

Social Death in the Staging of the Encounter; or, the Antiblackness of Critical Theory

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Saidiya Hartman chose to write about the torture and murder of Black captives on the slave ship *Recovery* in different occasions, “The Dead Book” chapter in *Lose Your Mother* (2007) and her *Small Axe* article, “Venus in Two Acts,” a year later. In her two reflections, Hartman respectively discusses the violence—described in the April 1792 court proceedings on the case—done by the ship’s captain on two enslaved women. Unidentified by their names, the records referred to the dead merely as “a Negro girl” and “Venus.” “I preferred not to tell or was unable to tell,” Hartman writes, one single account, which would “subject the dead to new dangers and to a second order of violence.”¹ The “second order” is narration itself, as inevitably based on evidentiary records directly emanating from the actions of torturers and murderers as well as the structural forces capacitating “the violence, excess, mendacity, and reason that seized hold of [Black] lives, transformed them into commodities and corpses, and identified them with names tossed-off as insults and crass jokes.”² It was precisely the violence of narration that underwrote William Wilberforce’s effort to repurpose the legal records on “the girl,” whose gruesome demise he turned into spectacle to solicit empathetic identification among the white public, and educate it to the abolitionist cause.

The ethical quandaries of narrative are ultimately determined by the absolute interdiction gratuitous antiblack violence presents to representing the positionality of the Black on a slave ship as part of human encounters, rather than the “horizontal arrangements”³ of objects under the absolute rule of subjects with an unlimited prerogative for terror in excess of all bounds of relationality or hegemony. Hartman writes that the very impulse of imagining the two girls in terms of relation—how they could have *felt* for (or supported, consoled, and comforted) each other—would always lead to her own violent encounter with the Archive:

Initially I thought I wanted to represent the affiliations severed and remade in the hollow of the slave ship by imagining the two girls as friends, by giving them one another. But in the end, I was forced to admit that I wanted to console myself and to escape the slave hold with a vision of something other than the bodies of two girls settling on the floor of the Atlantic.⁴

The lure of writing history as encounter induces then to the repetition of the violence that defines blackness as social death, as both violence and writing fortify the interlocutory life of the encounter's socially alive Human participants (like Wilberforce and his public), the white ethical dilemmas enacted on the deck of the ship, the trade in commodities replenishing its hold, and the historians' inscription of the archive into narratives of emancipation as the eventfulness of subjects' triumphs against "evil" and "adversity."⁵ Christina Sharpe lucidly positions relationality and affect as the ruses allowing the "monstrous intimacies" of Atlantic antiblackness, as such encounters organize horror into the legible rubrics—unthreatening to Human civil and epistemic coherence—of motivation, historicity, sociality, and kin.⁶ The reassurances of the encounter cloud the ethical challenges and defuse the disciplinary upheaval of telling a story that, in M. NourbeSe Philip's words, "cannot but must be told"⁷ and, Hartman insists, is the story of the World's present as the "afterlife of slavery."⁸ Hartman rejects that lure, and the accompanying temptation of sentimentality, or of narrative as relief, rescue, and restoration ("the romance of resistance that I failed to narrate and the event of love that I refused to describe"), rather opting to "leave them as I had found them. Two girls, alone."⁹ It is out of the impossibility of encounter and the unspeakability of terror—both predetermined by the structural positionality of blackness as captivity and social death—that a "counter-history of the human" stands in antagonism to the violence that founds the historical archive and the world it historicizes.

