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Gabrielle: When you hear the word “future,” what comes to mind for you? What does the word evoke in you?

Báyò: The first word that comes to mind is compulsion. I remember being invited to speak at an event in Paris with “youth” (which is another very loaded category). They were gathered in a bunker-style room—concrete walls, tables/desks nailed to the ground—and the premise of my invitation was for me to speak about the future and how young people can think and orient themselves toward the future. What immediately became compelling to me was the performative materiality of the future. The “future” is not just an idealized, platonic mental thing that is down the line, a chronological fait accompli, already composed in advance. It is, I dare say, physical: it enlists bodies in specific and anticipatory arrangements that excludes other temporal possibilities from being noticed. Every youth in that war-style bunker was dressed in a suit and tie. And it was not that they were required to do so, but it just struck me that there could be something about orienting oneself to “the future” that compels us to wear elaborate costumes and dress up and frown, an abandonment of play. A rejection of things that are childish and an acceptance of adult-isms, a becoming serious.

Inspired by Robin Williams’ character in the movie Dead Poets Society, I jumped on the desk in front of me—which was definitely something not to do—and I told every youth in the hall to jump on their own tables, to disturb the furniture in the room, and to remove their ties and just scream. It took them a while to understand what I was asking them to do, but they did it. Then, I got down off the desk, dropped the mic (both physically and metaphorically, I reckon), and left the hall.

When I think about the future, it seems to be this colonial secretion of bodies in specific anticipatory relationships with other bodies and their environments. I think of time as an effect and a condition, an assemblage. It (I should say “they,” since in my

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referring to “time,” I really mean to speak to its multiplicity, its indeterminacy, lack of Newtonian uniformity, and emergent quality) doesn’t precede bodies; it is how bodies gain shape. Temporalities are never idealized or super-phenomenal. They are not noumenal, they are immanent, entangled with ecologies, with what we eat, how we eat, with weathering patterns, with media technologies, with geological formations, with the built environment. Maybe it’s not the case that flies experience time slower or that time speeds up when we get older; maybe fly-bodies in entanglement with their environments and cybernetic patterns secrete their own fly-temporalities. One might presume that Kafka’s Gregor Samsa (in his short book, The Metamorphosis), having changed into a bug, experienced time in radically new ways his previously human body might have prohibited.

As such, temporalities are fragile becomings. The particular one that we’ve presumed as foundational, as universal, as uniformly spread, within this enlightenment project, is a trace of a certain domineering colonial machine, a convenient arrangement that situates bodies in a unilinear line that flows without fail from the past toward “the future.”

Gabrielle: To further delve into this, what are the assumptions you often encounter about the future in others?

Báyò: That it’s fixed. The fixity of the future. Let me situate my assertion by considering a cultural phenomenon in my country, Nigeria. There is a sense in which we perform some kind of catch-up imperative. This catch-up imperative means we are always late and that our failure to be punctual to the summit of modern transcendence is encoded deep in our bones, written into our flesh. The 19th-century sociologist Auguste Comte envisioned a spectrum of supremacy that planted the Global South, mostly at the poorer end of the spectrum, while industrial (and therefore rational) nation-states are poised on the richer, more advanced end of things. In this developmentally rigid notion of emergence, the industrial end is a prophecy of what is yet to come for the not-so-developed world, their trajectories of emergence already written into the fabric of things. Comte’s temporal/futural prison means there is only one way to go—and that’s forward. We can try to improve our speed, but we can’t veer off the already beaten tracks of our temporally advanced cousins.

Long before I heard of Comte, I already understood that the future was only available to a few. Progress was the software of societal emergence. The only way to participate in these games was to try to outstrip the others on the race tracks, was to try to run on that yellow brick road until we arrived at a time when we looked more like London or New York. So that’s the notion of the future that I grew up under. The idea that “we’re not quite there yet and we have to try our best” to look more like the masters that left us behind in postindependence eras.

Gabrielle: Given all of this, and you’ve begun to take us there already, how do you describe your own orientation to the future?

