AND THE TEXT STARTED TO SLAP

Wot hit talk / Laure Prouvost

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2
Barbara Dilley letter to Yvonne Rainer reflecting on Robert Morris's piece *Continuous Project Altered Daily* (1969) in *Feelings Are Facts* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006).

3
Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *#Black Lives Matter to Black Liberation* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016).

4
Barbara Dilley letter to Yvonne Rainer reflecting on Robert Morris's piece *Continuous Project Altered Daily* (1969) in *Feelings Are Facts* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006).

5
The Pitfalls of Liberalism, by Stokley Carmichael in the *Black Dada Reader*

6
See Ron Silliman's poem "Albany" in *ABC* (Tuumba Press, 1983) https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/albany

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Editorial – “As the world falls apart…”

So this is the plan that we came up with in the huddle, stunned and not so stunned at the storm clouds that have broken, at the deluge that is here: we are putting up alternative facts to the alternative facts that are being deployed in a rightward swerve that has us up against the rails. We are also putting up an alternative common sense to the centrist liberal one that is what ultimately, at the fundamental level, keeps this world from coming undone, preservation being its constitutive mandate. “Let us imagine,” David Marriott begins his essay in this issue, “that ‘black lives matter’ is a scandalous, even decadent claim, characterized, as the definition has it, by excess or luxury.” If this is so, Marriott makes clear, it is an excess we cannot afford to not afford. It is evident that #BlackLivesMatter and the organizations that coalesce the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) represent the most important and promising developments in the theory and practice of abolition. The luxury it is bound to may be communal above all else.

Unwinding fantasies of a post-racial society, the movement has rerouted political conversations and reignited imaginations. But we should bear in mind – keeping the alternative facts at bay – that this is happening through pelted riot shields and clogged circulation illuminated by the light of a blazing CVS store. And also, as Jared Sexton points out, through “the independent generation of a vast digital archive, a prolific online social-media commentary, and a rich analogue protest culture involving political graffiti, fashion, and dance, among other things.” Ferguson, as artist Carl Pope would probably put it, was and it ain’t: the future is its real name. It is what is happening, at all times and on all frequencies, as long as the desire to disorganize this world, to mangle it into something radically unlike itself, continues to burn. This is what is exemplary: the scorch-trail that the new insurrectionary bodies have put through everything, and which in turn is beginning to texture our moment away from the homogenous continuum of a resilient neoliberal and anti-black status quo, despite the desperate efforts to retrench it with executive orders and crony appointments.

The mandate we face is a new articulation of race and its role in reproducing class society. Or perhaps it’s the reverse: a new account of class and its role in reproducing racist society. Certainly the whole thing is gendered. The whole thing is increasingly difficult to disentangle from a mutating earth system, too. The whole thing is rotten. Everything must be considered, especially what lies beyond the world as it is currently assembled and the institutional practices holding it together. It is important to record this rethinking, to report back, to circulate

David.[2]

The specter of crisis was also bolstered by the cops’ simple inability to stop killing black people. Just prior to Brown’s murder, forty-six-year-old Eric Garner of State Island, New York, unarmed and minding his own business, was approached by police and then choked to death as he gasped eleven times, “I can’t breathe.”Two days after Brown was killed, Los Angeles Police department officers shot and killed another young black man, Ezell Ford. Months later, autopsy reports would confirm that Ford was shot multiple times, including once in the back, while he lay on the ground. In a suburb of Dayton, Ohio, police shot to death John Crawford the 3rd, twenty-two years old and African American, while he was talking on his cell phone and holding an air gun on sale in the aisle of a Walmart. And as the nation waited to hear whether a grand jury would indict officer Darren Wilson for Brown’s death, Cleveland police killed thirty-seven-year-old, African American Tanisha Anderson when they slammed her to the ground, remaining on top of her until her body went limp. The following week, police in Cleveland struck again, murdering a twelve year old boy, Tamir Rice, less than two seconds after arriving at the playground where Rice was playing alone. Making maters worse, the two Cleveland police stood by idly, refusing aid, while Tamir bled to death. When his fourteen-year-old sister attempted to help him, police wrestled her to the ground. [3]

I remember the breathlessness of the lifting section

I remember the opening bars of the Chambers Brothers

I remember… you grinning at the pleasure we had.

I remember watching the pillow solo and then during *Trio A* the wings would sometimes flap in my face.

I remember talking to you in the hotel, before “stoned,”

I remember standing around waiting to start the run-thru, and you were talking and then you turned and said, “What are you waiting for?”

I remember the pleasure of huddling in the rolls and Steve coming down on me with his self-conscious silly grin.

I remember the box improvisation with David. [4]

Whenever one writes about a problem in the United States, especially concerning the racial atmosphere, the problem written about is usually black people, that they are either extremist, irresponsible, or ideologically naïve.

What we want to do here is to talk about white society, and the liberal segment of white society, because we want to prove the pitfalls of

liberalism, that is, the pitfalls of liberals in their political thinking.

Whenever articles are written, whenever political speeches are given, or whenever analyses are made about a situation, it is assumed that certain people of one group, either the left or the right, the rich or the poor, the whites or the blacks are causing polarization.

The fact is that conditions cause polarization, and that certain people can act as catalysts to speed up the polarization; for example, Rap Brown or Huey Newton can be a catalyst speeding up the polarization of blacks against whites in the Untied States, but the conditions are already there. George Wallace can speed up the polarization of whites against blacks in America, but again, the conditions are already there.

Many people want to know why, out of the entire white segment of society, we want to criticize the liberals. We have to criticize them because they represent the liaison between both groups, between the oppressed and the oppressor. The liberal tries to become an arbitrator, but he is incapable of solving the problems. He promises the oppressor that he can keep the oppressed under control; that he will stop them from becoming illegal (in this case illegal means violent). At the same time, he promises the oppressed that he will be able to alleviate their suffering – in due time. Historically, of course, we know this is impossible, and our era will not escape history. [5]

A line is the distance between.

They circled the seafood restaurant singing “We shall not be moved.” [6]

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Adam Pendleton, *Just back from Los Angeles: A Portrait of Yvonne Rainer,* 2016–2017. Single-channel black-and-white video. 13' 51''. Dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.

Adam Pendleton, *Just back from Los Angeles: A Portrait of Yvonne Rainer,* 2016–2017. Single-channel black-and-white video. 13' 51''. Dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.

the material, and build the archive. History teaches that neither reform nor revolution is possible without revolutionary theory.

The mass media knows this too, and it has hostilely presented M4BL in general and BLM in particular in ways that simplify its ideas, downplay its organizational capacity, shade over its intersectional potency, and demonize the young black bodies whose availability to unaccountable state violence is the oldest and most consistent American reality since the European invasion. It certainly predates the republic, such as it is, and as of this writing, it may outlast it, now that a white supremacist has been elected. In light of such distorting narratives, it is important to provide a more robust, dynamic, and truthful image of this new activism through a partisan but critical lens. It seems necessary to place this current revolutionary sequence and its ensembles within a larger landscape of radical thinking, to highlight the bonds that exist in the crawlspaces of the common project.

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David Marriott

On Decadence: *Bling Bling*

1. Decadence

Let us imagine that "black lives matter" is a scandalous, even decadent claim, characterized, as the definition has it, by excess or luxury. One cannot understand this decadence outside of a certain moral politico-philosophical economy. If the virtues of restraint, industriousness, thriftiness have tended to be characterized as white, blackness is often construed as a *desiring* in whose meaning excess, or luxury, signifies a sociocultural impoverishment that is morally bankrupt. This trope takes on the amplitude of an all-encompassing theme in the discourse of anti-blackness in the West. It compels a view of blackness that, in relation to sovereign life, reveals an experience of excess enjoyed beyond consummation and one that is socially irresponsible. So what of this extravagant expenditure itself? If claiming "black lives matter" is to risk a certain exorbitance, this is not because there is any certainty about the meaning of black life, but because asserting that black life matters foregrounds those attributes by which blackness is assumed to have a value in culture. Black is a being that is somehow both useless and endlessly driven by consummation: *bling bling*.

This "decadence" rests on a twofold movement: unless blackness is put to work as the figure of endless, unproductive labor, its "natural" course will assert itself as an exaggeratedly inflated figure of inflation; or, rather, the way that blackness puffs itself up when possessed of capital is actually a sign of decadent inutility, as in the case of an excess noteworthy for its unproductive labor: *bling bling*. Since whiteness is therefore *the* privileged figure of productive capital, it represents, paradoxically, not only the limit that separates production from conspicuous consumption but also what separates racial wealth from racial poverty.

In this essay my aim is to explore how this racially derived notion of decadence always already relies on a perverse association of blackness with excess, upon which is founded an entire analysis of culture. For *bling bling* not only transcends class as well as gender; it makes it impossible to distinguish blackness from a racist economy of jouissance that, potentially, can invade and submerge every subject, person, or thing. Accordingly, if blackness denotes a profligacy that exceeds the moral economy of the subject, this is because it broaches the limits of being in general.

We could say that black life is the very experience of a life whose bling involves the exhaustion and degeneration of life itself, and one that necessarily involves a gradual separation of blackness and being. And this is

Adam Pendleton

Just Back from Los Angeles: A Portrait of Yvonne Rainer

Adam Pendleton's Just Back From Los Angeles: A Portrait of Yvonne Rainer *is the third in a series of video portraits, following* My Education: A Portrait of David Hilliard, *the former chief of staff for the Black Panthers, and* Lorraine O'Grady: A Portrait. *The text below represents a transcription of the script Pendleton prepared for Rainer to read during their day spent filming at the Ridgeway Diner in Chelsea. The text mixes citations from Stokely Carmichael, Malcom X, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, and excerpts from Rainer's own published works; the film ends with the gospel song "I Am Saved" by the Silver Harpes over the footage of Rainer's now canonical movement work* Trio A. *Whether read or viewed,* Just Back from Los Angeles *is an uncanny work, one that deploys the double meaning of the word "movement" – now choreography, now social uprising – to reveal a shared method of freedom coursing beneath traditions typically received separately.*

– Editors

They're beginning to see what they used to only look at ... [1]

I remember the breathlessness of the lifting section

I remember your Martha Graham story and your voice rising, and I got worried you were going to talk about whether she ate cock or not and Steve starting to read on the other mic and changing the atmosphere.

I remember the opening bars of the Chambers Brothers and doing *Trio A* slow, very slow, and Steve joining me and then fast, with and against Steve's tempo.

I remember... you grinning at the pleasure we had.

Oh, and the wings.

I remember watching the pillow solo and then during *Trio A* the wings would sometimes flap in my face.

I remember talking to you in the hotel, before "stoned," and you said I was always wanting to get someplace and that I should just be where I was...

and only there... and that was what happened in the performance.

I remember standing around waiting to start the run-thru, and you were talking and then you turned and said, "What are you waiting for?"

and Doug saying what I had been doing, which was waiting for you!

I remember the pleasure of huddling in the rolls and Steve coming down on me with his self-conscious silly grin.

And I remember being out of it thru Becky's solo, then toward the end seeing her so totally there with that changed and changing body of hers...

I remember the box improvisation with

1
Grace Lee Boggs with Scott Kurashige, *The Next American Revolution: Sustainable Activism for the Twenty-First Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 111.

2
Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), xi, ellipses in original.

3
Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16 (Spring 1986): 22–27.

4
Alexander Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 3.

5
Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations," *The Atlantic*, June 2014 http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/ .

6
Andreas Malm, *Fossil Capital* (New York: Verso, 2015), 10.

7
See http://www.hawking.org.uk/space-and-time-warps.html.

8
Karen Barard, "Nature's Queer Performativity," *qui parle*, vol. 19, no. 2 (Spring–Summer 2011): 121–58.

9
I'm drawing here on José Esteban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia* (New York: NYU Press, 2011).

10
E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism," *Past & Present* 38 (December 1967): 56–97.

11
David Roediger, *Seizing Freedom: Slave Emancipation and Liberty for All* (New York: Verso, 2015), 18.

12
Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

13
See http://policy.m4bl.org/.

14
Quoted by Lynn Hunt, "Revolutionary Time and Regeneration," *Diciottesimo Secolo* 1 (2016): 62.

15
1825 English text available at http://www.victorianweb.org/science/science_texts/cuvier/cuvier-e.htm.

16
George Cuvier, *Recherches sur les ossemens fossiles*, vol. 1 (Paris: Deterville, 1812); quoted by Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, 2nd ed. (London: Penguin, 1997), 69.

17
Kathy Finn, "Science Meets Voodoo in a New Orleans Festival of Water," *Scientific American* https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/science-meets-voodoo-in-a-new-orleans-festival-of-water/.

18
See http://knockdown.center/event/mami/.

19
See C. L. R James, *The Black Jacobins* (1938) and Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944). Present studies include Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

20
Azam Ahmed, "Haitians, Battered By Hurricane, Huddle In Caves: 'This Is The Only Shelter We Have,'" *New York Times*, October 17, 2016 http://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/18/world/americas/haiti-hurricane-matthew-caves.html?action=click&contentCollection=Americas&module=RelatedCoverage®ion=Marginalia&pgtype=article.

21
Laurent Dubois, "Who Will Speak for Haiti's Trees," *New York Times*, October 27, 2016 http://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/18/opinion/who-will-speak-for-haitis-trees.html.

A silver solid cast of wearable vampire fangs presented as advertised and sold at customgoldgrillz.com.

why black life paradoxically coincides with a decadence that can only enrich itself as absolute privation, and an enjoyment that can only enslave itself as a discredited imposture of working capital.

The coincidence of decadence and blackness remains unthought in black political philosophy, which continues to offer us an image of *bling bling* as that without use, or as that which uses up utility nihilistically, unnaturally. The moral traditionalism of this reading, however, opens to a reading of decadence that is itself decadent, or that at least produces a hyperbolic reading that overflows its own limits.

This failure to recognize our inherited understanding of black being as decadent being – or decadent nonbeing – makes establishing the sovereignty of black life difficult. This decadence summons, as a dialectical counterpart, a desire for discipline and subjection. Here, “black lives matter” meets the discourse of an anti-black presumption. Blackness, understood as decadence, must be restricted and resisted, made to respect force, for without opposition it will open civil life to the chaos of a demotic thematization whose consumption promises only pathological enjoyment. *Bling bling* is why black life matters to those who crave its substantive subordination. It is because blackness expresses the sign or movement of a slavish enjoyment that it is assumed to be naturally enslaving. Blackness is no longer a life or world, but an affliction. Blackness invades, submerges, ending not in existence in the traditional sense, but as something socially dead, like a zombie, driven only to multiply itself, whose sheer multiplicity reveals a decadent impropriety, one that frightens the white petty-bourgeois mind. Blackness is remiss because it manifests a being whose indebtedness has no remission. Four motifs support this configuration: pleasure, profligacy, waste, and excess.

2. The Bucket (or the Worth of Black Life)

“What’s the difference between a nigger and a bucket of shit? The bucket.”

I came across this graffiti in the toilet of my school when I was a young lad. My first thought was about the bucket: it marks a difference that is not really a difference between two things that are judged to be the same, but for the “joke” to work the bucket also has to first signify their separation. The joke depends on the presupposition that there is already a resemblance between blackness and shit: the bucket reinforces the resemblance precisely through its separation. My second thought was to ask, why this desire for resemblance? What is at stake in this filthy projection? Why do whites seem driven to process, or recategorize, blackness as a fecal-object, to sequester it or evacuate it as essentially wasteful? Is blackness horrid because it is *itself* a filthy form, or more horrid because of its filthy resemblance to wastefulness?

Since what is at work in this idea, its orthodoxy and politics, is the doctrine that blackness is polluting because it represents something excrescent, it is no surprise that “segregation” has always played a significant role in anti-black discourse. It’s a discourse that can only see blackness as a monstrous, polluting object. 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. It is clear that such associations derive from a politics of disgust that views blackness as a shameful, dirty incongruity irreconcilable with the categories of moral and social hygiene. How “smelly” is blackness as metaphor? How “clean” is race as a concept? And does the very ability to ask that question manifest an irreconcilable imbalance between the categories of race and pollution? As racially abject, the resemblance of blackness to human being is a resemblance that anti-blackness has to dispose of: it has to be evacuated. Yet the desire to turn black resemblance into shit appears to be constitutive of whiteness. To ask about the ontological status of blackness is to risk letting whiteness escape up its own orificial voiding. The evacuation of blackness – as content and form – certainly does not depend on whether blacks can ever avoid this avoidance. And this perhaps also means that the notion of a voided yet permanently felt excrescence needs a metaphoric bucket to relieve it of its own basely material rhetoric. We can and should note that anti-blackness is a discourse of assholes; the question is, should the matter of black life always act as its permanent laxative?

Now, some thirty years later, this toilet incident reminds me of another allegorical bucket. In his famous “Atlanta Exposition Address” (1895), Booker T. Washington tells the following story:

> A ship lost at sea for many days suddenly sighted a friendly vessel. From the mast of the unfortunate vessel was seen the signal: “Water, water, we die of thirst.” The answer from the friendly vessel at once came back, “Cast down your bucket where you are …” The captain of the distressed vessel, at last heeding the injunction, cast down his bucket and it came up full of fresh, sparkling water from the mouth of the

Haiti is known more as a crisis than a country.”[20] Many media accounts of the hurricane stressed the deforestation of the island. Not mentioned was the fact that deforestation began with slave-labor camps of the colonial period.[21] That is the result of two centuries of casting Haiti as “black beyond redemption,” to quote the nineteenth-century historian and arch-reactionary Thomas Carlyle, whose idea of the Great Man is once again in vogue among Trump followers. For Carlyle, Haiti, far from being the site of freedom, must be depicted as permanent, irredeemable crisis, forever lost for having dared to revolt.

The idea that black life matters is a new one for settler colonies – too new to have been fully accepted. Rather than modify behavior or change energy consumption, making America white again involves using as much fossil fuel as you can and building the next generation of luxury hotels on stilts so the flood water goes underneath, as is now standard practice in Miami. Call it migrant labor luxury hotel capitalism – the actually existing format of fully automated luxury communism. Its follies include aluminum museums being built in the desert, space tourism, cryogenic preservation, and other practices of zombification. What about the people below the water? For now, white supremacy considers them – us – defeated. Instead, we’re just figuring this out. Water is life. The land owns us. Respect the ancestors, respect the spirits. Those on the ground, understanding that black life matters, are making revolutionary time. The future is now, right alongside the reactionary zombie capitalism of the past. But the prophets got one thing wrong: not the fire next time, but the flood.

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who engaged in the dissection of the deceased Sara Baartman, a Khoisan woman (from present-day South Africa), and preserved her genitalia for the collection of the French National Museum of Natural History. Her remains were only repatriated to South Africa with the arrival of majority government in 1994. Catastrophic time seeks to explain geological and (white) human disaster. It imagines the end of time as a solution to present-day crisis. While the science of the Anthropocene is very different, it is animated by the catastrophic structure of feeling.

Beyoncé's take on the goddess Mami Wata shows her floating on top of a police car in a post-Hurricane Katrina scenario, as featured in the music video for the song "Formation" (2016).

5. Revolutionary Time Below the Water

In the fall of 2016, Hurricane Matthew spun through the Caribbean, delivering another devastating blow to Haiti. A Category 4 hurricane when it hit, it deposited forty inches of rain in some areas, with a storm surge of ten feet (enough to flood Manhattan, by way of comparison). Between five hundred and fifteen hundred people were killed, while 1.4 million were in need of humanitarian assistance and $1.89 billion of damage was done. The United States gave about $37 million. After Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans in 2005, there was much discussion about the fact that hurricanes seem to follow the same route taken by the slave ships. It was said that spirits from the Middle Passage (like the Haitian *lwa* Simbi) had destroyed the city in their anger over slavery. Why would the spirits destroy African-American homes over slavery, rather than those of slavers? They are nonhuman and think differently. They want to take their human counterparts "back to Africa." In Kreyol, that connection is called *anba dlo* (beneath the water). Since Katrina, an annual Anba Dlo ceremony has been held in New Orleans. Vodou came to New Orleans in the aftermath of the Haitian Revolution, when slavers fled the liberated island, bringing enslaved Africans with them. Organized by Vodou *mambo* (priest) Sallie-Anne Glassman at the New Orleans Healing Center, Anba Dlo brings together discussions on science and engineering with a ceremony addressed to La Sirène, also known as Mami Wata, the syncretic water deity of the African diaspora. Glassman calls on her in order "to apologize for what we've done to the water, but also to bring us guidance to fix the damage and live more in harmony with the planet."[17] Mami Wata/La Sirène is not easy to placate. She is proud of her beauty, cold, concerned with material wealth, and yet able to bring about healing for her followers. Beyoncé evoked her presence in the video for her song "Formation," and in 2016 an exhibit at the Knockdown Center in Brooklyn explored her legacy.[18]

The connections make sense: capitalism was fueled by slavery, as recent studies have shown, updating and endorsing the path that Caribbean activist-scholars C. L. R. James – later a close friend and comrade of Grace Lee Boggs – and Eric Williams had forged in 1938 and 1944 respectively.[19] As Cedric Robinson taught us, there is no capitalism that is not racial capitalism. And there is no capitalist accumulation that is not destructive to the natural habitat. Medieval historian Lynn White has dated the human domination of habitat to the ninth century CE. In thirteenth century Italy, early forms of merchant trading led to widespread deforestation. As early as 1281, landowners in Sienna were required to plant ten trees a year, while in 1333 deforestation caused a devastating flood in Florence. The sugar-fueled economy accelerated both sides of the equation. Barbados generated more wealth than anywhere else in the seventeenth-century British Empire and was deforested by 1666. Present-day capitalism has followed suit. In the "great acceleration" since 1980, rapidly increasing fossil-fuel emissions have warmed the planet and melted the ice sheets, leading to a rise in sea levels. A feedback loop has been created: warmer water gives more energy to storms, while warmer air retains more moisture and sea-level rise means there is more water to surge. Slavery engendered capitalism, which has caused earth-system crisis that produces warmer water, making hurricanes more powerful. Or in a phrase: Mami Wata did it.

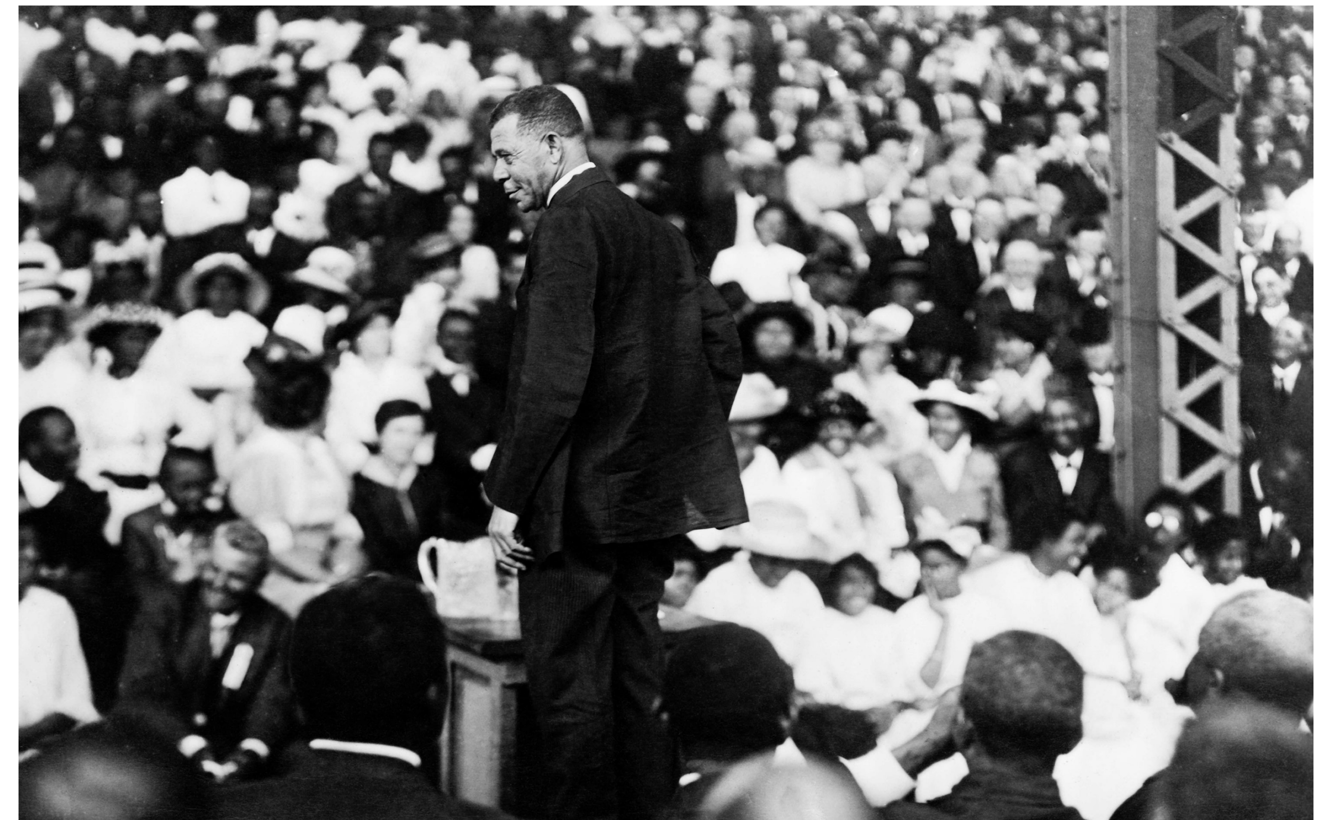
By contrast, the *New York Times* produced an online photo essay about Hurricane Matthew under the sensationalist headline "Haitians, Battered By Hurricane, Huddle In Caves: 'This Is The Only Shelter We Have.'" Wide-angle high-resolution color-saturated photographs by Meridith Kohut framed human figures as insignificant against the drama of nature. Although the caves could be seen, little else could be derived from the picture. Journalist Azam Ahmed opined, "For much of the world,

> Amazon River. To those of my race who depend on bettering their condition in a foreign land … I would say cast down your bucket where you are[;] cast it down in making friends in every manly way of the people of all races by whom we are surrounded.[1]

This passage echoes, in its own rhetoric, what it means to be cast down (benighted) and, conversely, what it means to be brought *up* (from slavery); it is a passage where literal and figurative meanings are cast down, repeatedly, only to be raised up as allegorical signs of raced enlightenment. In this justly infamous speech advocating social segregation and economic integration in the US – "In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress" – the figure of *segregation* is, once again, employed in the defense of hierarchy (113). And, as with the bathroom graffiti, a bucket functions as the metaphor of a separation that implicitly relies on a resemblance between the obscenity of an unwanted intimacy and its racial transgression. As signs of an expenditure that is potentially ruinous, intimacy and transgression cannot be absolutely separated. The tides of racism that flowed through the South after emancipation were, among other things, both transgressive ("lawless") and an obscene example of racial "animosities and suspicions" (114).

