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Same as round 1

Blaxploitation

If we had to characterize the 1AC’s performance by genre, it would definitely be a Blaxploitation film. Heroic black male protagonists are set up as figures of violent liberation in reference to much broader and multifaceted cultural movements of black liberation. This is troubling because it’s a performative form that silences and marginalizes women of color, ultimately undermining its liberatory aims

Terry 2012

Terry, John Robert, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, "Towards the Gendering of Blaxploitation and Black Power." <http://www.jmu.edu/history/mhr/wm_library/2012_-_4_John_Robert_Terry.pdf>

Many who have written about Blaxploitation have employed very limited concepts of¶ black power even as they explicitly link the genre to the ideology. In general, this has caused¶ scholars to misjudge black power’s apparent decline. Black power should be defined simply as¶ self-determination within the black community based on a sense of group solidarity and the¶ valuation of blackness and black cultural products. Scholars such as Eddie Glaude, William Van¶ Deburg, Adolph Reed, Jr. and others have delineated the different aspects of Black Nationalism¶ (economic, religious, revolutionary, territorial, cultural) that make up more specific black power¶ ideologies.3 There is much overlap between these distinctions but some are, in the case of¶ economic and revolutionary black nationalisms, either mutually exclusive or contradictory. The¶ biggest problems with these definitions are not their specificity or contradictory nature, but that¶ they fail to account for the gender dynamics of black power and the marginalization of women¶ that ended up alienating allies and ~~crippling~~ [hurting] some of the most visible strands of the movement.¶ This problem has carried over into studies of Blaxploitation. Scholars studying the genre¶ have generally attempted to fit their analysis of these films into a one-dimensional, static vision¶ of black power. To better understand the genre’s popularity among its primarily young, male,¶ black audience we need to understand the competing gendered visions of black power. Despite¶ women’s roles in the movement, male standards for black liberation dominated not only the¶ Blaxploitation genre but other pop-cultural and mass-mediated perceptions as well. For groups¶ such as the Black Panthers, CORE, and the Black Muslims, “liberation” was a goal that was¶ maintained even as these groups actively marginalized black women. Black power is often¶ remembered as something that was violent, male-dominated, and unreasonable – a black fantasy¶ – when in fact it was a dynamic form of race consciousness resulting from constant negotiations¶ of gender, class status, friendships, community affiliations, religious and political preferences,¶ notions of freedom, and concerns about the position of black people in the United States and the¶ world. It was a political act and even a way of life to some, for others, it was one ideology¶ among others and to many it was something with which they rarely concerned themselves.¶ Black power is recognizable in protest, film, rhetoric, literature, music, poetry, revolutionary¶ posturing, etc. The important thing to recognize is that the term meant different things to¶ different people and drew differing levels of commitment. Blaxploitation films most often fit a very specific, almost cartoonish version of black¶ power that emphasized the rhetorical posture of would be liberators, in many cases strong black¶ men and women who assisted the black community through singular acts of violence or revenge.¶ That filmmakers would parrot this type of black power for profit is not surprising. The most¶ prominent (or at least the loudest and most visible) black power advocates often defined –¶ through their appearance, rhetoric, and ubiquity in the media – the term for movie makers and¶ audience members. Many critics realized that Blaxploitation films were, in almost every respect,¶ counter-revolutionary and counter to the liberation of black people. However, even the harshest¶ critics of the violence and stereotypes found in Blaxploitation remained quiet about one of the¶ genre’s most salient features: the marginalization of women deriving from the genre’s insistence¶ on maintaining rigid gender hierarchies, even as women played central roles in some of its most¶ popular films.4 Through an examination what are widely considered representative Blaxploitation films, it is possible to see how these movies promoted and adhered to a¶ hierarchical, male version of black power and hence contributed to the overall decline of the¶ movement by popularizing a dangerous stereotype of liberation as violent, individual acts of¶ revenge against whites.

We present an alternative performance -

Play this video until the 0:50 mark -

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=regFjDLs3Ac&feature=player_detailpage>

The 1AC’s rejection of civic engagement forecloses transportation infrastructure as a site for performances that reconstitute civic engagement as a point of entry for critique – the Teatro Luna performance we just showed you offers a model for performance practice that engages participation through relating the traumas of female bodies of color.

