

Re-Processing the Body of Racial Trauma

Multidirectional Memory and Decolonizing Somatic Workshops in Art/Performance

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Elke Gaugele, Mona Schieren

Abstract

This essay traces the unlearning and transformation of racial violence and trauma through reparative workshops, developed as bodywork and micropolitical tools in the field of art in the late 1960s and today. In a historical critique, we analyze Anna Halprin's iconic workshop series for *Ceremony of Us* (1969), created as a political performance project for the catharsis and healing of racial violence and trauma in response to the so-called Watts riots in Los Angeles (1965). This work will be juxtaposed with the contemporary project *Merkabah for the Hoetep* (since 2016) by Tabita Rezaire, as a "collective healing offering" and a somatic, mental, and spiritual way of mending. Both artists assume that violence and trauma caused by experiences of racism have inscribed themselves in the body and sedimented as corporeal archives in all intersectional dimensions of discrimination. We aim to critically investigate the different conceptions of trauma—structural, historical, and cultural—that occur in the artworks.

The performance project *Ceremony of Us* (1969) was intended for the African American community and the (usually) white art and theater scene to mutually go through a process of catharsis and create a new community. As a prototype of the Western workshop model, it brought together many (body) therapeutic tools in the spirit of the Human Potential Movement. In contrast to these Western concepts of trauma, a movement of Black yoga therapy emerged in the US in the late 1960s, which provided fundamental knowledge to treat race-based traumatic stress and focused on African ancestry—as was the case in Kemeti Yoga. In light of this historical analysis, we investigate Tabita Rezaire's contemporary reparative art practices, navigating digital, corporeal, and ancestral memory as sites of struggles. Addressing structural trauma and "slow violence," her workshop *Merkabah for the Hoetep* (2016–20) is a decolonial form of somatic, mental, and spiritual resistance that nourishes visions of entanglement, mending, and kinship.



Tabita Rezaire, MerKaBa For The Hoeteps, Performa 17, NY, US. © Cameron Cuchulainn

Due to the various Covid-19 lockdowns in the early 2020s and the shut-down of art institutions, the use of digital workshop formats increased to create participative situations. Like in the late 1960s, many of today's workshops employ performative and somatic practices in order to cope with issues of race, diaspora, migration, and decolonization, because, as Memories Studies scholar Michael Rothberg observes, "social actors bring multiple traumatic pasts into a heterogeneous and changing post-World War II present."^[1] In the late 1960s, a political fusion of art and grassroots initiatives took place in the Civil Rights and the Human Potential Movement (HPM), which was based on humanistic psychology.^[2] At that time, Western workshop culture was established in the US and rapidly expanded globally. At present, in the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests and racist violence in Europe, anti-racist mending and decolonial practices have become very important topics for art institutions as well as for self-organized groups.^[3] In a similar way, art has been conceptualized as a cultural means to process and possibly transform trauma. Applying the feminist psychoanalytic concept of the "matrixial borderspace,"^[4] Griselda Pollock introduced the importance of artworks for the transformation of traumata to the theory of art:

Transcriptum is the art object or art event, art operation or art procedure which incarnates transcription of trauma and cross-inscription of its traces, in which case the artwork's working through of the amnesia of the world into memory is a transcriptomnesia: the lifting of the world's hidden memory into its outside with-in-side. The transcriptium provides the occasion for a sharing and affectively-emotively recognizing an unrecognized Thing or Event.^[5]

Our contribution traces the unlearning and transformation of racial violence and trauma through reparative workshops, developed as bodywork and micropolitical tools in the field of art in the late 1960s and today. We therefore investigate anti-racist pacifist strategies and bodywork to overcome and mend racist violence, which was developed in the context of therapeutic workshop cultures of the late 1960s, and is applied today. To what

extent did HPM-based art workshops globalize Western concepts of trauma and trauma therapy? Did Western trauma therapy even contribute to the continuation of racism and further consolidation of structural violence? What alternative reparative somatic practices were developed within the Black Arts and Civil Rights Movement at the time? How are these (re)adopted and refined by contemporary artists now? And how can Western conceptions of trauma be decolonized and transformed?

We will examine these questions in three parts. Starting from Anna Halprin's iconic performance *Ceremony of Us* (1969), we consider how she aimed at healing racial violence through somatic workshop practices, developed by the HPM to remedy historic trauma caused by WW II, fascism, and the Holocaust. As a hinge between that period and the present, we subsequently focus on Kemetic Yoga, a reparative body workshop practice that evolved in the wake of Black Arts and Civil Rights Movement (1965-75) to heal and empower Black and Brown people in the US. Following this, we will discuss Tabita Rezaire's contemporary work *MerKaBa for the Hoeteps*, practiced since 2016, to mend structural violence, to engage indigenous practices, and to decolonize the history of colonial trauma.

