

The Philosophy of the Sea: History, Economics and Reason in the Caribbean Basin

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On the other side you could make out the groves of the banana trees in the moonlight, the sad swamps, and the phosphorescent line of the Caribbean on the horizon. Santiago Nasar pointed to an intermittent light at sea and told us that it was the soul in torment of a slave ship that had sunk with a cargo of blacks from Senegal across the main harbor mouth at Cartagena de Indias. It wasn't possible to think that his conscience was bothering him.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*.

In his book, *Other Ways of Knowing*, John Broomfield states that the proof of the superiority of modern Western civilization is said to be its possession of the historical method, along with the associated social and natural sciences, which gives the West the capacity to accumulate knowledge systematically. Earlier humans lacked this method. They were prehistoric. "Thus," Broomfield informs us,

our limited capacity to comprehend their experience, resulting from the limitations of the historical method, can be advanced as proof of their inferiority. They failed to produce the historical documentation we need. Our civilization's construction of reality, our way of knowing, like that of every other civilization is limited. It is an approximation, a crude sketch map to one section of the cosmos, and we must not mistake it for the cosmos itself. It is but a semblance of reality.... All explanatory systems necessarily distort.¹

For people of African descent, this distortion took on the rigor of science. From 1429 till present day, Europeans, who did not understand the languages and philosophical systems of Africans, like Conrad in *Heart of Darkness*, dismissed both as a babble giving rise to the colonizer's logic: "These natives are not intelligent, we do not understand their languages."² The primary reason for this oversight was, of course, economic. It helped Europe and the European diaspora to have a comfortable headstart in the race for a capitalist domination of the world through slavery and colonialism. As Ned Thomas puts it:

There is no way of recounting the horrors of slavery whether on the 'middle passage' between Africa and the New World or on the plantations themselves without, a deep self-disgust at our whole European civilisation; for the working and living conditions, the deliberate sundering of family ties, the flogging, castrations, mutilations, were not occasional atrocities but an essential part of a commercial system with its centres in Europe, a system that moreover was defended on grounds of specious racial theory by ignorant intellectuals.³

After slavery, whose economic impetus and psychological traumas are still evident in the Caribbean, an axle of trade between Europe and Africa and the Americas for more than four hundred years, the Africans who were translocated to the diaspora and who had been educated away from themselves, their history, languages, philosophical systems, now desperate for power, after emancipation and independence, started perpetuating the same philosophy of subjugation and mimicry forged by a colonial mentality on their fellow Africans. The first generation of scholars

produced by this system actually predicated their authority in the field on their knowledge of European philosophy. Somewhere in that mimicry was the belief or illusion that in some mysterious and magical way, they could think their way out of the existential mess that Europe had put them in through a philosophical system that is intrinsically European. As Derek Walcott puts it, almost all members of the new made-by-Europe elite, comprising of ministers, civil servants and intellectuals indulged in this Caribbean hara-kiri humanism:

Academics crouched like rats
 Listening to tambourines
 Jackals and rodents feathering their holes...
 Geryons gnawing their own children.
 These are the dividers,
 They encompass our history...
 In their hands is...the future,
 they measure the skull with callipers...
 They measure them carefully
 as others once measured the teeth
 of men and horses, they measure and divide...
 They are the saints of self torture...
 Their vision blurs...⁴

But all this was soon to change. From the seventies through the eighties to the nineties, propelled by revolutions such as the Civil rights movements and Frantz Fanon's groundbreaking, politically-confrontational, work, and the institutionalization of Africana studies in the universities in the USA, a different, interrogative philosophical sensibility emerged in the scholarship of several African scholars and teachers from the Caribbean chief among who are Lewis Gordon and Paget Henry, among others.⁵ Apparently the European definition of philosophy had been found out to be not only inadequate but also to constitute, more perniciously, a tool for controlling resources that should go into the development of the discipline in order to embrace and teach to the world, the philosophical systems of non-European peoples. We must recall, with some measure of mirth today, that from the 17th to the 19th centuries, Hegel, Locke, Montesquieu, Carlyle, Hume, Voltaire, Kant, and Jefferson pronounced, with ultimate certainty and intellectual authority that the Negro was genetically incapable of literary expression. Do these Negroes also include the Nobel Laureates: Wole Soyinka, Derek Walcott, Naguib Mafouz, and Toni Morrison? There was now a yawning need to redefine what philosophy actually means and its political function in human society. Particularly important was the need to explain to the intellectual Cyclops of the West that philosophy, as Europe and her diaspora understand it, exists as a text-book bound body of knowledge, locked up in print, and to which human beings within the society have access to mainly in the university or other institutions of higher learning whereas in Asia, Africa and the rest of the pre-positivist, pre-Renaissance, non-European world, philosophy existed as orature. Like oral poetry, philosophy is:

a phrase men [and women] pass from hand to mouth.
 From hand to mouth, across the centuries,
 the bread that lasts when systems have decayed,
 when, in his forest of barbed -wire branches,
 a prisoner circles chewing the one phrase
 whose music will last longer than the leaves...
 [until the] memory needs nothing to repeat.⁶