Klein 2011

Emily Klein, assistant professor of modern drama and English at Birmingham Southern College, “Spectacular Citizenships: Staging Latina Resistance through Urban Performances of Pain,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*¶ Vol. 32, No. 1, Gender and the City: The Awful Being of Invisibility 2011

Not just a legal category, a stamp, or a government-issued document, citizenship in the age of twenty-first-century globalization is increasingly being thought of and studied as an embodied act, a dynamic set of behaviors, and a category of live (and lived) performance. Because of its role in transnational life, the modern city serves as the most obvious staging ground for performed citizenships. Distinct from traditional definitions of legal and political citizenship that entail obeying laws and helping to craft them, these new brands of embodied and engaged citizenship promote the broader values of critical reflection and, when necessary, active and spectacular expressions of dissent. Variously termed cultural citizenship, moral citizenship, and a citizenship of engagement, emergent streams of visibly resistant civic participation have been theorized by a small subset of scholars across a broad range of disciplines.¶ Critics of the modern city have suggested that these new models of engaged citizenship are constituted primarily by the volatile and efficacious social interactions that have come to define city life. From protests, strikes, and picket lines to public performances and street art, popular urban modes of political and self-expression have helped to solidify a Western conception of cities as places where collective action comes to a head and incites social change. Gyan Prakash argues that "modern urban life … has produced new subjects, solidarities and meanings. The cityscape—its streets and sidewalks, its public space, the ebb and flow of its crowd, its infrastructure of transportation—has served as the setting for dynamic encounters and experiences." For feminist scholars one point of entry within this new area of research is to articulate how revolutionary urban models of female participatory citizenship reframe and expand the practices and rituals that have traditionally been associated with women in the public sphere.¶ This essay takes up two examples of this phenomenon: the now canonical Madres de la Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires and the less widely known Chicago-based Teatro Luna. The Madres are a group of mothers whose children were the victims of state-sponsored violence during the Dirty War. Their weekly protest events have become increasingly performative in the decades since they began their public marches around the Plaza de Mayo. Teatro Luna, a pan-Latina performance collective, stages innovative theatrical workshops and productions that aim to represent and advocate for the rights of Latina and Hispana women. These all-female urban collectives have each used established Latin@ performance traditions like the escrache and the carpa, as well as cultural archetypes like the mater dolorosa, to invert and politicize stereotypical Latina modes of citizenship for the purpose of reframing loss and trauma to incite social change. I argue that by using urban spaces as their staging ground for politically resistant performances of pain, Teatro Luna and the Madres creatively adapt traditional Latin@ performance practices to attract and mobilize new audiences.¶ Key to these spectacularly performative inversions is the addition of the disruptive, raucous spirit that Yolanda Broyles-Gonzalez identifies as relajo. Even when performing stories of pain, the Madres and Teatro Luna both employ the resistant, mocking mood of relajo, which was first defined by Mexican philosopher Jorge Portilla as a "negation of required conduct" that "constitutes a subjective positioning of dissent vis-à-vis the dominant values of the social whole." This mode of boisterous and sometimes ironic critique allows Teatro Luna and activist groups affiliated with the Madres to question and subvert the status quo while still relaying their own traumatic stories as evidence of the need for structural change. While these two groups use entirely different performative modalities to reach their audiences—the street protest and the improvised short sketch—they both see relajo as a flexible but culturally specific way to attract engaged spectators and build community spirit.

Men have to acknowledge their system of unearned privileges especially in the classroom in order to advance any form of communication.

**Schacht** (steven, self-identified radical feminist queer who is an associate professor of sociology and women's studies teaching associate at Plattsburgh State , “Teaching About Being An Oppressor: Some Personal and Political Considerations” http://www.nostatusquo.com/Schacht/teaching.html)

Isn't it Amazing the Things One Might Ascertain?