At stake here is not just the impossibility of writing the encounter into the counter-historical and eventless temporality of antiblack violence (what Christina Sharpe [2016] calls "ship time"¹⁰ and John Murillo [2012] refers to as "murdered" Black temporality, or "un-time."¹¹) It is the very notion of encounter to be questioned for how it sustains that violence, or, in Frank Wilderson's words, "reconstitute[s] civil society's fortification against social death."¹² The obliterating power that erases the bodies of "Venus" and "the girl" makes their encounter impossible in terms of relation, as well as generation of claims. The political grievances emerging from the *Recovery* are rather the precious recompense in the intra-Human drama, "abolition," to the discursive machinations of which the flesh of the two Black women provide fungible raw material. Likewise, there is no question that Black female flesh cannot utter demands for justice along the lines of gender. To the ungendering sexual violence of the Middle Passage¹³ was added the *ex-post* abuse of Wilberforce's selective appropriation of the two women's imagoes, whereby the representation of "the girl"'s Christian-like martyrdom (as she resisted the Captain's attempts at rape) contrasted with the oblivion into which "Venus" was cast due to the allegedly less exemplary circumstances of her own, relatively unspectacular, end. If anything, the emerging white feminist movement would quickly learn to articulate its claims to justice by making gender a Human affair, a terrain of conflict enabled by white women's recognition as, first and foremost, not "thingified" and commodified Black flesh.¹⁴ But "The Slave's encounter with the world," Wilderson

comments, has “no dialectical potential,” no possibility of resolution in historical time.¹⁵ It is an encounter that annihilates relationality and makes the Slave “not so much the antithesis of Human capacity,” but rather “the absence of Human capacity.”¹⁶

At this point, a clarification is due as to the specific inflections of “encounter” that are addressed in these pages, as well as what motivates my interest in the antiblackness of the concept’s modulations in contemporary critical theory. As a category, “encounter” has become vital to theoretical perspectives grappling with the permanence, not merely historical contingency, of the uncertainty, vulnerability, and precarity that accompany the exposure of human bodies to the ravages of global markets, neoliberal policies, capitalistically determined environmental devastation, and technologically mediated cognitive and biological mutation. The turn to “affect” in the humanities and the social sciences, and the theoretical centrality of communication and language in post-work, or anti-work, analyses of Marxist derivation exemplify how visions of encounter question assumptions of subjective coherence, stability, autonomy, and self-determination, be they vested in the individual or class, gender, ethnic, or national collective “identities.” The grounding of agency in encounters, or in what Judith Butler invokes as an “ecstatic”¹⁷ opening to one another’s vulnerabilities, rather than in the illusory quest for self-contained subjective autonomy, gestures to a philosophical lineage that, in Western modernity, presents itself as an alternative to Cartesian rationalism, and is rather tributary to Baruch Spinoza’s work on bodies, *conatus*, and affect. The alternative is most evident in Gilles Deleuze’s influential reading of Spinoza’s political philosophy and anthropology as a critique of the avowed rational subject of modernity. It also extends to how affect theory departs from a Lacanian approach to desire and the symbolic order as structures of alienation to be dismantled by, in Wilderson’s terms, the “psychoanalytic encounter” as a radical experience of Human liberation.¹⁸ For Deleuze, Spinoza posits desire itself as the immanent force leading bodies’ “striving” (*conatus*) for “joyous encounters,” or combinations multiplying the capacities and world-making potentials of participants in the encounter. Far from any idealistic or rational justification, the *conatus* is primarily driven by the body’s necessity for self-preservation, thus allowing for the capacitation of singularities through the collective production of potentiality.¹⁹

In a highly influential formulation, Deleuze declared that Spinoza’s *Ethics* outlines “the art of...organizing good encounters, composing actual relations, forming powers, experimenting.”²⁰ While jailed for his revolutionary politics, Antonio Negri pursued this line of inquiry in his “post-workerist”²¹ and anti-dialectical revision of Marxism.²² Consecrating Spinoza as the true founder of modern materialism (or “materialistic metaphysics,”) Negri posed Spinoza’s “positive form of negative thought”²³ as foundational for the affirmative powers of the Multitude in its irreconcilable confrontation with capital and the state, which he opposed to the antithesis between labor and capital as dialectically requiring a progressive resolution.

