

Texturing Difference: Indigeneity, Tactility, and the Text of “black consciousness
philosophy”

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Dedication

For Jesse, Avila, Axel, and Kirstin.

Abstract

Texturing Difference: Indigeneity, Tactility, and the Text of “black consciousness philosophy” intervenes into contemporary debates around the postcolonial critique of apartheid through offering a new sense of an ‘undisclosed event’ in the broader text of black consciousness philosophy. In approaching this broader text, I stitch together works that are considered to be more overtly political, such as the Freedom Charter and the interventions of Steve Biko and Frantz Fanon, with a number of more literary interventions by Mongane Wally Serote, Jeremy Cronin, Aimé Césaire, J.M. Coetzee, and Ousmane Sembène, and read this weave into the problem of what comes *after* apartheid. The literary as it emerges in this project offers a sense of reading that tracks well with Deleuze and Guattari’s sense of the rhizomatic, and that is brought to bear on the more overtly political works that are generally taken as constituting its measure. It is precisely this act of reading that stages what is at stake in literature and its pedagogy as I inscribe it here: the literary emerges as essential to the attempt to not merely transcribe the lived experience of the black man but to think what it would be to inscribe such experience into the realm of community as such – what I have termed the community of the touch. Unfolding through four key moves that deal with the concepts of community, indigeneity, tactility, and life, as these are reworked and opened up in the touches that take place at the edge of the text of black consciousness philosophy, I argue that it calls for the practice of singularity as the living of a life—a life that does not expel, or vomit, the lived experience of the black man.

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Practicing Life in the post-apartheid

It is not a question of whether people are ready or not. It is a question of whether people should be made ready or not.

Steve Biko, "Interview with Steve Biko", p 29¹

Either ethics makes no sense at all, or this is what it means and has nothing else to say: not to be unworthy of what happens to us.

Gilles Deleuze, "21st Series of the Event", p 149²

The present moment in South Africa asks for life to be practiced, or at least for such a practice to be learned, in the wake of apartheid. However, what is most apparent in this moment is the persistence of what can be understood as apartheid's remainders as these cut into the potentialities of this life that remains to be learned. In what is perhaps a more cynical tone, it is possible to argue that the persistence of these remainders deeply marks the post-apartheid present with what is characterized as a general failure of the promise of the liberation struggle. This has come to be expressed in two dominant forms: on the one hand, there are increasing instances of protracted struggle by 'communities' against the ANC led government on the terms of what is called "service delivery"³ and, on the other

¹ Gail M. Gerhart, "Interview with Steve Biko". In: Mngxitama, A., Alexander, A. and Gibson, N.C. (eds), *Biko Lives! Contesting the Legacies of Steve Biko*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

² Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*. [1969] Translated from the French by Mark Lester and Charles Stivale. London: The Athlone Press, 1990.

³ As Achille Mbembe has argued, framing these protests as focusing on service delivery is, of course, a somewhat straightforward containment strategy – it obscures political and economic responsibilities (Mbembe, A. "Biko's Testament of Hope" (2007: 4, 12). See further Carrim, Y. "Towards better understanding of service delivery protests" (2010), Grobler, F. "Service-delivery protests a 'warning sign' for government" (2009), and Vavi, Z. "What would Chris Hani say?" (2010) for three distinct perspectives on these struggles from Government, the (neo) Liberal Media, and COSATU respectively. In more recent months these tensions have begun to be expressed through a series of increasingly violent instances of strike action in the mining and agricultural sections of the South African economy, the most notorious of these having culminated in the Marikana Massacre in which 34 Miners were shot dead during a stand-off with the South African Police Service—an event that drew immediate parallels in the media with the

hand, within political discourses there is a noticeable shift to the “re-racialisation” of the political.⁴ However, through setting to work within the weave of what I define as the broader text of black consciousness philosophy (a designation that refers, I argue in the opening chapter, to a constellation of texts that take the production of the black-I as non-I as a conceptual problematic that demands intervention), I contend that an adequate thinking of this apparent failure of promise requires that the present be considered as a realization of the trajectory of struggle that was encapsulated in the adoption of the much celebrated Freedom Charter of 1955. In other words, it is necessary to consider how the South African present might precisely not be characterized by a failure of promise, but rather by the arrival of the very politics that opened its possibility.

What is brought into view through framing the problem in this manner is the mode through which the present politics of South Africa can be read as derivative of a particular understanding of subjectivity that conditions its potentialities, rather than as a quagmire of events that obscures, and even constrains, its potency. This is not to argue that the material conditions of existence in post-apartheid South Africa are not important—as though lived experience is not marked by them—or that the struggle against apartheid as it was framed by the Freedom Charter should be rejected. Rather, through abiding by a different potentiality that can, perhaps, only be (re-) turned in the wake of this struggle, I suggest that the work of coming after apartheid, to learn to live in

Sharpsville Massacre in 1960. Cf. Saturday Star, “Marikana Massacre” (18 December 2012) and Micah Reddy, “Marikana is the latest chapter in a long saga” (24 October 2012).

⁴ Cf. Xolela Mangcu, “Nelson Mandela and the Unfinished Business of Identity Politics in South Africa”, Nelson Mandela Foundation Dialogue on “Justice, Rights, Race and Power in Post-apartheid South Africa” (2009). Mangcu’s argument is noteworthy for its crisp formulation of the resurging place of race and tribalism in South African politics. However, his rather paradoxical formulation that this resurgence is due to the unfinished work of identity politics is a little wanting.

its wake, is ordered by the demand of what I term, through reading Aimé Césaire's interventions at the level of indigeneity, 'the cut of the body' as it is marked both materially and conceptually. This cut, where the black-I is produced as non-I, and is maintained as external to Man, orders the coming to terms with apartheid while simultaneously ordering the terrain on which the new might emerge. In other words, as an adequate intervention into the weight of apartheid—an intervention that reckons with this weight without being weighed down by it—the work of what I call 'coming to terms' must simultaneously be lodged at the level of the conceptual terrain of apartheid (potentialities of subjectivation) and at the level of the material legacies that it produced and produces (the cut of the body).

The remainders I have invoked can, at one level, be understood as the material and systemic inequalities and violence that were produced by the policies of the apartheid regime. These, as the recent events at Marikana (see footnote 3) make all too apparent, are clearly still etched across the South African landscape. However, at the level of the conceptual terrain on which apartheid was lodged, the remainder has to do with a more primary violence that shapes the expression of subjectivity such that it is available to the stamping of reified racial or ethnic identity. By invoking the remainder as that which, perhaps, comes to define the offering of the post-apartheid moment (that is to say, if the post-apartheid offers anything it is the thinking of remainders), I am not simply declaring a rather cynical or pessimistic diagnosis of that which has transpired in the wake of the first fully democratic elections in 1994. Rather, following the intervention made by Zita Nunes in her *Cannibal Democracy*, I contend that the remainder is an integral element in

the production of a particular expression of subjectivity, namely that of Man, and it is this sense of the remainder that needs to be worked through.⁵

For Nunes, the remainder is that which is produced in the shaping of identities that are adequate to what she calls “racial democracy” —the form of democracy that would actively seek to attend to the problem of race, either through incorporation or exclusion (*CD* 135). Taking as her focus the comparison between the United States and Brazil—where, in the early texts that she examines, the United States is marked by race (i.e. the color line) while Brazil apparently is not—Nunes argues that the conceptual mechanism through which the subjectivities of these democratic States are produced is cannibalistic in the sense of this term offered by Oswald de Andrade in his “Cannibal Manifesto”. Indeed, Nunes argues that the most striking intervention by the early Brazilian modernists is the displacement that is brought about through the assertion that, at the conceptual level, the structure of the subject of modernity is cannibalistic: the cannibal as concept marks “the real beginning of the modern world,” it is not modernity’s apparent other (*CD* 36).⁶ While Nunes accepts the distinction that Lévi-Strauss draws between societies defined by anthropophagia (particularly Brazilian and Caribbean

⁵ Zita Nunes, *Cannibal Democracy: Race and Representation in the Literature of the Americas*. Critical American Studies Series. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008, hereafter *CD*. For Nunes, the question is more limited and hinges, rather, on the problem of the production of the subject of “racial democracy” (135).

⁶ The centrality of the metaphor of cannibalism, and its metaphysical equivalent in Europe of sacrifice, in the formation of subjectivity in modernity similarly forms the focus of Jean-Luc Nancy and Jacques Derrida’s critique of the subject of modernity in “Eating Well,” or the Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida”, pp 111 - 115. As Derrida argues, “the so called nonanthropophagic cultures practice symbolic anthropophagy and even construct their most elevated socius, indeed the sublimity of their morality, their politics, and their right, on this anthropophagy” (114). In contrast to this “dominant schema of subjectivity itself,” Derrida suggests the metaphor of “eating well” as a mode of “infinite hospitality” whereby one learns to eat and give oneself for eating to and from the other, as an ethical response that might begin to unravel this schema (115). This is a move that is very close to Andrade’s sense of cannibalism as a “swallowing of what is useful to make the new” that is directed in both directions (*CD* 32).

societies) and those defined by a form of “vomitism” (the expulsion of apparent impurities, such as the mad, to produce a healthy unity) that is mostly associated with Europe, she argues that this is a distinction at the level of expression where the underlying mechanism is consistent across both instances.⁷

This mechanism is understood by Nunes through the metaphor of the cannibal to the extent that the eating of flesh always entails a particular remaindering (namely of bones) that is subsequently discarded or utilized outside of the self. Through reading Oswald de Andrade’s and Gilberto Freyre’s interventions into the form of Brazilian society, Nunes argues that the mode through which a single Brazilian society is imagined in both cases occurs through an embrace of that which is white and a remaindering of blackness. She argues (with Freyre’s history of Brazil in mind) that “it is always the Black and indigenous that will dissolve, willingly, into white, and the white that will incorporate them” (*CD 79*).⁸ In a formulation that resonates strongly with the reading of apartheid that I will offer in chapter one, according to Nunes the myth of the fusional oneness of Brazilian society (its utopic rendition in the US imagination (*CD 123*)), along with that of the pure whiteness of the United States, hinges on the embrace of whiteness

⁷ For Lévi-Strauss’s argument see “A Little Glass of Rum” in Lévi-Strauss, *C. Tristes Tropiques*. Translated from the French by John Russell. New York: Criterion Books, 1961. Lévi-Strauss develops his argument on vomitism in relation to the negative effect of improved technology in the development of Rum. He suggests that it is the impurities that make the rum palatable, which is to say that his critique hinges on the question of taste, of eating well (382). In a move that resonates with Nunes’ reading of cannibalism as producing a remainder, Lévi-Strauss highlights how cannibalism was always ritual and selective (apart from cases of desperation, such as in a famine) and not a fully-fledged consumption (386).

⁸ It is the acknowledgment of this implicit action that formed the motivation behind the recent move towards affirmative action in Brazil. The passing of the Statute on Racial Equality (a document that was ostensibly inspired by the Freedom Charter, Cf. Amy Stillman, “Race: Wealth is still unevenly distributed” 14 November 2010) which was signed into law in July 2010 marked a significant federal intervention into these debates. The most interesting element in the legislation with regard to my argument is the tension it negotiates through addressing racial inequality without jettisoning Brazil’s historic commitments to non-racialism—evidenced through the mandate it places on the government to address inequalities without actually naming race as such in those moments.

as the marker of the health of the nation. As such, “blackness, in terms of racial democracy, is the name given to that which exceeds it and makes it visible—it is the remainder that makes the notion of racial democracy possible and sustainable, yet always destined to fail” (*CD* 135). Racial democracy is, within Nunes’ argument, beyond a question of reform as its condition of possibility is the production of blackness as a remainder.

It is in this context that Nunes reads Mario de Andrade’s (no relation to Oswald) interventions into the whitening of Brazilian society in relation to W.E.B. du Bois’ critique of the impossibility of being both black and American in the United States (*CD* 88). While at a certain level both of these figures, according to Nunes, operate within the metaphor of cannibalization as she frames it, what is productive is the manner in which they both refuse to repress or eject the remainders (such a repression or rejection is, she argues, a necessary condition for the assertion of unified identity (*CD* 153)). Nunes traces in Andrade’s *Macunaíma* a constant movement towards whiteness that is marked by the presence of ‘blacks’ in the narrative, thereby disclosing the mechanism and the cost of the movement toward whiteness (*CD* 56, 66). Similarly, in her reading of du Bois Nunes argues that it is “double consciousness”, or the “gift of second sight,” that enables the maintenance of the remainder as a form of resistance (*CD* 94). This remainder is maintained as a wound, where the black-I comes to be objectified as a condition of participation in society: it is only as a body that those marked as black can be members of society; to participate at the level of mind they must become white. As such, the

remainder in Nunes' argument is simultaneously the condition of possibility of what she calls racial democracy as well as the site from which to launch its critique.

This critique, that draws attention to the remaindering of blackness in the production of a subjectivity of racial democracy so as to disclose it as a failure, becomes the basis for an ethical relation that Nunes defines as “necrophilia” and, a little later, as “necrophagia” (*CD* 158, 161). As a “feeding off the dead” that neither fully consumes the dead nor allows the dead to fully consume the living, Nunes argues that such a relation with the remainder enables a “mutual embrace” that does not provide a unified sense of identity (*CD* 158 – 175). Necrophagia, in this instance, is held in opposition to the project either of rejecting the remainder or of allowing the remainder to fully determine the self, and is held in opposition to a sense of Diasporic identity that derives from the notion of “transculturation” (*CD* 157). Such an identity that takes the African Diaspora due to the Middle Passage as its terrain of emergence, Nunes argues, masks the violence that was perpetrated against indigenous peoples and reduces the trauma of slavery to a relation between African and European. Rather, in a move that resonates across the broader text of black consciousness philosophy, Nunes contends that it is the “becoming resistant” of the remainder—a refusal to be either inside or outside with regard to the nation and to identity (114)—that constitutes the terrain of emergence for this ethical possibility of necrophagia that works against the crystallization of reified identity. While the remaindering that Nunes attends to is very close to what I term the cut of the body and its role in ordering the emergence of that which properly comes *after* apartheid, I am

hesitant with regard to the efficacy of necrophagia as an ethical response to the weight of colonialism.

This reification of identities, and its particular articulation through apartheid, has come to mark the present South African context, and is often expressed in the terms of nativism, indigeneity, and the politics of blame. The remainder in this instance has very little to do with subjectivity and rather designates the legacies of apartheid with which always already reified racial or ethnic subjects contend. A recent instance of such a return (or, it might be argued, continuity) in the public sphere can be located in the African National Congress' (ANC) response to a critique directed at its president and the president of South Africa, Jacob Zuma, after he stated at a business gala that "everything you touch will multiply. I've always said that a wise business person will support the ANC, because supporting the ANC means you are investing very well in your business" ("Mazibuko is not African, says ANC"). The parliamentary leader of the Democratic Alliance (DA), Lindiwe Mazibuko, responded to these comments by arguing that they implied a naked misdirection of State resources in the interests of securing party specific funding. In short, the main opposition party in the South African parliament read Zuma's statement as symptomatic of corruption. The ANC responded to these allegations by arguing that Mazibuko is "naïve when it comes to African traditions [to such an extent] that she cannot relate to them" as these statements were "in keeping with African culture to say 'may you prosper'" when you receive a gift. Due to her misreading, they argue, it is not clear "whether Lindiwe is an African".⁹ Leaving the question of the validity of Zuma's statement aside, what is at stake in this response to the critique is the notion that

⁹ Babalo Ndenze, "Mazibuko is not African, says ANC" (15 January 2013).

there is an intuitive relation between being “African” and understanding “African culture”, where the expression of the latter determines the authenticity of the former.

The unmediated relation between identity and knowledge that is implied in this defense resonates with an earlier instantiation of such a return to nativism in the interest of defending Jacob Zuma against the charge of rape in 2006. It is in the mobilization of publics in support of Jacob Zuma through invoking ethnic identity (expressed in slogan’s such as “Zuma: 100% Zulu boy”) and Zuma’s own explanation for his actions (including “having no choice” but to have sex) offered in his testimony where they were represented as determined by his “Zulu upbringing” (*State v. J. Zuma*, April 3, 2006), that the resonance with this formulation can be perceived. What is invoked is an implicit relationship between identity and knowledge, whereby the latter is absolutely determined by the former: his Zulu upbringing (a condition that is as undefined as the terms “African” or “African culture” mentioned above) necessitates a particular action in the encounter with his alleged victim. On the one hand, what is at stake in both these formulations is an attempt to lay claim to an authentic sense of native or ethnic identity that authorizes action and political speech. What is more critical, however, is the mode through which these identities resonate through society, enabling the achievement of particular ends within the trajectories of modernity. In other words, it is not the somewhat facile argument that South African politics is racially marked that is of interest, but rather the continued availability to such an interpellation in the post-apartheid moment. Joining this diagnosis to the epigraph, it is clear that in the post-apartheid moment what is

required is the “making ready” of persons for the welcoming of that which might come *after* apartheid.