Báyò: I’m of the Yoruba people of West Nigeria and some parts of West Africa. We don’t think of time as an arrow of God flowing from a fixed past through the elusive present and to an always fugitive future. That notion of time being a straight line is missing from our cosmology. Time is slushy. It’s not even cyclical. It’s slushy—it falls in on itself. It’s rhizomatic. And in this sense, the past is yet to come (to quote Karen Barad); the past is not yet done; the future has already happened. This notion of time is melty and trickly. Sugary and sticky. It’s what allows us to face ancestry as a serious matter in civilizational endings. It’s the invitation for us to sit with the past—with the crack of time—and do other kinds of work there.
If time were a river, it would be fed and heavily nurtured by rivulets and tributaries and pockets of flows. I refuse to subscribe to an understanding of time as uniform duration, as progress, as a pre-relational quality of existence. My orientation to time invites me to disrupt an understanding of the continuous future through a concept that I call *chronofeminism*, which is a concept I deploy to signal time displaced from its imperial march from past to future. The performative, temporal, and physical arrangements that we rudely call “time,” that we reduce to the future (and even to an unchanging “history”), is only one particular arrangement. There are other ways of being temporarily assigned to the future, the past, and the present. My work is mostly about sitting in those cracks of time and sensing what other voices want to be heard.

*Gabrielle:* What are you noticing, hearing, feeling, sensing in those cracks?

*Báyò:* You’d have to allow some “worlding” to happen if I am to robustly respond to this question. Let me begin here, maybe even touching on some points I have already implied: a crippling anthropocentricity characterizes modern relationships with the world around us, with others, and with time. What I mean by this is that a convening of sociomaterial conditions and Enlightenment philosophies has contributed to political imaginaries that compel us to imagine ourselves, isolated and isolatable, independent and ensouled, as the proper and exclusive custodians of agency, thought, beauty, and imagination in the world. And that when we think, it is because we have the capacity to think; or that when we act in any way, our actions come from us, from within a gilded interiority, a special subjectivity and foundational causality that remains intact as it navigates a dead, dumb, and mute world of mere objects—agential only by virtue of the instrumental, second-hand value we offer it. This human centrality materializes as a species of time we might call progress, which in turn is measured with clocks, increasing technological sophistication, and—in terms of transhumanist aspirations—our proximity to a futural singularity defined by greater mastery, freedom from the material elements, and control over our experiences, possibly even death. What this inexorable march toward the populated future enacts is an occlusion of the ways we are co-produced by the interplay of ecological forces. In short, we are not as ontologically secure as we might think we are; we are not the “actors on the stage” in so far as the stage is (now increasingly seen as) a full-fledged actor as well. This means, what we call time is already an occlusion of other possible temporalities, other cartographies. The future performed by the Anthropocene emerges on the backs of other notions of futurity, with risks. To use a Latourian sentiment, if we must happen upon new temporalities, new worlds, different differences, we have to denaturalize “time” as colonial performance by expanding our sociology to include the more-than-human.

This is important to articulate and think about, especially as we seem to be reaching the end of the shelf life of a particular practice of time. With/in the so-called Anthropocene, we meet a fretful future, an anxious future worried about precision and solutions, a concern that produces disciplines like foresight and its analytical cousins. If the Anthropocene is an indictment of anthropocentricity, it doesn’t know where to go beyond that. It doesn’t know what to do beyond gathering data of our many deaths to come. It, too, is stuck in the time-field that sponsored its intelligibility. One might say that the Anthropocene is performatively calibrated toward the possible extinction of our species and the moral shock that such an anticipated end might evoke—and yet, it is simultaneously addicted to the Anthros, nested within the machinations of human centrality, comfortable amidst the luxurious affordances of our selective blindness. To put this seminal indictment to work, we must rework the premise that we are the agential core of the universe, for such
an assumption continually secretes the imperial arrangement that blinds us to other ways of being-in-relation with the world, with time, with our bodies, and with the multi-species firmament of becomings we’ve never stopped being a part of.

