## 1

#### Pessimism polices blackness by forcing it to remain within a damned subject position—that precludes lines of flight which black people can pursue within nothingness since blackness is experienced differently by different people.

**Moten 8** Fred Moten, Ph.D Professor of English and African American Studies “The Case of Blackness.” 2008.

The cultural and political discourse on black pathology has been so pervasive that it could be said to constitute the background against which all representations of blacks, blackness, or (the color) black take place. Its manifestations have changed over the years, though it has always been poised between the realms of the pseudo-social scientifi c, the birth of new sciences, and the normative impulse that is at the heart of—but that strains against— the black radicalism that strains against it. From the origins of the critical philosophy in the assertion of its extra-rational foundations in teleological principle; to the advent and solidifi cation of empiricist human biology that moves out of the convergence of phrenology, criminology, and eugenics; to the maturation of (American) sociology in the oscillation between goodand bad-faith attendance to “the negro problem”; to the analysis of and discourse on psychopathology and the deployment of these in both colonial oppression and anticolonial resistance; to the regulatory metaphysics that undergirds interlocking notions of sound and color in aesthetic theory: blackness has been associated with a certain sense of decay, even when that decay is invoked in the name of a certain (fetishization of) vitality. Black radical discourse has often taken up, and held itself within, the stance of the pathologist. Going back to David Walker, at least, black radicalism is animated by the question, What’s wrong with black folk? The extent to which radicalism (here understood as the performance of a general critique of the proper) is a fundamental and enduring force in the black public sphere—so much so that even black “conservatives” are always constrained to begin by defi ning themselves in relation to it—is all but selfevident. Less self-evident is the normative striving against the grain of the very radicalism from which the desire for norms is derived. Such striving is directed toward those lived experiences of blackness that are, on the one hand, aligned with what has been called radical and, on the other hand, aligned not so much with a kind of being-toward-death but with something that has been understood as a deathly or death-driven nonbeing. This strife between normativity and the deconstruction of norms is essential not only to contemporary black academic discourse but also to the discourses of the barbershop, the beauty shop, and the bookstore. I’ll begin with a thought that doesn’t come from any of these zones, though it’s felt in them, strangely, since it posits the being of, and being in, these zones as an ensemble of specifi c impossibilities: As long as the black man is among his own, he will have no occasion, except in minor internal confl icts, to experience his being through others. There is of course the moment of “being for others,” of which Hegel speaks, but every ontology is made unattainable in a colonized and civilized society. It would seem that this fact has not been given enough attention by those who have discussed the question. In the Weltanschauung of a colonized people there is an impurity, a fl aw, that outlaws [interdit] any ontological explanation. Someone may object that this is the case with every individual, but such an objection merely conceals a basic problem. Ontology—once it is finally admitted as leaving existence by the wayside—does not permit us to understand the being of the black man. For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man. Some critics will take it upon themselves to remind us that the proposition has a converse. I say that this is false. The black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man.1 This passage, and the ontological (absence of) drama it represents, leads us to a set of fundamental questions. How do we think the possibility and the law of outlawed, impossible things? And if, as Frantz Fanon suggests, the black cannot be an other for another black, if the black can only be an other for a white, then is there ever anything called black social life? Is the designation of this or that thing as lawless, and the assertion that such lawlessness is a function of an already extant fl aw, something more than that trying, even neurotic, oscillation between the exposure and the replication of a regulatory maneuver whose force is held precisely in the assumption that it comes before what it would contain? What’s the relation between explanation and resistance? Who bears the responsibility of discovering an ontology of, or of discovering for ontology, the ensemble of political, aesthetic, and philosophical derangements that comprise the being that is neither for itself nor for the other? What form of life makes such discovery possible as well as necessary? Would we know it by its fl aws, its impurities? What might an impurity in a worldview actually be? Impurity implies a kind of non-completeness, if not absence, of a worldview. Perhaps that noncompleteness signals an originarily criminal refusal of the interplay of framing and grasping, taking and keeping—a certain reticence at the ongoing advent of the age of the world picture. Perhaps it is the reticence of the grasped, the enframed, the taken, the kept—or, more precisely, the reluctance that disrupts grasping and framing, taking and keeping—as epistemological stance as well as accumulative activity. Perhaps this is the fl aw that attends essential, anoriginal impurity—the fl aw that accompanies impossible origins and deviant translations.2 What’s at stake is fugitive movement in and out of the frame, bar, or whatever externally imposed social logic—a movement of escape, the stealth of the stolen that can be said, since it inheres in every closed circle, to break every enclosure. This fugitive movement is stolen life, and its relation to law is reducible neither to simple interdiction nor bare transgression. Part of what can be attained in this zone of unattainability, to which the eminently attainable ones have been relegated, which they occupy but cannot (and refuse to) own, is some sense of the fugitive law of movement that makes black social life ungovernable, that demands a para-ontological disruption of the supposed connection between explanation and resistance.3 This exchange between matters juridical and matters sociological is given in the mixture of phenomenology and psychopathology that drives Fanon’s work, his slow approach to an encounter with impossible black social life poised or posed in the break, in a certain intransitive evasion of crossing, in the wary mood or fugitive case that ensues between the fact of blackness and the lived experience of the black and as a slippage enacted by the meaning—or, perhaps too “trans-literally,” the (plain[-sung]) sense—of things when subjects are engaged in the representation of objects. The title of this essay, “The Case of Blackness,” is a spin on the title of the fi fth chapter of Fanon’s Black Skins, White Masks, infamously mistranslated as “the fact of blackness.” “The lived experience of the black” is more literal—“experience” bears a German trace, translates as Erlebnis rather than Tatsache, and thereby places Fanon within a group of postwar Francophone thinkers encountering phenomenology that includes Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Emmanuel Levinas, and Tran Duc Thao.4 The phrasing indicates Fanon’s veering off from an analytic engagement with the world as a set of facts that are available to the natural scientifi c attitude, so it’s possible to feel the vexation of certain commentators with what might be mistaken for a fl irtation with positivism. However, I want to linger in, rather than quickly jump over, the gap between fact and lived experience in order to consider the word “case” as a kind of broken bridge or cut suspension between the two. I’m interested in how the troubled, illicit commerce between fact and lived experience is bound up with that between blackness and the black, a difference that is often concealed, one that plays itself out not by way of the question of accuracy or adequation but by way of the shadowed emergence of the ontological difference between being and beings. Attunement to that difference and its modalities must be fi ne. Perhaps certain recalibrations of Fanon—made possible by insights to which Fanon is both given and blind—will allow us to show the necessity and possibility of another understanding of the ontological difference. In such an understanding, the political phonochoreography of being’s words bears a content that cannot be left by the wayside even if it is packaged in the pathologization of blacks and blackness in the discourse of the human and natural sciences and in the corollary emergence of expertise as the defi ning epistemological register of the modern subject who is in that he knows, regulates, but cannot be black. This might turn out to have much to do with the constitution of that locale in which “ontological explanation” is precisely insofar as it is against the law. One way to investigate the lived experience of the black is to consider what it is to be the dangerous—because one is, because we are (Who? We? Who is this we? Who volunteers for this already given imposition? Who elects this imposed affi nity? The one who is homelessly, hopefully, less and more?) the constitutive—supplement. What is it to be an irreducibly disordering, deformational force while at the same time being absolutely indispensable to normative order, normative form? This is not the same as, though it does probably follow from, the troubled realization that one is an object in the midst of other objects, as Fanon would have it. In their introduction to a rich and important collection of articles that announce and enact a new deployment of Fanon in black studies’ encounter with visual studies, Jared Sexton and Huey Copeland index Fanon’s formulation in order to consider what it is to be “the thing against which all other subjects take their bearing.”5 But something is left unattended in their invocation of Fanon, in their move toward equating objecthood with “the domain of non-existence” or the interstitial space between life and death, something to be understood in its difference from and relation to what Giorgio Agamben calls naked life, something they call raw life, that moves—or more precisely cannot move—in its forgetful non-relation to that quickening, forgetive force that Agamben calls the form of life Sexton and Copeland turn to the Fanon of Black Skins, White Masks, the phenomenologist of (the lived experience of) blackness, who provides for them the following epigraph: I came into the world imbued with the will to fi nd a meaning in things, my spirit