Chapter Two

The Narcissistic Slave

A Culture of Politics

In the Introduction and the preceding chapter, we have seen how the aporia between Black being and political ontology has existed since Arab and European enslavement of Africans, and how the need to craft an ensemble of questions through which to arrive at an unflinching paradigmatic analysis of political ontology is repeatedly thwarted in its attempts to find a language that can express the violence of slave-making, a violence that is both structural and performative. Humanist discourse, the discourse whose epistemological machinations provide our conceptual frameworks for thinking political ontology, is diverse and contrary. But for all its diversity and contrariness it is sutured by an implicit rhetorical consensus that violence accrues to the Human body as a result of transgressions, whether real or imagined, within the Symbolic Order. That is to say, Humanist discourse can only think a subject’s relation to violence as a contingency and not as a matrix that positions the subject. Put another way, Humanism has no theory of the slave because it imagines a subject who has been either alienated in language (Lacan) and/or alienated from his/her cartographic and temporal capacities (Marx). It cannot imagine an object who has been positioned by gratuitous violence and who has no cartographic and temporal capacities to lose—a sentient being for whom recognition and incorporation is impossible. In short, political ontology, as imagined through Humanism, can only produce discourse that has as its foundation alienation and exploitation as a grammar of suffering, when what is needed (for the Black, who is always already a slave) is an ensemble of ontological questions that has as its foundation accumulation and fungibility as a grammar of suffering (Hartman).
The violence of the Middle Passage and the slave estate (Spillers), technologies of accumulation and fungibility, recompose and reenact their horrors upon each succeeding generation of Blacks. This violence is both gratuitous, that is, it is not contingent upon transgressions against the hegemony of civil society; and structural, in that it positions Blacks ontologically outside of humanity and civil society. Simultaneously, it renders the ontological status of humanity (life itself) wholly dependent on civil society’s repetition compulsion: the frenzied and fragmented machinations through which civil society reenacts gratuitous violence upon the Black—that civil society might know itself as the domain of humans—generation after generation.

Again, we need a new language of abstraction to explain this horror. The explanatory power of Humanist discourse is bankrupt in the face of the Black. It is inadequate and inessential to, as well as parasitic on, the ensemble of questions which the dead but sentient thing, the Black, struggles to articulate in a world of living subjects. My work on film, cultural theory, and political ontology marks my attempt to contribute to this often fragmented and constantly assaulted quest to forge a language of abstraction with explanatory powers emphatic enough to embrace the Black, an accumulated and fungible object, in a human world of exploited and alienated subjects.

The imposition of Humanism’s assumptive logic has encumbered Black film studies to the extent that it is underwritten by the assumptive logic of White or non-Black film studies. This is a problem of Cultural Studies writ large. In this chapter, I want to offer a brief illustration of how we might attempt to break the theoretical impasse between, on the one hand, the assumptive logic of Cultural Studies and, on the other hand, the theoretical aphasia to which Cultural Studies is reduced when it encounters the (non)ontological status of the Black. I will do so not by launching a frontal attack against White film theory, in
particular, or even Cultural Studies broadly speaking, but by interrogating Jacques Lacan—because Lacanian psychoanalysis is one of the twin pillars that shoulders film theory and Cultural Studies.¹

My problem with Cultural Studies is that when it theorizes the interface between Blacks and Humans it is hobbled in its attempts to (a) expose power relationships and (b) examine how relations of power influence and shape cultural practice. Cultural Studies insists upon a grammar of suffering which assumes that we are all positioned essentially by way of the Symbolic Order, what Lacan calls the wall of language—and as such our potential for stasis or change (our capacity for being oppressed or free) is overdetermined by our “universal” ability or inability to seize and wield discursive weapons. This idea corrupts the explanatory power of most socially engaged films and even the most radical line of political action because it produces a cinema and a politics that cannot account for the grammar of suffering of the Black—the Slave. To put it bluntly, the imaginative labor (Jared Sexton 2003) of cinema, political action, and Cultural Studies are all afflicted with the same theoretical aphasia. They are speechless in the face of gratuitous violence.

This theoretical aphasia is symptomatic of a debilitated ensemble of questions regarding political ontology. At its heart are two registers of imaginative labor. The first register is that of description, the rhetorical labor aimed at explaining the way relations of power are named, categorized, and explored. The second register can be characterized as prescription, the rhetorical labor predicated on the notion that everyone can be emancipated through some form of discursive, or symbolic, intervention.

But emancipation through some form of discursive or symbolic intervention is wanting in the face of a subject position that is not a subject position—what Marx calls “a speaking implement” or what Ronald Judy calls “an interdiction against subjectivity.” In
other words, the Black has sentient capacity but no relational capacity. As an accumulated and fungible object, rather than an exploited and alienated subject, the Black is openly vulnerable to the whims of the world; and so is his/her cultural “production.” What does it mean—what are the stakes—when the world can whimsically transpose one’s cultural gestures, the stuff of symbolic intervention, onto another worldly good, a commodity of style? Fanon echoes this question when he writes, “I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects” (BSWM 109). Fanon clarifies this assertion and alerts us to the stakes which the optimistic assumptions of Film Studies and Cultural Studies, the counter-hegemonic promise of alternative cinema, and the emancipatory project of coalition politics cannot account for, when he writes: “Ontology—once it is finally admitted as leaving existence by the wayside—does not permit us to understand the being of the black…” (110).

This presents a challenge to film production and to film studies given their cultivation and elaboration by the imaginative labor of Cultural Studies, underwritten by the assumptive logic of Humanism; because if everyone does not possess the DNA of culture, that is, (a) time and space transformative capacity, (b) a relational status with other Humans through which one’s time and space transformative capacity is recognized and incorporated, and (c) a relation to violence that is contingent and not gratuitous, then how do we theorize a sentient being who is positioned not by the DNA culture but by the structure of gratuitous violence? How do we think outside of the conceptual framework of subalternity—that is, outside of the explanatory power of Cultural Studies—and think beyond the pale of emancipatory agency by way of symbolic intervention?
I am calling for a different conceptual framework, predicated not on the subject-effect of cultural performance but on the structure of political ontology; one that allows us to substitute a politics of culture for a culture of politics. The value in this rests not simply in the way it would help us re-think cinema and performance, but in the way it can help us theorize what is at present only intuitive and anecdotal: the unbridgeable gap between Black being and Human life. To put a finer point on it, such a framework might enhance the explanatory power of theory, art, and politics by destroying and perhaps restructuring, the ethical range of our current ensemble of questions. This has profound implications for non-Black film studies, Black film studies, and African American Studies writ large because they are currently entangled in a multicultural paradigm that takes an interest in an insufficiently critical comparative analysis—that is, a comparative analysis which is in pursuit of a coalition politics (if not in practice then at least as an theorizing metaphor) which, by its very nature, crowds out and forecloses the Slave’s grammar of suffering.

The Dilemmas of Black Film Studies

In the wake of the post-Civil Rights, post-Black Power backlash a small but growing coterie of Black theorists have returned to Fanon’s astonishing claim that “ontology—once it is finally admitted as leaving existence by the wayside—does not permit us to understand the being of the black man [sic]. For not only must the black man be black; but he must be black in relation to the white man [sic]” (BSWM 110). Though they do not form anything as ostentatious as a school of thought, and though their attitude toward and acknowledgment of Fanon does not make for an easy consensus, the moniker Afro-Pessimists neither infringes upon their individual differences nor exaggerates their fidelity to a shared set of assumptions. It should be noted that of the Afro-Pessimists—Hortense Spillers, Ronald
Judy, David Marriott, Saidiya Hartman, Achille Mbembe, Frantz Fanon, Kara Keeling, Jared Sexton, Joy James, Lewis Gordon, George Yancey, and Orlando Patterson—only Yancey and Patterson are social scientists. The rest come out of the Humanities. Fanon, of course, was a doctor of psychiatry. Reading them, and connecting the dots at the level of shared assumptions, rather than the content of their work or their prescriptive gestures (if any) it becomes clear that though their work holds the intellectual protocols of unconscious identification accountable to structural positionality, it does so in a way that enriches, rather than impoverishes, how we are able to theorize unconscious identification. That is to say that though meditations on unconscious identifications and preconscious interests may be their starting point (i.e., how to cure “hallucinatory whitening” [Fanon], and how to think about the Black/non-Black divide that is rapidly replacing the Black/White divide [Yancey]) they are, in the first instance, theorists of structural positionality.

The Afro-Pessimists are theorists of Black positionality who share Fanon’s insistence that, though Blacks are indeed sentient beings, the structure of the entire world’s semantic field—regardless of cultural and national discrepancies—“leaving” as Fanon would say, “existence by the wayside”—is sutured by anti-Black solidarity. Unlike the solution-oriented, interest-based, or hybridity-dependent scholarship so fashionable today, Afro-Pessimism explores the meaning of Blackness not—in the first instance—as a variously and unconsciously interpellated identity or as a conscious social actor, but as a structural position of non-communicability in the face of all other positions; this meaning is non-communicable because, again, as a position, Blackness is predicated on modalities of accumulation and fungibility, not exploitation and alienation. Unfortunately, neither Black nor White Film Theory seems to have made this shift from exploitation and alienation as that which positions Film Theory’s “universal” cinematic subject to genocide, accumulation, and
fungibility as modalities of gratuitous violence which positions the Slave. In this respect, Film Theory mystifies structural antagonisms and acts as an accomplice to social and political stability. Even the bulk of Black Film Theory is predicated on an assumptive logic of exploitation and alienation, rather than accumulation and fungibility, when regarding the ontological status of the Black.

Film Theory, as concerns Black American cinema between 1967 and the present, is marked by several characteristics. Nearly all of the books and articles are underwritten by a sense of urgency regarding the tragic history and bleak future of a group of people marked by slavery in the Western Hemisphere; this, they would all agree, is the constitutive element of the word Black. To this end, most are concerned with how cinematic representation hastens that bleak future or intervenes against it. Cinema then, has pedagogic value, or, perhaps more precisely, pedagogic potential. Broadly speaking, Black film theory hinges on these questions: What does cinema teach Blacks about Blacks? What does cinema teach Whites (and others) about Blacks? Are those lessons dialogic with Black liberation or with our further, and rapidly repetitive, demise?

