

Charting the Atlantic Sublime

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I first saw Frank Bowling's Map Paintings in 2002. London-based curator Gilane Tawadros had brought them out of storage for an exhibition she was preparing for the fiftieth edition of the Venice Biennale. Unstretched canvases were rolled out on the floor and, with the aim of documenting a body of work that had gone unseen since the 1970s, a photographer stood on a ladder in an attempt to capture an image of paintings such as *Polish Rebecca* (1971) pp. 84–5 and *Marcia H Travels* (1970) p. 40. It was impossible. It was not just that their sheer size, at some two and three-quarters by five and a half meters, for instance, exceeded the frame by which the camera lens tries to discipline the field of vision. The difficulty, in not being able to get back far enough so the eye could encompass each painting as a totality, had everything to do with the far-reaching challenge these works throw down to the boundary conditions of opticality that are foundational to the life of painting.

To witness the rediscovery of Bowling's oeuvre over the last fifteen years, which have seen him elected to the Royal Academy of Arts in 2005 and awarded the Order of the British Empire in 2008, is to see at first hand that art's history is not fixed in the past but is actively written by the present. Art historians strive to achieve the narrative effect whereby readers will be convinced that the canon being narrated is authoritative, immovable, and unquestionably true. But to be present at a moment when a hitherto dormant body of work comes out of the archive, with the power to shake up our received view of modernist painting, is to realize that such "truth effects" are readily undone when material from the past comes back to take us by surprise. As well as asking why Bowling's Map Paintings went into storage in the first place, the timeline of their return into our contemporary moment calls for a fresh look at the story of post-painterly abstraction in light of Bowling's world-crossing journeys from colonial Guyana (British Guiana), through postwar London, and thence to New York at the height of the epoch-shifting 1960s.

In the presence of their immense scale, one's eye is de-centered from the visual field. The almost wrap-around dimensions of the Map Paintings disperse one's perception, which is invited to roam all over liquefied color fields whose surfaces sometimes blister into haptic relief. As well as unmooring the coordinates of vision that ordinarily position the viewer in mastery over what is viewed, the sensory evocation of the oceanic and the riverine envelops the viewer in multiple affective registers. As our attention is absorbed by heterogeneous surface incidents that spread across each canvas on a microscopic scale, we enter an imaginative realm that embraces the macrocosmic dimensions of ecological and geological time as it exists beyond anthropomorphic measurement. Being plunged into such a space of de-centering is not merely pleasurable but *blissful* in the sense that Roland Barthes distinguished the ego-confirming values of pleasure from the way bliss arises instead from aesthetic experience "that imposes a state of loss ... that ... unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological, assumptions."¹ Understanding how a painter could induce such vertiginous effects by experimenting with material processes of staining, dripping, stenciling,

and spraying requires that we set the context for the works in *Mappa Mundi* art historically, at the crossroads moment of "1968" when the language of formalist criticism was antagonized by the emergent cultural politics of the United States Black Arts Movement. But Bowling's art needs to be approached philosophically as well. Bringing formalist and materialist concerns out of their habitual dichotomy, and placing them instead into a cross-cultural dialogue, his Map Paintings traverse the aesthetic category of the sublime from an entirely new angle of inquiry, namely that of a late-twentieth-century diasporic cosmopolitanism which came to voice by radically questioning the cultural foundations of Enlightenment Man.

In 1948, when Barnett Newman proclaimed "The Sublime is Now" he foresaw the postwar shift of modernism from Europe to America, yet his argument for an abstract art that would fully engage with the worldly turmoil of twentieth-century life was gradually eclipsed by the formalist view of abstraction in which, as critic Clement Greenberg defined it, only the medium of art-making itself was to be the primary concern.² The critical writings Bowling published in the 1968–72 period are highly sig-



fig. 1
Frank Bowling, *Cover Girl*, 1966
Acrylic, oil paint, and silkscreened ink on canvas, 144.8 x 101.6 cm

nificant in this regard as they reveal an artist wholly committed to modernism's intellectual vocation—to call all received wisdom into question—and provide us with an interpretive key with which to grasp the scale of ambition driving his Map Paintings. Grappling with tensions between the all-or-nothing absolutes of high-modernist discourse, which saw abstract art as a quest to transcend history's ever-changing turbulence so as to reveal timeless truths, and the worldwide upheaval brought about by social movements that saw the Enlightenment narratives of rational progress as based on a West-centric repression of human diversity, Bowling was the first to ask a set of questions that were post-colonial *avant la lettre*.