fi lled 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. (Black Skins, 77) [J’arrivais dans le monde, soucieux de faire lever un sens aux choses, mon âme pleine du désir d’être à l’origine du monde, et voici que je me découvrais objet au milieu d’autres objets.]7 Fanon writes of entering the world with a melodramatic imagination, as Peter Brooks would have it—one drawn toward the occult installation of the sacred in things, gestures (certain events, as opposed to actions, of muscularity), and in the subterranean fi eld that is, paradoxically, signaled by the very cutaneous darkness of which Fanon speaks. That darkness turns the would-be melodramatic subject not only into an object but also into a sign—the hideous blackamoor at the entrance of the cave, that world underneath the world of light that Fanon will have entered, who guards and masks “our” hidden motives and desires.8 There’s a whole other economy of skins and masks to be addressed here. However, I will defer that address in order to get at something (absent) in Sexton and Copeland. What I am after is something obscured by the fall from prospective subject to object that Fanon recites—namely, a transition from thing(s) (choses) to object (objet) that turns out to version a slippage or movement that could be said to animate the history of philosophy. What if we bracket the movement from (erstwhile) subject to object in order to investigate more adequately the change from object to thing (a change as strange as that from the possibility of intersubjectivity that attends majority to whatever is relegated to the plane or plain of the minor)? What if the thing whose meaning or value has never been found finds things, founds things? What if the thing will have founded something against the very possibility of foundation and against all anti- or post-foundational impossibilities? What if the thing sustains itself in that absence or eclipse of meaning that withholds from the thing the horrific honorific of “object”? At the same time, what if the value of that absence or excess is given to us only in and by way of a kind of failure or inadequacy—or, perhaps more precisely, by way of a history of exclusion, serial expulsion, presence’s ongoing taking of leave—so that the non-attainment of meaning or ontology, of source or origin, is the only way to approach the thing in its informal (enformed/enforming, as opposed to formless), material totality? Perhaps this would be cause for black optimism or, at least, some black operations. Perhaps the thing, the black, is tantamount to another, fugitive, sublimity altogether. Some/thing escapes in or through the object’s vestibule; the object vibrates against its frame like a resonator, and troubled air gets out. The air of the thing that escapes enframing is what I’m interested in—an often unattended movement that accompanies largely unthought positions and appositions. To operate out of this interest might mispresent itself as a kind of refusal of Fanon.9 But my reading is enabled by the way Fanon’s texts continually demand that we read them—again or, deeper still, not or against again, but for the fi rst time. I wish to engage a kind of preop( tical) optimism in Fanon that is tied to the commerce between the lived experience of the black and the fact of blackness and between the thing and the object—an optimism recoverable, one might say, only by way of mistranslation, that bridged but unbridgeable gap that Heidegger explores as both distance and nearness in his discourse on “The Thing.” Michael Inwood moves quickly in his explication of Heidegger’s distinction between Ding and Sache: “Ding, ‘thing,’ is distinct from Sache, ‘thing, (subject-) matter, affair.’ Sache, like the Latin res, originally denoted a legal case or a matter of concern, while Ding was the ‘court’ or ‘assembly’ before which a case was discussed.”10 In Heidegger’s essay “Das Ding,” the speed of things is a bit more deliberate, perhaps so that the distinction between things and human affairs can be maintained against an explicatory velocity that threatens to abolish the distance between, which is also to say the nearness of, the two: “[T]he Old High German word thing means a gathering, and specifi - cally a gathering to deliberate on a matter under discussion, a contested matter. In consequence, the Old German words thing and ding become the names for an affair or matter of pertinence. They denote anything that in any way bears upon men, concerns them, and that accordingly is a matter for discourse.”11 The descent from Old High German to Old German is held here and matters. The trajectory of that descent is at issue such that we are to remain concerned with the detachment and proximity of “a gathering to deliberate” and “contested matter.” It might even be worthwhile to think of the gathering as contested matter, to linger in the break—the distance and nearness—between the thing and the case in the interest of the ones who are without interests but who are nevertheless a concern precisely because they gather, as they are gathered matter, the internally differentiated materiality of a collective head. The thing of it is, the case of blackness. THE CASE OF BLACKNESS 183 For Heidegger, the jug is an exemplary thing. The jug is a vessel; it holds something else within it. It is also “self-supporting, or independent.” But “[d]oes the vessel’s self-support alone defi ne the jug as a thing?” The potter makes the earthen jug out of earth that he has specially chosen and prepared for it. The jug consists of that earth. By virtue of what the jug consists of, it too can stand on the earth, either immediately or through the mediation of table and bench. What exists by such producing is what stands on its own, is self-supporting. When we take the jug as a made vessel, then surely we are apprehending it—so it seems—as a thing and never as a mere object. Or do we even now still take the jug as an object? Indeed. It is, to be sure, no longer considered only an object of a mere act of representation, but in return it is an object which a process of making has set up before and against us. Its selfsupport seems to mark the jug as a thing. But in truth we are thinking of this self-support in terms of the making process. Self-support is what the making aims at. But even so, the self-support is still thought of in terms of objectness, even though the over-againstness of what has been put forth is no longer grounded in mere representation, in the mere putting it before our minds. But from the objectness of the object, and from the product’s self-support, there is no way that leads to the thingness of the thing. (Heidegger 167) This is to say, importantly I think, that the “jug remains a vessel whether we represent it in our minds or not” (167). (Later Heidegger says: “Man can represent, no matter how, only what has previously come to light of its own accord and has shown itself to him in the light it brought with it” [171].) Its thingliness does not inhere in its having been made or produced or represented. For Heidegger, the thingliness of the thing, the jug, is precisely that which prompts its making. For Plato—and the tradition of representational thinking he codifi es, which includes Fanon—everything present is experienced as an object of making where “object” is understood, in what Heidegger calls its most precise expression, as “what stands forth” (rather than what stands before or opposite or against). In relation to Fanon, Kara Keeling calls upon us to think that which stands forth as project and as problem. Accordingly, I am after a kind of shadow or trace in Fanon—the moment in which phenomenology strains against its own, shall we say, reifi cation of a certain philosophical experience, its own problematic commitment to what 184 FRED MOTEN emerges from making, in order to get at “a meaning of things.” Though decisive and disruptive in ways that remain to be thought, that strain is momentary in Fanon, momentarily displaced precisely by that “representation of what is present, in the sense of what stands forth and of what stands over against as an object” that never, according to Heidegger, “reaches to the thing qua thing” (168–69). For Heidegger, the jug’s being, as vessel, is momentarily understood as being-in-its emptiness, the empty space that holds, the impalpable void brought forth by the potter as container. “And yet,” Heidegger asks, “Is the jug really empty” (169)? He argues that the jug’s putative emptiness is a semi-poetic misprision, that “the jug is fi lled with air and with everything that goes to make up the air’s mixture” (169). Perhaps the jug, as thing, is better understood as fi lled with an always already mixed capacity for content that is not made. This is something other than either poetic emptiness or a strictly scientifi c fullness that understands the fi lling of the jug as simple displacement. As Heidegger puts it, “Considered scientifi cally, to fi ll a jug means to exchange one fi lling for another.” He adds, These statements of physics are correct. By means of them, science represents something real, by which it is objectively controlled. But—is this reality the jug? No. Science always encounters only what its kind of representation has admitted beforehand as an object possible for science. . . . Science makes the jug-thing into a nonentity in not permitting things to be the standard for what is real. Science’s knowledge, which is compelling within its own sphere, the sphere of objects, already had annihilated things as things long before the atom bomb exploded. The bomb’s explosion is only the grossest of all gross confi rmations of the long-since-accomplished annihilation of the thing: the confi rmation that the thing as a thing remains nil. The thingness of the thing remains concealed, forgotten. The nature of the thing never comes to light, that is, it never gets a hearing. This is the meaning of our talk about the annihilation of the thing. (170) “The Lived Experience of the Black” bears not only a lament over Fanon’s own relegation to the status of object; it also contains a lament that it suppresses over the general annihilation of the thing to which transcendental phenomenology contributes insofar as it is concerned with Sachen, not Dinge, in what remains untranslatable as its direction toward the things themselves. Insofar as blackness remains the object of a complex disavowing claim in Fanon, one bound up precisely with his understanding of blackness as an impure product—as a function of a making that is not its own, an intentionality that could never have been its own—it could be said that Fanon moves within an economy of annihilation even though, at the same time, he mourns his own intentional comportment toward a hermeneutics of thingliness. Is blackness brought to light in Fanon’s ambivalence? Is blackness given a hearing—or, more precisely, does blackness give itself to a hearing—in his phenomenological description (which is not but nothing other than a representation) of it? Studying