Critique of Extractive Reason:

Time and the Elemental Coloniality of Capitalism

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For Areni:

"You, flowing through selves

toward You."[1]

[1] Audre Lorde, "Now That I am Forever with Child"

INTRODUCTION

Towards a Materialism of the Mine

"Perhaps it is the reality of a future as durable and far reaching as the past, a future that will be shaped by those who have been pressed to the margins, by those who have been dismissed as irrelevant surplus, by those who have been cloaked with the demon's cape; perhaps it is the contemplation of that future that has occasioned the tremble of latter-day prophets afraid that the current disequilibria is a stirring, not an erasure. That not only is this history not dead, but that it is about to take its first unfettered breath."

Toni Morrison "The Foreigner's Home"

The poem dreams of bodies always leadless, bearing
only things ordinary
as water & light

Aracelis Girmay, *the black maria*

"The search for and discovery of gold in new continents" Karl Marx writes, "plays so great a role in the history of revaluation, because by its means colonization is improvised and made to flourish as in a hothouse" (1993, 225). Following Sylvia Wynter, I locate the beginning of this long trajectory of "revaluation" in the Portuguese arrival in West Africa and their traffic in the exchange of "gold or slaves" as "the necessary and indispensable prelude, not only to Columbus' own voyage but also to the specific pattern of relations [. . .] between Christian Europe and the non-Christian peoples of the world to which Columbus and his crew had newly arrived (1995, 10-11). Not only would this pattern of relations "initiate more changes on the earth's surface than had been brought about in all the previous eras of Man's existence upon the planet" (Wynter N.D. 385), they would also usher the "root expansion of thought" (1995, 19) and a radical new definition of Man to rationalize the violently uneven distribution of wealth and

sovereignty central to colonial plunder and imperial statecraft. The historical relationship between extraction, merchant capitalism, and the secular revaluation of humanity along racial lines is subtly captured in Wynter's use of the phrase "gold *or* slaves" above. While its uneasy logic of equivalence signals the emergent fungibility of the enslaved body as a commodity, the contingency of "or" speaks to the "improvisational" quality of colonialism as it will come to be formalized in the act of exchange (whereby the concrete particulars of an exchange are irrelevant once they are translated through a universal referent of value, i.e. economic and racial *currency*).

What Wynter's apt phrasing also foregrounds, I will show, is a formal homology between the *metallic* valuation central to extraction and the *racial* valuation central to the emergent labor regimes that co-evolve in the colonial mine, as evinced by Spanish discourses of mining and natural law. By reading the emergence of gold as a global currency alongside the epistemic revolution of Western humanism I argue that we can parse how these (re)valuations mutually inaugurate the economic system and racial economy of knowledge that stubbornly persist to this day, leading to the climatological "hothouse" of our collapsing global environment. Reading Marx and Wynter comparatively in this way, I will identify a dialectic of *extraction* and *abstraction* operative in both accounts to elaborate the first and originary form of what I call "extractive reason" to name both material motive and mode of knowledge production. I ground "extractive reason" historically in this manner not to rehearse the well charted racial foundations of primitive accumulation but to enable theoretical entry into the racializing function of mining that I argue capitalism will inevitably systematize and perpetually reproduce throughout subsequent eras of industrial, post-industrial, and financial capital.

In so asserting, my project is instructed by studies of racial capitalism and the often-repeated necessity to "stretch" (Fanon 2004) Marxist categories to adequately account for the

role of race, colonialism, and slavery in capitalist accumulation. This theoretical "stretching" generally falls into two categories. The first category attends to the historical magnitude of primitive accumulation. Works like Eric Williams' seminal text *Capitalism and Slavery* and Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* attend, in different ways, to the underacknowledged *scale* of primitive accumulation and the massive role transatlantic slavery and colonial extraction played in the emergence of European industrial capitalism and maintenance of global economic inequality. In addition to recalibrations of scale, the *duration* of primitive accumulation has also been adapted through the important work of Cedric Robinson (1983), Robin Blackburn (1997), Silvia Federici (2004), Glen Sean Coulthard (2014) and numerous others, and it is now widely accepted that the extractive strategies of land expropriation, labor coercion, and state repression central to capital's bloody emergence are ongoing features of capitalist accumulation rather than a distinct "era" of egregious violence. Within this tradition, there is a tendency to focus on neo-colonial *events* as evidence of primitive accumulation's contemporaneity (this is particularly prevalent in petrocultural discourses regarding the capture of new extractive frontiers). By positing these events on the spatial and temporal periphery of capitalism, I argue that this approach fails to adequately grasp the foundational coloniality of capitalism "proper." Put another way, the colonial operation, largely reduced to a function of state sanctioned "theft" and "plunder" is posited as an epiphenomenon of capitalism.

The second dominant theoretical approach to race and capital involves a categorical expansion whereby race is understood as one (among many) identity categories by which the devastating effects of capitalism are distributed. This approach echoes in the vital work of Ruth Wilson Gilmore, who asserts that "Capitalism requires inequality, racism enshrines it." While

this is entirely true and productively notes the systemic function of racism, race is still figured as contingent rather than necessary to capital.[1] What I want to explore, rather, is how race, and specifically antiblackness, enabled inequality to become structurally necessary for capitalism in the first place.

At stake is an understanding, to quote Denise Ferreira da Silva, of how the "total (past, present, and future) value expropriated [from indigenous lands and enslaved bodies] is in the very structures (in blood and flesh) of global capital "(2014, 83). It seems that to grasp this "total value," it is not enough to register the "total violence" of slavery in the past, or to name slavery's ongoing legacies in the present, or even to elaborate those legacies' socio-economic determinism of the future. It is a matter, she writes, of suspending "the view that all there is is in Time and Space" (83-84). While I am under no illusion of achieving such a radical suspension in this work, I do think the mine—as a juridic-economic architecture of human and non-human energy capture and "total violence"—can offer one way of thinking the "total value" of racialized extraction not just as it has sustained global capital historically but how it continues to do so *formally.* So while I attend to the gold fields and silver mines in their historical specificity in this introduction, and analyze future iterations of the U.S. fossil-carceral nexus in subsequent chapters, I want to emphasize that I am less interested in charting a historical genealogy of anti-black forms than I am in elaborating a formal totality by which capitalism annihilates space by time (Marx, 1993, 524) through the vector of antiblackness.

Central to this inquiry is the framework of *conquest* as elaborated at the intersections of indigenous studies and black studies. My use of the term conquest throughout this project is

[1] To be clear, I am not identifying a theoretical "oversight" on Gilmore's part as I don't think the type of formal methodology I'm engaging in this project is necessary for elaborating the political economy of the carceral state, which Gilmore does incredibly well.

inspired specifically by Tiffany Lethabo King, who argues that "conquest is a larger conceptual and material terrain than settler colonialism and far more suited for the regional/hemispheric particularities of coloniality in the Americas and the specific ways diasporic Blackness gives conquest, genocide, and settlement its form and feel" (Lethabo King 80-81). This framework demonstrates how anti-indigeneity and antiblackness are historically and structurally intertwined, but by no means commensurable forms of violence. This orientation will guide my analysis of how racial capitalism systematizes land expropriation and time theft as co-constitutive components of accumulation at the same time its abstracting force reifies the dialectic of "land and flesh" along racial lines.[2]

My use of conquest as an analytic for thinking about how mining partakes in the "making and unmaking of Man" via Wynter also emerges out of dissatisfaction with the predominate absenting of race in eco-critical discourses. These occlusions are particularly prevalent in theorizations of the Anthropocene that turn on post-human and interspecies entanglements to grapple with the exigencies of climate collapse. As Axelle Karera persuasively explains, even when critics acknowledge that "uneven extraction and distribution of resources in the service of capitalism are the conditions for ecological damages caused by modern fossil-fuel technology for example, Anthropocene thinking has generally been unable to yield a sustained critique of the

[2] While a more thorough bridging of the work in indigenous studies and black studies could be affective for elaborating the relationship between de-colonization and abolition (as elaborated in collaborative works such as *Red Nation Rising* and *Otherwise Worlds*) such an approach exceeds the parameters of this project's current form, which applies a far narrower focus on the comparatively undertheorized relationship between systemic anti-blackness and extraction as inherently implicated in both New World mining and settler statecraft. That being said, my analytic approach to extraction would not be possible without the work of indigenous scholars and Water Protectors who have long elaborated (and resisted) the extractive legacies of New World colonialism operative in the ongoing creation of energy infrastructures such as the hydroelectric dams that flooded massive swaths of Sioux territory or the oil pipelines that traverse Nishnaabeg lands and waterways (these two examples are elaborated, respectively, in Nick Estes' *Our History Is the Future* and Winona la Duke's persistent critique of the Enbridge corporation: https://www.winonaladuke.com/winona-blog/pipeline-is-colonialism).

racist origins of global warming capable, in turn, of exposing the limits of its desire to rethink—to 'revamp' perhaps—the concept of the "human" (Karera 38). While not traditionally associated with eco-critical theory, Wynter's work is inherently attentive to environmental violence and her delineation of the colonial co-emergence of Nature and Man could very well offer a corrective "origin" story of planetary collapse.[3] However, what is perhaps more important for our present purposes is the way in which her critique of Western Man's over-representation and universalization allows us to understand the enormous stakes of narrative endeavors like the Anthropocene *as modes of racialization* that threaten to normalize the very master codes of "selection and dysselection" that create racially differentiated experiences of environmental vulnerability in the first place. Her work can help reveal, for example, how new materialism methodologically participates in the process of white human self-actualization by subsuming the racial particularities of environmental violence under the universal models such as "vibrant matter" (Jane Bennet 2010), "Kin," and "sym-poesies" (Donna Haraway 2016) creating what Dixa Ramírez-D'Oleo calls "forced or coerced relationality" (2023, 8) between whiteness and indigeneity that persistently hinge on the continued erasure of blackness as an enabling category for extraction. While I don't discuss the Anthropocene debates in any further detail in this project, my engagement with Wynter and colonial mining discourses will implicitly show that

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[3] Wynter suggests as much in a footnote from "The Ceremony Found: Towards the Autopoetic Turn/Overturn, its autonomy of Human Agency and Extraterritoriality of (Self-)Cognition." In response to "human-dominated geological epoch" of the "Anthropocene" era, Wynter "propose(s) otherwise." She writes, "Instead, from the perspective of the Ceremony Found's new answer to the question of who-we-are, the *non-natural* processes directly causal of this potentially impending "sixth extinction" are themselves driven by our continued performative-enactment of the monohumanist conception of Western-bourgeois, ethno-class *Man*(2), through whose *genre*-specific "inner eye" (Ellison, 1952) our planetary eco/life-support system is classified as a "natural resource" to be exploited and whose destructive environmental costs are classified as a "negative externality" also within the *genre*-specific "inner eye" of *Man*(2)'s (ethno-class) master discipline of economics" (2015, 240).

the vitalist turn, proselytizing posture, and apocalypticism that animates these contemporary theories are far from new discursive gestures, testifying to the way in which the "euro-cosmic vision of the world" is not "discarded," but "transformed" anew (Wynter N.D. 386). It is to the emergence of this vision that I will now turn.

Part I: Gold, Silver, and Colonial *Conversion*

The Portuguese landfall in today's Senegal would inaugurate an epistemological retotalization by challenging the tenets of Christian geography central to the European Scholastic model, which maintained, according to Wynter, "a founding ontological divide between the divine/ celestial realms and the human/ terrestrial (at the level of astronomy), and between the *habitable-within-God's arbitrary grace*, and the *uninhabitable outside it* (at the level of earth's geography)" (1995, 26). As Wynter explains, "this series of symbolically coded Spirit / Flesh representations mapped onto the 'space of Otherness' of the physical cosmos" both "functioned to absolutize the theocentric descriptive statement of the human" as well as "that statement's overall explanatory thesis of supernatural causation" (2003, 279). This metaphysical instrumentalism was accompanied by what Wynter describes as an "epistemological resignation" with respect to the cognitive capacity of "fallen man" being able to come *to know the rules* that governed everyday processes of nature. (1995, 26). However, Portuguese conquest on the African coast would disprove the previously asserted uninhabitable (and analogically "fallen") categorization of the "torrid zone" they now occupied. In so doing, these merchants would unintentionally but fundamentally destabilize the dominant "classificatory schemas" and render emergent organizing principles *improvisable* and deployable by laymen like Columbus. Indeed, it is Columbus' own visit to the Portuguese trading fort, El Mina, "that was to lie at the origin of his own "grand design" (1995, 9). This encounter with the *mine* (albeit in name only in this early

example) foreshadows what I argue is the onto-epistemological function of colonial extractive sites as spaces where classificatory schemas of race are renegotiated and instantiated according to shifting experiences of habitability enacted through a new and irreparably racialized division of labor.[4] By Columbus' radical re-imagining, the Scholastic totemic schema, or vertical *spatial* metaphor of nonhomogenous matter, ontologically differentiated by degrees of spiritual redemption becomes differentiated *temporally* between the already spiritually redeemed and not-yet-converted idolators. What arises is a justification of imperial *conquest* by the imperative of religious *conversion* – an imperative hastened by the pressures of Columbus' apocalyptic millenarian belief in the immanent second coming of Christ.

It is on this "counterterrain of reasoning" (1995, 23), opened up by New World extractive endeavors that two contesting "descriptive statements of the human"—theocentric man and the political subject of the state —would become a topic of heated debate among Spanish jurists and theologians tasked with justifying the brutal compulsory labor regimes deemed necessary to extract New World wealth in the name of Spanish sovereignty. The debate over whether Amerindians should be primarily defined in religious terms and thus "humanely subjugated" or in political terms that warrant either violent "civilization" efforts or outright extermination is captured most famously in the polemics of Bartolomé de Las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda respectively. While the discursive categories of selection and dysselection would be hotly contested, the metaphysical architecture of Scholasticism that undergirded both positions would remain unchanged, much like the degree and nature of the genocidal violence it helped to justify.

[4] The colonial racialization of environmental habitability has been discussed as a rationalization of the plantations system and its labor hierarchies. We see this notably in Williams' *Capitalism and Slavery* as he replaces the "climatic myth" with his political economic analysis, and in *Ariels Ecology*, by Monique Allewaert, who might be said to subtly reproduce a form of environmental racialization with her conception of "parahumanity."

Mining provided a particularly capacious application of ostensibly incompatible religious, economic, and political justifications for the compulsion of indigenous labor. Columbus' voracious lust for gold and silver, for example, did not complicate the religious rationales of his "grand design" even in their newly improvised forms. As Patricia Seed shows, this is due in large part to the Spanish belief that God buried precious metals in the earth for his followers to discover (Seed 69).[5] The fundamental compatibility between economic and religious ends under this paradigm is on particularly striking display in sixteenth century Jesuit scholar José de Acosta's assertion that "The Eternal Lord" chose to "enrich the lands of the worlds farthest away, and inhabited by less civil people and there put the greatest abundance of mines that has ever been found." This proves, he asserts, "that the Lord was making use of [Spanish] pretensions for his sovereign ends" (Seed 69). Drawing our attention to the global implications of this quote, I want to expand Seed's insights to suggest that it is precisely in the colonial mine that economic and religious ends cohere most forcefully with the imperative for *conversion*, that is, when understood in the context of the then-predominant Scholastic notion of "prime matter." Orlando Bentancor's recent text, *The Matter of Empire* is especially helpful in this regard as he elaborates the foundational relationship between New World mining discourses and natural law as it is applied to Amerindian labor and Spanish governance. Prime matter he explains, is "the principle of the natural subordination of imperfect matter to perfect form" (12) exemplified by the Aristotelian example of an artist creating a statue out of bronze: "Matter cannot rule in the same way that bronze cannot produce a statue out of itself" (76). What arises in the colonial context is "a strict homology" between hierarchies of humanity and of physical matter (76). Both

[5] While the affective register is inverted, it is interesting to note how this religious providentialism is rhetorically reproduced in the eco-critical idea of a "resource curse," as in, for example, Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor.*

the non-human and human registers of the hylomorphic division between "active" form and "passive" matter are operative in the mining relation, as, on one level, the yet-unrefined metals function as the prime matter perfected by Spanish smelting and refining practices, and on another level, indigenous laborers, "imperfect" according to standards of humanity and civilization, are commanded by the perfecting form of Spanish authority. Read alongside the providential view of God's hidden riches noted above, we can see how this *labor* can also be read as a subtle act of conversion as the indigenous miner is conscripted into the governing religious teleology of colonial extraction. Of course, conversion can never be complete by design: if Amerindians could fully achieve "salvation," then their labor could no longer be justifiably coerced (naturally this was a major point of contention in the debates noted above and discussed further below). In this way, race becomes a mark, as numerous scholars have noted, of perpetual belatedness. [6]

It is by this strange logic that Columbus can confidently declare: "Gold is a wonderful thing! Its owner is master of all he desires. Gold can even enable souls to enter Paradise!" (quoted in Marx 1993, 229). With this enthusiasm, he would establish gold fields across the island of present-day Dominican Republic and Haiti.[7] In doing so, he would transplant the deeply

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[6] Achille Mbembe, for example, writes, "the notion of race made it possible to represent non-European human groups as trapped in a lesser form of being" (Mbembe 2017,17), the "not-yet-human" separated both by time and space. This project is also in conversation with Mbembe's *Critique of Black Reason*, as he discusses the creation of "bodies of extraction" and the logic of disposability as products of racial logic, which positions race as "one of the raw materials from which difference and *surplus*—a kind of life that can be wasted and spent without limit—are produced" (Mbembe 2017, 34). Mbembe writes, "Race is an instrumentality that makes it possible both to name the surplus and to commit it to waste and unlimited spending. It is what makes it acceptable to categorize abstractly in order to stigmatize, disqualify morally, and eventually imprison or expel" (35). It is in this spirit that I analyze extraction in this dissertation. However, my evocation of bodies of extraction emerges from an important inversion, as noted above, that is: rather than read these processes of abstract categorization as a product of racial logic that is mobilized to rationalize the extractive violence of racial capital, my contention is that extraction, as a form of abstract categorization, arises from the value structure of capital itself—that is, as its racializing force.

[7] Central to this uneasy process of extractive "conversion" is the desacralization of indigenous land and cultural practices of gold production. As Bigelow explains, "For Taínos, gold mining and refining occurred within a larger matrix of gendered social norms and cosmological principles of balance. When

entrenched European hierarchies connected with mining that, for example, associate it with criminality, harkening back to Roman precedent. [8] European scholars and historians also abided by a strict differentiation between "the art of *mining"* and the "simple operations of *digging*" (Marx 1993, 178), and while this division is made according to hierarchies of material and immaterial labor, it was only in the colonial mine—with labor upon the "yet-to-be refined" physical stratum enacted by the "yet to be (spiritually) redeemed"—that indigenous workers themselves are represented in terms similar to the very elements they extract. This gesture, enabled by race, is evident in the shifting terminology used by Spanish colonizers. For example, the term *minero* shifts from "mineral" to "miner," that is, "from a physical or metaphorical source of wealth to a human body whose labor generated revenue for an overseas empire" (Bigelow 15), thus blurring the division between laborer and land under the emergent category of raw material.

New World Labor and the "Mouth of Hell"

This new labor regime was devastating for the indigenous populations who were relocated to mining cities and exposed to new diseases and prolonged labor, sifting and processing gold without the breaks that came with their traditional harvest [and extraction]

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artists fashioned metals into sacred objects, they restored a sense of balance to the world by honoring the fruits of the earth. This is not to say that Taíno metalworking traditions were ecologically innocuous; after all, they demanded substantial amounts of water and charcoal to wash minerals and fuel fires. Rather, these practices occurred in a different context, on a different scale, and with a different sense of things than Spanish miners and metallurgists observed in their artisan labors (Bigelow 34).[7] The colonial systematization of extraction on the island marks the process by which, to borrow Wynter's phrasing, an imperative to maintain the "the flow of life" is replaced by the demand to sustain "the flow of gold" (Wynter 1995).

[8] These beliefs insist (to quote Marx, ventriloquizing Ovid) that "One can determine *apriori* a people's degree of civilization if one knows no more than the metal, gold, copper, silver and iron, which it uses for weapons, tools, or ornamentation" (1993, 182).Columbus and his fellow colonizers would also belabor under (but ultimately ignore) the prohibitions against mining articulated in antiquity by authorities such as Pliny the Elder, who warned against mining because he "feared the consequences of a convenient means of circulation–opulence, increase in slaves, accumulation, land ownership" (Marx 1993, 182-183).

cycles (Blackburn 133). Consequently, at Columbus' request to the Spanish crown for more laborers, pack animals, and mining tools, the first enslaved African miners arrived in 1510 from El Mina, and by 1520, African gold miners outnumbered indigenous laborers in the Caribbean (Bigelow 58). With the transplantation of enslaved Africans, the racialized grammars of mining labor would shift yet again, to now include an uneasy conflation of the indigenous and African workers. For example, Columbus' royal refiner and historian, Oviedo, or "Pliny of the Indies" (36), would place gold miners "who dig ('indios y esclavos') or decide ('el hombre minero') into different racial categories" (30)[9] while leaving the European division between intellectual/physical labor unchanged. This marks, as Aníbal Quijano shows, the beginning of a new era of race as determinative of the "coloniality of power," where "specific forms of control of work" is "articulated with each 'race'. And so the control of some specific work could be, at the same time, the control of some specific, dominated people. This new technology of domination/exploitation in which race /work was articulated so as to appear 'naturally' associated has been, so far, exceptionally successful" (Quijano 220).[10]

By Wynter's account, the emergence of the triadic model (white-native-black) would initiate a new economic logic of *relatively devalued labor* enabled precisely through the colonial logic of conversion (be it into a spiritual or civic sheepfold) as it is unevenly applied to indigenous and black populations. As subjects of the evangelizing mission (according to Las Casas) or a "civilizing" mission (re: Sepulveda), the Amerindian could no longer be justifiably subjected to outright slavery. Wynter argues that it is ultimately Sepulveda's rationale that would

[9] Beneath the bad faith claims of technical inferiority, is the material fact, as Bigelow shows, that the first African miners sent from El Mina were highly skilled at mining.
[10] For a far more expansive analysis of extractivism in South America than my brief glance here, see Macarena Gomez-Barris' *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspective.*

prevail, leading to a new "degodded" definition of man that would weaponize culture, rationality, and civic deference (rather than religious devotion) as the categories by which the "space of Otherness" is continuously racialized. "The Sepulveda syndrome," she shows, would prevail in the plantation system as the diasporic transplantation of enslaved Africans was presupposed to constitute a complete fracture from their culture of origin.[11] Unbound to even the pretense of the conversion imperative, Africans would be considered "the only *legitimately enslavable* population group (1995, 11) and would thus be deployed "as the totally disposable, coercible, and unpaid labor force that alone made possible the accelerated economic development of the Americas" (1995, 11). Not only would they "serve to free the indigenous peoples from the outright slavery to which they had been reduced in the immediate decades after 1492" (1995, 11), they would also "play a central role in the instituting of the bases of the new social structure" (1995, 11). In so asserting, it is important to note that Wynter is not simply elaborating a new racial hierarchy of abjection, she is naming the process by which race comes to signify an "innately determined difference" —a process that is enabled specifically by the category of blackness.

This sheds important light on the naturalization of the racial division of labor Quijano notes above. This process of essentializing, I argue, is exacerbated by the structure of the colonial mine itself, particularly as operations shift from the surface capture of gold to the

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[11] Against the discursive cultural stripping associated with colonial account of African transplantation, Wynter offers the term / process of *indigenization* as the "dialectical process of resistance and adaptation" (N.D. 222). Such actions include the cultivation of the plot structure to grow ancestral crops, such as yams for direct use rather than profit (N.D. 52), the "revaluation of African culture" (N.D. 16) and slave revolts. As Wynter writes, "Black slavery in the Caribbean was synonymous with black revolt against slavery. And these revolts would be crucial to the indigenization process" (N.D. 71).

subterranean extraction of silver. Recall the Scholastic totemic schema noted above that differentiated between the atmospherically heavier, submerged elements of the dark and uninhabitable "fallen" zone and the lighter, higher celestial realm. As I have shown, following Wynter, the colonial telos of the global conversion imperative in some sense flattened the lateral spatial divisions onto a horizontal geographic plane occupied by subjects that are now *temporally* divided between the spiritually redeemed and the not-yet converted. Within the subterranean colonial mine, I argue, labor hierarchies combine again with the temporal grammars of metallurgy and prime matter (whereby miners and the metals they extract are conceived in terms of spiritual and physical *refinement*) to reconstitute the totemic scholastic schema in microcosmic form. Put another way, the spatial metaphor of the celestial chain of being and the temporal register of the conversion telos converge in the stratigraphic imagery of the mine, as the lower stratum (associated with the nonwhite "less redeemed" laboring subject) is, metallurgically, "less refined" than—and geologically "prior" to—the surface stratum (associated with white Spanish authority). In this way, the positionality of indigenous and African laborers within the mine reifies the racist assumptions that underpin their subjugation as (relatively) devalued labor. A causal tautology emerges: Who is fit to labor underground? Devalued labor. Whose labor is devalued? Those who labor underground.[12]

As we can see in colonial apologia of the *encomienda* and *mita* systems, these reifications are enabled by the radically shifting terms of habitability operative in the micro-climate of the mine shafts. Acosta's *Natural and Moral History of the Indies* (1590) clarifies the

[12] The mine, in this way, could be read as an example of what Alexander Weheliye has theorized as "racializing assemblages." Racializing assemblages, he writes, "articulate relational intensities between human physiology and flesh, producing racial categories, which are subsequently coded as natural substances, whether pure or impure, rather than as the territorializing articulations of these assemblages" (50-51).

epistemological force of these atmospheric considerations and their profound role in the "making and unmaking of Man."[13] Acosta spends over a hundred pages of his text marveling at how the New World is in fact habitable contrary to prior beliefs regarding the so-called torrid zone. The lush landscape and pleasant climate he evokes is sharply contrasted by his account of the silver mines of Potosi, which he refers to as the "mouth of hell." The miners, he writes,

> work there in *perpetual darkness*, with no idea of when it is day or night; and as these are places never visited by the sun, not only is there perpetual darkness but it is also extremely cold, with a very *heavy atmosphere* unfit for man's nature; and so it happens that those who enter the mine for the first time feel weak and dizzy, as happened to me, experiencing nausea and cramps in the stomach. Acosta, 310, *emphasis added* [14]

Acosta, being unfit for the climate of the mine, fortifies his position as Western Man. While the unnaturalness of the labor conditions serves to further distinguish him from the miners and deepen the racial divide between himself and the native other, it also establishes Acosta as an *empirical* authority through his heightened emphasis on the miners' blindness and insensitivity to the natural rhythms of the day, which, read alongside his extended catalogue of local flora and fauna highlights his scientific prowess in contrast to the laborers. In addition to his empirical authority, he also establishes his *moral* authority in his condemnation of the barbarity of the *mita* system. Notably, his demands are for reform rather than the complete abolition of these labor regimes (and their repressive techniques), which he argues would sow chaos and entail Spanish

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[13] In a more sustained analysis of Acosta's work, Daniel Nemser discusses the silver mines in the context of primitive and *spiritual* accumulation by taking up Giorgio Agamben and Achille Mbembe's notions of "zones of exceptions." While I agree with Nemser that the silver mines functioned as technologies of primitive accumulation, I read them not as zones of exceptions but as sites where the dyselected are interiorized into an emergent and racialized social form.

[14] At the end of this passage, Acosta interestingly surmises: "Such is the power of money, for the sake of which men do and suffer so much. Not without reason does Pliny exclaim, when discussing this, "we penetrate the inner parts of the earth and seek riches even in the place of the damned" (310-311)

withdrawal from the Americas. It is interesting to note how the sensationalizing descriptions and the address to a European readership (hailed elsewhere as "those to whom God has shown such good mercy in not making them miners") (Bigelow 2) all seem to signal incipient strategies for white self-actualization characteristic of the sentimental modes of the 18th and 19th century. This speaks, perhaps, to the persistence of this "colonial mode of relation" operative in (comparatively) "well-meaning" appeals to reform.

The multiple discursive registers in Acosta's text speak to his various roles as a "Scholastic humanist, a baroque political theorist, the father of modern ethnography, and a precursor to modern empirical science" (Bentancor 154), and to the variety of pseudo-scientific and scientific discourses that inform his racial worldview. In addition to alchemy and the metallurgical sciences, colonial accounts of mining are also informed by an emergent understanding of the "fossil record" as a stratigraphic ledger of time and dead matter. In the same way that the definition of Man, by Wynter's reading, would be re-secularized in the 19th century under the auspices of Darwin and evolutionary biology, we can see how the image of Man carved out by the colonial mine is particularly rife for its own manner of secularization (from theocratic to natural-scientific Man) by the geologic sciences (which in fact heavily influenced Darwin).[15] Both of these discourses—evolutionary biology and geologic sciences—would racialize "fitness" and re-cast the terms of selection and dyselection along temporal degrees of evolutionary actualization. But as a study of dead matter and specifically of *extinction*, it is the field of geology that would echo the genocidal nature of its New World precursors with

[15] Katherine Yusoff's persuasive analysis in *A Billion Black Anthropocene or None,* shows how geology, like evolutionary sciences, would indeed become a deeply racialized and racializing scientific discourse. My attention to these processes in these early colonial examples is influenced by her discussion of how race becomes "thoroughly sedimented in the bedrock of geology and its categorizing of fossil objects in time" in a manner that "figures the question of race within and through geologic classifications and its descriptive modes of extractive *pre*configuration" (Yusoff 2018, 79).

particularly jarring clarity in its assertion that the "powers of extermination are no prerogative of man" (Lyell, 276). Charles Lyell, so-called "Father of Geology" writes, "in thus obtaining possession of the earth by conquest, and defending our acquisitions by force, we exercise no exclusive prerogative" (Lyell, 276). He continues, "Every species which has spread itself from a small point over a wide area must, in like manner, have marked its progress by the diminution or the entire extirpation of some other, and must maintain its ground by a successful struggle against the encroachments of other plants and animals" (Lyell, 276). Here we can also see nascent forms of eco-fascism animating this discourse.

In addition to foregrounding the emergent role of science in the rationalization of conquest, Acosta's call for reform demonstrates central tenets of the mining relation that will be examined in detail in this project. The first such tenet is the instantiation of *contingency* as a weapon of colonial violence. As Bentancor writes,

> "Acosta admits that the *mitayo* system is a violation of the natural freedom of Amerindian subjects who are uprooted from their communities in order to supply Potosi with a steady source of labor. Once delivered over to the mines, the laborers are exposed to pure contingency: "Moreover, they are exposed to extreme danger due to the burden of the work, the change of climate and the many hazards from which many die." No free subject of the Crown, Acosta argues, should be exposed to pure chance, accident, or death as occurs in Potosi" (Bentancor 207)

Bentancor's reading of this passage highlights how the colonial mine functions as a site where the exposure to "pure contingency" through dangerous labor, atmospheric destabilization, and environmental toxicity is codified according to degrees of freedom and captivity as well as "innately determined" racial differences of environmental violability. The epistemological re-valorization of contingency through New World conquest (Wynter 2003), as articulated in the welcome surprise of new world habitability, is sharply contrasted by the precarity of the mines, where, I argue, contingency is simultaneously re-inscribed as a mark of *fallenness.* In this way,

the mine is not just a site of exacerbated time theft via labor and premature death, it is one where the racialized division of labor reifies the colonial monopoly over the violence of contingency and, as I show in subsequent chapters, over time itself.

Secondly, Acosta's approach to reform illustrates how mining doesn't just require repressive technologies of human and nonhuman energy capture and disposal, but actively partakes in the social inscription of criminality. As Bentancor notes, Acosta argues against the compulsion of *unpaid* indigenous labor, but concedes that paid labor can still be compelled as a necessary disciplinary measure. Furthermore, Acosta reminds his readers that subterranean labor in Roman mines was reserved for criminals, and thus suggests that outright enslavement is a fitting consequence of criminality and vice (a category that includes displays of non-Christian indigenous customs.) Given the racial essentialisms that inhere in the division of mining labor, one can see how criminality, while conditional for indigenous subjects, could be imputed to blackness simply by nature of the African miner's unfree status.

Thirdly, Acosta's assertion that "free subjects" of the crown shouldn't be enslaved, and that indigenous labor should be renumerated, highlights the inherently combinatory nature of labor in the colonial mine (paid/ unpaid, native/ black) and its role in the production of relative re/de-valuations. Against the historical fact of this combined labor in the mines of Potosi, Acosta's exclusion of African miners in his otherwise extensive account of the mines is notable. While this could certainly be read as evidence of Frank Wilderson III's claim that blackness, unlike whiteness and indigeneity, exists "*off the record*" (2003, 236), I want to show how Acosta's occlusion substantiates my arguments about the role of antiblackness in the capitalist structure of value. If we consider Marx's categories of concrete labor (which creates *things* and essentializes the laborer according to the nature of work performed) and abstract labor (which

creates *value* and atomizes the worker as a qualitatively interchangeable unit of labor) we can see how indigenous labor in the mining context is indexed as concrete labor according to the discursive material conflations of "prime matter" (of which only the natives, as subjects of conversion, are properly part). By contrast, black labor is indexed as abstract labor by the racial logics of the "Sepulveda syndrome" premised on the supposed break between black subjects from their native socio-cultural modes of individual and collective provisioning. This finds its corollary, I argue, in the social form of abstract labor because this form entails an essential occlusion of the division between necessary labor time and surplus labor time or, the time in which one would (traditionally) labor for their own subsistence and the time in which the worker creates profit for the owner of the means of production.[16] The category of blackness, as an innately relative labor category since its inception in the New World, doesn't just *personify* abstract labor as a metric of alienation (or exclusion). The category of blackness, I argue, enabled

[16] Ikyo Day analyses race in the context of abstract and concrete labor with attention to Chinese labor and its presumed hyper-efficiency in 19th century railroad construction. Hers is distinct from my approach because she analyses abstract labor through the lens of "socially necessary labor time" which I argue is a qualitative category related to, but distinct from the abstract labor form articulated by Marx as a quantitative categorical separation between necessary and surplus labor time. Regardless Marx's terminological slipperiness, I find her analysis of the racial personification of socially necessary labour time incredibly incisive. She writes, "the connection between the Chinese and the abstract domination of capitalism evolved through their identification with a mode of efficiency that was aligned with a perverse temporality of domestic and social reproduction. In many ways, the Chinese became the personification of Marx's formulation of "abstract labor." Here abstract labor, which represents a social average of labor time to produce a use-value in order to express its quantitative value during exchange, is set into opposition with concrete labor, the actual time and place of a specific laboring activity that expresses its qualitative use-value. Through the symbolic alignment of Chinese bodies with perverse forms of accelerated temporality, their human labor was rendered disembodied, abstract" (Day 117).

the emergence of the social form of labor as the formative structure of capitalist value in the first place.[17] [18]

In so asserting, I am offering the mine as an analytic for thinking capitalism as a racializing force in a manner that can account for labor exploitation, anti-black oppression, and indigenous land dispossession in a materialist framework. But it is in fidelity to Wilderson's warning against the "ruse of analogy" and alongside the (broadly conceived) afropessimist critique of Marxism that my claims are both made and clarified. As afropessimists correctly

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[17] Central to this unorthodox claim is my related argument that the colonial mine functions as an architectural or formal prototype of capitalism, which arises from a rather orthodox reading of Marx's discussion of surplus and necessary labour time. As he explains, this division, while structurally necessary for capitalism still exists contingently in pre-capitalist economies. Marx writes, "wherever a part of society possesses the monopoly of the means of production, the worker, free or unfree, must add to the labour-time necessary for his maintenance an extra quantity of labour time in order to produce the means of subsistence for the owner of the means of production" (190, 345). The division between surplus labor time and necessary labor time is fairly apparent in the pre-capitalist labor configuration whereas when the exchange value of a product predominates, as in capitalism, the division between surplus and necessary labor is structurally occluded by the form of abstract labor. In addition, under pre-capitalist conditions Marx explains, "surplus labor will be restricted by a more or less confined set of needs and that no boundless thirst for surplus labour will arise from the character of production itself. (1990, 345). A feudal landowner, for example, isn't going to demand labor *time* in excess of the farmer's satisfaction of the landlord's productive and reproductive needs. He might raise quotas, increasing material demands that correlate to time spent working, but this is not the same as demanding more labor time in itself. However, as Marx briefly, but evocatively notes, this is not the case with New World mining of gold and silver, where the explicit "aim is to obtain exchange-value in its independent monetary shape" (1990, 345) In this way, the mining relation displays a distinctly capitalist character were "boundless thirst for surplus labor" is *structurally compelled* rather than the product of individual needs and aims. The mine, by this reading, functions not as an historical or governmental (zone of) exception, but as a prototype of capitalist social form.

[18] A note on primitive accumulation: My reading of the Sepulveda syndrome and the category of blackness as an elemental component of capitalism's emergence also enables an alternative genealogy of primitive accumulation. Whereas Marxists often (Eurocentrically and at odds with Marx himself) apply the model of English primitive accumulation to colonial "peripheries," wherein the former is the precedent for the latter, I argue that the New World mine sets the precedent for European enclosures by valorizing a social form of labor dependent on divorcing a population from their indigenous modes of provisioning and transplanting that labor force onto a site of combined labor and that henceforth, colonial extraction and European enclosures are mutually co-constitutive forms. This is a systemic relationship rather than an analogic comparison, and while the degree and proportion of force and capture is profoundly different, I am alighting on the shared structural role played by a transplanted labor force.

assert, the Marxian category of exploitation, yoked to the worker and proletariat, cannot account for the relations of domination central to enslavement.[19] These claims are largely premised on the differences between the worker and the slave as they relate to the vastly different mode and degree of labor coercion (among many other unassailable differences in the constitutive violence of these systems). As such, Wilderson argues, "a slave does not enter into a transaction of value (however asymmetrical) but is subsumed by direct relations of force, which is to say that a slave is an articulation of a despotic irrationality whereas the worker is an articulation of a symbolic rationality" (2003, 230). I agree with the second clause of this statement, but I disagree that differential forms of labor *capture* necessarily mean that the slave is external to the production of value. Quite the opposite: by focusing on the *relative structural positionalities* of the worker and the slave in their historical emergence from the mine, as opposed to their *experiential differences as laboring subjects*, we can see that the slave enters the form of capitalist value.[20] The mine, then, is a framework that allows us to understand the epistemological totality of antiblackness that afropessimism names, without, however, necessitating recourse to the ontological status of the slave for black subjects. What my account emphasizes, rather, is the way capitalism

[19] We can see resonances of Wilderson's critique in Fred Moten's engagement with Marx commodity model in *In the Break*, as well as in Saidiya Hartman and Lethabo-King's elaboration of black fungibility and "porosity" (*Black Shoals*) as a more historically precise and analytically capacious framework than black labor. These important studies name what gets occluded by the (narrowly conceived) category of labor, which I attend to in this project through an expansion of the category itself, that is, by approaching labor as a totality.

[20] This has direct bearing on *where* one locates the operations of racism on the base/superstructural model of capitalism we cannot seem to escape. As Wilderson asserts, "the black subject reveals Marxism's inability to think white supremacy as the base and, in so doing, calls into question Marxism's claim to elaborate a comprehensive, or in the words of Antonio Gramsci, 'decisive' antagonism" (2003, 226) I agree with this claim, because it locates this Marxian oversight in the context of the black *subject* rather than the category of blackness. By my reading, furthermore, this oversight can be attributable to the value form itself, given that it arises historically from the abstractions of the "Sepulveda syndrome" as they transmogrify formally into the inherent abstractions of the capitalism value form.

ontologizes antiblackness by formalizing the category of blackness as the structural foundation for the relative devaluations necessary for capitalist accumulation. Furthermore, my point is not to rectify the shortcomings of orthodox Marxism, or to rehabilitate the worker as the "decisive antagonism" (Wilderson 2003, 226) for mass mobilization, but to articulate the specifically anti-capitalist imperatives of decolonialization in no uncertain terms—that is, to show that capitalism, as an inherently anti-black and anti-indigenous economic mode, cannot be reformed due to its totalizing force.

A Note on Wynter's "Plantation Model of Capitalism"

"The secret of capitalism" Wynter writes, "is to be found not in the factory but in the plantation" (N.D. 11). In suggesting that the New World mine holds secrets of its own, my work is building on Wynter's "Plantation model of Capitalism."[21] Her approach shifts focus from the exploitation relation in Marx's "Factory model of capitalism" to the repressive techniques born in the plantation as they are sustained by Jim Crow laws, racial policing, and the prison system as a mode of domination that gives way to capitalist exploitation more broadly.[22] Additionally, in

[21] While considerably less attention has been paid to mining in the histories of racial capitalism and modernity (prior to the emergence of fossil fuels and especially as a site of antiblackness) the mine and the plantation cannot be historically disarticulated as the ecologically devastating foundation of new world conquest and global capitalism. The new world mine's disrupted and transplanted labor force, for example, could only be sustained by a proto-industrial form of monocrop production, which necessitated the plantation system prior to its massive expansion with the sugar and cotton markets (Moore, 2007). The establishment of plantations—first through conquest and then through deforestation and clear cutting—would also reveal new sources of metallurgical wealth. Conversely, mining demanded mass quantities of wood fuel to feed the smelters, which would clear land for plantations. Additionally, as sites where profit maximalization, empire building, and eventually settler statecraft would supersede any non-instrumentalist considerations of human and ecological value, both the mine and the plantation are laboratories of violent mechanization and racialization.

[22] My work tracing the legacies of the colonial mine as they specifically relate to policing, criminality, and the production of carceral space in this project is inspired both by Wynter and by the scholarship that analyses the carceral legacies of the plantation system in the field of Black Geographies, such as Katherine McKittrick's "On Plantations, Prisons, and a Black Sense of Place."

her approach to the emergence of capitalism, Wynter notably stretches Marx's account not through categorical or historical expansion but by elaborating the "colonial mode of relation" that arises from the new definition of Man as an enabling condition of capitalism's emergence. These two corrective modes combine to constitute a radical departure from theories of capitalism that locate race (when they do account for it) in its ideological superstructure. As evinced by this projects' elaboration of the mine's unique mode of making and unmaking Man in conversation with global capitalism and the prison industrial complex, I find these important theoretical recalibrations deeply compelling.

