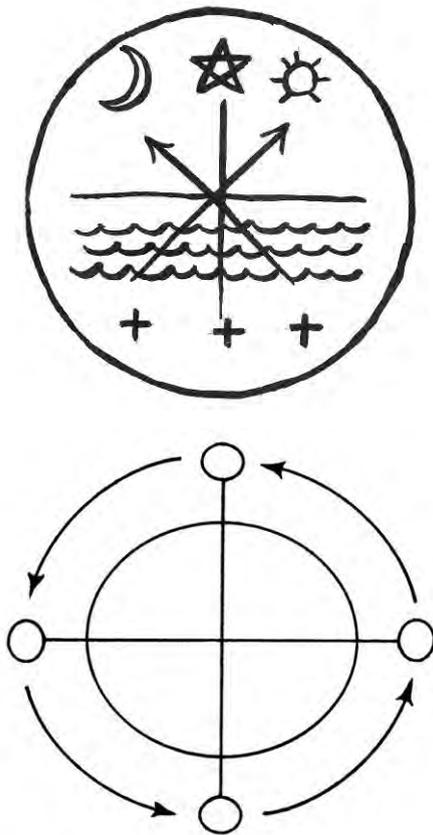




Duane Deterville

**Defining the Afriscape through
Ground Drawings and Street Altars**

Figure 1 (top). The *ponto riscado* for *Vovo Maria Conga do Congo* (Grandma Maria Conga of the Congo). Figure 2 (bottom). The Ki-Kongo cosmogram known as *Yowa* or *Dikenga*.



A sense of agency among Black people acknowledges the authenticity of recombinant African practices in the trans-Atlantic African Diaspora, as well as the influence of the African Diasporic discursive network on continental cultural practice and politics.¹ The sacred ground drawings of Umbanda called *pontos riscados*, drawn to indicate the presence of a spirit or entity, are a rich area to position a discussion of an evolving African practice in the Americas.² The ideograms contained in the drawings are frequently based on Kongo and Yoruba cosmology, indicating a connection to and contiguity with the spirituality of African continental space. They also demonstrate the recombinant nature of African Diasporic cultural expression. Likewise, *preto velhos*, or “old Blacks,” are manifestations of African Diasporic spirits that similarly express connections to Africa. The thousands of names and types of these entities multiply, diversify, and grow as Umbanda develops. They represent the connection to the dynamic agency of Africans in the Diaspora.

The extreme cultural segregation that chattel slavery created insured the continuity of African cultural practices as a survival tactic, while the imposition of European colonial languages

and religions has been the impetus for the idea that Africans in the Americas are hybrid objects of Western construction. However, operating from a theoretic lens that provides agency for Black subjects under colonial conditions, I interpret the impact of Western language and culture as being inevitably Africanized in some manner at this point of cultural change. In other words, those acts of cultural violence are rendered less harmful by self-determined Black subjects because, no matter what the mode of cultural interaction, we are always already African.

This essay is a critical exploration of the ways contemporary Black artists use African iconography in their work. The forms of *pontos riscados* are among the places that African iconography can be found. At the conclusion of this essay I propose the use of iconography found in *pontos riscados* along with emerging Internet web-cast technology as a tool for venerating the dead victims of gun violence in the Black communities of Rio de Janeiro and Oakland. This essay concludes by engaging ideas to use technology that adds Afrifuturism to my theoretic lens. The use of internet web-casting expands the area of ritual space to include virtual space along with metaphysical, African Continental, and African Diasporic spaces to form what I call the Afriscape. It is because I advocate for the model of willful agency for African Diasporic subjects that I find this usage to be an authentic African cultural practice.

