

Power Relations in Black Lives: Reading African American Literature and Culture with Bourdieu and Elias

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Christa Buschendorf (ed.)

POWER RELATIONS IN BLACK LIVES

Reading African American Literature
and Culture with Bourdieu and Elias

[transcript] American Culture Studies

Christa Buschendorf (ed.)
Power Relations in Black Lives

CHRISTA BUSCHENDORF (ED.)

Power Relations in Black Lives

**Reading African American Literature and Culture
with Bourdieu and Elias**

[transcript]

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For Bernhard

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Preface

This book is the result of “communicative enthusiasm,” to borrow an expression that Pierre Bourdieu used in a rare statement of professional exuberance to characterize the cohesive interaction within his research group. Except for two guests – Dennis Büscher-Ulbrich and Timo Müller – all contributors to this volume were at some point members of a long-standing study group. Its research program has focused on the methodological question addressed in the essays collected in the current volume, namely how to make use of the concepts of relational sociology, represented by Norbert Elias and Pierre Bourdieu, in the field of literary and cultural studies in general and in (African) American Studies in particular. The question emerged, as so often happens in our field, out of serendipitous reading – suggested, in this case, by my husband, Bernhard Buschendorf.

The “communicative enthusiasm” developed above all during the compact courses my husband and I would over many years jointly devise and teach, for instance, on “Key Concepts of Relational Thinking,” “Symbol Theories,” “Sociological Theories of Power,” or “Theories of Ideology.” Students, doctoral students, and young faculty members from the Department of Comparative Literature at Universität Duisburg-Essen and from the American Studies Department of Goethe-Universität Frankfurt would meet at Haus Bergkranz, a university-owned house located in the picturesque Alpine village of Riezlern, Kleinwalsertal. There we would enter into very intense and, as it were, never-ending discussions, hardly interrupted even when we took a break hiking in the mountains or when in the evening we would sit at the bar – “playing one of the most extraordinary games that one can play, that of research” (Bourdieu, *In Other Words* 26).

In grateful memory of the best of experiences academic life has to offer, I would like to thank all the participants of the seminars and reading groups who by entering the playfield and engaging in the exciting game of intellectual work have enlivened and enriched it.

Christa Buschendorf

Introduction

Key Concepts of Relational Sociology as Tools of Hermeneutics

CHRISTA BUSCHENDORF

More than one hundred and fifty years after the Emancipation Proclamation, the history of slavery still looms large in the United States. The notion of a post-racial society that prospered under the nation's first black president mistook the admittedly significant advancement embodied by a political icon for a substantial decline of discrimination against African Americans. Quite to the contrary, under the Obama presidency systemic racism returned with a vengeance, most obviously in the substantial increase of police brutality – from targeting black youth with stop-and-frisk practices to the notorious cases of the killing of unarmed black men by police officers. The idea that a black family in the White House would lead to the colorblindness of the nation may have been nourished by wishful thinking. To hold on to the illusion of colorblindness has become more difficult under the Trump presidency, as white supremacist groups increasingly feel encouraged to come to the fore. Ultimately, however, the widespread denial of a deeply ingrained racism rests on the powerful ideology of individualism that constructs the individual as essentially free and thus fully responsible for his or her fate. What on the one hand forms the core of the staunch American belief in upward mobility, known as the American Dream, on the other hand leads to the prevalent conviction that poverty, poor education, and bad housing must be mainly the responsibility of those who did not try hard enough to escape the unfavorable living conditions into which they

were born. Thus, black inequality – today manifested most obviously by what Loïc Wacquant has defined as the “hyperghetto” (cf. “Deadly Symbiosis”) – has frequently been blamed on African American culture rather than on structural conditions. In his discussion of the controversy between American liberals who commonly lean toward structural factors and conservatives who rather focus on aspects of culture, William Julius Wilson maintains:

It is an unavoidable fact that Americans tend to deemphasize the structural origins and social significance of poverty and welfare. In other words, the popular view is that people are poor or on welfare because of their own personal shortcomings. Perhaps this tendency is rooted in our tradition of “rugged individualism.” (Wilson 43)

It is undoubtedly for this very belief in individualistic explanations that, notwithstanding the fact that “the majority of poor people in the United States are white, [...] the public face of American poverty is Black” (Taylor 49). As Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor notes, “ideologies do not work when they are only imposed from above. The key is widespread acceptance, even by the oppressed themselves” (25). Taylor does not address the question why the oppressed would accept an ideology that not only enhances discrimination against themselves but also contributes to the reproduction of the inequalities of the given social order. Pierre Bourdieu and Norbert Elias, the sociologists on whose concepts the authors of this collection draw, do pose this question, and both formulate their answers on the basis of relational theories of power.

In Bourdieu’s oeuvre it is the concept of “symbolic violence” that – interrelated with the concepts of “habitus,” “field,” and “capital” – serves to explain why “the established order, with its relations of domination, its rights and prerogatives, privileges and injustices, ultimately perpetuates itself so easily, apart from a few historical accidents, and that the most intolerable conditions of existence can so often be perceived as acceptable and even natural” (*Masculine Domination* 1). As “a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims” (1), it contributes to the misrecognition of domination and thus to the reproduction of the established order.

The normalization of unequal power relations is also a concern of Elias. In his essay “Towards a Theory of Established-Outsider Relations,” a conceptualization of the field study *The Established and the Outsiders* he had

earlier undertaken together with John L. Scotson, he explicates various mechanisms meant to ensure that the uneven balance of power between two interdependent groups remains stable so that the group with a higher power ratio (called the “established”) manages to preserve its power superiority over the group with a lower power ratio (called the “outsiders”). According to Elias, an important means of the established to maintain their dominance is the application of “mechanics of stigmatisation” (9) that in the long run lead to the outsiders’ resignation, their acceptance of their allegedly lesser human worth. The effect of what Elias defines as “group disgrace” – complementary to the self-assigned “group charisma” of the established – resembles Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic violence and its consequences, namely naturalization: “Give a group a bad name and it is likely to live up to it.” (13) Like Bourdieu, Elias insists, then, on the longevity and rigidity of relations of domination. The “emotional barrier” that the established erect *vis-à-vis* outsiders, which defines closer contact with them as a taboo, “accounts for the often extreme rigidity in the attitude of established groups towards outsider groups – for the perpetuation of this taboo [...] for generation after generation, even if their social superiority, or, in other words, their power surplus diminishes” (8).

One of the examples Elias gives for the effectiveness of such an emotional barrier is the relation between the established in the United States, especially the descendants of slave-masters, and “the formerly enslaved group” (8), which causes the continuation of “a very uneven balance of power” (6) that notoriously lags behind all efforts on part of the state of providing institutional equality by legislation. It is not by accident that Elias avoids terms referring to ‘race’ or ethnicity to designate the outsiders of this figuration. “By using them,” he claims, “one singles out for attention what is peripheral to these relations (for example, differences of skin colour) and turns the eye away from what is central (for instance, differences in power ratio and the exclusion of a power-inferior group from positions with a higher power potential).” (16) Accepting Elias’s understanding of so-called “race relations” (16) as established-outsider relations and regarding ‘racial’ conflicts as “at the core [...] always balance-of-power struggles” (22) makes us comprehend that the assessment of the relation of groups with an uneven power balance depends on considering the long-term development of their social dynamics as well as the longevity of power imbalances. This insight will prevent us from overestimating the effect that the social rise of

certain segments of the outsiders (such as the black bourgeoisie) or the rise of individuals to positions of power has on the situation of the great majority of outsiders.

It is not by coincidence, then, that both sociologists would refer to the situation of Blacks in the United States in order to exemplify the long-term effects of domination. Just as Elias used Harper Lee's best-selling novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) – set in segregated Alabama in the 1930s – to further develop his theory of established-outsider relations and to discuss the difference between the European and the American civilizing processes (“Further Aspects of Established-Outsider Relations: The Maycomb Model”),¹ Bourdieu drew on a passage in James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* (1963) to show the traumatic consequences that the exertion of symbolic violence has on the black family and how it shapes the habitus of African Americans (*Pascalian Meditations* 170; cf. Kopp in this volume, p. 229). What Bourdieu and Elias also have in common, as these examples illustrate, and what is of special interest to literary scholars, is that in their sociological analyses they quite frequently make use of literary texts.² Elias claimed that “used critically, novels can help to reconstruct a past society and its power structure for us” (*The Germans* 47). And Bourdieu, in one of

-
- 1 In comparison with Elias's main work, *The Civilizing Process*, which traces the European development toward the formation of unified nation states with firmly established monopolies of physical force and the correlating long-term transformation of modes of behavior toward an increasing self-control, his theory of established-outsider relations is a much neglected part of his oeuvre. The more important it is to understand what Cas Wouters points out in the editorial note to his edition of *The Established and the Outsiders*, i.e., that both theories “complement each other,” the former focusing on “developments in the balance of controls” (external and internal), the latter concentrating on “developments in power balances” (“Note” xiii, my emphasis). Furthermore, Wouters states that from the essay “Towards a Theory” “it is obvious that Elias had the ambition of formulating a general theory of power relations” (xiv). On Elias's sociological reading of Harper Lee's novel, see Franke and Hirschfelder.
 - 2 For a record of Bourdieu's writings on writers and literature, see Bourdieu and Wacquant 206n167; see Kuzmics for a survey and discussion of Elias's references to fiction.

his reflections on the “translation” of the social world into the literary work, comments as follows:

The sensitive translation conceals the structure, in the very form in which it presents it, and thanks to which it succeeds in producing a *belief effect* (more than a reality effect). And it is probably this which means that the literary work can sometimes say more, even about the social realm, than many writings with scientific pretensions [...]. But it says it only in a mode such that it does not truly say it. (*Rules of Art* 32, original emphasis)³

From the point of view of the literary scholar, Stefanie Mueller suggests that “it is the relevance he grants the acting agent’s perspective from which the usefulness of Bourdieu’s theory for literary studies stems” (16).

While the affinity of Bourdieu and Elias to literary texts is of special interest to the discipline of the sociology of literature, the more important question for the current project is what, in turn, must be considered the methodological function of concepts of relational sociology for African American studies in general and, as is the case in this collection, for the interpretation of (literary) texts by black authors, in particular. As this volume focuses on issues of power, the above-mentioned concepts of Bourdieu’s and Elias’s theories of power are pivotal to our approach.⁴ What do they have to offer in comparison, for example, with the more widely known and, certainly in the discipline of cultural studies, more frequently applied

3 Cf. also “Understanding,” an essay on sociological hermeneutics, wherein Bourdieu points out similarities between transcribed interviews and literary texts: “By virtue of the exemplification, concretization and symbolization which they effect, and which at times give them a dramatic intensity and an emotional force close to those of a literary text, the transcribed interviews can have the effect of a *revelation* [...]. Like parables of prophetic speech, [...] they render tangible the objective structures which scientific work strives to expose, doing so even by way of the most individual characteristics of enunciation.” What Bourdieu asserts of transcribed qualitative interviews, literary scholars also claim of literary texts: “Being able to touch and move the reader, to reach the emotions, without giving in to sensationalism, they can produce the shifts in thinking and seeing that are often the precondition for comprehension.” (*Weight* 623)

4 See Fowler for a differentiated comparison of the two theories of power.

Foucauldian power theory? As useful as Michel Foucault's theorizing of the disciplinary power exerted by institutions is for an understanding of the coercion of the modern subject, he does neglect in his influential *Discipline and Punish* "forms of social constraint much more subtle than those that operate through the drilling (*dressage*) of bodies" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 196). Those concepts of subtle forms of violence direct the attention to the necessity of "revealing the wellsprings of power,"⁵ hidden to the extent that they are not recognized by social agents who tend to take the order of things for granted and thus, without being aware of it, become complicit in their own domination (cf. Bourdieu and Wacquant 167). Bourdieu's and Elias's power theories offer concepts that draw our attention to forms of domination that – in literature as well as in life – are often overlooked or misrecognized and that with our perspective sharpened by the theoretical tools of relational sociology we are then capable of discovering and dissecting (cf. Buschendorf and Franke 101).

However, the most fundamental principle of relational or figurational sociology⁶ is relational thinking itself. In its attempt to transcend the false antinomy of objectivism and subjectivism (cf. Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations* 188-89), the relational mode of thought breaks with "all forms of methodological monism that purport to assert the ontological priority of structure *or* agent, system *or* actor, the collective *or* the individual," against which both Bourdieu and Elias insist on the "*primacy of relations*"

5 In his eponymous essay, Bourdieu maintains a structural resemblance between sociology and comedy: "Sociology has an affinity with comedy, in that it reveals the wellsprings of authority. Through disguise [...], parody [...] or caricature, Molière unmasks the hidden machinery that makes possible the production of the symbolic effects of imposition and intimidation, the tricks and dodges that make up the powerful and important of all ages ..." (135; cf. Buschendorf and Franke 80)

6 Elias introduced the term "figuration" as a simple tool that would allow conceptualizing "individual" and "society" not as two different or even antagonistic objects, but relationally. As a term supposed to characterize his theory, Elias preferred "process sociology" to "figurational sociology" (Mennell 20). For a comparison between "fields" (Bourdieu) and "figurations," see Dépelteau 278-79, 285-88.

(Wacquant, “Social Praxeology” 15).⁷ Both these “resolute advocate[s] of the relational conception of the social” (15) see in ordinary language with its structural preference for expressing things rather than relations, states rather than processes, a major obstacle for the systematic development of relational thinking (cf. 15). Thus, Elias expounds, “we always feel impelled to make quite senseless conceptual distinctions, like ‘the individual *and* society,’ which makes it seem that ‘the individual’ and ‘society’ were two separate things, like tables and chairs, or pots and pans” (*What is Sociology?* 113). Elias’s study, *The Society of Individuals*, condenses in its title a statement that another radical relational thinker, Karl Marx, expressed in *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* as follows: “Society does not consist of individuals; it expresses the sum of connections and relationships in which individuals find themselves.” (qtd. in Wacquant, “Social Praxeology” 16)

According to Bourdieu, the challenge of the social scientist becomes to “*hold together*, so as to integrate them, both the point of view of the agents who are caught up in the object and the point of view on this point of view which the work of analysis enables one to reach by relating position-takings to the positions from which they are taken” (*Pascalian Meditations* 189).⁸ Consequently, the object of sociology is neither the ‘individual,’ “naively crowned as the paramount, rock-bottom reality by all ‘methodological individualists’” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 126), nor ‘society,’ but rather the relation between “a socialized subjectivity” that Bourdieu calls “habitus” and the social space divided into “fields,” “defined as a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions” (97). There is a historical

7 For comparative analyses of the two relational thinkers, see Paille, van Heerikhuizen, and Emirbayer; Dépelteau (with further references).

8 The integration of the “subjectivist” and the “objectivist vision” (*Pascalian Meditations* 188) takes a conscious effort of methodological reflection on the part of the sociologist. Thus, Bourdieu demands “epistemic reflexivity” (Wacquant, “Social Praxeology” 36-46) and insists on an epistemological break or rupture with commonsense perceptions. Elias shares this concern, to which attest the numerous methodological reflections throughout his work; on the special problem of social scientists who in contrast to natural scientists are simultaneously objects and subjects of the investigation, see especially the title essay in *Involvement and Detachment*.

dimension in these two interrelated key concepts; both are “*realizations of historical action*” (126, original emphasis). As Bourdieu writes, “[t]he *habitus*, a product of history, produces individual and collective practices – more history – in accordance with the schemes generated by history.” (*Logic* 54) Understood as incorporated history and embodied social structure, *habitus* can account for the fundamental factor in the lives of African Americans: the continuity of the past in the present.

As the contributions to this volume demonstrate, applied to African American literature and culture, the conceptual tools of relational sociology heighten our awareness of the power dynamics that have dominated the lives of Blacks in the United States for centuries. What Bourdieu finds with regard to gender power relations in Virginia Woolf’s novel *To the Lighthouse*, i.e., “an incomparably lucid evocation of the female gaze” (*Masculine Domination* 69), the contributors to this essay collection reveal in African American texts. Black Americans are also disposed to evoke the lucid gaze of the oppressed and, like Woolf, they of course do so with the help of aesthetic devices, so that the artwork, to repeat Bourdieu’s comment, “says it only in a mode such that it does not truly say it.”⁹

Thus, in addition to drawing on the concepts of relational sociology, it takes the tools of hermeneutics to bring to light what the texts “truly say.” This collection’s purpose is twofold. On the one hand, its articles contribute to the ongoing debate about relations of domination in the experience of Blacks in the United States; on the other hand, the essays are – in part implicit – theoretical explorations of the approach of relational sociology to African American studies. While Elias and Bourdieu are among the most highly renowned sociologists of the 20th century and while they have

9 The narrative instrument Bourdieu finds particularly efficient in Woolf’s novel is indirect free speech with its “‘fade-in, fade-out’ technique” (*Masculine Domination* 72, 74); cf. Mueller’s narratological discussion of this type of focalization in Morrison’s *Paradise* (50-53). As I pointed out elsewhere, “the fusion of outer with inner reality which is an essential feature of the third-person narrated monologue, is the ideal point of view for rendering the interrelation of a character’s position in social space and the person’s *habitus*” (“Narrated Power Relations” 236). Interestingly, in her contribution to this volume Astrid Franke demonstrates that the use of narrated monologue is not limited to fiction, but may occur in poetry as well (47 ff.).

figured prominently in the sociology of literature, they have so far not inspired many scholars to use their conceptual tools of relational sociology in literary and cultural studies.¹⁰ It is for this reason that the following summaries emphasize the articles' methodological aspects and, by quoting extensively especially from Bourdieu's writings, provide the opportunity to become further acquainted not only with the various instruments of relational-sociological thinking, but also with modifications of their meaning. Although many contributors refer to Elias's established-outsider theory, he figures less prominently than Bourdieu. Nevertheless, it is important to understand that one of the basic principles of the approach is the assumption that the two theories are complementary and that in the practice of interpretation their conceptual tools have proven compatible.

Most articles trace and interpret power dynamics in literary texts by such classic black writers as Gwendolyn Brooks, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and Toni Morrison, as well as two contemporary authors, Colson Whitehead and Percival Everett. Then there is a series of three articles dealing with diverse power struggles under the conditions of neoliberalism: from the role of self-commodification in position-takings in the field of rap and the fabrication of an idealized type of black homeless man to the demonization of a victim of police brutality. The penultimate contribution defines the outsider position of Civil Rights activist Bayard Rustin. The volume ends with a theoretical and political intervention, a discussion of the critique of Bourdieu from the perspective of Jacques Rancière.

The first article addresses a desideratum of the approach, namely the evidence of its applicability beyond the genre of realist fiction. Astrid Franke pursues the introductory reflections on method further by voicing major challenges the lyrical genre presents to the literary critic who interprets African American poetry on the basis of concepts of relational sociology. In Bourdieu's theory of the literary field, Franke states, poetry marks the most autonomous of literary genres; however, African American poets used to be highly dependent on a literary market dominated by whites, from patrons to publishers. Furthermore, the question arises whether the

10 In the United States, the fragmentary reception of Elias and the ambiguous reception of Bourdieu have certainly hindered any substantial transdisciplinary efforts. For reasons responsible for reservations in the American academy, see Wacquant, "Bourdieu in America"; Buschendorf, Franke, and Voelz 3-5.

homology between the world of fiction and the world of the author which Bourdieu posits in *The Field of Cultural Production* can be detected in a genre known for its scarcity of references to reality. In a similar vein, Franke claims, we may ask whether poetry “with its traditionally more limited scope of the social, may yet contribute to a detailed analysis of it” (35). Finally, and more generally, she wonders what influence the author’s position-taking in the literary field may have on the acuity of the vision of the social laid out in the text, and she asks whether it is possible to keep apart what Bourdieu considers interdependent, namely “a sociology of the literary (field) and a literary (text) sociology”?

Franke starts out by localizing Gwendolyn Brooks’s position in the field of African American poetry. It is characterized by a propensity for the reigning style of modernism and simultaneously a marginal position with regard to the male writers (represented by Langston Hughes and Richard Wright) dominating the field. This position, Franke maintains, correlates with Brooks’s highly ironic style which prevents the reader from defining the poet’s moral and political stance in the dilemmas exposed in the two selected poems, “The Sundays of Satin-Legs Smith” from her first volume of poetry, *A Street in Bronzeville* (1945), and “A Bronzeville Mother Loiters in Mississippi. Meanwhile, a Mississippi Mother Burns Bacon” (1960), a daring juxtaposition of the mother of Emmett Till and Carolyn Bryant, the woman at whom the black teenager had allegedly whistled and whose husband and brother-in-law thereupon lynched him. While both lyrical texts have been objects of highly controversial (political) debates, Franke opts for going beyond the existing alternative interpretations – on the basis of relational sociology. “The Sundays of Satin-Legs Smith,” she claims, “might be called a sociological dissection of the habitus of a lower-class black man from Chicago in the 1940s” (36). As she shows in her close reading, Brooks’s portrait of Satin-Legs Smith offers not only a very detailed depiction of his taste, but also conveys the origin of that taste in the collective history of African Americans and his social environment. “Brooks,” Franke states, “anticipates a number of central claims Bourdieu formulates in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1979): Taste is ‘the product of upbringing and education’ (xxiv) and ‘art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfill a social function of legitimating social differences’ (xxx).” (39) Yet the precision of Brooks’s definition of Smith’s taste is juxtaposed with utter indeterminacy

in the question of the evaluation of this taste, when the poet introduces a counter-voice in the form of an addressed “you,” an audience that represents a more conservative taste, yet remains ultimately indistinct with regard to race and class. Brooks keeps a distance by ironizing both Smith and “you” in a similar way that she seems to stay aloof from both women in her poem on Emmett Till’s murder. She has the political courage to offer a very detailed and complex “socio-psychological portrait of a white woman” (46) the sheer ambiguity of which makes it impossible for the reader to decide to what extent Brooks sympathizes with this “victim of a racist patriarchal order” (47). As Franke argues by drawing on Bourdieu’s concepts of symbolic violence and habitus, Brooks confronts us with a carefully documented case of masculine domination, with a protagonist misrecognizing the very power structures that lead to the racial physical violence as well as the interdependent symbolic gender violence.

Stephan Kuhl’s reconstruction of Richard Wright’s literary practice, which combines Freud’s psychoanalytical concept of “sublimation” with Bourdieu’s relational-sociological theory of practice and its core concept of “bodily knowledge,” addresses a question raised by both: How is the sexual instinct transformed into a social libido? (cf. Bourdieu, *Practical Reason* 78-79; 57-58) Kuhl’s focus is on the constituting factors that went into the writing of the key scene of Wright’s *Native Son*, wherein – based on a childhood memory recovered by the psychoanalyst Frederic Wertham – Bigger Thomas unintentionally kills Mary Dalton. His analysis not only unearths information of interest about the author, but, more generally, proposes a theory of creativity. In great detail, Kuhl examines the social and psychological conditions responsible for producing what in modification of Bourdieu’s concept of split habitus he defines as Wright’s “oppositional habitus” (65). The oppositional structure of Wright’s dispositions derives from the two contradictory forces shaping his early life. There was the intellectual encouragement he received from his mother, a schoolteacher, and there was the experience of poverty and Jim Crow oppression in the 1930s South. As Kuhl explains, the former led to Wright’s intellectual disposition and the acquisition of incorporated cultural capital, whereas the latter severely limited his access to institutional cultural capital and furthermore subjected him to the effects of symbolic violence exerted in the name of racial segregation. Based on Bourdieu’s methodological assumptions in *The Rules of Art*, i.e., that “the practices of writers [...] are the product of the

meeting of two histories, the history of the production of the position occupied [in the literary and artistic field] and the history of the production of the dispositions of its occupants” (256; cf. 59), Kuhl then examines Wright’s position in the literary field of the Harlem Renaissance and finds him suspended between the two rival positions represented by the “proletarian intellectualism” of Langston Hughes and the “academic intellectualism” of W. E. B. Du Bois (66). Corresponding to his opposition to the major positions of the literary field, his oppositional habitus was “the structuring principle of Wright’s literary practice in 1940 – and thus the structuring principle of *Native Son*,” (68) which Kuhl – by combining relational-sociological and psychoanalytic arguments – defines as “dispositional sublimation” (71). It suggests that Wright’s oppositional habitus allows for the integration of both his intellectual and his bodily knowledge into the creative process and its product. “Wright’s bodily writing,” Kuhl argues, “allows for an equally bodily reading of his text, a reading that, however, has as its necessary condition the reader’s own incorporated disposition to undergo the effects of symbolic violence, in particular as they relate to the ongoing histories of racism and capitalism, the two major forces in the structuring of the bodily disposition that Wright inscribed into his text.” (73)

Nicole Lindenberg’s interpretation of Ralph Ellison’s unfinished novel focuses on the prominent theme of father-son-relations and their significance for (African) American history. In addition to the work’s edited version, published under the title *Three Days Before the Shooting...* in 2010, Lindenberg draws on drafts and notes from the author’s extensive papers in the Ellison Archive. On the basis of her selection of published and unpublished material Lindenberg develops her central thesis: In his narrative of three generations of fathers and sons, Ellison creates on a psychological level a repetition of typical generational conflicts; at the same time he suggests that on a historical level this repetitive pattern reproduces the existing social order. With the aid of the tools of relational sociology – focusing on Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic violence and his habitus-field theory – Lindenberg highlights the interrelation between family history and national history. On the level of familial relations, she concentrates on the symbolic violence exerted by the father upon the son in the form of charisma. As her analysis of numerous father-son encounters shows, they follow what Bourdieu defines as an effect of symbolic violence, namely, “the transfiguration of relations of domination and submission into affective relations, the

transformation of power into charisma or into the charm suited to evoke affective enchantment,” which, he adds, “can be seen particularly well in relations between generations” (*Practical Reason* 102; cf. 80). In contrast to Bourdieu, who due to his interest in the reproduction of domination emphasizes the force of symbolic power rather than the potential of resistance, Ellison stresses the struggles of the sons against the strong emotions evoked by the fathers’ charisma. But while the sons at first manage to distance themselves from the fathers, the latter’s charismatic power proves its long-lasting impact when the sons, owing to their primary habitus, turn into charismatic fathers themselves: “[A]t the very moment when Hickman becomes a father himself,” Lindenber writes, “he experiences a change that confuses him the more as it turns him into a father who resembles his own father.” (95) Ellison links family history explicitly to national history through the father figure of Abraham Lincoln. Confronted with the Lincoln memorial in Washington, D.C., the most prominent of the novel’s fathers, Reverend Alonzo Zuber Hickman, displays the typical ambiguity of the son. The scene reveals an inner conflict with regard to habitus formation, in Bourdieu’s terms, a “split habitus.” As the archival material enables Lindenber to show, Ellison conceived of Hickman’s split habitus as a consequence of the confrontation with his own charismatic preacher father. The last son in the novel’s sequence of generations seems to break the chain by killing his politically powerful, racist father. However, the circular structure of the narrative – the published novel starts with the scene of the murder followed by the long narration of events that occur “three days before the shooting” – suggests the presence of the past, that is, the reproduction of domination.

In his analysis of *Sag Harbor* (2009), Marlon Lieber juxtaposes Colson Whitehead’s novel with Touré’s 2011 book *Who’s Afraid of Post-Blackness?*, in which the writer and TV host propagates “post-Black rugged individualism.” As his review of *Sag Harbor* reveals, Touré reads the novel as a document of post-blackness, that is, committed to the notion of the black individual’s allegedly limitless choice of identity options. However, claiming the freedom of choice and potential success for all Blacks, as Touré does, means ignoring social conditioning. In contrast, Lieber argues, Whitehead’s work is not a *Bildungsroman* focusing, like Touré’s own text, on the educational process of one individual, but rather “a novel about a particular class fraction and their manners” (104). As such it lends itself

particularly well to an interpretation drawing on Bourdieu's relational sociology, "which is essentially a theory of the reproduction of class differences" (104). In his close readings of representative scenes from *Sag Harbor*, Lieber shows how the African American protagonist, 15-year-old Manhattan-raised Benji, struggles during his summer vacation in an upper-middle-class black Long Island community to come to terms with the class positions of the various groups around him (the established of the neighboring white community, the norm-setting older generation of Blacks, the black youth drawn to the cultural practices of the ghetto). For example, as much as he would like to join in the complicated handshake routines and "the grammatical acrobatics" (111) of black slang perfected by a group of friends not socialized in private schools, Benji's habitus of the black bourgeoisie prevents him from adapting their ghetto lifestyle. As Lieber claims, Whitehead's novel does not support the post-black notion of the individual's free choice and responsibility, but rather "is fully committed to the (Bourdiesian) idea that individuals possess embodied dispositions that tacitly shape the manner in which they perceive the world, think, and act" (104). *Sag Harbor* clearly portrays the distinctions that mark the boundaries between different social spaces that promote the reproduction of a class society.

Like Whitehead's *Sag Harbor*, the satiric novel *I Am Not Sidney Poitier* (2009) by Percival Everett takes up current debates about 'race' in the United States by alluding, for example, to the notion of an alleged "post-racialism" or the so-called "culture of poverty." More generally, it deals with dynamics of racial oppression within the group of the dominated. As Johannes Kohrs shows in detail, Everett uses a great range of literary devices that he takes from the great reservoir of black humor – ranging from the hyperbolic, such as satire or farce, often overlapping with the absurd, to more subtle forms, such as parody or irony. They all function as strategies of subversion in that they draw attention to the mechanisms of power relations. The comic as well as other forms of humor are capable of unmasking symbolic violence (cf. Buschendorf and Franke 80-82). Everett's satire focuses on the social complexity evoked by symbolic violence to which the dark-skinned protagonist, Not Sidney, is exposed during a visit to his girlfriend's upper-class, color-conscious family and their posh home. For his analysis, Kohrs employs "Bourdieu's theoretical dyad of symbolic violence and habitus [...]" as an interpretative prism to zoom in on the social nuances

of Not Sidney's negotiation of his own 'place' in the racial order" (131). The protagonist's pre-conscious, bodily reactions to the situation, which culminate in contradictory emotions of "uneasy fascination" (135), insecurity, and ambivalence, can be explained, Kohrs contends with Bourdieu, by the "effect of symbolic domination [...] exerted not in the pure logic of knowing consciousness but in the obscurity of the dispositions of habitus, in which are embedded the schemes of perception and appreciation which, below the level of the decisions of the conscious mind and the controls of the will, are the basis of a relationship of practical knowledge and recognition that is profoundly obscure to itself" (*Pascalian Meditations* 170-71; 132).

Skin color is also at the core of Toni Morrison's latest novel, *God Help the Child* (2015). Bride, the protagonist, is a thriving business woman in the black beauty industry whose success "is crucially based on her self-marketing [...] focused on her very dark skin which she highlights by wearing only white clothes" (146). As Stefanie Mueller reminds us in a brief survey of the history of the rise of black business men and women and its representation in Morrison's novels, success stories of black female entrepreneurship have been rare in American history and, accordingly, in the author's oeuvre. The question whether the exceptional economic agency granted to the protagonist ("the fact that she is doing the selling herself – rather than being sold as African slaves were for centuries," 154) can be seen as a sure sign of autonomy and self-identity and thus as a model of contemporary black womanhood, Mueller answers by drawing on Bourdieu's interrelated concepts of habitus and field. "Specifically," she states, "this article borrows the idea of agency as emerging from the interrelationship between institutions and habitus, between history objectified and history embodied [...]. Bourdieu's understanding of agency stresses practical knowledge, embodiment, and history in a way that accounts for the endlessly creative acts and strategies by which agents navigate social fields – at the same time that it takes serious the limited horizon of possibilities available to any agent at any moment in his or her trajectory." (147) In her analysis, Mueller demonstrates that throughout Morrison's novels female economic agency connected to the black beauty industry is dominated both by white beauty ideals and consumer capitalism. As much as Bride may strive for self-possession in order to acquire genuine agency, she is bound to fail as

she and her partner Booker cannot escape a past that is “inscribed in their bodies and that structures the world that is available to them” (159).

Timo Müller’s contribution on rap music is based on the assumption that there is a remarkable structural homology between Bourdieu’s concept of “field” and the concrete field of hip hop. By definition, a field is “methodologically inseparable from the field of stances or position-takings (*prises de position*), i.e., the structured system of practices and expressions of agents” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 105). In a field defined as a “*space of conflict and competition*” (Wacquant, “Social Praxeology” 17, original emphasis), all players engage in struggles for power or authority in order to improve their access to the kind of profits that are at stake in the respective game, or field. But while commonly such position-takings in the “struggles for usurpation and exclusion” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 106) remain pre-conscious, the field of rap differs from other fields in that position-taking is at the very core of the cultural practice of rapping. Thus, Müller argues, “Bourdieu’s sociology of fields is particularly useful for a literary-sociological analysis of rap music [...] because it foregrounds an aspect of social interaction that rappers have continually discussed and performed: position-taking” (165). Jay Z’s intro to the album *In My Lifetime, Vol. 1* (1997), from which the title of the essay is taken, illustrates how rap lyrics thematize position-taking as an essential strategy in the game and, at the same time, are themselves position-takings in the field, “drawing on various markers of status and legitimacy specific to the field” (166). As Müller points out quoting Bourdieu, position-takings “challenge the alternative between an internal reading of the work and an explanation based on the social conditions of its production or consumption” (*Rules of Art* 231; cf. 169), that is, the concept allows combining the aesthetic with the sociological dimension of the songs. In the second part of his essay, Müller sketches historical transformations in the field of rap since the mid-1990s – when “a new generation of rappers began to redefine the popular perception of rap music by incorporating strategies from other fields, especially from pop music and the economic field” (176) – and addresses the changes in the kind of capital considered indispensable for profitable position-taking in three case studies: Kool Moe Dee’s rap battle with Busy Bee Starski (1981), Ice-T’s “O.G. Original Gangster” (1991), and Jay Z’s “Empire State of Mind” (2009).

While Timo Müller analyzes the self-fashioning of successful rappers in the field of hip hop, Wibke Schnieder mann focuses on the opposite pole of the African American social scale, drawing attention to the use of the mad-genius stereotype in narratives about black homelessness. The stories she examines depict a highly-gifted violinist who due to mental illness drops out of the renowned Juilliard School of Music, thereby tapping into the widely accepted concept of the mad genius that falsely correlates creativity with insanity. As Schnieder mann argues based on Bourdieu's critical reflections in *The Field of Cultural Production*, the "insistence on unconditioned, 'uncreated' creativity [...] presupposes a relation of mutual dependence between giftedness and inherent (and thus naturalized) illness. It therefore dismisses out of hand any attempt at situating both artist and artwork within the context of the conditions that rendered them possible and of the structures of which they are the product." (139; cf. 185) Positioning the black homeless man in the field of artistic production, "in which the glorification of 'great individuals'" is particularly common (29), is then a pertinent strategy of individualization which allows to regard the homeless-turned-artist as being separate from society. While the marketing of these texts emphasizes that they are based on "true stories," the mad-genius stereotype suppresses both the bleak reality of the lives of black homeless men and any discussion of its systemic foundation. In her survey of the American history of homelessness and its public image, Schnieder mann highlights the shift from white male to black male homelessness and provides the major reasons (ghettoization and criminalization) for the current overrepresentation of black men among the U.S. homeless population. In the second part of her article, she renders close readings of two versions of the mad-genius stereotype, Steve Lopez's *The Soloist* (2008), which is based on the author's factual meeting with the homeless African American Juilliard dropout Nathaniel Ayers, and the movie adaptation (2009) starring Jamie Foxx and Robert Downey Jr. The construction of the protagonist as a 'true artist' idealizes the life of the homeless by suggesting, for example, that he has the great privilege of endless free time and thus enjoys an enviable freedom. In other words, *The Soloist* transforms Ayers's underprivileged status into a source of his happiness. As Schnieder mann concludes, the "frame of the mad genius elicits sympathy for the individual while at the same time facilitating a tacit dismissal of race, class, and social conditionality" (200).

With Luvena Kopp's article "Understanding Ferguson," we move from the individualized and romanticized image of black homelessness to the case of a demonized victim of state violence, 18-year-old Michael Brown who was killed in Ferguson, Missouri, on August 9, 2014 by police officer Darren Wilson. Schniederemann's and Kopp's contributions expose the logic of "methodological individualism" (Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations* 155) whose function it is to hide systemic racism and its historical, economic, and legal causes. While both articles draw on the seminal article "Deadly Symbiosis" by Wacquant, "a rigorous contemporary proponent of relational sociology" (207), Kopp also highlights his *Punishing the Poor*, as she interprets Ferguson's law enforcement and penal system as an example of the neoliberal "establishment of a *new government of social insecurity*" (11). She devotes the first part of her analysis to a historical sketch of the racialized divisions in St. Louis and its suburb Ferguson, from the racial policing of Jim Crow sundown towns to today's claims for domination over public space, for example, by persecuting jaywalking and generating city revenue by extracting (traffic) fines and fees mainly from its poor black population. As Kopp argues with Bourdieu, social space is contested as a significant site of power struggles: "Because social space is inscribed at once in spatial structures and in the mental structures that are partly produced by the incorporation of these structures, space is one of the sites where power is asserted and exercised, and, no doubt in its subtlest form, as symbolic violence that goes unperceived as violence." (*Weight* 126; cf. 211) Social divisions that are objectified in physical space are in turn translated into categories that reproduce the very dividing lines in the perceptions of social agents. Kopp demonstrates this interrelation between the materialist and the symbolic dimensions of domination on the basis of statements by witnesses and an extended analysis of officer Wilson's grand jury testimony. As these testimonies reveal, symbolic violence is exerted by attributing to Blacks as a group of outsiders cultural deviance, for instance, with respect to their alleged irresponsibility or the imagined threat emanating from the demonized black body. This strategy of 'blaming the victim' has the function of legitimizing state violence, a mechanism that ultimately leads to the reproduction and naturalization of racialized power. As Kopp summarizes the legal outcome of the case in Bourdieusian terms, "the grand jury's decision not to indict Wilson for the killing of Brown [...] was the *socio-logical* outcome of the lawful 'encounter between [the subjective

structures of] the *habitus* and [the objective structures of] a field, between incorporated history and an objectified history” (*Logic* 66, original emphasis; cf. 223-24). Thus, “Wilson’s exoneration can be read as an official consecration of his (symbolic) power: of his authority, his representation, and, ultimately, of the murder itself” (224).

Nicole Hirschfelder’s article on the symbolic struggles of definition concerning Civil Rights activist Bayard Rustin and his legacy draws primarily on Elias’s theory of established-outsider relations. Rustin belonged to the inner circle of Martin Luther King, Jr. and was a major organizer of the movement, responsible, for example, for the famous March on Washington in 1963; and yet, despite his undoubtedly eminent position, he was ignored until the 1990s and since then still has been largely neglected in historiography. The common explanation for this so-called “silencing” is: No wonder, not only was he gay, but a former communist as well, two qualities sufficient to ostracize any American, let alone a black man. However, Hirschfelder argues, the case is more complicated than it may at first appear and, in addition, qualifies for the more general question what kind of power dynamics lead to a transformation of oppression that ultimately guarantees its reproduction. Following Elias’s principle of considering long-term developments in relations of interdependent groups, Hirschfelder looks at the impact of the constructs of both ‘race’ and ‘class’ on the fabrication of Rustin’s legacy in (African) American collective memory. The complexity of his case arises above all from his membership in one of the most renowned American religious denominations: He was socialized as a Quaker. Hirschfelder argues that the image of Rustin’s political activism is forged by changing processes of selection, most importantly, the neglect of his Quakerism. Rustin’s upbringing as a black Quaker not only accounts for his influence on King’s pacifist stance; more importantly, it makes him a member of a highly privileged group of the established among the established who “in hindsight were considered the spiritual founding fathers” of the nation (248). To be raised as a Quaker means sharing their *habitus* and their *we-ideal* as well as participating in the cultural and social capital ascribed to the Religious Society of Friends. Rustin, then, profited from the group charisma of the established which made him less vulnerable to the stigmatization that he experienced as a black homosexual. Not surprisingly, Rustin became known for his untiring efforts of mediating between the groups to which he belonged; however, his attempts to transcend the

boundaries between the respective established and outsiders challenged their very we-identity and necessarily met with resistance. As Hirschfelder argues, it is Rustin's Quaker habitus "that makes his development into one of the great Civil Rights leaders more plausible than mere contingency" (248). On the other hand, it is the same sense of empowerment and privilege derived from participating in the Quaker group charisma that led both the established and the various outsider groups to which he belonged to suspect him of being a traitor and consequently to distort his legacy.

The volume concludes with a critical intervention by Dennis Büscher-Ulbrich who, by presenting Jacques Rancière's anti-sociological disagreement with Bourdieu's relational concepts, raises the fundamental "question of the relationship between social science and emancipation" (259). Rancière's critique is above all directed against Bourdieu's concepts of "symbolic violence" and "misrecognition," as they imply that the dominated cannot perceive their own domination and consequently, according to him, are denied political agency. More generally, Rancière criticizes what he sees as the hierarchical structure of Bourdieu's thinking that places the sociologist above the excluded, turning the latter into a mere object of investigation. From the point of view of a theory of politics, then, the power theory of relational sociology is ineffective, since it necessarily prevents emancipation. In contrast, Rancière holds the fundamental assumption of unconditional equality, which ascribes equal powers of speech and thought to everybody. As Büscher-Ulbrich points out, Rancière derives the core idea of his philosophical project from Kant's and Schiller's belief in the emancipatory potential of aesthetics. Against Bourdieu's allegedly deterministic view of the transformative potential of the dominated, a charge he shares with many of Bourdieu's critics, Rancière insists on the possibility of emancipatory social transformation by rethinking politics from the perspective of the excluded who, in the formulation of Büscher-Ulbrich, are said to be capable of "disrupt[ing] not only the power arrangements of the social order, but also its perceptual and epistemic underpinnings, the obviousness and naturalness that attaches to it" (258). With its epistemologically different stance, Rancière's radical critique of relational sociology provides a valuable opportunity to reflect upon the fundamentally opposing assumptions of the two theories. It may be the more surprising that Rancière's concept of racism as "a passion from above" is comparable to Wacquant's thesis of the "neoliberal government of social insecurity." Linked to Kopp's

interpretation of Ferguson as a paradigm of the neoliberal state's systemic racism, the last contribution of this volume leads the debate on power relations beyond the problem of racial domination, asking "the pressing questions of what material and symbolic constraints on subjectivity and agency exist today that help reproduce a consensual post-political formation" (274).

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Satin-Legs Smith and a Mississippi Mother

Dissections of Habitus in Gwendolyn Brooks

ASTRID FRANKE

To read African American poetry with the help of Pierre Bourdieu is a challenge in at least three ways: With regard to his field theory, there is a tension between a genre that, since the end of the 19th century, seems most closely positioned toward the pole of autonomous literature on the one hand, and an oppressed group whose literature has only slowly emancipated itself from the economic dependence of a market dominated by whites, on the other. This in itself is a curious situation that warrants further elaboration, but to continue for a moment with the implications suggested by Bourdieu's *The Field of Cultural Production*, one may also wonder to what extent poetry can provide the researcher with enough of a fictional world to detect homologies between the world of the author and the world of the text. The second task then is to show that poetry, with its traditionally more limited scope of the social, may yet contribute to a detailed analysis of it. A third challenge is not limited to poetry and concerns a possible connection between a sociology of the literary (field) and a literary (text) sociology: If the struggles for a position in the literary field shape a literary text so that literary criticism can overcome "the opposition between internal analysis (text) and external analysis (context)" (Bourdieu, "Passport" 245), how does that shape the text's vision of the social? Will the vision be particularly acute or will there be blind spots depending on the struggles – or are these two possible ways to use Bourdieu for literary analysis separate from each other?

I will not be able to provide full-fledged answers to the third challenge, but in the following I want to elaborate on it via an examination of poetry. I will develop my sense that while we may find literary insights into the social that we may ‘see’ more easily with the help of concepts such as symbolic violence, we and the text may also have blind spots that are possibly connected with the struggles we, at our time, and the text are engaged in. There is always, in one of Bourdieu’s frequently repeated phrase, “vision and division” (“The Social Space” 726; “Eine sanfte Gewalt” 227), and the reason they come to light through literature is that they are not synchronized when critics look at older texts. To demonstrate this, I have chosen two poems by Gwendolyn Brooks that seem well suited to make this argument because, first, they so clearly present a psycho-sociological analysis of an almost Bourdieusian kind. Secondly, both poems, though quite different in content and technique, have been read as social critique, directed at forms of domination based on race and gender, but they have also been accused of catering to white tastes (cf. Bryant 114-15). I would like to explore the plausibility of these readings and relate them back to the vision and division that may be found in them.

“The Sundays of Satin-Legs Smith” from Brooks’s first volume of poetry, *A Street in Bronzeville* (1945), might be called a sociological dissection of the habitus of a lower-class black man from Chicago in the 1940s. Its subject matter and modernist form bear the traces of Brooks’s socialization in the field of poetry. Like other African American poets at that time, such as Robert Hayden or Melvin Tolson, Brooks drew on the poetic experiments associated with Modernism on the one hand and the Harlem Renaissance on the other. In her case, James Weldon Johnson advised her to read T. S. Eliot (Kent, *A Life* 26), Langston Hughes encouraged her to turn to African American street life as subject matter for poetry (40), and Richard Wright established a contact with the publisher Harper & Brothers (62) and suggested an important revision of the initial manuscript: Without “Satin-Legs,” the collection lacked “one real long good [poem]” to pull everything together, he felt (63). He also thought the opening poem “the mother” to be weak since abortion was not a fit subject for poetry.¹

1 In contrast, cf. Harold Bloom, who devotes a large section of his chapter on Gwendolyn Brooks to “the mother” (15-16).

These names do not simply denote individuals but are important to understand the relations and dynamics in African American literature in the early 1940s: More than is the case for the novel or drama and theater, the process of consecration in poetry in the 19th and 20th centuries has often happened through single, charismatic figures or small ‘schools’ of poetry. Since there is so little money to be made with poems, strong institutionalized market mechanisms are missing before the entry of the university into the field of poetry. Thus, 19th-century poetry was dominated by figures such as Henry W. Longfellow or James Russell Lowell; the beginning of the 20th century saw the rise of “heretics” such as T. S. Eliot or Ezra Pound who, by the mid-1940s, were well on their way to consecration themselves: Eliot received the Nobel Prize in 1954, Pound the Bollingen Prize in 1972. Though both poets had made efforts to reach a larger public (through drama, criticism, and not least Pound’s radio speeches), their poetry was initially directed against both Romantic personal expression and Victorian moral guidance in poetry. Against these popular forms, they advocated a detachment created by impersonal voices, impersonations or masks, and by irony.

Hughes and Wright are important for Brooks because of their self-confident embrace of urban African American subject matter, and perhaps also for their difficult relations with political organizations on the left, particularly the Communist Party. Due to the political developments of the 1930s and 40s, African Americans found their emancipatory struggles enmeshed with a number of groups, organizations, and institutions of the left in both politics and culture. These did not prescribe a common aesthetic – in fact, though there was a widespread belief in the importance of literature for racial emancipation (as there was in the Harlem Renaissance), there was no dominating doctrine about the relation between the two realms.

Langston Hughes’s poetry, like T. S. Eliot’s, challenged 19th-century sensibilities, but it did so primarily through the inclusion of urban African American experiences and vernacular forms, such as the Blues, which inspired his poetic experiments. When Hughes wrote “I, too, sing America,” he claimed an American heritage that goes back to Walt Whitman. To insist on the social responsibility of literature to include those previously excluded is not a tradition only upheld by racial minorities, but one that can also claim a ‘white’ genealogy. For reasons too complex to explain here, the American literary field always had a strong bias toward a heteronomy

embraced as necessary to a social function of literature. To be recognized as an important element of a democratic culture necessitates a certain popularity, and this leads to a greater permeability between popular forms produced for a mass audience and complex artistic forms produced for a limited audience: “[T]aste levels and aesthetic forms were never separated as categorically as in Europe” (Fluck 53).

Any poet entering the subfield of poetry in the 1940s would have felt the strong current of Modernism becoming the new accepted way to write. Its formal elements thus lose their exclusivity and become available for projects of a more politically conscious and socially responsive kind, such as explorations of the plight of workers or of urban low life. However, Hughes as a possible model and Wright as a direct supporter also point to a possible problem: Even though Hughes himself is often quite balanced with regard to the attention he gives to men and women, Wright’s comment on “the mother” points to a predominantly masculine stance in literary explorations of the ghetto where women hardly appear as mothers and are most likely to appear as Blues singers or prostitutes.

The opening lines of “Satin-Legs” at once position the speaker within the field as described above. With Latinate words and irony at Smith’s expense, the speaker establishes a defamiliarizing stance toward both the flashy male protagonist and his female lovers in their world of poverty and prostitution. The detached voice of a participant observer – someone familiar with the world of her objects of study yet distant enough to observe, analyze, and explain them – then begins to describe the Sunday routine of Satin-Legs with particular attention to his tastes in scents, clothes, music, movies, food, and finally women: He prefers strong aromatic lotions and oils to more subtle scents of flowers, cannot think of gardening as an aesthetic or educational occupation, likes colorful, spectacular clothes, has never heard classical music and probably cannot understand it, ritually boos white lovers in movies, and appreciates both in his food and in his women all the explicit signs that they will nourish his physical and sexual hunger. His taste is a marker of race, class, and gender; it has been formed by Smith’s individual life trajectory (his upbringing in the rural South, his migration to Chicago, his life in Bronzeville), as well as by the history of his ancestors, leading back to slavery. The way this socialization has shaped his taste can also be deduced from the poem: The reason why Smith likes strong smells and loud colors and why subtleties and understatement are

lost on him is that his senses are numbed by his environment. His partial blind- and deafness (“he sees and does not see,” “he hears and does not hear” 13) is a defense against the thwarted ambitions and betrayed promises, the misery and poverty that have surrounded him all his life. By contrast, a taste for “quiet arts” (15) needs education and material comfort over a couple of generations.

Taste then is a social, not an individual fact. It emerges as a set of aesthetic preferences at the intersection of social norms and economic and political interests – with this, Brooks anticipates a number of central claims Bourdieu formulates in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1979/1984): Taste is “the product of upbringing and education” (xxiv) and “art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfill a social function of legitimating social differences” (xxx). Smith’s taste arises out of the limits of his socialization (a lack of education, poverty) and thus mirrors and marks these limits while also being a means of momentarily transcending or perhaps forgetting them.

In the poem, these insights are brought forward in defense of Smith – or so it seems, initially. They are made, as the reader suddenly discovers in line 12, in an address to a (plural) “you” who advocate a very different taste: “You” appear to be so critical of Smith’s use of heavily scented bath oils that they are suspected of wanting to deny him these pleasures. Theirs is a restrained, unpretentious middle-class taste, as opposed to Smith’s loud expressiveness: Contrasts provided in the poem are those between the marble of sculpture vs. the flesh of his body; between Saint-Saëns, Grieg, Tchaikovsky, and Brahms vs. the Blues; between a “straight tradition” (11), “the quiet arts of compromise” (15), and “middle grace” (15) on the one hand and “baroque, / Rococo” (13) and “affable extremes” (15) on the other. There are two passages where the criticism of extravagance is given a more specific socio-historical context: One is the war-time insistence on restraint in consumption as a patriotic service, particularly with regard to the zoot suit, extensively described as “wonder-suits in yellow and in wine, / Sarcastic green and zebra-striped cobalt” (12); the second is a reflection on gardening as part of social reform in a progressivist style when we are entering the minds of “you”: “might his happiest / Alternative (you muse) be, after all, / A bit of gentle garden in the best / Of taste and straight tradition?” (11). Toward the end of the poem, when the description of his taste

in women and food converges in terms of excess and lack of control, we know that aesthetic values are also seen as moral values: The disapproval of Smith's tastes by "you" is also a disapproval of him as a man.

It is this implied moral condemnation of Smith that is rejected by a defense of his taste. But while the sociological explanations refute any psychologizing charges of innate aesthetic and moral deficiencies, they do not establish an idea about the value of that taste – it simply is what it is. In today's parlance we would probably say: It is part of his identity and thus no longer subject to discussions of value. This is by now a widespread assumption in cultural studies, sometimes accredited to Bourdieu.² What we realize through the poem is the fact that aesthetic relativism – all tastes being equally valuable – stands in an uneasy relation to social reforms tied to education in taste: school gardening, free or subsidized concerts, music and art lessons in school, etc.: If tastes arising from wealth and those arising from poverty are considered equally valuable they do not provide an angle to argue for change.³ If, however, some tastes, and by implication some forms of art (or food, or music, or clothes), are regarded as better than others, this is elitist in its value judgment (because the taste is likely to be that of the dominant social formation) but at the same time this assumption can be consistently used to argue for an education of taste as part of social reform. This is the position "you" hold and that is refuted by the speaker – so what is the poem's stance? That we should at least consider social change is made clear in the most explicitly political passage of the poem:

Ah, there is little hope. You might as well—
Unless you care to set the world a-boil
And do a lot of equalizing things,
Remove a little ermine, say, from kings,

2 Cf. During: "Bourdieu has been important to cultural studies [...] because, for him, cultural production [...] has particular functions and particular laws which [...] demystify the old opposition between 'high' and 'low' or, to put this more accurately, mean that high art has no more inherent value than other forms of cultural production." (89)

3 Cf. Honneth on Bourdieu in *Die Tageszeitung*. The problem is the foundation of norms, which, Bourdieu would argue, are never "universals" but historical outcomes of power struggles.

Shake hands with paupers and appoint them men,
For instance—certainly you might as well
Leave him his lotion, lavender and oil. (11-12)

Whatever the stance on revolution, we understand that the relativist position suggested at the end is not borne by a genuine respect for men like Smith, nor by the belief that the strong scents of lotions and oils Smith prefers and the flowers “you” prefer are equally valuable. It is rather a cop-out, a cheap solution once one realizes that only a redistribution of wealth, power, and access to education can change the differences in taste and thus the hierarchies demarcated by them. Therefore, an exploration of taste, when tied to the attempt to change it, is a far more radical endeavor than we all (the speaker, “you,” and the reader) may have thought. Aesthetic preferences are not played out in a world apart from politics and economics but tied to them. Whosoever is not prepared for radical change may well “[I]eave him” his oil (12). Why not stop then? Since the poem now asks the reader explicitly to “proceed” and “inspect” Smith more closely (12), it seems more interested in exploring his taste than it is in change.

There is no critical consensus as to the politics of this poem, and the divisions begin, understandably, with the question of who is addressed. The majority of critics initially regarded the addressee with the bourgeois taste and reformist intentions to be white (cf. Bolden 37; Miller 103-04; Smith 36; Stanford 164). Recently it has been conceded that these attitudes may have been found amongst a black middle and upper class as well. Marsha Bryant, for instance, states: “Brooks interrogates both her middle-class black readers’ notions of respectability and her liberal white readers’ fascination with black urban life, resisting their respective tendencies to view Smith as either a bad example or a representative figure” (117). On the other end of the spectrum, Bill Mullen believes the “you” to be the black strivers deeming themselves to be above Smith and “straining to escape its [poverty’s] mark” (163).