the case of blackness is inseparable from the case blackness makes for itself in spite and by way of every interdiction. In any case, it will have been as if one has come down with a case of blackness. Meanwhile, Heidegger remains with the question of the essential nature of the thing that “has never yet been able to appear” (171). He asks, What does the jug hold and how does it hold? “How does the jug’s void hold” (171)? By taking and keeping what it holds but also, and most fundamentally, in a way that constitutes the unity, the belonging together, of taking and keeping, in the outpouring of what is held. “The holding of the vessel occurs in the giving of the outpouring. . . . We call the gathering of the twofold holding into the outpouring, which, as being together, fi rst constitutes the full presence of giving: the poured gift. The jug’s jug-character consists in the poured gift of the pouring out. Even the empty jug retains its nature by virtue of the poured gift, even though the empty jug does not admit of a giving out” (172). What is it to speak of this outpouring, to speak of the thing, the vessel, in terms of what it gives, particularly when we take into account the horror of its being made to hold, the horror of its making that it holds or bears? This question is necessary and decisive precisely insofar as it insists upon a rough-hewn accompaniment to Heidegger’s talk of gift and consecration. Sometimes what is given is refusal. How does refusal elevate celebration? Heidegger invokes the “gush” as strong outpouring, as sacrifi - cial fl ow, but perhaps what accentuates the outpouring, what makes it more than “mere fi lling and decanting,” is a withholding that is aligned with refusal, a canted secret (173). At any rate, in the outpouring that is the essence of the thing/vessel dwells the Heideggerian fourfold of earth, sky, divinity, and mortals that precedes everything that is present or that is represented. The fourfold, as staying and as appropriation is where thing approaches, if not becomes, event. This gathering, this event of gathering, is, for Heidegger, what is denoted in the Old High German word “thing.” By way of Meister Eckhart, Heidegger asserts that “Thing is . . . the cautious and abstemious name for something that is at all.” He adds: Because the word thing as used in Western metaphysics denotes that which is at all and is something in some way or other, the meaning of the name “thing” varies with the 186 FRED MOTEN interpretation of that which is—of entities. Kant talks about things in the same way as Meister Eckhart and means by this term something that is. But for Kant, that which is becomes the object of a representing that runs its course in the selfconsciousness of the human ego. The thing-in-itself means for Kant: the object-in-itself. To Kant, the character of the “in-itself” signifi es that the object is an object in itself without reference to the human act of representing it, that is, without the opposing “ob-” by which it is fi rst of all put before the representing act. “Thing-in-itself,” thought in a rigorously Kantian way, means an object that is no object for us, because it is supposed to stand, stay put, without a possible before: for the human representational act that encounters it. (176–77) Meanwhile, in contradistinction to Kant, Heidegger thinks being neither as idea nor as position/objectness (the transcendental character of being posed) but as thing. He might be best understood as speaking out of a clearing, or a fl aw, that also constitutes a step back or away from the kind of thinking that produces worldviews or, at least, that particular worldview that accompanies what, for lack of a better turn, might be called intersubjection. Fanon offers, by way of retrospection, a reversal of that step back or away. In briefl y narrating the history of his own becoming-object, the trajectory of his own being-positioned in and by representational thinking, Fanon fatefully participates in that thinking and fails to depart from the “sphere of mere attitudes” (Heidegger 181). At the same time, Fanon, and the experience that he both carries and analyzes, places the Heideggerian distinction between being (thing) and Dasein—the being to whom understandings of being are given; the not, but nothing other than, human being—in a kind of jeopardy that was already implicit, however much it is held within an interplay between being overlooked and being overseen. So I’m interested in how the ones who inhabit the nearness and distance between Dasein and things (which is off to the side of what lies between subjects and objects), the ones who are attained or accumulated unto death even as they are always escaping the Hegelian positioning of the bondsman, are perhaps best understood as the extra-ontological, extra-political constant—a destructive, healing agent; a stolen, transplanted organ always eliciting rejection; a salve whose soothing lies in the abrasive penetration of the merely typical; an ensemble always operating in excess of that ancient juridical formulation of the thing (Ding), to which Kant subscribes, as that to which nothing can be imputed, the impure, degraded, manufactured (in) THE CASE OF BLACKNESS 187 human who moves only in response to inclination, whose refl exes lose the name of action. At the same time, this dangerous supplement, as the fact out of which everything else emerges, is constitutive. It seems to me that this special ontic-ontological fugitivity of/in the slave is what is revealed as the necessarily unaccounted for in Fanon. So that in contradistinction to Fanon’s protest, the problem of the inadequacy of any ontology to blackness, to that mode of being for which escape or apposition and not the objectifying encounter with otherness is the prime modality, must be understood in its relation to the inadequacy of calculation to being in general. Moreover, the brutal history of criminalization in public policy, and at the intersection of biological, psychological, and sociological discourse, ought not obscure the already existing ontic-ontological criminality of/as blackness. Rather, blackness needs to be understood as operating at the nexus of the social and the ontological, the historical and the essential. Indeed, as the ontological is moving within the corrosive increase that the ontic instantiates, it must be understood that what is now meant by ontological requires special elucidation. What is inadequate to blackness is already given ontologies. The lived experienced of blackness is, among other things, a constant demand for an ontology of disorder, an ontology of dehiscence, a para-ontology whose comportment will have been (toward) the ontic or existential fi eld of things and events. That ontology will have had to have operated as a general critique of calculation even as it gathers diaspora as an open set—or as an openness disruptive of the very idea of set—of accumulative and unaccumulable differences, differings, departures without origin, leavings that continually defy the natal occasion in general even as they constantly bespeak the previous. This is a Nathaniel Mackey formulation whose full implications will have never been fully explorable.12 What Fanon’s pathontological refusal of blackness leaves unclaimed is an irremediable homelessness common to the colonized, the enslaved, and the enclosed. This is to say that what is claimed in the name of blackness is an undercommon disorder that has always been there, that is retrospectively and retroactively located there, that is embraced by the ones who stay there while living somewhere else. Some folks relish being a problem. As Amiri Baraka and Nikhil Pal Singh (almost) say, “Black(ness) is a country” (and a sex) (that is not one).13 Stolen life disorders positive value just as surely as it is not equivalent to social death or absolute dereliction. So if we cannot simply give an account of things that, in the very fugitivity and impossibility that is the essence of their existence, resist accounting, how do we speak of the lived experience of the black? What limits are placed on such speaking when it comes from the position of the black, but also what constraints are placed on the very concept of lived experience, particularly in its relation to the black when black social life is interdicted? Note that the interdiction exists not only as a function of what might be broadly understood as policy but also as a function of an epistemological consensus broad enough to include Fanon, on the one hand, and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, on the other—encompassing formulations that might be said not only to characterize but also to initiate and continually re-initialize the philosophy of the human sciences. In other words, the notion that there is no black social life is part of a set of variations on a theme that include assertions of the irreducible pathology of black social life and the implication that (non-pathological) social life is what emerges by way of the exclusion of the black or, more precisely, of blackness. But what are we to make of the pathological here? What are the implications of a social life that, on the one hand, is not what it is and, on the other hand, is irreducible to what it is used for? This discordant echo of one of Theodor W. Adorno’s most infamous assertions about jazz implies that black social life reconstitutes the music that is its phonographic.14 That music, which Miles Davis calls “social music,” to which Adorno and Fanon gave only severe and partial hearing, is of interdicted black social life operating on frequencies that are disavowed—though they are also amplifi ed—in the interplay of sociopathological and phenomenological description. How can we fathom a social life that tends toward death, that enacts a kind of being-toward-death, and which, because of such tendency and enactment, maintains a terribly beautiful vitality? Deeper still, what are we to make of the fact of a sociality that emerges when lived experience is distinguished from fact, in the fact of life that is implied in the very phenomenological gesture/analysis within which Fanon asserts black social life as, in all but the most minor ways, impossible? How is it that the off harmony of life, sociality, and blackness is the condition of possibility of the claim that there is no black social life? Does black life, in its irreducible and impossible sociality and precisely in what might be understood as its refusal of the status of social life that is refused it, constitute a fundamental danger—an excluded but immanent disruption—to social life? What will it have meant to embrace this matrix of im/possibility, to have spoken of and out of this suspension? What would it mean to dwell on or in minor social life? This set of questions is imposed upon us by Fanon. At the same time, and in a way that is articulated most clearly and famously by W. E. B. Du Bois, this set of questions is the position, which is also to say the problem, of blackness.