Being ahead of their time, his queries did not find an adequate reception since discourses of formalist criticism, on the one hand, and black aesthetics, on the other, spoke past one another like ships in the night, as if they were incommensurable languages. It was not that Bowling offered a conciliatory synthesis, but rather—like a flash of lightning which momentarily makes visible what is covered in darkness—his art and his writings began to register the limits of the binary foundations on which modernism had been built. In the sense that the sublime concerns the human encounter with something so vast and so infinite as to be incomprehensible to our understanding, it is when Bowling's art brings us up against our perceptual finitude that the agency of the oceanic and the aquatic within his painting asks us to ponder "the inhuman" as a condition of modernity that is all the more powerful inasmuch as it ordinarily eludes our vision. Icy mountains, inhospitable deserts, and tempestuous seas were among the sources of the sublime for eighteenth-century thinkers, yet in distinguishing the sublime from the merely beautiful their twentieth-century counterparts came to include the anthropogenic violence of political terror, genocide, and environmental catastrophe within "the encounter between an 'I' and that which has the capacity to annihilate it completely."³ Our question, then, as Bowling's art plunges us into an oceanic realm of decentering, is to ask how his painting gives rise to an experience of the sublime that is at once terrifyingly unsettling and also blissfully enjoyable as well.

Late Modern Routes

During Bowling's 1959–62 years at the Royal College of Art figurative and abstract paradigms were widely regarded as mutually exclusive, yet his painting embodied a border-crossing ability to combine elements from both. Friends with Elizabeth Frink, Francis Bacon, and others whose existential figuration took off in the 1950s, he was also classmates with David Hockney and the "Young Contemporaries" of 1960s pop who disdained the institutional approbation acquired by abstract expressionism.⁴ Having first traveled to New York in 1961, then on a travel scholarship after graduation in 1962 that enabled him to revisit Guiana as well, Bowling arrived in Manhattan in 1966, with this combinatorial outlook in full flow as he moved from recognizable depiction toward

color-field abstraction. Early and predominantly figurative paintings such as *Cover Girl* (1966) fig. 1 combined a fashion model in an op-art dress, replete with yellow and red target, with ambient spores and horizontal bands of saturated color forming an abstract ground behind her, whereas the paintings Bowling began to produce in his Broadway studio from 1967 onward dispensed with the human form and manual rendering such that the representational element was now carried by the fragmented shapes of stenciled geographical outlines and by photo-generated images silkscreened atop or beneath vast stretches of acrylic.

With an epidiascope borrowed from Larry Rivers, whom Bowling had known from trips to New York in 1964 and 1965 when he stayed with Rivers and worked with him in his Long Island studio, his map-based experiments crossed the lines between abstract and pop at a time when many saw only an impassable boundary. But equally if not more important was Bowling's ease in moving across social lines of race as well. As he met Jasper Johns and others at his initial home in the Chelsea Hotel, Bowling also got to know Mel Edwards, Al Loving, Jack Whitten, and other African American abstract artists. In a milieu fraught with the legacies of segregation, now facing upheaval in every domain, Bowling's positioning as a diasporic subject who was both black and British put him in a unique location from which to put his recombinant skills to work. Thanks, in part, to his Britishness, Bowling knew the expatriate English critic and curator, Lawrence Alloway,



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Jasper Johns, *False Start*, 1959
Oil on canvas, 170.8 × 137.2 cm

