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The Vulnerable Observer: Self-Fashioning in Earl Lovelace's *Growing in the Dark* (Selected Essays)

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Moved by the shifts and complexities of personal voice in Earl Lovelace's *Growing in the Dark*, I wanted to explore issues of ideological self-placement in Lovelace's essays, especially as these issues relate to rootedness and the interactions between individual experience and social presentation. Lovelace is after all the quintessential outsider/insider, a writer and native son, and this collection of essays tells us a great deal about what it means to be a writer and insider in a culture, to register an individual sensibility and point of view, and also be a voice of the community's anxieties and aspirations.

As I see it, this collection of essays mediates a carefully constructed narrative of self, a narrative that the thematic arrangement of the essays only partially overwrites. Funso Aiyejina explains:

The initial impulse was to organize the collection chronologically so that it would be possible to follow the developmental changes in the ideas and style of Lovelace. However, that option was jettisoned in favour of a thematic arrangement because it was felt that such an arrangement would make it easier to see the consistency with which Lovelace has approached his role as analyst of culture and as thinker at every stage of his development. (xx)

The thematic arrangement of the text accomplishes precisely that; Aiyejina's introduction, "Finding the Darkness in which to Grow: The Journey Towards Bacchanal Aesthetics," lays out the key trajectories of Lovelace's thought from 1967 to 2002 with great clarity and understanding, and the essays collected here confirm this. Moreover, the chronology is easily recoverable since each essay is dated with brief notes about the occasion that prompted it. This sparked my interest in what chronology might reveal about Lovelace's distinctive style of self-revelation and cultural appraisal; "the dialectic between connection and otherness that," as Ruth Behar observes in *The Vulnerable Observer*, "is at the center of all forms of 'historical and cultural representation'" (20). In fact, in his introduction, Aiyejina calls attention to another way of reading the text when he observes that a chronological arrangement of the essays would provide a different understanding of Lovelace and the developmental changes in his ideas and style. Thus, I studied the essays across the thematic arrangement of the text, looking at dates, audiences, and occasions in the context of ideological self-placement.

I was also interested in Lovelace's use of a genre that is remarkable for its flexibility. Aiyejina explains in his Introduction that, "Although the subtitle of the book identifies its contents as essays, most of them are not essays in the strict academic sense of the word" (v). "The essay," writes Ruth Behar, "has been described as 'an act of personal witness. The essay is at once the *inscription* of a self and *description* of an object.' An amorphous, open-ended, even rebellious genre that desegregates the boundaries between self and other" (20). She is concerned with its usefulness in autoethnography, but other Caribbean writers have used the genre to great effect in challenging the normative, and in naming specific writers, Earl Lovelace directs our attention to his familiarity with the essays of C. L. R. James, Wilson Harris, George Lamming,

Derek Walcott, Kamau Brathwaite, and V.S. Naipaul. These writers have all demonstrated that experientially based cultural history is a powerful tool in challenging and even dismantling a dominant discourse, in part because mediated autobiography creates and legitimizes multiple spaces for alternative histories and different forms of knowing. So, what then is distinctive about Lovelace's use of a genre in which his very public, passionate identification with his native islands makes him a particularly vulnerable observer/participant? After all, the essays collected here are a record and reminder of his personal development as a writer and of the sociocultural dynamics of the island in colonialism and independence from a specific point of view, that of Earl Lovelace, native son, writer, and activist in a time of radical social change. Moreover, this selection bears his stamp of approval, and I was interested in what this says about where Earl Lovelace stands ideologically in relation to his record, which spans some thirty-five years, from 1967 to 2002.

I singled out key political events in the region that would have had a profound impact on Lovelace largely because they had a profound impact on us all, and because Lovelace's interest in these events is a matter of public record. My intention was to situate the selected essays in historical context, however loosely, so that their narrative moment would not be lost in the thematic arrangement of the text. I distinguished those *Express* articles and unpublished essays dated before and immediately after February 1970 (a date that marks the onset of the Black Power revolt and uprising in Trinidad), and up to the March 1979 Grenada Revolution. I grouped those dated March 1979 through October 1983, which marked the end of the People's Revolutionary Government (PRG) in Grenada, and includes the dates of the assassination of Walter Rodney on June 13, 1980, and the death of Eric Williams on March 29, 1981. Finally, I studied the interplay of individual experience and social representation in the post 1983 essays that include an unpublished essay on the watershed 1990 coup attempt that was led by Abu Bakr. I found that the public narrative of self that emerges through these essays is always race-conscious, always defensive and resistant in the face of perceived erosions in the African base of the society. That said, after the 1983 demise of the PRG, the narrative is increasingly less totalizing in its attitudes and gestures, and more open to the demands of hybrid modernity and postcolonial problems of democracy, development, and destiny.

