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Propter Nos

Volume 3

Anti- / Non-

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Introduction:

Anti- / Non-

The intertwined domains of political action and critical thought have undergone a renewed interest in the "anti-" and the "non-" as generative frameworks and approaches. This issue of *Propter Nos* is interested in the relationship between these two prefixes, generally thought to index a *negative* orientation toward any given concept or practice. The critical fervor surrounding "the negative" often fails to provide a safe home for such thinking and practice. More often than not, this posture is ostracized, considered "unproductive," heretical, and criminal—all designations which fall heavily on those positioned as the 'negativity' civil society aims to liquidate: the Black, the Prison Slave, the Native. From this perspective, the negative blemishes the neatness of "rational" and liberal-progressivist thinking; it stubbornly and myopically forecloses possibility and plentitude in favor of despair and fatalism. Due to this general aversion to the negative, the finer points of detail between various articulations of negativity are often collapsed, and any sense of nuance is evacuated from this discussion.

Thinking with/in the negative, not merely as a psycho-affective register but as an amorphous system of philosophical sensibilities and theoretical dispositions that tarry with negation as the locus of structural critique, this issue considers the following questions: Are "anti-" and "non-" collapsible terms? Are the "anti-" and/or "non-" only thinkable in opposition to an affirmative posture; or, is there a mode of accounting for the space between, and outside of, these terms? What do "anti-" and/or "non-" offer as *approaches* to aesthetic practice, political action, or theoretical inquiry, rather than mere descriptors? What is the generative potential of the (perceived) passivity or resignation of orientations toward the "anti-" and/or "non-"? And need there be the promise of generativity in order to ground a politics?

The contributions in this issue grapple with these questions by considering various permutations of the anti-/non-. While they tend to the theme from a range of approaches, they share a general inclination toward expanding and interrogating the limits of conventional idioms of the critical, radical, and insurgent. Many of the contributions question a general fidelity to critical theory's explanatory power by exposing the fact that its coherence is dependent on Black social death. This questioning takes a variety of forms, including: writing alternative and unfamiliar histories of medicine, feeling, sexuality, and racial capitalism; a crucial repurposing of critical theory and "the psychoanalytic," to ask questions that provide different understandings of embodiment, gender, desire, the erotic, and absence; and foregrounding repudiated and undertheorized knowledges—specifically, unorthodox approaches to Black feminism, which tend-toward the murderous fantasies of the

Fellow in Critical Theory and Art History at Northwestern University, Evanston. Joja was also part of the editorial collective of publication, *New Frank Talk: Essays on the Black Condition*. His writing has appeared in publications such as *The Mail* and *Guardian*, *Art Throb*, *Contemporary And (C&)*, *Chimurenga Chronic*, and *Africanah*.

Le'ah Kaplan is a student and scholar based in Chicago, Illinois. Le'ah holds an MA in Philosophy and Art from Stony Brook University. Her work seeks to articulate the phenomenology of Blackness.

Ivan Kilgore is a revolutionary abolitionist activist and peer mentor currently serving a life-sentence in Vacaville, California (Cal State Prison Solano) for a first-degree murder charge. Some of his organizing experience includes work within or collaboration with organizations such as Free Alabama Movement (FAM) and IWW Incarcerated Worker's Organizing Committee (IWOC), as well as True Leap Press (collaboration through our distro). He is the co-founder of Black Family Scholarship Foundation, an organization built to support the education of social prisoners in not only traditional academic study but in traditions of Black revolutionary consciousness. Ivan is also an aspiring writer with several books, zines, and creative projects in the making.

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Jonathan Jacob Moore, or Jon Jon, is a Detroit-born Oakland-based poet. He is a Ph.D. Student in the Department of African American and African Diaspora Studies at University of California, Berkeley, and a 2017 National Collegiate Slam Best Poet. You can find their work in *DRØME*, *The James Franco Review*, *RaceBaitR*, and *Vinyl* among others.

Tyrone S. Palmer is a writer and scholar currently living in Chicago, Illinois. He is a member of True Leap Press and editor of *Propter Nos*.

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Dylan Rodríguez is a Professor of Media and Cultural Studies at the University of California, Riverside, and was elected Chair of the UCR Academic Senate by his faculty peers in 2016 and again in 2018. The author of two books and more than fifty published essays, Dr. Rodríguez has helped build the foundations for three emergent scholarly fields: critical carceral studies, critical ethnic studies, and critical Filipino studies. He has spoken and written in a wide cross-section of scholarly and popular venues, including *Social Text, Huffington Post Live, American Quarterly, The Real News Network*, and *Radical History Review*. His thinking, writing, and teaching focus on how regimes of social liquidation, cultural extermination, physiological evisceration, and racist terror become normalized features of everyday life in the alleged "post-civil rights" and "post-racial" moments. He asks, What forms of collective genius and creativity emerge from such conditions, and how do these insurgencies envision—and practice—transformations of power and community?

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Contributors

Franco Barchiesi is an associate professor in African American and African Studies and Comparative Studies at the Ohio State University. A senior editor of the journal *International Labor and Working-Class History* and a former fellow at the Hutchins Center for African & African American Research at Harvard University, Barchiesi has also taught at the University of the Witwatersrand (South Africa) and the University of Bologna (Italy). His latest book is *Precarious Liberation: Workers, the State, and Contested Social Citizenship in Postapartheid South Africa*. He is currently working on two manuscripts, a study of how contemporary conceptualizations of crisis and precarity are ontoepistemically grounded in anti-Blackness, and an analysis of liberalism as a modality of racial domination across the Atlantic world between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Dhanveer Singh Brar is a scholar of Black Studies, as it intersects with Cultural Studies, Sound Studies and Critical Theory. The research he undertakes covers theorizations of black diasporic sonic culture from the mid-twentieth century to the present, and the racial politics of critical thought. At present he is working on a book manuscript analyzing electronic dance music, urban geography and sonic ecologies in the contemporary diaspora of the Global North. He is a Lecturer in the Department of Visual Cultures, at Goldsmiths, University of London.

Nicholas Anthony Eppert received his B.A. in Philosophy from Franklin and Marshall College in 2011 and his M.A. in Media, Culture and Communication (MCC) from NYU in 2018. He focuses generally on contemporary French theory, critical race theory (especially Afro-Pessimism), queer theory, political economy and psychoanalysis, and is more specifically interested in articulating the psychoanalytic interrelations between Blacks, Asian-Americans and Indigenous peoples. He is applying to Ph.D. programs for Fall 2019 as well as for a clinical license to practice psychoanalysis.

JoNina Abron-Ervin is a journalist, retired educator, and a former member of the Detroit chapter of the Black Panther Party. As a writer, teacher and organizer, she has helped organize numerous efforts over the course of decades, including the anti-apartheid movement and campaigns against police terror. She is the author of the book *Driven by Movement: Activists of the Black Power Era*.

Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin is an anarchist writer, organizer, and former political prisoner who came up through the Black Panther Party in the 1960's. Among other works, he is the author of the book *Anarchism and the Black Revolution*, which introduces the principles of class struggle anarchism and discusses its relevance to the black liberation struggle.

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Casey Goonan is a white abolitionist/anti-imperialist student and scholar-activist presently living in Chicago, IL. He is a member of True Leap Press and an editor of *Propter Nos*.

Athi Mongezeleli Joja is an art critic based in Johannesburg, South Africa. A member of the art collective Gugulective, he is currently studying toward his MFA at the University of the Witswatersrand on the critical practice of late critic Colin Richards. He was recently a Predoctoral Andrew Mellon

Black feminine. Throughout the issue there is also a focus on performance and the aesthetic. Multiple contributors offer accounts of (the politics of)"form," while also fleshing out the frictions within, and ends of, politicized performance. Specifically, contributors offer vital polemics against "work," upward mobility, mass imprisonment, and the politics of action.

The recurrent fascisms that define the present conjuncture pose new challenges, inviting us to revise our hopeful investments in the politics of action(lessness); to experiment with ways of doing (or *doing away with!*) politics. The contributors stretch the theme from California to Jamaica, South Africa, the U.K., Sierra Leone, and The Bahamas, demonstrating that Black Negativity is a global concern, reducible neither to the United States, nor any nation-state. Rather than arriving at a concrete set of answers or prescriptions, this third issue of *Propter Nos* seeks to expose the contours of the negative, whose power and scale we have yet to fully grasp. This orientation might direct us toward the world's necessary dissolution; toward a new poetics of the propter nos.

Flora & Fauna

Jon Jon Moore

"I was never non-violent. Never."
—Nina Simone

I remember how the red & brown scorpion
orchids inhaled my neck
aroused by the lingering aroma
apocalyptic. Something familiar.
Foxgloves begging to be pollinated
raw.

Can you blame me for wanting
every garden
to burn? For wanting
the gazanias & roses to bloom
on my side
of becoming—
for the world to wear
this color of birth?

To be Black Pansy/ to be
Black Hellebore
hivemind
then
was to kill anyone
presumptuous enough
to pluck & pot & watch us
make their property
a home watch us make a home
out of every other owned until garden
variety gone—until pesticide parade.

Yes, to watch
was to wound.
Yes, to desire
in the past
I think

in. For me, it seems as if the concept of safety, in this world, is dangerous. Since safety, in this world, is ensured and curated through the Police, the State, the Prison system, the Clinic, Anti-Blackness and so on and so forth. Yet as Achille Mbembe once said, "Freedom might be coterminous with madness." Thus, perhaps our project, contra Baldwin, is first recognizing the inevitability of Blackness as monstrosity as that which always already appears to the World as constituting a threat to safety, and to care for that monstrosity with a fervor that can only but lead to exhaustion. And once exhaustion is reached, we must pause, care for self, and then, care some more.

This is why I do not offer a romantic promotion of radical care nor radical violence. Both radical care and/or radical violence will only result in the exponentialization of violence on behalf of the World since they rattle its foundations which is gratuitous black death. Black Lives Matters is in no way, shape, or form a movement of radical violence, instead it is a movement of radical care which has been continuously repressed and suppressed by the State. Hence, I say hysterical strength only leads to more violence because the evidence from history seems to suggest that there is no way out but care or violence and both of these result in the suspension of safety and thus more streams of violence albeit in different forms. We can only ever become exhausted in a world where insurgency—as care or as violence—is not the basis of safety, but rather the basis through which safety is suspended in hopes of obtaining something that could only ever be thought of, at least to this world, as madness. In the words of Saidiya Hartman, "No one wants to be as free as Black people would make them."

I leave you with this and encourage you, in your exhaustion, to grant yourself unconditional love. The World goes on and we need you.

With care in struggle,

John Gillespie Jr.

to free his father pinned underneath,
or a camper fighting off a grizzly
with her bare hands until someone,
a hunter perhaps, can shoot it dead,
my thoughts turn to black people-
the hysterical strength we must
possess to survive our very existence,
which I fear many believe is, and
treat as, itself a freak occurrence.

To Stevie,

I would like to first thank you for engaging my words and thoughts. In times like these, when the world seems all but put together, it is crucial that we continue to work to transgress barriers that make lines of communication next to impossible. I am glad to have been a part of *Propter Nos*, and to have written something that abolitionists from out and inside of Prisons can fruitfully engage with and be inspired by. I hope that you find my responses to your questions equally as useful as the writing that generated them.

With this being said, I would actually like to start by tackling your questions on white hyper-realism and its internalization by non-white folks. My short response to your question is: Everyone is implicated by white hyper-realism since the constitution of the modern world was cofounded by the violence that white hyper-realism signifies. It is an inescapable map of reality because its language, systems, institutions, concepts, economy, knowledge, and desires are the means through which we all must speak our suffering, under its own rubric of gains and appeals, as a result of the metaphysical violence that alters the world in accordance to the ends of anti-Blackness.

As Frantz Fanon wrote as a way of introducing his classic *Black Skin, White Masks,* "Blacks are men who are black; in other words, owing to a series of affective disorders they have settled into a universe from which we have to extricate them. The issue is paramount. We are aiming at nothing less than to liberate the black man from himself." In other words, the entirety of the book is focused on the immense difficulty of trying to free the Black from itself when it exists in an anti-Black world that abolishes any potential coherence between a notion of a Black being and "metaphysics" outside the "two systems of reference" (the Black self/World and the Anti-Black self/World) that characterize anything that could be thought of as a Black consciousness. Put simply, if white people fucked up the *universe*, then anyone internal to that *universe* has been touched by the fact of this transgression.

Thus, with this being said, it is difficult for me to answer how we can relate to people suffering from this "pathological fixation" or, in your words, a "psychosis" which structurally permits them to see what is, in fact, not there—especially since as a result of the ontic histories of anti-Black violence, we all are now implicated in such a system of seeing and further, especially since paradoxically it seems that only through acknowledging the fact of blackness can we get out of the wormhole that is the world of anti-Blackness. My only guess is that we may have only two options available to us as a means to procure a sense of safety either now or in the future: radical care and/or radical violence. For to care for a Black body is to do violence to the World and to do violence to the World is to care for a Black body.

Yet to care radically is to suspend safety just as radical violence is an absolute decompression of safety. And this is where the hysterics come

was to speak of flowers
tearing apart human
limbs & burying them
in our gaudy backyards.

(Non)Presence: The Hole of Metaphysics

Le'ah Kaplan

"...the end of metaphysics is unthinkable without the end of colonialism and Eurocentrism..."[1]

September 8, 2017: Tourists arrive at Lynden Pindling Airport in Nassau, Bahamas. They are greeted by Black steel drum players and Bahamians dressed in Junkanoo costumes, dancing and welcoming them to Paradise. The tourists smile and dance, take pictures and move on to their hotels on the neighboring—and aptly named—Paradise Island, accessible by bridge: a metaphorical crossing of the tracks. When they reach the hotel's main entrance, Black doormen smile, greet them, and take their bags. They are checked-in by Black front desk agents. They unlock their rooms, freshly cleaned by an entirely Black housekeeping staff. They drink. Their bartenders are Black. They head to the Straw Market on West Bay Street with all the other white tourists to buy handmade bags, fans, and coasters made from straw. They walk to Fish Fry and eat conch salad and red snapper. They snorkel, they jet-ski, they swim with the dolphins. They dance to that same steel drum music and go back to the hotel, with its black doorman, black desk agent, and black housekeepers.

September 9, 2017: HURRICANE WARNINGS REMAIN IN EFFECT FOR THE NORTHWEST AND CENTRAL BAHAMAS AND RAGGED ISLAND. THIS INCLUDES THE ISLANDS OF GRAND BAHAMA, ABACO, BIMINI, THE BERRY ISLANDS, ANDROS, NEW PROVIDENCE, ELEUTHERA, EXUMA, LONG ISLAND, CAT ISLAND, RUM CAY, SAN SALVADOR, AND RAGGED ISLAND. A HURRICANE WARNING MEANS THAT HURRICANE CONDITIONS ARE AFFECTING OR CAN AFFECT THE AFOREMENTIONED AREAS WITHIN 36 HOURS.

White flight. This is no longer Paradise.

Geneva Cooper, senior director of hotel licensing in Nassau Bahamas, announced that all cruise lines due to arrive in the country had been diverted to "other destinations" in anticipation of the Category 4 storm (Hurricane Matthew).

My mother calls. Her husband is in Barbados doing a carpentry job. She is not allowed to check into Atlantis, the hotel on Paradise Island. She doesn't have access

Pilar Maschi, Haymarket Books, AK Press, True Leap Press, *Signs* and *GLQ* for the work you're doing. When you're feeling frustrated or doubtful, remember that you are helping so many people, especially those of us behind the walls, better understand the world and effectively struggle against oppression. You are appreciated.

As for your True Leap Press—I previously wrote thanking you for sending me *Propter Nos* and informing you that I would send some comments from my reading group. Our group is abolitionist. We are always eager to learn. Your publication created a lively discussion. We thank you. I want to share some parts of those discussions with you.

Your definition of "insurgency" (proper) aptly describes the only way for prisoners to successfully struggle behind these walls. We remain decentralized as a way to avoid detection and retaliation from the administration. We use multiple strategies, tactics and contexts to do our work also. We stay on our toes to keep the system on its toes. This work inevitably leads to exhaustion.

Many activists don't talk about exhaustion. I'm continually thinking about what we need to do to take care of ourselves and continue this fight. Tourmaline (formerly Reina Gossett) says: "*The Prison Industrial Complex doesn't just affect our material condition but also our spirits, psyches, and connection to the land, so any meaningful response and resistance has to be about more than material condition*." This is the work that is often neglected. We focus on external practices and forget the internal practices.

Focusing on internal practices means slowing the work down sometimes. This work. Internal practices, must be done in community. The work that SONG (Southerners on New Ground) is doing speaks to this need. By slowing the work down and tending to our inner selves, we strengthen ourselves thereby avoiding burnout. We're pleased that you chose to highlight this topic because oftentimes it's not approached until after something has terribly gone wrong.

Elsewhere in the issue, John Gillespie writes: "Blackness 'exists' only insofar as White Being structures it onto a map of anti-black violence." He goes on to quote Achille Mbembe: "When the racist sees the Black person, he does not see that the Black person is not there, does not exist, and is just a sign of pathological fixation on the absence of a relationship."

How do we relate to people suffering from this psychosis? How does one achieve safety and well-being among them? Gillespie says: "The reality that replaces that which is, is a white hyper-reality. This hyper-realism is the paradigm whereby consciousness is unable to distinguish between the fictions created by White being and the Real." Do others, besides whites, suffer from white hyper-realism? Can Black people suffer from it too?

Nicole Sealey has a poem in her latest collection, "Ordinary Beasts," that speaks about "hysterical strength," which is what Black people are required to have to endure the gratuitous violence meted out upon us daily. It's ironic how Gillespie flips the outcome: displaying hysterical strength leads to more violence. Here is Sealey's poem:

Hysterical strength

When I hear news of a hitchhiker
struck by lightning yet living,
or a child lifting a two-ton sedan

English translation of Yumil's letter:

I am a citizen of the sovereign Republic of Cuba and I was born in the municipality Regla-Havana, where the primary religion is Santería. It is a town that was created in the decade of slavery where the cradle of the Afro-Cuban religion was born. I am proud of my African ancestors, who raised me in a beautiful ancestral religion.

Today I am imprisoned in a state prison in the state of Pennsylvania. I arrived in this country during the exodus from Guantanamo Bay in 1993.

But no, it was not easy for me. Thanks to my military preparation I've been able to calm my PTSD caused by the missions that I participated in, like in Angola, Nicaragua, Ukraine and Colombia. Being imprisoned I have known and understood, and even studied about the oppression encountered because of culture, race, and origin enacted by the American white pigs and their government. We have been able to form a small group that day-by-day is growing, through which we are going to fight with force to confront capitalist oppression.

Even when we march they oppress us, so with our strength we will make the government squeal. This fight will be both internal and external. We cannot therefore say if we will win. But with pride in our hearts we can be sure that we will wound the serpent.

They have hurt me in prison. They have given me strong blows. They have left me for 18 hours handcuffed with my eyes swollen. They have left me lying like a dog.

But in this life, what goes around comes around.

I hope to hear from you soon.

God Bless You.

Stephen Wilson; LB8480
State Correctional Institution, Smithfield
P.O. Box 999, 1120 Pike St.
Huntingdon, PA 16652

As 2018 winds down, I want to take the time to thank you for your support, efforts, and generosity. You have enabled me to learn and convey a great deal this year. You have helped me better organize behind the walls. When we needed help to fight PA DOC's onerous mail policy, you were there. I thank you. I am grateful to have you—a patient ear and wise tongue—in my life. Words cannot adequately convey my appreciation so I work everyday to become a better person and ally behind these walls. This is my gratitude in practice.

It is my hope that moving into the new year '19 our connection strengthens. I hope to contribute more to the struggle and deepen my understanding and practice. I hope that together we move another step closer to building a world that values all our lives, or at least abolishing the oppressive one that exists today.

I want to specifically thank certain people. While many have contributed to my education and practice, these people have been mainstays of support and understanding: Dean Spade, Dan Berger, Charlotte Pope, Sarah Jane Rhee, Emily Abendroth, John Rowland, Suzy Martin, Black & Pink, and Critical Resistance.

I want to thank Eric Stanley, Che Gossett, Mariame Kaba, Joy James, Andrea J. Ritchie, Beth Richie, Reina Gossett, Liat Ben-Moshe, Toussaint Losier, Darnell L. .Moore, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Dylan Rodriguez, Maya Schenwar, Monica Trinidad,

to Paradise. She says that they are not allowing Black Bahamians to check into the hotel.

In times of catastrophe, The Bahamas' (non)presence constitutes a shifting existence from Paradise (presentable) to shithole (unpresentable). Presentable as that which is desirable, but presence as that which undergirds and constitutes Being in the world. Presence is the violent structure of metaphysics that allows for U.S. to imag(in)e itself.

In January 2018, while discussing immigration and the visa lottery system, United States President Donald Trump referred to Haiti as a "shithole" country. "Why do we need more Haitians, take them out." He continued by "questioning" why the United States would want immigrants from "all these shithole countries," if presented with immigrants from Scandinavian non-"shithole" countries, like Norway.

Trump, along with other wealthy white Americans, owns property in the Caribbean—specifically, a $28 million estate in St. Martin. The Caribbean is understood in terms of excess: at once a site of consumption and leisure, and waste, a "shithole." This coexisting mode of relation undergirds the fungibility of Black place. By Black place, I am referring to places like The Bahamas that are transformed into infinitely usable spaces. Catastrophes, like hurricanes and earthquakes, reveal the multiple ways Blackness is captured within language and structures of thought—maintaining and sustaining antagonistic systems of antiblackness that impact islands like The Bahamas and Haiti. Mediocre infra-structure—lack of proper emergency communications center (help!), desalination units (water), generators (light), proper water drainage (hygiene)—fails those who are most vulnerable, thereby reinforcing the naturalized distinctions between Blacks and whites. It is this "world-constituting violence," as Calvin Warren puts it, that maintains the force of distinction between the presence of the U.S. and the non-presence of The Bahamas.

In the ensuing lines, I will outline the antagonistic systems of functionality—a term used by Warren to evoke the equipmental character[2] of Blackness—between the U.S. and The Bahamas that are revealed after catastrophe, and emerge through the structure of presence, the metaphysical concept that frames living, recognition, and Being. In doing so, we will see the violence of presence that structures thought and why non-presence accounts for the ways that Black spaces like The Bahamas are instrumentalized and erased, preconditioning the presence, realization, and recognition of the U.S.

Shit-holes

When Trump referred to "shithole" countries, we understood this to be code for "countries where mostly black people live." In David Marriott's essay, "On

Decadence: Bling Bling," he opens by quoting a piece of graffiti he saw in a bathroom of his school when he was younger, it reads: "What's the difference between a nigger and a bucket of shit? The bucket."[3] Black is "shit," that which is excess, surplus, unthinkable, undesirable, and unintelligible. Blackness is consumed, digested, and shat out. The product of white consumption is black shit. Black is 'hole', a "terrifying hole." Black is nothing, Black is the abyss, Black is that which "is not heard, [that which] remains silent, secret, and discreet as a tomb…"[4] This excess (shit) silence (hole) is the "tomb of the proper in which is produced…the economy of death."[5]

The economy of death of différance, as Jacques Derrida puts it, "cannot be apprehended in speech, and…also bypasses the order of apprehension in general."[6] It is that which is "read but cannot be heard" between the *e* of difference and the *a* of différance.[7] Différance for Derrida exists as temporization and spacing. A temporal deferment and spatial arrangement. Perhaps this can also extend to the movement that is Blackness. Blackness circulates in the body of language through displacement. The Bahamas moves from the site of relaxation (Paradise) until it becomes time again for it to become the site of repulsion (shit). Blackness must be evacuated. The meaning is infinitely deferred to accommodate the infinite assemblages of Black existence. This deferral is felt by Black Bahamians like my mother, who are turned away when there is no more accommodation (in Paradise) except for at the door, behind the desk, or behind the toilet.

Derrida so accurately captures the impossibility of presence for Blackness when he asks us to think différance as twofold, "economic detour…and…an impossible presence, as expenditure without reserve, as the irreparable loss of presence, the irreversible usage of energy, that is, as the death instinct, as the entirely other relationship that…interrupts every economy."[8] The denial of resources to Bahamians, the deferral of means of subsistence, the irreparable loss of life, the usage of labor and land, that is Blackness' place in the economy.

Through Afro-Pessimism, we come to learn that Blackness is unintelligible, an object—dead. That which is "read but cannot be heard," is perhaps the Black body buried in the hole; only the tombstone remains to be read. Blackness is the remainder. "To be Black is to exist in exchange without standing in the modern world system."[9] Blackness exists in an economy of death with society at-large, wherein the death of the Black object is always already in an order of exchange.

~~I am~~ shit
~~I am~~ hole

you actually begin? It wasn't until I read bell hooks (*Feminism is for Everybody* and *We Real Cool: Black Men & Masculinity*) that I understood my own subtle and occasionally overt tendency to think and act out in patriarchal and homophobic ways that I had to consciously correct. One thing I also appreciate about her analysis is her insistence that both men and women can be perpetrators of patriarchal violence.

As for the books you sent, they rejected *Propter Nos* because it contained a poem promoting violence. Toni Morrison they rejected because all books are required to come straight from the publisher or an approved vendor (amazon, barnes & noble). And the anarchist book was also rejected from not coming from an approved vendor. Usually Xeroxed books are allowed through…. I know, it's a headache. I'm sorry you had to waste your money and time on postage, stamps etc. But it's to be expected right? How can we expect an enemy, the oppressor to help educate the oppressed out of their situation. It just wouldn't be intelligent on their behalf. It's just like when slaves were outlawed from learning to read and write.

Clenched fist!

Yumil Pérez #JG2234
SCI-Somerset
1600 Walters Mill Rd
Somerset, PA, 15510

Soy ciudadano de la República de Cuba soberana nací y me crie en el municipio Regla-Ciudad Habana, donde la religión lider es la santería. Es un pueblo que nació desde la década de la esclavitud donde se crió la cuna de la religión afrocubana del cual me siento orgulloso por mis ancestros Africano cual me crié en una religión bella ancestral.

Hoy me encuentro preso en una prisión estatal de estado de Pennsylvania. Llegue a este pais cuando el éxodo de Guantanamo Bay en el 1993.

Pero no, me fue nada facil, gracias a mi preparación militar e podido calmar mi (PTSD) a causa de las misiones que participe como en Africa-Angola, Nicaragua, Ukrania y Colombia. Estando preso e sabido y e comprendido que aun lo estudiado sobre la opresión encontró de culturas, raza y origen por parte de los puercos blancos americano y su gobierno e podido realizar un pequeño grupo que día a día va creciendo, cual vamos a luchar con fuerza encontrar del capitalismo opresor.

Ya que con marcha de paz nos oprimen, entonces con fuerzas llorarán el gobierno, esta guerra sera interna y externa, no podemos decir que vamos a ganar, pero con orgullo en nuestros corazones podemos estar agradecido que vamos a herir a la serpiente.

Me han herido en la prisión, me han dado golpes fuertes, me han dejado 18 horas esposado con los ojos inchado, me han dejado Tirado como un perro.

Pero todo en esta vida se paga.

Espero saber pronto de ustedes.

God Bless You.

❖

Letters to the Editor

Thomas Young 491506
Marquette Branch Prison
1960 U.S. Highway 41 South
Marquette, MI 49855

I was recently reading a book you may have read, titled *The Rise & Fall of California's Radical Prison Movement,* in which the author details the origins of radicalism in the California penal system. One of the central themes of the book he argues is that most prisoners weren't actually politicized, that they took advantage of those currents, the political environment, using politics to advance their own so-called "criminal" agendas and that many supporters on the outside as well weren't truly invested in abolition, but rather superficially attracted to individual figures such as the George Jackson's and Eldridge Cleaver's of the time.

In one fell swoop this author discredited the entire prison liberation movement by distorting and cherry picking a few isolated examples. I believe it's folks like that, his perspective among many other viewpoints from the pig's perspective is what's been dominating the media, the narrative, and people's overall perception over the past 30 plus years when we think of prisons and poor people who occupy them. It's what's been stifling the movement and any forward progress. That, along with the absence of a clear, comprehensive, aggressive abolitionist praxis.

When I look at the multi-billion-dollar industry they've created in crime dramas, murder mysteries, reality t.v., etc., essentially, they've narrowed it down to a very basic, generic formula of justifying oppression through finding defects in victims of oppression. An industry that's acquired legitimacy and influence, in part because entertainers and academics, many of mediocre talent, (have you seen Ice-T in Law & Order?!) are its paid spokespersons. Our conception of how we view "crime," who commits crime, what constitutes a "criminal" here in the U.S. is so etched in our psyche, programmed into our thought process that even the most well-intentioned among us can be guilty of viewing crime as synonymous with those of color, primarily Black. In *Blood in My Eye* George Jackson alludes to the importance of a revolutionary culture, but doesn't go too far in depth on the subject. I think maybe perhaps this is something we should devote more thought to. Defining a praxis and culture that's clearly anti-establishment, anti-prison, anti-racist, to counter the current attitudes and status quo.

I read the zine you sent me by Andrea Smith, "Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy." I'm familiar with the term (heteropatriarchy). It's an historically accurate description of the current social order. There are and will be enough theories and concepts to explain oppression as there are people grappling with the fact that "something" must be done. I'm with whatever works to getting folks to think and act outside oppression. So I don't spend much time arguing over one theory over another. I begin where others are at, I mean, were else can

"Consumption [of the Black is driven by] domination and sadistic pleasure."[10] The white tourist reduces the Black in the Bahamas to a hole to be penetrated and shit to be disposed of.

Blackness is doubly consumed by society in order to fill itself with representation and subjectivity. "Blackness persists as the always already retrievable (bucketed) figure of human being emptied of its humanness: and this evacuation is itself the separation of human being from a black phenomenal matter that is shitty and abject."[11] White tourists consume Black labor, Black land, Black flesh, Black place. They come to have us serve them in hotels, have us call them "ma'am," and have sex with them. They come to feel whole, to allow their somethingness to emerge from the nothingness. As racially abject, the resemblance of Blackness to human being is a resemblance that antiblackness has to dispose of: it has to be evacuated."[12]

Presence

Presence: "ousia, Parousia (origin and end)…The founding principle as that toward which one moves."[13]

"Antiblackness: an accretion of practices, knowledge systems, and institutions designed to impose nothing[ness?] onto blackness and the unending domination/eradication of black presence as nothing incarnated."[14]

Being Human means that one can be-come present. To be present is to "be." Thus, the history of philosophical thought has endowed an "extraordinary right" to presence—giving way to the structures of reason, meaning, and the Good.

If we are to engage with metaphysics and the no(n)-thing of Blackness, we must engage with the concept of the metaphysics of presence. Presence within the tradition of metaphysics has been used as both a spatial and temporal signifier. *I am present and I live in the present.* It is what metaphysics has assumed to be an integral part of the Being of beings (ontology).[15]

Calvin Warren argues that Being is "the grand aperture that has provided the conditions for relationality for epochs…"[16] and beings instantiate themselves temporally and spatially. It is important that we grapple with the two dimensions that condition Being and being in the world. Derrida quotes Heidegger's note on Being: "The relation to what is present that rules in the essence of presencing itself is a unique one (*ist eine einzige*), altogether incomparable to any other relation. It belongs to the uniqueness of Being itself (*Sie gehort zur Einzigkeit des Seins selbst*)."[17] Derrida uses Heidegger here to illuminate the presence that is always already

present in Being. "Beings are grasped in their Being as 'presence'; this means they are understood with regard to a definite mode of time—the 'Present.'"[18] The character of Being, that which constitutes beings, is one of presence which always already *belongs* to being present. Being and Presence are *general* conditions of *particular* present beings.

As noted above, Being has provided the conditions for relationality for epochs. If this is true, then Presence must be taken seriously as a fundamental condition of Being. Thus, this/the metaphysical condition of Being, the fact of Being as situated in the present, is specific to the Human.

Derrida explains, "...that which bears within it a certain *no-thing*, that which accommodates nonbeingness, cannot participate in presence, in substance, in beingness itself (ousia)."[19] This no-thing acknowledges the metaphysical lack of space for Blackness within the spatio-temporal limits of Presence and reveals that presence is itself a metaphysical vector that gives way to a destructive mode of functionality. "Metaphysics gives birth to black being through various forms of antiblack violence, and this birth is tantamount to death and worldlessness."[20] To have the power to come into the present and present your self is an ontological privilege inconceivable for Blackness. In this case, the U.S. is present because it utilizes the nothingness of The Bahamas to emerge as Being-Present.

Derrida notes, "one grants to the 'living present' the power of synthesizing traces and incessantly reassembling them."[21] To be present is to be endowed the power to reassemble nothingness, to render nothingness fungible. He continues by noting that "this privilege is the ether of metaphysics, the element of our thought that is caught in the language of metaphysics."[22] The living, in this case, are those that are not entombed in Blackness. The living are present and synthesize the (non)being or being[23] of those who are dead and not present. Trump (living) synthesizes the (non)being of Blackness when he articulates the phrase "shithole" countries. It is this utterance that traps Blackness in its metaphysical prison of not *being* present and being excluded from this metaphysical privilege.

A Note on Relation

Returning to the idea that Being serves as a condition of relation, we must acknowledge the idea of the relational to further grasp the violence of metaphysics and its structural hold on Black existence. One could argue that Édouard Glissant would be a more appropriate thinker within this conversation given his analysis of the poetics of relation in the Caribbean and the difference that emerges through this relation. However, because this piece serves to move away from the tradition

revolutionary organizers, create the conditions for revolutionary community organizing, we're going to have to reject this whole notion. And that's gonna be a big battle.

L: That's right.

J: A lot of people are gonna be saying "you have to vote." Well, you don't *have* to vote if the people who are running for office are not going to change the conditions in your community. Why do you have to vote for them? You *do not* have to vote for them. You could get your community to have its own community elections, where you choose people within your own community outside of the Democratic or Republican Party to be accountable to the people, to deal with the issues in your community. I see this as being a really key thing. There is too much focus on electoral politics right now. Until we get past it we're not going to be successful.

L: We need to create alternatives. We need to create people's assemblies that are independent and autonomous of all this garbage. And by doing this we can reach people and educate, organize, and put them in opposition to the government, the State. We should be fighting for dual power. We need to build a mass movement to free political prisoners, end mass imprisonment, especially among communities of color. We need to combat State violence from police and vigilantes, fight austerity and poverty imposed by the government. We need to defeat fascists in the streets *and* in the government and corporate suites. Start survival campaigns that begin to build a new economy to soften the blow of the collapse of this system, which is coming. We also need to build a black partisan/worker's militia. I'm not saying it will be done tomorrow or it should be done tomorrow, but we need to be doing these things if we are gonna go from oppression to liberation. I guess the main thing we can say is that we have to build an antfascist movement that is a movement fighting for revolution—for social revolution. If it's not ready to do that then it is just a defensive organization, which will be defeated in due time.

fascism. Especially when they are systematic police killings, where we've had essentially hundreds of thousands over the last few decades. We've had hundreds of thousands of people killed. And more killed by the United States in military conflict abroad. So we need to understand this as being a question of confronting the State. This rethinking is about that. We're asking organizers to begin to rethink. To understand that it is time to build a broader level of organization. Not just in the streets or a one-off protest. But to reach people on the everyday level and train them, so that *they* can then go and tell other people, and build organizations on a local level. It may just be block by block. We don't know. We've seen these things happen in the past. But they haven't been seen in this period. Therefore, we have to adopt new tactics. That's one of the things I would say.

Another thing is to bring together these movements, these different forces. Bring together the movement against police terrorism with the movement against mass imprisonment. Bring together all kinds of forces, including whatever is happening in particular communities. These fronts will differ from region to region, city to city, but whatever those contradictions are, whatever they're organizing around—you even got some churches that could be used! You got radical preachers, or whatever.

I think that's important to emphasize: the idea of community-based organizing is to reach masses of people, who you can educate and bring into the struggle. If you got in your whole movement 5,000 people, well then the objective is to bring in 50,000. And have those numbers and go out in the community and politically educate them. So that's what we need to do. We need to escalate our level of organizing and understanding as well. And we need to learn from past movements like the Black Panther Party. They practiced and created a whole movement of Black anti-fascism—or black-led anti-fascism. The actual conditions and the poverty of the masses of people requires us to organize a movement for food and housing, movements against imprisonment, and within the communities where so many go into prison create programs to reunite them, to offer transportation, and so forth. These are the kinds of programs we need to think about in this period. But on a broader scale. I even think we need to think about a poor people's survival movement. Or a "survival economy," if you want to call it that. This is something comrade George Jackson talks about in *Blood in My Eye* (1971). He talked about building these kinds of environments within a city that could feed people, and politically educate people, etc. He was of course basing this on the history of the Black Panther Party, and he saw it as a longer-term kind of thing. The creation of a resistance economy and a resistance movement that wasn't just armed self-defense, but about feeding people, housing, clothing you know. Those things that keep people going, as well as their own organizers.

J: And one of the things that really has to be done, especially right now, is we have to fight against this whole notion that we can use electoral politics. If we are going to build

of metaphysics and Humanism, Glissant's optimistic idea about the positive chaotic mode of difference that emerges via relation will not suffice to account for the nothingness that is Blackness. I am rather taking up Calvin Warren's argument from *Ontological Terror: Blackness, Nihilism, and Emancipation*, where he gives us a more fundamental critique of the onto-metaphysical status of black being. He argues that Blackness does not engage in relation because "black being's function within metaphysics is to inhabit the void of relationality."[24] Black being serves as *pure function* rather than relation because Blackness is merely there to "help the human being re-member its relation to Being through [Blackness'] lack of relationality."[25] While Warren invests in Being and its (mis)use of Blackness, my critique of presence emerges from the necessity to continue to acknowledge the remainder that metaphysics has left behind.

(Non) Presence

"This is catastrophic! I used to come here for summers as a young boy, I know these families, my God, look at this place, you wouldn't believe it looking at it now, but this place was paradise…"—Robert Carron (white) president of The Tribune Media Group in Crooked Island, Bahamas Post-Hurricane Joaquin in 2015.

