

# CYBORG BLACK STUDIES.

TRACING THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE  
ON THE CONSTITUTION OF BLACKNESS.

Dissertation  
zur Erlangung der Doktorwürde  
durch den  
Promotionsausschuss Dr. phil.  
der Universität Bremen

vorgelegt von  
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Berlin, den 18 Januar 2015

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Where available, works originally not written in English will be quoted in the original language and translations made by me and marked '(S.W.)' offered in footnotes.

(INTRODUCTION:)

## Tracing the Impact of Technological Change On the Constitution of Blackness: Towards Cyborg Black Studies

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*“Forecasts of a utopian (to some) race-free future and pronouncements of the dystopian digital divide are the predominant discourses of Blackness and technology in the public sphere.”*

(Nelson 1)

Up until the present, considerations of the relationship between technology and race have mostly fallen back on the colonialist portrayal of technology as an achievement of White<sup>1</sup> cultures and the depiction of Black people as technology-illiterates, often openly contesting and implicitly confirming these stereotypes at the same time. Rooted in traditions historically exemplified by Booker T. Washington and his emphasis on “industrial education” as a way to uplift the Black race (113.ff.), even critical considerations of the relation between technology and Blackness have and still largely do limit themselves to arguing that people racialized as Black do possess or master technology, too, and that there historically were and are today many important Black and specifically African-American inventors (Wright). Continuing the both modern and colonial grand narrative of ‘humanity’ and its perfection through evolution, these considerations approach technology as a both neutral and universal achievement mostly understood in terms of a tool-building whose products are considered as both separate and independent from its users and their identities. Mostly, these theories’ focus is on proving the long-denied humanity and cultural abilities of Black people by disproving “the idea that Afro-diasporic communities are inherently Luddite and therefore situated outside the bound of Western modernity.” (Weheliye, *Phonographies* 2). This, as the present book will show, is a misdirected approach, because it both misunderstands the existential enmeshment of technology and Blackness and unwillingly permits the continuation of an anti-Blackness inherent in modern colonialist technology-narratives and the epistemologies, economics and politics they draw from or spawn. It is problematic precisely because it is nothing more than an attempt to have Black people accepted as part of a historically White construction of ‘humanity’ without analyzing or

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<sup>1</sup> Both ‘Whiteness’/ ‘White’ and ‘Blackness’/‘Black’ will here be written with capitals when referring to racialized identities, and in lowercase when referring to color.

offering a critique of the criteria of admission or of that definition of 'humanity' and the understanding of subjectivity and agency it frames. Ignoring the specific constitution of Whiteness and Blackness that modernity and its successors are molded on, this approach leaves the general tendency to identify technology with Whiteness just as intact as the quiet assumption that the redemption of Black people lies in becoming White. The present volume will propose a critique of these underlying identifications that are still effective today in the stereotypical dichotomy that opposes White male middle class adolescent hacker-geeks or nerds to Black technologically illiterate athletes (Eglash); a dichotomy that, far from being a 'mere' intellectual misperception, shapes the way public institutions structure access to the technological infrastructure they offer (Banks 13.ff.). It is a dichotomy active not only in socio-political disclaimers "construct[ing] technology as a site of white male superiority" (Hines, Nelson and Tu 3) but also in Black identity politics claiming that "[c]omputers are not part of black culture" (Richard A. Goldsby, quoted in Kreuzer 88). In approaches such as these, technology is thought of as located in a superior socio-cultural strata, an advanced tool to either master or be mastered by, a machine or technique separate from and subjected to its user, a user who is identified as a monadic subject and source of all agency that has its fullest incarnation in Whiteness. The following chapters will offer a fundamental critique of these approaches. Focusing on the constitution of Blackness within the United States of America<sup>2</sup>, they will argue that the relation of technology to Blackness must not be theorized in form of concerns about the emancipating use of technology by Black people, but must focus instead on the role of technology in racializing people as Black and in constituting the meaning and significance of Blackness in the first place.

The following pages will pursue this project in three sections. Section I., titled *The Constitution of Blackness*, will offer a detailed analysis and critique of (post)modern/colonialist racializing patterns in contemporary theories of the subject and its formation. It will show how these theories not only deny subjectivity to Black people but rely on the latter's abjection in order to be able to constitute White subjects. An analysis of the historical continuity and "permutation" (Sexton, "The social life" 6) of Black abjection from slavery to the contemporary Prison Industrial Complex will show that this abjection, though fundamentally rooted in political economy, first and foremost

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<sup>2</sup> When speaking of 'Blackness', then, the following pages will always and only refer to Blackness in the U.S.A.

defines a socio-psychological matrix whose purpose it is to (re)produce Whiteness as a specific mode of power, domination and exploitation. Section I. will identify the structural logic of this matrix as the axiomatic<sup>3</sup> of White Supremacy (A[WS]) and, drawing from the work of Michel Foucault, trace its mechanics both in terms of micro-politics and in terms of the enmeshment of knowledge and power in form of a dispositive. On the micro-political level, it will show how both subjection and abjection describe specific relations between bodies and discourse, or, more specifically, specific configurations of inscribing power into White bodies and onto Black flesh. Section I. will then show how these configurations are constantly (re)produced on the level of the dispositive, that is, how the formation of power determined by A[WS] (re)produces its own epistemological foundations and legitimation through both modes of knowing and making sense and violence, cruelty and terror. This critique of the dispositive shaped by A[WS] will begin by emphasizing that, due to the complex enmeshment of politico-economical and socio-psychological factors in the constitution of Blackness, approaches that are only either materialist (e.g. Marxism) or psychoanalytic (e.g. Lacanianism) are not only inadequate to analyze the constitution of Blackness but in fact partake in the (re)production of this dispositive. Therefore, it will be argued throughout this book, a shift away from simple and separate materialism and psychoanalysis and towards a materialist psychiatry or schizo-analysis as proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari is necessary for any analysis of the constitution of Blackness aiming not to reproduce A[WS]. In theorizing this shift, section I. will move away from both micro-political notions of soul and ideas of performative social identities and introduce instead the concepts of constitutive and constituted Blackness.

Section II., titled *The Racial Glitch and Constitutional Blackness*, will apply the analytical framework developed in Section I. to cinematic and phonographic

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<sup>3</sup> The concepts of the axiom and the axiomatic are taken from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's two volume *Capitalisme et Schizophrénie*, where – very roughly condensed – they are used to describe a general and rigidly fixed system of signification based on a central axiom that overdetermines everything within the axiomatic, and is opposed to a less abstract “code” in which signification has yet to be established in relation to its location and is open to contamination. Hierarchically speaking, a code can be considered a minor piece in an environment determined by an axiomatic. Contrary to the notion of episteme, the axiom connotes its contingency, interchangeability and possible – but irreconcilable – synchronous coexistence with other axioms, even though totalitarian in its claims. While explicit in its foundational and indubitable position, the concept of the axiom avoids the mono-maniac reification of a single discourse embedded in notions of centrism, such as (e.g.) eurocentrism, and the illusionary politics connected to them, which suggest that a decentering could be a political act, while in fact it would only amount to nothing more than a reconfiguration of the exact same discourse. A simple re- or de-centering, in other words, would be considered a mere re-coding while leaving the axiomatic and its power untouched.

technologies. It will introduce the notion of the *racial glitch* as a disruption on the level of micro-political inscription of power into bodies and unto flesh made possible by technological change, and give examples of the glitch in its analysis of movies such as *Suture* and machine based music such as Detroit Techno. Analyzing examples of racial glitch and what it will call constitutional Blackness in cinema and phonography, as well as current Black Studies scholarship in these fields, section II. will argue that tracing the micro-political effect of the racial glitch shows how much of this existing scholarship (re)produces A[WS] and therefore makes a new approach to Black Studies necessary. By applying this critique to concepts such as 'soul' or 'Blackness', section II. will introduce concepts such as *unBlack Blackness* as well as a theorization of racialized bodies as cybernetic organisms or *cyborgs*.

Section III., titled *Cyborg Black Studies* will condense the analysis of sections I. and II. into a new Black Studies methodology and paradigm beyond A[WS] and serve as conclusion. *Cyborg Black Studies* integrate the problematics indicated by the racial glitch and constitutional Blackness and prepare the ground for future analysis of the constitution of Blackness in social formations and theories increasingly affected and challenged by technological change. In doing so, they will radically interrogate the embeddedness of Black Studies within White dispositives and question the axiomatic structure of (post)modern/colonial sciences and their epistemologies in terms of what Donna Haraway has called the "informatics of domination" (161).

The analytical framework thus drawn up in the following pages will not only indicate how writers like Anthony Walton are misled in theorizing a hostile relationship between Black people and technology that considers both as absolute terms and independent entities, but it will also emphasize how such an analysis is built on being blind to the existential interests of Whiteness in assuring a continued abjection of Blackness. Waldon's argument that "from the caravel to cotton gin, technological innovation has made things worse for blacks", and his question, "Will the information revolution be any different?" (n.pag.), direct attention to the wrong problematics. Instead of framing the relationship between Blackness and technology solely as one of labor exploitation, one must ask how technological change, through making the labor exploitation of Black people less necessary, leads to a socio-symbolic revaluation of Blackness and what the potential political consequences of that revaluation might be. How, one question must be, does the reduced need for an economic exploitation of

Blackness (if such a reduction is indeed the case) increasingly reveal and possibly modify non-economic factors in the abjection of Blackness? Although the historical identification of Blackness with easy to exploit labor (a labor easy to exploit because of that identification) is correct, the assumption that, through technological change, that labor will merely lose its significance and thus Blackness and its continued abjection become unnecessary to society seems wrong, as the continued presence of anti-Black violence, both on an individual and an institutional level, show. Walton conflates one technology (the cotton mill) that makes Black labor desirable (by Whites) and hyper-visible and leads to the increase of Black slave labor with other technologies that make this labor superfluous and invisible and lead to the decrease in Black employment (for example the robot arm or the mechanization of agriculture), when the questions should be exactly these: How (if so) does the difference between these technologies correspond, relate and/or symptomatize a difference in the constitution of Blackness? How does the constitution of Blackness change in order to assure that Whites continue profiting from their non-Blackness, either by not being enslaved or by not losing their jobs to technology (or at least losing it only after all Black workers have been replaced)? As section I. will show, this is not a simple historico-materialist question and in no way can Abdul Alkalimat's statement be supported, that: "The entire sweep of Black History needs to be reexamined on the thesis that technological change creates the main structural context for the grand historical narrative of enslavement and the subsequent freedom struggle"(n.pag.). The constitution of Blackness is about more than just the extraction of surplus labor from Black flesh and, as will be shown, no analysis of the constitution of Blackness can be reduced to questions of production, nor can the role of technology in such an analysis be reduced to a mere secondary factor in the production of surplus value. Instead, the following pages will show how and why the constitution of Blackness must be read through the lens of White desire and Black social death.

The following chapters, then, will problematize technology in systemic not instrumental terms. They will examine how technological change does indeed change the constitution of Blackness, as opposed to simply transforming the socio-economic situation of a fixed form of Blackness. Throughout this text, the engagement with technological change will focus solely on the significance of specific technologies for theoretical models of White subjection/Black abjection and the constitution of Blackness, rather than the practical use of technologies and their potential for changing real life relations of racial



domination. Focusing on meta-theoretical perspectives, the present book will trace micro-political changes in the constitution of Blackness and search for possible repercussions on the level of the dispositive, and it is precisely the lack of such repercussions that will motivate it to propose *Cyborg Black Studies*.

Not only does this approach based on micro-politics and the dispositive imply that the relationship between Blackness and technology is not instrumental, but it will be insisted that Blackness itself is a specific symptomatic constellation of the enmeshment of knowledge and power and not merely an instrument or technology at the hands of the individual. In other words: both essentialist attempts to prove that Black people participate in or suffer under technological change and excessively constructivist and performative notions of Blackness itself being a technology to use will be considered insufficient. Accordingly, approaches such as the following by Beth Coleman will be regarded as both dangerously misleading and implicitly apologetic of White supremacy: "... let us call 'race as technology' a disruptive technology that changes the terms of engagement with an all-too-familiar system of representation and power."(178).

Although this book would want to embrace Coleman's hope, "that technology's embedded function of self-extension may be exploited to liberate race from an inherited position of abjection toward greater expression of agency" (177), a short note on the disfunctionality her use of agency introduces into the concept of "race as technology" will help to further clarify the deficiencies of her approach and the character of the approach developed here. Just like the authors criticized earlier in this introduction, Coleman approaches technology as instrumental to the individual, that is, she understands the relationship of the subject to technology as one of "technological agency" on the side of a free subject and within the hegemonial modes of making sense. Coleman understands this "technological agency" as something that:

" ... speaks to the ways by which external devices help us navigate the terrain in which we live [...] In this case, agency indicates presence, will and movement – the ability to move freely as a being ... and it is not restricted to individuals but also includes systems: it concerns how beings are subjected in systems of power, ideology and other networks" (177.f.)

Against this emphasis on agency, the following chapters will show why an analysis of existing Blackness cannot be developed along humanistic lines or in terms of hegemony. This is especially true of theories concerned with the abjection of Blackness, as both Blackness and abjection, it will be argued, mark systemic situations of exclusion from society and humanity, not human subject positions on “the terrain in which we live”. Rather than a way of negotiating a terrain like humanity, civil society or hegemony, that is, rather than a way of shifting one’s position on that terrain, the abjection of Blackness describes the grid that structures that terrain. It cannot, it will be argued, change *on* but only *with* the terrain itself. Accordingly, Coleman’s often repeated point that “a notion of race as technology, however, moves toward an aesthetic category of human being, where mutability of identity, reach of individual agency, and conditions of culture all influence each other” (180) and that “*agency* is the operative word in extending race as technology” (183) can not only not be accepted but must be criticized for assuming that the relationship between technology and one’s racialized identity is always the same, no matter if one is racialized as White, or Black or in any other mode. What’s more, it completely ignores the significance of location in time and space for the potential use of or access to such race-as-technology-agency (e.g. being Black in the Jim Crow South vs. being Black in contemporary Liberia). From this perspective, Black People would be responsible for suffering from anti-Blackness and its effects simply for not putting the potential of their race-as-technology<sup>4</sup> into practice. Such approaches – ultimately no more than attempts to reduce race to performance – propose an all too innocent understanding of racialized identities because they ignore the apparatus of power, terror and cruelty that upholds specific systems of representation and knowledge not only against agency, but also as fundamental to any understanding of agency. It is precisely the force of notions such as the dispositive – and variations on this notion, such as the concept of coloniality – to constantly insist on this violence and force any analysis of social positions and situations to pass through a combined analysis of representation and sheer physical violence. Although the present book suggests that all modes of racialization are constitutively enmeshed with technology, it will repeatedly

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<sup>4</sup> Wendy Hui Kyong Chun defines the differences between ‘race and technology’ and ‘race as technology’ as follows: “Crucially, race as technology shifts the focus from the *what* of race to the *how* of race, from *knowing* race to *doing* race by emphasizing the similarities between race and technology. Indeed, *race as technology* is a simile that posits a comparative equality or substitutability – but not identity – between the two terms ... *Race as technology* reveals how race functions as the ‘as’, how it facilitates comparisons between entities classed as similar or dissimilar.” (8). This definition is subject to the same critique as the definition offered by Coleman.

emphasize that these modes are not identical and that no simple analogies between them must be made. Race, and particularly Blackness, is not a mere contingent tool available to anyone in the same manner, but a structure of social, political, economic, psychological and epistemological being and non-being that institutes differences between people. Contrary to technology, race is not optional, optimizable or transferable, but constitutive. But it is also not simply, as Falguni A. Sheth writes, that “[s]imilarly [to technology], within a juridico-political context, race becomes an instrument that produces certain political and social outcomes that are needed to cohere society” (22). In the United States, as the following chapter will show, Blackness is not an “instrument” and not “*within* a juridico-political context”. Rather, civil society in the U.S. being based on A[WS], the abjection of Blackness forms the basic structure and gives its character to that context. Technology and race must not be reduced to productivity or performance, but must be conceptualized in their constitutive impact on society, as well as epistemology, economy, politics and psychology. From this perspective, the impact of technological change on Blackness is not about the relation between the individual and specific technologies, it is not about technology-use, not about an individual’s access or non-access to it.<sup>5</sup> The focus here is not on acquiring capacity or dealing with incapacity, but on the constitution of the abject as void of any form of capacity (Wilderson, *Red* 251), that is, as excluded from any notions of capacity by definition. In order to analyze the impact of technology on Blackness one must then not look at their relationship as a static one, but analyze instead the correlations between the change in technology and the change in the constitution of Blackness. It is for this reason that this book does not interrogate the impact of technology as such on the constitution of Whiteness and Blackness, but the impact of technological change. The question simply is this: how – if so – do ever new technologies force the constitution of Blackness to either adapt or disappear; and what forms would such an adaptation or disappearance take? Connected to this question, further questions of the following sort then arise: how may technology uncover the cruelty constitutive of Blackness but often erased under constituted Blackness? How might it enforce such erasure? How can it lead to an abstraction of phenotype in social exchange and how might this subversion of face-to-face epidermal authority translate into a subversion of structural epidermal authority? What, for example, are Whiteness and Blackness in technologically mediated situations that

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<sup>5</sup> Non-access, such as the one theorized under the rubric of the digital divide, is considered structurally no different from more classical (or non-technological) forms of segregation.

permit no visual, but only aural interaction? What is the position of White desire in technology and how does it affect the constitution of Blackness? Might technology lead to the undoing of racialization and thus Blackness, for example by obliterating the reasons that inform it? Or will it help to further enforce racialization and its consequences?

The answers to these questions have multiple dimensions ranging from mechanisms of psychological suture to social suture through, among other things, ideological interpellation, physical discipline and surveillance. On the one hand, there are various attempts to erase traces of constitutive Blackness, to enforce Black invisibility in and through technology, e.g. through a “whitening of cyberspace” (Tal). There are attempts to ‘rescue’ or ‘reconstruct’ racist notions of Blackness using new technologies, such as the development of racial profiling into a quasi-social-science that is one of the promises of Big Data (Reardon; Whitmarsh & Jones; Roberts). There is the instrumentalization of the Human Genome Project to reestablish the broken link between the “the somatic and the inner self, the phenotype and the genotype, pigment shade and psychological sensibility”, between the “seen and the unseen” through which “the ‘truth’ of race is understood as grounded in somatically observable, *dependable* differences” (Stoler 372+371). These approaches rely on claiming ‘objective’ and ‘significant’ medical or statistical differences between ‘races’ in order to re-naturalize them, that is, in order to re-articulate an ontological grounding of race (Chinn; Hacking; Saul; Fujimura et al.; Hartigan). On the other hand, there are notions about “the decline in racial identity ... reinforced by the tendency of new media to undermine both medium specificity and personal or physical identity, either as a matter of bodies or bloodlines” (Mitchell 28). The present book locates itself close to the latter school of thought and shares its attention to media technologies in order to develop a *Cyborg Black Studies* methodology able to enquire into technology’s potential to enforce the erasure of constitutive Blackness as well as to create a *racial lag* subverting that erasure. Racial lag mobilizes traces of constitutive Blackness, that is, mobilizes moments in which the traditional representation and conception of race become dysfunctional and are thus put in crisis because an immediate racial identification, a direct reading of a person through a specific axiomatic, is disrupted (e.g. the disruption of identification through skin color on the phone or in cyberspace). It is through this racial lag that a racial glitch may arise between the dispositive and the body/flesh it wants to inscribe itself into/onto. Through

tracing this glitch, the following pages will theorize the impact of technological change on the constitution of Blackness. They will develop a methodology making possible a transfer of Black Studies from colonial and post-colonial to cybernetic spaces, moving them from face-to-face to interface situations. Leaving behind both the overemphasis on the body that was the mark of phrenology and similar sciences and the overemphasis on the symbolic and the performative that was the flaw of much of social constructivism and subsequent theories of race as identity, the present book will fuse these two extremes by theorizing White subjection/Black abjection and the cybernetic organism that will be in the center of *Cyborg Black Studies*.

*Section I. The Constitution of Blackness as Abject*

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## I.1.THE BLOOD-STAINED GATE OF BLACKNESS

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The beating of aunt Hester is a well-known example of African-American subjection<sup>6</sup> and Saidiya Hartman's treatment of it is a key moment in contemporary Black Studies debate that will allow us to expose the lines of flight that the considerations on the constitution of Blackness<sup>7</sup> will follow in this section. Following Frederick Douglass depiction, Hartman writes:

„The passage through the blood-stained gate is an inaugural moment in the formation of the enslaved. In this regard, it is a primal scene. By this I mean that the terrible spectacle dramatizes the origin of the subject and demonstrates that to be a slave is to be under the brutal power and authority of another.” (3).

Douglass original words were:

“[The beating of aunt Hester] was the blood-stained gate, the entrance to the hell of slavery, through which I was about to pass. It was a most terrible spectacle.” (3f.)

This constellation is striking in several ways. It is the violence conferred on the body of another – the aunt – that seems to create the foundation for the subjection of not only her, but also the “I”, the narrator partaking in the violence only through the mediation of his aunt's screams. The blood that stains the gate is not that of the narrator but that of aunt Hester's lashed back. It is through her body that the “I” feels the plantation being inscribed into itself, that he is enslaved. In fact, we are not explicitly told about aunt Hester's own point of entrance into the hell of slavery. The “terrible spectacle” relates exclusively to the position of the “I” as either witness or spectator/voyeur, a difference that Hartman will strongly emphasize (19). Sharing Douglass' sense of Black subjection

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<sup>6</sup> „Subjection“ will be used here as proposed by Judith Butler, viz. as equivalent to Michel Foucault's “assujettissement”, the act of both making someone one's subject in terms of a hierarchy of domination and therewith partaking in the formation of a subjectivity (*Psychic 2*).

<sup>7</sup> As will be elaborated in the following chapters, the term “Blackness” will here be used in the sense proposed by Fred Moten to designate a situation/position *constituted* as “fact” within a specific discourse, as opposed to (but not excluding) the “lived experience of the black”, and the “case of Blackness” as the relation between the fact and the experience (“Case” 179).

arising from the “spectacular character of black suffering” (3), Hartman argues that such spectacles should be avoided when writing about Blackness. What this demand delineates is how Black subjection – both during and since slavery – is not a binary relationship, but a performance that requires the presence of a third party to transform violence and suffering into a socio-normative act creating and re-iterating its own foundation, meaning, legitimacy and legibility. In order to analyze the character of Black subjection and the constitution of Blackness, then, one must focus on the spectacular, not in spite of Hartman’s critique of such procedures, but as an interrogation of where she draws the line between spectator and witness.

What is the “spectacle”? Guy Debord describes it as follows: “Le spectacle n’est pas un ensemble d’images, mais un rapport social entre des personnes, médiatisé par des images.”<sup>8</sup>(§4). This is exactly the „I“ situating itself in a social matrix through perceiving the spectacular beating of its aunt. The spectacular in this sense is a secondary process, as, in order to assume its function – in order to be legible – it needs to connect to a preset matrix of power that has always-already defined the meaning of the spectacle and which the latter can thus actualize but does not produce. The spectacular “mediates”, it does not create. The fundamental mechanics at play here are those of identification, both in term of identifying with and identifying something. Why does the “I” identify with its aunt, and not with Captain Anthony who is doing the beating? Why does it identify at all? How does the “I” identify the meaning of aunt Hester’s screams for its own life? What is identification; how does it work? The scene offers several different possible readings. It could be read as a moment of Althusserian interpellation, and chapter I.1. and I.3.c. will look into the role this concept can play in understanding Black subjection, or more precisely Black abjection. In this sense, aunt Hester’s screams actualize an always-already present subject within the “I”. The screams launch a preset identity, in which the “I” always-already knows that it is a slave, not a master; a subject which recognizes itself in interpellation, because it always-already feels guilty (Althusser 113). Guilt, of course, is a feeling that indicates the internalization of an external order as the ground of identity. It implies the possibility of experiencing a split and occupying two positions at once: that of perpetrator and that of judge. Considering the identification of slavery with Blackness, that chapter I.2. will explore in order to demonstrate the continuity of Black

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<sup>8</sup> „The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediaed by images.“ (S.W.)



abjection from the plantation to the penitentiary, from the past to the present, reading Blackness through the concept of interpellation and as “guilt” signals a prior constitution of Blackness as pathological and criminal. It thus hints at the importance of thoroughly considering the mechanics of internalization of power in the constitution of Blackness that will be explored throughout this section and will be considered with a special focus on the concept of the dispositive in chapter I.3. and on psychoanalysis and Blackness in chapter I.4. Blackness thus will be analyzed as a political concept, central in the formation of the subject, the abject, the self and the experience of itself and its worlds, impacting what will be defined as a “Black experience” (the split and double consciousness, the split and double ontology), but in no way identical with it. Blackness will be approached as socio-genetic, as a political construction within a system structured along A[WS] and it will solely be considered in relation to this system.

#### I.1.a. Axiomatics with and without Soul: Spectacular Blackness

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Although it might seem strange to equate aunt Hester’s screams of pain created through the violence of Captain Anthony with the interpellating voice of the police constable that Louis Althusser describes, this is exactly where the concept of the spectacular develops its force. As Douglass notes, Captain Anthony “would whip her to make her scream, and whip her to make her hush ...” (4). The beating is not a scene of mere violence between two bodies (aunt Hester and Captain Anthony), but it is a staging of the relation between the locations of these bodies, the situation of aunt Hester and the position of Captain Anthony. It is spectacular violence – that is: cruelty – whose aim is not the physical act as such, but its *mise-en-scène*, one form of “materialization of a regulatory norm” (Butler, *Bodies* xii). Cruelty is not directed at its immediate victim alone and not even foremost. Instead, it is intended to spread across time and space in the form of impersonal terror in order to produce within every individual sharing a determinative communality (“guilt”) with the victim the fear of becoming a victim, too, as well as a certain sense not only of the self, but also of the body, in this case: of its body as a Black body. This is exactly what the “I” writes: „I expected it would be my turn next“ (Douglass 5). Thus, terror can only work through identification, through the act of identifying in the victim and as a cause of its ordeal something that makes the “I” interchangeable with it. Contrary to violence, cruelty and the terror it aims to produce are abstractions; systemic effects due to and only possible because of a certain structure of discourse, a certain

axiomatic. In the case of Frederick Douglass' narrative, the structural location reiterated by this systemic effect is, of course, race, and its product is the identification of Blackness with slavery. Through beating aunt Hester, Captain Anthony re-iterates her situation as slave and his position as master and he does so in a relation to all other slaves and masters. The "I" is not peeping in; it is not an illegal and secret spectator tending to its private desires and pleasures and/or subverting the master's powers through its witnessing against his will. Captain Anthony makes Aunt Hester scream: he wants his power – supposedly put in doubt by misdemeanor – to materialize, become tangible, be openly demonstrated. But for this, he does not need to command the "I" to be an official witness present by explicit articulation of his will. Rather, the "I" is at once the product and the mediated and implied victim of Captain Anthony's cruelty. The guilt of being Black is not created but reiterated in the beating. The "I" partakes neither to bear "witness" nor to "enjoy" the spectacle, but it is forced to participate in the beating through its body that it knows to be the "guilt" it shares with the actual victim. Not only does the "I" identify in the first place, but it also knows that it is supposed to identify with the race of its aunt instead of the gender of the Captain (for one example). The fear of being next is not just an empathic identification, but a fully grounded understanding of the "I"'s identity that necessitates a complex self-situating within the community of the plantation<sup>9</sup>. It is a fear that implies a minimum degree of (racial) self-consciousness, that is: the integration of race into the self and its body as a determinative factor of the self in relation to the community. In this situation, race is a conscious factor, a moment configuring subjection through contend rather than form. Here, the "I" is constituted as slave through a cruelty it knows it must fear due to its Blackness.

As a platform for the spectacle of racial domination, Aunt Hester's body serves the materialization of the ideology dominant in the society it is situated in (Debord § 212). The terrible spectacle in this is not aunt Hester's suffering, but Black suffering, that is, the reiteration of the "fact" of the interchangeability of Black bodies projected within a constellation of time and space structured along A[WS]. What is being produced is not foremost the actual victim, are not actual witnesses or spectators, but virtual victims and non-victims as defined by racial ascription. This does not mean, that the actual victim should be ignored, nor that there can be no witnesses or spectators, as the non-victim

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<sup>9</sup> For further consideration of the plantation as a specific field of social relations see chapter 1.2. as well as Katherine McKittrick's "Plantation Futures".

(and to a certain degree also the virtual victim) may of course occupy such a position. But it shifts the focus from suffering and the fear of “pornotroping” (Spillers, “Mama” 67) to, on the one hand, socio-genetic morphogenesis and, on the other, fungibility and disposability. All of these terms refer to a social acting on the Black body – pornotroping as „the enactment of black suffering for a shocked and titillated audience“ (Weheliye, “Pornotropes” 71); “fungibility” as “the joy made possible by virtue of the replaceability and interchangeability endemic to the commodity” (Hartman 21); disposability as a characteristic of the Black body in its commodification – and are not concerned with the interior but only with the social life of Blackness. This will also be the field of enquiry the present text will limit itself to. Focusing on the social life and socio-genetic constitution of Blackness, the spectacular and the “routine display of the slave’s ravaged body” (Hartman 4) cannot be avoided here. However, this is not deemed more “obscene” (Hartman 4) than Hartman’s own writing, where she evokes the scene of aunt Hester’s beating in a way that pre-supposes her readers’ familiarity with the cruelty involved in the constitution of Blackness. Hartman can avoid the scene itself only because she assumes that it is well known and the fact of cruelty in the constitution has already been established. Writing from inside (even if against) A[WS] and its “abjectorship” (Broeck, “Enslavement” n.pag.) and “enslavism” (Broeck, “Borders” 6), the politics of writing in the present book not only cannot consider the fact of cruelty to have been established, but must pursue the tracing of this cruelty as well as an analysis of how it is being erased from perception in order to permit narratives on the ‘nature’ of Blackness that ignore the role of violence and cruelty in its constitution. It is assumed here that hinting at cruelty without going into detail only serves such erasure and therewith the reproduction of A[WS] by avoiding a direct confrontation with its modes of self-constitution. It avoids the cruelty that constitutes Blackness at the risk of remaining within axiomatically coherent representations of Blackness or what will be theorized as constituted Blackness below. Hinting at cruelty while wanting to avoid it at the same time risks being the first step to agnotology, that is, towards a production of ignorance concerning how Blackness is constituted that ultimately makes a detailed analysis impossible. Therefore it is necessary, at this point, to give a few examples of cruelty:

„Before he commenced whipping Aunt Hester, he took her into the kitchen, and stripped her from neck to waist, leaving her neck, shoulders and back, entirely naked. He then told her to cross her hands, calling her at the same time a d—d

b—h. After crossing her hands, he tied them with a strong rope, and led her to a stool under a large hook in the joist, put in for the purpose. He made her get upon the stool, and tied her hands to the hook. She now stood upon the ends of her toes. He then said to her, 'Now, you d—d b—h, I'll learn you to disobey my orders!' and after rolling up his sleeves, he commenced to lay on the heavy cowskin, and soon the warm, red blood (amid heart-rending shrieks from her, and horrid oaths from him) came dripping to the floor." (Douglass 4)

„LOWRY ROASTED BY INCHES BEFORE WIFE AND CHILDREN ... Inch by Inch the negro was fairly cooked to death ... As the flesh began to drop away from his legs and they were reduced to bones, once or twice he attempted to pick up hot coals and swallow them in order to hasten death.“ (Memphis Press, quoted in Gussow 120)

„A suspected [black] horse thief, he [a Union officer] said, 'was beheaded, skinned and nailed to the barn.'" (Oshinsky 25)

“[...] the particularly ghastly October 1934 murder of Claude Neal, who had been accused of rape and murder. With a crowd of some four thousand, including many children, bearing witness, Neal was stabbed, burned, and castrated. He was forced to eat his own genital before being dragged by an automobile to his death; then his body, mutilated and nude, was suspended from a tree in the courthouse square of Marianna, Florida. Photographs were sold for fifty cents. Neal's toes and fingers were put on display.” (Katznelson 167)

These are clearly not acts of mere violence, but spectacular re-iterations of social positioning and situating, scenes of materialization of power. The scandal here are not the easy to rationalize (even if possibly only feigned) causes of these actions (envy, theft), but their form. It is only through their form – their cruelty and terror as the production of virtual victimhood – that they reiterate race in the way Michel Foucault thought of it, as “La race, le racism, c'est la condition d'acceptabilité de la mise à mort dans une société de normalisation”<sup>10</sup> (*Société* 228). Cruelty re-iterates the distinction

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<sup>10</sup> „Race, racism, are the conditions of acceptability of putting to death in a society of normalization.” (S.W.)

between those who can be its perpetrators and those who are its victims; a distinction that precedes its actual enactment as the foundation of that enactment's possibility. Foucault identifies race as the form this distinction takes: it is, in this sense, an axiom that is not shaped within a certain society or discourse but shapes that society or discourse. Following Foucault, race becomes the norm guiding the instruments of power that in his theory are bio-power and discipline. Through setting up the norm, which will inform the normal and normalization, bio-power creates a criterion that divides society into those who conform to this norm and those who don't. The goal of bio-power, then, is to (re)produce and preserve the conforming/normal and to eliminate the non-conforming/pathological. From the perspective of bio-power, race is about life: it does not kill in order to kill, but it identifies something to keep alive and kills what it deems to threaten that life. The racial other, here, is that which must be killed in order to create a homeostatic (healthier/better/ etc.) population (*Société* 218). It is because it pertains to the creation of a 'people' and a specific form of society that bio-power means "bio-regulation through the State" (*Société* 223). In other words: in order to institutionalize a specific people in form of a specific nation and a specific civil society, "Whiteness" and "Blackness" are first created as its determinative concepts and norms and then imposed and thus rendered real through violent regularization and policing. The multiple and decentralized institutions sufficient for the enactment of discipline – focused at the spatial distribution and visibility of bodies in order to extract a maximum of surplus value from them (*Société* 215) – are supplanted (not suppressed) by a central normative instance of regularization. This instance is able to transform its norms (of what and how the *bios* should be) into reality. It is able to materialize these norms in and through bodies and to create homeostasis because of its power to first name and then kill that which is not conform/normal and thus pathological. The power to kill is the guarantor of the power to sustain a life defined through homeostasis: the Black body is not killed to be dead, but it is first created and then killed in order to produce the White body (and White people and society) and give life *ex negativo* to the White citizen<sup>11</sup>. This is the fungibility of the Black body, but it is also the coloniality of power that chapter I.3.a. will elaborate on: a construction of knowledge through power producing a "crooked" epistemology violently implemented and thus made "real".

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<sup>11</sup> It is because of this, that, for Foucault, the State as such is deeply enmeshed with racism and that bio-power is a deeply nationalistic concept (*Société* 227).

Cruelty is one form of materializing the racial axiom, as it is not only legitimate and legible only when directed towards Blacks, but marks bodies as Black in its exercise. Reading this through Foucault's concept of „châtiment-spectacle“<sup>12</sup> (*Surveiller* 17), one form in which the bio-political distinction at the base of cruelty finds expression is through the absence of a Black soul in a discourse structured according to A[WS]. In *Surveiller et Punir*, Foucault describes how cruel and unusual punishments, whose goal was the demonstration of state power, came to be replaced by non-spectacular punishments, whose goal was the re-education of the criminal. This “supplice”<sup>13</sup> at the heart of the „châtiment-spectacle“ – „une production de souffrance, un rituel organisé pour le marquage des victimes et la manifestation du pouvoir qui punit“<sup>14</sup> (*Surveiller* 44) – moves into the background of punishment because of the discovery of the soul (*Surveiller* 24), which is not to be understood in religious terms:

„Cette âme réelle, et incorporelle, n'est point substance; elle est l'élément où s'articulent les effets d'un certain type de pouvoir et la référence d'un savoir, l'engrenage par lequel les relations de pouvoir donnent lieu à un savoir possible, et le savoir reconduit et renforce les effets du pouvoir.“<sup>15</sup> (*Surveiller* 38)

Cruelty towards Black people demonstrated that these were considered to not have a soul: because they had no inherent part in power, power had to continue inscribing itself onto them through cruelty. Lacking here is not a metaphysical, but a micro-political soul (*Surveiller* 34) and it is in this sense that Frank Wilderson can describe Blackness as a “relation of terror as opposed to a relation of hegemony” (“Gramsci” 6). Black slaves were not conceded a legible and legitimate socio-symbolic existence in terms of a soul (humanity; citizenship ...), but were reduced to bodies and commodities to which society related not in terms of discourse but physical violence. It is important to be aware of this, as it signals the political character of the constitution of Blackness. Although there have been several historical attempts to explain race and racial hierarchy (the curse of Ham, social Darwinism, etc.), all of these have considered race as

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<sup>12</sup> “punishment-spectacle” (S.W.)

<sup>13</sup> “martyrdom” (S.W.)

<sup>14</sup> “the production of suffering, a ritual organized for marking its victims and manifesting the punishing power” (S.W.)

<sup>15</sup> „This real and incorporeal soul is not substance, it is the element wherein the effects of a certain type of power and the reference to a knowledge are articulated, the transmission through which power relations give birth to a possible knowledge, and knowledge redirects and enforces the effects of power.”(S.W.)

a given fact, that is, they have used and admitted a bio-political system structured by A[WS] as the basis of their enquiries. They did not consider race a product of White supremacist hegemony, but situated it outside that hegemony in the field structuring that hegemony. Race, in other words, was and is part of the axiomatic that shapes that hegemony, not an aspect within that hegemony. As the self-transparency of Blackness and Whiteness are the indubitable cornerstones of truth within A[WS], they cannot be changed or eliminated without eliminating this hegemony; they occupy for and within this hegemony an ontological status. Thinking from within A[WS] then, White supremacy would be considered a system of ontological politics, a polity based on truth and thus necessarily constructed as it is and incapable of being otherwise. Race here is an onto-genetic political situation. The basic axiom of A[WS] is that the Black person, having no soul and thus being ontologically different from the White person, is not a “human subject”, but just a “sentient being” (Wilderson, “Vengeance” 3).

Thinking, as this chapter has done, through cruelty as a mode of inscribing racialized power into and onto bodies and creating Blackness and Whiteness in the process is a method no less founded in axiomatic procedures, even if overtly anti-racist ones. However, these procedures do not operate along lines of ontological politics, but aim to deconstruct White supremacy in terms of “political ontology” (Wilderson, *Red* 3). This means describing the ontological predications made in A[WS] as not events of truth, but results of political processes and thus subject to change. In this case, Blackness is understood as socio-genetic. This means analyzing Blackness as ascription and political output, as opposed to approaching Blackness as a term describing something that is plain to see to “common sense” and therefore, as indubitable fact, an input to politics rather than a political outcome. Both A[WS] and the approach chosen here locate Blackness outside the discourse of White civil societies, but whereas ontological politics consider this field to be that of non-conflictual and transparent truth, political ontology considers this field to be a violent and cruel battlefield whose outcome is contingent and impermanent.

### I.1.b. Theorized in the Zero, declined in the Second Degree: Constitutive and Constituted Blackness

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As the consideration of cruelty has shown, any analysis of the constitution of Blackness must differentiate between the violent inscription of Blackness onto bodies (the level of constitutive Blackness) and subsequent intra-axiomatic narrations that may deny this cruel formation and consider Blackness to be a fact given prior to and existing outside the political (the level of constituted Blackness). The Foucaultian instance of regularization that implements race as the organizing principle of the normal posits its axiomatic not within but as the basis of its civil society; it is axiomatic precisely because it cannot be legitimized within the discourse that is established upon it, viz. after the constitution of civil society. Thus situating Blackness outside a social order and describing it as this order's foundational logic is reminiscent of what Giorgio Agamben has described as the "Homo Sacer", the figure of "zoe" or "naked life", of which he writes: "Dem nackten Leben kommt in der abendländischen Politik das einzigartige Privileg zu, das zu sein, auf dessen Ausschließung sich das Gemeinwesen der Menschen gründet"<sup>16</sup>(*Homo* 17)<sup>17</sup>. More such similitudes can be found, when one considers the function of cruelty as suturing discourse and bodies and the absence of a Black micro-political soul within A[WS] in the light of Agamben's political perspective on metaphysics:

„Die Politik erweist sich demnach als im eigentlichen Sinn fundamentale Struktur der abendländischen Metaphysik, insofern sie die Schwelle besetzt, auf der sich die Verbindung zwischen Lebewesen und Sprache vollzieht.“<sup>18</sup> (*Homo* 18)

The absence of a Black soul in A[WS] means that a Black person is not a person at all (it has no part in the socio-symbolic), but is 'just' a body on which but not in which discourse can materialize, and which thus can be no more than a sentient being and silent animal. It is not situated in the realm of the political and thus does not partake in the "bios". The Black body cannot be a citizen, as it serves as the *ex negativo* foundation

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<sup>16</sup> "To the naked live accrues in occidental politics the singular privilege of being that on whose exclusion the community of Man founds itself." (S.W.)

<sup>17</sup> See chapter I.2.d. for an elaboration on the difference between the situation of the Black abject and the Homo Sacer.

<sup>18</sup> "Politics proves to be the principal founding structure of occidental metaphysics in as far as it occupies the threshold on which the connection between living beings and speech is executed." (S.W.)



for the construction of a homeostatic White citizenry that, precisely because it is not Black, cannot be killed, enslaved, exploited (etc.), but is under the protection of the bio-power that constitutes it. At worst then, the Black body without soul is not even a body, but just flesh, in the way Hortense Spillers has theorized these terms:

„(...) I would make a distinction in this case between the „body“ and the „flesh“ and impose that distinction as the central one between captive and liberated subject positions. In that sense, before the „body“, there is the „flesh“, that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse, or the reflexes of iconography. [...] a theft of the body – a willful and violent (and unimaginable from this distance) severing of the captive body from its motive will, its active desire. Under these conditions ... the female body and the male body become a territory of cultural and political maneuver.“  
 (“Mama” 67)

This interlocked constitution of the White citizen body and the Black commodity flesh will be analyzed in this section through the term of abjection. In order to do this, what needs to be dissected is the situation of the Black flesh at the “zero degree of social conceptualization” (which will be written as  $\circ$ ). This will require a “hermeneutics of absence and a pedagogy of trace” (Broeck, “Borders” 6.f.) that this chapter will engage in in respect to the historical situation of the enslaved, before the following chapter traces the continuity of this situation from the plantation to the penitentiary in order to prepare the ground for the rest of this section to theorize the abject through a critique of contemporary theories of subjection.

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In his description of the micro-political soul, Foucault points out that this soul was the basis for a freedom accorded to a member of society as a property, as „un droit et un bien“<sup>19</sup> (*Surveiller* 18) whose confiscation would constitute the core of punishment and whose restitution would mark the end of it. Freedom and the sort of punishment connected to its confiscation thus relied on a notion of the criminal as a deviant part of a

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<sup>19</sup> “a right and a good” (S.W.)

political community that it was already a subject of. This meant that the criminal would not have to be set into relation to the punishing power, but that a relation already existed and had only to be corrected. The criminal in this sense had a political persona before becoming a criminal; he had been a subject before punishment and because of this could be re-instated as one without the need for a châtiment-spectacle that would first have to integrate him into discourse. Such a sober re-instantiation could not be the character of punishment when this was concerned with criminals who did not have and were not meant to have a political persona (and because of this were in fact not criminals who had broken the law but lawless savages). Being outside discourse, but discourse being the dimension of punishment, cruelty was a necessary performance for the paradox task of translating extra-discursive violence into punishment without making the non-persona a subject. Saidiya Hartman described this complex situation with regard to the slave as follows: „The cleavage or sundering as object of property, pained flesh, and unlawful agent situates the enslaved in an indefinite and paradoxical relation to the normative category person“ (56).

That slaves by law were not considered part of the political community of personas was famously explained by Supreme Court of the United States Judge Roger B. Taney in the Dred Scott verdict:

„In the opinion of the court, the legislation and histories of the times, and the language used in the Declaration of Independence, show that neither the class of persons who had been imported as slaves nor their descendants, whether they had become free or not, were then acknowledged as a part of the people, nor intended to be included in the general words used in that memorable instrument. [...] They had for more than a century before been regarded as beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race either in social or political relations, and so far inferior that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect, and that the negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefit.“ (Scott v. Sandford)

But at the same time, slaves were part of the polity of this community, that for one defined its people through a legally framed conception of race<sup>20</sup>, and for another allocated and judged the slave as property. Although a zero-degree (○) person, the slave was situated in a second-degree existence to a non-slave, that is, as the function of the right of a non-slave, and the concern of the law with the slave was only in the rights and goods of that non-slave:

„The unhappy black race were separated from the white by indelible marks, and laws long before established, and were never thought of or spoken of except as property, and when the claims of the owner or the profit of the trader were supposed to need protection.“ (Scott v. Sandford)

„The recognition of the slave as person depended upon the calculation of interest and injury“ (Hartman 94), and „The protection of property (defined narrowly by work capacity and the value of capital), the public good (the maintenance of black subordination), and the maintenance and reproduction of the institution of slavery determined the restricted scope of [black] personhood and the term of recognition.“ (Hartman 98).

To kill a slave was not murder, but it did qualify as a legal case of damaged goods that had to be refunded to the owner.<sup>21</sup> This difference between the not being quantified as humans and put in a situation of “social death” (Patterson 38) and ○, while at the same time being declined in the second degree and “legally protected” as property, points to

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<sup>20</sup> See Neil Gotanda’s “A Critique of ‘Our Constitution is Color-Blind’” for an overview on the legal construction of race.

<sup>21</sup> See for one example the *Slavery Code of the District of Columbia* of 1862, Sec. 90.:

„If any slave shall happen to be slain for refusing to surrender him or herself, contrary to law, or in unlawful resisting any officer, or other person, who shall apprehend or endeavor to apprehend such slave or slaves, and such officer, or other person, so killing such slave as aforesaid making resistance, shall be, and he is by this act, indemnified from any prosecution for such killing aforesaid; and that in every such case such slave or slaves shall be valued by two reputable persons, not being of kin to the master or owner of such slave, upon oath to be administered unto them, and to be appointed by the then nearest magistrate, ‘well and truly to value what such slave was worth, to the best of their knowledge, without favor or partiality,’ and that the whole value of such slave or slaves shall be certified by such persons to such magistrate, and that the same shall be paid to the owner or owners of such slave or slaves, or to his, her or their order, by the treasurer of the respective shore of this province on which the same death happened, upon a certificate from the said magistrate of the death and value of such slave or slaves, out of the public stock of this province in the hands of such treasurer, without fee or reward“

It is here that the constitution of Blackness is singular even in comparison to the treatment of Native Americans or immigrants, who were also not allowed to be citizens until after the Civil War, and thus could neither give witness, nor bring suit in courts, but who were not declined in the secondary degree.

the difference between constitutive and constituted Blackness. While constitutive Blackness is where Black abjection functions as the extra-discursive foundational structure for White civil society, constituted Blackness is the ensemble of intra-discursive forms related to but not identical with this function. Thus, the forms of constituted Blackness can change and give the impression of historical breaks in the constitution of Blackness, while on the level of constitutive Blackness an unchanged continuity of Black abjection can be observed. This continuity will now be shown through an examination of different approaches to the function of constitutive Blackness from the plantation to the penitentiary.

## I.2. DIA-CRINOUS BLACKNESS

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### I.2.a. Profits of Death: the Plantation and the Anti-Citizen

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The plantation was not the beginning of cruelty (Childs). The auction block, the slave ship, the chains came before. There was the Black Atlantic, water babies ... But the focus in this chapter is not on these prior passages, but rests on the plantation as a chronotope that must be placed right at the start, as the place of entry into a peculiar institution, a machine that makes race and race relations in more than one sense. It was here, as Eric Williams famously stated, that: „Slavery was not born of racism: rather racism was the consequence of slavery“ (7).

Williams argued that the insufficient availability of cheap White labor on the North American continent (e.g. in form of British convicts deported to the colonies for forced labor) was the reason for the importation of Black labor, which then only after the fact led to the identification of Blackness and slavery.<sup>22</sup> It is in the sense of Black slaves being integrated into a system constructed around White convict labor, that „[w]hite servitude was the historic base upon which Negro slavery was constructed“ (19). Or, to put it the other way around: Black people were not forced into slavery because that

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<sup>22</sup> A similar argument is made by Karen E. and Barbara J. Fields. Contrary to Eric Williams though, Fields & Fields suggest that Black slave labor superseded White convict or indentured labor not because of insufficient availability or profitability of White forced labor, but because White people had a history of struggle that had established their position as non-slaves within White society as inviolable, a history Black people supposedly had not (Fields & Fields 2012: 125).

seemed their 'natural' place in society, but slavery came to be regarded as the 'natural' place of Blacks because, following the development of certain kinds of economic interests and the strategies employed to their satisfaction, Black people had already been successfully exploited as slaves and a retro-active and sustainable legitimation and explanation for this system of exploitation developed out of custom. The function of Blackness here was the legitimation and securing of specific relations of production. Pointing to the emergence of capitalism and the system of mass production related to it as the reason for the shortage in available labor force, Williams goes on to describe capitalism as the axiomatic of these relations of production, of the economic interests that shaped the relations between to-be-races and thus the ultimate reason for the identification of Blackness with an inferior status in race relations, both socio-economically and, as a direct correlation, ontologically speaking. The plantation, here, makes slavery Black and then marks the Black person as slave. It is the place where race connects to the history not just of the United States, but of White supremacist, capitalist and colonialist power, which had already invented and implemented the plantation and the races it produced in the Spanish Colonies and elsewhere before it came to the North American South. The plantation is the chronotope where the identification of Blackness with an inferior status establishes itself within the axiomatic of the coloniality of power (see chapter I.3.a.) and the globalization of capital in a way that allows Aníbal Quijano to write: „[the] fundamental axes of this model of power [i.e. coloniality S.W.] is the social classification of the world's population around the idea of race“ ("Coloniality of Power" 181).

Reading Williams with Quijano<sup>23</sup>, we come across a classic Marxist critique of globalization and fetishization, as a system of relations produced by men suddenly acquires a life of its own and thus seems not within the reach of human power anymore. Just as the commodity system slipped through the merchants hands to establish the commodity-fetish, the identification of Blackness with slavery stops being perceived as a product of the division of labor in a globalized system and becomes a fact seemingly independent of and beyond human agency and its motivation and desires. Blackness thus transmogrifies from ascription to being, from existence to essence, from narrative to revelation, from episteme to ontos; and Black humanity is lost in the torrent of

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<sup>23</sup> Connecting Quijano to Williams here exceeds Quijano's own work in that Quijano gives more importance to the role of race before slavery than Williams does.

economic interests that undergird the socio-psycho-epistemo-economic system of White civil society. To be sure, race here becomes caste, not class; thus its already theorized position outside economic determination in the realm of meta-physics is reaffirmed. Because of this, it is exempt from redemption through revolution and the ensuing dissolution of the Marxist fundamental contradiction between the worker/producer and the capitalist who severs him from the means of production. The slave is not a worker, but flesh and/as a commodity; it might be thought of differently after revolution, but it will not change in status and remain instrumental, fundamental, constitutive. For classical Marxism, the fetish is a problem of knowing, not being. It is concerned only with the constituted, as the constitutive in form of historical materialism, cannot be acted upon but solely within. Williams is able to correct his perspective on the constituted, because he starts from a different epistemological standpoint that posits that Black does not equate to non-human. He writes from the other side of that dark veil under which, through fetishization, the humanity of the Black person has disappeared and become invisible. But he does not move to a consideration of the constitutive and because of this cannot solve the fallacies of the Marxist mechanics' inability to think what now may be a speaking commodity<sup>24</sup>. Through Williams the Black flesh/commodity-fetish may now be capable to speak of the fetishization that misportrays its essence, but it still remains a commodity nevertheless, which – unlike the worker – will not be affected by a change in the economic structure and the relations of production, because it is the constitutive element of economy and production as such and cannot be redeemed by a change but only through an end of production (Wilderson, “Gramsci” 6). While the worker can, as a worker, strive for equality and disalienation, the commodity must exit and thus end the system that makes it a commodity.

The core assumption in thinking through the plantation as chronotope — that the ‘need’ for exploitable labor leads to Black people being stripped of their humanity and transformed into commodities — is a condensation of a politico-ontological narrative that lost its original content and ended up standing on its head: as ontologico-political

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<sup>24</sup> I use this expression here in the way Fred Moten has taken it from Marx and then re-formulated it to express the paradoxical relationship between Marxism and the situation of the Black body (see chapter II.3. and Moten, *Break* 8ff.). Marx does mention the fantasy of a speaking commodity only to ridicule it and point out that the value of the commodity is socio-genetic and not intrinsic to the commodity. This approach does not allow the consideration of a real speaking commodity (such as the enslaved) as revolutionary agent, whose trade-value is indeed socio-genetic, but who nevertheless does speak and claim its intrinsic humanity.

revelation. This commutation from politico-ontological to ontologico-political (*et vice versa*) has to be kept in mind to understand the continuity of the abjection of Blackness from the past to the present, from the plantation to the penitentiary. It is the “stripping” part where constitutive and constituted Blackness connect and anti-Black cruelty originates. It is here that the hidden metaphysics of Black abjection feed back with the social imperatives for a self-legitimizing narrative that represents A[WS] as not based on cruelty, terror or other forms of foundational violence, but on an external truth. It is here that the constitutive is concealed and, far beyond representation and/or ideology, enters into the realms of the psyche and the imaginary, into the dynamics of unconscious desire and preconscious interest (see chapter I.4.c.). It is here that a colonial difference (see chapter I.3.a.) is first established and then sublimated. It is here that the problematics of thinking about the changing constitution of Blackness as abject makes the integration of Cultural Studies, psycho-analytics and psychoanalysis into the methodology and approach of this thinking indispensable: stripping, as a form of defining and constructing of Blackness amounts to the dressing up, yet another form of defining and constructing, of Whiteness. The narrative of White humanity and the White civil society and economy built on it can only function because of a “white ignorance” (Mills) concerning the foundational discrimination against Black people, the constitutive abjection of Blackness.

Going back to Foucault’s definition of race as the conditions of kill-ability in a regime of bio-power, it is possible to paraphrase this dressing through stripping as living through killing. The question to be answered is simple: How can I make a profit, how can I exploit, enslave and kill others without being killed, enslaved, exploited and made a profit from myself? In principle it is society that protects me from this; it is morals, ethics, law, the monopoly of power/violence, etc. The goal of modern society is to avoid a life that is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short”. This is, of course, Thomas Hobbes’ Leviathan; but it is just as much Foucault: “C’est pour pouvoir vivre qu’ils constituent un souverain”<sup>25</sup> (Foucault, *Société* 215). Clearly, the answer to the dilemma of exploitation is to find a way to posit oneself within and under the protection of constituted power, while at the same time situating the to-be-exploited outside this protection. For Foucault, as explained above, this is what race does. ‘Whiteness’ is the product of this

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<sup>25</sup> “It is in order to be able to live, that they constitute a sovereign.” (S.W.)

process of excommunication, where the trail of definition followed not what one was, but what one was not: not to be exploited, enslaved or killed which through the chronotope of the plantation turned out to mean: not Black. But this is an understatement which risks obscuring the epic dimensions of tragedy and power it contains, so, to be sure, what is implied here must be slowly repeated, over and over again, because what is looked at here is:

“America’s structuring irrationality: the libidinal economy of White Supremacy, and it’s hyper-discursive violence which kills the Black Subject so that the concept, civil society, may live. In other words, from the incoherence of Black Death, America generates the coherence of White life.” (Wilderson, “Gramsci” 8)

The precariousness of Black life is the dark side of the profitability, protection and enjoyment of White life. Constitutive Blackness is not a contingent position, but a structural situation whose constitution can only be changed at a cost of a structural change. But this constitution is not tied to a single form of constituted Blackness, such as slavery. This is essential for any understanding of the continuity of abjection into the present day and the theorizing of this continuity and permutations from the plantation to the penitentiary and from social to civic death that will follow bellow. Through the lens of bio-power, race is the dividing line between human and non-human, citizen and anti-citizen, subject and abject. What remains to be explained is how this constitution of constitutive Blackness as abject anti-citizen remains intact, unaffected by the changing constitution of constituted Blackness, which moved from the explicit designation of Black people as anti-citizen, to their ‘integration’ as zero citizens. What has to be shown, in other words, is how and why the transformation from anti- to zero-citizen is in fact no more than – to paraphrase Frank Wilderson – the transformation of Black people from anti-citizen to anti-citizen-in-waiting.