The political imperative of philosophy as a field of reconstructive thinking, a weapon of resistance and re-education, a tool for the regeneration of an enslaved people's psyche and the redemption of their cultural intelligence is eloquently articulated in the introduction to *From Africa to Zen: An Invitation to World Philosophy*. The editors, Robert Solomom and Kathleen Higgins, put the premise and thrust of my argument in this whole essay in proper perspective when they ask:

When we discuss modern philosophy, must it be defined by the latest books and ideas on the same old subjects out of Oxford or Berkeley, or are there other sources of contemplation and wisdom, lacking academic credentials perhaps but closer to the pulse of the human heart? What about...New Age philosophy? What about liberation theology? What about various folk (they mean indigenous) philosophies, passed from generation by way of myths and stories, admonitions and advice? What about the philosophy of multiculturalism...? What counts as philosophy today is very much at issue, but this should not be seen as a crisis but rather as fruitful and exciting opening and an opportunity for other traditions to come spilling in with their ideas and influences....That doesn't mean, as some would fear, that we have to jettison Socrates, Descartes, Kant and Hegel and the wisdom of the West, nor does it mean that that we should throw up our hands, refrain from criticism, and agree that every idea is as good as any other. What it does mean is that we are now ready to open our eyes and our ears to voices and ideas that have for too long been excluded or pushed to the margins of philosophy. They are demanding to be heard, and in their own terms.⁷

In the rest of the essay I will focus on the philosophical concept known in the West as phenomenology and illustrate why pivotal figures such as G.W.F. Hegel and Edmund Husserl never really fully understood what it means or how it functions outside of the ivory tower as an act of community and a tool for social, spiritual and political engineering of diverse peoples of the world. Using Maurice Merleau-Ponty's redefinition of the phenomenon, I will then show, from an African and African diasporic epistemic and performative perspective, how this concept is best understood not through abstract thinking or intellectual sumo wrestling or literary textbook-bound knowledge but through the experiential, physical dimension of embodied performance as obtains in many African and African diasporic working class, religious, social and political communities. I will highlight how the body itself, in African and African diasporic cultures, functions as a somatogenic instrument as well as a site of multiple discourses which absorbs and replays, like music recorded on vinyl, epistemologies of faith and power grooved into it by history. An Igbo proverb states that when we dance we express who we were, who we are, and who want to be. Time is compressed and telescoped teleologically to contain and express the past, the present and the future in one fluid kinaesthetic moment. My central purpose in this deconstructive exercise is to metabolize transcendental phenomenology, by demonstrating how this abstract, but universal, notion makes its appearance, bodily and physically, as a trope of spiritual and political resistance, in African diasporic ritual and festival theatre. I will do this with examples of semiotically well-researched religious, social and communal performances from the USA, Haiti, Jamaica, Trinidad, Bahia and Cuba.

The Link Between Philosophy, Faith, and Performance

The ultimate hubris of Western philosophy, in my thinking, is the arrogance, of course based on science, that you can separate faith from reason or replace faith with reason. You cannot. At least not within an African or African diasporic ontology. Reason and faith are inseparable in religious societies that are not yet totally atomized into white-picket-fence individualism. Chukwuma Azuonye, a Nigerian/Igbo professor of Linguistics and Cultural Studies at the University of Massachusetts has just had a kidney transplant after waiting for ten years and having dialysis three or four times a week. When he euphorically talked to me on the phone about the success of the transplant, he said: “This is a miracle. The more I see the wonders of science the more I believe in God. Doctors are a proof that God created us in his own image! You can feel the power of God just as you step out of the operating theatre!” For Azuonye, a religious faith in God does not conflict with progressive scientific reasoning.

I know that our new, agnostic, Westernized middle class niggerati in the academy will frown at this argument and perhaps daub it with the tar of black essentialism. But on closer scrutiny they will discover that no resistance to white oppression by people of African descent - from Touissant L’Overture through Frantz Fanon, the Harlem Renaissance, the Civil Rights Movement, and Bob Marley to Nelson Mandela! – has been conceived, orchestrated or executed without an ontology of collectivity. In other words, each movement has been propelled and sustained by a metaphysical thinking that privileges continuity and community: a connection between the living, the dead and the unborn, in other words, the past, the present and the future; all linked by a practical, intelligent understanding and deployment of phenomenology as an operational political and performative tool. This proposition, I feel, even for those who have read lot of Foucault, including *Discipline and Punish*, needs a little archeology!

