"This is, not was": M. NourbeSe Philip's Language of Modernity

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Abstract
As Ian Baucom (2005) has pointed out, the 1781 massacre on the slave ship Zong and its representations are central not only to the "political and cultural archives of the black Atlantic, but to the history of modern capital, ethics, and time consciousness". Contesting the notion that the legal documents produced in the Zong case are the only available testimony of the lives of the slaves thrown overboard, M. NourbeSe Philip's recent work, *Zong!* (2008a), invites a dismantling of that archive, its deconstruction and explosion in order to find different ways of telling what cannot be expressed. In particular, the article will show how, by reconfiguring the role of gaps and silences, Philip *engages* history rather than merely representing it, thus urging for a more radically unsettling language to inhabit modernity.
Keywords: *Zong!*, poetry, Middle Passage, archive

1. A disavowed modernity: museums, memory and the archive

In "A Travelogue of Sorts: Transatlantic Trafficking in Silence and Erasure", the Trinidadian poet M. NourbeSe Philip chronicles her visits to some of the exhibitions across England which celebrated the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade in 2007. As she discusses the erasures and silences marking these exhibitions, with very few exceptions, it appears increasingly clear that the act of simply "remembering" is not enough. As she expresses her concern and deep dissatisfaction with the way England institutionally celebrated 1807, the poet urges the necessity to rethink *the way* we remember in order to effectively come to terms with the past. Philip is particularly uneasy with the exhibition *Uncomfortable Truths* at the Victoria and Albert Museum. The V&A, as is well-known, has no dedicated gallery space for African art, thus the solution they adopted was to articulate the exhibition into five trails which invited visitors to

trace, through objects displayed in different rooms, certain aspects of the slave trade. In the words of the poet, apparently "the curators could not be bothered to remove [the objects] from their original places, [nor did they] wish to disturb the permanent exhibit"; further Philip notes that the exhibitions she visited "succeeded in, at best, neutralizing the event and, at worst, denying the horrific nature of this trade" (Philip 2008b: 17). By simply 'accommodating', or hosting, the memory of the slave trade in the cramped space of small museum rooms, curators (as well as cultural and political institutions at large) clearly reveal their "reluctance to engage with the true nature of the event" (Philip 2008b: 23).

The persistent unwillingness to confront that history on different terms speaks volumes about the contemporary politics of memory. Moreover, it is not merely the nature or the spatial arrangement of the objects displayed which troubles the poet. I would go as far as to suggest that the very *grammar* of institutional memory fails to recognise the complex entanglements of the event that is supposedly being marked. Philip's criticism of museological appropriations has also been illustrated in her "The Museum of Silence", in which she forcefully claims her right to own the silence of history:

> As I wandered throughout this museum, I recognised many of the displays – these silences were mine as much as they had belonged to the people they had been taken from. 'Return them', I demanded of the proprietors. 'You must return these silences to their owners. […] It is ours after all, I told them, and upon it their speech, their language, and their talk was built. […] Ours to do with as we pleased, I repeated, to nourish, care for, neglect…'. (Philip 1998: 136-7)

The West has thrived on that silence and Euro-America has in turn disavowed and used it for its own ends. After having "gorged themselves on that silence" (Philip 1998: 137) over the centuries, Euro-America has appropriated that silence once again in order to label, date and catalogue it, so as to celebrate its idea of modernity, its capacity to confront with a supposedly pre-modern past of slavery. However, here Philip does not simply counter silence with words and erasure with writing. By claiming the right to own her (collective) silence and to do with it as she pleases, she is already dealing with this impossible tension, articulating a radical critique of cultural memory and its very language.