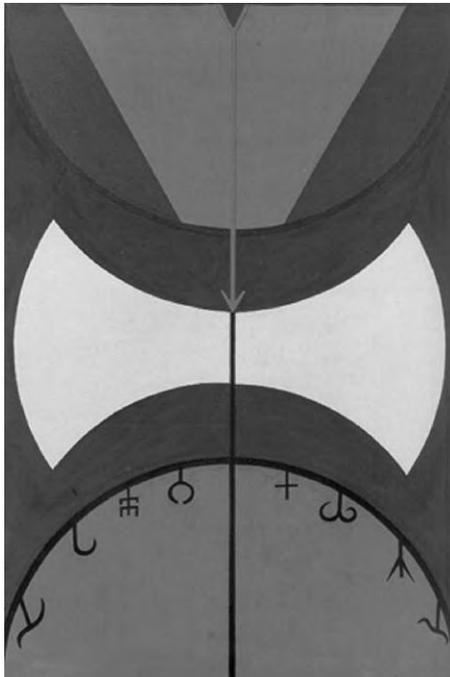
A brief explanation for one example of the form and syntax used in *pontos riscados* is useful to understand the potential of their artistic uses. The ideograms for the *pretos velho* entities usually contain a cross, which may be the circle of the *ponto riscado* sectioned into four parts or the Judeo-Christian cross that is found in Catholic iconography. The *ponto riscado* for *Vovo*

Maria Conga do Congo (Grandma Maria Conga of the Congo) is a good example of the *ponto riscado* broken into four sections (fig. 1). The most interesting aspect of the *pontos riscados* for *preto velhos*, however, is their apparent relationship to the Ki-Kongo cosmogram known as *Yowa* or *Dikenga*.³ The cross within a circle is the most common representation of the cosmogram (fig. 2). Most importantly, the area below the horizon line indicates *kalunga* or the land of the dead where the ancestors dwell, and the horizon line itself is often represented as a body of water. The *ponto riscado* for *Maria Conga do Congo* contains three smaller crosses below the horizon line that represent the “. . . *vibracao das almas*” or “vibration of the souls.”⁴ These crosses must be represented below the horizon line in the *ponto riscado*, and it is this element that ties them closely to the cosmology of Central African religions that manifest themselves in the Diaspora.⁵ Umbanda’s *pontos riscados* are a living practice that draws on ancient cosmology even as it evolves and recreates itself in contemporary ritual and contemporary artistic practice.

Abdias do Nascimento and Casper Banjo

Abdias do Nascimento’s paintings are an excellent example of how *ponto riscado* ideograms influence contemporary Afro-Brazilian art. Nascimento’s creative efforts are not primarily for aesthetic or formalist concerns; rather, his work explores a recombinant African spirituality and ethos that was, in his words, “exiled with my ancestors.”⁶ He paints *orixas* conflated with the names of contemporary people⁷ (fig. 3). Nascimento uses the *ponto riscado* ideograms as a powerful statement about the dynamic relationship between African religion, political struggle, and representational space. His paintings acknowl-

Figure 3. Abdias do Nascimento. *Efrain Bocabalístico: Oxossi, Xango, Ogum*. Acrylic on Canvas. 1969.



edge and represent both the living and the dead. He explains that, “In my painting I try to distinguish between those symbols and myths that exist only as tradition and those that fulfill the needs of our time and can open up perspectives for the future.”⁸

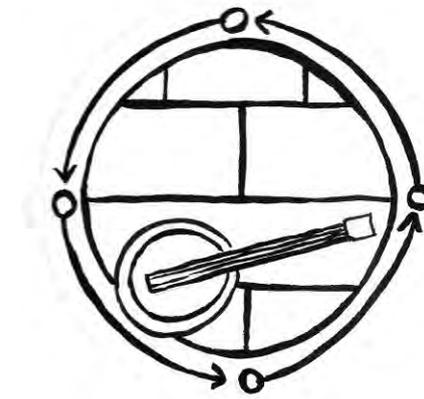
Nascimento emphasizes that his paintings use a contemporary practice to access the power of African spirituality for use in a secular context. The future-focused concerns inherent in Nascimento’s art practice relate it to Afrifuturism. I used a similar sensibility in my response to the violent killing of my friend Casper Banjo. Using the form of the *ponto riscado* ground drawing, I brought his image into a contemporary secular event. Contemporary secular rituals can be created anywhere in the Afriscape where visual subjects draw on similar cosmology for inspiration. The mourning vigil for Oakland Black artist Casper Banjo in east Oakland on March 25th, 2008 is a primary example of the *ponto riscado* form in use outside of the Umbanda ritual that nevertheless carries the same attention to Kongo cosmology and ancestor veneration. Seventy-one-year-old Casper Banjo was a highly respected Oakland printmaker and painter, whom Oakland police officer Tim Martin tragically killed on March 14th, 2008. On March 25th, 2008 a mourning vigil was held in east Oakland near the site of elder Banjo’s death.