**We live in a society where ignorance** truly **is bliss**, especially **for those with unearned male privilege** and status, **which** in turn often pr**ovides men with an excuse to deny the existence of the** very real and **harmful sexist hierarchical realities that surround us and the active role men must play in their maintenance.** While some men are willing to admit that women are disadvantaged in our society, very **few men are willing to acknowledge that they are over-privileged** (McIntosh 2000). After all, **to actually do so would mean that men would not only have to admit the unearned and unjust basis of their advantage but perhaps even personally change and give-up some of their privilege. In the highly competitive world we live in giving up any advantages--**earned or unearned--**one might have in the game of life would seem foolish at best to the vast majority men.¶** And yet, as a partner, a mother, a sister, a daughter or just a friend, most men have significant women in their lives that they deeply care about, love, and sometimes even view as equals. I believe herein lies the true promise of the feminist pedagogy that I bring to my classes. **Instead of abstractly talking about male dominance and women's subordination, I attempt to put a face on oppression. I offer my own experiences of doing unearned male privilege, and recognize the harm it inflicted on others--both female and male. Often courageous male students will also offer their experiences of doing male dominance. In all classroom discussions female students freely and frequently offer their experiences of being oppressed by men. Combined with constant reminders by me that the "who's" and "what's" we are talking about are our partners, parents, siblings, children, friends, and each of us, emerges lived images of the oppressor and oppressed**. **These "faces" of sort demonstrate how all too common oppression is, how harmful it is for so many, and why each of us--women and men--should join together to bring about its end.¶ By making men aware of the unearned advantages that society confers upon them, coupled with** the knowledge **of how this is oppressive** to the significant women in their lives, many men are left in an ideological bind: how can they personally express concern and respect for the welfare of these women all the while supporting realities that cause women's oppression in larger societal settings? While I realistically have no meaningful way to measure the answer to this question, I have witnessed many men (although admittedly not all) in my classes very much loosen the otherwise firm grip they have on justifying and living the male privilege that society so unjustly confers upon them. A world without unearned male privilege would be a significant step in the pursuit of a non-oppressive, egalitarian future.

Destroying civil society = bad for women

**Peterson in 2000**

V. Spike Peterson. “Rereading Public and Private: The Dichotomy that is Not One1” SAIS Review. Vol 20, Num 2. Pp 11-29. Summer-Fall 2000.

In Homer and Thucydides, **the meanings of public and private are delineated in relation to the demands of war and the moral dilemmas they pose.** In this sense**, their accounts link the state’s external affairs to “impossible” internal dilemmas.** In contrast, the most familiar account of public and private, provided by Aristotle, avoids the question of war and external affairs. Instead of a tragic choice between competing but parallel claims to loyalty, **Aristotle “resolves” the dilemma by privileging the public sphere over the private.** Here, **the public realm of politics constitutes the highest association, a realm of freedom and equality, where citizens pursue the good life. This higher realm depends upon but encompasses the private sphere, which is characterized not by freedom but necessity, and involves not equal but naturally hierarchical relationships.** In this account**, the public sphere of free, equal, reasoning citizens is masculinized by the exclusion of women and feminized characteristics, while the private sphere of contingency, inequality, and emotional attachments is feminized by the relegation of women and characteristics of femininity to it. This is the “model” of public and private most frequently assumed in the Western tradition of social and political theory.** **Arguably its greatest significance is in defining the boundary and elevating the status of “politics”: the dichotomy distinguishes what is deemed political and therefore what is politicized. That which is associated with the private sphere is denied the status of being political, hence, denied the important sense of being contingent** (not given), contestable (not fixed), **and of collective interest** (not simply personal). **Not only do we inherit a bounded domain of citizenship and political power, but we also inherit a subordinated sphere of naturalized inequality.** Or so we assume. What Aristotle intended is the subject of ongoing debate, but he is clear about the interdependence of public and private, which is often lost in modern accounts.14 This interdependence was both emotional and economic. The public sphere depended as much on the cultivation of virtue, love, and emotional attachments15 as it did on the economic productivity of the oikos (household). Hence, on the one hand, Aristotle’s account is more complex and less binary than conventionally assumed. On the other, however, his characterization does establish the hierarchy of public over private (and masculine over feminine), and his avoidance of war and external affairs and omission of (non-oikos) market exchanges introduce differently problematic simplifications.