All this derives from the literal casting down of a bucket: the lowering of the bucket into water that miraculously reveals itself as race capital is itself a transformation of metaphor into allegory. When capital triumphs, Washington avers, blackness ceases to be bereft. The stereotype of black abjection is preserved as the history that must be cancelled out even as it is raised up by the manufacture of a mutually enriching ideal of productive self-creation. Never mind the question of *how* the boat came to be lost, the question of *how* blackness was rendered abject; the fact is that it *is* lost. Washington continues:

> Cast it down in agriculture, mechanics, in commerce, in domestic service, and in the professions. And in this connection it is well to bear in mind that whatever other sins the South may be called to bear, when it comes to business, pure and simple, it is in the South that the Negro is given a man's chance in the commercial world, and in nothing is this Exposition more eloquent



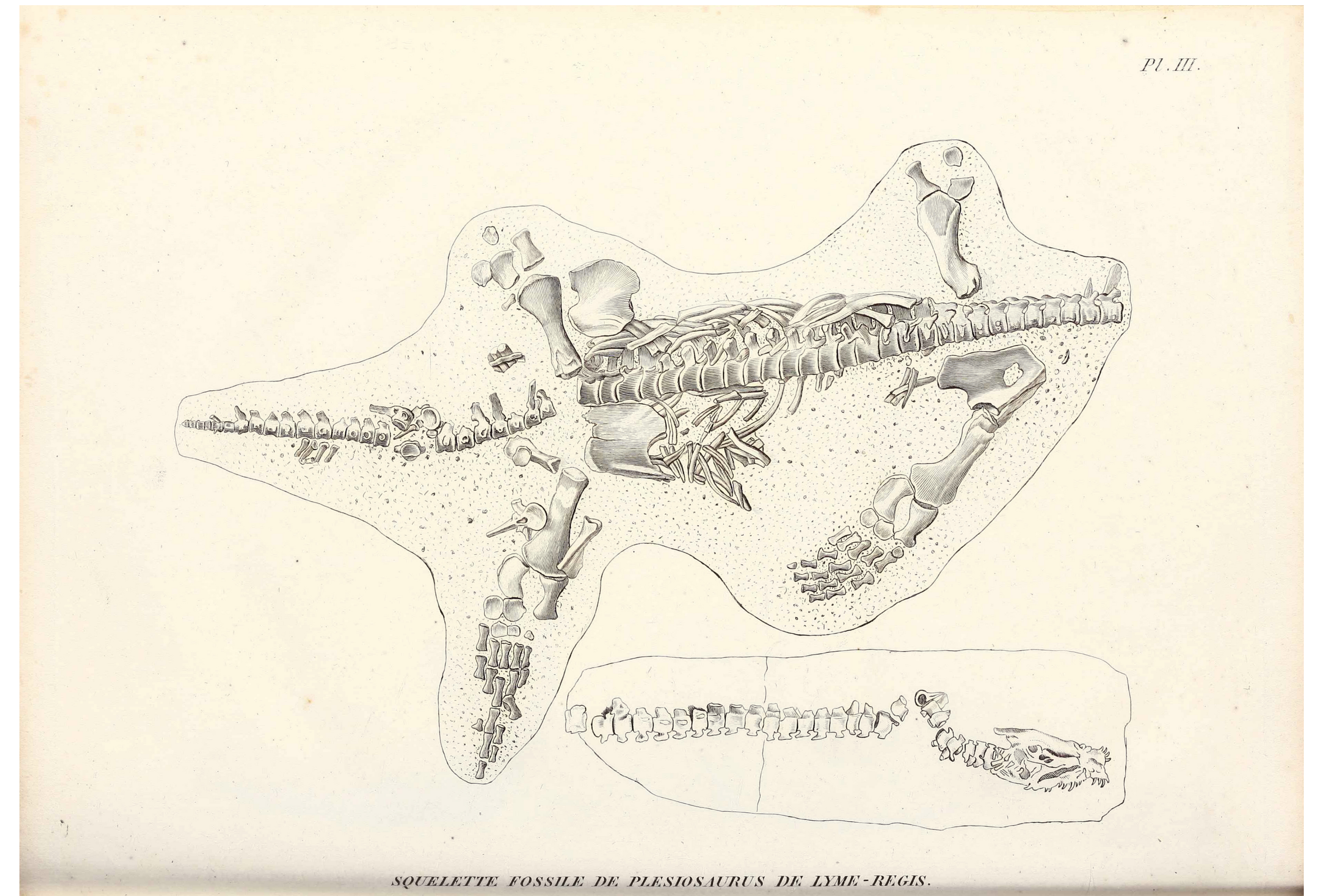
Booker T. Washington speaks to a crowd, 1902.

than in emphasizing this chance. Our greatest danger is that in the great leap from slavery to freedom we may overlook the fact that the masses of us are to live by the productions of our hands, and fail to keep in mind that we shall prosper in proportion as we learn to dignify and glorify common labour and put brains and skill into the common occupations of life; shall prosper in proportion as we learn to draw the line between the superficial and the substantial, the ornamental gewgaws of life and the useful. No race can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem. It is at the bottom of life we must begin, and not at the top. Nor should we permit our grievances to overshadow our opportunities. (112)

When Washington describes capitalism as a "man's chance" (as the fashioner of symbolic value), it is because the standard of what a black *man* should be is held up as one who is docile, submissive, "devotional," and self-sacrificing (112). Similarly, this deployment of a manly "mammy" figure as the most perfect worker transposes the threat of the black man taking his *chance* in the nation's most intimate spaces into an ideal of fidelity in which docility and productivity go hand in hand. And yet the exercising of that chance cannot be entirely separated from the fears of licentiousness and envy that also dominated America's race story post-emancipation. Washington, paradoxically enough, must thus usurp this *bling bling* by casting up the ideal of race segregation in which blacks are "patient, faithful, law-abiding, and unresentful" subjects (113). For a man who extolled the virtues of thrift and social hygiene there is thus a rhetorical luxuriousness here that is far from abject. How the abject puts to "work" its own abjection seems to appear here as an evacuation that is itself figuratively productive. Indeed, how else do we read this extravagant allegorical irony that extols thrift by furnishing proof of its sumptuous (yet burdensome) returns, or that turns "animosities and suspicions" into figurative profit by ending with the "absolute" claim that whites too must learn nothing less than the "willing obedience" of feminized blackness (114)?

Here, in Washington's figurative bucket, no recasting of race is conceivable without repression, and no repression (thus no mutual wealth) is conceivable without refashioning the referential meaning of race as *bling bling*. And the horror and anxiety over nigga desire cannot be allayed without reproducing the rhetorical flourishes that make the nigger no longer docile or definable as such. In the law of capital (and this is valid for all races; it is the law of race), this means that nigger inutility cannot be fashioned into profit unless one suspends the logic of domination of one race other another, including, of course, the economic suspicion of blackness as nonutilitarian value. The black worker, in which this ultimate justification of racial capitalism resides, never accumulates in order to spend, but only ever works in order to sacrifice himself to labor. Consequently, he designates a being who is always spent and appropriated. The abusive appropriation of blackness must end for the recasting of its labor to become meaningful as capital. When Washington says that this is the manly way of being useful, he implies that this is just what racial citizenship is. In this difficult marriage between manliness and capital, the bucket acts *like* (and this word marks an analogy or resemblance which is neither sovereign nor natural) a racial compromise (read here from the point of view of an equivalence between white and black men). Race is *like* capital once the former is isolated from the performative or cognitive rhetoric of *unreproductive* (nigga) labor. Instead, race must be determined on the basis of its fungibility, that is to say, its figural or allegorical productivity (as nigger). ("Nigga" is always thereby cast as the inconsequential affect of "nigger" being, a distinction that will occupy the final part of this essay.) Here the attempt to capitalize blackness by turning it into rhetorical profit relies on flattery to appease white despotism, but Washington's stern moralism is itself bound to a certain extravagance. It seems to me that in this logic of mutual need and benefit, which here takes on the figure of a compact, the metonymic movement of *casting* could equally mean that the language of race will be abolished by capital, without forgetting that capital itself requires voluntary servitude by *all* classes to "the mandates of [race] law" (114). According to this second reading, the casting (shaping, fashioning) by white and black men of the (racial-wealth) bucket is enabling because each has robbed the other of plenty and left both impoverished and impotent. If blackness is to become publicly productive, it only becomes so where the two activities of casting overlap, in that a utilitarian devotion to profit is mutually binding, and "the opportunity to earn a dollar ... is worth infinitely more than the opportunity to spend a dollar" (114).

From this perspective, earning is a veritable production: no longer of learning French or going to the opera (two parallel examples of black – but not white – frivolity), but literally turning blackness into *work*: the (consumed) ever excreted product of a chain of desires which



An illustration from Georges Cuvier's 1826 book *Discours sur les Révolutions de la Surface du Globe: et sur les Changements qu'elles ont Produits dans le Règne Animal* [Discourse on the Revolutions of the Surface of the Globe, and on the Changes They Produced in the Animal Kingdom].

imagining a leisure-directed future brought about by automation that would enable the then-decolonizing world to live very different lives. Deep time frames labor, life, and capital as accumulation without beginning or end. For Hutton, this was a “scientific” (his term) way to see what could not be physically seen.

3. Revolutionary Time

Revolutionary time allows for the unexpunged potential of a moment to be reanimated. A dialectical image catches such potential and contains it, waiting for the moment in which it can again be seen for what it is. Revolutionary time has never left the place of possibility, rather than trying to contain it in norms and hierarchies. In revolutionary time, actors experience the future in real time because the intensity of their contact with others takes place so quickly that it is to experience in days what otherwise might take months or years. Revolutionary time is more like cosmological time than it is like capitalist time. In thinking about Reconstruction in the United States after the abolition of slavery, David Roediger defines revolutionary time as “a cyclical time of liberation, of abolition, and of mechanisms of redress.”[11] The cycle does not complete until wrongs have been righted, which in this case means reparations for the “social death” of slavery.[12] That is not to say that enslaved human being had no life or no social life but that the social codes of law and governance excluded them absolutely from participation. In 1865, the demand was for forty acres and a mule. In 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. went to Washington to “cash a check,” meaning the unpaid reparations of a century prior. In 1967, with that repair still owed, he began the Poor People’s Campaign with his vision of a basic income, affordable housing, and social health care for all. In 2016, the Movement for Black Lives set out a “Vision for Black Lives” in which reparations was the first heading after the demand to end the war on black people.[13] Reparations are a spiritual as well as an economic demand, a repairing of life.

The revolutionary cycle is one of cosmological life. In 1793 the French revolutionary Fabre d’Eglantine proposed to recommence the calendar with the Year Zero: “We can no longer count the years in which kings oppressed us as a time in which we have lived.”[14] In other words, before the revolution, the people were suffering a form of social death. A few months later, by extension, colonial slavery was abolished. Earlier, at the 1791 ceremony at Bwa Kayiman that began the Haitian Revolution, the warrior spirit Ezili Danto inspired the Haitian priest Cécile Fatiman, and the revolutionary Dutty Boukman called on the enslaved to “listen to the voice for liberty that speaks in all our hearts.” Boukman challenged any concept of social death by locating liberty not in Enlightenment thought or the French Revolution but as an ethical demand from within the one body part that cannot be “owned.” The Haitian Revolution was a multiple victory over death – over the nonlife of living under kings and the presumed social death of slavery that made the very possibility of such an event unthinkable (by persons calling themselves white). Perhaps by way of recognition, Haiti created both a revolutionary calendar, beginning from zero in 1804, and continued to use the Christian calendar. The 1804 Constitution, promulgated on “the first day of the independence of Haiti,” expressed this complexity in its opening statement: “Slavery is forever abolished.” That imperative mixes past, present, and future to end (social) death. In this situation, white mastery becomes future impossibility. Thus in Article 12 it is decreed: “No whiteman of whatever nation he may be, shall put his foot on this territory with the title of master or proprietor, neither shall he in future acquire any property therein.” This clause undid colonialism, and sought to foreclose any future possibility of white supremacy, neocolonialism, or segregation. The constitution insisted, against the racialized hierarchy created by slavery, that all persons living in Haiti were to “be known only by the generic appellation of Blacks,” using the term *Noir* rather than the colonial *Nègre*. To simply be present – in the present – in decolonial space was to be black (*noir*), regardless of past personal histories, rewriting blackness as revolutionary affiliation and as abolition democracy. As life. As where black life matters.

4. Catastrophic Time

For many white persons, these revolutions were thus catastrophic, not to say unthinkable. In Baron Georges Cuvier’s *On the Revolutionary Upheavals in the Surface of the Globe* (1807), catastrophic geological time was committed to the suppression of human revolutionary time.[15] Cuvier later notoriously defined native Africans as “the most degraded of human races, whose form approaches that of the beast and whose intelligence is nowhere great enough to arrive at regular government.”[16] He wrote just after the creation of a revolutionary government by the majority African population in Haiti, a revolution of which Cuvier could not possibly have been ignorant. For Cuvier, one cannot even make the phrase “black lives matter” make sense. Black life for him was a variety of animal life, whose outcomes might be the subject of curiosity but not moral engagement. It was this same Cuvier

An artist’s rendition of what the new twenty-dollar bill might look like.

reserves for the black the abject *pleasure* of an endlessly consumable product that, in one and the same impulse, consumes itself in order to better be consumed by the orifices of whiteness.

This is the representation that, for me, is part of the profound and constant conviction that it will never be possible to liberate blackness from decadence, for decadence is, simultaneously, its authority and its fate. Or perhaps, even more consequentially: the persistence of this representation means that decadence can't stop haunting the *theory* of blackness, which is, perhaps, what is most decadently fervent and insistent about it.

3. Corpus Zero Sum

What that theory still needs to address is how blackness becomes the primary referent of a pleasure that enslaves itself, or that consumes itself as enslaved. In this connection, I would like to turn to a renowned essay by Hortense Spillers in which the reproduction of gender under racial slavery is discussed in terms of grammar, sovereignty, and naming.

In "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" (1987), Spillers reminds us that slavery doesn't only take violent and murderous forms, but also has more symbolic manifestations, such as the more or less general reduction of black being to a corpus defined as *flesh as value*. She denounces the corporeal-carceral violence by which this corpus is produced and clarifies the cultural and linguistic fact by which this corpus is made to *express* its excruciating resemblance to a commodity. She sets out the ways in which the captive body is made zero sum through its real and figurative *renaming* as *flesh*, a notion that derives from the slave's ontological insecurity as subject, an insecurity – and denudation – which beats up against it on all sides in the hold of its making. The captive body bears the wound of this insecurity; it becomes branded as the locus of an insecure-interval removed from any history or symbolic value. This insecurity conjoins two meanings that are decisive: blackness approaches the world, or comes into the world, as a void that is constituted out of an *entirely new semiotics of privation*; on the other hand, the part played by black cultural disinheritance continues to have a profound impact on black life and history. It is, lastly, to restore the figure of the slave *to* history – beyond the *grammar* of race, with its coded reference to "externally imposed meanings and uses" – that Spillers sets out to revise slavery's grammar which, as gender, has no "symbolic integrity."[2]

> The socio-political order of the New World … with its human sequence written in blood, represents for its African and indigenous peoples a scene of actual mutilation, dismemberment, and exile. First of all, their New-World, diasporic plight marked a theft of the body – a willful and violent (and unimaginable from this distance) severing of the captive body from its motive will, its active desire. Under these conditions, we lose at least gender difference in the outcome, and the female body and the male body become a territory of cultural and political maneuver, not at all gender-related, gender-specific. But this body, at least from the point of view of the captive community, focuses 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; 2) 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. (67)

So nothing lies outside this more general state of powerlessness, not even language, which, as Spillers shows, reproduces the terms of racial ownership by which slave offspring are "possessed" and fathered "without whatever benefit of patrimony" (74). In this way, by means of the loss of the patronymic, Spillers shows how the confusion of tongues becomes a figure for the confusion of inheritance in the Middle Passage: the literal suspension of the grammar of kinship has been succeeded by the issuance of owned-created property; and this was both the achievement of slavery and its failing; in short, it gave birth to a subject that can only perpetuate, in consequence, *the decadent excess of social death as its own most extravagant expenditure*.

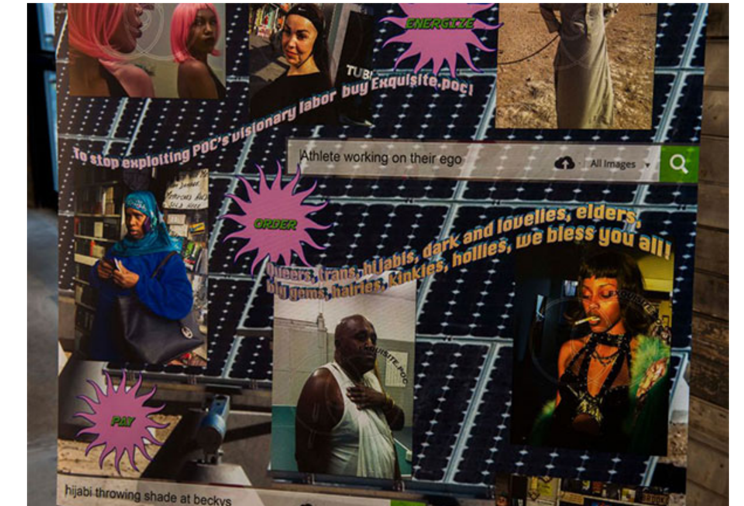
Spillers shows the importance of the invasion-elision of black kinship ties; using the term "ungendering," she focuses on how fathering-reproduction relies on a production that is also an evacuation or emptying-out of

electron is initially at one energy level and then it is at another *without having been anywhere in between*." Light results from the electron getting "*where it was going before it left*."[8]

In terms of visual materials, we might take a certain poetic license to say that, far from being a slice of past time, as has so often been assumed, photographs come from the future. Light is "fixed" into a pattern by the camera before it has left. Certain photographs seem to be specifically intended as messages to the future. During what W. E. B. Du Bois called the "general strike" against slavery, those enslaved human beings who gained "something akin to freedom" (to appropriate a phrase from Mary Prince's narrative of enslavement) by crossing into Union territory lined up to be photographed by the young Timothy O'Sullivan in just this way. Still technically "contrabands" (people who had "stolen" themselves) and subject to the Fugitive Slave Law, the people assembled for the group photograph made a statement of intent and a desire to be witnessed by the future. These messages exist in nonlinear time, containing elements of different temporalities. That is to say, screen-based images always blend time, legible in different ways to different readers. While a film begins and ends, and a photograph is exposed in a specific moment, the resulting images do work in and as (a) people's memories. If human lives are not lived like quarks, there is nonetheless a queer temporality at work in which a present that is not yet queer, not yet common, not yet free can experience the possibility of the abolitions that would be needed to make it so.[9] What times mingle in these frames?

1. Sacred/Cosmological Time

In Protestant theology, sacred time decentered the human in relation to the divine, even as its colonial version in Britain aspired to a certain precision. In 1650, Archbishop James Ussher of Ireland calculated that God created the world on October 22, 4004 BCE, around 9:30 pm. Here Ussher framed time as Protestant, ordered by God to culminate in the British Empire, just as US manifest destiny and Israel's messianic state draw authority today from the divine. Against these linear temporalities, indigenous and African peoples in the Americas thought of time and space as circular, meaning that life was lived in the visible world but also in the spirit world. Any human – whether a person, a spirit, or an animal – passed through both of these worlds over the course of time. Christian missionaries to the Americas were perennially frustrated by the "inconstancy" of the indigenous, who would accept Christian divinity but include it in their existing cosmology. By the same token, slavers were infuriated by the recurring suicides among their human property, not realizing that, in a cosmological worldview, to pass from one life in the world to the spirit world was the means to ultimately return to Africa. The water marked the dividing line between these worlds. It was not that life did not matter but that it did not end in death (or the afterlife), but continued otherwise. When the protestors at Standing Rock say "water is life," they are not being New Age-y or even environmentalist. It is a different perspective on what life actually is, not measured as a span but as a set of relations. When Black Lives Matter, for example.



Installation view from the exhibition Mami at the Knockdown Center (2016) featuring Exquisite.Poc by Malaxa. Photo: Kearra Gopee

2. Deep/Capitalist Time

Deep time was one of the most vital modern inventions, coming just a year after James Watt patented a workable version of the steam engine that opened the road to fossil-fuel-created climate change. Deriving his insight from the strata of rocks, British natural historian James Hutton reimagined time in 1785 as having "no vestige of a beginning, no prospect of an end." Hutton's colleague John Playfair commented that "the mind seemed to grow giddy by looking so far into the abyss of time." This metaphor gave rise to the recent geological imagery of "deep time," a time unaffected by human action in which our presence is the slightest of details. That *mise-en-abyme* (the dizziness of the abyss) has now ended. Hutton's framework of time as an unending continuum served as a form of raw material for what the historian E. P. Thompson called "work-discipline" in industrial capitalism.[10] He noted how clocks and watches were more available around 1800 and how the rhythms of agricultural life became subjected to the relentless pattern of industrial time. Thompson's 1967 essay was very much of its time, written from the white side of labor,

revolutionary time. No one has been more aware of this dynamic than the anti-black reactionary right. To be for revolutionary time, whatever one's own personal history, is to be for anti-anti-blackness as the condition of transformative possibility.

Critical work has for a long time now not been interested in time. In 1967 – a time that will keep recurring in this piece – Michel Foucault declared that "the present epoch will be perhaps above all the epoch of space." Here he was mixing temporal and spatial vocabularies. For his interest in space was a challenge not to time but to the teleology of Western concepts of History, whether that of the Great Man, the triumph of capital, or the revolution. He added a caveat: "it is not possible to disregard the fatal intersection of time with space."[3] That intersection today is twofold. In the first intersection, we see that white supremacy writes about race in terms of time. White races are "advanced" or "civilized," while nonwhite races have been designated as "backward" or "barbaric." Nineteenth-century typologies like that of John Nott organized this as a timeline extending from the chimpanzee, via the Negro, to the Apollo Belvedere. They did not understand this as an evolution but rather as a hierarchy of separate species. The fact that no living being could sufficiently instantiate whiteness was an irony that passed them by.

This hierarchy within the human is entirely active today, as Alexander Weheliye has pointed out: "blackness designates a changing system of unequal power structures that apportion and delimit which humans can lay claim to full human status and which humans cannot."[4] To be "white" only makes sense within a system of white supremacy that creates and sustains hierarchies, in which to be white is to benefit. In the American universal, as Ta-Nehisi Coates has put it, "white supremacy is not merely the work of hotheaded demagogues, or a matter of false consciousness, but a force so fundamental to America that it is difficult to imagine the country without it."[5] To make America great again is, then, to make it "white again," a temporal action in which the future becomes more like the past and less like the present.

The second fatal intersection with time is the Anthropocene. In August 2016, the Anthropocene Working Group of the International Stratigraphic Society proposed that the mid-twentieth century marked the beginning of the new epoch, indexed by the presence of plutonium fallout following atomic tests. Its symptoms include climate change, sea-level rise, the sixth mass extinction of life, the presence of plastic throughout the earth system, altered nitrogen levels due to fertilizer use, the acidification of the oceans, and so on. Setting aside for now all the controversy over its name and dating, the Anthropocene is a geological marker in time of a shift in the earth system. In this account, time is now specific and local, and points to ends of all kinds. The disruption of what scientists have come to call "uniformitarian time" – the sense that the past was as the present and predicts the future – creates a new temporality in which time is now subject to human agency. As the eco-critic Andreas Malm has it, "Now is a singularly bad time for declaring the demise of time."[6]

However, this "break" in time is too neat. On the one hand, it fails to account for the complex history of earth-system time. While present-day scientists see a continuity back to eighteenth-century natural history in the formation of what is known as "deep time," many important discoveries were made by people operating in what they thought of as "catastrophic" time. Rather than unfolding evenly, this model imagines time as a series of catastrophes breaking into separate spaces, analogous to the separate species of human that such thinkers imagined. This is not altogether wrong, as the asteroid extinction of the dinosaurs indicates, but it uses this framework to create and sustain an imagined racial hierarchy. Catastrophism was a reaction to the declaration of revolutionary time, in which the calendar began again, in order to indicate a new era after slavery.

On the other hand, time continues to intersect. All secular modalities of time interact with sacred times. For Protestant colonists, this time is linear and indexical. For indigenous peoples in the Americas and many Central African people brought to the Americas by force, time and space coexist in a circular cosmology. In the space available here, I will offer a taxonomy of modern time(s) as indexed by the Anthropocene and examine the intersections of time and revolution in Haiti, where black life mattered first.

What, to begin with, is time? Surely, you will say, time is a constant. Not according to the physicists. Richard Feynman, for example, suggests that time is a direction through space. There is a probability of what that direction might be but it is not given. At certain levels, time acts otherwise. According to Stephen Hawking, who should know, "the universe has every single possible history, each with its own probability."[7] Take the production of light. Niels Bohr famously demonstrated that electrons exist in fixed orbits around the nucleus of an atom. In the words of the Nobel committee: "When jumping from one orbit to another with lower energy, a light quantum is emitted." So far, so good. Science-studies theorist Karen Barad finds a certain queer performativity at work here: "the

Iceberg Slim languidly poses for the camera.

kinship. The slave child is exposed through its servitude to an elision that delivers it over to insecure kinless being. There are exclusively historical and social reasons for this transformation, which emerged alongside the modern capital-plantation system, but what I want to stress here is the affect of the slave's *obedience to its own extravagant elision*, which *demands* that it reproduce itself as a being that has no symbolic immanence as a modern subject.

And it was because the condition of the black slave was that of a zero sum that s/he could be so decadently stripped of human being and turned into a commodity. And in this way it is as the excess of a generalized impropriety that white plantation culture managed to line up sexual interest with its idea of virtue, the idea of a forced and forcefully used-up subject with that of *partus sequitur ventrem* – literally "that which is brought forth follows the womb." The whole idea of an extravagant, socially dead subject issues from this condition of the slave, whose systematic effacement as a zero sum is the route to its wealthy reconversion – all this is described effectively by Spillers as a "perversion of judicial power," but there is no outside of this perversity by which black property becomes identified with a pleasure that enslaves itself and is, therefore, socially dead (78).

