

On Saying the Impossibility of Black Testimony: Listening to the Rodney King Event and *Visiting Julian Cole*

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*Abstract: What does it mean to say that black testimony is impossible? This paper addresses this question, guided by Elizabeth Alexander's 1994 essay "Can you be BLACK and Look at This?": Reading the Rodney King Video(s)." Alexander studies the Rodney King event in terms of the language and memories that are shared between black people. Drawing from her thinking, this essay focuses on bearing witness and considers whether black testimony can exist not bound to a juridical structure. Following Linette Park and Jacques Derrida, the later part of this essay discusses the 2018 documentary *Visiting Julian Cole* (who currently is in a vegetative state after being assaulted by security and police in Bedford, UK) to reflect on the unsayable secret that is saved for memory and mourning.*

Introduction^[1]

"At the heart of this essay is a desire to find a language to talk about 'my people.'"^[2] This is the first sentence of Elizabeth Alexander's 1994 essay "Can you be BLACK and Look at This?": Reading the Rodney King Video(s)." I start with this quote for I wish to acknowledge that at the heart of this essay is also a desire to find a language to talk about "my people."^[3] My interest with Alexander's essay does not end at its very beginning. Alexander's essay reckons with how sharing memories of violence in slave narratives, watching videos of police brutality, and viewing the imagery of black suffering and white terror, such as the photography of lynching, are a means by which black people gather *as a people*. In some respects, Alexander understands this gathering and sharing as a "witnessing." Yet, in this paper, I will reveal how bearing witness for black people is paradoxical.

That said, in general, bearing witness in essence is paradoxical. However, while for whiteness bearing witness is troubled by the impossibility of its fully authentic and proper self, for blackness the impossibility of bearing witness is related more to its constitution as that which is rendered as unspeakable. Put another way, for example in terms of trauma studies, the crisis of bearing witness associated with, say, the testimony of Jewish Holocaust survivors,^[4] is not the same as the "crisis" confronting a black person. In the age of (slave) abolition, and even now in this epoch of (carceral) abolitionism, such a "crisis" is reserved for a white person who is suspicious of the reliability of a black person's testimony: for it is always in doubt and often found

unacceptable, as I am to address later. Instead, attempts are made for the black body^[5] to speak, for the episteme of truth regards the (black) body as having more reliability, credibility, and legitimacy, than the voice.

European philosophical thought consigns blackness to evidence, to the evidential, rather than assigning it the figure of the witness. Thus, blackness is that which is to be witnessed – it is not a witness in itself, to itself and to others. Yet, the impossibility of bearing witness for blackness is less an impasse but rather an abyss – which I shall touch upon towards the end of this paper.

As Linette Park points out, often times the figure and status of a witness is not conferred to blackness, which is instead considered and examined more as evidence than a modern ethical subject.^[6] If and when a black person is called to testify in a court of law their words have historically been used to bind them even further within a relation of domination, where they are demanded to perform codes and decorum of respectability and civility. Furthermore, if and when their narrative challenges the dominant narrative created by the state or political order, a black person is at risk of being punished, incarcerated, killed, or “found dead.” I will argue that when we consider the metaphysics of “black testimony,” we find it is not simply that a black person is an “impossible witness”^[7] but, following Park, that “black testimony” is itself an impossibility.

What is at stake is the *saying* of this impossibility. To make the claim that “black testimony is an impossibility” engages with the conditions of bearing witness, which I will address in the middle of this essay. The saying of this impossibility bears an unbearable blackness.^[8] I hesitate to give any impression or determination of what precisely the impossibility of black testimony is; any commitment and pledge to such a claim would foreclose (black) testimony.

Ethical questions about viewing black suffering focus heavily on the image and visual reproduction of anti-black violence, particularly police killings in the United States. The discipline of communications and media studies that examines race and racism is generally supportive of its public debate and deliberation. It also recognizes the power of journalism, albeit being aware of its limitations.^[9] Recent research on black testimony in legal studies also often takes a linguistic approach and defends the vernacularism of “African American English.”^[10] However, I want to consider black testimony, or rather black bearing witness,^[11] that is not housed in a courtroom:^[12] structures of relationality^[13] that injoin blackness to violence are not limited to legal forums. Despite, and in spite of, being contained within legal zones, there are other types of bearing witness that black people share. As Saidiya Hartman notes, in African and African American communal practices – and we could extend this to Afro-diasporas in other countries as well – “memory acts in the service of redress rather than an inventory of memory.”^[14] Similarly, for Alexander, her interest is in memory acts, the act of memory, or rather the act of remembering – how memory is passed and shared between black people.

It is the Rodney King event that calls on Alexander to find a language of her people. In the next section I will spend a considerable time discussing the different analyses of the Rodney King videotape. This may seem like an out-dated exercise, yet it is precisely the (non-) eventfulness of Rodney King that I am concerned with for it relates to how we share memories and visit survivors or the dead. In re-visiting Rodney King, and re-citing

“Can you be BLACK and Look at This?” this paper will move onwards, in a similar manner, visiting another “survivor” of anti-black police violence, in this case in the UK. Julian Cole – a nineteen-year-old black man – was assaulted and restrained by private security and police officers in Bedford, 2013. Since then, he has been paralysed and is in a post-coma unresponsive state. The question “Can you be BLACK and Look at This?” guides my *listening* in this essay, though what precisely “this” is cannot be properly determined. Yet, it is my approach throughout this essay to pose this ‘question’ not simply to receive an answer or response. I contend that it holds or bears the *saying* of an impossibility. An impossibility that is related to the unspeakability of white terror and anti-black violence, and an impossibility that is related to the unsayability of black testimony, where a secret is saved for memory and mourning.

Rodney King

The “videotaped police beating of Rodney King” is what makes Alexander (re)turn to this desire to find a language to talk about “my people.” On 3rd March 1991, after pursuing his car in a chase for its alleged speeding, a large group of L.A. police officers brutally beat Rodney King on the motorway at night, leaving him with serious medical injuries. Alexander is not so much interested in the event of this date, as she is the videotape of the beating, recorded by a member of the public, George Holliday, a resident who lived across the street and decided to film with his new camcorder once he saw what was happening outside his window. More specifically, Alexander is interested in the playing and play out of the videotape’s broadcast. Following the trial and acquittal of the police officers, riots/uprisings ensued in LA.^[15] The beating of Rodney King seemed to mark the ending of Civil Rights protections for African Americans and was concurrent with the rise of cable television, public camcorder use, and a new media circulation and spectatorship of black suffering. That the videotape did not result in a guilty verdict, and in fact was used as evidence to support the police’s justifications, reaffirmed, particularly for African Americans, that white supremacy was existent in the political and legal system of the United States. It further indicated how the simulacrum of the image was a tool for white supremacy and imperialism, such as with the televising of the first Gulf War.