#### **There is social life in political death. Slavery was political death in which black folk were neglected from civil society. This political death does not correlate to social death of black people.**

**Moten 13** Fred Moten, Ph.D Professor of English and African American Studies (“Blackness and Nothingness Mysticism in the Flesh”) The South Atlantic Quarterly 2013)Mberhe

Over the course of this essay, we’ll have occasion to consider what that means, by way of a discussion of my preference for the terms life and optimism over death and pessimism and in the light of Wilderson’s and Sexton’s brilliant insistence not only upon the preferential option for blackness but also upon the requirement of the most painstaking and painful attention to our damnation, a term I prefer to wretchedness, after the example of Miguel Mellino, not simply because it is a more literal translation of Fanon (though often, with regard to Fanon, I prefer the particular kinds of precision that follow from what some might dismiss as mistranslation) but also because wretchedness emerges from a standpoint that is not only not ours, that is not only one we cannot have and ought not want, but that is, in general, held within the logic of im/possibility that delineates what subjects and citizens call the real world (Mellino 2013). But this is to say, from the outset, not that I will advocate the construction of a necessarily fictive standpoint of our own but that I will seek to begin to explore not just the absence but the refusal of standpoint, to actually explore and to inhabit and to think what Bryan Wagner (2009: 1) calls “existence without standing” from no standpoint because this is what it would truly mean to remain in the hold of the ship (when the hold is thought with properly critical, and improperly celebratory, clarity). What would it be, deeper still, what is it, to think from no standpoint; to think outside the desire for a standpoint? What emerges in the desire that constitutes a certain proximity to that thought is not (just) that blackness is ontologically prior to the logistic and regulative power that is supposed to have brought it into existence but that blackness is prior to ontology; or, in a slight variation of what Chandler would say, blackness is the anoriginal displacement of ontology, that it is ontology’s anti- and ante-foundation, ontology’s underground, the irreparable disturbance of ontology’s time and space. This is to say that what I do assert, not against, I think, but certainly in apposition to Afro-pessimism, as it is, at least at one point, distilled in Sexton’s work, is not what he calls one of that project’s most polemical dimensions, “namely, that black life is not social, or rather that black life is lived in social death” (Sexton 2011b: 28). What I assert is this: that black life—which is as surely to say life as black thought is to say thought—is irreducibly social; that, moreover, black life is lived in political death or that it is lived, if you will, in the burial ground of the subject by those who, insofar as they are not subjects, are also not, in the interminable (as opposed to the last) analysis, “death-bound,” as Abdul JanMohamed (2005) would say. In this, however, I also agree with Sexton insofar as I am inclined to call this burial ground “the world” and to conceive of it and the desire for it as pathogenic. At stake, now, will be what the difference is between the pathogenic and the pathological, a difference that will have been instantiated by what we might think of as the view, as well as the point of view, of the pathologist. I don’t think I ever claimed, or meant to claim, that Afro-pessimism sees blackness as a kind of pathogen. I think I probably do, or at least hope that it is, insofar as I bear the hope that blackness bears or is the potential to end the world. The question concerning the point of view, or standpoint, of the pathologist is crucial but so is the question of what it is that the pathologist examines. What, precisely, is the morbid body upon which Fanon, the pathologist, trains his eye? What is the object of his “complete lysis” (Fanon 2008: xiv)? And if it is more proper, because more literal, to speak of a lysis of universe, rather than body, how do we think the relation between transcendental frame and the body, or nobody, that occupies, or is banished from, its confines and powers of orientation? What I offer here as a clarifi- cation of Sexton’s understanding of my relation to Afro-pessimism emerges from my sense of a kind of terminological dehiscence in Orlando Patterson’s (1982) work that emerges in what I take to be his deep but unacknowledged affinity with and indebtedness to the work of Hannah Arendt, namely, with a distinction crucial to her work between the social and the political. The “secular excommunication” that describes slavery for Patterson (1982: 5) is more precisely understood as the radical exclusion from a political order, which is tantamount, in Arendt’s formulation, with something on the order of a radical relegation to the social. The problem with slavery, for Patterson, is that it is political death, not social death; the problem is that slavery confers the paradoxically stateless status of the merely, barely living; it delineates the inhuman as unaccommodated bios. At stake is the transvaluation or, better yet, the invaluation or antivaluation, the extraction from the sciences of value (and from the very possibility of that necessarily fictional, but materially brutal, standpoint that Wagner [2009: 1] calls “being a party to exchange”). Such extraction will, in turn, be the very mark and inscription (rather than absence or eradication) of the sociality of a life, given in common, instantiated in exchange. What I am trying to get to, by way of this terminological slide in Patterson, is the consideration of a radical disjunction between sociality and the state-sanctioned, state-sponsored terror of power-laden intersubjectivity, which is, or would be, the structural foundation of Patterson’s epiphenomenology of spirit. To have honor, which is, of necessity, to be a man of honor, for Patterson, is to become a combatant in transcendental subjectivity’s perpetual civil war. To refuse the induction that Patterson desires is to enact or perform the recognition of the constitution of civil society as enmity, hostility, and civil butchery. It is, moreover, to consider that the unspoken violence of political friendship constitutes a capacity for alignment and coalition that is enhanced by the unspeakable violence that is done to what and whom the political excludes. This is to say that, yes, I am in total agreement with the Afro-pessimistic understanding of blackness as exterior to civil society and, moreover, as unmappable within the cosmological grid of the transcendental subject. However, I understand civil society and the coordinates of the transcendental aesthetic—cognate as they are not with the failed but rather with the successful state and its abstract, equivalent citizens—to be the fundamentally and essentially antisocial nursery for a necessarily necropolitical imitation of life. So that if Afro-pessimists say that social life is not the condition of black life but is, rather, the political field that would surround it, then that’s a formulation with which I would agree. Social death is not imposed upon blackness by or from the standpoint or positionality of the political; rather, it is the field of the political, from which blackness is relegated to the supposedly undifferentiated mass or blob of the social, which is, in any case, where and what blackness chooses to stay. This question of the location and position of social death is, as Sexton has shown far more rigorously than I could ever hope to do, crucial. It raises again that massive problematic of inside and outside that animates thought since before its beginning as the endless end to which thought always seeks Moten û Blackness and Nothingness 741 to return. Such mappability of the space-time or state of social death would, in turn, help us better understand the positionalities that could be said, figuratively, to inhabit it. This mass is understood to be undifferentiated precisely because from the imaginary perspective of the political subject—who is also the transcendental subject of knowledge, grasp, ownership, and selfpossession—difference can only be manifest as the discrete individuality that holds or occupies a standpoint. From that standpoint, from the artificial, officially assumed position, blackness is nothing, that is, the relative nothingness of the impossible, pathological subject and his fellows. I believe it is from that standpoint that Afro-pessimism identifies and articulates the imperative to embrace that nothingness which is, of necessity, relative. It is from this standpoint, which Wilderson defines precisely by his inability to occupy it, that he, in a painfully and painstakingly lyrical tour de force of autobiographical writing, declares himself to be nothing and proclaims his decision, which in any case he cannot make, to remain as nothing, in genealogical and sociological isolation even from every other nothing. Now, all that remains are unspoken scraps scattered on the floor like Lisa’s grievance. I am nothing, Naima, and you are nothing: the unspeakable answer to your question within your question. This is why I could not— would not—answer your question that night. Would I ever be with a Black woman again? It was earnest, not accusatory—I know. And nothing terrifies me more than such a question asked in earnest. It is a question that goes to the heart of desire, to the heart of our black capacity to desire. But if we take out the nouns that you used (nouns of habit that get us through the day), your question to me would sound like this: Would nothing ever be with nothing again? (Wilderson 2008: 265) When one reads the severity and intensity of Wilderson’s words—his assertion of his own nothingness and the implications of that nothingness for his reader—one is all but overwhelmed by the need for a kind of affirmative negation of his formulation. It’s not that one wants to say no, Professor Wilderson, you are, or I am, somebody; rather, one wants to assert the presence of something between the subjectivity that is refused and which one refuses and nothing, whatever that is. But it is the beauty—the fantastic, celebratory force of Wilderson’s and Sexton’s work, which study has allowed me to begin more closely to approach—of Afro-pessimism that allows and compels one to move past that contradictory impulse to affirm in the interest of negation and to begin to consider what nothing is, not from its own standpoint or from any standpoint but from the absoluteness of its generative dispersion of a general antagonism that blackness holds and protects in as critical celebration and degenerative and regenerative preservation. That’s the mobility of place, the fugitive field of unowning, in and from which we ask, paraontologically, by way of but also against and underneath the ontological terms at our disposal: What is nothingness? What is thingliness? What is blackness? What’s the relationship between blackness, thingliness, nothingness and the (de/re)generative operations of what Deleuze might call a life in common? Where do we go, by what means do we begin, to study blackness? Can there be an aesthetic sociology or a social poetics of nothingness? Can we perform an anatomy of the thing or produce a theory of the universal machine? Our aim, even in the face of the brutally imposed difficulties of black life, is cause for celebration. This is not because celebration is supposed to make us feel good or make us feel better, though there would be nothing wrong with that. It is, rather, because the cause for celebration turns out to be the condition of possibility of black thought, which animates the black operations that will produce the absolute overturning, the absolute turning of this motherfucker out. Celebration is the essence of black thought, the animation of black operations, which are, in the first instance, our undercommon, underground, submarine sociality.

#### Social death reduces blackness to nothing but being- the alternatives mysticism is a fugitive escape from ontology, which is key to any form of hope

Warren 16, Calvin is a black nihilist and is an assistant professor at Emory university on African American studies (“ Fred Motens Pheneology of the Black Spirit” 2016)MBerhe

Afro-pessimism and Black Mysticism are inseparable compliments or mutually constitutive when discussing, as Jared Sexton would call it following Jacques Derrida, the “supplementary logic of the copula.” Before I delve into this “supplementary logic of the copula” let me first say a word about metaphysics, since it is shares a philosophical affinity with certain aspects of mysticism and it is the source of anti-black violence in modernity. The history of metaphysics is complex, and it is often difficult to pin down the term within the philosophical cannon. Although Kant, Hegel, and Marx would consider themselves “post-metaphysical,” Heidegger read them in another way. In his Introduction to Metaphysics he describes metaphysics as a particularly violent episteme, one that reduced the grandeur of Being into a schematized, calculable, object of science—metaphysics is the objectification of Being. This thread of metaphysics runs deep in the philosophical tradition and, in this sense, I think of Moten as a “neo-Heideggerian” because he wants to abandon, if not destroy, traditional ontology and metaphysics—since it is ontology that distorts blackness and limits it to nothing more than forms of being. Moten reads African American Criticism in much the same way Heidegger read philosophy from Plato onward: He identifies the preoccupation of African American Criticism with blackness as being (e.g. people, things, etc) instead of Blackness as transcendental horizon (by this I mean that which escapes ontology, paraontology). African American Criticism has forgotten Blackness because it is preoccupied with the critique of political ontology (blackness as things). African American criticism, within this framework, is not really studying Blackness at all, but Western Civilization and political ontology. African American Criticism and Black Studies are not synonymous, for Moten, and his philosophical enterprise is situated within “the break” between the two. What Moten and Afro-pessimists share is a deep understanding of the relationship between Blackness and ontology—a relation that Heidegger could not, or would not, envision because of his Eurocentric perspective on being and Dasein. But unlike Heidegger, Moten does not abandon the theological imagination or the mystical impulse. It is precisely this mysticism that provides our fugitive escape from the confines of ontology. Thus, mysticism is not inimical to freedom; it is the only aspect of existence that provides hope. Because of this, Moten often appropriates seemingly mystical concepts in post-metaphysical writing: Heidegger’s “Thing,” Kant’s “unruly imagination,” Agamben’s “form-of life,” Leibniz’s “timelessness,” among others, all become mystical elements within his formulation of paraontology. Ironically, he reads Heidegger against Heidegger to develop a more robust critique of metaphysical violence than Heidegger himself. Moten is re-writing onto-theology in another register; he uses Eastern philosophy (e.g. Buddhism) and “mystical post-metaphysics” to imagine a flight from ontology, a place beyond the arid terrain of political ontology. His yearning to escape the brutal physicality of ontology results in a form of “mysticism in the flesh.”

