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#### Focus on cultural articulations of anti-blackness in trope, image, and discourse abstracts away from the material foundations of anti-blackness, and ensures the enduring power of the capitalist nation-state

Charisse Burden-Stelly 16, Berkeley African American-Studies PhD, “The Modern Capitalist State and the Black Challenge: Culturalism and the Elision of Political Economy,” pgs. 13-16

Even though contemporary articulations of the African diaspora became abstracted from radical enunciations of Blackness, and became a form of cultural critical practice, of mutual recognition against the universality of black misrepresentation and abjection, and an articulation of the politics of identity and representation, the Black radical structure of feeling nonetheless provided the grammar and the pedagogy to critique and challenge regimes of coloniality79 that sustain the trans-spatial and trans-temporal conditions of Black abjection. It created an intellectual map for theories of the African diaspora to reflect anticolonial and antiracist grievance articulated in the conjunctural space of black radical consciousness. Unlike post-Cold War articulations of Blackness, the Black radical structure of feeling inflected a heterogeneous critique imbued with not only cultural, but also structural, anticapitalist, and anti-imperialist foundations. “New Negro Culturalism”—the Harlem Renaissance enunciation of Black radicalism—had yet to become the hegemonic mode of theorizing and asserting Blackness, so the project of constructing Black modern subjectivity became inhered in a robust theoretical framework that included structural critiques of capitalist exploitation, analyses of racialization, and the politicization of cultural production. This dissertation seeks to comprehensively refocus the analytical frameworks dealing with black modern subjectivity through an in-depth examination of “Culturalism,” or the regime of meaning-making in which Blackness is culturally specified and abstracted from material, political economic, and structural conditions of dispossession through state technologies of antiradicalism. As Deborah Thomas explains, “Herein lies the root of the epistemological violence generated by the turn to [C]ulturalis[m]... The question of where black populations stood in relation to states... became secondary to the question of how blacks in the West were connected to roots, to Africa... the language of cultural politics... abandons the impetus within internationalism toward imagining political community. It derails a more global political economic analysis...”80 Herskovitsian cultural analysis, which asserted Black humanity and equality based on evidence of African cultural legacy,81 inaugurated the shift from political economy to “the language of moralism.”82 The focus on cultural continuity did not take into account historical conditions of forced labor, racialized oppression, colonial imposition, or capitalist exploitation;83 instead it codified the “assumption that the history and culture of peoples of African descent in the New World have to be argued out anthropologically in terms of an identifiable authentic past persisting into the present.”84 The latter was determined to be the key to citizenship and equality for Blacks. Cold War Culturalism institutionalized the hegemony of antiradical cultural politics by foregrounding cultural analyses of African retention and syncretism, cultural continuity, and comparative diasporic cultures. As the Cold War instantiated the bifurcation of the world and influenced the direction of decolonization, “diaspora became reduced to its cultural aspects... the question of origins became a question of culture.” It essentially framed connections among African descendants in terms of culture; asserted Black modernity and claims to equality on cultural grounds; and constructed culture as the domain of struggle. Culturalism divorced Blackness and the African diaspora from the material realties of governmentalized, transnational state projects that sustain racial and class hierarchies.85 The hegemony of Culturalism in contemporary theories of the Black condition and the African diaspora diverge significantly from those of the Black radical structure of feeling that conceptualized the Diaspora (thought not explicitly named at this time) through a nexus that included political economy, cultural formations, and nationalism. Conditions of Black abjection were seen to permeate both the base and the superstructure such that mobilization on both fronts was necessary to combat white supremacy. The ascendance of New Negro Culturalism as the progenitor of, and therefore the predominate structure in, post-Cold War theories of the African diaspora is the unfortunate consequence of the entanglements of anticommunism, antiradicalism, and antiblackness. The result has been a turn away from the political economy/structural critique that, in the interwar period, provided a theoretical framework to challenge American antiblack statist discourse. The marginalization of Black radicalism and political economy produced the politicization of culture as the dominant mode of organizing for Black equality, and the primary intellectual focus in African diaspora studies. Post-Cold War theories of the African diaspora became divorced from the Black radical structure of feeling and reduced to the Harlem Renaissance enunciation of black radicalism in a manner that does not sufficiently theorize the conditions of Black abjection and their connection to the material realities of Black people. Culturalism supports the constitution and maintenance of Blackness as a category of economic exploitation and dispossession and racialized abjection in three fundamental ways. First, it reinscribes the Black on the margins of the state by accommodating Blackness in a way that maintains their subordination and subjection on cultural grounds. The foregrounding of the culture, behavior, and performance of Black people leaves the effects of inequality, increased poverty, unemployment, and structural features of the global political economy on Black people largely undertheorized. Thus, on the one hand, deteriorating conditions of Black people globally are understood as innate cultural lack or pathology. On the other hand, it is assumed that Black empowerment and equality can be achieved in the struggle over cultural representation. Both of these positions reproduce cultural specifications of Blackness that negate the role of state and capitalist structures in its production and maintenance. Second, Culturalism creates the condition for the Black that is inscribed in the modern project to “niggerize”86 radical Blacks who present a fundamental threat to the organization of global and statist structures on the basis of racialized capitalist exploitation. Culturalism asserts a particular outlook, behavior, and set of goals for Black people,87 and those who deviate from these norms that are ostensibly shared by the entire group are cast out. In other words, culture is asserted to rationalize the marginalization of those who occupy the constitutive outside of the state because they have been construed as seditious, subversive, and dangerous. The latter are foreclosed from belonging and are therefore subjected to the violation of their civil liberties, confinement, and deportation. By severely curtailing the possibilities, potential, and forms of freedom of those who are inscribed in the modern project and niggerizing those who are not, Culturalism ultimately functions as a technology of state repression and subjection. Third, Culturalism has the dual function of erasing political economy as a means of understanding and critiquing the Black condition, and of specifying Black articulations of freedom and equality in terms of culture: [A]nalyses of race and class began to privilege a focus on culture over a focus on socioeconomic inequality. This had both academic and practical effects. Academically, it supported a liberal view of development that naturalized capitalist competition and that positioned the cultural... practice of middle-class white Americans as normative... practically, the cultural model... directed attention away from the overall political economy of American capitalism and of how it ‘uses, abuses, and divides its poorly organized working class’...88 Anticommunism entrenched this move away from structural analysis by criminalizing and disciplining critiques of the entanglements of the racialized social order, the spread of empire, and capitalist accumulation. Instead of challenging their exclusion from the state based on economic dispossession and maldistribution of resources, Black people in the United States began to mobilize around cultural specification, for inclusion based on liberal civil rights discourse, and/or to assert international linkages based on mutually recognized cultural enunciations of blackness. In other words, the Cold War curtailed the possibilities of challenging the state in terms of the political economy of exploitation, thus Blackness came to be understood in nationalist and cultural terms of exclusion. At the same time, decolonizing countries that sought equality in the world-system asserted their willingness and ability to adopt the culture of development, modernization, and anticommunism. This was notwithstanding the fact that their insertion into the global political economy as sovereign nations continued relations of unequal exchange, declining terms of trade, and neocolonialism.89 Culturalism is thus a function of antiradical and antiblack statist pedagogy, and after World War II, it became entangled with anticommunism as an instrumentality of surveillance and violence. Culturalism institutionalized the erasure of radical political economic critique in the theorizing of the black global condition, the disciplining of Black radicalism, and the cultural specification of African diaspora studies examined in this dissertation. The cultural specification of Blackness and the forms of Culturalism that it takes are integrally related to statist technologies that facilitate the accommodation of Black intellectual and practical challenges to the capitalist state while, at the same time, ensuring their cooptation. These are the bases for the surveillance, disciplining, and punishment of black radical critique.

#### They neoliberalize difference by theorizing identities as essentially different and in competition for recognition. The only way out of oppression inflicted by specific systems is striving for solidarity to amplify class consciousness.

Bruce Rogers-Vaughn 16, Associate Professor of the Practice of Pastoral Theology and Counseling at Vanderbilt Divinity School, “Muting and Mutating Suffering: Sexism, Racism, and Class Struggle,” Caring for Souls in a Neoliberal Age, pg 131-166

INTERSECTIONALITY AS A POST-CAPITALIST THEORY: THE INTER-RELATIONALITY OF SUFFERING In light of the foregoing discussions of the neoliberal alterations of sexism, racism, and class conflict, I propose that we understand intersectionality theory as a post-capitalist project. This is not a stretch, given its origin among 1970s feminists who were themselves quite critical of capitalism. This requires, however, careful attention to the radical impulse within intersectionality theory and a dedicated precision regarding terminology. Otherwise, as I have already noted, it can quite easily be co-opted by neoliberal versions of diversity and multiculturalism. I will make no effort to be exhaustive in this concluding section. Rather, I draw upon prior sections of this chapter to suggest, in summary fashion, five features of an intersectionality theory that help to preserve its post-capitalist spirit. In brief, a post-capitalist intersectionality theory: (a) is primarily concerned with understanding the social generation of suffering rather than individual identity formation; (b) emphasizes a material grounding in actual human relationships rather than intersections between abstract categories of difference; (c) refuses to ontologize or prioritize the differences that appear in relationships; (d) strives to establish solidarities rather than dwelling solely upon the recognition of difference; and (e) works toward an increase in consciousness that addresses both second- and third-order suffering. As for the first point, I have the impression that intersectionality theory, despite its original countercultural impetus, is often read superficially as first and foremost a discourse about identity formation and cultural difference. The isolated individualism of neoliberal rationality, furthermore, tends to interpret identity as simply a matter of personal choice or individual formation. The combination of these two moves robs intersectionality theory of its radical critique. This can have unfortunate real life consequences. For example, psychologists Grzanka and Miles ( 2016 ), after studying the literature and training videos for “LGBT Affirmative Therapy,” conclude that this psychotherapy training program reconceives intersectionality simply as a matter of “multiple identities.” They argue that this is an instance of the “multicultural turn” in psychology, elements of which “are actually consonant with neoliberal transformations of social and institutional life that foremost function to incorporate difference, rather than to redirect and reconfigure the ways power and material resources are unfairly distributed” (emphasis in original). 4 They conclude that, while this form of therapy should not be seen as “fundamentally neoliberal,” it is co-opted by a neoliberal agenda that ignores structural inequalities and shifts responsibility onto individual agents. The result, as we will see in the next chapter, is that individuals may blame themselves and remain unaware of the social–material origins of their distress. The overriding concern of intersectionality, however, is not identity but the suffering arising from systemic oppression. It is a theory about the social genesis of suffering more than it is an identity theory. In her overview of intersectionality theory, pastoral theologian Nancy Ramsay ( 2014 ) observes that social justice is “the normative goal in intersectionality” (p. 456). This means that, while it may indeed shed light on questions regarding identity, its main concern is social well-being. The statement of the Combahee River Collective ( 1977 /1979), for example, focuses on social systems of oppression. The intersections the authors envision are not between identities as such. In the initial paragraph, they note that their analyses and practices are “based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking ” (p. 362, my emphasis). The spirit of this document is preserved in bell hooks’s ( 2004 ) recurrent description of contemporary oppressions as emanating from “imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (p. 17). 5 Unlike many of the lists common in the intersectionality literature—race, class, gender, sexuality, and so on—the culprits here are systems rather than identity categories. Furthermore, the concern here is laser-focused on suffering . Oppression is accomplished, however, by both configuring identities and manipulating the power dynamics circulating around and through them. The black feminists who wrote the Combahee River Collective statement believed that, while racism, sexism, and heterosexism cannot be reduced to class conflict, neither can the oppressions around these identities be understood without comprehending their place in capitalist systems of production. For our purposes here, it is critical to remember that neoliberal rationality is perfectly capable of co-opting intersectional discourse, primarily by reemploying the economics/culture divide I have previously discussed in this book. This has become evident during the 2016 presidential campaigns in the USA, in which the problems of racism and sexism are often discussed without reference to class struggle. As Denvir ( 2016 ) has observed, such injustices “cease to be intersectional the moment they are abstracted from political economy” (para. 7). Speaking of abstraction, those who espouse a post-capitalist intersectionality, which is to say, a version of this theory that retains its historical origins, will have reservations about this designation. This brings us to the second feature of a post-capitalist intersectionality. The term “intersectionality” is highly conceptual and immaterial. On its face, it appears to conjure up a mental exercise in which abstract categories of difference, rather than actual people, are interrelated. Worse yet, it could be taken to imply—contrary to its original principles—that these are categories of essential difference that are first separate, with the challenge being how to theorize their points of contact. In addition to leaving aside considerations of class, this is precisely what neoliberalized forms of intersectionality tend to do. The neoliberal imagination conceives societies as aggregates of distinctive and separate-but-equal individuals. The intellectual problem is then how to explain the ways these individual building blocks intersect. Perhaps, then, we need a better word for theorizing the sufferings emerging around social differences. It is generally accepted that the term intersectionality first appeared in a paper by the legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw ( 1989 ). Thus neither the term “intersectionality” nor any of its derivatives appears in the statement of the Combahee River Collective ( 1977 /1979). Rather, the document consistently refers to human relationships . Markers of difference (identities) are understood as entangled in the dynamics of everyday relationships, not only between individuals but also between individuals and social systems, as well as between collectives. Womanist theologian and ethicist emilie townes (personal communication, January 19, 2016) suggests that a better term might be inter-relationality . In my view, this means that the differences suffusing actual relationships, and the sufferings that often originate in them, are embedded in the materiality of relationships. They appear as we relate in concrete ways—eating together, living together, working together—including the ways we collaborate within and among collectives, as well as how we construct the economics and policies of social life. From this perspective, identities are always formed in relationships. They may be healthy or unhealthy, just or unjust, or combinations thereof. But they are never simply “personal choices.” Thus Ramsay ( 2014 ) observes: “Intersectional approaches to identity clearly link individual and social dimensions to any experience of identity. Identity is socially and historically constructed” (p. 456). The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman ( 2004 ) adds that identity “cannot be formed unless in reference to the bonds connecting the self to other people and the assumption that such bonds are reliable and stable over time” (p. 68). In more just relationships and societies, individuals have enough liberty to improvise upon what is given to them, and identities remain flexible. In less just societies, identities are simply imposed and rigid. I have been claiming that neoliberal transformations of sexism and racism refer to identity categories that are shorn of class. This may be a good place to comment on the connection, within an inter-relational perspective, between class and other identities. In a previous publication, I have argued that class is not an identity (Rogers-Vaughn, 2015 ). I must now repent of that opinion. At the time, I was focused on the difference between class and identity as this term is understood within neoliberal identity politics. Inter-relationality, however, gives us a way to understand identity, and even identity politics, from outside neoliberal discourse. Class, of course, has to be amenable to identification. Otherwise there could be no “class consciousness,” as well as forms of solidarity and social movements founded upon it. I still claim, however, that class is “a different kind of difference.” As theologian Joerg Rieger ( 2013 ) has noted, to talk about inclusion or diversity with regard to class, as we might with gender and race, makes little sense (p. 199). For instance, applying affirmative action to gender and race leads to a more equitable society. If applied to class differences, however, “it would mean the end of capitalism” (p. 202). What I wish to add here is that the economic and political power differentials indicated by the term class are not simply the basis for a potential identity. More importantly, class power manifests the capacity to generate and reconfigure identities, including those attributed to sex, gender, and race. For example, the ability to have an identity, much less multiple identities, as well as the degree of agency to improvise upon identity varies with class power. Bauman ( 2004 ) summarizes this capacity: At one pole of the emergent global hierarchy are those who can compose and decompose their identities more or less at will, drawing from the uncommonly large, planet-wide pool of offers. At the other pole are crowded those whose access to identity choice has been barred, people who are given no say in deciding their preferences and who in the end are burdened with identities enforced and imposed by others ; identities which they themselves resent but are not allowed to shed and cannot manage to get rid of. (p. 38, emphasis in original) Although I reject the notion of identity as a personal choice, I am reinterpreting Bauman’s position with reference to the relative capacity to improvise upon what is given. Most of us, says Bauman, “are suspended uneasily between those two poles,” and must tolerate a level of anxiety surrounding the precariousness of our identities (p. 38). Finally, Bauman notes: “there is a lower space than low—a space underneath the bottom” (p. 39). In this space dwell those whom he calls the “underclass,” those whom Sassen ( 2014 ) calls “the expelled.” These inhabitants have no identities at all, even those that may be oppressive: The meaning of the ‘underclass identity’ is an absence of identity ; the effacement or denial of individuality, of ‘face’—that object of ethical duty and moral care. You are cast outside the social space in which identities are sought, chosen, constructed, evaluated, confirmed or refuted. (Bauman, 2004 , p. 39, emphasis in original) Bauman is pointing here to desubjectivation in its most extreme form, and thus to what I am calling third-order suffering. While desubjectivation appears in other classes, in the underclass it is pervasive and near-absolute. But what I wish to emphasize here is that class has a dual meaning. It is both a potential identity and a power that generates and configures other identities. Thirdly, a post-capitalist intersectionality, or inter-relationality, refuses to ontologize or prioritize the differences that appear in human relationships. It is clear to most people, I think, that class is not ontological. It is not, in other words, given or natural. The ideal of social mobility—shared in the USA by political conservatives and liberals alike—assumes that one may be born into one class but ascend (or descend) into another. This is one thing that distinguishes capitalism, which divides society into classes, from pre-capitalist feudal societies, which divided the populace into rigid caste systems. What is often missed is that race and gender have no more ontological status than class. Scientific efforts to identify essential differences according to race and gender, beyond somatic variations such as sexual anatomy, skin pigmentation, eye color, body morphology, and hair texture have either come up empty or confirmed cultural stereotypes (e.g. Fields & Fields, 2014 ; Fine, 2010 ). Reed ( 2013 ) concludes that such efforts are “nothing more than narrow upper-class prejudices parading about as science” (p. 51). Theories emphasizing inter-relationality eschew assertions of essential difference and seek instead to identify ways that a hegemony utilizes asserted differences to serve its interests and agendas. The focus here is on how dominant powers create, configure, and utilize identities to accomplish political and material agendas. Regarding designations of race, Victor Anderson ( 1999 ) has been a pioneer in asserting that “blackness” is not ontological. Similarly, Fields and Fields ( 2014 ) argue that through a process the authors call “racecraft.” As Harry Chang (Liem & Montague, 1985 ) claimed during the 1970s, racialization is a type of reification: “Money seeks gold to objectify itself—gold does not cry out to be money” (p. 39). The upshot of all this, according to Reed, is that race and gender are “ascriptive differences” utilized by systems of domination: “Ideologies of ascriptive difference help to stabilize a social order by legitimizing its hierarchies of wealth, power, and privilege, including its social division of labor, as the natural order of things” (p. 49). This is not an argument for a “class first” approach. While gender and race, like class, are created and configured within matrices of domination, the consequent sexism and racism are quite real and take up lives of their own. Moreover, gender, race and class are always already entangled . It would be futile to attempt to prioritize them, even in concrete instances of oppression. For this reason, the statement of the Combahee River Collective ( 1977 /1979) asserts that “race, sex, and class are simultaneous factors in oppression” (p. 371). It is tempting to think that each may assume priority, depending on contextual circumstances. Even bell hooks (Lowens, 2012 ), in a recent interview, observes that theories of intersectionality “allow us to focus on what is most important at a given point in time. …Like right now, for many Americans, class is being foregrounded like never before because of the economic situation” (para. 19). I fear that such declarations may be slippery slopes that function to maintain antagonistic divisions within the progressive left. Furthermore, such a position does not attend to how, in everyday life, the oppressions circulating around these identities are directly , rather than inversely, proportional. It just does not seem to be the case that, with the increasing economic inequality under neoliberalism, class concerns move to the foreground, while sexism and racism recede. Rather, they all rise together and in tandem. It is true that rampant inequality has intensified class conflict and made it more visible. However, sexism has also increased under these conditions, with disproportional numbers of women pressured into low-paid and unpaid work, and with discrimination and violence against women accelerating (Braedley & Luxton, 2010 ; Connell, 2010 ). Likewise, growing economic inequality has been accompanied by suppressed income for blacks and by more frequent and egregious acts of violence and exploitation toward people of color (Giroux, 2010 ; Goldberg, 2009 ). It is surely no coincidence that this period, in the USA, has been marked by massive incarceration of blacks and an escalation in killings of unarmed blacks by law enforcement officials. As a parent, I fear for the future of my two biracial sons, now eight years of age, who will likely experience oppression at the hands of dominant neoliberal powers unless substantial changes occur. The point is that economic and social exclusion and exploitation go together. We simply can no longer afford a “class first” or “race first” or “gender fi rst” approach to political action. This brings us to a fourth dimension of a post-capitalist inter- relationality. While the statement of the Combahee River Collective ( 1977 /1979) may be interpreted as laying out the significance of identity politics, it is not the same identity politics that have become so familiar in neoliberal societies. Neoliberal identity politics have effectively balkanized what was once “the public.” Society breaks up into a multitude of identity groups, each more or less insulated from the others and in competition with them. This sort of fractiousness is absent in the statement of the Combahee River Collective. While clear about their own identity and interests, these women look for ways to collaborate with others, especially for political action. They stress, for example: “Although we are feminists and lesbians, we feel solidarity with progressive black men and do not advocate the fractionalization that white women who are separatists demand” (p. 365). After noting a number of examples, they emphasize that they “continue to do political work in coalition with other groups” (p. 371). This underscores that a postcapitalist inter-relationality presses through the recognition of difference in search of solidarity . If the problems of class exploitation, sexism, and racism arise together, then they must be addressed together. Pastoral theologian Cedric Johnson ( 2016a ) observes: Social exclusion and labor exploitation are different problems, but they are never disconnected under capitalism. And both processes work to the advantage of capital. Segmented labor markets, ethnic rivalry, racism, sexism, xenophobia, and informalization all work against solidarity. (para. 77) Any approach that gives primacy to a particular identity, much less attributing ontological status to it, necessarily undermines solidarity and political action. Johnson singles out “liberal antiracist discourse,” which separates race from class and prioritizes racism, as an example: Liberal antiracist discourse further isolates the conditions of the most excluded segments of workers, separating their experiences from those of other workers, and their labor from the broader processes at work, instead of emphasizing the empirical and potential unity of the laboring classes. (para. 78) This aids and abets the “divide and conquer” strategy that financial elites have historically used to divide working people against each other. Finally, a post-capitalist inter-relationality strives toward the increase of consciousness, particularly with regard to the social origins of suffering. Even with regard to second-order suffering, consciousness-raising is often critical. This is because the complex machinations of institutions and social systems tend to occur, as Marx often noted, “behind the backs” of the people. With third-order suffering—which arises from the synergy of deinstitutionalization, desymbolization, and desubjectivation—the increase of consciousness is even more important. As I discussed in previous sections, neoliberal rationality denies and thus renders sexism, racism, and class conflict invisible. Furthermore, by undertaking the “Three Ds,” neoliberalization erodes a sense of belonging, a common language for naming the suffering, and any durable agency. This yields the most profound unconsciousness imaginable, including, ultimately, a lack of awareness of goingon- being. How is the language of inter-relationality to make any sense for people in such a condition? Where are its referents now? We are reduced here to a voiceless and nameless suffering. So that is where we must begin. William Davies ( 2015 ) speaks, I believe, to this situation: “Rather than seek to alter our feelings, now would be a good time to take what we’ve turned inwards, and attempt to direct it back out again” (p. 11). Part of the wisdom of inter-relationality is that nothing can “make sense” outside of relationships. Especially when we no longer know who we are, and our suffering has no name, we need others who will be present to bear witness. We can only direct our suffering back out when we can direct it to others, even when this means, initially, sitting in silence together. There is no hope unless we can begin with at least this seed of solidarity. This does not mean “psychotherapy for everybody.” Rising from such a deep unconsciousness occurs best in groups, and perhaps even in movements, where “deep calls unto deep.” After many years of activism, Angela Davis ( 2016 ) confesses: I don’t know whether I would have survived had not movements survived, had not communities of resistance, communities of struggle. So whatever I’m doing I always feel myself directly connected to those communities and I think that this is an era where we have to encourage that sense of community particularly at a time when neoliberalism attempts to force people to think of themselves only in individual terms and not in collective terms. It is in collectivities that we find reservoirs of hope and optimism. (p. 49) So, to undo the spell of neoliberalism, we must “play the record in reverse.” That means finding paths, however meager, back to solidarity. And this brings us to the next chapter, in which I must respond to the inevitable question: “Where do we go from here?”

#### Stopping capital is necessary to avoid extinction

William Robinson 16, UC Santa Barbra sociology professor, 4-12-2016, “Sadistic Capitalism: Six Urgent Matters for Humanity in Global Crisis,” http://www.truth-out.org/opinion/item/35596-sadistic-capitalism-six-urgent-matters-for-humanity-in-global-crisis)

In these mean streets of globalized capitalism in crisis, it has become profitable to turn poverty and inequality into a tourist attraction. The South African Emoya Luxury Hotel and Spa company has made a glamorized spectacle of it. The resort recently advertised an opportunity for tourists to stay "in our unique Shanty Town ... and experience traditional township living within a safe private game reserve environment." A cluster of simulated shanties outside of Bloemfontein that the company has constructed "is ideal for team building, braais, bachelors [parties], theme parties and an experience of a lifetime," read the ad. The luxury accommodations, made to appear from the outside as shacks, featured paraffin lamps, candles, a battery-operated radio, an outside toilet, a drum and fireplace for cooking, as well as under-floor heating, air conditioning and wireless internet access. A well-dressed, young white couple is pictured embracing in a field with the corrugated tin shanties in the background. The only thing missing in this fantasy world of sanitized space and glamorized poverty was the people themselves living in poverty. The "luxury shanty town" in South Africa is a fitting metaphor for global capitalism as a whole. Faced with a stagnant global economy, elites have managed to turn war, structural violence and inequality into opportunities for capital, pleasure and entertainment. It is hard not to conclude that unchecked capitalism has become what I term "sadistic capitalism," in which the suffering and deprivation generated by capitalism become a source of aesthetic pleasure, leisure and entertainment for others. I recently had the opportunity to travel through several countries in Latin America, the Middle East, North Africa, East Asia and throughout North America. I was on sabbatical to research what the global crisis looks like on the ground around the world. Everywhere I went, social polarization and political tensions have reached explosive dimensions. Where is the crisis headed, what are the possible outcomes and what does it tell us about global capitalism and resistance? This crisis is not like earlier structural crises of world capitalism, such as in the 1930s or 1970s. This one is fast becoming systemic. The crisis of humanity shares aspects of earlier structural crises of world capitalism, but there are six novel, interrelated dimensions to the current moment that I highlight here, in broad strokes, as the "big picture" context in which countries and peoples around the world are experiencing a descent into chaos and uncertainty. 1) The level of global social polarization and inequality is unprecedented in the face of out-of-control, over-accumulated capital. In January 2016, the development agency Oxfam published a follow-up to its report on global inequality that had been released the previous year. According to the new report, now just 62 billionaires -- down from 80 identified by the agency in its January 2015 report -- control as much wealth as one half of the world's population, and the top 1% owns more wealth than the other 99% combined. Beyond the transnational capitalist class and the upper echelons of the global power bloc, the richest 20 percent of humanity owns some 95 percent of the world's wealth, while the bottom 80 percent has to make do with just 5 percent. This 20-80 divide of global society into haves and the have-nots is the new global social apartheid. It is evident not just between rich and poor countries, but within each country, North and South, with the rise of new affluent high-consumption sectors alongside the downward mobility, "precariatization," destabilization and expulsion of majorities. Escalating inequalities fuel capitalism's chronic problem of over-accumulation: The transnational capitalist class cannot find productive outlets to unload the enormous amounts of surplus it has accumulated, leading to stagnation in the world economy. The signs of an impending depression are everywhere. The front page of the February 20 issue of The Economist read, "The World Economy: Out of Ammo?" Extreme levels of social polarization present a challenge to dominant groups. They strive to purchase the loyalty of that 20 percent, while at the same time dividing the 80 percent, co-opting some into a hegemonic bloc and repressing the rest. Alongside the spread of frightening new systems of social control and repression is heightened dissemination through the culture industries and corporate marketing strategies that depoliticize through consumerist fantasies and the manipulation of desire. As "Trumpism" in the United States so well illustrates, another strategy of co-optation is the manipulation of fear and insecurity among the downwardly mobile so that social anxiety is channeled toward scapegoated communities. This psychosocial mechanism of displacing mass anxieties is not new, but it appears to be increasing around the world in the face of the structural destabilization of capitalist globalization. Scapegoated communities are under siege, such as the Rohingya in Myanmar, the Muslim minority in India, the Kurds in Turkey, southern African immigrants in South Africa, and Syrian and Iraqi refugees and other immigrants in Europe. As with its 20th century predecessor, 21st century fascism hinges on such manipulation of social anxiety at a time of acute capitalist crisis. Extreme inequality requires extreme violence and repression that lend to projects of 21st century fascism. 2) The system is fast reaching the ecological limits to its reproduction. We have reached several tipping points in what environmental scientists refer to as nine crucial "planetary boundaries." We have already exceeded these boundaries in three areas -- climate change, the nitrogen cycle and diversity loss. There have been five previous mass extinctions in earth's history. While all these were due to natural causes, for the first time ever, human conduct is intersecting with and fundamentally altering the earth system. We have entered what Paul Crutzen, the Dutch environmental scientist and Nobel Prize winner, termed the Anthropocene -- a new age in which humans have transformed up to half of the world's surface. We are altering the composition of the atmosphere and acidifying the oceans at a rate that undermines the conditions for life. The ecological dimensions of global crisis cannot be understated. "We are deciding, without quite meaning to, which evolutionary pathways will remain open and which will forever be closed," observes Elizabeth Kolbert in her best seller, The Sixth Extinction. "No other creature has ever managed this ... The Sixth Extinction will continue to determine the course of life long after everything people have written and painted and built has been ground into dust." Capitalism cannot be held solely responsible. The human-nature contradiction has deep roots in civilization itself. The ancient Sumerian empires, for example, collapsed after the population over-salinated their crop soil. The Mayan city-state network collapsed about AD 900 due to deforestation. And the former Soviet Union wrecked havoc on the environment. However, given capital's implacable impulse to accumulate profit and its accelerated commodification of nature, it is difficult to imagine that the environmental catastrophe can be resolved within the capitalist system. "Green capitalism" appears as an oxymoron, as sadistic capitalism's attempt to turn the ecological crisis into a profit-making opportunity, along with the conversion of poverty into a tourist attraction. 3) The sheer magnitude of the means of violence is unprecedented, as is the concentrated control over the means of global communications and the production and circulation of knowledge, symbols and images. We have seen the spread of frightening new systems of social control and repression that have brought us into the panoptical surveillance society and the age of thought control. This real-life Orwellian world is in a sense more perturbing than that described by George Orwell in his iconic novel 1984. In that fictional world, people were compelled to give their obedience to the state ("Big Brother") in exchange for a quiet existence with guarantees of employment, housing and other social necessities. Now, however, the corporate and political powers that be force obedience even as the means of survival are denied to the vast majority. Global apartheid involves the creation of "green zones" that are cordoned off in each locale around the world where elites are insulated through new systems of spatial reorganization, social control and policing. "Green zone" refers to the nearly impenetrable area in central Baghdad that US occupation forces established in the wake of the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The command center of the occupation and select Iraqi elite inside that green zone were protected from the violence and chaos that engulfed the country. Urban areas around the world are now green zoned through gentrification, gated communities, surveillance systems, and state and private violence. Inside the world's green zones, privileged strata avail themselves of privatized social services, consumption and entertainment. They can work and communicate through internet and satellite sealed off under the protection of armies of soldiers, police and private security forces. Green zoning takes on distinct forms in each locality. In Palestine, I witnessed such zoning in the form of Israeli military checkpoints, Jewish settler-only roads and the apartheid wall. In Mexico City, the most exclusive residential areas in the upscale Santa Fe District are accessible only by helicopter and private gated roads. In Johannesburg, a surreal drive through the exclusive Sandton City area reveals rows of mansions that appear as military compounds, with private armed towers and electrical and barbed-wire fences. In Cairo, I toured satellite cities ringing the impoverished center and inner suburbs where the country's elite could live out their aspirations and fantasies. They sport gated residential complexes with spotless green lawns, private leisure and shopping centers and English-language international schools under the protection of military checkpoints and private security police. In other cities, green zoning is subtler but no less effective. In Los Angeles, where I live, the freeway system now has an express lane reserved for those that can pay an exorbitant toll. On this lane, the privileged speed by, while the rest remain one lane over, stuck in the city's notorious bumper-to-bumper traffic -- or even worse, in notoriously underfunded and underdeveloped public transportation, where it may take half a day to get to and from work. There is no barrier separating this express lane from the others. However, a near-invisible closed surveillance system monitors every movement. If a vehicle without authorization shifts into the exclusive lane, it is instantly recorded by this surveillance system and a heavy fine is imposed on the driver, under threat of impoundment, while freeway police patrols are ubiquitous. Outside of the global green zones, warfare and police containment have become normalized and sanitized for those not directly at the receiving end of armed aggression. "Militainment" -- portraying and even glamorizing war and violence as entertaining spectacles through Hollywood films and television police shows, computer games and corporate "news" channels -- may be the epitome of sadistic capitalism. It desensitizes, bringing about complacency and indifference. In between the green zones and outright warfare are prison industrial complexes, immigrant and refugee repression and control systems, the criminalization of outcast communities and capitalist schooling. The omnipresent media and cultural apparatuses of the corporate economy, in particular, aim to colonize the mind -- to undermine the ability to think critically and outside the dominant worldview. A neofascist culture emerges through militarism, extreme masculinization, racism and racist mobilizations against scapegoats. 4) We are reaching limits to the extensive expansion of capitalism. Capitalism is like riding a bicycle: When you stop pedaling the bicycle, you fall over. If the capitalist system stops expanding outward, it enters crisis and faces collapse. In each earlier structural crisis, the system went through a new round of extensive expansion -- from waves of colonial conquest in earlier centuries, to the integration in the late 20th and early 21st centuries of the former socialist countries, China, India and other areas that had been marginally outside the system. There are no longer any new territories to integrate into world capitalism. Meanwhile, the privatization of education, health care, utilities, basic services and public land are turning those spaces in global society that were outside of capital's control into "spaces of capital." Even poverty has been turned into a commodity. What is there left to commodify? Where can the system now expand? With the limits to expansion comes a turn toward militarized accumulation -- making wars of endless destruction and reconstruction and expanding the militarization of social and political institutions so as to continue to generate new opportunities for accumulation in the face of stagnation. 5) There is the rise of a vast surplus population inhabiting a "planet of slums," alienated from the productive economy, thrown into the margins and subject to these sophisticated systems of social control and destruction. Global capitalism has no direct use for surplus humanity. But indirectly, it holds wages down everywhere and makes new systems of 21st century slavery possible. These systems include prison labor, the forced recruitment of miners at gunpoint by warlords contracted by global corporations to dig up valuable minerals in the Congo, sweatshops and exploited immigrant communities (including the rising tide of immigrant female caregivers for affluent populations). Furthermore, the global working class is experiencing accelerated "precariatization." The "new precariat" refers to the proletariat that faces capital under today's unstable and precarious labor relations -- informalization, casualization, part-time, temp, immigrant and contract labor. As communities are uprooted everywhere, there is a rising reserve army of immigrant labor. The global working class is becoming divided into citizen and immigrant workers. The latter are particularly attractive to transnational capital, as the lack of citizenship rights makes them particularly vulnerable, and therefore, exploitable. The challenge for dominant groups is how to contain the real and potential rebellion of surplus humanity, the immigrant workforce and the precariat. How can they contain the explosive contradictions of this system? The 21st century megacities become the battlegrounds between mass resistance movements and the new systems of mass repression. Some populations in these cities (and also in abandoned countryside) are at risk of genocide, such as those in Gaza, zones in Somalia and Congo, and swaths of Iraq and Syria. 6) There is a disjuncture between a globalizing economy and a nation-state-based system of political authority. Transnational state apparatuses are incipient and do not wield enough power and authority to organize and stabilize the system, much less to impose regulations on runaway transnational capital. In the wake of the 2008 financial collapse, for instance, the governments of the G-8 and G-20 were unable to impose transnational regulation on the global financial system, despite a series of emergency summits to discuss such regulation. Elites historically have attempted to resolve the problems of over-accumulation by state policies that can regulate the anarchy of the market. However, in recent decades, transnational capital has broken free from the constraints imposed by the nation-state. The more "enlightened" elite representatives of the transnational capitalist class are now clamoring for transnational mechanisms of regulation that would allow the global ruling class to reign in the anarchy of the system in the interests of saving global capitalism from itself and from radical challenges from below. At the same time, the division of the world into some 200 competing nation-states is not the most propitious of circumstances for the global working class. Victories in popular struggles from below in any one country or region can (and often do) become diverted and even undone by the structural power of transnational capital and the direct political and military domination that this structural power affords the dominant groups. In Greece, for instance, the leftist Syriza party came to power in 2015 on the heels of militant worker struggles and a mass uprising. But the party abandoned its radical program as a result of the enormous pressure exerted on it from the European Central Bank and private international creditors. The Systemic Critique of Global Capitalism A growing number of transnational elites themselves now recognize that any resolution to the global crisis must involve redistribution downward of income. However, in the viewpoint of those from below, a neo-Keynesian redistribution within the prevailing corporate power structure is not enough. What is required is a redistribution of power downward and transformation toward a system in which social need trumps private profit. A global rebellion against the transnational capitalist class has spread since the financial collapse of 2008. Wherever one looks, there is popular, grassroots and leftist struggle, and the rise of new cultures of resistance: the Arab Spring; the resurgence of leftist politics in Greece, Spain and elsewhere in Europe; the tenacious resistance of Mexican social movements following the Ayotzinapa massacre of 2014; the favela uprising in Brazil against the government's World Cup and Olympic expulsion policies; the student strikes in Chile; the remarkable surge in the Chinese workers' movement; the shack dwellers and other poor people's campaigns in South Africa; Occupy Wall Street, the immigrant rights movement, Black Lives Matter, fast food workers' struggle and the mobilization around the Bernie Sanders presidential campaign in the United States. This global revolt is spread unevenly and faces many challenges. A number of these struggles, moreover, have suffered setbacks, such as the Greek working-class movement and, tragically, the Arab Spring. What type of a transformation is viable, and how do we achieve it? How we interpret the global crisis is itself a matter of vital importance as politics polarize worldwide between a neofascist and a popular response. The systemic critique of global capitalism must strive to influence, from this vantage point, the discourse and practice of movements for a more just distribution of wealth and power. Our survival may depend on it.