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an advocate of early pop as a member of the Independent Group in the 1950s, when he also embraced abstract art in his *Art News* articles; it was Alloway who encouraged Bowling to write the essays published in *Arts Magazine* pp. 164–215, where Bowling was a contributing editor between 1968 and 1972.⁵ And, by virtue of his blackness, Bowling was also attuned to the dilemmas of African American abstract artists marginalized from the high-modernist mainstream even as they disputed the representationalist demands of the Black Arts Movement. Bowling's essays matter not because they somehow "explain" his Map Paintings, but because they illuminate the agonistic space in which modernism's future was being contested in the mid-1960s. Although there is undoubtedly a biographical dimension to his Map Paintings, it was the border-crossing intelligence of Bowling's migratory life-world that animated the translational practice through which he opened up a hybrid interchange among disparate discourses, for in the transatlantic genesis of his painterly experiment "the map ... is a placeholder for the enormous task of bridging a stylistic divide in painting at a time when few voices outside formalism were being heard," as Courtney J. Martin has astutely remarked.⁶

Color is of paramount importance for in the midst of the pink haze shimmering in *False Start* (1967) or the sumptuous tonalities of *Schlesingerblue* (1968) pp. 74–5 one is not confronted with a cold frontal surface but receives instead a phenomenological invitation into an affective space of enveloping dimensions. Color is freed from line, as it was for Helen Frankenthaler, Morris Louis, and others grouped under the label of "post-painterly abstraction" that Greenberg coined for a 1964 museum exhibition, although Bowling's luminescent yellows, fiery pinks, lush greens, and other high-key colors (which would be at home in a pop palette) put him at odds with the muted pastels and earth-toned decorum of his counterparts. On closer inspection, moreover, one notices key differentiations that reveal Bowling's departure from the idea of pure opticality with which critic Michael Fried championed Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, and other color-field painters, whom he praised for eliminating any vestiges of illusionistic depth so as to unify canvas, shape, and color into a perceptual whole. Fried's notion of a pure opticality that delivered painting to "a space addressed to eyesight alone" recapitulated Greenberg's master criterion of medium specificity, for in formalist criticism a successful artwork was one that self-referentially showed its own making so as to reveal its total being in the blink of an eye.⁷ But where abstraction was thereby charged with the ultimate end of transcending all that was inessential to art, the view that "each art would be rendered 'pure,' and in its 'purity' find the guarantee of its standards of quality as well as of its independence," as Greenberg put it in "Modernist Painting," meant such purification functioned in foundationalist terms as an all-or-nothing absolute.⁸ Against the grain of such rule-bound thinking, Bowling generated hybrid impurities in his studio, emancipating color flows from linearity and manual handling, while allowing chance and accident into the picture-making processes as well. Painterly qualities of "openness and clarity" arose from a mode of

abstraction that he enacted not as an eliminative drive toward purification but as a combinatorial performance in which heterogeneous elements were intermingled. Noticing more than one Map Painting also entitled *False Start* (1968) pp. 66–7 alerts us to the counter-foundationalist dialogue Bowling struck up with Jasper Johns's *False Start* (1959) fig. 2.

Mismatching a word such as "blue" over a patch of orange brushwork, for instance, Johns exposed the conventionality of signs, worrying the line between representation and the real thing, just as his flags and targets had done. By the time Johns turned to cartographic sources in *Map* (1962) his semiotic inquiry into the codes by which arbitrary marks are made meaningful on the basis of shared conventions led him to dissolve the very legibility of the North American continent in grey-on-grey brushstrokes. Where such a painting detaches the sign from its referent to show that the map is, indeed, not the territory, the conceptual upshot of Johns's strategy, revisiting the Duchampian tradition of the readymade to trouble the border between art and life, was diametrically opposed to the formalist anxiety that modernist art should always assert its autonomy from the real space of the everyday world since, for critics such as Fried, that was how, "by virtue of its opposition to the banality, worldliness, and gracelessness of objecthood, art takes on transcendental significance."⁹

