

## CHAPTER 17

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# John Marrant Blows the French Horn: Print, Performance, and the Making of Publics in Early African American Literature

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### Performing Conversion

Sometime late in the year of 1769, John Marrant walked into an evangelical meeting in Charleston, South Carolina, where the famous Reverend George Whitefield was holding forth: Marrant's intention was to blow his French horn in the midst of the meeting in order to disrupt the sermon of the controversial Methodist preacher. Marrant, then fourteen years old, was a free black young man of tremendous musical talents who had been incited to this prank by a companion. However, as he lifted the French horn off of his shoulder, jostling for room among the throng of bodies gathered to hear Whitefield, Marrant was suddenly struck down by the religious exhortation of Whitefield: rather than lifting the horn to his lips as he had intended, he abruptly found himself lying speechless and senseless on the ground. His revival from this stupor, which occurred over the course of the next several days, unfolds as a tale of religious awakening, culminating in the moment when "the Lord was pleased to set [his] soul at perfect liberty."<sup>1</sup> This account of Marrant's conversion, which appears in *A Narrative of the Lord's Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, a Black* (1785), is striking for a number of rea-

sons. First, it is one of the earliest documents in print that is authored by an African American. Second, it places us within a familiar scene (religious revival) before a famous white man (George Whitefield), but the scene is narrated from the unfamiliar perspective of a free black youth. Third, central to the scene is an unusual and somehow excessively present material object: namely, the French horn.

The French horn is an object that we are unlikely to readily place in the hands of the eighteenth-century black youths of our historical imagination. But precisely the thingly, material quality of the French horn (an object that attracts attention to itself—one with sinuous curves, reflective ambit, deep and penetrating tones within) and its striking presence at the center of the scene lends a certain allure and potency to the conversion narrative.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, in a dismissive review of Marrant's narrative, which appeared in a London periodical, the role of the French horn is the specific subject of mockery: the review reports that Marrant "had strolled into a meeting house where Mr. W. was preaching, in order to disturb the meeting by blowing a French-horn; but was himself struck to the ground by a blast from the spiritual trumpet."<sup>3</sup> The mirroring relation between the literal French horn and the figurative spiritual trumpet is presented here as *de trop*—a sign that the narrative as a whole is too "glibly" constructed, too "enlivened by the *marvellous*" to be of serious interest to readers. The French horn is too much of a scene stealer, according to this review, and its presence turns Marrant's conversion narrative into an orchestrated performance of Methodist drama rather than a legitimate account of religious experience.

Given the oddity of the French horn as an object with a starring role in a conversion narrative as well as the difficulty of interpreting this object as a sign of the force of the narrative, or the opposite—that is, of the narrative's originality or its excessively codified nature—it seems worth asking: why is there a French horn in the middle of John Marrant's conversion narrative? Further, were one to begin by placing this object—the French horn—rather than the subject—John Marrant—at the forefront of an analysis of this text, might such a move enable a new reading of the *Narrative* and of its stature as one of the first texts of early African American print culture? My aim in this essay is to propose such a reading of Marrant's *Narrative*, as well as, more broadly, to propose a new account of the public sphere by way of an analysis of the performative dimensions of early African American print culture. Specifically, I aim to delineate the workings of an *embodied* public sphere in contrast to existing accounts of a print public sphere characterized by rational

critical thought and disembodied authorship.<sup>4</sup> Ultimately, I will argue, it is not possible to understand early African American print culture according to existing models of the print public sphere: an account of the embodied scenes of performance that inform print production, however, significantly augments and shifts our understanding of the public sphere such that texts such as Marrant's *Narrative* no longer hover at the illegible edges of the print public sphere, but reveal central dynamics of race, embodiment, and performance in relation to the social and political belonging that characterizes the public sphere.

### Making Sense, Making Music, Making Noise

Perhaps it is worth looking, then, at the scene of Marrant's conversion (French horn in hand) with greater attention. Here is the account offered in the *Narrative*:

One evening I was sent for in a very particular manner to go and play [music] for some Gentlemen, which I agreed to do, and was on my way to fulfil my promise; and passing by a large meeting house I saw many lights in it, and crowds of people going in. I enquired what it meant, and was answered by my companion, that a crazy man was hallooing there; this raised my curiosity to go in, that I might hear what he was hallooing about. He persuaded me not to go in, but in vain. He then said, "If you will do one thing I will go in with you." I asked him what that was? He replied, "Blow the French-horn among them." . . . So we went, and with much difficulty got within the doors. I was pushing the people to make room, to get the horn off my shoulder to blow it, just as Mr. Whitefield was naming his text, and looking around, and, as I thought, directly upon me, and pointing with his finger he uttered these words, "PREPARE TO MEET THY GOD, O ISRAEL." The Lord accompanied the word with such power, that I was struck to the ground and lay both speechless and senseless near half an hour. When . . . something more recovered, every word I heard from the minister was like a parcel of swords thrust into me, and what added to my distress, I thought I saw the devil on every side of me. I was constrained in the bitterness of my spirit to halloo out in the midst of the congregation, which disturb-

ing them, they took me away . . . as far as the vestry. . . . When the people were dismissed Mr. Whitefield came into the vestry, . . . and the first word he said to me was, "JESUS CHRIST HAS GOT THEE AT LAST."<sup>5</sup>

When Marrant sets out on this particular evening, he is planning to perform as a musician before a group of "Gentlemen," presumably at a dance or an informal concert of some sort. His intention, then, is to make music with his French horn. But he is waylaid, first by the sight of a gathering crowd, and then by a noise—the noise that Whitefield is said to make, described as that of "halloing." Eager to hear this noise—perhaps in order to understand what leads so many people to attend to this "halloing"—Marrant seeks to persuade his companion to join him in entering the meeting. His companion agrees on one condition: that Marrant use his French horn to create *noise* in the midst of Whitefield's meeting. What is the difference between making music with the French horn and making noise with it? What is the difference between the forceful words of Whitefield's sermon (which later strike Marrant down) and the noise of *halloing*? And why does Marrant, ultimately, end up disrupting the meeting, not with his French horn (which makes neither noise nor music), nor with his own words, but with a "halloo" of his own that he is "constrained in . . . bitterness" to emit?

What I mean to point to with this line of inquiry are the shifting definitions and registers of sound that constitute verbal communication, music, and noise in the passage. Initially, it is Marrant's skill as a musician that brings him into a community of meaning; his ability to create music with the French horn causes him to be sought out by a companion and ushered toward a social event, an event at which Marrant will likely be paid to perform and be received with pleasure. In contrast, the community gathered around Whitefield is initially construed as senseless; it is characterized by Whitefield's status as a "crazy man" and the imputed lack of meaning of his speech. Whitefield's "halloing" is, then, a meaningless noise, worthy of being derided by the prank of noisemaking that Marrant's companion contrives. But when Marrant enters the meeting, the meaning of each of these sounds shifts dramatically: the sound that issues from Whitefield's lips is anything but noise—rather, it is a sentence whose meaning is so palpable to Marrant as to assume physical force. Rather than entering a community of nonmeaning, then, Marrant has unwittingly entered a community in which sense seems directed at him and directly affects him. And as a result, a sound that formerly

seemed to have meaning for Marrant (his own voice) becomes itself a bitter noise—a disruptive “halloo” that intrudes upon the Christian meaning that informs and organizes a new community of sense making around him.