On the African continent, “life” or “being,” is a *performed* and *collective* activity. Thought is validated not only by writing but also by action, symbolic action. The regulation of feelings and the perceptions people have about themselves, their universe and their sense of communality are formulated into oral and performative structures, semiological sign systems, whose meanings to the individual and entire community are re-enacted through proverbs, myths, ceremonies, rituals, festivals, theatrical and political performances, a process by which complex abstract and philosophical ideas are expressed and made manifest experientially through dance, song, mime, movement, processions, spectacle and drama.. These ritualistically embodied and semiological structures which made, and still make, it possible for African people to perform “themselves” and what “they have become” in the Diaspora were *reasoned* out centuries ago by our forefathers as ritual and aesthetic infrastructure which aid spiritual and psychological survival in any circumstance: home, exile, migration, dispersal, captivity, slavery, colonialism, neocolonialism and globalization.

In Yoruba metaphysical thinking, ...all life emanates from an extra-human source, to which all life returns in a perpetual circle...In popular thinking, this source is metaphorically conceptualized as *orun* – heaven, the abode of gods and ancestors. After the death of human beings, their experiences and knowledge gained in life are stored in the source of existence to be used by other living beings. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to maintain contact with this source to partake of its energy and knowledge. By anthropomorphizing different aspects of existence, a pantheon is created as a pedagogical means to bridge the gap between thinkers and the rest of men i.e. the world.⁸

The spiritual, abstract, philosophical concepts described above, constitute a significant aspect of the core of the African cultural intelligence that was translocated bodily, i.e. phenomenologically, as unwritten theories of performance, via the Middle Passage, to the brave New World. It is through the medium of proverbs, oral poetry, rap, incantation, storytelling, dance, theatre, festival, ritual, the plastic arts that these concepts become manifest as transcendental phenomenology in action - to both initiates and outsiders. What makes this process of embodiment, bonding, identity-creation, translocation and replication of the forms possible is not fiction or reason but faith, or at least a dream of faith, in the belief systems and performance structures in which they were encoded and the human beings and human communities in whom these concepts are embodied. As Kacke Gotick puts it:

Any definition of drama, based on mimesis only, proves invalid. When Keir Elam, for instance, in *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, arrives at the conclusion that “The founding principle of dramatic representation, then, is the fiction of the presence of a world known to be hypothetical”; [it should be noted that] this is not true of all traditional African drama. Instead a new definition is needed, which includes enactments that are at the same time presentational and representational, that are efficacious, and that are conceived of as a duality by the appropriate spectators, comprising reality and fiction simultaneously.⁹

The reality mentioned above is a spiritual reality. It is older than Western science. Its function is survival and not merely subsistent survival, but something beyond mere animal and biological survival: spiritual survival structured and ritualized as performance. It is this holistic and transcendental knowledge of performance as ritual, art, theatre, communal therapy, faith and philosophy that Africans brought with them to the brave New World.

Equally, it is very important to note that the Africans who survived the Middle Passage were physically and spiritually, the strongest of the race. They arrived in the New World not only as resistant triumphs to the unnamable horrors done to the human body and spirit in the castles and ships, but also as living, thinking embodiments of ritual, medicinal, agricultural, political, musical, artistic, organizational, philosophical ideas and knowledges from old and complex cultures in Africa such as the Yorubas, Igbos, Ewe, Dogon, Wolof, Zulu, Kikuyu, among many others.. While their captors thought that these Africans were mere properties, acquisitions with an extraordinary capacity for manual labour and a unprecedented capability to adapt or acclimatize to a hostile landscape, the Africans, as history has come to reveal, were actually mobile libraries of their culture’s total intelligence. It is therefore because ignorance wears the mask of arrogance that for hundred years these Africans were treated like recreational facilities, their bodies and sexuality raped and abused by their masters without a cognitive understanding of the spiritual discourses, untranslatable knowledges and performative literacies that their indigenous cultures had coded into these same bodies and which, in the fullness of time, would transform these societies forever.

The physical, spiritual, creative, resilient cultural software described above explains why the Africans were able to negotiate new identities (USA), syncretize other religions (Haiti), subvert predatory histories (Jamaica), hybridize hegemonic cultures (Bahia), and deploy liberation theories of resistance (Martinique) in the Caribbean and the rest of the Diaspora. What they came with from Africa helped them to invent new social, economic and artistic strategies with which they survived four hundred years of slavery. After emancipation, these Africans produced some of the most important inventions in use in the USA and the rest of the modern/postmodern world today.¹⁰ In the performing arts, as Joseph Roach has argued in several essays and his magisterial book, *Cities of*

the Dead, African creativity is central to the aesthetics of contemporary Caribbean, North and South American popular culture, from work songs, through negro spirituals, to the blues, reggae, calypso, jazz and contemporary hip-hop which has morphed from **Black Noise** to **Global Noise**.¹¹ Persistent in these evolutions are indigenous African philosophies of art, spirituality, religion and concepts of the creative process as a functional, interrogative and subversive body of knowledge. Did the Europeans really understand who or what they were importing? And will they ever understand the complex epistemological constructs that were translocated to the New World. Wole Soyinka puts it succinctly in *Death and the King's Horseman*, "The white slavers came and went. They took away the heart of our race. They bore away the mind and the muscle of our race. The city fell and was rebuilt. The city fell and our people trudged through mountains and forest to found a new home..."¹²