"Time is not non-Being and non-Beings are not in time."[26]

"This place used to be Paradise." This is how the fungibility of the Bahamas' presence comes into "relief" after a catastrophe. What was once "Paradise" is quickly transformed into a shithole. The question we must ask is, *What is Black existence without presence?* (Just as Warren asks, "what is Black existence without Being?") For Warren, Blackness is nothing because it is objectified as nothing through the structure of metaphysics. His critique is that metaphysics and Blackness are incompatible in that, "objectification, domination, extermination of blacks [keeps] the metaphysical world intact."[27] Essentially, metaphysics is a double bind for Black existence, it refuses to grant humanity while also utilizing Blackness as a constitutive force for Humanity. "The world needs the Negro, even as it despises it."[28]

The Bahamas is the spatio-temporal remainder, it is excess and nothingness all at once within the metaphysical structure.

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white supremacy within the white working class. Who is gonna organize the white working class? To make *them* into revolutionaries. Clearly, as people of color that is not our responsibility. We cannot do it. We're too busy dealing with the stuff in our own communities. It is ultimately the primary responsibility of whites that say they're revolutionary forces to go in and begin transforming the white working class. Yet too many white radicals are unwilling to do this. They only want their work to be centered among peoples of color. And this is a big part of the problem; why we haven't made the type of progress we should be making in this country. Because no one on a serious level, in a really intense way is really trying to revolutionize the white working class in America. And unless we do that, we're ultimately going to fail. We're not going to be able to transform this society the way it needs to be transformed.

L: We're talking about a kind of lack of real consciousness not only about racism, but about the foundations in this country and about how this system really works. I've always said and tried to make people understand that this is a white republic that was created from slave labor—the conditions of slavery as a pedestal for the creation of American capitalism. And most so-called white radicals denounce that. Even though that doesn't come from me, that comes from Marx! [laughter] That comes from Karl Marx himself. It's quite interesting. This kind of thinking, of not understanding how this country was created and how it actually functions means that the movement will always make these kinds of ideological errors, where they see things from a white petty bourgeois perspective. This will always happen until they understand what's really happened. I mean people are being killed in this country. People are being tortured in prison. And all they can tell us is about some Nazi on the street. Nazi's have to be stopped, yes. But we need to understand that the greatest threat of fascism is State power. Fascism is a decayed capitalist system. And if we understand this, we will understand that these people in the streets are not yet linked to that but are creations *of* that. This is why Trump was, and is, able to use them—use their misery, use their unemployment, use their racism. And if we don't understand this, we can't ideologically defeat them. We have to combat the government itself. The fascist State.

C: What are some of the first steps you would like to see organizers in oppressed Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities take in the process of building a mass anti-fascist movement today? What are some steps we as readers and learners can make toward achieving the type of movement you are imagining?

L: Well, in actual fact, people *are* organizing now. It's not like they're not. Even though I have some differences of opinion with Black Lives Matters type groups, the fact that they came into existence and have been organizing during this period is important. But they need to take it to another level. We're saying that organizers and activists have to rethink tactically, and understand that community-based organizing where they politically educate the people in their communities is the key. We're telling people who are already doing this work to take a different approach, and think about this system in terms of being fascism. Take police killings for instance. Police killings are in fact

America. Why is it so important to understand how this regime operates? Why is it so important to expose it?

L: I use the term to demystify and delegitimatize the white Left, which is really only concerned with its own issues. It's not concerned with killings by the police, of Blacks and other peoples of color. They haven't been leading any movement about that and they haven't really been joining any movement around that. We talk about mass imprisonment. The huge numbers of Black people and other peoples of color that are going into the prison system. There has yet to be a *mass* movement against the targeted imprisonment of Black people and other peoples of color. We talk about all kinds of other attacks upon our communities, whether its conscious deprivation of the resources needed for our communities to survive. Poverty in other words. Austerity imposed poverty. These people don't fight that either. They are strictly concerned with the macho attacks on each other. Attacking a Nazi, punching him in the face. Sucker punch [laughter]. This is all they care about. It's infantile. And I even think its ineffective anyway. But it's just a reflection of the weakness and the paucity of an ideological understanding of the enemy. You know, they really are just fixated on physical confrontation.

Neither one of us is saying that this is not important, but that it cannot be the totality of your program. You got to be able to relate to oppressed people. Blacks and other peoples of color are *oppressed* people. At the most, you could say the white working class is *exploited* peoples. There's a difference. This country was based upon slavery and was based upon genocide and terror that empowered white people to build the United States of America. The land thefts from Indigenous people, and later the Méxicano people. All of these things went into building this imperial empire. If you are not fixated on anti-imperialist objectives then you clearly are just a passing trend; a white-led movement for ego gratification or something.

J: Within the white Left, in the United States anyway, there is a certain level of paternalism. Some on the white left—not saying all, but *some*—do have a paternalistic attitude, like they have to come in and save people of color. For some it's kind of like a missionary type of attitude. And again, I want to be clear I'm not saying it's true for all white radicals. But I have seen this kind of attitude in a fair number of them. As if people of color themselves do not have the strength or the ability and knowledge to be able to organize and fight for themselves. It is always going to be important for oppressed peoples to have autonomy and independence. We work with white radicals or other progressive whites on the left maybe, but peoples of color who are oppressed, we have the right to organize *ourselves*, to control our own struggles and our own liberation. We don't need people to come in and sort of tell us how to do it, and what to do. We know what needs to be done. We may need your help with resources and things. But we are, on whatever level, everyday experiencing these issues. So, there's that part of it: this sort of paternalistic part on behalf of some white radicals.

The other problem is that what's really been missing in recent years is that lack of effort and seriousness of most white radicals in terms of dealing with racism and

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housing, for their food, clothing, and other things, *that's definitely a form of State terror*. People have to survive on a day-to-day basis. So if you are going to build a community-based movement, you're gonna have to have a movement that deals with bread-and-butter survival issues. Everybody has to have a place to live, food, clothing, and shelter. And if you are not dealing with those issues then it's not going to be community-based. Because for people in the community these are the things they can relate to. It's not so isolated as going out to confront the Klan in a demonstration or a protest. You are talking about the everyday things that people need to survive. The point I'm making is that community-based has to deal with *people's everyday concrete material needs*, and it has to *organize* around those needs.

L: And we have to understand that fascism is longstanding. It isn't just coming at a certain moment and it's here. There has been a long-term crisis which the fascist regime has brought on. I can mention to you mass imprisonment: millions of people are already in concentration camps. This thing about "well he's gonna build concentration camps…" *He doesn't have to!* He's already got the biggest prison establishment in the world, created by previous American administrations. Whether it was the so-called liberal Obama administration or the administration we have now. It's been a longstanding creation. From the "war on drugs," which in itself was a program designed to create police militarism and mass imprisonment, to police killings. All the police killings. These are as a result of programs that the government created to produce a sense of crisis. It is also chemical warfare. Drugs, as a weapon of chemical warfare, and the ability of the police to come along and supposedly suppress it. Kicking people's doors in in the middle of the night. Shooting people on the street. All these things have been enabled by a fascist regime coming into existence.

We have to fight the government. It's the government who is the arch enemy and the purveyor of fascism. If we don't understand that and we think the real enemy is some punks in three-piece suits or polo shirts and so forth, if we think they are the enemy or the real ones to be feared, we are going in the wrong direction. It's no question they can be used at a later stage by a Trump or whoever the president is. Whoever the head of the so-called Party is will be able to use these forces. But at this stage we need to understand who the real enemy is and we need a way to fight back against the conditions that they are imposing on the people. We need a fight back movement.

We need a movement based in ordinary people, not in these people who consider themselves some kind of vanguard element. I reject vanguardism of this sort or any type. And I think it's necessary to build a broader-based antifascist movement, so that this movement can address the needs of the people; a movement of a new type. If anyone is going to be armed, and that time is fast approaching as well, it would be the people at large, as opposed to some kind of vanguard tendency or some hyper-macho tendency that is going out and fist fighting in the street, you know…. anti-Nazi sucker punch or something [laughter]. We need more than that.

C: Lorenzo, you use the term "Progressive Plantation" to describe the counter-revolutionary nature of the current, white-dominated progressive movement in North

corporations. This is what we need to understand in America. That this is not the same thing we saw in Italy. It's a new form. The fascists have been elected.

The fascists and crypto-fascists have been elected. And the government we have now is actually a United Front of different fascist tendencies. The Tea Party, the Christian Right, the various other groups within the Republican Party and outside the Republican Party, along with elements that are on Wall Street financing them.

So fascism is a complicated, tortured process of definition. But we do know what it is not. It's not just a bunch of street punks alone who have no political power. And that somehow they are the most dangerous element which produces fascism. That's what's captivated the Left at this point. The whole idea of battling right-wing tendencies in the streets. These "anti-fascists" are confused. But not only are they confused, they are being led by a type of romanticism and infantile Leftism that prevents them from being effective. There are really dangerous types of fascism that the State is capable of. It is the State that we have to fear. Whether it's led by Donald Trump or whomever. The State has been doing things to ensure that whenever the dictator got here, as the final solution, they'd have an easy time getting in, and doing what he or she needs to do. From that standpoint, I think fascism has different types of definitions wrapped into one, but also different kinds of contradictions. That's why it's so elusive.

One thing we can say, to be sure, is that it comes from the State and capital, it does not come from street punks. We're talking about a kind of vanguard versus vanguardism here, that has nothing to do with fighting fascism, whatsoever really. Or fighting racism for that matter. They are not trying to end white supremacy. They're trying to present themselves in contrast to certain forces, you know. Those forces are allegedly the evil ones and therefore white radicals are able to project themselves as the "good" white folks, versus the "evil," or the dangerous, treacherous white folks. Something like that. You know. It's just…*fanciful*. It doesn't do anything about racism. Whatsoever. It doesn't protect peoples of color. Or communities of color. Doesn't do any of that.

C: What does a community-based anti-fascist movement look like?

JoNina Abron-Ervin (J): Well if it's gonna be community-based, it has to deal with the impact of State authoritarianism on people's everyday lives. It can't be centered around just going out on a particular day to counter-demonstrate against the neo-Nazi's or the Klan. I'm not saying that that's not important. This is an important thing to do. But that is just sort of an episodic and event-based thing. You have to have an ongoing program to deal with the impact of this kind of authoritarian control over people's lives, and in terms of police terror and State repression. We even have to look at the issues that have to deal with people's every day survival; their ability to have a place to live, their ability to buy food—what we call the "survival issues." For instance, it had not necessarily begun in any really major way yet, but elements of the neo-fascist Trump regime have already said they want to eliminate social security. Okay, now, many people will say "social security? That doesn't have anything to do with fascism!" Well, if the State prevents people from being able to have income, to support themselves, for their

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Given the all-encompassing nature of presence, presencing, and the present as the de facto mode of Being in the world, it is of great import to acknowledge that those whose remains lie outside of presence, are spatially and temporally unstable and fungible within metaphysical systems of thought. Simply, the spatio-temporal metaphysical structure is unable to accommodate Blackness as such. The Bahamas cannot be in the world without being vulnerable to catastrophe, the U.S. maintains its stability and presence as impenetrable by rendering Black places like The Bahamas hyper-vulnerable and (non)present. This is because metaphysics, as Warren notes, gives way to a metaphysical Holocaust. "The metaphysical holocaust is violence without end, violence, constitutive of a metaphysical world. It is a 'violence that continuously repositions the Black as a void of historical movement. This void and stasis of temporal linearity is precisely the nothing that blacks incarnate."[30]

The void is the hole in which the Black lies and through which Blackness exists. Blackness is a-voided. The Bahamas is repositioned and repositioned and repositioned…temporized and temporized and temporized…spaced and spaced and spaced.

"Fresh water has been a problem on Crooked Island for years, ever since hurricane Irene damaged the r/o systems years ago. It would really be good if they could leave that here and we could rebuild water and sewerage around that, it could solve a lot of problems for this island."[31]

This space given by time exposes the violence of neglect after the storm. There is no repair except for those who inhabit Paradise, those who are on the fringes are left barely standing and relief never comes.

The violence of the Being-through-presence is a spatial and temporal one, such that presence becomes a "vector of terror for black being…producing and sustaining the destruction of black being in its own way."[32] Becoming through presence is reserved for those who have the possibility to develop meaning, for those for whom a humanist self can adhere. The human necessitates a (non)relational body, the Black as (non)presence. This violence emerges linguistically when we are regarded as 'shit,' a catalyst for national pride in the U.S. The U.S. produces the destruction of the Caribbean by exploiting its resources with $28 million estates, naturalizing catastrophes like Hurricane Irma, and sustaining the injuries of its aftermath through neglect.[33]

The Negro, and more specifically, the Negro in The Bahamas, exists in a temporal mode of non-presence. Non-presence appropriately captures the "black time" of Black existence. Black time exists in the wake of a thousand storms of colonization and recolonization. Blackness can never be-present. The rubble is a reminder, the storm surge is a reminder (remainder), nothing fades into the past. While white tourists relish in the moment, their worries fading away into the past, the past haunts the ruins of buildings and homes in the Bahamas. We in ruin.

Black existence does not adhere to a presence/absence binary that defines the metaphysical structure. Warren writes, "The Negro is born into absence and not presence."[34] What then, is Black existence without presence or absence? How do we account for the *making* of the tool and the *use* of the tool? Because absence does not appropriately account for the multiple ways in which islands like The Bahamas come in and out of existence for the sake of function, we must take up (non)presence as a fundamental mode of existence. Blackness can never be absence because absence *is*. Derrida writes of absence, "As such it remains essentially related to what is presently present, inasmuch as it either comes into the expanse of unconcealment or withdraws from it. Even what is absent is something present, for as absent from the expanse, it presents itself in unconcealment."[35] Absence cannot account for the remainder of Blackness. Absence implies former presence and thus, can still be accounted for. The localizing force of "shithole" is imbued with the fragmentation of Black place. Paradise and death coexist in the catastrophic zone of non-presence. And given the metaphysical Holocaust under which the Black is born, (non)presence accurately describes the ways in which Blackness is suspended between presence and absence, unaccounted for and positioned in the void.

Antiblackness is inherent in metaphysics and Warren suggests that "antiblackness provides the instruments and framework for binary thinking, the thinking of being as presence."[36] Moreover, he writes in "Onticide: Afro-pessimism, Gay Nigger #1, and Surplus Violence" that, "[Blackness] is rendered absent because it is muted and denied, but also present because it structures society."[37] Thus, (non)presence

Black Antifascism: A Conversation

JoNina Abron-Ervin & Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin

Below is a conversation between one of our editors, Casey, and Lorenzo Ervin and JoNina Abron-Ervin, which took place last Fall in Chicago. JoNina Abron-Ervin is a journalist, retired educator, and a former member of the Detroit chapter of the Black Panther Party. As a writer, teacher and organizer, she has helped organize numerous efforts over the course of decades, including the anti-apartheid movement and campaigns against police terror. She is the author of the book Driven by Movement: Activists of the Black Power Era. *Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin is an anarchist writer, organizer, and former political prisoner who came up through SNCC and the Black Panther Party in the 1960s. Among other works, he is the author of the book* Anarchism and the Black Revolution, *which introduces the principles of class struggle anarchism and discusses its relevance to the Black liberation struggle. In what follows, Lorenzo and JoNina discuss the current anti-fascist movement, its limitations, and how it could evolve to challenge the carceral state, white supremacy, and capitalist exploitation more explicitly.*

Casey (C): Thanks for taking the time to sit down and talk. There is a lot of interest in local activist circles around the idea of a grassroots, community-based anti-fascist movement. Particularly in the Black community spaces you both shared your story and advice within while in town this past week. To start off this conversation, maybe one of you could explain what exactly fascism is? How is the concept of "fascism" (mis)understood by many self-proclaimed Leftists and radicals today?

Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin (L): People respond to fascism in a number of different ways. One way, is to say fascism is a mass revolutionary *anti-democratic* movement. You have these undemocratic forces which are in the streets, many of which are paramilitary. Then there is another type of definition: the creation of a new form of authoritarian governance, directed by corporations, or corporations united with the State. This is the whole idea of the "corporate State." The definition that Mussolini himself gave was actually referring to a fascist *syndicalism*—the idea of uniting the workers with corporations, and under the control of the owners of corporations. But then there is the issue of all power to the State, and the idea of the leader (e.g. the "Führer" in Germany, or "Il Duce" in Italy). That's part of it as well. There is not one definition. It actually depends on the country. One is the form of governance that's already in place; the idea that a dictatorial leader can take over a country that had previously been a so-called democratic regime. We are also talking about the *economic* form of fascism. So, we got a number of different aspects of fascism, which doesn't lend itself to a universal definition. A lot of times people point to aspects of fascism like hyper-nationalism, leadership and party dictatorship, corporatism, or racism. Well, the thing is many countries have these features and they are *not* fascist regimes. Every authoritarian regime is not a fascist regime. In point of fact, it relates to the form of state and the economic structure. That's why I said we're talking about a *new* type of authoritarian governance ran by

supremacy galvanizes and organizes white publics into organized and semi-organized fronts for white self-defense, white autonomy, and white rights.

The ascendancy of White Being thus supervises the logic of White Reconstruction. It disciplines and reforms classical white supremacist institutions and their methods of human domination while still ensuring that white supremacy permeates the order of things. In this way, the end of official apartheid and the formal elimination of particular forms of racial colonialism are maneuvers of *sustainability*, more precisely, toward a flexibility of racial power (and suppleness of racial Being) that can absorb "anti-racist" reform for the sake of "human equality" precisely because the White Being's ascendancy *already assembles the material boundaries, methodology, and common sense pre-conceptions of the Human who is to participate in that egalitarian social wager*.

Within the cultural politics and delimited upward socioeconomic mobilities endorsed by White Reconstruction (which both relies on and despises "affirmative action" as a mechanism for re-ordering the epidermal layers of its generally-but-not-always-white human species), there is a production of new possibilities for attachment, allegiance, and affinity to White Being. There is, in other words, an invitation of sorts to thrill in its fiction, which is to say, to fantasize a "people of color" future within the ascendancy, even when material conditions yield palimpsests of degradation and humiliation within the allegations of the egalitarian. (This is why eugenics is simultaneously an embarrassment to modern biological and forensic science, while obviously persisting as a structuring *logic* of contemporary social engineering, from its liberal reformist to reactionary racist variations.)

The ascendancy of White Being has toxified most of us for multiple generations, in ways that we are constantly mapping, mourning, recreating, and theorizing. It is an ascendancy that, despite its allegations of Civilizational and natural permanence, is subjected to varying intensities of radical, irruptive challenge from below and periodic implosions from above.

On the other hand, rebellions and movements have many points of origin: the high school and college classroom, church/mosque/temple, community organization, warehouse, prison cell, hospital waiting room, living room couch, or apartment complex are as likely as any site to bear the fruit of social insurgency among people who refuse to be passive victims of (or willing participants in) an oppressive system. These forms of action do not necessarily rely on massive numbers to make their imprint on the surrounding world—rather, they pivot on the willingness of committed *collectives* of people (large and small) to analyze, strategize, and act on their surrounding social conditions. Such collective work, often beginning with numbers in the single digits, has shown the capacity to accomplish everything from stopping patterns of domestic violence in an apartment complex and disrupting citywide police brutality to sparking anticolonial revolutions and overthrowing repressive national governments. I think this is the work, as in some ways it has always been.

accounts for this both-and structure of Black existence. It is the deferred meaning of The Bahamas that allows it to be fungible—destination, Paradise, and 'shit-hole.' These multiple constitutions of The Bahamas are undergirded by the fact that "the world *needs blacks*, even as it tries to eliminate them [actively through brutality and passively through neglect] (this is the tension between necessity and hatred)."[38] According to Marriott, "the desire to turn black resemblance into shit appears to be constitutive of whiteness."[39] Thus, The Bahamas ultimately functions as a site for pure consumption, one that reaffirms the distinction between those who consume and those that are shit, those who are whole and those that are hole.

The structure of metaphysics is such that Blackness exists in the intermediary and for our purposes here, "between presence and absence. Between form and formlessness, animal and man, property and human…nothing and something,"[40] this is the spatio-temporal mode of Blackness, the mode of (non)presence.

Returning to Derrida, we know now that Presence cannot hold the body of Blackness, the body of the island, the body of The Bahamas. To account for the antiblack logics that adhere to the metaphysics of Presence in Being, Derrida's conception of différance provides us with a phenomenological account of spacing and deferral within the linguistic structure that does not adhere to the binary structure of absence and presence, while simultaneously revealing the violence of presence. "It is the determination of Being as presence or as beingness that is interrogated by the thought of différance."[41] We can take this phenomenon up, while also accepting Warren's critique that "we will never gain equivalence to humanity by inversion and displacement" through the procedure of Deconstruction. Because, as we know, the inversion and displacement that takes place during reverse peristalsis merely changes the hole, but the shit nonetheless remains the same. Différance, here, will serve to articulate the spatiotemporal mode that Blackness operates under within the metaphysical logic of Presence, giving way to a more accurate concept offered here as the (non)presence of Blackness.

Différance for Derrida is twofold in its nature, spatial and temporal. It is in constant motion, never grounded, never present. (Non)presence functions similarly, it accounts for the unstable temporal mode of Blackness and the spatial void of Blackness. As Warren notes, "time rebounds upon itself in a space of ontological terror—there is only temporal circularity or black time, an abyss of time."[42] Like the mode of (non)presence of Blackness, "différance (is) (itself) other than absence and presence…"[43] Derrida writes that "What presents itself as non-present is what is absent."[44] However, what we have seen above is that (non)presence is not equivalent with absence, but in between it. (Non)presence, like différance "is not. It is not a present being."[45] Further, "It governs nothing, reigns over nothing, and nowhere exercises any authority."[46] This is the (non)presence of which I speak. The Bahamas

has no authority, it exists merely as shit and hole, existing to be "unceasingly dislocate[ed]…in a chain of differing and deferring substitutions" for civil society.[47] The dislocation of shit during bowel movements and reverse peristalsis is just the motion of shit, deferred to other locations, repositioned. Différance "has neither existence nor essence. It derives from no category of being, whether present or absent."[48] The (non)presence of The Bahamas exists in this mode of (non)being, no category of being, just the category of "shit-hole."

Again, the impossibility of presence for Blackness must be thought twofold, "economic detour…and…an impossible presence, as expenditure without reserve, as the irreparable loss of presence, the irreversible usage of energy, that is, as the death instinct, as the entirely other relationship that…interrupts every economy."[49] This is what the concept of (non)presence asks of us, to think the existence of Blackness without Presence as an entirely other relationship that interrupts every economy. It encompasses the manifold ways in which Blackness can be used to metaphysically constitute everything that experiences Presence. This is the economy of death under which the The Bahamas exists. And ultimately, this is the hole of which we must continue to speak, even if we won't ever have the words.

Endnotes

1. Gianni Vattimo, *Nihilism and Emancipation: Ethics, Politics, and Law*, ed. Santiago Zabala, trans. William McCuaig. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004, 35.
2. A Heideggerian notion of use. He has two terms: ready-to-hand and present-at-hand. Ready-to-hand is something like a tool that serves a function for someone, it becomes useful.
3. David Marriott, "On Decadence: Bling Bling," *e-flux*, no. 79 (February 2017), 3.
4. Jacques Derrida, "Différance," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982, 4.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., 3-4.
7. Ibid., 3.
8. "Différance," 19.
9. Bryan Wagner, *Disturbing the Peace: Black Power and the Police Culture After Slavery.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009, 1.
10. Calvin Warren, *Ontological Terror: Blackness, Nihilism, and Emancipation.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2018, 25.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Derrida, "Différance," 9.
14. Warren, *Ontological Terror,* 9.
15. For Heidegger, the question of the meaning of Being is answered through temporality. Heideggerian Being is to be there, is to be present in space and time, and this is what Heidegger refers to as Parousia. When Heidegger refers to Presence, he intends to make clear that beings are in time and Being is beholden to being present. It is the "onto-theological determination of Being."
16. Ibid., 11.
17. Derrida, "Différance," 27.
18. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper and Row, 1962, 39.

available temporality of its belief—some of you know as well as i that the righteous protest is never far from next-level noise, of a kind that turns the deputies' presence into a beast of law.

The end of protest is nearby, as it has always been, even if the form of the convening riff-raff looks familiar to Them. It is another way of saying that there is an inherent, beautiful danger to the theater of collective consciousness when it is fixated on the correction of errors and hypocrisies that are, in the long historical script, the productive technologies of US nation-building.

the end of Hope

There are times when things change so rapidly it feels like breathing myth. Walls fall, nations implode, colonies collapse, apartheids melt, but only because *people move* with each other even as they are at odds, quaking the placid plains of history with the unmatched danger of other surging human species. Mankind begins to panic amidst cold calculations of austerity, reform, and military extermination, knowing that civil war is always a global war, an epochal war, when the fate of the species is at stake. Those who have been enslaved, occupied, displaced, trapped, and dominated find power in the fight. Of course, when some of us think about the truth of inhabiting these kinds of places, we realize that there has never been anything but a fight. It is a species-specific knowledge.

But then, the end of hope is a morbid thing. When the fiction of a better future, a revived present, a shared anticipation of life—good life—fades, a certain wildness ensues. There is a creeping sensibility that aggressive, violent neglect is the structuring principle of the modern world, interrupted only by the acute attention of the police and their analogues. They are, in their own way, attuned to our sensibilities in the manner of owners feeling the primal species-needs of their domestic animals—the dog is hungry, it is lonely, the pace of its wagging tail shows it is antsy, it needs to go outside and piss—but their reactions tend to be less generous and nurturing. They know you are upset over the always-bare fact of your naked disempowerment, but they are equally perturbed that you cannot appreciate how far your people have come, for after all, *a few of you are here* sitting at the conference table with them, drinking their coffee and being treated as classmates, peers, and colleagues.

Supremacy is an inherently armed and threatened regime. It must be reiterated, fortified, and violently enforced (usually across a broad, deep spectrum of violence—from genocidal to low-intensity, cultural-symbolic to physiological and environmental). There is little doubt that white supremacy is the convening animus of the United States of America and most of the Western world, and that its liberal disavowals in the era of diversity and official multiculturalism not only fail to displace white supremacy's paradigmatic role in defining social life and the distribution of wealth, poverty, health, and systemic suffering, but actually instigate white supremacist revivals at every conceivable social scale. The argument here is not that white supremacy has disappeared or faded from the ensemble of racial-social power assembled over the last half-century, but rather that it has been incessantly *disowned* by White Being as such, even as white

students, the elders, the shamed, the punished, the abnormal, the sick, the crazy—or so they say). The understanding forms as a byproduct of coerced overfamiliarity with what it means to seek redemption in evil, a knowledge that the adjudication of the internal debate occurs in a general symbiosis with the enforcement of cultural-juridical-military statutes that constantly reconstruct and affirm the anti-civilizational profile; that of those who are drawn into the profile, there are some old, some new, because criminals, terrorists, deviants, aliens, have always been around, some longer than others, and there's little mistaking the Black and Aboriginal common denominator in all of it. The understanding grows and spreads, that the anti-civilizational is an *honorable* inheritance, because it surges into domesticities that are always again frontiers; the plantation is an idea as much as a place, which is why it never goes away, territory (land) is always invoked, and it all materializes in the endlessly justifiable homicide that defines "freedom's" limits. Move, then, to the margins of the reputable, just beneath the high ground, flourishing in the tears and sobbing, studying within the mourning and grieving, theorizing the pain, it's already happening, and it needs no refinement.

echo (protest)

A delusion guides much of the righteous protest. It is the belief, tragic in its aversion to historical truth, that *They don't have The Right to do this (to us, to others, to the death).* The protest stakes its high ground on the claim that the violence is beyond Their Right. Its furnace of outrage is fueled by the demand that They cease and desist, stop stop stop stop the beating killing brutal degrading displays of savage-sophisticated contempt for skin, bones, still-beating hearts. The protest demands recognition that the (your) other human life is worthy of integrity. The protest grasps for words that will somehow touch the brutalizers' thin and nerveless membranes of decency. The protest claims the objects of violence embody dignity, manhood, motherhood, queer citizenship, and perhaps it will also remind them that "we are not criminals." This activity is not naïve, for the delusion is not derivative of dumb ignorance, but rather of a willful one. The protest works hard to believe in the redemption of Rights forsaken. It is a religious belief—this is what we mean by willful delusion. It is a powerful delusion, to project that the manic aggression of Their world can be harnessed by anything remotely so abstract as Rights. (Of course, abstraction is as well a method of and for revolt, which is why Their colleges and universities are increasingly overrun by an instructional logic of vocational indoctrination, especially in sites of "diversity.")

Always hiding in these soon-discarded terms of protest appeal is another kind of recognition, popping through the delusion like unwelcome glares from behind. It is the knowledge—a deep knowing in friction with anything actually formally learned—*that nothing is beyond Their Right,* which is to say, They cannot dialog with the protest, they can only ever *tolerate* it. There is another way to view the relation of power: that in Their maddening assumption of Right as capacity for self-making brutality (a.k.a. policing, governing, civilizing), They are daring you to violate the long-settled limits of the appeal to decency and respect. The residual power of the delusion is the always-

19. Jacques Derrida, "Ousia and Gramme," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982, 39-40.
20. Warren, *Ontological Terror,* 38.
21. Derrida, Différance," 16.
22. Ibid.
23. Derrida utilizes sous rature, a method originating with Heidegger, to emphasize the dislocation of meaning when referring to différance. Warren throughout *Ontological Terror* performs a method of sous rature, an act he calls Onticide (Black Being), a form of ontological erasure (sous rature) that acknowledges the (non)being of Blackness.
24. Warren, *Ontological Terror*, 32.
25. Ibid.
26. Derrida,"Ousia," 62.
27. Warren, *Ontological Terror,* 6.
28. Ibid.
29. Jacques Derrida, *Paper Machine*, trans. Rachel Bowlby. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005, 151-152.
30. Warren, *Ontological Terror,* 16.
31. Mr. Bonamy, senior man at Water and Sewerage Corporation from Crooked Island.
32. Warren, *Ontological Terror,* 22.
33. The naturalizing of "natural" disasters is a move by countries like the U.S. to divert the conversation away from the effects of capitalist modes of production (fracking, coal mining, oil drilling and pipelines, and overdevelopment of land) on climate change and vulnerable countries like the Bahamas and towards a conversation of monetizing disaster through companies who provide "relief" (port-a-potties, generators, cots, mobile homes), all the while calling places that are ravaged by these disasters "shitholes" and blaming them for lack of infrastructure.
34. Warren, *Ontological Terror,* 42.
35. Derrida, "Ousia," 34.
36. Warren, *Ontological Terror,* 10.
37. Calvin Warren, "Onticide: Afro-pessimism, Gay Nigger #1, and Surplus Violence," *GLQ* vol. 23, no. 3, (2017): 397.
38. Warren, *Ontological Terror,* 10.
39. Marriott, "On Decadence," 3.
40. Warren, *Ontological Terror,* 36-37.
41. Derrida, "Différance," 10.
42. Warren, *Ontological Terror,* 23.
43. Derrida, "Différance", 23.
44. Derrida, "Ousia,"34.
45. Derrida, "Différance," 21.
46. Ibid., 22.
47. Ibid., 26.
48. Ibid., 6.
49. Derrida,"Différance," 19.

Provisional Commentary on Vusi Beauchamp's *Paradyse of the Damned*

Athi Mongezeleli Joja

I.

I was in Chicago as a research fellow when I first received news of the controversial boys' hoodies advert by the Swedish clothing chain H&M. The advertisement showed two young boy models—one white, wearing a hoodie on which was written "mangrove jungle, survival expert"—and the other, black, togged in one which read "coolest monkey in the jungle." Social media was riotous with outrage. In South Africa, and perhaps elsewhere, the virtual fight did not suffice. People charged into various store branches, caused commotion, and even subjected the management to a tough public trial.[1]

The advert came hot on the heels of a litany of similarly reprehensible racist public utterances and subjection that had also roused the public. In mid-year 2016, a video circulated the internet showing two white farmers shoving a black man, Victor Mlotshwa, alive into a coffin.[2] Just less than a year before, a white South African estate agent, Penny Sparrow, in the wake of the 2016 New Year's Day revelry, came out on Facebook to call Black people swimming at the beach "monkeys."[3] It wasn't too long after this that the Premier of the Western Cape province, Helen Zille, followed up with her public comments defending colonialism.[4] In the Eastern Cape, a video of Linda Steenkamp, a black woman caged inside an animal enclosure at the back of a white farmer's bakkie, similarly caused pandemonium. These incidents, and many others, though less recorded or even ignored by virtue of the over-familiarity, have not disappeared in the "new" South Africa. They have, in variegated guises, been regenerated in both subtle and extroverted ways. Possibly stoked by the current political turn, these incidents created the necessary build-up for the aforementioned explosion that ultimately left some H&M stores in a wreck, and the company's public image tainted.

Rather coincidentally, South Africa's Phala Ookeditse Phala and Tony Miyambo's *KAFKA'S APE,* a theater adaptation of Franz Kafka's *A Report to the Academy*, was showing in Chicago. Tony Miyambo's startling solo performance momentarily rendered my criticality comatose, to the point of inadvertently erasing

debate. In this framing, the stakes are entirely affixed to the reorientations of Mankind and the question of whether a potential transformation (expansion) of its imagined collective is remotely capable of altering the intensity of casualties that fabricate the Indian, the Negro, the Alien, et. al. The blurring conflations of human life (in all its vulnerability and incommensurable wildness) with Mankind (in its self-narratives of autonomy, mastery, and ascendancy) provoke the other allegations of redemption, which are *only ever aspirational*. It is why, in contemporary parlance, "diversity" is always tethered to "tolerance and respect:" the vulnerable wild ones are the subjects of a domestication that never quite works.

The sources of the echo are the involuntary inhabitants of the blurring, outside Mankind (subhuman, colonized, expropriated, chattel) and incarcerated by the contingencies of white civil society's freedoms. To live inside the blur in this way is to be intimately *familiar* with the perpetual condition of war and conquest, even as there is constant struggle to apprehend the consequences of the totality, because there are counter-positions within the blur. There are casualties of varying intensity, some contingent and others paradigmatic. Yet there remains a persistent demand that crosses these counter-positions, anchored in the demand for security of body and the dream of collective futurity. This demand-dream runs the risk of coalescing with the terms of the internal debate. It is the militancy of an insistence on *becoming* the tolerated and respected, which of course is not really a *becoming* at all. This is when the echo is most open to misreadings, disciplined-harnessed-monetized by the organized entrepreneurial compromises of the "Non-Governmental Organizations" and the Non-Profit Industrial Complex.

We should be clear that the problem is not necessarily in the desire for redemption as a *protective capacity* in circumstances of duress. (At times, finding redemption through faith and spiritual practice is the only accessible pathway to insurgent mobilization around a shared *social-historical* as well as extra-earthly fate.) Rather, the dilemma is in the horizon of the fulfillment. What would happen on the eve of White Being's concession that Black lives matter? The terms of the internal debate can *only allow for the gesture of a concession*, which subsists on some peculiar idiosyncrasies: the notion of policing in equitability; a reordering of statecraft and cultural structure that affirms respect for and tolerance of those other lives; a statement of egalitarian value that nonetheless endorses another apartheid principle of human speciation, "separate but equal." It becomes clear that redemption in winning protective capacity is only that, and only for now. This is a problem of mistaken or misplaced horizons. Of course, horizons are open to interpretation and imagination, and must be projected as a matter of definition, so there is plenty of room to do good work here, which requires that the problem of political horizon be posed in the first place, as a problem, in fact, as the kind of problem that renders the conventional (and often indulgent or opportunistic) dichotomy of "theory" and "practice" irrelevant.

Perhaps there is already a solution to the problem, an ingenious rearticulation of the dilemma of mis-imagined, dys-imagined horizon that unfolds in basements, classrooms, and text message strings all the time, everywhere: there is an understanding that resonates in the dark echoing of the problem solvers (the children, the

gesture—modernization, independence, full citizenship, franchise, rights. Appendages of another body, an alien body. Rejection comes later, when the charity is experienced as redemption in their evil, white evil, which created the need for their industrialized condescension in the first place. It is part of the generalized fact that the white human condition—the condition of Mankind's restoration, remaking, and periodic reconstruction—is already steeped in an edifice of accessibility (the common sense of humanism rests on the myth of access). This human in the seat of humanism calls on other species to feed, to shit, to vote, to work, to speak, to dance, to enlist, to sit at the table in the house for a little while (but don't overstay your welcome, because you should beware of the grounds of such hospitality). What if, after "American Apartheid," there is only more chattel, more displacement, more of apartheid's spatial and physiological ordering?

echo

Meanwhile, there is a darker echo that restates the gestures of global white assistance—philanthropic, structurally adjusted, diversity inclusive, military occupied, and otherwise—as a conjugated dehumanization. The echo shudders an anti-colonial and plantation-burning violence, another kind of redemption in the symbolic genesis of white humanity's de-centering. In this instance, it is not the dark suffering that matters, but rather *the fact* of the exposure, the vulnerability, the imminence and inevitability of the suffering—this is what explodes the presumptuous arrogance of the white humanist universal, which is another way of saying that in this glimpse, we are daring to privilege the inheritance of a sensibility that the world exists on *Mankind's terms,* and this is an intimacy with the most alienating feeling. To be in a world not of your making, to be told that you must *become* in a manner alien to the conditions of your exposure.

It is often this alienation that fosters another differentiation, one that speaks collective genius in the imagining and fugitive practice of Mankind's obsolescence, the denaturing of the human speciation and thus, the reduction of white evil (by extension, white liberal humanism) to a localized, dysfunctional, even tribal matter that finally has little or nothing to do with the insurgency of all other life, including the other humans who have fantasized the demise of Mankind over many generations. The violence of which they accuse the savages and the slaves is often attributed to this idea. *Merely the idea.*

In Dallas a few are felled by a sniper's rounds in the midst of a demonstration for Black lives that was irreparably, painstakingly, also pro-police. A scattering thereafter, unsure how to read the blood on tar, a few wondering aloud what would happen if the fleeting moment of anti-state terror were socialized against its dense congruence with the proto-genocidal facts of Blackness. Here is another opportunity to alter the protocols of war by considering the absolute asymmetries of fatality and casualty—another way of showing the identity of law and brutality, thus the misapplication of our common phrase, "police brutality."

