## 1AC – Black Transhumanism – Rutgers RR 2021

#### The dice are loaded---Silicon Valley giants have partnered with the state to monopolize and exploit transhumanism’s potential---pseudo-monopolies have already secured self-regulation of transhumanist technology to ensure the commodification of human life for capital through technocracy

Giesen, 20 - Klaus-Gerd Giesen, Professor of Political Science at Université Clermont Auvergne, France; 2020(“The Transhumanist Ideology and the International Political Economy of the Fourth Industrial Revolution,” Ideologies in World Politics, Springer, pp. 143-156, Available to Subscribing Institutions via SpringerLink, bam) \*\*NBIC = Nanotechnologies, Biotechnologies, Informatics and Cognitive Sciences

This is an enormous new market in the world economy, and therefore an additional commodification of human life: we will see the birth of the “body-market” (Lafontaine 2014). It will be the result of the fourth industrial revolution. Indeed, the NBIC technology convergence will undoubtedly introduce an important rupture in the evolution of world capitalism, just like the steam engine (1st industrial revolution), electricity (2nd), and electronics and computing (3rd) (Schwab 2015). Countless new products and services will appear on the market. Faced with the explosion of NBIC supply, the transhumanist discourse tries to convey the message that each new device corresponds to a specific need and demand. In other words, transhumanism serves as the ideology that justifies this expansion into the world capitalist market.

The more further commodification of the (post)human being becomes successful, the more state regulations will inevitably be disrupted, especially by the new inequalities that will soon appear between humans who will have remained “natural”—the “chimpanzees of the future” (as they have been called by transhumanist Kevin Warwick (2002, p. 4)—and the future, technologically enhanced posthuman species. Thus, transhumanism poses an immeasurable challenge to the welfare state insofar as the latter, deeply rooted in meritocracy, has been forged to erase the initial social inequalities as far as possible. Transhumanism is also a challenge for democracy and the rule of law, because of the increasing complexity of all issues related to technological hybridization and the intentional “accelerationism” (Mackay and Avanessian 2014) promoted precisely by the transhumanists: the classical advisors to the political decision-makers (bioethics committees and other technology assessment structures) can probably no longer effectively assist them in order to regulate in real time the new artefacts and their marketing. In other words, we cannot exclude the possibility that there will soon be technological limits to democracy.

In addition, with the human-machine fusion, new perspectives are opening up for capital-labour relations. In the near future the worker and the employee can be fully integrated into productive systems (e.g. through chips implanted under the skin or directly into the nervous system) and better monitored. Their productivity—which is the key to competitiveness between firms—could be boosted. A prevalence of the transhumanist ideology, even partial, will undoubtedly cause further dehumanization of work. This would lead to the total adaptability of the individual to the demands of capital, and the very concept of human resources may become obsolete, insofar as the employee will simply merge with technological resources to become merely a production tool. Another possible consequence of transhumanistic policies: the struggles between employers and trade unions could intensify, focusing more on the degree of autonomy that the worker can still maintain in the face of the new productive system technologies than on wages and working time. Due to the mass unemployment that Artificial Intelligence will soon generate, “Luddite” revolts may arise, but probably remain occasional. Clearly, there is a risk that over the next decades we will gradually turn to a posthuman capitalism that will profoundly transform not only the relationships between individuals, to work and to the state, but also the way we relate to humankind itself.

5 The Ideological Outreach

Transhumanism is above all a major political project for the benefit of those industries and economic sectors which are most heavily involved in the fourth industrial revolution which will probably lead to a complete redistribution of wealth in our societies, a large-scale reconfiguration of social classes, and above all a profound change in the way our societies and the entire world system function. We cannot ignore, however, that considerable parts of both the state apparatus and the private sector are promoting this project.

The same Mihail C. Roco and William Sims Bainbridge who had issued the now famous National Science Foundation’s NBIC report in 2003 raised the entire NBIC issue to the ideological level by publishing ten years later (with Bruce Tonn and Georges Whitesides) the voluminous Converging Knowledge, Technology, and Society (CKTS) report that aims to guide considerable social engineering efforts to contain within narrow margins any possible contestation of the NBIC technologies. The new concept of CKTS Meta-Convergence is part of a resolutely “solutionist” strategy, resulting from the transhumanist thinking of the “techno-progressive” branding which does not envisage the “progress” of technology without immediate benefit for society, or at least for a fraction of society. It expressly states that “the study identified barriers to progress; this report proposes a framework, methods and possible actions to overcome them” (Roco et al. 2013, p. 2). On several occasions, it points towards the urgent need for massive mobilization of social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) in the targeted dissemination of transhumanist “solutionism”: “traditional institutions have[now] a reduced role, being bypassed by[new] social-media-enabled movements.” (Roco et al. 2013, p. 372). In their view, steering the debate in the desired direction is essential because “emerging technologies have the promise to bring higher than normal returns on public and private investment because of their transforming and disruptive nature. Such returns also depend on the general […] governance methods, and international context.” (Roco et al. 2013, p. 364).

If state agencies and international organizations—including the Council of Europe (Van Est 2014)—are heavily involved in most vectors of ideological diffusion, it is even less surprising that the elite of the big bosses of California’s Silicon Valley both adhere to and promote the transhumanist ideology. The same is true for many entrepreneurs of the countless start-up firms that revolve around them. The extraordinary financial investments made by, among others, billionaires Elon Musk (who has recently founded the Neuralink company for the creation of super-intelligent cyborgs inspired by Warwick’s experience), Peter Diamandis and Peter Thiel, and even more so by the famous GAFAM (Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, and Microsoft), weigh heavily in this social debate, because their economic interests in the future of high tech are directly at stake. These firms have already invested heavily in the fourth industrial revolution, and are now also injecting huge sums into political lobbying and social engineering at the national and international level.

One example is the Partnership on AI, which brings together almost all the giants of Silicon Valley (except Elon Musk and Peter Thiel, who have launched their own structure, named OpenAI and funded by US$ 1 billion) to implement a kind of ethical self-regulation of artificial intelligence technologies. It does this however with the aim at spreading to the general public the message that the transhumanist big business is itself taking care of all possible risks incurred by, and limits to be imposed on, artificial intelligence, and this without any need for state regulation (Partnership on AI 2019). This is what may be called the ideological “valium for the people” function. The Partnership on AI is also well-funded and co-opts many academics, which underlines the extreme care with which the U.S. giants try to prevent any social contestation threatening their big business. And indeed, those who oppose the new NBIC convergence technologies, whatever they are and wherever they come from, simply do not have the same financial means to make their point of view known.

6 Conclusion

Obviously, it is clear that the game is not equal. In the societal debate on the world level that has just begun, the dice are loaded: the transhumanist ideology is strongly driven by fractions of state apparatus and even more by those very powerful multinational companies that, objectively, have the greatest interest in ensuring that the NBIC convergence revolution runs smoothly. In this sense, transhumanism is already a dominant ideology, in that it overwhelms all other ideological positions in the face of rapid technological change—especially those of humanists from different backgrounds as well as those with a “deep ecology” stance—merely through the power of money.

#### That technocracy uses big data and automation to cement current oppressive structures through policy change and the introduction of technology as a bait and switch---that furthers surveillance and socially engineers the public towards codifying a bias towards whiteness

Butler, 19 – Philip Butler, Assistant Professor of Theology and Black Posthuman and Artificial Intelligence Systems at the Iliff School of Theology; 2019(“Black Transhuman Liberation Theology,” Bloomsbury Publishing, pp. 6-8, bam)

The potential for technology to be utilized as a form of governance can be seen through its roots. For instance, consumer products are often the most basic form of the actual technology used to create them. Many technological comforts taken for granted today, due to their widespread use, began as innovations of war. Global positioning systems were used by the military to track position; digital photography was used for surveillance; and the internet, especially the dark web, was used for communication by the government long before mass consumption. But the existence of these technologies as offshoots of government innovation alludes to the planned obsolescence of era-dependent forms of government. The nocuous and mesmerizing effect of consumer technology is evidenced in the ways in which systemically applied versions of these personal technologies very easily assert influence over human decision-making. Users frequently and willingly secede the luxuries of privacy, autonomy, and personal environmental awareness in order to adhere to technology’s hyper-engaging allure.

The technocracy itself runs on two major components—big data and automation. Big data is the process of collating large data sets composing of user activity within a particular technological medium. These sets necessitate realtime analysis. Real-time analysis allows for greater conceptual understanding of their practical application.10 The computational modeling of these sets can be utilized to determine behavioral trends, providing insightful information regarding user action/interaction in any given space/environment. Through computer modeling, big data can be applied as a means of surveillance, persuasion, and social engineering, geared toward steering mass consumption, public opinion, social norms, and social politics.11

Automation, as a governmental tool, creates avenues to complete tasks without direct observation or engagement through previously written code. It is the foundation of digitally mediated institutions (DMI) operating within the larger government apparatus. DMIs are government organizations characterized by their high degree of digital infrastructure and widespread use of digital applications and tools.12 They rely heavily on policy feedback and the inherent longitudinal dependence of government implementation (path dependence) to allow for the installation and ensuing codification of digitally automated policies in the form of electronic systems.13 It is important to note that the process of digitally reifying government policies is essentially the transformation of said policies into digital ontologies. As digital ontologies, added layers—in the form of technology via programming languages—create further separation between those who are governed and the actual technological components that work to automatically process governance. Meaning, the processing of government becomes a digital ontology, which adds extra layers between the laws being implemented and persons on the ground—increasing the difficulty of political action.14

DMIs utilize big data to streamline the governing process. The automation of computational modeling and of data sets bridges the benefits of big data with the seamlessness of automation. Since DMIs rely on path dependence to sustain their place within the e-governance model, those who initially created their infrastructure are now free to move on to something else entirely. The experts, who construct the automation of government, shrink the size of government solely for the purpose of maintaining current and past forms of order and not to make government smaller for the sake of the governed. The sinister side of automating DMIs is found in the fact that, like many other government officials, the code which runs them is simply doing its job. In this way, finding the person to blame after a policy or law is automated creates another deeply layered process.