Abstracted from a map, a painting such as Rivers's *Africa I* (1961–62) fig. 3, falls short of such exalted transcendentalism for its figural markings refer to life outside the picture plane, yet for Bowling, who valued formalist criticism for its discipline but did not identify with its purism, the *figural* was crucial as an



fig. 3
Larry Rivers, *Africa I*, 1961–62
Oil on canvas, 170.8 x 137.2 cm

intermediary zone between figuration and abstraction occupied by inchoate material as it exists in a state of signifying potential prior to being given distinct form or bounded shape. Coincidentally, Bowling traveled to Guyana in 1968 to film a program in the BBC's Monitor arts series (which went unrealized), just as Rivers toured Ethiopia, Kenya, Zaire, and Nigeria with French film-maker Pierre Gaisseau to make a documentary shown on NBC's Experiments in Television in 1968. Being responsive to world-turning events, as Bowling's early paintings of Patrice Lumumba p. 35 had been, was never mutually exclusive to experimental trial and error that investigated the material properties of color in water-soluble pigment.¹⁰ With regard to this figural element, Bowling's photo-generated silkscreen templates are highly important too.



fig. 4
Frank Bowling, *Who's Afraid of Barney Newman*, 1968
Acrylic on canvas, 236.4 x 129.5 x 2.7 cm

To notice that the colonial house with palm fronds in *Cover Girl*, and other figurative works such as *Bartica* p. 30 and *My Guyana* (both 1966–67) p. 30, carry over into the abstract color field of *Where is Lucienne?* (1971) p. 87 is to acknowledge the permeable membrane through which formal concerns about art's ontology were brought into contact with turbulent historical events within the two-way traffic of Bowling's visual thinking. Knowing the image is of the artist's family home in New Amsterdam on the Berbice River makes it a mnemonic inscription of the past, in a moment where Bowling's diasporic "routes" gave him a home in several places, not just "roots" in one. Moreover, we can also see that the figural element's almost illegible quality is of decisive importance for Bowling as it is a painterly manifestation of what Jacques Derrida called the *trace*. Whereas formalists wanted autonomous artworks to be wholly self-sufficient and thus fully present to the beholder – "presentness is grace" as Fried put it¹¹ – post-structuralists understood all sign systems to generate meaning through "differance," spelled with an "a," which meant that, far from being either-or opposites, presence and absence are always interwoven in textual structures of deferral and delay whereby every signifier is haunted by "something other than itself," and thus comes to be traced both by what is left behind and what is yet to come.¹²

The figural silkscreens in *Mother's House with Beware of the Dog* (1966) p. 29, and *Plus Mother's House* (1968) p. 71, like the child whose portrayal is just about readable in *Bartica* (1968–69) p. 76 and *Middle Passage* (1970) p. 81, inscribe something memory-like that can be said to survive the necessary losses through which every self must leave home to acquire a life of its own. But as it is technologically mediated, rather than rendered by hand – thus withdrawing any expressive authorship from the scene – the trace structures among the dripping, pouring, and staining are always markings of differance that are also open toward a futurity not yet present in the world. Interweaving absence and presence, such moves amount to a late-modernist intervention that introduces double-voicing into a hybrid text of recombinant elements, drawing us to understand loss not as a terminal ending but as a letting-go in which winning freedom from past constraint carries dispossessive force, which is exactly what was at stake in the concept of the sublime.

Oceanic Interspaces

Who's Afraid of Barney Newman? (1968) fig. 4 reads as art-about-art whose mischievous wit seems, at first sight, closer to post-modern pastiche than high-modernist self-seriousness. But it asks a question about who 1960s art was addressed to, while showing that color rarely exists in a state of purity sealed off from meaning. Alluding to Barnett Newman's series of four paintings begun in 1966, *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue?*, the work signifies on the hierarchy in Newtonian optics between primary colors (which are indivisible) and secondary ones (which are mixtures). It ques-

tions the idea that scientific knowledge guarantees unchangeable truth by performing a substitution that highlights the contingent happenstance whereby the Ethiopian tricolor, established in 1897, began to proliferate as African and Caribbean nations won independence from 1957 onward, when red, yellow, and green became the signifiers of Pan-African identification, which was in turn further disseminated in the visual culture of Rastafari.