Given the period under consideration, the writing of Black film theorists tends to share a common anxiety as regards the status of the filmic text and the nature of its coherence. But let’s keep in mind a point that I’ll expand upon below: the ground of that anxiety has to do with the film’s hegemonic value—as though there are representations that will make Black people safe, representations which will put us in danger, representations which will make us ideologically aware and those which will give us false consciousness. For many, a good deal of emphasis is put on the interpellative power of the film itself.

In Representing Blackness: Issues in Film and Video, Valerie Smith notes two dominant trends: the first impulse reads “authentic” as synonymous with “positive” and seeks to
supplant representations of Black lasciviousness and “irresponsibility” with “respectable” ones. To this end, she notes Gordon Parks’ *The Learning Tree* (1968) and Michael Schulz’s *Cooley High* (1975). But she adds that one can also find this impulse manifest in the films of certain White directors: Stanley Kramer’s *Home of the Brave* (1949) and *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* (1967), Norman Jewison’s *In the Heat of the Night* (1967), and John Sayles’ *Passion Fish* (1992). The second impulse is unconcerned with demonstrating the extent to which Black characters can conform to received, class-coded notions of respectability. Rather, it equates authenticity either with the freedom to seize and reanimate types previously coded as “negative” (i.e. the criminal or the buffoon) or with the presence of cultural practices rooted in Black vernacular experience (jazz, gospel, rootworking, religion, etc.). Duke Ellington’s *Black and Tan* (1929) is an early example; then—after the two Great Migrations—the urban-as-authentic Blaxploitation films of the late 60s and the 1970s and finally the “new jack” pictures of the 1990s: *New Jack City* (1991) and *Menace II Society* (1993).

She claims that not only has Black filmmaking been preoccupied with a response to negative visual representation but that this preoccupation has overdetermined criticism of Black film, as well: i.e., identifying and critiquing the recurrence of stereotyped representations in Hollywood films, Bogle’s *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes…* and Cripps’ work “inventoried the reproduction of certain types of Black characters in visual media.” Smith calls these texts “groundbreaking” but says, “they also legitimated a binarism in the discourse around strategies of Black representation that has outlived its usefulness.” Furthermore, she elaborates:

> Granted, despite their constructedness, media representations of members of historically disenfranchised communities reflect and, in turn, affect the lived circumstances of real people. But the relationship between media
representations and “real life” is nothing if not complex and discontinuous; to posit a one-to-one correspondence between the inescapability of certain images and the uneven distribution of recourse within culture is to deny the elaborate ways in which power is maintained and deployed (3).

The problem with the positive/negative debate, as Smith and a Second Wave (my shorthand) of Black film theorists like bell hooks, James Snead, and Manthia Diawara see it, is first that the debate focuses critical scrutiny on the ways in which Blacks have been represented in Hollywood films at the expense of analytical, theoretical, and/or historical work on the history of Black-directed cinema. Second, it presupposes consensus about what a positive or negative (or authentic) image actually is. Hardworking, middle-class, heterosexual Blacks may be positive to some Black viewers but reprehensible (if only for the fact that they are totalizing) to the Black gay and lesbian community. Third, “it focuses viewer attention on the existence of certain types and not on the more significant questions around what kind of narrative or ideological work that type is meant to perform” (3).

Donald Bogle’s *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, & Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* reveals the way in which the image of Blacks in American movies has changed and also the (he would say “shocking”) way in which it has remained the same. In 1973, Bogle’s study was the first history of Black performers in American film. Bogle notes that only one other “formal piece of work” had been written before his, the Englishman Peter Noble’s *The Negro in Films*, written in the 1940s. Bogle doesn’t say whether this is an article or a book (the impression one gets is that it is an article) and goes on to dismiss it as “so much the typical, unintentionally patronizing, white liberal ‘tasteful’ approach” (27). By his own admission *Toms, Coons…* is as much a history of the contributions of Black
performers in American film as it is a statement of his own evolving aesthetic and perspective.

Bogle’s book is acknowledged by many as a classic and definitive study of Black images in Hollywood. I would prefer classic and exhaustive—leaving the adjective “definitive” for James Snead’s three-times-shorter *White Screens, Black Images*. Bogle’s tome is more of a historical inventory (and we’re all grateful to him for it) than a history or a historiography. If there was a Black person who had a speaking role in a Hollywood film, s/he is more than likely inventoried in Bogle’s book. Prior to this inventory, not only was there not a published cinematic record of so many of the Black stars in the first seventy years of the 20th century, but for many of them, as Bogle points out in the first half of his book, there was no public record of them as *people*: “[T]he lives of early Black performers…usually ended up so tragically, or so desperately unfulfilled, with Hollywood often contributing to their tragedies….One important Black actor ended his days as a redcap. Another became a notorious Harlem pool-shark. Some became hustlers of all sorts. At least two vivacious leading ladies ended up as domestic workers. Other Black luminaries drifted into alcoholism, drugs, suicide, or bitter self-recrimination” (42).

Bogle’s *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, & Bucks*, Thomas Cripps’s well known *Black Film as Genre*, and Gladstone L. Yearwood’s *Black Film as a Signifying Practice: Cinema, Narration and the African-American Aesthetic Tradition* are three early examples of what I call First Wave Black film theory (with the notable exception of Yearwood who began writing almost thirty years after Bogle and Cripps) and decidedly emphatic voices that theorize the emancipatory/pedagogic value of Black cinema *from* the text *to* the spectator. They “stress the need for more positive roles, types, and portrayals, while pointing out the intractable presence of ‘negative stereotypes’ in the film industry’s depiction” of Blacks (Snead). Here,
however (again with the notable exception of Yearwood) semiotic, post-structuralist, feminist, and psychoanalytic tools of the Political Modernists were neglected in their hunt for the “negative” or “positive” image. Yearwood’s work is an exception in that he in fact utilizes the anti-essentialist tools of semiotics and post-structuralism in an effort to call for an Afro-Centric, essentialist aesthetic.

Yearwood argues that Black film criticism is best understood as a 20th-century development in the history of Black aesthetic thought. He maintains that Black filmmakers use expressive forms and systems of signification that reflect the cultural and historical priorities of the Black experience. In this way, the book resonates with much of what is advanced in Diawara’s volume of edited essays Black American Cinema. However, the Afro-centrism of Yearwood’s book, at times, seems to try to isolate the Black film’s narrational processes from Black filmmakers’ positionality under the despotism of White supremacy.

Part One of Yearwood’s book presents an overview of Black film and an introduction to Black film culture. It surveys the emergence of the Black independent film movement from the perspective of the Black cultural tradition. This marks a shift away from much of what takes place in Diawara’s Black American Cinema, which locates the emergence of Black independent film in relation to certain political texts (like Frantz Fanon’s The Wretched of the Earth) and domestic and international struggles for liberation and self-determination. Yearwood’s book gives a close reading of films at the level of the diegesis, but it also betrays a kind of conceptual anxiety with respect to the historical object of study—in other words, it clings, anxiously, to the film-as-text-as-legitimate object of Black cinema. Yearwood writes:

The term Black cinema describes a specific body of films produced in the African Diaspora which shares a common problematic…A primary
assumption is that Black culture is syncretic in nature and reflects hybridized forms that are unique to the Americas. This process of creolization, which is evident in African American classical music (Jazz), represents the forging of a new ontology and epistemology. It is the product of cultural practices that have developed from the experience of slavery, the struggle for freedom from oppression and the recognition that interdependence is the key to our survival. (5)

Later he notes:

As an expression that emanates from the heart of the African American community, good Black film can represent that which is most unique and best in Black culture. A good Black film can provide an intellectual challenge and engage our cognitive faculties. It can often present incisive commentary on social realities. (70)

These two quotes are emblematic of just how vague the aesthetic foundation of Yearwood’s attempt to construct a canon can be. What’s great about the book is its synthesis of so much of the literature on Black film which precedes it (including Diawara’s work). But in trying to show how Black filmmakers differ from White filmmakers and how the Black film as text is a standalone object, Yearwood reverts to conclusions general enough to apply to almost any filmography and, furthermore, his claims are underwritten by the philosophical, and semiotic, treatises of European (not African) theoreticians.

James Snead, Jacqueline Bobo, bell hooks, Valerie Smith, and Manthia Diawara belong to what I call the Second Wave of Black film theorists who complicated the field through the use of methodologies which (a) examine the film as a text, a discourse, and (b) bring into this examination an exploration of cinema’s subject-effects on implied spectators.
The emphasis here should be on implied, for, in most cases, these books and articles are not grounded in overt theories and methodologies of spectatorship. The advance, if you will, of this body of work over that of Cripps and Bogle is twofold. First, these works challenged the binarism of good/bad, positive/negative images of cinema. Thus, they opened the space for the iconography of third positions like un-wed Black women, gangsters, gays, and lesbians to enter into the Black cinematic “family.” Secondly, by way of sophisticated textual analyses, they were able to show how Black images can be degraded and White images can be monumentalized and made mythic, rather than simply making proclamations (good/bad) based on uninterrogated values (i.e. nuclear family values, upward mobility values, heterosexual values) already in the room. To put it plainly, they replaced social values as the basis of cinematic interpretation with semiotic codes, and in so doing made central the question of ideology—much as White Political Modernists were doing on the heels of Lacan.