#### The alternative is a politics of organizing around the common experience of life shaped by political economy. This starting point creates a mode of solidarity that doesn’t just add categories and stirs but creates an inclusive class identity via struggle that transforms participants.

Leo Panitch 18, York University Canada Research Chair in Comparative Political Economy, From the Streets to the State: Changing The World By Taking Power, pg 26-28

What accounts for the impasse of the left by the late twentieth century? Over the last four decades one of the central tropes of intellectual discourse, epitomized by the popularity of Laclau and Mouffe’s Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, criticizes the strategic mistake of excessively emphasizing class identity and consciousness. Even Geoff Eley’s (2002) monumental historical study, quoted above, which demonstrates how effective socialist labor movements were as advocates for democratic reform, also stresses “the insufficiencies of socialist advocacy,” not least pertaining to gender and race, in terms of “all the ways socialism’s dominance of the Left marginalized issues not easily assimilable to the class-political precepts so fundamental to the socialist vision” (10). Yet the left’s current conundrum in the face of the new right also brings to light the insufficiencies of the politics of identity, which has not only filled the void of class politics in recent decades but has often played a significant role in shunting class aside. Adolph Reed Jr. (1999) has perhaps most powerfully made the case for “a politics focused on bringing people together” around the common experience of everyday life shaped and constrained by political economy—for example, finding, keeping or advancing in a job with a living wage, keeping or attaining access to decent healthcare, securing decent, affordable housing. . . . Such concerns and the objective of collectively crafting a vehicle to address them is a politics that proceeds from what we have in common. . . . To the extent that differences are real and meaningful, the best way to negotiate them is from a foundation of shared purpose and practical solidarity based on a pragmatic understanding of the old principle that an injury to one is an injury to all. This is not simply a politics that attempts to build on a base in the working class; it is a politics that in the process can fashion a broadly inclusive class identity. (xxvii–xxviii) The failure to absorb this strategic insight, which might entail severe costs even for liberal democracy, is becoming ever clearer amidst the reactionary electoral appeal of a new right to working class voters. Nevertheless, this chapter shall argue that it also has much to do with the longstanding problems with the practice of democracy inside the institutions of the labor movement and the political parties with which they were intertwined. It has become far too commonplace to address these problems by criticizing the “ontological” mistake of those theorists who advance a class-oriented politics. This is a kind of idealism which attributes far too much historical impact to theoretical texts. It avoids serious inquiry into what determined the actual historical practices of working class parties and unions as democratic institutions. It thereby fails to uncover what really accounts for their limited contribution to the development of workers’ democratic capacities so as to carry the struggle for democracy beyond the electoral arena to the workplace, to the corporations and banks that dominate the economy, and perhaps most important to the democratization of the institutions of the state.

### 1NC

#### The role of the ballot is to determine the efficacy of a topical proposal relative to the status quo or a competing option.

#### Anticompetitive’ behavior are business practices that restrict competition without providing lower cost or higher quality goods and services

OECD 3 – OECD Glossary of Statistical Terms, from the Glossary of Industrial Organisation Economics and Competition Law, compiled by R. S. Khemani and D. M. Shapiro, commissioned by the Directorate for Financial, Fiscal and Enterprise Affairs, OECD, 1993, https://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID=3145

Definition:

Anticompetitive practices refer to a wide range of business practices in which a firm or group of firms may engage in order to restrict inter-firm competition to maintain or increase their relative market position and profits without necessarily providing goods and services at a lower cost or of higher quality.

#### ‘Expanding the scope’ must increase the area covered by antitrust law

Cesar A. Noble 17, Judge on the Connecticut Superior Court, Hartford Judicial District, 777 Residential, LLC v. Metro. Dist. Comm'n, 2017 Conn. Super. LEXIS 4178, \*4-5 (Conn. Super. Ct. August 1, 2017), 8/1/2017, Lexis

The defendant relies upon §7-249 as authority for the supplemental assessment. The statute provides that "[b]enefits to buildings or structures constructed or expanded after the initial assessment may be assessed as if the new or expanded buildings or structures had existed at the time of the initial assessment." The parties dispute whether the conversion of the property constitutes a construction or expansion of buildings or structures granting authority to the defendant to levy a supplemental assessment. The plaintiff argues that because the conversion did not constitute an expansion, that is, an increase in the volume or physical area of a building the defendant had no authority under §7-249 for the supplemental assessment. 5 In the view of the plaintiff it is significant that the conversion did not increase the physical footprint or interior square footage of the property in any way including by a vertical [\*5] enlargement. Absent such an increase, asserts the plaintiff, there can be no construction or expansion of any building or structure. The defendant assert that the construction of the 285 new residential units constitute new structures within the plain meaning of §7-249. The court agrees with the defendant.

[FOOTNOTE]

5 The plaintiff relies upon the definition of the word "expand" found in Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (10th ed. 2002) of "to open up; to increase the extent, number, volume, or scope of."

#### Violation---the affirmative doesn’t defend prohibitions on anticompetitive business practices by the private sector by at least expanding the scope of its core antitrust laws.

#### The impact is clash---debates about scholarship in a vacuum are myopic and breed reactionary generics---they allow the aff to cement their infinite prep advantage, because all the aff has to do is find evidence supporting an ideological orientation towards the world---this crushes clash because all of our prepared negative strategies are based on praxis, and by not defending a clear actor and mechanism we lose 90% of negative ground, and the aff still retains traditional competition standards like perms to make being neg impossible---clash is an intrinsic good and it’s vital to the overall practice of debate. Every debater is here for different reasons, but they trace back to the pedagogical uniqueness of the space. An open topic prevents iteration through shallow debates, unpredictable advocacies, and lack of testing.

## Case

### Case---1NC

#### Intersectional politics working within institutions for black women alleviates violence and recuperates institutions.

Patricia H. Collins 21, Charles Phelps Taft Emeritus Professor of Sociology within the Department of African American Studies at the University of Cincinnati. She is a social theorist whose research and scholarship have examined issues of race, gender, social class, sexuality and/or nation. She was awarded the Jessie Bernard Award of the American Sociological Association (ASA) for significant scholarship in gender, and the C. Wright Mills Award of the Society for the Study of Social Problems, “Intersectionality as Critical Inquiry,” in Companion to Feminist Studies, Chapter 7, 2021, pg. 107-123.

Kimberlé Crenshaw had no way of knowing that she was naming intersectionality as a form of critical inquiry and praxis when, in the early 1990s, she published her two groundbreaking articles on intersectionality (Crenshaw  1989,  1991). Crenshaw’s scholarly articles constitute an important turning point in the shifting relationships between activist and academic communities (see e.g. Collins and Bilge  2016, pp. 65–77). Social movements in the mid‐twentieth century pushed for institutional transformation in housing, education, employment, and health care. Transforming educational institutions and the knowledge they embodied was central to these initiatives. Indigenous peoples, African Americans, women, LGBTQ people, Latinos/as, and similarly subordinated groups challenged both the substance of knowledge about their experiences and the power arrangements within primary schools, high schools, colleges, and universities that catalyzed such knowledge. Many such groups produced oppositional or resistant knowledge that was grounded in their own experiences and that challenged prevailing interpretations of them (see Collins 2019, chap. 3). Higher education was an important site for social transformation. Calls for transforming curricular practices within the academy stimulated an array of programs that embarked on a similar mission of institutional transformation (Collins and Bilge 2016, pp. 77–81; Dill and Zambrana 2009).

Within contemporary neoliberal sensibilities, the commitment to the idea of social transformation within mid‐twentieth‐century social movements can be hard to understand. Yet a broader understanding of the meaning of resistance to subordinated people suggests that Black people, indigenous peoples, women, Latinx, LGBTQ people, differently abled people, religious and ethnic minorities, and stateless people continue to see transforming social institutions as necessary. Claims for social transformation can seem to be idealistic and naive, yet with hindsight, aspirations for social transformation in prior eras inform contemporary realities. Specifically, many of the visible changes within colleges and universities over the past several decades reflect prior efforts at institutional transformation (Dill  2009; Mihesuah and Wilson 2004; Parker et al. 2010).

In a 2009 interview, Crenshaw reflected on the experiences that led her to use the term intersectionality within the broader social conditions of the times. For Crenshaw, her activism in college and law school revealed the inadequacies of both anti‐racism and feminist perspectives, limitations that left both political projects unable to fully address the social problems that each aimed to remedy. There seemed to be no language that could resolve conflicts between anti‐racist social movements that were, in Crenshaw’s words, “deeply sexist and patriarchal”; and feminist activism, where “race reared its head in a somewhat parallel way” (Guidroz and Berger 2009, p. 63). For Crenshaw, informed social action within both movements required new angles of vision. This particular social problem propelled Crenshaw’s search for provisional language that she could use to analyze and redress the limitations of monocategorical thinking regarding both race and gender. Crenshaw describes what she had in mind when she introduced the term intersectionality:

That was the activist engagement that brought me to this work. And my own use of the term “intersectionality” was just a metaphor [italics added], I’m amazed at how it gets over‐ and underused; sometimes I can’t even recognize it in the literature anymore. I was simply looking at the way all these systems of oppression overlap. But more importantly, how in the process of that structural convergence rhetorical politics and identity politics – based on the idea that systems of subordination do not overlap‐would abandon issues and causes and people who actually were affected by overlapping systems of subordination. I’ve always been interested in both the structural convergence and the political marginality. That’s how I came into it. (Guidroz and Berger 2009, p. 65)

For Crenshaw, intersectionality named the structural convergence among intersecting systems of power that created blind spots in anti‐racist and feminist activism. Crenshaw counseled that anti‐racist and feminist movements would be compromised as long as they saw their struggles as separate and not intertwined. Significantly, racism and sexism not only fostered social inequalities, they marginalized individuals and groups that did not fit comfortably within race‐only, gender‐only monocategorical frameworks. Women of color remained politically marginalized within both movements, an outcome that both reflected the harm done by racism and sexism, and limited the political effectiveness of both movements. Crenshaw’s understanding of the term intersectionality is important for subsequent use of the term. Her work suggests that, from its inception, the idea of intersectionality worked in multiple registers of recognizing the significance of social structural arrangements of power, how individual and group experiences reflect those structural intersections, and how political marginality might engender new subjectivities and agency (Collins and Bilge 2016, pp. 71–77).

By now it is widely accepted that intersectionality is the term that has stuck. Of all the words that Crenshaw could have selected, and of all the idioms that might have resonated with intersectionality’s adherents, why did this specific term resonate with so many people when Crenshaw first used it? Crenshaw’s comment that her use of the term intersectionality was “just a metaphor” provides an important clue.

Many people think of metaphors as literary devices that are confined to fiction and essays. Yet metaphors are also important in shaping how people understand and participate in social relations. As a foundation of thinking and action, metaphors help people understand and experience one kind of thing in terms of another. A metaphor can spark an instant sense of understanding, fostering an immediate sense of the formerly unknown in terms of the known.2 In essence, the capacity to think and act is metaphorical in nature (Trout 2010, p. 3). As metaphor, intersectionality named an ongoing communicative process of trying to understand race in terms of gender, or gender in terms of class. Rather than following the chain of metaphors (race is like and unlike gender), the metaphor of intersectionality provided a shortcut that built on existing sensibilities in order to see interconnections.

Cultural theorist Stuart Hall provides another clue as to why intersectionality as a particular metaphor traveled so quickly. In an article published in the 1990s, Hall argues that metaphors are often linked to social transformation, ways that people can move from the familiar to imagining the unfamiliar. Hall posits that metaphors of social transformation must do at least two things: “They allow us to imagine what it would be like when prevailing cultural values are challenged and transformed, the old social hierarchies are overthrown, old standards and norms disappear. . . and new meanings and values, social and cultural configurations begin to appear. However, such metaphors must also have analytic value. They must somehow provide ways of thinking about the relation between the social and symbolic domains in this process of transformation” (Hall 1996, p. 287).

As a metaphor of social transformation, intersectionality invokes both elements. It arrived in the midst of ongoing struggles to resist social inequalities brought about by racism, sexism, colonialism, capitalism, and similar systems of power. The metaphor of intersectionality could move among and through these forms of domination, providing a snapshot view of their sameness and difference as a way to see their interconnections. Intersectionality as metaphor did not proscribe what social transformation would look like, or even the best way of getting there. Instead, using intersectionality as a metaphor provided analytic value in linking social structures and the ideas that reproduce them – in Hall’s terms, the ties between the social and symbolic domains of social change. For people who, like Crenshaw, were interested in social transformation, the metaphor of intersectionality expressed the aspirations of the time.

Crenshaw’s metaphor was recognizable to many people because it invoked the tangible, spatial relations of everyday life. Everyone is located in physical space, and everyone has had to follow a path or move through an intersection of some sort. People could pick up the metaphor, imagining different kinds of pathways and crossroads, and use intersectionality as a metaphor to understand very different things. The idea of an intersection where two or more pathways meet is a familiar idea in physical, geographic space. The roads or pathways need not be straight or paved to invoke this sense of a spatial intersection. All cultures have intersections or places where people cross paths, whether superhighways or barely marked paths in a forest. Moreover, the places where people cross paths are often meeting places, spaces where different kinds of people engage one another. Being in an intersection or moving through one is a familiar experience. This spatial metaphor also invokes the idea of seeing several possible pathways from the vantage point within the intersection, and being faced with the decision of which path to take. In this sense, the spatial metaphor itself is open‐ended and subject to many interpretations. Intersectionality as a metaphor worked so well because it was simultaneously familiar yet highly elastic.

This spatial metaphor that could be seen in the material world implicitly advanced a more abstract theoretical claim about social structure – namely, that the places where systems of power converged potentially provide better explanations for social phenomena than those that ignored such intersections. Racism and sexism may be conceptualized as distinctive structural phenomena, yet examining them from where they intersect provides new angles of vision of each system of power as well as how they cross and diverge from one another. Politically, the idea of intersectionality also worked. The term intersectionality encapsulated the convergence of multiple social justice projects and long‐standing critical practices within academia.

Crenshaw’s use of the term intersectionality as a metaphor for structuring her argument tapped into this power of metaphor to provide a snapshot view of complex social relations during a time of considerable social change. Significantly, Crenshaw’s metaphor was not confined to explaining racism, sexism, and similar systems of power. The metaphor of intersectionality emerged in the context of solving social problems brought on by multiple and seemingly separate systems of power. In her careful reading of Crenshaw’s signature articles on intersectionality, philosopher Anna Carastathis (2014) examines how Crenshaw used intersectionality as a “provisional” concept to frame her argument about resistance to oppression. For those involved in activist projects, intersectionality enabled those who used the term to understand, for example, a familiar racism in terms of an unfamiliar sexism, or a familiar violence against women of color as individuals in terms of a less familiar analysis of state‐sanctioned violence of colonialism. Using intersectionality as a metaphor offered an invitation to an array of social actors who were thinking about similar things within different social locations and from varying vantage points.

When Crenshaw dismissed intersectionality as just a metaphor, she could not foresee the impact of this particular metaphor in informing critical inquiry and social change. Instead, Crenshaw’s use of intersectionality seemingly provided the right metaphor at the right time. As intersectionality has grown, the importance of its metaphoric thinking has become clearer. Crenshaw’s use of intersectionality as a metaphor was not incidental to intersectionality’s subsequent development, but rather proved to be a fundamental pillar within intersectionality’s cognitive architecture and critical thinking.

Why Metaphors Matter

If naming the ideas that intersectionality invokes were as simple as choosing from a predetermined array of terms that had already undergone academic scrutiny, it would make sense to debate intersectionality’s merits in this universe of alternative terms. Intersectionality may not be the best metaphor for explaining social phenomena, but it is the one that has persisted. Some scholars recognize the significance of intersectionality as metaphor, yet offer alternatives to it that seemingly do a better job of explaining social reality. For example, Ivy Ken’s (2008) use of sugar as a metaphor aims for a more historically grounded, fluid understanding of intersectionality. Mapping how sugar as idea and product weaves throughout historical and contemporary relationships of capitalism, racism, and sexism, Ken’s metaphor of sugar is an innovative, alternative entry point into the constellation of ideas referenced by intersectionality. Sugar may be a better fit for the ideas that intersectionality invokes, but pragmatically, would it have worked as well?

The puzzle to be explained here concerns why the term intersectionality continues to resonate with so many people as a preferred way of conceptualizing an amorphous set of ideas. Can sugar as metaphor do the same metaphoric work as intersectionality? Conceptual metaphor theory helps explain why intersectionality as a metaphor persists. Intersectionality as metaphor provides a cognitive device for thinking about social inequality within power relations. It asks people to think beyond familiar race‐only or gender‐only perspectives in order to take a new look at social problems. Intersectionality as metaphor also provides a framework for drawing upon what people already know about racism to learn about sexism and vice versa. As metaphor, intersectionality suggests that racism and sexism are connected, the first step in establishing conceptual correspondences between these two constructs. Using intersectionality as a metaphor breaks down monocategorical analyses to focus on the conceptual correspondences or relationships among racism and sexism. And this process need not end with just race and gender.

Intersectionality may not have started out as a core conceptual metaphor for understanding social inequality, but over time, it has increasingly functioned as one. Just as creating social meanings in everyday life relies upon metaphors, theoretical knowledge also relies in some fashion on metaphorical thinking in constructing knowledge. In her classic work Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?, feminist philosopher Sandra Harding examines how metaphors have played an important role in modeling nature and in specifying the appropriate domain of a theory (1991, pp. 84–85). Harding points out that metaphors are important dimensions of doing social theory, the case, for example, of imagining society in metaphorical terms – society as a machine, an organism, or a computer  –  and by implication, changing the core metaphor of a field changes its theoretical orientation to the social world. Originally offered in the context of critical science studies, this critical perspective advanced within feminist philosophy preceded more recent attention to metaphors as an important dimension of social theorizing (Abbott 2004; Swedberg 2014). For example, in his volume The Art of Social Theory, Richard Swedberg remarks on these connections between metaphors in everyday life and within the sophisticated process of theorizing: “Metaphors abound in everyday language, in the arts as well as in the sciences. Their power can be immense, as evidenced by the metaphor of the brain as a computer. This metaphor is generally seen as having helped cognitive science come into being” (2014, p. 89). In this sense, Crenshaw’s reflection that intersectionality is just a metaphor underestimates the power of conceptual metaphors for critical analysis.

Intersectionality’s metaphor of the connectedness of different systems of power has proven to be an important one for theorizing power relations and political identities. For example, Norocel’s (2013) study of the radical right populist movement in Sweden provides an important example of an explicit use both of conceptual metaphor theory and of intersectionality as a metaphor. Norocel examines how the radical right used the idea of Folkhem (the home of [Swedish] people) as a conceptual metaphor to ground their political project. As a metaphor, Folkhem helped structure radical right masculinities, specifically heteronormative masculinities, at the intersection of gender, class, and race. Norocel identifies the significance of conceptual metaphor theory for this project: “The choice of a certain conceptual metaphor in a specific social context . . . has a crucial impact on how we structure reality, determining what is explained and . . . what is left outside this framework of intelligibility, thereby highlighting the various power relations at work in that particular discourse . . .. In other words, the analysis of metaphors needs to be undertaken whilst bearing in mind the very discourse in which they are embedded” (p. 9). In Norocel’s study, the idea of gender, class, race, and sexuality provided a framing metaphor that could be extended to explain a political phenomenon in a specific national context.

Feminist theorist Chela Sandoval also recognizes the significance of metaphors for theorizing power relations. In a section titled “Power in Metaphors” in her signature book Methodology of the Oppressed (2000), Sandoval describes how different metaphors highlight important distinctions between hierarchical and postmodern understandings of power. Imagining power relations as a hierarchical pyramid differs dramatically from imagining power relations through a flat, spatial metaphor of centers and margins. Sandoval notes that the shift away from a hierarchical, “sovereign model” of power enables power to be figured as a force that circulates horizontally:

As in the previous, sovereign, pyramidal model of power, the location of every citizen‐ subject can be distinctly mapped on this postmodern, flattened, horizontal power grid according to attributes as race, class, gender, age, or sexual orientation, but this reterritorialized circulation of power redifferentiates groups, and sorts identities differently. Because they are horizontally located, it appears as if such politicized identities‐as‐positions can equally access their own racial‐, sexual‐, national‐, or gender‐unique forms of social power. Such constituencies are then perceived as speaking “democratically” to and against each other in a lateral, horizontal‐not pyramidal‐exchange, although from spatially differing geographic, class, age, sex, race, or gender locations. (pp. 72–73)

This metaphoric shift has important implications for intersectionality (Collins 2018). Intersectionality as a core conceptual metaphor has traveled well, stimulating much innovative work within intersectionality. Yet the use of metaphoric thinking for intersectional analysis raises several questions. Do some aspects of intersectionality as metaphor work better in addressing certain social problems and less well with others? What experiences would people need to bring to the metaphoric use of intersectionality for it to have meaning?

Critics raise a valid point about the limits of intersectionality as a metaphor when used to invoke the image of a literal crossroads. In her signature book Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza (1987), Chicana feminist writer Gloria Anzaldúa expands upon the metaphor of intersectionality as a literal crossroads managed by traffic cops to that of the borderlands as a meeting place. The borderlands is simultaneously a place, reflecting the social relations of the physical border that influenced Anzaldua’s experiences growing up in south Texas. In this sense, borderlands are structural places that reflect hierarchical power relations and lie outside acceptable categories of belonging (Yuval‐Davis 2011). Borderland spaces show the working of hierarchical power relations, or the sedimented effects of, in Sandoval’s words, a “sovereign, pyramidal model of power.” But Anzaldúa’s borderland is simultaneously a way of describing the experiences of navigating marginal, liminal, and outsider within spaces that are created by multiple kinds of borders. This is the potential for “democratic” exchanges within borderland or intersectional spaces.

Anzaldúa’s work illustrates the possibilities and limitations of spatial metaphors of power. As AnaLouise Keating points out, Anzaldúa is generally defined as a “Chicana lesbian‐feminist” author, but Anzaldúa described herself more broadly as being on various thresholds, simultaneously inside and outside multiple collectivities. Anzaldúa both maintains multiple allegiances and locates herself in multiple worlds:

“Your allegiance is to La Raza, the Chicano movement;” say the members of my race. “Your allegiance is to the Third World;” say my Black and Asian friends. “Your allegiance is to your gender, to women;” say the feminists. Then there’s my allegiance to the Gay movement, to the socialist revolution, to the New Age, to magic and the occult. And there’s my affinity of literature, to the world of the artist. What am I? A third world lesbian feminist with Marxist and mystic leanings. They would chop me up into little fragments and tag each piece with a label. (Keating 2009, p. 2)

Anzaldúa uses her experiences with multiple groups as the foundation of her analysis, yet she is less interested in finding freedom by extracting herself from multiple groups in order to find herself, but rather in understanding how her sameness and difference across multiple groups fosters new experiences of self. As Keating describes this positioning, “Although each group makes membership contingent on its own often exclusionary set of rules and demands, Anzaldúa refuses all such terms without rejecting the people or groups themselves” (2009, p. 2). For Anzaldúa, the borderlands suggests a place not simply to house experiences but also a way of working, both politically and intellectually.

Intersectionality may be the metaphor that has taken hold as the descriptor to describe the field itself, yet the spatial metaphor of the borderland also deepens understandings of intersecting power relations. Anzaldúa’s work links experiences, spatial metaphors, power, and political engagement, signaling an important approach to critical theorizing. In discussing the significance of Gloria Anzaldúa’s work within intersectionality, Patrick R. Grzanka describes Anzaldúa’s “borderland” metaphor as signifying a geographic, affective, cultural, and political landscape that cannot be explained by binary logic (black/white, gay/straight, Mexican/American, etc.) or even the notion of liminality, that is, the space between. For Anzaldúa, the borderlands are a very real space of actual social relations that cannot be captured within existing social theory. Grzanka describes the connections between the metaphor of intersectionality and that of the borderlands: “Anzaldúa’s work exemplifies the concept of intersectionality perhaps better than the traffic intersection metaphor so central to the field and to Crenshaw’s initial articulation of the concept, because Anzaldúa denies any logic that presumes there were ever discreet dimensions of difference that collided at some particular point: in the borderlands, mixing, hybridity, unfinished synthesis, and unpredictable amalgamation were always already happening, and are forever ongoing” (2014, pp. 106–107). In this sense, the concept of the borderlands illustrates the power of metaphor that, in this case, not only complements but also deepens intersectionality’s metaphoric posture.

As metaphors, neither intersectionality nor the idea of the borderlands provide coherence, consistency, or closure. Both travel, sometimes working in tandem for some projects and apart in others. They illustrate that when a concept is structured by a metaphor, it is only partially structured and can be extended in some ways but not in others (Trout 2010, p. 13). Metaphors provide a holistic mental picture of interrelated phenomena as well as new insights into and angles of vision on social relations. Heuristics offer tools for investigating the ideas that emerge through intersectionality’s metaphoric thinking. Heuristics provide thinking tools that are typically used to solve problems.

Intersectionality’s Heuristic Thinking

Using intersectionality as a heuristic has facilitated the rethinking of existing knowledge – namely, social problems such as violence, social institutions such as work and family, and important social constructs such as identity. Kimberlé Crenshaw’s classic article “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color” (1991) illustrates the heuristic use of intersectionality for rethinking existing knowledge concerning violence as a social problem. Crenshaw’s immediate concern lay in analyzing violence against women of color, with the goal of strengthening grassroots and legal responses to it. Lacking the term intersectionality, Crenshaw draws upon the existing heuristic of race/class/gender as interconnected phenomena as a starting point for problem‐ solving concerning violence. In this regard, her approach illustrates the use of intersectionality (the race/class/gender heuristic) as a way to generate usable knowledge for social science as an instrument for “social problem solving” (Lindblom and Cohen 1979, p. 4).

Yet, in the context of using the race/class/gender heuristic, she recognizes its limitations for her particular project and adapts it for her specific context. Crenshaw kept the idea of intersectionality, yet incorporated categories that were a better fit for the women of color under consideration. Specifically, Crenshaw underemphasizes class as an explanatory category that explains violence against women of color. Instead, she includes the category of “immigrant status”; itself a construct invoking discourses of nation (citizenship status) and ethnicity (culture as proxy for color, race, and often religion). Via this adaptation, Crenshaw argues that the provisional combination of race, gender, and immigrant status better fit the experiences of the group in question as well as the social problems with violence that they encountered. Yet neither the existing race/class/gender framework nor the new framework that emphasizes race, gender, and immigrant status was by itself sufficient. Crenshaw then offers the term intersectionality as a way to respond to the challenge of solving social problems that could not be incorporated within the race/class/gender rubric. This shift from race/class/gender to intersectionality illustrates the utility of heuristics – ironically, in this case, in naming intersectionality itself.

Analyses of violence, as well as the intersectional categories that have been used to study it, have expanded tremendously since Crenshaw’s signature article. Because violence against women has been such a powerful catalyst for intersectionality itself, intersectional analyses of this topic are not only widespread but have also informed political activism and public policy (Collins and Bilge 2016, pp. 48–55). Analyses of violence that draw upon intersectionality reappear across a wide array of topics, such as the nation-state violence of militarism and war (Peterson 2007), the treatment of sexual violence and ethnicity in international criminal law (Buss 2009), and hate speech itself as part of relations of violence (Matsuda et al. 1993). Solutions to violence against women remain unlikely if violence against women is imagined through monocategorical lenses such as the gender lenses of male perpetrators and female victims, or racial lenses that elevate police violence against African American men over domestic violence against African American women. Viewing violence through an intersectional lens potentially creates new forms of transversal politics to confront it (Collins 2017b).

One strength of heuristic thinking concerns its ease of use for criticizing existing knowledge and posing new questions. For example, when it comes to the study of work, asking simple questions such as, “Does this apply to women?” or “Is slave labor included in the definition of work?” or “Why are white male workers the focus of studies of work?” identifies areas of overemphasis and underemphasis in understandings of work. The experiences of a particular group of working‐class, white, male industrial workers or middle‐class, white, male corporate managers and executives have garnered the lion’s share of scholarly attention. What are the effects of treating findings on this particular group as universal in work‐related scholarship? The effectiveness of heuristic thinking lies in its simplicity – its use shifts established perspectives on scholarship and practice. The heuristic of asking how an intersectional framework would shift what is considered to be fixed, and fix what has been in flux, signals a sea change in how to do scholarship.