Philip has always considered poetry a flexible tool for an *alternative* theorising, but at the same time she has also expressed her dissatisfaction with the notion of "theorizing differently". What she proposes is a radical reconfiguration of the engagement of the African diaspora with theory. Deeply concerned with language and words, Philip argues that the "we theorize too" approach is unsatisfactory because it suggests a sort of implicit conformity to the standard norm (in Mahlins 2004). The poet contends that, in the attempt to "catch up" with the Western category of theory, the result might be that of "pouring new wine into old bottles". By radically disrupting the "mould" of theory, she subverts both the signifier and the signified; not just *the way* we theorise, but the idea itself of theorising as a practice deriving from Western thought. Within the ongoing debate about the separation between theory and practice, African American and Caribbean female scholars have dismantled rigid assumptions as regards theory, contending that black women have always *theorised* through their *creative* works (Hill Collins 1991; Boyce Davies 1994). So, while 'theorising' has come to define a continuous process which challenges and denies exclusivist positions, the criticism of narrow and limiting divisions between creative and theoretical writing has triggered a reconfiguration of the engagement with 'theory', assessing the crucial function of poetic practice as an instrument to codify reality.

In a similar vein, borrowing Audre Lorde's much-quoted expression, she claims the necessity to fashion 'new tools' "because the work cannot be done successfully using the master's tools." (Philip in Saunders 2008: 71). Following this trail, I will contend that in her most ambitious work, *Zong!* (2008a), Philip highlights the inherent limit of those 'necessary' tools – theory, the archive – dismantling their very constitutive elements – language, words, grammar. In doing so, not only does she destabilise conventional 'moulds', but she also interrogates their premises, unexpectedly casting poetry as an epistemological tool itself. As a consequence, such a radical engagement with theory requires us to move towards a different understanding of and a new approach to the question of modernity as well as its archives, inviting a profound deconstruction and rearticulation of its very language.

Being simultaneously "inside and constitutive of modernity and outside and negated by modernity" (Bhana Young 2005: 47), diasporic

Africans have often been seen as both haunting and haunted by discourses of modernity. Acknowledging slavery as – paradoxically – the experience which characterises modernity and, at the same time, perceiving it as what has been left out from modernity, a growing body of scholarly literature has in fact problematised modernity in terms of its inextricable relationship with slavery and the plantation system, eventually converging in the field of Atlantic Studies. The insight of C.L.R. James (1938) in asserting the intrinsic modernity of the plantation system has found an echo in Toni Morrison's much quoted assertion that "modern life begins with slavery", and has been more recently taken up by Paul Gilroy (Morrison in Gilroy 1993a: 178).

The new conditions of life and work imposed by the plantation system informed the development of a pattern of life which indeed "inaugurated" modernity, as Gilroy has explained in *The Black Atlantic*. Contesting the notion of an "innocent modernity" (Gilroy 1993b: 44) triumphantly arising from a linear process which started with the Enlightenment project, Gilroy's work has pointed to the fundamental bias at the core of a notion of modernity based on enlightened values of Western universality and rationality, urging us to rethink the periodisation of the modern and the postmodern in the light of "the history and the expressive culture of the African diaspora, the practice of racial slavery, or the narratives of European imperial conquest" (Gilroy 1993b: 42). Similarly, the recovery of the past through a sort of "archaeology of black memory" (Scott 1998) has marked another important step in the articulation of different versions of modernity[1]. However, while the notion of slavery's modernity is uncontroversial and widely accepted, there is still a continuing debate on the nature and implications of 'modernity' (see Chambers 2008, among others).

In her study *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, Sybille Fischer criticised Gilroy's conflation of modernity "with the Eurocentric regime of racial subordination and colonial exploitation that became hegemonic in the course of the 19th century" (Fischer 2004: 37). She also rejected

[1] In her discussion on slave narratives and autobiographical strategies, Toni Morrison also famously used the expression "literary archaeology" (1995: 92) to refer to a writing which relies on memory, history and autobiography.

his proposal of a "counterculture" of modernity growing out of loss, suffering and memory. In her view, Gilroy implicitly re-instates the version of a modernity exclusively produced in Europe, thus not allowing for an understanding of "the ideological, cultural, and political conflicts that led to the ascendancy of a modernity that could be claimed only by European nations" (Fischer 2004: 37). By focusing on the notion of "disavowed modernity", Fischer on the contrary wishes to "signal the conflictive and discontinuous nature of modernity" (37).