Negri sought in Spinoza ammunition for an original Marxian theory of social antagonism, which conceptually and ontologically abjured the twentieth-century legacy of class conflict. He retained, nonetheless, labor (as living Human activity, rather than the quantifiable surplus extracted from the “working class”) as central to his vision of antagonism, which is, moreover, determined not by negation but by the immanent affirmation of Human positivity against the deadening despotism of capitalist command.²⁴ Wilderson exposes the limitations of Negri’s assumptive logic by targeting precisely Negri’s grounding of antagonism in labor and the “drama of value,” which misrecognizes the ontologically prior and constitutive antagonistic positioning of the Black *vis-à-vis* the Human, a positioning structurally determined not by exploitation or the repression of (Black) desire, but by obliterating, gratuitous violence that, within racial slavery as the engine not only of capital but of the modern world, necessitates the *impossibility* of Black desire and the marking of Black existence as social death, and, in Hartman’s terms, accumulation and fungibility.²⁵ The constitutive exclusion of the Black from the Multitude—indeed the capacitation of the Multitude’s life-affirming power by virtue of that very exclusion and the possibility it provides for defining Human freedom and agency themselves—reveals the post-Spinozian longing for relationality as resting on unspoken (inasmuch it is neither questioned nor accounted for) Black objecthood.

Central in Negri’s and Deleuze’s reading of Spinoza is the necessity of the World for the infinite substance and “essence” of Being (or God). As “recognized essence,”²⁶ the World’s material existence is ontologically self-validating and exists in itself only through the combination of corporeal singularities, or bodies. Spinoza’s notion of the body is explicitly premised on a qualitative articulation of Human distinctiveness as part of, and ontologically superior to, both other animated corporealities and what he terms “simplest bodies.” All bodies, including inanimate objects, are “modes” that in a determinate way express God’s essence as an extended being.²⁷ In that sense, foundational to Spinoza’s materialism is the idea that relations between bodies are to be considered as results of purely objective properties, densities, and effects: “I shall consider human actions and desires in exactly the same manner, as though I were concerned with lines, planes, and solids” (*Ethics*, Part III). In Part II, Proposition 13 of the *Ethics*, however, Spinoza provides a comprehensive enunciation of the physical and metaphysical distinctiveness of the Human body and its relationality from all other singularities and their compositions and combinations. For Spinoza, differently from Descartes,²⁸ the Human body is necessary to the Human mind (self-consciousness) as a mode, an empirical manifestation, of the divine attribute of thought. The “anti-idealistic” necessity of the body for the mind leads Negri to conclude that “both of these functions are given within an original and inseparable unity, guaranteed by the substantial order of the world. Corporeality, therefore, is foundational.”²⁹

Proposition 13 contains, however, indications to a perhaps less obvious way, from the standpoint of Negri’s “multitude,” in which corporeality is foundational

for Human relationality, civil society, and modernity. Negri quotes, without however any further inquiry beyond restating the distinction between simplest and Human bodies, the following, revealing passage from Proposition 13:

When a number of bodies, whether of the same or of different size, are so constrained by other bodies that they lie upon one another, or if they so move, whether with the same degree or different degrees of speed, that they communicate their motions to each other in a certain fixed manner, we shall say that those bodies are united with one another and that they all together compose one body or Individual, which is distinguished from the others by this union of bodies.³⁰

Spinoza's point was to show how bodies are differently affected by different forces in relation not only to their singularity but also their composition (thereby infinitely ascending to Nature itself as the ultimate Individual arising from infinite combinations and effects).

For Negri, according to whom all bodies in possession of sentience and self-consciousness must also be Human bodies, Spinoza's argument is valuable insofar it provides a purely materialistic justification for the "fabric of the utopia" and the multitude's liberation.³¹ Yet, the Middle Passage, the scene where "Venus" and "the Girl" met their demise, was premised on violence emanating from the premise that Black corporeality, although sentient and self-conscious, is *not* human, rather being liable to be stacked and stowed in the way of Spinoza's inanimate objects, commodities, or "simplest bodies." Proposition 13's image of "bodies, whether of the same or of different size ... so constrained by other bodies that they lie upon one another" and "if they so move...they communicate their motions to each other in a certain fixed manner," conveys, therefore, a far more than analogical association to the hold of the *Recovery* and the countless other floating devices that ensured not only the combinatorial precision and logistical composition of the enslaved cargo they transported, but also the resulting modes of economy, sociality, and ethics. Racial enslavement and sexual violence, rather than divine substance and its attributes, were the "essences" that posited, to recall the Spinozian term, the "modes" of Black existence in the modern World. For blackness the rewards of the philosophical drama unfolding at the dawn of capitalist modernity—whether the white Mind should find its manifestation through the Body, or in spite of it, by subjugating the Other or "redeeming" it—were either precluded or rendered inconsequential. In fact, Black social death is those debates' very condition of possibility.