The recent and ongoing debate that was sparked by Gillian Schutte’s letter in the *Mail and Guardian*, “Dear White People”, marks an analogous understanding of post-apartheid subjectivity and enables these questions of indigeneity, a politics of blame, and nativism to be approached from a somewhat different angle.¹⁰ In her letter, Schutte, an activist and scholar, sets out the terms by which she argues white people can unlearn their whiteness. Central to her argument is the double notion that whites must “wholly reject” the “unearned privilege” that produces their place in society while simultaneously keeping silent about “national debates that do not concern them” (par 3 – 6). Apparently both Schutte and her critics overlook the manner in which this formulation implicitly argues that white people are not part of the South African nation: how else can they stay out of “national debates” that do not concern them? Targeting both the structural violence of society that guarantees whiteness and the consequent expression of this whiteness in the terms of superiority (the totality of which she refers to as neo-liberalism), Schutte argues that the mechanism for producing “miraculous change” that will take place in “the blink of an eye” is the admission of guilt and the realization that economic redress must come from whites. As a well versed post-structural feminist critic, Schutte must be aware of the fanciful nature of her declarations of immediate release from whiteness. Indeed, in her response to her critics she declares that “whiteness cannot be miraculously transcended”. Unfortunately, apart from claiming “tone” as her defense, Schutte does not

¹⁰ Gillian Schutte, “Dear White People”. *Mail and Guardian* 2 January 2013. As this exchange makes clear, indigeneity and nativism—and their attendant politics of blame—are not problems “out there” but rather condition *all* subjectivities in the post-apartheid moment.

attempt to account for the disjuncture between her promise of redemption and the difficulties that such an easy offer of redemption glosses over. In chapter two I argue that the Benjaminian sense of redemption can be read as accounting for these difficulties through its resonance into the broader text of black consciousness philosophy.

Much of the response to Schutte's intervention was characterized either by liberal white men (such as Max Du Preez and Pierre de Vos) agreeing with the thrust of her argument while complaining about her "preachy", "shrill", and "belligerent" tone, or by the rightwing charge that she had turned against her own race. While Schutte was expecting and, she suggests, hoping to provoke such a reaction, it is the response from figures that she labels as "Afro-Pessimists" that she mainly contends with in her reply, "Dear White People: Theoretical Wars and Podium Envy," written two weeks later.¹¹ While the response to Schutte that was offered by Andile Mngxitama and Athi-Nonqamaso Esther Nkopho certainly does engage in a hyper personal attack on Schutte through deriding her continued relationship with a "black man" that resulted in "mixed children", "as if it mattered" (non of which were raised by Schutte in her letter); dismissing its argument with regard to whiteness under the label of afro-pessimism and podium envy is too hasty.¹² Mngxitama and Nkophe argue that the condition of whiteness cannot be rescued: there is no redemption for whiteness through "changed behavior and

¹¹ Gillian Schutte, "Dear White People: Theoretical Wars and Podium Envy". *Mail and Gaurdian* 16 January 2013. While Schutte is dismissive of the critique offered by Andile Mngxitama as she argues it amounts to afro-pessimism, she embraces the argument put forward by a figure such as Jackie Shandu who suggests that "black people [must] fight [their] own battles" rather than celebrating a white women who echoes what black people already know, Cf. Jackie Shandu, "Black People, Fight Your Own Battles". *Mail and Guardian* 10 January 2013. He further argues, in a move that Schutte does not agree with, that the discourse of class as it emerges in her letter and in a number of the responses actually works to mask the problem of race.

¹² Andile Mngxitama and Athi-Nanqamaso Esther Nkopho, "There's no unlearning whiteness, despite what 'anti-racists' say". *Mail and Guardian* 11 January 2013.

admission of guilt” (what Schutte calls for) as this misses the fact that whiteness has constructed the world through the objectification—or as Césaire phrases it, “thingification”—of the black man. As such, they suggest, in a phrasing reminiscent of Aimé Césaire although it departs from his intervention, that what is necessary to end the dominance of whiteness is an “apocalypse” in which whiteness as such is destroyed.¹³ In both Schutte’s initial jibe at whiteness and Mngxitama and Nkophe’s dismissal of this, there is an underlying condition of subjectivity that is held in common: for both there is a clear sense in which whiteness and blackness are reified identities in and of themselves, a condition that accounts for the slippage between whiteness/blackness and white/black that occurs in both their arguments. This is to argue, along the same lines as the invocation of Zuluness or Africaness, that for Schutte as well as for Nkophe and Mngxitama there is an intuitive link that specifies both an authentic notion of whiteness or blackness and the expression of subjectivity that is adequate to these. Such a condition is precisely what the philosophy of black consciousness attempts to unravel, and, I suggest, it is this condition that discloses the conceptual remainder of apartheid.

As an element in the intellectual question of the post-apartheid, nativism and indigeneity have not escaped the reduction to reified identity on which the above debate hinges. Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni has argued that the distinction between these two, where nativism is contained in the phrase “Africa for natives only” and indigeneity is articulated

¹³ The aporia of the position that both Schutte and Mngxitama and Nkophe sketch for themselves is neatly articulated by Sekoetlane Jacob Phamodi, who argues that both positions result in the conclusion that “whites can do nothing” without somehow re-entrenching whiteness, Cf. “Rescuing Whiteness”. *Mail and Guardian* 13 January 2013. Césaire, as I make clear in chapter two, does not argue for the destruction of whiteness but rather calls for the “end of the world” as he understands blackness and whiteness as being co-productive: you cannot end whiteness without ending blackness, and there can be no “new man” while either of these is maintained.

as “Africa for Africans”, reflects a long lasting division in the liberation struggle itself (“Africa for Africans” 75).¹⁴ He contends that the expression of anti-colonial struggle was consistently articulated as a form of nationalism premised on a claim to nativism (“Africa for Africans” 64). As such, Ndlovu-Gatsheni is resistant to what he describes as a rigorous, if not a little vicious, dismissal of nativism by Achille Mbembe.¹⁵ In effect, he suggests that a rigorous critique of nativism as such masks the role that it played and continues to play in the anti-colonial and postcolonial moments, that is, as a mechanism through which to mobilize and contain publics in the interests of anti-colonial struggle and postcolonial State formation (“Africa for Africans” 62 – 67). Although Ndlovu-Gatsheni argues that in Zimbabwe nativism was negatively articulated by figures such as Robert Mugabe due to the failure of a new-nationalism, in the South African context he argues that the more recent return to nativism (he speaks specifically of the formation of the Native Club in 2006) is more of an intellectual initiative (“Africa for Africans” 72). In that context, nativism has been mobilized as a mechanism through which to bolster and draw out “black intellectuals” so as to “counter the intellectual weight of neoliberalism” (“Africa for Africans” 74). Ndlovu-Gatsheni’s argument resonates with that offered by

¹⁴ Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, “Africa for Africans or Africa for ‘Natives’ only? ‘New Nationalism’ and Nativism in Zimbabwe and South Africa”. *Africa Spectrum*. Vol. 44, No. 1, pp 61-78. This division is reflected in the split between the ANC and the PAC over the adoption of the “Freedom Charter” in 1955, a split that hinged on what the leader of the PAC, Robert Sobukwe, labeled as an “unholy alliance” in which black, white, and coloured were all meant to work together toward the end of apartheid, Cf. Mgwebi Snail, “The Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa: A Product of the Entire World”, *Historia Actual Online*. 2008, no 15, pp 51 – 68.

¹⁵ Ndlovu-Gatsheni cites a number of public spats that Mbembe has had with Xolela Mangcu over the question of nativism. However, he argues that Mbembe’s strongest statement against nativism is located in his *On the Postcolony*. Studies in the History of Society and Culture. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001, in which Mbembe argues that Africa is embroiled in a web of nothingness, where nativism constitutes a thread in this web that must first be contended with in any work on Africa. I disagree with Ndlovu-Gatsheni’s assessment that Mbembe’s intervention might mask the mode through which the State mobilizes nativism in its own interests. I think this is precisely the target of Mbembe’s intervention.

Dorothy L Hodgson in her essay “Becoming Indigenous in Africa” (2009). She argues that the claim to being indigenous, on a global level, is articulated by “first peoples” or “autochthonous groups” as a defensive gesture against the encroachment on their polity by another more dominant group that generally controls the Nation State (“Becoming Indigenous in Africa” 3 – 8). Indigeneity, for Hodgson, signifies a minority status in relation to a dominant “ethnic group” as well as an intuitive relation to land (“Becoming Indigenous in Africa” 8, 12). While Ndlovu-Gatsheni frames this question as one of nativism (due to the invocation of ethnic identity), Hodgson suggests that if it is turned against the Nation State it is indigenous while if it emanates from that State it is nativist.

Despite these invocations of nativism and indigeneity, where although they are mobilized in the interests of achieving “modernist ends” (“Africa for Africans” 75) they nonetheless presuppose a certain autochthonous relation, Crain Soudien has argued for a sense of indigeneity that might not be reducible to the “conceits” of race or ethnicity. For Soudien, the concept of indigeneity comes to be mobilized by figures in the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM), as an element in constructing a “new identity” (“Indigenous Knowledge” 61). What this amounted to was an effort to offer an “ontological theory” of non-racialism so as to produce a “non-racial person” (“Indigenous Knowledge” 51 – 52). The Unity Movement, as NEUM was called, understood “politics as pedagogical” and, in that line, argued for a sense of indigeneity that articulated a local specificity rather than an autochthonous autonomy (“Indigenous Knowledge” 45).¹⁶ The idea, according to Soudien, was to instruct persons in an indentity

¹⁶ Gayatri C. Spivak makes a similar argument with regard to the model of the “creole” in relation to dominant languages. She argues that, perhaps, the Creole should be thought on the lines of the rhizome:

whereby “non-European” would express only a geographic relation rather than any sense of race or ethnicity (of course, this overlooks the mode through which that displacement is central to the establishment of Man in the first place). The vehicle for this movement, he suggests, is found in an inheritor of the legacy of the NEUM, namely Neville Alexander. Specifically, Soudien suggests that this non-racial subject is to be produced through turning to “class, caste, and colour”, where caste comes to take the place of race (“Indigenous Knowledge” 56 – 60). As my reading of Alexander in chapter one and of Césaire in chapter two will make plain, this shift to class obscures the mechanism of blackness/whiteness as it comes to operate in apartheid South Africa so as to produce the white man as Man and the black man as body.

What this brief overview of the role of indigeneity and nativism in contemporary South African society makes clear is that the mode of subjectivity (i.e. reified subjects of race) that was produced by apartheid in the interests of constructing a sense of whiteness, still underwrites the politics of the present. As such, I contend that the critical remainder of apartheid is its legacy of subjectivity and that, in an echo of Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History”, through laying hold of the mechanism of its production (blackness/whiteness) its continuity might be exploded, clearing a ground for an encounter in which neither black nor white are left intact. Such an intervention is, I argue, fundamentally different to that called for by Mngxitama and Nkophe where blackness is maintained through expressing a politics of blame directed at those designated as white.

multiple instantiations of one language expressive of multiple specificities without being rooted in these, Cf. Gayatri C. Spivak, “World Systems and the Creole”. *Narrative* Vol. 14, No. 1, 2006, pp 102 – 112. For an authoritative reading of the Unity Movement, and especially of the role of pedagogy in its political project, see Ciraj Rassool, *The Individual, Auto/Biography and History in South Africa*. Doctoral Dissertation, University of the Western Cape, 2004.

Central to this movement is the cut of the body as it emerges in Césaire’s reworking of indigeneity and in Frantz Fanon’s diagnosis of the mechanism of blackness/whiteness and its relation to the production of Man. Reading colonialism not simply as an event, but rather as an episteme that is critical in the production of European Man, my engagement with the broader text of black consciousness philosophy, conceived of as a network or grid of intelligibility, posits a sense of this network as it shifts colonialism from occurrence to “text” through the concepts of community, indigeneity, the cut of the body, and life.¹⁷

As I argue in the first chapter, “stumbling on community”, the concept of community is integral both to the understanding of projects that have laid claim to coming in the wake of apartheid—such as the claim to the rainbow nation or the construction of community through mourning—as well as to the actual production of reified racial subjectivities through apartheid. In producing this argument with regard to apartheid I contend its ordering anxiety has to do with the production of whiteness through the differential of community, which produces reified subjects of race. As interventions that do not account for the mechanism through which whiteness is produced in apartheid, I argue that both the Freedom Charter, as well as more recent invocations of mourning and fusional multiplicities (by Sam Durrant, Mark Sanders), actually work to maintain the very condition that apartheid sought to entrench: whiteness. In contrast to

¹⁷ I name colonialism as an episteme so as to call attention to the manner in which it is largely excluded in European critical thought. I think here particularly of Michel Foucault’s specification of three epistemes, the renaissance, the classical, and the modern as they condition the concept of man, in *The Archeology of Knowledge*. I deal with this in more detail in my discussion of Nancy in chapter two. The movement I invoke here clearly resonates with what Roland Barthes specifies as going “from work to text”, Cf. Roland Barthes, “From Work to Text” [1971] In: Barthes, R. *Image-Music-Text*. Translated from the French by Stephen Heath. London: Fontana Press, 1990, where text is understood, at least in part, as a “methodological field” to which only the practice of reading is adequate.

this, I argue that the figures of Jeremy Cronin and Mongane Wally Serote offer a more ethical engagement with the question of community. With Cronin there is a provisionality and a care offered in relation to the articulation of community that is critical to the work of black consciousness philosophy: there is a refusal to declare a triumphant conclusion, a walking out of the script of apartheid. Instead, Cronin traverses the limit of the potentiality that he explores, highlighting the proximity to falling back into that from which one tries to emerge. The provisionality of his intervention is accentuated through the medium in which he intervenes, namely poetry. He produces a series of short statements that lodge themselves in the script of apartheid, attempting to unravel it. This provisionality, and its attendant care for the limit, becomes more explicit in the second chapter where I discuss the intervention of Aimé Césaire in his *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*. This care for the limit that is expressed in the modality through which the intervention is posited can also be read into Steve Biko's decision to intervene through a series of publications (under the title "I write what I like") that each sketch an element of a critique, the totality of which exceeds its limits—elements of which are read in chapter four. As such, I argue that "I write what I like" takes on the modality of a notebook, enabling a politically scrupulous intervention at the level of the concept without programmatically declaring the arrival of the new: that which properly comes *after* apartheid.

Serote's *To Every Birth Its Blood* and Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure* constitute the hinge for my transition from a reading of the concept of community to the concept of indigeneity, the majority of which is discussed in the second

chapter, “Indigeneity in the wake of Man”. Both of these novels deal with the problem of indigeneity and community—Serote’s through the weightiness of the body that is black and Kane’s through a series of intellectual encounters that produces a condition of the subject in ambiguity. Neither novel, however, resolves this question, except, perhaps, through death. It is in the interventions articulated by Aimé Césaire that I locate a reworking of the concept of indigeneity where it is produced as the term for a relation to a concept of life that has been ordered by the tactility of the body: an indigeneity to a conceptual becoming that is named “negritude”. Césaire’s sense of the cut (as in a cutting) that can be set loose through poetry so as to cut (as in a slicing) is integral to this re-inscription of indigeneity as it comes to be produced through the provisionality of the *Notebook*. Carrying a strong resonance with Walter Benjamin’s sense of redemption in the “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” Césaire’s intervention also reverberates through Benjamin’s understanding of Man as a concept rather than as a phenomenological entity. As such, in this chapter I read Césaire alongside Benjamin as well as, later, Georg Lukács, so as to disclose what is at stake in the re-inscription of indigeneity as a conceptual becoming ordered by the cut of the body: grappling with the concept of Man as it comes to be reified through the mechanism of blackness/whiteness. Here Césaire marks an intervention into the episteme of colonialism—an episteme that also marks Lukács’ articulation of reification, as the juxtaposition of his intervention alongside that of Nunes in chapter two makes clear—clearing the ground for an intervention that would seize the mechanism of blackness/whiteness in reckoning with the weight of colonialism.

This weight, registered in the body as the production of the black-I as non-I that is maintained as external to the concept of Man, forms the focus of the third chapter, “Tactility”. This term registers what Frantz Fanon refers to as the “lived experience of the black man” as that which orders the necessity of coming to terms with the weight of apartheid and colonialism. The condition of blackness, which Césaire likens to “thingification”, is produced according to Fanon as an element in the broader production of the European notion of Man and the concept of society that hinges on it. I read Fanon’s argument with regard to the mechanism of blackness/whiteness—a mechanism that renders whiteness, alongside blackness, as a remainder in the production of Man—as a definitive intervention into the grounds for subjective certainty that orders both apartheid and Europe. Recognizing this schema leads to the further realization that any intervention that hinges on a reified sense of either blackness or whiteness must, necessarily, work to further that schema: a white man, as such, cannot walk out of the condition of whiteness anymore than the black man, as such, can. This is why Fanon rejects “fusional multiplicity” or, as it is termed in South Africa “multiculturalism”, as either a ground for resistance or an end goal of that resistance.

In the midst of this argument, however, the tactility of lived experience emerges as that which orders both the critique of the schema of blackness/whiteness (in other words an intervention at the level of the thematic) as well as the injunction that this tactility not simply be jettisoned. As my reading of Nunes makes clear, such a jettisoning—the temptation to read blackness as only conceptual—would precisely work to affirm the claim to a unified sense of whiteness. Rather, through reading Fanon in

relation to Ousmane Sembène's *Vehi-Ciosane, or, White-Genesis* where it is the weightiness of the body that fundamentally ruptures reified subjectivity and sets the reader (along with the child, Vehi-Ciosane) on the path toward *life*, I argue that the realization of this schema demands the production of a "new man". This new man that is set loose on the world is precisely, I argue in the subsequent chapter, what is meant by the expression of a life that enables the becoming expressive of subjectivity as an effect.