Perhaps then, the compelling question of the cracks I speak of is, how do we leave this plantation? How do we leave this sociomaterial arrangement that produces time by subjugating our body-minds to the construction of progress? And I have to say that “the future” is tethered to the historical slave plantation. You must know that the plantation never really disappeared. It became distributed—like the spare parts of Theseus’s fabled ship—spreading its organelles across the landscape it had helped engineer. The plantation in the Antebellum South in the US and the slave-holding communities across the Americas and the Caribbean were all both products of a futural politics of progress-making and instigators of colonial continuity. The future is, as such, umbilically tethered to the loss, the displacement, and the commodification of Black bodies. The future is premised on the slave ship. We’ve never really disembarked.

As such, with Herman Melville’s “Benito Cereno” in mind and the subterfuge of hidden intelligences within screams, I believe some kind of re-embarkation is needed. We need a decolonial aesthetic that tracks out new futurities, new ethno-temporalities by leaving the shore once again—where “leaving the shore” is not a function of gaining physical distance from the familiar but of revisiting colonial claims to its fixity and closure. This is what I imagine decoloniality as: the anarrangement of imperial settlement, the queering of sure boundaries, the haunting of a metaphysics of presence, the wild howling God that will not allow the village to sleep at night. More critically, the refusal to be fully named, to be fully owned, to be fully captured.

I often think of the phenomenon of the pandemic through (what I call) an autistic politics, which is an aesthetic that commends not looking at things straightforwardly, not returning the anxious gaze of interpersonal connection with one’s gaze, but looking-away-at things, looking at things slant. Just enough for the thing in question to betray the ecstasy of its becoming hiding behind the guise of being.

If you look at the virus, if you look at the pandemic, you might see/imagine it as a slave ship pulling up to the shores of modernity—just like those slave ships pulled up at the inception of our industrialized global context. Slave ships pulled up to the shores of Africa. Now there are ontological slave ships pulling up to the shores of modern civilization, and they are demanding surrender of some kind. It’s a siege. They are troubling the territoriality of the human.

This brings us to the worldly practice I call making sanctuary, which is about sitting within the cracks of time. Making sanctuary is a chronofeminist refusal of straightforward time, situating ourselves in failure, in disability or cripistemologies and cripontologies, decentering ourselves in research modalities, and becoming lost. Yes, the relentlessly smooth and furious autobahn of time hides seditious pockets, leakages, eddies, shadows, and fugitive temporalities. I think we need to cultivate ways—festive and bacchanalian—that help us convene a struggle within those paraontological spaces, those off-track pockets of possibility.

So, I’m really exploring making sanctuary as a form of posthumanist, post-anthropocentric sociomateriality—a research that invites us to get lost. Getting lost is privileging the furniture in the room where you might seek to conduct interviews with human subjects. Getting lost is denaturalizing data as a (violent) re-inscription of human centrality and to actually bring in the voices of the world when we make claims about the world. Getting lost is becoming-animal. I think something happens to us when we are met by
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the monstrosity of the wilds that we’ve tried to shut off in the bid to be civil citizens. Something meets us, and then new temporalities are born in the middle.

Gabrielle: I know that you’re inviting people into these inquiries through courses, programs, and conversations. What are you learning and seeing about how people are meeting these ideas and practices—where are you seeing openings, and where are you seeing obstacles? What’s the spectrum of how this is landing in people?

Báyò: This is a moment of joy and also great humility. It is shocking how powerful this feels—meeting people where they are and, with the spiritual-pedagogical generosity of postactivism, allowing something in their bones to sing out melodies of relief. Why relief? I think social movements for justice are stuck in a politics that is largely dedicated to—one might even say fixated with or entirely addicted to—seeking recognition. And I say this not to dismiss that politics: we do need a politics of recognition and a politics of critique. Minoritarian bodies do need a politics that calls out imperial and oppressive structures. We need that. We could use as much support as we can get, you know.