A Spinozian concern (with or without the Deleuzian mediation) with the body as the ontological ground of Human encounters has become quite appealing to critical theory, especially in the footsteps of the "affective turn" and "nomadic" decenterings of the subject. Perceptions that precarity is ineliminable and persistent severely disrupted older signposts of progress—labor, gender, or national social inclusion—and revealed anxieties with recuperating precarity itself within a relational ontology. The mission seems to be the rescue of "living labor"³² (Virno 1999)

as inherent to worker's bodies belonging to the Human family, leaving to the Slave the permanent, thus deathly, separation of "labor power" from the flesh, and the ensuing impossibility of social inclusion and recognition.³³ In Negri's reflection, it is indeed the possibility of encounter and the promise of relationality that infuse work with a new ontological status, keeping it on the Human side of precarity and preventing it from falling into the abjection of enslavement. Negri's redemption of work not as labor but as relation thus entails a revitalizing "ontology of work" centered on "immaterial" properties that are "intellectual, communicational, relational, affective, which are expressed by subjects and social movements, thereby leading to production."³⁴ Critical theory's conceptual and ethical investment in the encounter as the force deemed to restore potential, becoming, and equilibrium to bodies—singular as well as social—otherwise constantly and vehemently stimulated to be "out of step with themselves," to recall Simondon's formulation,³⁵ is thus overtly aimed at conjuring away slaveness as the haunting absence-presence of stasis and permanent disequilibrium without potential.

The specter of slaveness is, on the other hand, as constantly and menacingly alluded to, like the abyss out of which Humanity must be kept, in the Spinozian fold of post-Marxist critical theory, as this allusion systematically disavows the structural isomorphism between Slaveness and Blackness. Thus, Frédéric Lordon's image of neoliberal subjectivities turned into "willing slaves of capital," self-entrepreneurial actors motivated to pursue their own exploitation, rests not on classical notions of ideology and hegemony, but, Spinozistically, on the hypothesis that the Human's essential capacity to desire has been twisted toward a fleetingly joyful but ultimately oppressive encounter with capital and consumption.³⁶ In a praising review of Lordon, Jason Read reminds the readers of what is the touchstone of coherence for this peculiar version of the Human "drama of value":

Spinoza considers the historical transformation of desire primarily in terms of the biography of an individual. The movement from bondage, from domination by the affects, to liberation, to the rational comprehension of the affects, is the trajectory of liberation that defines the *Ethics*.³⁷

Hartman's "Venus" provides, of course, a far more structurally accurate and ethically rigorous, because less generically "human," characterization of the position of being "dominated by affect," one in which White affect *simultaneously* determines antiblack violence, the terror of enslavement, and the possibility of desire and encounter for those whose freedom means staying clear of *racial* bondage.

If the ominous evocation of slaveness—on condition that it completely disavows the violence defining racial blackness—is a somewhat unspoken asset in the critical *vis* of the Spinozian moment, its adamant opposition to the very notion of structural positionality, without which blackness becomes literally unthinkable at an ontological level, is a far more pronounced, perhaps even "programmatically," aspect in contemporary theorizations of the encounter. For Brian Massumi, for