Seized with a need to both mourn and venerate the life of my friend Casper Banjo, I designed a *ponto riscado* for him. The most common theme in elder Banjo’s paintings and prints was the motif of a brick wall. The walls were a representation of the urban Saint Louis environment in which Banjo spent part of his childhood. In keeping with this element in his life, my design consisted of a circle with a horizon line in the middle and a brick wall motif filling the space (fig. 4). The space below the

Figure 4 (opposite top). Duane Deterville. Casper Banjo Ponto Riscado Design.
Figure 5 (opposite bottom). Duane Deterville. Casper Banjo Ponto Riscado. East Oakland. Photo by Wanda Sabir.

horizon line contained a simple drawing of an African banjo string instrument. The outer circle was a reproduction of the Ki-Kongo cosmogram with arrows moving in a counter-clockwise direction as is common in its representation. The banjo instrument is an obvious representation of the “*alma*” or soul of Casper Banjo, and it is located below the horizon line to indicate that he dwells in *kalunga* or the land of the ancestors. At the mourning vigil, I drew the *ponto riscado* on the ground near the site of Elder Banjo’s death and subsequent transition to being an ancestor. Unable to endure the sadness of the event, I left immediately after executing the ground drawing. The following day I received the photographs of the ground drawing that the attendees had decorated with candles (fig. 5). I was told that attendees gathered around it in remembrance and veneration of Casper Banjo’s contribution to the community.

As a result of the placement of Kongo ideograms in the space of a communal event, this mourning vigil shares affinities with Umbanda’s *preto velho* “*gira*,” or ritual, and African ancestor veneration rituals. It is an example of the discursive networks that can be created via the language of Kongo-rooted signs and symbols related to the practice of creating *pontos riscados*. These practices have the potential of opening up dis-



cursive networks across African Diasporic lines that can provide a conduit for mourning and healing in the face of rampant oppressive gun violence in Black communities. In order to open those networks, Black culture workers have the opportunity to activate the spaces of secular mourning rituals with willful future-focused visionary actuation.

Afrifuturism or The Future Blackwards

There is a rich legacy of Afri-Diasporic intellectuals who draw on imaginative, creative vision to imagine new futures for Black folks without losing sight of contemporary relevance. These future-minded intellectuals engage in cultural expressions that draw upon components of African ethos and engage it with the deliberate intention to create recombinant African cultural expression in the Diaspora.

Afrifuturism is my preferred spelling for what theorist Mark Dery called “Afrofuturism.”⁹ Dery defines Afrifuturism as:

*speculative fiction that treats African American themes and addresses African American concerns in the context of twentieth-century technoculture—and, more generally, African American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future.*¹⁰

Dery’s descriptions of Afrifuturism omit the literature of Martin Delaney and George Schuyler (among others) who wrote about Black identity in speculative futures. This avoids the Black intellectual contribution to Afrifuturism prior to the appearance of Black characters in sci-fi. Afrifuturism’s historic engagement with Pan-Africanism and a desire to transcend colonialist boundaries is lost if these texts are not considered in

the body of literature preceding Dery’s description. However, Dery does observe that the tools used in Afri-Diasporic spiritual practices, “such as voodoo, hoodoo, santeria, mambo, and macumba, function very much like the joysticks, Datagloves, Waldos, and Spaceballs used to control virtual realities. Jerome Rothenberg would call them technologies of the sacred.”¹¹