Anna Halprin, *Ceremony of Us*

The workshops of the US-American Jewish dancer and choreographer Anna Halprin for *Ceremony of Us* (1969) can still be analyzed today through the film *Right On!*, a "rehearsal shot" by Seth Hill.^[6] The workshops^[7] and the subsequent choreography for the performance *Ceremony of Us* had been created as a political project for the catharsis and healing of racial trauma in response to the so-called Watts riots revolts in Los Angeles in 1965. In the social climate of shock, grief, and radicalization in the US after the assassination of Martin Luther King in April and Robert Kennedy in June 1968, James Woods, the African American director of Studio Watts School of the Arts, approached Anna Halprin, the leader of San Francisco Dancers Workshop. Driven by the idea of art as "a tool for social change,"^[8] and the bond between liberal Jewish artists and Black political causes at that time, Woods invited Halprin to develop a joint project for the Los Angeles Festival of the Performing Arts.^[9] Halprin refused to work "for," preferring to work "with the community" and suggested "to give a workshop at Studio Watts School of the Arts open to anyone regardless of training or experience."^[10] Ten days before the performance in 1969, both groups came together, "collectively creating their performance around the experience of becoming a group."^[11] Seth Hill's documentary features the days when artists from the San Francisco Dancers Workshop and the Studio Watts Group from Los Angeles met for a joint one-week workshop.^[12] Based on life situations they should arrive at some "sense of understanding, and of a feeling of trusting each other," as Halprin emphasizes and "break down some of those barriers" to overcome racism.^[13]

Influenced by the spirit of the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California, the center of the Human Potential Movement, the intention behind *Ceremony of Us* was that the African American community and LA's (usually) white art and theater scene should meet on stage as well as in the audience to go through a process together of healing racism and of creating a new community in a symbolic and almost ritual manner. More than creating an aesthetic dance performance, Halprin's interest lay in the interaction among the participants and the viewers, and in a shift from the theatrical focus and traditional narrative to the creation of solidarity.^[14]

A New Vocabulary: Halprin and Gestalt Therapy

If we listen to Halprin thinking out loud about her methods and aims in *Right On!*, four aspects condense.^[15] First,

the labor on “interpersonal relations”^[16]; second, the unlearning of former “preconceptions” and habits on a corporal level; third, the activity to develop a “new vocabulary” based on the “nonverbal” and the state of being in touch with one’s own organism; and finally, the awareness of “now,” constant becoming and “growing.” These angles are closely related to the principles of Gestalt therapy, which according to Friedrich Salomon Perls, is defined as “an organic function” and “an ultimate experiential unit,” embedded in every organism.^[17] Halprin had worked with Perls at the Esalen Institute before, and together with her company experienced Gestalt therapy workshops “with movements, with posture, with sound, with pictures.”^[18] Halprin began to infuse transformation, as “performance’s most consistent and recurring condition” and worked with Gestalt therapeutic approaches of human and social change.^[19]

The *Ceremony of Us* workshop aims at the unlearning of former racist preconceptions, and to contribute, as Halprin suggest, to “a new vocabulary.”^[20] Halprin’s idea of healing and overcoming violence corresponds with Perls’s theory of Gestalt therapy, arguing that social divisions created by the construction of race can be resolved by new terms of solidarity: “immediately a new boundary is created now the enemy” would be “the non-freedom fighter” and no longer be identified through race.^[21] Halprin underscores this level of collective progress: “The production was, what happened between the groups, it was like a collective effort, and that’s why we called it a *Ceremony of Us*.”^[22] Aiming at opening up these workshop experiences into public performance, bodily experiences should pass on from the workshop to the audience, where “through touch a door will open, with our organism, growth, potential to change, joyful, celebrate, others make a change though us.”^[23] This should build a “performative contract” between participants and spectators, especially when it came to collectivity and embodiment. This chimes with Pollock’s understanding of the potential of art as a field to transform trauma: “Art of a certain kind can become a means of staging of encounter.”^[24]

In this process we notice two strands: on the one hand there are exercises, movements, and encounters, which in the sense of Gestalt therapy aim at personal and social change; on the other hand we perceive scenes that unfold “multidirectional memories” by entangling and layering different historical experiences of violence and trauma by adapting further therapeutic techniques. These include Lawrence Halprin’s creative RSVP process (1969), Charlotte Selver’s sensory awareness, Ida Rolf’s Rolfing practices, and the bodywork of Moshe Feldenkrais and Randolph Stone.^[25] Common among all body therapies Halprin works with are longing for safety, integrity, and wholeness yearnings that may be rooted in the experiences of violence, racism, flight, and migration of the founders of these therapeutic concepts. On the other hand, their ideas of the integrity and “wholeness” of the body have to be considered critically: body therapy concepts of modernity have still to be revised given their ambiguity between empowerment and essentialism, and in respect of their idea of embodiment and body-based approaches to healing, as these are partly enmeshed with racist ideologies.