Ryan Watson comments that the televised videotape of the beating of Rodney King, which was continuously replayed during that period, challenged common preconceptions of the photographic and moving image held by some scholars and artists at that time.^[16] The videotape “reconceptualized the scope of radical documentary practices and marked a shift to witnesses, portable cameras, increased documenting, and the power of evidence in the 1990s.”^[17] It would seem there arose a revaluation, if not crisis, of representation, in regard to how to bear witness, or more specifically how to read “live” black suffering, how to read the scene of death, as opposed to the scene after death, as is arguably the case with lynching photography.

This spurred critical readings that sought to challenge and expose the racial logics of the police officer’s rationale, and to provide political context for the beating. These analyses were read against the police’s own reading of the videotape. In their essay “Endangered/Endangering,” Judith Butler claimed that the seeing of the videotape from the majority white jury was a “reading, a *contestable* construal, but one which nevertheless passes itself off as ‘seeing,’ a reading which became for that white community, and for countless others, the same as reading.”^[18] The task then was to read “aggressively” against this reading that mis-read itself for

seeing. Butler urged, “in order to establish the injury on the basis of visual evidence, an aggressive reading of the evidence is necessary.”^[19] The visual field is a racial formation where the freeze-frame and still images of the videotape were curated and “cultivat[ed] an identification with white paranoia.”^[20] Focusing on the relation between the majority white jury, the police officers, and the video/stills, Butler argued that the jury identified themselves with the officers and identified with white paranoia. For Butler the “black male body” was a “projection” of the white officers and jury’s “own aggression,”^[21] and thus, according to them, the “performative force”^[22] of whiteness that identified and named blackness as a danger, a threat, was transposed onto a black person, King.

According to Avital Ronell, the police could not read the videotape in a critical way. If they had they would no longer be the police. This presupposes that the theories from the “key thinkers” of modern European philosophy are not similar to the logics that the police articulate to protect the subject, the ego, and the sovereign self that decides matters of life and death.^[23] Apparently different from a “viewing of a spectacle,” Ronell asserted that the “video *require[d]* a reading.”^[24] She contended, “[t]he Rodney King event not only forces a reading of force and enforcement of law, but requires citation and the reading precisely of the phantom body of the police.”^[25] For Ronell the phantom body of the police *is* television,^[26] and hence her reading is an analysis of how *television* watched the videotape of the beating of Rodney King.

Fred Moten cautioned in 1994 (the same year of Alexander’s essay) that we should be careful of making it seem that Rodney King (the event) is legible for a reading to be allowed. Rather than using the term “the Rodney King event,” Moten (re-)named the totality: *Rodney King* – “in the effort to indicate the convergence of man, phantom, beating, ritual, mundane occurrence, event, trial, text, negation, principle.”^[27] Reading is not outside the event and to be applied, but reading is an integral part of this totality. Moten is against or at least hesitant of a reading that maintains Rodney King as idiomatic for a particular theme or issue, for any *reading* “is always in danger of becoming what it would critique.”^[28] Moten calls for an ensemble as an alternative to reading; an improvisation, where we would linger between “the ongoing and the ‘to come’.”^[29] Writing on the famous image of Emmett Till for example, Moten urges us to listen to the phonic substance of the image, the sound before the media, the sound of display, “which holds an affirmation not of, but *out of*, death.”^[30]

The subtitle of Alexander’s essay is “Reading the Rodney King Video(s).” She includes the term “reading” but does not discuss any such methodology or provide a visual analysis as Butler and Ronell do. Also note the bracketing of the letter “s,” indicating doubling and repetition of the video, where “Rodney King” becomes synonymous with “video(s).”^[31] Though Alexander refers to reading, she does not submit a counter-narrative or a guide on how she saw the video. It is not the footage of the video or the technics of the video she is concerned with but the memory of the video, the video as memory.^[32] Alexander maintains the notion of collective memory; that there are memories we share socially, wherein we are connected by these memories.^[33] This perspective is predicated on the notion of a kind of collect-*ivity* that views memory as collectable and containable within the body; transferrable, somatically and inter-generationally.

Alexander is of the view that Fredrick Douglass’ semantics of “‘heart-rending’ and ‘bloodshot’ work both literally and metaphorically to show the ways the body has a language which ‘speaks’ what it has

witnessed.”^[34] It would seem for Alexander it is the “black body” that bears witness and suggests she views evidence and bearing witness as a homologous – or perhaps she is hitting upon the trouble for blackness with the distinctions of evidence and bearing witness? If a black person bears witness, they bear witness to how they are made to be evidence.

Alexander is concerned not necessarily with the textuality or materiality of the videotape but with how black people speak of the videotape to themselves. To put another way, if Butler and Ronell focus on the transmission of the videotape, Alexander is attentive to the transmission of the *memory* of the (event of the) videotape. This videotape is not limited to the footage of the beating of Rodney King but the replay of the violence and the reaction to its viewing. Thus, there is more to see than just the footage of black suffering. There is the repetition and reproduction of these images that trouble notions of origin, primacy, and immediacy. Furthermore, there is a listening to be attentive of.

From the last decades of the twentieth century and into the twentieth-first century, there are now increased capabilities and potentialities for the public to record police brutality (and black suffering) with smartphones, and in turn they are also able to view and circulate images and recordings online. The ethical question that is often raised is whether one should watch the latest video of the beating, shooting, killing of a black person, most often in the United States. When the live-stream of the killing of Philando Castile, recorded by partner Diamond Reynolds, was circulated Kimberly Fain insisted that people needed to watch the video so as not to turn a “blind eye,” keep silent, and ignore racial violence.^[35] The video is supposedly meant to contribute towards putting pressure on the police, for their prosecution and conviction, reform or abolition, and thus, towards racial and social justice.^[36] Ultimately, this sense of a civic (anti-racism) duty and guilt pertains especially for those who are white, middle class, and members of the electorate. One of the purposes from viewing the video, along with being a “psycho-op,” is for the citizenry to play their part towards ending police killings. One watches the video in the hope they will not have to watch again.

Related to the ethical question is also a concern with reproducing the violence. There is the trauma for black people in seeing the repetition of anti-black violence. In addition, there is violence not simply of its contents (moving/still image) but the violence of its distribution, for example its broadcast on television, and the circulation on social media. For black people, particularly the working class and financially poor, the question over whether to watch the video is almost not a question at all. This perspective is based on the general view that black people do not have to watch a video to know about police violence for they already live with this experience.

