World-Making and Grammatical Impasse

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Not least from its ability to stand at times for both the earth itself and for what is on the earth or indeed in the purview of one individual, the concept of the world has always had a great deal of latitude: it can be at once geographical and intellectual.

[T]here is a long tradition of equating the concept of the world with the idea of Europe.

> Sean Gaston, *The Concept of World from Kant to Derrida*[1]

[T]he slave's inhabitation of the earth precedes and exceeds any prior relation to land—landlessness. And selflessness is the correlate. No ground for identity, no ground to stand (on).

> Jared Sexton, "The Vel of Slavery: Tracking the Figure of the Unsovereign"[2]

The Field of the World

To speak of the secular is to speak of the world. Or, more precisely, it is to speak of the age of the world, which for Christianity marked a time between the Christ's advent and return, and which for the secular modern came to mark a time in which "religion" would be superseded. However one goes about parsing the continuities and/ or discontinuities of Christianity and the secular,[3] one ends up with

the fact—the evident doing and making—of the world. This is to say that the world demonstrates an immense staying power, namely, the power to decide what stays (and what does not).

The world survives.[4] It certainly survives its Christian formation, but if it does so through an apparent identification with the secular, it may nonetheless survive the critique of the secular. More essential than the question of whether the post-secular (as that which follows from the critique of the secular) diverges from the secular is the question of whether the post-secular (or the critique of the secular) diverges from the world. The survival of the world, after all, is a matter of reproduction, of a development and futurity that—even (or especially) when emergent in the guise of crisis or threat—manages to extend itself in ever more supple and micro-calibrated degrees.

Is the critique of the secular a critique of the world? It is certainly the case that the critique of the secular, understood in its broadest or most inclusive sense, calls attention to the fact that the secular does not succeed in fulfilling its claims. This failure of fulfillment is often oriented around historical prognostication (the secularization thesis), but the more pressing issue—in my mind—concerns the ethical or political. Along these lines, the failure of the secular to fulfill its claims concerns the division and concomitant gap between, on one hand, the claimed capacity of the secular to establish a condition of equality and, on the other, the evident perpetuation of inequality— that is, Western domination—in the name of the secular.

What is the relation between the discourse of the secular and the discourse that critiques it? When critique addresses the gap between the claims made by the secular and the resoundingly repetitive evidence that contravenes such claims, to whom, or to what end, is such critique addressed? Is the point of critique (1) to call the secular to account for failing to live up to its claims, such that the secular would, at some future occasion, supersede its failures in order to (finally) fulfill such claims? Is the point, on the contrary, (2) to argue that the claims of the secular find their truth in their failures, such that these last reveal an essence of the secular otherwise concealed by (investment in) its claims? Or is the point—more modestly, but with a hesitance that can obscure the finality of a decree—(3) to trouble the certainties of both sides (whether that of the recommencement or

of the refusal of the secular) by remaining within the tensional gap between claim and failure?

The differences between the trajectories set forth by these points of critique are significant. Yet more significant, I contend, is the field to which all three trajectories belong (and contribute). This field is constituted by the polarity between secular claim and secular failure, together with the gap that emerges within and expresses the relation between these divided terms. One may express this field of division, gap, and relationality in terms of (1) a rigorous recommencement of the secular, (2) a refusal of the secular, or (3) an indefinite troubling of the secular. In each case, however, one expresses oneself in terms of the field. This field is the field of the world.

Critique Makes the World Possible

"World" names a field constituted not only by division—that is, the gap between secular claim and secular failure—but also by the possibilities of relation that emerge within this gap. The world thereby presents itself in two moments—as *the given* and as *the possible*. In doing so, it serves as the name of the already existent, or of that which may be subjected to critique, but it likewise serves as the name of the alternative that is imagined or invoked (even if only implicitly) by such critique. This is to say that the world, while it may be characterized in terms of given domination, is simultaneously able to be characterized in terms of possibility. One way of understanding the simultaneity of these characterizations is through the notion of welcoming—a term I invoke because the two predominant discourses of the world (the Christian and the secular) empower themselves by claiming the capacity to welcome that which is other.

Although the world, as presently given, shows evidence of domination—such that it has failed to be welcoming (to put it mildly)—it does not thereby lose the capacity to claim that it is welcoming. It can sustain this claim to be welcoming, first of all, insofar as it welcomes critique. The domination of the given world, a world without welcome, is superseded by this world's welcoming of the critique of such domination. Furthermore—and it is here that the second moment of the world becomes explicit—the welcoming of

such critique weds the world to the possibility of becoming different from the domination that it has been. While the given world is not welcoming, it *could become* welcoming—in fact, the world's welcoming (of critique of the given world) already provides the first fruits of a possible (and even more welcoming) world that is yet to come.

The world turns critique toward what actually is while it turns itself toward what could be; the world welcomes critique of the given in order to welcome itself as the (name of the) possible. In this sense, the world is not so much threatened by as dependent on critique: by welcoming critique, the world demonstrates that it is capable of far greater or different things than are presently given, that it carries futural possibilities that extend well beyond (a presently delimited) domination. It is by way of such critique that the world survives; critique is what makes the world possible.

This world depends on the operation of analogy, the massive scope and micrological flexibility of which is produced by the denominative likeness between that which is given and that which is possible, or between that which is critically opposed and that which is imagined to follow from this critique. In view of this denominative likeness, it should be stressed that the operation of analogy does not depend on the degree of critical severity; regardless of whether critique renders the given world as mildly or terribly dominative, analogy remains. This is because the operation ensues not from the degree of severity of critical rendering but rather from the *relation*, or implicit analogy, between the critically rendered given and the possibility invoked by critique. Similarly, analogy remains present regardless of whether the possibility that follows from critique appears as realizable or unrealizable, as pragmatic or idealistic. The given that is critiqued (no matter how severe the critique may be) and the possibility implied by critique (no matter how realizable the possibility may be) are both world.