However, the manner in which I account for how capitalism essentially "takes up" the colonial mode of relation differs from Wynter in important ways, beginning with our divergent approaches to the devaluation of black labor. My reading focuses on the triadic model operative in the mines and, borrowing Wynter's "Sepulveda syndrome," emphasizes the diasporic quality of transatlantic slavery as enabling a new and innately racialized form of alienation to serve as the primary force of black devaluation relative to other devalued labors. In conversation with Immanuel Wallerstein's world systems theory, Wynter focuses instead on the binary between wage labor, enacted in the "core" of European capitalism, and the unfree labor performed on the periphery plantation. While she similarly discusses how free labor and slave labor relativize one another (albeit largely in terms of the wage) she locates the devaluation of black labor in the ounces trade (where enslaved Africans were sold for a quantity of gold according to the value determinations of free labor in the capitalist market) as an inherently and irrevocably *unequal exchange.*[23]

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[23] Wynter writes, "The value of man's labor power, was now determined by the capitalist market, the same market which has fixed wages for 'free European labor.' The arbitrary 100% markup changed

Wynter then attributes the persistence of this devaluation through unequal exchange to a structural law of value defined by a rigid Manichean binarism (following Fanon) imparted by colonialism and sustained, henceforth, by capitalism. Put another way, hers is a relational totality that capitalism, as a system that requires inequality, is particularly good at sustaining through its division of labor (and technologies of repression). While *historically* foundational, antiblackness is still *structurally* contingent to capitalism in Wynter's reading, even if the binarism it helped inaugurate is deeply entrenched by the system itself. It is by this logic, Wynter writes, that "White/black, bourgeois/ proletariat, male/female, settler/native, became in different situations, interchangeable models of a central strategy of domination. Each model represented a colonial mode of relation—that is a relationship in which the colonizer achieves psychic gratification, psychic surplus-value, realized by and through his relations with another whose relative inferior value is fixed by the overall system" (N.D. 392). How this relation is "fixed" by capitalism specifically, seems, for Wynter, to be primarily a matter of the inheritance of an unequal share of recourses enacted by this originary inequality and devalued status (in a way that echoes theories of uneven development). In my reading, alternatively, the manner in which the devaluation of black labor is "fixed" by capital is intrinsic to capitalism because it metamorphized into the value form, where its function as an enabling structural positionality is entirely hidden as it is subsumed into a structure of formal equality. As such (and in keeping with Wynter's formula) the demographic constituencies of capitalist labor won't *always* follow a discernably racial logic, nor will exposure to immiseration and state violence. However, I argue, the ongoing nature of extractive conquest will persistently recalibrate these demographics and reify the colonial mode of relation in its continued modification of the terms of habitability and attendant social

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equivalence into unequal exchange. "Negro" labor power was *devalued* yet the value of *free labor* now formed part of the calculations that fixed his devalued worth" (N.D. 33).

inscription of disposability and criminality. From the coal mines of the U.S. postbellum South to the oil fields of the Niger Delta and cobalt mines of the Congo, the domestic and global division of toxicity and precarity (in and well beyond the labor relation) will effectively serve to re-inscribe the categories of selection and dyselection along racial lines. To put it simply, extractive conquest effectively "jump starts" the racializing engines of capitalism, particularly, I will show, in moments of juridic-economic transition.

While Wynter's approach to race in the specific context of capitalism in her monumental work, *Black Metamorphosis* defaults to a logic of material inheritance, her decades long theorization of the persistence of the signifying complex of "redeemed spirit | fallen flesh"—in its various religious, political, scientific, and economic permutations of Man—reveals a far more complicated process by which a metaphysical totality formally instantiates itself. It is *this* type of inheritance—of an auto-poetically reproducing "symbolic master code of life and death"— that profoundly impacts my reading of Marx's own approach to the phantasmagoria of capitalist totality as a "social form." To approach capitalist totality as a formally racializing enterprise in this way is, of course, at odds with Wynter's persistent disarticulation of Man and capitalism as inhabiting the same type or degree of motive force. Indeed, even as we have come to occupy humans' "bioeconomic" era, Wynter insists that it is the figure of capitalist Man, rather than capitalism itself that "induces us all to behave as producers, traders or consumers [and] unifies us as a species in *economically* rather than as before, in *theologically* absolute terms" (2000, 160).[24]

[24] As with prior "*Transformative mutations*" (Wynter 2015, 189) the terms or content of the absolutisms changes but the governing metaphysical form remains the same. Wynter emphasizes the persistence of this process in the following passage: "Now, this is very, very important, the recognition that our Otherness creates not so much a white identity as a bourgeois identity, with whiteness serving, together with non-whiteness and blackness, as a part of totemic signifying complex. But as one whose indispensable function is to suggest that the value difference between (bourgeois) Man and its working-class Others is as supraculturally and extra-humanly ordained as is the projected value difference between Indo-European peoples and all native peoples, at its most total, between white and black." (2000, 177)

It is the bioeconomic conception of the human, moreover, "that determines the hegemony of the *economic system* over the political systems—even more that mandates the functioning of the capitalist mode of production as the everyday expression of that hegemony" (2000, 160). Through my comparative reading, however, Western Man and Capitalism *mandate one another* because they share the same "mechanisms of occultation" (2000, 185). As I will show below, the nature of these mechanisms inhere in the homologous instantiation of "world coin" (global currency standard) and Universal Man as definitionally universal standards by which global capitalism will institute itself as the only possible mode of production through the economic "secularization" of the colonial conversion imperative.[25]

World Coin | Western Man: Accumulation via Occultation

These emergent forms of economic and racial valuation are structured by a shared contradiction between the fraught categories of the *essential* and the *representative,* between, to draw from Fanon, *skins* and *masks*. Both the metallurgic materiality of gold and the epidermally "evidenced" biocentric conception of race exist in oppositional tension to their roles as economic and social *currency*; that is, as socially constructed referents of value. Just as western man becomes a universal standard through New World conquest, it is precisely in their own universalization on the global market that gold and silver acquire their fetishistic form for the first time.[26] As Marx writes, "It is in the world market that money first functions to its full extent

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[25] We can see the economic conversion imperative notably in the scourge of contemporary figures like The World Bank. While I haven't seen World Bank discussed in the context of the conversion imperative, many have noted the institution's destructive functioning. See, for example, Alnoor Ladha's "The World Bank, Poverty Creation, and the Banality of Evil" https://truthout.org/articles/the-world-bank-poverty-creation-and-the-banality-of-evil/

[26] This process only emerges from the New World Mine precisely by nature of the materials it produced in the emergent context of its globalization as "world coin." Marx writes, "Without any initiative on their part the commodities find their own value-configuration ready to them in the form of a physical commodity existing outside but also alongside them, *this physical object, gold or silver in its crude state,*

as a commodity whose natural form is also the directly social form of realization of human labor in the abstract. Its mode of existence becomes adequate to its concept" (1990, 240- 241). It could be said that it is in the New World where the category of blackness similarly becomes adequate to its concept because its definitionally innate (not socio-culturally determined) character (contrary to indigeneity in the racist colonial imaginary) is what enabled the directly social form of capitalist labor to emerge in prototypical form in the mine.

It is not a coincidence, I think, that Marx and Wynter both highlight the magnitude of New World conquest not just as a series of remarkable historical events but as the instantiation of a new abstract totality that emerges from—but cannot necessarily be reduced to—the global market. As Wynter argues, the magnitude of changes wrought by New World conquest was a process of epistemological re-totalization made possible, she writes, "because the bourgeois became the bearers of a system which found the mechanisms to accumulate, appropriate and centralize the social power of all the peoples of the earth, including their own. (N.D. 385). In her reference to "social power" Wynter suggests that these are not just technologies of extraction, but also, centrally, mechanisms of abstraction. Similarly, in his discussion of gold exploration, Marx notes its massive role in imperial statecraft, mediating human need through exchange, and "drawing the dimensions of exchange over the whole world." However, Marx then offers an important clarification:

> But it is inherent in the attribute in which [gold] becomes developed that the illusion about its nature, i.e. *the fixed insistence on one of its aspects*, in the abstract, and the blindness towards the contradictions contained within it, gives it

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becomes, immediately on its emergence from the bowels of the earth, the direct incarnation of all human labour. Hence the magic of money. Men are henceforth related to each other in the social process of production in a purely atomistic way, Their own reactions of production therefore assume a material shape which is independent of their control and their conscious individual action. This situation is manifested first by the fact that the product of men's labor universally take on the form of commodities. The riddle of the money fetish is therefore the riddle of the commodity fetish, now become visible and dazzling to our eyes" (1990, 187 emphasis added).

> a really magical significance behind the backs of individuals. In fact, is it because of this self-contradictory and hence illusory aspect, because of its abstraction, that it becomes such an enormous instrument in the real development of the forces of social production" (1993, 225, emphasis added).

The abstraction of gold as money doesn't simply inhere in the contradictions between its material and immaterial existence, but in "the fixed insistence on one of its aspects" that is, in its inability to be thought simultaneously in its multiple registers (or, to borrow Fanon and Wynter's term, sociogenically). It is thus gold's abstraction specifically that made it "such an enormous instrument" in this era of massive upheaval. This emphasis is echoed in Marx's assertion that, "the period which precedes the development of modern industrial society opens with general greed for money on the part of individuals as well as of states." However, he continues, "The real development of the sources of wealth takes places as it were *behind their backs,* as a means of *gaining possession of the representatives of wealth*" (1993, 225 emphasis added). Read alongside Wynter, we can see that the bourgeois became bearers of a *new representative regime that systematically occludes the hybrid construction of material reality* (be it of money or Man). As a synthesis of Marx's social form and Wynter's Fanonian sociogenic principle, "extractive reason" thus seeks to name the foreclosure of the hybrid conception of the human as a function of racial capitalism. This foreclosure is essential for maintaining the racial divisions of the "symbolic master code of life and death" because as Wynter and McKittrick argue, "If humans are accepted as essentially hybrid (phylogenic, ontogenic, and sociogenic) then you can't believe that some are naturally selected (eugenic) and naturally dyselected (dysgenic) beings" (McKittrick, Wynter 2015, 17).

This marks an important distinction between abstraction and ideology. In the same way that fetishism isn't an ideological distortion for Marx, racism isn't an ideological perversion for Wynter. Relatedly, the violence of New World conquest cannot be simply reduced to the

profound pathologies of colonizers but must be understood as the foundation of a system that would ultimately systematize processes of pathologization. This inversion confirms that the demands of the system exceed the values and intentions of those who occupy that system. This is important politically because just as colonization was not simply enabled by racist feelings, decolonization is not simply a matter of changing hearts and minds. Rather, it is a matter, to return to Ferreira da Silva's formulation, of dismantling the systems that sustain racial capitalism through "total violence" and of returning the "total value" expropriated through extractive conquest.

Part II. "black/ arts vs. black abstraction"[27]

Figure 1: Noel Anderson, *Hood Dreams* Berlin Biennale, Museum Für Gegan, September 2022

[27] These lines are taken from Fred Moten's 2023 poem "Color Field."

Figure 2: *Downward Dog (2016-2020)* Berlin Biennale, Museum Für Gegan, September 2022

Figure 3: *Can you see the Light?* "Black Exhaustion", Shirley Fiterman Art Center, September 2023

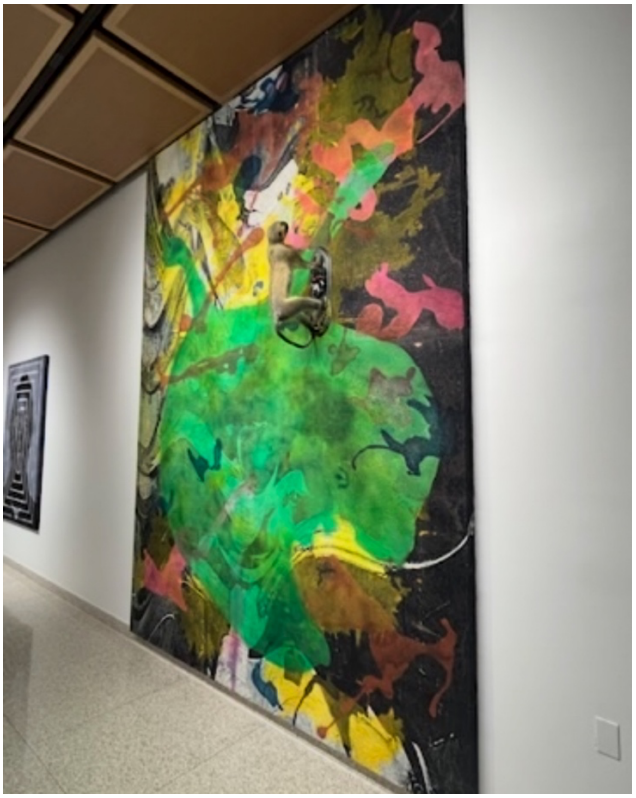

Figure 4: *The higher the monkey climbs the tree, the more it shows his ass* "Black Exhaustion" Shirley Fiterman Art Center September 2023

Figure 5: *Die Leitung"* 2016-2020. Berlin Biennale, Museum Für Gegan, September 2022

Figure 6*: Fan Addicts Series 5 and 7* "Black Exhaustion" Shirley Fiterman Art Center, September 2023

Noel Anderson's contemporary tapestry installations, inspired in part by European tapestries from the late 15th century, engage suggestively with the legacies of New World conquest in a number of ways. While the cotton medium could be said to signal the plantation foundations of global capital, his use of the Jacquard weaving method associated with early forms of computing,[28] calls forth our extractive present and our increasingly techno-automated system's insatiable demand for rare earth minerals. Anderson's depictions of the police (which is historically implicated in the plantation and the mine insofar as these are as precisely the sites of its modern emergence in the United States) register the centrality of repression in this long history of racialized devaluation and accumulation. Between these historical and technological signposts, then, Anderson's work juxtaposes the haptic qualities and tactile materiality of the

[28] Ingrid Bachmann explains: "the forerunner of the first computing machine - Charles Babbage's *Differentiation Engine* - was based on the early 19th Century Jacquard loom. Joseph-Marie Jacquard's system of patterm punch cards to store and process information for his automated 100m were translated into the first computer punch cards. Weaving after all, is a process of information storage, a binary system of interlocking threads, mirroring the 0 and 1's of computer programming" (370).

tapestries with the techno-utopian promise of pure dematerialization evoked by the computational allusion, reminding audiences that beneath such promises is just more mining, extractive conquest, and repression in the global division of labor.[29] As an artform that inherently monumentalizes labor, these tapestries thus function as a commentary on the co-constituency of black labor and anti-black violence in the creation of the modern economy as well as the persistently racializing thrust of the dialectic of material - immaterial, physical - intellectual, and unskilled- skilled labor.

I offer this crude historicist reading to highlight how, in positing the category of blackness as central to capitalism's extractive past and present, this project could easily default to invoking visual art and literature as mere examples of the political economy of anti-black conquest or the myriad modes in which black labor is devaluated in U.S. society, from policing to pollution. The impulse to critically reduce artworks to their evidentiary capacity—be it in the interest of historical exposition or articulating political imperatives—is characteristic of a long-standing critical posture towards visual art and literature by black artists that entails, as Phillip Brian Harper explains, "an empiricist demand that racialized representations perceptibly mirror real-world phenomena, however favorable—or not—any particular portrayal may seem" (2). Additionally, in attending to the "total violence" of policing and incarceration as it is lived and

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[29] My brief reading of the haptic qualities of textiles in the context of computation is indebted to Ingrid Bachmann's essay "Material and the promise of the Immaterial" where she writes, "Textiles are characterized by their haptic qualities and strong visual and tactile presence. The haptic quality of textiles reminds us of our own material origins and the often problematic physical conditions of our daily lives. This tactility and materiality appears to be in direct opposition to the almost antiseptic sterility of the design of computer hardware. To note this is not an attempt to indulge in nostalgic longing for the loss of the haptic, nor to fetishize the labour intrinsic to most textile work, nor to make a claim for the superiority of the haptic. It is to examine the nature of materials and their location within a signifying realm (370).

represented, this project also runs the risk of positioning instances of anti-black violence as a "sentimental resource" (Hartman 1997, 21) for white (political and moral) self-actualization. These critical postures, premised on a type of *analytic extraction*, converge in Toni Morrison's ventriloquizing claim that "when Afro-American art is worthy, it is because it is "raw" and "rich," like ore, and like ore, needs refining by Western Intelligences" ("Unspeakable"171).

Through calculated acts of visual distortion, Anderson enacts a refusal to simply weave images of systemic racial violence that can be easily "refined" by his audiences— despite how "raw" the tapestries may be rendered physically.[30] By stretching his tapestries, picking the fibers, and distressing the images, Anderson draws attention to his formal negotiation not just of the works' content, but of its aesthetic reception. His Sam Gilliam-style draping alone forecloses the possibility of complete disclosure and physically demands what Toni Morrison describes as "the active complicity of a reader willing to step outside established boundaries of the racial imaginary" (1997, 9)—central to which is the presumption of transparency.[31] While I will discuss Morrison's brilliant techniques of narratively engaging the reader's "active complicity"

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[30] Anderson work is part of a broader engagement by contemporary black diasporic artists with the material substratum of global capitalism. Here I'm thinking specifically of Otobong Nkanga's multi-media installation "Gently Basking in Debris" (2023) which calls attention to the material and aesthetic transformation of minerals within the broader context of colonial extraction, as well El Anatsui's work "fading cloth" which calls forth the political ecology of African colonialization through the form of an inverted trompe l'oeil between gold and trash. As Stephen Best puts it, "What is of value here, what may be of irreducible significance, is a process whereby the work *denies its own representational aspect*—where it gathers waste, congeals it into a form (or an identity), when the goal all along was to bring about that form's dissolution" (49). All of these works engage audiences, in different ways, in questions about physical matter and aesthetic mattering, economic value and critical (e)valuation.

[31] Denise Ferreira Da Silva discusses "the transparency thesis" in *Toward a Global Idea of Race"* as that which sustains the "onto epistemological account that institutes 'being and meaning' as effects of interiority and temporality" (4). In this text she also importantly asks "How did whiteness come to signify the transparent I and blackness to signify otherwise? Because it does not ask such questions, the metaphor of the veil rehearses that sociohistorical logic of exclusion, which writes blackness and whiteness as the 'raw material' and not as the products of modern strategies of power" (8).

in Chapter 3, I find this to be a useful framework for exploring how Anderson, like Morrison, "make[s] a way for the reader (audience) to participate in the tale" ("The Writer" 267). By manipulating his audiences' physical and intellectual orientations to his work, the "tale" Anderson creates in *Hood Dreams* for example, is not limited to the history it depicts (in this case, of the brutal police repression of the Rodney King uprisings). Because it is not a three-dimensional sculpture (where one perspective on the piece is generally sufficient for grasping what it is) but a two-dimensional image that is sculpturally distorted, the viewer has to (carefully) move around and beneath the tapestry to glean its content. In this durational reception, a narrative is created dialogically between the work and an audience who is directly implicated in the protracted process of "making and unmaking of Man" according to their identarian relationship to the figures depicted as they are progressively revealed in violent relation to the police.

In his solo exhibitions, Anderson further challenges audience presuppositions of what art by black artists should "do" through his juxtapositions of images of racial policing and African American expressive culture. What does it mean, for example, to approach a tapestry expecting to see another image of police violence only to see, upon closer inspection, a still from *Soul Train*? What does it mean to see resonances of the physicality of policing in the depiction of exuberant white basketball fans? In this way, Anderson's work calls attention to the types of "black images" and media that audiences feel secure in enjoying, versus what they may feel compelled to analyze deeply or ignore all together. Because these works are displayed in drastically varying degrees of abstraction, each viewer's traditional habits of engagement are disrupted and altered according to the relative transparency and opacity of each work's image. It

is the form, then, rather than the content (and its affective import) that determines the mode and duration of the viewer's engagement.

This is just one way that Anderson's highly stylized approach to distortion explicitly calls forth its representational register in keeping with Harper's definition of abstractionist aesthetics. In *Die Leitung* (2016-2020), for example, the image is warped like a television screen when you adjust the antennas,[32] highlighting what Harper calls "representational referentiality" in its evocation of multiple forms of photographic, televisual, and textile media (23). However, the specific way that Anderson distresses his materials reveals a different approach to abstraction, not just in the context of representation as it relates to the burdens of mixed company audiences or the ethics of disclosure. Anderson *theorizes* abstraction, rather, in the fullness of its role as a mode of knowledge production and world-making.[33] In doing so, he takes aim at the very foundations of normative epistemologies, that, while central to the "symbolic master codes of life and death," are not the *exclusive* prerogative of any subject position. This displaces considerations of audience identity in important ways. By pulling the warp (the textiles' base) foreword, not as a mode of exposition, but as a means of further occluding the surface image, Anderson calls into question our basic assumptions regarding representational topographies premised on surface and substratum that predispose analysts to an extractive mode of "unveiling" the truth content that lays beneath the "surface" of signification. Anderson further

[32] Anderson discusses how this televisual image inspires his work in his 2019 interview by Monique Long for Ubikwist magazine.

[33] My attention to the theorizing thrust of Anderson's creative work (following Morrison's narrative theorizing) is informed by Barbara Christian's seminal text "The Race of Theory" where she describes theorizing in relational forms as that which "unmasks" power relations (52). Unmasking, I think, isn't so much revealing certain things as it is creating new ways of seeing. She writes, "For people of color have always theorized—but in forms quite different from the western form of abstract logic. And I am inclined to say our theorizing (and I intentionally use the verb here rather than the noun is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create" (Christian 52).

emphasizes this topographic collapse in the fact that the images are themselves woven rather than printed on top of the textiles; as he makes explicit, "the image *is* the ground." This assertion gestures towards a relation of immanence that posits the work as its own totality regardless of its referential relationship to the anti-black world of its viewer and creator. Blackness no longer exists categorically as nonbeing or social death, but functions as a "poetics of being," in keeping with Kevin Quashie's transformational study of black aliveness. Quashie writes, "in a black world, in whatever manifestations of black world-ness texts create, *blackness* (not antiblackness) is totality; in such a world, black being is capacious and right—not more-than-right, just right-as-is. Life-as-is" (Quashie 10). I read "right" here is not a moral category, but as an invitation to understand blackness as immanent to black being alone.

In pulling the warp forward, Anderson also notably compromises the structural integrity of each piece. In some instances, they appear to be quite literally hanging by a thread, creating an anxious feeling and hyperawareness of the temporal relationship between suspense and precarity. While this could be said to reproduce, for the viewer, an experience of time marked by contingency in keeping with the dominant weaponizations of time operative under racial capitalism, it certainly signals to a profound sensitivity to the role of time in abstractions' ability to alter material reality more broadly. As opposed to simply representing the temporality of *suspense* (in content and form) that is characteristic of our present mode of production, Anderson produces a type of *suspension* to return to Ferreira da Silva's language, "of the belief that all there is is in time and space," as defined by our present system. What emerges in Anderson's work, contra the formal annihilation of space by time of racial capital, is a mode of temporal deformation that opens up new conceptual spaces for relation. Against the systemic abstraction of the mode of production, premised on empirical transparency, is the poetic abstractions we find

in what Wynter calls the "model of generation." While the former denies the hybrid creation of man to maintain rigid hierarchies, the model of generation insists upon the *reversibility of power*.

"Model of Generation" against the Capitalist Mode of Production

In *Black Metamorphosis,* Wynter outlines this model in the context of pre-colonial African customs, and the transplantation of funeral rites and the "Jonkunnu carnival complex" to the New World plantations. She does so, she insists, not to idealize African cultures "as a noble savage other" but to note how certain cultural innovations have taken new shape "as an underlife" that resurfaces periodically to "shatter the axiomatic certainty" of U.S. hegemonies (N.D. 506). While I can't imagine anyone waging a critique of such theoretical imprecision against Wynter, I note her clarification in passing because the fetish of the "noble savage" still appears to have purchase in popular strands of environmental discourse that appeal to "prelapsarian" relationships with nature as typified in the racial imaginary by indigenous cultures. Against this tendency I want to also clarify that the "model of generation" is not an affectively affirming ecological position of "care" or post-racial kinship either. It's an environmental *metaphor* for the social prohibition of violent concentrations of power, summarized by the following imperative: trees should not grow to such heights as to stifle the growth of the seedlings below. If they do, they must be cut down (497). Importantly, stultifying structures and figures aren't judged individually in terms of "good or bad" (N.D. 497) but according to whether they engage in a helpful or harmful relation to the social whole.

While Anderson's work engages the theme of generative destruction at the level of content in his depiction of uprisings and at the level of form through his techniques of distortion, he explicitly evokes the spatial metaphor associated with the model of generation in a piece titled, "*The higher the monkey climbs the tree the more he shows his ass*" (2023). This piece

features a taxidermied monkey appearing to make off with an (inherently diminutive) toy cop car as though ascending a tree, showing the more subtle role of humor in signaling the "reversibility of power."[34] The hedging of unwarranted authority is also glimpsed in the background image, which, upon close inspection, features the same archival image of policing used in his earlier piece, *Downward Dog* (2016-2020). While the image is considerably distorted, the cop featured in the far left of the image in *Downward Dog,* is the same one that later appears lying on his back in the bottom of the 2023 tapestry (while I noticed this well after the exhibit, I can't help but retroactively hear echoes of the title of the earlier piece as a command that is satisfied in/by the subsequent piece). This iterative process by which the cop is physically "toppled" speaks not necessarily to a specific event of curtailment but to the *ritual* of hedging, and to "the chain of innovations, of social codings [that serve] to prevent the possibility of an *unlimited desire for power*" (N.D. 497). In this way, aesthetic *iteration* in the model of generation runs counter to the reformist logic of extractive reason, which is simply the *repetition* of hierarchy masquerading as the progress of conversion and "refinement."

The violence of repetition in an anti-black system versus the generativity of poetic iteration under a "model of generation" is echoed in June Jordan's "Poem about Police Violence" (1980). Strategies of curtailment are far more explicit in this poem which begins with the following appeal:

[34] Wynter discusses the role of humor in the context of Bakhtin's genre of "Grotesque realism." He writes, "Not only parody in its narrow sense, but all the other forms of grotesque realism degrade, bring down to earth, turn their subjects into flesh. This is the peculiar truth of this genre which differentiates it from all the forms of medieval high art and literature. The people's laughter which characterized all the forms of grotesque realism from immemorial times was linked with the bodily lower stratum. Laughter degrades and materializes" (Bakhtin, quoted in N.D. 756).

Tell me something
what you think would happen if
everytime they kill a black boy
then we kill a cop
everytime they kill a black man
then we kill a cop

you think the accident rate would lower
subsequently?

While this is a provocative image of the strategic value of "cutting down" harmful forms of authority articulated by the model of generation, I want to note, first, how Jordan discourages a simplified reading of retributive causality in the poem. For example, Jordan's use of "everytime" speaks perhaps more to a condition rather than a singular event, which already displaces the formal equality that undergirds the logic of "an eye for an eye" premised on action and equal reaction. Put another way, whereas "then we kill a cop" is conditional, "everytime" suggests a degree of universality. Jordan's use of the more capacious pronoun "they" deepens this emphasis on a foundationally anti-black entity rather than the discreet actions of a singular cop. In contrast, "a black boy" and "a black man" retain their singularly, signaling an inherent lack of proportionality operative in police terror. This systemic emphasis importantly foregrounds the magnitude of the epistemic shift this poem opens up poetically through enjambment. Notice the line break between "lower" and "subsequently?" This enables one to read "you think the accident rate would lower" as the reaction to the events described in the preceding stanza. After "what you think would happen if", the causal chain is as follows: "everytime they kill a black boy" > "then we kill a cop" > "you think the accident rate would lower." The suspension of the question "subsequently?" momentarily gestures to a world where the addressee *could* rightly assume that killing a cop would lower the "accident rate" because it occurs within a model of generation.

The poem is thus asking the reader to imagine (evoked by the appeal, "tell me something") a world where life is universally valued. The following stanzas can then be read as an image of that world, ushered by the enjambed "subsequently?" as an explanation of what would follow if such a radical paradigm shift occurred. In this way, Jordan's enjambment enters the poem into the subjunctive mode.[35] These stanzas read:

> sometimes the feeling like amaze me baby
> comes back to my mouth and I am quiet
> like Olympian pools from the running the
> mountainous snows under the sun
>
> sometimes thinking about the 12th House of the Cosmos
> or the way your ear ensnares the tip
> of my tongue or signs that I have never seen
> like DANGER WOMEN WORKING

The repetition of "sometimes" marks an entirely new relationship to time, unbound to the universality of "everytime." While the temporal logic of action and reaction is subtly destabilized in the first two stanzas, causal temporal architecture of any kind is now entirely evacuated through Jordan's singular use of the present tense. Causal relations are replaced by comparative relations signaled through Jordan's frequent use of "like;" the repetition of which takes on an iterative quality as a gesture of approximation, a working-through of the feeling being engaged. Notably, the term "like" occurs exclusively in the stanzas that deal with "feeling," "thinking" and "reckon(ing)" suggesting that in these moments, there is no external referentiality as the very *terms* of relation are too disparate. In this way, this blissful scene appears to inhabit an entirely different plane of being, deepening its separation from the preceding stanzas and dramatizing

[35] My reading of the imperative-subjunctive as a temporally dynamic poetic mode is indebted to Quashie's elaboration of the subjunctive in *Black Aliveness, or a Poetics of Being.*

that if (something like) a model of generation prevailed, black being would not be conceived relative to antiblackness.

Read in the light of the poem's generic title, the separation between these "worlds" gives the poem an ars poetic quality in which the juxtaposition between scenes could be said to articulate how *poetry* could function without the constraints of its anti-black surround. In addition to occasioning the iterative working through of feeling, and imaging temporal architectures of relation outside the social form's fraught equivalizing imperatives, unencumbered poetics would, it seems, also enable a different relationship between the poem and its audience (as indicated by the shifting form of address from an external "you" to an internal entity). Understood specifically as an ars poetic gesture, this shift thus reveals how (in the same way that the category of blackness as a specific structural positionality serves a relativizing function economically) the category of blackness as an object of knowledge within the racial episteme serves a relativizing function epistemologically (in the Fanonion Sense, between self and other as racially mediated). As Fanon argues, (and as I'll explore further in the following chapter) this inherently forecloses the possibility for reciprocal recognition and intersubjective poesis. This foreclosure, and its poetic undoing, is dramatized when the external "you" that exists in uncertain proximity to the "we" of the speaker transforms into the internal "you" figured as someone who can join the speaker in quiet revelry and erotic exchange, and thus partake in the poem's blissful poesis. In keeping with Fanon's analyses, the future also opens up, as the domestic intimacy and familiarity of "baby" is vibrantly contrasted by the absolute newness of the lines "signs I have never seen / like DANGER WOMEN WORKING." Just as "sometimes" affords a sense of temporal multiplicity in an otherwise staunchly present-tense mode, this gesture towards the not-yet-seen, rendered poetically in the stanza's concluding

line, opens towards a capacious yet-to-be-defined future. As Quashie persuasively shows, this is the power of subjunctivity, as "the animating of being through the expressiveness of might-be" (61).

If we understand the subjunctive, following Quashie's specific formulation, as "a spell that casts its subject in the suspension of an imaginary" (2021, 59), then we can read the poem's dramatic shift back to the world of police violence as the moment the spell is momentarily broken. In keeping with the sharp distinction Jordan has thus far maintained between "worlds" in this poem, the mode of address once again shifts to the "you" of the reader in the following stanzas, to articulate, perhaps, what poems *can't* do, like "win wars" and blot out the "bestial."

> I lose consciousness of ugly bestial rabid
> and repetitive affront as when they tell me
> 18 cops in order to subdue one man
> 18 strangled him to death in the ensuing scuffle (don't
> you idolize the diction of the powerful: *subdue*
> and *scuffle* my oh my) and that the murder
> that the killing of Arthur Miller on a Brooklyn
> street was just a "justifiable accident" again
> (again)
>
> People been having accidents all over the globe
> so long like that I reckon that the only
> suitable insurance is a gun
> I'm saying war is not to understand or rerun
> war is to be fought and won
>
> sometimes the feeling like amaze me baby
> blots it out/the bestial but
> not too often
>
> tell me something
> what you think would happen if
> everytime they kill a black boy
> then we kill a cop
> everytime they kill a black man
> then we kill a cop

> you think the accident rate would lower
> subsequently?

The disproportionality subtly evoked in the first stanza is now made explicit in the "bestial" calculus of eighteen cops to one man, a proportion that serves to reveal the absurdity of claiming that such an event is a "justifiable accident." That the pretense of such claims is well known by those who make them is evinced in the way the speaker, channeling the "diction of the powerful" self corrects and replaces "murder" with the more passive, less legally implicating term "killing" in the following line. This dramatizes how "accidents," are always retroactively justifiable by those who control the legal grammars and mechanisms of "accountability." Moreover, Jordan's repetitious expansion of "accidents" on a global scale speaks again not to the singularly of specific events of police brutality, but to a colonial mode of relation defined by a monopoly of "accidental" violence.

The poem ends the way it begins, creating a cycle that could be said to formally enact the "repetitive affront" of white supremacy and its aesthetic constraints that Jordan articulates. But such a reading would ignore that these specific stanzas are subjunctive, and that the line "subsequently?" thus functions as an invitation, now extended to the reader, to imagine what such seismic societal shift would look like, that is, if the reader choses to be actively complicit in such imagining. Read this way, we can see that what the poem imagines it *could* do outside the constraints of anti-blackness is what it is already doing (not unlike Fanon's literary undoing of his own diagnoses). In this way, what I was describing as a type of subjunctive ars poetics is more accurately an ars poetics of subjectivity. Indeed, the poems blissful scenes of poesis are always already occurring within a "Poem about Police Violence."

Here I am reminded (to usher one final poetic example), of Fred Moten's poem, "are you one of these motherfuckers?" as a poem where its ars poetic quality also inheres in its shifting forms of address and navigation of external constraints. The poem begins in response to its title: "yeah, yeah, you are, and you don't seem to be tired of this / suspension, which is falling, whirling and unworlding storm." In this stanza, a motherfucker is one who approaches the "here" of the poem with a demand that it account for the motherfuckery (if you will) that the reader is complicit in creating, at the very least, by making such a demand. The stanza's concluding lines read "you can stop / calling here for some kinda response to these motherfuckers" which also subtly distances the addressee from "these motherfuckers" in opposition to the stanzas opening lines. The speaker's ambivalence in the first stanzas is then replaced by a notably iterative directive to the addressee in the third stanza:

> the immediate breathes through us before anything and these
> motherfuckers can't understand that. we're instruments of
> clinical ecstasy and if you want to listen you got to give up
> everything. you got to give up listening to sharing in folding
> in the bottom in oceanic engineering in the ungrammatical
> suffering of scourge and smile and babies in the nonresponse.

In contrast to the poem's perhaps polarizing diction, there is enormous generosity in explaining how the addressee might commit to "sharing in folding" in the "nonresponse" that is, in teaching the addressee how to *not* be a motherfucker. At first glance this could be read to condition the "salvaging" in the final stanza, which reads:

> when we salvage our surfacing and circling from your savage
> enclosure, it will be this miracle, right now, singing through
> can't breathe forever in this world and we ain't talking to you,
> motherfucker. it's gon' keep on being this miracle, our praise,
> our rite, miss pearlina, and all the thickened kitchen anarchy
> of our phrasing, the denotative detonation of am I blue, some
> times I'm blue, bye, burn, while all ya'll everything be burning.

"when we salvage our surfacing" is such a beautifully anti-extractive figuration, particularly in its characterization as inevitable and thus in no way beholden to any process undertaken by the reader or addressee. I would argue that it is precisely the inevitability of—and sovereignty over—this process that conditions the "miracle" of its being rendered "right now," that is, rendered in fidelity to the way to that "immediacy breathes through" the "us" of the speaker, and beyond the constraints of the addressee's "savage enclosure." The line "its gon' keep on being this miracle" suggests that this has been the function of the speakers' poetics all along, that is, in this case, to create an aesthetic temporality that recalls the sovereignty of its "denotative detonation."

"neither white nor surface"[36]: Black Feminism's Anti-Extractive Grammars

This project will continue to foreground black feminist literary works for their unique modes of theorizing extraction and abstraction, that is, for their engagement with the dual forces of "extractive reason" as I define it. In doing so, I'm not locating the answers to our collective yet unevenly experienced crises in these texts, but I *am* locating a unique mode of systemic-aesthetic theorizing that is inherently valuable for making sense of the world and perhaps even one's fragile role in it. This approach is in fidelity to Morrisons claim that, for her work to be "functional" then it must "bear witness and identify danger as well as possible havens from danger." She continues, "it must identify that which is useful from the past and that which ought to be discarded; it must make it possible to prepare for the present and live it out; and it must do that not by avoiding problems and contradictions but by examining them; it should not even attempt to solve social problems but it should certainly try to clarify them." (267). The "clarity" of black feminist theoretical insight inheres, in part, in the systemic incisiveness of its

[36] This phrase is from Audre Lorde's essay "Poetry is not a Luxury" where she writes, "The woman's place of power within each of us is neither white nor surface; it is dark, it is ancient, it is deep" (37).

articulation of the structural positionality black women occupy within the colonial capitalist patriarchic fascist state nexus. This position is determined, in part, by the disproportionate extraction of black women's productive and reproductive labor for the maintenance of capitalism (as elaborated by Claudia Jones, Angela Davis, and others), and for the maintenance of the carceral state (as articulated, for example, by Joy James in her discussion of the "Captive Maternal"). These formulations strategically position black women at the center of emancipatory struggle, in full awareness that, as the Combahee River Collective famously states, "If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since [black women's] freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression."

There is a foundational (and generative) antagonism, however, between the structural positionality (and attendant reifications) of black women's labor and the constitutive elisions of normative gender identities inaugurated by the transatlantic slave trade. This is as articulated perhaps most famously by Hortense Spillers in her seminal 1987 essay "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" where she argues that "diasporic plight marked a *theft of the body* – a willful and violent [. . .] severing of the captive body from its motive will" (67) that turned normatively gendered "bodies" into female flesh "ungendered" (68). It could be said that flesh is the "ur-matter" of New World extraction, at the same time its hieroglyphics exceed the empirical gaze and organizing principles of extractive reason. It is in this way that Spillers' figure of flesh "offers a praxis and a theory, a text for living and for dying, and a method of reading both through their diverse mediations" (68). Flesh is a "praxis and a theory" for understanding and mitigating racial capitalism specifically (as one mode of mediation) because it signals the *always already unconverted*, which I have argued is both central to—but persistently concealed by—the value structure of capitalism. Furthermore, part of the brilliance of Spillers'

theory of flesh is its inherent foreclosure of reformist, inclusion-based models of self-actualization for black women. She writes, "we are less interested in joining the ranks of gendered femaleness than gaining the *insurgent* ground as female social subject (80). Throughout this project I will be exploring the various ways black feminist authors displace the extractive logics of "refinement" by gaining the "*insurgent* ground" of the *unconverted*.

Chapter Summaries

In my first chapter, I show how the extractive paradigm I identify in this introduction is reproduced in the value structure of capital as a temporal totality of value and waste, activity and idleness. Operative as it is at the level of value, this form is inherently abstracted through the occlusion of human need. These temporal abstractions, I argue, animate the novel as a genre. Drawing from Wynter's essay "Novel and History, Plot and Plantation," I read the novel's structural ambivalence as that which suspends oppositional categories—like subsistence and profit, harm and healing—in a temporal totality that mirrors the capitalist value form. I extend Wynter's analysis to show how the novel functions, like the plot, as a critique of our estrangement from human need. Drawing on Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, I argue that this form doesn't simply show us our unmet needs or fill in the gap between a need and its satisfaction. Rather, its presumed fictionality and thus its explicit divorce from concrete life invites us to sensually grasp the gap itself as constituted by abstract systematizations of time (be it that of the novel or of capital). The novel's ambivalence sustains this distance by refusing to fulfill any distinct purpose. Any ethical or intellectual "lessons" imparted by the novel's representational register perpetually threaten to fill in this gap arbitrarily. This is perhaps why, as Lukács asserts, "we might almost say that the entire inner action of the novel is nothing but a struggle against the power of time" (1971, 122).

My attention to the temporal constituency of value facilitates an account of the state's role in producing and enforcing what Marx calls "disposable time." This is the time, I argue, of labor precarity, racial policing, and the prison sentence and is central to what I refer to in this work as the "economic force of the state," which is the power to render individuals, populations, and elemental matter active or idle according to the valorization requirements and energy demands of capital. In her novel *The Salt Eaters*, Toni Cade Bambara captures the economic force of the state as it is meted out actively through policing and passively through infrastructural neglect and environmental violence in the fictional town of Clayborne. Both the police and the decaying nuclear power plant volatize time as they loom over the town threatening violence externally, just as interpersonal conflict, strategic differences, and a patriarchic division of labor persistently threaten to undermine the community internally. These internal conflicts, Bambara shows, reproduce the governing logic of the institutions they endeavor to dismantle by recreating the artificial split between activity and idleness, in this case between the masculine-coded, activist realm and the feminine-coded domestic world of healing and care work. If, as Lukács asserts, this dichotomization of theory and praxis or "cognition and action" serves as the novel's determinant structure, Bambara frustrates this generic convention by formally engaging something like what Jacques Rancière refers to as "pensiveness." He describes this as "a zone of indeterminacy between thought and non-thought, activity and passivity, but also between art and non-art." Pensiveness signals, but importantly doesn't actualize, the latent presence of one regime of expression in another. The formal deferral of a collision that would bring this new regime to bear in the novel is perhaps one of the ways in which Bambara notoriously "made revolution irresistible."