Timing and sequence matter in the potential influence of DMIs on society. The endless automation of big data produces a compound analysis that increases the ability to decipher feedback provided by these large unrestricted data sets. This allows for more precise predictions as DMIs seek to effect “political interactions of organized interests and policy makers.” The goal of DMI’s is to influence public policies that affect the “beliefs, preferences, and actions of diffuse mass publics,” because “public policies affect the depth of democracy, the inclusiveness of citizenship, and the degree of societal solidarity.”15 Essentially, the technocracy, or technocratic e-government, works to embed measures of behavioral surveillance in order to track actions/interactions of citizens for the purpose of determining more efficient ways to socially engineer automated methods of control. This is not unlike governing structures of the past. Governmental policies, which maintained a specific position toward certain groups, will still hold those positions. Except this time, marginalized groups can only blame the machines for their predicament. The programmers responsible for reincarnating oppressive structures through digital ontologies only come back to work if there is a glitch in the system, and that is so they can fix the glitch, not the system.

The technocratic e-government is not a novel way to oppress Black folks. In fact it could oppress anyone. It is particularly sinister for that reason, because fundamentally it is no different than the governing system already in place. So, for the American contingent who have and continue to place their faith in the current form of American government as being grounded in fairness and nonbias, an automation of the current system will not be viewed as problematic.

In fact, it will be seen as useful and adding value to everyday life. However, the technocracy’s ability to simply automate the already oppressive structures of Americana (deemed normative) as outlined in Michelle Alexander’s The New Jim Crow, is particularly dangerous for Black folks.16 The added layers that automation creates further increases the distance between lawmakers, law enforcement, and citizens who become abstracted into statistics of criminality. Automated governance will make it harder to fight against the inherently oppressive nature of the American government, literally codifying its inherent bias for Whiteness—through computer language. Technocracy’s ability to render the human element of relationality between those who govern (lawmakers and law enforcement) and those who live under laws (citizens) as opaque creates a dangerous vulnerability for those under the law who already face disproportionate discrimination from its enactment. The state of vulnerability Black folks experience will then be delineated by the preset whims of disinterested machinery running lines of code so that it may simply do its job. This is a distinctly different level of volition than officers, judges, or lawmakers who currently say they are only doing their job. The most treacherous component of technocratic e-governance can be found in how it removes the direct weight of culpability from those who govern onto the technologically embedded layers, via the esoteric logic of computer language that underlies information systems, its software, the hardware that stores it, and the data science which augments its own capabilities. In essence, the promise of new technology distracts from the fact that when it is given the chance to govern it can only generate a snapshot of governmental structures that are dependent upon the temporality in which it was created. So, as society moves into the future, which often assumes a sentiment of social progress, the laws which govern society will more than likely remain in the digital ontology connected to the temporal existence from which they emanated.

#### Technocratic domination cements the afterlife of slavery and genocidal clearing through the process of techno-liberalism, attempting to make the racial post-racial

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In the desire for enchanted technologies that intuit human needs and serve human desires, labor becomes something that is intentionally obfuscated so as to create the effect of machine autonomy (as in the example of the “magic” of robot intelligence and the necessarily hidden human work behind it). Unfree and invisible labor have been the hidden source of support propping up the apparent autonomy of the liberal subject through its history, including indentured and enslaved labor as well as gendered domestic and service labor. 6 The technoliberal desire to resolutely see technology as magical rather than the product of human work relies on the liberal notion of labor as that performed by the recognizable human autonomous subject, and not those obscured labors supporting it. Therefore, the category of labor has been complicit with the technoliberal desire to hide the worker behind the curtain of enchanted technologies, advancing this innovated form of the liberal human subject and its investments in racial unfreedom through the very categories of consciousness, autonomy, and humanity, and attendant categories of the subject of rights, of labor, and of property.

Our usage of the concept of the surrogate throughout this book foregrounds the longer history of human surrogates in post-Enlightenment modernity, including the body of the enslaved standing in for the master, the vanishing of native bodies necessary for colonial expansion, as well as invisibilized labor including indenture, immigration, and outsourcing. The claim that technologies can act as surrogates recapitulates histories of disappearance, erasure, and elimination necessary to maintain the liberal subject as the agent of historical progress. Thus, framing the surrogate human effect as the racial grammar of technoliberalism brings a feminist and critical race perspective to bear on notions of technological development, especially in the design and imagination of techno-objects and platforms that claim to reenchant those tasks understood as tedious or miserable through the marvels of technological progress—ostensibly dull, dirty, repetitive, and uncreative work.

To understand how claims of human freedom and human loss enabled by technological development allow for the retrenchment of the liberal subject as the universal human, Surrogate Humanity foregrounds the obfuscated connections between the human–machine divide in US technological modernity and the racial production of the fully human in US political modernity. Focusing on the material, social, and political consequences of the mutual generation of “the human” and “the machine” from the US post–World War II standardization of automation into the present, we explore both the social impact of design and engineering practices intended to replace human bodies and functions with machines and the shift in the definition of productivity, efficiency, value, and “the racial” that these technologies demand in their relation to the post-Enlightenment figure of the human. We begin with the second half of the twentieth century because this is the moment when the United States ascends to global political and economic supremacy and cultural influence, inheriting the mantle of its own and Western European settler imperial social structures. At this same historical juncture, the racial architecture of US modes of governance and geopolitical ascendancy were erased in the logics of post–civil rights racial liberalism and multiculturalism.7 Crucially, the advent of what can be termed, ironically, a “postracial” domination translates directly into the perception of new technologies as neutral and disembodied, even as these technologies are anchored in, and anchor, contemporary US imperial power. In short, the technological sphere has been separated from the racial scaffolding of the social in the Cold War and post–Cold War eras. Yet, as we argue, it is essential to assess the racial and gendered architecture of post-Enlightenment modernity as engineered into the form and function of given technologies. This calls for situating techno-objects and platforms in a social relation to what is experienced as a “human.” Thus, although our book is primarily focused on present-day claims about the revolutionary nature of new digital technologies, robotics, and AI, throughout our analysis of techno-objects and the social and political discourses that frame them, we unearth the obscured histories that delimit technoliberal engineering projects focused on efficiency, productivity, and further accumulation through dispossession.

Throughout this book, we insist on the infusion of a seemingly neutral technological modernity with the racial, gendered, and sexual politics of political modernity, based as they are in racial slavery, colonial conquest and genocide, and forced mobility through ongoing racial imperial practices of labor allocation and warcraft. To accomplish this, we extend critical ethnic studies analyses of gendered racialization to include machine “others.” By focusing on machines, we take the weight of an ethnic studies analysis off of racialized people so that we can see how this relationship functions even in their absence. Tracking the surrogate human effect within technoliberal politics enables us to attend to techniques through which difference (whether human–nonhuman or interhuman) is produced, while understanding categories of difference as historically specific.

By tracking how the surrogate human effect functions as the racial grammar of technoliberalism, we connect critiques of historical and political consciousness, freedom, and agency, whether of the machine or of the liberal subject, to calls for thinking beyond the limits of liberal humanist visions of more just futures. We thus position our critique of technoliberalism in relation to how technologies can be used to create relations between the human and the machine that are outside of the use–value–efficiency triad of capitalist modes of production. We see this work of redescribing value, and what or who is valuable, outside of the parameters of racial capitalism and its modes of waging war and staging social relations already happening in artistic and engineering projects focused on creating technologies that blur the boundaries between subject and object, the productive and unproductive, and value and valuelessness, thereby advancing structures of relation that are unimaginable in the present. Pushing against the limits of the imagination imposed by the symbolic logics of the surrogate human effect, the artistic, literary, engineering, and scientific projects we include in juxtaposition with those we critique refuse existing frames for recognizing full humanity, particularly the categories of the liberal politics of recognition such as the subject of labor or human rights.

The Surrogate Human Effect

Like the “others” of the (white) liberal subject analyzed by decolonial and postcolonial scholarship, the surrogate human effect of technology functions first to consolidate something as “the human,” and second to colonize “the human” by advancing the post-Enlightenment liberal subject of modernity as universal.8 The concept of the surrogate brings together technoliberal claims that technological objects and platforms are increasingly standing in for what the human does, thus rendering the human obsolete, while also foregrounding the history of racial unfreedom that is overwritten by claims of a postrace and postgender future generated by that obsolescence. In our usage, the longer history of the surrogate human effect in post-Enlightenment modernity stretches from the disappearance of native bodies necessary for the production of the fully human, through the production of the fungibility of the slave’s body as standing in for the master, and therefore also into the structures of racial oppression that continue into the post-slavery and post-Jim Crow periods, and into the disavowal of gendered and racialized labor supporting outsourcing, crowdsourcing, and sharing economy platforms. Framing technologies through the lens of the surrogate effect brings a feminist and critical race perspective to bear on notions of technological development, especially in the design and imagination of techno-objects and platforms that claim a stand-in role for undesirable human tasks.

As part of the surrogate effect, the surrogate is a racialized and gendered form defining the limits of human consciousness and autonomy. Saidya Hartman conceptualizes the surrogate by citing Toni Morrison’s formulation of slaves as “surrogate selves for the meditation on the problems of human freedom.”9 Hartman proposes that “the value of blackness resided in its metaphorical aptitude, whether literally understood as the fungibility of the commodity or understood as the imaginative surface upon which the master and the nation came to understand themselves.”10 The slave, the racialized fungible body, also acts as a “surrogate for the master’s body since it guarantees his disembodied universality and acts as the sign of his power and domination.”11 As Hartman elaborates, these racialized structures of the surrogate did not simply disappear after emancipation. Rather, “the absolute dominion of the master, predicated on the annexation of the captive body, yielded to an economy of bodies, yoked and harnessed, through the exercise of autonomy, self-interest, and consent. . . . Although no longer the extension and instrument of the master’s absolute right or dominion, the laboring black body remained a medium of others’ power and representation.”12

While Hartman is referencing the rise of new modes of bonded labor following emancipation that were encapsulated by the liberal formalities of contract, consent, and rights, her theorization of surrogacy as a racialized and gendered arrangement producing autonomy and universality of and for the master is useful for thinking about the contemporary desire for technology to perform the surrogate human effect. The racialized and gendered scaffolding of the surrogate effect continues to assert a “disembodied universality” that actually offers the position of “human” to limited human actors, thereby guaranteeing power and domination through defining the limits of work, violence, use, and even who or what can be visible labor and laboring subjects.