The Secular—or, World-Making

Critique does not oppose so much as reproduce the world. Opposition to the world without this critical diversion entails antagonism toward both the world-as-given *and* the world-as-possible. Such antag-

onism opposes the given world *and* refuses the possibility of transit from this opposition. The possibility that is supposed to emerge from critique is refused; it is retracted by analysis of its role in reproducing what is critiqued. Whereas critique establishes relation between what it opposes and what (subsequent to such opposition) is supposed to become possible, antagonistic analysis articulates what it opposes without any possibility of relation. To operate in this manner is not to lessen antagonism. It is, on the contrary, to intensify antagonism through the refusal of that release valve called possibilization.

An instructive instance of such analysis is found in Gil Anidjar's argument that the discourse of the secular, though it calls itself worldly, though it makes itself into that which possesses access to worldliness, ultimately produces an *essentially* dominative relation to whatever is named world. Along these lines, to participate in the discourse of the secular—no matter how critical of domination that participation may be—is "certainly not to deal with 'local and worldly situations,' if by that one means the world populated by the oppressed (and by a perfectly 'secular' play of market forces gently trickling down on them), those all too often considered to have no 'critical distance' vis-à-vis their own lives, 'archaic' ideals, and, indeed, worlds."[5]

What should here be stressed is that such an argument holds not only in cases where the secular names the given world but also in cases where the secular is proposed as a means of opposing the domination of this given world. To invoke the secular at all, even in service of an emancipatory possibility, "is to oppose the world and those who inhabit it rather than those who make it unlivable" (*s*, 50). The secular, as a discourse of the world, is a matter of domination—in every instance. This is to say that the domination entailed by the secular continues to exist even in those cases where the discourse of the secular would be invoked as a means of defending that which is named world against given domination, or of expressing the possibility of a world without domination.

Anidjar therefore opposes the secular both as it names the given world of domination *and* as it names the possibility of a world opposed to such domination. Yet this opposition is against the given and possible moments of the *secular*—and not explicitly against the given and possible moments of the world. So does Anidjar, having

opposed given-possible relationality in terms of the secular, then re-introduce given-possible relationality in terms of the world?

He does not. Instead of granting attention to an expansion of the world, such that the world would name not only that which is dominated by the secular but also that which presents a possibility beyond the secular, Anidjar focuses attention on the world as an effect of power. The world does not expand beyond the secular; the world is instead used to intensify attention to "that which makes and unmakes it" (s, 50). Any division between world (as name of secular domination) and world (as name of that which is dominated by the secular, and which might invoke a possibility beyond the secular) is collapsed into world (as that which is made and defined by the secular). The world appears *only once*, and this appearance calls attention to the power by which it is made.[6]

The Analogical Operation

Central to the operation of analogy is the twofold appearance of its governing terms. With Christianity, this analogical operation proceeded as the participation—by way of transcendental terms—of created beings in the uncreated being of God. Goodness, truth, and beauty were fully present only in the being of God, but it was possible to attribute them to created beings in a limited sense, or according to the degree to which these beings participated in the being of God. The goodness of a created being and the goodness of uncreated being were related to each other by way of the gap between created and uncreated being; the division of the term *goodness*, or its distribution across the gap between created and uncreated being, human and divine being, thereby enables the existence of the term through the possibility of analogical relation. Hence the analogized term, far from being broken by its divisively twofold distribution, depends for its expression on the gap produced by such division.

While the secular tends not to be concerned with the specific transcendental terms of goodness, truth, and beauty, it continues the analogical operation by other means. For instance, one might call to mind the human: here one finds a term that exists, that coherently functions—in fact, is inevitably "universal"—through and as its divi-

sions, through and as the unending qualifications that hierarchically divide one (human) being from another. Put otherwise, the distribution of humanity across a divisively variegated number of beings serves to advance a horizon according to which humanity remains a possibility in which to participate. For the analogical operation, division and relation (or the possibility thereof) are complementary.

In these manners, then, the analogical operation concerns the relational expansion, the making-coherent, and the possibilization of a term *precisely through* its division. This is to say that the distribution of a term by way of division does not threaten, but rather enables, its coherence and reproduction. The division between the goodness of a created being and the goodness of God, or the division between the humanity of a subaltern position and the humanity of a majoritarian position, in no way undermines the coherence of the terms in play. Nor does it bring about a divestment from these terms. On the contrary, it is through the divisions and gaps of distribution that there emerges an ever-increasing investment in the term.

For the analogical operation, the decisive characteristic of division is that it produces a twofold appearance of the term. The division of goodness, or the division of the human, produces a field that stretches between the two divided appearances of the term, or within a gap that—because it is defined by the space between the divided appearances—is defined by the relational horizon of the term. This operation of divisive relationality has a rather striking consequence: the analogical term is defined by its *twofold* appearance; if the analogical term does not appear twice, then it does not exist. In other words, an analogical term cannot exist if it appears only once, since the existence of the analogical term resides in the gap between its divisive—that is, its twofold—appearance.

This means that the analogical term does not exist with a first appearance, and *then* reproduce itself in a second appearance that is posterior to the first appearance; it exists only insofar as it *always already* appears twice.[7] It means, furthermore, that to refuse the second appearance of an analogical term is to refuse the term itself. When the second appearance of the term is refused, it is not that the first appearance of the term is left in place; the term is twofold, and so the

refusal of its second appearance is the refusal of the very means by which the term exists.

The World of Analogy

The world is an analogical term, and so everything that has been said with regard to the divisively relational operation of twofold appearance, or to its exemplary instances of goodness or the human, likewise holds in the case of the world. Yet there is something additional that should be said about world, something that is peculiar to the role that it plays within a *secular*—that is, a *worldly*—order. In such an order, the world is not merely one analogical term among others. It is also, and at essence, an analogical term that traverses all other analogical terms: the world is an analogical term that—under a secular order, an order that articulates itself through its worldliness—names the field of possibilization for all analogical terms, the condition of possibility for analogical operation. This is to say, as well, that the world enables possibilization in those instances whereby one analogical term and another analogical term come into conflict.