Here again, Spillers can only see the sexual intimacy between masters and slaves as an example of "unrelieved crisis" in "the customary lexis of sexuality" (76). But such intimacy cannot be said to be perverse by virtue of humanism, since sexuality here isn't so much outside the customary laws or lexis of human recognition as it is the extravagant enjoyment of its destruction – the first act of which is to proscribe pleasure as a paradoxically useful, profitable remnant. Let us say that this is an enjoyment that always signifies destruction as a "property *plus*," in which coitus is an excretory reabsorption (65). I am deliberately choosing an oxymoron to speak of the unity here between ejaculation and enjoyment-domination. This locution permits us to glimpse how the raping and torture of slaves is always a pleasurable enrichment in which the right to power is bound up with the operation of violence and rule. That pleasure is moreover an operation that makes the slave, shorn of all sentiment and symbolic value, enslaved by its own passionate attachments to reproduce life as social death. At the same time, this presumed desire for enslavement contains another consequence: For if mastery is always presumed to be sovereign in its rapacious domination, doesn't the master too end up submitting his desire to property law? Is not this extravagant enrichment through sex already slavish in having its issue made into flesh, in losing its ancestral name to flesh, in reproducing a profit that borrows from social death a lien of social virtue *as* symbolic extravagance? That is why, even with the death of the slave, the endless expenditure of mastery remains the negative truth of a supernumerary economy, rather than the sign of a lasting sovereign power. This would also mean that all racial mastery is necessarily servile. But this conclusion is immediately impaired by another: such social death meets its necessary limit in a kind of decadence that cannot finally be captured by the moral legacy of humanism, and whose pleasure cannot be said to be located either exclusively in language (whether of nouns or names) or in a sovereignty that is slavishly perverse.

4. The Spending of Thrifts

The languages of extravagance and excess by which the idea of black life is segregated takes on a new emotional power in postbellum America. The idea of profligacy – whether social or subjective – makes of thriftiness a moral duty, in which the very notion of self-restraint is racially determined: the act of reining in, or better still, the act of self-repression, encodes a social hygiene whose sources are racial and, therefore, not natural. Hence, the failure of blacks to acquire the skills necessary for the accumulation of capital or money is the result of a specific kind of civic failure, according to which the bestowal of liberty in postbellum America vanishes beneath another desire that precedes it, and that establishes blackness as the point where "a general looseness of the passions" matches a "propensity to gratify and satiate every thirst."[3] Where does this discourse of *bling bling* come from? From various sources, each of which institutes race as a moral value, as ideology: for the white bourgeois and worker, from the nineteenth century to the present, blackness is a degraded form of being that cannot as such conserve itself; or, it is seen as an impoverished way of being that can only be put to work as a supplementary *labor* (for of course work *is* niggerdom), which means that it cannot profit from itself as capital. In all these readings, blackness is seen as both exorbitant and impoverished, both decadent and deliriously perverse. Its lack of restraint suggests both the collapse of capitalist values and a threat that puts an end to civic duty: the substitution of private consumption for collective duty is here linked to a more general anxiety about an *entity* driven to negate the very idea of accumulation – hence the extravagant excess of a being that is seen to come from a nihilistic, menacing, undeserving need to consume *everything*. So when Tocqueville spoke of the virtues of thrift as

Timothy H. O'Sullivan, [*Slaves, J. J. Smith's Plantation, near Beaufort, South Carolina*], 1862. Albumen silver print. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

A section cut of Fordite, a paint sediment collected from the Ford factories of Detroit. Photo: Flickr/Agatehill

"interest rightly understood," the word "rightly" denotes the racial recognition of both a frugality that liberates and a black consumption that can only enslave.[4] Desires and passions are "masters which it is necessary to contend with," he continues, but the slave has "learned only to submit and obey." Or again: if freedom is "the end [*telos*] of all just restraint," excess can never be free, for whatever the cost to ethics and the state, freedom can, paradoxically, only be just when it freely constrains or inhibits itself.[5] In the history of race in America, decadence is not only the effect of bourgeois notions of excess but also the effect of the perceived *unconstraints* of black being and desire.

It is therefore not surprising perhaps that a black counterdiscourse emerges in which blacks are urged to "cultivate honesty, punctuality, propriety of conduct."[6] If to be rightfully bourgeois means that one must cultivate signs of righteous self-government, which are taken as a natural fact, the belief seems to be that blacks can only earn their rightful place in society by turning en masse to a market-led devotion of thrift: in these counterdiscourses, blackness is thus identified as an active, rather than docile, labor, whose gratification is derived from the subjugation to market values.

What is new here is the idea of black utilitarianism, which Washington and other writers introduced and described.[7] In the field of such rhetorical labor, masculinity, conceived as the productive form, is contrasted to the feminine space of thrift, which is the duty of *the one who consumes*. Here in the spending of thrifts real black men work; they are not castrated sojourners in the marketplace of capital.

A second response, however, challenges the very discourse of thrift and the conditions that lead blacks to utter it. Opposing "nigga" to the very idea of work, and first of all, to racial capital's reproduction, this challenge reveals a commitment that is itself decadent. In serving his identity, the nigga breaks with any utilitarian concept of blackness. Niggas represent what thrift *represses*; as a signifier, "nigga" subverts every utilitarian classification of blacks as laboring being. Inasmuch as "niggerdom" (so properly named) implies the literalizing of blackness *as* work, niggas compel us to conceive of black discourse no longer in terms of a utilitarian and consequently slavish nomenclature, but as the very exercise of an extravagant expenditure; for example, *bling bling*, which is doubtless the nigga's most persistent sign, belongs structurally to decadence[8]; this is, one might say, its scandal, and it is this scandal which unites blackness and jouissance, so that each moment of expense is both absolutely enjoyed and absolutely meaningless. We can even, with a certain temerity, give this decadence a precise definition; hence, it is not, or at least not primarily, a question of saying that the nigga contests the institution of capital, or that it ignores its necessary conservatism, but of acknowledging that *bling bling* is completely opposed to the moral version of racial uplift, whose usefulness consists in its subjugation to the figuration of labor. Labor in itself is not the repression of blackness, but neither is there anything particularly liberating about it; if capitalist labor produces a failure to liberate blackness from slavish desire, it is so for two reasons:

1. The nigga, whatever its political status, is always in excess of the idealizations of bourgeois opinion. As such, the nigga questions the status of restraint in black history and culture, however virtuous or prudential it may be; confronting the conflation of black moral life with the parsimonious conservation of civic manhood, nigga describes a world that is in excess of the salvific habits of wise saving; instead of thrift and economic betterment, niggas "know" that cash money *is* desire: by which is meant a freedom that is not restricted to an idealized, deferred consummation, but a preparation for the *bling bling* that is zero sum. Rather than read desire "symbolically" – or "niggardly" – we can say that nigga does not refer to a temporal verb, but to a presence that cannot be identified and gathered into a presence, a category *that cannot be put to work as a meaningful category*. This is to say, to be nigga is not to reduce desire to use-value, or to treat black life as the expression of what is meaningfully, usefully knowable. We can call this nonrestricted meaning a categorical shift from duty to surplus, since it involves a displacement from *telos* to *eros*, corpus to jouissance. Nigga is nowise an anxiety about work as a system of accumulation and deferral. On the contrary, nigga expresses experience not as a limit-work, but as a rapid transversal with respect to the codes of consumption. The writings of Iceberg Slim are exemplary here, in that they contain the whole image-repertoire of this transition shorn of morality or humanism. Or again: in nigga narratives (*Pimp*; *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*), the moment of conversion (from slave to free, black to human) is the consequence of a profound dissolution, and not the cause of a wrong to be sublated or made symbolically useful. The insistence here is on the existential force conveyed by a *nausea* produced by the social death of which it is composed, the point being to confront this dehiscence to the point of suffocation rather than censor it or render its emptiness into a dream of its

salvation. Nigga is the being that corpses itself; it feeds on its own phantom, and presages its return as a kind of darkness.

2. This is why nigga is a product of social death, even though s/he is not the one who is socially dead. Indeed, it is “black folk [who] have killed themselves by striving to conserve themselves in a willful affect – the productive labor of modern subjects, a.k.a. work.”[9] As Ronald Judy explains, black folk have gone the way of all nonproductive consumption: their history is the result of what happens when the “nigger loses value as human capital” (212). That demise has led to two different worlds: one that is nigga, and the other that remains nigger; one that is seen as a nihilistic infestation – usually by its anti-black representation – the other that conserves itself as if it were nothing but exchange value; one that refuses being as a form of debt (a peonage that must be endlessly deferred), the other that holds up desire as a commodified demand rather than a non-commodified transgression. For Judy, the failure to *think* nigga derives from a failure to think beyond the representation of work, beyond its cultural and institutional hegemony. Further, in the wish to rename the nigger become-thing as “Negro,” Judy locates an historical paralipsis that represses or disavows the rebellious force of the nigga: in their devotion to neoliberal political economy, niggers have sold themselves, or they have executed themselves as subjects of debt, which means that they are used up, socially dead; but being the human-*cum*-things that they are, money cannot liberate them – in the world of hypercommodification, niggers are worth virtually nothing, and yet they are, nonetheless, endlessly disposable as such. To the extent that niggas know that “experience is essentially unfungible,” they also know that affects are not values, and that such knowledge is “the residual of the nonproductive work of translating experience into affect” (228). The nigga-affect functions to release “anger, rage, intense pleasure”: a force that expends itself as the “existential task” of its being (228, 229). Nigga is the incessant psychic work of this task.

These observations suggest that the central problem of modern black life exactly coincides with what we might call the “slavishness” of its manifestation: just as nigger defines the field of a slavish desire, so modern black subjects are trying, by various experiments, to establish desire from a position that is not always indebted. The goal of this effort is to substitute the history of a servile labor (with slavery as referent) for a decadence that is no longer dominated by the idea of capital as alibi: that is, one that is no longer enslaved to accumulation. Judy seems to speak approvingly of the nigga, not as a figure for rethinking race and gender, but as an ontological force for unbinding the fetishes and fantasies that impoverish black mental and social life. Unbinding, which is doubtless also a form of unshackling, is the exploration of potentialities without the constraint or compulsion to make them profitable or realizable. Is this, then, just an anti-bourgeois version of Washington’s utilitarianism? It seems to me necessary to say that nigga cannot be read as uplift in Washington’s sense, for such readability is always slavish. But to see the current operation of blackness as conforming to a nigga model of transvaluation is no less slavish perhaps, and in ways seemingly blind to the decidedly masculine form of its restoration (does the history of nigga allow a more heterogeneous sign or operation?). And where does the movement asserting that “black lives matter” fall in this debate – on the side of conservation, or on the side of a nigga’s irremissible expenditure?

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Nicholas Mirzoeff

Below the Water: Black Lives Matter and Revolutionary Time

The Clock of the World

Legendary Detroit activist Grace Lee Boggs used to begin every meeting with her now famous question: “What time is it on the clock of the world?” We rarely try to answer that question in terms of time, instead preferring to say what we think is the most important thing going on right now. But Grace, along with her husband Jimmy Boggs, was very aware of the temporal dynamic of revolution. When Detroit automakers disposed of human labor in favor of what was then called cybernetics, Grace and Jimmy understood that the time-work relation created by industrial capitalism as a structure for human life was ending. The violent suppression of the 1967 Detroit Uprising led them to update the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution as their model for change. Faced with the beginnings of deindustrialization in Detroit, Jimmy Boggs declared that “a job ain’t the answer” to systemic crisis, meaning a forty-hour work week contract. In her later thinking, Grace Lee Boggs took the situation in Detroit as an opportunity to shape the future: “we had been granted an opportunity to begin a new chapter in the evolution of the human race, a chapter that global warming and corporate globalization had made increasingly necessary. In its dying, Detroit could also be the birthplace for a new kind of city.”[1] Detroiters call it {r}evolution. It is a relation of human and nonhuman life, considered in relation to planetary time. This time is nonlinear and open, offering a means to rethink our relation to the world. Out of the ruins, whether of Detroit or the Anthropocene, it becomes possible to see how revolutionary time has always been there and what it might become now.

Black Lives Matter is a theoretical proposition. Here I want to explore the contradictions within the phrase “black life” in terms of the current crisis in the earth system. Denise Ferreira da Silva opens her study on the global idea of race with a reflection on “that moment … between the release of the trigger and the fall of another black body, of another brown body, and another … [which] haunts this book”[2]; we might say that the same moment haunts Black Lives Matter. That is, “life” in the phrase “Black Lives Matter” is defined as that which can be killed or which dies. It is also a measure of time, for however long we are alive is a life. Many human lives have been and are considered disposable, surplus, or without value, so the movement speaks of each life as mattering. When black life matters, time itself is altered, creating revolutionary time. These temporalities have become entangled with the crisis of earth-system time known as the Anthropocene. That time, known to geologists as “deep time,” is in crisis. And it’s a good thing too, because out of that crisis has reemerged the possibility of

James Boggs (1919-1993) was an auto worker, activist, and intellectual, author of *The American Revolution: Pages from a Negro Worker's Notebook*.

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1
Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1995), 111. Hereafter, page numbers will appear in-line.

2
Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics*, vol. 17, no. 2 (1987): 64–81; 67, 66. Hereafter, page numbers will appear in-line.

3
New Jersey Journal, quoted in Arthur Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 143–44.

4
Tocqueville also wrote the following on the demands of freedom facing the newly freed: "a thousand new desires beset him, and he has not the knowledge and energy necessary to resist them." Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1945), 2:129; 1:344.

5
William Ellery Channing, *A Selection from the Works of William E. Channing D. D* (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1855), 21.

6
Colored American, May 6, 1837.

7
Washington, *Up from Slavery*, 63.

8
For examples, see Thomas Hauser, "How bling-bling took over the ring," *The Guardian*, January 9, 2005 https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2005/jan/09/boxing.features; and Jay Smooth, "Bling Etymology," HipHopMusic.Com, April, 26, 2003 http://hiphopmusic.com/new/2003/04/bling_etymology/.

9
Ronald Judy, "On the Question of Nigga Authenticity," *Boundary 2*, vol. 21, no. 3 (Autumn 1994): 212. Hereafter, page numbers will appear in-line.

Denise Ferreira da Silva

1 (life) ÷ 0 (blackness) = ∞ – ∞ or ∞ / ∞: On Matter Beyond the Equation of Value

1. A thing, affair, concern
2. That which constitutes or forms the basis of thought, speech, or action
3. In purely physical application
4. The substance, or substances collectively, of which something consists; constituent material, esp. of a particular kind. [rare]

Contrasted with form:
22. Philos.
a) In Aristotelian and scholastic philosophy: that component of a thing which has bare existence but requires an essential determinant (form) to make it a thing of a determinate kind.
b) In scholastic philosophy: the result of the first act of creation, i.e. substance without form. Obs
c) In Kantian philosophy: the element in knowledge supplied by or derived from sensation, as distinct from that which is contributed a priori by the mind (the forms of intuition and the categories of the understanding).[1]

What if blackness referred to rare and obsolete definitions of *matter*: respectively, "substance … of which something consists" and "substance without form"? How would this affect the question of value? What would become of the economic value of *things* if they were read as expressions of our modern grammar and its defining logic of obliteration? Would this expose how the *object* (of exchange, appreciation, and knowledge) – that is, the economic, the artistic, and the scientific thing – cannot be imagined without presupposing an ethical (self-determining) thing, which is its very condition of existence and the determination of value in general?[2] Black Lives Matter, as both a movement and a call to respond to everyday events of racial violence (the killing of unarmed black persons by police) that rehearse the ethical syntax that works through/as the liberal democratic state,[3] signals a political subject emerging in the scene of obliteration through a sentence without a (self-determined) subject.

What I do in this text is activate blackness's disruptive force, that is, its capacity to tear the veil of transparency (even if briefly) and disclose what lies at the limits of justice. With a thought experiment that I call the Equation of Value, designed to help the imagination break away from the enclosures of modern thought, this speculative exercise reaches for The Thing,[4] which is the referent of blackness, or that which in it is exposed as the excess that justifies otherwise untenable racial violence.[5]

When taken not as a category but as a

just enthusiastic and aroused people. Its essential core must be cold, sober individuals […] who recognize the absolute necessity of a strong leadership who can organize and project a strategy of action to mobilize the conscious and not-so-conscious masses around their issues and grievances for a life-and-death struggle against those in power. Such a cadre must be able to continue the revolutionary struggle despite the inevitable setbacks because they believe that only through the revolution will their own future be assured.

At the same time that it recognizes the inevitability of setbacks, such an organization must build itself consciously upon a perspective of victory. […] The movement for Black Power cannot afford to lose other Malcolms, other Emmett Tills, other Medgar Everses, and it must build the kind of organization which has the strength and discipline to assure that there will be no more of these.

Nor can such an organization build itself on the counterrevolution's mistakes or abuses of the masses as the civil rights movement has done. Rather it must seriously plot every step of its course – when to act, when to retreat, when to seize upon an issue or a mistake by the ruling power and when not to.

Within such a cadre there must be units able to match every type of unit that the counterrevolution has at its disposal, able not only to pit themselves against these but to defend them. Colonialism, whether in Asia, Africa, Latin America, or inside the United States, was established by the gun and is maintained by the gun. But it has also been able to hold itself together because it had skilled, disciplined colonizers and administrators well versed in the art of ruling and able to make the decisions inseparable from rule.

There will be many fundamental questions and problems facing such an organization as it moves toward power. How will it create new national and international ties with other people within the country and without? What will it do about industry when its takeover is imminent and those in power resist? What will it do about the armed forces and how will it win over? In what cities or localities should a base first be built? What will it do when confronted by those in power as they respond to the threat of replacement? What segments of the old apparatus can be useful and which should be destroyed? And most important, how can it expose its alleged friends as the real enemies they are? […]

As I said in *The American Revolution*, the tragedy is that so few see the urgency of facing up to this reality. But as I also said, that is what makes a revolution: two sides – the revolution and the counterrevolution – and the people on both sides.

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This text appeared in *Racism or Class Struggle: Further Pages from a Black Worker's Notebook* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), 51-62.

The uniqueness of Black Power stems from the specific historical development of the United States. It has nothing to do with any special moral virtue in being black, as some black nationalists seem to think. Nor does it have to do with the special cultural virtues of African heritage. Identification with the African past is useful insofar as it enables black Americans to develop a sense of identity independent of the Western civilization which has robbed them of their humanity by robbing them of any history. But no past culture ever created a revolution. Every revolution creates a new culture out of the process of revolutionary struggle against the old values and culture which an oppressing society has sought to impose upon the oppressed. The chief virtue in being black at this juncture in history stems from the fact that the vast majority of the people in the world who have been deprived of the right of self-government and self-determination are people of color. Today these people of color are not only the wretched of the earth but people in revolutionary ferment, having arrived at the decisive recognition that their undevelopment is not the result of ethnic backwardness but of the systematic confinement to backwardness by the colonial powers. The struggle against this systematic deprivation is what has transformed them into a social force or an underclass.

The clarion call "black people of the world, unite and fight" is only serious if it is also a call to black people to organize. The call for Black Power in the United States at this juncture in the development of the movement has gone beyond the struggle for civil rights to a call for black people to replace white people in power. Black people must organize the fight for power. They have nothing to lose but their condition as the wretched of the earth.

The call for Black Power is creating – had to create – splits within the movement. These splits are of two main kinds. The first is between the Black Power advocates and the civil rights advocates. The civil rights advocates, sponsored, supported, and dependent upon the white power structure, are committed to integrating blacks into the white structure without any serious changes in that structure. In essence, they are simply asking to be given the same rights which whites have had and blacks have been denied. By equality they mean just that and no more: being equal to white Americans.

[…]

Inside the Black Power movement there is another growing split between the idealists or romanticists and the realists. The romanticists continue to talk and hope to arouse the masses of black people through self-agitation, deluding themselves and creating the illusion that one set of people can replace another set of people in power without building an organization to take active steps toward power, while at the same time agitating and mobilizing the masses. Masses and mass support come only when masses of people not only glimpse the desirability and possibility of serious improvement in their condition, but can see the force and power able to bring this about.

The realists in the movement for Black Power base themselves first and foremost on a scientific evaluation of the American system and revolution, knowing that Black Power cannot come from the masses doing what they do when they feel like doing it, but must come from the painstaking, systematic building of an organization to lead the masses to power. […]

The organization for Black Power must concentrate on the issue of political power and refuse to redefine and explain away Black Power as "black everything except black political power." The development of technology in the United States has made it impossible for blacks to achieve economic power by the old means of capitalist development. The ability of capitalists today to produce in abundance not only makes competition on an economic capitalist basis absurd but has already brought the United States technologically to the threshold of a society where each can have according to his needs. Thus black political power, coming at this juncture in the economically advanced United States, is the key not only to black liberation but to the introduction of a new society to emancipate economically the masses of the people in general. For black political power will have to decide on the kind of economy and the aims and direction of the economy for the people.

"The City Is the Black Man's Land" laid the basis for the development of the type of organization which would be in tune with the struggle for Black Power. Such an organization must be clearly distinguished not only from the traditional civil rights organizations which have been organized and financed by whites to integrate blacks into the system, and thereby save it, but also from the ad hoc organizations which have sprung up in the course of the struggle, arousing the masses emotionally around a particular issue and relying primarily on the enthusiasm and good will of their members and supporters for their continuing activity. By contrast, an organization for Black Power must be a cadre-type organization whose members have a clear understanding, allegiance, and dedication to the organization's perspectives and objectives and who have no illusions about the necessities of a struggle for power.

A cadre organization cannot be made up of

referent of another mode of existing in the world, blackness returns The Thing at the limits of modern thought. Or, put differently, when deployed as method, blackness fractures the glassy walls of *universality* understood as *formal determination.* The violence inherent in the illusion of that value is both an effect and an actualization of self-determination, or autonomy. My itinerary is simple. It begins with considerations of the role of *determinacy* – formal determination articulated as a kind of efficient causation – in modern thought, and closes with a proof of the Equation of Value, intended to release that which in blackness has the capacity to disclose another horizon of existence, with its attendant accounts of existence.

"Without Properties"

In her 2014 installation *In Pursuit of Bling*, Otobong Nkanga worked with mica and other minerals that glitter-image colonial violence, thereby making it impossible not to *see* the hole in the Green Hill (the site of a German mining operation in Namibia) – especially when I think about the minerals used in everything around me regardless of where they come from, precisely because they come from another "place of obscurity."[6] Listening to the artist's comments on these minerals, I wonder about the many ways in which her intention activates blackness's creative capacity, which at first manifests as a disruptive force. I find this in her distinction between what she terms "space of shine" and "places of obscurity," which comes through in images, artifacts, and movements – exhibitions and performances – and which exposes obvious but frequently obscured linkages between spaces of plenty and places of scarcity. Much like blacklight, Nkanga's intention seeps through *In Pursuit of Bling*, illuminating that which must remain obscure for the fantasy of freedom and equality to remain intact.[7]

In Pursuit of Bling, however, inhabits an artistic scene still framed by what the postcolonial literature scholar and critic David Lloyd calls "Western aesthetic culture," which not only produces the "disposition of the subject," as figured in Kant's disinterested "subject of judgement" or "the Subject without properties," but also provides the very condition of possibility for the notion of a "common or public" domain that holds the Kantian rendering of humanity as an ethical entity.[8] When describing *In Pursuit of Bling*, Nkanga notes that its chapters do several things, including to "look

Otobong Nkanga, *In Pursuit of Bling – Coalition*, 2014. Lambda print. 60 x 40 cm. Courtesy Lumen Travo Gallery.

Installation view of Otobong Nkanga, *In Pursuit of Bling,* 2014. Courtesy Lumen Travo Gallery.

radicals accept white power as so natural that they do not even see its color. They find it perfectly natural to exhort blacks to integrate into white society and the white structure but cannot conceive of its being the other way around. Integration has been an umbrella under which American radicals have been able to preach class collaboration without appearing to do so. Under the guise of combating the racism of whites, they have actually been trying to bring about collaboration between the oppressed race and the oppressing race, thus sabotaging the revolutionary struggle against oppression which, by virtue of the historical development of the United States, requires a mobilization of the oppressed blacks for struggle against the oppressing whites.

There is no historical basis for the promise, constantly made to blacks by American radicals, that the white workers will join with them against the capitalist enemy. After the Civil War the white workers went homesteading the West while the Southern planters were being given a free hand by Northern capitalists to re-enslave the blacks systematically. […] The present so-called white backlash is just white people acting like white people and just as naturally blaming their white hate and white anger not on themselves but on the blacks wanting too much too soon.

[…]

Black Power in the United States raises the same question Stalin could not tolerate from Mao: Would the revolution in China come from the urban workers or from the peasantry? Mao pursued his theory, based upon the specific conditions in China, and was proven right by the revolution itself. In the United States today, the question is whether the blacks (over 75 percent of whom are now concentrated in the heart of the nation's largest cities) will lead the revolution or whether they must await the white workers. In the twentieth century the United States has advanced rapidly from a semi-urban, semi-rural society into an overwhelmingly urban society. The farms which at the beginning of the century still employed nearly half the working population have now become so mechanized that the great majority of those who formerly worked on the land have had to move into the cities. Their land is now the city streets. Meanwhile, industry itself has been automated, with the result that black labor, which over the centuries has been systematically deprived of the opportunity to become skilled, has become economically and socially unnecessary. Unemployed or underemployed, the now expendable blacks are a constant threat to the system. Not only must they be fed in order to cool off the chances of their rebelling, but they occupy the choicest and most socially critical land in the heart of the nation's cities from which the racist white population fled in order to remain lily white. Moreover, since blacks have become a majority of the inner-city population, they are now in line to assume the political leadership of the cities in accordance with the historical tradition whereby the largest ethnic minorities have successively run the cities. The city is now the black man's land, and the city is also the place where the nation's most critical problems are concentrated.