#### **The alternative defends para-ontology- which maintains hope and the possibility for life through the social, while acknowledging political death- we are mutually exclusive**

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The metaphysical distinction between Blackness and blacks and paraontology and political ontology is also articulated through another binary distinction—social life and political death. It is within this distinction that the tension between Afro-pessimism and Moten’s black mysticism becomes most prominent. Most of this tension is semantic: the choice between “social death” and “political death” or “social life” and “political life.” For Moten, this sematic tension is a deep philosophical problematic because these signifiers carry philosophical baggage that is not always unpacked. At base, the philosophical tension boils down to the difference between “social death” and “political death”—what Moten calls “terminological dehiscence.” The terms “Social” and “Political” are often used interchangeably to describe the condition of anti-blackness and the particular enframing of this violence. It is the existential mapping of blackness that concerns Moten, and how our notion of blackness shifts given where blackness is placed. We can locate the origin of this tension in a foundational text of Afro-pessimism, Orlando Patterson’s Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Analysis. In this text, Patterson describes the condition of captivity as social death, which entails general dishonor, natal alienation, Civil “excommunication,” and forms of what Frank Wilderson would describe as “gratuitous violence.” Why does Patterson use the term “social” when what he seems to be describing is the realm of the political? This is the question that frustrates and invigorates Moten. His answer to this question adumbrates semantic confusion on Patterson’s part—he suggests that Patterson (mis)translates or (mis)appropriates Hannah Arendt’s distinction between the “social” and the “political”: What I offer here as a clarification of Sexton’s understanding of my relation to Afro-pessimism emerges from my sense of a kind of terminological dehiscence in Orlando Patterson’s (1982) work that emerges in what I take to be his deep but unacknowledged affinity with and indebtedness to the work of Hannah Arendt, namely, with a distinction crucial to her work between the social and the political. The “secular excommunication” that describes slavery for Patterson (1982:5) is more precisely understood as the radical exclusion from a political order, which is tantamount, in Arendt’s formulation, with something on the order of a radical relegation to the social. The problem with slavery, for Patterson, is that it is political death, not social death; the problem is that slavery confers the paradoxically stateless status of the merely, barely living; it delineates the inhuman as unaccomodated bios. Captivity, then, is the forced relegation of Blackness to the social because the political is foreclosed as a viable option (this existential mapping delimits the only options as the “political” or the “social”). Anti-blackness works its violence through this foreclosure, and it is this foreclosure that Patterson attempts to capture with his term “social death.” But “social death” is an unfortunate misnomer or intellectual sloppiness, given the primary form of exclusion that preoccupies Patterson’s work is the captive’s (non)relation to the political. Hannah Arendt relies on a rigid distinction between the “social” and the “political” to ground her Aristotelian theory of “action.” For her, the social constitutes the realm of necessity—those essential entities that secure the promulgation of life and survival of the citizen. The political, on the other hand, is the privileged space of unencumbered action and participation within the public sphere. It is the realm of the citizen. Arendt’s theory of political action parasitically relies on the excluded social—if the basic issues of living aren’t secure, it becomes difficult for the citizen to exercise freedom in the public because his creative energy would be spent securing necessity. Thus, the essentiality of slavery for Aristotle and Arendt: the slave, excluded from the political, is relegated to the social to free up the citizen’s creative (political) energy. Historically, necessity has been epidermalized in modernity, and Blackness has become the sign of such oppressive necessity. Part of the problem with anti-blackness, then, is the conflation of Blackness with an oppressive social, where the “social,” historically at least, is a synonym for slavery and oppression. It is this theoretical lineage that Moten believes orients Patterson’s term “social death.” Since the social is the realm of exclusion, rightlessness, and dispossession, then what the black experiences in modernity is tantamount to “death,” following Patterson’s rationale—the black becomes mere property in an anti-black social. The Afro-pessimistic belief in the futility of the social/political distinction is what Moten adamantly refuses. Thus, the tension does not reside in whether anti-blackness excludes blacks from Civil society (which separates Moten from black optimists who believe in political transformation), but in the utility of the social. What Moten wants to conceptualize by way of this terminological slide in Patterson, is the consideration of a radical disjunction between sociality and state sanctioned, state sponsored terror of power-laden intersubjectivity, which is, or would be, the structural foundation of Patterson’s epiphenomenology of spirit…this is to say that, yes, I am in total agreement with Afro-pessimistic understanding of blackness as exterior to civil society and, moreover, as unmappable within the cosmological grid of the transcendental subject. However, I understand civil society and the coordinates of the transcendental aesthetic—cognate as they are not with the failed but rather with the successful state and its abstract, equivalent citizens—to be the fundamentally and essentially anti-social nursery for a necessarily necropolitical imitation of life. So that if Afro-pessimists say that social [death] is not the condition of black life but is, rather, the political field that would surround it, then that’s a formulation with which I would agree. Social death is not imposed upon blackness by or from the standpoint or postionality of the political; rather, it is the field of the political, from which blackness is relegated to the supposedly undifferentiated mass or blob of the social, which is, in any case, where and what blackness chooses to stay. Thus, the transcendental, abstract subject of political ontology and state sanctioned terror comprise the “anti-social nursery” of the political. Social death is a particular synonym for the political field in Moten’s analysis. In other words, what Patterson and Afro-pessimists consider social death is not social at all, but the death-scape of the political. In Moten’s analysis, we have so confused the social with the political that we lack a proper analysis of the social and its potentiality. The relegation of Blackness to the social is not a death sentence at all for Moten, rather, it the site of dynamic possibility, fugitivity, and a mystical transcendence (not the flawed universalism of political ontology, but a transcendence that fractures, exceeds, and precedes traditional transcendental subjectivity). The social becomes akin to a sacred space and it refuses complete closure by the forces of anti-blackness. There is something about the social that is indomitable, untranslatable, and mystical for Moten—we might call this “something” Spirit in contradistinction to Orlando Patterson’s “epiphenomenology of spirit,” which privileges the terrain of political ontology and keeps blackness embattled in a failed struggle for recognition. Moten wants to redefine the terms of existence away from the pursuit of recognized ontology, since ontology and Blackness are unavailable for each other. The social offers a mystical space of existential reconfiguration. In “The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-pessimism and Black Optimism,” Jared Sexton destabilizes this distinction by suggesting the mutual dependence or even indissociability of social life and social death: To speak of black social life and social death, black social life against black social death, black social life as black social death, black social life in black social death—all of this is to find oneself in the midst of an argument that is also a profound agreement, an agreement that takes shape in (between) meconnaisance and (dis)belief. Black optimism is not the negation of the negation that is afro-pessimism, just as black social life does not negate black social death by inhabiting it and vitalizing it. A living death is as much a death as it is a living. Nothing in afro-pessimism suggests that there is no black (social) life, only that black life is not social life in the universe formed by the codes of state and civil society, of citizen and subject, of nation and culture, of people and place, of history and heritage, of all the things that colonial society has in common with the colonized, of all hat capital has in common with labor—the modern world system. In Sexton’s brilliant analysis, when a “living death is as much a death as it is a living,” the terms “death” and “life” must be reconfigured or rethought in relation to blacks in an anti-black world. Thus, the distinction between “social life” and “political death” is really a philosophical inquiry of what it means to “live” and to “die” in an anti-black world. The problem, then, is that we lack a grammar outside ontology to describe “life” and “death.” Because the terms of life and death are defined by an anti-black Order, the distinction between the two blurs into conceptual chaos: this is the condition of black suffering in the New World. The social life and political death distinction that Moten emphasizes seems to be a yearning for “life” within anti-blackness (i.e. life within the hold of the slave ship). If this “life” is found in the “social,” then the “social” must be protected at all cost from the destructive deconstruction of its boundaries (which, ultimately, is the aim of an afro-pessimistic analysis—to deconstruct these boundaries and expose the absurdity of the political architecture). Although Moten is most certainly correct that theorists haven’t handled the distinctions between “political death,” “social death,” and “social life” with care, once we sort through the sematic sloppiness of it all we must contend with the fundamental issue at hand: what type of life is possible for blacks in an anti-black world? What does this life entail? It becomes clear that Moten must reject “social death” because the social offers the only possibility of life along the existential cartography of political death. The stakes are exceptionally high here. If there is an irresolvable difference between Afro-pessimists and Black Mystics, it is the “form” that life assumes in anti-blackness—since both agree that death is the landscape of anti-blackness.

#### Both strategies are incompatible together—they don’t get a permutation.

Warren 16 Calvin is a black nihilist and is an assistant professor at Emory university on African American studies (“ Fred Motens Phenology of the Black Spirit” 2016) MBerhe

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## Case

#### The Affirmative’s forecloses the interior by tying blackness to public resistance via debate. They make resistance and blackness interchangeable where blackness can only exist through a social or political lense. This politics of representation recreates antiblack violence by denying the “inner life” of blackness, making their confrontation of antiblackness within this space nothing more than discursive. Materially blackening debate requires Black Quiet – this turn to the interior refuses to equate life and protest, opening up spaces for black life that ontology framing can never access.

**Quashie**, professor of Afro-American Studies, **2012**

(Kevin Everod, Ph.D. in English from Arizona State University, "The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture", pp. 10)