Borrowing a phrase from Jacques Rancière, one might say that the “distribution of the sensible” (*partage du sensible*) shifts dramatically during the course of this single paragraph of text. According to Rancière, the sharing of sensibility among a people—or more specifically, the sharing of meaning making—is a fundamentally aesthetic matter that is, in its collective nature, also inherently political. Insofar as a group of people consents to find meaning in a shared set of sense data (an aesthetic decision), they constitute themselves as a political community. Significant, as well, for Rancière are the limits of meaning making—that is, the kinds of sense information (noises, halloos, and so on) that are not collectively understood as meaningful signifiers and, as such, constitute the *limits* of a political community. Rancière defines these terms as follows: “I call the distribution of the sensible the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it.”<sup>6</sup> The distribution of the sensible thus defines both what is included and what (or who) is excluded from the community as well. To change the “distribution” of sense will change the boundaries of the political community. With respect to Marrant’s *Narrative*, one can clearly see Marrant’s own movement from an aesthetic and political community in which the sounds issuing from Whitefield’s mouth are mere noise (excluded from the *sensus communis*) to a community in which the same sounds are deeply meaningful and serve as the central organizing language of the community.

But Rancière’s argument is actually a bit more subtle than what I have just indicated, and, I would suggest, it is also a bit more useful to our understanding of Marrant’s text than I have thus far indicated. Rancière writes:

The “distribution of the sensible” refers to the implicit law governing the sensible order that parcels out places and forms of participation in a common world by first establishing the modes of perception within which these are inscribed. The distribution of the sensible thus produces a system of self-evident facts of perception based on the set horizons and modalities of what is visible and audible as well as what can be said, thought, made or done. Strictly speaking, distribution therefore refers both to forms of inclusion and to forms of

exclusion. The sensible of course, does not refer to what shows good sense or judgment but to what is *aistheton* or capable of being apprehended by the senses.<sup>7</sup>

In this passage, Rancière points out that the communal decision as to what constitutes meaning—as to wherein the sensible lies—is not one that is collectively adjudicated by means of rational critical debate as one might suppose within a Habermasian framework. Rather than a matter of “good sense or judgment,” the sensible is *aistheton*, or what is “capable of being apprehended by the senses.” We might note that much hinges here on the word “capable”: on the one hand, a *capacity* for apprehension would seem to be a matter of physiology if we are in the realm of the senses. And yet, Rancière’s claims rely upon an insistence that what can be heard and seen is not simply a matter of biology but one of aesthetics and politics. The “self-evident facts of perception”—the seemingly unmediated operations of sense apprehension—are, Rancière contends, structured in relation to political communities of meaning in which certain sounds *can* be heard as collectively meaningful and others cannot.

The implications of Rancière’s account of a *sensus communis*—a collectivity, a public sphere—defined in relation to the distribution of the sensible rather than in relation to rational critical debate are significant with respect to considerations of early African American print. According to Jürgen Habermas’s influential account of the public sphere, when people are free to express their ideas, these ideas compete with one another on the basis of their self-evident logic and rationality rather than on the basis of the prestige or power of their speakers: the impersonality of print, or, alternatively, the rules of public sphere engagement, ideally guarantee the triumph of reason and its Enlightenment corollary, justice. And yet, to what extent is the logic of “self-evidence”—the free competition of rational ideas in the open space of the public sphere—politically circumscribed in advance? In contrast to Habermas’s account of articulate political subjects debating within a public space or sphere, Paul Gilroy has proposed a model of diasporic African Atlantic culture that he describes as a “counterculture of modernity.” He identifies both the form and history of this culture as antithetical to norms of Habermasian communicative reason and print publicity. Instances of the counterculture Gilroy describes include music and memory—aesthetic forms that are “not reducible to the cognitive.” Gilroy explains that “the extreme patterns of communication defined by the institution of plantation slavery dictate that

we recognise the anti-discursive and extra-linguistic ramifications of power at work in shaping communicative acts.”<sup>8</sup> Gilroy thus suggests that because slaves within an Atlantic plantation culture were forbidden from self-expressive, rational communication, an alternative, counterculture of expression developed, characterized by its resistance to the form and content of Western Enlightenment and rationality. Indeed, the knowledge regime that enforced a system of racial oppression was precisely what slaves sought to evade. As such, then, meaning might profitably be lodged, for the enslaved, in the locations where a plantocratic *sensus communis* ended—in sites and sensations that were precisely not self-evident to the master class. Moreover, the nonparticipation of African American voices in an Enlightenment public sphere might be understood as more than a matter of self-camouflage or protective secrecy: the very fact of race slavery contradicted the premises of Enlightenment humanism and the liberal equality allegedly embedded (proceduralized) in a public sphere of rational critical debate. As such, slaves occupied a position that gave the lie to the epistemology of the public sphere and its “logic.” From the point of view of the enslaved, communicative norms based on such a logic could only be understood as epistemologically unsound—namely, illogical.<sup>9</sup>

Gilroy’s account of a counterculture of modernity linked to the Atlantic slave trade points toward a political history that is linked to differential distributions of the sensible.<sup>10</sup> In terms that render this racialized history of the sensible even more pointed Édouard Glissant writes, “For Caribbean man, the word is first and foremost sound. Noise is essential to speech. Din is discourse. . . . Since speech was forbidden, slaves camouflaged the word under the provocative intensity of the scream. . . . This is how the dispossessed man organized his speech by weaving it into the apparently meaningless texture of extreme noise.”<sup>11</sup> In the case of John Marrant, the cusp between music, noise, and sense-bearing language seems particularly uncertain and unstable, as we have seen. And in light of the claims that I have just rehearsed by Rancière, Gilroy, and Glissant, I would argue that it is no accident that this is the case. Gilroy’s emphasis on music as an alternative to the language of Enlightenment “logic” and Glissant’s discussion of noise as a form of communicative speech indicate the historical position of African Americans as participatory members in a public sphere that operates in terms that differ dramatically from those proposed by Habermas.