My final chapter, "Life ...", deals with the South African expression of black consciousness philosophy, both in terms of how it defines the question of blackness as well as the mode through which it seeks an encounter that would offer the world "the gift of a more human face". Turning through the problem of "white liberalism" as it is framed in Serote's *To Every Birth Its Blood* and the joining of this with the unraveling of the concept of Man as it comes to bear on the subject as it is worked out in Sembene's engagement with the Oedipus Myth, I offer a reading of black consciousness philosophy through both its common reception in South Africa as well as what I designate as a minor discourse in its articulation. For this latter, through a close reading of Steve Biko and Rick Turner's interventions with regard to blackness, whiteness, and the society to come, I argue that what black consciousness philosophy seeks to do is create the conditions for an encounter where white and black are not left intact so as to enable the living of "a life" in the wake of apartheid. Integral to this move is the reworking of indigeneity and tactility in the broader text of black consciousness philosophy, as well as Biko's insistence as part of his testimony that if the white man wants to actively work against apartheid, then he must "accede and become part of the black man" (see chapter four). In

other words, this has to do with becoming part of the unraveling of the subjective potential of Man that is embodied in whiteness. In short, it has to do with a form of what Deleuze and Guattari term “deterritorialisation” in the *face of the black man*.

Finally, I turn through J.M. Coetzee’s *Life and Times of Michael K* so as to offer a reading of a process whereby such an unraveling of the concept of Man is undertaken (in Coetzee’s reworking of Kleist’s *Michael Kohlstad*) so as to offer an ethical response to the demand of the lived experience of the black man. While Michael K (whose racial classification is ambiguous) does not escape the strictures of society as it is conditioned by the concept of Man, it is in the moments of this failure that the question of the lived experience of the black man is opened: Michael K is not capable of escaping the concept Man as it defines society precisely because he is denied the possibility of an encounter produced by the terms of black consciousness philosophy. In short, he fails because the world has not yet been made ready.

Stumbling on Community

There's a person down there.

[...]

His free hand, the talkative one,

Slips quietly behind

- *Strength brother*, it says

In my mirror,

A black fist.

Jeremy Cronin, "Motho Ke Motho Ka Batho Babang"¹

The dissolution of the apartheid regime in the first fully inclusive democratic elections in South Africa in 1994 brought with it the apparently bright prospects of a "new South Africa", an entity understood as a nation not premised on the exclusionary articulation of racial difference but rather on a "celebration of diversity", an understanding encapsulated in the phrase "the rainbow nation".² This promise, which the new state attempted to ensure through the process of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission,³ operated as a

¹ Jeremy Cronin, *Inside and Out: Poems from Inside and Even the Dead*. Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 1999, p14.

² The phrase "rainbow nation" is generally credited to Desmond Tutu who, it is held, made the pronouncement in response to the first democratic elections in South Africa—strikingly, no studies that I have read on the phrase actually locate the moment of its first articulation, although Tutu did use the formulation "the rainbow people of god" as early as 1989 (Cf. Desmond Tutu. *The Rainbow People of God: The Making of a Peaceful Revolution*. Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1996, 187). The statement became an integral part of the South African political imagination, however, when it found its way into Nelson Mandela's inaugural address as the first fully democratically elected president of South Africa, given on the 9th of May in Pretoria. In a formulation saturated with theological overtones he stated that "[w]e enter into a covenant that we shall build a society in which all South Africans, both black and white, will be able to walk tall, without any fear in their hearts, assured of their inalienable right to human dignity – a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world". Cf. "Statement by Nelson Mandela at his Inauguration as President", African National Congress, 10 May 1994. Last accessed 25 September 2012. <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=3132>. In both these cases the rainbow is offered as inclusive of black and white, or rather, where black and white can live together precisely not as black or white but as a range of colour: a difference that, perhaps, does not become reified as it always slips.

³ The critique of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) is myriad; on the manner through which the TRC's failings operated as a guarantee of the political compromise that heralded the formal end of apartheid see Mahmood Mamdani's "Amnesty or Impunity? A Preliminary Critique of the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa (TRC)", *Diacritics* Vol 32, No 3/4, Ethics (Autumn – Winter, 2002) pp 32-59. For what amounts to a defense of the TRC, see Mark Sanders' *Ambiguities of*

guarantee of the nation to come. Specifically, this guarantee entailed a very particular construction of the concept of apartheid so as to consider it a system of law that enabled—often through its own transgression—the violation of the human rights of individuals. In making this statement I agree with the general line of Mamdani’s critique that this focus on individual victims rather than on groups, on the legal language of rights rather than on the distinction between right and custom that was operative for apartheid (authorized, for example, by the Bantu Authorities Act 1951)—and by implication on individual perpetrators—effectively obscures the full weight of apartheid and offers a general amnesty through the mechanism of specific victimization (“Amnesty or Impunity?”, 41).⁴

However, rather than locating the shortcomings of the TRC process—and by implication the present failure of promise that marks the post-apartheid present—in the ground of “our negotiated settlement”, in this chapter I will argue that its grounds are to be located in an earlier reckoning with the concept of apartheid, namely, that of the Freedom Charter in 1955 and its resuscitation as an explicit programme for resistance in the 1980s.⁵ It is in this context that Tutu’s formulation of the concept of the rainbow

Witnessing: Law and Literature in the Time of a Truth Commission (Meridian: Crossing Aesthetics), Stanford University Press, 2007, which examines the mutual imbrications and interruption of literary texts, the law, and technology in the moment of the TRC and our coming to terms with it as a process of mourning.

⁴ This scenario, where the TRC recognized apartheid as a crime against humanity only generically, according to Mamdani leads to the naming of apartheid as “a crime against humanity without either victims or perpetrators” (2002, 54)

⁵ The tendency to identify the negotiated settlement as the ground for the present ‘failures of promise’ is by now commonplace. For what is one of the most influential such interventions, see John S. Saul, “Cry the Beloved Country: the Post-Apartheid Denouement”. *Monthly Review: An Independent Socialist Magazine*. January 2001, Vol. 52, Issue 8, pp 1—51. Saul argues, in short, that the negotiated settlement guaranteed a shift to the neoliberal right in the ANC (16, 29) whereby the party adopted a “meridional Thatcherism” (34)

nation gains its operative weight: through embracing the markers of ‘apart-ness’ and asserting these as markers of inclusivity, the metaphor of the rainbow nation aims to encapsulate the guiding principle of the Freedom Charter that “South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white”.⁶ As such, Tutu’s intervention in the naming of the emergent post-apartheid nation has an operative quality that extends beyond mere statements of triumph (“mission accomplished”) to the production of that promise in actuality; an intervention that hinges on both the concept of community and how it might be set to work, as well as on the concept of apartheid against which it is deployed.

Framing the emergent post-apartheid nation in terms of the metaphor of the rainbow—to the extent that it asks to be set to work—can be read as an integral element in the dominant modes through which a ‘coming to terms’ with the legacy of apartheid has been expressed. Stated differently, coming to terms with the weight of apartheid is invariably framed in the language of the constitution of ‘community’. This concept, as well as its attendant discourses in the post-apartheid moment of ‘a failed left’ and of ‘development’, has defined the ground of the post-apartheid present in such a manner as to obscure the weight that demands reckoning: that the work of coming to terms with the legacy of apartheid, to enable *life* in its wake, exceeds the demand to both memorialize

that led to the “squandered promise” (33) of the struggle for freedom in South Africa. It should be noted that more might have been made of Saul’s own acknowledgement—in the midst of his diagnosis of the ANC as sold out to neoliberalism—that resistance to this is found inside the ANC’s own structures, and that the current trajectory seems to be more strategic than is often acknowledged (29). In this dissertation I argue that this shift to neoliberalism is to be understood as symptomatic of the understanding of the subject as it is lodged on the terrain of race and class, an understanding that is shared by many on the left.

⁶ That rainbows do not include shades, such as black and white, and rather represents a refraction of sunlight into its constituent colours, seems to underscore a recent argument articulated by Antjie Krog at the Desmond Tutu Peace Centre Public Dialogues, “Rainbow Nation: Myth or Reality?” (Cape Town Slave Lodge, 13 October 2010) that the metaphor of the rainbow enables a non-fractured hybridity of essentialised identities, Cf. Julie Cunningham, “Rainbow Nation: Myth or Reality?” *South Africa: the Good News*. South Africa: the Good News, 28 October 2010. Web. 25 June 2012. This risk, I argue, underscores the wager that is the Freedom Charter.

the violences of that project (maintaining its weight in the present) and to simultaneously work towards opening an alternate trajectory (one not weighed down by its weight), which would register a future that is always already and yet still to come. As such, before turning to a fuller discussion of the Freedom Charter, I will first offer a discussion of an intervention at the level of ‘community’ that is suggestive in relation to its understanding of how the subject is lodged both through apartheid and through discourses that seek to come after it. Following this discussion, I will offer a reading of the Freedom Charter and the conceptual ground of apartheid against which it is lodged. In the wake of these discussions, I will turn through two key contributions—those of Sam Durrant and Wally Mongane Serote—in the project of coming *after* apartheid: after its grounds, reckoning with its weight. The last of these, particularly Serote’s *To Every Birth Its Blood*, offers the beginnings of an intervention that this dissertation seeks to push further. Serote’s intervention is mostly read as a text that marks his transition away from a Black Consciousness politics and toward a movement politics of the African National Congress. I, however, seek to read this novel as posing the question of the post-apartheid to “the movement” from the ground opened by a black consciousness philosophy.⁷ Particularly, the novel grapples with the demands of a programmatic mode of resistance in relation to what I will term ‘the weight of the body’. As such, through reading Serote’s novel I begin to set out the stakes of a turn to the philosophy of black consciousness as a mode through which to reckon with the question of racial formations in the post-apartheid present.

⁷ The distinction between a capitalized and lower case form of black consciousness is introduced by Daniel Magaziner in his reading of the movement so as to distinguish between black consciousness as a philosophy (lower case) and Black Consciousness as a dogma (capitalized): it is not clear whether Magaziner marks this distinction in this way consciously or not. Cf. Daniel R. Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets: Black Consciousness in South Africa, 1968 – 1977*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010.

Of touching and the gaze

It is important to frame this engagement with the concept of apartheid and its attendant notion of community with an intervention that attempts to offer a sense of community that *comes after* the conceptual sense of it that, I will argue, underwrites both the discourse of apartheid and those discourses that seek to lay it to rest. This frame enables me to set out the risks and potentialities that surround my intervention into the question of racial formations in the post-apartheid present. In short, turning to Jeremy Cronin's "Motho ke motho ka batho babang" enables the positioning of my intervention in what can be described as a politically scrupulous mode. His poem, the first and last lines of which constitute the epigraph to this chapter, moves toward a concept of community that comes after apartheid.⁸ The title of this poem, which in English is rendered by Cronin as "A person is a person because of other people", constitutes a central tenet in the notion of "*uBuntu*" as the name for an all inclusive sense of community that is meant to be indigenous to Southern Africa, a sense of community that is supposedly premised on openness and forgiveness.⁹ As such, Cronin's poem quite clearly has the concept of

⁸ Jeremy Cronin is currently the Deputy Minister of Public Works in the South African Government and the Deputy General-Secretary of the South African Communist Party (SACP) as well as a member of the National Executive Committee of the African National Congress. He completed a Masters degree in Philosophy at the Sorbonne in Paris before returning to South Africa in 1973 to teach philosophy at the University of Cape Town. Cronin was already active in the SACP and was arrested under the anti-terrorism laws in 1976 and sentenced to seven years imprisonment in September of the same year. Upon his release in 1983 Cronin became a founding member of the United Democratic Front and published his first collection of poetry, *Inside*, that was written during his imprisonment. The poem under discussion here is included in that collection. Cronin, along with Raymond Suttner, was also one of the key forces behind the resuscitation of the Freedom Charter as an explicit framework for resistance in the 1980s.

⁹ The term "*ubuntu*" operates as a place holder for the concept of community as it informs thought on post-apartheid South Africa, whether it does so as a marker of patriarchy and ethnic essentialism (as in its use by the Inkatha Freedom Party in the schools of the Kwazulu Homeland), or of a broader unraveling of identities. Dorothy Driver, in her "Truth, Reconciliation, Gender: the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Black Women's Intellectual History", *Australian Feminist Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 47, July 2005, pp 219 -229, has offered an interesting feminist reading of the concept of *ubuntu* as

community on its horizon. However, through the interaction of perspective, voice, and the semiotics of the hand, Cronin's intervention rapidly alters the sense of community that might be deployed from it.

Written in the first person and addressed directly to the reader, the poem offers (given the context of its publication in *Inside*) a sense of what communication and interaction was like for those who were incarcerated by the apartheid regime. As Cronin himself has said, these poems for him operated as a mode through which he could maintain his sanity while in confinement.¹⁰ While at a certain level the context of the poem is important, it is the unfolding of encounters as they take place in it that is of more interest to my argument at hand. All the encounters narrated in the poem take place, we discover, on the surface of the mirror that the narrator has extended out of the window, a mirror claimed as "mine". This mirror, that enables the narrator to "see / Clear to the end of the passage" (lines 1 and 2), functions as an interface between the narrator and the "person down there" (line 3), an interface that gives the sense of clarity in what it offers for perception. The first encounter offered in the poem, somewhat startlingly, is with a subject already constituted as a person. While it is possible that the naming of the figure at the end of the passage as a person is simply accidental, the title of the poem constrains

it operated in the TRC and, by extension, in the formation of a "new South Africa". She argues that *ubuntu* in its most radical sense means the "becoming hospitable to the strange" (226). However, Driver suggests that it is very rarely set to work in that sense, and rather provides a scenario (particularly in the TRC and in Mark Sanders' reading of it, to which she is generally sympathetic) where the concept "encompasses men-in-themselves but only women-in-community" where "*ubuntu* is bestowed by women but not onto women" (224). Driver argues that a more radical sense of *ubuntu* is developed in the writings of women in the Black Consciousness movement, particularly Ellen Kuzwayo's *Call Me Woman* published in 1985. She further argues that the joining of *ubuntu* and forgiveness as an instrument of restorative justice in the TRC is to be credited largely to Desmond Tutu. In this regard see also Jermaine McCalpine, "For the future? Restorative Justice, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation in Deeply Divided Societies", *Proteus*, Vol. 24, Issue 2, 2007, pp 35-41.

¹⁰ Barbara Harlow and Jeremy Cronin, "A Chapter in South African Verse: Interview with Jeremy Cronin". *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, No. 21. The literary Phenomenon, 2001, pp252-272.

its reading, marking the figure out as exceptional: he is already a person (not named, at first, as a prisoner or a figure), without any recognition or care for or of the other that his naming through *ubuntu* would require. The horizon in the poem is, through this naming of the person, immediately turned toward the question: what makes this person a person, and how does the narrator name it as such? To state this differently, this opening declaration of the poem puts into question the terms on which this person emerges as such.

In the next line we are given a description of this person: “A prisoner polishing a doorhandle” (line 4). This figure at work, not in the ‘productive’ Lockean sense whereby one finds one’s reason in society, but rather at work embellishing the façade of its own captivity, is located, fixed through its position in relation to broader society: a prisoner.¹¹ On the surface of the mirror, the site of intersection for the encounter about to be narrated and also the site from which views emanate, the speaker notes an event of recognition: “In the mirror I see him see / My face in the mirror” (Lines 5 and 6). The expression of this recognition from the side of the prisoner occurs in the semiotics of the hand. However, it is necessary to stress the dynamic of “seeing” or becoming visible that frames this encounter and which resonates strongly with the late turnings of

¹¹ This labour occupies an ambiguous sense in Locke’s *Treatise on Government* as it occurs in the realm of captivity, albeit not necessarily that of the slave. See footnote 47 in this chapter for a brief discussion of the role of labour in Locke’s understanding of what it is to be a person. As Foucault has convincingly argued, the function of the prisoner has as much to do with the production of society as an instance of the normal as it does with the removal from society of a figure of the deviant. Cf. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, Translated from the French by Alan Sheridan. London: Penguin Books, 1991, see especially the section on “Normalizing Judgment”, pp 177 – 184.

phenomenology offered by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a resonance that it is worth bringing into play in some detail in relation to my reading of the poem.¹²

Importantly, the becoming visible that is narrated in the poem is that of a double perception held in the view of a single perception: the holding point (or seat¹³) here is the mirror on which the recognition of the face of the narrator is recorded as becoming visible to the narrator through the body, specifically the hand, of the other figure. According to Merleau-Ponty, the body is not simply a physical thing (meat and bones) but is rather an “intertwining of vision and movement” (“Eye and Mind”, 353). An understanding of the body that becomes important for how we read the intersection between the hand and perception in the poem. Stated differently, the body is a place of the intertwining of senses so as to leave them (the senses) with no strict division (“The Intertwining”, 395). As such, the body can be considered a quilting point of sense. If this is read in relation to the poem, the perceptions recorded and held in the mirror become, quite seriously, expressions of the totality of being for the figures involved. Within this understanding, Merleau-Ponty argues that it is in fact perception (and thus the body) which is primary, not thought (or consciousness). What is important for the reading of Cronin’s poem in relation to the question of community is that, according to Merleau-Ponty, it is not an “I” that grasps perception, but rather that it is in perception that a form of “I-ness” is produced (“Primacy of Perception”, 91). Importantly, this grasping of a

¹² The important essays for this discussion are Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind” [1961], “The Intertwining—The Chiasm” [1961] and “The Primacy of Perception and its Philosophical Consequences” [1947], all in Ted Toadvine and Leonard Lawlor, eds. *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007.