Taken a step further, the *mojo* bags of Louisianan Hoodoo, the *patua* of Afri-Brazilian Macumba, and the *pontos riscados* ground drawings of Umbanda can be understood as Afri-Diasporic hyperlinks to metaphysical forces embodied in Kongo cosmology. These “technologies of the sacred” are evidence of how Africans in the Diaspora access the past and speculative future simultaneously. Cultural critic and theorist Greg Tate underlines this notion when he says, “you can be backward and forward-looking at the same time.”¹² The process of sampling employed in hip-hop is the most ubiquitous example of this sensibility and its application to the intersection between technology and cultural expression. The process of finding obscure, forgotten recordings and using them as the basis for pieces of music that are radically different from the original is no doubt what lead Tate to say that “hip hop is ancestor worship.”¹³ Tate’s statement is in keeping with perspectives on accessing traditions from the past that are expressed in West African Akan philosophical ideas and embodied in the *Adinkra* symbol of the *Sankofa* bird. The *Sankofa* ideogram is graphically illustrated by a long-necked bird with its head facing backwards. It represents the idea that there is no taboo in returning to retrieve something that you may have lost, nor using it in the present in order to build a new future.¹⁴

The notion of an ongoing ritual discourse—religious or

secular—with ancestors is in fact an advanced Afri-Diasporic survival tactic that protects African cultural ethos from Eurocentric hegemony. Culture theorist Tricia Rose states plainly in her interview with Mark Dery, “If you’re going to imagine yourself in the future, you have to imagine where you’ve come from; ancestor worship in black culture is a way of countering a historical erasure.”¹⁵

Defining the Afriscape

To this discussion about the past, I add that ancestor veneration in secular or religious settings is the primary force of African Diasporic subjectivity and that secular manifestations of ancestor veneration, such as hip-hop, are in fact a recombinant *African* ontology in the Americas that draws upon concepts predating the existence of the colonial “new world.” Poet, activist Amiri Baraka observes in his prescient 1971 Afrifuturist essay *Technology and Ethos* that “the actual *beginnings* of our expression are post Western (just as they are truly pre Western).”¹⁶ The act of drawing on Continental African cultural ethos, contemporary technology, and artistic actuation is what creates a self-determined, representational space that forms what I call the Afriscape. The Afriscape maps the deterritorialized cultural presence of Black/African subjects anywhere in the world. The term Afriscape draws on concepts created by social anthropologist and cultural theorist Arjun Appadurai.¹⁷ Appadurai proposes five aspects of global cultural flows that he says stem from disjunctions involving culture, politics, and economies. Among these aspects of cultural flows are *ethnoscapes* and *technoscapes*.¹⁸ The advantage to using terms that analogize varying concepts to landscapes is that these

terms acknowledge how different the landscape looks depending on what position we occupy in it.

I use the term Afriscape to underscore the contiguity of African culture, as it acknowledges commonality viewed from varying subjective lenses. However, I differ from Appadurai in my reasoning for the usage because my concern is for how the term defines cultural cohesiveness among African people rather than emphasizing debilitating disjuncture. The Afriscape is synonymous with Africa. It encompasses both Africa and its diaspora regardless of geographic location. Any location that African cultural ethos is found is where the deterritorialized, ever-changing horizons of the Afriscape can be mapped. This cultural cartography renders all these locales equidistant. Africa should not be defined narrowly in terms of geography but more importantly as a cultural history that encompasses and transcends nation-state boundaries. Along those lines I define Black people as subjects embodying the infinitely malleable cultural ethos of peoples descended from and ascending to an African contiguous history.

Blackness is the cultural ethos of African civilizations. Its very nature defies fixity and enables it to manifest across large expanses of time and space. Blackness is a perpetual motion mechanism that uses ancestor veneration as the motor of its ontology. This Black ontological process functions through the retrieval of an endless myriad of African practices, histories, and rituals in order to reconfigure them for contemporary application. African and Black are signifiers for the same subject viewed from different angles. In most contexts they are identical and synonymous. They are culturally constituted through a contiguity of histories, practices, and willful imagi-

nations that are never static but are positioned at the epicenter of the Afriscape in constant forward and backward symbiotic motion reflective of the *Akan* philosophical notion of *Sankofa*.