In “A No-Theory Theory of Contemporary Black Cinema,” Tommy Lott reflects on the paradoxes inherent in the very category of “Black film.” His claim: the essentialist criteria by which a “Black” film is understood to be one directed by a person of African American descent too frequently allows biological categories to stand in for ideological ones. Conversely, aesthetically grounded definitions of Black film risk privileging independent productions uncritically. With this direct political challenge to both Yearwood and Bogle, he suggests that the notion of Third Cinema could be appropriated for Blacks. (Such appropriation resembles how White film theorists developed the concept of counter-cinema through their translations of Lacan’s writings on the psychoanalytic cure of “full speech”.) Here is Lott’s appropriation of Third Cinema for Black Americans—his response to the identity politics of Bogle and Yearwood:
What makes Third Cinema third (i.e., a viable alternative to Western cinema) is not exclusively the racial makeup of a filmmaker, a film’s aesthetic character, or a film’s intended audience, but rather a film’s political orientation within the hegemonic structures of postcolonialism. When a film contributes ideologically to the advancement of Black people, within a context of systematic denial, the achievement of this political objective ought to count as a criterion of evaluation on a par with any essentialist criterion.

(92)

Second Wave Black film theorists such as Snead, Lott, Smith, Diawara, and hooks were able to bring a dimension to Black film theory that stemmed from their willingness to interrogate not just the narrative in relation to time-worn tropes of Black upward mobility, but also from their desire to interrogate cinematic formalism as well (i.e., mise-en-scene, acoustics, editing strategies, lighting); in other words, cinema as an apparatus/institution in relation to the derelict institutional status of Black people. But their drawback was in perceiving Blackness as having either some institutional status or having the potential for institutional status. They were not inclined to meditate on the archaic persistence of two key ontological qualities of the legacy of slavery, namely, the condition of absolute captivity and the state of virtual non-communication within official culture. Similarly, I take the recent celebration of superstars Halle Berry and Denzel Washington in both the Black press and the White critical establishment as symptomatic of a refusal or inability to countenance the long shadow of slavery insofar as it writes a history of the present. That is, the heralding of Black stardom, now disavowing its relation to long-standing cinematic stereotypes, is founded upon a belief in not only the possibility of redress under White supremacy, but also its relative ease. Central to this belief is an historical reduction of slavery to the relation of
chattel and a formulation of Black emancipation and enfranchisement limited to the most nominal dimensions of civil rights and liberties.

Embracing Black people's agency as subjects of the law (i.e., subjects of rights and liberties), and even their potential to act as or partner with enforcers of the law (i.e., Denzel Washington in *Training Day*), presents itself as an acting out of the historic paradox of Black non-existence (i.e., the mutable continuity of social death). Here, Black "achievement" in popular culture and the commercial arts requires the bracketing out of that non-existence in hopes of telling a tale of loss that is intelligible within the national imagination (Hartman, “Position”187). The insistence on Black personhood (rather than a radical questioning of the terror embedded in that very notion) operates most poignantly in the examples discussed through the problematic coding of gender and domesticity.

In perceiving Black folk as being alive, or at least having the potential to live in the world, the same potential that any subaltern might have, the politics of Black film theorists’ aesthetic methodology and desire disavowed the fact that:

[Black folk] are always already dead wherever you find them. The nurturing haven of black culture which assured memory and provided a home beyond the ravishing growth of capitalism is no longer. There cannot be any cultural authenticity in resistance to capitalism. The illusion of immaterial purity is no longer possible. It is no longer possible to be black against the system. Black folk are dead, killed by their own faith in willfully being beyond, and in spite of, power. (Ronald Judy, “On the Question of Nigga Authenticity” 212)

In short, a besetting hobble of the theorization itself is one which the theory shares with many of the Black films it scrutinizes: both the films and the theory tend to posit a possibility of, and a desire for, Black existence, instead of taking cognizance of the
ontological claim of the so-called Afro-Pessimists that Blackness is both that outside which makes it possible for White and non-White (i.e., Asians and Latinos) positions to exist and, simultaneously, contest existence. As such, not only is Blackness (slaveness) outside the terrain of the White (the master) but it is outside the terrain of the subaltern. Unfortunately, almost to a person, the film theorists in question see (i.e., their assumptive logic takes as given) themselves as *subjects*—dominated, oppressed, downtrodden, reduced to subaltern status, but subjects nonetheless—in a world of other subjects.

The assumptions that Black academics are subalterns within the academy (rather than the slaves of their “colleagues”), slavery was a historical event long ended rather than the ongoing paradigm of Black (non)existence, and that Black film theory can harness the rhetorical strategy of simile are most prominent in the work of Second Wave Black film theorists, who simply can’t bear to live in the impasse of being an object and so turn to hyper-coherent articulations of Third Cinema in order to propose a politics for cinematic interpretation. Lott, for example, short-circuits what could otherwise be a profoundly iconoclastic intervention, i.e., the proposal that the Third World can fight *against* domination and *for* the return of their land as people with a narrative of repair, whereas slaves can only fight *against* slavery—the *for*-something-else can only be theorized, if at all, in the process and at the end of the requisite violence against the Settler/Master, not before (Fanon, *Wretched 35-45*). Despite having ventured into the first unfortunate move—a need to communicate with other groups of people through the positing of, and anxiety over, Black coherence—Lott’s work does make brilliant interventions. I’m saying, however, that not only does the drive toward a presentation of a Black film canon show a desire to participate in the institutionality of cinema, but the work itself shows a desire to participate in the institutionality of academia. And “participation” is a register unavailable to slaves. Black film
theory, as an intervention, would have a more destructive impact if it foregrounded the impossibility of a Black film, the impossibility of a Black film theory, the impossibility of a Black film theorist, and the impossibility of a Black person except, and this is key, under “cleansing” (Fanon) conditions of violence. Once real violence is coupled with representational “monstrosity” (Spillers’ notion of a Black embrace of absolute vulnerability, 2003: 229), then and only then is there a possibility for Blacks to move from the status of things to the status of…of what, we’ll just have to wait and see.

In thinking the Black spectator as exploited rather than accumulated, the Second Wave of Black film theorists failed to realize that slaves are not subalterns, because subalterns are dominated, in the ontological first instance, by the machinations of hegemony (of which cinema is a vital machine) and then, after some symbolic transgression, in other words in the second instance, by violence. Blackness is constituted by violence in the ontological first instance. This, Hortense Spillers reminds us, is the essence of Black being: “being for the captor” (Spillers )—the very antithesis of cultural expression or performative agency.

Lacan’s Corrective

What is the essential arrangement of the subject’s condition of un-freedom? Every film theorist seems to have an answer (stated or implied) to this question. Though they perceive the field of these “answers” to be of a wide variety (which they are at the level of content) we could say that the structure of the subject’s condition of un-freedom is imagined along one or two shared vectors: the dispossession and stagnation within political economy (Marx) and the dispossession and stagnation within libidinal economy (Lacan)—sometimes a combination thereof, but rarely are both weighted equally). This is the rebar of the
conceptual framework of film studies; and I would not be surprised if it was the same for other theorizations that seek to (a) theorize dispossession and (b) theorize specific cultural practices (i.e., counter-cinema or performance art) as modes of accompaniment for the redress of said dispossession.

Jared Sexton describes libidinal economy as “the economy, or distribution and arrangement, of desire and identification (their condensation and displacement), and the complex relationship between sexuality and the unconscious.” Needless to say, libidinal economy functions variously across scales and is as “objective” as political economy. Importantly, it is linked not only to forms of attraction, affection and alliance, but also to aggression, destruction, and the violence of lethal consumption. He emphasizes that it is “the whole structure of psychic and EMOTIONAL LIFE,” something more than, but inclusive of or traversed by, what Gramsci and other marxists call a “STRUCTURE OF FEELING;” it is “a dispensation of energies, concerns, points of attention, anxieties, pleasures, appetites, revulsions, and phobias capable of both great mobility and tenacious fixation.”

The remainder of this chapter interrogates the efficacy of aesthetic gestures in their role as accompaniments to notions of emancipation within the libidinal economy (as opposed to Gramscian emphasis on political economy). This is a high-stakes interrogation because so much film theory (White, or, non-Black—Human—film theory) is in fee to Lacan and his underlying thesis on subjectivity and psychic liberation. It does not seek to disprove Lacan’s underlying theory of how the subject comes into subjectivity via alienation within the Imaginary and the Symbolic; nor does it seek to disprove his understanding of psychic stagnation (described as egoic monumentalization) as that condition from which the subject (and by extension, the socius) must be liberated. Rather than attempt to disprove
Lacan’s (and, by extension non-Black film theory’s) evidence and assumptive logic I seek to show how, in aspiring to a paradigmatic explanation of relations, his assumptive logic mystifies rather than clarifies a paradigmatic explanation of relations, for it has a vivid account of the conflicts between genders, or, more broadly, between narcissistic contemporaries and contemporaries who have learned to live in a deconstructive relation to the ego—that is to say, it offers a reliable toolbox for rigorously examining intra-Human conflicts (and for proposing the aesthetic gestures, i.e., types of filmic practices, which either exacerbate [Hollywood films] or redress [counter-cinema] these conflicts) but it has no capacity to give a paradigmatic explanation of the structure of antagonisms between Blacks and Humans. I argue that the claims and conclusions which Lacanian psychoanalysis (and by extension non-Black film theory) makes regarding dispossession and suffering are (a) insufficient to the task of delineating Black dispossession and suffering, and (b) parasitic on that very Black dispossession and suffering for which it has no words.