While I have emphasized the ways in which the divisively relational field capacitates possibility, it should likewise be acknowledged that this field is threatened by the tension or the anticipated breaking point between the two appearances of the term. What threatens, however, never comes to realization. This is because the threat of division reaching a breaking point is warded off through the ultimate commonality (the term-sharing) of the divided appearances— the tension between created being and uncreated being is resolved through a common goodness, or the tension between the subaltern position and the majoritarian position is resolved through a common humanity.

Yet what about a case in which tension appears not between two appearances of one analogical term, but rather between two analogical terms themselves? In such a case, the threat posed by tension would seem to be more pressing. Tension between two appearances of the same term can be resolved through the commonality provided by this term, yet in the case of tension between two different terms there appears to be no such commonality. The tension between sub-

altern human and majoritarian human can be resolved through a shared humanity, but the possibility of such resolution would seem to be lacking, for instance, in the tension between the human and the state.

It is precisely in such instances that the world, as the analogical term traversing all other analogical terms, comes into play. Simply put, in a case where tension emerges between two analogical terms, "the world" may be invoked as that in which the two terms-in-tension are commonly involved. The world thus names the field in which the tensional threat (between analogical terms) is situated, such that the tension between the human and the state may be resolved through the claim that the human is in the world and the state is in the world, or that both the human and the state belong to, participate in, the world.

It is in this sense, then, that the analogical operation of "the world" guarantees—or provides security against the breakdown of—the analogical operation of other terms. The existence of the human and of the state—or, more precisely, the *co*-existence, the *ensemble*, the *simultaneous presence* of the human and the state—is secured by the world. If an analogical term exists through divisively relational possibilization, and if the world is the total configuration of all such terms, then the world is the total configuration of divisive relationality, the configuration of possibility as such.

The Essential Specificity of Blackness

What would it mean to provide an antagonistic analysis of the world—of the analogy of analogies, or the analogical operation as such? An essential instance of such antagonistic analysis is provided by Frank B. Wilderson III, who attends to the specificity of blackness as it is positioned both within and without the world. To say that blackness is thusly positioned is to observe that blackness is not—as is often presumed within the inherited theoretical landscape—one subaltern or minoritarian position among others.

Following Wilderson's analysis, non-black minoritarian positions possess the capacity to oppose the discourse that dominates them through the invocation or reclamation of a term within that discourse; the field of discourse by which domination articulates itself is a field

that can, at least in principle, be inhabited as a means for the articulation of opposition to such domination. For instance, the position of the proletarian may articulate opposition to capital through the term of labor, the position of the woman may articulate opposition to patriarchy through the term of gender, or the position of the colonized may articulate opposition to the colonizer through the term of land. However, as Wilderson argues, the position of blackness has no capacity to invoke such a term. What inheres in the position of blackness is not labor, gender, or land, but rather the mark of slaveness.[8]

It is along these lines that blackness is both within and without the world: it is within the world in the sense that the world does in fact position it; yet it is without the world because this very positioning is marked by slaveness, which precludes the capacity—present even in subaltern positions—to (re-)claim worldly terms of relation. Domination over the aforementioned subaltern positions is articulated through the divisive (and asymmetrical) distribution of a nonetheless common—or twice-appearing—term. This is to say that the domination of labor, gender, or land is not only established through, but also possibly opposed within, the field of divisive relationality; the gap that emerges between majoritarian and minoritarian appearances of the same term provides a field within which both given domination and the possibility of opposition take place.[9] Blackness, on the other hand, is positioned without the field of such possibility, without the capacity of such relation—without the world.

Simply put, the position of blackness is without analogy. Such a point has been advanced by Wilderson in his argument against "the ruse of analogy" (R, 37), namely, the operation by which blackness, in order to articulate the suffering and demands of its position, draws upon—and thereby imagines itself as analogous to—minoritarian positions. The "ruse," then, is the presumption that blackness is not without the world—that it is able to participate in the possibility set forth by the divisive relationality of labor, gender, or land. In fact, the same ruse is evident in the presumption that blackness participates in the possibility that is set forth by the divisive relationality of the human. Due to "a disparate relationship to violence," Wilderson argues, the position of blackness is not analogizable with that of the human: "the Black is a sentient being though not a Human being."[10]

The world, I have argued, is the analogy that enables the (co-existent) operation of all analogical terms; any tension apparent be-tween analogical terms is resolved through the analogical possibility of the field of the world as such. One can say, along these lines, that analogy is how the world operates, or that "the world" is an adum-bration of the operation of analogy. To put it in this manner is to come to see how Wilderson's analysis of the position of blackness as that which is without analogy is a matter of essential specificity. Such "withoutness"—without analogy, without the world—is specific to the position of blackness. Yet this specificity does not refer to a partic-ularity that relates (together with other particularities) to an overar-ching universality. On the contrary, it indexes a point that is without, and that thereby breaks, the total configuration—the (ensemble of possible) relations between particularities and universality—of the world.[11] In other words, the articulation of antagonism toward the world—that is, of the antagonism that is *essential*—is inseparable from, bound to, the specification of blackness.[12]

Such essential specificity is what is at stake in Saidiya V. Hartman's remark that blackness is positioned as the "unthought" or in Hort-ense J. Spillers's invocation of a "zero degree of social conceptualiza-tion that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse."[13] Understood in this way, the position of blackness names a specificity that concerns the very essence of—or, more precisely, that is in essen-tial antagonism with—the world. It is not a part of the world that is excluded from the world, or that the world does not fully recognize. Much more essentially (though all the more specifically), the posi-tion of blackness indexes that which is denied participation in the world as such. It concerns an absence of recognizability, a denial of recognition that itself has no means of becoming recognized with-in the world. The withoutness specified according to the position of blackness thus entails the demand, following Wilderson, for "the end of the world" (*R*, 337).

What are the implications of an encounter between this demand and the critique of the secular? Although the terms *secular* and *world* are intertwined, they are often distinctly deployed. Consider, for in-stance, how Wilderson's call for the end of the world does not turn on reference to the critique of the secular, as well as how critiques of

the secular do not understand themselves to require the end of the world.[14] It may be imagined that this predicament should be resolved through a dialectical process of conjunction, that the demand for the end of the world and the critique of the secular should be positioned so as to equally inform and thus synthesize with each other. Against such a proposal, I contend that the essential specificity of the position of blackness requires a prioritization of the demand for the end of the world. This is to say that the concept of the world is logically prior to the concept of the secular. While the secular is most certainly a name for the world, by no means is the world bound to this name; one may critique (or even end) the secular while leaving in place (or enabling the reproduction and survival of) the world. *Intrinsic* to the end of the world, however, is the end (not to mention the critique) of the secular.