Historically, with regard to a real as well as an implied audience, everything is possible. As Brooks’s contemporaries Horace Cayton and St. Clair Drake point out in their sociological study *Black Metropolis* (1945), there had been an influx of African American migrants to Chicago in the last decades of the 19th century. In the interviews conducted by Drake these early migrants claimed, probably casting the past in an all-too-rosy light,

that there had been plenty of opportunities for work and almost no racism before a second wave of migrants from the South arrived in the so-called Great Migration. Throughout the beginning of the 20th century, there were tensions within the black population of Chicago between the old arrivals and the newcomers: As so often in migrant history, the people who arrived earlier felt their achievements of integration threatened by the newcomers (cf. Cayton and Drake 174-213). The more established and ‘respectable’ black middle and upper class might plausibly constitute the addressee of the poet; perhaps the repeated lines “you forget” (11) support the idea that there are people who could know the conditions Smith springs from if they would only care to remember.

On the other hand, the repeated “you forget” after the mentioning of baroque and rococo is also a general reminder that taste is historical and that what they now look down upon was once an acceptable style cherished by social elites. This reading does not have to assume an exclusively black readership. It is also possible to read Brooks’s poem as imagining a “you” consisting of black and white readers united by the belief in a “straight,” modest, unpretentious style as both aesthetically and morally superior to Smith’s. Likewise, it is not necessary to distinguish between an interest in either respectability or voyeurism along racial lines, as Bryant does: The allusions to Progressivist reform and “counsels on control” (15) allow us to assign the respectable taste to whites as well. Likewise, as Christopher Bigsby points out in a short history of the term “liberal” in the context of *The Second Black Renaissance*, when pertaining to a belief in reform rather than more radical change “liberal” may refer equally to Blacks and whites (6) – just as the critique of the liberal position as ineffectual was uttered by whites (Edmund Wilson) and Blacks (Richard Wright) alike (17-18). The lines above might well be read as directed toward whites who need to understand that human worth and dignity is a right and not a privilege. Or, like Richard Wright’s poem “Child of the Dead and Forgotten Gods,” as impatient with a liberal position of primarily whites but also Blacks who believe that the situation in urban African American ghettos can be improved by gentle moral and aesthetic education. Or as ridiculing the black bourgeois who have reduced race rebellion to “consumer preference” (Mullen 164).

A concomitant divisive issue is the poem’s stance toward black vernacular culture and its representative. There is a tendency to see Smith either as

hampered and constrained by circumstances, which are thereby condemned, or else as celebrated for his vitality and triumph over circumstances. A crucial instance is a judgment about Smith's pursuit of love and sex where, clearly, taste and morality converge. For R. Baxter Miller, Smith's date with the "ironic 'lady'" (106) is not celebratory but ironic. He also finds the juxtaposition of the Blues with 19th-century composers ironic and believes that the poem ultimately does not approve of Smith's preferences and escapism. He sees a discrepancy between Brooks's humanist values and a man who cannot escape his demeaning environment and becomes absurd in the end. A more recent example is Bill Mullen's reading, likewise pointing to "an ironic play of elements" at the end of the poem, comprising sex and mass-marketed food (the "Woolworth mignonette" 16) in a rewriting of Wright's *Bigger* Thomas: "Smith is an acclimated and unalienated *Bigger* blindly and ravenously at home among the comestibles." (166)

According to Judith Saunders, however, "The Sundays of Satin-Legs Smith" is rather a reworking of T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" – with Brooks alluding to Eliot's poem throughout, establishing an ironic contrast between "a man of low status and low income who nevertheless manages his life more competently than does his wealthy, high-status counterpart in Eliot's poem" (16). Saunders concludes: "The effect of allusion in Brooks's poem, finally, is to compel appreciation of Smith's un-subdued vitality. Refusing to succumb to despair or self-pity, even in an environment that would excuse such surrender, Smith triumphantly reverses nearly every one of Prufrock's failures." (17) Though Saunders also wants to read the poem as "an unmistakable indictment of the economic and social system responsible for Smith's circumstances" (16), the final assessment of its overall effect approaches current trends in psychology and sociology concerned with "resilience" – the power to withstand otherwise devastating circumstances. A celebration of someone who triumphs in the face of poverty and deprivation is not easy to reconcile with social criticism. Saunders wants to be careful not to read a devaluation of African American popular culture into Brooks's poem. Miller from a humanist point of view and Mullen from a Marxist one want to condemn the conditions (including the insufficient artistic choices available) that severely limit men like Smith in either their humanity or in their consciousness of racial and class identity.

These different readings are possible not just because of some general ambiguity but because of a logical inconsistency at the core of the poem, linked to a particular use of Modernist aesthetics for which Gwendolyn Brooks was recognized and praised: her tight control over meter and rhyme, latinate words, alliterations, and, tied to it, an all-pervasive irony resulting from the discrepancy of complex poetic means and subject matter. Irony is important here because it is a rhetorical means of division, of inclusion and exclusion: It separates people who can discern what is really meant as opposed to those who only understand what is said. In Eliot's "Prufrock," different layers of irony appeal to a readership ready to support the avant-gardist onslaught against the 19th century: These readers acknowledge the self-ironic, disillusioned, and dispassionate stance of the aging Prufrock but they will not make the mistake of identifying themselves with that voice – and the poem, of course, does not ask them to. While irony leading to satire is part of social critique with a clear target, the more diffuse irony of "Prufrock" is not easy to reconcile with social engagement. In Brooks's poem, it seems at times as though "you" is the target of satire, but since Smith is also treated with ironic detachment, neither the target nor the speaking position can easily be identified. This is irritating because the poem engages in normative discussions and thus demands a standpoint.

Two motifs can be examined to illustrate this further: The recurring motif of hunger and need for food could be read as suggesting that even though Smith is able to "go out full" (15) at Joe's Eats, he is not satisfied on a deeper level. There is a diffuse need for scent ("There must be scent, somehow there must be some" 11), as well as a general neediness: "People are so in need, in need of help. / People want so much that they do not know" (12). On his way to breakfast, Smith "swallows sunshine with a secret yelp" (13); in the street there are "men estranged / From music and from wonder and from joy / But far familiar with the guiding awe / Of foodlessness" (14). What a man can bring to music includes "what he ate / For breakfast—and for dinner twenty years / Ago last autumn: all his skipped desserts" (14). In the cinema, "it is sin / For his eye to eat of" (15) the whiteness of the heroine – announcing the convergence of sexual and dietary nourishment at the end. We may conclude from these examples that even though Smith is a kind of performance artist himself, his aesthetic

hunger is not satisfied – his performance only serves the purpose of gratifying his hunger for food and sex.⁴

Another motif occurring throughout the poem which not only describes Smith but also seems to judge him is the faux pomp of an anachronistic, vaguely medieval kind. It is announced in the opening lines: “Inamoratas, with an approbation, / Bestowed his title. Blessed his inclination” (10) and continues with words like “royal” and “reign,” the comparison of his closet to a “vault / Whose glory is not diamonds, not pearls, / Not silver plate with just enough dull shine” (12), and the comparison of his “hysterical ties” with “narrow banners for some gathering war” (12). It might be too much to compare his layers of clothing with an armor, but when he “Squires his lady to dinner”, the woman wearing “Queen Lace stockings,” (15) we are back with the discrepant image of aristocrats in the ghetto which ridicules both the squire and his lady. Confusingly, the above-quoted temptation to do equalizing things is also phrased in terms from that semantic field: “Remove a little ermine, say, from kings, / Shake hands with paupers and appoint them men” (12). It is confusing because Smith has been described as both “king” and “pauper,” with one figurative gesture of the poem being to remove his royal pretensions and reveal his nakedness underneath for everyone to see.

Perhaps the great distance that results from the many ironies surrounding Smith reflects Brooks’s social distance to him in class and gender. Her portraits of black women (as in the poems “the mother,” “hunchback girl: she thinks of heaven,” or “a song in the front yard”) carefully interweave inside and outside, depicting the life of the mind in a particular environment. However, Brooks does not shy away from portraying the minds of men, too: In *A Street in Bronzeville*, “Satin-Legs” is balanced by “Negro Hero,” a monologue by a soldier who is acutely aware of the hypocrisies

4 Furthermore, the claim that the men in the street are “estranged / From music” (14) also devalues the choices on offer in the ghetto, such as the Blues. Here as in other places we may suspect that the speaker, though explaining Smith’s taste, is secretly in agreement with “you” that Smith’s choices are inappropriate and deplorable. Formally, the poem certainly favors “control” which can be detected in tightly composed lines with internal rhymes and alliterations such as: “He waits a moment, he designs his reign, / That no performance may be plain or vain” (10).

involved in fighting a war in a segregated army for democracy elsewhere. Of all characters in the volume, it is Satin-Legs – the would-be artist and designer, the one still hungry for aesthetic experience – who is almost exclusively characterized with regard to his appearance and whose inner life is strangely vague and empty: “the pasts of his ancestors lean against / Him. Crowd him. Fog out his identity.” (14) He possesses no self-consciousness and thus no race- or class-consciousness. Instead, he has been made to think that “he walks most powerfully alone, / That everything is—simply what it is” (15). He is not consciously affected by the misery of his environment, he is neither prefiguring a black aesthetic for the poet, nor is he a possible agent of social change – he is no threat to the social order. It is in lieu of his blurred vision and fogged mind that the poet can use his performance for a display of her skills in portraiture without revealing her own stance. Ironically, the skillful portrait of a hollow figure becomes a centerpiece to the volume while leaving open a central question, namely that of the relation between literature and expressive culture on the one hand, and political action on the other.

Brooks received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1946 and the first Pulitzer award to an African American for her second volume, *Annie Allen*, in 1950. Through these prizes, she developed a reputation that allowed for a more powerful stance toward literary institutions, such as publishing houses, universities, editors, that were, of course, still predominantly white. This may be seen in a poem that goes way beyond the portrayal of poor urban Blacks and crosses the color-line to offer a socio-psychological portrait of a white woman. Equally daring is its allusion to a spectacular instance of racism in the South, which, because of its media coverage, shook a national public. Brooks’s “A Bronzeville Mother Loiters in Mississippi. Meanwhile, a Mississippi Mother Burns Bacon” (1960) juxtaposes and parallelizes Mamie Till, mother of Emmett Till, and Carolyn Bryant, the woman Till had allegedly whistled at. Emmett was tortured and killed by Bryant’s husband and his half-brother. In 1960, most people reading Brooks could be assumed to know about Till and the trial, in which the murderers were acquitted (cf. *Metress*). Contrary to what one might expect from the title, the first poem is actually about Carolyn, followed by only four broken lines called “The Last Quatrain of the Ballad of Emmett Till” which attempt to capture a psychological state by using the colors black, gray and red to express the inner turmoil of Mamie Till. While an image of her state of mind

is the last thing we are left with, she is not given a voice and thus the poem contrasts markedly with the first, much longer one.

Taken together, these aesthetic choices have irritated critics with regard to their moral implications. The discussions about the long poem revolve around the question to what extent Brooks sympathizes with Carolyn and portrays her as a victim of a racist patriarchal order: Does the poem follow a process of gradual awakening, how far does this awakening approach a realization of complicity and guilt, and is this enough to be morally and politically satisfying? An example of a harsh judgment is George E. Kent, who, in 1981, criticized Brooks for considering “a white woman, who was the source of the lynching of an early adolescent Black boy, simply as mother” (“Aesthetic Values” 90). A more recent article concludes instead: “Brooks’s apparent sympathy for the white woman as the pawn of dominating white men is subverted as she deconstructs the romance within the woman’s mind and thereby holds the woman responsible for her complicity in the myth, and consequently, in the murder.” (McKibbin 667)

In this poem, ambiguity results from a technique that often fuses the voice of the protagonist, Carolyn, with the voice of the poet in such a way that we can never be sure to what extent the insights about the complex power relations encompassing race and gender are supposed to belong to Carolyn Bryant, or rather only to the poet. What Brooks thus achieves is to illuminate the limits of insights into the very structures of oppression we are socialized into – to speak with Bourdieu: insights into the ways in which habitus prepares people to be susceptible and respond to symbolic violence. In particular, the poem dramatizes the simultaneity of a cognitive process and bodily practices: While Carolyn’s thoughts discover discrepancies between the events of the lynching and the justifying narratives, she is also practicing and enacting consent with her role as a Southern woman while doing household work. But we may also see in some passages, once we pay attention to the technique being used to render consciousness, a desire on the part of the poet that a crime like the murder of Till would be the type of crisis “in which the routine adjustment of subjective and objective structures is brutally disrupted” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, *Reflexive Sociology* 131) – which could produce insights into the workings of ideology and a more rational way to act.

The narratological instruments that may help to describe the technique used in Brooks’s poem are the same Stefanie Mueller uses in her study of

Toni Morrison, namely a combination of the terms provided by Gerard Genette and Dorrit Cohn (cf. Mueller 50-53). For simplicity's sake I will only use Cohn's three major terms here: Among the techniques used to present consciousness in fiction she distinguishes between "quoted monologue," "narrated monologue," and "psycho-narration" (Cohn 105). While the first is the attempt to render an internal voice directly, without mediation, the last one presents these thoughts mediated by a narrator, for instance by using mental verbs. Narrated monologue is situated in between the two: "Tense and person separate it from quoted monologue [...]; the absence of mental verbs (and the resulting grammatical independence) separates it from psycho-narration" (104). Narrated monologue is more oblique than quoted monologue, but more direct than psycho-narration. Imitating the way a figure may speak to herself "casts that language into the grammar a narrator uses in talking about him, thus superimposing two voices that are kept distinct in the other two forms" (105). The result may be some ambiguity and uncertainty as to who we listen to, and this is precisely the way the poem begins:

From the first it had been like a
Ballad. It had the beat inevitable. It had the blood.
A wildness cut up, and tied in little bunches,
Like the four-line stanzas of the ballads she had never quite
Understood—the ballads they had set her to, in school.

Herself: the milk-white maid, the "maid mild"
Of the ballad. Pursued
By the Dark Villain. Rescued by the Fine Prince. (61-62)

It is only with the personal pronoun in the fourth line that we realize we are witnesses to the thoughts of a woman. Her socialization into the gender role of a white Southern woman with the help of the two major institutions, school and literature, as something only insufficiently understood, is cast as narrated monologue. We are to assume that she is speaking to herself, saying "It has been ... like ... the ballads I have never quite understood – the ballads they set me to, in school," and yet through her voice we also hear the voice of the poet. In fact, we may never be entirely sure whether Carolyn is able to state quite clearly that she is reminded of ballads as "a

wildness cut up and tied in little bunches” (61) but has never quite understood them. As Cohn puts it: “By leaving the relationship between words and thoughts latent, the narrated monologue casts a peculiarly penumbral light on the figural consciousness, suspending it on the threshold of verbalization in a manner that cannot be achieved by direct quotation.” (103)⁵

The ballad or romance is instrumental in having made the speaker white and female, captured in the repeated puns “milk-white maid, the ‘maid mild’” (62). To be made white and female primarily means to be passive: to be set to ballads, to be pursued and rescued by men. It also means to be willingly subservient and unaggressive (“maid mild”), as well as pure and associated with nourishment (“milk-white”). The reward for corresponding to this image is to be desirable as erotic object, and this “was worth anything” (62). The phrase suggests a dim awareness of a price to be paid and the later repetition that she must be “worth It” (64) corroborates this. Indeed, the idealization of the white Southern woman and the attention and protection offered to her – seemingly out of adoration – is in fact a veiled instrument of masculine domination: Women in general “circulate as symbols fit for striking alliances” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, *Reflexive Sociology* 173), their function being part of an exchange system which creates alliances between families. Bourdieu formulates this with regard to masculine domination and its symbolic exchanges; when race as a second form of symbolic domination is added, the alliances go beyond single families. That Carolyn never quite understood the ballads is important because a literary socialization into female submission is not easy to recognize as such and thus not easily opposed. That something is going on is only recognized by admitting not to understand – it is the poet, as we see a few lines later, who understands that this socialization is turning the schoolgirl into a person prone to be subjected to repeated forms of symbolic violence. That Brooks here uses the same kind of vaguely medieval imagery for her male protagonist as in “Satin-Legs,” i.e., the “Fine Prince,” betrays this woman’s view of male practices as curiously anachronistic.

5 For Melhem, it is only later that Brooks renders the mind of the woman: “By the third stanza, via *style indirect libre*, Brooks has clearly stepped into the psyche of the white Mississippi mother, who has imagined herself a rescued maiden in a romantic tale.” (105)

The poem interrupts its forays into the mind of the white woman with descriptions of actions and gestures, such as burning and hiding bacon, putting on lipstick because of the need to be pretty and “worth It,” and finally being embraced and kissed by her husband who has just slapped one of her children. Through dramatic irony we are made to see that her role as mother and wife has nothing to do with romance: The Fine Prince is someone to serve breakfast to and likely to be angry about the waste of bacon. He is prone to violence and may consider his actions as a gift she must subsequently prove worthy of. But this does not mean that the romance is revealed or deconstructed as meaningless or that the poem would underline the “meaninglessness of the myth as a fantasy in the first place” (McKibbin 667). What the actions reveal is the power of romance and gender ideology over mind *and* body, revealed in thought *and* in action. Far from meaningless, the myth does not only serve as justification of physical violence (the lynching), which is comparatively easy to see through: Even Carolyn recognizes that falseness during the course of her musings. The myth, romance, or ballad also allows for and exercises multiple forms of symbolic violence the white woman is inevitably subjected to and cannot escape from.

Symbolic violence is a concept that helps to explain how grave instances of physical violence, such as lynching, but also how unequal distributions of power could be normalized. It helps to understand the complicity of the oppressed that is necessary to maintain unjust social orders. Its shortest formulation might be to say that it is “a mis-cognizing based on the unconscious adaptation of subjective structures to objective structures” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, *Reflexive Anthropologie* 203).⁶ Symbolic violence relates to the concept of habitus in that the socialization of the body and mind also serves the function of a somatization or incorporation of domination. Nowhere is this more visible than in the example of masculine domination as “the paradigmatic form of symbolic violence” (*Reflexive Sociology* 170). Thus we realize that despite her doubts, Carolyn’s recognition of her husband’s power happens through her little gestures as part of the

6 My translation of “... symbolische[n] Gewalt als jener Verknennung, die auf der unbewußten Anpassung der subjektiven an die objektiven Strukturen beruht.” A more extensive definition from Bourdieu’s *Pascalian Meditations* and its discussion can be found in Mueller (39).

household routine. *Vice versa*, it is the household routine as a field for her as wife and mother that will reaffirm her habitus so that her doubts will not lead to an overall crisis.

But the poem is also a document testifying to the poet's hope for an enlightening effect of the crime. Here are the lines that follow upon Carolyn's increasing awareness that neither Emmett, nor her husband and his half-brother easily fit into the roles of villain and prince: Emmett is too young and the "Prince" too childish. Finally, we read:

[...] So much had happened, she could not remember now what that foe had done
Against her, or if anything had been done.
The one thing in the world that she did know and knew
With terrifying clarity was that her composition
Had disintegrated. That, although the pattern prevailed,
The breaks were everywhere. That she could think
Of no thread capable of the necessary
Sew-work. (63)

The narrated monologue of the long passage imagining Emmett's surprise when facing his murderer leads into psycho-narration creating "the impression that the narrator is formulating his character's inarticulate feelings" (Cohn 106). Translated into direct speech the lines sound improbable: "I did know and knew with terrifying clarity that my composition has disintegrated. That I can think of no thread ..." It is not Carolyn but the poet who uses a variety of metaphors ("composition," "pattern," "sew-work") for an ideological framework that helped the white woman to understand herself and which is now questioned. But is the poet reliable? The narrated events and thoughts and feelings do not quite support the view of a collapsing ideology: While disturbed by her recognition of her complicity in a murder, the white woman has continued to act in agreement with her role. The poem actually demonstrates, in spite of the lines above, the limitations of any kind of ideological insight – or conversely, the strength of masculine domination in conjunction with the racial order. While the white woman cannot help to realize the discrepancies between romance and the events in Mississippi, she is still, in mind and body, submitting to the symbolic and physical violence the ballads prepared her for, and thus she is acknowledging its 'rightness.'

The poem ends with a form of rebellion that is, like the recognition of domination, likewise outside conscious control or will: As her husband kisses her, “a sickness heaved within her” (67), which she associates with the courtroom and Till’s mother. Finally, the disgust turns into hatred and we may surmise that the woman no longer feels united with her husband through their common whiteness but feels alienated from him because of her gender – but this diagnosis is clearly a level above Carolyn’s mind. Thus the technique of weaving in and out of a consciousness as in a narrated monologue allows Brooks to render the mind of her character in such a way that we are allowed to enter it, maybe even familiarize ourselves with it. If skillfully used, this technique then also allows us to see the limits of that consciousness and thus to understand what the character in front of us does not understand or is only dimly aware of. Just as the concept of ‘taste’ allowed us to appreciate the subtleties of “Satin Legs,” the concept of symbolic violence helps us to understand the contradictory physical and mental processes in “Mississippi Mother.” But on top of that I argued in both parts of my article that the poems do not only reveal but also conceal; they offer new visions but also divisions that might be related to the time and place in the literary field, itself embedded in a field of power. In “Satin Legs,” economic and social conditions clearly shape the tastes and self-fashioning of a young urban black man. The poem defends his everyday aesthetic practices but does not attribute any emancipatory power to them. There is a great distance to the figure whose peers are clearly neither included in an implied readership nor in an implied political vision.

What “Mississippi Mother” registers, primarily through the interference of a poetic voice producing three metaphors in a row, is the hope that the murder of Emmett Till will lead to a kind of reflexivity that may unmask the workings of race and gender to white women. It would be supported by the discovery of white mothers of what it means not to be able to protect their children from male violence. The hope that this may cut through the division of white versus black has a long literary tradition, underlying abolitionist work and anti-lynching literature in the sentimental mode. But the routines of the kitchen, which are neither sentimental nor romantic, betray the weak foundations of these hopes as the technical skills of the poem are all employed to underline the stubborn persistence of habitus.

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Intellectual Disposition and Bodily Knowledge

Richard Wright's Literary Practice

STEPHAN KUHL

And then, while writing, a new and thrilling relationship would spring up under the drive of emotion, coalescing and telescoping alien facts into a known and felt truth. That was the deep fun of the job: to feel within my body that I was pushing out to new areas of feeling, strange landmarks of emotion, tramping upon foreign soil, compounding new relationships of perceptions, making new and—until that very split second of time!—unheard-of and unfelt effects with words. It had a buoying and tonic impact upon me; my senses would strain and seek for more and more of such relationships; my temperature would rise as I worked. That is writing as I feel it, a kind of significant living.

RICHARD WRIGHT, "HOW 'BIGGER' WAS BORN"

In the essay "How 'Bigger' Was Born," Richard Wright explains his creation of one of the great American intellectual achievements of the 20th century, his novel *Native Son*. In the above quoted passage from the essay, however, Wright does not describe his writing of the novel as an intellectual process limited to the sphere of the conceptual, conscious, and rational. Rather, he emphasizes the somatic, the emotional and sensual dimension of his writing process. Literary creation, for Wright, was a bodily experience and his great American novel is at least partly the product of a knowledge

that, drawing on a concept of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice, may be called a "bodily knowledge" (cf. *Pascalian Meditations* 128-63).

The assumption that Wright was not consciously aware of all the forces that guided his creative process found psychoanalytic confirmation in Frederic Wertham's essay "An Unconscious Determinant in *Native Son*" from 1944.¹ In Wertham's "psychoanalytic study of a literary creation based on analytic study of its author" (111), he and Wright aimed to uncover the "unconscious determinant" for the creation of *Native Son*'s "key scene," meaning the scene wherein "Bigger Thomas unintentionally kills Mary Dalton in the presence of her blind mother" (112). With psychoanalytic methods, the two did bring to light a memory of Wright's adolescence that was not conscious to him while he was writing the novel, although it does bear striking resemblance to the scene of Mary Dalton's death. Wertham describes this memory, which, according to him, unconsciously provided the content of the scene:

As an adolescent of fifteen, Wright went to public school and worked mornings and evenings for a white family. [...] His chief duty was to tend the fireplace. [...] The fireplace corresponds of course to the furnace in the novel, in which the Dalton girl's body was burned. Further associative material led to the recollection of a special scene. In the early morning young Richard would carry scuttles of coal and wood in- to the house. On one such morning when he was carrying out his usual routine, he opened the door and came suddenly upon the lady of the house before she had dressed. She reprimanded him severely and told him he should always knock before entering. These recollections had great emotional power. They were related to much earlier emotional experiences. (113)

Reading the quoted passages from "An Unconscious Determinant in *Native Son*" and "How 'Bigger' Was Born," one is left to wonder about the connection that may exist between the powerful emotions that Wertham here describes as being related to this uncovered memory and the emotions that Wright claims to have experienced during the writing of his novel.

1 For an account of the relationship between Wright and Wertham, see my essay "Guilty Children: Richard Wright's *Savage Holiday* and Fredric Wertham's *Dark Legend*." Wertham several times changed the spelling of his first name.

While Wertham's essay aims to explain literary creation by means of psychoanalytic methods, it does not mention the psychic process of "sublimation," although Sigmund Freud considered this process to be "intimately connected" with "artistic talent and capacity" (136). In *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood*, Freud defines the sexual instinct's capacity for sublimation as its "power to replace its immediate aim by other aims which may be valued more highly and which are not sexual" (78). In the attempt to explain Leonardo's "vacillation between art and science" (134) and the inhibition that scientific research tended to impose on his artistic activity, Freud distinguishes between an "original sublimation" that is related to scientific investigation and a "second sublimation" related to artistic creation (133). He assumes that Leonardo had initially begun his scientific researches "in the service of his art" (76, see also 133), so that these two kinds of sublimation are not mutually exclusive. However, Freud sees them as arising from different origins. According to him, Leonardo's scientific researches developed from the "*infantile sexual researches*" (78, original emphasis) directed to the question of the origin of children. In Leonardo's case, libido then evaded the nascent sexual repression of early childhood "by being sublimated from the very beginning into curiosity and by becoming attached to the powerful instinct for research as a reinforcement" (80). Simultaneously, sexual repression was "still taken into account by the instinct, in that it avoid[ed] any concern with sexual themes" (80), so that it could be directed to scientific investigations more broadly. While Freud, therefore, can derive Leonardo's later scientific interests from his infantile sexual researches, redirected to non-sexual investigations through repression and reinforced through sublimation, the origin of artistic activity remains much more obscure to him: "We should be most glad to give an account of the way in which artistic activity derives from the primal instincts of the mind if it were not just here that our capacities fail us." (132) And while sublimation made an essential contribution to Leonardo's artistic and scientific achievements, Freud concedes that Leonardo's "extraordinary capacity for sublimating the primitive instincts" (136) remains inexplicable to psychoanalysis: "Instincts and their transformations are at the limit of what is discernible by psycho-analysis. From that point it gives place to biological research." (136) The question of the transformation of the sexual instinct was also raised by Bourdieu, who claims that "[o]ne of the tasks of sociology is to determine how the social world constitutes the biological

libido, an undifferentiated impulse, as a specific social libido. [...] [T]he work of socialization of the libido is precisely what transforms impulses into specific interests” (*Practical Reason* 78-79).

When Freud’s assumption that artistic creation is intimately connected with the psychic process of sublimation is taken into account, then Wertham’s psychoanalytic explanation of Wright’s creation of the key scene of *Native Son* can be considered incomplete. In Wright’s creative process, the unconscious memory that according to Wertham provided the content for this scene and the process of sublimation both played a part. An explanation of Wright’s creative process, therefore, must account for the relationship that existed in the writing of the key scene of *Native Son* between his memory and sublimation. This essay will try to offer this explanation through a relational-sociological reconstruction of the generative, structuring principle of *Native Son*’s key scene, a reconstruction that, in the end, will try to integrate the psychoanalytic insights that, first, the unconscious memory of Wright’s adolescence provided the material for the scene and that, second, the process of sublimation is intimately connected with artistic production. While the memory that Wertham uncovered is of specific interest to a study of Wright, the concept of sublimation is of interest to the theory of practice more broadly because, like no established concept of this theory, it accounts for the socialization of the libido, for its transformation from “biological” into “social libido.”²

2 Bourdieu’s own uses of the concept of sublimation exemplify the relationship between his theory of practice and psychoanalysis. The concept already makes an appearance in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, in a passage that precedes a critique of psychoanalysis (cf. 92), and it makes fleeting reappearances in most of his major publications. Only some of Bourdieu’s uses of the term adhere to a psychoanalytic conception of sublimation, which itself underwent slight transformations throughout the development of Freud’s thought. Although Bourdieu frequently borrowed psychoanalytic terminology, he never explicated the relationship between his theory and psychoanalysis, and the closest he came to a systematic integration of the concept of sublimation into his theory is a passage on “Censorship and the Field of Scientific Sublimation” in *Pascalian Meditations* (111-14). Partly due to the lack of a systematic rapprochement of the two disciplines even the question if Bourdieu’s borrowings from psychoanalysis are

WRIGHT'S EARLY SOCIAL TRAJECTORY

In *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, Bourdieu translated his theory of practice into the methodology of his "Science of Works of Art" (cf. 175-282). In this study he offers a concise rendition of the basic assumption of his theory: "[T]he practices of writers and artists, starting with their works, are the product of the meeting of two histories, the history of the production of the position occupied [in the literary and artistic field] and the history of the production of the dispositions of its occupants" (256). The dispositions of authors are inscribed into their habitus throughout their social trajectory, which Bourdieu defines as "the *series of positions* successively occupied by the same agent or the same group of agents in successive spaces" (258, original emphasis). According to Bourdieu, the authors central to his study had comparable social trajectories since they were what he calls "inheritors" (83). For Bourdieu, it is "money (inherited) that guarantees freedom with respect to money" (84), and the inheritors were, through the familial relations into which they were born, "equally endowed with economic and cultural capital" (86). In contrast to the subjects of Bourdieu's study, it is commonly accepted about Wright that he was not an inheritor. In a typical description of his early childhood and youth, Keneth Kinnamon lists the many obstacles Wright had to overcome in order to pursue a literary career: "the physical hunger and malnutrition" that he suffered due to his family's poverty, his lack of "formal education" and the indifference of "his environment [...] to creative intellectual activity," the fact that his father, "an illiterate Mississippi sharecropper," had "abandoned his wife and two sons in a penniless condition," and his "racial status" as a black man in the Jim Crow South (4). Acknowledging the emphasis that Bourdieu places on early experiences in the formation of habitus, Kinnamon's summary makes it appear inexplicable that Richard, born in Mississippi in 1908 as the grandson of four slaves (cf. Fabre 1), became Wright, one of the greatest authors of the 20th century. But when it is assumed, again with Bourdieu, that the dispositions of habitus are the result of the incorporation of social structures and that they include a sense for the limitations inscribed into the structures that they incorporate, so that they

coherent with his theory of practice or introduce inherent contradictions into it cannot generally be answered.

are incapable of generating practices that lie beyond these limitations, then Wright's acquisition of the dispositions that enabled his literary achievements must have been inscribed as a potentiality into the social structure that structured his habitus. Since Wright was born disinherited, the process wherein he acquired these dispositions and the ownership of the cultural capital that allowed him to enter the field of cultural production poses the greatest problem for analysis. In his autobiography, first published in 1945 as *Black Boy: A Record of Childhood and Youth*, but only posthumously published in its entirety as *Black Boy (American Hunger)*, Wright rendered the structural reasons for his acquisition of a literary disposition either under the veil of symbolism or in textual margins. In order to reconstruct Wright's early social trajectory, therefore, the autobiography's symbolic passages must be unveiled and its margins drawn into the center of the analysis.

In autobiographical and biographical materials on Wright, three members of his family, his father Nathan Wright, his mother Ella Wright, and his maternal grandmother Margaret Wilson, appear as the most important forces in his upbringing; the positions that they occupied in the field of the Wright family were the most distinct positions therein. All available accounts describe Nathan Wright as a poor and illiterate day laborer, who held odd jobs and worked for most of his life as a sharecropper (cf. Fabre 1-2, 6-7). He apparently abandoned his wife and their two children, Richard and his younger brother Leon Allan, relatively early in Wright's life, thus aggravating their already precarious economic situation. The breakup of Wright's parents, the fact that he stayed with his mother and was left by his father, largely removed him from the influence of the latter. While Nathan Wright, who had occupied a position of economic and cultural disinheritance in the field of the family, very early recedes into the background of the narrative Wright offers in *Black Boy (American Hunger)*, his maternal grandmother begins to take a more prominent role therein. The importance that she assumed for the maintenance of Ella Wright and her children strengthened her position in the field of the family and turned her into a potential role model for her grandson. Wright represents Margaret Wilson and her husband, his maternal grandfather Richard Wilson, as illiterate, too (cf. *Black Boy* 83, 133-34). Through their illiteracy and poverty, the positions that they held in the field of the family were close to the one that, previously, his father had occupied, so that they themselves were hardly able to

incite an intellectual inclination in Wright. This inclination first appears in one of the symbolically laden scenes of his autobiography. Wright writes: "To help support the household my grandmother boarded a colored schoolteacher, Ella, a young woman with so remote and dreamy and silent a manner that I was as much afraid of her as I was attracted to her." (38) Wright convinced the schoolteacher to narrate to him what she was reading, "*Bluebeard and His Seven Wives*" (38), and then states that "Ella's whispered story of deception and murder had been the first experience in my life that had elicited from me a total emotional response" (40). This scene is symbolic because it conceals, under the veil of the representation of a singular moment of intellectual awakening, the permanent structural factors in the field of Wright's childhood family that facilitated his acquisition of cultural capital and an intellectual disposition.

In his biography of Wright, Michel Fabre, without giving a source, identifies the young schoolteacher who tells the story of Bluebeard to Wright as "Eloise Crawford" (18). Wright, however, decided to give her the name of his mother, which his autobiography identifies as Ella only long after the episode with the schoolteacher (cf. *Black Boy* 83), and he emphasized a further similarity between the two women. Apparently Wright's maternal grandparents had, despite their own relative poverty in cultural capital, secured for their children a relatively high degree of education, and Fabre characterizes the relationship between the Wilson and Wright families as conflicted due to a discrepancy in their respective social standings: "Ella Wilson's family considered her marriage to an illiterate laborer a step down. Despite this disapproval Ella, who was teaching in Cranfield at the time, accepted Nathan Wright shortly after their first meeting." (6) Wright, in his autobiography, mentions that several of his uncles and aunts worked as teachers, either in religious or country schools (cf. *Black Boy* 99-100, 149). But he does not mention what Fabre here points out, namely, that his own mother was a schoolteacher, too. While Wright repeatedly mentions the menial work that his mother conducted after she had to abandon teaching shortly after his birth (cf. Fabre 14), for example her "cook[ing] in the kitchens of white folks" (*Black Boy* 59), he leaves out of his autobiography any explicit reference to her previous scholastic profession. But he renders this profession symbolically in the figure of Ella, the young woman who boards with his grandmother. Just like this Ella, Ella Wright was a "colored schoolteacher." The young woman in *Black Boy* (*American Hunger*) who

awakens Wright's literary interests through a rendition of the story of Bluebeard is a composite figure that condenses Eloise Crawford and Ella Wright, so that she represents, in a veiled form, the influence that his mother's teachings had on Wright. This symbolic rendition of the fact that Ella Wright did socially inherit an intellectual disposition to her son is made explicit in other passages of *Black Boy (American Hunger)*, which, however, marginalize her intellectual influence on him, frequently by rendering it in subordinate clauses. For example, after Wright describes how, prior to his entry into school, he questioned some local schoolchildren about the "baffling black print" (23) in their books, he writes: "When I had learned to recognize certain words, I told my mother that I wanted to learn to read and she encouraged me. Soon I was able to pick my way through most of the children's books I ran across." (23) Later Wright even states about his mother: "[S]he taught me to read, told me stories. On Sundays I would read the newspapers with my mother guiding me and spelling out the words." (24) These passages indicate that, even before he entered school, Wright had learned how to learn from his mother and, after having learned how to learn, had learned to read and write from her. Accordingly, Wright's meager formal school education was merely of secondary importance for his acquisition of an intellectual disposition and cultural capital, because his primary education was supplied by a private teacher: his mother. Wright was an autodidact insofar as the term signifies that his learning was not primarily derived from the school system of the American South; but he was an autodidact only insofar as the term does not signify what he himself in his autobiography calls his "self-achieved literacy" (352). The "auto" of his didacticism signifies that his intellectualism was less derived from his relationship to the educational system than from his relationship to his mother.

In contrast to Wright's marginalization of the intellectual influence that his mother exerted on him, *Black Boy (American Hunger)* strongly emphasizes the impediments that his family's great economic poverty and its dominated position in the racial order of the Jim Crow South set to his education. These impediments did not merely exist simultaneously to Wright's acquisition of an intellectual disposition, but in opposition to it. Wright repeatedly mentions that his family's economic poverty hindered his education, for example because he "began school [...] at a later age than was usual; my mother had not been able to buy me the necessary clothes to

make me presentable” (25). With regard to the year 1920, when he was about twelve years old, Wright states: “I had had but one year of unbroken study; with the exception of one year at the church school, each time I had begun a school term something happened to disrupt it. [...] Though I was not aware of it, the next four years were to be the only opportunity for formal study in my life.” (117) Wright writes about the year 1924, when he was sixteen: “School opened and, though I had not prepared myself, I enrolled. The school was far across town and the walking distance alone consumed my breakfast of mush and lard gravy. I attended classes without books for a month, then got a job working mornings and evenings for three dollars a week.” (156) As these quotes suggest, his family’s poverty hindered Wright’s attendance of school because it prevented the purchase of the necessary materials and because it forced him to spend his time wage-laboring instead of learning and attending school.

The limitations imposed on Wright by the symbolic order of the segregated South are, in an even more condensed form than in *Black Boy* (*American Hunger*), described in “The Ethics of Living Jim Crow: An Autobiographical Sketch.” It is his sense for these limitations which Wright calls the “ethics” of Jim Crow, and they are imparted to him through the physical violence that he suffers, witnesses, or is threatened with. This violence is executed by various white men or even Wright’s mother herself. After a fight between his childhood gang and a group of white boys, Wright seeks his mother’s understanding and receives a beating:

She grabbed a barrel stave, dragged me home, stripped me naked, and beat me till I had a fever of one hundred and two. She would smack my rump with the stave, and, while the skin was still smarting, impart to me gems of Jim Crow wisdom. [...] I was never, never, under any conditions, to fight *white* folks again. [...] She finished by telling me that I ought to be thankful to God as long as I lived that they didn’t kill me. (226, original emphasis)

In Wright’s representation, the landscape where the fight with the white boys had taken place becomes an internalized symbol that reminds him of the ethics of Jim Crow and that is connected to the feeling of fear: “Even today when I think of white folks, the hard, sharp outlines of white houses surrounded by trees, lawns, and hedges are present somewhere in the background of my mind. Through the years they grew into an overarching

symbol of fear.” (226) Among the many limits that this autobiographical sketch depicts as protected by the ethics of Jim Crow are those set to Wright’s education and those set to relationships between black men and white women. Wright reveals the tricks that he had to devise in order to receive books from a segregated library (cf. 235), and he tells how he was reprimanded for looking at a naked “snowy-skinned blonde” (233) prostitute by her white customer: “Keep your eyes where they belong, if you want to be healthy!” (233). What Wright himself calls his internalization of a “symbol of fear” is captured in Bourdieu’s theory under the concept of symbolic violence. For Bourdieu, in symbolic violence “the magical frontier between the dominant and the dominated” is practically accepted by the dominated in “the form of *bodily emotion* (shame, timidity, anxiety, guilt)” (*Pascalian Meditations* 169, original emphasis). But these bodily effects are only experienced in a present situation of potential symbolic domination when the disposition to undergo them was previously and permanently inscribed into the habitus of the symbolically dominated. The present situation then “reawakens and reactivates” (169) this incorporated disposition, including the constraints that it reproduces, in the form of bodily emotions. In Bourdieu’s terminology, “The Ethics of Living Jim Crow” shows how the disposition to undergo the effects of the symbolic violence that protected the frontiers drawn by segregation was inculcated in Wright.

Wright’s habitus, then, was structured by a structural opposition that existed in the field of his childhood family. In the position of Wright’s mother, who was distinguished from his illiterate father and grandmother through her possession of a relatively high degree of cultural capital, intellectualism was inscribed as a potentiality for Wright into the structure of this field. Motivated by the recognition that his mother granted for early intellectual successes, he modeled his position in the family according to the one that she held therein, so that he acquired an intellectual disposition and cultural capital from her. However, Wright’s attempts to realize this disposition were consistently opposed during his childhood and youth by the social necessities inscribed into the field of the family through economic poverty and Jim Crow segregation. In contrast to inheritors, who are able to convert inherited economic capital into the leisure time necessary for intellectual work, Wright, disinherited, had to use time that he could have invested into leisurely intellectual labor in order to perform the menial subsistence labor through which he contributed to his family’s survival. In

addition, he incorporated the limitations that were set to his education by Jim Crow segregation in the form of the disposition to undergo the effects of symbolic violence. This latter disposition Wright had also largely inherited from his mother, who, out of fear for his physical integrity, served as a mediator for the symbolic order of the South. This oppositional structure, constituted, on the one hand, by the mother's relative intellectual distinction and, on the other, by the social urgencies imposed on the family through poverty and racism, structured Wright's habitus. Accordingly, Wright had an oppositional habitus: He had socially inherited an intellectual disposition, but the limitations that opposed his acquisition and realization of this disposition were also inscribed into his habitus. This opposition, ultimately derived from the position of the family in the social space of the American South, was the structured structure of Wright's habitus, which, in turn, was the structuring structure of dispositions that contributed to his practices, including his literary practice.³

3 In his *Sketch for a Self-Analysis* Bourdieu states that he himself had a “*cleft habitus*, inhabited by tensions and contradictions” (original emphasis) that resulted from the “very strong discrepancy between high academic consecration and low social origin” (100). While Wright, too, may have had a “cleft habitus” as the result of the discrepancy between his “low” social origin, wherein his primary habitus was formed, and his later “high” literary consecration, the opposition that existed in his habitus, described above as an oppositional habitus, differs from the contradictions that Bourdieu's concept of the cleft habitus describes. Bourdieu's concept emphasizes a discrepancy between the field of primary socialization and the field wherein, after this primary socialization, the habitus is situated. The opposition that was inscribed into Wright's habitus, in contrast, developed from an opposition that already existed in the field of primary socialization, and it was reinforced by rather than derived from an opposition that existed between the fields that he moved through successively. However, the two forms of habitus, cleft habitus and oppositional habitus, do not mutually exclude each other and they probably describe two interdependent aspects of one and the same phenomenon, namely the phenomenon that the upward social movement that both, Wright and Bourdieu, underwent usually entails internal tensions, contradictions, insecurities, and anxieties.

WRIGHT'S POSITION IN THE LITERARY FIELD OF THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

In 1940 Wright published a joint review of two autobiographies that came out in that year, *The Big Sea: An Autobiography* by Langston Hughes and *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* by W. E. B. Du Bois. This review allows to hint at the position that Wright, in the year of the publication of *Native Son*, occupied in the literary field. Wright writes that the two books “reflect class divisions within the area of Negro experience” (“As Richard Wright Sees” 215), meaning a division between the “educated Negro” and “the masses of workers” (216). While, according to Wright, Du Bois “still clings to the hope of a ‘talented tenth’ leading and guiding the masses of the Negro people” (215), Hughes “looks to the masses of the people for hope and guidance. He feels that they are best fitted to protect and extend the basic values of our civilization and he has cast his hope with them in their struggles toward enlightenment and organization.” (215) Hughes and Du Bois represent two opposed established positions that were open to authors in the literary field constituted by the Harlem Renaissance, a field that both had shaped substantially.⁴ Du Bois’s academic intellectualism included the political assumption that social change would emanate from the leadership of a “talented tenth,” that is, the intellectual and cultural elite, which would uplift the masses through its guidance. In contrast, Hughes’s folkloristic or proletarian intellectualism included the political assumption that social change would emanate from the masses, who in a revolutionary act would overthrow the elite.

Since Wright’s entrance into the literary field was tied to the Communist Party and the possibilities for publication that it offered to him, his initial position in the field was close to the one that his review ascribes to

4 Describing the Harlem Renaissance as a literary field follows George Hutchinson who writes about it in *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*: “The movement represented the emergence of a literary sector or field; what becomes important is not individual author-by-author succession but the tension between a variety of possible (and overlapping) positions.” (436) While Hutchinson’s study draws on Bourdieu’s notion of field, it falls short of a relational account because it neglects its interdependent concept of habitus.

Hughes. So in his first poetological publication, "Blueprint for Negro Writing" from 1937, Wright claims that "there can be no doubt" that "Negro workers" possess "consciousness and mobility for economic and political action" (38). However, in retrospect Wright writes in *Black Boy (American Hunger)* about the time of the onset of the Great Depression, when he was working as an insurance agent in Chicago and first came into contact with the organized political left:

As I went from house to house collecting money, I saw black men mounted upon soapboxes at street corners, bellowing about bread, rights, and revolution. I liked their courage, but I doubted their wisdom. The speakers claimed that Negroes were angry, that they were about to rise and join their white fellow workers to make a revolution. I was in and out of many Negro homes each day and I knew that the Negroes were lost, ignorant, sick in mind and body. I saw that a vast distance separated the agitators from the masses, a distance so vast that the agitators did not know how to appeal to the people they sought to lead. (280)

No word here of the "consciousness and mobility for economic and political action" among the "Negro workers." As Wright began to perceive this "vast distance" between the Communists' intellectual conception of the masses and the reality of the life of the masses, he began to move away from the position he had espoused in his "Blueprint." Since the distance between Communist intellectuals and masses was structurally homologous to the opposition between intellectualism and social necessity that structured his habitus, Wright was predisposed to recognize that the intellectuals' assumption of the revolutionary potential of the masses was the result of an idealist projection, rather than an accurate description of the state of the masses. However, Wright's rejection of his initial position in the literary field could not lead him to a position like the one that his review ascribes to the distinguished academic Du Bois. As an autodidact intellectual, Wright possessed a high degree of incorporated cultural capital and this capital allowed him to enter the intellectual field. But he did not possess the institutional cultural capital, the degrees that are a requirement for access to academic institutions. Wright, who, as he himself had pointed out, had only received four years of uninterrupted formal education, was excluded from the central positions in the intellectual field that are situated in its academic subfield and reserved for holders of institutional cultural capital, like

Du Bois. Wright, moving away from a position similar to Hughes's and structurally excluded from Du Bois's, took a position of suspense in the literary field. This position was suspenseful because it was situated between the two opposed established positions of the Harlem Renaissance, the folkloristic or proletarian intellectualism represented by Hughes and the academic intellectualism represented by Du Bois, as it rejected them both. The meeting of Wright's oppositional habitus and his position of suspense between the two sides of an opposition that was running through the literary field was the structuring principle of Wright's literary practice in 1940 – and thus the structuring principle of *Native Son*.

Wright's initial position in the literary field had imposed relatively strong constraints on the expression of his oppositional dispositions because the intellectual standpoint of the Communist Party, which it required him to reproduce, inhibited the expression of the social urgencies that were inscribed into his habitus. In contrast, the position of suspense that he took in the field when writing *Native Son* allowed his oppositional habitual dispositions rather free expression because it had a higher degree of correspondence with the structure of his habitus. It was Wright's move away from the position he had taken in his "Blueprint" that allowed him to offer in Bigger Thomas his intellectual representation of a member of the masses who does not possess the "consciousness and mobility for economic and political action" that he had ascribed to "Negro workers" in this essay, but rather is "lost, ignorant, sick in mind and body," as he characterized "Negro workers" in his autobiography. While Du Bois's position would have precluded the depiction of such a character who is unresponsive to intellectualism and who does not follow an uplifting trajectory, Hughes's position would have precluded the depiction of a character who is not salvaged either through his participation in folk culture or by the possession of a revolutionary consciousness. Wright's intellectual representation of Bigger's sickness in mind and body finds its culmination in the key scene of *Native Son*, a scene generated and structured by the tensions that guided its author's literary practice.

WRIGHT'S LITERARY PRACTICE

On the basis of Wertham's "An Unconscious Determinant in *Native Son*" and Freud's book on Leonardo it was earlier assumed that the process of the creation of *Native Son*'s key scene included two elements: first, the unconscious memory of Wright's adolescence as it provided the content for the scene and, second, the process of sublimation as it is intimately connected with artistic creation in general. These two elements correspond to the two opposed dispositions incorporated in Wright's habitus and, therefore, to the tension that guided his literary practice during the creation of *Native Son*. Wright had socially inherited an intellectual disposition, but throughout his early trajectory the realization of this disposition was impeded by the poverty-imposed necessity to perform menial subsistence labor and by the limitations imposed on it by racial segregation, which had been inculcated in Wright as the disposition to undergo the bodily effects of symbolic violence when overstepping the frontiers drawn by Jim Crow. The memory of Wright's adolescence captures both of these impediments to his acquisition and realization of an intellectual disposition. It shows him performing the menial subsistence labor that stood in structural opposition to his intellectual leisurely labor and it shows him suffering from the effects of the symbolic violence that protected the racial order of the South. In the uncovered memory Wright involuntarily came upon the undressed white lady of the house in which he was employed and, thus, transgressed the borderline that protected white female nudity from the black male gaze and separated white female sexuality from black male sexuality. This transgression, for Wright, had great emotional power as it reawakened and reactivated his disposition to suffer from the bodily effects of symbolic violence when challenging the dominant order of Jim Crow. His emotionally powerful recollections were, as Wertham claimed, "related to much earlier emotional experiences" because they stood in a causal connection to the many situations wherein the disposition to undergo the effects of symbolic violence was inculcated in Wright through physical violence and its threats. The uncovered memory, then, does not only capture one isolated incident. Rather, this one incident synecdochically represents the social necessities that Wright had incorporated into the structure of his habitus. In particular, the memory of Wright's adolescence that provided the content of *Native*

Son's key scene represents his structured, structuring disposition to undergo the effects of symbolic violence.

In addition to this disposition, Wright had socially inherited an intellectual disposition and this inheritance involved the process of sublimation, as it describes the replacement of the immediate aim of the sexual instinct by another aim which is not sexual. In Wright's relationship to his mother his biological libido was socialized and transformed into a specific social interest. This transformation appears in even greater relief when relational sociology makes a concession to orthodox psychoanalysis and allows for the hypothesis that Wright's relationship to his mother entailed an incestuous desire on the part of the son. The libido that was related to the incestuous desire but could not be discharged sexually, then, found a sublimated outlet in the intellectual relationship to the mother, and Wright's intellectual desire developed a special intensity precisely because it was reinforced by the libido that was originally related to the incestuous desire for his teacher. Even then what was formative for Wright was not primarily the mother's position in an oedipal triangle but rather her position in social space, in particular her possession of the relatively high degree of cultural capital that allowed her to become a teacher to her son. Irrespective of the hypothetical incestuous dimension of their relationship, it was through the mediation of his mother's teachings that Wright's biological libido was transformed into an intellectual interest that ultimately turned into a habitual intellectual disposition. The specific form wherein Wright realized his intellectual disposition finds its origin neither in infantile sexual researches nor in other primal instincts of the mind, but rather in his social trajectory. Due to the limitations imposed on his access to institutional cultural capital, Wright was excluded from the academic or scientific field. Accordingly, he did not have the choice to vacillate between science and art, and his scientific interests, for example in psychoanalysis, were condemned to exist in the service of his literature.⁵ Wright's relationship to his mother, which mediated the sublimation of his libido into a habitual intellectual disposition, was later reproduced in his relationship to the literary field. His intellectual disposition made use of and was reinforced by biological libido and it found its

5 For an investigation of Wright's literary adaptations of psychoanalytic theories, themes, and tropes, see my dissertation "The Novels of Crude Psychology: Richard Wright, Fredric Wertham, and the Twofold Truth of Literary Practice."

realization in his literary practice. Wright's possession of an intellectual disposition, acquired and reinforced through sublimation, is the necessary condition for his literary creativity and, therefore, intimately connected with his writings in general, including his writing of the key scene of *Native Son*.⁶

Wright's literary practice exemplifies a process that in the following will be called dispositional sublimation. In his creation of the key scene of *Native Son*, both of Wright's two opposed habitual dispositions were simultaneously awakened, with the result that his intellectual disposition enabled him to sublimate his disposition to undergo the effects of symbolic violence. The concept of dispositional sublimation describes the process wherein the intellectual disposition is combined with the disposition to undergo the effects of symbolic violence, so that, in their simultaneous realization, the latter disposition itself becomes part of the creative process and the bodily emotions related to it, as they contribute to and guide the writing, are effectively inscribed into the text. The assumption that while writing *Native Son* Wright's intellectual disposition entered into an intimate connection with his disposition to undergo the effects of symbolic violence is supported by a stylistic homology that exists between the description of his creative process in "How 'Bigger' Was Born" and his description of his incorporation of the ethics of Jim Crow: In "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow," Wright illustrates his mother's inculcation in him of the disposition to undergo the effects of symbolic violence by claiming that she beat him until he "had a fever of one hundred and two"; in the above-quoted passage from

6 Norbert Elias makes the most systematic one of his rare mentions of the concept of sublimation in *Mozart: The Sociology of a Genius*. Before describing Mozart's "musical education" (103) by his father, himself "a gifted musician of the middle rank" and "a man with a pronounced pedagogic tendency" (102), Elias writes: "Among the factors which clearly influence the process of sublimation are the extent and direction of sublimation in a child's parents, or in other adults with whom the child has close contact in early life. Later, too, models of sublimation, such as suitable teachers, can exert a decisive influence through their personalities. Furthermore, one often has the impression that a person's position in the chain of generations has a special influence on the likelihood of sublimation; in other words, sublimation is easier for people in the second or third generation." (102)

“How ‘Bigger’ Was Born,” Wright declares that during his creation of *Native Son* his “temperature would rise.” It may be doubtful whether Wright’s mother actually achieved to beat him into a fever and whether he actually wrote himself into a fever. But this textual homology suggests that the bodily reactions related to Wright’s habitual disposition to undergo the effects of symbolic violence were connected to the somatic experience he claims to have had during his writing of *Native Son*. In the process of creation Wright’s disposition to undergo the effects of symbolic violence was activated, but combined with his intellectual disposition. Through dispositional sublimation, the suffering induced by the former disposition and the pleasure derived from the creation enabled by the latter disposition were combined and, in their combination, both transformed. Thereby they generated a specific structure of the linguistic sign, inscribing into the key scene of *Native Son* not only Wright’s intellectual but also his bodily knowledge.