In “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis” (*Ecrits*), Lacan illustrates what remains to this day one of the most brilliant and comprehensive scenarios for attaining what some believe to be the only bit of freedom we will ever know (Silverman, *World Spectators*). Lacan’s value to psychoanalysis in particular and critical theory in general was that he removed fear and loathing from the word “alienation.” Alienation, for Lacan, is what literally makes subjectivity possible. Unlike Brecht, who saw alienation (some prefer “distancing”) as the ideological effect of false consciousness, Lacan saw alienation as the necessary context, the grid which makes human relations possible and divides the world between those with sociability (subjects) and those without it (*infans*—children, say, prior to eighteen months of age). But on the grid of sociability, however, it is possible to imagine that
one exists in relation to signification as though words were windows on the world—or, worse yet, the very things they signify. These, of course are the speech acts through which the subject monumentalizes his/her presence in disavowal of the very loss of presence (lack) which alienation has imposed upon him/her in exchange for a world with others. This is the meaning of “empty speech,”

…which Lacan consistently defines in opposition to full speech. [Empty speech] is predicated upon the belief that we can be spatially and temporally present to ourselves, and that language is a tool for effecting this self-possession. But instead of leading to self-possession, empty speech is the agency of an “ever-growing dispossession.” When we speak empty speech, we lift ourselves out of time, and freeze ourselves into an object or “statue” (Ibid. 43). We thereby undo ourselves as subjects. (Silverman, *World Spectators* 65-66)

Silverman goes on to explain empty speech’s “refusal of symbolization in a second sense [as] what the analysand literally or metaphorically utters when he responds to the figural forms through which the past returns as if their value and meaning were immanent within them” (66). In short, the analysand collapses the signifier with that which is signified and in so doing seeks to “entify’ or ‘fill up’ the signifier—to make it identical with itself” (66). This entification (or monumentalization) is the subject’s refusal to surrender to temporality, “the fact that every psychically important event depends for its value and meaning upon reference to an earlier or a later one. The analysand also fails to see that with his object-choices and other libidinal acts he is speaking a language of desire. Empty speech is what the analysand classically utters during the early stages of analysis” (66).
But just as language, on the grid of alienation, can be assumed as the method through which signifiers are entified and egos are monumentalized, so that the subject is “shielded” from the fact of alienation, so language can also be that agency through which the subject learns to live in a deconstructive relation to this alienation—learns to live with lack. Rather than monumentalizing the image of a present and unified self, the subject can learn instead to comprehend the symbolic relation that has positioned him/her.

The later stages of the analysis ideally bring the subject to full speech. The analysand engages in full speech when he understands that his literal and metaphoric words are in fact signifiers—neither equivalent to things, nor capable of saying “what” they are, but rather a retroaction to an anticipation of other signifiers. Full speech is also speech in which the analysand recognizes within what he has previously taken to be the “here and now” the operations of a very personal system of signification—the operations, that is, of what Lacan calls his “primary language.” (66)

As a description of suffering and a prescription for emancipation from suffering, the Lacanian notion of full speech was a brake on what, in the 1950s, was becoming psychoanalysis’s slippery slope toward idealism and essentialism. Lacan cited three basic problems with the psychoanalysis of the 1950s: object relations, the role of counter transference, and the place of fantasy (Jonathan Lee 32-33). In all of them, he noted “the temptation for the analyst to abandon the foundation of speech, and this precisely in areas where, because they border on the ineffable, its use would seem to require a more than usually close examination” (Ecrits 36).

The “wall of language” is a wall that, for Lacan, cannot be penetrated by the analysand except in his/her a-subjective state, that is, either as an infans (that state of being
prior to alienation in the Symbolic) or as a corpse (that state of being after alienation—Death). Within the analytic context, there is nothing meaningful on the other side of language. “Beyond this wall, there is nothing for us but outer darkness. Does this mean that we are entirely masters of the situation? Certainly not, and on this point Freud has bequeathed us his testament on the negative therapeutic reaction” (Ecrits 101). The analysand jettisons his/her projected and imaginary relation to the analyst and comes to understand where s/he is finally in relation to the analyst (which is outside of her/himself) and from the place of the analyst (a stand-in for the Symbolic Order); s/he comes to hear his/her own language and becomes an auditor in relation to his/her own speech. “The analysis consists of getting him to become conscious of his relations, not with the ego of the analyst, but with all these Others who are his true interlocutors, whom he hasn’t recognized.” All these Others are none other than the Lacanian contemporaries or, in the vernacular most salient to the slave, Whites and their junior partners in civil society—Humans positioned by the Symbolic Order. “It is a matter of the subject progressively discovering which Other he is truly addressing, without knowing it, and of him progressively assuming the relations of transference at the place where he is, and where at first he didn’t know he was” (Lacan, Seminar II 246).” Again, there is no locating of subjectivity within oneself. Lacan is clear: one cannot have a relationship with oneself. Instead, one comes to understand one’s existence, one’s place outside of oneself, and it is in coming to understand one’s place outside of oneself that one can hear oneself and assume one’s speech—in other words, assume one’s desire.

Finally, Lacan was alarmed at how psychoanalysis was becoming more and more concerned with exploring the analysand’s fantasies—a practice which, again, subordinated exploration of the Symbolic to exploration of the Imaginary (Lee 33-34). The Imaginary
relation puts the analysand in an identificatory relation to the other, whether that other be
his/her own image, an external representation, or an outside other. This relation is one in
which the analysand allows the other to have only a fraction of “otherness”: the analysand
can barely apprehend the otherness of the other, because the psyche says, “that’s me.” But
this is the worse kind of ruse and induces feelings of disarray and insufficiency, putting the
analysand in an aggressive relation of rivalry to the other, for this (imaginary) other occupies
the place the analysand wants to occupy. Through such processes, analysis intensifies rather
than diminishes the analysand’s narcissism.

Given that so many psychoanalysts in England and America extolled the virtues of
an analysand/analyst encounter which culminated in an emboldened ego that fortified the
monument of a strengthened psyche able, as these claims would have it, to brace itself
against the very onslaughts which had produced its crippling frustration; and given the
rhetorical scaffolding of common sense and, so it seemed, empirical “evidence” of cured
analysands, what made Lacan so steadfast in his conviction to the contrary?

This ego, whose strength our theorists now define by its strength to bear
frustration, is frustration in its essence. Not frustration of a desire of the
subject, but frustration by an object in which his desire is alienated and which
the more it is elaborated, the more profound the alienation from his jouissance
becomes for the subject (Ecrits 42)...[T]o identify the ego with the discipline
of the subject is to confuse imaginary isolation with the mastery of the
instincts. This lays open to error of judgment in the conduct of the
treatment: such as trying to reinforce the ego in many neuroses caused by its
over forceful structure—and that is a dead end. (Ecrits 106)
The process of full speech, then, is a process that catalyzes disorder and deconstruction, rather than order and unity, “the monumental construct of [the analysand’s] narcissism” (*Ecrits* 40). To Ego Psychology’s practice of fortifying the ego in an effort to end the frustration of neurosis, Lacan proposed a revolutionary analytic encounter in which the analysand becomes:

engaged in an ever growing dispossession of that being of his, concerning which—by dint of sincere portraits which leave its idea no less incoherent, of rectifications that do not succeed in freeing its essence, of stays and defenses that do not prevent his statue from tottering, of narcissistic embraces that become like a puff of air in animating it—he ends up by recognizing that this being has never been anything more than his construct in the imaginary and that this construct disappoints all certainties… For in this labor which he undertakes to reconstruct for another, he rediscovers the fundamental alienation [my emphasis] which made him construct it like another, and which has always destined it [the ego] to be taken from him by another. (42)

This notion of “labor” which the analysand “undertakes to reconstruct for another” and thereby rediscovers “the fundamental alienation which made him construct it like another, and which has always destined it [the ego] to be taken from him by another” returns us to the thorny issue of “contemporaries.” Now we must take it up, not in a context of universal, unraced subjects (Whites) nor in a culturally modified context of specific identities (“dark” Whites and non-Blacks), but rather in a context of positional polarity which structures civil society and its nether region—namely, the polarity of Human and Black, the context of masters and slaves.
The analytic schema of Jacques Lacan’s breakthrough known as “full speech” posits a subject whose suffering is produced by alienation in the image of the other, or captation within Imaginary, and whose freedom must be produced by alienation in the language of the other, or interpellation within the Symbolic. The subject is constituted as subject proper only through a relation to the other. For Lacan, alienation, either in the Imaginary or in the Symbolic, is the modality productive of subjectivity for all sentient beings. In other words, subjectivity is a discursive, or signifying, process of becoming.

Psychic disorder, by way of the death drive, is that mechanism in Lacanian analysis that brings the analysand to his/her understanding of him/herself as a void. For Lacan, the problems of speech and the death drive are related; the relationship presents the irony “of two contrary terms: instinct in its most comprehensive acceptation being the law that governs in its succession a cycle of behavior whose goal is the accomplishment of a vital function; and death appearing first of all as the destruction of life” (Ecrits 101). But Lacan is clear that though death is implied, it is life through language which is the aim of analysis. (This too bears heavily on what, I argue below, is the poverty of full speech’s political or emancipatory promise.) Only by being alienated within the Big A, language, or the Symbolic Order, does the moi, small a or ego, come to be the je, the subject of lack, the subject of a void. Prior to the analysand’s realizing full speech, s/he projects onto the analyst all of the fantasms which constitute his/her ego. The emancipatory process of Lacan’s psychoanalytic encounter is one in which the analysand passes from positing the analyst as the small a, to one in which the analyst occupies, for the analysand, the position of the Big A, a position synonymous with language itself. For Lacan, these two moves complement each other. It bears repeating that this intersubjectivity, alienation in the other, exists whether the subject grasps it or not, whether or not s/he is the subject of full speech or empty speech. But we
are still left with alienation as the structuring modality for subjectivity. Whether, by way of description, we posit the analysand as being either alienated in the Imaginary (ego, small a) or as being alienated in the Symbolic (language as structure, as the unconscious of the Other)—or even if, in addition, we recognize the fact that full speech as prescription demands alienation within the Symbolic—we remain left with the fact that, where becoming is concerned, alienation is subjectivity’s essential modality of existence. Alienation is, for Lacan, an essential grammar of political ontology.

As I stated above, I am not arguing that the unconscious does not exist. Nor am I claiming that sentient beings, whether Human or Black, are not indeed alienated in the Imaginary and the Symbolic. I am arguing that whereas alienation is an essential grammar underpinning Human relationality, it is an important but ultimately inessential grammar when one attempts to think the structural interdiction against Black recognition and incorporation. In other words, alienation is a grammar underwriting all manner of relationality, whether narcissistic (egoic, empty speech) or liberated (full speech). But it is not a grammar that underwrites, much less explains, the absence of relationality.