example, the very existence of the social field as something distinct from a thingly “universe” of “death” rests on the “ontogenetic priority” of movement and becoming over stasis and position, a priority practically expressing itself through an expansive notion of affect and desire, not limited to emotions and feelings, but designating bodily intensive capacity for attractions that “affect” singularities in their collective assembling.³⁸ Inspired by Massumi, Rosi Braidotti and Jasbir Puar directly target radical projects they regard as anachronistically wedded to, respectively, “negativity” and “identity” as impediments to an affect-driven post-modern and post-human reconstitution of the social.³⁹ Patrice Douglass has convincingly shown how such critical turns—which I trace back to various influences of Deleuzian Spinozism—delineate their conceptual capaciousness through a deprecating allusion, which is often not even so implicit, to blackness (and, in political terms, Black radicalism and radical Black feminism) as a condition putatively obsessed with immobility, loss, and grief.⁴⁰ In its very allusiveness and persistent refusal to engage questions of racialized violence and structural positionality raised by Black critique (rather than the more academically *en vogue* “people-of-color” critique), however, the Spinozian celebration of movement, affect, and becoming is self-fulfilling, since it fixes blackness as conceptually immobile, hence the constitutive outside for the flourishing horizon of Massumi’s, Puar’s, and Braidotti’s joyous and positive Human assemblages. The coerced conceptual immobility and policed practical objecthood of blackness, Douglass concludes, fuel the “theoretical mobility” of critical theory and its manifold desired subjectivities.

Contemporary critical Spinozism has equipped (post)Marxist analysis with tools to tackle the challenge of post-structuralism by questioning post-Enlightenment notions of the subject (of either a Cartesian or an idealistic derivation) and hinting at a departure from, or at least a correction to, analyses centered on exploitation in the realm of political economy and alienation in the terms of libidinal economy. The particularly ambitious projects of Deleuze and Negri promised an alternative to capitalism reclaiming the autonomy of desire that is not in need of prior de-alienation and is unfettered by the symbolic order. Likewise, the self-fulfillment of living labor as “nomadic” subjectivity is for them unmoored from the rigors of dialectical directionality. Spinozian affect proclaims its absolute materialism, since it is premised on the intensity and physical proprieties of relations, not on feelings and emotions; its agency does not require normative notions of rationality or symbolic mediation. Thus armed, critical theory has reflected on the crisis, vulnerability, and precariousness of the Human by eschewing nostalgic invocations of more stable emancipatory subjects that turned out to be implicated in the oppressiveness of the nation-state, colonial exploitation and genocide, and inequalities by gender and class. Yet, the underlying subversive impulse of neo-Spinozism, targeted at a history of modernity as the history of the Subject, is prevented by its own conceptual apparatus from encountering the structural positionality,

Blackness, that stands in starkest antagonism (social death *versus* social life) to the Subject itself, whose defining violence it unflinchingly exposes.

The encounter envisaged by the neo-Spinozian project shares with the perspectives it interrogates (like the movements of working classes, women, anticolonial revolt, or decolonial rebirth) its anchoring in the relationality of the socially living. The very condition of thinkability of the Spinozian encounter is that it must require an ontological distinction between Human bodies and non-Human flesh (or Spinoza's "simplest bodies.") The associated political program of reclaiming precarity as ground for insurgent and defiant, or at least impolite and intractable, subjectivities, rather than consigning it to widespread self-exploitation under the dictates of corporate capital, is not, despite its avowed relinquishing of an analytic of exploitation and alienation, an exit from the Human "drama of value." It rather reboots that drama with a more diverse cast of characters and a somewhat more improvisational script. Spinoza's own placing of the early scene of the encounter on the stage of the antagonism between the relationality of the slave ship's Deck and the non-relation of the Hold is quite dissonant from his epigones' cheerful announcement of life-affirming, universal, post-racial, (post-)Human assemblages. Both nonetheless reflect the assumption that Human encounters differ from the mere stacking of "simplest bodies," because Human bodies partake of the divine attribute of self-determined thought, albeit secured not in the Cartesian separation of the mind from the body, but rather by the immanence of divine substance, which can only be through its self-becoming in Human relationality. Although the flesh in the Hold does not and cannot participate in the Spinozian encounter, its simultaneous presence and absence is what makes Human relationality thinkable and enunciative as qualitatively unique. The image of bodies that exist as such, not because of self-determination but because they are given a shared motion by the external forces of wind, tides, guns, policing, and social policy, is the impermissible truth of what makes Human encounters ontologically distinct. Perhaps, then, here is a terrain of reconciliation between Spinoza and Hegel, which has not been discerned by those, like Macherey, aiming at a critical encounter between the two: both premise the unfurling of the divine in the Human (surely across drastically different temporalities) on the prior excision of the Black/African, pronouncing the absolute irrelevance of which only makes it all the more central to the coherence of their philosophical edifices.⁴¹

