

Radical Sense
Now Reader Volume 6

IMAGES FROM THE WAR

1

With half a memory and ruined images, I turn over the past, repeating names that have no sound. Anxiety echoes back. The streets revolve, and the houses in my mind revolve, empty except for fear. I leave behind the years of experience, the tears and laughter, the farewells and encounters, and I run. Survival is a lost horizon, hope a device for the needy.

I fall into regret. For the meaning of life I go back to the drawing board, one foot tracing the steps, the other resisting missteps. In faces, a dictionary of fortitude, a thesaurus of longing. In conversation, stories amputated by a stray explosive. And in me a strange heart, an eye unable to contain its tears, a footstep hobbled by not knowing what now.

I carried all that came before and all that I've become. About my history I schooled others and was schooled. I was changed by this endurance, by hard necessity. Words grew in helpless silence. The ordeal shaped me. The body was besieged by a house unknown to it, by roads that do not lead to it. But hope leaks between our conversations. We chew it, chew its promises. For a long time we believe it and we don't let go.

2

I call out the powerless names, the narrow definitions. A pain resulting from restriction and from thought. A river releasing the current of its language into me, plunging me into the mind of the ancients. With a pair of clipped wings they say: My throat. I crouch, overcome by the weight. I refuse answers. The group photograph rejects me.

I drag my stubborn footsteps, pave my path. The river is angry, slapping my heart. I no longer care about footsteps, about meaning, about the knocks on the door, about my experiences and mistakes and missteps, my satisfactions and my grievances. I cross with neither my heart nor the river. On my back I carry frightened voices, asleep on my shoulder. To the tree from which I dropped at the beginning of time, with a color and a name and a voice that tries, I ask: Who am I? The tree hears nothing, says nothing. I say: What is war? A stab at immortality. A lust for it. I carry the answer and the explanation. I turn the facts over and accept them. I set off like a bird that knows its expanse and its nest, heart full and eyes hungry for salvation. Astonishment fences me round. The body is dug with the voice of our masters. They have eaten what remained of longing. Reassurance dazzles me: I see it waving at

me behind the fence of amazement. There it is; I recognize it, but it cannot reach me.

3

After a brief death, television was revived for the purpose of broadcasting names, each one snatched away by a weapon between inexperienced hands, and to convey to us—lest we forget—the moment memory was demolished and the capitals wept.

Red is a color that belongs to us. The martyred, the injured. Massacre. Blitz. And the color of the line that mourns us hastily, in shame.

Papers are our mission. We gather what may establish our names, so prone to being forgotten, and our birth certificates so that no confusion may exist as to our age. Then we remember that we have lived through four wars, and our miracle is survival.

The voices are heavy with reproach. We put questions to the gods and whatever lies beyond. The voices are questions going to and ceaselessly fro. There is a babble under your breath. All eyes huddle round. There is only one answer you are seeking: when will the house stop spinning?

Calm is a cruel warning sign, a lurking we know well. We repeat as many verses as we can, then we test our hearing. If you can hear, you are saved, and if you cannot hear, you become news.

Numbers are a waking nightmare, a hammer on our fingers. We count everything into which life has entered and which death crept in behind through the back door.

Ceasefire, an exit from one war into another. For war traverses us and finds a sister here. A single blaze that does not shed its burden and does not let us go.

(Doha Kahlout,
translated from Arabic by Yasmine Seale)

23/08/2021

Mujaawarah (neighboring... sort of) as manifested in my life

I would like to start by asserting that *mujaawarah* for me represents a main hope in today's world – mujaawarah as a medium for learning, social action, and understanding; as a way to regain rootedness, spirit and ability of regeneration, sense of community, who we are as well as regain full attentiveness to inner callings and to what is happening around us; as a means to deal with oppression and heal from modern superstitions; as an alternative to institutions and institutional categories in relating to one another and understanding the world; as a social “structure” where relationships and well-being have priority over products and outcomes; as a main protector of diversity, abundance, and natural immune systems; as main weaver of the fabric in communities; and as an embodiment of equality, fairness, reciprocity, sharing, freedom, honesty, dignity, and multiple-valued logic. Mujaawarah is crucial in the gift culture where ideas (among other things) are shared freely, honestly, generously, with no control by any authority.

Simply put, a mujaawarah is a group of people who want and decide to be together, with no authority within the group and no authority from outside.

Most of my life, I was either in institutions or trying to live outside their dictates through mujaawarahs. Since meanings in life are contextual and experiential, I will write about my understanding of mujaawarah basing it mainly on my experiences and making sense of them. I have been increasingly convinced during the past 40 years that the opposite of progress (as it has been conceived and practiced in modern times) is not backwardness or underdevelopment but being rooted in place, culture, and community; i.e., the opposite of progress is rootedness. The main medium in rootedness and community is mujaawarah, and the core value is wisdom. Prior to modern civilization, the main medium for learning was mujaawarah, and the main check against corruption and greed was wisdom. A main conviction in today's dominant world is that there is a single undifferentiated universal path for progress. Modern civilization is governed by control, greed, and winning. Means of winning include controlling meanings and

measuring people along a vertical line. Thus, co-authoring meanings and living in harmony with Imam Ali's statement ["the worth of a person is what s/he *yuhseen*" – with the various meanings of *yuhseen*: what one does well, useful, beautiful, giving, and respectful] can turn things around and put us on the path of wisdom. Co-authoring meanings is a natural ability, a responsibility, and a right.

British occupation: transforming mujaawarah (neighboring) into muhaawarah (dialogue)

In his memoirs of Jerusalem during transition from Ottoman rule to British occupation, Wasif Jouhariyyeh mentions that a first regulation the British imposed was related to entering Aqsa mosque and its yard. Before that, the yard was open to people from different religions and backgrounds with no restrictions where, through mujaawarahs, they interacted and children played together. The British regulation assigned days for Muslims, others for Christians, and others for Jews – claiming it was to protect rights of all! That regulation transformed the yard from a place of hospitality and plurality into one which planted seeds of sectarianism.

That story reveals the role of mujaawarahs in learning and building community and in weaving the spiritual-social-intellectual-cultural fabric among people. It included collective memory that linked people with the past and with one another. The British replaced mujaawarahs (that bring people together) by muhaawarahs (that use words and concepts which usually pull people apart). The story reveals the "sweet" approach Britain usually uses in its "divide and rule" policy; how it uses words (rights, dialogue, regulations...) to control minds, actions, and perceptions.

Early roots of mujaawarah in my life, and during the 1970s

In 1948, at age 7, I (with my family) was uprooted from our home and community in Jerusalem and moved to Ramallah. For several years, eight of us (my parents, 3 aunts, two sisters and I) lived in one room. That room was where we slept, ate, played (especially in winter), and

where my mother and aunts worked sewing clothes. Despite conditions and limited resources, those years were full of love, caring, and sharing within family and with neighbors; they formed, for me, the basis of the meaning of mujaawarah (though no one used the term at that time). With no TV then, evening gatherings of relatives, neighbors, and friends formed mujaawarahs where we (children) learned about community, culture, and life, and where the social fabric was woven every evening, and wisdom was instilled in us through stories we heard. Jokes and songs filled us with joy and happiness. Current entertainment comes via lifeless devices that cannot replace face to face interactions; if machines add to them, fine; if they replace them, we need to be cautious.

In 1967, Israel occupied the rest of Palestine, and in 1971 the Palestine Liberation Organization was expelled from Jordan. At first, we felt we lost our base but, soon, tremendous spirit, energy, and aliveness were manifested across the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, where groups were formed spontaneously and creatively (without hierarchy, authority, or budget) and did what they felt needed to be done and they could do. Those mujaawarahs were self-formed, self-ruled, and self-supported and, at the same time, they interacted in a mutually enriching way. They protected us from feeling desperate, lost, and indifferent; they spread without planning (no think tanks, no brainstorming, or any such violent terms). That autonomy and spirit of regeneration started disappearing when the Palestinian-Jordanian Committee was formed in 1978 to take care of us! Every time someone came to take care of us (from above or outside, and not reciprocally), we ended up being robbed of something precious. That helped me realize that the opposite of institutions is not chaos or anarchy but mujaawarahs.

It was during the 1970s that mujaawarah became an integral part of my thinking and doing. Its first manifestation was “voluntary work” groups. For 10 years, we met and decided where to go and work that week. No membership, no budget, no authority. Again, that autonomous creative spirit started disappearing when the “higher council of voluntary work” was formed in 1981 linking the work with political parties. I followed the path of mujaawarah in my work in schools where I encouraged students to form “math & science clubs” and meet on Thursdays after school, where each student would come with a question

that s/he wanted to explore. They flourished until the Israeli military governor of the West Bank banned those mujaawarahs in 1976 (students continued their explorations at home; mujaawarahs depend mainly on what is available).

Mujaawarahs during the first intifada (1987-92) and beyond

Mujaawarahs were again the main factor in energizing and allowing us to do what needed to be done, during the first intifada (1987-92), when Israel closed all modern institutions (universities, schools, professional societies, social clubs...), which was a blessing in disguise, since closure of modern institutions helped revitalize rooted social structures which Israel could not close such as families, neighborhoods, and mosques which spontaneously and creatively regained their role in managing life affairs. Most significant was formation of neighborhood committees mujaawarahs especially in relation to learning and communal farming. Israel's reaction to these committees was revealing. While it did not mind international conferences in Jerusalem denouncing closure of schools, universities, etc, it issued harsh military orders against those involved in neighborhood committees! That awakened me to the difference between “**free** thinking and expression” and “**freeing** thinking and expression”; the two freedoms are worlds apart. In neighborhood committees, people did not waste time denouncing and demanding; they freed themselves from such distractions and felt free to form groups to do what needed to be done.

In 1989, I resigned from Birzeit University and started Tamer Institute for Community Education which revolved around learning (without teaching) within “learning environments” where youth formed “mujaawarahs” around “reading and expressing” within the Reading Campaign [see my article “The Reading Campaign Experience within Palestinian Society: Innovative Strategies for Learning and Building Community”, *Harvard Educational Review*, Feb. 1995.] When I joined Harvard University's Center for Middle Eastern Studies in 1997 I established the Arab Education Forum, which included Qalb el-Umour that consisted of small groups (mujaawarahs) in Arab countries who met regularly in order to produce magazines or videos about aspects in their lives.

Mujaawarah in two Palestinian refugee camps in the West Bank (2008-2013)

Between 2008 and 2010, I worked with teachers and mothers in Shufaat Refugee Camp, and during 2012 until June 2013, in Dheisheh Refugee Camp with 16 young men and women. In Shufaat, I was amazed at what mothers were able to do under unbelievably bad conditions. Their knowledge in dealing with life in terms of providing hope and love, and having non-stop energy in managing and doing what needs to be done, for many people in small spaces was simply a miracle. I realized how shallow, naïve, irrelevant and blind modern words such as training and empowerment are! Mothers' lives formed the main theme in my work with them. Their diverse knowledges are usually invisible to the educated, simply because we academics are unable to see what cannot be expressed in words, and measured by numbers.

In Dheisheh Camp, the project's title was Campus in Camps. It took place under the umbrella of al-Quds University. The 16 participants and I walked our common journey along a rugged wild road in learning, enjoying the beauty, aliveness, and difficulties of the wilderness. We referred to it as "House of Wisdom" (inspired by Beit al-Hikmah in Baghdad 1200 years ago). Mujaawarah was the medium we used. It included unlearning much of what participants learned in controlled environments; re-thinking academic categories and professional terms and, instead, choosing words and meanings rooted in life and culture; and unplugging selves from modern superstitions such as the belief in a single universal path for progress. A most wonderful aspect of that experience was the fact that participants often shared our discussions with people in the camps.

Two other main mujaawarahs I was involved in

The first: A mujaawarah in January 2004 where ten practicing artists from 8 Arab countries joined Mohieddin Labbad (artist and graphic designer) in Cairo for several weeks. A book was produced that reflected what happened during and after the mujaawarah. Although they all had jobs and were busy, yet all went to Cairo. By being

together, they felt they could gain a broader understanding of what they do, acquire new skills and perspectives, and learn to do better, what they were doing. The gathering was very inspiring and convinced us even more that such mediums (where the learner is driven from within and is responsible for one's learning) should again become legitimate in educational institutions.

What took place in Cairo embodied several convictions: every person is a teacher and a learner (mutual nurturing); each person is uniquely complete (no one is a copy of another); learning involves building the inner world of each person and the social-intellectual-cultural fabric among people; listening is as important as speaking; and mature experiences precede or accompany words and concepts. Participants exchanged skills, publications, books and articles. Labbad's workplace and all the people and places they visited, formed rich learning environments where friendships were developed and arrangements for future cooperation on common projects started.

The second main mujaawarah was with Sayyed Diwwi, a storyteller and last poet of the Hilali epic. Ten young people from 5 Arab countries participated in addition to storytellers from Egypt, Palestine, and Lebanon. Participants visited a group of stick dancers in Mallawi and watched a performance by the group – which embodied, very nicely, learning through mujaawarah, where children were part of the performance all the time; they learned by neighboring those who had long and rich experience in dancing with sticks. In addition, participants neighbored storytellers in the Oasis of Siwah. [That mujaawarah in all its aspects was reflected in a book and a video.]

The Hawzeh (mujaawarah) in Qum, Iran

Two aspects fascinated me in the Iranian culture: poetry and *hawzeh*. I don't know of any country in the world today where poetry is part of daily living and interactions other than Iran. What pained me most, however, was the absence of that rich culture in education. Until 6 years ago, hawzeh was still the main medium of learning in Qum. The decision to abandon hawzeh and adopt courses was strange. I was invited twice to speak at the University of Religions and Denominations

in Qom, where I tried to explain that the loss of mujaawarah is a loss not only to Iranians but to the world. I tried to explain that modern pedagogy is contrary to mujaawarah and yuhsen (both of which are contextual, relational, and form part of their culture). However, the power of academia which treats knowledge and people as commodities prevailed.

More thoughts on mujaawarahs

What was true about the mujaawarahs that I experienced was the fact that they did not need institutional terms and categories (such as evaluation, development, competition, success, failure, hierarchy, and authority). Instead, they needed reclaiming “organic” words such as *muthanna*, *bahth*, *yuhsen*, *ahaali*, *hayy*, *ijtihaad*, and *tanaaqush* (which I will elaborate on later).

There was often a need to discuss rooted useful knowledge vs. rootless verbal knowledge; knowledge that starts with life vs. fragmented knowledge that starts with academic categories; knowledge that forms a “universe” vs. one that claims to be universal; interconnectedness vs. interdisciplinary; knowledge as wisdom vs. knowledge as power; knowledge manifested in one’s lifestyle vs. one manifested in exams; knowledge connected to a place vs. one in artificial space. Modern universities confuse tools with values treating e.g. excellence as a value rather than as a tool that can serve different values; they focus on texts without context; on textbooks instead of reflective books; on research more than search. Knowledge one gets in Palestinian universities qualifies her/ him to apply to any university in the world but usually useless in one’s home place.

Mujaawarah can only be lived; it requires physical presence and face to face conversations. It happens at the communal level, where learning takes place in freedom, not fear. It can only happen with trust, honesty, mutual nurturance, among people who are ready to *really* listen to one another with full attentiveness. The stress is not so much on information and content as on re-thinking and unlearning much of what has been learned before entering the mujaawarah – including beliefs. Mujaawarah does not have to follow any particular format. It embodies

a simple idea in the sense that it can be done by all people using what is available. Though simple, it is usually not easy, because it is contrary to what we were taught. All what mujaawarah needs are people who decide to meet over a period of time to learn what they want to learn, or do what they feel needs to be done, in freedom with no authority they have to please; a social structure where people learn, think, act, relate, and manage their affairs outside confines of institutions. It does not require license, budget, professionals or visible outcomes. It stresses convictions ignored in modern institutions such as every person is a source of meaning and understanding and every person is unique (cannot be compared with others along a vertical line). As a medium for learning, it is radically different from institutional learning. In mujaawarah, the subject of study includes people's lives in the context where they live. Learning is not something a person gives to another (as in educational institutions) but something a person does to oneself (within a group) that involves sharpening character through actions and interactions. However, it is worth stressing that a mujaawarah is a medium not a value (a bunch of thieves can form mujaawarah); that's why wisdom needs to accompany mujaawarahs we form or talk about.

Arabic Words crucial in mujaawarahs

I mentioned that in describing mujaawarahs, we need to reclaim words rich in meaning and rooted in life, culture, and community such as bahth (search), tanaaqush (discussion), ijtihaad (independent investigation of meaning), muthanna (dual), ahaali (people-in-community), hayy (neighborhood), and yuhsen (what a person does well, beautiful, useful, giving, and respectful). These words do not have synonyms in English; words I put help as "approximations".

Bahth tells who the person is. Rumi said, "a person is what s/he searches for". A person is not defined by the research one is involved in but what one searches for in life (suppressed in academia). In mujaawarah, everyone starts with what one searches for in life (which forms her/ his main contribution). This is crucial in knowing who we are.

Tanaaqush nicely describes the interaction within mujaawarah. Like most Arabic words ,it stems from a root (a verb). The root

naqasha refers to chiseling a stone which usually means making it more beautiful. Ancient Arabs, it seems, saw the purpose of tanaaqush (discussion) is not to win but for the different parties to come out more beautiful. Discussion in a mujaawarah is not about ideas or opinions as much as about those expressing them; about what happens to them and relations among them. The purpose is to deepen understanding of self and life, and weave fabric with whom and what is around. Mujaawarah usually has an intellectual component, but within relationships where participants are mirrors to one another. It can help each person realize and confront one's myths. Just like we need a mirror to see dirt on our face, we need human mirrors to see our myths – which all of us have, without being aware of it. In mujaawarah, one feels safe to confront one's myths; this is probably the biggest gift people in mujaawarah can give each other: humility and readiness to be “converted”. The biggest conversion in my life (which was very hard for me to admit for many years) happened through mujaawarah with my illiterate mother, which was the longest I ever had in my life – when I became aware that her math was impossible for me to understand and do. It touched my deepest convictions and produced most profound conversions. The fact it started with math (which is considered universal) made the conversions more significant. Our relationship was one between two worlds that did not intersect (just like real and plastic flowers; my world being the plastic). Whereas she had understanding of why she was doing what she did, the main reason I studied and taught the math I was given is that it came from authority, whose power stemmed from symbols and perceptions.

Ijtihad is a basic word in Arabic related to the responsibility (and ability and right) of every person to independently investigate and form meaning. Such meanings are connected to experience, reflection, freedom, dignity, and context. In mujaawarah, each person has to practice this duty; it is important in avoiding being consumer of meanings – a main engine of domination.

Muthanna embodies a relationship radically different from “one and many” or what is referred to as “the other”. It is a grammatical form representing a relation between two people that does not exist in any European language (except ancient Greek). Whereas Aristotle's logic

“everything is A or not-A but not both”, and Hegel’s logic “A and not-A can be combined to higher synthesis”, in the logic of muthanna A stays A and B stays B but the relation is important to both. It is not a legal, economic or any such bond. Whereas Descartes said, “I think therefore I am”, muthanna embodies “you are, therefore I am”: my existence is connected to yours, a relation between “I” and “thou”.

Hayy (neighborhood) and ahaali (people-in-community) are two other words connected to mujaawaraha. Hayy literally means alive; it is aliveness that characterizes a neighborhood and not just proximity or agreed upon rules. Ahaali refers to people connected to a geographical place, a common history and collective memory, and common culture. As a result of the Oslo agreement in 1993, Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip were transformed from ahaali to citizens. Whereas relationships among ahaali are basically to one another, basic relationship of citizens is with official institutions. The power of what happened during the 18 days in Cairo and during the 20 days in Istanbul (and in Tehran in 1978) reflect the fact that the spirit of ahaali is still alive in those cities; what happened form the biggest mujaawaraha in history. They were not revolutions or even evolutions, but manifestations of the deep human spirit that is fundamentally free, spontaneous, creative, incredible, and unpredictable. This rooted spirit is connected to ahaali. These aspects underlie the reason why I never felt as hopeful in my 72 years as I feel now. Young people did not get into dialectical dialogues but lived days where they shared hope, faith, and being ready to heal from modern illusions, superstitions, and categories that were dumped on them by institutions. Words such as success and failure are meaningless in describing what happened. The loss of the spirit of ahaali and the arrogance that exist in the West make it hard for people living there to see things in this light. [It is worth mentioning Newton as an example of such arrogance: he believed he discovered the laws God put in nature, which means he even limited the freedom of the Creator to be creative!]

I already spoke about yuhsen. I just want to stress it has been a most inspiring statement in my life. Since I read it in 1997, I feel it can form the vision for learning. Those who ask “how can 5 words form a whole vision?” can find the answer in what Naffari (an Arab Sufi) said

in Baghdad a thousand years ago: “the wider the vision, the less the words we need to express it”.

The roots of formal education in our countries

180 years ago, a main problem Britain faced was how to rule millions of Indians by a small number of British officers. Macaulay (who was assigned by Britain in 1835 to put a strategy for controlling India) found the answer: “We must do our best to form a class... Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect (...) we have to educate [them]”. Over the years, his words were “recycled” and today they give the aura of professionalism and appear to be knowledge-based. [The Arab Human Development Reports as well as official conferences and initiatives in the Arab world are good examples of the recycled language that carries Macaulay’s logic. The new language includes words such as development, evaluation, empowerment, rights, governance, quality, and knowledge society.] Prior to British occupation, Indians learned mainly through mujaawarahs. In an argument between Gandhi and Nehru, Nehru asked angrily: isn’t your aim to drive the British out of India? Gandhi said that his “greatest worry is for the British to leave and their institutions stay”. The nature of the “beast” is not in people but in institutions. The values that govern actions and relationships within institutions are control and winning.

Mujaawarah vs. anarchy

A word that is used to describe how to deal with control and domination is anarchy. I suggest mujaawarah instead. Even people like Chomsky could not find an English word that embodies what mujaawarah does. He uses anarchism which he describes as “a kind of tendency in human thought which shows up in different forms in different circumstances, and has some leading characteristics. Primarily it is a tendency that is suspicious and skeptical of domination, authority, and hierarchy. It assumes that the burden of proof for anyone in a position of power and authority lies on them. They have to give a reason for it. And if they

can't, which is the usual case, then the authority ought to be dismantled and replaced by something more free and just; anarchy is just that tendency, a conception of a society organized from below by direct participation with as little control as is feasible". For many, anarchy has negative connotations and stresses intellectual words such as "organized from below", "direct participation", "little control", and "dismantling authority". We should not blame Chomsky for not finding an English word rooted in people's lives, whose meaning grew out of experiences, and which can replace anarchy; the English language lacks such a living word. After all, why should the English (or Americans) invent a word for something that they don't practice in their lives? In contrast to anarchy, the tendency that Chomsky talks about is embedded in Arabic in the concept of *mujaawarah* and in Hindi in the concept of *swaraj* – both spring from deep cultures and rooted meanings. *Mujaawarah* stresses confronting cherished beliefs in oneself; and *swaraj* stresses the primacy of self-rule (as Gandhi translates *swaraj*). Both stress looking "inward", not outward, and both do not start with what they are against.

Throughout history, *mujaawarahs* were a main tool that people used to counter oppression; a main tool in protecting life, community, and sanity. Christianity started with a *mujaawarah* that consisted of Jesus and 12 disciples. For more than 300 years, Christianity flourished in the hearts, minds, and lives of people through *mujaawarahs*. It was not until Constantine declared his empire to be Christian that Christianity started to lose its soul. That declaration dismantled *mujaawarahs* and saved the empire from disintegration. However, the spirit of *mujaawarah* kept popping up every time oppression became intolerable. Liberation Theology in Latin America is one example. Another example is how 'Occupy Wall Street' resembles what the Palestinian Christ did 2000 years ago in Jerusalem: he carried a whip and led "occupy temple" movement, and drove moneylenders out! Similarly, Islam started with *mujaawarahs*, the first one consisted of Prophet Mohammad and his *sahaabah* (first followers). Again, that spirit kept popping up in Islamic societies every time oppression was intolerable. I witnessed that vividly in the first intifada when the "jaame" (one of two words used for mosque, which literally means "assembly place") flourished as a place for *mujaawarahs* when Israel

shut down all institutions. It became a place where people met to discuss what was happening, what they could do, and was also a place for distributing food and medicine. Every time religion became an institution, it lost that spirit. As for Blacks in the US, mujaawarahs around dancing, singing, and music were what kept them lively and alive and able to deal with unbearable oppression, for more than 200 years.

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What is interesting about organic flower plants is the fact that they have roots and they produce seeds. Those seeds are flown by winds into other places where they flourish and grow roots and produce new flowers and seeds. This is the lifecycle that embodies the spirit of regeneration. Similarly, mujaawarahs have roots and produce stories that can fly to other places, nurturing them and being nurtured by them. My dream is connected to this phenomenon: I believe the world is ready for “story-lines” where stories of mujaawarahs fly (just like airlines) in all directions – starting with those of the two big mujaawarahs: the 18 days in Cairo and the 20 days in Istanbul. The similarity in spirit between the two places is more than a coincidence; it is a “tale of two cities” of historical significance. After 100 years of tearing apart communities and peoples in the region (by Britain, France, and US), re-stitching the fabric within a civilization horizon, among peoples in the region (to include others later) is an idea whose time has come.

Ignoring the dangerous situation in the world and continuing to be hooked to institutional illusions and distractions will keep us blind to challenges we face in the real world. We have already entered a new era, which requires patience, trust, faith, and perseverance. What happened in Tahrir, Gezi and Wall Street reflect an understanding of life, which is profound, spontaneous, creative, responsible, and sacrificial, by people who had richness within, in relationships with one another, in their cultures and collective memories, communal roots, and common future. What happened was a surprise even to those who were there. It was not planned by the mind but stemmed from the heart – a manifestation of the miracle of life and rooted communal wisdoms.

Without wisdom, life on Earth is doomed. Whereas destruction is easy, protecting life requires wisdom, time, patience, and faith.

Modern progress is built mainly on invention of tools. If, for example, 100 people meet in a hall, and one person has a loudspeaker, that person will be heard more than others, not because s/he has wiser things to say but simply because s/he has a tool. Most modern tools are connected to domination and control. Mujaawarahs that are connected to liberation are our tool.

Who Said It Was Simple

By Audre Lorde

There are so many roots to the tree of anger
that sometimes the branches shatter
before they bear.

Sitting in Nedicks
the women rally before they march
discussing the problematic girls
they hire to make them free.
An almost white counterman passes
a waiting brother to serve them first
and the ladies neither notice nor reject
the slighter pleasures of their slavery.
But I who am bound by my mirror
as well as my bed
see causes in colour
as well as sex

and sit here wondering
which me will survive
all these liberations.



**OUR AFFINITY IS
OUR MANIFESTO**

/

MEXICO CITY-BASED
FEMINIST-ANARCHIST
AFFINITY GROUP IN
CONVERSATION WITH
AND TRANSLATED
BY SCOTT CAMPBELL

Greetings, compas! Thanks for agreeing to talk with me. How would you like to introduce yourselves?

We should start by saying that we aren't a collective or formal group. We see ourselves more as a small group of women and nonconforming folks who are united by love, friendship, and the struggle for freedom, autonomy, mutual aid, and life against the dynamics of the current patriarchal state. We come from different anarchist positions and understand things differently in many cases, but we come together to do things jointly based on trust and the need to support our existence. We live in different parts of Mexico City, where we carry out most of our struggles.

Or to put it more poetically, we are women of all the fires, born in lands full of misery. Our lives are written in the wind, and our struggles, loves, longings, and desires to change this reality live in the sea, in the waves that beat furiously on the rocks that contain them. Each one of us has her own history, forged with smiles and tears. Each one walks alone, yet we are strengthened by our paths that unite with the libertarian idea. Our hair is interwoven, and we move forward together, trying to be a support, company, and embrace, despite everything, despite the uncertainty and this overwhelming moment, despite the repression.

Survivors of the terrible, only the wind will know the passion with which we once tried, at some moment, in some time, for humanity to be strengthened by the beauty of mutual cooperation and disobedience, without states, exchanges, competition, and capitalism.

Can you share with us how you came to your anarcha-feminist positions, how you found one another, and how you decided to form an affinity group?

Not all of us conceive of ourselves as anarcha-feminists. We're all anarchists, antiauthoritarians, and antipatriarchal, yet we've never arrived at having a joint identity. We came together based on the recognition that our own experiences have provided. We're a group that ranges from twenty to forty years old. As such, we don't all have the same paths, trajectories, or positions.

All of our stories are individual ones, and each one took its time. For some, what was important was the break with those men who we believed to be *compañeros*, but who betrayed, hurt, or snitched on us. With that we saw the crumbling of a discourse that was just that: a discourse—and one that didn't delve deeply into how patriarchy runs through us. For others of us, the reality of being women and feminized bodies was always present: how we weren't listened to or were made invisible in political anarchist spaces; that only masculine voices were respected; and that even when we sustained various activities and a large part of the anarchist movement in the city, we continued to be relegated to the margins and unheard. So we assumed a position of defense and necessary confrontation within the movement, which was exhausting, but that helped us to be in this place today, together.

In a way, we lost our fear of separatism [femme-only spaces], although we never stopped seeing that there are men in this world we would have to interact with. We found one another in mixed, anarchist movement spaces through

that recognition of oppressions intertwined with gender, class, schooling, age, and others. Sometimes this process of encounter was simultaneous to our male “compañeros” dropping like flies due to reports of sexual or physical aggression against other compañeras, which we could not deny or support. We were left in a space limited to mostly femme bodies where sisterhood and recognition occurred among peers and through our own experiences. We were left alone, or rather, we were defining our affinities with greater judgment—how great! We recovered our affinity as feminized bodies within the anarchist struggle. We recognized ourselves as survivors.

From there, the confluence of our actions keeps us together. We fully trust each other regarding our position with respect to the state and the police, for example. We also know that each one of us walks the path of self-management, and not hand in hand with NGOs [nongovernmental organizations] or human rights groups. This has given us much of the confidence and trust that we have—even though, we repeat, we don’t all come from the same anarchist background. We are united in our belief that our unwavering principles are an essential part of our ethics.

What are your perspectives on the resurgent feminist movement in so-called Mexico that began in 2018?

Although the “boom” in the feminist movement around the world became more visible in the media in 2018, with massive marches on March 8, strikes in universities in Chile, Mexico, Spain, France, Italy, the United States, and so on, we hold that

previous struggles can't be left out of this upsurge. Whether we like them or not, that includes approaches that we don't adopt—as seen, for example, in the proabortion discourses that push for legislative and constitutional changes. We believe that the struggle for the reappropriation of our bodies marks an indisputable precedent; in some countries, the voices of women and other bodies are beginning to be heard, and the struggle for the right to decide for ourselves is strengthening. And not just with respect to abortion but also with respect to individual decisions around sexual pleasure.

In the case of Mexico and specifically Mexico City, the struggle was obscured, as it was appropriated by the state and leftist government. The existence of a small oasis in this country that provides noncriminalized abortion and guarantees for gay persons loses force due to the state's interference in women's bodies. For us, it is not enough for the state to decriminalize abortion, we simply and plainly do not want it to be in charge of regulating our sexuality and controlling our bodies.

Yet it is true that in Mexico, we live in a very particular situation that makes this boom urgent and inevitable. We're talking about the fact that in our territory, more than eleven women are killed every day. A boom that, we must also recognize, arrived late. What are we referring to? To the murders on the northern border, in Ciudad Juárez, where the neologism *femicide* was born during the 1990s. Why didn't the feminist boom explode then? Why was the massive murder of working women on the border made invisible? Why were we not outraged by so many bodies found scattered around the desert?