But over time, the gains of critique tend to become the gains of the critiqued, and the epistemologies we critique in the world start to become the ground upon which we seek to stabilize our own feet. It is like screaming for everyone to be “quiet” in a library: there’s something about the performativity of resistance that drags along that which it resists. If you lean on a wall for a long time, you’d take some of its shape. The chef kneads the dough but is also kneaded by the dough. Like Robert Johnson trading his soul with the legendary trickster at a crossroads for the irresistibly sensuous sounds his divinely tuned guitar went on to produce, the devil lives between the lines, in the details, or—should I say—at the chiasmus. Something gives. Sooner than later, the struggle for justice habituates us into silos of outrage that become part of the vast sprawl of the status quo we want to transform. Many might insist that resistance is all we have and that there’s nothing more, nothing else—and that to speak about the limitations of resistance at a time when it feels most urgent to perform is a form of philosophical sophistry or “spiritual bypass.” This is because they conceive responsivity as the call-and-response dynamic where a rigid and unchanging line that flows from a predetermined notion of accountability on one end to a lackadaisical apathy on the other is the menu of responses available, and the troubling goings-on around them is the call. But I resist this ontological closure, this finality of things, this scarcity of power. It cannot be that the only way to conceive accountability in these moments is to “resist”—and I say this knowing that resistance can take many forms, but that it is also not an ontologically pure category to itself. What is lost in the overwhelm of “fight-back,” what is often not noticed, is that the tensions of push and pull often reproduce realities and subjectivities beyond the imperatives of resistance, as is the case in the incident of Samudra-mathan, an episode in Hindu mythology: the churning of an ocean of milk by oppositional forces (devas and asuras) struggle with Vasuki the king of serpents or Naga wrapped around a pole at the heart of the conflict … a pole that extends deep into the ocean) creates an ocean of curds. An “ocean of curds” feels like a very potent metaphor to think with, and especially to think about the intra-molecular exchanges and material porosity between apparent polarities.

I think many people are sensing this but are going through the motions. They’d rather do as they are told or act as they are expected to act—if only to get by. Somewhere in the screaming silences of privacy, they understand that their side and the “other side” are stuck in a feedback system that heightens their sense of carcerality. As such, we need a break. We need a politics committed to breaks. Cracks. We need something different. Elizabeth Grosz, inspired by Gilles Deleuze, might call this something a supplementary
“politics of imperceptibility”; and Timothy Morton might think of it as the vocation of the “hyposubject,” beneath the subject. I think Ben Okri once referred to it as an “existential creativity.” Earl Lovelace, the Trinidadian author, on the other hand, spoke about it as “bacchanal aesthetics”—an unafraid invitation to appropriate the methodologies of the captured slaves to convene a new ecosystem of response-ability.

How do we make room for novelty? How do we access different temporalities, different notions of the future that are not premised on unbounded continuity and the supremacy of the human? How do we access these things? My understanding is that thinking with disability, failure, or what I call generative incapacitation is an example of how “novelty” happens. These are openings. Ontological expansions of sitting within those moments, meeting within those moments, enable us to be met by things that exceed us. I feel invited to think postactivism through disability scholarship, through cybernetic theories of embodiment, through wounds, through material ecocriticisms and posthumanisms, and through sociomateriality as an invitation to decenter the researcher.

And how all of this is being received is very surprising. People who are dedicated to anti-racism work, social justice work, people who are on different points of the terrain of contemporaneous politics dedicated to being right—that has given us cancel culture—are finding space for new reflections, new diffractions, new possibilities for speaking. And that is very heartwarming. I’m really excited about what this means and promises for work going forward.