Even when it most rigorously takes aim at the modern post-Enlightenment subject—the reviled perpetrator of colonial oppression, indigenous genocide, capitalist exploitation, and gender domination—critical theory's concerns with the decay of the social and the violence of markets and states simply cannot let go of the body as the ultimate guarantee of the coherence of the Human as well as its capacity for self-reinvention in encounters yet to come. The grafting of both imperatives in the body is what ultimately necessitates the positing of Blackness as the abyss from which bodies must recoil in order to be, if not autonomous subjects, at least

desiring agents of encounters. Responding to Michael Hardt's hope that the antidote to civil society's imprisonment in the logic of neoliberalism and the empire is "the organization of joyful encounters...the increase in our power to act and power to exist...a constitution of being...continuously susceptible to the intervention of new events," Frank Wilderson comments that such an "amorous dream shakes not one pillar on the Slave estate and in fact strengthens...the Slave estate's foundation."⁴² The encounter's (non)relation to blackness is in the end not only parasitic, but repressive as well, since the deployment of this concept in the longing for post-subjective, post-modern, even post-human and "queer" assemblages and sexualities transcending the horizon of gender silences Black theorizations where queerness reflects, responds, and elaborates on the violent un-gendering of racial captivity.⁴³ The Spinozian notion of bodily encounters is then violently antiblack in a double sense: on one hand, it sanctions the fixity of the enslaved into the inert category of "simplest body." On the other, it posits, as the sole condition of liberation, the deployment of the encounter's potential as the critique of pre-existing universalized (hence non-Black) agencies (workers, or women, or oppressed ethnicities and nationalities.) But, as Saidiya Hartman emphasizes, to enlist blackness—the life and afterlife of slavery—into the rubric of agency would "obscure as much as it reveals."⁴⁴ To categorize the labors of enslaved black women in terms of "production" or "reproduction" (no matter how immensely re/productive of white economy and sociality such labors are), two key agentic categories of subordination and claims, would miss their paradigmatic indistinction and interchangeability as a result of "the constitutive elements of slavery as a mode of power, violence, dispossession, and accumulation."⁴⁵ With an eye to affect theory in particular, Tyrone Palmer comments that Human affect works on Black existence in uniquely non-reciprocal and non-relational ways, since human ethics, politics, and economics have posited the Black body "as an abstraction upon and through which the desires, feelings, and ideas of others are projected."⁴⁶ The interdiction for blackness to be a subject of affect deriving from its forceful conscription into being its object results, Palmer continues, in the Human impossibility to recognize Black sentience in terms of either "feelings" or legitimate motivation for action.

Hailed as a declaration of the affirmative powers of social life, the encounter longs for a conceptual disentanglement from its primal staging in the scene of social death. But its strategic deployment in the critique of contemporary precarity and the resulting optimism toward social movements, the dissolution of identities, or new post-human horizons cannot account for accumulation, violence, and terror not as historically determined violations of the Human, but as the capacities through which the Human defines itself as the non-Black. No matter how devalued, frail, and residual under global capitalism, the Human body stands tributary to those capacities as its injuries, claims, and memories of what has been lost keep civil society and sovereignty intact as spaces of critical interlocution. But what of the existences that were brought into the world through the obliteration of bodies