#### I.2.b. From Surplus Labor to Surplus Life: the Penitentiary and the Zero-Citizen

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The abolition of slavery and the industrialization of the Southern United States after the Civil War are often thought of as having put an end to the dehumanization and abjection of Black people. This chapter will show why this assumption is not correct, even though the penitentiary did indeed replace the plantation as the chronotope of race and race



relations, and although some legal changes did formally end the chattel and commodity status of Black people and change their legal situation from anti- to zero-citizen. The reason for this is the complex intertwining between social and economic aspects in the abjection of Blackness that forbids a reductionist reading of abolition as cathartic restructuring of no more than slightly crooked labor relations. In order to fully understand this, a short glance at the transformations of the economic situation of Black labor from the plantation to the penitentiary is necessary.

Even though the abolition of slavery changed the way Black flesh was traded, it did not change the way it was treated. Neither did Black work on the plantation end with the Civil War, nor were the modernization and industrialization of the U.S. South post-bellum phenomena whose impact on the structure of the southern economy and the relations of production and society entwined with it would necessarily lead to changing race relations.<sup>26</sup> It therefore has to be emphasized that the plantation and the factory belonged to the same capitalist axiomatic of production and race relations. There is neither a diachronous (ante- and post-bellum) nor a synchronous (e.g. rural – urban; slaves - free White labor, South – North) divide within this axiomatic and it cannot serve to describe a change in the constitution of Blackness before and after the abolition of slavery. Quite to the contrary: the accelerated industrialization of the South after the War does not only not mark a paradigmatic socio-economic shift, but it will deliver the impulses for the installment of neo-slavery during the Reconstruction era.

As has often been pointed out, the Thirteenth Amendment, which took effect in December 1865, did not abolish slavery, but merely restricted its use:

“Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.” (Section 1. of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment. Emphasis added)

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<sup>26</sup> Already before the Civil War, slave labor had been used in industries such as mining, brick making or the steel and gunpowder production in Alabama (Blackmon), Georgia, Mississippi (Lichtenstein) and other southern states. According to Robert Starobin, around 200.000 slaves (5% of the total slave population), worked in industry in the 1850's. This was not an urban phenomenon: “They [the industrial slaves] lived in rural, small-town or plantation settings, where most southern industry was located, not in large cities, where only about 20 % of the urban slaves were industrially employed” (132).

This “except as”-catch was not lost on the contemporaries of the amendment, who had not only profited from slave labor before the war, but were also aware of the social and political profits of White supremacy. Offered this opportunity to reinstate economic constellations similar to slavery and the race relations it produced, law makers immediately began adopting *Black Codes*: sets of laws that would effectively re-define race through felony and thus assure the continued anti-citizenship of Black people as well as the exploitability of Black flesh:

“Every southern state except Arkansas and Tennessee had passed laws by the end of 1865 outlawing vagrancy and so vaguely defined it that virtually any freed slave not under the protection of a white man could be arrested for the crime. An 1865 Mississippi statute required African American workers to enter into labor contracts with white farmers by January 1. of every year or risk arrest. Four other states legislated that African Americans could not legally be hired for work without a discharge paper from their previous employer – effectively preventing them from leaving the plantation of the white man they worked for” (Blackmon 54).

To these, other laws obviously directed at Blacks were added, for example making it a felony for a Black man “to speak loudly in the presence of white women” (Blackmon 67). Even laws seemingly designed to protect Black people were subject to racist perversion, as in the case of Qualmy Walker, sentenced to 15 years of forced labor under Georgia’s anti-Ku-Klux-Klan statute for conspiring to assault another Black man, even though he was a Black man himself (Lichtenstein 37). Other similar systems, such as debt-peonage, sprang from the same source and served the same goals. The central catechism of A[WS] – that Black people, because of a “lack of natural reason” and through “natural laws” were condemned to be “natural slaves” (Wynter 297) – did not end with the abolition of slavery, but was simply translated from natural into positive law, transforming the slavery and abjection identified with Blackness from an ontologico-political position of fate into a politico-ontological performance of choice, therewith ensuring the continued and complete erasure of socio-genetic factors in the constitution of Blackness. After abolition, the representation of the bio-power binary “citizen-anti-citizen” underlying the “Whiteness = inside the law-Blackness = outside the law” opposition was rewritten by fusing it with the “good citizen-bad felon” binary. In this sense, the color-blind

constitution the abolition is often romanticized as having given birth to, was not only non-existent from the start, but the constitution of Blackness as abject was even enforced, as coercive factors in the lives of Black people became less visible. Although people of African descent were now legal subjects of the United States, that is technically speaking citizens under the constitution and entitled to protection by its laws, these same laws made sure to disenfranchise them as fast as possible and turn them into anti-citizens again, or, to be more precise, zero-citizens at the fringe of the constitution. Black people would see their citizen rights hollowed out in the hands of a racist executive and a White supremacist jurisdiction that constantly anodized ever bit of emancipatory legislation by introducing such minute legal distinctions as "private constitutional rights"<sup>27</sup> or "civil vs. social rights"<sup>28</sup> that made it virtually impossible for Black people to sue for their rights (Cho 1607 f.). Abolition did not end anti-citizenship but created zero-citizenship as another variation of  $\circ$  that was no more than anti-citizenship-in-waiting. This fine-tuning in the legal logic of constituted Blackness lead to a replacement of the plantation as chronotope and machine for the (re-)production of race, race relations and the relations of production internal to them, by the penitentiary; re-shaping the representation of constitutive Blackness while leaving it unchanged. If White supremacy and the control of Black flesh and labor necessary for this could only be sustained in a secular form, as punishment for "crime" if not the Curse of Ham, then so be it. Accordingly, the level of recorded crime skyrocketed in the southern United States after the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment came into effect. At the time this was declared proof of the corrupted and pathological character of the Afro-American, now no longer restrained and disciplined by his master's whip; an idea with a substantial impact on how the penitentiary system would treat Black people as it precluded once again the idea of a rebootable Black subject or body that had informed the shift away from the martyrdom of the "châtiment-spectacle". Not only had Black people never been members of society and were firmly believed incapable of being so, but they remained unwelcome to be so and as zero-citizens continued to be structurally bared from integrating. Abolition did not concede the Black soul on whose absence slavery had been built; although the

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<sup>27</sup> The rationale of „private constitutional rights“ holds that constitutional rights cannot be infringed upon in the relationship between individuals (as opposed to the relationship between an individual and an institution). It establishes a separation between a private space in which the state must not intervene to secure these rights, and a public one in which it must.

<sup>28</sup> See the 1896 *Plessy vs. Ferguson* ruling, in which „civil rights“ are defined as pertaining to „life, liberty and property“ and „social rights“ to racial discrimination in the “enjoyment of accommodations in inns, public conveyances, and places of amusement” (Cho 1608).

already constituted constitution of the United States of America was amended, the constitutive cruelty it was built upon continued unfettered.

Up until the Reconstruction period, the penal system in the United States had been small and concerned almost exclusively with White convicts, the punishment of Blacks being left to the plantation owners. After the Civil War, the same industrialists who had already used slave labor before the war (and were conscious not only of the advantage of a cheap and constant labor force as such, but also of the role forced labor held in the control of free labor, keeping wages low and making strikes inefficient), became a thriving force in the exploitation of the “except as”-catch. At first competing with plantation owners in the pursuit of convict labor, industrialists soon proved their savvy by convincing politicians that the projects deemed essential for the development of the South, such as the construction of railroads, could not be realized without the use of convicts. In 1886, only 20 % of the convicts leased out in the South were engaged in farm labor (Lichtenstein 20). Already in 1871, the State of Tennessee had leased all of its convicts to the Tennessee Coal, Iron & Railroad Co. (Blackmon 55). Georgia would follow in the next decade and lease its entire penitentiary system to the railroad company Grant, Alexander and Company, free of charge (Lichtenstein 58). Although Whites, too, could theoretically be subjected to this system of exploitation, they seldom were. In 1871, 84% of convicts in Georgia were Black. In 1876 it were 90 %, and it stayed that way until 1908, when Georgia changed its penal system from convict lease to chain gang (Lichtenstein 60).

The official rationale for the convict lease was to end state support of convicts in a period of fiscal limitation, when it would have been difficult to explain to White constituencies why they should pay taxes to feed and house Black convicts, though there was enough work for them to earn their own living.<sup>29</sup> This rationale was another instantiation of the firm belief in the legitimate exploitation of a Black population that had to be disciplined and could not have been so other than through brute violence and work, the discourse of “rehabilitation” or “integration” being inapplicable to these sub-humans. Whites, on the other hand, were usually not sentenced to convict-labor in the first place, or were given less straining tasks, such as mechanical work, often portrayed

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<sup>29</sup> The same rationale would later help re-transform the private convict lease system into a public owned and run chain gang system.

as to complex for Black convicts. That this logic of dehumanization of Black people had not changed since 1783, when the owners of the Zong slave ship were able to win compensation from insurance companies for 132 slaves which the ship's captain, Luke Collingwood, had thrown overboard in order – as the owners claimed before the court – to assure the health and therewith trading value of the rest of the “cargo” (Webster), is further emphasized by reports such as this one:

“One overseer had ‘wanted to kill [a sick convict]’, since he was ‘no account’ and Grant, Alexander & Co.” – the railroad company I mentioned a short moment ago – “could not afford to feed him for nothing.” (Lichtenstein 54).

The fungibility of Black life had not ended with abolition, on the contrary: it had increased. Although the slave driver could freely dispose of the slaves, he had to be cautious not to overwork them, lest they die. This changed with the shift from the plantation to the penitentiary, as the convict lessee had no long-term investment in the convicts. If one died, he could just get another (Mancini). The same was true for free Black people who, no longer declined in the second degree, could now be killed without running the risk of having to reimburse their owner and only little fear of state interference and possible punishment. Black flesh had entered a new stage of commodification, a little less disposable and a lot more dispensable as lives, if not as commodities<sup>30</sup>, in form of which they were still essential for the political economy of White supremacy.

Although the trade value of Black flesh was not entirely lost<sup>31</sup>, the convicts, technically speaking, remained state property throughout the lease and thus disappeared from the free market. They could not be leased out to a third party by the lessee, were often granted to the lessee for free, and, after the transition to the chain gang system, disappeared not only from the free market, but from the market as such altogether. It is this disappearance, this slight decrease in disposability of Black flesh, that is often

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<sup>30</sup> „Dispensable lives are those that become indispensable when they become commodities.“ (Mignolo, “Dispensable” 75).

<sup>31</sup> Convicts, or rather the lease on them, could be sold under certain circumstances. This was especially true for the beginning of the convict lease system, when Blacks who had committed minor offenses “were arrested and auctioned off to local planters” (Oshinsky 21). Douglas Blackmon mentions an example of convict-leases being auctioned off as part of the selling of the assets of a bankrupt pottery factory in Georgia in 1890 (92).

mistaken for the end of slavery, thus reducing slavery to the trade-ability of bodies, that is to economics and the non-self-possession of the body and the subjection to a master's will. But what the post-abolition legislation as well as the Zong/ Grant, Alexander & Co. example show, is, that abolition does not introduce a new epistemology of the human, nor a new logic of value, but simply a new configuration within a given complex inherent to A[WS]. Black people were still considered and treated as quantifiable beings, not humans. They still occupied the same socio-economic role, could still be forced to work, could still be commanded, humiliated, sold, traded, exploited and killed. But while the selling and trading became significantly more difficult and the form of labor extracted from Black flesh remained the same, the killing became easier, as individual Black bodies became dissociated from Black labor and thus dispensable because replaceable.

Black flesh was still a commodity, but it was now more determined by its use than by its trade value. Under slavery, White supremacy had asserted itself in spectacular moments of cruelty against Black flesh, but it had been subordinated to economic imperatives they served to rationalize and legitimize. The early ontologico-politics of status race was not completely detached from the labor relations that had birthed them. After the abolition of slavery, White Supremacy needed Black flesh for its assertion in a way that would more and more often go against economic reasoning in order to ensure the coherence and stability of a society structured along A[WS]. The only thing set free by abolition was White Fright and the same blast severed the fetish of Blackness from the economic origins Eric Williams has found it to have. The perceived decrease in White security, and especially White job security, had pushed for the harnessing of the Black bodies now perceived as out of control and roaming free<sup>32</sup>. The crisis in White Supremacy that the Reconstruction period is described as and to which Jim Crow is considered an answer, was not a crisis of production or a result of industrialization, but a crisis of sensing, being knowing; not a crisis in the commodity economy but in the White psychological economy. In this situation, the 'best' way to control a Black body, whose new found freedom lay almost exclusively in "locomotion" (Hartman 151), was to put chains around its ankles and put him to work, or hang him/her on the next tree. Convict labor,

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<sup>32</sup> This is a point, where technically speaking, it would be correct to continue speaking of Black "flesh" from a perspective of A[WS]. But because, after abolition, the borders between Black bodies and Black flesh become fluent and instable, I will now shift to using "body" except for moments where the reduction of Black people to flesh is very clear or requires special emphasis.

as has been shown, was not just an economic tool, but most of all an instrument of social engineering.

### I.2.c. From Social Death to Civic Death, from the Ghetto to the Prison Industrial Complex

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What becomes clear when considering the trajectory of the constitution of Blackness from slavery through emancipation, the convict lease and chain gang system to the Prison Industrial Complex that was to follow it, has been aptly summarized by Saidiya Hartman, who wrote: “the shifting register of race from a status ascription to a formal and purportedly neutral category ineluctably refigured Blackness as an abject category” (Hartman 173). The “social death” (Patterson 38) of the slave transformed into the civic death of the felon; a fractured continuity well captured in the 1871 verdict in *Ruffin vs. Commonwealth* in which the Virginia Supreme Court stated:

„For a time, during his service in the penitentiary, he [the convict] is in a state of penal servitude to the State. He has, as a consequence of his crime, not only forfeited his liberty, but also his personal rights except those which the law in its humanity accords to him. He is for the time being a slave of the State. He is civiliter mortus, and his estate, if he has any, is administered like that of a dead man.” (Supreme Court of Virginia, quoted in Alexander 31; emphasis added.)

This concept of a “civiliter mortus” forfeiting his personal rights is still in effect today:

„Unbeknownst to this offender, and perhaps any other actor in the sentencing process, as a result of his conviction he may be ineligible for any federally-funded health and welfare benefits, food stamps, public housing, and federal education assistance. His driver’s license may be automatically suspended, and he may no longer qualify for certain employment and professional licenses. If he is convicted of another crime he may be subject to imprisonment as a repeat offender. He will not be permitted to enlist in the military, or possess a firearm, or obtain federal security clearance. If a citizen, he may lose the right to vote; if not, he becomes immediately deportable.” (American Bar Association, quoted in: Alexander 2012:143)

Between the chain gang system, which, with the exception of a short renaissance at the turn of the millennium, has been abolished in the U.S. since the 1950s (Browne) and the birth of the Prison Industrial Complex, four events have taken place that have to be kept in mind when trying to understand the continuity of abjection and of Black zero-citizenship into the present: the creation of the Ghetto, the transformation of the U.S. economy from industrial to post-industrial, the Civil Rights Act and the War on Drugs.

Within this matrix, the penal system transforms from one of forced labor into one of forced (mostly Black) non-labor (for the convicts) as the fuel for a state sponsored industry of free and (mostly White) labor (for the judicial system). The key point here is a double demonstration that A[WS] is essential for the understanding of a constitution of Blackness influenced by but not determined in the last instance by economics. No revolution of the relations of production or their representation can end the significance of race and racism. On the one hand, it becomes obvious, once again, that the function of Black abjection is not solely the maintenance of cheap Black labor, that is: the Black body is not just a worker (who cannot be exploited as non-labor), but a fetishized commodity. The surplus labor of the slave has transformed into Black “surplus life” (Dillon 122). Thus, second, changing economics do have an impact on how Blackness is constituted as abject, but it is clearly not the only determinative factor of Blackness as it cannot alone explain the changes that can be traced in its constitution.

The socio-economic development in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century transforms Black convict labor from the tool for the maintenance of White civil society into an instrument with subversive qualities. The overlapping interests of White civil society and its economy fall apart when an overabundance in cheap Black labor that had been sought after to drive the economy starts creating fear of White unemployment and social unrest. This overabundance is, at first, not created through deindustrialization, but through “the decline of cotton agriculture due to floods and the boll weevil, and the pressing shortage of labor in Northern factories caused by the outbreak of World War I” (Wacquant, “Slavery” 47) which lead to the so called ‘Great Migration’ of Black people from the rural South to urban centers mostly located in the North. The number of Black people flooding into the cities exceeded the number of jobs available to them in a labor market regulated just as much by protectionist measures of



White supremacy (e.g. guilds keeping certain trades closed to Blacks) as by the law of supply and demand. This itself was not unwelcome in the North, as the oversupply in labor kept the latter cheap, thus fitting smoothly into the succession of preceding paradigms underpinning the exploitation of Black labor. But at the same time the rising Black presence in the cities increased the need for ethnoracial control of the population, ranging beyond the defense of purely White labor sectors to the prevention of racial intermingling. The Ghetto provided an answer to this, guaranteeing biological and economical separation by physical segregation. As Loïc Wacquant argues, the Ghetto, in its fundamental mechanics, is an “ethnoracial prison” (“Slavery” 51) that serves to enforce the segregation of space, society and labor. It is, after slavery and Jim Crow, „the third vehicle to extract black labor while keeping black bodies at a safe distance, to the material and symbolic benefit of white society“ (Wacquant, “Slavery” 48).

Although historically contemporaneous to the Chain Gang system, the Ghetto is technically speaking its successor, as it serves the same aims, but constitutes a new tool-set adapted to different circumstances. Like prison, it serves the concentration and control of Black bodies and the extraction of labor. But it already begins to concentrate this labor in a sealed off market, in a parallel economy that does not put White jobs at risk. Dispensability increases as Black labor is further excluded from a market at once over-saturated and shrinking. “Free” labor had mobilized against the use of convict labor from the beginning and had often expressed its discontent in form of rebellions and raids on convict camps in order to release the prisoners and undermine the lessees power to use convicts to control free workers (Lichtenstein 99; Schneider 194.f.). This opposition gained considerably in strength during the Great Depression, when social unrest regarding the competition created by convict labor on an unstable market led to legislation restricting the market access of convict labor products, e.g. laws prohibiting the shipment of goods produced through convict labor<sup>33</sup>, thus reducing its profitability and ultimately initiating its slow demise (Schneider 195). This same mechanism of sustaining White social peace by jettisoning dispensable bodies in a tight socio-economic space informed the Ghetto which served as a sort of security-valve in regulating the balance between “labor extraction” and “ethnoracial closure” (Wacquant,

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<sup>33</sup> While reducing the profitability of convict labor, these laws also served to create „Federal Prison Industries“, an institutionalized system for the trade of convict labor products between prisons and fellow state and federal government agencies (H.A. Thompson 718).

“Slavery” 48.f.), putting Black bodies on and off the market in measures that would not let White fright create social unrest and political dissatisfaction.

This structure functioned until the 1960s, when the Civil Rights Act and the new gained Black political power risked demounting the valve at a time where it became of increasing importance to control the mounting pressure created by the loss of jobs to de-industrialization, outsourcing, and the increase of available labor force due to the rising number of immigrants from Latin America. This situation differed from preceding historic moments, as a yet again increased dispensability of Black bodies coincided with a very real threat to White supremacy and its political and economic hegemony. But this time, the solutions to this problem were ready at hand, proved and approved: felon disenfranchisement and the development of the Ghetto into a hybrid system of Hyper-Ghetto<sup>34</sup> and mass incarceration that would ultimately lead to the creation of the Prison Industrial Complex as a “judicial Ghetto”, or a “fourth peculiar institution ... a system to remold the social meaning and significance of ,race’ in accordance with the dictates of the deregulated economy and post-Keynesian state“ (Wacquant, “Slavery” 51 + 55)<sup>35</sup>. The Prison Industrial Complex would be able to accomplish three things, which the Ghetto could not: 1. Control the explosive force of the Black bodies accumulated in the Ghettos that at the beginning of the 1960s began to kindle, to come under the influence of Black Radicals such as the Black Panther Movement and erupted more and more often in the form of race riots increasingly perceived as a threat to White security, 2. Neutralize the Black vote created by the Civil Rights Act (and partly eliminated by the Prison Industrial Complex through the mechanism of felon-disenfranchisement), 3. Create new possibilities of extracting surplus value from Black bodies, whose labor, because of the changing character of the economy and the over-supply in cheap work force, could no longer be exploited with sufficient profitability (that is: find new Black-body-businesses after disposability has become almost redundant and dispensability all but complete). All of this, of course, without recurring to the concept of race, but through “law and order” and the “War on Drugs”. This, as Michelle Alexander has so convincingly shown, was and still is an updated version of the Jim Crow laws aimed at maintaining

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<sup>34</sup> An analysis of the Hyperghetto is not necessary for the argumentation here. See the work of Loïc Wacquant for an elaboration of this concept.

<sup>35</sup> Wacquant himself explicitly prefers the term „carceral-assistential complex“ to that of Prison Industrial Complex in order to emphasize the role of the Prison as a part of a general apparatus of discipline and surveillance over its economic role (“Symbiosis” 97).

Black abjection through a redefinition of Blackness qua crime that allowed for color-blind racism (Carr; Sexton "People"), a similarity that lead Manning Marable to describe it as the "Second Reconstruction", Angela Davis to write of abolition as merely a transition "from the prison of slavery, to the slavery of prison" ("From the Prison" 75) and Frank Wilderson to propose an understanding of Black people in the contemporary U.S. as "prison-slave-in-waiting" ("Prison Slave" 18)<sup>36</sup>.

At this point, Black labor disappears from the socio-economic equation and Black bodies are not only commodities from a systemic perspective, but they become literally stored. Black zero-citizenship had accelerated to full citizenship only for the short amount of time it took White civil society to change gears, and only to be throttled even more once the law-and-order paradigm latched in. What this amounts to, interestingly, is a sort of reversed Myrdal-Dilemma<sup>37</sup>. To treat this dilemma with the minute attention to economic detail it deserves is beyond the scope of this text, which is why it will focus on a few aspects considered paradigmatic enough to suffice as an argument here. The easiest thing to understand is the one least characteristic of the Post-Civil-Rights A[WS], but still important to mention here: (Black) stored bodies do not take jobs away from free (White) people, but they create jobs in the Prison Industrial Complex (guards, office jobs, catering, etc.). Compared to non-stored bodies, their control function differs in that they do not even develop the specter of possibility (she might take my job, he might revolt and burn down my car, he might...) but are reduced to a social position that is absolutely nil. This is the logic of the Ghetto and of White protectionist exclusion of Blacks from certain jobs taken to the extreme. Consider the following statistics: „African American youth account for 16 percent of all youth, 28 percent of all juvenile arrests, 35 percent of the youth waived to adult criminal court, and 58 percent of youth admitted to state adult prison“ (Alexander 118). As Heather Ann Thompson points out, by the

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<sup>36</sup> It is also in this context that Dylan Rodriguez' analysis of Barack Obama's "exceptional Blackness" (26) and his critique of Obama's emphasis "that he is not a descendant of slaves" (25) must be read.

<sup>37</sup> In his book *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, Gunnar Myrdal, a Swedish Nobel Laureate in economics, predicted that at one point, what he saw as the dilemma between the American liberal ideology and its ostentatious belief in equality and freedom and the factual treatment of African-Americans would have to be solved by fully integrating the latter into society. He claimed that this would have to be the solution, because it would for one become an economic necessity and, for another, be the only possible choice able to protect the ideological basis of American society against communism. The phrase "reversed Myrdal Dilemma" is here intended to refer to a system that considers the non-integration of Black people the only solution to the dilemma as well as the only way to secure the stability of the economy and the American (White) ideology interlinked with it. Myrdal emphasized that the position of the Black was a "white man's problem" (li), by which he meant that it was a product of White power and the way it was wielded.

millennium, “a greater number of African Americans had ended up in penal institutions than in institutions of higher learning” (703). These youth have interrupted education curriculums and are unlikely to acquire the higher skills necessary in the contemporary economy. Even if they did not suffer any discrimination or disadvantages on the job market due to their incarceration, they would not be able to compete with a better-educated work force. Add to this the disproportionate total number of Black people in jail or prison and thus completely removed from the labor market, and not even available to control the existent labor force through the fear of being replaced: in 2006, 1 in every 14 Black men was behind bars compared to 1 in every 106 White men (Alexander 100). In 2007, 7.3 million people in the United States were under correctional control (in jail, prison, on probation or under parole) and 2.3 million of those in jail or prison (PEW Center on the States 4.f.), which amounts to a 500 % increase over the last 30 years (TheSentencingProject.org). At the same time, these prisoners feed an enormous and largely privatized Prison Industrial Complex worth about \$185 billion and employing almost 2.4 million people in 2003 (Alexander 231).

These numbers indicate why the reversed Myrdal dilemma is important for understanding Black zero-citizenship. Considering the recent development in some Detroit or Brooklyn neighborhoods of what are called “Million Dollar Blocks” (a name referring to the amount of tax money spent on people from this block currently in jail or prison)(H.A. Thompson 715)) with the history of convict labor in mind, the question arises why, especially in times of post-recession budget austerity, these convicts are not made to work in order to generate the finances necessary for their incarceration, but are instead condemned to non-labor<sup>38</sup>. Simple historical materialism or political economy are not able to explain why a capitalist would pay his employees more rather than scare them into the lowest possible wage and longest possible working hours, while at the same time paying taxes to have Black people spend some “lazy” time in jail. The reasons for this are as follows: first, as mentioned above, due to the socio-economic change in the twentieth century and the overaccumulation crisis of the contemporary economy, an army of Black unemployed would not have an additional positive impact on the economy and its processes, while stored Black bodies create millions of jobs. The role of

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<sup>38</sup> „Non-labor“ does not mean that there is absolutely no convict labor in U.S. Prisons. In 2003, about 7% of prisoners worked in prison industries (Atkinson & Rostad 2003:2). The intention of this formulation is to point out a general paradigm shift within A[WS]. It does not want to deny the existence of any convict labor but aims to underline its shifting function within capitalist White civil society.

A[WS] here is to determine why these jobs are created this and not any other way. It explains why the State funding used here went into imprisonment instead of (e.g.) market expansion through education and research. What remains to be explained is why these jobs in the prison industry were State funded in the first place, instead of being financed through revenues generated through convict labor. The answer has been given already in the short look at the role of the Great Depression in the ending of convict labor: unionists, workers and employees as well as employers afraid of cheap competition, politicians and residents do not wish to see jobs outsourced to the prisoners, even if such an outsourcing would mean reduced taxation, and this is especially true in times of economic crisis. This is essential for understanding the continued existence of the Prison Industrial Complex in times of a Great Recession that has made this Complex, in the words of Attorney General Eric Holder, “unsustainable economically” (quoted in: Gottschalk 62). This development is thus not merely tied to economic aspects, but also to questions of how to regulate White Fright.

At first, solving the financial issues posed by the Prison Industrial Complex may seem simple: reduce costs by reducing convictions by changing those drug laws that were the cause for most of the convictions fueling the prison population. This direction was partly chosen and culminated in the *Fair Sentencing Act* of 2010. According to a report released in December 2012, six states were closing 10 prisons (that is a capacity of 14,100 beds) in 2012, following 13 states closing prisons with a capacity of 15,500 beds in 2011, followed by further closings in 2013 (Porter, *Chopping Block 2012*: 1. + 3. and *Chopping Block 2013* 1f.). A second answer, also implemented, was to change punishment methods, thus not taking people out of the prison industrial complex *per se*, but shifting them to less cost intensive post such as work-release programs. But as further prison closings were announced and explicitly referred to as putting an end to prisons as “employment programs”, political and interest group opposition began to consolidate and prevented some of these closings on the basis of economic and security argumentation (N.Y. Times). This argumentation is shockingly direct in its rationalization of using inmates as fuel to secure jobs and thus votes, in spite not only of the commodification of Black bodies this means, but also in spite of the consequences for the economy in general. And although expressed in mostly color-blind terms, it is constitutively tied to the *a priori* stereotyping of Blacks as felons or thugs and zero-citizens and the ensuing dispensability of Black bodies. Nevertheless this is not just a

political strategy that considers crime and criminals exploitable socio-legal constructions, but some of the groups opposed to the shrinking of the Prison Industrial Complex seem to really believe that any crime is as such an objective fact independent of legislation. These groups warn of a reduction of criminal persecution and punishment as opening the gates to floods of violence. It is the logic of an always-already presumed Black pathology (or the afore mentioned Black guilt) (Marshall); yet another mechanism undergirding the precariousness of Black life in and outside the prison, coming to the surface over and over again in form of verbal attacks on Black “welfare cheats” or in the killing of young Black kids like Trayvon Martin, Jordan Russell Davis or Michael Brown. But this mechanism is historically so deeply rooted and so constantly re-iterated through the media that, as Angela Davis points out, even Black people themselves tend to believe in it (“Prison Abolition” 202). Here coloniality outdoes itself and the problematics of de-fetishization become critically complicated. The mechanics of ethnoracial closure and Black dispensability reappear inside Black perception as the ultimate triumph of Black abjection.

Thus, although paying taxes for the maintenance of the Prison Industrial Complex may seem sub-optimal compared to the prisoners being released or paying for their imprisonment by their own labor, the profits Whiteness – as a political system producing and discriminating between White citizens and Black zero-citizens – reaps from the Prison Industrial Complex in terms of securing its psycho-materialist structure, outweigh potential economic losses. Once again, Frank Wilderson’s dictum that the Black subject (and the Black abject) cannot solely be understood through class but must at the same time be considered through the matrix of White supremacy (“Gramsci” 1) forcefully asserts itself.

#### I.2.d. The Plantation/Penitentiary is not a Camp; or: *Contre Agamben I.*

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The transformation of constituted Blackness from status-race into felony does not only uncover the fallacies of Marxism that Wilderson underlines, but it also shows why the ‘Black flesh – Home Sacer’ analogy mentioned earlier (see chapter I.1.b.) is misled precisely because, from the plantation to the penitentiary, Blackness is at the same time constitutive of and constituted in A[WS] while the Homo Sacer in the figure of the camp-

inmate, is merely constituted in A[WS] but not necessary to (constitutive of) that axiomatic's existence.

Agamben himself acknowledges this difference between the penitentiary and the camp *in reverse* when he writes:

“Das Lager, und nicht das Gefängnis, ist der Raum, der dieser originären Struktur des Nomos [der Erde] entspricht. Das zeigt unter anderem die Tatsache, dass das Strafvollzugsrecht nicht außerhalb der normalen Rechtsordnung liegt, sondern bloß einen besonderen Bereich des Strafrechts bildet, während die juristische Konstellation, unter der das Lager steht, das Kriegsrecht und der Belagerungszustand ist (...)”<sup>39</sup> (*Homo* 30).

Here, Agamben points out that the prison is part of constituted law (within the existing State), while the camp is a state of exception, which, qua Carl Schmitt's concept of the *nomos* of the earth, is intended to suggest that the camp is located in the realm of the constitutive (founding the State). But to Agamben, the norm instituted in the constitutive and reiterated through the penitentiary and the plantation as the normal is illegible and he therefore misreads the camp. Barely does he manage to theorize an exceptional racism fixed on Whites, a 'perversion', that is, that is legible as scandal within A[WS] precisely because it is not normal, precisely because it is not the norm instituted in the realm of the constitutive as the foundation of the constituted. Agamben thus reiterates a White-centered logic that Aimé Césaire had already criticized half a century earlier: the outrage created by the concentration camps is not outrage at crimes against humanity, but outrage at crimes against Whiteness; it had not been expressed towards any of the atrocities of colonization and slavery (Césaire 14.f.). Although Agamben believes himself to be working in the realm of the constitutive from where he deems himself capable of offering a radical critique of the political as such, he remains safely within the constituted discourse of A[WS] and thus a very specific form of the political. Within A[WS], the camp inmate, once liberated, can return to civil society and become human again, whereas the Black body has no place in society except as

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<sup>39</sup> “The camp, not the prison, is the space corresponding to this original structure of the *Nomos* [of the earth]. This is proved among other things by the fact that the prison law constitutes a particular sphere of penal law and is not outside the normal order, while the juridical constellation that guides the camp is martial law and the state of siege (...)” (S.W.).

commodity. The fact that, within A[WS] and Agamben's writing as one of its expressions, the Black mass incarceration in prisons is considered normal while concentrating Whites in camps is considered exceptional, is a direct expression of the regulatory norm at the core of A[WS]. It indicates how the camp inmate must be freed for normalcy to reign, while the Black body must be maintained in its abjection if White civil society and its economies (financial, libidinal, etc.) are to continue normally. Claims such as the following:

„If we take into account the racial dimensions of the US penal system, imprisonment, and torture in their full juridical and cultural ‚normalness‘, it would seem that racial violence and Blackness are always already beyond the law under a constant state of siege. In this way, Blackness and racism figure as major zones of indistinction: Blackness is the state of exception.“ (Weheliye, „Pornotropes“ 69)

not only misread Agamben and misunderstand the quintessential (Foucaultian) normality of Black abjection, but they also misanalyse the Prison Industrial Complex. Interestingly, some authors are well aware of this, but still insist on connecting the figure of the Black prisoner to that of the camp inmate (Childs 286f.) in what amounts to a contra-factual normative claim conflating White and Black political ontologies, thus permitting to describe Black incarceration as both a “*conditio inhumana...state of exception*” (Childs 286) and “*normal life*” (Childs 289) at the same time. This is an easy slip to make, as (and therein lies the conflation) a White subject in a state of abjection within A[WS] would be in a state of exception, as the regulatory norm installed by A[WS] is precisely that only Blackness must be abject. Within A[WS], in other words, the abjection of Blackness is no exception but both normative and normal.<sup>40</sup> It is because of this that the plantation and the penitentiary, as chronotopes of and machines for constituting race, are not twins to the concentration camp. It has to be repeated that in and according to A[WS] the Black person has a different ontological status than the White person, that he has no soul that is, that his ‘normal’ state is to be considered constitutionally flawed. S/he enters the penal system and the penitentiary in order to be

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<sup>40</sup> It must be mentioned here that Childs and Weheliye both explicitly take note of the Agamben passage on the difference between the prison and the camp quoted above, but do not accept the argument he proposes therein. Especially Weheliye's work can be read as ambivalent concerning the conflation mentioned.



processed into civil death and anti-citizenship and the reason s/he does/is done so is because of her pre-established abjection in a White supremacist epistemology. Her fungibility, disposability and dispensability are essential to the formation of Whiteness, the capitalist system, the epistemology interwoven with and all the normalcy built on it. Thus, Black flesh and Black death are a way of sensing, knowing, being normal in a White supremacist system, while they would and would be a state of exception in other systems. Agamben's bare life on the contrary marks a life that can only be exceptional and stripped of humanity because it was able to and did possess these within the axiom in which it became bare. No such stripping is possible for the always-already socially dead Black body: the slave or Black prisoner is not the Homo Sacer or the Muselman, because it cannot be dehumanized but is, in A[WS], by definition inhuman chattel. The Muselman or Homo Sacer, on the other hand, are always-already more than the Black abject sentient being. The Black flesh is reduced to *zoe* from the outset; already socially and civically death, it is no *bios* to be stripped naked and transformed into bare life. Frank Wilderson refers his reader to the work of Frantz Fanon to point out that, as opposed to the Black person, the position of Agamben's camp inmate is still within civil society, which means that he, as a victim of "social oppression", not "structural suffering" (Wilderson, *Red* 36), belongs to a completely different ontology than the Black person.

To clarify and solve the problematics described here, it is necessary to disentangle this conflation of Black and White ontologies created through the disappearance of constitutive Blackness under constituted Blackness and necessary for Agamben to have the possibility to even think of the Nazi concentration camp as unprecedented and unparalleled. In order to do this, the following chapters will formulate a more detailed theory of constitutive Blackness, before section II. further engages the relationship between constitutive and constituted Blackness in relation to technology. Through an analysis of the erasure of constitutive Blackness in theories proposed by Agamben and others, the concept of Black abjection will be proposed to describe its construction within a system structured according to A[WS].

### I.3. ABJECT T/RACES OF DESIRE: CONSTITUTIVE BLACKNESS

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#### I.3.a. Ma(r)king a Difference: (Self-)Overrepresentation and Coloniality

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The disappearance of constitutive Blackness is no more than its erasure through the reification of constituted into a simulated constitutive Blackness. So far, this mechanism has been analyzed in the form of the capitalist fetishization of Blackness into a speaking commodity and it has been traced in the development of the Black legal persona from commodified anti- to pathologized zero-citizen.

This mechanism is located in the realm of a representation defined as the imaginary linking or delinking of a constituted with a constitutive according to an axiomatic such as A[WS]. This de-/linking must not be understood as a consciously productive act of dis-/connection. Quite to the contrary, representation here is predicated on the belief of a necessary and pre-established relation between the represented and that representing it. Representation is intra-discursive; its logic is that of the axiom informing it. It is unable to reflect its own conditions of possibility and legibility, because, if it did, it would not be representative, but productive. It is this belief in an externally guaranteed connection between the represented and the representative that predetermines the erasure of the constitutive through a reification of the constituted, just as it is capable of performing the reverse erasure of the constituted through the constitutive. At the same time, it performs the materialization of power in and on the body *as* body, that is, it presents power as deductive of qualities contained in the body independently of the effects of power (*viz.* it portrays White Supremacy as due to Black abjection, rather than explaining how White Supremacy creates Black abjection to legitimize itself).

In the ontological politics of A[WS], the constitutive can be an external truth known through revelation (God) or discovery (History and Science) and can be narrated, among other things, in the form of a Manifest Destiny, a White Man's Burden or a Mission Civilisatrice. In the political ontology of A[WS], such an openly meta-physical explanation is shunned and narratives usually center around supposedly non-metaphysical constitutives, such as a "respublica" built on a set of "ethical-political values" (Mouffe 66.ff) produced through enlightened debate and decision making. The

constitutive in the case of ontological politics is how things are in “truth”, that is: how they should or could be in reality. In this case, conditions in which the constitutive and the constituted coincide are “good” (everything is as it ought to be, the normative and the descriptive are identical), conditions in which they oppose each other are “evil” (everything ought to be different). Accordingly, the axiom governing representation of the constitutive will determine the action produced through it and any representation keen on keeping things as they are will seek to picture a ‘good’ situation in which the constituted and constitutive coincide, or, in the case of a perfectly conservative narrative, become one. This becoming one is considered erasure from a politico-ontological point of view. It is a totalitarian move of total representation within which all alternatives are condemned as either stupid (accidentally wrong), evil (consciously and willingly wrong) or superstitious (consciously but not willingly wrong), but always nonsensical. Representation, then, is nothing else but the narrating of the world according to a specific axiomatic, a narrating which is never an act of pure and disinterested judgment, but, due to its moral and ethical character, a rationale for action that translates knowledge into action and thus power, or: epistemology into politics.

In the examples enumerated above, this nexus between power and knowledge made it possible to colonize continents and slaughter millions while not only allowing its agents to represent themselves as doing ‘good’, but also forcing them to convince their victims of this same truth. The axiom in this case is that of a “colonial difference”,

„[a] difference that hegemonic discourse endowed to ‘other’ people, classifying them as inferior and at the same time asserting its geo-historical and body-social configurations as superior and the models to be followed.“

(Mignolo & Tlostanova 208)

The “colonial difference” is a functional twin to “race”. In analogy, the role of A[WS] in the erasure of the difference between constitutive and constituted Blackness is one but double: the erasure of the difference within the mind of the Black/colonized through “soft” colonization and the erasure of the difference within the mind of the White/colonizer through the act of (self-) overrepresentation.

The latter is a comparatively simple process in which a particular position identifies itself as universal and erases the self-representation and claims of everyone else

through this auto-self-universalization (mostly not perceived as an active rendering universal but as asserting a universality always-already given). This would be the case of one school of thought identifying itself with 'truth' (such as religion), or, as in the case of A[WS], a specific "ethno-class" identifying itself as "humanitas" while at the same time disqualifying all non class-members as an indistinct "anthropos" that has to be ruled by the humans "for his benefit" (Wynter 260). This is a simple process on the side of the self-overrepresenting part, as this part does not change its knowledge or modes of making sense, but only expands its reach.

"Soft" colonization on the other hand, the underbelly of (self-)overrepresentation, having not only to erase and restructure axiomatics and representations preceding, as well as experiences contradicting the self-overrepresenting part's claims, but also having to reconfigure the relation of the colonized/racialized to her or his own body (which is now what betrays, what makes one the target of terror, becomes one's "guilt", etc.), is a lot more complex. Aníbal Quijano has theorized this as "coloniality", a process consisting of three main steps:

„In the first place, they [the European colonizers S.W.] expropriated those cultural discoveries of the colonized people that were most apt for developing capitalism to the profit of the European center. Second, they repressed as much as possible the colonized forms of knowledge production, models of the production of meaning, symbolic universe, and models of expression and of objectification and subjectivity. [...] Third, in different ways in each case, the Europeans forced the colonized to learn the dominant culture in any way that would be useful to the reproduction of domination [...].” (“Coloniality of Power” 189)

Although drawing its force from the arsenal of hard colonization, the role of coloniality is to make the use of this hard force unnecessary by assuring reproduction of domination through creating in the colonized/Black person the guilt and identification that was already considered in the example of aunt Hester's beating. The role of coloniality then is to translate extra-discursive constitutive violence into the discursive constituted power. Its goal is to prevent opposition to the constituted by erasing the

gratuity of the constitutive through a legitimizing narrative which will represent it as well and right and transform cruelty into justice.

That coloniality has seldom lived up to this goal has been and is being proven throughout history. W.E.B. DuBois has best described its actual effects concerning the implantation of Blackness in the minds of those racialized as Black within the United States:

"The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second sight in this American World, – a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity." (2)

"The tape of a world..." is the axiom implanted through not only the coloniality, but also the cruelty of power based on A[WS]. It is with this tape that the zero degree of  $\odot$  is measured, that there is no soul. But this tape comes up against a different tape, another consciousness in the to-be-colonized/to-be-racialized, based on both pre-existing cultural traditions as well as experiences that are incompatible with the axiomatic. This double consciousness hollows coloniality out, limits its power and makes necessary the constant reiteration of cruelty as the form that the implantation of the axiomatic into and onto bodies and flesh takes. Instead of a single subjected mind, coloniality creates a double consciousness in the bodies colonized or racialized as Black. The colonial politico-ontological epistemology meets a resistance rooted in the body and its experience. But this is not the body as sheer materiality or source of a supposedly pure affect. Rather, it relates to the stigmatized situation, to the becoming Black through terror and cruelty as specific forms of materialization of power that create a different experience in the Black abject than they do in the White subject (which does not have to suffer cruelty to become White) and thus potentially creates situations that the axiomatic, because of its White blindness, cannot anticipate and does not cover. This experience of being Black under A[WS], then, creates a cognitive dissonance between being and axiomatic that produces a fissure in the coloniality of power. This double consciousness is not free from coloniality, but it is also not completely contained within

it. The double Black consciousness is the opposite of the unitary White (self-)overrepresenting consciousness: to a Black perception of two dissonant instances (White axiom and Black being) corresponds a White blindness that does not see anything outside its own self-overrepresentation in which being and axiom coincide. As will be shown now, this blindness relates to the constitutive Blackness whose exclusion founds the White subject and to which the latter must be blind in order not to face its own cruelty. This is the White blind spot that makes the totalitarian discourse of A[WS] possible, because it hides the contradictions between the constitutive and the constituted of White civil society and makes them seem one.

### I.3.b. Dispositivism: *Contre Agamben II. / Racializing the Subject I.*

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Constituted discourse aims to hide the constitutive violence it is founded on in order to monopolize violence and consolidate itself and its power. Rationality, coloniality, modernity (Quijano, “Coloniality”), Whiteness: all of these are knowledge formations that legitimize their force as not conquered but given by an extra-discursive higher order such as ‘truth’. This narrative portrays a specific social formation as uncontestable and denies the contingent and thus changeable nature of the axiomatic and regularizing norms that order it. This is what Michel Foucault has described as the dispositive<sup>41</sup>:

“J’ai dit que le dispositif était de nature essentiellement stratégique, ce qui suppose qu’il s’agit là d’une certaine manipulation de rapports de forces, d’une intervention rationnelle et concertée dans ces rapports de forces, soit pour les développer dans telle direction, soit pour les bloquer, ou pour les stabiliser, les utiliser. Le dispositif est donc toujours inscrit dans un jeu de pouvoir, mais toujours lié aussi à une ou à des bornes de savoir qui en naissent mais, tout autant, le conditionnent. C’est ça le dispositif : des stratégies de rapports de forces supportant des types de savoir, et supportés par eux.”<sup>42</sup> (“Jeu” 300).

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<sup>41</sup> Although “dispositif” is often translated as “apparatus” in English, it will be written as dispositive here in order to avoid confusion with the Althusserian concept of “Ideological State Apparatus” used below.

<sup>42</sup> „I said that the dispositive is of an essentially strategic nature, which supposes that we have here a certain manipulation of relations of power, a rational and concerted intervention into these relations of power, either in order to develop them in a certain direction, or to block them, to stabilize them, to use them. Hence, the dispositive is always inscribed into a game of power, but also connected to one or several limits of knowledge arising from it while, just as much, conditioning it. This is what the dispositive is: strategies of power relations that support specific kinds of knowledge and are supported by them.” (S.W.)

As a dispositive, coloniality implies for the colonized<sup>43</sup> a situation in the colonial matrix of knowledge and its social classifications that is at odds with their own tradition, experience, etc. This dissonance prevents the colonized from total identification with the colonial matrix. The colonizer on the other hand, in order to accept the colonizing narrative that guides his actions, can be assumed comfortably identical with his own colonizing matrix. Not feeling the whip that gives his knowledge its power (a constantly reiterated reminder of the roots of power), it is easy for him to ignore the nature of the colonial difference that informs his representation of society. The colonial dispositive then creates two distinct kinds of subjects (the double consciousness and the single consciousness subject), which are determined by their respective situation or position within the colonizing power/knowledge matrix. In this respect, Giorgio Agamben's statement, that „Das Dispositiv ist also zunächst eine Maschine, die Subjektivierungen produziert, und nur als solche ist es auch eine Regierungsmaschine.“<sup>44</sup> (Agamben, *Dispositiv* 35) seems at first glance no more than a description of the function of coloniality as creating discursive power through acquiescence. If the dispositive is a process that manipulates power relations according to a certain axiomatic<sup>45</sup>, then it is automatically a governing machine.

But, as has been shown, within the colonizing dispositive, the colonized is not thought of as a subject, but merely as a sentient being, a body or flesh. It is not a citizen, but an anti-citizen, a zero-citizen, a speaking commodity:

„In short, the colonized subject *is* embodiment. In the colonial principle of rationality, however, there is a clear difference between being and existing. Only the human exists, since the human alone can represent the self as existent, and have a consciousness of what is so represented. From the standpoint of colonialism, the colonized does not truly exist, as a person or subject.” (Mbembe, *Postcolony* 187)

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<sup>43</sup> The term „colonized“ will be used to refer to those subjected to coloniality as soft colonization. As such, it will also be applied to African Americans in the course of this text.

<sup>44</sup> “The dispositive is foremost a machine producing subjection, and only as such is it also a governing machine.” (S.W.)

<sup>45</sup> ‘Axiomatic’ refers to a specific knowledge formation without any consideration of power, ‘dispositive’ refers to that knowledge formation with an emphasis on the enmeshment of knowledge and power. Thus, an axiomatic can be considered as a part of a dispositive.

How does the dispositive account for the different forms of subjection regarding the colonizer and the colonized? Significantly, it doesn't. In fact, from the perspective of ontologically founded axiomatics such as A[WS] it can't, because these are by nature totalitarian and can as such not admit that they or their power are limited. Accounting for different forms of subjection would amount to admitting that the colonized is not what the colonizing axiomatic represents it as being, or, in other words, that the axiomatic is wrong or insufficient, thus not identical to truth, and not equipped with its moral and ethic power to command a very certain kind of action. The driving belief of a colonial axiomatic is that it does not produce the colonized's situation, but merely reveals it to him or her. It does not see itself as transforming but as revealing and could never think of itself in terms of coloniality. In other words, the dispositive is structurally blind to that which is beyond it and it has to be so in order to be what it is. This is the location of erasure, where the constituted is reified into the constitutive. This is also the reason why a hermeneutics of absence and a pedagogy of the trace is necessary.

What does this erasure mean for constitutive Blackness? What does it mean for constitutive Blackness, when it can only survive in the blind spots of colonialist representation, through syncretism or going underground? It means social death and  $\emptyset$ , it means invisibility:

„I am invisible, understand, because people refuse to see me ... When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination – indeed, everything and anything except me ... That invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact. A matter of the construction of their inner eyes, those which they look through their physical eyes upon reality.“ (Ellison 3).

Invisibility is not disappearance as such but erasure; it is refused existence and absence within the colonialist representation but not deletion. What is produced through this colonialist refusal and the attempt to assimilate the world to its knowledge, instead of the other way round, is a repressed unconscious (perceptible but not representable), a “colonial uncanny” (Low 113 f.), which for the axiomatic is an “unconcept” (Masschelein). In order to fully understand this erasure and its role for the constitution of Blackness, a closer look at the totalitarian subject is necessary, a second look that will



produce a description of the structural erasure of constitutive Blackness as abjection.

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How does the dispositive of coloniality operate within the mind; how does it create subjects? Quijano describes it as follows:

„This relationship [of coloniality] consists, in the first place, of a colonization of the imagination of the dominated; that is, it acts in the interior of that imagination, in a sense, it is a part of it. [...] The [systematic colonial] repression fell, above all, over the modes of knowing, of producing knowledge, of producing perspectives, images and systems of images, symbols, modes of signification, over the resources, patterns and instruments of formalized and objectivized expression, intellectual or visual. It was followed by the imposition of the use of the rulers' own patterns of expression, and of their beliefs and images with reference to the supernatural. These beliefs and images served not only to impede the cultural production of the dominated, but also as a very efficient means of social and cultural control, when the immediate repression ceased to be constant and systematic.” (“Coloniality” 169)

The subject in this sense would be something that not only internalizes the axiomatic of colonial culture (and the narrative determined by it) into itself as itself (in the perfect colonial world) or as a part of itself (in this imperfect but still colonial world), but which literally incorporates the axiomatic, materializes it in its own body (that is: as its own experience, perception, relation to its body, its morphology *and* as the body of the axiom (Butler, *Bodies* 35f.)). A total identification would in this sense imply an erasure of the implementation and a representation of the identified colonial psychological and corporeal identity as natural; viz. an erasure of the constitutive terror under the constituted discourse that would make cruelty unnecessary:

„Der Terminus Dispositiv bezeichnet also etwas, in dem und durch das ein reines Regierungshandeln ohne jegliche Begründung im Sein realisiert wird. Deshalb schließen die Dispositive immer einen Subjektivierungsprozess ein, da sie ihr

Subjekt selbst hervorbringen müssen.“<sup>46</sup> (Agamben, *Dispositiv* 24).

At this point, important questions reemerge. First: What role does the to-be-subjectivated play in the act of subjection? Agamben suggests that it is passive and powerless. Second: how is political change even thinkable in such a situation of passive powerlessness? If the dispositive meets no resistance, why and how should it change? Third: What is the significance of all of this for the constitution of Blackness, if it is premised that „eine rassistische Unbedingtheit und Logik in der Schaffung und Durchsetzung des Subjektbegriffes selbst [liegt], die eine Partizipation nicht-weißer menschlicher Handlungsfähigkeit im Orbit der Subjektivität nach wie vor ausschließt“<sup>47</sup> (Broeck, “Subjekt” 153)? These questions shall be used to formulate a critique of Agamben’s elaboration of the dispositive first, and then serve to introduce a different approach to this concept proposed by Gilles Deleuze.

Agamben emphasizes that dispositives rely on an “oikonomia”, that is an ensemble of practices, knowledges, procedures and institutions, whose goal it is to manage, govern, control and redirect the conduct, gestures and thought of people into supposedly useful channels (Agamben, *Dispositiv* 23.f.). At the same time, Agamben laments the pullulating of dispositives into oikonomias, into different apparatuses of control that unilaterally create subjects through edict and without exchange with the subjectivated; a process which he describes as “Niedergang der Politik”<sup>48</sup> (*Dispositiv* 39). In these sentences, Agamben just as categorically excludes any interaction between dispositive/s and subject/s as he precludes any multiple determination of the to-be-subjected through different synchronous dispositives. For Agamben, in other words, no double consciousness is thinkable. He explicitly proposes a top-down model of subjection, which one can neither escape nor exact any influence on: subjection is always-already determined and inevitable. Though the content of subjection remains unspecified and thus possibly contingent, subjection as a form and function is given for Agamben, that is, it possesses the force of ontological politics. For Agamben, there is only one model of the subject, and given this assumption, the subject can be completely enveloped in the

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<sup>46</sup> “The term dispositive thus designates something in an through which a pure action of governance is realized without any foundation in Being. Because of this, dispositives always include processes of subjection, because they have to produce their own subject.” (S.W.)

<sup>47</sup> “there lies within the creation and implementation of the concept of the subject a racist unconditionality and logic, which still excludes non-white human agency from the orbit of subjectivity” (S.W.)

<sup>48</sup> “demise of politics” (S.W.)

dispositive and merge into the totalitarianism of its mode of representation. Thus, in a White civil society, this can only be a White or colonizing subject, because it does not experience the cognitive dissonance between power and knowledge, between the constitutive and the constituted. Agamben's work has been successfully colonized by Whiteness; it is an example of what must be called dispositivism (viz. a positivist acceptance of the dispositive in force). In White civil society, this dispositivism asserts White (self-)overrepresentation and it is because of this that Agamben is blind to the problematics of double consciousness, Blackness or colonization and can speak of the Nazi camps as being without precedent.

While Agamben seems to indicate an awareness of the problematic of a totalitarian theory of the dispositive by posing the question of possible "profanation" (a word whose religious connotations are indicative of Agamben's erasing of the political under the ontological) of the dispositive, he undermines this by reducing profanation to the action of a "Gegendispositiv"<sup>49</sup> (*Dispositiv* 34). Although a counter-dispositive might counteract the influence of a first dispositive on the subject and its formation, this will not result in a double determination by both dispositives at once, nor produce any space for agency on the side of the to-be-subjected, but merely signals the replacement of one dispositive by another, thus leaving the fundamental mechanics of subjection intact. Agamben emphasizes that the counter-dispositive stands in a relation of "either-or" to the "primary" dispositive. For him, profanation cannot „[auf die S.W.] Wiederausammensetzung eines neuen Subjektes hinauslaufen, es sei denn in verhüllter gleichsam gespenstischer Form“<sup>50</sup> (*Dispositiv* 36), because the subject is so fundamentally limited to internalizing only a single and total dispositive that it cannot constitute itself in the blanks between more than one dispositive. On the contrary, Agamben argues that the to-be-subjected would not develop agency but would be lost in such an in-between-space and that such a space would therefore ultimately have to remain empty. Accordingly, he describes this space as one of "desubjection", a process whose result is exactly  $\emptyset$ , but which still counts as subjection nevertheless, because, due to the multitude of different dispositives present in the contemporary world, "Subjektivierungsprozesse und Desubjektivierungsprozesse [werden (S.W.)]

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<sup>49</sup> "counter-dispositive" (S.W.)