Lovelace was thirty-two and a rising national figure in 1967, when he began writing for the *Express*. His novel *While Gods are Falling* was published in 1965, while he was awaiting the publication of his novel *The Schoolmaster* in 1968. He had recently returned from a year of study at Howard University in Washington DC (1966-1967), where the issues and urgency of the Civil Rights Movement in the USA¹ and the Black Arts Movement² seemingly had intensified his sense of commitment to social justice, nation building, and Black Power,³ as a strategy for reversing and correcting the injustices of the past and present. This was a Black Power moment in our history, consolidated in some of its different aspects for the Caribbean writer and intellectual by Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* which became widely available in English translation in 1963, and *Black Skin, White Masks* which was published in English in

1967. This was also the year of Trinidadian-born Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton's *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*, a manifesto for political and social change.

The importance of the Black Power movement to Lovelace's revolutionary politics becomes abundantly clear in the unpublished "The Banning of Stokely Carmichael" (1968), which took the form of a rousing address to an audience of protestors in historic Woodford Square. Though Trinidad and Tobago had been politically independent of Great Britain for just four years, Lovelace's impatience with the status quo is palpable:

What we need is a black revolution. [...] a revolution of attitudes of black people: to each other; of black people to their own beauty. For black people to be proud of their own beauty, their blackness, and their hair. We who think in terms of mamaguy and papyshow and mauvais langue, we need to begin to love each other, to respect each other, to create heroes and myths that will form the base of a new culture, a culture of dignity and love, of morality and brotherhood. We need to embrace our blackness. What else can we do? I am black. I am not ashamed.
(121-122)

And in what might appear to be a non-sequitur, but is not in the context of Carmichael's avowed militancy and the rest of this speech, Lovelace adds a lurking threat: "So, I don't think we need guns, and hopefully may never need them" (122).

Lovelace's *Express* articles through 1970 reveal the pressure of his radical politics on style and content. Lovelace was editorial writer, columnist, and reviewer for the *Express*, and he made it clear that this association was meant to demonstrate his unambiguous commitment to redefining the values of national and cultural sovereignty. In "Why I Chose the *Express*" (October 15, 1967), he issued a personal manifesto that appeared to double as a mission statement on behalf of the *Express*. In full self-awareness, he describes his statement as "naïve and bombastic" (61), but this self-criticism does not lead to self-correction; the enunciative strategy is intentional. I and we and the *Express* appear interchangeable. The trinity of the writer, his society, and media organization are infused with the promise of a yet to be specified Black Power message of reversal and reclamation:

The *Express* is the first locally owned press in the nation. This should have some significance to Trinidadians. Like our country, the *Express* is not big, or sophisticated or wealthy. But it is ours
I expect that the *Express*, because of its birthrights, would be in the position to discharge its necessary duties with fearlessness and honesty. I expect the *Express* to be serious about this task. It faces the pressure of a small country (62)

The burden of a radical black nationalism in a hybrid postcolonial social space is increasingly apparent in the *Express* columns of the 60s and 70s. Though Lovelace decries the society's disposition to self-criticism, or "self-depreciation" as he describes it in his first column (62), he is characteristically irate and hypercritical. For example, in "Watch, Your Freedom in Jeopardy" (January 30, 1968), he disparages calypsonians for failing to spearhead criticism of the national government as the betrayal of an inherited cultural code of resistance.