In my second chapter, I extrapolate these contradictions between representation, totality, and time to explore the extractive foundations of settler colonial law. In identifying a formal homology between capitalist value and English derived common law, I show how capitalism is able to augment itself beyond present geographic/ material limits not by simply incorporating land and labor as the primary sources of *wealth (*as Marx would have it) but by formalizing a relation wherein time theft and land theft *enable one another* to consolidate (white) bourgeoise property ownership. In so accounting, I show how juridic subjecthood and a proprietary conception of labor are mutually constituent of what Barnor Hesse compellingly calls "white sovereignty." My analysis thus calls into question leftist's historical overestimation of the emancipatory potential of labor for achieving racial and environmental justice. In part two of this chapter, I analyze three moments in U.S. fossil-carceral history as acts of conquest that racialize the relatively valued forms of labor necessary for capitalist accumulation through the social inscription of disposability and criminality. Moving from industrial slavery and postbellum convict leasing to inmate oil spill cleanup and the incarcerated occupants of "toxic prisons," I illustrate how extractive zones continue to function as sites where exposure to toxicity is racialized through labor, and where antiblackness is re-naturalized through the colonial archaeologies of race and geologic grammars of time, as the dominant mechanism for securing the accumulative reserves necessary for capital's survival.

In my third chapter, I return to Bambara's guiding question, "Can you afford to be whole?" as it reverberates throughout my reading of the forces that cause bodily fragmentation in Audre Lorde's *Cancer Journals* and Toni Morrison's novel *Sula*. This chapter traces the figure of textual wounds as byproducts of labor marked most notably by a sacrificial imperative. In *Sula*, narratives of sacrifice emerge to replace a systemic account of disposability with an

essentialist one that justifies time theft by instantiating an alternative totality that is both constitutive and temporal. As Morrison shows, to sacrifice *for* one's family, community, or country is to have your consumption narratively configured as an essential part of the survival and linear progress of a collective whole. In this way, wounds emerge in Lorde and Morrison's text as confrontations not simply between bodies and extractive violence but between blackness and value, where characters stage their refusal to be fully conscripted into the reified collectives—such as the nuclear family, nation state, and community—that spell their simultaneous erasure and consumption.

Morrison's novel ends with the question "Sula?" Like Bambara's question above, this dialogically unsettles the formal parameters of the novel's ostensibly self-contained totality. This question asks, "what world can accommodate someone like Sula, who is entirely unbound to the logic of self-sacrifice?" It is a question asked in the full awareness that the only answer, in the moment of its articulation, is the world of the novel itself. Far from a defeatist position, I argue, this is where the abolitionist imperative of these novels is articulated. Indeed, *Sula* begins at the end, with the admission that the town in which the novel is set no longer exists; its buildings have been razed and its nightshade and blackberry patches have been torn up to make room for a golf course. Complementarily, *The Salt Eaters* ends at the beginning with Velma Henry emerging from a healing after her attempted suicide as from a "burst cocoon." Both novels consider, in different ways, the radical potential of their non- existence not as death or apocalypse, but as a gesture to a world in which the novel that exists in its current function, as a systematization of time, is obsolete.

CHAPTER ONE

Disposable Time, Racial Policing, and the Weight of Being Well in Toni Cade Bambara's *The Salt Eaters*

"It was precisely the culture of production whose *representations* of reality had made the knowledge possible that could split the atom that now cannot, by nature of the epistemology related to that same code of figuration, solve the problem of the kind of social order in which such knowledge could function in its creative, rather than its destructive aspect."
Sylvia Wynter, *Black Metamorphosis*

"Intellectual alienation is a creation of bourgeois society. And for me, bourgeois society is any society that becomes ossified in a predetermined mold, stifling any development, progress, or discovery. For me bourgeois society is a closed society where it is not good to be alive, where the air is rotten and ideas and people are putrefying."
Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin,White Masks*

"The form becomes the exact interpretation of the idea the story is meant to tell."
Toni Morrison, "The Writer Before the Page"

Toxic Exposure and Healing in "the Wake"

"In 1995," Toni Morrison writes, "racism may wear a new dress, buy a new pair of boots, but neither it nor its succubus twin fascism is new or can make anything new. It can only reproduce the environment that supports its own health: fear, denial, and an atmosphere in which its victims have lost the will to fight ("Racism and Fascism" 15). This short quote captures several of the concerns that animate my reading of Toni Cade Bambara's 1980 novel, *The Salt Eaters*, including the seamless reproduction of repressive institutions dressed up as progressive reforms, the uneven distribution of health and harm, and the depletion of insurgent energies. Set in the ecologically toxified and politically fractured Southern town of Claybourne, the novel follows the healing of beloved community member, organizer, and mother, Velma Henry after

her attempted suicide. Like the town itself, described as "a major energy center, one of the chakras of the country" (163), Velma is a source of immeasurable energy and magnetizing power in her community where she is said to do the organizing work of eight people in addition to taking care of her family and working various jobs.[37] Navigating this workload, especially in the wake of the Black Power Movement's swift, if incomplete, repression by the state, has left Velma depleted: "like work and no let up and tears in the night. Like being rolled to the edge of the bed, to extremes, clutching a stingy share of the covers and about to drop over the sides. [. . .] like going to jail and being forgotten, forgotten, or at least deprioritized cause bail was not as pressing as the printer's bill" (25). As suggested by the intimacy of this domestic metaphor, Velma is moved "to extremes" through a lack of care and respite, perhaps even more so than by the structural violence she encounters through her activism. Foundational but "deprioritized," Velma is "split" from herself and her community and has become, "as dangerous as [. . .] atomic energy in the hands of capitalists, as any kind of power in the hands of the psychically immature, spiritually impoverished and intellectually undisciplined" (133). Indeed, through her spiritual neglect, Velma has come to resemble the town's infrastructurally neglected power plant, raising her husband's concerns, for example, that "[s]he might catch fire any minute, break the vessel, and all he knew of her drain off, become ignited, burn away" (100). Bambara's subtle comparison between Velma and the nuclear plant emphasizes how deeply implicated the entire community is in her healing for their own wellbeing.

[37] As her husband Obie notes, "it took him, Jan, Marcus (when he was in town,) Daisy Moultrie and her mother (when they could afford to pay them), the treasurer of the board, and two student interns to replace Velma at the academy (93)

While the nuclear comparison highlights the shared stakes of her recovery, the novel's interwoven narrative structure suggests that the healing is itself a collective effort.[38] As a process of accessing frequencies "that could carry the clue spoken—a dream message, an item of diet, a hurt unforgiven and festering, a guilt released" (48-49), the "clue spoken" does not exist in isolation, but as part of a diverse locutionary habitat that Minnie, Claybourne's renowned healer, must parse to find the source of one's suffering. Just as Velma ruminates on past harm, other characters navigate their own memories of loss, toxicity, and state repression. Sophie, for example, recalls the murder of her son, Smitty by the police; Nilda remembers glowing jackrabbit pelts, irradiated from nuclear waste; and Obie is bitterly reminded that Rikers is built on a landfill "like so many joints where the family is caged" (96). The convergence of carceral and ecological violence dramatizes what Christina Sharpe theorizes as *the weather* "that produces a pervasive climate of anti-blackness" (106). As constitutive parts of Velma's healing, however, each narrative exceeds their individual expository function, testifying to how "those in the wake also produce out of the weather their own ecologies" (106) or relational environments. The dialogic whole that emerges in and as the novel thus functions as something like the raw material for Velma's healing, or to borrow Sharpe's evocation, the "ground" of normative and structurally necessitated anti-black violence upon which "possibilities of rupture might be opened"(7) in a praxis of care.[39]

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[38] My attention to the woven quality of Bambara's novel is inspired by Toni Morrison's description of how she approaches her work as Bambara's editor. She writes, "her writing is woven, aware of its music, its overlapping waves of scenic action, so clearly on its way–like a magnet collecting details in its wake, each of which is essential to the final effect. Entering her prose with a red pencil must be delicate; one ill-advised (or well-advised) "correction" can dislodge a thread, unravel an intricate pattern which is deceptively uncomplicated at first glance–but only at first glance" (Bambara 1999 viii).

[39] It is worth reproducing this passage at greater length for the way it depicts the "ground" as a foundation for a dialogic plane of being and caring. Sharpe writes, "The ongoing state-sanctioned legal and extralegal murders of Black people are normative, and, for this so-called democracy, necessary; it is the ground we

As a process of collective accounting for spiritual malignancies and forces of physical-ecological disequilibria, these narratives are often notably described in the context of harm that has gone unaccounted for, ungrieved, or misrepresented. For Sophie, it's the "Black TV announcer misnumbering the crowd, mixmatching the facts, lost to the community" (15) that seems to constitute not just a representational failure, but a betrayal of sorts. For Obie, it's his brother's lack of remorse for his violent actions that seemingly betrays Obie's abolitionist ethics of repair as much, if not perhaps more, than the toxic prison itself. And then there's Claybourne's bus driver, Fred Holt, whose narration is nothing if not a bitter confrontation with the structural silences that came to define his best friend's life and death:

> Porter. Had to bribe a doctor to get his papers through and get the job with the bus company. Some kind of wasting disease was eating him up. Yucca Flats, 1955, atomic test blasts—his theme song. [. . .] hospitalized, discharged, no compensation, no records, not service-connected they said, goodbye, get lost buddy, drop dead. She stabbed him, they said, in the side of the neck as he leaned into his cup, lips pursed, hot coffee. He fell, they said, like cattle fall in the stock yards. Yucca Flats, Pit Stop. It was enough to make a grown man weep. Enough to make you mean. (80) [40]

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walk on. And that it *is* the ground lays out that, and perhaps how we might begin to live in relation to this requirement for our death. What kinds of possibilities for rupture might be opened up? What happens when we proceed as if we *know* this, antiblackness, to be the ground on which we stand, the ground from which we attempt to speak, for instance, an 'I' or a 'we' who know, and 'I' or 'we' who care? (7).

[40] Like Sophie's account of the "the police rushing [the protest] "*like a tank*" (emphasis added 14), Bambara's evocation of the domestic test blasts that rendered the Western Shoshone Nation "the most bombed nation on earth" (Ian Zabarte) highlights the systemic connection between international and domestic expressions of settler colonial war powers, as well as the capture and disposal of black labor and life in the process. As Jessica hurley argues in her incisive analysis of "infrastructural violence" in *The Salt Eaters:* "Bambara conceptualizes—and teaches her readers to see—nuclear infrastructures as globally and temporally interconnected forms of colonial violence built into the land itself, inflicting harm on human and nonhuman life even as it occludes its own active role in the harm by presenting itself as just another part of the landscape"(394).

The repetition of "they said" calls to mind Jordan's "diction of the powerful" as an idiom of structural impunity and willful obfuscation. And indeed, like Smitty's murder, Porter's murder goes unaccounted for as "[n]ot a single Claybourne paper could piece together a story from the witnesses. And not a single witness could offer a description of the women" (78). I would argue that it is not simply the structural silences that have left Fred "brimming over with rage and pain and loss" but their callous repetition across fundamentally different experiences of life-altering and life-ending occupational violence. Put another way, it is the systemic form's indifference to the content of the lives it consumes and disposes of that Fred struggles to countenance in his grieving process. We can see Fred grappling with this systemic repetition in his recurrent juxtaposition of the two pivotal events recounted above. His repetition of the phrase "theme song" in reference to Porter's frequent discussions of toxicity, death, and dying, highlights the episodic quality of Fred's own recollection of these conversations. But just as their conversations always managed to return to Yucca Flats, Fred's circuitous remembrances are abruptly punctuated by some version of "Now Porter is dead," "Porter Dead," or just "Porter." Each episode formally mirrors the temporal opposition between the "slow violence"[41] of Porter's toxic exposure, and the immediacy of his confounding death, between "dying" and "dead," "haunted" and "gone" (82). Fred momentarily tries to subsume these incommensurate temporal registers into a semblance of equivalency in the short, spatially mirrored sentence, "Yucca Flats, Pit Stop." That is, he tries to make language do what was systemically done to Porter: reduce his life to a sequence of context-less "accidents" for which no one has to answer (including Fred himself, thus sparing him from his painful grief). His ultimate failure to do so, marked by his continued rumination on his friend's life and death, speaks not only to the unnaturalness of this

[41] This is a term from Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor.*

systemic imperative, but to his love for Porter which demands he continue figuring out "[h]ow to stay in the wake with and as those whom the state positions to die ungrievable deaths and live lives meant to be unlivable" (Sharpe 22).

Bambara's novel shows, in various ways, how healing and wellness amidst systemic forces of racialized disposability is fundamentally a contest over time itself. It is a battle not only against the time theft of labor and state sanctioned premature death, but of time's narrative reproduction of "modes of figuration" geared persistently towards destructive, rather than creative ends. As Damien M. Sojoyner writes, "the trick and abject horror of time is its covert use in the reinforcement of difference (i.e. race, gender, sexuality). On a very basic level the manifestation of such difference is understood within the context of *how* time is applied and to *whom*" (Sojoyner 63). Nowhere is the racially differentiated weaponization of time more flagrantly apparent than in racial policing and the prison system, and yet, because time appears "as a racial blank slate" its "structural effect on black people dissolves" (Sojoyner 63) into behavioralist accounts of immiseration and criminality. While Sojoyner's analysis helpfully identifies how the fetishization of "choice" partakes in the ideological illusions of time, I want to explore how capitalism's temporal architecture *imposes* behavioralist rationality (and its attendant essentialisms) at an epistemological level specifically through the instantiation of its value form. To these ends, in part one of this chapter, I will be reading Louis Althusser and Frantz Fanon comparatively to elaborate the epistemic causality of the extractive law of capitalist value—or "extractive reason," for short—before turning to its role in the naturalization of the police state and its constitutive racial violence. [42] In part two of this chapter, I will then return to

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[42] Dylan Rodriguez has gathered the following statistics regarding racial (and gender) demographics of sentencing and incarceration rates in the U.S. in his 2019 article for *The Harvard Law Review:* "A vast archive of criminological data consistently demonstrates that criminal justice–based incarceration is

The Salt Eaters to explore how the novel's structural ambivalence, like Fanon's critical liminality, names the imperative to "wretch time from its track" (Bambara 1992, 247).

Part 1: Waste, Value, and Capitalism's "Grip on Time"

To offer a materialist account of the relationship between racialized disposability and time we need to begin briefly with the broader role of "excess" in the capitalist mode of production. Like the geophysical processes of mining, capital both creates and necessitates waste. Be it the polluted byproducts of industry, the degradation of the health and energy of laborers, or the creation of immiserated and policed surplus populations, the fact remains: there must be human and nonhuman excess to create surplus. At its most basic, this is a process of energy capture premised on the capacity to lay-to-waste, to deplete workers and their environment with relative impunity. As Marx writes, capitalist accumulation "only develops the techniques and the degree of combination of the social process of production by simultaneously undermining the original sources of all wealth—the soil and the worker" (1990, 638). For Marx, this process is typified in the mining relation operative in the coal pits and mining shafts of 19th century England. He begins this section on "Economy in the Use of Constant Capital" in volume III of *Capital* with a discussion of waste in broad, even seemingly ethical terms. Citing the high mortality rate and dismal working conditions that characterize the industry, he writes, "these

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structured in gendered racist state violence. The Sentencing Project has recently summarized the vast asymmetries in the lifetime likelihood of imprisonment for U.S. residents born in 2001: 1 out of 17 for white men, 1 out of 6 for Latino men, and 1 out of 3 for Black men; 1 out of 111 for white women, 1 out of 45 for Latina women, and 1 out of 18 for Black women. Hispanics are incarcerated under state jurisdiction at a rate 170% higher than whites, while "[t]hirty-six states had overrepresentation of Native Americans in prisons, ranging from 1.2 times the rate for Whites in Missouri and Tennessee to 14.5 times the rate for Whites in Nevada."While rates of incarceration in the United States have slightly declined over the last decade or so and the gap between the number of incarcerated Blacks and whites is shrinking, the Pew Research Center reports that as of 2016, Black people are still subjected to state captivity at a rate more than 500% greater than whites" (1585-1586).

human sacrifices are due for the most part to the filthy avarice of the coal-owners, who for instance often only have one shaft sunk, so that not only is no effective ventilation possible, but also there is no escape if this shaft gets blocked" (1991, 182). In the passage that follows, he clarifies this seemingly moralistic appraisal to show how the coal mine is more than a compelling example of bourgeois callousness and brutal working conditions, but rather, I want to suggest, an apt model for *all labor* under capitalism. He writes,

> "Yet it squanders human beings, living labour, more readily than does any other mode of production, squandering not only flesh and blood, but nerves and brain as well. In fact it is only through the most tremendous waste of individual development that the development of humanity in general is secured and pursued [. . .]. Since the whole of the economizing we are discussing here arises from the social character of labour, it is in fact precisely this directly social character of labour that produces this waste of the worker's life and health. (1991, 182).

In an important shift from subjective categories such as "thrift" "greed" and "avarice," Marx begins to elaborate the waste compulsion in structural terms to show that the "economizing," or the economically advantageous disavowal of worker's health and longevity, is produced by the *social character* of labor which, as elaborated in the introduction, is abstract. Abstract labor, you will recall, is a formal structure of equivalence that "extinguishes every trace" (1990, 680) of the division between necessary labor time and surplus labor time, between the time that is required for the reproduction of the worker (what would traditionally be the time of subsistence) and the time in which the worker creates surplus value.[43] In this way, capitalist accumulation doesn't

[43] Necessary labor time (in contradistinction to surplus labor time) is not to be conflated with socially necessary labor time. Massimiliano Tomba makes this helpful distinction in his text, *Marx's Temporalities* (2013). He writes that necessary labor time "must not be confused, however, with the time of socially-necessary labor, which is, instead, the labor objectified in the value of the commodity. The latter does not depend on the quantity of time concretely employed in the production of a determinate commodity, but on the quantity of time that, in conditions of socially-average labour-productivity, is necessary for the production of that commodity" (137).

simply rely on the *capacity* to lay-to-waste in order to maximize profits; rather, its very value structure is premised on the temporal separation of value and waste like gold from dross. What is unique to capitalism is that value is not simply generated positively from the "active'" side of this binary, but in an immanent counter positionality to its "idle" opposite within a formal totality. It is not enough, for example, to simply exploit the labor force, there must also be the reserve army of labor to depress wages. This dual character has been largely acknowledged in terms of inequality, in keeping with Marx's assertion that the relations of production "do not have a simple, uniform character but rather a dual one; that in the same relations in which wealth is produced, poverty is produced also (Marx 1990, 799). To grasp this dual structure at the level of value, however, is to enable an understanding not only of how racial capital makes time constitutive but of how abstraction conceals these temporal constituencies.

"Disposable Time" and the Amputations of Race

For our purposes in this chapter, I want to highlight two major implications of this abstraction, beginning with the occlusion of human need. Just as geophysical extraction destroys the means of subsistence extant on any given landscape *materially*, the abstraction of the value form obliterates our cognitive grasp of the means of subsistence *temporally.* This occurs through an identical process of formally interiorizing "disposable *time*" in the social form of labor. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx writes, "The measure of wealth is then not any longer, in any way, labour time, but rather disposable time. *Labour time as the measure of* value posits wealth itself as founded on poverty, and disposable time as existing *in and because of the antithesis to surplus labour time*; or, the positing of an individual's entire time as labour time (1993, 708). Just as necessary labor time is posited as antithetical to and distinguished from surplus labor time, the division or "extractive cut" between the two disappears in the emergence of a single labor time;

its self-instantiation as a homogenous totality hides its heterogeneity. What we lack in this equation, I argue, is not necessarily subsistence itself, but *knowledge of the lack*. It is by this logic, as Marx argues, capitalism doesn't just fail to meet our individual and collective needs, it makes us unable to sensually grasp and codify what those needs even are.[44] Marxist feminists and (more recently) social reproduction theorists, show how this occlusion necessarily enables the patriarchic erasure of reproductive labor (including by Marx himself). [45] Bambara humorously gets to the heart of this socioeconomic and discursive dynamic as Velma reflects on the gendered division of labor that persists in even the most thoroughly politically educated households: "Not a clue, my friends, as to how the eggs, bacon and biscuits come to appear before him. [. . .] Velma was thinking 'abstractionist' summed him up, a perfect label for the habit, the unminding gap between want and done, demand and get" (31).

The "mechanisms of occultation" characteristic of the social form of labor can be extrapolated to class formation as well, specifically in the context of relative surplus populations, the idle other to the active workforce, and its various subclasses. Here it is not only waste posited as external, but as a distinct, occupiable stage, that conceals capital's structural necessitation of human surplus. Within the "lowest sediment of the relative surplus population" (1990, 797), we have the "sphere of pauperism" which contains two subsets: those who are able to work and will

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[44] Abstract labor, Marx writes, "changes the worker into an insensible being lacking all needs, just as he changes his activity into a pure abstraction from all activity" (1988, 118). Marx dramatizes this in the 1844 Manuscripts through similarly extractive spatial imagery in his evocation of a cave, wherein "Light, air, ect.—the simplest *animal* cleanliness—ceases to be a need for man." He "returns to living in a cave, which is now, however, contaminated with the mephitic breath of plague given off by civilization, and which he continues to occupy precariously" (117).The platonic allusion and this "insensitivity' signals an assault on one's sensual and intellectual cognition, which is intensified by the presence of waste, "the *sewage* of civilization," the "utter, unnatural neglect, putrefied nature" that saturates man's senses and "comes to be his *life-element*" (117).

[45] See, for example, Tithi Bhattacharya's edited collection, *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*.

be re-incorporated into the workforce when needed, and those who will remain unable to work. For Marx (writing in his historical moment) these are the elderly, the widowed, and importantly, the "victims of industry, whose number increases with the growth of dangerous machinery, of mines, chemical works, etc." (1990, 797). In volume one of *Capital*, this follows a more distinctly processual logic: one works and then is either temporarily unemployed or rendered permanently unemployable when they are disabled by the literal and figurative machinery of capitalism. Marx's account in the *Grundrisse*, however, offers a slight but important alteration to this teleological progression through distinct stages of work and non-work. In this account, Marx argues that pauperism is not simply a discreet status or stage but is, rather, internally constituent to the concept of the laborer under capitalism. He writes, "only in the mode of production based on capital does pauperism appear as the result of labour itself, of the development of the productive force of labour" (1993, 604). Notice he says it *appears* as the result, signaling a representative relation that instantiates an oversimplified relation of causality and progression. In reality, Marx writes, pauperism "is already contained in the concept of the free labourer, that he is a pauper: virtual pauper" (604).[46]

[46] Failure to grasp this formal co-constituency leads towards a fascistic account of capital's "human excess." This is demonstrated, for Marx, by Malthus' theory of overpopulation, which famously argues that population growth demands human and non-human checks such as famine, war, and disease, lest we fully deplete our naturally given resources. Malthus explains overpopulation incorrectly, Marx writes, as an "external law of nature, rather than the merely historical laws of the nature of capitalist production" (1990, 666). "His conception is altogether false and childish" Marx maintains, "because he regards *overpopulation* as being *of the same kind* in all the different historic phases of economic development"(*Grundrisse* 605); that is, he fails to historicize overpopulation and thus wrongly attributes the existence of an immiserated surplus to our species' fatally unbalanced relationship with nature, and not to the economic system that necessitates surplus and destabilized the environment in the first place. In response, Marx makes emphatic that "overpopulation and population, taken together, are *the* population which a specific production basis can create. The extent to which it goes beyond its barrier is given by the barrier itself, or rather by the same base which posits its barrier. Just as necessary labour and surplus labour together [are] the whole of labour on a given base (1993, 605). It is fitting that Marx compares this co-constituency to the abstract totality of labor because both are symptomatic of the occlusion of the necessary means of reproduction under capitalism and it is these very means or resources that Malthus is anxiously contemplating when faced with the condition of scarcity.

This is why abstract labor, to borrow Deleuze's phrasing, is the "genuine structure" of capital which designates a "differential virtuality to be interpreted" (186), just as it is rendered seemingly uninterpretable. Louis Althusser captures this conceptual elision in *Reading Capital* in his discussion of empiricism as a "real abstraction." While he doesn't align empiricism with the value structure of capital, he does notably align it with extraction (albeit largely for metaphorical impact). Beyond the terminological overlap, his analysis warrants my extrapolation of the motive force of empirical time to the value form not just because I maintain this form is itself extractive, but because it is a temporal totality constituted by the "cutting" procedures he describes below. Read alongside Fanon's study of the racial object of knowledge in *Black Skin, White Masks*, we can then begin to trace the process by which abstraction conceals the formal duality of capitalist value, and, in doing so, replaces a systemic understanding of mutually valuable and violable human "excess" with an essentialist account of racialized disposability. But first, the cut of abstraction:

> What does a *real* abstraction actually mean? It accounts for what is declared to be a real fact: the essence is abstracted from real objects in the sense of an *extraction*, as one might say that gold is *extracted* (or abstracted, i.e. separated) from the dross of the earth and sand in which it is held and contained. Just as gold, before its abstraction, exists as gold unseparated from its dross in the dross itself, so the essence of the real exists as a real essence *in* the real which contains it. Knowledge is an abstraction, in the strict sense, i.e. an extraction of essence from the real which contains it, a separation of the essence from the real which contains it and keeps it in hiding. (Althusser et al. 2015, 35-36)

Here, gold is identified through a process of recognition, separating it from non-gold, the essential from the inessential, and pure essence from impure essence according to external standards of value. This operation, writes Althusser, "and all its scouring procedures [. . .] are merely procedures to purge and eliminate *one part of the real in order to isolate the other*" (36). Consequently, Althusser continues, such procedures "leave no trace in the extracted part, every trace of their operation is eliminated along with the part of the real they were intended to

eliminate" (36). By evacuating the differential relations between the two sides, we lose what Althusser calls "the production process of the object of knowledge" (41). Put another way, the extractive cut is made at the same time its motive force (be it the instantiation of economic or racial forms of value) is concealed. This is the second major implication of the abstraction of the value form: what stands before us is an object of knowledge that is immanently vulnerable to essentialization because it has lost all trace of its hybrid construction (to return to Wynter's helpful terminology). As Althusser explains, rather than confront an object of knowledge as "an *always-already* complex raw material,[47][that] combines together in a peculiar '*Verbindung'* sensuous, technical, and ideological elements" (43), empiricism "desperately demands that one confronts a *pure object* which is then identical to the *real object* of which knowledge aimed to produce precisely . . . the knowledge (43).

What emerges is a conception of time founded by two major presuppositions: the homogeneous continuity of time, and the contemporaneity of time, or the category of the historical present as expressive of all historical existence (240). The extractive cut of capitalist value finds its epistemological corollary with what Althusser calls the "essential section" (241). This is "an intellectual operation in which a *vertical break* is made at any moment in historical time, a break in the present such that all the elements of the whole revealed by this section are in an immediate relationship with one another, a relationship that immediately expresses their internal essence" (241). In its expressive capacity, the present is ontologized which, for

[47] While "raw material," like its colonial predecessor "prime matter" generally has a negative connotation according to the racializing logic of extractive reason, Althusser endows raw material with inherent complexity and potentiality (in keeping with an anti-extractive notion of matter). Following Marx, Althusser defines raw material as "already elaborated and transformed, precisely by the imposition of the complex (sensuous-technical-ideological) structure which constitutes it as an *object of knowledge*, however crude, which constitutes it as the object it will transform, whose *forms* it will change in the course of its development processing order to produce knowledges which are constantly *transformed* but will always apply to its *object*, in the sense of *object of knowledge*" (43).

Althusser, is precisely what divorces this empiricist conception of time from any grasp on the future. What is lost is contingency and the interplay between differential temporalities and thus any relation to futurity or the new. This is why we "can never know the immanence of tomorrow's essence, the 'kernel in the shell', the future in invisible gestation in the present" (242). Instead, time is spatialized into sequential "presents" or essential sections to guarantee their sustained legibility and expressive correlation to a false totality.

Fanon captures the temporal valences of the empirical production of the "fact of blackness" in his famous account of the being hailed within the colonial episteme. In the moment of its articulation, "Look! A Negro!" three things happen simultaneously that function to essentialize the racial categories of selection/dysselection: The speaker is perceived according to the racial epidermal schema as black in contradistinction to the white man, he is interpellated into the colonial mode of relation, and he is "imprisoned" in the false historical totality of anti-blackness to which his own black being must now representationally cohere according to the logics of the "essential section." Fanon dramatizes this third effect notably through the metaphor of amputation (a theme I will return to in chapter 3). He writes,

> on that day, completely dislocated, unable to be abroad with the other, the white man, who unmercifully imprisoned me, I took myself far away from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object. What else could it be for me but an amputation? An excision, a hemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood? But I did not want this revision, this thematization. All I wanted was to be a man among other men. I wanted to come lithe and young into a world that was ours and to help build it together. (1986, 112-113)

Notice how Fanon rhetorically differentiates the speaker's metaphorical wounding from the "black blood" that "spattered" him, which suggests a degree of spatial separation between the speaker and the source of the blood. While in the 2008 translation it *is* explicitly the speakers' skin that is "peeled and stripped" causing "a hemorrhage that left congealed black blood all over [his] body" (2008 92), the word "congealed" suggests the blood is the product of past wounds

which enables a subtle temporal differentiation to the same effect as the spatial differentiation operative in the earlier transition. As with the cut of the essential section, what is being amputated, for Fanon, is any sense of *temporal plenitude* and thus the (sociogenic) production process of the object of knowledge which forecloses any possibility for mutual recognition and relational co-creation. This is why, for Fanon, history itself is a disciplinary paradigm that limits freedom and self-creation (2008, 20).[48] In this way, I am inclined to read the corporeal source of the universalized "black blood" as "The body of history" itself (1986, 231). Indeed, it is not simply the occlusions of the colonial account of history, or even the racist demands of expressive correlation *to* that history that Fanon rejects, but the way its foreclosure of futurity renders the past unusable as "raw material" for the future. As Darieck Scott compellingly shows, "The past only assumes a practical meaning in light of the liberated future (and the struggling present) that perhaps provides the necessary seed for it and that it could also correct— that is, rewrite, reconstitute, and even, for Fanon, erase" (Scott 45). It follows, as Scott argues, that for Fanon "there is a demand to *restore* time." To restore time, I will show in the pages that follow, is to

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[48] While this is the epistemological context in which the psychic image of racial identification is profoundly disported for Fanon, it is important to note that the temporal foreclosures are not total. We can see this if we understand the "perilous perspective of the concept of the image itself," as Homi K Bhabha writes in his introduction to *Black Skin, White Masks,* "The access to the image of identity is only ever possible in the negation of any sense of originality or plenitude, though the principle of displacement and differentiation (absence/ presence; representation/ repetition) that always renders it a liminal reality" (1986, xvii). As Wynter has shown, the *negative proscription* of the 'liminal category' "is central to the "ground" from which the 'regimes of truth' of each epistemological order and its disciplinary paradigms are rule-governedly generated*"* (Wynter 1994, 67). Importantly, however, it is also by self-consciously writing *from* the liminal position of self and Other in *Black Skin, White Masks*, that Fanon can critique the empirical imposition of its categorical violence as a racialized and racializing paradigm without necessarily being fully constricted by its binarism (this is why, I think, the sociogenic principle is both critically incisive and *temporally expansive* for Wynter).

recapture time from the state and its "viciously antihuman customs and cultural ways passed forward from the past" (Scott 45).

Part 2: The "Economic Force" of the State

One approach to the state's temporal mediation of the demands of capital can be found in Marx's theory of primitive accumulation, not as a historical moment per se, but as a political economic paradigm that shows the relationship between waste-making, state intervention, and population control. Marx's version of "so-called primitive accumulation" begins with his critique of Adam Smith, whose theory of "previous accumulation" is characteristic of the "insipid childishness" that is "everyday preached to us in the defense of property." This narrative of a gradual and *peaceful* delineation of classes, in which the frugal elite accumulated wealth, while the latter sort eventually agrees to sell their own labor, played, Marx writes, "approximately the same role in political economy as original sin does in theology. Adam bit the apple, and thereupon sin fell on the human race." Marx dispels this myth, and provides the account with which we are familiar, involving "the forcible creation of a class of free and rightless proletarians, the bloody discipline that turned them into wage-labourers, [and] the disgraceful proceedings of the state which employed police methods to accelerate the accumulation of capital by increasing the degree of exploitation of labour" (1990, 904). In keeping with my earlier claim about the formal precedent set by the "Sepulveda Syndrome," this process can only begin by divorcing a population from their means of subsistence. In the English context, this was achieved through enclosures. Tellingly referred to as "wastes" by the emergent bourgeois order, the commons were disparaged by the state as the source of "laziness and disorder" demanding they be privatized, emptied, and ultimately surveilled in order to be made "productive" (Federici 71). Newly expelled from the commons, individuals didn't just readily show up to the factory

gates to earn wages. Legal measures and police enforcement thus emerge both to criminalize non-capitalist means of reproduction and domesticate a new labor force. As Cedric Robinson shows, this became a formula for a new era of colonial expropriation beginning in the English context with the Irish, who were "accused of being idle, lazy, dirty and licentious" and again against indigenous populations in the "New World" who were said to be "an unsettled people who did not make proper use of their land and could thus be justly deprived of it by the more enterprising English" (80). As we saw in the introduction, the myth of the "idle, unenterprising Native" was firmly established as a means of colonial appropriation in the New World prior to its English articulation. As Wynter writes, "This stereotype was part of the mediating myth that lay at the heart of any relationship whose power was the extraction of surplus value from devalued labor power: whether by the forced labor of the slave on the plantation, or by the more complex contemporary mechanisms by which native labor is made to function" (N.D. 4).

Wynter's emphasis on the economic foundations of this myth alights on the relationship between capitalism and the state that I am proposing. As we know, following Marx, " '*the state is the 'direct' manifestation of the relation of production'* " which, Althusser writes, is precisely its "secret" (2006, 110). This would hardly seem to constitute a "secret" given the centrality of state violence in Marx's account above. Obvious as the role of the state may be in maintaining the hierarchies and property relations of capitalism, it is easy to ignore one of Marx's most fundamental interventions in his elaboration of primitive accumulation, which is that force "is itself an economic power" (1990, 916). It follows that the nature of that force —not just its economic *ends*— should be reflective of the form of economy in which it operates. Althusser's later work on the philosophy of the encounter begins to grapple more directly with this relation; he writes that "[w]hat counts in a mode of production, what makes it such-and-such, is the *mode*

of domination of the structure over its elements" (2006, 203). For feudalism it was the "*structure of dependence*"; for capitalism, "it is the structure of exploitation that is imposed on all the elements" (203). It must follow then that the nature of this force as exploitation, *and the manner in which it becomes a "secret"* can be structurally located in the social form of labor (which, I have argued, is a racially constructed form.) If the capitalist mode of production demands the free laborer and the pauper, then, I argue, the economic force of capitalism is the power to render individuals and populations active or passive not only to *compel labor* but to *devalue labor* along racial lines (which occurs in and importantly outside of the formal labor relation). The state, bound to the same "master code of life and death" that created and is sustained by this social form, thus responds to the structural necessity of capital and uses carceral force to determine *who* will be rendered disposable. But this is not simply a matter of the state applying physical force to dictate how time is occupied and by whom, but as, Wynter and Robinson's analyses show, it is also a matter of the state assuming a monopoly over the signifying power of time, that is, to socially inscribe temporal categories onto subjects in the very process of their expropriation and criminalization. We can see this in our contemporary moment, for example, in the condemnation of idleness in the concept of "loitering," or in the conspiratorial projections of activity in the conception of "furtive movements." In this way, police are granted the power of *diagnosing* social and individual "disorder" to devastating effects. [49]

[49] Broken window policing is a striking example of how declarations of "waste" expand police power. Robin D. G. Kelley discusses this in his chapter titled, "Thug Nation: On State Violence and Disposability" He writes, the underlying concept of broken policing is deceptively simple: to stop major rime from occurring, police must first prevent small signs of "disorder" from proliferating, such as graffiti, litter, panhandling, public urination, the sale of untaxed cigarettes, and so forth. It proposes that the best way to prevent major crimes is for people to take responsibility for their neighborhoods and for the police to facilitate that process. [. . .] Instead of addressing "individual crimes," broken windows theory has given police new authorization to control and moderate behavior."

Repetition of Racial Policing

As a material and representational dynamic, the economic force of racial policing is foundational for maintaining anti-blackness as "total climate" precisely because it is so deeply interwoven into the social form of capitalism. That is, policing creates structurally necessitated "disposable time" within a "mode of figuration" that conceals its systemic function *while persistently eliciting essentialist notions of race through its abstracting force.* This is a devastatingly effective scenario for both instantiating and normalizing the sheer magnitude of police presence in the U.S. as well as the racial violence that inevitably ensues. Barnor Hesse's formulation of "race as repetition" is particularly instructive for grasping how policing replicates the "master codes of life and death" while reifying the state's monopoly over the power of contingency. Hesse writes,

> "The question of race is always a question of its repetition as hierarchy, segregation, and normativity. To ignore this configuration of repetition is to discount how race has always had a policing function. Inscribed within a force of law, the salience of race is an enforceability that obliges conformity and imposes the law of its colonial inheritances. Guaranteed by a violence lying in wait, its origins forgotten but no less preserved in repetition, race is the assembled law of a certain kind of colonial or postcolonial social order." (586)

In thinking about the temporal register of a seemingly origin-less "violence lying in wait," I'm reminded of Toni Morrison's Shadrack, of his rapid shift from soldier to patient to prisoner in the early pages of *Sula*. Discharged from the military, and again from the hospital, he sits on a curb and cries soundlessly in the thick of a mental breakdown. "By the time the police drive up, Shadrack was suffering from a blinding headache" Morrison writes, "They took him to jail, booked him for vagrancy and intoxication, and locked him in a cell" (13). These events are all too familiar within the long history of racist policing in the United States: a black person is arrested for occupying a public space "unproductively" or for the even more damning crime of

suffering in public, of needing care in a society solely equipped to respond though carceral force. What is perhaps more striking than the events themselves is the rhetoric of inevitability in which they are conveyed. There is no catalyzing event, nor any mention of cops being summoned; they arrive as naturally as the progression of time itself. Morrison's use of the phase "by the time" also suggests a belatedness of arrival and thus presupposes a normative state of police omnipresence. This belatedness and the contingency of the particularities of racist policing sheds light on the temporal foundations of colonial police terror. Indeed, time itself is subtly deployed as a motive force (*by* the time) and conduit for the police arrival in this passage testifying to the way in which time both produces, and acclimates us to, the climate of antiblackness. As Hesse writes, "the racial policing event never fails to shock, is always to be expected, but always without knowing how, where, or when" (588).

In his reading of Claudia Rankine's *Citizen*, and its poetic navigation of racial profiling and stop and frisk, Hesse writes, Rankine "evinces racial policing in the inevitability of black bodies accumulating in the racial collateral damage that disfigures the rights of black citizens as noncitizens in daily violent encounters with the police's racial ordering of their social lives" (588). Hesse's use of the word "accumulation" is a bitter reminder of how the visual economy of racial capital's "excess" persistently elides systemic analysis. Just as the indictment of "mass incarceration" presumes a socially acceptable amount of incarceration, police shootings are characterized as "excessive force" as though there is any form of police presence that isn't already violently excessive.[50] Both are presented as outliers to the regular proceedings of the law

[50] Rodriguez critiques the abstraction of "mass" incarceration in his article, "Abolition as Praxis of Human Being." He writes: "As a racial-colonial, genocidal, and protogenocidal project of white Civilization-building, the long historical construction of racial chattel and its emancipated rearticulation in racial criminalization permanently disarticulate any allegation of the alleged 'mass' of "mass incarceration": there is no such mass; there are only fatal, systemically enforced differentiations of places, people, physiologies, subjectivities, and futurities" (1589).

that can be remedied by recourse to its own authority through reform, police training, and in exceedingly rare cases, by charging police officers under the law.

A Note on the Lumpenproletariat

It is not a coincidence, I think, that when Marx himself falls prey to the abstractions of "excess" and the temporal distortions of teleology, the class that emerges—the lumpenproletariat—is not just defined moralistically, but is notably criminalized as "the 'dangerous class,' the social scum, that *passively rotting* mass thrown off by the lowest layers of old society" (Marx and Engels, 1988, 220 emphasis added). Posited as the *byproduct* of working-class formation, the lumpenproletariat is defined by a lack of class consciousness that makes them easily conscripted into the repressive force of the state. The rural lumpenproletariat, while just as vulnerable to state incorporation, is defined less by its overtly criminal character than by its proximity to means of subsistence that exist outside capitalist reproduction.[51] Both the urban and the rural lumpen exhibit, for different reasons, a general disinterest in the capitalist mode of production, which for Marx renders them fundamentally incapable of seizing them. In this way, Marx mistakes this type of non-capitalist reproduction for idleness. Furthermore, by exteriorizing this "idle" class, in contradistinction to the interiorized pauper stratum, the lumpen is stripped of its revolutionary agency. For Fanon, this constitutes one of Marx's most egregious oversights and while he similarly characterizes this class through the language of delinquency, waste, and spoilage, he doesn't mistake their position with passivity. The colonial lumpenproletariat, Fanon writes, "constitutes a serious threat to the 'security' of the town and signifies the irreversible rot and gangrene eating into the heart of colonial domination" (2004, 81). Because they explicitly

[51] In the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, Marx writes "Each individual peasant family is almost self-sufficient" and "thus acquires its means of life more through exchange with nature than in intercourse with society" (2017 123-124)

occupy the position of the *always-already unconverted*, they present a unique challenge to the economic force of capital, which is why, as Fanon shows, the lumpen "constitutes one of the most spontaneously and radically revolutionary forces of a colonized people" (81). Following Fanon, Eldridge Cleaver also acknowledges the revolutionary power that emerges from the lumpen's unique positionality as both externalized by the state, but still structurally interiorized in the *totality* of the social form of labor. What Marx reads as a foundational weakness, Cleaver cites as a pivotal strength.[52] That is, because the lumpen "are all those who have no secure relationship or vested interest in the means of production and the institutions of capitalist society" (7), they are far more resistant to the reformist tendencies and complicities of the working class. If the proletariat "proper" is constituted through labor, their organizing energies will be oriented accordingly, the lumpen, on the other hand "has no institutionalized focus in Capitalist society. It has no immediate oppressor except perhaps the Pig Police with which it is confronted daily" (10). Marx's oversight is not surprising, then, because the value of the lumpenproletariat can only be recognized in the context of capitalism's foundational coloniality which requires an insurgent force capable of undermining the inseparable union between the economy and the state.