It's true that those were different times, and many of us were children or had not yet been born. Nevertheless, we believe that it goes beyond that; that it has to do with women whose deaths did not “deserve” to cause indignation because they were socially and morally devalued by the hegemonic discourse. They were morally unacceptable for going out late at night, for going out alone. They were invalidated under the construction of bodies that simply do not matter: poor, from the periphery, and workers. The state was lucky that there wasn't enough social courage for the entire country to erupt at that point in the fight against death. Of course, at that time there were feminist collectives, academics, and some politicians who pointed out the need to look at this problem. But we have to recognize that the state won that fight when, to this day, we're not even able to remember the names of some of these women, when we find it hard to say that we didn't see or know what to do and that the state imposed its version of history. Unfortunately, the so-called feminist boom can be read as an urgency to respond to the femicides of less stigmatized bodies too—university students, professionals, middle-class mothers, and so on—and it is equally regrettable that even in this situation, the same categories are still used to determine who gets named and who doesn't, such as the poor, whores, workers, and single mothers.

We like to think that the feminist boom is not 2018 and nothing more, that women and feminized bodies don't only appear when the media and government decide to “recognize us.” We like to think that we can honor our ancestors by giving continuity to a struggle that we have joined, that we did not originate, and that doesn't answer to external agendas

or media attention but rather to an inevitable necessity where we fight to stay alive and not forget any of our dead.

Street actions get a lot of attention, but beyond those, how have you all been involved in the broader feminist movement?

As we've mentioned, we're not a formal group, much less a homogeneous one, and therefore the ways in which we're involved in the feminist movement are equally diverse. Some of us accompany the anticarceral struggle, in which some compañeras have faced charges after participating in feminist actions or protests; others of us are involved in graphic design, which continues to be necessary to visualize the struggle in the streets and online; others are committed to physical self-defense; others of us contribute through print publishing; others are committed to radio work; yet others are involved in the self-management of mental and physical health; others have started and sustain spaces of resistance such as bookstores, libraries, and cooperatives; and others are involved in solidarity economies. In general, we're all in search of life and survival, which basically robs us of a lot of time and energy.

Something that has become necessary to do together, though, has to do with the precarious conditions that most feminized bodies experience. In this regard, in 2020 [when the pandemic began], we saw how women were at greater risk due to the forced confinement because they were with their aggressors all the time. It was necessary to go out and call on women to fight for life and occupy the streets. We called for the

creation of small markets, flea markets, and bazaars by and for women—there were also trans and queer friends—with the idea of surviving by exchanging the products we made and to spread awareness about our self-managed projects.

The organizing that has occurred since the pandemic has allowed for the opening of furrows where we've seen self-management and rebellion flourish, and where we've brushed its fierce and faint breath with anarchy. That's how we found ourselves in the streets within a broader feminist movement. This is not easy because there are many positions and understandings within the movement that we don't necessarily coincide with, but we firmly believe that it is the differences that make us powerful.

We believe that maintaining a fierce and voracious critique against the state and capitalism permits us to not waste time betting on lost struggles—for instance, for the approval of laws that guarantee us security that in the majority of cases, are applied against us or help to criminalize what is already criminalized: the poor and racialized. But we also see that especially in our context, in certain struggles, our critique isn't applicable—for example, the struggles undertaken by the mothers of the disappeared or murdered. We don't see ourselves as having the ability or arrogance to tell them not to seek “justice” from within institutions or not to engage in dialogue with the representatives of power, because there are many cases where that is impossible to avoid. On the contrary, we see ourselves as deeply inspired by them, by their actions and paths. We believe that it is those collectives that nourish us and give us a lot of strength to continue.

How would you describe your own general orientation when taking action?

As we come from anarchism, and we have little by little been breaking with its classical vision of struggle, we understand that the struggle is found in all spaces, micro and macro. Therefore we don't see the need to wait for some moment to intervene in this or that; rather, we believe in the necessity of placing strain on the relations of domination—among them gender and sex—in the spaces that we inhabit: families, collectives, compañerxs, and ourselves. But we can't do that if we don't struggle to make it clear that we exist, to make a space for ourselves among the already established structures of struggle, dissent, and society in general. That same space gives us the opportunity to make our positions clear, to go forward as we would like to live and according to our principles—that is, outside the institutions, away from the state, through direct action, self-management, and autonomy.

Contrary to the fashion of “visibility,” we position ourselves through obscure and opaque daily action. Our action is our own manifesto.

Speaking of taking action, what has your experience of participating in feminist actions felt like, and what has it made possible that previously might have seemed foreclosed to you?

A point of street action that seemed impossible was the acceptance of the slogan “It was all of us” in a moment when the white feminist discourse seemed to prevail and the supposedly citizenly idea of the “good feminist” kept

appearing, almost to the point of them becoming the “police” of the demonstrations, which they actually did with a citizen call to protect women police officers during the protests under the argument that they were also “sisters” and “women.”¹ Currently, this slogan has been taken up by more and more compañeras in the street, and that is motivating, but we’d still like to transcend the slogan, and see criminalization and political correctness be challenged. Even so, hearing in unison “It was all of us,” and taking on the rage of others as our own, brings the body joy and reaffirms our presence in the streets.

We were not enlightened by 2018, so to speak. Many of us had already traveled a long road in the anticapitalist and autonomous struggle. It was anarchy that gave us the possibility to position ourselves from a place of autonomy and have a deep critique of what it is to struggle against the prevailing system of domination. This path has given us immense possibilities, necessary stumbles, and inevitable ruptures. We have learned that from all of this, self-criticism, pressures, and openings emerge. One opening was perhaps feminism, which has swayed us with respect to many questions, leading us to explore micro- and infrapolitical spaces. We approach feminism to a greater or lesser extent and make critical distinctions because we’re not convinced that there is only one feminism, nor do we try to pursue it.

To place the body [in action] is, in this sense, to assume our struggle from within ourselves and toward the outside. To embody [feminist] struggle is to realize that part of it

1. “Fuimos todas” (It was all of us) was a slogan used in response to the direct actions carried out during feminist mobilizations. Instead of pointing out those responsible for the actions to the police, everyone chanted their complicity.

corresponds with us, such that we suffer and are not indifferent to it. The somatic experience of this is indistinct from all we're doing. Sometimes we are literally a ticking time bomb, and sometimes we're bodies that are vulnerable. Sometimes we are filled with collective strength, and other times we feel like weirdos and that we're singled out to such a degree that we become tiny. Sometimes we laugh out loud, and at other times we simply weep in torrents.

What has it meant for you all to be an affinity group of feminist anarchists participating in the movement and being there for each other as opposed to going it alone?

We go alone and together. We believe in each other's individuality and the power of being together. But we know that not all of us want or can take on the same things, or have the same abilities, to mention a few differences. Even so, knowing that we exist as a rare and amorphous entity has given us security in moving about our city. We know that if one of us falls into the clutches of the police, there will be many of us outside the police station or prison entrance. We know that if one of us is sick, we'll have another one accompanying and caring for us. And we know that whatever idea we want to carry out, we can share it and find an echo among others.

In this way, we see that affinity cannot be measured entirely in political, strategic, and pragmatic terms but instead goes hand in hand with how it transcends and traverses love, friendship, and the struggle for survival. Are we in affinity? Yes, but we are also accomplices, sisters, friends, and compañeras. We don't just see ourselves as an affinity group or meet

because of that. We do it because we care about each other's lives too, because we like to laugh together, eat together, cook together, and believe that this is how we'll be able to survive. This encourages us a lot.

This is a broad question, but how do you articulate your own feminist anarchism?

As we mentioned, we have different roots, and sexuality has not affected each of us in the same way and that means many things. The older members of our group grew up in a fairly heterosexual anarchist scene, and therefore nonconformity was more opaque or simply did not appear. Of course, we have precious beings who are openly gay, but we understand, as the anarchist scene here is heterosexual, that those bodies escape from those spaces and construct their own. We recognize that we came late to many criticisms in this sense, and little by little we have learned to come out of the closet ourselves or deconstruct our own sex-gender identity, although we don't see it as the core that defines us.

Indeed, we have a critique of identity. Sometimes it means taking on an essence in order to act from a certain positionality, but most of the time it blurs a series of differences that to us, seem necessary in order to walk together. Perhaps before indicating our sexual identity, we start from the point of being “dark-skinned” or Indigenous descendants—an inevitable matter that situates us on the stage of antagonistic struggles and more so in an essentially racist country. We are also poor; we come from places and families that have always struggled for survival.

We've learned that we can't generalize, even though there are structures that affect all of us. And in that sense, we see ourselves as distant from some groups of trans and nonbinary people because we don't share conditions of class or race. As we have grown up marked by that racism, there are many nonconforming spaces where we don't feel comfortable, or where that feeling of being seen as strange or exotic accompanies us. Many queer and nonconforming spaces—not all—are part of the art world, and we experience them as white and hostile places. Likewise, some of these people take part in the struggle from institutional, academic, or NGO spaces—spaces denied to us and that we reject. Our reality sometimes doesn't allow us to understand their direction, and many times we feel we don't share the same concerns. Maybe it has to do with us still struggling in a broader sense by not abandoning the enormous desire to destroy the state and see capitalism fall. Sometimes, the nonconforming compass focus a lot on the construction of sex and gender and our positions begin to bore them. Ha ha.

We don't take identity as the starting point—even though a few of us are nonconforming—but rather the practice and ethics of our political actions, and anarchism on some occasions has given us the answer to feeling comfortable with our sexual and political differences. We think it would be much better if anarchism were nourished by questions of gender and sexuality, and displaced the machismo and heteronormativity that lives in its core, just as anarchism can bring important questions to the queer and nonbinary struggles. In our ideal dream, this mutual reciprocity goes hand in hand.

We also know that language is patriarchal, so we take on the responsibility of thinking of new ways of naming ourselves, and we are learning to do so.

We don't trust cis men. Our space does not seek to directly link with these *compañeros*. We don't reject mixed spaces of work or coexistence, but our primary affinity is with women and feminized bodies, as we mentioned earlier. The relationship in mixed groups has almost always felt to us like a utilitarian one stemming from supposed collective and political positions. We're not interested in feeling threatened by or vulnerable to patriarchal thoughts.

Since the break with cis men in our spaces, we have seen a conscious organizational advance from the perspective of anarcha-feminism. Our presence in the streets and taking on demands from an antipatriarchal perspective have been fundamental to seeing and being in solidarity with others in different latitudes. Understanding that women around so-called Latin America are being murdered as a result of being objectified as merchandise has given us the opportunity to create spaces for dialogue to understand our realities. The radicalization of demonstrations has called on us to denounce and act against disappearances, femicides, and antiabortion.

Our affinity is not only because we are women or nonconforming; it is because in our actions, we seek a radical rupture with traditional patriarchal impositions and we see with pleasure that this rage is spreading, beginning transcendent struggles. In some countries, this has been initiated by women, and has been able to stay active due to organizational persistence that emanates from our groups or individualities.

As for our aspirations, the least we try to do is walk toward life in a dignified way, and toward death in a meaningful way, even if it's for ourselves. The maximum: social revolution, the destruction of the capitalist-patriarchal system, the creation of other forms of living life, although we're not married to the idea that someday this will appear; rather, we're building it as much as we can in the here and now.



As for our informal affinity group, we have no names that define us. Only the knowledge that nature is everything and humanity is destruction. To change that is our path.

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WITH MY BACK TO THE WORLD, 1997

This year I turned my back to the world. I let language face the front. The parting felt like a death. The first person ran away like a horse. When the first person left, there was no second or third person as I had originally thought. All that remained was repetition. And blue things. This year I stopped shaking the rain off umbrellas and nothing bad happened.

The terror of this year was emptiness. But I learned that it's possible for a sentence to have no words. That the meaning of a word can exist without the word. That life can still occur without a mind. That emptiness still swarms without the world. That it can be disconnected from the wall and still light up. The best thing about emptiness is if you close your eyes in a field, you'll open your eyes in a field.

(Victoria Chang)

The Creation of Patriarchy

PATRIARCHY IS A HISTORIC CREATION formed by men and women in a process which took nearly 2500 years to its completion. In its earliest form patriarchy appeared as the archaic state. The basic unit of its organization was the patriarchal family, which both expressed and constantly generated its rules and values. We have seen how integrally definitions of gender affected the formation of the state. Let us briefly review the way in which gender became created, defined, and established.

The roles and behavior deemed appropriate to the sexes were expressed in values, customs, laws, and social roles. They also, and very importantly, were expressed in leading metaphors, which became part of the cultural construct and explanatory system.

The sexuality of women, consisting of their sexual and their reproductive capacities and services, was commodified even prior to the creation of Western civilization. The development of agriculture in the Neolithic period fostered the inter-tribal "exchange of women," not only as a means of avoiding incessant warfare by the cementing of marriage alliances but also because societies with more women could produce more children. In contrast to the economic needs of hunting/gathering societies, agriculturists could use the labor of children to increase production and accumulate surpluses. Men-as-a-group had rights in women which women-as-a-group did not have in men. Women themselves became a resource, acquired by men much as the land was acquired by men. Women were exchanged or

bought in marriages for the benefit of their families; later, they were conquered or bought in slavery, where their sexual services were part of their labor and where their children were the property of their masters. In every known society it was women of conquered tribes who were first enslaved, whereas men were killed. It was only after men had learned how to enslave the women of groups who could be defined as strangers, that they learned how to enslave men of those groups and, later, subordinates from within their own societies.

Thus, the enslavement of women, combining both racism and sexism, preceded the formation of classes and class oppression. Class differences were, at their very beginnings, expressed and constituted in terms of patriarchal relations. Class is not a separate construct from gender; rather, class is expressed in generic terms.

By the second millennium B.C. in Mesopotamian societies, the daughters of the poor were sold into marriage or prostitution in order to advance the economic interests of their families. The daughters of men of property could command a bride price, paid by the family of the groom to the family of the bride, which frequently enabled the bride's family to secure more financially advantageous marriages for their sons, thus improving the family's economic position. If a husband or father could not pay his debt, his wife and children could be used as pawns, becoming debt slaves to the creditor. These conditions were so firmly established by 1750 B.C. that Hammurabic law made a decisive improvement in the lot of debt pawns by limiting their terms of service to three years, where earlier it had been for life.

The product of this commodification of women—bride price, sale price, and children—was appropriated by men. It may very well represent the first accumulation of private property. The enslavement of women of conquered tribes became not only a status symbol for nobles and warriors, but it actually enabled the conquerors to acquire tangible wealth through selling or trading the product of the slaves' labor and their reproductive product, slave children.

Claude Lévi-Strauss, to whom we owe the concept of "the exchange of women," speaks of the reification of women, which occurred as its consequence. But it is not women who are reified and commodified, it is women's sexuality and reproductive capacity which is so treated. The distinction is important. Women never became "things," nor were they so perceived. Women, no matter how exploited and abused, retained their power to act and to choose to the

same, often very limited extent, as men of their group. But women *always and to this day* lived in a relatively greater state of un-freedom than did men. Since their sexuality, an aspect of their body, was controlled by others, women were not only actually disadvantaged but psychologically restrained in a very special way. For women, as for men of subordinate and oppressed groups, history consisted of their struggle for emancipation and freedom from necessity. But women struggled against different forms of oppression and dominance than did men, and their struggle, up to this time, has lagged behind that of men.

The first gender-defined social role for women was to be those who were exchanged in marriage transactions. The obverse gender role for men was to be those who did the exchanging or who defined the terms of the exchanges.

Another gender-defined role for women was that of the "stand-in" wife, which became established and institutionalized for women of elite groups. This role gave such women considerable power and privileges, but it depended on their attachment to elite men and was based, minimally, on their satisfactory performance in rendering these men sexual and reproductive services. If a woman failed to meet these demands, she was quickly replaced and thereby lost all her privileges and standing.

The gender-defined role of warrior led men to acquire power over men and women of conquered tribes. Such war-induced conquest usually occurred over people already differentiated from the victors by race, ethnicity, or simple tribal difference. In its ultimate origin, "difference" as a distinguishing mark between the conquered and the conquerors was based on the first clearly observable difference, that between the sexes. Men had learned how to assert and exercise power over people slightly different from themselves in the primary exchange of women. In so doing, men acquired the knowledge necessary to elevate "difference" of whatever kind into a criterion for dominance.

From its inception in slavery, class dominance took different forms for enslaved men and women: men were primarily exploited as workers; women were always exploited as workers, as providers of sexual services, and as reproducers. The historical record of every slave society offers evidence for this generalization. The sexual exploitation of lower-class women by upper-class men can be shown in antiquity, under feudalism, in the bourgeois households of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe, in the complex sex/race re-

lations between women of the colonized countries and their male colonizers—it is ubiquitous and pervasive. For women, sexual exploitation is the very mark of class exploitation.

At any given moment in history, each "class" is constituted of two distinct classes—men and women.

The class position of women became consolidated and actualized through their sexual relationships. It always was expressed within degrees of unfreedom on a spectrum ranging from the slave woman, whose sexual and reproductive capacity was commodified as she herself was; to the slave-concubine, whose sexual performance might elevate her own status or that of her children; then to the "free" wife, whose sexual and reproductive services to one man of the upper classes entitled her to property and legal rights. While each of these groups had vastly different obligations and privileges in regard to property, law, and economic resources, they shared the unfreedom of being sexually and reproductively controlled by men. We can best express the complexity of women's various levels of dependency and freedom by comparing each woman with her brother and considering how the sister's and brother's lives and opportunities would differ.

Class for men was and is based on their relationship to the means of production: those who owned the means of production could dominate those who did not. The owners of the means of production also acquired the commodity of female sexual services, both from women of their own class and from women of the subordinate classes. In Ancient Mesopotamia, in classical antiquity, and in slave societies, dominant males also acquired, as property, the product of the reproductive capacity of subordinate women—children, to be worked, traded, married off, or sold as slaves, as the case might be. For women, class is mediated through their sexual ties to a man. It is through the man that women have access to or are denied access to the means of production and to resources. It is through their sexual behavior that they gain access to class. "Respectable women" gain access to class through their fathers and husbands, but breaking the sexual rules can at once declass them. The gender definition of sexual "deviance" marks a woman as "not respectable," which in fact consigns her to the lowest class status possible. Women who withhold heterosexual services (such as single women, nuns, lesbians) are connected to the dominant man in their family of origin and through him gain access to resources. Or, alternatively, they are declassified. In some historical periods, convents and other enclaves for single women created some

sheltered space, in which such women could function and retain their respectability. But the vast majority of single women are, by definition, marginal and dependent on the protection of male kin. This is true throughout historical time up to the middle of the twentieth century in the Western world and still is true in most of the underdeveloped countries today. The group of independent, self-supporting women which exists in every society is small and usually highly vulnerable to economic disaster.

Economic oppression and exploitation are based as much on the commodification of female sexuality and the appropriation by men of women's labor power and her reproductive power as on the direct economic acquisition of resources and persons.

The archaic state in the Ancient Near East emerged in the second millennium B.C. from the twin roots of men's sexual dominance over women and the exploitation by some men of others. From its inception, the archaic state was organized in such a way that the dependence of male family heads on the king or the state bureaucracy was compensated for by their dominance over their families. Male family heads allocated the resources of society to their families the way the state allocated the resources of society to them. The control of male family heads over their female kin and minor sons was as important to the existence of the state as was the control of the king over his soldiers. This is reflected in the various compilations of Mesopotamian laws, especially in the large number of laws dealing with the regulation of female sexuality.

From the second millennium B.C. forward control over the sexual behavior of citizens has been a major means of social control in every state society. Conversely, class hierarchy is constantly reconstituted in the family through sexual dominance. Regardless of the political or economic system, the kind of personality which can function in a hierarchical system is created and nurtured within the patriarchal family.

The patriarchal family has been amazingly resilient and varied in different times and places. Oriental patriarchy encompassed polygamy and female enclosure in harems. Patriarchy in classical antiquity and in its European development was based upon monogamy, but in all its forms a double sexual standard, which disadvantages women, was part of the system. In modern industrial states, such as in the United States, property relations within the family develop along more egalitarian lines than those in which the father holds absolute power, yet the economic and sexual power relations within

the family do not necessarily change. In some cases, sexual relations are more egalitarian, while economic relations remain patriarchal; in other cases the pattern is reversed. In all cases, however, such changes within the family do not alter the basic male dominance in the public realm, in institutions and in government.

The family not merely mirrors the order in the state and educates its children to follow it, it also creates and constantly reinforces that order.

It should be noted that when we speak of relative improvements in the status of women in a given society, this frequently means only that we are seeing improvements in the degree in which their situation affords them opportunities to exert some leverage within the system of patriarchy. Where women have relatively more economic power, they are able to have somewhat more control over their lives than in societies where they have no economic power. Similarly, the existence of women's groups, associations, or economic networks serves to increase the ability of women to counteract the dictates of their particular patriarchal system. Some anthropologists and historians have called this relative improvement women's "freedom." Such a designation is illusory and unwarranted. Reforms and legal changes, while ameliorating the condition of women and an essential part of the process of emancipating them, will not basically change patriarchy. Such reforms need to be integrated within a vast cultural revolution in order to transform patriarchy and thus abolish it.

The system of patriarchy can function only with the cooperation of women. This cooperation is secured by a variety of means: gender indoctrination; educational deprivation; the denial to women of knowledge of their history; the dividing of women, one from the other, by defining "respectability" and "deviance" according to women's sexual activities; by restraints and outright coercion; by discrimination in access to economic resources and political power; and by awarding class privileges to conforming women.

For nearly four thousand years women have shaped their lives and acted under the umbrella of patriarchy, specifically a form of patriarchy best described as paternalistic dominance. The term describes the relationship of a dominant group, considered superior, to a subordinate group, considered inferior, in which the dominance is mitigated by mutual obligations and reciprocal rights. The dominated exchange submission for protection, unpaid labor for maintenance. In the patriarchal family, responsibilities and obligations are

not equally distributed among those to be protected: the male children's subordination to the father's dominance is temporary; it lasts until they themselves become heads of households. The subordination of female children and of wives is lifelong. Daughters can escape it only if they place themselves as wives under the dominance/protection of another man. The basis of paternalism is an unwritten contract for exchange: economic support and protection given by the male for subordination in all matters, sexual service, and unpaid domestic service given by the female. Yet the relationship frequently continues in fact and in law, even when the male partner has defaulted on his obligation.

It was a rational choice for women, under conditions of public powerlessness and economic dependency, to choose strong protectors for themselves and their children. Women always shared the class privileges of men of their class *as long as they were under "the protection" of a man*. For women, other than those of the lower classes, the "reciprocal agreement" went like this: in exchange for your sexual, economic, political, and intellectual subordination to men you may share the power of men of your class to exploit men and women of the lower class. In class society it is difficult for people who themselves have some power, however limited and circumscribed, to see themselves also as deprived and subordinated. Class and racial privileges serve to undercut the ability of women to see themselves as part of a coherent group, which, in fact, they are not, since women uniquely of all oppressed groups occur in all strata of the society. The formation of a group consciousness of women must proceed along different lines. That is the reason why theoretical formulations, which have been appropriate to other oppressed groups, are so inadequate in explaining and conceptualizing the subordination of women.

Women have for millennia participated in the process of their own subordination because they have been psychologically shaped so as to internalize the idea of their own inferiority. The unawareness of their own history of struggle and achievement has been one of the major means of keeping women subordinate.

The connectedness of women to familial structures made any development of female solidarity and group cohesiveness extremely problematic. Each individual woman was linked to her male kin in her family of origin through ties which implied specific obligations. Her indoctrination, from early childhood on, emphasized her obligation not only to make an economic contribution to the kin and

household but also to accept a marriage partner in line with family interests. Another way of saying this is to say that sexual control of women was linked to paternalistic protection and that, in the various stages of her life, she exchanged male protectors, but she never outgrew the childlike state of being subordinate and under protection.

Other oppressed classes and groups were impelled toward group consciousness by the very conditions of their subordinate status. The slave could clearly mark a line between the interests and bonds to his/her own family and the ties of subservience/protection linking him/her with the master. In fact, protection by slave parents of their own family against the master was one of the most important causes of slave resistance. "Free" women, on the other hand, learned early that their kin would cast them out, should they ever rebel against their dominance. In traditional and peasant societies there are many recorded instances of female family members tolerating and even participating in the chastisement, torture, even death of a girl who had transgressed against the family "honor." In Biblical times, the entire community gathered to stone the adulteress to death. Similar practices prevailed in Sicily, Greece, and Albania into the twentieth century. Bangladesh fathers and husbands cast out their daughters and wives who had been raped by invading soldiers, consigning them to prostitution. Thus, women were often forced to flee from one "protector" to the other, their "freedom" frequently defined only by their ability to manipulate between these protectors.

Most significant of all the impediments toward developing group consciousness for women was the absence of a tradition which would reaffirm the independence and autonomy of women at any period in the past. There had never been any woman or group of women who had lived without male protection, as far as most women knew. There had never been any group of persons like them who had done anything significant for themselves. Women had no history—so they were told; so they believed. Thus, ultimately, it was men's hegemony over the symbol system which most decisively disadvantaged women.

MALE HEGEMONY OVER the symbol system took two forms: educational deprivation of women and male monopoly on definition. The former happened inadvertently, more the consequence of class dominance and the accession of military elites to power. Throughout historical times, there have always been large loopholes for women of the elite classes, whose access to education was one of the major

aspects of their class privilege. But male dominance over definition has been deliberate and pervasive, and the existence of individual highly educated and creative women has, for nearly four thousand years, left barely an imprint on it.

We have seen how men appropriated and then transformed the major symbols of female power: the power of the Mother-Goddess and the fertility-goddesses. We have seen how men constructed theologies based on the counterfactual metaphor of male procreativity and redefined female existence in a narrow and sexually dependent way. We have seen, finally, how the very metaphors for gender have expressed the male as norm and the female as deviant; the male as whole and powerful, the female as unfinished, mutilated, and lacking in autonomy. On the basis of such symbolic constructs, embedded in Greek philosophy, the Judeo-Christian theologies, and the legal tradition on which Western civilization is built, men have explained the world in their own terms and defined the important questions so as to make themselves the center of discourse.

By making the term "man" subsume "woman" and arrogate to itself the representation of all of humanity, men have built a conceptual error of vast proportion into all of their thought. By taking the half for the whole, they have not only missed the essence of whatever they are describing, but they have distorted it in such a fashion that they cannot see it correctly. As long as men believed the earth to be flat, they could not understand its reality, its function, and its actual relationship to other bodies in the universe. As long as men believe their experiences, their viewpoint, and their ideas represent all of human experience and all of human thought, they are not only unable to define correctly in the abstract, but they are unable to describe reality accurately.

The androcentric fallacy, which is built into all the mental constructs of Western civilization, cannot be rectified simply by "adding women." What it demands for rectification is a radical restructuring of thought and analysis which once and for all accepts the fact that humanity consists in equal parts of men and women and that the experiences, thoughts, and insights of both sexes must be represented in every generalization that is made about human beings.

TODAY, HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT has for the first time created the necessary conditions by which large groups of women—finally, all women—can emancipate themselves from subordination. Since women's thought has been imprisoned in a confining and erroneous

patriarchal framework, the transforming of the consciousness of women about ourselves and our thought is a precondition for change.

We have opened this book with a discussion of the significance of history for human consciousness and psychic well-being. History gives meaning to human life and connects each life to immortality, but history has yet another function. In preserving the collective past and reinterpreting it to the present, human beings define their potential and explore the limits of their possibilities. We learn from the past not only what people before us did and thought and intended, but we also learn how they failed and erred. From the days of the Babylonian king-lists forward, the record of the past has been written and interpreted by men and has primarily focused on the deeds, actions, and intentions of males. With the advent of writing, human knowledge moved forward by tremendous leaps and at a much faster rate than ever before. While, as we have seen, women had participated in maintaining the oral tradition and religious and cultic functions in the preliterate period and for almost a millennium thereafter, their educational disadvantaging and their symbolic dethroning had a profound impact on their future development. The gap between the experience of those who could or might (in the case of lower-class males) participate in the creating of the symbol system and those who merely acted but did not interpret became increasingly greater.

In her brilliant work *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir focused on the historical end product of this development. She described man as autonomous and transcendent, woman as immanent. But her analysis ignored history. Explaining "why women lack concrete means for organizing themselves into a unit" in defense of their own interests, she stated flatly: "They [women] have no past, no history, no religion of their own."¹ De Beauvoir is right in her observation that woman has not "transcended," if by transcendence one means the definition and interpretation of human knowledge. But she was wrong in thinking that therefore woman has had no history. Two decades of Women's History scholarship have disproven this fallacy by unearthing an unending list of sources and uncovering and interpreting the hidden history of women. This process of creating a history of women is still ongoing and will need to continue for a long time. We are only beginning to understand its implications.

The myth that women are marginal to the creation of history and civilization has profoundly affected the psychology of women

and men. It has given men a skewed and essentially erroneous view of their place in human society and in the universe. For women, as shown in the case of Simone de Beauvoir, who surely is one of the best-educated women of her generation, history seemed for millennia to offer only negative lessons and no precedent for significant action, heroism, or liberating example. Most difficult of all was the seeming absence of a tradition which would reaffirm the independence and autonomy of women. It seemed that there had never been any woman or group of women who had lived without male protection. It is significant that all the important examples to the contrary were expressed in myth and fable: amazons, dragon-slayers, women with magic powers. But in real life, women had no history—so they were told and so they believed. And because they had no history they had no future alternatives.

In one sense, class struggle can be described as a struggle for the control of the symbol systems of a given society. The oppressed group, while it shares in and partakes of the leading symbols controlled by the dominant, also develops its own symbols. These become in time of revolutionary change, important forces in the creation of alternatives. Another way of saying this is that revolutionary ideas can be generated only when the oppressed have an alternative to the symbol and meaning system of those who dominate them. Thus, slaves living in an environment controlled by their masters and physically subject to the masters' total control, could maintain their humanity and at times set limits to the masters' power by holding on to their own "culture." Such a culture consisted of collective memories, carefully kept alive, of a prior state of freedom and of alternatives to the masters' ritual, symbols, and beliefs. What was decisive for the individual was the ability to identify him/herself with a state different from that of enslavement or subordination. Thus, all males, whether enslaved or economically or racially oppressed, could still identify with those like them—other males—who represented mastery over the symbol system. No matter how degraded, each male slave or peasant was like to the master in his relationship to God. This was not the case for women. Up to the time of the Protestant Reformation the vast majority of women could not confirm and strengthen their humanity by reference to other females in positions of intellectual authority and religious leadership. The few exceptional noblewomen and mystics, mostly cloistered nuns, were by their very rarity unlikely models for the ordinary woman.

Where there is no precedent, one cannot imagine alternatives to existing conditions. It is this feature of male hegemony which has been most damaging to women and has ensured their subordinate status for millennia. The denial to women of their history has reinforced their acceptance of the ideology of patriarchy and has undermined the individual woman's sense of self-worth. Men's version of history, legitimized as the "universal truth," has presented women as marginal to civilization and as the victim of historical process. To be so presented and to believe it is almost worse than being entirely forgotten. The picture is false, on both counts, as we now know, but women's progress through history has been marked by their struggle against this disabling distortion.