Wright’s intellectual representation of Bigger Thomas’s suffering from the bodily effects of symbolic violence inscribed into the key scene of *Native Son* the very disposition that, throughout his social trajectory, had opposed his acquisition and realization of the intellectual disposition that was realized in the very process of his creation of the text. The great emotional power related to Wright’s disposition to undergo the bodily effects of symbolic violence finds entrance into the scene through the emotions that Bigger Thomas experiences when he fears to be detected in the bedroom of Mary Dalton, emotions referred to by signifiers like “excitement and fear,” “hysterical terror,” or “[f]renzy” (*Native Son* 523-25). While realizing his intellectual disposition and typing the signifiers that constitute the literary language of the scene, Wright’s dormant disposition to undergo the effects of symbolic violence was activated, but partly displaced, as it passed from a bodily to a textual state. The disposition that was actualized in the unconscious memory of Wright’s adolescence in the form of a bodily emotion was disembodied and implemented textually, so that Wright’s bodily disposition is signified by Bigger Thomas’s emotions. Accordingly, in Wright’s literary language, signifiers do not merely refer to signified concepts. Rather, while they refer to Wright’s conceptual knowledge of the urgencies that Bigger Thomas suffers from, they, in addition, begin to refer to his bodily knowledge of these urgencies, to his incorporated disposition to suffer from the bodily effects that symbolic violence induces. Wright’s literary practice, then, inserted a second signified into the structure of the sign; the

signifiers of his literary language refer to his conceptual and to his bodily knowledge. As Wright's bodily knowledge becomes a part of the structure of the sign, his bodily emotions are effectively inscribed into the text, so that they constitute therein a second layer of signification that is interdependent but not identical with its conceptual dimension. This second layer of signification – that is, the bodily meaning inscribed into the text through the bodily dimension of Wright's use of the sign – accounts for the key scene's uncanny capacity to evoke in disposed readers the very same emotions that the main character is experiencing. Wright's bodily writing allows for an equally bodily reading of his text, a reading that, however, has as its necessary condition the reader's own incorporated disposition to undergo the effects of symbolic violence, in particular as they relate to the ongoing histories of racism and capitalism, the two major forces in the structuring of the bodily disposition that Wright inscribed into his text. Through the specific structure of the sign that dispositional sublimation engendered, through the reference that it established between the signifiers of his literary language and their second signified, his bodily knowledge, Wright inscribed into the key scene of his great American novel the very sense-straining tension that guided his literary practice. As this practice was the result of the meeting of his oppositional habitus and his suspenseful position in the literary field, it seems at any rate as if only a man who had had Wright's social trajectory could have written *Native Son* and its key scene.

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“You have to leave home to find home”

Charismatic Violence and Split Habitus in Ralph Ellison’s
Second Unfinished Novel

NICOLE LINDENBERG

SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE IN THE FORM OF CHARISMA

In his essay “Tell It Like It Is, Baby” (1965), Ralph Ellison asks: “*what quality of love sustains us in our orphan’s loneliness; and how much is thus required of fatherly love to give us strength for all our life thereafter?*” (Collected Essays 35) With regard to his father’s early death Ellison has the feeling that he “*only perished, he did not pass away*” (36). Moreover, he identifies his mother Ida as a passionate bearer of the paternal values and norms, which she passes on to her sons and which make Ralph and his brother Herbert “*confused, sometimes bitter, but most often proud, recipients of their values and their love....*” The mother “*cherished his memory until she died, apotheosized his vital years*” (36, original emphases). While “Tell It Like It Is, Baby” addresses the author’s relation to his father Lewis Alfred Ellison and even, in a kind of dream-like apparition, fuses the narration of his loss with the assassination of the ‘historical father,’ Abraham Lincoln, Ellison recognized that the essay was not the appropriate genre to deal with the theme of father-son relations:

So I confess defeat; it is too complex for me to ‘tell it like it is.’ [...] For a writer who depends upon the imagination for his insights and his judgments, perhaps this is usually the way. Current events and events from the past, both personal and historical, ever collide within his interior life—either to be jumbled in the chaos of dream,

or brought to ordered significance through the forms and techniques of his art. Following my defeat with the essay, I returned to my novel—which, by the way, has as its central incident the assassination of a Senator. (46)¹

Ellison then turns back to his novel in progress because, as he writes in his 1946 essay “Twentieth-Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity,” fiction permits to combine social reality and individual experience:

Perhaps the ideal approach to the work of literature would be one allowing for insight into the deepest psychological motives of the writer at the same time that it examined all external sociological factors operating within a given milieu. For while objectively a social reality, the work of art is, in its genesis, a projection of a deeply personal process, and any approach that ignores the personal at the expense of the social is necessarily incomplete. (84)

Thus, to approach Ellison’s oeuvre with concepts of relational sociology seems particularly apt, since Pierre Bourdieu, aiming to overcome the long-established dichotomy between agent and structure in the social sciences, provides important conceptual tools for the disclosure of the interrelation of psychological and social factors that are not only involved in the genesis of the work of art, as Ellison suggests, but also in the representation of the fictional reality.² In the case of Ellison’s novel, its social reality juxtaposes normativity in the form of laws with an intimidating perfection of authoritative figures on the individual level.

1 In many ways, “Tell It Like It Is, Baby” can be read as a telescoped version of Ellison’s unfinished novel, which sometimes resembles a collection of essays, whereas the essay shows fictional traits. As Timothy Parrish argues, Ellison – regardless of the form in which he was writing – “was always telling a version of the same story” (194).

2 On the interdependency of these two levels, see Bourdieu’s profound analysis of Gustave Flaubert’s *Sentimental Education*, in which he identifies “the generative formula which is the basis of [the author’s] own novelistic creation” (*Rules of Art* 28-29) and claims that Flaubert’s novel “reconstitutes in an extraordinarily exact manner the structure of the social world in which it was produced and even the mental structures which, fashioned by these social structures, form the generative principle of the work in which these structures are revealed” (31-32).

Even before the publication of *Invisible Man* in 1952, Ellison began to work on his second novel, and when he died in 1994 he left behind several thousand pages, of which Ellison's literary executor, John F. Callahan, and Adam Bradley published about one thousand under the title *Three Days Before the Shooting...* in 2010. The unfinished novel centers on the story of Bliss, an orphan of indeterminate race, who is raised by his foster father, Reverend Alonzo Zuber Hickman, in an African American community in the Deep South. After decades as a shapeshifter,³ Bliss finally fashions himself into a powerful politician, who is assassinated by his own son, Severen, on the floor of the U.S. Senate. Undoubtedly, Ellison's second novel is about "fathers and sons" (Bradley 11).⁴

One of the most powerful father figures in *Three Days* is Reverend Hickman. He trains his foster son to become a child preacher and at one time even makes him reenact Jesus, which is one reason for Bliss's eloping. The chapter "Bliss's Birth" reveals that Hickman's father was a preacher as well. Hickman also left the religious field (for some time), but in contrast to Bliss he turned into a jazzman. As Ellison asserts,

the story goes back into earlier experiences, too, even to some of the childhood experiences of Hickman, who is an elderly man in time present. It's just a matter of the past being active in the present—or of the characters becoming aware of the manner in which the past operates on their present lives. Of course this gets into the general history, because one of the characters is a senator. He, too, is a trickster. (*Collected Essays* 820)

In each generation of fathers and sons, Ellison seems to suggest, history repeats itself. Why is it, Bourdieu asks, "that the established order, with its relations of domination [...], ultimately perpetuates itself so easily, apart from a few historical accidents, and that the most intolerable conditions of existence can so often be perceived as acceptable and even natural" (*Masculine Domination* 1)? Bourdieu's methodological answer is his concept of

3 See Eric J. Sundquist's systematic derivation of this term for Bliss/Mr. Movie-man/Sunraider from Joseph Campbell in his seminal essay.

4 On the prominence of father-son relationships in Ellison's unfinished novel, see also Callahan and Bradley in the general introduction to *Three Days* as well as the articles by Marc Conner and Lena Hill.

“symbolic violence,” a non-physical and therefore “gentle and invisible violence” (*Pascalian Meditations* 169), which is the more powerful as it works through emotions:

One of the effects of symbolic violence is the transfiguration of relations of domination and submission into affective relations, the transformation of power into charisma or into the charm suited to evoke affective enchantment [...]. The acknowledgment of debt becomes recognition, a durable *feeling* toward the author of the generous act, which can extend to affection or love, as can be seen particularly well in relations between generations. (*Practical Reason* 102, original emphasis)

In Ellison’s father-son relationships, it is the father who exerts symbolic violence upon the son in the form of charisma. Although the sons are under the spell of this ‘enchantment,’ they struggle to distance themselves from their fathers so that we repeatedly see desperate attempts by the sons to overcome the overwhelmingly superior father. No son is really successful, but rather turns into a charismatic father figure himself, so that the generational chain results in a form of repetition of history.

“THE ORDER OF SUCCESSION”⁵

Hickman has high expectations for little Bliss whose changing roles within the father’s religious project are mirrored in his various names. In one of Ellison’s drafts, Hickman summarizes the first stations in Bliss’s life as follows:

5 In “The Contradictions of Inheritance,” Bourdieu defines the paternal inheritance as “the *order of succession*,” which is founded on “the tendency to perpetuate in one’s very being” the father’s “*social position*” (507, original emphasis). According to Bourdieu, however, “it is frequently necessary to distinguish oneself from him, to go beyond him and, in a sense, deny him” (507). This, in turn, results in a feeling of guilt and “of *being torn* that comes from experiencing success as failure or [even] transgression” (510). Bourdieu writes: “The more you succeed (meaning the more you fulfill the paternal will to have you succeed), the more you fail, since the closer you come to killing your father, the farther you are from him” (510).

In Waycross: 'Blessed Boy.' [...] 'The Holy Baby'; in Birmingham, 'The Little Shepard': Rockymont [sic]; 'The Leader Child' Yes, 'The Lord's Littlest Lyric' that was Atlanta. 'The Golden Voiced Lamb' Tulsa. 'His Promise Affirmed' Pueblo; but to all the old ones, the close ones, he was Bliss. (Ralph Ellison Archive, Library of Congress, ms. box I:119, folder 9, n.p. [hereafter box and folder information only]).

Just as God was willing to sacrifice his son, Hickman is willing to sacrifice Bliss for the greater good. Hickman even aims to surpass God himself when he tells Bliss: "You're just a little over six and even Jesus Christ didn't get started until he was twelve" (*Three Days* 253). In contrast to his father's wishes, Bliss is not willing to sacrifice himself for the congregation. Instead, he transforms himself from God's son Jesus into the first human being Adam.⁶

Adam is willing to sin: In his first incarnation, Mr. Movie-man, Bliss seduces not only a whole community in the "territory" but also a woman named Lavatrice and becomes a father of a son himself. Yet with Adam's first son Cain, the first murder comes into the world; in contrast to the biblical story, Bliss's son does not commit fratricide but patricide. Unlike Hickman who "changes" from jazzman to minister to take over responsibility for his orphan son, Bliss himself rejects the responsibility of the father role. Thus, Severen becomes a fatherless son who has to search for a substitute father. As Bliss had accepted a father substitute in Hickman, Severen chooses Love New, the half-Indian, half-black shaman – another charismatic father figure.

And there are even more relations of 'fathers' and 'sons' in *Three Days*. As in "Tell It Like It Is, Baby," Ellison relates the father-son story to the political field, alluding to Abraham Lincoln as the father of the nation and to (African) Americans as his sons. In the presence of the "hero-father," as Ellison calls Lincoln (*Collected Essays* 46), the inner division of the dominant father figure Hickman is revealed.⁷ In his speech at the Lincoln Memorial, where Hickman leads his congregation members in an attempt to prevent the assassination of his son, the Reverend praises Lincoln as "one of the few who ever earned the right to be called 'Father'" (*Three Days*

6 The subchapters [Adam and Eve] and [Bliss and "snake"] seem to suggest that Ellison meant to develop the biblical analogy even further.

7 For a further discussion of Hickman and Lincoln, see Hill.

576). To Hickman, “perfection is reserved to God the Father,” but Lincoln comes close to perfection as “*the man who did the best he could for us and came out the winner*” (582). This perfection, which is based on symbolic violence in the form of charisma, stands for the normative, standard-setting power of the father, which the son has to work through.

In *Three Days* Reverend Hickman is presented almost invariably as an immaculate father figure – both as the perfect charismatic leader of his congregation and as a loving foster father to Bliss. In the very first scene of the chapter “Hickman in Washington, D.C.,” he is singled out from the congregation by his height, his elegant dress, and his gold watch and thus is identifiable as “HNIC,” which “means the ‘Head Negro in charge’; in other words, their leader” (505). Hickman stands out through his calm voice and his ability to lead the huge group just with “slight nods and gestures” (504). Through his charisma, and in his double function as leader and priest, Hickman exerts an exceptional amount of power over the congregation. In the scene at the Lincoln Memorial, however, Ellison also reveals the part in Hickman that once made him leave his religious family and turn into the rebellious jazzman. The confrontation with the heroic national father uncovers an internal combat hidden in the old Reverend. It is first uttered in a dispute between Hickman and his best friend Wilhite on whether Lincoln is the “man who changed history” or merely “*a creature of politics*” (582). Wilhite focuses on the ‘father part’ of Abraham Lincoln, i.e., on the politician, the old order. Hickman does not want to accept this image, because it shows him a truth about himself that he suppresses. Therefore, he underlines the ‘son part’ of the charismatic politician, characterizing Lincoln as the man who was brave enough to *revolt* against the old order. In denying the hypocrisy of this image he denies his own. He wants the congregation members to see in Lincoln as well as in himself an immaculate leader.

This controversial double portrait of Lincoln mirrors a conflict in Hickman that Ellison exposes through introspection: Approaching the Memorial, Hickman remembers “his own mixed emotions and conflict of mind which had left him shaken during his first visit to where they were headed [and] he had an impulse to draw Wilhite aside and suggest that they find an excuse for returning to the hotel” (574). Yet Hickman suppresses this impulse, focuses on the spell of the place, and stresses how “an old, restricted part of himself seemed to fall away, giving him a sense of moving from the familiar world of the given into the misty sphere of the possible” (575).

Thus, in the encounter between the national father and the national son, Ellison brings to light Hickman's son part fighting against the father part in him or, in Bourdieu's terms, Hickman's split habitus.⁸

In Hickman's case, the split derives from initially having rejected the father's trajectory, or inheritance, which led him from the religious to the cultural and eventually back to the religious field. "Such experiences tend to produce a habitus divided against itself, [...] doomed of a kind of duplication, to a double perception of self, to successive allegiances and multiple identities." (Bourdieu, "The Contradictions" 511) Later we learn that "increasingly such flashbacks were accompanied by interior dialogues in which a voice from his life as irreverent young bluesman mocked his present role of spiritual leader and reminded him of his lingering worldliness. Marked by a conflict between his past and his present, it was an ongoing dialogue in which the younger self badgered and teased while his older self stubbornly asserted its spiritual authority" (*Three Days* 715). The narrated monologue, occurring when Hickman is faced with the idealized father figure Lincoln, elucidates his internal combat between the normative, standard-setting father and the rebellious son.⁹

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- 8 Hickman reveals a *habitus clivé*, a split habitus, as Bourdieu defines it in retrospect of his own development. What Bourdieu describes in *Sketch for a Self-Analysis*, however, is the split habitus of the 'climber.' The tension Bourdieu experiences before his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France indicates that he is not able to hold his authority and that his former habitus adheres to him (108). For a famous example of split habitus in African American history, see Buschendorf's analysis of Frederick Douglass's transition from slave to famous orator.
- 9 See also Bradley's discussion of Hickman's "duality." Quoting Ellison's statement about Hickman as being of "'two minds'—one doubtful, the other hopeful; one blues-toned, the other sanctified," Bradley argues: "Unifying voice while complicating perspective, Ellison has made Hickman [in the computer files] a richer and deeper character than in the typescripts, albeit at the cost of his antiphonal relationship with Bliss/Sunraider. Through Hickman, Ellison explores the contrasts and the connections in a *bifurcated* voice" (50, my emphasis). Bradley then gives an example of what he calls Hickman's "doubling of vision" referencing a "tradition in African-American expression balancing the faith of the spirituals with the tragicomic sensibility of jazz and the blues" (50-51). This

In contrast to the dominating father-leader image of Hickman in *Three Days* the Ellison Papers contain scenes about his childhood experiences and his relationship to his own preacher father; most importantly, they comprise numerous versions of a scene called “Hickman Reminiscing” including a passage marked with the subtitle “[clock and church],” in which Hickman remembers a fateful Sunday in his father’s church, describing in detail the charismatic father preaching from the pulpit and his own feelings and thoughts while listening to the sermon that eventually result in an epiphany.¹⁰ These drafts open up a new image of Hickman as revolting son as well as charismatic preacher father. Both the drafts of “Hickman Reminiscing” and the two following notes reveal that Ellison aimed at a pattern of repetition: “Hickman’s fall and Bliss’s fall, each others doubles” and “1 runaway jazz / 2 runaway – politics / taken (send) away – murder” (ms. box I:138, folder 5).

A close reading of “Hickman Reminiscing” and especially “[clock and church]” uncovers the moment in Hickman’s childhood when he hears the second inner voice for the first time and when through introspection he captures the starting point of the “ongoing dialogue in which the [son] badgered and teased while [the father] stubbornly asserted [his] spiritual authority” (*Three Days* 715). These drafts, then, not only illuminate the genesis of both Hickman’s and Bliss’s primary and split habitus, they also reveal how Ellison, by emphasizing father-son relationships, writes history against history-book history.

evokes *The Souls of Black Folk*, notably the chapter “Of the Faith of the Fathers,” in which Du Bois defines the preacher as “the most unique personality developed by the Negro on American Soil. A leader, a politician, an orator, a ‘boss,’ an intriguer, an idealist” (116) and highlights “two great and hardly reconcilable streams of thought and ethical strivings [in two “types” or “groups of Negroes”]; the danger of the one lies in anarchy, that of the other in hypocrisy” (123).

10 Besides “[clock and church],” the three folders entitled “Hickman Reminiscing” (ms. box I:123, folders 5-7) contain “[Music dance hall],” “[Adam and Eve],” and “[Bliss and the “Snake”].” Some of these titles have different spellings in some versions; they are listed with “Jack Johnson” and “Other” on a folder page in ms. box I:123, folder 6.

“HICKMAN REMINISCING”

“Hickman Reminiscing” displays yet another overwhelmingly superior, charismatic, and powerful father figure who represents the old order, i.e., the normative order in the shape of religious *doxa* with its elements of the censorious, punitive father representing God(’s will) and the concept of sin and punishment. In Alonzo Hickman, we find yet another anxious son, who finally revolts in the form of escape. The drafts present a pivotal moment in Hickman’s childhood, which captures in an experience of epiphany *his* decision of turning away from his family. Here we have the origin of Ellison’s fictional chain of fathers and sons outlined in his note which marks Hickman as “1 runaway—jazz.”

The drafts of “[clock and church]” are dominated by introspection as a means to illuminate how Alonzo Zuber Hickman felt as the son of a charismatic preacher father, how the father’s behavior affected the little boy – including his bodily reactions that reveal the origin of what Hickman describes as “family traits and instincts inherited from the past” (ms. box I:123, folder 5). In other words, the notes disclose aspects of Hickman’s socialization and thus his primary habitus, which, according to relational sociology, is

the set of dispositions one acquires in early childhood, slowly and imperceptibly, through familial osmosis and familiar immersion; it is fashioned by tacit and diffuse “pedagogical labor with no precedent”; it constitutes our baseline social personality as well as “the basis for the ulterior constitution of any other habitus.” (Wacquant 7; cf. Bourdieu and Passeron 42-46)

And as Erica Edwards maintains in her study on black leadership, charisma is “a kind of habitus” (201).

The notes make us aware of the interrelation, the parallel between father and son. The analogy between Hickman and his father clarifies our understanding of Hickman’s own father role and thus in turn allows us to gain insight into Bliss’s son role as well as the process of his transformation. Furthermore, the notes draw attention to Hickman’s renunciation of his father as the representative of the old order and the religious field. That, in turn, illustrates the image of the son in revolt (which will be repeated by Bliss and again by Severen) and enables us to see more clearly the manner

of his revolt and his trajectory: Both sons move into the cultural field, Hickman turns into a jazzman, Bliss into Mr. Movie-man, appropriating the religious charismatic habitus to the position of an entertainer. In the draft “[in the music hall]” Hickman states explicitly how he transposed the pattern he adapted from his father in the church into the music hall, while Bliss does so twice, first as Mr. Movie-man and later as senator in the political field. The parallel underlines the structure of repetition in Ellison’s novel which, in turn, highlights the repetition in (African) American history and, more generally, in the relation of fathers and sons.

[CLOCK AND CHURCH]

In one of the drafts of “Hickman Reminiscing,” the Reverend denotes his childhood memory of his father’s “voice-flung sermon” (ms. box I:123, folder 6). All the variants of “[clock and church]” focus on Hickman’s father as the center of the ceremony and the master of collection. Hickman’s reflections uncover the father’s ability to lead and control the whole congregation solely with his body language. He depicts the father preacher before the start of the sermon as standing in front, staring at the congregation which turns quiet and finally silent.

With the beginning of the sermon Hickman chronicles the preacher’s transformation from “his beloved father” to “a figure of mysterious grace.” Alonzo hears his “preacher father’s voice-flung sermon” and sees “the pattern unfolding.” In one of the drafts, Ellison renders a detailed description of what the boy perceives: “it was nothing more or less than the *connection* between the creeping movement of the church house clock’s hands and roman numerals, the sunlight filtering through the red, blue, green and gold of a stained glass window, and the pattern” (my emphasis). Hickman reflects on the synesthetic quality of his past experience, which leads him to grasping the essence of time itself: “Once as a child being forced to sit quietly in church when I wanted to be outside playing, didn’t I catch time off guard, and wasn’t it made up of the details of familiar scenes and acts/actions and of smells and sounds that fused briefly in my mind before flying apart.”¹¹

11 The various versions of “[Adam and Eve]” contain further elaborations of Hickman’s (respectively Ellison’s) musings about time.

Alonzo watches the church clock as if in a sort of game, a race between his father's voice and the moving pendulum signifying his wish that the sermon would soon be over. "When the clock and his father's voice had come together," Hickman recalls, "the service had approached its end," which meant redemption for the members and "freedom," more precisely, "heathen freedom" for him. The boy distances himself more and more from the congregation, which remains fully under the spell of his father and is represented by his mother who reprimands Alonzo again and again to sit still and listen to his father's sermon. Although he soon begins to see through the game and, thus, the "familiar scenes and acts/actions and [...] smell and sounds [are] flying apart," he nevertheless is still afraid of his father and ascribes superhuman powers to him: He is convinced that his father knows about the game and will punish him for staging the race between pendulum and voice. A feeling of guilt overtakes him since he believes "that now everybody has to suffer the punishment for it."

What is in operation here is what Bourdieu calls *doxa*, in this case, the internalized concept of sin. Hickman is afraid of his vision and describes his father as "frightening." That his childhood self is scared is most clearly exposed by his interior monologue, which brings to light his inner division and its genesis; the two voices in him are dramatized in a dialogue for the first time in Ellison's drafts – and they are fighting:

Pulpit Why do they call it that?

To scair you, man. To make you feel if you don't listen you'll git pulled into the pit, thass why...

No, you're wrong and you better watch out now because what you doing is a sin...

And yet in spite of a sudden feeling of dread he couldn't stop listening for the game. (ms. box I:123, folder 5)

One part of him is obedient and adapts to the rules, which is stressed by the feelings evoked in the boy when he sees his mother crying; it makes him afraid "even when he had not sinned." The other part of him starts to see through the rules of the game, which is reflected in the appearance of Hickman's second voice. With this insight his perception of his father starts to change, but as he is still afraid he succumbs again to the *doxa* of the religious field, which he has internalized during socialization. The beloved father scares him by turning into "the figure on the rostrum [who] caused

judgement day.” Yet, Hickman’s second inner voice becomes more and more dominant – as, for example, in the following draft:

And then it happened. Beneath the roar around him he (=little Hickman) heard a (low) teasing voice (saying). No man, no. This always happens after they took up the collection. You just ain’t paid attention to it before, thass all. But you just watch: when this part is over him and the clock will be caught up with each other and then we can go home and eat and look at the funnies...You just listen and watch that clock.

In dialogue with his double, Alonzo’s emotions intensify, with the result that he is distancing himself from his father, the reference to whom is now marked by depersonalization: “the voice from the pulpit.” As Alonzo removes himself emotionally first from the other congregation members and then from his family, Ellison emphasizes his growing inner conflict by creating an analogy to his inner conversation on the physical level. First, the boy himself tries to find a way to sneak out of the church by pretending that he needs to run to the restroom. Then, during the father’s sermon on sin, Alonzo observes “a tall, light-skinned man” actually rising and leaving the church, evoking the preacher’s wrath: “As his father watched the man leaving he seemed to be growing taller. And as his body surged and panted with emotion it seemed to swell and fill out the robe and his voice became trumpet-like and threatening” (ms. box I:123, folder 7).

In any case, the boy waits with growing impatience for the sermon to end. In the process of gaining distance from the charisma of the father and the *doxa* of the religious ritual he is able to perceive the final part of the sermon already through ‘new eyes,’ which allows him to see the pattern and thus the truth.

HICKMAN’S APOSTASY

The conflict with the embodied concept of sin and the related fear makes the little boy feel as if “he were being swept away like a leaf in a whirlpool” (ms. box I:123, folder 5). Hickman is indeed swept away – from everything his life had stood for so far. And interestingly, with the ‘death of his old life’ he has a dream-like vision based on imagery of the Old Testament:

[H]e was being pelted by a rush of images he'd learned from the banners in Sunday school. The Hebrew children were dashing toward the blood red sea with Pharaoh's cinders lashing their horses like cowboys as they tried to head them off, and the bloody bodies of babies killed by King Herod's cutthroat bad men bobbed past like water-soaked dolls with sightless, staring eyes.

It is remarkable that this vision ends with a reference to the Book of Daniel: "And Shadrach, Mesrach, Abenego and Daniel were looking out at him from within a blazing furnace which spun and bobbed in the rush of water...." The prophet Daniel and his three companions represent unshakable faith as they refuse to worship Nebuchadnezzar's image of gold. In the very moment of Hickman's apostasy, they look at him reproachfully, frightening the little boy, who starts screaming and thinks he is about to faint. But despite his fear, he is able to free himself from the symbolic violence of the biblical image. Hickman abandons this vision and turns away – not only from his biological father but also from God, the father, from everything that has dominated his life so far and in which he has believed. Simultaneously, he seems to have gained an outsider's perspective on the scene, when he watches with great distance the screaming and chanting church members – including his mother.

Hickman's initial split from his family and his (first) congregation is effectively symbolized by the flying bird illuminated by a blue tilted beam of sunlight that he perceives in connection to the one o'clock stroke (cf. ms. box I:123, folder 6). The one o'clock strike is an ominous sign. It stands for time in general, and time, as Ellison writes in the draft, "came into the world after the fall" and is generally a "name for regret" (ms. box I:123, folder 5). Accordingly, the clock indicates that it is past twelve, i.e., it is always already too late. The flying bird signifies another rebellious son (Icarus) who tries to surpass the father. His subsequent fall is foreshadowed by color symbolism, the beam of sunlight tilted in blue. This conglomeration of metaphors, combined with the vision from the Book of Daniel foreshadows the end, which is told in the beginning: Sunraider's fall by the hand of his own son. Yet, it also fuses the stories of the sons into one story of sons.

In another draft, Ellison emphasizes the connection between the son's process of apostasy and the *doxa*-inflicted vision even more. He describes the charismatic father literally as "magician" of words who is able to

“pull[...]” the boy, who is “trying to stop the feeling,” “like a fish on a line,” while the mother appears to be “hypnotized” (ms. box I:123, folder 7). As soon as the son sees the above-mentioned “tear roll[ing] down her cheek [sic] [...] an invisible hand had reached out and was dragging him down inside a raging whirlpool of flashing scenes.” This time, the “frightening image [...] of [t]he Hebrew children” is paired with a more dramatically staged fall by a figure illustrating the dangerous state of blindness:

And as the [father’s] voice thundered and rapsed [sic] he [=Hickman] saw a blind man appear, tettering [sic] high on the edge of a cliff. And just as something which glowed like a lump of coal tore from the blind man’s chest and zoomed into the jet black sky he saw the man plunging headlong into space, forever falling. The poor blind man had strayed from the narrow path and seeing him fall made his mouth fly open to scream. But now, looking out through the iron-barred door of a big blazing furnace which tossed and spun past him in solemn retrograde were Meshrach, Shadrach, Abenego and Daniel, and he stared in amazement at the four saved souls who were so holy that they could sit cool and collected in fire so fierce that it burned in rushing water.

Ellison’s drafts of “Hickman Reminiscing” uncover a form of split habitus translated into biblical and mythical images, which reveal the unconscious and internalized *doxa* of the religious field at work in the little boy.

“THE PRESENCE OF THE PAST”

In the novel, Ellison produces an analogy to Hickman’s apostasy by creating a scene that associates Bliss’s apostasy with the same vision of the blazing furnace. In Bliss’s case, the allusion to the Book of Daniel occurs after the night in Sister Georgia’s house, where the boy “misbehaved” (350), namely, when he lifted Sister Georgia’s nightgown. This suggests that “Bliss’s fall” is connected to his first sexual exploration. In accordance with the biblical story and in contrast to Hickman, Bliss envisions only Daniel’s three companions when in his dream “Sister Georgia was there in the kitchen and was leading him over to the red-hot stove and asking him about Meshack, Shadrach, and old bigheaded Abernathy” (351). The dream of guilt is triggered by Bliss’s innocent musings about the kitchen stove:

When sitting there in the morning, waiting for his father, he sees a kind of synopsis of his old life; he thinks about seasons and food prepared on the hot stove and imagines finally: "That big pot on the back there will be puffing like a steam engine Meshack, Shadrach, and Abednego, and I like black-eyed peas [...]" (350).

In the subsequent scene, Ellison uses the eye metaphor to illustrate the distance between father and son. Hickman's face is literally behind bandages, and even his eye ("Thy merciful all-seeing eye"), that he shortly before had asked God to "keep us focused in [...] until we reach the living end" (349), is closed. In this scene, Hickman admits that he prayed the wrong prayer and left Bliss out (cf. 350). The night before, which Hickman spent in jail and Bliss in Sister Georgia's house, they were not only physically separated for the first time but had also lost the religious-based bond between father and son. That night sowed Bliss's seed of doubt¹²: His first step to transform himself into Adam was the moment he lifted Sister Georgia's nightgown. As a result, Bliss is no longer willing to reenact Jesus. Hickman lost control of Bliss just as his own father had lost control of his son in the church scene. Hickman announces that he will help Bliss to preach the following week and whispers that he will take him to the movies, but the connection between son and father is broken: "He [Bliss] looked but suddenly the eye was gone—as though someone had turned down the wick on a lamp" (356).

What Hickman sees as a child in his father's church, according to the draft, is "the scene in which Christ, loaded down with his cross and wearing a crown of thorns, was being driven up the hill by soldiers carrying shields [...]" (ms. box I:123, folder 6). From "his dual perspective" of himself as "reminiscing" adult and experiencing child, Hickman "could see the awe reflected in the eyes of his child self before the mystery of a life beyond death and dying which was depicted in the glass; the timeless agony in ancient dress, the array of figures and forces, political and spiritual, the endless climb." He would like to protect Alonzo from perceiving suffering at such a young age. He thinks, "listen to the words and leave this until you are older." The hypocrisy of the father is that Hickman will not save Bliss,

12 At the celebration of Juneteenth, when Bliss, again, reenacts Jesus, a red-haired woman appears and claims him as her son, which is closely connected to the boy's realization of his own whiteness.

even though he shows the desire to save his own child self. Instead of protecting Bliss from the “awe” that he sees “in the eyes of his child self” he charges him with the burden of his and the congregation members’ high hopes and even makes Bliss reenact Christ the incarnation of suffering.

The repetition of the father’s mistake is summarized in the following notes (ms. box I:138, folder 5) that start with the different ideas Hickman’s parents have of their son’s future occupation:

Hickman’s father wants him to be a preacher,
his mother taught him a little piano [...]

Highlighted on this page, encircled, Ellison drafts the novel’s basic structure of the three generations of father-son relations:

1 runaway jazz
2 runaway – politics
taken (send) away – murder

Further down Hickman reflects on the parallels between his own reaction to his father’s plans and Bliss’s response to himself. The father-son conflicts depicted in Ellison’s notes suggest the ambivalent feelings Bourdieu attributes to the “contradictions of succession,” especially “when the father occupies a dominated position, whether economically, socially [...], or symbolically (as a member of a stigmatized group)”:

He cannot want his son to identify with his own position and its dispositions, and yet all his behavior works continuously to produce that identification, in particular the body language that contributes so powerfully to fashioning the whole manner of being, that is, the habitus. [...] The product of such a contradictory injunction is doomed to be ambivalent about himself and to feel guilty [...]. Guilty of betrayal if he succeeds, he is guilty of disappointing if he fails. (“The Contradictions” 510)

Here is the passage from Ellison’s draft:

Well, I reaped twofold the seeds I sowed.
What I rejected of my father the boy rejected of me

He wanted me to become a preacher and the boy rejected (the same from me) my desire for him from me. I ran away from home and the boy ran away from me. (ms. box I:138, folder 5)

In the following variation, especially with the phrase “broke his heart” juxtaposed to “the shadow of his wish” Ellison expresses the ambivalence of the son more explicitly:

Well, I reaped twofold the seeds I sowed.
What I rejected of my father came back to me.
He wanted me to become a minister but I ran away and broke his heart by becoming a jazz musician. Then after he was long dead and gone I became both, minister and father out of heartbreak and I asked of the boy what my father had asked of me he ran away and now I'm here. Freedom
I ran but the shadow of his wish ran with me. I'd learned and forgot that¹³

In another draft of “Hickman Reminiscing,” the protagonist recalls an event from his childhood in which he shot his slingshot at the blue glass insulators of the telephone poles. Hickman underlines his relief that he never succeeded, “because now he could recall the color with pleasure that was unspoiled by memory of a boy’s thoughtless action” (ms. box I:123, folder 5). The color blue triggers Hickman’s memories.

In *Three Days*, in the chapter “[FALL],” Hickman draws on this analogy when in a hotel lobby in Washington, D.C. he interprets a tapestry, which (unknown to him) represents Pieter Brueghel’s *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*. In this scene, the color of the water of the sea reminds

13 Cf. a slightly different version of this note (ms. box I:123, folder 7), in which, for example, Ellison substitutes “I’d learned and forgot that” with “Even the spirit of his preaching had entered my unknowing flesh and claimed me long before I surrendered and answered its calling...” and adds: “Who says that play is simply play, or idleness mere suspension of action when both can be disciplines? The clock-game was a child’s diversion but through it I sensed that emotion given form brought communion. And later I came to recognize how the pattern of communion was there unfolding even in a low-life public dance.”

Hickman again of the glass insulators and he remembers that “[s]uch domed, translucent shapes had often served as targets for his slingshot, and though strictly forbidden by both the law and his father, he had found them so irresistible that years later, when coming upon young Bliss trying his hand at the game, he couldn’t help but grin at his own hypocrisy while putting a belt at the little boy’s bottom” (*Three Days* 597). This quote not only links the drafts of “Hickman Reminiscing” and “[clock and church]” to a scene among the computer files, “[FALL],” which establishes an explicit connection between Sunraider’s fall and Icarus’s fall, but associates “the law,” namely, the normative order, with the father who prohibits what the son is particularly tempted to do. The blue glass insulators are irresistible; consequently, the son revolts by overriding the prohibition.

As a father punishing his foster son for something he himself did as a boy, Hickman quickly changes back into a minister and is no longer jazzman. His admission of his own hypocrisy is reminiscent of Ellison’s memory about the common hypocrisy among respectable professionals and the greater sincerity of jazzmen who for this reason were more attractive role models for him, and his fatherless companion:

Looking back, one might say that the jazzmen, some of whom we idolized, were in their own way better examples for youth to follow than were most judges and ministers, legislators and governors [...]. For as we viewed these pillars of society from the confines of our segregated community we almost always saw crooks, clowns or hypocrites. Even the best were revealed by their attitudes toward us as lacking the respectable qualities to which they pretended and for which they were accepted outside by others, while despite the outlaw nature of their art, the jazzmen were less torn and damaged by the moral compromises and insincerities which have so sickened the life of our country. (*Collected Essays* 52)

As jazzman and revolting son, Hickman asks Bliss’s mother when she comes to him for help: “Do you think a man like me is even interested in the idea of trying to be Christlike? Hell, my papa was a preacher while I’m a horn-blowing gambler. Do you think that after being the son of a black preacher in this swamp of a country I’d let you put me in the position of

trying to act like Christ?" (*Three Days* 467-68).¹⁴ Yet, at the very moment when Hickman becomes a father himself, he experiences a change that confuses him the more as it turns him into a father who resembles his own father.

In his philosophical musings about time in "Hickman Reminiscing," Ellison establishes the principle of repetition which is realized in the sequence of generations. History is embodied in the seemingly endless chain of fathers begetting sons who then turn into fathers again. However, the novel's last son, Bliss's son Severen, does not turn into a father but instead kills his father: History stops. By letting *Three Days* begin with the assassination Ellison halts the family story to tell the story about history. It is interesting to note that the sons of the reference stories, Icarus and Jesus, also never become fathers, as they are sacrificed by their fathers for their own purposes. And it is only when Bliss rejects the Jesus identity, that he can turn into a father himself. As Ellison reminds us, "time came into the world after the fall" (ms. box I:123, folder 5). According to the bible, the history of humankind starts, then, with disobedience toward God-the-father causing the fall, and it continues with murder in the next generation. In the Icarus myth, the son also disobeys the father and like Adam and Eve he is punished by a fall. In contrast to the reference myths, in Ellison's narrative the last son, Severen, is able to break the spell of charismatic violence by killing the father and, as his name suggests, thereby also cutting the generational chain. However, the novel's circular structure indicates that Severen's murder will not vanquish once and for all the power of fathers.¹⁵

14 When Bliss's mother comes into the house of Hickman's family and asks him to help her deliver the baby, Hickman is sitting there ready for revenge, because due to the woman's false accusation his brother and mother died shortly before.

15 On repetition and variation in life and history, cf. the following statement Ellison made in an interview with John Hersey ("A Completion of Personality"): "[Y]ou just write for your own time, while trying to write in terms of the density of experience, knowing perfectly well that life repeats itself. Even in this rapidly changing United States it repeats itself. The mystery is that while repeating itself it always manages slightly to change its mask" (*Collected Essays* 810).

“THE END IS IN THE BEGINNING”

Ellison's notes and drafts disclose that he repeatedly changed the sequence of his narrative and even experimented with the function assigned to protagonists. For example, he considered the possibility of having McIntyre, the white reporter who witnesses the shooting of Sunraider in chapter one, travel to Oklahoma to talk to Love New or Hickman.¹⁶ Yet as the fragment “Hickman in Georgia & Oklahoma” documents, Ellison came to the conclusion that it should be Hickman who “meets Love New, a half-black, half-Cherokee medicine man who weaves a mysterious fable [...] of fathers of sons” (247). Confronted with Love New's outsider perspective about past events and his pivotal fable, Hickman begins to “see [his] mistake” (844). In response to Love New's repeated question about his identity, Hickman at first points to his past as a jazzman, and then states, “I'm a father” (851). Only Love New's persistence forces Hickman ultimately to admit that he is “a grown old man who's as confused in his own way as that lost boy of Janey's” (851), confessing that he, too, is a son who suffers “*the orphan's loneliness.*”

Love New not only makes Hickman aware of his position in the chain of individual father-son relationships, but with the Native American fable about the Chief's son that reveals the “great inner division [among the State folks]” (810) he emphasizes the interrelation between individual and national level, again using the parallel to Abraham Lincoln. Moreover, on the narrative level, the fable, which Love New had once told Severen when he returned to the territory to learn more about his father and which he repeats in his conversation with Hickman, strengthens the interdependence of the fates of Hickman, Bliss, and Severen. The Chief's son – so the fable goes – was seized by a bear and brought back to the tribe by a white man who insisted to take the boy with him to educate him. When the son returns after eighteen instead of the promised five years, the village experiences a joyful spring. After a short while, however, the son shows first signs of a change that the elders initially construe as a consequence of his overstepping a taboo. As his behavior changes more and more drastically, he is brought to a

16 Cf. one of the eight excerpts Ellison published during his lifetime, “A Song of Innocence” (1970), in which McIntyre talks to Cliofus about Severen's return to Oklahoma (*Three Days* 1073 ff.).

powerful medicine man in the mountains who tries to cure him. Upon his return, it soon becomes clear that he has turned even wilder, and the tribe finally decides that he has to die. In the fable, the father shoots his son up on the hill. Up on a hill is also where in Ellison's novel the son ultimately shoots his father, thereby revealing the influence of yet another charismatic father figure, Love New, who confesses to Hickman: "So I told the boy what I knew, and even though I went at it at an angle, like when you use a parable to say something that you'd rather not run the risk of saying straight out. So he got something from what I said, and when he finds his man we'll both know the rest" (768).

The tribal story contradicts the common historiography of the United States: The white man does not truly save the Native American from wild nature (the bear) here, nor does he bring 'civilization' to the 'barbarous' tribes; on the contrary, it is the socialization among whites that turns the Native into a beast who even unlearns to honor the taboos of the tribe, and as he comes to endanger the community, the tribe must kill him as it would kill a wild animal. Consequently, as Love New points out, there is no truth in written history, and the "bloody pyramid of bodies" (814) underneath everything – such as Lincoln's – haunt each new generation.¹⁷ Severen argues that he "wasn't even born" when all of that happened, but Love New explains that nevertheless, "its mark is upon you. And just like it haunts the spirits of those who did the murder and those who refused to do the right thing after it was done it haunts their children and their children's children" (815). Love New's Native American fable teaches not only Severen but also Hickman about "the manner in which the past operates on their present lives" (*Collected Essays* 820). However, Love New's history lesson is not limited to the abstract principle of the relevance of past falls and murders in the present. Rather, it also discloses the two concrete major falsehoods of American historiography: the claim of having civilized the Indians (as juxtaposed to their expulsion and extinction) and the allegation of the separation of the races (as juxtaposed to their actual mixture). Love New

17 Cf. Ellison's remark on Lincoln in "Tell It Like It Is, Baby": "the hero-father murdered (for Lincoln is a kind of father of twentieth-century America), his life evilly sacrificed and the fruits of his neglected labors withering some ninety years in the fields; the state fallen into corruption, and the citizens into moral anarchy, with no hero come to set things right" (*Collected Essays* 46).

acknowledges the blending of Native Americans, African Americans and whites by referring to his tribal name, “the black One” and the name he chose for himself, “Part White One,” adding that he and Hickman both “share the blood of a slaver” (829).

In one of his notes, Ellison suggests that the issue of race is at the core of the murder: “Bliss is killed not because he abandoned Severen’s mother nor because of his activities in [the] Senate but because he betrayed his past and thus provided Severen the deepest intellectual motive for murder. He is murdered by way of proving that Severen was full of that acceptance of whiteness which was [the] source of Bliss[’s] confusion” (ms. box I:141, folder 1).

CONCLUSION

In the introduction to Ellison’s “Oklabook,” the editors state that “[p]articularly with Love New, a story leads to another story, circles within circles, relevant to the novel’s theme of fathers and sons [...]” (496). While it emphasizes the circular structure of the novel, the Native American fable also extends the cultural horizon of father-son relations by adding a Native American version to the ancient and Christian stories. Moreover, Love New’s fable highlights the novel’s historical dimension. It reverses American history as written by white historians who exert the symbolic power of definition. Severen’s patricide is a reaction to one of the basic fabrications of American historiography. Enlightened by a Native American, he rejects and ultimately extinguishes his father who owed his success to the denial of his African American heritage and the subsequent internalization of the hypocritical national anxiety of racial mixing. By starting the novel with such a crucial break of the generational chain and ending it with its explanation Ellison argues not only for a fundamental rewriting of American history but also for a radical change in American politics.

Ellison’s notes and drafts provide important clues to the understanding of the novel. First, they contain explicit reflections on the novel’s structure and the protagonists’ relations to each other that confirm the narrative’s design of the generational conflicts and their repetitions. Second, Hickman’s childhood memories offer valuable insights into the bodily effectiveness of charismatic power, as they vividly demonstrate his fierce emotional struggles.

Finally, the scenes from Hickman's childhood provide an extension of the generational chain to include a particularly important link: Hickman's struggling against the influence of his dominant, charismatic father establishes a significant parallel between his and Bliss's early upbringings, thereby reinforcing the central idea of the repetition of father-son relations that ultimately guarantees the perpetuation of existing power structures. Having successfully overcome the symbolic violence of his father, Hickman, the revolting son, later recovers his primary habitus and turns into a charismatic preacher father himself. Bliss, having escaped Hickman's dominating charisma and the *doxa* of the religious field, also later exerts power himself as a charismatic politician father figure. The sons' "primary conditioning," dominated by their fathers, reproduces a habitus that represents the history of which it is the product: "It ensures the active presence of past experiences [...]" (Bourdieu, *Logic* 54). As race-baiting Senator Sunraider Bliss becomes a representative of the dominant political order and thus contributes to the stabilization of white supremacy.

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(Post-Black) *Bildungsroman* or Novel of (Black Bourgeois) Manners?

The Logic of Reproduction in Colson Whitehead's
Sag Harbor

MARLON LIEBER

As in all of Colson Whitehead's novels, the use of pop-cultural references in *Sag Harbor* is telling. Consider the following passage: 15-year-old Benji Cooper and his friends are listening to Afrika Bambaataa and Soulsonic Force's 1982 song "Planet Rock." His friend Marcus calls it "a classic joint," which prompts Benji to provide the information that the hip hop pioneers sampled a song by the German electronic music band Kraftwerk. However, Benji is not using these words; what he says is, "You know they bit that off Kraftwerk." Biting – as adult Ben, who narrates the novel, points out – was considered "a major crime" in 1985 when the novel is set. Thus Marcus angrily replies, "Afrika Bambaataa didn't steal anything. This is their song." (61) Today – with the assistance of the website *WhoSampled.com* that meticulously records the samples used by hip hop artists – it is easy to determine that Benji is right, for "Planet Rock," that "polycultural pastiche" (Chang 172), does use a Kraftwerk sample. Marcus however remains scandalized and accuses Benji of betraying black culture: "I forgot you like that white music, you fuckin' Siouxsie and the Banshees-listenin' motherfucker." (62) Ironically it is Marcus who gets hip hop wrong, for adult Ben emphasizes that it has always been a syncretistic art form drawing on heterogeneous sources. "Funk, free jazz, disco, cartoons, German synthesizer music—it didn't matter where it came from, the art was converting it to new

use.” (61) In other words, it is necessary to know “that white music” to experience the full range of hip hop’s creativity.

While not all literary critics might be familiar with the practice of sampling, they will certainly know about ‘intertextuality’ and ‘*heteroglossia*’ – related concepts that similarly posit that texts are characterized by the presence of earlier texts or a plurality of voices. In fact, we can read the passage just quoted from as a metafictional commentary on Whitehead’s own literary ambitions (cf. Schur 248); he has pointed out that the range of influences on his work include both ‘high-brow’ literature and popular culture, both white and black authors (cf. Sherman). The exchange between Benji and Marcus suggests that Whitehead is aware that some of his readers might go so far as to accuse him of betraying his ‘race’ (see, for example, Fain 120). If Whitehead is analogizing his position in the literary field with that of Benji among his friends, we will have to conclude that he feels misunderstood because of others’ facile juxtaposition of ‘black’ and ‘white’ culture as homogeneous and distinct entities.

This is remarkably similar to what writer and TV host Touré diagnosed in his 2011 book *Who’s Afraid of Post-Blackness?* in which he chastises “self-appointed identity cops” (7), who believe that “there is a correct or legitimate way of doing blackness,” and demands “for every Black-American to have the freedom to be Black however he or she chooses” in order to destroy “the bankrupt, fraudulent concept of ‘authentic’ Blackness” (11). Touré also favorably reviewed *Sag Harbor* and praised its “unapologetic” reshaping of the “iconography of blackness” (“Visible Young Man”). He lauded Whitehead’s semi-autobiographical tale of a summer spent in an upper-middle-class black Long Island community for its refusal to give in to normative demands about how Blacks should act. In Touré’s words, “Post-Blackness sees blackness not as a dogmatic code [...] but as an open-source document, a trope with infinite uses.” No longer “stamped inauthentic and bullied into an inferiority complex,” modern Blacks such as those represented by Whitehead are free to “do blackness their way.” Touré ends the review with a call for “more post-black stories,” such as Whitehead’s about “black boys with beach houses.”

Since 2009 – and also with reference to novelists such as Paul Beatty, Percival Everett, Mat Johnson, and others that seem to fit the bill – there has been continued scholarly interest in the phenomenon of ‘post-blackness’ (cf. Paul Taylor; Baker and Simmons; Schmidt). However, far

from all authors approve of the concept. As I have shown elsewhere (cf. Lieber), Touré's account is indeed deeply problematic, because it tacitly universalizes the experiences of (upper-)middle-class Blacks through its focus on "choice" (*Who's Afraid* 68) and "identity options" that are allegedly "limitless" (12), as well as its commitment to individual "Black success" (11). While Touré acknowledges that success in the corporate world can be a function of knowing how to behave in a 'proper' manner, he treats this knowledge as a purely intellectual operation as if it was a choice that each and every black person was able to make irrespective of his or her class position. Thus, he reproduces clichés about the 'American Dream,' claiming that Barack Obama's election provided proof "that believing in yourself and in the country can lead to towering rewards [...]. And for those who opt to hate America and refuse to play the game and reject it before it rejects you, there are no rewards." (200) In an autobiographical chapter we find out where Touré learned to "play the game," namely in a Boston private school whose alumni include Robert Kennedy and T. S. Eliot (77). He additionally spent time in a "culturally black and ghetto tennis club," and it was the combination of "preppy school" and "ghetto club" that taught him to do "rapid cultural 180s" (88), in other words, to successfully move in both 'white' and 'black' surroundings.

But Touré seems to have forgotten his privileged class position, arguing that success was a consequence of "[t]he way you walk—the grammar, articulation, and diction you *choose to employ*" (184, my emphasis). His emphasis on deliberately choosing how to act and speak reveals that he cannot grasp that social agents "have not chosen the principle of their choice," i.e., what Pierre Bourdieu calls "habitus" (*Pascalian Meditations* 149). Habitus is acquired in childhood and primarily a product of a social agent's position in a society's class structure. Speech – or the capacity to produce "an infinite number of sentences really appropriate to an infinite number of situations" (*Logic* 32) – is an important part of a habitus, and what Touré cannot see is that "access to legitimate language is quite unequal, and the theoretical competence liberally granted to all by linguists is in reality monopolized by some" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 146). Thus, the skill Touré calls "Black *multi-linguality*" (*Who's Afraid* 11, original emphasis) is also a result of having acquired sufficient cultural capital to be able to speak the language appropriate in various social situations. When Touré envisions "Black success" in "the game" – which is nothing but the labor market (cf. Lieber

277-78) – he similarly ignores that to succeed social agents must first possess a “feel for the game” (Bourdieu, *Logic* 66). Touré’s paean to “post-Black rugged individualism” (*Who’s Afraid* 8) knows only history- and thus habitus-less individuals and remains blind to structural constraints that limit the number of choices actually available to them. Lack of success can thus only appear to be the result of false choices, and this commitment to individual responsibility amounts to a central tenet of neoliberal ideology (cf. Wacquant 307).

So what about *Sag Harbor* then? If it really was a ‘post-black’ novel, would this not imply that it proposes a vision of a neoliberal society, a vision of individuals who are not constrained in their actions by an embodied class habitus? Walter Benn Michaels thinks so, writing that it is a hallmark of the “neoliberal novel” to substitute “cultural difference for [...] class difference” (184). Quoting Touré’s words of praise for *Sag Harbor* he polemically asks “if the crucial thing about rich black people is that they offer new ways of performing race rather than the old ways of embodying class” (185). While I am sympathetic to Michaels’s critique of neoliberal culture, I do not think that his brief remarks do *Sag Harbor* justice. The novel, I claim, is fully committed to the (Bourdieuian) idea that individuals possess embodied dispositions that tacitly shape the manner in which they perceive the world, think, and act. Through the novel’s focus on Benji we can reconstruct the influence of his habitus – and this habitus is that of a member of the (black) bourgeoisie. Unlike Touré he struggles with making “cultural 180s” and proves inept when it comes to “performing race” – and this is precisely because he has “embod[ied] class,” to use Michaels’s phrase once more. Ultimately, the difference between the two texts, *Sag Harbor* and *Who’s Afraid of Post-Blackness?*, is also expressed formally; for, many critics’ claims notwithstanding (cf. Maus 99, Fain 132), I argue that Whitehead’s novel is not a *Bildungsroman*. Rather than focusing on one (black) individual’s process of maturation – which is what Touré does – Whitehead has created a novel about a particular class fraction and their manners, and it is Bourdieu’s relational sociology – which is essentially a theory of the reproduction of class differences – that allows us to properly grasp this.

ENOUGH OF THAT “IF-ONE-OF-US-GETS-IN CRAP,” OR, DELINKING FATE

“Black success” in Touré means having “a shot at becoming the CEO or a vice president of the company” or at least “a powerful entrepreneur” (*Who’s Afraid* 184). By definition this is limited to the few – for there can hardly be many CEOs. And as long as their income drastically exceeds that of regular workers – on average, top CEOs make a staggering 300 times more (cf. Mishel and Davis) – it is hard to understand how this could count as meaningful progress for a majority of American Blacks – unless one accepts the logic of “linked fate” (Warren, *What Was* 138) according to which “the welfare of the race” (139) depends on the success of individual Blacks.¹ Kenneth Warren holds that the same structure of thought has historically underpinned African American literature, arguing that “the idea that sustains the possibility of an African American literature is a belief that the welfare of the race as a whole depends on the success of black writers and those who are depicted in their texts.” (139) While he acknowledges that this made sense in the era of Jim Crow segregation (cf. Warren, “On” 742), he believes that it no longer does. If black authors continue to follow this model, it is because they “need to distinguish the personal odysseys they undertake to reach personal success from similar endeavors by their white class peers” (*What Was* 139). For *Sag Harbor* to have the kind of significance that Touré imagines it possesses it would need to represent Benji’s experience as having some sort of positive effect on “the welfare of the race.”

Like Touré and Whitehead himself (cf. Maus 2), Benji and his brother attend a private school, where Benji is “the only black kid in the room” (7). Some people, notably white upper-middle-class liberals, see a benefit in the presence of a black student at this school, and adult Ben is able to explicate

1 Political scientist Adolph Reed has powerfully criticized the idea of a “black community” as “a racial population that is organically integrated and that operates as a collective subject in pursuit of unitary interests” (134). He thus inadvertently produced an *avant la lettre* rebuttal of Touré, pointing out that one consequence of the denial of “intra-racial stratification” is to reduce differences between blacks to “idiosyncratic attitudes and personal styles” which obscures “structured social relations” (135).

their motivations: The father of one of his classmates, a Mr. Finkelstein, is glad to see Benji around because for him and his wife (both Civil Rights lawyers),

[s]ending their daughter to a fancy private school was a betrayal of core values, paying tuition when you were supposed to support local public schools being in traitorous equivalence with eating grapes [harvested by non-unionized workers] [...]. / The fact that Mr. Finkelstein's daughter had a bona-fide black friend mitigated the situation a bit. Hey, wasn't that why they'd marched on Washington in the first place? (8)

Benji's presence makes it possible for white liberals to ignore the fact that they actively participate in the reproduction of an unjust education system in which success is a function of parental wealth: It produces the appearance that the system is essentially fair since it does not discriminate on racial grounds.

But it is not just white liberals who can appreciate individual black success; the parents of Benji and his friends – Blacks who would have experienced the U.S. before the end of legalized segregation – are committed to the idea of “linked fate.” On Labor Day the Sag Harbor community is listening to what Ben calls “the black national anthem,” i.e., the song “Ain't No Stoppin' Us Now” by R&B duo McFadden and Whitehead (259). The narrator appropriates two lines from the song's first verse: “There've been so many things that held us down—check. But now it looks like things are finally coming around—check” (259-60), and reflects on the song's significance: “Whether the association was civil rights triumph, busting through glass ceilings in corporate towers, or merely the silly joy of gliding around a roller rink [...], the song addressed the generations.” (260) Thereby collective achievements (Civil Rights legislation) are conflated with individual ones (success in corporate America). In the minds of the Sag Harbor bourgeoisie, the progress made by some Blacks – like themselves – is thus represented as signifying progress for all.