<sup>50</sup> "lead to a re-assembling of a new subject, except in a veiled and quasi spectral form" (S.W.)

wechselseitig indifferent”<sup>51</sup> (*Dispositiv* 37): where one dispositive fails, another succeeds. The  $\odot$  remains opaque and the gaze is again diverted from the constitutive to the spectacular, its constituted double feigning totalitarian transparency. It is no coincidence that Agamben draws on pornography to exemplify instances of profanation and to think a body invested by capitalist commodification. Here profanation is thought of in terms of stripping a thing of its function in the dispositive by voiding it of signification and turning it into a pure signified, or pure means, detached from a vanished foundation that will then seem to never have been. Only in pornography, this argument goes, is a body reduced to flesh and pornography, therefore, is a “re-appropriation of nihilism” (Prozorov 72 ff.). This nihilism, though, is just the embrace of a merely perceived nothingness or absence that is not so, but is the result of an erasure. The profane remains trapped within A[WS]. Its nothingness/absence is understood as a disruptive emptiness that brings to surface the “truth content” under the “subject matter” of capitalist spectacle (Prozorov 79): pornography as an act for show, not for its “authentic” goal (procreation), but merely for the consumption of the viewer. But, as argued above, the spectacle is not the flat surface Agamben takes it for. Rather, it is the translation of the constitutive into the constituted, the conservation of constitutive violence in discourse through cruelty, the administration of experience as narrative through an axiomatic, the transmogrification of ascription to description, the formation of subjects by writing an axiomatic into and onto bodies. The spectacle is not mere surface; it is not just a product that can be consumed, but first of all a medium in which an axiomatic transmits itself, an act of normalization that not only invests a subject, but also is “a regulatory ideal ... whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce – demarcate, circulate, differentiate – the bodies it controls” (Butler, *Bodies* XII). The “truth content” of its “subject matter” then is not emptiness, but power, and the bodies present in pornography are never mere surface or simple materiality. Ignoring this and embracing a supposed nothingness not only amounts to an intra-discursive act that is a far shot from disrupting the spectacle, but also embracing the power and terror hidden underneath it. The fact that Agamben does mistake erasure for absence is further proof of the dispositivism that forces him to refer to pornography and the Nazi camps to be able to think dehumanization, that makes him unable to think the abjection constituted through the commodification of Black bodies

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<sup>51</sup> “subjection and desubjection are becoming mutually indifferent” (S.W.)

and the reduction of these bodies to flesh in slavery and from the plantation to the penitentiary.

The Black desubjection that double consciousness would be from Agamben's perspective is in this sense constitutive of the 'innocence' (the constitutive blindness to cruelty and its role in it) that White subjection is made of, the 'innocence' that allows Whiteness to think of itself as having no responsibility for the world it has made, because it does not know that it has made this world. Because of this, desubjection and subjection can never be mutually indifferent: the one exists only because of and through the other. The absence of this Black desubject in Agamben has been shown in the paragraph above, but the trace from which to theorize this desubject as abject has also already been mentioned: the veiled and spectral form of that which is between dispositives. This abject is the uncanny colonial doppelgänger of the subject. Its haunting of the spectacular will offer clues to its understanding. But before this, a splitting up of the concept of the dispositive is necessary in order to recuperate it from Giorgio Agamben's flawed dispositivism.

### I.3.c. Re-*t/racing* the Potential of the Dispositive in the Psyche

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Required for recuperating the concept of the dispositive is adapting it to the realm of the psyche, where coloniality and subject theory converge, without conflating it with theories of ideology or repression. At first glance, both these terms seem to be perfectly adequate to explain the interior process that underpins subjection. In Louis Althusser's theory, it is ideology that implants in the subject the structures that will make the self-recognition of the subject as subject in the act of interpellation possible: For him, ideology is:

„ ... profondément inconsciente [...] L'idéologie est bien un système de représentations, mais ses représentations n'ont la plupart du temps rien à voir avec la 'conscience': elles sont la plupart du temps des images, parfois des concepts, mais c'est avant tout comme structures qu'elles s'imposent à l'immense majorité des hommes, sans passer par leur 'conscience'."<sup>52</sup> (*Pour Marx* 239)

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<sup>52</sup> "... profoundly unconscious [...] Ideology is indeed a system of representations, but most of the time these representations have nothing to do with 'consciousness': most of the time they are images,

Ideology works through representation. Its role in representation is similar to that of the axiomatic, with one fundamental difference. As Foucault has pointed out in his critique of the concept of ideology, theories of ideology are generally built on notions of a truth that would be veiled by ideology and could be revealed by tearing up ideology, and they necessarily rely on an a subject preceding ideology and posited „in untergeordneter Position in Bezug auf etwas, das ihr gegenüber als ökonomische, materielle usw. Struktur oder Determinierung wirksam ist“<sup>53</sup> (*Dispositive* 34f.). The concept of ideology, in this sense, is very similar to the Agambian version of the dispositive and it runs the same risks of totalisation. Although ideology seems to be a critique of totalitarian representation, it is so only by recurring to ontological politics of truth. Theories of ideology therefore do not consider the constitution of the subject or abject, but take these as given. Instead, they focus on the manipulation of the latter through representation, that is, they are concerned only with the level of the constituted, not the constitutive. This why Foucault combines his critique of the concept of ideology with a critique of using the notion of psychic repression in the analysis of power. Although psychic repression „scheint so gut zu einer ganzen Reihe von Erscheinungen zu passen, die von Machtwirkungen abhängen“, it is a „völlig inadäquat“ concept, because it implies not only theorizing a true or ‘core’ subject that exists prior to power and the repression it asserts, but also amounts to a “völlig negative, beschränkte, zu kurz gefasste Auffassung der Macht ist, die seltsamer Weise ein wenig von allen Seiten geteilt wurde“<sup>54</sup> (*ibid.*). Gilles Deleuze elaborates this in his book on Foucault: „la répression et l’idéologie n’expliquent rien, mais supposent toujours un agencement ou ‘dispositif’ dans lequel elles opèrent, et non l’inverse“<sup>55</sup> (*Dispositive* 36).

Both Foucault and Deleuze consider the dispositive to be more fundamental and foundational than Agamben does. They insist on its creative and constitutive power and refuse to see it as a merely deceptive or negative instance operating within the realm of

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sometimes concepts, but most of all they impose themselves as structures on the immense majority of Men, without passing through their ‘consciousness’”. (S.W.)

<sup>53</sup> “... in a subordinated position in relation to something acting on it in form of an economic, material, etc. structure” (S.W.)

<sup>54</sup> “[seems to (S.W.)] fit well to a whole series of phenomena depending on power effects “... „completely inadequate“ ... „completely negative, limited and insufficient conception of power, which strangely seems to be shared a bit on all sides“ (S.W.)

<sup>55</sup> „repression and ideology don’t explain anything, but always suppose an agency or ‘dispositive’ within which they operate, and not the other way around“ (S.W.)

the constituted:

„Wenn sie [Macht] nur repressiv wäre, wenn sie niemals etwas anderes tun würde als nein sagen, ja glauben Sie dann wirklich, dass man ihr gehorchen würde? Der Grund dafür, dass die Macht herrscht, dass man sie akzeptiert, liegt ganz einfach darin, dass sie nicht nur als nein-sagende Gewalt auf uns lastet, sondern in Wirklichkeit den Körper durchdringt, Dinge produziert, Lust verursacht, Wissen hervorbringt, Diskurse produziert [...]“<sup>56</sup> (Foucault, *Dispositive* 35)

The dispositive is neither absolute nor embedded in a prior discourse that assures its demands for identification and subjection are met. It must motivate obedience and create the basis for identification and subjection. This means that the dispositive must deal with the possibility of resistance on the side of the to-be-subjected. Why; and what does this possibility look like? It is the trace of something that could be called truth, though not in the form of an ontologico-political self-transparent and self-identical truth-kernel (as in theories of ideology and psychic repression), but as a politico-ontological truth: the presence of the constitutive in the constituted. In the case of the constitution of Blackness, this presence is ‘trace’: the presence of the constitutive as the presence of the (politico-ontological) truth of race, that is, as t/race. In order to constitute White Subjects and Black abjects, the dispositive needs to eliminate that t/race, which implies erasing the perception of the violence that founds its knowledge and representing its axiomatic as self-sustaining, translating hard into soft colonization. But the t/race signals that this translation can never be total, that there can be no discursive closure, due, among other things, to the cognitive dissonance present in double consciousness and to the colonial uncanny this double consciousness upholds into the dispositive.

This is the point where the analysis of the constitution of Blackness reveals itself to be the analysis of the desire contained in the commodity-fetish of race. What motivates the

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<sup>56</sup> “If it [power] were only repressive, if it would never do anything else then say no, do you really believe that it would be obeyed? The reason for the rule of power is that it is accepted, it is simply this, that it is not merely weighting on us as a prohibitive power, but in reality permeates the body, produces things, causes desire, generates knowledge, produces discourse [...]” (S.W.)

subject to at least acquiesce and internalize the *de jure* ontologico-political narrative that erases the *de facto* political ontology of the constitution of Blackness? How is this motivation a desire contained within 'Blackness' (but not of it), and what is the radical political potential possibly contained in a deconstruction of this fetish that may bar the desire this fetish structures or even generates? What does this tell us about desire itself? Is this analysis concerned with a socio-genetic or onto-genetic desire? Is this desire identical or intrinsic to the subject, or does it precede or succeed it? Is this desire constitutive or constituted? How does it operate? In the case of repression or of Althusser's "screen" of ideology (*Ideology* 89) and Agamben's oikonomia of the spectacle, this – even if not theorized as such by these authors themselves – is an onto-genetic but mislead and misused desire. Both Althusser and Agamben propose a notion of a return to and liberation by truth, but they do not explain where the impulse for such a return could possibly originate. For Foucault, the question of how obeisance is motivated reveals the subject as a mixture of unfettered, as well as mislead onto-genetic and freshly created socio-genetic desire. While it are mislead onto-genetic and socio-genetic desires that drive the motivation for acquiescence and internalization, onto-genetic desire is the potential constitutive force which always risks disrupting the constituted power, be it in its sheer being (for example as homosexual/non-normal love or friendship (Foucault, *Ästhetik* 70.f.)), or as impulse for an askesis as a "technique" or "care" of the self, a form self-purgatory discipline of desire<sup>57</sup>.

If a desire for material profit, this desire is at a minimum adapted to the parameters of a very specific axiomatic, necessarily secondary to the power that makes profit a possible and legible concept in the first place. But because knowledge of this secondary nature implies not only the possibility of opting (dropping) out, but signals the non-imperative nature of the axiomatic claims altogether, power weaves a narrative that erases within constituted discourse its constitutive violence and reifies the constituted into the natural (and thus only possible) state of things. Accordingly, subjects must be convinced that they themselves could not be and act any different from what they are and do within the system. This, as has been explained above, is attempted through fusing the constitutive and the constituted through (self-)overrepresentation and coloniality. As this chapter

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<sup>57</sup> Other approaches to the role of desire in subjection will be discussed in chapter I.4. The how, why and when (etc.) of possibilities of resistance connected to desire will be discussed in more detail when constitutional Blackness, the glitch and the semiosis of the object are considered in later chapters.



has shown, in order to assure this function efficiently, the narrative must not only inscribe itself into the subject's representations, but also into its body and its libidinal economy. It must create an incentive to identify with the narrative, it must create in the subject the impression to have stakes (possibilities of enjoyment) in the maintenance of power, in short: it must create a desire.

It is exactly the role of A[WS] to define this subject as 'non-Black' which is then called 'White'<sup>58</sup> and blessed with White innocence as to the (politico-ontological) truth of this desire. The politico-libidinal economy of A[WS] demands that the subject enjoy its Whiteness, and this is only possible if all it does is good and true. The price for this to be possible is a certain blindness of Whiteness, a 'White ignorance' reducing Blackness to  $\emptyset$ . The White subject is built on a Black desubject, which according to A[WS] is neither possible nor real and which cannot have a desire of its own. This situation is that of Black abjection, which may be tinged with desire but always harks back to that cruelty which only a White subject in a White civil society can ignore.

#### I.3.d. Supermax Erasure: Why the Black Desubject is Abject

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The colonial uncanny is not a repressed desire, but the haunting intuition of the (politico-ontological) truth of colonialist desire and White innocence. It is the shadow of that which lies underneath  $\emptyset$ , the foundation of the White subject, and leads to the Black abjection that this chapter will now theorize.

The Black abject is the impossible Black desubject. As has been shown, it is not only axiomatically excluded from being a subject, but it serves the constitution of the White subject and has to be necessarily erased from the discourse of the constituted White subject in order to make its existence possible. This is an abject situation very similar to that sketched by Judith Butler in order to conceptualize gender relations:

“Abjection (in latin, *ab-jicere*) literally means to cast off, away, or out and, hence, presupposes and produces a domain of agency from which it is differentiated. Here the casting away resonates with the psychoanalytic notion of *Verwerfung*,

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<sup>58</sup> Thus the wish to 'become White' in a White supremacist society, as for example described by Frantz Fanon. See chapter I.4.a. for an analysis of this proposal.

implying a foreclosure which founds the subject and which, accordingly, establishes that foundation as tenuous. Whereas the psychoanalytic notion of *Verwerfung*, translated as 'foreclosure', produces sociality through a repudiation of a primary signifier which produces an unconscious or, in Lacan's theory, the register of the real, the notion of *abjection* designates a degraded or cast out status within the terms of sociality. Indeed, what is foreclosed or repudiated *within* psychoanalytic terms is precisely what may not reenter the field of the social without threatening psychosis, that is the dissolution of the subject itself. I want to propose that certain abject zones within sociality also deliver this threat, constituting zones of uninhabitability which a subject fantasizes as threatening its own integrity with the prospect of psychotic dissolution ('I would rather die than do or be that!')." (Butler, *Bodies* 186, note 1.)

In the development of her concept of abjection, Butler remains on track with A[WS], which is why her approach needs to be differentiated from the understanding of abjection proposed here. At once very close and fundamentally different, the Butlerian abject will therefore be scrutinized in a separate sub-chapter below. It will suffice, at this point, to signal two important readings of the desubject as abject.

First, reading the Black desubject as something whose humanity is invisible to A[WS], while it is hypervisible as Black flesh, as a commodity or a pathological criminal, as prisoner, anti- and zero-citizen. This Black desubject can be acted upon within the constituted dimension, it can be described as dangerous or lazy, but its exclusion from the realm of White civil society, its absent soul, viz. its desubjection/ abjection are set in the realm of the constitutive and unchangeable. Hence, the necessity of cruelty as the form social reproduction takes in the realm of the constitutive, as opposed to (e.g.) the legal discourse of rehabilitation that is set in the realm of the constituted. Hence, the scenes of subjection in which Saidiya Hartman describes how the narrative of A[WS] attempts to conceal cruelty under a veneer of constituted discourse by making the slave sing or dance or express other signs of libidinal investment in and acquiescence to White civil society. This narrative is conceived to erase from White civil society's self-narration the possibility of a Black body not invested, that is, not inscribed with power and therefore not under the control of discourse and thus constantly summoning violence. This first reading of abjection, then, is that of Saidiya Hartman: the total erasure of

cruelty and its replacement through narratives of enjoyment; a situation in which „Blackness marks a social relationship of dominance and abjection“ (57).

Second, a reading of abjection to describe the function of Blackness for and in the psyche and self-consciousness created through subjection within a dispositive structured by A[WS]<sup>59</sup>. This is the abject described by Julia Kristeva as a „objet chu, [qui] est radicalement un exclu et me tire vers là où le sens s’effondre“<sup>60</sup> (9). For Kristeva, the abject is the impure, repulsive, disgusting and detestable that the “I” rejects in its self-constitution and represses to the degree of invisibility, because it feels threatened by it.<sup>61</sup> Kristeva here, of course, participates in the discourse of psychic repression tied to the conservative notion of the subject critiqued by Foucault and Deleuze above. Her notion of the abject is and can only be articulated in reference to Blackness if located firmly within A[WS]. There it describes the Black abject in accord with  $\circ$  as „à la lisière de l’inexistence et de l’hallucination, d’une réalité qui, si je la reconnais, m’annihile“<sup>62</sup> (Kristeva 10).

The haunting of the axiomatic by the colonial uncanny is just such a threat of annihilation or end of the world (see chapter I.4.a.). It is uncanny, because it can be present to experience, but is not representable in the narrative that is constituted on its exclusion. It is a gut feeling. It can be anxiety, a fleeting sense of the always possible collapse of the self. The colonial uncanny is uncanny not in a Freudian sense of a return of the repressed, but first of all in an almost Heideggerian manner: the sensing of the absence of (that which functions as) the ontological foundation of one’s being, the t/race of cruelty within the constituted. As such, the colonial uncanny also indicates the fear of having to face the truth of one’s desire.

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<sup>59</sup> “Ich werde Subjektivierung den Prozess nennen, durch den man die Konstitution eines Subjektes, genauer, einer Subjektivität erwirkt, die offensichtlich nur eine der gegebenen Möglichkeiten zur Organisation eines Selbstbewusstseins ist.” [„I shall call subjection the process through which the constitution of a subject, more precisely, a subjectivity, is produced, which obviously is only one of the possibilities for the organization of a self-consciousness.” (S.W.)] (Foucault, *Ästhetik* 251).

<sup>60</sup> “fallen object, radically excluded and pulling me towards the point where sense breaks down” (S.W.)

<sup>61</sup> This is also the difference between the abject and the object, which does not threaten but stabilizes the subject (Kristeva 9f.). In general, the object has to be considered as intra-discursive or belonging to the realm of the constituted. Fred Moten in this sense differentiates between the object and the thing, with the latter “sustain[ing] itself in that absence or eclipse of meaning that withholds from the thing the horrific honorific of ‘object’.” (Moten 2008: 181).

<sup>62</sup> “on the edge of inexistence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I recognize it, annihilates me” (S.W.)

The threat of the abject for the subject in A[WS] then is double: the end of innocence/ignorance on one side, and possibly the end of the subject and the world it senses, knows, is, on the other side. To repeat, yet again, a variation of the by now familiar theme: the subject can not be the subject that it is and recognize the abject at the same time: „L’abjet sollicite et pulvérise tout à la fois le sujet“<sup>63</sup> (Kristeva 12). The entrance of the constitutive abjection of Blackness into constituted discourse (its semiosis) would amount to an ontological jump; it would be and require a re-foundation of power and the subject. Sections II. and III. will analyze this as the concept of constitutional Blackness and in relation to the racial glitch. At this point, however, it is necessary to remain with the anxiety and its role for abjection. As has become obvious, this is a well-founded anxiety, because:

„Eradication of the generative mechanisms of Black suffering would mean the end of the world and they would find themselves peering into an abyss (or incomprehensible transition) between epistemes ...“ (Wilderson, “Vengeance” 33)

Speaking in these terms, the motivation of the White subject to sustain the abjection of Blackness is to secure the continuity of its self or ego in the form it was able to take and can only sustain because of this abjection, an abjection acquiesced in exactly because of the joy it brings. From a perspective emic to A[WS], the fetish of Blackness marks a taboo that can only be touched at the prize of the end of the world and whose uncanniness will be rationalized by the axiomatic narrative in order to sublimate the anxiety it generates. The White subject posits itself against the abject, defines itself as rational contra the irrational abject, whose supposed libidinal being is uncanny to rationality, because it can not be grasped by it, but which is contained through these terms nevertheless. Blackness becomes a shapeless something, noise or chaos, a jungle of drives, becomes perceived as barbaric, un-cultured savage, primitive or pathological, something which can be neither represented nor understood by a ‘normal’ mind: „a vast tumultuous world of drives and sensations, so tumultuous and opaque as to be practically impossible to represent, but which words must nevertheless grasp and anchor in pre-set certainty“ (Mbembe, *Postcolony* 176). Rationality acts like faith, culture or civilization as a basic axiom, a colonial difference under which to erase not only the

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<sup>63</sup> “The abject at the same time solicits and smashes the subject.” (S.W.)

constitutive nature of race but also its capacity for haunting. In its function as mechanism of delimitation it marks not only its own borders, but also transcends these borders by defining everything beyond them as the class of the ungraspable and then treating and dominating it through this class. The axiomatic representation asserts its totalitarianism through “empty signifiers”<sup>64</sup>, tools of reintegration and containment complementing the mechanism of erasure in moments where the constitutive risks gaining sufficient force to disrupt the constituted. The insufficiency and faultiness of not understanding or being unable to narrate are transferred from the necessarily perfect because true discourse to the not understandable itself. There is not a lack of explanatory capacity, but simply nothing to be explained, nothing beyond representation, its narrative, its imperative. As Achille Mbembe writes in an analysis of the colonial axiomatic that is also valid for A[WS], “it can be defined as a series of hollows” (*Postcolony* 179), a series of representations protecting the subject from the abject:

„In desperation to endow the colonized with an essence and enshrine them in a fossil, the colonizer can confine them in a name [...] Thanks to this name given by the settler, the native will become a fragment of the real, an objective thing, matter. The world of things and the world of names will then be a single reality and the settler able to make a representation of the colonized. [...] the native is only in so far as he/she is a thing denied, is only as something deniable. In short, from the standpoint of a ‘self’ of one’s own, he/she is nothing. In the colonial principle of rationality, the native is thus that thing that is, but only insofar as it is nothing. And it is at the point where the thingness and its nothingness meet that the native’s identity lies. The work of the colonizer will henceforth consist in self-representing that thingness and nothingness, what they are and how they are. [...] The native – and here lies the paradox – is also what makes possible the constitution of the colonizer as subject par excellence. [...] The subject that the colonizer is, is a subject stiffened by the successive images he or she makes of the

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<sup>64</sup> „An empty signifier can, consequently, only emerge if there is a structural impossibility in signification as such, and only if this impossibility can signify itself as an interruption (subversion, distortion, etcetera) of the structure of the sign“ (Laclau 37). The empty signifier can be characterized by Albert Memmi’s description of the colonized: „Er besteht zunächst aus einer Reihe von Negationen. Der Kolonisierte *ist* dies *nicht* und *ist* das *nicht*. Er wird niemals positiv beurteilt; falls dies doch geschieht, so verdankt sich die konzedierte Eigenschaft einem psychologischen oder ethischen *Mangel*.“ [“He consists primarily of a series of negations. The colonized *isn’t* this and he *isn’t* that. He is never judged in a positive manner; if this does happen, the conceded quality is due to a psychological or ethical lack” (S.W.)] (84).

native.” (*Postcolony* 186)

After defining Whiteness as not-Black on the constitutive level, Blackness is presented as lack and not-White on the constituted level. The causality is reversed and suddenly Blackness is fungible and exploitable because not possessing speech, nor history, nor civilization, nor humanity instead of the other way around. Supermax subject stability is secured and erasure perfect: supermax erasure.

### I.3.e. Dancing in the Dispo(sitive) Prohibited; or no Body, no Soul, no Black Desire

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In order to even think the possibility of subverting the supermax erasure of abjection, it is necessary to propose another subject model, another approach to the subject that will allow us to understand abjection in terms etic to A[WS]. This will be the subject model of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, which in the preceding pages has already served as default position for a critique of A[WS] multiple times, and which will now be sketched in more detail through Deleuze’s understanding of the dispositive in his reading of Foucault.

Contrary to Agamben, Deleuze centers his analysis of the dispositive on the question: „ ... ob die Subjektivierungslinien nicht der äußerste Rand eines Dispositivs sind, und ob sie nicht den Übergang eines Dispositivs zu einem anderen umreißen: In diesem Sinne würden sie ‘Bruchlinien’ präparieren“<sup>65</sup> (“Dispositiv” 156). According to this, the subject is not defined through a delimitation of its contours, but it is itself a delimitation of the dispositive. The subject then is imposed on a self with which it fuses, but not to the extent of total identity and not without being contaminated by the self: „Das Selbst ist weder ein Wissen noch eine Macht. Es ist ein Individuierungsprozess, der sich auf Gruppen und Personen bezieht und sich den etablierten Kräfteverhältnissen sowie den konstituierten Wissensarten entzieht: eine Art Mehrwert“<sup>66</sup> (Deleuze, “Dispositiv” 155f.).

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<sup>65</sup> “... if the lines of subjection are not the outermost edge of a dispositive, and if they do not outline the transition from one dispositive to another: in this sense, they would prepare ‘fault lines.’” (S.W.)

<sup>66</sup> “The self is neither a knowledge nor a power. It is a process of individualization that relates to groups and people and eludes the established relations of power as well as the constituted types of knowledge: a sort of surplus value.”(S.W.)

Although the subject is constituted, the self is not. It is located below the constitutive and relates to the constituted through the subject-form, but it remains a space of resistance to the constitutive force and cruelty of discourse. The dispositive cannot take totalitarian control of the self and its subject, it cannot position subjects that reproduce the truth of the axiomatic informing the dispositive, it cannot completely incorporate itself into the body. Read in reverse: the dispositive cannot take totalitarian control of the self and its abject, it cannot situate abjects that have never been in the truth of the axiomatic informing the dispositive. There are neither positions nor situations, but a self dancing<sup>67</sup> in the dispo(sitiv) as the delimitations of power are not the delimitations of the subject/object, but the self extends and dances below, above, beside and beyond these delimitations into a space that the subject/object may serve to integrate into and speak in the discourse of power, but which by definition is never totally colonized. In this model, the colonial uncanny is not deleted by supermax erasure, but it is a productive force of subversion and resistance. Asking „Wie ist in der Welt die Produktion von etwas Neuem möglich?“, Deleuze responds: something new is to be understood as the „Neuartigkeit der Ordnung und nicht die Originalität der Aussage“<sup>68</sup> (“Dispositiv” 159). This new order is what is created through the fault lines that delineate the subject without containing the self, as the dispositives react to the contamination with and subversion by the dancing self that establishes itself on these contested fault lines and transforms the dispositive. This is the essential difference between a Deleuzian/Foucaultian approach to the dispositive and that of Agamben: while the latter asserts that there can be no subject between dispositives, the former insist that it can be only there. While Deleuze understands the subject to be only the tiny part of the dispositive where the (from the perspective of the dispositive) insufficiently subjectivated self interacts and partly merges with it, Agamben identifies the subject with the complete self and not only ignores the self that exceeds the subject and the dispositive, but erases that surplus self completely from representation. The important impulse here is to think the subject as only a part of a self that eludes total subjection/abjection as a closed, definable, classifiable and containable entity that has a given and transparent identity and place and is incapable of changing its position and all

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<sup>67</sup> Though not directly inspired by it, the use of the term „dance“ here is also connected to Deleuze and Guattari’s consideration of Man Ray’s „Dancer-Danger“ (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipe* 464). See chapter I.4. for further analysis of the constitution of the subject in Deleuze and Guattari.

<sup>68</sup> “How is the production of something new possible in this world?” ... “the newness of an order and not the originality of an assertion“ (S.W.)

positions relational to it. There is no supermax stability here and the modality of the subject is thus propelled from passive-descriptive to ascriptive-aggressive. This is why power must motivate obeisance. It is also why a motivated conservative subject has an (ascriptive-aggressive) interest in maintaining other positions, to which it is relational, in their situation and why a system of supermax erasure has to be implemented in the first place. Again, desire asserts its force and asks the rhetorical question: who has a desire invested in White supremacy? Who enjoys it, when dancing in the dispo(sitive) is prohibited?

A[WS] is a system that creates Whiteness and White desire and seeks to guarantee their enjoyment in order to sustain itself. It was argued above that the identification of Blackness with slavery was a post-facto legitimization of certain relations of production intended to secure their reproduction and sustained profitability for a certain ethno-class. This implied that race as a concept pre-existed the fetishization of Blackness, but did only after this become the political axiomatic that structured the White civil society still in effect in the United States today. Blackness, then, is the product of the transformation of one dispositive into another, the transformation of a proto-capitalist class society into a White capitalist caste/ethno-class society. As it was only through this transformation that the desire undergirding it became White, this desire is a manipulated desire. It cannot be ontogenetically White, because there is no ontological Whiteness, but it has become White and reproduced itself as such through the political ontology of the fetishization of Blackness in which it is contained as its truth. Structurally speaking then, it is not possible to pose the question of Black desire within A[WS], because within A[WS] Black people were not subjectivated but abjected in the creation of Whiteness/Blackness. As the consideration of cruelty has shown, A[WS] pre-posit that its discourse neither can nor wants to enter Black flesh but only inscribes itself on it. Black people were not only not integrated (as humans), but constitutively excluded from the dispositive of A[WS]: they had no body, no soul and thus no desire. Black desire within A[WS] could only exist either as the potentially subversive explosion of a desire suspended (and contained) in the empty signifier of race, or as the abject acquiescence Saidiya Hartman traces. This latter desire, though, had nothing to do with White desire, because – even if it had been genuine – its structural functionality would



have meant a completely different kind of social suture<sup>69</sup> that can not be theorized in terms of desire qua enjoyment. Thus, as mentioned, in A[WS] Blackness is not constituted through hegemony, but through terror; Black people are not only constituted but also disciplined through violence (Wilderson 2011:4). Desire as motivation for subjection is specific to the axiomatic of the dispositive that generates this desire (be it from nothing, socio-genetically, or as a form of manipulation of another, onto-genetic desire). As such its universalization (its self-portrayal as being outside and above specific axiomatics and including all possible axiomatics) is an act of (self)-overrepresentation and coloniality that is by definition erasive of that which exists outside it (e.g. alternative desires).<sup>70</sup>

### I.3.f. Black Bodies matter Differently: *Contre Butler / Racializing the Subject II.*

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Given the axiom-specificity of discourse, what does it mean to ask what desire or enjoyment motivates the Black plantation or prison slave to approve of and internalize A[WS], that is: to ask for the impossible Black desire? Is such asking for Black enjoyment in White civil society not a tautological question that rests within A[WS] and is no more than a reiteration of abject acquiescence, no more than an act giving supermax stability to a colonialist subject and the system reproduced through it? It is, if asked on the assumption of a unitary colorblind desire. This, to give an example, is what Judith Butler does when she writes of the “longing for subjection, based on a longing for social existence” (*Psychic* 20). Given her awareness of gender-related abjection as a process of normative erasure of specific bodies from discourse and ontology in order to define the normal body, this is of special significance here, because it highlights the difference between gender and race and the consequences of this difference for Butler’s work.

Judith Butler emphasizes the “production of the abject” (*Bodies* xii), a production that is a discursive process of making invisible, of producing for the non-normative bodies an “inadmissibility to codes of intelligibility”, denying them any claim to partake in the human and forcing them to “live in the shadowy regions of ontology” (Costera Meijer & Prins 277). But in spite of her acknowledgment of abjection and its potentially

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<sup>69</sup> Suture and the interaction between constitutive and constituted Blackness will be analyzed in detail in section II.

<sup>70</sup> See also the discussion of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s common work in the next chapter, which contains similar propositions that have inspired the development of this one.

subversive power, as well as her claim to want to “refuse the ontological dualism that posits the separation of the political and the psychic” (*Psychic* 19) – which is the deep structure of the production of abjection as foundation for the subject-as-self-consciousness – Butler’s belief in a longing for subjection prevents her own theorizing from living up to her claims.

The claim that subjection should be the only possible way to gain a social existence is a Hegelian and Lacanian one<sup>71</sup> and is based not only on the assumption that there is only one instance from which this existence can be won, but also on the hypothetical existence of a universal core subject and a universal desire. This theory of a universal core-desire and its dependency on the single – and thus totalitarian – instance of recognition not only creates the motivation to internalize it, participate in its axiomatic and thus become a subject, but it assumes that the subject is forced to do so:

“Bound to seek recognition of its own existence in categories, terms, and names that are not of its own making, the subject seeks the sign of its own existence outside itself, in a discourse that is at once dominant and indifferent. Social categories signify subordination and existence at once. In other words, within subjection the price of existence is subordination.” (*Psychic* 20)

Where is the non-discursive abject in this? Is it not implied that those abjected should also seek recognition from the totalitarian power (that abjected them in the first place), as this desire for social existence is presented as non-axiomatic and universally valid? But this would not only radically undermine the disruptive potential of abjection and risk reducing it to abject acquiescence, but it also posits erasure as given (Butler, *Bodies* 24f.). Yet, what indeed does Butler’s proposition imply, if we consider for example Orlando Patterson’s question: „If the slave no longer belonged to a community, if he had no social existence outside of his master, then what was he?”, and his answer: „The initial response in almost all slaveholding societies was to define the slave as a socially dead person“ (38). Or to phrase this with Fred Moten “... if the black can only be an other for the white, then is there ever anything called black social life?” (“Case” 178). Does not

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<sup>71</sup> The next chapter will consider this in more detail. Note here that the “longing for subjection” Butler speaks of is taken from Jacques Lacan’s model of the Oedipal stage in the formation of the subject and its entry into the symbolic order that will be criticized in the context of Frantz Fanon’s work in chapter I.4.a.

Butler, fixed on a totalitarian because over-determining power, propose exactly such a Black social death and absence of Black social life as the only possible constitution of Blackness? Her concept of melancholia suggests as much and this is due to the fact that the difference between gender and race lies exactly in their im/possible relation to the desire of discourse. Although Butler masterfully analyses this problematic on the level of gender, her already highlighted use of a supposedly non-axiomatic model of core-desire, a supposedly non-erasure based and non-concealing psychoanalytic core subject/core self – which is in fact a secret supermax erasure in her otherwise explicitly contra-erasure system – forces her to repeat „the introduction of the slave into the community of his master, [which] involves the paradox of introducing him as a non-being” (*idem.*).

The concept of melancholia is Butler’s attempt to grapple with the colonial uncanny she seems to acknowledge but in fact reproduces in her thought of the subject. Even if the abject would acquiesce to the discursive power in order to gain a social existence, it would still not be contained in this discourse, as it can only assume as its identity within discourse the narrow corset of constituted abjection. Constitutive abjection cannot appear in the constituted abject without exploding it. As perfect coloniality, to attempt such an integration of the abject would only solidify the totalitarian narrative of an identity of the constituted with the constitutive, but it would not stop the haunting of the abject emanating from the erased constitutive abjection. Interestingly, Butler herself introduces melancholia in these same terms as the haunting of the subject by a rest that could not be integrated in the moment of subjection and thus marks its borders (*Psychic* 29) and describes the “unthinkable, abject, unlivable bodies” as “the excluded and illegible domain that haunts the former domain [of intelligible bodies] as the specter of its own impossibility, the very limit to intelligibility, its constitutive outside” (*Bodies* x). But instead of seeing in the abject the possibility of a subversive truth (in terms of the presence of the constitutive in the constituted) of that which is lost, Butler uses the term melancholia to theorize an irreversible supermax erasure as the loss of that which is lost. But even if this at least acknowledges the politics of erasure in subject-formation (“Is there a loss that cannot be thought, cannot be owned or grieved, which forms the condition of possibility for the subject? (*Psychic* 24)) and hints at the socio-genetic constitution of political ontology, it also affirms the subject in a conservative positivism or entrism that is due to her theorization of the performative as a process parasitical to a

discourse preceding and engulfed by it<sup>72</sup>as its certainly productive self-subversion but in now way its radical nemesis. As Butler writes herself of citing (which together with reiteration forms the core method of performativity), it: “establishes an originary complicity with power in the formation of the ‘I’”, and thus, “[a]lthough this constitutive constraint does not foreclose the possibility of agency, it does locate agency as a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power, and not a relation of external opposition to power” (*Bodies* xxiii).

Though pointing with important accuracy to supermax erasure as something similar to “a foreclosure that constitutes an unknowability without which the subject cannot endure” (*Psychic* 24), she does not seize this moment for a politics of liberation based on the rupture of the subject, but merely theorizes a slow shift in power through micro-differences produced in the reiteration and citations of discourse by those always-already constituted within discourse but not constitutive of it. It is in this sense that Black bodies matter differently. Their discursive limits are not identical to those of gendered bodies, because they have no soul and discourse only marks on the Black flesh, what it would write in the gendered body. Because of this, there persists in Butler’s theorization an abjection through the notion of a seeming non-axiomatically but in fact very discursively desiring subject, the risk of inheriting a White supremacist/colonialist hidden agenda powerful enough to not only undermine but turn one’s attempt to understand the constitution of Blackness against itself. Just how powerful, will now be shown through an analysis of its effect in Frantz Fanon’s *Peau noire, masques blancs*. This will allow a paradigmatic critique of large sections of psychoanalysis as a colonialist science of White self-overrepresentation that will be combined with the aforementioned critique of materialist approaches and the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in order to terminate this first section by proposing a psycho-materialist approach to the analysis of the constitution of Blackness.

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<sup>72</sup> Consider Judith Butler’s definition of performativity “as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects it names” (*Bodies* xii) and which is thus “not a singular ‘act’, for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms” (*Bodies* xxi).

#### I.4. *JUST WHAT IS IT THAT MAKES TODAY'S WHITENESS SO DIFFERENT, SO APPEALING?*<sup>73</sup> : T/RACING PSYCHOANALYSIS

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Psychoanalytic approaches based on the assumption of a universal structure of desire overrepresent the axiomatic that narrates this universal desire as the motivation of the subject to internalize this axiomatic and thus assure the power and reproduction of its dispositive. These approaches reify the politico-ontological constitutive processes into the ontology of nature or the human *per se*, thus erasing its axiomatic character and stabilizing the polities, policies and politics deduced from it. There is therefore the necessity to deconstruct these approaches, and this chapter will do so by focusing on the coloniality of the Oedipus complex as fundamental axiom of most psychoanalytic theories of desire used in cultural analysis.

Before doing this, a short emphasizing of the obvious is necessary: stating – as has been done in the previous chapter – that desire as motivation for subjection is specific to the axiomatic of the dispositive that generates it, is in itself a counter-axiomatic to the Freudian theory of culture (underlying Judith Butler's work among others) according to which the dispositive "Kultur-Über-Ich"<sup>74</sup> (Freud 104) saves society and the subject from a self-destroying abandonment to its desires (e.g. to its Thanatos). This latter claim is nothing less than the reification of a specific idea of humans as being constitutionally aggressive against each other, an aggression that has to be eliminated through the Super-Ego (Freud 105). Starting from this assumption, proclaiming that subjection is the only possible means to establish and maintain a functioning society becomes a fact of ontological politics. Power, in other words, becomes socially naturalized as the need to foreclose a part of the self in order to create the subject and society in a mutually constitutive interpellation. A short glance at history and the shifting definitions of that which is to be kept at bay in order to guarantee the maintenance of society (paganism, homosexuality, communism ... or Blackness) suffices to show how deeply entwined with abjection this model is. Thus, in order to even start an analysis of the A[WS] quality of psychoanalysis, desire has to be posited as given, but unknown as to its ultimate character. It might be onto-genetic desire or socio-genetic desire, or both, and its quality

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<sup>73</sup> The title is inspired by Richard Hamilton's 1956 Pop-Art collage and comment on consumer culture „Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?“

<sup>74</sup> "Culture-Super-Ego" (S.W.)

might be that of aggression, that of an abstract force or drive, or something completely different. Certainly though, positing a specific ontological desire risks doubling the coloniality of rationality in as far as it overrepresents a certain motive for and logic of action as universally valid. This is a basic hypothesis: liberal, Marxist and most other north-western social meta-narratives agree in modeling their theorization on a rational-choice-agent, their differences springing not from how the subject wants, but what s/he wants. This chapter will contend that separating 'how' from 'what' is a fatal flaw, though by no means an accident, but a very consistent and essential paradigm in A[WS]. According to this logic, there can only be ideological and intra-axiomatic differences between meta-narratives: the subject is given, and it is either good and true and values the well-being of the community above its own well-being or it is an individualistic, selfish and self-centered wolf only looking for his own good. All differences in action do not spring from a different logic of action, but from different parameters feeding into the logic. In impressive unanimity, desire is always posited as given and civilization is the means to channelize it in the realm of the possible defined by the nature of desire. The question is, if this desire is as Freud conceived it, or if this desire is as such 'good' and only turns aggressive and anti-social through the repressive structures of culture and authority, as for example Wilhelm Reich would content. Thus the binary logic of north-western social meta-narratives: if Man's Desire is anti-social, this deontologically legitimates the Police State; if not, let the State wither away so that a hundred flowers can blossom. Not denying that there is Evil in the World, these meta-narratives inquire into its roots, assuming those can only be either in the self or in the other, either the individual or the alien, and propose remedies according to their analysis' results.

But here the precincts of the Chinese Cultural Revolution and its 100 Flowers campaign are not crossed by coincidence. Indeed, the question of the nature of desire in political struggle seems to have been nowhere more imminent than in the context of colonialism and imperialism, where the colonized not only had to fight and liberate themselves from relations of force and exploitation, but also from soft power, from the coloniality of culture. Anti-colonial thinkers such as Liang Qichao, Rabindranath Tagore, Jamal-al-Din al Afghani or Léopold Senghor (to name but a few) not only criticized colonialism on the basis of economic exploitation, but also developed ideas of (Pan-)Asianism, (Pan-)Islamism and (Pan-)Africanism in order to pit certain modes of thinking, knowing and being against a western culture often felt to be spiritually corrupting. Without using the

concept of desire, these authors pointed to the psychological effects that lead certain people to cooperate in their own oppression, while driving others to apathy or psychological instability.

Before entering this problematic with maybe its most famous analyst, Frantz Fanon, the basic lines of flight of this chapter should be named in order to make its argumentation easier to follow. The goal of this chapter is to expose how the concept of desire functions within A[WS], while at the same time demonstrating that the politics of t/race and im/possible desire in White civil society are the points of departure for any retrieval of the political beyond the reproduction of race, racism and power within the subject. Any political programmatic must start from here, asking: *Just what is it that makes today's Whiteness so different, so appealing?*

#### I.4.a. T/racing Fanon's End of the World

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In order to understand Frantz Fanon's contribution to the critique of desire in A[WS], one has to read *Les damnés de la terre* as a critique of *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs*. In the latter, Fanon famously (and explicitly) complements Freud's approach to the subject as ontogenetic through a "sociodiagnostic" which attempts to analyze the socio-genesis of the Black person (*Peau* 8). In this, he goes as far as declaring the Black soul a construct of the White man (*Peau* 11). Although, at first glance, this seems to be the same politico-ontological approach so far described with Foucault and Wilderson, it is not (yet) so, and that is the central flaw of *Peau Noire, Masques Blanc* that *Les Damnés de la terre* will correct through the elaboration of a concept of (de)colonial violence.

All throughout *Peau Noire*, Fanon seems to become entangled in contradictions arising from his attempt to combine classical dialectics and psychoanalysis<sup>75</sup> with his political agenda; putting into doubt not the force of his argumentation but the capacity of psychoanalytic discourse to articulate this argumentation. What indeed to make of the subtext of a self-declared Freudian stating that the Negro is far from developing an Oedipus complex (*Peau* 123), given that Freud himself has described the development of

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<sup>75</sup> In spite of his critique of psychoanalysis (*Peau* 123), Fanon explicitly places himself in the tradition of Hegel, Alder and Freud (*Peau* 49) and connects his analysis to Lacan's theory of the mirror stage (*Peau* 131, footnote 25.).

this complex as the process of development of culture (Freud 95f.), viz. the point that marks the difference between the civilized and the savage? Might this have to be read as subversion or transgression? Or does Fanon play with the idea of the Noble Savage; do we find the naturally good man corrupted by society; does Fanon unwillingly connect with the *négritude* he tries to reject (*Peau* 183)? Is it a slip, an intellectual inconsistency or a strategic lie, given that the logic of his argumentation does not follow its enunciated program and continues to reason through the Oedipus complex?

Fanon emphasizes that the processes of subjection are different for White and Black people. While the White family prepares its offspring for life in a nation and society built in its image (*et vice versa*), the Black family cannot do this, and because of this the Black child “s’anormalisera”<sup>76</sup> with the first contact with the White world (*Peau* 117). Even when ignoring the fact that Black here means ‘colonized Black’ (viz. Black in a society where the number of White people forms a quantitative minority), as well as the impossibility of drawing such a clean division between the colonized family and the colonized/colonizing society that it is located in, and the ambivalence of politicizing the private of the psyche while at the same time de-politicizing the private of the home, the mechanics and vocabulary of this pathologization are quite problematic. For one, if, with Foucault, we consider race as an instrument of normalization, calling Black psychic processes anormal fits neatly into a White supremacist perspective, begging the question once more of what role psychoanalysis plays in the dispositive of White civil society. This is underlined by the fact that, in order to be able to even say this, Fanon accepts the psychoanalytic axiomatic of positing the north-western nuclear family as the place where the subject and its “morbidity”<sup>77</sup> (*Peau* 116) develops, thereby making it hard to read his formulation of anormalization as a cynical critique of a contagiously perverse White society. What, then, is this moment of anormalization? How does it come about, what does it consist in, and what are its consequences?

The moment of anormalization is one of the most famous passages in Fanon's oeuvre. Faced with a little child pointing its finger at him and saying: “Maman, regarde le nègre, j’ai peur”<sup>78</sup> (*Peau* 90) and other exclamations of the kind, Fanon becomes conscious of

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<sup>76</sup> “will anormalize” (S.W.)

<sup>77</sup> „morbidity“ (S.W.)

<sup>78</sup> “Mother, look at that Negro, I’m afraid!” (S.W.)



his Blackness: „au premier regard blanc, il [le nègre] ressent le poids de sa mélanine“<sup>79</sup> (*Peau* 122). The result of this is the „écroulement du moi“<sup>80</sup> (*Peau* 125).

What happens in this moment of anormalization? At first glance, this seems to be a situation of Althusserian interpellation in which an always-already present subject becomes actualized as the self recognizes itself as interpellated, thus assuming its always-already given identity. The problem with Althusser's model is that it cannot explain why the self should recognize itself as the interpellated subject at all and why, if it does so, it should choose to recognize itself in this specific form. This is correlative to one of the points of critique proposed against Butler above and also valid for Fanon, and which I will now repeat in a more extended form: “And if, as Frantz Fanon suggests, the black cannot be an other for another black, if the black can only be an other for the white, then is there ever anything called black social life?” (Moten, “Case” 178). Significantly, Fanon proposes a situation in which power inscribes itself not just on the Black flesh, but within the Black body; in other words: he theorizes a Black desire and longing for recognition within A[WS] that ultimately describes Blackness in a quasi-dispositivistic form.

The “Negro” cannot become Black at the moment of interpellation, but he has to have been inserted into the system producing his Blackness (his “guilt”) before in order to even understand, to make sense of and to identify with this interpellation and the Blackness it situates him in. This is exactly the predicament Fanon has placed himself in by positing a clean cut between the Black family and the White society. If the cut were as clean as portrayed, neither could the interpellation work, nor would there be the problematics of a Black desire dependent on White supremacy, the problematics of thinking Black life as what David Marriott has described as “haunted” by “the gaps left within us by the desires of others” (*Haunted* 53). Fanon's argumentation though, will move exactly in this direction. Anticipating Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses, Fanon argues that through institutions such as the school, subjection is performed in the same mode for White and Black children. Both are taught to consider the Gauls their ancestors, both learn the same logic of knowledge through the same textbooks and the same culture, the same adventure novels (*Peau* 118f.). Because of this, Fanon argues, Black children think of themselves as White and consider Blackness to be evil. Explicitly

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<sup>79</sup> “with the first white gaze, he [the negro] feels the weight of his melanine” (S.W.)

<sup>80</sup> “collapse of the self” (S.W.)

connecting, just as Althusser will do after him, his theory of the subject to Lacan's theory of the mirror stage (*Peau* 131), Fanon goes on to explain that what happens is that the Black child constructs a self-representation, an imago of itself that is different from its real self; a process that is not interrupted within the Black family as the family itself strives to be as White as possible within White civil society. Thus, through a „imposition culturelle“<sup>81</sup> (Fanon, *Peau* 156) – coloniality! – a Black collective unconscious is constructed in which Black people think of themselves not as lily-White, but as whiter than other Black people, e.g. whiter as the Senegalese (*Peau* 20): „Un Antillais est blanc par l'inconscient collectif, par une grande partie de l'inconscient personnel et par la presque totalité de son processus d'individuation“<sup>82</sup> (*Peau* 152).

It is this imago that is shattered by the White gaze, thus leading to the collapse of the self. The anormality and pathology created in the Black person in his contact with the White world is to be read very narrowly: as a factual and painful state of disruption and abjection, not merely a violent ascription in the Foucaultian sense. It is important to note that this shattering is not a moment of disillusionment or tearing apart of the misrepresentation of the self, but a moment in which the coloniality of power 'clicks' in the Black psyche in order to regulate its behavior towards the White (looking) master, viz. a moment in which power is not disrupted but affirmed. The dispositive produces in the racialized subject a White desire: to be White and enjoy the privileges of Whiteness. The gaze breaks this enjoyment and reveals the nature of its desire, the constitutive tears apart the constituted. Thus, Black desire in A[WS] is in fact White desire, thus Black life in A[WS] is haunted rather than haunting life and the destitution of its desire might inspire the conceptualization of the destitution of the 'real' thing, the Whiter than White desire. But in *Peau Noire* the trauma of collapse is in no way a revolutionary catharsis, but a humiliation. The desire to be White is not dispelled but enforced, as the Black psyche remains inside the discourse of its cultural imposition and understands Whiteness as the only way out of the state of humiliation. Not only does the White gaze not automatically lead the traumatized psyche to its 'true' or 'authentic' self, but it most often induces compensatory behavior seeking to rebuilt the collapsed self (which is

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<sup>81</sup> "cultural imposition" (S.W.)

<sup>82</sup> "An Antillean is white through the collective unconscious, through a big part of the personal unconscious and through almost the totality of his process of individuation." (S.W.)

indeed collapsed, but not totally erased) in accordance with the imago that lead to its collapse.<sup>83</sup>

At this point, two essential aspects of Fanon's argumentation in *Peau noire* come into focus. First, although as a classical psychoanalyst Fanon posits the existence of ontological desire (e.g. in the drives), he also theorizes socio-genetic desire, such as the Black-White desire to be White. This desire is the result of the coloniality of White civil society and nothing else and in accordance with this, Fanon urges Black people to gain hold of their means of self-representation and start writing Black children's books, songs, history books and so on (*Peau* 121). As long as these are not created, Fanon contends, people with Black skins will wear White masks. But Fanon does not stop with the mere intra-discursive advocacy of creating Black imagos invulnerable to the White gaze. In a Hegelian twist on desire<sup>84</sup>, Fanon demands that Black people be recognized and considered from their own desire (*Peau* 177). This is still a call for both sides to transcend their differences towards a common humanity and in *Peau noire* it is still considered a problem of the White subject most of all. Blackness is consolidated through White obstruction, through the refusal of White civil society to accept Black humanity; a refusal condensed in the White gaze that refuses the Black person access to Whiteness and lets it become aware of its positionality within White civil society. In this situation, the Black person can understand the dynamics of subjection/abjection because of an immediate Black experience of t/race, a double consciousness created through the machinations of coloniality that not only makes him or her aware of, but urgently forces him or her to act in two systems of reference at the same time (Fanon, *Peau* 89). As mentioned before, this being-in-two-systems at the same time is not given in the White experience which can remain within White self-overrepresentation constantly and comfortably without risking moments of cognitive dissonance. In order to be recognized as human, the Black person must force an awareness of double consciousness on the White subject, viz. it must break Whiteness' centrifugal power projection in which the White individual identifies itself with humanity and thus prohibits and prevents the humanity of everything non-White from being legible and legitimate. Fanon says that this breaking of White coloniality will require a struggle, but still shies away from

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<sup>83</sup> Fanon describes this extensively, analyzing acts such as interracial marriage, education or relocation to the metropolis (*Peau* chapters 2 and 3).

<sup>84</sup> For a more detailed take on Fanon's contradictory use of Hegelian dialectics, see David Marriott's *Haunted Life*.

acknowledging – as he will in *Les damnés* (37f.) – the necessarily violent nature of this struggle. Only such a struggle will permit Black and White people alike to ultimately break with White desire in order to develop a new community. But although he does call for an end of the world in *Peau noire* – “la fin du monde, parbleu!” (175) – he does not explain how it should come about. Instead, he explicitly rejects the political potential of history (viz. historical materialism) and posits a universal humanity in form of a psychoanalytic core-subject/core-self from which the foundation for the future recognition of that humanity’s true nature will spring (*Peau* 187). With this, he still summons the power of rationality rather than violence to combat coloniality and racial conflict. But how should an awareness of the double system dynamics of subjection/abjection be imposed on White civil society and White resistance to Black humanity broken, how the end of the world induced, if one remains within the axiomatic of this world by appealing to an intra-systemic logic of rationality instead of demanding a new constitutive moment (often perceived as violent because not contained within the known modes of making sense)? How can the psyche be purged of its humiliation, how the body be purged from power and the desire to either be White or to kill Whiteness be dissipated? How are Black and White psyches constructed from scratch, what is their content, what their form? These questions underline the conspicuous absence of double consciousness in Fanon’s writing and lead to the second essential aspect of his work highlighted here. Fanon’s study of the collapsed self is in fact founded on a psychological structure based on the Oedipus complex. It is because of this that he formulates an intra-discursive/unitary psychological system that references an always-already White humanity and thus ends up rolling the revolutionary potential of *Peau Noire* back into the processes that reproduce race and power within the subject.

In “Le stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je”, Jacques Lacan explicitly describes the concept of the imago as interwoven with the Oedipus complex (*Écrits I.* 92.ff.). The mechanism here is basically the same Fanon uses to describe the production of the White imago in the Black child. Due to a “méconnaissance”<sup>85</sup> (Lacan, *Écrits I.* 93), the child identifies with a picture of itself (“je”) that does not correspond to its real self, thus entering the realm of the symbolic. The “je” is, in form of the “je-idéal”, a symbol standing in for and producing a fictive unity of the non-unitary “moi”. Nevertheless, it

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<sup>85</sup> „misrecognition“ (S.W.)

does have social validity and power in spite of its fictive character, as it is recognized (mirrored) by the social context of the child, such as the family. As such, the “je” is the precursor of the not-yet full-fledged subject (which will only emerge after the Oedipus Complex has been passed through, viz. slightly ‘after’ the formation and transformation of the imago). Most importantly, the imago is the point where social construction and auto-perception of the self become interlinked with the desire of the Other on whose recognition it not only depends, but by which it is constituted (as any recognition diverging from the “je” will induce change in the “je”). This is not only the core matrix of the Oedipus complex (Lacan, *Écrits I.* 97), but also the exact same constellation Fanon uses in his description of the White gaze’s role for the self-perception of the Black psyche which cannot sustain its imago against this gaze. In order to further trace the enmeshment of this with Lacan’s theory of the Oedipus complex, a short reference to some of Lacan’s works published after 1952 (the publication date of *Peau noire*) is necessary<sup>86</sup>.

According to Lacan, the Oedipus complex consists in the interruption of the child’s imaginary identification with the mother through the interruption of that identification by the name-of-the-father<sup>87</sup> and the child’s subsequent attempts to reinstate this identification. Through this interruption, the child completes its entry into the realm of the symbolic, as the “je” it identifies with is now completely detached from anything real (such as the mother) and purely symbolic. Searching for the reason of its interrupted identification with the mother, the always-already rational-choice-analytic child now asks itself: What does the father have that I don’t? What in the father attracts the mother’s desire and love and enables the father to interrupt my bond/ identification with the mother? The name-of-the-father, in other words, creates a split in the child’s psyche. Through its prohibitive force, the child exits a holistic world of experienced mere being (even if this holism and mere being are just a misrepresentation, an illusion in the realm of the symbolic) and enters a world of insufficiency and lack, split into what is there and what is missing to be complete. In its attempt to identify the lack that leads

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<sup>86</sup> For a summary of the development of the Oedipus concept in Lacan’s work and its differences to Freud, see Borch-Jacobsen & Brick. For the explanations given here, see also Lacan’s *Des Noms-du-Père* and Sean Homer (*Lacan* 51.f.).

