

**A**ll *Incomplete* is a continuation of Stefano Harney and Fred Moten's dialogue in *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*. This earlier book has cult status in what is identifiably Aotearoa's undercommons (or what Arcia Tecun calls in Te Moana Nui a Kiwa 'the undercurrents'). With *All Incomplete*, Harney and Moten move beyond the university, creating a lexicon for fugitive thought—fugitive being the opposite of settling. Their propositions for thought and sociality are important to think with and through, especially in a settler-colonial context like Aotearoa New Zealand. I follow their notion of 'black study' as it develops through *All Incomplete*, arguing that black study constitutes a mode of what Jackie Wang calls 'communist affect'—a mode of being-for-others that reveals a kind of 'already-existing communism' in the present. I then look to how some of the ideas introduced by *The Undercommons* have been taken up in Aotearoa and consider the contributions that *All Incomplete* could make to our own context.

## Black Study and Communist Affect

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Stefano Harney and Fred Moten write together like rushing water alive—a phrase I steal from their own description of two others writing together.<sup>1</sup> I've sat with and absorbed so much of their work that I find their words and thinking constantly making themselves home in my own. Stuart Hall, once commenting on his friend and peer Ambalavaner Sivanandan's work, wrote that his essays had acquired a 'remarkable underground reputation' and that 'they have also, frequently, been plagiarized – which is its own kind of recognition'.<sup>2</sup> Even if recognition is perhaps too formal a concept for Harney and Moten, I think that, in the spirit of their notion of 'the undercommons', they would encourage such theft. For them, intellectual production in the university adheres strictly to the norms of private-property ownership, norms which they hold in contempt. Moten, for example, responding to a question about the academic practice of citation, once remarked, 'citation [makes me] think of a parking ticket!'<sup>3</sup> This quip captures their attitude well: a firm and unwavering commitment to undermining the carceral

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1 Stefano Harney et al., 'Resonances: A Conversation on Formless Formation', *e-flux Journal* 121 (October 2021).

2 Stuart Hall, 'Introduction', in Ambalavaner Sivanandan, *A Different Hunger: Writings on Black Resistance* (London: Pluto Press, 1991), ix.

3 Fred Moten, 'Gauss Seminars in Criticism: "Transubstantiation and Cosubstantiality"', *Kaltura*, 2019.

logic that structures political and academic life; refusal saturated in sharp wit.

Harney and Moten's mode of refusal is enacted across *All Incomplete* at many levels simultaneously. In this review essay, I follow their notion of 'black study', as it has been central to their work together since their last book, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (2013). As a practice, black study is their way of drawing in and moving through a wider constellation of thought on the underground of social life. *The Undercommons*, which first established the notion of black study, contains perhaps their most widely known and celebrated essay, 'The University and the Undercommons'. It was here they declared that 'the only possible relationship to the university today is a criminal one', based on the assessment that 'it cannot be denied that the university is a place of refuge, and it cannot be accepted that the university is a place of enlightenment. In the face of these conditions one can only sneak into the university and steal what one can'.<sup>4</sup> This prolific essay helped many find a language to articulate their complicated relationship to the university, and to navigate the contradiction of finding refuge (be it friends or books or resources) in an institution that reproduces itself based on the exploitation of its workers, unfettered professionalisation, and a 'site of the social reproduction of conquest denial'.<sup>5</sup>

*All Incomplete* was written following the opportunities that *The Undercommons* opened up, with a global interest in their ideas spreading amongst students, activists, artists, and academics alike. *The Undercommons* was able to gain such wide repute in part because it is open access, distributed by an autonomous press, and this underground acclaim created the chance to travel and meet with those who were engaging with their work. *All Incomplete* reflects this practice of study: going around and talking and learning with others. As such, they describe it as a 'peripatetic book of

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4 Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2013), 26.

5 Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons*, 41.

influences and circumstances, and sharedness'.<sup>6</sup> The resulting text is a restless one, unsettling both in form and content. This is perhaps what makes *All Incomplete* a difficult text to write about: any attempt to summarise its ideas would necessarily betray the text. Here, then, I offer some reflections on what are for me the most invigorating parts of *All Incomplete*, which orbit around their notion of black study. I follow this notion as it develops through *All Incomplete*, drawing too on its early use in *The Undercommons*, to link together some of their main ideas in this book, arguing that black study constitutes a mode of what Jackie Wang calls 'communist affect'—a mode of being-for-others that reveals a kind of 'already-existing communism'. I then look to how some of their ideas have been taken up and the contributions that *All Incomplete* could make to our own context in Aotearoa New Zealand.