Wilderson's demand for the end of the world does not speak explicitly of the secular, but the implications are clear: the end of the world entails the end of the secular.[15] The lack of an explicit reference to the secular may be attributed to the lack of an obvious need to linger with preliminary terms. But to what should one attribute the general absence of explicit concern for the end of the world within critiques of the secular? Relevant to any response is the fact that critiques of the secular have tended to arise out of postcolonial theory, where the position prioritized tends to be that of the subaltern rather than of blackness: whereas it is possible to articulate the end of a colonial domination named as secular within terms of the world, the end of the slave position requires the end of the world as such. It is in this sense that the ever renewed possibility and narration of the world—a narration advanced by Christianity as divine gift to the world and continued in the name of the secular as possibilization of the world itself—breaks down in encounter with the position of blackness.

Grammatical Impasse and Immanence

Wilderson's demand for "the end of the world" is a pressurization of the grammatical impasse that Spillers has indexed by foregrounding the question of "how *status* is made" (*B*, 21): "dominant symbolic activity, the ruling episteme that releases the dynamics of naming and

valuation, remains grounded in the originating metaphors of captivity and mutilation so that it is as if neither time nor history, nor historiography and its topics, show movement" (*b*, 208).[16] In Wilderson's terms, this means that the position of blackness, because it is without world(ly analogy), cannot articulate its demands in the grammar of the world. This is to say, as well, that it cannot emplot its demands in a narrative passage from present domination to the possibility of future liberation, for narrative logic requires and turns upon the capacity to use an analogical term as a means of gaining leverage against the world from a place within the world.

Such grammatical impasse, especially as it upends the narrative logic of beginning and end, is evident in Wilderson's articulation—which itself draws on "precursors"—of this demand: "Quoting Aimé Césaire, [Frantz Fanon] urged his readers to start 'the end of the world,' the 'only thing . . . worth the effort of starting'" (*r*, 337). Starting is thereby a matter of breakdown. In its inherited sense, to start is to project forward through a horizon of anticipation, a horizon that—regardless of its degree of determinacy—is presumptively established by the very act of starting. In the case of Wilderson's demand, however, to start is to collapse the possibility of this horizon, and to do so precisely because this horizon establishes a narrative of possibility. The establishment of divisive relationality—of the temporality of narrative logic distributed between the start and the end, or between the start and that which is invoked and incipiently pursued by the start—is what Wilderson demands must (start to be) end(ed).

One thereby encounters an immanence of start and end, where such immanence undoes the very division that gives sense to start and end—as well as to the field of possibility that emerges within their gap. This is an immanence of breakdown, or better yet of essential breaking (though without the notion, which "breakdown" may imply, of a moment prior to breaking). The vertiginous character of such immanence—its absence of any point by which to orient and thereby narrate itself—provides one means of addressing the "objective vertigo" that, on Wilderson's reading, is central to any articulation of the essential specificity of the position of blackness.[17]

The problem of grammatical impasse—of a vertigo that cannot (and necessarily refuses to) avail itself of a term that would transcend

(and thereby claim to resolve) it—is bound to the problem of imma-
nence. At stake is an antagonism that cannot orient itself within—
that is absent the capacity to appeal to—the grammar of the world,
the terms of which remain outside of or take distance from such an-
tagonism. What is transcendent is the world. This is to say that im-
manence is not a matter of turning the (secular) world against the
(religious) transcendent; it is rather a matter of turning away from
(thought in terms of) the world by turning toward (a terminally un-
thought) nowhere. Immanence is thereby defined according to a rad-
ical withoutness: if blackness is positioned as that which is without
the world yet framed within the terms of this world, then the artic-
ulation of antagonism toward the world insists as the immanence
of withoutness to itself. This is to follow Sexton's articulation of a
"politics of abolition"—that which addresses the slave position, or
"the threshold of the political world"—as one that "could only ever
begin with degeneration, decline, or dissolution," as "a radicalization
through the perverse affirmation of deracination . . . a politics with-
out claim, without demand even, or a politics whose demand is 'too
radical to be formulated in advance of its deeds'" ("vs," 593).

A logic of immanence that is adequate to—that accedes to—the
aforementioned criteria remains unthought. Yet there certainly have
been attempts to articulate immanence, the most thoroughgoing of
which is found in the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze. In what follows,
I will pursue an examination of Deleuze's thought, and more precise-
ly of his account of "the sensory-motor break."[18] My reason for doing
so is that it is with this account that his theorization of immanence
broaches the question of impasse, of the point at which the thought
of the world becomes inseparable from the thought of breaking.
Therefore the aim of this examination—which should be read both
as an afterword to the already articulated grammatical impasse and
as a foreword to a logic that accedes to this impasse—is to assay the
ways in which the theorization of immanence has thus far addressed
the breaking *of* the world.

The ambiguity of the genitive is precisely what is at stake: Is
breaking understood as that which makes necessary the end of the
world—a reading that I have argued is exigent—or rather as that
through which the world narrates (and reproduces itself as) the pos-

sibility of (its) redemption? It is in view of these bifurcated readings that the import of the articulation becomes evident. The logic of immanence concerns the articulation of a reality that is without the world, a reality that is incommensurable with and thereby against the world. Yet this reality finds itself always already framed by the grammar of the world and is thereby able to initially appear only as it is marked by grammatical impasse. The task of the articulation of immanence, then, is to insist on impasse, on breaking, without any recourse to possibilization or the narration thereof—that is, without recourse to the means by which the world seeks to ward off and supersede such breaking.