Bowling's tongue was firmly in cheek, yet amid the uptown/downtown partitions of the New York art world, his double-voicing addressed *both* the exclusionary tendencies of high-modernist discourse *and* the defensive mindset whereby "black art" activism seemed afraid to pass judgments among African American artworks. "It is as though what is being said is that whatever black people do in the various areas labeled art is Art – hence



fig. 5
Frank Bowling, *Night Journey*, 1968–69
Acrylic on canvas, 328 × 269 cm

Black Art," he argued in one essay, reiterating the point in a 1971 text that impishly asked "Is Black Art About Color?" when he wrote, "most of the noises being made about black art sound ... completely concerned with the *conception*, not the actual delivery (*the actuality!*) of a positively articulated object."¹³ Cultural nationalists who failed to distinguish individual artistic achievement mirrored the liberal condescension that also treated all black artists as a homogeneous set. Yet, for his part, Bowling sometimes wrote in absolutist terms—"Quality is the only criterion from which to judge"—that upheld the binarism whereby formalist discourse claimed universality for Euro-American art, while dismissing "other" modernisms as particularistic.¹⁴ In facing the paradox whereby Bowling's essays seem, at times, to close down the very problem space his paintings were opening up, it is vital to grasp the benefits of distance afforded by the back-and-forth travels of a diasporic life. "If I hadn't been in New York, I wouldn't have been able to come to grips with Black Art; there would have been no way of doing that had I remained in London," he said in a 1976 interview, having established homes in the US and the UK. He acknowledged the vantage he gained from his numerous Atlantic crossings, "and it is through this that I've come away knowing that there is something very distinctively Black—as there is something very distinctively Jewish, or Scots/Irish, but there is no Black Art. There is Classical or Tribal Art, but not Black Art." Yet in his concluding statement—"I believe the Black soul, if there can be such a thing, belongs in Modernism. Black people are a quite new and original people"—the hard-won insight of Bowling's diasporic positioning voices a doubleness that eloquently decenters and begins to dismantle the law of dichotomy which had, from Renaissance to Enlightenment, always codified the discourse of difference.¹⁵

In the sense that maps epitomize what Michel Foucault meant when he defined discourse as the power-knowledge medium in which how we come to know the world shapes our capacity to act upon it, Map Paintings such as *Night Journey* (1968) fig. 5 began to decolonize the entire archive of the imperial world picture. Where one sign system won out over others, with Mercator's 1569 cylindrical mapping overtaking the Peter's projection system, the darkness into which the global North disappears in this painting is thrown into relief by the yellow lightning flash that highlights the edges of Latin America and West Africa. With color set free from any fixed correspondence between signifier and signified, such a trace structure does not represent or symbolize the Middle Passage so much as it bears witness to something unrepresentable in slavery's relationship to modernity, which is conventionally eliminated from the field of vision regulated by the imperial world picture. "Man is an invention of recent date. And perhaps nearing its end," wrote Foucault in 1966, describing the break-up of liberal humanism's epistemological order in the decolonial moment when insurgent movements all over the globe revealed the West-centric foundations behind countless universalist truth claims. Foucault wagered that "man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea,"¹⁶ but while his

world still had edges separating water from land, Bowling countenanced an oceanic realm of boundarylessness that was utterly terrifying for those who clung to the civilized-versus-barbarian dichotomy that we can hear when W.H. Auden said "the sea, in fact, is that state of barbaric vagueness and disorder out of which civilization has emerged and into which, unless saved by the effort of gods and men, it is always liable to relapse."¹⁷