Halprin’s idea was to experience that racist and class-defined preconceptions of the body and its imaginary could be unlearned and transformed. She describes that she “worked on aggression first, to release anger and tears. [...] I introduced the bio-energetic movement of hitting in order to try to release rage. A black man in the group said to me, ‘I’m not ready to do that movement. If I let go, my rage will be so destructive I will tear this whole room apart and everyone in it.’”^[26] One way to cope with these tensions was to bring the structural integration of Rolfing techniques into play. Halprin states, “[i]n doing so we can find our goals reinforced, and their fulfillment brought nearer.”^[27] For the artist, Rolfing, with its alteration of the fascia muscles and capacities to integrate the body, was also an important remedy to mend racial trauma. This was based “on the idea that, either because of an injury caused by accident, or illness, or by some psychological incident, these experiences lodge themselves in the muscles, which in turn create tension and block the natural capacity for cantering and alignment in relation to gravity.”^[28] Rolfing, Halprin expounds, alters the body drastically, but in so doing, also

transforms the capacity to feel and increase energy: “Sometimes it is necessary to go to the physical body to repattern, and sometimes we go to the emotional body to do this work.”^[29] The instructions for the scene “When I look at you, I see,” are strongly connected to Gestalt therapeutic sightings of integration. The participants looked at and touched each other following Halprin’s instruction to “respond [...] to your immediate feelings about the person you are looking at and reacting to.”^[30] Halprin’s use of techniques from Gestalt therapy also led to mythically charged figures and moments, such as a birthing scene in which a black woman is giving birth to a white woman, developed during the workshop.

“Acting Out” Multidirectional Memory

It seems useful to analyze the historic art piece *Ceremony of Us* through the lens of the currently debated concept of “multidirectional memory,” developed by Michael Rothberg. As Rothberg outlines, “multidirectional memory posits collective memory as partially disengaged from exclusive versions of cultural identity and acknowledges how remembrance both cuts across and binds together diverse spatial, temporal, and cultural sites.”^[31] The struggles over recognition and collective identity that continue to haunt contemporary, pluralistic societies had been very active since the early postwar period.^[32] The fact that Rothberg repeatedly emphasizes the utopian content of multidirectional memory fits Halprin’s work very well, which through the procedures of Gestalt and body therapy opens the space for multidirectional memory in the post-World War II era. The mythical, historical, and politically charged scenes of violence that we observed in Halprin’s work evoke overlaps between contemporary political situations such as sit-ins, protests, and policing, and historical moments of violence like enslavement, fascism, the Holocaust, and drumhead trial martials during World War II. This is exactly a scene where, in Rothberg’s sense, “memories of slavery and colonialism bump up against memories of the Holocaust.”^[33]

If we compare these images from the performance with those of the transatlantic slave trade, a broad thread of associations emerges from captives on a slave ship to forced laborers (in cotton fields or in the war factories), from a primitivist dance ritual to meeting group members empowering each other, evoked by the scene in which male dancers stomp forward synchronously and move their arms powerfully from top to bottom. Their clasped hands seem like tools hammering into the ground in the same rhythm, or moving the oars of a ship while repeatedly emitting the same sound “Uh.” Afterwards the scene dissolves into a collective dance. The key scene of reflecting on violence starts with a dancer from the Watts company instructing the group to line up against the wall according to height.^[34] “Put your hands down!,” he reprimands in a harsh voice, “don’t look at me, look out there.” The dancer, now in the position of the oppressor, changes his role and lines up.^[35] Then *Ave Maria* sounds offstage. Right after that, the first person in the row starts to fall to the ground. The woman plunges lengthways, flat, and face forward. As she lies motionless on the ground, a second woman begins to sink to the floor. The performance becomes an execution. At the end of the scene, all members of the group lie on the stage, still, in sideway postures or flat, facedown. The “acting-out” raises associations of multidirectional memories, such as the Watts riots, but also anthropological line-ups to summary executions as scare tactics during enslavement, the Holocaust, and the war as techniques of colonial and racial extermination and conquest.