African Diasporic Ritual Performances as Rigorous Science: A Redefinition of Transcendental Phenomenology

In an exceptionally incisive paper presented at the first Caribbean Philosophical Association in Barbados in April, 2004, a young European-American scholar, Kenneth Knies, argued that recent attempts made by his African and African diasporic intellectual mentors: Valentin Mudimbe, W. E. B. Du Bois, Frantz Fanon, Lewis Gordon, and Paget Henry, among others, to think beyond the reach of imperial Europe have generated new forms of systematic inquiry that signal the effort toward a new kind of post-European science. These new forms of inquiry, he emphasizes, have a kinship to the dynamics of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology and are ways of thinking; part of actual disciplines that have recently achieved institutionalization within the US academy via African Studies, Ethnic Studies and post-colonial theory. These interrogative and deconstructive fields of inquiry, he stresses, contain an animating telos that point toward a radical rethinking of theory itself, a rethinking capable of drawing science beyond a myopic closure that we can call "European":

Husserl makes a *dejure* distinction between the theoretical attitude, which is essential to European humanity, and the mythico-practical attitude, which belongs to non-European peoples. This latter attitude, no matter its discoveries, does not aspire toward pure theory, and so cannot internally motivate transcendental phenomenology. For Husserl, Europe is the name for that unique historicity that departs from the natural and mythical attitudes, and has its guiding light in the pursuit of theory.... How can Husserl, normally so guarded against accepting unfounded claims, possibly know that there is no telos of theoretical reason animating non-European humanity? What kind of intuition is this?¹³

The speculative intuition, referred to above, has a basis in European misunderstandings and deliberate distortions of other people's history and cultural intelligence. It is the foundation of the theory of race against which we are all butting our heads and brains today. In fact this philosophical notion of being (us) and nothingness (the other) can be traced to, among many other European philosophers, Hegel, who believed until his death that Africa contributed nothing to human history. Husserl, like Hegel, spent the greater part of his career trying to explain what *transcendental phenomenology* means and, in my view, never really came to grasps with what the concept really means to non-European peoples of the world. His problem or mental block was that he based his analysis on the positivist premise that *phenomenology* could be understood and explained through rational thought, verbal discourse or typographical literacy. It cannot. Reading Husserl over and over again

can never compare with an initiation into *Candomble* in Bahia or *Santeria* in Cuba or *Voudoun* in Haiti. Phenomenology, as a *philosophical* and *performative* concept, I contend, can only be fully grasped through action, through a bodily participatory experience as we feel when we take part physically in a ritual, festival, carnival, dance, capoeira.

In fact, ritual performance is scientific. It uses dance movements, sounds, time-tested notes, and the human body, as in a laboratory, to test out the power and efficacy of artistic and semiotic stimuli on human beings and thus create for the individual and society a memory and performance history. Some of the songs we sing at Igbo funerals today, we must bear in mind, have been in the culture for one thousand years. The same notes we intone have passed through the bodies and voices of generations before us. Our ancestors, under the most disciplined circumstances, had experimented with these sounds to find out what effects they will produce on the mood and feelings of the mourners. As with drug therapy, ritual participation, whether at a funeral or carnival, becomes a form of communal therapy, a scientific, time-tested methodology of healing the psyche, constructing identity, renewing the strength in the individual to face the world through bonding structured as a bodily, not abstract, experience. With this comes political consciousness, faith and belief in one's society. What this then produces is a sense of release, ecstasy, self confidence, fulfillment, belonging, identity, fellow-feeling, community, not alienation as is the case in many parts of the sedentary, atomized West.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology departs from the transcendental phenomenology most associated with Edmund Husserl in that it stresses the embodied nature of human consciousness and views bodily existence as the originating material premise of sense and signification. We sit in a movie theatre, before a television set, or in front of a computer terminal not only as conscious beings but also as carnal beings. Our vision is not abstracted from our bodies or from our other modes of perceptual access to the world...The concreteness of technological "hardware" ...connects with the equal concreteness of our bodily existence and in this regard, the term existential in context refers to perceptual and bodily experience, to a kind of phenomenological materiality.¹⁴