Anxiety over the relational drift of the newly independent nation towards renegotiating its dependence on modern capitalist enterprise rather than severing those links altogether, prompted a dogmatism that was impatient and even ruthless with perceived difference, especially in the sphere of the arts. In "The Arts, The Critics, and A New Society" (June 9, 1968), in his self-defined role as critic and judge, the model for achievement and excellence is an undifferentiated and transcendent "strictly folk arts:" "Except for the strictly folk arts, the arts in this country have been European taught and European inspired. The earlier artist has, as a result, been an imitator in an almost total sense. I mean, not only did he imitate the form, the structure of the arts, but often he copied the content as well" (63-64). The polarizing racialized cultural perspective expressed here makes explicit Lovelace's quest for Black authenticity in the postcolonial Caribbean and his discernible alienation from the Westward/capitalist drift of his society.

The dream of a new society, in which a New World African community, stirred by an anguished Fanonian self-awareness and armed with a Black Power manifesto, would redefine itself in exemplary fashion around a shared history of European exploitation of African peoples, is evident in unpublished essays like "Creating Communities" (September 1968), "Carnival" (October 20, 1968), "The Banning of Stokely Carmichael" (1968), and "Involvement is the People's Only Guarantee" (January 1970). The *Express* essays from 1969 that were selected for inclusion in this collection, "Independence Versus Colonial Myths (January 7, 1969), "A Third World in the Third World," (January 14, 1969), and "The Colour of Violence" (January 21, 1969), testify to Lovelace's disaffection with the nation and with his fellow citizens. The "we" in "A Third World," is dictatorial rather than persuasive in enunciative strategy as Lovelace projects hard personal and national choices ahead:

The facts are there. We cannot revert to Anglo-American cultural and ideological impositions. With the West we are lost. Alone we shall founder. Clearly, we must move in the direction of the Third World. To fail to do so would be to ignore our opportunities for independence and fulfillment, and to trumpet for the world our lack of sincerity, lack of courage and lack of seriousness. (149)

The individual voice of Lovelace is enveloped in the mask of the Black Power revolutionary; the future is configured in a series of menacing negatives with the so-called Third World as its destiny. In "The Colour of Violence" Lovelace reflects on Fanon's "The Negro and Psychopathology"⁴ with the conviction of a resigned believer, then retreats somewhat from a

Fanonian vision of a corrupt Caribbean on the verge of violent revolution: "In any event, we do not have a tradition of violence in this country. Let us not suggest that we should begin to create one" (124-125). He concludes with an elaborate, if duplicitous, gesture of faith in the future, and a prayer of sorts:

In any event this country, this nation will be better or worse not only as a result of the resources of skill and capital we put into it, but also because of the confidence and trust we have in ourselves and in others who share this country with us. Let us in a spirit of goodwill carry on our discussions and our search for more meaningful existence. (125)

At this stage, Lovelace is sloganeering for the militant left. These essays and articles are programmatic diatribes, as in the case of "At War with the System," published as an editorial in the radical *New Beginning* (March 1971) shortly after the start of the Black Power uprising.

From 1971 through 1974, Lovelace was in the USA, teaching at the University of the District of Columbia and then at Johns Hopkins University, that most conservative of institutions, where he earned an MA in English in 1974. After an initial return to former themes in "Black Community Building," a lecture/discussion at Lorton Reformatory in Washington DC (August 6, 1972), the Lovelace essays, published and unpublished suggest a more self-reflective, philosophical shift in focus to as yet unexpressed areas of thought and feeling. On his return to Trinidad, he became active in the theater with several significant successes: *My Name is Village*, a musical drama staged in 1976; *Pierrot Grinnard*, also a musical drama in 1977; and *Jestina's Calypso* in 1978. The unpublished "I Never Heard Geeson Sing (God, Being and Becoming)," dated Matura 1977, is autobiographical, self-reflective, and ethnographic. In lieu of a barely suppressed rage at the recalcitrance of fellow citizens in the *Express* articles is a generosity of spirit and at-one-ness with the limitations and promise of the ordinary citizen of the new nation. His "Progress in Calypso" published in *People* (January 1978), like the unpublished "Why Promote Insularity" (Matura, January 1978), reflect a respect for his audience, a conversation among equals rather than a polemic.