¹³ This sense of holding or of a seat for perception becomes important in relation to Merleau-Ponty’s sense of “the flesh” as the site of intertwining (discussed below): “Flesh” in French is “la chair”.

sense of I-ness—a grasping that incorporates all of the body including its “unseen”—is not given in the form of a representation, in other words, as a probability stemming from geometric ideals *that a subject calculates*; rather, this whole is given as a style peculiar to the object (92). The geometric comes after, as a means to subordinate space to mind, whereas for Merleau-Ponty, each object blends all its looks (or lines of perception), that palpate it, into its own style, a style that stems from the looks, not from itself.¹⁴

For Merleau-Ponty, then, perception, or what he later terms the gaze, envelopes and palpates things: “It is not simply a thing *seen* in fact [his example is a subject’s sense of their back which is, per definition, mostly out of sight], it is visible in principle, it falls under a vision that is both ineluctable and deferred” (“The Intertwining”, 398). In order to understand the gaze in this way, it is necessary to “emigrate” into the outside, into what he terms “flesh”. In other words, being is moved outside of the self, or rather, the self is located on the other side of the body. This movement to the outside is, I would suggest, precisely what is offered through the mechanism of the mirror as the site of the encounter between the narrator and the person. The gaze (and this becomes important for Lacan who quite clearly also resonates through this poem) clearly emanates from the intertwining of the flesh which leaves no self-sufficient ego. Rather, there is only an “I” due to touching, to the palpation of the gaze.¹⁵ This “I”, which exists due to being entwined with other “I’s” in “flesh”, leads to a notion of “inter-corporeal being, a presumptive domain of the visible and the tangible which extends further than the things I

¹⁴ In the final section of this chapter I offer a brief reading of Lyotard’s concept of “the jews” that comes quite close to this initial sense of the outside of being.

¹⁵ For Lacan’s dependence on the philosophical interventions of Merleau-Ponty, see particularly his lectures “On the Gaze as *objet petit a*” in Lacan, J. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, (1981) Jacques-Alain Miller, ed. Alan Sheridan, Trans. NY & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998.

touch and see at present” (“The Intertwining”, 403). This inter-corporeal “I” whose inter-corporeality stretches beyond its apparent zone of perception, then, is clearly not simply reducible to an individual self, or a straightforward mixing of individual selves. In the privileging of perception that takes place in the poem, what is offered—through reading it in relation to Merleau-Ponty—is a sense of a community of touching, or a community of the touch in which persons are, always already. At stake in this formulation is the notion that this community of the touch is always already in *potentia* and is shown forth in moments of encounter such as that narrated in Cronin’s poem; as Casarino phrases it in his discussion of interferential ontology in *Modernity at Sea*, “In the beginning was interference” (xvii).

In a move that comes very close to certain understandings of *ubuntu* as a philosophical statement, through the positing of the concept of “flesh” as primary Merleau-Ponty displaces the possibility of a self that can know its existence internally (*cogito ergo sum*), rather, the self exists always already in relation to other existents, different to them due to a matter of style. Rather than Descartes’ *cogito*, Merleau-Ponty affirms—in distinction from Descartes’ first two meditations in his *Meditations on First Philosophy*—what we might phrase as a vicinity of fire and space that marks a perception occurring in its proximity. Despite the movement away from a self-sufficient “I”, the emphasis on style is important as within it is maintained an element of an “I” that is unique to itself due to its particularity as a particular kind of object in perception. The “flesh,” as an intertwining, holds the possibility of relation with others and becomes marked, according to Merleau-Ponty, by the haunting of language. It is this marking that

occurs through the semiotics of the sign so as to order the perception of community in Cronin's poem.

Coming back to the discussion of "Motho ke motho ka batho babang", following directly from the recognition of a mutual perception held in the point of view of the mirror, the narrator describes a series of four signs produced through the movement of the hand that come to characterize the understanding of community and being that is offered in the poem, as well as the relationship to authority that it must negotiate. The first of these, at least at its surface, has to do with the proximity of a marker of this authority: "I see the fingertips of his free hand / bunch together, as if to make / An object the size of a badge / Which travels up to his forehead / The place of an imaginary cap / (This means: *A warder.*)" (lines 7 – 12, emphasis in original, the definition of particular signs is presented in italics throughout the poem). This image of a free hand, recurring three times in the poem, suggests more than simply a hand not employed in the act of polishing. Rather, this hand is *active*, in the midst of the weight of disciplinary reason that saturates the prison, and this hand *articulates* the grounds for the becoming apparent of community. Clearly, in its most immediate articulation the hand operates as a sign that signals the presence of a prison warder through the mimicking of its insignias of authority (badge, uniform), in other words, it represents a signal of constraint.

I would suggest, however, that this sign of the proximity of the warder can be read at a more conceptual level, especially within the frame of the question of community. A key moment in the construction of this first sign is the arrival of the "free hand" at "the place of an imaginary cap". Strictly, this cap is imaginary because the

prisoner is not wearing one. However, as a sign of authority that structures the relationship between the two figures and the warder that is out of the narrator's point of view, this cap can also be read to signify the heading or direction with regard to community that authorizes this disciplinary relationship. The question of authority here is perhaps straightforward; as a marker of the heading or direction that constitutes the grounds on which apartheid is articulated it is necessary to draw the poem into relation with a language that Cronin knows very well, namely, French. To state the connection briefly: the French term "*cap*" translates as "course" or "heading", as well as "hurdle" or "limit" and, as such, the sign can be read as carrying this more forceful sense of the relation that is signaled here along with it. The sign is not locked in immediacy, it is itself active and, perhaps, transgressive.¹⁶ In short, while this warder clearly 'looks after' the prisoners under its (the warder is neuter in the poem) watch; the warder also looks after the grounds on which these prisoners are produced as such, namely, the grounds of apartheid through community.

The narrator then describes the second in this series of signs: two fingers of the free hand are "extended in a vee" and made to "wiggle like two antennae" so as to indicate that the prisoner is being watched (lines 13 – 15). The proximity of the warder to the prisoner that is in the narrator's point of view is accentuated through this sign; it is not a generalized authority that is invoked but a disciplining look quite different from the gaze through which the poem unfolds. Here a second "look" is brought into play, a look

¹⁶ For a discussion of this question of "headings" and "grounds", Cf. Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on today's Europe*. Studies in Continental Thought. Translated from the French by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael B. Naas, Indiana University Press, 1992. For a discussion of apartheid and its basis in community, see the second section of this chapter below.

that seeks to rend the prisoner from the possibility of the encounter that is staged by the mirror, a rending of the prisoner away from an encounter with a sense of “flesh” and into a form of relation that wards off the potentialities of this primary encounter. This is a look, as the later introduction of a voice makes clear, that seeks to hail the prisoner into a fixed subjectivity. At play in this series of signs, however, is not only the extent to which the prisoner as a subject is located inside a regime of disciplinary reason. Rather, through introducing the notion of time and rhythm through the third sign that is constructed in the view of the narrator, a mode of resistance and desire is articulated: “A finger on his free hand makes a watch-hand’s arc / On the wrist of his polishing arm without / Disrupting the slow-slow rhythm of his work / (*Later. Maybe, later we can speak*)” (lines 16 – 19). The double expressions of time in this sign, namely abstract linear time and the timing of rhythm, punctuates it in a manner that opens the possibility for the reader to contemplate the mode through which subjectivation takes place. On the one hand, the unfolding linearity of time is invoked as that which measures the actions of both the prisoner and the warder. The look of the warder that fixes the prisoner in place only exerts its weight over the prisoner for *a period of time*, even if in that time it attempts to fix the prisoner in its subjectivity absolutely. Time in this moment allows for the expression of alternate subjectivities through measuring out spaces where the look does not reach. To a similar extent, it is also implied that this same linear time determines the movements of the prisoner from place to place and from job to job: it moves him even as he moves in it.

In the midst of this determinative articulation of time the rhythm of movement marks a form of transgression in relation to the disciplinary look of the warder. While the

broad structure of the prisoner's daily existence (from actions to subjectivity) is determined by linear time, the actual expression of that existence moves according to a different rhythm, the "slow-slow" rhythm of his work. This rhythm of work is what enables the prisoner to articulate the possibility of an alternate concept of the subject in community even while inside the look of the warder—it enables him to have *a free hand*. As Jean-Paul Sartre has phrased it in his preface to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, the "slow and lazy" expression of existence of the native, or in this moment the prisoner, is a "form of sabotage" in and of itself (*Wretched of the Earth*, 15). That the rhythm remains uninterrupted even in the moment when it is used to articulate a sign that speaks to the passing of time, suggests that the transgression it enables is not simply for the narrator in whose perception this rhythm is lodged. Rather, it appears as "a form of sabotage" at the level of subjectivation enabling a space of becoming in which the prisoner lodges itself and the narrator in the final movements of the poem.

While this sign of the watch-hand strictly signifies the limited value of "later", the narrator imbues the sign with the potentiality of the narrator's own desire, adding that: "Maybe, later we can speak". This further level of meaning that is layered onto the sign is articulated somewhat hesitantly by the narrator as only a possibility of a future interaction, an interaction different from that expressed in the movement and visibility of the hand primarily due to the proximity offered by the notion of a voice. Carrying a certain promise of presence, the voice and, perhaps more significantly, the desire for the voice, reveals the fragile status of this community of touching—the narrator longs for an affirmation of existence that would supplement the subject effect of this gaze, a

supplement that allows this effect to express itself as an “I”. The role of desire here is not straightforward, however, and can be thought in relation to Lacan. As was mentioned briefly above, the understanding of the gaze articulated by Merleau-Ponty, as it palpates the body comes to be understood by Lacan through the concept of the *objet petit a*. Following Merleau-Ponty, Lacan suggests that his concept of the Real should be thought in relation to the concept of the “flesh” (“The split between the eye and the gaze”, 68). More particularly, it is in his discussion of the gaze, as a non-total ontology, that Lacan draws on Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the “flesh” as the locus both of perception and language. Fundamentally for Lacan, we are “beings who are looked at”, in other words, we are located as patients within perception, we are “in the spectacle of the world” (“The split between the eye and the gaze”, 75). This necessitates that Lacan formulate a distinction between the Sartrean gaze and the gaze in psychoanalysis.

Principally, the Sartrean gaze emanates in the realm of others, from others as subjects. It is thus always locatable, even if it carries an ethical imperative that is not easily answered (“Anamorphosis”, 84). On the other hand, the gaze for Lacan is more primordial, it “is presented to us only in the form of a strange contingency, symbolic of what we find on the horizon, as the thrust of our experience, namely, the lack that constitutes castration anxiety” (“The split between the eye and the gaze”, 72-73). In other words, the psychoanalytic gaze is that of the Real from which “I” am extracted as “eye” (“Anamorphosis”, 84) and this extraction, this emergence of a subject, is always mediated by lack or loss. The gaze in which the subject occurs, which is located in the Real (flesh), is the “underside of consciousness” (“Anamorphosis”, 83) in which Lacan

locates the lack by which the subject emerges as fixed to itself. As he later asserts, “the *objet a* in the field of the visible is the gaze” (“What is a picture”, 105). As such, the *objet petit a* is a concept that marks the expression of the subject as constituted through a particular lack: the lack of being an “eye”, a “look” that is precisely not equivalent to this more general and total gaze (“Anamorphosis”, 84). Desire in this instance is not a lack in the negative sense of a need or of a search for fullness, but rather is the productivity that styles, or marks, the non-total ontological character of the emerging subject effect as it traverses the singularities of the gaze. To state this differently, the desire expressed by the narrator in this instance is an element of the risk that always travels with the subject effect: a risk that might be phrased as the taming of desire through the constitution of a fixed subjectivity present to itself and to its others.¹⁷

This voice that is called for in the moment of the narrator’s re-articulation of the sign, however, is neither enabling nor safe. At the moment in which the supplemental nature of speech is brought to thought, a voice—it is tempting to call it real—cuts across this progression of signs. It is the voice of the warder hailing the prisoner as its subject: “*Hey! Wat maak jy daar?* [Hey! What are you doing there?] / — a voice from around the corner. / *No. Just polishing baas* [boss].” (lines 20 – 22, emphasis in original). The call of the warder serves to remind the prisoner that his time is not his own; it forces the prisoner to confront the fact that he is lodged in a system that distills the calculability of the subject into its most pure form: the atomized individual performing tasks set to the clock

¹⁷ For a discussion of the workings of this risk see Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Translated from the French by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem & Helen R. Lane. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983, especially the section on “The Desiring Machines” and the sub chapter “A Materialist Psychiatry” (pp 22 – 35).

and accounting for its use of that allotted time, an allotment that cuts through any sense of leisure. As such, the prisoner immediately responds to the call by affirming the “slow-slow rhythm” of his work as an act of compliance. The prisoner’s response hinges, as has most of the poem, on the question of perception and its relation to being. By asserting the apparent truth that the “slow-slow rhythm” of his work is deployed towards achieving the goal set by the prison schedule, the prisoner challenges the adequacy of the warder’s “look” and thereby preserves the site of an alternate encounter. The prisoner, through his own voice, affirms his existence as an individual lodged in the prison system while simultaneously miss-affirming the warder in the certitude of its surveillance. For the narrator, however, this voice does not interpellate it (however weakly) into the disciplinary complex of the prison. Rather, as the dash indicates, it slices or cuts into the hope of presence, reminding the narrator of the risk involved in the longing for the voice as a marker of presence.

The voice of the warder emanates from outside the realm of visual perception, of seeing and watching, and as such carries the force of the sovereign: a force that hails from out of his visual field so as to determine the actions of those who are offered up to its surveillance. This voice of the sovereign emanates from everywhere, marking an attempt to displace the force of the gaze.¹⁸ At this moment in the poem there is a break in the visual reciprocity between the narrator and the prisoner—the prisoner turns his back

¹⁸ See for example Jacques Derrida’s discussion of this function of the sovereign as specter whose voice emanates from behind the visor, in other words as a voice that is generally localizable but is specifically unlocatable: its force does not come from sight but rather through the voice—a voice that we must take “on its word” (8). This voice is an expression of the claim that the sovereign has on those who inherit from it their subjectivity. Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, Translated from the French by Peggy Kamuf. London: Routledge, 1994, see especially the chapter “Injunctions of Marx”.

on the narrator, not as an act of rejection but so as to more fully reveal the existence of an alternative notion of community that is resistant to the interpellative injunction of the voice and look of the warder. Critically, in order to open this space the prisoner first needs to turn itself fully toward the look of the warder: “He turns his back to me, now watch / His free hand, the talkative one, / Slips quietly behind / — *Strength brother*, it says, / In my mirror, / A black fist.” (lines 23 – 28). In this turn the prisoner opens the ground through which a subversive articulation of what I have been naming ‘community’ is available for encounter, held out, as it were.

This final movement of the poem, taking place on the ground cleared by the prisoner’s feigned embrace of the warder’s look (turning toward him), also hails the reader as a participant in this gaze that offers a community of touching. The narrator hails the reader in a language that immediately returns to the earlier discussions of time, looking, and of looking after, which structured the middle section of the poem. The narrator instructs the reader: “now watch”. This is an instruction premised on time, opened up toward perception. It is an invitation to find oneself a part of the gaze held by the mirror, now. It also separates the narrator from the look that it has articulated in the poem: the narrator expresses a certainty about what will now take place, in the future, to which it turns the reader, now. The prisoner’s “free hand”, which has in the wake of the warder’s injunction become “talkative”, “slips quietly behind”. The free hand is now the location of communication for the narrator (there is no longer a hope for the affirmative presence of speech), it is a talkativity that becomes inaudible so as to be set-to-work behind the lines of the look of the warder. This transgression, this coming from behind,

also marks the inversion of the sign-then-signified mode through which the movement and perceptibility of the hand has up to this point been registered: here the meaning is given first, the sign last.

It is in this sign that the most clear articulation with regard to life after apartheid is offered. The sign, the narrator informs us, means “strength brother”, an offering that extends beyond the relation of the prisoner and the narrator to the potential reader who touches on this interaction. The strength that is offered in this sign emerges alongside the first mention of color in the poem: the free hand forms a black fist. Rapidly recognizable as a sign of the anti-apartheid struggle and of what might loosely be grouped as Marxist struggles more generally, the mode through which the black fist offers a sense of strength to the narrator brings more than the overtly political into play. This offering hinges on the understanding of a community of touching held outside the self through the concept of the gaze that has been constitutive of the poem itself. The strength does not simply stem from a recognition of the self as an intimate element of the liberation struggle (this is, nonetheless, still signified: the strength is offered to a “brother” through the sign of struggle); the sign exceeds such an offer. The fist fills the mirror, saturates it, such that the narrator recognizes *only* the black fist in it. In this moment where the mirror becomes the sign, where the black fist marks that which holds the community of the gaze, the mirror as the seat of this sense of community is once again claimed—it is submitted to ownership through the possessive pronoun “my”, a designation that had slipped away during the unfolding of the semiotics of the hand in the poem. While it is possible to argue that the sign (of community, and hence in the frame of the poem, of being) in this

instance has become dislocated from both the prisoner and the narrator and that it has been lodged in the holding site of the mirror (the intertwining of two ‘looks’ in the generalized gaze, looks that emanate from the mirror and not from subjects), the claim to make the site of this sign proper to the self, to call it mine, seems to resist such an easy resolution to the question of community.¹⁹

This touching of the gaze that carries with it the peculiar style of the black fist suggests a mode of encounter in which the person is a person not simply through other persons, but rather the person is ordered through the weight of blackness even as it structures the mode of resistance to apartheid. In this moment, however, the narrator falls back into a sense of the self that is defined through property and that would, as such, seek to own this alternate sense of community that is heralded in the poem. It is pertinent to the discussion of community as a concept that both fundamentally structures the discourse of apartheid and the discourses of that which seeks to come after it, that Cronin’s poem ends in both an affirmation of this community of the black fist and in a disclosure of its ultimate limit: that it must confront the situation where the individuated person (i.e. the one defined through what is proper to it, hence through calculability) is always already in play. The tone of the poem at this point is one of resolute defiance in the face of the look of the warder that would seek to order such a sense of the person, but—and this is the point—this disciplinary look is marked as one from which it is not

¹⁹ As Cesare Casarino has argued in his discussion of philopoesis—“the love of the potentiality that cuts across philosophy and literature”—it is precisely the mode of “possession” that “stifles potentiality”: in this instance, the potentiality of a community of the touch. This touching, read through the lens of a philopoesis, could be read as an interference that rumbles through and shatters “representational texts”, precisely the kind of texts that would seek to read Cronin’s poem as an entry into an identity of blackness for the white man (*Modernity at Sea*, pp xxvii and xxxiv).

easy to walk out.²⁰ The question of the struggle against apartheid, of coming in its wake, is turned in this instance from one contained in political struggle to one that is lodged simultaneously at the levels of the political and the conceptual, as a struggle that seeks to clear the ground from which a “line of flight” might emerge.