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Pretending that only ideologies and signifiers structure social relations is wrong and it creates political failures – this correlationist criticism cannot change anything

Bryant 12 (Levi, prof of phil @ Collin College, Worries about OOO and Politics, http://larvalsubjects.wordpress.com/2012/05/29/worries-about-ooo-and-politics/)JFS

<correlationism = the idea that “thinking” and “being” are intrinsically tied, and that one cannot exist without the other>

2)  Correlationism and its Discontents:  For me, at least, the desire to overcome correlationism does not arise out of some pure speculative desire to “get at the things themselves”, but because I believe that correlationism has noxious political consequences that cultivate an attitude destructive to effective political practice or engagement.  As Stacy Alaimo, who is not an OOO theorist but who is very close to my onticology in many respects puts it, Matter, the vast stuff of the world and of ourselves, has been subdivided into manageable “bits” or flattened into a “blank slate” for human inscription.  The environment has been drained of its blood, its lively creatures, its interactions and relations– in short, all that is recognizable as “nature” –in order that it become a mere empty space, an “uncontested ground,” for human “development”.  (Bodily Natures, 1 – 2) Correlationism trains us to see all other material things as alienated images of ourselves in a mirror.  The question always becomes “what are things for *us*?”, and the thesis is that matter is merely a brute passive stuff awaiting our inscriptions.  In other words, the basic gesture that become dominant in cultural theory beginning around the 60′s was to show that what we take to be objects are really our own significations that we fail to recognize as our own.  A critical analysis– modeled on Marx’s theory of commodity fetishism but diverging quite significantly from his materialism –thus came to consist in revealing how these significations come from us, rather than from the things themselves. Now, as I have said, both here and elsewhere, I have no desire to abandon this form of analysis.  As I argue, all entities translate other entities in particular ways and this is no less true of humans.  However, the problem with this style of analysis is that it renders invisible the differences contributed by nonhuman objects to social assemblages.  We come to think that it is just significations that structure social assemblages and that if we want to change social assemblages all we have to do is critique and debunk significations or ideologies.  Clearly critiquing and debunking ideologies is a part of changing social assemblages, but it is not the only part.  And because correlationism functions as a theoretical axiom where we don’t even recognize the existence of this other part– say rice –because it treats the only real difference as signifying difference, we find ourselves surprised when we’ve adequately critiqued and debunked signifying systems and the social system doesn’t change.  Perhaps this would clue us into the possibility that perhaps there are other actors involved in these social assemblages, holding people in place in particular ways. The problem is that correlationism tends to render non-signifying differences in social assemblages invisible because it begins from the axiom that nonhuman things are just blank slates awaiting our inscription.  Anyone who’s ever gardened knows that this can’t possibly be true.  The diacritical nature of how I signify “tomato” will not make my tomatoes grow any better.  No, to grow tomatoes I have to navigate soil conditions, sunlight and heat (which are quite substantial here in Texas), the gangs of roving rabbits that populate my back yard, insects, worms, water, etc.  I am enmeshed in an entire network of actors that contribute to whether or not the tomatoes will grow and, more importantly, I must constantly attend to these nonhuman actors. The point here is not, as Berry suggests, to diminish human political interventions and promote a troubling conservatism, but to expand the sites of political intervention as well as our possibilities of acting.  We cannot effectively act and change things if we don’t know how the assemblages within which we are enmeshed are put together, what actors are present in those assemblages, and how we might intervene on these actors to change our social possibilities.  Correlationism tends to draw our attention to only one type of actor– the signifier –and while this is a real actor it is not the only one.