But this, we learn in the course of the novel, is the belief of the older generation. By way of focalizing through 15-year-old Benji's perspective, *Sag Harbor* suggests that his post-Civil Rights generation is in the process of *delinking* its fate from that of “the race as a whole.” In the novel “linked fate” is expressed in the form of the phrase, “If they got in, it was like all of us getting in.” (196) Only Benji does not refer to the corporate world but to

Bayside, a local music venue. *Sag Harbor* provides an allegory for the unsustainability of “linked fate” by way of detailing the plans made by Benji and his friends Bobby and NP to attend a concert. When only Benji and NP end up getting in this no longer figures as a collective triumph, but rather triggers the “resentment” (216) of those left outside. Similarly, once inside, Benji no longer feels solidarity with his friends who were turned down at the door but instead feels a new sense of comradeship with the other dancers at Bayside, among whom are “older white people” (218). At this point he has already given up on the idea that individual success in making it past the bouncer “was like all of us getting in” because NP and Bobby, in their attempts to secure places on the guest list, made it clear that they did not care about him. Benji concludes, “Now that the day [of the concert] had arrived, I wasn’t going in for that if-one-of-us-gets-in crap. I was pissed at the thought of them inside and me standing outside the club like a fucking jerk.” (212-13) By assuming what Benji – who is used to not “getting in” – elsewhere calls his “outsider’s perspective” (80), the novel shows that that notion of “linked fate” is only attractive for those already on the inside.

The black upper middle class then is shown to be a class fraction whose members compete for desirable positions. But the novel also addresses its relation to the black proletariat, for the flipside of the “if-one-of-us-gets-in” rhetoric is expressed by Benji as follows: “When they failed [to get into Bayside], we accepted our portion of shame.” (196) Again there is a structural homology to “linked fate” ideology. For if the success of individual Blacks reflects positively on “the race as a whole,” individual failure serves as a source of collective “shame” – this “*pars pro toto* distortion” (Elias 5) cuts both ways. Thus the inhabitants of Sag Harbor sharply distinguish themselves from what they euphemistically call “those of our race who possessed a certain temperament and circumstance”; or, phrased more explicitly: “There were no street niggers in Sag Harbor.” (31) In fact, both statements are made by the narrator, which serves to show that Benji has incorporated the principles of the Sag Harbor “classification system” (204), i.e., the principles of its habitus and “schemes of perception, thought and action” (Bourdieu, *Logic* 54). The language he uses is that of his father, who displays a dismissive attitude toward what he also calls “corner niggers” (162). The use of the ‘n-word’ in itself does not necessarily express class hostility, for the Sag Harbor adults also use it “in its familiar comradely sense” (31). When it is used to denigrate lower-class Blacks, it is always

brought up in connection with spatial referents such as “corner” or “street” (cf. Maus 106). Those places serve as a shorthand for “a vast, abstract plane of black pathology” (87) in the eyes of Benji’s father. That Benji tacitly applies the same principles of vision and division becomes clear when he sees his friend Nick wearing a big gold chain and imagines hearing his father exclaim: “Where does he think he comes from, the Street?” (87) As a child of the black bourgeoisie, it is not surprising that Benji has acquired its *habitus* and the attendant “classification system.”

By way of introducing Benji’s father and his ideas about black “pathology” the novel makes explicit the class condescension hidden under the surface in Touré. As Norbert Elias explains in “Towards a Theory of Established-Outsider Relations,” the self-image of “established” groups – such as the Sag Harbor bourgeoisie – is “modelled [...] on the minority of its ‘best’ members,” whereas their perception of “outsider” groups – such as the black proletariat – is based on “the ‘bad’ characteristics of that group’s ‘worst’ section” (5). In *Sag Harbor* the former is embodied by the community’s “founding fathers” and “their ideas of how proper black people should act” (221), whereas Benji’s father can see the latter – i.e., stereotypical representations of the black proletariat that were popular in the 1980s such as “Welfare Moms” (180) – on the news daily. At the same time the inhabitants of Sag Harbor are outsiders *vis-à-vis* the white elite that lives in the adjoining Long Island communities – and whose riches fuel Benji’s wildest dreams (cf. 37, 113).² Consequently, they must fear to be judged by the same standards as the black proletariat by whites. Benji’s father and everyone else committed to the Sag Harbor “classification system” tacitly understand that “systems of classification constitute a *stake in the struggles* that oppose individuals and groups” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 14, original emphasis), which is why they so desperately try to distinguish themselves

2 John Clegg writes: “Two important and somewhat contrary facts must be kept in mind when discussing this new black elite. Firstly, they constitute an elite only relative to the extreme and concentrated poverty of the black inner city. They tend to do significantly worse than their white neighbors, especially with respect to wealth, and like all black people they experience racism. Secondly, and despite this, they are in a relative sense more of an elite than the white equivalent, since black wealth in America is far more concentrated than white, and the income gap between top and bottom far greater.” (cf. Taylor 2016: 7)

from the black proletariat (all the while believing that their own success constitutes progress for “the race as a whole”) or from those of their own who “fell in with the wrong crowd” (256), such as Benji’s uncle Nelson.

In short, Benji’s father, the head of what his son terms a “Cosby family” (160), represents the same class resentment as comedian Bill Cosby himself, who (in)famously went on a rant about the black proletariat in a 2004 speech, in which he blamed what he called the “lower economic people” among American Blacks (qtd. in Dyson xi) for their allegedly “self-destructive behavior” in typical neoliberal fashion (xiii). Mr. Cooper is similarly committed to individual responsibility, claiming that the black poor “need to get off their asses” (180). While we have seen that 15-year-old Benji often unwittingly applies the same “classification system” as his father, the fact that the novel is narrated by adult Ben introduces a certain distance to the class condescension. After performing a sort of class ventriloquism by saying that “There were no street niggers in Sag Harbor,” the narrator adds “No, no, no” (31). The threefold repetition of the word suggests that Benji has repeatedly heard his father underscore that all kinds of behavior associated with “the Street” are contradicting the norms of respectability laid down by the “founding fathers”; but it also suggests that he – just like his friends – is tired of hearing this. While the manners of black bourgeois life have been inculcated in their minds for all their lives, this younger generation finds much that is desirable in “the Street.”

THEORIZING THE LOGIC OF PRACTICE, OR, BENJI AS GRAMMARIAN

The question remains whether their upper-middle-class habitus does not create an unsurpassable distance between their own lives and those of the black proletariat, however attractive they may find “the Street.” Benji sums up the teenagers’ predicament as follows:

According to the world, we were the definition of paradox: black boys with beach houses [...]. / It could mess with your head sometimes, if you were the susceptible sort. And if it messed with your head, got under your brown skin, there were some typical and well-known remedies. You could embrace the beach part—revel in the luxury, the perception of status, wallow without care in what it meant to be born in

America with money [...]. You could embrace the black part—take some idea you had about what real blackness was, and make theater of it, your 24-7 one-man show. Folks of this type could pick Bootstrapping Striver or Proud Pillar, but the most popular brands were Militant or Street, Militant being the opposite of bourgeois capitulation to The Man, and Street being the antidote to Upper Middle Class emasculation. Street, ghetto. Act hard, act out, act in a way that would come to be called gangsterish [...], knowing there was someone to post bail if one of your grubby schemes fell apart. (57-58)

While this passage implies choice, it also makes clear that the ability to choose is a result of certain material preconditions – in short, of being born “with money.” At the same time, the designation of possible choices as “popular brands” suggests that they are certainly not expressions of “real blackness” but rather the commodified expressions of 1980s urban culture. The teenagers attempt to buy into this lifestyle through sneakers and gold chains popularized by rap artists. But as a matter of fact we have already seen how the idea of hip hop’s “real blackness” has been deconstructed by way of Benji’s insistence on Afrika Bambaataa’s use of a Kraftwerk sample.

It is adult Ben who can verbalize this more precisely when he relates that his 15-year-old self “didn’t understand [...] why Marcus was hassling” him (61) because he thought “that it was okay to like both Afrika Bambaataa and Kraftwerk” (62) – which brings us back to the issue of ‘post-blackness’. Yet far from Touré’s “unapologetic” commitment to ‘post-blackness,’ Benji seems less self-assured. While he points out that “you could embrace the contradiction,” for instance by saying, “what you call paradox [of being “black boys with beach houses”], I call *myself*,” he continues that this worked only “[i]n theory,” for “[t]hose inclined to this remedy didn’t have many obvious models” (58, original emphasis).³ If “embrac[ing] the contradiction” is what ‘post-blackness’ requires, this does not come easy for Benji. And this is again a matter of habitus because unlike Touré, who learned to do “rapid cultural 180s” by spending time in a predominantly white private school and a “black and ghetto tennis club,” Benji is unable to connect with the “black and ghetto” lifestyle that his friends

3 The black “nerd,” a possible role model for Benji, only became a popular figure in 1986 with the release of Spike Lee’s *She’s Gotta Have It* (cf. George 135).

engage in (or try to, at any rate) due to what he calls his “strong dork constitution” (43). In other words, we again encounter the issue of an individual’s “practical sense” or the embodied dispositions that make up a habitus.

Bourdieu employs this concept to mediate between structure and practice. In a classic formulation he defines habitus as “systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations” (*Logic* 53). These dispositions are themselves structured by the objective conditions under which they were acquired, and here “[e]arly experiences have particular weight” (60). But the habitus also acts as a “structuring structure,” insofar as all subsequent “thoughts, perceptions and actions,” in a word, all forms of “practice” (55), are structured by the habitus’ “schemes.” The latter enable social agents “to adapt endlessly to partially modified contexts” (*Pascalian Meditations* 139), that is, they serve as the basis for the practical rationality of their practices in new situations – but only within “limits” (138) since the range of possible practices always remains constrained by the conditions under which the habitus was acquired. In short, individuals incorporate the objective structures of the social world that they experience early in their lives, and these structures are embodied as subjective dispositions that guide – though not mechanically determine – all their later practices. While this suggests that they will be able to act ‘properly’ in situations that resemble those in which they acquired their habitus without having to consciously adhere to explicit rules (cf. 143), it also suggests that this will not be easily possible under changed conditions: Due to what Bourdieu calls “hysteresis” (*Outline* 83), the habitus is slow to adapt to a radically changed context. There individuals might feel embarrassed due to their lack of access to the means of producing the correct practice – and this is often expressed in “the form of *bodily emotions*” such as “shame, humiliation, timidity, anxiety, guilt” (*Masculine Domination* 38, original emphasis).

Benji the “dork” thus falters when it comes to his encounters with “black slang and other sundry soulful artifacts [he]’d missed out on in [his] ‘predominantly white’ private school” (29). This refers primarily to complex handshake routines and the “grammatical acrobatics” (41) of the ritualized strategies of insult that his friends – some of whom do not attend private schools – introduce to Sag Harbor. Benji cannot transcend his “outsider’s perspective” which only allows him to provide detached descriptions of

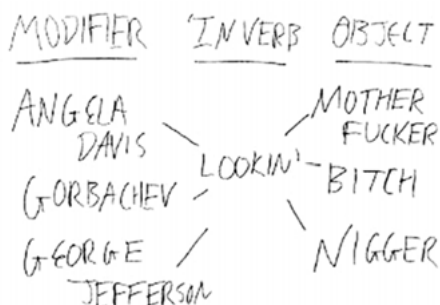
their actions without being able to acquire a “practical mastery” (*Outline* 19) of the logic of their practice. In other words, the habitus shaped by a “predominantly white” Manhattan environment and the manners of the older black generation hostile to ‘street’ culture makes it hard, almost impossible, for him to do “rapid cultural 180s” à la Touré.

Consider the description of a handshake routine performed by Benji’s friends Marcus and Bobby: “Slam, grip, flutter, snap. Or was it slam, flutter, grip, snap? I was all thumbs when it came to shakes.” Benji, who only perceives “a blur of choreography” reasons: “I had all summer to get it right, unless someone went back to the city and returned with some new variation that spread like a virus, and which my strong dork constitution produced countless antibodies against.” In short, Benji admits that his efforts to learn the new handshakes remain mere “fumbles” (43). Because Bourdieu’s concept of habitus is not determinist it does not exclude the possibility of adapting to new practices; but we see here that this requires an extended period of time (“all summer”) and remains imperfect (“fumbles”). Benji imagines the handshakes to be “[d]evised in the underground soul laboratories of Harlem, pounded out in the blacker-than-thou sweatshops of the South Bronx” (43), but this should not be misunderstood as suggesting that they express “real blackness.” For elsewhere we read that whatever Benji thinks about Queens and Brooklyn – boroughs that are structurally homologous to Harlem and the Bronx *vis-à-vis* Manhattan – is distorted by the “standard projections of the repressed” (239); “repressed” because he feels excluded from ‘black’ culture. That is, the content of his projection (say, “blacker-than-thou sweatshops”) is no more adequate to reality than the content of his fantasies about the “affluence” (113) that exists in the white neighborhoods surrounding Sag Harbor.⁴ In both cases spatial difference mystifies class difference. And this class difference is expressed in class habitus, if only negatively, because Benji fails to master the handshakes – which produces the sensation of “sham[e]” (43; cf. Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination* 38).

4 Benji’s exclusion from both black ‘urban’ culture and from white elites is further analogized when he imagines the latter as “secret-handshake groups” (110) as well.

When it comes to the “grammatical acrobatics” of the insults Benji’s “outsider’s perspective” on the logic of practice stands out even more clearly. He explains (41):

The trend this summer, insult-wise, was toward grammatical acrobatics, the unlikely collage. One smashed a colorful and evocative noun or proper noun into a pejorative, gluing them together with an -in’-verb [...]. Like so:



Benji points out that the addition of a “‘You fuckin’,’ as in ‘You fuckin’ Cha-Ka from *Land of the Lost*-lookin’ motherfucker,’” could serve “as a rhetorical pause, allowing the speaker a few extra seconds to pluck some splendid modifier out of the invective ether” (41-42). And he finishes thus:

True masters of the style sometimes attached the nonsensical ‘with your monkey ass’ as a kicker, to convey sincerity and depth of feeling. Hence, ‘You fuckin’ Kunta Kinte-lookin’ motherfucker ... with your monkey ass.’ You may have noticed that the -in’ verbs were generally visual. The heart of the critique concerned what you were putting out into the world, the vibes you gave off. Which is what made them so devastating when executed well—this ordnance detonated in that area between you and the mirror, between you and what you thought everyone else was seeing. (42)

Despite the ironic tone of this passage – which comes with giving vernacular language a quasi-academic treatment – the attention to detail suggests that Benji is intimately familiar with this practice. But in fact these observations are entirely a product of a “theoretical view of practice” that Bourdieu distinguishes from a “practical relation to practice” (*Logic* 81). For throughout the whole novel Benji not once utters a phrase of this sort. In

Bourdieu's terms, adult Ben can produce an account of the theoretical logic of the insult in the manner of a "grammarian," but teenage Benji cannot produce actual insults in practice as an "orator" would (31). The former speaks from the standpoint of "an 'impartial spectator' who seeks to understand for the sake of understanding" and possesses "mastery of the code"; the latter possesses "mastery of [its] appropriate usages" (32). "Orators" are thus the "[t]rue masters of the style" – but Benji is not one of them because he lacks the appropriate "practical mastery."

In *The Logic of Practice* Bourdieu discusses the need to complete two "epistemological break[s]" (26) in order to transcend the false opposition between "subjectivism" and "objectivism" (25). The first is a "methodical break with primary experience" (14) and the commonsense perceptions of social agents. By having adult Ben narrate the novel Whitehead introduces a potential first break, the break with the "primary experience" of teenage Benji. While sometimes this break fails to materialize, insofar as the novel remains focalized through the eyes of Benji, often adult Ben acts as narrator-focalizer – as in the passage quoted above. Whitehead himself states as much:

I knew that it had to be an adult looking back on his childhood because I would get bored out of my skull if I had to have a fifteen-year-old's voice for three hundred pages. [...] My narrators generally have a certain kind of critical faculty. They're analyzing what the characters are doing in larger social structures. So I wanted to have an adult voice looking back upon teenage years with that kind of critical distance. You know, being able to break down their cursing grammar. (qtd. in Chamberlin)

This "critical distance" equals Bourdieu's first "break." But the second one is missing. This would entail a critical distance to his own position which could enable Ben "to objectify the objectifying distance and the social conditions that make it possible" (*Logic* 14). Not having performed this second "break" he cannot reflect on the fact that he can "break down" his friends' "cursing grammar" but remains unable to employ it in practice himself. In other words, he does not grasp why he can assume the "objectifying distance" of the "grammarian" but lacks the practical understanding of the "orator."

In fact, according to Bourdieu, the “scientific break is inseparable from a social break” (5). It is significant that Ben resorts to producing a diagram of the logic of the insult. The diagram form represents the objectivist “break with primary experience” as practiced in Lévi-Strauss’s structuralist anthropology. Bourdieu points out that it produces a “synchronization effect” (10) that is alien to the actual logic of the practices the diagram purportedly represents. This is because practice by definition occurs in time and because social agents, rather than mechanically following a “rule” suggested by a diagram, engage in a “strategy” that allows for symbolic profits to be reaped based on the use of time (*Outline 9*, original emphases). Ben is tacitly aware that the diagram cannot represent the full truth of the insult, for otherwise he could not speak of insults that are “executed well” – for this implies that it does not suffice to produce some combination of “modifier,” “-in’ verb,” and “object.” And he explicitly evokes the role of time by pointing out that “You fuckin’” can provide a “rhetorical pause” that makes it possible to come up with a better insult, as it is the “interval” that allows for “strategy” in the first place (Bourdieu, *Logic* 106). But he cannot explain his own ineptitude, and this is precisely because he fails to objectify his class position that keeps him at a distance from the “grammatical acrobatics” of black vernacular. For his class privilege means that he is relatively “free from necessity” (*Pascalian Meditations* 17) which allows him to assume the “detached, distant disposition” of the observer who treats the world as “an object of contemplation, a representation, a spectacle” (51) that can in turn be represented by means of a diagram. But while Benji/Ben as an individual struggles with understanding how his class position shapes his actions and thought, the novel itself insists on the fact that social agents’ way of acting in the social world is not a matter of ‘choice’ alone (or of ‘performance’), but is decisively determined by the (‘embodied’) durable dispositions of (class) habitus.

BILDUNG VS. MANNERS

What kind of novel is *Sag Harbor* then? As indicated above it is somewhat common to classify it as a *Bildungsroman*; Whitehead himself has used the related term “coming of age novel” to describe his fourth work of fiction. As I have argued above, I do not believe that those are accurate

designations. And indeed in the same interview Whitehead himself qualifies this statement by saying that he was “avoiding certain expectations of plot and a certain kind of narrative satisfaction” in order to produce his “own kind of version” of a coming of age novel (qtd. in Shukla). Accordingly a closer look at the novel’s minimal plot reveals that there is neither a process of *Bildung* nor a coming of age in any meaningful sense. Quite the opposite. Benji starts the summer by planning to establish a “New Me,” basking in the “early-summer dream of reinvention” that should result in a “refurbished self” (23). But on the second-to-last page of the novel, just before returning to Manhattan, he must conclude that “[i]t didn’t work out the way I had envisioned.” Though no doubt “some stuff happened,” this is not exactly the stuff a successful *Bildungsroman* is made of. In fact, the desired “reinvention” is deferred: Benji resolves to sketch a “new plan” (272), now “sure” that “it is going to be a great year.” However, the novel’s two very last sentences – “Isn’t it funny? The way the mind works?” (273) – imply that the near future will not go according to Benji’s “new plan” either. *Sag Harbor* thus raises but ultimately frustrates the expectation that we are reading a *Bildungsroman*.

For this we should rather turn to Touré’s *Who’s Afraid of Post-Blackness?*, which is not strictly speaking a novel, but includes an autobiographical chapter that details precisely the process of maturation that we expect from a *Bildungsroman*. As Michaels argues, the meaning of this narrative form in the current (neoliberal) socio-political climate is to emphasize “that there are only individuals,” which is why the question of “whether memoirs really count as literature” (183) is secondary; what counts is the trajectory of an individual overcoming obstacles. And this is the very lesson of Touré’s “post-Black rugged individualism.” Reading his book we can reconstruct his struggle to free himself from oppressive definitions of “Blackness” and deal with the everyday racism he encounters as a journalist. In short, we see him triumph over those, both black and white, who want to constrict the free expression of his “post-Black” individuality. The logic of this type of narrative is essentially “optimistic” because, while it acknowledges “lingering racism” as a problem that continues to exist, it at the same time proposes that this can be overcome through the right choices and individual determination (Michaels 179). As Franco Moretti has demonstrated in his classic account of the *Bildungsroman*, “‘in the middle’ anything can happen – each individual can ‘make it’ or ‘be broken,’”

which is why this genre needs both “hope” and “disillusion” (248n5). The latter is provided by Touré in the chapter immediately preceding his autobiographical sketch in which he discusses the “fall” of black comedian Dave Chappelle, who was “scared [...] to death” by the “freedom of the post-Black era” in Touré’s telling (*Who’s Afraid* 74). The “hope” of course is provided by his own example.⁵

Sag Harbor remains a *Bildungsroman* deferred. Instead of following Benji as he truly ‘comes of age,’ we watch him stay in place. He does not undergo what the narrator calls a “[c]ommon rite of passage” among the Sag Harbor youth, namely getting out. This option is represented by Benji’s older sister Elena who no longer comes to Sag Harbor because she has had “[e]nough of this bourgeois shit” (234, original emphasis), and she even exhorts her brother: “[D]o me a favor, Benji, and get out when you can” (237). This process of getting out in a both literal (no longer spending summers in Sag Harbor) and figurative sense (breaking with the manners of the black “bourgeois” class) is precisely what would be the stuff of a *Bildungsroman* – but this is not what *Sag Harbor* is about. Instead it is a novel about a particular space, again both in a literal (a physical location) and a figurative sense (a position in social space). In fact, Whitehead’s spatial commitment goes so far that he produced a map of Sag Harbor included in the original edition of the novel and a further annotated map for the *Wall Street Journal* (cf. Mechling). Furthermore, it is a novel whose temporality is not linear, but circular. When summer ends Benji thinks, “[w]e plotted and planned and next year came around and we were in the same place” (259), and observes younger children that will be the “replacements” (261) of his circle. What is important here is not Benji’s individual trajectory, but the fact that there is a physical and social space that can and will be

5 Interestingly the very same logic pervades Ta-Nehisi Coates’s celebrated *Between the World and Me* (2015), a book that at first glance looks diametrically opposed to Touré’s. However, for all of Coates’s pessimism, we find the same dualism: the “disillusion” is represented by the police murder of his friend Prince Jones, but the “hope” is provided by Coates’s own career. As in Touré the relevance of class is denied, and we end up with a story of individual (‘post-black’) achievement. While in Touré class disappears behind acts of individual choice, in Coates it is the “social equalizer” of the “black body” (Kuhl) that serves this purpose (cf. also Clegg).

occupied again. In other words, the logic of *Sag Harbor* is one of reproduction not of change.

This is why it makes more sense to treat *Sag Harbor* as a novel of manners and start looking for its predecessors among works by authors such as Edith Wharton or Bret Easton Ellis rather than (exclusively) in the tradition of the (black) *Bildungsroman* or autobiography (as Fain does, see 127-36).⁶ In a classic account Lionel Trilling described “manners” as belonging to

that part of a culture which is made up of half-uttered or unuttered or unutterable expressions of value. They are hinted at by small actions, sometimes by the arts of dress or decoration, sometimes by tone, gesture, emphasis, or rhythm, sometimes by the words that are used with a special frequency or a special meaning. They are the things that for good or bad draw the people of a culture together and that separate them from the people of another culture. (206-07)

By “people of a culture” we are of course to understand members of a social class. As my reading of *Sag Harbor* has shown, the novel is committed to showing the myriad ways by which members of classes distinguish themselves from others – willingly or unwillingly, explicitly or implicitly. And no theorist was better suited to grasp these processes than Bourdieu with his keen sense for the way “[s]ocial subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make [...], in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed” (*Distinction* 6). The sense of difference goes so far that 15-year-old Benji imagines the super-rich whites who live in the neighborhoods nearby as belonging to a different species, as “reptilian creatures” wearing “human-flesh costumes” (113) or “[p]terodactyls” (37). Their lives – and manners – seem so radically different from what he knows that he cannot imagine their essential sameness any longer; and this recalls, say, Undine Spragg’s perception of Peter Van Degen as possessing a “grotesque saurian head” in Wharton (285) or Patrick Bateman’s literal turning of a homeless

6 To be sure, Wharton’s New Yorkers (and Ellis’s rich kids, too, if for other reasons) would disapprove of the ‘manners’ of Benji and his friends. But it is worth remembering that, “as economic structures change, so manners change.” The essential fact is that, whatever form they assume, manners express class differences; their “foundation” is “economic” (Godden 12).

man's face, with whom he claims he has nothing "in common," into a grotesque pulp (Ellis 131). In all these cases, behind the façade of manners, the "structural antagonism" of class society lurks as a monstrosity (Michaels 181). Unlike Touré's account of 'post-blackness' then Whitehead's *Sag Harbor* remains aware of the monstrous nature of class society and the logic of its reproduction.

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“You People Almost Had Me Hating You Because of the Color of Your Skin”

Symbolic Violence and Black In-Group Racism in Percival Everett’s *I Am Not Sidney Poitier*

JOHANNES KOHRS

imagine!...words were coming...a voice she did not recognize...at first...so long since it had sounded...then finally had to admit...could be none other...than her own.

SAMUEL BECKETT / *NOT I*

What does it mean to be not Sidney Poitier? More precisely: What does it mean to be black, male but not Sidney Poitier? Or, more precisely *and* confusingly: What does it mean to be black, male but not Sidney Poitier and have, as prime social identifier, a name that proclaims this very differential status? These questions lie at the core of *I Am Not Sidney Poitier* (henceforth: *Not Sidney*). The 2009 satiric novel by African American author Percival Everett portrays the absurdly funny, crisis-ridden coming of age of the wealthy black orphan Not Sidney Poitier. The novel’s eponymous narrator struggles for (self-)recognition in an episodic rite of passage through the starkly satirized cultural scene of the 1980s and 90s U.S.

Due to his peculiar name the Sidney Poitier look-alike Not Sidney sets off a sequence of ragingly racist episodes, all of which parody various filmic Sidney Poitier scenarios. In one of these, Everett changes the interracial conflict negotiated in the Poitier movie *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner?*

(dir. Stanley Kramer, 1967; henceforth: *Guess*) into an intraracial confrontation. Here, as a victim of in-group racism in the social domain of a black upper class family, Not Sidney is marginalized not by way of overt, physically transacted racial oppression but on the basis of what Pierre Bourdieu has termed symbolic violence.¹ By juxtaposing the icon of benign black masculinity, Sidney Poitier, with his elusive character Not Sidney Poitier, Everett insinuates a race-based analogy between the Civil Rights conflicts at the peak of Poitier's career and the multiculturalist entertainment industry in the era satirized in *Not Sidney*. Implicitly, the novel thus hints at the "post-racial" euphoria at the time of its publication, which is at odds with the growing awareness of the persistence and pervasiveness of systemic racism.

“YOU MAKIN’ FUN OF ME, BOY? – NATURE BEAT ME TO THAT” : TOWARD A DEHABITUALIZED READING OF RACE

Following the journey of a young black man through the geographical (Southern rural and East Coast urban) as well as social spaces (lower to upper class) of U.S. society, *Not Sidney* ironizes the idea(l) of a colorblind society that crystallized in the controversial concept of “post-race.”² Having first emerged in the 1990s as the utopian promise of social progress brought about with the turn of the Millennium, the notion gained further traction when – one year before the publication of *I Am Not Sidney Poitier* – Barack Obama took the highest office in the nation and seemed to prove an unparalleled upward social mobility of minorities.

Not Sidney grows up as an outsider in a poor black neighborhood of Los Angeles. The origin of his name is as dubious as his genealogy (his fa-

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- 1 It is precisely the import of Bourdieu's approach, on which this article is based, to consider every act of racial oppression as violent in a physical, i.e., body-centered way. Although this seems to be stating the obvious, the impact of fists and words can have the same psycho-corporeal “reality” for the racialized victim.
 - 2 I draw on “post-race” not as an accurate description of sociopolitical realities, but as the epitome of a simplistic socio-historical teleology from civic equality to colorblindness.

ther remains unknown). According to his mother, it has “nothing to do with the actor at all.” As she claims, it is “simply a name she had created, with no consideration of the outside world” (7). Raised by his self-made, “eccentric” (130), and politically radical mother, he is taught to read a lot and think critically, and not surprisingly he “turn[s] out to be extremely well educated” himself (30). However, she passes away when Not Sidney is eleven years old, bequeathing to him a vast amount of money from her fortunate investment in the TV company TBS, owned by the fictionalized Ted Turner. In appreciation of Ms. Poitier’s loyalty to his firm the media mogul takes Not Sidney to live with him and his wife, the fictionalized Jane Fonda, in Atlanta, Georgia. In this private, well-situated milieu, Not Sidney’s wealth grants him access to *the* privilege of whiteness, namely disregard for (his own) skin color. Educated by an almost exclusively non-white staff (an Indian American accountant, an African American social activist home teacher and a Korean American martial arts instructor) Not Sidney is raised to be entirely *unaware* of the racial divide outside his gilded cage. The frequent beatings he receives from kids in the formative years of his adolescence (they are confused by and frustrated with his name) instill in him an ironic indifference toward the social world in general and race-related stimuli in particular.

Embarking on what he deems a “valuable learning experience, a rite of passage” (168), Not Sidney resolves to find his mother’s headstone in Los Angeles in order to solve the mystery of his origin. He drops out of high school after a scandalous incident of forced fellatio inflicted on him by his white history teacher Ms. Hancock, gets arrested for “driving while black” in rural Georgia and is locked away in the “Peckerwood County Correctional Prison Farm,” from which he escapes and buys his way into the historically all-black Morehouse College. There, he is marginalized as being “not black enough” by the elitist fraternity of the “Big Brothers” and as being “too black” by his girlfriend’s extremely class-conscious light-black parents during the aforementioned episode in Washington DC, modeled on the Stanley Kramer movie. He has his accountant buy the TV channel NET (“Negro-Entertainment-Television,” obviously a satirical nod at BET), thus highlighting the novel’s parallelization of the “post-racial” era and the rise

of the commercialization of blackness in the 1980s.³ He enrolls in a philosophy course on “Nonsense,” taught by the fictionalized author of the novel himself, Percival Everett, only to drop out of college, too. Ironically, Not Sidney increasingly resembles the original actor, undergoing a quasi-surreal bodily transformation. His chaotic quest culminates in his solving the mysterious murder of his very own doppelgänger and, passing for the ‘real’ Sidney Poitier, accepting the Academy Award for Most Dignified Figure in American Culture as the man who “sets the standard” (234).

Everett’s satire presents an episodic experiment on a black millionaire: Not Sidney is the test object in a speculative test-scenario for which money serves as the key variable. He passes through the crucial institutions of socially regulated socialization: high school, college – and prison. Significantly, he returns with similar results every time. He is policed and brutalized, harassed and exoticized, in short: misrecognized. This punitive impetus emblemizes Everett’s ironic riffing on the principle of blaming the victim and the “culture of poverty” debates. Not Sidney thus can be conceived of as a privileged victim who, due to his very name, is *forced* to unsettle the racial order. This paradox of involuntary subversiveness marks the core of the novel’s absurd humor, which, as I will discuss below, productively complicates the social scope of the satire.⁴ Thus, his name is

3 BET was founded in 1980, at the beginning of the decade that saw the rise of one of the wealthiest and most widely influential African American figures in the U.S. entertainment industry: Oprah Winfrey.

4 *Not Sidney* experiments with a humor-based configuration of incongruity and nonsensicality that aligns it with *the Absurd*, as the paratextual reference to Samuel Beckett’s 1973 one-act play *Not I* is meant to show. Like Everett’s protagonist, Beckett’s acting unit, the mouth of a woman who soliloquizes her life-story of subjugation reduced to the corporeal function of her speech organ, is inserted into a linguistically predetermined power system, against which she revolts by refraining from using the pronoun “I.” Everett’s absurdist alignment with Beckett hinges on the problematization of the performative link between language and subjectivity as well as of art as a simplistically politicized practice. Aiming, above all, at debunking the misappropriation of language as a means of establishing meaning as naturally dominant, the Absurd can be conceived of as relating to symbolic violence in approaching racism not as a linear-hierarchical but rather as an inherently ambiguous, relational process of social domination.

interpreted by his white and black opponents as an act of sassiness, or making fun of them, for it induces an infinite interrogation loop, undermining any ascriptive attempt at identification: “‘What’s your name?’, a kid would ask. ‘Not Sidney’, I would answer. ‘Okay, then what is it?’” (13). This cyclic misrecognition is the defining principle of Not Sidney’s being persistently marginalized as the black Other; it epitomizes the novel’s complication of the essentialist view of race that results in stereotypically fixing human difference.⁵

The re-contextualization of the seemingly outdated Sidney Poitier scenarios challenges the reader to make sense of the racial madness erupting around Not Sidney. Though he is persistently punished for being unaware of race he actually fares moderately O.K. This discrepancy, which fosters the satiric humor in the first place, as well as the incongruity between Not Sidney and Sidney Poitier make the novel a particularly productive example of what Glenda R. Carpio has called “incongruity humor.” Carpio defines this so far understudied type of African American humor as the “playing of ‘what if’ games [...] that momentarily reconfigure habits of mind and language,” which has the function to challenge social normativity (6). Seemingly incongruent with the original Sidney Poitier, Not Sidney, as E. Lâle Demitürk asserts, “signifies a counter-discourse to whites’ stereotypes of blacks, deemed as deviant in normative spaces. He is denied a subjective performance of black masculinity because he is always shadowed by the Poitier image imposed on him” (89). Provoking his opponents (and thus the reader) to constantly question his subjectivity in favor of Sidney Poitier’s spectacular preeminence, Not Sidney evokes their (and the reader’s) commonsensical, i.e., habitualized conceptions of (stereotypical) blackness. By way of its comparative scenario (Civil Rights – multiculturalism – “post-racial” paradigm) *Not Sidney* critically comments on the institutionalization of these stereotypes. Yet, it does not exhaust its satirical potential with that. Rather, zooming in on Poitier as a cross-cultural icon, the novel presents a language-centered thought experiment that challenges

5 I am drawing on Mustafa Emirbayer’s and Matthew Desmond’s definition of race as “a symbolic category based on phenotype or ancestry and constructed according to specific social and historical contexts, a category that is misrecognized as natural” (51). By the “fixing” quality of stereotypes I mean, essentially, the fixing of human difference in readily accessible categories.

us to question our conceptual safe spots on *both* sides of the symbolic divide of race. More specifically, it also brings us to reflect on the receptive preconditions for critically negotiating the social and the literary sphere. This particular aspect ties in with Everett's critique of reductive conceptions of literary writing in general and writing labeled as "African American" in particular.

As a (self-declared) successor of black authors such as Ralph Ellison and Chester Himes, who ventures into various generic and thematic terrains – in the novelistic vein of Samuel Butler, Mark Twain, Samuel Beckett, and Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. (to mention but a few) – the Los Angeles-based novelist, poet, critic, painter, and USC professor Percival Everett makes a simple but important distinction: He does not stand *for* but *in* the tradition of African American literature and literary theory. He frequently stresses the problematic categorization of his (satiric) writing as "experimental." Instead he claims: "[E]very novel is experimental. There's no such thing as an experimental novel" ("Teaching Voice" 54). If anything, his writing can be considered experimental precisely because it is based on the productive interplay of story and the (often self-reflective) ways of its telling, which makes for its multi-conceptuality in the first place. *Not Sidney* thus can be conceived of as exemplary for Everett's experimental engagement with the possibilities of literature, specifically with respect to his critical negotiation of race and its sociocultural realities.⁶

Investigating Poitier as a signifier that has been culturally institutionalized as a shortcut to non-threatening, white mainstream-compatible black masculinity, Everett's impetus is based on what Anthony Stewart has identified in Everett's public political problematization of his birth state North

6 Like most of Everett's satires, *Not Sidney*'s conceptual configuration is based on the generic contrafactum of the *Bildungsroman* and the picaresque novel: a paradoxical protagonist, i.e., an inherently problematic figure of identification, and a (pseudo-)picaresque plot, i.e., an episodic, non-linear, simplified adventure story. These form the basic narrative framework of an often sign-theoretical, language-philosophical, and overall self-reflective project that, essentially, aims at dehabituating the reductive use of language as a shortcut to meaning, be it on the level of individual literary texts, literary history, or wider cultural discourses.

Carolina's racist legacy, namely paralipsis (189).⁷ Echoing the rhetorical tactic of misdirection, the novel revives the racial legacy of Sidney Poitier by his counter-character Not Sidney. Poitier, the racial representative of a seemingly bygone era, signifies a development that reaches its (first) peak in Not Sidney's time: the commercialization of blackness in the multiculturalist entertainment era. Generally, Everett's paraliptic project ironically appropriates various concerns and conventions of African American culture and literature.⁸ Obviously, *Not Sidney* draws on the black tropes of naming and genealogical dislocation. What is more, Not Sidney complicates the vernacular paradigm of tricksterism famously synthesized by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. in *Signifying Monkey*. Far from being a trickster who plays with language to compete in micro-social power games, Everett's protagonist is an involuntary subversive, who only reluctantly plays along with the events rather than deliberately shape their outcome. That the reader is encouraged to make sense of Not Sidney's humorously harmless punishment can be read as another deliberate deviation from the melodramatic mode dominating the canonical genre of the (neo-)slave narrative, with which Not Sidney's narrative shares the quest for freedom from racial oppression in the self-authenticating form of autobiography. What, finally, makes Everett's intermedial re-negotiation so unconventional and complex is that Not Sidney is not just not Sidney Poitier. Rather, both figures share a consistent inconsistency, as it were.

Having come "to personify *the Black Man on screen*" (Leab 223) during the post-WWII re-negotiation of the representational politics in U.S. popular culture, Sidney Poitier not only embodied a decisive diversification of on-screen images of blackness but changed the role of the black male in

7 Thus, Everett's investigation of Sidney Poitier echoes his engagement with the Republican, pro-segregationist South Carolinian senator Strom Thurmond in *A History of the African-American People (proposed) by Strom Thurmond as told to Percival Everett and James Kincaid* (2004). Everett's scathing satire forces us to complicate the commonsensical conception of Thurmond as the very model of a racist white supremacist much like he provokes us to reconsider the seeming iconic consistency of Poitier as the stereotypical good black man.

8 Not Sidney's name, one could even argue, echoes the race-related disprivileging of job seekers whose names, because they are (stereo-)typically associated with African-Americans, trigger their rejection in written applications.

the U.S. cultural consciousness by way of a vast array of groundbreaking “firsts.” For the very first time a black male artist received a tremendous popularity among a mass white audience, star-like fees, and, in 1964, the Academy Award in a leading role (for *Lilies of the Field*). Poitier achieved this at a time when films first “began cautiously to broach the subject of ‘race’ as problem,” as Stuart Hall recalls (240). On the one hand, his on-screen characters combined all the characteristics of cultivation that catered to the white liberal fantasy of the good black male citizen worthy of integration into mainstream society, thus countering the cultural fear of the aggressive, sexually predatory black male. As Hall points out, Sidney Poitier was “almost sexless” (241) in his absolutely non-threatening allure. On the other hand, the image of the acting Poitier was, as James Baldwin stressed, sexually codified, as he was a “sex symbol [...], though no one dares admit that” (58). Retracing the “Poitier effect” in her same-titled study, Sharon Willis identifies “unmanageable” tensions and ironies such as the sexual subtext as the crucial constituents of Poitier’s spectacular “extraordinariness” (23). Whereas “in his comforting returns” he “remains the same from role to role, just as his characters remain unchanged despite the dramas that develop around them” (40), the movies seem to have not been able to contain him “despite their accommodationist rhetoric” (23). It is this consistent inconsistency, i.e., the stability of his role and the contradictions implicit in his cultural appeal that Everett self-declaredly interrogates.⁹

Not Sidney looks “for the world like Mr. Sidney Poitier” (3). He is characterized by other characters as “tall and dark like him” (37), and, significantly, as “extremely handsome” (121) by women. The latter fact makes for several grotesque, sexually charged episodes of quasi-forced fellatio. What all of these encounters have in common is that Not Sidney remains passive, ironically echoing Sidney Poitier’s sexlessness on screen. Being “extremely well educated” (30), Not Sidney’s use of language shows his wit – oftentimes hilariously so, while he struggles to stay out of all the trouble that his name incites. Not Sidney’s Poitier-esque appearance and linguistic proficiency contrast with his clumsy behavior (as opposed to

9 “I was interested in the icon of the palatable black man in the ‘60s or ‘70s,” Everett stated in an interview with Drew Toal, stressing that Poitier was interesting to him precisely because he was such a “complicated” persona, “politically outspoken in public, and eminently ‘safe’ onscreen” (“The Tipping Poitier” 163).

Poitier's spectacular bodily presence and 'timing' onscreen) as a stoic of sorts. His inculcated ironic indifference is severely troubled in the *Guess* episode where, interestingly, space and Not Sidney's practical involvement in it are key, as opposed to the novel's overarching disintegration of plot and the backgrounding of setting, as well as the (stereo-)typification of characters (including Not Sidney). For a sociologically informed literary analysis Bourdieu's theoretical dyad of symbolic violence and habitus can serve as an interpretative prism to zoom in on the social nuances of Not Sidney's negotiation of his own 'place' in the racial order. Whereas Everett creates Not Sidney *not* as a conventional character but as a figurative test-device, Bourdieu's body-oriented, relational approach to human sociality allows us to focus on the author's characterological re-complexification of Not Sidney. Reemphasizing the social dynamics of the latter's involvement in his racial environment, Everett's central aim is to *keep* the reader pondering the potential import of Poitier on present-day racial realities, to keep us engaged in his challenging language-centered thought-experiment whose complexity is based on its productive, humor-centered balancing of imaginative absurdity and social credibility.

THIS BIZARRE GAME OF COLOR: SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE IN BLACK IN-GROUP RACISM

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner? is special within Sidney Poitier's array of cinematic works, for it stages a white-black miscegenation scenario in the year of the Supreme Court's *Loving v. Virginia* decision that legally sanctioned interracial marriages. The renowned black doctor John Wade Prentice Jr. (Sidney Poitier) and Joanna (Katharine Houghton), the 23-year-old daughter of the white, liberal, upper class Draytons, want to get married. Upon meeting their son-in-law-to-be Matt and Christina Drayton (Spencer Tracy, Katharine Hepburn) are challenged to live up to their ideals of tolerance and integration on which they raised their daughter. Translating the antagonism of white and black in Sidney Poitier's era to light-black and black in Not Sidney's fictional world, the *Guess* episode problematizes the latter's internal struggle to cope with his being marginalized as the dark-black Other by his class-conscious, light-black opponents. The

episode culminates with an instance of black in-group racism in the social sphere of what E. Franklin Frazier termed the “black bourgeoisie.”

Symbolic violence, Bourdieu contends, is “every power which manages to impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force” (Bourdieu and Passeron 4). With an entire academic career of sociological scholarship and critical thinking devoted to the attempt of understanding why “the established order, with its relations of domination, its rights and prerogatives, privileges and injustices, ultimately perpetuates itself so easily” (*Masculine Domination* 1), symbolic violence, as the power which epitomizes the social mechanisms of this perpetuation, has often been pointed out as Bourdieu’s key concept. It is valuable for a critical engagement with the social processes inherent in racial oppression and stereotyping, for it extends W. E. B. Du Bois’s epoch-making notions of the “color-line” and the “double-consciousness.” Drawing on Bourdieu’s theory we can conceive of the symbolic divide between black and white (and its ideological and individual, psycho-sociological institutionalization) as fundamentally formative for the establishment of the social order of U.S. society, precisely because it allows us to move beyond several problematic dichotomies. These comprise consciousness and unconscious, consent and coercion, but also those of the individual and the institutional, the dominated (i.e., those who are allegedly exclusively affected by racial oppression) and the dominant (i.e., those who effect that oppression). Reconsidering all of these as interrelating rather than self-contained spheres of human sociality we are able, with Bourdieu, to arrive at the fundamental insight of the body as the primordial site of social action and interaction:

The effect of symbolic domination (sexual, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, etc.) is exerted not in the pure logic of knowing consciousness but in the obscurity of the dispositions of habitus, in which are embedded the schemes of perception and appreciation which, below the level of the decisions of the conscious mind and the controls of the will, are the basis of a relationship of practical knowledge and recognition that is profoundly obscure to itself. (*Pascalian Meditations* 170-71)

Not Sidney reacts to the unspoken discrimination by his girlfriend’s parents, who dismiss him as potential son-in-law because of the dark *shade* of his skin color, and to the spatial structure of their decadent mansion in a

bodily-rooted way: He is urged to constantly, quasi-consciously reflect on the material composition of the house's interior space, unconsciously associating it with the particular sphere of the social order in which, as he recognizes, he illegitimately roams.

The ways in which Not Sidney recognizes his being out of place, of not belonging in the social sphere of the Larkins' home in Washington, D.C. attests to his habitus, his inculcated schemes of perception and recognition of the social order. His reaction resonates with what Du Bois once stated when reflecting on the wider historical reverberations of racial oppression in the U.S.: "we were not facing simply the rational, conscious determination of white folk to oppress us; we were facing age-long complexes sunk now largely to unconscious habit and irrational urge" (296). In the *Guess* episode, which marks the peak of the narrative's episodic progression from overt, physically transacted forms to ambiguous and subliminal manifestations of racial violence,¹⁰ Not Sidney struggles severely to maintain his ironic indifference. Becoming "sadly, irritatingly, horrifyingly observant of skin color and especially my own" (138) he proves to have cultivated a habitus of an oppressed of the oppressed. The episode thus forms a climactic micro-section in the novel's episodic experiment, subsuming two variants of symbolic violence. The first consists in Not Sidney's reaction to his socio-spatial environment, the second in his interaction with the patriarch of the family, Ward Larkin.

Ironically, very much like John Wade Prentice, Not Sidney meets his girlfriend's parents to find himself at first challenged and then acknowledged as the perfect son-in-law-to-be. He has been invited by his girlfriend Maggie to meet her parents and bringing their relationship to the next level

10 The episodic progression broadly follows the chronology of the movies' production – beginning with *The Defiant Ones* (1957), the movie that consolidated Poitier's image as the benign black male – and culminates in returning to Poitier's Oscar decorated *Lilies of the Field* (1963) at the end of the novel. This sequentialization correlates with the overall progression of Not Sidney's encounters from overt, physically transacted racial violence to subliminal, ambiguous forms of oppression. This progression, significantly, applies to the *main* narrative of Not Sidney's autobiographical account, i.e., his active involvement in his social environment. His dreams, as meta-reflective elements, are excluded from it.

on the pretext of celebrating Thanksgiving together. Although having been informed that Maggie's "family is slightly class-conscious [...] Hell they're snobs" (119), Not Sidney accepts the invitation because of what Bourdieu has termed *illusio*, the belief in the purposefulness of one's engagement in the everyday social competition of societal life. Not Sidney believes in living what he deems the American way of life, in the validity of the multicultural promise of emancipation qua cultural contribution,¹¹ hoping to find his own place in society.¹² He believes in the reasonableness of having a proper education, of getting the real "college experience" by joining a fraternity and living in student dorms rather than affording a much more luxurious abode (94).¹³ Above all, he wants to celebrate Thanksgiving and participate in *the* American ritual of celebratory communion – despite his mother's disapproval of this event as "one big glorious lie to put a good face on continental theft" (153), as Not Sidney imagines her argue in retrospect. However, Maggie has really brought Not Sidney to antagonize her overbearing parents Ruby and Ward in her attempt at post-adolescent rebellion. She plans to use the darkly complected Not Sidney as a "wedge" (141) between herself and her lightly complected, race-obsessed parents. As if in an absurd adaptation of a passing melodrama in the vein of Charles Chesnutt, the Larkins predicate their pride of belonging to an elite racial caste of almost white but still distinctly (light-)black conservative progressivists by way of a twisted notion of social Darwinism. This notion manifests in Ward's passion for the *idea* of hunting as "a demonstration of man's primacy in the order of nature" (133) and his fable for stuffed animal heads. The Larkins'

11 This notion, obviously, is complicated by his implicit cooptation by the entertainment industry as the owner of the TV channel NET and the protégé of the media mogul Ted Turner.

12 Part of the novel's successful negotiation of imaginative absurdity and social credibility rests on the frequent commenting of the narrating I on the narrated I's naiveté, which is inherent in Not Sidney's status as autodiegetic narrator.

13 Not Sidney has an ambivalent perspective on his own extraordinary socio-economic status and its influence on his enterprise. He buys a used Toyota for his journey but spends 325,000 Dollars to buy his way into college. In the end, he resolves to help a group of Pentecostal sisters to build their new church as a "newfound and fairly ironic way to spend my ridiculously easy-to-come-by money" (185).

overall repudiation of pro-black social support as allegedly undermining their self-achieved exceptionality is revealed when he asserts, "I'm nothing but an American. I'm no needy minority," thus expressing his pride of having worked his way up from "dirt poor Alabama to Yale" (137) to being one of D.C.'s top lawyers. Maggie's mother heads a conservative think tank with the intention of getting rid of "the welfare system because it keeps black people down," stopping "gay rights because it endangers the family structure and keeps black people down," and abolishing "affirmative action because it teaches special preference and that keeps black people down" (128), as Maggie explains to Not Sidney. Thus, the Larkins display a starkly caricatured variation of what Frazier identified as the black bourgeoisie's pathological inculcation of white oppression: "the repressed hostilities of middle-class Negroes to whites are [...] directed [...] inward toward themselves. This results in self-hatred, which may appear from their behavior to be directed towards the Negro masses but which in reality is directed against themselves." (186) According to Frazier's controversial account, the black bourgeoisie "suffered spiritually not only because they were affected by ideas concerning the Negro's inferiority, but perhaps even more because they had adopted the white man's values and patterns of behavior [...] thus developing] an intense inferiority complex" (124).

It is the Larkins' outward display of their high socio-economic status, for Frazier a "symptom" of the black bourgeoisie's whiteness-related inferiority complex, to which Not Sidney initially responds with an uneasy fascination with the ornate décor of the rooms and the splendor of colors at display in them, the color red in particular. He stresses the "heavy red drapes" (126) and the resultant darkness in the anteroom, as well as his difficulty "to take a step without staring down at" the carpet and "the expanse of red [that] was, if not disorienting, unsettling" (127). The omnipresence of the color red – or as Not Sidney calls it, "crimson" (127) – can be read as a proleptic leitmotif, hinting at the Larkins' obsession with skin color, i.e., the (alleged) exceptionality inherent in their light-blackness. In fact, they appear to conceive of themselves as members of a genetically privileged light-black "bloodline," as one of the dinner guest's, the Reverend Golightly, reveals in his mealtime prayer: "Thank you for our fine homes and our nice clothes and for money. Thank you for our lineage, our good blood, and our distance from the thickening center [of non-light-black blacks]" (159). Not Sidney deals, unconsciously, with the implicit

contrastive conflict between his own dark-black skin color and the predominantly dark colors of his surroundings, its absorption in the dark, dimly lit rooms, as a problem of orientation. The dark red, crimson-colored carpet makes him feel as if it was pulling the rug out from under his feet, compelling him to constantly “watch his step.” His social debasement thus translates into an association of spatio-symbolic dislocation. In his guest room – which is stuffed with stuffed animals that represent Maggie’s mother’s making up for the lack of the most important unaffordable luxury of her poor childhood; this ironically correlates with Ward’s stuffed “real” animals¹⁴ – Not Sidney sits “on the bed and [feels] suddenly like [he] ought not” (128). Troubled by the kitschy regalia he notices small bells, which make him recall the forced fellatio incident with his white history teacher Ms. Hancock, who was especially fond of this decoration item. He quickly gets up from the shiny golden bedspread, leaving it “smooth as if it had never been touched” (128). He associates the former, unsettlingly weird pseudo-sex scene with his present situation in the kitsch-crammed, golden bed, a sort of symbolic site of his (bodily) liaison with Maggie, of which her parents, as he grows more and more aware, strongly disapprove. Whereas he had felt as if being absorbed in the crimson-colored darkness of the downstairs, the golden spread seems to highlight his dark skin color and thus (proleptically) reflect (his recognition of his) black masculinity as compromising the racial purity of the Larkins.

“[I]t is through this material inclusion—often unnoticed or repressed,” Bourdieu argues, “and what follows from it, the incorporation of social structures in the form of dispositional structures” that a person acquires “a practical knowledge and control of the encompassing space” (*Pascalian Meditations* 30). In the case of Not Sidney, this incorporation of social structures, which shapes his peculiar feeling of displacement, seems to have been stalled in the entrepreneurship-centered domain of the Turner home, where his pecuniary means granted his however exceptional membership of this micro-community. Not Sidney’s entry into the upper-class society of the Larkins marks his first encounter with a race-centered socio-economic

14 These absurdly kitschy, because literal tokens of their social self-idealization ironically echo the Draytons’ extensive display of modern works of art in *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* as an alleged sign of their cultural sophistication and open-mindedness.

elitism that is not solely based on money but on ancestry and heritage, both of which he lacks. This further fosters his unconscious recognition of (skin) color as *the* exclusive constituent of the Larkins' light-black racial identity – which he associates with the spatio-symbolic structuration of their private domain – or in fact, with racial identity as such. Significantly, Not Sidney's only quasi-conscious strategy of making sense of his encounter with the Larkins is to imagine Ward and Ruby as Ward and June Cleaver of the mid-century TV sitcom *Leave it to Beaver* (137). The fact that he refers to this comedic-didactic show about a *white* American suburban family further hints at Not Sidney's (un-)conscious recognition of the Larkins' naturally legitimate, whiteness-centered dominance.

Upon meeting him in person Maggie's parents are disappointed by the young black man accompanying their daughter and, unsurprisingly, are stupefied by his name, which, as Ward later suspects, is “some kind of ghetto nonsense, no doubt” (131). Ruby, who is first to meet Not Sidney, takes an uneasy interest in his skin color and tells her husband that it is “just so dark” (131). Just like Bigger Thomas, Richard Wright's epochal black outcast, Not Sidney accidentally overhears their conversation, which corroborates his recognition of displacement: “It hadn't occurred to me, but now it did that the Larkins were all very light in complexion. It hadn't dawned on me that I should have noticed or cared.” (131) Thus already fully aware that Maggie's parents disapprove of him because of his dark complexion, Not Sidney then meets the patriarch of the family, Ward Larkin, and imagines to hear him concluding his casual welcome small talk with “boy,” *the* verbal epitome of black emasculation. That Not Sidney hears this derogatory appellation without it actually having been uttered hints at his habitus, that “practical sense for what is to be done in a given situation—what is called in sport a ‘feel’ for the game, that is, the art of *anticipating* the future of the game, which is inscribed in the present state of play” (Bourdieu, *Practical Reason* 25). Not Sidney, despite his seemingly race-neutral socialization in the Turner domain, *anticipates* his own ostracization when imagining hearing racial slurs. “Boy” not only echoes his experiences in the South, where white, ragingly racist policemen and prison guards frequently made use of this appellation while brutalizing him. It seems to have been implemented in his habitus during his childhood in a poor neighborhood of Los Angeles, about which the reader knows next to nothing. This lacuna in his protagonist's social profile further ties in with Everett's provoking the reader to

ponder the implications of Not Sidney's social background in his stereotype-activating and -complicating experiment.