Questioning Modernist Concepts of Historical and Collective Trauma

For US culture critic Robby Herbst, Halprin’s performance is a symbol of the failure of the overall Hippie countercultural practices and their Esalen Institute associated group psychology, which according to him produced nothing more than “essential race and gender stereotypes nodding toward a new age of ‘free’ (association, love, etc.)”^[36] Halprin’s thinking through the powers of heterosexual desire and its “unbelievable

sexual potency” and sentences such as “[t]he white women were so liberated by the black men” sound in retrospect like a reaffirmation of colonial and racist topoi.^[37] In her book on *Decolonial Feminism* (2021), French feminist Françoise Vergès elaborates how the definition of a “sexual temperament” had historically moved to that of a “racial temperament.”^[38] Herbst further argues with the naiveté and failure of the four Esalen Racial Confrontation Workshops in summer 1968, applying techniques from Gestalt therapy to work through the “blocked dynamics” between races,^[39] which ended in irresolvable dissent and with it a disaster of the whole therapeutic project for personal and political solutions at that point.^[40]

From the perspective of a cultural theory of trauma, Halprin’s work is dedicated to two sorts of trauma: historical and collective trauma. The idea of historical trauma derives from an identifiable event or the specific experience of suffering and loss, such as the Holocaust or 9/11.^[41] Collective trauma is defined as the response of the group to the specific violent or overwhelming occurrence of historical trauma and the social disruption that follows this traumatic event. Based on the modernist concepts of historical and collective trauma, *Ceremony of Us* doesn’t actually approach trauma caused by structural violence.

The breakthrough movements created by Halprin are related to the concept of historical trauma, open to various processes of acting-out and working-through that would allow the traumatized subject to reconnect to the present and the future.^[42] The emerging images and scenes of *Ceremony of Us* enhance the acting out by flashbacks of compulsively reliving traumatic events of the past in the present. In a further working-through as a process of coming to terms with trauma the group should move beyond it. This enables one to distinguish between past and present and therefore not fall into traumatic stress automatisms again and also to overcome the collective trauma.^[43] Not taking structural violence into account, the Human Potential Movement and *Ceremony of Us* as part of it contributed to the further consolidation of racism. At that point Halprin’s work resembles the naiveté of the four Esalen Racial Confrontation Workshops in summer 1968 that completely failed when applying Gestalt techniques to work through the “blocked dynamics” between races,^[44] and ended in the earlier mentioned disaster for the whole therapeutic project at that point.^[45] Nevertheless, Halprin remains critical, noticing that “the Watts people seemed to have a built-in loyalty,” and “really had a sense of unity [...] unified by the Watts riot,” and that the merging of the two groups had acted against this strong bond.^[46]

Kemetic Yoga and the Black Nonviolent Civil Movement

Distinguishing themselves from the violent protest of the time, when Halprin conceived *Ceremony of Us*, as well as taking distance from a field of trauma therapy that neglects ethnic and race-based traumatic stress as areas of inquiry, in the late 1960s a movement of Black yoga therapy, salvation, and enlightenment emerged in the US.^[47] Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I have a Dream” speech in 1963, and his practices of nonviolent resistance as a tactic of political liberation and social progress had been deeply influenced by the Indian lawyer, politician, and social activist Mahatma Gandhi’s concept of *satyagraha*.^[48] Defined as “holding on to truth,” “hence truth-force,” “power-force” or “soul-force,” some of Gandhi’s principles of *satyagraha*, with its ways to develop spiritual-mental strength, had been adopted by the Yoga Sutra and transformed into means of anti-colonial civil resistance against the British rule of India. In the years after King’s assassination, Asar Hapi and Elvrid Lawrence (later Master Yirser Ra Hotep) from Chicago started conducting research on the African roots of yoga in ancient Egypt. They developed Kemetic Yoga as an African American reparative body practice that refers to the specific spiritual practices of African ancestry. Kemetic Yoga, with its mantra *hotep*, which can roughly be translated as “to be satisfied, at peace,” follows Afrocentric historiography and the mythology of *The African Unconsciousness*, as outlined by psychologist Edward Bruce Bynum, tracing the foundation of all yoga back to Kundalini Yoga in Kemetic Egypt: “Numerous bas-reliefs on the walls of tombs and ancient Egyptian statues

dating from the old kingdom period show that the Egyptians were well aware of Yoga postures and possibly kyrias in addition to the inner mysteries of Kundalini Yoga meditation.”^[49] Bynum further elaborates that “Kemetic Egyptians also spoke very specifically, accurately, and forcefully about [...] the Kundalini phenomenon [...] as a foundation for salvation or enlightenment.”^[50]