To quote at length from Fred Moten and Stefano Harney:

Blackness isn't unwatchable because of whiteness, because whiteness needs it to be, or because whiteness cannot see it; it's not invisible, or surveilled or evaded in dark sousveillance, or exaggerated, or desired; it's not subject to (color) correction even in the total, broken ubiquity of the institution, though the unwatchable may be given all these explanations. Blackness is unwatchable because there's no way to watch it that ain't in it, no way to watch it from the outside, which is to say from its anti-black and worldly effects: politics, policy, legality.^[37]

What is at stake is the distinction of watched footage and unwatched footage. Can we know for certain whether we have *actually* seen the footage and know for certain whether we have not. Furthermore, underlying this is the desire to be (both) inside (and) or outside blackness.

Looking at “Can you be BLACK and look at this?”

Following the confession of her desire for a language to talk about “my people,” Alexander wonders “What do black people say to each other to describe their relationship to their racial group, when that relationship is crucially forged by incidents of physical and psychic violence which boil down to the ‘fact’ of abject blackness?”^[38] Alexander studies the language of Douglass, Mary Prince, Harriet Jacobs, the photograph of Emmett Till, the videotape of the beating of Rodney King, and Pat Ward Williams’ artwork. Specifically speaking about Douglass’ *Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglass*, Alexander maintains that the “black body” “has a language which ‘speaks’ what it has witnessed.”^[39] Though Alexander acknowledges Hortense Spiller’s concept of the flesh, she refers to the body (not in opposition to the flesh) to emphasize the corporeality, where memory “resides” and responds.^[40]

The black body takes in experience of white terror “via witnessing and recorded in memory as knowledge. This knowledge is necessary to one who believes ‘it would be my turn next.’”^[41] Indeed, as Alexander argues, “in order to survive, black people have paradoxically had to witness their own murder and defilement and then pass along the epic tale of violation.”^[42] For Alexander black people are placed in the position of a witness and participant. To rephrase one of her questions to be more declarative, Alexander suggests that despite the “abjection” of blackness, there remains a “creative space for group self-definition and self-knowledge.”^[43] Such a creative space is storytelling that “works to create collective counter-memory of trauma as those stories also terrorize.”^[44] Yet, that space is a spatial and physical one for Alexander. Her perspective is of memory, rather than remembering. Memory resides in the black body and reacts to the embodiment of this memory, violence, and terror.

Alexander cites the statements of African American students who expressed the maddening pain and rage they experienced when they watched the videotape of the beating of Rodney King. “[T]he violence that is watched, this time on the television, is experienced, as it were, in the bodies of the spectators who feel themselves implicated in Rodney King’s fate. The language employed by the first person is a corporeal one, heard and then experienced in his nervous system as ‘a pain that went from the top of my head to the tip of my toes.’ The entire body responds.”^[45]

The language is corporeal, not merely seen but heard, experienced in the nervous system, throughout the body. Furthermore, to evoke the responses of the students that Alexander cites, the body responds, it reacts, it blows up, it wants to kill, and it breaks everything. This raises the question of whether the embodiment of memory and the reaction to a collective memory that is transferred into and imprinted onto the black body, where that reaction is impulsive and natural, is of a language. If it is a language, is the language of “my people” simply the exchange of mnemonic (corporeal and cerebral) activations? I suspect Park would warn us that the notion that memory resides in the black body misleads us to think that the black body is a proper

place, as though blackness is at home *in* blackness.

Before I examine the figure of the witness and consider whether a black person is able to fill that position, as Alexander contends, I want to think about another statement that she cites. For Alexander the question “Can you be BLACK and Look at This?” awakens a memory of terror that needs to be remembered. The title is in reference to Pat Ward Williams’ mixed media artwork *Accused/Blowtorch/Padlock*, 1986. At the centre of this artwork is a polyptych^[46] that frames the photograph of a black man tied to a tree. The window plane to the left shows the full height of the man, with the three planes to the right close-ups of the arms pulled behind his back and the upper part of his body graphed onto the tree, the rope cutting into his flesh. Surrounding the polyptych is a text of polyvocal reveries. They are handwritten (in legible English, the statements in lowercase are cursive, while the letters of capitalised words stand apart) and recall looking at the photograph, which in turn is framed within the artwork. The voice of the text asks who took the photo and how it can exist. To the right, it asks “could Hitler show pics of the Holocaust to keep JEWS in line?” To the left it asks why “couldn’t he just as easily let the man go?” At the bottom it asks “HOW can the photograph EXIST?”. “do something” is stated below the word “somebody.” At the top, above the polyptych, the text speaks of how unfathomable it is to reckon with this photograph. One of the questions that is inscribed is, “Can you be BLACK and look at this?” Interestingly, there are or were two versions of this artwork. In the version that is cited the word “black” is capitalised in full and the question mark ends at the word “this.” In another version the full question is “Can you be black and look at this without fear,” with “black” in lowercase.

Indeed, what remains of the question from repeating the question? There is no primacy or principality to this question, that is forged with its repetition, yet with discontinuity. It would seem there is a history to this artwork with traces of its erasure and effacement. This writing has an errantry to it.

Alexander asserts “the line, ‘Can you be BLACK and look at this?’ forces viewers to confront the idea of memory that would indelibly affect the very way that someone sees what is before them.”^[47] This view follows the perspective that confrontation is a strategy of Williams’ work, as has been suggested by Janet Marquardt-Cherry, though she centres her whiteness in her review.^[48] Yet, confrontation is an adept term for Williams’ work, as well as for Alexander’s essay, for the confrontational invokes the thematical motif of the face, the positionality of standing and anteriority of the front, the encounter of the accused or witness, the bordering of oppositions.^[49] *Accused/Blowtorch/Padlock* con-fronts, that is joins together the fronts of the photographs so to speak – and *a*/front itself, in the sense of its panelled “flatness” though with a depth of voices in the “background.”

This question, this “line,” is an image itself. However, this image is not merely a memory aid. It is less an act or work of memory but the remainder of a memory. “Can you be BLACK and look at this?” does not so much test us (addressee/addressor) but tests the *act* of addressing, and by extension the act of memory. In this sense, there is a testimonial quality to the question, a question that is doubled. It asks can you be BLACK and look at this (photograph of a lynching), and – perhaps this is the *and* of the question, which marks the question’s doubleness – it asks can you be BLACK and look at this very question. If we are confronted, it is not merely with the images of black suffering, but the image of how we question the images of black suffering.