Increasingly taking offense with the Larkins' racist elitism, Not Sidney, significantly, confides *not* in Maggie but in Violet, the family's black servant.¹⁵ Having been raised by Ted Turner's staff, Not Sidney considers Violet an ally in the hierarchical color confrontation since they both "are pretty much the same color" (155). Violet rejects his proposition, stating that she is "milk chocolate and [he's] dark cocoa, dark as Satan" (155) and stressing: "Listen, boy, Mister and Missus have worked too hard [... to] have a black boy like you come around Miss Maggie" (154). Whereas on the conscious level Not Sidney is able to pinpoint Violet's absurd, Stockholm syndrome-like mindset ("This is not the antebellum south and you're not a house slave" 155), his confiding in her in the first place illustrates his unconscious acknowledgement of skin color as a defining factor in the racial order of the Larkin's private domain. Evidently, the logic that undergirds what Not Sidney describes as the "bizarre game" of pigmentation¹⁶ (156) is that whiteness is the racial default, whose social dominance manifests in its very power to obscure its dominance and thus is naturalized as *the* seemingly self-evident standard, in relation to which all other races are marked. Not Sidney is essentialized as the counterpart to the Larkins' class-conscious elitism that hinges on their paradoxical pride in their light-blackness and their allegedly superior status as almost-white, i.e., almost sufficiently American.

When the Larkins find out about their guest's enormous wealth and his status as a media mogul, Ward and Ruby reconsider their antipathy toward Not Sidney and try to beguile him, hoping to succeed in integrating him into their social ranks as Maggie's future husband. However, Not Sidney, who has once again overheard them, undermines their plotting. He debunks the pillar of their racial pride – their anti-affirmative action stance – by turning the tables on them at the final climactic Thanksgiving dinner scene:

15 Not Sidney is inclined to call her a "servant," whereas he describes her as the family's "housekeeper" in Maggie's company because he feels the former description to be "more correct but less appropriate" (127).

16 That most of the characters bear color-related names further attests to the productive interplay of the starkly (stereo-)typified conflict-scenario and the social complexity of Not Sidney's struggle.

“You people almost had me hating you because of your skin, but I’ve caught myself. [...] I don’t hate you because you’re light.” (162).

“A MAN THAT SETS THE STANDARD”: SIDNEY POITIER REVIS(IT)ED

Everett’s satirical impetus hinges on what Terry Rey phrases thus: “only where there is distinction can there be domination” (55). The Thanksgiving Dinner episode is but one example of how *Not Sidney* investigates institutionalized structures of meaning along the lines of race, gender, and class to challenge those consensual conceptions that are accepted by the dominant and the dominated alike. The intermedial adaptation of *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner?* is remarkable for its negotiation of black in-group racism as an ambiguous, double-bound form of social debasement, during which Not Sidney’s own racial formation is reflected in his habitus of an oppressed of the oppressed. That his birthday coincides with the premiere of the movie in 1967¹⁷ further attests to the import of this episode for Everett’s re-contextualization of Sidney Poitier for his particular version of a dehabitu-alized reading of race.

Along with his other two movies of 1967, *In the Heat of the Night* (dir. Norman Jewison) and *To Sir, with Love* (dir. James Clavell), *Guess* made Poitier finally and fundamentally famous, establishing him as the benign black male in the U.S. cultural imaginary. Not Sidney’s fictional life thus begins in the exact year when Sidney Poitier, the star-like figure of black masculinity, is born, as it were. Everett’s novel ties in with what the movie never shows: the interracial confrontation of the family dinner. It retraces the reverberations of the happy ending’s conciliatory silence by forming a provocative epilogue to the film’s eponymous ellipsis.¹⁸ This ellipsis allows

17 Recapitulating the peculiar circumstances of his own conception, i.e., his mother’s “hysterical pregnancy” lasting 24 months and the “urban legend” around it, Everett’s protagonist states that he “was two [years old] in 1970” (4). Had he been born after nine months his birthday would have been in 1967.

18 The movie concludes shortly after Matt’s monologue, fading out the subsequent conversations of the guests at the dinner table while playing the soundtrack song “The Glory of Love” (by Billy Hill, sung by Jacqueline Fontaine).

for an unchallenged notion of social progress that manifests in Matt Drayton's idealization of white-sanctioned integration and white-monitored political debate as answers to racism's threat to the civic cohesion and moral integrity of a de-segregated U.S. society still deeply divided by race.

As Keith M. Harris concludes in his study *Boys, Boyz, Bois*, "Poitier's masculinity [...] hinges upon the tropological transformations of racialized masculinity (the black man) into a figure of honor, dignity, and sacrifice: Black masculinity and the battle for recognition and respect is a trial, a redemptive struggle to find and overcome the shortcomings of whiteness" (68). Poitier's characters thus achieved an ethical authority that surpassed the dominant "Tom-dom" (62) in early American cinema by often being paired with white partners. In *Guess*, this partner is Matt, who, as the white, liberal newspaper editor and patriarch of the upper-class Draytons of San Francisco, stands in as proxy for the nation's collective catharsis in a phase of profound social crisis. His sanctioning of the young white-black couple Joanna and John – who, as he idealistically argues, "happen to fall in love and happen to have a pigmentation problem" – marks the climactic resolution of his internal ethical conflict around which the plot coheres. In this regard, John Wade Prentice Jr.'s very name seems to symbolize the movie's idealization of a sociocultural pilot project, a white-monitored interracial test-run exemplified by John and Joanna's marriage. Thus, John Wade Prentice is the "apprentice," as it were, the to-be-examined beneficiary of a socially emancipated, ethically upright white-centered U.S. society.

The predication of racial integration on interracial love epitomized by Matt Drayton's cathartic monologue is, obviously, problematic, as it is conceptualized at the expense of several simplifications.¹⁹ The most significant one is John's status as an acclaimed doctor, which, despite his foregrounded cultivation, is what actually makes him a suitable candidate for the upper-class Draytons.²⁰ The "threat" of Poitier's black male sexuality, Harris

19 These simplifications resulted in the film taking "a well deserved critical beating," as Daniel J. Leab points out (230). Following the peak of his career in 1967 Sidney Poitier's image as race negotiator became increasingly unpopular with both white and black audiences, as Leab furthermore stresses.

20 Speaking with Bourdieu, John owns a lot of cultural capital (consolidated in his doctoral degree from Harvard, for one) that is derived from his participation in the competition over professional legitimacy in the prestigious profession of

stresses, “is contained in class, effeminacy, and morality in the image of Poitier as sexual passivity” (69). The racial redemption of whiteness is thus exclusively allocated to the alleged supra-bodily realm of the intellectual, for which class (and the Draytons’ position in the upper section of it) serves as metaphor. What is more, the anticipated societal opposition to John and Joanna’s interracial union is only tangentially associated with several white characters, namely one friend of Christina’s. Rather, this antagonism is ascribed to the family’s black servant Tillie and John’s black father, a retired mailman, and his petty bourgeois *amor fati*: He has self-declaredly bent over backwards to allow for his son to have a better life. Joanna’s transgression of the social taboo of white-black miscegenation, in turn, is camouflaged by her feminine-codified naiveté and good-heartedness. Also, why should so distinguished and attractive a black man as John Wade Prentice Jr. actually come up with the idea of marrying such a strikingly shallow white damsel such as Joanna, after all? Whereas the movie suggests that love, or mutual recognition, is able to transcend the borders of race, said episode in Everett’s novel, as I sought to show above, renegotiates all of these three issues: socio-economic mobility (rooted in Wade’s status as high-achieving doctor), black in-group racism (rooted in Wade’s father’s *amor fati*), and colorblind or “post-racial” love (rooted in Joanna’s naiveté). Thus, *Not Sidney*’s *Guess* episode ironically literalizes this very notion of symbolic transcendence not only by transposing the interracial conflict into an intraracial conflict, thus bridging the symbolic intraracial border. It also relocates the overtly articulated and (tele-)visually observable confrontation into the realm of the symbolic, i.e., into the subtextual script of *Not Sidney*’s encounter with the Larkins.

That the satiric novel *Erasure* appears in *Not Sidney* – when the character Ted Turner mentions to the fictionalized Percival Everett that he liked the novel in the novel (“My Pafology / Fuck”) better than *Erasure* itself (226) – makes for a good laugh, given that the continuation of conventional debates on race and black identity by critics made for a peculiar receptive irony of this satire that actually satirizes (an unsuccessful) satire (on race). Yet, it also stresses how deep Everett’s engagement with the possibilities of aesthetic representation runs. *Not Sidney*, as I tried to illustrate above, aims

medical science. This capital, because of the medical field’s interrelation with the supra-field of power, is especially easily transferrable into economic capital.

first and foremost at challenging the critical preconditions of reflecting sociocultural realities (in literature). His negotiation of black in-group racism complicates the notion that today, in the putative ‘post-racial’ moment, racism manifests in significantly different, i.e., increasingly ambiguous (intra-racial) and subliminal (non-physical) ways, than it did in the 1960s. Yet, it also problematizes the notion of the very opposite being true. Everett’s paraliptic preoccupation with Sidney Poitier, probably *the* most (mis-) recognized cross-cultural figure of race relations in the post-war U.S., questions the safe spots on *both* sides of the symbolic divide in U.S. society.

What makes (Not) Sidney Poitier such a productive focal point for an inquiry into race and its present-day realities? Given the novel’s date of publication and its thematic core of social mobility, it is hard not to think of Barack Obama, whose political appeal, one could argue, stems from his sharing several characteristics with Poitier, such as his striking rhetorical talent and (televisual) bodily presence. The re-contextualization of Sidney Poitier qua Not Sidney Poitier is narrativized as a fictional experiment: What if Sidney Poitier still is *the* prevalent safe spot of black subjectivity? And, taking this question at face value, what does it mean to be a black male and *not* Sidney Poitier, after all? It means that in a culture which commercially exploits individual artists and socially pathologizes entire urban communities categorizing black subjectivity along the lines of “Not-/Sidney-Poitier-ness” is as hilariously absurd as it is troublingly tautological.

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Black Women's Business

Female Entrepreneurship and Economic Agency in

Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child*

STEFANIE MUELLER

Toni Morrison's latest novel, *God Help the Child* (2015), features her professionally most successful protagonist to date: Lula Ann Bridewell, known as Bride, an executive who manages her own line of products at a Los Angeles based cosmetics company. In prior novels, female characters predominantly participated in informal economies. In *Home* (2012), for example, which is set in the 1950s, the female protagonist works as an untrained nurse in a private practice. In *Love* (2003), the women of the male owner's family effectively run the hotel business that he neglects in favor of devoting himself to his mistress and his grief. In *Paradise* (1997), none of the women who live at the convent had a job prior to their arrival, with some of them housewives, others simply scraping by. As a result of these informal economic structures, the women's source of income and thus their (financial) security and autonomy is often precarious or at least dependent on men.

To some degree, this prevalence of female characters without a professional career or a stable source of income independent of men is a consequence of the historical setting of most of Morrison's novels. Several take place, in part or even fully, during the time of slavery – such as *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Beloved* (1987) and *A Mercy* (2008) – when the opportunities for exercising economic agency were limited at best (for both sexes). Even more importantly, her novels present and explore precisely the kind of work black women have done that historically has received little

recognition, such as child rearing, keeping the family together, organizing the community.¹ Yet even in the stories that are set in the 20th century and that portray women in professional positions or as financially secure – such as *Love, Home* and parts of *Sula* (1973) and *Song of Solomon* – Morrison is much more interested in the corrupting influence of wealth as such, whether inherited, won, or enjoyed through relationships with men. This is also the case in *Tar Baby* (1981) whose protagonist is a successful fashion model and, as reviewers have noted, a potential predecessor of Bride.² In light of these tendencies and themes in Morrison's novels, Bride's success in *God Help the Child* warrants a closer look, in particular when considering that it is premised on the beauty industry and on the fact that Bride is strategically "capitaliz[ing] on her dark skin" (*Child* 143).

While she is portrayed as having a knack for inventing and marketing cosmetic products, such as eye shadows, lipsticks, etc., Bride's success at Sylvia Inc. is crucially based on her self-marketing, without which her cosmetics line would not have received any attention and which is focused on her very dark skin which she highlights by wearing only white clothes. This form of self-marketing connects her success to her childhood trauma, her mother Sweetness's rejection. Herself light-skinned, Sweetness was incapable of accepting the fact of her daughter's skin and raised her in a cold and punitive environment, in which her affection became a coveted prize for Bride. The irony of her material success and recognition being based on the very color of skin that her mother regarded as an impediment to success and even as a liability is explicit in the narrative and a special source of satisfaction for Bride: "I sold my elegant blackness to all those childhood ghosts and now they pay me for it" (57). Yet, does Bride's ability to turn herself into a commodity and sell herself for a price of her own asking mean that she possesses economic agency? Does Bride offer a model of black female entrepreneurship and success?

To investigate these questions, this article draws on Morrison's previous novels as well as on recent scholarship about the connection between the rise of professional black beauty salons and the emergence of female

1 For a study of the representation of African American women's work in which "work" explicitly refers to this aspect see, for example, Courtney Thorsson's *Women's Work* (2013), which also discusses Morrison's *Paradise*.

2 See, for example, Hermione Hoby's review in *The Guardian*.

black leadership in business and politics in the early 20th century. The concept of economic agency employed here, however, is not based on the kind of rational actor model that modern economics tends to apply when inquiring into economic behavior, but on a recognition of the historical genesis of individual as well as collective agency. Specifically, this article borrows the idea of agency as emerging from the interrelationship between institutions and habitus, between history objectified and history embodied, as proposed by Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu's understanding of agency stresses practical knowledge, embodiment, and history in a way that accounts for the endlessly creative acts and strategies by which agents navigate social fields – at the same time that it takes serious the limited horizon of possibilities available to any agent at any moment in his or her trajectory.

MADAM WALKER AND THE PROFESSIONALIZATION OF BEAUTY

For early 20th-century African American leaders like W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington, the rise and success of black businessmen was a key element of the advancement of black people and the security of their Civil Rights. Accordingly, in 1900, Washington established the National Negro Business League (NNBL), while Du Bois had helped to organize a conference on the theme of black business the previous year. As Tiffany M. Gill notes in her recent study of the relationship between Civil Rights activism and female entrepreneurship in the beauty industry, the initial debates over black business posited “entrepreneurship primarily as a masculine ideal” and discussed women’s potential to contribute only in terms of their “roles [...] as consumers and nurturers of the next generation of young male entrepreneurs” (12).³ Simultaneously, however, with the support of

3 See pp. 7 ff. in Gill’s *Beauty Shop Politics* (2010) for an overview of black female business activities in colonial and antebellum times, as well as for a detailed presentation of gendered business roles in the African American community at the turn of the century. Also see the chapter “Antebellum Free Black Women Enterprises” in Juliet Walker’s *The History of Black Business in America* (1998).

the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs (NACWC),⁴ black women's business clubs began to spread throughout the country. Their aim was to improve black women's financial security while also promoting middle-class ideals of feminine respectability and domestic responsibility. As Gill puts it, this two-pronged approach left the business clubs "[c]aught between a desire to prove black women's ability to succeed in the business world and the desire to assert their femininity, something they had been denied throughout their history" (17).

It was through the example and influence of businesswomen like Madam C. J. Walker and Annie Malone that female entrepreneurship gained respectability in the black community and was recognized as a form of social and political activism during the first two decades of the 20th century. Yet the beauty industry had been and remained at the center of controversies over the dominant beauty ideals for black women, even as Walker and Malone took over. Before they introduced their products and business models, the beauty industry had been dominated by white businessmen whose companies advertised skin bleaching creams and hair straightener to ameliorate what was presented as inferior physical attributes in black women.⁵ Annie Malone pioneered a hair product that was ostensibly *not* designed to straighten hair but to improve its condition by treating scalp diseases, though it did "temporarily alter black women's hair by stretching and adding shine to it" (Gill 20). Moreover, Malone established a system in which her agents would carry her products into black women's homes as they went from door to door and offered free scalp treatments. One of her saleswomen opened her own business in 1906 and soon rose to even greater prominence than Malone under the name of Madam C. J. Walker. As Tiffany Gill explains, Malone and Walker "created what they called 'hair systems,' which included hair-product manufacturing, distribution, and sales throughout the United States and the African diaspora as well as salons and eventually beauty colleges and training programs" (22).

4 The NACWC was established in 1896 as the National Association of Colored Women (NACW).

5 Gill points out that it was Anthony Overton, a black businessman, who first moved toward a different beauty ideal for black women when he established the Overton Hygienic Company in 1898, which sold "High Brown Face Powder" and employed only Blacks (19).

But it was only when Madam Walker decided to attend the NNBL annual convention in 1912 and boldly claimed a place at the podium that the African American male leadership took note of the women's potential for the political struggle. In 1915, as Gill recounts, "the NNBL chose the 'Beauty Parlor Business' as the theme of the sixteenth annual convention" (24).

The rise of the black beauty industry was inextricably connected to the emergence of modern black womanhood in the urban centers of the North. On the one hand, it provided women avenues to entrepreneurship and thus to financial stability, on the other, it gave them access to a modern urban lifestyle. Fueled by the Great Migration, this transformation turned black women into consumers and entrepreneurs. An important aspect of this transformation was that Walker and Malone initiated and supported a process of professionalization of the beauty trade. They helped to bring the work of beauticians closer to the status of nurses and teachers, which had been the only other professions open to black women before. Yet there was an important difference: The training and education was both more affordable and less time-intensive than teaching and nursing, and therefore available to a broader stratum of women. This professionalization of the beauty industry was reflected in the fact that the women who had trained at one of Madam Walker's beauty colleges were not called hairdressers, but "beauty culturists" (Gill 49),⁶ and they were not only trained to provide a service to their customers but also taught to assume leadership: "Beauty college curricula instilled in their students the strategic importance of using their position to influence their communities" (47).

Gill's study *Beauty Shop Politics* shows that during the following decades beauty parlors assumed a significant role in the Civil Rights struggle, as they "provid[ed] one of the most important opportunities for black women to assert leadership in their communities and in the larger political arena" (2). By the beginning of the 1960s, beauty salons offered black

6 In *Masculine Domination*, Bourdieu explains that this step in the professionalization of a trade also signifies upon a gendered symbolic order: "[T]he same task may be noble and difficult, when performed by men, or insignificant and imperceptible, easy and futile, when performed by women. As is seen in the difference between the chef and the cook, the couturier and the seamstress, a reputedly female task only has to be taken over by a man and performed outside the private sphere in order for it to be thereby ennobled and transfigured" (60).

women not only financial security, but a “unique institutional space they controlled” and “access [...] to black women within their communities,” which allowed them to take an active role in the Civil Rights struggle and contribute to the movement’s political infrastructure (99). Of course, by that time, Gill notes, “the practice of straightening or pressing one’s hair [...] had become so deeply entrenched in black women’s lives that there was little discussion over its meaning” (105). This would change by the end of the decade, with the advent of the Afro and the Black is Beautiful movement.

MORRISON AND THE BUSINESS OF BEAUTY

In one of the most famous photographs of Toni Morrison, she walks side by side with Angela Davis. It is the spring of 1974 and both women, evidently deep in conversation, sport impressive Afros. It is hard to overestimate the political significance of this hairdo during the 1970s,⁷ just as it is hard to overestimate the significance of the hair-motif in Morrison’s work.⁸ Physical beauty, in general, is a central topic in her novels, starting with her first, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), whose protagonist, a young girl named Pecola, wishes for the blue eyes that mainstream culture celebrates as the standard ideal of beauty because she believes that it will make her more lovable. As countless scholars have since demonstrated,⁹ Morrison’s novels present a powerful indictment of a black beauty ideal defined by white standards, on the objectification of the female body and the reduction of black women to passive consumers. By contrast, novels like *Song of Solomon* and *Tar Baby* suggest an alternative definition of black beauty based on a rejection of

7 For research on this topic, see, for example, Ayanna Byrd and Lori Tharps, *Hair Story* (2001); Maxine Leeds Craig, *Ain’t I a Beauty Queen* (2002); Susannah Walker, “Black Is Profitable” (2007).

8 In particular in *Song of Solomon* (1973), in which Hagar becomes convinced that her lover, Milkman, has left her for a woman with straight copper-colored hair. When Milkman finally returns and finds that Hagar has killed herself, her mother hands him a box of her hair as a reminder of his responsibility for her death. See, e.g., Ashe.

9 See, for example, Tait; Kuenz; Miner.

both the position of consumer and the position of the object to be (visually) consumed. As Malin LaVon Walther has argued, in Morrison's novels women's beauty is based on their usefulness (as opposed to idleness), on the fundamental reality of their bodies as grounded in a racial experience, and on their refusal to operate within a "specular system," in which the female body is a body represented and hence an object of consumption (775).

Morrison's critique of an ideal of beauty defined by white standards of femininity also underwrites her representation of the era in which the beauty parlors of Madam Walker and Annie Malone had their heyday. *Jazz* tells the story of a couple that once moved to New York City from the South, Joe and Violet, and of the girl, Dorcas, with whom Joe falls in love and whom he shoots after their breakup. Famous for its narrative voice, the novel recreates the cityscape of Harlem in the 1920s and underscores both the opportunities and the many dangers in store for its black citizens. Significantly, both Joe and Violet earn money by selling beauty: Joe is an agent for beauty products, while Violet works as a hairdresser in people's homes. Her informal work is contrasted with the "legally licensed beauticians" (5) who can charge more than her and who work at salons while "Violet carries her tools and her trade [...] into the overheated apartments of women who wake in the afternoon, pour gin in their tea and don't care what she has done" (13). After Joe has killed his lover and after Violet has attempted to cut up the corpse's face during the funeral wake, the money from Violet's hairdressing keeps the couple afloat.

Black women in *Jazz* participate in formal and informal economies. They earn money by cleaning offices (40-41) or by watching children "for mothers who worked out of the house" (55), and some, like the Dumfrey sisters, have "nice paper-handling jobs: one took tickets at the Lafayette; the other worked in the counting house" (19). But what is significant about the portrait of women's work in the novel is the pleasure that women of Violet's generation take in a job well done. In a scene in the apartment of Alice Manfred, a seamstress and Dorcas's aunt, "a woman of fifty and independent means" (54), the fact that women like Alice and Violet are never idle is addressed:

Alice ironed and Violet watched. [...]

The iron hissed at the damp fabric. Violet leaned her cheek on her palm. "You iron like my grandmother. Yoke last."

“That’s the test of a first-class ironing.”

“Some do it yoke first.”

“And have to do it over. I hate a lazy ironing.”

“Where you learn to sew like that?”

“They kept us children busy. Idle hands, you know.”

“We picked cotton, chopped wood, plowed. I never knew what it was to fold my hands. This here is as close as I ever been to watching my hands do nothing.” (112)

The narrative also emphasizes the social aspect of Violet’s hairdressing which takes place in the private space of homes, whether her own or her customers’: “Violet is sudsing the thin gray hair, murmuring ‘Ha mercy’ at appropriate breaks in the old lady’s stream of confidences” (16). Their work is presented as more than the source of an income independent of their husbands or the business of another.

Violet’s and Alice’s work is characterized as useful in a social and practical sense: It contributes to the welfare of their families and their communities and as such is a source of agency for the women. The difference to the women of Dorcas’s generation becomes apparent in the different uses of time because a visit to the beauty parlor requires leisure time.

The beauticians have it beat when it comes to that: you get to lie back instead of lean forward; you don’t have to press a towel in your eyes to keep the soapy water out because at a proper beauty parlor it drains down the back of your head into the sink. So, sometimes, even if the legal beautician is not as adept as Violet, a regular customer will sneak to a shop just for the pleasure of a comfy shampoo. (18)

To enjoy the pleasures available at a beauty parlor,¹⁰ women need to pay with money and time. Such practice requires a habitus different from Alice and Violet’s because their pleasure derives precisely not from being idle.

10 This pleasure is qualitatively different from the intimacy of hair washing, as described before, with Violet. The intimacy created by washing somebody’s hair and body is a central element in *Love*, for example during a scene in which Junior helps Heed to wash and dye her hair. Gill repeatedly underscores the importance of this intimacy in the beauty salons, as well as what she calls a politics of dignity (121).

By contrast, Joe's young lover, Dorcas, is a regular customer at a beauty parlor.

In *Jazz*, the problem with female entrepreneurship as a source of economic agency is that its emergence goes hand in hand with the development of a black (female) consumer identity. Idleness, shallowness, and a possessive way of thinking are manifestations of this identity that also defines Dorcas's choice of a new lover: "Other women want him—badly—and he has been selective. What they want and the prize it is his to give is his savvy self" (188). This "savvy self" is a performance and a commodity that ultimately rests on a split between real and ideal, a split that obstructs an experience of the self as authentic and whole. This split becomes apparent to Dorcas's friend, Felice, as she recalls a game that she used to play with Dorcas:

Dorcas and I used to make up love scenes and describe them to each other. [...] Something about it bothered me, though. Not the loving stuff, but the picture I had of myself when I did it. Nothing like me. I saw myself as somebody I'd seen in a picture show or a magazine. Then it would work. If I pictured myself the way I am it seemed wrong. (208-9)

Echoing Violet, Felice describes this sense as "having another you inside that isn't anything like you" (209). But the beauty industry as criticized in Morrison's novels, together with white mainstream culture (movies and magazines), depends for profits on customers that specifically desire such an ideal self, on dispositions that are attuned to the structures of consumer capitalism.

PROFESSIONAL WOMEN AND THE COMMODIFICATION OF THE SELF

To some extent, Bride in *God Help the Child* embodies this logic of the consumer identity taken to its extreme. In the chapters in which she narrates her story the commodification of her self is presented as an achievement in power and control: "I sold my elegant blackness to all those childhood ghosts and now they pay me for it" (57). The backdrop of her statement is the novel's serious pun on the market for this commodity, as when her

personality coach tells her that “[b]lack sells. It’s the hottest commodity in the civilized world” (36). But the question that Bride’s success raises is whether the fact that she is doing the selling herself – rather than being sold as African slaves were for centuries in the so-called civilized world – is enough to prove that she is now in a position of autonomy and power as well as of self-identity; or whether her economic agency is ultimately still directed by the very “childhood ghosts” she had set out to defeat.

As did previous novels, *God Help the Child* suggests that ownership of the self is a prerequisite for agency. Yet this ownership is not a Lockean form of ownership, conceived to explain and legitimate a commercial exchange, such as of one’s labor for money. Whereas Florence in *A Mercy* must learn that giving up oneself entirely to those we love is a form of enslavement that deprives her of her agency and selfhood, Bride’s lesson in self-enslavement is part of a critique of the American capitalist system with its roots in black slavery. In particular, it is a critique of the beauty industry as capitalizing on the commercialization of female bodies at the same time that it is selling the illusion of agency and self-ownership by equating them with the body’s market value. In other words, in the corporate world of *God Help the Child* ownership of the self, self-possession, and autonomy are strongly encouraged yet they are always already premised on the cash value of this self and thus only gained in order to be sold.

At first, the fact that Lula Ann Bridewell is making a career out of her particularly dark skin seems to defy her mother’s rejection – which is portrayed as a result of the racist system she herself grew up in and as an attempt to prepare her daughter for the social stigma attached to skin that is, in Sweetness’s words, “[m]idnight black, Sudanese black” (4). But black skin is still a liability, as Bride herself admits when she recounts how she started with “a job working stock,” not where customers could see her (36). She needs to invent herself as a commodity, beginning with her name or rather, her brand: “Lula Ann Bridewell is no longer available and she was never a woman. Lula Ann was a sixteen-year-old-me who dropped that dumb countryfied name as soon as I left high school” (11). It’s “Bride” she is selling to her customers through her product line: “YOU, GIRL: Cosmetics for Your Personal Millennium. It’s for girls and women of all complexions from ebony to lemonade to milk. And it’s mine, all mine—the idea, the brand, the campaign” (10). “YOU, GIRL,” which resonates so strongly with Felice’s description of that other “you inside that isn’t anything like

you,” originates with her personality coach, Jeri, who “call[s] himself a ‘total person’ designer” and is responsible for her “makeover” (33). It is Jeri who adds the necessary final ingredient or perhaps “packag[ing]” for her product (Wyatt 33):

“You should always wear white, Bride. Only white and all white all the time.” [...] “Not only because of your name,” he told me, “but because of what it does to your licorice skin,” he said. “And black is the new black. Know what I mean? Wait. You’re more Hershey’s syrup than licorice. Makes people think of whipped cream and chocolate soufflé every time they see you.” (33)

Always clothed in white garments, the blackness of Bride’s skin becomes relational: It depends on the presence of whiteness to show it off, to frame it, maybe even to contain it. This dependence finds an echo in her name, “Bride.” Not just because, as Jeri suggests, a bride wears white, but because a bride is a bride in relation to a groom. She is a woman who is soon to be married or has just married. In this regard, her dress and her name also stage her as the quintessential object of exchange in a patriarchal society.¹¹

This dependence is even constitutional for Bride’s relationship with Booker who, when remembering the beginning of their relationship, calls her a “midnight Galatea always and already alive” (132). But Galatea is the creation of the artist Pygmalion, a feminine ideal come alive, and even though Booker may not be Pygmalion in this comparison, it suggests that she is created for consumption by a male gaze. In addition, Galatea’s name means *She who is milk-white*, a meaning that is now framed by Booker’s addition of “midnight,” as if to invert the relationship between the framing white garments and Bride’s black skin. The success of Bride’s beauty, while it appears to affirm the beauty of black womanhood, remains dependent on a structure of perception that is essentially white and male.

11 While women are no longer goods of exchange in a marriage market based on the symbolic order of kinship structures, Bourdieu does emphasize the role that women still play as guardians or perhaps even managers of the symbolic capital of the family; see *Masculine Domination* 98-100. Bride’s chosen name is also significant, of course, with respect to the fact that her body seems to lose the signs of womanhood, thereby rendering her even more virginal (and immature) than the name suggests.

The novel is straightforward in its rejection of the beauty industry as a field in which female economic agency can grow and become meaningful. Sylvia, Inc., Bride tells us, “used to be Sylph Corsets for Discriminating Women back in the forties, but changed its name and ownership to Sylvia Apparel, then to Sylvia, Inc., before going flat-out hip with six cool cosmetics lines, one of which is mine” (10). Making money of the practice of constraining women’s bodies, the cosmetics corporation is a twin of the correctional facility in which Sofia, Bride’s former teacher, is incarcerated.

Decagon Women’s Correctional Center, right outside Norristown, owned by a private company, is worshipped by the locals for the work it provides [...] most of all [for] construction laborers [...] [who were] adding wing after wing to house the increasing flood of violent, sinful women committing bloody female crimes. Lucky for the state, crime does pay. (13)

Both corporations are making money with the management of women’s bodies, and it is significant in this respect that Sofia rejects not only Bride’s offer of a plane ticket but also of cosmetics for a makeover. The fact that Sofia is white also underscores that the novel’s critique of a culture based on the marketability of the self is universal. It constrains “girls and women of all complexions from ebony to lemonade to milk.”

As critics have noted, the novel’s portrayal of the beauty industry and its protagonist’s self-commodification is reminiscent of Morrison’s 1981 novel *Tar Baby*, which tells the story of Son and Jadine, as well as of the wealthy white employers of Jadine’s aunt. Jadine is a Sorbonne-educated fashion model, orphaned at age twelve and presently at the height of her commercial success, whereas Son is a mysterious stranger, a drifter who tries to resist and break with what he perceives as the trappings of white capitalist culture. While scholars have suggested many possible incarnations of the tar baby in the novel, often focusing on Jadine, John Lutz, in a recent interpretation, argues that the tar baby represents not so much a single character as “the destructive, self-negating social desires inspired by the system of commodity fetishism” (57). In Lutz’s reading, Jadine and Son move in a world peopled by “brand names,” while people are turned into objects, a double movement that he brings into dialogue with “Marx’s memorable phrase” that “‘relations between people’ have been transformed into ‘relations between things’” (57). In this sense, the scene in which

Jadine makes love to her new and expensive sealskin coat – a gift from a suitor – epitomizes

the substitution of material objects for human relationships by foregrounding the hidden brutality that informs the system of commodity production and exchange. Described as “the hides of ninety baby seals stitched together so nicely you could not tell what part had sheltered their cute little hearts and which had cushioned their skulls” [...], the coat serves as a concrete manifestation of the exploitative character of commodity production. (Lutz 59)

In *Tar Baby*, exploitation and domination are continually shown to underwrite the capitalist system as such, which means that identity, liberty, and community are impossible for the characters as long as they stay within this system.

This is ultimately also the problem of Bride’s career in *God Help the Child*. Trading in beauty, the industry in which she succeeds is deeply entwined with a history of female oppression that distorts the self. While Bride does not fetishize the expensive objects with which she surrounds herself – consider the fate of the increasingly shabby Jaguar – her cosmetics line “YOU, GIRL” does bear a resemblance to the function of the sealskin coat, in particular when it is anthropomorphized, as in the following passage, in which Bride worries what her injured face might do to her brand if she were seen in public: “And what if the local newspaper gets the story along with my photograph? Embarrassment would be nothing next to the jokes directed at YOU, GIRL. From YOU, GIRL to BOO, GIRL” (22). The brand has become an extension of herself, locking Bride in a narcissistic loop in which her self and her brand serve to recognize and affirm each other.

The beauty industry is thus anathema to what is essential in Morrison’s novels when it comes to selfhood and subjectivity: a relational understanding of the self, in which characters grow by caring for others. They do not grow through a love that is infatuation, as Bride reveals when she muses that Booker’s love made her feel “curried, safe, owned” (56).¹² This is the kind of infatuation that leads Florence to attack her lover with a hammer after he has told her, “Own yourself, woman” (*A Mercy* 139). But they grow

12 Compare also her description of her feeling “safe, colonized somehow” (78).

through caring for someone who is their own separate self, such as the girl Rain, whom Bride literally protects with “[her] own self” from the shots of a shotgun, and such as Queen, for whom Booker and Bride care jointly (105). By the time, Bride has taken her place at Booker’s side to care for his aunt, she can tell him, “I don’t know about my job and don’t care. I’ll get another one” (168).

RADICAL SELF-RELIANCE AND THE HORIZON OF POSSIBILITIES

For Bourdieu, agency is the result of the interrelationship between two histories: one individual and embodied, one collective and institutional. These histories dialectically define a horizon of possibilities, a wide range of possible actions, choices, behaviors which, while limited by this horizon, are nonetheless greatly variable. As I have shown elsewhere, Morrison’s novels explore these two levels in which the past is present in the present: how the past seeks to perpetuate itself into the future and how this process becomes obstructed, interrupted, or redirected.¹³ Moments of crisis are moments in which the categories of perception, action, and appreciation on the basis of which agents inhabit the social world no longer apply. Such moments offer a potentially liberating discordance in which novelty can emerge and change occur and which can thereby widen the horizon.¹⁴ In *Tar Baby*, Jadine returns to her familiar environment in Paris, rejecting the possibility of changing. But Son is given a radical opportunity: Left on a small island in the Caribbean, he joins a mythical community of blind men and presumably abandons his life in American society.

13 See Stefanie Mueller, *The Presence of the Past in the Novels of Toni Morrison* (2013).

14 Bourdieu explains this discordance in terms of a “gap”: “[H]abitus helps to determine what transforms it. If it is accepted that the principle of the transformation of habitus lies in the gap, experienced as a positive or negative surprise, between expectation and experience, one must suppose that the extent of this gap and the significance attributed to it depend on habitus: one person’s disappointment may be another’s unexpected satisfaction, with the corresponding effects of reinforcement or inhibition” (*Pascalian Meditations* 149).

In *God Help the Child*, Bride tells Booker that she is pregnant, after which he takes her hand and they both drive away in her Jaguar. Even without the subsequent and final chapter in which Bride's mother Sweetness comments on her daughter's pregnancy by saying, "Good luck and God help the child" (178), this ending does not bode well. For one thing, the sentimental set-up and the road-movie ending that has the couple driving into a "future" that they believe they are free to "imagine" is reminiscent of the high-gloss love stories that had earlier been shown to distort Bride's perception of the world and herself in it, as in the following passage in which she tries to console herself after Booker has left her (175).

Well, anyway, it was nothing like those doublepage spreads in fashion magazines, you know, couples standing half naked in surf, looking so fierce and downright mean, their sexuality like lightning and the sky going dark to show off the shine of their skin. I love those ads. [...] Why I kept comparing us to magazine spreads and music I can't say, but it tickled me to settle on "I Wanna Dance with Somebody." (9)

While they may have exorcised the child-ghosts that haunted them, Bride and Booker are not free of a history that is inscribed in their bodies and that structures the world that is available to them. The "future" that they "imagine" is less an open road that they follow in Bride's "dusty gray car," "leaning back on the headrests to let their spines sink into the seats' soft hide of cattle" (175), than it is a horizon of possibilities rooted in the very past they are driving away from. While *Tar Baby's* Son may perform a radical break with the world as he knew it, he did join a community by doing so. Yet communal bonds are conspicuously absent from *God Help this Child*.

All characters in the novel appear isolated, whether it is Bride's mother, Sweetness, who only receives letters and money from her daughter, or Booker's aunt Queen, who has several children but has lost touch with them. Even the impromptu family that Evelyn, Steve, and Rain have formed is merely "a fake family" (104), and Brooklyn, Bride's colleague at Sylvia, Inc., is not "a true friend," but an ambitious competitor who uses her influence over Bride to her advantage (29). Morrison's emphasis on the isolation of the characters is the more significant, as in her previous novels social bonds are presented as nurturing, often enabling characters to connect with the past healingly. In this light, the drive that concludes Bride's

narrative and presents her and Booker united yet alone with each other, is too Hollywood-esque, too glossy, to be real. In their celebration of one another, Bride and Booker also evoke a form of *radical self-reliance* that has become a fashionable staple of the neoliberal-capitalist regime in the 21st century.¹⁵ It is here that the novel's criticism of contemporary entrepreneurial agency is most pronounced.

The novel criticizes a model of female entrepreneurship that follows the ideal of liberal individualism, in which ownership of the self is a value because it is the prerequisite for entering the capitalist system of exchange. That Morrison's depiction of the contemporary beauty industry is spot on in this respect becomes apparent when we look at fashion model and entertainer Tyra Banks. As if reviving the "hair systems" with which Madam Walker and Annie Malone had once contributed to the emergence of a new black woman, Banks recently launched her own cosmetics company.¹⁶ TYRA Beauty uses a multi-level marketing system in which women receive bonuses not just for selling products at their homes but also for recruiting new "Beautytainers."¹⁷ The company's mission statement explains (see the section "Business" on their website):

My goal is to help you be the CEO of your life! YOU can start your own business by selling TYRA Beauty products. I am galvanizing a community of entrepreneurs called "Beautytainers" who will sell products by throwing fierce parties at their

15 I am borrowing this term from the mission statement of the Burning Man Festival (see Harvey), which has arguably emerged as the annual celebration of neoliberal lifestyle.

16 Ralina Joseph analyzes Banks as "performing a post-racial, post-feminist ideology," explaining that she "has made a career out of presenting herself, on the one hand, as a 'post-identity' everywoman who embodies a universal appeal because of her positioning as a liberal, democratic, colorblind subject, and on the other hand as an African-American supermodel who embodies niche desirability because of her positioning as a racially specific, black female subject" (238).

17 The company was launched in 2015 and its business model is similar to long-established predecessors such as Mary Kay. Banks has been criticized for what some see as the company's exploitative practices (see Marthe) while she has also been invited to teach a "personal-brands course" at Stanford University (see Bazzaz).

homes and online. We'll provide cool, customized ways to help our Beautytainers use their social media networks to promote their business, and they'll be able to create a personalized TYRA Beauty website with cutting edge technology. Plus, my TYRA Beauty team and I will train our Beautytainers in the art of fusing beauty and entertainment and rackin' up them Bank\$igns!

I'm a business, man. And you can be, too!

From the capitalized brand name to the commercialized domestic space and the idea of a life turned into a company, the mission statement eerily evokes Bride's YOU, GIRL. It is this ideal of radical self-reliance in which every woman is the CEO of her own life, responsible for herself alone and connecting with others only to exchange commodities, that the novel rejects as a source of economic agency for black women.

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“What’s the Position You Hold?”

Bourdieu and Rap Music

TIMO MÜLLER

Rap music has met with increasing scholarly interest since the appearance of the first full-length studies in the mid-1990s (Rose; Potter). While early scholarship focused on the social conditions from which rap music emerged and the political debates it incited, recent studies have increasingly addressed its literary qualities as well (Bradley; Caplan 103-32; Pate). In the following I will explore an approach from relational sociology that draws on both of these areas and helps elucidate the interconnections between them. Pierre Bourdieu’s sociology of fields is particularly useful for a literary-sociological analysis of rap music, I argue, because it foregrounds an aspect of social interaction that rappers have continually discussed and performed: position-taking.

The importance of defining, claiming, and occupying one’s position in the field of hip hop is a central concern in many rap songs, and the frequency with which positions are defined by referring to other actors in the field confirms a basic assumption of Bourdieu’s relational model. The beginnings of rap music were shaped by an explicitly relational activity, the rap battle, in which two rappers competed for superiority, often by addressing and comparing themselves to each other. The social milieu out of which rap music emerged was dominated by street gangs, which additionally underscored the importance of position-taking: Claiming or denying one’s membership in a gang could be a question of life and death. When rap music became a national phenomenon in the 1980s, these relational principles were extended accordingly. Rappers now defined their position with reference to

larger spatial entities such as their hometown or, as the East Coast-West Coast feud intensified, an entire part of the country. At the same time, the emergence of message rap saw rap music defining itself against mainstream society, a tendency strengthened by hardcore rap a few years later. In the mid-1990s, rap music entered yet another phase as the most successful rappers made themselves into icons by developing personae that combined strategies from earlier phases and staked their iconic status on obsessive self-positioning.

The title of this essay is taken from the intro of *In My Lifetime, Vol. 1* (1997), an aptly titled album by Jay Z, one of these iconic rappers. Entitled “A Million and One Questions/Rhyme No More,” the intro celebrates Jay Z’s achievements by contrasting them with the incredulous questions he was facing at the beginning of his career:¹

A lot of speculation

On the monies I’ve made, honeys I’ve slayed

How is he for real? Is that nigga really paid?

Hustlers I’ve met or dealt with direct

Is it true he slay the beef and slept with a tech?

What’s the position you hold? Can you really match

A triple platinum artist buck by buck by only a single goin’ gold?

Not only does the passage illustrate the importance of defining one’s “position” and the unusually explicit discussion of position-takings in the field of hip hop. It is also a position-taking itself, drawing on various markers of status and legitimacy specific to the field (money, womanizing, street life, guns, successful albums) that Jay Z claims by implication. The relationality of such position-takings is emphasized by the communicative situation evoked in the passage, which implies that some other actors in the field already admired Jay Z while others questioned his status, and by the explicit comparison Jay Z draws with an ostensibly more successful peer at the end. The comparison indicates that positions are defined by combinations of status markers (or in Bourdieu’s terms, types of capital) that are themselves open to negotiation: Jay Z in effect suggests that he can match an economically

1 Quotations from songs by Jay Z and Ice-T are taken from the records listed in the bibliography. Transcriptions are available at rap.genius.com.

more successful rapper because of the artistic superiority of his work. This essay argues that Bourdieu's theory can help us understand both the role of relational position-takings in rap music and the transformations the field underwent as a result of changes in the valorization of different kinds of capital. The first section of the essay discusses this proposition from a theoretical perspective; the second section traces the position-takings and historical transformations in the field of hip hop by examining three representative rap texts: Kool Moe Dee's rap battle with Busy Bee Starski (1981), Ice-T's "O.G. Original Gangster" (1991), and Jay Z's "Empire State of Mind" (2009).

BOURDIEU'S FIELD THEORY AND RAP MUSIC

The concept of position-taking emerges out of Bourdieu's field theory, which he began to develop early in his career and differentiated in a series of case studies. A field, Bourdieu says, is "a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions" defined "by their present and potential situation (*situs*) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions" (Wacquant 39). All actors in the field are engaged in a struggle for power, that is, for a position that gives them control over the distribution of these profits (*Rules of Art* 232). As Bourdieu's definition suggests, his understanding of capital is not limited to the economic sense of the term. He distinguishes three main types of capital – economic, cultural, and social – but points out that every field ultimately defines its own kind of capital ("The (Three) Forms"). The one kind of capital operative in all fields is symbolic capital, which Bourdieu variously equates with "recognition," "prestige," and "honour" (*Language* 106; *Logic* 118). In highly institutionalized fields such as politics or religion, most positions exist independently of the actors who occupy or aspire to them. In less institutionalized fields such as the literary, by contrast, actors often define their own position, and even preexisting positions (such as that of poet laureate) depend on the occupant for much of their authority. The arrival of an influential young writer or a new school changes the configuration of the literary field, so that personal and temporal factors acquire considerable importance in

sociological analysis (*Rules of Art* 127-28, *passim*). As a result, Bourdieu's study of the literary field, *The Rules of Art*, contains not only his most thorough discussion of the concept of position but adjusts to the fluidity of that field by introducing the more dynamic concept of position-taking.

Since in the modern world actors are seldom born into positions, they need to make their aspirations to a position known by means of direct or indirect discursive signals. It is these signals that Bourdieu calls position-takings. In sociological terms, position-takings have a subjective and an objective component: They result from the individual actor's personal dispositions but also from the structure of positions in the field. While they are not determined by either of these components, sociological analysis of dispositions and positions can elucidate the motivations behind position-takings (*Rules of Art* 234-35, 264-67). Bourdieu uses the term both for singular, empirically traceable acts like criticizing another actor in the field and for larger projects like developing a new school or movement (92-93). With regard to literary texts, he argues that both the content and the form of the text function as position-takings in the literary field. Some position-takings are explicit, for example in autobiographical or metafictional texts, but most are implicit in that the author's "aesthetic choices" signal his position relative to the various groups, schools, and movements that structure the field at the time of publication (231-34). While Bourdieu offers few examples for such implicit, "aesthetic" position-takings, he points out that a wide range of formal aspects can fulfill this function, including "genres, styles, forms, manners" (233; cf. Dubois, "Pierre Bourdieu" 100; Müller 45-52; Speller 64).

Position-takings are only one element in Bourdieu's detailed sociological analysis of the literary field, which raises the question of whether they can be analyzed without reconstructing field structures and actors' dispositions in detail. In *The Rules of Art*, Bourdieu himself begins with a close reading of a literary text and later points out that his model allows for both deductive and inductive approaches. A "stylistic strategy," he says, may "furnish the starting point of a search for its author's trajectory" (234), and one might add the analogous point that the structure of the field can be elucidated by tracing stylistic choices through a number of works. The inductive approach has the additional advantage of avoiding the reductive tendencies of Bourdieu's model. With regard to rap music, his limitation of structural power differentials to issues of class is particularly problematic as

it risks occluding the racial issues so momentous in an African American context. Similarly, Bourdieu's tacit assumption that his field theory can explain any society in its entirety has resulted in problems of national or cultural bias when applied to global or non-Western social formations.²

The inductive analysis of position-takings is also supported by a phenomenon specific to rap music: the ubiquity of explicit position-takings. Whereas literary texts usually "veil" their negotiation of the field and of the world in general, as Bourdieu and his followers have stressed (*Rules of Art* 33; cf. Dubois, "Flaubert" 83-84; Rabaté 29-31), rappers have made their messages and their position toward one another clear from the beginning. The rapper's sociological interests, in the sense of both socio-political concerns and of aspirations in the field, are the central topic of many songs. In historical perspective, moreover, the alliances, goals, and even institutions of rap music emerged from negotiations often conducted in the music itself. To a considerable extent, then, the field of rap music does not only motivate position-takings but is constituted by them.

In analyzing these songs as position-takings, we can account for both their sociological and their literary dimension without reducing one to the other. Bourdieu himself argues that position-takings "challenge the alternative between an internal reading of the work and an explanation based on the social conditions of its production or consumption" since they foreground the interplay of these aspects (*Rules of Art* 231). With regard to rap music, the concept of position-taking helps bridge the division between social and poetic approaches noted at the outset of this essay. The analyses that follow will address the function of position-takings both in the field of hip hop and within the aesthetic configuration of the individual songs.

While a thorough sociological analysis of the field of hip hop is beyond the scope of the essay, a brief survey of relevant structural features will help demonstrate the applicability of Bourdieu's concepts and provide background information relevant for the case studies.³ The field of hip hop emerged in New York City around 1980, when the art forms that make up hip hop were a few years old and began to institutionalize within structures provided by producers, record labels, and art galleries, but also by street

2 For discussions of these problems, see Figueroa; Gurr; for a Eurocentrically biased application, see Casanova.

3 The survey draws on Chang; Forman; and George.

gangs. The oppositional self-definition of these gangs made hip hop an unusually bounded and structured artistic field. The principle of gang territories was extended first to the boroughs of New York, then to the nation as a whole, as the well-publicized East Coast-West Coast feud attests.

The foregrounding of capital is another characteristic feature of the field of hip hop. Actors seek and demand “respect” from their peers, a term that could be added to the list of Bourdieu’s synonyms for symbolic capital. A closer look shows that respect is usually gained by foregrounding other kinds of capital. This distinguishes the field of hip hop from other artistic fields, which, as Bourdieu has shown, try to obfuscate the importance of capital in general and valorize cultural capital over other kinds. Economic capital is demonstrated by status symbols such as cars, diamonds, and champagne. Cultural capital is awarded for artistic skills (in rap music, primarily the originality of rhymes, metaphors, and insults) but also, again unusually for an artistic field, for quantitative factors such as sales figures and the size of concert audiences. Social capital is generated by associations with successful artists, producers, and music executives on the one hand and by loyalty to one’s neighborhood and gang or clique on the other. Hip hop here differs from other artistic fields in that it awards social capital for purely material relations such as those with the music business. From the mid-1990s onward, rappers like Puff Daddy, Jay Z, and Kanye West began to create personae that demonstrated their possession of all three types of capital.

While Bourdieu’s concepts have proven useful in analyzing various fields,⁴ they are particularly suited to the field of hip hop, with which they share several core metaphors. For example, Bourdieu describes fields as “social games” (*jeux sociaux*) that have their own rules, require the “players” to believe in “the game and the value of its stakes” (*enjeux*), and maintain themselves by the “continual reproduction” of this belief (*Rules of Art* 248, 228, 227). In the field of hip hop, the word “game” has become synonymous with rap music and the rap business, implying the same underlying mechanisms. Another example is the metaphor of “struggle,” which for Bourdieu captures the dynamic that defines and sustains a field. The

4 Bourdieu himself published analyses of the academic (*Homo Academicus*), educational (*State Nobility*), and fashion fields (*Sociology* 132-38). For other applications, see Benson and Neveu; Hilgers and Mangez.

“history of the field is the history of the struggle for a monopoly of the imposition of legitimate categories of perception and appreciation,” Bourdieu writes, and “it is in the very *struggle* that the history of the field is made” (157). He returns to struggle and related metaphors such as “symbolic violence” throughout his case studies of specific fields (*Language* 164). Position-takings are weapons in this struggle, which they reinforce because most position-takings function “negatively, in relation to others,” and thus “often remain almost empty, reduced to a stance of defiance, rejection, rupture” (*Rules of Art* 240). The field of hip hop, too, emerged out of struggles over authority: first in the ritualized form of rap battles in which artistic superiority was at stake, then in the larger-scale “beefs” and “feuds” that established the structure of the field. The frequency with which these terms, and indeed the word “struggle” itself, appear in rap songs attests to the continuing awareness and negotiation of struggle as a core dynamic in the field of hip hop.⁵ It also confirms the finding, cited above, that the field of hip hop is unusually aware of its own mechanisms and willing to discuss them openly.

CASE STUDIES: FROM RAP BATTLE TO RAP PERSONA

Rap music emerged in the predominantly African American areas of New York City in the 1970s, when local DJs began to extend the popular instrumental passages of funk and disco songs and to speak (“rap”) over these passages. As rapping increased in popularity, “masters of ceremony” (emcees) began to specialize in this occupation, animating the crowd with rhymed stories and party calls. The frequent personal references and comparisons with other rappers in these early pieces indicate the importance of position-takings for the definition of the new field. These position-takings found their most condensed form in rap battles, where two rappers competed in generating noise from the crowd. The dynamic of the emerging field, and the usefulness of Bourdieu’s vocabulary for analyzing this dynamic, is perhaps most evident in the legendary battle between Busy Bee Starski and Kool Moe Dee at the Harlem World Christmas celebration in 1981. The

5 The online database rap.genius.com features dozens of songs with these titles and hundreds in which the words appear in the lyrics.

contestants positioned themselves at opposite poles of the emerging field. Busy Bee was one of the most successful party rappers at the time, whereas Kool Moe Dee questioned the artistic value of party rap and emphasized verbal skills and innovation instead (Nguyen). In Bourdieu's terms, the contest pitched a member of the orthodoxy who fulfilled existing requirements for recognition against a heretic who sought to redefine these requirements.

Both contestants voice their aspirations to the "number one" position, as Busy Bee puts it, but Kool Moe Dee turns his reply into a comprehensive critique of party rapping in general and Busy Bee's work in particular.⁶ He accuses Busy Bee of stealing rhymes from other rappers and goes on to portray party rapping as "counterfeit," repetitive, and childish ("ba-ditty-ba"). The negative dimension of this position-taking is evident in the frequent personal attacks on Busy Bee, but also in the comments Kool Moe Dee makes about the structure of the emerging field:

You're not number one, you're not even the best
And you can't win no real emcee contest
Celebrity clubs and bullshit like those
Those the kind of shows everybody knows
Celebrity clubs, those are the kind you can win
They're all set up before he comes in
But in a battle like this, you'd know you'd lose
Between me and you, who do you think they'll choose?

The opposition between "real" and "fake" was one of the basic structural features of the field of hip hop from the beginning. It manifests in Kool Moe Dee's distinction between "real emcees" and celebrity emcees who win rap battles not because of their superior skills but because of outside support. The positive dimension of his position-taking is beginning to take shape in this passage: Kool Moe Dee wants the field of hip hop to emancipate itself from such outside influences and award cultural capital for artistic skills, not popularity. This would make the field homologous to other artistic fields such as the literary, which, as Bourdieu shows, established itself

6 Quotations from the rap battle are taken from the recording available in Nguyen and the partial transcript available at rap.genius.com.

in this very act of separation (*Rules of Art* 47-112). It would also require field-specific rules by which skills can be measured and cultural capital distributed. One of the reasons for the success of Kool Moe Dee's intervention was, arguably, that it was not only a demand for but also a practical demonstration of such rules. The second part of his performance opens with Kool Moe Dee's announcement that he will now "say those rhymes that I invent," which recalls his claim about Busy Bee's stealing rhymes while at the same time drawing attention to the originality of his own rapping. He underscores this self-reflexive dimension by extending each of the following rhymes over several lines:

And for your pleasure, a rhyme you'll treasure
Please don't try 'cause you can't measure
The length of time can't touch the rhyme
Hip hop don't stop, 'cause you know I'm
An MC supreme and I'm one-of-a-kind
And if you search real hard, I'm sure you'll find

The repetition of rhymes here functions as a positive position-taking in that it showcases Kool Moe Dee's artistic skills, but also as a negative position-taking in that its inventive repetitions contrast with Busy Bee's dull ones, as summarized in the alliterative lines "Party after party, the same old shit / Record after record, rhyme after rhyme." Several other passages in the song function in this manner, for example Kool Moe Dee's inventive puns on his opponent's name: "Busy wanna-bee / Cause you know he wanna be another Kool Moe Dee." The formal complexity of the language underscores the explicit position-takings formulated on the level of content. The Busy Bee vs. Kool Moe Dee battle is widely regarded as formative of the field (Nguyen). In sociological terms this is because it replaced the old orthodoxy of party rap with new rules for the distribution of cultural capital. Authority was now conferred for verbal skills rather than crowd response, so that the field of rap emancipated itself from popular music and instituted rules similar to those of other artistic fields.