**Fanon and Full Speech**

Jacques Lacan and Frantz Fanon grappled with the question what does it mean to be free? and its corollary what does it mean to suffer? at the same moment in history. To say that they both appeared at the same time is to say that they both have, as their intellectual condition of possibility, France’s brutal occupation of Algeria. It is not my intention to dwell on Lacan’s lack of political activism or to roll out Fanon’s revolutionary war record. My intention is to interrogate the breadth of full speech’s descriptive universality and the depth of its prescriptive cure—to interrogate its foundation by staging an encounter between, on the one hand,
Lacan and his interlocutors and, on the other hand, Fanon and his interlocutors. To this end alone do I note the two men’s relation to French colonialism, as the force of that relation is felt in their texts.

Frantz Fanon’s psychoanalytic description of Black neurosis, “hallucinatory whitening,” and his prescriptions for a cure, “decolonization” and “the end of the world” (BSWM 96) resonate with Lacan’s categories of empty speech and full speech. There is a monumental disavowal of emptiness involved in hallucinatory whitening, and disorder and death certainly characterize decolonization. For Fanon the trauma of Blackness lies in its absolute Otherness in relation to Whites. That is, White people make Black people by recognizing only their skin color. Fanon’s Black patient is “overwhelmed…by the wish to be white” (BSWM 100). But unlike Lacan’s diagnosis of the analysand, Fanon makes a direct and self-conscious connection between his patient’s hallucinatory whitening and the stability of White society. If Fanon’s texts ratchet violently and unpredictably between the body of the subject and the body of the socius, it is because Fanon understands that “outside [his] psychoanalytic office, [he must] incorporate [his] conclusions into the context of the world.” The room is too small to contain the encounter. “As a psychoanalyst, I should help my patient to become conscious of his unconscious and abandon his attempts at a hallucinatory whitening…” Here we have a dismantling of all the fantasms that constitute the patient’s ego and which s/he projects onto the analyst that resonates with the process of attaining what Lacan calls full speech. But Fanon takes this a step further, for not only does he want the analysand to surrender to the void of language, but also to “act in the direction of a change…with respect to the real source of the conflict—that is, toward the social structures” (BSWM 100).
As a psychoanalyst, Fanon does not dispute Lacan’s claim that suffering and freedom are produced and attained, respectively, in the realm of Symbolic; but this, for Fanon, is only half of the modality of existence. The other half of suffering and freedom is violence. By the time Fanon has woven the description of his patient’s condition (i.e., his own life as a Black doctor in France) into the prescription of a cure (his commitment to armed struggle in Algeria), he has extended the logic of disorder and death from the Symbolic into the Real.

Decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is, obviously, a program of complete disorder…[I]t is the meeting of two forces, opposed to each other by their very nature…Their first encounter was marked by violence and their existence together…was carried on by dint of a great array of bayonets and cannons…[T]his narrow world, strewn with prohibitions, can only be called in question by absolute violence. (The Wretched of the Earth 36-37)

This is because the structural, or absolute, violence or what Loic Wacquant calls the “carceral continuum,” is not a Black experience but a condition of Black “life.” It remains constant, paradigmatically, despite changes in its “performance” over time—slave ship, Middle Passage, slave estate, Jim Crow, the ghetto, the prison industrial complex. There is an uncanny connection between Fanon’s absolute violence and Lacan’s Real. Thus, by extension, the grammar of suffering of the Black itself is on the level of the Real. In this emblematic passage, Fanon does for violence what Lacan does for alienation: namely, he removes the negative stigma such a term would otherwise incur in the hands of theorists and practitioners who seek coherence and stability. He also raises within Lacan’s schema of suffering and freedom a contradiction between the idea of universal un-raced contemporaries and two forces opposed to each other, whose first encounter and existence
together is marked by violence. In short, he divides the world not between cured contemporaries and uncured contemporaries, but between contemporaries of all sorts and slaves. He lays the groundwork for a theory of antagonism over and above a theory of conflict.

If Lacan’s full speech is not, in essence, a “cure” but a process promoting psychic disorder, through which the subject comes to know her/himself, not as a stable relation to a true “self”—the Imaginary—but as a void constituted only by language, a becoming toward death in relation to the Other—the Symbolic—then we will see how this symbolic self-cancellation (Silverman, Male Subjectivity...63-65, 126-128) is possible only when the subject and “his contemporaries” (Lacan, Ecrits 47) are White or Human. The process of full speech rests on a tremendous disavowal which n-monumentalizes the (White) ego because it sutures, rather than cancels, formal stagnation by fortifying and extending the interlocutory life of intra-Human discussions.

I am arguing that (1) civil society, the terrain upon which the analysand performs full speech, is always already a formally stagnated monument; and (2) the process by which full speech is performed brokers simultaneously two relations for the analysand, one new and one old, respectively. The process by which full speech is performed brokers a (new) deconstructive relationship between the analysand and his/her formal stagnation within civil society and a (pre-existing or) reconstructive relationship between the analysand and the formal stagnation that constitutes civil society.

Whereas Lacan was aware of how language “precedes and exceeds us” (Silverman 2000: 157), he did not have Fanon’s awareness of how violence also precedes and exceeds Blacks. An awareness of this would have disturbed the coherence of the taxonomy implied by the personal pronoun “us.” The trajectory of Lacan’s full speech therefore is only able to
make sense of violence as contingent phenomena, the effects of “transgressions” (acts of rebellion or refusal) within a Symbolic Order. Here, violence, at least in the first instance, is neither sense-less (gratuitous) nor is it a matrix of human (im)possibility: it is what happens after some form of breach occurs in the realm of signification. That is to say, it is contingent.

Implied in this gesture toward Lacan’s trajectory on violence are several questions regarding full-speech. First, can Lacanian full-speech, so wedded as it is to the notion that there is no world to apprehend beyond the realm of signification, adequately theorize those bodies that emerge from direct relations of force? Which is to ask, is the logic of full speech too imbricated in the institutionality of anti-Blackness to be descriptively or prescriptively adequate for thinking Black positionality? In trying to read Human suffering and its effects (what Lacan calls empty speech) as well as Human freedom and its effects (what he calls full speech) through the figure of a Blackened position can one simply assume that, despite relations of pure force which distinguish one “epidermal schema” (BSWM 112) from another, relations of signification have the power to cast webs of analogy between such disparate positions, webs of analogy strong enough to circumscribe relations of pure force, so that all sentient beings can be seen as each others’ “contemporaries”? Put another way: is full speech for the master full speech for the slave? What would it mean for a master to live in a deconstructive relation to his moi? Is “liberated master” an oxymoron or, worse yet, simply redundant? Through what agency (volition? will?) does a slave entify the signifier? Which is to ask, can there be such a thing as a narcissistic slave? Or, what is full speech for a slave? Lacan seems to take for granted the universal relevance of (1) the analytic encounter, (2) the centrality of signification, and (3) the possibility of “contemporaries.” But can a Blackened position take up these coordinates with merely a few culturally specific modifications, or is to blacken these coordinates precipitous of crises writ large?
I contend that the web of analogy cast between the subject of analysis and her “contemporaries,” in the process of full speech, is rent asunder by insertion of the Black position, who is less a site of subjectification and more a site of desubjectification—a “species” (Fanon; Hartman) of “absolute dereliction” (Fanon), a hybrid of “person and property” (Hartman), and a body that magnetizes bullets (Martinot and Sexton). I intend to scale upward (to the socius) the implications of Lacanian full speech to illustrate its place as a strategy which fortifies and extends the interlocutory life of civil society, and scale downward (to the body) the implications of Fanonian decolonization to illustrate the incommensurability between the Black flesh and the body of the analysand. Full speech is a strategy of psychic disorder, within Human limits, and decolonization is a strategy of complete disorder, without any limits. The implications of this dilemma are extremely high, for it suggests that Lacanian full speech—like Film Theory, so much of which stands on its shoulders—is an accomplice to social stability, despite its claims to the contrary.

At the crux of this critique is (a) the unbridgeable gap between the ethical stance of Lacanian full speech and the ethical stance of Fanonian decolonization—in other words, the method by which Lacanian full speech intensifies a disavowal of a violence-structuring matrix—and (b) the question of the analysand’s “contemporaries,” the language of which, according to Lacan, the analysand speaks when s/he shatters the monuments of the ego’s “formal stagnation.” To what extent can the analysand become the slave’s contemporary as the latter seeks to shatters civil society? To which call to arms would the analysand be compelled to respond?

What constitutes the ground on which the analysand is able to do the deconstructive work of full speech? My contention is that prior to, and contemporaneous with, the analytic encounter, the Black body “labors” as an enslaved hybridity of person and property
(Hartman) so that the analysand may “labor” as a liberated subject. Furthermore, it is the matrix of violence which divides the enslaved from the unenslaved, just as the matrix of alienation divides the *infans* from the subject: violence *zones* the Black whereas alienation *zones* the Human. But whereas “becoming towards death,” which results from the Lacanian analytic encounter, allows the analysand to deconstruct his/her monumentalized presence in the face of alienation and a life papered over by language, analysis additionally allows the analysand to take for granted (be oblivious to) the matrix of violence which zoned his terrain of “generalized trust” (Barrett), that terrain euphemistically referred to as “civil” society. “Generalized trust” (racialized Whiteness), along with relative stability, are the preconditions for the analytic encounter, or any other “civil” encounter. Fanon makes clear how some are zoned, *a priori*, beyond the borders of generalized trust:

This world divided into compartments, this world cut in two is inhabited by two different species... When you examine at close quarters the colonial context, it is evident that what parcels out the world is to begin with the fact of belonging to a given *race*, a given *species* [my emphasis]. In the colonies the economic substructure is also a superstructure. The cause is the consequence; you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich. (39-40)

When I say that the analysand can take for granted the matrix of violence which zoned his terrain of “generalized trust,” I mean that unless the world is parceled out—unless there are two species—s/he cannot commence the work of becoming toward death—nor could Lacan have theorized the work. In short, violence—the “species” division, the zoning, of the enslaved and the unenslaved—is *the condition of possibility upon which subjectivity* (empty-, full speech paradigm: the Imaginary vs. Symbolic dialectic) can be theorized (i.e., the writing
of *Ecrits* and performed (the analytic encounter). But this theorization and performance, by ignoring its relation to the species zoning which “labors” for its condition of possibility, deconstructs the monuments of the analysand’s ego, while simultaneously fortifying and extending the ramparts of civil society which circumscribed those monuments. In short, the trajectory of disorder toward full speech deconstructs that which prohibits relations between the analysand and his “contemporaries” while simultaneously entifying and unifying that which prohibits relations between species (between masters and slaves). Despite Lacan’s radical interventions against the practical limitations of Object Relations and the ideological pitfalls of Ego Psychology, the process of full speech is nonetheless foundational to the vertical integration of anti-Blackness.