During the 1970s and the heyday of jazz ikon’s Sun Ra’s Afrofuturistic, Kemetic-Egyptian inspired performances,^[51] southern California became the principal center of a Black yoga community that rejected militant Black activism: “The struggle is not on a physical level. It is on the level of the mind.”^[52] In 1975, the Black lifestyle magazine *Ebony* welcomed the news that Angela Davis, the prominent civil rights activist and supporter of the Black Panthers, had started to practice yoga “as a way to retain her sanity” while awaiting trial in a California prison.^[53] Kundalini yoga teacher Krishna Knaur formerly known as the actress Thelma Oliver who established the first yoga center in South Central Los Angeles in the neighborhood of Studio Watts (and today’s Watts Empowerment Center) claimed that “the revolution is one of the mind. Blacks have got to realize where the power really is.”^[54] More and more Black artists, activists, and celebrities became yoga practitioners, investigating “yoga as a means of fulfillment and an answer to the problems that confront them as a group and as individuals.”^[55] With the headline “Yoga. Something For Everyone.,” *Ebony* brought together images and stories of the 1970s Black yoga boom when celebrities from music, film, and sports embraced yoga poses and various other Eastern philosophies, such as jazz pianist Herbie Hancock, singer Freda Payne, music manager Marc Jordan, or the actress Tanisha.^[56] At the same time, Hapi and Ra Hotep developed Kemetic Yoga as a trademark and a modern version of an Afrocentric yoga system, based upon the practices of physical movements, controlled deep breathing, and meditation. Ra Hotep emphasizes that his interest has been always driven by the perspective of liberation and the idea of healing racial and social trauma of the Afro-Diasporan community:

Black people brought to America, or other countries in the diaspora, as enslaved Africans have been damaged psychologically and psychospiritual to some degree or another. To me, yoga, and Kemetic Yoga in particular, is a way of reclaiming our identity. When we are able to train ourselves to get into a state of deep relaxation, healing can take place on the deepest levels of our being.^[57]

Psychologist and yoga therapist Gail Parker, who came of age during the Civil Rights, Black Power, and Black is Beautiful cultural movements, emphasizes “Ethnic and race-based traumatic stress injury are ongoing, recurrent, and cumulative, and not something you get over easily or quickly, because in a racialized world events of ethnic and race-based stress and trauma are likely to occur anytime, anywhere, and without warning over a lifetime.”^[58]

Tabita Rezaire’s *Decolonial Healing and Merkabah for the Hoeteps*

The contemporary artist Tabita Rezaire, who was trained in Kemetic Yoga by Ra Hotep, developed the performative practice *Merkabah for the Hoeteps* from 2016 onwards as a “collective healing offering.” In her programmatic talk “Decolonial Healing: In Defense of Spiritual Technologies” she states:

By engaging with African and indigenous ancestral technologies of information and communication, we dare to reconcile the worlds of organic matter, energy and electronics to nurture a mystic-techno-consciousness. So we sing to decolonize and heal our technologies. To grasp the immensity and the responsibility decolonial healing demands [...] we must first apprehend the necessity and urgency of both decoloniality and healing in their singularity and multitude.^[59]

Rezaire thereby refers to Walter Mignolo's concept of decoloniality with its "epistemic reconstitution"^[60] and the "decolonial option" to propose alternative ways of sensing and knowing.^[61] This calls for a transition from the power of "owning and representation" to the "power of listening and reception," which is more of an "owing."^[62] This de-linking process enables plurality, openness, practices of listening and also, as Rolando Vázquez points out, "ancestral connection (to a history that was erased by colonialism)."^[63] Rezaire develops these practices to heal the "symptoms of coloniality." For the artist, "ancestral practices of divination" are "a technology of information and communication" enabling "cosmic downloads."^[64] According to her, "the rewriting of history" offers "potent healing", opening up "new potentials for what can be dreamt for our future."^[65] Rezaire diagnoses present times with "Shame. Anger. Pain. Humiliation. Low self-esteem. Anxiety. Fatigue. Restlessness. Addiction. Stress. Depression. Precarity. Loneliness. Disconnection."^[66] In her workshops, the artist aims at an "epistemic delinking" that removes us from "a materiality-centric fear-based reality."^[67] This also reverberates with Audre Lorde's *Uses of the Erotic* (1984) as "a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling."^[68] Rezaire's work connects decolonial Amerindian, Panafrican, Afrocentric, and cyberfeminist perspectives. "Healing as Transforming [...] Unlearning, [...] Aligning, [...] Listening,"^[69] via "TeChnology, sPiriTualiTy and The eroTiC," Rezaire writes, using cyberfeminist typography.^[70]

During the museum closures in 2020, Rezaire produced the video *Merkabah for the Hoeteps*, featuring a guided yoga set that she had practiced since the Berlin Biennale 09 in 2016.^[71] She starts by describing the history of Kemetic Yoga as well as its Egyptian cosmologies, drawing on the Senegalese historian Cheikh Anta Diop's 1970s Afrocentric theories. Each physical exercise follows a specific Egyptian deity, while the artist explains their different hand positions similar to mudra gestures and spiritual meanings as "powerful practices to channel our ancestors."^[72] Rezaire wears a turban and a pink jellabiya with an ankh appliqué, as a "symbol of life." In the Ma'at cycle, the sequence of the video dedicated to the goddess Ma'at, she is backed by the golden wings of a Ma'at relief. Instructing the exercises, Rezaire sits in the center of the frame, surrounded by historical representations of the respective deities mounted in front of animated desert landscapes with pyramids, similar to *Sun Ra's* and other Afrofuturistic visual universes. In other practices shown in the film, Rezaire's body is surrounded by the celestial canopy of Nut, the goddess of the firmament. Similar images can be found in popular culture Kemetic Yoga sets. The sessions culminate in a deep relaxation sequence in which the artist plays rhythms on drums in front of cosmological constellations.