Moreover, for more than 2500 years women have been educationally disadvantaged and deprived of the conditions under which to develop abstract thought. Obviously thought is not based on sex; the capacity for thought is inherent in humanity; it can be fostered or discouraged, but it cannot ultimately be restrained. This is certainly true for thought generated by and concerned with daily living, the level of thought on which most men and women operate all their lives. But the generating of abstract thought and of new conceptual models—theory formation—is another matter. This activity depends on the individual thinker's education in the best of existing traditions and on the thinker's acceptance by a group of educated persons who, by criticism and interaction, provide "cultural prodding." It depends on having private time. Finally, it depends on the individual thinker being capable of absorbing such knowledge and then making a creative leap into a new ordering. Women, historically, have been unable to avail themselves of all of these necessary preconditions. Educational discrimination has disadvantaged them in access to knowledge; "cultural prodding," which is institutionalized in the upper reaches of the religious and academic establishments, has been unavailable to them. Universally, women of all classes had less leisure time than men, and, due to their child-rearing and family service function, what free time they had was generally not their own. The time of thinking men, their work and study time, has since the inception of Greek philosophy been respected as private. Like Aristotle's slaves, women "who with their bodies minister to the needs of life" have for more than 2500 years suffered the disadvantages of fragmented, constantly interrupted time. Finally, the kind of character development which makes for a mind capable of seeing new

connections and fashioning a new order of abstractions has been exactly the opposite of that required of women, trained to accept their subordinate and service-oriented position in society.

Yet there have always existed a tiny minority of privileged women, usually from the ruling elite, who had some access to the same kind of education as did their brothers. From the ranks of such women have come the intellectuals, the thinkers, the writers, the artists. It is such women, throughout history, who have been able to give us a female perspective, an alternative to androcentric thought. They have done so at a tremendous cost and with great difficulty.

Those women, who have been admitted to the center of intellectual activity of their day and especially in the past hundred years, academically trained women, have first had to learn "how to think like a man." In the process, many of them have so internalized that learning that they have lost the ability to conceive of alternatives. The way to think abstractly is to define precisely, to create models in the mind and generalize from them. Such thought, men have taught us, must be based on the exclusion of feelings. Women, like the poor, the subordinate, the marginals, have close knowledge of ambiguity, of feelings mixed with thought, of value judgments coloring abstractions. Women have always experienced the reality of self and community, known it, and shared it with each other. Yet, living in a world in which they are devalued, their experience bears the stigma of insignificance. Thus they have learned to mistrust their own experience and devalue it. What wisdom can there be in menses? What source of knowledge in the milk-filled breast? What food for abstraction in the daily routine of feeding and cleaning? Patriarchal thought has relegated such gender-defined experiences to the realm of the "natural," the non-transcendent. Women's knowledge becomes mere "intuition," women's talk becomes "gossip." Women deal with the irredeemably particular: they experience reality daily, hourly, in their service function (taking care of food and dirt); in their constantly interruptible time; their splintered attention. Can one generalize while the particular tugs at one's sleeve? He who makes symbols and explains the world and she who takes care of his bodily and psychic needs and of his children—the gulf between them is enormous.

Historically, thinking women have had to choose between living a woman's life, with its joys, dailiness, and immediacy, and living a man's life in order to think. The choice for generations of educated women has been cruel and costly. Others have deliberately chosen an existence outside of the sex-gender system, by living alone or

with other women. Some of the most significant advances in women's thought were given us by such women, whose personal struggle for an alternative mode of living infused their thinking. But such women, for most of historical time, have been forced to live on the margins of society; they were considered "deviant" and as such found it difficult to generalize from their experience to others and to win influence and approval. Why no female system-builders? Because one cannot think universals when one's self is excluded from the generic.

The social cost of having excluded women from the human enterprise of constructing abstract thought has never been reckoned. We can begin to understand the cost of it to thinking women when we accurately name what was done to us and describe, no matter how painful it may be, the ways in which we have participated in the enterprise. We have long known that rape has been a way of terrorizing us and keeping us in subjection. Now we also know that we have participated, although unwittingly, in the rape of our minds.

Creative women, writers and artists, have similarly struggled against a distorting reality. A literary canon, which defined itself by the Bible, the Greek classics, and Milton, would necessarily bury the significance and the meaning of women's literary work, as historians buried the activities of women. The effort to resurrect this meaning and to re-evaluate women's literary and artistic work is recent. Feminist literary criticism and poetics have introduced us to a reading of women's literature, which finds a hidden, deliberately "slant," yet powerful world-view. Through the reinterpretations of feminist literary critics we are uncovering among women writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a female language of metaphors, symbols, and myths. Their themes often are profoundly subversive of the male tradition. They feature criticism of the Biblical interpretation of Adam's fall; rejection of the goddess/witch dichotomy; projection or fear of the split self. The powerful aspect of woman's creativity becomes symbolized in heroines endowed with magical powers of goodness or in strong women who are banished to cellars or to live as "the madwoman in the attic." Others write in metaphors upgrading the confined domestic space, making it serve, symbolically as the world.²

For centuries, we find in the works of literary women a pathetic, almost desperate search for Women's History, long before historical studies as such exist. Nineteenth-century female writers avidly read the work of eighteenth-century female novelists; over and over again

they read the "lives" of queens, abbesses, poets, learned women. Early "compilers" searched the Bible and all historical sources to which they had access to create weighty tomes with female heroines.

Women's literary voices, successfully marginalized and trivialized by the dominant male establishment, nevertheless survived. The voices of anonymous women were present as a steady undercurrent in the oral tradition, in folksong and nursery rhymes, tales of powerful witches and good fairies. In stitchery, embroidery, and quilting women's artistic creativity expressed an alternate vision. In letters, diaries, prayers, and song the symbol-making force of women's creativity pulsed and persisted.

All of this work will be the subject of our inquiry in the next volume. How did women manage to survive under male cultural hegemony; what was their influence and impact on the patriarchal symbol system; how and under what conditions did they come to create an alternate, feminist world-view? These are the questions we will examine in order to chart the rise of feminist consciousness as a historical phenomenon.

Women and men have entered historical process under different conditions and have passed through it at different rates of speed. If recording, defining, and interpreting the past marks man's entry into history, this occurred for males in the third millennium B.C. It occurred for women (and only some of them) with a few notable exceptions in the nineteenth century. Until then, all History was for women pre-History.

Women's lack of knowledge of our own history of struggle and achievement has been one of the major means of keeping us subordinate. But even those of us already defining ourselves as feminist thinkers and engaged in the process of critiquing traditional systems of ideas are still held back by unacknowledged restraints embedded deeply within our psyches. Emergent woman faces a challenge to her very definition of self. How can her daring thought—naming the hitherto unnamed, asking the questions defined by all authorities as "non-existent"—how can such thought coexist with her life as woman? In stepping out of the constructs of patriarchal thought, she faces, as Mary Daly put it, "existential nothingness." And more immediately, she fears the threat of loss of communication with, approval by, and love from the man (or the men) in her life. Withdrawal of love and the designation of thinking women as "deviant" have historically been the means of discouraging women's intellec-

tual work. In the past, and now, many emergent women have turned to other women as love objects and reinforcers of self. Heterosexual feminists, too, have throughout the ages drawn strength from their friendships with women, from chosen celibacy, or from the separation of sex from love. No thinking man has ever been threatened in his self-definition and his love life as the price for his thinking. We should not underestimate the significance of that aspect of gender control as a force restraining women from full participation in the process of creating thought systems. Fortunately, for this generation of educated women, liberation has meant the breaking of this emotional hold and the conscious reinforcement of our selves through the support of other women.

Nor is this the end of our difficulties. In line with our historic gender-conditioning, women have aimed to please and have sought to avoid disapproval. This is poor preparation for making the leap into the unknown required of those who fashion new systems. Moreover, each emergent woman has been schooled in patriarchal thought. We each hold at least one great man in our heads. The lack of knowledge of the female past has deprived us of female heroines, a fact which is only recently being corrected through the development of Women's History. So, for a long time, thinking women have refurbished the idea systems created by men, engaging in a dialogue with the great male minds in their heads. Elizabeth Cady Stanton took on the Bible, the Church fathers, the founders of the American republic. Kate Millet argued with Freud, Norman Mailer, and the liberal literary establishment; Simone de Beauvoir with Sartre, Marx, and Camus; all Marxist-Feminists are in a dialogue with Marx and Engels and some also with Freud. In this dialogue woman intends merely to accept whatever she finds useful to her in the great man's system. But in these systems woman—as a concept, a collective entity, an individual—is marginal or subsumed.

In accepting such dialogue, thinking woman stays far longer than is useful within the boundaries or the question-setting defined by the "great men." And just as long as she does, the source of new insight is closed to her.

Revolutionary thought has always been based on upgrading the experience of the oppressed. The peasant had to learn to trust in the significance of his life experience before he could dare to challenge the feudal lords. The industrial worker had to become "class-conscious," the Black "race-conscious" before liberating thought could

develop into revolutionary theory. The oppressed have acted and learned simultaneously—the process of becoming the newly conscious person or group is in itself liberating. So with women.

The shift in consciousness we must make occurs in two steps: we must, at least for a time, be woman-centered. We must, as far as possible, leave patriarchal thought behind.

TO BE WOMAN-CENTERED MEANS: asking if women were central to this argument, how would it be defined? It means ignoring all evidence of women's marginality, because, even where women appear to be marginal, this is the result of patriarchal intervention; frequently also it is merely an appearance. The basic assumption should be that it is inconceivable for anything ever to have taken place in the world in which women were not involved, except if they were prevented from participation through coercion and repression.

When using methods and concepts from traditional systems of thought, it means using them from the vantage point of the centrality of women. Women cannot be put into the empty spaces of patriarchal thought and systems—in moving to the center, they transform the system.

TO STEP OUTSIDE OF PATRIARCHAL THOUGHT MEANS: Being skeptical toward every known system of thought; being critical of all assumptions, ordering values and definitions.

Testing one's statement by trusting our own, the female experience. Since such experience has usually been trivialized or ignored, it means overcoming the deep-seated resistance within ourselves toward accepting ourselves and our knowledge as valid. It means getting rid of the great men in our heads and substituting for them ourselves, our sisters, our anonymous foremothers.

Being critical toward our own thought, which is, after all, thought trained in the patriarchal tradition. Finally, it means developing intellectual courage, the courage to stand alone, the courage to reach farther than our grasp, the courage to risk failure. Perhaps the greatest challenge to thinking women is the challenge to move from the desire for safety and approval to the most "unfeminine" quality of all—that of intellectual arrogance, the supreme hubris which asserts to itself the right to reorder the world. The hubris of the god-makers, the hubris of the male system-builders.

The system of patriarchy is a historic construct; it has a beginning; it will have an end. Its time seems to have nearly run its

course—it no longer serves the needs of men or women and in its inextricable linkage to militarism, hierarchy, and racism it threatens the very existence of life on earth.

What will come after, what kind of structure will be the foundation for alternate forms of social organization we cannot yet know. We are living in an age of unprecedented transformation. We are in the process of becoming. But we already know that woman's mind, at last unfettered after so many millennia, will have its share in providing vision, ordering, solutions. Women at long last are demanding, as men did in the Renaissance, the right to explain, the right to define. Women, in thinking themselves out of patriarchy add transforming insights to the process of redefinition.

As long as both men and women regard the subordination of half the human race to the other as "natural," it is impossible to envision a society in which differences do not connote either dominance or subordination. The feminist critique of the patriarchal edifice of knowledge is laying the groundwork for a correct analysis of reality, one which at the very least can distinguish the whole from a part. Women's History, the essential tool in creating feminist consciousness in women, is providing the body of experience against which new theory can be tested and the ground on which women of vision can stand.

A feminist world-view will enable women and men to free their minds from patriarchal thought and practice and at last to build a world free of dominance and hierarchy, a world that is truly human.

Everything is Waiting for You
By David Whyte

After Derek Mahon

Your great mistake is to act the drama
as if you were alone. As if life
were a progressive and cunning crime
with no witness to the tiny hidden
transgressions. To feel abandoned is to deny
the intimacy of your surroundings. Surely,
even you, at times, have felt the grand array;
the swelling presence, and the chorus, crowding
out your solo voice. You must note
the way the soap dish enables you,
or the window latch grants you freedom.
Alertness is the hidden discipline of familiarity.
The stairs are your mentor of things
to come, the doors have always been there
to frighten you and invite you,
and the tiny speaker in the phone
is your dream-ladder to divinity.

Put down the weight of your aloneness and ease into the
conversation. The kettle is singing
even as it pours you a drink, the cooking pots
have left their arrogant aloofness and
seen the good in you at last. All the birds
and creatures of the world are unutterably
themselves. Everything is waiting for you.

VIEWPOINT

The Laugh of the Medusa

Hélène Cixous

Translated by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen

I shall speak about women's writing: about *what it will do*. Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies—for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement.

The future must no longer be determined by the past. I do not deny that the effects of the past are still with us. But I refuse to strengthen them by repeating them, to confer upon them an irremovability the equivalent of destiny, to confuse the biological and the cultural. Anticipation is imperative.

Since these reflections are taking shape in an area just on the point of being discovered, they necessarily bear the mark of our time—a time during which the new breaks away from the old, and, more precisely, the (feminine) new from the old (*la nouvelle de l'ancien*). Thus, as there are no grounds for establishing a discourse, but rather an arid millennial ground to break, what I say has at least two sides and two aims: to break up, to destroy; and to foresee the unforeseeable, to project.

I write this as a woman, toward women. When I say “woman,” I'm speaking of woman in her inevitable struggle against conventional man; and of a universal woman subject who must bring women to their senses

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and to their meaning in history. But first it must be said that in spite of the enormity of the repression that has kept them in the “dark”—that dark which people have been trying to make them accept as their attribute—there is, at this time, no general woman, no one typical woman. What they have *in common* I will say. But what strikes me is the infinite richness of their individual constitutions: you can’t talk about a female sexuality, uniform, homogeneous, classifiable into codes—any more than you can talk about one unconscious resembling another. Women’s imaginary is inexhaustible, like music, painting, writing: their stream of phantasms is incredible.

I have been amazed more than once by a description a woman gave me of a world all her own which she had been secretly haunting since early childhood. A world of searching, the elaboration of a knowledge, on the basis of a systematic experimentation with the bodily functions, a passionate and precise interrogation of her erotogeneity. This practice, extraordinarily rich and inventive, in particular as concerns masturbation, is prolonged or accompanied by a production of forms, a veritable aesthetic activity, each stage of rapture inscribing a resonant vision, a composition, something beautiful. Beauty will no longer be forbidden.

I wished that that woman would write and proclaim this unique empire so that other women, other unacknowledged sovereigns, might exclaim: I, too, overflow; my desires have invented new desires, my body knows unheard-of songs. Time and again I, too, have felt so full of luminous torrents that I could burst—burst with forms much more beautiful than those which are put up in frames and sold for a stinking fortune. And I, too, said nothing, showed nothing; I didn’t open my mouth, I didn’t repaint my half of the world. I was ashamed. I was afraid, and I swallowed my shame and my fear. I said to myself: You are mad! What’s the meaning of these waves, these floods, these outbursts? Where is the ebullient, infinite woman who, immersed as she was in her naiveté, kept in the dark about herself, led into self-disdain by the great arm of parental-conjugal phallocentrism, hasn’t been ashamed of her strength? Who, surprised and horrified by the fantastic tumult of her drives (for she was made to believe that a well-adjusted normal woman has a . . . divine composure), hasn’t accused herself of being a monster? Who, feeling a funny desire stirring inside her (to sing, to write, to dare to speak, in short, to bring out something new), hasn’t thought she was sick? Well, her shameful sickness is that she resists death, that she makes trouble.

And why don’t you write? Write! Writing is for you, you are for you; your body is yours, take it. I know why you haven’t written. (And why I didn’t write before the age of twenty-seven.) Because writing is at once too high, too great for you, it’s reserved for the great—that is, for “great men”; and it’s “silly.” Besides, you’ve written a little, but in secret. And it

wasn't good, because it was in secret, and because you punished yourself for writing, because you didn't go all the way; or because you wrote, irresistibly, as when we would masturbate in secret, not to go further, but to attenuate the tension a bit, just enough to take the edge off. And then as soon as we come, we go and make ourselves feel guilty—so as to be forgiven; or to forget, to bury it until the next time.

Write, let no one hold you back, let nothing stop you: not man; not the imbecilic capitalist machinery, in which publishing houses are the crafty, obsequious relayers of imperatives handed down by an economy that works against us and off our backs; and not *yourself*. Smug-faced readers, managing editors, and big bosses don't like the true texts of women—female-sexed texts. That kind scares them.

I write woman: woman must write woman. And man, man. So only an oblique consideration will be found here of man; it's up to him to say where his masculinity and femininity are at: this will concern us once men have opened their eyes and seen themselves clearly.¹

Now women return from afar, from always: from "without," from the heath where witches are kept alive; from below, from beyond "culture"; from their childhood which men have been trying desperately to make them forget, condemning it to "eternal rest." The little girls and their "ill-mannered" bodies immured, well-preserved, intact unto themselves, in the mirror. Frigidified. But are they ever seething underneath! What an effort it takes—there's no end to it—for the sex cops to bar their threatening return. Such a display of forces on both sides that the struggle has for centuries been immobilized in the trembling equilibrium of a deadlock.

Here they are, returning, arriving over and again, because the unconscious is impregnable. They have wandered around in circles, confined to the narrow room in which they've been given a deadly brainwashing. You can incarcerate them, slow them down, get away with the old Apartheid routine, but for a time only. As soon as they begin to speak, at the same time as they're taught their name, they can be taught that their territory is black: because you are Africa, you are black. Your

1. Men still have everything to say about their sexuality, and everything to write. For what they have said so far, for the most part, stems from the opposition activity/passivity, from the power relation between a fantasized obligatory virility meant to invade, to colonize, and the consequential phantasm of woman as a "dark continent" to penetrate and to "pacify." (We know what "pacify" means in terms of scotomizing the other and misrecognizing the self.) Conquering her, they've made haste to depart from her borders, to get out of sight, out of body. The way man has of getting out of himself and into her whom he takes not for the other but for his own, deprives him, he knows, of his own bodily territory. One can understand how man, confusing himself with his penis and rushing in for the attack, might feel resentment and fear of being "taken" by the woman, of being lost in her, absorbed, or alone.

continent is dark. Dark is dangerous. You can't see anything in the dark, you're afraid. Don't move, you might fall. Most of all, don't go into the forest. And so we have internalized this horror of the dark.

Men have committed the greatest crime against women. Insidiously, violently, they have led them to hate women, to be their own enemies, to mobilize their immense strength against themselves, to be the executors of their virile needs. They have made for women an antinarcissism! A narcissism which loves itself only to be loved for what women haven't got! They have constructed the infamous logic of antilove.

We the precocious, we the repressed of culture, our lovely mouths gagged with pollen, our wind knocked out of us, we the labyrinths, the ladders, the trampled spaces, the bebies—we are black and we are beautiful.

We're stormy, and that which is ours breaks loose from us without our fearing any debilitation. Our glances, our smiles, are spent; laughs exude from all our mouths; our blood flows and we extend ourselves without ever reaching an end; we never hold back our thoughts, our signs, our writing; and we're not afraid of lacking.

What happiness for us who are omitted, brushed aside at the scene of inheritances; we inspire ourselves and we expire without running out of breath, we are everywhere!

From now on, who, if we say so, can say no to us? We've come back from always.

It is time to liberate the New Woman from the Old by coming to know her—by loving her for getting by, for getting beyond the Old without delay, by going out ahead of what the New Woman will be, as an arrow quits the bow with a movement that gathers and separates the vibrations musically, in order to be more than her self.

I say that we must, for, with a few rare exceptions, there has not yet been any writing that inscribes femininity; exceptions so rare, in fact, that, after plowing through literature across languages, cultures, and ages,² one can only be startled at this vain scouting mission. It is well known that the number of women writers (while having increased very slightly from the nineteenth century on) has always been ridiculously small. This is a useless and deceptive fact unless from their species of female writers we do not first deduct the immense majority whose workmanship is in no way different from male writing, and which either obscures women or reproduces the classic representations of women (as sensitive—intuitive—dreamy, etc.)³

2. I am speaking here only of the place "reserved" for women by the Western world.

3. Which works, then, might be called feminine? I'll just point out some examples: one would have to give them full readings to bring out what is pervasively feminine in their significance. Which I shall do elsewhere. In France (have you noted our infinite poverty in this field?—the Anglo-Saxon countries have shown resources of distinctly greater consequence), leafing through what's come out of the twentieth century—and it's not much—the

Let me insert here a parenthetical remark. I mean it when I speak of male writing. I maintain unequivocally that there is such a thing as *marked* writing; that, until now, far more extensively and repressively than is ever suspected or admitted, writing has been run by a libidinal and cultural—hence political, typically masculine—economy; that this is a locus where the repression of women has been perpetuated, over and over, more or less consciously, and in a manner that's frightening since it's often hidden or adorned with the mystifying charms of fiction; that this locus has grossly exaggerated all the signs of sexual opposition (and not sexual difference), where woman has never *her* turn to speak—this being all the more serious and unpardonable in that writing is precisely *the very possibility of change*, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures.

Nearly the entire history of writing is confounded with the history of reason, of which it is at once the effect, the support, and one of the privileged alibis. It has been one with the phallogocentric tradition. It is indeed that same self-admiring, self-stimulating, self-congratulatory phallogocentrism.

With some exceptions, for there have been failures—and if it weren't for them, I wouldn't be writing (I-woman, escapee)—in that enormous machine that has been operating and turning out its "truth" for centuries. There have been poets who would go to any lengths to slip something by at odds with tradition—men capable of loving love and hence capable of loving others and of wanting them, of imagining the woman who would hold out against oppression and constitute herself as a superb, equal, hence "impossible" subject, untenable in a real social framework. Such a woman the poet could desire only by breaking the codes that negate her. Her appearance would necessarily bring on, if not revolution—for the bastion was supposed to be immutable—at least harrowing explosions. At times it is in the fissure caused by an earthquake, through that radical mutation of things brought on by a material upheaval when every structure is for a moment thrown off balance and an ephemeral wildness sweeps order away, that the poet slips something by, for a brief span, of woman. Thus did Kleist expend himself in his yearning for the existence of sister-lovers, maternal daughters, mother-sisters, who never hung their heads in shame. Once the palace of magistrates is restored, it's time to pay: immediate bloody death to the uncontrollable elements.

But only the poets—not the novelists, allies of representationalism. Because poetry involves gaining strength through the unconscious and

only inscriptions of femininity that I have seen were by Colette, Marguerite Duras, . . . and Jean Genêt.

because the unconscious, that other limitless country, is the place where the repressed manage to survive: women, or as Hoffmann would say, fairies.

She must write her self, because this is the invention of a *new insurgent* writing which, when the moment of her liberation has come, will allow her to carry out the indispensable ruptures and transformations in her history, first at two levels that cannot be separated.

a) Individually. By writing her self, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display—the ailing or dead figure, which so often turns out to be the nasty companion, the cause and location of inhibitions. Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time.

Write your self. Your body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth. Our naphtha will spread, throughout the world, without dollars—black or gold—nonassessed values that will change the rules of the old game.

To write. An act which will not only “realize” the decensored relation of woman to her sexuality, to her womanly being, giving her access to her native strength; it will give her back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal; it will tear her away from the superegoized structure in which she has always occupied the place reserved for the guilty (guilty of everything, guilty at every turn: for having desires, for not having any; for being frigid, for being “too hot”; for not being both at once; for being too motherly and not enough; for having children and for not having any; for nursing and for not nursing . . .)—tear her away by means of this research, this job of analysis and illumination, this emancipation of the marvelous text of her self that she must urgently learn to speak. A woman without a body, dumb, blind, can’t possibly be a good fighter. She is reduced to being the servant of the militant male, his shadow. We must kill the false woman who is preventing the live one from breathing. Inscribe the breath of the whole woman.

b) An act that will also be marked by woman’s *seizing* the occasion to *speak*, hence her shattering entry into history, which has always been based on *her suppression*. To write and thus to forge for herself the antilogos weapon. To become *at will* the taker and initiator, for her own right, in every symbolic system, in every political process.

It is time for women to start scoring their feats in written and oral language.

Every woman has known the torment of getting up to speak. Her heart racing, at times entirely lost for words, ground and language slipping away—that’s how daring a feat, how great a transgression it is for a woman to speak—even just open her mouth—in public. A double distress, for even if she transgresses, her words fall almost always upon the

deaf male ear, which hears in language only that which speaks in the masculine.

It is by writing, from and toward women, and by taking up the challenge of speech which has been governed by the phallus, that women will confirm women in a place other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is, in a place other than silence. Women should break out of the snare of silence. They shouldn't be conned into accepting a domain which is the margin or the harem.

Listen to a woman speak at a public gathering (if she hasn't painfully lost her wind). She doesn't "speak," she throws her trembling body forward; she lets go of herself, she flies; all of her passes into her voice, and it's with her body that she vitally supports the "logic" of her speech. Her flesh speaks true. She lays herself bare. In fact, she physically materializes what she's thinking; she signifies it with her body. In a certain way she *inscribes* what she's saying, because she doesn't deny her drives the intractable and impassioned part they have in speaking. Her speech, even when "theoretical" or political, is never simple or linear or "objectified," generalized: she draws her story into history.

There is not that scission, that division made by the common man between the logic of oral speech and the logic of the text, bound as he is by his antiquated relation—servile, calculating—to mastery. From which proceeds the niggardly lip service which engages only the tiniest part of the body, plus the mask.

In women's speech, as in their writing, that element which never stops resonating, which, once we've been permeated by it, profoundly and imperceptibly touched by it, retains the power of moving us—that element is the song: first music from the first voice of love which is alive in every woman. Why this privileged relationship with the voice? Because no woman stockpiles as many defenses for countering the drives as does a man. You don't build walls around yourself, you don't forego pleasure as "wisely" as he. Even if phallic mystification has generally contaminated good relationships, a woman is never far from "mother" (I mean outside her role functions: the "mother" as nonname and as source of goods). There is always within her at least a little of that good mother's milk. She writes in white ink.

Woman for women.—There always remains in woman that force which produces/is produced by the other—in particular, the other woman. *In* her, matrix, cradler; herself giver as her mother and child; she is her own sister-daughter. You might object, "What about she who is the hysterical offspring of a bad mother?" Everything will be changed once woman gives woman to the other woman. There is hidden and always ready in woman the source; the locus for the other. The mother, too, is a metaphor. It is necessary and sufficient that the best of herself be given to woman by another woman for her to be able to love herself and return in love the body that was "born" to her. Touch me, caress me,

you the living no-name, give me my self as myself. The relation to the “mother,” in terms of intense pleasure and violence, is curtailed no more than the relation to childhood (the child that she was, that she is, that she makes, remakes, undoes, there at the point where, the same, she others herself). Text: my body—shot through with streams of song; I don’t mean the overbearing, clutchy “mother” but, rather, what touches you, the equivocal that affects you, fills your breast with an urge to come to language and launches your force; the rhythm that laughs you; the intimate recipient who makes all metaphors possible and desirable; body (body? bodies?), no more describable than god, the soul, or the Other; that part of you that leaves a space between yourself and urges you to inscribe in language your woman’s style. In women there is always more or less of the mother who makes everything all right, who nourishes, and who stands up against separation; a force that will not be cut off but will knock the wind out of the codes. We will rethink womankind beginning with every form and every period of her body. The Americans remind us, “We are all Lesbians”; that is, don’t denigrate woman, don’t make of her what men have made of you.

Because the “economy” of her drives is prodigious, she cannot fail, in seizing the occasion to speak, to transform directly and indirectly *all* systems of exchange based on masculine thrift. Her libido will produce far more radical effects of political and social change than some might like to think.

Because she arrives, vibrant, over and again, we are at the beginning of a new history, or rather of a process of becoming in which several histories intersect with one another. As subject for history, woman always occurs simultaneously in several places. Woman un-thinks⁴ the unifying, regulating history that homogenizes and channels forces, herding contradictions into a single battlefield. In woman, personal history blends together with the history of all women, as well as national and world history. As a militant, she is an integral part of all liberations. She must be farsighted, not limited to a blow-by-blow interaction. She foresees that her liberation will do more than modify power relations or toss the ball over to the other camp; she will bring about a mutation in human relations, in thought, in all praxis: hers is not simply a class struggle, which she carries forward into a much vaster movement. Not that in order to be a woman-in-struggle(s) you have to leave the class struggle or repudiate it; but you have to split it open, spread it out, push it forward, fill it with the fundamental struggle so as to prevent the class struggle, or any other struggle for the liberation of a class or people, from operating as a form of repression, pretext for postponing the inevitable, the staggering alteration in power relations and in the pro-

4. “*Dé-pense*,” a neologism formed on the verb *penser*, hence “unthinks,” but also “spends” (from *dépenser*) (translator’s note).

duction of individualities. This alteration is already upon us—in the United States, for example, where millions of night crawlers are in the process of undermining the family and disintegrating the whole of American sociality.

The new history is coming; it's not a dream, though it does extend beyond men's imagination, and for good reason. It's going to deprive them of their conceptual orthopedics, beginning with the destruction of their enticement machine.

It is impossible to *define* a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded—which doesn't mean that it doesn't exist. But it will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallogocentric system; it does and will take place in areas other than those subordinated to philosophico-theoretical domination. It will be conceived of only by subjects who are breakers of automatisms, by peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugate.

Hence the necessity to affirm the flourishes of this writing, to give form to its movement, its near and distant byways. Bear in mind to begin with (1) that sexual opposition, which has always worked for man's profit to the point of reducing writing, too, to his laws, is only a historico-cultural limit. There is, there will be more and more rapidly pervasive now, a fiction that produces irreducible effects of femininity. (2) That it is through ignorance that most readers, critics, and writers of both sexes hesitate to admit or deny outright the possibility or the pertinence of a distinction between feminine and masculine writing. It will usually be said, thus disposing of sexual difference: either that all writing, to the extent that it materializes, is feminine; or, inversely—but it comes to the same thing—that the act of writing is equivalent to masculine masturbation (and so the woman who writes cuts herself out a paper penis); or that writing is bisexual, hence neuter, which again does away with differentiation. To admit that writing is precisely working (in) the in-between, inspecting the process of the same and of the other without which nothing can live, undoing the work of death—to admit this is first to want the two, as well as both, the ensemble of the one and the other, not fixed in sequences of struggle and expulsion or some other form of death but infinitely dynamized by an incessant process of exchange from one subject to another. A process of different subjects knowing one another and beginning one another anew only from the living boundaries of the other: a multiple and inexhaustible course with millions of encounters and transformations of the same into the other and into the in-between, from which woman takes her forms (and man, in his turn; but that's his other history).

In saying "bisexual, hence neuter," I am referring to the classic conception of bisexuality, which, squashed under the emblem of castra-

tion fear and along with the fantasy of a “total” being (though composed of two halves), would do away with the difference experienced as an operation incurring loss, as the mark of dreaded scitility.

To this self-effacing, merger-type bisexuality, which would conjure away castration (the writer who puts up his sign: “bisexual written here, come and see,” when the odds are good that it’s neither one nor the other), I oppose the *other bisexuality* on which every subject not enclosed in the false theater of phallogocentric representationalism has founded his/her erotic universe. Bisexuality: that is, each one’s location in self (*répérage en soi*) of the presence—variously manifest and insistent according to each person, male or female—of both sexes, nonexclusion either of the difference or of one sex, and, from this “self-permission,” multiplication of the effects of the inscription of desire, over all parts of my body and the other body.