Tracking the endurance of the racial form of slavery as the (not so) repressed or spectral frame for the imaginary of what surrogate technologies do, or who or what they are meant to replace, we insist throughout this book that human emancipation (from work, violence, and oppressive social relations) is a racialized aspiration for proper humanity in the postEnlightenment era. In the US context, reading technologies as they reflect the dominant imagination of what it means to be a human thus means that they are situated in social relations of race, gender, and sexuality, as these derive from embodied histories of labor, Atlantic chattel slavery, settler colonialism, and European and US imperialism, to name the most dominant. The preeminent questions of the politics of the subject, and the derivative politics of difference that consume critical theory—questions that are about political consciousness, autonomy with its attendant concepts of freedom and unfreedom, and the problem of recognition—also drive the preeminent questions we must ask of technologies that perform the surrogate human effect.

The surrogate effect of technological objects inherits the simultaneously seeming irrelevance yet all-encompassing centrality of race and histories of enslavement and indenture against which the liberal subject is defined. As Lisa Lowe writes:

During the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, liberal colonial discourses improvised racial terms for the non-European peoples whom settlers, traders, and colonial personnel encountered. We can link the emergence of liberties defined in the abstract terms of citizenship, rights, wage labor, free trade, and sovereignty with the attribution of racial difference to those subjects, regions, and populations that liberal doctrine describes as unfit for liberty or incapable of civilization, placed at the margins of liberal humanity.13

Lowe explains that while it is tempting to read the history of emancipation from slave labor as a progress narrative of liberal development toward individual rights and universal citizenship, in fact, “to the contrary, this linear conception of historical progress—in which the slavery of the past would be overcome and replaced by modern freedom—concealed the persistence of enslavement and dispossession for the enslaved and indentured” and racialized populations necessary to the new British-led impe- rial forms of trade and governance “expanding across Asia, Africa, and the Americas under the liberal rubric of free trade.”14 Moreover, according to Lowe, “the liberal experiment that began with abolition and emancipation continued with the development of free wage labor as a utilitarian discipline for freed slaves and contract laborers in the colonies, as well as the English workforce at home, and then the expanded British Empire through opening free trade and the development of liberal government.”15 While the history of capitalism tends to be written as the overcoming of serf, slave, and indentured labor through free contract and wage labor, that is, as freedom overcoming unfreedom, as Lowe demonstrates, it is actually the racialized coupling of freedom and unfreedom that undergird and justify capitalist and imperial expansionism.

Rather than freedom being on the side of modernity, which overcomes the unfreedom that is the condition of premodernity, in fact the states of both freedom and unfreedom are part of the violent processes of extraction and expropriation marking progress toward universality. Undergirding Euro-American coloniality, political liberalism maintains the racial temporality of post-Enlightenment modernity that depends on innovating both bodies and resources (and how each will be deployed). David Theo Goldberg argues that liberalism is the “defining doctrine of self and society for modernity,” through which articulations of historical progress, universality, and freedom are articulated.16 Because liberalism’s developmental account of Euro-American moral progress has historically been premised on the transcending of racial difference, as Goldberg puts it, under the tenets of liberalism, “race is irrelevant, but all is race.”17

To articulate freedom and abstract universal equality as the twin pillars of liberal modes of governance, racial identity categories and how they are utilized for economic development under racial capitalism are continually disavowed even as they are innovated. In her writing about how such innovations played out in the post–World War II context, the historical period in which we locate our study, Jodi Melamed has argued that US advancement toward equality, as evidenced by liberal antiracism such as civil rights law and the professional accomplishments of black and other minority citizens, was meant to establish the moral authority of US democracy as superior to socialist and communist nations.18 Highlighting antiracism as the central tenet of US democracy, the US thus morally underwrote its imperial projects as a struggle for achieving states of freedom abroad over illiberal states of unfreedom, racializing illiberal systems of belief as a supplement to the racialization of bodies under Western European imperialism.19 The assertion that the US is a space of racial freedom, of course, covered over ongoing material inequalities based on race at home. As part of the articulation of US empire as an exceptional empire whose violence is justified because it spreads freedom, the history of slavery is always acknowledged, but only insofar as it can be rendered irrelevant to the present day—that is, the history of slavery is framed as a story of US national overcoming of a past aberrant from the ideals of US democracy, and as a story of redemption and progress toward an inclusion as rights-bearing subjects of an ever-proliferating list of others (women, black people, gay people, disabled people, etc.).

#### Linguistic expressions towards a “collective humanity” fail to understand the complexities of black death in relation to white life---only understanding blackness through the lens of transhumanism rejects practices of assimilation in favor of accepting the fluid nature of blackness.

Butler 19 [Philip Butler, Assistant Professor of Theology and Black Posthuman and Artificial Intelligence Systems at the Iliff School of Theology, December 12, 2020, “Black Transhuman Liberation Theology”, pg. 29-31, JMH]

I do recognize that the term “human” is the primary mode of linguistic currency when referring to bi-pedal, predominantly hairless and self-aware beings with supposedly superior intellects. I also recognize that certain rights are given to those who are classified as human. But, in America, those rights and protections evaporate in disparate proportions when the recipient is Black. The utility of the term “human” also evaporates when presented as currency for liberative exchange. Similar to the offering of Anthony Pinn’s reflection on the utility of the term “God,” I would like to move a step further. **I propose that the term “human” which has been employed as a tool for claiming one’s worth has not served to produce any concrete manifestation of Black liberation.**

In his book Black Skin White Masks, Fanon claims that “Black [folks] wants to be white. [Yet, white folks] slave to reach a human level.” While Fanon was attempting to speak to the fleeting relationship that both Black and white folks have with this term, it is also an allusion to the limitations of the term “human.”3 While Fanon claims that Black folks ought to forge a new (hu)man, which I argue has transhumanist implications, the reasoning he employs creates a doublelayered conundrum that highlights the depth to which Black folks are buried in the struggle to break free from the white gaze. The first layer arises through the relationship Fanon rightfully exposes. Black folks want to be white, and white folks want to be human. For Fanon, **this serves as a statement of clarity, because it exposes the never-ending problem of assimilation. Assimilation into white culture does not protect Black humanity.** The second, and most entangling, layer of this conundrum can be found in Fanon’s use of the term “human”:

But, if we want humanity to advance a step further, if we want to bring it up to a different level than that which Europe has shown it, then we must invent and we must make discoveries. . . . We must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new [hu]man.4

Fanon’s declarative search for a new human hints at his recognition of the inherently problematic nature of the term. However, his maintenance of the term “human” only recycles the dilemma he highlights earlier. Trying to fit Black existence within Eurocentric codices confines the constructive potential of the chosen descriptor. So, **when I say that Black folks are not human I am suggesting that the deeply racist and exclusivist history attached to the term needs to be considered.** This is especially true since **the use of the term continues to impose boundaries upon Black bodies regarding how we ought to live. The boundaries** associated with the term **stems from its weaponization.** Molly RandellMoon and Ryan Tippet call attention to the necropolitics associated with this weaponization in the introduction of Security, Race, Biopower, suggesting **the human designation was used for the “economisation of . . . resources in favour of those who ‘deserve life.’5** Essentially, the human classification functions to protect the proto-normativity of white supremacy by upholding epistemological systems of anti-blackness, which are dependent upon the meaning disproportionately imbued upon those who bear its monicker. When we consider the role that the technological apparatus of language plays in undergirding anti-blackness, it could also be inferred that white people are not human either. White people are simply the benefactors of this technology, given their status within the cultural milieu in which it is employed. So, when Black folks insist upon participating within the supposedly protective schema of this term, Black folks are actively reifying anti-Black hierarchies inherently embedded within its cybernetic reach.

So, what is a new (hu)man? And why maintain the use of the term (hu)man at all? Why lay claim to a terminology that has been used to leave so many out of its designation, and create hierarchies of race? Why buy into a term that is part of the larger Eurocentric linguistic machinery? Most importantly, why employ a technology that was meant to subjugate the “Other” when it cannot adequately communicate the complexities of embodiment, let alone Black existence? Now, one could easily argue that the use of any European linguistic derivative maintains a connection to Eurocentric power dynamics. I would not disagree with that argument at all. This is not a departure from a term for the sake of being provocative. It is an intentional departure from the cognitive limitations associated with what it means to be human and Black. Nevertheless, **until Black folks become linguistically liberated** (something that I will not be able to unpack here) **the very components that comprise the reality in which Black folks understand themselves will be influenced by Eurocentrism. The term “human” functions as an elusive value marker, of which Black folks have been unable to grasp due to our lack of control of the term**. In this temporality, it is not a derivative of Black epistemic technology. So, in this invitation to unsubscribe to the use of the term “human,” I am taking into account the tumultuous history of the term and positing a temporary marker in its place, something a bit more generative—something a bit more true to form. W. E. B. DuBois’s testament to Black tenacity may be an indicator of the willingness of Black folks to combat maladaptive narratives surrounding Blackness, in order to usurp the suffocation of anti-Black power structures. It is with that in mind that Black transhuman liberation theology calls for a further deconstruction from the term “human,” and ultimately a separation from it**. Black folks are transhuman, flexible, and adaptable.** But why transhuman? Why utilize the very term I am asking Black folks to unsubscribe from as the root of this new label? Simply put**, transhumans do not carry the same boundaries as humans. They are not limited by the constraints of their form, or situation. Transhumans are transcendent, yet grounded in materiality.** Nevertheless, an adoption of the designation of transhuman for Black folks is rooted in the idea that Black bodies are technology—complex auto-/allopoietic biological systems undergoing constant change. But ever more so**, it is a recognition that since transhumans are always in a state of becoming, the term “transhuman” is only a placeholder for categorizing Blackness.** Thus, it is an invitation not only to depart from the human designation but also to wrestle with the uneasiness and potentiality of what Black folks might be. This is also an assertion that futuristic iterations of Blackness are unbounded. So, it has yet to be determined what Black folks are. We are just not human.6