<sup>87</sup> The expression „name-of-the-father“ (nom-du-père) intends to highlight that the function by that name in the Oedipus Complex is performative and can also be assumed by someone else than the biological father. It also hints at the “no-of-the-father” (non-du-père) on which the phallic law and the realm of the symbolic are founded.

to the disruption of the unity and the diversion of the mother's love from the child towards the name-of-the-father, the child discovers the phallus as answer and it will now attempt to become that phallus (that is: the child attempts to be that which – according to the theory of the Oedipus Complex – is missing in the mother and makes her love the father as the one where that is not missing) to re-become the object of the mother's desire, re-conquer her love and re-instate the unity with her, while at the same time ending (castrating) the disruptive force of the name-of-the-father. The phallus thus is at once the signifier of the m/Other's desire (Lacan, *Écrits II* 172) and at the same time the signifier of lack in the (child's) split self or the child's desire for the m/Other. This is exactly the 'incestuous' matrix of desire that the child will have to leave behind in its passage through the Oedipus complex in order to become a subject. It will do so by identifying with and thus integrating the name-of-the-father into its self in form of the law-of-the-father. This integration is the conclusion of the entrance into the realm of the symbolic, the development of a signifier of the self determined by three different poles: a signifier, a signified and an Other/law-of-the-father both sustaining the connection between them and preventing the two from (incestuous) union (and therewith from regressing into the realm of the imago: the imaginary). The child recognizes the impossibility of re-entering the imaginary and sublimates its incestuous desire for being the phallus of the name-of-the-father into the desire for becoming a different symbolic phallus that can be reconciled with and recognized by the law-of-the-father, thus starting the act of transference that initiates the chain of signification in which the signification of the signifier slides from signified to signified in search for the phallic signifier with which and through which the split between signifier and signified will be transcended and unity reinstated. The desire to transcend the split self will continue in its quest for the missing object and the recognition of the Other. Lacan condenses this by saying, that desire is always the desire for the recognition of one's desire (*Écrits* 342), which is exactly the conclusion to *Peau Noire*: "Je demande qu'on me considère à partir de mon Désir."<sup>88</sup> (177).

Although Fanon dismisses the significance of the Oedipus complex for the Black psyche, his analysis is profoundly Oedipal. What else indeed is the collapse of the self under the White gaze than the interruption of the imaginary identification and the destruction of

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<sup>88</sup> "I demand to be considered on the basis of my desire." (S.W.)

the imago through the name-of-the-father? Seeing this, the role of psychoanalysis in the maintenance of White civil society suddenly loses all obscureness, as it becomes obvious that the Oedipal structure of White civil society posits a very specific phallus: Whiteness. It is the lack of Whiteness that leads to the collapse under the gaze and it is this the phallus that the law-of-the-father, the law of White civil society will forever refuse the Black psyche. In White civil society, Blackness means castration. It means forever remaining a 'boy', never becoming a man. This is the anormalization of the Black psyche, which cannot solve the Oedipus complex created through the dispositive A[WS]. Being forced into this situation, the Black psyche begins the compensatory behavior already mentioned. The White mistress (partner), the White mind (education), the White metropolis: the quest for surrogate Whiteness is the very reality of White coloniality and White civil society, but it is also the beginning of its undoing, because it creates in the Black mind a White desire that cannot contain the Black body excluded from this same White desire. If, as Judith Butler contents in relation to symbolic sexual identities, "without symbolic inscription, that body [which refuses the inscription] will be negated" (*Bodies* 65), what we encounter in the quest for Whiteness described by Fanon is exactly desire as the dispositivistic drive for subjection proposed by Butler and Agamben. The Black person must become White in order to avoid castration. But because it can't, it will ultimately disappear within the Oedipal model. Unable to solve the Oedipus complex, the Black person cannot become subject, but only abject. Black desire thus can only lead to psychosis or pathology, and into what is exactly an abject invisibility and social death created under the law-of-the-father that as such neither will nor can recognize Black desire. In this dispositivistic situation, Black desire remains stuck in the pre-subject relation between the law and the body from which the subject is supposed to ascend as a product of the law's terror and cruelty:

"There must be a body trembling before the law, a *body whose fear can be compelled by the law, a law that produces the trembling body prepared for its inscription*, a law that marks the body first with fear only then to mark it again with the symbolic stamp of sex." (*idem*; emphasis: SW.)

This stamp of sex can be paralleled to the stamp of race. Power implants itself in the very desire of the self and the body produced through and within this desire, and the complicity of Oedipal psychoanalysis in White civil society lies exactly in not pointing to

the socio-genesis of this desire, because this would mean its mutability and signal the possibility of a revolution. Pointing to socio-genesis here would be to indicate the necessity to change the socius creating and sustaining a lack in order to transcend that lack, as opposed to narrating that lack as a deficiency in the 'patient'. It would mean proposing the literal end of the socius, the end of the world, the end of the gaze. Instead, Oedipal psychoanalysis diagnoses a Black pathology, a Black incapacity to deal with the supposedly onto-genetic problematic of desire common to all humans and suggests that the 'patient' needs to adapt to a social order that is given and unchangeable. This simultaneous creation and pathologization of racialized identities is the colonial difference that is at the core of Oedipal psychoanalysis. While the argument in *Peau noire* seems not yet to engage this and remains within the confines of Oedipal psychoanalysis, *Les damnés* picks up on this point, refuses psychoanalytic solutions to colonial problematics and argues for a new constitutive violence and the creation of a new society as the necessary paths not to healing but to re-founding the psyche, to working on the psyche through working on its socio-genetic determinants. Here, Fanon points out that the supposedly universally human Oedipal crisis is not so for every colonized Black psyche, but only one for the non-revolutionary intellectual and the bourgeois, and, sometimes, the urban worker. It is a problem of those inside White civil society, that is, supposedly partaking (at least in parts) in the phallus and its power. This is why, "... la décolonisation est très simplement le remplacement d'une 'espèce' d'hommes par une autre 'espèce' d'hommes" (Fanon, *Damnés* 39), why tabula rasa is necessary (*idem.*), why décolonisation will create "des nouveaux hommes, un nouveau langage, une nouvelle humanité"<sup>89</sup> (Fanon, *Damnés* 40). This is why, in *Les damnés*, the White gaze does not smash the colonized any longer ("son regard ne me foudroie plus" (48)). But it is also the reason why a White subject can "se faire nègre" by giving up its privileges, by accepting that its enjoyment of the phallus be barred, by becoming a traitor to his own race and accepting the constitutive violence and terror of the revolutionary struggle, by accepting "les souffrances, la torture, la mort"<sup>90</sup> (*Damnés* 139).

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<sup>89</sup> "... décolonisation very simply means the replacement of one 'species' of Men with another 'species' of Men" ... "new Men, a new language, a new humanity" (S.W.)

<sup>90</sup> „become a negro" ... "the suffering, the torture, the death" (S.W.)



At this point, a first tentative answer to the initial question of this chapter (What is the role of desire in White civil society?) can be given: it is a very specific instrument of control that implants the dispositive of White civil society in the self and its body by connecting its libidinal economy to A[WS]. In this sense, the following is true both for the Black-White desire and the Whiter-than-White desire:

”Œdipe, c’est toujours la colonisation poursuivie par d’autres moyens, c’est la colonie intérieure, et nous verrons que, même chez nous, Européens, c’est notre formation coloniale intime.”<sup>91</sup> (Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipe* 200)<sup>92</sup>

But there is one fundamental difference between Black-White and Whiter-than-White. Although in White civil society the White psyche is impregnated with the same desire for the phallus of Whiteness, it is not confronted with the gaze of race, which informs it of a difference in kind (human – non-human), of its not having the phallus, but only with the gaze of class and gender, which informs it of a difference in degree (human – less human). To be White means not to carry colonial difference as a split in the self or between body and desire, but only as a social split between the self and the Other. Whiteness is a single determinacy system without the experience of double consciousness and colonial castration. According to this logic, it is exactly this White self-image that White civil society and its political economy will seek to uphold against economic reasoning, because profit in this instance is an intra-systemic variation while A[WS] is constitutive of the system itself. It is also exactly this logic that Fanon’s violence will seek to break.

Thus, as this chapter will contend in its consideration of some concepts of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari below, Oedipal psychoanalysis is constitutively entwined with White civil society and it cannot be used to transcend the reproduction of race and power within the subject. A successful passing of the Black psyche through the colonial Oedipal stage would mean nothing short of recognizing everyone White as the all powerful name-of-the-father to whose authority the castrated Black boy cannot resist and must

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<sup>91</sup> “Oedipus is always colonization pursued with other means, it is the interior colony, and we will see that even with us, Europeans, it is our intimate colonial formation.” (S.W.).

<sup>92</sup> Amber Jamilla Musser has written a text connecting the work of Fanon to that of Deleuze and Guattari via the concept of the Oedipus complex. But because she uncritically accepts Fanon’s dictum that there is no Oedipus complex in the Black psyche, her text’s conclusions have only superficial consistency.

bow and which it has to make a part of itself through integrating the White law-of-the-father. Oedipal psychoanalysis incarnates the micro-politics of White desire as formulated in the development of the notion of the abject. Nevertheless, a short consideration of Hortense Spillers' appropriation of Michel Foucault's concept of askesis and her engagement with psychoanalysis as a method of healing for African-Americans is necessary at this point, because the difference between her approach and that of Fanon will allow for a precise dissection of the hidden programmatic of Oedipal psychoanalysis and will initiate the theorizing of a politics of t/race and constitutional Blackness in sections II. and III.

#### I.4.b. T/racing Hortense Spillers' Askesis

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In "All the things you could be by now, if Sigmund Freud's wife was your mother" (a title taken from a Charles Mingus composition), Spillers reflects on the fetishization of Blackness through the lens of the relationship between race and psychoanalysis. Like Eric Williams, she relates race, racism and the racialized subject to socio-economics, implicitly following Althusser's (to whom, along with Lacan and Fanon, she refers repeatedly in the text) dictum that „no theory of psychoanalysis can be produced without basing it on historical materialism“ (Althusser, *Ideology* 142). Spillers insists on pointing out the reality of race as a lived experience as well as its impact on the psyche. Although race does not have an ontological foundation as such, it does have a very tangible politico-ontological existence in a way that makes it possible for Spillers to describe race as "destiny in the world we have made" ("All" 78). It is her concern in "All the things you could be ..." to create a possibly emancipating consciousness of the artificiality of race and racialized desires while at the same time acknowledging race as not only a very powerful factor in real life but also as a possible cure (for example in the form of Black culture) for the evils of racism. In order to accomplish this, she does two things.

First, she proposes the concept of the "socionom", which she defines as "the speaking subject's involvement with ideological apparatuses" ("All" 88) and as an addition to Lacanian psychoanalysis ("All" 81) that will permit her to think of race as "an outcome of politics" and an "interior intersubjectivity" at the same time ("All" 80). The Fanon-inspired goal of the socionom is to reveal the subject as the socio-genetic effect of

several intersecting lines of flight, instead of representing it as an onto-genetic entity independent of its context. Thus, the self is intrinsically interwoven with its community, culture, society, economic system (etc). Understanding – becoming aware of – this, Spillers argues, is essential for gaining the possibility of agency and thus emancipation. In a second step, she therefore introduces askesis as the method to develop this awareness. Askesis<sup>93</sup> is a “discipline”, a process of “self-interrogation” intended not to produce solutions as to how to change constitutive Blackness, but to throw into doubt, subvert and destabilize the power of the discourse built on it (“All” 85). It does so by exploiting the inconsistencies between the self-legitimizing narratives of discourse, and the lived experience of the racialized subject. Askesis works on double consciousness, it collapses the erasive power of discourse by putting into relief traces of constitutive race – t/races – within discourse, by laying open its constitutive violence and terror. In this sense, it is always-already public, political and emancipatory<sup>94</sup>: the work on the subject is not an intra-monadic exercise but a very nomadic deconstruction of the public and the political that undergird the constitution of the subject/abject.

This deconstructive and analytic focus on the self marks the difference between Hortense Spillers approach, and earlier, less psychoanalytic, more performative and community work oriented approaches to Black consciousness, such as for example that of Steve Biko (38; 48ff.) or of many African American Political Movements in the 1960s (think of Rev. Jesse Jackson’s “I am somebody”). It is also the point, where her conceptualization differs significantly from classic Marxist notions of false consciousness in 2 ways:

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<sup>93</sup> Although Spillers does not explicitly connect her use of askesis to its presence in Michel Foucault’s work, her otherwise significant engagement with his thought as well as the similarity between her and his theorization of the term suggest making an analogy here. Foucault wrote about askesis as a “technic of” and “care for” the self in his late works, presenting askesis as a work on the self capable of flowing into social change (Foucault, *Ästhetik* 68ff+74). Especially interesting here is the connecting of askesis and epimeleia as a “Hermeneutik des Subjekts” [“hermeneutic of the subject” (S.W.)], which has to go together with an un-learning (“de-discere”) of all „schlechten Gewohnheiten, aller falschen Ansichten, die man von der Menge, von schlechten Lehrmeistern, aber auch von den Eltern und der engeren Umgebung übernehmen kann“ [“bad habits, all erroneous views that one can adopt from the mass, from bad teachers, but also from parents and one’s close entourage” (S.W.)] (*Ästhetik* 127). It is important, though, to emphasize the difference between askesis as a purifying work on the self, bringing it closer to the ‘good’ through moving it nearer to its ‘true’ self on the one hand, and an aesthetic of existence or the self, on the other hand, which points to a work on the self moving it closer to an ideal completely independent of any notions of ‘good and true’ and which is honorable exactly because of its strenuous and disciplined work of moving the self away from a socially inherited pattern to something different (*Ästhetik* 112).

<sup>94</sup> Spillers describes it as “socio-political engagement”(“All” 84).

1. As Fanon pointed out before her, Spillers assumes that the subject is not completely determined by the economic infrastructure. Spillers emphasizes that, although race “is found in economy”, it, “is not exhausted by it” (“All” 84). The lifting of the ideological veil of race and racism will not occur through the escalation of economic contradictions between capital and the worker, but the subject will become aware (or more aware) of the contradictions of its existence and emancipate herself through askesis. Emancipation here is not yet revolution, and the notion of the avant-garde is not abolished, as self-interrogation might just as well be induced by the functionary, the teacher, the psychoanalyst. Nevertheless, and in spite of the Althusserism undergirding “All the things you could be...”, a quintessential anti-Marxist event has occurred here, with individual (but not individualist) agency producing history instead of the other way around. The implications of this become obvious once it is asked where and how askesis becomes possible. Here, the second significant difference between Spillers analysis and that of Marxism can be found.

2. The individual agency contained in askesis must not be confused with the ideal of bourgeois individualism disconnected from and disinterested in the masses, its culture, its context. Rather, it is the action of what Spillers calls “the One” (“All” 100), an intersubjective moment that condensates the mass in herself/ her selves. In contrast to the seemingly self-contained nature of the individual, the One exists as a sort of thickened perception of shared identity and shared self among the members of the masses and draws her self-interrogatory potential from this. In other words: false consciousness is subverted through community and experience. Unlike the White worker, the Black One does not have an artificially unified and homogenized false consciousness that needs an external or traumatic event to be fractured. No lightning strike is necessary to be politically charged: due to its race and the commodification and fungibility embedded therein, the Black One always-already has a double consciousness (“All” 104), an awareness of interior exteriority that can be developed into a consciousness of internal intersubjectivity. Askesis does not create or find inconsistencies. Rather, it is a method of grasping, a method of articulation and making sense, of politically mobilizing these contradictions and of purging the selves of their pre- and sub-conscious dispositive determination. Askesis piggybacks on ‘The Black Experience’; it is the discipline that transforms this experience into event.

But there is a fundamental flaw in this approach, contained in Spillers' statement that askesis is merely a form of speech. Even though she emphasizes that this is speech as a "social positioning vis-à-vis discourse" ("All" 106), her approach ends up along the lines of Judith Butler's warning that it is the fate of performativity that it may change the logic of exclusion and erasure, but not abolish it (Butler, *Bodies* 24f.), that is: that it always remains ensnared *in* discourse. It is, in Spillers' own words, about the "stigmatized subject[']s ... access to discourse" ("All" 139) and not about revolutionizing discourse itself. But neither Butler nor Spillers seem to be aware of the implications this has as to the production of a racialized subject. Just like Fanon before them, both authors do not just replace one form of erasure by another, but by assuming a meta-formation and functioning of a supposedly not-yet-racialized psychoanalytic core-subject/core-self, they re-introduce a subject that is far from being free of the mechanics of erasure of A[WS]. It is in this sense of accepting a presumably non-erasure based and non-concealing ('true') core subject or self, that performativity is entangled in discourse and not just theoretically, but methodologically blind to constitutive race.

But although the t/races in Hortense Spillers work are based on such a misreading of the constitutive, they form an important impulse that proves very fruitful in the search for retrieving the political beyond the reproduction of race and power within the subject. In order to mobilize this impulse, the critique must continue where it has begun with Fanon: with the Oedipal, whose role in the Black psyche Spillers attempts to prove ("All" 119ff.+140).

#### I.4.c. T/racing Deleuze and Guattari's Schizo-Analysis: *Constitutional Blackness*

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At first glance, the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (written 'D&G' from here on), specifically their critique of the Oedipus complex and their development of schizo-analysis, could be mistaken as a form of t/racing itself. Not only do they explicitly write against erasure in different forms (two of which will be considered below), but they also explicitly tie its varying mechanics to those of race. Still, they consider race just one particular and exchangeable factor in a more general psycho-materialist system, seemingly approaching a making visible of constitutive race, but failing in the process. It is because of this that their theory and methodology cannot be approached here without t/racing their work itself, even though it is precisely their fusing of a psychoanalytic

with a materialist approach that not only makes them relevant at this point of the argument, but will guide the argument from here on.

It is not within the scope of the present book to go into every intricate detail of the two tomes of *Capitalisme et Schizophrénie*, to which this chapter will restrict itself in its tracing of D&G. Though a closer dissection might add further nuance to the analysis proposed here, it would not only not be necessary for the development of its argument, but even risk fraying it out and detracting from the goal pursued here, that is, from an understanding of the political constitution of Blackness. Instead, this chapter will portray in broad strokes central concepts of schizo-analysis and its development by D&G in relation to race that it considers to be already present in the analysis presented so far. The goal then is to use the work of D&G to end this first section by synthesizing its main lines of flight into a platform on which the following sections will rest.

To portend to begin this chapter with two cases of erasure is already an adaption of D&G's work to the present purposes. The first case, developed in *Anti-Oedipe*, is not exactly one of erasure, but rather a "refoulement" in two steps: first, the repression of the "représentant du désir" under a "représentation refoulante", then the suppression of the représentation under a "représenté déplacé"<sup>95</sup>, that is, under a substitute that assumes the role of the repressed in order to doubly erase the representative (*Anti* 136). In other words: not only is there repression, but that repression is acknowledged in order to pretend that that which is being repressed is in effect something different from that which is in fact repressed. Obviously, this double erasure is reminiscent of Judith Butler's description of homosexual melancholia as the loss of loss, as a loss hidden within repression that founds the subject and threatens it with dissolution (Butler, *Psychic* 23.f.). And indeed this first form of erasure is closely linked to D&G's critique of the Oedipus complex and the role this critique will assume in their conceptualization of the subject and the role of race and racism in the formation of the subject. But there is one fundamental difference, in as far as this loss is neither real nor irretrievable, even though the belief in the permanence of loss is exactly what this process aims to achieve. Butler, D&G would contend, has been fooled, trapped not only within the Oedipus complex she embraces in her writing, but also in the A[WS] whose instrument the complex is. There are several reasons for this.

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<sup>95</sup> „repression/suppression” ... “representative of desire” ... “repressing representation” ... “displaced represented” (S.W.)

First, *refoulement* is a process through which power structures discourse in order to assert itself. For D&G, desire is not the attempt to retrieve something that is missing (viz. the phallus). It is not connected to lack or representation of lack, but it is itself an unstoppable productive force. Accordingly, refoulement cannot repress and suppress desire, but only its representative. In other words: unable to eliminate desire, it attempts to make it invisible or even unthinkable within a discourse that would be disrupted by its presence (such as the presence of Black desire would be within a discourse structured according to A[WS]). Thus, to assume, as Butler does, that something is irretrievably lost is exactly to fall prey to that power which uses refoulement, whereas D&G emphasize that it is understanding that nothing is really lost or lacking in the subject/abject that marks the first necessary step in contesting power.

It is precisely the impossibility of real erasure that makes it necessary to supplant the repression of the representative of desire by its suppression under a displaced represented. Unable to delete desire, its perception will be distorted through the introduction of the Oedipus complex. Oedipus, and its portrayal of desire as incest, is an “image truquée”<sup>96</sup> (*Anti* 136) of real desire; defining it as a relation between a child and its parents, it introduces filiation as its “natural” principle and thus reifies power based on the ontological politics of race and nation. Thus, a system of interpretation is created, a system of ordering a world according to a specific axiomatic, whose goal it is to *a priori* capture all not-yet-named/colonized – controlled! – productivity of desire by fitting it into a totalitarian discourse of power. Power then, is a rigid system of signification striving for but unable to achieve closure. It has the force to name and explain, and it is through this power of signification that it creates its subjects.

D&G do not assume that desire thrives to fill a lack and produces a subject within this process. Rather, the fixed subject is a product of the repression of a desire always in possession of its object and producing the real (*Anti* 34). It is exactly the aim of the Oedipus complex and all other systems of signification to fix the subject, to arrest the “nomade et vagabond” (*Anti* 34) subject by locating, positioning or identifying it within its discourse. And it is exactly because of the productive nature of desire that this fixing, locating, positing, identifying must be constantly reiterated, that the names already given must be extended and adapted in the form of interpretation, and erasure befall

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<sup>96</sup> “faked image” (S.W.)

that which cannot be integrated. Because desire is constantly productive, names and explanations and the relations they establish are permanently unstable. It is because of this, that power needs to gain control over desire: “Si le désir est refoulé, c’est parce que toute position de désir, si petite soit-elle, a de quoi mettre en question l’ordre établi d’une société [...]”<sup>97</sup> (D&G *Anti* 138).

The Oedipus complex then is internal to a specific axiomatic, it is nothing else than a particular logic of implantation of that axiomatic by arresting the dynamics of a matrix of interwoven signification/subjection, that is, of imposing a way of making sense internal to a specific system of power, which, in the case of the Oedipus complex, is that of White civil society. The Oedipus complex is “impérialiste”<sup>98</sup> (*Anti* 30): it seeks to determine the totality of possible subjectivities, identities and events by enforcing what counts as what, what is representable or not and thus thinkable or unthinkable. This is the imperialism of a certain semiotic, defined as imperialism through its pretention “à écraser toutes les autres sémiotiques”<sup>99</sup> (*Mille* 223); it is coloniality. Accordingly, to think the subject within the parameters of the Oedipus complex is to think the subject within the semiotic of that power which Oedipus sustains. The claim to a universal validity of the Oedipus is dispositivism at its best.

As mentioned above, and because of its reliance on the notion of filiation, D&G explicitly link the Oedipus complex to Whiteness, to White supremacism, to White capitalism and to what has been called White civil society here. The Oedipus complex is portrayed as breaking representation along color lines, as structuring signification through race<sup>100</sup> until, in *Mille Plateaux*, the semiotic of the modern White man and that of capitalism become one (223). At this point, it is not the head of a Chinese, an Arab or a Black that puncture and threaten to undo signification through the threat they pose to the White subject (the threat to become Chinese, Arab, Black that within Oedipus fuse with the threat of castration, the threat of abjection), but it is the face of the White man, the face of Jesus, that arranges signification in its image. At this point, D&G explicitly connect

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<sup>97</sup> „If desire is repressed, it is so because every position of desire, as small as it might be, has the potential to put the established order of a society in question [...]“ (S.W.)

<sup>98</sup> „Imperialistic“ (S.W.)

<sup>99</sup> “to crush all other semiotics” (S.W.)

<sup>100</sup> „Pas de chaîne signifiante sans un Chinois, un Arabe, un Noir qui passent la tête et viennent troubler la nuit d’un Blanc paranoïaque.“ [No signifying chain without a Chinese, an Arab, a Black showing their head and troubling the night of a paranoid White.“ (S.W.)] (*Anti* 117).



their writing with Foucault's definition of race within his theory of biopolitics<sup>101</sup>. Just how is a process of signification/subjectation racialized, how can D&G write: "Tout délire est racial, et cela ne veut pas dire nécessairement raciste"<sup>102</sup> (*Anti* 101)? It is because imperialist semiotics are normalizing powers. In the case of the oedipal-White-capitalist semiotic the norm governing its system of signification is the "Homme-blanc-mâle-adulte-habitant des villes-parlant une langue standard-européen-hétérosexuel"<sup>103</sup> (*Mille* 133)<sup>104</sup>. This norm is subsumed in the term "visage" whose imperialist process D&G term "visagéité"<sup>105</sup> (*Mille* chapters 5+7). Technically speaking, the face is that in whose image interpretation structures the world, which means it is *not necessarily* White, but *de facto* so. In terms of politics, the face is the product of the inscription of power into a body and its desire<sup>106</sup>, and it can be thought of as subject-as-mask in the Greek sense of "persona"<sup>107</sup> that determines the social position and/or situation of the inscribed body and its place within signification, that is, its modes of relating to other bodies, its capacities to signify as well as to make sense. It is exactly the halting of a previously uncontrolled process of signification and desire and its reigning into identities produced and certified by power, that characterizes the subjectation through visagéité (*Mille* 144). Here, racism is the political mobilization of the relation of the self not to an other, but to a lesser self, not to an external opposition built on its own terms – because there is no and must be no potentially equal exterior – but to a deviance from the racialized norm of the White man's face:

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<sup>101</sup> D&G also emphasize two fundamental differences between their understanding of biopolitics and that of Foucault: 1) their belief that desire is not only a product of and reaction to power, but also the other way round; 2) that, because of this, desire does not simply 'confirm' or 'resist' power, but it is also productive before and beyond power (*Mille* 175, footnote 36). The power that facializes must not be equated with a State Apparatus or a simple Master-Signifier. Rather, it is an ensemble of static relations foundationally enmeshed with, shaping and being shaped by, a specific historical and material context, not only in the sense of economy, but also of physical, cultural, social and technological environment ("paysage" ["landscape" (S.W.)](*Anti* 211)).

<sup>102</sup> „All delirium is racial, which does not necessarily mean racist" (S.W.)

<sup>103</sup> „Human-white-male-adult-city dweller-speaking a standard language-European-heterosexual" (S.W.)

<sup>104</sup> D&G in fact use the term „étalon", which in the sense of "standard measure" is almost identical not only with the term norm, but also with DuBois' term "tape" as considered in chapter I.3.a.

<sup>105</sup> "face" ... "faciality" (S.W.)

<sup>106</sup> Or, to translate this from D&G's terminology to that used so far: the transforming of flesh into a body.

<sup>107</sup> "Le masque ne cache pas le visage, il l'est." ["The mask does not hide the face, it is the face." (S.W.)](*Mille* 145). Accordingly, someone "subjected" to martyrdom ("supplice") is a "person" who loses her face/personhood/being-subject and thus becomes-animal, but whose body is not returned to flesh but burned in order for the ashes to be shed to the winds (*idem.*). The "supplice", the cruel spectacle, cannot be applied to the subject or human; it either demonstrates or reiterates the dependence, guilt, debt a person/subject has, not only in terms of being a person/subject but even a body, towards a power that makes it such. It is in this sense, that "le visage est un conte de terreur" ["the face is a tale of terror" (S.W.)] (*Mille* 206): it can be given, withheld or withdrawn from a power that subjectivates and/or objects by brandishing the possibility of not only inflicting cruel pain, but putting to death those that resist it (See chapter I.1.a.).

“Le racisme procède par détermination des écarts de déviance, en fonction du visage Homme blanc [...] Du point de vue du racisme, il n’y a pas d’extérieur, il n’y a pas de gens du dehors. Il n’y a que des gens qui devraient être comme nous, et dont le crime est de ne pas l’être.”<sup>108</sup> (*Mille* 218).

At this point, the focus of D&G’s analysis of power has shifted. The erasure happening within the process of race is no longer articulated in terms of “refoulement”, but as the erasure of the “sujet d’énonciation” under the “sujet d’énoncé”<sup>109</sup> (*Mille* 160 ff.). This is the second of the two kinds of erasure mentioned above (t/race would have to be added as a third, so that there would be a psychological, a linguistic and a political erasure, but it is not and the consequences of this will be shown in a critique below). All these kinds of erasure are not separate but one: they are aspects of a single process of power based on the manipulation of desire. Once again, it becomes obvious that the analysis of power then must be an analysis of desire and for this, D&G propose a “psychiatrie matérialiste” (*Anti* 29) in the form of “schizo-analyse”<sup>110</sup> (*Anti* 325 ff.).

Materialist psychiatry is psychiatric in as far as it concerns itself with the psyche, with processes and phenomena of consciousness and subject formation, such as the Oedipus complex or the question of desire. It is materialist because it approaches these processes and phenomena not as universally given and valid, but as specific to precise social, historical, economic, cultural and technological circumstances or environments. Materialist psychiatry, in other words, radically understands the subject as a product of its environment, and because of this a critique of the environment (e.g. capitalism) and an attempt to overcome it must also always be a critique of the subject it produces and an attempt to overcome this specific subject formation.

The subject itself is understood as a product of a subjection based on signification and the manipulation of desire. This means that power does not simply control a given universal subject, but creates it through dispositives such as that of the law-of-the-father. The subject does not precede power and the political, but “avant l’être, il y a la

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<sup>108</sup> “Racism proceeds by determining intervals of deviation according to the White man face [...] From the perspective of racism there is no outside, there are no outside people. There are only people that should be like us, and whose crime it is to not be so.” (S.W.)

<sup>109</sup> “subject of enunciation” ... “subject of the enunciated” (S.W.)

<sup>110</sup> „materialist psychiatry“ ... „schizo-analysis“ (S.W.)

politique”<sup>111</sup> (D&G, *Mille* 249). In other words: power produces the subject, and it does so in basically two ways. First, power is not only an external environment, but through its manipulation of desire it serves as matrix for the affective experience of the subject: it is not identical to, yet a part of the subject’s self and the way the subject experiences itself and the world through this self. The subject and its environment are not two, but dual aspects of a unitary whole. Second, through signification, power endows the subject with social visibility and legibility, that is: a system of having and making sense. Both these processes function is to attempt to halt the flux of non-manipulated desire in order to produce rigid and thus controllable identities. Given that such a halting is not possible, this means that subjection relies not only on distortion, but also on erasure.

There is an onto-genetic desire, then, constantly producing the real in spite of the attempts to stop it, but there is also a socio-genetic desire that is the product of the attempts to halt and control onto-genetic desire. This socio-genetic desire is not only a distorted representation of onto-genetic desire, but also a distortion of parts of that desire. It is not merely a question of ideological misrepresentation, but of real libidinal investment in a certain social formation. In as far as society is shaped by a power that is not only constantly revolving around the capture of onto-genetic desire and the containing and recapturing of fugitive subjects <sup>112</sup>, but also enmeshed with this desire, D&G contend that “le désir fait partie de l’infra-structure”<sup>113</sup> (*Anti* 124).

The main goal of schizo-analysis as one form of materialist psychiatry is to understand the desire thus captivated in order to undo it:

“Tel est donc le but de la schizo-analyse: analyser la nature spécifique des investissements libidinaux de l’économique et du politique; et par là montrer comment le désir peut être déterminé a désirer sa propre répression dans le sujet qui désire ...”<sup>114</sup> (*Anti* 124f.)

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<sup>111</sup> “before being, there is politics” (S.W.)

<sup>112</sup> „... une structure ... qui a toujours fermé un système, justement pour l’empêcher [le sujet] de fuir.“[„ ... a structure ... which has always closed a system, precisely to prevent it [the subject] from fleeing.“] (D&G, *Mille* 248). The term „subject“ here is used in relation to a becoming subject independent of subjection. In other words: the fugitive subject is that which is not a subject determined (though affected) by power, but a self becoming subject against and in spite of this determination.

<sup>113</sup> “desire is part of the infrastructure” (S.W.)

<sup>114</sup> “This is then the goal of schizo-analysis: to analyze the specific nature of libidinal investments of the economic and the political; and to thus show how desire can be determined in a way to desire its own repression in the desiring subject ...” (S.W.)

Schizo-analysis is a process of emancipation, it undermines power by destroying the link (desire) that implants it in the subjects it makes and is made of, it subverts power by liberating the fugitive subject. The program of schizo-analysis is simply to “détruire, détruire”<sup>115</sup> (*Anti* 371) that which impedes the free flux of desire (viz. imperialism and the coloniality of power). Because of this, it cannot propose an alternative world, as doing so would simply mean to substitute one regime of signification with another; it would not free the flux of desire and liberate the subject, but merely free them from one environment and its axiomatic and re-subject them to another. Schizo-analysis is a methodology for a possible revolution, not a utopian manifesto<sup>116</sup>. It is exactly because of its undoing of the link between the signifier and the signified, between the subject and that which it is supposed to contain through subjection, between the “sujet d’énonciation” and the “sujet d’énoncé”, that it is schizoid<sup>117</sup>. Schizo-analysis destroys an axiomatic and the sense and subjects it produces; it is a way of putting the world to an end; something that from the perspective of the axiomatic-to-be-destroyed not only seems but also is a-normal, sick, pathological, psychotic. But schizo-analysis is far more radical than the revolution Fanon wants to stage under the same banner of the “end of the world”, precisely because Fanon is not psychotic, because with his resort to the “nation”, he proposes just another imperial regime of signs, while schizo-analysis proposes a method whose goal is to remain fugitive.

Through the lens of schizo-analysis then, Black desire is not only not impossible<sup>118</sup>, but it is exactly that which has to be mobilized in order to break the tenets and power of White civil society. As mentioned above, though, Blackness is not t/race in

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<sup>115</sup> “destroy, destroy” (S.W.)

<sup>116</sup> „... la schizo-analyse en tant que telle n’a strictement aucun programme politique à proposer. Si elle en avait un, ce serait tout à la fois grotesque et inquiétant [...] Un programme politique n’est pas censé s’élaborer dans le cadre de la schizo-analyse [...] La schizo-analyse en tant que telle ne pose pas le problème de la nature du socius qui doit sortir de la révolution ; elle ne prétend nullement valoir pour la révolution même.“ [...] schizo-analysis as such has strictly no political program to propose. If it did have one, this would not only be grotesque, but disquieting [...] A political program is not supposed to be elaborated within schizo-analysis [...] schizo-analysis as such does not consider the problem of which society must arise from revolution; it does in no way amount to the revolution itself ...” (S.W.) (*Anti* 456).

<sup>117</sup> It is important to emphasize here that it is schizophrenia as a process and not the schizophrenic as a person that is potentially revolutionary (D&G, *Anti* 408). The difference here is precisely in the mode of being fugitive: “Du schizo au révolutionnaire, il y a seulement tout la difference de celui qui fuit, et de celui qui sait faire fuir ce qu’il fuit [ ...]” [“Between the schizo and the revolutionary there is only all the difference between he who flees and he who knows how to make flee that which he flees [ ...]” (S.W.)] (*idem.*). It is not about “... fuir le monde, mais plutôt à le faire fuir, comme on crève un tuyau ...” [“...fleeing the world, but make it flee, like one would blow up a pipe” (S.W.)]

<sup>118</sup> As it is within A[WS]; see Chapter I.3.e.

*Capitalisme et Schizophrénie*, but just another “minoritarian” position; it is considered not as abject but within discourse. This tension between the role of Black desire and the ignoring of the specificity of the constitution of Blackness as external to hegemony and its dispositives needs to be explained in more detail, before schizo-analysis can be used to further the understanding of the constitution of Blackness and help us understand its transformation through and in relation to technological change.

The impossibility of Black desire within A[WS] is due to the abjection of Blackness: there can be no Black desire, because Blackness is not a social position within the dispositive of White civil society that can be thought of in terms of identity and enjoyment, but the situation of a flesh exterior to power and in a relation of terror with it. As has been shown in previous chapters, power does not inscribe itself into the Black flesh in form of a soul, but marks itself on the Black flesh through cruelty<sup>119</sup>. As argued in the chapter on Fanon, this does not mean that a person racialized as Black cannot have a libidinal investment in White civil society, but it means that such a desire would not be Black desire<sup>120</sup>. This theorization is close to D&G’s approach to racism through visagété, as the face is the product of the inscription of power on a head and stands to it in the same relation as body to flesh. Thus D&G’s insistence that there is no other exterior to the axiom: there is no Black face within White civil society except blackface, that is: as an interval of deviance from the White face and thus constituted in its terms. The Black face in terms of t/race is abject and thus invisible; seeing a Black face in White civil society would be schizoid, having a Black face, or wanting to have one, schizophrenia. Yet, just like Fanon, that seems to be exactly what D&G propose in terms of radical politics: to make oneself Black, to become Black, to become minoritarian<sup>121</sup>, just like (as they portend) John Brown did<sup>122</sup>. But the schize is not to be confused with the minor here, it

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<sup>119</sup> Note the closeness of D&G’s definition of cruelty to that elaborated in chapter I.1.a.: „La cruauté n’a rien à voir avec une violence quelconque ou naturelle qu’on chargerait d’expliquer l’histoire de l’homme; elle est le mouvement de la culture qui s’opère dans les corps et s’inscrit sur eux, les labourant.“ [„Cruelty has nothing to do with a contingent or natural violence that one would use to explain the history of mankind; it is the movement of culture operating within bodies and inscribing itself on them, working them.“ (S.W.)] (*Anti* 170).

<sup>120</sup> D&G emphasize that even Black people still need to become Black: “Même les Noirs, disaient les Black Panthers, ont à devenir-noir.” [“Even Black people, the Black Panthers said, have to become-black.” (S.W.)] (*Mille* 357).

<sup>121</sup> “Minoritarian” is not to be confused with “minor”. While the latter is defined in terms of relative quantity, the former is defined as contrary to a majority understood in terms of power and dominance independent of quantity (D&G, *Mille* 356).

<sup>122</sup> “Je suis nègre [...] dût-on se faire nègre à la manière de John Brown.” [“I am negro ... should one have to make oneself negro in like John Brown.” (S.W.)] (*Anti* 329).

has to be taken to its full extent: to sever, to split, but also in a more popular sense of having more than one self, a consciousness that is double or more, to identify and dis-identify simultaneously, that is: to use constituted Blackness as a Trojan horse to intrude into constituted discourse, to introduce constitutive Blackness and let lose Black desire within this discourse, which cannot be the same after the event. The schize, then, is not the becoming negro or minor. It is still connected to the axiomatic, but exploding it.

This difference between schizoid Black desire and becoming minoritarian is also exactly the point where D&G's model needs to be problematized, because they, too, fail to think beyond blackface. D&G continue thinking race in terms of difference, whereas abjection is not a quality of difference, but that, which makes the articulation and movement within a system built on abjection possible: all the degrees of deviance from the face of Whiteness are related in their difference to each other as being not-Black because 'not-Black' is the political ontos of White.

Becoming-negro, becoming minoritarian does not propose to identify with, to end up being or imitating abject Black. It means initiating a movement of unfinished becoming in which one adopts the "paysage" and affective intensities of that which one becomes in order to subvert one's own environment and liberate one's desire from the power it is enmeshed with. Becoming is not a movement in which one takes the place of that which one becomes, but it is a movement of "involution" in which one enters into an "alliance" or "symbiosis" with that which one becomes. Significantly, D&G emphasize that becoming is not productive (*Mille* 291.f.). Its goal is to shake the subject of power to the point where parts of it break lose, become fugitive and escape; not into another singular self, but into a multiplicity of being. Becoming is not related to filiation, it is neither regression nor descent, but an act of contagion (*Mille* 295) in which what is always-already inter-existent reacts in a way that lets it split from the discourse that held it.

Although this idea of becoming in terms of alliance and contagion holds an undisputable attraction for political activism with its implicit vision of communities of contagion in which, say, Black and White people not only come together, but exist as one in modalities of selves changed through this holism in ways that allow oppositional or even revolutionary politics, its consequences in terms of Black abjection are less than progressive. Although the notion of becoming does indeed propose a mode of

subjectivity that counters subjection, dissolves the subject of power and thus potentially holds the possibility of *eo ipso* modifying the modes of abjection, it does not because the movement of becoming relies on abjection just as much as subjection does. This is so, because the minoritarian which one becomes is only present in its intra-discursive paradigmatic position vis-à-vis the major, that is: because the Black person is still only visible in and as blackface. Becoming does attempt to mobilize the constitutive under the constituted, but does so only in terms of White desire, on a level of abstraction beyond the specific situation of the minoritarian or Black person, which in its being minoritarian or being Black are *ex vi termini* still coagulations of discourse. Although the fetish of race as reified relation of production has been deconstructed, race and other minoritarian positions are re-fetishized as totems that exist only as catalyst for process within its worshippers, but are completely irrelevant as to their own characteristics.

Becoming, then, is a political project on a par with Spillers concept of askesis. It attempts to change the political through a focus and work on the self. In difference to askesis, it does not rely on a rigid system of core self and a universal rationality (which it both criticizes) for this. Becoming does not think itself in terms of introspection, because it posits a subject and self that are part of a greater whole. Within this whole, a totem<sup>123</sup> (an animal, a woman, a drug, a minority, a “star”, etc.) is chosen towards which the self will become in a movement that is at once external because moving away from the subject one already is and internal because the notion that that which one becomes is separate from that which one is but an illusion produced by subjection. Becoming is not a controlled process, not a controlled transformation, but a letting go of the parameters of identification and thus control. The totem serves to sustain this process of letting go not by offering a new identification or cathexis, but by annulling the identification already in effect. In other words: through the alliance with the totem, the self experiences that it is not what it used to be, but it does not know what else it is. Becoming, it is not transforming into a unified new subject, but liberating a flux of desire, a multiplicity of contacts and communities, a bit of everyone, but no one specifically.

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<sup>123</sup> D&G would disagree with this use of the „totem“ to characterize their work, because they consider it a structuralist term to rigid to describe their emphasis on free movement and time independent of structure (*Mille* 291.f.). However, it is precisely my intended point here that D&G never achieve the post-structural mobility and flux they believe themselves to have achieved, and remain instead caught in the structures of Whiteness as a system of meaning and being, a method of thought and making sense as well as a mode of experience.

Blackness as totem helps the subject to become fugitive. But the fugitive subject is still predicated on the subject, it is not a liberated or transformed and not even a haunting abject. Becoming minoritarian is not becoming abject, but merely a refusal to remain or become subject/ed. The fugitive subject and its becoming are intra-discursive processes, viz. internal to dispositives and their contestation. This, as argued above, is not an option available to the abject. Its desubjectification is not an available choice but an extra-discursive destiny it is held in through cruelty and terror. The slave, unlike the Musselman, cannot reclaim her humanity in degrees of deviance beyond the face of Hitler, Pizarro, Livingston. To think, as D&G do, Blackness as interchangeable with all other minoritarian positions, to merely define it as not major, that is, as not (yet) in a position to dominate a regime of signs and produce desire and subjects, is to misunderstand its essential function as something invisible (not even a minority, not human at all) on and against which even other minorities will built their claim to become (part of) a majority.

There is no becoming in abject Blackness. Becoming-negro is a formula composed against Whiteness, but it is still predicated on constituted Blackness. "Becoming" marks a movement of differentiation within a discourse that the Black abject is not part of. This remaining within the realm of the constituted even in speaking about the constitutive, D&G claim in a rare moment of schizo-pessimism, is due to the fact that that is the discourse that subjectivates us, into which we were born, on which we have to fight and whose beyond we might be able to experience, but cannot speak of within this discourse, except in an interpreting way (*Mille* 231), which is to say in a manner that uses the known to express and therewith ultimately capture the unknown. Given the erasure of abject Blackness this discourse performs, becoming is not a productive tool to further the understanding of abjection or its change. Because of this, the two tomes of *Capitalisme et Schizophrénie* are very much focused on the capacity of the White subject to undermine the White face, and D&G are aware of this: "D'une certaine manière, c'est toujours 'homme' qui est le sujet d'un devenir; mais il n'est un tel sujet qu'en entrant dans un devenir minoritaire qui l'arrache à son identité majeure"<sup>124</sup> (*Mille* 357).

At the same time, in D&G's writing the existence of the imperialism of the White face in the first place at times almost seems like a socio-historical process independent

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<sup>124</sup> "In a certain way, it is always 'Man' who is the subject of a becoming; but he is such only in entering a becoming minoritarian that rips him from his majoritarian identity." (S.W.)



of that same White subject. The process of becoming always centers on (White) non-object agency at the cost of reducing the minoritarian to a catalyst (“le medium ou l’agent”<sup>125</sup> (D&G, *Mille* 357)) within this agency. Though positively connoted, the minoritarian remains something incomprehensibly primitive, a quasi-erotic force subversive despite itself. D&G themselves do not propose an analysis of why visag  t   is modeled around a White face in the first place, and they do not explain the relationship between the minoritarian and the fugitive subject that one might strive to become, nor the relationship between the minoritarian and the minor in which it exists enmeshed with a phenotypic stigmatization that is obviously not a question of becoming. The overlapping between Whiteness and capitalism is a coincidence<sup>126</sup>; D&G simply take it evident and attempt to focus their efforts on creating a critique that might make it possible to break the White face. As a result, their critique amounts to reducing the minor to a functional abstraction hidden, if not completely erased, under the minoritarian.

This critique is not meant to suggest that D&G ought to consider an ‘authentic’ or ‘true’ Blackness. It is not intended to argue for another form of ontological politics, but wants to draw on the potential schizo-analysis offers exactly in the moment after its de-fetishization and before the totemization of the minoritarian. In this moment, schizo-analysis suggests a new kind of Blackness, a schizoid Blackness both constituted and constitutive at once, but not through an erasure collapsing constitutive into constituted Blackness (that is eliminating one and reifying the other), but through a fusion producing a third instance: *constitutional Blackness*. This would also not be a static state (as in the ontology of a universalized human psyche), but a flux, though it would not be a becoming, because it is not a movement of the subject but an emergence of the abject. What this difference amounts to, can best be shown by considering the differences between the signification/subjectation of the visage and that of the nom-du-p  re.

While the visage might be just any visage, once it has coalesced into a general form, the process of subjectation (of the visage inscribing itself into the flesh of the head) is almost like cloning. It is a self-replication of the norm (a normalization) with anything

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<sup>125</sup> “the medium or the agent” (S.W.)

<sup>126</sup> This is yet another overlapping point between D&G and Fanon, who mentions a „soci  t   capitaliste, colonialiste, accidentellement blanche” [„a capitalist and colonialist society accidentally white” (S.W.)] (Fanon, *Peau* 163).

not part of the to-be-cloned-image rendered invisible and put on the run, either as haunting abject or fugitive subject. From this perspective, the nom-du-père would be just another visage within a specific regime of signs. Faciality is not based on the Lacanian mechanics of a non-du-père that prevents incest by disrupting the imaginary unity between the self and its m/Other, thus creating a lack in the self that drives its search for the phallus. Different from the Oedipal nom-du-père model that leads Judith Butler to her notion of the “longing for subjection”, the concept of faciality emphasizes the possibility that we might refuse subjection and fight, “fleeing our faces” (Lingis 185). For D&G, neither faciality nor desire is dialectic: there is no structural necessity for an/Other in order to become a subject. While, for Oedipal psychoanalysis, the nom-du-père is fundamental to every human’s being and its subject-formation, faciality not only does not occupy such a fundamental role, but must – quite to the contrary – be escaped in order to become fully human (*Mille* 209). The face is not an instance of the individual and its singular self<sup>127</sup>, it is not a moment in the process of individualization as the nom (and non)-du-père might be, but it is a process of socialization in the sense of generalization. But while most systems of power have to rely on a face, D&G argue that some don’t and the face thus is not even essential to power as such. It is just one of many possible instances of subjection, and it is never total. Contrary to the non-du-père, the face is not dispositivistic in as far as it does not hide its contingency and limitedness.

Considering the subject through the visage then means considering the constituted dimension of one very specific type of subject, and through the concept of becoming minoritarian schizo-analysis emphasizes that this subject could be different. In opposition to Oedipal psychoanalysis’ attempt to suppress the colonial uncanny, schizo-analysis tempts to unleash its haunting, open the Pandora box of the commodity fetish of race and set desire free. Schizo-analysis will not interpret (D&G, *Anti* 213), it will not adapt its object to the world it is set in. Its duty to destroy is but a negative formulation of its positive duty to liberate the lines of flight. Both processes attempt to unravel the “moi” (D&G, *Anti* 434), “déssubjectiver” (D&G, *Mille* 168) by “échapper auf

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<sup>127</sup> As Claire Colebrook argues in an astonishing attempt to write about face and race not only against D&G’s explicit warning not to read it through art (D&G, *Mille* 229), but also through a complete misunderstanding of their use of the ‘body’ and while mentioning *Mille Plateaux* (which dedicates more than a complete chapter to the development of “face” and “faciality”) only *en passant* in order to focus on minor and secondary references to that concept in other texts.

visage" (Mille 209), or simply to perform "dévisagéification"<sup>128</sup> (Mille 232), all of this in order to become "assignifiant" and "asubjectif"( Mille 210).

But the destruction that feeds into becoming minoritarian here is predicated on a "symbolic integrity" (Spillers, "Mama's" 66) that has historically been withheld from slaves and their descendants and feeds into an "American grammar" (Spillers, "Mama's" 68) that still does not permit Black people to act as fugitive subjects, but continues their abjection. By avoiding Oedipal structures, D&G avoid having to ask themselves, how "quantities" that were "neither female, nor male" (Spillers, "Mama's" 72) might have been subjected by the threat of castration. At the same time, writing of a face that inscribes itself on a head, they fail to take into account the case in which there was no faciality, but simply a stealing of the head and all the flesh 'attached' to it. This is the fallacy of the concept of becoming minoritarian.

Constitutional Blackness on the other hand is a kind of t/raced schizo-analysis that integrates these problematics into its considerations of power and its contestation. It relies on the psycho-materialism of schizo-analysis, which permits a pragmatic understanding of Blackness as part of a specific dispositive, producing a specific desire and specific subjects to sustain a specific system. Schizo-Analysis is that anti-dote to coloniality that is the necessary beginning for a semiosis of the abject (that the following chapters will consider). The necessary second step is to avoid stopping, as Fanon, Spillers and D&G do, with this desire and remain within the discourse that produces and manipulates it. Instead of becoming minoritarian, constitutional Blackness will have to create a semiosis of the abject. Section II. will consider such a semiosis through a consideration of the impact of technological change on the constitution of Blackness, before section III. will condense the findings of both section I. and II. into *Cyborg Black Studies*.

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<sup>128</sup> „me“ ... „desubjectivate“ ... „escaping the face“... „defacement“ ... „assignifying“ ... „asubjectif“ (S.W.)

*Section II. The Racial Glitch and Constitutional Blackness*

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## II.1. THE RACIAL GLITCH

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Cassandra Jackson, an African-American professor of English, born, raised and still living in a middle class environment, relates how she encountered repeated trouble trying to hire a nanny. Assuming her to be White, due to her middle class dialect on the phone and her address, potential nannies were shocked to see that she was Black on their visit to her house, and often tried to find a way not to accept the job they had come looking for, putting up maneuvers such as doubling their hourly rate or suddenly finding they already had prior engagements. Because of the technological determination of their first exchange on the telephone, the nannies were put in crisis on their visit: unknowingly, they had touched the abject Black and risked the contamination and punishment this touching bears in the subjection/abjection mode proper to A[WS]. Jackson titled the article in which she published this anecdote “The Accidental Caucasian”, directly implying a technologically mediated way of passing. It is this accidental passing that this section will begin from. Combining it with what was termed *racial lag* in the introduction, section II. will analyze the impact of technological change on the constitution of Blackness through considerations of cinema (in chapter II.2.) and phonography (in chapter II.3.). In doing so, it will combine the idea of accidental and technological passing with Judith Butler’s concept of queering in order to develop the concept of a technologically created *racial glitch*, while continuing the theorization of constitutive and constituted Blackness begun in section I. by introducing the concept of constitutional Blackness.

Thinking the intersections between queering and passing had already been proposed by Judith Butler in her book *Bodies that matter*:

“In the last instance, queering is what upsets and exposes passing; it is the act by which the racially and sexually repressive surface of conversation is exploded, by rage, by sexuality, by the insistence on color.” (131)

In opposition to passing as erasure of color, Butler portrays queering as insisting on color. But contrary to Butler’s location of queering processes on the level of individual and voluntary acts in which a self mobilizes it’s own abjectness to directly interfere with

processes of dispositivistic subjection, Cassandra Jackson's article shows how technology can create an analogous, yet different dynamic. While Jackson may have been accidentally passing on the phone, this technologically created moment of accidental passing set up a later encounter whose effect on the nannies was similar to that of the queering described by Butler: an unprepared confrontation of subject and abject through color. In Butler's theorizing, queerness can lead to a situation in which the subject will come into contact with that which it must not touch in order to be and remain a subject, because of the subject's inability to identify the abject as such. Queering happens, when the abject manages to mobilize its abjectness to destabilize the norm-conform subject in its confrontation with it. Unable, for example, to identify the gender-queer person it faces, the hetero-normal subject may find itself interacting with abject homosexuality in a manner taboo to heteronormativity (e.g., if being a man he mistook another man for a woman and treated him according to the gendered norms of interactions between a Man and a Woman). Thus, queerness forces the subject to confront the normativity usually invisible under the cloth of daily routine, ritual and 'common sense' and hopes to therewith undermine it. By creating a moment of social existence for the structurally excommunicated, invisible, illegible and illegitimate abject, queerness puts the subject in crisis and thus creates the opportunity for a reconfiguration of the subject as well as the abject it is built on.

Like queerness, the racial glitch has an effect on subjection/abjection by disturbing and potentially disrupting the inscription of discourse into and onto the body and flesh. Like queerness, it works on the relation between subject and abject, mobilizing the abject in a manner that may potentially destabilize the subject and therewith the power based on the (always fictive) clear separation between subject and abject. However, the glitch differs from queerness in two fundamental aspects. First, as the example of Jackson's accidental passing shows, the glitch is not a voluntary act, but an effect not only mediated but caused by technology, a process not intended by the participants but produced by the parameters of technological social exchange. In opposition to passing and queering as conscious performative acts on physical markers, the following chapters will develop the concept of a racial glitch caused by the growing abstraction from physical and immediate face-to-face situations and a shift to inter-face situations caused by technological change. Second, the abjection framed and mobilized by queerness is not the same as the abjection framed and mobilized by the racial glitch.

As argued in section I., power must constantly try to recapture the fugitive subject and the haunting abject. Subjection/abjection is not a static process finished and fixed after an initiatory or initiating interpellation, but needs to constantly reiterate its cruel inscription into and onto body and flesh. According to Butler, this need to reiterate is due to the resistance of the self against total subjection, a resistance that also causes micro-differential rifts in the reiterations, so that the subjectivity produced in each iteration is never totally identical to the prior subjectivity. This micro-differential rift is both the result of and the ground for further resistance. Queerness is a political strategy of emphasizing this rift from which, subjection having failed, the abject hails and emerges to haunt the subject (Butler, *Bodies* 169.ff.). But the abject in Butler's case is homosexuality, and its abjection is different from racial abjection in that it is a body-abject, not a flesh-abject. Contrary to the flesh-abject, the body-abject as theorized by Butler is not only tied to a subjectivity that enables it to articulate queerness as a legible social position, but is also tied by that subjectivity's desires and specifically the desire for subjection proposed by Butler that was the focus of critique in chapter I.3.f. As a consequence of this, homosexual abjection may be – and is assumed to be – articulated from a human position such as that of White European. The flesh abject, on the other hand, has no such access to legibility and cannot express itself and make claims within the discourse of civil society, nor is it certain that it would 'desire' to. Queerness operates from a position of uncertainty and ambiguity; it is able to articulate its abjection by playing on ambivalence. As chapter II.2. will show in its analysis of the movie *The Crying Game*, the body-abject can operate by metaphorically exploding from under a presumed dispositivist subjectivity, while the flesh-abject can never be mistaken for a subject in a face-to-face situation. This possibility to act from the position of a presumed dispositivist subjectivity is the ambivalence queerness works from, and it is the ground on which Butler draws the parallels between queering and passing, describing passing as working from exactly the same kind of ambivalence and giving the example of a White racist in a novel, whose subjectivity is fatally shaken when he finds out he's married to a Black woman that was only passing as White (*Bodies* 137). This passing, however, is an expression of the Black-White desire (a desire to be White) criticized in chapter I.4.a., viz. it is a concept that remains within A[WS] and therefore continues the abjection of Blackness by insisting that this abjection can only be suspended by masquerade but never be eliminated, by insisting that the Black abject can

only cease being abject by becoming a White subject, or at least pretending to be so, although this becoming is not only ultimately impossible, but arguably unwanted outside of White desire and A[WS].