The concept of disavowal, both in its primary meaning as "repudiation" and "denial", and in its psychoanalytical definition as the refusal to recognise the reality of a traumatic experience, makes it necessiry to "identify what is being disavowed, by whom, and for what reason" (Fischer 2004: 38). In this light, modernity comes to be defined by the complex web of denied, repudiated events and by the reasons which produced them. Insisting on hidden relations and unacknowledged discursive and material conditions, the engagement with such a "disavowed modernity" will trigger new and more radical investigations on the terms of this modernity.

M. NourbeSe Philip seems to take precisely this act of recognition as the foundational moment of her work and, refusing to be frozen in the unspeakable and unrepresentable nature of the traumatic event of slavery, she engages with it and confronts its representations. Her dealing with this disavowal is illuminated by her discussion of the interplay of memory and amnesia informing what she terms the "fugal state" of Caribbean societies. The fugal state does not simply refer to their ethnic, cultural and linguistic polyphony, but it also describes their dissociative state (Philip 2005: 6-12). In her reflection on the fragmented nature of memory, the poet detects in every fragment an impulse to forget, a flight of the mind which performs a protective function for the traumatised psyche. At the same time, while fleeing from an unacknowledged trauma, which cannot be faced, such fugues also paradoxically provide a language to convey this experience.

In her view the calypso, more so than other Caribbean musical forms, "has the potential of bringing us out of that fugue state where we flee the reality of what has been and is still around" (Philip 2005: 10). Abandoning the fugue state thus acquires a

double function: acknowledging the event and finding a new language to articulate it.

The poet signals the urgency of asking 'whose modernity' this is, while at the same time posing the impelling question of how those events should be remembered and through what language. The very archives, both visual and written – museums, historical documents, texts – which have reproduced and transmitted such a *disavowal* of modernity must therefore be questioned and deconstructed. Struggling with this disavowed modernity rather than merely representing it through its fissures, in *Zong!* Philip engages most fully with the tension between memory and forgetting; as she "explodes" a language complicit with systems of oppression, the poet provides a new understanding of the role of gaps and silences as tools for questioning conventional representations of memory.

2. Spectres of the Zong, spectres of modernity

Philip's poem relies on the infamous story of the Zong, the British slave ship that in 1781 sailed from the coast of West Africa, heading to Jamaica with its human cargo. Following the captain's order that sick slaves be thrown overboard, the mariners reportedly drowned 131 slaves. The shipowners claimed for the loss of their slaves from the underwriters, who refused to pay (see Walvin 1993: 16ff). In England outraged reactions and public debate followed this deliberate murder but all attempts at persuading government officers to prosecute all those involved in the drowning were met by official silence; the refusal to acknowledge the murderous nature of the act was obviously embedded in the necessity to disavow a confrontation which would have shattered the very foundations of late 18th century British economy and society.

The event inspired William Turner's famous painting *Slaveship* (*Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying. Typhoon Coming On*, 1840), exhibited for the first time a few weeks before the World Anti-Slavery Convention. However, in celebrating Turner's artistic mastery in his *Modern Painters* (1843), and relegating to a footnote the information that the event represented in the painting was that of a slave ship throwing slaves overboard, John Ruskin triggered much critical debate on the repressed representations of slavery in

Europe (Gilroy 1993). For centuries the spectres of the Zong have haunted the imagination of activists, intellectuals, painters and writers of the African diaspora as the symbolic figuration of the past haunting the present in its most disturbing form. The episode has been variously re-written or re-engaged with in a number of literary works, such as Michelle Cliff's *Free Enterprise* (1993), David Dabydeen's *Turner* (1995) and Fred D'Aguiar's *Feeding the Ghosts* (1997). In all these cases, the massacre has been obliquely evoked or reworked through a haunting of some kind: the spectral presence of Turner's painting in Cliff's *Free Enterprise*, and the phantasmatic literary creation of the one hundred thirty-second slave, Mintah, who survived the massacre on board the ship in D'Aguiar's novel.