This book explores what **a concept of quiet** could mean to how we think about black culture. The exploration **is a shift in how we commonly under- stand blackness, which is often described as expressive, dramatic, or loud. These qualities inherently reflect the equivalence between resistance and blackness**. Resistance is, in fact, the dominant expectation we have of black culture. Indeed, this expectation is so widely familiar that it does not require explanation or qualification; it is practically unconscious. These assumptions are noticeable in the ways that blackness serves as an emblem of social ailment and progress. ln an essay from his 1957 collection White Man Listen!, Richard Wright captures this sentiment, noting that "The Negro is America`s metaphor" (log). Wright`s comment might be hyperbolic. but it also summarizes the exceptional role that black experience has played in American social consciousness: **Blackness** here **is not a term of intimacy or human vagary but of publicness**. One result of this dynamic is a quality of self-consciousness in black literature, a hyper- awareness of a reader whose presence-whether critical or sympathetic- shapes what is expressed. Such self-consciousness is an example of the concept of doubleness that has become the preeminent trope of black cultural studies. The result is that black culture is celebrated for the exemplary ways it employs doubleness as well as for its capacity to manipulate social opinion and challenge racism. **This is the politics of representation. where black subjectivity exists for its social and political meaningfulness rather than as a marker of the human individuality of the person who is black**. As an identity, blackness is always supposed to tell us something about race or racism, or about America. or violence and struggle and triumph or poverty and hopefulness. **The determination to see blackness only through a social public lens,** as if there were no inner life**, is racist-it comes from the language of racial superiority and is a practice intended to dehumanize black people.** But it has also been adopted by black culture, especially in terms of nationalism, but also more generally: it creeps into the consciousness of the black subject, especially the artist, as the imperative to represent. Such expectation is part of the inclination to understand black culture through a lens of resistance, and it practically thwarts other ways of reading. **All of this suggests that the common frameworks for thinking about blackness are limited**. **Resistance is hard to argue against**, since it has been so essential to every black freedom movement. **And yet resistance is too broad a term**-it is too clunky and vague and imprecise to be a catch-all for a whole range of behaviors and ambitions. It is not nuanced enough to characterize the totality of black culture or expression. Resistance exists, for sure, and deserves to be named and studied. And still. sometimes, when **the term "resistance" is used, what is being described is something finer**. There is an instructive example of this tension in Stephanie Camps Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South, a compelling work on the lives of black women during slavery. As Camp`s title suggests, the frame for the book is resistance, the ways that black women`s everyday lives ("private, concealed, and even intimate worlds") constitute a defiance of the vagaries of enslavement. Like Deborah Gray White and others before her. Camp notices how black women’s acts of resistance appear in day-to- day activities as much as (if not more than) in formal planned rebellions or revolts. And yet even Camp realizes that the meaning **of black women`s everyday lives was not shaped entirely by their engagement with and resistance to the institution of slavery-that black women and men who were enslaved grew gardens and decorated their living spaces and organized parties in the woods** (the chapter "The intoxication of Pleasurable Amusement: Secret Parties and the Politics of the Body" is beautifully imagined and written). **The point here is not to dismiss the intensity and vulgarity of slavery's violence on black people, but instead to restore a broader picture of the humanity of the people who were enslaved**. Under Camp's careful eye. these women's everyday lives are brought into fuller relief and even if Camp reads these lives as moments of resistance, their aliveness jumps out beyond that equation to offer something more! **The case for quiet is**, implicitly, **an argument against the limits of blackness as a concept**; as such, this book exists alongside many others that have questioned the boundaries of racial identity. These include recent scholarly work by Robert Reid-Pharr, Paul Gilroy, Thomas Holt, Michelle Wright, Gene Andrew Jarrett, Kenneth Warren, Kimberly Michele Brown, Hazel Carby. Trey Ellis, Thelma Golden, and especially David Lionel Smith, whose essay "What Is Black Culture?" is dazzling and indispensible. There is also a large body of work by black women scholars, especially since the 1970, that has posed consistent challenges to the singularity of race. The specific concern about the dominance of resistance as a framework, however, is exposed by black artists who have always struggled with the politics of representation. From Zadie Smith, Afaa M. Weaver, and Rita Dove, to Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, and Ralph Ellison, the black artist lives within the crosshairs of publicness and, if she or he is to produce meaningful work, has to construct a consciousness that exists beyond the expectation of resistance. Inspired by these artists, this argument for quiet aims to give up resistance as a framework in search of what is lost in its all- encompassing reach! Resistance, yes, but other capacities too. Like quiet. **The idea of quiet is compelling because the term is not fancy it is an everyday word but it is also conceptual.** Quiet is often used interchange-ably with silence or stillness, but the notion of quiet in the pages that follow is neither motionless nor without sound. **Quiet**, instead, **is a metaphor for the full range of one’s inner life, one's desires, ambitions, hungers, vulnerabilities, fears. The inner life is not apolitical or without social value, but neither is it determined entirely by publicness**. In fact, the interior- dynamic and ravishing-is a stay against the dominance of the social world; it has its own sovereignty. It is hard to see, even harder to describe, but no less potent in its ineffability. Quiet. In humanity, quiet is inevitable, essential. It is a simple, beautiful part of what it means to be alive. It is already there, if one is looking to understand it. An aesthetic of quiet is not incompatible with black culture, but to notice and understand it requires a shift in how we read, what we look for, and what we expect, even what I’ve remain open to. It requires paying attention in a different way. This point about how we read is especially relevant to the image in the frontispiece, Whitfield Lovell`s KIN VII (Scent of Magnolia). Lovell is a giant in contemporary art, a 2007 MacArthur fellow whose work has been show cased at the Smithsonian, the Whitney, the MOMA, and in various other locations in the United States and abroad. His most well-known exhibits, Whispers from the Walls and Sanctuary, consist of a series of tableaux and full room installations that display the daily lives of anonymous African Americans. In these installations, charcoal drawings of posed studio photo- graphs found at flea markets or town archives (largely from the woos to the 19405) are paired with various objects (boxing gloves, a knife, barbed wire, a bucket). The drawings are made on pieces of wood-parts offences or walls-and seem to bring domestic scenes to life. More recently, in a stunning collection entitled Kin, Lovell has continued drawing portraits of anonymous black people, though this time on paper: these figures are made from identification photographs (headshots from passports or mug shots, for example) and are often paired with an object. Critics note the dignity of Lovell's figures, which is a tribute to his skill in drawing: His portraits render their subjects in terrific clarity (the intensity in the eyes, the defined neck and cheek, the textured quality of the hair). His use of shadow is astute, and the result is images of people who look like people not symbols of a discourse of racism, but people in the everyday. wary and resolute, alive. T|1ey look familiar to us even if it is rare to see black faces represented in such a studied, elegant way. But the dignity is related also to the pairing of image and artifact, the clean juxtaposition of locating each near the other without abrasion or overlap. This doesn`t really create a sense of doubleness because the portrait is intended to be prominent; still proximity is contagion, and the artifact insinuates itself on the portrait. In KIN VII (Scent of Magnolia) the cloth wreath becomes part of the male figure`s body. marking the place where one might expect a shirt collar, a piece of jewelry, the outline of a chest. Localized and domesticated, the wreath's randomness becomes specific to this bold beautiful black face. And the subject is clarified by the artifact: Are these flowers from his room, a private and unusual explosion of color? The flowers he gave to a date or the ones he brought to a funeral? A sign of his desire to visit all the world's spectacular gardens? We might pick up the title's reference to Billie Holiday's thick voice on "Strange Fruit" ["scent of magnolia sweet and fresh/the sudden smell of burning flesh") which might lead to a more ominous reading his killed body marked by a wreath-but it is unsatisfying to be so singular and definitive with this image. Because of the flowers, he can be a subject more than an emblem; we can wonder if he loved pink and purple tones, without ignoring the possibility of racist violence. Whatever the story, the flowers are a surprise that interrupt the dominant narratives that might be ascribed to the profile of a black man of that age. The foreboding is there to be read in some of the objects in Lovell's work chains, barbed wire, targets, rope which is as it would be, often is, for a black person in the United States. And still, foreboding is only part of one’s life story, and it should not overwhelm how we think of the breadth of humanity. Lovell seems to aim for a balance between the social or public meaning of a person or object, and its intimacy, its human relevance. Where his earlier work created tableaux using full-bodied figures, the aesthetic of juxtaposition in these more recent pieces is what evokes narrative, as if we are seeing the unfolding of a scene of human life, as if more and more of the image will manifest if you look long enough. (This is especially true of Lovell's drawings that lack a corresponding artifact.) The key is to let the unexpected be possible. We might want to read a narrative of resistance on KIN VII (Scent of Magnolia), but there is something else there: a ravishing quiet. **Quiet is antithetical to how we think about black culture, and by extension, black people. So much of the discourse of racial blackness imagines black people as public subjects with identities formed and articulated and resisted in public. Such blackness is dramatic, symbolic, never for its own vagary, always representative and engaged with how it is imagined publicly. These characterizations are the legacy of racism and they become the common way we understand and represent blackness;** literally they become a lingua franca. **The idea of quiet**, then, **can shift attention to what is interior. This shift can feel like a kind of heresy if the interior is thought of as apolitical or inexpressive,** which it is not: one’s inner life is raucous and full of expression, especially if we distinguish the term "expressive" from the notion of public. **Indeed the interior could be understood as the source of human action that anything we do is shaped by the range of desires and capacities of our inner life**. This is the agency in Lovell's piece, the way that what is implied is a full range of human life: that we don’t know the subject just lay looking at him or noticing the artifact; that his life is wide-open and possible; that his life is more than familiar characterizations of victimization by or triumph over racism. For sure, the threat and violence of racism is one story, as is the grace and necessity of the fight, but what else is there to black humanity, this piece seems to ask. The question is an invitation to imagine an inner life of the broadest terrain. It is remarkable for a black artist working with black subjects (and in a visual medium) to restore humanity without being apolitical. It is remarkable, also, to make the argument that Lovell makes so well with his work that what is black is at once particular and universal, familiar and unknowable. This is challenging territory to navigate, given the importance of resistance and protest to black culture. But **the intent here is not to disregard these terms, but to ask what else, what else can we say about black culture, what other frameworks might help to illuminate aspects of the work produced by black writers and thinkers? How can quiet, as a frame for reading black culture, expose life that is not already determined by narratives of the social world?** After all, all living is political-every human action means something but all living is not in protest; to assume such is to disregard the richness of life. In humanity, quiet is inevitable, essential. It is a simple beautiful part of what it means to be alive. It is already there, if one is looking to understand it. There are many books on black expressiveness and resistance; there will be and should be many more. This, however, is not one of them. This book is about quiet.