The racial glitch describes neither a suspension of abjection, as in passing, nor does it retain the psychological model of White desire and individual agency underpinning both passing and queering. By focusing on the production of racial glitches in the course of the technological change of society, the following chapters move away from performance to system error, from individual volition to structural effects. Queerness is understood first and foremost as a noticeable and irritating but only momentary disturbance of system surface and not of system structure. Although it touches on the constituted dimension of the subject, it does not significantly alter its constitutive structure. The Fanonian end of the world, on the other hand, means total system destruction, and the glitch will be investigated in that sense here: as a system structure event that has to be traced on the level of system surface and differentiated from other important surface effects without structural impact, such as (e.g.) constitutional Blackness. The main research impulse will be to ask how racial glitches may come about, how they can be t/raced and if and when they may lead to such structural effects. When and how does A[WS] produce a self-subverting failure in its constant reiterations and recaptures of fugitive subjects and haunting abjects? When and how does it fail itself in its cruel spectacle? What is the role of technological change in this? Is the glitch really only possible/thinkable as an event or effect connected to but ultimately beyond human volition and action, or may there be a formation such as *glitching*, that is, a politics of consciously provoking and disseminating glitches, of using technological change to transform the constitution of Blackness? Is technological change de-racializing (does it undo established forms of racialization) or does it create not-yet-racialized forms of being?

The following chapters will approach these questions through the problematics of subjection/abjection established in section I. They will look at questions of desubjection inspired by Butler's concept of queerness, framing racial glitches and thinking towards the *Cyborg Black Studies* that will be established in section III. This analysis will not be propelled by techno-utopian hopes of a future abolition of race, but it will t/race and engage with present moments of technology related not-yet- and de-racialization. It will



focus on processes that undermine racialization by obstructing the suture of flesh and discourse and by disrupting established identities through contact and mutual contagion of subject and abject. From this vantage point, the potential of technology to impact the constitution of Blackness is based on the notion that technology increasingly undermines the spectacularity of Blackness, but in no way obliterates the 'necessity' of the abjection of Blackness for the maintenance of White civil society. Parallel to the racial lag and glitch – to the technologically reduced capacity for identifying *someone* as *something* or flesh – runs an enhanced transmission of cruel spectacles: the possibility to broadcast aunt Hester's screams, the beating of Rodney King ... Technology transforms the relation between flesh and dispositive as it facilitates the inscription onto a discursively constituted body of Blackness in general but renders the inscription of discourse onto a specific Black flesh more difficult. To speak of a subversion of the spectacular, then, is not to speak of a disturbed mediality as such, nor of the end of race or Blackness, but of failing mechanics of racial marking and unmarking, of failing mechanics of the reproduction of constituted Blackness and its subsequent impact on the constitution of Blackness as the axiomatic attempts to recapture what technology enables to be or remain fugitive and haunting. Though the spectacle remains cruel, the stigmatization and hypervisibility necessary to identify specific individuals as Black are rendered increasingly difficult to achieve and thus the mechanisms of defense against the abject, the capacity to not come in contact with Black and remain untainted White, are hampered. The hypothesis, in other words, is that technology undermines the containment of social identities through social death and therewith enhances the eruption of that abject while also driving an evolution of structural recapture of that abject.

Clearly the impact of technology in form of machines on the constitution of Blackness is different in this context from the impact of social technologies such as segregation or eugenics, but they must not be seen as separate but as interactive realms<sup>129</sup>. Connecting to Foucault's theorization of the soul in his analyses of techniques and technologies of punishment, one way the interrogation of the impact of technological change on the constitution of Blackness will proceed in this section will be by asking: is there a (post-)soul in the machine? Is there a possible transcendence of Blackness

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<sup>129</sup> E.g.: „Segregation, importantly, did not only map space but was also a reaction to the transgression of space brought about by modern technologies, such as trains” (Chun 18).

through the machine? Is there, for example in machine-based music, a potential to create a “de-raced cultural sphere”, a potential for a “reframing, diversification and fragmentation of notions of ‘Blackness’”, for a “post-soul futurama”(Albiez 147+144)? Or are all the glitched and post-soul moments just will-o-wisps in an atmosphere of (e.g.) a general Big Data driven technological re-constitution of race and Blackness? The following chapters will acknowledge both dynamics (de- and re-racialization) but focus and insist on the potential of the former.

## II.2. FROM CINEMATIC SUTURE TO CONSTITUTIONAL BLACKNESS: THE ABJECT'S HAUNTING SUB-SYMBOLICITY

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*“ ... because the oppressiveness of black cultural identity is so intimately connected to the anguish and anxiety of the visible, of the epidermal schema, the cinema would potentially be a prime site for the corroboration of such an identity. Its corroboration, however, takes place not on the screen (or not only on the screen) but in the theater itself.” (Doane 1991: 226)*

Based on schizo-analysis and a critique of different theories of subjection, section I. has argued that the abjection of Blackness is not a variable within a specific social system, but the (politico-ontological) core fiber in the texture of a White civil society. In this context, Blackness has been understood as integrated into a pattern of White desire and White enjoyment as well as Black social and civic death, an erasure/impossibility of Black desire within the parameters of White civil society. This Black desire has then been analyzed as potentially revolutionary. In this chapter, White desire, as the point of fusion between self and White civil society (the self's centripetal moment), and Black desire, as the point of rupture (the self's centrifugal moment – the end of the world), will be reconsidered in terms of suture in order to delineate the role of technology in the manipulations and materializations of such desires. Following the method established in section I. and with the critique of Lacanian models of subjection and psychoanalysis in mind, this chapter will first frame the classic model of suture in order to sketch an understanding of the function of suture in racialization, and then move on to a critique

of this model in order to analyze the role of technological suture in the containment of Black desire.

The concept of suture was already implicitly present and subverted in the consideration of the spectacle and the interrogation of identification as well as the relation between flesh and discourse that the spectacle's cruelty aims to establish. As Kaja Silverman points out: "The concept of suture attempts to account for the means by which subjects emerge within discourse" (199.f.). Or, to use Jacques-Alain Miller's authoritative definition of this concept originally proposed by Lacan:

"Suture names the relation of the subject to the chain of its discourse ... it figures there as the element which is lacking, in the form of a stand-in. For, while there lacking, it is not purely and simply absent. Suture, by extension – the general relation of lack to the structure of which it is an element, inasmuch as it implies the position of a taking-the-place-of." (25.f.)

To think of the cruelty of spectacular Blackness as a process of suture requires minute attention to two different forms of suture: that which 'sews' a subject into the body and that which 'sews' an abject and its stereotype-stand-in onto the flesh. To articulate suture merely in relation to the subject, as all existing approaches to suture have done so far, reiterates the erasure of race from discourse through the positing of a concept of a universal humanity that implicitly equates with Whiteness. While it is correct to note that the use of a stand-in mentioned by Miller applies to everyone, White and Black alike, the form of insertion into discourse ranges from White subject presence to Black abject absence, from hegemony to social death, from full to empty signifier, from enunciation to erasure. Considering how these forms have been theorized in section I, suture as it has been theorized by different authors so far must be understood as an attempt to create a 'transparent' signifier which claims to leave no t/race, a subject which claims to contain within itself the whole self, a subject which admits no multitude, no selves. Suture, then, is a process, which, as yet, has admitted no excess, and thus, for the abject, is performed in the form of a stereotype (Bhabha 115). Contrary to White suture, stereotype is the disavowal of the invisibility as human and its transformation into hypervisibility as flesh; it is a stand-in which does not integrate but excommunicates, it is an ersatz-presence that erases erasure, it is what Deleuze and

Guattari have described as “refoulement” (see chapter I.4.c.), in which abjection is disavowed and discourse posited as total and true and thus, implicitly, static. As Eden Osucha has forcefully argued in relation to photography, technologically mediated presence and absence have historically been deeply racialized. While, in 1902, a White woman named Abigail Roberson could sue a large corporation for having used her photographic image for publicity purposes on the grounds of her privacy rights – that is: her possession in herself – and encounter large public sympathy for this, this would have been unthinkable for the Black woman Nancy Green whose image and persona were at the same historical time being used to incorporate the “Aunt Jemima” minstrel figure as a trademark used to sell a pancake mix. In the former case it was argued that:

“ ... because her picture was ‘conspicuously posted and displayed in stores, warehouses, saloons and other public spaces’ where Roberson herself would never dream of going, given the self-evident unseemliness of female traffic in such areas of public life, Roberson was effectively made a prostitute by this circulation and display. In other words, her lawyers claimed that the adventurous peregrinations of her commodified image brought on her person a shame and distress as real as if she herself had been sold and circulated in such a way.” (Osucha 95).

It was argued that the picture belonged to the one pictured as a part of her and that anything done to the picture was also done to the pictured person. The picture was part of the body. In the case of Nancy Green though, not only were no such claims made, but Green was in fact engaged by the pancake company to play Aunt Jemima until her death, when “the company [owning the Aunt Jemima trademark] promptly replaced their spokesmodel without comment” (Osucha 92). While Roberson sued for control over her body, Green exemplifies a stereotype-as-suture like inscription into a flesh that, through its social death, is *terra nullius* in the White public sphere. Green thus literally became the physical support of her own stereotype, to the degree where that stereotype could be transferred unto other flesh after her death.

Writing about suture, then, it must be kept in mind that pictured bodies are not the same as pictured flesh. Although technologies as such may seem race-blind, their conception, construction and social significance is in no way colorblind or post-racial *per se*. This is

what the present chapter will theorize. As will be shown in the consideration of suture in the cinematic<sup>130</sup> apparatus below, doing this requires considering technology on a formal, rather than content level. From this perspective, no distinction is made between fictional and non-fictional. They are both considered to belong to the constituted in as far as the constituted and the constitutive both mark structural dimensions, while the subject and the abject respectively mark structural positions or situations within these dimensions. Wedged between these dimensions and structured by these positions, but not identical to them, is the self. Suture is that which binds the self to its structural position/situation in the constituted, it is imbricated with desire, it forms when the self is structured into a subject or abject, when discourse inscribes itself into the body or onto the flesh. As insertion of the self and body or flesh into discourse, the suture Miller writes of is integral to the theory of subjection proposed by the equally Lacan inspired Judith Butler in her elaboration of the subject adopting a gendered identity under the threat of social death or psychosis. Considering the critique of Butler offered earlier, it should be clear that suture is a situation of force, not of choice. Suture is not simply a process of integration of pre-formed subjects but it is a secondary process contained differently in the process of subjection and abjection. As a methodological tool, its value is to permit an analysis of specific aspects of the processes of subjection, rather than a general analysis. As shall be explained in relation to neo-formalism below, suture emphasizes an analysis of *form* where the consideration of the subject in section I. emphasized the analysis of *function*. The enquiry into suture and suturation in this chapter will permit to ask how specific technologies are contaminated by, how they can enhance or how they can disrupt subjection/abjection. In order to do so, it will focus on cinema and the contrast between the immediate gaze of a face-to-face situation and the technologically mediated gaze.

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Significantly, the concept of suture has received its most important reception in film studies, that is: in the field of vision that is also the primary field for the constitution of race qua phenotype. The starting question of suture here is the same as in the cruel spectacle: How does the spectator participate in the spectacle? How is an identification

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<sup>130</sup> In the context of this chapter, I use the term „cinematic“ to stand for the audio-visual field in general.

produced that lets the spectator know where to position/situate himself in the discourse offered him? In her review of the cinematic approach to suture, Silverman writes that “Theoreticians of cinematic suture agree that films are articulated and the viewing subject spoken by means of interlocking shots” (201). The syntax of alternating shots is supposed to conceal from the viewer the limitations of the single frame, it is supposed to prevent her from becoming aware of the fact that for everything she sees on the screen, there is a lot outside the screen that she not only does not see but which it would not be in her power to see if she wanted to. The interlocking shots, in other words, perform the art of agnotology, in which the spectator partakes in the narrative, because she is kept willingly unaware of the things she doesn’t know, but which structure her perception no less, that is: she is kept unaware of her constitutive limitation by discourse and thus one with it. This agnotology is not forced on the spectator. Just like Butler’s version of the Lacanian subject, the theory of suture assumes that the spectator not only accepts, but desires suture in order to avoid castration, that she accepts an existence in predetermined categories (such as camera perspective (Metz 35.f.)) because she does not want to remain outside the world formed in, by and as spectacle. Thus, the cutting and editing of a film direct the spectator’s desire to prevent her from disidentifying with what she is offered. By banning the specter of the fugitive subject and the haunting of the colonial uncanny, this agnotology allows the spectator to experience herself as part of the plenitude of the narrative, when in fact she is absent or lacking therein.

What the agreement among film theoreticians mentioned by Silverman amounts to, though, is the overrepresentation of a specific desire as universally valid and adoptable. In order to make sense, this theory of cinematic suture as direction of desire must assume and presuppose a standardized/normal spectator with a standardized/normal desire and a standardized/normal perspective that produces predictable because standardized/normal effects in the spectator. It must, in other words, assume not only spectators always-already determined by normalizing dispositives but constitutively in harmony with them; it must assume bodies always-already inscribed with discourse, not flesh. Without such a harmonious normalized spectator/citizen the cinematic process could neither claim to be universal, nor would it be able to anticipate or direct the spectator’s desire. Desire and identification, here, are therefore understood as being independent of who the spectator is. As a result of this, this agreement suffers from a constitutional blindness to the exclusions and disidentification performed by discourse

both prior to the spectator's visit to the cinema and subsequently during that visit. This concept of suture does not create the spectator, but relies on prior processes of subjection, which it reiterates. Just like the cruel spectacle of aunt Hester's beating, suture must rely on prior processes of subjection/abjection, which it does not create but reiterate. Silverman is aware of this, writing:

"The system of suture functions not only constantly to reinterpellate the viewing subject into the same discursive positions, thereby giving that subject the illusion of a stable and continuous identity, but to rearticulate the existing symbolic order in ideologically orthodox ways."

and then pointing to the role of sexual difference in suture:

"Indeed, the entire system of suture is inconceivable apart from sexual difference." (221)

It is not news, then, that theorizing suture as neutral is just another aspect of dispositivism. The aim here, though, is not to pick up and continue from an analysis of suture and "woman as spectacle" (J. Rose 199) to an analysis of Blackness as spectacle, as the analysis of spectacular Blackness in chapter I.1.a. is considered sufficient in this respect. Rather, feminist film critique will be used as a stepping stone only. The rest of this chapter will start from there to deconstruct the concept of suture to theorize the cinematic apparatus as a technologically mediated gaze and ask if its consequences for the constitution of Blackness differ from those of the non-cinematic gaze.

Consider, for instance, the following quote in the light of Fanon's description of the colonial gaze:

"Thus [through the shot/reverse shot] a gaze within the fiction serves to conceal the controlling gaze outside the fiction; a benign other steps in and obscures the presence of the coercive and castrating Other. In other words, the subject of speech passes itself off as the speaking subject." (Silverman 204)

This “benign” ersatz-other that steps in is exactly what is missing for Fanon when he is faced with the coercive and castrating gaze of the little boy pointing a finger at him and saying “Mother, look at that Negro, I’m afraid!” (*Peau* 90)<sup>131</sup>. Fanon is not protected from the finger directing the social gaze like a camera would that of the spectator in the cinema. He is not looking, but looked at and it is precisely this unprotected being-looked-at-ness, that is: the dependence of his self-conception on the conception the White Other has of him, that (from a Lacanian perspective such as Fanon’s) makes it possible for that little boy’s gaze to socio-symbolically castrate him, shatter his self-image and reiterate his social death. Even though the White desiring Black man in Fanon’s example would want suture-as-subject and the body-armor it offers to avoid castration, even though the subject of speech would like to experience itself as the speaking subject, he is not offered it. Quite to the contrary, any spectacle structured by A[WS] precisely aims to re-iterate this castration, to keep the Other dependent on the master’s gaze, as abjection is the only place Blackness is situated in in relation to this discourse. The Black man in Fanon’s example not only cannot but must not identify with a protective ersatz-other in order to move from speech to speaking; he does not speak, but as Black man he is spoken within A[WS] and must remain so. Within this dispositive, then, the ersatz-other indicates a symbolic existence that is as such not available to the socially dead, except – as will be argued below – as living dead, as a *haunting sub-symbolicity*. Except, that is, against the dispositive, except, that is, as violence, as displeasing from the perspective of the dispositive and its subjects.

The idea of a cinematic ersatz-other is not a variation of surface reading and its idea that technology might cancel out the subjectivity of the critic (or the spectator more generally) in her relation to works of art (Best & Marcus 9.ff.+17) and create a non-subjective (viz. non-interpretative and outside the dispositive) interaction with art. As has been argued, all perception and desire cannot be understood as *per se* undistorted by power, and they therefore always necessarily require exegesis. In analyzing the gaze one has to be careful, as Fanon himself emphasized, to understand how the gaze performs a connection between the inner eye (“l’oeil”) and the outer eyes (“les yeux”) that makes a racialized perception possible (*Peau* 163). It is important to analyze how that connection permits the White gaze an enjoyment of Whiteness that is as such –

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<sup>131</sup> See chapter I.4.a.



Whiteness being defined as non-Black – identical with Black castration and abjection<sup>132</sup>, and which can only be considered as surface if one overrepresents one's own position in an act of self-fetishization (viz. by considering one's own constitution as outside any dispositive or 'natural'). On the one hand, then, the analysis of the gaze in the cinematic apparatus is by default embedded in the analysis of the immediate/non-mediated gaze in the sense that it is based on the same assumptions about the nature of discourse, power and the privileging of visual perception in the framing of race in A[WS] that underpin any analysis of the non-cinematic gaze. Cinematic desire and identification, as Christian Metz pointed out, are "secondary" processes imbricated on the desire and identification constitutive of the subject-formation that precedes the cinematic-spectator (32.f.+40). Rather than create a completely new desire at the risk of producing displeasure, Metz insisted that cinema in general seeks to guarantee enjoyment (or pleasure), that is, to tend to (and thus mold itself along the lines of) always-already existing desire in order to generate the attendance and revenue necessary for its reproduction (6.f.). To point out, as Kaja Silverman does, that suture is based on sexual difference is to emphasize this overrepresentation of the master-gaze and the reproduction of non-cinematic desire and its power-infrastructure that it potentially performs in the spectator through filmic discourse. Within a civil society not only patriarchal but also (to expand on Silverman) White, this reproduction means two things. Firstly, with Metz, it means that the pleasure of watching a film lies in its faithful reproduction of White patriarchy and that cinema is inherently conservative and repressive of alternative desires. This is why and where the critique of cinematic suture combines with a critique of ideology (Dayan) and political economy. Secondly, with Silverman and Fanon, it means reading cinema through the Oedipus complex in which 'woman' and 'Blackness' embody the displeasure of castration and it means equating suture with the assumption of a White male position that by definition avoids such displeasure. This second reading also identifies the conservative moment of cinema, but it moves beyond that identification by summoning the spectre of non-male and non-White desire and raising the possibility of the "destruction of pleasure as a radical weapon" in filmmaking (Mulvey 7).

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<sup>132</sup> The asymmetry between the cinematic 'universal/neutral' gaze and the ability to derive pleasure from it has for many years been one of the central concerns of alternative cinemas such as (e.g.) Third, Post-colonial, feminist and Queer Cinema (Shohat & Stam). However, as the theories these cinemas have spawned lead away from the focus on the role of technological change in the constitution of Blackness that is the center of enquiry here, they will not be considered here.

Raising the possibility of the destruction of pleasure or of displeasure in cinematic suture suggests that the cinematic apparatus permits performing a disconnection between the inner and outer eyes, between what we see and how we (should) see it. It suggests a possible sliding of the gaze, a shift of the control of the gaze from epidermal and gender authority to the authority of the camera, the authority of the interlocking shot, the authority of the cutting and editing: the authority of cinema as technology. Given the assumed similarities between the cinematic gaze and the non-mediated gaze, what appears as different between them is precisely the possibility of cinema to permit such a sliding through its capacity to both offer and refuse an ersatz-other as a technologically generated position within discourse that is not simply occupied and enjoyed, but that can also lag, be displeasurable, haunt and be haunted. Contrary to the non-cinematic gaze of the dispositive, which implements transparent subjects/objects in which the signified must always correspond to the signifier the dispositive has attributed to it or risk punishment, cinema, it will be argued below, offers the possibility of creating a lag and therewith disconnecting signifier and signifier.<sup>133</sup> This creates a dynamic of displeasure in as far as it interrupts and frustrates the primary desire Metz argues cinema must reproduce. The question to be asked is thus how cinematic technologies might facilitate a subversion of the axiom that defines primary desire and the connection between bodies and discourse this desire is meant to perform. Approaching the role of the impact of the change of technology on subject/object constitution through the concept of cinematic suture is, then, not about the filmmaker and her power of enunciation, but about how the constitutive and the constituted are affected and may possibly come apart through the technological manipulation of subjection/abjection through the ersatz-Other and its production of sub-symbolicity<sup>134</sup>. This is at once a more general technological effect, and a specifically cinematic situation. As will be argued in this section, technology permits a lag between the constitutive and the constituted that is not possible in normal social interaction and that turns into a racial lag when it undermines racial marking and identification. Lag and the displeasure

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<sup>133</sup>For a critique of Christian Metz' differing argument that the difference between the non-cinematic gaze and the cinematic gaze is the absence of the seen object in the latter(45), see Jacqueline Rose (195f.).

<sup>134</sup>It is irrelevant from this perspective, whether or not cinematic suture is in fact identical to the technique of shot/reverse-shot or not, as long as it is based on the formation of an ersatz-other. As Stephen Heath has argued (65.ff.), any critique trying to deconstruct the concept of suture solely through reference to the shot/reverse-shot – either completely dismissing suture on that basis (Rothman) or by pointing to different kinds of shots also able to perform suture (such as what Slavoj Žižek calls “interface”, a shot which condenses the shot/reverse-shot formation into one frame (*Tears* 39.ff.)) – must fall short.

it can foster are effects possible because of the need for adapted suture that is created in technologically framed situations in order to sustain subject-identity (if sustaining this identity is essential to discourse, as it is in A[WS]), and they become haunting when lag creates the impossible simultaneity of marking and non-marking, existence and erasure, symbolic life and social death. Lag, in other words, makes possible the semiosis of the abject by deconstructing the ersatz-Other through its effect on suture.

Just like the Oedipus complex, Lacanian suture must always be considered a contra-factual reality from a schizo-analytic perspective: although its structures do exist and are effective and must therefore be analyzed and deconstructed, they do not exist by destiny, but as an effect of discourse. Accordingly, there are two ways of thinking lag and displeasure in relation to the cinematic gaze, and both revolve around the gaze one adopts and the gaze one is assumed to adopt or not to adopt. The first way of thinking lag and displeasure is to consider suture through the Lacanian dictum of an imperative desire to identify and the idea that, through suture, the gaze of the spectator and that of the camera become one. The second way of thinking lag and displeasure is to refuse the notion of such an imperative desire and to insist that the spectator and the camera may as well remain separate and multiple.

In the first case, lag would amount to the effect of the difference between one's assumed identity and the one the cinematic gaze forces one to adopt (e.g. a Black woman forced to see herself in a movie through a White male gaze). Displeasure here, as Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks argues in her Lacanian enquiry into the relation of race and suture in the movie *Suture*, is the product of disturbed identification, of a disrupted desire to identify paired with an imperative to do so that imposes suture, even if a crippled and negative one (103.ff.).

In the second case, lag and displeasure might also be the effects of such a forced difference, but here it is only possible, not necessary. In this model, lag must primarily be understood as the complete failure of suture, rather than the effect of a forced and crippled one. Not only can lag refer to a distance between the social identity of the spectator and that offered by the cinematic gaze, but its emphasis on the possibility of refusing suture permits the articulation of a crucial point. Lag implies more than that a White male might refuse to identify with a White male gaze and attempt to occupy a different subject-position (a possibility which might be read as White entitlement). It also points out how the abject can refuse to identify with and be erased under

stereotype-as-suture, how the Black man can refuse to identify with Sambo or the Gauls, rather than suffering from the impossible desire for Whiteness Fanon diagnosed, but also how he might chose to identify with another position, how he might refuse symbolic death and appear in a discourse he is in principle barred from by simply adopting a position other than the stereotype he is supposed to suture into. In this case, displeasure arises not from a crooked identification, which the spectator might desire and want to avoid at the same time, but from the uncertainty of identification and the malleability of identities that are produced in the interaction between film and spectator, from the slipperiness of multiple possible points of suture and non-suture.

Obviously, these two ways of approaching suture have differing political potential. The Lacanian approach technically suggests that, because of the imperative to identify, a White straight conservative might be violently forced to identify with a transgender gaze – as Judith Halberstam suggests in her use of the concept of suture in her comment on Kimberly Peirce’s film *Boys don’t cry* – just as a Black person might be forced to see herself through a White camera gaze. This imperative to identify might nurture fantasies of state sponsored brainwashing as well as of a brachial cinematic power to force (literally) new views on people, but most of all it is a reduction of the analysis of the cinematic gaze to the parameters of analysis of the non-mediated gaze because it assumes that the spectator must always identify with the gaze it assumes. This is the conservative conception of suture, which describes the everyday experience of the abject. Driven to the extreme of disrupting identities, it would come at the price of psychosis. It would mean subject annihilation not transformation and displeasure, lag and ultimately glitch would therefore not be valid political concepts. However, because this approach ignores the mediating cinematic technologies, it also ignores the difference between disrupting identities in the strictly socio-symbolic space of political subjection under the law of the father and the cinematic space of the film in which, due to the manipulation of the ersatz-Other (as will be argued with Guattari below), the subject is able to enter and exit partially disrupted states and to ‘play’ at transformation without the immediate risk of psychosis.

It is precisely the openness to such play that characterizes the schizoanalytic way of thinking lag. This approach emphasizes how the (non-)existence of an ersatz-other implies a multitude of different sutures ranging from the plenitude of the transparent signifier to symbolic death. It also points out how the ersatz-other allows the spectator

to assume a position within the filmic narrative that is at the same time identifying and distancing, that is only a quasi-suture (as opposed to a total suture) in which lag permits the spectator to touch the horror of abjection without the fear of contamination. To be concise: the Lacanian theory of suture assumes an entry of the spectator into the narrative of the film on the model of (but not identical to) the entry of the subject into the symbolic. The necessary identification with the ersatz-other as guarantor of the symbolic integrity of the narrative offered by cinematic technology is an echo to the identification with the non-du-père. Similar to the non-du-père that regulates the relation between the signifier and the signified and thereby the subject's place within the symbolic through its threat as well as factual imposition of social death, cinematic technology regulates the relation between the images and the imaged and the subject's place in the filmic narrative through a threat or imposition of symbolic death. At the same time, technology's power to force subjection and abjection is significantly less than that of the non-du-père, as the threat of narrative castration wielded by technology cannot develop the same social urgency tinged with a fear of physical annihilation as the threat of socio-symbolic castration, although both are closely linked. Emphasizing this reduced threatening capacity of cinematic technology, the second way of thinking lag underlines that, furthermore, the possibility of refusing symbolic integrity as well as haunting it (that is: assuming an affective presence where no symbolic position is offered, colonizing the ersatz-Other) is always-already given in cinema, because there is not one single totalitarian symbolic realm, but a multitude of mutually subverting discourses (e.g. the cinematic and the social one). The second way of thinking lag refuses the truth claim of the narrative; it claims the right to deny the suspension of disbelief necessary for narrative capture just as it claims the right of the self to defend itself against discursive capture, its right to believe in the face of abjection. This second way, then, is a case of schizo-analysis rather than Lacanianism, a case of fugitive subject and haunting object.

Although Félix Guattari is explicit in accusing cinema of being complicit with Oedipal psychoanalysis in its attempt to shape subjection through the manipulation of psyche and desire according to the ruling discourse of power ("Divan"), and in spite of Gilles Deleuze's two tomes on cinema (*Cinéma 1 +2*), neither Guattari nor Deleuze have offered a schizo-analysis of or specific to cinema. Nevertheless, the observations offered by Guattari seem to validate further inquiry into the role of the ersatz-other as specifically

cinematic moment in the process of subjection/abjection. As he points out, the difference between cinema and face-to-face situations such as the analytic setting is, that:

“Au cinéma, on n’a plus de parole; ça parle à votre place [...] une machine vous traite comme une machine, et l’essentiel n’est pas ce qu’elle vous dit, mais cette sorte de vertige d’abolition que vous procure le fait d’être ainsi machiné. Comme les personnes sont dissoutes et que les choses se passent sans témoin, on n’a pas honte à s’abandonner ainsi.”<sup>135</sup> (“Divan” 101).

While insisting that cinematic desire is but a variation on non-cinematic desire and that a mere analysis of the cinematic signifier would be ideologically corrupt in obscuring the role of the political in the claim that the cinematic signifier would be beyond politics, Guattari also emphasizes the dissociation of symbolic and social threat posed to the self within cinema and underlines that the unconscious manifests itself differently in the cinematic setting. Due to the absence of witnesses – that is: due to the reduction of spectacularity as well as social accountability and surveillance – and the interruption of the direct link between interpellating instance and interpellated subject/abject, the signifier (and with it the dispositive it condenses and conveys) partly loses its dictatorial power. In cinema, in other words, faciality is disturbed. As Guattari claims, the mode of expression (the film in its materiality) becomes excessive to the content of expression because the mechanics of surveillance and regulation of discourse are reduced in the cinema. Film, then, can potentially subvert subjection/abjection in two ways: because the abject is less contained by taboos and thus more mobile, more apt to identify with or be identified with, and because the subject is less afraid of opening up to the abject, less afraid of contamination. In cinema, the Black man might stare at the White woman without fear of being lynched and castrated, just as the White man might enjoy seeing a Black man’s quest for justice without being afraid of having to pay the price. Because of this, desubjection and de-individualization are rendered more facile in cinema (Guattari, “Divan” 1975:99 f.). Implicitly writing against Metz’ argument that the identification with the camera constitutes a unitary “transcendental subject” (Metz 36), Guattari underlines

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<sup>135</sup> “In the cinema, one ceases to have speech; it speaks in your stead [...] a machine treats you like a machine, and the essential thing is not what it tells you, but this sort of vertigo of abolition that is given to you by the fact to be machined/done in this way. Because people are dissolved in this way and things happen without witness, one feels no shame to abandon oneself in this way.” (S.W.)

the need to think cinema in “multitudes de modes de subjectivation et de sémiotisation”<sup>136</sup> (“Divan” 100.).

This enhanced availability (and commodification) of the abject, however, is just a potential, not a necessary effect of cinematic technology, as Judith Butler has shown in her comment on the “racially saturated field of visibility” that she analyses in relation to the Rodney King video and trial (“Endangered” 15). Thus, contrary to Ian Buchanan’s proposal to attempt to establish a schizo-analysis of cinema asking “such questions as *why* we desire to watch particular films and willingly pay money to do so” (4; emphasis added), a schizo-analysis must ask *how* we desire in cinema and what role the technology in and by itself plays in this *how*. “How”, to put this in Butler’s paradigmatic question, could the Rodney King video “be used as evidence that the body being beaten was *itself* the source of danger, the threat of violence ... ?” (“Endangered” 15; italics in the original). How does the “common sense” of “racialization” (Omi & Winant 62+64) pervade the field of vision, how does it “pervade white perception” (Butler, “Endangered” 16) and how is this related to technology? How does cinema’s potential to undermine or reinforce Black social death come to play? How is race a “medium ... something we see through, like a frame, a window, a screen, or a lens, rather than something we look at” (Mitchell xii)? And how is it, as “a repertoire of cognitive and conceptual filters through which forms of human otherness are mediated” (*idem.*), affected by technological change?

Proceeding to understand this ‘how’ from Félix Guattari’s and Judith Butler’s texts, the concept of suture confirms itself as another form of ideological interpellation. The trial scene analyzed by Butler differs significantly not only in outcome, but also in setting from the cinematic context analyzed by Guattari. The courtroom in which the Rodney King video was shown was literally filled with witnesses, with attorneys wielding the power of positive law and judges supervising and regulating the potentially transgressive (viz. undermining central tenets of A[WS]) force of the video. Watching here was nothing else than the reiteration of stereotype-as-suture. Built on the relation between desire and the signifier, suture is thus not independent from non-technological parameters, not indifferent to the difference between body and flesh. In the case of

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<sup>136</sup> “multitudes of modes of subjection and semiotisation” (S.W.)

cinematic suture, it must be understood as the technology-specific form of totalitarian subjection and abjection. As Slavoj Žižek points out:

“The ultimate gap that gives rise to suture is ontological, a crack that cuts through reality itself: the ‘whole’ of reality cannot be perceived/accepted as reality, so the price we have to pay for ‘normally’ situating ourselves within reality is that something should be foreclosed from it: this void of primordial repression has to be filled in – ‘sutured’ – by the spectral fantasy.” (Žizek, *Tears* 71)

The ‘normal’ here is foucaultian. Foreclosure corresponds to the politico-ontological process of Black abjection, the ontological crack between Whiteness and Blackness, while spectral fantasy relates to the axiomatic formation of race; it is the erasure of constitutive Blackness on which Whiteness is built. But contrary to face-to-face social interaction, in which the threatening dispositive completely represses the abject in order to contain the self in a unitary subject, cinematic suture has only slight threatening power and must rely on external actors to force the spectator into a specific subject-position. Although it does not do so by default, it may allow for a multitudinous self sliding between subject-positions and abject-situations. This is a possibility boosted by a cinematic setting, but it is created through the technology that makes up the cinematic apparatus. Just as peer-groups or film reviews might serve as invisible but present attorneys within cinema, cinema’s subversive potential is also present outside the cinema as location, for example during home video sessions, or surfing the web.

What, looking at the cinematic apparatus, must be singled out as the impact of technological change on the constitution of Blackness and Black abjection? How might the relationship between the ontological gap and the ersatz-other’s potential to work on the white self-overrepresented subject through racial lag be exploited and the multitudinous cinematic subject be produced? How might the cinematic (deconstructive) work on the subject/abject be fed back into the structures of abjection present outside the cinematic setting?

Considering the critique just offered, as well as that of authors such as Kaja Silverman and Jacqueline Rose, it must be clear that, against the Lacanian imperative longing to be subjected by a dispositive, the simple presence of the White ‘benign’ ersatz-other, say in



a film like D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, will not suffice to have just any spectator identify with it. Neither is this wanted from the perspective of A[WS], as the identification of the abject with the subject of the spectacle would undermine that spectacle's performance of power, nor is this possible within the matrix of social death that structures its discourse and excludes flesh from suture. This also implies that there is no advancement in understanding how the spectator's desire functions and is formed in cinema in simply introducing an alternative ersatz-other so as to re-enable suture for an assumed Black spectator, as for example the emphatic reception of Melvin van Peebles' *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* by Huey Newton and the Black Panthers (Wiggins 40.ff.) or Frank Wilderson's reading of *Bush Mama* – considered below – might suggest. Rather, one must think of the cinema of displeasure when reading how Manthia Diawara points out, in his consideration of Black spectatorship, that cinema always also creates "resisting spectatorship" (893). The critique of classic cinema as just another form of coloniality, just another form of opium for the (assumedly homeostatic) masses ignores all those to whom classical cinema refuses a point of entry into the narrative, all those whose social death of the screen translates into symbolic death on the screen. This critique ignores the blackfaciality of most of cinema and the resistance, the "oppositional gaze" (hooks, *Looks* 115.ff.), as well as the haunting it produces. It ignores cinema's potential to not only harbor but also spawn dissent; it ignores the decolonial potential of cinema<sup>137</sup>. It ignores, that "it cannot be assumed that black (male or female) spectators share in the 'pleasures' which such films [as "The birth of a nation" or "Beverly Hills Cop"] are able to offer to white audiences" (Diawara 896) and how this might help in thinking the impact of changing technology on the constitution of Blackness. It is not sufficient, then, to simply criticize suture for assuming passive selves under a totalitarian imperative to subject themselves as well as for its quietist reproduction of abjection, but any critique must revolve around the question of desire and its political constitution as well as enforcement. This becomes obvious when considering such alternative readings of suture as that of George Butte, Tina Chanter and Frank Wilderson.

Like other critiques of suture before him (Bordwell; Carroll), Butte attacks the

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<sup>137</sup> The notion of a „decolonial cinema“ was coined by Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas in their 1969 manifesto "Towards a Third Cinema". For an assessment of the movement that adopted that name and its theories, see Jim Pines and Paul Willemsen's *Questions of Third Cinema* and Anthony R. Guneratne and Wimal Dissanayake's *Rethinking Third Cinema*.

Lacanianism underlying most theories of suture by opposing the former's emphasis on lack to a presumed plenitude of consciousness and perception. Ignoring the politico-economic nature of the constitution of consciousness – especially, as Christian Metz's theory of cinematic desire emphasizes, in a finance hungry art form such as cinema – Butte instead proposes an understanding of suture as "embodied intersubjectivity" in a form of an inter-weaving<sup>138</sup> of onto-genetic consciousnesses not fully but nevertheless immediately present to each other (Butte 292.f.): cinema as a meeting and entwining of souls. The flaw in this, as well as the cause for its incompatibility with the concept of Black abject invisibility, is of course its structuring assumption of a race-independent socio-symbolic fullness. The problematics of this become clear in Butte's attempt to apply his theory to Michael Roemer's film *Nothing but a Man*, which is built on an almost exclusively African-American cast starring Ivan Dixon (who would later direct *The Spook who sat by the Door*) and Abbey Lincoln as the main characters Duff and Josie.

Set in the United States South in the early sixties, *Nothing but a Man* narrates the troubles of a young African-American couple in a White supremacist civil society. Butte chooses two sequences revolving around the couple with the aim to demonstrate that suture "illuminates *presence*, not absence" (294; emphasis in the original). Although this is proposed to target the notion of an absence that forces the self to suture in order to avoid castration, it obviously also amounts to denigrating the erasure performing Black symbolic death. In other words: in emphasizing presence, Butte's main point is to argue that symbolic presence is always-already there and need not be gained. Given his – by no accounts representative – example of 1960's filmmaking, this amounts to arguing that there is no abjection of Blackness in cinema, because there are Black characters on the screen. It amounts to claiming that what one sees on the screen is indeed Blackness as such, independent of any racializing formations. Thus, it means ignoring the Black loss of body, the cinematic commodification of Black flesh and suturing through stereotype, as well as its structuring role for Whiteness. By reading suture this way, Butte not only evades the question of dispositive erasure in cinema (carefully choosing an example in

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<sup>138</sup> Butte uses the term „inter-leaving“ (294) in order to attach his theory closer to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theory of chiasm. Quoting Merleau-Ponty, Butte speaks of a relationship between consciousness and embodiments in which one consciousness or embodiment fills the space left by another consciousness or embodiment. Inter-leaving is a pun on inter-weaving Butte uses to emphasize the non-passive stance of the self in suture. I will not adopt his terminology here, because I consider it a mannerism of no conceptual necessity, but marked distractive potential in the context of the present critique of his theorizing.

which the filmmaker has attempted to avoid erasure), but changes the basic architecture of the concept of suture. Eliminating the participation of the spectator in the filmic narrative that suture is built to explain, Butte applies his notion of inter-weaving subjectivities solely to the two intra-diegetic characters (296). As he points out, they “look and return looks and return looks yet again” (297), they are present to, they socially exist for each other. Besides the characters, the only other ‘consciousness’ Butte admits is that of the narrator/camera in which the spectator is present as implied (“the camera’s implied viewers”), but in no way constitutive of the spectacle (298f.). In Butte’s reading, focused on the surface of the screen, cinema becomes a double of reality in the service of helping to think this reality and the spectator’s relationship is one of looking in the most basic sense: sitting in a chair and looking at the screen in a constellation in which spectator and movie are two distinct and closed entities with the movie speaking to the spectator. Although Butte uses this structure to point out that suture allows the spectator to partake in the diegetic intersubjectivity while avoiding its emotional risks (300), his approach is fundamentally opposed to the schizo-analytic approach, which would emphasize how reality and cinema, spectator and movie constitute each other. The consequence of this is that, in Butte’s argument, the Black symbolic fullness he posits does not spill from the screen into the social. His analysis that the characters exist for each other in no way implies that they also exist for the spectator as anything else than flesh. The difference between his approach and schizo-analysis is precisely that between witness and spectator mentioned by Saidiya Hartman (4) in that Butte proposes a viewing audience as witness, empathic but in no way implicated, while schizo-analysis knows only spectators, a gaze always already imbued with (dis)pleasure and desire. Schizo-analyzing suture in *Nothing but a Man* would begin by pointing out Butte’s attempt to avoid taking responsibility for his de-politicizing stance by writing that “because suture is embedded in the social life represented in a narrative, it will carry political implications” (304). Not only can politics, according to Butte, be observed on screen as in a petri-dish, but this is due to the story-line rather than the form and also implies that the spectator should feel involved in the narrative *qua* a universal form of social commons shared by the spectator and the characters on screen. Not only does this ignore the absence of such commons, as well as the potential of non-narrative political cinema, but it also does away with a long tradition of formalist analysis. How a story is told does not matter to Butte. More importantly, in emphasizing presence and negating the role of a gap in suture and positing a split between the audience and the film as

given, he negates the possibility of a productive lag that is at the core of schizo-analysis.

Against this, schizo-analysis will emphasize that the political lies exactly in the formalist dimension of narration. The potential for excessive expressivity Guattari saw in cinema can be understood as analog to the possibility for “defamiliarization” that Kristin Thompson, borrowing from Russian Formalism, saw in the neo-formalist analysis of cinema (10f.). Schizo-analysis shares with neo-formalism its critique of “the presuppositions of the Saussurean-Lacanian-Althusserian paradigm” of film analysis, but it does not agree with its dispositivistic assumption that “[s]ince historical contexts make the responses [of the viewer to the film] inter-subjective, we may analyze films without resorting to subjectivity”(K. Thompson 29). Against this, schizo-analysis assumes that who the spectator ‘is’, e.g. whether she is abjected or subjected, must be clearly delineated with every analysis, rather than positing a passe-par-tout stereotype non-racial spectator. To be sure, defamiliarization, defined as the potential to let a spectator experience things in a new way because of encountering them in a new and different (unfamiliar) placement or pattern, is but one form of excessive expressivity, but it is an essential and maybe the central one. The emphasis here is double. First, the concept of defamiliarization insists that: “Meaning is not the end result of a art-work, but one of its formal components” (K. Thompson 12). Second, defamiliarization is based on the notion of transformation in the process of re-iteration (as in repetition everything may soon become familiar and change meaning).

Looking at *Nothing but a Man*, several layers then have to be dissected. The film might be seen as defamiliarizing in that it focuses on a narrative within the African-American community and with Black lead characters, which was still rare at the time of its release. At the same time, it does not offer a tale of redemption or perseverance, but merely sees itself as a mirror of a bleak reality in a style indebted to Italian neo-realism. Its plot, conceived according to its director, along a desire to portray “an intimate story of marriage set against the backdrop of the economic effects of racism” while trying to avoid that “the film should be overtly political” (Roemer in Vasilopoulos), neither was nor attempted to portray anything uncommon. This, however, must be put in perspective to be correctly understood; something which Butte fails to do. Although a spectator of *Nothing but a Man* contemporary to the writing of the present text may not feel defamiliarized by its portrayal of Black people, at the time of the movie’s release,

and writing from the point of view of A[WS], what *Nothing but a man* did was a t/racing of cinema. Against the at the time still pervasive representation of Black as “toms, coons, mulattoes, mammies and bucks” (Bogle) – that is: against the reiteration of the constituted Blackness of the time – the film and its focus on showing the impact of socio-economics on a young couple’s life emphasized the level of constitutive Blackness. *Nothing but a Man* was defamiliarizing in that it chose to speak of the constitutive in the realm of the constituted. Defamiliarizing as well was its attempt to portray Black people as human beings, to render flesh as bodies and give a socially legible form to Black abjection. In doing so, it created a moment of constitutional Blackness because it asked (but in no way forced) all of its spectators to, through suture, constitute themselves as that Black couple and experience the racist discrimination at the root of that couple’s trials and tribulations. For a White audience, such a demand amounted to requiring a multiple identification usually left to Black audiences. Whites were supposed to first empathize and then feel the sting of an injustice perpetrated by a White civil society they could at best partly dissociate themselves from. This demand was totally independent of any intra-diegetic intersubjectivity Butte might wish to prove.

Following the schizo-analytic lead and with Roemer’s stated goal not to make a political movie, one would have to point out how cinema here at the same time becomes political and non-political almost despite itself. The form (cutting, editing, etc.) of the film follows standard procedures and only becomes unusual in the application to its subject. The defamiliar here is exactly that suture would require, and that the distancing intermediation of the ersatz-other should permit, a potentially White audience to identify through the usual formal language with a Black perspective. Defamiliarizing is that the White subject should occupy an abjected position and thereby transgress and break that abjection. It is in this sense, from the perspective of A[WS], that *Nothing but a Man* might be described as a cinema of displeasure. This shows that no analysis of cinema whatsoever can proceed without clearly articulating the assumed spectator in relation to which the analysis proceeds (rather than treating the spectator merely as an invisible presence only implied in the editing). Generally failing at the box office in the United States, *Nothing but a Man* did well among the socially progressive and Black public. It found distribution in Black churches and schools, was endorsed by the Nation of Islam newspaper *Muhammad speaks* and won prizes at the Venice and New York film festivals (Vasilopoulos). It’s reception and potential to (dis)please were and are directly related to its spectatorship. On the other hand, the movie’s rendering of Black humanity

within the Black community largely, if not completely, avoids the full displeasure of Black social death within White civil society that films such as *Sweet Sweetback* or *Uptight* (a.k.a *Black Power*) aim to mobilize.

It is important to be fully aware of the relationship between approaching abjection and experiencing displeasure here, a relationship at the core of Julia Kristeva's already cited concept of abjection. Displeasure marks the warning track for a subject at risk to de-subjectify. As such, it also marks a self straining against its intra-dispositivistic borders (in which, it must be remembered, it is not contained, but by which it is articulated in a specific socio-symbolic setting). A cinema of displeasure is a technologically mediated situation in which the spectator is moved to acknowledge something which prior to its cinematic experience would have been not only unacceptable, but also unthinkable, illegible, unspeakable. It is in this sense, that Deleuze writes of the capacity of cinema to create a "noochoc" (*Cinéma 2*. 204), that is, the capacity of cinema to shock the spectator into new categories and forms of thought, perception and ultimately being. Although such a noochoc is not exclusive to cinema, cinema's enticement to the subject to dare approach the abject is extraordinarily conducive to producing such a shock. A cinema of displeasure, then, must be understood as an echo to the theater of cruelty, and it leads us back to the situation of the abject outside discourse and the spectacle necessary to inscribe this discourse onto the abject Black body. The cinema of displeasure is the opposite of the pleasure of the cruel spectacle analyzed in section I. in that its goal is not to 'sew' a self and body or flesh to a specific discourse, but to dissociate them from it. Nevertheless, it is based on similar mechanics.

In a text on theatre, Antonin Artaud (to whom Deleuze and Guattari refer repeatedly throughout their writings) points out the following: "Sans un élément de cruauté à la base de tout spectacle, le théâtre n'est pas possible. Dans l'état de dégénérescence où nous sommes, c'est par la peau qu'on fera entrer la métaphysique dans les esprits »<sup>139</sup> (118). Like Artaud's cruelty, displeasure is due to the forceful obtrusion of situations and sensations that are socially coded in a negative way or even as taboo. The question embedded in the notion of noochoc is, if such an obtrusion may reach the point at which it breaks the axiomatic, the point at which it is no longer just at a negatively coded

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<sup>139</sup> "Without an element of cruelty at the root of every spectacle, the theater is not possible. In our present state of degeneration, it is through the skin that one will make metaphysics enter the minds." (S.W)

distance undermining suture, but something which forces itself upon the subject in a manner that makes it crack, or leads to a sort of subject-fusion. In this case, the subject suddenly realizes that it has touched the object in an undeletable way. It has seen what it was built not to see, senses what it is not structured to make sense of. Subject-fusion marks a collapse of dispositivism with no option of return. This fusion might take the form of the psychosis the subject had been threatened with by discourse. Or it might simply be like a called bluff, a moment of demystification: I have touched the object, but I am still alive. The assumption in either case is that the object has emerged into perception, where, given that it can only do so after discourse's security architecture (viz. refoulement, etc.) has been breached, it is present, but not articulated and thus needs to be either integrated into the subject or might even end up breaking the subject apart and push to the construction of a new form that is neither subject nor object. It is within the realm of the symbolic, but not symbolized: it is within sub-symbolicity. This is the experience of a racial glitch that must be understood through the somatic not captured by the axiomatic and related to a possible attempt to signify it. This is a first possible moment for a semiosis of the object that section III. will focus on. For the moment though, attention must remain with understanding abjection in cinema as a technologically inflected form of the constitution of Blackness. Two ways of approaching abjection here impose themselves: explicitly, as Tina Chanter does in relation to Julia Kristeva's version of abjection; or implicitly, as I will argue Frank Wilderson does in his work on cinema.

Writing that:

“Identificatory regimes operate according to imaginaries that facilitate and support symbolic matrices in ways that remain inarticulate or invisible to dominant representations. By effecting a momentary disruption of such identificatory regimes, film can bring into relief alternative images, and in doing so can open up the possibility of transforming the terms in which dominant socio—symbolic representations construct identification as normative.” (1),

Tina Chanter proposes an approach to film that is close to the idea of a technologically produced lag permitting a racial glitch proposed earlier. But as will be shown now, Chanter's approach is fatally flawed by her failure to differentiate between object bodies

and abject flesh. This means that, although she explicitly develops her argument through the concept of abjection (as formulated by Julia Kristeva) and acknowledges the racialized and gendered nature of psychoanalytic theory and the impact of this on the possibilities of identification and fetishization underlying suture, her theory diverges from the one proposed here in a significant way best illustrated by the following passage in her book.

In a comment on a sequence involving the main characters of the 1992 movie *The Crying Game*, Chanter gives the following example of her understanding of the use of abjection to destabilize the subject in and through cinema:

“On discovering Dil’s [a male transvestite with whom Fergus was falling in love, assuming her to be a woman. S.W.] penis, Fergus hits out at her, and then vomits. The moment can be described as one of abjection, the impact of which encompasses not only Dil and Fergus, but potentially also the audience. Dil’s abjection occurs as the sexual identity Fergus thought he had established for himself is thrown into question, and as those in the audience who had identified with what they (and he) took to be Fergus’s heterosexual desire for Dil are, along with Fergus, abjected.” (26)

Striking in this sequence, more than the moment of gender-abjection considered by Chanter (and which, as theorized in section I., must not to be confused with the modes of racial abjection), are the mechanics of its containment, its function in relation to sustaining suture, its capture of gender-abject bodies and Chanter’s ignoring of all of this. The condensed event here is that a man who considers himself heterosexual, discovers himself desiring another man, whom he had considered to be a woman, and thus is confronted with the part of himself that needs to remain repressed in order to sustain his image of himself as a heterosexual male. This is a perfectly gender-queer moment. The abject here is not so much Dil’s gender-passing, as it is the possibility of homosexual desire that emerges from this passing and that, for a moment, must be faced by Fergus and which he then immediately re-abjects. This is first a sequence in which something that was abjected in the Butlerian sense explodes out of its invisibility and impossibility into discourse, and second, a sequence in which this desire as well as Dil’s passing is re-abjected, re-repressed. Because of this re-abjection, it is not a proper



semiosis of (whatever form of) abject, even though Fergus will slowly accept his love for Dil later in the film. Rather, it is a re-capture of a gender-abject body, whose eruption into presence (in opposition to an eruption of Black abject flesh) may force those affected by it to reposition themselves within the social axiomatic, but can ultimately be contained by that axiomatic without forcing it to change. The shock of touching the gender-abject is immediately transformed into vomit and violence, offering the spectator an intra-diegetic way to purify himself of the experience of contamination and thus avoiding a possible recourse to a disidentification of the spectator with Fergus that would serve that same goal of protecting oneself against the contact with the gender-abject. Through this offer, the distance between the subject and the abject can be maintained, as well as the identity between the cinematic and the non-cinematic gaze. Suture remains intact, the cinematic apparatus remains invisible, the constitutive remains erased under the constituted and the abject moment is contained within this re-capture. This sequence is symptomatic, as what is constituted as abject is so in reference to a constitutive discourse that is not made explicit but whose erasure is reiterated in Fergus' shock. Why, the simple question must be, does Ferguson react the way he does? The alternative possibility, lost in Chanter's analysis, would have been to simply let Fergus continue his infatuation with Dil uninterrupted, completely unaffected by the presence of her penis from the get on, rather than moving him and the hetero-identified spectator through a period of shock and awe and reconciliation. This would have been a 'true' cinema of abjection and displeasure, which, I want to argue, consists not in the projection and explosion of an always-already contained horror, but in the continued presence of an intangible uncanny forcing the spectator to acknowledge a split between the on-screen and off-screen worlds, an uncanny sub-symbolicity that forces him to experience how the social constitutive is at odds with the discourse constituted on screen, how his seeing here undermines his being, how it is different from his usual normative seeing, how his gaze here turns against itself, not allowing itself to force abjection on others, but fracturing along the abject. A cinema of abjection can by definition not be a cinema of realism, as the common-sense real is precisely constituted by the invisibility of abjection. The uncanny differs from horror precisely in that it, as well as the reaction to it, are not already coded and the subject secured within it, in that it is truly unfamiliar and defamiliarizing. The difference between the cinematic and non-cinematic gaze is emphasized here, as it is only the presence of the ersatz-other that makes the cinematic pleasure of horror and the displeasure of abjection possible, as it

allows the normative spectator-subject to touch the abject and not touch it at the same time, while also forcing it to confront it; to create a moment in which the subject is subverted, and to allow this moment to be contained within the movie, so that the subject can stop watching it, leave the cinema or switch off the TV set and be just as and what it was before its encounter with the abject.

What this proves and what Chanter cannot acknowledge from her theoretical perspective, is how the semiosis of the abject (flesh) within the field of the cinematic experience not only can, but might effectively need to be enabled through technology at the same time that it can also be instrumentalized in a more or less refrained manner by it. The differences between Tina Chanter's approach to abjection in cinema and the one elaborated here is this: even though Chanter admits for "multiple and shifting" (108) processes of identification within cinema, she does not permit for an identification in which the gaze of the spectator and the camera are separate at the same time that they are one and she can also not see why this would be necessary. This is due to her exclusive focus on the narrative structure of cinema, and her ignoring of its technological determination. Although Chanter locates the abject in the pre-oedipal (which she identifies as the realm of the semiotic (105)), she understands movies as firmly set in the symbolic and thus not only ultimately subject to the Lacanian model of subjection but also striving to sustain this realm of subjection and, thus, always fixed on bodies and blind to flesh, prohibiting sub-symbolicity. From this perspective, she describes a cinema of abjection in which the abject seems to move immediately from the semiotic to the symbolic because it is always-already contained therein. This is one of the fundamental differences between the consideration of the gender-abject and the race-abject and an example of why they cannot be put into a relation of analogy. Chanter does not acknowledge the capacity of cinema to exist on different, mutually subverting, symbolic and semiotic levels simultaneously. Thus, her theoretical framework would be unable to conceptualize a situation in which, e.g., what is visually present can at the same time remain erased or impossible to the narrative discourse of a movie, how body or flesh can bleed into discourse, such as an uncommented presence of Dil's penis might do, or, even more so, the difference between the Black actor and his White character in *Suture*<sup>140</sup>. This is a technological situation, an experience that must have an ersatz-other

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<sup>140</sup> Although Tina Chanter quotes from the book in which Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks engages with *Suture* (27+284.f.), she does not herself engage with or even mention this movie.

and a play on (dis)belief in order to be possible, in order to force itself on the making of meaning, sense and being rather than be deleted by the rules of common sense and the threat of psychosis.