Now it happens that at present, for historico-cultural reasons, it is women who are opening up to and benefiting from this vatic bisexuality which doesn’t annul differences but stirs them up, pursues them, increases their number. In a certain way, “woman is bisexual”; man—it’s a secret to no one—being poised to keep glorious phallic monosexuality in view. By virtue of affirming the primacy of the phallus and of bringing it into play, phallogocentric ideology has claimed more than one victim. As a woman, I’ve been clouded over by the great shadow of the scepter and been told: idolize it, that which you cannot brandish. But at the same time, man has been handed that grotesque and scarcely enviable destiny (just imagine) of being reduced to a single idol with clay balls. And consumed, as Freud and his followers note, by a fear of being a woman! For, if psychoanalysis was constituted from woman, to repress femininity (and not so successful a repression at that—men have made it clear), its account of masculine sexuality is now hardly refutable; as with all the “human” sciences, it reproduces the masculine view, of which it is one of the effects.

Here we encounter the inevitable man-with-rock, standing erect in his old Freudian realm, in the way that, to take the figure back to the point where linguistics is conceptualizing it “anew,” Lacan preserves it in the sanctuary of the phallos (ϕ) “sheltered” from *castration’s lack*! Their “symbolic” exists, it holds power—we, the sowers of disorder, know it only too well. But we are in no way obliged to deposit our lives in their banks of lack, to consider the constitution of the subject in terms of a drama manglingly restaged, to reinstate again and again the religion of the father. Because we don’t want that. We don’t fawn around the supreme hole. We have no womanly reason to pledge allegiance to the negative. The feminine (as the poets suspected) affirms: “. . . And yes,” says Molly, carrying *Ulysses* off beyond any book and toward the new writing; “I said yes, I will Yes.”

The Dark Continent is neither dark nor unexplorable.—It is still unex-

plored only because we've been made to believe that it was too dark to be explorable. And because they want to make us believe that what interests us is the white continent, with its monuments to Lack. And we believed. They riveted us between two horrifying myths: between the Medusa and the abyss. That would be enough to set half the world laughing, except that it's still going on. For the phallogocentric sublation⁵ is with us, and it's militant, regenerating the old patterns, anchored in the dogma of castration. They haven't changed a thing: they've theorized their desire for reality! Let the priests tremble, we're going to show them our sexts!

Too bad for them if they fall apart upon discovering that women aren't men, or that the mother doesn't have one. But isn't this fear convenient for them? Wouldn't the worst be, isn't the worst, in truth, that women aren't castrated, that they have only to stop listening to the Sirens (for the Sirens were men) for history to change its meaning? You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing.

Men say that there are two unrepresentable things: death and the feminine sex. That's because they need femininity to be associated with death; it's the jitters that gives them a hard-on! for themselves! They need to be afraid of us. Look at the trembling Perseuses moving backward toward us, clad in apotropes. What lovely backs! Not another minute to lose. Let's get out of here.

Let's hurry: the continent is not impenetrably dark. I've been there often. I was overjoyed one day to run into Jean Genêt. It was in *Pompes funèbres*.⁶ He had come there led by his Jean. There are some men (all too few) who aren't afraid of femininity.

Almost everything is yet to be written by women about femininity: about their sexuality, that is, its infinite and mobile complexity, about their eroticization, sudden turn-ons of a certain miniscule-immense area of their bodies; not about destiny, but about the adventure of such and such a drive, about trips, crossings, trudges, abrupt and gradual awakenings, discoveries of a zone at one time timorous and soon to be forthright. A woman's body, with its thousand and one thresholds of ardor—once, by smashing yokes and censors, she lets it articulate the profusion of meanings that run through it in every direction—will make the old single-grooved mother tongue reverberate with more than one language.

We've been turned away from our bodies, shamefully taught to ignore them, to strike them with that stupid sexual modesty; we've been made victims of the old fool's game: each one will love the other sex. I'll give you your body and you'll give me mine. But who are the men who give women the body that women blindly yield to them? Why so few

5. Standard English term for the Hegelian *Aufhebung*, the French *la relève*.

6. Jean Genêt, *Pompes funèbres* (Paris, 1948), p. 185.

texts? Because so few women have as yet won back their body. Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reserve-discourse, including the one that laughs at the very idea of pronouncing the word "silence," the one that, aiming for the impossible, stops short before the word "impossible" and writes it as "the end."

Such is the strength of women that, sweeping away syntax, breaking that famous thread (just a tiny little thread, they say) which acts for men as a surrogate umbilical cord, assuring them—otherwise they couldn't come—that the old lady is always right behind them, watching them make phallus, women will go right up to the impossible.

When the "repressed" of their culture and their society returns, it's an explosive, *utterly* destructive, staggering return, with a force never yet unleashed and equal to the most forbidding of suppressions. For when the Phallic period comes to an end, women will have been either annihilated or borne up to the highest and most violent incandescence. Muffled throughout their history, they have lived in dreams, in bodies (though muted), in silences, in aphonic revolts.

And with such force in their fragility; a fragility, a vulnerability, equal to their incomparable intensity. Fortunately, they haven't sublimated; they've saved their skin, their energy. They haven't worked at liquidating the impasse of lives without futures. They have furiously inhabited these sumptuous bodies: admirable hysterics who made Freud succumb to many voluptuous moments impossible to confess, bombarding his Mosaic statue with their carnal and passionate body words, haunting him with their inaudible and thundering denunciations, dazzling, more than naked underneath the seven veils of modesty. Those who, with a single word of the body, have inscribed the vertiginous immensity of a history which is sprung like an arrow from the whole history of men and from biblico-capitalist society, are the women, the supplicants of yesterday, who come as forebears of the new women, after whom no intersubjective relation will ever be the same. You, Dora, you the indomitable, the poetic body, you are the true "mistress" of the Signifier. Before long your efficacy will be seen at work when your speech is no longer suppressed, its point turned in against your breast, but written out over against the other.

In body.—More so than men who are coaxed toward social success, toward sublimation, women are body. More body, hence more writing. For a long time it has been in body that women have responded to persecution, to the familial-conjugal enterprise of domestication, to the repeated attempts at castrating them. Those who have turned their tongues 10,000 times seven times before not speaking are either dead

from it or more familiar with their tongues and their mouths than anyone else. Now, I-woman am going to blow up the Law: an explosion henceforth possible and ineluctable; let it be done, right now, in language.

Let us not be trapped by an analysis still encumbered with the old automatisms. It's not to be feared that language conceals an invincible adversary, because it's the language of men and their grammar. We mustn't leave them a single place that's any more theirs alone than we are.

If woman has always functioned "within" the discourse of man, a signifier that has always referred back to the opposite signifier which annihilates its specific energy and diminishes or stifles its very different sounds, it is time for her to dislocate this "within," to explode it, turn it around, and seize it; to make it hers, containing it, taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of. And you'll see with what ease she will spring forth from that "within"—the "within" where once she so drowsily crouched—to overflow at the lips she will cover the foam.

Nor is the point to appropriate their instruments, their concepts, their places, or to begrudge them their position of mastery. Just because there's a risk of identification doesn't mean that we'll succumb. Let's leave it to the worriers, to masculine anxiety and its obsession with how to dominate the way things work—knowing "how it works" in order to "make it work." For us the point is not to take possession in order to internalize or manipulate, but rather to dash through and to "fly."⁷

Flying is woman's gesture—flying in language and making it fly. We have all learned the art of flying and its numerous techniques; for centuries we've been able to possess anything only by flying; we've lived in flight, stealing away, finding, when desired, narrow passageways, hidden crossovers. It's no accident that *voler* has a double meaning, that it plays on each of them and thus throws off the agents of sense. It's no accident: women take after birds and robbers just as robbers take after women and birds. They (*illes*)⁸ go by, fly the coop, take pleasure in jumbling the order of space, in disorienting it, in changing around the furniture, dislocating things and values, breaking them all up, emptying structures, and turning propriety upside down.

What woman hasn't flown/stolen? Who hasn't felt, dreamt, performed the gesture that jams sociality? Who hasn't crumbled, held up to ridicule, the bar of separation? Who hasn't inscribed with her body the differential, punctured the system of couples and opposition? Who, by

7. Also, "to steal." Both meanings of the verb *voler* are played on, as the text itself explains in the following paragraph (translator's note).

8. *Illes* is a fusion of the masculine pronoun *ils*, which refers back to birds and robbers, with the feminine pronoun *elles*, which refers to women (translator's note).

some act of transgression, hasn't overthrown successiveness, connection, the wall of circumfession?

A feminine text cannot fail to be more than subversive. It is volcanic; as it is written it brings about an upheaval of the old property crust, carrier of masculine investments; there's no other way. There's no room for her if she's not a he. If she's a her-she, it's in order to smash everything, to shatter the framework of institutions, to blow up the law, to break up the "truth" with laughter.

For once she blazes *her* trail in the symbolic, she cannot fail to make of it the chaosmos of the "personal"—in her pronouns, her nouns, and her clique of referents. And for good reason. There will have been the long history of gynocide. This is known by the colonized peoples of yesterday, the workers, the nations, the species off whose backs the history of men has made its gold; those who have known the ignominy of persecution derive from it an obstinate future desire for grandeur; those who are locked up know better than their jailers the taste of free air. Thanks to their history, women today know (how to do and want) what men will be able to conceive of only much later. I say woman overturns the "personal," for if, by means of laws, lies, blackmail, and marriage, her right to herself has been extorted at the same time as her name, she has been able, through the very movement of mortal alienation, to see more closely the inanity of "propriety," the reductive stinginess of the masculine-conjugal subjective economy, which she doubly resists. On the one hand she has constituted herself necessarily as that "person" capable of losing a part of herself without losing her integrity. But secretly, silently, deep down inside, she grows and multiplies, for, on the other hand, she knows far more about living and about the relation between the economy of the drives and the management of the ego than any man. Unlike man, who holds so dearly to his title and his titles, his pouches of value, his cap, crown, and everything connected with his head, woman couldn't care less about the fear of decapitation (or castration), adventuring, without the masculine temerity, into anonymity, which she can merge with without annihilating herself: because she's a giver.

I shall have a great deal to say about the whole deceptive problematic of the gift. Woman is obviously not that woman Nietzsche dreamed of who gives only in order to.⁹ Who could ever think of the gift as a gift-that-takes? Who else but man, precisely the one who would like to take everything?

9. Reread Derrida's text, "Le Style de la femme," in *Nietzsche aujourd'hui* (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, Coll. 10/18), where the philosopher can be seen operating an *Aufhebung* of all philosophy in its systematic reducing of woman to the place of seduction: she appears as the one who is taken for; the bait in person, all veils unfurled, the one who doesn't give but who gives only in order to (take).

If there is a “propriety of woman,” it is paradoxically her capacity to deappropriate unselfishly: body without end, without appendage, without principal “parts.” If she is a whole, it’s a whole composed of parts that are wholes, not simple partial objects but a moving, limitlessly changing ensemble, a cosmos tirelessly traversed by Eros, an immense astral space not organized around any one sun that’s any more of a star than the others.

This doesn’t mean that she’s an undifferentiated magma, but that she doesn’t lord it over her body or her desire. Though masculine sexuality gravitates around the penis, engendering that centralized body (in political anatomy) under the dictatorship of its parts, woman does not bring about the same regionalization which serves the couple head/genitals and which is inscribed only within boundaries. Her libido is cosmic, just as her unconscious is worldwide. Her writing can only keep going, without ever inscribing or discerning contours, daring to make these vertiginous crossings of the other(s) ephemeral and passionate sojourns in him, her, them, whom she inhabits long enough to look at from the point closest to their unconscious from the moment they awaken, to love them at the point closest to their drives; and then further, impregnated through and through with these brief, identificatory embraces, she goes and passes into infinity. She alone dares and wishes to know from within, where she, the outcast, has never ceased to hear the resonance of fore-language. She lets the other language speak—the language of 1,000 tongues which knows neither enclosure nor death. To life she refuses nothing. Her language does not contain, it carries; it does not hold back, it makes possible. When *id* is ambiguously uttered—the wonder of being several—she doesn’t defend herself against these unknown women whom she’s surprised at becoming, but derives pleasure from this gift of alterability. I am spacious, singing flesh, on which is grafted no one knows which I, more or less human, but alive because of transformation.

Write! and your self-seeking text will know itself better than flesh and blood, rising, insurrectionary dough kneading itself, with sonorous, perfumed ingredients, a lively combination of flying colors, leaves, and rivers plunging into the sea we feed. “Ah, there’s her sea,” he will say as he holds out to me a basin full of water from the little phallic mother from whom he’s inseparable. But look, our seas are what we make of them, full of fish or not, opaque or transparent, red or black, high or smooth, narrow or bankless; and we are ourselves sea, sand, coral, seaweed, beaches, tides, swimmers, children, waves. . . . More or less wavyly sea, earth, sky—what matter would rebuff us? We know how to speak them all.

Heterogeneous, yes. For her joyous benefit she is erogenous; she is the erotogeneity of the heterogeneous: airborne swimmer, in flight, she

does not cling to herself; she is dispersible, prodigious, stunning, desirous and capable of others, of the other woman that she will be, of the other woman she isn't, of him, of you.

Woman be unafraid of any other place, of any same, or any other. My eyes, my tongue, my ears, my nose, my skin, my mouth, my body-for-(the)-other—not that I long for it in order to fill up a hole, to provide against some defect of mine, or because, as fate would have it, I'm spurred on by feminine "jealousy"; not because I've been dragged into the whole chain of substitutions that brings that which is substituted back to its ultimate object. That sort of thing you would expect to come straight out of "Tom Thumb," out of the *Penisneid* whispered to us by old grandmother ogresses, servants to their father-sons. If they believe, in order to muster up some self-importance, if they really need to believe that we're dying of desire, that we are this hole fringed with desire for their penis—that's their immemorial business. Undeniably (we verify it at our own expense—but also to our amusement), it's their business to let us know they're getting a hard-on, so that we'll assure them (we the maternal mistresses of their little pocket signifier) that they still can, that it's still there—that men structure themselves only by being fitted with a feather. In the child it's not the penis that the woman desires, it's not that famous bit of skin around which every man gravitates. Pregnancy cannot be traced back, except within the historical limits of the ancients, to some form of fate, to those mechanical substitutions brought about by the unconscious of some eternal "jealous woman"; not to penis envies; and not to narcissism or to some sort of homosexuality linked to the ever-present mother! Begetting a child doesn't mean that the woman or the man must fall ineluctably into patterns or must recharge the circuit of reproduction. If there's a risk there's not an inevitable trap: may women be spared the pressure, under the guise of consciousness-raising, of a supplement of interdictions. Either you want a kid or you don't—*that's your business*. Let nobody threaten you; in satisfying your desire, let not the fear of becoming the accomplice to a sociality succeed the old-time fear of being "taken." And man, are you still going to bank on everyone's blindness and passivity, afraid lest the child make a father and, consequently, that in having a kid the woman land herself more than one bad deal by engendering all at once child—mother—father—family? No; it's up to you to break the old circuits. It will be up to man and woman to render obsolete the former relationship and all its consequences, to consider the launching of a brand-new subject, alive, with defamilialization. Let us demater-paternalize rather than deny woman, in an effort to avoid the co-optation of procreation, a thrilling era of the body. Let us defetishize. Let's get away from the dialectic which has it that the only good father is a dead one, or that the child is the death of his parents. The child is the other, but the other without violence, bypassing loss,

struggle. We're fed up with the reuniting of bonds forever to be severed, with the litany of castration that's handed down and genealogized. We won't advance backward anymore; we're not going to repress something so simple as the desire for life. Oral drive, anal drive, vocal drive—all these drives are our strengths, and among them is the gestation drive—just like the desire to write: a desire to live self from within, a desire for the swollen belly, for language, for blood. We are not going to refuse, if it should happen to strike our fancy, the unsurpassed pleasures of pregnancy which have actually been always exaggerated or conjured away—or cursed—in the classic texts. For if there's one thing that's been repressed here's just the place to find it: in the taboo of the pregnant woman. This says a lot about the power she seems invested with at the time, because it has always been suspected, that, when pregnant, the woman not only doubles her market value, but—what's more important—takes on intrinsic value as a woman in her own eyes and, undeniably, acquires body and sex.

There are thousands of ways of living one's pregnancy; to have or not to have with that still invisible other a relationship of another intensity. And if you don't have that particular yearning, it doesn't mean that you're in any way lacking. Each body distributes in its own special way, without model or norm, the nonfinite and changing totality of its desires. Decide for yourself on your position in the arena of contradictions, where pleasure and reality embrace. Bring the other to life. Women know how to live detachment; giving birth is neither losing nor increasing. It's adding to life an other. Am I dreaming? Am I mis-recognizing? You, the defenders of "theory," the sacrosanct yes-men of Concept, enthroners of the phallus (but not of the penis):

Once more you'll say that all this smacks of "idealism," or what's worse, you'll splutter that I'm a "mystic."

And what about the libido? Haven't I read the "Signification of the Phallus"? And what about separation, what about that bit of self for which, to be born, you undergo an ablation—an ablation, so they say, to be forever commemorated by your desire?

Besides, isn't it evident that the penis gets around in my texts, that I give it a place and appeal? Of course I do. I want all. I want all of me with all of him. Why should I deprive myself of a part of us? I want all of us. Woman of course has a desire for a "loving desire" and not a jealous one. But not because she is gelded; not because she's deprived and needs to be filled out, like some wounded person who wants to console herself or seek vengeance: I don't want a penis to decorate my body with. But I do desire the other for the other, whole and entire, male or female; because living means wanting everything that is, everything that lives, and wanting it alive. Castration? Let others toy with it. What's a desire originating from a lack? A pretty meager desire.

The woman who still allows herself to be threatened by the big dick,

who's still impressed by the commotion of the phallic stance, who still leads a loyal master to the beat of the drum: that's the woman of yesterday. They still exist, easy and numerous victims of the oldest of farces: either they're cast in the original silent version in which, as titanesses lying under the mountains they make with their quivering, they never see erected that theoretic monument to the golden phallus looming, in the old manner, over their bodies. Or, coming today out of their *infans* period and into the second, "enlightened" version of their virtuous debasement, they see themselves suddenly assaulted by the builders of the analytic empire and, as soon as they've begun to formulate the new desire, naked, nameless, so happy at making an appearance, they're taken in their bath by the new old men, and then, whoops! Luring them with flashy signifiers, the demon of interpretation—oblique, decked out in modernity—sells them the same old handcuffs, baubles, and chains. Which castration do you prefer? Whose degrading do you like better, the father's or the mother's? Oh, what pwetty eyes, you pwetty little girl. Here, buy my glasses and you'll see the Truth-Me-Myself tell you everything you should know. Put them on your nose and take a fetishist's look (you are me, the other analyst—that's what I'm telling you) at your body and the body of the other. You see? No? Wait, you'll have everything explained to you, and you'll know at last which sort of neurosis you're related to. Hold still, we're going to do your portrait, so that you can begin looking like it right away.

Yes, the naives to the first and second degree are still legion. If the New Women, arriving now, dare to create outside the theoretical, they're called in by the cops of the signifier, fingerprinted, remonstrated, and brought into the line of order that they are supposed to know; assigned by force of trickery to a precise place in the chain that's always formed for the benefit of a privileged signifier. We are pieced back to the string which leads back, if not to the Name-of-the-Father, then, for a new twist, to the place of the phallic-mother.

Beware, my friend, of the signifier that would take you back to the authority of a signified! Beware of diagnoses that would reduce your generative powers. "Common" nouns are also proper nouns that disparage your singularity by classifying it into species. Break out of the circles; don't remain within the psychoanalytic closure. Take a look around, then cut through!

And if we are legion, it's because the war of liberation has only made as yet a tiny breakthrough. But women are thronging to it. I've seen them, those who will be neither dupe nor domestic, those who will not fear the risk of being a woman; will not fear any risk, any desire, any space still unexplored in themselves, among themselves and others or anywhere else. They do not fetishize, they do not deny, they do not hate. They observe, they approach, they try to see the other woman, the child,

the lover—not to strengthen their own narcissism or verify the solidity or weakness of the master, but to make love better, to invent

Other love.—In the beginning are our differences. The new love dares for the other, wants the other, makes dizzying, precipitous flights between knowledge and invention. The woman arriving over and over again does not stand still; she's everywhere, she exchanges, she is the desire-that-gives. (Not enclosed in the paradox of the gift that takes nor under the illusion of unitary fusion. We're past that.) She comes in, comes-in-between herself me and you, between the other me where one is always infinitely more than one and more than me, without the fear of ever reaching a limit; she thrills in our becoming. And we'll keep on becoming! She cuts through defensive loves, motherages, and devourations: beyond selfish narcissism, in the moving, open, transitional space, she runs her risks. Beyond the struggle-to-the-death that's been removed to the bed, beyond the love-battle that claims to represent exchange, she scorns at an Eros dynamic that would be fed by hatred. Hatred: a heritage, again, a remainder, a duping subservience to the phallus. To love, to watch-think-see the other in the other, to despecularize, to unhoard. Does this seem difficult? It's not impossible, and this is what nourishes life—a love that has no commerce with the apprehensive desire that provides against the lack and stultifies the strange; a love that rejoices in the exchange that multiplies. Wherever history still unfolds as the history of death, she does not tread. Opposition, hierarchizing exchange, the struggle for mastery which can end only in at least one death (one master—one slave, or two nonmasters \neq two dead)—all that comes from a period in time governed by phallogocentric values. The fact that this period extends into the present doesn't prevent woman from starting the history of life somewhere else. Elsewhere, she gives. She doesn't "know" what she's giving, she doesn't measure it; she gives, though, neither a counterfeit impression nor something she hasn't got. She gives more, with no assurance that she'll get back even some unexpected profit from what she puts out. She gives that there may be life, thought, transformation. This is an "economy" that can no longer be put in economic terms. Wherever she loves, all the old concepts of management are left behind. At the end of a more or less conscious computation, she finds not her sum but her differences. I am for you what you want me to be at the moment you look at me in a way you've never seen me before: at every instant. When I write, it's everything that we don't know we can be that is written out of me, without exclusions, without stipulation, and everything we will be calls us to the unflagging, intoxicating, unappeasable search for love. In one another we will never be lacking.

WE LOVE WHAT WE HAVE

We love what we have, no matter how little,
because if we don't, everything will be gone. If we don't,
we will no longer exist, since there will be nothing here for us.
What's here is something that we are still
building. It's something we cannot yet see,
because we are part
of it.

Someday soon, this building will stand on its own, while we,
we will be the trees that protect it from the fierce
wind, the trees that will give shade
to children sleeping inside or playing on swings.

BLACK METAMORPHOSIS:

NEW NATIVES IN A NEW WORLD

BY

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INTRODUCTION

In this essay I want to explore a key fact of the black presence in the Americas. This fact, largely overlooked, is the historical process, the socio-economic sea change, the cultural metamorphosis by which the multi-tribal African became the native of that area of experience that we term the New World. The classic example of this transformation is to be found in the plantation islands of the Caribbean. Why plantation? Why the Caribbean? The black was, as a mass force, incorporated into Western civilization through firstly, the latifundia, the large landed estates, of Spain and Portugal, and, secondly and more intensively, the plantations of the New World. These were the institutions which, similar to the encomienda for the New World Indians, functioned as the locus where the tribal African -- Yoruba, Ga, Ashanti, Ibo, etc. -- was converted into a homogenous commodity, into a unit of labor power collectively labelled negro. The negro is then, both as word and as fact, inseparably bound up with the creation of the plantation system. As a Caribbean economist wrote,

"In America, the locus of the plantation system is the Caribbean. Indeed this region is generally regarded as the classic plantation area. So much so that social anthropologists have described the region as a culture sphere, labelled Plantation America." (1)

The Caribbean islands constitute the classic plantation area because it is there, most nakedly, that the plantation system functioned in what we may term its "pure" state. Increasingly in the seventeenth century and from then on, the Caribbean islands, were 'planted' with peoples.... not in order to form societies, but in order to carry on plantations whose aim, was to produce monocrops for a market whose dynamic

impulse was that of production for profit." (2)

As a consequence of this,

"the plantation societies of the Caribbean constituted a radical break with all previous societies. They came into being at a particular ^{or} juxtaposition of history --- the European discovery of the New World, and the European experience of this New World as the frontier reserved for the manifest destiny of Europe. They were created out of this frontier experience, as adjuncts to the market system of capitalism." (3)

That is to say, if the plantation was the locus of the transformation of the tribal African into a negro, a commodity (pure labor power), the agent of that transformation was the market mechanism of capitalism. Yet it was to be at the locus of the plantation, and in resistance to the dehumanization reification imposed on him by the market imperative of capitalism, that the black would rehumanize himself as the native of the Caribbean. As native he was to endure a new form of dehumanization reification and was to carry on a new variant of the old struggle against exploitation dispossession.

I shall therefore, within the limits of this essay, largely restrict myself to the Caribbean with particular reference to Jamaica. I shall, however, draw certain parallels with other New World areas of experience in order to suggest a more universal validity for my thesis. In this context, I propose to

- a) Define the concept of indigenization
- b) Trace and explore the stages of this paradoxical process which I have termed indigenization and
- c) Discuss some of its contemporary implications.

(A) THE CONCEPT OF INDIGENIZATION

The Cuban Indian did not influence the formation of our character; their footsteps are very faint in our spiritual patrimony. On the other hand, the position that the original inhabitants left empty was occupied by a kind of "surrogate autochthonous man" (Lino Dou), the black African.... (4)

In his pioneer work --- Race and Color in the Caribbean ---

Gabriel Coulthard noted:

"The Negro, of course, is not any more indigenous than the white creole, nevertheless he appeared more distinctive, more typical, less European, and gave, and continues to give to Caribbean life a large part of its peculiar tonality. The preoccupation with creating a Caribbean nativism (indigenismo), then, lies at the heart of the cult of the Negro, especially in Afro-cubanism..." (5)

Also, discussing the U.S. Negro Renaissance movement of the twenties, which paralleled the Afro-Cuban movement, and influenced the Negritude movement, the co-founder of this last movement, Leopold Sedar Senghor, the Senegalese, wrote:

"They wanted America to provide something of their own in the realm of Art. From then on, they were obliged to return to the roots of the people. Now it turned out that the people were the blacks." (6)

That something of their own -- as Senghor pointed out, ^o that the U.S. gave the world was jazz. Today jazz and its multiple variants constitute the universal twentieth century expression of alienated and disrupted man: the beginning of a universal popular/mass culture -- the first such.

Philip Curtin, in another equally pioneering work on Jamaican society,

had this to say:

"In many ways Negro culture was more truly native to Jamaica than European culture, although both were alien." (7)

The approximation, Negro/Native, is not found only in works of scholarship. Richard Wright's classic novel of the 1940's, Native Son, powerfully grasped the paradox and ambiguity of the "nativity" of the Negro in America. On a lower level, this is a widespread cliché. In pulp and no-so pulp literature, in yellow journalism, the Negro/Native is a typical part of the background, part of the "local color", the picturesque tourist scene, the complex of exoticism endemic to the Caribbean.

This Negro/Native approximation was seen too, and still is, by the travel writer's eye, essentially a colonizer's eye. The travel writer popularized the "native" stereotype of the black -- the lazy nigger, grinning and singing his minstrel song as he popularized the stereotype of the lazy "native", i.e. the Mexican complete with guitar, hat over eyes, half asleep under a tree. This stereotype was part of the mediating myth that lay at the heart of any relationship whose purpose was the extraction of surplus value from devalued labor-power: whether by the forced labor of slaves on the plantation, or by the more complex contemporary mechanisms by which native labor is made to function. The Sambo Stereotype or 'nigger minstrel' was an earlier variant of the lazy native myth which is maintained to contrast with the self-serving image of, first, the "paternalistic slaveholder weighted with his duty", and, second, "the care-laden white colonizer, burdened with his mission." (8)

The English colonizer, travel writer, J.A. Froude, writing in the nineteenth century shows us the essential interconnection of these two stereotypes, that of the colonized and that of the colonizer, of the victim

and the victimizer. He wrote:

"The West Indian Negro is conscious of his own defects, and responds more willingly than most to a guiding hand. He is faithful and affectionate to those who are just and kind to him, and with a century or two of wise administration he might prove that his inferiority is not inherent... and that with the same chances as the white he may rise to the same level.... The poor black was a faithful servant as long as

he was a slave." (9)

The fabrication of a pliant native was indispensable to the white colonizer to justify his position just as the just Sambo stereotype was needed of a pliant native to justify his position as the paternalistic slaveholder demanded the fabrication of the Sambo stereotype to justify his.

Both the nineteenth century colonizer Froude and the twentieth century ~~scholar~~ ^{historian} Stanley Elkins mistook the fabrication for the fact, seeing the stereotype as the reality rather than as the complex ideological instrument by which the colonial powers and the early Southern slave-holders helped to establish and perpetuate relations of production in which relatively more ^{surplus} value could be extracted from relatively ^{more devalued} ~~less~~ native power, whether in "slave" form, or in its later "native" variant. To ensure the perpetuation of the later native variant, the fabrication of the native stereotype calls for a continuation of the earlier Slave/Sambo stereotype to ensure a distortion of history: the black was a faithful servant as long as he was a slave. The long and persistent slave revolts that took place in the Caribbean by generations of "faithful servants" are eliminated from the colonizers' consciousness. Slave revolts, i.e., the struggle against the exploitation of the slave's labor power, are eliminated from the "civilizer's" frame of reference. Slave revolts are inconvenient truths. But the memory of

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past slave and native revolts haunt the fringes of the civilizer's consciousness. This consciousness of revolt is transformed into a further variant of the myth--the faithful servant who without the master's guidance may turn out bad, Fraude wrote:

"As a freeman he is conscious of his inferiority at the bottom of his heart, and would attach himself to a rational white employer with at least as much fidelity as a spaniel. Like the spaniel too, if he is denied the chance of developing under guidance the better qualities which are in him, he will drift back into a mangy cur." ()

The contradictions are resolved. Whether as a slave, or as a free man (i.e., a native) the black man needs the paternal guidance of the white man. The slaveholders' ideology of paternalism demanded the fabrication of the Sambo stereotype; the colonizers' ideology demand the fabrication of "lesser breed... without the law", i.e. the stereotype of the native. The black in the Caribbean was stereotyped both as negro and as native.

Repetitions

→ In mythic fact or factual myth the Caribbean Negro is the Caribbean Native. Yet rarely had the fact been questioned - Why? Why should the black man, as much an emigrant to the New World as all the others, come to be considered indigenous to the Caribbean, to the Americas and to so consider himself, not only at the conscious but more profound at the unconscious level? ()

Vidia Naipaul, a gifted Trinidadian Indian writer, in his travel book, The Middle Passage, which was a long and sustained rejection of the black component in his own psyche, notes this fact with a jaundiced eye:

"Travel writers who didn't know any better spoke of him as 'native' and he accepted this: 'this is my island in the sun'

Mr. Harry Belafonte sings 'where my people have toiled since time begun'. Africa was forgotten. ()

The accuracy of perception is marred by the distorted focus. Naipaul notes the question, but his simplified answer-- that the black wanted to be native, because in this way he could reject Africa, is only one strand of a complex historical process. This is the process of black cultural resistance and response to the Middle Passage and to what lay on the farther side--the alienated reality of a New World, new not only in its geography, but also in its radically different experience. It is this historical experience and response which I shall explore as a process of indigenization. Why the term "indigenization"? *already explained*

Chapter Making of the Myth The Negro As Commodity

25

"...they do not wish to be called 'negros'
but 'prietos'. Only slaves are called 'negros'
And thus amongst them its is the same thing to
be called 'negro' as to be called a slave." ()

(Father Antonio de Teruel, A Capuchin missionary, writing of the
Congolese in the 17th century.)