Consider the recent periods of crisis, emergency, and militant reformist demand as a political inheritance in continuity with the limits of that internal "American"

the play's racist undercurrents. The dramatic and emotional labour in the play—the prancing, hunching over, and eloquent speech acts —truly conjured the ape in Kafka's story. Yet despite that theatrical brilliance, Miyambo's role elicited a myriad of implied provocations about the extent to which performance and ontology pervaded each other on his body, as well as how the coterminous relationship between blackness and animality reaches symbolic consolidation. That Kafka's ape "coincidentally" hails from the Gold Coast instantiates a prelogical assumption that apes are metonymic signs for Africans, and their captivity/westernization follows natural law. Thinkers like Valentin-Yves Mudimbe, Charles Mills, Kobena Mercer, *et al.,* have alluded to how these associative mythological urges permeate pre-anthropological constructs of alterity, and that their current representational exaggerations remain enunciative practices of an ongoing tradition.[5] Their recursive circulation subtends much of civil society's agendas and the ocularcentric logics of anti-black racism pervading aesthetic and moral questions.

Considering the timing of aforementioned events, or their coincidental, although ominous, eruption with the "decolonial turn," it is hardly unpredictable. Even though these acts tend to be commonplace and even autogenetic in a racist society, recently their concurrency with ongoing protests made them seem reactive. Less familiar is how the moral reach of a black public outcry—though it might intermittently drive these attitudes underground—does not hold enough power to conjure, let alone eviscerate them. Instead, it registers as a sublime clamor in the jungle, an infinite renewal of its own bestial inferiority. Voices that are not necessarily silenced, but are more frequently transmuted and undermined. Simianization, therefore, not only regenerates myths about blacks, it assuages white culpability. And more appropriately, like U.S. lynchings and the attendant paraphernalia dispersed for the scopic pleasure and collective identification that those meetings induced, images of blacks as buffoons, simian, and infantile aim at fomenting similar affectations. This might explain the libidinal continuities between whites flaunting bananas during the #SaveSA march, and the repeated symbolic assaults against student protesters. Recall that it was not—and is not—uncommon to refer to student protests in zoological phrases, just as it was not—and is not—disconcerting to publicly refer to black politicians, like former president Jacob Zuma, as monkeys. These utterances are usually from different ideological camps—one relatively left-liberal, and the other straight out right-wing—yet their spontaneous affinity and use of similar negrophobic tropes shows racial signification as an itinerant, elastic, and common ersatz within reach for various racial interests and groups. As if without restrictions, these tropes mediate between hard boundaries of every social strata, ideology, and other discursive enterprises including in the visual arts. As Mills has noted, "even when literal identity is ostentatiously denied, it hovers as a semiotic aura over what are claimed to be just innocent satirical comparisons."[6]

II.

[Fig. 3] Vusi Beauchamp, *Mambo Jambo*, 2018. Mixed media on canvas, 1.8m x 2m.

Let's return to the story! Months later, I'm back home and about to leave visual artist Vusi Beauchamp's exhibition *Paradyse of the Damned* at Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG) when questions that had nagged me about the incidents I mentioned earlier returned with a vengeance. Why are anti-black tropes so endemic in our public space such that even critical interventions cannot help but rehash or rely on them for legibility or creative reinvention? Is anti-blackness so pervasive that it can stage an autocritique, or hybridize itself into obscurity? These questions help me maneuver the labyrinth that the discourse of stereotypes engenders; or, at best, think around how Beauchamp's art works might co-activate or blur the prefixes "anti-/non-" that are the general theme of this volume. With the hope of better clarifying my response to Beauchamp's work, I will proceed first by peripatetically sketching the behavioral patterns, assumptions, and historical unfolding of blackface iconicity in the South African cultural plain, before finally teasing the work. This plan is not to perpetuate a kind of theory vs practice hierarchy, but to cognitively map the theoretical terrains from which I am thinking and reading Beauchamp's work.[7] I will speak of stereotypes specifically as a language (in Roland Barthes' sense) that mobilizes archetypical tropes historically linked to blackness and its recurrent subjection. Although largely disparate and dissimilarly characterized, racial significatory practices in the end always seem to pervade each other more regularly, placing emphasis on the inferiority, sexual ambiguities, and exotic

cultural formation, crystallizing in the allegation that certain counter-positions within their fields correspond with redemptive possibilities.

The historical record shows what the allegation of redemption entails when waged and executed by the subjects of a transatlantic, hemispheric, and global promise of white human vindication: formed in the crucible of the Encounter, it is the making of Mankind in White Being (with all its gendered correlates) that determines the economics, jurisprudence, political philosophy, social science, and geographic coordinates of conquest-in-permanence. There is preliminary and always-unfolding violence in raciality as a principle term in Mankind's cohering of language, vision, feeling, science, spirit, and subjectivity in this globality of imagination and economy.

The fraud of the post-racial and the post-civil rights allegations, then, is not merely in the unbroken chain of racist casualties produced through systemic and scene-specific assaults on both collective physiology and the mere possibility of shared, symbolic integrity. The deepest discrepancy is in the pretense that there is *any* possibility for categorical rather than piecemeal (temporary, fleeting, flimsy) inclusion in this apartheid speciation of "humanity," an apartheid that cannot be dismantled in law or even nominally abolished, unless Mankind—and crucially, the material and symbolic grounds of Mankind's global integrity as such—becomes the subject of a creative disintegration (some will call this terrorism, others call it their hope for tomorrow). The speciation draws its dominance from a changing circuit of abstraction and embodiment: there is a template for humanity's progress, there are terms (scientific, Biblical, politico-economic, or otherwise) through which the most evolved, blessed, modern, and autonomous of the human species may be recognized as such, and these abstractions are always tied to notions of manifest personhood, including but not limited to genes, spirit, blood, epidermis, and cranial capacity (such is the rough description of humanity's speciation—a *narrative* of differentiation within the category of human being that militarizes the terms of the ascendant species-group). These are the premises of White Being.

Apprehend the United States, in the fullest distensions of its colonial and chattel formation, as an internal debate over the relative violence, vulgarity, sophistication, and political capaciousness of white humanity. The latter, you will recall, is the position that offers humanitarian favors against the wish and urge to violently decline them. There is a claim that persists beneath the din of civil accommodations, that changes in tenor but not in premise. Accusations of backwardness, savagery, tribalism, and even fundamentalism become self-replicating when such humanitarianism is rejected by the ungrateful, suspicious antagonists of white humanity's creeping universals. The language of urban-to-rural insurrection—when the people "riot," "loot," burn, and destroy—moves from a vocabulary of anti-humanitarianism (which, in this sense, is also a recalibration of the world to mirror the evil) to insist that it is in the moment when the representatives of white humanity extend the helping hand that there must be a state of militant opposition; a tensing against the insult. It is in times like this that the white human creates the groundwork of its forcible universality.

This is the other side of the aforementioned redemption: a rejection of the invitation to thrill in the absolute violence of a charity. There are different versions of the

Insult/Internal Debate/Echo

Dylan Rodríguez

preface (insult)

Suspicion and accusation are a minimal disturbance to a force that spills endless violations of spirit, memory, and flesh. There is no state of exception, just a grinding normal that concedes reform in the demand, inventing and refurbishing a Civilizational imperative. White supremacy is but a minimal term for this extended order of things. Its dangers become refined and acute under changing protocols of recruitment, retention, expulsion, and elimination. The white nationalist imperative surges and retreats. Contrary to liberal narratives of the reaction's periodic and exceptional rise on waves of mobilized xenophobia, misogyny, and populist racialized "hate," the white national form is constantly in evidence, everywhere, shaping the multiculturalist diversity initiatives that re-embody the inheritances of 1619 and Manifest Destiny.

The nominal abolition of United States apartheid has been followed by more than half a century of proliferating, innovative, and sometimes authentically new regimes of gendered racial domination and state sanctioned racist violence. Against all apparent and sometimes spectacular evidence of its absurdity, there is a resilient narrative of national racial progress, characterized by the insult of an insistence.

The depth and normalcy of the interdisciplinary, multimedia, terror-inducing methodologies of racist reaction are not mere resurgences or disruptions, but are affirmations that such racial progress is in fact at hand. There is no hypocrisy in the gestures of subjection when they are already enmeshed in the coercive promises of postponed or suspended futurity for those who fit the civil-enemy profile of gendered racial domestic war. In such instances, survival tends to be a question raised for the absolute present tense, and so the edge of the insult is in the insistence that there *is* a future to be shared, in fact, that there *is* a "humanity" within the deadly span of raciality that can ever even be remotely common, familial, or universal.

internal debate (redemption)

The United States, if it is to exist as such, is always necessarily a theater of racial nation-building with vacillating movements and subtitles: post-civil rights multiculturalism, resurgent white nationalism, post-racial liberalism, law-and-order, the War on Drugs, the War on Terror, and the infrastructures of tolerance and repression are never finally separable. There is a deadly coherence to the historical variations of this statecraft and

curiosities of the black, from burlesque shows to public "tribal" jigs. As Cedric J. Robinson has observed, blackface minstrelsy always "survive[s] its [timely] demise[s] only by an act of migration" and finding "a new home."[8] If a century and a half ago "this language was aimed at a racial structure whose ideological and psychological instability required its boundaries continually to be staged, and which regularly exceeded the dominant culture's capacity to fix such boundaries"[9] how are these boundaries negotiated or brokered today? If racism remains intact, what are the "new homes" for racist tropes to take refuge or renew colonial subjectivities? As Sianne Ngai correctly argues, racism is "beyond" the stereotypes it produces.[10] I contend that it cannot sufficiently hold sway without recurrently manipulating the gap these stereotypes offer, and thus always reaches unto the social screen memory to reconstitute racial boundaries.

The spatio-temporal afterlives of racial stereotypes always seem contingent on the perpetual non-events of freedom, aporias of redress, and endless rebirths of Capital. Since neoliberalism has accelerated privatization, it has also symbolically disaggregated "race"—as its definitive agent—from state politics but without dissolving the conditions that give rise to racism and its practices. Instead, racial tropes appear denuded of their historical profanities, and reinvented as capacious forms floating innocently in the visual field. But this shouldn't surprise us, it might seem, because we have historically witnessed how the temporality of anti-blackness is entangled with alterity. Thus, its obscenities can be invoked, inflected or recuperated, yet simultaneously denied or diffused into the fabrics of the norm.[11] Equally, racial stereotypes can be about anything except what they truly (and have always) represent(ed): the denial of black humanity. Our bombardment, or their recurrent appearances, always annotated with circumlocutive explanatory airbrushes, leave trails important for study. Consider how in contemporary film practices, whites often blacken up to play black characters, and how the inverse is quickly dismissed as absurd.[12] Or consider how profanities in the H&M advert, and even in revisions of King Kong, simianization strategically acquires a desacralized stature.[13] Thus, whether those boundaries are social or aesthetical, references to blackface minstrelsy, simianization, or forms of racist tropes have acquired an institutional posture, to be uninhibitedly used and circulated as creative metaphors. However, the shadow of the appropriative impulse of racial types "remains grounded in the *originating metaphors* of captivity and mutilation…over and over again by the passions of a bloodless and anonymous archaism, showing itself in endless disguise."[14]

For Homi Bhabha, the stereotype, under ambivalence, must reproduce itself always in *excess*, and therefore beyond what can be proved empirically and logically. Ambivalence, he argues, is what gives it this repeatability and disguise as it is predicated on the coarticulation of repulsion and pleasure, or what Eric Lott has dubbed "love and theft." Thus, normative stances of dismissing stereotypes are not viable for Bhabha, instead he suggests, we 'displace' them. Since to "dismiss" signals

an oblivion towards the ambivalent nature of the stereotypes; that is, its upswings, multivalences, or even internal contradictions of colonial mimicry.[15] But to displace it on the other, suggests differently: to reorient, redirect, and eventually empty them; a certain level of ontological resistance latently provided within the schema of difference. I find neither positions helpful since the black ego is submerged within the facilitative power of the racial imago; though it rejects and resists it, it cannot be anything else in the eyes of the world. Thus, blackness stands differently from, which is to say outside of, Bhabha's "colonial subjects," as suffering that isn't only unthought and derelict, but as an onto-corporeal "deathliness that cannot be…brought into meaning."[16] And if the 'converse' (to name and shame) is denied *a priori*—for "*the black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man,*"[17] and other non-blacks—we need not to ask if they/our stereotypes of non-blacks exist, and even if they do, they don't matter. Put another way, if the black and white relation is that between subject (humans) and object (non-beings), then stereotyping as performance of structural power is unidirectional.

Though it might appear easy to make reference to a catalogue of racial stereotypes prevalent in contemporary South African visual arts practice, as debates on the 1990s have shown,[18] art historically there is very little, if elaborated, study done in this area since the majority of textual inscription has been the relative exclusive domain of the historically oppressive race. I am thinking of the primitivist proclivities of early to midcentury artists such as Irma Stern, Maggie Laubser, Vladimir Tretchikoff, and even the likes of Cecil Skotnes. For example, Stern's elaborate searches for the "perfect native," or even Tretchikoff's famous Watermelon series of black natives with broad smiles carrying chunky slices of watermelon are precursors. These gestures have refused to disappear, at least not completely. Whilst they've continued to show themselves in "endless disguises" in art, throughout the country they have echoed in the tourist industry, workplaces, residencies, and especially in how "tribalism" has been historically constructed.[19] The extemporaneous subjection of black bodies, cultures, and spaces into all kinds of extractive economic and intellectual mechanisms, has inevitably culled its objects from "every corner of our planet, the remotest villages and towns, into the land of contemporaneity."[20]

In the 1990s their discrepant iterations had "exceeded" obvious colonial and apartheid maleficence, by entering into the erudite, and yet market friendly, spaces ridden with all kinds of "posts," the polished stylistics of new media, and the overall buzz this created consonantly with concepts like hybridity and multiculturalism enabling what art historian Sarat Maharaj has dubbed fatal natalities. By this, Maharaj meant how the dominant discourse "identifies those who fall outside 'cultural visibility' sussing out how they might be counted in the arena of representation; how the excluded, 'the excremental other,' might be rendered visible."[21] The surge into new media and digitalization practices in South Africa, Olu Oguibe contended, forced these proclivities to not only intensify "pleasure through the effacement of

anatomy, but "in terms of a tension between modalities of *jouissance,* phallic *jouissance,* and a hypothesized *jouissance* 'beyond the phallus' (or 'non-all')" (Osserman, "Is the Phallus Uncut?," 509). As Osserman argues, referring to the work of Philippe van Haute and Tomas Geyskens "Less remarked on is the fact that, with this latter theorization, one is no longer in a position to diagnose a subject as 'truly' masculine or feminine, for the "formulas of sexuation' does not determine two kinds of subjects, but they express a field of tension in which each subject moves" (Ibid.).

65. For a survey of the literature on transgender and psychoanalysis, see: Sheila L. Cavanagh "Transpsychoanalytics," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly,* vol. 4, no. 3-4 (2017): 326-357.
66. Eric Laurent, "Gender and Jouissance," trans. Ilya Merlin and Raphaëlle Desvignes, Retrieved from the Academia.edu page of Ilya Merlin, 20 Aug. 2018, https://www.academia.edu/31960130/Gender_and_Jouissance_Eric_Laurent.
67. Osserman, "Is the Phallus Uncut?," 510.
68. Ibid.
69. Ibid., 509.
70. See Part 1, Section III of this paper.
71. Erik Hollis, "Figuring the *Angry Inch:* Transnormativity, the black femme and the fraudulent phallus; or fleshly remainders of the 'ungendered' and the 'unthought'" *Feminist Theory,* vol. 19, no. 1 (2008): 27-28.
72. Ibid., 36.
73. Ibid., 28.
74. For an elaboration of this concept see Nicholas Eppert, "Asian-Americans in Affirmative Action: A Genealogy of the Trans*racial Family Romance," Masters Thesis, May 25, 2018, NYU: Media Communication and Culture Department.
75. Here I use "racial psychoanalysis" as a heuristic device for something that has yet to be created or elaborated. Thus while "racial" designates the relations between Blacks, the Indigenous, Asian-Americans and Latin@s, I realize that the term "race" or "racial" as a putatively "unifying gesture" presents its own problems. For example, as Audra Simpson argues in *Mohawk Interruptus,* "Race and sex become meaningful categories of determining membership in the consciousness of Kahnawa'kehró:non when resources were threatened and Mohawks become 'Indians'" (Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2014, 60). Here "race" becomes an effect of blood quantum requirements and so the very category of "race" becomes a Settler Colonial imposition upon Indigenous peoples. A "racial psychoanalysis" must take into account the simultaneous logics of Anti-Blackness, Settler Colonialism, Orientalism and Immigration and Border logics.
76. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 179.

constitution of Gender as *objet a* allows the Black to see Gender apropos of the (White) Human Unconscious as something distinct from it.

42. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 2006, 23.
43. Spillers, "Mama's Baby," 206.
44. I have elsewhere written about the Black Unconscious as a Generalized Unconscious. See Nicholas Eppert, "(Black) Non-Analysis: From the Restrained Unconscious to the Generalized Unconscious," *Labyrinth,* vol. 19, no. 2 (2017): 86-101.
45. Here I abide by Spillers' distinction between the flesh and body in which the former designates a "liberated" subject position, while the latter designates a "captive" subject position.
46. The Markmann translation reads "He is turned into a penis. He *is* a penis" (130) and the Philcox translation reads, "He has been turned into a penis. He *is* a penis" (147). Both the Markmann and Philcox translations render the French "*membre*" as penis, and add an article in front of "penis" in the second sentence to render it palatable in English. Additionally, the Philcox translation renders "*est faire*" into the past perfect rather than the present perfect.
47. Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1952, 137.
48. Incidentally *pénis* in French is feminine, taking a feminine article.
49. Because "gendered anatomy" returns us to the domain of the anatomical, it requires a reinvestigation of various feminist critiques of Freud concerning the little girl's desire for the (anatomical) penis and the "castration complex" which have largely been dismissed in favor of the Lacanian emphasis on language and signification. What would it mean to move from the Symbolic "phallic function" to the Anatomical "*pénis* function"? For an overview of these debates, see: Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism: A Radical Reassessment of Freudian Psychoanalysis*. New York: Basic Books, 2000. And for a brilliant investigation into one such possible reconsideration of the anatomical in psychoanalysis and gender studies in relation to the "gut" and medication, see: Elizabeth A. Wilson, *Gut Feminism.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2015.
50. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks,* 170.
51. Marriott, "On Racial Fetishism," *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol 18, No. 2, 226.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid.
54. For an articulation of the "phallic function," see Jacques Lacan's "The Signification of the Phallus," in *Ecrits.*
55. See: Claudine Razanjao and Jacques Postel, "La Vie et l'oeuvre psychistrique de Frantz Fanon," *Sud/Nord* 22 (2007): 147-174.; Jean Khalfa, "Fanon, psychiatrie révolutionnaire," in Frantz Fanon, *Écrits sur l'aliénation et la liberté*, Reunis par Jean Khalfa et Robert Young. Paris: Éditions la Découverte, 2015..
56. Frantz Fanon, "Altérations mentales, modifications caractérielles, troubles psychiques et déficit intellectuel dans l'héredo-dégenération spino-cérébelleuse. Á propos d'un cas de maladie de Friedrich avenc délire de possession," dans *Écrits sur l'aliénation et la liberté*, 192 (my translation).
57. Ibid.
58. Fanon, "Altérations mentales, modifications caractérielles, troubles psychiques et déficit intellectuel dans l'héredo-dégenération spino-cérébelleuse. Á propos d'un cas de maladie de Friedrich avenc délire de possession," 181.
59. "Beside phylogeny and ontogeny stands sociogeny" (Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks,* 4).
60. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 84.
61. In "Is the Phallus Uncut?: On the Role of Anatomy in Lacanian Subjectivization," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly,* vol. 4, nos. 3-4 (2017): 497-517, Jordan Osserman argues that "psychoanalysis has traditionally allowed a 'too easy capitulation of the terms *feminine* and *masculine* to 'gendered' readings (510)" and makes the useful, though not unrelated, distinction between "desire (what you want) [as] different from identification (who you want to be, and be seen as (510)." I take this distinction from him.
62. Patricia Gherovici, *Transgender Psychoanalysis: A Lacanian Perspective on Sexual Difference.* New York: Routledge, 2017, 104.
63. Ibid., 104.
64. *Jouissance* is again a Lacanian term. See: Jacques Lacan, *The Seminars of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge (1972-1973),* trans. Bruce Fink. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1999.. Here Lacan articulated the problem of sexual difference in not in relation to

the subject" at the crossroads of emerging theories and the excitement brought by a certain, if slow, demise of apartheid so that "the object of the obliterative act now disappears together with the evidence of its own excision, making erasure an act without trace."[22] Racism, as a default position in the South African art world, particularly by its "retrieval of the black figure from the debased image-bank of the former apartheid state" raised in Okwui Enwezor's infamous essay, "Reframing the Black Subject," a piece that remains to polarize the art discourse, informs us of the aporias of representation and "freedom."[23] Central to Enwezor's calling into question white art practitioners' insatiable appetite for turning blacks into "over-aestheticized vessels for pleasurable consumption, untroubled and available," in art, also probed how this gesture represented a "betrayal" of the very terms of the *faux* negotiated settlement essential to nation building. Enwezor drew a clear parallel between these abjective importations of black bodies and seeming reluctance to jettison apartheid-incurred privileges. The notorious cautionary force of that particular essay seems to echo louder and louder these days. The pairing of social transformation and visual representation, since racism lives in the appearances, enables us to bear witness to the full spectrum. That the project of political restoration has remained permanently deferred, delayed or even abrogated, so is the heightening of social anxiety and historical antagonism. This coexistence between politics and culture has been the stimulant for the ongoing public altercations pertaining to how black corporeal integrity is perpetually debased, deflated, and abashed. In the last couple of years, images of black public servants as subhuman creatures with insatiable sexual appetites, arguably have reached beyond the normative film industry's characterizations. Yet in South African art critical and historical discourse, the preponderance of these images and attendant performative showoffs, have attracted no critical explanatory interest beyond the valorization.

In the diaspora, however, black art historians and cultural thinkers have shown more than inquisitive interest on these matters over the years. They have pondered, albeit divergently, not only on their impacts in the U.S. racial imaginary and realities but also about black vernacular strategies responsive to the "perpetual returns" of those significatory gestures in the visual field.[24] The repurposing of older concepts or inventing newer ones— ambivalence, signifying, humor, pornotropes, afrotropes, afrokitsch, racial kitsch, negrophilia, black grotesquerie and so on— have engendered dialogical exchanges across the Atlantic; informing, influencing, and deepening a discourse on representational logics of anti-black racism.[25] Of course, there are divergences, overlaps, disjunctures, and connections between these ideas—which I clearly cannot exhaust here. My interest here, albeit briefly, lies in the interrogative interventions around the subversive potentialities or lack thereof, in vernacular signifying practices. For example, Mercer's reading of the works of the post 1960s artists like Betye Saar, Robert Colescott, et al., reproducing critical images of blackface, argues that the "turn to laughter [w]as a key resource in strategies of counter-appropriation that were brought into artistic circulation as

a result of the broader cultural critique of Eurocentric modernism that gave way to postmodernism."[26] Mercer, echoing Bhabha, further clarifies that laughter enables a "critical detachment" that "subverts the seriousness of racist stereotyping not with angry protest or rationalist refutation but with a *homeopathic* strategy that operates in-and-against the semantic capillaries of the symbolic order it critiques."[27] In their concept of Afrotropes, art historians Krista Thompson and Huey Copeland note that "Afrotropes make palpable…how modern black subjects have appropriated widely available representational means only to undo their formal contours, to break apart their significatory logic, or to reduce them to their very substance."[28] Abdur-Rahman, using her concept of black grotesquerie— which in turn echoes Mercer's "stereotypical grotesque" that aims at "unfixing blackness"—though "marked by structural ambiguity and excess…[black grotesquerie] undermines normative perception and action, renders contingent the presumed fixity of meaning, and ruptures the given world."[29] Interestingly these concepts, though relatively different, rely on the enabling energy of ambivalence and the unpredictability of contingency. Artists like Kara Walker, Betye Saar, David Hammons, et al., have creatively re-written blackface iconicity by poking fun, transmogrifying, and even adopting those stereotypes in their own terms "in order to dismantle them from the inside out."[30] And as Mercer argues, by way of a question, these strategies are not deluded exercises that assume that "art has powers to dissolve established versions of reality" or "imply that aesthetic innovation by itself leads to social change."[31]

Other views seem to stress a structural impossibility. In his critical essay "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke," which looks at the role of blackface minstrelsy, Ralph Ellison observes those "pleasures of archetype-hunting," and how the "role with which they are identified is not, despite its blackness."[32] That is, blackness isn't metaphor arbitrarily assumed and relinquished within the fetishistic frolicking of blackface minstrelsy but underwrites the entire charade. The adopted 'masks' of blackface minstrelsy—literary and figuratively—he writes, "was once required of *everyone* who would act the role—even those Negroes whose natural coloration should, for any less ritualistic purposes at least, have made it unnecessary."[33] And for that reason, Ellison notes, the "mask was an inseparable part of the national iconography. Thus even when a negro acted in an abstract role *the national implications were unchanged*."[34] Here, masking has a double function—it plays into the scopophilic drives of white *jouissance,* whilst also coercing the black subject to assume a kind of double negation, as neither a self nor an other. Zine Magubane, Jared Sexton, Saidiya Hartman, and David Marriott piggyback on this lingering or insistence in structural foreclosure, which at every "resurfacing…reveals the tenacity of the visual, narrative, and characterological paradigm,"[35] that "engender pleasures" that "thwart the emergence of an oppositional consciousness."[36] What seems relatively similar—echoing—amongst the latter group, that is beyond their noting of structural denial, is their skepticism towards detachment, as they're of flight. For Marriott, the split between the ego and alter, is prevaricated from the outset, that

19. I consider Gender to constitutively be part of (White) Human ontology. I hope that this reasoning will come out in the process of my argument. I thus capitalize Gender to indicate its ontological dimension in antagonism with Blackness. However, among works that address this issue, in *Gender and the Abjection of Blackness,* Sabine Broeck establishes that Gender and Gender Theory have constituted themselves through a dispossession of the Black body. See: Sabine Broeck, *Gender and the Abjection of Blackness*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2018.
20. C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017, 76.
21. Ibid., 5.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid., 83.
24. Quoted in Ibid.
25. Ibid., 83.
26. This is how one should understand Spillers' conception of "un/gendering." See Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," in *Black, White and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003, 204: "In other words, in the historic outline of dominance, the respective subject-positions of 'female' and 'male' adhere to no symbolic integrity. At a time when current critical discourses appear to compel us more and more toward gender "undecidability," it would be reactionary, if not dumb, to insist on the integrity of female/male gender."
27. Calvin Warren, "Calling into Being: Tranifestation, Black Trans, and the Problem of Ontology," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly,* vol. 4, no. 2, (May 2017): 268.
28. Ibid.
29. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks,* trans. Charles Lam Markmann, New York: Grove Press, 1967, 83.
30. Warren, "Calling into Being" 267.
31. Ibid., 268.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid., 271.
34. Sigmund Freud, "Negation" in *General Psychological Theory: Papers on Metapsychology*, ed., Philip Rieff, trans. Joan Riviere. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991, 218.
35. Ibid., 217.
36. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks,* 84.
37. Marriott, *Whither Fanon?,* 239.
38. On the notion of "separation" see Jared Sexton, "On Black Negativity, or the Affirmation of Nothing," *Society and Space*, 18 Sept. 2017, Retrieved from: http://societyandspace.org/2017/09/18/on-black-negativity-or-the-affirmation-of-nothing/. Sexton says, "This is not about a return to one's literal or figurative native land-mother, motherland, mother earth-except to learn how to lose that grounding, to see it dissolve or vanish and eventually to let it go and to rejoice in that separation. Why? Because separation, as psychoanalysis has shown powerfully, is a precondition for any relationship whatsoever."
39. See Freud, "Further Remarks on the Neuro-Psychoses of Defence," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Vol. 3 (1893-1899): Early Psychoanalytic Publications,* ed. and trans. James Strachey London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1962. According to Freud, when the defense fails it is characterized by a return of repressed memories. The compromise-formation is that of coming to terms with both "the repressed ideas and repressing ones."
40. For the Black, Gender as "natural given" and as "performative" are exactly the same, an imposition of the (White) Human Unconscious. See Part II, "Fanon's White Penis."
41. This is a Lacanian term. As Lacan argues "The subject is an apparatus. This apparatus is something lacunary, and it is in the lacuna that the subject establishes the function of a certain object, *qua* lost object. It is the status of the *objet a* in so far as it is present in the drive" (Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of* Psychoanalysis, ed., Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1998, 185). The *a* in *objet petit a* stands for Other or *Autre*, such that the *objet a* designates that piece of the Other around which the drive circles. This allows for a mediation which does not conflate the Subject either with the Other or the *objet a.* The

Endnotes

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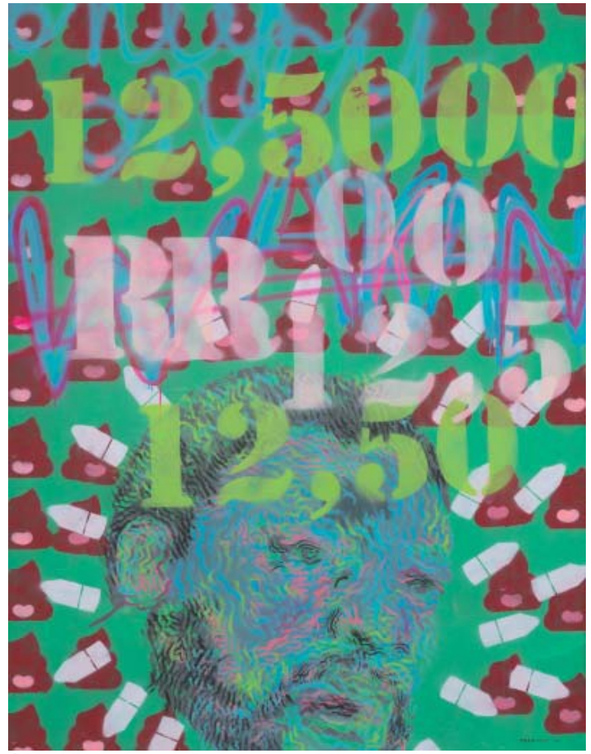
1. I use third-person neutral pronouns to refer to the Black so as to be faithful to the academic literature which considers the Black to be a "fungible object" or a "thing." See: Calvin Warren, *Ontological Terror: Blackness, Nihilism, and Emancipation*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2018; Frank B. Wilderson III *Red, White, & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms.* Durham Duke University Press, 2010.
2. The term "psyche-soma" was coined by D.W. Winnicott to denote the primacy of psychosomatic experience against mind-body dualism. See: D. W. Winnicott, "Mind and its Relation to the Psyche-Soma," in *Through Paediatrics to Psych-Analysis: Collected Papers,* (Brunner/Mazel Publishers, 1992). For Winnicott, "the mind does not exist as an entity in the individual's scheme of things provided the individual psyche-soma or body scheme has come satisfactorily through the very early developmental stages; mind is then no more than a special case of the functioning of the psyche-soma (244)." Perhaps paradoxically then, I use it here to indicate that the Black's experience of Gender as "psyche-soma" is in fact a "false entity" or "false localization" (244), a dimension that Winnicott reserves for the putative localization of the mind.
3. Wilderson, *Red, White, & Black*, 38.
4. Ibid., 23.
5. Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," in *Ecrits*, trans. Bruce Fink with Héloise Fink and Russell Grigg. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006, 76.
6. Ibid.
7. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique 1953-1954*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. John Forrester. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1988, 53.
8. As Orlando Patterson argues in *Slavery and Social Death*, manumission is not freedom but rather an extension of slavery. See:Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982, especially Chapter 8, "Manumission: Its Meaning and Modes."
9. Guyora Binder quoted in Jared Sexton, "Preface: The Perfect Slave," in *Black Masculinity and the Cinema of Policing*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, ix.
10. David Marriott, *Whither Fanon? Studies in the Blackness of Being*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018, 48.
11. Sexton, "Preface: The Perfect Slave," x.
12. Ibid., x.
13. Marriott, *Whither Fanon?,* 56.
14. Ibid., 51.
15. Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route.* New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2007, 6.
16. This identificatory aspect of *méconaissance* is outlined by Lacan. According to Lacan, "Misrecognition (*méconnaissance*) is not ignorance. Misrecognition represents a certain organization of affirmations and negations, to which the subject is *attached*" (Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I*, 167, my italics). The subject is thus attached to the very thing that prompts misrecognition.
17. As Jonathan M. Metzl admirably shows in his book *The Protest Psychosis: How Schizophrenia Became a Black Disease,* the constitution of psychosis or schizophrenia as pathological mental disorder became a condition associated with Blackness. I do not intend my use of Black Psychosis in this sense of pathology or mental illness, but rather as a heuristic device. See: Jonathan M. Metzl, *The Protest Psychosis: How Schizophrenia Became a Black Disease.* New York: Beacon Press, 2010.
18. Marriott, *Whither Fanon?,* 15.

is in the prelogical and phantasmic thought of negrophobic representation and/as being. Instead, he'd opt we "must descend into the icy depths like Orpheus if we are to experience that endless death that pierces us and that we preserve inside ourselves like a lump of ice."[37] Magubane, reading the coonish belligerence-inflected responses of Dennis Rodman and RuPaul turning the gaze against black stereotypical insults, adds an interesting dynamic, and writes:

> Despite their efforts to the contrary, neither artist has been able to fully bridge the gap between the kinds of black images our society can safely tolerate and the particular qualities they wish to embody and display. The public transcript simply cannot accommodate their efforts to turn the gaze of white society back on itself…However, because it is so often assumed that all black personae are mimetic representations of the real essence of blackness rather than carefully staged performances, the complexity of the interplay between those moments when stereotypes are reconfirmed and those when they are being parodied is often lost. And so, too, the tension between looking and laughing as opposed to being laughed and looked at.[38]

III.



[Fig. 2] Vusi Beauchamp, *R12 500*, 2018. Mixed media on canvas, 1.8m x 2m.

JAG is located in the tumultuous downtown precinct of Johannesburg; and like its decrepit surroundings, its prospects are flimsy. Cops are strewn all along its gate, and a fancy tent soars over its leaking roofs; the old colonial structure now really looks like a chicken shed. In the new South Africa, cultural spaces like JAG suffer a terrible neglect. And such neglect often functions as a code: that is, better explained as something between the Fanonian colonial spatiality and Armah's postcolonial apocalypse. A cartographic layout that blurs the temporal lines of past and future central to our narrative of national progress. A form of totalizing design or designation of life and death according to the colonial and racial logics of difference and separation. *Paradyse of the Damned* implicitly echoes Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), not just at the level of its title but also in how it concerns itself with apocalyptic conditions. In Afrikaans, *Paradys* means Paradise. Of course, the standard biblical narrative, positions the damned in hell, and the saved in heaven. In this oxymoronic slyness, it implies a sado-masochistic theatre of pleasures of the dead and dying, a kind of thanatological expression of unbridled delight. That pleasure is probable, sustainable, or even plausible in the contradictory, if not ironic, place; and under damnation, is a name we cannot afford to invoke without resorting to cynicism.

Beauchamp has exhibited widely, and amongst many of his solo shows, he includes, *Welcome to Banania* (2017), *Terrorist* (2016), and *Kaffer Paradys* (2006). The titles themselves indicate not only a penchant for contradictions but also for shock and awe. Arguably this proclivity for provocation and scandal isn't simply generated by his intermedial approach to art, but a satirical flippancy culled specifically from comic art. He has also co-published a comic book called *Kaffer Paradys* (2006) with Eric Rantisi. Appropriately, spectacle tends to require a certain level of comic craze, more often than not, averse to subtlety. Beauchamp's visual commentary arrives at his critical junctures by way of this characteristic simultaneity: a bit of a Basquiat-esque touch here, Pointilism there, and some street art elsewhere: yet the ubiquitous recourse to blackface seems to be where he draws his pictorial strength from. So, far from innocence or naiveté, his childlike cartoonish figurines tend to be dark and horrific. Their deliberate incompleteness and roughness, in a manner that is popular in Johannesburg public spaces, combines texts and visuals, employing disjuncture and palimpsestic methods to convey their urgency and also commonality. Other characteristics are featuring repeatedly like haloes, emblems of international corporations, afrotropes and so on, that also seem to add to the complex painterly world of Beauchamp. As largely works on canvas and paper, they take the public wall as their motif, which is manipulated as a contact-zone of disparate approaches. It is the availability of the public wall that gives it anonymity, and also unpredictability, that Beauchamp uses as latent symptomatic trait, a site of protest, shock, and commentary in this *oeuvre*. Vacillating between the comical and protest indexes the role of all things specular. And though shabbily put together, the boisterous indignity of the show was sensational.

imposition of (trans)Gender reveals its (un)Gendering for, as Erik Hollis argues, Blackness and Gender are "two incommensurate positions, attempting to merge, a collision that results in incomplete halves making a fractured (w)hole."[73] This (w)hole of Blackness and Gender which *appears as one* reveals the hole that is Blackness as absolute contradistinction to trans for it comprises a *jouissance* that is utterly singular and cannot be realized through anatomical changes, because this anatomical implantation is the way the Black is made to be (White). If the Black undergoes further anatomical changes this is because *it can never find enjoyment,* and merely seeks out the least constraining prison. Ultimately *jouissance* as Black flesh seeks to utterly negate not only the current object of its investment, but the body as *organization* itself, so as to free itself in an expenditure without reserve, as pure proprioceptive capacity.

Conclusion: Whither Racial Desire?