One only needs to look at the couch potatoes and overweight population in the West, particularly the USA where obesity has recently been pronounced a legitimate epidemic, to appreciate the acuity of the observation above. As Sobchack, a North American scholar, goes on to remark: "At this historical moment in our particular society and culture – the USA - the lived body is in crisis."¹⁵ She argues that the body's struggle to assert its gravity, its vital and social investment in concrete life-world inhabited by others is now marked in hysterical and hyperbolic responses to the disembodied effects of electronic representation. How, if I may ask, can reading Hegel and Husserl and the entire corpus of Western philosophy intervene in this casual, progressive atrophy of the human ectoplasm and mind? What, in the West, is the option to the progressive loss of bodily contact, spirituality, bonding and human warmth experienced in ritual communion on the African continent and the diaspora whether it is the rubbing of buttocks in a Trinidad carnival or the grinding of the pelvis in a Brazilian samba or the processions in an Ekpe festival in Ngwaland, the "massing" in an Odo festival in Nsukka or the dances in an Ogun festival in Abeokuta. The role that phenomenology plays in the construction of the transcendental – that which transcends materiality- in the form of choreography, theatrical performance, religious worship, communality, fellow feeling, sharing, extended family systems in Africa and the Diaspora best explains why Burkina Faso, one of the poorest countries in the world has little or no suicides at all, from year to year, whereas Sweden, with one of the highest in come per capita in the world has a 55% suicide

rate all year round. The causes? Nuclear family, individualism, alienation, divorce, boredom, neuroses and suicide or serial murders. Thus,

any phenomenological analysis of the existential relation between human objects and technologies of representation must be semiological and historical even at the microperceptual level. Description must attend both to the particular materiality and modalities through which meanings are signified and to the cultural and historical situations in which materiality and meaning come to cohere in the praxis of everyday life.¹⁶

In the praxis of everyday life, the primary problem that philosophy faces in the West, is that it is trapped in typographical literacy which the West privileges because, again, literacy-based-on-literature and the printed word gives the West an economic advantage and the control of education based on reading and writing. The written text, I need to emphasize, is only one medium, one conduit through which philosophy, a human engagement with deep knowledge manifests itself. Among Native America, Asian, African and Aboriginal cultures, there are at least ten other literacies through which the philosophical constructs of the society are expressed. These are iconographic, kinaesthetic, sonic, calligraphic, proxemic, sartorial, linguistic, gustatory, tactile, olfactory and spiritual literacies. Let me give an example with *sonic* literacy. Among the Yoruba, Kalabari and Igbo peoples of Nigeria, there is a tradition of using drum language to articulate information meant for people who understand this non-verbal, secondary modeling system of communication within the community. The phrasing of these messages are cryptic, poetic and philosophic. These are messages meant to be decoded only by the initiated. When Africans were brought over to the new world, they translocated this sonic intelligence and literacy. That is why the drum was banned in the USA. It afforded the Africans the medium to communicate and express some aspects of their worldview, of which their values, their philosophies of communality and spirituality as part of political agency were intrinsic. After emancipation, these philosophic ideas, stoic as they were, started finding expression through the collective expressions of the spirituals and the more word-driven, individualized expression: the blues. The primary power of the blues is that it became a body of verbalized articulations of those philosophical ideas that characterized the will of the Africans to survive, their notions of the beauty of resistance, of spiritual and physical resilience in a crushing world in which Africans, as slaves, could not own their bodies, emotions or freely express their emotions or thoughts. In the Caribbean, this sonic literacy, transformed into a weapon of cultural and political resistance, manifested itself in reggae, calypso, ska, steel band music and many other musical forms! Drumming as a historically and politically charged meta-language still powers and underscores Rastafarian religious philosophy! “There’s natural mystic flowing through the air, sings Bob Marley, accompanied by the heavy thud of an African drum, “if you listen carefully, now, you will hear!”

To further illuminate the relationship between a pragmatic understanding of phenomenology and the politics of identity, let us turn now to a more immediate and palpable, tactile albeit visual art form, dance, which epitomizes what I mean by kinaesthetic literacy. Most African cultures knew that there are aspects of human feeling, emotion and thought that cannot be easily rendered in speech. What they did was to sculpt these ideas into dance. The dance was then transmitted, as it were, into the body as a site of discourse. The philosophy, let us say, of resilience or beauty or the sublime or transition or life or the meaning of death, or most importantly, identity, was written unto this slate, the body. When the Africans were taken to the new world, where they lost their languages, their names, some of their rituals, their gods, they had one common vocabulary to express those aspects of their individual histories, their meta-languages, chiefly through orature and

dance. Katherine Dunham's creation of a choreographed piece, **Sango**, after research in Haiti endorses the circum-Caribbean and African-American nature of this kinaesthetic and phenomenological intelligence in the African diaspora. A more recent example of how this knowledge recycles itself as a currency for African diasporic identity and creativity is Ralph Lemon's *Geography* whose choreography involved translocating eight African dancers from Ivory Coast to the USA in order to bring to a postmodern American audience the power, intensity and complexity of indigenous African dance before it was hybridized or watered down by the dance of the pointed toe, ballet.