Confronted with this dilemma, the power structure, from its highest echelons to the middle classes, is seeking to incorporate or integrate a few elite Negroes into the system and thereby behead the black movement of its leadership. At the same time, the power structure has devised ingenious methods for mass "Negro removal." Under the pretext of "urban renewal," it condemns and breaks up entire black communities, bulldozes homes, and scatters the black residents to other black communities which in turn are judged to need "urban renewal." Meanwhile, under the auspices of white draft boards, black youths are sent as cannon fodder to die in the counterrevolutionary wars which the United States is carrying on all over the world as it replaces the old European colonial powers. Today the sun never sets on an American Empire which maintains bases in at least fifty-five different worldwide locations. The war in Vietnam is a war of sections of the world underclass fighting one another, for it is the poor, uneducated, unemployed who are drafted and the privileged (mainly white) who are deferred. This United States counterrevolution all over the world has the support not only of the general population but of organized labor. A peace demonstration in any white working-class or middle-class neighborhood brings out a hostile mob which is sure to come even when the peace demonstrators are allegedly guarded by police.

Those progressives who are honestly confused by the concept of Black Power are in this state of confusion because they have not scientifically evaluated the present stage of historical development in relation to the stage of historical development when Marx projected the concept of workers' power vs. capitalist power. Yesterday the concept of workers' power expressed the revolutionary social force of the working class organized inside the process of capitalist production. Today the concept of Black Power expresses the new revolutionary social force of the black population concentrated in the black belt of the South and in the urban ghettos of the North – a revolutionary social force which must struggle not only against the capitalists but against the workers and middle classes who benefit by and support the system which has oppressed and exploited blacks. […]

issue of power is raised it means one set of people who are powerless replacing another set of people who have the power. Just as Marx's concept of workers' power did not mean workers becoming part of or integrating themselves into capitalist power, so Black Power does not mean black people becoming part of or integrating themselves into white power. Power is not something that a state or those in power bestow upon or guarantee those who have been without power because of morality or a change of heart. It is something that you must make or take from those in power.

It is significant that practically nobody in the United States has tried to seek out the extensive theoretical work that has been done on the concept of Black Power. Actually, most of those writing for and against Black Power don't want to investigate further. They would rather keep the concept vague than grapple with the systematic analysis of American capitalism out of which the concept of Black Power has developed. In *The American Revolution: Pages from a Negro Worker's Notebook*, I stated my belief that if Marx were living today he would have no problem facing the contradictions which have developed since his original analysis, since his method of analysis itself was historical. I said further that I considered it the responsibility of any serious Marxist to advance Marx's theory to meet today's historical situation, in which the underdeveloped – i.e., the super-exploited – nations of the world, which are in fact a world underclass, confront the highly developed capitalist countries in which the working classes for the most part have been incorporated or integrated into pillars of support for the capitalist system. Yet such an analysis has not been seriously attempted by either American or European Marxists, who have not seriously grappled with: 1) the fact that Marx specifically chose England (at the time the most advanced country industrially in the world) as the basis of his analysis of the class struggle in terms of the process of production; and 2) the fact that at the same time the European workers were beginning to struggle as a class against the capitalist enemy at home, this same class enemy was expanding its colonial exploitation of Africa, Asia, and Latin America and thereby acquiring the means with which to make concessions to and integrate the working class into the system at home. Therefore, the working classes in the advanced countries were to a significant degree achieving their class progress at home at the expense of the underclass abroad. It was Lenin who dealt with this question most seriously when the European workers supported their capitalist governments in the first imperialist world war, and it was Lenin who found it necessary to deal seriously with the anticolonialist character of the black struggle in the United States. Yet today, nearly a half century after the Russian Revolution and after two generations of European workers have shown themselves just as opposed to independence for the peoples of Africa and Asia as their capitalist oppressors, European Marxists are still using the slogan "workers of the world, unite" and evading the scientific question of which workers they are calling on.

Who is to unite? And with whom? The underclass of Africa, Asia, and Latin America which makes up the colonized, ex-colonized, and semi-colonized nations? Or the workers of highly developed Europe and America, whose improved conditions and higher standard of living have been made possible by colonial exploitation of the world underclass? Isn't it obvious that the working classes of Europe and America are like the petty bourgeoisie of Marx's time and that they collaborate with the power structure and support the system because their higher standard of living depends upon the continuation of the power structure and this system?

The United States has been no exception to this process of advanced nations advancing through exploitation of an underclass excluded from the nation. The only difference has been that its underclass was inside the country, not outside. Black men were brought into this country by a people dedicated to the concept that all blacks were inferior, subhuman savages and natives to be used as tools in the same way that machines are used today. The phrase "all men" defined in the Constitution as "created equal" did not include black men. By definition, blacks were not men but some kind of colored beings. It took 335 years, from 1619 to 1954, before an effort was made to extend the definition of manhood to blacks. Yet American radicals sought to propagate the concept of "black and white, unite and fight" as if black and white had common issues and grievances, systematically evading the fact that every immigrant who walked off the gangplank into this country did so on the backs of indigenous blacks and had the opportunity to advance precisely because the indigenous blacks were being systematically deprived of the opportunity to advance by both capitalists and workers.

The United States has a history of racism longer than that of any other nation on earth. Fascism, or the naked oppression of a minority race not only by the state but by the ordinary citizens of the master majority race, is the normal, natural way of life in this country. The confusion and bewilderment of old radicals in the face of the Black Power concept is therefore quite natural. United States and European

at the notion of power" (by which she means colonial and imperial power as well as capitalism) "through the notion of shine." Reading the work with her intention, I find that it does more than comment on power. For *In Pursuit of Bling*, like other works in her portfolio,[9] performs both as an item in the anticolonial arsenal and a site of confrontation; that is, it works for the exposure of how colonial violence remains active in the global present. In doing so, it punctures the presumed transparency of the subject of aesthetic culture, whose whole ethical framework rests on a formulation of universality held by our modern formalized syntax. For the most part, what I do here is try to emulate Nkanga's artistic intervention into Western aesthetic culture with an analytic formal artifact – that is, the proof of the Equation of Value – which might implode the basis of the ethical grammar that cannot but provide a negative answer for the never-asked question for which Black Lives Matter demands a different answer.

Hence, I do not engage with what Sylvia Wynter claims to be the core of racial subjugation, namely, the hierarchical division of the human between rational/irrational, or "selected/dysselected."[10] My critical move here is not about ideological unveiling (as in exposing how European Man "overrepresents" the human, thus disavowing all other modes of being human); nor does it attempt to delineate an outside space from which to expose that "other" side of the "color line" dividing white/European (human) from nonwhite/non-European (nonhuman). For I am not interested in a transcultural (transcendental or physiological or symbolic) human attribute that would be both the condition of possibility for what is activated in Western European being and all other modes of being, and that which has already been mapped by anthropology, cognitive science, or neurology. My attention to Nkanga's intention immediately takes me away from the usual analytical path. It takes me further in/down/through but beyond the observed divisions, beyond what the artist has already offered in the minerals which in her work expose the links between "places of shine"/"spaces of obscurity," after and against that which gives meaning to the "/" that signals it. More particularly, I am interested in the ethical indifference with which racial violence is met – 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. For this reason, I move to expose how determinacy, which along with *separability* and *sequentiality* constitutes *the* triad sustaining modern thought, operates in the ethical syntax in which this indifference makes sense as a (common and public) moral stance.[11]

When considering the "Subject without properties" it is always helpful to recall its genealogy, in particular how it emerged in efforts to answer another question that very few thinkers explicitly formulated: How to describe the world in such as way as to make it possible to establish that the human mind can know the truth of things in it without the need for divine revelation? This genealogy usually opens with Francis Bacon and René Descartes as crucial players in assembling tools and scientific programs intended to ensure just that. What interests me in their attempts is the account of causality they compile through a selective appropriation of Aristotle's famous four causes, namely, material, formal, final, and efficient.[12]

Bacon and Descartes emphasize *efficient causality* – that is, the idea of cause and effect – in modern knowledge. Though each grabs onto efficient causality for different reasons – or, to put it better, in the effort to address different issues – both do so in the preambles to knowledge programs devised to break through the mold of medieval scholasticism held together by authority, syllogism, and an image of the world governed by Aristotle's final and formal causes. Like his contemporaries, Bacon postulated that scientific knowledge should deal with what was known as "secondary causes," through which the divine author performs his work in/as nature. In the *New Organon* (1620), Bacon, advancing an ambitious knowledge program intended to replace Aristotelian orthodoxy, claims that material and efficient causes are all that matter for understanding the book of "God's Work," i.e., for understanding nature. Drawing from pre-Socratic philosophers such a Democritus, Bacon describes the elements constituting the world as "corpuscles" (atoms), which carry in themselves the force – or what he calls "form" – imprinted on them by the divine author. Nevertheless, while celebrated for introducing the inductive and experimental methods into Western science, Bacon does not occupy the same position as Descartes, precisely because, in addition to providing an acceptable ground for the claim that the human mind alone can decipher the book of nature, Descartes successfully demonstrated that the mind itself was such a ground when he established its existence and essence as the *formal* (thinking) thing, or *res cogito*.

Not surprisingly, *formalization* is the most evident contribution Descartes made to modern knowledge. For Descartes locates efficient causality in the very movement of thought that establishes *I think, therefore I am* as the ultimate ground for ontological and epistemological statements.[13] He was not the first or the only one to make a case for replacing syllogistic logic with

mathematical necessity; Galileo had done the same. Nevertheless, *effectivity*, or efficient causality, was central to his claim that the mind has direct access to truth because it is supported by how adequately its workings are captured by mathematical tools and reasoning. Effectivity also governs Descartes's investigations of nature. For instance, in "The Treatise on Light," Descartes, like Bacon and other philosophers of that era, privileges the investigation of nature from the point of view of the examination of what Galileo called "local motion," that is, the spatial dislocation of bodies:

> Someone else may if he wishes imagine the "form" of fire, the "quality" of heat, and the "action" of burning to be very different things in the wood. For my own part, I am afraid of going astray if I suppose there to be in the wood anything more than what I see must necessarily be there, so I am satisfied to confine myself to conceiving the motion of its parts. For you can posit "fire" and "heat" in the wood and make it burn as much as you please: but if you do not suppose in addition that some of its parts move or are detached from their neighbors then I cannot imagine that it would undergo any alteration or change.[14]

In sum, the emergence of modern science can be described as a shift from a concern with forms of nature, which prevailed in scholastic thought, to an inquiry into the efficient causes of changes in the things of nature. For Descartes, as for Galileo and later for Newton, change (as motion in space and alteration) results from the operation of efficient causes, the effects of which can be mapped mathematically. Resting on the two onto-epistemological components of effectivity and necessity, the "Subject without properties" (i.e., the Cartesian cogito) began a trajectory that would extend beyond the confines of knowledge to become the ruler of modern economic, juridical, ethical, and aesthetic scenes.

The Ethical Scene of Value

> Negroes are enslaved by Europeans and sold to America. Bad as this may be, their lot in their own lands is even worse, since there a slavery quite as absolute exists; for it is the essential principle of slavery, that man has not yet attained a consciousness of his freedom, and consequently sinks down to a mere Thing – an object of no value.[15]

The call for Black Lives (to) Matter hides the question it answers: Why don't black lives matter? More precisely, it exposes how this question already contains the Kantian program and its equation of the universal and the formal – through articulating determinacy as efficient causation, or effectivity – which guides modern ethical, economic, and juridical formations. For, as a tool of modern knowledge, the category of blackness figures the operation of efficient and formal causes (that is, anatomic forms and organic processes) in the production of a racial subject destined to obliteration. Efficient and formal causes are conjoined in Kant's account of knowledge and the figuring of reality, which is putatively a philosophical presentation of Newton's natural philosophy. In it, the world becomes an effect, that is, the result of determination – of judgements or decisions reached by the pure intuitions and the categories of the understanding, that is, the tools available to the mind to access the Truth of the things of the world. This is so because, when he repeats Galileo's and Bacon's rejection of final and formal causes – in the famous statement that science is not interested in the Thing-in-itself (essence) – Kant defines the limits of knowledge as that which in things – now objects – is available to the senses (movements and alterations). Furthermore, repeating Descartes's assertion that the mind can only know with certainty that which is akin to it – that is, the abstract or the formal – Kant consolidates modern thought when he elevates the formal (as the pure or transcendental) to that moment that is before and beyond what is accessible to the senses. Only there, as Descartes had stated about a century before, is the mind comfortable dealing with the sort of objects – numbers and geometrical forms – which it can handle without reference to space-time. For only objects exhibiting such attributes can allow for the kinds of statements Kant considers proper to knowledge, that is, statements that add to what is known about something without drawing from experience. My objective in rehearsing this argument in this context is simply to highlight how, while formalization remains central to modern thought, effectivity constitutes the main descriptor of the world, as knowledge becomes interested in what happens (events, movements, and alteration). More importantly, effectivity refers both to the senses' *access* to the things of the world (being affected or moved by them) and to the mind's *capacity* to resolve the manifold into the basic tools (categories) that the understanding has available for the "higher" moments of cognition – that is, abstraction and reflection – as well as for the task of knowledge – that is, determination.

Among other things, in Kant's account of knowledge Descartes's formal thing (the cogito)

Jacob Lawrence, *Migration Series, panel 45,* 1941. This painting is accompanied by a set of captions issued by the artist, the first in 1941: "They arrived in Pittsburgh, one of the great industrial centers of the North, in large numbers."

James Boggs

Black Power: A Scientific Concept Whose Time Has Come

e-flux journal #79 — february 2017 James Boggs
Black Power: A Scientific Concept Whose Time Has Come

Black Power. Black Power. This is what is being written about and talked about in all strata of the population of the United States of America. Not since the specter of Communism first began to haunt Europe over one hundred years ago has an Idea put forward by so few people frightened so many in so short a time. Liberals and radicals, Negro civil rights leaders and politicians, reporters and editorial writers – it is amazing to what degree all of them are fascinated and appalled by Black Power.

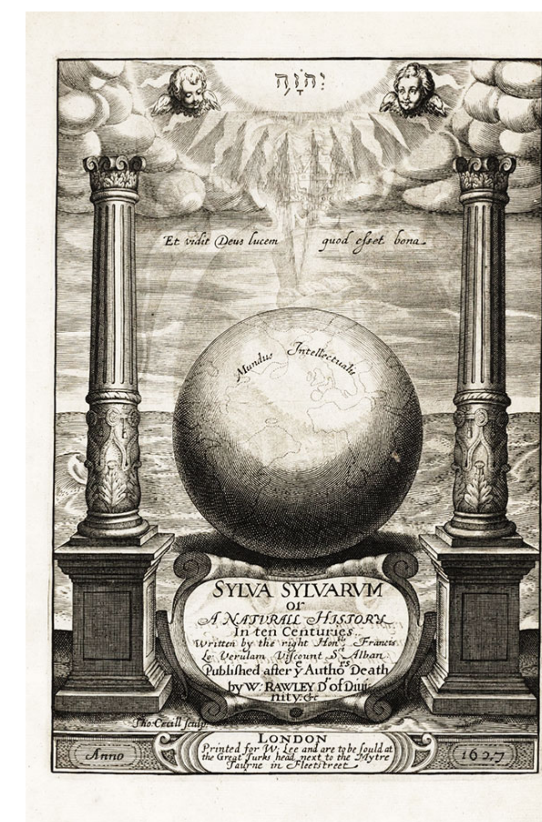
The fact that these words were first shouted out by the little-known Willie Ricks and then by Stokely Carmichael to a crowd of blacks during a march to Jackson, Mississippi, in the spring of 1966 has heightened the tension surrounding the phrase. For earlier in the year the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), which Carmichael heads and of which Ricks is an organizer, had issued a public statement on American foreign policy condemning the war in Vietnam as a racist war and connecting the black movement in this country with the anti-imperialist movement in Asia. In that same period, SNCC had begun to analyze the role white liberals and radicals could play in the movement, aptly characterizing it as one of supporting rather than decision-making. Coming after these statements, the cry of Black Power was seen by most people as deepening the gulf between the pro-integrationists and the nationalists. Whether or not Carmichael had intended this cannot really be determined since the phrase had scarcely left his lips before the press and every so-called spokesman for the movement were making their own interpretations to fit their own prejudices or programs.

When Malcolm X was assassinated in February 1965, every radical in the country and every group in the movement began to seize on some slogan Malcolm had raised or some speech he had made or some facet of his personality in order to identify themselves with him or to establish some plank in their own program. The same process of attempted identification is now taking place with Black Power. The difference, however, is that Black Power is not just a personality or a speech or a slogan, as most radicals, liberals, and Negro leaders would like to regard it. The immediate and instinctive reaction of the average white American and the white extremist or fascist is far sounder than that of the liberal, radical, and civil rights leader. For these average whites reacted to the call for Black Power simply and honestly by reaffirming "white power." Their concern is not civil rights (which are, after all, only the common rights which should be guaranteed to everyone by the state and its laws). They are concerned with power, and they recognize instinctively that once the

not only knows itself (its existence and essence) without the aid of its body, but also envelops Bacon's material and efficient causes, and takes the lead in the task of classifying and measuring nature. For instance, in his *Lectures on Logic* we find Kant employing the categories of the understanding in a description of Bacon's method for producing his tables; in this description, Kant subsumes Bacon's method into his own rendering of Descartes's "formal I" as a transcendental (a priori, pure, or formal) condition for knowledge.[16] Of course, the reference to Bacon's program is more evident in what is called Kant's "pre-critical" work. However, determination – that is, the attribution of one, and just one, predicate to a subject – remains central in his rendering of knowledge as a matter of judgement (that is, of decision), as well as in the very definition of the critical task, which privileges the exposure of grounds. In any event, as noted before, determination is crucial to Kant's notion of synthetic judgements a priori, as it is the term he uses for what Descartes called the "nexus" of consequences that the rational mind follows when attempting to establish something with certainty.[17] There is no question that determination is a task of the mind.[18]

In sum, determinacy as deployed in Kant's knowledge (scientific) program remains the core of modern thought: it is presupposed in accounts of the juridical and ethical field of statements (such as the human-rights framework) which (a) presume a *universal* that operates as an a priori (formal) determining force (effectivity), and which (b) produce *objects* for which "Truth" refers to how they *relate* to something else – relationships mediated by abstract determinants (laws and rules) that can only be captured by the rational things' (including the human mind/soul) "principles of disposition."

With the consolidation of the Kantian knowledge program starting in the nineteenth century, knowing and all other activities of the mind are reduced to determinacy: namely, the assignation of *value* that refers to a universal (scale or grid), while the object of knowledge becomes a unity of formal qualities (properties, variables, etc.), that is, an effect of judgements that produce it through measurement (degree) and classification (position). Precisely this notion of effectivity lies at the core of the modern ethical program and accounts for how difference plays into it. For there too the assignation of value results not from direct comparison – the juxtaposition of two or more things – but from



Frontispiece of Francis Bacon's book *Sylva Sylvarum: or, A natural history, in Ten Centuries* (1669).

Detail of the installation Otobong Nkanga, *In Pursuit of Bling*, 2014. Courtesy Lumen Travo Gallery.

experience of the Congress of African People, the Black Power group led by Amiri Baraka, in supporting the election of Kenneth Gibson as the first black mayor of Newark, New Jersey is an exemplary case of the dynamics at work in the ascendancy of the black political class and the abandonment of the radical perspective of Black Power. See Komozi Woodard, *Nation Within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

36
For a clear presentation of Boggs's account of "postindustrial" society, see Cedric Johnson, "James Boggs, the 'Outsiders,' and the Challenge of Postindustrial Society," *Souls*, vol. 13, no. 3 (2011): 303–26. On the historical and structural relationship of unemployment and wage labor, see Michael Denning, "Wageless Life," *New Left Review* 66 (November–December 2010): 79–97.

37
To start: Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Donna Murch, "Paying for Punishment: The New Debtors' Prison," *Boston Review*, August 1, 2015 https://bostonreview.net/editors-picks-us/donna-murch-paying-punishment.

38
See https://policy.m4bl.org/.

10
James and Grace Lee Boggs, “CLR James: A Critical Reminiscence,” *Urgent Tasks* 12 (Summer 1981).

11
James famously suggested that James and Grace Lee Boggs needed to take “education classes in Marxism” if they believed Marx had not grasped the link between automation and unemployment in capitalist development, one of the central arguments of chapters 15 and 25 in volume 1 of *Capital*. See Nicola Pizzolato, “The Revolutionary Task of Self-Activity: A Note on Grace Lee Boggs,” *Viewpoint Magazine*, January 4, 2016 https://viewpointmag.com/2016/01/04/the-revolutionary-task-of-self-activity-a-note-on-grace-lee-boggs/.

12
Boggs, *The American Revolution*, 85.

13
Paul Romano (Phil Singer) and Ria Stone (Grace Lee Boggs), *The American Worker* (New York, 1947) https://libcom.org/history/american-worker-paul-romano-ria-stone. Other pertinent texts include Charles Denby (Si Owens), *Indignant Heart: A Black Workers' Journal* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978); Marie Brant (Selma James) and Ellen Santori (Filomena D'Addario), *A Woman's Place* (Detroit: Facing Reality, 1970), later republished in a famous pamphlet alongside an essay by Mariarosa Dalla Costa, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (London: Falling Wall Press, 1972).

14
For a thorough account of this theoretical lineage, see Asad Haider and Salar Mohandesi, “Workers' Inquiry: A Genealogy,” *Viewpoint Magazine* 3 (2013) https://viewpointmag.com/2013/09/27/workers-inquiry-a-genealogy/.

15
For a careful presentation of the concept of class composition, see Salar Mohandesi, “Class Consciousness or Class Composition?” *Science and Society*, vol. 77, no. 1 (January 2013): 72–97.

16
Boggs, *The American Revolution*, 32. In some sense, the encounter between Boggs and Italian workerism did take hold at the level of practice. As writers including Nicola Pizzolato, Steve Wright, and Michael Staudenmaier have demonstrated, there was a robust exchange and circulation of ideas, texts, and experiences of struggle between the radical milieus of Detroit and Italy during the 1960s. In 1968 Boggs embarked on a lecture tour of Italy, organized by Roberto Giammanco, which coincided with a wave of campus occupations in the cities of Milan, Turin, and Trento. He and Grace Lee Boggs provided reports and analyses of the Black Power movement and the Detroit political scene, and this visit made a lasting impression on Italian activists. See Nicola Pizzolato, *Challenging Global Capitalism: Labor Migration, Radical Struggle, and Urban Change in Detroit and Turin* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Steve Wright, *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 85, 132–33; Michael Staudenmaier, *Truth and Revolution: A History of the Sojourner Truth Organization, 1969–1986* (Oakland: AK Press, 2012), 44–45, 279–80. Nicola Pizzolato, “Transnational Radicals: Labour Dissent and Political Activism in Detroit and Turin (1950–1970),” *International Review of Social History* 56 (2011): 1–30; Sergio Bologna, “Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism: A Review of Steve Wright's Storming Heaven,” trans. Arianna Bove, *Strategies: Journal of Theory, Culture & Politics*, vol. 16, no. 2 (2003). John Watson of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers would also travel to Italy in 1968, to speak at a conference on anti-imperialism.

17
For representative texts: Roman Alquati, “Organic Composition of Capital and Labor-Power at Olivetti” (1961), trans. Steve Wright, *Viewpoint Magazine* 3 (2013) https://viewpointmag.com/2013/09/27/organic-composition-of-capital-and-labor-power-at-olivetti-1961/; Raniero Panzieri, “Socialist Uses of Workers' Inquiry” (1965), trans. Arianna Bove, *eipcp* (2006) http://eipcp.net/transversal/0406/panzieri/en; Mario Tronti, “Lenin in England” (1964), in *Working Class Autonomy and the Crisis: Italian Marxist Texts of the Theory and Practice of a Class Movement: 1964–79* (London: Red Notes, 1979) https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/it/tronti.htm.

18
Boggs, *The American Revolution*, 14–16.

19
Ibid., 52.

20
James Boggs and Grace Lee Boggs, “The City is the Black Man's Land,” in *Racism and the Class Struggle*, 50.

21
Paolo Carpignano, “U.S. Class Composition in the Sixties,” *Zerowork* 1 (1976): 7–32.

22
Boggs, “The City is the Black Man's Land,” 46.

23
The literature on the Black Power movement has exploded in recent years. For an overview of the movement at the local level, see Rhonda Williams, *Concrete Demands: The Search For Black Power in the 20th Century* (New York: Routledge, 2015). For an enduring examination of the stakes of campaigns for community control and empowerment, and the problems with confronting entrenched municipal regimes and social welfare programs, see Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 215–55.

24
James Boggs, “The American Revolution: Putting Politics in Command,” in *Racism and the Class Struggle*, 187.

25
Bill Mullen, *Afro-Orientalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

26
Boggs, “The American Revolution: Putting Politics in Command,” 183.

27
See the still-relevant line in “The City is the Black Man's Land”: “Because Afro-Americans were the first people in this country to pose the perspective of revolutionary power to destroy racism, I have been using the word 'black' as a *political* designation … It should not be taken to mean the domination of Afro-Americans or the exclusion of other people of color from black revolutionary organization” (50). For his criticisms of cultural nationalism, see his essay “Culture and Black Power,” in *Racism and the Class Struggle*, 63–69.

28
Boggs, “The American Revolution: Putting Politics in Command,” 182–85.

29
Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 69.

30
Donna Murch, *Living For the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 179.

31
The best history of the LRBW remains Dan Georgakas and Martin Survin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1998 (1971)). See also James A. Geschwender, *Class, Race, and Worker Insurgency* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977). On its decline, see Ernie Allen, “Dying from the Inside: The Decline of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers,” in *They Should Have Served That Cup of Coffee: Seven Radicals Remember the '60s* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1999), 71–109. For a strong recent account, see Elizabeth Kai Hinton, “The Black Bolsheviks: Detroit Revolutionary Union Movements and Shop-Floor Organizing,” in *The New Black History: Revisiting the Second Reconstruction*, eds. Manning Marable and Elizabeth Kai Hinton (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 211–28.

32
James Boggs, “The Future Belongs to the Dispossessed,” in *Racism and the Class Struggle*, 99. In addition to being a mentor of sorts to the future core leadership of the League, Boggs was a regular contributor to *Inner City Voice*, a newspaper that catalogued RUM activities and other community struggles in Detroit, and which functioned as a central coordinating tool. For a detailed account of the importance of *Inner City Voice* as the “focus of a permanent organization … a bridge between the peaks of activity,” see John Watson's 1968 interview with *Radical America*, “Black Editor,” recently republished by *Viewpoint Magazine* https://viewpointmag.com/2015/01/13/black-editor-an-interview-1968/.

33
Georgakas and Survin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying*, 36. The authors' description of the RUM strategic approach is worth examining: “More like the IWW of an earlier generation of radicals than like a trade union, DRUM had many aspects of a popular revolutionary movement that could go in many directions.”