Party rap remained a popular strand of rap music but no longer commanded the recognition it did at the beginning. On the contrary, it became a foil against which succeeding movements defined themselves. The most influential of these movements – the one that had the greatest impact on the

structure of the field – was arguably hardcore rap, which combined verbal skills with an aggressive style and an insistence on street credibility (De Genova; George 53-60; Quinn). The breadth of positions in hardcore rap is indicated by two of its most successful representatives: Run-D.M.C. were celebrated for their rhyming skills while N.W.A. brought the “gangsta” lifestyle to nationwide attention in simple, authentic language. In sociological terms, hardcore rap changed the field of hip hop by establishing the importance of economic and especially social capital alongside the cultural capital awarded for skills and success. Many successful hardcore songs, especially of the gangsta variety, were centrally concerned with defining and claiming these types of capital. One of the best known gangsta rap songs, Ice-T’s “O.G. Original Gangster” (1991), demonstrates both the valorization of social capital and its combination with the other types.

The song is of particular interest in our context because it opens with an explicit position-taking and goes on to undergird that position-taking on the levels of form and content. Ice-T recalls his origins in party rap and his eventual realization that instead of imitating other rappers he needed to draw from his own experience:

So I sat back, thought up a new track,
Didn’t fantasize, kicked the pure facts.
Motherfuckers got scared cause they was unpre-
Pared. Who would tell it how it really was, who dared?
A motherfucker from the West Coast, L. A.
South Central fool, where the Crips and the Bloods play
When I wrote about parties it didn’t fit
“6 in the Mornin’”—that was the real shit.

The position-taking has a positive and a negative dimension, but both refer back to the authentic personality of the artist: Ice-T distances himself from his own earlier party songs and defines his new style by autobiographical reference to the “pure facts” about life in his gang-ridden hometown. The self-referentiality of the song is also evident in the heavy use of first-person pronouns (“When I wrote about parties someone always died / When I tried to writ happy yo I knew I lied cause / I lived a life of crime”) and the repeated linking of the eponymous “Original Gangster” with Ice-T’s name. It points to the central role of social capital in the song and its position-taking.

Social capital is conferred for street credibility, a concept that was defined in large part by hardcore rap and encompasses distinctions drawn on the basis of race, class, and geography. “I rap for brothers just like myself,” Ice-T announces, and reinforces the distinction by addressing the listener as a “fool” unacquainted with life in lower-class black neighborhoods: “I’m from South Central, fool, where everything goes / Snatch you out your car so fast you’ll get whiplash.” The notorious South Central neighborhood is not merely mentioned as a posture but depicted as a conditioning social environment characterized by violence and a lack of education.

These claims to social capital are intertwined with claims to economic and cultural capital. Economic capital still plays a subordinate role in “O.G. Original Gangster.” Just as the party rappers had occasionally referred to cars and other indicators of wealth, Ice-T mentions his “quest for extreme wealth” but clearly valorizes the other kinds of capital more highly. His claims to cultural capital are based on artistic skills, which indicates that the redefinition of the field inspired by Kool Moe Dee’s battle rap had been successful in the long term. When Ice-T describes his rap as “Hardcore topics over hardcore drum beats,” he positions himself in the new movement of hardcore rap and at the same time in the tradition of Kool Moe Dee’s artistry. The line evokes an approach similar to the formalist aesthetic the literary field had instituted in the process of its self-definition: form and content enter into an organic, mutually supportive relationship.

Ice-T demonstrates his artistic skills by using internal and triple rhymes (game to me / fame to me / claim to be), and especially by paralleling gangsta life and rap music throughout the song. This is not only an aesthetically valuable conceit but it allows him to marshal his social capital (gangsta life) in support of his aspirations to cultural capital (rap skills). While other rappers pose as invincible action heroes, Ice-T recognizes the emptiness of their posture and turns to the more valuable pursuit of rapping instead: “I ain’t no super hero, I ain’t no Marvel comic / But when it comes to game I’m atomic / At droppin’ it straight, point blank and twisted.” The concluding reference establishes a metaphoric link between rap songs and guns that is sustained throughout the song (“I blast the mic with my style”; “my wit’s as quick as a hair trigger”), echoing Amiri Baraka’s influential poem “Black Art” (1966) which calls for “poems that kill. / Assassin poems, poems that shoot / guns” (116). The strategy of drawing on social capital and inventive language in pursuit of cultural capital can be found

throughout Ice-T's work, starting with the title of his 1987 debut album, *Rhyme Pays*. Given the positive reviews his albums received within the field of hip hop, the strategy was fairly successful, and Ice-T is now remembered as one of the defining rappers of the period (Metcalfe and Turner).

From the mid-1990s onward, a new generation of rappers began to redefine the popular perception of rap music by incorporating strategies from other fields, especially from pop music and the economic field. These rappers made themselves into carefully constructed personae, or "icons." By individualizing their appeal, they stabilized their authority in the field of hip hop and at the same time reached audiences beyond the field. They differed from previous rappers, one might argue in Bourdieu's terminology, in that they elevated economic capital to the same importance as the other types and laid claim to all three. The fusion of social, cultural, and economic capital into a rap persona is succinctly illustrated by Jay Z's "Empire State of Mind" (2009), arguably the most successful song by the most successful rapper of this generation.

The title of the song indicates that geography continues to be an important source of social capital but now acquires an additional dimension. While the song stresses Jay Z's origins in Bedford-Stuyvesant, a notorious black neighborhood in Brooklyn, it presents these origins not as a determining or conditioning factor but as the starting point of a success story. This trajectory is established at the very beginning of the song, where Jay Z introduces himself in terms of the geographical coordinates of his success: "Yeah I'm out that Brooklyn, now I'm down in Tribeca / Right next to De Niro, but I'll be hood forever." These lines signal a change in the rules of the field, a change that Jay Z instituted along with other rap "icons" such as Puff Daddy and Kanye West. Social capital is now awarded not only for street credibility ("hood") but also for economic success and upper-class markers such as living next to movie stars. New York, nicknamed the Empire State, thus functions both as a geographical indicator and as a metonym for a personal quality that enables economic success: the "Empire State of Mind."

The various sets of images Jay Z uses to outline his success story indicate the continuing importance of relational position-takings, which acquire an additional dimension in that they serve not only to situate the rapper in the field but to define and solidify his persona. The geographical references,

for example, are intertwined with references to Jay Z's business ventures, from his early drug dealing to his current status as co-owner of a basketball team. The parallel between these career trajectories serves to reinforce the success story but also, in sociological terms, the fusion of social and economic capital in his rap persona. Moreover, the linear geography of the success story (Bedford-Stuyvesant to Tribeca) is embedded in a set of horizontal references to the various black neighborhoods in New York City (like Harlem or the Bronx), which underscores Jay Z's claim that his persona is representative of New York and *vice versa*.

The same strategy can be detected behind the frequent references to other celebrities who became personae. On the one hand, Jay Z parallels his success story with that of better-known mainstream celebrities (Robert De Niro, Frank Sinatra, Bob Marley); on the other hand, he lays claim to field-specific social capital by referencing classic New York rappers (Afrika Bambaataa, Special Ed, The Notorious B.I.G.). The association with The Notorious B.I.G., or Biggie, is developed into a complex position-taking in the course of the song. It positions Jay Z as an East Coast rapper in the East Coast-West Coast opposition Biggie came to embody, and as a Brooklyn rapper in the New York scene. On the temporal scale, Jay Z is laying claim to Biggie's legacy as one of the greatest rappers of all time but also an early rap persona and thus one of the few rappers to attain celebrity status beyond the field of hip hop. On yet another level, Jay Z combines this temporal succession with the coordinates of his personal success story when he parallels his precursor figures with New York landmarks:

[...] rest in peace Bob Marley
 Statue of Liberty, long live the World Trade
 Long live the King, yo; I'm from the Empire State

The succession from Bob Marley to Biggie ("the King") to Jay Z extends the temporal position-taking further back in time, toward an earlier black icon whose Jamaican origins point to the role of Caribbean immigrants in the emergence of rap music; the link between Marley and the Statue of Liberty emphasizes this connection. The next pairing, of Biggie and the World Trade Center, is indicated by the repetition of "Long live ...," an ambiguous phrase that expresses veneration but in this context also relegates its subjects to the past. The phrase alludes to the unbroken succession

of monarchs in the Middle Ages (“the King is dead, long live the King”), thus underscoring Jay Z’s claim to the social capital held by his precursors (cf. Kantorowicz). The allusion to the title of his own song right afterward reinforces this claim. In the context of this passage, the reference is now unmistakably to the Empire State Building, itself an iconic site that has survived where the World Trade Center has not and that combines aesthetic appeal with business success.

The complexity of the “Empire State” trope amounts to a claim for cultural capital alongside the other types. It prominently demonstrates the verbal skills manifest throughout the song in such formal devices as slant rhymes (Dominicanos / that McDonalds; melting pot / selling rocks / hip hop) and double-layered wordplay (drug-dealing is discussed in terms of food and of basketball), but especially in the linguistic and formal density of the final section:

Lights is blinding, girls need blinders
So they can step out of bounds quick, the side lines is
Lined with casualties who sip the life casually
Then gradually become worse; don’t bite the apple, Eve
Caught up in the in-crowd, now you’re in-style
And in the winter gets cold en vogue with your skin out
The city of sin is a pity on a whim
Good girls gone bad, the city’s filled with ’em
Mommy took a bus trip and now she got her bust out
Everybody ride her, just like a bus route
“Hail Mary” to the city, you’re a virgin
And Jesus can’t save you, life starts when the church ends

The main skill required of rappers, rhyming, is demonstrated not only by the frequency of rhymes in this passage but also by their variety and inventiveness. The section features slant rhymes, triple rhymes, internal rhymes, parallelisms, assonances, and alliterations, to a degree that several examples could be cited for each of these devices. Since each line is interwoven with the neighboring lines, often by several links, the section has a tight structure even by the standards of formal poetry. The formal connections often reinforce semantic affinities or contrasts: the blinding lights necessitate blinders, the casual attitude of the newcomers makes them casualties, and so

forth. The section is additionally structured by extended metaphors for life in the big city, especially football, religion, and fashion. The second line describes the challenges of the city in terms of an athletic competition played on a field. Various references suggest American football, a rough, relentless game where players “step out of bounds,” stand on the “sidelines,” can easily become “casualties,” and in desperate situations throw “Hail Mary” passes. These references frame the passage, as does the religious imagery introduced in the fourth line (“don’t bite the apple, Eve”), taken up in the “city of sin” phrase, and developed more fully in the concluding lines of the passage. The central metaphor in terms of its location in the passage, and also of its significance for the song as a whole, is that of fashion. While it only extends over two lines (“now you’re in-style / And in the winter gets cold en vogue with your skin out”), it exemplifies the compact wordplay of the passage and thus the rapper’s verbal skills. As Jay Z himself has pointed out, the lines do not merely describe the exposure of fashionable girls to the hardships of the city but also contain a string of references to fashion magazines: *InStyle*, *Vogue*, and the notoriously icy editor of the latter, Anna Wintour (*Decoded* 129).

The fashion metaphor also recalls the importance of economic capital for the sort of rap persona Jay Z is developing and presenting in the song. References to status symbols pervade the song: living “next to De Niro,” driving an “off-white Lexus,” living “on Billboard,” “sipping mai tais,” holding courtside seats at professional basketball games. Many of these status symbols are brands that combine all three types of capital in that they indicate economic success, social recognition, and cultural authority in the field of hip hop. These brands stand in metonymical relation to the rap persona of Jay Z, which also combines the three types of capital and depends on global marketing and instant recognizability. When Jay Z brags that he “made the Yankee hat more famous than a Yankee can,” he summarizes the aspirations underlying his creation of a rap persona. His iconic status not only equals but surpasses that of the New York Yankees, the most successful baseball club of all time, in that his iconicity ranges beyond its field of origin. This achievement can only be measured against that of the Yankees, however, and the obsessively comparative self-descriptions of many “persona” rappers indicate that relational position-taking has lost none of its importance since the early days of hip hop.

This essay has provided only a broad outline of the interplay of social structures and artistic strategies in rap music. A more detailed study would inevitably complicate the configurations and trajectories identified so far, and would thus present a fuller picture of the social relations that shape rap music.

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“Decolorized for Popular Appeal”

‘True’ Stories of African American Homelessness

WIBKE SCHNIEDERMANN

INTRODUCTION

If George Dawes Green had published his mystery novel *The Caveman’s Valentine* within the past decade and not in 1995, one might be tempted to accuse him of rather crude plagiarism. Its main character is a homeless African American man in his fifties who suffers from paranoid schizophrenia. He turns out to be an incredibly talented pianist who used to study at a world-renowned conservatory, Juilliard’s music division, and we learn that prior to the beginning of the story his illness first made it impossible for him to graduate and ultimately rendered him unfit for what is usually considered a regular life altogether. For the entire diegetic time, he lives in a cave in New York City’s Inwood Park and refuses all attempts to ‘reintegrate’ him into society.

More than ten years after the publication of Green’s novel, *LA Times* columnist Steve Lopez met a homeless African American man in downtown Los Angeles. Nathaniel Ayers is 54 years old at the time, plays the violin and turns out to be a highly-gifted Juilliard dropout who has been diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. Ayers’s illness has prevented him from graduating, and when Lopez first meets him, he insists on sleeping outside and playing music in a noisy tunnel. Lopez repeatedly wrote about Ayers in his column and also contacted his family, who assured him of their efforts to convince Nathaniel to return to sleeping indoors and recommence his medication. Lopez published a much-noticed book, *The Soloist*, about

his friendship with Ayers in 2008. A movie adaptation came out the following year, starring Jamie Foxx and Robert Downey Jr.

Musical geniuses, it seems safe to assume even without solid data on the topic, make up only a fraction of the American inner-city homeless population. Black Juilliard alumni (or dropouts) are also not exactly abundant; African American students currently make up between 3 percent and 4.2 percent of the school's student body, which makes Blacks the second-smallest ethnic group among Juilliard students after Native Alaskan and/or Native Hawaiian.¹ And while mental illness has been a significant factor for many Americans in becoming homeless and not finding their way back into regular housing,² psychotic disorders and their borderline symptoms are in many cases compounded not just by lack of access to medical treatment, but also by increased substance abuse, self-medication, and addiction.³

The conspicuous parallels between Green's fictional and Lopez's factual character suggest that the two books draw on some sort of 'type' or cultural staple, namely the mad-genius stereotype. In what follows, I will discuss the use of the mad-genius trope in allegedly "true" stories about black homelessness from different media in the context of Pierre Bourdieu's critique of the notion of the "uncreated creator" on which the myth of genius is built (cf. *Cultural Production* 139). The "substantialist mode of thought," as Bourdieu writes with reference to Ernst Cassirer, dominates the field of cultural and artistic production more blatantly than most other areas of social and cultural reality (*Sociology* 29). Its tendency "to foreground the

1 According to colleges.niche.com and collegefactual.com, respectively. These numbers refer to the entire student body of all Juilliard divisions, including the music school.

2 In *The Insanity Offense: How America's Failure to Treat the Seriously Mentally Ill Endangers Its Citizens*, E. Fuller Torrey refers to a number of studies reporting that one-third of homeless men and two-thirds of homeless women suffer from severe psychiatric disorders. He also quotes a study of chronic, long-term homelessness conducted in Miami which found that "every one of them was mentally ill" (123-24).

3 According to the National Coalition for the Homeless, roughly half of all mentally ill urban homeless in the U.S. suffer from substance abuse and addiction, many of them self-medicating with street drugs. African Americans are even more over-represented in this group than other minorities ("Mental Illness").

individual [...] at the expense of the structural relations [...] between social positions” is reflected in this field’s *doxic* belief in “unique creators” that are “irreducible to any condition or conditioning” (29). This insistence on unconditioned, “uncreated” creativity informs the mad-genius stereotype in particular because it presupposes a relation of mutual dependence between giftedness and inherent (and thus naturalized) illness. It therefore dismisses out of hand any attempt at situating both artist and artwork within the context of the conditions that rendered them possible and of the structures of which they are the product.

While the texts analyzed here are in one way or another self-proclaimed “true stories” of African American homeless persons,⁴ I use Green’s work of fiction as a point of departure not just for the above described parallels. In addition to these similarities between Green’s and Lopez’s books, the novel includes one scene that anticipates my essential argument here and boils it down to one ideologically charged motto: Romulus Ledbetter, the mystery novel’s protagonist and homeless would-be detective has a television set in his cave. The device does not work in the technical sense, of course, since the cave has no electricity. Romulus’s schizophrenic mind, however, fabricates hallucinatory television programs that sometimes reveal parts of the character’s pre-diegetic past. On one of these TV nights, Romulus believes to be watching a film starring Steve McQueen and Ali MacGraw, a reference to *The Getaway*, Sam Peckinpah’s 1972 road-movie gangster drama.⁵ The film’s plot, however, rendered through the filter of Romulus’s perspective, bears no resemblance to *The Getaway* but tells the story of a young music student at Juilliard, who drops out of school because

4 To be more precise: All homeless characters in these texts are male, as is the case for the vast majority of fictional representations of homelessness. To find accounts of the experiences of homeless women with psychotic disorders, one could turn to Tanya Marie Luhrmann’s ethnographic studies, e.g., “Down and Out in Chicago” (2010).

5 The chapter featuring this made-up film provides information about Romulus’s early years at Juilliard and about his marriage. McQueen’s and MacGraw’s disastrous real-life marriage, their characters’ turbulent and often dysfunctional marriage in *The Getaway*, and also their public personae as the epitomes of rebellious masculinity and tragic feminine beauty provide insight into Romulus’s self-image and his analysis of his own biography.

his girlfriend is pregnant. Despite its two white leading actors, it is suggested that the film's male hero is "in fact supposed to be a young black man," that "his great-grandfather had been a slave," and that the composer is "treated like family" in Harlem (*Caveman's Valentine* 43). His social and physical downfall from promising musical talent to homeless madman being unappealing enough, the poor black musician from the Bronx is represented in Romulus's imagined movie by one of Hollywood's most iconically masculine white stars. A caption flashing on the screen definitively drives home the reason for this choice of cast, informing the viewer – or, rather, the reader – that "this movie ha[s] been DECOLORIZED FOR POPULAR APPEAL" (43).

This slogan pointedly summarizes the effect of framing the narratives discussed here as "true stories" of individual pathologies. I will argue that what these depictions achieve by foregrounding the giftedness and mental illness of their characters serves the purpose of fading out the racist and classist challenges these characters face in their lived realities. The narrative frame of the mad genius provides a well-known type of tragic hero that allows these stories to superficially make black homelessness more visible while avoiding a discussion of systemic conditions.

In order to be palatable for a mass audience, African American homeless characters must be framed in a particular – and particularly narrow – way. It's not a story about *that* kind of homeless guy, these texts suggest. Instead, they offer an easier to swallow tidbit of truth in the form of alternately pitiable (for their mental illness or bad luck) and admirable (for their genius and/or their resilience) individuals. Yet, these stories nonetheless claim to offer a piece of truth since they all are being marketed as either 'inspired by a true story' or as the direct or adapted results of journalistic production. While apparently zooming in on an especially devastating aspect of America's rapidly growing issues of mass poverty and social, political, and cultural neglect of the poor – particularly if they are people of color (cf. APA; Gradín; Institute for Research on Poverty) – these texts provide their audiences with an alternative perspective of black homelessness in which criminalization, racial profiling, and the reach of the prison system are relegated to the margins. The audience's attention is instead drawn to the extraordinary yet conceptually familiar individual whose giftedness and social invalidity are mutually dependent and hence form a

perfectly circular system that seems to function without any outside (social, systemic) influences.

HOMELESS, GIFTED, AND BLACK

Cultural articulations of homelessness since the late 19th century have, for the most part, represented unhoused characters as white and male. When public discussions about the socio-economic plight of the extremely poor began to identify the unstable housing situation of a growing number of Americans as an issue of national importance during the 1870s, African Americans were already “a significant presence” within the homeless population (Hopper and Milburn 124). Yet, as Kenneth Kusmer has shown, the public image of a typical homeless person remained that of a white male until the 1960s, rendering homeless Blacks even less visible than white street dwellers. Nowadays, however, no group is as overrepresented among the homeless in the U.S. as African Americans. It is estimated that forty percent of the entire homeless population in the U.S. and more than fifty-six percent of those who experience long-term and chronic homelessness are black (cf. NCH, “How Many People”; SAMHSA).

A number of historical, political, and legal factors play into this imbalance. In *Slavery by Another Name*, Douglas Blackmon unravels the extensive perpetuation of the structures that shaped slave-based economies in the South well into the 20th century and that contributed greatly to processes of ghettoization and the precarious housing situation of an disproportional number of African Americans, as well as to the systematic criminalization of poor Blacks moving freely in public spaces. Thus, the postbellum vagrancy laws in former slave states were designed specifically to target African Americans and sentence them to what essentially amounted to slave labor (cf. Blackmon). Today’s staggering incarceration rate among African Americans is in part a direct result of this deliberate criminalization. The U.S. prison system, including the laws and legal practices facilitating it, in turn fuels the increase of homelessness rates by releasing inmates into a life in which they are often legally barred from employment or housing.⁶ “The

6 Ava DuVernay’s documentary film *13th* (2016) takes on the interconnections between the U.S. criminal justice system and racial inequality. Featuring scholars

racial dimension of mass incarceration is its most striking feature,” as Michelle Alexander notes in her groundbreaking study of 2010, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (6). A similar claim could be made for homelessness.

While literature and film seldom feature homeless protagonists, un-housed African American characters are particularly rare given the demographic reality, which renders the similarities in those few representations all the more salient. Looking at cultural articulations of black homeless persons of the past two decades, both fictional and allegedly factual, one cannot but notice a tendency toward narratives that center on giftedness and special talents. One example of great popular success is Gabriele Muccino’s overachiever drama *The Pursuit of Happyness* (2006), which claims to be “inspired by a true story” about its protagonist, Chris Gardner (Will Smith).⁷ The film follows the improbable career of a single father who goes from lining up outside San Francisco’s homeless shelters while taking care of his infant son to becoming a successful stock broker. The hyperbolic emphasis on an extraordinary individual’s personal success story certainly comes as no surprise in a high-profile Hollywood production, but Muccino’s film deserves to be mentioned in the context of how American popular culture represents black homelessness due to its strong reliance on its main character’s unusual capabilities.

The Pursuit of Happyness only brings up in passing the interrelations of mental health and destitution: as a foil against which the protagonist’s resilience can shine even brighter. A secondary character (played by Kevin West) personifies the stereotype of a mentally confused hippie roaming the streets of San Francisco. He mistakes Gardner’s bone-density scanner for a “time machine” with which he wishes to travel back to the 1960s. First introduced in a scene that shows Gardner waiting for and then riding a bus, the homeless man’s constant jabber about the “time machine” provides a

like Michelle Alexander, Angela Davis, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., the film was widely released on the online streaming platform Netflix, which makes it available to subscribers worldwide, perhaps an indicator that this topic is beginning to receive more popular attention.

7 With a box-office result of over \$26 million during its opening week, *The Pursuit of Happyness* compares to *The Departed* or *The Devil Wears Prada*, which also came to theaters in 2006.

basis for the protagonist's aversion against public transportation. The homeless hippie returns later in the film when he is in possession of the lost bone-density scanner that Gardner has to wrestle from him in another scene of public humiliation. The clownish role amounts to little more than a parody of Bay Area hippie culture. Like other homeless characters in the film – e.g., the man who picks a fight with Gardner while they wait in line at a homeless shelter – the character has little to no impact on the story itself but merely showcases what a nuisance homeless people are for Gardner and how admirably he shoulders the mental, emotional, and physical burden of his situation. Chris Gardner could have gone mad, this tells us, but he didn't. Instead, he puts his extraordinary intelligence to good use – demonstrations of which culminate in his solving the Rubik's Cube puzzle and thereby securing an interview for an internship – and becomes a stock broker, i.e., a representative of the profession widely blamed for laying the foundation for and then accelerating the most recent housing market crisis and financial meltdown⁸ that led to over four million home foreclosures in the U.S. between 2008 and 2011 alone (cf. Bennett).

Certain forms of fusing individualization with pathologization, in the way that *The Caveman's Valentine* and *The Soloist* do, loom large in narratives of black homelessness. Most recently, Ted "Golden Voice" Williams leapt to fame in 2011, at age 53, after a video interview with the then homeless man was published by the *Columbus Dispatch* and later on *YouTube*. His unusual vocal skill has dominated Williams's self-presentation as well as the narratives that various media have based on his persona. The other two aspects of Williams's biography that define his public image are his drug and alcohol addiction and his homelessness. A voice-over artist by training, Williams struggled with addiction, lost his house, and was homeless for over 15 years. The media reported extensively on his return to middle-class living standards, his job opportunities, the emotional reunion with

8 Economist Josh Bivens, among others, speaks out against the notion that the financial meltdown of 2008 was an unpredictable and inevitable event within a complex system: "The economy that [...] turned a housing bubble into an economic catastrophe was [...] designed, specifically, to guarantee that the powerful reaped a larger share of the rewards of overall economic growth" (9). See also Calomiris and Haber; Stiglitz.

his mother, his relapse and subsequent rehabilitation program, and his wedding in 2014.

While the character of Nathaniel Ayers in *The Soloist* suffers from a psychotic disease that fits snugly into the framework of madness and the mad-genius trope, Ted Williams's struggle with addiction does not lend itself so well to the ambiguous fascination with ingenious madness but leans more toward the abject end of the illness spectrum. A BBC report of 2011 – apparently unaware of the real-life basis for the film – goes as far as explicitly comparing the internet sensation Ted Williams to the movie adaptation of *The Soloist*, claiming that Williams's story was “a remarkable case of life imitating art” and asking if, based on the parallels between the “golden voice” media coverage and the movie, Williams's fame was “too good to be true.” This slightly hypocritical attempt at criticizing the media's tendency to overemphasize personal tragedy and success for the sake of a heartwarming story – the BBC is cashing in on the sensationalism, too, after all – addresses by proxy (through an internet commentator's video footage) how a discussion about the increase in poverty and homelessness is notably absent from most of the media coverage on Ted Williams, but then does not engage in or initiate such a discussion. Williams's mental health issues are subsumed under his “checkered past,” accompanied by Roger Miller's sentimental hobo song “King of the Road.” The reality for the thousands of mentally ill homeless in the U.S., however, bears little resemblance to the fiction of a freedom-loving hobo life celebrated in Miller's song.

MENTAL HEALTH AND HOMELESSNESS

Homelessness and mental illness are in many cases mutually dependent. Being homeless poses a severe mental health risk, and mental illness in turn increases the risk of becoming homeless. This correlation does not merely stem from the social, economic, physical, and psychological strains of living on the street or the many challenges that accompany mental illness and make it difficult to secure one's income and housing. Political and legal changes are decisive factors, particularly in the U.S. with its political developments of the last decades that relieved the federal and state governments of many responsibilities with regard to mental health care. The

systematic deinstitutionalization of psychiatric patients since the 1960s has contributed considerably to what E. Fuller Torrey calls “the rise of mass homelessness” (*The Insanity Offense* 124). Under the Community Mental Health Act of 1963, public psychiatric hospitals were closed and funding moved instead to community mental health centers. With the introduction of Medicaid and Medicare many states passed legislations modelled after California’s Lanterman-Petris-Short Act, which regulates involuntary civil commitment to mental health institutions and involuntary assistance or medication. These policies make it extremely difficult to institutionalize or medicate even severely psychotic persons against their will.⁹

Deinstitutionalization works in two stages: First, patients are discharged from public institutions, most of which are then closed down afterwards. As Torrey writes, “[t]he former affects people who are already mentally ill. The latter affects those who become ill after the policy has gone into effect and for the indefinite future because hospital beds have been permanently eliminated” (*Out of the Shadows* 8). By the 1980s, after the Reagan administration had repealed Carter’s Mental Health Systems Act (thus defunding many of the already underfinanced community mental health centers), the “overtly psychotic” homeless who could not or did not want to find adequate care were “politicized, provoking major debates regarding their numbers, their origin, and the relative responsibility of local, state, and federal governments for their care.” “By the turn of this century,” thus Torrey, “the homeless were no longer causes célèbres, having quietly blended into urban landscapes like abandoned cars or rundown buildings” (*The Insanity Offense* 124).¹⁰

9 To illustrate the at times absurd consequences of these legislations, Torrey recounts the case of a mentally ill homeless man in Augusta, Maine, whose chosen abode resembles that of Green’s protagonist in *The Caveman’s Valentine*: “Randy Reed, a forty-three-year-old man, dug out a cave-like home for himself on the banks of the Kennebec River. Mental health outreach workers and police were aware of Reed and offered him help, but he refused [...] Reed continued enlarging his home to the point that it eventually undermined a city parking lot, causing it to sag. Reed was then deemed eligible for psychiatric commitment because of the danger posed to the parking lot, not to Reed himself.” (126-27)

10 The results officially intended by these policies failed to materialize in most regards, as Daniel Yohanna points out: “Three forces drove the movement of peo-

Homelessness and mental illness are interrelated; homelessness and prison also have a strong correlation; and to come full circle, mental illness ties in with incarceration as well. 45 percent of federal prison inmates and 64 percent of local jail inmates have been reported to suffer from mental health problems (cf. James and Glaze). “America’s jails and prisons have become our new mental hospitals,” a 2010 study states based on the fact that in some states there are “almost ten times more mentally ill persons in jails and prisons than in hospitals” (Torrey et al. 1). This conglomerate of factors – homelessness, incarceration, and mental health issues – affects people of color at a much higher rate than any other group in U.S. society. “People of color [...] are more likely to suffer disparities in mental health treatment in general,” as Lorna Collier reports, which also makes them “more likely to be ushered into the criminal justice system.” The texts discussed here, however, focus on just a fragment of one of those interrelations, namely homelessness and mental illness, and neglect the interconnections of racial bias, poverty, incarceration, and mental health altogether.

ple with severe mental illness from hospitals into the community: the belief that mental hospitals were cruel and inhumane; the hope that new antipsychotic medications offered a cure; and the desire to save money” (886-87). None of these three points proved entirely true or attainable. While the institutionalized treatment of mentally ill patients has a long and in many cases well-deserved reputation for cruelty, discharging patients from hospitals without providing the legal requirements or infrastructure to ensure the care they need turned out to be just as inhumane in the long run. The development of the first widely effective antipsychotic drugs, above all chlorpromazine in the 1950s, fueled expectations that psychotic patients would be enabled to return to a ‘regular’ life. Since a strong belief that one is not sick, however, is a common symptom of many psychotic disorders, patients stopped taking their medication after being discharged. As for saving money, the decision to pull funding from public mental health care suffered from the same short-sightedness as most other policies defunding institutions that provide care and assistance to those citizens most in need of it. It looks good in a government’s annual budget, but the actual expenses for cities and counties – if and when somebody takes the time to estimate such costs – are staggering (cf. Mangano and Blasi; Culhane).

THE MAD GENIUS

The narratives spun around Chris Gardner in *The Pursuit of Happiness* and the *YouTube* phenomenon Ted Williams derive much of their momentum from continuously dramatizing their protagonists' outstanding talents, a strategy that Green's novel *The Caveman's Valentine* and Lopez's book *The Soloist* carry to an extreme by making use of the mad-genius trope for the depiction of their main characters. Certain mental illnesses such as schizophrenia have long been believed to coincide with creativity, artistic talent, and unusual cognitive abilities. The mad genius, as Judith Schlesinger puts it, "has been a cherished cultural icon for centuries, a romantic and compelling concept" (62). Schlesinger's analysis dismantles the misconception behind the mythconception of the mad genius stereotype, the unfounded belief that creativity and what is perceived as genius have any scientifically proven correlation to psychopathology and madness. She hints at the cases made about famous artists like Mozart, Beethoven, van Gogh, or Kafka, and canonical literary figures fitting into the Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde theme. "Who needs science when we have such compelling poetry to make the case?" she asks (63).

The figure of the mad genius has not lost its allure for today's storytellers. "Hollywood can't get enough of it," Arne Dietrich points out in a polemical article on medical research's readiness to assume a connection between mental illness and creativity: "The narrative of the troubled genius just strikes all the right chords for coverage in the tweet-sized attention span of modern news reporting." (1) Although it makes for a compelling narrative, the mad genius nonetheless belongs to the realm of long-established myths about superhuman intelligence and artistic talent, as Dietrich makes clear. "The simple truth of the matter is that the VAST majority of creative people are not mentally ill and, more importantly, the VAST majority of those suffering from psychopathology are not geniuses." (2)

While medical researchers like Schlesinger and Dietrich refer to clinical psychology's tendency to draw ill-informed and then widely popularized links between mental illness and creativity, the question with regard to cultural images of black homelessness is one of representational politics and the effects this well-established – if scientifically unsound – stereotype has on character development and the ways in which these "true stories" are

told. When relying on the mad-genius trope and its less flamboyant neighbor, the highly gifted individual who is faced with personal tragedy, media representations of homeless Blacks tap into a popular myth of extreme individualization whose very logic separates the individual from society. The same condition that makes the mad genius unfit for society – their mental illness – is believed to produce inexplicable yet socially and culturally valuable outcomes, namely artistic work. Social exclusion is not simply a regrettable side-effect of genius; in the logic of this stereotype, it is necessary for peak performances.

Representational strategies that personalize social and systemic issues have been widely criticized in Reality TV formats, a genre with a programmatic claim to telling ‘true stories’ (cf. Aho; Andrejevic and Colby; Escoffery). Employing the mad genius frame is in itself such a strategy of individualization. Merely by depicting characters as artists or creative talents locates them within the field of artistic production and, according to Bourdieu’s analysis of this field, detaches them from their social conditioning: “There are in fact very few other areas,” he observes in *The Field of Cultural Production*, “in which the glorification of ‘great individuals’ [...] is more common or more uncontroversial” (29). Due to their relative position within social reality, artistic production and creative work are singularly suited to promote a consecration of creative individuals that, even while acknowledging socio-cultural and socio-political environments, obliterates most of the interdependencies between the personal and the context of which it is the product. Naturalization of the assumed bodily source of genius – illness – is but one side of this process of de-socializing, de-politicizing glorification. The production of “a particular form of belief” on which the artistic field depends – and within it the myth of the mad genius as a specific kind of tragic artist – forms the other. “The work of art is an object which exists as such only by virtue of the (collective) belief which knows and acknowledges it as a work of art,” writes Bourdieu (35). The same is true for the artist whose name consecrates the work qua the collective belief in that name. Producing this belief requires practices that “can only work by pretending not to be doing what they are doing,” which is building and participating in an economic structure that “can function [...] only by virtue of a constant, collective repression of narrowly ‘economic’ interest” (74).

In this ostensibly anti-economic, disinterested universe, the figure of the 'true artist' incorporates the assumed opposition in which the artistic field constructs itself in opposition to fields of power. The 'pure' artist defies economic interest, state institutions, bourgeois standards, and politics. What could be a purer artist, then, than one whose very body does not even allow for the option of participation in mainstream society? By representing black homeless characters through the mad-genius frame, texts like *The Soloist* pretend to be doing what they are not doing: They appear to depict the racial dimension of poverty and homelessness while actually eclipsing the systemic scope of their characters' racialized identities. For the remainder of this essay, I will engage in a closer reading of the specific techniques used in the book and the film *The Soloist*.

THE DISCONNECTED SOLOIST

The first time Lopez and Ayers meet, the homeless musician is playing his violin at the foot of the Beethoven statue in Pershing Square in downtown Los Angeles. Lopez describes the scene as an "odd picture of grubby refinement," expressing the discrepancy between contradicting elements unexpectedly forming a coherent image: a homeless man, visibly poor and "troubled," as Lopez puts it, skillfully playing an old violin with only two strings and seeming "oblivious to everyone around him" (*The Soloist* 13). Ayers's clownish attire and the decorated shopping-cart in which he holds his possessions add to the air of absurdity in this scene that constantly tip-toes the line between the merely odd and a parodic portrait of the protagonists' first encounter.

Within the artistic field, intentional parody "presupposes and confirms *emancipation*" in that this form of parody means to overcome "the dominant mode of thought and expression" (Bourdieu, *Cultural Production* 31). The borderline-parodic effect of a visibly psychotic homeless African American playing a damaged violin, however, does not constitute an act of emancipation in *The Soloist* – not so much because Ayers does not intend an emancipatory parody, but because the narrator Lopez, who creates and constructs the character Ayers for the reader, does not allow it. In what I read as an act of false modesty, Lopez claims not to know much about classical music while at the same time making what seems intended to sound

like a valid judgment of Ayers's skills. He discerns from hearing Ayers play on a two-stringed violin that he must have had "some serious training" (13); it sounds "brilliant" to him, who is "no musician" but has "a good ear for pitch" (23). Lopez remains wedded to a conventional (bourgeois) perspective on classical European music that focuses on the cultural and symbolic capital of canonical works, expressed also in his namedropping of composers, and aims at harnessing its profits for the benefit of the underprivileged homeless man – and also for Lopez's own creative work, namely his newspaper column.

The character Nathaniel Ayers is, of course, a product of the author/narrator Lopez's creative imagination. Lopez creates Ayers not just as an artist, but at the same time as a work of art, an object: He is introduced, first and foremost, as 'material' for a story; in fact, Ayers *is* the story. "I'm figuring this vagrant violinist is a column," Lopez realizes (8); and a few pages later, when it proves difficult to get a hold of Ayers, he states: "Now I'm worried that I've lost the column" (16). Journalistic writing occupies a rather low position within the field of cultural production. Therefore, the journalist jumps at the opportunity to increase his story's (in other words, Ayers's) value by way of the quasi-magical effect of name recognition. As soon as Ayers mentions his Juilliard education, and no sooner than that, Lopez begins to do the "legwork" necessary for a "good column" (20). The journalist is ready to drop the idea when a first enquiry at the renowned conservatory does not confirm Ayers as an alumnus. When the school calls back with the information that Ayers did in fact attend Juilliard but failed to graduate, it 'upgrades' Ayers to the status of a particularly unique object. Bourdieu describes this mysterious 'alchemy' using the example of "the magic of the designer's label" which, "stuck on any object, [...] can multiply its value in an extraordinary way" (*Sociology* 102). With the Juilliard label attached to his persona, Lopez's character Ayers takes on the extraordinary cultural capital that comes with the famous name and that is even increased by his destitute living conditions because of the improbability of the two labels – 'homeless' and 'Juilliard' – coinciding. "This is indeed a magical, alchemical act," as Bourdieu puts it, "since the social nature and value of the object are changed without any change in its physical or its chemical [...] nature" (102). After Lopez receives the phone call from Juilliard, Ayers is still the same person, nothing about him has changed, except for his now being a product of the Juilliard school. Not the crazy,

homeless black man is of value to Lopez's writing, and even the obviously talented homeless black musician has barely any scarcity value; it is the label of Juilliard – an institution that stands for elite education in high-brow, classical European music – that grants Ayers a position of uniqueness. In Bourdieu's words, "what makes the value of the work is not the rarity [...] of the product but the rarity of the producer [...], that is, the collective belief in the value of the producer and his product" (102).

The Soloist sidesteps the issue of the conditionality of Ayers's class affiliation and racialized identity by way of the mad-genius trope that shields the character from his surroundings and also keeps the audience from engaging in a discourse about the race- and class-related aspects of African American homelessness. It must be mentioned here that the film adaptation uses a more ambivalent strategy than the book. While it increases the individualization that disconnects Ayers from his environment and foregrounds Lopez's character, the movie also includes scenes that seem to criticize the effects of this individualization in a form of meta-critique of the media.

On the one hand, the film presents Ayers as a de-racialized, assumedly non-political character. What the book rather soberly mentions as a historical landmark coinciding with Ayers's biography turns into a character-defining scene on the screen: In a sequence that summarizes Nathaniel's socialization, he is shown in the basement of his Cleveland home, feverishly practicing the cello while Civil Rights protests take place on the street right outside his small window. Only the flickering lights of a burning car catch his attention. After briefly glancing through the window with an expressionless face, he returns to his cello practice. His schizophrenic mind provides an opportunity for the story to detach Ayers from socializing as well as politicizing influences.

On the other hand, the film includes a scene in voice-over narration in which Lopez is composing his first column about Ayers while we also see a woman reading the published column. The scene begins with a full-screen image of a television broadcasting news footage from New Orleans in the days after Hurricane Katrina, which hit the gulf coast just before Lopez published his first piece about Ayers. The newspaper reader is sitting in front of her television, but instead of watching the news where predominantly black people persevere on rooftops and in overcrowded buildings, holding up signs that ask for help, she is immersed in the column and so touched by Ayers's fate that she donates her old cello to him. The

personalized story about one singled-out individual elicits generosity while thousands of hurricane survivors, cooped up in stadiums and ignored by the federal and state governments, are not even granted a look. A discussion in the *LA Times* newsroom also addresses the lack of response to an investigative article revealing large-scale corruption, in contrast to Lopez's piece about his own accident which generated tens of emails from concerned readers.

By limiting to an ultimately personal level even those passages of the book that deal with social institutions, political agendas, and the responsibility of the media with regard to the way the public deals with issues of poverty and racism, Lopez's *The Soloist* divests itself of the opportunity to place such issues in their larger socio-political context. "Is he happy?" the narrator Lopez asks himself in reference to Ayers. "Clearly music makes him happy, and how many musicians in the world have as much time to play as he does, entirely free of expectation? For him, it isn't work" (163). Interpreting lack as freedom here, Lopez paints Ayers's life as endless free time where the absence of conventional expectations, rather than being the result of marginalization, provides constant opportunity to indulge in one's favorite pastime.

The passage suggests that Ayers does not conceive of music as "work" simply because he enjoys it so much, and not, as would be much more to the point in many respects, because he does not get paid for playing. The line between being free of constraints and being denied access to opportunity gets even blurrier as the passage continues: "Sure, he [Ayers] gets down on himself occasionally, frustrated by his limitations. But he doesn't have to worry about training for an audition, like he did when he was younger, and he doesn't need to make a living at it. For Nathaniel, music is freedom" (163). Again, and more pronouncedly at this point, Lopez interprets as a privilege what is in fact an expression of Ayers's exclusion from the opportunities of those who have access to the labor market (limited as these opportunities may be for a growing number of artists and many other workers in the United States). Ayers is *unable* to make a living and he could not prepare for an audition if he wanted to because he has no access to that professional part of a musician's life anymore. And yet *The Soloist* suggests that his being underprivileged is the source of Ayers's happiness.

This strategy works all the better because Lopez stages himself as a hard-working everyman and his work life as a burden. His complaints about

the nuisances of a regular life in mainstream society sometimes sneak in through the back door when he pretends to talk about Ayers: “Nathaniel is 100 percent off the books. No Social Security card, no driver’s license, no address, no living will, no job, no lawn to mow, no phone calls to return, no retirement to plan for and no rules except his own” (164). What begins as a mere list of items separating Ayers from regular citizens soon turns into a cliché of middle-class tedium and then culminates in what sounds like the tagline of a Wild West drama featuring a lone hero of last-man-standing caliber. But domestic chores, social etiquette, or retirement plans are not inevitable consequences of secure housing and mental health; plenty of people enjoy the roofs over their heads without ever mowing a lawn or responding to certain phone calls. What Lopez conceives of as Ayers’s “freedom” is the kind of liberation the *illusio* of the artistic field ascribes to the ‘true’ and ‘pure’ artist. “The position of ‘pure’ writer or artist,” writes Bourdieu, is assumed to be “an institution of freedom, constructed against the ‘bourgeoisie’ [...] and against institutions – in particular against the state bureaucracies, academies, salons, etc.” (*Cultural Production* 63). Ayers has no bourgeois reputation to protect, no federal or state institutions to deal with, and no academic aspirations to train for. Without his musical talent, he would merely be a social failure. As a Juilliard-certified and medically diagnosed mad genius, however, he meets the requirements for ‘pure artist.’

The particular focus not just on individual experience as detached from the systemic, historic, and habitual forces of which it is the product, but on an individual’s unusual mental capacities and shortcomings has a double effect. For one thing, it allows for the fading out of the physical experience of homelessness by ascribing its bodily aspects to pre-existing mental pathologies (and moral disciplining, or lack thereof), thus further marginalizing the socially exposed and culturally divested black body, along with the political-cultural history incorporated in these bodies. For another, these narratives neatly fall in line with the specifically U.S. American welfare ideology, which aims at charity rather than welfare, “not solidarity but *compassion*” in Loïc Wacquant’s words (42). Displaying and eliciting moral sympathy for an exceptional individual gives a forum to the cathartic proclamations and outbursts of compassion so ingrained in the liberal American habitus, while the texts edit out the relational entanglements of African American poverty.

In 1969, Nina Simone released the single “To be Young, Gifted and Black” (lyrics by Weldon Irvine), later to be included on her live album *Black Gold* (1970). The song honors playwright Lorraine Hansberry, author of the famous play of the same title, and became an important protest hymn in the Civil Rights movement. It celebrates the abilities of the new generation of black youths all over the world, demands they be acknowledged, and encourages Blacks to claim recognition and equal opportunities. “There are billion boys and girls / That are young, gifted and black, / And that’s a fact!” one stanza ends. The giftedness this song wants to convince its listeners of, however, is not the kind attributed to black homeless men in the early years of the 21st century. Simone’s song – arguably the most widely distributed cultural reference that links being black to being talented – promotes a change in how the public conceives of African Americans, and even more so in the collective self-image of people of color in the U.S. It targets the demeaning identity politics of the Jim Crow era and claims agency for a disempowered social group.¹¹ The homeless and gifted black characters of the early 2000s, by contrast, are divested of much of their individual agency as well as their African American identity precisely through a foregrounding of their special talents. The frame of the mad genius elicits sympathy for the individual while at the same time facilitating a tacit dismissal of race, class, and social conditionality.

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11 Wright’s film adaptation of *The Soloist* quotes a line from Simone’s song in one of the flashback scenes that recount Ayers’s childhood during the Civil Rights revolution. While tucking him in at night, Nathaniel’s mother tells him that “there’s a whole world waiting for you.” However, the teenaged Nathaniel has just been visually cut off from the political movement in the previous scene (see above) which renders the reference quite hollow.

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Understanding Ferguson

Suburban Marginality and Racialized Penalty in the Age of Neoliberalism

LUVENA KOPP

This is the message that has spread through streets and tenements and prisons, through the narcotics wards, and past the filth and sadism of mental hospitals to a people from whom everything has been taken away, including, most crucially, their sense of their own worth. People cannot live without this sense; they will do anything whatever to regain it. This is why the most dangerous creation of any society is that man who has nothing to lose. You do not need ten such men—one will do.

JAMES BALDWIN, "DOWN AT THE CROSS"

On August 9, 2014, 18-year-old Michael Brown and his friend, Dorian Johnson, were walking on the roadway on Canfield Drive in the southeastern part of Ferguson, Missouri.¹ As they walked, the young men

1 This is a revised version of a German article titled "Der Fall Michael Brown: (Symbolische) Polizeigewalt und kollektive Fantasie." *Von Selma bis Ferguson: Rasse und Rassismus in den USA*, edited by Michael Butter, Astrid Franke, and

encountered Darren Wilson, a white police officer in an SUV, who demanded that they use the sidewalk. Approximately two minutes after this encounter, Michael Brown was dead, killed by the police officer with at least six shots.

After the killing, Brown's corpse was not immediately removed from the scene but left "bleeding [...] in the hot summer sun for four hours, much of that time uncovered, as the residents of [his neighborhood of] Canfield looked upon his splayed-out corpse in horror" (Devereaux). The blatant brutality of Brown's spectacular murder and the attempts of Ferguson officials to deflect responsibility for the killing that "devastated a family with high hopes for their college-bound son" (Devereaux) sent a shockwave through the town, which erupted into weeks of intense protests. When a jury decided not to indict Wilson for the killing, protests intensified further and the black rage thus kindled catalyzed a transnational activist movement which, most prominently under the slogan Black Lives Matter, continues to assert human rights for black people in the face of anti-black state violence (cf. Harris).²

In the aftermath of the shooting – and owing to the public protests and their international media coverage – the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) issued a report on the Ferguson Police Department (FPD) and the city's municipal court. The report exposed a systemic pattern of abusive and largely unconstitutional law enforcement practices that were "shaped by the City's focus on revenue rather than by public safety needs" (U.S. Dept. of Justice, *Ferguson Report 2*). Ferguson's focus on revenue generation was further structured by racial bias. As the DOJ explained, the city's officials perceived "some residents, especially those who live[d] in Ferguson's predominantly African-American neighborhoods, less as constituents to be protected than as potential offenders and sources of revenue" (4). Weaving together material and symbolic modes of division, Ferguson's

Horst Tonn, Transcript, 2016, pp. 261-86. I would like to thank Derek C. Maus for reading and commenting on the manuscript.

2 My use of the term black rage draws on Cornel West's description of Malcolm X as a "prophet of black rage." According to West, this rage is shaped, among other things, by a "great love for black people," a "profound commitment to affirm black humanity at any cost," and a "tremendous courage to accent the hypocrisy of American society" (136).

approach to law enforcement emblemizes “the law-and-order upsurge that has swept most postindustrial countries around the close of the century” and which “constitutes a *reaction to, a diversion from, and a denegation of, the generalization of the social and mental insecurity* produced by the diffusion of desocialized wage labor against the backdrop of increased inequality,” as Loïc Wacquant, a rigorous contemporary proponent of relational sociology, argues in *Punishing the Poor* (xv, original emphasis). Ferguson’s penal system thus instantiates the interrelation of the materialist and symbolic dimensions of the social, which are traditionally kept apart in critical thought.³ For, as Wacquant further argues,

penal institutions and policies can and do shoulder both tasks at once: they simultaneously act to enforce hierarchy and control contentious categories, at one level, and to communicate norms and shape collective representations and subjectivities, at another. The prison symbolizes material divisions and materializes relations of symbolic power [...]. (*Punishing the Poor* xvi)

Exploring the symbolization of material divisions and materialization of symbolic power that characterize law enforcement in Ferguson, this article places the killing of Brown within the larger nexus of what Wacquant defines as the neoliberal “government of social insecurity” (11). Contrary to common critique of the idea of a post-racial America, this government of social insecurity is indeed post-racial to the effect that “the absence of racism in the law mean[s] that African Americans [can]not claim racial harm,” as Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor notes in *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (52-53). Post-race then, indicates not post-racism but the state’s consistent withdrawal from the legacy of the Civil Rights revolution. Intertwining structures of *race making* (cf. Wacquant, “Deadly Symbiosis” *passim*) and structures of *class making*, penal practices in Ferguson, as

3 Emphasizing this link between the materialist and symbolic spheres of the social is truly in line with relational sociology which “demands [...] a rupture with naive conceptions derived from philosophical anthropology that dominate our perceptions in everyday life, most importantly the binary opposition of society and individual, structure and agent, or, more generally, the long-established dichotomy of objectivist and subjectivist modes of knowledge,” as Christa Buschendorf explains in a review of *Punishing the Poor* (305).

elsewhere in the U.S., are indicative of the state's larger task of protecting the established order or, put differently, of reinforcing its resilience in the face of social disturbances caused by heightened economic deregulation, fiscal austerity, reduced social spending, expansive social precarity, population shifts, and growing social discontent (cf. Franke and Hirschfelder). Thus, I contend that the case of Ferguson "ties together [issues of] inequality and identity, fuses [issues of] domination and signification, and welds the passions and the interests that traverse and roil society" (*Punishing the Poor* xvi).

THEORETICAL APPROACH: NEOLIBERAL PENALTY AND THE SYMBOLIC POWER OF 'RACE'

Wacquant's work on urban marginality, ethnoracial domination, and the penal system offers powerful analytic tools and methodologies that allow researchers of social inequality to grasp more clearly the progressive interweaving of social policy and penal policy within the larger context of a neoliberal state that 'punishes its poor' (cf. Buschendorf et al. 303, 306). Wacquant argues that the post-Civil Rights era was marked by a shift in U.S. state policies that "*tipped the balance of the US bureaucratic field from its protective to its punitive pole*" (*Punishing the Poor* 43, original emphasis). A particularly drastic feature of this shift is the rise of the penal state, which has come to replace the country's relatively tenuous welfare state. This penal state, Wacquant insists, "responds, not to rising *criminal insecurity*, but to the wave of *social insecurity* that has flooded the lower tier of the class structure owing to the fragmentation of wage labor and the destabilization of ethnoracial or ethnonational hierarchies" (287, original emphasis). Consequently, the targets of America's penal system are, firstly, poor and, secondly, black (cf. Wacquant, "Class" 78-79).

In his seminal article "Deadly Symbiosis: When Ghetto and Prison Meet and Mesh," Wacquant traces the *longue durée* of racialized domination in the U.S. from slavery to the present. He identifies four "peculiar institutions" – slavery, the Jim Crow system, the urban ghetto, and the hyperghetto – that have successively performed "the task of *defining, confining, and controlling* African Americans in the United States" (98-99, original emphasis). Postindustrial restructurings starting in the late 1960s – includ-

ing the shift from manual to service-based labor and the relocation of production plants from the city centers of the Northeast and Midwest to southern anti-union states and low-wage foreign countries – led to the disintegration of the urban ghetto, rendering its (semi-)skilled black residents effectively redundant within America’s national economy. Unable to sell their labor, and thus devoid of economic – and ultimately human – worth, these deproletarianized African Americans from the inner cities have been caged in the symbiotic interlocking of the remains of the ghetto, defined as hyperghetto, and the prison system. In other words, as the ghetto loses its ability to enforce the color line through “economic extraction and social ostracization of a population deemed congenitally inferior, defiled and defiling” (“Class” 81), a function uniting all before-mentioned institutions, “it is up to the fourth ‘peculiar institution’ born of the adjoining of the hyperghetto with the carceral system to remould the social meaning and significance of ‘race’ in accordance with the dictates of the deregulated economy and the post-Keynesian state” (“Deadly Symbiosis” 117).⁴

4 The nexus of the various structures of ethnoracial marginality is the result, first, of the epistemic propensity to highlight structural coherences and, second, of the tendential systematicity of social practices and struggles. I must insist on this lest it is believed that Wacquant is attempting to propagate some kind of conspiracy theory. Rather than stemming from an intentionalist or even determinist unity, then, the interconnectedness of the structures outlined above must be conceived as the product of a *practical unity* shaped by regularity as much as by digression and driven less by monolithic behavior than by (collective and individual) interest, social competition, and researchers’ analytical practice. “It should be clear,” Wacquant explains, “that the high degree of internal coherence and external congruence displayed by the radiography of the nascent government of social insecurity after the collapse of the Fordist-Keynesian order drawn here is partly a function of the analytic lens deployed. It should not mislead the reader to think that the penalization of poverty is a deliberate ‘plan’ pursued by malevolent and omnipotent rulers—as in the conspiratorial vision framing the activist myth of the ‘prison-industrial complex.’ Nor does it imply that some systemic need (of capitalism, racism, or panopticism) mysteriously mandates the runaway activation and glorification of the penal sector of the bureaucratic field. The latter are not preordained necessities but the results of struggles involving myriad agents and institutions seeking to reshape this or that wing and prerogative of

Wacquant defies essentialist notions of ‘race’ by embedding this concept within a framework of social practices, more precisely relations of power. ‘Race,’ then, is produced in various acts of race making; it “consists of a set of *politically negotiated meanings, a symbolic structure of power that must be activated to be efficacious*” (“The Puzzle” 12, original emphasis). To characterize ‘race’ as a structure of symbolic power is to highlight its capacity to legitimize, or rather naturalize, the established social order. In this sense, ‘race’

becomes an operative principle of social vision and division [which] resides in the full gamut of forms assumed by social action: in categories, taxonomies, and theories, but also in the objective distributions of positions and powers that make up institutions and, last but not least, in human bodies shaped and inhabited by the differentiations it stipulates. (Wacquant, “For an Analytic” 227-28)

Today, the penal system constitutes America’s primary institution of symbolic production. It is, as Wacquant puts it, the country’s “main machine for ‘race making’” (“Deadly Symbiosis” 117). A particularly far-reaching effect of this rise of the penal state has been the renewed popularization of the phantasmatic association of blackness and deviance (cf. 117), which allows state officials to deprive African Americans of basic constitutional rights, above all, their right to vote.