The model developed here sees the capture of an explosive appearance of the abject by the dispositive as performed in *The Crying Game*, that is, a sudden appearance of the abject that is immediately contained through the offering of a legitimate intra-discursive response to this appearance, such as vomiting or violence, as the most common form of the semiosis of the body-abject. In opposition to this, the form of a haunting uncanny lingering in sub-symbolicity is the only possible form for a semiosis of the flesh-abject as a process capable of so deeply disturbing suture as to ultimately force fundamental shifts not only within the subject but also in the dispositive that produces it. Concomitant with this, the theory developed in this text so far would also insist that the body-abject co-opted into the symbolic in Chanter's theory, is not radically abject at all, given precisely the facility with which it is re-integrated into the symbolic, a re-integration that is not possible for the flesh-abject. As has been argued in section I., the Oedipal is understood as a specific model of discourse intimately associated with White civil society and capitalism, and it is in failing to acknowledge this and the limitations posed by it, that Chanter's model (just as Kristeva's model informing it) is conservative to a degree that locates it firmly within A[WS]. Accordingly, Chanter limits her exploration of the abject in cinema to the level of narrative and reduces the semiosis of the abject to a narrative trick, such as merely hiding Dil's penis from view and then making it appear, instead of asking how such a hiding and discovering are determined by a dispositive, and how this dispositive is again determined by its technological possibilities. Although she argues for a cinema in which there is a "suspension of pleasure" (127), she cannot follow through with this argument, because the impossibility of the suture of flesh that she refuses to reflect upon must necessarily be maintained in order for her argument to have traction. Chanter, to emphasize this point, does not differentiate between the cinematic and the non-cinematic, the technological and the non-technological gaze, and because of this, in all the examples of film analysis she gives, she can only locate displeasure on-screen, but not as a relationship between the subject-spectator and the movie-discourse mediated by technology. The semiosis of the abject is here reduced to a detail of and thus within the narrative, rather than the disruption of the narrative and the socio-epistemico-political intervention into the off-

screen world that it necessarily would be, if it truly touched upon the Black abject. *Suture*, as already mentioned, is just such an example ignored by Chanter, in which displeasure is produced through the fact that, although there is a discrepancy, a lag, between the body/somatic/semiotic of the lead actor and the racial/discursive/symbolic identity of the main character, this has no effect whatsoever within the movie narrative itself. Against the displeasure of *The Crying Game* (which is clearly located with Fergus and where the gender-abject, through Fergus' vomiting, is immediately given a symbolic position in which it remains marked as abject and thus ultimately re-captured), the displeasure of *Suture* is conveyed through the apparatus and established in the space between the movie and the spectator. The vomit and violence, the visceral of *The Crying Game* are of a markedly different nature than the disturbance of *Suture*, where an abject flesh is present but cannot be contained by the movie, creating a pronounced racial lag splitting the character from what would have been its body. Chanter is aware of such a possibility, but refuses it as incompatible with her theoretical frame: "In order to prevent fantasies becoming merely mesmerizing, reductive, and repetitive, one must retain the role of interpretation that the symbolic can contribute" (146). Chanter's analysis of abjection is more of a general approach to processes of symbolization, and tied to cinema only by chance, while the approach proposed here seeks to detail the specifically cinematic as well as the specifically Black in abjection.

Nevertheless, Chanter's approach to a "suspension of pleasure" provokes a necessary refinement of the concepts of the abject (gender versus race abject) and of desire to be used in an analysis of a cinema of abjection and a semiosis of the abject. Clearly, as has been argued throughout this chapter, the desire considered must not simply be that of the characters on-screen but it must be that of the subject/abject-spectator. It is the (im)possibility of Black desire that is at stake here, and the analyses so far have shown that, although queer and feminist film theory are of fundamental help in approaching this desire, the analysis of Black desire is in no way sufficiently fathomed by an analysis of feminine or homosexual desire as in *The Crying Game*, nor even of a Black homosexual desire, such as that in Isaac Julien's movie *Looking for Langston* analyzed by David Marriott (*Haunted* 106). It is in performing such an analysis that this chapter has shown how this desire defined by sexuality and gender is ultimately compatible with A[WS], while Black desire, by definition, is not. This has been extensively demonstrated in

section I. and it will now be reiterated, once more, to close this chapter by returning, once again, to the work of Frank Wilderson.

In his book *Red, White and Black*, Wilderson himself proceeds to apply his theoretical work to cinema. While doing so, he insists on the importance of Black symbolic death within cinema (*Red* 139), asking: “Can film tell the story of a sentient being whose story can be neither recognized nor incorporated into Human civil society?” (*Red* 96). Already implicit in this question is Wilderson’s attention to the difference between body and flesh, as well as the focus of his approach on “story” at the detriment of what he calls “discourse”, which he defines as “the formalism of cinematic strategies (lighting, sound, camera angle, editing, mise-en-scène)” (*Red* 156), and which will be called cinematography here. He considers cinematography as the language in which story is transmitted. Permitting for a creative tension between story and cinematography, while at the same time paying almost no attention to the relation between film and spectator, Wilderson reduces the latter to the structural position/situation of either subject or abject and defines these as determined by the political context of their time.

Accordingly, Wilderson argues that abject invisibility in cinema would simply equate with a story line in which the abject is presented as not structurally and constitutively banned. This would be a story line that would insist that it does not trade in stereotypes but in bodies, a story which would insist that Black people really do decide to live outside society, or are forced to do so by bad luck and fate, rather than being forced there on a politico-ontological level, on the level of the constituted, by A[WS]. Sustaining abject invisibility would amount to narrating gratuitous violence as contiguous violence, it would amount to telling the story of mass incarceration as due to mass criminality as opposed to telling it as due to results produced to sustain A[WS]. Contrary to such a form of storytelling (which he analyses in the example of *Antwone Fisher*) Wilderson contents that a movie like *Bush Mama* does manage to narrate the structural situation of Blackness as produced by gratuitous violence by showing the Black as flesh, which means by showing gratuitous violence: the rape of a little girl by a police officer and his killing by the girl’s mother. At the same time, he insists that the film’s ability to do so is not it’s own achievement, but the creation of the zeitgeist that produced it, a possibility generated by the political movements contemporary to the film. This is a zeitgeist so strong, that Wilderson assumes the violence to be perceived as gratuitous even though, as he himself admits, it is obviously scripted as contingent on a

specific transgression, which is the girl's rape (*Red* 143).

Not only is this a highly subjective reading of the movie and the relation of story to cinematography it performs, but it also exemplifies the problematic of Wilderson's approach for the task posited here. The goal of his film analysis is to read film against the grain of the political ontology of Blackness (the abjection of Blackness) he identifies in his theoretical work. In his reading, Black desire becomes possible in films, which offer a story in which Blackness is sutured not as stereotype (not through erasure), but as presence, as t/race. But contrary to the approach developed here, Wilderson's does not think of t/race in relation to constitutional Blackness, which implies the possibility of a revolutionary presence of Blackness within A[WS], but only in terms of total and irreconcilable opposition, "the black desire to take the country down" (*Red* 139). Arguing for constitutional Blackness, Wilderson would say, amounts to reducing a structural and ontological antagonism, "an irreconcilable struggle between entities, or positions, the resolution of which is not dialectical but entails the obliteration of one of the positions" (*Red* 6) to a mere intra-hegemonic "conflict". This argumentation requires him to reduce spectatorship to paradigmatic structural positions of Whiteness and Blackness, or, in other words, requires him to implicitly work with suture<sup>141</sup> through stereotypes himself. Such stereotyping pre-determines any analysis of suture and the impact of cinema and its technology on the spectators, as these are theorized as set and static positions, and allows Wilderson to use the concept of spectator as self-fulfilling-prophecy (the Black spectator who sees the gratuitous violence because of the Black Liberation Movement, the Black spectator who can only enjoy if offered a story that reflects Wilderson's structural analysis, the White spectator who can not enjoy ...).

One must be concise here – as this is the kind of critique Wilderson would anticipate – that what this amounts to is an ontology of desire that presumes to be political ontology, but ultimately tilts into ontological politics that guarantee the possibility of Black desire at the same time that they preclude constitutional Blackness. Consider, for instance, Wilderson's following question:

"How do we explain a White political cinema genuinely anxious about government corruption, the integrity of the press, a woman's right to choose, the

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<sup>141</sup> Although Wilderson repeatedly uses „suture“ as a verb, he elaborates on it only once, pointing out what can be paraphrased as the conflation, within suture, of the human and the sentient being through an erasure of the latter (*Red* 249).

plight of turtles and whales or the status of the public square, and a Black political cinema calling for the end of the world?" (*Red* 131)

As has been pointed out in chapter 1.4.a., the end of the world must be read as a radical disruption of established discourse and its process of subjection/abjection, and it has been noted that Fanon's proposal on how to create this moment was the use of revolutionary violence. It seems very strange, then, to see Wilderson note the possible subversion of story by cinematography (*Red* 340) but emphasize antagonism within the story and *not* choose to theorize the violent potential of *cinema itself*, the potential for noochoc, the potential of t/race to inscribe itself into the body, but instead permit a tilting of ontology in which a cinema's revolutionary potential is not only bound to specific racial prerequisites but also exhausts itself in a cinema of displeasure on the level of story, rather than the cruel displeasure of a punch against the performative integrity of body and discourse (a punch, which, of course, is not possible in ontological politics, where discourse and body are *always* one and discourse and flesh *always* two). Black desire, here, is nothing but a question of emplotment of something assumed given, rather than the performative force as which the present text has attempted to theorize it. Thus, paradoxically, Wilderson himself transforms antagonism to conflict by restricting his articulation to the realm of discourse.

Understanding Black desire in this way ultimately forces Wilderson to locate a cinema of displeasure on the level of the story, as he does when he identifies a cinema "calling for the end of the world" with movies such as *Bush Mama*. He does not theorize desire and pleasure on the level of the somatic and of sub-symbolicity, but merely as already symbolized – which ultimately means: contained – threat. By doing this, Wilderson falls short of being able to really theorize a cinema of gratuitous violence, a cinema of displeasure as a *reverse* cruel spectacle that is. This, I want to argue, is the result of two things. First, his choice to ignore the materiality of cinema, that is, its existence as technology and as an apparatus with the power to inflect race, rather than simply reproduce or represent it. This is the fundamental difference between his approach and the one proposed here. Secondly, the fact that such a focus on the materiality of cinema would fatally undermine the racial politics of his writing, as it amounts to a total indictment of his choice to not only classify movies according to the racial identity of their directors and main characters, but also of his decision to reserve a particular political agency to that specific racialized identity. Note, for example, that

Wilderson, just like Tina Chanter, cites Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks book *Desiring Whiteness*, but does not engage with *Suture* (Red 310.f.). Given his acknowledgment of a possible tension between a filmic narrative and the dispositive of White civil society, it would have been highly interesting to read his assessment of *Suture's* sub-symbolicity and its potential for forcing a semiosis of the abject, its potential for haunting the spectator and, most of all, the eruption of abject flesh it stages. Unfortunately, the White racial identity of *Suture's* directors, as well as its main character (but not main-flesh!) seem to stand in the way of such an analysis of *Suture* as radical cinema in Wildersonian terms. At the same time, it remains unclear why, *mutatis mutandis*, *Suture* would then not have been worthy of an analysis demonstrating in how far it must be considered White, or as Wilderson calls it: "Settler/Master" cinema (Red 251). It can only be assumed that this is due to the lack of the fulfillment of Black desire as defined by Wilderson within *Suture*, as well as the possibility it offers to interpret Black desire as fulfilled in its perverted form: as the desire to be White.

Frank Wilderson's approach to the absence of the abject in cinema must be described as dispositive in its own rights, if not to A[WS], then to Wilderson's own pronounced racial axiomatic. Wilderson cannot theorize the impact of technology on race, nor the political potential of cinema beyond conservatism. In his view, the constitutive and the constituted collapse into each other in cinema just as anywhere else, except for a few very rare exceptions. This, for him, is the cinematic collapse of "the story of the slave estate and the story of civil society" (Red 144), a collapse that he cannot think of as narrated in a self-subverting way, but only as violently opposed. This is Black desire in cinema: the threat of annihilation, the threat of violence. But it is this refusal of self-subversion and his structural analysis cum ontological "afropessimism" (Red 258), which prohibit him from perceiving the possibility of a semiosis of the flesh-abject or constitutional Blackness as a transformative force arising when a tension between the constituted and the constitutive is mobilized, and of which sub-symbolicity describes but one possible moment and a cinema of displeasure and cruelty but one possible form.

Although Wilderson's structural analysis is of great importance for section I. of the present book, the ontological tilt in his analysis of cinema cannot be accepted. This is not only due to the theoretical reasons elaborated above, but also necessary for the present book to assure the conditions of its own possibility, as a text written by a White author on the abjection of Blackness and claiming for itself, just as it does for *Suture*, the



capacity to stage in its discourse what is not of its own experience except for the encounters with flesh and White displeasure. These conditions ground the possibility of writing on A[WS] with one foot outside it, a necessity without which the flesh-object would have to remain invisible. This outside foot stands precisely on works of post-colonial and African-American authors, artists and encounters that have created moments of constitutional Blackness for this author. The consideration of the impact of technology on the constitution of Blackness, then, posits the present text in the realm of “black optimism”, a “metacritical optimism ... bound up with what it is to claim Blackness and the appositional, run-away, phonoptic black operations – expressive of an autopoietic organization in which flight and inhabitation modify each other – that have been thrust upon it” (Moten, “Black Op” 174). While this optimism does not deny what Wilderson described as Black desire in cinema, it lacks his insistence on physical war as the only possible path to Black emancipation in as far as it considers coalition politics and entrism a theoretically – if not necessarily practically – possible way to politico-ontological change. Focusing on the deconstructive rather than destructive aspect of this desire, the aspect that has been called constitutional Blackness, this text renders itself suspicious of “unconsciously prefer[ing] the violence of the state to the violence of the Blacks” (Wilderson, *Red* 132), given Wilderson’s ontologico-political assumption that:

“the imaginative labor of White radicalism and White political cinema is animated by the same ensemble of questions and the same structure of feeling that animates White supremacy [...] Anti-Blackness, then, as opposed to White apathy, is necessary to white political radicalism and to White political cinema because it sutures affective, emotional, and even ethical solidarity between the ideological polar extremes of Whiteness” (*Red* 131).

This chapter has analyzed cinema as technology by engaging with the concept of suture, the difference between the non-mediated and the cinematic gaze and the difference between the body-object and the flesh-object. It has posited the presence and absence of an ersatz-other in the cinematic gaze as that difference and developed the possibilities of producing constitutional race through such methods as a cinema of displeasure and cruelty, and defamiliarization, and such moments as sub-symbolicity. In doing this, it has framed the difference between Black desire and constitutional race and has located this text within the tension between afropessimism and afro-optimism. The impact of

technological change on the constitution of Blackness that has been theorized while doing this, was the capacity of cinematic technology to produce racial lag, to glitch race, to make the spectator experience t/race and thus inflect the structures of subjection and abjection. The following chapter will now continue the analysis of this capacity of technology to glitch and inflect by engaging with phonography and its potential to harness sub-symbolicity in, through and as noise.

### II.3. THE NOISE OF BLACK UNBLACKNESS

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*“It was post-human in affect if not quite in construction, deliberately using only machines and processing the voice heavily when it was used. It was cinematic, evoking, by turns, gothic scenarios of decaying urban centers and transcendent images of consciousness, riding the electronic airwaves.”*

(B. Williams 154)

The analysis of the potential role of sound technologies in politically constituted fields spontaneously suggests an analysis of how sound becomes an instrument of power. As Jacques Attali points out, such an analysis of sonico-political fields could focus on control and manipulation both in terms of sound reception, for example through bugging devices, and sound production, for example in the mass production and commodification of sound and its potential ideological implications. Sound technologies, in this case, would serve homeostasis. Their role would be to help prevent fugitivity and haunting by making dissident ‘silence’ (the reverse application of agnotology to the state) near impossible, as surveillance of sounds and other forms of communication becomes pandemic, while also censoring unwelcome sonic presences (what this chapter will theorize as ‘noise’) and imposing other, more accommodating and axiom-compatible sounds instead (‘music’, ‘information’). Sound technologies as technologies of power would not only render a haunting of the dispositive by the abject impossible by reducing the possible space of silence (or secrecy more generally), but reverse this haunting, enforcing the grip on the abject, as well as the fugitive subject by implementing in the subject and abject the constant fear of such surveillance, creating a form of disciplinarity in which power is a constant ghostly presence. Not only would

such technologies increase control of sound production (in a broad sense), but sound technologies in terms of mass production and distribution of 'legitimate' sound would also shape sound perception, enforcing the distinction between legitimate and legible music and mere 'noise'. This would be sonic coloniality in a mode described by John Mowitt as "the electronic colonization of listening" (215). But although these are certainly very real and important potential uses of sound technology, this chapter will not consider them at length. As was the case in chapter II.2., the focus will not be on the conservative potential of technology, but on its potential impact on changing the constitution of Blackness. Nevertheless, Attali's (historio-graphically and theoretically highly defective) politico-economic analysis of sound offers an important starting point. Consider his following statement:

"Il n'y a pas de pouvoir sans contrôle du bruit, sans code pour analyser, marquer, restreindre, dresser, réprimer, canaliser les sons. Ceux du langage, du corps, des outils, des objets, des rapports, avec les autres et avec soi-même. Toute musique, toute organisation des sons constituent un moyen de créer ou de consolider une communauté, le lien d'un pouvoir avec ses sujets, un attribut de ce pouvoir, quel qu'il soit."<sup>142</sup> (16)

There is a crucial lack of distinction in this statement about power's reach into the sonic; a significant erasure that occurs in the *de facto* equation of noise and sounds and noise and 'music' that Attali performs in his book misleadingly titled *Bruits*<sup>143</sup>. For it is in the impermanent and oscillating relationship between what counts as noise and what counts as 'music'<sup>144</sup> that this chapter, taking its cues from Deleuze and Guattari as well as Jacques Rancière's notion of the "partitions of the sensible" (which will be elaborated on below), locates the political dimension of sounds and sound technology. Is there, the question will be, a "sonic afro-modernity" (Weheliye, *Phonographies*) made possible by

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<sup>142</sup> „There is no power without control of noise, without codes for analyzing, marking, holding back, training, repressing, canalizing sounds. Those of language, of the body, of tools, of objects, of relations with others and with oneself. Every music, every organization of sounds constitutes a medium for creating or consolidating a community, a relation of a power with its subjects, an attribute of that power, whatever it may be." (S.W.)

<sup>143</sup> „Noise“ [SW]. The title is misleading in so far the book's subject is not so much noise as 'music'.

<sup>144</sup> For the sake of argument, this chapter will focus on 'music' as referring to common sense music genres such as jazz or blues, etc. Hence, 'music' needs to be written in quotation marks in order to distinguish it from the musciologically more precise understanding of music as defined as "organization of sound" at large (Cage 3).

or even always-already inherent to sound technologies such as phonography? Is the relationship between noise and 'music' transformed by sound technologies in a way that enables a semiosis of the (sonic) abject or at least an unsettling of the (sonic) subject? Is there, in other words, a possible role for sound technologies in transforming noise into legible and legitimate 'speech', legible and legitimate social presence? Can sound technologies affect and transform social and symbolic death? In order to analyze the impact of these technologies on the constitution of Blackness, it is crucial to develop an awareness of this relationship between 'music', noise and also silence independently of technology first. Understanding all of these as aspects of *sound*, this chapter will emphasize that sound technologies are not only about recording and recorded 'music', but about recording and producing sound more generally. This chapter will argue against the innumerable attempts to construct Black agency within White civil society through considerations of 'Black Music'. The following pages will not dive into the endless stream of publications on gospel, blues, jazz and hip hop (etc.) as politically powerful expressions of African American culture or identity. Instead, they will consider phonography and technologically produced music, such as Detroit Techno, engaging with the (im)possibility of a sonic "Black Atlantic Futurism", of which Kodwo Eshun has written that its "mayday signal ... is unrecognizability as either Black or Music" (*More brilliant*, 00[-001]<sup>145</sup>).

This chapter straddles the fields of Black Studies theory, Political Theory and Sound Studies and it is therefore necessary to prepare the argument with a consideration of what the terms 'music' and 'sound' (music as well as noise and silence) imply. The necessary first step here has to be a repudiation of the belief – ranging from orientalist to quasi-religious – in 'soul' and improvisation as not only *the* subversive elements in and of Black Music, but also the essential factors in processes of twentieth century Black liberation struggles. This belief informs most writing on music and Blackness, but the thrust of critique here will be focused on Attali and Fred Moten, who share the same simplistic conceptualization of improvisation. Never offering a concise definition of improvisation, both sketch improvisation as "subversion" (Attali 204ff.), as a technique that subverts the 'music' identified with power by inserting the individual into a field of discourse whose universalizing structure, Attali contends, is broken by that insertion.

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<sup>145</sup> Kodwo Eshun chooses a particular pagination for *More Brilliant than the Sun* that references will follow here.

This is also true for Moten, for whom improvisation creates the “sonic event” (*Break 12*) that creates breaks, cracks and fissures within discourse, therewith rendering the ‘invisible’ created by dispositive erasure present. Improvisation, for Moten, creates a “surplus” (*idem.*) of being within the symbolic, a surplus that enters discourse through “fissures or invaginations” which he considers as the core of “black performances” (*Break 14*).

### II.3.a. Improvising being Black as Black Being

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Improvisation, as Attali and Moten conceptualize it, is based on unitary subjects and an agency arising from their inner (or ‘true’) self not only in spite of, but completely independent of the process of subjection/abjection that forms them. For Moten, the objectification of the Black person consisted above all in its muting, that is, in a destruction of symbolic presence that may at first glance seem similar to social and symbolic death. But Moten considers social death as always-already undone in and through Black performance, therewith reducing it to a symbolic death that explicitly refuses to accept the politico-ontological dimension of the concept of social death (Moten, *Just friends 2*). Throughout his writings, Moten refuses to accept the lack of relationality that social death implies. For him, invisibility is a problem of representation and identity, not being. It is the force of Black performance (and specifically improvisation) to transform representation and identity by introducing what finally amounts to ‘authentic’ Blackness into discourse. ‘Music’ and improvisation, here, are the modes of entering into a community of those who are not born into a community; they are, in a sense, a becoming-human: “Where shriek turns speech turns song – remote from the impossible comfort of our origin – lies the trace of our descent” (*Break 22*).

But what is Moten really proposing in what seems like a description of a transformation of noise into music and ultimately speech? What does it mean to not only suggest that improvisation accomplishes this transformation, but that this is also more than mere identity politics? And what is this “Blackness” Moten ascribes to such performance? Although Moten’s idea of improvisation seems similar to that of haunting and fugitivity developed in section I, it is fundamentally different in that it not only assumes that haunting and fugitivity exist, but also pretends that their expression enters the one and only (as opposed to a multiple) symbolic realm easily, necessarily and with guaranteed

political repercussions. Both Attali and Moten assume not only a natural drive from *the* semiotic to *the* symbolic, but also a readability and acceptance as ‘music’ within A[WS] of the sounds improvisation produces. But why would there not only be an authentic Blackness, but one at that, which would strive to be recognized not only as Black, but as a specific form of Blackness? How would improvisation as such generate its reading as ‘music’ and not merely noise-making and thus have the potential to make such a recognition of authentic Blackness possible?

At this point it is important to point out “the ‘para-ontological’ distinction between Blackness and the people (which is to say, more generally, the things) that are called black” (Moten, “Black Op”, 1744) that Moten attributes to Nahum Chandler (“Case ...”, 215) and adopts in his more recent works. Moten’s notion of being Black, then, is not Black being (viz. an ontological mode of race), but something he theorizes as based in a Black experience, that is, in the experience of those marked as Black in a specific society. As the para-ontological distinction emphasizes, this being Black is not necessarily exclusive to Black bodies, even if Moten thinks being Black solely from a Black-body-perspective. While afropessimism insists on the ascribed identity of Blackness and attempts to think being beyond Blackness and being Black, Moten insists on the givenness of Blackness and theorizes how Blackness can be reclaimed by those that are (marked as) Black. Afropessimism, in other words, explores how to create new worlds and exit the axiomatics that create Blackness and beings that are Black, while Moten posits that there is only one world and that, therefore, Blackness cannot be refused, only reclaimed. Authentic Blackness, in this sense, marks a constellation in which both segments of the para-ontological equation coincide, that is, when Blackness is determined by those who “are called black”. As will be shown below, this leads him to explicitly adopt Judith Butler’s model of subjection, according to which the self necessarily accepts the way it is interpellated by power out of a desire for social relationality<sup>146</sup>. He then goes beyond that model, by pointing out that axiomatic Blackness is not able to contain ‘authentic’ Black subjects and is thus subverted in and through Black performance. Although those who are Black must adopt Blackness, Moten argues, this Blackness is changed in the process of that adoption.

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<sup>146</sup> Although Moten attempts to think a refusal of the self to accept that interpellation in *Just friends*, he fails to do so, as his interrogation revolves around the refusal of Black people to accept one specific form of Blackness and not Blackness in general. Thus, his position of thought revolves around a position that is always-already interpellated (as Black) and therewith beyond the pre-subjected point Moten assumes he theorizes.

Black performance, then, is Black just as black people are Black, by fact of the structural position it occupies and emanates from. What Moten fails to accept, though, is that the improvisation performed by Black people is marked as Black by that same positionality, and therefore never a sonic *event* at all. This, in fact, is the underside of Moten's refusal of Black social death and his emphasis on re-coding Blackness rather than creating a semiosis of the abject. Black musical performance (in terms of both 'Black' and 'music') has not been the unflinching eruption of the noisy abject into the dispositive A[WS], but has always-already been contained in the black hole of its origin<sup>147</sup>, viz. in a series of empty signifiers (e.g. 'race music') that are both the foundation of Moten's Black relationality and are specifically produced by the dispositive in order to contain possible subversive semiotic eruptions of that which is called Black, of that which is racialized as Black in order not only to be but to remain Black. Therefore, not only are the sounds produced through improvisation in Black Music always-already contained, but improvisation itself, as an identifiable musical praxis opposed to merely making noise, is performed by someone who already has a symbolic authority to perform music, that is, someone already positioned and subjected within a dispositive in a specific manner. This is precisely the problematic of thinking about/through 'Black Music': every eruption of the haunting in improvisation is never an event at all, because it is always already contained as 'Black' or/and 'music'. Instead of an event, a noisy eruption of an alternative language, a new world, there is a development of micro-differential (viz. intra-symbolic) movements in form of short moments of 'extravaganza' still embedded in easily identifiable Blackness and 'music' and thus embedded within the limits of 'music' at least through a quasi-montage (viz. these sounds are 'music' because they are presented in the context of 'music' as 'music') that ensures their legibility. In this case, as Sean Higgins points out, one is not dealing with noise but with "noises" which:

"are identified and then incorporated into music, and thus the noise aspect of theses 'noises' has been suppressed. A differential sonic noise would be more than, for instance, a composed noise – noise still in the service of a masterful, aesthetic whole." (52)

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<sup>147</sup> This is a 'black hole' in the sense that it marks a point in discourse that absorbs and assimilates anything that comes close to it. It is a black hole in the sense of D&G's "trou noir", which stops deterritorialization and de-subjection by colonizing its line of flight (*Mille* 167+179).

Obviously, the legibility of noise, its potential capture in the form of “noises”, expands through time as micro-differences accumulate, so that what might have been a noise-event in the time of Duke Ellington’s symphonic music, was less so when Eric Dolphy performed with his free-wheeling quintet, and is fairly familiar in Matana Roberts’ contemporary compositions. But both Attali and Moten do not see this, insisting instead on the immediate liberatory nature of improvisation as such, that is, of improvisation as the act of introducing into a dispositive something that is, according to Moten and Attali, in but not of that dispositive, as a singularity that exists in relation to, but cannot be contained in the dispositive’s universalizing claims. There is a movement, then, from constitutive to constituted Blackness in this mode of improvisation, in the tension between axiomatic and authentic Blackness. But as will be shown below, that movement is (mis)theorized by Moten as drive and thus remains contained within the confines of a specific subject model based on exactly that Black abjection that Moten refuses to admit. Here, no constitutional Blackness is possible, as the subversive singularity located in improvisation is re-universalized and re-racialized as libidinal process. Through this drive, being Black reverts to Black being. Improvisation becomes a kind of ritual linking of different realms of moral existence: the constructed (Blackness) and the true (Black experience). Not only is such a theory of improvisation politically dubious for reasons that will be elaborated on below, but ignoring the differences between the various existing forms of improvisation also transforms any considerations of improvised music into a homeostatic process in its own right. Thus, although improvisation as ritual might be a fruitful approach to understanding John Coltrane’s *Ascension*, it proves fallacious when applied to more secularly minded and differently structured forms of improvisation, such as Ornette Coleman’s *Free Jazz* or the work of Max Roach (that Moten himself refers to), whose potential event-ness are muted, rather than amplified, in this specific interpretation.

In order to think through improvisation, two points must thus be given detailed attention. Firstly, the relevance of the question of how noise becomes legitimate and legible sound. Secondly, the role of the figure of the subject and object in the process of answering this question, this interrogation being based on the locating, within a specific axiomatic, of the subject in ‘music’ and the object in noise. The present chapter does not share Moten’s optimistic belief in an onto-genetic drive allowing the object to become



subject in a form different from its dispositivistic (viz. socio-genetic) interpellation as stereotype, a drive whose presence would leave the reader asking why and how that subject ever became an object or abject in the first place. Rather, this chapter will attempt to understand how sound technologies (which play no role in Moten's theorization of Black Music) might create racial glitches (which are structural events) and produce moments of constitutional Blackness (which is created by individual acts, such as t/racing) from which a semiosis of the abject may arise by short-circuiting authenticity and improvisation (as ritual revelation of a specifically White form of autonomous subjectivity) all together. On the sonic level, a racial glitch will necessarily express itself as noise, that is, as sound not yet contained in 'music', while constitutional Blackness will bear noises but not be noise. In complete opposition to improvisation, the glitch is decidedly anti-humanist; it is not a performance by an individual, it does not explain the (re-)production of the human by way of human volition. Rather, it posits the human as a political effect, both in terms of human as self-overrepresentation of a specific group (for example White European men, or what Sylvia Wynter terms "Man1" and "Man2" (264) and what will be written as huMan1/2 here) and in terms of an alternate humanity opposed to or transcending the self-overrepresented huMan1/2. Noise, here, is how the new language Fanon calls for will be perceived from within the axiomatic A[WS] with its huMan1/2. It is the sonic form of a new 'humanity' that will not constitute Man, but something altogether different, neither White nor Black. Constitutional Blackness, on the other hand, is closer to Moten's thinking, in that it does not abolish an axiomatic, but aims to modify it. However, it does not share Moten's implicit belief that racialization will be undermined from within the ontologically human itself. Constitutional Blackness is not an unstoppable force but a place for human volition and agency created when technological change spawns spaces that are not yet completely axiomatically over-determined. It is ultimately a form of Blackness in which Blackness comes to an end, in which (as will be elaborated on below) both Whiteness and Blackness become unBlack unBlackness, but which, through remaining Black, never totally transcends the axiomatic that produced it. The question of the present chapter is how sonic technologies impact the constitution and perception of such post-human noise and noises, of not only post-Blackness but un-Blackness.

Though Moten's idea of sonic surplus may seem to offer an example of a sonic sub-symbolicity at first glance, of a sound in which something more than huMan1/2 appears,

its ostentatious identification as authentically Black prohibits thinking sonic sub-symbolicity in his terms of Black performance, as will be shown below. It is for this reason – the difference between the structural effect of the de-racializing glitch, the structurally enabled abject action in constitutional Blackness and the ontologically guaranteed subject agency in Moten’s racialized improvisation – that this chapter will move the problematization away from ‘music’ widely and easily identified by common sense as Black. The focus will instead shift to technologically produced/electronic music in general and early Detroit Techno in particular, in order to be able to ask if technology’s impact on Blackness in the sonic field “did result in a reframing, diversification and fragmentation of notions of ‘Blackness’” (Albiez 144). The focus therewith moves away from ‘music’ produced by people always-already racialized as Black (as in Moten) to sound producing (post-/ un-)Blackness.

Sound is not simply the raw material of ‘music’ or language, as Moten argues (*Break* 13). Rather, the legibility and legitimacy of sound as music or language as opposed to its being considered mere noise, is the product of a social, political, epistemological and psychological differentializing process that section I. has analyzed in relation to coloniality, colonial difference and the process wherein ‘Black’ becomes equated with ‘primitive’, ‘slave’ and ‘non-human’. Through epistemic coloniality, noise is to music what the savage is to civilization. Accordingly, sound will be analyzed in the following pages along the lines of a dispositivistic enmeshing of power and knowledge that was already touched upon in relation to Foucault as well as Deleuze and Guattari. It is assumed, then, that there is no ‘natural’ aesthetic affect, but rather a series of socio-genetic sensations such as beauty or (dis)pleasure and (de)familiarity. There are no high and low arts, rather, just as there is coloniality and a racializing common sense to which Blackness is an obvious fact, there is “common sense” (Higgins 57) of what counts as music and what counts as noise, of what is art and what isn’t. But while this common sense is easier to frame when concerned with material forms such as film, sculpture or painting, where the bone of contention can be literally pointed to and its presence – if not necessarily its quality – be acknowledged<sup>148</sup>, it seems less easy to agree on even the

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<sup>148</sup> Although such an acknowledgment is easier, it is in no way detached from the politics inherent to every acknowledgment as an act of giving social validity/ social life. Consider for instance the coloniality of art in the debate on where and if to draw a line between art and artifact, the former often being equated with the West and individual productive expressivity, and the latter with the non-west and communal (or tribal) reproductive representation.

presence of music as opposed to the presence of sound or noise. Consider for instance, the problematic of this statement:

“The main thing, in the end, is to think about what the foreclosure of music has wrought where music is understood not only as a mode of organization but more fundamentally as a phonic substance, phonic materiality irreducible to any interpretation but antithetical to any assertion of the absence of content.” (Moten, “Interpolation” 117)

Given the present understanding of ‘music’ as precisely nothing but a category of interpretation, Moten’s identification of ‘music’ with substance or materiality is a process of fetishization in which a social and socio-genetic category (‘music’) becomes located outside of society, in the physical and ontological support deemed to sustain social existence below and beyond meaning. What does Moten do, when he transforms a structure (viz. ‘music’ as structure, as a mode of organization, as a category identifying the location of a specific set of relations of sound within an axiomatic, as well as the relation of this set of relations to the other relations structured by that axiomatic) into substance? What would be different in the phonic materiality of noise or sound compared to that of music? Moten doesn’t tell, and the difficulties of his fallacious writing are increased by the evocative and sometimes self-contradictory mode he has chosen for his writing in what seems to be a failed attempt to formally reproduce such materiality, a failed attempt to mobilize both the haunting and fugitive character he ascribes Black performances.

This chapter continues where the last one ended, with an engagement with “phonoptic black operations”, in order to sound the constitution of subject and abject in ‘music’ and noise, the difference between the latter terms being the colonial difference. This is what Moten suggests when he writes of a “materiality irreducible to any interpretation but antithetical to any assertion of the absence of content”. Here, this materiality will not be (mis-)named ‘music’, but noise. This noise is defined as a perceptible presence that does not make sense or carry meaning within a specific axiomatic; its seemingly ‘pure’ materiality is due to its (only comparable and never total) lack in relationality. Though it has a symbolic presence as noise, it is not valid information, that is, it has no positive symbolic value in the axiomatic from which it is described as noise, but is defined first

and foremost through its mere presence and its disturbing qualities as well as potential for (a politics of) displeasure. Speaking in terms of abject Blackness, it would not be symbolically always-already charged and contained 'music', but noise that could be the trace of a haunting of the axiomatic by the presence of the abject. Moten steps in this direction but fails to go the distance, thinking this in terms of the already criticized "lyricism of the surplus" (*Break* 26) and "excess" (*Break* 42) that he describes 'music' as bringing into discourse.

Like the notion of sub-symbolicity developed in the preceding chapter, the sonic haunting of noise would mark the first step of a semiosis of the abject: no longer totally invisible, not yet fully legible and legitimate within the dispositive that constitutively excludes it. But, as indicated above, this approach needs to be handled with care. It is not the fate of noise to become music, it does not have to turn into a unit that is legible within discourse, but it may just as well remain noise, become 'music' or foster silence, viz. a space that is not (yet) racialized, a blank that marks an absence of constitution. Maybe one function of the mass production of 'music' is to avoid the discovery of such silence, a place neither spoken from nor to. But can there ever be no 'music'? Can there be silence outside coloniality? Must the semiosis of the abject not rely on an amplification of noise (an enforced presence of its own, a re-capture and deterritorialization, a de-racialization), rather than on the hope for a moment of pure silence, a heterotopia in which the abject would not (yet) be abject? This is one of the questions this chapter will have to deal with. But either way one must bear in mind that there also exists a sonic void different from silence in that the sonic void is the product of axiomatic erasure, while silence is a space of non-colonization, a place where neither noise nor 'music' sound.

The present chapter reads the impact of sound technologies on the constitution of Blackness in terms of a politics of noise, sound and silence/s. It will offer a consideration of this impact in terms of amplification, before it considers its relation to silence in chapter II.3.3. This chapter connects the idea of amplification to Moten's critique of the very real existence of a speaking commodity that Marx ignored (see chapter I.2.a.), a critique that prepares for a haunting of 'music' by that speaking commodity, by that content that is irreducible to interpretation, by that displeasure, by that noise. But, as argued, it needs to translate Moten's ideas from his incompatible axiomatic to the one

used here. In order to proceed in its endeavor, it must deconstruct Moten's notion of a 'music' producing drive that turns the object into subject, his never explicit (and theoretically inconsistent) location of what is known as 'soul' in Black performance.

The problem with Moten's book on music can be summarized as follows: Moten forcefully attempts to work within one specific discourse, one specific language whose limitations he constantly tries to bend, expand and subvert by an evocative and poetic use of language. From this result two difficulties. Firstly, Moten refuses afropessimism's notion of political ontology and social death and opts for a para-ontological distinction instead, the latter offering the possibility of changing the world as it is through a transformation of a relational Blackness, while the former insists that Blackness will only change when the world ends. At the crux of this choice for para-ontology is Moten's adoption, qua Judith Butler, of the Oedipal subject model (Moten, *Break 2*)<sup>149</sup>. Thus, although para-ontology permits a differentiation between Blackness and bodies being Black, the Oedipal self's desire for socio-symbolic existence prohibits a dissociation of bodies being Black from their interpellation as Black. This leads to the second difficulty. Because within a globally significant A[WS] bodies being Black can only exist as Black beings, Moten's thought revolves around the re-signification of Blackness, rather than the refusal of Blackness altogether. It is because of this impossibility to conceive of a realm beyond the axiomatic of (anti-)Blackness, that he must refuse the notion of Black social death. Unable to posit multiple different, if enmeshed, realms of existence – one of Black social death, one of life in something other than Blackness – Moten needs to bend Blackness to have it contain both life and death at once. He does this by insisting that those racialized as Black are not contained in constituted Blackness and that the axiomatically erased surplus of Black experience over Blackness as a mode of socio-symbolic existence is re-injected into White civil society through arts, and specifically improvised music.

It is from this conception of a need for a resignification of Blackness that Moten writes that "black [political S.W.] radicalism is (like) music. The broken circle demands a new

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<sup>149</sup> In his recent work, Moten has begun to move away from this position: „What if Blackness is the name that has been given to the social field and social life of an illicit desire, an alternative capacity to desire? Basically, that is precisely what I think Blackness is." (*Just Friends* 53f.). But as he has not yet elaborated on this change, nor explained its consequences for his thinking on music, I will continue my critique along the lines exposed in his earlier writings.

analytic (way of listening to music)” (Moten, *Break* 24). Instead of producing Black life, Black radicalism and music aim at having the life already present recognized as such. Moten’s project thus is ultimately about representation and identity, about the way Blackness captures bodies being Black and is re-captured by those bodies. His project, in other words, is one of participation not revolution. This is crucial: when Moten writes of a “radically exterior aurality that disrupts and resists certain formations of identity and interpretation by challenging the reducibility of phonic matter to verbal meaning or conventional music form” (*Break* 6), he locates his inquiry within a symbolic realm that may change in detail, but is not supposed to ever end. Moten, in other words, does not believe in the necessity, nor in the possibility of the end of the world, the end of Blackness and the need for a new language, and this translates – in all of his writing – into an insistence on Black social life, that is, of Black life in terms of authentic Blackness.

For Moten, “Black Music” is “*materiality*” (*Break* 205; italics in the original), that space in which the Black experience erased in constituted Blackness not only resides, but from which it haunts that Blackness and in which it grounds a different Blackness. But in spite of this conception of a non-melancholic and non-castrated Black self and despite his mentioning the role of „a priori interpretive racialization of human desire’s basis in castration“ (*Break*, 178), Moten never puts the validity of the Oedipal subject structure as such (or that structure’s political consequences) in question. Moten’s Black self, in other words, may be misplaced (or at least mis-understood) in the Oedipal model, in as far as it is assumed to be an object rather than a subject according to A[WS], but the model itself remains the interpretative frame guiding and determining Moten’s analysis. Just like Fanon, on which he grounds large parts of his thought, Moten thus accepts a model of the human as huMan1/2, therewith introducing internal contradictions into his theorization of Blackness. Thus, like Butler, Moten believes in an inner imperative for the subject to integrate the symbolic. But unlike Butler, who theorizes subjection through the subject-to-be’s melancholic compliance with the interpellation by the symbolic order, Moten implicitly (never explicitly) presents a model of improvisation that amounts to the assertion of that which is lost in the process of subjection. Black performance, in other words, produces subjects that can resist the nom-du-père and are not broken by lack. Accordingly, in the case of Black performance, Moten thinks the drive that makes the subject-to-be comply with the imperative of subjection as a “heroic but bounded eroticism” (*Break* 14). While the heroism expresses Moten’s belief in

subject agency, both the term bounded (which refers to the dispositive) and eroticism (which refers to the shared humanity of libidinal economy) qualify this agency as limited. The subject must and will act, even if it can only do so to a certain degree. This agency is the expression of the “freedom drive that animates black performances” (*Break 12*) as a “material productivity of black performance” that Moten ultimately considers an “ontological condition” (*Break 18*). While this ontological condition must as such be present in all subjects, one must assume that Moten’s insistence that the freedom drive is specific to Black performances implies the assumption that the difference between authentic existence and its axiomatic representation is more pronounced in the case of Blackness and thus the freedom drive more intense in Black subjects than in others. Unlike the constitutional Blackness it resembles, this freedom drive is thus based on a meta-physical kernel that, in spite of the para-ontological distinction, is ultimately nothing other than ‘soul’, a force common to all humans, but present in bodies being Black in a degree of intensity that makes it specific to those bodies, socio-genetic in form even if onto-genetic in origin<sup>150</sup>.

Although Moten’s partial refusal of castration should be greeted, his recourse to a quasi-orientalist model of a Black authenticity and eroticism that does not escape coloniality cannot be accepted. Instead of de-constructing the fetish or totem character of Blackness itself, Moten taps into the colonial difference ‘music’ is charged with and reproduces it:

“Blackness – the extended movement of a specific upheaval, an ongoing interruption that rearranges every line – is a strain that pressures the assumption of the equivalence of personhood and subjectivity.” (Moten, *Break 1*).

Moten’s answer to the question “How does noise become music?” is foreclosed by his naturalization of music. ‘Music’ is given as self-evident, so is the production of ‘music’ by people racialized as Black, and thus Black performance changes Blackness just like this, *qua definitione*. Moten’s theory of being Black ends up proposing a Black being identical to a hyper-intensive freedom drive that guarantees the subversion of power and its modes of knowing, being, making sense. Again, his writing does simply assume

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<sup>150</sup> One cannot help but notice the similarity to models of hyper-sexualized or hyper-violent Blackness, in which drives common to all of humanity are also theorized as hyper-intensive in bodies being Black to a degree that effectively determines the meaning of being Black.

subjectivity as given and merely focuses on subjectivity's social existence in form of identity and personhood. His is not a model of a White subjection based on Black abjection, but Blackness is one identity among others and it can change without the others having to change. The freedom drive, then, renders Black social death impossible, as the very definition of being Black insists on a socio-symbolic drive.

In opposition to this, the concepts of both the racial glitch and constitutional Blackness do not think of a Black subject working its own way into the dispositive through its sheer will and individual effort. Rather, they theorize a semiosis of the abject through structural changes. The racial glitch is an event made possible by a structural incapacity to reiterate power in a specific constellation that can occur when a dispositive is not (yet) able to contain dynamics created through (for example technological) changes to its constitution, changes that potentially annul prior moments of erasure and therewith undermine constituted Blackness. This is a structural dynamic, not an ontological force comparable to Moten's drive, to his unavowed soul and, most importantly, it is not compatible with the Oedipal subject model. While Moten thinks of music and Blackness in terms of representation, the glitch and constitutional Blackness, as will be argued below, will think of music and sound technologies in terms of production and disruption of enslavism and abjection.

Although Moten's Black Optimism resides precisely in his refusal of the concepts of Black social death and Black abjection and his belief in a performance that can end the "ongoing repression of the primal scene of subjection that one wants to guard against and linger in" (*Break* 5), this does not amount to a t/racing of Blackness, because the 'truth of race' for Moten is given and set, not constitutive and subject to change. The "archétrace" (*Break* 45) and the "trace of the breakdown between the person and the thing" (*Break* 213) that Moten wishes to see uncovered through Black performance are, for him, the traces of a shared humanity, while the t/race insists that humanity itself is a concept based on Black abjection. Unlike Moten's notion of Black performance, constitutional Blackness does not deny the reality of Black castration within A[WS], while relativizing this castration by insisting on the limited and contingent character of this axiomatic. Moten, in other words, thinks anti-Blackness in terms of conflict, rather than antagonism, and this is reflected in his focus on Black Music, rather than noise whose existence he also acknowledges (*Break* 68).



Noise, by disturbing the smooth surface of 'music', also scratches the smooth surface of constituted discourse, but the question is: to what degree does it do so? In all of Moten's examples (Duke Ellington & Billy Strayhorn, Max Roach and Abbey Lincoln, LeRoi Jones ...) noise is always already part of 'music'. It emerges within a setting that already is 'music' and remains so after the (non-)event of (non-)noise. These "sonic event[s]", as mentioned above, are framed as 'music' and not truly events, they are "noises" not noise. Strayhorn's compositions or Lincoln's screams in "Triptych: Prayer/Protest/Dance" or Jones' "Black Dada Nihilismus" poetry may point to a constitutive Blackness repressed under constituted Blackness, but they are also already coded as 'music', which means that their potential for defamiliarization is always-already contained within the dispositive. They are thus not moments of constitutional Blackness that destabilize the listening subject and create a semiosis of the abject. The conditions of their possibility of production and reception have been pre-determined within the axiomatic and they function (at best) in the micro-differential mode of resistance proposed by Butler. This is obvious in Moten's repeated description/containment of Black performances as 'Black' (viz. in a term reproducing a racializing axiomatic) in the first place. While the present text would understand this Blackness as a product of a specific axiomatic, Moten uses it in a manner that Ronald Judy would describe as "nigga authenticity". Through Judy, I would put Moten's proposition that performance transforms the commodified object into a subject into question by asking: "Can a commodified identity be authentic?" (214), that is: can that which has been commodified and been put to social death in order to found a society be anything other than commodified and socially dead in the modes of knowing and making sense of that society? Is not commodification the mark of authenticity of Blackness in the political ontology of that society? I would agree with Judy's analysis that: "Authenticity is hype, a hypercommodified affect." (229); it does not exist except within a specific axiomatic whose closure it signals by reproducing its names, concepts and logic. It is nothing other than the insistence on the truthfulness of the stereotype and its apperception, and by implicitly referring to notions of authenticity Moten binds himself to the stereotypes and locks himself within the axiomatic that produces Blackness, that is, within A[WS]. Put another way: the event of the racial glitch would not be identifiable as 'Black', but would have to happen as something that cannot be grasped in these dispositive categories in order to be a racial glitch at all. As bell hooks writes about "postmodern Blackness": "[c]ontemporary African-American

resistance struggle must be rooted in a process of decolonization that continually opposes re-inscribing notions of ‘authentic’ Black identity” (*Yearning*, 28).

The present chapter attempts to think towards such postmodern or post-soul<sup>151</sup> Blackness and to theorize such a decolonization and production of constitutional Blackness through a consideration of the event of noise as music and speech, rather than its presence as or within ‘music’. The focus of analysis here is not on learning or transforming an existing axiomatic, but, as mentioned, on the new language Fanon wrote of. Transposed to the present enquiry, one question would thus be, if sound technologies as such do not only replicate such a containment of noise, but even enhance the control over sound and its modes of subjection by reducing the possibility of the event of noise to zero because, as Jacques Attali argues (163), the lag between performance/recording and reception introduced by phonography permits more censorship of sound? Does the time lag between sounding and listening that is produced by phonography permit the erasure of potential moments of racial lag? Certainly so, but in this it is no different from the cinematographic apparatus. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, although the present project focuses on the potential of technology to produce racial glitches and to advance constitutional Blackness and the semiosis of the abject, this does in no way imply that technology as such is necessarily empowering. It will suffice, then, to finish the consideration of Attali’s argument by reiterating that technology is not an independent actor with definite effects. It is an additional vector, whose impact is considered in the potential to alter the constitution of anti-Blackness with a focus on potential openings towards a semiosis of the abject and the creation of post- or even unBlackness.

### II.3.b. Noisy Subjects

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Chapter II.2. has located a potential sub-symbolicity in the cinematic apparatus that can amount to a technologically created moment of a semiosis of the abject. This sub-symbolicity was defined as a clearly delineated presence impossible to integrate into the dominant symbolic register, yet present as haunting. The notion of noise bears resemblance to this concept of sub-symbolicity – clearly in, yet not of a specific realm;

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<sup>151</sup> The notion of ‘post-soul’ will be considered in more detail below. It will be understood as identical to hook’s proposition of postmodern Blackness.

easy to mobilize for a politics of displeasure – and information theory has offered a definition of noise as a signal or bit of information illegible and thus excessive and disturbing within one system or axiomatic, yet possibly rich in meaning within another system or axiomatic (Attali 49). This approach delineates noise as a problem of context or axiomatic compatibility; it avoids more classical aesthetic categories of beauty and truth that tend to organize thinking about noise and music around claims of universal/trans-axiomatic legibility. This difference between information and aesthetics is the difference between the approach this chapter has taken to sound and phonography, and the approach chosen by Moten and Attali in their writing. Especially in Moten’s writing, improvisation is nothing else than the aesthetic event created by the emergence of truth through authenticity into a system of mis(re)presentation. It is because of its origin in the ontological (that underpins Moten’s writing in spite of his reference to the para-ontological distinction) that it can be theorized in terms of drives and desire. As has been pointed out though, this system of drives and desires maintains Black abjection in that it gives a truth-value and permanence to the subject model rooted in A[WS]. The concept of noise referred to here is the complete opposite of such an understanding. As Sean Higgins writes:

“When noise successfully drives an act of thought it is the intrusion of the outside into a system, forcing that system to break down and rebuild in an attempt to maintain stasis. This interference is a motor of creation – the transmission of noise stimulates the system to develop, to *become* different in spite of attempts to stay the same [...] Noise is an essentially evasive limit concept ... ”<sup>152</sup> (54; italics in the original)

What is this noise? How does it come to be? What is the role of technological change in shaping the answers to these questions, and how does noise relate to the constitution of Blackness? Both Higgins (65.f.) and Alexander Weheliye (as will be shown below) argue that phonography increases the possibility of noise to appear and to proliferate. These are two important points. First, noise can appear on its own; it is often produced as a side effect in phonography, that is, as an effect of technology as such, independent of

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<sup>152</sup> Although Sean Higgins offers an interesting projection of noise into Deleuze’s writing, he sometimes describes noise as “the purely sensory”(55), a concept inconsistent with my reading of Deleuze’s work with Guattari, in which no pure perception and thus nothing “purely sensory” can exist.

human volition. This is noise as glitch. Second, noise may, nevertheless, be proliferated, thus shifting the role of phonography from re-production/ representation of 'music' to the production of sound. This is the noise of constitutional Blackness.

The shift from representation to production parallels Deleuze and Guattari's critique of the Oedipal subject model, and the argument for noise made here reiterates this in its critique of 'music' as representation (as in Moten and Attali) and its proposition to think of noise as breaking up dispositivistic subject/object constructions. What prevents the sub-symbolicity of noise to be as politically powerful as that produced through cinematic technologies, is its comparably negligible potential to splice open the symbolic on different levels simultaneously and thus force itself onto the subject in the form of cognitive dissonance between levels. Noise cannot present a body and a discourse at odds in the same manner a film like *Suture* can. But does this reduced potential for dissonances imply that noise may easily be discarded and ignored and thus has only a marginal potential to create a semiosis of the object? Or is it possible to "(mis)us[e] technology to make noise unavoidable to the listener ... " (Higgins 55)? In order to develop an understanding of the potential of noise, it is necessary to begin by delineating a sonic subject model different from that of Moten and Attali.

Significantly, referring to Deleuze and Guattari's work in the *Capitalisme et Schizophrénie* books hits a dead end at this point. On the one hand, the analysis of the role of phonography in the constitution of Blackness relies on the theory of subjection and abjection developed mostly in section I. and heavily influenced by D&G. On the other hand, D&G themselves think of music only in terms of 'music' and their theorizing of rhythm and melody is orientalist, at best. Also, in spite of recognizing (in one footnote and one sub clause) that electronic music (viz. music relying on machine technologies for its production) does possess a radical potential that can undo faciality and its totalizing forces by proposing ensembles defined by the multitude of its individual and non over-determined constituent parts (*Mille* 371+379), D&G's elaborations on music tend to focus on classical music exclusively and do consider noise only *en passant* to deny it all subversive potential (*Mille* 424). Significantly, though, these elaborations

include Edgar Varèse, a border case between classic and electronic music<sup>153</sup>. D&G point out the following about Varèse's music:

“Exemplaire serait la démarche de Varèse, à l'aube de cet âge [de la Machine]: une machine musicale de consistance, une *machine à sons* (non pas à reproduire les sons), qui molécularise et atomise, ionise la matière sonore [...] Assemblant les modules, les éléments de source et de traitement, les oscillateurs, générateurs et transformateurs, aménageant les micro-intervalles, il rend audible le processus sonore lui-même, la production de ce processus, et nous met en relation avec d'autres éléments encore qui dépassent la matière sonore.” (*Mille* 423; italics in the original)<sup>154</sup>

The key point is the process of sound production as opposed to sound re-production, not sonic materiality as opposed to composition (as Moten would have it). Focusing on production instead of reproduction and representation, there is no authenticity here, only originality. But this originality is still contextualized in terms of an implicitly pre-supposed knowledge of what exactly would be legible and legitimate as 'music', while the present chapter proposes that this pre-knowledge (or common sense) is exactly that mark of power that one needs to think beyond. Any understanding of 'music' is exactly what must be debilitated in the listeners encounter with noise (which is noise not in itself but in the context of a specific listening only), just as subjectivity must be debilitated in the individual's encounter with the abject. One then needs to make some noise here, to make the shift from material to process productive, in order to advance in the analysis from the consideration of Black Music to the consideration of the impact of music technology on the constitution of sound and Blackness.

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<sup>153</sup> For a reading of popular electronic music through Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts see Drew Hemment. Although Hemment considers the role of technological change (and the importance of the phonograph specifically) for a Deleuzo-Guattarian understanding of music, he focuses on its impact on sound as such, not its socio-political or cultural implications. Thus, he analyzes how these technologies have enabled a move of focus from musical construction to musical materiality or “surface” in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, for example through the newly created possibility to manipulate recorded sound in the process of its reproduction and therewith transform reproduction into production, copy into original.

<sup>154</sup> „Varèse's method would be exemplary, at the dawn of that [Machine] [A]ge: a musical consistency machine, a *sound machine* [...] Assembling modules, source elements and elements of treatment, oscillators, generators and transformers, setting up micro-intervals, he makes audible the sonic process itself, the production of the process, and puts us in relation with even more other elements that go beyond sonic matter.” (S.W.)

As mentioned, Alexander Weheliye locates in phonography a potential to impact subject constitution and the constitution of Blackness. He argues that sound technologies permit thinking a “sonic afro-modernity” that is not a “countermodernity” that would run parallel and in opposition to Western modernity, but would consist in “technocultural practices that are indicative of and shape modernity as such” (*Phonographies* 207). Besides phonography in general, Weheliye mentions specific sound technologies such as the Walkman as an example of such technocultural practices. Phonography, he argues, relates to noise in ways that impact the constitution of Blackness. It undermines the formation of race by delinking race from bodies and therewith delinking ‘music’ from what this chapter called the black holes (viz. its containment within the categories of ‘Black’ and ‘music’) of its origin, while at the same time permitting subversive practices of racial-(counter)formation.