#### The only way to actualize black liberation is through a spirituality of revolt, one that utilizes black biotechnology to imagine liberative possibilities both individually and communally to fight against the technocratic regime

Butler, 19 – Philip Butler, Assistant Professor of Theology and Black Posthuman and Artificial Intelligence Systems at the Iliff School of Theology; 2019(“Black Transhuman Liberation Theology,” Bloomsbury Publishing, pp. 129-130, bam)

Black Transhumanism as Revolt Spirituality

This entire project has led to this point. So far, we have engaged in four distinct explorations: (1) a trek into Black transhumanism; (2) a theoretical outline of panpsychic vitalism which is intended to ground Black bodies as biotechnology; (3) a reflection upon the potential effects of Black spiritual practices on Black biotechnology as a preemptive means to combat a racist white supremacist world; and (4) an exploration of the ways that Black folks are already transhuman, which imagines the potential for emergent technology to interact with Black biotechnology. This chapter will attempt to bring all of these together through the underlying idea that in order for Black folks to materialize liberating realities it is imperative that Black folks operate from a disposition that I call the spirituality of revolt. This chapter will begin with an exploration of the spirituality of revolt. Then it will imagine two futures: a Black transhuman dystopia and an illustration of Black transhuman liberation.

Revolt spirituality

The spirituality of revolt is embodied by nonconformity, rebellion to indoctrination of docility in all forms, and the insistence of absolute justice. It is dependent upon the action of transhumans for the liberation of transhumans. In the case of Blackness, it is dependent on the actions of Black biotech for the liberation of Black biotech. It does not look to God, or the hills, for help. The spirituality of revolt becomes a spiritual disposition originating from individual and communal remembrance. Biotechnology remembers. It combines a recollection of historical pain and ancestral histories. It assesses the limitations of historical actions as it imagines liberative possibilities. It knows that liberation will not come from a God who is somewhere else. God is us. We are . . . incarnate with life itself. Revolt spirituality results in a posthuman spawn that acknowledges the convergence of spiritualities, actions, and complexities toward the goal of freedom. It recognizes the potential for teaming up with others in the fight for freedom and acknowledges historical alliances demonstrated by Bacon’s Rebellion, the Populist Party, and the Poor People’s Campaign. However, based on the fragility of those alliances, it takes seriously the belief that the action of Black biotechnology is key to Black freedom. Realistically, it realizes the fragility of organizing actions that are intended to topple power structures (think COINTELPRO or the betrayal of Denmark Vesey). And so, it employs a mixture of skepticism, foresight, and strategy. It considers technological trends and imagines synchronistic and projective measures to work with while imagining unforeseen tech to fit its own needs. Imagine it as the merger of Black biotech, spirituality, and technology as a means to embody (through the totality of action and thought) the directed evolution of Black biotech, Black spirituality, and Black life, for the freedom of Black folks from organisms of oppression.

#### We might not know our final strategy, but we know that we must be ourselves, no matter how indignant we have to be---that is our spirit of revolt, the way to overcome the oppressive structures of the future by utilizing the resistances of the past

Butler, 19 – Philip Butler, Assistant Professor of Theology and Black Posthuman and Artificial Intelligence Systems at the Iliff School of Theology; 2019(“Black Transhuman Liberation Theology,” Bloomsbury Publishing, pp. 137-139, bam)

Let’s circle back to revolt spirituality. Given the variable nature of life one cannot determine for others which route to take. The apparatuses of nonviolent love/peace, potentially anti-white supremacist assimilation, or active violence each become wildly acceptable means of engagement. So, I’ll reaffirm what was said in Chapter 2. Vitality justifies biotechnology, even meta-biotechnology and its use. Revolt spirituality is an opportunity to live from radical modes of being one’s self. Revolt spirituality is a switch in biotechnology, preoutfitted with existing overlays (programming) that make being one’s self the most generative option, regardless of the outcome. This is not being yourself as in just randomly doing what you want. This is a call to demand the most of what makes you you while engaging in the absolute violence that dismantles the system. Since being one’s self is a mode of violence it becomes an epistemological affront to proto-normative modes of existence. Colonial frameworks work in the binary. Revolt spirituality works in the multivariate. It is an everyday way of pushing against the grain as a way to combat harmful modes of existence that maintain white supremacy. It is a commitment to the expansion of one’s self into the very essence of their Blackness (potentiality). It affirms oppression as a viable means to establish and reassert dominance in the social sphere. So, be you in the most indignant way. Engage in the violence of being yourself. I think the late Neighborhood Nipsey Hustle (Nip tha Great) might have described Revolt Spirituality the best. Revolt Spirituality is being “disrespectful and arrogant, but who gon’ stop us.”23 It signifies a violently antagonistic approach to organisms which seek to subjugate. It’s engages in the violent tactics of oppression for the sake of liberation. And its paradox is a statement to its complexity. But that should not discourage from its embodiment.

Historically embodied revolt spirituality

Revolt spirituality requires a consideration of what may be thought as its former embodiments. Nat Turner can be seen as an example of historical revolt spirituality. His vision of fighting spirits that represented what he perceived as an impending apocalypse ignited his plan which culminated in his all-out attempt to overthrow slavery on August 21, 1831. Harriet Tubman’s clandestine network was an example of revolt spirituality, as a communal practice. The boldness of Ida B. Wells to risk life and limb through her journalism and through her systematic documentation of the lynchings of Black folks across the United States was another example, too. W. E. B. DuBois’s scholarship provided a strategic vision of self-determination which became part of the foundation of decolonial discourse.24 Bishop Henry McNeal Turner embodied revolt spirituality through his insistence on self-consciousness, which he urged was key to revolution. The legendary punch thrown by Stormé DeLarverie that sparked the Stonewall Riots was another example. So are Octavia Butler’s speculative visions, and Assata Shakur’s willingness to participate in self-defense. It is important to note that these are not the only examples of revolt spirituality in history. It is also important to note that the Black spirit of revolt requires a “hundred year plan,” that simultaneously carries the weight of more than 250 slave revolts (conspired or materialized) during the antebellum period, the cunning wisdom of the Marooners, the defiant fortitude of the Deacons for Defense and Justice, the economic strategy of Robert F. Smith, along with the strategic fire of the Black Panther Party.25 The necessary coupling of patience and intensity that an intergeneration plan like revolt spirituality requires can be considered an upward apocalypse; accumulating positions of power and physically dismantling systems of inequity. Because before Black revolt spirituality can make itself known, the moving variables need to be accounted for. The wisdom provided by a hindsight view of the civil rights movement informs Black revolt spirituality. Its manifestation cannot afford the loss of its leaders. It also cannot afford to have just any leaders. Most importantly, it cannot wait and act in reply to acts of injustice. Black revolt spirituality must materialize as an intentionally relentless holistically calculated strategic plan that culminates in a spiritual disposition that will accept nothing less than freedom—nothing less than justice.

I think complete and utter freedom has not been attained because the line of freedom is elusive and continues to move. So, while tremendous organizers like Angela Y. Davis, Fannie Lou Hamer, Shaun King, W. E. B. DuBois, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, Opal Tometi, and Marcus Garvey have been able to rile the people, garnering strong support not only from the Black community but also from people all around the globe, Dick Gregory so rightfully stated, “Civil rights [are] what black folks are given in the U.S. on the installment plan, [of] civil-rights bills. [They are] not to be confused with human rights, which are the dignity, stature, [personhood], respect, and freedom belonging to all people by right of their birth.”26 The stark reality is that dialogue has not brought freedom. Marching has not brought freedom. Speeches have not brought freedom. Legislation has not brought freedom. Riots have not brought freedom. Slave revolts have not brought freedom. Advocating for the humanity of Black folks has not brought freedom.27 Black folks have historically found themselves contentiously staring at a gaping ravine. Freedom is on the other side, but there is a constant struggle to define what we see and decide on the right action that will get us there.

#### Through the process of revolt spirituality, our advocacy puts resolutional terms of art into play, intervening in the traditional organization of debate as a limited institutional---but, the imposition of strict limited definitions opens the door for right wing populism and xenophobic nationalism

Taylor, 20 - Paul C. Taylor, W. Alton Jones Professor of Philosophy at Vanderbilt University; 2020(“Black Reconstruction in Aesthetics,” Debates in Aesthetics, Vol. 15, No. 2, August 2020, British Society of Aesthetics, pp. 10-28, bam)

1 Introduction: Moten’s Toys

In a recent interview with Stefano Harney, Fred Moten offers an intriguing picture of the spirit in which theorists may offer terms of art to their readers (Harney and Moten 2013). Refusing the familiar metaphor of stocking a conceptual toolbox, he turns instead to the image of children sharing a toy box. He explains the merits of this image:

With my kids, most of what they do with toys is turn them into props…. They don’t play with them the right way – a sword is what you hit a ball with and a bat is what you make music with. I feel that way about these terms. In the end what’s most important is that the thing is put in play…. [T]here are these props, these toys, and if you pick them up you can move into… a new set of relations, a new way of being together, thinking together. (Harney and Moten 201, 105-06)

Moten expands on the point a bit later, focusing now on the work of writerly reflection:

[A] text is a social space…. [P]eople, things, are meeting there and interacting, rubbing off one another, brushing against one another…. [T]he terms are important insofar as they allow you, or invite you, or propel you, or require you, to enter into that social space. But once you enter into that social space, terms are just one part of it… (Harney and Moten 2013, 108; emphasis added)

To offer a concept is to put something in play, to invite others to play along with you and see how far it takes them. At some point the standard of success must be something other than enjoyment or satisfaction, something like truth or warranted assertibility. But attempting to meet the standard can still involve shared experimentation. And this sharing will come burdened and enriched by the complexities of human relationships, just as it does when children share, or decline to share, their toys.