In Defense of Spiritual Technologies: Slow Violence, Trauma, and Decolonial Healing

Rezaire's decolonial healing practice operates on the level of trauma caused by structural violence. This is linked to the concept of "structural trauma," which can be defined as "foundational absences [...] which might be ontological, ideological, theological, or referential in nature, [and] are transhistorical and unbridgeable."^[73] Unlike the legacies of discrete historical losses, structural trauma is non-responsive to processes of working-through that aim to alleviate the effects of historical trauma.^[74] In traumas caused by structural violence, the stressor is not one specific event but a normative quotidian aspect of trauma, which often leads to a chronic psychic suffering, such as safe-world violations, postcolonial syndromes, post-traumatic slavery, oppression-based trauma, and ecological grief.^[75] Gail Parker explains race-based traumatic stress as a specific trauma

that is associated with experiences of racial events that are negative and emotionally painful. An event can be experienced as race-related based on the individual's perception that a racist act occurred. Symptoms include defensiveness, anxiety, depression, anger, low self-esteem, shame, and sometimes guilt. Racial stress is a cumulative experience that is often magnified by the lack of opportunity to

recover before the next experience, causing it to become chronic.^[76]

In contrast to concrete violent historical events that caused traumata, here another frequency of violence is at stake that Rob Nixon calls “slow violence,” a “violence that occurs gradually and out of sight; a delayed destruction often dispersed across time and space.”^[77] Nixon further defines slow violence as “long dyings” that are staggered, dispensable casualties both human and ecological that carry the weight of trauma and degradation but lack the political salience needed to afford significant outrage.

Along the same lines, Ethan Watters critiques what he calls “the grand project of Americanizing the world’s understanding of the human mind,” defined as the imposition of American terms and treatments for mental disorders as the international standard.^[78] Lucy Bond and Stef Craps expound how these trample over local ideas about mental illness and healing and how in their rush to help victims end up causing more distress instead of alleviating suffering.^[79] Therefore alternative conceptualizations have been proposed to capture the normative, quotidian aspects of trauma in the lives of many disempowered people. Typically, trauma here has collective causes, including insidious trauma,^[80] complex PTSD or disorders of extreme stress not otherwise specified,^[81] type II traumas,^[82] safe-world violations,^[83] oppression-based trauma,^[84] and postcolonial syndrome.^[85] This recent work was anticipated, though, by Frantz Fanon, the black Martinique-born psychiatrist-turned-Algerian revolutionary who can be regarded as a pioneer of postcolonial trauma theory.^[86]

In contrast to “historical trauma,” Rezaire’s work on trauma caused by structural violence is less about identifying specific historical events of violence, and more about creating a collective Afrocentric history, with positive imaginings of common ground and telepathic connection to ancestors. With it, Rezaire addresses the absence “including the absence of ultimate metaphysical foundations”^[87] which “refers to the lack of foundations (be they referential, ideological, theological, or some other structural component) that have never existed.”^[88] Situating it as a pacifist, somatic, mental, and spiritual way, she initializes the fine-tuning for other frequencies, namely of connection, kinship, and entanglement. In an interview, Rezaire enumerates the practices her work “resonates with,” including

dance, water, Judaism, daydreaming, drug culture, classical philosophy, psychoanalysis, European/eastern mysticism, oracles, Kemetic Yoga & Ancient Egyptian cosmology, Kundalini Yoga & Vedic sciences, Sufism, African and diasporic spiritual systems, South African traditional healing, ifá, Amazonian teachings, herbalism, Tantra, Buddhism, conspiracy theory, alien/spirit channeling, New Age, animal life, astrology, numerology, physics, wombwork, dreams, sound, nature... They all inform each other and reflect my eclectic path, but the nature of my engagement with different teachings differs greatly, some I only read about, others I practice daily.^[89]

Rezaire’s work can be understood as a transmission of high-tech, body knowledge, and healing art. How the latter has been suppressed in the colonial setting by Western technologies, is currently shown by Amerindian artists in an ecological-decolonizing sense.^[90] What is special here is that participants are in her offerings enabled to influence and put in motion or guide those images further with their own imaginary, and an interesting agency of “the image” emerges to repair trauma in the process. The simultaneous co-production of images and collective and subjective imaginary worlds has been a central point in many performative practices since the mid-twentieth century. In Rezaire’s work, it becomes a shared image-making between artist and perceiver, sensitizing the perceiver to their creative ability of self-healing and transmitting autonomous technology to all.