In the years of the People's Revolutionary Government in Grenada (March 1979 to October 1983), Lovelace was very much the traveling writer and intellectual like many of his contemporaries. *The Dragon Can't Dance*, which was published in 1979, was an immediate success. Lovelace split his time traveling between the Caribbean, the USA, and the UK. He was a Lecturer at the University of the West Indies (UWI), St Augustine, visited the University of Iowa on a Guggenheim fellowship in 1980, taught, lectured, and was active in the theater in the Caribbean and abroad. *The Wine of Astonishment* was published in 1982, and confirmed his growing reputation as an outstanding talent. With the exception of "Lord Fluke, the Believer" which appeared in the *Express* (February 15, 1983), Lovelace's revolutionary politics were still very much in the mode of Fanon's denunciation not only of the old imperialism, but the new wave of native leaders who negotiated or fought for independence. In "Progress in the West

Indian Environment,” a speech delivered on Literature Day at UWI, St. Augustine (January 26, 1982), success or failure in the region is represented in racially exclusive terms as the success or failure of Africans in the Caribbean; the West Indian story is very much an African story and regional in scope. His quest for Black authenticity remains rooted in the idea of an inherently subversive, resistant African folk cultural base in the Caribbean. In keeping with this philosophical self-placement, in “Rhythm and Meaning” (based on an interview by Chris Searle in Carriacou and published in *The Free West Indian*, July 2, 1983), Lovelace names calypso as the inspiration for *The Dragon Can’t Dance*: “Calypso is a very malleable form. If we call calypso a kind of rhythm, it has the form of call and response, of individual and group in a real and genuine relationship. In both an artistic and philosophical sense it is a form that has come down to us, surrounds us and it is what we have to use” (96). But this claim to a folk sensibility is prefaced in binary terms that couple V.S. Naipaul and George Lamming, despite their vastly different styles and politics, and dismisses them both and their generation of writers as bourgeois and unredeemably colonial. Lovelace was at this time an active participant in the Conferences of Intellectual Workers for Regional Sovereignty of the Caribbean Peoples chaired by George Lamming on behalf of the PRG, but Lovelace gives Lamming no quarter. In “Engaging the World” (*South*, December 1983), Lovelace identifies the pressing problems of modern existence as the loss of community and the loss of revolutionary fervor, but he had yet to recognize the constitutive limitations of his revolutionary politics as a primary site of alienation, an artistic and philosophical problem which is recognized, if not resolved in the calypso model he chose for *The Dragon Can’t Dance*.

In “Anxious Insularity: Identity Politics and Creolization in the Caribbean,” Michael Dash observes, “The twin anxieties that have haunted identity politics in the Caribbean [are]—the temptation to exclusionary constructs and the related fear of a pathological mimeticism” (297). One might argue that the Lovelace essays from 1976 through the 1980s reveal anxieties about the African cultural base of the society that are expressed in a singular focus on the recovery and affirmation of African cultural practices, rituals and philosophical thought, in the context of the revolutionary politics of Black Power. It is not until after the demise of the People’s Revolutionary Government in Grenada in 1983, that Lovelace appears to question in earnest the inherent weakness of a revolutionary activism that had failed to explore the historical and cultural differences of postcolonial nationalism in the hybrid spaces of Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean generally.

The fear of mimeticism that Michael Dash describes appears repeatedly in his essays and articles and speeches up to this point. In “Replacing One Colonialism with Another” (*Express* December 24, 1967), continuity with the new nation’s colonial past is invoked as a sign of mimicry and an act of disloyalty; mimicry is a term of contempt and it is a measure of the contradictoriness of this line of thought that Lovelace uses the much-castigated, anti-nationalist V.S. Naipaul to legitimize his argument. In “Progress in the West Indian Environment” (January 26, 1982), he urges a rejection of the discourses of mimicry he attributes to V.S. Naipaul and

Eric Williams in favor of a heroic dream of authenticity that he embodies in C. L. R. James, Cuba, Grenada, cricketers, and in songwriters and singers like Bob Marley. But it is at this point, following the tenure of the PRG in Grenada that Lovelace becomes more visibly thoughtful in the way he situates himself as a writer and native son in a hybrid postcolonial space.