34
See “To the Point of Production: An Interview with John Watson of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers,” reprinted in *The Movement*, 1969 https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/1960-1970/watson.pdf. For an excellent recent study of the League's “radical imagination,” from their reading of social conditions in Detroit to their robust legacy of cultural production, see Jordan T. Camp, *Incarcerating the Crisis: Freedom Struggles and the Rise of the Neoliberal State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 43–67.

35
See Adolph Reed Jr., *Stirrings in the Jug: Black Politics in the Post-Segregation Era* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 117–62. See also Cedric Johnson, *Revolutionaries to Race Leaders: Black Power and the Making of African American Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007). The

the operation of a universal (formal or transcendental) mediator – the universal unit of measurement or the universal basis for classification. That is, the assignation of value results from the operation of something which shares in the attributes that universal reason acquired in the late eighteenth century.

Let me briefly elaborate on this by situating blackness in the Kantian design of the modern ethical scene of value.[19] Here, as we know, the guiding ethical entity is humanity, which Kant describes as the sole existing thing possessing dignity, that is, possessing intrinsic value. Among existing things, humanity is highest in the figuring of determinacy because it alone shares in the determining powers of universal reason, since it alone has free will, or self-determination.[20] Though humanity, in Kant's formulation, already refers only to Europeans, the closing of humanity's ethical boundaries occurs in the nineteenth century, both in Hegel's revision of the Kantian program and in the deployment by scientists of man and society of the tools of scientific reason to account for human difference. In Hegel's version, this happens in an ethical account that transforms World History into a scene of development (the self-actualization of universal reason), which culminates in the mental and social (juridical, economic, symbolic) configurations found in post-Enlightenment Europe.[21]

Both the scientific and ethical figurings of determinacy would enter into nineteenth-century scientific accounts of human difference, which produced the notions of racial and cultural difference. Both notions are manufactured in knowledge procedures that produce physical and social configurations as *effects* and *causes* of (explanations for) mental (moral and intellectual) differences. Further, these procedures deploy the European/white mind as the universal gauge, since it alone shares a key quality with universal reason (or with Hegel's “Spirit”), namely, self-determination. In this way, this earlier moment of racial knowledge yielded indexes of human difference – i.e., the naming of racial collectives such as the Negro, the Caucasian, the Oriental, and the Australian – that transformed economic differences resulting from conquest, colonization, settlement, and enslavement into presentations of (Hegel's self-actualizing) universal reason, identifying spatial and bodily configuration that, in their turn, produced the mental (intellectual and moral) forms that caused the differences in social configurations found in the European continent and its colonies.[22]

My point here is that the very arsenal designed to determine and to ascertain the truth of human difference already assumed Europeanness/whiteness as the universal measure, that is, as the bodily, mental, and societal actualization of universality. This has several consequences, the most relevant (to my argument here) being the occlusion of the latter as a term of comparison. More explicitly, economic differences resulting from hundreds of years of expropriating land and labor were attributed to racial and cultural difference. In racial knowledge, they become the effects of particular bodily arrangements, which are established as the causes for particular mental (moral and intellectual) traits, which are themselves expressed in the social configurations found across the globe. Put differently, both the anthropological and sociological versions of racial knowledge transform the consequences of hundreds years of colonial expropriation into the effects of efficient causes (the laws of nature) as they operate through human forms (bodies and societies). In sum, as a category of racial difference, blackness *occludes* the total violence necessary for this expropriation, a violence that was authorized by modern juridical forms – namely, colonial domination (conquest, displacement, and settlement) and property (enslavement). Nevertheless, blackness – precisely because of how, as an object of knowledge, it occludes these juridical modalities – has the capacity to unsettle the ethical program governed by determinacy, through exposing the violence that the latter refigures.

A United Nations image used to illustrate an article on migrant deaths in 2016 on the website *World Maritime News*.

The Equation of Value

To explore this potential of blackness to unsettle ethics, I will now tackle the unquestioned question reiterated by the disregard for lives lost in the streets of the US and in the Mediterranean Sea: Why don't black lives matter? To do this, I use that which grounds the modern knowledge

program – mathematical reasoning – to devise a procedure that unleashes blackness to confront *life*. Using what I call the Equation of Value, I describe blackness's capacity to unravel modern thought without reproducing the violence housed in knowledge and in the scene of value. My proof of this equation is designed to sidestep the hegemony of the Kantian subject and to make it possible to expose the disruptive/creative capacity that blackness hosts/holds.

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 its economic and ethical scenes.[23]

The crux of this exercise is to provide an account of *opposition* that figures *nullification* instead of *contradiction*. This is crucial for distinguishing a radical engagement from a critical one – because the latter cannot but assume the Kantian forms when it seeks to expose their conditions of possibility.[24]

Let us first see how the figuring of opposition as contradiction would work in relation to black life. Life is the form; the positive position vis-à-vis life is figured as "1," and the negative position is figured as "-1":

i. positive life = 1
ii. negative life = -1

If blackness occupies the place of negative life – that is, life that has negative value, that *does not matter* – then

iii. blackness = -1

Let me now figure the relationship between life (1) and blackness (-1) using basic mathematical procedures: addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. Addition in this case becomes subtraction because of blackness's negative value:

a) 1 (life) + -1 (blackness) = 0

When simply combined with life, blackness brings about nullification (0); when added to the positive form of life, blackness *obliterates* it.

As discussed previously, value, because it is both an effect of determinacy (Kant's account of knowledge) and is equated with determinacy (Kantian and Hegelian ethical scenes), it is (a) *determinate*, resulting in relations marked by effectivity (efficient causation), that is, relations marked by power differences insofar as one element effectively acts upon another; and it is (b) *determinant* insofar as it is the *effective* element – that is, it is the form which is applied to matter (content).

To express the relation between blackness (0) and life (1) in terms of effectivity, I use multiplication (×) and division (÷):

b) 1 (life) × -1 (blackness) = -1
c) 1 (life) ÷ -1 (blackness) = -1

When blackness multiplies or divides life, it remains in its negative expression, as blackness (-1) – that is, as lack, as a symbol of an absence (of life).

My next move is to take blackness's power to annihilate life (a) and deploy it to multiply (×) life. If

iv. life = 1
v. blackness = 0

then we find that

d) 1 (life) × -1 (blackness) = -1
e) 1 (life) × 0 (blackness) = 0

The movement in both cases is unmistakably violent; it refigures dialectics. In (d), negativity (blackness) engulfs value, and in (e) it destroys it. Put differently, in (d), life without value – that is, blackness (-1) – disappears with life, and in (e), blackness as a figuring of the absence of form (blackness = 0) disappears with the form (life = 1) and releases *matter* itself (0).

Taking this a step further, it might be possible to move away from dialectics and its deployment of effectivity, which cannot but reproduce violence, by dividing life by blackness:

f) 1 (life) ÷ 0 (blackness) = & – & or & / &

Instead of the sublation (d) or obliteration (e) of the form, this procedure has no result because it is impossible to divide something by zero. I have chosen & – & (infinity minus infinity) or & / & (infinity divided by infinity) to picture the result because it is undeterminable, it has no form: it is & minus itself or & divided by itself. It is neither life nor nonlife; it is content without form, or *materia prima* – that which has no value because it exists (as &) without form.

In equating blackness with & and capturing the rare ("of which something consists") and the obsolete ("substance without form") meanings of matter, I claim a radical praxis of refusal to contain blackness in the dialectical form. Though Frantz Fanon's refusal of dialectics is the most celebrated, I find this refusal also in Cedric Robinson's tracing of the black radical tradition;

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For a recent study and intellectual history of Boggs's extraordinary life and his personal and political relationship with Grace Lee Boggs, see Stephen M. Ward, *In Love and Struggle: The Revolutionary Lives of James and Grace Lee Boggs* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

2
James Boggs, "Black Power: A Scientific Concept Whose Time Has Come," in *Racism and the Class Struggle: Further Pages from a Black Worker's Notebook* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), 51–62.

3
This historical perspective of Black Power necessitated a study of working-class formation and capital accumulation in the US, in particular the constitution of internal divisions within the working class along racial lines through the legacy of slavery – a perspective which was to also be advanced by the theorists of "white-skin privilege." See Noel Ignatin (Ignatiev) and Theodore W. Allen's 1967 pamphlet *The White Blindspot* (published in 1969 by SDS's Radical Education Project), available online at http://www.sds-1960s.org/WhiteBlindspot.pdf. Another essay in *Racism and the Class Struggle*, "Uprooting Racism and Racists" (146–60), discusses debates tracing "the parallel between the rise of capitalism and the rise of racism": "The historical fact is that without African slavery the class struggle between capitalists and workers could not even have been joined in the first place. For the capitalist, it served the functions of primitive accumulation. That is, It provided both the initial capital and the labor force freed from the means of production which is a prerequisite for the process of capitalist accumulation inside the factory."

4
Not to mention their involvement in the formation of the Freedom Now Party in Detroit in 1964, and their role in organizing the 1963 Northern Negro Grass Roots Leadership Conference in the same city, where Malcolm X gave his famous "Message to the Grassroots" speech.

5
See A. Muhammad Ahmad, "The League of Revolutionary Black Workers: A Historical Study" http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/rbwstudy.html. See also Dan Georgakas's eloquent recollection of Boggs and his influence: "The person who made the strongest immediate impression on us, particularly among the Blacks who would become the nucleus of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, was James Boggs. He had been through numerous rank-and-file movements and racial initiatives within unions, and he spoke eloquently about his experiences. Although Marty and others in the group also worked in factories, Boggs was the only one who seemed to be the kind of militant who spoke and acted in terms that had immediate application. When he spoke about workers, he described the kind of people we all knew rather than the idealizations projected by other radical groups and even other members of his own circle. Boggs was especially intriguing when he enumerated the shortcomings of the class and its internal problems, emphasizing underdevelopment among Black as well as white workers. Later, of course, he and his wife would develop these ideas more fully in a number of writings." Dan Georgakas, "Young Detroit Radicals, 1955–1965," *Urgent Tasks* 12 (Summer 1981) http://www.sojournertruth.net/detroitradicals.html.

6
James Boggs, *The American Revolution: Pages from a Negro Worker's Notebook* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1963). The text was originally released as a double issue of *Monthly Review* in the summer of 1963, and was published as a separate pamphlet later that year. The complete text of *The American Revolution* has been collected along with many of Boggs's other important writings in *Pages from a Black Radical's Notebook: A James Boggs Reader*, ed. Stephen M. Ward (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011).

7
Boggs, *The American Revolution*, 53.

8
See Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 275. Sugrue also traces the effects of automation on employment in the auto industry over the course of the 1950s and '60s (130–35).

9
For a comprehensive account of the divergence between Boggs and James on the question of Black Power, see Stephen M. Ward, "An Ending and a Beginning: James Boggs, C.L.R. James, and the American Revolution," *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society*, vol. 13, no. 3: 279–302. For James's definitive statement on the independent validity of black struggles for civil rights in the US, see C. L. R. James, "The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Problem in the United States," *C.L.R. James on the "Negro Question,"* ed. Scott McLemee (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1996) 138–47 https://www.marxists.org/archive/james-clr/works/1948/revolutionary-answer.htm.

organizations.[27] But he also had provided sharp rebukes of, for instance, the Black Panther Party, a group that shared Boggs's class analysis and understanding of political power. Although Boggs was appreciative of the historical importance of the Panthers in demonstrating the "tremendous potential among black street youth … to overthrow racism and capitalism," the Boggses charged the Panthers with a too-direct importation of Maoist concepts and ideology "without distinguishing what is appropriate to China … and what is appropriate to the United States." Moreover, Boggs argued that the Ten-Point Program and survival programs, while articulating the correct issues, did not translate into a clear long-term strategy, and that the Panthers' rapid national growth into a "small mass party" resulted in a situation where the organization found itself "being led by those who should be following."[28] Recent scholarship on the Panthers would certainly temper and nuance these claims made by Boggs. For Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, Huey Newton's early writings outlined a vanguard party in the US that would articulate the political and military force of the "riotous energy of the ghetto," but "with the practical capacity to build political power and gain leverage to redress the wrongs against black people and meet their needs."[29] And for historian Donna Murch, the Panthers' survival programs were essentially alternative institutions for political education, centered on an organizing practice of grassroots socialism.[30]

Boggs held a positive view of another major Black Power group, one to which he had direct ties: the League of Revolutionary Black Workers (LRBW), an umbrella organization formed in 1969 to solidify the mushrooming wave of Revolutionary Union Movements (RUMs) at automobile plants across the Detroit region.[31] In an essay written while a series of wildcat strikes and walkouts rippled through the Dodge and Chrysler plants, Boggs hailed the League's ability to organize black autoworkers outside of traditional institutional structures, especially the United Auto Workers union. As he writes, "the demands and the expectations of these young black workers far exceed the wildest dreams of the labor movement and of earlier generations of workers even in their militant days."[32] Boggs's text was written in the early stages of the LRBW's formation, and thus it appears to temper the group's explicit revolutionary strategy and shop-floor initiatives by emphasizing demands to hire "a black plant doctor, fifty black foremen, even a black chairman of the Board of Directors." The first leaflets put out by the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement, the most active RUM, did call for the direct representation of black workers in the factory and the union: a clear "reformist" approach.[33] But later on, John Watson, one of the more publicly visible LRBW members, would stress that the organizational structure of the League was intended to support rank-and-file workers' struggles "in different industries and different plants," through an insurgent system of communication and united action with the ultimate aim of developing a "national general strike."[34] In any event, the LRBW's combination of immediate demands and long-term strategy was in line with Boggs's own prescriptions, and even sought to bridge the gap between the factory as a primary site of struggle and battles over the social wage and community defense.

Of course, the Boggses' conception of a revolutionary vanguard yielded its own problems. The enduring outcomes of the Black Power movement seem to be the demobilization of once-powerful grassroots insurgencies coupled with the rise of "black officialdom" and the realignment of ruling-class strategy to absorb popular movements. In Adolph Reed's words, "the imperatives of managing racial subordination" won out among mainstream African-American politicians; as more electoral routes to political participation opened for communities of color, lines of communication with radical activists and organizing groups fell through or were actively cut.[35]

The driving forces of capitalist development have shifted since the 1960s, after the crisis of Fordism; many of the effects of automation and technological unemployment that Boggs foresaw in *The American Revolution* are now our reality (sharp rises in precarious and informal employment, the production and racialization of "wageless life").[36] As a consequence, new forms and articulations of racial oppression need to be taken into account. The uneven, differential impact of social processes like mass incarceration and police violence is a clear effect of devastating mechanisms of economic exploitation and control (infrastructural and social service transfers, debtors' prisons), fortifying the determinations of race and class struggle in our current conjuncture.[37] With the emergence of new sets of demands for black self-determination (the program of the Movement for Black Lives[38]) in tune with resurgent networks of grassroots activism (coalitions between Black Lives Matter chapters and Fight for $15 campaigns), James Boggs's analysis of Black Power as both a scientific concept rooted in the history of the US social formation and a political condensate with concrete strategic implications might yield new insights and clarity for the present.

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in Hortense Spillers's figuring of the flesh as zero degree of signification; in Saidiya Hartman's refusal to rehearse racial violence as the moment of black subjectification; and in Fred Moten's descriptions of blackness in the scene of violence which refuse a simple reconciliation with the categories and premises of modern thought.[25] When blackness's oppositional power refers to matter – or, in Fanon's words, in the "night of the absolute" – it is possible to avoid the principle of contradiction and the accounts of self-determination it sustains; it is possible to avoid, that is, a return to Hegel (or Marx) via the shortcut of racial eschatology. What I hope this move against determinacy – the very notion presupposed in the question that Black Lives Matter sets out to challenge – makes possible is an appreciation of the urgency of bringing about its dissolution. For the work of blackness as a category of difference fits the Hegelian movement but has no emancipatory power because it functions as a signifier of violence which, when deployed successfully, justifies the otherwise unacceptable, such as the deaths of black persons due to state violence (in the US and in Europe) and capitalist expropriation (in Africa). That is, the category of blackness serves the ordered universe of determinacy and the violence and violations it authorizes. A guide to thinking, a method for study and unbounded sociality[26] – blackness as *matter* signals &, another world: namely, that which exists without time and out of space, in the plenum.

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Thing, n., *OED Online*, Oxford University Press.

2
A reminder to the speculative realists: wishing the subject out of existence by holding onto an independent object without attending to how one informs the other is not enough for announcing a whole new philosophical age. For an extended engagement with speculative realism, see Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Notes Toward the End of Time* (London: Living Commons, 2017).

3
Take, for instance, the increase in the number homicides in Chicago last year, which has been attributed to, among other things, the unwillingness of police officers to work in the city's black and brown neighborhoods (see http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-chicago-violence-solutions-met-20161230-story.html). But, of course, the city's police officials are very quick to blame anti-police brutality mobilizations (see http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/breaking/ct-two-shot-to-death-in-uptown-marks-first-homicide-of-2017-20170101-story.html).

4
With this move to claim The Thing – which here refers to Hegel's formulation of it, as will be clear later in this text – I am proposing a radically immanent "metaphysical" point of departure inspired by the failures of quantum physics, which expose the fundamental indeterminacy of the reality beyond space-time, at the quantum level, that is the plenum. For elaboration of this argument, see Denise Ferreira da Silva, "Toward a Black Feminist Poethics: The Quest(ion) of Blackness Toward the End of the World," *The Black Scholar*, vol. 44, no. 2 (2014).

5
For an analysis of police brutality as the mode of deployment of racial violence characteristic of the liberal modern state, see Denise Ferreira da Silva, "No-bodies: Law, Raciality and Violence," *Griffith Law Review*, vol. 18, no. 2 (2009): 212–36.

6
"Crumbling Through Powdery Air," a lecture by Otobong Nkanga, Städelschule, Frankfurt, July 14, 2015. (Recording provided to the author by Clare Molloy.)

7
See Denise Ferreira da Silva, "Blacklight," in *Otobong Nkanga, Luster and Lucre*, eds. Clare Molloy, Philippe Pirotte, and Fabian Schöneich (Berlin: Sternberg Press, forthcoming).

8
David Lloyd, "Race Under Representation," *Oxford Literary Review*, vol. 13, no. 1 (1991): 62–94; 64.

9
Such as, for instance, the exhibitions "Crumbling Through Powdery Air," Portikus, Frankfurt, September 2015; and "Comot Your Eyes Make I Borrow You Mine," Kadist, Paris, June 2015.

10
Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Toward the Human, after Man, Its Overrepresentation – An Argument," *CR: The New Centennial Review*, vol. 3, no. 3 (2003): 257–337.

11
For an account of these pillars, see Denise Ferreira da Silva, "On Difference without Separability," *Incerteza Viva: 32nd Bienal de São Paulo*, exhibition catalogue, eds. Jochen Volz and Júlia Rebouças (São Paulo: Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, 2016), 57–65.

12
For descriptions of the four causes, see Aristotle, *Metaphysics* (London: Penguin, 1998).

13
This is accomplished though Descartes's famous thought experiment, his systematic doubt. See René Descartes, *Meditation on the First Philosophy: Philosophical Essays and Correspondence* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2000): 97–141. How it does so is evident in the account of his method provided in "Rules for the Direction of the Mind," ibid., 2–28.

14
René Descartes, "The Treatise on Light," in *The World and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 6.

15
G. F. W. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (Kitchener: Batoche Books, 2001), 113.

16
Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Logic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 82–98.

17
See, for instance, Kant's analogy for how synthetic judgements work: "x is therefore the determinable (object) that I think through the concept a, and b is its determination or the way in which it is determined. In mathematics, x is the construction of a, in experience it is the concretum, and with regard to an inherent representation or thought in general x is the function of thinking in general in the subject." Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 51.

18
"There is in the soul a principium of disposition as well as of affection. The appearances can have no other order and do not otherwise belong to the unity of the power of representation except insofar as they are amenable to the common principio of disposition. For all appearance with its thoroughgoing determination must still have unity in the mind, consequently be subjected to those conditions through which the unity of representations is possible. Only that which is requisite for the unity of representations belongs to the objective conditions. The unity of apprehension is necessarily connected with the unity of the intuition of space and time, for without this the latter would give no real representation. The principles of exposition must be determined on the one side through the laws of apprehension, on the other side through the unity of the power of understanding. They are the standard for observation and are not derived from perceptions, but are the ground of those in their entirety." Ibid., 53.

19
For a discussion of racial difference in regard to Kant's framing of aesthetics, see Lloyd, "Race Under Representation."

20
Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*.

21
G. F. W. Hegel, *Hegel's Science of Logic* (Amherst: Humanity Books, 1969).

22
The argument in this and the following section is presented in Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

23
For an elaboration of this view of blackness as a Thing, see Denise Ferreira da Silva, "Towards a Black Feminist Poethics."

24
This is the case with Hegel's and Marx's renderings of dialectics, in which negation (opposition) appears as contradiction. In both, the distinction is between opposed presentations of the same form: for instance, in Marx's account of capitalism, property (or the means of production) is the form, while the fundamental oppositional social entities are defined in terms of whether they have a positive or negative position in regards to it: respectively, having property (capitalists) or not having it (the proletariat).

25
Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 1986); Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism* (London: Zed Press, 1983); Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics*, vol. 17, no. 2 (1987): 65–81; Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Fred Moten, *In the Break* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

26
For black study, see Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons* (Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2013).

> contents. In this sense these struggles connected welfare, reappropriation, and armed struggle with the factory. To use traditional terms, they united the factory and the community.[21]

The terrain of social reproduction to which Carpignano refers – the "socially necessary activities" of community organization, social and public services, education, transportation, public health, and other areas – became the central point of focus for the Boggses' vision of Black Power. Through struggles over this institutional infrastructure, Northern ghettos could become red bases of black self-management; concrete demands could be articulated into a more coherent program to confront urban power structures. The founding statement of the Organization for Black Power, included in the Boggses' seminal 1965 essay "The City is the Black Man's Land," reflects this emphasis on forming a coordinated system of parallel institutions: "The city is the base which we must organize as the factories were organized in the 1930s. We must struggle to control and govern the cities, as workers struggled to control and govern the factories of the 1930s."[22]

This conception of urban grassroots insurgency was a prescient anticipation of the arenas in which the meaning and import of calls for Black Power would be fought out: welfare boards, newly founded War on Poverty programs, and neighborhood housing coalitions.[23] Crucially, these campaigns for community control would need political leadership to combine them in an expansive dynamic of struggle – through which "mass consciousness of grievances" could translate into a "reorganization of society."

The Boggses would embrace the vanguard party as the organizational vehicle for this passage; and indeed, this aspect of their work no doubt appears unsatisfactory today. They would outline the form and tasks of this party in numerous texts, including the final essay of *Racism and the Class Struggle*, "Putting Politics in Command," and the pamphlets *The Awesome Responsibilities of Revolutionary Leadership* and *Manifesto for a Revolutionary Party*. On one level, it is a quite orthodox conception of the vanguard: a body of committed militants with a clear sense of strategy and tactics, who can

> adapt themselves to the painstaking and often unglamorous tasks of building cadre who are dedicated to working in the community, carrying out and developing programs of struggle and projecting political solutions and perspectives of power to which the masses may not immediately subscribe but which they can

> begin to understand through a process of escalating struggle.[24]

While this understanding of party organization could certainly seem to tip over into the traps of rigid hierarchy and sectarianism, Boggs does stress the *interaction* between this vanguard party and the masses as a relationship of testing, metamorphosis, and transformation. As Bill V. Mullen notes in his *Afro-Orientalism*, the Boggses' "dialectical humanism" implied the creation of new ideologies; vanguard organizations, through the circulation of international revolutionary experiences and the mobilizing force of social struggle, would trigger continuous learning processes wherein the transmission and intensification of knowledge could take place. Their humanist leanings would later spiral off into a politics of personal development in works like *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century*, with the construction of a "new concept of human identity" taking center stage.[25] But in the final pages of *Racism and the Class Struggle*, James Boggs draws a tight correlation between political practice and the masses' capacity to think and act:

> The people who are striving for power must themselves be transformed into new people in the course of the struggle. Their will to struggle, their vision of what they are struggling for, their social consciousness and responsibility, and their capacity to govern must all be systematically increased. The struggle must therefore be an escalating one, focused on problems the people can learn from. It cannot be hit-and-miss or in reaction to what the enemy does; but must be based on a strategy which has been mapped out in advance and which permits the organization to take advantage of the enemy's predictable actions or mistakes. Indispensable to victory is the strategic employment of time as a dimension of struggle within which contradictions are deepened, conflicts escalate, and there is an accelerated growth of the revolutionary social forces, not only in numbers and understanding but in organization and sense of community.[26]

Boggs advanced strong criticisms of other political trends in the Black Power movement, which we find in the essay republished in this issue when he draws lines of demarcation between "realists" and "romanticists." He expressed fierce opposition to cultural nationalist sentiments, and argued for the value and collective power of multiracial

1930s, they indicated a new phase in the cycle of struggle, with updated programmatic objectives and tactics which would target the fundamental antagonisms of US society and spearhead a collective project of emancipation.

Boggs's approach not only elaborates important features of the trajectory of black radicalism; it also revisits the distinct Marxist problematic of workers' inquiry uncovered by his comrades in the Johnson-Forest Tendency and Correspondence. In several texts – including *The American Worker*, cowritten by Grace Lee Boggs under a pseudonym – and the pages of their newspaper, also titled *Correspondence*, the group investigated the conditions of proletarian life in the US based on the concrete experience and first-person narratives of workers.[13] From these accounts, one could chart changes in the process of production, the autonomous needs of different sectors of the working class, and, most importantly, nascent forms of rank-and-file resistance. The goal of documenting these scattered experiences and elements of discontent was political: to establish connections between workers in their various locations, so that they might realize their shared interests and act collectively against the alienating forces of capitalist production. This historically reflexive attempt to link theory and practice would have a wide resonance, with some theoretical adjustments, in the projects of the Socialisme ou Barbarie collective in France and the workerist and autonomist traditions in Italy.[14]

In a sense, *The American Revolution* advances a class-composition analysis of the relationship between economic conditions and political subjects: the technological breakthroughs, so exalted by Big Three auto executives, recast not only the labor process itself, but also the field of action in which workers could determinately respond to such a restructuring plan.[15] There is a compelling overlap between Boggs and the workerists in their understanding of science and strategy: a consistent striving for historical adequacy over the dangers of anachronism, and an attention to how workers could "bypass existing organizations and form new ones uncorrupted by past habits and customs."[16] Just as Romano Alquati, Raniero Panzieri, and Mario Tronti meticulously studied the technical conditions on the factory floor in Italy, and articulated appropriate forms of struggle on that basis, so too did Boggs understand scientific analysis as the "systematic examination of the specific conditions, contradictions, and antagonisms in one's own country and one's own time."[17] One major difference, of course, was that Boggs had already moved past a stringent focus on the factory, and found a class figure which no longer held the ability to sell its labor power for a wage.