2. do not deal in abstractions – thinking of Whiteness or racism as a social force that merely “exists” is a link because it starts our politics in the world of signifiers

Bryant 13 (Levi, http://larvalsubjects.wordpress.com/2013/01/10/onto-cartography-marx-and-abstraction/)JFS

First rule of onto-cartography, don’t track in abstractions (society, capitalism, patriarchy, racism, environment). Second rule of onto-cartography: DON’T traffic in abstractions! To this, a very close and old friend responded asking, but isn’t the concrete an abstraction as well? Good question, so here’s the response. That’s certainly an abstract way of responding! The idea is to suspend our assumptions about why and wherefore things are organized as they are, pausing instead to trace networks, relations between things, to discern how they’re linked up, how they’re organized, and so on. Rather than \*beginning\* with the premise that x organizes y, we should instead look at how things are actually linked and interact. Latour’s \_Reassembling the Social\_ is indispensable reading on this. His thesis is that these big terms do more to \*obscure\* than explain. I disagree with Latour on a number of his conclusions (I think he too hastily rejects Marx– not Marxism, for example –but think he’s making an important point. As Laruelle might argue, the problem with these big master-signifiers (society, patriarchy, capitalism, racism, environment) is that they seem to be saying something without really saying anything. Here it’s worthwhile to think of Hegel’s analysis of “formal ground” in the Science of Logic. When we think in terms of formal ground we appear to be giving the ground of something, when we’ve really replaced the thing to be explained with a \*synonym\*. You ask “why does the earth move about the sun?” The m’aitre responds “because of gravity!” (formal ground). You ask “what is gravity?” The m’aitre responds “things falling and orbiting about other entities!” You’ve replaced what is to be explained with a different set of words, that are nonetheless saying \*exactly\* the same thing (A = A).

This link independently turns the case and means the alt is a better strategy

Reid 12 (Alex, buffalo u, http://www.alex-reid.net/2012/09/what-is-and-what-should-never-be.html)JFS

I think that's it. The issue in the conversation I was tracking above seems to be over whether or not "racism," which would certainly be an object in OOO terms, can overdetermine (or "overmine" in Harman's terminology) other objects, in this case, a shooting. In OOO terms, and here I am probably thinking more of Latour, it is certainly possible for one object to overwhelm another: a flame can burn up a piece of cotton is one of Harman's common examples. So is it possible for a person to be so overcome with racial hatred that it drives him to shoot someone? I would say it is absolutely possible. However, racism alone does not get someone shot. Obviously a gun is also required, at minimum. In addition, there are many other objects involved in a given situation that lead to the shooting which might shed light on why the shooting happened at that particular instant rather than a minute before or a day before or later. None of these other objects necessarily take away from the role of racism in the event, though they might provide us with a more nuanced understanding of how racism functioned in this particular case. Such an investigation shouldn't be taken as a moral judgment about racism, though its results might provide better tactics for confronting racism. On the other hand, the simple declaration that some spectral ideological force called racism swept down and caused a shooting doesn't really tell us anything useful at all. It just reasserts what one may already believe to be true. In the end, I don't think it is useful for anyone to assert a subject-oriented ontology. Isn't it necessary to be able to claim that racism is real beyond our subjective representations of it? Are we simply prescribing that racism exists? Instead, I would want to claim that racism is a real object with a real history, even though its reality withdraws from me. I know that I can only get some partial encounter with that real object; I can only know it in a limited way. But at the same time, I know that it is ontologically possible to destroy it, like the flame burning up the cotton. To me, the best way to do that would be to try to figure out how it really works.

2. Sequencing DA – they make the object a footnote in cultural studies, we must focus on objects because discourse currently has a total hegemony in the academy

Bryant 12 (Levi, prof of phil @ Collin College, Worries about OOO and Politics, http://larvalsubjects.wordpress.com/2012/05/29/worries-about-ooo-and-politics/)JFS

Again, it is difficult to see how any of these considerations are indifferent to politics– for me they’re riddles with political considerations –or how they aim to cultivate a political conservatism.  The entire aim is to enhance our ability to act, change the world about us, and intervene.  This requires that we actually know what is organizing situations.  And here I believe that nonhuman actors play a significant role in why assemblages take the form they do.  If there is currently a focus on nonhuman entities in OOO– and I perpetually go back and forth between human and nonhuman actors in my work, trying to show their imbrications with each other –then this is because signification currently hegemonizes cultural studies and the humanities and it is necessary to bring other things into relief.  I would invite Berry to tarry a bit with the question of what difference toilets make– especially in human assemblages where they are absent –and what changing introducing plumbing might make in those assemblages.  If he thinks seriously about such earthly things he might begin to see that signifying intervention is not the only form of intervention and that often big emancipatory differences can be introduced by attending to non-signifying entities.