In "From De I-Lands," an essay that dates back to a speech given at Hartwick College in Oneonta, New York in 1993, Lovelace uses the word "outsider" to describe a sense of dissociation that he experienced as a child and adolescent, first as a Trinidadian in Tobago, and later as a Trinidadian-Tobagonian mistaken for a Barbadian in Trinidad. He also uses "outsider" to describe the necessary distance of the writer as observer of his society:

What additionally prepared me for looking very closely at my environment was that I was an outsider. I saw myself as an outsider. I was born in Trinidad and from the age of three went to live with my grandparents on my mother's side in [...] Tobago. [...] As a child, I did not feel Tobagonian. I was something of an outsider there. [...] When years later I returned to Trinidad, talking with the accent of a Tobagonian, the first thing an arrogant little Trinidadian boy said to me was, "Hey, Baje," calling me a Barbadian I was a stranger here also. (2)

In the same essay, he describes the antidote to ensuing questions of identity, affirmation of self, and social responsibility, in terms of his growing intimacy with "the folk culture by which people live and which has provided a bedrock of values, attitudes, and ideas that I have been able to utilize in facing these questions" (2). Questions of dissociation and rootlessness relative to his native landscape are in fact represented as a question of choice and of ideological self-positioning: "And it soon became quite clear to me that my task lay in validating the lives of these people, because they were indeed the salt of the earth. They represented meaning and possibility; moreover, in validating them, I was validating myself. I was one of them" (4).

If the issue is continuity of personal and cultural identity, in this mediated narrative of self and community, on the one hand Lovelace sublimates a childhood sense of displacement in the detachment of the writer/artist as "outsider" that is at the heart of the creative process. On the other, the detachment of the writer/artist is subsumed in a foundational shift towards viewing identification, rather than difference, as the defining mechanism of personal identity and professional commitment; what Ruth Behar describes in the context of ethnography as the "personalizing of culture" (25), hence the vulnerable observer.⁵

There are numerous examples of this fashioning of self and community in Lovelace's essays. I will cite a few examples from "Culture and the Environment," an address which dates back to the Carifesta V Symposium in August 1992:

"I have spent a great part of my life in the countryside. So, in a kind of way, I feel that I qualify as a country person." (7)

"In a kind of way, I want to say that I come from stickfight people and wayside

people.” (12)

“More recently, I spent about nine, ten years in Matura. I spent some years in Valencia and I view myself as somebody who has really come alive and come to understand myself because of the village.” (8)

In statements like these, Lovelace embeds his life in facets of his native community of choice, by reiterating, and at times scrutinizing “the connection, intellectual and emotional, between the observer and the observed” (Behar 14). He describes himself as writer and artist, as both participant and witness: “One of the more important aspects of the writer or the artist is that he gives personal testimony. He doesn’t simply tell you abstract ideas without presenting them to you in a sense that he has been there, that he understands” (“Culture and the Environment” 13). The issues as stated are cultural continuity, authenticity, and also testimony.

Lovelace introduces testimony as a rhetorical strategy and as a therapeutic tool for a variety of purposes. His personal experience testifies to successful community as a mechanism that is available to others: “as I said, there is a kind of solidity here which you should not give up because it makes you solid, it makes you somebody, it makes you rooted. I think that is it. It gives you things that you have that are yours” (“Culture and the Environment” 13). Moreover, his personal experience of successful community testifies to the sacred values by which that community lives and dies:

And the philosophical support I called upon was to be found in the activities of the very people, and in the very culture that gave meaning to their actions. It is this culture that I call the folk culture. I see folk culture not as a rural culture conceived in the context of an agrarian society, or as having to do with the nature of the seasons but as resistance.” (“From De I-Lands” 5)

And of course, testimony is, by its very nature, a call to social activism that, in this case, is linked to the rehabilitation of a negative image of Africans by inscribing an indigenous, if not primordial, African cultural identity:⁶ “To validate them [the folk community] required me not only to know them well but to know and deal with the myths that served to illegitimise them and myself: ‘the slave mentality,’ ‘black and ugly,’ the devaluing of family, language, thought” (“From De I-Lands” 4).