I’ve started with Moten’s reflections because I mean for this essay to enact, encourage, and embody the kind of ludic “thinking together” that he describes. The editors have generously offered me some space to extend my recent reflections on black aesthetics. I propose to do this by deepening my engagement with a concept that has heretofore remained on the margins of these reflections. I started thinking in earnest about black aesthetics many years ago, and used John Dewey’s notion of reconstructing philosophy as a rhetorical point of entry. But it has since become clear to me that this notion can do more work, both for Dewey and for me.

I propose, then, to put the concept of reconstruction in play, to signal a determination to make an argument and an intervention. The argument will have to do with the parochialism of John Dewey, the institutional inertia of professional philosophy, the aesthetic dimensions of the US politics of reconstruction, the centrality of reconstructionist politics to the black aesthetic tradition, and the staging of a reconstructionist argument in the film, Black Panther (Coogler 2018). But arguments like these tend not to register properly because of certain reflexive and customary limits on some common forms of philosophical inquiry. The sort of professional philosophy I was raised to practice and value, and that largely underwrites forums like this one, tends not to be particularly inclusive and open-minded, especially when it comes to subjects that bear directly on the thoughts, lives, and practices of people racialized as black. Black aesthetics, by contrast, is an inherently ecumenical enterprise, reaching across disciplinary and demographic boundaries to build communities of practice and exchange. Hence the need for an intervention: to create the space for arguments in the latter sphere to do work in the former, and for people to make the arguments across contexts.

The sense of reconstruction that animates this essay, then, maps directly onto Moten’s sense of playful intellectual engagement. It aims to use this sort of engagement to expand the self-conception of the community of inquiry to open it to new members, subjects, methods, and perspectives. The burden of the essay will be to explain this transformation, but I wanted to start, to some degree, by modeling it. This is why I began with Fred Moten rather than with an authorising nod to one of philosophy’s mighty dead. Dewey has already started to push toward center stage, so the dead will have their say. But to start with Moten is to subject myself to the discipline that I’m demanding of the profession. A contemporary stalwart of Black Studies and related fields, Moten is a capacious thinker, as likely to reference Cavell and Wittgenstein as Coltrane and Wynter. He is also a challenging prose writer (in addition to being a celebrated poet), whose style can provoke in the unwary analytic philosopher the same dismay that led to Heidegger’s long banishment from (our part of) the canon. But he is, most of all, a tremendous resource for the study of black aesthetics (and much else). I do not know of any better evidence of the need for reconstruction than my own recently defeated willingness to remain silent about his work.

The analogy to play has the additional benefit of reinforcing the need for ground rules. In this spirit, it’s worth making a couple of comments here at the outset.

First, I will assume in what follows that it is possible to talk coherently about racial phenomena. Race is not, as far as this essay is concerned, an illusion or a lie. It may be a myth, depending on what one thinks myths are; and it is surely not the motive force behind all human history or the most salient variable in every human interaction. But it is, for all that, in a suitably complicated sense of the term that will not get fleshed out here, real enough. Anyone needing argument on the point can consult the growing literature on the topic and return to this discussion at a more convenient time.[1] For current purposes I will simply help myself to concepts like the “black” in “black aesthetics,” fully confident that sufficient backing is available should the need arise.

Second, nothing in what follows entails or requires that one accept blackness as the only racial position with aesthetic dimensions worth exploring. Nor is it the only one that has animated a venerable and vibrant tradition of such explorations. It just happens to be the one I am interested in right now, and it happens, like the others, to repay attention to its specific and distinctive manifestations.

There is of course a great deal to say about the way different modes of racialization interact, just as there is a great deal to say about the way racialization intersects with the forces that animate other social identity categories. But one cannot say everything at once. As the study of these topics is in its infancy in philosophical aesthetics, a provisional narrowing of the subject seems in order. Added to which, as we will see, part of the point of developing a philosophy of black aesthetics is to connect to a pre-existing field of inquiry and practice that goes by that name and insists, much of the time, on this focus.

2 The Wars of Reconstruction

I have not argued for the thought that putting concepts in play is interestingly and productively different from what one might otherwise do with concepts. I have simply appealed to the authority of Moten and Harney, or, better, to the intuitive plausibility of their account of this activity. I do not propose to argue for it—not, at least, in any way other than trying it out and tallying up the results. But granting for now that there is something to this approach, it is worth explaining why I want to put this particular notion in play. Why reconstruction? Why take up reconstruction in relation to aesthetics?

One reason to take up a concept is, of course, that working with the notion in question might be instructive or otherwise illuminating. I will soon offer a reason like this for my approach here. Working through the concept of reconstruction can deepen my account of black aesthetics, instructively complicate the legacy of John Dewey, and highlight the tensions between philosophy as a practice and philosophy as a profession. But pointing to a concept’s uses does not explain how its potential for use became apparent.

Two factors put the notion of reconstruction in my path so that it might occur to me to work through it in the way I have proposed here. The first factor has to do with the accidents of history and biography that led to my interest in black aesthetics, and that led me to the peculiar thought that Dewey could help me nurture that interest. This will, to some degree, be the topic of a later section.

The second factor is the state of racial politics in the US and beyond—or, perhaps better, the convergence of racial politics with politics full stop, for people who need these things to be separated. I chose to put the notion of reconstruction in play in part because the world did it first, and I found myself fairly confronted with the thought that this concept was a resource worth mining, representing a reality worth confronting. That will be the topic of this section.

I received the commission for this essay a few short months after the first, now-infamous “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. A group of alt-right supporters gathered on the University of Virginia campus the day before the rally, galvanized by plans to remove a statue of Confederate general Robert E. Lee. The mostly young, mostly male protestors “proudly proclaimed their loyalty to a white-nationalist ideology,” (Wallace-Wells 2017) shouted “white lives matter,” “blood and soil,” and “Jews will not replace us,” while marching in “a torchlight procession—a symbolic gathering meant to evoke similar marches of the Hitler Youth and other ultra-right nationalist organizations of the past century” (Helm 2017). The rally on the next day then devolved into violent conflicts with counter-protestors, one of whom died when an alt-right sympathiser aimed his car into a crowd.

The events in Charlottesville were striking for several reasons. The killing of Heather Heyer was tragic, and the apparent fragility of civility and order was sobering. But homicide and antisocial criminality are, sadly, not that unusual. This instance of antisocial and homicidal criminality was striking in part because it came during the latest in a series of increasingly brazen attempts to recuperate and mobilise white supremacist discursive machinery. The torchlight march, the cries of blood and soil, the defense of a Confederate monument in the name of a putatively shared American heritage, and the vocal refusal—which is to say, announcement, then refusal—of a Jewish conspiracy: all of these gestures manipulate familiar racist rhetoric and symbols in support of a white nationalist agenda.

One way to register the familiarity of the Charlottesville conflict is to think of it as another front in what historian Douglas Egerton calls “the wars of reconstruction” (Egerton 2014, 5971, 5863-5864). “Reconstruction” here names the period that followed the US Civil War and the process of rebuilding and recreating the social and political order that the war had destroyed. This process took multiple forms. Some involved straightforward political and policy initiatives, backed by military and police power. Others involved cultural and ethical projects backed by softer and more dispersed forms of power and influence, as we will see in the next section. All were viciously and vigorously contested, in the bitter struggles that give Egerton his animating metaphor and organising theme.

Charlottesville can represent a new front in these wars because these conflicts far outlasted the formal hostilities between the United States and the renegade Confederacy. The war was simply the most concentrated eruption of the violent contradictions that lay at the core of the American project, a project rooted, to put it only a little too crudely, in the valorization and pursuit of freedom by an expansionist, slaveholding, settler colonial state. These contradictions defined the project from the beginning, and committed its architects and managers to periodically renegotiating the basic terms of cooperation to avoid open conflict. In this sense the three-fifths clause of the Constitution, the Fugitive Slave Act, and the Missouri Compromise were all ways of managing tensions that finally erupted in the Civil War. The end of the war did not resolve the tensions and contradictions, although some of the more ambitious advocates for the Reconstruction project imagined that it might. Some people thought that the post-war rebuilding might also be a second founding, serving to re-establish the American project on a new, more secure footing. But what actually happened was that the same cycle of periodic renegotiation resumed, only with new stakes. Before the Civil War the question had been whether the union would hold. After the war, after reconstruction, the question had to do with the prospects for reconciling American democracy with racial justice; or, put differently, for comprehensively rooting out the social, political, and ethical conditions for the persistence of white supremacy. Charlottesville showed that the question has yet to receive a satisfactory answer.

3 The Aesthetics of Reconstruction

Once one notes the persistence of the wars of reconstruction, it is easy to credit the aesthetic implications of this state of affairs. Warfare is always bound up with expressive culture, most clearly in the narratives and symbols that combatants use to cultivate patriotic fervor and to galvanize hatred for the enemy. The wars of reconstruction are no different. The domain of the aesthetic is one of the fronts in these wars, in ways it will pay for us to consider in relation to the broader history of reconstruction politics.

The Reconstruction era got its name from a constellation of programs launched by the US federal government in the wake of the Civil War. These programs aimed mainly to restore order in the vanquished southern states, while also, to varying degrees, uprooting the white supremacist, anti-democratic, and secessionist practices that defined the erstwhile Confederacy. This federal initiative came to an end in 1877, when the provisional consensus of pro-Union and anti-slavery political forces that supported it splintered under the pressures of fatigue and of white supremacist recalcitrance.