The now commonsense idea that individual identity is shaped by multiple factors whose saliency changes from one social context to the next owes much to intersectionality’s ease of use as a heuristic. On a basic level, an individual need no longer ask, “Am I Black or am I a woman or am I a lesbian first?” The answer of being simultaneously Black and a woman and a lesbian expands this space of subjectivity to encompass multiple aspects of individual identity. Rather than a fixed, essentialist identity that a person carries from one situation to the next, individual identities are now seen as differentially performed from one social context to the next (Butler 1990). The process of crafting a unique sense of self that rests on multiple possibilities generated new questions about how those identities were interconnected and coforming, rather than how they were or should be ranked.3

Intersectionality is not a theory of identity, but many scholars and intellectual activists understand it through this lens primarily because the heuristic use of intersectionality as applied to the topic of identity is commonplace. Given the inordinate attention devoted to identity and its seeming association with intersectionality, returning to Stuart Hall’s work, written about the same time as Butler’s, may be helpful. Unlike Butler, Hall contends that the performative nature of identity and the frameworks of social structures both matter: “Identity is not a set of fixed attributes, the unchanging essence of the inner self, but a constantly shifting process of positioning. We tend to think of identity as taking us back to our roots, the part of us which remains essentially the same across time. In fact identity is always a never‐completed process of becoming – a process of shifting identifications, rather than a singular, complete, finished state of being” (Hall 2017, p. 16). Other scholarship examines identity in relation to social inequality and political action, such as the possibilities of identity categories as potential coalitions (Carastathis 2013), or case studies on how attending to intersecting identities creates solidarity and cohesion for cross‐movement mobilization within participatory democracies (Palacios 2016).

Using intersectionality as a heuristic not only has facilitated the rethinking of existing knowledge‐violence and similar social problems, work and similar social institutions, as well as identity and similar social constructs – it has also brought new systems of power into view. Intersectional analysis now incorporates sexuality, ethnicity, age, ability, and nation as similar categories of analysis (Kim‐Puri  2005). Specifically, increased attention to the themes of nation, nationalism, nation‐state, and national identity has aimed to align the power relations of nation with structural analyses of racism, capitalism, and patriarchy (Yuval‐Davis 1997). Literature on the nation‐state and its citizenship policies has benefited from intersectional frameworks, the case of Goldberg’s (2002) analysis of the racial state, or Evelyn Glenn’s (2002) study of work, American citizenship, and nation‐state power. Intersectional frameworks have also deepened understandings of nationalist ideologies, as evidenced in Joane Nagel’s (1998) analysis of masculinity and nationalism, or George Mosse’s (1985) classic work on nationalism and sexuality. The political behavior of subordinated groups as they aim to empower themselves has also garnered intersectional analysis, for example, Ana RamosZayas’s (Ramos‐Zayas 2003) ethnographic study of Puerto Rican identity within a Chicago neighborhood that illustrates the benefits of incorporating nationalism in studies of local politics. Intersectional analyses of nation‐state power have expanded to consider transnational processes, for example, placing analyses of transnational tourism within intersectional processes of erotic autonomy, decolonization, and nationalism (Alexander 1997, 2005).

At some point, one bumps up against the limitations of heuristic thinking. In this sense, the ways in which race/class/gender studies have unfolded since the 1980s can serve as a cautionary tale for the vast amount of data that is currently being produced by the heuristic use of intersectionality. Race/class/gender studies laid substantial groundwork for intersectionality’s metaphoric and heuristic use. Scholars and activists working in race/class/ gender studies, and similar interdisciplinary endeavors routinely used the phrase “race, class, and gender” for a wide array of projects (Andersen and Collins 2016; Collins and Bilge 2016). The heuristic use of “race, class, and gender” as a provisional, place‐holder term across the myriad projects that  sprang up within and across academic disciplines catalyzed considerable scholarship. Viewing race, class, and gender as interconnected phenomena seemingly shared a loose set of assumptions: (i) race, class, and gender referenced not singular but intersecting systems of power; (ii) specific social inequalities reflect these power relations from one setting to the next; (iii) individual and collective (group) identities of race, gender, class, and sexuality are socially constructed within multiple systems of power; and (iv) social problems and their remedies are similarly intersecting phenomena. Each of these assumptions served as jumping off points for a range of  projects. Intersectionality drew from and expanded the heuristic use of these assumptions that underlay race/class/gender studies.

Race/class/gender studies and intersectionality both rely on heuristic thinking, yet while it may seem that they are interchangeable, they do have distinctive approaches to social problem solving. Using the framework of race/class/gender analysis reminds researchers to attend to race, class, and gender as particular categories of analysis. Either singularly or in combination, the categories of race, class, and gender identify distinctive structural foundations for social inequalities, for example, the racism of white supremacy, the class exploitation associated with capitalism, and the sexism inherent in patriarchy. Race, class, and gender not only reference specific systems of power; each category has its own storied traditions of scholarship and activism done by interpretive communities that developed around each category. Ironically, the particular history of the field itself was seen as getting in the way of its universal possibilities. The field was seen as being too particular because it confined analysis to race, class, and gender. Some users erroneously assumed that these particular concepts, when taken literally, must be present in every analysis, and that the absence of any one category compromised the integrity of race/class/gender studies. Because it was deemed to be too closely associated with the particular, subordinated social groups that were central to its creation and growth, the field of race/class/gender was also seen as having another kind of particularity problem. “Race” meant Black people, “gender” meant women, and “class” meant poor people. Yet race/class/gender never argued that its concepts were confined to subordinated people – it was perfectly capable of studying privilege within the categories of race, class, and gender. Similarly, race, class, and gender were never meant to be used as a fixed list of entities that applied in all times in all places. Rather, race/class/gender was a heuristic that pointed toward other combinations that not only were possible but were better suited for a range of particular issues and contexts.

The heuristic use of intersectionality provides different strengths and limitations. Because intersectionality does not specify the configuration of categories, or even the number of relevant categories for a particular analysis, it seemingly offers more flexibility than race/class/gender studies. By providing a new term that was elastic enough to incorporate the particularities of race/class/gender studies yet expand them to include additional particular concepts, intersectionality ostensibly solved the particularity problem of race/class/gender. Yet intersectionality’s quest for universality – and this is important for its status as a social theory in the making‐meant that it need not attend to its own particular history. Using intersectionality as a heuristic by referring to a generic intersectionality without attending to particulars of the categories themselves, or to the social issues that catalyzed both race/class/gender studies and intersectionality, created new problems. The rapid uptake of intersectionality by adding even more categories suggests a parallelism among these categories, one that implies that each system of power is fundamentally the same. If the categories of race, class, and gender, among others, are equivalent and potential substitutes for one another, then the systems of power that underlie intersectionality are similarly equivalent. Understanding one means understanding the others.

This assumption of equivalence and interchangeability may facilitate intersectionality’s ease of heuristic use, but it simultaneously limits intersectionality’s theoretical potential. For example, the category of class has been often mentioned within intersectionality yet less often treated as an analytical category that is equivalent to race and gender. The categories of nation, sexuality, ethnicity, age, religion, and ability resemble one another but cannot be collapsed into one another under the heading of a generic intersectionality. Each is an analytical category that cannot be simply added together and combined with the others. The relationships among these categories lie in their particulars  –  they must be empirically studied and theorized, not simply assumed for heuristic convenience. This brief comparison of race/class/gender and intersectionality suggests that if a heuristic device is applied uncritically, more as a formula than as a tool of invention for critically engaged social problem solving, it may no longer be able to spark innovation.4 \*\*\*FOOTNOTE BEGINS\*\*\* In Chapter 3 of Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory (2019), I develop this theme of the relationship between particularity and universality by examining intersectionality’s ties to resistant knowledge traditions with social action components. Critical race studies aims to resist racism, feminist studies resists heteropatriarchy, and decolonial studies resists neocolonialism. In this sense, each project reflects the particular social problems confronting Black people, women, and colonized people. Yet each project also sees beyond the particulars of any one group. \*\*\*FOOTNOTE ENDS\*\*\*

Intersectionality as a heuristic offers provisional rules of thumb for rethinking a range of social problems as well as strategies for criticizing how scholarship studies them. In this sense, intersectionality’s metaphoric and heuristic thinking provides important conceptual tools for problem‐solving. These strategies remain important, yet their use should not be conflated with theorizing.

The effects of intersectionality are far‐reaching  –  it has catalyzed significant changes within academic disciplines concerning some of their cherished frameworks, such as the aforementioned case of sociology and work. Intersectionality has also influenced the contours of women’s, gender, and sexuality studies; media studies; and similar interdisciplinary fields of inquiry. Intersectionality’s knowledge and practices stemming from how its practitioners use it might have catalyzed a wealth of new knowledge across many fields of study. To me, intersectionality has reached an important milestone in its own journey, a place where it has catalyzed paradigm shifts across many fields of study, but one where it also must spend time examining its own paradigmatic thought.

Intersectionality and Paradigm Shifts

Paradigms provide frameworks that describe, interpret, analyze, and in some cases, explain both the knowledge that is being produced as well as the processes that are used to produce it. Paradigmatic thinking involves having a model or provisional explanation in mind, a typical pattern of something, a distinct set of concepts or thought patterns. Such thinking is often difficult to recognize as such, because paradigms are often implicit, assumed, and taken for granted. For example, for some time, assumptions about biology and the natural world exerted enormous influence on research on gender and sexual identities, on public policies that understood citizenship through binaries of fit and unfit bodies, as well as on broader evolutionary explanations of the natural and social worlds. The reliance on biological explanations seemed more like the truth itself, rather than just one paradigm among many.

When the paradigmatic thinking in a field changes, the ideas and social relations within that field can also change quite dramatically. Thomas Kuhn’s (1970) description of how paradigm shifts occur in the natural sciences provides a useful rubric for understanding intersectionality’s effects on existing fields of study. Ironically, Kuhn analyzed the way that paradigms changed within the natural sciences as an implicit critique of the social sciences; he wanted to demonstrate how paradigms in the natural sciences provided certainties for scientific disciplines – certainties that the social sciences seemingly lacked. Yet this dimension of his work has been overshadowed by how rapidly the concept of a paradigm shift traveled into the social sciences, as well as into everyday language.5

A paradigm shift is a change not just in ideas, but also in how a field of study reorganizes its practices to facilitate its problem‐solving objectives. When fields encounter anomalies, or puzzles that can no longer be solved within the conventions of their dominant paradigm, they shift, often rather dramatically. The old paradigm can disappear rapidly, with a new one emerging to take its place. A paradigm shift occurs along three dimensions: the new paradigm (i) convincingly resolves previously recognized problems; (ii) has enough unresolved problems to provide puzzles for further inquiry; and (iii) attracts enough specialists to form the core of new, agreed‐upon provisional explanations for the topic at hand. When applied to intersectionality, the concept of a paradigm shift suggests that intersectionality convincingly grapples with recognized social problems concerning social inequality and the social problems it engenders; that its heuristics provide new avenues of investigation for studying social inequality; and that it has attracted a vibrant constellation of scholars and practitioners who recognize intersectionality as a form of critical inquiry and praxis. This newly formulated, heterogeneous community of inquiry both resonates with the metaphor of intersectionality as a collective identity and relies on heuristic thinking for social problem solving.

This concept of a paradigm shift is especially useful for thinking through the changes that intersectionality has engendered within disciplinary and interdisciplinary fields. Kuhn’s argument is targeted toward the changes within the natural sciences, where paradigms consist of shared assumptions within an existing field of study, subfields within a particular discipline, or both. Yet when uncoupled from the assumption that paradigm shifts occur primarily within existing fields of inquiry, Kuhn’s basic argument concerning paradigm shifts also applies to broader interpretive frameworks. Paradigm shifts are significant because they describe what happens when traditional frameworks no longer sufficiently explain social realities and thus become ineffective. In this sense, the concept of a paradigm shift is especially important for intersectionality as a critical social theory in the making, because a paradigm shift identifies a significant turning point when established social theories lose their critical edge and when other social theories displace them.

Across academic disciplines, traditional paradigms approached racial inequality and gender inequality, for example, as distinct, separate, and disconnected phenomena. Because race, class, gender, sexuality, age, ethnicity, nation, and, ability were conceptualized as separate phenomena, their interactions remained invisible because no one thought to look for them. Using intersectionality as a metaphor fundamentally challenged this takenfor‐granted assumption, and using intersectionality as a heuristic developed new knowledge as evidence for intersectional claims. In this [Table Omitted] sense, intersectionality was not just an adjustment to business as usual. It pointed toward a fundamental paradigm shift in thinking about intersecting systems of power and their connections to intersecting social inequalities.

In the following section, I sketch out selected core constructs and guiding premises of intersectionality that are drawn from my readings of intersectional inquiry as well as my understandings of intersectional practice. When combined, these core constructs and guiding premises provide a provisional template for analyzing intersectionality’s ideas and practices. My goal is to address some ideas of intersectionality’s paradigmatic use  –  namely, the core constructs and guiding premises within intersectionality’s critical inquiry.

Table 7.1 provides a provisional schema of the paradigmatic ideas that form the content of intersectionality’s critical inquiry. These ideas come from its metaphoric, heuristic, and paradigmatic uses. This schema distinguishes between the core constructs that reappear across intersectionality and guiding premises that inform intersectional analysis.

Intersectionality’s core constructs routinely appear within intersectional inquiry, either as topics of investigation or as methodological premises that guide research itself. They are (i) relationality; (ii) power; (iii) social inequality; (iv) social context; (v) complexity; and (vi) social justice (Collins and Bilge 2016, pp. 25–30, 194–204). For example, when it comes to social science research, intersectionality requires attending to complexity, whether in the questions asked, the methods used in a study, or the interpretation of findings.

Core Constructs and Guiding Premises

Intersectionality’s core constructs constitute one important dimension of intersectionality’s paradigmatic thinking. The themes of relationality, power, social inequality, social context, complexity, and social justice reappear across intersectionality as a form of critical inquiry and practice (Collins and Bilge 2016, pp. 25–30, 194–204). When it comes to scholarship, these themes are not all present in a given work, the treatment of them varies considerably across research traditions, and the relationship among them is far from coherent. My goal here is to identify intersectionality’s core constructs that, either singularly or in combination, reappear within intersectional scholarship. Significantly, none of these themes is unique to intersectionality in the academy. They also appear across diverse projects with little apparent connection to intersectionality. Intersectionality often shares terminology and sensibility with similar projects but is not derivative of them. Identifying these core constructs constitutes a promising first step in sketching out intersectionality’s paradigmatic use in scholarship. Significantly, how these constructs are used within intersectionality offers a window into intersectionality’s critical inquiry.

Relationality constitutes the first core theme that shapes heterogeneous intersectional projects (Phoenix and Pattynama 2006, p. 187). This emphasis on relationality shifts focus away from the essential qualities that seemingly lie in the center of categories and toward the relational processes that connect them. The idea of relationality is essential to intersectionality itself. The very term intersectionality invokes the idea of interconnections, mutual engagement, and relationships. Race, gender, class, and other systems of power are constituted and maintained through relational processes, gaining meaning through the nature of these relationships. The analytic importance of relationality in intersectional scholarship demonstrates how various social positions (occupied by actors, systems, and political/economic structural arrangements) necessarily acquire meaning and power (or a lack thereof) in relation to other social positions.

The significance of power constitutes a second core theme of intersectionality’s critical inquiry. Intersecting power relations produce social divisions of race, gender, class, sexuality, ability, age, country of origin, and citizenship status that are unlikely to be adequately understood in isolation from one another. Non‐intersectional scholarship assumes that race, class, and gender are unconnected variables or features of social organization that can be studied as singular phenomena – for example, gender or race as discreet aspects of individual identity, or patriarchy or racism as monocategorical systems of power. Intersectionality posits that systems of power co‐produce one another in ways that reproduce both unequal material outcomes and the distinctive social experiences that characterize people’s experiences within social hierarchies. Racism, sexism, class exploitation, and similar oppressions may mutually construct one another by drawing upon similar and distinctive practices and forms of organization that collectively shape social reality.

Third, intersectionality has catalyzed a rethinking of social inequality. Within the academy, prevailing frameworks explained social inequalities as separate entities, for example, class inequality, racial inequality, gender inequality, and social inequalities of sexuality, nation, ability, and ethnicity. The causes of social inequality often lay in fundamental forces that lay outside the particulars of race, class, gender. Yet treating social inequality as a result of other, seemingly more fundamental social processes suggested that social inequality was inevitable because it was hardwired into the social world, into individual nature, or into both. Intersectionality rejects these notions that normalize inequality by depicting it as natural and inevitable.

A fourth core theme within intersectionality’s critical inquiry stresses the significance of social context. This theme is especially important for understanding how interpretive communities, both academic and activist, organize knowledge production. This premise applies to the internal dynamics of a given interpretive community, for example, how sociologists or women’s studies scholars go about their work; to the relationships among interpretive communities, such as how sociology and Africana Studies within academia develop different interpretations of race and racism; as well as to how communities of inquiry are hierarchically arranged and valued, for example, how Western colleges and universities rank the sciences over the humanities. Social context also matters in understanding how the distinctive social locations of individuals and groups within intersecting power relations shape intellectual production.

Managing complexity constitutes a fifth core theme of intersectionality’s critical inquiry. Intersectional knowledge projects achieve greater levels of complexity because they are iterative and interactional, always examining the connections among seemingly distinctive categories of analysis. Complexity is dynamic  – intersectionality’s categories of race, class, gender, and sexuality, among others, are a useful starting point for inquiry. Bringing multiple lenses to intersectional inquiry facilitates complex, comprehensive analyses. Managing complexity also speaks to intersectionality’s methodological contours. Complex questions may require equally complex strategies for investigation.

Social justice constitutes another core construct that underlies intersectionality’s critical inquiry. The construct of social justice raises questions about the ethics of intersectional scholarship and practice. Within contemporary academic venues, the significance of social justice as a core theme within intersectionality is increasingly challenged by norms that place social justice, freedom, equality, and similar ethical issues as secondary concerns within acceptable scholarship. Viewing theory and practice in binary terms not only fosters a division between truth and power within intersectionality; it also challenges intersectionality’s long‐standing commitment to social justice. Historically, social justice was so central to intersectionality that there was little need to examine it or invoke it. Currently, many intersectional projects do not deal with social justice in a substantive fashion, yet the arguments that each discourse makes and praxis that it pursues have important ethical implications for equity and fairness.

How might these core constructs within intersectionality’s critical inquiry shape it? Some concepts are so fundamental to intersectionality itself that removing them would compromise the very meaning of intersectionality. Relationality constitutes one core construct. It is reflected in the name of the field itself, shapes the methodological premises of intersectional projects, and describes the content of intersectional knowledge. The very question of the connections among intersectionality’s core constructs is fundamentally one of relationality. In contrast, other core themes are more contingent. For example, intersecting systems of power as well as social inequalities of race, class, gender, and similar categories of analysis occupy prominent positions within intersectionality. Yet, does the absence of a particular category of analysis within intersectional inquiry somehow lessen its value? Similarly, some intersectional scholarship is inattentive to power relations or ethical standards of social justice. Does this absence make these projects less authentically intersectional? Some core constructs are differentially contingent. They can be used to structure a study itself, the case of attending to social context, or they can be used to evaluate outcomes; for example, is a particular study stronger because intersectionality has fostered greater complexity?

This brings me to another important dimension of intersectionality’s critical inquiry – namely, my provisional list of guiding premises that distinguish intersectional scholarship (see Table 7.1). Such premises should be recognizable to intersectionality’s practitioners in the ways that those of any field of inquiry are to its researchers, teachers, and students. These guiding premises synthesize the assumptions that intersectionality’s practitioners take into their projects in order to guide their work: (i) Race, class, gender, and similar systems of power are interdependent and mutually construct one another; (ii) Intersecting power relations produce complex, interdependent social inequalities of race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity, ability, and age; (iii) The social location of individuals and groups within intersecting power relations shapes their experiences within and perspectives on the social world; (iv) Solving social problems within a given local, regional, national, or global context requires intersectional analyses (see also Collins 2015; Collins and Bilge 2016). These core constructs and guiding principles provide a vocabulary for describing intersectionality’s paradigm shift. This shift raises important questions about how intersectionality’s cognitive architecture might inform intersectional theorizing. This framework also offers a way of seeing the limits of paradigmatic thinking and the possibilities of the beginnings of theorizing. How might intersectionality’s core constructs inform the guiding premises within the field of intersectionality itself? Conversely, how might these guiding premises shed light on the meaning of intersectionality’s core constructs?

#### Particularly, an empathetic view of flesh is critical for generating momentum for political action.

Alessandra Raengo 17. Associate Professor of Moving Image Studies, Georgia State University and coordinator of liquid blackness, a research project on blackness and aesthetics. “Dreams are colder than Death and the Gathering of Black Sociality.” *Black Camera* 8(2): 120-36. Emory Libraries.

Arthur Jafa's 2013 essay film Dreams are colder than Death begins as a lyrical meditation on the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a dream" speech conducted through interviews with African-American intellectuals—the specialists, as Jafa calls them—such as Hortense Spillers, Fred Moten, Saidiya Hartman, and Nicole Fleetwood; filmmaker Charles Burnett; ex–Black Panther and professor Kathleen Clever; musician Flying Lotus; and visual artists Kara Walker and Wangechi Mutu, among others.1 Quickly, however, the film detours toward more fundamental and open-ended questions, [End Page 120] such as "What is the concept of blackness? Where did it come from? And what does it mean for people of color living in America today?" Weaving together lyrical slow-motion images of black people—the uncommon folks—mostly in outdoor spaces hanging out, walking around, or talking to one another, with images of dark waters or deep space, the film creates a tapestry within which the voices of some of the most powerful contemporary black artists and thinkers engage in a meditation on the ontology of blackness and its relationship to life, death, and the concept of the human in the context of the "afterlife of slavery."2 That the social existence of blackness has to be understood within the context of the "afterlife of slavery" is the position held by scholars that identify with the conversation described as Afro-Pessimism,3 while the ascendance of the #BlackLivesMatter movement, founded by three queer women—Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi—can be seen to vindicate the "Afro-Optimist" position that affirms instead the primacy, vibrancy, and generative capacity of black social life.4 To be sure, this opposition stands more strongly in the eyes of critics of Afro-Pessimism than those of its supporters, as Jared Sexton has recently articulated in his article "Afro-Pessimism: The Unclear Word," where he describes Afro-Pessimism as an ars vita "because it emerges from within a global catastrophe so total that the creation or production of a black poetry, a black art, a stylization of the black body, a black sense of place cannot but be invented wholesale [. . .] without a future promising anything different or, rather, better."5 In what, to date, is the most explicit alignment of the goals of Afro-Pessimism with those of the #BlackLivesMatter movement, the overarching question Afro-Pessimism, as an art vita, poses then becomes, "How do we create a world where black lives matter, to everyone or, rather, to everyone else as well? What economies—political, libidinal, symbolic—must be destroyed or negated, what others forged or affirmed?"6 The film addresses this issue through the words of Moten, who asks, "When you say that black people are just an effect of slavery you raise a question: can black people be loved? Not desired, not wanted, not acquired, not lusted after . . . can blackness be loved?" By posing this question, especially in the current context within which the intimacy between blackness and death has become increasingly obscenely clear, the film holds these apparent opposites in suspension.7 This essay reads Dreams as the aesthetic articulation of the fact of black love. The film's structure, I argue, effectively performs the very networks of solidarity, grief, and grievance that are some of the goals of #BlackLivesMatter.8 In other words, my reading finds in the film's edits—which I approach as passages, as I will explain below—the expression of its own balancing act between the commemoration of a speech so closely associated with fantasies of equality and freedom, and the philosophical and artistic decision to frame [End Page 121] it through the concept of death.9 In other words, the decision is to approach all this from the midst of an ongoing genocide, a place where the dream has given way to the coldness of an endless deferral, to the solitude of a corpse abandoned too long in the middle of the street.10 The film holds these two poles in balance while reflecting on their implications: on the one hand, the recognition, as Spillers puts it in the film, that slavery is such a powerful and huge phenomenon that in some ways it is still present—a statement we hear over an image of dark waters—and, on the other hand, the repeated association of blackness with images of galaxies and deep space, which, instead, affirm its life-giving force and cosmic reach. Through its aesthetic "liquidity"—i.e., the way in which it enacts unobstructed and yet unprecedented "passages" between seemingly disparate and incongruous concepts and situations, as well as the facility with which it travels across scale, from the molecular to the celestial—the film connects experiences of personal grief to the expression of grievance, to reflections on the challenges blackness poses to the conception of the human subject and her freedom. It performs, in other words, what Sexton describes as a series of conceptual moves "from the empirical to the structural or, more precisely, from the experiential to the political ontological."11 One methodological premise of this essay is that the film's edits have to be regarded as types of passages, that is, as very similar, at least in spirit, to those L.A. Rebellion filmmaker Larry Clark adopted in his film Passing Through (1977). For years, Jafa has been "obsessed" about this cult film that, by many accounts, has successfully transposed the compositional principles of jazz improvisation into filmmaking and thus reached a powerful synergy between free jazz and film form.12 In his work, Clark leverages the adventurous expansiveness of free jazz to connect, and therefore pass through, a variety of seemingly incongruous or remote spaces, making adjacent, for example, sites of artistic improvisation and sites of systemic oppression, spaces of addiction and spaces of healing, the US racial scene and Third World revolutionary struggles. These very passages, which Jafa has carefully studied since his time at Howard University, which had purchased a print of the film through his mentor Haile Gerima, are precisely what joins so essentially the aesthetics and politics of the film. They also stand as testimony that blackness requires incredibly capacious frameworks to gather and comprehend its audacious transitions. Thus, methodologically speaking, this essay interprets the film's editing structure—beautifully executed by Dreams' producer and editor Kahlil Joseph—and, in particular, the elements that the film posits as adjacent, as indices of the network of love and care that #BlackLivesMatter also seeks to establish as a way to counteract state-sanctioned antiblack violence. The balance that Dreams performs between the thinking of life and the thinking of death is also attained by the particular way in which the film [End Page 122] dislodges some of the very conditions for black surveillance by having voices disjointed from bodies, faces made hardly legible because shot against intense natural light sources and a pervasive use of slow motion that creates a sense of another space, an alternative—perhaps suspended—dimension, and different sets of expectations and constraints, within which black bodies can move at their own chosen pace.13 This image/sound disjunction, whereby the interviewees' voices are strategically recorded independently from the image, establishes its own passages connecting otherwise distant or disparate things, including the passage from the "particular universal" of the queer identities of #BlackLivesMatter's founders to the capaciously collective ("All Black Lives Matter" is the claim on their website) and, by extension "all people," which is one of the main guiding ideas of the #BlackLivesMatter movement.14 It is in this way, I will show, that the film claims for blackness an expansiveness and intelligence that reaches across space and time and therefore can be seen to attain its own “fugitivity,” a line of escape, as Moten describes it, an optimistic thinking "on the run," rendered here, in Melissa Louidor's words, as a "mobilization of Black vitality, in which biomechanic and metaphysical forces are deployed to activate effort; an effort that is integral to claiming survival."15 Dis-joining and Re-joining The study of filmic movement and sound has been a central preoccupation for Jafa since his collaboration with Julie Dash in Daughters of the Dust (1991). For years he researched ways to bring "intonation and inclination down to actual movement" and to manipulate motion in concordance with black people's handshakes—that is, to find a different integrity and comfort or ease between black sound and black body, black image and black motion.16 For this film, he decided to record the sound of the interviews separately from their images, which are consistently overexposed or shot at oddly tilted and unusual angles, or in extreme close-up, so that the faces might be present but not necessarily legible, and legibility quickly becomes irrelevant anyway (fig. 1). There are two main reasons for this choice. First, the decision not to use direct sound in his practice came in part as a matter of production circumstances. Early on, after his experience on the set of Charles Burnett's My Brother's Wedding (1983), shot on location in Watts, Jafa realized that if he wanted to film in black neighborhoods, he would have to add sound in post-production: as he explained, black neighborhoods have all kinds of environmental noises that cannot be put on hold. He adopted this practice because of his commitment to working on location, with nonprofessional actors, to cast against (the industrial) grain, on the footsteps of neorealist filmmakers. [End Page 123] At the same time, Jafa's decision about sound recording performs a powerful critique of the problem of forced coherence between black voice and black body that has been a staple of the film industry since Hollywood's transition to sound.17 This is what he has attempted to reproduce by casting from the streets: for example, the possibility to choose on the basis of people's natural movements and then pair them in postproduction with someone whose voice has the right sound. This affords the possibility to combine various voices to produce transgender sounds, ultimately, as he describes it, to take the same liberties with sound and voice that black musicians have historically taken with their music. In many ways, this is a particularly "black move" in the sense that this disarticulation of image and sound performs a critique of the very properties of self-possession that constitute "the existential issue for Black Americans."18 While, on the one hand, as Kahlil Joseph also confirmed, separate sound recording creates a different comfort zone where people can speak freely, without being policed by the camera, it also affords a different rendering of aural style in the sense that ultimately the sound of what one says, as well as the posture and movements that go with it, might have a deeper stylistic mark than the specific content of what is being said.19 Movement, including the movement induced by editing, in other words, might attempt to translate a speaking style, or the sound design might strive to render the texture of a stroll, and so on. To push this strategic disconnection and reconnection between sound and image even further, at some point the interviewers—i.e., Jafa or Greg [End Page 124] Tate—asked the interviewees what were the things they truly believed. Recorded independently from the image, the interviewees express themselves rather freely. As a result, the film is punctuated with exceptionally powerful statements—" I know that . . . I know that"—one of which opens the film. This knowledge, the film argues, is a combination of knowing, feeling, and believing; it is ultimately what Moten describes as a type of knowing "under the rubric of faith," which he considers to be the theological component of Black Studies. Even more profoundly, this knowledge is the expression of a "thinking [that is] irreducible in blackness," a statement that is overlaid to the image of a filament spectacularly detaching from the sun (fig. 2). Black Flesh The film opens with a quasi-still and fairly flat image of a young man slowly turning his head right to left while also looking into the camera, as Spillers's voice is heard making a commanding and unconditional assertion: "I know that." Her voice continues over the image of a backward movement: we see young men somersaulting out of (instead of into) a swimming pool in slow motion, their bodies remaining temporarily suspended in midair: "We are going to lose this gift of black culture unless we are careful," she elaborates, "this gift that is given to people who don't have a prayer." Her [End Page 125] voice screeches for emphasis around the word "prayer" and is cued to the frozen close-up of one of the young men in the pool who looks intensely at the camera (fig. 3). [End Page 126] Juxtaposed to two lynching images, Spillers's in Selma voice continues: "beat our skins off our bodies; kill and rape our mamas in front of us." As she repeats for the last time that "we didn't have a prayer," the film's first "abstract" image appears, possibly the picture of a molecular structure, with clearly visible filaments and small translucent masses; it is an image enigmatic enough that it suggests a dimension blackness possesses that does not necessarily belong to the phenomenological world but rather expands unbound across scale (fig. 4). Spillers continues over slow motion images of people walking down the street: Now we are heads of international courts, President of the United States, we sit in the United States Supreme Court, Presidents of Universities, CEO of American Express. . . . Some black person is it. But the price of that is to lose this precious insight that connects you to something human and bigger than white folks—I don't give a fuck what color the folk—something bigger than that. We are losing that connection because we are buying this other shit. "I know that. I know that," she concludes over increasingly hazy images of semi-opaque glass panes at dusk, as the camera is looking onto trees and green outside (fig 5). Here transparency is blocked in favor of an emphasis, not on the haptic properties of these images, but rather on their "intransitive" character—they [End Page 127] don't convey any clear and readable relation to what she is saying, they don't lead anywhere else—so that they can also be "arresting" and create a moment of philosophical suspension. After a fade to black, one of the filmmakers explains in voice-over how Dreams began as an assessment of "the roles and ambitions of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States," fifty years after Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech to gather "thoughts and conversations of an America that is rarely heard." These words unfold over two images of deep space and a close-up of colorful light reflections on dark waters that show all the chroma of the visible spectrum, as if slipping into blackness and back to color, from color into blackness. (fig. 6). The voice-over continues: "In the process the filmmakers discovered even a more fundamental set of questions: What is the concept of blackness? Where did it come from? And what does it mean for people of color living in America today?" The last question is posed over the image of a black star-child that fades into the title, Dreams are colder than Death, while the sound design bears an outer-space quality reminiscent of 2001: A Space Odyssey (dir. Stanley Kubrick, 1969). This transition embodies the connection with something bigger that Spillers described earlier. It is also steeped in Jafa's admiration for Stanley Kubrick's film, which he saw when he was ten and which provided him with "a model for how powerful art could be."20 Despite being initially utterly puzzled by 2001, he eventually understood his fascination with the "glacial pageantry" of the film in part because a "nascent melancholy" emerged as he began to recognize "categorical constraints" dictated by his blackness. Yet, he also registered the "transfixing" and "unprecedented blackness" of the inhabitants of the Mississippi Delta region where he grew up, including their [End Page 128] "arresting beauty and dense corporeal being," which he ultimately described as "the dark matter of black being."21 In this context, he read 2001's horror vacui as animated by a profound fear of "black being contaminating white being, which, by the very nature of the self-imposed fragile ontological construction of white being, equals the annihilation of white being."22 Yet, what happens when the dark matter of black being, rather than the atavistic whiteness of 2001, is placed at the center of the textual system?23 One way Jafa attempts this radical recalibration is through Spillers's influential notion of the flesh. She discusses how her sister was subjected to a partial amputation and yet continued to feel an excruciating pain in her phantom leg, as if her pain remembered, so to speak, the part of the leg that was no longer there. She calls this "flesh memory" in a manner that echoes Elizabeth Alexander's argument in her article "Can You Be Black and Look at This?," that is, the idea that there is a bodily archive of practical memory that is reactivated at the moment of collective spectatorship of the black body in pain.24 For Spillers, the flesh results from the "theft of the body" that occurs in the Middle Passage.25 It is also a way to describe, as Alexander Weheliye has done, the ungendering inscription of domination onto the biopolitical dimension of the slave body as well as the slave's availability as raw material.26 "We were available in the flesh to the slave master," her voice-over explains, "immediate; hands on," and these words are layered over a slowmotion image of a woman crossing the street. "I can pluck your nappy head from wherever it is. Bang!," Spillers continues. The sound of her "Bang!" is cued to the image of the same woman, who now turns in slow motion toward the camera with a puzzled and inquisitive look, as if reacting to Spillers's mimicked slap (fig. 7). [End Page 129] "How many kids you have here? Bang! Bang!" Spillers continues. This layering establishes a call-and-response between the scholar's voice and the "uncommon people" it is laid over by moving through the "passage" that this very layering produces and toward the experience of the flesh as a source of empathy; it also reinforces the very connection that Spillers worries might be lost. Not only does the empathy of the flesh, as rendered here, vividly materialize the network of solidarity, grief, and grievance that #BlackLivesMatter supports, but it locates it within a cosmic context. As Spillers introduces the concept of empathy, the film transitions from a close shot of her face temporarily obscured by foliage as she is walking under a tree, to a shot of the word "TERROR" carved on a black man's chest—a quite literal representation of Spiller's concept of the "hieroglyphics of the flesh"—to an image of the Centaurus galaxy. The flesh here is what binds people who slavery deprived of their "body," and yet, this passage suggests, it is also, possibly, cosmic black matter. The Dark Matter of Black Being Key to Jafa's understanding of the "dark matter of black being" in 2001 is the fact that the monolith is a sentient black object, although its blackness, as well as its perfectly smooth and polished modernist surface, might ultimately obscure this very sentience.27 In Christina Sharpe's words, black sentience, just like black pain, is "anagrammatical blackness," an "index of violability," which also means, as Calvin Warren explains, that the metaphysical violences directed at black lives "are indecipherable because they constitute a non-sense sign within the grammar of redress and humanism." While unreadable to the outside, they are affectively felt, where affect provides "form for an experience anti-blackness places outside ethics."28 Drawing on Hortense Spillers's field-defining essay "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," one of the issues both Afro-Pessimism and #BlackLivesMatter insist on is the need to find an appropriate grammar for black pain. If "suffering," as Sexton puts it, is a "simple enough term for withstanding the ugliness of the world—and learning from it—[then] Afro-Pessimism is, among other things, an attempt to formulate an account of such suffering, to establish the rules of its grammar."29 Black sentience and suffering are appropriate "black matter" for the type of knowledge and flesh memory on which Dreams insists. Saidiya Hartman, for example, shares her relationship with premature death: how she knows too many people who died young, including all the guys she had crushes on in her youth. Similarly, she knows her life could end at any [End Page 130] minute because of an act of gratuitous violence. The social existence of blackness, she says, is one of "intimacy with death."30 Yet images of human suffering in the film are all historical rather than contemporary, and even this latter statement happens in conjunction with an image of a mother and three girls absorbed in their own thoughts, walking in slow motion toward the camera (fig. 8). Horizontal passages such as this one register as assertions of the equal preciousness, and equal enigma, of all black lives. They establish affective links and therefore enact what Sharpe might call "wake work" and which Warren would describe as "black care." At the same time, and overall, they can be seen as a form of gathering in a way that stages also the "Thingness of blackness" in the Heideggerian sense that Moten follows in his essay "The Case of Blackness." There, he claims for blackness that status of Thing, a "gathering as contested matter"—both Sache, that is, gathering, and Ding, that is, the "matter under discussion"—a thingness that pours out of the object, and, like troubled air, escapes from its vestibule. This "breath," he argues, this outflowing of "stolen life," describes the ontological vitality of blackness—its unbound and ungraspable Thingness—as a constitutive and dangerous supplementarity, a "transplanted organ, always eliciting rejection."31 This type of gathering, as Sarah Cervenak similarly writes in her reading of Leonardo Drew's sculptures, "ceremoniously aestheticizes rejectable life, making way for the im/proper regard of its unencroachable (always [End Page 131] unfigurable) value."32 Thus, in this gathering of the "dark matter of black being" across scale—from the microscopic to the cosmic—as well as horizontally, Dreams too institutes the networks of care that transform #BlackLivesMatter from a concept to a movement, insofar as in their very gathering, black lives acquire "the weightedness of being [which] comes through precisely through a kind of deregulated togetherness."33 Indeed, structurally speaking, the film can be regarded as an archival "gathering" of still and moving images—both archival and contemporary images, found and original, recognizable and unrecognizable—which include footage of the interviewees as well as other people who are not named, whose connection to the speaking voices is not known and cannot be guessed. The film features a number of still images that also appear on APEX\_TNEG, a "proof of concept" piece, originally developed with Malik Sayeed, in which still images quickly flash by in a variety of different orders and combinations. Jafa has modified this montage several times over the years, and it follows rather closely Jafa's "collecting" practice and his sense that individual elements acquire a measure of additional density just by virtue of being gathered together.34 A great part of the film's gathering occurs in the "bosom" of the cosmos itself. When Rich Blint asks, "How do you know that you are free without captivity?" his question is posed over a stunning image of Saturn's moon Dione (fig. 9).35 [End Page 132] The image of the NGC 3621 Galaxy shown while Nicole Fleetwood explains that "there is something unique about black expressive culture" also underscores this dimension. We can say that anagrammatical blackness reappears here but this time as an index of potentiality, "blackness anew, blackness as a/temporal, in and out of place and time putting pressure on meaning and that against which meaning is made."36 More specifically, this Galaxy is believed to have a system of three black holes at its center, one of which is active and swallows matter while producing radiation.37 Fleetwood explains that she was raised with a working-class black female religious sensibility, and that, at the church where her grandmother was the music director, it was music, and not the sermon, that would drive the service. Indeed, music acted as a mechanism capable of generating energy. Her words are laid over images in part inspired by Hart Leroy Bibbs's Manifesto Optksorption, a 1977 collection of poems and long-exposure photographs of jazz musicians as they are playing. The traces of the musicians' movements linger around their figures as squiggles of light that blur the figures' contours, arguably one of the closest photographic counterparts to the "intensities" that traverse Francis Bacon's paintings, which Deleuze discussed to illustrate the "logic of sensation" (fig. 10).38 Jafa knows Bibbs's work, and he too has been making similar images because he is equally invested in the energizing and expansive intensity of black music. A similar jazz image comes back during Moten's discussion of blackness as a critique of ownership and of the proper. "We have been placed in a position that requires us to break the law, to disobey," Moten explains, and [End Page 133] thus blackness displays an irreducible relation between law making and law breaking, legality and criminality. Not contingently, but historically: during slavery, he elaborates, black gathering was illegal. Yet this also means that blackness is involved in a jurisgenerative process whereby formal innovations are necessarily types of lawbreaking (while lawbreaking might also always conduce to formal innovation). What Miles Davis and John Coltrane were doing, he elaborates, was to break the very rules that they had established the night before, while their improvisatory acts performed a disruption of both property and propriety. There are no imaginable circumstances within which #BlackLivesMatter could make a similar claim. In the discourses and practices in which it intervenes, where "white safety equals black murder," criminality does not have a philosophical meaning, but it is rather the overarching framing within which blackness is seen to operate, before and regardless of any actions actually taken.39 Yet, Moten and Harney insist, in an essay devoted to Michael Brown, "If we refuse to show the image of a lonely body, of the outline of the space that body simultaneously took and left, we do so in order to imagine jurisgenerative black social life walking down the middle of the street—for a minute, but only for a minute, unpoliced, another city gathers, dancing."40 Mattering Blackness Filling the frame in extreme close-up, and barely emerging into visibility, silhouette artist Kara Walker rubs her eyes. "When I work . . . I find myself in this kind schism, in this kind of mercurial space, that is sort of non-gendered and non-raced," she says over some of her most famous silhouette installations. "My skin keeps trying to stick itself back on. . . . I become aware of the skin and everything that comes with it. . . . And then it comes detached, only slightly, not all the way." Now an extreme close-up of her lips occupies the left side of the frame. "I am getting this image of retinal detachment. The skin is literally folding away and it's gory and grotesque and that's where I feel like when I am at home." Seen in extreme close-up now, her eyelid occupies the right side of the frame (fig. 11). "It is not a safe place to be," she continues, "but one where you can kind of look at the underside of race . . . what is being escaped from." She proceeds: "What is this existential horror that one can feel about being kind of invisible . . . being kind of a heavy presence / a heavy non-presence?" It is a question heard over an image of waves hitting a shore dotted with black rocks. The space she describes is no longer purely cosmic but also mental and epistemological—a space for the skin to slightly detach and raciality [End Page 134] to be placed in suspension. This is a space for the flesh to be not the product of dispossession but rather the location of pure sentience, one that the film translates through a process of mattering: from Walker's actual flesh, seen from an unnaturally close proximity, as if the camera aspired to eliminate any distance whatsoever between itself and its profilmic subject, to "dark waters," and eventually to the extreme close-up of an older man slowly nodding his head. Here, too, black gathering produces weight, density, and mass. Black matter gathers, Dreams shows, but also remembers. Spillers narrates the loss of family members: her father and mother, her niece, her nephew, and her last sibling. The details seem at first very specific to her contingent experience; yet she claims that in this process she discovered something she didn't know: "dying is really real. It is really nonnegotiable." The particular universal of her loss traces the same network #BlackLivesMatter attempts to travel by giving way to the capaciously collective, and beyond that, to the universal fact of dying. All lives end. Not just black lives. It is at this point that, through Moten's words, the film poses its crucial question about loving blackness regardless of its relationship to the after-life of slavery: I know there is such a thing as blackness—not an effect of horror—it survives horror and terror. It can be loved, and it has to be loved; it should be defended; it should be nurtured. [End Page 135] I know those things to be true. I know those things. As he explains the source and nature of his knowledge, he also affirms the constant thinking that is "irreducible in blackness." The image of the sun mentioned at the beginning then transitions to a slow-motion close-up of Spillers laughing broadly (fig. 12), as if exhilarated, perhaps in passage toward a suspended lightness that springs from the knowledge of black love.