Following Moten, there is a sound to this image, to these images. If Williams, as Alexander claims, “shows why such images need to be remembered,” it is in the sense that the bottom/less line^[50] is needed to be questioned. It is a necessary question for it folds and joins the possibility and impossibility of black testimony.
[51]

The subject of the witness, the act of bearing witness, and meta-witnessing

There are different types of a witness. There is the third party who authorises or verifies an event or status; the survivor who outlives those who were killed or died from an event – speaks for the other; the martyr, who does not only speak a truth but is committed and lives, and dies, for this truth. While there is a distinction between witness (the subject) and bearing witness (the act), they are inter-related. On a generic level, a witness is someone who was present at an event from which they observed or experienced something. This claim of an experience is predicated on a memory, which is particularly resonant for Alexander. Experience institutes a witness, who is thus the subject of an event, so long as they are able to speak of this experience, intelligentially and rationally. That is to say, the “fact” of being present to an event is not enough for one to be a witness. Strictly speaking, to be a witness, one must bear witness: firstly, to promise what they say is true (to them) and to speak on how they experienced an event.

The promise to tell the truth is what partly distinguishes bearing witness from other performative modes of speech, which may serve more towards officiating, verifying, or narrating.^[52] Through this promise, a witness pledges and agrees to engage with language, linguistically and culturally, and, by extension, the procedure of a legal forum or public setting. For the social convention of bearing witness, a witness cannot bear only to themselves, inwardly, internally. To respond to the call and demand of their summons, a witness must share and speak about their experience and share their knowledge for the public and for its reproduction. Thus, while bearing witness privileges the past, it is always for the future – for repetition, reiteration, and recitation.
[53]

To be understood by the public, a witness must speak in the same language as the public.^[54] Their testimony must meet the standards of credibility, authenticity, and honesty. Such standards emanate from “the modern subject,” idealised as the white European man, a property-owning human, with the potential of transcendental consciousness. One of the major requirements for a witness is that they are singular and irreplaceable. That is, they should only speak directly for themselves, not for a group. Though they may be a representative of a community, a witness should not claim to have the exact identity and experience of another person. Where they speak on behalf of a community, they should be clear about this, and not explicitly express that it is solely their own individual and unique experience. Yet, to be understood and for it to be cited as evidence, a testimony must be able to be repeated and reproduced, which, paradoxically, troubles the notion and status of a singular, unique, irreplaceable subject and witness.^[55] Being open to the public, a witness is split and divided from the public, and themselves.

Bearing witness is heterogenous for it is continuously reproduced through repetition and translation. When one appears and declares themselves to be a witness, when one affirms their identity and status as a witness,

and vows to speak truthfully, to speak with the intention that they mean to speak the truth, this vow, spoken in an agreed and understood language, this temporal moment, marks an instant that divides the witness from the one who bears and the one who had experienced an event. The status of the witness, and the normative opposition of truth and fiction, is troubled from the multiplicity inherent within the figure of a witness and the heterogeneity of bearing witness. It is based on this condition, that Derrida asserts, following many other European continental philosophers (e.g. Agamben and Lyotard), bearing witness is an impossibility.^[56]

Celan is famously cited for expressing this impossibility: “no one can witness for the witness.” Generally speaking, this poetics expresses that the witness is always divided from oneself, and thus, cannot properly and purely bear witness to who they were or are, and what they experienced or experience. This paradox does not however annul bearing witness or testimony. For van der Heiden, the articulation of this incapacity to speak is where bearing witness begins.^[57] However, while this may be true for the conceptualisation of bearing witness, if a witness bears to this incapacity or failure too explicitly, their words would not be accepted as testimony. As Derrida points out, the speaking of this “meta-witnessing” would be not considered a testimony in the legal sense, but rather taken as a theorem, a poem, or madness.^[58]

What is at stake with meta-witnessing, with any discursivity of the impossibility of bearing witness or testimony, is as Derrida states, “the strange limit between what can and cannot be determined or decided” in such poetics and analytics.^[59] The idiom of the impossibility of bearing witness however relies on the figure of the witness. Thus, it is *bearing* that is impossible here, not necessarily *the* witness. While the statement *No one can witness for the witness* may dispel a positivist historiography, it maintains the humanness of the witness.^[60] And while it may supposedly speak to the general condition of bearing witness, following Park, this idiomatic code is not licenced to blackness.^[61]

European Enlightenment places blackness on the side of evidence rather than of the witness. Blackness is that which can be witnessed, but cannot be a witness; thus, it is untroubled by the idiom no one can witness for the witness. As “no bodies,” already always dead, when black people have borne witness or testified it has been an impossibility.^[62] Yet, to reiterate Derrida, we need to concern ourselves with the determination and the sayability of such a statement.

Testimony and black testimony

Considering Krämer and Weigel’s observation that the testimony of a witness is not solely assessed in a court of law or a public but also it is their character that is judged. Park importantly points out that black people are excluded from the category of a witness.^[63] This assertion should not be confined merely to a discourse of ethics. Park explicates the significance of this assertion for ontology and psychoanalysis.

Black people are precluded from the category of being a witness not simply because of cultural prejudice or racial discrimination within the court system, but because blackness has no symbolic support, according to Park. For her, this does not mean that blackness “does not simply lack signification, or require, for that matter, a better translation,”^[64] but that blackness is unsupported to whiteness, and thus, blackness is a property that

cannot own itself. Even when “in” blackness, blackness is never at home with itself.

Park associates unhomeliness and uncanniness with blackness:

Here, the notion of uncanniness designates blackness with and as an absence (without home or self) but also signals a process of conversion between familiar and unfamiliar, present and elsewhere. This duality should not be construed as an opposition, but as a becoming that emerges from the vaults of repression and that initiates the cyclical return of blackness's absence as a presence.^[65]

Botham Jean, a black man who was shot dead by “off-duty” police officer Amber Guyger, a white woman, in his apartment in Dallas, Texas, September 2018, was an “intruder in his own home.”^[66] Guyger claimed she shot and killed Jean because she thought he had broken into her apartment. Killed for both being where Guyger had “mistakenly” thought he was and for being where he should not have been (that he was in Guyger’s imagination as an intruder precisely underscored her “mistake”), Jean was “imagined as a kind of errancy within different registers of signification.”^[67] He “represents a life of ‘neither-either – screened out and exposed,’ a life deprived of symbolic support as a life lived or a living being.”^[68] As an unsupported, unclaimed, and unleased property, this unhomeliness was the ground upon which Guyger was able to support her claim – through her testimony – that she was mistaken and the shooting, the killing, was accidental.^[69] Thus, Guyger’s testimony dwells in the unhomeliness of Jean’s blackness.