How might we define the shape and terms of participation in a public sphere *not* grounded in critical rationality, *not* grounded in an abstractive,

negative relation to embodied presence? Further, how might we understand such a public sphere in terms that are not merely oppositional with respect to existing, dominant accounts of the public sphere—that is, not simply defined in terms of illogic, nonspeech, nonsense, or sheer physical presence? Again, reference to Rancière’s work proves useful here: according to Rancière, a politics of radical equality occurs not in the center of the traditionally conceived public sphere (as Habermasians would have it) but at its fringes. Specifically, the possibility of equality is mobilized in moments of *dissensus*—moments when the limitations and exclusions of existing framings of the public sphere are rendered visible rather than naturalized under the guise of the self-evident, under the guise of the sensible. Rancière writes: “A dissensus is not a conflict of interests, opinions, or values: it is a division put in the ‘common sense’ a dispute about what is given, about the frame within which we see something as given. . . . This is what I call a dissensus: putting two worlds in one and the same world. A political subject, as I understand it, is a capacity for staging such scenes of dissensus.”<sup>12</sup> Notably, Rancière employs a theatrical language here: he refers to the device of framing, much as a theatrical event is framed by a stage and a proscenium arch for apprehension and consumption by an audience. What occurs beyond the frame of a staged performance is defined as outside or beyond the meaning conveyed by a theatrical scene—as unworthy of registering as sensible data. Yet Rancière suggests that politics occurs precisely when a disruption of the frame becomes visible or intrudes upon existing distributions of the sensible. This jarring at the foundations of meaning making—a rendering disjoint of the frame of meaning—is dissensus. What registers as political in this account is not the voice of a subject who presents a persuasive argument to other subjects; rather, it is the movable line drawn between sense and nonsense—the aesthetic and political break between what constitutes common sense (in any given setting, at any given historical moment) and what constitutes its exterior.

Rancière’s dissensus—viewed historically in relation to the world of early African American print—bears a relation to the *break* identified by Fred Moten as central to a history of African American aesthetics. More specifically, Moten describes a black aesthetic tradition of performance that operates “in the break,” offering material resistance to structures of exchange value and meaning: “There occurs in such [black] performances a revaluation or reconstruction of value, one disruptive of the oppositions of speech and writing, and spirit and matter. It moves by way of the (phono-photo-porno-)



graphic disruption the shriek carries out.”<sup>13</sup> Here, Moten invokes the “din” or “noise” of black (non)speech—the noise of the scream, the cut, or the shriek at the disrupted edge of one regime of meaning and the beginning of another. And Moten underscores, as well, the meaning-making (political) possibilities of performing in this break. Consider, with respect to Marrant’s conversion scene, Moten’s discussion of this break as a “radically exterior aurality that disrupts and resists certain formations of identity and interpretation by challenging the reducibility of phonic matter to verbal meaning or conventional musical form.”<sup>14</sup> Marrant’s French horn is an instrument for the production of just such a “radically exterior aurality”: it is, within Marrant’s conversion scene, productive of music, of noise, and of stunned silence. Each shift in the form of aurality the horn embodies enacts a disruptive distribution of the sensible—a challenge to *sensus communis*, the din of dissensus.

In viewing the public sphere through the lenses offered by Rancière and Moten of the theatrical, performative dimensions of a radical politics/aesthetics we are able to see the limits of normative accounts of the public sphere *subject*—a subject who is typically seen as fully formed and endowed with a wholly functioning (and comprehensible) voice prior to his or her entry into the public sphere. The human subject, in an Enlightenment tradition, is defined by this capacity for reason and self-expression, thus Habermas tends to presume that all humans will find their place (and voice) within the charmed circle of the public sphere. A somewhat less sanguine line of thought has pointed out that barriers of access to the public sphere in the eighteenth century may inhere in the technologies of literacy and printing. Michael Warner thus argues that blacks were unable to participate in the print public sphere because of a prohibition on access to literacy as well as lack of access to the resources of printing: “Printing constituted and distinguished a specifically white community,” writes Warner.<sup>15</sup> If we follow this view, however, a form of racial redlining around the print public sphere assumes the shape of a historical infelicity or injustice that does not, fundamentally, eclipse the democratic possibilities of the print public sphere. But here let me propose that we reverse this account and imagine a political subject who is formed not *prior* to entry into the public sphere but in the moment of assuming substance (or conversely, lapsing into nonsensibility) within the modalities of self-evidence generated by the *sensus communis* in any given staging or embodiment of the public. On this account, the public sphere would look less like a bounded circle that preexisting subjects seek to enter from the outside than like the formation of particulate matter into crystals or molecules moving from

soluble disassociation into nucleated, aggregate form. Pursuing this image, we might imagine a public sphere in which the force of meaning radiates outward from a nucleus, instantiating and giving form to a set of meanings (and subjects) that do not formally preexist this assemblage. Dissensus (politics) might thus be seen to arrive not when debate occurs within a bounded sphere, nor when individuals seek to enter such a redlined circle, but when a new distribution of the sensible crystallizes a community into an assemblage, thereby reconstructing the very terms of political subjectivity.

The “assemblage” model of a public sphere that I invoke here draws, in no small measure, on the increasingly prevalent theoretical imagery of the network—an imagery that seems particularly germane to accounts of African American publishing and performance in early America.<sup>16</sup> And, too, I mean to invoke Bruno Latour’s work on actor network theory insofar as this work describes power and politics in terms of provisional assemblages of subjects and objects—assemblages that form the substance of the Latourian social world.<sup>17</sup> In what follows, I want to play out some of this imagery—networks, assemblages, crystallizations—in relation to John Marrant’s *Narrative* and the specific scenes or performances of sense making, noisemaking, and music making that occur in that text. Let us return, then, to the *Narrative* and to the French horn that led John Marrant into the assembly gathered around George Whitefield.

### Transitional/Translational Objects: A Horn, a Fiddle, a Bible

In 1773, the Boston lawyer Josiah Quincy visited Charleston, South Carolina, and reported that he attended a dinner at which he heard “six violins, two hautboys and bassoon, with a hand-taber beat excellently well.” After dinner, he was treated to a performance of “six French horns in concert—most surpassing musick! Two solos on the French horn by one who is said to blow the finest horn in the world: he has fifty guineas for the season from the St. Cecilia Society.”<sup>18</sup> Quincy, visiting from Boston, reckoned himself a superb judge of cultural value and, while preserving a general degree of disdain for Charlestonians and their habits, Quincy bestows upon the French horns he hears on this evening the highest degree of approbation to be found in his journal. As such, we might conclude that Charleston boasted an unusually accomplished cohort of French horn performers in the late eighteenth century. Note, as well, the relatively elite company the French horn keeps in this

passage: violins, hautboys, and bassoons appear in the group of instruments assembled with the French horn. In addition, Quincy refers to the St. Cecilia Society in which one of the French horn players performs. This private concert society was formed in 1766, just one year prior to John Marrant's arrival in Charleston.<sup>19</sup> The society was supported by a group of subscribers culled from the city's economic and social elite who underwrote a series of concerts throughout the year. While it is unlikely that Marrant performed as a member of the St. Cecilia orchestra, it is clear that he participated in a Charlestonian music culture that would have included the French horn players of the St. Cecilia Society.