The Sensory-Motor Break

Deleuze, when he speaks of the sensory-motor break, refers to the lack of a capacity to establish and maintain a successful *link* between two moments: the first of these is the moment of being affected by the sensation of the world (the "sensory"), while the second of these is the moment of acting upon or moving within that world (the "motor"). The successful[19] operation of the sensory-motor link is therefore evident insofar as the subject is able to remain active upon or within the world that affects it. In such a case, the affect caused by the sensation of the world is able to be integrated into a narrative of action or movement.

On the other hand, the sensory-motor *break* concerns the encounter with an affect that—due to its intensity—undoes the link between the subject and the world. This break disintegrates the narrative(s) by which action, or any form thereof, is imagined to be adequate to such affection. That which the subject senses in the world comes to affect the subject with an intensity that outstrips that subject's capacity to act. The subject is unable to narrate its successful movement within the world by which it is affected; the world is too much for the capacitation implied by action or movement. Consequently, to think of the world is not to think of a stage of action; it is rather to think of a power—overwhelming and perduring—that binds to inaction.

Deleuze names this subject without action as "the seer" (*c*, 170). The absence of any form of action and the definition of thought as the seer are coeval: on one hand, it is because the subject cannot act

or move that it finds itself bound to (a relatively passive) seeing; on the other, it is because the subject undergoes visions of immeasurable affective intensity that thought—positioned, in its inherited sense, at the site of the subject—is defined without action. Thought, as the seer, is stunned, paralyzed, or—following Deleuze's mention of "a strange fossilization" (*c*, 169)—petrified.

If the successful operation of the sensory-motor link emphasizes a transitive power, then insistence on the seer emphasizes an intransitive power. Such intransitivity lacks the capacity for action, but it is not a matter of withdrawal from reality. On the contrary, the capacity for action is revealed as inadequate to reality, as something that depends on a denial of reality, whereas intransitivity marks an intensified encounter with such reality. One is a seer, without transit from sensation to action, because one is affected by reality in its essential intensity, its essential breaking.[20]

The inherited definition of the subject, or "man"—a name that I will, following Deleuze's own terminology, henceforth use[21]—entails a basic capacitation. This capacity stems from a division between man and world. The notion that man has the capacity to act *in response to* such affection, to *transform* affection into movement within the world, requires the ultimate independence of man from the world. It is this division that grounds the sensory-motor link: although man is affected by the world, his independence enables him to convert affection toward an action into or onto the world.

The breaking of the sensory-motor link precludes man, and in doing so it precludes the ground for the possibility of another world. This is because the possibility of a world *other* than "this world" (*c*, 172)—where "this world" names the world that is sensed and that affects here and now—derives its ground from the independence of man.[22] The division between this world and another world, or the transit from the former to the latter, is enabled by the division between man and world: man, due to his division from (this) world, provides a space of action that can produce or discover a (new) world; the independence of man from world—the invocation of an actor that, while intertwined with and affected by the world, is not ultimately defined by this world—provides the ground for transit to another world. To adhere to the insistence of the sensory-motor break

on the incapacitation of man, on the necessary dismantling of that which presumes to be independent from the world, is thereby to dismantle the ground of possibility.

The Intolerable and the Unthinkable: Nonrelational Immanence

The stakes of such dismantling are stressed and raised by the fact that Deleuze marks the "break in the link between man and the world" (*c*, 169) according to the intolerable: "The sensory-motor break makes man a seer who finds himself struck by something intolerable in the world, and confronted by something unthinkable in thought" (*c*, 169). The dismantling of a ground of possibility for another world, then, is furthermore the dismantling of a ground of possibility for a world in which the intolerable will be or would have been superseded. There is only this world, the intolerability of the here and now. Far from providing a ground for the possibility of escape from this world, man is collapsed into it: "Man *is not himself* a world other than the one in which he experiences the intolerable and feels himself trapped" (*c*, 170).

To invoke the intolerable is to mark the immeasurability of affect with regard to man, or to thought as action. What is central is that the intolerable is too much *for* the thought of man—hence the parallelism of "something intolerable in the world" and "something unthinkable in thought." Intolerability concerns not only the wretchedness of world but also the incapacity of thought—as man, as action—to become adequate to, to truly encounter and articulate, such wretchedness. In other words, if there is to be an adequate thought of this reality encountered as wretched, then there must be a dismantling of thought as man or action. Anything less than such dismantling amounts to the denial and reproduction of the selfsame wretchedness.

This entails the articulation of a thought that is incommensurable with the actor called man. Thought must be articulated without any trace of its inherited definition as that which is possessed by man, or as that by which man exercises his capacity. Yet the weight and pervasive overdetermination of this inheritance means that the appearance of such an articulation is foreclosed. It is in view of this foreclosure

that Deleuze, when invoking a thought incommensurable with inheritance, resorts to a radically direct negativity: such an incommensurable thought is defined, quite simply and all the more opaquely, as the unthought.

To characterize the unthought in terms of negativity is not to imply that the unthought negates thought on the basis of a ground. On the contrary, the negativity here at issue is *without ground*; it is an ungrounding that proceeds from *nowhere*. This ungrounding is a matter of the immanence of the unthought and the intolerable. To be affected by the intolerable, by that which is too much for thought, is simultaneously to be bound to the unthought; the unthought, then, cannot be divided from the affection marked as the intolerable. Refusing any such division, the unthought is immanently bound to the too much of affection; the "un-" of the unthought is entailed by its immanence with immeasurable affect.

This immanence of the unthought and the intolerable is irreducible to the link between man and the world. The sensory-motor link of man and the world establishes a dynamic of division and intertwining, such that the gap between divided terms (man and the world) produces the possibility and production of relationality. The unthought and the intolerable, however, are immanent to one another; they cannot be divided from each other in the first place. It is in virtue of this refusal of division that there is no relational possibility: relationality depends on a gap that itself depends on division, and it is precisely this division that unthought-intolerable immanence utterly refuses.