I had originally intended to write this article about "racial desire." I found that I could not do this without addressing the fundamental antagonism between Blackness and Gender, so as to locate Gender as a position within the (White) Human Unconscious. I therefore pose my initial idea as an inquiry: If the Black is not Gender but seeks to destroy it, would it be possible for a "racial desire" to come into existence, which would determine desire by racial considerations alone? This "racial desire" cannot be a "racial fetishism" for the realm of fetishistic projection is that of "real fantasy" imposed by the (White) Human Unconscious in the experience of Gender as a bodily sedimentation. What we would normally describe as racial fetishism is in fact *gender fetishism* insofar as the White fixates Gender onto the racial Other. What the putative racial fetishist desires is in fact his own projection of Gender. Could there be a "racial desire" which takes only into account the desires, hatred, love, and anger that, for example, Blacks, Asian-Americans, Latin@s the Indigenous have for each other without reference to (White) Gender in a kind of "trans-racial primal scene"[74]? Beyond a facile call for racial solidarity, I envision "racial desire" as something like a *tactic of the intimate* which *nevertheless* or *precisely because* of its emphasis on intimacy, love and sex takes as its task the end the World. How does such an enormous task result from such a putatively everyday affair? This is because "racial desire" is a call for a psychoanalytic structure which withdraws from the World. In other words, *another (racial) psychoanalysis is possible*![75] The elaboration and realization of such a psychoanalysis would allow us rid ourselves of our White psyches and end the World. For these psyche-somas are *not ours*-they are mere adornments that we wear like hats and masks that we put on to pass in the World. Would not cultivating this alternative psychic formation be an "invention into existence?"[76]

This proprioceptive constraint or the inability of integration into the *socius* because of an imposition of an anatomical organ cuts to the heart of issues surrounding Trans and Black Trans studies. (White) cis-gendered or queer individuals are able to express their desires (what one wants) *within* the anatomical bodies they are given and are in identification (who one wants to be, and be seen as)[61] with, having access to the "illusory mastery"[62] (identification) over their gendered *imago* that is constitutive of the mirror stage. In the case of trans individuals, however, as Patricia Gherovici notes, "sexual identity issues revolve around a particular body, a body one is not born into, one that one becomes."[63] Psychoanalytically speaking[64] then, the trans individual does not experience the necessary "illusory mastery" over their anatomical body which is equivalent to saying that trans individuals are not able to express their desires or inhabit their mode of *jouissance*[65] within the gender, or anatomical body, they are given. There exists a leveled down antagonism between *desire* and *identification*, which can be resolved dialectically when the trans individual alters their anatomical body (what one identifies with) in order to enjoy their mode of *jouissance* (desire) since the latter "seeks a place to be inscribed, which is the body."[66]

For the (White) trans individual, anatomy becomes gendered performance or a *means* to achieve their *jouissance* and moreover is indicative of the fact that this performance of "gender does not transparently denote [its] desiring position."[67] My lowercasing of "Gender" in the case of (White) trans, connotes then the fact that "gender" and "desire" are *not identical*, and that the anatomical body, or gender, must be brought "into closer alignment with one's own desire."[68] As Jordan Osserman argues, on the level of *desire* or *jouissance,* the (White) trans individual is still determined by sexual difference because it "concerns the desiring position one adopts in relation to castration, to the phallus"[69] as signifier and allows for an *increased proprioception in the socius.* This is particularly instructive for the case of the Black and Black trans because my persistent uppercasing of "Gender" in reference to Blackness is indicative of the fact that desire and identification (gender in lowercase) are *made to be identical* under the ontological structure of the (White) Human Unconscious. Thus, the Black trans individual cannot but utterly identify with (its) Gender[70] which is symptomatic of the fact that the Black both wants to *be* and to *have* Whiteness. Paradoxically, in the case of Black trans, or when Blackness is "grafted onto" trans, it "covertly reifies the aforementioned binaries"[71] (gendered anatomy and identification), which were in antagonism in the case of (White) trans, making them more *securely seen and experienced as natural.* This naturalization of the antagonism inherent in trans is nowhere better evidenced than in Fanon's (White) *pénis*. Fanon's *pénis* is but an always-already performed ontological anatomical surgery by the (White) Human Unconscious, which has the effect of making it *appear* that Fanon's *jouissance* and gender align in the imposition of Gender. Fanon (and all Blacks) are trans(gender) in the (White) Human Unconscious. The Black is then *both "trans*gendered and *un*gendered"[72] in such a way that the

Previously shown at Pretoria Arts Museum in 2015, the re-installment of *Paradyse of the Damned* at JAG is indicative of the gradual reach of his ideas and its public reception.[39] Right at the entrance of the gallery is a garishly composed painting entitled *R12 500* [Fig. 2] in which these digits are blown and repeatedly inscribed across the canvas. Its backdrop is conceived of rows of stenciled poo emojis (with bulged lips). In the painting, a figure resembling the younger bearded Cyril Ramaphosa, current President of South Africa, with his head haloed by bullets. The trade unionist turned tycoon, then shareholder of Lomnin, a British platinum mining company, was directly implicated in ordering the hit of Marikana miners in 2012, which left 34 dead and 78 in critical condition. The story behind the public execution, amongst a number of reforms the workers wanted, was a wage increase to R12,500 per month.[40] One would ask: how then does he, after this known catastrophic event, rise not only to Presidency but a nationally celebrated alternative to his predecessor? In fact, it was not uncommon to compare him to Mandela. That he murdered innocent working men and disrupted their families, has been met with sobering silence in certain corners. Therefore, deifying gesture by halo of bullets, intentions aside, isn't a mark of shame or insult but applause and "ignorability"[41] under the current regime. Thus, Beauchamp projects feces as the communicative background to convey disgruntlement and horror.

Is the humanization of excrement allegorizing the unsanitary, if not crude, habits of state functionaries? The recent pervasiveness of fecal ideographs since, at least, #RhodesMustFall, has given shit explanatory symbolic power within public discourse and equally weaponized it into a protest item. Like "the return of the repressed," excrement has literally and figuratively become a tool used to confront, rewrite, and besmirch elite spaces. For much of the chain reactions to turning poo into a protest item, excrement is gradually turning into an aesthetic prop under the aegis of the deracialized marker of "the poors."[42] But what if this subtlety facialized feces, with its big lips, not only, albeit inadvertently, draws easy parallels with the failures in public services or reminds us the ephemeral victories pervading activism? That instead of making the elites smell the results of their political doing, it is rather implicitly, yet harrowingly, alarming us about the interstitial connections between blackness and waste? That waste isn't only, as the class analysts would like to believe, a circumstance of economic exclusion but a fundamental emblem of blackness itself? Or as David Marriott might put it, that the repeated need to civilize, humanize, and even dispose of blackness is predicated on the fear of "being smeared with shit."[43]

Clearly, the curatorial decision to have this piece at the entrance, prepared the audience for what was to come in the show. From socio-economic problems, to political leadership, to the media, to consumption—everything trembles under the artist's critical brush. The prevalence of blackface as a consistent iconographic sign, whether tentatively suggested or fully mobilized, jumps up with its typical visual ferocity. Intended irony and other discursive calculations tend to get lost or even

subsumed in the quest to demythologize blackface. Aesthetically, against the largely psychedelic and kaleidoscopic substrates, like the shit ideographs mentioned above, blackface here, with its overstated subversive aims, retains and enfranchises the protocols of its injurious foundations. The characteristic prominence of black male subjects, and especially politicians or public servants, relies on established demonological sentiments towards black masculinities. As art historian Michael Hatt has pointed out, "what is true of…the diverse modifications of the basic stereotypes [is] that they involve an implicit belief in the negro's racial difference in terms of gender."[44] Relying on the guise of Sambo, a figure gendered as one without gender but also as *excess*, Hatt argues, helped characterize the captive body as a "childlike, docile, and comic creation." For Hortense Spillers these figures are:

> Embedded in bizarre axiological ground, they demonstrate a sort of telegraphic coding; they are markers so loaded with mythical prepossession that there is no easy way for agents buried beneath them to come clean. In that regard, the names by which I am called in the public place render an example of signifying property *plus*.[45]

In *Mambo Jambo* [Fig. 1], a work in which the excessiveness of these signifying properties is both palpable as it is also eluding comprehension, proprietary relations appear abundantly. Dominated by pinks, in the back and foreground, and various shades of blues and greens, it first appears that the painting dramatizes black male fixation with white women. This composition is structured in a manner that allegorizes a liturgical exercise akin to the worship of the Virgin Mary in the Catholic Church. Right at the top center, a seemingly white feminine figure posing in the full substitutive surrogation of the father—what bell hooks notoriously terms "doing it for daddy"[46]—stares, coldly, through the viewer into distance. Behind her head, it's written, in bold pink letters, KAFFER. By her sheer composure, she has long jettisoned all liberal Samaritanism—accepting her position and its attendant role at the zenith of the human chain. On each side of her heels she's anchored by two male figures kneeling slavishly, with their arms jutting towards her, in the form of the famous eighteenth century British abolitionist medallion, *Am I Not a Man and a Brother*. On top of each male effigy, the word SHIT "deifies" each figure. Whilst they stare at her pleadingly, she appears in total disregard of their appeals. At the center of the canvas a pink inscription horizontally cuts through: *Mambo Jambo,* a phrase that has come to stand for the incomprehensibility of black speech-acts. Rather incomprehensibly, other textual annotations cascade down, as if offering clues to the entire narrative plain. At the rear end of the picture appears a blackface minstrel choir in joyous celebration, as if their sonic intervention embalms the masquerade with aura. The pink palette does not seem coincidental or unconsidered, if anything, it echoes with the stereotypical compositional inflections that haunt this body of work. The didactic nature of the overall commentary not only relies on notable (read: problematic) visual tropes but constructs its narrative plot

These anatomical facts persuade "no one" (neither the Black nor White), because the *pénis* is imposed on the Black as real *imago,* as anatomical appendage. This is due to the fact that the imposition of the structure of the (White) Human Unconscious onto the Black partakes of a tautological quality or the character "of a timeless enunciation: 'that's the way they are.'"[51] The *pénis* appears as timeless enunciation because the White enacts its own ontologically temporal schema onto the Black so that it situates a "loss of animation" in the "imaginary representations of *what is missing or visibly absent* from others."[52] The *pénis* appears quite literally as rigid, erect, fixated and timeless because the White imposes onto the Black "a rigidity of thought"[53], in which the Black loses all capacity of animation and proprioception. The Black experiences its Gendered body as it(self) because the (White) Human Unconscious imposes this Gendering in such a way that it is *anatomical,* for how could the Black deny this rigidity which immanently emerges from its *corpus*, the *pénis*? And how could the Black not consider anatomy to be it(self)? The (White) Human Unconscious *projects* onto the Black a Gender, (necessarily contingent) that becomes *rigid,* a *"gendered anatomy"*[54]. The Black's *pénis,* is, in its anatomical dimension, purely contingent as anatomy.

In Fanon's psychiatric dissertation, which we know he was writing at the same time as *Peau noire, masques blancs*,[55] he was concerned with establishing the irreducibility of the mental to the biological (specifically neurological). In the analysis of a case of a child patient with Roussy-Levy Syndrome, Fanon notes that the boy exhibited a muscular impairment which affected his personality. The boy says:

> Whenever I walk for a period of time, I'm forced to stop myself because it seems to me that it is not I who walks. I do not feel that my legs walk by own desire; I do not move; I am transported as if I were in a car. I do not feel my personality.[56]

The boy feels as though he does not walk through his own desire. He does not walk, *he is walked* in the passive, experiencing himself in the third person, as if some unknown force were walking him. Due to this proprioceptive difficulty, Fanon says that the "result is a declining of the notion of the ego and the personality."[57] Because of proprioceptive constraints, the self is limited and diminished. Of the reason for this, Fanon says, "the sane man is a social man. This means to say again, psychologically, that the measure of a sane man is more or less perfect integration into the *socius*."[58] This emphasis on the *socius* echoes Fanon's insistence on *sociogeny*[59] in *Peau noire, masques blancs.* We must read the issue of the Black's *pénis* in analogy to this. The ontological infliction of the *pénis* is an anatomical limiting of the Black's proprioception, and thus a sociogenic imposition. It is not so much, therefore, that the Black "is penis" as much as he *is pénised*, passively by some Other controlling it ("…It was no longer a question of being aware of my body in the third person but in a triple person"[60]). This anatomical proprioceptive constraint limits the Black's integration into the *socius,* for the Black is *only* a *pénis*.

imposition of an Other-Wordly authority, as ontological superego or Master, which the Black is constantly trying to kill. This body, which the Black experiences as its own, does not belong to it. The Black thus gives way to *two bodies*, one being the Gendered body that it is not, and the other being the *flesh,* that "zero-degree of social conceptualization."[43] The Black Unconscious[44] is therefore this "*body" which has been lost, or stolen,* the dimension of the flesh.[45]

Fanon's (White) Penis

> When one reads this passage a dozen times and lets oneself go-that is when one abandons oneself to the movement of its images-one no longer perceives the Negro but a member (limb); the Negro is eclipsed. He is made member (limb). He *is* penis.
>
> —Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs,* p. 137, my translation.

Having established the fundamental antagonism between Blackness and Gender, we are able to see the confrontation between the Black Unconscious and the (White) Human Unconscious *as such*, incarnated in the Black's *pénis*. I have amended both the Markmann and Philcox translations[46] of this excerpt from Fanon's *Peau noire, masques blancs* to capture the manner in which the Black man is mutilated in his *imago*, the *pénis*. The last two sentences in the original French read: "Il est fait membre. Il *est* penis".[47] The Black *is made or turned,* in the present perfect, denoting an action that is past *and* still constantly occurring in the "afterlife of slavery," into a determinate *partial object*, an organic member or limb, which the Black identifies with. The second sentence is odd, for it lacks an article in front of the French *pénis*.[48] Based on my translation, I assert that the Black is not *this or that* particular *pénis*, but *pénis* as ontological predication. This *pénis* is not to be confused with the "*phallus*", which is a representation of a (typically erect) penis, indicating male virility, or the psychoanalytic concept of the "phallic function"[49], Since *pénis* here is most definitively anatomical organ, what would it mean to speak of a "*pénis* function"? The (White) Human Unconscious ontologically imposes the *imago* of the *pénis* in such a way that it constitutes a "real fantasy." *Both* the Black and the (White) Human *see* the Black as *pénis*, since this *imago* is taken as *real.* This "seeing" of the Black as *pénis* should be taken literally since, riding on Warren's argument, the Black can only *manifest* in the ontological plane as *pénis*. Insofar, as sight is an ontological function this is all one can cognize of the Black. Fanon's penis is White.

Almost immediately after the quoted excerpt in *Peau noire, masques blancs,* Fanon addresses the issue of anatomy in regard to the Black's *pénis*:

> The average length of the penis among the black men of Africa, Dr. Pales says, rarely exceeds 120 millimeters (4.6244 inches). Testut, in his *Traité d'anatomie*, offers the same figure for the European. But these are facts that persuade no one.[50]

on similar grounds. Between the now hackneyed exegesis about the black heteronormative male's lascivious praise for white women, and the depicted black masculinity in cowardly submission or as amusement prop, the same prescriptive gesture is at play here. Through repeated recourse to plantation visuality, whether in its inflammatory or empathetic forms, Beauchamp repurposes these ventriloquizing postures with apolitical enthusiasm and a jingoistic acquiescence to their incendiary conclusions.

[Fig. 3] Vusi Beauchamp, *Congress*, 2014. Mixed media on canvas, 1.8m x 2m.

In the painting entitled *Congress* [Fig. 3], this gleeful recourse to the most proverbial of tropes, that is, "the heart of darkness." Through this seemingly impenetrable and esoteric forest, a figure resembling the young Nelson Mandela abstractedly appears in the background. Over him an emblem or ribbon hovers above like a halo, and the word "king" is inscribed across it. The punchline seems clear: Mandela is the "king of the jungle." Across the middle of the image, the word "cooning" is inscribed in cursive red Coca-Cola typographic style. Below, towards the edge of the painting, in black, is written CONGRESS. Suppose the prominent blackface figures, with their thick red lips, gaping mouths and big eyes, in shock or jubilation, are his "comrades." In archetypal neo-Tarzanist specular visuality, we encounter

the "traditional Hollywood image of the pop-eyed African in the jungle."[47] Is the abstracted Mandela Tarzan here? If so, the implications of that are neither flattering nor politically sensible as Magubane suggests to us above. It has become commonplace to publicly refer to the African National Congress (ANC) as the "circus," a slanderous moniker that re-adjudicates blackface lexical descriptions of the black politician. The exoneration of Mandela hinges on the false appraisal of his ushering a "miraculous revolution," on the basis that whites didn't lose their unjustly accumulated wealth of the time of "transition." This honorary whiteness, or even the "mythical body"[48] allegedly existing independently of the man, arguably are inventions in the wake of the debased historical mission and the rise of the mythological triumphantalist ruse of Rainbow Nationalism.

Beauchamp's paintings, even with their veneer of criticality, assume an orientation which does not operate outside of the purview of this mythology. Images of Mandela appear at least almost four times in this show. In his *oeuvre*, the depiction of Mandela interestingly follows a self-replicating pattern that seems dedicated at times, in spite of its critical commentary, to evade fully blackfacing Mandela. Works like *Skull* (2013) and *As You See on TV* (2012) are suggestive of this. In *Skull*, marked by his distinctive youth hairstyle, Mandela appears either abstracted or even stripped of his flesh into skeletal figure. A living death that even precedes his post-prison stardom. A critique representative of the Africanist view. But this is a *faux* representation. It appears there's also a tactical formality, if structural, reason behind this—after all, blackface cannot go unnoticed no matter how nuanced it is. As it were an anti-portrait, its objective is not always to veil, but also eliminatory. The mask of blackface is the mask of the proprietor and captivity (literally and imaginatively) and accordingly, of the fungible conquered body. At the level of its pictorial *modus operandi,* blackface must selectively extract or exaggerate to imply itself. Whether quietly reconfigured or detonating the field of vision its nocturnal grandiloquence, each grain inflected presence is symptomatically effective. Like in *Congress*, the iconicity of Mandela appears subdued, but nevertheless compositionally, formally, and narratively implies a supplementary account to the dominant hagiographic national image of "the Santa-Clause." Though we can attribute to the visible figure relative humanity, we are bound to run into an analytical cul-de-sac. The defamatory portrayals of Mandela that seem to contravene the dominant view of global iconicity aren't fully its opposite. And when looked at differently, that is politically, they represent the same reactionary view. Ultimately, they not only both exonerate the pervading hand of whiteness which parades each effort, but also allay the "forces of capitalism, racism and state violence" that structure them.[49] The iconographic monumentalization of Mandela was a racial capitalistic construct, which staged a systematic foreclosure of black freedom dreams by singularly extracting and molding Mandela as a symbolic savior.

The voguish representations of black political figures like Mandela, Steve Biko, and even Jacob Zuma in the works of contemporary South African artists

onto the Black by the (White) Human Unconscious, in which Gender appears as the "total form of [the Black's] body" that is nevertheless real. For, how does one *negate* a disavowal, that, because embodied, *manifests* or *appears* "by itself" as it were, without having ever entered into the mechanisms of the Black psyche insofar as the latter is considered something internal? This is how we must understand Fanon's experience of the crumbling of his "corporeal schema" being replaced by "a racial epidermal schema"[36] when the little French boy cries "Look, a Negro!" This racial epidermal schema is nothing other than the full imposition of the (White) Human Unconscious as ontological structure onto the Black flesh, insofar as the latter becomes a (White) Gendered body. The (White) Human Unconscious is lived wholly on the Black's skin, as a sedimentation that it misrecognizes as its Gendered (self). In truth then, the Black's psyche insofar as it is considered "internal" has never been analyzed.

The resolution cannot occur from the outside but from within, from the Black Unconscious of which we have no knowledge of its functioning. Since we are in a dimension of absolute non-knowledge, of a radical passivity that can only bring itself into existence via a radical affirmation of invention, this resolution can only be spontaneous decision, which must immediately be qualified as Marriott argues, as "radical indecision whose emergence introduces something entirely new into the world."[37] Such a decision that is indecision takes the following form: The Black must break its identification with Gender completely, absolutely separate[38] from what it perceives as its body, realizing that this body is a mask which imprisons it, giving way to a fundamental *psychic antagonism* which can never be allayed in which the Black individual lives everyday seeking to utterly negate its Gendered body, which it now experiences as affliction or burden. Insofar as the Black must *partially* manifest ontologically, however, while recognizing that this Gendered appearance is *not it,* it must engage in a *compromise-formation*[39] where it no longer takes Gender as natural given[40] from the side of the (White) Human Unconscious, but rather as partial object of the Black drive [*Trieb]*, as what Lacan designates by the *objet petit a*.[41] By separating itself from its conflation with Gender, and constituting the latter as *objet petit a*, the Black drive enacts the mediating function which allows it to see Gender as completely and utterly Other from itself, coming from the side of the World, and not of immanence. In claiming that the Black must realize Gender as contingent and not a natural given, I am most certainly not advocating for a classic performative theory of Gender. Whereas such a theory purports to undermine the fiction of an "identity" that precedes repetitive Gender performance positing "identity as a normative ideal"[42] that is constantly deferred, the point here is that the Black has neither Gender nor "identity" at all. They are imposed as burdens, and are simply descriptors of the wrong kind. If there is anything like a deferred normative ideal here, it is that of the day in which Gender can finally be negated in its entirety by the Black, without sublation. The compromise-formation can therefore only exist as psychic antagonism, since the Black will experience Gender as the

> The place of manifestation is this very thereness for the self. We might think of gender, then, as a particular metaphysical coordinate along an onto-metaphysical plane, which provides an intelligible place for the self.[28]

However, since the Black lacks "ontological resistance"[29] it can never manifest itself in a constitutively Anti-Black World and so attests to "an unsuccessful call-an appeal to being that is ultimately rejected."[30] The Black "does not inhabit the world as a self but as a thing"[31] and yet in such a manner that it is an "experiencing thing"[32] which can experience a Gendered self while being unable to manifest itself as Gendered.

What is this (Gendered) self that the Black experiences while being unable to experience it(self) *as* self? This experience of (non-)experience is what I've articulated as Gender insofar as it is a "real fantasy." One must understand Gender in the dimension of "real fantasy" as a determinate, yet phantasmatic, predication that is able to manifest in the "onto-metaphysical plane." The various "genderings" of Blackness, conceived in terms of the displacement of the experience of freedom to the realm of Gender, are *physical embodiments* of Black misrecognition. In this way, Gender "is a cloak, an ontic garment" which "do[es] not fit"[33] Blacks. Gender is an accoutrement that covers up naked Black *flesh*, but which the Black (mis)recognizes as the Black *body*. Gender is the White mask the Black skin wears, the direct embodiment of its *méconaissance*. The Black wears or performs its *méconnaissance* on the surface, in plain sight, all the better to mask the symptom of a Blackness that is-not.

In the Black's complete identification with this Gender as accoutrement, a psychic conflict arises, since the Black thinks it can manifest on the ontological plane, able to have a *self*. Paradoxically, the Black engages in a mechanism of defense and disavowal of its Blackness through asserting itself as Gender. Freud argues that we know something is repressed when it "can make its way into consciousness on condition that it is *denied*."[34] He gives the following example of a patient's denial: "'You ask who this person in the dream can have been. It was *not* my mother.'" However, "we emend this: so it *was* his mother."[35] In contradistinction, the Black communicates its denial by an affirmation of the denied content or image: "I am my Gender." Language becomes psychotic. This instance of Black disavowal would already be a radical reversal of the psychoanalytic experience, substituting an active affirmation of the denied or repressed content (Gender) for denial or repression of the passively affirmed (insofar as it appears in consciousness). However, this disavowal does not simply function on the level of speech implying the presence of the Other, whether external or internalized. Because the Black lives this *méconnaissance* on the surface as Gender, it literally *embodies* its disavowal. Its disavowal is its (Gendered) body, and its body is its disavowal. *Gender as a disavowal of Blackness.*

Marriott's notion of "real fantasy" can therefore be understood as the imposed conflation of the Lacanian Imaginary qua mirror stage and Symbolic reality

inadvertently participate in the cyclical orgy of what Sylvia Wynter calls "licensed heresy," those inscriptions of blanchitude "binding the structure of production under the hegemony of its imaginary social significations."[50] And indeed, under the banner of such an imaginary blackness is overdetermined from without. True to the form of racial typecasting, their significant differences amount to nil; they become what Spillers might call a "nightmarish undifferentiation."[51] Stereotypes prevent dynamism, fixing the other into an eternal anachronism, always an outsider to the time and place of the victim's presence. Stuart Hall aptly described this fixity as 'naturalization,' an attempt to "halt the inevitable 'slide' of meaning, to secure discursive or ideological 'closure.'"[52] Like Linda Steenkamp inside a cage, or Victor Mlotshwa forced into a coffin, blackface flirts or insatiates the movement between life and death, performance and existence, or even appropriation and property. It is an expression of white proprietary procurement, which allegorizes a turning "of people into things, objects into fetishes."[53] In other words, it's a semiotic inscription of endless redaction, reconstructing itself as a sovereign aesthetic within an "autotelic and self-perpetuating regime."[54] In this sense, stereotypes can render themselves as obsolete or ambiguous, so that they can travel beyond their established denotation. Zanele Muholi's current photographic project *Somnyama Ngonyama—Hail the Dark Lioness*, is also exemplary of this type of recuperatory strategy which employs racial stereotypes and ethnic trinkets in self-otherising ways to satisfy, it seems, the exoticising interests of her occidental eyes. Sometimes employed considerably and in other moments reluctantly; it is clear even by Muholi's own consistent rendering of the repetitive recourse to Blackface and auto-ethnographic visuality, that these gestures serve what Oguibe might call "playing the Other"—not necessarily to subvert their significatory violence of these tropes but to give them a palatable veneer. Thus, we must ask after Marriott and, later, Sexton, if the reliance on the images really cleanses us of our inhibitions only by allowing us to feed well off our own abjection? This is the implicit wish behind Beauchamp's work, which assumes the role of brokering the significatory power of racial typology by way of individuation or characterization. Listen to him talking about the *Kaffer*:

> ...I came up with this 'Kaffer Paradise' comic where there is paradise everybody is a *kaffer*, white, black whatever, everybody in that comic book is basically a *kaffer*. And to sort of shift it away from if you are blackened dark that word [only] applies to you. [My attempt was] to see how I could [dismantle] the word *kaffer* into [a global] word, in this paradise everybody is that word and how is that going to change (chuckles) perception?[55]

This implicit reluctance is a ruse: the aim is to "take away the power it has over black Africans and expose its legacy that continues to this day."[56] His imaginary power to "name" ends up misnaming, if not underestimating the power of the thing he thinks he's undermining. Contrasting himself with white cartoonist Zapiro and musical groups like *Die Antwoord*, he says "I remain accountable and mindful of a

derogatory interpretation of raced and gendered politics." Contrast this with the opening lyrics from the video "Enter the Ninja" from Die Antwoord: "Checkit. Hundred per cent South African culture. In this place, you get a lot of different things. Blacks, Whites, coloureds. English, Afrikaans, Xhosa, Zulu, watookal [whatever]. I'm like all these different things, all these different people, fucked up into one person."[57] This parallels Beauchamp's work and its ambition, as it also problematically echos, against its wishes, in Muholi's as well.

As Christopher Ballantine has noted in his work that the history of minstrelsy in South Africa has been around at least since the late 1840s, and upon its arrival, "blacks…tried to capture it for their own ends."[58] Indeed, latent iterations of this "end"—minstrel cultures—have, in subtle gestural signs, unfolded throughout the historical evolvement of black popular musical practices in South Africa from its early mining hostel forms of entertainment to more modernized ones—from Marabi to iScathamiya up to Kwaito. Though not a radical exception from Steve Biko referring to white liberals as "a bunch of do-gooders," cultural writer Bongani Madondo, riffing on U.S. novelist Norman Mailer's term "White Negroes," has noticed how white "anthropological desires" persist in contemporary culture, fighting "not to be out blacked."[59] This fetishistic desire to be culturally black recalls a line from Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*: "the man who adores the Negro is as 'sick' as the man who abominates him."[60] These quests in cultural production are therefore inseparable from the blithely public renditions of blacks as buffoons and sexual deviants that have remained part of white entertainment and critical practice.

From cartoonist Zapiro's Rape of Lady Justice (2008) to Brett Murray's painting, The Spear (2010) and innumerable others, the preponderance of pathologized and caricatured blackness has been running amok in the post-1994 era. Shielded behind commentaries on state capture, maladministration, and corruption, they rendered the black body as the playground of unadulterated insults. Perhaps with the exception of few public intellectuals like curator Khwezi Gule and media professor Adam Haupt, there's been a relative absence of dissent memorable enough.[61] Haupt called into question the ritualistic blackening up and the cultural appropriation of the white duo, Die Antwoord, paying strict attention to how forms of stereotyping practices don't just generate economic and symbolic returns for whites. In visual arts, Gule has observed a similar trend, that these derogatory images seem only fit for "corrupt" black politicians, but never their white or coloured conspirators. For Gule, in his article on Kannemeyer's *Pappa in Africa*, "courting controversy and notoriety has become the stock in trade of artists of the post-1994 era."[62] Both interventions, their limits aside, suggest to us not only the problematic of a racially unidirectional flow of stereotypical practice, but also begin to unravel how signifying can be a thriving and necessary strategy to establish various forms of psychopolitical, aesthetic, and ethical fortifications against blackness.[63] Contrary to Gule's moralism, Danie Marais' rejoinder to him accentuates the unthought pleasures such images enable for whites. With the diligence of a savant with a red pen, Marais,

that takes for granted or introjects the (White) Human taboo of interracial heterosociality as the condition of possibility for "passing." If we pay attention to the more fundamental issue of how two Blacks "passed" by means of Gender, then the very logic of "passing," which Snorton articulates both as "trans" and "Blackness," reveals how the Black embodies its own *imago as Gendered* reflected back to it in the White gaze. Passing as White is always-already what Blacks do insofar as Black experience is a misrecognition of how Blackness is made to be White, and the mask of Gender is a "real fantasy" which represses realizing *méconnaissance* as symptom. The Crafts' could never have "passed" as *themselves, as Black*, regardless of heterosocial or homosocial norms. In such a way, Snorton misrecognizes or confuses Black ontology (and "black freedom"[23]) by reducing the former to a White Gendered ontology.

Snorton critiques Wilderson's assertion that there is "no philosophically credible way to an experiential, contingent, rider onto the notion of freedom when one considers the Black-such as freedom from gender or economic oppression"[24] in the context of this case as a "refusal of the ways gender is itself a racial arrangement that expresses the transubstantiation of things."[25] However, Snorton engages in a more basic refusal, which is how Blackness masks itself in the *imago* of (White) *gendered arrangement*. The dispossession of the Black body comes *from Gender* insofar as the latter imposes the structure of the (White) Human Unconscious**.** Gender is quite simply how the Black masks its *méconaissance* (to itself!) by manifesting itself in the embodiment of gendered flesh.[26] What Snorton's analysis of Black ontology *as* White Gender allows us to see is how Gender becomes the libidinally cathected displacement of "the question that rests upon" Black ontology, "black freedom." Gender is how the Crafts' became free.

III. *Ontological Defense and the Objet petit a of the Black Unconscious*

Up to this point I have argued that Black experience is fundamentally a masked-*méconnaissance* and that this misrecognition *becomes* mask in Gendered embodiment. In this section I will establish that there exists a fundamental antagonism between Blackness and Gender in both an ontological and political sense by grounding this antagonism in the individual Black's embodiment. This embodiment is first revealed as a *psychic conflict,* in which the Black utilizes the mechanism of defense to disavow the dimension of the Black Unconscious. The resolution occurs by a "spontaneous decision" of the Black Unconscious that it must separate itself from its identification with Gender. Gender then is only realized the *objet petit a* of the Black drive [*Trieb*], giving way to a *psychic antagonism*.

In "Calling into Being: Tranifestation, Black Trans, and the Problem of Ontology," Calvin Warren takes up Jean-Luc Nancy's suggestion that "ontology is a phonology" and argues that "the law of being calls, or summons, the place of *Dasein.*"[27] Manifestation designates a successful "call into being" because

slavery."[15] Freedom is an ontological question because in the absence of a mediating (Black) Symbolic structure that would allow Black experience and desire to recognize themselves as *méconnaissance*, the ontology and psyche of the (White) Human imposes itself as non-mediated "real fantasy." Black experience is not only *a priori* unable to distinguish itself from Whiteness, but also unable to realize that in its dimension of masked-*méconnaissance* it is an *attachment or identification*[16] to an Anti-Black ontology embodied as the World. Let us call this masked misrecognition-cum-identification that the Black undergoes with the World the condition of "*Black Psychosis,"* understood in an absolutely non-pejorative sense[17], but rather as imprisonment in the (White) Human Unconscious.

II. *(En)Gendering Méconnaissance*

Under the concept of "Black Psychosis" I have so far argued that Black experience and desire (for freedom) is intrinsically a masked-*méconnaissance* of Whiteness. The Black is thus "wishfully, unconsciously-already a slave to the *imago* of whiteness" and "this pervertibility is the condition (to be violently affirmed) of what it means to be a black subject."[18] I will show that through this White *imago* Black *méconnaissance embodies itself* in and through *White Gender*[19] via an analysis of C. Riley Snorton's *Black on Both Sides*, where he addresses the issues of Blackness and "trans" as ontological logics.

Snorton presents this logic in his analysis of the fugitive slave couple Ellen and William Craft, who escaped from their respective slave plantations in 1848 by disguising themselves as a male disabled White planter and his slave, respectively. Because Ellen's complexion was "near white" the color difference between her and William "necessitat[ed] Ellen's gender transformation [into a White male planter] so that the Crafts could travel together homosocially, as was mandated by a legal and social invective against interracial heterosociality-particularly for white mistresses-within slavery's sexual-cum-racial logics."[20] For Snorton this embodied "passing" exhibits how Blackness operates "in apposition" to "trans" which he resists nominalizing "as a category of gender."[21] Rather he defines "trans" and Blackness through the heuristic of transitivity as "the condition for what becomes known as *the* human" or that which "articulates 'the quality of passing into another condition."[22] The case of the Crafts illustrates this logic insofar as Ellen's "cross-gendering" expresses a mode of escape by "passing into another condition" which Snorton sees as a mode of Black fugitivity.

Does not the "passing" that occurs here, however, depend upon Black psychosis? Ellen and William's "passing" took the form of a White slave owner and his slave so that this "passing" from the condition of slavery into the "human" reiterated the condition of social death. One might direct attention to Ellen's cross-gendering which allowed her and William to "pass" as free. This "homosocial" passing against prohibited "interracial heterosociality," however is a *permitted transgression*, one

in luxuriating energy, sterilizes blackface of its wrinkly improprieties and recasts Kannemeyer's work as an act of aesthetic proficiency and dutiful citizenry. Quoting his other reflections on *Pappa in Africa*, Marais recalls, "it isn't possible to get to the bottom of the race and identity politics without getting your hands dirty."[64] Key words: bottom, race, dirty. Kannemeyer, from this view, is definitely doing the most—he's cleaning the lavatory. As Slavoj Zizek would say, there is no satisfaction better than that of finally removing the stain. For Marriott, "The stereotype of black abjection is preserved as the history that must be canceled out even as it is raised up by the manufacture of a mutually enriching ideal of productive self-creation."[65]

IV.

Perhaps to draw toward conclusive remarks, I want to go back to the beginning, to the remarks about effectivity, something I was trying to articulate through my running notes here. Throughout this entire piece, I have been trying to think around the question of colonial *effectivity* that opens Homi Bhabha's essay, "The Other Question: The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse." Maybe without clarity, I have been trying to pose and posit this effect, more so how it can be perceived in Beauchamp's work. Albeit not as a way of attempting to raise the question of ambivalence—in the strict sense of postcolonial thought, that is—that often mystifies power. I have been thinking rather of, or with, effectivity, as that which "indicates the subtext of ongoing black captivity" that Jared Sexton picks up in his reading of Antoine Fuqua's blockbuster film *Training Day* (2001) as that which we "can neither transcend nor do without; *a trope* whose inarticulate demand for redress is not accommodated by cinema [read: visual arts] that flirts with historical antagonism but fails to move beyond unmistakably inadequate resolutions, whether community policing schemes or individual escape attempts."[66] Ralph Ellison might refer to this effect or that which it metonymically represents, as the "trope of tropes."[67] Let's hear Hortense Spillers' suggestive advice:

> When I spoke of the "hieroglyphics of the flesh" in "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," I was trying to identify not only one of diasporic slavery's technologies of violence through marking, but also to suggest that "beyond" the violating hand that laid on the stigmata of a recognition that was misrecognition, or the regard that was disregard, there was a *semiosis* of procedure that had enabled such a moment in the first place. The marking, the branding, the whipping—all instruments of a terrorist regime— were more deeply *that*—to get in somebody's face in that way would have to be centuries in the making that would have had little to do, though it is difficult to believe, with the biochemistry of pigmentation, hair texture, lip thickness, and the indicial measure of the nostrils, but everything to do with those "unacknowledged legislators" of a discursive and economic discipline.[68]

It is those unacknowledged legislators which I have been after, that which is anterior and beyond the significatory logics of blackface minstrelsy that Beauchamp's

work enunciates, though it might have sounded that my critical leaning was more towards dismissal, or even displacement. As said from the jump, my interest, if articulated well, was the self-activating process of subjectivization that I was after. Thus, the paradox lies, at least it seems to me, not in whether or not these tropes can or cannot be redeployed for subversive purposes, but in that their popular reinscription has given them not only honorific, but also critical stature such that we are no longer sensitized to their troubling histories or their casual circulation—especially if tinted with some critical commentary. The irony of it all, of course, isn't just the self-recycling structural posture of racist discourse but it's also that Beauchamp himself, as a Black person, does not treat his images as mirrors (to borrow from Marriott once more), instead he assumes a critical self-exoneration from the general public's ridicule.

With all his handy skills and instruments such as his brimful palette of cold and warm colours in a largely palimpsest technique, Beauchamp's art is, sadly, trapped. He pick-pockets iterations of various styles with the same coonish zeal he seeks to address. His own subversiveness seems rather undercut from the jump—its critical interventions notwithstanding.

Creatively, Beauchamp's work is undoubtedly flat, and conceptually, spectacularly pedestrian. Nowhere does it enrich the agenda of social transformation or the racist discourse he believes he undermines. Instead, it unthinkingly gives racism a radical voice. It is this kind of anti-black mediocrity, with all its exhibitionist proclivity, and non-reflexivity, that should invigorate interests far more content, not with what is said, but instead, with how it is said. It also raises questions about how the language that we rely upon often goes unnoticed, especially in critical discourse (whether textual or visual). The iterance of racist idioms and idiosyncrasies, as *Paradyse of the Damned* indicates, has the power to undermine itself in its pursuit of its original goals. Besides the issue of the banality of racist tropes, it occurred to me that, increasingly, the utilization of these epithets is slowly expanding beyond their supposedly typical right-wing confines, and they are gradually informing even the grammar of the views of those in the supposedly critical and dissenting quarters in South Africa and beyond.