At a very basic level, Boggs was trying to answer the question: "What has happened within the working class since Marx?" The proletariat, in Boggs's view, could no longer be grasped as a "homogeneous segregated bloc." Capitalist development in the US had engendered "changes in the nature of work, the social composition of various strata of the population, the classes within it, and the culture of the population."[18] The subaltern stratum of the outsiders – a product of a renewed capitalist class offensive and racialized strategies of social control in the US – possessed a class position that transcended the limits of bourgeois political reform and posed an antagonistic challenge to the wage-labor system. More to the point, the outsiders could potentially combine heterogeneous forces of social protest into a universal movement.

Boggs indicated this potential by channeling currents of revolutionary nationalism. He specifically situated the black underclass as an internal colony: "they have grown up like a colonial people who no longer feel any allegiance to the old imperial power and are each day searching for new means to overthrow it."[19] The political sensibility of this move was important, because it extended lines of analysis, communication, and solidarity to the international level. The qualifier "black" had an eminently political and generic connotation: included in the perspective of Black Power were also the "people of color who are engaged in revolutionary struggle in the United States and all over the world."[20]

With these provocations, Boggs altered how one maps the territory of revolutionary struggle in the American context. Paolo Carpignano, in an article that appeared in the US autonomist journal *Zerowork*, captures the thrust of Boggs's broadening of revolutionary agency to "actions and forces outside the work process," towards connected spheres of social activity:

> black struggles demonstrated that the wageless were part of the working class. They unveiled the factory-like organization of society where ghettos, unemployment and poverty were not a byproduct of the system nor a transitory malfunction, but a necessary element in the social reproduction of capital ... Most importantly, they brought working class struggle to the society at large, and at that level they forced its recomposition. By recomposition we do not mean only the extension and the massification of the struggle but primarily the homogenization of its subjective

Jared Sexton

All Black Everything

> You could build a world out of need or you could hold
> everything black and see.
> – Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric*

I will take as axiomatic the following premise, expressed in the editorial to the current issue: "It is evident that #BlackLivesMatter and the organizations that coalesce the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) represent the most important and promising developments in the theory and practice of abolition." Important and promising to this conjuncture, to be sure, as the *eupraxia* of black millennials refashions the linkage between the singular claim for freedom – the slave's cause – and the whole range of leftist efforts for dignity, justice, and equality.[1] But this is also true within a larger, structural view, since the *longue durée* of black strivings in this twilight civilization, which continually give rise to the collective aspirations of black activists in any given moment, encompass and inflect the whole range of leftist efforts – from the reformist to the revolutionary – on a global scale. To my mind, abolition, as it has been unevenly developed within the internationalist black radical tradition over several centuries now, "is the interminable radicalization of every radical movement," most especially its own.[2] It is that which radicalizes all others because it radicalizes itself as its most essential activity. The slave's cause is the cause of another world in and on the ruins of this one, in the end of its ends.

The discourse of black lives distinguishes mattering and movement from any reductive concepts of legal right or standing, even if it remains entangled with and against the violent dynamics of lawmaking and law enforcement. One crucial aspect of the abolitionist imagination highlighted by this discourse on that score involves resistance to the aestheticization of politics and advocacy of a renewed politicization of aesthetics, including myriad representations of blackness in art, entertainment, and news media. If, as the editors suggest, the mass media "has hostilely presented M4BL in general and BLM in particular in ways that simplify its ideas, downplay its organizational capacity, shade over its intersectional potency, and demonize the young Black bodies whose availability to unaccountable state violence is the oldest and most consistent American reality since the European invasion," that simplification, shading, and demonization has been contested by the independent generation of a vast digital image archive, a prolific online social-media commentary, and a rich analog protest culture involving political signage, graffiti, fashion, and

Photo documentation of the lecture "What is Contemporary? Black Lives Matter: Patrisse Cullors and Tanya Lucia Bernard in Conversation" with artists Patrisse Cullors and Tanya Lucia Bernard (2016). Photo: Casey Winkleman. Courtesy of The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.

Grace Lee Boggs (left) and James Boggs (right) in an undated photograph.

Struggle continue and update the fundamental arguments of Boggs's landmark 1963 pamphlet, *The American Revolution: Pages from a Black Worker's Notebook*.[6] Boggs's first book, *The American Revolution*, established him as a leading intellectual force on the US left, a position that would only solidify over the coming years. But the text was both the cause and outcome of an acrimonious split within the Correspondence Publishing Committee, the Detroit-based political organization to which both James and Grace Lee Boggs belonged throughout the 1950s (a continuation under a different name of their activity as the Trotskyist splinter collective the Johnson-Forest Tendency), along with several close comrades, including the famed Trinidadian Marxist theorist C. L. R. James and the radical labor historian Martin Glaberman. The reasons for this split can help lead us into the discussion of Boggs's distinct definition of Black Power.

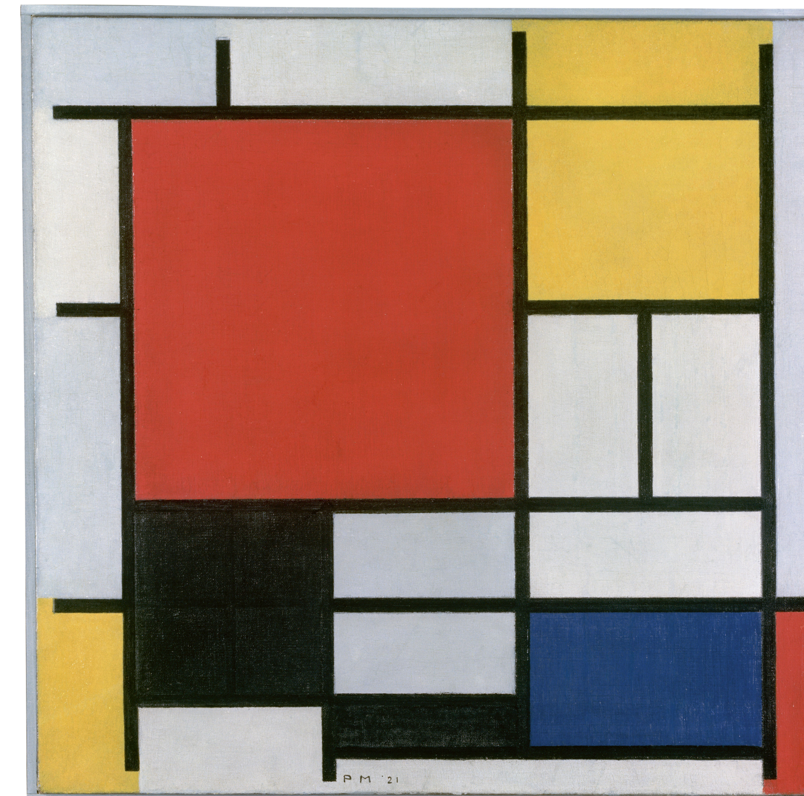
The American Revolution was guided by an effective methodological principle: theoretical analysis would be prompted primarily by conjunctural developments in social conflict. Two historical threads guided the text's argument. First, that automation and technological breakthroughs in US industry had created the conditions for a post-scarcity society; a sufficient amount of socially necessary goods and services could be produced and distributed to all members of the population. Recalling earlier arguments made by C. L. R. James and Grace Lee Boggs in *The Invading Socialist Society* (cowritten with Raya Dunayeskaya) and *Facing Reality* (cowritten with Cornelius Castoriadis), Boggs forecast that the seeds of a "classless" and "workless" society were already present, wherein the masses could "walk out on the streets and get their milk and honey."[7] However – and this is the second thread – the same trends towards automation and cybernetic command had deleterious effects on the industrial labor force, union power, and shop-floor organization. Old forms of labor were becoming outmoded and generated an ever increasing surplus population of the "permanently unemployed," the "underclass," or the "outsiders," predominantly concentrated in urban black communities – a trend demonstrated by Detroit employment statistics tracking the period from 1940–1970.[8]

Boggs recalibrated his strategic outlook accordingly: African-Americans were now positioned as "the chief social force for the revolt against American capitalism." One crux of the split between C. L. R. James and the Boggses came precisely on this point: despite the former's consistent appreciation of the validity and strength of African-American movements for self-determination and the global reach of Pan-Africanism, James was not simply willing to uphold the black liberation movement as the central front of struggle.[9] Nor did he think the revolutionary process necessarily implied the creation of vanguard organizations to develop instances of proletarian self-activity, as the Boggses would soon insist – for James, this was an indefensible retreat from his conception of socialism as being expressed in bursts of spontaneous proletarian organization.[10] He also adamantly opposed the Boggses increasingly tendentious attacks against Marxism as a relevant revolutionary theory over the course of the 1960s.[11] A passage from the penultimate chapter of *The American Revolution* neatly encapsulates the points James found most objectionable:

> American Marxists have tended to fall into the trap of thinking of the Negroes as Negroes, i.e. in race terms, when in fact the Negroes have been and are today the most oppressed and submerged sections of the workers, on whom has fallen most sharply the burden of unemployment due to automation. The Negroes have more economic grievances than any other section of American society. But in a country with the material abundance of the United States, economic grievances alone could not impart to their struggles all their revolutionary impact. The strength of the Negro cause and its power to shake up the social structure of the nation come from the fact that in the Negro struggle all the questions of human rights and human relationships are posed. At the same time the American Negroes are most conscious of, and best able to time their actions in relation to, the crises and weaknesses of American capitalism, both at home and abroad.[12]

Despite the controversy, Boggs's methodological impulse in these pages is striking: the existence, constitution, and trajectory of the industrial proletariat could not be taken for granted. Effective strategies for power had to be grounded in actual motions and political developments. For Boggs, the bus boycotts, sit-ins, armed self-defense groups (led by Robert Williams), the explosive ghetto rebellions in Watts and Harlem (and later Detroit and Newark), and the rapid growth of mass black nationalist organizations, especially the Nation of Islam (in particular the political ideas of Malcolm X), demonstrated the momentum, scope, and "striking force" of autonomous black movements. Like the wildcat strikes of the

Ad Reinhardt poses in front of one of his paintings, date unknown.



Piet Mondrian, *Composition in Red, Yellow, Blue, and Black*, 1921. Oil on canvas Photo:Wikimedia Commons

dance, among other things. All of which is, of course, shaped by the diverse theoretical formulations drawn from and contributed to the interdisciplinary field of black studies, most notably regarding currents of black feminist and queer theory; all of which is, of course, shaped by the diverse philosophies, practical wisdom, and good sense characteristic of black thought in the most general sense.

Black art and black artists have been critical to this development from the beginning. It is not insignificant that one of the founders of BLM, Patrisse Cullors, is a practicing artist, and that BLM has an Art + Culture director, Tanya Lucia Bernard.[3] The art world has, as a result, witnessed a fairly steady stream of initiatives in recent years related to the movement for black lives, exploring its many dimensions and situating it within the broadest historical, geopolitical, and even spatiotemporal contexts. We can note events spanning, for instance, from Erin Christovale and Amir George's Black Radical Imagination film and video series at REDCAT in Los Angeles, to Simone Leigh's Black Women Artists for Black Lives Matter (BWA for BLM) launch at the New Museum in New York.[4] But the present engagement is not only of urgent topical interest. It also revisits deeply entrenched questions about aesthetics and art history, the asymmetrical ways and means of artistic production, the contradictory role of financial backers and institutional brokers, the political economy of the culture industry, and the perennially troubled ethical vocation of the artist. These questions condense with great force at the point where blackness, blacks, and the color black come into focus, whether black people are agent, object, or audience of the work. It is hoped that the comments below might facilitate a thought and practice of art and activism, their mutual organization or disorganization, as they traffic between the material and symbolic terms of blackness whose spacetime presents itself in paradoxical display.

Tom Vanderbilt, a design, science, and technology writer, suggests in his essay "Darkness Visible" for *Cabinet* magazine: "There is perhaps no color freighted with as much meaning as black; what makes this significant, as art students will remember, is that black is not a color at all, merely the absence of wavelengths of visible light. To truly see black would require the loss of any visible light, meaning in fact that all would be black."[5] Black, notes Vanderbilt, is not a color at all by some accounts. But what a curious way to refer to the color freighted with the greatest meaning. As if the meaning becomes so excessive or extreme that the color, as such, disappears into itself, or into everything else that is not itself. In fact,

Vanderbilt glosses several discrepant understandings of black. On the one hand, we find descriptions of black as a force of incorporation, swallowing up all light and color, all meaning and desire and fantasy, even all existence, so much so that "our lives consist of those things that we draw away from the black." In this sense, black is best seen not at all, as noncolor and as nonseeing, the failure or impossibility or limit of seeing. Like an astrophysical singularity, we agree to the undeniable importance of the effects of black without being so sure as to the nature of its existence. On the other hand, we have meditations, running from the ancient period to the present, about black as the color of sight itself, as what sight cannot see about its own seeing. "To truly see black would require the loss of any visible light, meaning in fact that *all would be black*." One sees black and black alone, or one sees everything else *without* it, we might even say *against* it. To see black at all is to see all black everything.[6]

Black, then, begins and ends as a paradox or a problem of definition; it may even be the paradox or problem of definition *itself*, which is to say the paradox or problem of beginning and ending, being and nothingness. We might try to approach black by way of its relation to other colors, by way of a kind of originary difference, such that black, the presence of noncolor, is black only *in relation to* white, the color of absence. Or, given that black entails the self-cancelling presence of all color and colors combined, we might learn something about its qualities when compared to other colors comprised of mixture as such, colors like brown or gray, for instance. Novelist Paul La Farge writes the following in his own contribution to the *Cabinet* issue on the color black:

> We "see" in total darkness because *sight itself has a color*, Aristotle suggests, and that color is black: the feedback hum that lets us know the machine is still on. The contemporary philosopher Giorgio Agamben, following Aristotle, remarks that the fact that we see darkness means that our eyes have not only the potential to see, but also the potential *not* to see. (If we had only the potential to see, we would never have the experience of not-seeing.) This twofold potential, to do and not to do, is not only a feature of our sight, Agamben argues; it is the essence of our humanity: "The greatness – and also the abyss – of human potentiality is that it is first of all potential not to act, *potential for darkness*." Because we are capable of inaction, we know that we have the ability to act, and

Patrick King

Introduction to "Black Power: A Scientific Concept Whose Time Has Come" by James Boggs

This issue of *e-flux journal* presents one of the most remarkable, and overlooked, conjunctural texts to come out of the Black Power movement: "Black Power: A Scientific Concept Whose Time Has Come," by James Boggs, an autoworker, organic intellectual, and lifelong revolutionary activist.[1] In this text, which first appeared in the spring 1967 issue of the radical black nationalist journal *The Liberator* and was later included in his 1970 collection, *Racism and the Class Struggle: Further Pages from a Black Worker's Notebook*, Boggs perceptively analyzes the rising tide of black struggle in the Northern cities in the wake of the civil rights movement, and places these events in the context of anticolonial national liberation projects in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.[2]

Black Power had always been ambivalent as a political slogan since Stokely Carmichael propelled it onto the nationwide stage during the March Against Fear in June 1966. Black Power formulated a pressing need – that black people in the United States obtain actual economic and political power beyond integration – but there were many potential routes to achieve that goal. Boggs attempts to not only refine the concept, arguing that it is grounded in the "specific historical development of the United States"; he also advances a set of tactics and a long-term revolutionary strategy of social struggle with the aim of establishing black political power.[3] Boggs and his wife and close collaborator, Grace Lee, had already elaborated their particular understanding of Black Power in practice. In 1965, they helped form the Organization for Black Power in Detroit, which was a coordinating group of grassroots activists that looked to establish a concrete program for black self-determination centered in the cities, and one of the countless organizing projects the Boggses would initiate over the course of the 1960s and '70s: other initiatives would include the Inner City Organizing Committee, the Committee for Political Development, and the National Organization for an American Revolution.[4] In the rich political context of Detroit, the Boggses acted as a "resource base" for a new generation of African-American radicals who were interested in the nexus between revolutionary socialism and black nationalism. As historian and Revolutionary Action Movement leader Muhammad Ahmad recalls, "Discussion sessions were held at the Boggs home which provided young Black radicals with insight on concepts, goals, strategy and tactics of socialism and revolution."[5] These younger activists included the future core of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers: John Watson, Luke Tripp, John Williams, General Baker, and others.

The texts included in *Racism and the Class*

the landscape that Lamin Fofana came back with. What we got, what we are still getting, as the thing unspools its textured strands, is our increasingly derelict Now, compressed and distilled, the good shards extracted from it, into a flexible terrain that flickers in and out of different configurations. At one moment, it is riot-space; at another, thinking-space; at yet another, chill-out-and-recharge-space; and at yet another, historical-space. At all times it is a delicate synthesis of multifarious strands and an enterprise in gauging dirt patches in this mad moment, in exposing little bits of hard ground on which our desires for another world, certainly for the end of this one, can continue to find traction. – Editors

Track list:
Dedekind Cut, "Maxine"/ clipping., "Knees On The Ground"/ Auntie Flo, "Reverence"/ Shabazz Palaces, "Black Up"/ Jamila Woods, "VRY BLK"/ Robert Hood, "Still"/ Fatima Al Qadiri, "Fragmentation"/ Lamin Fofana, "In the House of Catastrophe"/ S Olbricht, "Floa1"/ Run The Jewels, "Down"/ Lamin Fofana, "A Feeling"/ Terence Dixon, "My Journey Here"/ Grace Lee Boggs / Alicia Garza / Blood Orange, "Sandra's Smile"/ Lamin Fofana, "The Dithering" / Lauryn Hill, "Black Rage"/ Beyonce, "Formation (Lotic America Is Over Declaration)"/ T.I., Killer Mike, "40 Acres"/ Kendrick Lamar, "Alright"/ Rapsody, "The Man"/ Omar-S, Amp Fiddler, "Ah' Revolution (Poli Grip For Partials Nik Mix)"/ Solange, "Don't Wish Me Well"/ Will Long, "Chumps (Sprinkles Overdub)"/

×

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> also the choice of whether to act or not. *Black, the color of not seeing, not doing, is in that sense the color of freedom.*[7]

La Farge loses track of the distinction between freedom and a negative condition of possibility and then reduces the former to the latter. Even so, we can hold onto the fundamental association he draws between black, or blackness, and freedom.

Since at least the time of Malevich's *Black Square* (1915), white artists have, for this very reason, been drawn to working with black, and none more so than the mid-century abstract expressionists. But few, it appears, have affirmed all they have found in its precincts. Poet and theorist Fred Moten is interested in this thwarted interest, especially as it is found in the example of Ad Reinhardt, one of the towering figures of the movement and the moment of abstract expressionism. In "The Case of Blackness," Moten pursues an extended criticism of Reinhardt's attempts to contain, to quarantine, blackness and blacks from the color black in order to pursue his creative practice as formal purification: "art-as-art."[8] Reinhardt is not indifferent to the world and his is not conservatism in either the social or the political sense. Quite the contrary, he is at war with the conventions of the art world and its stifling historical inertia and he is, at the time, a critic of the imperialism of US foreign policy in Southeast Asia and its domestic policy of Jim Crow legal segregation. His problem lies elsewhere, in an inability to see how his desire for mobilizing the critical force of abstraction – what he calls "concept" – need not sacrifice what he saw as the distracting messiness of lived experience – what he calls "symbol."

On this score, Moten thinks backward through Reinhardt en route to another, earlier white abstract artist, Piet Mondrian, whose quest for the universal by way of form and color passed through and, unlike Reinhardt, carried along the world from which it was drawn. Artist Michael Sciam writes at great length about *Victory Boogie Woogie* (1944) and its predecessor piece, *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (1943), in his own book on the Dutch painter, touching on some of the most compelling aspects of the work:

> While the space [of *Victory Boogie Woogie*] is nevertheless very dynamic (not least because of the lozenge format), its dynamism is the result of a virtually unlimited number of planes interacting with one another. While the finite dimension of the planes appears to predominate now, their enormous number and variety tend to evoke an infinite space. The infinite space of the lines is now expressed through the finite space of the planes. Everything varies in this painting, as it does in *Broadway Boogie Woogie*, but we no longer see any process leading to a unitary synthesis. It is multiplicity that predominates here. *Victory Boogie Woogie* appears to present an endless sequence of possible syntheses of yellow, red, and blue manifested in constantly varying forms. In actual fact, this is precisely what *Broadway Boogie Woogie* tells us: unitary synthesis opens up again to multiplicity. We encounter a great many instances of partial unity (including white) in *Victory Boogie Woogie*, but not one that holds for the composition as a whole. All the planes are in a state of reciprocal motion. They are all relative and there is not one that establishes itself as a synthesis of all the others.[9]

What Sciam describes as the painting's construction of "infinite space" and "an endless sequence of possible syntheses" is, ultimately, about its ability to evoke a sense that "unitary synthesis opens up again to multiplicity." That is the key. For Moten, too, unitary synthesis opens up again to multiplicity, but not just any synthesis can accomplish such an opening. It is blackness that enjoys a certain pride of place in that respect, as the *singular unitary synthesis of all colors*, the monochrome that is actually the combination of the whole range of monochromes: "the related nonexcluded, nonexclusive understanding of mixture, of color, as constitutive of blackness and of blackness or black as a constitutive social, political, and aesthetic power."[10] Mixture as power: but how? Black is what you get when all the primary colors are present equally in the mix. It is what you get when there is equality among colors. In other words, "the endless sequence of possible syntheses of yellow, red, and blue manifested in constantly varying forms" are, in a way, the infinite shades of blackness that Moten has in mind when he claims that Mondrian's "great, final picture, *Victory Boogie Woogie*, is all black, is all of what had been absorbed in black, is the explication of a dissonant, chromatic saturation, the inhabitation of a break or border, the disruption embedded in the grid's boundaries."[11]

In the wake of Moten's analysis, we are struck anew by Reinhardt's statement at the 1967 *artscanada* teleconference, the so-called "black conversation," between Toronto and New York to address the color black in light of the emergent protocols and priorities of the Black Power and Black Arts movements. Joining him at this gathering of artists were Aldo Tambellini,

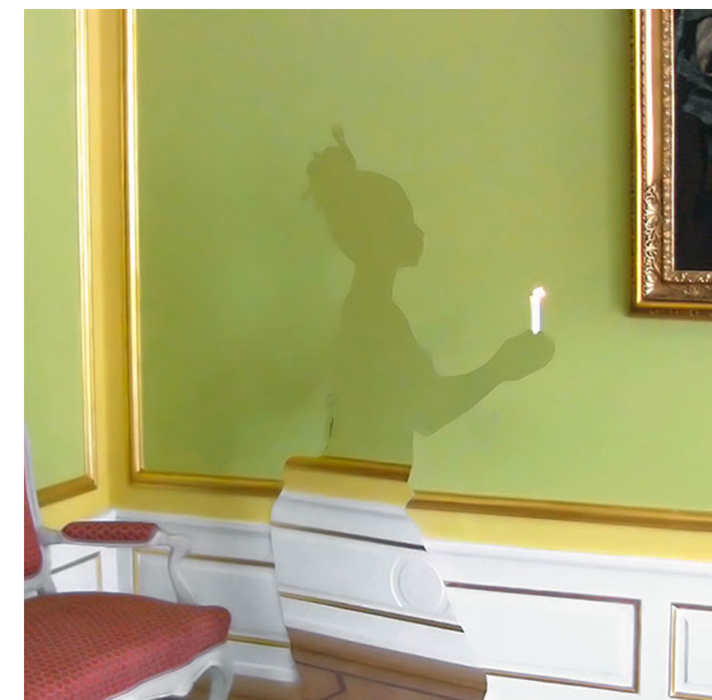
An installation view Quentin Morris's Untitled Show at Blum & Poe, New York (2016). Photo: Christian Defonte

Lamin Fofana

Dis/Continuum

Sounds for M4BL

"As the world falls apart, the opportunity for visionary organizing expands."
– Grace Lee Boggs



Jeannette Ehlers, *Black Magic at the White House*, 2009. Videostill.

e-flux journal #79 — february 2017 Lamin Fofana
Dis/Continuum

To listen to this soundtrack, please visit:
https://soundcloud.com/laminfofana/discontinuum

The bonds that new modes of resistance establish with previous historical sequences are scratching loose their very own world-disorganizing potential. Constituent history has never submitted to the tyranny of the textual. The sonic moves audiences-cum-comrades, fleshy things that, in feeling and moving communally, call up the specter of the common project. This is the surplus of their corporeal, anti-transactional transactions. Of their uprising against even minor miseries. Whether one is thinking of music, spoken word, coded patois, scratched records, effective and affective oration, glitching at mechanical interfaces, the multidimensions of performativity in and around sounds – the sonic has always been a most active field in bonds-making. A kind of goddammed Mississippi, seeded with tragedy and resilience, to the frigid Northeast of more buttoned-up organic intellectuals who prefer the tabloid and the blog. Approaching the vicinity of this fact – or perhaps the ways in which its incontrovertibility impinged in our catching-up thinking – led us to commission e-flux journal's first "text" as track. Of course, "track" seems wanting as a name for

1
See Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2003); Huey Copeland, *Bound to Appear: Art, Slavery, and the Site of Blackness in Multicultural America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Kobena Mercer, *Discrepant Abstraction* (London: Institute of International Visual Arts, 2006); Kellie Jones, "'It's Not Enough to Say 'Black is Beautiful': Abstraction at the Whitney 1969–1974," in *EyeMinded: Living and Writing Contemporary Art* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011): 397–427; Adrienne Edwards, *Blackness in Abstraction* (New York: Pace Gallery, 2016)

2
See Angela Y. Davis, "Afro Images: Politics, Fashion, Nostalgia," *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 21, no. 1 (Autumn 1994): 37–45; David Marriott, *On Black Men* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Richard Powell, *Cutting a Figure: Fashioning Black Portraiture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Krista Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics: Tourism, Photography, and Framing the Caribbean Picturesque* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Leigh Raiford, *Imprisoned in a Luminous Glare: Photography and the African American Freedom Struggle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

3
See Sylvia Wynter, "Sambos and Minstrels," *Social Text* 1 (Winter 1979): 149–156; Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics*, vol. 17, no. 2 (Autumn 1987): 64–81; Fred Moten, *In the Break*; Fred Moten, "Blackness and Nothingness," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 112, no. 4 (Fall 2013): 779; Frank Wilderson, "Of Grammar and Ghosts: The Performative Limits of African Freedom," *Theatre Survey*, vol. 50, no. 1 (May 2009): 119–125; Hannah Black, "Fractal Freedoms," *Afterall* 41 (2016): 4–9.