What all this means is that centuries before Hegel wrote *Phenomenology of the Spirit* or Husserl started wrestling with the discourse called "Transcendental Phenomenology" or Martin Heidegger and Jean Paul Sartre started exploring its meaning as a philosophical concept or possibility, African cultures, like the Yorubas, whose phenomenological constructs we can see in its full complexity and splendor in Bahia, Brazil, Havana in Cuba, in the USA or United Kingdom, had known the power of this concept, this philosophy of the body as a site of transcendent discourses, and used it to regulate thought and feeling and ideas of identity within their cultures. They knew that the body had a memory more powerful than the retentive capacities of the cognitive mind, hence their privileging of the meta-languages as the semiological vehicles for expressing the values most precious to their perception of a fully-lived communal life, a holistic life not a partial, dysfunctional one in which the mind races ahead into prozac and schizophrenia while the body lags behind, balloons or sags and cannot even pick up simple musical rhythms.

We find the alternatives to the West's understanding of phenomenology boldly expressed in African retentions and performances in Alvin Ailey's *Revelations*, *Wade in the Water*, and to a lesser extent, *Rock my Soul in the Bosom of Abraham*. We also find it in the *Holy Ghost* dance of the African-American pentecostal or baptist churches. We hear it in Coleman Hawkins *Self Portrait* and *Body and Soul*.¹⁷ We see it in James Brown, in the dance of Urban Bush Women and in Hip-Hop. In the Caribbean Basin, we find its manifestations enduringly expressed in Santeria, Abakwa, Dance Hall, Plena and Bomba, Carnival and numerous other kinaesthetic forms that Africans deployed in order to survive the sea crossing into a world in which they were the only unfree people in supposedly democratic and free societies. The quilts used by freed slaves to signal to escaping slaves on the underground rail road is yet another example of philosophical resistance, based on sartorial literacy, which has only begun to be studied as an important aspect of African diasporic cultural and semiological intelligence.

Philosophy in the Igbo Worldview

Philosophy, in the culture that I come from, is associated with *amamihe* i.e wisdom or *uche di omimi* i.e. deep or profound thought. In other words, philosophy, in Igbo language, means *amamizu* which means a love for wisdom so deep it requires the extra attention of thinking and rethinking until the knowledge sets like clay and can be used to carry, like water, the liquid of life. A deep thinker is often called *onyenweuche* and his or her gifts are highly respected because he deploys them as a service to the community. He or she will often be called upon to play leadership roles ranging from a counselor to a spokesperson if members of the community were going to court or to a wedding or a political rally or if important decisions are to be taken in the *amala*, the council of elders, in which debate and argument characterize the Igbo dynamic of democracy and republican life.. What I am trying to illustrate here is that in the Igbo worldview the concept of philosophy for philosophy's own sake does not exist. Philosophy is a tool for regulating and engineering society. It is not some rarified thing written and locked up in a book as a body of knowledge that you encounter with awe in the university as in the West. It is functional. And because philosophy is functional, it manifests

itself in the form of orature. By orature I mean poetry, incantations, riddles, conundrums, stories, dance, mime, ceremony, performance, words of advice, proverbs and names that encode the precious experiences of the community.

A word about names and naming. In Igbo culture children are not given names plucked from television or dictionaries or the bible or flower gardens or a single's bar. A child's name is a philosophical contraction of what his or her parents or entire community experienced at the time of his or her birth. Naming involves deep thinking and poetry and so produces such complex and long names as Ehilegbuonefumaanodilalaulo: "On the day you will kill an innocent man may I not be at home!" Enyeribeonyinyenyenmandiufoenyedugughi: "If God had delegated the allotment of talent and genius to human beings, some human beings would have greedily seized the gifts meant for others." Osonduagabaghilodo: "In a time of war, we do not run the race for life on a straight path." Onwundinulo: "Death has built his barracks in this family." These names become, for the community, mnemonics of the stoicism with which they wrestled with difficult confrontations and situations in their lives and, thus, celebrate, through the physical appearance of the child, the fact, as in the last name, Osonduagabaghilodo, that they survived the Nigera/Biafran civil war. But most importantly Igbo philosophy manifests itself in song e.g.: "Uwa by ndoli ndoli; kama nga anwu kam doliwa, uwa by ndoli ndoli." Life is an eternal struggle. Life is an interminable struggle. Instead of committing suicide I would rather go on struggling. (Think of the number of intellectuals in the West who commit suicide every year! They say John Berryman waved to a non-existent crowd before he jumped off a bridge into a river !) Whether it is in Caribbean or the USA or the African continent, we can see how philosophical thought is expressed through pithy complex structures of meta-languages all constituting a multilayered praxis of human expression.