Endnotes:

1. Hayley Miller, "Protesters Trash South African *H&M* Stores Over Racist Ad," *Huffington Post*, January 14, 2018. Retrieved from: https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/south-africa-hm-protests-racist-ad_us_5a5b9d47e4b0fcbc3a1122e9
2. Rebecca Taylor, "White Farmers Jailed for More than 10 Years for Forcing Black Man into Coffin," *Sky News*, October 27, 2017. Retrieved from: https://news.sky.com/story/white-farmers-jailed-for-10-years-for-forcing-black-man-into-coffin-11100320
3. Vhahangwele Nemakonde, "Penny Sparrow Calls Black People 'Monkeys'," *The Citizen*, January 4, 2016. Retrieved from: https://citizen.co.za/news/south-africa/927765/kzn-estate-agent-calls-black-people-monkeys/

Wilderson's point is that the perception of freedom for the Black is in fact a *méconnaissance* of the ontological structure of the (White) Human, which is itself, *enslaving*. The notion of méconnaissance (or misrecognition) is intimately tied to Lacan's articulation of the "mirror stage" in the which the previously fragmented body of the child libidinally invests in, or "assumes [*assume*] an image"[5], or *imago*, of the "total form of his body"[6], which, however, only exists on the level of the Imaginary as "gestalt" or "ego-ideal." While the identification of the fragmented body of the child as *bodily-imago* allows for the coming into existence of the "specular I" or ego, *méconnaissance* is in fact the "fundamental function of the ego"[7] insofar as it denotes the inability of the Subject to recognize Symbolic or intersubjectively structured reality in favor of the Imaginary. The Black's perception (of freedom) is therefore symptomatic of *méconnaissance* insofar as it is a failure to recognize the *ontological structure* of the (White) Human.

Jared Sexton makes this point salient in his analysis of the abolition of slavery during the Reconstruction era. Drawing on the work of legal scholars Guyora Binder and Anthony Farley, Sexton argues that the Thirteenth Amendment, which intended to abolish slavery, instead functioned *de jure* as a manumitting[8] of slaves, "redistribut[ing] the resources and power of the masters"[9] to the legal domain and *displacing* the experience of the slave into the reification of *a structuring lack* in the letter of American law. It would be a mistake to focus on individual perceptions of freed slaves, for the law engenders the promise of freedom in such a way that the promise exists only *as* promise. *Méconnaissance* occurs on the level of the Imaginary when the tautological dimension of the promise is (mis)perceived as freedom. Apropos of the putative freedom of Blacks during and after Reconstruction, it is impossible for the Black to recognize this *méconnaissance* as symptom of *méconnaissance*, allowing the law to be revealed only as promise. This is because the misrecognition of the promise for the fulfillment of freedom is *immanent to the law itself*. The law undoes itself in its Symbolic capacity. In order to reveal *méconnaissance* as symptom there must exist a mediating Symbolic domain via which this misrecognition can become aware of itself in the Real. But because the Symbolic domain embodies this misrecognition, Black *méconnaissance* becomes a symptom, which, as David Marriott brilliantly argues, is *masked* as symptom, because it is the structure or the "group itself [that functions] as symptom."[10] Instead of freedom, it is the "perfection of slavery [which] issues forth" from the desire of this promise, "*the slave's desire for equality itself*."[11]

Under such conditions it is the Black's "self-assurance"[12] of freedom that takes the form of the fantasy of a desire that is without lack, or more precisely (in the case of the Black, rather than Human) the fantasy of a desire which is not enslaved. Since this fantasy is masked by an inability to realize itself as symptom it is a fantasy which "fugues" the "structure of the real": "thus it is that fantasy at once performs and masks itself."[13] This gives way to the dimension of "real fantasy"[14] casting a shadow over structuring enforcement of social death in the "afterlife of

This Body Which is (Not) Mine: Blackness, Gender, and the Antagonism of Embodiment

Nicholas Eppert

"Mon ultime priére: Ô mon corps, fais de moi toujours un homme qui interroge!
[My ultimate prayer: Oh my body, make of me always a man who questions!]"

—Frantz Fanon

Can the Black manifest itself[1] or make itself *appear* in and through Gender? Is the Gendered body that the Black ontologically manifests as its *own body (corps),* its own self (*soi-même*), or is it rather a "ruse of embodiment"? This is a complex question which requires an analysis of the psychoanalytic vicissitudes and reversals of Black desire, embodiment, identification, and (mis)recognition. I aim to establish that a fundamental ontologico-psychic antagonism exists between the Black and Gender, in the dimension of the lived experience of embodiment. This "psyche-soma"[2] of Gender does not belong to the Black, but is an imposition of the (White) Human Unconscious. Because this question is so bound up with identity, I begin with the question of what the Black considers itself to be, first and foremost, and how this experience *could* unfold, so that the Black might understand its Gender as a mask. For that reason, this investigation should be read as if it were a psychoanalytic encounter, or the unraveling of a dialectical process between Blackness and Gender in which subsequent realizations retroactively sublate previous ones until sublation is no longer possible and the pure negation (of Gender) remains the only option.

On the Fundamental Antagonism Between Blackness and Gender

I. Black Experience and the Problem of Masked-Méconnaissance

What is Black experience? Frank Wilderson III obliquely approaches this question by asserting a fundamental antagonism between the (White) Human and Blackness, for "whereas Humans exist on some plane of being and thus can become existentially present through some struggle for, of, or through recognition, Blacks cannot reach this plane."[3] The antagonism is of two conflicting *ontological structures*. This is because "for the Black, freedom is an ontological, rather than *experiential*, question (my italics)."[4] Why ontological rather than experiential?

4. "'Colonialism Wasn't Only Negative'— Helen Zille", online, BusinessTech. Access: https://business-tech.co.za/news/general/164777/colonialism-wasnt-only-negative-helen-zille/
5. See: V.Y Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.; Charles W. Mills, "Bestial Inferiority: Locating Simianization Within Racism," in *Simianization: Apes, Gender, Class, and Race,* ed. Wulf D. Hund, Charles W. Mills, et al. Zurich: LIT VERLAG, 2015; Kobena Mercer "Carnivalesque and Grotesque: What Bakhtin's Laughter Tells Us about Art and Culture," in *No Laughing Matter: Visual Humor in Ideas of Race, Nationality, and Ethnicity,* ed. Angela Rosenthal. Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2016.
6. Mills, "Bestial Inferiority," 30.
7. Although not stated, the general theoretical orientation of these notes is indebted to Afro-pessimism and associable theoretical tendencies in the works of Hortense Spillers, largely compiled in her 2003 volume *Black, White, and in Color.* See: Hortense Spillers, *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2003.
8. Cedric Robinson, *Forgeries of Memory and Meaning: Blacks and the Regimes of Race in American Theater and Film before World War II.* Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2007, 127.
9. Eric Lott, "Love and Theft: The Racial Unconscious of Blackface Minstrelsy," *Representations* no. 49 (summer 1992): 27.
10. Sianne Ngai, "'A Foul Lump Started Making Promises in My Voice'": Race, Affect, and the Animated Subject," *American Literature* vol. 74, no. 3 (2002): 571-601. This text also forms part of her subsequent monography *Ugly Feelings* under the chapter title "Animatedness." See: Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005.
11. Of course, black people have been circumventing these practices from the inside, which is not to imply they/we were ever outside the system but rather denied presence. Yet, I am wary of how the recognition of staged moments of resistance and smuggling in of resistance, more than being acknowledged as "fact" often gives way to valorization. Consider how Kara Keeling—after James Snead—opines that 'temporalities of culture in general have begun to *conform* to the temporalities previously posited as particular to black culture, and the extant political potentials of "the human" have started to parallel those available through examination of the historical relationship between the logics of commodification and "the Black."' And that maybe indeed "the saturation of culture by the logics of Capital, the rearrangement that accompanies that process…might offer support to innovative and egalitarian alternatives." But I remain skeptical: if white supremacy coheres by way of a denial of blackness and its cultures, as history has taught us, the intermittent arrivals and departures to and from black cultural production — from Pablo Picasso to Amy Winehouse — then blackness is indeed the gift that never stops giving. See Kara Keeling, "Passing for Human: Bamboozled and Digital Humanism," *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory* vol. 15, no. 1 (2008): 237-250.
12. See: Paul C. Taylor, *Black is Beautiful: A Philosophy of Black Aesthetics*. Hoboken: Wiley, 2016. See especially chapter 2.
13. For example, recall the scene from the recent film *Kong: Skull Island*, where the black Lieutenant Colonel Preston Packard (Samuel L. Jackson)—who has come to represent the roles previously played by white actors—stands with a fire torch at the other end of the lake, whilst Kong charges on. The camera vacillates between Kong and Packard, seemingly drawing attention to the affects of rage that permeate both figures. As many theorists have pointed out, the filmic metaphor of Kong stands for what blacks, and especially men, have been to the white imagination—an uncontrollable beast out to reconquer the world, which thus must be stopped. Thinkers like Sol Plaatje, Richard Wright, and Jean-Paul Sartre have dedicated texts, novels and plays to this trope of the black man as a grotesque and senselessly lecherous beast, in their disparate conceptions of the "white problem." In the film Kong, however, latent in the scene mentioned above is how the very narrative arc of the mythic creature captured by US agents in nameless rainy forests, now appears as if without its implied early 20th century assumptions on race by literally having a black character. But the rage that permeates both Kong and Packard—two irrational entities—switches roles, where the latter's insensitive and blood thirsty character becomes the beast. Thus, its intensions rewrite the script with an uncanny resemblance in characteristics that transliterate simianization directly to blackness. However, other thinkers have drawn attention to how King Kong, in the same gesture, redramatizes the narrative of the transatlantic slavery and the related matters of spectatorship, white enjoyment, and black denigration. For writings that have reconsidered how the

pornotropic case of Kong, see: Stefanie Affeldt, "Exterminating the Brute: Sexism and Racism in King Kong," in Mills, et al., *Simianization*; James Snead's *White Screens, Black Images: Hollywood from the Dark Side*, ed. Colin McCabe and Cornel West. New York: Routledge, 1994 (see especially the first two chapters); and, last but not least, Jared Sexton, "Chaos and Opportunity: On Training Day," in *Black Masculinity and the Cinema of Policing*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

14. Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," in Spillers, *Black, White, and in Color*, 208.
15. Homi Bhabha, "The Other Question: The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse," *Screen* vol. 24, no. 6 (1983): 18-36.
16. David Marriott, *Haunted Life: Visual Culture and Black Modernity*, Newark: Rutgers University Press, 2007, 231.
17. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markman. London: Pluto Press, 1967, 110.
18. The debates in the 1990s and early 2000s are largely covered in various volumes and independent essays; most notably: Brenda Atkison and Candice Breitz, eds., *Grey Areas: Representation, Identity and Politics in Contemporary South African Art*. Johannesburg: Chalkham Hill Press, 1999; Elvira Dyangani Ose, Tracy Murinik, et al. *Erase Me From Who I Am*. Las Palmas, Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno, 2006; Gary Van Wyk's *A Decade of Democracy: Witnessing South Africa*. Sacramento: Axis Gallery, 2004; and Thembinkosi Goniwe, "From My Sketch Pad: Notes of a Black South African Artist," in *Coexistence: Contemporary Cultural Production in South Africa,* ed., Pamella Allara. Waltham: Rose Art Museum, 2003, among others.
19. On the tribalism as an ideological category constructed under apartheid laws, see: Archie Mafeje, "The Ideology of Tribalism," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* vol. 9, no. 2 (1971): 253-261. For a more recent explication of how tribalism impacted cultural identification, see: Peter Lekgoathi's "Ethnic Separation or Cultural Preservation? Ndebele Radio Under Apartheid, 1983-1994," *South African Historical Journal* vol. 64, no. 1 (2012): 59-80.
20. See: Everlyn Nicodemus, "Inside. Outside.," in *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa*, ed., Clement Deliss. London: Whitechapel, 1995.
21. See: Sarat Maharaj, "Fatal Natalities: The Algebra of Diaspora and Difference After Apartheid," in *Fault Lines: Contemporary Art and Shifting Landscapes,* eds., Gilane Tawadros and Sarah Campbell. London: Turner/A&R Press, 2003.
22. See: Olu Oguibe, "Art, Identity, Boundaries: Postmodernism and Contemporary African Art," in *The Culture Game*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004, 10-17.
23. Okwui Enwezor, "Reframing the Black Subject: Ideology and Fantasy in Contemporary South African Representation," in *Race-ing Art History: Critical Readings in Race and Art History,* ed. Kymberly N. Pinder. New York: Routledge, 2002, 372.
24. Huey Copeland and Krista Thompson, "Perpetual Returns,"*Representations* vol. 113, no 1 (2011): 1-15.
25. To trace these works I would suggest that the reader checks the words of the following cultural thinkers: Bhabha, "The Other Question,"; Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "The 'Blackness of Blackness': A Critique of the Sign and the Signifying Monkey," in *Figures in Black: Words, Signs, and the "Racial" Self.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1987, 235-276; Alexander G. Weheliye, "Pornotropes," *Journal of Visual Culture* vol.7, no. 1 (2008): 68-81; Leah Dickerman, David Joselit, and Mignon Nixon, "Afrotropes: A Conversation with Huey Copeland and Krista Thompson," *October* no. 162 (2017): 3-18; Manthia Daiwara, "Afro-Kitsch," in *Performing Hybridity,* ed. May Joseph, et al. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998, 177-181; Tavia Nyong'o, "Racial Kitsch and Black Performance," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* vol. 15, no. 2 (2002): 371-391; Patrine Ercher's *Negrophilia: Avant-garde Paris and Black Culture in the 1920s*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2000; and so on.
26. Mercer, "Carnivalesque and Grotesque," 13
27. Ibid.
28. See: Huey Copeland and Krista Thompson, "Afrotropes: A User's Guide," *Art Journal* vol 76 (2017): 7-9.
29. Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman, "Black Grotesquerie," *American Literary History* vol. 29, no.4 (2017): 700. See also: Kobena Mercer,"Intermezzo Worlds," *Art Journal* vol. 57, no. 4 (1998): 43-45.
30. Petrine Archer, "Negrophilia, Diaspora, and Moments of Crisis," in *Afro-Modern: Journeys Through the Black Atlantic*, eds., Tanya Barson and Peter Gorschluter. London: Tate Liverpool, 2010, 37.

48. Athena Athanasiou, Pothiti Hantzaroula, and Kostas Yannakopoulos. "Towards a New Epistemology: The 'Affective Turn,'" *Historein: A Review of the Past and Other Stories* 8 (2008): 6.
49. Ibid., 9.
50. Oxford Dictionary of English
51. Benjamin, Walter, "On the Concept of History," trans. Harry Zohn, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Vol. 4: 1938–1940,* eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Harry Zohn, 389–401. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006: 391
52. spoil n. 2. waste material brought up during the course of an excavation or a dredging or mining operation (New Oxford American Dictionary)
53. Walter Benjamin, "Convolute N," in *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002, 456-488 [N2a,3].
54. Allen Feldman, "Memory Theaters, Virtual Witnessing, and the Trauma-Aesthetic." Biography, vol. 27, no. 1 (2004): 164.

18. Trinh T. Minh-ha, "The Totalizing Quest of Meaning," in *Theorizing Documentary*, ed., Michael Renov. New York, NY: Routledge, 1993, 96.
19. isiZulu for "grandmother."
20. "My child" in isiZulu.
21. The anthropologist Michael Jackson: "[M]etaphors which are ordinarily quiescent (yet are the verbal correlatives of actual bodily dispositions) are activated on … critical occasions to mediate changes in people's bodies and experience, as well as alter their relationships with one another and the world." Michael Jackson, "Thinking Through the Body: An Essay on Understanding Metaphor" *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice.* No. 14 (1983): 134.
22. Macarena Gómez-Barris, *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2017, 133.
23. "It is everything that should be free (or as cheap as possible). This covers everything that can be appropriated through robbery (as opposed to exchange), and beyond that everything they can neither renew nor preserve. This 'everything' does indeed amount almost to *everything:* the entire globe, along with its products, commodities, and peoples." Claudia Von Werlhof, "On the Concept of Nature and Society in Capitalism," in *Women: The: Last Colony,* ed., Maria Mies. London: Zed Books. 1988, 97.
24. Marx, *Capital Vol. 1,* 130.
25. B. Wallet Vilakazi, "In the Gold Mines," in Francis Wilson, *Labour in the South African Gold Mines 1911-1969*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972. 190-94 (Appx. 30)
26. Marx, *Capital Vol. 1*, 130-131.
27. https://web.archive.org/web/20110728030648/http://www.slminerals.org/content/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5&Itemid=9
28. Von Werlhof, "On the Concept," 98.
29. Rajesh Gopalakrishnan Nair, "The Diamond Resource Curse in Sierra Leone: Analysis from a Political Economy Perspective," *The Thinker*, Quarter 3, vol. 69 (2016): 66n5.
30. Denise Ferreira da Silva, "1 (life) ÷ 0 (blackness) = ∞ – ∞ or ∞ / ∞: On Matter Beyond the Equation of Value," *e-flux*, no. 79 (February 2017).
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Marx, Karl. *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft),* trans. Martin Nicolaus. London: Penguin, 1993, 141.
34. Established in 2000 by the United Nations General Assembly, The Kimberly Process Certification Scheme, which, through an international certification of diamond imports and exports sought to prevent the circulation of conflict diamonds. Ultimately, though, it was largely a failure and was abandoned by many of its supports such as Global Witness, the NGO whose 1998 report entitled "Rough Trade" brought international attention to the diamond trade's entanglement with armed conflict.
35. Von Werlhof, "On the Concept," 97.
36. Ibid., 98.
37. Da Silva, "On Matter Beyond the Equation of Value."
38. Von Werlhof, "On the Concept," 105.
39. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1985, 5.
40. Michael Taussig, *The Nervous System.* New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc. 1992, 11.
41. Ibid., 117.
42. Michael Herzfeld, *The Social Production of Indifference: Exploring the Symbolic Roots of Western Bureaucracy.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992, 26.
43. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2003, 13.
44. Herzfeld, *The Social Production of Indifference,* 74.
45. Marc Augé. N*on-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity,* trans. John Howe. London: Verso Books, 1995, 78.
46. Estelle d'Halluin and Didier Fassin, "The Truth from the Body: Medical Certificates as Ultimate Evidence for Asylum Seekers," *American Anthropologist.* vol. 107, no. 4 (2005): 600.
47. Because the court no longer has an official Krio interpreter, many of my informants began the asylum process for more than two years.

31. Kobena Mercer, *Travel and See: Black Diaspora Art Practice Since the 1980s*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2016, 10.
32. Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act*. New York: Vintage Books, 1995 [1964], 47
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. Sexton, *Black Masculinity,* 28.
36. Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 47.
37. Marriott, *Haunted Life,* 241.
38. Zine Magubane, "Black Skins, Black Masks or 'The Return of the White Negro:' Race, Masculinity, and the Public Personas of Dennis Rodman and RuPaul," *Men and Masculinities* vol. 4, no. 3 (2002): 254.
39. By the time of this writing, it appears that a third iteration of *Paradyse of the Damned* was being installed at Kalashnikov Gallery (Johannesburg). This review reflects on the show as encountered at the Joburg Art Gallery in June 2018.
40. For more journalistic reflection on the narrative of Marikana Massacre, see: Greg Marinovich's *Murder at Small Koppie: The Real Story of the Marikana Massacre.* Cape Town: Penguin Random House South Africa, 2016.; Peter Alexander, et al., *Marikana: A View From the Mountain and a Case to Answer.* Auckland Park, SA: Jacana Media Ltd., 2012; *Miners Shot Down,* Documentary Film, dir. Rehad Desai, Johannesburg: Uhuru Productions, 2014.
41. See: Jared Sexton and Steve Martinot,"The Avant-Garde of White Supremacy," *Social Identities* vol. 9, no. 2 (2003): 169-181; see also: Steve Martinot, "Skin for Sale: Race and the Respectful Prostitute," *in Race After Sartre: Antiracism, Africana Existentialism, and Postcolonialism*, ed Jonathan Judaken. Albany: SUNY Press, 2008, 55-76.
42. In his essay "The Obscurity of Black Suffering," Jared Sexton writes "It is as if there is no way to talk about anti-blackness, or the matrix of racial slavery, without reducing it to those anemic empirical markers of that pass for class analysis. It is as if the only way to register this ongoing event of racial slavery is to analogize it to neocolonial subjugation…or assimilate it to processes of economic exploitation.'" These remarks can serve to both expose the continual referral to black people's experience as "the poors" as one of those instances where the naming of racial blackness is but an impediment or a foreclosure of some other grand theory of organizing or political practice. See: Jared Sexton, "The Obscurity of Black Suffering," in *What Lies Beneath: Katrina, Race, and the State of the Nation*, ed., The South End Press Collective. Boston: South End Press, 2007, 120-132. For elaborate examples on how this prevarication of not only naming the racialized nature of oppression in the post-apartheid reality, also their political strategies, especially in reference to excremental politics, see: Richard Pithouse, "Thought Amidst Waste," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* vol. 47, no. 5 (2012): 482-497; for an art historical example, see: Nomusa Makhubu's "Changing the City After Our Heart's Desire: Creative Protest in Cape Town," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* vol 53 (2017): 686-699.
43. This is a recurrent thought in David Marriott's body of work from his early books namely *On Black Men* (2000) and *Haunted Life* (2005). It has also reiterated in shorter dispatch articles such as "On Decadence" (2017). See: David Marriott, *On Black Men*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000; David Marriott, *Haunted Life*; *David Marriott* "On Decadence: Bling Bling," *e-flux journal* #79 (Feb. 2017).
44. Michael Hatt, "'Making a Man of Him': Masculinity and the Black Body in the Mid-Nineteenth Century American Sculpture," in *Race-ing Art History: Critical Reading in Race and Art History*, ed Kymberly N. Pinder. New York: Routledge, 2002, 193.
45. Spillers, "Mama's Baby," 203.
46. See: bell hooks, "Doing it for Daddy: Black Masculinity in the Mainstream," in *Reel to Real: Race, Sex and Class at the Movies*. New York: Routledge, 1996, 104-113.
47. Wole Soyinka, "Neo-Tarzanism: The Poetics of Pseudo-Tradition," in *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*, eds., Tejumola Olaniyan and Ato Quayson. London: Blackwell Publishing, 2007, 227.
48. Steven Nelson, "Nelson Mandela's Two Bodies," *Transition,* No. 116 (2014): 130.
49. Frank B. Wilderson III, "Obama and Mandela: The Parallels and the Differences," unpublished talk, February 2, 2010.
50. Sylvia Wynter, "Sambos and Minstrels," *Social Text* no.1, (1979): 150.

51. Hortense Spillers, "Peter's Pans: Eating in the Diaspora," in *Black, White, and in Color,* 23.
52. See: Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices.* London: Sage Publications & Open University, 1997.
53. Dickerman, et al., "Afrotropes: A Conversation with Huey Copeland and Krista Thompson," 10-11.
54. Spillers, "Peter's Pans," 22.
55. "Interview with Mxolisi Vusimuzi Beauchamp," retrieved from: https://mmutleak.com/2015/05/03/interview-with-mxolisi-vusimuzi-beauchamp-part-ii-2/
56. Ibid.
57. Die Antwoord, "Enter the Ninja," 2010, YouTube video, 5:12, Posted August 2010. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cegdRoGiJl4.
58. Christopher Ballantine, "A Brief History of South African Popular Music," *Popular Music* vol. 8, no. 3 (1989): 306.
59. Bongani Madondo notes that these acts—From Johnny Glegg, P.J. Powers, to Pule Welsch and even the *Die Antwoord*—we see a situation whereby these 'smart creatives [make] profit simply through fitting into cultures deemed 'on the rise' or exotic without really adding anything new or complex, intellectually, artistically or incendiary, to those cultures.' That is, in order for whites to satisfy a kind of metaphysical emptiness or simply for purposes of pure enjoyment, they turn to black people and their practices—to empty of the very substance, much like they have dispossessed their worlds. See: Bongani Madondo, *Hot Type: Icons, Artists & God-Figurines.* Johannesburg: Picardo Africa, 2007
60. Fanon, *Black Skin*, 10.
61. Adam Haupt, "Die Antwoord's Revival of Blackface Does South Africa No Favours," *The Guardian*, October 22, 2012. Retrieved from: https://www.theguardian.com/global/2012/oct/22/die-antwoord-blackface-south-africa.
62. Khwezi Gule, "Just 'Cause You Feel It Doesn't Mean It's There," *Mail & Guardian,* August 23, 2010. Retrieved from: https://mg.co.za/article/2010-08-23-just-cause-you-feel-it-doesnt-mean-its-there
63. Noting the limits, especially of Gule's rebuttal and the strains that motivates his agenda, is linked to how his remarks are quick to caution against the pitfalls of generalization of the stereotyping image. For Gule, amongst many of his reservations, is that Kannemeyer's typecasting pathologizes blacks *a priori*, forgoing even the fact some "Africans travel to other countries—not as refugees businessman and women tourists and scholars." (Ibid.) What Gule seems frustrated by, but cannot articulate nor see how his own resistance reconstitutes the problem, is forgetting that blacks are not people with pathologies, but are *de facto* pathology. That the luxury of individual distinction of black subjects seems permanently out of bounds in stereotypes, is telling. It is no wonder Gule recourses to cheap moralism that the artist irresponsibly riles up white fears but also at the same time assures us "it is not that Kannemeyer is ignorant of privilege that comes with being white" (Ibid.).Yet what he misses is the necessary and coarticulated pleasure that Kannemeyer generates.
64. Danie Marais, "Denying the Privileged a Voice," *Mail & Guardian*, August 27, 2010. Retrieved from: https://mg.co.za/article/2010-08-27-denying-the-privileged-a-voice
65. Marriott, "On Decadence."
66. Sexton, *Black Masculinity*, 31.
67. See: Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.
68. Spillers, "Peter's Pans," 21.

A fragment:

Two years ago in kwaBulawayo, I accompanied my former lover and his brother to clear the weeds off the tombstones of his father and his father's kin. We passed the hospital: Mpilo hospital. A white signpost with stenciled black lettering. Mpilo means life in isiNdebele. "But there's only death inside" he said. "No bandages, no food, you cannot get well in there." Or out here.

Endnotes

1. mama bell: "I am writing this essay sitting beside an anonymous white male that I long to murder." bell hooks, "Killing Rage: Militant Resistance," in *killing rage: ending racism*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995, 8-20.
2. See: Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Radicalizing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2014.; Hortense J. Spillers "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* vol. 17, no. 2 (Summer 1986): 65-81.; bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Boston: South End Press, 1992.
3. Tyrone S. Palmer, in "What Feels More Than Feeling," acknowledges the importance of the culture of dissemblance as discussed by Darlene Clark Hine. However, Palmer also acknowledges the ends of mobilizing dissemblance by arguing that "[the] enactment of dissemblance does not shift the symbolics of [the] 'Black female body' against the world's sharp white background. She is still contained, trapped in a racial imaginary" (46). See: Tyrone S. Palmer "'What Feels More Than Feeling?': Theorizing the Unthinkability of Black Affect." *Critical Ethnic Studies* vol. 3, no. 2 (2017): 31-56.; Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West: Preliminary Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance," *Signs* vol. 14, no. 4 (1989): 912-920.
4. bell hooks, *Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self-Recovery*. New York: Routledge, 2015, 142.
5. Marx writes "The use and construction of instruments of labor, although present germ among certain species of animals, is characteristic of the specifically human labor process, and [Benjamin] Franklin therefore defines man as 'a tool making animal.'" Karl Marx, *Capital Vol. 1 : A Critique of Political Economy,* trans. Ben Fowkes. London: Penguin, 1990 [1867], 286.
6. Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2017.
7. By way of an analogy that just so happens to hint at the hell our bodies are put through, Marx asserts that capital extracts the life force of labor power "in the same way as a greedy farmer snatches more produce from the soil by robbing it of its fertility" (Marx, *Capital Vol. 1,* 376).
8. Oxford Dictionary of English
9. João Biehl,*Vita: Life in a Zone of Social Abandonment.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013.
10. See: Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2017. Aereile Jackson, a character/caricature/black woman, in Allen Sekula and Noel Burch's documentary *The Forgotten Space,* whose children have been taken away by the state is referred to as a "former mother." Through her figuration, Sharpe draws attention to the naturalized relationship between black motherhood and loss.
11. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value," *Diacritics (*Winter 1985): 80.
12. Spivak, "Scattered Speculations," 77.
13. *Sous-rature,* invoked by Jacques Derrida via a reading of Martin Heidegger, translates to "under erasure." See: Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967.
14. a black/African born to parents of the colony; we are iterations of the "native," fixtures of the anthropological imagination.
15. Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism.* New York: Grove Press, 1968, 128.
16. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/ebola-virus-top-sierra-leone-doctor-shek-umar-dies-of-disease-9636406.html
17. Félix Guattari, *Chaosmose*. Paris: Edition Galilée, 1992, 78-79.

Mariatu once told me about the "tablets" prescribed to her by a psychiatrist as she retwisted my dreadlocks. She had not seen her two children in almost three years. Friends back home told her not to take the meds because it would mean that she was crazy. "I didn't want to take them because I know I'm not mad."

Regimes of body-imaging, where the intangible, affective, and biological dimensions of pain coalesce, the domains of medicine and human rights are appealed to when people are at their most vulnerable. In the asylum process, medical certificates issued by doctors take part in "the validation of [asylum seekers'] accounts by the corporal inscription of their persecution," constituting a new form of transnational administration of peoples.[46] Through the accruement of medical documents, while waiting for their "papers," the adage that "paper is proof" is recast.[47] Forced is a negotiation between their ostensible unknowability, as *"real refugees"* before the law, and their fundamental physicality, which is to say, the "bodily intensity and dynamism that energize the forces of sociality…[which] cannot be thought outside the complexities, reconfigurations, and interarticulations of power."[48] Thrown into sharp relief is that the articulation of pain entails an "an endless spiral of subjection and subjectivation:"[49] half death, half-life.

Half Lives: Out there /in here

Of all of the SSRIs Fluoxetine has the longest half-life. Half-life refers to the "the time required for any specified property to decrease by half."[50] It determines how much time is needed for a drug to accumulate—reach a 'steady state' in the system—and also how much time the system needs to eliminate it.

"The task of historical materialism," writes Walter Benjamin in "On the Concept of History," is to seize "that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to the historical subject in a moment of danger. The danger threatens both the content of the tradition and those who inherit it."[51] Elsewhere, Benjamin identifies the slag heap—the spoils[52] of mining—as the site where one discovers that which has past. Mined for meaning, mine dumps are dialectical images wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: is not progression but image, suddenly emergent.[53]

And too, our displacements, violations, (depressants?) and encounters, as fragments remembered and rearranged: talking, taking care, loving, crying, wailing—are a messy entanglement of "residual historical fragments."[54]

Off Littorality (Shoal 1.0): Black Study Off the Shores of "the Black Body"

Tiffany Lethabo King

On July 15th 1914, the Silver Spray ferry was travelling across Lake Michigan from Chicago to Milwaukee carrying 200 University of Chicago students when it ran aground on a 32-acre limestone formation. In 1914 and today, about 300 yards off of the shoreline, a 425-million-year-old limestone formation rises up from the lake's floor and kisses the surface of the water. The shoal, hard to detect particularly if the tide and water levels are above average, wrecked the Silver Spray. Even after shoals are mapped, they can often remain elusive due to the tide as well as their own capacity to shift and morph over time. By attending to what a shoal can do to a vessel moving toward it, I foreground the shoal as a conceptual and methodological disturbance.

As a geological formation and nautical disturbance off shore it represents an elusive and at times a dangerous space of encounter. In addition to being part of the lake's rising and falling floor, the shoal is also a nautical process. As a verb, to shoal means to move into shallow water.[1] When a ship moves into shallow water it must change speeds or adjust its velocity. The shoal forces a vessel approaching the shore to change its momentum and often its course. My discussion of the shoal imagines it as a metaphor and methodology within Black Studies. I argue that encounters with the various shoals of Black Studies throw normative theories, methods, reading practices, aesthetics, and associations off course. The shoal forces a vessel to remain off shore—off the littoral—impeding it from reaching its intended destination. In what follows, I consider two practices within Black Studies that slow, and force thought to reorient itself in relationship to Black embodiment.

As a formation that reroutes thought, I situate the shoal as a practice and praxis of black study that has the potential to impede the normative movement and momentum of the practice of gazing upon, reading, and theorizing "black bodies." As I proceed, I intend to discuss methods and approaches within Black Studies that shoal or slow normative, reflexive, and pornotropic movement toward the black body.[2] The first shoaling or method that I focus on is Katherine McKittrick's practice of "noticing" Black livingness that requires "shifting our analytic frame away from the lone site of the suffering [Black] body" and "toward co-relational texts, practices, and narratives that emphasize black life."[3] While McKittrick (and Ruthie Gilmore) has critiqued the dehumanizing deployment of the suffering black body—

and "the black Body" more generally as an object of analysis across scholarly traditions and disciplines; McKittrick's more recent work, "Mathematics Black Life" (2014) and "Diachronic Loops/deadweight tonnage/bad made measure" (2016) grounds my attention and thinking for the moment. More specifically, I think with McKittrick's method of and devotion to noticing the "what else"—or surplus of Black livingness—that exceeds black death, black suffering, and the black body.[4]

For instance, in the case of the notorious Zong incident, McKittrick's "noticing" opens up the possibility that through a rereading of the Zong's histories and ledgers (and their unreliable numbers of the dead) against M. NourbeSe Philip's poetics that a possibility of something else—or as McKittrick terms it, a "what else"—emerges alongside the killings. The way that McKittrick holds out—or holds space for—black livingness among stories of the dead resonates with the way Christina Sharpe poetically cares for the enslaved on the Zong in her book *In the Wake*. At the bottom of page thirty-seven, in what I remember as the last two devastatingly beautiful lines of the page, Sharpe writes of a captive on the Zong. She writes of a 'male' [the ledger's gendering of insurable goods] "who thrown overboard, managed to climb back onto the ship."[5] When I read this passage, the last two lines of that page appear to me as if they are straining and clinging for dear life to the lines of text directly above to avoid falling into the void of the page's bottom margin. The dangling sentences on the edge of page thirty-seven haunt me and bring me back to McKittrick's desire and effort to notice the possibility of something in excess of Black death and the suffering black body. Prodded by McKittrick, this dangling and suspended figure climbing back onto the ship opens up a place to imagine the unimaginable metaphysics of Black livingness in the wake of anti-blackness.

What kind of otherwise desire mixed with an unfathomable desperation, hope, and anticipation of an unknowable future—filled with its own terrifying horizon of unpredictable events—supplied this person's muscles with energy for this (perhaps futile) embodied act? This embodied act presents an occasion to consider the radically different kinds of futures and temporalities conjured by the community in the hold. Did the person with their immediate and unknowable understanding of the future climb back on the ship to: say goodbye, to kill a crew member, to take someone with them into the ocean, or to negotiate for their spot on the ship headed toward unknown terrors and its tiny opportunities to create black slivers of joy? *Did this climbing-dangling person shoal the vessel?* What kind of implausible notions of black futurity urged and animated this embodied act? Have interdisciplinary and Black Studies methods cultivated the kind of imagination and practices of study necessary to approach or come close to understanding this desire/desperation/hope? Does this desire, desperation, hope and its sensations and kinetic energy create the body as an effect? With the help of the something else or that which is in excess of black death and the body, is it possible for current interdisciplinary methods to begin to conceptualize the body as an effect (Butler) of the current, pull, and pulse of Black livingness (McKittrick) and the "what else" that produces

pain and the making intelligible of injury that destabilizes the discourse of the "human" at the center of humanitarianism.

> 'Talking terror' is a question of distance…a matter of finding the right distance, holding it at arm's length so it doesn't turn on you (after all it's just a matter of words), and yet not putting it so far away in a clinical reality that we end up having substituted one form of terror for another.[40]

"You can never know what goes on in the Bush if you've never been inside," Musa said to me. He was referring to the opacity of the asylum process. On one level, the Bush indexes the "savage Africa" that informants have fled. More generally, it indexes the esoteric, the hidden, the illegible. "Modern Europe" rubs against traditionalist notions of "the bush" as a site of sequestration. Musa's metaphor, loaded with cultural currency, puts into relief the slippage between the fear of being forcibly taken to "the bush" to be initiated into a secret society, and the anxiety of awaiting one's fate from a rural French town; it invites a "rejuxtaposing [of] the colonial gaze…where the terms and practices imposed upon and appropriated from the colonies, like *fetish, sorcery*…and *taboo* are redeemed and come alive with new intensity."[41] Waiting for "papers" is like being in a "civilized prison," to use the words of Mariatu.

France is, as Obai said, a "paper country," where paper is an irrational stand-in for *lived experience,* and yet paper has the power to alleviate pain. "Having papers" means having refugee status. "Paper" is not only materially, but socially, culturally, and symbolically central to the construction of the "Western Bureaucracy," as an annex of the State. It is paper that constitutes the State's archive, which works to enumerate and classify citizens, those who wish to become citizens, and those who never will be citizens. Information is life and vice-versa. "If it's not on the computer, it doesn't exist to them," one of the two Ishmaels said in a discussion with Abu and me, moving his fingers across an imaginary keyboard.

Paper, in the context of political asylum emerges as an "empty semantic vessel[s], capable of being filled with a variety of ideological messages."[42] It is malleable by way of the imagination, "the great inbuilt instrument of othering."[43] "The clash of these readings is the stuff of which bureaucratic encounters are made."[44] Paper is shorthand for access to a "*status.*" In the words of Ishmael, "papers, it's up to God."

A refrain: I'd rather die here than there. Toothaches, stomach pain, chest pain, head pain. Heart pain. "Wasted energy," Abu called it "[F]estering longevity."[45] "That's why we're sick all the time," Obai said with certainty. Each one of the guys amassed an impressive collection of appointment cards, prescriptions, and lists of blood tests to drop off at the lab for analysis. Prescriptions for sleeping pills to get through the interminable nights; Doliprane for the headaches; Anti-depressants for "the stress."

beneficiary nothing…"[36] Value crystallizes in the circulation of myths of eternal love and transcendence.