Fanon and Cleaver's acknowledgement of the lumpen's spontaneity speaks, again, to a respective sensitivity to the temporal foundations of colonial police terror. As Fanon writes,

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[52] Cleaver writes, "Some blind so-called Marxist-Leninists accuse the Lumpen of being parasites upon the Working Class. This is a stupid charge derived from reading too many of Marx's footnotes and taking some of his offhand scurrilous remarks for holy writ. In reality, it is accurate to say that the Working Class, particularly the American Working Class, is a parasite upon the heritage of mankind, of which the Lumpen has been totally robbed by the rigged system of Capitalism which in turn, has thrown the majority of mankind upon the junkheap while it buys off a percentage with jobs and security" (8).

"Every human problem cries out to be considered on the basis of time" (2008 xvi). This is as much a methodological imperative as it is a strategic one. If the economic force of the state dictates how time is occupied and by whom, a materialist methodology must be able to account for these reconfigurations as they have historically taken place without subsuming them under a rubric of linear causality, which would leave the abstracting tendencies of economic force firmly in place and conceal the insurgent value of spontaneity and contingency. For Althusser, this is precisely what Marx's theory of primitive accumulation models, as an *encounter* between the owners of money and those left with nothing but their labor. He writes, "It so happens that this encounter took place, and 'took hold' [. . .] the whole that results from the 'taking hold' of the 'encounter' does not precede the 'taking hold' of its elements, but follows it; for this reason, it might not have 'taken hold" and *a fortiori*, 'the encounter might not have taken place" (2006, 197). To read the encounter as aleatory alerts us to the radical possibility of its non-existence because it asks us, "instead of thinking contingency as a modality of necessity, or an exception to it" to consider necessity as "the becoming-necessary of the encounter of contingencies" (193-194).

Aleatory Materialism and the Temporal Reclamation of "Raw Material"

This radical potentiality lies in the uncertainty of the future in the aleatory encounter. Althusser writes,

> The encounter, one that is not brief, but lasts, never guarantees that it will continue to last tomorrow rather than come undone. Just as it might not have taken place, it may no longer take place. [. . .] In other words, nothing guarantees that the reality of the accomplished fact is the guarantee of its durability. Quite the opposite is true: every accomplished fact [. . .] only a provisional encounter, and since every encounter is provisional even when it lasts, *there is no eternity in the laws or any state.* (emphasis added 174)

This "historico-aleatory conception" (198) I want to suggest, resembles or approximates the temporality that haunts *Black Skin, White Masks,* and that, if realized, would enable Fanon to "be a man among other men" capable of coming "lithe and young into a world" (1986, 112-113), as the "raw material" of co-creation unbound by the temporal rigidity and determinant causality of extractive reason and its diagnostic violence. It is this temporality, I want to suggest, that informs Fanon's declarative below:

> "I am not a prisoner of History. I must not look for the meaning of my destiny in that direction.
> I must constantly remind myself that the real *leap* consists of introducing invention into life.
> In the world I am heading for, I am endlessly creating myself." (2008, 204) [53]

Against the constraints of historicism, aleatory materialism, Althusser writes, "is the materialism, not of a subject (be it God or the proletariat), but of a process, a process that has no subject, yet imposes on its subject (individuals or otherwise) which dominates the order of its development, with no assignable end" (190).[54] Under this rubric, we can cite socioeconomic determinants outside the stultifying logic of teleology at the same time we can parse the compulsions of the social form of labour without fetishizing the worker as the "decisive antagonism" (Wilderson 2003, 226) for mass mobilization. However, when the processual character is truncated by a

[53] Fanon's assertion that he is "endlessly creating himself" directly challenges the extractive logics of "raw material" as that which demands governing form like its Scholastic predecessor "prime matter."
[54] This also offers an important corrective to what many have wrongly identified as the humanistic foundations of Marxism. Jane Bennett, for example, argues that in focusing "exclusively on economic and social structures of human power" (2013, 62) historical materialism is limited to existing humanistic paradigms and anthropocentrism. As Althusser makes emphatic in his 1964 essay "Marxism and Humanism," "Marx broke radically with every theory that based history and politics on an essence of man" (227).

causal or teleological end, we fall prey to "the logic of the accomplished fact" and to the essentialist approach to historical causality that Fanon so influentially denounces.[55]

Under the essentialist rubric, "*the specific histories no longer float in history* like so many atoms in a void, at the mercy of an encounter that might not take place. Everything is accomplished in advance; *the structure precedes its elements and reproduces them in order to reproduce the structure"* (200). This naturalizes the structure's existence as inevitable by retroactively applying a present condition as its causal force. But what the aleatory encounter shows us is that X cannot cause Y if X only exists because of the encounter with Y. Waste, for example, was not a precondition for enclosures because it was only through enclosures that waste was posited as such. By this same logic, the "criminal" didn't necessitate the carceral system if the criminal only exists because of their encounter with that very system. In this way, aleatory materialism is a de-essentializing historical approach. But to highlight the effectiveness of a materialism of the encounter in this way is not to posit this as a novel methodology for grasping the criminalizing force of capitalism. Indeed, I think it could be said that many abolitionist scholars demonstrate the importance of this type of materialist approach as they elaborate the economic determinants of our carceral system to ask the central question: why prisons? or to borrow Davis' popular 2003 title, "are prisons obsolete?" This work isn't just expository or speculative, it forces a confrontation with the system's illegitimacy and *impermanence*. Gilmore's *Golden Gulag*, for example, brilliantly traces California's political

[55] Marx is not also not immune to this teleological foreclosure, as Althusser writes, "When Marx and Engels say that the proletariat is 'the product of big industry,' they utter a great deal of nonsense positioning themselves within the *logic of the accomplished fact of the reproduction of the proletariat on an extended scale,* not the aleatory logic of the 'encounter' which produces (rather than reproduces), as the proletariat, this mass of impoverished, expropriated human beings as one of the elements making up the mode of production. In the process, Marx and Engels shift from the first conception of the mode of production, an historico-aleatory conception, to a second, which is essentialist and philosophical" (198).

economy to elaborate how four surpluses (finance capital, land, labor, and state capacity) combined, resulting in the expansion of prisons. This is formulated as an aleatory encounter. She writes, "make no mistake: prison building was and is not the inevitable outcome of these surpluses. It did, however, put certain state capacities into motion, make use of a lot of idle land, get capital invested via public debt, and take more than 160,000 low-wage workers off the street" (2006, 89). The admission that this could have been otherwise explains, to borrow Althusser's phrasing, "something we find very hard to grasp: that laws can change" (195). Abolitionists are also inherently sensitive to the way in which reformist models succumb to the "logic of the accomplished fact" which, as Davis writes, "help to produce the stultifying idea that nothing lies beyond the prison" (2003, 20).

Part 2: The Weight of Being Well

The School-to-Prison pipeline

It is widely accepted that the education system is a major obstacle to abolition.[56] Like the prison industrial complex, schools adapt to the shifting demands of capital. Just as carceral force was once seen as a means of domesticating a workforce, of transforming the criminal into the proletariat (Pavarini 204), education used to be directed more towards assimilation to enforce

[56] As Davis writes, schools can be "the most powerful alternative to jails and prisons" (2003, 108), that is, if they are fully de-carcerated. She continues, "unless the current structures of violence are eliminated from schools in impoverished communities of color—including the presence of armed security guards and police—and unless schools become places that encourage the joy of learning, these schools will remain the major conduits to prisons" (108). Removing police from schools is essential but won't combat the ongoing criminalization of students of color and the long history of racialized suffering enacted through U.S. education initiatives. As Bettina L. Love puts it, "Native American boarding schools, school segregation, English-only instruction, Brown v. Board of Education, [. . .] all have been components of an education system built on the suffering of students of color. I call this the educational survival complex, in which students are left learning to merely survive, learning how schools mimic the world they live in, thus making schools a training site for a life of exhaustion" (27). This act of mimicry is structurally symptomatic.

social "stability" and future economic productivity. In an interview with *Proud Flesh* journal, Wynter remarks, "The function of education is to reproduce the order of society" (2006, 6), and in the present order, the value of students of color, like the value of prisoners, is now extracted from their absence. "In fact," Wynter says, "if you notice what is happening now, the order no longer needs labor." She continues, "It is increasingly becoming automated. So masses and masses of people have to be pushed out [. . .] They have to be dropped out." (6) We can see this logic reproduced on a small scale as teacher employment and salary are tied to student test performance, thus incentivizing the removal of low-scoring students through suspension, expulsion or dropping out (Vitale 60). In this way, what is commonly referred to as the "school-to-prison pipeline" is not just metaphorically extractive in its evocation of energy infrastructure, but directly partakes in the extractive logic of capital in the necessitation of waste, or the idle human excess that creates value for capital *negatively*. It is for this reason, as bell hooks argues in *Teaching to Transgress,* that "any radical pedagogy must insist that everyone's *presence* is acknowledged," genuinely valued, and consistently reaffirmed in practice (emphasis added 8).

The school-to-prison pipeline is a particularly potent abstraction. While it appears to signify a process—from child to adult, innocence to guilt, school to prison—its hyphenated character collapses its temporal valence into a modifier of "pipeline," a state that, if in any flux at all, is merely a repetition of existing assumptions about criminality and blackness, where the end subsumes the process in "the logic of the accomplished fact." Here I'm reminded of Sharpe's reference to a first-grade teacher who posted online that she considers her students to be "future criminals" (87). Sharpe writes, "future criminal" joins "former mother" in the anagrammatical: not child; not mother; not being" (87). Indeed, "future criminal" says nothing about the child. "Child" falls away, illustrating how "meaning slides, signification slips, when words like child,

girl, mother, boy abut blackness" (80). Being in the wake, Sharpe writes, means being forced to "connect the birth industry to the prison industry, the machine that degrades and denies and eviscerates reproductive justice to the machine that incarcerates" (87). The-school-to-prison pipeline rhetorically performs this violent suturing.

Attempts to account for the "criminal inevitability" suggested by the school-to-prison pipeline often default to the language of an achievement gap, which has become a vague shorthand for inequality and favored corporate buzzword. Even well-meaning appeals to the skills gap conceals the system's internal logic. Bettina Love discusses this occlusion and its similarity to carceral justifications when she writes, "Creating the narrative that dark people are criminals to justify locking them up for profit is no different from continuously reminding the American public that there is an educational achievement gap while conveniently never mentioning America's role in creating the gap" (10). As Love's critique suggests, and as Paulo Freire and Jacques Rancière show in their respective theorizations of repressive pedagogy, the gap is not a byproduct or unintended result of unequal access to proper education, but a structural component of an education model premised on inequality. The first gap they both identify exists within the student themselves, who is characterized as a receptacle that must be "filled" by the instructor. For Freire, this gap is central to what he calls the "banking concept" of education, "in which the scope of action allowed to students extends only so far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits" (72). While it is true, Freire admits, that the student can manage and reorganize their received knowledge, "in the last analysis, it is the people themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this system" (72). In this way, the banking method follows a notably extractive logic by conditioning disposability and by positing the student's consciousness as a spatialized topography shaped by the teacher as an "act

of conquest" (138). Rancière cites a similarly spatialized conception of knowledge at work in his theorization of "stultified pedagogy" which aspires to "transmit learning and form minds simultaneously" (1991, 3).

Rancière's model reveals another topographic image of knowledge production in its necessitation of excavation. "Having thrown a veil of ignorance over everything that is to be learned" Rancière writes, the explicator "appoints himself to the task of lifting it" (7). This positions truth beneath the surface of signification, requiring "the work of an *other* intelligence" to reveal it (10), which reproduces a position of mastery and hierarchy of capacities. This is the second gap (or distance) that sustains the staunch opposition between the student and the teacher and is premised on an originary inequality of authority and knowledge. Ostensibly, the role of the teacher or schoolmaster is to fill the individual student's gap of knowledge, and in doing so, gradually reduce the distance between him and his pupil. However, Rancière, writes, the master "can only reduce the distance on condition that he constantly re-creates it. To replace ignorance by knowledge, he must always be one step ahead, install a new form of ignorance between the pupil and himself (2009, 8).[57] The student not only lacks knowledge in this equation, but an understanding of "what she does not know" (9). In this way, it is not only a gap of knowledge but *knowledge of the gap,* "of the exact distance" (9) that eludes her and perpetuates her inferiority. This repetition of a representative topography, is, to borrow Deleuze's phrasing, "a false movement of the abstract" (23). Just as it repeats the extractive logic of capital (to ensure it continues to "take hold") this pedagogical model partakes in the same form of abstraction, whereby a division is made structurally necessary at the same time it is rendered cognitively and

[57] Here I'm reminded of the colonial conversation imperative elaborated in the previous chapter as necessarily never being complete by design as well as the fact that, as Bentancor insightfully notes, Acosta's *Natural History and Moral History of the Indies* functioned as a treatise on *colonial pedagogy.*

sensually ungraspable. As with abstract labor, we are rendered insensate to our estrangement from the means necessary to reproduce our lives. This is why radical pedagogy, as hooks defines it, must emphasize basic well-being, lest it perpetuate our unmet and unacknowledged needs.

In addition to this formal homology, stultified pedagogy also exerts the economic force of capital by dichotomizing and enforcing the temporal occupations of the teacher as the active subject of the learning process and the student as its passive object (Freire 77). This domesticates time, and in doing so, "domesticates men and women" (38) to the economic force of capital. As such, any destabilization of this temporal dichotomy is stigmatized and punished. For example, hooks writes, "*Excitement* in higher education was viewed as potentially disruptive of the atmosphere of seriousness assumed to be essential to the learning process" (hooks 7), because, I would add, excitation is fundamentally a transgression against the student's designated role as passive spectator.[58] The alternative to the banking system for Freire is "problem-posing" education, which is notably dialogic, and posits "consciousness as consciousness *of* consciousness" (79). Conscientization, as he calls it, trains our eye to the contradictions present between our internally sensed needs and those that are causally determined from without. "Obviously" he writes, "this doesn't stop at mere perception, but through action prepares men for the struggle against the obstacles to their humanization" (119). In this way, a pedagogy of the oppressed overturns the presuppositions of activity and passivity. Freire writes, "The problem

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[58] hooks destabilizes the opposition between activity and passivity in other terms, she writes, "Teaching is a performative act. And it is that aspect of our work that offers the space for change, invention, spontaneous shifts, that can serve as a catalyst drawing out the unique elements in each classroom. To embrace the performative aspect of teaching we are compelled to engage "audiences," to consider issues of reciprocity. Teachers are not performers in the traditional sense of the word in that our work is not meant to be a spectacle. Yet it is meant to serve as a catalyst that calls everyone to become more and more engaged, to become active participants in learning" (hooks 11)

posing method does not dichotomize the activity of the teacher-student: she is not 'cognitive' at one point and 'narrative' at another "(80). The students—no longer docile listeners—are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher (81). This is an emancipatory pedagogy because it acknowledges that "human activity is theory and practice; it is reflection and action" (125).

For Rancière, disrupting the present articulation of economic force is precisely the role of emancipated pedagogy and politics more broadly. Given the centrality of the police in its execution, Rancière's definition of politics is particularly striking. He writes, "Politics is specifically opposed to the police. The police is a "partition of the sensible" [*le partage du sensible*] whose basis is the absence of a void and of a supplement" (2014, 564). He continues, "society consists of groups dedicated to specific modes of action, in places where these occupations are exercised, in modes of being corresponding to these occupations and these places. In this fittingness of functions, places, and ways of being, there is no place for a void. It is this exclusion of what "there is not' that is the police principle at the heart of statist practices" (564). This "void" I argue, is the precondition for an aleatory encounter, the empty state that ensures the encounter emerges in pure positivity, not as a reaction to a preexisting state or external force.[59] This is precisely what the pedagogical "gap" is meant to suppress and replace by being perpetually determined in advance. As Deleuze writes, learning, as a process with no discernible end (in opposition to knowledge) "introduces time into thought - not in the form of the mythical past or former present, but in the pure form of an empty time in general" (Deleuze 167). He continues, "we learn nothing from those who say: 'Do as I do'. Our only teachers are those who tells us to 'do with me' and are able to emit signs to be developed in heterogeneity

[59] As Althusser writes, "the materialism of the encounter is contained in the thesis of the primacy of positivity over negativity" (189).

rather than propose gestures for me to reproduce [. . .] To learn is indeed to constitute this space of an encounter with signs" (23).

This is what the teacher, and I would add *novelist* stage: an encounter with a heterogeneity of signs that problematize the homogeneous totality of capitalist time. The text doesn't represent these signs, just as the teacher doesn't simply convey them, in fact it would be more accurate to say that the novel systematizes totality in capitalism's image. [60] Indeed, the novel form is a direct product of capitalism. However, as Lukács writes, "Such abstract systematization is, it is true, the ultimate basis of the entire structure, but in the created reality of the novel all that becomes visible is the distance separating the systematization from concrete life: a systematization which emphasizes the conventionality of the objective world and the interiority of the subjective one" (70). This distance is that which sustains abstracted elements of life *in their abstract relation*, which as I have shown, is temporal. This is why, I would argue, for Lukács, unlike the spatialized time of theater, the corrupting time of romanticism, or the abolished time of the epic, time in the novel is *constitutive*, just as it is under capitalism. Lukács writes, "In the novel, meaning is separated from life, and hence the essential from the temporal; we might almost say that the entire inner action of the novel is nothing but a struggle against the power of time" (122). This struggle—as the pedagogic function of the Bambara's novel—will be focus of the pages that follow.

Like education, salt can harm or heal. But unlike education, with its universally positive connotation in popular usage, salt is discursively ambivalent and seemingly resists dichotomization within our grammars of value and waste. For example, to be the "salt of the earth" is to be essential, while to "salt the earth," is to scorch the land and make it infertile; to be

[60] Lukács says the novel is "the representative art form of our age: because the structural categories of the novel constitutively collide with the world as it is today" (93).

"worth your salt" suggests competency, while "a grain of salt" questions the validity of one's testimony. Historically, its value has been great enough to compensate labor, just as its power has released individuals from an afterlife of eternal work.[61] Bambara's novel captures this precarious balance between health and harm, between "eating salt as an antidote to snakebites and turning into the salt, succumbing to the serpent" (8). This is an apt representation of the structural ambivalence of the novel form itself, as Wynter elaborates it in her iconic 1971 essay "Novel and History, Plot and Plantation." Like the plantation, the novel genre is inextricably bound to the emergence of capitalism, "which marked a change of such world historical magnitude, that we are all without exception still "enchanted", imprisoned, deformed and schizophrenic in its bewitched reality" (1971, 95). Just as the plot lays bare the inadequacy of the plantation to meet human needs and illustrates the necessity of alternative modes of communal production and care, the novel, Wynter writes, is the "critique of the very historical process which has brought it to such heights of fulfillment" (97). It is a critique, I would add, not just of historical events, but of historical time itself, of its linearity and progressive logic that threatens to obscure the "secretive histories" and insurgent possibilities of the plot. Furthermore, if we take seriously the subsistence component of the physical plot and adapt it to its "sibling" or textual corollary, we can see how the novel functions as both a *systematization and critique* of abstraction because the division between the constituent components of abstract labor—subsistence and profit, healing and harming—can be made discernable through the ambivalent vacillation between the plot and plantation. Put another way, the novel doesn't fulfill our needs

[61] Here I'm referring to Zora Neale Hurston's study of Haitian Zombies in *Tell my Horse*, who can be released from their state though salt. She writes "He will work ferociously and tirelessly without consciousness of his surroundings and conditions and without memory of his former state. He can never speak again, unless he is given salt" (183).

or fill in the gap between need and its satisfaction, but rather, it allows us to sensually measure the gap itself as it is constituted by racial capital.

Bambara geographically dramatizes the division between plot and plantation in *The Salt Eaters* through the dual dependency and antagonism between the nuclear power plant that is slowly exposing residents, as Porter characteristically puts it, "to some kind of wasting shit—the radioactive crap, asbestos particles, noise, smog, lies" (78) and the community infirmary where Minnie attempts to generate an alternative form of energy, strong enough "to bring [Velma] back and to restore her" (59). As Wynter and Lukács assert, "the novel form is in essence a question mark" (Wynter 96). Bambara fills the novel's interrogative form in that iconic opening line: "Are you sure, sweetheart, that you want to be well?" (3). As Love writes, channeling Bambara, "wellness is wisdom and being well is hard work" (156), especially for the residents of Claybourne, who have woven a community of care and self-determination in a persistently anti-black and environmentally toxified world. As I suggested in this chapters opening pages, one register of the novel's pedagogical import exists in staging an encounter with the myriad forces that threaten wellness, from racial policing to pollution and the structural silences that obscure them.

According to Toni Morrison, the pedagogic function of literature was something Bambara knew well. In an introduction to Bambara's posthumous collection of stories and essays, Morrison discusses her sense of responsibility as Bambara's editor and lovingly reflects on the late author's aesthetic craft and convictions toward work, politics, and pedagogy. She writes,

> I don't know if she knew the heart cling of her fiction. Its pedagogy, its use, she knew very well, but I often wonder if she knew how brilliant at it she was. There was no division in her mind between optimism and ruthless vigilance; between aesthetic obligation and the aesthetics of obligation. There was no doubt whatsoever that the work

> she did had work to do. She always knew what her work was for. Any hint that art was over there and politics was over here would break her up into tears of laughter, or elicit a look so withering it made silence the only intelligible response. (Bambara 1999 ix).

As with hooks and Freire's radical pedagogy, Bambara's work left no room for a false opposition between art and politics, theory and praxis.[62] As Morrison puts it, she knew that "the work she did had work to do"; that is, that work both meets existing demands and creates *new obligations* and forms through the unified whole of reflection and action. In this way, the pedagogic function of Bambara's work far exceeds its politically educative insights.[63] Just as emancipated pedagogy has no interest in the linear transmission of knowledge, Bambara's novelistic pedagogy has nothing to do with didacticism, and acknowledges, to return to Freire's formulation, that "conviction cannot be packaged or sold; it is reached, rather, by means of a totality of reflection and action" (67). This is why when Minnie Ransom asks if Velma wants to be well, she is also always asking "Can you afford to be whole?" (106). This wholeness, or totality, is the goal of *radical* pedagogy because it foundationally opposes the extractive divisions wrought by capitalism and administered through its economic force.[64]

The Salt Eaters stages an encounter with the temporal command of economic force, first, I will show, at the level of content. In one scene Velma's godmother, Sophie joins her at the infirmary to pray over her. Shocked by her suicide attempt, the narrator remarks, "you never

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[62] I think it is worth nothing that Bambara considered Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* to be one of her politically formative reading experiences (1999, 250).

[63] Bambara playfully manages any possible overinvestment in such throughout the novel, for example, when Velma is about to emerge from the healing and Min and Old Wife are bickering, and Min says "Don't hand me no somesuch about division of labor at a time like this" (295).

[64] Lukács discusses the dichotomization of "cognition and action" as the determinant structure of the novel itself, he writes, "We have found the only true substance within ourselves: that is why we have placed an unbridgeable chasm between cognition and action, between soul and created structure, between self and world, why all substantiality has to be dispersed in reflexivity on the far side of that chasm, this is why our essence had to become a postulate for ourselves and thus create a still deeper, still more menacing abyss between us and our own selves"(34).

really know a person until you've eaten salt together, she told herself. But she'd gone through many a bitter experience with Velma, and still she was baffled" (147). Considering the scientific and pseudo-scientific explanations such an act would evoke from therapists, analysts, and the like, Sophie acknowledges that such diagnostic views "had more to do with their own habits of illusion" and served to give them something to "explain things, to make up things to go on living blind" (147). Sophie continues to contemplate, and eventually identifies a cause of Velma's suffering as precisely this division, expressed for Velma in the artificial "split" between the "masculinist," public, activist realm and the "feminized," private world of healing, between what is assumed to be an active political vocation and a more passive theoretical one. Bambara writes,

> In time. And in time Velma would find her way back to the roots of life. And in doing so, be a model. For she'd found a home amongst the community workers who called themselves "political." And she'd found a home amongst the workers who called themselves "psychically adept." But somehow she'd fallen into that chasm that divided the two camps. Maybe that was the lesson. Maybe the act of trying to sever a vein or climbing into the oven was the like going to the caves, a beginning . . .
> Sophie opened her eyes. The walls were alive. So many possibilities. But not now. Relax, she instructed herself, resuming her former position. In time. (148)

Sophie acknowledges the false dichotomization as that which renders Velma lost in the artificial chasm between them, and rhetorically dismantles the gendered and temporalized presuppositions that undergird it by referring to both camps as simultaneously "work" and "home." Furthermore, Sophie's repetition of "in time" as the necessary state of healing reminds us of Velma's suicide attempt, when she wanted to break the hourglass of time altogether, "to tip time over for one last sandstorm and then be still, finally be still. [. . .] "sealed from time and life" (20). Sophie attempts to pull Velma from the chasm, imaginatively plunging deeper and deeper below the earth's surface, to the "the center of the universe" where "the divinely healthy whole Velma waited to be called out of its chamber, embraced and directed down the hall to claim her life from the split imposter" (148). As Sophie travels through and across geologic stratum she is also

travelling across layers of sedimented time. This is not, however, an extractive endeavor, but as act of healing is an attempt to combat the very extractive forces to which Velma has been exposed, from the unequal burden of community care and activism that has depleted her well-being to her exposure to the toxic byproducts of nuclear fission. Walter Benjamin mirrors this attempt at healing in "One Way Street" as a counterbalancing force to the "sacrificial shafts dug in Mother Earth" (93) that must, he similarly insists, occur "in time." He writes, "mankind is now preparing to embark on incalculable journeys into the interior of time, to encounter there rhythms from which the sick shall draw strength as they did earlier on high mountains and or at Southern seas" (94).

In this scene, Bambara affirms that the work of healing is a struggle in, against, and for time, and narratively destabilizes the opposition between activity and idleness even further, as Sophie's frenzied movements are punctuated by the contradictory refrain "she sat still." Bambara writes, "she sat still though the chair dumped her"; she sat still while she climbed through "turbulent waters in search of a saline solution, through earthquake landscapes and landslides" (149). Despite this conflation of activity and passivity, Sophie is still pursued by the temporality of economic force that split Velma in the first place. This is personified in the text as "motion" as the narrator remarks, "She sat still while motion raced through the office seeking its lack, searching her out, attempting to lure her from stillness, sucking at the petals on her head, slapping at her earrings, tugging at her belt buckle, beating against her wedding band to no purpose, like hammering cold iron" (148). Sophie's attempt to rupture and shift tectonics to create a new time, an unclaimed void yet untouched by temporal command ultimately falls short. The void is breached, she can't hail Velma, and her memory returns immediately to the horrifying instance of police brutality, to the event of her son's death and to the moment after

when the police forced her neighbor Edgers to physically beat her in a jail cell. This rapid shift tellingly conflates police terror with the "motion" that stalks and thrashes, threatening her stillness or sovereignty over time.

If nature provides the resources for healing, as Sophie's attempt to reclaim Velma suggests, it's no surprise that its constant devastation through toxification, structural neglect, and gentrifying development is an ever-present obstacle. Like the "mephitic breath" of civilization that divorces Marx's worker from codifying his most basic needs, the community's very vision and understanding of wellness is at stake: "So used to being unwhole and unwell" Bambara writes, "one forgot what it was like to walk upright and see clearly, breathe easily, think better than taught, be better than one was programmed to believe" (107). Even the birds, it seems, have become conditioned by their toxic surroundings, as Fred Holt remarks "so used to dipping your beaks in muddy water and turpentine, wouldn't know what to do at a fresh lake spring if you got a paid vacation" (155). Like the chasm above, the spatial imagery of a gap, or hole, replaces and conceals the sought-after void. Driving through town, Fred Holt comments of the shifting landscape, "Home one minute, a crater the next. Flower boxes, stoops, lawns slipping into the maw of the mechanical monster. The bite of the hydraulic bit breaking up potsy courts and basketball courts. Over and over in fuck-you repetition. How long, how long? A gaping hole, a grave, a pit" (73). Here I'm reminded of Morrison's comparison between the world as home and the "raced-house" as she describes it in a speech given at a conference titled "Race Matters." She says to her audience, "to the extent the world- as-home that we are working for is already described in the raced house as waste, the work this conference draws our attention to is not just interesting—it may save our lives" (Morrison 1997, 17). The preemptive foreclosure *as waste* of the future "home" Morrison and her colleagues are envisioning is captured in the temporal

register of Fred Holt's "fuck you repetition." It is the work of healing, and *the work of work* as Morrison is describing it, to disrupt the repetitive regime, countering it with the "positive principle" against the lack, represented by the hole, grave, and pit.

Gathering

Deleuze writes, "If repetition makes us ill, it also heals us; if it enchains and destroys us, it also frees us, testifying in both cases to its 'demonic power'" (19). Sophie taps into the healing side of repetition through the act of gathering, which allows her to recalibrate her line of vision according to her codified and stated needs. In this way, the marshes serve as an alternative plot structure in the novel. Bambara writes, "gathering is a particular thing where the eyes are concerned, M'Dear Sophie taught. You see nothing but what you're looking for. After sassafras, you see only the reddish brown barkish things of the woods. Or after searching out eucalyptus, the eyes stay tuned within a given range of blue-green-gray and cancel out the rest of the world" (18). While this may seem like a practice that counterintuitively limits her field of vision, it is a practice, rather, of attunement to an object that determines the conditions of its own accounting, as suggested by these ocular adjustments. This process is also not simply one of identifying a need and gratifying it, as Bambara writes, "never mind that it's late, that your basket is full, that you've got what you came for" (18), because "the gatherings demands stay with you, lock you in to particular sights"(19). The time of gathering, like that of healing, is concrete: the time it takes to complete is directly determined by the task at hand. This alternative temporal experience of work is perhaps what enables, for Sophie, the gathering's demands to lay bare the artificiality of the world around her, the "forced foods [that] weaken the will to live" and develop "in people's systems an affinity for killed and old and dead things" (152).

These demands also illuminate the exigency of a positive principle—or the necessary "leap" that "introduce[s] invention into life" (Fanon 2008, 204)—which transforms gathering into something like the pedagogy of mutual recognition premised on the *sensuous* appropriation of human need. Contrary to the empirical dictates of extractive reason, which ushers negatively isolated elements as determinative of identity to occlude human need, this is an orientation to the object of knowledge's "total [that is, positive] essence" to authorize forms of *obligation* outside of the term's stultified articulation under capitalism. Here I'm drawing from a compelling passage on the positive transcendence of private property from the *1844 Manuscripts*; Marx writes,

> The *sensuous* appropriation for and by man of the human essence and of human life, of objective man, of human *achievements*—is not to be conceived merely in the sense of *direct*, one-sided *gratification* –merely in the sense of *possessing*, of *having*. Man appropriates his total essence in a total manner, that is to say, as a whole man. Each of his *human* relations to the world—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, thinking, being aware, sensing, wanting, acting, loving,--in short all the organs of his individual being, like those organs which are directly social in their form, are in their *objective* orientation or in their *orientation to the object*, the appropriation of that object, the appropriation of the *human* world; their orientation to the object is the manifestation of the human world. (1988, 106)

Sophie's *orientation* to her objects makes her acutely sensitive to the needs of others as well as her own. For example, after the violent event in jail, Edgers comes around to do yardwork for Sophie in the hope she can once again, gradually, get used to his presence. There was Edgers, Bambara writes, "in his overalls, a light dusting of sawdust saying that he'd been to the mills and her porch would be fixed. Edgers standing there with his sheriff-ruined hands hugging each other behind the bib of his overalls [. . .] Hands that could manage an ax or a hoe, but nothing so dainty as a wooden match" (150). "Get used to me please, Sophie" he said, and set to the work of tending her garden. While many would offer a polite dismissal of 'you don't need to do that,' Sophie refrains, and remarks instead "No use telling him he needn't, because he needed, and she

knew it each time she combed her hair, and she needed" (151). The scars on her scalp, like Edger's "sheriff ruined-hands," recall the memory of that horrible event, and while this puts Sophie's deep generosity in stark relief, it more importantly reveals the epistemological value of gathering for Sophie as that which cultivates an orientation that honors the constitutive complexity of all individuals, that is, one's hybrid nature. This is captured in the gorgeous lines where Sophie compares Edgers to the other men who would do handy work for her. Here she remarks that Edgers was the only one, among the many who requested a light for their pipe, who "supplied his own fire, his own light, his own sweat, his own energy. And gave light. Always found space to let the sun in" (151). Here Edger's need for a light is determined not by a lack (of the physical ability to strike a match) but by the obligations of *reciprocal illumination*. This deemphasizes the traumatic event as determinative of Sophie's willingness to satisfy this specific request and signals a broader refusal to assess Edger's worthiness according to any isolated element, which is what enables her to honor his much more profound request to "get used to him." I read this not as a request to simply tolerate his company, but to hold his *presence* in the fullness of his humanity. To do so is to radically displace the foundational logics that sustain retributive rationality, which Sophie tellingly abhors. Indeed, when Velma angrily and flippantly suggests that "he should cut off both his hands" because of what happened, the thought of such a callous call for retribution fills Sophie with rage and hurt that is only calmed by a cognitive return to the eucalyptus and sassafras (152). "To go gathering, Sophie sighed. And let her soul get on with its gathering and return with greater force to its usual place. But so hard to do" (152).

Appalling as the retributive rationale conveyed by Velma's statement may be to Sophie, it is, in some sense, sustained by the formal apparatus of the novel in which she lives. As a product of capitalism, the novel is not immune to its carceral logics. Davis briefly discusses the

relationship between prisons and the novel as a symptom of enlightenment values and reformist approaches to incarceration. She cites John Bender who argues that the novel helped facilitate prison reform, as texts like *Moll Flanders* and *Robinson Crusoe* furthered the "discourse of progress and individual transformation" and emphasized "the power of confinement to reshape personality" (Davis 2003, 51- 52). To this I would add that carceral binaries of victim/ perpetrator also animate novelistic categories like protagonist and antagonist, and genres like the bildungsroman could also be said to partake in what Sojoyner refers to as the state's "hypervigilant focus on the individual" to "develop a cognitive dissonance against structural argumentation" (62). The individualist emphasis of the novel genre is consistent with Wynter's assertion that the novel is not only an effect of capitalism, but also the cause and effect of history, which is, Marx shows, an individuating force.[65] Herein lies another form of novelistic ambivalence. If the novel sustains the individuating force of a history premised on progress through its narrative temporality—which subsequently sustains carceral rationality through its reformist emphasis—it follows that therein lies an alternative impulse towards the collective that antagonizes the individualist notion of reform. Put another way, if time is the root cause of alienation, then it must, to follow Wynter's formula, also signal abolitionist horizons.

"Seize the Time"

By way of an epigraph, we find a letter written by Bambara that directly situates the reader in time, both by nature of its closing time stamp and by its opening lines. I want to reproduce it in its entirety below even if only because I find it beautiful, and because to divide it

[65] As Marx argues in the *Grundrisse,* "Exchange itself is a chief means of this individuation [*Vereinzelung*][. . .] But human beings become individuals only through the process of history" (1993, 496).

up would seem to betray the intimacy of its invitation, extended generously to the reader though its inclusion in the text. It reads:

> "Dear Khufu—
> The manuscript, assembled finally in the second and third years of the Last Quarter and edited under Leo's double moons, was initially typed by Loretta Hardge and is dedicated to my first friend, teacher, map maker, landscape aid
> Mama
> Helen Brent Henderson Cade Brehon
> who in 1948, having come upon me day dreaming. in the middle of the kitchen floor, mopped around me.
>
> Bless the workers and beam on me if you please.
>
> Thank you,
> Toni CB
> August 27, 1979

In keeping with her conviction regarding the importance of her work, Bambara's use of the word "finally" here characterizes the novel as long-awaited, while its gentle imperative in the closing line speaks to its "gathering" demands.[66] This non-traditional epigraph's explicitly extradiegetic quality renders the border between fiction and reality strangely porous (hence, perhaps, its intimate quality). One phrase in particular—"in the last quarter"—traverses this unstable border to flag a type of temporal exigency, where time is both the form and content of this anticipated arrival. In the novel proper, this is one of Minnie Ransom's favorite refrains. In one passage, for example, Min says to Old Wife, "Here we are in the last quarter and how we gonna pull it all together and claim the new age in our name? How we gonna rescue the planet from them

[66] This "finally" also gestures to the temporal demands made by the concrete labor of authorship as well as its relation to the concrete time of healing, which is similarly characterized in the opening pages as taking longer than expected as well as being long-awaited by those who love Velma. Bambara also alights on the healing power of the text *explicitly* when she says, "I was writing that book in 1981 so I could kick cancer's ass in 1993. That book taught me how to get well" (1999, 235).

radioactive mutants? (46). That this is *Min's* favorite refrain further aligns the work of the text with the work of healing, which, when combined with the call to "bless the workers" above, coheres in a manner that subtly affirms Benjamin's assertion that "The power of the proletariat is the measure of its convalescence (94).[67]

This refrain also bookends the healing itself, beginning when Minnie remarks, "in the last quarter, sweetheart, anything can happen. And will." She tells Velma "you just hold that thought" (6). Instead of holding on to the thought of an aleatory future, Velma considers the past and thinks, "I might have died" and "she sat there holding on to *that* thought" instead (7). True to her word, she carries this second thought through the healing as she navigates memories and draws closer and closer to emerging from the session. Near the novel's end this becomes an alternative refrain, repeated with slight variations. First Velma exclaims "I might have died" (267) anew, then the first-person pronoun is replaced with "she," then pronouns fall away entirely, and we're left with truncated and altered versions such as "might have fried" "might have bled to death" (272) and "might have been killed" (274). While these "might haves" appear as aleatory encounters (between Velma and death), they do not fully affirm chance because they are determined externally by the violent effects of white supremacy and racial capital, which are presented as reasons not to hold on to the thought of an open, undetermined future as Minnie originally commanded. She is imprisoned, in the Fanonian sense, by history. Velma keeps resisting, returning instead to the memory of Smitty being beaten by the police: "trying to think what good did wild do you, since there was always some low-life gruesome gang bang raping lawless careless pesty last straw thing ready to pounce, put your total shit under arrest and crack your back" (278). What she has yet to do is find the void, to remember Minnie's words: "It's all

[67] I cite this quotation just to highlight healing in the context of a collective, not to re-posit labor as the single source of a revolutionary collectivity.

a matter of time. The law of time. And soon, sweetheart, this will all be yours. You just hold that thought, ya hear? (41). She comes close by imagining that things could have been otherwise, but it is only in the retro-speculative assessment that "she didn't know the half of it. Of what awaited her in years to come" (278) that the rest of Minnie's statement that time *could be hers* fully resonates and takes hold.

In this moment we're reminded of the afternoon she spent with her godparents, listening to "Nature's Boy" collecting oysters and dancing. Bambara writes, "Velma leaning out the window and learning how it was supposed to be when it would be for her" (228). The song's lyrical reference to learning and reciprocal love suggests that she's pondering how love would be when she's older, but the uncertainty of "it" leaves this future state entirely open save for the fact that whatever it is, it *would be for her.* The lack of temporal marker, such as "was" or "is" between "Velma" and "leaning" suggests that Minnie's thought—that "anything can happen"—has been held in this moment, suspended in the stillness of "leaning" in a tense-less, un-periodized time that escapes progressive conceptions of history that sustain reformist logic.[68]

The stillness Velma so desired is achieved now not as idleness, or in binary opposition to motion, but as something akin to what Rancière refers to as pensiveness. Pensiveness arrives "to thwart the logic of the action. On the one hand, it extends the action that had come to a halt. But on the other hand, it puts every conclusion in suspense" (2011, 123). To speak of the pensive image, Rancière argues, is "to speak of a zone of indeterminacy between thought and non-

[68] In her reading of the novel *New Day*, Wynter illuminates the text's ambivalence in its foundational antagonism to reform. She writes, "Whilst the first part of the book parallels and patterns the structure of its society; and reflects its failure to satisfy human needs, the second part, fails by ignoring the fact that a change in the superstructure of the plantation, a new constitution, even Independence, were changes that left the basic system untouched; and which only prolonged the inevitable and inbuilt confrontation between the plantation and the plot" (102).

thought, activity and passivity, but also between art and non-art" (107). In this way, it is the novel's pensiveness that *formally* destabilizes the economic force of capital. Rancière describes this structure as comprised of two chains of events: the narrative directed from beginning to end and "the chain of micro-events that does not obey this directed logic, but which is randomly dispersed without beginning or end, without any relationship between cause and effect" (124). Bambara masterfully creates this formal structure with Velma's healing as the durational armature of the novel's plot, within which the second chain, consisting of a multitude of perspectives, memories, events, and even planes of existence kaleidoscopically interact. This second chain, I argue, is something like the Althusserian underground current of the materialism of the encounter that Sophie's subterranean journey dramatizes, operating, as it is, on a different plane altogether from the formal healing taking place down the hall. She couldn't reach Velma because as Rancière maintains, these two registers cannot combine within the work of art, despite persistently striving towards their collision. In this way, pensiveness stages, to return to Althusser's phrasing, "the becoming-necessary of the encounter of contingencies" to reveal "the latent presence of one regime of expression in another" (Ranciere 124). The formal deferral of a collision that would bring this new regime to bare is perhaps one of the ways in which Bambara notoriously "made revolution irresistible"[69]

As Velma emerges from the healing, we can see glimmers of such a regime change, but importantly not the catalyzing (or perhaps cataclysmic) event itself, which goes unnamed despite what we are told is its historical magnitude. As portended by the dropped pronouns and the collectivization of the weight of past trauma that the "might have died" refrain suggests, this

[69] Morrison includes this quote by Louis Messiah, in her introduction to *Deep Sightings and Rescue Missions.* I would add that Sophie's radically principled approach to repair and the goodness it enables is perhaps another way Bambara achieves this effect.

moment inaugurates (but notably doesn't complete) a healing process in others, including Fred Holt, Campbell, Meadows, Palma and Obie. In this way, Velma emerges yet again in service to her community, but not as before where her constant care for others depleted her own well-being, because the future that is becoming necessary is promised to be *for her*. As Bambara shows, the image of a world where a black woman is sovereign over time demands nothing less than abolition in the full awareness "that the ecology of the self, the tribe, the species, the earth depend[s] on just that" (247). This requires a complete recalibration of obligations and social problematics that acknowledges the systemic intersection of ecological, carceral, and economic harm. One could argue that Velma's healing in some sense inaugurates this process of recalibration as when Campbell declares, "of course everything was everything" (248) [70] or when Jan's responds to Ruby's claim that "all this ecology stuff is a diversion" from racial politics with the following:

> "They're connected, whose community do you think they ship radioactive waste through? Or dig up waste burial grounds near? Who do you think they hire for the dangerous dirty work at those plants? What part of the world do they test blast in? And all them illegal uranium mines dug up on Navajo turf—the crops dying, the sheep dying, the horses, water, cancer, Ruby, cancer. And the plant on the Harlem River and—Ruby, don't get stupid on me" (242).