How then, did Marrant join this select company of musicians? In the description of his entry into the world of French horns and fiddles, Marrant relates that he became interested in music when, out walking in Charleston one day, he "passed by a school, and heard music and dancing, which took [his] fancy very much."<sup>20</sup> He persuaded his mother to have him apprenticed to the owner of the music and dance school, thereby locating himself at the center of Charleston's musical economy. Marrant writes:

The first day I went to [the school owner] he put the violin into my hand, which pleased me much, and applying close, I learned very fast, not only to play, but to dance also; so that in six months I was able to play for the whole school. In the evenings after the scholars were dismissed, I used to resort to the bottom of our garden, where it was customary for some musicians to *assemble* to blow the French-horn. Here my improvement was so rapid, that in a twelve-month's time I became *master* both of the violin and of the French-horn, and was much respected by the Gentlemen and Ladies whose children attended the school, as also by my *master*. This opened to me a large door of vanity and vice, for I was invited to all the balls and *assemblies* that were held in the town, and met with the general applause of the inhabitants.<sup>21</sup>

Two aspects of Marrant's language in this passage are worth underscoring: First, his rapidly acquired skill in playing the fiddle and the French horn position him in a location of mastery: he becomes, as he states, "master" of these instruments. While mastery is constitutively denied to him by the racialized structure of Charleston society, he finds another form of mastery here—one that competes (linguistically) in this passage with the master status of the

school owner to whom he is apprenticed.<sup>22</sup> Second, Marrant's mastery of the French horn, in particular, serves to embed him in assemblages (scenes he explicitly defines as "assemblies") including the cohort of musicians (some, if not most, of whom were probably white) who blow the French horn together in the garden in the evening and at the elite society balls and concerts at which he is invited to perform.

Although Marrant's language here appears to be casually descriptive of his early musical career prior to his conversion, it is worth noting that the participation of blacks in assemblies in Charleston in the late eighteenth century was a matter of no small political import: indeed, the assembling of blacks was expressly forbidden by law. The most extensive regulations concerning black assembly were codified in the Negro Act of 1740: the act not only fixed the permissible ratio of blacks to whites on plantations at ten to one, but it also prohibited more than seven blacks from traveling together on a road without a white person and authorized all justices to keep order by "dispers[ing] any assembly or meeting of slaves which may disturb the peace or endanger the safety of his Majesty's subjects."<sup>23</sup> In addition, the 1740 law states that "all due care [must] be taken to restrain the wanderings and meetings of negroes and other slaves, at all times, and more especially on Saturday nights, Sundays, and other holidays, and their using and carrying wooden swords, and other mischievous and dangerous weapons, or using and keeping of drums, horns, or other loud instruments, which may call together or give sign or notice to one another of their wicked designs and purposes." Further, masters were forbidden by the act to allow "public meetings or feasting of strange negroes or slaves in their plantations."<sup>24</sup>

Of particular interest in the phrasing of the 1740 law is the connection it draws between the specter of black gatherings and music, feasting, and weaponry. Enacted directly following the Stono rebellion, the law is clearly written in response to the events that unfolded in the environs of Charleston in 1739 when roughly twenty slaves gathered and began attacking white warehouses and killing whites in order to acquire weapons. According to an account of the events printed in London's *Gentleman's Magazine* in March 1740, the Stono rebellion began as slaves "calling out Liberty, marched on with Colours displayed, and two Drums beating, pursuing all the white people they met with. . . . They increased every minute by new Negroes coming to them, so that they were above Sixty, some say a hundred, on which they halted in a field, and set to dancing, Singing and beating Drums, to draw more Negroes to them, thinking they were now victorious over the

whole Province, having marched ten miles & burnt all before them.”<sup>25</sup> Accounts such as this evidently engendered fear among whites about the activities of groups of blacks “dancing, Singing, and beating Drums”—that is, groups of slaves performing a black cultural *sensus communis* and thereby displaying and giving voice to their political power as a collectivity. As Richard Cullen Rath reports, slave colonies in the Caribbean had repeatedly enacted legislation to outlaw drumming and blowing horns among slaves: white planters were concerned that horns and drums might function as calls to arms among slaves.<sup>26</sup> With the Negro Act of 1740, South Carolina followed in the footsteps of such efforts—efforts that aimed to prevent the communicative function of horns and drums. Further, such legislation points to the fact that dance and music were cultural forms with particular power and persistence that were exercised in the face of a system that sought to eradicate the communicative and collectivizing (that is, social and human) capacities of New World Africans in order to more efficiently extract their labor for profit. Recalling Gilroy and Moten’s terms, we might say that white slave owners recognized that something more than noise issued from New World African instruments, but were often at a loss to characterize and thus regulate what occurred in the “break” beyond the *sensus communis* of the plantocracy.

In addition to regulating assembly and music making, the 1740 law also aimed to prohibit literacy among slaves. Specifically, the law criminalized the teaching of writing to slaves. Yet as compared to the skills that literacy comprises, those of music making are somewhat more difficult to regulate: that is, if reading and writing are fairly identifiable acts, the act of performing music (horn blowing, drumming, creating din, making noise, shrieking) and the meanings attached to such music are less so. And indeed, the broader question of the meaning of music and dance among slaves and free blacks in South Carolina is quite complex. As Rath demonstrates, drumming and horn playing in particular were viewed as threatening and were banned by planters in the Caribbean and the Carolina low country. However, as Saidiya Hartman shows, planters were often interested in having slaves play the violin and dance in ways that demonstrated (to a planter audience), “contentment” and fitness for slavery. Thus, as Hartman reports, it was not unusual for planters to provide slaves with fiddles and encourage certain forms of dance.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Rath argues that fiddles largely replaced drums after 1740 as the instrument of slave music in the low country: “the [fiddle] was not thought of as a threat, as drums were.” However, Rath also points out that the ways in which the fiddle was used by slaves were not entirely controlled

by white intentions: “While drums were banned, the violin functioned well for quietly representing African drumming traditions that were so feared, but little understood, by planters. The polymeter rhythms of banned drums were stored in the distinctive pulse of the stick knockers and the fiddler’s three- or four-note rhythmic pattern.”<sup>28</sup> In related terms, Hartman documents the ways in which—in contrast to the efforts of slave owners to generate “simulated jollity” among slaves—musical forms of patting juba carried counter-meanings of New World African autonomy, cultural production, and rebellion against white oppression: “Juba was a coded text of protest. It utilized rhythm and nonsense words as cover for social critique.”<sup>29</sup> The accounts of the Stono rebellion suggest the power of music in articulating a new epistemic framing—a new assemblage—that challenged plantocratic power. The Negro Act of 1740 demonstrates that whites were fully aware of the challenge to their power that such assemblages implied and sought to eradicate both the assembling of collectivities of blacks and the communicative possibilities that writing and music enabled for those collectivities. However, music, in particular, remained in a zone of indeterminacy with regard to assemblage and communication, precisely because its meaning does not lie in rational expression and thus potentially evades the episteme of the plantocratic public sphere.