As Dabydeen bitterly notes in his Preface, Ruskin's footnote "reads like an afterthought, something tossed overboard" (Dabydeen [1995] 2010: 7), establishing an uncanny parallel between the murderous throwing overboard of slaves and the discursive, textual disavowal of slavery. However, the Zong case and its representations are central not only to the "political and cultural archives of the black Atlantic but to the history of modern capital, ethics, and time consciousness" (Baucom 2005: 31). Problematically taking up Gilroy's argument, Ian Baucom firmly locates the "spectres of the Atlantic" in a series of interconnected relations which shape and are an inextricable part of modernity at large. Cast as the figuration of modernity itself, this "hauntological condition" foregrounds a modality which can unhinge power relations and unsettle hierarchies, thus interrupting the linear sense of the past, as well as of modernity, as a neat, progressive movement forward. As he parallels the Zong case with Walter Benjamin's arcades, Baucom suggests a sort of "hauntological time consciousness" (2005: 31), the awareness that the present time is not merely "rhetorically haunted" by the past and by the many spectres of the Zong, but is rather "repeated and intensified" (Baucom 2005: 18 and 29)[2].

Philip moves beyond this ontological haunting, providing on the contrary an understanding of modernity which shatters the linear

[2] In Walter Benjamin's words, "It is not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, (…) what has been comes together with the now to form a constellation" (1999: 463).

progression of time and, at the same time, exceeds the idea of a critical temporal and spatial dislocation, as the visual impact of her text confirms[3]:

this is

not was

or

should be

this be

not

should be

this

should

not

be

is

(Philip 2008a: 7)

The poet reconceptualises slavery not as an event consigned to the past, but as a powerful reassessment of contemporary politics of memory that imposes a reconsideration of our notion of modernity. Far from simply suggesting a coexistence of different temporal levels, the living memory of the Middle Passage thus requires a more radical revision of modernity that results from a continuing engagement with the past and in the deconstruction of the very language of the archive.

3. "Defending the dead": shattering the archive, mutilating language

As Jenny Sharpe has contended in her work of 'literary archaeology' on the lives of three slave women – the Maroon leader Nanny, the enslaved Mulatto Joanna, and the author of the first English slave narrative Mary Prince –, "[s]lavery

[3] The layout of the text clearly recalls the techniques of concrete poetry. It visually resembles Guillaume Apollinaire's *Calligrammes* (1918) and, in particular, Stéphane Mallarmé's *Un Coup de Dés Jamais N'Abolira Le Hasard* (1897).

continues to haunt the present because its stories […] have been improperly buried" (Sharpe 2003: xi). In this trail, Philip strives to give proper burial to the slaves thrown overboard. Their stories are not lost, since they are reported in the legal document known as "Gilbert v. Gregson", from the names of the shipowners and the underwriters. However, their continuing disavowal, which has transformed them into haunting presences, begs to be recognised. Confronted with the painful awareness that there are no bones, no graveyard for them but the Atlantic, Philip thus performs an unsettling mourning work "to defend the dead" (Philip 2008a: 200).