Newman's art, like Auden's poetry, faced a world torn apart by the Holocaust and Hiroshima, in which, "in 1940, some of us woke up to find ourselves without hope—to find that painting did not really exist."¹⁸ In his *Stations of the Cross: Lemba Sabachthani* (1966) fourteen abstract paintings articulated an ethical mode of address in which, "after giving viewers the sense of loss; after pushing viewers to ask questions related to the disaster of the Holocaust, and then making them aware of the conditions of survival," Newman called on his viewers to acknowledge events of such horror and violence as to be otherwise overwhelming.¹⁹ More so than Alloway's role in curating these works at the Guggenheim, Bowling's call-and-response relationship to Newman reveals that in *Night Journey* he translated the latter's zip, registering the zero-degree difference between the picture plane and its surrounding space, into an inscriptive "gulf," an abyss of loss that also, in its luminescence, radiates hopeful futurity.²⁰ If "slavery broke the world in half," as Toni Morrison said, then *Night Journey's* bisected picture space confirms the view that "modern life begins with slavery." And the sheer scale of what Bowling's Map Paintings ask us to bear witness to—the catastrophic violence from which modernity itself arose—also upholds the view that the dark underside of Enlightenment rationalism is often rendered visible whenever the testimonial narratives of Jewish and African diasporas become mutually imbricated.²¹

Oceanic feeling, a term that originated in religious studies, connotes the euphoric state of being blissfully at one with the world, whereas being completely without space-time boundaries risks the loss of the embodied condition that makes us human. The sublime is sometimes misread to mean taking



fig. 6
Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Slave Ship (Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On)*, 1840
Oil on canvas, 90.8 x 122.6 cm

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pleasure in the sight of suffering caused by terror, a view as egregious as when “the unrepresentable” is used to deny the occurrence of traumatic events rather than as a term that registers the limitations and partiality built into all conventions of representation. The Atlantic sublime Bowling navigates, however, combined intimacy and extremity as it brushed against the grain of postwar movements that decried oppression in the name of universal Man, opening instead onto a decolonial space of decentering which asked the viewer to bear witness to the inhuman not as a moral failing in an otherwise sound civilizational structure but as foundational to the condition of modernity *tout court*. The wide-screen ratio of epically scaled works such as *Africa to Australia* and *Dog Daze* (both 1971) pp. 90–1 encompasses both astronomical mapping and the evolutionary time in which tectonic plates shift imperceptibly, while along another axis, the burnished colors of *Middle Passage* call out to nothing so much as the setting sun that suffuses J.M.W Turner’s *Slave Ship (Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On)* (1840) fig. 6.

Turner’s slave-ship painting was sublime rather than beautiful for the disquiet that led John Ruskin, its first owner, to dispose of it speaks of the fear and trembling provoked by what astonishes us into incomprehensibility, unlike the reassurance we gain from the confirmation of our faculties when we behold mere beauty. The sublime-versus-beautiful distinction put forward by Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant saw the overwhelming nonhuman otherness of nature as a pretext for self-transcendence, as the overcoming of fear would lead modern Man to leap away from the bodily senses toward the supersensible laws of pure reason. By contrast, the counter-emphasis, in conceptions of the feminine sublime, for instance, on art’s ability to induce momentary dissolutions of self/other distinctions in immersive aesthetic experiences, leads to the view that such temporary shatterings can open restrictive definitions of the human to possibilities of growth by presaging transformations in the overall ecology of all inter-dependent life.²²

Charting a passage between these contested views of sublimity as that which brings human and nonhuman into a potentially transformative encounter, I cannot help but feel it is impossible to tell, in the presence of such an overpowering work such as *Penumbra* (1970) pp. 82–3, whether the shapes I see are the cartographic tracings of continental land mass or accidental stains of water-borne paint whose flow and direction were never under the control of human hands. To say it was only in the aftermath of the decentering of liberal humanist Man that we belatedly came to “see” what Bowling had accomplished in his studio is to agree with Jean-François Lyotard that, in the late twentieth century, the sublime was no longer about other-worldly transcendence but about making a game-changing move with the potential to alter relations and positions among all the players.²³ Although we only caught up with him belatedly, Bowling prepared the way for the post-colonial turn that, by decentering modernism, changed the rules of the game that gave rise to the emergence of global contemporary art.