Phenomenology, simply and finally put, is a philosophical construct that *examines* how the human body is the primary source and interpreter of all significations: desire, sexuality, power, freedom, presence, intelligence, aliveness, spirituality joy, grief, anarchy, etc. The concept is concerned with what it is like for human beings to be in the world around them and how they perceive that world. Western philosophers wrote about it. African and African-Diasporic philosophers, centuries before the logocentric West, used phenomenology as a tool for fashioning structures of performed collectivity that ensure the survival of their peoples as if they knew what would happen to them after 1492 when their encounter with Europeans, proud inheritors of Greek philosophy and thought, began.

Descartes: I think, therefore, I am.

Camus: I rebel, therefore, we are.

African Proverb: We are, therefore, I am.

We can see quite clearly the quality of African thinking when compared, in its ontological, epistemological and semantic concerns, with Descartes'. In other words, the African thinks collectively and this impacts how Africans on the continent or diaspora ACT in the world. To ACT and to take responsibility for the action is the most important aspect of any discourse or discussion of phenomenology and philosophy. Without action or resistance when faced by falsifications of your own history and philosophy, racist theories or the KKK you will not even be alive to get home and read Hegel and Husserl.

The Philosophy of the Sea

In conclusion, we are left with the question, what will become of philosophy in the Caribbean? Apart from the distinguished scholars such as Lewis Gordon and Paget Henry, what will younger

Caribbean scholars or scholars who are interested in the Caribbean make out of philosophy? What will be our response to Kenneth Surin's brilliant injunction and demand for a new Post-European science? Will these younger scholars be able to redefine the word "intellectual" to include non-academic, literary and topographic discourses such as carnival, music, dance, rituals, religious performances, among other human expressions? Are they going to transcend the written word and theorize, from an indigenous Caribbean perspective: the occult powers of the spoken word, the chanted word, the body in dance, in motion, in rapture, whirling, genuflecting, recalling, channeling, revealing, prophesying? Will they be able to make the West understand, as Dennis Scott does in his brilliant ritual play, *Echoes in the Bone*, that there are forms of things unknown, discourses beyond the lore of the West? Will we be able to take European philosophers to that place, in human experience, where reason must lay down its arms; that transcendent arena, the grove of ancestral spirits, full of cultic knowledges and aboriginal force which are glimpsed not through cognitive understanding as taught by the West, but through revelation as evidenced in the spiritual literacy and complex performative texts of the African-American church, the Candomble, Santeria, Abakwa, Ninth night ceremonies in Jamaica, Damballah in Haiti, Ogun festival in Yoruba land, Amadioha in Igboland, and numerous ceremonies of worship and initiation and funerary rites executed by those whose humanity, day to day experiences, presence and philosophical intelligence have been questioned for centuries? How will we represent our ancestors and parents whose education took a different turn and texture; souls whose wisdoms we are expected to represent and defend in the academy, minds, out of whose crystallized narratives of the pain of being and nothingness we make our living?

It is pertinent to ask these questions in the Caribbean, to the Caribbean, as a representative African diasporic people, because the Caribbean, more than Africa or Europe, has been the vortex and testing ground of both the integrity and efficacy of both African and European perceptions, definitions and applications of philosophy in the real world away from the certainties of the academies and citadels of the Sorbonne or the great civilizations of Kush, Zimbabwe and Ile Ife. In this new world, this supposedly no man's land i.e. the extermination of the Caribs, the Arawaks and the Tainos, something strange and beautiful was forged here. At least, unlike in the USA, the melting point where, Tony Kushner tells us, nothing ever melted, something did melt and merge here.

From the variegated gradations of the castle of the Caribbean skin, largely through rape, through the plantation economy that made Barbados one of the jewels on the British imperial crown, to the three anthems that most Caribbean islanders have had to learn because these islands, for three hundred years, kept changing hands between English, French and Spanish conquistadors, something, no matter how painful to remember took roots here. A humanity. A people with a clear sense of their origins. In other words, against Froude's, the English historian's notion or illusion or claim that there are no people here with a character and destiny of their own, in the twenty-first century, we can assert that a people, a place, a sensibility, a way and philosophy of life was farmed here. A stoic philosophy, a philosophy of resilience and resistance with its performative antecedents in the African continent, the body and parts of which are espoused and fully expressed by many African peoples not only on the continent but also in the diaspora.