## Refusal as/of form

For Harney and Moten, black study is an aesthetic practice of refusal—aesthetics taken in its broadest sense to mean the way we inhabit modern life—and this shapes the wider conceptual, political, and analytic elements of their project.<sup>7</sup> The form of *All Incomplete* exceeds the rigid descriptor of a conversation, or even dialogue. It feels more akin to something like a poetics of relation. The Caribbean poet-philosopher Édouard Glissant writes, 'when we speak of a poetics of Relation, we no longer need to add: relation between what and what?' Instead, functioning as an intransitive verb, relation 'informs not simply what is relayed but also the relative and

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6 Stefano Harney, Fred Moten, and Stevphen Shukaitas, 'Refusing Completion: A Conversation', *e-flux Journal* 116 (March 2021).

7 Elsewhere, Moten turns the Kantian notion of aesthetics on its head. The Kantian definition of aesthetics considers the domain of beauty or taste, whereas for Moten, aesthetics is more akin to something like the expressions of social life. These are the grounds on which he makes the claim that the Black radical tradition is an aesthetic tradition. See Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2003).

the related'.<sup>8</sup> It strings together a constellation of indiscreet things, bound by their inseparability, in turn revealing their boundlessness. Harney and Moten's mode of thought performs a poetics of relation because it does exactly that; they enter into the boundlessness of what *All Incomplete* names 'black sociality', refracted back through their method of writing together—what they call their 'ongoing rehearsal'—and the nature of its content.<sup>9</sup> Where dialogue assumes a two-way exchange, relational poetics moves in and through a rhythm not predicated on a give-and-take that follows the logic of individuation; rather, it emerges from a full immersion into the depths of a movement larger than the individuals it comprises.

In a conversation with Stephen Shukaitis preceding the publication of *All Incomplete*, they note that poetics brought them together in friendship, forming the basis of their work together. Moten says, 'to the extent that we were interested in theory or philosophy, we were always interested in folks who revel in their poetic sensibilities, whether that was James or Derrida or Glissant or Wynter or Spillers. And we gravitated towards the poetic or literary sensibility that animates Marx's work. We were looking for poetry, or for the poetic, in everything we read'.<sup>10</sup> Their use of 'the poetic' resonates with the Surrealist tradition and, in particular, the work of Aimé Césaire, in which poetry or 'poetic knowledge' is able to say what we cannot in (social) scientific terms. In other words, poetry liberates knowledge. For Harney and Moten, the poetic performs this liberation because of the potential of language to move, and their search for the poetic signals their own desire to *be moved*. Their work together revels in their own poetic sensibilities too, ever-present in the cadence of their thought; a kind of phonic poetics that rides out the waves of their correspondence across geographical and temporal distance, leaning into the dyssynchronous to produce an inimitable rhythm. Moten again: 'we like to think we're involved in a kind of musical correspondence, like we're trading fours. You know, Stefano takes four bars and I take four bars; or, probably it's more like he takes four

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8 Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 27.

9 Harney et al., 'Refusing Completion'.

10 Harney et al., 'Refusing Completion'.

bars and I take forty-four'.<sup>11</sup> This rhythm is above all a *will to move*; desire inflected with the temporality of transformation and change.

*All Incomplete* is not a traditional academic text. As such, it can be a hard text to enter; there is no gate being kept here, which is precisely why the matter of entrance can feel a bit disarming. Harney and Moten are not building a systematic argument, or enacting a critique based on what Paul Ricoeur calls the hermeneutics of suspicion, or what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick reveals as the epistemic and affective privileging of paranoia in contemporary critical theory.<sup>12</sup> Harney and Moten are not paranoid because they already know the world is fucked up, which means they aren't anticipating this revelation, or trying to prove it to you, because they know you know it's fucked up too. This reveals something important about the internal structure of critique, which always betrays an investment in its object of inquiry, as an analytic procedure that reinscribes the object's centrality. This too is extended to the figure of the 'critical academic' who they first problematise in *The Undercommons*, writing that 'to be a critical academic in the university is to be against the university, and to be against the university is always to recognize it and be recognized by it, and to institute the negligence of that internal outside, that unassimilated underground, a negligence of it that is precisely, we must insist, the basis of the profession'.<sup>13</sup> *All Incomplete*, even more so than *The Undercommons*, marks a shift away from critique by turning away from the problem of the university as a site of struggle.

Harney and Moten do not want to make the university better because they know it's not broken, that it's working as intended. They know that it has to go, and, in the meantime, they aren't particularly worried about the matter of complicity or any purity of political or analytic position. To worry about complicity, they argue, is to fear the general antagonism

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11 Harney et al., 'Refusing Completion'.

12 For Sedgwick, paranoid reading is the method of interrogating a text defensively, foreclosing possibilities for surprise: *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

13 Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons*, 31.

(the contradictions of racial capitalism). Rather than being preoccupied with the strategy of being within and against the university, they embrace complicity as a way to heighten the contradiction, as Cedric Robinson says.