4
Adrienne Edwards, "Blackness in Abstraction," *Art in America*, vol. 103, No.1 (January 2015): 62–69.

5
Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 112.

6
For a global visual history of the raised fist, please see art historian Lincoln Cushing's work-in-progress "A Brief History of the Clenched Fist Image" http://www.docspopuli.org/articles/Fist.html.

7
As Danny Widener has noted, during his time in Los Angeles, Hammons worked closely alongside Social Realist Charles White, which undoubtedly influenced Hammons's work in Southern California.

8
Richard Powell, *Black Art and Culture in the 20th Century* (London: Thames and Hudson): 152–154.

9
See Kellie Jones, "Interview with David Hammons," *Real Life Magazine* 16 (Autumn 1986): 249.

10
Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks,* 112.

11
For more on the relationship between surface and print, see David Joselit, "Notes on Surface: Towards a Genealogy of Flatness," *Art History*, vol. 23, no.1 (March 2000): 19–34.

12
I am grateful for Nicole Archer's insights on Hammons's use of his own skin during the process of impression in his *Body Prints* series.

13
Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 111.

14
Ibid., 120.

15
There is much to be said about the relationship between Hammons's works and the historical European avant-garde. Indeed, Hammons himself was compelled by Yves Klein's *Anthropometries* works, and many of the prints created aesthetically recall and depart from avant-garde abstraction. For more on the relationship between black abstract or conceptual practices and the historical avant-garde, see the insightful works of Adrienne Edwards, Hannah Black, and Adam Pendleton: Adrienne Edwards, *Blackness in Abstraction* (New York: Pace Gallery, 2016); Hannah Black, "Fractal Freedoms"; Adam Pendleton, *Black Dada Manifesto*, 2008. For more on the subterranean, underground, and covert possibilities of black radical insurgency, see Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013).

16
COINTELPRO effectively destroyed radical social movements in the US by engaging in infiltration, sabotage, arrest, false imprisonment, and, in some cases, murder. The impacts of this program are lasting, from radicals who are still imprisoned based on COINTELPRO operations, to the many communities who were psychologically traumatized due to infiltration and police terror. In addition to these immediate and very material impacts, COINTELPRO advanced and expanded state intelligence programs, and indeed legitimated surveillance, policing, and the criminalization of political activists, thus justifying the suspension of legal protections and the expansion of governmental power. Part and parcel of this program was the production of a jaw-dropping amount of documentation of these operations, often organized around individual political activists in an attempt to discredit and criminalize their political work. For more, see Jim Vander Wall and Ward Churchill, *Agents of Repression* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2002); Andres Alegria, Prentis Hemphill, Anita Johnson, and Claude Marks, 2012, "COINTELPRO 101," DVD, San Francisco: Freedom Archives.

17
Maria L La Ganga, "Black Panthers 50 years on: art show reclaims movement by telling 'real story.' *The Guardian*, October 8, 2016 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/08/black-panthers-50th-anniversary-oakland-museum.

18
Angela Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography* (New York: International Publishers, 1988), 360.

19
Rodney and Sadie Barnette, "A Panther's Story Becomes Art: A conversation between artist Sadie Barnette and her father and former Black Panther Rodney Barnette," Oakland Museum of California blog, November 4, 2016 http://museumca.org/blog/panthers-story-becomes-art.

20
There is a potentially dynamic relationship here to South Asian and Arab diasporic artists who also work through the politics of redaction in relationship to the prolonged War on Terror. As several scholars have noted, COINTELPRO piloted and advanced state intelligence programs and provided the groundwork for the post-9/11 PATRIOT ACT. Scholars like Anjali Nath, Ronak Kapadia, and Sara Mameni have noted how contemporary South Asian and Arab diasporic artists have all manipulated the redaction into an aesthetic form in their practices. For more, see Anjali Nath, "Beyond the Public Eye: On FOIA Documents and the Visual Politics of Redaction," *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, vol. 14, no. 1 (2013): 21–28; Ronak Kapadia, "Kissing the Dead Body: US Military Imprisonment and the Evidence of Things Not Seen," in "Transnational Visual Cultures," ed. Kasturi Ray, special issue of *South Asian Diaspora*, vol. 7, no. 1 (March 2015); Sara Mameni, "Dermopolitics and the Erotics of the Muslim Body in Pain," in "Sentiment and Sentience: Black Performance Since Scenes of Subjection," eds. Sampada Aranke and Nikolas Oscar Sparks, special issue of *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory*, vol. 27, no. 1 (forthcoming March 2017).

21
See Natsu Taylor Saito, "Whose liberty? Whose security?: The USA PATRIOT Act in the Context of COINTELPRO and the Unlawful Repression of Political Dissent," *Oregon Law Review*, vol. 81, no. 4 (2002): 1051–1131.

22
Krista Thompson, *Shine: The Visual Economy of Light in African Diaspora Aesthetic Practice* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 225.

23
Rodney and Sadie Barnette, "A Panther's Story Becomes Art."

24
For a brilliant study on the uses of photographic technology (vis-à-vis the mugshot) in the expansion of state power, see Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive: the use and classification of portrait photography by the police and social scientists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries," *October* 39 (Winter 1989): 3–64. For a lucid study on the relationship between the black freedom struggle's uses of photography, see Leigh Raiford, *Imprisoned in a Luminous Glare: Photography and the African American Freedom Struggle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

25
Sadie Barnette's work is indeed an extension of Zora Neale Hurston's notion of "the will to adorn" as a "notable characteristic" of black American literary aesthetics. See Zora Neale Hurston, "Characteristics of Negro Expression," 1934. Reprinted in *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Bonnie Kime Scott (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 176, 178.

26
For more on the relationship between blackness and current debates in new materialisms, see Huey Copeland, "Tending-toward-Blackness," *October* 156 (Spring 2016): 141–144.

27
I am grateful and indebted to Nikolas Oscar Sparks for his insightful and suggestive use of the phrase "black life matter" in our conversations about this article, and Hammons's and Barnette's respective works more generally.

Rashid Johnson, *Cosmic Slop "Bitter"*, 2015. Black soap, wax. Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth. Photo: Martin Parsekian

Michael Snow, Cecil Taylor, Arnold Rockman, Stu Broomer, and Harvey Cowan. Reinhardt's statement, published later as "Black as Symbol and Concept," opens like this:

> I started with black as a symbol, black as color, and the connotations of black in our culture where our whole system is imposed on us in terms of darkness, lightness, blackness, whiteness. Goodness and badness are associated with black. As an artist and painter, I would eliminate the symbolic pretty much, for black is interesting not as a color, but as a noncolor and the absence of color.[12]

Reinhardt would liberate black from its connotation, which is to say from its color, whereas Taylor, Reinhardt's counterpart and critical interlocutor, "speaks not only out of but also of the lived experience of the black," in other words, the enriching and enabling experience of the symbolic dimension of black.[13]

When we read about black art by black artists, they seem always to refer, however indirectly, to black lives (and deaths), and to living (and dying), in relation to their black art. So, even if they pivot away from figuration and toward greater abstraction, black life (and death) and lives (and deaths) still enter the frame and the conversation. This is perhaps why, as Moten notes, "Taylor interrupts himself and the conversation he joins" at this historic event "by raising the question of black dignity in a discourse on black art. He moves differently to Reinhardt, whose opening of the discussion is followed and carried forth in a kind of uninterrupted seriality by other participants in the conversation … before Taylor leaps, or breaks, in."[14] Black artists making black art move differently with and through the color black. At the outset of "The Case of Blackness," Moten declaims: "The cultural and political discourse on black pathology has been so pervasive that it could be said to constitute the background against which all representations of blacks, blackness, or (the color) black take place."[15] It is, in part, this discourse of pathology that prompts Reinhardt to displace and diminish the symbolic in the name of art-as-art. A work of art, for him, to say nothing of an artist, cannot be black in the symbolic sense and attain its true nature. Reinhardt believes this and he doesn't believe this; he is of two minds, let's say, a white mind and a black mind. "Reinhardt reads blackness at sight," Moten observes, "as held merely within the play of absence and presence. He is blind to the articulated combination of absence and presence in black that is in his face, as his work, his own production."[16] In order to recover the negativeness of black, Reinhardt attempts to shuck its negativity.[17] He is trapped in his own ostensibly nonsymbolic conception of concept and symbol, unable to see or to acknowledge the mixture, the "articulated combination," of absence and presence, concept and symbol, of color and noncolor in blackness and black.

It is precisely this willingness to work with, through, and against such negativity that has propelled the career of someone like Quentin Morris, a Philadelphia-based black artist who abandoned the figurative work he was trained to create as a scholarship student at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. In 1963, at the height of the US Civil Rights movement, Morris decided to begin working on "monochromatic painting … exclusively using black in a myriad of tonalities and textures to present black's intrinsically enigmatic beauty and infinite depth." Morris was, of course, relating in some way to the charged political atmosphere that year surrounding the pivotal March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, an event witnessed firsthand by fellow artists like Norman Lewis, Romare Bearden, and Ad Reinhardt himself. For Morris, it has been vital to undermine "the whole idea that black is supposed to be something macabre, negative, dirty, filthy," and to challenge the "racial stereotypes in there as well, and the whole thing about it being funereal." His black monochromes would thus serve "to refute all negative cultural mythologies about the color, and ultimately to create work that innately expresses the all-encompassing spirituality of life."[18]

Alex Baker, director of the Fleishman/Ollman Gallery in Philadelphia, describes Morris's use of black as an "oblique reflection on racism … subtly critiquing the dominant white culture's history of racism." And yet this engagement with the symbolic dimension of black does not in any respect distract from or diminish his exploration and experimentation with its formal qualities, its conceptual aspect. As Heidi Becker, co-owner of Larry Becker Contemporary Art, remarked: Morris's work is "immersive. The artist and viewer become consumed by it … There are no perceptual tricks or [high-tech] performances … Quentin uses black to distill everything to its essence."[19] Put slightly differently, the symbol, when addressed with care, is a conduit rather than an obstacle to the concept; the concrete, in its infinite depth, leads us toward rather than away from the universal and its infinite breadth. This is why Morris can eventually see no difference between his figurative and monochrome works. The border between the two, so central to the debate exercising the minds of the American Abstract Artists, had dissolved in

Contact Matters

Hammons and Barnette aesthetically unpack how visibility is always impeded by conditions of surveillance and policing aimed to delimit or fix black representational capacity specifically, and black ways of being writ large. Both artists reposition the ways that materials alert us to the textures of black life that are often flattened by logics of visibility alone, and in so doing open up corporeality and materiality as crucial archives of black radical aesthetics. As examples of Huey Copeland's opening provocation to pay heed to the "mattering of blackness itself," these works suggest we apply a collective weight, defying demands for legibility and instead enlivening opacities of visibility that might allow for a mode of mattering critically through contact.[26] Hammons and Barnette carefully materialize contact through the activation of skin, slide of grease, viscosity of paint, and adornment of touch as black life matter.[27] This kind of black radical aesthetics contours the limits of visibility and in so doing enacts a sense of resistance thoroughly felt.

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Barnette's riffs on the redactions of her father's file throw into even more crisis the conditions of visibility documented by the state's information-gathering protocols and subsequent practices of redaction.[20] The frustration of not knowing certain details transforms into a self-reflexive moment. The reality sets in: Even if all the words were there, made transparent, would that make the truth of this information somehow less disturbing? Isn't it enough to know that the government conducted sustained and invasive surveillance against political activists? Barnette moves us to ask these questions for what they mean *now*. If COINTELPRO pioneered state intelligence-gathering programs to date,[21] then Barnette's material methods take on ever contemporary meanings. Her application recalls a popular 1960s visual tactic: wheat-pasting, whereby political posters were glued in thick, repeated sequence on public walls. Here, spray paint, often associated with the 1980s urban aesthetic practice of graffiti, another method of visual intervention in public, is layered on top of this wheat-pasted wall. Barnette stages historical collision, where reproductions of 1960s and '70s photocopy ink is met with spray, a material associated with Sadie's generation. The conditions of visibility here are where history's present becomes activated – the relevance of COINTELPRO's legacy is functionally accented by an aesthetics generationally out of its reach. Sadie Barnette speaks here to the public function of seeing itself: radical visibility after COINTELPRO is always wrapped up in the nexus of policing, surveillance, criminalization, and vulnerability to state violence. Rodney Barnette's redacted FBI files make that reality certain, and Sadie Barnette's enhanced obfuscation make that reality felt.

This is best seen in Barnette's use of surface, as perfected in her shiny pink glitter wall, which stands adjacent to the document-laden wall. This wallpaper glows when the light catches it, making for a shine that radiates off the wall and mobilizes what art historian Krista Thompson has so brilliantly theorized as "shine": a black diasporic aesthetic strategy in which "the visual production of light reflecting off polished surfaces" emphasizes the "materiality and haptic quality of objects."[22] The shine invites the viewer to come close. Once close, we are met with Barnette's *Untitled (Dad's Mug shot)* (2016). Mounted in a frame far too large for what it carries sits another pencil drawing, this time a recreation of Rodney Barnette's mugshot as captured within his file. In an interview with her father, Sadie tells him:

> I also did a drawing of your mug shot. It's the only image in the FBI file and had been photocopied so many times that it had this poster-like quality to it. I wanted to draw it in pencil to really spend time and love laboring over it. Instead of the FBI investigating you, now I am creating a portrait of you using this material.[23]

The drawing's chiaroscuro is strikingly perfect as it embodies the effects of repeated photocopied reproduction, as well as the racialized politics of black and white. Barnette attends to the material effects of the copy as she herself reproduces the stark contrast of black and white, manifesting an image not of clarity but of obscurity, not of resemblance but of difference, not of distance but of intimacy.

This formal and material manifestation alerts us to the racial logics of the colors white and black, which have been adhered to subjects as signifiers of one's proximity to state violence and its attendant white supremacist logics. Barnette calls attention to the violences of anti-black racism through her recreation of her father's highly contrasted mugshot – there is no gray area, only the spaces between black and white. This image eerily reminds us of the manifest impacts of state violence at the affective ties that emerge from those who inherit these legacies. Hers is a labor of love aimed to rematerialize a mugshot into a portrait, a state-rendered image of criminalization into an intimate image of affection.[24]

Barnette's aesthetic materialism transforms an image meant to signal her father's (and by extension, the Movement's) criminalization into one of adornment, even celebration, thus making claims towards an intimacy that remains.[25] Barnette does this at the level of touch, as she spends time with the drawing, rendering her father's face with her own hand. Hers is a black radical aesthetic that demonstrates how these files tarry between public or private, wallpaper or wheat-paste, family album or FBI file, a cherished photograph or police mugshot. She works to trouble how knowledge is constituted through a rematerialization of intimate space, portraiture, and archives in black radical aesthetic practices. Barnette forces us to think about the intimate proximity between visibility, policing, and surveillance in the wake of COINTELPRO. In so doing, she traces her lineage, the evidence of her corporeality, through the lines and marks of ink on the page, through an image of her father flattened by protocol and the state's war on black radicals, until she arrives at an image of him that is only made possible by her touch, her aesthetic material. This is her life matter – her aesthetic materialization of black radical history's present.

articulated combination. Black, to repeat, is the singular unitary synthesis of all colors, the monochrome that is actually the articulated combination of the whole range of monochromes; a multichromatic monochrome; it is the color that is also all color and colors, including itself; it is, to use a mathematical phrasing, *the universal set*, the set of all sets, the logical paradox discovered by Bertrand Russell at the turn of the twentieth century: Russell's paradox, black's paradox. Black is inclusive of all color and colors without failing to be itself. It is inclusive insofar as it is itself. Black lacks for nothing.

Do we not see a similar technique at work in this younger generation of black artists working in and with black and blackness? One might think in this vein of Chicago-based artist Rashid Johnson's 2015 piece *Cosmic Slop "Bitter"*. The work is, according to the Guggenheim Museum, "created from a concoction of wax mixed with a black West African soap that is often used for the treatment of sensitive skin. Inscribed with the artist's dense mark-making, this work merges the modernist tradition of the black monochrome with the cultural resonances of its unconventional materials." These "cultural resonances" not only situate the artist within a

transnational and diasporic community of African descent, but also, by raising the problem of sensitive black skin, within a history of the body in which such skin has been rendered sensitive – to physical irritants, to physical assault, to denigration, and to celebration as well. This is, after all, *black* soap, not white, soothing and cleansing dark skin with darkness. The mark-making indicates the traditional customs of decorative scarification in the region, in which practitioners "place superficial incisions on their skin, using stones, glass or knives, amounting to permanent body decoration that communicates a myriad of cultural expressions."[20] As well, we cannot help but recall the disfiguring scars of the slaver's whip and chain in the historic instance, and the systemic sexual violation it implies. The latter point is underscored by the title, borrowed from the hit 1973 song of the same name by Parliament Funkadelic. "Cosmic Slop" is a lament and a tribute to a poor black woman, and mother of five, coerced into sex work by the combined effects of race, class, and gender domination. The soap may soothe and cleanse, but its taste, like the slop it washes away, is bitter. And all of this conveyed through the formal manipulation of tone and texture in the abstraction of black

Kimberly M. Becoat, *Absence of Subjection*, 2013. Rice paper, stones, mesh, acrylic and twine on paper. Courtesy of the artist.

monochrome.

Finally, consider Kimberly Becoat's 2013 *Absence of Subjection*, "a work that addresses remnants of past travels by Black Americans – either on their escapes to freedom or in their migrations from south to north, or in their displacement at present." In the artist's view, this work "serves as an homage to their souls." Created using a Sumi ink wash and black acrylic on treated rice paper, *Absence of Subjection* draws from a centuries-old East Asian painting style whose goal "is not simply to reproduce the appearance of the subject, but to capture its spirit" as well. The use of this style alludes to a much larger temporal frame than the several centuries of African American history, relativizing and destabilizing the seeming permanence of slavery, segregation, policing, and mass imprisonment. It also marshals what is historically an elite form to honor the lives and deaths of the most common and lowly. The mesh wire, twine, sand, and stone that lend density, structure, and granularity to the folds of delicate paper – like the sturdy bones hidden beneath vulnerable skin or the thick curly hair growing from its scalp – also cite the history and present of confinement behind iron or steel bars and the lethal ropes used to bind hands or feet and strangle or break necks. Travel is, then, a deliberately imprecise term here; it frustrates the idea of volition or will; it renders problematic notions like origin and destination; it suggests movements both passive (like displacements or abductions) and active (like escapes or migrations). Which is also to say it refers to the struggle of actual living, the striving of a people, of *the* people.[21]

The stunning ambiguity, and perhaps irony, of "absence" designated in the title relates to both the absences produced by subjection – the devastation and destruction of these epoch-making "high crimes against the flesh"[22] – and the (real or imagined) absence of subjection itself, what is present before, after, beneath, and in excess of that subjection along the way. We are brought into being – as potentiality – by the same processes by which we are subordinated by power.[23] In other words, we are or could be or become *blacks* if only we could affirm "our fundamental dependency on a [color] we never chose but that, paradoxically, initiates and sustains our agency"[24]; if we could love black, if we could dwell in blackness, the space of refusal and imagination. Blackening the world thus might begin by reframing the issues of greatest ethical concern with respect to those most blackened by their effects; it begins in curiosity about these effects. To think the terms of political analysis and mobilization, to say nothing of aesthetic practice and judgment, through a black or blackened lens is to think from the point of constitutive exclusion from those very terms, which is to say freedom from those very terms insofar as that exclusion is affirmed.[25] Black is generous and generative, inclusive and encompassing. Black is color, noncolor, and all colors. All colors are initially, eventually black, but they cannot give or give back unless and until they see themselves and others as such. Black is and is not (only) itself. To see or not to see is the question of blackness itself: "You could build a world out of need or you could hold / everything black and see."

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Portions of this essay were first delivered as a lecture to Professor Randy Cutler's Chroma seminar at the Emily Carr University of Art + Design in 2016. My thanks to EJ for inspiration, direction, and collaboration in the ongoing project; to Professor Cutler for the generous invitation and hospitality; and to the many students and faculty in attendance for very engaging, critical feedback. Any limitations or errors are, of course, my own.

Barnette's leadership in the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPP) was the primary justification for this level of government interest in his activities. Barnette opened the BPP's Compton office and emerged as a central figure in community organizing. The FBI's surveillance of his everyday activities was comprehensive to say the least. It included a steady team of SAs who conducted routine surveillance, harassed people close to Barnette, and attempted to frame him in conducting illegal activities by soliciting informants to infiltrate the BPP.[19] Apart from its many disturbing revelations, Barnette's FBI file marks the state's overall structural investment in maintaining sight of him – keeping him in view at all times as a standard measure of policing and criminalization.

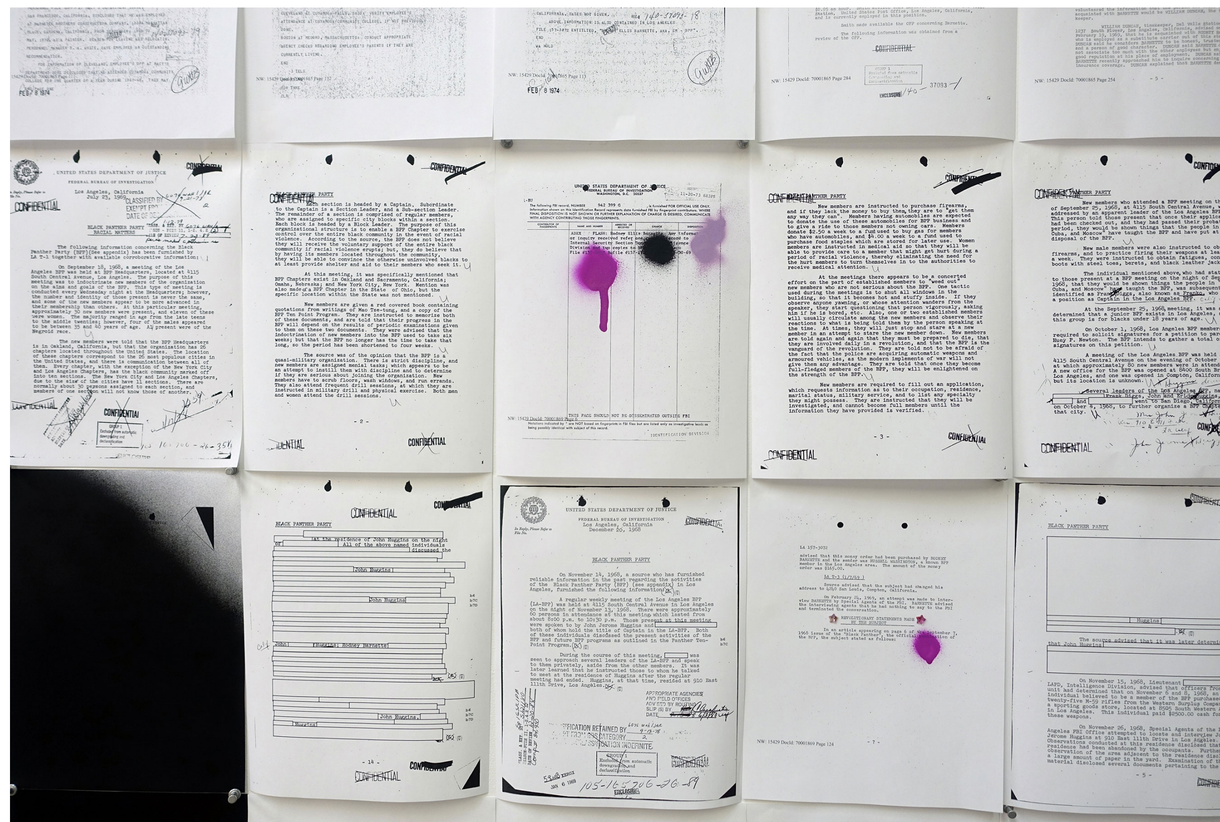
These uses of sight are evidenced in the amassed pages of FBI files obtained by Barnette and his family after filing a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request some decades later. These documents reveal a decentralized strategy aimed not only to keep an eye on Barnette, but to archive and materially record activities as noteworthy. These typed memos were relentlessly photocopied, faxed, and filed away in FBI field offices and headquarters around the country. While we have no certain way of tracing how these documents circulated, we can speculate that this paperwork fell into the hands of hundreds of governmental employees, were read by several officers, and even probably occupied file cabinets across the nation. Barnette's surveillance therefore reflects a long-standing practice of policing black people at the level of sight. It also reveals how policing is recorded through documentation that necessitates a *particular kind* of material practices.

Rodney Barnette's files take on a radically different material character in his daughter Sadie's hands. When received by the Barnettes, these documents looked like all FOIA-requested FBI files – full of redactions, visibly represented by thick strikethrough rectangles, sometimes filled in black, but mostly left open in white. These redactions staccato the flow of information, as they leave crucial details hidden. What are the names of the secret agents that followed Barnette and Davis on June 16, 1972? Who was "at the residence of John Huggins on the night of "? Who were "all of the above named individuals" now obscured by empty white boxes, save for Huggins and Barnette, whose names repeatedly appear on page 14 of the released files? These spaces are evidence of the state's withholding, as the information left unseeable is most often the information most wanted – the details of operations, names of informants or agents, and goals and targets of key events. The desire to know is impeded by these stubborn obstructions, which protect the state from relinquishing details that would further support claims by victims of COINTELPRO of governmental overreach, violation of constitutional rights, and the encouragement – if not incitement – of violence against black radicals.

Sadie Barnette troubles the central role of sight in a series of 2016 works that utilize her father's FBI file as raw source material. Barnette's installation of three works, *My Father's FBI File, Project 1* (2016), *Untitled (J. Edgar Hoover)* (2016), and *Untitled (Dad's Mug shot)* (2016), were show-stopping contributions to the Oakland Museum of California's "All Power to the People: Black Panthers at 50" (2016), an exhibition commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the BPP's founding. Nestled in the corner of the exhibition, taking up two adjoining walls, Barnette approaches these documents as archival materials which bring her into closer proximity to her father specifically, and to the Black Liberation Movement more broadly. In this way, she channels these documents' historical import into a contemporary discourse on their repercussions for post-1960s social movements and those who inherit their legacies.