The basic reconstructionist impulse—aimed at rooting out the conditions for the persistence of white supremacist and anti-democratic practices—survived the demise of the federal initiative, and worked on multiple levels to animate a variety of activities and projects. There was, for example, a constellation of local and regional movements, policies, and initiatives, many of which began with federal support but continued without it as long as they could manage in the face of lethal and terroristic violence. Underwriting many of these efforts was an ideological commitment to a general cultural reorientation, organized around revised understandings of freedom, equality, community, democracy, and citizenship. And underwriting this ideological program was a project of ethical counter-habituation, calling individual citizens to locate and cultivate the better angels of their natures and repudiate their “unreconstructed” anti-democratic sentiments.

The ethical and cultural dimensions of the broader Reconstruction program point toward the relevance of this program, and of its prehistory, for the work of black aesthetics. Whatever black aesthetics is—a topic we have not come to yet, I realize—it will have to involve the work of people like the great abolitionist Frederick Douglass, whose greatness is constituted in large part by his determination to use culture work to clarify the contradictions and injustices of a slaveholding democratic republic. Douglass’ speeches, writings, and visual culture strategies deserve pride of place here,[2] but there are many other examples of aesthetic strategies being brought to bear on the work of vindicating black humanity and imagining political transformation. Harriet Beecher Stowe’s massively influential novel, Uncle Tom’s Cabin, is just one example, albeit one that also does us the service of raising thorny questions about, for example, the limits of didactic art and the relationship between ethical and aesthetic criticism.

These transformational aesthetic interventions continued into the Reconstruction era proper, and well beyond. Culture workers continued to use visual art, song, oratory, drama, literature, and other forms to insist on black humanity, to reimagine racially oppressive and exploitative social arrangements, and to call attention to the damage that white supremacy was doing to black life and to the causes of democracy and justice. This work did not stop when the federal program ended in 1877, any more than the local struggles for institutional transformation ended. In this spirit one might think of the “New Negro” movement usually associated with the Harlem Renaissance as a continuation of this Reconstructionist cultural program.

Despite the steady persistence of Reconstructionist efforts after 1877, the demise of the federal Reconstruction program did mark a real change in the prospects for transformation. From this point on the US state declined to enforce the new dispensation and then, to varying degrees in various places, threw itself fully into the work of restoring, or “redeeming,” something very much like the old dispensation.[3] Violence flowed into the breach created by the “Redemption” of the political and cultural forces that animated the old south, as lynching and “white riots” became routine methods of reining back in the labour power and political aspirations of the nominally free African American population. Until the passage of federal civil rights legislation in the 1960s, white supremacy reasserted itself and clung assiduously to its cultural importance and political influence.

Then, after the Second World War, the Reconstructionist program found new openings. This was the beginning of what activist and organizer Jack O’Dell calls “the new reconstruction” (2010), and what Manning Marable (1984) calls “the Second Reconstruction”. In the 1950s and 1960s the ongoing struggles of what some scholars call “the long Civil Rights Movement,” reaching all the way back to the 1920s and 1930s, gained new traction with governmental authorities and with US popular opinion. Thanks to the efforts of people like O’Dell, Fannie Lou Hamer, Ella Baker, and Martin Luther King, Jr., and to the organizations they helped lead and build, the nation now seemed to be returning to the Reconstructionist project nearly a century after the premature end of the project’s first iteration.

As with the first Reconstruction, the twentieth century US black freedom movement accepted aesthetic experience as an appropriate and promising arena for political engagement. Public memories of the movement’s accepted political heroes are bound up with specific styles of oratory, dress, and bodily comportment, though the resulting focus on middle class, Christian, heterosexual black men is in tension with at least some of the movement’s stated goals. In addition, culture workers practicing in a variety of idioms, in various relationships to elite and popular artworld communities, took the movement’s priorities as inspiration and as subject. Think here of everyone from Gwendolyn Brooks and Joan Baez to James Brown and Max Roach. Finally, many of the more controversial inhabitants of this cultural moment, like Malcolm X, Huey Newton, and Angela Davis, found their substantive contributions to the elimination of racial (and other forms of) injustice bound up with their stylistic innovations. Angela Davis has spoken eloquently and poignantly to this phenomenon in a wonderful essay about the reduction of her historical legacy to a hairstyle (1994).

4 The Ironies of American Philosophy

The opening of a new front in the US wars of reconstruction—or, one might say, the revival of Redemptionism as a broadly viable political and cultural force—encouraged me to put the notion of reconstruction in play. But the notion may not have struck me as a potential resource for specifically philosophical reflection, had John Dewey not tried to mobilize it for this purpose first. What really did the trick was the realization that I had tried to use Dewey’s use of reconstruction to build the bridge between professional philosophy and black aesthetics, while mostly ignoring Dewey’s own inattention to the deeper meanings of the concept. This layering of oversights or evasions—layered because Dewey’s came first, to be compounded by mine—interests me now not as an occasion to take the canon down a peg, but as a cautionary tale about the dangers that await and the ironies that attend superficial invocations of the idea of reconstruction.

Almost a hundred years ago, in 1920, Dewey published a little book of lectures called Reconstruction in Philosophy (1948). The book’s organizing theme animated most of his mature work in one way or another: society’s needs and capacities have outgrown its practices and assumptions, he argued, and something must be done. He chose to use the idea of reconstruction to help make this point, but somehow failed, or declined, to notice that this choice points in the direction of an even richer and more challenging philosophical practice than he imagined.

Dewey thought that liberal democratic society (in its industrial, capitalist, and managerial form, we would now add) needed reconstructing, and a reconstructed philosophy was essential to meeting this need. This meant, among other things, uprooting some familiar but damaging intellectual and professional habits in philosophy, and using the newly liberated practice of inquiry to root out similarly damaging habits in the wider society. These bad philosophical habits involved broad misconceptions of experience, knowledge, history, truth, and other such things, all wrapped up in a general inattention to historical and phenomenological context. But the details of this worry are less important right now than the punchline: recovering philosophy from these mistakes would enable it to embrace a vital social role, a role Dewey would describe later as a “criticism of the influential beliefs that underlie culture” (1985).

Equipped with this philosophical model of cultural criticism, Dewey spent much of his career reinterpreting concepts at the heart of vital social institutions and practices. He argues in Individualism Old and New (1930) that the most influential strains of twentieth century political thought are rooted in flawed conceptions of freedom and of the individual, conceptions forged in the fires of earlier social conflicts and carried over without appropriate adjustment (which is to say, it makes sense to demand liberty or death in response to King George in a way that it probably doesn’t in response to the New Deal.) Similarly, he argues in Art as Experience (1934) that the dominant conceptions of art are rooted in flawed conceptions of aesthesis and expression, misconceptions directly traceable to misunderstandings of experience as such.

Dewey’s emphasis on historically informed, phenomenologically responsible, reconstructive cultural criticism comes with several strange ironies in tow. Some are tangentially related to the topic of this essay, but need not detain us. Think here of the way Dewey’s appeals to cultural criticism look rather little like anything a contemporary reader would assign that name. Or think of the way he declines to subject the concept of reconstruction to the sort genealogical scrutiny that he gives concepts like “art,” “individualism,” and “experience”.

The principal irony is that Dewey’s uses of “reconstruction” maintain a distressing distance from the racial politics that surround the term in US contexts. He seems to have employed the notion largely as an allusion to World War I, and to the need for the sort of postwar restoration that the term “reconstruction” broadly signifies. But, as we have seen, this term happens also to name a project that is intimately bound up with the afterlife of the US Civil War and with the bitter and lethally violent racial politics that drove and dominated this war. The struggles over this project cast a deep shadow over US social life during Dewey’s lifetime. Even worse, the shadow fell rather directly across Dewey’s own life—he was born in 1859, and his father fought in the Civil War—and, if Louis Menand is right, across his philosophical commitments (Menand 2001).[4] But it somehow manages not to fall over the Reconstruction lectures, which remain utterly disinterested in the fact of white supremacy, much as the rest of Dewey’s work would lead one to expect.

The irony of a child of the Reconstruction era remaining silent on the persistence of that era’s conflicts is particularly striking if one considers the extremely public forms that the conflicts had taken in the years leading up to 1920. Lynching, which is to say, lethal and extra-legal violence overwhelmingly visited on black people as a terroristic method of social control, had by that time become a thriving social practice. It had also become, among people who fancied themselves more enlightened than the residents of the unreconstructed south, something of a national scandal. In 1918, Leonidas Dyer introduced legislation in the US House of Representatives to stop the scandalous practice, spurred by the vigorous public advocacy of Ida B. Wells-Barnett and, somewhat later, others (including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People [NAACP], an organization that Dewey helped create). The Dyer Bill immediately became a source of intense controversy and remained unsuccessfully on the legislative horizon for years. Similarly, there was the so-called “Red Summer” of 1919, when US veterans of colour returned from fighting overseas only to find their freedoms still radically, violently, and infamously curtailed by deadly “white riots” at home.

Perhaps the best example (for an essay in aesthetics, anyway) of the ongoing struggle between reconstruction and redemption might be the bitter cultural debate over works like D.W. Griffith’s landmark film, Birth of a Nation. Released in 1915, this cinematic re-telling of a sensationalist racist novel affirmed a number of troubling racist and sexist propositions. It depicted black people as unfit for democratic self-government and as threats to law and order. The sense of law and order it relied on was rigidly gendered and racialized. It rendered black men as rapacious and predatory threats to white womanhood, and by extension to the political order that required white male authority over and access to all female sexuality. Similarly, it rendered black women as licentious and predatory temptresses, whose wicked influence over white men could, as one of the film’s title cards put it, “blight a nation”. The film motivated its narrative by affirming and amplifying the racist and sexist myths that were at that very moment being used to justify lethal terroristic violence. In these ways and others, it justified mass disfranchisement and extra-legal violence in support of white supremacist modes of social organization. (It is also, as is well known, a landmark in the history of cinema. As one writer puts it, the worst thing about the movie is how good it is (Brody 2013). It is therefore grist for the mill of reflection on the relationship between aesthetic criticism and moral criticism. That is not my topic here.)