But not only the perception within the body is activated, the postures can act as powerful technologies together with the narrative to clear the trajectory to other levels of cosmic connection. Dreaming leads to a sense of holistic networks, which enhance “the otherwise” and its creative energy as Lorde argues. Rezaire states: “The apparatus of coloniality knows that our most powerful resource is our relationship with the creative energy of creation, so its mission has been to demean and condemn its wisdom.”^[91] She generates shared experiences about spiritual methods beyond Western ones, alter-histories and non-Western spiritual paths. As she puts forward in *Decolonial Healing*, along with Roy Ascott’s idea of vegetal reality,^[92] “teacher plants can bestow visions, cleansing, detoxifying and guidance for healing and spiritual evolution.”^[93] In contrast to the internet as a repression and surveillance “dispositiv of coloniality,”^[94] this vegetal network allows, according to the artist, communication with the ancestors in order to connect to alter-histories and insofar recover from the violence of Western ideology.^[95] The artist makes this more concrete when she says,

[w]hether through the internet, ancestor, communication, DNA, intuition, atomic communication, teacher plants, sound, water or the womb, the routes of knowledge migration are infinite and we have access to a database as vast and profound as we allow ourselves to be. The present offering investigates the cybernetics spaces where the organic, technologic and spiritual worlds connect, to encourage a poetics and politics of epistemic reconstruction against manufactured amnesia.^[96]

Conclusion

Rezaire’s and Halprin’s artistic approaches can be connected to a transformative potential of art that operates on the level of structural trauma, albeit with different results. Pollock underlines how different models of structural and/or historical trauma produce different potentiality. Because structural trauma is based on primordial encounters, it has already engraved the potentiality for severality, Pollock suggests.^[97] In contrast, “historical, in-time encounters are housed by but also affectively realize this potentiality.”^[98] Thus the potential of processing structural trauma lies in the creation of new communities as it forges subjects “yearning for these specific resonating connectivities, transmissions, transports, and transformations.”^[99] The central concern of both artists is to dissolve diasporic, racist, and colonial violence and traumas in order to achieve long-term social change. The workshops of 1968 and those in present times, in the 2020s, are based on bodily practices and driven by the idea of nonviolent resistance and the conviction that trauma reprocessing and unlearning are necessary for all participants.

While Halprin is concerned with historical trauma and direct violence, Rezaire’s practice also aims to mend injuries caused by slow violence. This corresponds to more recent popular concepts to heal historical and racialized trauma carried in the body and the soul, such as those explored in *The Embodied Lab* or by *New York Times* bestselling trauma specialist Resma Menakem, who emphasizes that “healing from white-body supremacy begins with the body,” “new expressions of culture,” and needs “social activism.”^[100] Artistic workshops enable experiencing the physical body, sensing alternative forms of knowledge, and, as Halprin says, they reflect “the impact of psychology, social sciences and the new technologies.”^[101] Both Halprin and Rezaire are committed to fostering somatic knowledge in the context of alternative forms of knowledge. As a visual artist, Rezaire plays with the aura of the spiritual healer and the image of the goddess. As a dancer, Halprin’s self-conception is rather that of an HPM therapist. Through artistic workshops, which open up to performances, both artists activate the role of the viewer and artist to become allies in working toward personal and political change. While the performance of *Ceremony of Us* addressed a (mostly white) theater audience, Rezaire’s workshops involve international museum audiences, while in addition empowering BIPOC communities to reclaim their narratives,

such as the South London Narration Group, a collective of women and non-binary people of color at the South London Gallery. Yet the workshop impetus often aims for a betterment on the level of the individual and dilutes the collective task which caused the problem. This critique is also raised by Stef Craps, who aims for a decolonization of Euro-centrist trauma theory, which still takes the universal validity of Western definitions of trauma and recovery for granted.^[102] It is this taking for granted that permeates Halprin's HPM-based approach, while Rezaire works on its decolonization. Concluding, we situate the anti-racist and decolonizing work of the artists as well as our own writing as part of being "implicated subjects," as outlined by Rothberg, "joining with others in collective action."^[103] Although this path often "involves ambivalence, error, and unintended consequences," we aim at linking together to form the ground for a "long-distance solidarity."^[104]