Significantly, attempts to stop the gathering of black collectivities in South Carolina in the eighteenth century failed; despite laws to the contrary, blacks gathered at a variety of sites in Charleston, including the street, the marketplace, the racetrack, and in private spaces as well. Further, extant evidence demonstrates that whites were ineffectual in their efforts to eradicate large gatherings of blacks unmonitored by whites at which dancing, music, and festivity occurred during the eighteenth century. Consider, for example, a newspaper account from 1772, complaining about the lack of enforcement of laws against slave gatherings in Charleston:

The [author of the letter] had once an opportunity of seeing a Country-Dance, Rout, or Cabal of *Negroes*, within 5 miles distance of this town, on a Saturday night; and it may not be improper here to give a description of that assembly. It consisted of about 60 people, 5–6th from Town, every one of whom carried something, in the manner just described: as, bottled liquors of all sorts, Rum, Tongues, Hams, Beef, Geese, Turkeys and Fowls, both drest and raw. . . . Moreover, they were provided with Music, Cards, Dice &c. The

entertainment was opened, by the men copying (or *taking off*) the manners of their masters, and the women those of their mistresses, and relating some highly curious anecdotes, to the inexpressible diversion of that company. Then they *danced, betted, gamed, swore, quarrelled, fought*, and did everything that the *most modern* accomplished gentlemen are *not ashamed of*. . . . They had also their private committees; whose deliberations were carried on in too low a voice, and with so much caution, as not to be overheard by the others. . . . Whenever or wherever such nocturnal rendezvouses are made, may it not be concluded, that their deliberations are never intended for the advantage of the white people?<sup>30</sup>

The gathering is initially described as a “Country-Dance, Rout, or Cabal”—a series of terms whose definitions, while equated with one another in this passage, cover a wide range of meanings, beginning with the social and recreational resonances of the term “dance,” moving to the legal/military implications of the term “rout” (one definition of the word that seems germane in this instance is “an assembly of people who have made a move towards committing an illegal act which would constitute an offence of riot”),<sup>31</sup> and concluding with the politically resonant term “cabal.” Dancing and feasting are thus closely associated with military and political engagement. Further, the parody of white masters mobilizes a collective understanding of and disdain for the codes of performance that structure white and black behavior in daily life and that inform white subjugation of blacks. Moreover, as the conclusion of the passage makes clear, for the white observer of this event, the gathering of blacks into a collectivity can only imply an assault upon the white power structure.<sup>32</sup>

It is intriguing to speculate that John Marrant might have performed at exactly this kind of gathering or “rout” in Charleston. Only four years before the event described above, Marrant was in the service of a carpenter in Charleston, but spent more time engaged in playing music than in carpentry: “Every evening I was sent for to play on music, somewhere or another; and I often continued out very late, sometimes all night, so as to render me incapable of attending my master’s business the next day; yet in this manner I served him a year and four months, and was much approved of by him.”<sup>33</sup> Marrant does not specify, in this instance, what kinds of gatherings he attended, but one might suppose that there were a variety of kinds, from the sort for which his first master trained him—that is, balls and concerts for the

white slaveholding class—to the sort of informal gatherings that occurred within the black community such as that described above. What is clear is that Marrant's skills as a performer were in immense demand; he indicates, as well, that he was well paid for his musical performances and his master's approbation of his musical career indicates that he received a degree of respect for his musical skills.

Thus, while the “using and keeping of drums, horns, or other loud instruments” was forbidden to slaves by the Negro Act of 1740, Marrant was apprenticed in order to be taught to use and keep a French horn and to play it loudly and frequently.<sup>34</sup> Why this apparent contradiction? I would suggest that the significance of the horn, and the meaning of the sounds it emits, is wholly conditioned by the assemblage formed around it. For this reason, a French horn would seemingly bear no relation to the implicitly African horn (the abeng, for instance) blown to signal slave rebellion or to communicate among slaves. The French horn, as we have seen, is understood as a European, rather than an African horn, and one that is sounded in the performance of European orchestral, dance, and military music. An advertisement appearing in the *South Carolina Gazette* in 1784 makes the status of the French horn particularly evident: books of instruction for the French horn are included in a lengthy enumeration of luxury goods on sale at the store of Charles Morgan in Charleston—goods “just imported from London” that include sheet music; instructions on playing the violin, flute, harpsichord, piano forte, guitar, clarinet, bassoon, German flute, hautboy, and fife; books of poetry, divinity, and philosophy; stationery; maps; jewelry; teapots; gilt watch chains; gold and silver lace; and sword knots (among other items). We might read this particular list of objects as a significant assemblage: each of the items on the list confers with it the status of wealth and luxury that form the network of power, display, and performative abilities of the white planter class of Charleston. Notably, at the end of the advertisement a short addendum appears: “N.B. WANTED to hire for two or three month, from 10 to 20 Negroe Men.”<sup>35</sup> The “Negroe Men” who are sought here are, on the one hand, marked as typographically separate from the luxury goods advertised above, and yet, the advertisement as a whole assembles the labor of these men in close proximity to the luxury goods enumerated in the larger advertisement.

As such, the possible conclusions that we might draw from reading this advertisement as an assemblage point in opposing directions: on the one hand, the “10 to 20 Negroe Men” mentioned at the close of the advertisement would seem to have little relation to the goods enumerated earlier. On the



other hand, their proximity suggests some kind of metonymic relation, one that we might identify in terms of the economy of surplus that is on display in the advertisement itself. The labor of the “10 to 20 Negroe men” literally subtends or underwrites the presence of English luxury goods in Charleston. The bodies of these men are both written out of the display of erudition, pleasure, and consumption that is signaled in the list of goods, and their presence is quite literally required (“WANTED”) to make such a display possible.

John Marrant, both a Negro man and a French horn player, does a remarkable job of navigating the assemblage on view here to his own advantage. On the one hand, he is a figure of black labor—not enslaved, but apprenticed and called upon to perform labor for the white master class. Yet while Marrant may be subject to laws that regulate black bodies in Charleston, his French horn is not subject to such regulation, and by associating himself with the French horn and the world assembled around it, Marrant becomes a part of a variety of disparate publics, including the public of the dancing school, the public of white balls and concerts, possibly the public of black assemblies or “routs,” and certainly the public gathered around George Whitefield. The French horn thus becomes something of a transitional object for Marrant: the French horn, in the hands of John Marrant, performs the relation between white luxury and black labor, but does so in a setting that seeks to erase the relation of interdependence—that seeks to exclude black persons from public meaning.<sup>36</sup>

In the contradiction between a legal system designed to prevent blacks from attaining forms of citizenship and belonging associated with the public sphere and John Marrant’s own experiences at the center of social assemblies in Charleston—in the contradictory status of the sound that emanates from a horn blown by a black person in Charleston in the eighteenth century—we can see evidence of the complex and movable nature of the rules of assemblage. For instance, we can see the way in which networks of association crystallize the meaning of a black body or a French horn in differential terms in any given instance, thus shifting the contours of publics and the subjects found within them. In advancing this argument, I do not mean to suggest that Marrant’s French horn was, in fact, an abeng of sorts (an interesting, but eminently speculative claim). Rather, I would suggest that Marrant’s experience with the French horn gave him mastery not only of music but of the unstable and mobilizing force of performance and assembly, particularly for African Americans whose performances achieved radical force from the position of the “break”—that is, from the position of epistemic dissensus or the

site of frame disjuncture and by means of catalyzing or crystallizing the possibility of new assemblages emerging from such disruption.