Gabrielle: Could you say more about postactivism?
Bayò: If you think of history as a straight line, such a venture has material consequences. This idea that history is a straight, unforgiving line terraforms the planet in particular ways, in constitutionally exclusive ways. I’m not saying it’s bad. I’m not saying thinking about the future in the ways that we’ve learned to think about homogeneous clock time is wrong. I’m not saying any of that, but I’m saying it has effects. It has exclusions, it has illusions, it has invisible migrations. It is subsidized by certain lives and bodies. And now we’re witnessing or “with-nessing” an insurgency of those bodies, of the appropriated, of the stolen, in real and more than metaphorical ways. Bones sprouting in Brazil through sedimented layers of colonial establishment and settlements. Cracks appearing everywhere. Researchers recovering bones of slaves from hundreds of years ago. It is as if modernity cannot hold its own promise. That static surface is breaking open under the weight of something else. One might say that postactivism is tuning ourselves to these events.

If you think of history as a straight line and you run into cracks eventually, what do you do with those cracks? Because the cracks are not just stoppages or pauses in continuity, they are palimpsests—a layered terrain of dense text resisting the command that the world dance to our whips demanding intelligibility. Applied to temporality, this framing of discontinuity (the discontinuity afforded us by exposure) allows us to notice that time and life and death are doing more things than history can accommodate. The Anthropocene is a creature of linear histories. It’s dedicated to fixing the future and sometimes paying some attention to the past, but I don’t think that’s quite enough.

We need a different terrain and an aesthetic of acting that is not reducible to creating spaces of safety or addressing recalcitrant futures that are not quite amenable or malleable to the images and visions we have of what we would like the future to look like. This is what I call the Afrocene. Not the African Anthropocene but the Afrocene—an Atlantic phenomenon that is about oceanic bones, about hybrid creatures, about archetypes and gods, and about weird creatures in their ongoingness. The Afrocene gives birth to postactivism. The Afrocene is about getting lost and veering away from the highway of
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history. Like those old Negro spirituals, the Afroocene invites us to wade in the water and to perform hiding as a political fugitivity, a collective exploration of that crack in the fabric that refuses to be smoothened over by the beguiling promise of arrival. The call to the Afroocene, while inspired by the anarranging turbulence of Blackness along Afro-Caribbean tracks of capture, enslavement, and queer survival, is not about African repatriation, or about paying us what is owed us, or about blaming the villainous West, or mocking the dopaminergic/somnambulistic circuits that drug conscientious recycling activists and environmentalists into thinking their green futures are actually “saving” the planet. It is the errancy of accountability, the underground of agency, the promiscuity of history, the risky politics of “speaking truth to power,” the refusal to dismiss magic as if it were an inferior epistemology to “science.” The Afroocene invites a planetary carnival, a trans-local festival of listening deeply to different kinds of inquiry. Postactivism, in a very uneasy nutshell, is the idea that there are others in the room and it’s not simply about us. It is the diffraction of agency, where transformation and change are not situated within human doings or human society. It is the notion that there are aliens in the room, and we are those aliens as well. And so, we have to make do with a world that isn’t central, available, readable, and intelligible at all times to human commentators or human researchers. What that terrible task of postactivism does is to allow us to be met by a world that exceeds us, allows our anxieties to cool off into different kinds of feelings and affects, allows us to open ourselves to the markings of stray, bovine, slothful, slimy, ephemeral creatures, earthkin, and oddkin—the same ones we protect ourselves from behind our spacesuits calibrated to extract data from the world around us. A sociomateriality of matrixial subjectivities, infectious affectations, and new imaginations. Such a vocation may not be amenable or available for the ethnographic algorithms that operate within UNESCO, or the UN, or even the IPCC, but I think it is an example of errancy, a speculative experimenting that allows us to do other things that might co-create the world differently or at least has the potential of mobilizing our heavy bodies to the cavernous summits where gods, microbes, and humans might meet to think together about Hathor’s rage.

Gabrielle: From this place of postactivism, dare you describe futures to step into? Or is the work right now to stay off the highway of the future and in the cracks? Do you dare seed principles, qualities, or even ephemeral textures about futures we could step toward?