I said above that I wanted to scale upward the implications of Lacanian full speech to illustrate its place as a strategy which fortifies and extends the interlocutory life of civil society, and scale downward the implications of Fanonian decolonization to the level of the body to illustrate the incommensurability between Black flesh and the body of the analysand—how those two positions subtend each other but, like a plane to an angle, mutually construct their triangulated context. Before unpacking, at the level of the body, what this relationship makes (im)possible, I am compelled to extend the cartography of this very intimate encounter, that is, to ratchet the scale up from the body to the socius—where civil society subtends *its* nether region.

**Civil Society and Its Discontents**

As noted above, before the “healthy” rancor and repartee that represent the cornerstone of civil society (be it in the boardroom, at the polling booth, in the bedroom, or on the analyst’s couch) can get underway, civil society must be relatively stable. But how is this stability to be achieved, and for whom? For Black people, civic stability is a state of
emergency. Frantz Fanon (Wretched) and Martinot and Sexton (“The Avant-garde of White Supremacy”) explain why the stability of civil society is a state of emergency for Blacks. Fanon writes of zones. For our purposes, we want to bear in mind the following: the zone of the Human (or non-Black—notwithstanding the fact that Fanon is a little too loose and liberal with his language when he calls it the zone of the [postcolonial native]) has “rules” within the zone that allow for existence of Humanist interaction—i.e., Lacan’s psychoanalytic encounter and/or Gramsci’s proletarian struggle. This stems from the different paradigms of zoning mentioned earlier in terms of Black zones (void of Humanist interaction) and White zones (the quintessence of Humanist interaction).x

The zone where the native lives is not complementary to the zone inhabited by the settler. The two zones are opposed, but not in the service of higher unity. Obedient to the rules of pure Aristotelian logic, they both follow the principle of reciprocal exclusivity. No conciliation is possible, for of the two terms, one is superfluous…The settler’s town is a town of white people, of foreigners. (Wretched 38-39)

This is the basis of his assertion that two zones produce two different “species.” The phrase “not in service of higher unity” dismisses any kind of dialectical optimism for a future synthesis. Fanon’s specific context does not share the same historical or national context of Martinot and Sexton, but the settler/native dynamic, the differential zoning and the gratuity (as opposed to contingency) of violence which accrue to the blackened position, are shared by the two texts.

Martinot and Sexton assert the primacy of Fanon’s Manichean zones (without the promise of higher unity) even when faced with the facticity of American integration:
The dichotomy between white ethics [the discourse of civil society] and its irrelevance to the violence of police profiling is not dialectical; the two are incommensurable whenever one attempts to speak about the paradigm of policing, one is forced back into a discussion of particular events—high profile homicides and their related courtroom battles, for instance [emphasis mine]. (Martinot and Sexton 6)

It makes no difference that in the USA the “casbah” and the “European” zone are laid one on top of the other, because what is being asserted here is the schematic interchangeability between Fanon’s settler society and Sexton and Martinot’s policing paradigm. (Whites in America are now so settled they no longer call themselves settlers.) For Fanon, it is the policeman and soldier (not the discursive, or the hegemonic agents) of colonialism that make one town White and the other Black. For Martinot and Sexton, this Manichean delirium manifests itself by way of the US paradigm of policing which (re)produces, repetitively, the inside/outside, the civil society/Black void, by virtue of the difference between those bodies that don’t magnetize bullets and those bodies that do. “Police impunity serves to distinguish between the racial itself and the elsewhere that mandates it…the distinction between those whose human being is put permanently in question and those for whom it goes without saying” (Martinot and Sexton 8). In such a paradigm White people are, ipso facto, deputized in the face of Black people, whether they know it (consciously) or not.

Until the recent tapering off of weekly lynching in the 1960s, Whites were called upon as individuals to perform this deputation. The 1914 Ph.D. dissertation of H. M. Henry (a scholar in no way hostile to slavery), *The Police Control of the Slave in South Carolina,*
reveals how vital this performance was in the construction of Whiteness for the Settlers of the 1600s, 1700s, and 1800s, as well as for the Settler-scholar (Henry himself) of the 1900s:

The evolution of the patrol system is interesting. The need of keeping the slaves from roving was felt from the very first. Among the earliest of the colonial acts in 1686 is one that gave any person the right to apprehend, properly chastise, and send home any slave who might be found off his master’s plantation without a ticket. This plan was not altogether effective, and in 1690 it was made the duty of all persons under penalty of forty shillings to arrest and chastise any slave [found] out of his home plantation without a proper ticket. This plan of making it everybody’s business to punish wandering slaves seems to have been sufficient at least for a time. (28-29)

But today this process of species division does not turn Blacks into species and produce Whites with the existential potential of fully realized subjectivity in the same spectacular fashion as the spectacle of violence that Henry wrote of in South Carolina and that Fanon was accustomed to Algeria. In fact, Martinot and Sexton maintain that attention to the spectacle causes us to think of violence as contingent upon symbolic transgressions rather than thinking of it as a matrix for the simultaneous production of Black death and White civil society:

The spectacular event camouflages the operation of police law as contempt, police law is the fact that there is no recourse to the disruption of [Black] people’s lives by these activities. (6)

By “no recourse” the authors are suggesting that Black people themselves serve a vital function as the living markers of gratuitous violence. And the spectacular event is a scene
that draws attention away from the paradigm of violence. It functions as a crowding out scenario. Crowding out our understanding that, where violence is concerned, to be Black is to be beyond the limit of contingency. This thereby gives the bodies of the rest of society (Humans) some form of coherence (a contingent rather than gratuitous relationship to violence):

In fact, to focus on the spectacular event of police violence is to deploy (and thereby affirm) the logic of police profiling itself. Yet, we can't avoid this logic once we submit to the demand to provide examples or images of the paradigm [once we submit to signifying practices]. As a result, the attempt to articulate the paradigm of policing renders itself non-paradigmatic, reaffirms the logic of police profiling and thereby reduces itself to the fraudulent ethic by which white civil society rationalizes its existence [emphasis mine]. (6-7)

“The fraudulent ethic by which white civil society rationalizes its existence” endures in articulations between that species with actual “recourse to the disruption” of life (by the policing paradigm) and another member of the same species, such as the dialogue between news reporter and a reader, between a voter and a candidate, or between an analysand and his/her contemporaries. “Recourse to the disruption” of life is the first condition upon which a conflict between entified signification and a true language of desire, a non-egoic language of contemporaries, full speech, can be staged: one must first be on the policing side, rather than the policed side, of that division made possible by the violence matrix. In other words, where violence is concerned, one must stay on this side of the wall of contingency (just as one must “stay on this side of the wall of language” by operating within the Symbolic) to enable full speech. Both matrixes, violence and alienation, precede and anticipate the species.
Whiteness, then, and by extension civil society’s junior partners, cannot be solely “represented” as some monumentalized coherence of phallic signifiers but must, in the first ontological instance, be understood as a formation of “contemporaries” who do not magnetize bullets. This is the essence of their construction through an asignifying absence; their signifying presence is manifest in the fact that they are, if only by default, deputized against those who do magnetize bullets: in short, White people are not simply “protected” by the police, they are the police.

Martinot and Sexton claim that the White subject-effects of today’s policing paradigm are more banal than the White subject-effects of Fanon’s settler paradigm. For Martinot and Sexton, they cannot be explained by recourse to the spectacle of violence. “Police spectacle is not the effect of the racial uniform; rather, it is the police uniform that is producing re-racialization” (Martinot and Sexton 8). This “re-racialization” echoes Fanon’s assertion that “the cause is the consequence. You are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich” (Fanon Wretched…40). Whereas in Fanon’s settler paradigm this White/rich/rich/White circularity manifests itself in the automatic accrual of life producing potential, in Martinot and Sexton’s paradigm of policing it manifests itself in the automatic accrual of life itself. It marks the difference between those who are alive, the subjects of civil society, and those who are fatally alive (Marriott 16), or “socially dead” (Patterson), the “species” of “absolute dereliction” (Fanon, Wretched…).