Sensory-motor circulation is a matter of (the aspiration toward successful) relationality, or transitive action, whereas breaking is a matter of nonrelationality, or intransitivity. This is to say that while thought breaks as unthought, and while the world breaks as intolerable, the thought-world relation does *not* break as unthought-intolerable relation. The breaking of thought and of world is coeval with the breaking of the very possibility of (the) relationality (invoked between them); breaking extends not only to the *terms* of relation (thought and the world) but to relationality *itself*. Consequently, thought-world relation breaks as *nonrelational* immanence,

as immanence that has no division through which, and thus no ground on which, to circulate. Such negative immanence—indexed by the "un-" (of unthought), the "in-" (of intolerability), the "non-" (of nonrelationality)—is groundless.

Worldly Amelioration

Deleuze elaborates this unthought-intolerable immanence in terms of belief. Yet in doing so he ameliorates, evades, and ultimately denies groundlessness. This denial stems, specifically, from an investment in possibility—not, that is, from the use of belief as such. In fact, there is a certain incisiveness in the use of belief: if inherited thought is incapable of encountering the intolerable, if it connotes an action that inevitably immunizes itself against such encounter, then the unthought—in its incommensurability—should be characterized in another manner; belief is a compelling means of such characterization, at least insofar as it connotes a mode of cognition that does without the security of thought as actor or the possessiveness of thought as man. In other words, belief may be used to characterize the utter affectability indexed by the unthought, which insists on thought's "powerlessness to function" (*c*, 169).

The obstacle presented by Deleuze's account, or the cause of its investment in possibility, does not then stem from belief *as such*. It stems, more precisely, from the manner in which his articulation of belief *in the world* advances a call for possibility: "Which, then, is the subtle way out? To believe, not in a different world, but in a link between man and world, in love or life, to believe in this as in the impossible, the unthinkable, which none the less cannot but be thought: 'something possible, otherwise I will suffocate'" (*c*, 170). Bracketing for a moment the logical implications of this statement, one is struck by the explicit and brute assertion that the possible *must* be—that the experience of intolerability, here indexed as suffocation, must be framed in terms of the possibility of escaping it. Faced with the exigency of encountering and becoming adequate to the unthought, why assert that there must be "something possible"? Perhaps the essence of the unthought, of the powerlessness that follows from an

utter affectability, resides precisely in the absence of a possibility that would mediate, and thus provide a modicum of leverage on, the intolerability of the world.

Such a gesture of mediation before a threatening irreparability is likewise present (though less directly) in the implications of Deleuze's attachment of belief to the world. This invocation of belief—which, in its attachment to the object "world," ceases to be a matter of belief as such—is oriented, as evident in the aforementioned passage, around "a link between man and world." How should one understand this suddenly renewed concern for the relationality of such a link? After all, Deleuze's analysis of the sensory-motor break, which was presented as a virtual revelation, emphasized the utter incapacitation of man to establish such a link. In virtue of what, then, is the possibility of this link able to reemerge?

Narrative Relation

One explanation is that man, when he now reemerges in the context of belief, is no longer defined in terms of possessive thought. Man defined by belief would then be significantly distinct from man defined by thought. I do not find such a distinction to be compelling. Nonetheless, even if one were to grant this distinction, the obstacle presented by belief in the world would remain. This is because the obstacle presented by belief in the world does not stand or fall on whether man (defined by belief) significantly differs from man (defined by thought): the obstacle emerges—prior to the definition of man (as belief or as thought)—through the call for *relation*. In other words, the obstacle is the relationality that emerges in Deleuze's invocation of belief in a *link* between man and world. The notion of a link presumes that there exists a division between poles of relation, a field between man and world, whereas it is precisely this division, or its concomitant field of relation, that is refused by unthought-intolerable immanence.

Along these lines, one should understand Deleuze's call for linking as a way of denying and seeking leverage on the groundlessness of immanence, which marks the irreparability of relational possibility. One can observe, furthermore, that in this call the capacity previously at-

tributed to man is subtly transferred to relationality, to the possibility of linking, as such. The *incapacitation of man*, having already been acknowledged, is compensated for through the *capacitation of linking*—man is reproduced as the medium of belief in, as the vehicular link to, the world. It is as if man defined by thought, having undergone an incapacitation before the immeasurable intensity of affect, before the intolerable, is now in a position to have learned something from the world, to have been taught by the world—a *Bildungsroman* of worldliness. Man would then be able to renew relation to the world, to properly believe in the world, and thereby to reestablish—or to renew, via belief, the capacity to establish—relation to the world.

I should make clear that my argument is not that Deleuze invokes another world, one that would exist apart from this world. As he clearly states, "it is not in the name of a better or truer world that thought captures the intolerable in this world" (*c*, 169). There is no sense in which Deleuze wishes to invoke the existence of another world that would transcend, and thereby be able to judge, this world. He rightly remarks that, for him, belief in the world is not "addressed to a different or transformed world," and that it instead means "belief in this world, as it is" (*c*, 172). Deleuze does not then call for transit from this world to another world.

He does, however, call for transit from a *present relation* to this world—that is, a present brokenness or absence of relation—to a *future relation*, one that would be brought about by belief in the world. Put otherwise, Deleuze does not invoke transit to a better or transformed world, but he most certainly does invoke transit to a better or transformed *relation* to the world. This investment in relationality, or the possibility thereof, serves to evade the stakes of the break: the demand to encounter an immeasurable affective intensity is converted into a demand to better relate to the world; the negativity of encounter with the unthinkable is converted into the possibility of renewed relation.

For Deleuze, there is only "this world, as it is"; there is no other world in an ontological sense. Yet even as the world appears only once ontologically, it *appears twice in the narration of relational possibility*. This world, the only one there is, is divided into the brokenness or absence of relation and the possibility of relation; it appears first under the aspect of intolerability and second under the aspect

of restoration. Such a narrative of redemption, of transit from present brokenness to futural redress of this brokenness, is evident when Deleuze remarks that "the point is to discover and *restore* belief in the world" (*c*, 172; emphasis mine).[23] It is likewise evident when Deleuze describes the sensory-motor link as something "of which man has been *dispossessed*" (*c*, 172; emphasis mine). What is central here is that the sensory-motor link is described not as something that is, at essence, a hallucination or a denial of reality, but rather as something that *once was possessed* and that has only come to be *lost*[24]—something that, in being no longer, once was.[25]

This presumption of *dis*possession expresses the past or backward-moving moment of narrative logic, while the call for restoration of belief in the world expresses the futural or forward-moving moment of narrative logic. These two moments of loss and restoration, of no longer and yet to be, are mutually supportive: the possibility of restoration grounds itself through the claim that what is to be restored is that which once existed. It is here, in this dependence on narrative, that one should ultimately locate the presumptive ground of Deleuze's brute assertion of possibility. Despite the zero point of the sensory-motor break, despite the irreparable groundlessness and nonrelationality of immanence, the possibility of relation is set forth and survives at the level of narrative: relationality remains possible insofar as it is narrated as that which has been lost, as that which once was, and thereby as what could be.