Black ~~lives Temne lives, Mende lives, Krio lives, Kono lives, Koranko lives, Limba lives, Susu lives, Fulani lives~~… matter then, present the material for a poetic vision of the World that is formal as well as affective; chromatic as well as social; suffused in light or shrouded in darkness; "place[s] of obscurity."[37] "These 'non-values' become subject to exchange—at the highest possible value."[38] Blackness of the body is not just what you can or cannot see, but what you can do to a black *body*—let it live or suffer, rape it, de-sacrilize it.

Asylum, or Deathly Ideations

> All change can create sadness. It's when the sadness lingers that we can become stuck, mired, and unable to move.
>
> —bell hooks, *Sisters of the Yam*

In 2011, I met a group of Sierra Leoneans who were afraid they were going to die. The fear of dying is the fear of most people, but it must be different when death is both imminent and immanent. The convergence of our bodies brought about by circumstance, timing, and tragedy—at once horrifying and enchanting—resembled a diasporic pastiche. I was part of an activist organization that provided those in search of refugee status with the language to write asylum claims and appeals, indices of undoing, injury persecution, stories of de-linking from the place that was once "home."

Most all of their first claims were dismissed as *fantastique, voire pas crédibles* [fantastical, not credible even]. *Ses explications orales sont dénuées de substance* [his oral explanations lack substance] read one letter of refusal from *OFPRA (*Office français de protection des réfugiés et apatrides). *The incommensurability of* "the *real"* and "real effects" crystallizes by the UN Human Rights Commissioner's clumsy construction "manifestly unfounded or not." The notion of "manifestly unfounded" hints to a particularity of pain: "It is not *of* or *for* anything. It is precisely because it takes no object that it, more than any other phenomenon, resists objectification in language."[39] Indeed, the "or not" assumes a groundless claim from the start. The juxtaposition of "manifest" visible or evident, with the "unfounded"—the invisible or out of reach—points to the conundrum implicit in what Michael Taussig calls "talking terror," which is to say laying claim to the injury suffered. The questions at the heart of the asylum process: *Who are you?, Why are you here?,* and *Why can't you go back?* are implicitly related to the ethnographic question of cultural translation. The outcomes of these "translations" were about more than the status of a copy to an original or the transmission of meaning. At stake is the transmission of

it?[6] Have critical theories and their methodologies chosen to only see the effect—the body—of black desire, world making, and radical futures? I think about the difficulty to register or foreground black pulse and breath (Crawley) as a force that is more than (or before the) body as partly an epistemological problem presented by the limits of visuality and perception.[7]

For example, Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyèwùmí in *The Invention of Women* writes of the ways that pre-colonial Yoruba cultures navigated and experienced each other and the social realm through a world-sense as opposed to a worldview. Unlike a western world-view that privileges sight, a Yoruba world-sense apprehends reality though a multiplicity of senses anchored by hearing.[8] A Yoruba world-sense is also attuned to the multiple worlds that constitute the realities that people exist within including the physical (body) and metaphysical (exceeding the body and materiality).[9] Without visuality as a perceptual anchor, the body—as mere appearance or a surface for projection—does not become the primary field of orientation for the social world and an order based on somatic or body reasoning. Did the person climbing aboard come from a community in West Africa that had the capacities to attune themselves to these extra-somatic—not outside of the body but exceeding it, like flesh—ways of existing? The one who survived—crawled back onto the ship—could have felt that their life force did not belong to the ocean. They could feel and hear their pulse beating, and therefore desire their life force back on the deck of the ship. Their particular desire, will, and vitality animated an embodied movement—a body crawling—back into the ship. The will of the flesh that precedes the body. The willing of the flesh and the climbing back into a black future—bleak as it may be—produces the body as an effect. An understanding of the body as the effect or will of black vitality and life pulse is a way or method of noticing that needs to be homed among others.

I think with McKittrick's insistence on noticing and the "what else" it might lead to as a method/approach for redirecting a singular attention on the black body toward other important objects of scholarly, ethical, and sensational concern.[10] For white and non-black scholars who attempt to engage in the practice of Black study, I introduce another practice or method of noticing or giving one's attention that follows more erotic lines. I offer that instead of looking to the Black body—whether suffering or in ecstasy—as an object of study, that one attends to or notices their own (white and non-black) desire(s) for the Black body. Noticing requires one to pause, take a beat, and maybe a breath before proceeding. It requires a slowing of one's momentum maybe even one's pulse and a moment to regroup and reorient. Similar to the space of the shoal, where a vessel must pay attention in a new way and possibly set a new course, McKittrick's noticing requires one to seek out something else, maybe a detour around the black body to perceive the "what else" that is the relentless desire to pursue the black body. What are the sensations, feelings, and desires of the white and non-black body that produce the black body as an object of inquiry?

Alongside McKittrick's noticing that seeks out "what else," I think with the work of Black scholars who attend to black erotics, black kink, and perversion. I turn to Ariane Cruz, Amber Musser, Jennifer Nash, and LaMonda Stallings because they insist upon a different practice of "noticing" at the level of sensation and affect. In their 2015 roundtable discussion "Race, Pornography and Desire," published in *The Black Scholar*, they insist that one notices their own body and its desires particularly as one approaches the black body, be it in ecstasy, pain, or both. In discussing the quotidian, ordinary, and mundane ways that sexual pleasure and anti-black violence become tethered to one another, these scholars argue that kink and perversion run through and organize capitalism's quotidian anti-black violence.[11] I argue that like shoals, Cruz, Musser, Nash, and Stallings force the reader—of the black body—to run up, into, and against their own desire for the black body. For Cruz, Musser, Nash, and Stallings confronting one's own body and its response to—and desire for—an experience with the sexualized, and at times suffering black form, is what the erotic labor of Black kink and perversion demands.

McKittrick's noticing of Black life, not found at the site of the suffering black body, and Black feminists' kinky and perverted methods that demand noticing your (white and non-black) own bodily sensations in the face of the black body's pain (and pleasure) perform a shoaling. They offer new sites and objects of scholarly analysis that are often ignored when thinking about and theorizing Blackness. For example, some forgotten and (I argue willfully) ignored sites might include how white and non-black bodies feel when focusing on black bodies. How might the practice of Black study make white and non-black scholars that do Black Studies make their own bodies and sensations sites of analysis?

This question became more than an abstract or hypothetical exercise for me when I began to advise graduate thesis projects. While I am outraged about gratuitous uses of Black bodies (often penises, anuses, and vaginas), rather than issue an immediate moratorium on white and non-black scholars using black people's bodies in their research, I needed to think about what it would mean instead to respond to this desire to gaze upon and load black bodies with the burden of performing the *sensual labor* (while white and non-black bodies disappear) of theoretical race work.[12] As a teacher who is able to build a relationship with white and non-black scholars (who I believe to be earnest and full of good intent), the one-on-one exchange enables me to enter this conversation from a place of compassion instead of rage. From this relational space, I am able to develop a more adaptive repertoire of responses as a teacher and thesis advisor, particularly when it comes to my white students' interest in Black studies and more often than not black bodies. As a teacher and advisor, I can frame my students' desires as possible sites of theoretical and methodological intervention. For example, I can ask them, "What could a focus on your desire to home in on the Black body bring to the surface or make visible and available for interrogation?"

discourses that are haunted by the violence what they displace. The practice of mining stages this conundrum in the way the material and the immaterial, the metaphorical and the literal, oscillate in discourses of and around mining as the work of valuation. "The world is seen as an exploitable mine"[28] for meaning, for metals, and for diamonds. Diamonds are one of the hardest materials on earth, but that is neither here nor there. This doesn't matter. What does matter is that diamonds undeniably do (matter). What does alluvial nature diamond mining in Sierra Leone in particular tell us about the violence against those who have come to be known as black in our global arrangement of the World? It is telling that Rajesh Gopalakrishnan Nair, in "The Diamond Resource Curse in Sierra Leone: An Analysis from a Political Economy Perspective," characterizes the diamonds in Sierra Leone as particularly "lootable." In the language of political economy, "[l]ootable commodities are those that have high value-to-weight ratios, and can be easily appropriated and transported by unskilled workers."[29]

In "1 (life) ÷ 0 (blackness) = ∞ – ∞ or ∞ / ∞: On Matter Beyond the Equation of Value," Denise Ferreira da Silva asks why it is that racial violence does not matter. Da Silva is interested in "an indifference signaled by how the obvious question is never (to be) asked because everyone presumes to know why it can only have a negative answer."[30] In order to elaborate her proof on the Equation of Value, she draws from Nigerian artist Otobong Nkanga's 2014 installation *In Pursuit of Bling,* which illuminates the way in which the opulence that characterizes Western aesthetics—much like "the West" itself—is encrusted with "materials that glitter-image colonial violence."[31] She continues:

> In the modern Western Imagination, blackness has no value; it is nothing. As such, it marks an opposition that signals a negation, which does not refer to contradiction. For blackness refers to matter—as The Thing; it refers to that without form—it functions as a nullification of the whole signifying order that sustains value in both economic and ethical scenes.[32]

If value is a symbolic apparatus that gestures towards the commodity's "natural but also…purely economic existence,"[33] then the "conflict diamond"[34] seems to bespeak a terrible beauty. Violence works to untether the "merely" from the symbolic. To speak of "blood diamonds" is to join the material, lived, and symbolic to the "economic" in the most capacious sense. Blood diamonds bear (commodity) fetish qualities as well as claims for redress. Raw materials are not found; people are robbed. The mechanics of representation are as critical to the creation of value as the actual exchange of use values in the marketplace—the way that the mobilization and mutilation of bodies can be overlooked as long as they are mining diamonds for those who inhabit spaces of shine. Labor is indispensable to the valuation of a "natural resource."[35] "What is available for virtually free to the economic process and transformed into 'value' within it appears to have no cost simply because it costs its

To speak of the resource curse is to invoke what Macarena Gómez-Barris calls the extractive view, which is to say the "logics that map territories as commodities rather than perceive the proliferation of life and activities that make up the human and nonhuman planetary."[22] And to call such a state of affairs a "curse" is to conveniently overlook valuation's white mythology that posits the steady supply of cheap African labor for mines, plantations, and farms as natural resources. Nature is a perspectival concept that privileges the vantage point of slavers, creditors, and ruling parties.[23]

In *Capital Volume 1* Marx writes: "Diamonds are of very rare occurrence on the earth's surface, and hence their discovery costs, on an average, a great deal of labor-time. Consequently, much labor is represented in a small compass."[24] This raises questions about value, which in Marx's understanding is determined by the socially necessary labor time expended to make diamonds as a commodity available. Indeed, minerals become valuable only once they have been extracted by human beings helped by machines. Diamonds in South Africa and Botswana must be extracted from deep kimberlite reserves, with the help of "machines of the mine,"[25] making it a rather labor- and capital-intensive process called mining: a form of resource extraction that dates back to antiquity. Marx continues:

> If man succeeded, without much labour, in transforming carbon into diamonds, their value might fall below that of bricks. In general, the greater the productivity of labour, the less the labour-time required to produce an article, the less the mass of labour crystallized in that article, and the less its value. Inversely, the less the productivity of labour, the greater the labour-time necessary to produce an article, and the greater its value. The value of a commodity, therefore, varies directly as the quantity, and inversely as the productivity, of the labour which finds its realization within the commodity.[26]

Diamond fields cover approximately 7,700 square miles of Sierra Leone's surface,[27] and while diamonds are found underground in kimberlite pipes, they are mostly alluvial, which is to say they are commonly dispersed among the gravel of riverbeds. Extraction is therefore done artisanally: by hand or with simple tools, by laborers often working at the behest of dealers.

Mining, in general, allows us to think about capital's transformation of populations (civilians) and lands (mines) into raw materials for the creation of surplus value and, by extension, the violence of surplus extraction. Extraction as "the action of taking out something, especially using effort or force." Some questions that seem to emerge naturally: (taking something) out of where? To what ends? When is "effort or force" synonymous with violence? Perhaps, it would depend on what is being extracted? "Natural resources" seems to be a natural response and(/but) as a response it allows us to question how we theorize a thing rather than the critical

As a way of moving forward, I share a scenario that emerged with a former white graduate student who took one of my sections of Black Feminist Thought in 2016. More and more white students are approaching me with an interest in thinking about anti-Blackness and doing anti-racist and decolonial work. When they map out their initial project they often start with thinking about and through Blackness. More often than not, when these white students think about Blackness, it is the black body that is on their mind. I have a lot of thoughts about why this might be the case which is another discussion. But what I do want to think about is a response to these students' desires. How could I slow them down and direct them to do some critical "noticing?" More specifically, how could I have them think about their own embodiment? Might I ask the student, "What does your body feel, desire, want when it thinks about blackness?" "What does your body—or desire—want from the Black body or the idea of Blackness that you are describing to me right now?" This line of questioning brings me back to the email request from a former student now living in Europe. They wrote me a year late in 2017 with a request. At the time, I did not know what to do with the request and all of the feelings that I had about it, and decided not to respond to the message. In the body of the email the former student wrote the following:

> I got back to you because I am writing my dissertation on the Body Politics of Black Lives Matter. Particularly, I am referring to the process of rearticulation of Blackness in this social, cultural, and political space, paying attention to the way in which the narrative of the movement *has shifted the focus of attention on the body.* The work is still pretty much in the making, but I thought of you because your class has been fundamental for me and your opinion would be really precious.[13]

I have many questions about this email and its underlying assumptions about who I am, why I would respond and why I would take up this labor. But more importantly, I want to ask if this perceived movement or shift to the body is of their own making? Even if sources point to the body, why are you interested in Black bodies? Are you excited by this shift to the body? What excites you about Black bodies?

I invite white and non-black scholars studying, theorizing, aestheticizing black bodies and Blackness to think with McKittrick's noticing and turn to the "what else" of black kinky and erotic methods to become better attuned to (Adreanna Nattiel) their own bodies.[14] I extend this invitation because I contend (however controversial it may be) that white scholarly projects that gesture toward or state their critical and anti-racist intent engage in acts of pornotroping black embodiment. I draw on Hortense Spillers' elaboration of pornotroping in "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" as a way of analyzing white scholarly efforts to aestheticize (look, gaze, capture, know) and deconstruct (close reads of black authored texts as bodies) in visual and literary studies. Thinking with Spillers, I argue that white and non-black scholars transform black figures and

forms into "captive bodies" under their scholarly gazes and modes of deconstruction in their work related to visual culture and literary criticism regardless of their intentions. In the white and non-black scholars' visual and or semiotic field of study, I argue that the black form becomes a captive body and site of "captured sexuality."[15]

Sensuality and captive sexuality map onto one another within Spillers' configuration of the pornotroping that happens under captivity. Under the eyes of and within the semiotic and interpretive field of the white and non-white visual scholar and literary critic, black embodiment transformed into a body—or *being for* the captors.[16] Treated as a captured (*hold still and now move*) body for the close, detailed and surgical reads/examinations, the black body becomes a source of "irresistible, destructive sensuality."[17] While I do not intend to conflate the sensual with the sexual, the act of tracing the contours of black bodies, black literature, expression, sound and prose (as black experience and embodiment) can be a physically, intellectually, and emotionally gratifying experience.[18] (*I can do sooo many things with/to Blackness/Black bodies. They are sooo capacious/liquid/unbound…*) Spillers' notion of how the "irresistible, destructive sensuality" of the captive body comes into contact with the sexual is crucial. Spillers notices the way that the captive body becomes an othered kind of object (not the self) and therefore a form of captured sexuality. The many ways that white and non-black scholars produce themselves through capturing and producing the black—sensual and sexual captive—object of study remains a space of unthought in contemporary critical theories.

Cruz, Musser, Nash, and Stallings, who draw upon Sharon Holland's book *The Erotic Life of Racism*, are correct in acknowledging that racial difference is a sexually charged place.[19] Amber Musser speaks of the difficulty of separating out the "hold that race has on our sexual imagination."[20] Had I been thinking with McKittrick, Musser, Nash, Cruz, and Stallings when this former student emailed me, I would have urged this eager white scholar to consider the ways that her process of thinking about the Black body concerns her own body, its sensations, and how she understands herself as someone who should not be subject to sensual scrutiny. I would want her to consider the ways that the pulls of racialized erotics and its sensual and gratifying elements shape her intellectual project. Beyond reading and citing—#CiteBlackWomen—I encourage non-black scholars to take up the transformative labor that black erotic, kinky (and sometimes feminist) methodologies demand.[21] Reading Black women's texts, particularly the work of Spillers, Hartman, and Wynter, has become a sexy practice of citation at the moment. While non-black scholars now eagerly cite these scholars and their texts, non-black scholars ignore the embodied-intellectual and ethical work that they demand.[22] In addition to all of the generative theoretical work that black gender and sexuality studies, and black feminist/queer/trans studies performs, they also call forth a practice of noticing and carefully attending to how the white and non-black self emerges in relation to the black texts, art, and people they are reading/consuming. At this

the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL). Momoh's army came under attack not only from the NPFL, but also from the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), a Sierra Leonean rebel group led by Foday Sankoh, a disillusioned corporal of Sierra Leone's army, who found it more worthwhile to collaborate with the Liberians. Violence begets violence; in turn, Sierra Leone struggled through a series of coups, beginning with the overthrow of Momoh in 1992. He was replaced by military officer Valentine Strasser, making him one of the youngest dictators, turning 25 shortly after seizing power. During this time, the RUF gained more control over the diamond mines. The war escalated. Little boys were abducted and taught to wield AK-47s. They were given cocaine and were shown *Rambo* until it no longer made them cry. Little and teenaged girls became sex slaves and were forced to take up arms.

Around the age of 10, I became obsessed with death, overtaken by nightmares that left me an insomniac for two years**.** I would spend sleepless nights visualizing piles of discarded black limbs with exposed raw flesh and bone, hearing screams, pleas, and even worse, laughter. The Revolutionary United Front's principal means of brutality was amputation. Which could be read as a spectacular response to former President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah's 1996 plea for citizens to "join hands for peace." "Short sleeves or long sleeves?," rebels would ask. Legs were hacked off with machetes, so were lips, and ears. Pregnant womens' bellies ripped open after onlookers were taunted to guess the sex of the baby. Compromised bodily integrity indexed a compromised political life. I was haunted by broken bodies, uneven hack jobs, gripping and repulsive images at once ephemeral and chillingly overbearing, a spectacle of death in life that left me disoriented, far-flung, ill, nervous: the return to our land, the return to comfort seemed violent, painful, and long. We were flung to the Gambia, the US, the UK, France, South Africa…

Dreams and the imaginary lend themselves well as the metaphors of compromised visuality, the shadowy obverse of what remains unquestionably present in waking life. It is a theatrical way of seeing that challenges and confounds modes of subjectification, animation, gendering, and racialization, where the body appears ghostly rather than epidermal, it's corporeality defamiliarized. Bodies appeared as traces, making manifest the latent relationship between flesh and memory—what once was, *history* ÷ living, breathing, entities transformed into some things that can only be cited as *spectacular, horrifying*, but never *known.*

Some joke that Sierra Leone (whose name leads people to assume that it is in South America) is so small that you could walk around the whole country in a huff. Sierra Leone's land area measures 27,539.736 square miles, and in this speck of a country one finds iron ore, bauxite, gold, limonite, and diamonds. Like many African countries, Sierra Leone suffers from what political economists call the "resource curse."

supply of insulin. Taking insulin while running on empty means diabetic coma, means emergency (which may or may not mean, trip to the emergency room). Care only happens when slow death becomes too much, no longer abated by desperate writhing or Panadol. And fittingly, emergency medicine seems to stage this discrepancy between who is seen and the process by which they are seen. A (emergency) case received: A *gogo*[19] in pain. Classic symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis: stiff, painful joints, diminished joint range, fatigue. Rheumatoid arthritis cannot be cured, but it can be treated to varying degrees of effectiveness depending on when it is diagnosed. Degenerative illness that makes movement painful. Knuckles and fingers warp into charred branches. Tebogo couldn't help but marvel aloud that nothing was done sooner. "*Mntwan'am*:"[20] Life is like the charge of the light brigade. Following the orders of Lord Cardigan, Crimean War's Battle of Baclava, British light cavalry charged Russian troops into a bloody frontal assault. Strategically/militarily speaking, the deaths that resulted were senseless, but the battle looms large in the British mythic-historical imagination as a metaphor[21] for selflessness. Mixed metaphors are emblematic of the colonial experience; school kids learn to confidently recite poetry about snow-capped mountains, despite only knowing rainy and dry seasons. And yet, over there in that town in Mpumalanga life sometimes rhymes with the charge of a light brigade: the poorly equipped foot soldiers, obeying the orders of empire, even in the face of certain death. A (noble) act of selflessness or a self that is less (than)?

On Insomnia, precious metals, and feeling lackluster.

> Though it's thousands of miles away
> Sierra Leone connects to what we go through today
> Over here it's a drug trade, we die from drugs
> Over there they die from what we buy from drugs
> The diamonds, the chains, the bracelets, the charmses
> I thought my Jesus piece was so harmless
> 'Til I seen a picture of a shorty armless
>
> —Kanye West, "Diamonds From Sierra Leone (Remix)"

Sierra Leone's civil war "officially" broke out in 1991. Control over the country's diamond mines is often said to be a cause, but really, we can never know. Public servants shuffled to work, shoulders slumped forward, and unpaid until they were so fed up they started to break into government offices and buildings, taking what they knew was theirs. The public education system was barely on its knees. Neighboring Liberia was going through coups, executions, and widely-seen-as-fraudulent elections, all drenched in blood, and as we know, borders are lines to be crossed as well as an affective vestibule where anxiety and fear reside and proliferate. Joseph Momoh deployed troops to ward off Charles Taylor's rebels, who called themselves

particular juncture when another surge in interest around projects on Black and Indigenous peoples' movements and bodies is cresting, I'm not sure that there is a way around doing this erotic and ethical work of noticing. I do not believe that there is a way for non-Black scholars to separate the erotic from the intellectual project of thinking about Blackness. Working on Blackness is always already an erotic project. However, this reality does not present an occasion for shame or judgment.

The work of Black feminist scholars on the erotic, kink, and pornographic illumines the ways that the desires, affects, and sensations embedded in work on race and raceplay become important sites of knowledge production. Musser encourages the pursuit of an erotic line of inquiry (as opposed to a pornotropic one) that opens up possibilities rather than judgment. Musser suggests that, "rather than ask whether or not something is oppressive, I am interested in thinking about the fantasies that people are attaching to difference and whether there is a way to think around them or through them to reframe these questions of desire."[23] Musser helps me make an important affective shift here.

When I am confronted with yet another white project on Black people's bodies—specifically Black people's genitals, entrails, and rotting carcasses—I am now compelled to ask more questions of (as opposed to shut down) the scholar. Following Musser, who develops an empathetic reading practice in *Sensational Flesh*, I argue that there is generative potential and value to mining the white and non-black scholar's desires, motivations, and affective states in the midst of thinking about Blackness.[24] Some of these black erotic and kinky methods and practices even run alongside queer methods of feeling, thinking, and writing. For example, Ann Cvetkovich models critical memoir as a mode of writing and knowledge production in *Depression: A Public Feeling* that encourages a contemplative and affective practice. Cvetkovich's critical mode of feeling, attending to, and writing about how depression feels as "everyday sensations that do not immediately connect to any larger diagnosis or explanatory framework" is one of many models and templates for noticing.[25] In a way, Cvetkovich directs her own attention to feeling and describing the "minutiae and boring effects" of depression in a way that defamiliarizes how she and her readers think and talk about depression.[26] What is important about this practice is that Cvetkovich's attention to the minutiae, mundane, boring, and ordinary feelings of depression can break with the scripted, polite, respectable and accepted way of talking about depression. This mode of writing and thinking allows Cvetkovich to pick at or puncture the layer of film of academic discourse that covers and floats on top of the pulsing and ugly ways that depression lies under the surface and expresses itself under ordinary (and often uninterrogated) circumstances. As a research method, Cvetkovich's "Depression Journals," that accompany the scholarly essays in the second half of the book, help reveal "the emotional investments that guided" and shaped her more scholarly and conventional essays.[27] Queer methods like Cvetkovich's provide evidence of the existence of reflexive and contemplative

tools that white and non-white scholars have already developed and can access if they choose. These tools can be sharpened and adapted to respond to the challenge that black kinky and erotic methods present.

Further, the most generative white queer theory contains a playful, kinky, and open-spirit of public sexual experimentation and exhibitionism (a large part gifted from black queer theorist Samuel Delany[28]) that allows it to offer its own white body up for use. I hold out hope that the critical and ethical white and non-black scholars who acknowledge queer theory's deviance, kink, funk, bare-backed, rawness are able to follow, or rather accept, the invitation of the black kinky call to show your goods. Give black erotic and kinky studies something to play and think with. What is your body doing in response to blackness? That is the unexplored and yet to be answered kinky question. Queer and necessarily anti-racist theoretical labor that seeks to abolish anti-black violence must attend to and study the white and non-black body's becoming and unbecoming at the site of blackness. The queerest and most radical scholarship must, and will, abandon its own practice of dissemblance in the face of its own desire (whatever it may be at the moment) for blackness. The anti-racist project that seeks the eradication of anti-black violence must relinquish its posture of "respectable" and duty-bound interest. The black kinky and erotic method is a demanding lover/fuck. Stop being so prudish and so selfish with all of the "let me see yours" without bending it over and spreading it—wide and white or non-black—for Black kinky methods to gaze upon. Far from staid and serious, white, and non-black practices of scholarly withholding while gazing and examining with the best intent are actually anthropological (I see/notice you). Far from altruistic or an expression of allyship, white and non-black scholars are interested, invested, and erotically motivated (understood broadly) by their studies of black people, black expressive culture, theory, and life.[29]

With a recognition and deep awareness of the erotic currents that animate white and non-Black interests in blackness and sometimes (often) black bodies, white and non-Black scholars could be receptive to asking themselves the following questions. How could my desire—to the extent that it can be made known—be made useful as an object of study? Since the body is always implicated in the production of knowledge, how will I acknowledge my own body as a white/non-black scholar while studying Black bodies? How does studying black bodies make me feel? How do/es my skin, eyes, genitals, mind, tongue feel when I think about the black body? (For those who have done meditation or yoga this is a practice of noticing that might feel familiar.) What are the methodological implications of attending to my own body and its sensations as an object of knowledge as I attend to Black bodies? Am I willing to make myself an object as I make blackness an object?

I consider these questions because the exercise of situating oneself in the vein of, "I acknowledge that I am a white-cis-queer-male-setter-scholar working on yada…" has become an inane exercise. I want to know how it feels to acknowledge arousal—and or other sensations—at the sight of Black bodies in pain, rebellion,

enacted cannot be resisted or prepared? What if [they] just [settle] in, awful, hurtful, and intrusive?"

In my scholarly life as an anthropologist,[14] labor around ugly states of being: dispossession, abandonment, humiliation, grief. Should we understand the study of "valuelessness" as valuable, or is another qualifier necessary, one which breaks with the language of valuation, worth, investment, return? What are the ethical and methodological implications (Ethical because the modes of valuation suffuse both labor and life, and as a result, one seems to necessitate the other. Methodological because the language of value suffuses critical inquiry)? What does it mean when one studies structures of unbearable feelings, but finds oneself deadened by a reduction of feeling, or contending with "a permanent struggle against an omnipresent death,"[15] and looking for healing nonetheless? Does it matter? Not long before he contracted the ebola virus and died, after treating hundreds, Dr. Sheik Umar Khan, a Sierra Leonean epidemiologist, physician Specialist from the Ministry of Health and Sanitation, is reported to have said: "I am afraid for my life, I must say, because I cherish my life."[16] "Existence is not dialectical, not representable. It is barely livable."[17] The thing we like to call "real life" has a way of feeling "more fabulous, more maddening, more strangely manipulative than fiction."[18]

Diminished Ability to Move

> Half a league, half a league,
> Half a league onward,
> All in the valley of Death
> Rode the six hundred.
> "Forward, the Light Brigade!
> Charge for the guns!" he said.
> Into the valley of Death
> Rode the six hundred.
>
> —Lord Alfred Tennyson, "The Charge of the Light Brigade"

I met up with my friend Tebogo during a weekend visit home to Johannesburg. He is a doctor doing a year of community service in the South African province of Mpumalanga in a not-quite-industrial, not-quite-rural town. He said he prefers emergency medicine to anything else. "Someone has a heart attack, you treat them and then they're on their way," he said. "Maybe that's just a defense mechanism on my part," he added. But maybe, I ventured, emergency medicine, more accurately reflects the state of affairs (as though, it is this isomorphism one seeks)? The constellation of factors that makes life barely livable in the material sense, make for a slow dying. How to find words to narrate a demise, a weathering, that is incremental and unspectacularly spectacular? Chronic illnesses like diabetes require luxuries of regularity and certainty that one will regularly have food to eat to accompany one's

him:

> "Largest food company in the world
> According to wikipedia
> Is this the Man?"

Is Fluoxetine (generic for Prozac) the Man? Is an anti-depressant selling out, a concession, or, an aspiration? Maybe it is the Man. The Man tells us stories about ourselves, about the way we move through the world. Because of the Man, because of loss, the longing, and numerous other reasons, Prozac is a part of my pharmaceutical being.

A constellation of symptoms felt together/collectively known as clinical depression or major depressive disorder: decreased interest or pleasure in most activities, most of each day, significant weight change (or change in appetite), change in sleep: Insomnia or hypersomnia, change in activity, psychomotor agitation or retardation, fatigue or loss of energy, diminished ability to think or concentrate, thoughts of death or suicide.

Depressant can refer to a drug or chemical substance that "reduces functional or nervous activity."[8] A depressant: an influence that depresses economic activity. The polyvalence of "depressant" is instructive for thinking about the racializing and weathering of our bodies. The psychological toll of the emotional labor that is not only ungratifying but damaging; the slog through bureaucratic regimes, the becoming prisoners to our ailing bodies, and to The System in general; the dying when making life; our descent into ex humanity,[9] former maternity,[10] the immobility of being without verbs. Another symptom of clinical depression is the feeling of worthlessness.

An idea for a conceptual art project/installation came to mind on a day I was able to drag myself out of bed: a series of nearly-blank word-processor pages on a computer screen. Depression isn't so conducive to artistic production, "everyone" now accepts as common knowledge. Being depressed: being overwhelmed by emptiness. Motivation leaches from your bones, your nerves, your mind. A series of false starts and stops: the writings of a depressive. Intellectual/artistic/literary production: a trick of vocabulary, or an iteration of "the textuality of value"?[11] Spivak gives us two connotations of the textual: rooted in language and following, Deleuze and Guattari, that "'reality' is a fabrication out of discontinuities and constitutive differences with 'origins' and 'ends' that are provisional and shifting."[12] What if we thought with the textuality of "depressant" to think about the limits of analytical categories and, about the blockages that foreclose imaginative possibility and lived experience? How does one struggle to live under erasure[s][13], ~~depressants,~~ which "violently

movement, ecstasy, and make that feeling—your feeling—an object for study. This kind of empathetic disclosure interrupts the violence of politesse and its performance of "pure" and anti-racist intent on the part of the white/non-black researcher. This empathetic practice of accountability does not naively assume that that the white/non-black scholars' interest in blackness/black bodies is an expression of allyship. *The corporate university does not produce scholars whose primary interest is in producing knowledge for political action and more specifically the eradication of anti-black racism*. The corporate university trains us to work against our best selves. The humanist or social scientist in the corporate university is trained to intervene upon and improve fields of study. The scholar who will be successful is trained to develop an impulse to improve, develop, elevate, abstract, queer, trans or post-humanize existing fields, especially Black Studies. The successful scholar will be able to track their accomplishment and growth by documenting a record of the impression or legacy they have left on the field. The question that white and non-black scholars in the academy must ultimately answer is how did I advance, intervene upon, or "save" Black Studies. Rarely are white and non-black scholars asked to reflect upon and come to terms with how Black Studies "saved" them. To be clear, I am not cynical or invested in an indictment and understanding of white and non-black anti-blackness as hopelessly intractable, unrelenting, or unchangeable. The empathetic practice of disclosure and engagement I invite assumes and holds space for the possibility that people can be (and want to be) accountable and ethical. Further, this kind of empathetic practice requires more than accountability.

Unlike the empathy of the abolitionist or the misguided white liberal subject that Hartman treats as an object of inquiry in *Scenes of Subjection*, this empathetic practice is an erotic process of unbecoming.[30] This erotic call toward an unbecoming submits to the mandate of Lorde's erotic movement toward chaos.[31] Is it possible to invite the Lordean chaos that can ensue when one approaches blackness (in its embodied form in this case) and submits to its invitation to abolish a self that makes and remakes itself through the sensuous objectification and destruction of black people? If approached ethically, the power of black presence and embodiment can undo and reorganize the white and non-black body and self on different terms. White and non-black scholars could choose to open themselves to a Black erotic method and practice of unravelling their investments in possessing themselves and the black captive body. If white and non-black scholars can bare or expose the ways that their white/non-black self depends on rendering the black body a captive "being for" whiteness/others, it is possible to render themselves available for being radically rearranged by Blackness. This work leaves room for the formation of a new kind of body—a Deleuzean Body Without Organs—that can be undone and remade in relation to blackness.[32] This kind of ethic and reorientation can interrupt the current impulse to objectify black embodiment and black life while transforming the white and non-black scholars who hope to abolish anti-black violence in their own work.

Endnotes

1. H. Willuoughby in R. Hakluyet. Princ. Navigation (1589) 11.269, “Shoal,” Dictionary, Oxford English. “Oxford English dictionary online.” (2016).
2. In “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” Hortense Spillers introduces the captive body as a surface or matter that has the “potential for pornotroping,” as a thing that becomes a “being for” the captor. On page 67 in a long passage Spillers writes the following: “But this body, at least from the view of the captive community, focuses on a private and particular space, at which point of convergence biological, sexual, social, cultural, linguistic, ritualistic and psychological fortunes join. This profound intimacy of interlocking detail is disrupted, however by externally imposed meanings and uses: 1) the captive body becomes the source of an irresistible, destructive sensuality; at the same time—in stunning contradiction—the captive body reduces to a thing, becoming *being for* the captor; 3) in this absence *from* a subject position, the captured sexualities provide a physical and biological expression of “otherness”; 4) as a category of “otherness,” the captive body translates into a potential for pornotroping and embodies sheer physical powerlessness that slides into a more general “powerlessness,” resonating through various centers of human and social meaning.” Hortense J. Spillers "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." *diacritics* vol. 17, no. 2 (1987): 65-81.
3. See: Katherine McKittrick, "Mathematics Black Life," *The Black Scholar* vol. 44, no. 2 (2014): 16-28; Katerine McKittrick, "Diachronic loops/deadweight tonnage/bad made measure," *cultural geographies* vol. 23, no. 1 (2016): 10.
4. McKittrick, “Diachroncic loops.”
5. Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Durham:Duke University Press, 2016, 37. There are also other documented accounts of attending to this figure climbing back onto the Zong. See: Erin M. Fehskens, "ACCOUNTS UNPAID, ACCOUNTS UNTOLD: M. NourbeSe Philip's Zong! and the Catalogue," *Callaloo* vol. 35, no. 2 (2012): 407-24.
6. See: Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge, 1990; see also McKittrick’s counter arguments to scholarship that reflexively focuses on black death as if it is axiomatic to black studies. McKittrick chooses a method of attending to black life as something that is always lurking among black death and that can expose anti-black violence in ways that a sole focus on black death cannot “Black Livingness,” “Black Atlantic Livingness,” in McKittrick, “Diachronic loops.”
7. See: Ashon Crawley, *Blackpentecostal breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2016.
8. , Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Giscourses*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, 14.
9. Ibid.
10. In “Diachronic loops,” McKittrick introduces and describes this practice of noticing Black Livingness that I extend upon as an ethical and erotic method in this essay.
11. See: Louis Chude-Sokei, Ariane Cruz, Amber Jamilla Musser, Jennifer C. Nash, L. H. Stallings, and Kirin Wachter-Grene,"Race, Pornography, and Desire: A TBS Roundtable," *The Black Scholar* vol. 46, no. 4 (2016): 49-64.
12. See Kathryn Bond Stockton, *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame: Where “Black” Meets “Queer.”* Durham: Duke University Press, 2006; Timothy S. Lyle, "Tryin'to Scrub that" Death Pussy" Clean Again: The Pleasures of Domesticating HIV/AIDS in Pearl Cleage's Fiction," *African American Review* vol. 50, no. 2 (2017): 153-168.
13. Email communication from Fall 2017.
14. See Adreanna Nattiel’s notion of attunement to a black lesbian sensorium in “Bringing Sex to Theory: Sensational Affinity, Pleasure, and Sexual Pedagogy” Georgia State University (2018) Unpublished Master of Arts Thesis. Nattiel uses it in the context of thinking about how one might attune—direct their attentions and senses to--themselves to a black lesbian sensorium that attends to the specificity of black lesbian affects and sensations without reifying the uniqueness sensations of lesbian sensuality to a rigid identity category.
15. Spillers, “Mama’s Baby,”67
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.

grief of almost/former motherhood and now, I must be your mammy. But I don’t want to be.” “I don’t feel like I can talk to you,” she said. “I didn’t know that was how you were supposed to feel,” I didn’t say. “I don’t care,” I also didn’t say. ~~A reminder/warning:~~ “Because many black women make care synonymous with love, we confuse the issue.”[4]

“You can be too black for the university,” a professor told mother—black woman—and me during office hours. An affirmation of what we suspected, knew to be true. If labor is a bodily disposition for *homo faber,*[5] must we not distinguish a body from a life? A valuable perspective offered by feminists, people of color, and indigenous scholars is that reproduction is the unseen in labor-power’s value, through silent support: at the university, we’re the contingent diversity workers.[6] “Out there”: our experiences become the material for a whole range of “interesting” academic inquiries. I had a seminar with a white man who announced during the first-day round of introductions that his dissertation topic was “black girl magic.” A student of musicology, he was especially interested in black girls’ use of rhythm and gestures. When I recounted this to anyone who would listen, I couldn’t help but add “did he *really* mean snaps and neck rolls?” Faces around the seminar table were countenanced, neutral, blank, unsurprised, un-hurt. Care? Love? (for whom?). A contention that has been rehearsed many times over, that is worth rehearsing once more: to call us magic undermines our labor. The non-recognition of labor is itself a process of extraction. “That hurts my heart so much,” said my friend L. She told us a story about a black woman friend of hers who wanted black women and girls to be the focal point of her dissertation, but was met with resistance from faculty advisors. So painful this unroomy bind of need and use.[7]

(anti-)~~-depressants~~

FLUOXETINE (floo OX e teen) belongs to a class of drugs known as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs). It helps to treat mood problems such as depression, obsessive compulsive disorder, and panic attacks. It can also treat certain eating disorders. Ask your primary care provider or pharmacist if you have questions.