The film struck many observers and activists as scandalous and dangerous from the start. It inspired nationwide protests and boycotts, and led to an abortive NAACP campaign to produce a response film, to fight the fire of cinematic propaganda with fire. Nevertheless, the film, along with a great many similar creative works in print, on stage, and on screen, prospered and enjoyed great popularity. Figures like filmmaker Oscar Micheaux and journalist William Monroe Trotter worked tirelessly to dispel the myths that animated these aesthetic products. But their efforts ran aground on considerations that Egerton puts like this: “elegantly written monographs [like Du Bois’s Black Reconstruction (1935), written to counter the pseudo-scholarly version of Griffith’s narrative then current among US historians] were no match for romantic fiction” (like Gone With the Wind (1939)), and “reasoned editorials about the truth of Reconstruction were no match for popular media” like film (Egerton 2014, 5971, 5863-5864).[5]

These glimpses of the state of racial politics in the early twentieth century should sharpen the tensions I have tried to tease out of Dewey’s Reconstruction lectures. If the point of the broad reconstructionist program was to renew the prospects for American democracy and to subdue white supremacy as a political force, then this work was very much still ongoing, with its outcome still hanging in the balance. This work had, moreover, become a matter of national controversy, fueled by extremely high-profile contests over federal legislation, popular art, and appropriate uses of political violence. And while all this was happening, Dewey actively recommended, without irony, something that made almost no contact with any aspect of this wider situation, but that he nevertheless described as “reconstruction”.

5 Missed Connections: Ideas and Institutions

I have read Dewey in a way that opens the door to a number of interesting questions, but the work I have in mind for this essay requires closing the door on most of them. One might ask, for example, what led Dewey to use the idea of reconstruction in 1920 and then to abandon it soon after? How could he fail to notice the rhetorical and potentially substantive alignments between his philosophical program and the challenges of the Jim Crow era?

Answering these questions would require scholarly excursions that, however fascinating, would lead away from the subject of this essay. Insights surely await in the historical record—in Dewey’s correspondence, say. Engaging the literature on Dewey and race would also be instructive, especially since that literature has grown considerably in scope and sophistication in recent years. But my aim in highlighting Dewey’s apparent indifference to the historical baggage of Reconstruction is not to work toward explaining these missteps, if that’s what they are, or toward reconciling them with his considered philosophical views.

(One short digression may not be amiss, though, since it takes on an issue that, if left untended, may distract from the work of this essay. One easy way to account for Dewey’s indifference is to credit the profundity of the world-historical shift that came with the First World War. The sixty-year-old Dewey can surely be forgiven, one might think, for letting this devastating cataclysm that was not really about race turn his attention away from a race-related conflict that happened when he was a baby. Unfortunately, this move just pushes the worry back, or perhaps up, a step. For one thing, and as noted above, the white supremacist commitments that animated the US Civil War also spawned bitter controversies on the domestic front both during and after the war years. For another, and as Du Bois ably argues in “The African Roots of the War,” these same commitments were also very much at work in World War I. We tend not to notice because we falsely think of the war as a contest only involving white people, and because foregrounding the agency of white people routinely discourages people from applying race-theoretic analyses. But race-thinking was central to the evolving conceptions of civilization and progress, and to the great power machinations, that both led to “The Great War” and were undone by it. So: tracing Dewey’s race- and reconstruction-blindness to the greater gravity of a World War somehow purified of racial politics only deepens the problem.)

Dewey’s decontextual lapse is instructive here because it shows him missing connections that philosophical aestheticians are still missing today, connections with important resonances for our current practices. Worse, it shows him apparently failing even to notice that the connections are there. We can learn from his example and work harder to notice these opportunities and to take advantage of them.

First, we see him missing opportunities to bring powerful philosophical tools to bear on important social conditions. His failure to subject the culture of white supremacy to philosophical criticism is in part a failure of theoretical imagination, as is his tardy and partial recognition that cultural criticism might productively involve a robust, sustained engagement with particular artifacts in popular culture and in everyday life.

Contemporary philosophical aestheticians are in danger of a similar failure. We are witnessing the second redemption of exclusionary white identitarianism in the US and the revival and growth of xenophobic right populism in Europe. Both of these developments rely heavily on aesthetic strategies, and so far we have had little to say about them. Taking on board the questions and resources of critical social theories—like critical race theory and decolonial feminism—would be one way to deepen our engagement with these pressing and aesthetically rich phenomena.

A second missed connection involves the institutional conditions that enable the aforementioned failure of theoretical imagination. If we think of Dewey’s indifference to the legacies of Reconstruction as the deliverance of a whitely epistemology of ignorance, it behooves us to consider the social conditions that produce and enable this ignorance (Sullivan and Tuana 2007; Mills 1997). José Medina might say at this point that the conditions for an epistemology of resistance were not sufficiently developed: Dewey was not enmeshed in the circuits of exchange and communities of inquiry that would have pushed back against—resisted—the easy ignorance of racial conditions that white supremacy cultivates even in well-meaning moral agents (Medina 2012). There is an easy story to tell about how this happened to Dewey, working as he did in a rigidly segregated academy. But once again, I mean to bracket the question of whether and how much this historical figure could have fought the constraints of his social environment. I am more interested in learning from his example and actively working to build more responsibly constructed communities of inquiry.

Undertaking philosophical reconstruction in this critical spirit means working on at least two levels. One level involves the sort of work professional philosophers usually do and are most comfortable doing: appealing to theoretical and conceptual considerations to recommend different ways of thinking. But a second level involves the sort of work we do too infrequently and too haphazardly: interrogating and grappling with the institutional conditions under which dominant ways of thinking attain their influence. This takes us back to Moten and Harney’s focus on ways of thinking and being together. Philosophy happens in social contexts, and some of these contexts happen to be curated by professional associations and scholarly societies. We often treat these associations like low-stakes social clubs, charged simply with organizing the next meeting in deference to whatever traditions and customs have governed every other meeting we can remember. But history sometimes brings us to crucial points at which the leaders of these organizations have to take seriously the burdens and opportunities of leadership and organizational design. We have reached one of those points, both because of general challenges facing humanistic scholarship in the higher education sector and because of the broader political challenges of the moment.

#### That prevents an emphasis on efficiency that furthers the drive towards total access, perfecting the algorithm of work under the guise of freedom and equitability

Harney & Moten, 15 – Stefano Harney, Professor of Strategic Management Education at Singapore Management University; and Fred Moten, Professor in the Department of Performance Studies, Tisch School of the Arts, NYU; 2015(“Mikey the Rebelator,” Performance Research, Vol. 20, Iss. 4, Fall 2015, pp. 141-145, Available to Subscribing Institutions via Taylor and Francis, Accessed via Michigan Libraries, bam)

THE REBELATOR

In Upon Westminster Bridge, Mikey Smith is jay-walking through the language.2 It's 1982, the beginning of logistical capitalism. The assembly line is snaking out of the factory and into his mouth. And he cyaan believe it. He won't believe it. He won't go to work. He comes from the property. He's been there before. He's come to undo. He's moved to dissemble. The gathering in his mouth is out of line.

With the rise of logistical capitalism it is not the product that is never finished but the production line, and not the production line, but its improvement. In logistical capitalism it is the continuous improvement of the production line that never finishes, that's never done, that's undone continuously. The sociologists caught a glimpse of this line and thought that they were seeing networks. The political scientist called this line globalization. The business professors named it and priced it as business process re-engineering. Mikey knew better.

Mikey veers back across the street to where Louise Bennett sits, talking about how she inspired him. We can see her in a clip, wronging rights with her words, advocate of an undone language open to respecting what you like, and liking what you respect. Now her words are everywhere, like whispers from a cotton tree, and they have to be. And logistics, which is to say access, is everywhere – again, because it wants to be.

But not just logistics; and not just any kind of access. The capitalist science of logistics can be represented by a simple formula: movement + access. But logistical capitalism subjects that formula to the algorithm: total movement + total access. Logistical capitalism seeks total access to your language, total translation, total transparency, total value from your words. And then it seeks more. At Queen Mary, University of London, before the counter-insurgency, we called this postcolonial capitalism. How does it feel to be a problem in someone else's supply chain? What else is a colonial regime but the imposition of psychopathic protocols of total access to bodies and land in the service of what today is called supply-chain management? The problem of the twenty-first century is the problem of the colour line of assembly.

This logistical capitalism, this postcolonial capitalism, uses the stored, stolen, historical value of words to press its point. But Mikey would not speak that way. He saw what was coming by misremembering what had come to pass. Mikey jay-walked through his audience as they listened the wrong way across his words. Mikey put his hands up to fight one night and surrendered to us. He fought, and by fighting surrendered, to what M. Jacqui Alexander called our ‘collectivized self-possession’3, to our hapticality, which is at the same time our collectivized dispossession. Because a rebelator defends our partiality, our incompleteness, our hands dispossessed to hold one another up in the battle of Zion. Mikey was a rebelator in the battle of Zion. Mikey the rebelator sabotaging a line of words(worth).

Mikey is talking to C. L. R. James on a bed in Brixton in South London, in an unsettled room, Linton Kwesi Johnson standing to the side. You have to move across the language because the language moves the line through you. The line moves now, the assembly line, the flow line, the high line, and that means you. You're moving to work like you always did but now you're working as you're moving, too. James is telling them he used to love Wordsworth and still does, but it was only when he got back to the Caribbean that he realized what was missing in that poetry because something else in that poetry was everywhere. James is talking about language as domination; Mikey is already having to deal with language as forced improvement in production, on the new and improved line, where the Man gives orders to His men. Mikey's working on an old new open secret logisticality, born in the hold, held together in loss and in being lost, and James is giving him some uncoordinates, a sea captain like Ranjit's father, high on the land now, low, shipped, stranded on a bed in Brixton, in an unsettled room. Mikey's not working on improving the English language. He's working on disproving it.