As I argued at the outset of this essay, Marrant's conversion scene can be read as the performance of just such a dissensus. The sense data generated by the French horn shifts from music, to noise, to silence and generates, with each term, a different assemblage or *sensus communis* in relation to this sense data. I want to suggest that Marrant is able to use precisely this methodology—that of disruptive assemblage—in repeated performances across the *Narrative*, up to and including the performance of the sermon that is the basis for the *Narrative*'s appearance in print. Let me sketch, here, the brief outlines of such a reading of the remainder of the *Narrative*.

Following his conversion to Methodism, Marrant wanders into the woods, befriends a Native American hunter, and is later taken prisoner by the Cherokee who have seemingly marked him for execution. In a long scene that unfolds as Marrant is ushered toward the moment of his impending death, Marrant is able to successively convince a series of members of the tribe to convert to Christianity: ultimately, the king of the tribe is converted as well and Marrant is heralded as a tribal prince rather than executed as an interloper. The signal features of Marrant's labor of conversion (and thus his salvation from death) include dramatic prayer and the singing of hymns. When he is first imprisoned by the Cherokee, and at several points in the subsequent narrative of his captivity, Marrant prays volubly—an act that elicits queries from his Indian captors as to whom his interlocutor is in these verbal exchanges. Marrant writes:

And truly this dungeon became my chapel, for the Lord Jesus did not leave me in this great trouble, but was very present, so that I continued blessing him, and singing his praises all night without ceasing: The watch hearing the noise, informed the executioner that somebody had been in the dungeon with me all night; upon which he came in to see and to examine, with a great torch lighted in his hand, who it was I had with me; but finding nobody, he turned round, and asked me who it was? I told him it was the Lord Jesus Christ but he made no answer, turned away, went out, and fastened the door.<sup>37</sup>

In this instance, Marrant emphasizes that his song—which he engages in all night—is the sign of an assemblage: Marrant is singing because Christ is

present to hear his song. Interestingly, the executioner and the watch assume as much as well: hearing his song as a form of address, they search for the person to whom Marrant's song has been directed. Moreover, Marrant encourages just such an interpretation when he insists to the executioner that Christ is present. Accordingly, the executioner is hailed, so to speak, as a member of the assemblage—as someone who has participated in the *sensus communis* of Marrant's song. Moreover, Marrant insists that this song is generative of a public—that it is a sensible form of address that the executioner, too, should be capable of hearing. In similar terms, Marrant repeatedly performs (in this same scene) the shock of dissensus—the shock of unexpected communication—of noise refigured as sense. Thus, for instance, he stages another scene of prayer as he is led to his execution, and in this case, before those who are gathered to listen, he shifts suddenly from speaking in English to the Cherokee language: “About the middle of my prayer, the Lord impressed a strong desire upon my mind to turn into their language, and pray in their tongue. I did so, and with remarkable liberty, which wonderfully affected the community.”<sup>38</sup> Following this scene of communal translation—which for a Cherokee listener might be experienced as a transition from the noise of English to the sense of the Cherokee tongue—members of his audience are jarred into a new community of meaning, namely, a Christian assemblage.

One might read the famous “talking book” incident in this scene in similar terms. Marrant, as we have seen, performs his religious faith as dispersed across bodies and things, including Jesus Christ and the Bible. Christianity is thus a network of sorts for Marrant, and it is this network that the king's daughter expresses interest in when she laments that the Bible will not talk to her. The king's own conversion occurs, finally, on the heels of his daughter's illness brought on by her exile from Christian community: in other words, the growing assemblage of converts and the shared *sensus communis* among them ultimately convinces the king that meaning inheres in Marrant's words, songs, and performances—a meaning that the king chooses, finally, to endow with political value. Marrant, in turn, becomes a recognized and celebrated member of the Cherokee community.

What Marrant seems to be particularly skilled at is creating a sense of community (an assemblage) in locations where sense itself does not initially seem to be shared between Marrant and those around him. This occurs not only when he is captured by the Cherokee, but again when he begins preaching to the slaves on the plantation where he is employed as a carpenter, and it

occurs, as well, when he delivers the ordination sermon that serves as the basis of the *Narrative*. We might say, then, that Marrant has a marked ability to *make publics* around him by means of performance, and for this reason, it is perhaps not an accident that he is among the earliest African Americans to appear publicly in print. As such, then, we might view Marrant's accomplishment less as that of entering into the public sphere (crossing the boundary from outside to inside the redlined circle of the print public sphere) than that of generating a public around the nucleus of his own performative interaction with other subjects and objects (including the French horn, Christ, and the Bible). As Cedric May notes, the *Narrative* is in fact a transcribed version of a sermon that Marrant preached on the occasion of his ordination as a minister in the Huntingdon Connexion at a chapel in Bath, England, in 1785.<sup>39</sup> Two amanuenses published versions of the sermon: the first, the basis for the *Narrative* cited in this essay, was "arranged, corrected, and published" by the Reverend William Aldridge; another version of the sermon appeared in print as a poem titled *The Negro Convert, a Poem: Being the Substance of the Experience of Mr. John Marrant, a Negro, as Related by Himself, Previous to His Ordination* (1785), authored by Samuel Whitchurch.<sup>40</sup> The fourth edition of the Aldridge version (cited in this essay) was evidently reedited by Marrant himself; the title page announces that the *Narrative* has been "Enlarged by Mr. MARRANT, and Printed (with Permission) for his Sole Benefit."<sup>41</sup> Notwithstanding the evidence of Marrant's hand in the editing of the fourth edition of the *Narrative*, critics have been wary of attributing the full force of authorship to Marrant in a text that is prefaced with Aldridge's comment that he has "always preserved Mr. Marrant's ideas, tho' [he] could not [preserve] his language; no more alterations, however, have been made, than were thought necessary."<sup>42</sup> Given that the words of the *Narrative* may not be those of Marrant, how is it possible to attribute to this text the status of African American authorship? How is it possible to read the text as conveying the voice of Marrant rather than that of Aldridge?