Again, the subject of civil society is the species that does not magnetize bullets, though s/he does not necessarily perform any advocacy of police practices or of the policing paradigm the way s/he had to in the H.M. Henry’s 19th century South Carolina. As Martinot and Sexton argue, the civic stability of the 21st century U.S. slave estate is no longer every White person’s duty to perform. In fact, many Whites on the Left actually perform
progressive opposition to the police, but each performance of progressive opposition encounters what Martinot and Sexton call

…a certain internal limitation. …The supposed secrets of white supremacy get sleuthed in its spectacular displays, in pathology and instrumentality, or pawned off on the figure of the “rogue cop.” Each approach to race subordinates it to something that is not race, as if to continue the noble epistemological endeavor of getting to know it better. But what each ends up talking about is that other thing. In the face of this, the left’s anti-racism becomes its passion. But its passion gives it away. It signifies the passive acceptance of the idea that race, considered to be either a real property of a person or an imaginary projection, is not essential to the social structure, a system of social meanings and categorizations. It is the same passive apparatus of whiteness that in its mainstream guise actively forgets [in a way in which settlers of the first three centuries simply could not] that it owes its existence to the killing and terrorizing of those it racializes for the purpose, expelling them from the human fold in the same gesture of forgetting. It is the passivity of bad faith that tacitly accepts as “what goes without saying” the postulates of white supremacy. And it must do so passionately since “what goes without saying” is empty and can be held as “truth” only through an obsessiveness. The truth is that the truth is on the surface, flat and repetitive, just as the law is made by the uniform. (7-9)

A truth without depth, flat, repetitive, on the surface? This unrepresentable subject-effect is more complex than H.M. Henry’s early Settler performances of communal solidarity in part because:
The gratuitousness of its repetition bestows upon white supremacy an inherent discontinuity. It stops and starts self-referentially, at whim. To theorize some political, economic, or psychological necessity for its repetition, its unending return to violence, its need to kill is to lose a grasp on that gratuitousness by thinking its performance is representable. *Its acts of repetition are its access to unrepresentability,* they dissolve its excessiveness into invisibility as simply daily occurrence. Whatever mythic content it pretends to claim is a priori empty. *Its secret is that it has no depth. There is no dark corner that, once brought to the light of reason, will unravel its system*…[I]ts truth lies in the rituals that sustain its circuitous contentless logic; it is, in fact, nothing but its very practices [emphasis mine]. (10)

To claim that the paradigm of policing has no “mythic content,” that its performance is “unrepresentable,” and that there is no “political, economic, or psychological necessity for its repletion” is to say something more profound than merely “civil society exists in an inverse relation to its own claims.” It is to say something more than what the authors say outright: that this inversion translates today in the police making claims and demands on the institutionality of civil society and not the other way around. The extended implication of Sexton and Martinot’s claim is much more devastating. For this claim, with its emphasis on the gratuitousness of violence—a violence that cannot be represented but which positions species nonetheless—rearticulates Fanon’s notion that, for Blacks, violence is a matrix of (im)possibility, a *paradigm* of ontology as opposed to a *performance* that is contingent upon symbolic transgressions.

Alienation, however, that Lacanian matrix of symbolic and imaginary castration, on which codes are made and broken and full (or empty) speech is possible, comes to *appear,* by
way of the psychoanalytic encounter, as the essential matrix of existence. We are in our place, Lacan insists, on this side of the wall of language. (Ecrits 101) It is the grid on which the analysand can short circuit somatic compliance with hysterical symptoms and bring to a halt, however temporarily, the egoic monumentalization of empty speech. Thus, the psychoanalytic encounter in general, and Lacanian full speech in particular, work to crowd out the White subject’s realization of his/her positionality by way of violence. It is this crowding-out scenario that allows the analysand of full speech to remain White, but “cured” (a liberated master?). And, in addition, the scenario itself weighs in as one more of civil society’s enabling accompaniments (like voting, coalition building, and interracial “love”) for the production of the slave—that entity:

…insensible to ethics; he [sic] represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values. He is, let us dare to admit, the enemy of values, and in this sense he is the absolute evil. He is the corrosive element, destroying all that comes near him; he is the deforming element, disfiguring all that has to do with beauty or morality; he is the depository of maleficent powers, the unconscious and irretrievable instrument of blind forces (Fanon, Wretched 41)

Unlike Fanon’s base-line Black, situated a priori in absolute dereliction, Lacan’s base-line analysand is situated a priori in personhood and circumscribed by “contemporaries” who are also persons. Lacan’s body of subjectification is not of the same species as Fanon’s body of desubjectification. I am not suggesting that Black people’s psyches are free from machinations of the moi and therefore have no impediments in a process of “becoming towards death.” What I am asking is: how are we to trust a Lacanian assessment of Black narcissism? Half of this contradiction could be solved if we simply re-named full-speech
“White speech” (or Human speech) and attached to the analyst’s shingle Blacks need not apply. "They may not need apply but they are still essential in positing difference." But coupled with this gesture of full-disclosure regarding full-speech, we would have to acknowledge that even in the White analysand’s becoming toward death, that is to say, even after the stays and defenses that heretofore had kept his/her ego from tottering are all stripped away, yes, even after the narcissistic embraces of formal stagnation are hewn into kindling, and even after the labor through which the analysand has rediscovered his/her fundamental alienation, there will still be a nigger in the woodpile.

What Masters Rediscover in Slaves

The difference between Jesus and Buddha is that, though some people may become Christ-like, the church does not take kindly to the idea of Jesus being mass-produced. There is only one Jesus. He came once. One day, so goes the legend, he will come again. Amen. In the meantime we will just have to wait. A psychoanalysis modeled on Christianity would have a hard row to hoe. But by becoming toward death in a most unflinching manner anyone can become a Buddha. Small wonder Lacan’s prescription for the analytic encounter looks toward this (non)religion with neither a church nor a god. Toward the end of “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis,” Lacan acknowledges the debt full speech owes to Buddhism, but he adds, curiously, that psychoanalysis must not

…go to the extremes to which [Buddhism] is carried, since they would be contrary to certain limitations imposed by [our technique], a discreet application of its basic principle in analysis seems much more acceptable to me…in so far as [our] technique does not in itself entail any danger of the subject’s alienation.
For [our] technique only breaks the discourse in order to deliver speech.  

(*Ecrits* 100-101)

Unlike ego psychology, and more like Buddhism, Lacan embraced the death drive as the agency that could deconstruct discourse in order to deliver speech and thereby disrupt the corporeal integrity, presence, coherence—the egoic monumentalization—of stagnated subjectivity (or empty speech, a belief in oneself as occupying a position of mastery in the Imaginary rather than a position of nothingness in the Symbolic). Many White film theorists and White feminists, such as Mary Ann Doane, Constance Penley, Kaja Silverman, Jacqueline Rose, Janet Begstrom, and Luce Iigaray, embrace the utility of the death drive as well, for it is only through an embrace of the death drive that “normative” male subjectivity, the bane of women’s liberation, can free itself from the idiopathic as opposed to heteropathic identifications of formal stagnation. As Silverman points out, psychic death or self-cancellation is no small matter. Her description of the process as a kind of ecstasy of pain is noteworthy:

Masochistic ecstasy...implies a sublation of sorts, a lifting of the psyche up and out of the body into other sites of suffering and hence a self-estrangement. It turns...upon a narcissistic deferral and so works against the consolidation of the isolated ego [emphasis mine]. (*Male Subjectivity* 275)

For Silverman, the emancipatory agency of this kind of psychic death enables “a kind of heteropathic chain-reaction ...[as] the [subject] inhabits multiple sites of suffering.” Thus the “exteriorization of one psyche never functions to exalt another and identity is stripped of all ‘presence’” (266).

This exteriorization of the White male psyche in a quest to inhabit multiple sites of suffering, i.e. White women, has its costs. The political costs to White men stripped of all
presence in relation to White women are death-like but not deadly. Nor do most White feminists wish it to be deadly. Silverman’s caution, “I in no way mean to propose catastrophe as the antidote to a mass meconnaissance” (64), diverges dramatically from Fanon’s demand that “morality is very concrete; it is to silence the settler’s defiance, to break his flaunting violence—in a word, to put him out of the picture” (Wretched 44). The same settler won’t weather both storms in quite the same way. Fanon’s brand of “full speech” makes this clear: “The violence which has ruled over the ordering of the colonial world…will be claimed and taken over by the native at the moment when, deciding to embody history in his own person, he surges into the forbidden quarters” (40). For feminists like Silverman, full speech is that process through which the analysand has “claimed and taken over” the alienation which rules over the ordering of her world. The analysand comes to hear and assume her speech, in other words, as she assumes her desire. This is not simply a quest for personal liberation but instead the assumptive logic that underwrites two (imbricated) revolutionary projects: the political project of (for Silverman et al) institutional, or paradigmatic, change; coupled with an aesthetic project (i.e., counter-cinema) that accompanies the political project—the two, then, work in relay with each other, a mutually enabling dialectic. In The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema, Silverman underscores the vulnerability in the armor of the Oedipal paradigm (that point most vulnerable to attack in what for her is a world ordering paradigm). Her close reading of Freud’s Ego and the Id reminds us that there are “two versions of the Oedipus complex, one …which…works to align the subject smoothly with heterosexuality and the dominant values of the symbolic order, and the other …which is culturally disavowed and organizes subjectivity in fundamentally ‘perverse: and homosexual ways’” (120). Oedipus, therefore, can be claimed and taken over for a revolutionary feminist agenda.
Fanon, however, demonstrates how the tools of species division are “claimed and taken over” by that species of absolute dereliction; how violence is turned to the native’s advantage. This notion of embodying “history in his own person” can be likened to a subject becoming lost in language (recognition of the void). But it’s important not to lose sight of the difference between the Fanonian implications of “species” and the Lacanian implications of “subjects” because history, for Fanon, is in excess of signification. In addition, for the Lacanian subject, the grid of alienation holds out the possibility of some sort of communication between subjects—a higher unity of contemporaries. Whereas for Fanon:

To break up the colonial world does not mean that after the frontiers have been abolished lines of communication will be set up between the two zones. The destruction of the colonial world is no more and no less than the abolition of one zone, its burial in the depths of the earth. (40-41)

To say, as Silverman does, “I in no way mean to propose catastrophe as the antidote to a mass meconnaissance” is, I contend, to say that the two antagonists are of the same species—they have been zoned not apart but together. So, they are not really antagonists. To be precise, violence as it pertains to and structures gender relations between White men and White women (and it does!) is of a contingent nature: White women who “transgress” their positionality in the Symbolic order run the risk of attack. But as Saidiya Hartman (and Fanon) makes clear, contingency is not what structures violence between White men and Black women, White women and Black women, White women and Black men, or White men and Black men. These White on Black relations share, as their constituent element, an absence of contingency where violence is concerned. The absence of contingency eliminates the necessity of transgression which is a pre-condition of intra-settler (White men to White women) violence.
More is at work here than the monumentalization of White supremacy through the imposition of cultural signifiers. Important questions emerge regarding the possibility of full speech, the possibility of an analysand speaking in the language of his “contemporaries” when the field is made up of Whites and Blacks. Put another way, how does one defer the narcissism of a Real relation? How can speech alone strip Whites of all presence in the face of Blacks? What is the real danger entailed in lifting the White psyche up and out of the body into Black sites of suffering? In short, what kind of performance would that be? We have come up against Lacan’s caution not to take Buddhist techniques beyond “certain limitations imposed by [psychoanalysis],” the limitations of speech.