Rather than worrying about whether they are for or against the university, *All Incomplete* takes inspiration from General Baker and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers—the coalition of Black union movements in the auto industry in Detroit across the 1960s and 70s. In their words, ‘under the guidance of General Baker’s stance, we could stop all the critique and we could start to write about what we loved, the ongoing red and black abolition, and this could take the form of criticism instead of critique, criticism like what collectives do because they want more collectivity’.<sup>14</sup> This critique/criticism distinction is generative because it tells us about the orientation of their project. Sara Ahmed teaches that orientations matter because they guide the direction we take, and the paths we take to get there. Where the path of critique leads you back to its object, criticism is disorientating precisely because it leads to an unknown: you don’t necessarily know where you might end up.

The question of entrance is therefore less about finding a way in and more about bringing to the text what you already have, because the undercommons is a place you never left, because it’s not really a place at all. Harney insists, ‘we’re happy if our rehearsal, our rhythm as you call it, the strangeness of our dub, as Eddie George would say, comes through to people as a kind of insurgent information about the obvious, a cadence in that common wind’.<sup>15</sup> In other words, you already have what you need. *All Incomplete*, as its opening chapter suggests, is about renewing our habits of assembly, rather than submitting to the authors’ mastery of a concept. In *The Undercommons*, when discussing the reception of the text, Moten says, ‘if somebody’s reading our stuff, and they think they can get something out of the term “planning” or “undercommons” or “logisticality”, that’s great, but what matters is what they do with it; it’s where they take it in their own relations’. Harney follows with a comment on the social world of study: ‘it’s

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14 Harney et al., ‘Refusing Completion’.

15 Harney et al., ‘Refusing Completion’.

exciting for me when we get to that point where the text is open enough that instead of being studied, it actually becomes the occasion for study'.<sup>16</sup> *All Incomplete* is, then, a continuation of their ongoing invitation to study, and simultaneously an ongoing moment in Harney and Moten's own study together, on its own terms.

## On violence (a total education)

The conceptual framing of study is crucial to this work because it challenges the normative modes of instruction administered through the university and other sites of social reproduction today. This idea is developed across *All Incomplete* through a nebulous exploration of the situation in which black study emerges, and the conditions that engender its struggle. This forms around an unspoken question: what is the nature of the violence done to social life?

One answer to this question begins with Michel Foucault, who has shown that the modern prison regime was deployed against what was (and continues to be) deemed the 'perversion' of the individual. This regime of corrective disciplinarity 'straightens out' the prisoner—in all the colonial, heteropatriarchal instances of the word—by giving them a 'total education', that is, depriving them of liberty in all areas of life inside.<sup>17</sup> This is the case primarily, as Foucault illustrates, in the carceral system, but also in the ways that carceral logic informs other sites and relations of social life. Following Foucault, Harney and Moten suggest that perversion is racial capitalism's universal diagnosis of the subject as a site of embodied deviance: 'the first lesson of this total education – after the inevitable diagnosis of perversion (wilfully misunderstood as sickness rather than as health) stemming from our deinstitutionalisation – is that we must improve'.<sup>18</sup>

They locate the origins of improvement—etymologically linked

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16 Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons*, 106, 109.

17 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Penguin, 1991), 334-337.

18 Harney and Moten, *All Incomplete* (Chico: AK Press, 2021), 65.



to profit—in modern *usufruct*. As John Locke’s labour theory of property insists, an individual’s right to property naturally follows his improvement of the land. In the chapter ‘Usufruct and Use’, Harney and Moten state: ‘the moment you say it is mine because I worked on it and improved it, or you say that I am me because I worked on myself and improved myself, you start a war. And by misattributing the initiation of this war to nature, you then codify this war as the (anti)social contract’.<sup>19</sup> This applies to land too, with regimes of improvement decimating natural ecosystems and setting in motion the ecological crisis we face today. But what they call improvement performs a stretching of our metanarrative of colonial capitalism’s teleological complex—which orients us as an epoch towards endless accumulation, development, and growth—and this allows us to identify how this telos works across multiple layers at once. Improvement’s relationship to ownership and possession is therefore understood as violence by dispossession simultaneously in relation to land, but also to oneself, and others.

*All Incomplete* asserts that the cost of improvement is the speciation of man. This follows the insights of Sylvia Wynter, who stretches the notion of speciation from its bio-evolutionary meaning to account for the symbolic and cultural elements of species-life. Harney and Moten make this connection between improvement and speciation through Pierre-Joseph Proudhon’s assertion that all property is theft: ‘Locke invents the derivative here, a degraded part of the accursed share that is poised to draw on the power of this share, but only to create more derivatives, to create more zones of dispossession by positing possession, in the denial of loss that prepares for loss. All property is loss because all property is the loss of sharing’.<sup>20</sup> This loss is only conceivable through the violence of speciation. Wynter’s distinction between human/man understands that the creation of a self-owning, earth-owning, individual is contingent on the figure of (European, bourgeois) man, who universalises itself as the only legible genre of humanity. This individuation requires a kind of exceptionalism to produce itself, by severing itself off from the social body. *All Incomplete*

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19 Harney and Moten, *All Incomplete*, 33.