#### AND their a-priori mistrust of a libidinal attachment to futurity sidelines meaningful consideration of how things might be otherwise and accedes to the terms of power.

Gary Wilder 17, Associate Professor of Anthropology at CUNY Graduate Center, “Anticipation,” Political Concepts: A Critical Lexicon Issue 3 [gendered language modification denoted by brackets]

There is no doubt that cruel optimism and benevolent pessimism have produced, and leveraged the concept of anticipation in order to prohibit or require certain kinds of citizen action, to legitimize or exempt certain state interventions, to produce docile and anxious subjects who become trapped in states of what Berlant has nicely phrased “animated suspension.”15 The constant exhortation to self-manage, improve, and promote is accompanied by precarity and exhaustion, uncertainty and anxiety, disorientation and meaninglessness. But does this mean that all future-oriented thinking or action is intrinsically disabling, normalizing, and depoliticizing? It would be a mistake to reduce futurity as such to a liberal conception of progress, or anticipation to a liberal ideology or affect. Doing so is precisely what has led some of these scholars to draw dubious political conclusions from their own important insights. Think here of Berlant’s assertion of the present as an impasse in relation to which affective beings must focus on survival, maintenance, and adaptation, “without futurity.”16 She dismisses the wish for new images of the good life as a symptom of the current situation.17 Or, consider David Scott’s melancholic ruminations about our being tragically stranded in a post-socialist political present. Adams, Murphy, and Clarke ask us to refuse anticipation as such.18 And Edelman promotes an anti-political opposition to “every realization of futurity,” any aspiration to forge “some more perfect social order,” any action oriented toward future “good.”19 Instead he celebrates jouissance as bound up with the death drive and an absolutist negation of social form.20 By treating the present as one-dimensional and unsurpassable, such criticism accedes to existing arrangements and discounts politics oriented toward a future good life as intrinsically delusional, self-undermining, or conservative. But to abandon good-life imaginaries and future-oriented practices is to erase the crucial space between how things are and how they ought to be. It is no surprise, therefore, that such thinking often turns to (post-political understandings of) affect, bodies, objects, or deep history as the only way to think outside or against existing conditions and ideologies. How then are we to pursue progressive politics when relations of domination are mediated by the idea and reality of progress itself?21 Against the liberal tendency to plan and predict we must insist on a radically open future, and refuse to define that which it might hold. But against the liberal tendency to project present arrangements, forward, we must also fashion images of the good life. Of course this imperative leads immediately to a further challenge. How are we to envision alternative social arrangements when the concepts, frameworks, and forms with which to do so can only really be furnished by an open future that has not yet arrived? This is the very dilemma implied by Marx’s claim that “the social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot take its poetry from the past but only from the future.”22 Radical politics is thereby fated to imagine the unimaginable. And this is the challenge posed by Adorno’s call to contemplate the world from the standpoint of redemption. 3. The Price of Messianism Some thinkers have attempted to challenge liberal progressivism without abandoning futurity by turning to ungrounded utopianism, blank futurism, or Messianic apocalypticism. But such moves also tend to leave present arrangements undisturbed—whether by idly fantasizing about ideal worlds, refusing to name possible alternatives, or either fetishizing or waiting for the sudden event that will produce an absolute rupture. Think here of Bloch’s “principle of hope,” Derrida’s “waiting without expectation,” and Badiou’s “fidelity to the event.”23 We might usefully recall Gershom Scholem’s remarks on “the paradoxical nature” of the Messianic idea in Judaism whereby the wished-for redemption can have no concrete relationship to previous history. As a “transcendence breaking in upon history . . . from an outside source,” he explains, Jewish redemption rejects the Enlightenment idea of historical progress. But it also rules out the possibility of immanent developments or history-making practices. Scholem thus suggests that the “price demanded by Messianism” has been “endless powerlessness in Jewish history . . . There is something grand about living in hope, but at the same time there is something profoundly unreal about it . . . in Judaism the Messianic idea has compelled a life lived in deferment.”24 Although Benjamin invoked this Messianic tradition, his reflections “On the Concept of History” do not imply powerlessness, pessimism, or deferment. Noting the Jewish prohibition on “inquiring into the future,” he endorsed its focus on “remembrance” as a way to “disenchant the future, which holds sway over those who turn to soothsayers for Enlightenment.”25 But Benjamin was less concerned with renouncing futurity as such than with challenging the homogeneous empty clock time and the associated continuum that underlie bourgeois conceptions of predictable futures, automatic progress, and historicist history. Benjamin seeks to break the spell of bourgeois progress by understanding history in terms of “Now-time, which, as a model of messianic time, comprises the entire history of mankind in a tremendous abbreviation.”26 But this was neither a call to adapt to the present nor to wait for a divine irruption. It was a reminder that “every second was the straight gate through which the Messiah might enter.”27 But by Messiah, he means us—contemporary human actors. We can recognize this as a political, and not a strictly theological, claim when we read it alongside of Benjamin’s second thesis: “there is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one . . . our coming was expected on earth . . . like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a weak messianic power on which the past has a claim.”28 In this formulation, living historical actors are themselves quasi-Messianic agents who, at any second and in the name of past generations, might initiate a revolutionary irruption, break the historical continuum, stop clock-time and redeem the world. Benjamin invoked revolutionary Messianism to challenge the political passivity of Social Democrats whose faith in automatic human progress, he argued, had opened the door to fascism and diverted the working classes from making their own history here and now. By exploding the continuum of history and transcending clock time, he believed, they would liberate humanity from the “progressive” processes that had enslaved them and their ancestors. In this way modern society would be emancipated from an infernal history of ongoing catastrophe whereby human actions fueled the quasi-autonomous force that was propelling them blindly into a future over which they had no control.29 At the very least, Benjamin suggested that this revolutionary interruption would end the “storm” of progress, free humans from their “servile integration in an uncontrollable apparatus,” and, maybe even allow actors “to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed” (as the Angel of History wished to, but could not, do).30 But despite the Jewish injunction not to inquire into the future, Benjamin is not only offering a formal definition of revolution as redemptive rupture. We often forget that he also elaborates substantive ideas about what a redeemed, or post-revolutionary, society would entail. He relays that it would mark the end of a “positivist” and “corrupted conception of labor” based in “the Protestant work ethic” which collapses human progress with “technological development” and is “tantamount to the exploitation of nature.”31 In contrast, Benjamin envisions a new form of “cooperative labor” that would “increase efficiency to such an extent that . . . far from exploiting nature, would help her give birth to the creations that now lie dormant in her womb.”32 Emancipated from alienated labor, historical “progress,” and the meaningless tyranny of clock time, human actors (honoring their responsibility to enslaved ancestors) would make their own worlds within a qualitative now-time. Benjamin thus offers us an orientation to futurity that breaks with the logic of deferment contained in both liberal progressivism and blank Messianism. With the idea of a revolutionary rupture that can be initiated in any given second, his insights point to an understanding of anticipation as a kind of political disposition whereby radical actors cultivate a state of readiness for any possibility at every possible moment. But by also offering a positive vision of what a better society might look like, his call to act in the name of oppressed ancestors, provide concrete content to such anticipatory action. Yet, Benjamin does not try to account for how these actors might move from this now to a next-now. Beyond routing future possibilities through past eras, he does not indicate how subjects might orient their action, recognize what might actually be possible or even desirable, or what conditions might facilitate this or that leap. He beautifully triangulates revolutionary classes, past generations, and historical materialists, but does not work out the mediations between radical thinking and revolutionary praxis. He directs our attention to “now time” as cause and consequence of a revolutionary interruption, but does not address the dialectical movement between acting and imagining, naming and discovering, making and seizing. 4. Practicing Anticipation Adorno too sought to overturn the bourgeois conception of progress without paying the price of Messianism. In his 1962 essay, he argues argues that if we are to reclaim a real concept of progress we need to avoid both “atemporal theology” (which expects redemption from a “transcendental intervention”) and “the idolization of history” (as if progress were automatic or human actions necessarily led toward a more perfect world).33 Adorno explains that the term progress promises “an answer to the doubt and the hope that things will finally get better, that people will at last be able to breathe a sigh of relief.”34 Like Benjamin, he insists that “Wherever bourgeois society satisfies the concept it cherishes as its own, it knows no progress; wherever it knows progress, it violates its own law.”35 But rather than simply reject the concept of progress, he seeks to sublate its bourgeois form. He writes, “The nexus of deception surrounding progress reaches beyond itself . . . the devastation wrought by progress can be made good again, if at all, only by its own forces, never by the restoration of the preceding conditions that were its victims.36 He does this by seeking real progress precisely in those places where bourgeois “progress” is interrupted and the bourgeois concept is called into question. He writes, “Progress means: to step out of the magic spell, even out of the spell of progress . . . in that . . . humanity . . . brings to a halt the domination it exacts upon nature . . . In this way it could be said that progress occurs where it ends.”37 One thereby pursues that which progress promises precisely by interrupting or undoing that which purports to be progress (as well as the conceptual framework that reduces progress to domination and misrecognizes domination as progress). Despite Adorno’s reputation for political pessimism and philosophical abstraction (and vice versa), he does not only insist on the possibility of real human progress, but suggests that it must be pursued concretely. He writes, Too little of what is good has power in the world for progress to be expressed in a predictive judgment about the world, but there can be no good, not a trace of it without progress . . . Every individual trait in the nexus of deception is nonetheless relevant to [progress’s] possible end. Good is what wrenches itself free, finds a language, opens its eyes. In its conditions of wresting free, it is interwoven in history that, without being organized unequivocally toward reconciliation, in the course of its movement allows the possibility of redemption to flash up.38 Adorno thus offers an orientation to futurity, at once political and dialectical, that is organized around human action in the present. Beyond the opposition between gradual reformism and revolutionary rupture, through the everyday work of finding and wrenching free bits of good which can be associated with new languages and rewoven into history, the possibility of reconciliation is opened and glimpses of redemption are possible. Adorno thus suggests that these glimpses of future possibility must be pursued concretely. But he also reminds us that these glimpses are no less important than the pursuit. He explicitly links prospect for transformation to acts of political imagination. As with “progress,” Adorno tries to think utopia against “utopia.” In his 1964 exchange with Ernst Bloch, he criticizes ideological forms of “cheap” and “false” utopias which present the given world as already reconciled and realized.39 And he recognizes the value of the (Jewish) prohibition against picturing the future concretely “insofar as we do not know what the correct thing would be.”40 At the same time, he insists that “something terrible happens due to the fact that we are forbidden to cast a picture . . . the commandment against a concrete expression of utopia tends to defame the utopian consciousness and to engulf it.”41 In the West, he explains “people have lost . . . the capability to imagine the totality as something that could be completely different . . . people are sworn to this world as it is and have this blocked consciousness vis-à-vis possibility.”42 Such concessions to the given, he suggests, can only be overcome through some kind of utopian orientation that insists, for example on “the evident possibility of fulfillment” in modern society or that “a life in freedom and happiness would be possible today.”43 But he is equally concerned by the fact that “the idea of utopia has actually disappeared completely from the conception of socialism,” explaining, “the apparatus, the how, the means of a socialist society have taken precedence over any possible content, for one is not allowed to say anything about the possible content. Thereby the theory of socialism that is decidedly hostile toward utopia now tends really to become a new ideology concerned with the domination of humankind.”44 Adorno warns that any claim to know the future should be avoided. Yet he also insists that unless some kind of “picture” of what might be possible can “appear within one’s grasp, then one basically does not know at all what the actual reason for the totality is, why the entire apparatus has been set in motion.”45 He concludes by agreeing with Bloch that there can be no transformation, no socialism, no fulfillment without the utopian-transcendent belief that “something’s missing.”46 In short, Adorno invites critics to undertake a tricky, if not paradoxical, practice of envisioning without defining. This balancing act between identifying concrete possibilities through utopian imagination while not foreclosing outcomes through predictive naming is a crucial dimension of what I am calling anticipation. This orientation to the future breaks with the liberal faith that things will automatically and progressively work themselves out. But does so in ways that differ fundamentally from either “waiting without expectation” or nihilistic calls to accept the impasse of the present, abjure transformative projects, or renounce propositions about a future good life. The concrete utopian orientation to futurity suggested by Adorno resonates with a similar position formulated by Henri Lefebvre, another heterodox Marxist who sought to make sense of late capitalist alienation in the postwar period. In the first volume of his Critique of Everyday Life (1947), Lefebvre argued that material progress had created unprecedented possibilities for the good life, but its benefits were only enjoyed by the few; real power was stolen from community and placed in the hands of an elite, and the domination of things was transformed into domination of humans by other humans.47 He thus describes the colonization of everyday life by capital. But because capitalism develops unevenly, he believed, “traces of ‘another life,’ a community life” organized around different social logics and values, persisted within a heterogeneous modernity.48 At the same time, Lefebvre contended, a paradoxical situation of “backwardsness” emerged in which “life is lagging behind what is possible” — behind the very different set of arrangements that capitalist modernization had actually made possible.49 It is precisely this proximity between, on the one hand, an alienated existence and, on the other, that which is no longer possible and that which is newly possible which, according to Lefebvre, creates opportunities, through everyday practices, for different ways of being to emerge.50 In cities especially, he suggests, alternative modes of living and new forms of solidarity appear in the theater of everyday life.51 In response to optimistic “partisans of Progress,” Lefebvre points out “the decline of everyday life since . . . Antiquity.” But it also differs from nihilistic calls for adapting to the impasse of the present, abjuring transformative projects, or renouncing propositions about a future good life. Conversely, in response to the pessimistic philosophers of decadence, he insists on “the breadth and magnificence of the possibilities which are opening out for man, and which are so really possible . . . (once the political obstacles are shattered).”52 Such anarchist pessimists, he argues, mistakenly accept “this life as the only one possible” and are unable to recognize the potential “greatness” that may shine through alienated forms.53 Rather than focus on the false opposition between progress and decline, Lefebvre directs our attention to the difference between quantitative and qualitative forms of progress. He dismisses as a “childish error” the tendency to base our image of “the [hu]man of the future on what we are now” and “simply granting him a greater quantity of mechanical means and appliances.”54 Rather, he insists, “we should acquire a sense of qualitative changes, of modifications in the quality of life – and above all of another attitude of the human being toward himself.”55 He thus calls on us to envision a future organized around “total life” and a “living totality” in which a “truly human” and “total man” may be realized.56 For Lefebvre, the task of recognizing the possible in the actual requires creative acts of political imagination. But he also criticizes idle speculation about fantastic futures, insisting that understandings of alternatives must emerge through experimental practices. He asserts that “man as a total problem” – “the possibility of the total” and “truly human man” – can only be “posed and resolved on the level of everyday life.”57 Challenging the kind of critique or revolt promoted by “mystics and metaphysicians,” he proposed a dialectical approach that would overcome false oppositions between “everyday life and festival – mass moments and exceptional moments . . . seriousness and play – reality and dreams.”58 According to Lefebvre, everyday life, especially in cities, becomes the scene of a certain utopianism which combines imaginative vision with experimental practices in order to identify and pursue what he called the “possible-impossible.”59 At once future-oriented and now-centered, aesthetic and political, a serious strategy and an end in itself, such everyday practices contribute to what a more human “art of living.”60 We might also call this an art of anticipation in which visionary thinking and experimental acts come together in a type of “play acting” that “explores what is possible.”61 In the late 1950s, Lefebvre further developed this thinking about lived utopianism. Under modern capitalist conditions, he explains, previous modes of envisioning a truly human form of life (whether based on fantasies of natural living or classical antiquity) had either been lost or discredited as fictive or mythical, but new ones had not taken their place. Far from celebrating this development, he regarded it as tragic that the postwar Left had no myth of “the new life” and spoke only in the language of industrial rationalism, technocratic planning, and productivist acceleration.62 But Lefebvre also argued that in the new era of postwar planning there was a resurgence of utopian thinking because “the advanced countries are lagging behind their own possibilities” and are “less able to satisfy those who ought to be happy with it.”63 He writes, “Utopianism lives again . . . It is exploring the possibilities of praxis . . . Imagination is adopting or rediscovering a creative power. It is pooling forces with an obscurely rediscovered spontaneity.”64 And, “If we are to build a revitalized life . . . we must use utopian method experimentally, looking ahead to what is possible and what is impossible and transforming this hypothetical exploration into applicable programs and practical plans.”65 Lefebvre called this orientation a “philosophy of the possible” which attends to “relations with the real and the here-and-now” in order to discover “the opening, by which [we] may enter in a practical way into the ‘possible-impossible’ dialectic.”66 Lefebvre’s call in the late 1950s for a new “revolutionary romanticism” seemed to receive an uncanny answer in what he regarded as “the irruption” of May ’68. For him this unforeseen event “broke into” everyday life even as everyday practices constituted that which was revolutionary about the event.67 For Lefebvre, May ‘68 was neither an unmediated presentist eruption nor the working out of a blueprint for the future. He writes, “A theory of the movement has to emerge from the movement itself, for it is the movement that has revealed, unleashed, and liberated theoretical capacities.”68 His analysis of ‘68 emphasizes spontaneous popular contestation and mass participation, the commitment to transform society as a whole and create new forms of life, and above all the emergence of experiments in self-management which were at once concrete and utopian, practical and performative, actual and prefigurative, political and cultural. For Lefebvre, this “irruption” demonstrated that “everyday existence” cannot be “transcended in one leap” but only through “the process of self-management.”69 He characterized it as an “unthinkable movement” that nevertheless “actually existed” and therefore allowed and compelled people to “think the unthinkable.”70 Not surprisingly, he called May ‘68 a “concrete utopia.”71 The dialectic movement between utopian imagination and experimental practice allowed May ‘68 to make real a supposedly impossible form of life in the “anticipated urban society.”72 He writes, “The specifically utopian function of cultural contestation will thus supersede itself by fulfilling itself in practice.”73 This kind of collective anticipation through concrete utopian experiments in self-management comes through clearly in Kristin Ross’s insightful analysis of the Paris Commune. Ross writes: More important than any laws the Communards were able to enact was simply the way in which their daily workings inverted entrenched hierarchies and divisions . . . The world is divided between those who can and those who cannot afford the luxury of playing with words or images. When that division is overcome, as it was under the Commune . . . what matters more than any images conveyed, laws passed, or institutions founded are the capacities set in motion.74 If social relations are to be radically transformed, Ross suggests, it will not be by teaching people how to be citizens of a future society, but by mobilizing such capacities, which are at once practical and theoretical, political and aesthetic, actual and potential.75 In a similar spirit Massimiliano Tomba examines the “insurgent universality” that was practiced and performed by the more radical and subaltern forces within the French Revolution. He writes, this insurgency not only interrupted the continuum of a specific historical configuration of power, but . . . disclosed and anticipated new political pathways, which indicated alternative trajectories beyond political modernity. These pathways were molten in the red-hot magma of many experiments, abandoned or repressed. The experiment was the virtuous “skidding off course (dérapage)” of the Revolution during which slaves, women and the poor gained voice and acted as if they were citizens.76 More recently, we might consider the category confounding character of the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the everyday practices of “horizontalism” following the 2001 financial crisis in Argentina, in recent Occupy struggles, and autonomous popular movements worldwide. Concrete utopian anticipation has assumed more robust forms in the Zapatista experiment in Chiapas, Mexico and the ongoing Kurdish experiment in Rojava, Syria. 5. Reconstruction, Transfiguration, Improvisation These brief examples should make clear that the politics of anticipation are not only symbolic and performative. An anticipatory dialectic of prefiguration and transfiguration – or the circular relation among envisioning, enacting, and realizing – has been especially well developed within the black radical tradition. Consider, for example, W.E.B. Du Bois’s plan during the early 1930s to organize African Americans into self-managing consumer cooperatives. He took as his staring points the refractory character of the color line (which proved to be invulnerable to rational refutation or legal challenges), the mutually reinforcing relation between racism and poverty, the white supremacy of the American labor movement, and the devastating effect of the Great Depression on the black community. Given this historical condition, Du Bois sought to identify immanent possibilities within alienated forms by turning the fact of segregation into a source of social strength and political education. He argued that if planned and organized, existing networks of black sociality and exchange could ground a new form of solidarity and autonomy through which to confront capitalism and racism. He believed that self-managing cooperatives organized around mutualist lines could create opportunities for work without exploitation, production without profit, exchange without stratification, knowledge production without exclusion – in ways that would reinforce bonds across different social sectors of the black community.77 On one level, Du Bois’s multi-faceted program was a pragmatic response to an immediate predicament. These consumer cooperatives would create a basis for economic survival under conditions of Jim Crow segregation during the Depression. By doing so without depending on either state aid (that might not come) or legal reform (that might not matter), it was also meant to transform formal liberty into substantive freedom. Du Bois emphasized that these economic efforts were meant to complement, and help to realize, rather than replace the existing civil rights struggle. He offered a strategy for achieving full citizenship from a position of economic security, strength, and leverage. But Du Bois’s call for economic self-management was also a concrete utopian project to radically reconstruct American democracy by abolishing the color line and overcoming capitalist social relations. In his view, these self-managing cooperatives would allow black actors to develop alternative forms of labor, exchange, and sociality – the new subjectivities, everyday practices, ethical relations, and spiritual/cultural orientations that would: 1. prepare themselves for the future order they desired, 2. model (to themselves and others) what was possible and what that future might entail (through experimental practices), 3. help to hasten that future by enacting it here and now (to materialize it by envisioning it, and to come to see it through material practices). With this plan for strategic self-segregation, Du Bois was not calling for blacks to withdraw from American society. He was recognizing that their involuntary status as a nation-within-a-nation offered them an opportunity (and perspective) to lead the nation as a whole (beginning with the white working class) on a different path beyond the color line and towards socialist democracy. His program was based on the conviction that racial domination could never be overcome under capitalist conditions and that socialism could never be realized until the color line was abolished.78 It envisioned self-managing black communities playing a vanguard role in a process whereby a whole range of cooperative movements among different communities would form, federate, and help to create a new “cooperative commonwealth” in and beyond America. It thereby anticipated both a multi-racial socialist democracy within America and a new order of international solidarity among self-managing peoples of color against global imperialism. In this way, Du Bois believed that the black freedom struggle could realize American democracy, empower and unite colonized peoples, redeem the West, and emancipate humanity – through concrete everyday practices that anticipated, in all of these ways, a seemingly impossible future already made plausible by present conditions and glimpsed through the subaltern’s privileged critical insight. On the one hand, his plan was a revolutionary rejection of liberal progress. It insisted that no change would come automatically and that real emancipation would not be possible by merely adjusting the existing framework. On the other hand, this was a program for radical transformation that refused the fantasy of sudden revolutionary rupture. Du Bois was mindful of the long black Atlantic history during which each emancipatory break enabled a new forms of domination. He suggested that the process of subjective and objective transformation that he was proposing might take decades, or even generations. It was this long view that helps explain why Du Bois developed this plan during the period when he was writing Black Reconstruction in America, and vice versa. In his 1935 masterwork, Du Bois demonstrates how black slaves interrupted the historical continuum through a “general strike” whereby they fled plantations and withdrew their labor power from the Confederate war effort. He famously recounts how freed slaves experienced emancipation as an apocalyptic rupture. But, as importantly, he demonstrates how an alliance of freed blacks, Southern white workers, and Northern abolition democrats (black and white) was briefly able to leverage the Freedman’s Bureau to open the possibility for an experiment in non-racial socialist democracy that, in challenging the very basis of capitalist private property and American social divisions, far exceeded the intentions of the U.S. government and Northern interests who had supported its creation. Much of his study is devoted to describing the revolutionary attempt to reconstruct the very bases of American democracy through experimental practices made possible by a contingent set of conditions that created a unique historical situation which was seized by an alliance of actors who anticipated – envisioned, performed, pursued – an alternative future in their everyday acts. This nexus of vision, conjuncture, and practices, he suggests, positioned freed blacks to be the vanguard of a socialist revolution and truly democratic society that might have been. But Du Bois explains how this revolutionary “Southern Experiment” was ultimately foreclosed by white working class racism. When white workers allied with the planter class against freed blacks, Northern capital was allowed to destroy the prospect of real democracy (and racial equality) in America and across the imperialist world. Du Bois demonstrates how this process allowed slave emancipation to evolve into a regime of legal segregation and social stigmatization – the very regime into which Du Bois was born and against which he spent his life in militant struggle. Du Bois’s interwar plan for self-managing black cooperatives can thus be read as an untimely attempt to pursue the unrealized promise of the post-Civil War Southern Experiment. In the 1930s Du Bois sought to revitalize the unrealized 1870s project to reconstruct American democracy on multi-racial and socialist lines.79 The anticipatory character of Du Bois’s account of Reconstruction and his program for cooperative self-management may be situated in a long history of black Atlantic concrete utopianism which combined visionary projects with experimental practices. Here we might think of maroon communities throughout the New World slave system, Toussaint Louverture’s 1801 black republic, and the emergence of what Laurent Dubois, following Jean Casimir, called the “counter-plantation” system in post-revolutionary Haiti. Thomas Holt describes how a similar movement for peasant self-sufficiency immediately followed the emancipation of slaves in 19th century Jamaica. As I have argued elsewhere, Aimé Césaire’s and Léopold Senghor’s constitutional struggle to transform imperial France into a postnational democratic federation may be located in this tradition of anticipatory politics. But so too can Frantz Fanon’s account of the new forms of life that emerged through the lived experience of revolutionary struggle for Algerian independence and Patrice Lumumba’s untimely experiment in popular democracy in the Congo. In each of these anticipatory initiatives, we can recognize what Paul Gilroy has called the dialectic of fulfillment and transfiguration. In The Black Atlantic, Gilroy describes a pragmatic “politics of fulfillment” whose “normative content focuses attention on . . . the notion that a future society will be able to realize the social and political promise that present society has left unaccomplished.”80 Gilroy distinguishes this orientation from a utopian “politics of transfiguration” that strives “continually to move beyond the grasp of the merely linguistic, textual, and discursive. . . This politics exists on a lower frequency, where it is played, danced, and acted, as well as sung and sung about, because words . . . will never be enough to communicate its unsayable claims to truth.”81 Gilroy treats black musical expression as an especially rich locus and medium for such utopian acts. Gilroy argues that this “tradition of expression” “refuses to accept that the political is a readily separable domain. Its basic desire is to conjure up and enact the new modes of friendship, happiness, and solidarity that are consequent on the overcoming of the racial oppression.”82 He suggests that these two modes of politics are not mutually exclusive; within the black Atlantic tradition they have long co-existed and complemented each other. But if the politics of fulfillment has generated a black “counter-discourse” through which to make political claims, Gilroy argues, the politics of transfiguration constitutes a “counterculture of modernity” that seeks to expand the very domain and meaning of politics itself – partly by linking it to ethics and aesthetics, imaginative practice and cultural performance, embodied practices and lived memories.83 I would like to underscore the anticipatory dimensions this politics of trasnsfiguration, which conjures and enacts new ways of being and relating. According to Gilroy, it emphasizes the emergence of qualitatively new desires, social relations, and modes of association within the racial community of interpretation and resistance and between that group and its erstwhile oppressors. It points specifically to the formation of a community of needs and solidarity which is magically made audible in the music itself and palpable in the social relations of its cultural utility and reproduction.84 These transfigurative practices create new continuities among politics, ethics, and aesthetics; Gilroy speaks of “grounded ethics” and “grounded esthetics.85 Gilroy thus describes a set of concrete utopian practices that anticipate (by enacting in both form and content) an alternative good life. He writes, progress from the status of slaves to the status of citizens led [western blacks] to enquire into what the best possible forms of social and political existence might be. The memory of slavery, actively preserved as a living intellectual resource in their expressive political culture, helped them to generate a new set of answers to this enquiry. They had to fight – often through their spirituality – to hold on to the unity of ethics and politics sundered from each other by modernity’s insistence that the true, the good, and the beautiful had distinct origins and belong to different domains of knowledge.86 This path from broken present to utopian future, by way of living memory and embodied performance, resonates with the ways that Benjamin conjugated remembrance and rupture. It is indeed likely that Gilroy had both Benjamin and Adorno in mind when he writes, The history and utility of black music. . . enable us to trace something of the means through which the unity of ethics and politics has been reproduced as a form of folk knowledge. This subculture often appears to be the intuitive expression of some racial essence but is in fact an elementary historical acquisition produced from the viscera of an alternative body of cultural and political expression that considers the world critically from the point of view of its emancipatory transformation. In the future, it will become a place which is capable of satisfying the (redefined) needs of human beings that will emerge once the violence – epistemic and concrete – of racial typology is at an end. Reason is thus reunited with the happiness and freedom of individuals and the reign of justice within the collectivity.87 Gilroy affirms that this political orientation converges with Marxism, even if the convergence is also undercut by the simple fact that in the critical thought of blacks in the West, social self-creation through labour is not the centre-piece of emancipatory hopes. For the descendants of slaves, work signifies only servitude, misery, and subordination. Artistic expression, expanded beyond recognition from the grudging gifts offered by the masters as a token substitute for freedom from bondage, therefore becomes the means towards both individual self-fashioning and communal liberation. Poiesis and politics begin to coexist in novel forms [– autobiographical writing, special and uniquely creative ways of manipulating spoken language, and, above all, the music.]88 The important point here is not the extent of Gilroy’s Marxism or the accuracy of his interpretation of Western Marxist desires regarding labor, but that he is describing a tradition of concrete utopianism through which a future good life is anticipated (envisioned, enacted, conjured ) through experimental practices that are at once political, ethical, and aesthetic.89 Gilroy writes eloquently about an “ethics of antiphony” and “the tactics of sound developed as a form of black metacommunication.”90 His attention to music and performance as black radicalism’s privileged media, and to utopian enactment or untimely anticipation as central features of black aesthetics, has been extensively elaborated by Fred Moten. Referring to blackness as “the extended movement of a specific upheaval, an ongoing irruption that annaranges every line,” Moten links this upheaval and irruption to (an ethics, politics, and aesthetics) of “the cut” and “the break.”91 Moten uses this multivalent term to index variously the gap between (as well as the elevated conjunction of): sound and words, music and text, poetry and philosophy, phenomenology and semiotics, experience and expression, scream and message, being and knowing, description and explanation, performance and analysis, showing and naming, deconstruction and reconstruction, objectivity and subjectivity, body and spirit, substance and sign, violence and joy, absence and abundance, visibility and invisibility, tragedy and elegy, singularity and totality, emotion and structure, spontaneity and preparedness, individuality and collectivity, event and process, situatedness and ongoinginess, return and birth, origin and repetition, past and future. It is through this cut, by lingering in this break – at once existential, epistemological, and temporal – that the (radical) work and play of “improvisation,” in and through and for what he calls “ensemble,” unfolds. This is a dazzling intervention on blackness and/as improvisation in the break where form mirrors content, or each reworks the other, in every instant. Among the many ramifying images that Moten offers is that of improvisation as the performance of an “old new language – tragic, hopeful, fallen” that registers “the fantasy of what hadn’t happened yet” and works “to activate the foresight that is not prophecy but description . . . embodied and silently sounded in the music’s knowing echo of shriek and prayer.”92 Descriptive foresight (in an old-new language) of what has not yet happened wonderfully expresses the peculiar political logic of anticipation that I have been trying to outline. Moten explains how this improvisational practice links vision, performance, and action. He relates blackness (and critique) to the practice of “lingering” in the “shattering tremble of the improvising ensemble’s music . . . Not in the interest of an understanding or adequate representation of the action whose performance would occur in this lingering, but in the interest of an enactive invocation, a material prayer, the dissemination of the conditions of possibility of . . . action.”93 In short, Moten conjures a space and practice of imaginative performance and embodied desire that is at once aesthetic, ethical, and political. It recognizes aesthetic performances as political acts and political performances as aesthetic acts within a relational, which is to say ethical, ensemble. For Moten, the practice of improvisation also confounds reified past-present-future distinctions. His discussion does not only imply that such aesthetic-ethical-political practices may anticipate, by enacting, what hasn’t yet happened. It also suggests that they anticipate that which is not yet known, a wish that can only emerge through present practice and performance. He thus links improvisation to the “unsayable claims of black utopian political desire, an unrequited love imaged after the fact.”94 Raising the question of “improvisation’s time and the time of ensemble’s organization” Moten writes of the “attempt . . . to sustain the desire that you anticipate, that you’ll have felt even now, to stop to look up, to sing the inscription.”95 This will and capacity to see and sing the inscription in order to sustain the desire that you anticipate is one way to understand prophecy. In a recent interview Moten remarks, “The prophet is the one who tells the brutal truth, who has the capacity to see the absolute brutality of the already-existing and to point it out and to tell that truth, but also to see the other way, to see what it could be. That double-sense, that double-capacity: to see what’s right in front of you and to see through it to what’s ahead of you.”96 Moten thereby voices an insight that has long been recognized by Jewish Marxist and black radical thinkers – namely that anticipation is less a matter of predicting the future than of “foreseeing the present.”97 In 1940 Walter Benjamin described the paradoxical character of the “prophetic relation to the future” by noting that “the seer’s gaze is kindled by the rapidly receding past . . . the prophet has turned away from the future: he perceives the contours of the future in the fading light of the past as it sinks before him into the night of times.”98 A few years later, during the war that would take Benjamin’s life, Aimé Césaire identified “the ground of poetic knowledge” as “an astonishing mobilization of all human and cosmic forces” in which “all lived experience. All the possibility . . . all the pasts, all the futures . . . Everything is summoned. Everything awaits.”99 And the “visionary” speaker in his 1946 poem declares, “my ear to the ground, I heard Tomorrow pass.”100 Decades later, but in a similar spirit, Edouard Glissant writes about the existence within Caribbean thought and consciousness of “a prophetic vision of the past” based on “the identification of a painful notion of time and its full projection forward into the future.”101 Perhaps people compelled by history to inhabit a painful sense of time are gifted with a prophetic sense of the past and a capacity (and necessity) to foresee the present. Running through these otherwise distinct reflections is the insight that anticipation entails sudden or stolen glimpses across epochal divides. It names the proleptic power of acting “as if” impossible futures were already at hand. 6. Dialectics of Anticipation What links these various concrete utopian experiments, thinkers, and traditions is not only a commitment to radical politics, direct democracy, or autonomous socialism. They also share a distinctive orientation to futurity. Their reflections and actions point beyond both the fiction of liberal progress and the fantasy of apocalyptic rupture. They reject the given order, envision a better world, and act as if the impossible were possible – even while mindful that new forms cannot be planned and implemented but can only emerge practically, experimentally. We can thus think of anticipation as a kind of political disposition whereby radical actors cultivate a state of readiness for any possible possibility and a will to overcome existing arrangements by acting from the standpoint of a not-yet redeemed world. We can think of anticipation as an untimely desire to recognize and pursue alternative possibilities that are enabled by and condensed within present arrangements. From this perspective, anticipation prefigures by enacting the supposedly impossible. It indexes a politico-temporal orientation, rather than an affective state or an ideological discourse. As a critical political concept, anticipation is neither about planning nor waiting. It rejects nihilistic presentism but also avoids the false opposition between liberal progress and apocalyptic rupture. (Or we can say that it rejects liberal progress while avoiding the false opposition between nihilistic presentism and apocalyptic rupture.) Through an immanent critique of actual relations that allows actors to recognize supposedly impossible possibilities, by tacking dialectically between creative imagination and experimental practices, anticipation seeks to balance the dual imperative to insist on an open future and to envision envisioning a good life. We might therefore refer to a dialectics of anticipation marked by the dual imperatives to be open to the impossible and to imagine the possible, to envision and enact, to seize the sudden illumination as it appears and seek to produce it through everyday life. A dialectical concept of anticipation is a calling for that is also a calling forth, an enacted idea that may bring into being what it desires through the performance itself (even as that very image of future possibilities only arises through such performative acts). Anticipatory politics are therefore also aesthetic operations (and vice versa). Neither about optimism nor pessimism, these concrete utopian practices cut across reified distinctions between immanence and transcendence, present and future, actual and possible, instrumental and utopian, imagination and action, strategy and spontaneity, politics and performance. Anticipation signals a readiness to interrupt the continuum and a commitment to live otherwise. They are not only “practices” in the sense of doing, they are forms of practice in the sense of learning, of getting better at – in this case, getting better at being the kind of person, living the kind life, entering into the types of social relations that will only be really possible, or possibly realized, in a future order.