by the converging vectors of violence that Dionne Brand locates in “the sovereignty of the sea?”⁴⁷ The encounter’s grounding in, and disavowal of, Black social death exposes how critical theory deepens its dependence on antiblackness precisely at the point where it seeks in the most uncompromising terms a structural and ontological explanation for Human suffering. The expectation that such a quest would drive critical theory to ethical accountability toward blackness in the afterlife of slavery is thus routinely disappointed in ways that only re-instantiate the encounter’s constitutive excision. The proposal that new encounters can address the crises of the social curtails any further inquiry into the crises’ origins from a non-place that is the absolute, antagonistic negative of the social, for the notion of encounter itself is part of the social as a “crisis category.”⁴⁸ By that, Hartman means that the social exists to name disruptions requiring intra-human discussion, deliberation, and recalibration of boundaries, overlaps, and articulations of public and private, law and affect, terror and hegemony most suitable to “domesticate, isolate, and normalize those envisioned as infectious, aberrant, dangerous, and dependent.”⁴⁹ Fred Moten’s plea for Black radicalism “as a kind of encounter,”⁵⁰ one that defies both language (including the language of politics) and relation as an ontologically Human property, would then demand from critical theory the impossible task of being ethically accountable to the absolutely negative, antagonistic, and unthought, or submitting to the illegibility that haunts agency.

Endnotes:

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1. Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 26 (2008): 5-8.
2. *Ibid.*, 2.
3. Hortense J. Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics* vol. 17., no. 2 (1987): 75.
4. Hartman, “Venus,” 9.
5. It is to be noticed the engagement, in Hartman’s work, of Michel de Certeau as a critical theorist intuiting the connection between death and history-writing, which “exorcises and confesses,” thereby bringing within the horizon of legibility and signification, “a presence of death amidst the living.” See: Michel De Certeau, *The Writing of History*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988, 89.
6. See Christina Sharpe, *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.
7. M. NourbeSe Philip, *Zong!*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008, 196.
8. Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007.
9. Hartman, “Venus,” 9.
10. See: Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.
11. See: John Murillo III, *Quantum Blackanics: Untimely Blackness and Black Literature Out of Nowhere*, Ph.D. dissertation, Brown University, 2016.

- 12., Frank B. Wilderson III, *Red, White, & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010, 90.
13. See: Spillers, "Mama's Baby."
14. See: Sabine Broeck, *Gender and the Abjection of Blackness*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2018.
15. Wilderson, *Red, White, & Black*, 251.
16. Ibid.
17. Judith Butler, "Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy," in *Undoing Gender*. New York: Routledge, 2004, 17-39.
18. Wilderson, *Red, White, & Black*, 54-91.
19. See also: Aurelia Armstrong "Some Reflections on Deleuze's Spinoza: Composition and Agency," In *Deleuze and Philosophy: The Difference Engineer*, edited by K. Ansell Pearson. Abingdon: Routledge 1997, 44-57.
20. Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, translated by Robert Hurley. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988 [1970], 119.
21. See: Antonio Negri, *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.
22. In this sense, post-workerist (a.k.a. "autonomist") theorists influenced by Deleuze are one of the two main strands in the Marxian rediscovery of Spinoza, the other having been originated by the group of the *Reading Capital* project collaborating with Louis Althusser. The two strands are not necessarily in contrast but rather significantly overlap (see note 24).
23. Negri, *The Savage Anomaly*, xix.
24. In this regard, Pierre Macherey (whom Negri credits as one of the pioneers in revaluing Spinoza as a revolutionary thinker, emphasizes that in Spinoza nothing is determined by its negative, which is totally external to the essence of things (See: Pierre Macherey, *Hegel or Spinoza*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011, 189). An interesting contradiction would then open here for Negri, since this position would seem to deny the possibility, in practical terms, of antagonism as the irreconcilable opposition between entities that, *sans* the obliteration of one of them, define themselves through that very impossibility of reconciliation. Macherey detects in fact here an affinity between Spinoza and Kant's notion of "negative magnitude" in ways that even seem to suggest the impossibility for Western philosophy to think of antagonism (as well as of something that can be itself and its contrary at the same time) outside of purely logical terms. On the other hand, the reality of material antagonisms is central to Black thought, not only Wilderson's Afropessimism, but also a long trajectory of reflections on blackness in the modern world as "full" and "empty" at the same time, or deprived of Human wholeness while remaining the object of endless libidinal and discursive impositions (See: Jared Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiculturalism*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008; Rizvana Bradley, "Living in the Absence of a Body: The (Sus)Stain of Black Female (W)holeness," *Rhizomes* 29 [2016])
25. Wilderson, *Red, White, & Black*.
26. Negri, *The Savage Anomaly*, 54.
27. Benedict de Spinoza, *The Ethics (Ethica Ordine Geometrico Demonstrata)*, translated by R.H.M. Elwes. London: George Bell and Sons, 1883 [1677], D1. Hereafter cited parenthetically in-text.
28. Denise Ferreira da Silva elaborates on how the Cartesian mind-body separation is foundational for the philosophical project of Western subjectivity and how it opens the way to raciality and the self-constitution of whiteness as necessary to thinking the autonomy and "unaffectedness" of the modern subject. See: Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.
29. Negri, *The Savage Anomaly*, 65.
30. Spinoza, Quoted in Ibid., 66.
31. Ibid.
32. See: Paolo Virno, *Il ricordo del presente: Saggio sul tempo storico*. Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1999.
33. See: Franco Barchiesi, "Precarity as Capture: A Conceptual Deconstruction of the Worker-Slave Analogy," in *On Marronage: Ethical Confrontations with Antiblackness*, edited by P. Khalil Saucier and Tryon P. Woods. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2015, 177-206.
34. Antonio Negri, *Cinque lezioni di metodo su moltitudine e Impero*. Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2003, 33.