This is not to posit a universal class or subject, nor is it to presume a shared degree of subjugation, but rather to elaborate what Freire calls "the interpenetration of problems" that are wrought by racial capital, that is, without its accumulated waste blinding us to the exigency of collective struggle. Fred Moten phrases it best when he says "The coalition emerges out of your recognition that it's fucked up for you, in the same way that we've already recognized that it's

[70] The recognition that "everything is in everything" (41) is one of Jacotot's major discoveries through emancipated pedagogy.

fucked up for us. I don’t need your help. I just need you to recognize that this shit is killing you too, however much more softly, you stupid motherfucker, you know?” (10).

CHAPTER TWO

Land, Labor, and the Extractive Reason of Settler Colonial Law

"Today's prisons are extractive. What does that mean? It means prisons enable money to move because of the enforced *inactivity* of people locked in them. It means people extracted from commmunites, and people returned to communities but not entitled to be of them, enable the circulation of money on rapid cycles. What's extracted from the extracted is *the* resource of life—time. "
Ruth Wilson Gilmore "Abolition Geography and the Problem of Innocence"

"[Natural law] perceives in the use of violent means to just ends no greater problem than a man sees in his "right" to move his body in the direction of a desired goal. According to this view . . . violence is a product of nature, as it were a raw material."
Walter Benjamin "Critique of Violence"

"We will never have a complete definition of fascism because it is in constant motion, showing a new face to fit any particular set of problems that arise to threaten the predominance of the traditionalist, capitalist ruling class. But if one were forced for the sake of clarity to define it in a word simple enough for all to understand, that word would be "reform."
George Jackson, *Blood in My Eye*

In a letter dated March 24th, 1970, political prisoner, George Jackson writes, "It is the function of the uniform to hold a man here. This means they do the key work, the searching, beating, killing. The individual with the tie and white shirt (really just another type of uniform) determines what we'll eat, what bullshit academic and make-work programs we'll have. He presides over the silly group therapy games that always end in fights or snitch contests. Oh, he also makes our board reports" (217). Jackson's use of the word "hold," combined with the list of officer roles—from the violent to the mundane, from the "essential" to the arbitrary—speaks to the way in which prisoners are suspended in a relation of persistent contact and enforced

dependency. This dependency makes inmates immanently vulnerable to what I defined in the previous chapter as the "economic force of the state" because their needs can be weaponized against them at any given moment. We can see this dynamic with something as seemingly innocuous as commissary, which despite being deemed a "privilege" by the authorities is essential for supplementing state meals that are, more often than not, nutritionally insufficient and prohibitively foul besides. In addition to food, incarcerated people also purchase phone time, message vouchers, postage, and additional clothing as well as hygiene products that often have to double as "household" cleaners. Commissary access is so central to inmates' capacity to endure scarcity, mitigate extreme temperatures and unsanitary conditions, and maintain connection to the outside world that it comes as no surprise that it is wielded by prison administration as a central means of control and discipline. Commissary denial is used to punish infractions, and whole populations face restrictions while under lockdowns for security issues, labor shortages, and most recently, covid surges (that is, before prisons abandoned any pretense of caring about public health).

In other instances, inmates wont shop for extended periods simply because of administrative ineptitude and staff callousness. This seemed to be the case recently at a medium security prison in Illinois when it had been well over a month since the occupants of one housing unit had been allowed to shop. This was not an uncommon occurrence, explained James Jones, an abolitionist organizer incarcerated at this facility, and once it was brought to staff attention the unit was eventually allowed, wing by wing, to go to commissary. Jones' wing was last, and as they moved through the line insults were exchanged between one inmate and a correctional officer. While by no means did this constitute a "security threat" or even warrant an infraction, the aggrieved officer demanded the dozen remaining inmates return to their cells. They were

unlikely to be allowed to shop any time soon, and food was scarce as it was, so Jones requested that a complaint be made to administration about this specific incident. Calls were made, he and the others were allowed to go to commissary the following day, and, as expected, officers later visited Jones' cell to assure him that he would regret his actions. No details of this situation, from the arbitrary denial of "privileges," to the threat of retribution are particularly remarkable. The interaction between Jones and the c/os was comparatively mild, no one was beaten or put into segregation and the event was recounted with the type of caustic humor characteristic of such accounts of everyday officer "fuckery"- an apt term for the persistent state of petty torments and power trips in prisons. What made the story worth telling, for Jones, were the respective statements made by the two officers who visited his cell:

"We're going to make your life a living hell."

"Why would you do something like that? Don't you know he's retiring this month?"

The first statement, with its uncreative threat of violence, warrants little attention. The second, however, is striking in the audacity of its reference to the correctional officer's *labor* and for the manner in which its appeal to common sense decency presupposes a relation of solidarity that is laughably non-existent. To this officer's question, Jones replied "How would I know that? I just wanted to buy food, and your buddy's hurt feelings got in the way of that." At the further suggestion that Jones had lied about the c/o's actions, he simply stated, 'look for yourself, everything is on camera." In telling the story, Jones added "I thought to myself, 'hold on, why the fuck would I care about his career as a *correctional officer* no less? I'm supposed to go hungry in deference of the 30-40 years he's made our lives miserable? It's absurd." Beneath the absurdity of this appeal is a more pernicious line of questioning: "how dare *you* as inmate, as devalued labor, as black person, sully the reputation of a white *worker*?"

Within the long history of racialized labor in the United States, we can read this encounter as one in which the white worker demands "tribute" or recognition of *racial* supremacy in the absence of a more pronounced *economic* supremacy, or actual bourgeois property status. In demanding such tribute, these correctional officers engage in what Wynter describes as a "colonial mode of relation," which you will recall is a "relationship in which the colonizer achieves psychic gratification, psychic surplus-value, realized by and through his relations with an Other whose relative inferior value is fixed by the overall system" (N.D. 392). Prisons, like the plantation, "fix" or "hold" this inferior value for the overall system, because, as Wynter writes, "forced confinement of black labour [is] central to the constitution of the social value of "free labour," and to the constitution of the bourgeoise mode of freedom as the single freedom—freedom to labour "freely" (N.D. 894). What this interaction shows is that the social value of free labor is (re)confirmed through confinement even in the absence of black *labor.* Furthermore, in the achievement of psychic gratification, the white worker assumes a different power of expropriation. What he expropriates in this case, Wynter writes, "is the power of the Other to define himself, to signify himself. What he appropriates is not merely labour power. Far more comprehensively the expropriation is that of social power" (N.D. 394) or "the worker's power to choose his own signification through the choice of his own end, his own purpose" (N.D.394). Although self-fulfillment, in Jones' case, is entirely delimited by the prison microeconomy and constrained by carceral force, we can read commissary as the "ends" or needs sought and denied in the expropriation of social power. And it was precisely an assertion of *testimonial* self-definition (albeit only as someone for whom corroborating visual evidence of lived experience has *any* evidentiary value whatsoever) that somehow challenged the officer's identity *as a laborer.*

In this chapter I will be exploring the governing assumptions of this mundane yet evocative exchange not necessarily to name the violent manifestations of white grievance under the condition of relative legal impunity, but to understand how juridic subjecthood and a proprietary conception of labor are mutually constituent of what Barnor Hesse compellingly calls "white sovereignty." He describes this is as "White settler's 'founding violence' that established the 'right of conquest,' created the space over which whiteness was exercised, "presupposed its own existence," and regarded itself as the sole power to judge its laws" (592). In this first half of this chapter, I will show how white sovereignty emerges from capital's "expansive capacity" as it is mediated specifically by racialized conceptions of labor and formalized in settler law. In Part two, I will be analyzing three moments in U.S. mining history as acts of conquest that racialize the relatively valued forms of labor necessary for capitalist accumulation through the social inscription of disposability and criminality. In doing so, I will be following Tiffany Lethabo King's assertion that "conquest, its subjects (conquistadors), and its daily instantiations (modes of conquering) must be spoken in a sharper vernacular and hypoglossic speech that can give significations to its forms of violence that remain unnamed in the wake of discourses of settlement" (90). By reading the prison, like the infrastructures of confinement and disposal that precede it, as "modes of conquering" I will show how extractive recalibrations of land, labor, and law secure for the settler state a monopoly of violence that is, to borrow Walter Benjamin's formulation, both *lawmaking* and *law preserving*. What is made and preserved, I argue, is both law itself, and the extractive law of capitalist value.

Part 1: Capitalist Expansion, Settler Conquest

Mining both typifies and inaugurates capital's expansive capacity, I want to suggest, because of its unique relation between "dead labor" and living labor (that is, between "previous

labor" as it is objectified in the means of production and the active labor that utilizes and incorporates it). What is unique to traditional forms of mining is that they rely almost entirely on the latter as "the raw materials do not form part of the capital advanced. The object of labor is in this case not a product of previous labor, but something provided by nature free of charge, as in the case of metals, minerals, coal, stone, etc." (1990, 751). In this way, expenditures on raw material and fixed capital are nearly non-existent, and constant capital is limited to instruments of labor that can "very easily absorb an increased quantity of labour" (Marx 1990, 753) without depleting the same way industrial machinery inevitably would. It follows that the amount and value of coal, for example, will rise in direct proportion to the labor expended. And that, "thanks to the elasticity of labour-power" Marx writes, "the domain of accumulation [can expand] without any prior increase in the size of constant capital" (1990, 752). Unburdened by such costs, it follows that mine owners have a uniquely significant incentive to invest instead, not in living labor per se, but in this *elasticity*, that is, in the precarity and *volatility* of the labor force.

After extractive industries, agriculture comes in a close second as an industry where accumulation arises almost entirely from "the direct action of man on nature [. . .] without the intervention of any new capital" (1990, 752), that is, besides seed and fertilizer. Finally, in industry proper "every additional expenditure of labor presupposes a corresponding additional expenditure of raw materials" but the accumulative perks of "free nature" in the extractive and agricultural domains persistently "redounds to the advantage of the manufacturing industry" (1990, 752). We arrive, Marx writes, at this general result: "by incorporating within itself the two primary creators of wealth, labour-power and land, capital acquires a power of expansion that permits it to augment the elements of its accumulation beyond the limits apparently fixed by its own magnitude, or by the value and mass of the means of production which have already been

produced" (1990, 752). Marx's movement from extraction, to agriculture, to industry, to capital as a whole alights on how foundational these extractive accumulative strategies are to the entire functioning of capitalism, and, I want to suggest, to its imperializing tendency. Because these industries are premised on labor elasticity, which is sustained by the economic force of the state, these are strategies not just of energy capture be it though resource accumulation or labor exploitation, these are strategies of *domination*. It is not a coincidence that nascent police forces in the U.S. emerged from precisely these two industries, and that the repressive techniques used to police the plantation in the south and the coal mine in the north are both informed by, and in turn, became models for, the repression of anti-colonial movements across the globe.[71]

While it constitutes capital's expansive power, the extractive relation as it operates in mining (and agriculture to a slightly lesser extent) also exposes capital's latent weaknesses by revealing extractive events to be products of aleatory encounters (in this case between capitalist and non-capitalist modalities). This is because, I argue, the extractive relation doesn't partake in the normative *preserving* function of other industries where, as noted above, living labor preserves the use-value of dead labor as it is objectified in the instruments of production. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx discusses this confrontation in the language of necromancy as objectified labor "ceases to exist in a dead state [because] it is itself posited as a moment of living labor" (1993,

[71] In the South, as is widely acknowledged, these repressive techniques emerged from the planation as self-deputized slave patrols roamed rural landscapes at the behest of slave owners, and professional police forces surveilled private plantations in search of weapons, fugitives, and signs of organization and educational activities to suppress revolt and escape. In the North, mine owners were faced with some of the most militant unions in the late 19th and early 20th century. As a result, Pennsylvania mine owners turned to the state for help managing an aptly emboldened labor force. The state responded by creating the privatized Coal and Iron Police to aid in suppressing strikes and intimidating organizers (Vitale 44). As Alex Vitale shows, employers could deputize anyone of their choosing as an official officer of the law for one dollar per person. After committing numerous atrocities (such as the Latimer massacre of 1897) and effectively failing to break the Anthracite strikes of 1902, the Coal and Iron police were disbanded, and replaced with the nation's first state police force.

364). The latter, in essence, breathes new life into the former. This "preserving force of labour" Marx writes, "therefore appears as the self-preserving force of capital" (1993, 364). In this confrontation, living labor is posited along a temporal continuum "as *ongoing labor'* that "is itself already incorporated in capital, and a moment of the same." (1993, 364). The temporal equivalency created between dead and living labor evacuates the *content* of said labor, to produce the *form* of abstract, objectified labor. This is why Marx refers to living labor as a "form-giving fire" and to this process as the "eternalization of value." While he maintains that "no immanent law of reproduction maintains this form" (1992, 360), the preservation effects noted above allow capital to appear otherwise, that is, as natural and inevitable through this temporal abstraction. Now let's return to the mining relation and remove dead labor from this equation. Because the raw materials aren't constituted by previous labor, capital must *posit itself* as its own presupposition to produce its own durational appearance.

There are two implications of this, which I will explore in greater detail below. The first is that in the absence of the formalizing encounter between living and dead labor, and thus in the absence of capital's self-preserving appearance, an intensified and compensatory articulation of economic force (that is, the racial policing of labor as a totality) is demanded in its place. The temporal force of policing, then, is not simply the power to render individuals and populations active or idle according to the labor requirements of capital, as argued in the previous chapter; it is the power to *eternalize capitalist value as premised on the social form of labor.* Second, because there is always an element of a primary accumulation taking place, "an accumulation which is not the result of the capitalist mode of production but its point of departure" (Marx 1990, 873), the compensatory eternalization of value through economic force functions simultaneously, in the U.S. context, as the *eternalization of the colonial project*.

This dialectic between capital's expansive capacity and the compensatory preserving effects it necessitates alights not only on capital's imperializing tendency, but to the manner in which colonial projects and the capitalist mode of production *eternalize one another.* This preservation effect is what distinguishes colonialism—a time-bound project of imperialist resource extraction for a political-economic metropole—from settler colonialism. Both are defined by acts of conquest, of accumulation beyond present geopolitical parameters, but settler colonialism's durational capacity, its staying power, I will show, inheres in what emerges to bridge the gap between present parameters and speculative horizons: law. We can see this geographic-temporal confrontation, and the way it produces its own expansive imperative as inflected by a juridic rationale in a statement by President Jefferson, made in 1801 as he reflects on the United States' goals of settler territorialization. He remarks, "However our present interests may restrain us within our own limits, it is impossible not to look forward to distant times, when our rapid multiplication will expand itself beyond those limits and cover the whole northern, if not the southern continent, with a people speaking the same language, governed in similar form by similar Laws"(quoted in Ortiz, 3). In the pages that immediately follow, I will be showing how legal governance is not among the ends of conquest, but the means by which the settler state, like capital (to return to Marx's phrasing), "acquires a power of expansion that permits it to augment the elements of its accumulation beyond the limits apparently fixed by its own magnitude, (1990, 752). It does so, I will show, by incorporating land and labor within the form of law as the primary creators not of wealth, necessarily, but of white sovereignty. It may seem obvious to assert that law sanctions and secures settler sovereignty and capitalist accumulation by protecting the property interests of capitalist colonizers. Far less obvious, however, is the way in which settler law *formally* secures a terrain of human and non-human

energy capture according to a racial hierarchy of value and violability. To understand this process we must return briefly to the extractive labor relation and to the colonial origins of property rights in The New World.

Labor Theory of Property | Property Theory of Labor

European colonizers in the Americas were tasked with the necessity to instantiate their authority as they confronted sovereign peoples and resources not yet constituted by their labor and command. Like the encounter between non-capitalist and capitalist modalities characteristic of the mining labor relation, this is an encounter between non-colonized and colonial social entities. It is notable that the two domains through which Iberian and English colonists saw fit to leverage their claims of ownership were precisely the extractive and the agricultural respectively. It is my contention that this speaks not only to material aspirations or interests but to an awareness of how the modes of subjugation necessitated by the extractive relation makes these two domains, once established, uniquely strong foundations for both capitalist accumulation and colonial statecraft. As discussed in the introduction, Iberian colonizers were explicitly motived by mineral wealth and legitimized their conquest of the Americas on a divine right to plunder the earth and extract God-given treasures for the "common good" of an ever-growing Christendom. The English, on the other hand, aspired for occupiable, farmable land. In naming these aspirations, however, we must be mindful that beneath the subjective category of *interest in* expropriated wealth lies the objective process of capitalist expansion afforded *by* the extractive endeavor itself. Wynter draws upon a similar distinction made by Bernard de Voto, who writes "The New World… was a constantly expanding market . . . its value in gold was enormous, but it had still greater value in that it expanded and integrated the industrial system of Europe' (N.D. 573). *This* value of expansion, and the manner in which its actualization is rationalized by

English colonists specifically, is our present concern. This is because while all European colonists cited the "ill-use" and "waste" of native land and the "idleness" of its occupants as proper cause for intervention, it was only the English whose *labor,* they maintained, entitled them property rights over indigenous lands (Seed 15). This was consistent with domestic custom prior to the late seventeenth century, as the English didn't require contractual claims to land ownership, but rather "could claim that they had acquired ownership of land simply by exchanging other commodities and by doing physical labor on the land" (15). Accordingly, it was generally asserted that one's behaviors, rather than status determined right, giving labor and the property relation the illusion of equality, particularly as this made it possible for "hundreds of illiterate or barely literate people to acquire title to plots of ground at the start of English colonization" (Seed 14).

English property claims were all the more compelling when the labor was strenuous and, as Seed explains, breaking ground on "virgin" soil provided a particularly persuasive claim to ownership because it was inherently difficult (as it would be for Europeans in the New World). This "sense of striving that the English believed entitled them to own the land upon which they toiled" (15) was codified by John Locke in what came to be known as the "labor theory of property." This theory, I argue, acknowledges the formalizing function of capitalist labor (wherein living labor innervates dormant use-value to formalize abstract labor as a totality) in a way that notably dramatizes the compensatory instantiations that are necessitated by the absence of this function in the extractive relation. Tasked with rationalizing a system that has no concrete precedent in the Americas, Locke asserts the "original Law of Nature for the *beginning of Property" (*Locke) as follows: "Whatsoever then he removes out of the State the Nature hath provided. . . [and] hath mixed his labour with . . . makes it his property" (Seed 15). In keeping

with the extractive relation discussed above, labor here confronts raw material as "free nature," and yet, despite the lack of precedent (of either previous labor or ownership) labor still serves a mediating role. Put another way, Locke is projecting the normative labor relation onto the extractive labor relation extant in agriculture to make *labor* formalize the *property* relation-a task it is not, logically speaking, equipped to do. Seed's use of ellipses between "labour" and "make it his property" in her reproduction of this quote helpfully draws our eye to the gaps in this claim, but if we look at this passage in full, we can see the pivotal presupposition that emerges to make this claim "cohere."

> Though the Earth, and all inferior Creatures be common to all Men, yet every Man has a *Property* in his own *Person*. This no Body has any Right to but himself. The *Labour* of his Body, and the *Work* of his Hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the State that Nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his *Labour* with, and joyned to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his *Property*. It being by him removed from the common state Nature placed it in, hath by this *labour* something annexed to it, that excludes the common right of other Men. For this *Labour* being the unquestionable Property of the Labourer, no man but he can have a right to what that is once joyned to, at least where there is enough, and as good left in common for others.

Notice how, in order to rhetorically manufacture the confrontation between like terms, *labor as property* is introduced. Now Locke is able to replicate (albeit falsely) the normative labor relation as we arrive at the following processual claim: property constituted *by* labor confronts, "mixes," and "joins" with the property *of* labor to formalize property in its abstract, objective state as a universal law. In doing so, Locke also endows labor its preserving effects: Just as the "preserving force of labour…. appears as the self-preserving force of capital" (1993, 364) the preserving force of labor (as property) appears as the self-preserving force of settler sovereignty. In his *Second Treatise*, Locke articulates this force as a moral imperative made by Natural Law through the language of spoilage. Of the "annexed" fruits of one's labor, he writes, "if they

perished, in his Possession, without their due use; if the Fruits rotted, or the Venison putrified, before he could spend it, he offended against the common Law of Nature, and was liable to be punished" (Locke). As in industry proper, one might say, failure to use the objects of previous labor offends the common law of capital by disrupting its self-formalization.

As Marx explains, the use value and form of instruments are "preserved only by being posited as a means of living labor, as an objective moment of the existence of labour's vitality" (1993, 362). The temporal register of this process—wherein dead and living labor are posited as equivalent *moments* along a temporal trajectory of "ongoing labor"—finds its settler corollary in the English notion of "improvement," which emerged to name the processes of enclosure, expulsion, and cultivation that transformed the English commons into privately owned land in keeping with the prohibition against "waste" and spoilage. As Seed shows, by misrepresenting indigenous land as commons, Locke "linked America to England's vanishing past, noting with yearning that "in the beginning all the world was America" (Seed 41). By presenting commons as the originary state of nature, Locke creates a universal, but specifically English historical teleology composed of equivalent moments—emptied of the diverse ways indigenous groups (and the English, for that matter) concretely cultivated their land—within the long durée of "improvement." "If in America the past of England's communal landownership still existed" Seed writes, "settlers could envision themselves as bringing inescapable historical progress to "communal" landholders as colonists did not need to believe they were the wicked dispossessors of Native American farmers, rather, they were the slightly apologetic bearers of unavoidable historical and economic progress" (Seed 41).

In the U.S., this teleological abstraction combines with the labor theory of property into particularly fertile grounds for capitalist accumulation because, according to the widely accepted

Lockean model, it mattered little if an Englishman toiled on the land himself, so long as his resources sustained and compelled the labor of those that did. It follows that while the Spanish conceptions of property accommodated the use of indigenous labor in colonial mines, the English had a vested interest in displacing indigenous populations (lest their labor legitimate a property claim) and transplanting their own work force, be it free or unfree. In this way, *time theft (of labor) begets land theft, just as land theft (via expropriation/privatization) begets time theft.* With each genocidal expulsion of Native Americans, the white settler can thus assert his sovereignty and racial supremacy simultaneously *as a capitalist*. Slavery will consolidate this function by providing a population that substantiates settler property *as labor*, without threatening settler property *as property*.[72] Here we must complicate or stretch Marx's formula to say that capitalism achieves its expansive capacity or its ability to augment itself beyond present limits through the extractive relation not by simply incorporating land and labor as the primary sources of wealth but by formalizing a relation wherein time theft and land theft *enable one another* to consolidate (white) bourgeoise property ownership. Alighting on this mutual constituency of U.S. settler conquest, legal scholar Cheryl Harris writes, "The origins of property rights in the United States are rooted in racial domination. Even in the early years of the country,

[72] While the Spanish genocide of indigenous populations in the New World necessitated the transplantation of foreign laborers, we can see, in the English example, the inverse causal relationship whereby the introduction of foreign laborers enables the settler state to fulfill its genocidal intensions. We can see this model is a contemporary context with Israel's utilization of hundreds of thousands of migrant workers from Thailand, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and elsewhere which released the settler state from any reliance on Palestinian labor thus lifting any economic prohibitions to the genocidal siege we are witnessing today. Furthermore, if we understand extraction as both cause and effect of settler statecraft it should come as no surprise that Israel began granting licenses to transnational energy companies for Mediterranean oil and gas exploration within weeks of the al-Aqsa flood. William I. Robinson and Hoai-An Nguyen capture this dynamic in the context of the global crisis of capitalism through their insightful differentiation between surplus populations and surplus humanity. They write, "the Palestinian masses have gone from serving as a tightly-controlled and super-exploited labor force for Israeli and transnational capital to surplus humanity standing in the way of a new round of capitalist expansion" (https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/gaza-a-ghastly-window-into-the-crisis-of-global-capitalism/).

it was not the concept of race alone that operated to oppress Blacks and Indians; rather, it was the *interaction* between conceptions of race and property that played a critical role in establishing and maintaining racial and economic subordination" (Harris 1716). This interaction, I would add, is not simply between anti-indigeneity and antiblackness as racial conceptions or ideologies, but between the motive forces of land-expropriation and time-theft mediated by capitalism to secure the racialized distribution of property.

In her groundbreaking essay, "Whiteness as Property," Harris describes this racialization in the context of U.S. law by tracing how whiteness evolves — from a racial identity to the prerequisite of ownership and then to a property itself that designates the right to uninterrogated entitlements. "Whiteness as property" Harris writes, is "the reification, in law, of expectations of white privilege." Paying particular attention to the ways whiteness as property is re-affirmed in landmark cases such as Plessy v Ferguson and Brown v Board of Education, Harris shows how it "has taken on more subtle forms, but retains its core characteristic—the legal legitimation of expectations of power and control that enshrine the status quo as a neutral baseline, while *masking* the maintenance of white privilege and domination" (italics added 1715). While Harris effectively illustrates how the content of U.S. law reproduces whiteness as property, I want to explore how racialized conceptions of property, as mediated specifically by labor, are reproduced *formally* by the juridic-economic architectures of racial capital. In doing so, I hope to build off of one of the most (of many) important insights of Harris' essay, which is that race is not contingent but necessary to legal conceptions of property. She writes, "The legal legacy of slavery and of the seizure of land from Native American people is not merely a regime of property law that is (mis)informed by racist and ethnocentric themes. Rather, the law has established and protected an actual property interest in whiteness itself, which shares the critical characteristics of property

and accords with the many and varied theoretical descriptions of property" (1724).

By extrapolating Harris' assertion of necessity to the legal structure *as a whole*, we can identify the basis of what I argue is a formal homology between settler law and racial capital to further enable an account of the "masking" she identifies as abstractions that arises from these systems themselves. To approach law as a totality, I contend, isn't to discount the myriad ways that specific laws and cases structure our daily lives and sow racial antagonism. Rather, it is to trace how the structure as a whole produces the conditions for the economic force of the capitalist state (and its self-deputized proponents) to create the "disposable time" necessitated by racial capital under the condition of white sovereignty. It is to trace, finally, how conquest may take "subtler forms," in things like legislative reform and energy transitions, but remain securely on the destructive path of settler improvement at the ongoing expense of abolition.

Labor Theory of Settler Law

Law, like capital, *formalizes* itself. Recall the "form-giving fire" of living labor, which evacuates the *content* of concrete labor as a determinant of its constituency within the totalizing *form* of objectified labor to posit discreet moments of labor along a trajectory of *ongoing* labor. The same can be said of our English-derived common law, which attains its authority from precedent, that is, from the formal architecture of law as ongoing law rather than the declarations of legal statutes. In this way, law's authority and coherence *as a whole* doesn't arrive from the content of specific cases or particular laws, rather, common law's structural coherence is contingent upon the ability for new rulings to potentially obviate the content of previous rulings and provide new procedural norms. In the process, the form (rather than content) of past adjudications is preserved by being posited as a means of present adjudications. This, I want to suggest, is the tension that arises between law's content and its form. As Lukács maintains, "The

rationalization of isolated aspects of life results in the creation of—formal—laws. All these things do join together into what seems to the superficial observer to constitute a unified system of general 'laws.' But the disregard of the concrete aspects of the subject matter of these laws, upon which disregard their authority as laws is based, makes itself felt in the incoherence of the system in fact" (Lukács 1969, 101).

In his 1924 text, *The General Theory of Law & Marxism*, Soviet legal scholar Evgeny Pashukanis shows how this evacuative process is symptomatic of the commodity and its exchange. For Pashukanis, the incoherence noted above can be understood through the commodity fetish. His "commodity theory of law" is particularly helpful because it alights on the emergence of the juridic *subject* as constituted by this process. He writes,

> Just as in the commodity, the multiplicity of use-values natural to a product appears simply as the shell of value, and the concrete types of human labour are dissolved into abstract human labour as the creator of value, so also the concrete multiplicity of the relations between man and objects manifests itself as the abstract will of the owner. All concrete peculiarities which distinguish one representative of the *genus homo sapiens* from another dissolve into the abstraction of man in general. Man as a legal subject. (Pashukanis 113)

Just as the commodity "reflects the social characteristic of men's own labor as objective characteristics of the product of labor themselves" (Marx 1990, 164), the legal subject reflects its "concrete peculiarities" as objective juridic characteristics. Therefore, I would add, rights, "abstract will" etc. appear as the "socio-natural properties" (1990, 164) of "Man as legal subject" rather than products of, for example, their unequal distribution according to differences of gender, race, class, and ability. While Pashukanis' theory is helpful for grasping how "Legal fetishism complements commodity fetishism" (Pashukanis 117), its comparisons hinge largely on the fetish as a representative distortion at the expense of identifying a more foundational relationship between law and capitalist value that comes into view, I contend, if we focus once

again on the abstract labor form rather than the commodity.

The "labor theory of law" I'm proposing is not incompatible with Pashukanis' "commodity theory of law" but rather builds from his central claims, most notably regarding the tension he identifies between positive law (that compels behavior in the manner of a contract) and negative law (that punishes behavior deemed criminal). He writes, "Law is simultaneously the form of external authoritarian regulation and the form of subjective private autonomy. In the one case, the fundamental, substantive characteristic is that of unconditional obligation, of absolute external coercion, while, in the other, it is the characteristic of freedom, guaranteed and recognized within certain limits" (Pashukanis 97). This duality, Pashukanis suggests, "has led to many attempts to eliminate somehow this unwelcome cleavage of concepts, to sacrifice one of these two 'meanings' to the other" (97). I argue that these two cannot be reconciled because it is precisely their contradictory unity that constitutes the structure of law as defined by an "abstract will" or *formal freedom* in the same way the contradictory unity of activity and idleness constitute the social form of labor as a totality. In so asserting, I don't mean "free" the way idealist theorists of law do, but rather, free in the way the capitalist laborer is free, that is, in a double sense: free to work and free to starve, or, free to enter into a contract and free to suffer if they don't (be it through starvation or punishment). The illusion of choice here is what animates the idealist account of law as providing equal opportunity for self-determination. As Pashukanis' contemporary, George Friedrich Puchta argues (in a dramatic display of the legal fetish), "the fundamental concept of law is freedom . . . Man is the subject of rights for the reason that he has this possibility, and that he has free-will" (Pashukanis 110).

But it is not free will or choice that constitutes the contradictory "freedom" of the legal structure because freedom can only be elevated to the level of form as an *immanent* counter-

positionality of opposing terms or in the "immediate identity" (Marx 1993, 93) of opposing terms. Just as pauperism "is already contained in the concept of the free labourer, that he is a pauper: virtual pauper" (604), negative law is already contained in the concept of positive law. Furthermore, one could argue that it is the *simultaneity* of the competing rationales for law that is vexing for legal theorists because it demands an understanding of the constituencies of a temporal totality when we are so thoroughly conditioned to think causality though a processual lens—a distortion, one might suggest, that is augmented by the processual character of common law itself, as noted above. We saw this abstraction in the context of labor and class in the previous chapter, as normative accounts of surplus populations fall prey to teleology in the presumption that the idleness of the non-work and the activity of the labor are occupiable stages rather than co-constituents of the social form of labor. The same mistake is made in regard to law when it is asserted that subjection to negative law results from a deviation of the strictures of positive law. As discreet, occupiable stages, these forms are pre-inscribed by the carceral categories of innocence and guilt, which, under the aegis of formal freedom culminate into a staunchly behavioralist view of immiseration and criminality.

Marx discusses a similar legal co-constituency, interestingly, in the context of both property and the social form of labor and it is the historical-temporal register of these two laws that returns us to settler conquest. The first law resembles Pashukanis' general theory of law and is premised on the pre-capitalist labor relation. In this exchange, "both sides confront each other as persons. *Formally,* their relation has the equality and freedom of exchange as such. As far as concerns the legal relation, the fact that this form is a mere *semblance,* and a *deceptive semblance,* appears as an external matter" (1993, 464). This law of bourgeois property is premised on simple exchange where the laborer appropriates the product of their work which

they can then exchange for property that is equivalent to the labor expenditures of another. This is an anachronism, of course, because, as Marx writes "The fact that surplus labor is posited as the surplus value of capital means that the worker does not appropriate the product of his own labor; that it appears to him as *alien property."* This is the second law of bourgeois property, an inversion of the first. In the transition from simple exchange to capitalism, Marx writes, "The right of property undergoes a dialectical inversion so that on the side of capital it becomes [. . .] the right to appropriate alien labour without an equivalent, and on the side of labour capacity, it becomes the duty of respecting the product of one's own labour or to one's own product as to *alien property"* (1993, 458). This inversion is precisely what occurs in the extractive encounter of conquest, whereby the property of one's labor, as constitutive of a property claim, is transformed into a proprietary claim over *another's labor* through that very property claim. Marx continues, "The relation of [equal] exchange has thus dropped away entirely, or is a *mere semblance*. Furthermore, the right of property originally appeared to be based on one's own labour. Property now appears as the right to alien labor, and as the impossibility of labour appropriating its own product" (1993 458). This resultant "impossibility," is the *reproduction* of the structural division between wealth and labour, and capitalist and worker. "This social relation . . . appears in fact as an even more important result of the process than its material relation" (458). The value lies in the instantiation and *preservation* of the capitalist relation. Like the performatively apologetic settlers Seeds notes, the bourgeois economists who legitimize capital as eternal and natural "by formulating the conditions of it's becoming as the conditions of its contemporary realization' Marx writes, "demonstrate a guilty conscience, as well as the inability to bring the mode of appropriation of capital as capital into harmony with the *general laws of property* proclaimed by capitalist society itself (460).

What is interesting about this dynamic is that despite the *historical* transition between simple and capitalist exchange and the dialectic inversion it catalyzes in the act of conquest, the first law isn't replaced by the second, nor do they simply co-exist with varying degrees of contemporary salience within our legal system. Indeed, by Marx's assertion it appears that understanding how these two are equally "established in law" (1993, 470) is central to understanding the formal homology between law and capital in general, as Marx writes, "in order to express the relations into which capital and wage labour enter as *property relations* or *laws*, we need do no more than express the conduct of both sides in the *realization process* as an *appropriation process" (470).* This is the procedure by which each law confronts the other and *combines with its own negation*. This is a confrontation between pre-capitalist modalities (law one: equal exchange) and capitalist ones (law two: premised on the expropriation of another's alienated labor). Law two can't simply replace law one because law one provides the proprietary conception of labor necessary to grant the formal totality of law a semblance of coherence, just as it did for Locke's labor theory of property.

In Part Two, we will see how this coherence is threatened when settler property law's racial foundations appear unstable, that is, when non-white subjects are nominally granted rights and equal protection under the legal system. A tension thus arises when law's newly "egalitarian" *content* ostensibly contradicts law's *formal* preservation of white sovereignty. Because law's "coherence" is secured by the (mythic) proprietary conception of labor, which is the exclusive property of whiteness, black *labor* is perceived not only as a threat to white labor, but to *white juridic subjecthood*. On the other hand, because juridic subjecthood is defined by this same myth, the extension of legal rights is inherently perceived as a threat to white *labor*, as we saw in the exchange between Jones and the Correctional Officers. This dynamic speaks to

why, after the abolition of slavery, labor regimes and the legal system will become and remain the primary sites of racial antagonism, retribution, and violence, converging anew in vexed unity with each perceived threat to white sovereignty. Furthermore, because both the social form of labor, and the formal totality of law are temporal abstractions, these "violations" are perceived as threats against the proprietary time of whiteness, and retaliation manifests in efforts to recapture and manage time, be it through the economic force of racial policing, the coercive labor contract, or the prison sentence. In the pages that follow, I will be tracing three specific moments in U.S. fossil-carceral history as systematizations of time that instantiate the material, symbolic, and legal architectures of racial capital. I use the term "instantiate" specifically to name the way in which the extractive law of value relies upon a logic of equality (be it as a juridic subject or free laborer) that rests upon a temporal equivalency whereby instances of a legal case, like discreet moments of labor, are posited along the temporal continuum of "improvement" to formalize its ongoing existence.[73]

As we move from industrial slavery, to convict leasing and correctional labor, we will see how the proprietary conception of labor, as a founding myth, will re-emerge with each extractive configuration of land, labor, and law to preserve settler sovereignty by fomenting the racial antagonism necessary for an elastic labor force on the one hand, and by stultifying the very movements geared towards democratizing these three domains on the other. The persistent failure of the left to grasp the foundational interconnectedness of these commitments emerges, I argue, from the failure to understand labor as its totality and from a deeply misguided complicity

[73] My reading of law throughout this chapter is informed by Hartman's seminal analysis of how abstract notions of freedom enables anti-blackness. She writes, "as a consequence of emancipation, blacks were incorporated into the narrative of the rights of man and citizen; by virtue of the gift of freedom and wage labor, the formally enslaved were granted entry into the hallowed halls of humanity, and, at the same time, the unyielding and implacable fabrication of blackness as subordination continued under the aegis of formal equality" (1997, 119).

with the legal function of state. It is essential that the false presuppositions—freedom, equality, and ownership over one's labor—that arise to legitimize the legal system in the face of "the incoherence of the system in fact" are persistently scrutinized precisely because they are deeply persuasive to those for whom "whiteness as property" confirms no property status in reality, despite persistent striving on their part. White workers do need to be made to confront the relative unfreedom of their labor and the paltry forms of survival to which they have been reduced in their conscription by capital and the state. But class consciousness, I will show, that begins and ends with the sanctification of labor will only reproduce the forms that enable and preserve the exploitation of the labor relation and the manifold degradations of settler conquest. This awareness is especially important in moments of transition, when the legal system's "active and conscious influence upon production and other social relations assumes exceptional significance" (Pashukanis x), and when the terms and stakes of conscription are yet again in flux.

This is by no means an exhaustive account of this history, in keeping with Marx's assertion that "it is not necessary to write the *real history of the relations of production" (1993, 460)* My goal, rather, is to ascertain the "points at which the suspension of the present form of production relations gives signs of its becoming–foreshadowings of the future" (460). It follows that extractive zones are apt sites of analysis because each authoritarian instantiation of juridic economic *form* simultaneously reveals that "no immanent law of reproduction sustains the form" despite the ostensible intransigence of its legal-economic armatures. Transitions, thus, are also apt sites of abolitionist intervention. Indeed, as Robinson teaches us, "whatever the forms of primitive accumulation assumed, its social harvest would also include acts of resistance, rebellion, and ultimately, revolution" (164).

Part 2

Salt and Slavery

Nestled in the Appalachian Mountains, atop the long-extinct Iapetus ocean, the Kanawha Salines were a source of salt for indigenous populations—including the Shawnee and Seneca Cayuga—for centuries. By the late 1700s white settlers expropriated the salines and made quick work of extracting this lucrative resource, which was pivotal for food preservation, meat processing, and tanning, and laid the technological groundwork for the coal, oil, and gas industries that would eventually surpass salt as the regions primary extractive resource (Forman 14). At its peak in the mid nineteenth century, an average of 3,000 enslaved men worked daily to extract the ancient subterranean brine, mine for coal to fuel the furnaces, and package salt for distribution (Stealy 51). Unlike the plantation model that predominated to the South and East, enslaved miners were not the property of the saltworks owners but were rather leased for one-year terms from nearby plantations. This system was common to extractive industries at the time and was a brutal calculus well suited to an incredibly dangerous production process where explosions, flooding, and rockslides were so frequent as to render any investment in the duration of any single human life financially unsustainable. Injury and death became so common that many slave owners began taking out life insurance policies on the men they leased to the mines. Despite these conditions, working at the salines provided a couple of alluring opportunities. The first was the Kanawha River, unique for its Northern flowing waters that offered expedient passage into Ohio. The second was the opportunity to earn wages (a fitting arrangement considering the root "sal" in the word "salary") by working overtime keeping the salt furnaces running seven days a week. These wages were notably earned in defiance of both leasing agreements and the widely observed Sabbatarian laws in place at the time (Forman 19).

I draw on this example not only because it captures, once again, how differentially

racialized labor in the mining relation secures colonial conquest, but because it illuminates the complicated relationship between time and law in the *maintenance* of white sovereignty. As Du Bois notes "white people paid no attention to their own laws. White men became the law unto themselves" (quoted in Hesse 591). By making the law and its execution contingent on their interests and thus their whims, the sovereign exerts their power not simply over the law but over time in its enforcement. This is dramatized by the example above: time is codified by the Sabbatarian laws that restrict how and when time can be occupied, but it is not the systematization of time that matters but rather the process by which legal codifications are made incoherent to the non-sovereign through their irregular enforcement. In this way, the content of this specific law, and its sanctioned violation, illustrates the temporal form of law in general under the condition of white sovereignty. As Althusser remarks, the "state always has an interest in basing itself in laws; if necessary, laws of exception, even, if necessary, in order to violate or 'arbitrarily' suspend them" (2006, 110). In this way, contingency once again becomes a weapon that suspends the non-sovereign in an abject state of anticipation of an erratic and fundamentally unknowable future articulation of the law.[74]

Sanctioned or not by the saltworks owner, the fact remains that the black worker in this example enters the wage relation by transgressing the law, and their labor is subsequently marked, however mundanely, by a degree of criminality. This is postulated as primarily a violation of the proprietary time of whiteness in two ways, first as a transgression of the edicts contained in Sabbatarian law, and second simply by nature of being waged labor, that is, quantified through a temporal measure and racialized as white in contradistinction to slave labor.

[74] The unequal power over contingency operates at the level of labor as well. The worker, Marx writes, "can live as a worker only in so far as he exchanges his labour capacity for that part of capital which forms the labour fund. This exchange is tied to conditions which are accidental *for him*, and indifferent to his *organic* presence. He is thus a virtual pauper" (1993, 604).