- 1 Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill & Wang, 1975), 14. (First published in French in 1973.)
- 2 Barnett Newman, “The Sublime is Now,” *Tiger’s Eye* 1, no. 6 (December 1948); republished in Charles Harrison and Paul Woods, eds., *Art in Theory, 1900–2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (London: Blackwell, 2002), 580–1.
- 3 Christine Battersby, *The Sublime, Terror and Human Difference* (London: Routledge, 2007), 3.
- 4 See Leon Wainwright, “Frank Bowling and the Appetite for British Pop,” *Third Text* 22, no. 2 (2008): 195–208.
- 5 See Lucy Bradnock, Courtney J. Martin, and Rebecca Peabody, eds., *Lawrence Alloway: Critic and Curator* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2015).
- 6 Courtney J. Martin, “They’ve All Got Painting: Frank Bowling’s Modernity and the Post-1960 Atlantic,” in Tanya Barson and Peter Gorschlüter, eds., *Afro-Modern: Journeys Through the Black Atlantic* (London: Tate, 2010), 53.
- 7 Michael Fried, “Three American Painters: Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, Frank Stella,” republished in Fried, *Art & Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 232. (First published in 1965.)
- 8 Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting,” republished in Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Vol. 4: Modernism with a Vengeance*, ed. John O’Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 86. (First published in 1961.)
- 9 Tony Gilbert, “Objecthood,” in University of Chicago: Theories of Media, Keywords, 2002, accessed January 5, 2017, <http://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/objecthood.htm>.
- 10 Paintings depicting Lumumba were shown in the exhibition *Image in Revolt: Derek Boshier, Frank Bowling, Grabowski Gallery*, London, October 5–November 3, 1962.
- 11 Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” republished in Fried, *Art & Objecthood* (see note 7), 172. (First published in 1967.)
- 12 Jacques Derrida, “Différance,” in Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 13. (First published in French in 1968.)
- 13 Frank Bowling, “It’s Not Enough to Say ‘Black is Beautiful,’” *Arts Magazine*, April 1971, 53; “Is Black Art about Color?” in Rhoda Goldstein, ed., *Black Life and Culture in the United States* (New York: Thomas Crowell, 1971), 303. On abstract art and the Black Arts Movement, see Kellie Jones, “‘It’s Not Enough to Say Black is Beautiful’: Abstraction at the Whitney, 1969–1974” in Kobena Mercer, ed., *Discrepant Abstraction* (Cambridge MA: MIT, 2006), 154–80.
- 14 Frank Bowling, “The Rupture: Ancestor Worship, Revival, Confusion, or Disguise,” *Arts Magazine*, Summer 1970, 31.
- 15 Frank Bowling and Bill Thomson, “A Conversation between Two Painters,” *Art International*, October–November 1976, 65.
- 16 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Tavistock, 1970), 387. (First published in French in 1966.)
- 17 W.H. Auden, *The Enchafed Flood, or Romantic Iconography of the Sea* (1950), quoted from John Mack, *The Sea: A Cultural History* (London: Reaktion, 2011), 72.
- 18 Barnett Newman, *Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. John P. O’Neill (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1992 191. (The quotation dates from 1940.)
- 19 Mark Godfrey, *Abstraction and the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 74.
- 20 I owe this observation to Courtney Martin, who visited my Theorizing Diaspora seminar at Yale University, October 27, 2016.
- 21 Toni Morrison in “Living Memory: a meeting with Toni Morrison,” Paul Gilroy, *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 1993), 178; on inter-diasporic imbrication, see Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996) and Nicholas Mirzoeff, ed., *Diaspora and Visual Culture: Representing Africans and Jews* (New York: Routledge, 1999).
- 22 See Battersby, *The Sublime, Terror and Human Difference* (see note 3), esp. 1–84.
- 23 Jean-François Lyotard, “The Sublime and the Avant-Garde,” trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby, in Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1991), 89–107. (First published in French in 1985.)