Báyò: No one has framed that question to me as delicately as you just did. Most people hear what I have to say and immediately jump to the question, “so tell us about 2050—what does the world look like 50 years or 70 years from now?” I just thank you for really listening. Because, yes, dare I speak about the future after speaking about such dense materialities that decenter human confidence? I will not presume that anticipation is impossible. I mean, I could spend a lot of time reminiscing about 20 years from now, looking back into the past to see a future to come, and maybe imagining a global order that is not divided by nation-states or a world where money isn’t fiat currency or something like that. But I would still be thinking with/in the temporalities that I’m framed by because, as I have said earlier, we don’t think independently. We think with the times. We think within ecologies. We think within trans-affective materialities.

The 1950s US vision of the future, of the 2000s, which we are now in, looks a lot like the 1950s. It was flying cars and flying trains, space portholes, ray-guns, and huge shoulder pads with chrome finishes. It looked like the 1950s. It doesn’t look like Twitter, social media, fascism, and the world that we have and live in and experience today. So, I don’t give a lot of my time to thinking about what the world might look like as much as I
give my time to the work of situating ourselves within what I might call the *politics of surprise*. Because postactivism is the invitation to be humble about what we know and to do some work in allowing ourselves to be met by new visions that might be glimpse-able but probably not fully articulable. They will be glimpsed through cracks that are constantly emerging through the fabric of our sociality because the heart of postactivism is the idea that the way we meet the crisis, and the way we respond to the crisis, are part of the crisis.

It bears mentioning again and again that what we do when we say we are thinking about the future or when we say we are solving our problems is this: we are materializing within a firmament of bodily production and sticky ethico-epistemo-ontologies that bend our bodies into the shape of tautological imaginations. Instead of being “free agents”—you know, autonomous liberal actors who can choose for themselves what they want—we seem to act as splotches of ecological intensities or irrupptions from rhizomatic fields of co-becoming. I am sure you understand I do not mean to suggest we are mindless automatons or projections of an amorphous hive-mind with no agency, which is what one might come to if you think about freedom only through the polar arguments and exhausted conversation between “free will” and brute determinism. What I am on about is a bit more nuanced. Without getting lost in the weeds, I am saying that by the force of our great and good intentions to address climate change, to address racial injustice, to address police brutality, to meet the injustices of the past, we often reiterate and reinscribe these injustices in different forms. Solutions become problems masquerading as messianic interruptions.

What I think we need to seed are “small” acts of prophecy. Prophecy is not about predicting what might yet come. It is the reconvening of time, putting to work of its presumed eliteness, a denaturalizing of time as material and political effect and as somatic-semiotic arrangement. In such a convening, our imbrications and tentacular commitments to deconstructed time become visible. We can then look again, trace out new lines and new moves. Yes, prophecy is the invitation to look again. To reevaluate the ordinary. To re-relate with the things that we’ve categorized and objectified as dead, mute, and instrumental to human purposes. It’s only until we refabricate or reconvene the network that nests human becoming, only until we do that might we be able to glimpse new things. Visions and imaginations of the future are not human phenomena, they are phenomena of ecologies. So, we need to shapeshift. We need to get lost. We need to find new relationships with things around us. And maybe we might then find some confidence in speaking about the years to come. About the worlds to come. Until then, I’m quite shy about doing it.

**Gabrielle:** Are there practices that you offer when working with people? Invitations into shapeshifting, fugitivity, getting lost, and making sanctuary?

**Báyò:** It depends on the context. If I’m speaking online, there are practices and invitations that I make, for instance, about letting ourselves be mispronounced. This is inspired by what I call the *gift of mispronunciation*. Something to hack the idea that identity is pre-relational and pre-encounter. When we think of identity as categorical and as independent of what the world is doing, what other humans and nonhumans alike are fabricating, we risk running into what we’ve already started to create in today’s saturated media landscapes: the impossibility of expression. This is a form of “pixelation”—this is computational capitalism at work.