Regardless of whether or not this is perceived as a *temporal* violation, the association of criminality with time will have enormous repercussions for the forms of policing that emerge during reconstruction. Before I return to this dynamic in the following section, I want to highlight how black labor more broadly is implicitly criminalized by this proprietary logic. This rationale saturates the racist, xenophobic perspective on any perceived scarcity of resources and opportunities and subsequently reifies central carceral categories. As Patricia J. Williams shows in a contemporary context, anxieties of displacement are "an incantation of innocence and guilt" (Williams 60). This default to carceral categories, specifically in response to black wages, foreshadows how reactionary white subjects will leverage their sovereignty by appealing to categories of "law and order" to elicit law's preserving effects while undermining law according to their needs. In 1868, for example, the incommensurate affordances of white sovereignty and of the law itself was on dramatic display when hundreds of formerly enslaved workers filed lawsuits against white landowners demanding wages they had earned for the previous harvest season and "whites responded by burning down the courthouse, and with it all 1,800 lawsuits filed by the freedmen" (Blackmon 18). In this example, black worker's assertion of ownership over their labor was met by a flagrant display of white sovereignty over the law as whites enact their exclusive prerogative to destroy "*their"* juridic architecture however they please.

In his monumental work *Black Reconstruction*, Du Bois elaborates how the proprietary conception of labor didn't simply rationalize slavery and stall abolition, nor was it solely the position of the most overtly, unapologetically racist groups. For Du Bois, this logic and the white labor movement's inability to escape it, was responsible for the devastating failure of reconstruction in its entirety. He summarizes this process and its vast consequences below.

> "Indeed, the plight of the white working class throughout the world today is directly traceable to Negro slavery in America, on which modern commerce and industry was founded, and which persisted to threaten free labor until it was partially overthrown in 1863. The resulting color caste founded and retained by capitalism was adopted, forwarded and approved by white labor, and resulted in subordination of colored labor to white profits the world over. Thus the majority of the world's laborers, by the insistence of white labor, became the basis of a system of industry which ruined democracy and showed its perfect fruit in World War and Depression. And this book seeks to tell that story" (30).

The beginning of *Black Reconstruction* formally stages the primary antagonism of this disastrous legacy, separating "The Black Worker" and "The White Worker" into two distinct chapters. The only class of white workers that appear in both is the group of poor southern whites, who, by nature of their "deep-rooted" racial hatred and lack of class consciousness, don't understand "that the black man enslaved was an even more formidable and fatal competitor than the black man free" (20), that is, as a force that exerts downward pressure on wages. True to their (white) lumpen character, this group is easily conscripted to defend the property interests of slave owning planters and will emerge as a makeshift but "unusually effective" (12) police force for the purpose of catching and returning fugitive slaves. This class plays a much smaller role in the following chapter, which is more concerned with tracing the competitive rationale in the industrial North. It is worth recounting these various subsets of the white working class in detail because of how clearly Du Bois' account shows what Hartman, Sharpe and others have, in various ways, identified as the symbolic fungibility of blackness or its "signifying surplus" (Sharpe 80)[75] –that is, the way blackness is positioned as a resource to be extracted and

[75] Or as Hartman puts it, "The figurative capacities of blackness enable white flights of fancy while increasing the likelihood of the captive's disappearance" (1997, 22)

mobilized in a myriad of ways, be it in the service of white liberation, or in the self-defeating appeal to the wages of whiteness at the expense of actual wages.

First, Du Bois shows, we have the early wave of immigrant workers, who, accustomed to poverty and oppression arrived in the U.S. unwilling "to regard itself as a permanent laboring class" (17). Unburdened by European models of worker solidarity and collective improvement and seduced by the American promise of upward mobility, this group sought to join "the successful, well paid American laboring class, a petty bourgeoise 'ready always to join capital in exploiting common labor' of all races" (17). They opposed slavery on economic grounds in the awareness that their chances of becoming the petty bourgeoise from their current station was "threatened by the competition of a working class whose status at the bottom of the economic structure seemed permanent and inescapable" (18). Confronted with the potential competition of the free black laborer in the North, however, poor white immigrants saw only competition, (which would culminate in the race riots of the 1820's and 1830s). The second wave of workers, largely from England and Germany, "envisaged the Marxian reorganization of industry through trade unions and class struggle" (19) and contrary to the former group, they opposed slavery on moral grounds, that is, until they were confronted with enticing opportunities of their own. These aspirations are of a settler colonial sort, and the allure of virgin soil and "unoccupied" land out West proved too great a temptation to maintain their prior moral convictions. Afterall, here was an opportunity to reverse the "original sins" of capitalism and, Du Bois writes "restore the industrial balance ruined in Europe by the expropriation of the worker from the soil" (19). The idea of free, mobile, landless black population whose free labor could potentially constitute a property claim, proved too threatening, and this group emerged in opposition to abolition, scapegoating its proponent's capitalist allegiances and presenting the suffering of white workers

as the most pressing political impasse. To borrow Du Bois' apt phrasing, they "curiously enough" lost their Marxist discerning towards the structural interworking of capitalism, and despite their class consciousness, made an identical error to their poor southern counterparts. Du Bois writes that even "the wisest of the leaders could not clearly envisage just how slave labor in conjunction and competition with free labor tended to reduce all labor toward slavery" (19). His use of the word "wisest" carries the same connotative weight as "curious enough" in the preceding quotation and suggests that this is not quite a result of intellectual oversight. How, then, do we account for such an egregiously counter-intuitive, self-defeating stance? While "racism" seems like a perfectly adequate answer, a more nuanced appraisal will illustrate the paradoxical affordances of white sovereignty under racial capital.

Frank B. Wilderson III's analysis of labor and slavery in *Red, White, & Black*: *Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* is particularly instructive for grasping a fundamental contradiction that emerges when the symbolic value of racial oppression confronts its economic (lack of) value for the white worker. Wilderson cites David Eltis, who argues that Europeans could have run a dragnet across their own increasingly populated lands, prisons, and poorhouses to provide the New World with an enslaved work force at significantly less cost. Not doing so was comparatively "bad business," thus illustrating, for Wilderson, a prevailing investment in the symbolic value of slavery over its economic value.[76] As a system born of racial violence that requires an immiserated surplus, capitalism is uniquely well suited to making these two registers of value cohere, but, because capitalist social form is ultimately indifferent to its content, they won't always, and their incommensurability will inevitably be used to rationalize the very

[76] However, as I have argued, the symbolic value of slavery *is itself an economic value* because it enabled the emergence of the capitalist value form. It follows that the decision to use slave labor can be seen less as an investment in racist ideology than as a (likely unacknowledged) investment in the expansion of the global market.

systems that perpetually recalibrate capital's dominant demographic constituencies along racial lines. Indeed, maintaining capital's most valuable infrastructures for devaluing black labor—such as the prison industrial complex—requires a seemingly counter intuitive sacrifice of white life as well, which, while undermining the ideological "coherence" of white *supremacist* thought, sustains the myth of equality central to the juridic-economic apparatus that secures white *sovereignty*. White people are, in a sense, forfeited to legitimize the existence of carceral institutions and their disproportionate devastation of black, indigenous, and other non-white populations. This becomes a talking point for those with the greatest investment in both the economic and symbolic value of racial oppression, leading to the type of "race blind," equal opportunity violence arguments below:

> Catherine Herridge, CBS News journalist: "Why are African-Americans still dying at the hands of law enforcement in this country?"
> Donald Trump: "What a terrible question to ask. So are white people. More white people, by the way" (Peters, New York Times).

Here we can see how the myth of equality leads, again, not to an understanding of the unevenly but universally degrading force of the capitalist state, but to consciousness of persecution, testifying to the way in which the settler conceives of himself as somehow "both exploiter and victim" (Wynter N.D. 385). Violent and pervasive as this logic is in the United States (and other contemporary settler states), I'm more interested in how this line of thinking is subtlety reproduced in the leftist conflation of exploitation and oppression that continues to emerge at the expense of grasping the strategic value of a specifically abolitionist labor struggle.

Recall, one last time, the saltworks mine. Note the salt worker's shift from slave to waged labor. No one would reasonably argue that this shift secures the black worker's freedom in any way. But, as evinced by the various historical rationales noted above, one might very likely use

this fact and the manner in which the physical properties of his labor and condition of *exploitation* remain constant, to situate labor as the central medium of oppression, and thus the logical target for remediation. We can see how this logic, and its flagrant insufficiency in practice, is reproduced in our present moment as a number of U.S. states have voted in favor of "abolishing slavery" once and for all by amending constitutional loopholes permitting forced prison labor. These measures passed in four states: Oregon, Vermont, Tennessee, and Alabama. The logic goes, no more unpaid labor, no more slavery, as though prison labor is only *unfree* when it is *unpaid*. Of course, this ignores a foundational fact of slavery, which is that, as Wilderson writes, "the positionality of the slave makes a demand that is in excess of the demand made by the positionality of the worker" (2007, 28). As suggested by the salt worker, this "excess" cannot be met by democratizing labor (dramatized by the extension of the wage) because, as Wilderson states, echoing Orlando Patterson, "Forced labor is not constitutive of enslavement because whereas it explains a common practice, it does not define the structure of the *power relation between* those who are slaves and those who are not" (italics added 2010, 14). Once slavery is abolished, this "excess" still remains because, as I have argued, the *relative devaluation* inaugurated by New World slavery is structurally sedimented in the extractive law of value, and, far more importantly, the forces of devaluation persist as a means of labor capture and valorization (through the economic force of the state). For this reason, it is essential that one appreciates the excess demands that Wilderson articulates, not necessarily because slavery still exists in the prison system, per se, but because they are precisely the demands necessary to *confront capitalist labor as a totality* of alienated and devalued labor. In the same way that forced labor is not constitutive of enslavement, the exploitation relation is not constitutive of capitalist labor as a totality because the necessary forms of labor devaluation exceed the site and

activity of labor. This insight is particularly important for confronting the prison system, which, while not analogous to slavery, reproduces many of its mechanisms of devaluation characteristic of slavery, from family rupture and disenfranchisement to unpaid labor and the imposition of dependency.[77] To borrow and adapt Wilderson's phrasing to the abolitionist imperatives of our contemporary moment, then, we can say that the positionality of the *inmate* makes a demand that is in excess of the demand made by the position of the *narrowly defined* worker because "whereas [labor] explains a common practice, it does not define the structure of the power relation between" relatively (de)valued forms of labor, or between alienated labor and devalued labor (or between correctional officers and inmates, for example).

The fetishization of the *activity* of labor naturally culminates in the leftist overestimation of the emancipatory power of labor's democratization. This tendency stubbornly persists in what Wilderson describes as a type of Marxian conceptual anxiety. There is, He writes,

> a desire for socialism on the other side of crisis, a society that does away not with the category of worker but with the imposition that workers suffer under the approach of variable capital: In other words, the mark of its conceptual anxiety is in its desire to democratize work and thus help to keep in place and ensure the coherence of Reformation and Enlightenment 'foundational' values of productivity and progress. This is a crowding-out scenario for other postrevolutionary possibilities, i.e. idleness" (2003, 226).

While I fully agree with Wilderson's critique of socialism, I think there is still value in appealing to workers *self-interest* (rather than moral sense, which Du Bois, Hartman, and others have

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[77] Terminologically, because the prison system, unlike racial slavery, is not *formally* exclusive to any race, I don't refer to prison labor, for example, as slavery. Wilderson is more comfortable equating the prisoner and the slave, referring to the "prison slave" and the "prison slave-in-waiting" in his work. He also describes the prison system as a renaissance of slavery, which I think is an apt description. He writes, "late capital is imposing a renaissance of this original desire, the direct relation of force, the despotism of the unwaged relation. This renaissance of slavery—that is, the reconfiguration of the prison-industrial complex—has once again as its structuring metaphor and primary target the black body" (2007, 28)

shown to be devastatingly unreliable historically). This is because the demands of the inmate necessarily spell the emancipation of the worker, given the centrality of the former in the value structure that compels the latter. Put another way, the forces of *alienation*, characteristic of the labor relation, cannot be overcome until the forces of *devaluation* are. Because it is the capitalist value form that necessitates devaluation, it is only through *its* complete abolition via communism[78] that the symbolic and economic value of incarceration, like that of slavery, mutually cease to exist. Whereas, for Wilderson, it would seem that labor is un-recuperable for abolitionist organizing (a fair conclusion), I am not willing to throw out the baby with the bathwater just yet, and I take inspiration from recent examples where labor *has* taken a stand against the racial violence that sustains the settler state both inside and outside the prison. [79] As I show below, the seemingly divergent interests of the worker and the inmate converge in the general strike and, as suggested in the passage above, in the underacknowledged emancipatory potential that inheres in strategic "idleness." [80]

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[78] My use of the term "communism" follows what Ruth Wilson Gilmore calls "small c" communism, or what some refers to as "abolition communism", that is, abolition that is not solely premised on the police and prisons, combined with communism that is decidedly anti-carceral. Alberto Toscano offers a very helpful explanation of "abolition communism" and its long history in his recent article of the same name. https://salvage.zone/abolition-communism/

[79] Here I am thinking of European dockworkers who have refused to load ships containing weapons for Israel. https://peoplesdispatch.org/2025/07/10/workers-in-europe-refuse-cargo-to-israel-our-solidarity-is-with-the-oppressed-not-with-war-criminals/ I am also thinking of Labor Leader, Chris Smalls' participation in the Handala Freedom Flotilla that sailed to Israel in an attempt to bring aid to the Palestinians being starved in Gaza. https://www.democracynow.org/2025/8/5/chris_smalls

[80] In the *Grundrisse*, Marx briefly discusses the decay of the plantation system and interestingly cites idleness as the new standard of value in a society that ceases not just to labor under slavery, but to labor at all. Marx writes, "The Times of November 1857 contains an utterly delightful cry of outrage on the part of a West-Indian plantation owner. This advocate analyses with great moral indignation -as a plead for the re-introduction of Negro slavery—how the Quashees (free blacks of Jamaica) content themselves with producing only what is strictly necessary for their own consumption, and alongside this 'use-value", regard loafing (indulgence and idleness) as the real luxury good; how they do not care a damn for the sugar and the fixed capital invested in the plantations, but rather observe that planters' impending bankruptcy with an ironic grin of malicious pleasure [. . . .] They have ceased to be slaves, but not in

The General Strike as Abolitionist Praxis

Concurrent with the reformist legislation being passed in Alabama was the Alabama Prisoner's Strike, which notably made demands that exceeded calls for higher wages and safer working conditions.[81] Rather, using labor as a fulcrum, they demanded the state adopt measures that would de-carcerate large portions of the population. Labor strikes such as these are important because by ceasing production (or in this case, the daily functioning of the prison itself) they lay waste to previous labor and disrupt, if even just momentarily, capital's self-formalization and self-preserving appearance. Strikes in general are most powerful when they are concerned not with democratizing labor for labor's sake, but when they leverage labor power to attack the institutions, like the prison industrial complex, that sustain the *elasticity of labor* through the devaluation of the black worker. In doing so, as Benjamin writes, the "general strike clearly announces its indifference to material gain through conquest by declaring its intention to abolish the state" ("Critique of Violence" 291). Indeed, it is worth nothing that the Alabama prison strike was vehemently condemned by state officials, while the legislative reforms to "abolish slavery" were widely praised in characteristically self-congratulatory ways.

The power of the general prison strike as a uniquely abolitionist communist weapon can only be fully appreciated, I think, in the context of its emergence from the plantation. While the general strike is commonly associated with the industrial proletariat, Joseph Albernaz offers a radically alternative genealogy of the general strike as "aimed from the first at regimes of racial capitalist control and accumulation (539). While it has long been assumed that the model for the

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order to become wage labourers, but, instead, self-sustaining peasants working for their own consumption" (*Grundrisse* 326).

[81] Interestingly, these reforms occurred on the back of the largest labor strike in U.S. history, the 2016 prison strikes. These began on September 9th, on the 45th anniversary of the Attica uprising, and involved the striking of nearly 25,000 prisoners across the country, including Alabama.

general strike was created by London reformist, William Benbow, who argued for the withholding of labor, as during "jubilee," Albernaz shows that it was actually Robert Wedderburn, an "abolitionist and communist ultraradical, born into slavery in Jamaica [. . .] who first lays out the concept, plan, and call for the general strike in his 1817 periodical *The Axe Laid to the Root*" (542). His plan called for every plantation worker to withhold their labor at the exact same time for one hour across the island. Drawing from the Haitian revolution, Wedderburn acknowledged that the strike is just as much about striking fear into the bourgeois landowners than it is about withholding labor and ceasing production; so while the stoppage is limited to one hour, "this hour is meant to have resounding revolutionary consequences, shifting the entire work, time, and disciplinary regimes of the plantation system on their axes" (543). The general strike speaks to the reversibility of power, and "gestures toward a general union of the nonrepresented" (547), or, to return to the terms of this project, the unconverted. As Albernaz beautifully puts it: "The general strike names an inoperative displacement—a destituent power—that while historically situated, exceeds linear time and scrambles chronology with its irradiant demand, constellating an atopology of revolt through the folds of time, earth, and flesh" (547).[82]

Coal and Convict Leasing

After the civil war, the Kanawha salt works fell into disrepair, but the leasing system it helped popularize remained an essential means of accumulating the labor necessary for the nation's rapidly growing and evolving resource demands. With slave leasing, company owners

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[82] Albernaz describes "atopology" as that which assembles "the world's nonplaces, the barred sites of generativity, disorder, and desire that cannot appear in the conceptual terms or spatiotemporal coordinates of the modern world—it gestures toward a general union of the nonrepresented" (547).

were unencumbered by the paternalistic obligation and economic motives that came along with full ownership and could thus exploit their workers with greater impunity and little regard for their ability to reproduce their labor power beyond their one-year term (that is, until insurance policies became popular). Once slave leasing is abolished with slavery itself, convict leasing emerges to take its place as the most acutely wasteful form of forced labor, because, as Mary Church Terrel noted at the time, "the death of a slave meant an actual loss in dollars and cents, whereas the death of a convict today involves no loss whatsoever either to the lessee or to the State" (1999, 90). Without the added check of ownership under slavery, or the insurance policies that eventually emerged in the prior leasing arrangement, the treatment of incarcerated laborers was far more appalling. As Angela Davis writes, they "could be subjected to such intense exploitation and to such horrendous modes of punishment precisely because they continued to be perceived as slaves "(2003, 33). I would add that the continuity of leasing pre- and post-emancipation, where one's labor is contractually secured with heightened disregard for the worker's life and longevity, helped fortify a related but unique perception towards criminality that extends well beyond the realm of labor. This is because, I will show, the state no longer exerts economic force in a (relatively) passive manner, that is, by legally sanctioning the violent means by which plantation owners and industrialists accumulate a laboring population. The state now exerts this economic force directly, literally seizing laborers to meet the needs of private industry through criminalization. In this section I will show how this combines with the diminished responsibility to meet fundamental human needs characteristic of the leasing arrangement, resulting in, among other things, the racialized criminalization of poverty. We arrive at, or rather return to, the cycle of devaluation through relative deprivation and criminalization.

Convict labor was central to the industrialization of the Postbellum South, and was, as Alex Lichtenstein argues, "the vanguard of the region's first tentative, ambivalent, steps towards modernity (Davis, 2003, 35). This forced labor built the railroads and other transportation infrastructure and was central to resource extraction from coal, ore, turpentine, and phosphorite. Despite the centrality of convict labor in the creation of a modern southern economy, Davis writes, "it still remains a hidden dimension of our history" (2003, 35). Even at the time of emancipation, penal servitude went largely unremarked by even the most vocal and influential of abolitionists, most notably Frederick Douglass. In her essay, "From the Prison of Slavery to the Slavery of Prison" Davis offers an insightful analysis of Douglass' omission and of the lasting impacts of convict leasing. She writes, "that black human beings might continue to be enslaved under the auspices of southern systems of justice (and that this might set a precedent for imprisonment outside the South) seems not to have occurred to Douglass" even as southern states began rapidly instituting Black Codes "which criminalized such behavior as vagrancy, breach of job contracts, absence from work, the possession of a firearm, and insulting gestures or acts" (1999, 76). Subsequently, the courts became the ideal conduit for Southern states both to forge a new labor force and to sustain white supremacy. Not only were property crimes such as petty theft elevated to felony offences to ensure longer sentences spent building and extracting, but many of the charges levelled against black people were completely fabricated (2003, 34). As such, courts served as a "subterfuge for political revenge" (Curtin, quoted in Davis, 34). The stark inequality under the law and imputation of criminality to blackness was so dramatic that in some circumstances, Du Bois shows, whites even went so far as to blacken their appearance when committing a crime.

Like other black leaders at the time, Douglass wanted to dispel these essentialist notions of black criminality, especially as they became increasingly influenced by eugenics discourses. While many leaders cited lack of resources and opportunities in their present moment, Douglass pointed backward, attributing, for example, "a thieving propensity" to "holdovers from slavery," in keeping with his philosophical emphasis on historical progress (74-75). These related rationales, Davis writes, "represented an engagement with the presumption of criminality, but not with the institutions that concretely structured this ideology of criminality" (91). To put a finer point on this, Douglass focused on criminality as a component of racial ideology at the expense of critiquing the material forces of criminalization operative in law and policing. Davis continues, "To take on convict leasing would have required Douglass to relinquish some of his major Enlightenment principles—and his vision of black liberation was too solidly anchored in the promise of legislated justice to permit him to ponder the possibility of the profound complicity of legal institutions in the continuation of the micro-cosmic slave system" (84). In this way, convict leasing forces us to confront our most foundational assumptions about criminality, and a full accounting of this practice would lay bare the obsolescence not just of the carceral system but of the entire government for securing anything like freedom and justice.

In keeping with his enlightenment principles, Douglass also notably emphasizes the *property* of one's labor as a primary means of upward mobility through equal exchange. The previously enslaved, he writes, "has labor, the South wants it, and must have it or perish. Since he is free he can now give it, or withhold it; use it where he is, or take it elsewhere, as he pleases. His labor made him a slave, and his labor can, if he will, make him free, comfortable and independent" (Davis, 1999, 80). "Progressive" anti-slavery senator, Charles Sumner made a similar case for the importance of labor, not necessarily as means to leverage legal and civic

recognition for the black worker, but as an untapped source of wealth for white capitalists. In his argument against the Liberian colonization movement, he warns its proponents that "besides its intrinsic and fatal injustice, you will deprive the country of what it most needs, which is labor. Those freedmen on the spot are better than mineral wealth. Each is a mine, out of which riches can be drawn, provided you let him share the product, and through him that general industry will be established which is better than anything but virtue, and is, indeed, a form of virtue" (Du Bois147). States moved quickly to tap this resource, but the mass extraction of black labor would be far from virtuous. Alabama, for example, tripled its prison population between 1874 and 1877 to meet the demands of extractive industries (Davis, 1999, 79) and was soon "generating in excess of $120,000 a year, "an extraordinary sum for a state whose total general tax revenue—and budget—at the time barely exceeded $1 million" (Blackmon 94).

While Sumner's mine metaphor politely glosses over the inherent violence of extractive endeavors, it does anticipate the explicit re-territorialization of the black worker's body that would occur with the leasing model. Harkening back to the slave trade, when the exchange value of black labor was determined according to a speculative consideration of future productivity in the manner of an extractive frontier, convicts were priced similarly according to "their health and ability to dig coal." As Blackmon shows, "Under state rules, a "first-class" prisoner had to cut and load into mine cars four tons of coal a day to avoid being whipped. The weakest inmates, labeled "fourth class" or 'dead hands were required to produce at least one ton a day" (94) A first class state convict cost a company $18.50 a month, with a dead hand costing $9. This reference to the body part recalls the Pieza or "piece" system of measure, where "the norm was a man who represented the largest possible amount of labor" (Wynter N.D. 30), while the introduction of

class markers signals slavery's jarring contemporaneity in this in not-so-distant historical era of U.S. capitalism.

As we also saw in the era of slavery, the social inscription of blackness as devalued labor occurs not only through the activity of labor, but through the power relations enacted through that labor within repressive conditions. Wynter describes this process in the planation model below,

> Planation masters wanted both –work and recognition. We may argue that for the slave masters, who owned their plantation, the slave's labour was tribute and recognition enough: the slave at work was the recognition of his mastership. But with the smaller masters, the poor whites who owned no slaves themselves, recognition cannot be accorded by the slaves through indirect tribute of productive labour. This recognition of the self-consciousness as masters, has then to be effected by the direct personal tribute that they demand of the slave so that the surplus value of the white self can be realized. (N.D. 421)

After emancipation, in the absence of slavery, the "tribute" demanded by poor whites would be captured anew through the act of lynching. While this certainly warranted Douglass' attention, convict leasing simultaneously emerged as the new system in which no additional tribute is necessary. Now, devastatingly, this tribute is made not only to the mine owners and white overseers but to the *state itself*, that is, the very state Douglass leaves comparatively unchallenged. In this way, convict leasing reproduced a number of the dominant conditions of slavery while consolidating the racializing force of the state. Convict leasing also shaped the legal system in more subtle, but no less harmful ways due to its unique way of socially inscribing neglect (rather than paternalistic obligation) and occupational toxicity onto the black laborer. As Blackmon writes of one of the largest carceral coal mines in Alabama, "Pratt mines was a scene of nightmarish human suffering and brutal retaliation. Subjected to squalid living conditions, poor medical treatment, scant food, and frequent flogging, hundreds died—the victims of mine explosions, rock falls, fires, neglect, and, most commonly, recurring outbreaks of disease." (95).

This brutality, in turn, became a central means not of labor domestication (as in the plantation model) but of *legal coercion*, as it was in these Southern courts that the modern plea agreement was born, as black "defendants," acutely aware that due process was a right only afforded to whites, were compelled to "confess judgement" or plead guilty to avoid drastically longer sentences in the mines (Blackmon).

Labor as Sentimental Resource in Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*

Yaa Gyasi captures the brutality of convict leasing in Alabama coal mines in her generational saga, *Homegoing*, which traces eight generations of descendants from two half-sisters, Effia and Esi, born in 1750s Ghana. The book is separated into the two parts, and for the Esi family line, part two directly shows the failure of Reconstruction and its violent reverberations up to the present. The first episode of this section tells the story of H, a previously enslaved man who is arrested on charges he only learns later are related to "studying a white woman." When he is unable to pay his fees, he is sentenced to 10 years of penal servitude and leased to the local mining company. Critics tend to agree that the novel's second half, with its movement from Mississippi plantations and Alabama coal mines to Baltimore and Harlem, becomes a bit overshadowed by historical exposition. Indeed, there are moments when this appraisal seems warranted, like when the speaker describes all the petty offences the miners were charged with or when the narrator remarks, "But what kind of life was this? At least when he was a slave his master needed to keep him alive if he wanted to get his money's worth. Now, if H died, they would just lease the next man" (162). However, to see H as one of the novel's "walking, talking history lessons" (Miller 2016) as one critic ungenerously puts it, is to miss how Gyasi is actively mobilizing aesthetic tropes that have historically been overdetermined by white readership. By condemning the character's "demographic imperative" in one breath and citing

the author's historical anachronism and bleak depiction of African American life in another, the critic noted above seems to be unironically participating in this tradition.

For H's chapter, Gyasi evokes the sentimental mode common to abolitionist narratives of slavery, first by detailing the inhumanity of the convict leasing system, the awful working conditions in the mine and the depravity of the pit bosses and wardens. Gyasi paints a gruesome picture as the bodies of miners who are worked or whipped to death are left in the sprawling shafts and chambers of the underground city to be buried by coal dust alongside the many more miners who are killed by explosions and cave-ins. Amidst these horrors, H stands apart as a "first class" convict, exceptional for his John Henry stature and work ethic. He adapts quickly to the work and hierarchies in the mine, accepting his lot with patience and composure. While the vast majority of miners are black, "third-class' white prisoners would occasionally be sent to the mine, ostensibly for far more egregious crimes. As Du Bois and Davis show, the coexistence of black and white convicts was a contentious issue in the postbellum South, and for many, constituted a uniquely cruel form of punishment for the white convict. In one particularly dramatic example, southerners speaking at an 1880 National Prison Association meeting "called up such exaggerated comparisons as that between incarcerated whites and blacks and the 'ancient torture' of tying up murderers with the 'decaying corpses,' resulting in death to the living murderer" (Davis 1999, 84). Gyasi echoes these outlandish grievances with the white convicts who, upon being chained to a black miner, would "beg his white brothers, the wardens, to have mercy on him, spare him from the shame of it all" (163).

The white worker's repulsion is not only historically precise- it operates in the text to give the event that bestows H his nickname "Two Shovel" all the more sentimental impact. One day H is partnered with one such 'third-class" man, Thomas, "whose arms had started shaking so

badly, he couldn't lift his shovel" (163). Acutely aware that failure to meet one's quota could very well be a death sentence, he collapses crying, "stammering that he didn't want to die down there" with only black men as his witness (163). True to his superior ethical constitution, H "wordlessly" fills their quota to everyone's surprise. "'Ain't no man ever shoveled double-handed before,' the boss had said after it was over, respect lacing his voice, and H simply nodded" (163). When H is unable to shovel his own coal the following day through shear exhaustion, other workers step in to help, including Thomas, who, in a dramatic display of personal enlightenment even thanks H for saving him.

It is no surprise that this overtly melodramatic appeal to racial solidarity through work is said to champion "the multiracial utopianism that briefly flourished in some corners of the labor movement" (Miller). Indeed, upon his release, H returns to mining in a neighboring city, with "both colors joining the same unions, fighting for the same things" (Gyasi 169). One might say this appeal to work as a conduit for racial equality plays the same role literacy did in the sentimental texts of a previous era. However, Gyasi subtly critiques this tradition as well and in doing so illustrates the false promise of assimilationist appeals to enlightenment values, be it education or the dignity of free labor. Despite H's assertion in this chapter that he has no family, we learn in the first half of the novel that he's actually the last of eight children: Agnes, Beulah, Cato, Daly, Eurias, Felicity, Gracie. In this earlier chapter, H's parents, Jo and Anna, live in relative comfort in Baltimore, working and raising their large family. Gyasi writes, "It seemed like he and Anna were going to have one child for every letter of the alphabet. They would teach their children to read those letters, grow them up to be the kind of people who could teach those letters to other people. Now everyone in the house called the new baby "H," as a placeholder until it came out and brought its name along with it" (114-115). But then Anna is kidnapped, her

theft sanctioned by the Fugitive Slave Act despite her free status, and H's name remains incomplete, a testimony to the unfulfilled promise of assimilation and the unfinished project of emancipation. This truncated legacy of education gives new meaning to H's "crime" of "studying" a white woman, just as Gyasi's use of the word "placeholder" foreshadows how H would become a surrogate of sorts in his own chapter, a vessel for a new era of appeals to unity, coalition, and collectivity under the banner of labor as well as their respective forms of erasure.

A closer look beyond the more spectacular events that occur in the mine will reveal the limitations of these appeals. Every day, Gyasi writes, "when he and the other prisoners left the mines, they would always be coated in a layer of black dust, their arms burning, just burning" (162). Black and white workers emerge from the mine physically indistinguishable, and by a sentimental reading, on the "equal footing" of the surface. While the coal dust dramatizes how thoroughly criminality is imputed to blackness in this era, this scene suggests that white workers can, in a sense, be "blackened" by their subterranean labor under the convict system. However, the *residual* materiality of the coal dust offers an important corrective to this line of thinking, highlighting the racialized distinction between devaluation and alienation, a distinction the white horrified miner above sought to keep firmly in place. Gyasi returns to the coal dust imagery upon H's release. As he showers that first morning, Gyasi writes, he "tried to rub the clench marks of his shackles from his ankles, the soot from underneath his nails. He stared at himself in the mirror until he was confident that no one could tell he had ever been in a mine" (166). He walks for miles to distance himself from the coalmines even further. Despite his prior confidence, H is apprehended as an ex-convict almost immediately.

Unlike the white worker, who can be metaphorically "blackened" if they commit a crime, H's criminality is marked, in the Fanonian sense, epidermally. "Can be" marks an important

distinction for the white worker and the black worker. Wilderson discusses the importance of the conditional "if" in his discussion of 16th century British laws that made vagrancy punishable by slavery. For some, this might suggest some sort of equality under the law, but as Wilderson shows, these laws not only made white slavery contingent upon a criminal act, but they perpetually defer the actual enforcement of white enslavement through "the imposition of the numerous *on condition that* and *supposing that* clauses bound up in the word *if"* (2010, 17). He argues that blackness, on the other hand, appears in the condition of slavery a priori to any transgressive act. To be clear, I cite Wilderson here (and throughout) not to further any claim about the ontological status of slavery for the black subject, but because his analysis of the conditional, as a category reserved for whiteness, sheds important light on the unequal access to the power of contingency operative under the condition of white sovereignty. While convict leasing is not analogous to slavery, we can see how the nature of the Black Codes serves a function similar to its legal codifications by rendering effectively all manner of black existence punishable by law a priori to any actual transgression. And in this era, there is an interesting new conditional at work: white people are only subject to these *specific* codes by association with black people. As one 1866 Mississippi law decrees, "all white persons so assembling with freedmen,[. . .] or usually associating with [them] on terms of equality or, in living in adultery or fornication [. . .] shall be deemed vagrants" and fined or imprisoned" (Du Bois 174-175).

Blackness is posited, in this way, as somehow a contaminating force under the law at the same time that convict leasing re-naturalized the distribution of the most toxic jobs to non-white laborers. Like his folk hero prototype, John Henry, who is said to have actually been a convict laborer who died—not from exhaustion, but from silicosis—H eventually dies from the black

lung.[83] Both, in their respective worlds, live on as labor icons. I would argue that in this way, Gyasi doesn't use the dignity or humanity of labor to reveal the inhumanity of convict leasing; she uses convict leasing to show how sentimentalizing labor obscures and naturalizes the racialized power dynamics at work. Far from melodramatically illuminating "the violation of domesticity, the parody of liberty, and the callous defiance of sorrow" (Hartman 17) in one passage, the mine is, rather, quite explicitly domesticated: Gyasi writes, "Now he saw that there was an entire city underground. Larger, more sprawling, than any county that H has ever lived or worked in, and this city was occupied almost entirely by black men and boys. This city had shafts for streets, and rooms for houses. And in every room, everywhere, there was coal" (161). The conflation of the mine with a home alerts us to the damaging legacies of the convict leasing system in the realm of reproduction. Just as convict leasing granted the state a more pronounced ability to exert economic force to stimulate production, both through the explicit criminalization of public idleness via vagrancy laws, and by direct participation in the capture of laboring populations, it also reconfigured the state's role vis a vis reproduction. To put a finer point on this, the state's increased role in production combines with a decreased responsibility to produce the means necessary for reproduction. This is because while all labor under capitalism is premised on a general disregard for the worker's ability to reproduce their labor, convict leasing takes this to the absolute extreme, depleting and disposing of workers with complete impunity. As Benjamin writes, "in the exercise over life and death [. . .] law affirms itself" (286); in this case as disposability becomes socially inscribed to blackness in the realm of production, while convict leasing's juridic armatures rationalize relative deprivation within the realm of reproduction through the processes of criminalization. Unmet needs and reproductive failure are

[83] Historian, Scott Reynolds Nelson elaborates the origins of the John Henry folk song in his book *Steel Drivin' Man: John Henry, The Untold Story of an American Legend*

no longer "represented as the failure of the system but as the "crime" of it's victims" (Wynter N.D. 430). Furthermore, because this is orchestrated by the state, the disavowal of human needs or utter neglect of black populations extends beyond the realm of private industry and is posited, in a sense, as matter of public resources more broadly. As Williams puts it, when slaves were unowned [. . .] they were also disowned" (21). This unowning, she writes, meant "their consignment to some collective public state of mind, known alternatively as "burden" and "menace" (22). She writes, the "Have-nots must be out in the open—scrutinized, seen with their hands open and empty to make sure they're not pilfering" (22).

Prisons and Pollution

The convergence of vagrancy laws, the racialization of state neglect, and the conflation of poverty with criminality ushered in a new era of police surveillance in the United States. As Gilmore writes, "a social safety net has been replaced by a criminal dragnet" (2006, 77). Under the guise of yet another reform, prisons would emerge as sites of large-scale social control and racial devaluation. [84] Highly effective at mobilizing capital in their construction, prisons, once built, require a steady inmate population to sustain all the private corporations contracted to provide health services, commissary products, and communications technology at exorbitantly high rates to incarcerated people and their families. Members of surplus populations no longer bear value as future workers and wage depressors; their value exists as "future criminals." As

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[84]As Gilmore writes, "Reform, then as now, opened the door to expanding prison under the guise of social improvement. The rise of the case as a large-scale all-purpose solution to problems is a relatively recent phenomenon in world history. Modern prisons were born and grew up with the United States, as impersonal but individualized sites of large-scale social control, in the long historical turn marked by the consolidation of the bourgeois nation-state as the world's fundamental political economic unit, the normalization of capitalism, and the development of racist science and philosophy to explain it all. Although the reformist purpose of prisons was to end bodily torture, in the United States prison did not replace torture but rather complemented its role in securing social order (2009, 81).

Gilmore shows, "The correspondence between regions suffering deep economic restructuring, high rates of unemployment and underemployment among men and intensive surveillance of youth by the state's criminal justice apparatus present the relative surplus population as the problem for which prisons became the solution" (113). Increased surveillance to create a criminal population is only one way in which incarceration fundamentally fails to create social stability. The trauma of family separation, the enormous costs of supporting an incarcerated loved one, the stigmatization and lack of resources for ex-incarcerated people, all toxify communities beyond the prison walls; in other words, Gilmore writes "prisons wear out places by wearing out people, irrespective of whether they have done time" (17).[85]

Alongside the reformist model of prison expansion is the transition from labor-intensive to technology-focused extractive methods—from processes such as shaft and strip mining for coal to offshore drilling and hydraulic fracturing for oil and natural gas. This process illustrates what petrocultural scholars call "Energy Deepening" to name "the tendency through which capitalist modernization mobilizes natural forms of physical power to optimize, manage, and discard human labour" (*After Oil* 24). As with previous eras, the carceral system will adapt again in our contemporary moment to meet the shifting requirements of extractive industries in a manner that re-naturalizes the exposure of non-white subjects to environmental and occupational toxicity. That is because, despite these less labor-intensive practices, what remains throughout all these eras of extraction is the ongoing production and accumulation of toxic waste. In the wake of the 2010 BP oil spill, for example, inmate labor was used to clean up coastal landscapes, exposing workers to large quantities of crude oil and the far more toxic dispersant chemicals

[85] Jackie Wang aptly describes this process in terms of time as well, when she writes, "The carceral ripple effect when any life is taken by the state [and] how it warps the temporalities of everyone in the orbit of the disappeared person (218).

used to break up oil slicks. The public response was particularly interesting, as the presence of inmate labor in an economically immiserated area incited new perceptions of competition. As journalist Matthew Clarke writes, "Early in BP's effort to clean up oil-soaked beaches in Louisiana, cleanup workers wearing scarlet pants and T-shirts emblazoned with the words "Inmate Labor" were easy to spot. Local residents, many of whom had been rendered destitute by the oil spill, which had destroyed the fishing industry in the region, expressed outrage. Why was BP hiring prisoners when the Deepwater Horizon accident had forced so many coastal residents into unemployment? (Prison Legal News).

The short answer, of course, is cost, as incarcerated workers are paid less than a dollar an hour and many work for free to earn "good time" off their sentence (Clarke). The other reason is that inmate labor is more reliable because incarcerated people rarely have any say in the type of work they do, and any forms of refusal by those in work-release programs leads to a forfeiture of the good time they have earned. One oil recovery company owner in Alabama unabashedly credits such punitive measures for domesticating what he seems to consider to be an ideal workforce. SG & S owner Jay Graddick says, "It's almost impossible for them to steal anything," "They're not walking around talking on cell phones. They're orderly, because repercussions are harsh. I've had less problems with these guys than when I've hired just normal people" (Clarke). Unlike the unemployed locals, this labor force comes with its own surveillance, so no additional energy need be expended—to return to Williams' phrasing—scrutinizing their open hands to make sure they're not pilfering (22).

Inmates are not just mobilized to clean up the aftermath of acute environmental crises. Some of the most violent forms of toxic exposure occur in the processing of our most ubiquitous commodities, like computers and other electronics. One of the largest providers of recycling

services is the federally owned company Unicor, which markets itself as a labor-based rehabilitation company. Their mission, as stated on their website "is to protect society and reduce crime by preparing inmates with job training and practical work skills for reentry success." In reality, Unicor has been actively disabling incarcerated workers since the first E-scrap factory was opened in 1994. Tasked with breaking down and sorting the remains of computers with no safety equipment or respirators, workers have been exposed to numerous toxins such as lead, mercury, barium, arsenic, phthalates and phosphorus, leading to all manner of adverse health effects including rashes, kidney disease, respiratory problems, miscarriages, and cancer (Cusac). Many inmates, however, don't work, testifying to the way in which, as Pavarini shows, "penitentiary practices vacillate between a negative imperative (the 'destructive' prison with deterrent aims) and a positive imperative ('productive' prison with essentially re-educative aims" (Pavarini 205). Recently, in keeping with the labor demands of capital, Gilmore writes, "the generally accepted goal of prisons has been *incapacitation:* a do-nothing theory if ever there was one" (G.G. 21). Unlike in the 19th and early 20th century, Gilmore notes, most prisoners today remain idle (21). This enforced idleness has little bearing on one's exposure to the toxic byproducts of fossil capital, because exposure to toxicity is in no way limited to labor. Nearly 600 U.S. Prisons are built in dangerous proximity to landscapes the government has deemed "superfund sites" that were previously occupied by mines, coal processing centers, slurry impoundments and contaminated waste receptacles. Cartographer Paige William found that nearly a third of all U.S prisons are located within 3 miles of these sites, with 134 within just one mile (Waters).[86] In some instances, as with Big Sandy Detention Center in Martin County,

[86] Unsurprisingly, inmates at these facilities are getting horribly sick A 2014 study found that at SCI Fayette, "of 75 former and current inmates, 61 had respiratory problems, 51 had gastrointestinal issues, and 39 had experienced rashes. Of the 17 people who died while incarcerated from 2010 to 2013, 11 did so because of cancer" (Waters).

Kentucky, the defunct mine and the prison *directly* overlap, as facilities are built on the truncated, porous remains of mountains bored through and blasted by successive eras of shaft mining and mountain top removal. It is difficult to account for this history and our current fossil-carceral nexus without defaulting to the abstracting force of the mine itself, that is, without spatializing time in a lateral image of progress.

