essay entitled “There Is a River in Me: Theory from Life” invites and commands us to the right-now:

34. James, introduction to *New Abolitionists*, xxii.
So, what do we know that we might act from? We are living in a time when the most vulnerable die (this includes many, many life-forms), a worldwide experience that affects our vital relations with life itself. There is a struggle against the capitalization, the commoditization of life even as it is happening. . . . Our collective history-filled space here is not a void . . . the space is filled with the emotional resonance of our actions in this place.  

Resonant Futurities

Langston Hughes understands that the world is marked on its own terms, by earth, life, and water:

I’ve known rivers:
I’ve known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins.  

Conquest cartographers marked the world on parchment—most often the untreated skins of animals ransacked for the properties of their carcasses, properties of susceptibility to the recording of plunder and all its claims. As they marked the former home of the creature with their most permanent ink, they made heaviest the lines that were meant to reveal the shape of land. Almost as if natural and eternal borders encased place.

But we know that heavy line to be, in actuality, a place among the most volatile, most pliable, most definitively impermanent. Where the shore and the ocean meet is abundantly, exuberantly relational. No two tides mark the same shadow as they recede. No sand or pebble stays locked in place. No droplets of water crash together or swirl in the same way twice. Yet an entire teeming world lives there—between low and high tide; between storm and calm;

ice and currents—reminding us that bounded permanence, too, is a controlling invention of conquest.

There are other futures, unbounded. The future is an idea/idea is the future. In “Some Like Indians Endure,” Paula Gunn Allen writes,

the idea which
once you have it
you can’t be taken
for somebody else . . . 39

The idea is a resonant link. We’ve watched the idea of memory as self-determined, relationally refusing. We’ve seen the idea of time as partner and slipstream. We’ve heard the idea of names and watched their puff emerge as powerful actors. The idea is a willing willful movement from and toward unpredictable and yet practiced possibility—of worlds outside conquest, of dimensions unimaginable in empire cartographies and calendars, of names we’ll remember when we hear them for the first time—where we will find out what is there, and where we know one thing for certain: abiding, deep connection will be our guide.

Life Is Precious

Life is precious 40 not because or when it’s exceptional—exceptionally good or exceptionally bad. Most of us most of the time are just moving through or being in the simple, mundane of our hours and days. Sometimes we’re funny, and sometimes we’re jerks, and sometimes for a minute we’re pretty insightful.

In this hour of this day, Desmond was working blandly on a multiple-choice handout. He was a serious, though not terribly thoughtful, young person. I often wondered if he was just fundamentally tired. At any rate, he had asked me to help him out, even

though there was nothing to help with. He was smart. This was inane busy work. So I sat with him on the long side of the work table to keep him company, and we both pretended I was helping.

Across the table, Jakes drew insect-headed, semi-human-bodied anime-like figures on his handout. They jumped around the questions, stretched into the margins, dallied between choices. I strained my eyes to read their speech bubbles—upside down and in dull, prison-issued number 2 pencil.

The time moved on this way, Desmond and I pretending our roles, Jakes lost in another universe, me glancing over regularly in admiration and curiosity. There was no particular beginning or end. Or middle.

But there were moments, of all sorts. This one was Jakes and our teeth.

Looking at a particularly odd multiple-choice question on Desmond’s handout, I apparently enlisted my facial expression in my thinking. Occasionally in life, I squinch up my brow, press my tongue against the back of my top teeth, and mutter something to the effect of “huh.” In this expression, my front two teeth show in full.

“Hey!” Jakes must have taken a pause from his worksheet bugworld-making and seen me. “Hey! Sabina!”

“Yeah?” I looked up. He was pointing up at his front teeth.

“Check it out. See? We got the same cracked tooth.” He pressed his pointer finger against the small cutout in his upper right tooth.

_I prefer “chipped” to “cracked,”_ I thought, but went along with it.

“I was wondering if you were gonna notice that,” I smiled.

“How you get yours?” Jakes asked, gesturing at my face with his chin. Avoiding the teacher’s interest, Desmond pointed to something on his handout, and I looked down.

“How you get yours?” Jakes asked, gesturing at my face with his chin. Avoiding the teacher’s interest, Desmond pointed to something on his handout, and I looked down.

“Beat the crap out of someone,” I said, nonchalant, not looking up.
It was a little bit smart-ass teasing, a little bit making fun of myself. (I think, actually, I got it opening a lid to something. Unexciting and probably embarrassing, if I thought too much about it.)

“What about you?” I followed casually.

“Actually beat the crap out of someone.” I could hear the priceless satisfaction in his deft, quick retort.

“Well, yours is pretty,” I said to Jakes, looking up.

“Yeah?” Suddenly he was sweetness and yearning.

“Yeah,” I confirmed.

“Yeah, man,” said Desmond.

Desmond and I returned to pretending. Jakes went back to his other-universe doodles. His multiple-choice, slipstream handout a portal to a teeming world of insect-humans, with a cracked-tooth leader named Jakes.