Blaxploitation

**Blaxploitation iconography is not a peripheral issue for black liberation – it is an essential starting point to understand previous failures in the Black Power movement**

Terry 2012

Terry, John Robert, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, "Towards the Gendering of Blaxploitation and Black Power." <http://www.jmu.edu/history/mhr/wm_library/2012_-_4_John_Robert_Terry.pdf>

Blaxploitation films catered to a new black consciousness. Loosely defined as black power, this¶ consciousness was associated with black control of black communities and predicated on group¶ solidarity. However, the black power sentiments to which these films catered was explicitly¶ gendered “male” and contributed to the larger problems plaguing the movement. Young black¶ men, the target audience for these films, consumed a new kind of hero and a new kind of¶ stereotype. The archetype was often male – and, if not, carried dual qualities of the violent agent¶ characterized by physicality and the feminine object characterized by sexuality – always acting¶ as an individual, attacking whites while failing to attack the structures that created urban and¶ racial problems. The hero lived and acted in a fictionalized ghetto environment plagued by¶ pimps, pushers, prostitutes, and police. For many, especially men organizing around radical¶ philosophies of black power, this was an appropriate role model. Others realized that no¶ revolutionary could act alone and were critical of the trumpeting of drug dealers and sexual¶ predators as heroes. These environments depicted stereotypes that, although indicative of¶ realities in the black community, were not authentic depictions of that community. Few realized¶ that these movies represented one type of black power consciousness while women were¶ articulating a vision of black power that addressed their own concerns. Scholars look at black¶ power as a movement and Blaxploitation as a genre and blame the simultaneous decline on¶ political apathy, frustrations with the slow rate of progress, law-and-order conservatism, and¶ repression coming from state entities. Few note that the marginalization of women undermined¶ the movement’s strength at the time that women were needed most. Blaxploitation perfectly¶ displays this version of black power and should be considered a starting point for analysis for the¶ decline of both, rather than as a tangential phenomenon that hardly merits comment.

Teatro Luna performances re-order civil society and bring women of color into the public sphere – their use of *Relajo* allows them to avoid mere victimization

Klein 2011

Emily Klein, assistant professor of modern drama and English at Birmingham Southern College, “Spectacular Citizenships: Staging Latina Resistance through Urban Performances of Pain,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*¶ Vol. 32, No. 1, Gender and the City: The Awful Being of Invisibility 2011

Crucially, these two activist collectives both draw on established and emerging Latino performance traditions to interrogate and disrupt notions of gender and womanhood within their respective cities and communities. By refusing to work within the limited scope of ideologically established forms of Latina citizenship, Teatro Luna and the Madres bring the work of reimagining participatory women's citizenship into the public sphere. William Flores and Rina Benmayor see this work as a way of creating new spaces for civic and cultural engagement:¶ Cultural citizenship allows for the potential of opposition, of restructuring and reordering society. Cultural citizenship can be thought of as a broad range of activities of everyday life through which Latinos and other groups claim space in society and eventually claim rights. Although it involves difference, it is not as if Latinos seek out such difference. Rather, the motivation is simply to create space where the people feel "safe" and "at home," where they feel a sense of belonging and membership.… Space is a physical location, a piece of real estate, and simultaneously an existential freedom and a mental expression.8¶ In performing their resistant identities in public, in Buenos Aires and Chicago, the Madres and Teatro Luna create an urban space of belonging in which their citizenship, though oppositional to dominant cultural representations, is legitimated and protected. Furthermore, not only do these performers give their audiences the chance to become witnesses to what Diana Taylor calls "performances of trauma," but they also sidestep the pitfalls of enacting victimhood by narrating through relajo the empowering effects of their activism and demanding that audiences interrogate their own roles within public civic life.