20 Harney and Moten, *All Incomplete*, 14.

further problematises this figure's compulsion towards improvement and endless accumulation, showing how this produces and sustains the figure in a broader sense, and importantly, that its inaugural moment is one to be grieved rather than celebrated. Improvement, even at the level of the self, is thus understood to be a discursive and material manifestation of colonial capitalism's telos, as both its destiny and its *raison d'être*.

Against a total education and its corrective faculties that compel us to improve, Harney and Moten lean into the idea of the 'anoriginal perversion'—'there is something wrong with us . . . namely, that we don't wanna be right'—which study encourages. Their conception of study is in stark tension with the instructional and disciplinary methods of capital's reproduction. They set up the distinction between study and instruction in the chapter 'A Partial Education':

Study perverts instruction. Study emerges as the collective practice of revision in which those who study do not improve but improvise, do not develop but regenerate and degenerate, do not receive instruction but seek to instantiate reception. Study is our already given gift of the *general* dispossession of ourselves for each other, and our service to that dispossession. Study is the (im)permanently unformed, insistently informal, underperforming commitment to each other not to graduate but instead indefinitely to accumulate an invaluable debt to each other rather than submit ourselves to their infinitely fungible line of credit. Study is a partial education.<sup>21</sup>

At the heart of black study is a constitutive openness that resists the deep regulation of a total education, and by extension, the will to (self-)possession. In other words: it's about tempo rather than telos.

## **Black study as mastery's antagonism**

In *Unthinking Mastery*, Julietta Singh shows how some anticolonial thinkers end up reproducing the same theoretical formulations of colonial mastery

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21 Harney and Moten, *All Incomplete*, 65, 68.

they intend to resist. Singh argues that, ‘by continuing to abide by the formulation of “mastering mastery”, we remain bound to relations founded on and through domination. In so doing, we concede to the inescapability of mastery as a way of life’.<sup>22</sup> In contrast to the theoretical formulation of mastering mastery, then, Harney and Moten engage the mode of black study as mastery’s antagonism. Black study, they write:

moves against the mastery of and over the concept as if it were a matter of life and death. But more important, black study means you serve your concepts without a master(y). And this would mean that the rupture of subjection and objection is never closed, healed, settled for plunder and expropriation. This is why those who master concepts hate black study so much, in what appears to be a disproportionately violent response to the service. They can’t stand it because serving something without a master is a totally open form of love.<sup>23</sup>

One of the lessons offered by Frantz Fanon’s analysis of colonial violence is that mastery is the settler’s ontological inheritance. It is true that, for Fanon, ontology is simultaneously fixed and malleable, but this lesson still indicates something about the settler’s mode of life in terms of their habits, patterns, affective states, and, particularly, their mode of social relation to others. To master something means to kill it in some sense, to subjugate it beyond recognition, make it alien to itself (this is Fanon’s master/slave dialectic at work) in order to procure its ownership. This is to enact a contradiction, of course, because the thing in question is very much alive on its own terms, be it land, animal, or another person. But mastery is also an act of violence on oneself, as Aimé Césaire suggests when he so astutely observes that colonisation *decivilises* the coloniser because it awakens him to his most violent instincts.<sup>24</sup> Black study unravels these masterful subjectivities, in turn renewing life by nourishing a sociality not based on domination.

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22 Julietta Singh, *Unthinking Mastery: Dehumanism and Decolonial Entanglements* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 67.

23 Harney and Moten, *All Incomplete*, 81-82.

24 Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 35.

Another way to think about black study is through its relationship to what the Marxist tradition has called historical consciousness. Harney and Moten put black study into conversation with historical moments within the Black radical tradition that makes this connection clear. One example is Amílcar Cabral's address to the first Tricontinental Conference of the Peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America in 1966. Cabral urges that theory can be used as a weapon, because it can help the petty bourgeoisie realise their own revolutionary potential—what he calls committing 'suicide as a class'—by understanding that they belong to the working class. Cabral's demand for 'suicide as a class' is a demand for historical consciousness, which would entail a rupturing of the ideological convictions of a whole stratum of capitalist society, restructuring their class interests. In turn, this would mean the abolition of the notion of a class whose self-identification is predicated on distance from the working class.