If identity (what I am) is reducible to my experiences, fully determined by my creativity, and *this* … prior to the heat of social encounters, prior to the molecular exchanges that thwart presence in an ongoing way, where I have seemingly figured out who I am
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with, say, new pronouns, and where a sense of being offended might lead me to be angry with you for not subscribing to my mode of framing myself, then identity (now rendered as essence or individualist) is performed as something potentially capturable. The worlds that I come from teach, in some humble way, that we meet ourselves in the compost heat of encounter. Sure, the Yorubas speak about “ori,” one’s destiny, as something that is largely pre-ordained. But there are errant traditions within its fields of mattering and oracular traditions that lean toward the fluency of processual theologies and posthumanist becoming. I like to think and play within those spaces. From there, one might say that every encounter is an altar requiring sacrifice, even if that sacrifice were just a tiny morsel of the images we’ve cultivated. Sitting at the feet of my father while he consumed a bowl of pounded yam and egusi soup, I learned that one doesn’t finish one’s dish: one must leave a little for the gods if you will. If you’re complete prior to encounter, then you’re capturable, you’re intelligible to the nation-state—you’re subjugated, and you are a “subject.”

The invitation of fugitivity is to flee identity as a pure category. To think of identity as nomadicity. What does this look like in practice? Well, I have been known to invite others to try speaking my Yoruba name through their anxious and sweaty concerns that they might offend me by missing a syllable or inventing entirely new ones.

In workshop settings, I have other kinds of invitations. They mostly have to do with naming as well, but there are also rituals that affirm and invite us to pay attention to the voices around us. There are so many of these rituals—which are not stable archives in my mind. Feet-washing ceremonies. Stringing ceremonies where we create a cat’s cradle meshwork of stories as a communal process of threading and tracing the genealogies that have created presence (another way of deconstructing the subject and the isolated self). But the most impactful practices emerge as clusters of the ethical work of making sanctuary, here conceived as sociomaterial research, as post-anthropocentric research that invites people to go out and speak with trees and to gather around communally and share their experiences and create questions from those feelings of lostness, from their encounters with the wilds. It might sound voodoo-ish or new age-y to some people, but I think the practice is to break the spell of independence, of gilded interiority, and to invite a certain kind of playful experimentation with loss, with failure, and with becoming.

The framework is not a pure and already complete archive of things to do. It’s not a fait accompli. I’m always excited to hear what people are doing with what I call making sanctuary, what it instigates within a field that has been conditioned and acculturated for so long to think in terms of human centrality and the salvation of the political left or the political right. I get emails all the time from people experimenting with what “sanctuary” might mean for them.

Gabrielle: What is an edge that you are on? What is your unknown?
Báyò: We are a consortium—a federation of friends, thinkers, artists, and activists—gathering around the concept of postactivism as if we are in a post-apocalyptic classroom and seeking to see what it can do. This end-of-time “classroom” is creating new forms of trans-local experiments. It is creating think groups and spin-away-hubs and courses. It is becoming a transdisciplinary opening within more conventional educational contexts. Professors are sending me assignments of students exploring what postactivism might contribute to these moments. It is doing good work.

It’s difficult for me to explore what might be the next thing or an unknown because I’m feasting right now in a very bacchanalian space. While the space includes uncertainty, I think I’m captivated by the food in front of me. The complete vision is not entirely...
In Conversation with Gabrielle Donnelly

up to me. If I may speak about this theory-making *bacchusphere* as “a vision,” I would quickly add that it is not entirely left to my imagination—and thankfully so. Perhaps, I might say that an edge for me is that there are many people who feel that this thing I call postactivism gets in the way of the urgent work of critique. That it sidesteps speaking truth to power, being accountable, and raising one’s voice. I understand where that is coming from; there’s nothing to be dismissed about that. But I must also insist that the will to speak truth to power tends to gloss over the fact that “voice” is not a property of the subject: voice is an intensity of the field. I agree with Fred Moton when he says one does not speak truth to power because speaking itself is the software of the imperial. It matters little what the content of speaking is. Voice is always more than the subject.