The Concept of Apartheid and the Freedom Charter

As the dangers and risks surrounding the notion of community that emerges in Cronin’s “*Motho ke motho ka batho babang*” make clear, the task of coming to terms with apartheid is neither straightforward nor is it contingent on simply finding oneself located chronologically after its formal demise. Rather, in an echo of the response that the philosopher Gilles Deleuze offered in relation to the question, “after the subject, who comes?” it is clear that any effective reckoning with the weight of apartheid requires that the terrain on which the subject of apartheid is lodged, be unsettled.²¹ Integral to this is an

²⁰ This edge that the poem leaves the reader with is precisely the line of risk that Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari explore in their highly influential discussion of “nomadology”. Cf. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Translated from the French by Brian Massumi, London: The Athlone Press, 1988, pp 351 – 423. Setting to work on this edge Deleuze and Guattari argue for a sense of the intellectual position of nomadology as that of “a tribe in the desert instead of a universal subject within the horizon of all encompassing Being” (379). However, just as the schizoid is often pathologized as schizophrenic, they argue that nomadology is amenable to being reduced to a nativism or an orientalism, in other words, it runs the risk of being crystallized as race (379). Arguing in the midst of this risk that race needs to be remembered as a coding of the socius (the form of the social), they posit that “a race is always minority, it exists only through domination” (379). In other words, to be in opposition to the State, to lodge yourself on what they call the BwO (Body without Organs), is to assume the position of race in relation to the State. This understanding of race is very close to that offered by Steve Biko, namely that it is a “mental attitude” in opposition to the state (Cf. *I Write What I Like*, 48, see also chapter 4 of this dissertation). For Deleuze and Guattari this is put in play as a technique to decode the socius—to unravel the grounds of the State—it actively works against its recoding within the apparatus of the state, or, as Levinas phrases it, it has to do with “holding onto oneself while gnawing at oneself” (“Substance”, 114). The difficulties of this position is, on a number of levels, what this dissertation attempts to contend with.

²¹ On the question of the subject and its terrain, see Gilles Deleuze, “A Philosophical Concept ...” *Who comes after the subject?* Ed. Eduardo Cadava, Peter Conner and Jean-Luc Nancy. New York: Routledge, 1991. 94-95. Print.

adequate understanding of the concept of apartheid and, particularly, the understanding of apartheid that was articulated in the Freedom Charter of 1955 (the key text that authorizes the majority of mainstream attempts to come to terms with the legacy of apartheid). So as to effectively structure my reading, I will first discuss the concept of apartheid and then, secondly, I will offer a reading of the Freedom Charter as well as a reading of some of the key critiques of the Charter.

While the dominant critiques of apartheid tend to focus either on its expression as a form of racist nationalism or as an integral element in the entrenchment of monopoly capital, it is the lesser discussed notion of the manner in which the concept of community is invoked by apartheid that most clearly resonates into the present failure of the post-apartheid moment and, as such, will form the focus of my discussion of apartheid here.²² It is necessary however, to situate this argument inside a very brief overview of some of the major modes of reading apartheid. Neville Alexander, in his *An Ordinary Country*, has offered a useful reading of the role of the concept of the nation in the ordering of the historiography of South Africa.²³ He argues that there are four basic senses of the nation, namely, an Afrikaner multi-nationalism (*OC*, 35), the liberal four nations hypothesis (*OC*, 36), the more radical two nations thesis (*OC*, 37), and finally his own one nation argument (*OC*, 39). While the Afrikaner multi-nationalist perspective (the perspective that Alexander argues underwrites the apartheid fracturing of the category of the native

²² I am indebted to Mark Sanders' *Complicities: the Intellectual and Apartheid*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2002, as a key text in opening up this question of apartheid and community—However, I find his notion of complicity and its relation to redemption, less convincing.

²³ Neville Alexander, *An Ordinary Country: Issues in the Transition from Apartheid to Democracy in South Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2002, hereafter *OC*.

into multiple ethnicities) and the two nations thesis (that he argues characterizes the interventions of the Pan-Africanist Congress and the Black Consciousness Movements—namely, the division between African and non-African) have practically no traction in the post-apartheid moment, Alexander argues that the liberal four nations hypothesis is the hegemonic ground for the South African present. This hypothesis, that posits the existence of four definitional categories (white, black, coloured, and Indian) that were “never considered to be ‘nations’” (*OC*, 36), was solidified in the second clause of the Freedom Charter that declares that “all national groups shall have equal rights”.²⁴ In addition, this hypothesis similarly orders the demand articulated in the Report adopted at the 1969 ANC conference in Morogoro, Tanzania, the “Strategy and Tactics of the South African Revolution”, that the struggle must “unambiguously accept the primary role of the most oppressed group, Africans”.²⁵ However, according to the ANC this acceptance was offered, in this instance, as a strategic response to the organizing function of racial hierarchization as it was deployed by the Apartheid State; in other words, they claim to hold to a single state hypothesis. This is a response, however, that self-consciously emerged as a defense against the anxiety that the ANC was dominated by minority groups and, as such, reveals the extent to which the reality of racial distinction had come to order the social in which their interventions were lodged (“Apartheid”, 201).²⁶

²⁴ The Freedom Charter was adopted in 1955 at the Congress of the People. The copy that I have relied on is included on pages 262 – 266 in Jeremy Cronin and Raymond Suttner Eds, *50 Years of the Freedom Charter*, Pretoria: UNISA Press, 2006.

²⁵ Reproduced in Alex La Guma, Ed. *Apartheid: A Collection of Writings on South African Racism by South Africans*, New York: International Publishers, 1971, 200.

²⁶ There is no attempt to theorise this ambiguous relation between the refusal of race (these ‘nations’ are equally spoken of as ‘races’) and its implicit acceptance that is revealed here. In the third chapter of this dissertation I deal with this question through reading the concept of tactility as it emerges in the work of Franz Fanon.

According to Alexander, all of these modes of understanding the construction of apartheid South Africa work to obscure the “class element” that has become lodged in the “hierarchy of racial stereotypes which reinforced the relations of domination and subordination that had been inaugurated by colonial conquest and colonial settlement” (OC, 12). I will briefly discuss Alexander’s sense of a “one nation thesis” as part of my reading of the Freedom Charter a bit further on. Race, in Alexander’s reading (which is generally representative of what is called “revisionist historiography” in South Africa) operates as a form of false consciousness that mistakes a “functional necessity” (labour control) for a cause (OC, 22). Crucially, Alexander’s reading of race here is not a straightforward dismissal of it as an ontological category (he returns to it as constituting part of South Africa’s uniqueness later in his book). Rather his position is closer to that of Alain de Benoist who in an essay titled “What is Racism?” argues both that race exists (his frame of reference is anthropology and biology, 33 and 36) and that it only has a “secondary relation” to domination (19).²⁷ In this argument, it is only when race is defined “as an invariable *ideal type*, independent of the historical, social or cultural circumstances to be found, to some degree or another, affecting the various members of a social group” that race becomes an “essentialism” (26). However, de Benoist argues against the underlying principle of Alexander’s reading of race by arguing that this notion of race applies equally to class, that “both race and class play the same explanatory role” (28) when classes are taken as given in and of themselves (clearly, there is a distinction

²⁷ Alain de Benoist, “What is Racism”. *Telos*. Winter 1999, vol. 114, pp 11-48. Web. Critically, the comparison drawn here has to do with the understanding of race as a function. Alexander is in no way politically close to the arguments of de Benoist whose interventions, such as absolute opposition to all forms of immigration, have shaped the “New Right” in France through the “Research and Study Group for European Civilization” (GRECE) of which he is a member.

here between class and class consciousness). Ultimately, in a move that draws close to Fanon in its structure, de Benoist argues that race “is perceived”, in other words it is a “signifier” and, as such, must be reckoned with but, and this departure from Alexander is crucial, class is similarly such a signifier (40).

Turning to the question of community (which cannot simply be reduced to a question of nation, although that is Alexander’s move), Hermann Giliomee, in his 2003 article discussing the “making of the apartheid plan” (the central tenets of which I discuss below) agrees with Alexander’s overview of the general trends in South African historiography. He suggests that these all hinge on correlative definitions of the concept of apartheid: that it is either considered as a question of “labour control” (374), in other words, as a mechanism to enable the extraction and control of labour at a minimal cost to capital (Alexander’s position); as a question of “moral economy” (375), or to put it more forcefully, as a further instantiation of the missionary complex (the liberal four nations hypothesis); or as a fascist or proto-fascist nationalism (the multi-nation hypothesis), that is, as derivative from National Socialism in Europe (377). While these are all clearly expressions of the project of apartheid they do not, according to Giliomee, constitute its conceptual ground. For this he offers, rather, the question of “community” (375), by which he means the preservation of the sense of self through belonging to a distinct group.

This question of the conceptual ground of apartheid is in stark contrast to (but not disagreement with) the interventions by notable figures such as Alex La Guma and Oliver Tambo—who argued, for example, in clear echoes of the interventions made by Franz

Fanon, that apartheid was equivalent to genocide (La Guma) and that its force would bring about its own destruction through force (Tambo).²⁸ These interventions are included in a collection of essays and documents pertaining to the problem of apartheid that were collected by Alex La Guma—a leading literary and left political figure in the 1960s in South Africa—as a mode through which exiled South Africans could articulate a strategic and definitive definition of apartheid. Apart from defining its totalitarian expression, the two major factors in the project of apartheid, according to the essays in this collection, were the question of dispossession associated with the Bantustan policy (i.e. a question of land *and* ethnicity) (*Apartheid*, 83-112; this becomes a central feature of the Freedom Charter) and the notion of apartheid as a colonialism of a “special type” due to the domination of “an alien body only in the historical sense” (*Apartheid*, 195). This latter sense of apartheid, which resonates with Mamdani’s reading of South Africa in *Citizen and Subject*, comes to be thoroughly problematised by Neville Alexander through his sense of the genocide that settler colonial countries have in common (*An Ordinary Country*, 9).

While Giliomee acknowledges the existence of an extreme fascist element in the National Party, specifically represented by the *Broederbond* [society of brothers], he argues that this element was more interested in segregation as a form of “locking in” rather than apartheid as a form of “development” (“Making of the Apartheid Plan”, 383). In a highly provocative formulation, Giliomee suggests that the conceptual grounds of apartheid looked more like “an indigenous, postcolonial response” to the problem of “two

²⁸ Cf. Alex La Guma, Ed. *Apartheid: A Collection of Writings on South African Racism by South Africans*, New York: International Publishers, 1971, pp 11 – 22.

rights”, namely, the existence of a particularly Afrikaner and a particularly African self-identity (“Making of the Apartheid Plan”, 375 and 387). As such, in the terms of the distinctions in South African historiography outlined above, Giliomee fits into the two nation hypothesis. To make the argument as to the centrality of a concern for community in the constitution of the concept of apartheid, Giliomee offers a nuanced reading of NP van Wyk Louw’s interventions with regard to “survival in justice” and the notion of self-identity in community.²⁹

“Survival in justice” is a formulation that indicates the demand not simply to survive (what Giliomee names as fascism) but rather to survive in an ethical relation to the other, a relation articulated through the form of a liberal nationalism. Essentially, in this reading race only comes after the articulation of apartheid, it emerges as a late alibi. In the considerations of the Sauer Commission (the official National Party commission that put forward the definitive policy positions understood as apartheid), as well as in the early deliberations (particularly in the Dutch Reformed Church) on the relation between the Afrikaner and its others, Giliomee identifies a common concern articulated at the time that “only identification with one’s own ethnic community was authentic” (“Making of the Apartheid plan”, 381). In these formulations, it is argued, colour comes to mark “language, tradition, and lifestyle” as that which defines the self, a self that is always already in relation to others *that are like it* (“Making of the Apartheid plan”, 383). The

²⁹ Mark Sanders similarly turns to van Wyk Louw as a key figure for understanding the liberal genesis of the notion of apartheid. It is interesting that for Giliomee, van Wyk Louw is indicative of the enduring legacy of apartheid in the mentality of post-apartheid South Africa whereas for Sanders van Wyk Louw comes to stand in as a precursor to Black Consciousness. Cf. “Making of the Apartheid plan”, 390-392 and Mark Sanders, *Complicities: the Intellectual and Apartheid*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002, pp 91 and 128. While I find Sanders’ joining of van Wyk Louw to Black Consciousness provocative, in my reading it is too reductive and rather marks the limit of Sanders’ reading of the differing sense of the subject that is offered in the latter.

logic of this self-identification in community leads directly from a two nation hypothesis (that Alexander wants to limit to the politics of Black Consciousness) to a particular multi-nationalism, namely, apartheid. As support of his argument that race was not the defining factor of apartheid's emergence, Giliomee cites Verwoerd as arguing against the existence of "biological differences between the races" in his lectures at Stellenbosch University. Rather, for Verwoerd the distinction emerges at the level of culture ("Making of the Apartheid Plan", 379).³⁰

In a similar vein, the then Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa, D.F. Malan, declared in Parliament in 1948 that the "building up and reconstruction of the Reserves does not consist merely of work in the material field; it consists especially of a better care for the spiritual life of those Natives [...] In the Native you must build up self-esteem and a pride and love for *everything that is his own*". This notion of constructing the native, of producing the native as a particular kind according to the imagination of those doing the building, is wholly consistent with the question of education and "culture" as it comes to define groups in South Africa. The materiality of existence in this moment—from the perspective of the 'native'—is removed as a question and is replaced,

³⁰ It should be noted that legislation such as the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act of 1953 that sought to reserve not only structural apartheid (government, etc) but also the absolute restriction of contact in everyday life through reserving benches, sides of bridges, and so on for particular groups indicates the manner in which this marking becomes lodged in discourses of purity and health that extend beyond the question of an ethical resolution to the problem of difference. I think here particularly of what has been called the "sanitation syndrome" Cf. M. W. Swanson, "The Sanitation Syndrome: Bubonic Plague and Urban Native Policy in the Cape Colony, 1900-1909", *Journal of African History*, 18 (1977). For a broad overview of the development of segregation and a look at its continuities and discontinuities from colonialism, through Union segregation, to apartheid, see Paul Maylam, "Explaining the Apartheid city: 20 Years of South African Urban Historiography". *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 21, 1 (1995), pp 19 – 38. To make his argument Giliomee cites R. Miller, 'Science and Society in the early career of H. F. Verwoerd', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 19, 4 (1993), p. 646. Miller reads Verwoerd as decidedly liberal in his academic positions on the question of racial characteristics and capabilities, arguing that the idea of a *volk* comes after social and educational orientation and training. In short, Miller implies that the *volk* for Verwoerd is an ideological construct.

or in fact answered, by the assertion that the native must become more native.³¹ Malan's statement goes further, so as to reveal the constructed character of this apparently inherent nature that is meant to be expressed in community: "Give the Native what is his own and let him keep it, if he should have lost part of it already, try to reconstruct it for him".³² The apparent impossibility of giving to someone that which is proper to them is a necessary paradox that lies at the heart of the function of community in the construction of the concept of apartheid.³³

That community constitutes the ground for the articulation of apartheid is discernible from its founding acts of legislation as much as from statements made in relation to the problem of education. The extent to which community informs the project of apartheid can be ascertained from the logic that infuses one of its guiding pieces of legislation, the *Group Areas Act (no. 41 of 1950)*:

1. (ix) "group" means either the white group, the coloured group or the native group referred to in section two, and includes, to the extent required to give effect to any relevant proclamation under subsection 2 of the said section, any group of persons who have under the said section been declared to be a group; (iv)

³¹ This is compounded by a definition of labour that was circulated by Prime Minister J.B.M. Hertzog where he defined Civilized labour as: "labour rendered by persons whose standard of living conforms to the standard generally recognized as tolerable from the usual European standpoint," while "uncivilized labour" is "rendered by persons whose aim is restricted to the bare necessities of life as understood among the barbarous and undeveloped peoples". *Prime Ministers circular*, No. 5 of 1929. The distinction of civilized and non-civilised through recourse to language is quite clearly derivative of Locke (discussed in more detail below).

³² Prime Minister D.F. Malan. *Assembly Hansard*. 2 September 1948, col. 1428.

³³ Cf. W.W.M. Eiselen, *Harmonious Multi-community Development: A Statement of South African inter-racial policy*. Johannesburg, 1959, for a discussion of how the apartheid notion of "separate development" was understood as a model for "racial" interaction, of "working together but in separate social channels for peace and prosperity" that, if successful, would "pay the Western world handsomely" (14 – 15).