When a black person testifies in a criminal court, especially in the trials of police officers who have killed a black person, “black witnessing is only made to bear evidence or truth at the expense of black death.”^[70] In the case of neighbour, Joshua Brown, he was “mysteriously” shot dead ten days after testifying in court. “Black witnessing” or “black testimony” is dangerous for it can be a risk to a black person’s life but also black bearing witness is limited to matters – the *mattering* – of black social life/death. According to Park’s perspective, even if black bearing witness intends to testify for the worth of black “livelihood,” is it bound to relationality,^[71] wherein a claim of the humanity of black people, is incumbent on notions of civility, respectability, and hetero-normativity, that only “ramify the carceral conditions of relationality whence blackness is positioned already always into enslavement.”^[72]

By this measure, black bearing witness or black testimony is an impossibility. To refine this further, there is an impossibility of black testimony. Such a claim is premised on the proposition that the category of a witness does not permit blackness, for according to Park, following Denise Ferreira da Silva and David Marriott, blackness does not have the symbolic support to sustain such a category. Once this is accepted, “it makes perceptible the impossible position of a black witness to bear any infliction of truth from within and without a system that relies on a construction of the modern subject as the transparent I.”^[73]

Is there a (possible) position for blackness outside the modern subject? Do black people bear witness that does not rely on a construction of the modern subject? When black people gather is the modern subject an uninvited guest? Is there no room for a black person to enter without history waiting there?^[74] In the next section, I will touch upon these questions. But before I do I want to raise another issue concerning the very articulation of Park’s statement. If the impossible position of a black witness becomes perceptible, what of the

sayability of this statement? Indeed, how are we able say, to determine, to perceive, this impossibility?

Park reminds us that the possible and impossible are not mutually exclusive, especially when she states: “the possibility of black witnessing is ensured by the impossibility of (black) testimony to bear a human truth into existence without it portending that existence to aphanisis.”^[75] Staying with the inter-play of possibility and impossibility here, the first part of this statement is similar to Derrida’s comment – despite him not speaking on blackness – that possibility and impossibility are not oppositional.^[76] Following this, though black testimony is an impossibility, it is only possible to say it is an impossibility. Yet, the sayability of this impossibility betrays black testimony, for it is necessary that black testimony remains unsayable, even when in the gathering only of black people. We must be careful that this avowal of its impossibility does not disavow its impossibility.

Visiting Julian Cole

Though Julian Cole *remains alive*, the police have killed a part of his life. On 6 May 2013, in Bedford, UK, in the early hours of a Bank Holiday Monday, Julian Cole – a nineteen-year-old black man – and his three friends were forced out of a nightclub by security.^[77] Julian wanted to get a refund for the entry he paid and approached the entrance. One of the bouncers tackled him to the ground and restrained him. The police were called and joined in the restraint when they arrived. Witnesses recalled seeing police officers drag Julian to the van, who appeared unable to stand and walk. When the police van arrived at the station officers called an ambulance due to Julian’s condition. He was then taken to hospital where, following a medical examination, it was established the vertebrae in his neck was broken. Since then he has been paralysed and in a “vegetative state.”

There has not been an inquest for Julian as he did not medically die from the assault and restraint. The Crown Prosecution Service did not charge any of the officers for they did not believe there was sufficient evidence for a criminal investigation. Following the completion of an “independent” investigation by the regulatory body Independence Police Complaints Commission – as it was then known– a police misconduct hearing dismissed three officers involved in the killing after they were found lying in their notebooks and statements to investigators. They claimed Julian walked to the van and that he was moving his legs when they had asked if he could during the detention. In addition, the officers did not perform health checks when they detained Julian.^[78]

In the 2018 “documentary” *Visiting Julian Cole* his mother says Julian has been forgotten and the film attempts to remind the public and viewer that he is still alive, in addition, that the issue of accountability and justice has not been achieved.^[79] The documentary was commissioned and distributed by the British newspaper *The Guardian*.^[80] Though it is a work of journalism, it sits back and observes how visitors – Julian’s mother and friends – spend time with him in the hospital room.

The documentary visits Julian but also *visits* the visitors. This thematic of visiting we could further consider in terms of the hospital, of hospitality and, following Park, the unhomeliness of the hospital room – indeed of the eviction from the club that refused him a refund. Where does Julian reside? “In” life or death, or somewhere

in-between?

It is difficult for his mother and friends to reckon with the notion that Julian is alive but that he is not living his life. He is not conscious, in the medical sense, nor receptive to the people around him – to the camera on the other side of the bed. How do we speak to Julian? How do we speak of Julian?

Following Alexander's line of inquiry, how do black people in this documentary describe violence to each other? If you have seen the documentary or not, you may feel it is not the best documentary for this question. Firstly, this is a documentary, and so it is open to a public, and therefore the space that Julian's mother and friends share is not exclusively between one another. Indeed, they are not all together in the documentary. Julian is visited by them, one at a time. Neither actually speak to him about what has happened in detail. Thus, there is not really a description of violence spoken about in the documentary. Nonetheless, despite this being a documentary, open to the public, despite the fact that the company Julian shares is limited to one person at time, and despite the absence of a description of violence for us to assess the documentary in relation to Alexander's question, the visitors keep a secret of the secret, that relates to the unsayability of black testimony's impossibility.

Julian's mother and friends have different ways of speaking, addressing, and facing him. Julian's mother perhaps says the most, sharing with the camera what could be considered as her "inner" thoughts, fears, and prayers. The three friends who appear are less forthcoming and seem conscious of the camera. One friend reflects on Julian's former life, his maturity, and his prospects for the future. Framed within the documentary, Julian is put forth as someone worthy of life, for the civility and respectability he demonstrated. Another friend jokes that he would not be wearing a shirt he has on. Another friend has a "one-sided" conversation with Julian. He asks him questions, not expecting a reply, as though to show that what has happened has not changed the way he speaks to him. This friend speaks for Julian to hear he is listening.

How much influence the camera has on how they all speak to Julian, we cannot say. They speak to Julian directly and respond to questions from the director and yet as this film is public there are times when they speak to Julian via speaking to the camera, and they sometimes speak to the camera via Julian. In terms of its cinematic style, the camera does not survey, in that it does not attempt to conceal itself, or position itself from a distance to record the activity in the room. Rather, the camera is a mirror, close to Julian on his left bedside (like the Bible his mother places by his head on the pillow). His friends are not tempted to stare at the camera. It does not seem to register for them. They seem unfazed by the camera, as though they are familiar with this feeling, this sensation, of being watched, under the gaze of an observer.

Arguably, the camera attempts to twin Julian, to embody his disembodiment. The camera is a prosthesis for Julian (something for him to look back on?) or is it the case that he is a prosthesis for the camera? There is much we could consider on this relationship of cinema, technology, disability, and blackness but at this juncture I am interested in the uncertainty and incertitude of the public, in and of the film, for this concerns and troubles the secret, that which is not said and said in place of something else being said, which should not be fully affirmed, so that the declarative statement of "no words" is not heard as a demand for words.

There is a publicity to the documentary in that the visitors in the film are aware they are being filmed, that they will be seen by people who are not there, people who they will never meet or know. Additionally, in another sense of publicity, the documentary is accessible by viewers, online for free, and is thus continuously circulated and distributed, and referenced – this paper is no “exception.” Furthermore, there is publicity within the relations between visitors, Julian, and the camera, which undergirds bearing witness. They will not really see themselves, in themselves, if they watch the documentary.