But do our philosophers recognize these semiologies that bespeak an African ontology and its phenomenological and philosophical manifestations in the Caribbean? Are these the concerns of our philosophers? Do they have the methodologies to decode the manifestations of African philosophical systems in many aspects of Caribbean life including orature, literature, music, politics, economics, technology, food, agriculture, to name a few. Locked in, as African and African diasporic scholars of philosophy are, in a prevalently Western mode of typographical and logocentric discourse that is endorsed by the Western academy, can our scholars make the break and walk that

self defining walk and talk that self-renewing talk that Henry Louis Gates demands of all scholars, whatever their discipline may be, in the twenty-first century.¹⁸ Can they create the rupture that is needed to set a submerged philosophical system free from its implacable and oppressive yet exhausted Western oppressor since the 15th century when the first African arrived on these strange and mind annihilating shores and sang with brine and blood gushing out of their tongues and mouths? Can they, like Derek Walcott's hero, Shabine, in *The Schooner Flight*, say with a careless new found confidence:

I am just a red nigger who love the sea
I have Dutch, English and nigger in me
I had a sound colonial education
It is either I am a nobody or I am a nation!¹⁹

Can we say, with a final authority and faith :

Though my Flight never pass the incoming tide
of this inland sea beyond the loud reefs
of the final Bahamas, I am satisfied
if my hand gave voice to one people's grief.
Open the map.²⁰

Notes

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1. John Broomfield, *Other Ways of Knowing* (Rochester: Inner Traditions International, 1997), 13.
 2. See Chinweizu, *Invocations and Admonitions* (Lagos: Pero Press, 1986), 21.
 3. Ned Thomas, *Derek Walcott: Poet of the Islands* (Cardiff: Welsh Arts Council Press, 1980), 1.
 4. Derek Walcott, *Collected Poems* (New York: Noonday Press, 1988), 269-270.
 5. See Paget Henry, *Caliban's Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Lewis Gordon, *Bad faith and Antiracist Racism* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press 1995); and Lewis Gordon, *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man: An Essay on Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (New York: Routledge, 1995)
 6. Walcott, *Collected*, 377.
 7. See Robert Solomon and Kathleen Higgins, "Introduction," *From Africa to Zen: An Invitation to World Philosophy*, edited by Robert Solomon and Kathleen Higgins (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1993), n.p.
 8. Kacke Gotrick, *Apidan Theatre and Modern Drama* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1984), 130.

9. Gotrick, *Apidan*, 127.
10. The list of inventions by blacks includes aeroplane propelling, coin changer, disposable syringe, home security system, blood plasma, icecream mold, electric lamp, pressure cooker, gas mask, urinalysis machine etc etc. In fact the list is endless.
11. See Patricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press, 1994). Also see Toni Mitchell, ed., *Global Noise* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2001).
12. Wole Soyinka, *Death and the King's Horseman* (London: Methuen, 1975), 10.
13. See Jaqueline L Tobin and Raymond G. Dobard, *Hidden in Plain View* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000).
14. Vivian Sobchack, "The Scene of the Screen: Envisioning Cinematic and Electronic Presence," in *Film and Theory: An Anthology*, ed Robert Stam and Toby Miller (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 70.
15. Sobchack, "The Scene," 70. Sobchack bemoans the progressive disembodiment of the Western body because of technology and criticizes, quite caustically, the obsession of this society with the physical look of the body instead of its spirituality. In contrast, among African Diasporic communities, ritual performance, as in the church, has been medically proved to lower blood pressure. People who are surrounded by community and touch and prayer have been proved to recover faster from illness than loners. In a ritual, what occurs, scientifically, inside the participants, as result of the combination of all these kinaesthetic, sonic, olfactory and other stimuli which use the body, phenomenologically, as an experimental medium or specimen, is a synaesthetic experience in which all the senses participate and is therefore both artistic and healing.
16. Sobchack, "The Scene," 70. For an African Diasporic variation on the interface between spirituality, performance and phenomenology, see Telia U. Anderson, "Calling the Spirit," in *African American Performance and Theatre History: A Critical Reader*, edited by Harry Elam and David Krassner (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 114-131. In this particularly iconoclastic essay, Telia U. Anderson convincingly demonstrates how women in African American Baptist churches use "catching the spirit", a bodily i.e. phenomenological act, to subvert and undercut patriarchal domination of worship, leadership and power in the African American church. This an exhilarating essay sashayed with all the nuances of the body as a site of signification and retention and embodiment and translocation of sacred and secular including erotic messages even in the church.
17. Gena Dagal Capón, *Signifyin(g), Sanctifyin' & Slam Dunking: A Reader in African American Cultures* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999); Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 223.
18. Henry Louis Gates Jr., "Canon Formation, Literary History, and the Afro-American Tradition: From the Seen to the Told," in *Falling into Theory*, edited by David Richter (Boston: Bedford/St Martins, 2000), 175-183.

19. Walcott, *Collected*, 346.

20. Walcott, *Collected*, 360.