Indeed, places like Big Sandy invite us to read time stratigraphically, to imagine the subterranean depths as a historical ledger of sorts. Beginning with the lowest sediment, we have the most acutely coercive, labor intensive, and wasteful modes of human and non-human energy capture, above which new extractive technologies of confinement and disposal build, rising incrementally to the ostensibly more ecologically sustainable and socially progressive "present" of the surface. It follows that each reconfiguration of land, labor, and law is a corrective to the most egregious abuses of the preceding configuration. This process culminates most explicitly in the "toxic prison"—a project within which ecological *remediation* and the carceral logic of *reform,* converge. SCI-Fayette, for example was built to consolidate two prior prisons in the name of "energy efficiency" and is located in a county littered with the polluting infrastructure of yet another extractive reform and energy transition: hydraulic fracturing. These "toxic prisons," as environmental abolitionists call them, are the latest expression of racial capital's extractive self- instantiation along the long trajectory of colonial "improvement." Folks across Appalachia, for example, are enveloped into the carceral system as nurses, administrators, and correctional officers and are granted immense power over the disproportionately black, indigenous and non-white prison population in a manner that flagrantly reproduces the white supremacist infrastructures of the previous era, reconstituting a sort of racist inheritance again, not of real

wealth, but of the wages of whiteness. The worker is re-conscripted, to return to Jackson's phrasing, to "Inflict pain, satisfy the power complex, get a check" (Jackson 221).

Conclusion: The Refuse of Reform

I have offered these three reconfigurations of land, labor, and law not just to highlight the underacknowledged allegiance between extractive industries and the carceral system, but to highlight the value of reading emergent technologies of accumulation and punishment as reforms that build upon, rather than remediate, a long and violent history of extractive conquest. Given the barbarity of each example above, it is easy to see why Marx characterizes such innovations as a deathly accretion or ever-growing burial mounds. But I want to insist on foregrounding the violence of reform as we account for even the most "progressive" technocratic advancements as they will inevitably emerge to remediate the climate crisis. To be attuned to the reformist logic that undergirds initiatives like renewable energy and green public policy is not to discount them as insufficient simply because of their complicity with the system. Nor it is simply a matter of commodity chain analysis that would, for example, indict solar energy for its ecologically devastating and geopolitically volatile lithium dependency. Because even if energy production moves beyond mining completely, the extractive law of capitalist value will continue to exist as a racializing force so long as capital does. Rather, I'm arguing for an orientation towards energy transitions where we perpetually ask ourselves, "where and how is this consolidating the economic force of the state?"

One's ability to maintain this orientation will be consistently threatened by the accumulating and intersecting environmental and political crises of our present moment, as the exigency of state intervention falsely yokes failure, accountability, and reform to *progress*, granting the state legitimacy and its legal system a renewed semblance of coherence. This

phenomenon is dramatized by events that recently took place at the long defunct Piney Point phosphate mine when a state of emergency was declared in Manatee County, Florida as a newly discovered leak threatened to send over 400 million gallons of contaminated water cascading into the surrounding area. Over 300 homes were evacuated, and after significant public outcry, so too were a portion of the incarcerated occupants of the county jail, located within just one mile of this toxic site. This crisis reveals a familiar pattern: catastrophe looms, the state intervenes (in this case by diverting contaminated water into the Tampa Bay), and the government pledges to ramp up remediation efforts and hold guilty parties accountable.[87] In this way, the state is characterized as a respondent to crises posited as byproducts of failure. The volatility of containment infrastructures is thus depicted as aberrational rather than constitutive to their daily functioning. Of course, without the freedom to inevitably fail—to leak, pollute, and maim— in the future, extractive industries couldn't profitably function in the present. And the same can be said of their carceral corollary but with a slight inversion: without the freedom to "fail" in the present, the prison industrial complex would lose its foothold on the future. Crumbling, overcrowded prisons, for example, beget new prisons; in the same way that police shootings, tellingly labeled "excessive" to the normative functioning of policing, usher in more oversight and training (i.e. funding and legitimacy).

This cycle of failure and accountability obscures the role of the state as the pedestrian arbiter of disposable time. As all the examples in this chapter have shown, time that exists in excess of that which is appropriated through labor is not inherently, or *essentially* disposable, but must, as Marx writes, be *created.* We don't seem to struggle with this fact in the environmental

[87] For Piney Point, that would be the Wallstreet financiers of HRK Holdings, who bought the toxic site in 2006 under the weakly enforceable condition that they clean up and monitor the old plant. As Marx reminds us, it is "generally the most worthless and wretched kind of money-capitalists"(*Capital Volume III*, pp 199) that swoop in to monetize the ruins of defunct industries.

context. Of course the state helps determine what communities can be polluted and displaced. We call them "sacrifice zones" and acknowledge that they are products of encounters with extractive violence that were sanctioned by the organized neglect of the state. No one would reasonably point to some innate "sacrificiality" of their constituents or suggest that they became sacrificial by partaking in sacrificial acts. And yet the same cannot be said of how our society accounts for communities rendered disposable through the extractive violence of policing. Here racist notions of innate criminality stubbornly persist alongside more common but no less counterproductive liberal accounts of crime as a result of economic desperation. In addition to projecting a prelapsarian state of innocence onto predominantly racialized subjects for whom, we have seen, such a category is denied a priori of any actual transgression, the liberal account of crime does little more than offer a socioeconomic *motive* for criminal *acts* at the cost of grasping the active *creation* of the criminal through surveillance, policing, and incarceration. While more sympathetic as "a victim of circumstance," this figure is ultimately still posited as the agent of their own disposability rather than the product of an encounter with the very structures and forces that render them disposable.

This type of vulgar environmental determinism fails even when the determinant forces of disposability are *literally environmental*. In the wake of natural disasters, for example, white commentators rapidly devolve into a behavioralist account of the storm's impact on black communities, a habit that is due in no small part to how thoroughly criminality has been imputed to blackness in the U.S. In these moments, as Sharpe argues, black subjects (and particularly black mothers) are "cast as less-than-human *victims* and *agents* of 'natural' disasters" prompting pathologizing questions such as "what was she doing in the storm in the first place", or "why didn't they evacuate?" Had the crisis at Piney Point not been averted, we can imagine another

likely refrain: "well maybe they shouldn't have committed a crime." Their guilt, it follows, justifies their exposure to environmental harm. It doesn't matter that, given their pre-trial status, the occupants of Manatee County Jail are categorically "not guilty" according to the myth of due process. It doesn't matter because their criminal status is, once again, not behaviorally defined in the first place.[88] It is created in the recursive cycle of infrastructural codification masquerading as the machinery of accountability.

This cycle won't be broken until the infrastructural armature that supports it is destroyed, beginning with the disruption of reformist construction efforts. Indeed, as indigenous water protectors and abolitionists know, "No New Prisons" and "No New Pipelines" are not just catchy and aspirational movement slogans; they are declarations of an essential strategy for rupturing the capitalist states' self-instantiation. This is exceedingly important as we contend with the climatological offspring of decades of fossil fuel combustion and the accelerated creation of precisely the types of human geographies that are displaced, neglected, policed, and incarcerated. If the state, as Lenin teaches us, is the manifestation of the irreconcilability of capital's contradictions, it cannot overcome or transcend its own extractive foundations even if our technologies of energy production do. If there is no such thing as post-extractive capitalism, the state is not only incapable of delivering us from a future of climate collapse, it also cannot respond to its devastating effects outside the stultified parameters of its repressive technologies of confinement and disposal. This is to say, it *will* reform itself, it *will* adapt but it won't produce anything fundamentally new. Organizing energies must be directed accordingly, with the express knowledge that our alternative infrastructures will themselves be condemned and criminalized.

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[88] Bettina Aptheker makes this emphatic in her essay "The Social Function of the Prisons in the United States" She writes, "The single most important thing to understand in all of this is that the behavioralist view of the criminal *has nothing to do with breaking the law"* (53).

We must adapt in turn, without letting the state of emergency distract us from the emergency that is the state.

CHAPTER THREE

Reclaiming the "Future of Time" in Audre Lorde's *Cancer Journals* and Toni Morrison's *Sula"*

"I am not interested here in signs of progress, an idea whose time has come and gone— [. . .] gone in the histories of so many nations mapping their geography with lines drawn through their neighbor's mass graves; fertilizing their lawns and meadows with the nutrients of the citizens' skeletons; supporting their architecture on the spines of women and children. No, it isn't progress that interests me. I am interested in the future of time."

Toni Morrison, "The Future of Time"

A Blade in the bed of a child
will slice up nightmare
into simpler hungers.

But a knife is a dangerous gift
girl brave enough to be crazy

Audre Lorde, "On the Edge"

"Nevertheless with all my strength I refuse to accept that amputation. I feel in myself a soul as immense as the world, truly a soul as deep as the deepest of rivers, my chest has the power to expand without limit."

Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

The "only kind of pain that is intolerable," Audre Lorde writes, "is pain that is wasteful, pain from which we do not learn" (Tate "Audre Lorde" 142). To learn from pain is not to simply avoid painful experiences as one would avoid repeating a mistake, nor it is to accept pain as an end in itself. Rather, to learn from pain, by Lorde's telling, is to use it as a tool, "unwanted, but useful" for examining past "priorities and omissions" under the "merciless light" refracted off an ever-shifting future (Lorde 2020, 13). For Lorde, navigating her breast cancer diagnosis, mastectomy, and recovery, this reordering occurs under the auspices of a newfound intimacy with time and mortality—an intimacy that both embraces and safeguards against the type of fear that would otherwise immobilize her and enervate her strength. "Within this time of assertion

and growth," Lorde writes, "even the advent of a life-threatening cancer and the trauma of a mastectomy can be integrated into the life-force as knowledge and eventual strength, fuel for a more dynamic and focused existence" (2020, 56).

Pain is wasted, on the other hand, when it is discredited as a form of knowledge, when its causes remain uninterrogated, and perhaps most damagingly, when it is allowed to "fossilize into yet another silence" (1). As Lorde makes emphatic, "what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood" (12). This risk is particularly acute for black women for whom such utterances have historically been ignored, pathologized, or warped by racist conceptions of innate fortitude and resilience. In *The Cancer Journals*, one of the primary causes of pain demanding articulation, lest it be wasted, is waste itself—from the carcinogenic byproducts of capitalist accumulation to the broader cultural logic of racialized disposability. As Lorde writes, "we can sit in our corners mute forever while our sisters and our selves are wasted, while our children are distorted and destroyed, while our earth is poisoned, we can sit in our safe corners mute as bottles, and we still will be no less afraid" (15). In this call for speech amidst and despite persistent forces of toxification and disposability, Lorde foregrounds this chapter's preoccupation with extraction not simply as a violent mechanism of energy capture and settler statecraft, but as a discursive and aesthetic problematic.

Both authors under consideration in this chapter accommodate a reading of extraction in the political economic and environmental context I have elaborated in this project thus far. From her account of corporeal energies and waste, to her discussion of occupational toxicity, Lorde signals an acute sensitivity to the mutual devastation of land and laborers under the extractive paradigm. Toni Morrison's *Sula*—set in a town flanked by steel mills and cut by a river that by novel's end has "killed all the fish"—is similarly attuned to the environmental impacts of

extraction and to the manner in which one type of energy capture, be it of land or labor, begets another. As Morrison shows, to live up in The Bottom—a town founded through the historically unequal exchange of unfree labor, nominal freedom, and infertile land—is to remain equally exposed to the "excesses of nature" as to forms of labor that are precarious and coercive.

Like Lorde, Morrison locates the effects of extraction in the body, specifically in the figure of bodily wounds. As Susan Willis observes, physical injury and alterity in Morrison's text, "is a figure for the equally monstrous psychological and social transformation which capitalism in all its modes (slavery, the military, and wage labor) has inflected on the minds and bodies of black people" (Willis 2017, 688). Wounds, I would add, manifest as the byproducts of labor marked, like extraction terrains, by a sacrificial imperative. These are forms of labor that disproportionately disable through exhaustion, exposure to toxicity, and the ravages of war and signal the ongoing racialization of exacerbated and accelerated time theft. Channeled specifically through black feminist grammars of *surrogation*, wounds in Morrison's text alert the reader not only to the devastations of racialized, gendered labor, but to the way this labor is made to reproduce the very systems—from the nuclear family and nation state to racial capital more broadly—that simultaneously valorize, deplete, and consume black women's productive capacities in and well beyond the formal labor relation[89].

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[89] This is the domain of the Captive Maternal as it is theorized by Joy James to name the women and "those feminized into caretaking and consumption" who are "most vulnerable to violence, war, poverty, police, and captivity" (James 2016, 255). However, she makes clear, "it is not their victimization that defines them, it is their productivity and its consumption" (255). Like their labor, the compensatory care work and insurgent energies Captive Maternals orchestrate in the face of state repression and organized neglect ultimately "enables the possessive empire that claims and dispossesses them" (255). In the introduction of *Sula,* Morrison describes this position through the image of a cross, notable for both its intersectional spatial imagery and culturally sacrificial connotations. She writes, "Hannah, Nel, Eva, Sula were points of a cross—each one a choice for characters bound by gender and race. The nexus of that cross would be a merging of responsibility and liberty difficult to reach, a battle among women who are understood to be less able to win it" (xiv). Around this cross, she continues "were the wires of other kinds of battles—the veteran, the orphans, the husband, the laborers, confined to a village by the same forces that mandated the struggle. And the only possible triumph was that of the imagination" (xiv).

My reading of the wounds in *Sula* is inspired by Lorde's powerful account of labor, illness, and self-consolidation in *Zami* and *The Cancer Journals.* Read together, we are confronted with the disabling effects of labor in a manner that invites (but ultimately denies) a neat causal link between her toxic exposure working at Keystone Electronics processing X-Ray crystals and her disease later in life. Lorde writes, "Nobody mentioned that carbon tet destroys the liver and causes cancer of the kidneys [or that] the X-Ray machines, when used unshielded, delivered doses of constant low radiation far in excess of what was considered safe even in those days" (1982, 126). The workers' radiation-blackened fingers, however, testify to these facts and to the way in which their exploitation is disproportionately defined by their physical violability. For Lorde and her co-workers, this is heightened by the fact that the only way to meet quotas and earn extra money was to shirk the already lax safety protocols. Lorde, for example, would slip handfuls of crystals in her socks before bathroom breaks, crush them with her teeth and flush them down the toilet each day to inflate her numbers. In her beautifully elaborated analysis of this scene, Elizabeth Alexander writes, "she chews the crystals and spits them out; they are nonfood but nonetheless "metabolized"; as she tells us hatred, too, can be metabolized. The body, then, makes visible also what has been metaphorically imbibed. Lorde's cancer turns the body inside out, alluding to the internal lacerations of chewed X-ray crystals, which are themselves a manifestation of what a poor black female has to do to survive" (Alexander 1994, 709). By interiorizing and making the lacerations of this labor visible, Lorde's textual body signals the broader toxic metabolism of racial capital, not as a mere casualty or symptom but, as I will show, as a site of relation through which she can consolidate her many selves ("black,

lesbian, mother, warrior, poet") alongside all her "dismembered moments" into a figure that is less rather than more palatable to the system that harms and consumes her.

In foregrounding a systemic critique of extraction in the body, however, both authors run the risk of having this embodied knowledge "bruised or misunderstood." My contention in this chapter is that it is precisely in accepting and formally negotiating this risk that Lorde and Morrison enable a unique reading of extraction as a problem for thought, language, and representation[90]--that is, as a force that both demands and frustrates its articulation. Lorde captures this fraught imperative in the journal entry below, dated September 1979.

> *"There is no room around me in which to be still, to examine and explore what pain is mine alone—no device to separate my struggle within from my fury at the outside world's viciousness, the stupid brutal lack of consciousness or concern that passes for the way things are. The arrogant blindness of comfortable white women. What is all this work for? What does it matter if I speak again or not? I try. The blood of black women sloshes from coast to coast and Daly says race is of no concern to women. So that means we are either immortal or born to die and no note taken, un-women.* (4-5).

Beginning with the absence of a space where "pain is [hers] alone", Lorde identifies her pain's *surrogation* as that which subsequently denies a proper appraisal of her structural positionality within "*the outside world's viciousness*"- a systemic blindness typified, in this case, by white feminist erasure. This poses the second problem: "*What is all this work for?"* or, in this context: How do you articulate the extractive violence to which you are disproportionately exposed when that very articulation risks undergoing a secondary extraction, be it through outright denial or

[90] Morrison explicitly identifies pain, wounds, and racialized disposability as a problem for readership. In her essay, "Unspeakable Things Unspoken" she laments not having started the novel with Shadrack's violent war scene "which would have put the reader into immediate confrontation with his wound and scar" (2019, 189). "The difference [her] original beginning would have made," she continues, "would be calling greater attention to the traumatic displacement this most wasteful capitalist war had on black people in particular, and throwing into relief the creative, if outlawed, determination to survive it whole (189). She opts instead for the "welcoming lobby" to accommodate the "diminished expectations of the reader, or his or her alarm heightened by the emotional luggage one carries into the black topic text" (186).

surrogation? Lorde's declarative, "I try." that is, to work and speak, situates the work itself as the answer to its determinate problematic. Read in this way, the lines that follow can be interpreted as the purpose of her work's intervention as it reveals the violently essentialist accounts of disposability that arise in the place of a systemic appraisal. Lorde does so by following the implications of racial erasure to their logical conclusion: "*So that means we are either immortal or born to die and no note taken, un-women."* Formally, then, *The Cancer Journals* becomes the room, otherwise denied, for Lorde to examine her pain and for staving off its surrogation by staging a confrontation with the reader's *own* extractive preconceptions and impulses.

It is in this process of both naming and poethically negotiating extraction within and across diegetic boundaries that Lorde and Morrison's texts emerge as critiques of "extractive reason" as I have defined it in this project. In this chapter, however, I'm interested in how both author's navigation of bodily wounds exceeds a critique of labor and the value form in a manner that pushes existing analytic frameworks towards their own obsolescence. As such, the Marxist framework that has guided this project (obnoxiously so, at times) will eventually fall away and the theoretical tools will adapt according to the shifting demands made of the reader first by Lorde and then by Morrison. In doing so, this chapter attempts to both explore and respond to the Black Feminist Poethic invitation, as Denise Ferreira da Silva describes it, for critique to "review its categories, rearrange its project and interrogate the very premises of its craft, without any guarantees that the craft itself will survive the exercise" (Ferreira da Silva 2014, 86). My reading of *Sula* will focus on three characters—Eva, Shadrack, and Sula—as they respectively critique, unsettle, and transcend their enforced surrogation to family, nation, and community, and in doing so, signal "the possibility of knowing without modern categories" (84), that is, the possibility of thought outside extractive reason.

Central to "extractive reason," I have argued, is the spatialization of time into sequential "presents" or "essential sections" to guarantee their sustained legibility and expressive correlation to a false totality. You'll recall that for Fanon, the "extractive cut" of the essential section or the racial amputation demanded expressive correlation to the historical totality of anti-blackness. As in *The Cancer Journals* the speaker's wounds in *Black Skin, White Masks* were seemingly never singularly his own. I have also shown how the ontologization of the essential section combines with the necessitation of an excavatory mode of knowledge production into a conception of time that is particularly well suited to the racialization of land and the territorialization of racialized bodies. Kathryn Yusoff elaborates this geologic racial imaginary in her reading of Achille Mbembe's argument that "the notion of race made it possible to represent non-European human groups as trapped in a lesser form of being" (Mbembe 2017,17), the "not-yet-human" separated both by time and space. As Yusoff shows, in its evocation of lesser, as in both spatially lower and evolutionarily prior, blackness is "thoroughly sedimented in the bedrock of geology and its categorizing of fossil objects in time" in a manner that "figures the question of race within and through geologic classifications and its descriptive modes of extractive *pre*configuration" (Yusoff 2018, 79). As we have seen, this geologic temporalization of history—wherein each stratum is read as a legible and sequential moment along a vertical temporal trajectory striving towards unity or the 'present" of the surface—leads to a reified conception of progress that naturalizes past violence while safeguarding the economic system and false totalities (such as the nuclear family, community, and nation state) that enacted said violence.[91]

[91] Morrison is acutely aware of the manner in which this type of historical rendering engenders reactionary recourse to the nuclear family and the nation, as well as the supposed comforts of their militaristic protection. In "The Future of Time" she writes: "Seen through the selectively sifted grains of past time, the future thins out, is dumbed down, limited to the duration of a thirty year Treasury bond. So

Against the temporal distortions of extractive reason and its foreclosure of futurity, Morrison writes. "What becomes most compelling, therefore, are the places and voices where the journey into the cellar of time is a rescue of sorts, an excavation for the purposes of building, discovering, envisioning a future" (2019, 122-123). Morrison continues with an important clarification: "I am not, of course, encouraging and anointing happy endings–forced or truly felt–or anointing bleak ones intended as correctives or warnings. I mean to call attention to whether the hand that holds the book's metaphors is an open palm or a fist" (122-123).

How then, given the task of this chapter, can we approach the novel's metaphors with an "open palm"? How can we attempt to locate the structural legacies that comprise "total value," without reinstating the deterministic, homogenous temporal continuity characteristic of extractive reason? How do we read the disabling effects of racialized labor without preforming the interpretive cut of the essential section? Indeed, as essential sections physical and psychological wounds would function as ableist metaphors, combining with the imperative for political signification that is disproportionately applied to literary representations of blackness in a manner that betrays Morrison's explicit deconstruction of both analytic impulses.[92] To approach these question in the pages that follow I will be reading wounds not as a metaphor for

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we turn inward, clutching at a primer-book dream of family–strong, ideal, protective. Small but blessed by law [. . .] We turn to sorcery: summoning up a brew of aliens, pseudo-enemies, demons, false "causes" that deflect and soothe anxieties about gates through which barbarians saunter; anxieties about language falling into the mouths of others. …The loudest voices are urging those already living in dread of the future to speak of culture in military terms–as a cause for and expression of war" (Morrison, 118).

[92]Sami Shalk offers an important distinction between ableist metaphors and disability metaphors. Ableist metaphors posit disability as inherently negative, make disability stand in for unrelated individual or collective flaws, failures, decline, ect. and analogize forms of oppression. Disability metaphors, in contrast, can simultaneously speak to disability in concrete terms while offering figurative associations and critiques of disabling systems and forces. Shalk writes, "Disability metaphors therefore allow us to explore the historical and material connections between disability and other social systems of privilege and oppression such as race, gender, sexuality, class, the nation, and more. Such metaphors need not be either/or (*i.e.*, this representation is either about race or about disability); in fact, they are often both/and, due specifically to the mutually constitutive nature of oppressions" (Shalk 2017, 141).

institutional violence in a traditional sense, but as a textual problematic in their emergence as phantom limbs. In their spectral materiality, I argue, phantom limbs register the *afterlife* of slavery (Hartman 2007, 6) without falsely analogizing slavery with current forms of exploitation because their expressivity operates at the limits of normative Time and Space. This is because unlike the extractive cut and its temporal abstraction, this problematic interiorizes the constituent relations of collision, fracture, and separation, which can then germinate into the solution of future problems. Gilles Deleuze describes this process in terms of the problematic Idea in *Difference and Repetition*, when he writes, "just as difference immediately reunites and articulates that which it distinguishes, and the fracture retains what it fractures, so Ideas contain their dismembered moments" (1994, 170). This is dramatized by the phantom limb that, to return to Althusser's phrasing, retains the "traces of the essence," from the lost limb, and of the cut itself through "phantom pains."

To be clear, it is not my intention to suggest that phantom limbs (or my reading of them) transcend the stultifications of extractive reason. They are vessels, rather, through which Morrison invites the reader to confront the motive force of time to first engage, then problematize our analytic tools as they reproduce the symbolic architectures of time theft. This is essential because, as Ferreira da Silva writes, "before we can collectively design the framework for reconstruction, we need first to follow Blackness as it signals that knowing and doing can be released from a particular kind of thinking, which is necessary for opening up the possibility for a radical departure from a certain kind of World" (2014, 84-85). Morrison's phantom limb, I want to suggest, is merely one such signal we might follow.

Audre Lorde and the "Ghost of [her] breast"

My reading of phantom limbs is inspired by Lorde's refusal of prosthesis. For Lorde, passively accepting prosthesis is part of "the passive acceptance of false values" which, she

writes, “corrupt our lives and distort our experience” (68). After her mastectomy, she opts instead to stay with the “ghost of [her] breast” (2020, 59) and embrace asymmetry and its powers of antagonism in a “woman phobic world.” It is a refusal, she writes, “to be reduced in [her] own eyes or in the eyes of others from warrior to mere victim, simply because it might render [her] a fraction more acceptable or less dangerous to the still complacent (Lorde 2020, 53). In doing so, she denaturalizes the roles into which black women are conscripted and unsettles the false totalities on which they rely, beginning importantly with the unified body. In the vulnerable period after surgery, Lorde argues, women are determined to return to a “natural,” unified physical state through prosthesis and reconstruction, rather than reclaim a sense of self amidst an altered, fragmented body. This “emphasis upon physical pretense” at this crucial point in recovery, Lorde argues, “encourages a woman to focus her energies upon the mastectomy as a cosmetic occurrence to the exclusion of other factors in a constellation that could include her own death (50). If the past is idealized as a wellspring of unity, the forces that potentially fomented bodily malignancies in the first place are obfuscated, and healing is limited to merely affirming narrowly defined standards for womanhood. Instead, she embarks on a process of healing and becoming into a unified self in powerfully non-normative terms. In his study of Lorde, Sula, and Beyoncé, Kevin Quashie captures the resplendent *audacity* it takes to claim the status of the philosophical “one” for black women “whose access to ideological oneness is rendered impossible in the logics of antiblackness and patriarchy” (Quashie 2018, 68). As Quashie shows, Lorde’s pursuit of oneness resists consolidating the universal ideal of the “whole” that spells her erasure and consumption, because hers is an unyielding self-centeredness that is deeply relational and ever evolving in fluid movements of intimate connectivity to those around her. This radically different collective, Quashie writes, “is a relation, a habitat that facilitates one’s being to the all that is around, beyond, within it—a capacious and transcendent

inhabiting" (73). Unlike extractive zones, this *habitat* does not accommodate a sacrificial relation wherein the expenditure of energy is premised on harm to its source. As Lorde notes in one journal entry "We do not have to give up ourselves to get each other" (72).

Lorde describes this habitat in the context of her healing network in notably anti-extractive terms. Support, she writes,

> will always have a special and vividly erotic set of image/meanings for me now, one of which is floating upon a sea within a ring of women like warm bubbles keeping me afloat upon the surface of that sea. I can feel the texture of inviting water just beneath their eyes, and do not fear it. It is the sweet smell of their breath and laughter and voices calling my name that gives me volition, helps me remember I want to turn away from looking down. These images flow quickly, the tangible floods of energy rolling off these women toward me that I converted into power to heal myself. (2020, 31-32)

Interestingly, the energy that can be exhausted or "bled out" is interiorized metaphorically in her veins, demanding a piercing force to extract it, while the energy described just above flows freely in abundant "floods" on the surface of the women's bodies at no physical expense to either source. That it is "converted" from their bodies to Lorde's own suggests a process of alchemical transmutation rather than combustion or depletion. This generative or poetic power is captured further in the dialogic register of this energy exchange, where Lorde is beckoned by "the laughter and voices calling her name" that awakens the "answering energy" (32) within her. In this dialogic encounter, Lorde and her loving network are able to realize, to borrow Mikhail Bakhtin's phrase, "their own inner unfinalizability, their capacity to outgrow, as it were, from within and to render untrue any externalizing and finalizing definition of them" (Bakhtin 1984, 59). What is rendered untrue, I want to suggest, is the logic of totality founded on any neat correlation between part and whole. As such, Lorde also resists the temporality of the essential section and its foreclosure of futurity. The vast potentiality and capaciousness of her future is captured in the powerful moment when she declares, "I am who the world and I have never seen

before" (Lorde 2020, 42). As I will show in the reading of Eva that follows, this is the theoretical power of the phantom limb as a determinant absence that inaugurates new forms of being outside the stultifying logic of visibility, recognition, and totality. As such, it inaugurates, to use Morrison's phrasing, "The process of re-membering the body and its parts, re-membering the family, the neighborhood, and our national history" (Morrison 1997, 6).

Eva Peace

As Willis notes, "self-mutilation represents the individual's direct confrontation with the oppressive social forces inherent in white domination" (2017, 689). For Sula, it is a group of white boys and her desire to protect Nel that compels her to cut off the tip of her finger. For Eva, it is abject poverty. Abandoned by her husband with three children, little food, and almost no money, Eva is forced to rely on the kindness of her neighbors until her youngest is old enough for Eva to find domestic work in a white household. Unsatisfied with these options, and weary of burdening her neighbors, Eva leaves town and "eighteen months later she swept down from a wagon with two crutches, a new black pocketbook, and one leg" (Morrison 1973, 34). The exact cause of her amputation is unknown; some characters say "that she stuck [her leg] under a train to make [the railroad company] pay off" while others claim she sold it to a hospital for $10,000. Eva herself contributes to this lore, telling children "fearful" stories about how "the leg got up by itself one day and walked on off (30), or about how "she had a corn on her toe and it just grew and grew and grew until her whole foot was a corn and then it traveled on up her leg and wouldn't stop growing until she put a red rag at the top but by that time it was already at her knee" (30-31). While these stories are merely for entertainment, they betray an anxiety over the loss of bodily sovereignty in a manner that allows us to read Eva's supposed act of self-mutilation primarily as an intervention against the impending violence that often characterized surrogate domestic labor for black women in the early 20th century. Such labor, as Hartman

shows, “carried the taint of slavery” as women worked under constant threat of sexual abuse in white households. Even under the best possible conditions, “the care extracted from her to tend the white household is taken at the cost of her own” (Hartman 2016, 171). In a very practical sense, Eva’s drastic act and the freedom it afforded from surrogate domestic work ruptures this specific trajectory. However, she ultimately still appropriates the extractive logics of capital. “Extracting choice from choicelessness” (Morrison 2019, 188) Eva claims sovereignty over the extractive terrain of her body to ensure that *she alone* is the beneficiary of whatever violence awaits her. But hers is a fictive sovereignty, warped by extractive reason as primarily the power to maim. Yet, in so claiming, Eva importantly refigures the limits of capital’s normative extractive violence as enacted in the domestic space.

For many readers, however, Eva’s act of self-mutilation makes her the ultimate symbol of maternal sacrifice. Kimberly Idol, for example, notes that “Eva is the Bottom’s celebrated mother figure who sacrifices her leg to provide for her children and becomes forever after, a good women” (Idol 50). While Terry Otten similarly perceives Eva’s missing leg as a symbol of her “fierce love for her children” (Otton 656) he is less willing to grant her the same deified maternal status that she occupies in her community. “Morrison does not characterize Eva Peace as some romanticized or maudlin matriarchal figure,” Otten argues, “She is at once disturbing and enormously compassionate, simultaneously able to commit an act of appalling horror and mercy” (655). While Idol’s account of Eva’s mythic standing as “the source of motherhood” (Idol 50) in her community is certainly correct, I find myself bristling against any affirmation of motherhood within a text that is so fundamentally critical of locating a project of freedom in a site of normative, that is oppressive, domesticity. Indeed, even familial domestic labor is articulated in the language of exhaustion and consumption. As the narrator remarks, “those with men had had the sweetness sucked from their breath by ovens and steam kettles. Their children

were like distant but exposed wounds whose aches were no less intimate because separate from their flesh" (1973, 122). Here the extractive quality of this care work combines with the language of externality to grant familial care a surrogate quality- defined by alterity, harm, and distance. In doing so, Morrison is not simply indicting the devaluation of caregivers in patriarchic, anti-black society by comparing it to a more harmful form, she's also indicting the narratives that emerge in the face of this devaluation. Morrison wages a critique of both registers of extractive reason by soliciting an affirmative appraisal of Eva's sacrifice (in keeping with Idol's reading), which she then frustrates through Eva's "act of horror and mercy" to occasion a critical-experiential engagement with "the ways that the domestic authorizes a normative tragedy of black maleness and reifies black women and children as objects of communal recuperation" (Quashie 2018, 70). It is to this scene, when Eva kills her son Plum who was suffering from a heroin addiction, that I will now turn.

If children are like "distant but exposed wounds" felt by, but extant outside of the maternal body, Eva's violent act can be read first as a refusal to sacrificially internalize the wound completely or to be wounded for another. Indeed, Eva's act is catalyzed by having almost imbibed the bodily byproducts of wounding as she takes a sip from Plum's cup thinking it's strawberry soda, only to find it is blood-tainted water (Morrison 1973, 47). She throws the glass to the floor, refusing this warped eucharist along with all its sacrificial significations. Before he is engulfed in flames, Plum imagines sacraments of another order, "Some kind of baptism, some kind of blessing, he thought" (47). In violently disrupting this ritual, Eva ruptures her narrative conscription (evoked by the biblical allusions) as the vessel of salvation, in this case, for black male "fallenness." When Hannah asks her why she killed him the following year, Eva's rationale is notably described again as a refusal to internalize Plum, this time, importantly, through the metaphor of gestation. Eva explains, "I birthed him once. I couldn't do it again. He was growed,

a big ol thing. Godhavemercy, I couldn't birth him twice. I'd be laying here at night and he be downstairs in that room, [. . .] and he'd be creep in to the bed trying to spread my legs trying to get back up in my womb" (71-72). The unnaturalness (and implied sexual impropriety) of this imagined scenario is notably marked *temporally* as it is in the course of *re*-gestating a now-grown child that Plum would become an invasive part of her body-turned-host. Here we can see how the narrative of redemption cycles recursively through the figure of the violable maternal body and in so doing, rhetorically reproduces the logic of surrogacy. This coiled temporal architecture, and the time theft it sanctions, is obscured by the linear narrative of salvation whereby violence is posited as an essential (and bygone) stage of development—a necessary labor pain on the path to collective maturity.

Eva is able to frustrate these narratives, I argue, because of her unique relationship to the commodity form. In rendering her body divisible and in some sense, exchangeable, we are reminded of Spiller's distinction between "body" and "flesh," between the liberated and the captive subject. Flesh is subject to and marked by immeasurable violence; "these undecipherable markings on the captive body" Spillers argues, "render a kind of hieroglyphics of the flesh whose severe disjunctions come to be hidden to the cultural seeing by skin color" (Spillers 1978, 67). These "severe disjunctions" are also obscured from view simply by nature of the commodity structure, which "transforms every product of labour into a social hieroglyphic" (Marx 1990, 167). For bodies made commodities, the "fantastic form," or the commodity's fetish character, obscures the social relations that produced it which, in this case, would be the intergenerational reproductive labor that created life. Any bodily commodification, then, is a natal alienation, a fracture of the relations that produced it. But as Spillers argues, one can't mitigate the violence of flesh by simply reclaiming the status of the normatively gendered female body (along with the condition of motherhood it implies) in the same way that we can't obviate the fetish character of

a commodity by simply revealing the social relations that produced it. This is because the fetish character of the commodity is not simply a *representational distortion,* nor does it arise from a process of objectification. It arises rather from the process undertaken by labor, wherein "the labour of the private individual manifests itself as an element of the total labour of society" (165) that is, as it is subsumed into, and instantiated as part of a totality. Georg Lukács' extrapolation of this process into the logic of reification though the metaphor of law is helpful in this regard. He writes, "The rationalization of isolated aspects of life results in the creation of—formal—laws. All these things do join together into what seems to the superficial observer to constitute a unified system of general 'laws.' But the disregard of the concrete aspects of the subject matter of these laws, upon which disregard their authority as laws is based, makes itself felt in the incoherence of the system in fact" (Lukács 1969,101). Again, the concrete aspects of a particular law, prior to its incorporation cannot be recuperated within a system whose coherence as a whole is contingent upon the "disregard" of the particularities of its parts, just as for those who "stand in the flesh" normative motherhood cannot be recuperated because the very process of "enfleshment" relies on the simultaneous destruction and reification of the maternal. In this way, any attempt to "de-reify" that is predicated either on a return to a prelapsarian state or through entry into an existing category of being (the gendered body, or motherhood for example) merely partakes in reification.

Eva's phantom limb frustrates the attempt to "de-reify" her body by embracing the power of the negative and of nonidentity. Not only does she refuse to offer any true account of her accident, her prior physical state is largely inaccessible to those around her: "Fewer than nine people in the town remembered when Eva had two legs and her oldest child, Hannah, was not one of them" (1973, 30). It is telling that her previous state is not accessible to her daughter, which fundamentally destabilizes matrilineal inheritance as a discursive corrective to the natal

alienation of bodies-made-flesh. Rather, Eva offers the stories noted above in a manner that perhaps speaks to the truth of the incoherence of the process of commodification more than any "coherent" account could. This is augmented by the way Eva accentuates the physical absence of her left leg. Morrison writes, "Whatever the fate of her lost leg, the remaining one was magnificent" (Morrison 1973, 31). The beauty of her right leg serves not to distract from or conceal the absence of the left leg; Eva did not "disguise the empty place on her left side" but dressed so that "her one glamorous leg was always in view as well as the long fall of space below her left thigh" (31). She accentuates her lost leg in an almost curatorial fashion, drawing unspoken attention to its absence, testifying to the way in which, as Morrison writes, "invisible things are not necessarily "not-there"; [. . .] a void may be empty, but it is not a vacuum. In addition, certain absences are so stressed, so ornate, so planned, they call attention to themselves, arrest us with intentionality and purpose" (Morrison 2019, 173). What the ornate absence of Eva's phantom limb demands, is what Theodor Adorno calls "cognition of nonidentity" that reveals the *incoherence of totality itself* and not just the contradiction between part and the totalizing whole. Adorno writes, "Totality is to be opposed by convicting it of nonidentity with itself—of the nonidentity it denies, according to its own concept" (Adorno 1987,147). Thinking in terms of nonidentity asks us not to measure adherence to the norm to fetishistically label Eva a "good mother" nor does it ask us to measure aberrations to say the opposite. It forces us to question what universal concepts such as "motherhood" cannot account for and what is omitted by their very conceptual unity.

While Eva frustrates any misguided attempt at de-reification through nonidentity, it is Shadrack and Sula, I will show, who disrupt reification itself through a positive process of sensually appropriating a unified subject. Unlike Eva, who prioritizes the types of understanding that allow her to identify and fulfill her *needs* within the confines of extractive reason, Shadrack

and Sula prioritize the forms of embodied knowledge and feeling that enable them to fulfill their *desires.* This is essential, "For within living structures defined by profit, by linear power, by institutional dehumanization, our feelings were not meant to survive" (Lorde 1984, 39). Such feelings, Lorde says, "are chaotic, sometimes painful, sometimes contradictory, but they come from deep within us. And we must key into those feelings and begin to posit a future nourished by the past" (Tate "Audre Lorde" 141). Indeed, while Eva unsettles normative conceptions of time by frustrating the notion of matrilineal inheritance, Shadrack and Sula inaugurate an inheritance of an entirely different order. Theirs, I will show, isn't an inheritance in or over time but is a transmission of time itself through the promise of "Always." If by the logic of reification, "time sheds its qualitative, variable, flowing nature; it freezes into an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable "things" (Lukács 90), Shadrack and Sula counter this with a temporality that retains its fluidity by obviating the present as a conceivable site of becoming. In doing so, they embrace the type of "discredited knowledge" Morrison insists the novel must "centralize and animate."[93] In a system premised on both the abstraction of human need and foreclosure of the "future of time" this discredited knowledge—emergent from a well of intimate self-discovery— is deeply valuable, and as Lorde teaches us, dangerous. She writes, "*The idea of knowing, rather than believing, trusting, or even understanding, has always been considered heretical. But I would willingly pay whatever price in pain was needed, to savor the weight of completion* (2020, 17). It is to The Bottom's heretical couple and their movement through and beyond the realm of the phantom limb that I will now turn.[94]

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[93] Such information is discredited, she writes "not because it is not true or useful or even of some racial value, but because it is information held by discredited people, information dismissed as "lore" or "gossip" or "magic" or "sentiment" (2019, 267).

[94] My reading of Sula and Shadrack as one of the couplings in the novel is also indebted to Quashie's reading of relational oneness in "To Be (a) One: Notes on Coupling and Black Female Audacity".

Shadrack

Just as Lorde exposes the extractive temporal architecture associated with the unified body, and Eva with the matriarchal family, Shadrack alights on the abstractions and historical occlusions that emerge from the sacrificial imperative posed by the false totality of the nation.[95] Morrison wages this critique, again, through the language of wounding in her depictions of Shadrack's traumatic experiences in World War I. "Blasted and permanently astonished by the events of 1917," Morrison writes, Shadrack returned from war, "handsome but ravaged" (7). One event, when Shadrack witnesses a soldier's decapitation, is recounted in detail:

> Wincing at the pain in his foot, he turned his head a little to the right and saw that face of a soldier near him fly off. Before he could register shock the rest of the soldier's head disappeared under the inverted soup bowl of his helmet. But stubbornly, taking no direction from the brain, the body of the headless soldier ran on, with energy and grace, ignoring altogether the drip and slide of brain tissue down its back. (8)

In this passage, Shadrack and his fellow soldier are conflated under the indistinct pronoun "he" as it remains unclear who was unable to register shock, be it physical or psychological. This conflation, combined with the image of consumption—evoked by the soup bowl helmet—signals to the shared logics of fungibility and metabolic disposability that undergird slavery and modern warfare. The soldier's severed body, "taking no direction from the brain" dramatizes the way in which, as Spillers shows, the transatlantic slave trade marked "*a theft of the body*—a willful and violent [. . .] severing of the body from its motive will, its active desire" (Spillers 67). The soldier—and by extension, Shadrack—comes to occupy the fraught positionality of what Spillers calls an "undynamic human state, fixed in time and space" (78) which occurs in their shared condition of being "Blasted and *permanently* astonished" [emphasis added] by the war. While the soldier's body is physically blasted apart by artillery, his affect is fixed in the state of being

[95] As James argues, Captive Maternals are not singularly the targets of state violence. They often work "in and for governance, corporations, prisons, police and the military" (James 2016, 258).

unregistered and temporally suspended as that which precedes the shock that never comes- and permanently so, as the body continues charging forward in time because neither Shadrack nor we, as readers, ever see its final collapse. The wounding cut (or blast) repeats permanently, severing trauma from the physiological and psychological response of shock- that is, from the body's natural, if violent manner of *accounting* for injury. Morrison's evocation of slavery in her depiction of war, followed by Shadrack's rapid procession through the military, the hospital, and the jail cell that follows, signals the repetitious assault on black life through which these institutions traffic and the manner in which injury, when left unaccounted for, gets replaced by narratives of servitude, sacrifice, and progress. Indeed, even in death, the headless soldier still contains the "energy" to be extracted, and the "grace" necessary for nationalistic recuperation.[96]

Throughout *Sula*, "headlessness" speaks not only to lost bodily sovereignty but to the impulse to reinstate sovereignty within the very structures that would render one "headless" in the first place. We see this articulated by the novel's end, when townspeople gather in unprecedented numbers to celebrate National Suicide Day in what the narrator strikingly calls a "headless display" (Morrison 1973,160). This group gathers, the narrator remarks, because of a sense of hope.