#### The focus on “unraveling…mimetic desire” is an investment in failure that precludes revolutionary potential.

Elisabetta Brighi 20, Lecturer in International Relations at the University of Westminster, “The Global Politics of Ugly Feelings: Pessimism and Resentment in a Mimetic World,” in Pessimism in International Relations: Provocations, Possibilities, Politics, Chapter 7, pg. 107-113, 2020, Springer. error and language edited.

While resentment is understood to denote a legitimate sense of anger, and a desire for justice in the face of an injury, ressentiment indicates the pernicious and self-defeating folding-in of this emotion onto itself. It is the spiteful and counterproductive mentality cultivated by victims or ‘slaves’, in Nietzsche’s famous characterisation.24 According to Max Scheler’s reading of Nietzsche’s ressentiment, the origin of this emotion lies not in questions of justice but in questions of recognition, in particular the envy that derives from comparing oneself to others and resenting one’s inferiority. ‘Envy […] is the strongest source of ressentiment. It is as if it whispers continually: “I can forgive everything, but not that you are – that you are what you are – that I am not what you are – indeed that I am not you”’.25 Ressentiment is therefore a frustrated, ossified and ultimately generalised form of resentment; it is the affect that underpins the construction of scapegoats, the exercise of revenge, and the affirmation of a negative or inverted form of enjoyment. For the subject experiencing ressentiment, enjoyment perversely comes more from the misfortunes of others than an increase in one’s well-being.

Interestingly, a number of contemporary political and social theorists, such as Wendy Brown, William Connolly but also Réne Girard, seem to be in agreement that ressentiment, rather than resentment, is one of the dominant moods of our age. The conditions of late modernity, with the apparently limitless expansion of neoliberalism and its logic of extreme competition, create the breeding ground for an explosion not so much of resentment but of ressentiment. As Wendy Brown stated, individuals are ‘starkly accountable, yet dramatically impotent’—as such, they are ‘quite literally seething with ressentiment’.26 Further, Réne Girard argued that rivalry and envy, already normally present in human relations given their inevitably mimetic nature, have escalated out of proportions in late modernity due to the very operating principles of liberal and capitalist societies. This creates an epidemic of envy and ressentiment. 27 William Connolly submitted that contemporary ressentiment is not only about the return of a Nietzschean, existential resentment against mortality and our finitude, but it is also about ‘stored resentment that has poisoned the soul and migrated to places where it is hidden and denied’, a ressentiment grown out of ‘an accumulation of justified resentments’ that got somehow congealed and encoded into the political sphere.28

While resentment has been given credit as a negative emotion with critical potential, ressentiment has not been considered generative of emancipatory possibilities. Gilles Deleuze proposed that far from being an active and positive mode of political action, ressentiment is an alienating and non-emancipatory negative emotion, one that decomposes resistance and incapacitates contestation.29 More recently, Éric Fassin has looked at the question of resentment and ressentiment in connection with the contemporary return of populism.30 In his recent book Populisme: le grand ressentiment, Fassin recognises once again the ambivalent politics of resentment which, on the one hand, has been appropriated by the right to fuel, as ressentiment, an increasing xenophobic sentiment against migrants and minorities; but, on the other hand, has also been reintroduced, qua resentment, in the discourse of the new ‘populist left’ to inspire the struggle against economic elites and for greater economic and social equality. Resentment therefore emerges as an ambivalent and ambiguous expression of our contemporary disenchantment—its political work is complex, equivocal and ever-shifting. Can the same be said about pessimism?

Pessimism as Melancholia: On the Creative Possibilities of Negativity

As a sad passion, in Spinozan terms, pessimism shares a number of characteristics with resentment. This dysphoric, non-cathartic, fat emotion suggests a degree of suspended or obstructed agency—either in the subject, or in the context that gave rise to such feelings. Moods associated with pessimism, such as cynicism and above all melancholia, were central to nineteenth-century existentialism in the same way as resentment. As signals of radical alienation from the system and, as such, affects with critical potential, these moods were also valued in the process of critique of modernity. However, can the same be said now about contemporary forms of pessimism? Is the politics of pessimism today as ambiguous and slippery as the politics of resentment, caught between emancipatory and reactionary tendencies? In what follows I concentrate on pessimism understood as melancholia, starting from how one of the foremost pessimists of the last century, Sigmund Freud, introduced and understood such concepts.

The series of works that properly started psychoanalysis at the turn of the twentieth century are arguably imbued with a pessimism that, on the one hand, has survived until today and, on the other, reflects Freud’s own sense of helplessness in the face of the human condition, as well as the specific cultural and political developments leading up to the two World Wars. Freud’s pessimism developed gradually to assume an ontological and metaphysical, as well as cultural and ethical, nature.31

The foundation of Freud’s ontological and metaphysical pessimism can be traced to the rejection of the Enlightenment’s optimism regarding the place of rationality and freedom of the will in human nature. Freud’s inquiry into the unconscious is nothing but an attempt to debunk the illusion that human beings determine their own destiny out of a rational and realistic pursuit of happiness. To start with, Freud’s theory of subjectivity places the conscious, rational self (the ego) in a complex triangle of forces which constantly threaten to overpower it— some of these wholly unconscious (the id), some super-conscious (the super-ego). Either way, to use Freud’s famous expression, our rational self, our ego, is not ‘master in its own house’.32 As a consequence, any sense of conscious control and direction over our own lives is bound to be severely limited; indeed, it is an illusion. Happiness, furthermore, is more futile and less realistic a prospect than its opposite, pain. Although our lives are dictated by instincts aimed at satisfying ‘the programme of the pleasure principle […], this programme is at loggerheads with the whole world’. As Freud laconically notes in Civilisation and its Discontents, ‘one feels inclined to say that the intention that man should be “happy” is not included in the plan of “Creation”’.33

From these ontological and metaphysical considerations, a strong form of ethical and cultural pessimism follows. Firstly, as Freud readily concedes in his 1920 book Beyond the Pleasure Principle, love and our libidinal instincts provide only one of the two foundations upon which our existence is built—the other foundation being an equally powerful set of instincts, born out of aggression and driven by the death principle. ‘As well as Eros, there [is] an instinct of death. The phenomena of life could be explained from the concurrent or mutually opposing action of these two instincts’.34 Aggressiveness is an ‘indestructible’ feature of human nature, admits Freud after approvingly citing the Latin maxim ‘homo homini lupus’.35 If the father of psychoanalysis was pessimistic about the human condition, he was even more disenchanted about the future of civilisation. That the instinct to destroy and kill has been a constant force since the dawn of humanity is testified by Freud’s assertion in Totem and Taboo that, at the root of civilisation and culture, one finds murder—namely, the foundational murder of the primal father.36 Civilisation, therefore, is nothing but an immense attempt at maintaining peace—a fragile state of affairs perpetually ‘threatened with disintegration’.37

The two World Wars only reinforced Freud’s sense of the irreparably flawed nature of the human endeavour, revealing how unstable (and hypocritical) our civilisational foundations were, and how illusory the chances of peace. In his 1915 essay, Timely Reflections on War and Death, Freud writes: ‘war cannot be done away with; as long as the conditions of life of the various nations are so different and the conficts between them so violent, wars will be inevitable […]. We remember the old proverb: Si vis pacem, para bellum. This might be the time to alter it to read as follows: Si vis vitam, para mortem. If you wish to endure life, prepare yourself for death’.38 Furthermore, in his 1933 exchange of letters with Albert Einstein, with Nazism on the rise in Germany, Freud restated his belief that any attempt to outlaw war was bound to fail: ‘The ideal condition of things would of course be a community of men who had subordinated their instinctual life to the dictatorship of reason… But in all probability that is a Utopian expectation’.39

The problem of loss and death, so vividly imprinted in Freud’s consciousness by two World Wars, the loss of his beloved daughter Sophie, and his own persecution as a Jewish intellectual, occupies a central place in Freud’s entire psychoanalytical palimpsest. The question of how to cope with loss and death animates, in particular, Freud’s 1917 paradigm-altering reflections on Mourning and Melancholia. 40 Arguably, this contribution provides an essential angle into the varieties and complexities of pessimism, both past and contemporary. While in his early work Freud understood melancholia as a form of depression of variable intensity, drawing on the then popular theory of neurasthenia, two decades later Freud identified mourning and melancholia more specifically as two different responses to the same problem, that of loss. If mourning is the normal mechanism through which we struggle to come to terms with the loss of an object to which we are consciously attached, melancholia is the affect generated by our inability to fully integrate loss. Appalled by the loss of the loved object, the melancholic subject refuses to let it go, to the point that they identify and fuse with it, at the expense of their own self: ‘in mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself’.41 Thus, despite the pain and disappointment that its loss has caused, the loved object is safe, but the melancholic subject is not—they start tormenting and criticising themselves, losing faith in their own self. ‘If the love for the object, which cannot be abandoned while the object itself is abandoned, has fed into narcissistic identifcation, hatred goes to work on this substitute object. […] And this signifes the satisfaction of tendencies of sadism and hatred, which are […] turned back against the subject’s own self’.42 This is how, according to Freud, pessimism turns into melancholia and, oftentimes, into a form of mania—via a narcissistic regression and an unacknowledged rejection of the ambivalence the subject felt towards the loved object in the first place.

If this is Freud’s understanding of pessimism and melancholia, it is worth asking now what the political work of pessimism and, in particular, melancholia might be. As in the case of resentment, my argument is that this sentiment of disenchantment has translated into an ambivalent, equivocal and at times perverse kind of politics, suspended between action and reaction. A contemporary of Freud, Walter Benjamin, was the first to warn against the prevalence of a certain pessimistic, indeed melancholic, attitude especially among progressives on the Left. Benjamin mocked self-professed radicals of his time for merely mimicking the needs of the proletariat while being devoid of any genuine revolutionary praxis, thus providing a ‘papier-maché’ version of ‘the revolutionary gesture, the raised arm, the clenched fst’.43 Benjamin was, in other words, concerned about the way in which critique could turn into an empty and narcissistic nihilism, a ‘negativistic quiet’ which provided these intellectuals ‘comfortable arrangements […] in an uncomfortable situation’.44

More recently, the debate about the future of the Left after 1989, the crisis of social democratic parties, and the global recession of 2008, has once again trodden on the terrain of pessimism and melancholia, assessing the political potential and pitfalls of these moods. In a 1999 piece titled ‘Resisting Left Melancholy’, Wendy Brown returned to both Freud and Benjamin to launch an attack against the way the Left had fundamentally failed to reorganise and restructure itself after the end of Communism.45 Brown accused the Left of being ‘more attached to its impossibility than to its potential fruitfulness, to its own marginality and failure rather than its hopefulness’.46 Although to some extent inevitable, given the Left’s siding with the underprivileged and the marginal, progressives had developed an unhealthy, traumatic attachment to defeat, including the historical defeats of the twentieth century. The Left, notes Brown, seems to be caught in ‘a structure of melancholic attachment to a certain strain of its own dead past, whose spirit is ghostly, whose structure of desire is backward looking and punishing’.47 It is precisely the sentiments of pessimism and melancholia ‘about broken promises and lost compasses’ that create ‘potentially conservative and even self-destructive undersides of putatively progressive political aims’.48 Similarly to Benjamin, Brown intended to warn against the subtle nihilism of melancholia and the way this risked incapacitating and [freezing] ~~paralysing~~ the Left precisely at a time of great need for a revived left-wing politics.

In contrast to Brown’s arguments, Enzo Traverso presented an alternative view of a melancholic left-wing politics, one able to depathologise melancholia, celebrate a form of healthy, rather than self-satisfied, nihilism and rehabilitate it as a potential site of resistance.49 Traverso agrees that after the ‘eclipse of utopias’, the Left cannot but be burdened with a sadness it cannot dispel, which comes from defeat. However, sadness, detachment and irony can be points of departure—notwithstanding the imperatives of political action. After all, the transformation of the world, he suggests, can never be anything more than a ‘melancholic bet’.50 Along similar lines, in Capitalist Realism, Mark Fisher offered important reflections on the role of negative feelings in building a progressive future.51 Although recognising that there is probably no escape from neoliberalism and its pervasiveness, Fisher is critical especially of that kind of left-wing politics which has replaced class analysis with moralism, solidarity with guilt and fear—appropriating forms of bourgeois nihilism that traditionally would be the purview of conservative movements. Recuperating the lessons of Marcuse and Adorno, Fisher contrasts this form of impotent melancholia and nihilistic pessimism with the real power of negative thinking, which can only consist of a conscious and deliberate politicisation of the overwhelmingly negative emotions of our age.52 The project of turning depression into anger was not one that Fisher himself could carry out in his own life.53 However, I would argue it remains his most important legacy.

Feeling Dangerously—Final Thoughts

It would be bad enough to inhabit a world swallowed by rising tides of negative emotions. What this chapter sought to demonstrate is that the real complexity of the ugly feelings currently sweeping across the four continents is their treacherous, ambiguous and duplicitous nature. Resentment and pessimism have both gone global and constitute an important affective vector of international politics today. And yet, if there is certainly virtue in ‘feeling bad’, that is, feeling resentful or pessimistic, when this condition corresponds respectively to a clear commitment to pursue questions of global justice, or expose the affective micro-foundations that sustains neoliberal forms of exploitation, these sentiments of disenchantments can just as easily be hijacked by global political actors in an attempt to sustain narcissistic, self-satisfied subjectivities, incapable of acting politically and confined to narrow horizons. Spinoza famously argued that, insofar as it incapacitates action, inspiring sad passions is necessary for the exercise of power and indeed functional to the maintenance of hegemonic regimes and the stifling of any resistance.54 Before and contra Nietzsche, he was unconvinced that pessimism could lead to the life-affirming joy necessary for acting in the world—just as he condemned resentment and, a fortiori, ressentiment in as categorical a way as Nietzsche two centuries later. Therefore, today we should be asking ourselves whether the global hegemony of deeply conservative projects such as neoliberalism, or the growing threat of global fascism, can truly be tackled without questioning the envious, narcissistic and nihilistic affects on which these developments critically rely.

#### Their theorization of antiblackness and the hetero-patriarchy is incorrect---it is an ideological projection in line with a history of black elite essentialism. You should prefer historical analysis of racism that attends to the specificity and contingencies of moments. That analysis reveals reform is possible.

Kenneth Warren 19, UChicago Fairfax M. Cone Distinguished Service Professor, 5-10-2019, “Blackness” and the Sclerosis of African American Cultural Criticism," nonsite.org, https://nonsite.org/article/blackness-and-the-sclerosis-of-african-american-cultural-criticism