A witness bears a unique experience for the other to understand as evidence. In general terms, through testimony, a singular and private experience becomes public and generalisable for reproduction and knowledge. As discussed, there is an aporia of testimony with its heterogeneity. Extending Celan’s poetics to the documentary, it could be argued that Julian’s mother and friends cannot bear witness for Julian. Moreover, we could say that Julian cannot bear witness for himself. For a juridical order, he is an unreliable witness as he lacks the mental capacity to bear witness or testify. In terms of meta-witnessing, Julian’s selfhood is temporally and spatially divided, thus he could only bear witness to what he fails to witness for.

We could seek the assistance of Malabou if we wanted to think about violence inflicted on the self that is wholly other from their constitution, but not only would this likely be to forget the flesh,^[81] we would overlook how the witness is an impossible position for black people. Following Park, we cannot bear witness for Julian, for neither he, his mother nor his friends are witnesses, in the ethico-juridical sense of the term. When they do speak about Julian and share their experiences, it is contained within the relationality of the documentary.

However, there is something that interrupts this relationality of the “true story.” Extending the uncanniness or errancy of blackness to the abyss, Park associates bottomlessness with how blackness turns away from testimony.^[82] Park quotes Felman who states the law “inadvertently denies the abyssal nature of the abyss.”^[83]

Rizvana Bradley and Damien-Adia Marassa suggest that the experience of the abyss, by way of Spillers, “originates in the historical moment when language ceases to speak.”^[84] However, with the abyss in the documentary, I contend that language does not cease to speak. Rather the cessation of language is sealed by the voice. The voice does not simply refuse to speak or is cut off from the ability to speak, but moreover seals an unsayability.

One of Julian’s friends admits that he does not have the words. Irrevocably, what has happened to Julian is unspeakable. This “missed” death that denies Julian a “proper” life and a death, this anti-black violence is unspeakable. More than just an assault, this anti-black violence misplaces and disarranges death, (and), blackness, (i.e. Julian put to death but not placed in death). Yet, while we speak of this unspeakableness, this unspeakableness is not unspoken. *That said*, if it can “properly” be said, my claim that the unspeakable is not unspoken must not be said so freely. We must save something of the unspoken so as not to make the unspeakable seem accessible, audible, and citable.

Weigel comments that “[B]earing witness does not convey a representative knowledge about ‘how it was’, but

a *qualitative* knowledge; that is witnesses report about specific experiences that are not accessible to the listener and to which there is no access via other paths.”^[85] Park quotes this passage to attribute this *quality* to – in Weigel’s words – the “human-made system of jurisdiction.”^[86] The construction of the modern subject and the “human-made system of jurisdiction” certainly take advantage of this claimed inaccessibility to truth and its *in-difference*,^[87] to justify, legitimise, and authorise its conquests, invasions, and domination. To underscore this point, it is important to stress that this inaccessibility within listening pertains not simply to qualitative knowledge but is core to the *episteme* of truth. Conversely, it is just as important to recognise that this inaccessibility is a condition and necessity of testimony to affirm the abyss and save the concept of the secret.

Julian’s friends appear to face something of an abyss, yet we could never say – as neither could they fully affirm – what that abyss looks like. When the director is heard asking “off camera” if he was “there on the night it happened,” the eyes of Julian’s friend instinctively glance up from under his navy-blue cap, but then just as quickly, in a blink, his eyes return to Julian. His clasped hands block his mouth – the nail of his thumb is touched to his lip. He slips out a “Yeah.” He remains still in his pose, stuck in the stare he was in before, and does not say anything further.

This avowal says what needs to be said without submitting towards providing a longer testimony for evidence to be collected. Perhaps Julian’s friend knows what the director is trying to do, can see what he is aiming at. He does not need to look at the camera to see what it is trying to capture. He is looking or perhaps rather facing his friend, Julian, and perhaps he is facing Julian now to help turn the gaze away from him to somewhere else. Perhaps when we look at this – whatever “this” may be – perhaps it is to go unseen by the gaze, optics, and sensorium of white sovereignty. If we do look at this – whatever *this* may be – perhaps it is for others to go unseen – to remain unwatchable, and unsayable.

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Notes

1. Special thanks to Damata Konaté, who has supported the writing of this essay.
2. Elizabeth Alexander, "'Can you be BLACK and Look at This?': Reading the Rodney King Video(s)." *Social Text* 7, pp 77-94, 1994, p 77.
3. There is much to say not only about this quote but in addition the act of quotation. That is of citation, iteration, and punctuation in regard to speaking to a public and the publicity of this speech, especially as it relates to blackness and black sociality. To quote Derrida, the "apostrophe [...] allows one to speak to several people at once. To more than one other." Jacques Derrida, "How to avoid speaking: Denials," in, Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser, ed., *Languages of the Unsayable: The play of negativity in Literature and Literary Theory*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996, pp. 3-70, p. 48. Also see Jennifer DeVere Brody, *Punctuation: art, politics, and play*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2020.
4. Friedländer Saul, ed., *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"*, Cambridge Mass, Harvard University Press, 1992; Annette Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 2006; Felman Shoshana and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis, and history*, London, Taylor & Francis, 1992; Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: the witness and the archive*, New York, Zone Books, 2002.
5. Alexander prefers the term black body over flesh, while she acknowledges Spillers' use of the term "flesh." "'Can you be BLACK and Look at This?'" op. cit. p. 78, fn. 4. For a more in-depth study of the corporeality of black body and flesh, that challenges phenomenology, see Rizvana Bradley, *Anteaesthetics: Black Aesthetics and Critique of Form*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2023.