One mode of reading such a text consists in searching between the lines in order to excavate an authentic black voice beneath the cover of Aldridge's white voice—to find, in the words of John Sekora, the black message sealed within a white envelope.<sup>43</sup> Sekora, for one, is not optimistic about the possibility of finding an authentic voice within such a packaged product. And yet, if one shifts away from the notion of a Habermasian, preconstituted subject who generates expressive truth upon entering into print, a different understanding of the printed text of John Marrant emerges. Consider, instead, the

meaning of the text as an assemblage. Precisely because Marrant has generated such an assemblage—created a *sensus communis* through acts of performance—he has found both an audience and a conduit for a new distribution of the sensible. The fact that Marrant’s sermon generated two print versions by two separate amanuenses might, on this account, be viewed less as evidence that an impassable screen shields the authentic voice of Marrant from view than evidence of the force of Marrant’s sense-making capacities—sense making demonstrated by the fact that his performances generated a sense of meaning, communication, and significance among a community of audience members. This community, crystallizing outward from Marrant, was, in turn, augmented by its intersection with the Huntingdon Connexion and the impulse of members of that network to turn to print as a means of distributing the sensible. Again, what strikes me in this case is Marrant’s consummate skill in the generation of new communities—namely, his ability to frame a *sensus communis* such that it becomes “common sense” for an evangelizing Christian network to publish his narrative. To cite the work of Daphne Brooks, it seems clear that Marrant enters print precisely because he has “mastered the art of spectacle, (representational) excess, and duality” in a manner that is crucial to the history of African American cultural meaning making: that is, he has marshaled an array of networked relations that are often contradictory in order to position himself as the bearer of meaning rather than as a figure subject to death and erasure.<sup>44</sup> I do not mean, in the least, to attribute nefarious or a-religious intentions to Marrant in making this argument; rather, I would suggest that Marrant infused a particular Christian community with a new “common sense” according to which his narrative was profoundly valuable and worth sharing widely.

We have known for a very long time that publication in print is not transparently linked to individual authorial interiority. Ongoing work in the history of the book has demonstrated repeatedly that the printed book is the result of a series of collective interchanges (performances of sorts) involving authors, editors, printers, publishers, consumers, booksellers, reviewers, and readers not to mention technologies related to such matters as paper production, printing presses, typefaces, and transportation infrastructures.<sup>45</sup> Books are the products of networks of peoples and technologies. However, to my mind, there remains a disconnect between the implications of this work in the field of history of the book and the stubborn insistence on a politics of expressive individualism that is implied in dominant accounts of the print public sphere. This fallback position renders a mediated narrative such as

Marrant's marginal if not altogether discredited; as such, it also tends to posit a resolutely white public sphere as an inevitable (if regrettable) historical truth. The alternative account of a performance-based, embodied public sphere that I have traced in this essay makes visible the participation of New World Africans in networked early American and transatlantic public spheres that are both interracial and intraracial. In his mastery of performance, John Marrant produces a new *sensus communis* at the limits of an Enlightenment reason that holds a contradictory racial politics at its core. Performing in and through this contradiction, Marrant demonstrates the power of reassembling the social by means of language, noise, music, performance, and print.

50. Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2003), 89; Terdiman, *Present Past*, 8.
51. Terdiman, *Present Past*, 8.
52. John F. Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990), 174–75.
53. *Second Annual Report*, n.p.
54. Elise Virginia Lemire, *Miscegenation: Making Race in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 99.
55. See Richards, *Gentlemen of Property and Standing*.
56. Harriet Beecher Stowe, quoted in Jim O'Loughlin, "Articulating *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," *New Literary History* 31 (Summer 2000): 592.
57. Maria Weston Chapman, ed., *Harriet Martineau's Autobiography*, vol. 1 (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1877), 407.
58. Morgan, *Protestants and Pictures*, 6.

#### CHAPTER 17. JOHN MARRANT BLOWS THE FRENCH HORN

1. John Marrant, *A Narrative of the Lord's Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, a Black*, 4th ed. (1785), reprinted in "Face Zion Forward": *First Writers of the Black Atlantic, 1785–1789*, ed. Joanna Brooks and John Saillant (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002), 53.
2. The French horn was not a valved instrument in the late eighteenth century, thus it was not identical to the contemporary French horn. For a history of the development of the instrument, see R. Morley-Pegge, *The French Horn: Some Notes on the Evolution of the Instrument and of Its Technique*, 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973).
3. *Monthly Review; or, Literary Journal*, November 1785, 399.
4. For the classic account of the public sphere, see Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger with Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991); note that Habermas's public sphere is not limited to print alone, although much work in the wake of Habermas has turned in this direction. For discussion of disembodiment in relation to the print public sphere in early America, see Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990).
5. Marrant, *Narrative*, 51–52.
6. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (New York: Continuum, 2004), 12.
7. *Ibid.*, 13.
8. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 57.
9. This view is eloquently expressed by Frederick Douglass in his famous speech, "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?" in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*,

ed. William L. Andrews and William S. McFeely (New York: Norton, 1997), 116–27. Douglass points out that the illogic and immorality of slavery are so manifest that rational debate is not a legitimate expressive response to its injustice: “What, am I to argue that it is wrong to make men brutes, to rob them of their liberty, to work them without wages, to keep them ignorant of their relations to their fellow men, to beat them with sticks, to flay their flesh with the lash, to load their limbs with irons, to hunt them with dogs, to sell them at auction, to sunder their families, to knock out their teeth, to burn their flesh, to starve them into obedience and submission to their masters? Must I argue that a system thus marked with blood, and stained with pollution, is *wrong*? No! I will not. . . . At a time like this, scorching irony, not convincing argument, is needed” (126).

10. Thoughtful challenges to, and extenuations of, Gilroy’s influential arguments can be found in the work of Ronald Radano, *Lying Up a Nation: Race and Black Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 39–42; and Sibylle Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004), 35–38.

11. Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays by Édouard Glissant*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 127–28.

12. Jacques Rancière, “Who Is the Subject of the Rights of Man?” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 103, nos. 2–3 (2004): 304.

13. Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 14.

14. *Ibid.*, 6.

15. Warner, *Letters of the Republic*, 11–13.

16. For a powerful analysis of the significance of networks to early African American print culture, see Joanna Brooks’s account of Phillis Wheatley’s writing and publishing strategies, “Our Phillis, Ourselves,” *American Literature* 82 (March 2010): 1–28.

17. See Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), for an analysis of “assemblage” in relation to the social world. Latour’s account of a network of “actors” that are indiscriminately either subjects or objects (people or commodities or musical instruments, for instance) has proven particularly suggestive with respect to the ideas under discussion in this essay.

18. Josiah Quincy, “Journal of Josiah Quincy, Junior, 1773,” ed. Mark DeWolfe Howe, *Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings* 49 (1916): 451.