Following Cabral, *All Incomplete* asserts that theory 'cannot be wielded by a theorist. It cannot be lifted or aimed alone, by a single voice, or even by a chorus of single voices shouting at the enemy. That's how our weapon gets pried from our own dead, individuated hands and is deployed against us'. Thus, Harney and Moten position black study in relation to historical consciousness by emphasising the way that studying theory has revolutionary potential when done together:

Practical, antipolitical refusal of the metaphysics of class 'morals' are a matter of murmuring. To feel fully the aspirations of the people to which you belong would bring about a terrible and beautiful differentiation in murmuring, an harmonic irresolution of and with and in the choir, in anticipation of a shift in flock, where belonging is in flight from belonging in sharing, at rest in an unrest of constant topographical motion. The weapon of theory is a conference of the birds. The kitchen table is its public and its publisher.<sup>25</sup>

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25 Harney and Moten, *All Incomplete*, 149.

Murmuration, which brings to mind the 12<sup>th</sup>-century Sufi mystic Farīd ud-Dīn's *Conference of the Birds*, is in *All Incomplete* an image of historical consciousness. Murmuration, Moten says, 'bears the trace of the sound. It's beautiful when you watch those movements, but it's even more beautiful when you hear them. The internal differentiation of the swarm is absolute wealth'.<sup>26</sup> The image performs the dialectical interplay of the universal and the particular, what Denise Ferreira da Silva calls 'difference without separability'.<sup>27</sup> In other words, the image paints a picture of a revolutionary movement and the chorus which accompanies it—rich with all that is particular.

The notion of black study returns us to the image of murmuration, where historical consciousness looks like coming together around the kitchen table, or in hallways, or at a smoke break, to figure things out. Where *Conference of the Birds* offers a picture of divine unity—revealing a sea of contingencies that bind us together, always changing, always irreducible—*All Incomplete* also works to unravel the myth of sovereignty by emphasising openness rather than enclosure. This acts as a kind of intervention into the logistics, 'the white science', as they call it, that keep us tethered to property, capital, and self. But they remain suspicious of the imperial connotations of unity, offering another word in its place: diffunity. Between diffuse and unity, diffunity articulates a new kind of social life, one that operates just under the surface, *in* but not *of* the world. Where the appeal to unity has often in the Enlightenment tradition enacted violence by collapsing difference or asserting boundaries of inclusion/exclusion, diffunity suggests an inversion of this formulation by maintaining difference as its condition of possibility.

If all property is loss, impropriety is important because it suggests a different social relation is possible, one that isn't predicated on theft. For Harney and Moten, impropriety is a gift, the ability to break rules, violate principles, and resist scarcity. By throwing away the inheritance of a total education, then, impropriety offers unmediated potential for new ruptures,

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26 Harney et al., 'Refusing Completion'.

27 Denise Ferreira da Silva, 'On Difference Without Separability', Catalogue of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Bienal de São Paulo, Incerteza Viva, 2016.

which means it is world-making in as much as it is world-destroying. Diffunity speaks to social life within these ruptures, what Moten elsewhere calls inhabiting the break.<sup>28</sup> In the chapter ‘Plantocracy and Communism’, they write: ‘the undercommons *is not*, except incidentally, about the university; and the undercommons *is* crucially about a sociality not based on the individual. Nor, again, would we describe it as derivative of the individual – the undercommons is not about the individual, or the pre-individual, or the supra-individual. The undercommons is an attachment, a sharedness, a diffunity, a partedness.’<sup>29</sup> The undercommons might thus be understood as the perversion of resources for the project of mutual implication; importantly, this is a practice in so far as we understand practice to mean the process by which the subject and their object are unmade together.

The social practice of black study for *All Incomplete* connects each of its other themes in a way that makes it impossible to consider any one theme as conceptually distinct from the others. This is partly what makes the book incomprehensible at times; the refusal to submit to separability is embedded in the text at the levels of method, object, and subject, resulting in what we might call their ruptured sovereignty. But this is exactly the point, if we consider black study to be mastery’s failure. In her foreword, Ferreira da Silva writes that incomprehension ‘accentuates this failing because it recalls how formality and efficacy both request and give completeness. That which does not exhibit either cannot be seen as total, finalized, absolute, or perfect. It is not then comprehensible: it does not explain (account for) itself, either all of its various parts or as a whole’.<sup>30</sup> *All Incomplete* as a text is perhaps better understood in this light, as a speculative practice, what Harney and Moten call ‘study in movement’.<sup>31</sup> Another way to put this might be in Glissant’s terms of opacity. Glissant describes ‘the right to opacity’ as the right of the oppressed for their difference to remain uncompromised

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28 Moten, *In the Break*.

29 Harney and Moten, *All Incomplete*, 123.

30 Denise Ferreira da Silva, ‘Foreword,’ in Harney and Moten, *All Incomplete*, 6.

31 Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons*, 118.

by refusing transparency, refusing to be translated. Where transparency requires translation for the purpose of making one's difference legible, this is an impossible compromise that black study is unwilling to concede. This is perhaps one of the most striking things about *All Incomplete*. The attention to aesthetic and affective forms of refusal immerses the reader in the porosity of their text and, by extension, their mode of uncompromised, incomplete sociality. It encourages the reader to think with the text in the ways they have available to them, and therefore it performs the very openness and incompleteness it theorises.