"They say that I am a thing, bought and sold,
That it is not right that such a slave, a negro
Be permitted to perform a noble deed
To say that I am excluded as a negro is malicious
Negroes are noble; to be a slave is what
Prevents me from obtaining justice."

(Diego Ximenez de Encisco in the seventeenth century Spanish play,
JUAN LATINO.)

The early Congolese warned against the process of fetish-making by
which the biological being of the African, his (prieto) black skin, would
be confused with the social being of a slave, a negro. Spanish playwright
of the Golden Age, Diego Ximenez de Encisco, writing a drama based on the
real life figure, Juan Latino, (famous Latin Scholar, born in Africa but
brought up in Spain, and admitted to the University system through the
influence of his ducal masters and his own scholastic mastery), gives to
his dramatic figure a speech in which a distinction is made between the
biological and the social being, between being black and being a slave.

But it was to be an essential feature of the first large scale
capitalist slave trade across the Middle Passage, that the African, the
multi-tribal, multi-cultural 'prieto' (black) had first to be transformed
into a new entity. That entity was labelled 'negro'. In Africa itself

slavery was widespread. But it was a type of slavery quite different from the Middle Passage slavery that was just beginning. In Africa, slavery formed part of the social system. Indeed, there were grades of slaves depending on their different roles and functions. Also, there were relative degrees of servitude, the right to ownership of property, possibility for social mobility, etc. Above all, a slave was not defined by biological characteristics. He was not 'naturally' a slave; he was socially, not biologically defined.

Even more vital was the fact that the African slave operated in the context of a mode of production which was the basis of what has been defined as an 'Archaic economy', an economy in which 'no markets for labor and land existed'. As a modern economist explains it in the case of Dahomey:

"Dahomey's economy was based on the balance of a redistributive administration and local freedom mediated through a tissue of reciprocating and householding institutions supplemented by local markets. A planned agriculture was combined with village freedom; a governmental foreign trade coexisted with local markets while avoiding a market system. This archaic society possessed a solid structure built upon the rule of law; and status was further reinforced by money functions foreign to the market system." ()

To be a slave in the context of an archaic system was to occupy a certain role, a status defined by law. In this role the slave fulfilled the economic function of helping to provide 'use-values'. In the absence of a market system which would transform the products of his labor power into a commodity, he himself, as part of the society, constituted a 'use value', i.e., his labor power was valued in relation to the needs of the society which it helped to satisfy. These needs were traditional, fixed, relatively constant.

The European slave traffic across the Middle Passage was from the beginning a capitalist enterprise, as Marx noted:

"..In the second class of colonies--the plantations, which are from the moment of their inceptions, commercial centres of production for the ..the world market--a regime of capitalist production exists, if only in a purely formal way, since slavery among the negros excludes free wage labor, which is the base on which capitalist production rests. However, those who deal in slave trading are capitalists. The system of production introduced by them, does not originate in slavery, but was introduced into it. ()

The system of production of the plantations--"commercial centres of production for the world market"--at once caused a mutation in the concept of the word 'slave'. THE 'SLAVE MODE OF PRODUCTION' ON THE PLANTATION WAS TO BE A MODE OF PRODUCTION QUITE DIFFERENT FROM THE SLAVE MODE OF PRODUCTION IN THE NON-MARKET ECONOMIES OF AFRICA. THE WORD 'NEGRO' WHICH THE SLAVE TRAFFICKERS --PORTUGUESE, DUTCH, ENGLISH, AND OTHER CHRISTIAN, CIVILIZED, EUROPEAN NATIONS-- APPLIED TO THE MULTITRIBAL AFRICAN TOOK ON A SPECIFIC MEANING. THE 'NEGRO' WAS NO LONGER A SLAVE AS IN THE AFRICAN TRIBAL CONTEXT. HE WAS NOW ESSENTIALLY A FORM OF LABOR POWER CALCULATED IN TERMS OF HIS EXCHANGE VALUE, BOUGHT AND SOLD NOT AS A SLAVE, BUT AS A COMMODITY. HE WAS 'LABOR POWER' IN THE ECONOMIC SYSTEM, WHICH PRODUCED GOODS FOR THE WORLD MARKET, NOT ON THE BASIS OF FULFILLING RELATIVELY CONSTANT NEEDS, BUT ON THE BASIS OF MAXIMIZING PROFIT, WHICH WAS LIMITLESS.

As I hope to show later on, the "negro" was a commodity whose exchange value could only be determined, in the last instance, by the value of free wage labor in the metropolis which produced the goods for which he was exchanged. He ^{he} on the plantation would produce the raw materials which were finished and refined by free wage labor. So that while the value of free labor power was determined in the market place where the worker sold his labor, the value of slave labor

power was calculated in the marketplace where his labor power and its products were exchanged for the products of free wage labor. I hope to show later that the regime of production on the plantation based on slave labor was a variant of the regime of capitalist production which existed in the metropolis, and that while the metropolitan regime based on direct, "free," wage labor was dominant, it was inherently interdependent with the regime of plantation production based on slave labor. I shall trace this interdependence through exchange from the initial process in which the multi-tribal African was converted into a "negro" and a social, cultural human being was metamorphosed into a commodity.

start here

As a 'negro', a commodity, the multi-tribal African was 'valued' by his European purchasers when being sold to the New World plantation according to the 'labor power' which he was estimated to be able to provide, i.e., his labor power was quantified:

"The slave was reckoned and sold in units of labour power...As has been pointed out, even the method of sale was one of the techniques employed to reduce a man to a commodity. The slave was sold in the New World as a pieza--a piece. A pieza was the equivalent, for example, of a 'count' bunch of bananas--a count bunch of bananas is a stem of nine hands or more and this is the norm. A stem of six hands, for example, "would count as a quarter bunch. The amount of stems of banana is therefore more than the amount of bunches." So with the African, the pieza was the norm. The norm was a man who represented the largest possible amount of labor power. He had to be above average height, without physical defect, with good teeth, and between thirty to thirty-five years, the years in which he had most labor to give. Others who did not attain these qualifications had to be added together to make up a pieza. Three boys or girls between eight and fifteen would make up two pieces. Between four and eight years old, two boys or girls made up one. Between thirty-five to forty, when physical powers were waning, two made up one. Over forty they were sold as 'refuse' at cut rate prices..." ()

The slave merchants who bought--after the first wave of simple capture--the slaves from African States, used the pieza calculation in their system of exchange of manufactured goods for slaves, i.e. negroes. That is to say, the commodity, negro-pieza, realized its exchange-value in the exchange which took

place. In the eighteenth century, for example, as has been pointed out,

"it was possible to buy a 'Prime Man Slave' for:

*4 Dane Gunes, 2 Half Barrels Powder, 2 Fine Chints, 2 Patna Do,
4 Bajudpants, 2 Necanees, 6 Romauls, 3 Half Cittons, 3 Two
Blues, 1 Half Taffaty, 4 Lead Bars, 2 Small Brasspans."* ()

In this exchange, two different concepts of exchange were involved: that of African economies, whose people still inhabited a structure of use-values, central to the Archaic economy and that of the capitalist system, based on exchange-value.

Karl Polanyi explores, and elaborates on the gap between '*West African and European ways*', pointing out certain '*essential differences*'.

*"..institutional and organizational rather than valuational.
Native trade was an import-directed activity of acquiring staples
from a distance, bartered at the rate of I.I. In emergencies
simple variants of it occurred such as 2.1 or 2½.1. European
trade overseas exports of varied manufactures, oriented on
monetary gain."* ()

In the structure of the native economic exchange meant, primarily, the exchange of equivalents the values of which was related to their use. In the European capitalist economic structure, exchange had to be, by the logic of a system based on the maximizing of profit, not the exchange of equivalents, but the operation by which a profit margin was obtained. In a structure of the first type, prices would gravitate around use value; in a structure of the second type, prices would have to gravitate around prices of production. The amount of goods, (a collection of varied items that the Africans needed), which the European slave trader paid for 'a prime man slave,' i.e., the cost of the free wage labor of the European worker who had manufactured the goods, would help

to determine the market value of the 'slave' labor power. Both forms of labor power - that of wage labor, and that of slave labor could then be expressed in terms of each other.

In that Unequal Exchange which as Arghiri Emmanuel has recently shown, constitutes the central mechanism by which the 'rich' countries 'underdevelop' and impoverish the 'poor' ones, the multi-tribal African, was made into the 'primary product' as opposed to the secondary manufactured product. () His labor power became the 'primary' labor power as distinguished from the factory labor power of the European worker. Kenneth Stampf has pointed out that the 'slave price' paid by the planter for each 'negro' was the equivalent of the wage bill of the free worker. () But it was never, not even at the beginning, a true equivalent

Karl Polanyi shows, in the case of Dahomey, how at first the native economic notion of equivalence imposed certain patterns of trading on the Europeans. He points out that,

"The native staples were standardized goods exchanged in kind against other staples, at traditional rates, by status traders, whose income did not derive from the business in hand'...If this is described as 'administered trade'. its European counterpart should be designated as 'market selling'. In contrast to the former, it was bent on making a profit on prices, hence the need for a monetized accountancy to encompass a manifold of wages in a single currency, namely gold." ()

Karl Polanyi then points out that the purpose of the African's trading was 'the need for distant staples to be acquired for domestic ones.' The European companies at first had to adjust their market trading "with its inherent accountancy in gold" to the 'native system of gainless barter at traditional rates.' Polanyi shows that in the early era, and in the era of the gold trade, Europeans did manage to find a mode of trade which met 'the native requirements of bartering in kind' at

a one to one rate (or a multiple of it) by a series of practical adjustments. He goes on to show how the early trade was governed by 'the native ways and needs'. Native trade goods--gold, slaves, pepper, ivory, native cloths, hides, cattle and millet--were used as standards. Some European staples such as iron bars, coppers and cloth were also used, but at first when European and native standards came into conflict 'it was the native standard that was brought into play'. This standard was based on need. Hard bargaining on the part of African traders did not center on the question of price (market imperative), but on the questions of the kind of goods (social imperative) which made up each sorting. The African traders could work both to the advantage and the disadvantage of the exchange value of the European trader. Working within 'the native monetary framework' the European trader could not depend on a fixed margin of profits.

As the trade in 'negroes' developed, a system was developed with the use of a new monetary unit, the 'ounce trade'. This device,

"simple, consisted in paying 'in kind' for the gold ounces that the Europeans owed for slaves, but counting the goods in 'ounce trade', i.e. with an average one hundred per cent markup." ()

That is, the 'prime man slave' would be sold for a certain amount of gold ounces. But the goods in kind paid in lieu of the gold ounces would be calculated according to the exchange value of the goods in the western market plus an average one hundred per cent markup. The native standard of use value was replaced by this inflated value.

As a witness before the English Parliamentary Committee pointed out in 1789, in the slave trade at Cape Appollonia, "slaves were rated in 'ounces' at four 'ounces' each." Now four ounces of gold amounted to sixteen pounds sterling. But the witness said that the four ounces trade (i.e. the goods which were paid) were equivalent to only eight pounds sterling.

"To put it differently the Europeans paid in goods marked up one hundred percent for the 'ounces' which they owed." ()

The main goods were 'negroes', slave labor power. The slave price, the value of a man's labor power, was now determined by the capitalist market, the same market which had fixed wage rates for 'free European labor.' The arbitrary 100% markup changed 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. The 'negro', collected at the different ports and factories for embarkation to the plantations of the New World, began his metamorphosis from a human entity to a market one. In this market he was a 'primary commodity' supplied by an archaic economy, which through its trading relations was now partly incorporated into the capitalist global market. In this relationship, unequal exchange--with its fiction of equivalence--was already the motor, the dynamic of the process which would over-develop Europe and under-develop Africa. () AND IT WAS THIS DEVALUATION OF THE LABOR POWER OF THE BLACK, A DEVALUATION CARRIED OUT THROUGH EXCHANGE, RATHER THAN SLAVERY PER SE--SINCE SLAVERY WAS ONLY THE FIRST FORM, THE FIRST MECHANISM BY WHICH HIS LABOR POWER WOULD BE DEVALUED--THAT LED TO THE DEVALUATION OF HIS HUMANITY. IN OTHER WORDS, IN THE GLOBAL CAPITALIST SYSTEM IT IS NOT THE PERCEPTION OF THE BLACK (THE INDIAN, THE NATIVE) AS INFERIOR. THEREFORE IT IS NOT THE IDEOLOGY (SUPERSTRUCTURE) BUT THE MATERIAL BASE, THE ECONOMIC INFRASTRUCTURE WHICH IS FINALLY DETERMINANT OF THE RACISM INTRINSIC TO THE CAPITALIST SYSTEM. The "oversight" of this fact has led to ~~delete~~ theoretical misinterpretations which I shall discuss later. } For now, let us look at the beginning of a relationship in which the use of superior physical force, i.e., the gun, enabled the global capitalist system to ^{impel} force the sudden abrupt incorporation into the world market of non-capitalist modes of production whose peoples were compelled to exchange their labor power and their products, for the labor power

and

and products of a specifically capitalist mode of production based on wage labor.

In the initial stages of the process, the negro, i.e., a pure and naked form of labor power () was the large scale staple whose exchange made the relation of unequal exchange possible. He was the expression of the coexistence and interpenetration of two modes of production, that of the archaic, formerly closed economic system, and the burgeoning capitalist system which produced for the global market.

Rosa Luxemburg pointed out that in order to realize its surplus value, the capitalist system needs purchasers outside the market economy, purchasers who inhabit the noncapitalist sectors of the world. Capitalism, she pointed out, needed to cannibalize other non-capitalist economies, needed Third Persons. ()

Africa and her staple product, 'negroes', provided the necessary relationship, the necessary site for the full scale realization of surplus value. Africa and her exported labor power also provided that minimum priced labor power needed, in these early stages, for the production of cheap raw materials which, finished in factories by relatively higher priced European labor power, would form the ~~dominant standard~~ and the basis of that exploitative exchange which Emmanuel have rightly described as the Imperialism of Trade. ()

Arghiri Emmanuel's theory, first put forward in his book Unequal Exchange: The Imperialism of Trade, published in France in 1969, and in its English translation by the Monthly Review Press, 1972--is of central importance to my argument. Because of this I shall briefly summarize those points which are germane to my thesis. They are these:

- a) Today our planet is being divided into rich and poor nations--whose richness and poverty are believed to be structurally interconnected so that the one maintains the other.
- b) The reason for this was generally interpreted as a necessary worsening of the

terms of trade between manufactured goods whose prices tend to go up and primary products whose prices tend to fall.

c) But, Emmanuel argues, this interpretation springs from a mistaken identification of the exports of rich countries with manufactured goods and those of poor countries with the export of primary products. It is rather the products of poor countries whether manufactured or primary - that go down. Why is this so?

d) Emmanuel argues that the poor countries always exchange a larger amount of their national labor for a smaller amount of the rich countries' labor. And that this exchange depends primarily on the fact of the relatively lower level of wages in the poor countries and the relatively higher level of wages in the rich countries. THAT IS, THE EXCHANGE BETWEEN TWO COUNTRIES, THE EXCHANGE BETWEEN UNEVEN LEVELS OF WAGES IS BETWEEN RELATIVELY LESS AND MORE DEVALUED LABOR.

e) Emmanuel goes on to point out that the pre-Marxist, classical economists had assumed that wages were "always and everywhere the same, because irreducible." To quote, "in the framework of the classical assumptions." the postulate was made of "a real basic wage, predetermined and unchangeable. It was a certain basket of goods that corresponded to the physiological subsistence minimum of the worker and his family...the basket could not be made any smaller. Any increase above the minimum vital, (i.e. the minimum that would sustain life and allow the worker to function as labor power, and to procreate and reproduce more labor power) would cause the workers to become more prolific, and this by increasing the supply of labor would bring wages back to their starting level:" ()

That is to say, as Emmanuel points out, in the assumptions of the classical economists,
"...a biological law independent of the market and of men's economic relations deter-

mined the level of real wages. Since this wage level was predetermined so like wise was the level of profit..." ()

f) But Marx showed that wages are not exclusively determined "by biological factors, but also by sociological and historical ones". From this, Emmanuel argues, comes the "theoretical possibility that wages, and thereby profits, may be determined by market forces".

g) He goes on to argue that while the physiological minimum wage nevertheless does exist, and that there is therefore, "an absolute lower limit that the market is powerless to shift (i.e. the minimum needed to sustain life)," the notion of physiological minimum is itself elastic and relative, since needs are themselves relative, and socio-historically determined. He writes:

"A need that has been created by technical progress and the power of demonstration becomes a biological need if it has been satisfied over a very long period of time...a stage is reached at which certain needs created by civilization become so habitual and urgent that a worker will rather cut down on his food or his clothing than do without the corresponding article or service. When that stage is reached, a wage that is too low to enable both groups of needs to be satisfied becomes a wage that is lower than the physiological minimum, and so becomes impossible." ()

h) Emmanuel then comes to a conclusion that is central to our thesis: "Thenceforth the 'cost of living' ceased to be an invariable datum, and in the absence of the mobility of the labour factor wages can vary both in time and space."

To give an example relevant to my thesis, slaves on the plantations of the U.S. South were a labor factor that was not mobile. As slaves, they were not allowed to be. The socio-historical physiological basket of goods needed to maintain them was therefore fixed. The minimal level of this basket of goods remained

low because as slaves their needs remained relatively low in a country where wages well above the level of the norm of the rest of the world were common. As slaves within the internal unit of the United States they functioned as more-devalued labor. After emancipation and the brief period of Reconstruction, the Jim Crow laws designed to keep the "nigger in his place" were essentially designed to keep the nigger as native labor, i.e., as relatively devalued labor. Paradoxical as it may seem, in the habitual and increased lynchings of the Post-slavery era, the sexual connotations were essentially subsidiary to a concealed economic motive. To use Adorno's terms, the belly was disguised as idealist rage, i.e. the protection of the flower of white Southern womanhood which also functioned as a form of devalued domestic labor. ()

It is in the context of this argument that an episode in Richard Wright's autobiography, Black Boy, takes on its full implications. Hired by a Yankee employer while still in the South, he is supposed to be instructed by two Southern (white) employees in the "mechanics of grinding and polishing lenses". He does the odd jobs about the place, but as the weeks pass, the two white men make no attempt to teach him. He asks one of the men, Reynolds, to tell him about the work. The following dialogue ensues:

"What are you trying to do, get smart, nigger?" he asked me. "No sir" I said.

Wright was baffled, he decided to try the other worker, Pease, instead, reminding him "that the boss had said that I was to be given a chance to learn the trade". The following dialogue ensued:

"Nigger, you think you're white, don't you?"

"No sir,"

"You're acting mighty like it" he said.

"I was only doing what the boss told me to do," I said.

Pease shook his fist in my face.

"This is white man's work around here," he said. ()

This was the crux of the matter. The tormenting incidents with Pease and Reynolds which Wright suffered after that were not "inherent racism" in the two men, even though they saw this racism in themselves as instinctive.

The racism was, in the last instance, determined by the economic motive.

Devalued black labor meant a relative over-valuation of theirs. The black was their 'native labor'. Jim Crow laws served the same primarily economic function as apartheid laws. In the capitalist system even the psyche of man, in its ultimate recesses, is mediated by economic factors. The "belly" is finally determinant.

g) Emmanuel goes on to argue that Marx showed that the historical and social factors render possible a variation in the rate of wages between one country and another. Here we would like to add between one 'race' and another within the same country (black/white), between one group and another in the same country (the urban and rural proletariat of Third World countries). As Emmanuel points out, Marx saw that social and historical factors can bring about considerable differences of wage levels and make impossible the equalization of wages on a world scale.

h) He then goes on to point out certain facts that are important to my thesis:

He shows that Marx was the first to see that the

COMMODITY THAT WAGES PURCHASE IS NOT THE WORKER'S LABOR BUT HIS LABOR POWER. LABOR, THE COMMON DENOMINATOR AND MEASURE OF THE VALUE OF ALL COMMODITIES, IS NOT ITSELF A COMMODITY AND THEREFORE HAS NO VALUE. WHAT UNDER CAPITALIST PRODUCTION RELATIONS BECOMES A COMMODITY, WHAT IS BOUGHT AND SOLD, IS, IN A SENSE, THE MAN HIMSELF. HIS STRENGTH, THE ACCUMULATED ENERGY THAT "ENABLES HIM TO WORK FOR A CERTAIN NUMBER OF HOURS, HIS LABOR POWER."

From our point of view what is important here is that the transformation

of the multi-tribal African into a commodity was the transformation of his labor into labor power. The multi-tribal African, i.e., a specific human being, during the process of exchange in the slave 'factory' in Africa, and later on the auction block in the New World, was transformed into a pieza, pure labor power, a commodity labeled a negro.

This commodity, labor power in slave form, had to be fed and kept alive and active. As Emmanuel puts it:

"In order to be kept up, this strength needs a certain supply of substances, some of which are freely given by nature while others are produced by human labour. It (i.e. the strength, the labour power) is therefore worth the amount of labour necessary to produce these substances... Labour does not measure its own value but that of labour power....the two quantities involved are not equal. The labour time a man can put in is usually longer than the time needed to produce the substance he has to absorb in order to contribute this labour time. THE DIFFERENCE CONSTITUTES THE SOURCE OF PROFIT." ()

The perception of the black as inferior, the elaborate rationale built up to justify this inferiority was, in the last instance, determined by the mechanism which forcibly keeps his needs and his historical basket of goods at the lowest level. This was to be the same with 'native' labor. The Sepúlveda syndrome of the cultureless Indian and the resultant perpetuation of the encomienda system and its variants ~~2~~ provided the mechanism by which the Indian was made to expend enormous quantities of labor power, and was sustained in an overall sense by a minimal supply of substances. () This difference constituted the superprofits made from forcibly (by the mechanism of the encomienda, the plantation, the Jim Crow laws, Apartheid, the colonial system, internal colonialism, neo-colonial, imperialism) devalued labor power. Cultural racism therefore plays

an economic role. It is part of the mechanism by which the value of non-white labor power is conditioned and determined at a lower level than that of white or skilled labor power. () Cultural racism is the ideological apparatus which interacts with the apparatus of force to determine the unequal exchange which takes place in the apparently "free" and equal exchange of the market.

The unequal exchange which Polanyi shows in the original exchange between a use-value economy and an exchange value economy (unequal exchange guaranteed in the final instance by the superior force of the capitalist economy) has remained central to the relation between free labor and slave labor, metropolitan labor and 'native' labor, the urban proletariat and the rural agro-proletariat. As Emmanuel puts it:

"I think it is possible to state that unequal exchange is the elementary transfer mechanism which enables the advanced countries (and we would like to add, the urban capitalist sectors in the underdeveloped countries) to begin and to regularly give new impetus to that unevenness of development that sets in motion all the other mechanisms of exploitation..." ()

He goes on to point out that this transfer mechanism can only be seen in the full context of world production relations. In these relations the excess surplus value that is extracted from the 'native' worker in his own country is transferred to the richer countries through the higher prices that are paid for goods, i.e. through their exchange with higher paid labor. This payment is made not only in the wage packet but in the whole range of amenities that go to make up the historical basket of goods which higher-paid labor requires reproduces itself. To give an example, white schools in the U.S. are well-equipped. Segregated, inferiorly equipped black schools lessen the baskets of goods of the blacks, lowering their acquisition of highly paid skills. Hence the struggle of

blacks to attend 'white' schools. Hence the reaction of the poor whites of South Boston. The latter preserve their slight, relative overvaluation in the system, by excluding the blacks whose relatively greater devaluation - as a group - might further increase their devaluation. () Their racism is, in the last instance, economic. () The Irish Protestants in Belfast wage, finally, the same struggle against the Catholics as the Boston Catholics wage against the blacks. ()

The historical and social factors which have projected the blacks, the native, the Boston Irish, the Belfast Catholics, as inferior, provide the rationale for the relatively smaller historical basket of goods; and the super-exploitation of their labor power. As technological progress is made, their lack of skills, resultant from their inferior opportunities for training and education, is then used as the justification for their high levels of unemployment. Increasingly the unskilled, marginally unemployed, are discriminated against on the ground of lack of skills. The earlier grounds for discrimination had been their 'lack of culture inherent in their race.'

The alleged inferiority of black and Indian labor created a relative norm in which 'white' labor was increasingly seen as standard, and non-white labor as substandard. () The trade Union struggles of 'white' labor in the developed countries, coupled with the more widespread utilization of non-white labor during 19th century colonial expansion, gradually led to a perception in which 'white' skilled labor was seen as normative labor, and as such, given an increasing claim-- which their trade union struggles validated--to a share of the product, and to a relatively increased appropriation of the world's good. This is not to say that white labor was and is not exploited, but that native, non-white labor has been increasingly more devalued, more exploited. That is to say, they were and are exploited both as workers, and as 'native' workers.

Theories of the racial inferiority of non-white peoples were intricate components of the material infrastructure on which the superstructure of Western superiority was maintained. The West was superior because it increasingly appropriated an increasingly superior amount of the world's good to make it superior. The negation of the black slave as man, his reduction to a commodity, the later reduction of native labor to lesser men () were central to the ongoing exploitation which led to the results that Emmanuel shows:

"Within this poor and underdeveloped world...there are some islets of advanced development, in which approximately ninetenths of the equipment and in general, of the human and productive forces of the entire world are concentrated..." ()

These islets are inhabited by those who see themselves, to borrow Sartre's terms, as men. () The rest of the world, which must do with one tenth of the world's productive forces, ^{is} ~~are~~ seen as "native", as devalued labor power.

This devaluation began with the forced labor of the Indian in the encomienda, with the transformation of the multi-tribal African into a commodity.

The counter-process by which the black refused to accept his dehumanization, his commodity status, was a process of physical revolt and cultural re-invention. This constituted the ongoing struggle by which the plantation proletariat--substandard labor, whether in "slave" or later "native" form--have struggled, in the ways available to them, to resist their dehumanization/exploitation. To affirm and demonstrate the process by which the blacks reinvented themselves as natives of the New World through a process of cultural creation, is to show not only that a black New World culture exists, but that it is an ongoing and permanent culture of struggle. () Intrinsic to this culture is a refusal to accept those assumptions of Western civilizations which dehumanized/inferiorized them by exploiting their devalued labor power. The struggle against their alienation

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from humanity is therefore an intrinsic and necessary part of their struggle against exploitation. () It is this that gives to cultural nationalism/negritude/indigenismo- its revolutionary intention. As I shall show later it is only when the effect-- the cultural devaluation of the black/the native-- is fought as an end in itself in order to obscure the real cause of this cultural devaluation-- the exploitation of devalued labor--that the revolutionary intention of cultural nationalism can be transformed into its reactionary opposite.

del

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In the context of Emmanuel's theory of the imperialism of trade and of Polyani's analysis of the trading relations between a use value economy and an exchange value economy, it is clear that the intra-African indigenous to his own territory--the continent of Africa--entered a market relation of exchange, a relation that would define him as "native labor". Here the dialectic begins. For if he was the native in the context of a new economic relation, he also remained a native in the sense of being indigenous. And it was this indigenous culture, or elements of it, that would protect his psyche from the worst onslaughts of dehumanization that the new/stagnation imposed on this traditional culture by superior Western force which also helps to make him exploitable by the new relationship, by partly perpetuating his use-value structure, a structure which by its very nature would make him vulnerable to being exploited during the process of exchange with the products of an exchange value structure. ()

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p 25

Yet, in a complex movement, the super-exploitation of his labor power was intricately bound up with the devaluation of his native culture, a devaluation which he was made to accept. The movement of indigenismo was therefore central to the struggle against Western exploitation as Coulthard has shown. Negritude, along with its more concrete manifestations such as Garveyism, the Black Muslim Movement and Black Power, was more complex. In Africa it was in essence indigenismo, the revindication of the autochthonous culture sprung out of an indigenous relation

to one's own land, as pointed out before. In Africa and Latin America, the struggle was less mediated. Their native cultures had been devalued, inferiorized but only had to be revindicated. Only with the New World black would the claim be made that he lived in a cultural void. Africa, the land of his origin was first said to have no culture; when it was admitted that Africa had a culture, the New World black was said to have lost all elements of a former African culture that he had had. The negritude movement, spearheaded in the Caribbean by Cesaire and Price-Mars had to fight on two fronts--to revindicate the devalued culture of origin, and then to demonstrate that it was this original culture, ^{ed} metamorphosized, that had been transplanted by the blacks during a process in which they became indigenous to a new landscape and reinvented themselves as natives in a new world. The process was dialectical. Negated as human, ~~made into a commodity,~~ the black ~~reinvented himself as human,~~ ^{and} as native. The process began with his sale in Africa. Exchanged as a negro he was deprived of his tribal characteristics, except in those instances where the kind of tribe from which he came--and which the traders used to judge him as docile/hardworking, or intractable/dangerous--was essential to his market value. () Instead, gathered at the ports of embarkation where the factories were located he was given the "brand name" of the factory. Formerly an Ashanti, a Yoruba, an We, he could now find himself labeled a Mina negro, i.e. someone shipped from the Portuguese factory at Elmina, like a Sears product. From this moment he was no longer a slave in the African sense.

No social fabric now determined his essence. He was not only alienated from Africa, from his means of production, from the use of his own labor for the communal purpose defined by his culture, He was also alienated from his former being, from his humanity. He was a pieza, so many units of exchange value. The African who sailed across the Middle Passage suffered a seachange. Transformed into a negro, a commodity, his human response was to negate this transformation. That culture that he was to create would spring out of the imperative of this negation.

part insert

It was this imperative, this dynamic that set in motion the process by which the Negro became at one and the same time, the neo-native of the New World.

"The people of the Black Diaspora, uprooted and thrown into the New World cauldron and melting pot, have had to grapple for centuries with the problem of how to preserve their dignity and self-esteem in situations where white men held them in slavery.... great myths, the source of every people's deepest strengths--were needed to bolster their self-esteem." (St. Clair Drake, 1970)

Two scholars in a recent study on slavery point out that it is by now indisputable that "human beings were a form of capital in slave society"; and that "slaves who were traded commanded prices as specific and well-defined as those in land, buildings or machines." () Eric Williams in Capitalism and Slavery traced the intricate relationships between black slavery and the growth and expansion of Western capitalism. Yet as I shall discuss later, there is a continued scholastic dispute about the way in which capitalism developed from feudalism in the West. A major ideological oversight of three central factors--New World land, new world "forced" labor, and the trade in and utilization of black labor--had led to much mystification. C.L.R. James in Black Jacobins pointed out long ago the way in which the immense wealth from the slave trade that the Haitian sugar plantation enriched the bourgeoisie of Nantes and Bordeaux to the extent where they were powerful enough to help set in motion the French Revolution. () And Eric Williams made explicit the fact that the hegemony of the bourgeoisie in Europe, and of the global capitalist system itself, cannot be understood apart from large scale black slavery out of Africa, dominated and controlled by the nations of Europe. In other words both the hegemony of the Western bourgeoisie and of capitalism were in their origin based mainly on New World land, the forced labor of the Indian, and the total conversion of man--the black man--into a commodity. The later large-scale dehumanization of the European

proletariat, followed on and did not precede the total negation of the black as human. Capitalism as a system therefore required the negation of the black as human. Far from being an anomaly in the "rational" system of capitalism, black slavery was rationally central to capitalism as a system. ()

As I pointed out before, early capitalism required the devalued labor power of Indian and black. Since man's labor is the instrument with which he creates himself as man, as human, () the systematic alienation and exploitation of his labor necessarily entailed the devaluation of his humanity.