#### Using social death as a frame of analysis destroys agency – it accepts the colonial narrative of spatiality as inevitable

TraceyWalker 12, Birkbeck University Masters in Psychosocial Studies, “The Future of Slavery: From Cultural Trauma to Ethical Remembrance”, Graduate Journal of Social Science, 9.2, July, JSTOR

To argue that there is more to the popular conception of slaves as vic­tims who experienced social death within the abusive regime of transat­lantic slavery is not to say that these subjectivities did not exist. When considering the institution of slavery we can quite confidently rely on the assumption that it did indeed de­stroy the self-hood and the lives of millions of Africans. Scholar Vincent Brown (2009) however, has criticised Orlando Patterson’s (1982) seminal book Slavery and Social Death for positioning the slave as a subject without agency and maintains that those who managed to dislocate from the nightmare of plantation life ‘were not in fact the living dead’, but ‘the mothers of gasping new societ­ies’ (Brown 2009, 1241). The Jamaican Maroons were one such disparate group of Africans who managed to band together and flee the Jamaican plantations in or­der to create a new mode of living under their own rule. These ‘run­aways’ were in fact ‘ferocious fight­ers and master strategists’, building towns and military bases which en­abled them to fight and successfully win the war against the British army after 200 years of battle (Gotlieb 2000,16). In addition, the story of the Windward Jamaican Maroons disrupts the phallocentricism in­herent within the story of the slave ‘hero’ by the very revelation that their leader, ‘Queen Nanny’ was a woman (Gotlieb 2000). As a lead­er, she was often ignored by early white historians who dismissed her as an ‘old hagg’ or ‘obeah’ woman (possessor of evil magic powers) (Gotlieb 2000, xvi). Yet, despite these negative descriptors, Nanny presents an interesting image of an African woman in the time of slavery who cultivated an exceptional army and used psychological as well as military force against the English despite not owning sophisticated weapons (Gotlieb 2000). As an oral tale, her story speaks to post-slavery generations through its representa­tion of a figure whose gender defy­ing acts challenged the patriarchal fantasies of the Eurocentric imagi­nary and as such ‘the study of her experiences might change the lives of people living under paternalistic, racist, classist and gender based oppression’ (Gotlieb 2000, 84). The label of ‘social death’ is re­jected here on the grounds that it is a narrative which is positioned from the vantage point of a European hegemonic ideology. Against the social symbolic and its gaze, black slaves were indeed regarded as non-humans since their lives were stunted, diminished and deemed less valuable in comparison to the Europeans. However, Fanon’s (1967) assertion that ‘not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man’ (Fanon 1967, 110) helps us to un­derstand that this classification can only have meaning relative to the symbolic which represents the aliveness of whiteness against the back­drop of the dead black slave (Dyer 1997). Butler (2005) makes it clear that the ‘death’ one suffers relative to the social symbolic is imbued with the fantasy that having constructed the Other and interpellated her into ‘life’, one now holds the sovereignty of determining the subject’s right to live or die: this death, if it is a death, is only the death of a certain kind of sub­ject, one that was never possible to begin with, the death of the fan­tasy of impossible mastery, and so a loss of what one never had, in other words it is a necessary grief (Butler 2005, 65). The point to make here is that al­though the concept of social death has proved useful for theorists to de­scribe the metaphysical experience of those who live antagonistically in relation to the social symbolic, it is nevertheless a colonial narrative within which the slaves are confined to a one dimensional story of ter­ror. In keeping with Gilroy’s (1993b) argument that the memory of slav­ery must be constructed from the slaves’ point of view, we might in­stead concentrate, not on the way in which the slaves are figured within the European social imaginary, but on how they negotiated their own ideas about self and identity. We might therefore find some value in studying a group like the Maroons who not only managed to create an autonomous world outside of the hegemonic discourse which ne­gated them, but also, due to their unique circumstances, were forced to create new modes of communi­cation which would include a myriad of African cultures, languages and creeds (Gottlieb 2000). This cre­ative and resistive energy of slave subjectivity not only disrupts the colonial paradigm of socially dead slaves, but also implies the ethical tropes of creation, renewal and mu­tual recognition. In contrast, the passive slave proved to feature heavily in the 2007 bicentenary commemorations causing journalist Toyin Agbetu to interrupt the official speeches and exclaim that it had turned into a discourse of freedom engineered mostly by whites with stories of black agency excluded 8. Young’s argu­ment that ‘one of the damaging side effects of the focus on white peo­ple’s role in abolition is that Africans are represented as being passive in the face of oppression’, appears to echo the behaviour in the UK today given that a recent research poll re­veals that the black vote turnout is significantly lower than for the white majority electorate and that forty percent of second generation ‘immi­grants’ believe that voting ‘doesn’t matter’.9 Yet, Gilroy (1993a) argues that this political passivity may not simply be a self fulfilling prophecy, but might allude to the ‘lived contra­diction’ of being black and English which affects one’s confidence about whether opinions will be validated in a society that, at its core, still holds on to the fantasy of European supe­riority (Gilroy 1993a). Without con­sidering the slaves’ capacity for sur­vival and their fundamental role in overthrowing the European regime of slavery, we limit the use–value of the memory and risk becoming overly attached to singular slave subjectivities seeped in death and passivity. The Maroons story how­ever, enables slave consciousness to rise above the mire of slavery’s abject victims and establishes an ethical relation with our ancestors who lived and survived in the time of slavery.

#### An analytic of traumatic racial identification unconcerned with material solvency results in a mythologization of whiteness and trades off with material struggles capable of mobilizing momentum towards better futures. Externally, the affirmative sustains the resentful self-hatred and inter-group policing that maintains white supremacy.

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In these times of urgency, when weak and lazy minds would like us to oppose “thought” to “direct action”; and when, precisely because of this propensity for “thoughtless action”, everything is framed in the nihilistic terms of power for the sake of power – in such times what follows might mistakenly be construed as contemptuous. And yet, as new struggles unfold, hard questions have to be asked. They have to be asked if, in an infernal cycle of repetition but no difference, one form of damaged life is not simply to be replaced by another. The force of affect Indeed the ground is fast shifting and a huge storm seems to be building up on the horizon. May 68? Soweto 76? Or something entirely different? The winds blowing from our campuses can be felt afar, in a different idiom, in those territories of abandonment where the violence of poverty and demoralization having become the norm, many have nothing to lose and are now more than ever willing to risk a fight. They simply can no longer wait, having waited for too long now. Out there, from almost every corner of this vast land seems to stretch a chain of young men and women rigid with tension. As tension slowly swells up, it becomes ever more important to hold on to the things that truly matter. A new cultural temperament is gradually engulfing post-apartheid urban South Africa. For the time being, it goes by the name “decolonization” – in truth a psychic state more than a political project in the strict sense of the term. Whatever the case, everything seems to indicate that ours is a crucial moment in the redefinition of what counts as “social protagonism” in this country. Mobilizations over crucial matters such as access to health care, sanitation, housing, clean water or electricity might still be conducted in the name of the implicit promise inherent to the struggle years – that life after freedom will be “better” for all. But fewer and fewer actually believe it. And as the belief in that promise fast recedes, raw affect, raw emotions and raw feelings are harnessed and recycled back into the political itself. In the process, new voices increasingly render old ones inaudible, while anger, rage and eventually muted grief seem to be the new markers of identity and agency. Psychic bonds – in particular bonds of pain and bonds of suffering – more than lived material contradictions are becoming the real stuff of political inter-subjectivity. “I am my pain” – how many times have I heard this statement in the months since #RhodesMustFall emerged? “I am my suffering” and this subjective experience is so incommensurable that “unless you have gone through the same trial, you will never understand my condition” – the fusion of self and suffering in this astonishing age of solipsism and narcissism. So it is that the relative cultural hegemony the African National Congress (ANC) exercised on black South African imagination during the years of the struggle is fast waning. In the bloody miasma of the Zuma years, these years of stagnation, rent-seeking and mediocrity parading as leadership, there is hardly any center left standing as institutions after institutions crumble under the weight of corruption, a predatory new black élite and the cynicism of former oppressors. In the bloody miasma of the Zuma years, the discourse of black power, self-affirmation and worldliness of the early 1990s is in danger of being replaced by the discourse of fracture, injury and victimization – identity politics and the resentment that always is its corollary. Rainbowism and its most important articles of faith – truth, reconciliation and forgiveness – is fading. Reduced to a totemic commodity figure mostly destined to assuage whites’ fears, Nelson Mandela himself is on trial. Some of the key pillars of the 1994 dispensation – a constitutional democracy, a market society, non-racialism – are also under scrutiny. They are now perceived as disabling devices with no animating potency, at least in the eyes of those who are determined to no longer wait. We are past the time of promises. Now is the time to settle accounts. But how do we make sure that one noise machine is not simply replacing another? Settling Accounts The fact is this – nobody is saying nothing has changed. To say nothing has changed would be akin to indulging in willful blindness. Hyperboles notwithstanding, South Africa today is not the “colony” Frantz Fanon is writing about in his Wretched of the Earth. If we cannot find a proper name for what we are actually facing, then rather than simply borrowing one from a different time, we should keep searching. What we are hearing is that there have not been enough meaningful, decisive, radical change, not only in terms of the life chances of the black poor, but – and this is the novelty – in terms of the future prospects of the black middle class. What is being said is that twenty years after freedom, we have not disrupted enough the structures that maintain and reproduce “white power and supremacy”; that this is the reason why too many amongst us are trapped in a “bad life” that keeps wearing them out and down; that this wearing out and down of black life has been going on for too long and must now be brought to an end by all means necessary (the right to violence?). We are being told that we have not radically overturned the particular sets of interests that are produced and reproduced through white privilege in institutions of public and private life – in law firms, in financial institutions such as banking and insurance, in advertising and industry, in terms of land redistribution, in media, universities, languages and culture in general. “Whiteness”, “white power”, “white supremacy”, “white monopoly capital” is firmly back on the political and cultural agenda and to be white in South Africa now is to face a new-old kind of trial although with new judges – the so-called “born-free”. Politics of impatience But behind whites trial looms a broader indictment of South African social and political order. South Africa is fast approaching its Fanonian moment. A mass of structurally disenfranchised people have the feeling of being treated as “foreigners” on their own land. Convinced that the doors of opportunity are closing, they are asking for firmer demarcations between “citizens” (those who belong) and “foreigners” (those who must be excluded). They are convinced that as the doors of opportunity keep closing, those who won’t be able to “get in” right now might be left out for generations to come – thus the social stampede, the rush to “get in” before it gets too late, the willingness to risk a fight because waiting is no longer a viable option. The old politics of waiting is therefore gradually replaced by a new politics of impatience and, if necessary, of disruption. Brashness, disruption and a new anti-decorum ethos are meant to bring down the pretence of normality and the logics of normalization in this most “abnormal” society. Steve Biko, Frantz Fanon and a plethora of black feminist, queer, postcolonial, decolonial and critical race theorists are being reloaded in the service of a new form of militancy less accommodationist and more trenchant both in form and content. The age of impatience is an age when a lot is said – all sorts of things we had hardly heard about during the last twenty years; some ugly, outrageous, toxic things, including calls for murder, atrocious things that speak to everything except to the project of freedom, in this age of fantasy and hysteria, when the gap between psychic realities and actual material realities has never been so wide, and the digital world only serves as an amplifier of every single moment, event and accident. The age of urgency is also an age when new wounded bodies erupt and undertake to actually occupy spaces they used to simply haunt. They are now piling up, swearing and cursing, speaking with excrements, asking to be heard. They speak in allegories and analogies – the “colony”, the “plantation”, the “house Negro”, the “field Negro”, blurring all boundaries, embracing confusion, mixing times and spaces, at the risk of anachronism. They are claiming all kinds of rights – the right to violence; the right to disrupt and jam that which is parading as normal; the right to insult, intimidate and bully those who do not agree with them; the right to be angry, enraged; the right to go to war in the hope of recovering what was lost through conquest; the right to hate, to wreak vengeance, to smash something, it doesn’t matter what, as long as it looks “white”. All these new “rights” are supposed to achieve one thing we are told the 1994 “peaceful settlement” did not achieve – decolonization and retributive justice, the only way to restore a modicum of dignity to victims of the injuries of yesterday and today. Demythologizing whiteness And yet, some hard questions must be asked. Why are we invested in turning whiteness, pain and suffering into such erotogenic objects? Could it be that the concentration of our libido on whiteness, pain and suffering is after all typical of the narcissistic investments so privileged by this neoliberal age? To frame the issues in these terms does not mean embracing a position of moral relativism. How could it be? After all, in relation to our history, too many lives were destroyed in the name of whiteness. Furthermore, the structural repetition of past sufferings in the present is beyond any reasonable doubt. Whiteness as a necrophiliac power structure and a primary shaper of a global system of unequal redistribution of life chances will not die a natural death. But to properly engineer its death – and thus the end of the nightmare it has been for a large portion of the humanity – we urgently need to demythologize it. If we fail to properly demythologize whiteness, whiteness – as the machine in which a huge portion of the humanity has become entangled in spite of itself – will end up claiming us. As a result of whiteness having claimed us; as a result of having let ourselves be possessed by it in the manner of an evil spirit, we will inflict upon ourselves injuries of which whiteness, at its most ferocious, would scarcely have been capable. Indeed for whiteness to properly operate as the destructive force it is in the material sphere, it needs to capture its victim’s imagination and turn it into a poison well of hatred. For victims of white racism to hold on to the things that truly matter, they must incessantly fight against the kind of hatred which never fails to destroy, in the first instance, the man or woman who hates while leaving the structure of whiteness itself intact. As a poisonous fiction that passes for a fact, whiteness seeks to institutionalize itself as an event by any means necessary. This it does by colonizing the entire realms of desire and of the imagination. To demythologize whiteness, it will not be enough to force “bad whites” into silence or into confessing guilt and/or complicity. This is too cheap. To puncture and deflate the fictions of whiteness will require an entirely different regime of desire, new approaches in the constitution of material, aesthetic and symbolic capital, another discourse on value, on what matters and why.