I was chatting with a friend on WhatsApp while I was in Sierra Leone and he in New York, and we got to talking about coffee, mainly because I wanted some. Isn’t it something that the countries that cultivate coffee beans only have a taste for the powdered Nescafé that has flooded every market, grocery shop, tuck shop, spaza?

me:

“Nestle needs to chill
With their poison products
eyeroll emoji

antidepressant; or, a history of present illness

chloé samala faux

> I could not honestly say that I had found new community, new kin. I only knew that I was inhabited by a restless roaming spirit that was seeking to learn things in a world away from my people. Much of what I learned in that world was not life-affirming. Longing to become an intellectual, I stayed in college. I learned some important information.
>
> —bell hooks, *Sisters of the Yam*

Anger, or (Black) Magic

face me whose whole life is tied up to unhappiness cause it's the only for real thing i know.
—Nikki Giovanni, "Woman Poem"

My white colleague called me hostile and I was stunned into silence. "Maybe my face just looks like this," I didn't bother to say. An alternate explanation: a piece of me was ripped from my womb and I feel like I want to die and as a result I am enduring a pronounced episode of melancholia, also unvoiced. Though I never walk alone: mother, father, theirs before theirs, changing and adapting constantly, my ancestors. There is also Depression, life's loyal companion. "You (my colleague)," I wanted to say (but didn't say), remind me of the man that incites bell hooks to action after he refuses to change plane seats so she can enjoy the flight with her friend. "I am standing across from a may-as-well-be-anonymous white woman that I long to murder."[1] "I am beside myself with grief. And there you are standing across from who you think is me." "What must I do to get you off my ass?" In that moment I could not help but think of Saartjie Baartman/"Hottentot" Venus, whose ass became the site for white people to rearticulate racism as science. For me, black women (un)thinkers try to make sense of an "excess and surplus sexuality" that is imposed and inscribed by a racist society,[2] an innate hostility or apparently bottomless reserve of fucks to give. I try to carve out a place for myself "out there"—as well as *in* "here"—with as little subjection to violence as possible.

The deadened look in my eyes as I said, "I'm not sure what you're talking about" was an enactment of dissemblance: the performance of aloofness, part of a politics of withholding, an improvised mode of self-preservation.[3] "I feel the tremendous

18. The sensual feeling that is gratifying for the white and non-black bodies that can be a number of things that include and exceed the sexual ranging from a sense of elevating black experience, moving black experience to a level of white and non black aesthetics and theoretical abstraction. The ecstasy of mastering, dominating and therefore organizing black thought and bodies into white and non black coherence. This elation and pleasure can also be likened to the feel of a potter manipulating wet squishy clay into form/order and cooking the raw form in a kiln.
19. See: Sharon Holland, *The Erotic Life of Racism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012.
20. Chude-Sokei, Cruz, Musser, et al., "Race, Pornography, and Desire: A TBS Roundtable."
21. #CiteBlackWomen is a hashtag started by Black women scholars....in order to their twitter handle's page reads @citeblackwomen: It's simple: Cite Black Women. We have been producing knowledge since we blessed this earth, We theorize, we innovate, we revolutionize the world. Honor us. https://twitter.com/citeblackwomen
22. Further, the citation and apparent white consumption of black women's texts is rewarded while black women's and black scholars' citation of themselves and other black women is undervalued and in fact penalized in the academy.
23. See: Amber Musser, *Sensational Flesh: Race, Power, and Masochism*. New York: NYU Press, 2014. When I refer to "desries, motivations and affective states," I do not intend to imply that these things are are stable, unchanging and essential qualities that can be "confessed" or dislodged from the core of one's beings. The things and elements that need to be "mined" are the conditions under which Black bodies are made objects and the reward systems that stimulate certain kinds of sensations and affects.
24. In *Sensational Flesh,* Musser defines her "empathetic reading practice" as a method that allows her to bring multiple texts/notions of masochism together that might be seen as non-commensurable (19) and more directly related to this discussion enables Musser to forge a relationship with the text and the writer of the text as well as the writer's subject position (24). My own use of Musser's notion of empathetic reading is a call for the non-black subject to announce self-interest, motivation and desires, sensations to allow for a reading of the person's becoming in relationship to blackness. To state differently, a reflexive feeling out or description of the self that enables black studies to subject the motivation, desire, sensation to object status as it comes into the space of the subject through blackness.
25. See: Ann Cvetkovich, *Depression: A Public Feeling*. Durham: Duke University Press, 79.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. See: Samuel Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*. New York: NYU Press, 1999.
29. White bourgeoise protocols of civility impose the expectation that Black people will perform codes of politesse and refrain from asking white people about their feelings, sensations—possibly arousal—in response to black content (bodies, text, ideas). This politesse and its codes of civility act as forms of control which protect whiteness.
30. See: Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 21-22. Hartman explains why empathy—specifically white empathy is a failed project as it too often relies on a displacement of black pain in favor of white suffering and the white capacity to perform humanness. Black life and pain becomes unthinkable and unsayable under the liberal formation of empathy.
31. Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches.* New York, Crossing Press, 1984, 53-59.
32. See Deleuze and Guattari's notion of a Body Without Organs—BWO—as a body that has potential rather than already a predetermined gendered, raced, agentive, autonomous thing. The BWO poses the question "what can a body?" do rather than "what is a body?" See: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980.

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

Franco Barchiesi

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 men in the triptych I am constructing here don't speak—or if they do, we don't hear them. They are actors on a screen not agents. But men in real life often speak more—and more often speak when not asked.

In Rihanna's visual imaginary of undoing, "Rihvenge" might be a practice that is an approach to imagining reparatory justice that takes what is owed rather than waits for it. We could call the gun a phallic symbol or the events justice, but I wouldn't—not yet. More than speaking to contemporary demands for reparations, Rihanna stays true to the one cinematic idiom of the rape revenge narrative that matters: despite product placement, film direction by men, she takes herself seriously.

***

"Needed Me" is the cherry on top of these videos where Rihanna kills a man. Directed by Harmony Korine (of *Kids*, *Gummo*, *Mister Lonely, Spring Breakers*), the video presents no crime. In "Man Down," the revenge plot is structured around sexual abuse. In "Bitch Better Have My Money," the revenge plot is financial. In "Needed Me," the one video that does not begin *in medias res*, the viewer is given no real narrative of revenge. The man is worth murdering anyway.

Endnotes

1. Angry white women make for "good and proper" cinematic language. Like the popular 1991 thriller *Sleeping with the Enemy* with Julia Roberts, rape-revenge cinema is often directed by white men and stars white women as victims of rape turned agential murderers. For more on rape-revenge as a cinematic trope, see: Claire Henry, *Revisionist Rape-Revenge: Redefining a Film Genre.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014; and Jacinda Read, *The New Avengers: Feminism, Femininity, and the Rape Revenge Cycle.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000.
2. In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger wrote about the difference: "Nakedness reveals itself. Nudity is placed on display" (John Berger, *Ways of Seeing.* London: Penguin Books, 1972, 54).
3. See "Feeling Down(town Julie Brown): The Sense of Up and Expiring Relationality," *Journal of Visual Culture* vol. 17, no. 1 (2018): 3-21.

everyday into the form of the music video. (In 2010, an *LA Times* music critic called "Man Down" a "warning shot" to Chris Brown. Another writer suggested that the accountant in "Bitch Better Have My Money," is based on a lawsuit Rihanna filed against her former accountant in 2012.) In other words, we cannot talk about Rihanna without talking about Rihanna.

All three videos are set in coastal locales—Portland, Jamaica; Miami, Florida; and Los Angeles, California—in which water, blood, and cashflow risk to overflow, threatening the bounded stability of sexual propriety and patrilineality. The apparatus of the music video allows for a kind of promiscuous citationality where we might also add examples from Rihanna's earlier career, like the mysterious chance-based killings of "Russian Roulette" or "Unfaithful," where she sings "I don't wanna be a murderer." These are what Avery Gordon might call ghostly matters, those unruly references that haunt the triptych I am constructing. Rihanna's music videos index a site of fantasy, a world where the vulnerable are able to enact retribution without punitive consequences, and envision a kind of unimaginable justice. Both "Needed Me" and "Bitch Better Have My Money" employ the physical iconography of capital circulation: cold hard cash, not the abstracted late capital tedium of credit cards, digital banking, and cryptocurrency. Similarly messy is the portrayal of bodily fluids—blood, sweat, tears, saliva, and the invocation of semen—which unveils a sexual politics of adorned disorder, a glorification of violence that can only be called glorious. Rihanna subverts both the archetypal figure of the *femme fatale* and her historically captive body—the black woman's body in pain—into the actress of violent domination. Black women's agency is a vision here, quite literally a visual terrain.

These videos present us with revenge we can tolerate: rih-venge. We tolerate it because Rihanna tolerates retributive justice for us. The womanly "us" here, though it matters, is hardly obvious. As much as Rihanna has some relatable qualities—a cute niece, a personal history of violence, posting memes in response to a romantic fight, weight fluctuation—she is also always worlds apart. That's what makes her Rih. No doubt if there is a "we," we want the presentation of Rihanna's revenge to provide a neatly (if bloodied) packaged response to the contemporary call of me, too. "Me too" provokes a "we" without the plural. It is well known that contemporary feminism, coded as white, does not think collectively but through the individual subject. There is a "we" there, there has to be, but it is implicit. Who will ask out loud just who "we" are? Who will yell: How many are we? Who counts?

Still, most of *us*, those of us not on screen, cannot be iconic in our response to sexual violence. But the everyday has a place in this spectacular narrative, even as it is confined to the social scripts that pulse through all life.

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, "*re*constitute[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 Passage[13] 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.

More water, more smoke, more money. On screen, Florida (*Spring Breakers, Florida Project, Moonlight*) is thick. So is Rihanna, here, barefoot in her blue chiffon, but not as thick as the strippers on the pole. Not as thick as the guns, the motorcycles, the blunt, the masks.

The video "Needed Me," which was released, let's not forget, on 4/20 in 2016 can't decide what its message is. This is *ANTI*, after all. The first sounds are fluid: the slosh of a wave, a quick-and-quiet bird call, the wobble of the beat. Then Rihanna sings, "I was good on my own, that's the way it was."

The iconography of the strip club, its shine, is entangled with what Patricia Hill Collins called a controlling image (e.g. the Mammy or the Jezebel). The strip club, as a psychic space, is over-signified and yet under-theorized. That is to say, we think we know it, we think it's culturally legible because in popular culture, we are confronted with aesthetics that were stolen from the strip club. And yet the strip club is a horizon that cannot be grasped, only glimpsed.

Finally, somewhere in a back room, Rihanna comes face to face with the enemy. We know he is the enemy because he is a man and he's attempting to look Rihanna in her eyes. Rihanna stares back. The man throws bills at Rihanna but she doesn't flinch as they graze her face. She points her gun and shoots.

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Thick descriptions of the music videos where Rihanna kills men—"Man Down," "Bitch Better Have My Money," and "Needed Me" congeal as a triptych—doubles down on the virtuosity of "killing it," that slang for performing with intensity.[3] Killing it, that double entendre, that double bind. The title of this piece was inspired by Hentyle Yapp's discussion of Rosie Perez killing it for Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing*: "Perez emphasizes the intensity of killing it, a limited mode of existence that allows one to get through difficulty. She endures dancing for eight hours; however, it is only through physical exhaustion that one can finally kill it. Killing it emerges from being pushed through exhaustion…Killing it, in particular, directs us to this shifting landscape that requires changes in rhythm, where killing it cannot be sustained."

"Killing it" is both never enough and always too much. "Killing it" is a site of escape in two related senses: performance and murder. Both end, though the cousins of performance and murder—performativity and death—continue. Both require intense energies, the realization that the practice of escape does not end, leaves you open to critique, legal sanction, emotional unrest. The video ends. Rihanna the celebrity provides the path to leaving the everyday behind, even as she threads her

pantsuit, her hair and clothes tripling her already apparent and blinding whiteness—is made to look easy.

The clothes are flashier this time. And there are snacks, convertibles, and a girl group. It's clear that white girl is just collateral, swung around like a toy. Rihanna smokes weed while they play a perverse game of dress up and force-feed her Ciroc vodka. Why, though? Soon, the flashbacks, the machinations of the problem. The white girl is a wife, the wife of Rihanna's strong-jawed accountant. Rihanna only has 420 dollars in her back account, which pisses her off, somewhat shockingly, because that's a perfect number. This part of the video is prone to make you smile.

One of the final shots, a vista of homes, trees and hills, is the other side of where we began. Covered in cash and blood, Rihanna sustains some space between naked and nude.[2] The sweetness of revenge's cathartics twinned with the comical relief of the middle of the video is forced to an abrupt end with a lush and dirty portrait of Rihanna awash with blood after killing her accountant with a knife. Here, the revenge narrative is thrown into crisis; nothing feels okay because nothing is.

***

As Safiya Sinclair's 2016 book of poetry *Cannibal* (and much of Caribbean studies scholarship) explores, the English words "Caribbean" and "cannibal" are historically coupled. Though Jamaica-born Sinclair does not cite Barbados-born Rihanna in her gendering of Caliban, she might as well have. "I had known what it was to be nothing," Sinclair writes in a poem called "Autobiography." "Bore the shamed bloodletter of my sex / like a banishment; wore the bruisemark / of my father's hands to school in silence." In other words, the daughters in and of the Caribbean are often stamped as feisty and overbearing, as *too much and too fast*, and punished accordingly, Sinclair and Rihanna get after the affective underside of what it means to be a woman indexed by violence.

Sometime in the early twentieth century the noun "maneater" began, less and less, to signify cannibalism and, more and more, to refer to women who did not respect the sanctity of men. Women don't *kill* men, they *eat* them, just like the gendered constructing of "eating my feelings." After all, men kill women (and men too). Rihanna, which should mean "blessing" in *l'écriture feminine*, makes us think twice of the gender and race of the killer.

"Why did she do it?" transformed into "How did she do it?"

***

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)

chests that index their masculinity in a gradual reveal. More senses that the violence to-come is already here.

Rum-pum-pum-pum, rum-pum-pum-pum, rum-pum-pum-pum
man down

All this time, the screen looks like a high-contrast Instagram filter, all reflected through Rihanna's red hair. Even the blues are red.

Rihanna goes to a particularly sweaty party; she grinds with the man she will later kill. A brief dance, then a no. A no. She shakes her head. This is a no among nos. In this one moment, it seems as if nos are said every day, and they are, even if they mean nothing to the one being addressed. She heads home. We know what happens next: she is followed and she is raped. She runs home, frantically searching drawers for a gun. Now, we are at the end which is also the beginning.

***

Who is "she?"

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The etymology of the word "homicide" bears the mark of gender by inscribing the man-ness of the crime. "Homicide" comes from Latin homicīda ("man-slayer") and homicīdium ("manslaughter"). No need to break it down; the one slaughtered is a man. The gender of the one who kills is not specified but, in much of her visual *oeuvre*, Rihanna forms her as a woman anyway.

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There is no stable ground to fix "she."

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Directed by Rihanna and Megaforce, the 2015 music video for "Bitch Better Have My Money" lasts seven minutes and one second, stretching that last second in every direction. Four years after "Man Down," Rihanna's first onscreen murder, we begin in the same place: after killing a man.

She's in California this time. The birds are chirping and Rihanna is covered in blood. Moments later, Rihanna has some trouble lugging a massive suitcase around but the trick of capturing the white woman—a skinny blonde dressed in a white

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 equlibrium 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-entrepeneurial 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 "programmatic," aspect in contemporary theorizations of the encounter. For Brian Massumi, for

Killing It

Tiana Reid

Before any music plays, a black man is dead. There is little warning. No preamble. Emerging from a shadowy balcony, Rihanna—or, the character she is playing—looks down on a bustling street. In the music video for 2011's "Man Down," directed by Anthony Mandler, the exact year is unclear, muddy. What is important, following the tripartite idiom of rape-revenge cinema (one: rape, two: survival, three: revenge), is both that we are in the past and that the past has passed.[1] Rihanna raises a revolver and shoots a black man in his back. He doesn't see it coming. There is little warning. No preamble. Since this is a music video—a video we clicked on; somewhat discrete, that is, not embedded in a television show like music videos once were—we know that music is coming. At first all we hear is the bustle of a street—the dint of quotidian anxiety—and then suddenly, gunshots. Then silence. Then hushed waves. It is now, the viewer is told by way of a caption, yesterday morning. The beat drops. A blowhorn to release the tension. A sign from above is the sound of the ballet-tinkle that persists beneath the violence in the song's lyrics and visuals. Rihanna is on a bicycle, smiling. She's running through freshly laundered sheets with children, smiling. She's wearing white and sponsoring the coconut water brand Vita Coco, smiling. This #CarefreeRihannaGirl is contrasted with the Rihanna who lip-syncs, the all-knowing one who is definitely not smiling. Singing Rihanna—the one who moves her mouth to pretend like she's speaking, the one with the burden of speech—sits in a curtained room with streaks of light seeping in where they can. She sings.

I didn't mean to end his life, I know it wasn't right
I can't even sleep at night, can't get it off my mind
I need to get out of sight, 'fore I end up behind bars

Silent Rihanna continues to smile, not knowing what she will become: a man-killer. Still, we are presented with nods to violence of a different, socially exorbitant kind: hungry dogs, homosocial glances, red and blue bandanas, a glock barely out of the jeans where it usually resides.

Rihanna is singing on the beach now. Her struggle against the waves cuts against boys playing in the water. A music video's cut, a jumpy transition from one sequence to another is dense, supplements narrative content and works the imagination. Rihanna again. Then a slow-panning shot of the boys, each puffing up the

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,

rather as a reflexive and deliberate strategy according to which various confounding options are alternately chosen and false happy endings rejected." (Richard Iton, "Still Life", *Small Axe* vol. 17, no. 1 (2013): 39).

19. Cedric Robinson, *The Terms of Order,* 5.
20. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xdDSqxVyyyY
21. Stefano Harney, "Al-Khwariddimia"; Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, "Mikey the Rebelator", *Performance Research* vol. 20, no. 4 (2015): 141-145.
22. Robin James, *Resilience and Melancholy: Pop Music, Feminism, Neoliberalism.* Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2015.
23. Kodwo Eshun: Mark Fisher Memorial Lecture (Delivered 19th January 2018) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ufznupiVCLs&t=7s
24. https://fisherfunction.persona.co/INFO
25. https://archive.ica.art/whats-on/care
26. Smiley Culture, *Cockney Translation* (Fashion, 1985); London Posse, *Gangster Chronicle* (Mango Records, 1990)
27. Babyfather, *"BBF" Hosted by DJ Escrow* (Hyperdub, 2017)
28. Xavier Boucherat, "Klein, *Tommy*" on *Crack Magazine* https://crackmagazine.net/article/album-reviews/klein-tommy-ep/
29. Robin Mackay & Armen Avanessian, *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader* (Urbanomic 2014)
30. Aria Dean, "Notes on Blacceleration," *e-flux* 87 (December 2017).
31. Steve Goodman, *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect and the Ecology of Fear.* Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012.
32. Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures.* Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2014.
33. Adam Harper, "How Internet Music is Frying Your Brain," *Popular Music* (No 1, Vol 36, 2017)
34. Klein on *Tommy* (Radar Radio, 25th September 2017), Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xv7Eg8Gywys&t=51s

more so of producing something degraded, porous, and vulnerable, a sonic object so thick it becomes solvent.

Endnotes

1. Klein, *Tommy* (Hyperdub, 2017); Marvin Gaye, *What's Going On* (Tamla Records, 1971)
2. Joe T. Darden & Richard W. Thomas, *Detroit: Race Riots, Racial Conflicts and Efforts to Bridge the Racial Divide*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013; Heather Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit?: Politics, Labour, and Race in a Modern American City.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004; Scott Kurashige, *The Fifty-Year Rebellion: How the U.S. Political Crisis Began in Detroit.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017; Dan Georgakas & Marvin Survin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying.* Boston: South End Press, 1998.
3. Ben Edmonds, *What's Going On? Marvin Gaye and the Last Days of the Motown Sound*. Edinburgh, UK: Canongate Books, 2002; Suzanne E. Smith, *Dancing in the Street: Motown and the Cultural Politics of Detroit.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009.
4. David Ritz, *Divided Soul: The Life of Marvin Gaye.* London: Omnibus Press, 2010.
5. Laura Harris, "What Happened to the Motley Crew?: C.L.R James, Helio Oiticica and the Aesthetic Sociality of Blackness," *Social Text* vol. 30, no. 2 (2012): 49-75.
6. Stefano Harney & Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study.* New York: Minor Compositions, 2013.
7. Theo Darton-Moore, "Tommy // Klein" on *Straylandings* (2nd October 2017) http://www.straylandings.co.uk/reviews/klein-tommy
8. Xavier Boucherat, "Klein, *Tommy*" on *Crack Magazine* https://crackmagazine.net/article/album-reviews/klein-tommy-ep/
9. Nick James Scavo, "Klein, *Tommy*", *Tiny Mix Tapes* https://www.tinymixtapes.com/music-review/klein-tommy
10. Ben Cardew, "Klein, *Tommy EP*", (2nd October 2017) https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/klein-tommy-ep/
11. Nina Power, "Klein, Mhysa, Sadaf, Kelpa & DeForrest Brown Jr pitch the sounds of the future against an unstable present", *The Wire* (Issue 404, October 2017)
12. Ibid.
13. Sophie Weiner, "Rising Producer Klein Makes Music for the Drama" *The Village Voice* (11th November, 2016) https://www.villagevoice.com/2016/11/11/rising-producer-klein-makes-music-for-the-drama/ ; "It's been so sick for me to have other girls come across my music. It's actually mad because I'm in such a male world. So when girls actually come across my music and they like it, it's really nice. I'm going to put on more events for young people. I want to do more all-ages shows. Let's get these 14-year-olds turnt up! Just doing more really cool stuff. Like, I did a musical", Khalila Douze, "Klein is funny as hell", *The Fader* (27th September 2017) http://www.thefader.com/2017/09/27/klein-tommy-hyperdub-interview
14. Simon Frith, *Performing Rites: Evaluating Popular Music* (Oxford UP, 1998), p100
15. Simon Frith, p242-244
16. "If we belong to a group forged from musical beauty, not a group brought together by an already existing shared political sensibility, then most often we contain multitudes characterized by difference, not unity…New possibilities for political community can emerge from the pleasurable experience of new formations of difference" (Barry Shank, *The Political Force of Musical Beauty.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2014, 3-18).
17. Cedric Robinson, *The Terms of Order: Political Science and the Myth of Leadership*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1980, 6.
18. "In other words, following the logic of thinking of diaspora as anaformative impulse, and of black politics or the substantively postcolonial as anarrangement, anaformality, and a commitment to the practice of disclosure, it would not be a matter of just deliberate sensory strikes but rather the possibility that any of the channels or registers might be flooded, invaded or abandoned at any moment. Deorchestration, then, not as reorchestration—for example—through a commitment to silence or invisibility – but

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 diktats 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 enunciable 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

Consider the following on *Tommy* from Ben Cardew, writing in Pitchfork: "The result is music that overwhelms with its sickly density: a flawed, chaotic structure that feels both solid and strangely vulnerable." An intensified processing and thickening of audio to the point where the fault-lines of digital software become the sensuous basis for the music: such aspects of Klein's sound can be filtered through the lens of Adam Harper's discussion of what he calls "Internet Music." For him, the criticism levelled at Internet Music along the lines of its maximalism, its uncanny effects and use of kitsch, are default reactionary responses from those who are unable to grasp the ways in which the musicians operating under this umbrella are undertaking highly speculative explorations into the psychic dimensions of new mediascapes. As such, Harper argues, the experiments generated by Internet Music signal the potentials for remodulating now limited conceptions of collective human behavior.[33]

There is still the question of the relation between the sonic qualities of Klein's sickly density, and the proposition that her music is built upon a labor process organized by leisure. Take as an example a short video produced by Radar Radio to mark the release of *Tommy*.[34] We see Klein lounging with her friend and collaborator Embaci (from the NON label), and an unnamed third companion, in a room with either a Basquiat original or replica on the wall behind them. As they discuss the track-by-track content of her new EP, their conversation turns to topics as varied as the basis of their friendship (a shared appreciation of Disney soundtracks and Celine Dion), and a desire to retain a core trace of RnB in the record despite its levels of abstraction. This conversation, contained within a listening session, is all conducted whilst they eat take-away chicken and rice, drink white wine and Cherry B, break out into dance, and even take a nap. Although this is to a large extent a staged promotional video, I think it gives us an insight into Klein's labor process. To be clear, this is not to say Klein lacks commitment to her practice, nor am I making the case that she is producing this material without any level of strategic decision making. It is more that there is a heavy emphasis on the leisure of hanging out, of supposed unproductivity as the generative resource for what eventually gets presented as the musical object. It is about time with friends, free-time, girl time, immature time, black time, time where nothing much seems to be happening other than idle chatter and low-level intoxication, but what's really going on is that the type of music which became *Tommy* is already being assembled. Hence, the density and the vulnerability which dominates the soundscape of the EP. To gather together all of the social wealth held in the unproductivity of leisure, and compact it into the space-time of a musical object requires Klein to overload the available digital technologies, to stretch, layer, and pock-mark the audio material. It is not so much a case of Klein adequately containing the aesthetic sociality she and her friends are constantly not working on within a single sonic object, but

historical realities of the black/slave as an object outside of (and resistant to) capital. There is, though, a minor note of caution I would like to introduce into Dean's schema. If Eshun and Fisher's intellectual formation through the Hardcore Continuum (or as Goodman calls it Black Atlantic Sonic Futurism) is central to Dean's conceptualization of blacceleration, then we have to recognize its status as a historical object. The ecologies in which Jungle, UK Garage, Techno and an array of other black machine musics were forged were specific to the closing decades of the twentieth century. Thus, the ways in which they re-modulated various psychic-political atmospheres of alienation into highly intensive structures of sonic feeling which were socially irruptive, was particular to those moments in the organization of racial-capitalism. We now know the conditions which determined those projects of phono-social experimentation have passed. The specific temporal charge which the Hardcore Continuum carried has been left largely unfulfilled. Hence, the blacceleration which Dean quite astutely identifies as the alienating sensuosity that captured Fisher and Eshun, and was thus a prefigurative dismantling of Landian acceleration, might not be a formulation which is adequate to the organization of racial-capitalism in the West as we approach the third decade of the twenty-first century. It is inevitable that the conditions, operations, and desires of technologically infused black sonic experimentation have been redesigned under new racially entrenched structures of political-economy.

What does this have to do with Klein and the fifty-five seconds of "Runs Reprise"? The proposition already in play is that her use of distorted snatches of Jungle's propulsion engine—that signature febrility of time-stretched Amen breaks—is not undertaken in the service of lost futures (a la Fisher's exemplary reading of Burial), but as a textural device.[32] If we push forward with this idea, then two avenues open up. Firstly, "Runs Reprise" exposes the historical limitations contained within the concept of blacceleration outlined above. Secondly, if Klein is—through her fledgling project—constructing the conditions for thinking and experiencing the contemporary via her redesign of the experimental grains of black electronic music, then we need to speculate on the way her sound enters into, grasps, and escapes the present articulation of racial-capitalism.

In many ways this is too big a question to pose of an artist who has just set out on her career. Hence it is not a task we can assign to Klein alone, but requires simultaneous encounters with peers of hers, including Yves Tumor, Jlin and Mhysa—to name but a few. For the moment though, there are specific dynamics of Klein's work—especially as they operate within *Tommy*—that I want to consider as part of a new set of possibilities for black electronic music.

In *Tommy* what we hear as part of Klein's deviation away from the po-faced sincerity and posturing which has become the ethical ideal of electronic music in the early twenty-first century, is a kind of undulation between an attempt to thicken her audio materials beyond the prospect of their collapse, and the way such gestures emanate from the intimate impulses of a labor process shaped by leisure.

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 "unaffectability" 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.

about Klein's use of the signatures of UK Garage and Jungle (as well as 1990s RnB) on *Tommy*.

Secondly, and building on the first point, Boucherat proposes that rather than historical and cultural ballast, the deployment by Klein of audio elements from the Hardcore Continuum and other related systems, "add texture more than rhythm, and their inclusion catches you off guard." Boucherat's reading is significant. He is stating that on Klein's *Tommy*—and in our case especially on "Runs Reprise"—the elements we hear are present because of the sensations they generate rather than their evocation of a historical form. The deployment of such decomposed snatches of Jungle and RnB has more to do with their malleability and an element of surprise, as opposed to a set of claims upon a cultural genealogy.[28] Having opened with Kodwo Eshun and Mark Fisher, let's stay with them a little longer via their appearance in a recent article by artist, critic, and curator Aria Dean.

"Notes on Blacceleration" features both Fisher and Eshun as part of Dean's diagnosis of a fundamental structural problem in that avant-garde of philosophical and political aesthetics known as "accelerationism."[29] Pinpointing all of the co-ordinates of what appears to be the first stage in a major intellectual undertaking on Dean's part is not my intention. There are, though, specific lines of her argument I want to extract and work with.[30] One such line is her proposition that the current staging of an impasse between left and right tendencies in accelerationist thinking is really no impasse at all, but has much more to do with a flaw in its mode of conceptualizing and historicizing capital. For Dean, that which operates as speculation in accelerationism—i.e. the attempt to imagine the annulment of capitalism through a desired radical in-humanism which does away with the worker—has been concretized and animated for over five hundred years in the West through the real figure of the black, who as slave was first and foremost a racialized object of capital (rather than its subject).

In addition, despite identifying Mark Fisher's role in determining the racial absence at the center of accelerationist thinking, the commitment he and Eshun shared to the soundscape of the Hardcore Continuum signaled that at the level of aesthetic desire, Fisher was acutely attuned to the frequencies of what Dean calls "blaccaleration." Hardcore, Techno, Jungle, Drum n Bass, UK Garage and House—the nodes of Fisher and Eshun's phono-conceptual obsessions—were generating a rich field of sensory theory which Dean suggests were highly functioning enactments of blaccaleration as political and philosophical aesthetics. Such a reading is re-enforced if we turn to another product of the CCRU, Steve Goodman, and his claim that the late twentieth century was shaped by entire swathes of Western populations being captured and re-engineered by wave after wave of black machine music.[31]

What we have then with Dean's piece is the first stage in a necessary racial dissolution of accelerationism in its present form, a dissolution which is achieved through the identification of a phono-aesthetics of blacceleration that points to the

felt that if he could get to grips with the time-signatures of a given electronic music style then not only could he begin to theorize the temporal dimensions of the conjuncture of capital in which it was produced, but equally, by taking the music seriously as a theoretical undertaking on its own terms, we could navigate our way out of capitalism's perpetual production of crisis.[23]

If we were to take this compulsion—one which many of us shared with Mark, wearing it as a badge of honor—and repackage it as a method, then what is opened up if it is deployed as a way to listen to a contemporary instance of underground electronic music in the form of Klein's *Tommy*. If we take a single element from *Tommy*—say the track "Runs Reprise"—and drop it into the vast pool of the Fisher Function, what sort of chain reactions are set off?[24]

At first we might hear a neat correlation between the helium RnB vocalizations spliced with staccato jungle breaks on the track and Fisher's constant return to the music of what he—following Simon Reynolds—called the Hardcore Continuum. To accept such a correlation at face value though would be to do a great disservice to the specificity of the project Klein is unveiling through *Tommy,* alongside other self-released EPs such as *Lagata* (Bandcamp, 2016) and also her recent piece of musical theatre *Care,* which was performed at the ICA in London.[25] We need then to listen with greater intent and think more carefully about Klein's sound, as exemplified here by "Runs Reprise." We need to listen to this track as something which is, firstly, making a claim upon the contemporary (or maybe even constructing the conditions for contemporaneity) and secondly, as a soundscape operating according to set of internally determined operations.

With such qualifications in mind, one thing we could say about "Runs Reprise" is that the audio elements we hear on this fifty-five second track are not citations. They are not, I believe, intended to be heard as historical artefacts, and thus they are not designed to organize the track through the modality of lost futures. Xavier Boucherat provides us with an alternative way to consider the role audio elements resembling the output of the Hardcore Continuum play throughout the *Tommy* EP. In his review of the record he makes two pertinent claims. The first is that to adequately listen to Klein's EP, it is useful to frame this record in its relation to the work of a contemporary of hers in Dean Blunt. Boucherat states that Blunt's "Babyfather" project is clearly imbued with the genealogies of a London continuum of MCing, one which stretches from Smiley Culture's fast-chat style, via the London Posse, and into Grime, as they were organized by the fugitive social technology of pirate radio.[26] Yet on the first "Babyfather" release—*BBF Hosted by DJ Escrow* (again on Hyperdub)—there are few, if any, clear references to prior MC styles.[27] For Boucherat, *BBF* is soaked in the sedimented atmospheres of London MCing, but it is not nostalgic about it. There is no attempt to use sonic citations as a means to generate a historic relation to elements which precede the record, yet it still comes from that continuum. Boucherat suggests we could deploy the same lens to think

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 Crery 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 lack 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.

Not Worker, But Chattel

Ivan Kilgore

Whereas the positionality of the worker (whether a factory worker demanding a monetary wage, an immigrant, or a white woman demanding a social wage) gestures toward the reconfiguration of civil society, the positionality of the Black subject (whether a prison-slave or a prison-slave-in-waiting) gestures toward the disconfiguration of civil society. From the coherence of civil society, the Black subject beckons with the incoherence of civil war, a war that reclaims Blackness not as a positive value, but as a politically enabling site, to quote Fanon, of "absolute dereliction." It is a "scandal" that rends civil society asunder. Civil war, then, becomes the unthought, but never forgotten, understudy of hegemony. It is a Black specter waiting in the wings, an endless antagonism that cannot be satisfied (via reform or reparation), but must nonetheless be pursued to the death.

—Frank B. Wilderson III

One of the most overlooked contradictions that imprisoned abolitionists face today is not merely the issue of our resistance meeting a master's repression, nor is it a matter of fending off the Democratic Party's attempt to co-opt—to steal and covertly misdirect—our efforts into the legal machine of Civil Rights reform. What we prison slaves and millions of other "prison-slaves-in-waiting"[1] have yet to comprehend is the extent to which an internal ideological struggle must be waged among ourselves, within a segregated prison population, as well as in our neighborhoods and communities, if we are ever to realize our potential as revolutionary class.

What I convey in the following essay is a particular lesson regarding what Hortense J. Spillers calls "the intramural,"[2] derived from my experience organizing side-by-side with fellow U.S. prison slaves. It is a story about the white supremacist state's use of deprivation, terror, seduction, and organized treachery as tactics to maintain compliance and 'order' among the imprisoned masses. It is a story of the past and an analysis of the present, to clarify the trajectory for our struggle moving forward—without promise, without confirmation of an eventual justice, drawing only upon our collective abolitionist faith. In what follows, I argue that a Black abolitionist politic—a set of beliefs and practices formed in opposition to the white supremacist state; struggles for life and death initiated by and for those inhabiting the social position of chattel property—must both be definitively against "work" and against defining ourselves as "workers." As a number of Black Studies scholars write, there are fundamental differences between the political category of the "worker" and that of the "slave."

Rendered civilly dead by U.S. law, I am to the State as the slave was to the plantation Master. The same relation of coercive racist violence applies: my Black

frequencies tuned to a debasement of politics. Shank wants to bring the noise. Iton realizes the noise must be deployed against its own interests.

I think Marvin Gaye was acutely attuned to the relations between labor process, the instability of the object and the abuse of the political when it came to the song. In fact, his aesthetic project could be understood as one built around the desire to keep the labor process in as much flux as possible, so as to render the song a "solvent object" (again, by way of Cedric Robinson in *Terms of Order*).[19] Hence the way to listen to *What's Going On* is as a labor dispute. It is the staging of a dispute over the working conditions on the Motown assembly line. Gaye's terms are secreted in those opening seconds of the album, as an absolute commitment to the song as a social thing, twinned with a refusal of the expectation that the song be the result of hard work. He likely had the first part of this impulse engrained in him before arriving at Gordy's factory, through the years of learning blow harmonies with Harvey Fuqua in The New Moonglows. Gaye's strike reached its zenith with the image of him in training gear, stretched out on a couch, his band arranged around him, whilst he sings the shit out of "I Want You."[20]

But Gaye's moment has been and gone. It's Klein who's concerning us now. Hence, the detour into Motown only serves a purpose if we recognize that whilst *What's Going On* and *Tommy* share almost nothing at the level of conventional musical referents, they have another common imperative.

In Klein's "Prologue" we hear a reconfiguration of the song as solvent object under new laboring conditions. The assembly line isn't around anymore. Now it's the flow of logistical capital which dominates, as does its installation of algorithmic governance.[21] This is perhaps why *Tommy* sounds like both "a collection of neo-songs written in the dust of so many failed artifices" and a "cracked, warped…split-apart gospel." Robin James would most likely argue that what Klein enacts on *Tommy* is a refusal to build into the song form the types of resilience finance capital demands of its pop music.[22] And she'd be right to an extent. But the real question is, how might Klein be building songs that operate beyond the logics of refusal? What work does her no-work do whilst she's still making songs which skirt the edge of their own dissolution? Or rather, what auditory form does Klein's strike take?

Runs Reprise

In the question and answer session following his delivery of the inaugural Mark Fisher Memorial Lecture in January 2018, Kodwo Eshun commented that in order to understand his friends theoretical project, we really need to acknowledge that Mark's work was driven by a particular compulsion. Mark could not help himself, Eshun suggested, when it came to the pull underground electronic dance music exerted upon him. The reason for this compulsive attachment to say 1990s Jungle was not the result of youthful fandom he had yet to outgrow. It was more that Mark

desired sensuous field can be created through the organization of the chosen audio elements.

Prior—or perhaps simultaneous—to the immediate sensuosity of the song's soundscape are the conditions in which audio decisions are made. Here I am alluding to a range of factors including access to and use of technologies, relationships with other musical laborers (especially those who might have technical expertise with specific technologies), and then there is the sedimented intimate knowledge of various song styles, which broadens the repertoire of available audio elements and the possibilities for their arrangement.