When Judith Stein assessed African American historical analysis in the mid 1970s in “Of Booker T. Washington and Others: The Political Economy of Racism in the United States,” she observed that because “dominant American historians have used formal categories—accommodation and militance, self-help and protest—to describe the course of black history” they have described “black movements as mechanical successions of protests against racism and withdrawal into self-help.”1 This analytical formalism, Stein averred, “only mystifies the historical process,” guaranteeing that the answer to any question about why these protests failed to achieve their aims would always be the same—”racism.” “In essence,” Stein noted, “the explanation is advanced before the investigation is conducted. Racism is reified, divorced from the concrete and complex experiences of social groups in particular circumstance.” Stein countered that a “study of black politics…limited to men and movements seeking purely racial goals” was insufficient. To “understand black history, one must examine the principal social forces affecting black people concretely and in historical time.”2 She continued: Because blacks interacted with other workers and other social classes, the historian must analyze specific social and class relationships, and not be satisfied with general statements about broad social changes as backdrops for Afro-American history. To understand the era of Booker T. Washington, one must first examine the whole pattern of social forces affecting blacks after the Civil War, not only the racial manifestations.3 The result of Stein’s undertaking was one of the two best (Michael West’s The Education of Booker T. Washington is the other) accounts of the ascendance of Booker T. Washington and the long-term consequences of the consolidation of the regime that made possible his rise. Challenging what was (and unfortunately, too often still is) the prevailing view that during this period “poor whites were the sources of proscriptions against the blacks” and that “the ‘better whites,’…were allies of black people,” Stein demonstrated that southern planter and industrial elites confronted the Populist insurgency with a campaign of disfranchisement that relied on rewriting or passing new laws, rewriting state Constitutions, vicious and biased journalism, and outright intimidation and violence, thereby shaping the terms of politics and cultural practices for the next several decades. Disfranchisement was decisive. She writes: By removing the lower class from politics, disfranchisement had enormous effects upon subsequent black and white political movements. It encouraged among northern blacks petit-bourgeois notions like Du Bois’s “talented tenth.” Although northern blacks personally possessed more rights, they were basically proposing solutions for all the black people, nine-tenths of whom were southern. The prevalent northern ideologies, like the southern, were based upon appeals to the ruling elements of society. Whereas Washington tried to persuade whites of their self-interest, Du Bois appealed to their sense of justice and morality. Although Washington urged blacks to build up racial enterprises and Du Bois to fight for constitutional rights, both positions fused in practice. The two leaders perceived their roles as elevating a passive population.4 Stein was not, in her analysis, concerned with sifting out literary production from the larger domain of cultural activity to which she refers. However, her observations about the politics of that moment not only illuminate the patterns of black literary writing and commentary that emerged in response to the political dynamics that led to disfranchisement and to the imposition of Jim Crow throughout the south, but they also help explain the major strain of scholarly analysis of literary and cultural production regarding race at the current moment. This strain, which encompasses the writings of such prominent scholars as Daphne Brooks, Saidiya Hartman, Fred Moten, Jr., Christina Sharpe, Frank Wilderson, Jr. and others, attributes the ongoing overrepresentation of African-descended Americans among the poor, the incarcerated, the politically weak, and the chronically ill not merely to racism as such, but rather to an amorphous but abiding “blackness/antiblackness” deriving from slavery but enduring, insistently, across the century and a half following the Civil War. Hartman, for example, asserts that If slavery persists as an issue in the political life of black America, it is not because of an antiquarian obsession with bygone days or the burden of a too-long memory, but because black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery—skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment. I, too, am the afterlife of slavery.5 In the same vein, Christina Sharpe aligns her work with “those scholars who investigate the ongoing problem of Black exclusion from social, political, and cultural belonging; our abjection from the realm of the human.”6 The postulated effect of insisting on black exclusion as the basis for constituting modern political, cultural, and social life is to invest the most downtrodden with the power to call the existing order to account. As Anna Julia Cooper remarked in 1892, “Only the BLACK WOMAN can say ‘when and where I enter, in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole Negro race enters with me.’”7 The far-reaching implication of such a claim is that the work of social justice can be deemed complete only when the formerly excluded speak up to ratify that order’s claim to comprehensive justice. Cooper’s presumption was that the qualities meriting inclusion into the polity—gentility, intellectual achievement, piety, moral uprightness, and the like—were as likely to be embodied by black women as by women or men from any other social group, and that only an immoral but corrigible prejudice prevented whites from acknowledging the fitness of black women, and the Negro race as a whole for equality. For Cooper, the terms of social worth produced by the existing order were, when considered in their ideal form, and absent racial prejudice, more or less sufficient to encompass the hopes and desires of all black Americans.Of course, as legions of African Americanist scholars have noted, Cooper’s politics were a politics of uplift that assumed the bulk of her recently freed compatriots would enter the polity only via their deference and willingness to model themselves on their social betters, who were, unsurprisingly, people like Cooper herself. In many respects, however, those contemporary scholars who inveigh against antiblackness can be seen as attempting to radicalize Cooper’s “when and where I enter” dictum with the idea that true entry into the political and social life of western nations, were it ever to occur, would require or precipitate an absolute reimagining of the social-political order. Indeed, for some, even such reimagining marks a bridge too far. Sharpe, for example, sees, blackness as an “ongoing and irresolvable abjection” rather than as the effect of political and social practices that might be contested successfully. Blackness, she suggested is best apprehended not as an imposed condition but “as a form of consciousness.”8 Against this recent turn, a consideration of Stein’s account of the political economy of racism in the waning decades of the 19th century provides a welcome tonic. By making clear that the political consciousnesses of freedmen extended well beyond racial goals, Stein’s work establishes several key points. First, any attempt to speak on behalf of those black freedmen—laborers and farmers who built the Colored Farmer’s Alliance that enabled the Populist insurgency to mount a serious challenge to capitalism during this period—that simply overrides such sentiments as those expressed by the black Texan Populist R.H. Haynes who declared “The colored people in the rural districts will affiliate with any party that is against monopolies, in the interest of the poor men,” 9 in favor of discounting in advance the significance of political and social affiliation with people recognized as members of different races, does not represent the views of these individuals but, rather, imposes on them the supposed wisdom of the scholarly observer. To be sure the defeat of Populism was catastrophic, enabling the imposition of the Jim Crow that affected much of black political life in the ensuing decades .But the material and psychic investment in this politics was real. Its defeat affected the social and political consciousnesses of black and white Americans alike, but it did not determine them absolutely. Secondly, Stein’s analysis of the regime of race relations that derived from the imposition of the Jim Crow regime highlights the dominant form of politics supported by that regime, namely (as we have seen above), a politics, “like Du Bois’s ‘talented tenth’” that was “based upon appeal to the ruling elements of society.” Notwithstanding that those making such appeals were lodged, for the most part, in situations that differed significantly from those for whom they purported to speak (as Stein notes, in the early Jim Crow era most spokespersons “northern blacks [who] personally possessed more rights” the “nine-tenths…[who] were southern), they nonetheless felt authorized to proffer “solutions for all the black people.” While Stein foregrounds the appeals to white elites from their black counterparts, part and parcel of this politics was the desire to consolidate the black elite itself as a leadership cadre for the race—to cultivate a sense of racial responsibility and solidarity within the group. That we are encouraged to label as traitorous and cowardly the decision of the protagonist of James Weldon Johnson’s 1912 novel, The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man, to succeed by passing as a white businessman rather than accepting the responsibility of becoming a race leader distils this sensibility. The readiness to hand of a fictional example for this sensibility highlights another key point: A politics based upon appeals to the ruling elements of society was a politics in which the writing of literature could assume an outsized role in the political situation of black Americans in terms of its presumed capacity to move, persuade, and impress potentially sympathetic whites who occupied positions of influence and power and to encourage, console, and inspire the nation’s black citizens. And while this literature would foreground the problem of how best to represent the relations between educated and semiliterate blacks (alongside that of representing relations between the races), often extolling the virtues of the vernacular and cultural expressions of rural southern blacks and, later, their northern, urban counterparts, as the epitome of cultural genius, this literature was not the political voice of the race—which, to the extent it exists as a social reality comprises myriad and often conflicting views and interests—but rather the voice of those whose political legitimacy rests on the perception that they truly represent and speak for a race. The politics of the laborers and farmers of the Populist movement was not a politics premised on producing a race literature. The politics of black elites, however, as will be elaborated below, virtually required it. Further, although the raison d’etre of this literature lay largely in its commitment to contesting the practices and presumptions of the Jim Crow regime, the perceived authority of its precepts and formulas rested, paradoxically, on the political silencing of those for whom it spoke. Before elaborating further the literary dimensions of this history, it will be helpful to highlight some of the consequences of the race relations regime. As Stein and Adolph Reed, Jr. have demonstrated, postbellum black life political consciousness was “shaped by the experiences of slavery, emancipation, and especially Reconstruction.”10 Political participation itself had produced and reproduced forms of affiliation, affecting relations among former slaves; between former slaves and white farmers and laborers; between former slaves and former masters; between former slaves and free northern blacks; and between northern and southern whites. Stein writes, “The new Republican party, through its Union League clubs, united polity, society, and economy to protect and enhance black labor and lives.”11 The point here is not that southern blacks began thinking politically only in the wake of emancipation but rather that conditions attendant upon emancipation necessarily played a role in how former slaves viewed themselves racially. In seeing themselves as Republicans, southern blacks asserted a racial identity that also stressed interregional and cross-class and interracial identifications as necessary to realizing their visions of what was necessary to secure prosperity and independence. As a result, as Stein points out, the “decline of Republican politics was a crucial blow…to collective politics” as it had been developing in the south.12 This blow, however, did not destroy the possibility for collective action for black farmers and laborers. Reed adds, black political engagement was not restricted exclusively to racial issues. In the late 1870s blacks in Virginia aligned with white workers and small farmers in the proto-populist Readjuster Party that elected a governor and a U.S. Senator. In the 1880s, membership in the radical Knights of Labor included roughly 60,000 blacks. In the 1890s, the Colored Farmers Alliance, black expression of the Populist insurgency, had 1,250,000 members, and in 1894 an interracial Populist-Republican Fusion alliance won statewide power in North Carolina as well as in several municipalities in the state and was re-elected by a larger margin in 1896. In New Orleans in 1892 black workers participated with whites in a general strike that withstood employers’ and white supremacist politicians’ efforts to break their solidarity through racist agitation.13 Participation in all of these movements and activities betokened a mode of racial identification for southern farmers and laborers less dependent upon and less in line with the needs and views of black elites. Such alliances were significant enough to affect the political programs of black elite brokers, including Booker T. Washington, the architect and enforcer of the race relations regime. Stein observes that the embrace of Populism by the very population that he proposed to uplift via his Tuskegee program “forced Washington to address agrarian problems more directly than in the previous decade.”14 Likewise, the recognition among black elites that the Republican Party was proving less efficacious than before in determining the horizon of political action for black southern workers and farmers demanded responses. By 1895, when it became clear that “the most effective means to struggle against discriminatory practices, disfranchisement, and racism—all of which affected prosperous black southerners as well as the poor—was Populism,” black republicans joined forces with Populists. The results were palpable: The places where “black Republicans succeeded in challenging racial practices” were those places where they had allied “with the party challenging capital,” namely, Populism.15 Although the rise of disfranchisement would shift the center of gravity of political activity for the nation’s black population by effectively removing southern black farmers and labors from politics, it was, in part the initial attractiveness of a class politics to black laborers and farmers in the south that encouraged black elites to proliferate calls for a race literature. For example, Henry Clay Gray’s 1891 article in The New York Age titled “Office of Distinctively Afro-American Literature,” bespoke a growing sense among blacks with literary or journalistic ambitions that the moment called for developing a literature that would enhance racial unity. Gray observed, “We all hear a great deal about ‘race pride,’ ‘race unity’ and the like; but in spite of us we cannot escape observing that, for the most part, we are bound together by a mere rope of sand—aimless talk. A distinctively Negro literature is alone the cable of infinitely superior quality and tension which can bind the race into one coherent, materially helpful and heroic people.…Literature is more than talk…its essence actualizes ideals and ennobles motives. Thus there can be no such things or facts as ‘race pride’ or ‘race unity’ where there is nothing made of a distinctively race literature.”16 Gray’s sentiments were echoed across the decade in the writings of such figures as Frances E.W. Harper, Sutton Griggs, J. McHenry Jones, and the aforementioned Anna Julia Cooper. In Jones’s 1896 novel, Hearts of Gold, which centers on the trials and tribulations of relatively accomplished “Afro-Americans” during the early Jim Crow era, one of the central characters, an enterprising newspaper man named Clement St. John, asks rhetorically, “Is not a race literature just as necessary as a race church, club, or school?”17 While earlier in the century, such terms as race literature, Negro literature, or colored literature were used comparatively rarely and more likely, when they did occur, to designate books about blacks rather than books by blacks, Negro literature in the 1890s came to mean literature by blacks that could be seen as speaking for blacks as a corporate entity in the manner described in Grady’s New York Age article. That disfranchisement accounted largely for this shift is attested to directly in Sutton Griggs’s novel Imperium in Imperio when one of the novel’s co-protagonists, Belton Piedmont, declares to an all-black assembly, “There is a weapon mightier than [the sword and ballot]”: I speak of the pen. If denied the use of the ballot let us devote or attention to the mightier weapon.…[It] would be a worthy theme for the songs of the Holy Angels, if every Negro, away from the land of his nativity, can by means of the pen, force an acknowledgement of equality from the proud lips of the fierce, all conquering Anglo-Saxon, thus eclipsing the record of all other races of men, who without exception have had to wade through blood to achieve their freedom.18 Griggs, as I have argued more extensively elsewhere,19 took the fact of disfranchisement as reason to approach black politics as a decidedly literary affair and in so doing bestowed upon black elites the responsibility of crafting a program to advance what they saw as the best interests of the race as whole. While Griggs, unlike many of his fellow literary writers, remained in the south, his politics was, like theirs, at once an exhortation to fellow black elites to devote themselves to the race as a whole and an appeal to elements of the south’s ruling class to recognize that their own wellbeing required collaboration with people like him. In the words of one character from his final novel, Pointing the Way, “The one thing needed in the South is political co-operation between the better elements of whites and the Negroes.”20 Black literature, as it emerged, then, was not itself the terrain upon which southern blacks and their more elite northern counterparts contested views of the race. Rather it was an extension of the way that black elites sought to promulgate the phenomenon of a race interest in response to shifting and fracturing alliances. It would be up to these elites to determine which politics could best provide blacks a way forward, and literary texts were one of the venues in which they debated among themselves the visions of racial alliance and affiliation they believed would be most efficacious for race progress. A novel like Frances E. W. Harper’s Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted (1892) made a point of insisting on the nonradical disposition of the black workers even as it acknowledged that a desire for black literature was not among the chief demands of the freedman. So, while one the novel’s prominent characters assures a white interlocutor that unlike northern immigrant workers, “the negro is not plotting in beer-saloons against the peace and order of society. His fingers are not dripping with dynamite, neither is he spitting upon your flag, nor flaunting the red banner of anarchy in your face” the novel’s eponymous heroine makes little headway in impressing on the novel’s vernacular characters the value of literary reading.24 Iola Leroy’s assumption that Aunt Linda, a woman of status among the community of freedmen, will have come to recognize the value of reading literature is proved erroneous. Asked by Iola why she hasn’t learned to read, Aunt Linda responds matter-of-factly, “sence freedom’s com’d I’se bin scratchin’ too hard to get a libin’ to put my head down to de book.” When Iola presses her case further by asserting literature’s capacity to provide companionship and succor in times of loneliness, saying, “it would be such company when your husband is away, to take a book,” Aunt Linda remains unpersuaded, saying, “Chile, I ain’t got no time ter get lonesome. Ef you had eber so many chickens to feed, an’ pigs squealin’ fer somethin’ ter eat, an’ yore ducks an’ geese squakin’ ‘roun’ yer, yer wouldn’t hab time ter git lonesome.”25 Thus, while Harper as an author trumpeted the importance of black people telling their own stories, she also acknowledged such a program was a top-down affair. Disfranchisement, despite being vigorously opposed by elites (even as some individuals, including Harper, expressed a willingness to countenance some qualifications on the right to vote), lent further credence to the idea that a literature could define and represent a race. “The imposed silence of the disfranchised farmer permitted others, black and white to speak for them.”26 As Adolph Reed and I have noted elsewhere, black studies scholarship on the whole has been plagued by “the temptation to attempt to speak on behalf of the political and social needs of some ‘black community’ outside the academy.” 27 Declaring themselves responsible to this community, which is in no way positioned to ratify the propositions being put forth on its behalf, while disdaining the professional norms prevailing in the academy as inherently biased against the beliefs and practices necessary to carry out their work, many black scholars have been able to operate in a zone of relative unaccountability in which the narrative recounting of their own experiences and thoughts are treated as paradigmatic of “the race.” Against this state of affairs Reed and I have called for scholarly approaches that focus instead on the way “that the study of the evolving discourses of politically articulate black Americans has provided an important conceptual anchor for the black studies field for most of its own history,” shaping “the main lines of public debate of political, social, and cultural ideas and strategies through which dominant notions of common black American identity and agendas have been constructed and pursued.” And if this admonition seems to entail turning away from non-elite concerns, our contention was precisely opposite. The field’s failure to scrutinize systematically “the sedimented premises of elite debates” had resulted in their naturalization as “background assumptions” which were then ascribed to a putative black community as authentic, organically-derived sentiments.28 Over the last two decades, however, the prevailing winds of black scholarly inquiry have shifted in a direction counter to that sketched out by Stein, Reed, and me. From the standpoint of “blackness” and “antiblackness” any attempt to approach black political and cultural activity dialectically in terms of “the whole pattern of social forces” and not merely the “racial” ones affecting black people is rendered inoperative from the outset by a stipulation that, to quote Frank B. Wilderson, III (who is prominently cited by scholars in this vein), “Blackness, refers to an individual who is by definition always already void of relationality.” In Wilderson’s view, “modernity marks the emergence of a new ontology” in which blacks “stand as socially dead in relation to the rest of the world.30 Although Wilderson tracks the emergence of this condition of blackness to a particular historical moment, he sees the problem in transhistorical terms, asserting that “chattel slavery, as a condition of ontology and not just as an event of experience, stuck to the African like Velcro.” Indeed, “Velcro,” fails to convey the degree of adhesiveness Wilderson has in mind here as he draws “a distinction between the experience of slavery (which anyone can be subjected to) and the ontology of slavery, which in modernity (the years 1300 to the present) becomes the singular purview of the Black.” In his view the entire “race of Humanism (White, Asian, South Asian, and Arab) could not have produced itself without the simultaneous production of that walking destruction which became known as the Black. Put another way, through chattel slavery the world gave birth and coherence to both its joys of domesticity and to its struggles of political discontent; and with these joys and struggles the Human was born, but not before it murdered the Black, forging a symbiosis between the political ontology of Humanity and the social death of Blacks.”31 In essence, what Stein diagnoses as fatal to the enterprise of intellectual inquiry, namely, ignoring the “the dialectic operating between blacks and whites,”32 is refigured by Wilderson not as a failure but as a principle of analysis. A primary casualty of the formal binarism entailed by an analysis based on antiblackness is the possibility of examining cultural expression as a variety of institutional practices engaged in by particularly situated individuals whose relation to the constituency they seek to constitute and represent is necessarily rhetorical and contestable. Instead, certain events and individuals are treated as paradigmatic of blackness, a condition demanding either acknowledgment, or hostile (or embarrassed) disavowal. Wilderson opens Red, White, and Black by recalling two seemingly abject figures. The first is “a Black woman who used to stand outside the gate [of New York’s Columbia University] and yell at Whites, Latinos, and East and South Asian students, staff, and faculty” accusing “them of having stolen her sofa and of selling her into slavery,” and the second, “a Native American man sitting on the sidewalk of Telegraph Avenue” near the University of California at Berkeley behind “an upside-down hat and a sign informing pedestrians that here they could settle the ‘Land Lease Accounts’ that they had neglected to settle all of their lives” by putting money in the hat. Both figures for Wilderson speak and embody what he calls “an ethical grammar,” which he describes as a demand for the restoration of stolen land and of the “corporeal integrity” that had been “ripped” from the women’s body to secure “the corporeal integrity of everyone else on the street.” This women’s bodily dispossession according to Wilderson had given “birth to the commodity and to the Human,” without giving her in turn either “subjectivity” or “a sofa”.33 Of course, it doesn’t answer here to point out that the woman had not literally been sold into slavery or that none of those passing her on the street had stolen her sofa, because her role in Wilderson’s anecdote (despite its emphasis on corporeality) is figurative—disciplinary, admonitory, and non-dialogic. The only proper response to her demand would be to defer to its legitimacy or to acquiesce in the structure or “grammar” of her address. And to the extent that Wilderson’s argument aligns itself with her ethical grammar, he arrogates to himself the same posture of non-relationality to his readers. He writes, “My analysis of socially engaged feature film insists on an intellectual protocol through which the scholarship of preconscious interests and unconscious identifications are held accountable to grammars of suffering—accountable, that is, to protocols of structural positionality.”34 The abstraction, “structural positionality,” replaces attention to the historical specificity of actual black political actors. In addition to the work of Spillers, Wilderson relies heavily on the concept of “social death” or “social alienation,” derived from the work of Orlando Patterson. Indeed, for Wilderson, Patterson’s Slavery and Social Death so convincingly “demonstrates how and why work, or forced labor, is not a constituent element of slavery” and that “the Slave is not a laborer but an anti-Human,” that the book’s assertions require virtually no further argumentation, placing the burden of proof instead “on the one who argues there is a distinction between Slaveness and Blackness. How, when, and where did such a split occur?”35 Wilderson is hardly alone among scholars of African American cultural expression in treating Patterson’s concepts of “social death” and “natal alienation” as historical givens. As the historian Vincent Brown suggests in a 2009 article in The American Historical Review, although the “concept of social death is a distillation from Patterson’s breathtaking survey—a theoretical abstraction” that cannot “explain the actual behavior of slaves” and has been criticized by other historians for this limitation, it has, since the late 1990s reemerged as a touchstone in the study of slavery among a host of prominent scholars who “extend social death beyond a general description of slavery as a condition and imagine it as an experience of self.”36 Ian Baucom’s Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History, Saidiya Hartman’s Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route, and Stephanie Smallwood’s Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora are three of the works on which Brown focuses, but the list could easily be extended to include, aside from the aforementioned book by Wilderson, work by Fred Moten, Jared Sexton, Daphne Brooks, Sabine Broeck, and Christina Sharpe.37 Perhaps tellingly, even Brown’s criticism of Patterson’s influence on studies of slavery accepts rather than questions the assumption that analysis of black history and culture must proceed from within the domain of what has been designated as blackness. For Brown the chief problem with Patterson’s account of social death is not its severing of any dialectical relation between the enslaved and the societies in which they were forced to labor, but rather its severing of the enslaved from any “meaningful links to the past,” by which he means something like overlooking the capacity of slaves “to enshrine the political importance of ancestry, mourning, and commemoration in [their] struggle against social alienation.”38 Having cautioned against the interpretive consequences of forgetting that social death/alienation is at best a theoretical abstraction, Brown then treats it Patterson’s concept as if it were the basis for social motivation by the enslaved. What further facilitates Brown’s apparently inadvertent retransformation of Patterson’s “exposition of slaveholding ideology” into “a description of the actual condition of the enslaved” is precisely the shortcoming that Stein descries in post-Civil Rights historical scholarship: an assumption that the only activities among blacks that merit political scrutiny are “movements seeking purely racial goals.” In Brown’s case, this assumption cashes out as the pursuit of “a politics of belonging, mourning, accounting [for the life and death of fellow slaves], and regeneration.”39 Brown’s confining of politics to matters of affect and expression (rather than, say, deliberation and decision-making) is also symptomatic of a presumption of racial community or unity across space and time as the condition or telos of black political activity. Opening his review by recounting an incident aboard the slave ship Hudibras when enslaved women insisted on commemorating the death of a particularly esteemed woman, Brown asks that we consider this event as exemplifying “a politics of history, which connects the politics of the enslaved to the politics of their descendants.”40 From such a perspective, differences and disagreements within black populations fail to signify as “real” political conflicts that reflect competing visions of how economic, social, and cultural life ought to be organized, taking a distant backseat to expressive activities asserting the value of black humanity against a centuries-old project of dehumanization or antiblackness. It follows necessarily from this analytical predisposition that the very idea of historical change in considering the status of blacks from slavery through emancipation and into the present gets severely attenuated. The reality that social change, however profound, is never absolute and always contested (and that even partial victories can be turned into defeats) gets taken as a reason not only to acknowledge the ongoing need for struggle to realize the idea of true human freedom, but also to find within the very conceptualization of freedom the implacable logic of further domination. Saidiya Hartman’s Scenes of Subjection is illustrative. Proceeding as if the only available analytical options are adopting “the grand narrative of freedom, with its decisive events and incontrovertible advances” or a “common sense” view stressing “the similarities and correspondencies [sic] of slavery and freedom,” Hartman opts for the latter, viewing any attempt at periodization as an attempt “to assert absolutist distinctions between slavery and freedom.”41 In Hartman’s view, although “the Thirteenth Amendment abolished the institution of slavery, the vestiges of slavery still acted to constrict the scope of black freedom. It proved virtually impossible to break with the past because of the endurance of involuntary servitude and the reinscription of racial subjection. Rather, what becomes starkly apparent are the continuities of slavery and freedom as modes of domination, exploitation, and subjection.”42 At issue here is not a project of ideological critique dedicated to understanding the conceptual limitations of the ideas and beliefs that people have about how political and social life ought to be organized, but rather a project that sees the disfranchisement of virtually all of the nation’s southern black population and the rise of Jim Crow in the 1890s as almost a predetermined outcome of an ontological commitment to antiblackness among whites. The formal binarism that undergirds Hartman’s analysis enables her to bypass the fact that the passage of the Reconstruction Amendments enabled political and social interactions that were not possible under slavery, interactions that challenged prevailing social and political arrangements in ways that required response. Such a challenge was possible only because as Stein points out, “the difference between a discriminated-against free person and a slave was enormous. The ending of slavery placed a boundary, imposed by the national state, on the variety of treatment consistent with American ideology. Slave status was now outside the boundary. Because the only people who were slaves were blacks, the national definition of citizenship simultaneously redefined blacks.”43 By foregrounding abstract, theoretical debates about the scope of the 13th Amendment (for example, pondering “whether universalism merely dissimulates the stigmatic injuries constitutive of blackness with abstract assertions of equality, sovereignty, and individuality.”44 ) at the expense of attending to the actual decisions and interactions of those affected by it, an analysis like Hartman’s overlooks the way that, however narrowly or expansively the 13th Amendment was construed by those debating its meaning, its passage was consequential, and the actual unfolding of events in the south in the latter portion of the 19th-century followed from the fact that the nation’s black population were no longer slaves. To see the rise of Jim Crow as primarily an expression of the continuities between slavery and emancipation is to miss the entire story illuminated by Stein’s analysis.45 Another apparent casualty of the formal binarism entailed by an analysis based on blackness/antiblackness has been the capacity to understand literature as an artifact of institutional, historical, and material practices, and not the relatively unmediated expression of some pre-existing group or community and their experiences. In the 1890s the problem was not that those who advocated for African American literature lacked an appropriately complex formula for representing the multiple social realities of the nation’s black population (although as I’ve suggested above, the depictions of social relations in many of these texts did leave a lot to be desired). Rather, the problem was that the politics required to achieve justice for most black Americans at the turn of the century was offered through Populism, which had been defeated by the late 1890s, and not a politics of black literature, which was emerging in conjunction with that defeat. In other words, the call for an African American literature as a social imperative was implicated in the process whereby the problem of labor exploitation, the solution of which required challenging capitalism, was transformed into “The Negro Problem,” for which the proposed solution was good race relations. Were literary scholarship to come to terms with the historical reality that a politics in which literary production could play a disproportionately large role was also a politics leveraged on the political silencing of the black southern laboring population, scholars in the field would have to embrace an analysis that recognizes the propositional and constitutive nature of appeals to race. Races are not simply “there” to be represented. Rather, as Karen E. Fields and Barbara J. Fields have argued, races are conjured through discursive and social practices (for which they have coined the neologism “racecraft”) that transform “racism into race, disguis[e] collective social practice as inborn individual traits…[and] entrench…racism in a category to itself, setting it apart from inequality in other guises.”46 Particularly noteworthy for Fields and Fields is that those committed to social justice are often as likely to contribute to racecraft as are those who are happy with the world inequality has made.47 By way of conclusion, a recent issue of the journal American Literary History (for which I sit on the editorial board), titled “What is Twenty-First-Century African American Literature?” can serve as an example.48 The issue’s programmatic introduction, written by Stephanie Li, takes the ongoing-ness of African American literature as a given, declaring that the task on hand is primarily, if not solely, matter of denomination: “What then will we call the current era of African American literature? ”For Li, lurking within this challenge is the problem of comprehensiveness—how to determine what “unites this diverse outpouring” and how “to think through African-American literature of these momentous early years of the twenty-first century,” without repeating the exclusions, both intentional and inadvertent, that plagued such efforts, including the “patriarchal assumptions and virulent homophobia undergirding demands for Black Power,” or the failure to acknowledge generational, ethnic, socioeconomic and other differences. The solution Li proffers rests on treating literary expression and black political identity as isomorphic. She insists, African American literary history affirms that there is no separation between the demand for social change and sublime expressive culture. As [Toni] Morrison reminds us, “the best art is political and you ought to be able to make it unquestionably political and irrevocably beautiful at the same time.” Twenty-first-century African American literature, in this respect, seconds the urgency, vision, and hope that we associate with the Black Lives Matter movement.49 At issue here is not whether a significant number of contemporary black writers align themselves with or endorse the phenomenon of Black Lives Matter, but rather that Li proceeds as if BLM were an expression of the sensibility of the race as such. For Li, and many of the other contributors to the volume, sentences such as “Blackness in the twenty-first century is inseparable from acknowledging and confronting the dead” 50 spring readily to the tongue, notwithstanding the fact that, as Cedric Johnson has recently pointed out, “The sheer size of the black population today should in and of itself render such talk of ‘black self-organization’ and ‘black sentiment obsolete. At nearly 46 million, the black population in the US is greater than the population of Canada, three times the size of the population of Greece, and slightly larger than the combined population of Oceania (i.e., Australasia, Melanesia, Polynesia, and Micronesia).”51 To presume that this vast population must have a literature, one must first craft these millions of people as a race, and in doing so one must, as Fields and Fields observe earlier, entrench “racism in a category to itself” such that an antiracist politics and the literature attending it, can emerge as the solution. On cannot deny the importance of redressing the injustices that gave rise to BLM, but a broad analysis of the conditions that have led to disparities in police shootings reveal that attributing this injustice to race is inadequate. Adolph Reed has recently pointed out, “high rates of police killings [are] the product of an approach to policing that emerges from an imperative to contain and suppress the pockets of economically marginal and sub-employed working class populations produced by revanchist capitalism.”52 A literary project committed to producing new racial narratives will necessarily come up short here both analytically and expressively. The task at hand, then, is not to try to produce an African American literature adequate to the current moment, but to recognize that any attempt to limn the contours of an African American literature—however one tries to define it—cannot escape being the incoherent, class-inflected project that such an effort has always been. Only through such a recognition can those scholars who hope to help us understand literary texts written by black authors avoid succumbing to the temptation to remake what is best left behind.

#### Their notion of a “breach” of relationality denies the specificity and intersections of lived experience.

Eric King Watts 15. Associate Professor of Media and Technology Studies, UNC Chapel Hill. “Critical Cosmopolitanism, Antagonism, and Social Suffering.” Quarterly Journal of Speech 101(1): 271-9. Emory Libraries.

Given this dire diagnosis, why and how might we interact with Afro-Pessimism? Speaking from the point of view of a Black rhetorical scholar (and a scholar of Blackness), the answer to why is virtually self-evident: thinking through Blackness as a condition of possibility for rhetorical action and social justice is a life-long pursuit that, given the tragic killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri in August 2014, feels especially burning.25 Given the affective intensity of the charge of Black noncommunicability, a failure to meaningfully interact would engender a different kind of “violence”; in this case a structural injunction sponsored by a lingering and recurring anxiety regarding the authority of Communication Studies. And so how might we interact? If I take up the orientation of critical cosmopolitanism, I need to recognize immediately that my efforts can be dismissed by the Afro-Pessimist as colonial; that is, as a reiteration of the sort of practices that presume that one’s epistemologies can translate other’s bodies of knowledge into comprehensible and useful concepts and constructs. And yet, we must begin where we are, not where we hope to be. Hence, I want to make two modest and one not-so-modest suggestions for how Communication Studies in general and Rhetorical Studies in particular might interact: first, Wilderson calls for “a new language of abstraction” to elaborate “Blackness’s grammar of suffering.” 26 But in my reading, Afro-Pessimism is already too reliant on a language of abstraction. Lois McNay, in The Misguided Search for the Political, recently contends that theories of political power are overwrought owing to a social weightlessness brought about through high abstraction. She recommends the reinvigoration of the concept of “social suffering”—not as an entrenched category of victimage but, rather, as the habitus of lived experience that must be articulated to analyses of structural positionality.27

Second, I agree with McNay (who says nothing about Afro-Pessimism, by the way) that structural antagonisms are not static, but are movable and moving configurations. The Afro-Pessimist in Wilderson’s account must agree that when a non-Black person is thrust toward the horrible condition approximating (but not identical to) the Black’s structural position, that adjustment can rightfully be called a “Blackening.” As a happening—and not an event that has simply always already happened—this racialized procedure makes itself felt and knowable in the dense social fabric of the everyday. If the Black is in a structural position that delimits the impossibility of capacity, might we enjoin an analysis of the vocabulary of that impossibility itself? And since a “Blackening” receives intelligibility from the structural position of the Black, might we gain some productive understanding from a scrutiny of key discursive and material forms of “Blackening”? Was not Michael Brown “Blackened” in and through (and not only a priori to) his bodily encounter with state violence? Given my ongoing scholarly interest in the Zombie, I am willing to concede that an Afro-Pessimist might claim that Brown was, at the moment he was shot to death, “the dead but sentient thing, the Black” struggling “to articulate in a world of living subjects.” 28 This concession functions as an assertion: the Zombie is not wholly outside Western intelligibility; it haunts the nether regions between Human and Black. Its undead existence is material and social, and supplies some vital resources for inventing a new language—a grammar of (Black) suffering. Perhaps “there is no way to Africa through the Black,” 29 but maybe there is a route through the Zombie. I have argued for such a project using the terminology of reanimating Zombie voices.30

Lastly, we might think of this gloomy predicament as a tenuous point of contact with Afro-Pessimism. Wilson’s intellectual history provides the basis for such a conception. Communication Studies has been (and continues to anguish over the extent that it still is) in the structural position of inferior and alienated. There should be no shame in admitting that the discipline, in relation to both the Social Sciences and the Humanities, has been and is subject to being “Blackened.” Indeed, its originary moment, as I alluded to above, meant the rejection of a set of nationalistic proprietary politics that treated Speech teachers like disposable labor. By any reasonable measure, that structural positioning—despite the fact that the people involved were White—was a racialization, a “Blackening.” Let’s be perfectly clear: there is no identification being made here with the fundamental antagonism associated with the Black. However, this racialized politics (among other political registers) might provide a new critical vocabulary for Communication scholars if we do the painful work of coming to grips with the discursive and material practices of “Blackening.” There are structures of different scales. Academic structural dynamics are not dissociated from the identity ideologies implicated in nationalism and cosmopolitanism, citizenship and exile, privilege and destitution, Whiteness and Blackness. Indeed, Wilderson’s critique is launched from and resides within those very same structural dynamics. It seems to me then that, at the very least, our shared social suffering with Afro-Pessimism—although of vastly different magnitudes and qualities—should be asserted as a mode of transnational fidelity.

#### Libidinal investments manifest themselves in degrees---pure psychoanalytic explanations of will, agency, and individuality ignore specific social and cultural value systems and confuse habit with instinct.

Peter Hudis 15, Professor of English and History @ Queens College, 2015, “Frantz Fanon: Philosopher of the Barricades,” Pg. 35-37

Fanon’s vantage point upon the world is his situated experience. He is trying to understand the inner psychic life of racism, not provide an account of the structure of human existence as a whole. Racism is not, of course, an integral part of the human psyche; it is a Social construct that has a psychic impact. Any effort to comprehend social distress that accompanies racism by reference to some a priori structure- be it the Oedipal Complex or the Collective Unconscious- is doomed to failure. Carl Jung sought to deepen and go beyond Freud's approach by arguing that the subconscious is grounded in a universal layer of the psyche- which he called "the collective unconscious:' This refers to inherited patterns of thought that exist in all human minds, regardless of specific culture or upbringing, and which manifest themselves in dreams, fairy tales, and myths. Jung referred to these universal patterns as "archetypes:' It may seem, on a superficial reading, that 1 Fanon is drawing from Jung, since he discusses how white people tend to unconsciously assimilate views of blacks that are based on negative stereotypes. Even the most "progressive" white tends to think of blacks a certain way (such as "emotional;' "physical," or / "aggressive"), even as they disavow any racist animus on their part. However, Fanon denies that such collective delusions are part of a psychic structure; they are not permanent features of the mind. They are habits acquired from a series of social and cultural impositions. While they constitute a kind a collective unconscious on the part of many white people, they are not grounded in any universal "archetype." The unconscious prejudices of whites do not derive from genes or nature, nor do they derive from some form independent of culture or upbringing. Fanon contends that Jung "confuses habit with instinct." Fanon objects to Jung's "collective unconscious" for the same reason that he rejects the notion of a black ontology. His phenomenological approach brackets out ontological claims on both a social and psychological level insofar as the examination of race and racism is concerned. He writes, "Neither Freud nor Adler nor even the cosmic Jung took the black man into consideration in the course of his research.” This does not mean that Fanon rejects their contributions tout court. He does not deny the existence of the unconscious. He only denies that the inferiority complex of blacks operates on an unconscious level. He does not reject the Oedipal Complex. He only denies that it explains (especially in the West Indies) the proclivity of the black "slave" to mimic the values of the white "master." And as seen from his positive remarks on Lacan's theory of the mirror stage, he does not reject the idea of psychic structure. He only denies that it can substitute for an historical understanding of the origin of neuroses .23 Fanon adopts a socio-genetic approach to a study of the psyche because that is what is adequate for the object of his analysis. For Fanon, it is the relationship between the socio-economic and psychological that is of critical import. He makes it clear, insofar as the subject matter of his study is concerned, that the socio-economic is first of all responsible for affective disorders: "First, economic. Then, internalization or rather epidermalization of this inferiority."24 Fanon never misses an opportunity to remind us that racism owes its origin to specific economic relations of domination- such as slavery, colonialism, and the effort to coopt sections of the working class into serving the needs of capital. It is hard to mistake the Marxist influence here. It does not follow, however, that what comes first in the order of time has conceptual or strategic priority. The inferiority complex is originally born from economic subjugation, but it takes on a life of its own and expresses itself in terms that surpass the economic. Both sides of the problem-the socio-economic and psychological-must be combatted in tandem: "The black man must wage the struggle on two levels; whereas historically these levels are mutually dependent, any unilateral liberation is flawed, and the worst mistake would be to believe their mutual dependence automatic:''5 On these grounds he argues that the problem of racism cannot be solved on a psychological level. It is not an "individual" problem; it is a social one. But neither can it be solved on a social level that ores the psychological. It is small wonder that although his name never appears in the book, Fanon was enamored of the work of Wilhelm Reich. This important Freudian-Marxist would no doubt feel affinity with Fanon's comment, "Genuine disalienation will have been achieved only when things, in the most materialist sense, have resumed their rightful place:'27

# 2NC

## T-USFG

### AT: Communicative Anti-Blackness---2NC

#### Literally every social organization involves some judgement on ideal forms and arguments---it is impossible to escape contestation, so you should make it as effective as possible at the outset.