#### Their attempts to relegate blackness to ontology prevents lines of flight. The aff operates within grids of intelligibility, affixing the body to a state of gridlocked, identarian stasis that cannot account for the movement of energy and matter.

Kline 17 (David Kline, Rice University, “The Pragmatics of Resistance: Framing Anti-blackness and the Limits of Political Ontology”, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/645848>, 2017) CJun

As I’ve argued, Wilderson’s flattening of Black social heterogeneity and the narrowing of any possibility of resistance outside the total apocalyptic destruction of the existing world is a result of his political ontology and macropolitics of racial positions revolving around the formal poles of Master/Human and social death. The delimitation of social and political possibility happens both in terms of Black and non-Black resistance to the structure of the racialized world. Of course, I do not want to argue for a coalition politics or any kind of reconciliatory framework that would find a solution to anti-Blackness in some form of liberal multiculturalism or “colorblindness” that ignores the real and particular violence of white antagonism. I do, however, want to argue for the sheer possibility of opening or breaking through the closure(s), of lines of flight that mark a multiplicity of encounters and possibilities between forces, technologies, bodies, and what Foucault calls dispositifs that run across varying positions and social sites that are not wholly reducible to fixed ontological positions and which potentially provide connections and flows that break through to an outside of political ontological sedimentation. Focusing on how the dispositifs of biopolitical forms of governance—as opposed to the legal and formal ontological structure of sovereignty—take into account “processes of life” as the basis for governance, Foucault theorizes what he calls the “aleatory” body that is the target of biopower and exists prior to any imposition of governance or domination. Appealing to the “freedom” of the aleatory body is not some kind of idealized notion of the body that ignores the macropolitical fact of Black suffering’s undeniable gratuitous nature. This is not an appeal to what Sexton calls the “in spite of the terror” argument, where notions of Black freedom are understood merely as a kind of concession to the deeper realities at hand (Sexton 2010, 35). Rather, it is to start with the basic fact of the material body in space and time and the idea that “resistance comes first” (Foucault 1997, 167). This point is particularly salient within the biopolitical frame because, as Deleuze puts it, “when power becomes biopower resistance becomes the power of life, a vital power that cannot be confined within species, environment or the paths of a particular diagram” (Deleuze 1988, 92). In other words, resistance is the micropolitical force of life that can never be fully confined or contained within a political ontological frame (or diagram) of antagonisms.6 In terms of Wilderson’s ontology of social positioning, we might say, following Foucault and Deleuze into Fred Moten’s Black optimism,7 that Black (aleatory) life always already precedes the gratuitous violence of an antagonism. Blackness, then, is not wholly reducible to a political ontological position, but rather is the movement prior to and against the imposing force of any violent constitution—or, as Nathanial Mackey says, that “insistent previousness evading each and every natal occasion” (Mackey 1986, 34). Even though an antagonism functions as the political ontological constitution of a Black being as socially dead in relation to civil society, there is still an even deeper level that precedes ontological constitution itself: the movement and resistance of Black life.8 In In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition, Moten makes inseparable Blackness and resistance with this provocative opening sentence: “the history of blackness is a testament to the fact that objects can and do resist” (Moten 2003, 1). Flowing in the vein of Adorno’s anti-identitarian negative dialectics and its prioritization of the object, Moten reads the history of Blackness, which for him is nothing other than a history of certain performativity as improvisation, as a history of the object’s absolute objection to the capture of identity, the fugitive drive towards freedom where an untraceable, stateless, and ungoverned life of “improvisational immanence” is always becoming (ibid., 255n1). Not ignoring or bracketing the problem of political ontological antagonism (although he does reject describing it in terms of social death), he nevertheless opens the frame of analysis and social possibility to the aleatory field of life itself, or, micropolitics. Tracing the Black radical tradition through everything from its poetry to its music to its banal everydayness, Moten shows Blackness as a counter-force sparked into movement by the imposing and regulating force of anti-Black power. In critical yet sympathetic opposition to Wilderson and other Afro-pessimists, Moten rejects the notion that a full analysis of Blackness should be reduced to the imposition of social death. Or, to put it another way, Moten rejects the notion that Blackness is reduced to a fixed ontological position within a macropolitics that has no recourse to forms of life that might resist and evade the imposition of an antagonism. Rather, Blackness is a counter-force to ontology itself. As he puts it, blackness [is not (just)] ontologically prior to the logistic and regulative power that is supposed to have brought it into existence but . . . blackness is prior to ontology; or in a slight variation of what [Nahum] Chandler would say, blackness is the anoriginal displacement of ontology, that it is ontology’s anti- and ante-foundation, ontology’s underground, the irreparable disturbance of ontology’s time and space. (Moten 2014, 739) Here, Moten is riffing on Chandler’s idea of “paraontology,” which is in specific distinction from political ontology. Paraontology, as Moten describes it, is “the transformative pressure blackness puts on philosophical concepts, categories, and methods” (Moten 2008, 215n3). Rather than an account of being that seeks to uncover an essence or totalizing account of a particular social or political position, paraontology describes the mode of being that is always already resisting the imposing logic of (political) ontology. Chandler articulates this phenomenon through Du Bois’ double consciousness, honing in on the “in between” of its double identity. As he says, ”between” would delimit any simple notion of its spatiality or presupposed relationality. It would instead accede to the most general disruption of boundaries. . . . “[B]etween” dissipates any simple notion of inside and outside, of above and below. . . . Du Bois’s inscription may be understood to name the opening of the sense of space, of spaciality, rather than confirm it. (Chandler 2014, 6–7) Chandler is describing the way Blackness—in all of its social scope and complexity—overflows or breaks open the boundaries of any formal imposition, the way Blackness cannot be reduced to a frame of abjection or the irreconcilable position of an antagonism. From this perspective, Blackness is a rhizome, a dynamic, creative, and desiring counter-force in which lines of flight present possible modes of freedom and sociality in excess to political ontological positioning. As a paraontological phenomenon, Chandler and Moten understand Blackness as a unique and specific exertion within modernity—which might also be called the historical regime of racial political ontology—that challenges every schema of formalization and positional fixity. In this way, from this vantage, the history of Blackness is read as a history of a certain performativity of the drive towards a freedom not determined by the terms or boundaries of ontology, as a history of the object’s absolute objection to the macropolitical capture of identity. This paraontological movement of Black fugitivity, as Moten has coined it, calls into question the framing of Blackness wholly within a political ontology that seeks to index and describe Black life in terms of pure abjection.