> The same hope that kept them picking beans for other farmers; kept them from finally leaving as they talked of doing; kept them knee deep in other people's dirt; kept them excited about other people's wars; kept them solicitous of white people's children; kept

[96] My thinking about the extractive narrative architecture of individual suffering for collective "progress" was enriched by William C. Anderson's work in *The Nation on No Map*, which helped me refine my thoughts on the implications of sacrifice posited as necessary for the development of an exclusionary collective. In his discussion of the memorialization of anti-black violence and emancipatory struggle within a narrative of national progress, Anderson writes, "This assumes, of course, that today is satisfactory and that our struggle is finished or nearly concluded. All the displacement, brutality, and murder are seen as beneficial for the sake of social change" (65). This presents the United States "as a complete, finalized democracy thanks to Black suffering" (65) which in turn characterizes the nation's reforms as well-intentioned rather than counter insurgent.

> them convinced that some magic "government" was going to lift them up, out and away from that dirt, those beans, those wars. (160)

All the potentiality of hope is stripped away by the repetition of "kept" into a sequence of suspended presents that are characterized by the occupations that "carried the taint of slavery" in the early 20th century. Morrison juxtaposes hope with the "understanding" that keeps some from participating. She writes, "Others, who understood the Spirit's touch which made them dance, who understood whole families bending their backs in a field while singing as from one throat, who understood the ecstasy of river baptisms under suns just like this one, did not understand this curious disorder, this headless display and so refused also to go" (160). Hope is to the soldier's perpetual state of "astonishment" that understanding is to "shock." The former fails to promise anything other than the condition of the present precisely because it denies a systemic engagement with the "total value" of racialized expropriation in the past, present, and future at the same time it assumes existing social structures are capable of property accounting for their repetitious violence.

The sense of historical continuity expressed by the headless soldier is emphasized by the immediate shift between the grizzly account of decapitation and Shadrack's awakening in the hospital, where the chaotic bodily fragmentation of the war and the soldier's unruly corpse become incorporated into Shadrack's own. As he awakes, Shadrack is unsure where his hands are. He looks around cautiously knowing full well after the war, that "anything could be anywhere" (8). Once he locates them, he finds to his horror that they won't stop rapidly growing. Like Eva's leg that "walked on off" and the soldier's body that took "no direction from the brain," his hands are alien to him. He can feel them but refuses to look at them lest they continue on their grotesque path. By refusing to look at them and rendering his hands invisible, then, it is as though they have been psychologically amputated. If the headless soldier in its perpetual

charging forward in time stands in for the ongoing material legacy of slavery as it is abstracted into an uninterrupted, deterministic temporality, then the phantom limb is what emerges to rupture it, to produce a differential temporal order that illuminates the corporeal effects of the afterlife of slavery *without reifying the body anew as a visible testament to the historical totality of extractive racial violence*. It does so, I will show, not only by refusing expressive correlation (of part to bodily whole), but in its inherent illegibility. Neither entirely positive nor negatively extant, Shadrack's phantom limb resists the logic of recognition in its entirety.

Shortly after his release from the hospital, Shadrack wanders around disoriented, alone, and terrified. "He was sure of one thing only: the unchecked monstrosity of his hands" (12). When his hands prevent him from untying his shoes, he suffers a breakdown and is arrested for vagrancy and intoxication. The scene in the jail cell that follows, where Shadrack searches for his reflection in the toilet bowl is, as Willis remarks, "one of the most powerful literary statements of racial affirmation" (Willis 2017, 688). Before turning to this scene, I want to stay with the moments proceeding it, with the command that compels this radical scene of becoming as a rupture of extractive reason because it introduces a central component of this process: the erotic, as defined by Lorde. It is precisely this element that resists thinking affirmation in terms of conformity and recognition despite what this revelatory encounter with his *reflection* might suggest. Before this scene, Shadrack sits in agony on his cot, staring "helplessly at the wall, so paralyzing was the pain in his head" (13). Morrison writes, "he lay like this in agony for a long while and then realized he was staring at the painted-over letters of a command to fuck himself. He studied the phrase as his pain subsided" (13). This command to "fuck yourself," while a common insult, is not brushed off as such. Shadrack has to decipher it from under layers of paint running over it again and again in studious contemplation. It gives him something on which to focus, calming the chaotic torrent of fear and memories, allowing his pain to subside along with

the feeling of helplessness and paralysis it engendered. At its most basic, to fuck yourself is to affirm your embodied existence, to sensually register one's being, which is precisely what Shadrack desires, in light of his "skittish apprehension that he was not real—that he didn't exist at all" (13). To read the scene that follows as an answer to this command, as an act of (auto)eroticism is to appropriately identify the essential convergence of the erotic and anti-extractive modes of knowledge production that are occasioned by the necessary "shock' of the phantom limb. That it is occasioned by the act of reading, furthermore, suggests that the erotic can be understood as a textual disposition, as a form of reading, to put it crudely, with an open palm.

As a "resource within each of us" (53) that "can provide energy for change" (Lorde 1984, 33) the erotic "becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence" (57) that staves off the petrification of thought precisely in its emergence from chance. The knowledge this produces is importantly not determined by a lack according to a normative idiom of rights or needs, but by reference to an *interiorized potentiality*, which for Lorde is the "*capacity* for joy" (emphasis mine 56). Lorde writes, "as we begin to recognize our deepest feelings, we begin to give up, of necessity, being satisfied with suffering and self-negation, and with the numbness" (1984, 58). Shadrack's psychological creation of phantom limbs already signal an unwillingness to capitulate to numbness, to be rendered insensate but enduring like the headless soldier, but it is the erotic command that further wrests him from his "paralyzed" state. As the fog of pain clears, Shadrack remembers his unsatisfied longing to see his reflection. The first time this idea is articulated is in the hospital, when he "wanted desperately to see his own face and connect it with the word "private"—the word the nurse (and the others who helped bind him [in a straitjacket] had called him" (Morrison 1973, 10). The impulse to see his face is expressed here as want, whereas in this scene of affirmation it is expressed as *desire* (13). Accordingly, the

desire to see his own face in this latter articulation is not motivated by an externally determined lack (of correlation to the title, "private"). It is determined from within, showing, to borrow Henri Bergson's phrase, that "our will is capable of willing for willing's sake" (Bergson 1950, 157). Indeed, this desire, Morrison writes, "insinuated itself [like] moonlight stealing under a window shade" (Morrison 1973, 13). This interiorized causality, as desire, is mediated through and codified by a sensual apparatus before it can be articulated outward to the object of desire. Furthermore, the future-oriented anticipation of the satisfaction of object desire is preceded, but always inflected by, primary or narcissistic desire, giving it a durational quality, that is, a sense of fluidity and constitutive heterogeneity.

It is fitting that this scene signals towards duration because this is precisely the temporal envelope in which the self-differentiating central to becoming can occur. It is where, for Deleuze, difference is "made." In Morrison's evocation of fluid materialities and the collapse of topographic depth in the following scene we can further parse out the anti-extractive register of duration.

> Finally, keeping his hands carefully behind his back he made his way to the toilet bowl and peeped in. The water was unevenly lit by the sun so he could make nothing out. Returning to his cot he took the blanket and covered his head, rendering the water dark enough to see his reflection. There in the toilet water he saw a grave black face. A black so definite, so unequivocal, it astonished him. He had been harboring a skittish apprehension that he was not real—that he didn't exist at all. But when his blackness greeted him with its indisputable presence, he wanted nothing more. In his joy he took the risk of letting one edge of the blanket drop and glanced at his hands. They were still. Courteously still. (Morrison 1973,13)

This passage is striking in its use of water as the medium of reflection, particularly in an enclosed bowl, because it creates what could be read as a microcosmic environment, landscape, or "habitat" to return to Quashie's helpful framing. In addition to the constitutive depth of the water, a sense of geologic sedimentation is evoked with the word "grave," calling to mind burial and a spatialized conception of ancestry or history. While this topographic depth might suggest

an extractive impulse on Shadrack's part, the image he desires, practically speaking, can only be found at the surface. Shadrack further collapses this depth when he makes the water "dark enough to see his reflection." The water and the emerging Black figure converge into a single plane in the shared state of blackness, as Shadrack, in some sense, "salvages [his] surfacing" (Moten 2023).

Using strikingly similar imagery, Deleuze describes how this type of spatial collapse is simultaneously destructive and generative in the production of difference, he writes, "when the ground rises to the surface, the human face decomposes in this mirror in which both determinations and the indeterminate combine in a single determination which 'makes' the difference" (1994, 28). By "decomposing" the distinct contours of his face into the "unequivocal" blackness, Shadrack doesn't subsume multiplicities into a homogeneous unity as this "shared state" might suggest, but rather creates the plane on which causal determinations, indeterminacy, and the aleatory interact in discordant harmony to produce the new. Furthermore, Shadrack's sense of identity in this scene does not emerge in relation to whiteness, which could only produce extensive difference or difference in degree though empirical observation and juxtaposition. The differentiating process taking place in this scene, in contrast, is that which creates intensive difference and cannot occur without producing a state change. Morrison's use of the word "render" as in the melting of fat from its solid to liquid form speaks to this drastic shift in composition. The opposition between this more radical production of difference and the empirical insistence on transparency and temporal foreclosure, is further elaborated in this scene by Morrison's unstable placement of "nothing" within the dialectic of presence/absence, solid/liquid, light/dark. In the beginning of this passage "nothing" refers to an absence of image ("he could make nothing out"). "But when his blackness greeted him with its indisputable presence," Morrison writes, "he wanted nothing more." The "nothing" he desires here could be

his “indisputable presence” or the state of illegibility (the nothing he could make out). This interpretive multivalence—emergent from Shadrack’s experiential corrective to his “skittish apprehensions” of racialized non-existence—could be read as the intended result of *Morrison’s* desired encounter between the reader and the voids she creates in her novels, be it the phantom limb or the toilet bowl. She writes, “these spaces, which I am filling in, and can fill in because they were planned, can conceivably be filled in with other significances. This is planned as well. The point is that into these spaces should fall the ruminations of the reader and his or her invented or recollected or misunderstood knowingness” (2019, 192).

“Always”

The fusion of memory, consciousness, and an undetermined future in the durational register of becoming is expressed by Shadrack’s “Always” that he shares with Sula after she encounters her own void, “the closed place in the water” (61) that envelops Chicken Little’s body during his accidental drowning. When Sula arrives at Shadrack’s cabin, frantic and afraid, she finds him smiling “a great smile, heavy with lust and time to come. He nodded his head as though answering a question, and said, in a pleasant conversational tone, a tone of cooled butter, “Always” (62). Recalling this moment towards the novel’s end, he remarks that “She had wanted something—from him. Not fish, not work, but something only he could give” (156). When he realizes she is terrified, he assumes it is of her own death (which he articulates, again, in terms of decapitation), of the “skull beneath her braids” that would eventually be exposed by the “falling away of skin” (157). “So he had said “always,” so she would not have to be afraid of the change [. . .] the drip and slide of blood, and the exposure of bone underneath. He had said “always” to convince her, assure her, of permanency” (157). In this way, we might read “Always” as Lorde’s “reminder” that she “had known the pain, and survived it. It only remained for [her] to give it voice, to share it, for use, that the pain was not wasted” (2020,9). This transmission of “always”

is a transmission of Shadrack's own survival, as well as the formative moment where he encountered his "grave" face and inaugurated a newfound freedom from death, culminating in the creation of National Suicide Day. Like Lorde, who works "with the consciousness of death at [her] shoulder," this freedom doesn't come from simply safeguarding time against its theft, in Shadrack's case, by military service, medical institutionalization, and the carceral system, but by *taking constitutive power over time itself*. Lorde does so formally in *The Cancer Journals* through the ritual of sifting through and reordering her journal entries. They are extracted, examined, and displayed not unlike the precious stones she gathered and polished in her cherished practice of rock digging, each expressive of a distinct time in a geologic sense. While some expressions, we know, "fossilize into silence" some stones speak. Indeed, as the figure in Lorde's poem, "Parting" declares: "sometimes they answer/ double-voiced/ as a woman in love/ taking leave/ in roars of jade" (2000, 286).

Morrison's "always" is similarly dialogic: "Always. He had answered a question she had not asked and its promise licked at her feet" (63). If questions or problems "must be stated and solved in terms of time, not space" (Deleuze 2018, 31), then the unarticulated question and its answer, "Always," with its "promise" of time to come seems to satisfy this demand. As such, the future is not predetermined, the "Always" is not biting at Sula's heels propelling her forward in space and time, but is, rather, "licking at her feet." This is because problems properly posed in terms of time are seemingly both solvable and *unfinalizable*, or eternal. Death inflected, erotically uncovered, this "Always" is a promise of the "future of time" (that is, time outside its present systematization by racial capital) without which there is only the perpetual territorializations of extractive reason. As Morrison writes, "without "eternal life," which casts humans in all time to come–forever–the future becomes discoverable space, outer space, which is, in fact, the discovery of more past time" (2019, 115).

The dual meaning of the word "promise" as an assurance and as an evocation of potentiality (wherein something has promise or is promising) also returns us to Lorde's definition of the erotic as engaging in a process of interiorizing potentiality in the production of difference. The affirmation of "Always" is not an insistence on material solidity so much as an affirmation of endurance and chance simultaneously. In further keeping with Lorde's erotic, we can read this as a declaration of love along the lines of Alain Badiou's definition. He writes, "If 'I love you' is always, in most respects, the heralding of 'I'll always love you', it is in effect locking chance into the framework of eternity" (Badiou 2017, 47). For Roland Barthes, the phrase is in itself empty of meaning, *it has no usage*, and suppresses explanation. Like "always," "I-love-you" is immanent, "it has no elsewhere—it is the word of the (amorous, maternal) dyad; in it, no distance, no distortion will split the sign; it is a metaphor of nothing else" (149). It is not a unified whole that transmits meaning, but is fastened onto a limit situation, Barthes argues, quoting Lacan: "the one where the subject is suspended in a specular relation to the other." The "I-Love-you" is a holophrase, Barthes continues; It is a suspended state of imagined intersubjectivity. According to Lacan, the holophrase emerges in the field of psychoanalysis to frustrate those who "try to engineer the transitions between an appreciation of the whole situation and symbolic fragmentation" (Lacan, 1995, 225) to account for the arrival of language. In this way, the holophrase destabilizes the totalizing force of extractive reason and as such "cannot be broken down" (225) or analytically divided. The affective register of the "inter-gaze" of the holophrase is suspended anticipation (a desire for an impossible or yet-to-come totality), which, as a statement of love, signals to the exigency for a corrective (collective) to the deterministic morbidities of the "dialectic of death."

Sula

Sula encounters the temporal power of "Always" most notably through sex. As Quashie notes, "*Sula* is an ars erotica, a tracking of its title character's encounters in relationality through sex" (2018, 80). And "she went to bed with men as frequently as she could" (Morrison 1973, 122) Morrison tells us, because "it was the only place where she could find what she was looking for: misery and the ability to feel deep sorrow" (122). While the ability to feel sorrow seems a far cry from Lorde's capacity to feel joy, both are sources of discredited knowledge that, as Quashie shows, engender relational forms of oneness. For Sula, joy, as orgasmic release, and sorrow, as a sensitivity towards death, are inherently bound together in erotic encounters as the recognition of mutual energies. This is Sula's "always" that sends her "howling in a stinging awareness of the ending of things" (123) where she weeps for "the deaths of the littlest things," from lost shoes to broken stems of grass to "wedding rings in pawn store windows" (123) in a state of imagined intersubjectivity. Morrison captures the vexing, dynamic interplay that precedes this experience in the following passage:

> During the lovemaking she found and needed to find the cutting edge. When she left off cooperating with her body and began to assert herself in the act, particles of strength gathered in her like steel shavings drawn to a spacious magnetic center, forming a tight cluster that nothing, it seemed, could break. And there was utmost irony and outrage in lying under someone, in a position of surrender, feeling her own abiding strength and limitless power. But the cluster did break, fall apart, and in her panic to hold it together she leaped from the edge into soundlessness and went down howling, howling into the stinging awareness of the endings of things; an eye of sorrow in the midst of all that hurricane rage of joy. (122)[97]

The reference to steel and "cutting edge" in this passage, as well as the mention of knives and wounds in the paragraph preceding it, calls to mind Sula's entrance into the realm of the

[97] We can briefly glimpse the authorial power Sula inhabits in the novel if we recall Morrison's description of Bambara's aesthetics craft as "so clearly on its way–like a magnet collecting details in its wake, each of which is essential to the final effect" (Bambara 1999 viii).

phantom limb during her act of childhood self-mutilation. As a brush with "always" this is also where Sula encounters her power over time itself as a different type of severing. In this passage, the past, present, and future could be read as the "tight cluster" that "nothing, it seemed, could break." Eventually however, the cluster does break, testifying to the power of "nothing" anew, and sending her into the depth of sorrow that she longed for. Morrison writes, "There, in the center of that silence was not eternity but the death of time and a loneliness so profound the word itself had no meaning. For loneliness assumed the absence of other people, and the solitude she found in that desperate terrain had never admitted the possibility of other people. (123) This "desperate terrain" created through sex functions like Lorde's textual room where her feelings *are hers alone*. The radical alterity of this space is signaled by the affect Sula desires, loneliness, which is definitionally contingent on another person. And yet, as she triumphantly tells Nel near the end of *Sula:* "my lonely is *mine*" (141). It is no surprise that this (im)possibility is actualized amidst the "death of time" if we recall Lorde's response to the ostensible impossibility of a non-surrogative terrain outside the work itself. In acknowledging the work "being its own answer" Lorde writes:

> "Is there any other way, I said.
>
> In another time, she said" (47).

What dies in this moment, I would argue, is not simply time, but Time in its spatialized existence in the present, empty of alternative futurities. In this way, the cutting edge she finds is something like what Deleuze refers to as "the Aion", which "endlessly subdivides the event into a proximate past and imminent future [. . .] without ever rendering them less urgent" (Deleuze 1996, 63). It operates in opposition to Chronos, or the "coiling of relative presents" (63) (recall how Eva's act of violence exposed this temporality as that which recursively posited the violable maternal body). In the scene above, the Aion is captured by the strange temporality of "found

and needed to find the cutting edge," empty of the present save for the act of "cutting." In keeping with Sula's "stinging awareness of the ending of things," the event that is endlessly subdivided, Deleuze writes, "is that no one ever dies, but has always just died or is going to die, in the empty present of the Aion" (63). The distinction between Aion and Chronos is helpful for imagining an anti-extractive mode of knowledge production because of their respective operative fields. The Aion is a surface event which, as only ever the past and future, disrupts the signification of the surface as an ontological present. The Chronos, in contrast, is the temporality of the depths. The secret of events "and of the becoming unlimited which they imply" (9), Deleuze argues, is not found in plunging depths, but at the surface and its border. In this way, the *empty* present of the Aion is the exact opposite of the constituent components of extractive time: the expressive present(s) of the essential section and the geologic temporality of depth.

As Deleuze argues, the Aion "endlessly decomposes itself in both directions at once" (77). This is the state of temporal decomposition (as a corollary to Shadrack's material decomposition) that precedes becoming in the "post-coital privateness" where Sula "met herself, welcomed herself, and joined herself in matchless harmony" (123). After sex, Morrison writes, "she waited impatiently for him to turn away and settle into a wet skim of satisfaction and light disgust" (123). It is telling that Sula welcomes her sexual partner's feeling of disgust, as it constitutes yet another return to her act of self-mutilation, to the moment when she had tried to protect Nell "and earned not gratitude but disgust" (141). It also informs our sense of "unbecoming" or decomposition as both a process of destabilization and as an indictment of the unseemly, nonconforming, and heretical. Indeed, like Shadrack, who "everybody knows [is] a reprobate" (117), yet whose National Suicide Day is absorbed into the thoughts and lives of his community (15), Sula's reviled status exerts considerable power over the community's habits and attitudes, as Morrison writes, "Their conviction of Sula's evil changed them in accountable

yet mysterious ways (Morrison 1973,118). In their disgust, Nel and the men Sula sleeps with, and the community that vilifies her, don't see themselves as beneficiaries of her actions and thus don't set in motion the inescapable cycle of exchange. If, as Jacques Derrida argues, every gift reproduces a logic of debt and exchange, it is annulled the moment the receiver recognizes it as a gift and enters into the cycle of reciprocity. For a gift to truly be a gift, Derrida writes, "it must not circulate, it must not be exchanged, it must not in any case be exhausted, as a gift, by the process of exchange" (Derrida 1991,7).

I would argue that Sula's ability to truly give is made possible not only because her deeds go unnoticed, but because of the temporal valence of "always," which distributes holophrastic temporal singularities into the past and future by the force of the Aion. As Derrida argues, "wherever *time as circle*, is predominant, the gift is impossible." The circle of exchange, or the "coiling of relative presents" of the Chronos, is what marks the impossibility of the gift. This is because "time, the "present" of the gift, is no longer thinkable as a now, that is, as a present bound up in the temporal synthesis" (9). The hindrance of the gift is the existence of the present, as that which spatializes time through the logic of equivalency in exchange, and temporalizes time in the present of reflection (anticipation, memory, ect). The gift is only possible at the "instant of the effraction (of the circle)" and, he makes emphatic, "*only on the condition of the instant*" (9) That is to say, the instant cannot be relative to anything other than itself, it must retain its singularity and, to return to Bergson's phrasing, "will itself for willing's sake." It follows that unlike her protective sacrifice for Nel as a child, Sula's gift to her community is notably not premised on any form of personal loss or harm, but arises, rather, from her mere existence, "uncontained and uncontainable" (Morrison 2019, 188). As Morrison asserts, "There was only her own mood and whim, and if that was all there was, she decided to turn the naked

hand toward it, discover it and let others become as intimate with their own selves as she was" (121). Sula's gift, like the gift of *Sula*, I would argue, is an invitation for erotic self-discovery.

Sula's ability to truly give is consistent with Morrison's assertion that Sula has "no affection for money, property or things, no greed" (119). This all changes, however, when she enters into a captivating affair with a man named Ajax. This marks the moment when Sula begins to capitulate to a normative idiom of domestic femininity despite her understanding of the depletion that goes along with it. While she "had no intimate knowledge of marriage" (119) she falls into its routine with considerable ease: Ajax brings her gifts and she tends to the Peace home, cooking, cleaning, preening, and importantly *waiting* for his arrival. "She began to discover what possession was. Not love, perhaps, but possession or at least the desire for it. She was astounded by so new and alien a feeling "(131). It is this moment when she remembers her childhood fear that her head could fall off like her paper dolls. After Ajax's eventual departure, she remarks that she "did not hold her head stiff enough when she met him and so [she] lost it just like the dolls" (134). In keeping with the "headless display" of National Suicide Day, or of locating "hope" in the reform of existing structures of oppression, Sula's headlessness results from being "kept" waiting in the time of the present, wherein her desires can only be defined within a proprietary framework: Ajax's arrival promises to fulfill not her desire for love, but for possession. As a result, she redirects her cutting edge from time-unspatialized to temporalized matter in an imagined excavation of Ajax's skin. This moment of sexual exploration is described at length:

> *If I take the chamois and rub real hard on the bone, right on the ledge of your cheek bone, some of the black will disappear. It will flake away into the chamois and underneath there will be gold leaf. I can see it shining through the black. I know it is there . . ."*
> How high she was over his wand-lean body, how slippery was his sliding sliding smile. *And if I take a nail file or even Eva's old paring knife—that will do and scrape away at the gold, it will fall away and there will be alabaster. The alabaster is what gives your*

> *face its planes, its curves. That is why your mouth smiling does not reach your eyes. Alabaster is giving it a gravity that resists a total smile.*
> The height and the swaying dizzied her, so she bent down and let her breasts graze his chest.
> *Then I take a chisel. and a small tap hammer and tap away at the alabaster. It will crack then like ice under a pick, and through the breaks I will see loam, fertile, free of pebbles and twigs. For it is the loam that is giving you that smell.* (130)

Layer by layer Sula delves deeper into Ajax's imagined physical stratum, separating and cataloguing each one until she reaches the rich loam beneath. If we read this as her capitulation to domesticity, we can read the final stage of this fantasy as the moment Sula realizes its potentially destructive effects. Sula thinks "*I will water your soil, keep it rich and moist, but how much? How much water to keep the loam moist? And how much loam will I need to keep my water still? And when do the two make mud?* He swallowed her mouth just as her thighs swallowed his genitals and the house was very, very quiet" (131). How much Sula will it take to sustain Ajax? When will her care and cultivation erase her fluid singularity, mix with his soil to create the unified materiality of mud? Is she bound to the same fate as Nel, upon whose marriage to Jude, Morrison remarks, "The two of them together would make one Jude" (83)? That this extractive endeavor concludes with Ajax "swallowing" Sula seemingly confirms this fate. And yet, to be swallowed is to retain her defining fluidity, which suggests less capitulation than momentary exploration. As Quashie argues, "If we forget that Sula is in-progress, then we might read this happening as a lapse or even as a sign of confusing self-betrayal. But Sula is relational, and being with Ajax offers a chance to refine what being is. She is free to risk inquisitiveness about this new feeling rather than only conserve or protect herself in keeping with a notion of female frailty" (Quashie 2018, 81). This reading allows us to draw an important distinction: Sula's becoming necessitates *risk*, but not self-sacrifice, and it is telling that this extractive impulse brought her into confrontation with such a demand in the first place. Rather, her journey

into the temporal stratum of Ajax's body, to return to Morrison's phrasing, "is a rescue of sorts, an excavation for the purposes of building, discovering, envisioning a future" (2019, 123).

Eventually Ajax leaves Sula, and she surfaces fully to his "stunning absence" (Morrison 1973, 134). Morrison writes, Sula "looked around for tangible evidence of his having ever been there [. . .] she could find nothing, for he had left nothing but his stunning absence. An absence so decorative, so ornate, it was difficult for her to understand how she had ever endured, without falling dead or being consumed, his magnificent presence" (134). *She could find nothing, for he had left nothing.* These lines so gorgeously capture the potentiality of discovery with which Morrison endows her unique figure of "nothing." Counterposed to empirical data ("tangible evidence'), this nothing enables Sula's exploration of her own capacity to endure being swallowed *without being consumed* into a metabolic whole. We are returned again in this moment to Shadrack's jail scene where he "could make nothing out" and just as Shadrack's pivotal scene is followed by "the first sleep of his new life, a sleep deeper than hospital drugs; deeper than the pits of a plum; steadier than the condor's wing; more tranquil that the curve of eggs" (14), Sula's Ajax chapter concludes with a deep sensual languor as the mark of absolute newness. When she wakes, "There was a melody in her head she could not identify or recall ever hearing before. "Perhaps I made it up," she thought" (137). Then an entirely new song comes to her "just as if she had heard it many times before. She sat on the edge of the bed thinking there aren't any more new songs and I have sung all the ones there are. I have sung them all. I have sung all the songs there are" (137). As she drifts back to sleep she sings the "little wandering tune" (137) made up of these lyrics. It is here that she returns her cutting edge to time: she is performing the instant the present becomes the past, where the song becomes "already sung." Only by relegating it to songs already sung is any future song inherently new. The present,

subsequently, becomes an impossibility according to the logic of the lyrics. It is this lullaby that puts her to sleep, that fulfills the promise of "a sleep of water always" (149).

On her deathbed, Sula is reminded of the promise of Always, and though she struggles to recall its source, she senses that "the water is near," that she would soon "curl into its heavy softness and it would envelope her, carry her, and wash her tired flesh always (149). In the moment after her death, in the purest expression of her utter unfinalizability, "Sula felt her face smiling. "Well, I'll be damned," she thought, "It didn't even hurt. Wait'll I tell Nel" (149).

Conclusion

In their elaboration of "black ether" J. Kameron Carter and Sarah Jane Cervenak ask "What would it mean to think about blackness as that which experimentalizes being [. . .] That moves as unfettered ur-matter, unthinkable exorbitance and deregulated transubstantiation? (Carter and Cervenak 2016, 204). This is precisely what the novel's final question asks, posed on the final page in what I believe is the final conversation between Nel and Sula (as suggested by the dialogue-style line breaks between Nel and the rustling of nature.) It is here that Sula, true to her word, "tells" Nel about the promise of always.

> Shadrack and Nel moved in opposite directions, each thinking separate thoughts about the past. The distance between them increased as they both remembered gone things.
> Suddenly Nel Stopped. Her eye twitched and burned a little.
> "Sula?" She whispered, gazing at the tops of trees. "Sula?"
> Leaves stirred; mud shuffled; there was the smell of overripe green things. A soft ball of fur broke and scattered like dandelion spores in the breeze.
> "All that time, all that time, I thought I was missing Jude." And the loss pressed down on her chest and came up her throat. "We was girls together," she cried as though explaining something. "O Lord, Sula," she cried, "girl,girl,girlgirlgirl."
> It was a fine cry—loud and long—but it had no bottom and it had no top, just circles and circles of sorrow.

This is the final cry of "always," of "I-love-you," howled in the face of stunning absence that Sula transmits to Nel, a gift given not in time but of the "ecstatic sorrow" and cutting edge of

time itself. In this moment, Sula emerges through the corporealized subject position of the phantom limb and becomes the incorporeal phantasm herself to bear witness to the "potential energy" of the pure event (Deleuze 1994, 103) or that which can only be imagined and the empirically unimaginable" (144). Like the cut of the Aion, the phantasm is a surface phenomenon (Deleuze 1990,16), an event that collapses representative depth into a monument ("without top or bottom") of virtuality. Here, Deleuze writes, "we become with the world; we become by contemplating it. Everything is vision, becoming. We become universes. Becoming animal, plant, molecular, becoming zero" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 104). It is on this plane that individuations are undone: what was two distinct "girls" is now "girlgirlgirl". Sula is becoming tree, becoming mud, becoming overripe green things, "unfettered" and "deregulated" as she transmutes being into unthinkable new becomings, distributing temporal singularities and potentialities "in the manner of a pod releasing its spores" (Deleuze 1990, 167). Indeed, it is only now that the gray ball of fur that has long hovered in Nel's line of vision, "terrible in its malevolence" (Morrison 1973,109) can finally disperse.

The virtual monument or "bloc of sensations" Deleuze writes, "does not actualize the virtual event but incorporates or embodies it: it gives it a body, a life, a universe" ("Percept" 109). This new body resists extractive procedures: we cannot parse historical, sociological, or clinical "symptoms" from it because the very logic of representation has been suspended, that is, if we as readers allow it to be. In this way, Morrison doesn't just signal the exigency for anti-extractive modes of being, she implicates the reader in that very mode, asking us to find the "answering energy" (Lorde 2020, 32) within ourselves to meet Nel's "Sula?"

Sula? It is a question "stated and answered in terms of time (Deleuze 2018, 31) that transports *us* into the "stinging awareness of the ending of things" (Morrison 1973,123). It is a question that asks, "what type of world can accommodate Sula's 'metaphysical blackness'

(Morrison 2019, 189), and immanent "oneness" (Quashie 2018, 84)—or can hold someone so "out-of-the-house, outlawed, unpolicing, uncontained, and uncontainable (Morrison 2019,188)? Asked in the full awareness that the only answer is the novel itself, it is a question, finally, that posits "the End of The World as we know it" (Ferreira da Silva 2014, 84), not as a warning, but as a political imperative. If, as Mbembe argues, we can "compare the work of race to a sacrificial cut, the kind of act for which one does not have to answer" (Mbembe 2017, 35), then we can think of the work of *Sula*, with all its cutting procedures, as an act for which we all must answer.

CODA

Omens of Abolition[98]

> "The children are always ours, every single one of them, all over the globe; and I am beginning to suspect that whoever is incapable of recognizing this may be incapable of morality. Or, I am saying, in other words, that we, the elders, are the only models children have. What we see in the children is what they have seen in us–or, more accurately perhaps, what they *see* in us."
>
> James Baldwin "Notes on the House of Bondage"

This project has attempted to engage (rather than necessarily answer) two central questions: "How does capitalism structurally necessitate human and non-human disposability?" and "How does this system occlude its systemic necessitation to normalize the unequal (and racially differentiated) distribution of wellness and harm?" I have approached these questions with two counterbalancing presuppositions characteristic of an organizing ethos that, in some sense, haunts this project against my best intentions. The first presupposition relates to the value of political education. This can be glimpsed in my elaboration of fossil-carceral history as well as my efforts to show how the reformist juridic-economic architectures of the settler state are not just tools for capitalist accumulation but are formally homologous to, and irreparably bound up with, the colonial logics of racial capitalism. Optimism guides this approach because it presumes that, for example, if people understood the systemic function of racial criminalization or self-interestedly grasped the relationship between one's own alienation and another's devaluation, their behavioralist attitudes and self-defeating priorities would ostensibly change. The other presuppositional approach to the questions above is in fidelity to the far more pessimistic reality

[98] This term was thought up in collaboration with Kiran Lam-Saili, whose generosity as a thought partner, reader, and beloved friend has impacted this project in immeasurable ways.

that people in positions of absolute and relative (material and symbolic) power *do* know, for example, the ongoing ravages of settler colonialism, they just *don't care.* If, in keeping with Audre Lorde's example in the previous chapter, we trace this logic to its natural conclusion, it follows that such lack of care is premised on the belief that those outside of one's family, race, or nation must be *essentially* disposable. Just as there is strategic value in this realization in an organizing context, I believe there is discursive value in approaching this warped consciousness as the factual "ground" from which to pursue systemic analyses, not to change it necessarily, but to understand it, such that one can clarify, in the process, what their work's obligations are and to whom. Thus emerges my attempt to articulate *this* disposition as an onto-epistemological function of racial capitalism specifically —rather than primarily a problem of empathy or pathological self-interest—and thus in keeping with the abolitionist and materialist imperatives of this project.

This specific undertaking has revealed the expository tools of Marxism to be both essential and foundationally insufficient. Indeed, it is only through the lens of Wynter's decades long (and notably iterative) elaboration of the colonial creation of Western Man and its autopoietic reproduction of the "master code of life and death" that I have been able to explore how capitalism's racializing function in and beyond the mine could be formally implicated in the maintenance of the callous disposition noted above. Through this comparative reading, I have argued that the structural category of blackness enabled the emergence of the capitalist value form, which henceforth aids in the reification of the colonial mode of relation in its instantiation of an empirical interpretive temporal schema that supports essentialist notions of racialized disposability. In this way, the two counterbalancing aims noted above have converged into the framework of "extractive reason" to name both the material and epistemological ways by which

capitalism annihilates (corporeal and environmental) space by time through the vector of anti-blackness.

The temporal framework of extractive reason is indebted to anti-colonial critiques of historicism, Marxian grammars of capitalist time and abolitionist analyses of time's weaponization by the carceral state. My attention to time is also foundationally inspired by the artists and authors that consciously inhabit and narratively rupture the abstract temporal totality of capitalism in numerous ways. Indeed, all of the creative works this project has engaged reveal their creator's sensitivity to the role of narrative in the production of the racial economy of knowledge and the way in which, to return to Wynter's formulation, we are "constantly 'initiatedly reborn' as fictively instituted inter-altruistic kin, recognizing members of each symbolically re-encoded genre-specific referent 'we'" (Wynter and McKittrick 34). What's at stake is not just how we *account for* the past, present, and future, but how we perceive ourselves to be *accountable to* one-another according to how we perceive time itself. As Morrison shows, the foreclosure of the future as catastrophe or apocalypse, for example, reifies the nuclear family at the expense of a more capacious concern for collective generational wellbeing. When the "future is already catastrophe" She writes, "Political discourse enunciates the future it references as something we can leave to or assure 'our' children of –or– in a giant leap of faith– 'our' grandchildren. It is the pronoun, I suggest, that ought to trouble us. We are not being asked to rally for *the* children, but for *ours*" ("The Future of Time"117). Time, in this way, has a tendency to conceal the essential fact, as James Baldwin puts it in his iconic lines, that "The children are always ours, every single one of them, all over the globe."

Against the "storytelling-chartered code of symbolic life/death" which denies the "hybridity of humanness" (Wynter and McKittrick 29) through the amputation of temporal

plenitude is the explicit attempt to aesthetically usher alternative images of time. Throughout this project I have attempted to elaborate such temporal solicitations, including: Noel Anderson's dialogic duration of audience reception, June Jordan's subjunctive "subsequently?", Fred Moten's ars poetic "here," Toni Cade Bambara's unnamed and ever-arriving future that *would be* Velma's, Joseph Albernaz's analysis of Robert Wedderburn's one-hour general strike, and of course, Shadrack and Sula's "Always." As I have argued, these works don't just demonstrate alternative temporalities, they implicate the audience in a process of reordering time.

One of the ways Morrison engages her audience in this process is through the figure of the omen. She writes, "strange things are all omens; you don't know what's going to happen at the time the omens occur, and you don't always recognize an omen until after the fact, but when the bad thing does happen, you somehow expected it. As the reader, you can take comfort in knowing whatever it is has already happened so you don't have to be frightened" (Tate, "Toni Morrison"163). In addition to being a nurturing force and gesture of authorial care for Morrison, omens invite their reader (or diviner) to engage in narrative retro-speculation. Because we identify an omen after the event, we endow a past image or sensation heightened motive force in its temporal afterlife in the present, at the same time we enrich the present with potential significance for future retro-speculations. Put another way, we make ourselves aware of the necessity to enliven the past as the "raw material" for the future. As Lorde puts it, "this is how new visions begin, how we begin to posit a future nourished by the past" (Tate "Audre Lorde" 141). To be attuned to omens is to be sensitive to signs of environmental and spiritual disequilibria like Sophie, who Bambara writes "was forever reading signs before they were even

so" (1980, 13); it is to notice things like irradiated jackrabbits, swarms of robins, the absence of marigolds in the fall, or even a shift in a loved one's manner of storytelling.[99]

Omenic encounters thus invite us to take an active role in the narrative selection of inherited significations, which is inherently an experience of the temporal sovereignty associated with authorship and poetics. By "us" I don't just mean the readers, because by Morrison's provocative admission, her audience is "always the people in the book [she's] writing at the time" (Tate "Toni Morrison" 159). Eva Peace, for example, is a devout reader of omens and notably takes on an authorial position throughout the novel, as when she reveals a degree of seemingly impossible omniscience to Nel at the novel's end, or when she names the Deweys, who, despite the vast differences between their ages and appearance, eventually become indistinguishable to everyone. That is, they *become* the Deweys who "spoke with one voice, thought with one mind and maintained an annoying privacy. Stouthearted, surly, and wholly unpredictable, the Deweys remained a mystery not only during all of their lives in Medallion but after as well" (39). In addition to their enduring mythic quality, they also don't appear to age in the novel, as if in the process of their naming, they were *representationally suspended* by Eva.[100] But nowhere is Eva's authorial power more striking than when she disrupts her narrative conscription as a vessel of salvation through her act of "horror and mercy." In disrupting the "master code" that recursively cycles through the violable black maternal body, Eva embraces a

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[99] Here I'm thinking of Palma's response to a photograph of Velma, which reminded her of how, during one of Velma's depressive episodes, she was "Talking in an odd way but never quite explaining what the matter was, complaining about sexual harassment on the job but not offering an example in the stand-up comic way she had—no anecdotes, just her reaction. (Bambara 1980, 139). The photograph, then, could be read as an omen for the suicide attempt Palma has yet to hear about. Moreover, this example shows how deeply related wellness and storytelling are for Bambara.

[100] The same could be said for Tar Baby, who Eva named ironically in light of her conviction of his whiteness despite all the other accounts to the contrary. He is notably apprehended as such by the police later in the novel.

radically alternative power of address premised on the type of *authorial* care noted above, contra the fraught demands for maternal care she is violently rebuking. Morrison's claim that her characters are her audience suggests that Eva also partakes in a relationship defined by the *reciprocal* forms of obligation Morrison elaborates elsewhere between herself and her readers. This enables us to read (if rather speculatively) Eva's confounding response to Plum's conflagration as an appeal to Morrison herself, as a moment when Eva is, in some sense, demanding accountability when she asks, soundlessly:

"'Is? My baby? Burning?'" (48).

The dialogic collapse of diegetic norms that I am proposing here affirms Eva's co-authorial voice in the novel, which I want to suggest is later captured in concert with Morrison's own voice when Hannah asks Eva why she killed Plum and "When Eva spoke at last it was with two voices. Like two people were talking at the same time, saying the same thing, one a fraction of a second behind the other" (71). The radical alterity of a co-authorial position, emergent from speculative forms of obligation, is signaled by the interpretive capaciousness ushered by the lines' punctuation: "Is? My baby? Burning?" which throws the received knowledge of maternal proprietorship in this moment of burning into complete chaos. In this way, through this utterance, Morrison (and Eva) ever so subtly "storytellingly" reconfigures the discursive enclosures of the myopic family model rightly lamented above.

As an omen, fire insists on the languageability of *new* initiation rites, that, to return to Bambara's writing, "would open up and welcome one in before the end, welcome one in in time to wretch time from its track so another script could play itself out" (Bambara 1980, 247). As signs of "an alleged impossibility that is furtively present, pulsing, produced in the persistent

insurgencies of human being that undermine the totalizing logics of empire" (Rodriguez 1578) these are omens, importantly, of abolition.

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