35. In this very sense, my use of “equilibrium” is mindful of Simondon’s distinction between “stable” and “metastable” equilibrium, or equilibrium that is constantly generative of new potential and becoming. See: Gilbert Simondon, “The Genesis of the Individual,” in *Incorporations*, edited by Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter. New York: Zone Books, 1992, 297-319.
36. See: Frédéric Lordon, *Willing Slaves of Capital: Marx and Spinoza on Desire*. London: Verso, 2014.
37. Jason Read, “Of Labor and Human Bondage: Spinoza, Marx, and the ‘Willing Slaves’ of Capitalism,” *Los Angeles Review of Books*, December 9, 2014 (<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/labor-human-bondage-spinoza-marx-willing-slaves-capitalism/#!>, accessed May 26, 2018).
38. Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002, 35.
39. See: Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013.; Jasbir K Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007.
40. See: Patrice Douglass, “At the Intersections of Assemblages: Fanon, Capécia, and the Unmaking of the Genre Subject,” in *Conceptual Aphasia in Black: Displacing Racial Formation*, edited by P. Khalil Saucier and Tryon P. Woods. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016, 103-126.
41. Similarly, Lindon Barrett observes how, by *a priori* decreeing the excommunication of Africa from historical time and the possibility of Human civilization, Hegel paradoxically makes his entire philosophy of history and schemata of progress thinkable out of, therefore dependent on, what is excommunicated, racial Blackness. See: Lindon Barrett, *Racial Blackness and the Discontinuity of Western Modernity*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2013, 82.
42. Wilderson, *Red, White, & Black*, 275.
43. See: Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, “Losing Manhood: Animality and Plasticity in the (Neo)Slave Narrative,” *Qui Parle* vol. 25, no. 1-2 (2016): 95-136.
44. Saidiya Hartman, “The Belly of the World: A Note on Black Women’s Labors,” *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society* vol.18, no. 1 (2016): 166
45. Ibid.
46. Tyrone S. Palmer, “‘What Feels More Than Feeling?’: Theorizing the Unthinkability of Black Affect,” *Critical Ethnic Studies* vol. 3, no. 2 (2017): 37.
47. Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging*. Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2001, 7.
48. Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 203.
49. Ibid.
50. Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003, 223.