Preoccupation with racial origins and roots features prominently in the work of many West Indian writers, and each is to be differentiated from the other.⁷ I might begin with Wilson Harris’ womb of space, or Édouard Glissant’s poetics of relation, “in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other” (*Poetics of Relation* 11). But in Lovelace’s case, given the trajectory of these essays, it is more appropriate to begin with Kamau Brathwaite’s “Timehri.” In a frequently cited passage from “Timehri,” Brathwaite observes that, “The most significant feature of West Indian life and imagination since Emancipation has been its sense of rootlessness, of not belonging to the landscape; dissociation, in fact, of art from the

act of living” (“Timehri” 29). In “Timehri,” Brathwaite offers a solution to this pattern of dissociation and rootlessness in a foundational poetics that was inspired by the primordial vision of Guyanese painter Aubrey Williams, who looked to the rock signs and paintings of the Warraou for an alternative to the forced heterogeneity introduced and maintained by colonialism.

In the Caribbean, whether it is African or Amerindian, the recognition of an ancestral relationship with the folk or aboriginal culture involves the artist and participant in a journey into the past and hinterland, which is at the same time a movement of possession into present and future. Through this movement of possession we become ourselves, truly our own creators, discovering word for object, image for the word. (“Timehri” 42)

“Timehri” was published in 1974 and is fairly representative of Kamau Brathwaite’s thought at the time. By equating the aboriginal culture of the Warraou with African folk culture in the Caribbean (Rastafarian, Orisha, Shango, Vodun, Shouter Baptist), Brathwaite inscribes a prehistoric timelessness to the African presence in the Caribbean landscape as the antidote to a sense of rootlessness and dissociation. The desire for a primal, ethnic past takes shape as a foundational poetics: “For Williams, this central source is Amerindian. For others of us the central force of our life of awareness is African” (“Timehri” 41).

In Lovelace’s collected essays, we have the remarkable record of a writer and ardent nationalist on a similar quest. The representational politics that emerge at this stage map a distinctive foundational poetics that is anchored in activist notions of the duty, responsibility, and role of the artist to his community, in short, the transformative value of art. In “Reparation: For & From Whom?” which was excerpted from two speeches delivered at Pacific Lutheran University, Tacoma, Washington, October 4, 1998 and October 29, 2001, this criterion of value is quite explicit. The essay is punctuated with passages from *Salt* published in 1996, which suggests a long gestation and sustained commitment in the way the issue is phrased. With explicit reference to African enslavement, emancipation, and the missed opportunities of political independence, Lovelace observes: “Our best art has always talked about this loss, this loss that we suffer when we violate others” (181). Other examples include:

One of the most important values to be derived from literature is its ability to call us to account as humans, by placing before us what we say we value and believe and by showing us how we act in regard to these beliefs and values. (181)

And what literature does is to show us ourselves [...]. It asks: How could we be so stupid, how could we do this cruelty, how could we commit these acts? And, at least, forces us to acknowledge our error, understand our condition and seek to redeem ourselves. (182)

Lovelace uses a religious language of sin and redemption here to talk about aesthetics, which lends credence to his confessed secret desire to be a “Shouters’ leader, or something like that”

(“Culture and the Environment” 10). However, in statements like this, the tension and the interplay between individual experience and social representation seemingly bends to the pressure of criteria other than that of a nationalist/autonomist ideology that is based on the assertion of a messianic African-based cultural identity and charged with the rehabilitation of negative stereotypes.⁸

In “Artists as Agents of Unity,” an address delivered at the Carifesta V Symposia, August 1992, the “Self-Self” relation of the “I” and the African folk base of his twin-island society, for example, in “From De I-Lands,” refocuses an exclusive nationalist particularity to embrace a regional forum: “My subject is Caribbean artist[s]. I’ll talk about artists as agents and catalysts in regional integration” (“Artists as Agents of Unity” 98). In the shift from island to region the issue of continuity of personal and cultural identity remains constant, since it does not really rupture the essential link with the African folk base of his village/island society: “The artists, to be catalysts and agents in regional integration, must help to make us see the region not only as a place but also as people who share the same history of resistance in slavery” (“Artists as Agents of Unity” 99). In short, the multivocal Caribbean is interpreted as univocal through a strategic poetics of origination. Additionally, this is represented as a stabilizing and therefore desirable vector given the competing claims of island and regional heterogeneity.