For *My Father's FBI File, Project 1* (2016), on one wall, Barnette transformed 180 pages of her father's file into a wheat-pasted wallpaper that covers the entirety of the 9' × 13' museum wall, from the ceiling to the floor. Rather than display these documents as received in their fully redacted format, Barnette flourishes them with bright pink and purple hues or thick coats of black spray paint that selectively obscure legibility, and thus accentuate the paint's density in relation to the flatness of the glued documents. What comes into focus as one steps back from *My Father's FBI Files, Project 1*, is the spray paint applied to select pages by Barnette's own hands. Her pinks, purples, and blacks obscure portions of text and page into further illegibility, rendering opaque already impenetrable memos, descriptions, and data. She coats aerosol paint on decisively, allowing splatters of color to delicately sit on the page before laying it on so thick that its viscosity bubbles from the surface. Fully realizing the wallpaper motif, Barnette mounts ornamented frames that hold family photos. Next to these photos sits *Untitled (J. Edgar Hoover)* (2016), a 22" × 30" pencil drawing in a plain white frame. The drawing is Barnette's rendering of the most notable signature in all the files: "Very truly yours, John Edgar Hoover Director." Sandwiched between "yours" and "John" is the infamous COINTELPRO architect's signature, brilliantly forged and magnified by Sadie Barnette herself.

Sadie Barnette, *Untitled (Dad's Mug shot)*, 2016. (installation view) Graphite paper.



Sadie Barnette, *My Father's FBI Files, Project 1*, 2016. (installation detail) 180 laser prints, aerosol paint, family photographs Figure 3

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1
For an introduction to the political orientation of the Movement for Black Lives, see "A Vision for Black Lives: Policy Demands for Black Power, Freedom and Justice" (2016) https://policy.m4bl.org/. For a critical analysis of #BlackLivesMatter, see Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016). For an account of abolitionism's historical role as source of inspiration and instruction for progressive and radical movements more generally, see Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

2
See Jared Sexton, "The Vel of Slavery: Tracking the Figure of the Unsovereign," *Critical Sociology*, vol. 42, no. 4–5 (2016): 583–597, 593. I argue there that abolition is not only the historical movement to end the racial domination of chattel slavery and its varied permutations. It is also, by definition and of necessity, a movement to abolish the coloniality of power in the fullest sense, driven by a radical will that is antiracist, feminist, queer, and socialist at least. It is the movement that encompasses – in the dual sense of causing and including – the whole range of left movements in their most radical form and function. It is, or could become, the true movement of movements.

3
Cullors and Bernard were in public conversation on related topics at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles last summer. See Jessica Roy, "MOCA's Black Lives Matter Event Turns Into Community Forum," *Los Angeles Times*, July 8, 2016 http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-black-lives-matter-moca-grief-20160707-snap-story.html. A podcast of the event is available online http://www.moca.org/program/what-is-contemporary-black-lives-matter-patrisse-cullors-and-tanya-lucia-bernard-in-conversation.

4
For an overview of events, see "How Are Artists Supporting Black Lives Matter?" *The Chart*, vol. 1, no. 8 (2016) http://thechart.me/black-lives-matter-reading-list/.

5
Tom Vanderbilt, "Darkness Visible," *Cabinet* 12 (2003) http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/12/vanderbilt.php.

6
There is a conversation to be had between what I am trying to formulate (with the help of many others thinking in the wake of afro-pessimism), François Laruelle's thoughts on "the black universe" (as an aspect of his larger non-philosophy), and the critical interpretations of his interlocutors. Andrew Culp recently attempted such a theoretical encounter but, unfortunately, the engagement with afro-pessimism in particular and black studies more generally is so glib and impatient that the statement fails to be anything except a rather presumptuous and, I have to say, obscurely motivated chastisement. And the treatments of Laruelle and company, though more affirmative, are no more precise. Basic exposition and some sense of rationale, prior to any attempted analysis, let alone critique, would go a long way toward promoting genuine intellectual engagement. As such, it does little to advance *any* of the projects evoked. Culp, in a sense, repeats Ad Reinhardt's error (discussed below) in reverse: instead of imposing the false dichotomy of concept/symbol, he assumes it can be bypassed in advance. See Andrew Culp, "Afro-Pessimism as Aesthetic Blackness? Putting the Pessimism in Afro-Pessimism," *NON*, January 8 (2016) http://non.copyriot.com/afro-pessimism-as-aesthetic-blackness-putting-the-pessimism-in-afro-pessimism/; Eugene Thacker et al., *Dark Nights of the Universe* (Miami: (NAME) Publications, 2013).

7
Paul La Farge, "Colors / Black," *Cabinet* 36 (2009–10) http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/36/lafarge.php.

8
Fred Moten, "The Case of Blackness," *Criticism*, vol. 50, no. 2 (2008): 177–218. Reinhardt's "art-as-art" is not to be confused with the Romantic notion of "art for art's sake" (e.g., Theophile Gautier's *l'art pour l'art*). The former is an aesthetic strategy for isolating elements of appearance, the latter an aesthetic philosophy for isolating art from an acknowledged political function. See, respectively, Barbara Rose, *Art as Art: The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991) and Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Art for Art's Sake: Aestheticism in Victorian Painting* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007). For more on Reinhardt, see Michael Corris, *Ad Reinhardt* (New York: Reaktion Books, 2008).

9
Michael Sciam, *Piet Mondrian: An Explanation of the Work*, trans. unknown (Bormio: Associazione nuova culturale, 2006), 137. Also available online →. For more, see *Inside Out Victory Boogie Woogie: A Material History of Mondrian's Masterpiece*, eds. Maarten Van Bommel, Hans Janssen and Ron Spronk (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

10
Moten, "The Case of Blackness," 193.

11
Ibid., 189.

12
Rose, *Art as Art*, 86.

13
Moten, "The Case of Blackness," 192. Taylor, of course, is no folk artist and he is no stranger to abstraction. He is a paragon of abstraction, in fact, a pioneer of the free jazz movement, and for this reason maybe the most central source of guidance for Moten, who considers Taylor to be a uniquely brilliant artist and theorist as well as a representative of the unparalleled power of the black musical tradition more broadly. Taylor's 1966 magnum opus, *Unit Structures*, is something like a musical Mondrian or vice versa. For more on Taylor's life and work, see Howard Mandel, *Miles, Ornette, Cecil: Jazz Beyond Jazz* (New York: Routledge, 2008) and A. B. Spellman, *Four Jazz Lives* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004) as well as Moten's own engagement in his *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), especially Chapter 1.

14
Moten, "The Case of Blackness," 191.

15
Ibid., 177.

16
Ibid., 190.

17
"For Reinhardt, the multiplicity of symbolic meanings that have been attached to the color black – sinfulness, evil, femininity, maternity, formlessness, and the 'yearning for whiteness in the West that counters and accompanies these meanings' – are and must be detachable from the absence (of difference) that defines and is internal to the color black. This detachment is in the interest of 'the negativeness of black', which interests Reinhardt" (Ibid., 191).

18
Stan Mir, "And Then There Is Using Whatever Happens: Quentin Morris' 'Untitled'," *Hyperallergic*, May 21, 2016 http://hyperallergic.com/300498/and-then-there-is-using-whatever-happens-quentin-morriss-untitled/. Morris's statements here may seem to accord with Reinhardt, insofar as both profess a desire to engage the color black against or apart from its "negative cultural mythologies," but it would be a mistake to conflate their respective approaches. Reinhardt takes the contest over black's symbolic dimension, offering either affirmation or refutation of its negative cultural mythologies, to be a barrier to the expression of its conceptual power. So, while Reinhardt does not seek to redeem black with the production of positive images, say, he neutralizes his work as a symbolic intervention per se. And, of course, there is no way to remain neutral on a moving train, as the people's historian Howard Zinn often reminded us. Morris, however, frames what Moten calls "the cultural and political discourse of black pathology" as a structuring antagonism, one that can be challenged and re-signified, perhaps, but not resolved, much less eschewed or evaded. Moreover, that critical engagement with the antagonism of anti-blackness is, for Morris, the very means by which the conceptual power of black is activated, the untranscendable horizon of its creative power. Consider that, despite and across the myriad transformations in contemporary art, Morris has continued to work in black monochrome for well over fifty years!

19
A. M. Weaver, "Artist Quentin Morris Explores the Color Black," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 19, 2016 http://www.philly.com/philly/entertainment/arts/20160519_Artist_Quentin_Morris_explores_the_color_black.html.

20
Katherine Brooks, "This Is The Last Generation of Scarification in Africa," *Huffington Post*, September 23, 2014 http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/09/23/scarification_n_5850882.html.

21
Becoat's body of work to date seems as much an adventure in form, color, and texture as an extended meditation on what it means to inhabit conditions of unrelenting racial domination, in its gendered and sexual dimensions. See, for instance, her entire "urban hottentot series" as well as her pieces on racial residential segregation (*blink – 'gentrification', blink – gentrification #2*) and scientific exploitation (*soon henrietta come hela*, *blackness all inside*) http://kimberlymbecoat.squarespace.com/.

22
Hortense Spillers, *Black, White and In Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 206. Space does not allow for an elaboration of the several concepts converging in this oft-cited phrase. This includes Spillers' recourse to the notion of "high crimes" – a political charge brought peculiarly against government officials or others in positions of great authority for dereliction of duty and, in the US context, leading to impeachment – and Spillers' enigmatic notion of "the flesh," particularly as it is distinguished from the body as a figure of corporeal integrity and finitude. Much has been debated of late regarding the flesh/body distinction and the exchanges have often generated more heat than light. But aside from the evident theological reference and resonance involved in any conception of flesh (e.g., the flesh viz. the spirit and the word), we would need to think as well on this count about Spillers' re-articulation of certain arguments from de Certeau, which Spillers cites directly on various occasions, and from Merleau-Ponty, whose "indirect ontology" provides, I think, a background interlocution with Spillers' most famous interventions. See Michel de Certeau, "Tools for Body-Writing," Intervention 21/22 (1988): 7-11 and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968). The flesh, for de Certeau, is a sort of carnal raw material that is inscribed or textualized into legible embodiment by the range of economic, legal, political, social practices. The practices that produce legible embodiment can also, by that same token, render the body as illegible and formless, i.e., as flesh. The flesh, for Merleau-Ponty, is neither a pre-cultural state of nature nor a degraded (natural) status to which the (cultural) body could be reduced (though he had much to say about the latter potential), but rather a term for something like the fundamental ontological connection of all that exists (and not only all life) across the divisions of nature/culture, self/other, mind/body and so on. High crimes against the flesh perpetrated by the regime of racial slavery might, then, be read in at least two ways: 1) as a crime committed against no-body and thus no legible subject of law and/or 2) as a crime committed against that undivided primordial being which is neither (yet or still) subject nor (yet or still) object. Depending on the inflection, then, differentiation or undifferentiation is the problem. And, moreover, the high crimes allegation would seem rather fitting here because enslavement in this sense represents not simply a violent transgression against another, however severe and permanent, but also a fundamental political irresponsibility toward fleshly embodiment and/or an absolute ethical disregard for the flesh of the world. I note, in this vein, the recurrent use of the term "lifeworld" in Spillers' writing (from Husserl to Habermas and beyond), suggesting a broader and more sustained critical engagement with the phenomenological tradition on her part that has yet to be addressed fully in the secondary literature. One has only to recall this note from Merleau-Ponty to suspect the richness of the exploration: "Do a psychoanalysis of Nature: it is the flesh, the mother" (267). How might that psychoanalysis unfold once it is admitted that these most basic terms – nature, flesh, mother – are the very ways and means for the production of racial difference, and hence freedom and captivity, as such? I hope to take up this and related questions elsewhere.

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See, for instance, Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997). Saidiya Hartman's contemporaneous *Scenes of Subjection: Slavery, Terror and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) elaborates on points found in Butler but also, due to her stronger psychoanalytic inflections and closer attention to conditions of political economic and socio-legal extremity, diverges in her further complication of notions of agency, resistance, and transformation.

24
Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 2.

25
This piece was written before I had the opportunity to read Zakiyyah Jackson's recent article "Losing Manhood," *qui parle*, vol. 25, no. 1–2 (2016): 95–136. I take to heart her central point that blackness is not simply excluded from the principle terms of modern human being from the dominant vantage, but rather forcibly included as the permanently degraded form of human animality, i.e., a racist (de)humanization. And so suggesting that exclusion might be a negative condition of possibility for freedom is, bearing this in mind, no mean feat and so may need to be rethought altogether. I hope to take up some of the illuminating arguments and provocative questions posed there in future work.

vigilante anti-black violence; post-Civil Rights black poverty; and, finally, the Black Power politics that shaped and shifted then-contemporary politics. *Caution* images the so-called pedestrian, everyday taxonomies that present and exceed these histories, while enlivening and inhabiting others.

The Opacity of Defense

Emphasis on the pedestrian is followed up in Hammons's 1974 print *Defend Your Walk*. The grayish pigment bursts from the black plane to render an incredibly detailed, full image on the left, which blurs into fragmented parts, until the print fades to black. Moving from left to right makes it seem like the figure is walking backwards – defending his walk back, or defensively walking back, depending on who's looking. This printed body is composed of multiple parts of Hammons's body: his face, shoulder to elbow, forearm, and, in one iteration, his hand. While these elements are legible, Hammons overwhelmingly obscures most of the image, drawing on what Caribbean philosopher Éduoard Glissant theorizes as "opacity" – a response to Western colonial impulses for a transparent world that perpetuates a "lukewarm humanism, both colorless and reassuring."[13] In my adoption of the term in relation to Hammons, opacity is a strategy that saturates the field of vision in the very matter of blackness as a means of obscuring desires to see and know entirely, to make transparent. Opacity denies complete incorporation, and directs us to ways of being and knowing that are vibrant, untamed, and free-floating. Opacity strives towards an "opportune obscurity" such that a type of aesthetic autonomy and resistant, black inhabitation can exist.[14] In Hammons's works, opacity invokes the brutality waged against black subjects at the level of representation, while also signaling an aesthetic presence that resists and refuses such violent categorizations. To put it baldly, these prints don't just picture, but materialize skin, corporeality, and blackness in order to alert us to possible subterranean ways of black being that refuse racist typologies often governed by sight.[15]

Taken together, *Caution* and *Defend Your Walk* both offer insight into what it means to be black in public – the need for caution or defense in everyday life, the routine acts of surveillance that often accompany quotidian activities, and the ever looming possibilities of violences unforeseen. Considering that both works were made when the impacts of the black liberation struggle were felt nationally and black radicals were met with more violent reactionary force than could be anticipated, these prints suggest that we attend to black corporeality and materiality in the everyday. If the street is where both radical protest and white supremacist violence most visibly take place, then turning to the pedestrian qualities of black life is of urgent political need. Hammons asks: How might we defend our walks? How might we remain cautioned and vigilant against the transparent impulses of anti-black violence? How might we return to a political opacity that alludes to the depth of inhabitation and repurposes the surface for opaque possibilities of black being?

Hammons's 1970s prints ask us to reconsider the black body in public in light of the history of racist projections rehearsed through scopic regimes of sight and white supremacist violences in the everyday. Skin becomes a surface that materializes black radical presence, and being in one's skin is but one of many modes of opaque inhabitation, in which the possibilities of political refusal might take shape.

Redaction and Affection in Sadie Barnette's Aesthetic Materialism

> On June 15, 1972, Rodney Barnette was observed embarking on American Airlines Flight 474 in the company of Angela Davis. This flight was en route from San Francisco to Chicago.
> – Observation by FBI special agents (June 16, 1972)

By 1972, the FBI had amassed an unprecedented amount of surveillance documentation under their now infamous Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO). This program had successfully carried out a complex network of operations aimed to discredit, dismantle, and destroy black radical activists, organizations, and movements.[16] Collected among over five hundred pages of FBI documents on Rodney Ellis Barnette,[17] the two-sentence memo above is striking. Barnette was followed by FBI special agents (SAs) for years. His everyday movements and activities were under constant surveillance. This particular surveillance operation was conducted just eleven days after Angela Y. Davis was found not guilty on charges of murder, kidnapping, and criminal conspiracy. Barnette lived with Davis during the duration of her trial and was in charge of her personal security.[18] Here, even after Davis was rendered not guilty and without a single criminal charge leveled against Barnette, we're given a scene of relentless government surveillance and invasion of privacy – an all-seeing operation invested in policing Davis's and Barnette's lives.

The FBI's ongoing and invasive surveillance documentation reveals a deep investment in keeping track of Barnette's every move.

movement, as many of these prints mobilize issues central to black people in the US, including the production of racist stereotypes and more explicit images associated with the black freedom struggle, as in *Caution*. For these prints, Hammons coated grease onto various parts of his body – his arms, legs, torso, and face. He then laid and pressed these body parts onto paper and, subsequently, applied powdered colorant, which stuck directly onto the greased impressions. Hammons's use of grease is part and parcel of his interest in the ways that materials are racialized, and how those materials might be applied in such ways that potentially disturb racist logics or unravel their affects.[9] Hammons's use of grease to adhere pigment onto his skin takes on a particular charge – its stickiness coats black pigment onto the trace of Hammons's black skin, thus doubly signifying the social chromatism of the color black, while the grease's slipperiness when skin touches surface enlivens a particular understanding of the precarity of blackness. In this process, Hammons blends material – grease, skin, pigment – in such a way that confuses the relationship between primer, pigment, and surface.

Body Prints engages the curious work of the epidermis, Hammons's passport to the relationship between surface and interior, skin and self, boundary and body. Hammons's 1970 works are in fact an activation of Frantz Fanon's insistence that the history of blackness is adhered to and mediated by the black subject's racial epidermal schema: the awareness that one's exposure to racial violence is sighted and sited at the level of skin, which becomes the surface of racist projections writ large.[10] By transforming his own skin from a surface upon which racist typologies are projected into a transfer point of material from self to surface, Hammons confuses the line between subject/object and body/print.[11] This material confusion opens up the dynamism between the process of rendering, the impression of Hammons's black skin as matrix,[12] and the subject of the work, as a nonrepresentational yet figurative engagement with what it means to be black. Print and skin are elided into a fleshly surface rendered to trouble the boundaries between both at the level of sight. In this series, Hammons deploys various citational practices that reference taxonomies of slaves as living commodities brought through the Middle Passage; binding legal contracts of slave purchases; lynching photographs; police and

David Hammons, *Defend Your Walk*, 1974. Body print, 31 Figure 2.5 x 42 in.

Sampada Aranke

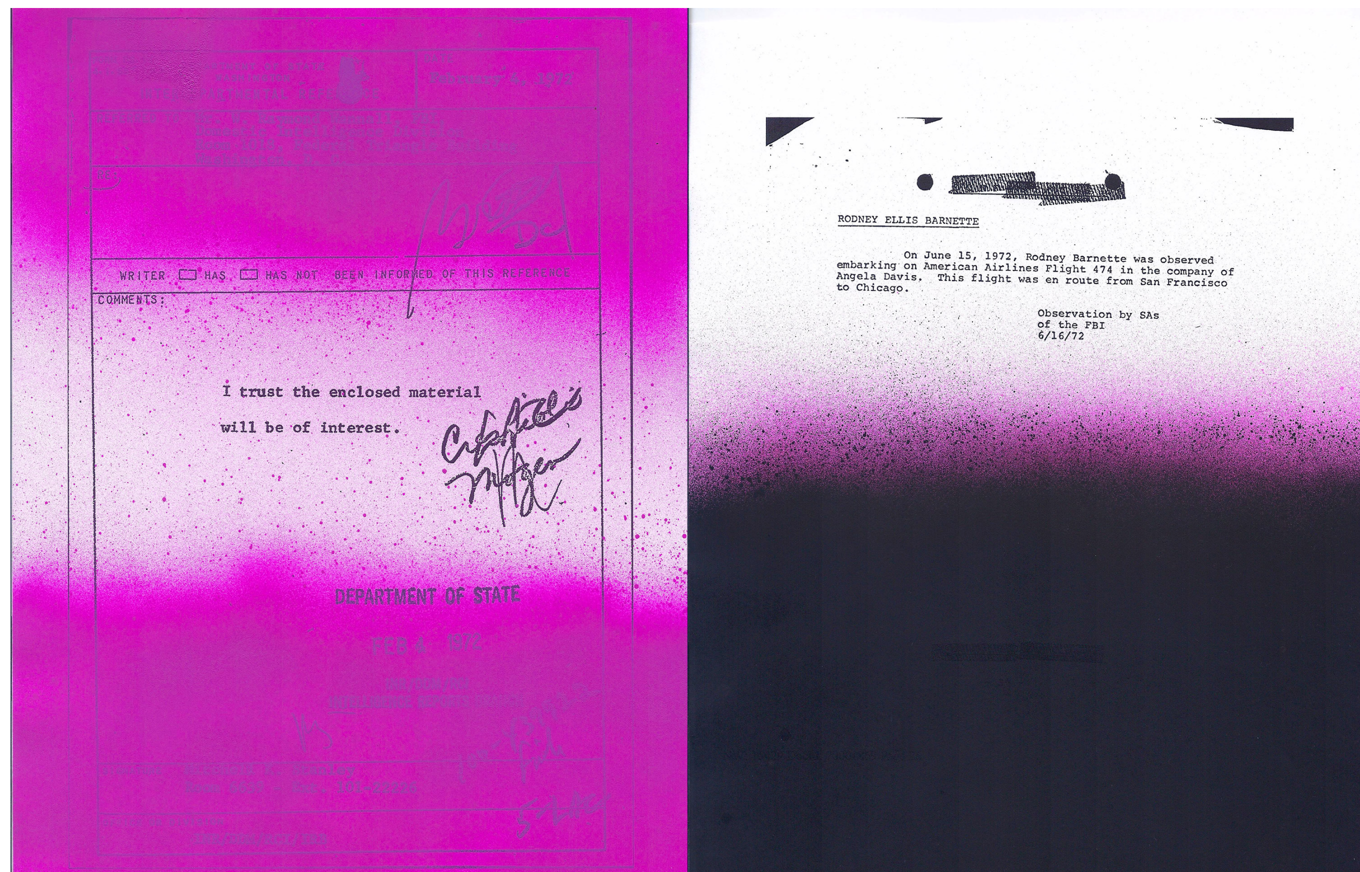
Material Matters: Black Radical Aesthetics and the Limits of Visibility

Particularly in relation to African American historical images, we need to find ways of incorporating them into "social and political memory, instead of using [them] as a substitute which encourages the atrophy of such memory."
– Angela Y. Davis (including a quotation by John Berger), "Afro Image: Politics, Fashion, Nostalgia" (1994)

If, in the words of the latest rallying cry, "black lives matter," then we must recalibrate our modes of reading, thinking, and acting in order to pay heed to the political ontology of race and to the mattering of blackness itself.
– Huey Copeland, "Tending-toward-Blackness" (2016)

Contemporary black radical aesthetic practices that emphasize materials that surface, texture, and visualize blackness ineluctably trouble, if not unravel, the panoptic qualities of the visual itself. It is without a doubt that images play a hyperactive role in our understanding of black life, but what of the *material matters* of black resistance? In my use of the phrase, black radical aesthetic practices endeavor to recompose the relationship between the body and visibility, often by sidestepping representational mandates towards "accuracy." Instead, these practices turn to the potentiality of abstract or conceptual approaches in materializing black corporeality.[1] Much attention has been paid to the vexed relationship between representation and black cultural forms in light of white supremacist practices that have produced and policed images of black people along the spectrum of spectacular and quotidian violence.[2] By emphasizing abstract and conceptual artistic practices, my definition of black radical aesthetics builds upon the notion of blackness as anoriginary abstraction – a category created in the service of devastating material, corporeal, and psychological violences that trafficked through the Middle Passage and whose afterlives are still active today.[3] Abstract and conceptual practices do not abandon the social, cultural, and material meanings that blackness invokes. As Adrienne Edwards has lucidly noted, these practices turn to what blackness "does in the world without conflating it – and those who understand blackness from within a system that deems them black, that is black people – with a singular historical narrative or monolithic subjectivity."[4]

In this spirit, the black radical aesthetic practices detailed here fully activate many of the



Sadie Barnette, *My Father's FBI Files, Project 1*, 2016. (detail) 180 laser prints, aerosol paint, family photograph

aims of the black freedom struggle through conceptual and material choices that disturb visibility as a measure of black presence. Instead, these approaches impede sight. They trouble its stability and open up modes of touch that reroute our expectations. This essay focuses on select works by David Hammons and Sadie Barnette that ask us to consider what constitutes the matter of black life, and in so doing reclaim the place of material and the body as archives of black radical history.

Hammons opens up the complex dynamics between what Frantz Fanon called the "racialized epidermal schema" that composes blackness, and the representational traps of the two-dimensional surface.[5] In Hammons's case, skin becomes the cause and effect of his 1970s *Body Prints.* These works turn to the materiality of surface to comment upon quotidian exposures to violence in everyday black life. For Barnette, her father's FBI file becomes the source material through which she materializes the complex politics of inheritance between black liberation struggles of the long 1960s and their impacts upon her own sense of self. Barnette mines the FBI file as a personal archive, and in so doing manipulates the documents therein towards a radical aesthetic materialization. While both artists produce works in distinct historical contexts, to mobilize their practices together opens up the conditions of possibility for us to rethink, if not re-inhabit, black radical history's present.

Caution in David Hammons's Surfaces

A pigment-saturated black fist is brought into stark clarity, centered within a sun-like round. Underneath, the fist's forearm trails off, like an ellipsis, only to be boldly interrupted by obtuse bright yellow rectangles, aligned at the bottom of the page like a crosswalk. Titled *Caution* (1971–72), the greased and pigmented black fist, an iconic if not now overdetermined signifier for black liberation struggles, rises out of a pedestrian site – one that directs us to look both ways, take heed, remain vigilant.

Caution is one of many prints in Hammons's *Body Prints* series, which were made in Los Angeles in the 1970s.[6] While Hammons did not formally belong to black radical organizations, during the time he lived and worked in Los Angeles – 1963 until the mid-1970s[7] – he and other abstract and conceptual black artists did "redefine black consciousness in art."[8] The *Body Prints* series most notably takes on commitments crucial to the Black Power

David Hammons, *Caution*, c. 1971-1972. Body print, 37 x 28 in, Edition 4/10.