Ypi 16 [Lea, Professor in Political Theory in the Government Department, London School of Economics, 2016, “Political realism and the ethics of activism,” in The Trouble with Democracy: Political Modernity in the 21st Century, ed. Rosich & Wagner]

If we take seriously the unavoidability of conflict thesis we will come up with two different interpretations of legitimacy demands compatible with norms internal to it.9 One interpretation leads to the idea that since politics is by its nature inherently coercive and ill-­‐suited to promote a variety of ends, we should seek to contain its reach by theorizing alternative associations (economic, cultural, religious) where individuals can pursue their interests and act together in a more spontaneous form.10 Thus, if we limit our ambitions to the attempt to secure order rather than guarantee justice, we will contain the potential for abusing power in seeking to realise the latter. But the problem with this view is that it conflates the statement that politics is essentially coercive with another one, which appears more controversial, namely, that only politics is essentially coercive. Although it is plausible to say that any exercise of political power, however noble its inspiration, is likely to result in a few elites imposing their own standards of legitimacy to the rest of the civic body, it is naïve to suppose that only political elites are vulnerable to a similar critique. If disagreement among individuals exists and is unavoidable, it will shape any association in which they take part. If rules are needed to contain such disagreement, the question of who makes such rules and in what name, will apply to all circumstances characterized by division of labour, structures of coordination, and collective decision-­‐making. Thus, not just political institutions, but also families, the market, religious organisations (to mention but the most relevant examples) will entail some degree of coercion in order to flourish. It is contrary to the spirit of realism to assume that they will spontaneously guarantee the pursuit of agents’ ends free from any degree of unilateral interference. Even more importantly, if disagreement pervades all areas of human interaction, the distinctiveness of the political as that realm in which collective decisions must be made on the face of such disagreements seems difficult to capture.

### AT: Framework = Capitalism---2NC

#### Concepts can be re-appropriated, they don’t have a problematic essence and that is not an impact.

Gregory Pappas 17, Associate Professor of Philosophy at Texas A&M University, March 31, 2017, “The Limitations and Dangers of Decolonial Philosophies: Lessons from Zapatista Luis Villoro,” Radical Philosophy Review

For Villoro a serious study of ideologies has to be as specific to time and place as possible. The quest for theoretical barometers of good and evil at a global level and across history should be subject to critical suspicion and may be futile since the present ideological function of a concept/category is not always determined by its past use or the original purpose for which it was created. A distinction created to oppress may play a different function or have different functions in different social contexts. Modernity and liberalism have not always functioned as ideologies or to the same degree, nor does it make sense to claim that they always will. Even native thought (indigenismo) can become an ideology if adopted to keep the oppressed in their place, i.e., if it perpetuates subordination or oppression.39 If Villoro is correct in the above analysis then decolonial views are vulnerable to inaccuracy and insensitivity, especially those that wish to trace back to 1492 and across different countries the ideologies that have supported coloniality—such as modernity, capitalism, or liberalism. Villoro did not ignore how historically similar colonial structures were throughout the Americas, but for him ideologies and the logic of domination that operate in one particular place and time may not operate in the exact same way in another, especially in such a complex and diverse region as the whole of Latin America. If domination and exclusion via ideologies are local, its diagnosis and remedies must also have to be local. We need to be careful when we extrapolate from one context to another. Villoro raised a similar criticism of leftist reactions to the problem of Eurocentrism that relies on simple formulas that state we just need to embrace what is “ours” and reject what is European. Although Villoro was a critic of Eurocentrism and admirer of indigenous thought, he warned Zea and the Latin Americanist or indigenismos movement to not react to Eurocentrism and the colonial Manichaean ideas, where what is “ours” or indigenous is denigrated, with a mere inversion of the Manicheanism. For Villoro the Left must resist the temptation to rely on lazy theoretical barometers of good and evil. It must be able to provide a basis for being critical of Western ideas beyond the fact that they are Western or come from the oppressor. Not all Western concepts, standards, and categories are oppressive even to the most non-Western people. To decide between good and evil requires intelligent discriminative judgment and not easy theoretical formulas according to geopolitical coordinates or cultural origins. Again, even native thought (indigenismo) can become an ideology. He expected the Left to be sensitive to this, but what he actually experienced was a Left slipping dangerously toward subtle Manichaean assumptions, i.e., simplistic barometers about the boundaries between good and evil. This, I am afraid, is a danger in decolonial thought, one that seems unavoidable as long as they make central to their project the coloniality axis that relies on binaries to determine the direction of good and evil. I am aware that it is not easy to oppose a binary without just inverting it, but we must be careful. To be fair, decolonial thought has been critical of Manichaeism as part of the colonial legacy and there is no doubt about their good intentions to move in a pluralistic direction where there is no one central epistemology. However, this center-versus-periphery framework is easily susceptible to slipping into the simplistic view that all evil comes from what is at the center—Europe, the West, modernity, liberalism, capitalism. For instance, Mignolo describes the decolonial project as “delinking” from the West and recovery of the indigenous as if this determines what is the right path from evil toward the good.40 This smells like a subtle Manichaeism or at least a position that does not permit inquiry that is sensitive to historical context. The decolonialists’ criticism of the hegemony of the West is warranted and important, but for it to continue as a growing project that does not succumb to the excesses (vices) of the Left that Villoro diagnosed it must be careful to not slip into any of the following assumptions: • Modernity and liberalismwere and are totally bad; they are ideologies for dominating, colonizing, and oppressing or only have a darker side. • Eurocentrism (interpretation, standpoint) is bad, but philosophy from the periphery is good. •Western concepts have been used to distort or occlude indigenous (non-Western) ones therefore all or most Western concepts distort or contaminate, or are tools of domination. • Western epistemologies areimperialistic; the epistemologies of each of the colonialized regions are good. Finding particular instances where these assumptions have been explicitly articulated in the decolonial project is not necessary since the point is about the latent danger of slipping into these assumptions due to what the project is centered on or stresses. However, to make the case that I am pointing to a real danger, I next present some examples and controversies within the decolonial literature where a subtle Manicheanism has already raised its ugly head. Mignolo has come closer than any other decolonial thinker to assume the view that Western epistemologies are imperialistic. Linda Alcoff criticizes Mignolo for “often operating with what appears an overly simplified account of Western philosophical positions.” 41 One way to make Manicheanism work is to provide or assume simplistic accounts of both the good and evil poles. In Mignolo’s case, varieties of epistemologies in Europe and the United States are lumped together into asingle category before they are all easily dismissed according to an implicit barometer of domination/ liberation.

# 1NR

## Case

### Ontology Wrong---1NR

#### Finishing

n’s analysis of the regime of race relations that derived from the imposition of the Jim Crow regime highlights the dominant form of politics supported by that regime, namely (as we have seen above), a politics, “like Du Bois’s ‘talented tenth’” that was “based upon appeal to the ruling elements of society.” Notwithstanding that those making such appeals were lodged, for the most part, in situations that differed significantly from those for whom they purported to speak (as Stein notes, in the early Jim Crow era most spokespersons “northern blacks [who] personally possessed more rights” the “nine-tenths…[who] were southern), they nonetheless felt authorized to proffer “solutions for all the black people.” While Stein foregrounds the appeals to white elites from their black counterparts, part and parcel of this politics was the desire to consolidate the black elite itself as a leadership cadre for the race—to cultivate a sense of racial responsibility and solidarity within the group. That we are encouraged to label as traitorous and cowardly the decision of the protagonist of James Weldon Johnson’s 1912 novel, The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man, to succeed by passing as a white businessman rather than accepting the responsibility of becoming a race leader distils this sensibility. The readiness to hand of a fictional example for this sensibility highlights another key point: A politics based upon appeals to the ruling elements of society was a politics in which the writing of literature could assume an outsized role in the political situation of black Americans in terms of its presumed capacity to move, persuade, and impress potentially sympathetic whites who occupied positions of influence and power and to encourage, console, and inspire the nation’s black citizens. And while this literature would foreground the problem of how best to represent the relations between educated and semiliterate blacks (alongside that of representing relations between the races), often extolling the virtues of the vernacular and cultural expressions of rural southern blacks and, later, their northern, urban counterparts, as the epitome of cultural genius, this literature was not the political voice of the race—which, to the extent it exists as a social reality comprises myriad and often conflicting views and interests—but rather the voice of those whose political legitimacy rests on the perception that they truly represent and speak for a race. The politics of the laborers and farmers of the Populist movement was not a politics premised on producing a race literature. The politics of black elites, however, as will be elaborated below, virtually required it. Further, although the raison d’etre of this literature lay largely in its commitment to contesting the practices and presumptions of the Jim Crow regime, the perceived authority of its precepts and formulas rested, paradoxically, on the political silencing of those for whom it spoke. Before elaborating further the literary dimensions of this history, it will be helpful to highlight some of the consequences of the race relations regime. As Stein and Adolph Reed, Jr. have demonstrated, postbellum black life political consciousness was “shaped by the experiences of slavery, emancipation, and especially Reconstruction.”10 Political participation itself had produced and reproduced forms of affiliation, affecting relations among former slaves; between former slaves and white farmers and laborers; between former slaves and former masters; between former slaves and free northern blacks; and between northern and southern whites. Stein writes, “The new Republican party, through its Union League clubs, united polity, society, and economy to protect and enhance black labor and lives.”11 The point here is not that southern blacks began thinking politically only in the wake of emancipation but rather that conditions attendant upon emancipation necessarily played a role in how former slaves viewed themselves racially. In seeing themselves as Republicans, southern blacks asserted a racial identity that also stressed interregional and cross-class and interracial identifications as necessary to realizing their visions of what was necessary to secure prosperity and independence. As a result, as Stein points out, the “decline of Republican politics was a crucial blow…to collective politics” as it had been developing in the south.12 This blow, however, did not destroy the possibility for collective action for black farmers and laborers. Reed adds, black political engagement was not restricted exclusively to racial issues. In the late 1870s blacks in Virginia aligned with white workers and small farmers in the proto-populist Readjuster Party that elected a governor and a U.S. Senator. In the 1880s, membership in the radical Knights of Labor included roughly 60,000 blacks. In the 1890s, the Colored Farmers Alliance, black expression of the Populist insurgency, had 1,250,000 members, and in 1894 an interracial Populist-Republican Fusion alliance won statewide power in North Carolina as well as in several municipalities in the state and was re-elected by a larger margin in 1896. In New Orleans in 1892 black workers participated with whites in a general strike that withstood employers’ and white supremacist politicians’ efforts to break their solidarity through racist agitation.13 Participation in all of these movements and activities betokened a mode of racial identification for southern farmers and laborers less dependent upon and less in line with the needs and views of black elites. Such alliances were significant enough to affect the political programs of black elite brokers, including Booker T. Washington, the architect and enforcer of the race relations regime. Stein observes that the embrace of Populism by the very population that he proposed to uplift via his Tuskegee program “forced Washington to address agrarian problems more directly than in the previous decade.”14 Likewise, the recognition among black elites that the Republican Party was proving less efficacious than before in determining the horizon of political action for black southern workers and farmers demanded responses. By 1895, when it became clear that “the most effective means to struggle against discriminatory practices, disfranchisement, and racism—all of which affected prosperous black southerners as well as the poor—was Populism,” black republicans joined forces with Populists. The results were palpable: The places where “black Republicans succeeded in challenging racial practices” were those places where they had allied “with the party challenging capital,” namely, Populism.15 Although the rise of disfranchisement would shift the center of gravity of political activity for the nation’s black population by effectively removing southern black farmers and labors from politics, it was, in part the initial attractiveness of a class politics to black laborers and farmers in the south that encouraged black elites to proliferate calls for a race literature. For example, Henry Clay Gray’s 1891 article in The New York Age titled “Office of Distinctively Afro-American Literature,” bespoke a growing sense among blacks with literary or journalistic ambitions that the moment called for developing a literature that would enhance racial unity. Gray observed, “We all hear a great deal about ‘race pride,’ ‘race unity’ and the like; but in spite of us we cannot escape observing that, for the most part, we are bound together by a mere rope of sand—aimless talk. A distinctively Negro literature is alone the cable of infinitely superior quality and tension which can bind the race into one coherent, materially helpful and heroic people.…Literature is more than talk…its essence actualizes ideals and ennobles motives. Thus there can be no such things or facts as ‘race pride’ or ‘race unity’ where there is nothing made of a distinctively race literature.”16 Gray’s sentiments were echoed across the decade in the writings of such figures as Frances E.W. Harper, Sutton Griggs, J. McHenry Jones, and the aforementioned Anna Julia Cooper. In Jones’s 1896 novel, Hearts of Gold, which centers on the trials and tribulations of relatively accomplished “Afro-Americans” during the early Jim Crow era, one of the central characters, an enterprising newspaper man named Clement St. John, asks rhetorically, “Is not a race literature just as necessary as a race church, club, or school?”17 While earlier in the century, such terms as race literature, Negro literature, or colored literature were used comparatively rarely and more likely, when they did occur, to designate books about blacks rather than books by blacks, Negro literature in the 1890s came to mean literature by blacks that could be seen as speaking for blacks as a corporate entity in the manner described in Grady’s New York Age article. That disfranchisement accounted largely for this shift is attested to directly in Sutton Griggs’s novel Imperium in Imperio when one of the novel’s co-protagonists, Belton Piedmont, declares to an all-black assembly, “There is a weapon mightier than [the sword and ballot]”: I speak of the pen. If denied the use of the ballot let us devote or attention to the mightier weapon.…[It] would be a worthy theme for the songs of the Holy Angels, if every Negro, away from the land of his nativity, can by means of the pen, force an acknowledgement of equality from the proud lips of the fierce, all conquering Anglo-Saxon, thus eclipsing the record of all other races of men, who without exception have had to wade through blood to achieve their freedom.18 Griggs, as I have argued more extensively elsewhere,19 took the fact of disfranchisement as reason to approach black politics as a decidedly literary affair and in so doing bestowed upon black elites the responsibility of crafting a program to advance what they saw as the best interests of the race as whole. While Griggs, unlike many of his fellow literary writers, remained in the south, his politics was, like theirs, at once an exhortation to fellow black elites to devote themselves to the race as a whole and an appeal to elements of the south’s ruling class to recognize that their own wellbeing required collaboration with people like him. In the words of one character from his final novel, Pointing the Way, “The one thing needed in the South is political co-operation between the better elements of whites and the Negroes.”20 Black literature, as it emerged, then, was not itself the terrain upon which southern blacks and their more elite northern counterparts contested views of the race. Rather it was an extension of the way that black elites sought to promulgate the phenomenon of a race interest in response to shifting and fracturing alliances. It would be up to these elites to determine which politics could best provide blacks a way forward, and literary texts were one of the venues in which they debated among themselves the visions of racial alliance and affiliation they believed would be most efficacious for race progress. A novel like Frances E. W. Harper’s Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted (1892) made a point of insisting on the nonradical disposition of the black workers even as it acknowledged that a desire for black literature was not among the chief demands of the freedman. So, while one the novel’s prominent characters assures a white interlocutor that unlike northern immigrant workers, “the negro is not plotting in beer-saloons against the peace and order of society. His fingers are not dripping with dynamite, neither is he spitting upon your flag, nor flaunting the red banner of anarchy in your face” the novel’s eponymous heroine makes little headway in impressing on the novel’s vernacular characters the value of literary reading.24 Iola Leroy’s assumption that Aunt Linda, a woman of status among the community of freedmen, will have come to recognize the value of reading literature is proved erroneous. Asked by Iola why she hasn’t learned to read, Aunt Linda responds matter-of-factly, “sence freedom’s com’d I’se bin scratchin’ too hard to get a libin’ to put my head down to de book.” When Iola presses her case further by asserting literature’s capacity to provide companionship and succor in times of loneliness, saying, “it would be such company when your husband is away, to take a book,” Aunt Linda remains unpersuaded, saying, “Chile, I ain’t got no time ter get lonesome. Ef you had eber so many chickens to feed, an’ pigs squealin’ fer somethin’ ter eat, an’ yore ducks an’ geese squakin’ ‘roun’ yer, yer wouldn’t hab time ter git lonesome.”25 Thus, while Harper as an author trumpeted the importance of black people telling their own stories, she also acknowledged such a program was a top-down affair. Disfranchisement, despite being vigorously opposed by elites (even as some individuals, including Harper, expressed a willingness to countenance some qualifications on the right to vote), lent further credence to the idea that a literature could define and represent a race. “The imposed silence of the disfranchised farmer permitted others, black and white to speak for them.”26 As Adolph Reed and I have noted elsewhere, black studies scholarship on the whole has been plagued by “the temptation to attempt to speak on behalf of the political and social needs of some ‘black community’ outside the academy.” 27 Declaring themselves responsible to this community, which is in no way positioned to ratify the propositions being put forth on its behalf, while disdaining the professional norms prevailing in the academy as inherently biased against the beliefs and practices necessary to carry out their work, many black scholars have been able to operate in a zone of relative unaccountability in which the narrative recounting of their own experiences and thoughts are treated as paradigmatic of “the race.” Against this state of affairs Reed and I have called for scholarly approaches that focus instead on the way “that the study of the evolving discourses of politically articulate black Americans has provided an important conceptual anchor for the black studies field for most of its own history,” shaping “the main lines of public debate of political, social, and cultural ideas and strategies through which dominant notions of common black American identity and agendas have been constructed and pursued.” And if this admonition seems to entail turning away from non-elite concerns, our contention was precisely opposite. The field’s failure to scrutinize systematically “the sedimented premises of elite debates” had resulted in their naturalization as “background assumptions” which were then ascribed to a putative black community as authentic, organically-derived sentiments.28 Over the last two decades, however, the prevailing winds of black scholarly inquiry have shifted in a direction counter to that sketched out by Stein, Reed, and me. From the standpoint of “blackness” and “antiblackness” any attempt to approach black political and cultural activity dialectically in terms of “the whole pattern of social forces” and not merely the “racial” ones affecting black people is rendered inoperative from the outset by a stipulation that, to quote Frank B. Wilderson, III (who is prominently cited by scholars in this vein), “Blackness, refers to an individual who is by definition always already void of relationality.” In Wilderson’s view, “modernity marks the emergence of a new ontology” in which blacks “stand as socially dead in relation to the rest of the world.30 Although Wilderson tracks the emergence of this condition of blackness to a particular historical moment, he sees the problem in transhistorical terms, asserting that “chattel slavery, as a condition of ontology and not just as an event of experience, stuck to the African like Velcro.” Indeed, “Velcro,” fails to convey the degree of adhesiveness Wilderson has in mind here as he draws “a distinction between the experience of slavery (which anyone can be subjected to) and the ontology of slavery, which in modernity (the years 1300 to the present) becomes the singular purview of the Black.” In his view the entire “race of Humanism (White, Asian, South Asian, and Arab) could not have produced itself without the simultaneous production of that walking destruction which became known as the Black. Put another way, through chattel slavery the world gave birth and coherence to both its joys of domesticity and to its struggles of political discontent; and with these joys and struggles the Human was born, but not before it murdered the Black, forging a symbiosis between the political ontology of Humanity and the social death of Blacks.”31 In essence, what Stein diagnoses as fatal to the enterprise of intellectual inquiry, namely, ignoring the “the dialectic operating between blacks and whites,”32 is refigured by Wilderson not as a failure but as a principle of analysis. A primary casualty of the formal binarism entailed by an analysis based on antiblackness is the possibility of examining cultural expression as a variety of institutional practices engaged in by particularly situated individuals whose relation to the constituency they seek to constitute and represent is necessarily rhetorical and contestable. Instead, certain events and individuals are treated as paradigmatic of blackness, a condition demanding either acknowledgment, or hostile (or embarrassed) disavowal. Wilderson opens Red, White, and Black by recalling two seemingly abject figures. The first is “a Black woman who used to stand outside the gate [of New York’s Columbia University] and yell at Whites, Latinos, and East and South Asian students, staff, and faculty” accusing “them of having stolen her sofa and of selling her into slavery,” and the second, “a Native American man sitting on the sidewalk of Telegraph Avenue” near the University of California at Berkeley behind “an upside-down hat and a sign informing pedestrians that here they could settle the ‘Land Lease Accounts’ that they had neglected to settle all of their lives” by putting money in the hat. Both figures for Wilderson speak and embody what he calls “an ethical grammar,” which he describes as a demand for the restoration of stolen land and of the “corporeal integrity” that had been “ripped” from the women’s body to secure “the corporeal integrity of everyone else on the street.” This women’s bodily dispossession according to Wilderson had given “birth to the commodity and to the Human,” without giving her in turn either “subjectivity” or “a sofa”.33 Of course, it doesn’t answer here to point out that the woman had not literally been sold into slavery or that none of those passing her on the street had stolen her sofa, because her role in Wilderson’s anecdote (despite its emphasis on corporeality) is figurative—disciplinary, admonitory, and non-dialogic. The only proper response to her demand would be to defer to its legitimacy or to acquiesce in the structure or “grammar” of her address. And to the extent that Wilderson’s argument aligns itself with her ethical grammar, he arrogates to himself the same posture of non-relationality to his readers. He writes, “My analysis of socially engaged feature film insists on an intellectual protocol through which the scholarship of preconscious interests and unconscious identifications are held accountable to grammars of suffering—accountable, that is, to protocols of structural positionality.”34 The abstraction, “structural positionality,” replaces attention to the historical specificity of actual black political actors. In addition to the work of Spillers, Wilderson relies heavily on the concept of “social death” or “social alienation,” derived from the work of Orlando Patterson. Indeed, for Wilderson, Patterson’s Slavery and Social Death so convincingly “demonstrates how and why work, or forced labor, is not a constituent element of slavery” and that “the Slave is not a laborer but an anti-Human,” that the book’s assertions require virtually no further argumentation, placing the burden of proof instead “on the one who argues there is a distinction between Slaveness and Blackness. How, when, and where did such a split occur?”35 Wilderson is hardly alone among scholars of African American cultural expression in treating Patterson’s concepts of “social death” and “natal alienation” as historical givens. As the historian Vincent Brown suggests in a 2009 article in The American Historical Review, although the “concept of social death is a distillation from Patterson’s breathtaking survey—a theoretical abstraction” that cannot “explain the actual behavior of slaves” and has been criticized by other historians for this limitation, it has, since the late 1990s reemerged as a touchstone in the study of slavery among a host of prominent scholars who “extend social death beyond a general description of slavery as a condition and imagine it as an experience of self.”36 Ian Baucom’s Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History, Saidiya Hartman’s Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route, and Stephanie Smallwood’s Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora are three of the works on which Brown focuses, but the list could easily be extended to include, aside from the aforementioned book by Wilderson, work by Fred Moten, Jared Sexton, Daphne Brooks, Sabine Broeck, and Christina Sharpe.37 Perhaps tellingly, even Brown’s criticism of Patterson’s influence on studies of slavery accepts rather than questions the assumption that analysis of black history and culture must proceed from within the domain of what has been designated as blackness. For Brown the chief problem with Patterson’s account of social death is not its severing of any dialectical relation between the enslaved and the societies in which they were forced to labor, but rather its severing of the enslaved from any “meaningful links to the past,” by which he means something like overlooking the capacity of slaves “to enshrine the political importance of ancestry, mourning, and commemoration in [their] struggle against social alienation.”38 Having cautioned against the interpretive consequences of forgetting that social death/alienation is at best a theoretical abstraction, Brown then treats it Patterson’s concept as if it were the basis for social motivation by the enslaved. What further facilitates Brown’s apparently inadvertent retransformation of Patterson’s “exposition of slaveholding ideology” into “a description of the actual condition of the enslaved” is precisely the shortcoming that Stein descries in post-Civil Rights historical scholarship: an assumption that the only activities among blacks that merit political scrutiny are “movements seeking purely racial goals.” In Brown’s case, this assumption cashes out as the pursuit of “a politics of belonging, mourning, accounting [for the life and death of fellow slaves], and regeneration.”39 Brown’s confining of politics to matters of affect and expression (rather than, say, deliberation and decision-making) is also symptomatic of a presumption of racial community or unity across space and time as the condition or telos of black political activity. Opening his review by recounting an incident aboard the slave ship Hudibras when enslaved women insisted on commemorating the death of a particularly esteemed woman, Brown asks that we consider this event as exemplifying “a politics of history, which connects the politics of the enslaved to the politics of their descendants.”40 From such a perspective, differences and disagreements within black populations fail to signify as “real” political conflicts that reflect competing visions of how economic, social, and cultural life ought to be organized, taking a distant backseat to expressive activities asserting the value of black humanity against a centuries-old project of dehumanization or antiblackness. It follows necessarily from this analytical predisposition that the very idea of historical change in considering the status of blacks from slavery through emancipation and into the present gets severely attenuated. The reality that social change, however profound, is never absolute and always contested (and that even partial victories can be turned into defeats) gets taken as a reason not only to acknowledge the ongoing need for struggle to realize the idea of true human freedom, but also to find within the very conceptualization of freedom the implacable logic of further domination. Saidiya Hartman’s Scenes of Subjection is illustrative. Proceeding as if the only available analytical options are adopting “the grand narrative of freedom, with its decisive events and incontrovertible advances” or a “common sense” view stressing “the similarities and correspondencies [sic] of slavery and freedom,” Hartman opts for the latter, viewing any attempt at periodization as an attempt “to assert absolutist distinctions between slavery and freedom.”41 In Hartman’s view, although “the Thirteenth Amendment abolished the institution of slavery, the vestiges of slavery still acted to constrict the scope of black freedom. It proved virtually impossible to break with the past because of the endurance of involuntary servitude and the reinscription of racial subjection. Rather, what becomes starkly apparent are the continuities of slavery and freedom as modes of domination, exploitation, and subjection.”42 At issue here is not a project of ideological critique dedicated to understanding the conceptual limitations of the ideas and beliefs that people have about how political and social life ought to be organized, but rather a project that sees the disfranchisement of virtually all of the nation’s southern black population and the rise of Jim Crow in the 1890s as almost a predetermined outcome of an ontological commitment to antiblackness among whites. The formal binarism that undergirds Hartman’s analysis enables her to bypass the fact that the passage of the Reconstruction Amendments enabled political and social interactions that were not possible under slavery, interactions that challenged prevailing social and political arrangements in ways that required response. Such a challenge was possible only because as Stein points out, “the difference between a discriminated-against free person and a slave was enormous. The ending of slavery placed a boundary, imposed by the national state, on the variety of treatment consistent with American ideology. Slave status was now outside the boundary. Because the only people who were slaves were blacks, the national definition of citizenship simultaneously redefined blacks.”43 By foregrounding abstract, theoretical debates about the scope of the 13th Amendment (for example, pondering “whether universalism merely dissimulates the stigmatic injuries constitutive of blackness with abstract assertions of equality, sovereignty, and individuality.”44 ) at the expense of attending to the actual decisions and interactions of those affected by it, an analysis like Hartman’s overlooks the way that, however narrowly or expansively the 13th Amendment was construed by those debating its meaning, its passage was consequential, and the actual unfolding of events in the south in the latter portion of the 19th-century followed from the fact that the nation’s black population were no longer slaves. To see the rise of Jim Crow as primarily an expression of the continuities between slavery and emancipation is to miss the entire story illuminated by Stein’s analysis.45 Another apparent casualty of the formal binarism entailed by an analysis based on blackness/antiblackness has been the capacity to understand literature as an artifact of institutional, historical, and material practices, and not the relatively unmediated expression of some pre-existing group or community and their experiences. In the 1890s the problem was not that those who advocated for African American literature lacked an appropriately complex formula for representing the multiple social realities of the nation’s black population (although as I’ve suggested above, the depictions of social relations in many of these texts did leave a lot to be desired). Rather, the problem was that the politics required to achieve justice for most black Americans at the turn of the century was offered through Populism, which had been defeated by the late 1890s, and not a politics of black literature, which was emerging in conjunction with that defeat. In other words, the call for an African American literature as a social imperative was implicated in the process whereby the problem of labor exploitation, the solution of which required challenging capitalism, was transformed into “The Negro Problem,” for which the proposed solution was good race relations. Were literary scholarship to come to terms with the historical reality that a politics in which literary production could play a disproportionately large role was also a politics leveraged on the political silencing of the black southern laboring population, scholars in the field would have to embrace an analysis that recognizes the propositional and constitutive nature of appeals to race. Races are not simply “there” to be represented. Rather, as Karen E. Fields and Barbara J. Fields have argued, races are conjured through discursive and social practices (for which they have coined the neologism “racecraft”) that transform “racism into race, disguis[e] collective social practice as inborn individual traits…[and] entrench…racism in a category to itself, setting it apart from inequality in other guises.”46 Particularly noteworthy for Fields and Fields is that those committed to social justice are often as likely to contribute to racecraft as are those who are happy with the world inequality has made.47 By way of conclusion, a recent issue of the journal American Literary History (for which I sit on the editorial board), titled “What is Twenty-First-Century African American Literature?” can serve as an example.48 The issue’s programmatic introduction, written by Stephanie Li, takes the ongoing-ness of African American literature as a given, declaring that the task on hand is primarily, if not solely, matter of denomination: “What then will we call the current era of African American literature? ”For Li, lurking within this challenge is the problem of comprehensiveness—how to determine what “unites this diverse outpouring” and how “to think through African-American literature of these momentous early years of the twenty-first century,” without repeating the exclusions, both intentional and inadvertent, that plagued such efforts, including the “patriarchal assumptions and virulent homophobia undergirding demands for Black Power,” or the failure to acknowledge generational, ethnic, socioeconomic and other differences. The solution Li proffers rests on treating literary expression and black political identity as isomorphic. She insists, African American literary history affirms that there is no separation between the demand for social change and sublime expressive culture. As [Toni] Morrison reminds us, “the best art is political and you ought to be able to make it unquestionably political and irrevocably beautiful at the same time.” Twenty-first-century African American literature, in this respect, seconds the urgency, vision, and hope that we associate with the Black Lives Matter movement.49 At issue here is not whether a significant number of contemporary black writers align themselves with or endorse the phenomenon of Black Lives Matter, but rather that Li proceeds as if BLM were an expression of the sensibility of the race as such. For Li, and many of the other contributors to the volume, sentences such as “Blackness in the twenty-first century is inseparable from acknowledging and confronting the dead” 50 spring readily to the tongue, notwithstanding the fact that, as Cedric Johnson has recently pointed out, “The sheer size of the black population today should in and of itself render such talk of ‘black self-organization’ and ‘black sentiment obsolete. At nearly 46 million, the black population in the US is greater than the population of Canada, three times the size of the population of Greece, and slightly larger than the combined population of Oceania (i.e., Australasia, Melanesia, Polynesia, and Micronesia).”51 To presume that this vast population must have a literature, one must first craft these millions of people as a race, and in doing so one must, as Fields and Fields observe earlier, entrench “racism in a category to itself” such that an antiracist politics and the literature attending it, can emerge as the solution. On cannot deny the importance of redressing the injustices that gave rise to BLM, but a broad analysis of the conditions that have led to disparities in police shootings reveal that attributing this injustice to race is inadequate. Adolph Reed has recently pointed out, “high rates of police killings [are] the product of an approach to policing that emerges from an imperative to contain and suppress the pockets of economically marginal and sub-employed working class populations produced by revanchist capitalism.”52 A literary project committed to producing new racial narratives will necessarily come up short here both analytically and expressively. The task at hand, then, is not to try to produce an African American literature adequate to the current moment, but to recognize that any attempt to limn the contours of an African American literature—however one tries to define it—cannot escape being the incoherent, class-inflected project that such an effort has always been. Only through such a recognition can those scholars who hope to help us understand literary texts written by black authors avoid succumbing to the temptation to remake what is best left behind.

#### Particularly, any theorization of economics requires openness to error. That proves our offense on T.

Clive L. Spash & Adrien O.T. Guisan 21, Chair, Public Policy and Governance, Vienna University of Economics and Business; PhD, Vienna University of Economics and Business, "A Future Social-Ecological Economics," Real World Economics Review, No. 6, 09/07/2021, pg. 203-214.

Economies are the socially structured institutional process involving the interaction of humans with the natural world. Social reproduction is achieved only within the bounds of the given structure and mechanisms of biophysical reality. The form and scale of economic processes depends upon a set of spatially and temporally contextual social institutions. That is economics concerns the form and function of social provisioning process which can take various forms and are far from limited to price-making market or capitalist institutions. Starting from processes of social provisioning, economics becomes the study of plural historical, actual and potential economies with their underlying institutional arrangements and biophysical basis rather than a singular abstract idealised “economy”. This broadens analysis not only to what institutions, norms and values shape the economic process and agents’ behaviours, but also to what are socially desirable and ecologically sustainable systems of social provisioning. Economics is neither value free nor ethically neutral but its stance on both should be made explicit. It must also be realist about how economies are reproduced via social and ecological mechanisms. That means linking to both power relations and ethical and just means of provisioning, but also material and energy throughput that respects others (human and non-human). The aspirations of economists to provide for the well-being of humanity, if taken seriously, mean a revolutionary change in economics is long overdue.

The philosophical basis of the approach is argued to be closest to critical realism. Core aspects of correspondence here are depth ontology raising the profile of both structure and mechanisms as opposed to a sole focus on empirical facts. Structure as a metaphysical reality with multiple causal mechanisms operating in open systems then poses challenges for how economics conducts itself as a science. While following critical realism in its epistemic pluralism there is also a recognised need for structuring interdisciplinary research and uniting diverse fields via common ontological understanding leading to a structured methodological pluralism (not the eclecticism of constructionism and conventionalism). Potential methods for research are selected on the basis of the qualities of an object of study and research question and as such remain open and diverse (quantitative/qualitative, intensive/extensive, see Sayer, 2010). Economic science is then neither deductivist, empiricist nor reducible to a set of idealised methods.