6. Linette Park, "Unhomeliness – Afterlife and Testimony," *Political Theology*, 2022.
7. Dwight McBride, *Impossible witnesses: Truth, abolitionism, and slave testimony*, New York, NY, New York University Press, 2001.
8. On the bearings of black femininity as it relates to reproductivity see Rizvana Bradley, *Anteaesthetics*, op. cit. On a different register, also see Jared Sexton, "Unbearable Blackness," *Cultural Critique*, no. 90, pp. 159-178, Spring 2015.
9. Allissa V. Richardson, "Bearing Witness While Black, Digital Journalism," vol. 5, no. 6, pp. 673-698, 2017. Cf. Tonia Sutherland, "Making a Killing: On Race, Ritual, and (Re)Membering in Digital Culture," *Preservation, Digital Technology & Culture*, vol. 46, no. 1, pp. 32-40, 2017; Cf. Patrice D Douglass, "Black feminist theory for the dead and dying," *Theory & Event* vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 106-123, 2018.
10. John R. Rickford and Sharese King, "Language and linguistics on trial: Hearing Rachel Jeantel (and other vernacular speakers) in the courtroom and beyond," *Language* vol. 92, no. 4, pp. 948-988, 2016; Taylor Jones, Jessica Rose Kalbfeld, Ryan Hancock, and Robin Clark, "Testifying while black: An experimental study of court reporter accuracy in transcription of African American English," *Language* vol. 95, no. 2, pp. e216-e252, 2019.
11. I am using the phrase "black bearing witness" to distinguish it from "black testimony," and to further distinguish *bearing* witness from (the figure of the) *witness*.
12. For a study and mediation that maintains the notion of "black testimony" in artistic practices, see, LaCharles Ward, *Black Redaction, Black Evidence: Another Testimony of Black Life*, in Janet Dees, ed., *A Site of Struggle : American Art against Anti-Black Violence*. Princeton, NJ; Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art Northwestern University; Princeton University Press, pp 87-99, 2022; Imani Robinson, *Objects Who Testify*, London: PSS, 2019; Languid Hands & Gabriele Christian: Performance for "Towards a Black Testimony," 30 April 2022, thelab.org/projects/2022/4/30/languid-hands-amp-gabriele-christian-towards-a-black-testimony, accessed 25 October 2023.
13. Karera conceptualizes relationality as "inherently not only a position that the black cannot afford or even claim. The structure of relationality is essentially the condition for the possibility of their enslavement." "Blackness and the Pitfalls of Anthropocene Ethics," *Critical Philosophy of Race* vol. 17, no. 1, 2019, pp. 32-56, p. 48.
14. Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, slavery, and self-making in nineteenth-century America*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 73.
15. For a political and historical study of the LA riots and the re-formation of "race relations" (including not just black and white Americans, but Asian and Latinas/os) within "civil society," see, Lynn Mie Itagaki, *Civil Racism: The 1992 Los Angeles Rebellion and the Crisis of Racial Burnout*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2016.
16. Ryan Watson, "In the Wakes of Rodney King: Militant Evidence and Media Activism in the Age of Viral Black Death," *The Velvet Light Trap*, no. 84, pp. 34-49, Fall 2019.
17. *Ibid.*, p 39.
18. Butler Judith, "Endangered/Endangering: Schematic Racism and White Paranoia," in Robert Gooding-Williams, ed, *Reading Rodney King/Reading urban uprising*, London: Routledge, 1993, pp.15-22, p. 16.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
23. Cf. Melayna Lamb, *A Philosophical History of Police Power*, London, Bloomsbury, 2024; Tia Trafford, *Everything Is Police*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2024.
24. Avital Ronell, "Video/Television/Rodney King: Twelve Steps beyond *The Pleasure Principal*," *Differences*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 1-15, 1992, p. 3, emphasis in original.

25. Ibid., p. 9.
26. "The police become hallucinatory and spectral because they haunt everything. They are everywhere, even where they are not. Their present is not presence: *they are television.*" Ibid., p. 9, emphasis in original.
27. Fred Moten, "Music against the Law of Reading the Future and 'Rodney King.'" *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, vol. 27, no. 1, pp. 51-64, Spring 1994, p. 56.
28. Ibid., p. 56.
29. Ibid., p. 56.
30. Fred Moten, "Black Mo'nin," in David L. Eng and David Kazanjian, eds., *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, Berkeley, University of California Press, pp. 59-76, 2003, p. 72.
31. "Video(s)" which could also connote "still(s)."
32. For a recent treatise on the Rodney King videotape from a study of memetic blackness see Legacy Russell, *Black Meme: A History of the Images that Make Us*, London, Verso, 2024.
33. Christina Sharpe claims Alexander "sought a language that would carry the ways such historical and present violence positioned black people as witness and participant – constituted through and by vulnerability to overwhelming force though not *only* known to themselves and to each other *by* that force." "Blackness, Sexuality, and Entertainment," *American Literary History*, vol. 24, no. 4, pp. 827-841, Winter 2012, p. 828.
34. Alexander, "'Can you be BLACK and Look at This?'" op. cit., p. 83.
35. Kimberly Fain, "Viral Black Death: Why We Must Watch Citizen Videos of Police Violence," 1 September 2016, daily.jstor.org/why-we-must-watch-citizen-videos-of-police-violence/, accessed 24 October 2023; Cf. Alexandra Juhasz, "How Do I (Not) Look? Live Feed Video and Viral Black Death," 20 July 2016, daily.jstor.org/how-do-i-not-look/, accessed 24 October 2023.
36. For example, see Jane M. Gaines, "Political Mimesis," in Jane Gaines and Michael Renov, eds., *Collecting Visible Evidence*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1999, pp. 84-102.
37. Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, "The Unwatchable and the Unwatchable," in Nicholas Baer, Maggie Hennefeld, Laura Horak, and Gunnar Iversen, eds., *Unwatchable*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2019, pp. 45-47, p. 47.
38. Alexander, "'Can you be BLACK and Look at This?'" op. cit., p. 78.
39. Ibid., p. 83.
40. For study on the black body not as a subject but a dissimulation, see Bradley, *Anteaesthetics*, op. cit.
41. Alexander, "'Can you be BLACK and Look at This?'" op. cit., p. 83.
42. Ibid., p. 90.
43. Ibid., p. 78.
44. Ibid., p. 88.
45. Alexander, "'Can you be BLACK and Look at This?'" op. cit., p. 85.
46. I borrow this term from Kellie Jones, *EyeMinded: Living and Writing Contemporary Art*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2011, p. 210.
47. Alexander, "'Can you be BLACK and Look at This?'" op. cit., p. 93.
48. Janet Marquardt-Cherry, "B(l)ack Talk: African American Women's Confrontational Art," *Exposure*, vol. 33, no. 1/2, 2000, pp. 53-60.
49. For a thesis on confrontation as an artistic and critical practice, see Denise Ferreira da Silva, "Reading Art as Confrontation," May 2015, e-flux.com/journal/65/336390/reading-art-as-confrontation/, accessed 24 October 2023.
50. Alexander admits, "[D]espite the prevalence of anti-essentialist, post-identity discourses, I still believe there is a place for a bottom line. The bottom line here is that different groups possess sometimes-subconscious collective memories which are frequently forged and maintained through a storytelling

tradition, however difficult that may be to pin down, as well as through individual experience,” and uses the term “*bottom line blackness*.” ““Can you be BLACK and Look at This?”” op. cit., p. 80, p. 81 emphasis in original. My dis-joining of the word “less” is a precursor to the Park’s use of the term *bottomlessness* to mean for the errancy and abyss of blackness, which the later part of this paper will turn to.