Most of Weheliye’s argument focuses on the phonograph and its potential to bring noise into discourse. Emphasizing that the phonograph is not only reproduction, but also production of sounds, he notes, firstly, that in the process of reproduction, sound can be transformed, for example by mixing or scratching or through other sonic distortions made possible by technology (*Phonographies* 73ff.). Secondly, he notes how “the phonograph’s perception of sound differs manifestly from the human ear” (*Phonographies* 35). This difference is not due to the perceptual faculties as such, but to the fact that categories such as sound, noise, music and silence mark social differentiations within the field of sound in general. As such, they impact a human listening socially formed to ignore certain sounds, but are, Weheliye argues, *per se* not factors in technological listening, where every sound is recorded. While this argument marks the fundamental difference between recorded and written music (the latter, obviously, does not record noise), it ignores how human listening and technological listening shape each other. It romanticizes technology at the cost of ignoring pre- and post-production processes, as well as the possibility to program technology to ignore specific sorts of sounds or the adaption of listening to its technological conditioning (so that, for example, the noises of a used cassette are simply ignored). Nevertheless, Weheliye argues that the phonograph promotes the propagation of sounds or noise(s) that were either recorded inadvertently or unwillingly, or that may be produced through technical defects in the reproduction apparatus. Thus, Weheliye argues that phonography frees sounds from the authority of the musician and the black hole of

'music', because the 'music' that is recorded can become something other than that in the process of its reproduction and technologically mediated reception. By voluntary or accidental manipulation of the source material, the reproduction is not simply a copy but produces a sonic surplus over the "original".

The problem with this approach is, firstly, that it takes the notion of noise all too literally as noises in the sense of accidental rather than 'illegitimate' sound, confusing the distinction between a purely technical effect and a consciously repressed sonic presence (although, of course, the line of separation between these categories and their interaction is not always clear cut). The second problem is that, because of this, its theorization of the social potential of noise unknowingly locates this potential not so much in the emerging sounds enabled by new sonic technologies as in the socio-symbolic authority of the technological apparatus as such, therewith replacing one black hole containing noise's political potential (the authority of the musician) with another. Thus, Weheliye's argument assumes that the noise (re)produced by the phonograph is not immediately dismissed as such by the listener, seems to hark back to a supposed suspension of disbelief with which the listener faces the phonograph. The implicit assumption here is that anything that is (re)produced by technology partakes in a specific mode of socio-symbolic existence through that fact of technological reproduction. As John Mowitt suggests, what Walter Benjamin theorized as the aura of a thing or performance is reconstituted in the age of electronic (as opposed to mechanical) reproducibility<sup>155</sup> (Mowitt 218), where a difference between original and copy is in many cases no longer pertinent (there is no difference between an 'original' piece of software and its copies, between an 'original' electronic sound, and its reproduction). Like Weheliye, Mowitt insists on the productive qualities of sound technologies, which take over the "aura" that Walter Benjamin describes as the "Autorität der Sache"<sup>156</sup> (13) and assert themselves through that authority. There is, then, a double and closely entwined authority that complicates Weheliye's argument: first, the authority of technological originality, and secondly, the authority of an apparatus equated with civilization and thus Whiteness. The paradoxical effect of that double authority when applied to Black Music – assuming that there is no other racial

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<sup>155</sup> This play on the title of Walter Benjamin's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" is only possible because of the mistranslation of the original title that speaks of "technical/technological" reproduction.

<sup>156</sup> „Authority of the thing“ (S.W.)

inscription, for example through the sleeve design or the possible categorization as ‘race music’ or under any other genre pre-identified with Blackness in record stores or on radio programming, etc.<sup>157</sup>– would be a trans-coding of the social death of the Black performer into the socio-symbolic authority of a recording that is coded as White because of being technology-based. In other words, Weheliye can only theorize sound techniques and technologies, such as the scratch, as emancipative Black sonic practices, because he chooses to consider technology as a not-(yet)-racialized realm, ignoring how (as pointed out in chapter II.1.) within A[WS] technology is coded as White, and Blackness is equaled to techno-illiteracy. One central problematic in considering Black technological practices thus is the possible identification of such practices as Black, as opposed to their continued erasure under the parameters of constituted Blackness. As will be elaborated below, rather than theorizing technology as a not-(yet)-racialized space, one will need to consider technology in terms of its potential for de-racialization.

This is an important point, considering that Weheliye continues *Phonographies* by arguing that the phonograph transforms Blackness because it frees Black Music from the stigma it becomes attached to when produced live: the stigma of Blackness inscribed onto Black bodies and, therewith (what was in Moten) the black hole of Blackness. For Weheliye, racialization is firmly optical, and the phonographic emancipatory potential lies in technology’s capacity to (re)produce the sonic without the visual. The social constitution of the sensible is subverted by “the very ‘real’ (re)formulation of the sound/source relationship occasioned by the phonograph” (Weheliye, *Phonographies* 35). Sound technologies are theorized by Weheliye as being able to shield Black Music from social death by subtracting it from the visual field of Blackness that would mark it as a specific form of Blackness. Writing about the phonograph, Weheliye notes that “Blackness necessitated redefinition in relation to this new technology; as it could now be imagined phonographically, and had therefore to be recast in order to fit into the already existing templates for racial formation” (*Phonographies* 40). Although this argument is compelling in as far as it proposes a technologically produced glitch in the constitution of Blackness, its insistence on the persistence of Blackness in the process of

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<sup>157</sup> The comparatively negligible absence of such possibilities of visual colonization of sound is one of the main differences between the glitch produced by the telephone and the potential glitch produced by the phonograph, although it is not necessarily completely absent in telephony. Consider, for instance, how the display of the caller’s telephone number might indicate her or his location in a racially coded neighborhood.



technological (re)production of sound is problematic. One must wonder what a sonic Blackness that is de-stigmatized but still Black would be in the first place? How would the phonograph both de-link and re-link sound from and to Blackness at the same time? How would such a de-re-linking transform Blackness from object to subject? Why would Blackness “necessitate redefinition”, viz. be reformulated in order to continue fitting into the dominant discourse, instead of being mobilized to end the world altogether? Given Weheliye’s analysis of this model in Ralph Ellison’s description of Louis Armstrong’s music in his *Invisible Man*, that is through Black Music rather than a technologically enabled post- or unBlack music, it becomes clear that Weheliye’s approach to sound remains attached to the black holes his theorizing of technology would enable him to avoid. Yet, these black holes change in character.

In his portrayal of the phonograph’s potential for subversive racial-(counter)formations, Weheliye does not consider the representation of an authentic Blackness so much as the production of a ‘new’ Blackness and he emphasizes Blackness’ performative character in terms of differential effects between sound and noise, rather than the expression of ‘soul’ through ‘music’. The phonograph, Weheliye suggests, does not amplify a pre-existing notion of what Black authenticity is, but plays a central role in the constitution and distribution of what will be/come Blackness. The phonograph produces originality not authenticity, which Weheliye explicitly refuses, just as he refuses – what would have been Attali’s – criticism of the phonograph as erasing such authenticity (*Phonographies* 20). This enables him to elaborate his shift of theoretical focus from musical techniques, such as improvisation, or musical aspects, such as rhythm, to the impact of sound technologies on such techniques and on the constitution of Blackness. Thus, he argues: “Sound recording and reproduction technologies have afforded black cultural producers and consumers different means of staging time, space, and community in relation to their shifting subjectivity in the modern world” (*Phonographies* 20).

While time, space and community are impacted by the enhanced potential to distribute sound, the central importance of phonography for the constitution of Blackness resides in its potential to change both the modes of (re)producing and listening to sound and thus challenge what counts as legible and legitimate sound/speech. But although Weheliye mentions mixing and scratching as technology based techniques of sound (re)production, he neither can (nor tries to) explain how the sound produced in such a

manner is identified as Black, nor why it should be or why such sound would be legible as 'music', rather than being qualified as exactly the noise it mobilizes? There is a slight modification of his argument here, a back-pedaling into the mainstream of soul-based Black Music theory, in as far as the be/coming of Blackness enabled through sound technologies ultimately relies on a pre-constituted Blackness it de-constructs<sup>158</sup>. Thus, Weheliye pits a Black experience and a Black stereotype against each other, as Moten does, but he does not reclaim a correction of the representation of Blackness to reflect Black authenticity more accurately, but insists on the formation of a completely different Blackness originating in sonic technology, yet based on the Blackness of racialized bodies. Phonographic de-stigmatization, for him, is only partial, yet substantial. It's most important potential lies in the move away from the reproductive consumption of hyper-commodified authentic Blackness to the production of 'new' Blackness. In Weheliye's argument, sound technologies produce a shift away from the Blackness of the White gaze of modernity (and A[WS]) to the Blackness of sonic afro-modernity, away from a "white projection of Blackness" to a "black image of Blackness" (*Phonographies* 40). But how does this shift resonate and impose itself within White civil society?

In implicit opposition to Moten and Attali's notion of improvisation and in explicit opposition to Friedrich Kittler, Weheliye emphasizes that the phonograph does not produce "acoustic events as such" (Kittler, quoted in *Phonographies* 33). Sound technologies will not suddenly change the constitution of Blackness and the axiomatic that determines it by letting the symbolic explode through a sudden infusion of the real or by destabilizing the discourse of music by introducing individual expressivity. There is neither improvisation-as-subversion, nor noochoc here, even though Weheliye's emphasis on the unfiltered listening of technology as well as on the phonograph's raw "sonic materiality" (*Phonographies* 36) might suggest this. Rather, in Weheliye's argument, moments of axiomatically defined Blackness have to always-already be and remain present in sonic (re)production in order to enable a technological transformation of Blackness. It seems, then, that one could rephrase Weheliye's argument as follows: through the symbolic authority of technology, noise is slowly trans-coded into sound in a process that parallels a slow becoming subject of the abject. This is a micro-differential shift remaining within the confines of A[WS]. The reason why

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<sup>158</sup> "Surely, *Phonographies* concerns itself with black culture given that all the 'primary' artifacts discussed were authored by subjects rumored to be of African Origin ..." (*Phonographies* 206).

it can impact the constitution of Blackness specifically is that according to Weheliye, Blackness is an essentially visual concept that relies on the optic for its inscription onto the Black body. Freed from the chains of the visual, Blackness is more agile to shift from haunting presence to tangible existence in the sonic realm. Just as the cinematic setting facilitates the contact between the abject and the subject, so the sonic, according to Weheliye, reduces the threat incorporated by the abject. Just as in the cinematic setting, the question remains, however, how this potential sonic subjectivity of the abject affects the White civil subject, how it translates back into social subjectivity instead of social death? It is as if we must assume a White negrophilia implicitly suggested in Weheliye's argument, a desire for Blackness which sound would permit the White subject to satisfy, changing this subject in the process of consumption. Should one not, against these metaphysics of desire, assume a technologically increased potential for a politics of displeasure, an almost literally amplified threat posed by noise to the axiomatic that defines it as noise?

Before this question can be answered, it is necessary to consider Weheliye's only conceptual specification of this noise. In a chapter on mobile devices for sound reproduction, he opposes "noise" to "music", defining the former as sounds imposed upon people by others, while suggesting that devices such as the Walkman permit building a private space through playing "music" that will protect one from the intrusion of noise (*Phonographies* 107). Crucially, Weheliye here insists that the respective definitions of noise and "music" "both are heavily reliant on the perspective of the sonic consumer vis-à-vis the borders between 'music' and 'noise'" (*idem*). This emphasis on the consumer runs counter to his prior argument that phonography changes the relation between noise and music on the producing side. If it is mainly upon the consumer and his "common sense" to decide what counts as noise and what as music, what socio-political force do sound and phonography have? The answers to these questions are significantly tied to Weheliye's negative coding of noise. One is reminded that, as a consequence of his necessary reliance on pre-existent categories of Blackness and 'music' – which are merely modified, leaving the logic that produced them as black holes largely intact – his understanding of technology's mobilization of noise is geared towards an enlargement of the field of 'music', and not towards an enquiry into the subjection re-coded and abjected as, erased and hidden under and in noise that this chapter aims to propose. Just like Moten, whom he quotes, Weheliye equates music with

sound (*Phonographies* 69) and locates subjectivity in the field of 'music', rather than noise. For Weheliye, new subjectivities do not arise from the re-coding of noise as 'music' and fracturing of modes of knowing and being this entails, but from the transformation noise occasions in that which is and is known already. This is the becoming noise of music in a modality similar to the fetishistic becoming minor. Weheliye criticizes Stuart Hall's distinction between identity and subject, insisting that the constitution of Blackness is best summarized in the formula "I am I be", that is, as a fusion of subjectivity and identity in which one's self-experience gives rise to the articulation of one's social relationality, in which one's axiomatic Blackness is the basis for one's production of a new Blackness (*Phonographies* 65). The phonograph's impact on the constitution of Blackness, to repeat Weheliye's argument, lies precisely, firstly, in its delinking of Blackness and the visual formation of race, and, secondly, in its capacity to give Black people the means to fuse identity and subject formation through the originality of sound technology. Like Moten, Weheliye suggests that music subverts stereotypical identity formations, enhancing a "black cultural production" (*Phonographies* 71) that would recapture identification as self-identification. But unlike Moten, Weheliye's model is not grounded in the ontologico-political universalism of Lacanianism, but links itself explicitly to schizo-analysis. It insists, with Edouard Glissant, on the "opacity" and the becoming of the subject, rather than its attaining transparency and being in improvisation (*Phonographies* 68f.). As opposed to Moten, Weheliye's emphasis on Black Music as permitting a grounding of identity in subjectivity does not mean that that subjectivity can be completely known or must be re-presented in identity. The reason why Blackness cannot be equated with symbolic castration, then, is, that castration itself is merely one among many models of subjection, not, as Moten claims, because of Black people having a freedom drive that ends castration through an erotics of improvisation. For Weheliye, in other words, music is not the recovery of a surplus erased in subjection, but it is a place of producing a surplus that does not exist outside of or prior to its performance and the technologies that enable them. Both castration and authenticity are not possible, because there is no 'real' Blackness apart from its axiomatic formation and counter-formation. This means that one must ignore ontological politics and focus on the political ontology of structure and performance exclusively, while at the same time assessing the quasi-ontological character of axiomatic Blackness within this political ontology. Technology's potential for constitutional Blackness lies exactly in disrupting racializing structures and therewith

creating the possibility of performance and the space for 'new' Blackness. It is constitutional because it aims to produce a different constituted Blackness and therewith affect the constitution of Blackness, it is Black because it relies on the t/race and is grounded on the quasi-ontology of constitutive Blackness.

In a critical move away from models that assume the know-ability of the subject, Weheliye distances himself from "psychoanalytic theorizations of sound and subjectivity [that] suggest that all listening experience hark back to this instant in which the child cannot distinguish between itself and its mother's voice" (*Phonographies* 59). These models and the pre-Oedipal object relations theory they sustain, move to a moment prior to castration without putting its theoretical legitimacy in doubt. They focus on a not yet erased surplus in exactly the same manner Moten does. According to this perspective, the para-ontological de-linking of Black experience and Blackness produced in music would either have to remain outside the symbolic, or ultimately be recaptured at its moment of entry into the symbolic. The dispositive that commands legibility and legitimacy, here, can never change, though it is possible to reside in an outside that is defined not as another realm of legibility and legitimacy (not as another dispositive), but as mere affect, as mere materiality free of any form of axiomatic. Weheliye's particular target for critique here is Kaja Silverman's concept of the acoustic mirror and he insists that sound must not be thought in terms of unproductive pre-symbolic being, but be understood as a continuously productive force never hedged in by the symbolic or a dispositive. But what, then, is it, that Weheliye thinks sound performs in terms of subjectivity, given his refusal to let go of such staunchly dispositivistic terms as 'music' (as opposed to noise) and 'Black'? Why would sound be more than dispositivistic discourse? Weheliye's frequent quoting of Deleuze and Guattari suggests an understanding of the subject similar to that expounded in the critique of suture in chapter II.2. Although the Oedipal model does exist, it is not absolute, and it may be disturbed or even disrupted through technologically enabled symbolic processes. As was the case in the critique of Silverman and visual suture in chapter II.2., Weheliye points out that the idea of the acoustic mirror necessarily implies that whatever de-subjection sound may induce is ultimately recaptured and reintegrated into the Oedipal structure (63). It is here that the significance of sound technologies for the constitution of Blackness in Weheliye's argument, as well as the difference between him and Moten is most visible. As mentioned, Weheliye does not refer to a liberatory drive. The de-

subjectifying potential of 'music' is not located in the subject and the music itself as much as it is a product of its mechanical reproduction in so far as this reproduction enables "openness" towards engaging with Blackness, or what, in the language developed so far, would have to be called an openness of the subject towards the abject:

"Over the course of the twentieth century this openness has been boosted by sound technologies such as the phonograph, which, by disturbing any seemingly predetermined symbiosis between the aural and the visual, have allowed for a multiplication of practices and contexts for both the production and reception of black musical cultures." (*Phonographies* 70)

Weheliye, in other words, insists that the implementation of the Oedipal model of subjectivity is visual and dispositive at its core. Against this, he explicitly theorizes a phonographic potential along the lines of W.E.B. Du Bois' concept of double consciousness. While the Black person may be abject in terms of constituted Blackness (by the "tape" of White society), that constituted Blackness is rooted in the visual. Phonography, on the other hand, permits an emergence into the symbolic of erased Blackness and an encounter of the White civil subject with that which has been/is erased under constituted Blackness. It therewith produces a moment of constitutional Blackness that Weheliye's writing somehow presages when he writes of "the surplus gift inherent in Afro-Diasporic double consciousness" (*Phonographies* 36). Instead of emphasizing, as Moten does, a surplus existence that is always already there and is introduced into the symbolic as excess through performance, Weheliye points out a "surplus gift", that is, a potential to produce surplus. But while Weheliye describes a symbolic that is not unitary, but multiple and fractured (among other things) along the different lines of sensual perception, he clings to the idea that all of these dimensions are based on the same logic of being and knowing. While improvisation expresses itself within a singular symbolic, which it seeks to fix, sound technologies emphasize the multiplicity of the symbolic at those points where one symbolic register is no longer erased under another, while insisting that these points are not in an antagonistic relationship of impossible reconciliation, but, rather, in a conflict that technology helps solve. Thus, Weheliye writes:

“The phonograph disturbed this traffic between the sonic and visual by denying the audience, at least initially, any easy way to determine the performer’s racial identity. At stake was clearly discerning a white projection of Blackness from a black image of Blackness ... It further suggests, that Blackness necessitated redefinition in relation to this new technology, as it could now be imagined phonographically, and had to therefore be recast in order to fit into the already existing templates for racial formation.”(*Phonographies* 40)

This is the essential difference between thinking through noise or thinking noises as the fetish that helps music become minor: noise is not based on the same logic as ‘music’ and its appearance in the symbolic explodes the concept of ‘music’. Contrary to this, Weheliye’s model is one of “recasting” and of coming to terms. Weheliye’s work, thus, by refusing to let go of Blackness, remains contained within the axiomatic that defines it. From this perspective, both the White and the Black image of Blackness within White civil society are based on the same constitutive Blackness, though the constituted Blacknesses they produce differ. It is also for this reason that Weheliye’s model is not one of glitch. Sound technology, in his argument, mobilizes instances that are not sub-symbolic, but can still be aptly articulated within the dominant axiomatic.

In order to facilitate the conceptual move from ‘music’ to noise, a short look at Jacques Rancière’s notion of the “partitions of the sensible” will be of help. He states:

“Political subjectivity thus refers to an enunciative and demonstrative capacity to reconfigure the relation between the visible and the sayable, the relation between words and bodies: namely, what I refer to as the ‘partition of the sensible’”.  
(Panagia & Rancière, 115)

By this partition, as Davide Panagia points out, Rancière,

“ ... does not simply mean that an aesthetic attunement to the world of politics shows us that there are different perspectives or points of views that must be recognized. On the contrary, Rancière’s phrase suggests that our modes of perceiving the world, of sensing the presences of others, are parsed; that as subjects of perception, human beings are partial creatures variously divided. A

partition of the sensible thus refers to perceptual forms of knowledge that parse what is and is not sensible, what counts as making (i.e. fabricating) sense and what is available to be sensed.” (Panagia 6)

The crux here is on the “relation between the visible and the sayable”, and the possibility of putting it into analogy with Weheliye’s emphasis on the split between the optic and the sonic exploited by technology. Although ‘music’ seems to describe more than just what can be said, this is incorrect in Weheliye’s case precisely because he reduces music to (canonic) ‘music’ by thinking it in terms of conflict, while excluding the antagonistic potential of noise from his thinking of the impact of sound technologies on the constitution of Blackness. At the same time, “the relation between words and bodies” points to the complicated inscription of race and power into and onto bodies and flesh, the complication of the relation between discourses and their inscription into bodies that has been theorized as the racial glitch.

Thus, although both the racial glitch and the constitutional Blackness of Weheliye’s “surplus gift” “step in the direction of creating hitherto nonexisting forms of subjectivity” (*Phonographies* 61), they do so in fundamentally different ways, with different goals and with different potential. The constitutional Blackness of the “surplus gift” is located in subject agency and the tension between different kinds of symbolically valid Blacknesses: the White and the Black versions of constituted Blackness, which, due to the power struggle their differences imply, is always also a tension between constitutive and constituted Blackness. The racial glitch, on the other hand, is the product of the disintegration of only one single form of symbolically valid Blackness and describes a productive dynamic that emerges at those points where the dominant axiomatic falters to racialize, those points where it is no longer/not yet able to exert its power. Because of these differences between the glitch and constitutional Blackness, it is hard to follow Weheliye’s enthusiasm for the productive power of Black images of Blackness, not only because it sustains the notion of Blackness as such (which means, that a re-constituted Blackness will still be Black, which it can only be if the axiom that makes it so persists), but most of all because it thinks this Blackness and its music as being less infused with the gaze or other modes of dispositivism. There is no sub-symbolicity here, no consideration of musical “common sense” and stereotyping. Weheliye’s assumed surplus springs from his vision of a Black (image of) Blackness that



may not be authentic in an ontological sense, but is very much so in a performative sense. Although this is not the same kind of soul Moten relies on to literally drive his argument, it is still soul in terms of cultural politics, in as far as it does admit the possible non-existence of Blackness in ontological terms, while, due to its emphasis on opacity, still thinking and acting as if it were based in eternal truth nevertheless. But how would even Black Blackness within A[WS] not be abject? What 'music', indeed, would drive non-abject phonographic Blackness? Must one not, rather, leave behind the black holes of 'music' and Blackness?

This is precisely the point Kodwo Eshun has made in the lines quoted at the beginning of this chapter (that one must think of sound that is neither "black" nor "music"). It suggests moving the analysis of the impact of sound technology on the constitution of Blackness away from 'music' to noise, that is, away from an analysis bound to given social categories and merely engaged with micro-differential transformations, towards the creation of something completely new and different. This 'new' 'thing' would not have to immediately replace Blackness, but begin by providing a model of technologically originated post-Blackness, or – as will be theorized in chapter II.4. – *Cyborg Blackness*. In other words: rather than theorizing technology as connecting the subject to a realm outside the dispositive it originated in, or to a different variation proposed by the same dispositive, one needs to understand technology's potential to create it's own way of making sense and maybe even it's own dispositive and modes of subjection. Instead of thinking in terms of soul and or stereotyping vs. self-identification, one must begin to understand the "post-soul futurama" (Albiez) technology offers. Noise must not be understood as an absolute category. Rather, referring to it as noise indicates its subversive political valence in relation to a specific axiomatic. In this sense, producing, recording, distributing noise are modes of counter-becoming-subject in that they sound against the neatness and therewith the naturalization and reification of 'the' subject through a politics of displeasure. But how could such noise promote constitutional Blackness? In how far is it already beyond Black in producing an unBlackness aimed at ending the world that racializes Blackness? When is noise a Fanonian new language? Is it the specific potential of sound technology to produce such a de-subjectifying tension between 'music' and noise? In order to answer these questions, one must move away from conceptualizing technology as offering not-(yet)-racialized spaces and propose an understanding of sound's de-racializing potential. A

consideration of Detroit Techno Music as a specific intersection of sound, technology and Blackness will permit doing this.

### II.3.c. From Detroit to the (Afro-)Future: Technology and UnBlack Blackness

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*“Techno is probably the first form of contemporary black music which categorically breaks with the old heritage of soul music [...] Techno is a post-soul sound.”*  
(Cosgrove 88)

A short glance at the discourses from and on 1980’s Detroit Techno and its birth in the city’s African American community will demonstrate how sound technologies play a fundamental role in assessing the impact of technological change on the constitution of Blackness and help refine the concepts of the racial glitch and constitutional Blackness. This glance will not offer an analysis of techno’s history or musical structures, but focus on the understanding of this music offered by writers as well as the producers themselves. As the term ‘producer’ indicates, what will be sketched here is in how far Detroit Techno uses technology to create an art form that is productive, not representative, an art form that is not ‘music’ (therefore no musicians but producers), but connected to noise because it emanates from beyond the field of canonical ‘music’ both in terms of creation (by whom, with what) and philosophy. Neither is this music still Black in a “common sense” way, nor already unBlack<sup>159</sup>. This chapter will ultimately offer a perspective on technology’s post-human and post-racial potential. Thus, it is in itself not precisely a consideration of noise, but by being beyond ‘music’ it indicates ways of thinking of noise in relation to Blackness qua technology, of detecting *a* (as one example of the paradigmatic Fanonian new) language to come in the language that is.

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The focus on the post-human is what differentiates techno<sup>160</sup> from hip hop, another major African American music genre to emerge in the 1980’s and relying heavily on sound technology. As Ben Williams points out, the main difference between techno and hip hop was not only techno’s hybrid birth from a mix of Black funk (such as that of

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<sup>159</sup> The term ‘unBlack’ will be used to designate something that is neither ‘Black’ nor the ‘not-Black’ that describes Whiteness.

<sup>160</sup> Although ‘Detroit Techno’ refers to a specific form within the ‘Techno’ genre of music, the latter term will be used as short form for the former here.

George Clinton and Parliament Funkadelic) and European electronic music (such as that produced by the German band Kraftwerk), but the development of techno away from these influences towards a post-human space that starkly differed from hip hop's embrace of African American aesthetic traditions and cultural heritage:

“Despite all these influences, techno also significantly departed from African diasporic music traditions, which may have prevented its acceptance in centers of black music like New York. Where hip hop firmly inscribed its Blackness within machine-created grooves by recontextualizing the oral tradition and sampling canonical funk grooves, techno's more total embrace of a mechanized sound and aesthetic moved away from such traditional signifiers of the black body as gospel-derived vocal harmonies, oral narrative, and instrumental virtuosity ...” (B. Williams 163)

Williams emphasizes a,

“... tension between African American tradition and technology that seemed to produce music devoid of cultural and human reference points ...” (*idem.*)

Thus, although hip hop culture, too, relates to 'noise' in terms of legibility and legitimacy of Black presences in a society structured by A[WS], it does so in a different manner than techno. First of all, hip hop's self-conscious production of “[n]oise on the one hand and communal counter-memory on the other ...” (T. Rose 65), depending on which perspective in the matrix of double consciousness one chooses to speak from, is fundamentally different from techno's turning away from (counter)memory towards a “counterfuture” (Eshun, “Further Consideration ...” 288). This does not imply that African American techno producers chose to ignore the past or its impact on the present. Some African American techno artists explicitly link their explorations of technology to Afro-futurist engagements with the slave-past, such as Sun Ra's vision of the intergalactic mothership as futurist counterpart to the slave ship. Others, like Detroit techno-collective Drexciya have developed an extensive African American mythology according to which the unborn children of the pregnant slave-women thrown overboard during the Middle Passage founded a technologically advanced mutant civilization below the surface of the sea whose members have returned back to the mainland, living

unrecognized among the Black population (Eshun, *More brilliant* 06[083]f.). According to this mythology, techno is the product of this mutant civilization, that is, the product of those determined to the core of their being by the slave past. The difference in focus here, is between a technological recovery of cultural heritage and a history of denied humanity in hip hop, and techno's conviction that such a humanity not only cannot be recovered, but that the heritage of Blackness is always-already one of post-humanity which the epistemological breaks produced by technological change further emphasizes. Thus, Ben Williams writes the following about Drexciya's mythology:

“In this context, the mechanical metaphors we have been tracking extend beyond signifying post-humanity to embody a history that began with slavery; indeed slavery, the original unit of capitalist labor, is here considered to be the originary form of the post-human [...] Thus the utopian myth of a music that crosses all national and ethnic boundaries to speak in the pure language of electronic tones is grounded firmly in the all too concrete history of slavery, which is conceived as the founding dislocation of modernity, the condition that lies at the heart of the global network that began with the colonial adventures of the great European powers.” (169f.)

In hip hop, then, the idea of noise pushes against the limits of 'music' and its political implications, but it still remains contained in the black hole of Blackness. Techno, on the other hand, acknowledges its heritage, but understands it differently than hip hop does and seeks to avoid being constrained by it. From the standpoint of analyzing the impact of technological change on the constitution of Blackness, the fundamental difference between hip hop and techno is that hip hop is theorized in terms of Black “use of electronic equipment” (T. Rose, 64), while techno focuses on the interbeing of Blackness and technology.

From this difference, the questions of authenticity and soul re-emerge that were already touched upon earlier. While it is not necessary to expand the critique of authenticity already offered<sup>161</sup>, Dan Sisko's observation that “[e]ven the most 'hard core' and militant-sounding techno groups, like Detroit's Underground Resistance, have lofty ...

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<sup>161</sup> For a critique of authenticity in hip hop, see Ronald Judy's “On the Question of Nigga Authenticity”.

ideals at heart – scenarios where race is no longer an issue” (12) and Sean Albiez’ understanding of techno as a “post-soul futurama”<sup>162</sup>, offer a path to an important reconsideration of soul and the marking of Black bodies as understood through the perspective of technological change. More than just a notion of Black authenticity, the racialization of musical talent or of a specific musical affect, the concept of soul has been theorized (in chapter I.1.a.) as the perceived capacity of power to inscribe itself into, as opposed to just onto, the flesh. It was the axiomatically posited absence of a micro-political soul, it was argued, that posited Black flesh outside the realm of humanity, exposing it to terror, cruelty and gratuitous violence, putting it in a relation of irresolvable antagonism with White civil society. The concept of glitch focuses on this relation between discourse and body, marking moments in which there is not only no inscription into, but also a disrupted inscription onto the body. What techno’s post-soul futurama allows us to enquire into is the significance of the glitch for the theorization of micro-political soul in musical soul and what their relation tells us about the impact of technological change on the constitution of Blackness.

Albiez takes the term “post-soul” from a larger corpus of writings<sup>163</sup> that generally use the term to refer to the post-civil-rights historical period and define post-soul as an artistic approach striving for independence from both White and Black dominated race politics and leading towards a slow dissolution of the differences between Black and White cultural identities (Ashe 612). Emphasizing neither purely White nor purely Black cultural influences on the creation of techno (Albiez, 132), Albiez thus shares Bertram Ashe’s understanding that “there, in the unstable, wobbly interstices of those two categories [of Black and White. S.W.], is where the post-soul aesthetic lives” (611)<sup>164</sup>. But contrary to this common approach, the present text will not define post-soul as a historical period, but defines it as an epistemological break in constitution of Blackness and the first phase in the shift from huMan1/2 to cyborg (that section III. will elaborate

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<sup>162</sup> Sicko himself, as the single exception in an otherwise concordant field, considers techno’s description as “post-soul’ [...] only partially accurate – techno has an obvious relationship to soul and even to Motown ...” (70). Unfortunately, he does not specify this “obvious relationship”.

<sup>163</sup> As Albiez himself points out, techno has previously been described as “post-soul” by Stuart Cosgrove and Kodwo Eshun. He also explicitly relates his understanding of the term “post-soul” to the work of Nelson George and Mark Anthony Neal (Albiez 130).

<sup>164</sup> In an effort to define a post-soul aestheticism, Ashe acknowledges that a mere historical definition is insufficient. Therefore, he adds what he calls “my triangular post-soul matrix” to his approach to aesthetics. These are “the cultural mulatto archetype; the execution of an exploration of Blackness; and, lastly, the signal allusion-disruption gestures that many of these [post-soul] texts perform” (613).

on) that were and continuously are brought about by technological change. Therefore, rather than considering existing writing on the subject in detail, the question of the glitched (post-)soul and the consideration of Blackness it entails will be analyzed through the concept of constitutional Blackness.

Three different kinds of 'soul', all connected to the relation between Blackness and Black people or bodies-being-Black, have been touched upon so far.

First, a 'White Blackness' connected to bodies-being-Black through cruelty. This Blackness implies the absence of a Black micro-political soul and marks the total erasure of constitutive Blackness under constituted Blackness, as well as the absence of constitutional Blackness. White Blackness is the identification of Black people with a White defined Blackness; it is entirely dispositivistic and based on ontological politics. Here, body and discourse are not separate, there is no soul, the Black person is only a body-being-Black, mere corporeality.

Second, W.E.B. Du Bois' souls of Black folks and their double consciousness. Du Bois insists on the presence of a metaphysical soul in spite of the White perception of an absence of a micro-political soul. This idea finds its contemporary translation in Fred Moten's idea of a "black blackness" and the liberatory drive, whose ultimate goal is to create an identity between metaphysical and micro-political soul. The theoretically possible tension between the structural categories of constitutive and constituted Blackness is elided in this model by recurrence to authenticity and White ontologico-political analytical frames such as the recurrence to humanism and the huMan1/2 of Oedipal psychoanalysis. There is no constitutional Blackness here, because Blackness itself is not understood in terms of production and position but representation and being.

Third, soul in terms of an 'unBlack Blackness'. This is the soul in the common definitions of post-soul and post-Blackness and to a certain degree in writings such as that of Alexander Weheliye. It is unBlack, because it is neither Black nor that not-Black that defines Whiteness. It can be produced by people of any color. This is a politico-ontological position that refuses the idea of Black authenticity and emphasizes the existence of an irreducible multitude of constituted Blacknesses. Instead of the absence of soul and the  $\circ$  of White Blackness, instead of the double consciousness of Black Blackness, unBlack Blackness conceptualizes "... triple consciousness, quadruple consciousness ..." (Eshun, "Further Considerations" 298). This multitude of constituted

Blacknesses is as such articulated in relation to and partly limited by the confines of A[WS], because it is this axiomatic structure that defines Blackness as Black. As was indicated in the remarks on the differences between hip hop and techno, two sorts of post-soul exist. One kind assumes a meta-physical kernel of Blackness but insists on the constructed nature of both structural Blackness and the micro-political soul. This kind is unable to imagine the possibility of the end of the world and therewith Blackness. The second kind refuses both the metaphysical and micro-political soul and aims to ultimately move away from Blackness toward (what will be theorized below as) unBlack unBlackness. Although it cannot yet articulate an end to the discourse of A[WS], it marks a first movement towards the possibility of this articulation. It is because of its origin in and continued relational identity to A[WS] that it still remains Blackness, even if of an unBlack kind striving towards unBlackness. The constitutional Blackness it creates remains limited in scope. It allows a “post-soul blaxploration” of Blacknesses that argues that “Blackness is constantly in flux” (Ashe, 615) but does not yet permit any transcendence of Blackness as such.

Albiez’ post-soul futurama locates Detroit Techno in the second sort of unBlack Blackness. While noting it’s rootedness in African American culture and music, he emphasizes technology’s capacity to create – through such things as the new electronic sounds produced by new and therefore not yet racialized electronic instruments (such as the by now legendary Roland 808 drum machine) and the new sonic structures they made possible – a space beyond this heritage, a futurama with the potential to “de-race” and “deterritorialize” music (142). He describes this as a “ ... *progressive* desire to move beyond essentialized ‘Blackness’ [...] the process of ethnic dislocation ... central to techno ... “ (143, emphasis in the original), yet also warns that “we should not be tempted to inflate the transformative potential of [techno’s] escapist rhetoric” (149).

While Albiez’ warning is based on the fact that techno’s post-racial dynamics have had little to no effect on the daily lives of Black people in the Unites States (or elsewhere), this should not impede consideration of the full extent of techno’s de-racializing utopian potential. Such a consideration would mean delineating the potential of technological change to open up un-raced dimensions not only in terms of a literal creation of new spaces that do not need to be de-racialized but are assumed to be not-yet-racialized (as in Weheliye’s work), but most of all in form of de-racialization. This dynamic amounts to

the promise of a fourth type of (post-)soul. Thus, this chapter wants to argue that technological change creates the possibility of an 'unBlack unBlackness', that is, the possibility of a racial glitch and constitutional Blackness that are unlimited in scope and can expand beyond their originary Blackness, to not only post- but even unBlackness. UnBlack unBlackness shares with unBlack Blackness its focus on the production of Blackness, the multitude of constituted Blacknesses and the central importance of a single constituted Blackness antagonistic to White civil society. But contrary to unBlack Blackness, unBlack unBlackness aims to move beyond constituted Blackness and the structure and cruelty that define it as Black. UnBlack unBlackness (u.u.) is the only conceptualization of Blackness that implicitly theorizes the possibility of an end to Whiteness, its discourse, and its enslavist regime. It is important to repeat, though, that the concept of u.u. describes an idealist potential effect of a technological matrix such as the racial glitch and in no way automatically implies its always-already translation from the sound of the ghetto blaster, so to speak, into the streets of the ghetto system. In this sense, the 'Blackness' in unBlackness at once marks the battle field (A[WS]) in relation to which it is Black, and indicates a temporal matrix: 'un-' as a prefix pointing beyond the present, 'Blackness' as a trace of the past that both indicates the present and the maieutic function of Blackness in bringing about the unBlack future. This is a trap of words here: to speak of a language which is not yet a language, to give sense to noise that would therewith cease to be noise, viz. to speak of a noise that constantly remains *to come*, that would evaporate in enunciation, yet is present. This is a trap of words, where both Black and White people can become unBlack, but as long as 'Black' and 'White' make sense, only Black will have a u.u. coming, while White is not quite u.u., remains w. until the difference between them has become noise to other ears determined by another language.

To consider the impact of technological change on the constitution of Blackness means thinking together its present effect on the production of unBlack Blackness and its potential dynamic towards the production of unBlack unBlackness. By emphasizing this difference between the actuality of what is and the (Deleuzian) virtuality of something that *de facto* is not (yet), but whose ideal existence produces effects as if it were real, thus creating the conditions of possibility of its becoming actual, one avoids the recurrent accusations leveled against considerations of technology and race (e.g. within AfroFuturism) as having fallen prey to an idealization of technology at the cost of



ignoring real world racism. The post-soul operating between unBlack Blackness and u.u. is not part of the imaginary described by Marlo David as follows: “As some would have it, in a post-human universe governed by zeroes and ones, the body ceases to matter, thereby fracturing and finally dissolving ties to racialized subjectivity, positionality and self” (695). First of all, David’s remark fails to distinguish different modes and levels of Blackness, proposing the fusion of a mode of constitutive Blackness (“the body”, the micro-political cruelty, the inscription onto the flesh) with a future form of constituted Blackness (“zeroes and ones”), while the constitutional Blackness of the ‘between’-post-soul still operates in the tension between constituted and constitutive Blackness. Although “the promise of a placeless, raceless, bodiless near future enabled by technological progress” (Nelson 1) is present in this ‘between’, it remains virtual. Insisting on this virtuality means insisting on the fact that pure u.u. can not yet be imagined or articulated within A[WS], but exists in a totemic manner similar to the “becoming” of D&G, or, as argued above, as noise. As such, u.u. is the exact opposite of the colonial empty signifier of Blackness: while the latter served as a “black hole” to contain that which exceeds discourse within the confines of that discourse, the former serves as a wormhole that brings that excess into discourse and therewith forces that discourse and the axiomatic that structures it to change or even explode. The dynamic towards u.u. is a process on the level of constituted Blackness whose ultimate implication would be that the cruelty that founds constitutive Blackness (the pessimist permutations from the plantation to the penitentiary theorized in section I.) would cease (and constitutive Blackness with it) because the form of subjectivity and abjection it sustains has become unfit to the socio-politico-epistemological realities created, among other things, by technological change. The racial glitch can be read as a first signal of a disjunction between body and discourse that creates the possibility for the post-soul unBlack Blackness of which u.u. is an extrapolation. At the present point, this disjunction is not total, and the post-soul between unBlack Blackness and u.u. does not claim anything to the opposite. But even though bodies still are racialized enough to magnetize bullets, the importance of the physical space of the body for socio-politico-psycho-epistemics is (very slowly) decreasing due to technological change. The multiple nature of the subject/object implies a simultaneous presence in different forms and different spaces and locations at the same time, and simultaneous fragmentation that permits theorizing the interlinked persistence of pessimist permutations of anti-Blackness and technological dynamics of unBlackness without risk of contradiction.

Marlo David, then, is right in pointing to a “‘post-soul’ or ‘post-black’ aesthetics, through which contemporary artists and writers strategically reject Blackness as a unitary subject position” (*idem.*), but he is wrong not only in locating such a unitary position in the body (as he did in the previously quoted passage) but also in assuming that such a position ever existed outside the dispositive perspective of A[WS].

Part of this problematic is that, due to the adoption of dispositive perspectives not only by those racialized as white but sometimes also by those racialized as Black, post-soul itself is a highly contested terrain. This adoption is also highly relevant in the consideration of techno. The fundamental questions here are these: when does one move beyond the ‘between’ unBlack Blackness and u.u. into u.u.? How does one recognize/experience u.u.? Is it just any un-racialized space? Does it already exist, viz. are there already techno-epistemical breaks in the fabric of White civil society that permit imaging un-racialized spaces in this given world, language, axiomatic? How would unBlackness affect anti-Blackness, how do dynamics in the field of aesthetics spill over into the social and the political; how does sound interact with flesh? Consider the following. The potential for a de-racializing politics of displeasure that the analysis of cinematic technologies traced was based on a tension between different aspects of the filmic narrative that offered contradictory racial markings on the level of the visual and the flesh/body on the one hand, and the level of discourse on the other. This was a tension between recognizably racialized poles. When looking at techno-tracks, one could argue (as was done in the critique of Weheliye) that electronic music genres such as techno are perceived as White precisely because they are technology based and that Black techno producers such as Juan Atkins “ ... adopted and adapted what was viewed by some as the most ‘white’ of ‘white music’ ...” (Albiez, 142). The Whiteness of the tracks could then be put in tension with the Blackness of their producers and thus the same tension of unBlack Blackness would arise that was delineated in chapter II.2. But contrary to cinematic technologies, this tension is not inherent in sound technologies, but arises from their setting. The racial tension of a live DJ-set, where the producer is present, is not given in, say, a track played on the radio, that might simply be registered as White, as Simon Reynolds or Juan Atkins suggest<sup>165</sup>. In this case, one could argue that

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<sup>165</sup> Reynolds writes: „In Detroit, everybody assumed [the pioneering African American Techno duo] Cybotron were white guys from Europe. And indeed, apart from a subliminal funk pulsing amidst the crisp-and-dry programmed beats, there was scant evidence to hint otherwise” (11). And Sean Albiez

the colonial difference and its contemporary expression in the digital divide still function effectively to erase moments of constitutional Blackness.

Some authors, such as Mirko Hall and Naida Zukic or Kodwo Eshun, refuse this pessimism, insisting that: “By the 1980s, the emergent digital technology of sequencers, samplers, synthesizers, and software applications began to scramble the ability to assign identity and thereby racialize music”(Eshun, “Further Considerations ...” 296). These authors build their argument by taking the references to Deleuze and Guattari that structure Albiez’ and Weheliye’s work a step further. Just as in the latter pair’s writings, Eshun implicitly thinks music through such Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts as the war machine or de-racialization as deterritorialization. While they use “decoding” to characterize intra-axiomatic change, D&G describe deterritorialization as a form of axiom-deconstruction that aims to undo not only a specific code, but the discourse within which a code makes sense altogether (see *Mille* 437). In this sense, deterritorialization would undo not only the structure imposed on something (e.g. a territory, a body, a desire ...) by an axiomatic, but the complete axiomatic within which a structure’s consistency is anchored (*Anti-Oedipe* 42.f.). From Eshun’s perspective, the deterritorializing potential of contemporary sound technology is sufficient to create sounds that are neither Black nor ‘music’, that is, sound technology impacts cultural constellations in a manner permitting the creation of unBlack unBlackness. As he writes about contemporary ‘music’: “Black music is in the machines. Therefore an approach to the machine and machinethought *obsolesces* premachinic identity” (*More brilliant* 03[31]; emphasis added). It is important to note that from this perspective, unBlack unBlackness is not created by the emergence of silent or not-yet-racialized new spaces (for example early cyberspace or soundscapes created by new technologies), but through de-racializing something (‘music’) that was racialized prior to that deterritorialisation. This is a “process of deterritorialization [that] creates new sonic configurations by aligning itself with the forces of chaos” (Hall & Zukic, 109), a chaos that is such only from the perspective of the axiomatic it attempts to undo, a perspective from which it will ultimately be perceived as a sort of noise whose “chaosmotic”<sup>166</sup>

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quotes Juan Atkins assessment that specifically “... African American audiences think of techno as essentially white and European ...” (Atkins according to Albiez, 149).

<sup>166</sup> Section III. will elaborate on the concept of chaosmosis.

potential for (de-)subjection informs the shift from the human to the cyborg that the next chapter will analyze in more detail.

Considering the originality of electronic music already noted by D&G, as well as Fred Moten's conceptualization of what would be deterritorialized sound as existing in a form of "*being maternal* that is indistinguishable from a *being material*" (*Break* 16; emphasis in the original) and Weheliye's notion of the production of Blackness in music in form of an "I am I be", theory at this point becomes what Sun Ra termed "MythScience" (according to Eshun, *More brilliant* 09[156.ff.]). It becomes a post-foundational intervention into Black social death in which the lack of world and historical relationality is supplanted by a new world created through not so much de- as counter-colonization, through a Black agency from which will spring unBlack Blackness and ultimately u.u. This is the cyborg Blackness moment, when, in Drexciya's MythScience and in much of Afro-Futurist arts, the logic of the denial of Black humanity is taken to its extreme conclusion by the action of the abject Black being itself. The unBlack Blackness of cyborg-Blackness is the Black abject shed of its invisibility by exploding abjection from the inside. Just like the abject Black person, the unBlack cyborg remains an-other to humanity that puts it under constant threat. But in constructing a MythScience in which (e.g.) racial narratives are shifted from alien abduction by slave traders to self-constructions as interstellar aliens, from representational absence to being-beyond-humanity, from authenticity to becoming, cyborg-Blackness exemplifies constitutional Blackness. This is a constitutional Blackness in which t/race – both as the truth of race and the historical marker of its social construction – morphs from indicating stigma and marks of the cruelty of constitutive Blackness that become visible in constituted Blackness, into the productive force of a constant refoundation of Blackness in which constituted and constitutive Blackness have become one, not in terms of authentic representation, but in terms of socio-genesis taken literally: the unBlack Blackness of the cyborg is constructivism become flesh, it does not indicate a literal machine-body-hybrid, but signals how the racialized body is always-already a cybernetic organism inscribed with something other-than-itself, how an axiomatically Black body is always-already more than its flesh or material, how it is always-already infused with technology.

Although – even if one shares Eshun’s belief in the possibility of unracialized technological spaces – u.u. must still be located in an utopian realm, it is important to keep in mind that the racialized body is always-already a cyborg and therefore cyborg Blackness is still unBlack Blackness, not always already u.u. The racial glitch is a disruption in cyborg-genesis that offers a path for constitutional Blackness from the body racialized as Black to unBlack cyborg Blackness. But it does not sever the flesh from discourse as such. It disturbs the inscription of discourse into the body and onto the flesh. As a de-racializing and de-territorializing effect of systemic failure, it creates a de-coded space in which subject and abject – which may now be understood as specific cyborg-configurations – are less determined by context (such as, for example, visual racial markers and the bio-political orders they indicate) and thus more open to potential transformation. Technological change, by creating such glitches, transforms cyborg-configurations, creating both re-written racial codes (for example definitions of Blackness through the genomic code rather than skin color) and potentially unracialized bodies (for example electro-sonic bleeps and bloops, clicks and cuts, noise). Yet, so far, unBlack Blackness has not generated an u.u. that would alleviate the dispensability and disposability of Black bodies. The axiomatic system, so far, has been able to persist with its glitches and to contain constitutional Blackness.

It is important to note that although technological change has an impact on the constitution of Blackness in terms of the relation between constituted and constitutive and the production of constitutional Blackness, it has not (yet) had a sufficient impact on the axiomatic necessity of (anti-)Blackness that ultimately determines Black social and civic death. Far from being only a messenger of hope and harbinger of liberation, technology in the form of the robot, the computer or the cyborg not only emerges as de-racialized humanoid instance, but may also be re-coded into a black hole that contains and regulates the potential of unBlackness – thus both moving Blackness to that ‘between’ between Black unBlackness and u.u. and keeping it there. If indeed techno sounds were perceived as neither White nor Black, they would mark a space theorized earlier in this chapter as ‘silence’ or ‘no music’. Such silence (viz. the absence of discourse and the power it embodies) would mark a permanent state of crisis in an epistemo-political system that is defined by the Black–non-Black binary. This crisis could take the form of the racial glitch theorized in earlier chapters, with its potential to de-subjectify through racial indeterminacy. However, far from extending the state of

crisis, the figure of the cyborg seems to have become yet another empty signifier to contain the glitch. Cyborg tones, humanoid sounds: somehow human, but also somehow not. If human enough, they are often considered White. If not, they are mostly captured into a 'machine music' that is cognitively severed from humanity, or remains coded as noise. Nevertheless, sound technologies have produced a significant enlargement and therewith reconfiguration of the partition of the sensible by producing at least potentially de-racializing war machines that may not yet have taken to the streets but started re-coding constituted Blackness from soul to post-soul, from the non-humanity of the animal like thing to the non-humanity of the cyborg. In order to properly assess and analyze this impact of technological change on the constitution of Blackness, a methodology for *Cyborg Black Studies* is necessary.

*Section III. Cyborg Black Studies*

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(CONCLUSION:)

### III.1. CYBORG BLACK STUDIES

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*“This project is complicated by the fact that, in the historical era of advanced postmodernity, the very notion of ‘the human’ is not only de-stabilized by technologically mediated social relations in a globally connected world, but it is also thrown open to contradictory redefinitions of what exactly counts as human.”*

(Braidotti, “All too human” 197)

*“[This statement about] the coexistence of the ‘human’ with various ‘technological’ structures and processes ... presumes that the human and the technological represent separate, if not antagonistic stable identities, which at this point, and perhaps always already, seems untenable, to say the least, given that one is hardly conceivable without the other. Why then does black cultural production still function as a convenient outside to this interface that will not quite listen to the catachrestic nominalism ‘cyborg’?”*

(Weheliye, *Phonographies 2*)

In 1937, the architect Le Corbusier published notes on his travels to the United States. Discerning in the American Black man and his musical expression an uncanny affinity with the “spirit of the machines” (158) that he saw as shaping the twentieth century, Le Corbusier wrote in *When the Cathedrals were White*:

*“Negro music has touched America because it is the melody of the soul joined with the rhythm of the machine. It is in two-part time: tears in the heart; movement of legs, torso, arms and head. The music of an era of construction: innovating.”*  
(*idem*; emphasis added)

Le Corbusier saw the frenzy of jazz as the ultimate rendition of the experience of his times, times which he welcomed and in which he saw machines as positively connoted harbingers of the future, rather than as the signs of dehumanization they have become in much contemporary thought. Although repeatedly acknowledging and decrying the persistent discrimination and exploitation of Black people in the United



States, he emphasized that it was what he perceived as the physicality of the Black past and present that made Black music so attractive. Black people, in other words, lived a more intense relationship between body and soul than White people did, and as Le Corbusier saw modernity turn this intense relation into the dominant model in society, so he saw Black music become modernity's most fitting form of aesthetic and emotional expression. Black people and the machine shaped the United States in his eyes, they shaped its culture until it, too, became Black, became machine, defined by vitality, force and rhythm. But although Le Corbusier emphasized the spontaneity of Black creation in a "primitivist and essentialist" manner (Dinerstein 4)<sup>167</sup>, he did not intend to portray a Black soul as opposed to or excluding a White mind or rationality. Rather, he attempted to distill the dynamics of a specifically American cultural blend. Writing of Louis Armstrong's music, Le Corbusier noted: "Its precision is staggering ... That implacable exactitude expresses American taste; I see in it an effect of the machine" (159). A moment later, he observed: "Tap dancers are very popular in the USA – silent Negroes, as mechanical as a sewing machine ..." (160). In Le Corbusier's writing Black people were not just a socio-economic, but also a spiritual and aesthetic factor in United States society, and he emphasized that the impact of this spiritual role increased not only because Black music represented the spirit of the machine so well, but also because the machine played an essential role in its form and propagation, be it through "radio broadcast" (*idem.*) or "mechanical recordings" (162).

Arguably, Le Corbusier's vision of a Black man-machine hybrid as the future of the United States can be read as a form of paleo-AfroFuturism, a first step towards reading Blackness and technology as not merely intersecting but constitutively enmeshed. Although Le Corbusier still wrote of a Black authenticity – a Black soul of the machine, not a post-human, a cyborg or a post-soul moment – his musings on technology took part in transforming the Black (non-huMan1/2)-machine-trope from that of the slave as

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<sup>167</sup> Although the reference to Le Corbusier here is inspired by Joel Dinerstein's reference to him in her introduction to her book *Swinging the Machine*, it must be emphasized that her approach to Blackness and technology can be neither adopted nor approved from the theoretical perspective of the present text. This is due to several reasons, of which the principal are: her opposition between "white technology and black culture" (21); her primitivist reduction of Black culture to "portable cultural forms such as music, dance and slang" (19); and propositions such as that of a Black cultural "Saturday night function" in which Black people would "reclaim their bodies from their boss and 'the man'" in a "suspension of social convention" (22). Especially this last argument has been the subject of the critique of cruelty and spectacular Blackness elaborated in section I., and its repudiation forms one of the main thrusts of Saidiya Hartman's book *Scenes of Subjection*. See Mabel Wilson's *Dancing in the Dark* for an analysis of the racism in Le Corbusier's *White Cathedrals*.

machine with no (micro-political) soul – of the slave as “the ultimate human tool” (Patterson, 7) or as “servomechanism”<sup>168</sup> – into a Black soul that is still very much machine, but also human and therefore, in Le Corbusier’s eyes, the herald of a new and better humanity. Le Corbusier’s *Cathedrals* is located in a historical moment in which the social death of slavery has already largely morphed into the civic death of the prison-slave-in-waiting, while new technologies (“broadcast”, “recordings”) have become increasingly important in the reproduction of symbolic death, both fostering the propagation of pessimist permutations of cruelty – from lynching-postcards (Allen) to the infamous Willie Horton mug-shot to media hysteria on Black hooded youth in the wake of the Trayvon Martin murder – and creating disruptions in the racializing suture of body and discourse, modes of technologically enabled and enhanced haunting that have been the subject of chapter II.2 and II.3.

This chapter will continue Le Corbusier’s industrial theme in a techno-music-post-industrial mode, by proposing a *Cyborg Black Studies* approach that is both historically and theoretically situated after a moment, when, as Ben Williams writes, “Becoming robots was, for African American musicians, a subliminally political empowerment and an identification with otherness, whether technological or racial”(161). In order to do this, a short terminological clarification is necessary. Although “[t]he cyborg and the posthuman are often used interchangeably, with both formations intended to signify a profound transformation in human identity” (Harvey, 352), there is a crucial difference between them that will lead this chapter to first explain why they are not identical, and then argue why they do have to be combined in order to permit the analysis of the impact of technological change on the constitution of Blackness.