Wilderson constructs an ungendered black subject which fails to accurately describe violence against black flesh and ignores the female black body

Hodges 2012 – Asia Hodges University of California Irvine, African American Studies, [*Mama’s Baby & the Black Gender Problematic*](http://www.academia.edu/2027925/Mamas_Baby_and_the_Black_Gender_Problematic)

<http://www.academia.edu/2027925/Mamas_Baby_and_the_Black_Gender_Problematic>

Asia Nichole Hodges Undergraduate Critical Theory Conference 2012 Mentor: Tamara Beauchamp Mama’s Baby & the Black Gender Problematic For me, this paper represents an opportunity to bring focus to the ungendered black subject of afropessimist thought, a concept I was first introduced to in winter quarter of 2011, which was the most theoretically rich coursework I have ever undertaken. In retrospect, the work of Frank Wilderson, III also appeared at a very critical moment in my development, both as a thinker and as a black woman engaged in organizing around issues affecting the black community on campus as well as back home. Afropessimist thought resonated deeply because it spoke to the terrifying truths of antiblack racism, black structural positionality and black life, corroborating my own experience but more importantly providing the language and a framework through which to approach a more thorough explanation of this experience theoretically. Further, when I use the term ‘’black” I mean it in the sense closest to the truth of the paradigm of afropessimist thought as described by Wilderson in Red, White & Black: Cinema & the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms. It is my intent to critique Wilderson’s argument for an ungendered black subject using the work of black feminist scholar, Hortense Spillers, and explore the categories she protects in her work. She is indispensible here not only because she was an impetus for Wilderson’s project, but also because it was her thought that mothered my own. In conversation with the seminal article of Hortense Spillers, Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book, Wilderson explains that, for him, antiblackness functions as a prohibition on gender, thus the black subject is inherently genderless. He writes, “Gratuitous violence relegates the Slave to the taxonomy, the list of things. That is, it reduces the Slave to an object. Motherhood, fatherhood, and gender differentiations can only be sustained in the taxonomy of subjects.”1 While this framework has helped me to understand of the structuring properties of violence, and grasp its role in subject formation more generally, this explanation features an ungendered black subject and cannot be extended to the truth of my life as a black and as a female. This is not to say that afropessimism does not hold the potential to speak to the effect of antiblackness on gender. To the contrary, it was Spillers who first argued that such work was fruitful, writing that in “undressing these conflations of meaning, as they appear under the rule of dominance… we would gain… the potential for gender differentiation as it might express itself along a range of stress points, including human biology in its intersection with the project of culture.”2 Both Wilderson and Spillers take the dereliction of the black from civil society as their point of departure, but in many ways, Spillers has offered us a great deal more than we know what to do with on Wilderson, III, Frank B., Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010, 136. 2 Spillers, Hortense. "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe."Diacritics. (1987): 66. Print. 1 matters of gender and antiblackness. In Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe she theorizes that there is a profundity to the particularities of the position of the female black that is exemplified through regimes of naming. In the spirit of black feminism, though its ensemble of questions cannot help me here, I must occasion an explanation of black positionality that accounts for the manner of existential negation and the modes of violence which position me, moving beyond the concerns with black patriarchy. Theoretically, antiblackness does not only lend itself to an argument against a gendered understanding of my condition, it also offers an opportunity for a more nuanced understanding of gender itself. This begs the question, what does a genderless black subject help us to understand that a more complicated rendering [or gendering] of the black subject would obscure? In my view, black political thought lags here, unable to describe its condition without relegating the particularities of the female black to the abyss. Moreover, it seems the black female labors in service of civil society in ways we have yet to fully understand. Spillers supports an argument for the necessity of this work in building a more robust theoretical foundation for black political thought, and afropessimism could be our point of departure. For Wilderson, there is a line of recognition and incorporation. Above it are human beings, civil society made up of white men and women, and below it is the black in absolute dereliction, a concept he draws from Frantz Fanon writings on the black condition. I mean to suggest that the distinction we’re looking for under the line of recognition and incorporation is not “man” and “woman”, which Wilderson would reject, but that is not to say there is no distinction to be made whatsoever. It seems we may too hastily disregard the possibility for distinction for three reasons, described loosely as