Afri-Diasporic Artists, Representational Space, and Ancestor Veneration

The process and method of venerating ancestors—in secular or religious contexts—are probably the most common spiritual practices among Black people across the Afriscape. The practice of remembering the dead, invoking their names, invoking their images, and channeling their presence in spirit possession is found both on the continent of Africa and in its wide-ranging Diaspora. The value of ancestor veneration lies in the power that it holds to bring the past into the present in new ways that can create a communal, representational space that facilitates communal healing. Both established international contemporary artists and cultural workers whose impact is purely local create artifacts that access ancestor veneration in some way. The notion that the dead still guide the living is a powerful tool in healing Black, urban communities that have organically developed secular rituals for venerating the dead through the creation of street altars. The West African Yoruba word *Egun* or *Egungun* is commonly used for the practice of venerating the dead in African Diasporic religious systems such as Afri-Cuban Lucumi, Afri-Cuban Palo, and Afri-Brazilian Candomble.¹⁹

Afri-Diasporic artists such as Nascimento (born in 1914) and Kerry James Marshall (born in 1955) are examples of two different generations that have created visual art that accesses the power of African spirituality. By accessing African spirituality in their work, Black artists open up avenues of representa-

tional space that function in similar ways to the notions of *Egungun*. The living and historical figures are conflated with supernatural African spirits or venerated as ancestral spirits. Similarly, in the Yoruba belief systems, the ancestors are present with the living and can be mediators between the material and spiritual worlds.

A variation on this practice is the method of conflating historical figures with *orishas* in the way that African American artist Kerry James Marshall does with his 1991 painting titled *Nat Shango (Thunder)*²⁰ (fig. 6). The painting depicts a standing Black, male figure with two single-headed axes, one in each hand, with several collaged heads of white women painted with yellow filling the upper third of the painting. The presence of two axes implies the double-headed axe symbol for *Shango*. The historic figure of Nat Turner, who led the most famous slave rebellion in United States history, is merged with the powerful image of the Yoruba deity of justice, retribution, and thunder. Not only does it singularly imply that this famously brutal rebellion was a manifestation of justice, it also subverts the notion that Nat Turner acted under the influence of the European, Judeo-Christian teaching that he espoused as a preacher. Marshall's painting reclaims this historical event and reinscribes it with a narrative that claims autonomy of thought and action motivated by African belief systems in the people who executed the rebellion. In addition, when Marshall superimposes *Shango* with Nat Turner, he further insinuates the Yoruba notion that long dead ancestors are mediators between the living and the supernatural *orishas*. Marshall claims Black historical, representational space and Black cultural space that delineates two geographic points in the Afriscape; the location

Figure 6. Kerry James Marshall, acrylic on canvas with paper collage. 74 x 55".
Nat Turner (Shango), 1991.



of *Shango* with the Yoruba in West Africa and the location of a historic slave rebellion in the state of Virginia are brought into the present through the medium of a contemporary painting.

The role of the artist in contemporary, secular ancestor veneration varies widely in the types of cultural expression used. I am using the label “artist” here in the broadest sense to include those creative projects that are not considered in the same ways that western art projects are considered. An artist is a participant in the creation of vernacular street altars in Oakland or a painter of the walls of Vodun ritual spaces in Haiti. Artists are consistently a key element in the creation of Afri-Diasporic ritual space.

The late Haitian painter and Vodou *Houngan* Andre Pierre is one example of the multiple roles that artists play in the creation of ritual space in the African Diaspora. I visited Andre Pierre’s compound and outdoor painting studio in 2002. Pierre’s multiple roles included not only being recognized as a Vodou *Houngan* in his community but also as an internationally recognized painter of Vodou rituals and spirits called *loas* (fig. 7). His paintings are not just illustrations of the Vodou rituals but consecrated religious icons. In a catalog published in 1978 by The Brooklyn Museum for an exhibition titled *Haitian Art*, Ute Stebich noted,

*Pierre sees no contradiction between painting and his priesthood. On the contrary, since every piece is devoted to the spirit’s glory, he understands his art as a principal means of demonstrating his reverence. Each picture is presented to, approved and consecrated by the divinities. This ceremony turns his paintings into religious icons.*²¹