We see this clearly in the fact that when at the height of the Industrial Revolution the English bourgeoisie needed to super-exploit its own working class--women and children were the relatively more devalued labor--they perceived their own people, their own race with such class contempt, brutalized them so nakedly that contemporary spokesmen could speak of the two "nations" of England, i.e. the "superior" nation of the English middle classes, and the "inferior" nation of the English working classes. () Nor is it surprising that in England where the bourgeoisie has had longest hegemony, class attitudes are still so deep and rooted.

The "freedom" which the bourgeoisie claimed from the feudal aristocracy of Europe was based primarily on their right of property. The blacks were not simply excluded from these rights. They themselves were "property". Their struggle against dehumanization, against being reduced to commodity status could not be waged within the structure of values, the ideology of the bourgeoisie as it struggled for its own rights, its own brand of freedom. The struggle of the blacks would call for another structure of values, an alternative and opposed consciousness. This structure of values, could only be created out of their struggle to resist dehumanization, and to rehumanize themselves by the creation of a counter-culture through the transplantation their old cultures onto a strange soil, its reinvention in new and alien conditions. It was in this transplantation, this metamorphosis of

Torso of Air

Suppose you do change your life.
& the body is more than
a portion of night—sealed
with bruises. Suppose you woke
& found your shadow replaced by a black wolf. The boy, beautiful
& gone. So you take the knife to the wall instead. You carve & carve
until a coin of light appears & you get to look in, at last,
on happiness. The eye
staring back from the other side—
waiting.



request

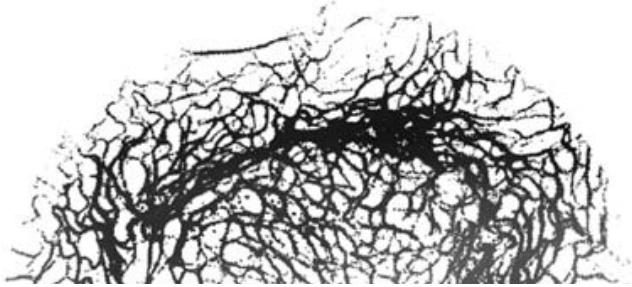


we would like it if you wrote us poems. we would like it if you wrote us long life sentences. we would like it if you broke sentences and gave us more life than you or we were told could be contained. we would like it if you remained. we would like it if you showed up every day. we would like it if you drank water. we would love it if you would turn off your phone. we would sincerely appreciate it if you stopped pretending to be alone.¹

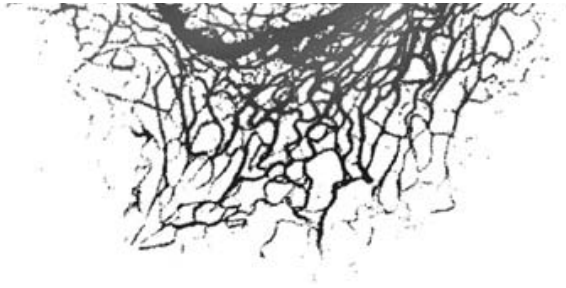


commitment

we promise to wake you up if we think you won't get the point of the dream. we promise to show up if you show up. every day. we promise to make you feel sick when you lie to yourself. we promise to let love through if it's love you came to do. we promise to make time flexible if you give us all your time. we promise to think of you more often than you think of us. we promise to remember you when you forget. we promise to be wherever and in everything you haven't noticed yet. we promise to be we, even one by one. we promise to outsmart your mind. we promise to overlove your heart. we promise to echo over your voice. we promise you everything. everything. all we ask.¹



instructions



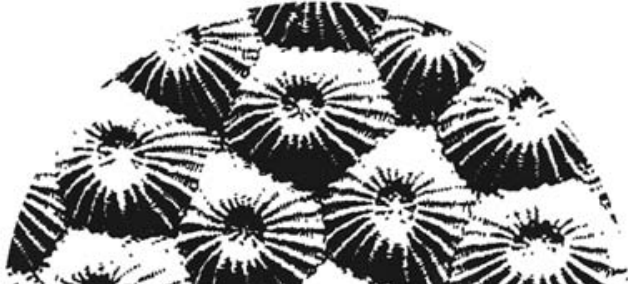
tell them about the eastern shore and running. tell them about underneath the boat. the hard shell breaking open. the land so wet it's water. the water so hard we live on it most the day. tell them how we left and how we stayed.

tell them about the whales. but tell them using the oyster shells. tell them about wampum and waiting. tell them about the salted dirt within you. tell them how we found each other again.

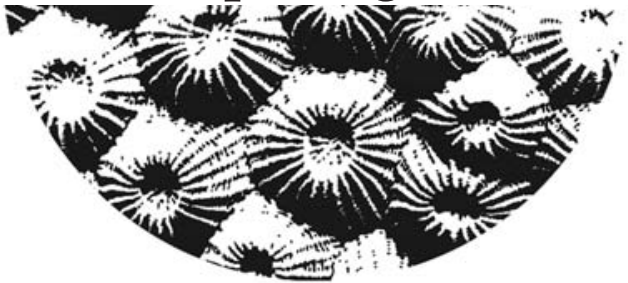
tell them about the shells. tell them about the giant turtle shells. tell them about the soup we made in shells when we needed armor. tell them why we needed armor and what we did before the harm. tell them about flint, magic, coral, god, and fire. and what we left to tell the tale.

tell them about the whales. and how they swam next to us singing. how they breathed sometimes bigger than the boats. what they taught us about evolution. how they clicked sometimes louder than the chains. how they taught us to make time out of salt. how they deepened our lungs. opened the top of our heads. how they made their whole bodies into drums to show us how it would be.

tell them who taught you to dream. to stay. to breathe. and then show them who taught you to leave.¹



opening



if you gathered them they would be everyone.

gather them.

recognize in them your jawline, your wet eyes, your long-fingered hands, seeking what but this multitude. if you gathered them they would not fit on this island. they would spill back into the ocean whence they came. when you gather them they will have fins and claws and names you do not know.

gather them anyway.

some will look you in the eye, some are too microscopic to see. if you don't gather them all you will never be free. if you gathered them you could not hold them, scold them, demand back what you think is lost. gather them today or your soul is the cost. gather the ones who sold and who bought and who tossed overboard. gather the erstwhile children in the name of the lord. gather the unclaimed fathers, the ones with guns and with swords. gather them up. with your hands. with your relationship to land. with your chin set. you are not done yet. you never will.

gather them more. gather them still.

they will unfound you and surround you unfind you and unwind you travel to you unravel through your own needle. gather the thread. collect your dead.¹

put yourself in the center and draw them in. stand where you standing which is not under and not over. you. not gonna get over it. and where you stand is not always standing either, is it? sometimes quicksand sometimes bended knee, very often that cross-legged thing you do, sitting on the floor or hugging your own legs like they were people. be where you are and draw them to you. you might need to move your hands, one of those legs or a book from blocking your heart. that would be a good start. put your arms out like if you were floating in water. daughter. they know where to find you.²

this is what we did. we put everything where it needed to go. we knew about need by intuition. we knew about need by experience. we knew about need by not needing what we thought we needed. we needed you to know something else. so this is what we did. we knotted up our knowing with our needing. we kneaded back our needing into notthisnotthennotagain and we knew the net of our needing, the need of our knowing would wander and would wait. we knew it like we knew salt. we knew it like we knew bait. we know it like we know you. don't hesitate.³

first, the sound. you hear it even if no one else does. even if you wake and already don't remember. second, the seconds. you feel the up-tick in your heart bringing you back into time. third, the rise. as if you are pulled vertical across the floor and before you know it you have taken several steps. it is a minute or so before you are you as you know you. in the rising you could be any of us.⁴

save the top of your head for the water. don't let the nonsense burn it out. cleanse with salt and coolness. thousands of years ago it was a spout. place your head in places worthy. place your hands over your heart. bless yourself with generations. that's a start.⁵

what the coral said:

breathe. breathe. breathe. sing. let that water move within you. let it be you. let your every cilia dance you into healing. let the warm salt water brighten you. your tears. sleep. and when you dream of working, sleep again. sleep until you dream of floating. dream until your edges soft. dream until you birth yourself in water singing with the bones of all your lost. dream until you breathe not from your mouth, not from your nose but through your hair and through your skin. dream until you claim the ocean. breathe until you feel no need to swim. breathe until your dreams flow out your brain. breathe and let them in your heart. breathe and we will call you again. that's a start.⁶

there are very few things that you must do. this is one. this will show you the others. there is a difference between assignment and need.⁷



whale chorus



it's not the world on our shoulders, it's the ocean on our hearts. on top of our whole torsos, actually. we get round beneath it. the weight that tries to lift us, the pressure that spreads like if love was sonic and could get everywhere, the sound of your unasked-for heartbeat, like if you were the center of something, stretching to try to make the globe not break, like without you the world would crack and lose itself. it's more like that.

they say god moved over the face of the deep, but in the deep there we already were. already pulsing, already pulled by moon, relevant to us whether or not it was lit by sun. they fear the depth of the ocean rightly. we know what it means to be encumbered under there. we know what it is to have no choice but to pull from the bottom of ourselves daily. we don't have the luxury of surface. whether or not we want it.

ever wonder why an island woman loves a clean floor? looks down without missing anything? sweeps even the dirt in the yard? well, where do you think we live while you sleep? down here. at the bottom of everything.¹

who do you think thought of the ocean? we who would be whales. how could we prepare for the lives we evolved into. immersed in a substance we could not breathe. and nevertheless called to be graceful. huge in ways that the world could not hold. except by these means. unbound by the limits of time. because we thought of the ocean before we became who we are. how could we know the selves we had never been. how could we know places we had not the bodies to see. how do we breathe across generations. ask yourself. this is not the power of positive thinking. this is no birthday wish in smoke. this is existence or absence. no joke.²

between you and me, we knew it would never work. just because the singing of the whales had caused bumper stickers and rallies and international bans on their murder and the criminalization of the exploding harpoon (you know. that thing that got under their skin and destroyed them from the inside) didn't mean it would work for us. i mean how long had we, black women, been singing.

when they decided the whale was an intelligent creature, nuanced, descriptive, they decided that the people who killed them were greedy, were savage, were less evolved. isn't that interesting. the same people who forced the whaling indigenous into sale instead of ceremony now spoke of evolution. spoke of the humane and didn't choke. this is why we didn't have much hope. our intelligence and the multiple forms of proof required did not inspire the world to disentangle its hooks from our looks and our attitude.

we assert that it was not the song of the whales that saved them. if singing could save we'd be god. it was the fact of other sources of oil to move onto, other deep black resources to extract. it was a fact. they could only save the whales once they knew they didn't need them. it was as simple as that. and they haven't found a way yet to say it. their needles in our skin, targeting us where we breathe. which is everyone we love. trapping us below and yet detracting us above. chasing us across oceans. they risk their very souls. they know it though. they need us more than gold.³

so we listened. and we started with the top of the head. we listened from the opening of the womb for the futures not yet forgotten. borne not of brain but higher. and at the moment of birth sometimes lower. but we listened. in warm rooms of waiting shaped like the stomachs of whales.

if we were whales why would we eat ourselves. why would we turn our bodies into heat and light for the whole community. ask it again. if we were not whales what would we do. waste ourselves. nourish nothing. leave our people cold. and what for?

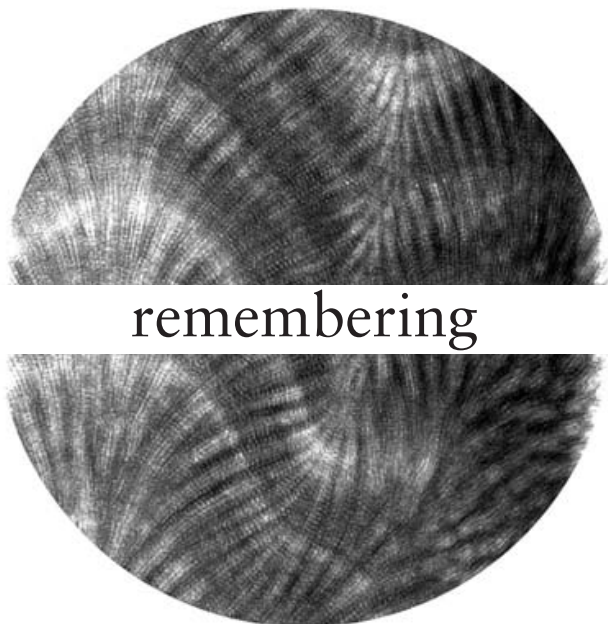
if we were whales then we would know about choosing. about remembering. about remembering an even older self that knew land. about coming back to the belly of the people, to the circle of the story. when you remember, put yourself there. in the belly of the whale. let yourself return. learn what it takes to come from water and find legs and then leave your legs to find water and to hear with your mouth and find lungs and wings in everyone around you.

there is an older story. if you want to know. about a big enough love for winter. a love deep enough to come back.⁴

i would sing you the shape of the world between us. turn my body into drum to let you know. slam my skin onto the surface of the ocean to tell you. i am here. wherever you are.

if it's dream you listening for. i'll dream you. if it's poetry in the morning. whatever. the radio. just test me. there is nowhere i cannot be. there is no sound i cannot travel through. there is no you i don't surround.

you can look or not look. you can fill your days with running in the shoes of other people. you can suffocate the minutes. i have time. i do not leave you. you can muffle every moment with your fear. it doesn't matter. i'm still here. and i am here. and i am here.⁵



remembering

you. basically our dreams were you. our nightmares too. can you imagine what it looked like from here? of course you don't have to, do you. the space, the colors, at the same time the dullness. we dreamt and we thought it was us, but it was always you. and you dream and you think that it's you, but it's always us. remember that.

sometimes in our dreams you were a bird. or that was us . . . the calling birds and owls reminding you. sometimes you were a wall covered with words. sometimes you were all the other people you know. sometimes we are all the other people you know. usually our dreams were of school. where we didn't get to go. where we went and got abused. where they told the lies about us. where you always are, we've noticed.

sometimes in your dreams you paint us with pieces of books you have read that we didn't write. somewhere you read that we didn't really write. but we did. and we do. i mean look. not just here in the book. look. your face.¹

some of us were here because we were stuck. some of us were here because we were stuck on believing other people needed us in order to get unstuck. some of us were here for the water, just the look of it, not the need for it. some of us were here for the pleasure, heightened by the pain of suffering, activated by the unavoidable repetition. some of us were here for others of us. just to see them again in form. just to form them again in seeing them. some of us were here for no reason. it was completely unreasonable for us to be here. some of us were here for our own names. to reclaim them. some of us were here to repay something that couldn't be repaid. some of us were here to get laid, and get the rest of us here. some of us couldn't be bothered. some of us were here to be mothered or fathered better than what happened or more. some of us were not really here, but just seemed to be. we were the ones guarding the door. you came here because we called you. you called you. the you that was us. before.²

there was a time when we thought no one would ever understand. even that, as we say it, presupposes time. as you understand it. and that's not what we mean. what we mean is how could you. how could you understand imperatives outside of time. how could you live this daily way if you did. how could the waves we sent become words you could hold, or could they? if they would be flutters in your heart would you yet know them? pulses in your thighs, would you still know what to do? and then you started dancing. all of you. any of you. and that's when we knew to keep sending the messages. that's when we knew that you knew.³

we would never leave you. we would never leave you here. we would never leave the world like this. that's why we put you here. you hear us? we put maps behind your eyes and over the entire sky. we put stories everywhere you stepped. but child services would have called it neglect.⁴

the first thing to remember is the smell. no, that's just the last thing that remains. but use it anyway to bring you back to earth, to make your memories solid. to make you long for sweetness. before that comes water and the way you taste it. the way you call it up within yourself. remember. remember. and before that there was heat. the way you changed into you. you the way you feared what you knew. the way you knew when to move and how to stay. and before that day there was the sound that you found. that had followed you around from the stars with just one thing to say:

feel it. you'll be okay.⁵

what do you think? maybe sometimes the breakthrough pulls on your brain. makes the contractions of your heart hard like Pitocin. and you sleep at the bottom of the ocean during the storm. and you feel the moon pull you through all the layers of water. and you let the heat drag you through all the layers of rock. and when you crash against anything you crash against yourself. remember what the ocean told you. there is nothing that is not me. and whatever confuses that, will break selves against themselves against me and still be mine. i am cause and effect. i am me pushing me into meaning. know that and breathe. know that and breathe again.⁶

you had to have a last name. last is a function. and a descriptor. but the types of names that last are the paternal names. and if you give yours away to take on the name of another man or if you keep the one your mother gave hers away for, or if, like with my people, you steal the name in some grab towards impossible accountability it is still never the name of the mother.

which is just another evident example of what you already know. they don't want you to remember me, they don't want you to remember free. they do not want you to know my name. but you know it. don't you?

so then build your memory early in the morning out of secrets and intuition. make your archive out of unauthorized claims. craft your knowing out of water and heat. wake up and write down my name.⁷

when they made me they tapped on the sound between the stars until it rang clear enough to call them back to what they came to do. the sound dispersed across centuries, the rhythm speeding and slowing with the urgency of particular times and particular tides and the particular curves of particular orbits. what you see is just a particle. what can be held by sound, what can seem solid in all this movement, a shimmering stillness so you can know. but the important thing is not to look. it is to listen and find the rhythm. is it speeding up or slowing now. tap tap. tap tap.⁸

do they do that to you too? mistake you for themselves. take you as anyone they love. it's the love does it. wherever you go in the world people try to claim you. something in them is saying they know love when they see it. when they see you first they have already seen you before. everyone's cousin at least. at best. keep it. cultivate love and share it. look at yourself in the mirror, look yourself in the eye like you never saw yourself before. look through time into your own eyes and find me. ⁹

there was a thick brown we used. to remember all of it. muck and how we got here. mud and how they stole it. land and what it didn't mean. trees and what they remembered and how they cracked and what they were used for. trees and how they witnessed and whipped and wept. there was the brown of sugar and vanilla and everything they would use to make whiteness. everything they would use to make whiteness, even their own bodies, their own children, also brown. all so brown. dirt. the color of dirt. everything. you did. everywhere. you're going.¹⁰

you remember the pulse. that broke into stars. you remember the songs and their echoes still floating. you remember the floating before needing breath. you remember that life. that life without death. you remember the crashing. the spacemaking heat. you remember the falling. the blazing bright streaks. you remember explosions and oozing and cooling. you remember the hardening time. you remember the widening. remember the wet. you remember the ocean that breathing begets. you remember the depth and don't ever forget the pulse and the float. you remember the breathing before the boat. you remember the hardening coral notes. you remember the reaching, the clawing, the hands. the need for the sand. you remember the crawling, the suction, the sludge. you remember the slither unleashed from above. you remember the shiver the need and the love. you remember creation. you remember the length and the holding and roots. you remember the dreams and the brightness, the truths. you remember the entrance the closeness the route to the place we now glow. you remember the way and the want and the loss. you remember the distance, the pull and the cost. you remember remembering and jolt and toss. don't forget what you know.

just remember to grow.¹¹

go back. it was the kitchen table. it was close enough to a window that you could see yourself in glass. there was something you were looking for but you wouldn't let yourself look long enough. there was something you wanted to ask.

back when? it was the kitchen table. it was the desk. it was the changing table and all the rest. it was the reason we were stable and able and blessed, because we ate from there. and it was not shells. it was only spells made by repetition. prayer made by pounding dough. critique culled by cutting herbs and vegetables down to size. it was not a place where you would gaze into your own eyes, but if you looked you could see your hands.

no one understands what makes the surface steady, what makes the sacred items charged and ready is not what they are. you could make an altar today by what you have scattered around the car if you really trusted. it is not all that. just sit down.¹²

In Praise of Mystery: A Poem for Europa
Ada Limon

Arching under the night sky inky
with black expansiveness, we point
to the planets we know, we

pin quick wishes on stars. From earth,
we read the sky as if it is an unerring book
of the universe, expert and evident.

Still, there are mysteries below our sky:
the whale song, the songbird singing
its call in the bough of a wind-shaken tree.

We are creatures of constant awe,
curious at beauty, at leaf and blossom,
at grief and pleasure, sun and shadow.

And it is not darkness that unites us,
not the cold distance of space, but
the offering of water, each drop of rain,

each rivulet, each pulse, each vein.
O second moon, we, too, are made
of water, of vast and beckoning seas.

We, too, are made of wonders, of great
and ordinary loves, of small invisible worlds,
of a need to call out through the dark.

INTRODUCTION

No matter how much we pretend that technological acceleration and transitioning to a computational civilization can pave the way to salvation anew, in truth, it is as if the short history of humanity on Earth has already been consummated.¹ Time itself might have lost all potentiality. With the system of nature now so out of kilter, it might be left to us merely to contemplate the world's end.² The task of thought then consists simply in announcing it. Hence the current rise to power of all sorts of eschatological narratives and the discourse of collapsology.

Combustion of the World

Collapsology truly risks dominating the decades ahead. Multiple anxieties backdrop its spread. On the one hand, the predatory reflexes that marked the first phases of capitalism's development are being honed everywhere, as the machine wrests free from all moorings or arbitration and seizes the living itself as its raw material.³ On the other hand, from the point of view of the production of signs that speak to the future, we keep going round in circles. In the North in particular, old imperialist impulses now combine with nostalgia and melancholy.⁴ This is because, stricken with moral lassitude and boredom, the center is now being irremediably gnawed at by the aggravated desire for a border and the fear of collapse. For this reason, we see barely disguised calls not for conquest as such, but for secession.⁵

If the mood is one of withdrawal and closure, it is partly because we no longer believe in the future.⁶ With time having exploded, and duration having been evacuated, all that counts now is emergency.⁷ The Earth is

held to be irremediably contaminated.⁸ We no longer expect anything, except the end itself. Besides, the norm, our common condition is more and more one of the living of life at the extremes. The concentration of capital in the hands of the few has never before attained the astronomical levels that it has today.⁹ On a planetary scale, a devouring plutocracy has never stopped playing here and elsewhere at capturing and sequestering humanity's goods and, soon, all living resources.¹⁰

At the same time, the heightened risk of a dizzying loss of social condition affects entire strata of society.¹¹ Until quite recently, such strata had had the possibility of changing status and experiencing upward mobility. Now that the race to the bottom runs at full tilt, however, they are confined to a struggle to hold on to, and possibly to secure, what little is left to them. Yet, instead of blaming their setbacks on the system that causes them, they shift the threat of impoverishment wielded against them onto others more unfortunate than they, others who have already been denuded of their material existence, and they call for those who have already been stripped of almost everything to have even greater brutality meted out on them.¹²

This desire for violence and endogamy, together with the rise in forms of anxiety, takes place against the background of the awareness of our spatial finitude, which is much keener than ever before. The Earth is indeed contracting continually. In itself a finite system, it has reached its limits. The division between life and nonlife is all the more telling. Living bodies exist only in relation to the biosphere, of which they are an integral component. The biosphere is not only a physical, organic, geological, vegetal, or atmospheric reality. As many scientists are rediscovering, it is also interwoven with noumenal realities that lie at the source of existential meaning.¹³ Some will come up against this experience of limits before others do. As a matter of fact, for many regions of the South, *having to re-create the living from the unlivable* is already a centuries-long condition.¹⁴ What is new is that the ordeal is one these regions now share with many others, others that no wall, border, bubble, or enclave will be able to protect in the future.

The experience of the world's combustion and the headlong rush toward extremes is manifest not only in the vertiginous depletion of natural resources, fossil energies, or metals that support the material infrastructure of our existence.¹⁵ It is also manifest, and in toxic form, in the water we drink, in the food we eat, in the technosphere, and even in the air we

breathe.¹⁶ It occurs in the transformations undergone by the biosphere, as evidenced by phenomena such as ocean acidification, rising water levels, the destruction of complex ecosystems—in short, climate change—and the flight reflex and hastened path to exodus of those whose living environments have been wrecked. In fact, the very food system of the Earth is impacted, and perhaps thus also is the ability of humans to make history with other species.

Even our conception of time is called into question.¹⁷ While speeds continue to explode, and distances to be conquered, the concrete time of the flesh and breath of the world, and that of the aging Sun, is no longer infinitely extensible.¹⁸ The countdown has begun.¹⁹ Ours is an age of planetary combustion. An emergency is thus upon us. Yet many peoples of this Earth have already known the reality of this emergency, fragility, and vulnerability—of the ordeal facing us—peoples who have had diverse disasters inflicted on them, disasters that have marked their histories with exterminations and other genocides, with massacres and dispossession, with slave raids, forced displacements, confinement in reserves, carceral landscapes, colonial ravages, and skeletal remainders along mined frontiers.²⁰

The possibility of a generic rupture thus hovers over the membrane of the world, subjected as it is to corrosive radioactivity.²¹ This possibility is fostered, on the one hand, by today's technological escalation and the intensification of what I am here calling *brutalism*, and on the other, by logistics of combustion and the slow, indefinite production of all kinds of ash clouds, acid rains, and so on—in short, of all the ruins among which those whose worlds have collapsed are forced to live.²² Strictly speaking, the age of the world's combustion is a posthistorical age.²³ The prospect of this event has seen reruns of old races, starting with that to redistribute the Earth, to partition it anew. Old nightmares have also resurfaced, above all the human race's division into different species and varieties, each marked by their supposedly irreconcilable specificities.²⁴

This is perhaps what explains the revival, on a planetary scale, of the desire for endogamy and of the kind of selection and sorting practices that stamped the history of slavery and colonization—two moments of rupture borne by the storm of steel and fed by the fuel that racism has been for modernity.²⁵ Unlike in those times, the selection drive is now based on manifold forms of nanotechnology.²⁶ It is no longer simply about machines.

This time it concerns something even more gigantic, something apparently limitless, that stands at the juncture of computation, cells, and neurons, and which seems to defy the very experience of thought.²⁷ Technology has become biology and neurology. It has become a figurative reality, shaking up all humans' fundamental relations with the world.

Everything is converging on an unprecedented unification of the planet. The old world of bodies and distances, of matter and expanses, of spaces and borders still persists, but through its metamorphosis. Further still, the now transformed horizon of calculation continues to see a spectacular return of animism, a cult of the self and of objects, while the almost indefinite extension of logics of quantification is leading to an unexpected acceleration of humanity's becoming artificial. This becoming-artificial of humanity and its counterpart, the becoming-human of objects and machines, may well constitute the real substance of what some today call the "great replacement."

Brutalism is the proper name for this apotheosis of a form of power without external limits or an outside, which dismisses both the myth of exit and that of *another world to come*. In concrete terms, what characterizes brutalism is the tight interweaving of several figures of reason: economic and instrumental reason; electronic and digital reason; and neurological and biological reason. Brutalism is based on the deep conviction that the distinction between the living and machines no longer exists. Matter, in the last instance, is the machine, which today means the computer taken broadly—the nerves, the brain, and all numinous reality. The spark of the living lies in it. The worlds of matter, machine, and life are henceforth one. As privileged vectors of the neovitalism that fuels neoliberalism, animism and brutalism accompany our transition to a new technical system, one more reticular, more automated, more concrete, and more abstract all at once. Under these conditions, can the Earth and the living be places not only of intellectual provocation, can they also be properly political concepts and *events for thought*?

The idea of a generic rupture, at once telluric, geological, and almost techno-phenomenal, can be found at the basis of modern Afro-diasporic thought. The idea is particularly manifest in the three currents of Afropessimism, Afrofuturism, and Afropolitanism. A theme impels each of these currents, namely that of the fallen seed that, landing on barren soil, struggles to survive by catching light rays in a hostile environment. Thrown

into an unknown world and confronted with extremes, how can this seed germinate in a place that is so poor and where everything tends to desiccate? What root systems must be developed and what subterranean parts maintained? In each of these three currents of thought, and particularly in Afrofuturism, the invention of a new world is a vibratory act. This act proceeds from what we could call radical imagination.²⁸ The vibratory act is characterized by its straddling and going beyond the given and its constraints. This is how it participates in technical activity, where such activity is understood as the capacity to actualize, deploy, and manifest a reserve of power.²⁹

In these three currents, Africa, beyond all its wounds, is that which will have paradoxically represented this reserve of power, or this *power in reserve*, as the sole power able to repatriate the human being not to Earth, but to the Cosmos. It is a potentially constitutive power, in its reality as well its form, in its vibrations as well as its matter, since it is liable to open onto an unlimited field of permutations and new structurations. In this essay, then, we set out from the hypothesis that *it is on the African continent, the birthplace of humanity, that the question of the Earth is now posed, and is posed in the most unexpected, complex, and paradoxical manner.*

In Africa, indeed, the prospects of decline are the most glaring. But it is also where we find the ripest chances for *creative metastasis*. Many planetary issues related to the question of reparations manifest themselves with the greatest acuity in Africa, starting with the reparation of the living, the persistence and durability of circulating human bodies in movement, of our accompanying objects but also of the *part of the object* now inseparable from what humanity has become. Africa is, as the Earth's *vibranium* (in the sense that others speak about a *sensorium*), also the place where all the categories that have served to envisage what art, politics, need, ethics, technology, and language are, face the most radical challenge, and where, simultaneously, paradoxical forms of the living emerge ceaselessly.

Moreover, this planetary turn of the African condition and the Africanization of the planetary condition will perhaps constitute the two major philosophical, cultural, and artistic events of the twenty-first century. It is indeed here, in Africa, that the great questions of the century, those that challenge the human race most immediately, are posed with the utmost urgency and acuteness—whether concerning the ongoing planetary repopulation, significant population movements and the imperative to

deborderize, the future of life and reason, or further, the need to decarbonize the economy. Thanks to Africa's gigantic animistic reserves, all truly planetary thinking will inevitably have to confront the African sign.

The *Pharmakon* of the Earth

This is why the expression "African sign" ought to be understood as that which always exceeds what is given to be seen. As it happens, contemporary Afro-diasporic creation is engaged precisely in an attempt to show this excess and this beyond of appearances. It strives to imbue it with a particular energy. On the world stage, Africa is once again an object of intense psychic and oneiric activity, just as it was at the beginning of the twentieth century. From within and among its various diasporas, there is renewed interest in the dream of a nation that stands on its own feet, powerful, and unique among humanity, or of a civilization (the word is not out of place) capable of grafting a futuristic technological core onto thousand-year-old indigenous traditions.

In cinematographic productions, Africa is portrayed as a land that harbors unfathomable riches, an abundance of minerals and *raw materials* that undoubtedly make it the *pharmakon of the Earth*. In science fiction, dance, music, and novels, Africa evokes almost telluric rituals of resurrection, as when, on clay or buried under the red ocher soil, the king's body undertakes its journey to the ancestors, carried by the shadow of Osiris, and begins dialoguing with the dead. In fashion and photography, Africa seizes upon costumes of solar beauty, depicted in a deluge of colors and a tornado of forms.

In gleaming colors, bodies are making their appearance everywhere—from dark blue black to sun black, fire black, brown and yellowish black, clay black, copper and silver black, lunar black, volcanic black, and crater black. These are true hymns to multiplicity, proliferation, and dissemination. And what can we say about matter at the level of dreams and machines that are themselves sculpted in the image of the world of animals, birds, flora, fauna, and an ancient aquatic environment? And, above all, how can we not evoke woman? Is she not ultimately, when it comes to the world's duration and rebirth, the enigma and the secret alike?

Here in Africa, everything has always been plurally combined. Life itself has always been about learning to put together composite, disparate,

and in a pinch, incompatible elements, then establishing equivalences between them, transforming the one into the other. In addition to this social polytheism, we must also add movement, *circulations*. Its apparently immobile expanses are actually worked by extensive movement, on the surface as well as subterraneanly.³⁰ Even duration is a mobile cut. There is thus a planetary becoming of Africa that forms the counterpart of the planet's becoming-African. The task of critique is to take this planetarity on board.