In “In the Voice of the People,” which is excerpted from a speech in St. Thomas, 21 March 2000, individual identification is with “the ordinary people” (102), who are represented as a distillation of the African folk base of his village/island society and as such the embodiment of the writer’s self, identity, and desire. The writer’s quest for narrative voice is the quest for their voice: “In the process of telling these stories of the ordinary people, the narrative voice begins to discover its power and integrity to speak for the region ...” (103). Yet, there are definite limits as well as possibilities to identification with “the ordinary people” as the defining image of self and community, and this becomes apparent in the resurrection of dichotomies of Self and Other in a narrative of identification:

I have so far spoken about Black people, African people, but I want to suggest that the same is perhaps true *of others*, certainly for the Indians from India who came as indentured; they had no rank either. (“In the Voice of the People” 105)
I think it is possible also to raise the same question with regards to the Europeans who came here: ... (“In the Voice of the People” 105, my emphasis)

I think that one of the things that is happening here is that the racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity of the island and the region is straining to impress itself on the trope of island space that Lovelace projects in an African-Caribbean poetics of origination, not as exemplary and relational in a fragmented community but as primordial and rooted in the landscape, and in a sense privileged by linear affiliation. In “Welcoming Each Other: Cultural Transformation of the Caribbean in the 21st Century,” which was presented in Washington DC on January 22, 1998 as part of the Inter-American Development Bank Cultural Center’s Lectures Program, Lovelace

qualifies his characteristic emphasis on self as authentic and representative voice of the people in the following way:

I should let you know that here I am using Trinidad and Tobago to represent the Caribbean. It is a truly West Indian community peopled by Barbadians, Vincentians, Grenadians, St. Lucians, Martiniquans, by Africans from other parts of the Caribbean as well, of course, and by Africans from the continent, Indians, Chinese, and Europeans ... It maintains as well a presence of African institutions, Shango, Orisha, and Shouters alongside Indian religious forms and expressions. (166)

Immediately following this paragraph, the personal "I" vanishes for the equivalent of a couple pages of what is by implication objective historical summation that begins: "Trinidad, in particular, is a complex, cosmopolitan society with a population of 1.3 million, with roughly 41% African, 41% Indian, a small minority of Chinese, Lebanese and Europeans, and with traces of Amerindians found in mixtures with the African population" (166). When the personal "I" reemerges, it is to talk about the unfulfilled liberation of the African-Caribbean person in Diaspora and reparation as a necessary prerequisite to social stability and social justice (169ff).

There is in the more recent essays a thoughtfully engineered shift in the way national cultural identity is conceptualized, from identity as authoritative primordial presence (memorialized in a heroic resistance and cultural continuity) to identity as a process and a movement between poles of value. In "In the Dance," an address to the matriculating class of the National Institute of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology in 2000, Lovelace observes:

To read the newspapers these days, one would believe that we were heading to not one nation, but two, three, four nations. One rooted in a mythical India, one rooted in a mythical Africa, one in an unrepentant Europe, while the *others of us* make our individual way in the global village. (186, my emphasis)
It seems to me that many of these tribal activists have no idea that the challenge we face is one of a New World, and have completely lost sight of the challenge of including others in the world they envision for their tribe. (186-87)

What Michael Dash calls, "insular anxiety" is in this case producing a different series of constructs (296). Lovelace is at this point proposing a model of identity that valorizes the heterogeneity of Caribbean cultures by embracing their multiple origins and challenging an Afrocentric politics of privilege and purity that had been the cornerstone of his *Express* articles and other essays, published and unpublished, from 1967 through the 1980s.

This line of argument is even more richly detailed in Lovelace's speech on behalf of honorary "graduands" at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine in November 2002. In

this speech, “my society” is invoked as culturally diverse and regional rather than racially specific and national:

It seems to me that we need to update the vision of who we really are. We need to recognize that wherever we have come from and whatever we have brought from different regions, even in awkward circumstances—all of it—is really our heritage In the process we might just discover that the tribes said to be in contention are seeking what we have been always seeking—the same things: a sense of belonging, a psychic ease, the valuing of our contributions, a space in which to grow and the natural acknowledgement of our worth and dignity as human beings. (230)

If the personal essay is about vulnerability, it also resists the politics of closure. This has been the pattern with Wilson Harris, Édouard Glissant, George Lamming, V.S. Naipaul, and Derek Walcott, to name a few of our great writers. The genesis of Caribbean thought and imagination is ongoing. The real and symbolic values of insularity open up to new definitions of Caribbeanness; in Glissant’s words, “One is not Martinican because of wanting to be Caribbean. Rather, one is really Caribbean because of wanting to become Martinican” (*Caribbean Discourse* 224).