Andre Pierre understood his paintings to be agents of his priesthood in the secular world of art collectors. He used them to send the power of the *loas* into the world. An additional dimension of Pierre's role as a Vodou priest is that he paints the walls of his ritual space with sacred imagery. He expands the borders of his ritual space through his visionary artistic expression. He affects the ritual space through control of the visual field not just within the confines of his Vodou *Houmfour* but outside of it when his consecrated paintings make their way through the secular, western art collector's world. The movement of his consecrated ritual images in the form of paintings, beyond the Vodou rituals that they depict, empowers them to create Afri-Diasporic representational space away from the point on the Afriscape that they were created.

These artists make representational spaces that acknowledge the presence of spirit forces beyond the material world. They purposely use the power of African ritual iconography and imagery to ignite a historical space, in the case of Kerry James Marshall's painting *Nat Shango*, and the spaces outside of the Vodou ceremonies, in the case of Andre Pierre's paintings. Paintings by these Black artists use a different value system and purpose than that which is usually ascribed to the tradition of western painting. Abdias do Nascimento not only emphasizes the power of his imagery to transcend the colonial nation-state boundaries but also his belief that his images become a conduit of non-verbal communication between the living and the dead. Nascimento says,

*In the United States for instance I was very impressed by people who viewed my paintings and started crying. . . . my art was used as a way to express feelings between people who are alive and other people who are dead.*²²

Figure 7. Andre Pierre, Oil on canvas. 42x24", *Baron Samedi*, 1977.



Nascimento refers here to the way in which his paintings transcend the colonial language barriers of English and Portuguese. Similar to the manner that Andre Pierre viewed his artistic practice as part of his spiritual practice, Nascimento sees no difference between his contemporary painting practice and the creation of Umbanda's *ponto riscado* ritual ground drawings.²³

The ground drawing that I created in East Oakland at the mourning vigil for Casper Banjo carries a similar sensibility because my intention was not as much to create an image to be aesthetically evaluated, but to respond to a traumatic event in a way meant to go beyond aesthetics in order to access a collective emotional response. The collective response to the ground drawing was perfectly appropriate. My intention is to engage the visual subjects that inhabit the Afriscape directly. I am not analyzing visual events at a distance through critical theory alone. I enter the ritual theater of the visual event and become one of the visual subjects. In her essay *Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture*, curator and writer Irit Rogoff remarks, ". . . the perspectives that I would like to try to represent, the critical analysis of visual culture, would want to do everything to avoid a discourse which perceives itself as 'speaking about' and shift towards a discourse of 'speaking to'...in claiming and retelling the narratives ('speaking to') we alter the very structures by which we organize and inhabit culture."²⁴ I agree with Rogoff's comments, and I propose to continue the method of speaking to Afri-Diasporic subjects in the manner of an Afrifuturist who proposes new narratives or ways for Black subjects to inhabit new futures.

Collective Healing: A Proposal for an Afrifuturist Intervention

"The real problem is, do we have time enough to get at the nihilism—the collapse of civic attentions that has gone on in this country, where blacks are allowed to sink into poverty and shoot each other—drug wars—while the rest of America commutes indifferently to the suburbs?" —Robert Farris Thompson²⁵

As one of the most prominent scholars of trans-Atlantic African culture, Robert Farris Thompson's statement is an indication that the study of Afri-Diasporic cultures should not be solely concerned with unearthing or theorizing connections between African cultures. My concern, along with Thompson's, is for how these connections affect the representational space of Black people, the *contemporary* inhabitants of the Afriscape. The trauma of gun violence in Black communities has produced the practice of turning sidewalk space into secular ritual place. The manner in which Black people in these communities respond to these tragic events by creating street altars to those who have been slain is an indication that even in the midst of great trauma there is still a sense of agency and a willingness to venerate the dead. These altars are significant because they reinscribe the evolving African presence in Afri-Diasporic Black identity that is reflective of African sensibilities towards ancestor veneration. Additionally, they are important because they evidence the fact that contemporary vernacular artists still express these sensibilities.