But, apart from this, every project to do with repairing the Earth will have to take into account what we, in this essay, call *humanity's becoming-artificial*. The twenty-first century has indeed begun with a spectacular return to animism.³¹ This is no longer the nineteenth-century's animism, whose expression is modeled on the worship of ancestors; this new form is based instead on the cult of the self and of objects as our multiple doubles. More than ever, these latter constitute the sign par excellence of the unconscious states of our psychic life.

It is through their mediation that experiences of strong emotional intensity are increasingly felt, and what is not directly symbolizable now tends to be expressed. Humanity no longer stands and looks down from above on a system of objects. Humans are now traversed, from one side to the other, by objects that work us as much as we work them. There is a becoming-object of humanity that is the counterpart of the becoming-human of objects. We are the ore that our objects are tasked with extracting. The objects act with us, make us act and, especially, animate us.

Digital technologies have above all made possible the rediscovery of this power of animation as well as this psycho-prosthetic function. As a result, the new animism merges with electronic and algorithmic reason, which is its medium and its envelope, and even its motor. On the political level, this new animism is a knot of paradoxes. Virtualities of emancipation are to be found in its deepest core. It announces—perhaps—the end of dichotomies. But it is also able to serve as a privileged vector of the neovitalism that feeds neoliberalism. The new animist spirit must therefore be critiqued. The aim of this critique would then be to contribute to *protecting the living against the forces of desiccation*. Therein lies the signifying force of the African object in the contemporary world.

This critique, undertaken on the basis of precolonial artifacts, also bears on matter and the mechanical principle itself. To this mechanical principle, the African object opposes that of breathing, as that which is

specific to all forms of life. In fact, African objects have always been the manifestation of what lies beyond matter. While made of matter, they are actually a strident call to overcome and transfigure it. In African systems of thought, the object is a discourse on the beyond of the object. It acts, with other animated forces, within the framework of a regenerative and symbiotic economy. An uncompromising critique of this civilization in the process of immaterialization in which we bathe would gain inspiration from this history and this epistemology.³² What do these latter teach us if not that life is not sufficient to itself? It is not inexhaustible. Neovitalism asserts that life will always survive all sorts of extreme and even catastrophic situations. We can thus, according to this logic, destroy life as much as we want.³³

But neovitalism does not know how to live with loss. Within humanity's ongoing and frantic race to extremes, our shared lot is dispossession and deprivation. It is increasingly likely that that which is being taken is both invaluable and unable ever to be returned. The absence of any possibility of restitution or restoration will perhaps mark the end of the museum, understood not as the extension of a cabinet of curiosities but as the figure par excellence of humanity's past, one to which it would be a sort of silent witness. The antimuseum alone would remain—not the museum without objects or the fugitive residence of objects without museum, but a kind of attic of the future, whose function would be to welcome what must be born but is not yet there.

To anticipate a potential, as yet unaverred, presence, one that has not yet assumed a stable form, should perhaps be the starting point of any future critique whose horizon is to forge a common ground. It would be a question of starting not from absence, not from what is vacant, but from an *anticipatory presence*. For, it will be impossible, without this common ground and thus without deborderization, to repair the Earth or set the living back in circulation.

FIVE

BORDER-BODIES

Contemporary forms of brutalism are characterized not only by the dismantling of social safety nets and by risk-hedging mechanisms or, more generally, by the attempt to replace democracy with the market. These forms are also identifiable in the obsession with abolishing politics, a foremost feature of what is now called “authoritarian liberalism.” Indeed, the most decisive changes in contemporary capitalism are not only about deregulating financial transactions, serving public services up to private-sector profiteering, reducing taxes for the rich, or contending for the good graces of liquidity providers. Above all else, one of the major anthropological transformations of our time is humanity’s division into multiple *racially typed class* fractions. This involves a distinction, between solvent and insolvent human persons, on the one hand, and a planetary-scale division between what Étienne Balibar calls the “mobile part of humanity” and “wandering humanity,” on the other.¹

“Too Many” Humans

The border institution is the mechanism by which this new division becomes part of reality. Moreover, borders are no longer made of irreversible lines that only rarely cross. They are no longer exclusively physical. They are fundamentally hybrid and deliberately incomplete and segmented. If they are sites par excellence that manifest today’s depredation, it is because they are the point of convergence formed by various measures that ensure the managing and regulation of the living as well as the unequal distribution of the perils we face. Sometimes they are combined with security

measures, sometimes with humanitarian measures, and sometimes with identity measures.² Even the law of mortality now meshes with the border institution.³ Whether physical, virtual, or dotted lines, all borders share the common feature of being tension-charged. Now that they operate toward the exterior as well as toward the interior, they have effectively become fish traps, apparatuses for capturing, immobilizing, and removing populations deemed undesirable, surplus, and even “excessive.” But what do “surplus populations” name?

Answering this question requires that we return to two types of fears that have shaped Western discourse on “population mathematics” since at least the seventeenth century. These are the fear of overpopulation and its opposite, the fear of depopulation. The latter, that is, fear of the conditions that permit the extinction of the human species, resurfaced as of the seventeenth century, a time when the physiological subsistence of humans was at stake. The example of France was acute. Between 1565 and 1788, the kingdom was shaken by interminable subsistence crises. Sometimes they were the consequence of climatic reversals, or the rise in wheat prices and tax pressures, and sometimes they resulted from a combination of food shortages and epidemics. Fertility and mortality rates canceled each other out in successive phases.⁴ During the last twenty years of the reign of Louis XIV, the great famines of 1693–1694 and 1709–1710 resulted in a population decrease.⁵

Of all the epidemics, the plague, but also cholera, smallpox, typhus, and measles were the most devastating.⁶ Each of these epidemics always caused a sharp increase in deaths and had devastating effects both in the cities and in the countryside.⁷ Additionally, epidemics and famines caused Balibar’s “wandering humanity” to pour out onto the streets in search of food. While hunger does kill, epidemics have often led to a sudden multiplication and circulation of virulence. In these conditions, the word “population” referred to a mass reality, and more precisely to potentially virulent bodies.⁸ This mass was at once physiological, organic, and biopolitical.

The issue concerned the mass of bodies and organisms potentially exposed to the risk of enfeeblement due to their contact with disease and misfortune. The issue of virulence appeared in different forms, in particular in the case of fevers. These fevers were given many names: putrid fever, malignant fever, pestilent fever, purple fever, or typhoid fever. In their various guises, fevers flagged an organism’s putrescent part, that which

was liable to host worms and have maggots eat into it.⁹ In short, depopulation was interpreted as a real biological threat, situated at the meeting point of climatic accidents, crop and price regimes, and rates of natality, mortality, and mobility.

The fear of depopulation was matched by the fear of overpopulation. It was commonly believed, for examples, that states were put at risk by having “too large a number of people.” Excessive and uncontrolled population growth was likened to a plague. If the multitude lacked for food and space, so the thinking went, people would readily start devouring each other. Population excess was, moreover, likely to prepare the ground for frightful riots, even revolutions.¹⁰ The scarcity of births, combined with an increase in infant mortality, would likely wipe out certain social classes, especially with the addition of subsistence crises.¹¹ Death was not just a matter of singular destinies, and it was not distributed randomly. Mortality did not increase exclusively with age. Births and deaths obeyed laws that could be mathematized.¹² All things considered, population policy was for a long time subordinated to the question of subsistence.¹³

The idea that a country’s population ought to be proportional to its means of subsistence was, for example, at the core of Malthusianism. “Subsistence” referred not only to economic resources but also to the basic nourishing capital without which life itself is threatened, starting with the body turned to waste and its multiple endowments. For example, crises related to hunger and food shortages, plagues, other epidemics, and wars were likely to affect subsistence. Major crises of high mortality and low natality rates usually coincided with these key moments. Medical advances (prophylaxis) were key to nipping them in the bud.

An increase in the number of people was considered legitimate only if there was a simultaneous increase in means of subsistence.¹⁴ If, like the absolute sovereign of the seventeenth century, a feudal lord viewed “with a favorable eye the multiplication of his subjects,” and if the nineteenth-century industrialist was sympathetic to a “vigorous birth rate among the working population,” this did not hold for the castle owner. The latter, as Alfred Sauvy would later state, viewed with concern “the development of a population of vagabonds, who prowled around his estate. Are they not, one day, capable of resorting to a distribution of goods outside the usual law?”¹⁵ The problem was therefore not the birth rate in general, but that of the popular classes. As we shall see, this concern was later directed toward

“proletarian nations,” leading Sauvy to say that the “fear of the multiplication of others,” and of the proletarian races, in particular, led to “a fresh outbreak of Malthusianism in populations already undermined by demographic ageing.”¹⁶

Amid this ebb and flow, the demographic regime was generally characterized by stagnation. Whatever the intensity of the fluctuations, both subsistence and demographic crises constantly called into question the political order itself. They dramatically raised the question of what to do with the poor in general and with errant poverty in particular: How to feed the poor? Who was in charge of them? Insofar as food shortages and epidemics had the consequence of throwing multitudes out onto the streets without a safety net, the number of errant populations, and mobile and weakened bodies increased each time. This being the case, population policy was, more than ever, couched in terms of surpluses; that is, the number of humans and bodies was deemed to be “in excess,” and draconian rules were devised to regulate their mobility.

From that point on, some enduring questions were raised as a matter of course within each historical cycle and regime of domination, starting with the question of how to define who is part of the “too many,” what to do with those who are part of those infected lives of the “too many,” and how to deal with them with regard to the law of survival and mortality?¹⁷ How do we stop the production of “too many” humans? How can we ensure that we have simply the right number of subjects, and what would be the “best means of euthanasia for an excessive population” and the cohort of “excess mouths”?¹⁸ And, above all, how do we regiment the mobility of potentially virulent bodies, that is, human waste, those who are unexploitable as manpower, unable to be absorbed and, therefore, superfluous?

Up until the fourteenth century, it was the poor, wandering beggars who figured as the living expression of these “surplus” men. Being associated with Christlike figures, they received alms and were the target of charitable care. Then, from the sixteenth century onward, a phase of stigmatization began.¹⁹ Having the specificity of living everywhere and nowhere, being without community or territorial attachment, didn’t they question the values of sedentary life? As they barely worked, as their strength was already diminished and they were destined to a premature death, didn’t they belong to the useless part of humanity? Attempts were consequently accelerated to control this supernumerary, disaffiliated, and

mobile humanity, resulting, on the one hand, in the establishment of welfare systems, such as the General Hospital (1656) and the beggar's warehouses created in 1764, and, on the other hand, in the increasing penalization of illicit forms of migration, henceforth regarded as vagrancy.²⁰

The repressive arsenal targeting poor and migrant populations were subsequently designed to partition them off, to confine and imprison them, and possibly also to deport them to the colonies.²¹ The treatment of migrant bodies, which were likened to virulent bodies or to human waste, gradually came to appear as measures of social prophylaxis. The best way to deal with this human waste was to evacuate it from the ordinary spaces of life. This would not stop them moving about. But it would ensure they moved about simply as flows and rejects directed toward drainage points. The movement of such bodies would thus be limited. They would be subjected to sorting procedures, not because they were to be considered as resources to be tapped into, but with a view to their possible elimination, since they were potential sources of nuisance.

Virulent bodies would also become trapped in the mesh of several penalizing measures. Sometimes, during epidemics, the constabulary might be ordered to pursue vagrants and send them to the galleys or subject them to forced labor in fortifications. Migrancy was thus criminalized, and beggars and vagrants were transformed into convicts and forced to serve their sentences in the navy's prisons or in the ports and naval dockyards. Having escaped natural death, they were subsequently caught, sentenced to the galleys or to perpetual banishment, to a whipping, to making a public apology, or to undergoing a period of banishment.²²

This preventative treatment of the issue of "excess" people and surplus populations came to be supplemented with practices of elimination. In terms of eliminating "surplus" people, the demographic consequences of mass wars and other military campaigns could be considerable. In the event that the troops were numerous and stationed in the territory they crossed through, they were able to decimate civilian populations, especially if they engaged in exactions or pillaging. War was therefore part of the panoply of devices available for regulating surplus populations.

The population also counted as ammunition for fighting against the enemy. Payment of the blood tax largely fell to surplus populations. Sometimes they were forcibly conscripted into militias formed through the introduction of compulsory service. The incorporation of large numbers of

subjects into armies depended on the wealth of the state. After the French Revolution in particular, the idea prevailed that the state's military power was proportional to the extent of the population it could place under arms.

In itself, emigration to the colonies was not a practice of elimination, except when the colonists undertook to liquidate the indigenous populations living in the territories where they wished to settle.²³ This was sometimes the result of a multiform process, which the anthropologist Paul Broca described well to the Academy of Medicine in 1867. What happens, he asked, "wherever men multiply on an inextensible soil"? His reply:

They begin by compressing somewhat, clearing the heaths, fertilizing the moors, drying out the marshes. Up to this point, then, it's wonderful; but there comes a time when the whole place is occupied. And afterwards? There remains the resource of emigration. Thus we will expatriate; we will go across the seas to expropriate and destroy little by little races weaker than ours: we will fill America, Oceania, southern Africa. But the planet on which we live is not elastic. So, what will happen in future generations when the temporary resource of emigration has been exhausted? There will be an aggravation of the struggle for existence that Darwin called the struggle for life, which is manifested in nature at every level of the chain of beings.²⁴

Other practices of elimination relied on population transfers.²⁵

The Mathematics of Populations

We have just shown that the notion of "surplus," or "excess," people, has been a core part of the European mathematics of populations since the beginning of the modern era. It served as the basis for many theories about "living space" and as a pretext for policies of extermination between the two World Wars.²⁶ It also played a crucial role in European emigration to the rest of the world because of colonization.²⁷

Today, and for the rest of the twenty-first century, the Earth is and will be divided between "high-fertility countries" and countries suffering a "decline in fertility."²⁸ The question of population control is once again on the cultural and geopolitical agenda. Already many people, especially those in the world's North, are making a direct link between migration pressures and population pressures. The idea of sterilizing the dominated

classes and nations has resurfaced in the imagination of the dominant. Fears about the spilling over of prolific populations have resurfaced. Why? Because the problem of the population is one of the Earth's distribution, namely "the fear, more or less declared, that one day there will have to be some sharing."²⁹ While in the countries of the South, extractive capitalism is reaching cruising speed, neo-Malthusianism is consolidating and is now considered the "ethical" counterpart of neoliberalism.

In practice, neo-Malthusianism is based on what the philosopher Elsa Dorlin calls the "colonial management of the human herd." This, she reminds us, "branches into different techniques of social sterilization."³⁰ This paradigm is what enables us to understand antimigration policies and the phenomena of detention, encampment, refoulement, and deportation of errant humanities. In the age of brutalism and ostentatious disregard for the rule of law, "surplus" humans now have many faces. Not all fit the portrait that Marx paints of them in his descriptions of the capitalist social relationship.

In Marx's time, "surplus" bodies were clearly part of what he called the "industrial reserve army." Generally speaking, surplus bodies were a reservoir of muscular force that was sometimes useful (especially when the capitalist system was expanding and needed to replenish its labor force), and sometimes useless (when an expansion phase was followed by a contraction phase). In contraction phases, such bodies were relegated to unemployment. With regard to capitalist logic, Marx also distinguished different scales of "overpopulation." Thus, he dealt with the "relative overpopulation" typical of the early phases of capitalism, in particular when it was a matter of destroying traditional ways of life and creating the objective conditions for proletarianization.

One was then faced with bodies from which one removed the material conditions of reproduction and existence. This removal was the prelude to their being thrown into a labor market in which they were subjected to new logics of exploitation. In this phase, these bodies were dispossessed and relatively expropriated, as dispossession and relative expropriation were both necessary conditions of entry into process of primitive accumulation.

But dispossession and expropriation could not be absolute. This held, in particular, in the case of the settler colonies. In South Africa, for example, the system of "reserves" and the later "Bantustans" worked to subsidize

capital. Thanks to these “subsidies,” a part of capital’s operation costs was shifted onto traditional systems of reproduction, which figured women at their core. These systems were not totally dismantled. Instead, they came to be articulated in a relatively complex way to the machinery of exploitation itself.³¹ To these categories, Marx added those of “floating overpopulation,” which names the mass of potentially exploitable bodies; and “latent overpopulation,” in which he included social minors such as women and children; and “stagnant overpopulation,” which included peasants and craftsmen.

It is not clear that this taxonomy holds any longer, as the capitalist social relationship now largely operates by enforcing loans and debts, and as the price of labor power is falling.³² Competition for credit allocation is now the keyword in the dispute. If, within capitalism’s new orientation, profit is increasingly based on credit, then the rules of production of obsolete populations also necessarily change. Today’s “surplus” people are those with neither the skills to make them employable nor the assets, titles, or property to guarantee their solvency.³³

The age of *land grabs* has thus been superimposed upon by an age of relative disembodiment and the *setting in motion* of flows of all kinds. By no means is this about the abolishing of matter. The Earth itself continues to be targeted by all sorts of appropriation.³⁴ But, more than ever, matter is effective only in articulation with dematerialized movement. A case in point is credit and currencies. Their space of circulation is allegedly the “boundless space” of the globe as a whole. In this regime of dematerialized movement, no border is a priori impassable. Borders are fundamentally no longer effective. All that exists is the horizon and its beyond. In principle, then, movement is no longer restricted. Space is also returned to its zero degree insofar as it serves circulation alone. In return, circulation is not only a spur for technology; it is also a spur for movement—it is movement’s substratum.

But how do human bodies fare in all this? And which bodies precisely? Patterns of exploitation have changed from those at whose center stood the Marxian bodies of the worker, the peasant, or the “excess” woman. Perhaps there has never been a time when belief in an integral body, a full member of a political community, was the norm. Perhaps in every community the sacrifice of bodies has always been at the foundation of the imaginaries of any community, understood as a vital hearth. Perhaps

the taking of certain lives from time to time has always been the very condition of possibility of life in its generality.

In ancient African systems of thought, the human body was seen as a digest of energetic relationships, their clustering as well as their point of convergence and coagulation. In the context of the Black Trade, human bodies could be bought and sold. Slave bodies were captured and put to work as privileged sources of energy. The plantation system extracted this energy, exploited, and eventually depleted it. These bodies were occasionally subjected to various technologies of torment, mutilation, and torture (cf. the *Codes Noirs*). In effect, the point was to hollow out life as much as possible.

Much the same occurred with the transition from the workshop to the factory, with the exception of the salary (however modest). The submission of bodies to the machine and its rhythms was designed to produce consumable goods. This production involved machines in squandering the energy of bodies of workers and laborers. With the slave and the worker alike, the body was not only the object of an energy extraction. It was without integrity, pulverizable and dislocatable, both dispensable and indispensable, too much and too little. In the age of the machine, the body has been one of the machine's innumerable excreta. In the passage to the immaterial, other figures of the virulent body make their appearance.

Neo-Malthusianism

The border-body is a key example, insofar as—divisible, dismemberable, re-memberable, and decomposable—it is an assembly governed by the law of codes and space. The border-body is essentially a racial body, the body of a racial class subjected to a new kind of intensive calculation. It brings together externalization and internationalization. Always on the verge of falling onto the other side of the fence, it fundamentally lacks any safety membrane. A body torn to pieces, it is folded in several layers and carries the memory of partitions and subdivisions in its flesh. This body can be found on land, at sea, in abstract spaces, in transformations of the air into light and vapor, both solid and fluid, lurking under optical fibers.

To a great extent, the decisive paradox of African history within capitalism is the largely unresolved tension between movement and immobility. This is also its great enigma.³⁵ In other parts of the world, this tension

received some resolution through the machine and that which made it possible, namely the automobile and road, the train and railway, the airplane and the ship, and today, the great material infrastructure that has enabled distances and speeds to be overcome. The machine has made it possible to tame natural environments, whether forests, deserts, rivers, oceans, or mountains. It has vastly increased the ability to set beings, things, and objects in motion. In this way, the machine can rightly be considered “materialized movement,” or matter that has the specificity of appropriating movement. This appropriation is, as Yves Stourdze remarks, original and decisive, not only because it effectively revolutionizes the social order but also because it enables new chains of domination to be established.³⁶

In Africa, humans, draining the vitality of other humans, damage the Earth in the process. But neither the Earth nor man have been entirely, at least not until now, subjected to mechanical movement. For the time being, this subjection is partial and relative. Extortion therefore takes singular forms. The privileged means used to extract riches are extraction and drilling. This space is composed of a multitude of points of drainage and evacuation that do not constitute an actual network. The great movement of elemental forces is far from reaching the explosive speed and swirling power of which it is capable, and which is typical of what we might call the *great forge*. In the absence of this experiment of the great forge, the body of race remains a soot-covered firebrand, subject to accident, even to planned calamity.

The border, however, is simply the visible part of larger measures and installations that have been constituted in response to the question of what to do with the flows of waste, that is, with the *surplus of humanity* of which the fleeing and stray fraction—which is undergoing accelerated growth—is only a tiny part. Borders and other facilities comprise so many platforms for oversorting. The border-bodies are part of these waste-filled worlds.³⁷ Unlike slaves, they have little added value. Their market value is limited. Some wastes travel long distances. Once captured, many border-bodies will end up in the same channels. The operations of capture are increasingly subcontracted to external or private service providers. Most of these providers are tasked with eliminating such bodies in remote areas. A case in point are the bodies buried and incinerated in the desert. Other forms of disposal without treatment or recycling characterize the maritime sectors.

The mass production of border-bodies has led to a reactivation of imaginaries concerning the population that were typical of the period that coincided with the emergence of capitalism and then colonialism.³⁸ This reactivation could be called *neonaturalism*, that is, the revived belief in a series of fundamental truths that nature as a system would supposedly legitimize. Such truths are seen not as social or historical constructions but instead as fundamental, self-justifying facts. It is similar with imaginaries concerning the species and the evolution of living beings. Our time is a time in search of new foundations on which to classify living beings. Once again, the limits of the species are being inquired into, since new forms do not cease to appear, notably given today's technological escalation. Among these "new" figures are what were formerly referred to as "aberrant forms," part of which is the wandering fraction of humanity.

The other imaginary that neonaturalism sets in motion concerns hybridity. Originally, hybridity was seen as the result of the sexual mating of two individuals of different species, "the fruit of which had to be necessarily and radically infertile."³⁹ Species could be distinguished from one another on two levels. First, on that of external dissimilarities; second, on that of fertility or, more precisely, the impossibility of mutual fertilization. The language of zoology has already done the work of overseeing the discourse on species.

Today, belief in the existence of distinct species has made a comeback, as have fears concerning infertile mating. The discourse on life and on the living has come once more to revolve around the theme of fertility and its other—heredity. The desire for endogamy comes as a response to hybridity insofar as hybridity is perceived as a threat to distinguishing species. The conviction here is that humanity comprises different kinds; and that, while there is no race as such, there are in fact different species. The possibility of fertilization or fertility is lost without the presence of a number of common characteristics. As such, fertility is regarded as possible only within the limits of one and the same natural kind, that is, within the confines of an *anatomical and epidermal community*. Such a community would be, moreover, the surest means by which to determine the individuals who compose it.

In the contemporary context, which is characterized by the growth of computer and computational systems, we are thus witnessing the establishment of another architecture and other ways of dividing the planet

into sovereign spaces.⁴⁰ These sovereign spaces do not emerge through land grabs and control of the sea- and airways so much as through the extension of a hold on speed and on the living, understood in part as that which moves. Spatial machines are ever more calculating, abstract, and ubiquitous. They operate through the segmentation of spaces, and in the process produce places conducive to greater mobility for some and to more immobility for others. The dialectic of speed and immobility (or immobilization) has the effect of making life burdensome for “surplus” people. In its treatment of them, the state is no longer bound to repress its constitutive violence.

The treatment of border-bodies no longer takes place along the line separating inside from outside. Each now dissolves into the other. As a result, the mesh of ordinary repression and practices of immobilization operate on a different basis. They most often begin with generalizing practices of identity verification, which lead to possible police custody. It is increasingly the case that special police deployments are called upon to deal with civic demonstrations. They will effectively smother protest movements with tear gas. The police-justice chain, especially during protest events, increasingly involves searches, arrests, the obstruction of movement, placement in police custody, and if necessary, examinations and subsequent court referrals.

Nowadays social peace is secured through molecular forms of social warfare. This warfare centers on the body that is forced to turn around for handcuffing, not without having been subjected to searches beforehand. It is a matter of applying innumerable mechanisms that make it possible to exercise the power to punish and intimidate, the power to exact retribution, but within the margins of legal interpretation, that is, on its arbitrary edge.

The combination of police arbitrariness and judicial coercion indeed allows for the creation of zones of legal indeterminacy that, in turn, enable the preventive punishment of people who have been transformed into suspects, but who have not been formally judged or convicted.⁴¹ The war against border-bodies also depends on an economy that it also has the function of feeding. This explains, for example, the uninterrupted manufacture and sale of equipment and software intended to track down or neutralize virulent bodies. We can find all kinds of instruments of brutality on these markets, and in these workshops. The most eye-opening are those that enable bodies to be torn apart, that can emit gas clouds over men and women

down on the ground with a boot on the neck—instruments that make it possible to dent, break, and violently deform the body, thus returning it to bare existence. These instruments, torture equipment included, aim to terrify those who are already afraid, to break their power of endurance, to encircle bodies like rings of fire.

All these forces are about wearing bodies down. This is the case, for instance, with “electric ankle restraints” or “electric shock anti-riot forks,” which are designed to impart “electric shocks to the thighs,” or with tear gas launchers.⁴² But we must also include facial recognition devices, identity management systems (which are supposed infallible and made of interoperable components), integral biometric modules able to bring together registers of civil and social security status, identity cards, passports, and geolocation and body-tracking technologies.

We know the significance of population issues in Hitlerian and fascist thinking. The destruction of peoples was its climactic dimension. But we must also bear in mind the mass deportations and other forms of elimination achieved through so-called natural death as well as through other forms of death caused by malnutrition, ill-treatment, lack of protection against epidemics, food shortages, and starvation.⁴³ Brutalism is a form of planetary social war. As molecular warfare, it is largely directed against those who, wishing to sell the only commodity they possess, namely their labor power, can no longer find any buyers. Their transformation into border-bodies is perhaps the greatest challenge to contemporary population policies.

Intifada Incantation: Poem #8 for b.b.L.

By June Jordan

I SAID I LOVED YOU AND I WANTED
GENOCIDE TO STOP
I SAID I LOVED YOU AND I WANTED AFFIRMATIVE
ACTION AND REACTION
I SAID I LOVED YOU AND I WANTED MUSIC
OUT THE WINDOWS
I SAID I LOVED YOU AND I WANTED
NOBODY THIRST AND NOBODY
NOBODY COLD
I SAID I LOVED YOU AND I WANTED I WANTED
JUSTICE UNDER MY NOSE
I SAID I LOVED YOU AND I WANTED
BOUNDARIES TO DISAPPEAR

I WANTED
NOBODY ROLL BACK THE TREES!W
I WANTED
NOBODY TAKE AWAY DAYBREAK!
I WANTED
NOBODY FREEZE ALL THE PEOPLE ON THEIR
KNEES!

I WANTED YOU
I WANTED YOUR KISS ON THE SKIN OF MY SOUL
AND NOW YOU SAY YOU LOVE ME AND I STAND
DESPITE THE TRILLION TREACHERIES OF SAND
YOU SAY YOU LOVE ME AND I HOLD THE LONGING
OF THE WINTER IN MY HAND
YOU SAY YOU LOVE ME AND I COMMIT
TO FRICTION AND THE UNDERTAKING
OF THE PEARL

YOU SAY YOU LOVE ME
YOU SAY YOU LOVE ME

AND I HAVE BEGUN
I BEGIN TO BELIEVE MAYBE
MAYBE YOU DO

I AM TASTING MYSELF
IN THE MOUTH OF THE SUN

20

Abolition Geography and the Problem of Innocence

We were trying to find language to make sense of a time before whatever came after.

—China Miéville, *Embassytown*

Money

Loot. Pay. Wage. Profit. Interest. Tax. Rent. Accumulation. Extraction. Colonialism. Imperialism.

The modern prison is a central but by no means singularly defining institution of carceral geographies in the United States and beyond, geographies that signify regional accumulation strategies and upheavals, immensities and fragmentations, that reconstitute in space-time (even if geometrically the coordinates are unchanged) to run another round of accumulation.

Prison rose in tandem with a world-historical transition in the role of money in everyday life. In retrospect the transformation looks just like a flip. From having been, as for most people it continues to be, a *means* to move stored energy between sellers and buyers of desired objects, money became the desirable *end*, not for hoarders' and misers' erotic caresses, but to touch differently and not for too long—to enliven through pressing into imperative motion irregular but perpetual cycles of transformation to make more money. Capitalism: never not racial, including in rural England, or anywhere in Europe for that matter, where, as Cedric Robinson teaches us, hierarchies among people whose descendants might all have become white depended for their structure on group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death, exploited by elites, as part of all equally exploitable nature-as-other, to justify inequality at the end of the day, and next morning as well.

Racial capitalism: a mode of production developed in agriculture, improved by enclosure in the Old World, and captive land and labor in the Americas, perfected in slavery's time-motion field-factory choreography, its chorographic imperative forged on the anvils of imperial war-making monarchs and the tributary peers who had to ante up taxes—in cash not kind—so the sovereign might arm increasingly centralized and regularized militaries who became less able to pay themselves, as they had in the past, by looting at each battle's end. Not that they stopped looting later or now.

Nor did the pay packet come all at once: in the United States many nineteenth-century citizen-soldiers went to their graves still waiting to be paid for having killed or agreed to kill Native Americans or French or their proxies. The compensation took the form of something that could be transformed into something else: title to looted land—an honor for the vast *herrenvolk* peerage of enfranchised white men—land, a good that can't be moved, though a deed can be pocketed or sold or borrowed against or seized for a lien, in other words, turned into money; and if not a title, a pension, an entitlement paid out regularly as money to ease one's golden years.

Indeed, modern prisons were born alongside, and grew up with, the United States of America. Penitentiaries established state-making at the margin of the early republic, whose every founding document recapitulated free as against other, imported as against immigrated, to clarify that sweeping ideals of defense and general welfare, long before the Thirteenth Amendment, had no universal remit but rather defined from the earliest pages who was in and who out.

Then, as now, competing concepts of freedom shaped the planetary movement of people and relationships. Like lives, early sentences were short, absorbing one by one people who wouldn't toe their assigned or presumed line, play their part, hit their mark, in racial capitalism's dramatically scaled cycles of place-making—including all of chattel slavery, imperialism, settler colonialism, resource extraction, infrastructural coordination, urban industrialization, regional development, and the financialization of everything.

Racial capitalism's extensive and intensive animating force, its contradictory consciousness, its means to turn objects and desires into money, is people in the prime of life or younger, people who make, move, grow, and care for things and other people.

Who then was or is out of place? Unfree people who sold things they made or grew on the side, hiding the money in an emancipation pot. People who couldn't say where they worked, or prove that they were free, or show a ticket or a pass, a document to save their skin, or save themselves from the narrative that their skin, stretched in particular ways across muscles and bones, seemed or seems to suggest something about where they shouldn't be—caught.

Racial capitalism's imperative requires all kinds of scheming, including hard work by elites and their comprador cohorts in the overlapping and interlocking space-economies of the planet's surface. They build and dismantle and refigure states, moving capacity into and out of the public realm. And they think very hard about money on the move. In the contemporary world, when product and profit cycles turn faster and faster, with racial capitalism ever less patient with any friction on money-flow, sticking resources in prisons whence they might not emerge on time and in the quality required isn't all that attractive, even though the cages are full of millions of people in the prime of life.