## Communist affect

In the essay 'Oceanic Feeling and Communist Affect', Jackie Wang examines modes of social relation that might be enlisted in service of a communist project today. While the oceanic features across psychoanalytic discourse in many ways, Wang draws on the term's inception: in 1927 Romain Rolland wrote his friend Sigmund Freud a letter in which he suggested Freud's critique of religion neglects to consider the mystical experiences of religious sentiment. To describe this mysticism Rolland used the term 'oceanic feeling', which Freud later said is 'a feeling which he would like to call a sensation of "eternity" a feeling as of something limitless, unbounded – as it were, "oceanic" . . . it is a feeling, then, of being indissolubly bound up with and belonging to the whole of the world outside oneself'.<sup>32</sup> Rolland, deeply influenced by the philosophy of Baruch Spinoza, refers to oceanic feeling as an affective state through which one connects to what Spinoza believed to be the infinite substance of existence. Wang writes that this affective state 'reveals a kind of already-existing communism, even while on another level, we inhabit a historical milieu that is considered post-communist (insofar as the major communist political endeavors of the 20th century have failed)'.<sup>33</sup> Thus, Wang illustrates that oceanic feeling has

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32 Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (London: Penguin Books, 2010), 3-4.

33 Jackie Wang, 'Oceanic Feeling and Communist Affect', in Giulia Tofana, *The Apothecary*, 3 December 2016.

the potential to ‘denaturalize the individual and undo the fiction of the bounded subject’, enriching social, psychic, and material connectedness and dependence by allowing us to think modes of social relation beyond the boundaries of the ‘I’.<sup>34</sup>

The question of thinking outside the boundaries of individuation has been a central concern for communists for a long time. The Italian communist Amadeo Bordiga, for example, wrote that ‘the original content of the communist programme is the abolition of the individual, as economic subject, holder of rights, and actor of human history’.<sup>35</sup> More recently, Alberto Toscano has drawn on this demand for the abolition of the individual, connecting its philosophical articulations to historic political movements for the abolition of slavery and contemporary demands for prison abolition. Underscoring communist theory’s focus on a political economy not based on private-property ownership is also the conviction that modes of social relation are possible in which privatisation, including individuation, are no longer conceivable in the first place. Wang’s project of communist affect signals a new turn in this discourse, with the notion of oceanic feeling pulling in psychoanalytic and mystic references; but it goes further than theorising a philosophical abstraction of social collectivity, because Wang attempts to articulate the sensory feeling of what togetherness already feels like. The introduction of affect theory to the communist tradition offers a way to think and practice embodied and sensory ways of being-together that lend themselves to communal social life.

Harney and Moten’s black study might too be described as a practice that constitutes communist affect. On one level this is an abstraction. For instance, they refuse the language of the political because they conceive of politics as being governed by the metaphysics of individuation, and they are drawn instead to the language of the social because true sociality exceeds what politics allows. In other words, while they are deeply invested

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34 Wang, ‘Oceanic Feeling and Communist Affect’.

35 First published in Italian as ‘Contenuto originale del programma comunista è l’annullamento della persona singola come soggetto economico, titolare di diritti ed attore della storia umana’, *Il Programma Comunista* nos. 21-22 (1958).



in struggle and resistance, this is not always articulated on the familiar or recognisable register of the political. On the level of practice, however, they are interested in the ‘mechanics of undercommon hapticality’, that is, what being together in collective dispossession *feels* like and how to nurture and grow this feeling. They originally developed this concept in *The Undercommons*, connecting undercommons hapticality with a formulation of blackness that ruptures ontological containment. Here they think from the perspective of being ‘in the hold’—a reference to the transatlantic slave trade—writing that ‘the hold’s terrible gift was to gather dispossessed feelings in common’, which marked an unavoidable, new kind of being-together (elsewhere, Moten calls this the ‘paraontology of blackness’).<sup>36</sup> *All Incomplete* leans further into the form of social existence; Harney and Moten remark that ‘communal sensual life emerges in the hapticality of those called upon to assemble this flow, those who dissemble this flow in their renewed assembly, running underground and overhead and undercommon’.<sup>37</sup> Wang too notes the significance of Moten’s conception of blackness to the project of communist affect, observing that ‘Moten’s paraontological subjects (and perhaps ‘subjects’ is a misnomer here) are without boundaries. They are oceanic. Not only are they affected by others, they spill over, into, and are haptically undone and remade by each other’.<sup>38</sup> Thinking with and from this theorisation of blackness, Harney and Moten are thus ‘philosophers of the feel’, interested in the touch and taste and caress of being-together, with an understanding that hapticality is fundamentally transformative.