Altars that conspicuously occupy ground space on street corners and sidewalks in response to the presence of death in Black communities underscore the continual presence of Kongo rooted signs in the African Diaspora. The common

denominators in Kongo symbols serve as signposts that map the Afriscape. An altar constructed communally by mourners who knew the dead victim of the gun violence typically consists of flowers, stuffed animals, dolls, balloons, and prayer candles. But most prominent and common are glass bottles that are mostly, but not exclusively, liquor bottles. These bottles are another manifestation of the practice found in Mississippi, Louisiana, and South Carolina of using bottles on gravesites and trees as ways of variously protecting the houses of the living against the return of evil spirits and also preventing the worthy traits or talents of the deceased from being lost in the void. The presence of plates or bottles on trees over Central African Kongo gravesites, according to Thompson, means “not the end,” or “death will not end our fight.”

According to Thompson, “Afro-American bottle trees are fugitive specters from a graveyard realm, just as bottle-lined burials are horizontal bottle trees.”²⁶ I agree with Thompson’s assertion and add that urban street altars are to bottle trees what Urban Blues music is to Delta Blues—a southern, rural Kongo fugitive specter finding its way into the city. In Oakland the presence of bottle glass on urban concrete that is still hot with violent death is the innate, culturally constituted practice of Black folks that is used to cool a space from the return of destructive spirits. The presence of the bottles also alludes to the custom of pouring water or alcohol as libations in honor of spirits and ancestors. This explains the presence of bottle glass on Vodun altars in Haiti. They are part of the recurring presence of Kongo signs, form, and syntax in the common lives of Afri-Diasporic subjects.

The presence of these street altars and the creation of vernacular street art in Oakland that venerates ancestors make a

particularly fertile ground for projects that directly engage the community in healing strategies. The predominantly Black communities in East and West Oakland have recently responded to the prevalent gun violence by creating effigies that represent the dead victims of shootings (fig. 8). These effigies, most frequently representing the likeness of a young Black man, are erected in the space that the victim died. These effigies represent the latest evolution of an ongoing practice of veneration for the dead that turns place into secular ritual space. The emergence of the vernacular artists who erect these effigies are an indication that there is an open acceptance of new, evolving forms of venerating the dead in the space of the public street. I observed that the street is more recognized by the Black community as the place holding the spirit of those young men lost to gun violence as opposed to the rarified spaces of galleries, mortuaries, or churches where there are more customs and expectations imposed on claiming representational space.

I observed similar conditions of gun violence in my fieldwork while visiting the Jacarezinho *favela* of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in August of 2008. Jacarezinho’s impoverished community’s victims were predominantly young Black men killed in violence associated with the presence of the drug trade. Using the Afrifuturist visionary lens that engages technology, in addition to seeking ways of willfully engaging and making connections across Afri-Diasporic lines with other inhabitants of the Afriscape, I propose a new method for venerating the dead. The community’s reaction to the ground drawing that I created for Casper Banjo in East Oakland indicates that there is acceptance for the notion of the ground drawing in the open context of the street. Building upon people’s reactions and the openness of the

Figure 8. Unidentified Artist. Effigy located in West Oakland. 2007.



secular ritual space of an Oakland urban street, I plan to create an event that connects the creation of ground drawings by artists for people who have fallen to gun violence via intercontinental internet webcast. The creation of ground drawings on the street by artists venerating the recently killed inhabitants of Jacarezinho *favela* in Brazil along with East and West Oakland will create a unique Afri-Diasporic secular ritual space. The form and syntax of the *ponto riscado* ground drawing is already familiar to most inhabitants of Rio de Janeiro, and the work of Abdias do Nascimento is an indication that their usage in secular spaces is not unheard of. The images representing the recent dead in the secular ritual space of two local urban streets will be connected in a way that widens the ritual space to include cyberspace.

The presence of others within the context of a mourning ritual is one powerful element in the healing process. Oakland's Black neighborhoods deal with trauma from the rampant loss of community members through the creation of communal altars. The act of creating the altar reinforces the idea that there is still community, that there is emotional support for the family of the victims, and that the dead are in some way still present with us. If these communities—Jacarezinho and Oakland—experienced an even larger representational space that connects them to other Afri-Diasporic peoples with a situational commonality, such a representational space holds the potential to bring an even deeper sense of community, empathy, and subsequent emotional support.