Wacquant’s sociology of ethnoracial domination invites us to explore anti-black state violence not in isolation, but within the larger processes of the crafting of the neoliberal state and, relatedly, the political aim of neutralizing an ever-growing dispossessed and dishonored “*surplus population*” (105, original emphasis; see also “Crafting”). Correspondingly, the killing of Brown should not be viewed merely as additional evidence of the racism of individual police officers or departments; rather, it must be understood as the realization of the – political and economic – necessities of a postindustrial society wherein (poor) black lives have indeed ceased to matter.

the state in accordance with their material and symbolic interests” (*Punishing the Poor* xx).

OBJECTIVE DOMINATION: FERGUSON'S MATERIAL DIVISION IN SOCIAL/PHYSICAL SPACE

This section outlines Ferguson's objective conditions of racialized power. One cannot fully understand these conditions, which shaped Brown's fatal encounter with Wilson, unless they are observed in the larger context of struggles over physical space and its various forms of capital: Wilson's attempt to charge Brown and Johnson with the 'crime' of jaywalking is essentially a variation of this struggle and an example of the established group's claim to Ferguson's public space.⁵ For Pierre Bourdieu, spatial struggles are intimately linked to struggles over power and, thus, a main site of symbolic violence:

Because social space is inscribed at once in spatial structures and in the mental structures that are partly produced by the incorporation of these structures, space is one of the sites where power is asserted and exercised, and, no doubt in its subtlest form, as symbolic violence that goes unperceived as violence. (Bourdieu et al. 126)

5 My use of the terms "established group" and "outsider group" is based on Norbert Elias's theory of established-outsider figurations. In the introduction to his seminal study *The Established and the Outsiders*, co-authored with his student John L. Scotson, Elias argues that it is not so much ethnicity than social inequality that generates the perceived human superiority of the established group *vis-à-vis* the perceived human inferiority of the outsider group (cf. 1). "[R]ace relations," he contends, "are simply established-outsiders-relations of a particular type" (15). Similarly, we may argue that Ferguson's established-outsider relation is shaped, but not restricted by 'race.' After all, the FPD did include a small number of Blacks; and there is no reason why a black police officer should not have seized this opportunity for revenue generation. Thus, even though 'whiteness' is a vital component of the established representation of Ferguson's dominant group, "the salient aspect of their relationship [with the outsiders] is that they are bonded together in a manner which endows one of them with very much greater power resources than the other and enables that group to exclude members of the other group from access to the centre of these resources and from closer contact with its own members, thus relegating them to the position of outsiders" (16).

The struggle over physical space, then, corresponds to the struggle over “social space” and is therefore inseparable from the “*political construction of space*” which, shaped by government and economic interests, practically translates into “the *construction of homogenous groups on a spatial basis*” (129, original emphasis).

Whereas Wacquant’s studies tend to focus on the urban cores as the main site of socio-spatial marginality, the social struggles in Ferguson indicate a gradual shift of socio-spatial marginalization from the cities to the suburbs. According to Richard Rothstein, segregation in 21st-century America replicates the European model: Affluent whites settle in gentrified neighborhoods in the city centers while the poor, particularly Blacks and Latinos/as, are continually pushed to inner-ring suburbs (cf. 2-4, 31). Today almost forty percent of America’s poor live in suburbs such as Ferguson (Dreier and Swanstorm).

Ferguson, a city with approximately 21,000 inhabitants, is one of 90 municipalities in St. Louis County, Missouri. 25 percent of the city’s population live below the poverty line (U.S. Dept. of Justice, *Ferguson Report* 11), which is one and a half times the rate of poverty in America as a whole (Casselman). While Ferguson’s total population has remained more or less consistent, its racialized demographics have changed rapidly over the past four decades (cf. *Ferguson Report* 11). In 1970, Blacks accounted for less than 1 percent of the city’s population with whites comprising nearly all of the remaining 99 percent; by 2010, these proportions had changed to the point that Blacks and whites represented 67 and 29 of Ferguson’s population, respectively (cf. Rothstein 3; U.S. Census Bureau 2). Space does not permit an extended discussion of the manifold reasons for this remarkable change in Ferguson’s racial composition, but it will suffice to highlight a few significant points.

In his report “The Making of Ferguson” (2014) Rothstein conducts a detailed analysis of racialized division in the St. Louis metropolis, from the segregationist policies of President Woodrow Wilson in the early 20th century until the present. Rothstein shifts the analytical focus from a “methodological individualism” (Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations* 155), i.e., the emphasis on personal racism as the main cause for segregation, to an inquiry into the systemic structures and policies that indicate “the explicit intents of federal, state, and local governments to create racially segregated metropolises” (1). As he further explains,

[m]any of these explicitly segregationist governmental actions ended in the late 20th century but continue to determine today's racial segregation patterns. In St. Louis these governmental policies included zoning rules that classified white neighborhoods as residential and black neighborhoods as commercial or industrial; segregated public housing projects that replaced integrated low-income areas; federal subsidies for suburban development conditioned on African American exclusion; federal and local requirements for, and enforcement of, property deeds and neighborhood agreements that prohibited resale of white-owned property to, or occupancy by, African Americans; tax favoritism for private institutions that practiced segregation; municipal boundary lines designed to separate black neighborhoods from white ones and to deny necessary services to the former; real estate, insurance, and banking regulators who tolerated and sometimes required racial segregation; and urban renewal plans whose purpose was to shift black populations from central cities like St. Louis to inner-ring suburbs like Ferguson. (2)

Rothstein applies one of the main hypotheses of relational thought, the interpenetration of objective configurations and subjective modes of thought and perception, in defining the extent to which segregationist policies structured whites' prejudiced efforts to distance themselves from Blacks in St. Louis as a whole:

Whites observed the black ghetto and concluded that slum conditions were characteristic of black families, not a result of housing discrimination. This conclusion reinforced whites' resistance to racial integration, lest black residents bring slum conditions to white communities. Thus, to the extent we attribute segregation of the contemporary St. Louis metropolitan area to white flight, government policy bears some responsibility for creating conditions that supported the racial stereotypes fueling such flight. (20)

Another important aspect of Rothstein's report for the Economic Policy Institute is that it moves away from what Elias has criticized as "process-reduction" (*Zustandsreduktion*) by defining segregation as a set of dynamic processes that, over the course of historical changes, prevail in the form of "*transhistorical invariants*" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 78, original emphasis). "The following pages," he writes at the outset of his study,

tell the story of how St. Louis became such a segregated metropolis, where racial boundaries continually change but communities' racial homogeneity persists. Neighborhoods that appear to be integrated are almost always those in transition, either from mostly white to mostly black (like Ferguson), or from mostly black to increasingly white (like St. Louis's gentrifying neighborhoods). Such population shifts in St. Louis and other metropolitan areas maintain segregation patterns established by public policy a century ago. (3-4)

Ferguson used to be what James Loewen has called a sundown town. To wit, until the mid-1960s, Blacks and other racialized minorities were forced to leave town after sunset (cf. Rothstein 3, 32n2; U.S. Dept. of Justice, *Ferguson Report* 118). Warning signs that read "Nigger, Don't Let The Sun Go Down On You In ..." or "Nigger, Read This Sign and Run" frequently marked the boundaries of such towns (qtd. in Loewen 3, 69).⁶ In Ferguson, this practice of racialized exclusion was discontinued in 1968, among other things because of organized protests in the neighboring predominantly black town of Kinloch following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in April of that year (cf. Rothstein 32n2).⁷ In 1975 a federal court further mandated that Ferguson "and other white towns [...] integrate their schools into a common district with Kinloch" (Rothstein 3). All of this concurred with the elimination of public housing in the city of St. Louis to generate a steady migration of Blacks to formerly white suburban towns. Once the first African Americans broke the color line in these suburbs, 'for sale' signs began to pop up on the lawns of their neighbors (cf. Rothstein 4).

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- 6 Like lynching, this exclusion of Blacks after sunset must be viewed as a racializing form of violence. As such, it is established firmly in the collective memory of African Americans. In his famous "Message to the Grassroots," Malcolm X earns much applause and laughter from the almost exclusively black audience when he signifies on sundown towns in his critique of the March on Washington. Arguing that the March was essentially hijacked by the Kennedy Administration, X contends: "They controlled it so tight, they told those Negroes what time to hit town [...]; and then told them to get out of town by sundown. And every one of those [Uncle] Toms was out of town by sundown" (16-17).
- 7 Moreover, as Loewen demonstrates in his study of sundown towns, opposition to housing discrimination increased with the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1968 which banned discrimination in housing (395-96).

The gradual ‘blackening’ of Ferguson did not counter the persistent racialized division in the city’s physical space. According to a study by *Spatial Structures in the Social Sciences* (S4), a research initiative at Brown University, only 26 percent of the city’s Blacks lived in majority-white areas in 2010 (“Ferguson City”). This lack of integration is further evinced by the unequal distribution of power resources, i.e., capital. While the black newcomers were gradually becoming the majority, the city’s resources of power remained firmly in the hands of the old-established whites: At the time of Brown’s death in 2014, Ferguson’s mayor was white, the all-white school board had recently suspended its first black superintendent under unclear circumstances, the city council included only one black member, and the city’s municipal judge, court clerk, prosecuting attorney, and assistant court clerks were also all white. Ferguson’s white police chief presided over a department of fifty white and three black police officers, which gave the city’s white establishment full control over the local monopoly of violence.⁸ Defining the power imbalance between Ferguson’s established and outsiders in a way that highlights the link between distribution of capital and social distance, Marc Lamont Hill notes: “[T]he social distance between those in positions of authority—particularly the police, but others as well—and those who actually lived in Ferguson was [...] vast” (21).

Social distance in Ferguson, as elsewhere, is inseparable from the unequal distribution of economic capital, which helps to structure the racial division in Ferguson’s physical space. The city is more or less split between a “middle-class suburbia” (Casselman) in the Northwest and a “suburban ghetto” (Dreier and Swanstorm) in the Southeast. Ferguson’s southeastern

8 Cf. “Institutional Racism”; Levintova et al.; Smith; U.S. Dept. of Justice, *Ferguson Report* 13. When the DOJ conducted its investigation in September 2014, the Ferguson Police Department held four black police officers (12). By outlining this racialized imbalance in Ferguson’s distribution of (power) capital, I do not mean to suggest that the killing of Brown would not have occurred had there been a higher number of African Americans in positions of power. As the 2015 death of Freddie Gray in Baltimore, Maryland, illustrates, cities run by a black political elite are not exempt from problems of structural violence against Blacks (cf. Taylor 75-80). For a discussion of the way in which diversification – particularly of police departments – and black exceptionalism are used to further the neoliberal project, see Taylor 75-152.

tip, comprising the apartment complexes of “Canfield Green, where Brown lived and died,” is basically truncated from the rest of the city by West Florissant Avenue, “a bleak stretch of payday loan stores, nail salons and half-vacant strip malls”; the median household income of this census tract is below \$27,000, “making it the eighth-poorest census tract in the state” (Casselmann). It is roughly a mile from Brown’s neighborhood to the headquarters of Emerson Electric, a multinational corporation with a history of union suppression (cf. Berger). The company that once “provided the types of housing and employment opportunities that drew Black people to the city” has meanwhile moved all of its production plants to foreign countries; and, “as much of the town lives in suburbanized poverty, Emerson’s CEO, David Farr, guides the company while pulling an annual compensation worth as much as twenty-five million dollars” (Hill 8).

Because of the withdrawal of industrial facilities and the hesitance of officials to raise taxes on the wealthy and on corporations (cf. Taylor 126), Ferguson is one of many municipalities across the U.S. that generates revenue out of fines and fees issued on the basis of aggressive police and court practices.⁹ In a city wherein Blacks account for 80 percent of the poor (cf. Casselman), police officers used ordinary activities, so-called “[n]uisance crimes” or “quality of life” violations (Taylor 123), as pretexts to impose citations predominantly on black citizens, frequently issuing multiple tickets during a single stop.¹⁰ Once caught in the dragnet of law enforcement (cf. Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor 2*), citizens were sent on a “legal odyssey” by Ferguson’s municipal court “from which it [could] be difficult, if not impossible, for ordinary people to emerge with their finances intact” (Taylor 127-28). Individuals who were too poor to pay their fees even faced jail time, a punishment of poverty that is utterly unconstitutional (cf. 127).

9 The digital version of the *Ferguson Report*, which can be accessed on the DOJ’s website, makes explicit reference to the city’s police department as “a collection agency for its municipal court” (55). According to Taylor, this aggressive police and court practice constituted “the town’s second leading source of revenue” (155).

10 In an interview with *The New Yorker*, Darren Wilson cited the example of a fellow police officer who had issued sixteen tickets during one stop. When asked how many tickets he issued, Wilson replied “that he ‘usually’ never wrote more than three” (Halpern).

According to the DOJ, African Americans accounted not only for 95 percent of jaywalking charges in Ferguson but also “for 85% of vehicle stops, 90% of citations, and 93% of arrests made by officers”; furthermore, black drivers were “more than twice as likely as white drivers to be searched during vehicle stops” despite being “found in possession of contraband 26% less often than white drivers” (U.S. Dept. of Justice, *Ferguson Report 7*). The police’s monopoly of physical violence certainly undergirded this enormous power imbalance between Blacks and whites in Ferguson. As the DOJ found,

FPD records suggest a tendency to use unnecessary force against vulnerable groups such as people with mental health conditions or cognitive disabilities, and juvenile students. Furthermore, [...] Ferguson’s pattern of using excessive force disproportionately harms African-American members of the community. The overwhelming majority of force—almost 90%—is used against African Americans. (*Ferguson Report 47-48*)

Thus, the DOJ also exposed a process of criminalizing mental illness, which Taylor sees as a byproduct of fiscal austerity designed to exempt “the state [from] any obligation to address poverty” (123). Municipal governments impose massive cuts in social services, such as mental healthcare, and then empower police officers “to ‘clean up’ the consequences.” “[J]ails,” Taylor continues, “have become the predominant destination for those who commit crimes of mental health. This is because of the dearth of mental healthcare, including treatment facilities that would be more appropriate destinations” (123).

The racialized power in Ferguson, then, exemplified by the death of Michael Brown, is shaped not merely by anti-black animus, but by the violence of a state that intertwines its traditional exclusion of Blacks with “the neoliberal era of free-market reform, the rollback of social spending, and cuts in taxes for corporations and the wealthy” (Taylor 6). In this way, Ferguson ties together its past, present, and future, wedding its historical anti-blackness with the present demands of economic discipline in anticipation of the larger scheme to promote “the advance of neoliberalism” (Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor* xviii).

SUBJECTIVE SIGNIFICATION: SYMBOLIC DOMINATION ON THE BASIS OF ‘RACE’

According to Bourdieu, “[t]he great social oppositions objectified in physical space [...] tend to be reproduced in thought and in language as oppositions constitutive of a principle of vision and division, as categories of perception and evaluation or of mental structures” (Bourdieu et al. 125). This section examines the reproduction of Ferguson’s objective divisions in the “categories of perception and evaluation” of agents. To highlight the interrelation between these two dimensions of the social – on the one hand, the objective social relations and divisions and, on the other hand, the subjective modes of perception and thought that infuse the former with meaning – allows us to grasp more clearly the invisible mechanisms through which racialized power in Ferguson becomes naturalized.

In its report, the DOJ found that Ferguson officials drew on black stereotypes to explain the racial disparity in their penal practices:

Several Ferguson officials told us during our investigation that it is a lack of “personal responsibility” among African-American members of the Ferguson community that causes African Americans to experience disproportionate harm under Ferguson’s approach to law enforcement. (115)

Based on Bourdieu’s assumption of the reproduction of social oppositions in perception and thought, I argue that this subjective position of Ferguson officials is firmly rooted in their objective position in the city’s social space. Insisting on African Americans’ presumed irresponsibility, they articulate a feeling of human superiority (expressed as black inferiority) that indicates the embodied presence of the city’s racialized power structure. The officials’ view corresponds to an *officialized* and thus established view which, denying the police’s participation in an oppressive system, reinforces a discourse of ‘blaming the victim.’

According to Elias, this form of self-exculpation is usually achieved through “collective fantasies” on the part of the established group which “reflects and, at the same time, justifies the aversion—the prejudice—its members feel towards those of the outsider group” (19). According to such establishment fantasies, the outsiders are marked by an objective sign – for example, a different skin color – that signifies their supposed natural

inferiority. This mark at once reifies the act of stigmatization and absolves the established group from it. Elias notes: “[I]t is not *we*, such a fantasy implies, who have put a stigma on these people, but the powers that made the world—they have put the sign on these people to mark them off as inferior or bad people” (20, original emphasis). Thus, Elias’s concept of collective fantasies highlights a mechanism in the legitimization of power that characterizes the practice of race making.

Race making is not readily evident in the language of Ferguson’s established group, which emphasizes the alleged inferior culture, rather than the ‘race,’ of the city’s black outsiders. In an interview with Jake Halpern, Darren Wilson echoes the established notion of black anomie when, characterizing the children of a black woman, he explains that “[t]hey’re so wrapped up in a different culture.” Halpern, suspecting “racial code language,” asks Wilson to specify, whereupon the latter responds: “[I mean] pre-gang culture, where you are just running in the streets—not worried about working in the morning, just worried about your immediate gratification,” concluding that this “is the same younger culture that is everywhere in the inner cities.” Wilson employs a culturalist language to reinforce the racist establishment fantasy of ‘super predators’ (cf. Dilulio), thus illustrating that, in the age of ostensible colorblindness, the notion of culture is used as a “classifying category” that is “never far from race” (Butter, Franke, and Tonn 9, my translation). By pointing to an allegedly devious ‘black culture,’ Ferguson’s officials engage in a phantasmatic production of ‘race’ to the effect that this act of production itself is denied.

A variation of this established fantasy of black anomie – which evokes the pro-slavery discourse according to which slaves were “unfit for freedom” – can be found in the FPD’s public representation of Brown. Almost a week after the shooting, the Ferguson police finally gave in to public protests and decided to disclose Wilson’s identity. Yet, the officer’s identity was revealed only after the FPD publicized a surveillance video that showed Brown stealing a pack of cigarillos in a local neighborhood store. On August 15, 2014, a press conference was held during which Police Chief Thomas Jackson admitted that Wilson’s decision to stop Brown and Johnson was not connected to the theft (cf. Lee and Richinick). The fact that the “strong-arm robbery,” as the police defined it, finds no mention in Wilson’s call for backup (cf. “Case: Grand Jury” 256) tends to support this claim. However, during the grand jury hearing that took place a month

before the press conference, Wilson claimed to have recognized Brown as the suspect in the larceny (209). Similarly, the March 2015 DOJ report of the shooting indicates that “Wilson was aware of the theft and had a description of the suspects as he encountered Brown” (“Justice Department” 6).

Regardless of whether Wilson’s approach was linked to the theft, “the real work of the tape had already been done” (Taylor 22). Paralleled by the mainstream media’s depiction of Ferguson protesters as vandals and looters, this symbolic work of public demonization drew on the collective establishment fantasy of black anomy and, more specifically, on the notion of the “underclass.” Characterized by Wacquant as a “scholarly myth” (“Decivilizing” *passim*), the concept of the underclass allows state officials not only to talk race in colorblind or coded language (e.g., ‘gang banger,’ ‘thug,’ or ‘welfare queen’) but also to continuously amplify the penal state in the name of ‘law and order,’ that is, on the basis of a rationale that constructs the effects of systemic dispossession – such as stealing – as the product of an alleged “culture of poverty” (161).¹¹

11 In his documentary *Stranger Fruit*, released in March 2017, director Jason Pollock reveals a previously unreleased surveillance video from the neighborhood store that supposedly proves that, as Pollock himself puts it, “Mike did not rob the store” (“Stranger Fruit Trailer”). The silent video shows Brown entering the store at approximately 1:13 am, eleven hours before the alleged robbery and his subsequent death (1:09-1:11). The teenager takes two bottles of soda from a beverage cooler, walks to the counter, and asks for two big boxes of cigarillos. A different camera angle shows three clerks behind the counter. One clerk bags the items while Brown pulls a small package out of his pocket and throws it on the counter. The second clerk takes the package and, after sniffing it, passes it on to his colleagues who also sniff it. There is a brief verbal exchange between the clerks and Brown before the latter picks up the bag with the items and begins to leave. Seconds later, Brown turns around, goes back, and leaves the bag on the counter. He then exits the store. Pollock claims that Brown bartered the cigarillos in exchange for marijuana. The video released by the FPD captures not a robbery, he further contends, but Brown retrieving the items he had put on lay-away the evening before. Jay Kanzler, the attorney for the neighborhood store, disputes this narrative, arguing that Pollock’s film, which led to further protests and disturbances in front of the store, was heavily “misedited” (FOX 10 Phoenix).

In a passage of “Deadly Symbiosis” that highlights the demonizing of young black males, Wacquant writes:

In the era of racially targetted [sic] ‘law-and-order’ policies and their socio-logical pendant, racially skewed mass imprisonment, the reigning public image of the criminal is not just that of ‘a *monstruum*—a being whose features are inherently different from ours’ [...] but that of a *black* monster, as young African-American men from the ‘inner city’ have come to personify the explosive mix of moral degeneracy and mayhem. (118, original emphasis)

Aiming to construct his killing of Brown as an act of self-defense, Wilson draws on precisely this public image in his grand jury testimony. The officer describes his physical altercation with Brown as follows: “[W]hen I grabbed him, the only way I can describe it is I felt like a five-year-old holding onto Hulk Hogan” (“Case: State” 212). Wilson’s self-infantilization invokes the symbolic complementarity of white innocence (or vulnerability) and black blameworthiness (or danger). Writing about the trial that followed the police beating of Rodney King, Judith Butler explains:

Kanzler draws on an extended version of the video – showing the clerks reshelving the items after Brown has left – to forward his claim that the store workers declined Brown’s offer to barter and that the teenager left the bag in the store only after they had threatened to call the police (cf. McLaughlin, Shah, and Valencia). Since St. Louis County investigation papers indicate that prosecutors and the Ferguson police viewed the video, Pollock’s film “raise[s] questions about how forthcoming police and prosecutors [are] about evidence” (“Prosecutor Says”). Despite the fact that the details of Brown’s earlier visit to the store still remain unclear, the events surrounding the release of the two videos emblemize the struggle over the power of “performative magic” or, put differently, the “power to impose a certain vision of the social world, i.e. of the divisions of the social world” (Bourdieu, *Language* 106). Brought back to the fore by the Trump administration’s emphasis on “alternative facts” (cf. Blake), this struggle over the power of legitimate definition, which constitutes one of the most fundamental “symbolic struggles of everyday life” (*Language* 106), signifies “a contest within the visual field, a crisis in the certainty of what is visible” and believable, as Judith Butler has argued (16).

[T]he infantilized white [...] is positioned [...] as one who is helpless in relation to that black body, as one definitionally in need of protection by his/her mother or, perhaps, the police. The fear is that some physical distance will be crossed, and the virgin sanctity of whiteness will be endangered by that proximity. The police are thus structurally placed to protect whiteness against violence, where violence is the imminent action of that black male body. And because within this imaginary schema, the police protect whiteness, their own violence cannot be read as violence [...]. (18)

Indeed, Wilson constructs his own violence as the imminent violence of Brown; for it is while recounting his first shots that his discursive demonizing of the teenager becomes explicit: “[H]e looked up at me and had the most intense aggressive face. The only way I can describe it, it looks like a demon, that’s how angry he looked” (“Case: Grand Jury” 224-25). Brown, hit by one of Wilson’s shots, flees; Wilson takes up chase until the teenager stops at a lamppost. The officer describes the ensuing events as follows:

He turns, and when he looked at me, he made like a grunting, like aggravated sound and he starts, he turns and he’s coming back towards me. His first step is coming towards me, he kind of does like a stutter step to start running. When he does that, his left hand goes in a fist and goes to his side, his right one goes under his shirt in his waistband and he starts running at me. (227)

Wilson shoots again. He can tell that Brown is hit at least once because the teenager flinches; according to the police officer, Brown does not stop, but continues to run mechanically toward him: “At this point it looked like he was almost bulking up to run through the shots, like it was making him mad that I’m shooting at him” (228). Wilson then invokes his social distance by articulating his effort to maintain physical distance: “I know if he reaches me, he’ll kill me. And he had started to lean forward as he got that close, like he was going to just tackle me, just go right through me” (229). The officer bespeaks in this description a threat that is intimately linked to the danger of social mixture, a repugnance toward close contact with members of the outsider group defined by Elias as fear of “anomic infection” (9). It is in this way that the officer’s narration subtly indicates his dread of losing social status and, ultimately, racialized honor.

Brown dies from a bullet that enters the top of his head. Describing this last moment of the teenager's life, Wilson states: "And when [the bullet] went into him, the demeanor on his face went blank, the aggression was gone, it was gone, I mean, I knew he stopped, the threat was stopped" ("Case: Grand Jury" 229). Wilson's animalization of Brown hyperbolizes the establishment fantasy of black anomy to the point of revealing its (super-)naturalist essentialism: In the officer's narration, Brown is turned into a devious black brute, filled with uncontrollable rage and devoid of the fear and pain that would make him human. The "performative magic" (Bourdieu, *Language* 106) of Wilson's phantasmatic delineation is intimately tied to the officer's social position as a representative of the state. It is this proximity to the state as the center of power or, as Bourdieu puts it, "as the holder of a sort of metacapital" (*Practical Reason* 41) that vests Wilson with the authority "to impose a more or less authorized way of seeing the social world," one that "helps to construct the reality of that world" (*Language* 106). In popular culture, the brute is usually construed as a menace that must be neutralized because it defies the established (white) authority, because it fails to 'stay in its place.' Similarly, when asked in a televised interview what should have happened to prevent Brown's death, Wilson matter-of-factly replies: "Him complying" ("Exclusive" 23:05).

Habitus, Bourdieu explains, "tend[s] to transform instituted difference into natural distinction, produc[ing] quite real effects, durably inscribed in the body and in belief" (*Logic* 58). Wilson's ability to anticipate his chances in court on the basis of a "feel for the game" (66) constitutes one of the real effects of this bodily inscription. Ryan Devereaux invokes the bodily dimension of knowledge when he observes:

The fact that Wilson testified was telling. He was not legally required to do so, and in most grand jury cases defendants do not testify because their attorney cannot be present. This move, some suggested, was an indication that Wilson and his legal counsel *felt* the proceedings would work to his favor. (my emphasis)

Thus, the grand jury's decision not to indict Wilson for the killing of Brown was not simply the 'logical' result of the officer's adjustment to an

'objective' law, as some legal analysts contend¹²; it was the *socio-logical* outcome of the lawful "encounter between [the subjective structures of] the *habitus* and [the objective structures of] a field, between incorporated history and an objectified history" (Bourdieu, *Logic* 66, original emphasis). Rather than merely freeing the officer from any wrongdoing, Wilson's exoneration can be read as an official consecration of his (symbolic) power: of his authority, his representation, and, ultimately, of the murder itself.¹³

OBJECTIVE CRISIS AND SYMBOLIC BATTLE

On July 21, 2014, exactly twenty-five years after the initial release of his critically acclaimed film *Do the Right Thing* (*DTRT*) and nineteen days before the shooting of Brown, director Spike Lee posted a short film on *YouTube* that interspersed two sets of footage by way of parallel editing. The first set of footage, taken from *DTRT*, depicts the dramatic death of one of the film's main characters, Radio Raheem. The second set of footage, taken from a cell phone video, shows the killing of forty-three-year-old Eric Garner on July 17, 2014.¹⁴

12 Cf. Theodore Shaw's "Introduction" to the *Ferguson Report* (U.S. Dept. of Justice xi-xii).

13 "The form par excellence of the socially instituted and officially recognized symbolic power of construction is the legal authority, law being the objectification of the dominant vision recognized as legitimate, or, to put it another way, of the legitimate vision of the world, the ortho-doxo, guaranteed by the State. An exemplary manifestation of this State power of consecration of the established order is the *verdict*, a legitimate exercise of the power to say what is and to make exist what it states, in a performative utterance that is universally recognized (as opposed to an insult, for example) [...]" (Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations* 186, original emphasis). My argumentation is mainly one of structural positionality and therefore independent of the presence of 'nonwhite' agents. From a structural viewpoint, "whiteness as an episteme operates despite the existence of [...] nonwhite jurors" (Butler 19).

14 Lee released two films within a period of five days. The first video, posted on July 21, 2014, appeared on the director's official *YouTube* channel (www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bnq4rrcIO1g). The second film, released four

What links Raheem's filmic death to Garner's real death is the fact that both men were killed by officers of the New York Police Department using an illegal chokehold. By intercutting the various pieces of footage and arranging them according to certain patterns of movement, speech, and action, Lee sensitizes the viewer to the similarities of the two killings, and thereby also to the presence of the past of racialized (state) violence – a present-past that links the police terrorism of the late 20th and 21st century to the terrorism of lynching of the late 19th and early 20th century. The stylistic device of parallel editing is central to the video's interleaving of present and past (and, in the same vein, of fiction and reality). It explicates the filmic break with the established notion of chronological temporality – and thus also with the notion of progress – generating what Jelani Cobb, in his commentary of the video, has called a “cinematic sense of *déjà vu*.” “It's entirely possible for an uninformed viewer,” Cobb further notes, “to believe that Lee's scene was inspired by Garner's death instead of preceding it by a quarter century.”

There is another, less obvious, similarity between Garner and Raheem which Lee's video subtly indicates, a similarity that links the two cases to the later one of Brown. Like Brown, the two men were killed while defying police authority or, put differently, while attempting to assert their humanity against the oppressive forces of a state that consistently constructs the inhumanity (in the form of illegality) of the black (surplus) body. As we have seen, this consistent dehumanization (qua illegalization) characterizes the violence – symbolic as well as physical¹⁵ – of a state that embraces the

days later by Lee's production company, 40 Acres and a Mule Filmworks, appeared on *Vimeo* (vimeo.com/101731549). While both films, entitled “Radio Raheem and the Gentle Giant,” are fairly similar in terms of content and style, the *Vimeo* film is approximately 47 seconds longer. The reason for this is that, in depicting the death of Garner, the *Vimeo* film includes not only the famous cell phone video by Garner's friend, Ramsey Orta, but also a lesser known video by another bystander, Taisha Allen. Though shorter in running time, the *YouTube* film represents Lee's most immediate response to Garner's death and thus constitutes the focus of my inquiry.

15 Highlighting the interrelation of symbolic and physical violence, Bourdieu maintains: “Domination, even when based on naked force, that of arms or money, always has a symbolic dimension [...]” (*Pascalian Meditations* 172; cf. also

hegemony of market ideology, practicing “[s]mall government’ in the economic register” and “‘big government’ on the twofold frontage of workfare and criminal justice” (Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor* 308).

The collage aesthetic of Lee’s video – the juxtaposition of *DTRT* and the Garner video, the “mixing and matching of fragments [of readymade found footage] to provide a new whole” (Lippard 136) – cues viewers to revisit the director’s 1989 film and to reassess it in terms of “the role of art [...] to ‘become’ reality, rather than merely recoding it” (Cran 7). It is by recognizing this interpenetration of fiction and reality in *DTRT* that we can appreciate the film’s prophetic vision and arrive at certain conclusions about its significance regarding current structures of racialized state violence.¹⁶

A closer examination of the film’s climactic murder scene and its portrayal of the subsequent uprising of the predominantly black (and brown) residents of Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, will serve to illustrate this point. Lee constructs the killing of Raheem as an act of lynching. A medium close-up depicts the young man as he struggles against three police officers who restrain him after having pulled him away from a fight. In the course of the struggle, one of the officers puts his baton around Raheem’s neck and begins to pull. The following thirty seconds depict Raheem’s struggle for his life. Tension builds as Lee crosscuts between the choking and the residents of the neighborhood who are forced to witness the death of their friend. Raheem’s feet are filmed in a close-up, jerking above the ground until they finally stop moving. Depicting this police killing from an African American perspective – a kind of meta-perspective that mirrors the

Logic 126). Brown, Raheem, and Garner are further united in their respective defiance of the established economic power: Brown (more or less consciously) challenged Ferguson’s systemic for-profit policing whereas Garner was approached by two NYPD officers in plainclothes because they believed that the father of six was selling so-called “loosies,” i.e., untaxed loose cigarettes (cf. Hill 31-39). Radio Raheem died as a cause of fighting Sal, the owner of the local pizzeria, whom the film represents as the neighborhood’s main entrepreneur.

16 *DTRT* includes various elements that establish it firmly in the social and political reality of its time – from posters of Jesse Jackson’s 1988 presidential campaign to a graffiti calling upon voters of New York City’s 1989 mayoral election to “dump Koch” (*Do the Right Thing* 1:23:01-1:24:36).

residents' witnessing of the killing – Lee renders the death of Raheem as a “crucial moment of the process of gaining insight” (Buschendorf and Franke 87) into the neighborhood's power relation.¹⁷ This moment is experienced by the residents of Bed-Stuy in the form of a symbolic “encounter with the collective past” (87) of racialized violence, prompting them to realize that the police “did it again” (*Do the Right Thing* 1:33:51).¹⁸

In a wider sense, Raheem's killing also instantiates an encounter with the collective past of lynching itself: As Jonathan Markovitz points out, lynchings are “generally meant ‘never to be forgotten by anyone’” and function to “create collective memories of terror and white supremacy” (xxvi). Thus, in Lee's film, the uprising against the local powers-that-be is catalyzed by a process of awareness wherein the unconscious, embodied knowledge of vulnerability to gratuitous violence – the residents' realization that they are not even “safe in [their] own [...] neighborhood” (*Do the Right Thing* 1:33:55) – is finally raised to the level of consciousness. “The unconscious,” writes Bourdieu, “is history—the collective history that has produced our categories of thought, and the individual history through which they have been inculcated in us” (*Pascalian Meditations* 9).

A similar process may have sparked the uprising in Ferguson. Reflecting on the circumstances that contributed to the rebellion, Taylor assumes that “[t]he transformation of Mike Brown's murder from a police killing into a lynching certainly tipped the scales” (154). Many observers have stressed the link between Brown's murder and America's history of lynching. Isabel Wilkerson, for instance, uses the negligent treatment of Brown's

17 According to the storyboard of the scene, published in Lee's production journal, the incident is depicted from the point of view of the black character Buggin' Out who instigated the conflict that leads to the killing (cf. Lee and Jones 272).

18 *DTRT* itself is dedicated to, and was inspired by the fate of, various black victims of racially motivated killings in the 1980s, including Michael Stewart, who was choked and killed by New York Transit Police in 1983 after he had been arrested for spraying graffiti on a subway station; Eleanor Bumpurs, who was shot and killed in 1984 while being evicted from her apartment in the Bronx; Michael Griffith who was fatally hit by a car in 1986 after fleeing from a racist mob in the predominantly Italian-American neighborhood of Howard Beach, Queens; and Yusef Hawkins, killed by a racist mob in the predominantly Italian-American neighborhood of Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, in 1989.

corpse by the Ferguson police as an example to argue that “Mike Brown’s shooting and Jim Crow lynchings have too much in common”:

The demeaning objectification of the victim that was evident historically also persists to current times. During formal Jim Crow, the lynched body was sometimes left hanging for days or weeks as a lesson to people not to step outside the caste into which they had been born. In a similar way, Michael Brown’s body was left in the street in Ferguson for four hours in the August sun after he had been killed. (Wilkerson)

Besides serving as a symbolic manifestation of power – one that undergirds the (neoliberal) imperatives of police compliance and personal responsibility (cf. Wacquant *Punishing the Poor* 307) – the act of leaving Brown’s body on the street also entails what Buschendorf defines as “one of the most efficient means of symbolic violence”: the violence of ascribing lower human value to the members of the outsider group (Buschendorf and Franke 84). It would be erroneous to conceive of the symbolic violence of Ferguson’s penal system in rationalist terms; rather, this violence is best understood as a form of ritualistic imposition that shapes acts of seeing as much as it relies on them. As Wacquant puts it,

the rampant gesticulation over law and order is conceived and carried out not so much for its own sake as *for the express purpose of being exhibited and seen*, scrutinized, ogled: the absolute priority is to put on a spectacle, in the literal sense of the term. For this, words and deeds proclaiming to fight crime and assorted urban disorders must be methodically orchestrated, exaggerated, dramatized, even *ritualized*. (*Punishing the Poor* xi-xii, original emphasis)

Halpern’s interview with Michael Brown, Sr. illustrates the symbolic effectiveness of this official discourse:

Brown, Sr., recalls worrying that his son’s physical stature might make him a target for the police. “We had a conversation about just following orders,” he said. “After you thought that you were being disrespected, get a name and a badge number, so your parent can reach out to the police department and file a complaint.” Most important was a simple directive: “Obey.”

The words of Brown, Sr. highlight the “subtle psychosocial mechanisms of symbolic violence” (West and Buschendorf 7), illustrating the extent to which the established power has been inculcated into the subjective structures of the father who experiences this power in the form of a deep-seated fear. Based on a knowledge derived from a Du Boisian “double-consciousness” (364), Brown, Sr. can only prepare his son “for a fate from which” he knows he “cannot protect him” (Baldwin 302). Thus, he can only attempt to meet this horror by resorting to the established language which becomes the only legitimate language (“follow orders,” “obey”) and by passing this language on to his son.¹⁹

Although symbolic violence binds its victims through a relation of coerced recognition, it does not render them altogether powerless. As Buschendorf explains,

the emphasis on the connivance of the dominated does not at all exclude their potential power of resistance and subversion [...]. As to symbolic violence, Bourdieu maintains that it is not restricted to the dominant, but that it could also emanate from the victims of domination, in which case it would take the form of a “symbolic battle” or even a “symbolic revolution.” (Buschendorf and Franke 79)

Bourdieu insists that it is especially during periods of “objective crisis” that a “heretical break with the established order” can be precipitated (*Language* 128). Such a period of objective crisis may, if met by critical (dis)positions, promote the creation of a new *langue* – a language capable of “exploit[ing] the possibility of changing the social world by changing the representation of this world which contributes to its reality or, more precisely, by counterposing a *paradoxical pre-vision*, a utopia, a project or programme, to the ordinary vision” (128, original emphasis). Brown’s death generated precisely such a crisis in the Bourdieusian sense, exposing the arbitrary violence

19 For an insightful discussion of James Baldwin’s “Down at the Cross” in the context of the concept of symbolic violence, see Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations* 170; also cf. West and Buschendorf 7-8. For a powerful illustration of the fear of black parents and their coerced complicity in instituting their children into the (symbolic) power of the police, for instance, by urging them to “[s]wallow your pride,” see Martinez, Elam, and Henry.

that characterized Ferguson's racialized relation of power: the fact that its Police Department's mistreatment of Blacks was systemic, essentially dehumanizing, and due to the city's material and symbolic necessities rather than the result of 'bad behavior.' It is through this recognition of vulnerability to gratuitous violence that the members of Ferguson's black outsider group became "rebel[s] who [fought] back in a 'symbolic battle'" (Buschendorf and Franke 89). The establishment of a language of black affirmation, which forms the conceptual core of the Black Lives Matter movement, can be seen as one site of this symbolic battle. It is by expediting this new wave of symbolic struggle for love and power for the dispossessed and dishonored that Brown's death reveals the extent to which his life actually mattered (cf. Goodman and Moynihan).

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Transformations of Oppression

The Case of Bayard Rustin

NICOLE HIRSCHFELDER

Considering his numerous contributions to social justice in the United States, Bayard Rustin (1912–1987) deserves to be a household name. His tireless work for equality and peace before, during, and after the Civil Rights movement had a considerable impact on American society. Yet, compared to other prominent figures of the Movement, such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, or Rosa Parks, Rustin, the organizer of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom (1963) and a close political advisor and personal mentor to Dr. King, did not receive a fraction of their public recognition.¹ Apart from very few incidents, the Civil, Labor and Human Rights activist and Quaker remained “the man-behind-the-scenes” throughout his lifetime (D’Emilio 1). Until the late 1990s, Rustin was largely ignored by historiography, resulting in a public silence about both the name and the story behind ‘Bayard Rustin’ (333). Only in recent years has his case enjoyed renewed interest, culminating so far in the posthumous award of the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2013.

1 The employment of Rustin’s case for this analysis primarily serves the purpose of providing a concrete example for how oppression continually adapts to the circumstances in order to persist. These structural power dynamics tend to remain too abstract if they are not illustrated with (historical) examples, though. Rustin’s case study, rather than amplifying his unique accomplishments and experiences, should then also be read as a paradigm for the neglect of many other merited Civil Rights activists advocating for equality.

Scholars frequently state that Rustin's position at the margins of society derives from having been an openly gay African American and a former communist (D'Emilio; Levine; Miller; Podair;). The fact that he is still primarily referred to as an outsider and that certain facets of his personality tend to be highlighted, while others continue to be downplayed, proves both startling and interesting at this point, especially since this phenomenon does not solely pertain to the present, but also ties in with the oppression Rustin experienced during his lifetime. To begin with, the issue of his omission in historiography, the continued absence of Rustin's case in most college textbooks, for example, is mainly attributed to the lack of support from both the African American community and whites who dominate mass media, academia, and society. Since Rustin was not fully accepted by either of the two groups, he was left without advocates and thus fell into oblivion.

Whereas it shall not be disputed that Rustin and his public reception suffered from stigmatizations due to his skin color, sexuality, and the allegation of being a communist, it seems evident that a consideration of merely these factors falls short of providing a deeper understanding not only of his story, but also of the transformations of oppression on a larger, social scale. What is more, the aforementioned reasons for Rustin's marginalization fail to account for his – if intermittent – rise to power, bearing in mind that all of the aspects that allegedly marked him an absolute outsider were known to exist from the beginning of his career as an activist.

The contemporary discussion of Rustin's case reveals insights about today's society and the transformation of oppression. How and by whom is someone (to be) remembered in order to be recognized for his or her merits today? Are the categories through which (the legacy of) a person is both remembered and evaluated not a perpetuation of forms of discrimination, such as racism, homophobia, and the like, that continue to be widely spread in society? In the following, these questions will be addressed by examining aspects of Rustin's life with an emphasis on 'class' and 'race,'² as these

2 I would like to point out that, in line with the figurational approach, the employment of the terms 'class' and 'race' in this article certainly does not imply an essentialist notion of them. Rather, both 'class' and 'race' are regarded as social constructs that merely tend to evoke an essentialist perception due to social power relations. It is the effects of this essentialist perception with which I am concerned.

two concepts are key to understanding (the misperception of) his case and its social implications. Moreover, the silencing and unsilencing of his story will also be touched upon before I conclude with some brief remarks on what the discourse about Rustin says about these issues in Civil Rights-movement American society.³

Norbert Elias's framework of figurational sociology and some theoretical insights by Pierre Bourdieu will serve as analytical tools for this endeavor. Since Rustin marks the central figure of this analysis, the figurational approach with its emphasis on group relations may appear counter-intuitive at first. However, Rustin's case will of course be regarded in relation to social dynamics (Elias, *Civilizing Process* 472) and may thus serve as a lens through which larger, social power dynamics can be made visible. To capture those larger power dynamics in relational terms, it is furthermore crucial to adopt a long-term historical perspective even when dealing with short-lived moments. When it comes to the constructs of 'class' and 'race' in particular, it is long-term developments that need to be analyzed in order to understand the persistence of certain structures in people's thinking, a persistence that frequently tends to be considered 'common sense' but is rarely scrutinized with regard to how the structures in question have developed and prevailed over time.

Elias's premise that power dynamics will never cease to exist (*What Is Sociology?* 74) marks the basis for analyzing various forms of oppression, such as racism or homophobia. Power struggles constitute a given in any society, and new alleged reasons for marginalization and domination can, or rather must, constantly be invented by those groups who possess more power than others. Rustin's biography, I argue, perfectly illustrates how an individual is repeatedly turned into a threat so that current power relations may be sustained. At this point, a closer look at the analytical instruments is in order: According to figurational sociology, a synchronic perspective is insufficient when assessing what seems to be an entirely unique individual case (Elias and Scotson 30-31). To account for longstanding, embodied structures of thinking, feeling, and acting, figurational theory employs the concept of *habitus*. With its historical and sociological perspective on the

3 Some passages as well as parts of the main argument of this article are taken from my monograph *Oppression as Process*; see also my article "Homophobic und Rassismus."

status quo, this concept delivers useful insights about how the collective past shapes what is frequently considered an individual's "nature" (Bourdieu, *Logic* 56). Especially in a case like Rustin's, whose rise to and fall from power is usually attributed to his personal qualities, the concept of habitus reveals its wide repercussions in social dynamics, holding up a mirror to society that shows the ideological lenses through which people's lives (still) tend to be viewed. Moreover, in refusing essentialism that commonly works toward the stigmatization of the individual, figurational theory also helps to shed light on positive, even empowering figurations in a person's life.

The term "empowerment" is often juxtaposed to the concept of "privilege." Whereas empowerment evokes the notion of liberation from oppression, privilege is commonly identified as one of the main sources and reasons for oppression (Mullaly and Mullaly; Kimmel and Ferber). However, as my analysis of Rustin's case will demonstrate, one and the same aspect of a particular life story can be regarded as empowerment or as privilege depending on which of two interdependent groups – labeled by Elias the *outsiders* and the *established* – interprets the case (Elias and Scotson 5-6).

THE ESTABLISHED AND THE OUTSIDERS

Before I briefly outline the main ideas in Elias's *The Established and the Outsiders*, it is important to clarify that these terms refer to a power differential in the relation of two groups. While the terms 'the established' and 'the outsiders' can evoke a simplistic, binary opposition, it is crucial to understand that both of these groups can be further subdivided along the same lines (e.g., established/outsiders within the overall outsider group). In Rustin's case, this differentiation allows to reveal the complexity and interplay of oppression, empowerment, and privilege in his story. 'Race' and 'gender' have become naturalized so much that it requires great analytical effort to lay open the fact that they actually constitute social constructs and reveal the force of stigmatization connected with them. As Rustin was simultaneously part of both the established and the outsiders, the oppression he was subjected to was neglected by some who only considered his privilege. Due to the profundity with which the belief in essentialism has become ingrained in society, race thus occupies a special position within

Rustin's and many other figurations. But what makes his case particularly interesting with regard to race is that discrimination due to his skin color ironically seems to have had less of a negative impact on Rustin's life in the short run – i.e., at the very period when racial inequality seemed to be the most prevalent issue – than it did in the long run. Indeed, it was mainly after Rustin's death that racist thought structures (in Blacks and whites alike) either neutralized or devalued certain empowering forces in his life, by regarding them as privilege or dismissing them altogether. While figurational sociology and the analytical concept of an established-outsider relation does not lead to a complete dissolution of this dichotomy, it helps to form a more complex image by placing an emphasis on the underlying power relations that produce, or rather surface as, racism.

A closer look at Elias's book will now elucidate the dynamics between the established and the outsiders. In their sociological field study, Elias and his colleague Scotson examine two groups of residents in a small community in England they name "Winston Parva" (39), revealing a sharp division between them although there are no differences in terms of nationality, ethnicity, religion, or social class. Whereas the established stigmatize the outsiders in ways reminiscent of mechanisms frequently employed to justify racist or homophobic discrimination, none of the commonly given reasons apply here because the groups only differ in the amount of time they have lived in the same area. The families of the first group, the established, have known each other for two or three generations. Thus, their social networks are very dense, and they also hold the monopoly on positions in local organizations, such as city council, church, etc. (cf. 4). The outsiders, on the other hand, do not form a coherent group because as newcomers who only recently moved into a new housing development they are strangers both to the old residents and to each other (4). This observation makes Elias conclude that aspects commonly associated with discrimination, such as skin color or the like, are a less significant reason for oppression. Instead, both the power differential between groups and the process of group formation itself deserve closer attention.

According to Elias, the power of the established over the outsiders is then mainly due to the fact that their group is very tight-knit and integrated, which allows them to close ranks against the newcomers. Within their dense social networks, the established have developed distinct norms and modes of behavior to which they attribute a high value (8, 147-48). This

ascription of positive qualities results in a feeling of superiority shared by all members of the established group, which Elias refers to as “group charisma” (103). The practice of gossip constitutes the most important and effective instrument to maintain group charisma among the established and to simultaneously attribute “group disgrace,” i.e., to ascribe the worst qualities of a minority to the whole group of outsiders (104). Group disgrace is accomplished through the practice of “blame gossip” (122) in which outsiders are accused, for example, of smelling bad, being lazy, or being less intelligent than members of the established. The established, on the other hand, talk about themselves in exactly opposite terms: They constantly reaffirm the best qualities and accomplishments of their group members through “praise gossip” (122). Indeed, the social control exerted through these two types of gossip plays a decisive role in the reproduction of the unequal power balance between both groups.

Interestingly, today’s discourse about Rustin still appears to be organized along the same paradigm of praise-gossip and blame-gossip as outlined in Elias’s study: Rustin’s story is viewed in terms of how it might affect the existing power dynamics; consequently, qualities or facets of his case that truly challenge or even undermine the current relations between groups are either ignored, distorted, or judged negatively. For example, while Rustin’s work has been honored by naming a high school after him in his native town of West Chester, Pennsylvania, the text about Rustin’s life on the school’s website says nothing about his homosexuality and his advocacy for gay and labor rights, topics that continue to be considered controversial by some in contemporary America (cf. “Rustin History”). The fact that certain pieces of information are deliberately left out when it comes to shaping his legacy shows the continuous control over the narrative of his persona. Thus, the reception of Rustin’s story can be said to reveal the persistence of established-outsider figurations that equally affects all those who choose to talk about or ignore his case.

Not belonging to the established obviously constitutes a disadvantage. In the case of Winston Parva, the outsiders are not even aware of the power dynamics that result in the formation of groups, since the ostensive prerogative of defining and naming members of *both* groups is entirely left to the established. In fact, the newcomers at first do not even regard themselves as a group, let alone a group of outsiders that in the eyes of the established does not come up to their norms. If, in line with the long-term approach of

figurational sociology, we transfer this insight to the historical situation of Blacks in the U.S., it becomes clear how deep-seated and also how constructed the notion of race and the corresponding status of black and white individuals are in society: The black people who were abducted from their home countries and later sold as slaves, did not initially see themselves as a group either, for they often were divided by different languages and dialects, cultures, and also the point of time they were enslaved and forced on ships to America (Beer and Jacob 26). Rustin, through his black ancestors, shared this past collective experience. However, he also possessed a habitus shaped by the behavioral religion of Quakers that seemed to work against some of the negative forces imposed on black bodies by whites through slavery. His belief not only provided Rustin with an empowering mind-set but also with embodied knowledge that stood in stark contrast to the stigmatization connected with race.

According to Elias, the established always attribute the worst qualities of an anomic minority of outsiders to the entire group. This explains why in a case of an exceptional outsider like Rustin even a single individual can constitute a threat to the social standing of an entire group of outsiders if that group is being subjected to discrimination by a group of established. In addition, aspects that are regarded as positive character traits or accomplishments in the group of the established take a negative turn when a member of the outsiders possesses them. These qualities are then either devalued or ignored (Elias and Scotson 120). Rustin's case again illustrates this practice: Neither his adherence to Quakerism nor his clear statements against the Communist Party (Levine 20), gained him respect from the established, in real life or in discourse. Instead, these aspects were either dissociated from him as an individual or linked to other issues, such as his sexual orientation, resulting in a strong rejection of Rustin (Podair 20).

Elias stresses that the power differential between established and outsiders is primarily held up by the feeling of either superiority or inferiority on the part of the members of the respective group. Yet when the power differential changes and the outsiders gain more power, new norms and modes of behavior must be found by the established to ascertain that they may once again set themselves apart from the outsiders. This observation is also crucial to understanding some of the transformations that oppression has undergone in the 21st century: Especially a closer examination of 'race' and 'class' shows that while power differentials may have changed, the

practices of oppression have not disappeared but rather transformed according to the social dynamics within figurations. A figurational perspective therefore also takes the underlying and slow-changing structures of thinking into account, and thus helps explain why the implementation of new laws or acts, for example, does not immediately lead to the intended results in society. Consequently, 'transformation' constitutes the more appropriate term in this context, for the connotation of 'change' suggests a much more drastic effect than can actually take place both within and between figurations. Transformation instead captures the social processes initiated *by* change and conveys the aspect of persistence concerning certain stigmatizations and self-images. While it also emphasizes that human relations can by no means be characterized as stable, it acknowledges the continuity of power relations and alludes to the fact that the respective stigmatizations are revised according to the dynamics both within and between figurations.

SILENCING AND UNSILENCING

Against the background of figurational theory, the lack of Rustin's public recognition, or his so-called *silencing*, can now be conceptualized as one of the examples of the transformations of oppression. As I would argue, the silence about Rustin after his death is directly related to the very established-outsider figuration that affected him throughout his life. Yet the thesis of a continuing power differential between the two groups contradicts the progressive narrative prevalent in the historiography of the Civil Rights movement that suggests a successful outcome of the struggle in the form of a constant development toward a more equal, better future (Alexander 101-02). According to this narrative, power relations after Rustin's death would have changed to his benefit, so that the ongoing lack of recognition was ascribed to his personality rather than to persistent oppressive structural forces. However, Rustin does not cater to that progressive narrative. In fact, his very existence could even be seen to subvert the predominantly optimistic view of the Civil Rights movement. His subversive potential provides yet another explanation for why he was rarely (prominently) included in the literature about the Civil Rights era. Given the social significance of so-called individual cases, we may assume then that Rustin's story has never been irrelevant to larger debates. In fact, when at the height of the Civil

Rights movement he had become a public persona, his example was repeatedly used in arguments about the moral or political future of the United States (D'Emilio 191-92). Yet laying claim to his case usually meant that certain aspects of his person were either played down (if not ignored) or exaggerated – depending on the respective agenda of the established.