51. I am borrowing the term “join” from Sharpe, who in turn is borrowing Toni Morrison. See Sharpe, “Blackness, Sexuality, and Entertainment,” op. cit., p. 839, fn. 2.
52. Derrida, *Demeure*, op. cit.; Gert-Jan van der Heiden, *The Voice of Misery: A Continental Philosophy of Testimony*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2019.
53. Derrida, *Demeure*, op. cit.
54. Ibid.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid.
57. van der Heiden, *The Voice of Misery*, op. cit.
58. Derrida, *Demeure*, op. cit., p. 48; Jacques Derrida, “Poetics and politics of witnessing,” in Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen, eds., *Sovereignties in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2005, pp. 65-96.
59. Derrida, “Poetics and politics of witnessing,” op. cit., p. 70.
60. For more a brief note on the notion of in-humanness in Agamben’s philosophy as it pertains to bearing witness, see van der Heiden, *The Voice of Misery*, op. cit., p. 122.
61. I deliberately use the term “code” here to hint at the Roman legal code *testis unus testis nullus* (one witness, no witness) – e.g. there must be two witness to affirm the truth. I suggest we could consider Celan’s poetic line as a codification (of the *saying*) of the impossibility of bearing witness. For a historical and philosophical briefing on testimony, see Sigrid Weigel, “Bearing Witness as a Boundary Case: Survivor Testimony, Legal Testimony and Historical Testimony,” in Sara Jones and Roger Woods, eds., *The Palgrave Handbook of Testimony and Culture*, Cham, Switzerland, Palgrave, 2023, pp. 39-63.
62. Following Moten, Denise Ferreira da Silva, and Celan, Rachel Zolf, claims the “no-thing or no-body or No One” is “an entangled social (non)figure” who (non-)performs its innumeracy and multiplicity. “No One occupies “in the break” of the typology of the witness (e.g. the third, the survivor, and author). “*No One’s Witness: A Monstrous Poetics*,” Durham: Duke University Press, 2021, p. 4, p. 45.
63. “The philosophical problem is no longer about the self-determination of a person in relation to their experience or about the assessment of the person as a politico-moral judgment, but rather about the conditions that preclude blackness from fitting the categories of identity at all.” Park, “Unhomeliness – Afterlife and Testimony,” op. cit., p. 11.
64. Ibid., p. 4.
65. Ibid., p. 6.
66. Ibid., p. 4.
67. Ibid., p. 4.
68. Ibid., p. 7.
69. For an analysis of how the claim of mistakenness informs police account-giving which justifies for the death of black people, particularly in the UK, see Carson Cole Arthur, “Make believe: police accountability, lying, and anti-blackness in the inquest of Sean Rigg,” *Crime, Media, Culture*, vol. 19, no. 3, pp. 362–379.
70. Park, “Unhomeliness – Afterlife and Testimony,” op. cit., p. 10.
71. Ibid., p. 10.
72. Ibid., p. 10.
73. Ibid., p. 11.

74. I am echoing the phrase from Dionne Brand, who writes, “One enters a room and history follows; one enters a room and history precedes. History is already seated in the chair in the empty room when one arrives.” *A Map to the Door of No Return*, Toronto, Vintage Canada, 2001, p. 25.
75. Park, “Unhomeliness – Afterlife and Testimony,” op. cit., p. 10.
76. Jacques Derrida, A certain impossible possibility of saying the event,” *Critical Inquiry* vol. 33, no. 2, 2007, pp. 441-461.
77. For more information, see Independent Police Complaints Commission, “Mr Julian Cole Investigation into the restraint and arrest of Mr Julian Cole by Bedfordshire Police on 6 May 2013 (redacted),” London, 2018.
78. Damien Gayle, “Police officers sacked for lying about arrest where man's neck was broken,” 22 October 2018, [theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/oct/22/julian-cole-police-officers-face-dismissal-over-incident-in-which-student-was-paralysed](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/oct/22/julian-cole-police-officers-face-dismissal-over-incident-in-which-student-was-paralysed), accessed 24 October 2023.
79. The decision to show Julian and to have the viewer visit him, recalls Mrs. Bradley’s decision to display the beaten, dead body of Emmett Till to the public with the publication of his photograph in *Jet* magazine.
80. Ben Ferguson, “Visiting Julian Cole: the man paralysed after being tackled outside a nightclub – video,” 25 October 2018, [theguardian.com/world/video/2018/oct/25/julians-wait-visiting-the-man-paralysed-after-an-incident-outside-a-nightclub-video](https://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2018/oct/25/julians-wait-visiting-the-man-paralysed-after-an-incident-outside-a-nightclub-video), accessed 24 October 2023.
81. For a rejoinder to Malabou’s centering of the cerebral over the black flesh, see Fred Moten, “The Touring Machine (Flesh Thought Inside Out),” in Brenna Bhandar and Jonathan Goldberg-Hiller, eds., *Plastic Materialities: Politics, Legality, and Metamorphosis in the Work of Catherine Malabou*, Durham, Duke University Press, pp. 265-286.
82. Park, “Unhomeliness – Afterlife and Testimony,” op. cit., p. 15.
83. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
84. Rizvana Bradley and Damien-Adia Marassa, “Awakening to the world: Relation, totality, and writing from below,” *Discourse* vol. 36, no. 1, 2014, pp. 112-131, p. 122. Bibi Bakare-Yusuf also follows Spillers in this regard, though Bakare-Yusuf maintains the notion of the desubjectification of the black woman captive, rather than of the captive in-between being and non-being, as Bradley argues in *Anteaesthetics*. Bakare-Yusuf “suggest[s] that we view pain as not necessarily resisting language, but rather as resisting everyday speech.” Following Paul Gilroy, she states “[w]hat cannot be spoken in language is evoked through other cultural representation such as dance.” “The economy of violence: Black bodies and the unspeakable terror,” in Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick, eds., *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*, London, Routledge, 2017, pp. 311-323, p. 314, p. 315.
85. Sigrid Weigel, “Probing the Limits of Visual Testimonies: A Cinematic Approach to Different Modes of Testimony from the Warsaw Ghetto in Hersonski’s *A Film Unfinished*,” in Sybille Krämer, and Sigrid Weigel, eds., *Testimony/Bearing Witness: Epistemology, Ethics, History, and Culture*, New York, Rowan & Littlefield, 2017, pp. 167-186, p 180, emphasis in original.
86. Park, “Unhomeliness – Afterlife and Testimony,” op. cit., p. 11.
87. *In-difference* is where from the perspective of the juridical it is impossible to distinguish from the legal force of the state (law-making and law-preserving) from the alleged violence of “criminals,” as described by Denise Ferreira da Silva. “No-bodies: Law, Raciality and Violence,” *Griffith Law Review* vol. 18, no. 2, 2009, pp. 212-236, p. 231.

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