19. For the history of the St. Cecilia Society, see Nicholas Michael Butler, *The St. Cecilia Society and the Patronage of Concert Music in Charleston, South Carolina, 1766–1820* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007).

20. Marrant, *Narrative*, 49.

21. *Ibid.*, 50, emphasis added.

22. As Philip Gould points out, Marrant’s language is similar in this passage to that of Olaudah Equiano who writes of becoming “master” of a few pounds through trading; amassing this money subsequently enables Equiano to purchase his freedom from slavery. See Philip Gould, “Free Carpenter, Venture Capitalist: Reading the Lives of the Early Black Atlantic,” *American Literary History* 12 (Winter 2000): 668.



23. David J. McCord, ed., *The Statutes at Large of South Carolina*, vol. 7 (Columbia, S.C.: A. S. Johnston, 1840), 399–400.

24. *Ibid.*, 410. See also John Belton O’Neill, *The Negro Law of South Carolina* (Columbia, S.C.: J. G. Bowman, 1848).

25. Reprinted in Mark M. Smith, ed., *Stono: Documenting and Interpreting a Southern Slave Revolt* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005), 14–15.

26. In *How Early American Sounded* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003), Richard Cullen Rath reports the passage of laws prohibiting drums and horns in Jamaica (1688 and 1717), Barbados (1699), and Saint Kitts (1711 and 1722). Rath explains, “Planters passed laws against drums and drumming several times, and in various forms, indicating that their control was less than absolute. European[s] . . . feared drums as loud signals that could lead men on a battlefield. Thus, they banned loud instruments, ignoring quieter ones in their laws. They understood only the soundways of military and state drumming that they shared with Africans: planters failed to comprehend how African Americans could represent themselves and their agendas in their music rather than just signal with it” (79). Note that Radano argues that drumming was not the subject of a particular fear among whites in the United States; however, Radano’s argument seems largely aimed at countering the notion that slave drumming can be seen as evidence of the “‘naturally rhythmic’ character of blacks” (Radano, *Lying Up a Nation*, 102). I am in agreement with Radano’s argument in this latter respect and concur with his emphasis on the polysemic possibilities of African American music. Indeed, the 1740 Negro Act indicates precisely the concern of whites to exert control over such polysemic possibilities.

27. Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 43–44.

28. Richard Cullen Rath, “Drums and Power: Ways of Creolizing Music in Coastal South Carolina and Georgia, 1730–90,” in *Creolization in the Americas*, ed. David Buisseret and Steven G. Reinhardt (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2000), 113, 118.

29. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 70.

30. *South Carolina Gazette*, September 17, 1772, cited by Peter Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in South Carolina from 1670 to the Stono Rebellion* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1974), 342–43.

31. *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 12th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), s.v. “rout<sup>1</sup> n.”

32. The dance described above was not an isolated event. Historian Bernard Powers reports that dances were common in the black community of Charleston in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In *Black Charlestonians: A Social History, 1822–1885* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1994), Bernard Powers relates that in 1804, for instance, an observer reported seeing forty slave men and women arrive early in the morning in Charleston by boat from the neighboring Sullivan’s Island; the slaves said they had been “dancing and carousing all night” (23). Although the period Powers focuses on in this study is slightly later than the one under consideration here, Powers provides ample evidence that the legal statutes governing public gatherings of slaves and

free blacks were routinely ignored in Charleston: thus, for example, “Although slaves were not permitted to be on the streets without a pass after the evening curfew, between September 1836 and September 1837, 573 were convicted of this offense or for being at large in some illegal place” (22).

33. Marrant, *Narrative*, 51.

34. Marrant was not enslaved but apprenticed, thus some provisions of the Negro Act do not explicitly apply to him: however, the language of the Negro Act often specifies that both slaves *and* free blacks are subject to its regulation, particularly with regard to the prohibition of assemblies. Accordingly, Marrant would have been subject to the terms that prohibited assembly.

35. *South Carolina Gazette*, March 4–6, 1784.

36. I have found additional references to black French horn players in the Atlantic world in the same period: in a print titled *A View of Cheapside, as It Appeared on Lord Mayor's Day Last*, published in 1761, London engraver John June depicts a street scene that includes a black French horn player. (My thanks to Catherine Molineux for bringing this image to my attention.) Further, a runaway slave advertisement from a newspaper in Jamaica describes a “Negro Man Slave Named RICHARD . . . belonging to his Excellency Gen. DALLING, and lately the property of Mr. Thomas Dolbeare, of Kingston, merchant. He is remarkably tall, well-made, likely fellow, speaks good English, is very plausible, and plays well on the French horn, he is well known in Kingston and Spanish Town, having for a considerable time past attended his Excellency, together with a Sambo fellow belonging to Dr. Duncan M'Glasham, named BILLY HARE, who has also absconded, and, as it is apprehended, in company with the said Richard” (*Gazette of Saint Jago de la Vega*, February 8–15, 1781). At the same time, an advertisement for Richard's compatriot, Billy Hare, appeared in another Jamaican paper: “RUN AWAY, from the Subscriber, a Sambo man, called, BILLY, ALIAS WILLIAM HARE, He has been for several months past in the Governor's service, and absconded when ordered home. He blows the French Horn plays on the Violin, Pipe and Tabor, writes and reads, and is well known all over the Island, pretends to be free, and has a design of getting off the Island in some of the ships going with the next Country for England” (*Royal Gazette*, February 3–10, 1784). The evocative terms of these advertisements point, to my mind, to how free and enslaved blacks, like Marrant, navigated a complex imperial/Atlantic world in ways that we have not fully understood, and in ways that are usefully viewed in relation to the concept of assemblage.

37. Marrant, *Narrative*, 60.

38. *Ibid.*, 61.

39. Cedric May, “John Marrant and the Narrative Construction of an Early Black Methodist Evangelical,” *African American Review* 38 (Winter 2004): 553–70.

40. Samuel Whitchurch, *The Negro Convert, a Poem: Being the Substance of the Experience of Mr. John Marrant, a Negro, as Related by Himself, Previous to His Ordination at the Countess of Huntingdon's Chapel, in Bath, on Sunday the 15th of May, 1785; Together with a Concise Account of the Most Remarkable Events in His Very Singular Life* (Bath: S. Hazard, 1785).

41. For discussion of the evidence of Marrant's editorial hand in the fourth edition and the distinction between this edition and others, see Brooks and Saillant, *Face Zion Forward*, 38–39.

42. Marrant, *Narrative*, 49.

43. John Sekora, "Black Message/White Envelope: Genre, Authenticity, and Authority in Antebellum Slave Narratives," *Callaloo* 10 (1987): 482–515.

44. Daphne Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850–1910* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006), 65.

45. For a superb collection of essays on the history of the book in the Atlantic world, see, in particular, Hugh Amory and David D. Hall, eds., *A History of the Book in America*, vol. 1, *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).