As literary and theoretical reflections from the African diaspora have often engaged with a search for a space of mourning which could help negotiate the recovery from trauma and the sense of loss, the Atlantic has come to signify the material space and the symbolic place of memory. The watery womb for the "sixty million and more", the sea has been represented as the repository of the memory of the Middle Passage, as in Derek Walcott's famous lines:

> Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs?
> Where is your tribal memory? Sirs,
> in that great vault. The sea. The sea
> has locked them up. (Walcott 1986: 364)

However, this liquid tomb poses the problem of locating the bodies in order to grieve them; if you return dignity to the dead by "exhuming" them, how do you bring someone back from underwater? Moreover, while nothing indicates the spot of underwater death, the poet paradoxically recognises that the only tombstone marking the existence of the Africans thrown overboard the Zong is the account of the "Gilbert v. Gregson" case. The legal document describing the unnamed Africans as commodity, as goods lost at sea for which compensation is claimed, constitutes a troubling "gravestone", a place of paradoxically impossible mourning. Hence, the necessity to confront this disavowal and acknowledge the humanity of the Africans on board the ship, by naming them and marking their presence on every page: in Philip's words, their names become "ghostly footnotes floating below the text" (Philip 2008a: 200). In acknowledging their spectral and, at the same time, physical

presence on the page, where "*the footnote equals the footprint*" (Philip 2008a: 200, emphasis in the text), the poet powerfully defies the text and "shatters" the very "gravestone" that denied them their humanity (Philip in Saunders 2008: 65).

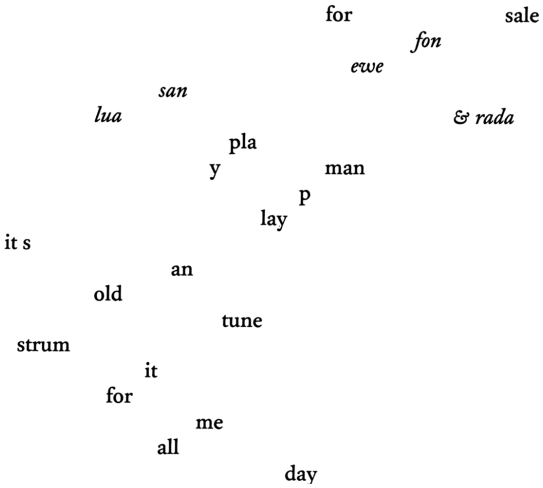
Her search for an "idiom of remembering" in fact leads Philip to deconstruct the sheer materiality of the archive (Derrida 1995: 9) and dismember its textual space. As she draws on that written archive and opens it up, Philip uses the legal report as a "generative system" (Foucault 1972: 128) which does not confine memory to the past but, on the contrary, interrogates the discursive constructions of the archive and their very language. In her painful decision to use the legal report as a sort of "mother text", the poet is thus inevitably confronted with a most haunting archival text and the violence of its language.

Philip has often expressed her distrust with language, feeling the urge to expose its disturbing complicity with oppressive systems of power. The poet contends that the very language that invented and transmitted black people's inferiority, legitimising their de-subjectification, cannot be used today to express that experience. In a sort of ideal continuation of her commitment to language, which started with the publication of *She Tries her Tongue* (1989), in *Zong!* Philip thus followed the imperative "to move beyond representation of what the New World experience was" (2008a: 197). In this light, the poet transforms the legal text into a sort of "fugal palimpsest through which *Zong!* is allowed to heal the original text of its fugal amnesia" (Philip 2008a: 294).

As she thrives precisely on the contradictory pulls between the necessity and the impossibility to tell, Philip finally resolves the aporia, "telling it by not telling it": she lets the story "untell itself" through gaps, silences and disconnections. In the view of the poet, who also practised law for seven years, law and poetry share a common concern for accuracy and precision. However, while "the law uses language as a tool for ordering", she relies on poetry's ability "to disassemble the ordered"; in this case, the lucid violence of the legal language needs to be unhinged and dismantled in order to "release the story that cannot be told" (Philip 2008a: 199). For this reason, as she is painfully aware that there is no sense to be made out of the murder of the 131 slaves, apart from the economic profit which derived from the slave trade and the money which came from the insurance compensation, the poet fights the impulse to make

sense (Philip 2008a: 194). Section after section, the words on the page are increasingly fragmented, and the mutilation of language is coupled with the irruption of other languages, those heard on board the *Zong!* – English, Spanish, Yoruba, Fon –, to suggest that "language happened" on the slave ship (Philip 2008a: 205).