In examining the spectacles of the slave coffle, plantation slave parties, the musical performances of slaves for masters, and the scenes of “intimacy” and “seduction” between Black women and White men, Saidiya Hartman illustrates how no discursive act by Blacks towards Whites or by Whites towards Blacks, from the mundane and quotidian, to the horrifying and outlandish can be disentangled from the gratuitousness of violence that structures Black suffering. This structural suffering, which undergirds the spectrum of Black life, from tender words of “love” spoken between slave women and White men to screaming at the whipping post, is imbricated in the “fungibility of the captive body” (Hartman 19). Black “fungibility” is a violence-effect that marks the difference between Black positionality and White positionality and, as Hartman makes clear, this difference in positionality marks a difference between capacities of speech.

The violence-induced fungibility of Blackness allows for its appropriation by White psyches as “property of enjoyment” (23-25). What’s more remarkable is that Black fungibility is also that property which inaugurates White empathy toward Black suffering (23-25). We might say Black fungibility catalyzes a “heteropathic chain-reaction” that allows a
White subject to inhabit multiple sites of suffering. But, again, does the exteriorization of one psyche (Silverman 266), enabled by Blackness, successfully strip White identity of all presence? Hartman poses this question in her critique of a Northern White man’s fantasy that replaces the body of slaves with the bodies of himself and his family, as the slaves are being beaten:

“By exporting the vulnerability of the captive body as a vessel for the uses, thoughts, and feelings of others, the humanity extended to the slave inadvertently confirms the expectations and desires definitive of the relations of chattel slavery. In other words, the case of Rankin’s empathetic identification is as much due to his good intentions and heartfelt opposition to slavery as to the fungibility of the captive body… In the fantasy of being beaten…Rankin becomes a proxy and the other’s pain is acknowledged to the degree that it can be imagined, yet by virtue of this substitution the object of identification threatens to disappear. (19)"

Hartman calls into question the emancipatory claims (for both the individual psyche and the socius) of heteropathic identification and masochistic self-cancellation (loss of self in the other, a process germane to full speech) when these claims are not circumscribed by a White social formation—when they claim to be more than intra-Human discussions. For no web of analogy can be spun between, on the one hand, the free body that mounts fungible flesh on an emancipatory journey toward self-cancellation and, on the other hand, that fungible being that has just been mounted. The two positions are structurally irreconcilable, which is to say they are not “contemporaries.” Hartman puts a finer point on it:
…the effort to counteract the commonplace callousness to black suffering requires that the white body be positioned in the place of the black body in order to make this suffering visible and intelligible. Yet, if this violence can become palpable and indignation can be fully aroused only through the masochistic fantasy, then it becomes clear that empathy is double-edged, for in making the other’s suffering one’s own, this suffering is occluded by the other’s obliteration. (19)

It’s worth repeating the lessons of cultural historians: that the Black experience is a “phenomena without analog” (Genovese); that “natal alienation” is a constituent element of slavery (Patterson; Hartman); that Black people are socially dead; and natal alienation endows the species with a past but not a heritage (Patterson). Therefore, even if, through the iconoclasm of becoming toward death, the analysand dismantles his monuments, even if he deconstructs his heritage, he will still exist in a relation to heritage, however deconstructed, and it is the possibility of heritage itself, a life of not magnetizing bullets (Martinot and Sexton), a life of contingent (rather than gratuitous) violence, which divides his species from those with a life of gratuitous violence. By sifting through the object choices of his meaning-full heritage, rather than a Black and sense-less past, he comes to assume his desire where he is (the goal of full speech). But though where he is may not be where he began in his relationship (before heteropathic identification with Blackness) to his “contemporaries,” it is indeed even more intensely where he began in his relationship to Blacks.

Conclusion
Anti-Blackness manifests as the monumentalization and fortification of civil society against social death. “Narcissism can be deconstructed in pursuit of subjectivity but civil society
remains strengthened.” Whereas Lacan’s analytic encounter, the process of full speech, is deconstructive of narcissism internal to civil society, it is one in a wide range of encounters (from voting to coalition building to “innocent” filial encounters) is re-constitutive of civil society’s fortification against social death. If, on the other hand, White supremacy’s foundations were built solely on a grid of alienation, where entified signification wards off the encroachment of deconstructive signification, then full speech would hold out the revolutionary promise of White supremacy’s demise much the way many White film theorists and feminists have demonstrated full speech can hasten the demise of intra-Human patriarchy. But, as Fanon so vividly warns, White supremacy’s and Humanism’s foundations are also built on a grid of violence, where positions of contingent violence are divided from positions of gratuitous violence (from the slave position). Here two kinds of “species” are produced and zoned beyond the pale of speech. The social distinction between Whites (or Humans) and Blacks can be neither assessed nor redressed by way of signifying practices alone because the social distinction between life and death cannot be spoken. “It is impossible to fully redress this pained condition without the occurrence of an event of epic and revolutionary proportions… the destruction of a racist social order” [my emphasis] (Hartman 77). In life, identification is limited only by the play of endless analogies, but death is like nothing at all. Perhaps psychoanalysis and the promise of full speech are not ready for the end of the world.

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1 The other pillar is Gramscian Marxism.
2 Thanks to Saidiya Hartman who suggested the moniker of Afro-Pessimism to me.
3 For an exposé on how anti-Blackness is foundational to the libidinal economy of multicultural political formations see Jared Sexton’s *Amalgamation Schemes*. Minneapolis: University of MN Press, 2008. For an analysis of how anti-Blackness is manifest in the political/social economy of multicultural political formations see George Yancey’s *Who is White? Latinos, Asians, and the New Black/Nonblack Divide.*
4 Email correspondence.
5 Melanie Klein’s emphasis on a normative progress of libidinal object choices ran counter to an emphasis on the analysand’s speech, an emphasis which Lacan believed should guide the course of analysis. He took Melanie Klein to task for her promotion of a psychoanalytic cure which centralized the “interplay of reality and fantasy.
in the subject’s choice of sexual objects,” otherwise known as Object Relations Theory. Secondly, new attention was being paid to the role of counter transference in the psychoanalytic encounter and thus to the importance, in training, of dealing with its typical manifestations (Lee 33-34). Through what Lacan considered to be a second theoretical “wrong turn” the ego (or Imaginary) of the analyst ran the risk of becoming entangled with the ego (or Imaginary) of the analysand, leading the psychoanalytic encounter through a perpetual hall of mirrors—empty or egoic reflections speaking to similarly empty, egoic, reflections, a process that could fortify and extend the interlocutory life of what Lacan called “empty speech.” This is why, “Throughout the course of the analysis, on the sole condition that the ego of the analyst does agree not to be there, on the sole condition that the analyst is not a living mirror, but an empty mirror, what happens happens between the ego of the subject…and the others” (Lacan, Seminar II 246). “The others” are what Lacan calls the analysand’s “contemporaries” (Ecrits 47). Or Lacan, the analytic encounter must bring the analysand to a place where s/he is able to see what s/he is depositing at the place of the analyst. If the analyst’s ego is present, if the analyst is not an empty mirror, then the analysand will not come to understand where s/he is in relation to the analyst. The place of the analyst will not become what, for Lacan, it should become, the Symbolic Other through which the analysand can hear his/her own language. For this to happen, the analyst must become a “headless,” or asexual, subject; a subject that mirrors nothing other than a void. In this way, and in this way only, will the analysand come to understand him/herself as a void papered over by language.

vi Here I am thinking alienation as a grammar psychoanalytically, that is through the framework of libidinal economy. In “The Ruse of Analogy” I think alienation through the framework of political economy.

vii See Loic Wacquant, “From Slavery to Mass Incarceration.”

viii Meaning Whites and their junior partners in civil society.

ix I am tweaking Fanon’s notion of decolonization to meet the needs of the post-emancipation subject (the slave) as opposed to the post-colonial subject (the native). I think Fanon himself does this in Black Skin, White Masks. When he writes The Wretched of the Earth, I would argue that he is often times ventriloquizing on behalf of the post-colonial subject. His letters to his brother seem to suggest how (if not why) he cannot be a “contemporary” of the Arab, even though they fight in the same guerrilla army against an enemy in common: France.

x Special thanks to Donovan Sherman, for helping me clarify this. Email correspondence, March 13, 2008.

xi “Between the years 1882 and 1968, lynching claimed, on average, at least one life a week. Almost 5,000 black men were lynched. In addition, black women, Jews, White cattle rustlers and a few white women became its objects. The practice began long before the Civil War but peaked during the backlash to Reconstruction, particularly during the decade just prior to World War I. [According to Leon Litwack]…the violence inflicted…was often selective, aimed at educated and successful Blacks, those in positions of leadership, those determined to improve themselves, those who owned farms and stores, those suspected of having saved their earnings, those who had just made a crop—that is, black men and women perceived by whites as have stepped out of their place, trying to be white.” Lynching ranged, geographically, from the San Jose, CA. to St. Paul, MN to Dixie. See Patricia J. Williams, “Without Sanctuary.” The Nation. February 14, 2000.

xii Donovan Sherman. Email Correspondence, March 13, 2008.