We start this explanation of SEE by taking issue with the hegemonic definition of economics based on choice and offer an alternative based on social provisioning. This clarifies the failure of economics to address different forms of economies both in theory and as actualised and operational both historically and at present. The relationship of economies to needs and their satisfaction with an associated material and energy throughput then becomes part of economic analysis. As noted, a clarified relationship between the ecological economic and the social is required and we explain some basic aspects of the relationship to social reality. This coverage is an outline of the ontological commitments of SEE, that is how reality is understood, its key constituents as far as an social-ecological economic system is concerned and some of their relationships. Next we outline the way in which economics can be conducted from the perspective of two other aspects of philosophy of science, namely epistemology and methodology.

II. Economics as the study of social provisioning

A rather obvious approach to defining what constitutes economics as a subject is to determine its primary object of study. Economics as an orthodoxy has for some time been dominated by a neo-Austrian dogma that was introduced significantly via Lionel Robbins (1932) and adopted into the mainstream, not least in microeconomic theory. This placed the concepts of resource scarcity and individual choice at the centre of a liberal political economy that was supposedly value free. The economic problem became meeting unlimited and competing wants and the supposed solution was meant to be resource allocation via “the market”, soon supplemented by (macro-)economic growth. In fact a single institutional process associated with capitalism was being advocated, namely, what Karl Polanyi (1957) termed, the price-making market. Robbins neo-Austrian definition then merged into Chicago school neoliberalism, where choice in a market setting, subject to price incentives, became the essence of economics and this has since permeated its meaning. This approach permitted an imperialistic expansion of economics into all sorts of subject areas, simply based on the idea that humans must make decisions as individuals so that any decision became an economic topic, e.g. equating everything from buying a cup of coffee to suicide (as infamously proposed by Becker, 1976).

In stark contrast, an older tradition regards the core of economics as determining the social and institutional arrangements for providing the needs of a community (or nation). Here the aim is to achieve a common good or well-being of all. What constitutes the good/well-being for a group then requires explicit ethical judgment. Modern times reduced the goal of seeking the “common weal” (i.e., the ability to fare well, prosper and have good fortune) into accumulating wealth and making money. Economics then simply became the study of capital accumulation using money and market prices and ultimately leading to economists’ claims of being able to determine optimally efficient public policy.

SEE immediately takes issue with reducing the subject down to studying something as singular as the economy, as if there were only one such entity or form. The term “the economy” is merely unthinking code for market capitalism, while denying actualised varieties of capitalism and that this is only one form of economic system (Hodgson, 2016). So rather than reduce economics to the study of one generic form meant to approximate the currently dominant system, a far broader approach is required, and not least so because this system is failing and creating catastrophic social and ecological crises.

A more comprehensive approach is to define economics as the study of social provisioning to meet human needs within an ethical framework of care and justice for others, both human and non-human. Social provisioning is a necessary activity for any social group whether a household, village, town, city, region, nation state or global collective. It concerns the ways in which people organise as social groupings to satisfy their needs. Markets as mechanisms for allocation are merely one form of arrangement and themselves diverse in structure.

Economics can then be seen as concerned with the variety of institutions for ensuring the satisfaction of needs and the reproduction of a society. Institutions here are to be understood as inclusive of conventions, norms, rules and regulations (Vatn, 2005). This immediately opens up economics for the consideration of alternatives and potentialities rather than the nihilistic claim that there are no alternatives.

A common objection to a focus on needs is that this is deterministic and fails to allow for the variety that appears evident in human society. Such a claim can be seen as confusing objective requirements with subjective means of their fulfilment. Thus Max-Neef (2009 [1992]) makes the distinction between needs and the satisfiers that enable their actualisation. He identifies nine fundamental needs – subsistence, affection, understanding, participation, leisure, creation, identity, freedom – that are regarded as universal and only changeable over extremely long time periods of species evolution (Max-Neef, 2009[1992]: 138). Meeting needs is regarded as a necessary prerequisite for human flourishing, while their means of fulfilment is socially contextual and varies across space and time (Rauschmayer and Omann, 2017). Satisfiers relate to the institutions, norms and practices that structure the satisfaction of needs, and will influence how economic goods and services contribute to their fulfilment or inhibition (Max-Neef, 1992). As such, while needs remain objective, how they are expressed, perceived, and fulfilled will always be subjective, conditioned by institutional arrangements and wider social and cultural contexts. This embeddedness and emergence of an economy from and with social structure forms one of the foundational ontological commitments of SEE.

In turn, social and economic systems are understood as being embedded in, and fundamentally constrained by, biophysical structures (Spash, 2017; Spash and Smith, 2019). All economic processes interact with their environment. There is a straight forward and basic dependency of economic systems upon flows of materials and energy as well as sinks for the necessary removal of waste material and energy. Economies are open social-ecological systems. Their processes operate within a set of limits prescribed by ecosystems structure and functioning, and social structure represented by actors and their institutional context.

III. The biophysical in economics

A basic fact, although absent from most economic thinking, is that natural resources and waste sinks are required to ensure social provisioning. The reproduction of societies must address the maintenance of ecosystems structure and their functioning or fail. Production fundamentally requires energy, or, more precisely, available energy termed “exergy”. That is, humans require energy capable of performing useful “work”, which is defined, as in physics, to mean the exertion of a force against some form of resistance (Ayres and Warr, 2009). Such work can be performed by humans, animals or machines, but will always require some input of exergy, whether it is the solar radiation embodied in food that fuels human and animal labour, or fossil fuels to power a heat engine. This dependency of societies on flows of energy and materials is captured in the concept of “social metabolism” (Krausmann, 2017). There is no single social metabolism because it will vary depending upon the structure of an economy and its social provisioning mechanisms, and there-in lies the potential of alternative socialecological economies.

The metabolic nature of human societies emphasises the role of materials and energy in their reproduction. This make the laws of thermodynamics central to any economic process as explored by Georgescu-Roegen (1971). The first law of thermodynamics stipulates that The metabolic nature of human societies emphasises the role of materials and energy in their reproduction. This make the laws of thermodynamics central to any economic process as explored by Georgescu-Roegen (1971). The first law of thermodynamics stipulates that

Human, and non-human, survival depends upon material and energy exchange which means on being open systems. Giampietro (2019) notes how Schrödinger described living organisms and ecosystems as having the capacity to seemingly avoid, or even reverse, entropic decay through interaction with their surroundings but this requires gathering available energy and concentrated materials from, and disposing of waste into, other systems. Entropy is not actually reversed because it continues in the larger system with which living organisms interact and are dependent. As biophysical entities living organisms are open systems. In general, open systems can maintain organisation, a given size and level of activity, but this has consequences for the systems with which they must interact. The growth of any organism, ecosystem or population is therefore fundamentally limited by the biophysical structure of its environment. These are termed horizontal limits by Devictor (2017: 120-121), because they relate to the spatial-temporal boundary for a given population, assemblage or ecosystem. The same principle applies to human societies and their economies, which depend upon ecosystems for flows of materials and energy as well as sinks for the waste they generate. Giampietro (2019) remarks that this implies that the processes ensuring the reproduction of elements of a “technosphere” (i.e. a social economy) must not interfere with the reproduction of elements in its associated “biosphere” (i.e. ecosystems structure and function) upon which they depend for maintaining a given scale of activity and organisation. Different societies have attempted to address this requirement in different ways with varying degrees of success in sustaining themselves.

Human history consists of a long period in which social provisioning was organised by free roaming, migratory, hunter gatherers prior to the rise of sedentary agricultural settlements. The former appear highly sustainable, long lived and relatively low impact, although some extinction of species is implicated. The latter consisted of small bioregional economies, with regional material flows and solar radiation as the main source of exergy, reliant on agriculture and forestry for various reproductive processes. The industrial revolution marked the start of a major transformation of social metabolism in human social and economic systems. The use of fossil fuels – coal then gas then oil – became the main source of exergy driving production processes, while increasing use of concentrated minerals replaced solar dependent plant and animal materials. This expansion of production, along with the development of artificial fertilizers, facilitated the growth of economic activities and populations beyond their previous limits (Spash, 2017).

This social metabolism appears highly unsustainable. After a few hundred years operating in just parts of the global provisioning system the results appear headed towards catastrophic collapse. The move away from exergy derived from solar radiation to finite stocks of concentrated minerals, combined with economic growth, has meant the social metabolism of industrialised human societies rapidly depleted the “entropic dowry” upon which it depends (Georgescu-Roegen, 1971). As a physically closed system, the Earth exchanges flows of energy but not of materials with its surrounding (at least not in any significant sense), while the reproduction of biospheric entities is made possible by the existence of various climatic systems that dispose of thermal energy into outer space, maintaining favourable conditions for life (Mayumi, 2017). Once used the stocks of low entropy are in effect irreversibly lost. In theory, the flows of exergy from solar radiation could be harnessed to reverse the dispersal of available energy on Earth, but to date this remains science fiction, while the ability to reconcentrate all dissipated materials to original quality on a substantive scale appears equally implausible (Spash and Smith, 2019). Recognising the biophysical reality of the economic process then leads to the inevitable conclusion that industrial economies are dependent on finite stocks exergy and their continued operation, let alone continual growth, is impossible over any extended period of time.

While the exhaustion of finite resources remains an ultimate limit on human activity, an arguably more pressing limit is the accumulation of waste. Industrial social metabolism “merely transforms low entropy into waste” (Georgescu-Roegen, 1971). As such, pollution should not be treated as a problem outside the system (i.e. an externality), or an anomaly, that could somehow be solved through increased efficiency, or correcting prices, but as an integral part of the economic process (Spash, 2021b). The Laws of Conservation indicate the inevitability of pollution because mass remains the same, but the quality of materials, like energy, declines. Ecological economists such as Daly (1992) have emphasised the scale of impacts from human activity (e.g. waste accumulation). What has been given less attention is the qualitative aspect arising due to the creation of artificial substances and interventions that would not have otherwise occurred and to which natural systems and entities are unable to adjust. Such unnatural impacts on the biosphere and ecosystems lie at the heart of the ecological crisis, such as the on-going mass extinction of species. Thus, not just the scale of human activity (e.g. quantity of waste, population size) but also its qualities determine the consequences for the environment and functioning of ecosystems. The importance of the form of intervention is why technology is never neutral, and also what determines the extent to which something is unnatural (Deckers, 2021). Humans are then engaged in processes of change not equilibrium and stability.

The development of ecology in the 1970s brought new insights into the structure of complex systems and their interconnections. This was mainly driven by the realisation of the disruptive impact of human activities on ecosystems’ structure and function, which in turn affected human systems (Spash and Smith, 2019). Contrary to previous views of ecosystems as isolated, self-regulating and stable systems, they became recognised as complex and dynamic open systems. The potentiality to change ecosystem structure dramatically following systems collapse was highlighted by Holling (2009[1986]), who described this organisation and reorganisation process as part of a cyclical pattern. The evolution of an ecosystem or population can be chaotic with abrupt changes in trajectory. Besides the “horizontal limits”, mentioned earlier, “vertical limits” are emergent and arise due to interactions between ecological levels and dependencies between different components of the system (Devictor 2017). Human activities interacting with ecosystems have uncertain and indeterminate consequences for their structure and function. In the face of such partial ignorance and indeterminacy over human intervention, public policy would better be precautionary than risk taking (Stirling, 2017), and society prepared to adapt rather than lock itself in to a specific “optimal” pathway (e.g. infrastructure, technologies, energy and materials).

IV. The social dimension of economics

Social reality is the dynamic outcome of human practices from which it emerges and by which it is reproduced (Lawson, 2006). However, emergence means that social structure while dependent upon is not reducible to human practices (e.g. individual behaviour). Social structure enables coordinated interactions through collective practices. Collective practices refer to accepted ways of doing things in a community, and can emerge in various ways, notably because of their functionality, but also simply by chance or repeated occurrences (Lawson 2012). They form a basis for individuals to form expectations as to the appropriate course of actions to follow in order to coordinate with others. Interconnected obligations and rights may evolve that are relationally constituted and constitutive of social positions (Lawson 2006). For example, the positions of employer and employee exist in relation to each other and entail associated rights and obligations for both parties.

How, and to what degree the actions of agents are pre-determined by social structure, as opposed to being autonomous, is a fundamental point of debate. Mainstream economics reduces “society” to being an aggregation of individuals who act purely out of individual selfinterest (i.e. maximising their own personal utility) and are basically identical (both ethically and psychologically). As such it cannot explain the historical variety in social provisioning systems – production and consumption patterns – throughout history and across contemporary cultures. This requires understanding human variety and social relations as emergent and mediated through institutions and values that interact with, shape and form economic structures. Human action is always relative to a particular context in space and time and set within social structure. While agency is restricted it is neither denied nor entirely pre-determined.

Following Jessop’s (2001, 2005, 2007) “strategic-relational” approach, structure and agency can be viewed as dialectical concepts beyond an artificial dualism. He considers structures as strategically selective, but not absolutely constraining, leaving some room for agency. His main argument is that structures generally tend to favour some actions over others. In this sense, he emphasize the importance of a strategic context for action: agents will strategically reflect on their (usually incomplete) understanding of structural constraints and opportunities and act accordingly. Action is therefore both structured, and “structuring” as it tends to reproduce structures and their patterns of strategic selectivity. These recursive interactions between agency and structure create tendencies because structures are not absolutely constraining. There is then only relative and temporary stability to patterns of strategic selectivity, with the possibility for actions to circumvent structural constraints or change them.

As structures are the product of human agency, they are dynamic and are open to change (Lawson, 2012). Through their practices and interactions, humans continuously (and often unintentionally) reproduce and transform the social structures that influence these practices. The employer-employee relation for example has evolved, with a changing set of rights and obligations as unions have negotiated better working conditions. Likewise, the social positioning of women has changed as emancipatory movements have fought for equal rights as citizens.

That major social structures can change (if generally only slowly) is evident from the contrast between modern society and archaic societies. For example, Sahlins (1972) described how hunter-gatherer economies were characterised by a high degree of underproduction and disdain towards accumulating material possessions. Modern industrialised societies promote over production and waste in a throwaway, fashion conscious mode of conspicuous consumption. Thus, modern consumer behaviour is not an ahistorical trait of human nature, but a specific form of social structure which helps reproduce the capitalist mode of production. The change in economic and social structure during the rise of capitalism and associated market economies has sometimes been described as a change in terms of the extent to which “the economy” is embedded in society. A prime example is the work of Karl Polanyi (1957) which argues that such modern market economies should be understood using a “formal” economic approach (i.e. individual choice in price-making markets). He regards most of human history as having been spent in “primitive” economies, where market exchange was largely or totally absent, and distribution occurred via reciprocity and kinship groups (Polanyi, 1957). Economic (provisioning) activities were described as being embedded in social relations and institutions. Understanding such economies required a “substantive” approach to economics in contrast to the formal approach, which he accepted as valid only for modern economies. The latter are governed by rational logic, efficiency, self-interest and prices which he believes means they can be regarded as disembedded from social relations (Gemici 2008; Polanyi, 1957).

While Polanyi highlights aspects of institutional differences between capitalist market economies and past economies, the division he draws between socially embedded primitive economies and socially disembedded modern economies is erroneous and only serves to reify the utopia of the “self-regulating market” that he painfully attempted to deconstruct (Spash, 2019; Gemici, 2015). The notion of (dis-)embeddedness fails to capture the changing qualities of social provisioning, and ultimately denies their social aspects. This encourages the separation of the social and economic, rather than their conceptual distinction and actual connection. Modern market economies are instituted differently than their historical counterparts, but market relations remain embedded-in, and built upon networks of social relations (Granovetter, 1985).

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Price-making markets have little, or in fact nothing, in common with perfectly competitive markets, where each firm has no power to set prices or control other factors of production. Actual market economies evidence oligopoly and monopoly power institutionalised in the corporation. Prices are the result of power relations and that includes the power to structure markets and regulations in ones own favour. Multi-national corporations and the Davos elite do not wait to be regulated; they lobby and influence government action in their favour opting for self-regulation when other choices are unavailable.

Power in the market place also means creating demand for products. Large firms have means to manipulate social attitudes, and therefore to manage what consumers buy and at what price (Galbraith, 1979; Kapp, 1978 [1963]; Spash and Dobernig, 2017). Promotion of dissatisfaction is the essence of modern marketing via normalising comparison with others, status-seeking (i.e. keeping up with the Jones’s), fashions, in-group/out-group identity, shopping as therapeutic and possessing the latest technology. Rather than industrial production leading to material satiation, and the need for less work, the consumer society has evolved with more work and more disposable products. This process has long been recognised as involving conspicuous consumption (Veblen 1991 [1899]) and manipulation by corporate and business enterprises (Galbraith 1969 [1958], 2007 [1967]; Kapp 1963).

V. Philosophy of economic science

Mainstream economics has attempted to employ and maintain discredited philosophical approaches to conducting itself as a science. On the one hand it aspires to finding objective truths through empiricism as if theory was unnecessary and data could speak for themselves. On the other it promotes a form of deductivism that places abstract mathematical models at its core with unquestionable foundational axioms divorced from any reality. Sometimes the two are combined in a pseudo logical empiricist approach,1 or claims to some vague form of positivism with epistemological positions such as a fact-value dichotomy, a naïve objectivism and the search for universal laws (Spash, 2012). None of this has been neutral, but has rather hidden an implicit conceptualisation of reality. Thus, the particular worldview of mainstream economics has tended to favour regarding economies as physically isolated, mechanical, self-regulating, equilibrating and predictable systems. Leaving an ontology to be defined by a methodology (whether deductivist or empiricist) means falling foul of the epistemic fallacy. That is, objects and their relationships only become accepted as valid, or even recognisable as relevant, if they conform to the methodology, e.g. if something cannot be measured it is ignored, effectively not existing in the analytical approach. Thus mainstream economics is blinkered by its methodological choices and methods (e.g. cost-benefit analysis) come to dictate understanding of reality (e.g. Nature must have a monetary price to be of value). In addition, contrary to the approaches of mainstream economists, the second half of the 20th Century saw a general recognition that science operates in a social context, and that our knowledge is fallible. However, the failings of mainstream philosophy of science are not the primary concern here (see Tacconi, 1998; Lawson, 2006; Spash, 2012, 2020), but rather we aim to suggest what would be a way forward in relation to SEE.

The search for philosophical foundations led Tacconi (1998) to propose a combination of post-normal science and constructionism. However, in its strong form constructionism denies realism and is incompatible with the ontological commitments of ecological economists to a biophysical reality independent of the human mind. Post-normal science is also not a philosophy of science, but an epistemological critique of traditional naïve objectivism in the natural sciences and its transference into the social sciences. As Tacconi (1998) seems to recognise his mixture of inconsistent approaches results in contradictions. Puller and Smith (2017: 19) summarise the problem as follows:

“Ecological economists seem to be searching for a way to combine a perception of the world as independent of our knowledge, while at the same time admitting the social construction of knowledge and the role of meaning-making in the social realm”

They then detail how a philosophical well-grounded approach can be found in critical realism, which combines ontological realism with epistemic relativism.

The form of critical realism of relevance here is associated with the early works of Roy Bhaskar (1975 [2008], 1979). As explored by Lawson (1997) in relation to economics, a strong emphasis is placed on the importance of addressing ontological issues. More specifically critical realism propose a depth ontology that goes beyond empiricist and actualist philosophies to give place to structure and the causal powers of their mechanisms. Structures and mechanisms make events happen. What is actualised is merely part of the potential and the result of which mechanisms and counter mechanisms are operative and which ones dominate. The empirically observable is then merely a subset of what is actualised based on human ability to take events into account.

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While social structures are human constructs they are no less real for that. Capitalism is, for example, a recognisable system with real mechanisms and effects (as described earlier). Reality is further conceived as stratified, with hierarchically ordered strata, starting from a physical dimension, followed by chemical, biological, social and economic dimensions (Collier 1994b). All biological entities are physical, but physical structure is independent of biological structure. Similarly, the co-dependent social and economic strata are dependent upon the biological, the chemical and physical, but not vice versa. However, as consistent with the earlier discussion, higher strata are irreducible to lower from which they are emergent. Similarly, Georgescu-Roegen (2009[1979]) exemplifies such properties by considering how an elephant is composed of physical and biological structure but its behaviour (an emergent property) cannot be explained purely form physics or chemistry. As we have noted society is not simply the aggregation of the individuals of which it is composed.

This stratified and layered understanding of reality also results in a concept of causality that differs from traditional realist approaches. Instead of being explicable as event regularity, critical realism explains actualised events using the concept of causal powers of mechanisms based on structures and mechanisms (Collier 1994a). In open systems, there are multiple mechanisms at play that can either enable or prevent the actualisation of potentialities. Rather than seeking universal and timeless “laws” of Nature there are law like conditions where certain tendencies of mechanisms become actualized (Puller and Smith, 2017).

Bhaskar describes the scientific process as “the social production of knowledge by means of knowledge” (Collier, 1994a: 54). In this view, “transitive” knowledge or thought objects, provide the concepts, models and theories that are simultaneously the raw material and the product of science, and which seek to explain “intransitive” reality or real objects (Sayer, 2010). Science seeks descriptive and explanatory knowledge if natural and social entities, phenomena, events and their relationships. While social structure is subject to change it is not so easily or quickly, it has durability (Lawson, 2006), and that means the same transitive / intransitive approach to understanding knowledge can be applied. Those who emphasise change as undermining all knowledge (e.g. Goddard, Kallis and Norgaard, 2019) fail to allow for durable structure and mechanisms which are the essence of the ability to know anything. There is also a tendency to over play the role of social scientists in affecting their objects of study.

As Sayer (2010: 33) states “social scientists and historians produce interpretations of objects, but do not generally produce the objects themselves”. He argues that a clear distinction is required between an object of inquiry and our knowledge of it, which consists in the language, concepts or images that we use to describe reality. Thought objects are therefore referents to their “real” counterparts, but he regards knowledge of true correspondence as impossible, i.e. all knowledge is fallible.

Experience of the external world consists of ideas (percepts, sense data, qualia) involving socially contextual conceptualisation (e.g. language, culture, prior knowledge). The extension of knowledge involves reconceptualization and involves the role of metaphors and analogies which relate to existing ways of thinking e.g. the current prevalence of computing metaphors and analogies. The transitive or thought object in critical realism involves weak constructionism and is termed epistemic relativity or (sometimes) epistemological relativism. This weak constructionism contrast with the radical relativism of strong constructionism where knowledge is simply a matter of shared conventions among researchers. In such accounts the relation to real structures, mechanisms and objects is regarded as irrelevant or even the existence of a reality beyond the human mind is denied.

Although knowledge is fallible, it is not equally so. Choices can be and are made between difference explanations and descriptions. Representations of the world are of practical use and their employment in our actions and practices has consequences which can be evaluated, help us navigate it and enable us to have an impact on it. We judge what works well and what does not. In Sayer’s (2010: 48) terms intersubjectively shared conventions must prove themselves to be practically adequate, so that our expectations about the world and results of our actions are actually realised. This is more than just the usefulness of a theory, because the adequacy of knowledge is also judge in terms of descriptive realism relative to the structure of reality. Thus critical realism is distinct from instrumentalism (such as found in American Pragmatism) because the aim is not simply prediction but causal explanation. Prediction can be equated with explanation only if one assumes event regularity, which fails to hold in open systems like economies. Indeed, prediction is unnecessary for the explanation of a phenomenon (Collier, 1994a).

Investigation of open systems requires a distinct approach from the idealised laboratory experiment which tries to create a partially isolated system through controlling mechanisms. The limited applicability of such methods for social phenomenon means alternative methods are typically required, such as the use of counterfactuals. However, as Danemark et al. (2002b) point out, there is no specific “method of critical realism”. Indeed the method for investigation is relative to the object of study and research question. Critical realism also recognises a wider range of modes of inference than the traditional induction and deduction. It includes the roles of retroduction and abduction (see Danermark et al., 2002a), as forming part of the process of providing causal explanation, which opens up the methodological toolbox of social sciences and changes understanding of methodology as supposedly (but not actually) conducted in traditional sciences. An inference always implies a form of generalisation and can either refer to extrapolation in an empiricist sense or to conceptualisation of the “hidden essence of things” in a realist sense. Danemark et al. (2002a: 100) suggest five strategies that can help us discern the hidden underlying structures and mechanisms: (1) counterfactual thinking; (2) social experiments; (3) studies of pathological cases; (4) studies of extreme cases and (5) comparative studies.

There are also grounds for judging which methods are appropriate. Methods and related theories must be adequate to their objects of study (Puller and Smith, 2017; Spash, 2012). For example, evolutionary theory, and its associated tools for analysis, is inadequate for understanding the operation of a mechanical clock. Thus, Hodgson’s (2008) argument that evolutionary theory should replace mechanistic theory in economics is flawed because it simply repeats the same mistaken belief that all objects of relevance to economic must be of one form (i.e. evolutionary rather than mechanical). Similarly the imposition of mathematical formalism as defining economics fails not because the methods is inherently wrong but because it cannot address the object of study, i.e. the characteristics of economic systems. More specifically quantifying everything with arithmomorphic concepts excludes all qualitative aspects (Georgescu-Roegen, 2009[1979]). This indicates the need for a structured methodological pluralism, where theories and methods are informed by the qualities of the object under study and cooperation occurs between those with common understanding (Spash, 2012).

A final aspect of note is the emancipatory role of social science research. Investigating the real (structural) cause(s) of a social phenomenon means the explanation of the social scientist will inevitably clash with the existing ideas of some people, that is new evidence may appear, theories brought into question, previously confirmed positions be undermined. Such is the nature of scientific research. Social scientists criticise those holding fallacious ideas. If there are institutions holding those false ideas then the research is also a criticism

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of them and the social scientists has a role in removing wrong beliefs. Collier (1994a) argues the role of the social scientist is not just to criticize but should be to undermine institutions promoting false ideas. Emancipation is then seen as transforming structure. When considering environmental research the case being made here is clear because research showing beliefs about the benefits of economic growth, fossil fuels, chemicals, plastic, asbestos, genetic modification and so on, to be false then criticise the institutions promoting such things. Research is neither neutral nor value free and facts have ethical implications for both the researcher and society.

VI. Conclusion

The multiple social, ecological and economic crises of our age, and the failings of mainstream economics to explain or address the structural causes of these crises, means new approaches to economics are essential. SEE has been outlined here as a necessary and emerging paradigm. Economics has become increasingly detached from its object of study and the orthodoxy is fundamentally flawed as a social science because it advocates a prescriptive methodology while lacking any serious engagement with epistemology and ontology. The resulting epistemic fallacy means it promotes a narrow implicit world view as if a factual truth. Failures here include imposition of limited quantitative methods and mathematically formalist methodology that exclude qualitative aspects of reality and the use of isolated/closed systems thinking for an open system reality.

Economies are the socially structured institutional process involving the interaction of humans with the natural world. Social reproduction is achieved only within the bounds of the given structure and mechanisms of biophysical reality. The form and scale of economic processes depends upon a set of spatially and temporally contextual social institutions. That is economics concerns the form and function of social provisioning process which can take various forms and are far from limited to price-making market or capitalist institutions. Starting from processes of social provisioning, economics becomes the study of plural historical, actual and potential economies with their underlying institutional arrangements and biophysical basis rather than a singular abstract idealised “economy”. This broadens analysis not only to what institutions, norms and values shape the economic process and agents’ behaviours, but also to what are socially desirable and ecologically sustainable systems of social provisioning. Economics is neither value free nor ethically neutral but its stance on both should be made explicit. It must also be realist about how economies are reproduced via social and ecological mechanisms. That means linking to both power relations and ethical and just means of provisioning, but also material and energy throughput that respects others (human and non-human). The aspirations of economists to provide for the well-being of humanity, if taken seriously, mean a revolutionary change in economics is long overdue.

### Ontology Wrong---AT: Libidinal Economy

#### Finishing

and which manifest themselves in dreams, fairy tales, and myths. Jung referred to these universal patterns as "archetypes:' It may seem, on a superficial reading, that 1 Fanon is drawing from Jung, since he discusses how white people tend to unconsciously assimilate views of blacks that are based on negative stereotypes. Even the most "progressive" white tends to think of blacks a certain way (such as "emotional;' "physical," or / "aggressive"), even as they disavow any racist animus on their part. However, Fanon denies that such collective delusions are part of a psychic structure; they are not permanent features of the mind. They are habits acquired from a series of social and cultural impositions. While they constitute a kind a collective unconscious on the part of many white people, they are not grounded in any universal "archetype." The unconscious prejudices of whites do not derive from genes or nature, nor do they derive from some form independent of culture or upbringing. Fanon contends that Jung "confuses habit with instinct." Fanon objects to Jung's "collective unconscious" for the same reason that he rejects the notion of a black ontology. His phenomenological approach brackets out ontological claims on both a social and psychological level insofar as the examination of race and racism is concerned. He writes, "Neither Freud nor Adler nor even the cosmic Jung took the black man into consideration in the course of his research.” This does not mean that Fanon rejects their contributions tout court. He does not deny the existence of the unconscious. He only denies that the inferiority complex of blacks operates on an unconscious level. He does not reject the Oedipal Complex. He only denies that it explains (especially in the West Indies) the proclivity of the black "slave" to mimic the values of the white "master." And as seen from his positive remarks on Lacan's theory of the mirror stage, he does not reject the idea of psychic structure. He only denies that it can substitute for an historical understanding of the origin of neuroses .23 Fanon adopts a socio-genetic approach to a study of the psyche because that is what is adequate for the object of his analysis. For Fanon, it is the relationship between the socio-economic and psychological that is of critical import. He makes it clear, insofar as the subject matter of his study is concerned, that the socio-economic is first of all responsible for affective disorders: "First, economic. Then, internalization or rather epidermalization of this inferiority."24 Fanon never misses an opportunity to remind us that racism owes its origin to specific economic relations of domination- such as slavery, colonialism, and the effort to coopt sections of the working class into serving the needs of capital. It is hard to mistake the Marxist influence here. It does not follow, however, that what comes first in the order of time has conceptual or strategic priority. The inferiority complex is originally born from economic subjugation, but it takes on a life of its own and expresses itself in terms that surpass the economic. Both sides of the problem-the socio-economic and psychological-must be combatted in tandem: "The black man must wage the struggle on two levels; whereas historically these levels are mutually dependent, any unilateral liberation is flawed, and the worst mistake would be to believe their mutual dependence automatic:''5 On these grounds he argues that the problem of racism cannot be solved on a psychological level. It is not an "individual" problem; it is a social one. But neither can it be solved on a social level that ores the psychological. It is small wonder that although his name never appears in the book, Fanon was enamored of the work of Wilhelm Reich. This important Freudian-Marxist would no doubt feel affinity with Fanon's comment, "Genuine disalienation will have been achieved only when things, in the most materialist sense, have resumed their rightful place:'27

#### Libidinal explanations of attachment are wrong, not universal, and dangerous.

Derek Hook 18, Department of Psychology, Duquesne University, “Racism and jouissance: Evaluating the “racism as (the theft of) enjoyment” hypothesis,” Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society, September 2018, Volume 23, Issue 3, pp 244–266

While this seems, in many ways, a gripping account, the degree of reductionism here from a sociologist or historian’s perspective must appear staggering. The multiple complex sociological, economic, and socio-historical variables underlying distinctive historical forms of racism are brushed aside in favour of a generalizing psychoanalytic formula.1 Racism = reaction to perception that the (perversely enjoying) other has stolen our enjoyment. This reduction of racism to an affective equation is evident also in Žižek’s precursor in this conceptual domain, Jacques-Alain Miller:

Why does the Other remain Other? What is the cause for our hatred of him, for our hatred of him in his very being? It is hatred of the enjoyment in the Other. This would be the most general formula for the modern racism we are witnessing today: a hatred of a particular way the Other enjoys […] The question of tolerance or intolerance is […] located on the level of tolerance or intolerance toward the enjoyment of the Other, the Other who essentially steals my own enjoyment (Miller, cited in Žižek, 1993, p. 203).

Not only does the above formula generalize across different socio-historical sites of racism, but it also bundles together a variety of different forms of prejudice. Anti-Semitism, racism, (hetero)sexism, xenophobia, etc. come very close to being reduced to problems of (libidinal/political) jealousy. The depoliticization (indeed, the implicit psychologization) inherent in such a conceptual move is surprising inasmuch it is something that Žižek has proved critical of elsewhere.2 In his contribution to Christopher Lane’s The Psychoanalysis of Race (1998), for example, Žižek outlines the charge of psychological reductionism against standard psychoanalytic explanations of racism, which offer “a way of explaining racism that ignores […] not only racism’s socioeconomic conditions but the sociosymbolic context of cultural values and identifications that generate reactions to the experience of ethnic otherness. (p. 154)”

This is well said, but surely it applies also to the racism as theft of enjoyment formula outlined above? Explanations of racism as jouissance are surely prone to psychological reductionism inasmuch as they often appear to privilege a series of psychoanalytic assumptions (drive, fantasy, libido, projection, etc.) as existing prior to—or independently of—considerations of economic, historical, political, and socio-symbolic context. Does this explanatory over-reliance on the psychological not amount to a retreat from the political, to precisely an attempt to explain social phenomena on the basis of psychological accounts? Moreover, one often has the impression, in looking at passages such as those cited above, of a given conceptual template (indeed, a formula) imposed on one after another historical context by way of an “explanation” of racism, despite the huge variation in socio-historical and cultural factors. This one-size-fits-all type of explanation seems particularly ill-suited to Lacanian psychoanalysis which claims, after all, to be a science of the particular (Verhaege, 2002).