The ultimate goal is to transcend nation-state boundaries in addition to the colonial language barriers of Portuguese and English in a way that reinscribes the African presence in new ways across the Afriscape.

Notes

- 1 J. Lorand Matory, "Afro-Atlantic Culture: On the Live Dialogue between Africa and the Americas," in *Africana: the Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience*, ed. Jr. Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 1999).
- 2 Diana DeGroat Brown, *Umbanda Religion and Politics in Brazil*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994; reprint, Columbia University Press Morningside Edition). Pontos riscados is pronounced "pawn-toes his-cah-dohs."
- 3 Kimbwandende Kia Bunseki Fu-Kiau, *African Cosmology of the Bantu Congo*, 2nd ed. (Brooklyn: Athelia Henrietta Press, 2001).
- 4 Mae Fatima Damas, in conversation with the author, Rio De Janeiro, 2008, digital audio.
- 5 Ibid. Damas indicated that if the crosses are not represented below the horizon line she would question the authenticity of the *ponto riscado*.
- 6 Abdias Nascimento, "Art and the Orishas," in *Abdias Nascimento 90 Years-Living Memory*, ed. Elisa Larkin Nascimento (Rio De Janeiro: IPEAFRO, 2006).
- 7 *Orixas* are West African gods found in primarily Yoruba-rooted religions.
- 8 Abdias do Nascimento and Elisa Larkin Nascimento, *Africans in Brazil* (New Jersey: Africa World Press Inc., 1992). 54
- 9 Mark Dery, "Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delaney, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose," in *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*, ed. Mark Dery (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994). 180. I prefer the spelling "Afrifuturism" because there is no "O" in Africa, and it is my suspicion that the prefix "Afro" is merely a flawed dialectical response to the prefix Euro.
- 10 Ibid. 180
- 11 Dery, "Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delaney, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose."
- 12 Greg Tate, interview by Dery in "Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delaney, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose."etc. Ibid. 211
- 13 Greg Tate, *Flyboy in the Buttermilk: Essays on Contemporary America*, First ed. (New York London Toronto Sydney Tokyo Singapore: Fireside Simon and Schuster, 1992). 130
- 14 Kwame Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience*, First ed. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). 233. The Akan are an ethnic group residing in Ghana. They are renowned for having developed a corpus of symbols called *adinkra* which correspond to proverbs that explain philosophical ideas practiced by their group. Gyekye explains the meaning of Sankofa.
- 15 Tricia Rose, interview by Dery in "Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delaney, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose." 215
- 16 (Leroi Jones) Imamu Amiri Baraka, "Technology and Ethos," *Amistad 2 Writings on Black History and Culture*, no. 2 (1971). 321. Baraka's essay pre-dates Mark Dery's Afrofuturist interviews by two decades and engages the idea of African cultural expression's relationship to technology before Dery's.
- 17 Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, ed. Dilip Gaonkar and Benjamin lee, 1st ed., vol. 1, Public Worlds (Minneapolis London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).
- 18 Ibid. 34.
- 19 J. Omosade Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs & Sacrificial Rites*, First ed. (Brooklyn: Athelia Henrietta Press, Inc. Publishing in the Name of Orunmila, 1996). 65–66.
- 20 Kerry James Marshall, Terrie Sultan, Arthur Jafa, *Kerry James Marshall*, First ed. (New York Harry N. Abrams, 2000). 11, 53.
- 21 Ute Stebich, *Haitian Art*, First ed. (Brooklyn: The Brooklyn Museum, Division of Publications and Marketing Services, 1978). 167.
- 22 Abdias Nascimento, in conversation with the author. (Rio De Janeiro: Unpublished, 2008), Digital recording.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Irit Rogoff, *Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture*, First ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2000). 32
- 25 Robert Farris Thompson, interview by Donald Cosentino in *African Arts* 25, No. 4, no. 100 (1992). 59.
- 26 Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 1983). 144–145.