Mikey Smith deregulates the Queen's English in Mi Cyaan Believe It and he's not worried about being incomplete. He's jay-walking through the Queen's English, instituting a sound system to which her standard submits, right across down there so. He's walking across to it right now, on the gully side. Mikey the rebelator. He says that those have ‘been restless a full time, dem go get some rest’. But there's no rest with access; access troubles the unrest it came to steal, and still. This is the early moment of logistical capitalism, with James on the bed aged from industrial capitalism, and all that settler capitalism sedimented underneath them in London in the hard red earth. In an unsettled room they institute. They're the offline institute of the new line, the new poetics of the anti-line, the antillean, multi- matrilinear dispersion of drum and bass and grain against the grain of organized saying, catching logistics in logisticality's crosstown traffic, in crosstown traffic's constant violation of the crosswalk, the sanctioned intersection, the settled, hegemonic term. Mikey's more and less than perpendicular swerve cyaan believe that managed disturbance and keeps on fucking it up as a field of hypermusical staying, crossed between crossing and forgetting, contradicting and misremembering, revealing and rebelling, refusing to believe. Look the wrong way before you cross. Move the wrong way when you cross. That's how we semble.

When we move we move to access, which is to say we assemble and disassemble anew. And in logistical capitalism the assembly line moves with us by moving through us, accessing us to move and moving us to access. We can't deny access, because access is how we roll, and roll on, in and as our undercommon affectability, as Denise Ferreira da Silva might say.4 But we make access burn and we love that, the line undone in the undoing of every single product, our renewed assembly in the general disassembly, our dissed assembly offline on the line, strayed staying, stranded beneath the strand, at rest only in unrest, making all the wrong moves, because our doing and undoing ain't the same as theirs.5 They know, sometimes better than we do, that to move wrong, or not to move, is now no longer just an obstruction to logistics or an obstacle to progress. To move wrong or not to move is sabotage. It is an attack on the assembly line, a subversion of logistical capitalism. To move wrong is to deny access to capital by staying in the general access that capital desires and devours and denies. To move wrong, to move nought, is to have our own thing of not having, of handing and being handed; it is our continuous breaking up – before, and against that, we were told – of our continuous get together. But with the critical infrastructure that is the new line, and with the resilient response that protects it, the jay-walker becomes no longer just a rube in the way of logistics, a country bukee in traffic, but a saboteur, a terrorist, a demon. Jay-walkers do not sabotage by exodus or occupation as once a maroon, or a striking miner, or a ghost dancer may have. Jay-walkers disturb the production line, the work of the line, the assembly line, the flow line, by demanding inequality of access for all. When the line don't stop to let you catch your breath, jay-walkers stand around and say this stops today. Jay-walking is dissed assembly for itself. Such sabotage is punishable by death. It's hard to know what we institute when we don't institute but we do know what it feels like.

Total value and its violence not only never went away, but as da Silva says, they are the foundation of the present as time, the condition of time, of the world as a time–space logic founded on the first horrible logistics of sale, the first mass movement of total access.6 Now continuous improvement drives us toward total value, makes all work incomplete, makes us move to produce, compels us to get online. We are liberated from work in order to work more, to work harder. We are violently invited to exercise our right to connect, our right to free speech, our right to choose, our right to evaluate, our right to right individuality in order that we may improve the production line running through our liberal dreams. Freedom through work was never the slave's cry but we hear it all around us today. Continuous improvement is the metric and metronomic meter of uplift. Those who won't improve, those who won't collectivize and individuate with the correct neurotic correctness, those who do the same thing again, those who revise, those who tell the joke you've heard and cook the food you've had and take the walk you've walked, those who plan to stay and keep on moving, those who keep on moving wrong – those are the ones who hold everybody back, fucking up the production line that's supposed to improve us all. They like being incomplete. They like being incomplete and incompleting one another. Their incompleteness is said to be a dependency, a bad habit. They're said to be partial, patchy, sketchy. They lack coordinates. They're collectively uncoordinated in total rhythm. They're in(self)sufficient.

Paolo Friere thought our incompleteness is what gave us hope.7 It is our incompleteness that inclines us toward one another. For Friere, the more we think of ourselves as complete, finished, whole, individual, the more we cannot love or be loved. Is it too much to put this the other way around? To say, by way of Friere, that love is the undercommon self-defence of being-incomplete? This seems important now when our incompleteness is something we are invited and then compelled to address and improve, when we are told to be impatient with it, and embarrassed by it. We need to be intact. We're told to raise our buzz because we're all fucked up. But in our defence we love that we are complete only in a plained incompletion, which they would have undone, finished, owned, and sent on down the line. We do mind working because we do mind dying.

THE CONSULTANT

The consultant is not here to provide solutions, innovation or even advice. The consultant exists to demonstrate access in the era of logistical capitalism. The consultant is not an ideologue. Ideology operates here only for the consultant himself. He is demonstrably the only one who believes his bullshit, but fortunately for him this is not the point, not his point. The consultant literalizes access to workplaces, demonstrating their openness by showing up in their midst, like a drone. One day you come to work and there he is sitting next to the boss. Nothing she says or does is as important as this demonstration of access. What the consultant introduces into the imposed, exposed workers’ corp is the algorithm. The consultant bears the algorithm, which violates in the name of completion. When the consultant brings his algorithmic charge, the body of the workers, that undesired and constantly invaded enclosure, is finished. We are rendered complete, made free, by the work, in the work, of the algorithm. We are done, and done in by, the consultant's forced, aggressive incorporation of an undoing that was of and for itself, of and for ourself, the undoing we keep on making in the face of every sovereign invasion, every violent ascription of words and worth and (the) work. The consultant completes, so that he can access the private loop of a thwarted desire to be intact. It is not the product or even the organization that interests the algorithm of work. It is the production line's infinite curvature. The algorithm of work is a demonstration within a demonstration. With access comes (the necessity of) improvement, which always takes the form of a demand for more access. As the introduction of the consultant inside the organization demonstrates access, so the introduction of the algorithm demonstrates improvement. The algorithm is the machine of self-improvement; as such, it is the only machine that makes new machines. There is a mirror – marking and instantiating self-envisaging's shared exclusivity, that scary, silly, Stuart Smalleyish binary solipsism – that stands between it and man, the other only machine that makes new machines and, in so doing, improves itself. The mirror between man, the mirror, and The Man, man's mirror, is the algorithm. Meanwhile, the inhuman, which is our fleshly inherence and inhabitation in the general mechanics of a general disregard for self-reflection, makes machines because it does not want to improve. Before the algorithm, machines came from strikes, from resistance, from sabotage. Machines made from the algorithm do not wait for the class struggle.

The algorithm of work subjects every labour process on the production line to undoing, disassembly and incompletion, in order to demand it be completed better, assembled better, done better. It leaves behind not an improved organization but a metric to ensure the organization will never be satisfied. The metric measures everything against its last instance, ensuring that the last instance never comes. The metric demands more access, more measurement of access, more movement, more assembly, more measure of the last instance, which is given in and as enclosure. The consultant is still talking but it does not matter now what he says. The algorithm of work has arrived, algorithmic surplus has gone viral. If the settler could not be heard over the screams of primitive accumulation, and the citizen could not be heard over the noise of the machines, the consultant cannot be heard over the click of the metrics. Mikey heard this noise and walked the other way, another way, so the algorithm could not pass through, so we could hold him up and pass him along.

Nahum Chandler reminds us of a term W. E. B. DuBois invented and employed; ‘democratic despotism’8. When the consultant cannot demonstrate access, and therefore the algorithm cannot demonstrate improvement, the consultant calls for policy as once (and still) the citizen calls for heteropatriachal nationalism or the settler for racist manifest destiny. Policy is past all that, even though all that's not past. Policy comes in to diagnose what's blocking access, and what's blocking access are ‘those people’. What's wrong with those people in Detroit who want water, in British Columbia who want land, in Manila who want some place to stay? Policy says there is something wrong with those people that makes it so that the consultant can't get access. But it is the other way around. The consultant is denied access – those people deny him access – because they embrace the general access-in-antagonism that he denies. And so policy must be called. Self- defence becomes the disease. Love becomes the problem because love is the problem, the self-defence of the accessible. But, hey, maybe governance can help, which is to say maybe those practising self-defence may be willing to self-diagnose, self-reflect, self-improve! One way or another policy will proscribe, or policy will get posed – as democracy, as democratic despotism, where everyone is given the chance to say there is something wrong with those people. Democratic despotism is the imposition of policy and its violent possibilities and impossibilities on the wrong(ed).

Because the thing is, the consultant's not wrong, the algorithm of work is not malfunctioning, the policy hustler is not misdiagnosing. We're wrong, which is why we're wronged. We are incomplete. Moreover, they got the very idea of incompleteness from us! Another word for incompleteness is study, or more precisely, revision. The consultant gets this revision from us, from study, from our sumptuous revisions of one another out of existence, as existence. Study happens and it don't stop. In study, we are engaged consciously and unconsciously. We revise, and then again. This is not just about distinguishing improvement as capitalist efficiency. That is too easy to dismiss. It is about improvement itself, the time-concept, the moral imperative, the aesthetic judgement, which is to say capitalist improvement founded in and on black flesh, its female informality. Revision has no end and no connection to improvement, never mind efficiency.

So the consultant does and undoes institutions but can't access instituted life, can't open black life, can't uncover queer life, can't expose feminist planning around the ‘kitchen table’ as Barbara and Beverly Smith called it and Tiziana Terranova calls to it again, all noting certain paradoxes of freedom and sequestration in little general intellects of surreal life.9 He can't access open secrets, can't incomplete what is already incomplete, can't deform what is always informal already and yet; they can't believe and this leads to the state emergency that goes under such names as resilience and preparedness. When democratic despotism fails, simple despotism in the name of democracy must be imposed. Resilience is the name for the violent destruction of things that won't give, won't return to form, won't bend when access is demanded, won't be flexible and (com)pliant. Stopping when you are told to stop and moving along when you are told to move along demonstrates resilience and composure; but broken, breaking, dissed assembly demonstrates itself openly, secretly, dissembling in captured but inaccessible glance, for us, to us, as incomplete and much more than complete. Its daimonic performance can't be individuated and won't be performed.