Given the elaborations on the constitution of Blackness and the analysis of racialization as a social technology of suturing flesh and discourse, chapter II.3. argued that both White subject and Black abject must be understood as cybernetic organisms (cyborgs). This terminology emphasizes the idea of the body as an enmeshment of a mode of axiomatic discourse (in this case *cybernetics* in the sense of Norbert Wiener’s science of information and system regulation<sup>169</sup>) with the corporeality of flesh. In doing

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<sup>168</sup> “Like the robot – Karl Capek’s ‘21 Czech neologism for a mechanized worker – the slave was actually manufactured to fulfill a function: as a servomechanism, as a transport system, as furniture, as 3/5 of the human, as fractional subject” (Eshun, *More brilliant* 07[113]).

<sup>169</sup> The reference to cybernetics here is purely terminological. Norbert Wiener’s model itself is not adopted by the Cyborg Black Studies proposed here.

so, it differs from previous elaborations on the intersection of Blackness and the cyborg in two things. Firstly, a Cyborg Black Studies approach claims, following AfroFuturism, that Blackness has always–already been constituted as a posthuMan1/2 as well as cyborg identity. But because this has not been reflected within most of Black Studies outside AfroFuturist approaches, Cyborg Black Studies secondly propose to mobilize the figure of the Cyborg as a trope for thinking the constitution of Blackness beyond the huMan1/2, viz. beyond subjection and abjection. In spite of reclaiming a *longue durée* analysis of Blackness, Cyborg Black Studies is first and foremost focused on contemporary and future configurations of Blackness and the role of technological change therein. It is because of this double step of reclaiming explanatory power for both the past constitution of Blackness and the future of what Blackness may become, as well as because of the longstanding dispositivism within Black Studies, that ‘cyborg’ describes both the political ontology of Blackness and the trope that will permit thinking beyond this political ontology. In this, the notion of the ‘cyborg’ in Cyborg Black Studies is different from other elaborations combining Blackness with the cyborg or the posthuman, which do not approach the cyborg as a trope for a critical reading of the relationship between discourse and flesh and the deconstruction of the notion of the huMan1/2, but take the huMan1/2 as given, focusing either on the cyborg-body as a recent or yet to come “human-artificial hybrid” (Lavender 26) or reducing its potential to the cyborg as literary metaphor of the past rather than analytical model of ongoing modes of racialization<sup>170</sup>. In these latter approaches, the cyborg is portrayed as a ‘new’ or additional race (Lavender 182) rather than the prototype of racialization as such. Mostly, they have been centered on analyzing the parallels of race and technology as binary oppositions (rather than constitutionally enmeshed aspects within subjection/abjection) in SF (speculation fiction/science fiction). This can be exemplarily observed in Isiah Lavender’s notion of “technicity”:

“I define technicity as the integration of various technologies with humanity to produce new racial forms such as AI (artificial intelligence), cyborgs, artificial people and posthumans. Technicity is a reimagining of how race is affected by technology, a

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<sup>170</sup> See for example Thomas Foster’s reading of the cyborg as metaphor for slavery (150.f.).

way of imagining how individuals might conceive identity within increasingly technological worlds.” (17)<sup>171</sup>.

Although such works and their primary sources often offer valuable insights into racist structures underlying SF, they also over-identify cyborgness with Blackness, thereby reproducing the qualification of both the huMan1/2 and Whiteness as unmarked or natural (not technologically infected) and will therefore not be taken into account here. However, due note must be made here of Harryette Mullen’s idea of the “media cyborg constructed as a white body with a black soul” (86). The media cyborg is a fairly loose term that extends from the assimilation of Black culture by White people to the dubbing of White film actresses with Black singing voices. Here, the media cyborg harks back to the racial glitch theorized in relation to *Suture*, yet differs from it in the crucial point that in the media cyborg there is neither disruption (no glitch) nor deconstructive modification (no constitutional Blackness), but an artificial and voluntary racial assemblage that most often goes unnoticed and is designed to do so. Thus, in spite of its dissociation of constitutive and constituted Blackness, the media cyborg is not a trope of radical critique, but serves to conserve racial binaries beyond their seeming deconstruction. This, as Michael Chaney observes, is in fact the main goal of Mullen’s creating this figure as a trope for analyzing miscegenation:

“Unlike [Donna] Haraway’s cyborg, which is ideally able to occupy a radical new subject position by denaturing both of its constitutive terms (the human and the machine), Mullen’s cyborg underscores the way in which a particular term is always favored even after hybridizing ‘ontic’ binaries, in this case not merely human and machine but also black and white. Assimilation is equated with cyborgization in Mullen’s view, and the media cyborg always entails a production of Whiteness...” (264).

Cyborg Black Studies move away from this narrow and negative identification of cyborgness with a specific mode of racialization and insists that all ‘races’ are cyborg configurations. However, Whiteness and Blackness (to focus just on these two), subject

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<sup>171</sup> The term „technicity“ has also been used by other authors. Thomas Foster, for example, criticizes „David Tomas’s suggestion that ‘technicity’ is replacing ‘ethnicity’“ in terms of technological changes „making racial categories obsolete“ (xxiv).

and abject are not the same configurations. Connecting to Ben Williams' description of the cyborg as the contemporary follow-up to the robot as Black political trope, Cyborg Black Studies offer a general model of the cyborg as thinking beyond the huMan1/2, all the while emphasizing that reclaiming one's cyborgness, just like reclaiming one's humanity, takes on a different character depending on which side of the colonial difference that claim is made from. Thus, the model of the cyborg is universal, while the trope of the cyborg in Cyborg Black Studies is particular and localized in as far as it focuses on the cyborg configuration 'Blackness'. Expanding on Juan Atkin's introduction of the robot figure into Detroit Techno-culture<sup>172</sup>, Ben Williams writes of such a cyborg:

"The body that this music creates is not armored against the world with robot technology, but rather open and redefined by technology. Atkin's robot has been replaced by the cyborg, and the difference, as Claudia Springer points out, is crucial: 'While robots represent the acclaim and fear evoked by industrial age machines for their ability to function independently of humans, cyborgs incorporate rather than exclude humans, and in so doing erase the distinctions previously assumed to distinguish humanity from technology'." (167)

Unquoted by Williams, Springer continues her elaboration by pointing out that the development towards cyborgs means that: "Although human subjectivity is not lost in the process, it is significantly altered" (Springer 306). Unlike the robot, the cyborg is not-any-more-yet-still (as opposed to always-already) human, viz. the cyborg as understood here is not defined through a man-machine construction with clearly delimited human and machine parts but through a man-technology interbeing that undermines both these categories to create a hybrid being not in terms of synthesis between thesis and anti-thesis but as binary breaking third term. When referring to cyborgs, the term 'hybrid' is mostly used to signify the combination of the human and technology, both in terms of material machines (bionic prosthesis) and immaterial machines/technologies (genetically modified organisms). Yet, 'hybrid' also denotes postcolonial and decolonial attempts to undo the coloniality of subjection and abjection and avoids Oedipal triangulation and the Other it implies. In Cyborg Black Studies, the cyborg therefore is

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<sup>172</sup> "Berry Gordy built the Motown sound on the same principles as the conveyor or belt system of Ford. Today the plants don't work that way – they use computers and robots to build the cars. I'm probably more interested in Ford's robots than Berry Gordy's music" (Atkin quoted in Cosgrove 89).

hybrid both in terms of the human-machine interbeing and as a condensed form of referring to the Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of the assemblage that replaces the triangulated subject and object. Furthermore, it is a hybrid between the huMan1/2 past of Blackness and the cyborg future of unBlackness, thus marking the position of the cyborg as simultaneously inside and outside A[WS] and emphasizing the conceptual hybrid of unBlack Blackness and the MythScience that concerns itself with it.

The cyborg hybrid, then, is post-human in more than one sense. While both Whiteness and Blackness may be cyborg configurations, the interest of Cyborg Black Studies' interrogation of the impact of technological change on the constitution of Blackness lies in its post-huMan1/2 dynamics; it lies in the change – the afropessimist permutations – in the constitution of cyborg Blackness, not in the fact that it is a cyber organism (precisely because Blackness and race are so by definition). A cyborg, in other words, can still be huMan1/2, it can still be anthropo- and andro-centric<sup>173</sup> and intrinsically White and therefore the terms cyborg and posthuman must not be used interchangeably. A similar critique, however, also applies to trends in posthuman theory that, although critical of the historical trajectory of the term 'human', tend to confuse and lump together White (settler) humanity and Black (slave) non-humanity and often use the notion of the posthuman to extend the human both as a cognitive category and a value system beyond those identities explicitly posited as huMan1/2 towards a "pan-humanity" (Braidotti, *Posthuman* 11) that does not only not account for one's own situatedness in relation to the epistemic split created by A[WS] but also re-produces the erasure of Blackness<sup>174</sup>. Cyborg Black Studies is not about proposing a new form of totalizing narrative, it is not about the *Aufhebung* of race in a salvaged neo-humanism. Cyborg Black Studies refuses to recognize "advanced capitalism" as "post-racial" (Braidotti, *Posthuman* 98) and refers to the always-already post-human of Blackness in order to theorize the constructedness and constitutive nature of race not in terms of

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<sup>173</sup> Claudia Springer's goal, in fact, is to show how the figure of the cyborg serves to uphold male subjectivities and what in the present terminology would be considered the general axiomatic of huMan1/2. Thomas Foster also analyses this strain in cyberpunk writing and movies such as *Robocop* (171.ff.).

<sup>174</sup> The work of Rosi Braidotti shows why a critique inspired by D&G remains insufficient if it does not include D&G (specifically their notion of "becoming" and who can "become") within that critique. Thus, although the present text has many points in common with Braidotti's conception of the posthuman, it also proposes fundamental differences drawn from its engagement with the erasure of Blackness and the embracing of its own emanation from a White position of knowledge production. See Hayles and Halberstam & Livingston for further examples of feminist post(-)humanism limited by their insensitivity to their own racializing mechanics.

abolition, but in terms of its technologically induced and framed permutations and continuity. Although it carries the utopian promise of u.u., Cyborg Black Studies is both grounded in unBlack Blackness and – as the term unBlack unBlackness indicates by insisting on clinging to Blackness in spite of the *un-* – the forever impossible erasure of the constitutive nature of Blackness even in a hypothetical times that would not abject Blackness: the future will forever have been made of anti-Blackness. Cyborg Black Studies distances itself both from the focus on futurist huMan1/2-machine-constructions of most Cyborg theories and from the huMan1/2ism of much of posthuman theory, focusing instead on an anti-humanist humanoid-technology-interbeing whose pessimist permutations have been in process since the beginning of the transatlantic slave trade. The goal of the present chapter is to think of the post-huMan1/2 cyborg in terms of the decentered, non-linear assemblage that is the hybrid cyborg. The cyborg is not castrated by the master-signifier: it refuses the axiomatic lack in B/lack. Instead, it has to be thought of as a hybrid, productive and autopoietic instance (as will be further explained below).

But in spite of these reservations towards existing scholarship concerned with the post-human and cyborgs, Cyborg Black Studies owes a considerable debt to feminist writing, specifically Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto". In the "Manifesto", the cyborg becomes the ideal post-huMan1/2 utopian figure. Although still defined as "a hybrid creature, composed of organism and machine," Haraway's cyborg-trope already reaches beyond the binary opposition of man and machine, towards the *hybrid*:

" ... cyborgs are compounded of special kinds of machines and special kinds of organisms appropriate to the late twentieth century. Cyborgs are post-Second World War *hybrid* entities made of, first, ourselves and other organic creatures in our unchosen 'high-technological' guise as *information systems, texts, and ergonomically controlled laboring, desiring and reproducing systems*. The second essential ingredient in cyborgs is machines in their guise, also, as communication systems, texts and self-acting, ergonomically designed apparatuses." (150; emphasis added)

Describing her vision of cyborg politics as an updating of Foucault's notion of biopolitics (*idem.*) into "technobiopower" (Gane & Haraway, 148), Haraway's Cyborg Feminism

both diverges from (for example in terms of historical narrative) and anticipates and inspires many of Cyborg Black Studies' central ideas. She writes:

“By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics. The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centers structuring any possibility of historical transformation [...] the relation between organism and machine has been a border war. The stakes in the border war have been the territories of production, reproduction, and imagination. This chapter is an argument for *pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries and for *responsibility* in their construction [...] the utopian tradition of imagining a world without gender, which is perhaps a world without genesis, but maybe also a world without end. The cyborg incarnation is outside salvation history. Nor does it mark time on an oedipal calendar [...] The cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labor, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity. In a sense, the cyborg has no origin story in the Western sense [...]” (150; emphasis in the original)

The connections here are best established in dialogic form.

“No origin story in the Western sense ... ”

\_ *but MythSciene*, the AfroFuturist method of locating the origin of the posthuman in the Middle Passage, the alien abduction, the slave ship as the womb into which flesh enters and from which a cybernetic organism is pushed out; not entirely flesh, because freshly inscribed with Blackness, but also not huMan1/2, not body, already posthuman because made flesh in order to ‘create’ the huMan1/2 that is not-Black.

“The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics ... ” \_

\_ *a political ontology*; the race which is not given yet destiny in the world made with a colonial difference; but also a *hauntology* (see below). A cyborg configuration is an axiomatic identity and the Black Cyborg that is the abject of study here is internal to A[WS] in as far as it is Black. Cyborg politics are not about abolishing the enmeshment of



cybernetics and organism, body and discourse – they are not about regaining a lost purity and innocence or what Haraway calls “salvation” –, but of changing the configuration, changing the cybernetic axiomatics, about substituting it for another axiomatics by whatever means possible<sup>175</sup>. Even in u.u. the cyborg would still be cyborg, but of another political ontology and with another politics. The posthuman cyborg has no soul: it has been and can be reconfigured. This is what it means for AfroFuturism, Techno and other Black radical (culture) politics to not only embrace but try to move beyond post-soul.

*“By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs ...”*

*\_ MythScience, not anti-science: a science that ventures to explore that which is beyond itself, the language striving to catch the first rays and sine-waves of one of those, of that Fanonian new language(s) and new modes of being, thinking, making sense. Science, because still bend on discovering and explaining structures that allow explanation of causality, effect, predictability, because still respecting the requirements of intra-axiomatic falsifiability/verifiability. Myth, because insisting on the contingent foundation and malleability of the axiom that founds the realm of the explainable, thinkable, perceivable, predictable. MythScience because hybrid. Given the enmeshment of coloniality, modernity and rationality (see section I.), any attempt to un-think coloniality is always-already at risk of being axiomatically discredited as mythological-or-indigenous-as-politically-correct-noun-for-primitive. For the axiom, it’s own undoing starts in the form of noise and non-sense. At another moment in her *Manifesto*, Haraway writes:*

*“Cyborg politics is the struggle for language and the struggle against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism. That is why cyborg politics insist on *noise* and advocate pollution, rejoicing in the illegitimate fusion of animal and machine.”*  
(176; emphasis added)

Noise as illegible and illegitimate presence, haunting presences, t/races of information from another axiom. Emphasizing, as is done here, the *cyb*-ernetic in *cyb*-org, noise

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<sup>175</sup> In this, they differ from the schizo-analytic goal of simply abolishing an axiomatic without substituting it with another.

becomes interference in the “informatics of domination” (161), it becomes a re-wiring of the –org. As Nicholas Gane and Donna Haraway muse:

“NG: This means, in turn, that resistance – if we can call it that – might play through the breakdown of communication, or in the formulation of codes that prevent the easy translation of all cultural-natural forms. In light of this, is noise – that key term in cybernetic thinking – of increased political significance?”

DH: Yes, I think it is. [...] I’m interested in tropes as places where you trip. Tropes are way more than metaphors and metonymies and the narrow orthodox list. Noise is only one figure, one trope that I’m interested in. Tropes are about stutterings, trippings. They are about breakdowns and that’s why they are creative. That is why you get somewhere you weren’t before, because something didn’t work.” (*Interview* 151.f.)

Noise not just as counter-axiomatic signal, but as methodology, a form of t/racing that can only be articulated in *MythScience* precisely because what it has to speak of cannot be witnessed within the axiomatic.

*“This chapter is an argument for pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and for responsibility in their construction ...”*

\_ *and displeasure*: displeasure shaking the subject, the displeasure created by the semiosis of the abject that returns the cruelty that has made and is constantly remaking it.

*“The cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labor, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity ... ”*

\_ *antagonism, not conflict*. Haraway, too (and afropessimism would agree with this analysis of the posthuman, but disagree with the analogy between gender and race), understands the posthuMan1/2 as irreconcilable with White civil society. She shares AfroFuturism’s vision of the cyborg as something altogether different than human: the cyborg not simply as a hybrid that encompasses both the subject and its other but as the utopic figure of an emancipated abject. Yet both Haraway and AfroFuturism over-

emphasize the minoritarian position of the cyborg within a specific axiom and tend to naturalize the huMan1/2 versus the cyborg, as opposed to thinking Whiteness and Blackness as different cyborg configurations.

*Cyborgness!*

$$\{(soul \neq \text{O}) = (White = not-Black) = (human \neq machine)\}.$$

This axiomatic equation marks the split in cyborg theory, between the human and posthuman cyborg, between authors such as Claudia Springer, who argue that the cold rationality and force of the machine and cyborg are coded as male and that the cyborg in popular culture therefore should be understood as a mode of male and huMan1/2 reproduction, and authors such as Donna Haraway, who argue that the in-humanity of the cyborg must be subversively adapted to narrate not “countermemory” but “counterfuture” (cf. section II.3.3.), viz. that the cyborg signals something beyond the understanding of gendered and huMan1/2 thought. The cyborg, here, is a totem, a figure for becoming, accessible only to a few, rather than a description of something that already is. Using the critique of D&G’s notion of “becoming”, however, becoming cyborg turns into a useful problematization of the utopian potential of the cyborg trope and u.u., as it would mark the dynamic of a contemporary constitution of Blackness that both permits some privileged bodies to work the disruption of the constellation between constitutive, constituted and constitutional Blackness (or: C<sup>3</sup>) and tweaks these bodies’ cyborg configuration, while over-identifying and mass-incarcerating others. This problematic of becoming thus marks the crucial problematization of the differences between the anti-humanist racial glitch that can not be voluntarily produced, and the modalities of C<sup>3</sup> and t/racing that are central methodological tenets of Cyborg Black Studies and as such subject to both ‘human’ agency and volition and the axiomatic that frames them. Although the MythScience that is Cyborg Black Studies can attempt to retro-actively diagnose/narrate a glitch, it’s own mobilization of the abject has to be understood in terms of C<sup>3</sup>, with both the glitch and C<sup>3</sup> marking different kinds of semiosis of the abject. Cyborg Black Studies’ discourse on the abject aspects of the hybrid cyborg is always caught in a paradox, attempting to speak and write about something within a language whose axiomatic foundation the abject exceeds. As in cinema, realism necessarily stops here and myth begins, because the appearance of the abject part of the hybrid cyborg is not only noise, but also irrational and unreal within

the axiomatic. At the same time, however, this noise risks being both validated and contained by the its intra-axiomatic location of appearance in science. In order to avoid both the pitfalls of this paradox and its potential reproduction of Black abjection, further elaboration on the semiosis of the abject and the relationship between the glitch and C<sup>3</sup> is therefore necessary.

Closely related to Walter Mignolo's concept of "colonial semiosis" (*Hermenéutica*, 126), the semiosis of the abject emphasizes not only the potentially lethal appearance within the axiomatically determined socio-symbolic realm of something that is constitutively excluded from it, but also indicates that this appearance cannot simply take place or be expressed within the vocabulary or grammar of that realm and its axiomatic. The semiosis of the abject can never be total in the axiomatic that creates this abjection to constitute itself, because such a total semiosis would destroy that axiomatic. It can, however, be partial and it is this partiality that is emphasized in terms such as unBlack Blackness that still rely on the axiomatic framework of their appearance (viz. Blackness). As section II. has shown, thinking about the semiosis of the abject thus revolves around two key fields of interrogation:

1. How and in how far does the abject cease to be abject through its semiosis within the axiom that abjects it? Does a prior transformation have to take place for such a semiosis to even be thinkable? Does its appearance indicate that it was not 'really' abject in the first place? How many kinds of semiosis of the abject are there (semiosis of the body-abject in *The Crying Game*, semiosis of the flesh-abject in *Suture* ...)?
2. How would such a semiosis come about? What form would it take? Would it be possible to intra-axiomatically speak about such a semiosis in a form that is not noise? Would such a semiosis emerge in uncolonized fields, or would it create such fields through deterritorialization? How does a partial semiosis of the abject relate to a total semiosis and the creation of one or many (Fanonian) new language(s)?

So far, two approaches towards answering these questions have been suggested: the glitch and constitutional Blackness (which are not in themselves moments of the

semiosis of the abject, but describe structural dynamics which may cause and be caused by such moments).

The glitch is an event within discourse and it is from here that it affects the inscription of discourse onto and into the body. The glitch is cybernetic, it is not between discourse and body – this “between” being the place of cruelty – but firmly within discourse. The glitch emphasizes a structural effect, it is not the product of a free and oppositional consciousness. How, then, does it come about, if it cannot be willed? Either through accumulation of micro-differential ruptures that are produced within its reproduction, or through an autopoietic moment, an event in the desiring machine, a chaotomic happening, which exceeds or disrupts existing modes of racialization and Blackness. Again, the argument returns to Deleuze and Guattari. Although proponents of micro-differential ruptures (e.g. Judith Butler) theorize these in dispositive patterns, micro-difference and autopoiesis are not mutually exclusive. While micro-difference explains intra-dispositive effects, the concept as such does not exclude the possibility that events originating outside the dispositive affect that dispositive. The schize is not ‘either ... or’ but accumulative. Thus, although micro-difference as such terms the ruptures that might appear in reiterative processes of subjection and abjection, it does not exclude haunting (see chapters I.3.f. + II.2.). Indeed, micro-differential thought is motivated by haunting in as far as haunting comes from that space which is not subjectivated/abjected and which thus forces the reiterations of subjection in which micro-differences can appear. But micro-differential thought insists that haunting will remain such, contained in melancholia as the impossible morning of the lost part. But rather than accepting the idea of melancholia, one should consider haunting the first indication of a possible autopoietic event. As such the uncanny and frightening feeling the marionette or cyborg may cause carry a socially symptomatic dimension. This is where the politics of displeasure emerge as part of cyborg politics, but it is also the hauntology as theorized by Mark Fisher:

“What haunts the digital cul-de-sacs of the twenty-first century is not so much the past as all the lost futures that the twentieth century taught us to anticipate. [...] More broadly, and more troublingly, the disappearance of the future meant the deterioration for a whole mode of social imagination: the capacity to conceive of a

world radically different from the one in which we currently live.” (“Hauntology”, 16)

Musing about the records of Blues musician Robert Johnson and the hauntological character of AfroFuturism, Fisher notes that in hauntology, “there is no presence except mythologically” (“Crackle”, 49). But mythological, here, does not refer to imaginary or made up, but designates the only possible mode of presence for something which is not compatible with the axiomatic criteria of reality and ‘hard’ science, while also indicating that the semiosis of the abject, in disrupting the axiomatic, also inflects time beyond the supposed linearity of modernity and its subjects and towards the assemblaged hybridity of the unBlack Black cyborg and some of its temporal performances such as the remembering that Toni Morrison develops in *Beloved*. Haunting emanates from outside the axiomatic and therefore poses a threat to both that axiomatic and the political ontology it founds. As Colin Davis points out:

“Hauntology supplants its near-homonym ontology, replacing the priority of being and presence with the figure of the ghost as that which is neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive. [It marks; S.W.] a wholly irrecoverable intrusion in our world, which is not comprehensible within our available intellectual frameworks, but whose otherness we are responsible for preserving.” (373)

UnBlack Blackness is (as Blackness) something that bears the trace of its axiomatic constitution, yet the para-ontological split it mobilizes and the hybridity it creates mark a haunting of that constitutive axiomatic. Reading Fisher’s notes on Johnson, one could think he might well have been speaking about the presence of the Black abject in A[WS], with his focus on formalist play as a way in which hauntology pushes against the limits of expression and cognition and his emphasis that “Hauntology is the proper name for a history made up of gaps, erased names and abductions” (“Crackle”, 52). Here we begin to circle around the specificities of the hybrid cyborg. Thinking not only about, but through the unBlack Black cyborg (as AfroFuturism does) means taking up the challenge to think of haunting as a mode of conceiving from within A[WS] a “world radically different”. Thus, haunting, again, returns us to the question of the semiosis of the abject, just as it

returns us to the difficulty of intra-axiomatic speech and noise and to the question (C. Davis, 379) and “position of the unthought” (Wilderson & Hartman).

Where is haunting located in the terminology developed thus far? Is it a precondition or already the first stage of the semiosis of the abject? An uncanny feeling, present but not grasped in language, felt (affective? psychological?) noise but not yet symbolic noise? One must dwell on autopoiesis for a short moment to grapple with this problematic. How does it come about, what is it? Derrida – whose “hauntology”<sup>176</sup> inspired that of Mark Fisher – approaches autopoiesis through (auto)teleipoietics, giving the following definition:

“*Teleipoiós* qualifies, in a great number of contexts and semantic orders, that which *renders* absolute, perfect, completed, accomplished, finished, that which *brings* to an end. But permit us to play with the *tele* [...] *Rendering, making, transforming, producing, creating* – this is what counts; but given that this happens only in the auto-tele-affection of the said sentence, in so far as it implies or incorporates its reader, one would – precisely to be complete – have to speak of auto-teleipoetics.” (*Friendship*, 32; emphasis in the original)

The emphasis here is on a production that is more than the micro-difference created by disturbed re-production. (Auto)teleipoiois is an act of “generation by joint and simultaneous grafting of the performative and the reportive, without a body of its own” (*idem*). (Auto)teleipoietics have a retroactive character through which a cause is determined by its effect, viz. in which an effect creates in its event the conditions of its possibility and epistemic grasp-ability, which, in axiomatic terms means that an extra-axiomatic event creates only in its happening the ruptures in the axiom that make it cognitively possible. Thus, (auto)teleipoiois marks the relationship between the racial glitch and Cyborg Black Studies. What could not be thought of, what was neither legible nor legitimate, imposes itself in its event. It will not be erased by an axiom, because if the modes of erasure were able to do this, this would imply that the event had a least been

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<sup>176</sup> “Repetition and first time: this is perhaps the question of the event as questions of the ghost. *What* is a ghost? What is the *effectivity* or the *presence* of a specter, that is, of what seems to remain as ineffective, virtual, insubstantial as a simulacrum? Is there *there*, between the thing itself and its simulacrum, an opposition that holds up? [...] Let us call it *hauntology*. This logic of haunting would not be merely larger and more powerful than an ontology or a thinking of Being ...” (Derrida, *Spectres*, 49; emphasis in the original).

implicitly anticipated and therefore never really was an event at all. But although this offers a first clarification of the importance of the concept of (auto)teleipoetics for Cyborg Black Studies, it does not explain how such an event could happen nor what its implications would be, but stops with the assertion that, could we understand the event *a priori*, it would not be an event. The questions asked about the character and possibility of the semiosis of the abject still stands, while it seems, again, that the argument begins to circle around itself faster and faster the more one nears the limits of the axiom that founds it. While MythScience may attempt to narrate an origin to (auto)teleipoetics, the fact that it can only be acknowledged retroactively makes of it an intuition more than a deduction, that is, a cognitive category fundamentally determined by one's position in relation to the colonial difference and once position or situation vis-à-vis A[WS] and its constitutional cruelty and agnotology.

This has two fundamental consequences for a Cyborg Black Studies approach. First of all, it means that (auto)teleipoetics cannot be conceived as Freud-Lacanian drives (such as Moten's liberatory drive), which occupy well defined dynamics and constitute well analyzed relationships. Rather, it is very much like the productive desire in D&G. As Slavoj Žižek argues in his reading of Deleuze through Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela's conceptualization of "autopoiesis" (to which Derrida's notion of (auto)teleipoetics harks back)<sup>177</sup>, the question of this autopoietic event is nothing less than the question of freedom as the possibility to act in spite of not being a free monadic agent (Žižek, *Organe* 153-162), in spite of being determined by discourse deep into the

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<sup>177</sup> According to Félix Guattari, Varela's autopoiesis refers to a homogenetic system reproducing itself inside itself (as would for example be the case in a living organism). Guattari himself explicitly refuses to limit the term to homogenetic and self-identical processes, describing Varela's version of autopoiesis "... as unitary individuation, with neither input nor output ...", while his own conceptualization would, "... direct us towards a more collective machinism without delimited unity, whose autonomy accommodates diverse mediums of alterity" (*Chaosmosis* 42). Guattari therewith performs a rapprochement to the function of the "telei" in Derrida's (auto)teleipoetics which emphasize both the notion of becoming and becoming beyond one self. Although not identical – especially in what concerns the emphasis on event in "poiesis" and the emphasis on systematicity in "poietics" – Guattari's and Derrida's terms sufficiently overlap to be subsumed in the use of Guattari's concept of autopoiesis for the purpose of this chapter. For a more detailed look at Maturana & Varela's concept of autopoiesis and its adaptation by D&G, see Paul Bains (85ff.). Rosi Braidotti also uses an adaptation of the Maturana-Varela notion of "auto-poietics" closer to the original to ground her thinking of the posthuman in a nature-culture continuum that refuses both a transcendental notion of the human (e.g. through the soul) and a biological purism that would oppose species and technology: "My point is that this [social constructivist] approach, which rests on the binary opposition between the given and the constructed, is currently being replaced by a non-dualistic understanding of nature-culture interaction. In my view the latter is associated to and supported by monistic philosophy, which rejects dualism, especially the opposition nature-culture and stresses instead the self-organizing (or autopoietic) force of living matter"(Braidotti, *Posthuman* 3).



realms of one's desires. It is the question of agency in spite of accepting the afropessimist analysis, the question of agency in spite of disagreeing with large parts of Black Optimism (see chapter II.2.) and thus one of the central questions of Cyborg Black Studies. Autopoiesis marks the limits of discourse and guarantees its insufficiency in terms of a total reproduction of power. There will always be disturbance and rupture. But this must not be misunderstood as abject agency. Haunting is not simply a political scheme, but a socio-politico-epistemico-economico (etc.) effect. Although haunting seems to imply agency on the part of the abject, it should rather be understood as a deficiency of the axiom, haunting as long as that axiom holds, but transforming into a semiosis of the abject as soon as the axiom falters, e.g. in the event of a glitch, which thus marks an effect involving both the axiom and its outside.

C<sup>3</sup>, on the other hand, describes an intra-axiomatic process, a dynamic between different dimensions of an axiom. The glitch points to an effect within the axiomatic that disturbs or disrupts its inscription into the body/flesh, viz. the glitch describes a rupture between constitutive and constituted Blackness that potentially disrupts its constitution and introduces into the axiom outside-moments that it cannot understand and not assimilate or colonize, such as noise. The glitch has no founding, except hauntology. C<sup>3</sup>, on the other hand, is founded on political ontology. It describes a dynamic that arises out of the relation between constitutive and constituted Blackness and works on the level of the constituted, remaining within the language of the axiomatic and the space for perceived agency it offers, trying to transform rather than abolish it. The glitch, in other words, pertains to *aeskesis*, it works towards the new language and a new political ontology and can only be hinted at, while C<sup>3</sup> remains in the given language and ontology and marks a specific mode of contra-axiomatic expression at the intersection of politics and aesthetics (e.g. Free Jazz, Black Arts Movement, etc.). While the glitch describes a more radical position working towards u.u., C<sup>3</sup> enables a theorization of intra-axiomatic changes within the continuity of pessimist permutations; the paradigmatic (but by no means exclusive) counter-axiomatic dynamic of C<sup>3</sup> therefore is micro-difference, not the autopoiesis attributed to the glitch above.

This leads to the second consequence of the intuitive character of autopoiesis for a Cyborg Black Studies methodology: it's schizo-analytic approach. In spite of insisting on the differences between different cyborg configurations, as well as its emphasis on the

continuing fatality of pessimist permutations, Cyborg Black Studies ultimately propose a system of hybridity not based on difference (or *différance*). As Guattari points out (and this defines the engagement with the work of both D&G throughout the present text), autopoiesis is a concept that is neither structural nor post-structural, but on the contrary describes productive forces that are constantly undoing structure:

“Structure implies feedback loops, it puts into play a concept of totalisation that it itself masters. It is occupied by inputs and outputs whose purpose is to make the structure function according to a principle of eternal return. It is haunted by a desire for eternity. The machine, on the contrary, is shaped by a desire for abolition. Its emergence is doubled with breakdown, catastrophe – the menace of death. It possesses a supplement: a dimension of alterity, which it develops in different forms. This alterity differentiates it from structure, which is based on a principle of homeomorphism. The difference supplied by the machinic autopoiesis is based on disequilibrium, the prospection of virtual Universes far from equilibrium. And this doesn’t simply involve a rupture of formal equilibrium, but a radical ontological reconversion.” (*Chaosmosis* 37)

Breakdown, death, disequilibrium, catastrophe ... those were the dangers that threatened the Lacanian subject if it came too close to the abject that is both constitutive of and banned outside the dispositive and its axiom. It is in this sense that Guattari’s use of “alterity” has to be understood as referring to something not assimilated by the axiom, as that whose introduction into the dispositive creates ruptures, disorder and ultimately freedom. The ultimate potential of autopoiesis is thus the abolition of the axiom and the political ontology it founds; the “radical ontological conversion” points to a fanonian new language and the axiomatically unspeakable and afropessimist a-topia. But Guattari, too, must admit that, although autopoiesis guarantees agency and freedom, the ontological reconversion marks an extreme point that escapes an agency one can only theorize in that discourse which will break down in its event. The question asked of the impact of technological change on the constitution of Blackness here continues in a different form: Is autopoiesis – as that which undergirds the semiosis of the abject – deterritorializing or reterritorializing, does it undo racialization or create not yet racialized spaces?

The glitch would be an example of deterritorialization, but as was pointed out in the critique of becoming cyborg, one has to be careful not to confuse epistemological deracialization with deracialization ‘in the streets’: unthinking race is not undoing race. As anti-humanist autopoiesis, the glitch can neither be a political strategy nor an academic method in itself. It is an event that not only escapes, but undermines structure. No matter on what side of the colonial difference one is located, one cannot willingly produce a glitch. Nevertheless, the significance and impact of the glitch changes according to that location. While Blackness, through its abjection and antagonistic relation to constitutional cruelty, always-already ‘lives’ as such ‘in’ an epistemological hybridity made up of both A[WS] and that which haunts it and breaks open in the glitch, the White subject can only learn to note the glitch’s presence in its effects and through the affects it produces. While the Black abject, then, because of its experiences of being Black in A[WS], may ‘know’ of the possibility and necessity of the glitch before it happens, the White subject, indeed, can only (but must) learn to be affected after the fact. Parts of a Cyborg Black Studies approach would therefore consist in teaching/learning a mode of apprehending, a mode of listening to noise, of not erasing the t/race, not ignoring the glitch, of being “in the wake” (Sharpe). This is a mode of askesis, where the subject needs to learn its enmeshment with abjection and its erasure. But as the abject and its semiosis are not contained within the discourse they constitute, this cannot simply be done through “common sense” and everyday language and reason. It is for this reason that MythScience and autopoiesis are related to affect, to sensing (both as perceiving through the senses and as giving sense) the uncanny, to being haunted by absent presences/present absences not contained in axiomatic modes of feeling, knowing, making sense. But one need not aim directly for ontological reconstitution and the radical potential of the glitch, but may approach the work of/on haunting (both in terms of a t/racing hauntology and in the sense of promoting the creation of the conditions of possibility of haunting) – as it was theorized in the preceding chapters under the names of a politics and cinema of displeasure or noise – through the conceptual framework of C<sup>3</sup>.

This is also the direction of Félix Guattari’s work, who defines his engagement with chaosmosis (based on schizo-analysis) as an attempt to articulate an “ethico-aesthetic paradigm” (*Chaosmosis* 8). This step back from total ontological reconstitution to the aesthetic is precisely the step back from afropessimism to a partial and provisional

alignment with Black Optimism that I have defined as inevitable for White authors such as myself, or, in other words, for the White subject which, through its being a subject, has necessarily to begin its engagement with abjection from an intra-axiomatic position. But this schizo-analytic engagement and provisional alignment is also strongly characterized by important differences from Black Optimism, because it refuses the latter's structural approach and its reliance on Lacanian psychoanalysis. In using the term "machine", Guattari refers back to his development, together with Deleuze, of a notion of desire that is productive, not representative, a desire that is always full, never lacking. This desire is a force of autopoiesis, much like Fred Moten's idea of a liberatory drive, but it is not simply based and contained in Oedipal models, but must remain unknown in its ultimate nature. The machine cannot be known in itself, it can only be approached in the assemblages of political, psychological, technical (and so on) effects and the dynamics it combines to form the subject. This assemblage is an ongoing process with ever changing and developing parts, not simply a soul damned into the confines of the dispositive. In fact, as was mentioned several times already, there is no soul here at all: both the subject and the abject do not exist as such but are only ever constituted through political ontologies: they are only relational, configured by but never completely contained in A[WS].

Cyborg Black Studies focus on these configured relational assemblages from within A[WS], because this is the location of the sciences in which even MythScience still partly partakes. They are still *Black* Studies, but, working from unBlack Blackness, they push towards unBlack unBlackness (and thus, ultimately, self-abolition). Although Cyborg Black Studies give a central role to autopoiesis in the transformation of Blackness, they do not simply prophesize the coming of the glitch and built a cult around its epiphanies, but both analyze its conditions of possibility and work to create them. In doing so, they focus on the transformation of axioms, and on disruptions in central racializing mechanics such as constitutional cruelty, without simply withdrawing into esoteric systems of inspiration, improvisation, revelation or individual genius. The term "Myth" is not to be read as indicating mysticism or gratuitousness. Rather, the "Myth" in Cyborg Black Studies as MythScience emphasizes (as this text hopes to have demonstrated) the existence of alternative modes of knowing and sensing as a position of disciplined critique. This is precisely the point where Cyborg Black Studies as MythScience meet with Guattari's ethico-aesthetic paradigm. Both position themselves on the fine line

between analytical science and a productive mode more closely associated with art. MythScience, thus, is caught in several aporias: it has to use speech to express that which is not only beyond that speech but lethal to it; it is concerned with a position it partly excludes (viz. Cyborg Black Studies are still connected to White colonialist epistemology. Even though it strives to undo that epistemology, its enunciative position refers it back to the White subject side of colonial difference); it aims to undo the subject that determines its grammar; it emphasizes the anti-humanism of the axiomatic event while venturing to t/race these through the haunting of the abject. These aporias signal the necessity of a methodology pushing against the limits set by A[WS], and it is in order to even be able to think them that one needs to engage with science through the “Myth” of MythScience.

In other words: Cyborg Black Studies, as all Black Studies, is a mobile methodology whose specificities depend on who uses them, with what they concern themselves and at whom they are directed. Thus, a White author such as myself, who does not experience being-in-a-Black-body and its socio-political consequences and implications, must posit a glitch in A[WS] prior to his work in order to guarantee its conditions of possibility. Such a White subject can only approach Black Studies from a decentered perspective, having to learn to listen and having to work on its subjectivity in order to be able to do so. Given the foundational role of Black abjection for White subjection, Black Studies is always also a work on Whiteness (*et vice versa*). However, a shared cyborgness must not produce mislead universalities. As was mentioned above, cyborgs do differ in their configurations and these differences play an essential role for the design of Cyborg Black Studies methodology. While this may be read as radical socio-epistemological determinism, the effect of autopoiesis is precisely to prevent this. It is precisely to break the power of any form of dispositivism and make possible instead what Guattari describes as “chaosmosis”, whose main point of definition is that it subverts static modes of subjection by a mobilization of pre- and non-discursive affects which qualify as chaos when set in relation to the structures they undo (*Chaosmosis* 79). This being-set-in-relation is essential: Chaosmosis is not simply the eruption of “being in general” (81) into discourse; it does not start from the “zero degree of subjectification” (*idem*) but marks an “extreme degree of intensification” (82). In other words: the abject is not being-itself threatening to destroy the dispositive, nor is it a new magic totem White subjects must capture in order to free themselves of themselves and access new

realms of pure knowledge. It must not be forgotten that the abject stands in a relation of mutual constitution with the axiom that erases it. Therefore, any mobilization of the abject is never simply the eruption of a separate outside, but the folding back of the constitutive outside into the inside of the axiom, hence, an intensification of its constitutive mode that may create ruptures in the constituted; an “intensification” that may reach the mode of being/becoming constitutional. As the analysis of *Suture* has shown, such an intensification may be put in scene within A[WS] in a manner pushing against but still firmly inside its limits. While the glitch signals a deterritorializing structural defect completely outside volition, constitutional Blackness and the C<sup>3</sup> complex mark a productive effect to which both subject and abject may connect and whose ultimate results can range from a mere recalibration of (post)structural categories such as constituted Blackness (for example giving voting rights to Black people while maintaining and even refining the mechanisms which produce their social, civic and symbolic death) to a semiosis of the abject disrupting the (post)structural paradigm and not only incompatible with, but unthought and unthinkable through it.

Cyborg Black Studies exceeds (Post-)Structuralism. It is schizo-analytic and it is tied to hauntology: its chaosmosis is not ontological, but happens where political ontology, in its attempt to constitute and reproduce itself, partially fails to do so. Chaosmosis may therefore be understood as an anti-humanist principle of hope: though one’s own agency is limited through one’s axiomatic subjection/abjection, the latter not only describe a never total nor finished process, but are furthermore subject to sudden and violent disruption (at least on the theoretical level) and therefore change is thinkable and theoretically possible. But Cyborg Black Studies and its conceptualizations of chaosmosis, autopoiesis, glitch, C<sup>3</sup> and semiosis of the abject is not merely focused on abstract events: for Cyborg Black Studies, a pure event is not relevant if it does not bear the potential to partake in the undoing of racial discrimination and privilege. It is in its focus on the assemblaged subject/abject, that Cyborg Black Studies permits theorizing how technological change impacts the constitution of Blackness and its socio-political situation and feeds back into the Cyber of the Cyborg. Right from the beginning of *Chaosmosis*, Guattari insists on the importance of considering technology in any theorization of the assemblage that is the subject:

“...technological machines of information and communication operate at the heart of human subjectivity, not only within its memory and intelligence, but within its sensibility, affects and unconscious fantasms.” (3)

Though he does not use the word ‘cyber’, the argument that founds its use here is implicit in Guattari’s elaboration on the assemblage-subject. *Chaos* designates a glitch in the *Cyber*; it affects the *Cyborg* as glitch, the ultimate threat of *Chaos* being psychosis. Drawing from both his work as a practicing psychoanalyst and his previous writing on schizo-analysis, Guattari refuses to qualify psychosis as negative in relation to a positive ‘normal’, but he is also aware of the difficulties of proposing psychosis as a socio-political model, choosing to focus on art as a contained mode of psychotic moments instead. This amounts to acknowledging the possibility of the glitch and of the semiosis of the abject in general, while recognizing that one can only approach it through conceptual frames such as C<sup>3</sup>. Art, here, is not located in the artist<sup>178</sup>, but marks a shift of focus from ontological claims to truth to performative and formalist interrogations. As such, the term designates a chaotomic potential inherent to every part of the subject-assemblage and a function that may also be occupied by non-living things or places, e.g. a kitchen:

“The enunciative emergence of the kitchen at La Borde [the clinic where Guattari worked; S.W.], to stay with this example, can lead it to take on the role of partial analyzer, without any guarantee in time. The autopoietic character of such an instance calls for a permanent renewal of the assemblage, a verification of its capacity to welcome a-signifying singularities – unbearable patients, insoluble conflicts – a constant readjustment of its transversalist opening to the outside world. [...] Just as the schizo has broken moorings with subjective individuation, the analysis of the Unconscious should be recentered on non-human processes of subjection that I call machinic, but which are more than human ...” (*Chaosmosis* 71f.)

Guattari’s theorization of chaosmosis as an ethico-aesthetic paradigm follows normative pragmatics that are also those of Cyborg Black Studies: it hints at a productive space

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<sup>178</sup> “This is not about making artists the new heroes of the revolution, the new levers of History!” (*Chaosmosis* 91).

whose alterity-to-the-axiomatic-inside functions to create and guarantee intra-axiomatic modes of change and freedom, yet cannot inhabit this productive space because it's goal is to offer modes of critique and creativity engaged with both noise and axiomatically legible and legitimate modes of knowing and making sense.

The Cyborg is an assembled/assemblaged figure. It is a trope chosen to facilitate thinking beyond the linear and (post-)structuralist subjectivity and abjection so prevalent in current North-Western Theory. Through this trope, the subject is both radically decentered and destabilized and the role of technology in this decentering is emphasized. The cyborg, thus, is not simply a given object of study, but also a figure that crosses the White huMan1/2 axiom of A[WS] and, in doing so, creates the chaosmotic dynamics that will permit proposing a a-topian thinking from unBlack Blackness towards unBlack unBlackness. By theorizing chaosmosis and autopoiesis, the semiosis of the abject and the ontological reconstitution it would signal cease to be only a radical horizon and become recognized as recurrent events that permit at least the thought that the pessimist permutations in the constitution of Blackness may one day come to an end. Yet, these recurrent events are precisely the objects of the erasure that makes the constitutive disappear under the constituted. As the necessity to still speak of subject and abject indicates, not all cyborgs inhabit the same social position/situation. As in noise, the subject and the abject cyborg configurations find themselves on different sides of an epistemic divide, on different sides of the colonial difference. What may be a chaosmotic event in one series of cyborg assemblages therefore must not be so in another. Guattari acknowledges this:

“Art is not just the activity of established artists but of a whole subjective creativity which traverses the generations and oppressed peoples, ghettos, minorities ... I simply want to stress that the aesthetic paradigm – the creation of mutant percepts and affects – has become the paradigm for every possible form of liberation, expropriating the old scientific paradigms, to which, for example, historical materialism or Freudianism were referred.” (*Chaosmosis* 91)

Again, we return to MythScience (but this time we will not begin the ritornello of hybridity again, we will not write about the difficulty of writing of that beyond the axiom that structures writing one more time.) Rather, this chapter and text will perform



closure by considering what the shift from subject/abject to hybrid assemblage might mean for constitutional cruelty.

The trope of the cyborg does not only indicate a move away from the huMan1/2 as a matrix for analysis, but also distances itself from conceptualizing subjectivity through desire(-as-lack) that has been a focus of critique all throughout this text. The cyborg trope follows the critique of dispositivistic White self-overrepresentation and answers to the impossibility of Black desire within A[WS] that the schizo-analytic approach has traced in dispositivism. The cyborg signals how the suturing of flesh and discourse is not an ontogenetic process, but constituted and performed by power. The cyborg has no drives or Butlerian imperative longing to participate in any society and occupy symbolic space at all costs, in it desire as the 'natural' link between flesh and discourse is broken and therewith the soul undone. The emergence of the cyborg and the development of the glitch fundamentally revolutionize the role of desire in the explanation of social identity and racialization, both redirecting the focus to the essential importance and constitutive role of cruelty in the formation of Blackness (and Whiteness), and underlining the both artificial and tragic character of both Blackness, Whiteness and other forms of racialization. However, as has been emphasized repeatedly in the schizo-analytic approach pursued here, this does not mean that such totalizing desire does not exist, but merely indicates that this desire does not exist 'as such' or as the only form of desire, but is merely one possible aspect of a series of cyborg configurations among others. What these other configurations and their relations to cruelty or different forms and modes of desire might be, cannot be known or expressed within the axiomatic of this writing at this point. This means that in spite of the change in the constitution of Blackness and in spite of the potential of the glitch theorized here in relation to technological change, neither cruelty nor the racialization it founds cease to exist. Neither C<sup>3</sup>, nor the racial glitch, so far, have kept Black bodies from magnetizing bullets, even if the trope of the cyborg permits thinking and points beyond (social, symbolic, civic) death. Thus, death itself is hybridized. The cyborg is not only within huMan1/2-speech but makes cyborg-noise. If there should be a desire specific to the cyborg-trope proposed here, it would emanate from unBlack Blackness, that is: from an assemblage rooted in the past and present of A[WS] while also outside and haunting it. This desire would be the productive and chaosmotic force proposed by D&G: something whose presence would affect the axiom, but can not be integrated, channeled and controlled by

it. Thus, unBlack Black cyborg-pleasure is already a different pleasure as yet unspeakable. The cyborg makes a totalizing theory impossible, including the one expounded here. It is a trope whose mode of activation indicates the position of the author in relation to the epistemic split of colonial difference: the cyborg's pleasure would frustrate the axiom, while the cyborg's frustrations would drive the politics of displeasure. As Donna Haraway writes:

“Race, gender and capital require a cyborg theory of wholes and parts. There is no drive in cyborgs to produce total theory, but there is an intimate experience of boundaries, their construction and deconstruction. There is a myth system waiting to become a political language to ground one way of looking at science and technology and challenging the informatics of domination in order to act potently.” (181)

*“ ... a makeshift memorial sprang up in the middle of the street where Michael Brown’s body had been sprawled in plain view for more than four hours. Flowers and candles were scattered over the bloodstains in the pavement [...] Soon, police vehicles reappeared [...] An officer let the dog he was controlling urinate on the memorial site. [...] Brown’s mother, Lesley McSpadden, and others ... placed candles and sprinkled flowers on the ground where Brown had died [...] Soon, the candles and flowers had been smashed, after police drove over them.”*

(Follman)

*“The radio receiver guaranteed this true lie. Every evening, from nine o’clock to midnight, the Algerian would listen. At the end of the evening, not hearing the Voice<sup>179</sup>, the listener would sometimes leave the needle on a jammed wavelength or one that simply produced static, and would announce that the voice of the combatants was here. For an hour the room would be filled with the piercing, excruciating din of the jamming.”*

(Fanon, “Voice” 332)

Tuning into the din, the noise, the listener of the *Voice* tuned into a presence erased, or at least partly so. She or he tuned into a disrupted signal on and through which anti-colonial fighters in Algeria reclaimed constitutive violence and cruelty in order to constitute themselves and to constitute an independent state. And although these fighters had not yet been able to conquer all public spaces, or even the both constitutive and constituted space of radio waves, those who sympathized with the emancipation struggle were able to hear the *Voice* through the noise of the jammed station. These listeners had not only tuned their radio to static, but they themselves had tuned into a different desire, not for smooth ‘music’ and reportive or iterative communication, but for generative noise. Their desire had become chaosmotic, creating an imaginary

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<sup>179</sup> *The Voice of Fighting Algeria* was a pirate radio station during the Algerian war of independence, whose reception the French colonial state powers tried to disturb by jamming its wavelengths. The “true lie” refers to claiming that one had heard this station. It was true in as far as one was tuned into the station’s wavelength and might be able to hear snippets through the jamming. It was a lie in as far as, because of the jamming, this was a productive rather than receptive listening, an imagining rather than knowing of what was being transmitted.

community and a shared public space out of the white noise of State produced jamming, out of sheer will and want, drawing hope from signals that prior to that had been illegible, the radio becoming a mediating agent of autopoiesis not unlike the LaBorde kitchen.

As the writing on this text began, the Black teenager Trayvon Martin was shot by a vigilante for not much more than wearing a hoodie and being Black. Now, as this writing is coming to an end, a St. Louis County Grand Jury has decided not to bring criminal charges against the White police officer who shot Michael Brown, another Black teenager, and left him to bleed to death in the streets for four hours. Even before that Grand Jury decision, police let their dogs urinate on a memorial for Brown, made up of flowers by mourners on the place where he died. Whatever deracializing potential a theoretical consideration of the racial glitch might trace, whatever transformative force this consideration might find in C<sup>3</sup>, must measure up against this continued cruelty and the continued pessimist permutations of anti-Blackness and Black abjection. Combined with the ongoing continuity of technological change, this continued reproduction of anti-Blackness makes it impossible to conclude a study on the impact of technological change on the constitution of Blackness. Instead, one can only sketch further problematics and directions for future work, work that inherently needs to continue, just as change never stops and cruelty persists. It is a work of listening to the din, the noise, listening to the voices of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, aunt Hester ...

Fanon wrote of *The Voice of Fighting Algeria*:

“This voice, often absent, physically inaudible, which each one felt welling up within himself, founded an inner perception of the Fatherland, became materialized in an irrefutable way. Every Algerian, for his part, broadcast and transmitted *the new language*. The nature of this voice recalled in more than one way that of the Revolution: present ‘in the air’ in isolated pieces, but not objectively.” (*idem*. Emphasis added.)

In order to not only engage with Fanon’s call for a new language, but apply its creative and political force to its own production, this text’s research into postcolonial and Black epistemologies and their effects in such diverse fields as Political Theory, Film and

Sound Studies offered an often fundamental critique of the foundations of established disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. It combined post-Marxist and psychoanalytic as well anti-psychiatric and Film Theory with French Theory and Black and Sound Studies. Interweaving research into the Prison Industrial Complex and its history with theoretical questions of desire and abjection drawn from Gender Studies and pursued in an analysis of postmodern film and Detroit Techno music, several fields that are often treated apart within Black Studies were combined to offer a new approach to Black Studies. The focus of this approach was often the inscription of power into and onto bodies and flesh and the complication technological change introduces into that inscription. The common thread running through all the different chapters and fields of the present text was a Black Studies inspired schizo-analytic critique of the mostly Lacanian infrastructure of the theories touched upon. This critique was articulated with a pronounced decolonial interest and lead to the formulation of a fundamentally new approach to Black Studies by closing with a critique of posthumanism, offering 'noise' as a new epistemological paradigm and moving the 'Cyborg' instead of the 'Human' into the focus of Black Studies. In doing so, however, the text has also criticized schizo-analysis for ignoring the effect of its situatedness as well as the impact of the racialized identity of its creators on its formation. It was emphasized that the epistemic divide between White subject and Black object is necessarily present in a writing about Blackness that is also always a writing about Whiteness, a writing that at worst reiterates dispositivistic subjection and at best strives for a chaosmotic semiosis of the object.

But as cruelty continues, just as technological change continues, there is never really a conclusion, but a sustained coda that keeps repeating the elements of the main corpus, putting them in ever new constellations with each other. A coda of noise becoming voices, a desire to hear these voices, to tune into the din, to listen, to face abjection and enslavement and work towards its undoing, not only unthinking. As the previous pages have shown, these impulses and questions about the impact of technology on the constitution of race revolve around two central possibilities: creating as yet non-racialized spaces or un- (and re-)doing already racialized spaces and the identities that they sustain. By introducing both  $C^3$  and the racial glitch, the present text has decidedly focused on the latter possibility, theorizing transformations in the constitution of Blackness as opposed to the idea that "the historical, political, and cultural construction of ethnicity ... inevitably will weaken and fade as the technological future unfolds ..."

(Lavender 190). One potential of *Cyborg Black Studies* lies precisely in offering a method and theory to ferreting out such glimmers of change in the continuing pessimist permutations in the constitution of Blackness, as opposed to prophesizing a total techno-utopia beyond Blackness and Whiteness. From this perspective, two projects impose themselves for the immediate future development of *Cyborg Black Studies*. One is to continue theorizing the always coming but never to arrive *avenir* of unBlack unBlackness and the creative dynamics that arise from is contra-factual force. The other project lies in combining the work done on Black Diasporas with more recent work on race in cyberspace (Nakamura) and Digital Diaspora Studies (Everett), fields of research that are still connected to Black Studies at large but will attain more importance and independence as technological change continues to impact society. Increasingly, large parts of the methodologies and conceptual vocabulary partly in use since colonialist times will prove to be incapable of explaining contemporary social and polit-theoretical problematics. What is Blackness, when communities not only can, but always-already do rely on cyberspace to constitute themselves? What is a racialized body, when subjectivity and social identity are no longer supported only by the physical body, but also by technological devices that permanently connect one to the internet (e.g. smartphones) and thus make cyber-presence a constitutive aspect of social existence? What, in other words, will Blackness become as transmediality increases? What would politics of displeasure gone digital look like? How does the constitution of Blackness change at the intersection of desire and data? How radical is the potential of the racial glitch and C<sup>3</sup>? These are some of the questions for future applications and developments of *Cyborg Black Studies*. These are some of the lines of flight in attempting to listen to the voices, some of the ways of adapting the language of Black Studies to contemporary and future challenges and to continue understanding and working from (and as far as possible against) the constitution of Blackness as abject within White civil society.

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# ERKLÄRUNG

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