According to this definition there are clearly two different kinds of group, those that somehow naturally denote a particular type (white, coloured, native), and those that have been “declared” as denoting a distinguishing feature that may or may not also be ‘naturally’ evident. It is at this level of the somehow purely representative, where a distinguishing feature is available to be marked rather than produced through marking, that the logic of community is set to work in the Act. The legislation elaborates on these groups (and I quote at length):

2. (1) for the purposes of this Act, there shall be the following groups:
 - (a) a white group, in which shall be included any person who in appearance, obviously is, or is generally accepted as a white person, other than a person who although in appearance obviously white, is generally accepted as a coloured person, or who is in terms of sub-paragraph (ii) of paragraphs (b) and (c) or of the said sub-paragraphs read with paragraph (d) of this sub-section and paragraph (a) of sub-section (2), a member of any other group;
 - (b) a native group, in which shall be included—
 - (i) any person who in fact is, or is generally accepted as a member of an aboriginal race or tribe [...]
 - (ii) any woman to whichever race, tribe or class she may belong, between whom and a person who is [...] a member of a native group, there exists a marriage or who cohabits with such a person
 - (c) a coloured group, in which shall be included—
 - (i) any person who is not a member of the white group or of the native group; and

- (ii) any woman [...] between whom and a person who is [...] a member of the coloured group, there exists a marriage, or who cohabits with such a person [...]

[...]

(2) The Governor –General may by proclamation in the *Gazette*—

- (a) define any ethnical, linguistic, cultural or other group of persons who are members either of the native group or of the coloured group [...]

Although in the first section of the Act these groups (the white, coloured, and native) are referred to as self evident, it is clear that in the elaboration of these groups in the second section a mechanism that tempers perception with recognition is put in place. To state this more plainly, the deciding principle (as it is articulated in the Act) in the process of locating a person into the domain of a group is the degree of recognition that that person holds as a part of that group (this recognition can stem from the self, from that group, or from the other groups). The implication of this mechanism, where recognition takes precedence over what the Act names as “fact”, or what in more modern terms we might name as an ocular perception, is that the classificatory function of the state is not in itself sufficient to produce persons as members of a group; rather, the classificatory function is more than a little dependent on a recognition that extends beyond the state to the self. As such, the specification of groups in the Act carries a very similar function to that of the policeman in Althusser’s essay on “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” where the hailing of a stranger by the policeman on the street, and the stranger turning to

respond, does not indicate the moment of interpellation but rather the *self recognition* of the prior interpellation of the stranger as a subject (174 - 175).³⁴

Passing through the South African Parliament just two days after the Population Registration Act of 1950 (requiring the registration of persons as belonging to one of the specified groups from birth), the Group Areas Act expands on the mechanism of classification by including the clause that, despite “fact” or “general acceptance”, if a woman marries or cohabits with a man from a group lower in the hierarchy of classificatory status than hers, she will assume that group’s status. This additional fluidity, albeit a fluidity that slides away from whiteness, that is added into the question of classification indicates the concern that underlies the classification: whiteness, understood as primarily male (men don’t slide, as it were), must be constructed as pure, as an entity devoid of miscegenation, an entity without remainders. As Claude Lévi-Strauss has pointed out in his short essay “A little glass of rum”, this distilling function is a common feature in the formation of European identity, a feature that he describes as vomitism.³⁵ It is interesting in this vein that the Immorality Act of 1957, whose section 16 made it illegal for “coloured” or “white” persons to have sexual relations with each other, does not have a definition of “native”, providing rather that “‘coloured person’

³⁴ Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses”. Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, Ben Brewster, Trans. Monthly Review Press, 1971. To state this differently, it is the work of ideology to produce a subject that is available to the hailing of the policeman. While this distinction is maintained in Althusser’s text, in English translations and discussions of it the work of ideology and the moment of interpellation, or hailing (*interpeller*), tend to be considered as one, hence the distinction I introduce above.

³⁵ His discussion moves from a discussion of the impurities of rum as the source of its flavor, impurities that are removed by the industrial distillery process, to the application of this method of industrialized production to the formation of a European identity. Cf. Claude Lévi-Strauss, “A little glass of rum”. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*. Translated from the French by John Russell. New York: Criterion Books, 1961, 381-392.

means any person other than a white person” (sec. 1 (ii)). Whereas the earlier definitions allowed for a process through which whiteness could be distilled, along the lines outlined by Lévi-Strauss, in this later definition whiteness is taken as an established entity as such, an entity that determines all others. If the former definition of the categories of classification indicates an anxiety about what can be included as white, about producing whiteness as such, in the latter definition this anxiety has been settled through the reification of that which is white. In this moment of hardening racial subjectivity for those designated as white it is nonetheless still striking that misperception of the other’s classificatory status is maintained as a ground for innocence.

It is this hardening, or reification, of a sense of whiteness that Leslie Witz has argued is the primary concern that underlies that construction of the defining public spectacle of the emergent apartheid nation, namely, the celebration of the tercentenary of Jan van Riebeeck’s (apparently the first European who came to settle at the Cape) arrival at the Cape.³⁶ What is most interesting here is that the communal identities of being either English or Afrikaans had to be negotiated in such a way as to allow the emergence of a common sense of whiteness, a contestation that had begun quite some time before the formal start of National Party rule in 1948.³⁷ While the concern with regard to Afrikaners and the English in South Africa had to do with the production of a sense of whiteness as

³⁶ This reification, overtime, clearly impacted on many of the other groupings. An example of this can be seen in the debates, inaugurated by Alex La Guma, surrounding the use of the term “so-called” as a prefix to the designation “coloured”. La Guma argued that being named a “so-called” coloured relegates a person to being a “so-called human” (*Sechaba*, June, 1984). Immanuel Wallerstein’s “The Construction of Peoplehood: Racism, Nationalism, Ethnicity” from 1985 was an attempt to think through the difficulties raised in this debate.

³⁷ Leslie Witz, *Apartheid’s Festival: Contesting South Africa’s National Pasts*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003. See particularly the chapter “We Build a Nation” where Witz sets out the manner through which the Afrikaner and English elements of whiteness were brought together as well as, critically, how this was framed in the language of producing “the meaning of white civilization for the natives” (129).

marking a common community, with regard to what the legislation referred to as “natives” and “coloureds” the concern had to do with the production of multiple communities that are grouped together under the given terms. In both cases, however, these were communities of a paradox of recognition: established through recognition *and simultaneously* enabling recognition. Although Collette Guillaumin, in her highly important essay “Race and nature: the system of marks” (1977), does not account for how the system of apartheid is first and foremost interested in producing whiteness, her reading of race in relation to South Africa (as well as France and the United States) is useful for understanding this paradox: she argues that race is a “social relationship” that “secretes the idea of nature” (143). In other words, it can be understood as a differential that produces fixed entities, subjects of race rather than singularities of life. In the context of my reading of the concept of apartheid in the South African case, race—or more to the point, the concept of apartheid as its articulator—would be a differential of community that produces racial subjects.³⁸

Having posited my understanding of the concept of apartheid I will briefly turn to the Freedom Charter (hereafter FC) , a text that gains its importance for the post-apartheid present not simply as a central frame for the struggle against apartheid, but also as an organizing document for the foundations of a post-apartheid South Africa. Before signaling at what levels in the Charter the sense of community as a differential is operational, it is necessary to briefly outline the process through which it came to be

³⁸ Cf. Collette Guillaumin. “Race and nature: the system of marks” Translated from French by Mary Jo Lakeland. *Racism, Sexism, Power and Ideology*, London & NY: Routledge, 1995, pp 133 – 152.

adopted. Jeremy Cronin and Raymond Suttner, in their *50 Years of the Freedom Charter* (2006) (hereafter *YC*)—first published in 1986—offer a sense of the FC’s function as akin to the transcendental subject in Kant’s philosophy: it was the unifying force, the ordering principle or condition of possibility for an organized articulation of resistance to apartheid (*YC*, 130). The primary concern of Cronin and Suttner is to demonstrate through the production of a social history the manner in which this transcendental function of the FC is constructed from below. To this end Cronin and Suttner reproduce a 38 part ‘life history’ of the Charter, indicating how it represents women’s views, rural views, and the views of the poor, in short, the views of people from every constitutive grouping of the apartheid state: these views were collected through diverse and dispersed meetings that were held with individuals and entire localities in both rural and urban settings. Peppered throughout this narration are short, detailed stories (such as that of the tobacco pouch, *YC* 122) that operate at the level of a ‘reality effect’, contributing to the sense of the density of the FC in everyday life.

As an intervention into the lines of struggle as they were emerging in the 1980s, Cronin and Suttner’s emphasis on the history of the Freedom Charter served a double purpose: on the one hand, it framed the document as originating “from the people”, a refrain that emerges multiple times throughout the text (*YC*, 115, 129, 178, 210, 213) while, on the other hand, it sought to operate as a “pedagogical tool” that could connect the more militant sense of struggle of the 1980s with the more idealistic tone of struggle from the 1950s (*YC*, xvi). As such, Cronin argues that the Charter, understood as a document that expresses the desire of the vast variety of South African society, provides

a sense of the future that is possible. In other words, it is a tool but not a programme of action; or as they phrase it, “you don’t use a spoon to cut meat” (*YC*, 250). The political use of desire, in this instance, operates at a starkly different level to desire as it emerged in Cronin’s poem, discussed above. The desire invoked here is already tamed, already names the type of community and subject to which it belongs. It is this sense of the Charter as an expression of desire that Cronin deploys as a defense against the criticisms, particularly from the left, that the Charter did not go far enough in the claims that it laid on the future. Cronin suggests that such critiques “mistake *words* for *political struggle*” (*YC*, 144). Rather, the argument has been made that the Charter was a document of “minimum and maximum demands” (*YC*, 213). In other words, that the Charter operated as a point of articulation between the socialist or working class demands in the struggle (their minimum demands) and the demands of the bourgeoisie (their maximum demands). As such it operated as the condition of possibility for unified struggle, but not for the constitution of a final sense of community. This is precisely what Steve Tshwete (a prominent figure in the United Democratic Front) argues when he suggests that the Charter is not capable of giving birth to a utopia, rather: “The baby South Africa that is about to be born [he is writing in 1986] must, and will, bear the birthmarks of the cultural situation from which it emerges” (*YC*, 218).

In an attempt to address the problem of the rejection of the Freedom Charter by, particularly, the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) and the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), Cheryl Carolus and Mosiuoa Lekota (both former Black Consciousness leaders) are hosted in the text as arguing for an understanding of Black Consciousness as “a

necessary stage” (*YC*, 154) in their coming to political consciousness. The BCM and the PAC rejected the Freedom Charter as a document that advocated for working in unison with white people.³⁹ Situating Black Consciousness as a stage in the broader struggle enables both the inclusion of those who adhere to its philosophy inside the “broad church” (*YC*, 130) of the Charter and it enables the articulation of the Charter as the coming to maturity of the struggle against apartheid.⁴⁰ As I will begin to argue in my discussion of Serote at the end of this chapter, and with more depth in the fourth chapter of this dissertation, the sense of Black Consciousness that is offered in this text comes to be unsettled by a minor discourse in that movement, namely, the interventions associated around the figure of Steve Biko.

Tshwete’s interventions on the Charter must be taken seriously, especially the notion that the Charter attempts to articulate the conditions of possibility for a post-apartheid South Africa while being constrained by the concept of society that is produced by apartheid. His intervention can be read along similar lines to the resolution of Cronin’s poem: walking out of Apartheid’s script, whether understood in terms of race or class, is neither straightforward nor something that can be triumphantly declared. However, in

³⁹ Snail, M. “The Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa: A Product of the Entire World”, (2008: 65). The ANC was not oblivious to this critique. In fact in its 1969 “Strategies and Tactics of the ANC” policy document the ANC took on board the language of “unholy alliance” [between black and white] (14) so as to argue for a people centered liberation struggle, in other words, one which organized the people according to their apparent present capacities, as a way out of this problem. Despite attempts to settle organizational anxiety about the perceived paradox of asserting non-racialism in tandem with an insistence on African leadership, the ANC failed to provide an alternate concept of subjectivity that might resolve this precise paradox (12)

⁴⁰ This presentation of Black Consciousness fits well with Neville Alexander’s argument that “the decade and a half from the mid-1970s until the end of the 1980s was, as is well known, a period of intensifying mass struggle, one which began under the banner of the BCM and ended under the flag of the ANC and its allies” (*An Ordinary Country*, 47)

order to resist the fixity with regard to the subject that is enabled by the Charter's positing of community, it is necessary to specify its limits with regard to this concept.⁴¹

The preamble to the Charter sets out the strong negative to which the Charter is offered as a response. It is in the naming of those in whose name the Charter is articulated that the first markers of the differential that constitutes the concept of apartheid can be read. While refusing distinction by "colour, race, sex, or belief" the preamble names "the people" as a "black and white" "brotherhood" (*YC*, 262). This invocation of the masculine nation marked by the primary divide of black and white constitutes a strong echo of the language through which the concept of apartheid was formulated. More specifically, its purpose was not only to set out the claims for the future—to counter the strong negative of apartheid—but rather to locate those who consider themselves as in opposition to apartheid within its conditions of possibility for struggle. In short, to recognize the self as resistant to apartheid is to recognize it as constitutive of and constituted by the Freedom Charter. Through this naming, every moment in the Charter where the concept of "the people" is invoked, it is implicitly punctuated by the markers of black and white.

In the second declaration of the Freedom Charter, it is stated that "All national groups shall be protected by law [...]" and "all people shall have equal rights to use their own language and to develop their own folk culture and customs" (*YC*, 263). This is

⁴¹ While Neville Alexander's critique of the Freedom Charter centers precisely on the mode through which its "language of multiculturalism" (108) re-inscribes apartheid and through which its guarantee of minority rights forecloses an adequate sense of racial reconciliation (117, 156), I do not think that these arguments mark the limit of the Freedom Charter's intervention. Rather, they mark the limit of the Charter's explicit use value to a more thoroughly Marxist understanding of action. In relation to this, it does seem to me that Tshwete's defense of the Charter against the argument that it maintains race in a straightforward manner, as well as Cronin's response to the argument that it doesn't go far enough in relation to its critique of capital, is effective.

joined to the later declaration on education where it is asserted that “the aim of education shall be to teach the youth to love their people and their culture [...]” (*YC*, 265) and, in the second last line of the Charter it declares: “Let all who love their people and their country now say [...]” (*YC*, 266). It is striking how similar this language is to the language through which the concept of apartheid is structured and articulated. However, it is not simply at the level of an echo of language that the Charter carries the conceptual ground of apartheid with it into the post-apartheid. What is perhaps most striking in these guarantees that seek to undo the negative claims of apartheid through implementing apartheid’s own system (the differential of community) on different terms (no exclusion), is that there is absolutely no sense in which the category of whiteness has been produced through the concept of apartheid. That which the Charter addresses is the negative modes that come to mark blackness in apartheid. In short, the restrictions on language that Tshwete argues must be kept in mind when reading the Charter (the limit that society as it is must see itself represented in the Charter) do not account either for the extent to which those limits are allowed to mark the declarations of the Charter through being placed inside the signifier “The People”, nor (and more startlingly) does it account for the lack of a critique of the concept of whiteness as constitutive of those categories (that include whiteness itself). To not unravel the conceptual production of whiteness in the concept of apartheid is to leave it intact. It will be my contention that in a particular thread of Black Consciousness—a thread that extends to Martinique, Algeria, and France—a critique of the mode through which whiteness/blackness operates as a production of man is advanced.

A Community after apartheid?

In the light of the concept of apartheid as being constituted through a differential of community, it is necessary to turn to a number of modes of coming to terms with apartheid; modes that I argue are precisely reliant on the concept of community. That the concept of community fundamentally underscores all of the more prominent modes through which to come to terms with the legacy of apartheid—even if the concept of community is practically untheorized in most of these—suggests that a mode of complicity (to borrow Sanders’ term) exists in these that is not simply lodged at the level of the problematic of apartheid, but rather at the level of its thematic grounds.⁴² Stated differently, it is in their concept rather than, necessarily, in their expression, that I argue these modes share a founding premise of apartheid, namely that community *is to be formed* as the ground for articulation and recognition. Community, as it operates here, becomes a stumbling point for any engagement with the concept of apartheid, a

⁴² Cf. Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996. Chatterjee’s sense of the thematic and the problematic, while not offering an escape, goes beyond the apparent problem of complicity. In relation to the specific problem of national thought in India (not as exception but as marker of the broader disjunction that confronts the postcolonial world) Chatterjee introduces the concept of the thematic and the problematic. Citing Abdel-Malek as his source for the distinction between the two levels, Chatterjee offers his own definition:

The thematic, in other words, refers to an epistemological as well as ethical system which provides a framework for elements and rules for establishing relations between elements; the problematic, on the other hand, consists of concrete statements about possibilities justified by reference to the thematic. (38)

Through positing the distinction between the thematic and the problematic, Chatterjee hopes to gain “access into the internal structure of nationalist discourse” (52). In other words, the distinction is a conceptual device that might assist us in thinking the problem of nationalist thought within its particularities without getting bogged down in them. Through utilizing the distinction, Chatterjee suggests that nationalist discourses in the third-world both challenge and incorporate the thematic of colonialism so as to produce “a different discourse, yet one that is dominated by another” (42). As such, the distinction enables the reading of strategies so as to better understand our present moment. In a more provocative formulation, I suggest that Chatterjee’s distinction operates as a mechanism to enable the clearing of the ground through which the new might arrive, although (and this is critical) this is not reducible to a simple walking out of the scripts that produce us (in this case, nationalism).

stumbling point by which, in this chapter, I seek to abide. To the extent that these modes of coming to terms with apartheid share this thematic ground of that with which they seek to reckon, I argue that the terms they come to are inadequate to the weight that they attempt to confront and move beyond. In what follows I will offer a reading of an intervention in this mode that has been made by Sam Durrant (as well as noting some contributions made by Mark Sanders, although I read his major contribution only in the fourth chapter due to the centrality of black consciousness philosophy in it), setting out the stakes of the conceptual reliance on the notion of community. If my focus here is mainly on Durrant, it is due to the centrality of his work to the constitution of the field of literary studies in post-apartheid South Africa. In addressing these figures I seek to resist the tendency to treat either of them as a foil for my argument. Rather, they are productive precisely due to the fault lines of the concept of community that they set out.⁴³

It is helpful to recall the limit, or edge, of the recognition of community in Cronin's "Motho ke motho ka batho babang"—an instance of community that is precisely resistant to becoming a pedagogical object in so far as it is known *only* through encounter. This edge, however, is the affirmation of the community of a black fist while specifying the difficulty of confronting the scenario where the already differentiated subject is in play. Following my discussion of apartheid and the Freedom Charter, it is possible to further nuance the limit against which Cronin's intervention runs. As I mentioned in the discussion of the final sign of the poem, it is also the sign that

⁴³ Integral to my sense of reading that I seek to bring to this project is the intervention made by Cesare Casarino in his preface to *Modernity at Sea*, namely that what he terms *philopoesis* is a mode of reading that seeks to abide by the "interferential" potentiality of a text through setting to work at its limit, on the edge of a text's "perfection". Cf. Cesare Casarino, *Modernity at Sea: Melville, Marx, Conrad in Crisis*. Theory Out of Bounds, vol 21. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002, pp xxvii, xxxiv, xxxv.

introduces into the poem the first mention of colour. This is in itself not particularly a problem. However, in not attending to the production of whiteness through the concept of apartheid (and, of course, how could it do so in 28 lines?), especially considering how the poem is available to be read in relation to what might be considered as Europe's auto-critique, it leaves the concept of apartheid as a differential of community in play. In short, I would argue that apartheid's concept is carried along with it, perhaps even authorizing the longing for the voice that threatens the encounter with a community of touching. It is precisely this edge, where the ground is yet to be cleared, that marks the limit of the interventions articulated by Sam Durrant and Mark Sanders. To state this differently, read along the edge of Cronin's intervention with regard to community, both Sanders and Durrant assume community as a line of flight from apartheid (much as apartheid assumes it as its founding principle), as that which can be constituted as contending with its wake. While both their interventions offer productive edges for thought, these potentialities are foreclosed precisely through the sense of community on which they are premised.