Exteriority

The demand for the end of the world—the world of possibility and the possibility of the world—calls for an articulation of immanence according to its intrinsic breaking. While Deleuze provides key means of such articulation—the encounter with immeasurable affect, for instance, or the groundless, nonrelational immanence of the unthought and the intolerable—he simultaneously denies its consequences and force through his concern to salvage the possible. This concern, I have argued, is most evident in his reliance on a narrative temporality of loss and restoration. The field of possibility that emerges between these divided-apart moments of no-longer and yet-

to-be, of past and future, is the world toward which Deleuze calls and thereby directs belief.[26] As object of belief, world—the world likewise named via Christianity and the secular—wards off (a belief bound to) the vertigo entailed by immanence, by the absence of any transcendent term of orientation (such as the world).

It is therefore noteworthy when Deleuze articulates belief without object, and hence without any point of orientation. He does this, specifically, by binding belief to exteriority: "Thought finds itself taken over by the exteriority of a 'belief,' outside any interiority" (*c*, 175).[27] What is marked as exteriority is not a transcendent point of reference—the invocation of a world in which it is possible to participate—but rather a withoutness that is incommensurable with the world. If such exteriority connotes an outside, then this outside is not something beyond the world. It is instead the mark of a reality that, in being defined by immeasurable affect, is irreducible to—and thus unthinkable within—the world. At stake is an essential withoutness to the terms and grammar of the world, to the field of possibility: exteriority marks the now-here of the no-where.[28] There is no world, only a sheer happening or taking place of immeasurable affect, a being "taken over by" that groundless immersion marked as exteriority.

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Acknowledgments

Notes

1. Sean Gaston, *The Concept of World from Kant to Derrida* (London: Rowman and Littlefield International, 2013), 3, 44.

2. Jared Sexton, "The *Vel* of Slavery: Tracking the Figure of the Unsovereign," *Critical Sociology* 42, nos. 4–5 (2016): 593. Hereafter cited as "vs."

3. I have sought to address these continuities and discontinuities in *On Diaspora: Christianity, Religion, and Secularity* (Eugene: Cascade, 2011), 88–114.

4. See Gil Anidjar, "Survival," *Political Concepts: A Critical Lexicon* 2: http://www.politicalconcepts.org/survival-gil-anidjar.

5. Gil Anidjar, *Semites: Race, Religion, Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 51. Hereafter cited as *s.*

6. The making of the secular is, as Anidjar expresses it, a continuation of Western domination: "Secularism continues to be fostered by the same institutions, and structurally identical elites, out of the same centers of power that earlier spread their 'civilization' and continue to expand their mission, be it economic, military, cultural, or whatever. It still has the bigger bombs—it *is* the history of bombing—and the bigger police, security, military, and financial forces" (*s*, 50).

7. The second appearance of an analogical term is not the reproduction, but rather the very production, of this term; the reproduction of the analogical term should be located not in the occurrence of a term's second appearance (after the first), but rather in the continuation of an already produced twofold appearance of the term.

8. A comprehensive elaboration of and argument for these claims is provided in Frank B. Wilderson III, *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 37. Hereafter cited as *r*. Wilderson adumbrates this argument, in one instance, as follows: "I have critiqued Marxism, White feminism, and Indigenism by arguing that their approach to the question *What is to be thought?* and to its doppelgänger *What is to be done?* advances through misrecognition of the Slave, a sentient being that cannot be. The way Marxism, White feminism, and Indigenism approach the problem of the paradigm, in other words, their account of unethical power relations, emerges as a constituent element of those relations. Through their indisputably robust interventions, the world they seek to clarify and deconstruct is the world they ultimately mystify and renew" (338). Or, as he goes on to remark: "Historical time is the time of the worker, the time *of* the Indian, and the time of the woman—the time of analysis. But whereas historical time marks stasis and change *within* a paradigm, it does not mark the time of the paradigm, the time of time itself, the time by which the Slave's dramatic clock is set" (339).

9. Elizabeth Povinelli has pointed to one of the effects of this field—under

a condition that she terms "late liberalism"—when she describes a dynamic in which "[l]iberals will listen to and evaluate the pain, harm, torture they might unwittingly be causing minority others. Nonliberals and other minority subjects will present their pained subjectivity to this listening, evaluating public." See Povinelli, "Radical Worlds: The Anthropology of Incommensurability and Inconceivability," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30 (2001): 329.

10. Frank B. Wilderson III, "The Vengeance of Vertigo: Aphasia and Abjection in the Political Trials of Black Insurgents," *InTensions* 5 (2011), http://yorku.ca/intent/issue5/articles/pdfs/frankbwildersoniiiarticle.pdf. Hereafter cited as "vv."

11. This is to say that the specification of the position of blackness is not one among many specifications, joined together through some common, more general term (such as humanity), but rather a specification that touches upon the essential operation of the world, and that does so precisely because it is *not* one specification among (or in analogy with) other specifications.

12. The operation of analogy, when confronted with the essential specificity of blackness, can be viewed from two sides: on one side, analogy is a capacity that is at the essence of the world, and that is denied to the position specified as blackness; on the other, it is because the position specified as blackness is without this capacity that it cannot then be made analogous with other (worldly) specifications.

13. Saidiya V. Hartman and Frank B. Wilderson III, "The Position of the Unthought," *Qui Parle* 13, no. 2 (2003): 185; Hortense J. Spillers, *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 206, hereafter cited as *B*.