outlined by Spillers: 1) there was no distinction made between male and female slaves on the ships, 2) men and women performed the same hard, physical labor and lastly, 3) gender is a category requiring the symbolic integrity from which the black is barred. I am unable to go into each in detail here, but the validity of these points of contention is not what is in question for Spillers. The distinctions made on ships or on fields are not the only sites we should scourer for insight into the black gender problematic, and evidence that captives are not regarded as “men” and “women,” like their captors, is elucidating but not explanatory. In Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe, Spillers uses naming as a point of entry into black gender problematic. She revisits Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s report on the state of the black community in America during the late 1960s, and meditates on the significance of black women emerging as the locus of black pathology. She writes that for Moynihan, “the ‘Negro Family’ has no Father to speak of—his Name, his Symbolic function mark the impressive missing agencies in the essential life of the black community… and it is, surprisingly, the fault of the Daughter, or the female line”. Thus, it is the “displacing [of] the Name and the Law of the father to the territory of the Mother and Daughter [that] becomes an aspect of the African-American female’s misnaming.”3 The black is without the gendered symbolic integrity that the subjects of civil society enjoy; the black performs to both genders, as well as anything in between and beyond, and is not granted the protections of motherhood or the entitlements of fatherhood for example. Moynihan observes the behavior of the black family and concludes that it is a manifestation of the backwardness of blackness generally, and the pathology of black women in particular. But a structural analysis would include a discussion of historical context, relations to power and positionality, with an understanding of the black as positioned through the violence of captivity. Moreover, the emergence of the female black marks the divergence between chattel slavery and racial slavery. Peter Wood, professor of history at Duke University, explains that partus sequitir ventrem, “that which is brought forth follows the womb”, is a legal doctrine which mandates that the child follows the status of the mother, or rather in the case of the female black, her child is doomed to captivity. Woods notes that there was a “shift from indentured servitude to lifelong slavery to heredity slavery, where not only am I enslaved but my children as well” and emphasizes that it was indeed “a remarkable shift”4. However, the problem is not that we do not know this history, but rather we have not dealt with it theoretically, and even in the most likely 3 4 Ibid, 66. of discourses, particularity on the basis of sex is not explored. In chapter 11 of Red, White and Black, Wilderson takes up the issue of gender and sex under captivity, but largely leaves the work Spillers does in Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe untouched. Earlier in the chapter, she is employed as support for Wilderson’s claim that the position of white women and black females are made distinct as a direct consequence of captivity. However, when Wilderson addresses blackness and gender, specifically gender ontology and the reification of gender, Spillers absence is haunting. Moreover, the effect of captivity on gender is not simply a reversal of power between the categories of “man” and “woman” as suggested by Moynihan, but rather that these categories are in fact eviscerated entirely where the black is concerned. Though the black does not hold the symbolic integrity for gender normativity, as argued by both Wilderson and Spillers, the categories of male and female are still apt here; “man” and “woman” representing the body and the latter, eviscerated categories, representing Spillers’ notion of the flesh. She writes: Before there is the ‘body’ there is the ‘flesh,’ that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse, or the reflexes of iconography. Even though the European hegemonies stole bodies—some of them female… we regard this human and social irreparability as high crimes against the flesh, as a person of African females and African males registered the wounding. 5 Here, Spillers shows that the violence of captivity registers on multiple levels, and of course that the violence can be understood from multiple registers, however the flesh that registers the wounding is sexed, the violence at times sexualized. So how, then, does the female black function within the structure, positioned through regimes of sexualized violence? My project is to seek answers to the questions developed here by acquiescing to the chasms in our understanding. I do not aim to fill the chasm here, but only to make the conceptual leap and let the matter remain unresolved so that we might titter on the edge and engage further with the black gender problematic. To conclude, the closing thoughts of Spillers in Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe, “The female breaks in upon the imagination with a forcefulness that marks both a denial and an ‘illegitimacy’… In this play of paradox, only the female stands in the flesh, both mother and mother-dispossessed. This problematizing of gender places her, in my view, out of the traditional symbolics of female gender, and it is our task to make a place for this different social subject.“ 5 Spillers, 67.