In Zun Lee’s afterword to *All Incomplete*, aptly titled ‘Home is Where We Displace our Selves’, he announces that ‘we cannot wait for a tomorrow that will never come’.<sup>39</sup> Undercommons hapticality as a mode of communist affect provides an alternative way of thinking about struggle, against utopian narratives of hope that project a future redemption. It leans

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36 Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons*, 97. On paraontology, see Fred Moten, ‘Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)’, *South Atlantic Quarterly* 112, no. 4 (2013): 737–780.

37 Harney and Moten, *All Incomplete*, 103.

38 Wang, ‘Oceanic Feeling and Communist Affect’.

39 Zun Lee, ‘Afterword’, in Harney and Moten, *All Incomplete*, 172.

into the messiness of the present to deepen the ways we are already engaged together, already transforming and being transformed by each other, encouraging us to renew these habits of assembly, in the face of its theft from us. To think about this in terms of communist affect is useful because it illuminates for us that the communist project today doesn't have to be an untenable aim, projected into a future we'll never see; it gives us permission to believe in the ways we are already practising this on an affective (and in many cases, material) level. Ultimately, it's our conviction in this belief that can push us towards its material structure, because we see its blueprint in our very lives and social relations.

The idea of home in Aotearoa New Zealand is a highly contested one. It surfaces tensions and contradictions, depending on who you are, your relationship to this land, and the historical circumstances from which you were born, and to which you belong. Home is the grounds on which claims to belonging are made. Speaking from the position of tauīwi living on settler-colonial New Zealand imposed on stolen Māori land, I see the discourse of home and belonging play out in messy ways in my own community. Simply put, Indigenous dispossession is the precondition for many migrants to call Aotearoa New Zealand home. In settling on these lands, our own lives become transformed by the logic of individuation, and it is through this logic that our political demands are articulated. This isn't necessarily exclusive to this context, but is a requirement nonetheless. What would renouncing our right to home look like? For settlers, and I can speak only to settlers, the answer *All Incomplete* offers is that true home can only be found in the breaks, in the gaps between what we know, including our selves. To find home in communist affect is to lean into fugitivity, which is to say, to refuse to settle. *All Incomplete* offers us a language for thinking and planning precisely this kind of fugitivity.

## Fugitive planning in Aotearoa New Zealand

The practice of black study requisites an affective state in which communal sensual life can flourish, and it is here that fugitive planning happens. Our

own context in Te Moana Nui a Kiwa is not untouched by the influence of Harney and Moten's black study, and it has been taken up widely by those for whom undercommons sociality is emergent. For instance, Kai Tahu/Pākehā sociologist Simon Barber attests to the influence black study has had on his own articulation of the Māori radical tradition. In a recent interview, he remarks on how he first read *The Undercommons* amidst the student movement in London. This is when he joined his friends in the Black Study Group, where they came together and read key texts from the Black radical tradition, like Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism*; but Barber notes that 'more than just the texts we wanted to read, it was also an attempt to come to a different mode of reading: we read collectively, we read with food, the importance of the material sociality of getting together and studying together, and posing questions together'. Barber also makes a note of study's conceptual overlap with the notion of wānanga in te ao Māori: 'wānanga, as the fullest expression of this process in collective enquiry, debate, and deliberation, is the properly social form of thought in collective speech. Study shares I think this need for sociality-in-thought as well'.<sup>40</sup> Some of the convergences between modes of study and struggle has led to what Barber calls the Māori radical tradition, which he discusses as being a part of the Black radical tradition—not by reducing Māori experience and struggle to Black, particularly African, struggle, but by drawing from the rich depth of te ao Māori to join a 'deeper and wider current of human liberatory thinking and practice'.<sup>41</sup>

Study, like wānanga, evades the hierarchical practices of knowledge accumulation and dissemination in the university, emphasising instead collectivity and, importantly, movement. This is why it's important for Barber that black study is accompanied by the idea of 'fugitive planning'—gathering around and figuring out what we want to do and where we want to go—because it ensures undercommons sociality stays agile and doesn't *settle*. For Barber, part of fugitive planning is:

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40 Simon Barber, 'The Gathering of Disparate Things', in *Towards a Grammar of Race*, eds. Arcia Tecun, Lana Lopesi, and Anisha Sankar (Wellington: BWB, forthcoming).

41 Barber, 'The Gathering of Disparate Things'.

the need for our sociality not to harden or settle into something that itself becomes oppressive and external, like politics. For example, this notion of 40 acres and a mule, that was never actually honoured, but was supposed to be given to ex-slaves that fought on the side of the North [in the American Civil War]. But that 40 acres would have still been stolen Indigenous land and would have been given as private property, its own poisoned chalice. So that need not to settle, to remain in motion, to refuse the sovereignty of the fictive individual and the isolation and division it carries in its tow.<sup>42</sup>

Barber draws on these lessons for our own context in Aotearoa, for thinking Māori liberation from colonisation, social relations beyond domination, and the potential dangers of colluding with colonial capitalism.