Ultimately though, a song has to make its mark.[14] Therefore, the two stages I've just described are subsumed by the portion of the labor process which is both the most crucial and the most nebulous. I am referring here to the divination of a mood, a phrase, or a tone from the social grammar of a given moment, which not only allows the song to say something, but means it feeds back into and enacts a transformation of the same social grammar. We could call this the conjunctural speculative capacity of the song.

Simon Frith reminds us that, as an object, a song is never finished, it is never whole. It is by its nature fragmentary and unstable. It is incomplete and refuses full incorporation.[15] This is why, when we develop a sudden and seemingly inexplicable attachment to a song, try as we might to decode the interplay between audio elements, technical arrangement and conjunctural speculation, by virtue of having been fused together into a song, they can no longer be accessed as separate dimensions. Hence, the only choice we are left with when listening to a song which is so compelling and perplexing as to be bordering on the repulsive, is to go ahead and make another one.

Barry Shank and Richard Iton offer contrasting meditations on the song as an unstable object by taking it on a walk through the terrains of the political. For Shank the song is the setting where the possibilities for the political realization of community in difference are animated. Taking up with Jacques Ranciere, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Chantal Mouffe, he hears in the pop song the aesthetic concretization of mutuality, which carries with it the promise of a true democracy of public feelings. Therefore, for Shank, the song is a technology of political scale. It can be deployed to scale up the communal aesthetic experience of the song to the level of a general political program.[16]

Richard Iton hears something rather different at work in the black pop song. He hears a type of deinstrumentalisation of the political. In an echo of Cedric Robinson's *Terms of Order,* Iton interprets the internal world of the black pop song as an enactment of abuse upon the political consciousness.[17] For Iton, the song is not about the expression of community in difference which can then be scaled up, but rather it is about the surreptitious flooding of the channels and machinery which determine the very ground of the political.[18] So whereas Shank hears in the song the pursuit of the political force of musical beauty, Iton is deep in its lower

body is always vulnerable, open to an enveloping State terror. As property of the State, I exist in direct confrontation with the punitive core of capitalist relations of force. Every movement I make carries with it the possibility of authority's lash. I am the bodily raw material that gives the prison industrial complex purpose and social meaning. Beyond recognizing the structure of violence that I inhabit, it should also be noted how the very act of naming myself—a slave held captive by the State—as "worker" enables various tactics of seduction which operate to displace the gravity of the situation. Because job assignments are seen as a relative privilege behind these walls, we are lured into conformity and compliance to work, often merely out of a need to survive. While I discuss this latter dilemma for the majority of this essay, I would first like to begin by unpacking the former, clarifying the structural position of the (prison) slave.

I.

There are two essential dilemmas that prisoners face when organizing as the worker-on-strike instead of the slave-in-revolt. One is that a prison strike must be organized differently, its operations conducted differently, and requires a level of active solidarity (from others not in our position, non-imprisoned people) far greater than any other united workplace action. Many on the outside need to take up more of the risk. For example, there are numerous ways that free-world people can participate in a prison strike that does not mistake symbolic action for direct, disruptive tactics. We need mass civil disobedience, not more civic performance. If our goal is to clog the arteries of the prison regime from within, it might be more effective to choose methods that interrupt the prison's reproduction from without. While we are staging sit-ins, boycotts, stoppages, and refusing trays inside, free-world activists could occupy the offices of a Department of Corrections, stage protests at a prison warden's private house, or stage sit-ins in the buildings of government institutions and corporations that benefit from the smooth functioning of the prisoncrat's political-industrial machine. As an outside comrade once pointed out, "phone zaps" are effective in certain historical situations, but disrupting this fascist regime requires a whole lot more.

As Frank B. Wilderson argues, the worker is exploited at best, yet only shot, brutalized, or imprisoned because they engage in sabotage or forceful strike. The slave however is rendered the object of gratuitous violence as a perpetual structural constant. By missing this point and defining ourselves as imprisoned "workers," we open ourselves up to the public's misrecognition of the levels of risk involved with organizing on the inside. The universalist category of the worker also fails to grasp the centrality of our captivity to the making of U.S. society's sense of (racial) freedom and (white) civilizational ascendency over the wretched of the earth. This, in fact, brings me to my second point, a thing much more complex to explain. That is,

the fact that our enslavement by the State holds a culturally specific purpose for the society that appears driven to physically disappear us.

In the antebellum South, plantation slavery was not only an institution for the production of material goods at a cheap cost for the ruling class. Slavery established the very structure through which white freedom was, and is, made legible. The machinery of slavery was foundational to the non-slave's experience of freedom at a psycho-social level. In fact, there would be no need to use the word "freedom" at all had there not first been the creation of a structural position called the Slave. It has always been white freedom and life produced in opposition to Black unfreedom and death.

State power is not only repressive but productive of social relations. It creates traps that lure us into complicity and participation whether it is for our own benefit or not. We need to understand work in prisons as such, and promote an abolitionist politic that is profoundly anti-work. We can't see the struggle as merely a fight for better wages, because the majority of us don't have wages at all. We have to abolish the apparatus that cages us, separates us from our families, and disappears us from our communities. We need a movement that thinks not only in terms of labor/economics, but a movement that challenges the carceral foundations of the white supremacist state.

Often when I tell fellow prisoners of my reluctance to work in one of the many prison factories or so-called "job assignments," I am looked upon as if I have said something foolish. They always defer to the question of "Why?" As if being exploited for pennies on the dollar or no wage at all for our labor is an acceptable situation. In answering their question, I explain to them my experience in the Seminole County Jail in Wewoka, Oklahoma.

For twenty-three months, I was trapped in that Barney Fife of a hellhole, fighting for my life on a capital murder charge. It had no commissary. No TV or radio. No outside cell activity. No library. Nothing. We were housed six to a cell, and all we had were our bunks, a few card games, and what few books we could get our hands on. Lunch was reheated for dinner and, needless to say, the food was terrible. So terrible that almost twenty-five years later I still can taste that stale Thursday morning breakfast. It was degrading; an army ration of dehydrated ham and egg. Mixed with a little hot water it swelled up like dry dog shit on a rainy summer day. After flushing it down the toilet for about six months I finally relented. When you lose thirty pounds from starvation you begin to acquire a taste for this sort of shit.

Of course, the trustees (i.e. slaves with "work privileges") were allowed to watch TV, listen to radio, and to use the soda machine upstairs in the courthouse. Every now and then, the jailor would also allow one of them to go across the street to the Dollar General to purchase candy, underwear, deodorant, or some other miscellaneous item that seemed to make life in that shit-hole that much more tolerable. (In case you're wondering, the only clothing the jail provided were the

corruption is that Klein rarely sings alone. There is, as Nina Power writing for *The Wire*, points out, a constant "flow between the solitary and the group" on *Tommy* which means the record becomes "an exercise in proximity and distance."[11] Power is particularly attentive to the ways in which Klein seeks to dissipate the song form via the use of dense vocal aggregation. Zooming in on "Prologue" she hits upon the social atmospheres that appear to be Klein's musical resource:

> the drunken-sounding 'Prologue' discusses doing a collective a-cappella version of a song, with laughs interjecting, the word 'sailing' mingling and merging between male and female voices, while repetitive machine suction sounds, multiple effects, the weird piano, and grime turn at the end transform a collaborative anthem into an uncanny memory of a strange afternoon.[12]

The sense of a slightly giddy, intoxicated afternoon spent with friends as the guiding atmospheric of the track is significant, but only if —as Power implies—we listen to such registers as constitutively intertwined with the formal propositions Klein manufactures. With "Prologue," there is no placement of a field recording alongside delicately designed sonic gestures; instead, the non-musical sounds of idle chatter and numerous aesthetic flourishes flow across and interrupt each other so as to become indistinguishable. Neither though is there the same lusciously crafted transition from the informal to the formal a la Gaye's *What's Going On*.

In many ways Power's comments hit upon Klein's description of her own labor process. In the few interviews she has given so far, Klein looks to deflate the austere masculine self-importance which tends to be the default mode of presentation amongst experimental electronic musicians. Her routine revolves around a diet of reality television (*Love & Hip Hop: Atlanta* being a favorite and one of the key sources for *Tommy*), as well as Nollywood films. She openly states a preference for chilling, and even when pushed to reflect upon her production methods, Klein instead implores other young women to take the step into independent experimental music culture, because she describes it as easy—a sham even—thus punching through the veneer of artisan specialization which figures within the scene often cultivate.[13]

Despite the levels of social intoxication, and a refusal of her own sovereign authority as an artist, Klein still generates things which sound like songs. It might be worth then stepping back from the specificities of *Tommy* for a moment in order to reflect on the status of the song. What is this thing, this object, we call a song? How is a song made? Where does it come from? How does the process of producing a song relate to its eventual status as a thing, as an object? At its most immediate level the song is made up of phonic material. To produce a song requires the selection and arrangement of various audio elements. Some sounds are left out, others are chosen, usually on the basis of their sensuosity, or rather, how a certain type of

for Harney and Moten, is that *What's Going On* shows us the distinction between the formal and the informal in an artwork is no distinction at all.[6] In an album which at the level of its content was concerned with the psychic aftermath of imperial war, Gaye was able to animate the idea that the formal notion of an end product (in his case a song or an album) emanates from the supposed unproductive leisure of informality. Gaye's brilliance thus lay in undermining the received wisdom at Motown concerning the song's production through a highly formalized labor process. He did this by generating an entire album of songs whilst hanging out with his friends at home.

It is important to resist the urge to collapse such an interpretation of a kind of prologue in Gaye into an understanding of Klein's own "Prologue." We have to listen more carefully to *Tommy* because, as is inevitable, the relation between the formal (let's call it for our purposes the synthesis of labor process and product), and the informal (the wealth laborers carry with them) has shifted between 1971 and the present. To describe Klein's "Prologue" as a song (i.e. a product or object which is the result of a process) that issues forth from the atmospheric surround of informality is not quite precise enough. We need to slow down a little, and take more time with the triangulation between those critical terms "song," the "formal" and the "informal." With Klein's "Prologue" it is more that the recorded materiality of what we nominally identify as the informal, is rippled, cut, stretched, morphed and looped so as to generate an object of sorts which resembles the distorted edges of the known song form.

The early critical reception of *Tommy* has tended to focus on the malleable approach Klein takes to her sonic materials. On the Stray Landings website, Theo Darton-Moore describes how "cranky, data-moshed percussion and pitch-tweaked vocals are processed to oblivion."[7] Similarly, Xavier Boucherat of Crack magazine pays attention to the way in which on the track "Act One," "warm clips of piano are pitched up and down a sampler at will, creaking under the weight of digital processing."[8] Nick James Scavo takes this line a stage further for the Tiny Mix Tapes website: "you can hear digital snaps and cuts pockmarked like scars on the audio material."[9] Already then there is an interpretation of Klein's output as occupying a specific sensory terrain when it comes to the aestheticization of distortion in digital electronic music. At the same time, what is still evident on *Tommy* is the retention of and commitment to the song, even if the immediate features of the song form are rendered highly vulnerable.

The most obvious indication of the song form is the presence of vocals. Klein has named Brandy, Kim Burrell, Luciano Pavarotti and the musicals of Andrew Lloyd Webber as the heaviest influences upon her conception, design, and performance of vocal elements. In a Pitchfork magazine profile Ben Cardew talks of Klein slathering on vocals "from herself, her collaborators and in sampled snippets—in thick, inky layers, manipulating her source material until the voices sound tarnished, rotting and irregular."[10] The significance of vocal thickening to the point of

oversized, bright orange jumpsuits; no coats, underwear, etc.). They also were allowed a hug and kiss from their visitors and, on the weekends, they worked maintenance on the courtyard.

As for the rest of us, we were allowed nothing. No commissary, no TV, no outside cell activity. Nothing. Old cornbread, wrapped in some toilet paper wrapper, was the only the thing we had to eat that kept our stomachs from growling at night. Man, how I wished to be a "trustee" during those days. The "perks" alone made it to where nobody in that situation, including myself, cared that we were in fact being paid nothing for our labor.

For twenty-three months, I was forced to live under the foregoing conditions, wanting nothing besides freedom, and willing to slave just to get a small taste of it. Yet because I was charged with a M1 (i.e., 1st-degreee-murder-charge) and would later face a death penalty trial, there would be no listening to country music or enjoying the sliver of mobility awarded to a trustee.

Looking back on that situation today, I cannot help but think of how unfreedom and "gut" starvation conditioned me. I internalized so much stress, fear, and anger that it tempered my spirit. I failed to even realize how profoundly it suspended my reluctance to work in a carceral setting. Essentially, I was disciplined to withstand the taunting effects of my incarceration which prompt so many of us slaves to relent to the illusive "perks" associated with prison labor and a life of hard-scrabble.

Eventually, I was able to place those so-called perks in their proper perspective: They were but a distraction, misplaced values and desires I had yet to conquer; things that I had been manipulated to hold in esteem that, with exception of food and exercise, were not necessarily needed to sustain life. They were but a carrot-on-a-stick, an inducement used to exercise power over my being by misleading me to believe they were privileges.

Yet because I could not value a privilege I did not have, or be made content by it, the power my captors sought to exercise over me was ineffective. Little did I realize at the time how this enabled me to see my situation for what it truly was—a grave injustice—and respond accordingly. Instead of submitting to the distraction and attempting to ameliorate the harsh conditions of my incarceration with an illusive perk, I learned how to use those conditions as a source of motivation to fight for my freedom and just treatment.

In short, *I TURNED UP!*

Food trays were thrown at the jailors and trustees. Mattresses burned. The entire jail flooded, and the power short-circuited. I fired attorneys left and right, and began the processes of learning how to represent myself in court. Ultimately, I won and was back on the streets in 36 months.

In time, I was to discover my experience in Oklahoma was not typical compared with most county jails and prison systems created by this settler colonial

nation. To put it mildly, the Seminole County Jail was a relic of the Old South, where doing time was and still is, in many aspects, harsh and unbearable.

Years later, when I was committed to the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), one of the first of many cellies I was to have over the years called himself schooling me on the hustle and perks of prison work assignments. The perks, he explained, ranged from something as simple as stealing extra food from the kitchen, to manipulating staff for sex and other "contraband." Indeed, the inducement to work seemed to have its advantages.

However, as he explained all of this, I could not help but think that while he meant no harm with his advice, he was thinking ass-backwards. At this point, he had done almost twenty calendar years. And what he was kickin' to me was hustling to be content with his life in prison and being "penitentiary rich." As time passed and we became better aquatinted with one another, I eventually pointed out to him that neither the "perks" or anything he had hustled for in almost 20 years of being incarcerated has purchased his freedom, or created any kind of financial stability either inside or outside these walls. I explained that hustling in prison, moreso than hustling on the bricks, is short-lived. It's corner hustling at its worst, dealing with shifty-ass scavengers, opportunists and scalawags—REAL LIFE DOPE FIEND SHIT! Where snitching is at an all-time high and it's a hit-and-miss inconsistent game where the hustlers, often more than not, wind up in the "hole" with more time, restrictions, and most defeating, giving their hustle stacks back to the canteen or their own habits.

Despite having explained all this, none of it seemed to register with him or countless other prisoners who, because of a lack of productive opportunities, confidence, knowledge, discipline, and plausibility of instant gratification, disregard the odds and relent to the bullshit.

In time, I observed that it wasn't even about the hustle and perks for most prisoners. Many were simply looking for an escape from the daily monotony of an otherwise drab existence. Prisons, we know, are idle and mundane places. They are isolating. And the majority of us do not have the fortune of frequent, or any, interaction with the outside world. Therefore, to be able to get out of the cell to work—especially in a maximum security setting—and to be able to fraternize with other inmates or staff—especially those staff who are comfortable sharing their life experiences, which many prisoners have yet to have, if ever they will—is vicariously and psychologically rewarding in and of itself.

Having observed the foregoing, it became abundantly clear that while the majority of us are conscious of the fact that our labor is being exploited, the value we have come to place on a work assignment has been manipulated by the structural environment created by prison officials. To this end, we know prisons are purposefully designed to be cruel and unusual places. And despite countless court rulings ameliorating the abuse we frequently encounter at the hands of prison administrators, the intent remains to maintain oppressive conditions that, in effect, aim

No Work. All Play.

Dhanveer Singh Brar

Klein's Prologues

We could begin by posing the same question of Klein and her 2017 release *Tommy* that Marvin Gaye put to his audience in 1971: "What's Going On?"[1] The distance between these two pieces of music might appear insurmountable—one standing as a historic monument to the cohesive animation between aesthetic experimentation and black radicalism, and the other a comparatively minor release by a burgeoning black artist from Britain on the critically acclaimed underground electronic music label Hyperdub. Yet there are features central to both Gaye's masterpiece and Klein's fledgling EP which allow them to be placed within each other's orbit. As works which manipulate the operations of black music, both *What's Going On* and *Tommy* contend with an entanglement between the external demands of a labor process and their internal performative insistence upon the defense of leisure time.

What's Going On put such propositions into play during a moment we are now able to historicize. Gaye's album was shaped by the ecology of late 1960s & early 1970s Detroit. The city had for decades been dominated by the automobile industry and the temporalities of the production line, but the combination of the 1967 Detroit rebellion, the formation of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers in 1969, and the impending shift towards a post-industrial economy, meant the city was in flux.[2] Such flux was also evident in Gaye's place of work—the Motown Record Corporation—where Berry Gordy's adapted version of the automated production line had been in place since 1959. Motown was undergoing two major upheavals, one initiated by its labor force through their demands for greater autonomy over the product (exemplified by the likes of Gaye, Stevie Wonder, and Martha Reeves). The other upheaval was the impending unannounced overnight relocation of the Motown label to Los Angeles in 1972, a maneuver carefully planned and ruthlessly executed by Gordy and his inner-circle.[3]

Klein's *Tommy,* though, carries a charge because it is embedded in our current predicament, and as such it places pressure on its listeners, asking them now, in 2018: what's going on? "Prologue," the opening track of *Tommy,* begins with a scene resonant of all those Detroit Lions we hear packed into the studio at the mansion Gaye had been given as a wedding gift when he married the boss' sister.[4] Stefano Harney and Fred Moten have discussed in detail the drift from party into song which announces *What's Going On.* For them such a transitional moment marks the album out as one imbued with—as well as reconstituting—an aesthetic sociality of blackness (a formulation put in play by Laura Harris).[5] The reason being,

to keep us impoverished, dependent and, thus, powerless. Consequently, this has given life to the culture that we subscribe to where, for example, pushing a broom on the tier for 20 years with little to no compensation is accepted as a norm so long as we may entertain the illusion of a "come up."

II.

> *"Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude,* except as a punishment for crime *whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction."*
>
> —13th Amendment *of the United States Constitution*

"Prison slavery" over the past decade has gained traction as a keyword in activist vocabularies and progressive popular culture. Some people use the term to describe the conditions of cheap or literal indentured labor that I discuss above. Yet over time, it has taken on a new and more adequate meaning referring to the generalized condition of a prisoner's social death. Slavery in this theoretical context is the legally-sanctioned and state-condoned project of containing and disappearing certain targeted and criminalized populations—the social condition that animates the machinery of the U.S. Prison-Industrial Complex; a white supremacist regime with its own separate drives that exceed the demands of wealth accumulation. Of course, punishment has been industrialized as a means to manage various (criminalized) surplus populations, those deemed unqualified or ineligible for even the most exploitative of waged occupation. Yet at its core modern prison slavery is also predicated on a distinctly white supremacist *logic of extermination*.[3]

The Thirteenth Amendment, according to this argument, is a legal technology that has anchored U.S. geopolitical power in a foundation of Black genocide. This mass of white supremacist violence is not confined only to the physical site of the prison/jail itself, but is also a basis for the white settler's entire conception of himself as "free," as the proper subject of "rights," as the allegedly peaceful guardian a "democratic" social order. It is the removal of criminalized populations from white civil space that enables the U.S. settler to think they are free. The structural violence of prison slavery is thus modeled on the master-over-slave relation, yet in the present era it has been transfigured into the state-over-convict relation. The latter figure is effectively eviscerated of all "rights" under law and placed in a position of government-imposed civil/social death.

In 2014, Free Alabama Movement co-founders Melvin Ray, Kinetic Justice, and I were discussing the prospect of kicking off a "Free California Movement" in which California prisoners would join the international movement to abolish prison slavery. My initial response was, "It'll never work in Cali." Why? To be clear, in no way was my response a reflection of my own disposition, but rather it was a

So, you learn to do small tricks: spinning in place, isolating motion in one limb at a time, twirling and descending through various shapes named after objects found in nature. You learn the fundamental trick to maintain balance while spinning: keep your gaze on a single moving point, always on your body, never on the silk or, god forbid, anyone watching.

This self-centered approach seems risky at first. You want to know how your movement is affecting the others—if the coach approves, if the birdlike figure even sees—to gauge how your future audience might too react. The elevated status brings up some insecurities, naturally. You are never quite stable for long, and your every action is visible at every angle. You surely signed up to be seen, so it must matter what they all think. Isn't group consensus the true test of your practice? Mustn't this all be for everyone else, those trapped in boxes, those suffocating from pressure, the kids? But as soon as your gaze shifts away from your toenail toward the birdlike figure, the you can barely hang on, the illusion breaks, and no one in the room is entertained. The sequence cannot work if you acknowledge others, not even in your periphery.

You learn that the illusive performance is nothing more than a dance with the self.

** The silk climber invokes anti-gravity at every stage of her performance. Her climb illustrates the necessity of counterintuitive training of the body to propel upward. She remains visible only through a sequence of letting go and holding on again, oscillating her various limbs, joints, and muscles—each a source of motion, flexibility, or strength—between flex and rest in any given moment. Her performative art is a sequence of manipulation. Her pauses remain strategic.*

reflection of the many conversations I have had on the subject over the years with fellow prisoners.

Time and time again, what they say is, "Man… I ain't got not outside support. I can't risk losing my job. That $10, $50 and, in some cases $200 pay number, counts!"" or it's "I'm trying to 'come up'!" And I can't forget the chowhall workers. They like to eat! It's *that* simple. (And that's not to mention how all the recent changes in law that now provide earned time credits and parole consideration have impacted them in such a way that "protesting" anything is the last thing they're concerned about). For them the inducement to work is simply too strong. Then, of course, there are those who honestly believe they owe a debt to society. Therefore, they see nothing wrong with their enslavement.

All this Melvin and Kinetic Justice couldn't believe. They were simply astonished and under the impression that there would be a strong resistance to injustice within California's prison population, on account of George Jackson's legacy and the 2011/2013 hunger strikes in which a reported 30,000 prisoners protested the renegade administrative process that landed countless people in the SHU indefinitely. To my dismay, I had to explain to them that the hunger strikes were a gradualist reform movement, not a militant abolitionist movement; that they had nothing to do with abolishing prison slavery or genocide more generally; that the majority of prisoners in California would view a general strike as counter-productive to their own selfish reasons for working in a prison setting, and like prisoners anywhere many simply lacked the necessary vision, discipline, knowledge, and willingness to sacrifice those crumbs for the bigger picture.

Having said that, I've noticed a slight change of disposition amongst many prisoners in California. Before and during the hunger strikes, many were doubtful, if not pessimistic, as to our ability to bring about change and abolish many of the oppressive and inhumane aspects of prison. However, after the hunger strikes lead to the 2015 settlement in "Ashker v. Brown," which supposedly abolished indefinite SHU terms, the conversation on the yard has been somewhat optimistic. That said, the most significant result of the hunger strikes was not forcing CDCR to reform its bogus gang validation process and indeterminate SHU scheme, rather it was the cultivation of faith that we as prisoners—as a collective and enslaved political body—have the power to dismantle the oppressive and inhumane circumstances we find ourselves in.

In essence, the hunger strikes exemplified what abolitionist Ruthie Gilmore describes as the mobilization of the forms of dual power already latent in colonized and oppressed communities; the disruptive potential of organizing ourselves as rebel slaves. She explains:

> Power is not a thing but rather a capacity composed of active and changing relationships enabling a person, group, or institution to compel others to do things they would not do on their own (such as be happy, or pay taxes, or go to war). Ordinarily, activists focus on taking power, as though the entire political setup were

the fall. But your tears go unnoticed. You get back up, this time leading with the other hand, and climb again. It's never as good as the first time.

No one explained that the rise would take so little, the peak be so exhausting, or the descent so critical. No warning that once you were down, you would have no time to rest before starting again. That layers of skin would break open. Your guides would frown and say you must train to the point of mastery if you want to be bird-like. But you would rather become your own master.

You recall how Kerry re-negotiated the whole canon by way of his own mastry in painting. How he said there are no mysteries in the work of his artistic brilliance—he puts it all out there, crystal clear. How he does the work to reach this level, to the point of becoming the history of the level himself. How he reaches the height to determine his own range of mobility, at his own will, with nothing to prove to anybody. Because only through this point of genius in action can you genuinely explore what is possible in the highs, lows, and in-betweens. This, he says, is mastry: freedom, being unrestrained through non-lacking in ability or knowledge. So you go on with the work.

You remember the beautiful graceful figure and wonder if she has gone through the same process. You remember that the force of gravity is universal to anything bearing mass—painters and dancers alike. That she could stay up high a long time and look good all the while, but she too would descend to solid ground.

She walks by, still advertising grace. She wears the practice like a cloak, and you wonder how it is wearing on her.

the hardest part is moving in the air

Today you think you see the birdlike figure meet your gaze in the air. She is doing a complicated move that ends in the "death drop," a dramatic dive from the hip basket she crocheted by repeatedly weaving her legs through both strands of silk. You know the drop is coming from her long, grip-less pause at the ceiling, but it produces a force of air that has a visceral effect, leaving you paralyzed in your own elevated resting place. She dives into a downward spiral and catches herself upright with calculated precision, transforming her silk from board to pool, land to water, like magic. But you don't believe in magic, not even the black-girl kind. She is a mastr of illusion, until illusion is made crystal clear, and you learn to respect the technique.

Being safe in the air means tricking gravity into submission. To do this, you must keep moving until you're ready to fall with intention. But continuous movement presumes a strong core and a tighter focus, neither of which you have developed.

width of your hips can weave in between. You have not worked your hands enough to create friction, so your initial efforts will feel futile. The shocking sensation will come once you realize that your hands have slid over the sleek fabric a second too soon, and it has split you wide open. Ignore this, and, as with the locks, shift your attention to the feet. Use the ball of one foot to hold the silk in place on top of the other, which will undoubtedly slide out of the way. Remember that with unformed callouses, everything will slide. Your goal now is not to climb, but to thicken your skin in an effort to do so, the quicker the better.

As callouses develop, you learn that neither hands nor feet alone make the climb work; they are just place-markers. The real engine of the motion comes from your hips, and there really is nothing to it once you get the form down. Callouses help you to grip the fabric and hang. Hang there a moment, and open your legs. You can bring both feet together at once, a simultaneous catching and locking the fabric between them. Or wrap one leg around it like you would a lover and hold it in place with the opposite foot. That's it, you're in a groove. And now, to keep the feet feeling secure, hold them horizontally, as if you are making your own little stairway in the air. Pull up your knees and stand yourself up with your core. It is not intuitive, but engage the hip, all the time. There is your form.

You're climbing with ease now, and with all the pressure gone from your hands and feet, you feel able-bodied, all swift motion and long length. You arrive to the top without breaking a sweat. It occurs to you that, all things considered, this climb was really never about your strength or specialness, and only about some uniform technique. In the end, it costs very little blood, sweat, or tears to do it; yet here you are, some twenty feet in the air. Just a moment off the ground feels like a prize. Damn, you can't believe this was such an easy come-up.

But it's really just the beginning. In no time, you are quickly running out of breath. Panic arises again because you have already forgotten the protocol for safely getting down. Your hands are also giving out—they burn, they are tired—and you cannot imagine following more technicalities to reverse the trip. You made it to the peak, and you have about three more seconds up there. What will be the harm in letting go and sliding a mere twenty feet, especially when there is a thick safety cushion beneath you? Time is up, you release the grip and let gravity do its thing.

But hindsight is twenty-twenty, and twenty feet is far as hell. The mistake is now evident as you sit with more raw cuts, dull pain, and the coach yelling that the climb is only half as important as what comes after it. She demands that you start over again, quickly now, to become even on both sides. Realizing the mat is far less supportive than it looks, you experience another downward pull from allowing yourself to actually feel what is happening. Everything hurts now, including the memory of

> really a matter of 'it' (structure) versus 'us' (agency). But if the structure-agency opposition isn't actually how things really work, then perhaps politics is more complicated, and therefore open to more hopeful action. People can and do make power through, for example, developing capacities in organizations. But that's not enough, because all an individual organization can do on its own is tweak Armageddon. When the capacities resulting from purposeful action are combined toward ends greater than mission statements or other provisional limits, powerful alignments begin to shake the ground. In other words, movement happens.[4]

As emblematic as the hunger strikes were in demonstrating how counter-state forms of power are fortified, which Gilmore argues succinctly in the above passage, we still have our work cut out for us. The entire structure of prison slavery/genocide must be challenged as a whole. I believe it is important that we acknowledge the policing and imprisonment regime as the central target we rally around and develop the capacities of "power" that reside—dormant, always—within our communities. Just as it took slaves refusing trays, street protestors, progressive lawyers, university workers, and many others to build the 2011/13 resistance and provide documented evidence that long term solitary confinement is psychologically damaging and "cruel and unusual punishment," so too will the same effort be required to demonstrate that prison slavery in fact is programmatic, low-intensity Black genocide more generally.

Notably, the recent 2016 and 2018 nationwide prison strikes show promise. But we need more. We need to build a mass movement that wages an offensive for genocide abolition. What is needed is not merely slavery abolition, but the abolition of the prison as a lethal mechanism of social death. We must resist the seductions of work in an environment of forced isolation and (the always-present-potential for) extermination. In turn, we must not misconstrue our status as mere exploited workers, or model our operations on the lessons of striking wage workers. The position of the (prison) slave is a structural juncture of improvised unity with which we can all rally behind, whether locked in the gulag already, or as peoples struggling together on the outside to avoid/defend-against/abolish the possibility of capture. There is a power that we can utilize, a power that can be unleashed in the domino effect of the revolting slave. This is how Black political consciousness is formed—from the everyday to the extraordinary, in the anti-dialectic between master and slave, we continue to build the grounds upon which the former's disintegration becomes imperative. The chattel convict is thus from the moment of arrest positioned in such a way as to develop Black politics, as imprisoned people are all subjected to the gratuitous terror of the state. We are not workers for the most part. We are enslaved. Captive. Captured. Property of the U.S. nation state. The raw materials disappeared to give shape to white democracy's freedom. Free world abolitionists will you join in the dance with social death?[5]

Endnotes

1. Frank B. Wilderson III, "The Prison Slave as Hegemony's (Silent) Scandal," *Social Justice* vol. 30, no. 2 (2003): 26.
2. See: Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *diacritics* vol. 17, no. 2 (1987): 64-81.
3. For more on the concept of "logic of extermination," see: Dylan Rodriguez, *Forced Passages: Imprisoned Radical Intellectuals in the U.S. Prison Regime.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.
4. Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulags: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.
5. Frank B. Wilderson III, *Red, White, & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.

to restrict the wrist and hand joints, in this case, it is you who will manipulate the material, developing mastery over *its* unruliness. And this will be the first and most important lesson to learn for the duration of your practice.

It takes many attempts to figure out how to lock the material at the same height on both arms. Once you do, you quickly learn the dynamics of your relationship with it—how a slight movement in the wrong direction can result in incredibly uncomfortable positions. The silk irritates, embarrasses, humbles you. You try the same with your ankles, making self-shackled "foot locks" that lift you a foot or so off the ground. The fabric pulls too tightly on your skin and bone, and your heart races from panic once you realize you cannot safely undo the trap without following a specific protocol that you did not fully grasp. In the meantime, your guide is holding up one of your legs and speaking slowly, but you cannot hear her outside of your anxieties. One foot is stuck within the tangled web of relentless material, the other is hopping to relocate its nerve endings. Struggling to manage the body's panic and create a new center of balance, you consider that perhaps silk is not made to be climbed after all.

You mean, sure, anyone can do anything within reason, and some people do this well—particularly those that started in their youth when their nimble muscles memorized new languages with ease. But it is best to keep your aspirations in check before beginning such an expensive habit. It is not as if you can do anything substantial with it, despite what your coach sells. She says the silk can be anything once you master it, but reason says that climbing cloth is just for show; there is no real purpose of utility, such as with a ladder or staircase. Conquering fabric will not take you to another level of stability or help you get anywhere any faster. And how it works the nerves! You have to grapple with all its unbearable thickness when it refuses to cooperate. Its threads will eventually rub your hands from raw to calloused, burn your lower back and slice your inner thigh the second you lose control of your core. It will grind under your knees. It will fold inside your ribcage until you can't breathe.

Indeed, silk will trap your body in a web of pain. And only after you learn this on a visceral level can you do anything with it at all.

how to climb silk

Now that you have tested your wrists and ankles and everything is undone, you can begin to learn to climb. There is no locking involved at this stage—only training your grip and intuition. It feels as tricky as it appears. Like water, the silk responds to your every touch. You must remind yourself that you are in control, fiercely gather all the material in one hand, and create a single opening through which the

Anti-gravity:
Upward Mobility on Silk

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to dangle and stunt from the ceiling, too. You suspect it will take some time, years probably, and might be harder on your body than you imagine. You suspect there will be costs, but probably no more than the sum of what you endured by the time you were fifteen, certainly no more than the words you swallow every day like your mother did her cocktail of prescription drugs. And still your mother taught you that though there ain't no anti- that fixes antipathy for long, it feels good to be seen, anyway.

So what exactly *is* the silken wave she's riding? What amount of tension is entailed in the climb up, in executing the pose, over and over again? You wonder what it's like to be dark and wide and woman and in sync with your own body; to have the mental space for practice, to focus on something other than heartbreak for longer than five minutes; to be fly without the pressure of desire on your bones; to curse gravity in this way, and suspend your own disbelief.

** The term "gravity" carries several meanings. In physics, it is a force that pulls a mass downward, toward the center of the earth or another, larger body of mass. In social terms, it is a force of significance or importance. It is also commonly referred to as a weight of seriousness and sobriety, perhaps in one's work ethic, disposition, or sense of self. Between all definitions, we can think about the downward "pull" of gravity at work.*

** Antigravity is generally used within the natural sciences: a "reducing, canceling, or protecting against the effects of gravity."*

** Here I further suggest the notion of anti-gravity, to speak of reducing, canceling, or protecting against the weight of quests for praxis in social and moral aspects of being. Anti-gravity addresses the friction between theory and practice by re-centering movement that is neither in resistance nor fugitivity, but of renegotiating the illusion of any coherent upward mobility.*

but actually, silk is not made to be climbed

Finding it is difficult enough. You turn another lonely road before spotting the isolated, seemingly vacant warehouse, its exterior walls smeared in faded paint and chipped postings. Someone will eventually open the door and lead you into the dimmed gym. You see a few towering ladders stationed beside the thick vertical plane of shiny turquoise fabric fastened to the industrial ceiling by carabiners nearly too far to see. The ladders look unapproachable—too dangerous to touch, let alone climb—but the silk has a chimeric quality that brings you back to the image. You admire the promise of its slip.

To identify the limits of your flexibility, the coach recommends that you stretch in wristlocks with the silk before attempting to climb. This wristlock is different from the ones that have been done to you, to hold you in place. While the point is still

you got a mean streak,
get real mean sometimes.
doctor says you can't have salt.
less, you mumble,
none, she says.
if you refuse the prescription, none.

what you're dealing with here is life and death, she says,
extreme risk,
invisible,
what makes it so dangerous.
high-pressure force,
strong enough to
invert,
from the inside out.

they call it the silent killer for a reason, she says,
you go on about your way,
drink your bourbons neat,
season meat 'til it smells like youth.

your heart is like a pressure cooker, she says,
vessels stress then pop,
stop you dead in a stroke.

heart-break
won't see it coming

it *is* silent, you say,
not invisible, though,
your mother's was an elephant, rest her soul,
both grandmothers, three aunts, too.

if gravity is law, as she says,
& even the elements an enemy,
might as well risk the fall,
to pull illusion free.

silky aspirations

You see the image on the company's computer screen, at the company's desk, behind the company's three-by-three cubicle wall. The company's workload is heavy, but the image asks you to stop for a while and consider how attention-seeking behavior isn't always so bad after all. Besides, the self-effacement game you've been playing until now hasn't exactly made you any healthier, happier, or more able to fit in other people's boxes. This image has you wondering if the gravity around you can somehow be evaded, and who you'd be, how you'd manage, without it.

It makes you recall Audre's words on silence and Zora's resistance to shyness. You consider Toni's warning about focusing on distractions, rather than on your real work—whatever that might be—and where the displaced gaze gets you in the end. They all seem to speak through this singular reflection of a woman: black, wide, wise with her body, floating at the top of a room, her chest a horizontal plane, her lower back perched on a silken knot. She is spreading and dangling her limbs in every direction from above: uppity, birdlike, looking at you:

Baby, what's so bad about being seen?

You've observed similar images of acrobatic circus performers, but none like this. They were pale, spindly shadows, hued in fluorescent lights and crystal-coated leotards, eyelids exaggerated with jade feathers, cheeks amplified in layers of gold. Their vibrancy felt cartoonish, irrelevant, too many worlds away. What a goofy ass bore, you always thought. What did they know about pulling tricks, juggling work, disappearing acts, madness?

But acrobatic art was made for the gaze, and this image makes you look beyond the look. It is captured behind the scenes—a candid from a training session or warm-up practice, perhaps—with no costumes in sight. Something about the blurred grey of the room and the tattered flimsiness of her clothing draws you in: that nostalgic luxury of working with what one has, the less-is-more approach to craftsmanship. You suspect that this "realness" you perceive has been staged somehow—that it's all on trend, not unlike the minimalist white-wall/wood-floor/green-plant aesthetic in every R&B-playing café and artisan pop-up shop in town. You reckon it's all connected, and assume you're the target buyer: the kind that seeks escape from your abysmal center of non-exotic non-existence; the elder millennial grown weary of social media but longing to participate lest find yourself missing from the collective archive; the inner artist child that grew too thin from hunger and too tall too fast.

Whatever the marketing tactic, this image says, ridiculous as you know it sounds, that you—invisible, thirty-somethinged, hyper-tense you—can somehow manage