In these essays, Earl Lovelace shares with us the problematics, beauty, and strength of a vital and vulnerable Caribbeanness. A chronological reading of these essays tells a personal story of struggle and realization that counterpoints the thematics of the Lovelace/Aiyejina arrangement of the text in important ways. The narrative that emerges from a chronological reading is autobiographical and exemplary though not necessarily in respect to specific themes and preoccupations. An unpublished essay like “Abu Bakr: Speaking for the People” (1990) maps self-knowledge, and exemplary self-knowledge at that, as a thoughtful dismantling of the boundaries between self and other over the course of some thirty-five years. In this essay, the Abu Bakr phenomenon is not an occasion for polemic so much as an occasion for examining issues of power and agency on micro and macro levels. In Lovelace’s thoughtful analysis of the national crisis, for example, the figure of the badjohn conjoins the political with the cultural and aesthetic in an open-ended process of becoming. The quest for authenticity is located in the future rather than the past, and in the process of becoming rather than an absolute integral self.

Notes

¹USA President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act into law on July 2, 1964.

²In a 1968 essay, "The Black Arts Movement":

Larry Neal proclaimed Black Arts the "aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept." "The Black Arts Movement is radically opposed to any concept of the artist that alienates him from his community. Black Art is the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept. As such, it envisions an art that speaks directly to the needs and aspirations of Black America. In order to perform this task, the Black Arts Movement proposes a radical reordering of the western cultural aesthetic. It proposes a separate symbolism, mythology, critique, and iconology. The Black Arts and the Black Power concept both relate broadly to the Afro-American's desire for self-determination and nationhood. Both concepts are nationalistic. One is concerned with the relationship between art and politics; the other with the art of politics. (184)

³The 1960s' use of the term originated in 1966 with Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee civil rights workers Stokely Carmichael and Willie Ricks. Black Power was separatist and associated with a militant advocacy of armed self-defense, and pride in the goodness and beauty of Blackness. See Carmichael and Hamilton, *Black Power*.

⁴Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, (141-209).

⁵Writing as an ethnographer, Ruth Behar reflects on the pros and cons of inserting personal stories into social and cultural analysis in *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart*: "Writing vulnerably takes as much skill, nuance, and willingness to follow through on all the ramifications of a complicated idea as does writing invulnerably and distantly. [...] to draw deeper connections between one's personal experience and the subject under study. That doesn't require a full-length autobiography, but it does require a keen understanding of what aspects of the self are the most important filters through which one perceives the world and, more particularly, the topic being studied" (13). According to Behar, "Vulnerability doesn't mean that anything personal goes. The exposure of the self who is also a spectator has to take us somewhere we couldn't otherwise get to (14).

⁶"The genres of life history and life story are merging with *testimonio*, which speaks to the role of witnessing in our time as a key form of approaching and transforming reality. Producing testimony became a crucial therapeutic tool in the treatment of people who suffered psychological trauma under state terrorism" (Behar 27). See also John Beverley, *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth*.

⁷It is interesting to me to locate Lovelace generationally in relation to other Caribbean writers who share some of this preoccupation with rootlessness interpreted as an alienation from the geographical and cultural landscape of their origins. Lovelace was born in 1935, which places him squarely in the generation of Caribbean writers that includes Kamau Brathwaite, born in 1930; Derek Walcott, born in 1930; the late Antonio Benítez-Rojo, born in 1931; V. S. Naipaul, born in 1932; and, if we think of a generation as ten years with 1935 as the mid point, the Lovelace generation can be stretched to include George Lamming, born in 1927; Édouard Glissant, born in 1928; and Andrew Salkey, born in 1928, to name a few that come to mind.

⁸Among them are: Anancy as a scamp and a “smart-man,” the Shouters as people dealing with the devil, and the panman as a “badjohn” (“Artists as Agents of Unity” 99).

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