In his *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning* (2004) Sam Durrant offers a reading of a selection of works by J.M. Coetzee, Wilson Harris, and Toni Morrison in an effort to state the grounds on which a new community that is properly *after* colonialism/apartheid/slavery can be forged.⁴⁴ These three figures are read as constructing modes of coming to community that, respectively, offer a deferral before the other who cannot be known, offer a redemption through a common trauma, and offer a mode of reading the body that enables a community for those marked by slavery. To be

⁴⁴ Sam Durrant, *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning: J.M. Coetzee, Wilson Harris, and Toni Morrison*. Explorations in Postcolonial Studies. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004. Print, hereafter *PN*.

absolutely clear: each of these constitute the grounds for the emergence of community; community as such is in Durrant's reading only a promise; and each of these constitutes that ground through the work of mourning. These modes, in Durrant's reading, limit the sense of community that might be constituted, and as such it is worth briefly outlining his argument in relation to each one.

Durrant's offering of mourning as a work of coming to terms with the legacies of colonialism hinges on an understanding of the postcolonial as a movement toward a "horizon of emancipation" (*PN*, 2) and an understanding of the body as the mark of "Forgetting" as it comes to bear on what is named as community (*PN*, 6, 88, 113). This double weight is what Durrant argues is negotiated in the works of Coetzee, Harris, and Morrison—through the concepts of deferment, redemption, and the body, respectively—so as to enable what he names as "the resymbolization of the body" so that it can once again "function as the sign of the human" (*PN*, 94). While Durrant's concern here is an attempt to bring that which cannot be named but nonetheless resides in the black body into language, his formulation of this problematic raises the urgent question of when and under what conditions the body has signified "the human". It is this conflation of sign and symbol that discloses the proximity of Durrant's project to the general thrust of the thinking of the subject in European philosophy (after Hegel, at least) and, as such, to the concept of the subject that underpins apartheid. This formulation—of the conflation of sign and symbol—is not incidental to the understanding of subjectivity that orders, despite some quite careful maneuvering, the concept of community as it comes to be

posited in the closing pages of Durrant's intervention. Rather it names its conceptual grounds.⁴⁵

While it is at the level of the subject and its position in community that the proximity to the grounds of apartheid that haunts Durrant's intervention is made most explicit, the full weight of its conceptual proximity is set out in the mode through which the frame of Durrant's intervention is brought to play in his text. Particularly, it is the interaction of the concept of Forgetting and the horizon of emancipation that discloses the terrain on which Durrant's concept of the subject is installed. The centrality of Forgetting for Durrant's argument, as I will momentarily show, precisely marks both the extent to which his argument attempts to extend the interventions made by Jean-Francois Lyotard (whom Durrant invokes as an alibi) into the debates surrounding Heidegger's Nazism, and the extent to which his attempted transplanting of Lyotard's conceptual apparatus into the frame of the postcolonial maintains that against which he writes.⁴⁶ In Durrant's argument the concept of Forgetting comes to mark (perhaps too quickly) what he understands as the foreclosure of the humanity of the other; it names the condition of possibility of colonialism and, as such, of that from which emancipation must be ordered (*PN*, 6). More particularly for his argument, it is the black body that is marked by this Forgetting and, as such, any attempt to narrate its status in exclusion carries the risk of reinscribing this Forgetting.

⁴⁵ For a discussion of the role of sign and symbol in Hegel's sense of the subject see Paul de Man, "Sign and Symbol in Hegel's *Aesthetics*", *Aesthetic Ideology*, (1982) Edited and translated from the German by Andrzej Warminski, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996. See also my discussion of Hegel and de Man in relation to my reading of Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K* in chapter 4 of this dissertation.

⁴⁶ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Heidegger and "the jews"*. Translated from the French by Andreas Michel and Mark Roberts. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990, hereafter *HJ*.

Lyotard's understanding of Forgetting, derived from a reading of Freud alongside Kant, offers a sense of the concept that is out of time with the notion of Forgetting as it comes to operate in Durrant's intervention (*HJ*, 5). The difference here is critical for grasping what is at stake in the sense of community that Durrant offers as the call of postcolonial narration. Before dealing with the question of Heidegger's Nazism, Lyotard sets out a conceptual understanding of what he names as "the jews" (lower case as they do not exist, are not a people) and the mechanisms that were at work in the Nazi programme of extermination. The frame for this understanding is provided by the distinction between the "unconscious affect" of a primary shock that occurs at a level at which the mind "cannot deal with it"—a shock that is in excess of the subject—(*HJ*, 12) and the later expression of this shock through an effect that has no cause, in other words, as a generalized anxiety (*HJ*, 13). As a structure, Lyotard points out, this is very close to the relation between the aesthetics of the sublime and the beautiful in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, whereby the mind realizes itself as more than immediate through encountering its limit in the sublime (*HJ*, 32 and 44). Critically, as something encountered in lived experience, it is always this secondary expression that appears to come first. In other words, this structure is untimely in its relation to a historically grounded sense of the subject—the first blow is always in excess of it, an excess that is named by Freud as "sexual difference", a naming that Lyotard argues includes many names, such as the death of the father, the castration of the mother, and so on (*HJ*, 16-19).

Crucially this sexual difference is not anatomical but rather has to do with "a furor, of pleasure and pain mixed, of an inclusive disjunction or a conjunctive exclusion,

the aforementioned exogamy [one of the names included under sexual difference for the first blow], of which the psychic apparatus is unaware, which it cannot establish or synthesize, where its life and death are played out, outside of it although within” (*HJ*, 20). The distinction here is similar to that between “the jews” (a name of this primary excess) and “The Jews” (a name for a community constituted through the attempted remembrance of this other name—a remembrance that is always impossible, 23 and 37). Durrant’s notion of blackness as a self-evident marker of subjectivity—which he most clearly articulates in his reading of Morrison, although it threads his whole narrative—would clearly be troubled by this distinction. It is as a mark of primary repression—the repression of the death of the father that Freud says constitutes all community—that the West (not only politically, but also in terms of intellectual and aesthetic production, *HJ* 34) becomes “anti-Semitic” not as an instance of xenophobia, but as a guarding against the return of this “horror” (*HJ*, 23). Notably, it is “the Jews” (understood as a people rooted in exodus, as a people without place) that are exterminated—albeit as an expression of secondary repression—in an attempt to finally Forget, to remove all traces of that which dislocates the foundational fictions of the West. This threat to “the jews”, who are not equivalent to the Jews (this latter becomes targeted as a symptom of the former), is only heightened in the modern (and also apartheid) notion of multiculturalism and toleration—a system that Lyotard suggests exists so as to enable the smooth extraction of labor: “The understanding, which figures and counts [peoples, groups, functions], imposes its rule on to all objects, even aesthetic ones. This requires a time and a space under control [what the modern, particularly Kantian, sense of the

subject enables]. It ignores what is not an object or what has no object—and thus the soul, if "soul" means a spirit disturbed by a host that it ignores, nonobjectal, nonobjective" (*HJ*, 41). The relation of "jews" to Jews in society that is outlined here, particularly the manner in which "the jews" resist calculation and the science of the state, is very close to the sense of nomadology that is offered in Deleuze and Guattari's project on *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, considered briefly in relation to Cronin above.

Having articulated his concept of "the jews", a concept that Lyotard rigorously attempts to keep from sliding into the reified notion of The Jews (although he is not always successful), he turns to offer a reading of the "Heidegger affair" that proceeds by drawing attention to the manner in which the reactions to Heidegger's Nazism follows the markers of the response to the threat of "the jews" outlined above. In other words, the critique of Heidegger betrays the extent to which, at one level at least, the reaction is a secondary repression aimed at the unsettling anxiety that emanates from the recollection of a primary encounter (*HJ*, 59). This is not an attempt to minimize Heidegger's Nazism. Rather, it is to note how, through drawing attention to how Heidegger missed the question of "the jews" in his philosophy—a striking omission precisely because his is a philosophy concerned with remembering—and *how the criticism of Heidegger echoes this failing*, Lyotard reveals our common implication in this primary Forgetting (*HJ*, 81, 82 and 88). This implication extends beyond complicity; it comes in the moment of subjectivation. The concern here, for Lyotard, is to demonstrate that "Nazism is alive and well" in differing forms in the present, that the extermination failed in the removal of witnesses to the Forgetting ("bad" witnesses, for sure) (*HJ*, 88). Refusing to offer a total

explanation to the question, why “the jews”, Lyotard suggests that it is due to the role the Jews were forced to play in Western society at least since Hegel: they bore the responsibility for a failed reconciliation with the un-nameable, with “the jews”—there was an indebtedness before the Law, an indebtedness shared with Heidegger, that became expressed in the holocaust (*HJ*, 89-90). As such, the Jews bore the weight of “a forced representation of that which does not belong to it: the Forgotten” (*HJ*, 89).

In a move that Durrant will imitate, Lyotard concludes his discussion of Heidegger and “the jews” by turning through the question of community as it is *protected* by Heidegger. The key figure here is Jean-Luc Nancy and his sense of the potentialities of a community of writing as an example of an “inoperative community”, one that is not produced through work (*HJ*, 91). While I am generally convinced by Nancy’s sense of a community of writing, a community of the touch as expressed in Cronin’s intervention, there is a sense in which this discussion of “the jews” haunts it: the Jews become available as a symptom of “the jews” perhaps, primarily, due to an affinity in writing (Lyotard argues that the “jewish” God is a God without Being, it resides in a book, *HJ* 80). This distinction goes to the heart of the problem of geophilosophy as it takes place in Heidegger’s thought and, more generally, in the thought of the West: Heidegger preserves the potentialities of geophilosophy (colonialism, empire, and holocaust) through maintaining the hope of a “return to a promised Germania”, understood as the “taking place of people as the truth of Being” (*HJ*, 92). This, however, is precisely the forgetting of that whose Forgetting must not simply be forgotten, as Lyotard argues:

[it] misses the debt that is our only lot—the lot of forgetting neither that there is the Forgotten nor what horror the spirit is capable of in its

headlong madness to make us forget that fact. "Our" lot? Whose lot? It is the lot of this non people of survivors, Jews and non Jews, called here "the jews," whose Being-together depends not on the authenticity of any primary roots but on that singular debt of interminable anamnesis.

(*HJ*, 93 – 94)

This never ending remembering of the forgetting of the Forgotten that marks this community of “ non people” is the only marker that is, in Lyotard’s view, proper to “us”, to those who attempt to abide by the unsettling of foundations, the absent centre that conditions an expression of life.

Returning to Durrant’s *Postcolonial Narrative*, it is precisely in response to the demand that colonialism, slavery, and apartheid be remembered or at least narrated— a demand that Durrant argues stems from an obligation to the “future”, to “community”— that he offers (in a turn of phrase echoing that of Driver on *uBuntu*) a notion of postcolonial literature as a mode of narration that constructs “a home for disproportion” (*PN*, 1; 10). In this “home” the possibility of a “new humanism” is offered precisely through the manner in which the literary operates allegorically, “exceeding the proportions of the individual subject” in terms of the loss to which it bears witness (*PN*, 11). The concern to exceed the limits of the individual subject marks the extent to which Durrant argues that subjects must be lodged in community, not—and this is critical—the sense that the subject might be considered as an effect as is offered through Cronin’s intervention. A certain Heideggerianism emerges here in the central demand of Durrant’s text, namely, the demand of community as that which collects the being of subjects. It is in registering this demand for an allegorical reading of postcolonial narrative that one of the most striking symptoms of Durrant’s uneasy reliance on Lyotard’s intervention

becomes apparent: the admission (or perhaps slippage) that in his view colonialism was largely not genocidal “in intention” but that it nonetheless shares with the holocaust at the level of its memorialisation (*PN*, 3). The question that most immediately arises in relation to this turn to genocidal intention, particularly given Durrant’s reliance on Lyotard’s notion of “the jews”, has to do with the manner in which the exclusion of ‘indigenous’ peoples from the register of humanity operated as the basis for the genocidal actions that did occur.⁴⁷ This exclusion, what Fanon names as a “bloodless genocide” in *The*

⁴⁷ Such a basis can be found, for example, in the Lockean understanding of the State of Nature and of perpetual death in slavery, an understanding that is worth delineating: In distinction from Hobbes (who excludes reason and morality from the State of Nature), the state of nature for Locke is not one characterized by war, rather, it is one characterized by the rule of the law of nature through reason (i.e. there is morality in the state of nature for Locke):

[...] every man in the state of nature has the power to kill a murderer, both to deter others from doing the like injury, which no reparation can compensate [and so as to] secure men from the attempts of a criminal who, *having renounced reason*, the common rule and measure that God hath given to mankind, hath, by the unjust violence and slaughter he hath committed upon one, declared war against all mankind, and therefore may be destroyed as a lion or a tiger, one of those wild savage beasts with whom men can have no society nor security. (*Second Treatise*, 5, my emphasis, hereafter *ST*)

The state of nature, then, holds a sense of justice as reciprocity which claims to measure the degree of reason that guides the action (reason being synonymous in Locke with the well being of man in general), and relegates those who act outside of reason into the realm of “savage wild beasts.” One of the difficulties of Hobbes’ state of nature, namely its instantiation in the “savage American” (*Leviathan*, 71), is compounded in Locke through his assertion that initially “all the world was America” (*ST*, 17), by which he means, in a state of “wretchedness” and “waste” (*ST*, 19), in other words, in a state of nature.

The concept of waste is important in Locke as it stands as the negative of the primary element in the state of society, namely, property. (It is worth noting here that the idea of a sovereign subject, as one always already individuated, is itself characterized by the notion of property—the notion of subjectivity proper to man). Property, which is based on personal sovereignty and industry (*ST*, 20), is also for Locke the measure of one’s position in society—those who have the use of their reason, in other words, “maturity”, are accorded majority status in society: they own property (*ST*, 28). To put it bluntly, to be without property is to be without reason and thus it is to be included in society only as either property or waste. By way of a discussion of property acquired in a just war (defense against the unjust invasion of another), particularly of the labour of those captured in such a war, in other words, of slavery, Locke argues that “these men, having, as I say, forfeited their lives [by acting outside of reason], and with them their liberties, and lost their estates—and being, in the state of slavery, not capable of any property—cannot in that state be considered as any part of civil society, the chief end whereof is the preservation of property” (*ST*, 38). This perpetual death of slavery is, perhaps, one of the most severe exclusions from the concept man articulated in politico-philosophical terms. The “savage-American”, as being without property and without reason is thereby finally excluded from the category man: the “savage American” serves as an example for those in a state of nature, without *private* property, and thus not only incapable of partaking in society, but actually a threat to society that must be neutralised.