In the section "Notanda", which provides the reader with a sort of support to the poetic text, Philip explains how she replicated – on the language of the legal account – the destructive violence performed on the bodies of the Africans. She randomly chose the words, then disjointed, slashed and finally slaughtered the text, "castrating verbs, suffocating adjectives, murdering nouns, throwing articles, prepositions, conjunctions overboard" (Philip 2008a: 193). While her training as a lawyer provides the poet with an attentive consideration for words, she decides here to stand on the other side of the bar – or, paradoxically, on both sides at the same time: both lawyer and indicted, she is the accuser of language and its murderer. This is the only way, Philip claims, for the poem to reveal itself, "when the text is fragmented and mutilated, mirroring the fragmentation and mutilation that slavery perpetrated on Africans" (Philip 2008a: 195). Words are scattered on the page as if needing space "to breathe" (Philip 2008a: 194), disturbingly evoking the breathing space needed by the slaves in the cramped "bottomless pit" of the slave ship:

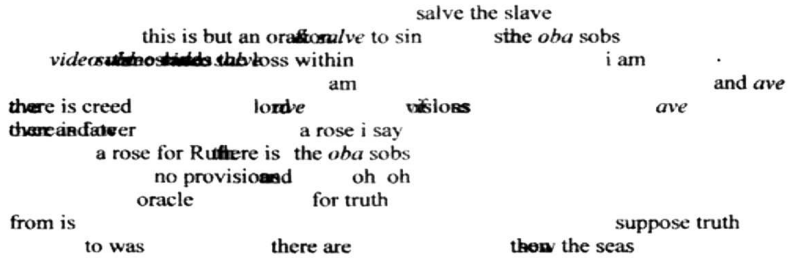


(Philip 2008a: 94)

While the textual disposition of the words visually reproduces on the page the image of the Africans' bodies floating in the waves, the visual gaps can be seen as reproducing a figuration of alternative possibilities: wounds, intervals, openings, silences. Refusing to simply bridge that gap and fill that silence, the poet decides to thrive on the interstices, leaving the wound open, as a constant site of interrogation.

4. Testimony, responsibility and the language of modernity

Philip has claimed that the text "wrote itself", the words themselves suggesting how to work with them, her "eyes skimming the text for phrases, words, feelings, as one would cast one's eyes over the sea looking for bodies" (Philip 2008a: 195). The words from the legal account – separated, mutilated and recomposed by the eyes of the reader – combine the necessity of re-membering those bodies with the impossibility to tell the story through the necessary sacrifice of language. As one reviewer has suggested, "it takes courage to keep reading, the courage to step overboard into meaninglessness. All that is familiar – a name, the wholeness of a sentence (of a body, of a human being) – has been stripped away." (Klonaris 2011). The disintegration of language which dominates the last section of the poem, "Ebora", clearly reveals how to "untell that story"; the ink gets fainter, words are unintelligible and overlap[4]. The reader is more and more at a loss:



(Philip 2008a: 177)

[4] The manifest imperfection of the page is a visual effect deliberately deviced by author as a textual strategy.

Terror is thus conveyed by this unfamiliar and frightening territory in which language is disturbingly deprived of its comforting wholeness and coherence. Nevertheless, despite her radical engagement with silence playing on the edge of intelligibility, the poet does not abandon language and yield to non-communication but, on the contrary, she finds in (the apparently meaningless) silence a suitable form of expression. While she declares the failure of the ordering principle of grammar to convey this unspeakable experience, Philip also reinvents a language to do so. As she states in an interview: "For the first time in my writing life, I felt, this is my language – the grunts, moans, utterances, pauses, sounds, and silences" (Saunders 2008: 71). Words – truncated, deconstructed, overlapping – never cease to signify. The meaning they provide, however, is not easily available. Baffling its readers and entangling them in the struggle to read the unreadable/tell the untellable, not only does the poem require courage, but also the responsibility to take on this task.