We used to think that in the United States, contemporary mass unfreedom, racially organized, must be a recapitulation of slavery's money-making scheme. But if these massive carceral institutions, weighted like cities, are not factories and service centers, then where's the profit, the surplus money at the end of the day? 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 communities, 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.

If we think about this dynamic through the politics of scale, understanding bodies as places, then criminalization transforms individuals into tiny territories primed for extractive activity to unfold—extracting and extracting again *time* from the territories of selves. This process opens a hole in a life, furthering, perhaps to our surprise, the annihilation of space by time. A stolen and corrupted social wage flies through that time-hole to imprison employees' paychecks. To vendors. To utility companies. To contractors. To debt service. The cash takes many final forms: wages, interest, rent, and sometimes profit. But more to the point, the extractive process brings the mechanics of contemporary imperialism to mind: extraction, in money form, from direct producers whose communities are destabilized too. But money, too, gives us some insight into the enormity of the possible inhabitants and makers of abolition geographies—abolition geography, the antagonistic contradiction of carceral geographies, forms an interlocking pattern across the terrain of racial capitalism. We see it.

Abolition Geography

Abolition geography starts from the homely premise that freedom is a place. Place-making is normal human activity: we figure out how to combine people, and land, and other resources with our social capacity to organize ourselves in a variety of ways, whether to stay put or to go wandering. Each of these factors—people, land, other resources, social capacity—comes in a number of types, all of which determine but do not define what can or should be done. Working outward and downward from this basic premise, abolitionist critique concerns itself with the greatest and least detail of these arrangements of people and resources and land over time. It shows how relationships of un-freedom consolidate and stretch, but not for the purpose of documenting misery. Rather, the point is not only to identify central contradictions—inherent vices—in regimes of dispossession, but also, urgently, to show how radical consciousness in action resolves into liberated life-ways, however provisional, present and past. Indeed, the radical tradition from which abolition geography draws meaning and method goes back in time-space not in order to abolish history, but rather to find alternatives to the despairing sense that so much change, in retrospect, seems only ever to have been displacement and redistribution of human sacrifice. If unfinished liberation is the still-to-be-achieved work of abolition, then at bottom what is to be abolished isn't the past or its present ghost, but rather the processes of hierarchy, dispossession, and exclusion that congeal in and as group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death.

Everyone was surprised in May 2011 when the notoriously pro-states'-rights Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) upheld a lower court order that the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation¹ reduce the number of people held in the stock of adult prisons and camps. SCOTUS affirmed a lower court's opinion that the Golden State could not "build its way out" of constitutional violations so severe they could be measured in premature, which is to say preventable, death: averaging one

per week, every week, for decades, due to well-documented medical neglect.

The decision, although a victory, did not mark a clear turn away from nearly forty years of life-shortening mass criminalization, even though five judges recognized the accumulated catastrophe of premature death happening to the people whom most Americans of all races, genders, and ages have learned to abhor and ignore. And yet, in the context of the global war on terror coupled with domestic wars on vulnerable people, we know that challenges to murderous outrage (torture, drone strikes, police killings, poisoned water) readily dissolve into frenzied analytical activity that produces fresh justification, cancelling out prohibitions by the combined force of applied violence, revised legal reasoning, and lengthy commission reports. In the wake of scandal and demand for prison reform, the ruthless principles and procedures of criminalization remain intact, noisily tweaked at the margin but ever hardening at the center where most people in prison languish: average sentences, average conditions, average cages, average charges, average misery. In other words, against the scandal of documented deliberate neglect, criminalization remains a complicated means and process to achieve a simple thing: to enclose people in situations where they are expected, and in many ways compelled, to sicken and so die.

The processes contributing to both the development and epochal ordinariness of mass criminalization have been the focus of research, action, advocacy, and other forms of study trying to make sense of experience. A general but not exhaustive summary goes like this: In the United States, the multidecade crisis-riven political economy threw off surpluses that became prison expansion's basic factors: land, people, money-capital, and state capacity. The elements of "the prison fix" neither automatically nor necessarily combined into extensive carceral geographies. Rather, an enormously complicated people-, income-, and asset-rich political economy made a relatively sudden turn and repurposed acres, redirected the social wage, used public debt, and serially removed thousands and thousands and thousands and thousands and thousands and thousands and thousands of modestly educated people from households and communities.

As we can see, something changed. Crucially, instead of imagining the persistent reiteration of static relations, it might be more powerful to analyze relationship dynamics that extend beyond obvious conceptual or

spatial boundaries and then decide what a particular form, old or new, is made of, by trying to make it into something else. This—making something into something else—is what negation is. To do so is to wonder about a form’s present, future-shaping design—something we can discern from the evidence of its constitutive patterns, without being beguiled or distracted by social ancestors we perceive, reasonably or emotionally, in the form’s features. (I’ll come back to ancestors in a few pages.) To think this way is to think deductively (there are forms) and inductively (interlocking patterns reveal generalities which might or might not be structural). I suppose I became a geographer because this kind of back and forth is what we do, trying to see and explain the formalities and improvisations of place-making, which are shaped by human/environmental relationships, always elaborated by dependency—the coupling or connection of power with difference—and sometimes but not inevitably interrupted by preventable fatalities. Deliberately propagated fatalities, and the forms and patterns that coalesce into premature death, reveal human sacrifice as an organizing principle, or perhaps more precisely as an unprincipled form of organizing, which returns us to racial capitalism and the role of criminalization in it.

The prolific advocacy shaping efforts to foster anti-prison awareness and action partially reveals, campaign by campaign, bits of mass incarceration’s breath-taking structure. The selection and arrangement of categories inspiring sustained action ironically tend to legitimize the system as such by focusing on how it’s specifically harmful to youth, women, parents, mothers, men, gender-nonconforming people, the aged, or the infirm, or that it’s the outcome of the war on drugs, stop-and-frisk, racism, privatization, and so forth. And yet the extraction of time from each territory-body specifically and viscerally changes lives elsewhere—partners, children, communities, movements, the possibility of freedom. At the same time, the particular also implies entire historical geographies in constant churn. For some examples, think: Gentrification. Auto or steel manufacturing. Coal mining. Gold mining. Conflict minerals. Fracking. New shipping technologies. Robotics. Commodity chains. Finance capital. The challenge is to keep the entirety of carceral geographies—rather than only their prison or even law-enforcement aspects—connected, without collapsing or reducing various aspects into one another. Any category or system has many dimensions, analytically necessitating scalar stretch in order to perceive the material world in a variety of overlapping and

interlocking totalities. This basic imperative requires more in the way of self-critical consciousness than additional data (we already have too much): although what's real matters absolutely, the experience of it will never automatically reveal how and why negation (the thorough reworking of materiality and experience) sometimes succeeds.

Worldwide today, wherever inequality is deepest, the use of prison as a catchall solution to social problems prevails—nowhere as extensively as in the United States, led by California. Ideologically, which is to say in thought and everyday culture, the expression and normalization of the twin processes of centralization and devolution—patterned as they are by the sensibility of permanent crisis—shape structures of feeling and therefore, to a great extent, socially determine the apparent range of available oppositional options. In other words, the doctrine of devolution results in a constantly fragmenting array of centers of struggle and objects of antagonism for people who seek equal protection, to say nothing of opportunity. In crisis, in resistance, in opposition: To whom, at whom, against whom does one carry one's petition or raise one's fist?

Devolution is partition, sometimes provisional, sometimes more secure. Its normalizing capacities are profound, patterning political imagination and thus contouring attacks on the carceral form. As a result, many such attacks exhibit trends which, not surprisingly, coalesce tightly around specific categories: policing, immigration, terrorism, budget activism, injunctions, sexuality, gender, age, premature death, parenthood, privatization, formerly and currently incarcerated people, public-sector unions, devalued labor, and (relative) innocence. Racism both connects and differentiates how these categories cohere in both radical and reformist policy prescriptions—in other words, how people (and here I cite Peter Linebaugh's exquisite phrase) "pierce the future for hope." Insofar as policies are a script for the future, they must be sharp, a quality often confused with excessive narrowness—narrowness being something that devolution's inherent patterning encourages to a fault. As A. Sivanandan teaches, while economics determine, the politics of race define techniques and understanding, even though racial categories and hierarchies—at any moment solid—are not set in concrete. If, as Stuart Hall argued back in the late 1970s, race is the modality through which class is lived, then mass incarceration is class war.

And yet, breadth carries analytical and organizational challenges as well. It's not news that we find the answers to the questions we ask. What then might the most adequate general term or terms be that usefully gather together for scrutiny and action such a disparate yet connected range of categories, relationships, and processes as those conjoined by mass criminalization and incarceration? Seventeen years ago, the abolitionist organization Critical Resistance came into being, taking as its surname "Beyond the Prison-Industrial Complex." The heuristic purpose of the term "prison-industrial complex" was to provoke as wide as possible a range of understandings of the socio-spatial relationships out of which mass incarceration is made by using as a flexible template the military-industrial complex—its whole historical geography, and political economy, and demography, and intellectual and technical practitioners, theorists, policy wonks, boosters, and profiteers, all who participated in, benefited from, or were passed over or disorganized by the Department of War's transformative restructuring into the Pentagon.

In other words, we meant "prison-industrial complex" to be as conceptually expansive as our object of analysis and struggle. But I think in too many cases its effect has been to shrivel—atrophy, really—rather than to spread out imaginative understanding of the system's apparently boundless boundary-making. As a result, researchers spend too much time either proving trivial things or beating back hostile critiques, and activists devote immense resources to fighting scandals rather than sources. And yet there is a prison-industrial complex. So it has occurred to me, as a remedial project, to provisionally call the prison-industrial complex by another name—one I gave to a course I developed in 1999 and taught for half a decade at Berkeley—the somewhat more generic "carceral geographies." The purpose here is to renovate and make critical what *abolition* is all about. Indeed, abolition geography is carceral geography's antagonistic contradiction.

I will return to this point at the end, but here—as you who know me will expect—I will remind us that, in the archival record of self-organization and world-making activity among the Black people of the South under Reconstruction, the great communist W. E. B. Du Bois saw places people made—abolition geographies—under the participatory political aegis of what he called "abolition democracy." (Thulani Davis has most recently and exquisitely elaborated this work through tracing its expansion and contraction across space-time.) People didn't make what they made from

nothing—destitute though the millions were as a result of the great effort to strike, free themselves, and establish a new social order. They brought things with them—sensibilities, dependencies, talents, indeed a complement of consciousness and capacity Cedric Robinson termed an “ontological totality”—to make where they were into places they wished to be. And yet they left abundant evidence showing how freedom is not simply the absence of enslavement as a legal and property form. Rather, the undoing of bondage—abolition—is quite literally to change places: to destroy the geography of slavery by mixing their labor with the external world to change the world and thereby themselves—as it were, habitation as nature—even if geometrically speaking they hadn’t moved far at all.

Such Reconstruction place-making negated the negation constituted as and by bondage, and while nobody fully inhabits its direct socio-spatial lineage because of the counterrevolution of property, the consciousness remains in political, expressive, and organizational culture if we look and listen. (Indeed, 2015 is the 100th anniversary of *The Birth of a Nation*—a tale that made the wages of whiteness not only desirable but in many senses obligatory.) What particularly concerns us here is a general point: to enhance their ability to extract value from labor and land, elites fashion political, economic, and cultural institutions using ideologies and methods acquired locally, nationally, and internationally. They build states. Tweak them. Aggrandize and devolve them. Promote and deflate explanatory and justificatory explanations of why things should either be otherwise or as they are. But even in the throes of periodic abandonment, elites rely on structures of order and significance that the anarchy of racial capitalism can never guarantee. Further, as the actual experience of the Negro during the Civil War and Reconstruction shows, non-elites are never passive pawns. Ordinary people, in changing diversity, figure out how to stretch or diminish social and spatial forms to create room for their lives. Signs and traces of abolition geographies abound, even in their fragility.

* * *

Gaza and the West Bank: During the First Intifada (1987–93) popular committees throughout the territories organized an astonishing array of institutions that would constitute the outline of an infrastructure for postcolonial Palestine. The projects included health clinics, schools, shops,

food-growing and -processing capacities, and clothing factories. The people who organized and worked in these places discussed the work as partial although necessary to liberation and requiring persistent work on consciousness through imaginative education, training, and other programs. For example, some of the women who worked in food processing discussed how the revolution-in-progress could not be sustained unless patriarchy and paternalism became as unacceptable and unthinkable as occupation. The work in popular education depended on stretching awareness from the particular (an inoculation, an irrigation ditch, an electrically powered machine) to the general requirements for the ad hoc abolition geographies of that time-space to become and become again sustained through conscious action.

Domestic Violence: Carceral feminism has failed to end violence against women or domestic violence in general, although sometimes law enforcement intervention makes time and space for people to figure out alternatives. So, INCITE! Women of Color against Violence and many other people organized in a variety of ways around the world have tried to figure out how to make that time-space in the context of household or community building rather than criminalization. The idea here is, rather than punish violence better or faster, to end violence by changing the social relationships in which it occurs. As a result, and as the Story Telling Organizing Project demonstrates, people around the world have devised many approaches to stopping the central problem—violence—without using violence to achieve successful change, involving friends, neighbors, wider communities, and different strategies.

Decolonial Education: Sónia Vaz Borges's 2016 PhD thesis on the liberation schools established by the anti-colonial forces during the Guinea-Bissau thirteen-year liberation war shows the intricate interrelation of place-making, space-changing activities. Educated to be a member of the Portuguese state's overseas professional managerial class, Amílcar Cabral's role in the development of revolutionary consciousness drew in part from his training as an agronomist. Having walked the land of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde to evaluate problems and solutions for soil productivity, he also got to know the people who lived on and worked that land. The Party for

the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) created a curriculum for alphabetical, practical, and political literacy, wrote textbooks, and trained soldiers to become teachers. The schools, built and staffed as soon as possible after expulsion of the colonial military in each region of the country, articulated possible futures for localities and beyond, with particular emphasis on Pan-African and Third World connection.

Oakland Anti-Gang Injunctions: The range of concrete control exercised by the criminal justice system doesn't stop at the system's border. Rather, local administrators can use civil law to extend prison's total-institution regime to households and communities, while employers can discriminate at will against the 65 million or more people in the United States who are documented not to work because of disqualifying arrest or conviction records. In Oakland, a coalition of formerly incarcerated people, several social and economic justice organizations, family members, and others launched a campaign to compel the city government to cancel an established injunction zone and not establish more planned zones. In a zone, people named in the injunction, and the places they live and frequent, have no barriers to police questioning and searches. Further, household members become involuntary deputies, expected to enforce injunction terms or get into trouble themselves. Transforming the zone into an abolition geography required transforming consciousness, as officially and locally mocked and reviled individuals had to develop their persuasive power both at city hall and in the streets and empty lots where they built community and trust through extraordinary commitment to ordinary things: creating a garden and a mural. Being the first to respond in times of trouble. Leading by following. Curiously, people not afraid to die had to demonstrate their fearlessness anew in altogether novel contexts.

The Problem of Innocence

I noted earlier that many advocates for people in prison and the communities they come from have taken a perilous route by arguing why certain kinds of people or places suffer in special ways when it comes to criminalization or the cage. Thus, the argument goes, prisons are designed for men and are therefore bad for women. Prisons are designed for healthy young men and are therefore bad for the aged and the infirm. Prisons are designed for adults and are therefore bad for youth. Prisons separate people from their families and are therefore bad for mothers who have frontline responsibility for family cohesion and reproductive labor. Prisons are based on a rigid two-gender system and are therefore bad for people who are transgender and gender-nonconforming. Prisons are cages and people who didn't hurt anybody should not be in cages. Now this does not exhaust the litany of who shouldn't be in prison, but what it does do is two things. First, it establishes as a hard fact that some people should be in cages, and only against this desirability or inevitability might some change occur. And it does so by distinguishing degrees of innocence such that there are people, inevitably, who will become permanently not innocent, no matter what they do or say. The structure of feeling that shapes the innocence defense narrative is not hard to understand: after all, if criminalization is all about identifying the guilty, within *its* prevailing logic it's reasonable to imagine the path to undoing it must be to discover the wrongly condemned.

The insistence on finding innocents among the convicted or killed both projects and derives energy from all the various "should not be in cages" categories such as those I listed above. But it also invokes, with stupefying historical imprecision, a cavalcade of other innocents to emphasize the wrongness of some aspect of mass incarceration. In particular, it is as if mass incarceration were the means through which we are presumed to have inherited duty for some set of the uncompensated tasks because of what our ancestors were violently compelled to do. It's a reasonable extension given the historical facts of convict leasing and chain gangs that once upon a time were widespread. However, since half of the people locked up are not, or

not obviously, descendants of racial chattel slavery, the problem demands a different explanation and therefore different politics. This does not mean that the lineage of abolition extending through chattel slavery is not robust enough to form at least part of the platform for ending mass incarceration in general. However, as it stands, to achieve significance, the uncritical extension of a partial past to explain a different present demands a sentimental political assertion that depends on the figure of a laboring victim whose narrative arc—whose structure of feeling—is fixed, and therefore susceptible to rehabilitation—or expungement—into relative innocence. The turn to innocence frightens in its desperate effort to replenish the void left by various assaults, calculated and cynical, on universalism on the one hand and rights on the other. If there are no universal rights, then what differentiated category might provide some canopy for the vulnerable? In my view, the proponents of innocence are trying to make such a shelter, but its shadow line or curtilage—like that “legally” demarcating people drone-murdered or renditioned by the United States abroad—can and does move, expunging the very innocence earlier achieved through expungement. In other words, dialectics requires us to recognize that the negation of the negation is always abundantly possible *and* hasn’t a fixed direction or secure end. It can change direction, and thereby not revive old history but calibrate power differentials anew.

Consider this: a contemporary development in the relative innocence patrol, highlighted by the Supreme Court decision but not born of it, is toward the phenomenal spread of both saturation policing (stop-and-frisk; broken windows; and various types of so-called “community policing”) and its new formation (which echoes some Second Klan practices): carceral or police humanitarianism. One of the results of contemporary racial capitalism’s relentlessly restructured state-institutional capacities, and the discourses and practices that combine to enliven them, is “the anti-state state”—governmental capacity dominated by mainstream parties and policies that achieve power on the platform that states are bad and should shrink. Mass incarceration might seem inconsistent with something named the anti-state state. I think, to the contrary, mass incarceration is its bedrock. In other words, the dominant trend that goes hand-in-hand with mass incarceration is devolution—the off loading to increasingly local state and non-state institutions responsibility for thinning social welfare provision. At the same time, increased centralization (the strong executive) belies one of

democracy's contemporary delusions—the notion that more local is somehow more participatory.

Carceral/police humanitarianism is a domestic counterinsurgency program spreading rapidly throughout the United States and abroad. Like mass incarceration, this humanitarianism is a feature of what I've long called the anti-state state: a dynamic pattern among the patterns shifting and reconsolidating the anti-state state form, dispensing (to riff on Du Bois) the wages of relative innocence to achieve a new round of anti-state state building. It's not new, but now altogether notable in the general landscape of exclude and define, capture and reward. This too is part of devolution, and more aggrandizing of police organizations coupled with not-for-profit and parastatal partners to identify and attend to the (relatively) innocent victims of too much policing and prison—sometimes formerly incarcerated people, sometimes their families, sometimes their neighborhoods. Police humanitarianism targets vulnerable people with goods and services that in fact everybody needs—especially everybody who is poor. But the door opens only by way of collaboration with the very practices that sustain carceral geographies, thereby undermining and destroying so many lives across generations in the first place.

We have already seen that innocence is not secure, and it's a mystery why it ever seemed reliable. And while nothing in this life is secure, sitting down to make common cause with the intellectual authors and social agents who unleashed and manage the scourge of organized abandonment—highlighting for the present discussion the organized violence on which it depends—puts into starkest terms the peril of the innocence defense.

Let's think about this problem in another way: While all those who benefited from chattel slavery on both sides of the Atlantic, and from all the forms of slavery that preceded and intersected with and since have followed it, are responsible for vicious injustices against individuals and humanity, to prove the innocence of those who have been or are enslaved for any purpose ought to play no role in the redress of slavery. In his controversial but indispensable *Slavery and Social Death*, Orlando Patterson notes that the power to kill is a precondition for the power of “violent domination, natal alienation, and general dishonor.” The power to put humans in cages also derives from the power to kill—not only by way of the ritualized punishment of the death penalty, but also by life sentences, as well as the ritual of serially excused police killings that transformed

#BlackLivesMatter from a lament to a movement. Patterson gives us the elegant turn of phrase that helps us, sadly, wrap our minds around the continuum of killing to keeping: “The one fell because he was the enemy, the other became the enemy because he had fallen.”² Human sacrifice rather than innocence is the central problem that organizes the carceral geographies of the prison-industrial complex. Indeed, for abolition, to insist on innocence is to surrender politically because “innocence” evades a problem abolition is compelled to confront: how to diminish and remedy harm as against finding better forms of punishment. To make what I’m discussing a bit more explicit, I turn to the words of the great armed thief and spy Harriet Tubman. She told this story:

I knew of a man who was sent to the State Prison for twenty-five years. All these years he was always thinking of his home, and counting the time till he should be free. The years roll on, the time of imprisonment is over, the man is free. He leaves the prison gates, he makes his way to the old home, but his old home is not there. The house in which he had dwelt in his childhood had been torn down, and a new one had been put in its place; his family were gone, their very name was forgotten, there was no one to take him by the hand to welcome him back to life.

So it was with me. I had crossed the line of which I had so long been dreaming. I was free, but there was no one to welcome me to the land of freedom, I was a stranger in a strange land, and my home after all was down in the old cabin quarter, with the old folks and my brothers and sisters. But to this solemn resolution I came; I was free, and they should be free also; I would make a home for them.³

Infrastructure of Feeling

W. E. B. Du Bois interviewed Harriet Tubman late in her life. For a while in the mid-twentieth century, a small but rather raucous scholarly competition developed to “prove” how many (which is to say how *few*) people Tubman helped “keep moving” along the Underground Railroad. By contrast, Harvard- and Humboldt-trained historian and sociologist Du Bois, a numbers guy if ever there was one, said hundreds. Then thousands! Why? Did he just get sloppy? Or did he begin to see how abolition geographies are made, on the ground, everywhere along the route—the time-route as well as the space-route. Indeed, was he able to redo in *Black Reconstruction in America* his earlier research on the Freedmen’s Bureau because of the

insights—truly visionary—he gained from talking with the ancient Tubman? It’s here that I think the concept “infrastructure of feeling” might help us think about how we think about the development and perpetuation of abolition geographies, and how such geographies tend toward, even if they don’t wholly achieve, the negation of the negation of the overlapping and interlocking carceral geographies of which the prison-industrial complex is an exemplar—while absolutely nonexhaustive, as the examples of abolition geographies show.

Raymond Williams argued more than fifty years ago that each age has its own “structure of feeling,” a narrative structure for understanding the dynamic material limits to the possibility of change. Paul Gilroy and many others have engaged Williams’s thinking and shown that ages and places necessarily have multiple structures of feeling, which are dialectical rather than merely contemporaneous. Williams went on to explain how we might best understand tradition as an accumulation of structures of feeling—that gather not by chance, nor through a natural process that would seem like a drift or tide, but rather by way of what he calls the “selection and reselection of ancestors.”⁴ In this, Williams disavows the fixity of either culture or biology, discovering in perpetuation how even the least coherent aspects of human consciousness—feelings—have dynamically substantive shape.

The Black Radical Tradition is a constantly evolving accumulation of structures of feeling whose individual and collective narrative arcs persistently tend toward freedom. It is a way of mindful action that is constantly renewed and refreshed over time but maintains strength, speed, stamina, agility, flexibility, balance. The great explosions and distortions of modernity put into motion—and constant interaction—already-existing as well as novel understandings of difference, possession, dependence, abundance. As a result, the selection and reselection of ancestors is itself part of the radical process of finding anywhere—if not everywhere—in political practice and analytical habit, lived expressions (including opacities) of unbounded participatory openness.

What underlies such accumulation? What is the productive capacity of visionary or crisis-driven or even exhaustion-provoked reselection? The best I can offer, until something better comes along, is what I’ve called for many years the “infrastructure of feeling.” In the material world, infrastructure underlies productivity—it speeds some processes and slows

down others, setting agendas, producing isolation, enabling cooperation. The infrastructure of feeling is material too, in the sense that ideology becomes material as do the actions that feelings enable or constrain. The infrastructure of feeling is then consciousness-foundation, sturdy but not static, that underlies our capacity to recognize viscerally (no less than prudently) immanent possibility as we select and reselect liberatory lineages—in a lifetime, as Du Bois and Tubman exemplify, as well as between and across generations. What matters—what materializes—are lively rearticulations and surprising syncretisms. If, then, the structures of feeling for the Black Radical Tradition are, age upon age, shaped by energetically expectant consciousness of and direction toward unboundedness, then the tradition is, inexactly, movement away from partition and exclusion—indeed, its inverse.

Unboundedness, Against Conclusion

Thus, abolition geography—how and to what end people make freedom provisionally, imperatively, as they imagine *home* against the disintegrating grind of partition and repartition through which racial capitalism perpetuates the means of its own valorization. Abolition geography and the methods adequate to it (for making, finding, and understanding) elaborate the spatial—which is to say the human-environment processes—of Du Bois and Davis’s abolition democracy. Abolition geography is capacious (it isn’t only by, for, or about Black people) and specific (it’s a guide to action for both understanding and rethinking how we combine our labor with each other and the earth). Abolition geography takes feeling and agency to be constitutive of, no less than constrained by, structure. In other words, it’s a way of studying, and of doing political organizing, and of being in the world, and of worlding ourselves.

Put another way, abolition geography requires challenging the normative presumption that territory and liberation are at once alienable and exclusive—that they should be partitionable by sales, documents, or walls. Rather, by seizing the particular capacities we have, and repeating ourselves—trying, as C.L.R. James wrote about the run-up to revolutions, trying

every little thing, going and going again—we will, because we do, change ourselves and the external world. Even under extreme constraint.

A last story: in the 1970s, the California Department of Corrections decided to reorganize the social and spatial world of people in prison in response to both reformist and radical mobilization. Evidence shows that the Department of Corrections experimented with a variety of disruptive schemes to end the solidarity that had arisen among its diverse (although then mostly white) population in the prisons for men. Cooperation, forged in study groups and other consciousness-raising activities, had resulted in both significant victories in federal courts over conditions of confinement and deadly retaliation against guards who had been killing prisoners with impunity. In spite of twenty years of Washington, DC rule-making forbidding, among other things, segregation, failure to advise of rights, lack of due process, and extrajudicial punishment, the Department of Corrections decided to segregate prisoners into racial, ethnic, and regional groups labeled gangs, to remand some of them to indefinite solitary confinement, and to restrict the ending of punishment to three actions: snitch, parole, or die. To reify the system as the built environment, the Department of Corrections created two prisons for men and one for women with high-tech Security Housing Units (SHU—a prison within a prison). The history of SHUs has yet to be fully told; it is indisputable that they induce mental and physical illness, which can lead to suicide or other forms of premature, preventable death. Indeed, the United Nations defines solitary confinement in excess of fourteen days as torture.

The people locked up in the Pelican Bay State Prison SHU, some from the day it opened on December 10, 1989, might or might not have done what they were convicted of in court; their innocence doesn't matter. For many years lawyers and others have worked with people in the SHU trying to discover the way out, not picking and choosing whom to aid, but interviewing any willing subject about conditions of confinement and struggling to devise a general plan. Activists created handbooks and websites, lobbied the legislature, testified to administrative law judges, devised lawsuits, held workshops, organized with family members, and otherwise sought to bring the SHU scourge to light. (In 1998, at a hearing into the cover-up of seven SHU prisoners shot dead by guards, a producer for Mike Wallace's *60 Minutes* asked: "Tell me why to care about these

guys.” “Do you care about justice?” “Of course. But the audience needs to care about people. Why should they care?”)

The Department absolves itself of breaking laws and violating court decrees by insisting that the gangs it fostered run the prisons and the streets. After almost forty years of people churning through the expanded Department of Corrections, it's impossible that there's no stretch or resonance across the prison walls. SHU placement mixes people from ascriptive (what the Department says) and assertive (what the prisoners themselves say) free-world social geographies in order to minimize the possibility of solidarity among people who, the circular logic goes, are enemies or they wouldn't be in the SHU. They can't see or touch one another, but across the din of television sets and the machine-noise of prisons they can talk, debate, discuss. And while race is not the SHU's only organizing factor, race is the summary term that ordinary people, inside and out, use to name the divisions. For many years some of the most active SHU residents debated racism versus racialism, first embracing and then challenging a variety of supremacies, while for years continuing to accept the structure of feeling that keeps race constant as naturally endowed or culturally preferable.

People make abolition geographies from what they have; changing awareness can radically revise understanding of what can be done with available materials. It's clear that the SHU, in calculated opposition to 1970s Soledad or San Quentin or Attica, thins social resources to the breaking point. But what breaks? In many cases the persons locked up. But consciousness can break into a different dimension, shedding common-sense understandings of being and solidarity, identity and change. A negation of violence through violence is possible, which returns us to the territory of selves invoked in the opening pages of this discussion. Even in a total institution, sovereignty is contradictory, as resistance to torture demonstrates. The regime—its intellectual authors and social agents, its buildings and rules—tortures captives one by one. They can turn on the regime through shifting the object of torture into the subject of history by way of hunger strikes. Participating individuals turn the violence of torture against itself, not by making it not-violent but rather by intentionally repurposing vulnerability to premature death as a totality to be reckoned with, held together by skin.

The first strike, whose organizers represented all of the alleged prison gangs, sent its demands upward to the Department of Corrections, asking for modest improvements for all SHU dwellers' experience and fate: better food, improved visitation, and some way to contest SHU sentences based in evidence rather than system aggrandizement. People in many non-SHU prisons joined the strike in solidarity, and one died. The Department offered to negotiate; the strike ended. Nothing changed.

A second strike erupted, well-covered both by the ever-active in-prison grapevine and the organizing collective's free-world support infrastructure. In the context of the Supreme Court decision concerning medical neglect and of uprisings in many parts of the planet—North Africa, West Asia, South Africa, the streets of the United States—the demands took a new direction, against the partitions that, especially in the contemporary era, normalize devolved imaginations and shrunken affinities when expansive ones seem absolutely necessary. The collective sent its demands out, horizontally as it were, to their constituent communities inside and out, calling for an end to the hostilities among the races. Although some people interpret the call as “Black-brown solidarity”—because race seems to mean people who are not white—the collective's documents are radical and all-encompassing. The call has a history as old as modernity, however anachronistic contemporary labels might be.

The racial in racial capitalism isn't epiphenomenal, nor did it originate in color or intercontinental conflict, but rather always group-differentiation to premature death. Capitalism requires inequality and racism enshrines it. The Pelican Bay State Prison collective, hidden from one another, experiencing at once the torture of isolation and the extraction of time, refigured their world, however tentatively, into an abolition geography by finding an infrastructure of feeling on which they could rework their experience and understanding of possibility by way of renovated consciousness. The fiction of race projects a peculiar animation of the human body, and people take to the streets in opposition to its real and deadly effects. And in the end, as the relations of racial capitalism take it out on people's hides, the contradiction of skin becomes clearer. Skin, our largest organ, vulnerable to all ambient toxins, at the end is all we have to hold us together, no matter how much it seems to keep us apart.

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