14. As I contended at the outset of this essay, the implications of such critique for the concept of the world remain indeterminate at best.

15. Here I have in mind Sexton's call "for *black* study or, in the spirit of the multiple, for black *studies* . . . wherever they may lead. And, contrary to the popular misconception, they do lead *everywhere*. And they do *lead* everywhere, even and especially in their dehiscence." See Sexton, "The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism," *InTensions* 5 (2011), http://www.yorku.ca/intent/issue5/articles/pdfs/jared sextonarticle.pdf.

16. In fact, the focus on grammar arises directly from Spillers's invocation of "an 'American grammar'" (*B*, 209) and indirectly from her contention that the violence of slavery is inseparable from discourse: "In a very real sense, a full century and a half 'after the fact,' 'slavery' is *primarily* discur-

sive, as we search vainly for a point of absolute and indisputable origin, for a moment of plenitude that would restore us to the real, rich 'thing' itself before discourse touched it" (*b*, 179). For an instance in which Wilderson details his understanding of "grammar," see *r*, 5.

17. Wilderson addresses "objective vertigo" as follows: "Subjective vertigo is vertigo of the event. But the sensation that one is not simply spinning in an otherwise stable environment, that one's environment is perpetually unhinged, stems from a relationship to violence that cannot be analogized. This is called objective vertigo, a life constituted by disorientation rather than a life interrupted by disorientation. This is structural as opposed to performative violence. Black subjectivity is a crossroads where vertigoes meet, the intersection of performative and structural violence" ("vv").

18. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 169. Hereafter cited as *c*.

19. "Success" should here be understood in terms of its definition both as an achievement and as a continuation or proceeding forward.

20. Deleuze remarks that "the expression 'difference of intensity' is a tautology. Intensity is the form of difference" (Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton [New York: Columbia University Press, 1994], 222). I have addressed the intersection between difference in itself and the work of Wilderson in "The Creation of Non-Being," *Rhizomes* 29 (2016), http://rhizomes.net/issue29/barber.html.

21. The fact that the site of thought is literally "man" indicates the degree to which the purported universality of thought—especially in the predication of such thought as possessive—is conditioned by prior distributions of structural positionality.

22. This is true not only in the case of modern philosophy, where the independence of man is pursued in terms of the subject, but also in the case of Christianity, where the independence of man is pursued in terms of Christ.

23. In using the term "redress," I have in mind the sense given to it by Hartman in *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). Along these lines, Deleuze's investment in (a) narrative (of) restoration should be read according to the narrative of emancipation—from the "past" of slavery to the "future" of reconstruction—that Hartman refuses. In one instance of this refusal, she remarks: "I contend that the recognition of the humanity of the slave did not redress the abuses of the institution

nor the wanton use of the captive warranted by his or her status as chattel, since in most instances the acknowledgement of the slave as subject was a complement to the arrangements of chattel property rather than its remedy. . . . Put differently, I argue that the barbarism of slavery did not express itself singularly in the constitution of the slave as object but also in the forms of subjectivity and circumscribed humanity imputed to the enslaved" (6).

24. Wilderson, drawing on the work of David Marriott, distinguishes between the loss found in narrative and the absence by which objective vertigo is marked: "loss indicates a prior plenitude, absence does not" ("vv").

25. The obstacle presented by the logic of dispossession, or by the "no longer," is particularly evident in one of Deleuze's late essays, "The Exhausted" (Deleuze, *Essays Clinical and Critical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997], 152–74). This is because Deleuze here sketches a rather explicit and severe critique of possibility while nonetheless leaving untouched the operativity of possibility at the level of narrative (dispossession).

    The thesis of the essay presents a striking difference—an irrecuperable or unmediatable divergence—between tiredness and exhaustion: "The tired person can no longer realize, but the exhausted person can no longer possibilize" (152). The difference between experiences of tiredness and exhaustion is thus defined according to the difference between realization and possibilization—or, more precisely, the difference between the *failure* to realize and the *failure* to possibilize.

    With tiredness, or the failure to realize, possibility persists. Such possibility is evidently marked by failure, by the lack of realization, yet possibility nonetheless remains central: tiredness is defined by failure at the task of realization, and this task presumes the existence of a possibility to be realized; tiredness requires—even as failure—possibility, and so to experience tiredness is be located in terms of possibility. With exhaustion, or the failure to possibilize, things are quite different. This is because exhaustion challenges the very existence of possibility: whereas tiredness, in its incapacity to realize possibility, presumes the existence of possibility, exhaustion concerns an incapacity that extends to possibility as such. The failure indexed by exhaustion is the failure to inhabit a frame in which possibility would even exist. If tiredness incapacitates the realization of possibility, or the possibility of realization, then exhaustion incapacitates the very reality of possibility.

    Nonetheless, while exhaustion's refusal of possibility diverges from

and remains irreducible to tiredness's presumption of possibility, this divergence is set within a common claim to the possibility of *narration* (even as the logic of this narration proceeds via dispossession rather than achievement). Such narrative logic is manifest as the "no longer": "the tired person can *no longer* realize, but the exhausted person can *no longer* possibilize" (emphases mine). This is to say that exhaustion, even as it names an experience without the capacity for possibilization, remains an experience that retains (at least in the instance of Deleuze's essay) possibilization at the level of narrative (loss).

26. In fact, belief in the world relies on a grammar of the dative that Deleuze elsewhere precludes. He speaks of the "confusion" that occurs when immanence is "related to something like a 'dative,' Matter or Mind" and insists that "Immanence is immanent only to itself." See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 44–45. Hereafter cited as *w*.

27. While exteriority can, by way of an implied complementarity with interiority, connote the possibility of a relational horizon, it is precisely such a possibility that is here cut off by the manner of its articulation: exteriority is "outside any interiority," which is to say that its happening is irreducible to, without relation to, any purported interiority. Exteriority, far from entering into a field of mediation with interiority, eviscerates the very idea of interiority.

28. Deleuze proposes an understanding of "no-where" that is simultaneously "now-here": "*Erewhon*, the word used by Samuel Butler [for utopia], refers not only to no-where but also to now-here" (*w*, 100).