The responsibility of dealing with the paradoxical tension between the need to tell and the impossibility to make sense of the horror marks the painfully contradictory condition of the witness, caught between utterance and aphasia. The work of Giorgio Agamben, although mostly silent on the "state of exception" of slavery, in Baucom's view "can help illuminate the enduring, repeating object and form of that politics of witnessing […] which recurs over the course of occidental modernity" (Baucom 2005: 181). Indeed, in his study on the relation between the Holocaust and memory, Agamben argues that the aporia of Auschwitz lies in the non-coincidence "between fact and truth, between verification and comprehension" (Agamben 1999: 12). This lacuna at the core of modernity signals the interstice between expression and the unsayable, what Agamben (1999: 39) calls the "non-language" of testimony. In remarking the etymological duplicity of the word 'testimony', he significantly traces a distinction between the external observer, the *testis*, and the survivor, the *superstes*, "a person […] who has experienced an event from beginning to end and can therefore bear witness to it" (Agamben 1999: 17). For different reasons, however, both are caught in the impossibility of articulating testimony, which takes place in the "non-place of articulation" (Agamben 1999: 55).

For Agamben, to bear witness, testimony ought to be expressed through "the voice of something or someone that, for entirely different reasons, cannot bear witness" (1999: 19). In other words, it ought to be expressed through the voice of the "complete" witness; in Philip's case, the voice of the "drowned". Philip is neither *testis* nor *superstes*; she has not been involved as "third party" nor has she directly experienced the events on the Zong. Nonetheless she feels compelled to "testify" by speaking "in the stead of" the drowned, well aware that "the survivors bore witness to something it is impossible to bear witness to" (Agamben 1999: 13).

It is precisely this gap that marks the poet's responsibility; conscious of the paradoxical condition of the survivor who bears witness "to something impossible to bear witness to", and unable to fully disclose that narrative herself, Philip's role is that of interrogating this lacuna or, as Agamben (1999: 13) would say, "attempting to listen to it". For this reason, the poem is co-authored by Philip and the "true witness", the ancestor Setaey Adamu Boateng, whose voice the poet has heard.

Assuming the ethical responsibility of listening to the silences of modernity, the poet's evocation of the past is always an interpellation of the present. In her preface to *Zong!* the poet thanks "the Ancestors for bestowing the responsibility of this work" on her (Philip 2008a: xii). Thus in the performance of this "practice of speaking in tongues" (Philip 2008a: 197), she struggles to infuse back feeling into the archival text by deconstructing, decomposing, destroying and finally reassembling it. However, as she confers in turn this responsibility to her readers, the poet expands her notion of "community" so as to embrace all those who will engage with the reading. The radical fragmentation of language in fact compels the reader's deep involvement: as it creates discomfort, it also forces the reader "to make meaning from apparently disparate elements" (Philip 2008a: 198). In this process of re-membering and recreating new meaning, every reader is "contaminated" with the risk of "piecing together the story that cannot be told" (Philip 2008a: 198). The silence she had claimed as her own thus becomes a shared responsibility that does not belong exclusively to the descendants of the slaves, but inescapably implicates all those who approach the text. By relying on the role and responsibility of the reader to recompose the fragments, the words, the bones scattered on the

page, Philip thus suggests a more participant, open and fluid use of memory and the archive.

In this liquid, unstable archive where the interplay of sound and silence critically recomposes memory, Philip's rejection of a mere appropriation of the tools of modernity powerfully interrogates both its language and its silences, striving to find different ways of telling what cannot be expressed. Her struggle with the fugal state of amnesia and disavowal thus invites a rethinking of the grammar of modernity; in this light, she shapes a radically unsettling language which involves the ethical responsibility to *listen* to that disavowed silence and to make sense of it in the present.

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