As the following example will illustrate, the Movement used Rustin's 'personal image' to counter outward attacks against him and – by proxy – defend the Movement as a whole. At first, white supremacists targeted Rustin, one of the key strategists of the Movement, on account of his former brief communist affiliation and his homosexuality. Since some black leaders also felt uneasy about supporting Rustin due to too many controversial issues connected to his personality, it was not until later, shortly before the March on Washington, that he received strong public support from other prominent black leaders: In view of the underlying charges of immorality, Rustin was (and had to be) primarily defended as 'a man of character.' Yet, this strategy also (erroneously) affirmed the conceptualization of 'morality' as something universal that was not subject to power dynamics. In fact, however, ideas of morality were clearly shaped by the more powerful whites and their norms and could be used to easily discredit an entire group if only a single member was believed to stray from the path that they, the established, had identified as the acceptable one. Consequently, Rustin's endorsement prior to the March on Washington did not include his sexuality, nor was it shared by all Civil Rights proponents. On the contrary, the fact that Rustin was gay required a supportive statement by fellow activists, lest the entire Movement suffer from Rustin's bad reputation (Podair 59). As the main organizer and strategist of an event embedded in a mass movement that was about to profoundly impact social relations in America, Rustin was deemed significant enough by both his allies and his adversaries to manipulate information and create partial and thus distorted images of him. Thus, as independent as he strove to be, he was and continues to be subject to the bene- (and male-) violence of the established, in various kinds of figurations.

Rustin's example thus reveals how individual stories fall victim to larger dynamics of power. This happens through the aforementioned silencing of certain aspects and thus the distortion of the person's public image – if he/she is not erased altogether from public memory. Whoever does not neatly fit into the distinct categories that hold the power relations in place is

perceived as a threat by the established and will therefore be either misrepresented by or eliminated from the discourse.

CLASS

In Rustin's case, 'class' constitutes one of these aspects that have not received adequate consideration and thus caused a distortion of his story. For example, Rustin's socialization in one of the most influential, predominantly white religious groups in the United States, the Religious Society of Friends, is routinely mentioned, but rarely analyzed. This leaves room for uninformed, simplified ideas or even stereotypes about Quakerism, for instance as regards whiteness or wealth.⁴

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- 4 It is crucial to clarify that while Quakers, compared to many of their contemporaries, possessed the *spiritual* foundation to consider Blacks or women as equals, these beliefs did not immediately translate into social practices. In fact, the rather common narrative of Quakers as ultimate equalizers who were exempt from racism is not supported by historical evidence. Although Quakers were among the first *in relation to* their contemporaries to fight against injustice and include marginalized groups into their community, their practices, such as segregated seating during meetings, were in fact not as detached from the secular world as one would be inclined to think. The complicated process of coming to terms with their history, including racism, is ongoing for Quakers and sheds a new light on the past (cf. McDaniel and Julye). Yet, from a figurational perspective, these comparatively new insights about Quaker history must still be considered against the strong background of the Quakers' we-image and collective fantasies that inform the habitus of their community members. In other words, reality is not 'void' due to the revelation of new facts according to a figurational perspective. Reality is indeed never 'fact-based,' but rather always the result of beliefs, power dynamics, and social practices. This helps us understand why, in contrast to a non-figurational perspective, the lived experience of many marginalized groups does indeed *not* immediately change significantly, even though newfound evidence would suggest otherwise. Since incorporated 'knowledge' persists in people, buildings, and institutions even when new facts call into question the very beliefs that informed and created them, change can never be as drastic as a substantialist approach would suggest.

According to this reasoning, Rustin, as a black Quaker, is either labeled an ‘Uncle Tom’ because he is said to betray his race, or he is declared an odd exception that can be dismissed. Without considering the theology of the Religious Society of Friends, however, these notions easily confirm the categories ‘black’ and ‘white,’ working toward perpetuating existing but rarely scrutinized structures that link skin color with economic and social standing. That being said, how can it be explained that Rustin’s Quaker faith received significantly less attention than his homosexuality, his skin color, or his interest in labor rights?

Seen through the lens of an established-outsider figuration, it becomes clear that the tightly-knit pacifist community of Quakers with their great amount of *social capital*,⁵ their belief in the equality of all people, and their emphasis on education does not fit the negative image the established have of the outsiders. The very fact that Rustin mentored Dr. King in pacifist tactics, for example, is closely related to his Quaker upbringing: The Quakers traditionally hold strong pacifist convictions and regard it as an integral part of their faith to act upon their spiritual beliefs and to become politically active (Hamm 12). Moreover, the power differential between groups is inextricably bound to differentials of *cohesion* and *integration*. Due to resources within the Quaker community, such as their group cohesion and trusted reputation, Rustin’s affiliation with the Religious Society of Friends afforded him the social capital of a very influential and special kind of privileged group. Given the 370-year history of Quakers, a history that, particularly during its early years, was marked by marginality and rebellion, such a claim of ‘privilege’ may seem ironic if not paradoxical. Yet, the Quakers’ image gradually changed with their steady development from “a peculiar people” (Hamm 194) to a both economically and politically active and successful group.

Indeed, the example of the Quakers illustrates how a formerly oppressed group – in the course of centuries – has been able to redefine its role in society. Interestingly, the Quakers’ notorious skepticism, or even rejection, of authority can be regarded as one of the main reasons for this

5 “Social capital is the totality of resources (financial capital and also information etc.) activated through a more or less extended, more or less mobilizable network of relations which procures a competitive advantage by providing higher return on investment.” (Bourdieu, *Social Structures* 194-95)

development. To speak with Elias, Quakers, according to their habitus, were prone to ignoring or even rejecting the group disgrace that had formerly been attributed to them by the established, i.e., the commonly recognized religious denominations. Instead, they cultivated their own virtues, such as pacifism, integrity (e.g., in trade), and education and, over time, earned the public's respect. The recognition by mainstream America was not even a goal of the Quakers; they simply rigorously abided by their own standards and thus resembled a common behavior put forth by the established.

Rustin's religious belief gave him the feeling of belonging to a community and the ability to "speak truth to power" (American Friends Service Committee 1967) – i.e., to question authority with "plain speech" (Hamm 23). It also made him less susceptible to feelings of inferiority which the established strive to instill in the outsiders. On the contrary, Rustin was part of one of the religious groups that in hindsight were considered the spiritual founding fathers and thus, quite literally, the establishment of America. Although Quakers had been regarded as outsiders in times gone by, their important role in U.S. history increasingly bestowed them with a very unique and well-respected standing in American society (Hamm 3-4; 10-12).

HABITUS

As has already been mentioned above with regard to slavery, which marks a collective experience for most African Americans, the behavioral creed of Quakerism likewise inscribed itself onto *Friends'* bodies. Rustin, too, came to embody cognitive structures and modes of behavior based upon Quaker values, and it is this Quaker habitus that makes his development into one of the great Civil Rights leaders more plausible than mere contingency (cf. Bourdieu, *Distinction* 333). To quote William Deal and Timothy Beal's summary of Bourdieu's concept:

a *habitus* is a set of dispositions that generate and structure human actions and behaviors. It shapes all practice, and yet it is not experienced as repressive or enforcing. Its effects on us typically go unnoticed. [...] How does one come to or learn a particular habitus? Bourdieu describes this process as one of informal, unconscious

learning rather than formal instruction. [...] The habitus one occupies shapes the practices that one engages in. [...] Once internalized, habitus dispositions are taken for granted. (50-51)

Frequently accused of determinism (see Bourdieu and Wacquant 132-36), Bourdieu in fact always insisted that habitus was a product of history. Thus, while the habitus of an individual makes his/her practice, conduct, decisions, etc. seem 'natural,' one should not conclude that a habitus constitutes essential or innate characteristics of that person. Yet, this reasoning is frequently applied to the issues of 'class' and 'race:' A set of allegedly inherent qualities is attributed to people based on their ancestry, upbringing, or skin color, which results in a certain evaluation of that group and its individual members. While Bourdieu clearly distances himself from such essentialist thinking, he stresses the (symbolic) power attached to both the perception and possession of a particular habitus:

Bourdieu's notion of habitus is not simply about a process of socialization or enculturation into a set of practices, but is also concerned with the power relations that exist between social classes, that is, with how social inequality is perpetrated and maintained. Habitus functions to distinguish social classes from each other. [...] [T]his is so socially powerful, [...] because class inequalities and the dominance of one class over another occur covertly. Rather than the application of overt force, symbolic power is harnessed to maintain class distinctions and the appearance of their naturalness. (Deal and Beal 51)

Against this background, it is interesting to return to the correlation of habitus and class in Rustin's life: According to Bourdieu, 'class' comprises the amount of *economic, social, and cultural capital*. This results in a particular lifestyle that is bound to certain values as well as a corresponding degree of *symbolic power* (Swartz 333). As Rustin's Quaker upbringing went along with a traditionally high regard of education, a great amount of social capital, and a long tradition of political activism based on one's spiritual beliefs, 'class' can be said to have played a crucial part in enabling his rise to power. But it was then either dismissed or even blotted out from current accounts of his life – thus depriving Rustin (and perhaps people he could have been seen to represent, such as gays or African Americans) of that source of symbolic power.

Considering Rustin's Quaker upbringing in the light of figurational theory challenges commonly racist, divisive structures in dominant thinking, for this spiritual background introduces a new perspective on issues that usually tend to be solely regarded in terms of race – which means to run the risk of perpetuating racist thinking by means of a reasoning similar to that of the established. In order to truly challenge racism, however, the unscrutinized naturalization of this term, as it occurred in the course of a long and continuing process of social construction, must be pointed out and revealed as rooted in power dynamics.

RACE

While 'class' can be considered an empowering factor in Rustin's life, 'race' undoubtedly plays a decisive negative role. Rustin experienced blatant racism throughout his lifetime. He was beaten and verbally abused as a Freedom Rider and activist as he put his body on the line to challenge racism. Compared to the time after his death and other aspects relevant to his story that were silenced, however, one could infer that 'race' did – at first glance – at least not completely hinder Rustin from exerting influence during his lifetime. For a certain period of the Movement, particularly during the time following the March on Washington, Rustin was by some even considered part of the Civil Rights establishment. His was a well-known name among radical pacifists; he worked closely with A. Philip Randolph and Dr. King and was a coveted speaker and advisor in non-violent tactics (D'Emilio 358-61). At the time, other issues connected to Rustin, such as his short-lived Communist affiliation or his sexuality, caused greater stigmatization than his skin color. After his death, however, race appears to outweigh any of the privileges Rustin's class affiliation may have suggested. Taking into consideration the numerous figurations of which he was part, this suggests that the reception of his case is still dependent on the established-outsider figuration that continues to operate along the lines of skin color. The stigmatizations, however, tend to be more complex and do not reveal their roots in racism immediately. Here, a figurational perspective helps lay open the dynamics leading to the silencing of Rustin.

In the time after the Civil Rights movement, when power differentials were beginning to change in favor of the African American outsiders, the

majority of whites did not show any interest in casting a positive light on the “troublemaker” Rustin (Levine 41) so that his negative image remained tied to his alleged communist beliefs. The majority of African Americans did not provide Rustin with much support either. Due to his cooperation with (primarily white) labor rights activists and his strong opposition to Black Power, Rustin was regarded as a “sell out” and further fell out of favor with many Blacks and whites when he and his white partner openly advocated for gay rights in the 1980s (Podair 33-34; Levine 191, 216-17, 242-43).

From a figurational perspective, one could explain this kind of detachment with the fear of an increase of stigmatization should the openly gay Rustin be seen as standing for their entire group. This could have been used by the established against the slowly growing power of outsiders, because homosexuality was then closely linked to immorality. Moreover, Rustin, who was active in various fields, did not maintain the distance that was usually upheld between the outsiders and the established (that is both Blacks and whites, as well as other outsiders and established) but in fact reached out and sought to integrate (all of) these separate camps, asserting that “[w]e are all one” (Chang and Terry 253). Against Rustin’s intention, however, this tireless effort of coalition-building made him even more suspicious (for either side) of being a traitor. Elias explains this phenomenon as follows:

The very existence of interdependent outsiders who share neither the fund of common memories nor, as it appears, the same norms of respectability as the established group, acts as an irritant; it is perceived by the members of the latter as an attack against their own we-image and we-ideal. The sharp rejection and stigmatisation of the outsiders are the counter-attack. (*Established* 30-31)

Indeed, one could say that Rustin, by being the complex person he was, revealed how Blacks and whites who had been systematically divided by skin color were associated with categories, preferences, or opinions that were by no means inherent to a certain ‘race.’ And yet this very mobility that allowed him to move between various groups should neither be considered an entirely deliberate choice, nor a merit of Rustin’s. Rather, it was his habitus that enabled and at times may even have forced him to repeatedly undermine, expand, and overstep the boundaries erected between groups. Thus,

Rustin's case demonstrates particularly well that any proclaimed essentialism is fictitious and that the naturalization of differences which people have come to accept is in fact a social practice of division in which they are complicit. Great efforts had to be continuously undertaken in order to uphold these apparently natural divides; gossip, written and unwritten laws, as well as segregation actually helped construct and perpetuate such differences.

In Rustin's eyes, these practices were oftentimes justified under the guise of protecting or restoring identity. Consequently, he initially spoke out against Black Power, an idea he thought wrongfully constricted the issue of justice and – as did so many other ideas related to identity – rendered collective action impossible. Given the importance of a positive we-image for groups, Rustin's opposition to Black Power caused significant irritation among its followers and attached the persistent label of a traitor to him once again (Levine 210). The former Freedom Rider and well-known Civil Rights activist James Farmer did not express a singular opinion when he said: "Bayard has no credibility in the Black community. Bayard's commitment is to labor, not to the Black man" (Levine 244). Rustin, however, whose intention it was to break the cycle of division between the races, classes, or nations, criticized Black Power not for the pride and dignity for which it stood but merely as a potential source of division.

Referring to Elias's theory, one could say that the group charisma promoted by Black Power in Rustin's eyes only entrenched positions instead of solving the larger, underlying problems. In his 1966 article, "'Black Power' and Coalition Politics," Rustin claimed that Black Power not only worked toward segregation but also distracted people from the actual challenge in society: injustice. Hinting at what he perceived to be the lack of a clear strategy behind the slogan "Black Power," one that would succeed at overcoming racism, he wrote: "The issue was injustice before 'black power' became popular, and the issue is still injustice" (39). With this statement, Rustin pointed out the larger, social issues at the core of oppression. His habitus led him to perceive the political struggles around him from the perspective of the Quaker principles he was socialized to hold, which also meant to prioritize the greater goal over smaller victories. The alienation this caused among other black activists is certainly understandable. In their eyes, Rustin was self-righteously skipping crucial steps in the process of liberation that – to them – formed the only solid foundation for a better

future. However, as the figurational perspective helps us understand, Rustin's take on Black Power should not be mistaken for a white perspective; rather, it was a spiritual perspective that became essentialized as white.

While it is not surprising that the heteronormative, white establishment did not make an effort to promote him, the question remains why it took more than ten years for a handful of scholars, mainly from the queer and African American communities, to rediscover Rustin after his death. In this context, the aspects of evaluation and norms become relevant again. The power of definition the established exert over the outsiders creates a profound and persistent feeling of inferiority amongst the latter. The established not only determine the virtues and forms of capital that are deemed important in any given field, they also declare themselves the 'yardstick' by which all others are to be measured. Since the established always attribute the highest value to their group and all of its members, it is virtually impossible for the outsiders to reach the standard defined by the established. This can result in feelings of inferiority that show in apathy or, as in Rustin's case, the intermittent absence of work about him.

Nevertheless, social dynamics at least seem to promise certain 'advantages' for those outsiders who learn to comply with the rules of the established. Rustin's case was (and may well be) misunderstood to constitute an example of that, as he was frequently accused of being 'a traitor to his race,' for instance. Rustin's case still runs the risk of being misread by (white) established who might use his story to infer that it was indeed possible to 'bypass' racism if an individual was capable enough, thus blotting out social and structural forces. According to this reasoning and in line with the behavior of the established, Rustin's story would then only serve the purpose of casting a negative light on all others who allegedly lacked that 'ability' – which is obviously highly problematic. It is therefore important to acknowledge that hardly any group of outsiders possesses, like the Quakers, a spiritual foundation that provides them with the historical background of successfully resisting the dominant norms and rules of conduct. Consequently, it is crucial to be aware of Rustin's unique socialization with Quaker values, for his case could otherwise easily be exploited for either colorblind, racist, or otherwise misinformed arguments that fail to take multiple facets of a person as well as social dynamics into consideration.

Seen from an established-outsider perspective, the fact that Rustin's biography is barely discussed, or for that matter fully recognized, can be regarded as an attempt to inhibit the power potential inherent in his case. Rustin's notorious crossing of the lines between various social groups carries the danger of providing cohesion within these separated and marginalized groups – and, consequently, unite and empower them (Elias and Scotson 5-6). Thus, it may not be altogether surprising that the discourse about the ultimate integrator Rustin still operates exclusively within the paradigm of the outsider, and thus fails to account for the content of his message. It is as if Rustin's greatest asset during his life, the fact that he was never 'either ... or' but always 'both ... and,' continues to work against him to such an extent that it prevents the larger implications of his story from coming to the fore. Indeed, the main decision about Rustin's legacy was made within an established-outsider figuration in which his persona – if for different reasons – was and continues to be claimed by the established in various figurations for their own respective purposes.

Instead of repeating that Rustin was an outsider in the conventional sense, research should address the question why society still tends to take for granted the reasons for the silencing of his full and complex story. The fact that certain parts of that story now enjoy renewed interest is subject to the very same power dynamics. Thus, both the phenomenon of silencing – the lack of public recognition of Rustin's whole story – and his unsilencing – the rediscovery of his case – constitute significant examples of the transformation and reproduction of oppression.

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Introducing Disagreement

Rancière's Anti-Sociology and the Parallax of Political Subjectivity and Political Economy (of Racism)

DENNIS BÜSCHER-ULBRICH

The sociology of “misrecognition” [...] share[s] with Althusserianism the idea that the dominated are dominated because they are ignorant of the laws of domination. This simplistic view at first assigns to those who adopt it the exalted task of bringing their science to the blind masses. Eventually, though, this exalted task dissolves into a pure thought of resentment which declares the inability of the ignorant to be cured of their illusions, and hence the inability of the masses to take charge of their own destiny.

RANCIÈRE, *ALTHUSSER'S LESSON XVI*

In *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (1999) Jacques Rancière introduced the polemical notion of “the police” [*la police*] to refer to “the set of procedures whereby the aggregation and consent of collectivities is achieved, the organization of powers, the distribution of places and roles, and the systems for legitimizing this distribution” (28). Curiously, for Rancière sociology as such – rather than dissecting “the police” and thus underwriting emancipation – is part and parcel of a non-egalitarian “distribution of the sensible” [*partage du sensible*] secured by *la police*. In other words: Sociology is a disciplinary knowledge and practice that eventually amounts to the policing of subjectivities rather than emancipatory social

transformation. “Politics,” by contrast, is “an extremely determined activity antagonistic to policing: whatever breaks with the tangible configuration whereby parties and parts or lack of them are defined by a presupposition that, by definition, has no place in that configuration” (29-30). Accordingly, “politics” is not a matter of negotiating conflicting interests, nor the exercise of power or its institutionalization. Rather, it is a matter of what the excluded and disenfranchised [*les sans-part*] do that interrupts the hierarchical order of the social; in the process, they constitute a political subject (“the *demos*,” “the people,” “the proletariat,” but also “women,” “black people,” “the 99%,” “the *sans-papiers*,” etc.). Political subjects disrupt not only the power arrangements of the social order, but also its perceptual and epistemic underpinnings, the obviousness and naturalness that attaches to it. Rancière’s notion of “politics” is thus well suited to contest a post-political social formation, brought about by neoliberal capitalism and “end-of-history” teleologies, that presents itself as non-ideological, non-antagonistic, and permanent, where “consensus” has come to mean the eclipse of an identity constituted through polemicizing over the common. In other words: the disavowal of historical contingency and the “disagreement” [*la mésentente*] constitutive of politics (cf. 43 ff.).

But Rancière’s polemical critique of “the police” and his rethinking of politics as a performative contradiction has also led him to reject the concept of power *tout court*:

What makes an action political is not its object or the place where it is carried out, but solely its form, the form in which confirmation of equality is inscribed in the setting up of a dispute, of a community existing solely through being divided. Politics runs up against the police everywhere. We need to think of this encounter as a meeting of the heterogeneous. To be able to do this *we have to let go of certain concepts that assert in advance a smooth connection between them. The concept of power is the main such concept.* This concept once allowed a certain well-meaning militancy to contend that “everything is political” since power relationships are everywhere. [...] The concept of power allows one to retort with an “everything is policing” to an “everything is political,” but this is pretty poor as a logical conclusion. If everything is political, then nothing is. So while it is important to show, as Michel Foucault has done magnificently, that the police order extends well beyond its specialized institutions and techniques, it is equally important to say that nothing is political in itself merely because power relationships are at work in it. For a thing to be political, it

must give rise to a meeting of police logic and egalitarian logic that is never set up in advance. (*Disagreement* 32, my emphasis)

It is thus not difficult to see why Rancière's thinking can largely be considered antithetical to that of Pierre Bourdieu, in particular. Rancière's profound anti-sociological bias, which can be shown to rest on a deliberate Foucauldian rejection of the Marxian and Freudian dialectics of essence and appearance, can indeed be illustrated by way of his fundamental rejection of Bourdieu's relational sociology and habitus-field theory. But it also clearly invites a dialectical critique and raises numerous hard-edged questions about the nature of the relationship between "the police" and "politics," structure and agency, a critical theory of society and the prospect of its radical transformation. Whereas Marx famously stated in Vol. 3 of *Capital* that "all science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided" (Marx 532), Rancière has radically distanced himself from both the critique of ideology (including commodity fetishism) and a "hermeneutics of suspicion" (cf. Ricoeur 30 ff.) toward an "approach that is more affirmative of the surface itself," where "the surface no longer hides, but becomes a scene on which the symbolic efficacy of language and discourse are demonstrated" (Arsenjuk 7). What ultimately is at stake in Rancière's anti-sociology, though, is the question of the relationship between social science and emancipation – as rightfully highlighted in a 2013 *n+1* editorial piece called "Too Much Sociology" (Saval et al.) and further discussed in Ruth Sonderegger and Jens Kastner's *Pierre Bourdieu und Jacques Rancière: Emanzipatorische Praxis denken* (2014).

Rather than reading Rancière in the light of contemporary theories of recognition, or situating his radically egalitarian philosophy – "more Jacobin than Marxist" (Žižek, "Lesson" 75) – in the traditional chasm on the Left between Marxism and anarchism, the proper historical and intellectual context for understanding the development of his thought is to be found in the post-1968 New Left milieu and its post-Althusserian rejection of Marxism as a science of revolution. Rather than being the necessary product of and strategic means for overcoming class antagonism, "politics" happens when the logic of "police" (and its agents) clashes with the logic of emancipation (and its agents), which interrupts the former's distribution of the sensible and "changes the very parameters of what is considered 'possible' in the existing constellation" (Žižek, *Ticklish Subject* 199). This theoretical

proposition, then, i.e., Rancière's "ground-clearing distinction" (Davis 76) between "politics" and "police," sits uneasily with Bourdieu's insistence on the reflexive nature of symbolic power and the relationality of structure/agency sustained by a logic of praxis in the face of which the Rancièrian "disagreement" seems unlikely and "politics" itself becomes unthinkable. In other words: Rancière's post-Althusserian notion of politics aims precisely at what is rendered impossible in the given post-political conjuncture and affirms the possibility of both intellectual and political emancipation conceived as a "dissensual" rupture of a non-egalitarian and thus always-already *policed* "distribution of the sensible." Since the latter is a key concept in Rancière's work that is also somewhat reminiscent of Bourdieu's notion of "symbolic violence" and the "*paradox of doxa*" in *Pascalian Meditations* (164 ff.) and *Masculine Domination* (1-2), for instance, it seems conducive to systematically highlight and explicate Rancière's theoretical departure from and polemical dismissal of Bourdieu and related thinkers.

DISTRIBUTIONS OF THE SENSIBLE

Partage du sensible is a challenging concept which has variously been translated as "partition," "division," or "distribution" of the sensible, where "sensible" signifies both what is available to the "senses" and thus perceptible and what makes "sense" within a hegemonic regime of signification and meaning. The term refers at once to the conditions for sharing that are constitutive of a given sense and order of the community and to the sources of disruption, or "dissensus," of that same order. As Rancière has acknowledged, the concept is reminiscent of the Kantian transcendental argument or critique – "re-examined perhaps by Foucault" – of conditions of possibility or "*a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience" (*Politics* 13). Most importantly, it does not rely on the concept of "misrecognition" [*méconnaissance*] on the part of the dominated, or the *sans-part*. Key to understanding Rancière's intellectual project, moreover, is his singular understanding of emancipation as a kind of 'pulling oneself up by one's bootstraps' and the enactment of unconditional equality in the here and now, which from the perspective of the sociologist may well appear impossible. This holds true for the possibility of both politics and aesthetic

experience proper. It is thus no coincidence that Rancière also theorizes what ties aesthetics to politics and that he politicizes the terminological foundations of Kantian aesthetics in order to highlight the aesthetic dimension inherent to political subjectivization (cf. *The Philosopher and His Poor*, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, *The Emancipated Spectator*). But why, again, is sociology to be rejected?

As Caroline Pelletier puts it, Rancière “targets an often-noted tension in Bourdieu’s work between the denunciation of domination and the modeling of its ineluctable reproduction” (138). While the absence of an account of political agency is commonly described as a limitation of Bourdieu’s work, Rancière “sees in this the truth of Bourdieu’s entire discourse, [...] which places the poor in one position in society, and the sociologist in another; in which the poor are objects of study rather than intellectual and political subjects” (138). Rancière thus identifies a disavowed continuity between Althusser and Bourdieu, a continuity which Bourdieu himself firmly rejected in *Pascalian Meditations*. Rancière’s egalitarian rejection of any tendency toward (not just) sociological orthodoxy, on the other hand, already motivated his ferocious critical examination of its most dogmatic example in the wake of Paris 1968: “Althusserian structuralist Marxism with its rigid distinction between scientific theory and ideology and its distrust towards any form of spontaneous popular movement which was immediately decried as a form of bourgeois humanism” (Žižek, “Lesson” 69). Rancière’s theoretical intervention into this schema, however, is not grounded in a rejection of Marxism *tout court* but in a rejection of a particular discursive employment of academic Marxism and especially structural Marxism as a kind of master knowledge which, according to Rancière, not only runs counter to the idea of workers’ intellectual emancipation but performatively reinscribes, or reinstalls, and thus helps to reproduce some of the very hierarchies it purports to abolish – the dividing lines between worker and bourgeois, manual and intellectual labor, unrefined and refined senses, incapacity for critical reflection and capacity for critical reflection.¹

1 Cf. *Althusser’s Lesson*; *The Philosopher and His Poor*; *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. Rancière’s critique of sociological mastery and the question of ‘performativity’ in relation to Judith Butler’s use of the term are cogently discussed in Pelletier. For a critical survey, see Davis 15-25.

This type of criticism of performative reinscription is characteristic of Rancière's approach to a number of highly influential critical sociologies, chief among which is the work of Bourdieu. More recently, he has tackled Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello's analysis of "network-based organization, employee autonomy, and post-Fordist horizontal work structures" in *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (2006, back cover). As Rancière argues in *The Emancipated Spectator*, their work is perfectly in line with Bourdieu's teaching in that it

[makes] do with attributing the struggle against misery and for community bonds to workers and the individualist desire for autonomous creativity to the fleetingly rebellious children of the big or petty bourgeoisie. But the collective struggle for working-class emancipation has never been separate from a new experience of individual existence and capacities, wrested from the constraint of old bonds of community. (35)

Social emancipation, Rancière argues, is "simultaneously an aesthetic emancipation, [...] a break with the ways of feeling, seeing and saying that characterized working-class identity" in a hierarchical order (35). In his essay on "The Misadventures of Critical Thought" Rancière thus locates the "solidarity of the social and the aesthetic, the discovery of individuality for all and the project of free collectivity [...] at the heart of working-class emancipation," while insisting that "by the same token it signified the disordering of classes and identities that the sociological view of the world has always rejected, against which it was itself constructed in the nineteenth century" and which it naturally rediscovered "in the slogans of 1968" (*Emancipated Spectator* 35). It is therefore

neither the novelty nor the strength of the thesis that has proved seductive, but the way in which it puts the 'critical' theme of the complicit illusion back to work. It thus provides fuel for the melancholic version of leftism, which feeds off the dual denunciation of the power of the beast and the illusions of those who serve it when they think they are fighting it. It is true that the thesis of the recuperation of 'artistic' revolts leads to several conclusions: on occasion, it underpins proposals for a radicalism that would at last be radical: the mass defection of the forces of the General Intellect, today absorbed by Capital and the State, advocated by Paolo Virno; or the virtual subversion counter-posed to virtual capitalism by Brian Holmes. It also fuels

proposals for an inverted activism, aimed no longer at destroying but at saving a capitalism that has lost its spirit. But its normal pitch is disenchanted registration of the impossibility of changing the ways of a world that lacks any solid point for opposing the reality of domination [...]. (36-37)

Again, Rancière's main opposition to Western Marxist sociology rests on his axiomatic notion of equality and the assumed effects of pseudo-radical academic discourse. Critical social science and its thesis of recuperation may well end up reinscribing – by way of ideologically functional discursive emplotment – the (logic of the) social division of labor. In other words: The concept and analysis of recuperation can itself be recuperated into power.

But Rancière, who is himself a critic of recuperation, goes further than this when he asserts that

[t]he dominated do not remain in subordination because they misunderstand the existing state of affairs but because they lack confidence in their capacity to transform it. [...] The feeling of such a capacity presupposes that the dominated are already committed to a political process in a bid to change the configuration of sensory givens and to construct forms of a world to come, from within the existent world. (*Aesthetics* 45)

It is such undialectical humanist affirmation that ultimately risks trapping Rancière's thinking in a kind of de facto standpoint theory, unless we also read his work as expressing a Kantian, or Lacanian, insistence on the real/Real of appearances, disavowed by sociology at large. As he argues in *The Emancipated Spectator*,

[t]he current disconnection between the critical procedures and any perspective of emancipation only reveals the disjunction at the heart of the critical paradigm. *It may make fun of its illusions but it remains enclosed in its logic.* This is why I think it is necessary to re-examine the genealogy of the concepts and procedures of that logic and the way in which it got intertwined with the logic of social emancipation. (42, my emphasis)

A potential Lacanian point to be made against the sociology of “misrecognition” and symbolic power would be that such “illusions” are, of course,

never mere illusions but necessary material-symbolic fictions that structure (or, with Kant, “schematize” the perception of) reality itself, which in turn – and against Rancière – may come to assert itself as part and parcel of the problem of social domination.

What is of crucial importance according to Slavoj Žižek’s reading of Rancière, though, is the realization that “these poetic displacements and condensations are not just secondary illustrations of an underlying ideological struggle, but the very terrain of this struggle” (“Lesson” 77). Thus, if Rancière’s “police” focuses on the policing of subjects and subjectivities, on “the clear categorization of every individual, of every ‘visible’ social unit,” Žižek argues, “then disturbing such orders of the visible, the sensible, the perceptible, and proposing different lateral links, unexpected short-circuits, etc., is the elementary form of resistance” (77). Žižek thus aligns Rancière’s “police” with his Lacanian-Marxist notion of ideology. For him, ideology operates as a social fantasy which structures reality itself (cf. *Sublime Object* 29 ff.), and the task of ideology critique is to read the social symptomatically in order to drag “the unconditional Real of global Capital” into the realm of the Symbolic (*Ticklish Subject* 4, cf. Fink 70-72).

THE SOCIOLOGY OF MISRECOGNITION AND THE SCIENCE OF REPRODUCTION: BOURDIEU AND ALTHUSSER

Rancière’s critique of a Western Marxist sociology of neoliberal recuperation (esp. of cherished New Left ideas and practices) seems all the more remarkable in light of the fact that he himself had contributed an important section to *Reading Capital* in 1965, in which he exercised his fidelity to Althusserian Marxism and political-economic “symptomatic reading” in the cause of the “epistemological break” (cf. Davis 8-15). But this was before he forcefully critiqued his former teacher and collaborator in *La Leçon d’Althusser* (1974) and entered on a series of archival projects, including *The Nights of Labor* (1981), *The Philosopher and His Poor* (1983), and *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1987), which basically reversed Althusserian Marxism and scientism, focusing on social history and workers’ struggles instead. Anthony Iles and Tom Roberts thus argue that his greatest contribution is to social history.

Henceforth, Rancière follows, in the most minute detail, the mediations which surround the subaltern subject, the proletarian or worker. The problem of theory, of Marxist science and the condescension of the intellectual to his subject, is raised to a general principle traceable back from the perspective of the present through the entire history of the left.

While Althusser strictly opposed any spontaneous understanding of the social as necessarily fetishistic, “Rancière has explored the consequences of the opposite presumption—that everyone is immediately and equally capable of thought. [...] Everyone shares equal powers of speech and thought.” (Hallward 109) Rancière’s axiomatic account of equality thus strictly refuses to posit equality and emancipation as *telos*, in which case it could be endlessly deferred. Instead, for him, equality is a polemical *a priori* to be demonstrated both intellectually and practically qua politics: “[E]quality is not a goal to be attained but a point of departure, a supposition to be maintained in all circumstances” (*Ignorant Schoolmaster* 138).

Nowhere is this idea articulated more forcefully than in Rancière’s scathing response to Bourdieu’s *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1979). Rancière essentially argues that Bourdieu’s sociology of art and aesthetic experience hinges on the systematic exclusion of the ‘gray area’ of aisthesis:

The sociologist needs only to show each time the sufficient reason organizing the universe of judgements—simple distinction. He only needs to widen the distance. Questions about music without music, fictitious questions of aesthetics about photographs that are not perceived as aesthetic, all these produce inevitably what is required by the sociologist: the suppression of intermediaries, of points of meeting and exchange between the people of reproduction and the élite of distinction. Everything happens as if the science of the sociologist-king had the same requirement as the city of the philosopher-king. There must be no mixing, no imitation. The subjects of this science, like the warriors of *The Republic*, must be unable to “imitate” anything else than their own dye. (*Philosopher* 189)

Contrary to Bourdieu’s wholesale rejection of Kantian aesthetics as “the site *par excellence* of the ‘denegation of the social’” (*Aesthetics* 1), Rancière seeks to lay bare again and reaffirm the emancipatory kernel of aesthetics. For instance, he reminds us that Horkheimer and Adorno’s

“profound motif” of denouncing the separation of labor and enjoyment goes further back than the Marxist critique of commodity fetishism and ‘bourgeois’ Enlightenment thought: “Through the intermediary of Hölderlinian poetry, it harks to that which is without a doubt the veritable founding text of the modern thought of emancipation, Friedrich von Schiller’s *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen [in einer Reihe von Briefen]*” (*Chronicles* 27). Rancière repeatedly refers to Schiller’s *Letters* as the founding text of aesthetic politics, precisely because Schiller counterposes “[t]o the established social division between the barbarism of the civilization of the Great and popular savagery [...] that chance at common humanity—at reconciliation in the sensory world—constituted by beauty” (27). However, in contrast to Schiller’s transcendental *homo ludens*, Rancière understands the Kantian “free play” (102 ff.) between the cognitive powers of imagination and understanding (i.e., the autonomy of aesthetic experience) to be “free” only insofar as it reveals the contingency of “the police” and its “distribution of the sensible” through the dissociation between what can be experienced – perceived, felt, done – and its *a priori* (dominant social) signification.

The “bold move” in *The Philosopher and His Poor*, as noted by Oliver Davis, is Rancière’s “insinuation, by suggestive juxtaposition, [...] that the scientific strand identified within the Marxist tradition [...] is rooted in a certain conception of the relationship between power and knowledge first elaborated in Plato’s autocratic model of the ideal city in *Republic*” (17-18). Davis further argues that “[t]he value to Rancière of Plato’s discussion in *Republic* lies in the way in which Plato, by introducing the myth of the three metals, admits to the arbitrariness [or rather contingency] of the distinction between those rulers capable of philosophy and the multitude of their ‘poor’ [...]” (20). In Rancière’s “argument by parataxis,” Marx, Sartre, and Bourdieu become “tainted by association” with Plato (20). All four have in common the construction of a group Rancière calls “the poor,” who are held to be constitutively incapable of thought, aesthetic experience, and historical agency.

Following Charlotte Nordmann, Davis acknowledges that “Rancière somewhat overstates the case against Bourdieu” (23), not to mention Marx and Sartre. In any case, “Rancière’s reaction against the sociologist’s institutional self-interest is extreme and unforgiving” (102). Davis thus summarizes Rancière’s “composite objection to Bourdieu’s approach” (23) as follows:

[H]is sociology is unduly suspicious, scientific, self-aggrandizing, reductive, deterministic and practically (politically) ineffectual. It is suspicious and scientific because it assumes, as Althusser did, that social mechanisms are hidden and accessible only to scientific analysis by sociologists and that surface manifestations are unreliable; it is institutionally self-aggrandizing because only sociologists are thought capable of such analysis, as opposed, in particular, to philosophers; it is reductive because it suppresses mixity of, and exchange between, high and low cultures and between oppressed and oppressors [...]; it is deterministic because it assumes that social milieu determines taste, thought, feeling and potential and thus, surprisingly given its progressive reputation, it renews Plato's autocratic and hereditary model of a society in which [...] individuals stay put in the places into which they have been born. Finally, it is practically (politically) ineffective because it is 'depressing', a diagnosis of social injustice which sees this as so powerful and all-encompassing as to be beyond the redress for which the analysis ostensibly calls. (23)

Not accepting "Bourdieu's display of self-awareness as mitigation for the untenable paradox of his institutional position" (24) and his critique of elitism, Rancière considers Bourdieu's work a "sophisticated scam which preserves pedagogical privilege and inequality by purporting to analyse it" (24-25). In his own words (with reference to Bourdieu and Passeron's *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*): "What can one do with a science of the school that says pedagogy is impossible? With a science of relations of power that says these are infrangible?" (*Philosopher* 180). What is at stake in this legitimate polemic, again, is the relationship between social science and emancipation.

The symbolic struggles of the distinguished élite escape the non-sense of pure competition because they define themselves as separate from the primary economy of a people affected solely by the movement upon itself of Parmenidian Marxism, by the eternal reproduction of the relations of production. An infra-world of the pure adhesion of the popular body to itself, with no other possible judgment than a love of fate which resembles fate, and with no other thinkable symbolic than marks of virility—that is to say, of reproduction. What distinguishes this generalized capitalism is therefore its Marxist unconscious: a "class struggle" functioning only at the price of not leaving to the classes a point where they could ever meet. (195)

While Rancière's anti-sociological bias and extraordinary faith in the performative side-effects of sociological discourse must be considered problematic, his polemics against the very lack of a political conception of emancipation not only in Bourdieu's sociology but in what he terms "Parmenidian Marxism" is compelling, at least from the point of view of a theory of politics.

Rather than relying, in Althusser's terms, on the power of ideological state apparatuses (ISA) to interpellate individuals into subject positions and thus reproduce the relations of production, Rancière insists that "what guarantees that appearances remain as they are is the power of circulation itself; the 'police' want us to continue to see things as we are accustomed to seeing them," to operate, in other words, with the same ideo-affective standards of perception and signification that are already in place (Panagia 299; cf. Rancière, "Dissensus" 37-40). Following Davide Panagia, it can be argued that Rancière's "disagreement" (*mésentente*) is nothing less than a performative "interruption of the indexical competence of human knowledge [and] disruption in the correspondences between perception and signification" that would amount to a social and aesthetic de-classification (300). A de-classification, that is, which would radically (self-)transform the habitus of the *sans-part* but without, as it were, a change of field. This is also why aesthetic appropriation is crucial to Rancière's idea of (the logic of) revolt and emancipation. To put it crudely, Bourdieusian sociological analysis of symbolic violence and distinction is itself a mode/part of symbolic violence and distinction, the science of social domination is itself a mode/part of social domination. For in its reliance on the epistemology of "misrecognition" (*méconnaissance*) it reinscribes discursively and thus helps reproduce the social division of labor.

ANTI-BLACK "POLICE": DEPOLITICIZATION AND STATE RACISM

It is tempting to use Rancièrian key concepts to theorize race and racism in terms of an anti-black "distribution of the sensible" and anti-black "police," which at least would have the benefit of avoiding the quasi-essentializing notions of (anti-)blackness and (critical) whiteness. But what exactly is at stake in this theoretical war of maneuver? For Rancière, the 'dominant

ideology' today (although he never uses the term explicitly) can be said to be one of depoliticization (or saturation). The suturing logic of "the police" aims at a *de facto* positivization of the entire social sphere. And we may add that this kind of consensual police "distribution" is fundamentally aligned with the needs of global capital, which can always return to or reinvent new forms of "accumulation by dispossession" (Harvey 159-65), and with the power of race-making institutions from slavery and apartheid to the (hyper-)ghetto and the prison. In the United States, what Loïc Wacquant has called the "neoliberal government of social insecurity" has severely weakened the "Left hand" and greatly empowered the "Right hand" of the state in order to "regulate" the effects of economic deregulation and welfare state retrenchment by way of "wedding restrictive 'workfare' and expansive 'prisonfare'" (287).

In the face of these developments, a sociological analysis of "symbolic power" is increasingly rendered obsolete by drastic austerity measures, state repression, and police violence. The neoliberal state's increasingly authoritarian response to poverty and economic crisis particularly affects racialized surplus populations and undocumented workers, and specifically Blacks and Latinos in the United States. Here, Joshua Clover's historical materialist theory of the dialectical relation between labor strikes and riots and its significance for "the new era of uprisings" – from Watts, Newark, Detroit to Oakland, Ferguson, Baltimore and beyond – puts a spotlight on the interaction of class domination and racism by asking how we are to think the racialization of the riot (especially in the U.S.), thus focusing on what is, in fact, a global problem of racialized surplus populations – from laid-off workers and prison populations (not just) in the Global North to refugees and slum dwellers (not just) in the Global South (cf. Clover 153-74). Judging from the perspective of the *longue durée*, it seems mistaken to even try to disentangle race and class relations, unless both race and class are understood merely in a vulgar sociological or culturalist sense. Rather, as Stuart Hall put it in 1980, "race" appears to be "the modality in which class is 'lived'" (341). *Mutatis mutandis*, it should be considered reductive, if not outright racist, to identify the contemporary uprisings mentioned above as "race riots" rather than "circulation struggles" (Clover 175) of racialized surplus populations that are effectively disrupting the "police distribution" of (not just) the sensible.

It has been argued by some that Rancière's critical thinking is ignorant of race and racism, which indeed it rarely addresses due to its focus on the universality of dis-identification and disagreement. In a more recent essay, however, Rancière identifies racism as "a passion from above," focusing on the logic of the neoliberal state.

Today's racism is [...] primarily a logic of the state and not a popular passion. And this state logic is primarily supported not by who knows what backward social groups but by a substantial part of the intellectual elite. [...] The invocation of universality in fact advances its opposite: the establishment of a discretionary state power that decides who belongs and who doesn't belong to the class of those who have the right to be here; the power, in short, to confer and remove identities. That power has its correlate: the power to oblige individuals to be identifiable at all times, to keep themselves in a space of full visibility before the state. [...] A lot of energy has been spent against a certain figure of racism—embodied in the *Front National*—and a certain idea that this racism is the expression of "white trash" [...] and represents the backward layers of society. A substantial part of that energy has been recuperated to build the legitimacy of a new form of racism: state racism and "Leftist" intellectual racism. It is perhaps time to reorient our thinking and struggle against a theory and practice of stigmatization, precarization, and exclusion which today constitutes a racism from above: a logic of the state and a passion of the intelligentsia. ("Racism")

As Adolph Reed has stringently argued, it is "particularly important at this moment to recognize that the familiar taxonomy of racial difference is but one historically specific instance of a genus of ideologies of ascriptive hierarchy that stabilize capitalist social reproduction" (53). Reed notes that "entirely new race-like taxonomies could come to displace the familiar ones: For instance, the 'underclass' could become even more race-like as a distinctive, essentialized population" (53). After all, anti-racism and gender equality "are now also incorporated into the normative and programmatic structure" of a progressive neoliberalism, inasmuch as the "[r]igorous pursuit of equality of opportunity exclusively within the terms of given patterns of capitalist class relations [...] has been fully legitimized within the rubric of 'diversity'" (53).

In the face of the specifically U.S. American dilemma of anti-black racism and police, there may be more to be gained from Reed's and

Wacquant's analysis than from Rancière's, which is closely bound to the French national situation. Leaving the detailed sociological analysis of "the police" behind and assuming its logic to be more or less universal, Rancière's post-Althusserian theory polemically reclaims the notion of politics and inquires into the conditions of (im-)possibility of the emergence of a political subject. By rethinking politics exclusively from the perspective of the *sans-part*, while sidelining both the critique of ideology and the sociological analysis of modes of recuperation into power (not to mention the bracketing of Marxian critique of political economy) Rancière thus pits the sequence of desubjectification and political subjectivation constitutive of emancipatory politics against the determinations of Bourdieu's habitus-field theory and analysis of symbolic power – as he did against Althusser's account of ideological "hailing" and the material-symbolic force of ideological "interpellation." It is crucial to note, however, that Rancière does not simply reject the latter but re-conceptualizes it as a kind of non-interpellation: "Move along, there is nothing to see here!" (*Dissensus* 37). This, then, is the ultimate "consensual" rationale of *la police* (cf. Žižek, "Lesson").

THE PARALLAX OF POLITICAL SUBJECTIVITY AND POLITICAL ECONOMY

Thus rejecting social science, Rancière instead provides an anti-essentialist and economically non-deterministic theory of political subjectivity, beginning with the paradoxical Marxian notion of the proletariat as a "class" that entails "the dissolution of all classes" that we find in the Young Marx's *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, noting that the emergence of a political subject proper that addresses an inaugural "wrong" (*Disagreement* 21 f.; *Politics* 84, 93) and engages in politics as "the polemical verification of equality" (*Politics* 86) is necessarily accompanied by the creation of symbolic "operators of declassification" ("Democracy" 287; also cf. *Disagreement* 35 ff.). Given Rancière's declared intention to theorize and "re-interpret class struggle from a political point of view" ("Democracy" 289), it is obvious that he avoids "the metapolitical affirmation according to which the system is endowed with a truth that has its own effectivity" (*Dissensus* 88).

In contradistinction to (Platonic) “archi-politics,” (Aristotelian) “para-politics,” and (Marxian) “meta-politics,” democratic politics proper

always comes as a kind of exception to the way in which, generally, communities are gathered, it comes as an interruption. There are factual communities, grounded in the power of birth or money, and there is politics as the process of challenging the meaning of these factual communities through the operation of declassification. (“Democracy” 291)²

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- 2 Rancière develops this idea at its most elaborate in *Disagreement*, arguing that political philosophy has conceived of these three scenarios to forestall the democratic event of politics proper (cf. 61-94). It is no coincidence that these scenarios align neatly with Rancière’s genealogy of historical regimes of the identification of art, enabling a shuttling back and forth between political theory and aesthetic theory, labor/social history and art history. The following excerpt from his 2005 interview with *Historical Materialism* clarifies Rancière’s use of Marx: “In the young Marx, there is a kind of debasement of politics, politics for him being only superstructural appearance, and the real thing being the subterranean process of class war. I tried to overturn the position by appropriating for myself the enigmatic sentence of the *Introduction to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right* where he writes that the proletariat is a class of society that is not a class of society, and is actually a ‘class’ that entails the dissolution of all classes. The question is: what does this mean, how do you think of this class which is not a class? In the same text, Marx makes the proletariat akin to a kind of chemical or biological idea of dissolution. The proletariat is thought as the process of the decomposition of old classes. From this point on, Marxism oscillated between a negative idea of class as dissolution and a positive idea of class as identity. And, ultimately, this second sense, the proletariat as a positive class of labour, obviously became the mainstream sense of class in Marxism. I tried to put differently this process of ‘dissolution’. It is not a matter of the historical and quasi-biological decomposition of old classes. I rather think this dissolution as a symbolic function of declassing. The class that is not a class thus becomes an operator of declassification. The proletariat is no longer a part of society but is, rather, the symbolic inscription of ‘the part of those who have no part’, a supplement which separates the political community from any count of the parts of a society. *The idea of the dissolving class can thus give the concept of what constitutes a political subject*” (“Democracy” 287, my emphasis).

Rancière thus reconceptualizes class struggle “as the power of de-classification,” resisting simultaneously Marxist orthodoxies and the “replacement of the proletariat by a multiplicity of minorities” in favor of “the universality of disidentification” (289). Hence,

[w]hat is important in politics as class struggle is political subjectification, that is, not only the fact of the action of minorities, the action of groups, but the creation of what I call empty names of subjects. What was the proletariat? The proletariat was an empty name for a subject – for anyone, for counting anyone. (289)

Politics, for Rancière, creates “empty names of subjects” for counting anyone, including the *sans-part*. The collective subject of politics, identifying with the point of exclusion in a hierarchical order, thus functions as a polemical concrete universal.

From the Greek *demos* to the East German crowd’s chanting “We are the people!” in 1989 and the protesters on the streets of Cairo or Tunis in the “Arab spring” of 2011, “the people” (as opposed to the ethnic-nationalist *Volk*) has “stood for universality not because it covered the majority of the population, nor simply because it occupied the lowest place within the social hierarchy, but because *it had no proper place within this hierarchy*” (*Ticklish Subject* 224-25). It is “a site of conflicting, self-canceling determinations [...] of performative contradictions” (225) or what Rancière calls “a supernumerary subject in relation to the calculated number of groups, places, and functions in a society” (*Politics* 51). The Occupy movement’s “We are the 99 percent!” and the more recent “Black Lives Matter!” also essentially function in the same way. In both cases the solidary identification with the point of exclusion – or exploitation and oppression – in a hierarchical order, combined with the denunciation of a “wrong,” opens onto a radical universality.

The problem with such a ground-clearing post-Marxist account of ‘pure politics,’ of course, is that it sits uneasily with the Marxian emphasis on both the internal contradictions of capital accumulation and the constitutive social antagonism also known as “class struggle.” What anti-economic political theory thus fails to address is the politico-economic *form* of the social. For Žižek, however, “[t]he relationship between economy and politics is ultimately that of the well-known visual paradox of ‘two faces or a vase’: one

sees either two faces or a vase, never both—one has to make a choice” (*Parallax View* 56).

Following Žižek, Rancière’s political critique of Marxism and sociology thus needs to be “supplemented by its obverse: the field of economy is *in its very form* irreducible to politics – this level of the form of economy (of economy as the determining form of the social) is what French ‘political post-Marxists’ miss when they reduce economy to one of the positive social spheres” (56). Intertwined with this onto-epistemological “parallax,” then, are the pressing questions of what material and symbolic constraints on subjectivity and agency exist today that help reproduce a consensual post-political formation. If the “police” order’s most effective means of forestalling “politics” in our time of post-political consensus is indeed, as Rancière claims, a non-interpellation of the subject – the inverted form of Althusser’s “hey, you there!” that takes the form of the “move along, there is nothing to see!”³ – then this also implies the rather successful reproduction of said order by way of consensual discourse and social practice. In other words: an ideo-affective formation ‘securing’ the depoliticization of appearances by positing “an identity between sense and sense” (Corcoran 2). Rancière suggests to rethink this without relying on the notion of power (Bourdieu) and outside of the critique of political economy (Marx).

As Marx knew very well, though, political-economic conditions are never absolutely determining. Rather they suggest both possibilities and limits. The field of social contest is held in tension, dialectically, by both the capacity of humans to “make their own history” and circumstances “given and transmitted from the past” (329). It is because of the tension between these forces, between agency and determination, that we find multiple forms of collective action within a given conjuncture rather than moments of ‘pure’ politics. At the same time, as emphasized by Clover in his historical materialist theory of the riot, “because a given set of conditions tilts one way and not another, one among the forms of action will tend to become the leading tactic” (105).

John Roberts has further pointed out that Rancière’s “quasi-poststructuralist flight from externally ‘imposed’ notions of ‘collectivity’,

3 “The police say that there is nothing to see on the road, there is nothing to do but move along. It asserts that the space of circulation is nothing other than the space of circulation” (*Chronicles* 37).

'unity', 'identity' and 'political action' may take the fight to those self-deluding forces on the left (and right) that assume such notions as unproblematically good things" (78); while Hallward argues that Rancière's "trenchant egalitarianism seems all too compatible with a certain degree of social resignation" (126). Rancière believes that politics "shatters any division between those who are deemed able and those who are not" (*Politics* 202). "But," Hallward asks, "is the old relation of theory and praxis, intellectual and worker, so easily resolved? Does political action no longer need to be informed by a detailed understanding of how the contemporary world works, how exploitation operates, how transnational corporations go about their business?" (127). Hallward's criticism of Rancière's indifference toward a theory of revolutionary practice (strategies and tactics) ends on the following note, though: "In the field of recent critical theory, there are few better illustrations of [a decisive commitment necessary to art and politics that is itself organized, unequivocal, categorical, and combative] than the consistency and resolve that have over the last three decades characterized the development of Rancière's own project" (129).

However, we may also argue that at a time when anti-black policing and murder at the hand of the state is fundamentally disavowed and primarily attributed (by a significant number of black conservatives and tea party republicans) to 'black-on-black' crime, a time when 'sociological excuses' are already under attack from the neoliberal and neoconservative Right, the belated Anglo-American academic reception and rise to fame of Rancière's egalitarian critique seems rather untimely. Even more so as those engaged in the present wave of "circulation struggles" (Clover 129) and "communization" currents are not at all 'enthralled' by Marxist scientism or sociology. As Nathan Brown writes in his critical reassessment of "the lesson" of both Althusser and Rancière:

Real history returns, and with it a renewed intensity to debates over the relation between theory and politics. But the theoretical articulation of history's real movement doesn't pass through *The Emancipated Spectator*, darling of *Artforum* and the Venice Biennale. [...] From the Red Years following May '68 to the reddening of the twenty-first century, the impasse that [*Théorie Communiste*] finds a way through, in my opinion, is precisely that which Rancière reproaches Althusser for walking into. [...] Theory] cannot 'guide' a revolutionary movement by telling the proletariat what it should have done differently or what it should do now. Theory can, however,

compare, analyse, synthesize, periodize and arrive at a tendential and *structural* account of the concrete situations in which we are historically and geographically immersed. It can do so in a way that emerges *from* particular struggles, and this can help us to situate those struggles in relation to a movement that traverses and exceeds them, a real movement that cannot be guided by ‘a general line’ or prescriptions from party philosophers. Nor will any effort to situate our struggles be aided by what Rancière has to offer: an abdication of structural analysis and a theory of politics as the unaccountable interruption of ‘a freedom that crops up and makes real the ultimate equality on which any social order rests’ [...]. This is a theory of the relation between politics and ‘the police’, as a game of whack-a-mole. (“Red Years” 23, original emphasis)

Because the critique of political economy is fundamentally “bound up with the Marxist analytic of value and valorization” (namely “the production, self-presupposition, and expanded reproduction of capital that is called ‘accumulation’”), Brown concludes (in an article for *Mute*) that “Rancière is not a Marxist.” He is right to note that “Rancière’s approach to the figure of ‘the worker,’ throughout his corpus, proceeds exclusively from the perspective of the labour process, ignoring the valorisation process.” Rancière is therefore ill-equipped to think the “distribution of the *insensible*,” the movement of valorization, and thus “misses entirely the dimension of political economy in his thinking of politics.” This, of course, is precisely the point of Rancière’s strategic anti-sociology and anti-economic theory of politics. Its general objective, as rightfully noted by Jean-Philippe Deranty, is “to bring class struggle into *logos*” (17, original emphasis) – for the sake of both ‘revolts of logic’ and the ‘logic of revolt.’

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