Footnotes

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4. Ettinger, Bracha. "Transcriptum: Memory Tracing in/for/with the Other." In *Matrixial Borderspace*. Edited by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press. 2007. pp. 162-72.
5. Ibid., p. 166, cited in Pollock, Griselda. "Art/Trauma/Representation." *Parallax*. Vol. 15. No. 1. 2009. p. 51.
6. Halprin, Anna and Hill, Seth. "Right On (Ceremony of Us)." Internet Archive. Uploaded by California Revealed, December 8, 2017. Time code 01:10. Available at https://archive.org/details/right-on-ceremony-of-us_11873_pm0047625 (accessed 2022-09-14).
7. All links to the workshop images and the following links to a wide range of archival material are meant to illustrate and underline the analysis in a general sense.
8. Woods cited in Halprin, Anna and Burns, James T. "Ceremony of Us." *The Drama Review*. Vol. 13. No. 4. 1969. p. 131.
9. Ross, Janice. *Anna Halprin: Experience as Dance*. Oakland, CA: California University Press. 2007. p. 265.
10. Halprin and Burns, "The Ceremony of Us," pp. 131-32.
11. Halprin and Hill, "Right On (Ceremony of Us)," time code 03:00.
12. Herbst, Robby. "Ceremony of Us." East of Borneo, April 15, 2014. Available at <https://eastofborneo.org/articles/ceremony-of-us/> (accessed 2022-05-15).
13. Halprin and Hill, "Right On (Ceremony of Us)," time code 00:48.
14. (Courtney 2014, 36) > not in reference list.
15. Halprin and Hill, "Right On (Ceremony of Us)."
16. Following Halprin and Hill, "Right On (Ceremony of Us)," time code 10:00.
17. Perls, Frederick S. *Gestalt Therapy Verbatim*. New York, NY: Bantam Books. 1971 [1968]. p. 16.
18. Ibid., p. 56.
19. Heathfield, Adrian. "Then Again." In *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History*. Edited by Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield. Bristol: Intellect. 2012. p. 23.
20. Halprin and Hill, "Right On (Ceremony of Us)," time code 10:16.
21. Perls, *Gestalt Therapy Verbatim*, p. 12.

22. Halprin and Hill, "Right On (Ceremony of Us)," time code 00:59–01:07.
23. Ibid., time code 11:55.
24. Pollock, "Art/Trauma/Representation," p. 52.
25. Halprin, Anna. *Moving Towards Life: Five Decades of Transformational Dance*. Edited by Rachel Kaplan. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1995. pp. 111–12.
26. Ibid., pp. 112–13 and pp. 116–17.
27. Ibid., p. 117.
28. Ibid., 117–18.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, p. 49.
32. Ibid., p. 38.
33. Ibid., p. 26.
34. Halprin and Hill, "Right On (Ceremony of Us)," time code 20:27.
35. Ibid., time code 21:01.
36. Herbst, "Ceremony of Us."
37. Halprin and Burns, "The Ceremony of Us," p. 155.
38. Vergès, Françoise. *A Decolonial Feminism*. London: Pluto Press. 2021. p. 26.
39. Herbst, "Ceremony of Us."
40. Curtis, Adam. "The Century of the Self. Part 3: 'There is a Policeman Inside All Our Heads; He Must Be Destroyed.'" YouTube. January 3, 2017. From 21:18. Available at
41. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ub2LB2MaGoM> (accessed 2022-0515).
42. LaCapra, Dominick. *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press. 2014;
43. Bond, Lucy and Craps, Stef. *Trauma: The New Critical Idiom*. London: Routledge. 2020. p. 145.
44. Ibid., p. 151.
45. Herbst, "Ceremony of Us."
46. Curtis, "The Century of the Self. Part 3," from 21:18.
47. Halprin and Burns, "The Ceremony of Us," p. 132. Nonetheless, this aspect of desolidarization among Black Civil Right activists—and be it by the whitener of psychology and Human Potential Movements therapeutic approaches—had been an important political question, which in 1966 led to the formation of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense in California.
48. Parker, Gail. *Restorative Yoga for Ethnic and Race-Based Stress and Trauma*. London/ Philadelphia, PA: Singing Dragon. 2019. p. 12.
49. Chandra, Sudhir (ed.). *Violence and Non-violence across Time: History, Religion and Culture*. London/New York, NY: Routledge. 2018. pp. 247–314.
50. Thakkur, 1977, cited in Bynum, Edward Bruce. *The African Unconscious: Roots of Ancient Mysticism and Modern Psychology*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press. 1999. p. 297.
51. Ibid., p. 335.
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54. Ibid., p. 96.
55. Knauer, cited in Ibid., p. 102.
56. Ibid., p. 97.
57. Ibid. pp. 96–102.
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 60. Rezaire, Tabita. "Decolonial Healing: In Defense of Spiritual Technologies." Unpublished manuscript. 2016. p. 1.
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 65. Rezaire, "Decolonial Healing," p. 6.
 66. Ibid., pp. 6–7.
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