My son, a verbal four-year-old autistic boy at this time, struggled with speech at first. In those moments before he began to string repetitive sentences together, I often wondered about the power of the nonverbal and its constitutional refusal to be part of the project of the well-thought-out. By privileging voice, privileging presence, and privileging recognition (I say this so many times that I sound like a broken record, but it needs to be said), we often reinscribe those settlement epistemologies that we are so desperately trying to leave behind. Speaking about edges, I have encountered complaints from some who think that Black people have tried for generations to be acknowledged as humans and that the way posthumanism moves the goalposts subverts intergenerational struggles for recognition. They say, how dare you shift the party so quickly! *We just arrived here in the room!* I don’t know if that’s entirely true. On the one hand, the “human” is a posthumanist production. No goal posts are moved anywhere. The work of decentering the human is the work of tossing out all that subsidizes humanity’s claims to exceptionality. On the other hand, I think the colonial project of modernity needs an outlier: it needs its others. It needs props. It will need something to show to the proper citizens that says, “if you don’t stick by our rules, you will be like ‘them.’” It needs a “them” to create an “us.” So, I don’t know if it’s true that we (Black and minoritarian bodies) have “arrived” or could ever arrive under the same circumstances. But I understand that critique and posthumanisms are subject to that critique.

To be clear, I am not thinking alone within the fields of posthumanism. The work I feel called to is speculative, risky, experimental, Indigenous, and animist. It is a diffractive reading of an assemblage that is also full of shadows, one of which I’ve just spoken of.

**Gabrielle:** What are some of the obstacles you encounter in this work?

**Báyò:** I’m thinking of a Chinese proverb, which is also a curse. The first part of it is, may you live in interesting times. The second is may you be seen (by the emperor). And the final one, the most curs-iest of them all, is may you get what you want. They are curses because they remind us that what we want may be engineered by desirous libidinal flows that exceed our subjectivity and that even speaking about “harm” and “care” are not easily reducible to our individual isolated cognitive productions. There are principalities and powers at work that exceed individuals. So, I find that there is a lot of pushback from the position of the citizen—whether it’s a conscientious subject who is fighting for racial or social justice or even the person who does not want to hear about social justice at all. The position, comfort, and luxury of the modern citizen are perhaps the greatest obstacle to an emancipatory politics of animist persuasions.

**Gabrielle:** What encouragement or orientation do you provide for people to build the stamina to stay in the work of getting lost, to not just consume this work and move on?

**Báyò:** When I invited thousands of people to the last course, *We Will Dance with Mountains,* I stressed within my invitation that the course was not about what one might eat. It was
(and is) also a matter of what one might be eaten by. This turns unilinear consumption on its head. There is a Rainer Maria Rilke notion that positions man as defeated again and again by things that exceed him. To break into new vistas and new futures, we need not only to consume things but also to be consumed by things that exceed us. It will take the working together of God, man, beast, energy, archetype, story, and imagination for the world to re-world itself.

It often shocks people when I insist that we’re not going to get this right. We will not arrive intact. Our job is to fall to the earth. It carries the understanding that we’re in this intergenerational conversation where we must make room for failure to visit. We must have spaces for failure to visit us because we’re not going to arrive and finally nail this thing or finally become “woke.” We won’t become complete with any concept, workshop, with any movement, with any way of speaking. As such, this postactivism I play with is already an invitation into a deeper form of humility that prepares people for the kind of work I feel is needed at this time. If we think of the work of this time as cumulative—a race to gather new tools, to string together new books, to assemble new ways of speaking, and populate our workshops with new rituals, then we run the risk of creating a tautological economy where we can speak glowingly about entanglement and still be quite enraptured and fixed in pre-relationally categorical economies.

My sister, what I think we need is a break. This break is not going to be engineered by us or by our genius. The world will have to belch or gasp and move us in ways that are quite unexpected—and sometimes radically uncomfortable—before we are able to see new possibilities that we can celebrate.

This conversation has been edited for length and clarity. For more information about the work of Báyò Akómoláfé, visit https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/.