Barber's elaboration of the Māori radical tradition as a liberatory theory/practice that enjoins the Black radical tradition is echoed by Arcia Tecun, whose formulation of 'knew world undercurrents' also leans into undercommons sociality to produce conceptual links between global histories of oppression. In nurturing the practice of assembly, Tecun writes that the undercurrents are 'philosophical, intellectual, and relational connections to the Black radical tradition from Te Moana Nui a Kiwa through the continents of Turtle Island and Abya Yala that lie in between these oceans and their thoughts'. Responding to the call to study, Tecun emphasises 'knew' (rather than 'new') because we are 'making something out of what we already have'. Aside from evidencing the ongoing resonance and relevance of Harney and Moten's ideas in our own context, Tecun demonstrates a way to think through the relational undercurrents that are in motion between peoples and communities, subverting colonial divisions on an epistemic level. For Tecun, this means connecting the histories of global struggles against colonialism and capitalism to see the underlying root cause, made possible because the undercurrents are a 'creolising process of intimacy' between oppressed peoples and communities. Tecun encourages us to dive into the undercurrents to think beyond national histories and exceptionalising narratives that succumb to what Lisa Lowe

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42 Barber, 'The Gathering of Disparate Things'.

calls the ‘colonial division of humanity’. So even though the ways that colonialism and capitalism manifest in Aotearoa are not the same as in other places, it is helpful to remember that the structures and histories are entangled, and therefore ‘the more we learn about ourselves and each other, the stronger our knowledge and knowing of one another grows, revealing how we are related, and how we can relate better’.<sup>43</sup> Tecun shows that ideas that happen elsewhere are already here, they travelled through the undercurrents to circulate around us, even though they manifest in very particular and differentiable ways.

For Tecun, as for Barber, black study and fugitive planning are ways of being-together socially, politically, and intellectually. They both draw on connections between global histories and genealogies of thought, attesting to how leaning into the undercurrents can help us develop theoretical insights that can enrich our understanding of our own contexts. This points to the importance of the Black radical tradition in this part of the world, and also more generally to anti-colonial theory from the Global South. To draw each of these histories together weaves a complicated picture; yet it leaves us better prepared to be kinks in the system, unsettling the metaphysical and material structures of sovereignty to which we are bound.

In a settler-colonial context like ours, *All Incomplete* offers an incredible insight into the ways that settlers in Aotearoa might come to think about what it truly means to unravel our own masterful subjectivities. At the heart of this practice is the epistemological and social embrace of incompleteness, to first recognise sovereignty as mastery’s political articulation (or, mastery as sovereignty speaking), and then to refuse it, deepening instead an ontology of indebtedness, or Wang’s communist affect. This includes recognising and leaning into the ways we are already assembling together, studying collectively (whatever that looks like for us), and planning our next moves. This kind of study is also another way of saying, ‘let’s not wait for liberation to come in the near or distant future, but rather nurture the ways in which we are already practicing that very liberation in the present’. This requires of us a dedication to fleet-footedness, to stay dancing without settling. In

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43 Arcia Tecun, ‘Knew World Undercurrents’, in *Towards a Grammar of Race*.

his afterword to *All Incomplete*, Lee beautifully summates that ‘study is wake work toward incompleteness, so we may more tightly interconnect the tender synapses of our callused souls’.<sup>44</sup> This is the ultimate commitment, not moving towards healing per se, not desiring to be whole, but to be okay with our own incompleteness and find meaning collectively therein.

As a concluding note, I want to return to a connection between Moten’s quip about citation reminding him of a parking ticket and Wang’s project of communist affect. Alongside his unease with citation, Moten notes how he ‘would prefer to say recitatoriness’. To recite something makes me think of prayer, the way that prayer becomes muscle memory. When you recite something enough times you can remember it by heart, which is to say, it finds a home in your body. *All Incomplete* is not filled with citations, although it is overflowing with the ideas of many artists, theorists, and revolutionaries. This is, I think, a testament to the kind of communist affect that black study embodies, by way of the embrace of ‘common work’, rather than citational practices aimed at protecting private property. Moten says, ‘the convergence of the beauty of what you’re trying to study, with what it is you hope your study leads to, in terms of how life on earth should be, that seems sacred to me’.<sup>45</sup> It is a model for the kind of haptic modality of study, another example of how study can become a way that we put our bodies towards this work in common and, in the process, embrace the inseparability of the work of others that lives through us and our own articulation of them. This is what it feels like when we lose ourselves to the great and urgent currents of mutual liberation.

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44 Lee, ‘Afterword’, 172.

45 Moten, ‘Transubstantiation and Cosubstantiality’.