Wretched of the Earth, goes to the core of the work of Forgetting not only in relation to the colonial/slave/apartheid subject, but more pointedly in the constitution of whiteness as the realization of Man.⁴⁸

The deferred proximity to the holocaust, and by extension to Europe, that structures Durrant's intervention is articulated in a number of moments in *Postcolonial Narrative* where he sets out the manner in which Lyotard's understanding of Forgetting as an instance akin to that of the Kantian sublime forms the core of his own understanding of colonialism as a symptom of a primary repression (*PN*, 3—4). However, Durrant's repeated affirmation of the holocaust as the exemplary instance of trauma, a trauma to which colonialism can only be likened *in its memorialisation*, reveals a primacy of the European experience of trauma in the ordering of memory that, it seems, is premised on an even more rigorous Forgetting of the schema of blackness and whiteness as integral to the constitution of Man. While Lyotard similarly privileges the holocaust, his privileging of it is not due to its trauma, but rather to the symptom that he argues it marks: the forgetting of "the jews". As such, a more rigorous formulation of colonialism as a symptom of primary repression would, I suggest, mark these as common in their primacy. This offering of primacy to Europe operates in Durrant's argument at a similar level to the look of the warder in Cronin's poem—ordering the potentialities of his argument through marking itself as its limit—stifling the transgressive potential of Durrant's insertion of Lyotard's argument on "the jews" into the postcolonial (as my

⁴⁸ It is the weight of this conceptual frame that Frantz Fanon names in the final pages of *The Wretched of the Earth* as a "bloodless genocide which consisted in the setting aside of fifteen thousand millions of men" (*Wretched of the Earth*, 254). On the construction of Man through the schema black/white see my discussion of Fanon in chapter 3 of this dissertation.

reading of Césaire in the next chapter will make clear, this reading of “the jews” in relation to colonialism is precisely what Césaire aims at when he states that “colonization = thingification”, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 42). This limit is what is pressed up against in Durrant’s reading of the role of the body in Morrison’s novels. What colonialism shares with the holocaust in its memorialisation, according to Durrant in a turn of phrase that chimes interestingly with Tshwete’s defense of the Freedom Charter, is the difficulty of bearing witness to a trauma that is only accessible through its symptoms. This position is shared with Cronin’s intervention to the extent that it can only be posited in the site of the prison. And it is to this relation that Durrant’s chapter on Coetzee’s literary interventions turns its attention.

Durrant argues that Coetzee’s relation to apartheid (and by extension to colonialism and slavery [*PN*, 29]) can be understood as the equivalent of Europe’s relation to the holocaust (*PN*, 20).⁴⁹ Taking *Foe* and *Life and Times of Michael K* (Durrant also reads *Waiting for the Barbarians* and some non-literary texts) as his two exemplary novels of the ethical relation that Coetzee articulates through his form of postcolonial narration, Durrant suggests that this relation stems from Coetzee’s attempt to allow the novel to remain “inconsolable *before* history” (*PN*, 24) through offering the reader an “irreconcilable sight of the abused body, stripped bare of the explanatory narratives of historical discourse” (*PN*, 51). One of the principle modes, for Durrant,

⁴⁹ The assertion that post-apartheid literature should be understood as the pre-eminent form of postcolonial literature has been made by Durrant in his essay, “The Invention of Mourning in Post-Apartheid Literature”. *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 3, Connecting Cultures, (2005), p 441. Working mainly through the novels of Coetzee and Zakes Mda, Durrant argues that in the post-apartheid moment the “role of the artist” becomes “the role of the professional mourner” (443) and that, as such, the novel through its ability to mime loss in its form becomes the site of bearing witness to the losses of apartheid (447).

through which Coetzee achieves this is in his refusal to imagine blackness (though I would add: apart from the scripted imagining of it as the mark of the other) so as to maintain otherness in relation to the other (who, in Durrant's imagination, is clearly black) (*PN*, 27). The exemplary instance here is the character Friday in the novel *Foe*. Durrant suggests that through narrating instances of mourning without claiming access to Friday's 'personal' history, Coetzee manages to offer a sense of the trauma of the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade without reducing it to simple memory (*PN*, 35). Critically, however, the reader, and particularly in this instance Durrant (who is unable to recognize this), cannot not imagine the history of blackness that Coetzee refuses to imagine or even narrate: Friday is *always* taken as exemplary of slavery, as mourning the death of fellow slaves through scattering flower petals on the ocean (this reduction, of a multiplicity of possible readings to one, is precisely the reificatory work of Europe). This marks, in my view, a fundamental dilemma, or even aporia, in Durrant's work and in the works of Coetzee—it is not possible to argue for an ethical relation to the other *as other* without constituting the other as *a particular* other (especially not when the particularity of this other is assumed to begin with). And this despite the celebrated “silent movement toward a world beyond the world of representation” (*PN*, 37) that Durrant reads in the final passages of the novel—a silence that quite clearly still signifies.

This respect before the otherness of the other (and the limits thereof), and particularly before the trauma that marks them as Other, orders Durrant's reading of the eponymous character of Michael K. For Durrant, Michael K signifies an attempt to think a subjectivity not reducible either to that proscribed by the Enlightenment or to that

offered under the guise of a subaltern history (*PN*, 26; 39). That is, Durrant reads the character of Michael K as signifying how the subject might appear outside of these discourses—outside of any sense of constitutive community that might fix the subject in place as an other. However, what seems to be missed in Durrant’s reading is precisely the manner in which the terrain on which Michael K is lodged, both through its geographic references and through its conceptual markers, is precisely the terrain on which the modern always already individuated subject of the Enlightenment emerges—in other words, how Michael K might be read as being set to work as confronting the problem of whiteness (a joining that I will consider in my fourth chapter where I discuss this novel of Coetzee’s in relation to black consciousness philosophy). Nevertheless, reading this offering of subjectivity as a movement toward a future community of non-subjects, Durrant argues that Coetzee’s fiction offers itself as an ethical relation to the other that seeks to abide by the unrepresentability of precisely that which constitutes that other as other, thereby hosting that trauma as the nameless that shapes the future. To the extent to which the novel is lodged in this interstice of an unrepresentable traumatic past and a future hope, Durrant argues it operates as a work of mourning and, as such, as the potential ground of a new community (*PN*, 1).

If the force of Coetzee’s intervention is read by Durrant as constituted through his deferment before the otherness of the other, a deferment that leads to an offering through Michael K of a subjectivity of escape without community, it is in Harris’ literary work that Durrant finds an articulation of the community to come toward which his own intervention aims. In a sharp distinction from the secularism that Durrant argues

underscores Coetzee's literary interventions; Harris' writing is read by Durrant as "securing a promise or prophecy of redemption" through its mode of bearing witness to the trauma of colonialism and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade (*PN*, 54). This redemption, however, is neither religious—at least not in any monotheistic sense—nor is it, according to Durrant, redemptive of any actual subject. It is rather a redemption that is turned towards history, it is a "hosting of history" (as opposed to remaining inconsolable before it, in the moment prior to its articulation) that resists the notion of a splitting between subject and object through encountering a common loss made evident through the history of colonialism but which is, according to Durrant, not unique to it (*PN*, 58; 61). To put this differently, for Harris the loss that is the trauma of colonialism can operate as a loss constitutive of the more-than-human that might come in its wake; it is a loss in common for *all* of what might be termed the human. Quite clearly such a project would transcend the necessary limits of Coetzee's deference before the other as such. It is the trauma of what has been perpetrated as much as of the act of perpetration itself that is collectively read as constituting this redemptive ground (which is very close to Lyotard's formulation). Stated differently, in its broadest terms the equation could be rendered as follows: the act of stripping 'humanity' from the other is a stripping of 'humanity' from the self and, as such, it is a trauma of loss that is held in common. There is, however, a departure from Lyotard in this formulation. For Lyotard the loss occurs to proclaim the human, while for Durrant the human is *always already assumed* and the loss measures the extent to which this humanity has been stripped.

While Durrant is (perhaps correctly) hesitant towards Harris' redemptive notion of the trauma of colonialism as constituting a ground for a new form of the human, what he embraces in Harris is the manner in which this "loss" as a ground of the human leads to an unraveling of subjectivity (*PN*, 54). The trauma that is colonialism and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, in Durrant's reading of Harris, can be redeemed not through memorialisation but rather through taking as the basis for interaction with others the dislocation, or the realization of the foundationality of "loss", that is produced in an encounter with it (*PN*, 75). This is not a memorialisation of what was lost but an acceptance of loss itself, a loss that encompasses any sense of the self as a discrete entity but that, in Durrant's reading, is nevertheless welcomed by precisely such a subject that is placed into question. The move here extends away from a sense of self as that which would enable, in Lyotard's words, "a time and space under control" (*HJ*, 41) that frames the other. Rather, it is dislocation, or being "out of joint" (Durrant cites Derrida's *Specters of Marx*) that comes to mark a revelation in which "our 'complex community' destroys the illusion of the self even while it founds community", a community that is *ours* (*PN*, 71). This community, which Durrant suggests can be likened to that offered by Jean-Luc Nancy in his *Inoperative Community*, is a "community of others" that nonetheless (in a move that in my reading misreads Nancy) must become operative, must be constructed as *a community* (*PN*, 75).

In their very different modes, Durrant argues, both Coetzee and Harris work to negotiate the "unresolvable tension between mourning and melancholia, between the need to come to terms with the past and the need to never forget" (*PN*, 77). Whereas

Coetzee offers a deferment before the other (which Durrant refers to as a secret hope for redemption) and Harris offers redemption at the expense of the individualized self (in other words, both Harris and Coetzee dissolve the subject as a means to account for the trauma of colonialism/apartheid), Durrant suggests that it is in the literary interventions of Toni Morrison that a mode of coming to terms is offered that is most adequate in its relation to the demands of the past and its futures for those who were and are marked by slavery. Unlike with Coetzee and Harris, Durrant suggests that Morrison is not addressing the question of a relation to others, but rather that she addresses the problem of a remembering for a community marked by slavery (the other, in Durrant's argument, is always rendered as either black or white). The efficacy of Morrison's intervention has to do with the role of the body.

Central to Durrant's reading of Morrison's attempt to come to terms with the legacy of slavery is the manner in which she suggests that the collective trauma of slavery has become a "bodily memory", a memory "reduced to flesh" in the sense that it has taken it on, become, a body (PN, 80 – 89).⁵⁰ The becoming body of a memory is not an instance of recalling the trauma of the body, rather, Durrant argues it should be read as a shift that marks the end or limit of language: the trauma is registered in the body because language cannot contain it (PN, 87). It is this attempt to address a trauma that "exceeds both the individual's and the community's capacity for verbalization and mourning" (PN, 80), that constitutes the ground for what Durrant will name as

⁵⁰ It is in my discussion in the third chapter of this dissertation of Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* that this sense of the lived experience of the black man and its relation to the body is more forcefully worked out. Durrant's reading of Morrison comes quite close to the interventions made by Fanon with one exception: in Durrant this becomes expressed as an affirmation of being black, something that Fanon defines as a sickness.

community. Deploying a sense of the subject that rhymes with that of apartheid, in other words, as a subject that exists to be marked, rather than as that which is produced through marking as is the case with Coetzee, Durrant expresses the difficulty of coming to terms with the trauma of slavery as an impossible choice, an aporia between adequately memorializing the collectivity or adequately coming to terms with the trauma as it affects the self (*PN*, 84). The choice that takes place in the face of this bodily memory—a memory of “collective negation” that Durrant argues is unique to subjects that are racially marked (*PN*, 80)—has to do with how the effects of this memory are worked out in relation to a present life. Either, Durrant suggests, the full weight of the negation of humanity is accepted to the expense of any sense of the self (which seems to be where Coetzee goes, in Durrant’s reading) or that weight is limited, bracketed, or expelled, so as to enable the articulation of a self in relation to it (*PN*, 101).

It is precisely in the relation between the character of Sethe—a powerful and thoroughly traumatized maternal figure and escaped slave—and the community in which she is lodged that the risk of this choice is articulated. Durrant suggests that Sethe wastes away in her body due to her attempt to meet the claim of the past (signified by Beloved, which she carries as a fetus in the womb), and that it is only through the voices of an already existing community of the living that she is able to be brought back to substantive existence through the exorcism of the weight of the past (the figure of Beloved). It is here that the body comes to offer a sense or a process of redemption for those who are marked by slavery. As an attempt to get out of the “white man’s symbolic” (*PN*, 103) where black skin is the latent sign of the repression of the non-white from the horizon of

humanity, Morrison offers the black body as a site that exceeds the work of mourning: it operates as a symptom that marks the trauma of colonialism, resisting “symbolic registration” (PN, 86).⁵¹ In a formulation that, at least at one level, seems to echo the final image of the black fist in Cronin’s poem, the role of the body here could be understood as a point of articulation where the terms of exclusion and inclusion reside uneasily together. However, if in “*Motho ke motho ka batho babang*” claiming this articulation as proper to the self is marked as a necessary element of risk in the wager, in Durrant’s argument it becomes the ground proper to a community that is black, in the genetic sense of being descendant from slavery. This is precisely the risk that the Freedom Charter attempts to run, and which, I argue through misreading the conceptual ground of apartheid, the Freedom Charter runs into (this question of running and running into will re-emerge in the third chapter of this dissertation). The community of *this* body is one of a “once belonged” (to trauma) (PN, 108) that orders how the new sense of belonging to community in the present is worked out, in other words, what Durrant reads Morrison as offering is an ethics of trauma that opens the ground for a new community of “black folk” (PN, 102).

Although the entire thrust of Durrant’s analysis hinges on the prospect of a community after colonialism/apartheid/slavery, it is only in the final pages of his

⁵¹ It is striking that in his essay “The invention of mourning in post-apartheid literature” (2005), Durrant argues that “it is precisely the politicization of funerals during apartheid that creates the need for a non-instrumental mode of post-apartheid mourning” (443). In other words, mourning is necessary to attend to a lack rather than a loss or a trauma in and of itself—a lack brought about by the over politicization of the dead body. Of course, as Durrant himself notes even while refusing it attention, the mourning rites that Toloki performs in *Ways of Dying* (the main focus of his essay) are laced with the tunes of resistance songs, thus preserving the political quality of mourning into the post-apartheid present (442). In *Postcolonial Narrative* Durrant calls for the body to become more political, to become a site of articulation not reducible to the individuated and essentialised body (PN, 104).

narrative that he begins to offer a semblance of a theory of this community. As a response, it seems, to Coetzee's apparent notion of a subjectivity that might be lodged outside the problematics of the enlightenment, Durrant argues that what Morrison makes clear is the need for this new community of subjects to not simply be "anti-essentialist". Rather, it needs to be offered in relation to that which cannot be articulated, namely, the trauma of slavery and colonialism (*PN*, 112). This trauma, which is designated by Durrant through the phrase "racial memory"—a memory of having been reduced to flesh while simultaneously also a recognition of no longer belonging to that reduction—marks the subjects that constitute this new community as, in some sense, irrevocably damaged while, however, maintaining the identity of these subjects as black or white (*PN*, 105). Such a concept of community, a community of "embodied" and wounded subjects, is what is asked for in each of the figures read by Durrant through revealing the act of Forgetting that constituted the grounds of apartheid/colonialism/slavery (*PN*, 111 and 117).

Durrant's intervention into the question of coming after apartheid/colonialism/slavery, in the manner that it offers a sense of a community to come that is ordered by the trauma of that which it comes after, gestures towards a mode through which the ground might be cleared so as to bring about a new sense of the subject that might come after apartheid. To this extent Durrant's project of abiding by the "three versions of an indebted or deconstructed subject" (*PN*, 114) that he locates in Coetzee, Harris, and Morrison, gestures toward a potential direction that the task of coming after apartheid might pursue, a direction that might contend with the concept of

community as it is set to work by apartheid. However, the community that is offered here, in his argument, is structured around subjects that are already given as either black or white.⁵² In short, in Durrant's reading the individual subject as human is valorized in the process of a self edifying increase of consciousness in relation to the other (which might or might not be human). Durrant thus posits and valorizes a somewhat problematised humanism (due to the need to encounter difference) as the basis for his concept of mourning. This re-inscribed humanism is similarly, I will argue, the limit of the sense of community that is run up against in Serote's *To Every Birth its Blood*.

The question of community as a differential that constitutes the concept of apartheid haunts Mongane Wally Serote's *To Every Birth Its Blood* (1981), and it does so as a question that similarly haunts the post-apartheid South African present.⁵³ As I have argued, this is a question that fundamentally problematises what we understand by the term "post-apartheid" as well as what we understand by a designation of "coming to

⁵² This is similarly the limit of Durrant's reading of Jean-Luc Nancy's *Inoperative Community* in his essay on mourning in post-apartheid literature. Crucial to Durrant's understanding of the work of mourning is the assumption that it is always persons, as morally responsible subjects, being brought into relation through mourning ("The Work of Mourning", 446). The promised community, as Durrant might have it, is formed around fragile relations (to self and other) and loss—an environment that enables an ambiguous perseverance of the individuated subject (446). Durrant offers up mourning as a work through which a community might be established – a community marked by the attempt to "inhabit or be inhabited" by difference (447). The individual subject as human is valorized in the process of a self edifying increase of consciousness in relation to the other (which might or might not be human): Durrant thus posits and valorizes a somewhat problematised humanism ("an immanence of man to man", in Nancy's terms, "*Inoperative Community*", 4) due to the need to encounter difference as the basis for his concept of mourning. Durrant's sense of what comes together in community is thus contrary to Nancy's notion of a community of singularities in which there is a "sharing out" of being: community is without work, the individual does not need to be brought into community, as a singularity it is already in it ("*Inoperative Community*", 28).

⁵³ Serote is recognized primarily as a poet, having published numerous volumes of poetry as well as collections of critical essays. *To Every Birth Its Blood* is Serote's first novel, emerging at a significant time in his own existence, being dated as written from 1975 to 1980, and being published in 1981. Serote moved into exile in 1974, first to the USA and then to Botswana. He is currently a national spokesperson for the ANC and the department of Arts and Culture.

consciousness” both as the lens through which to understand the role of Black Consciousness and as a mode through which to interpret Serote’s first novel. This question is articulated most succinctly in the early pages of the second part of the novel in the thoughts of Dikeledi, as she returns home after her father Ramono had been sentenced to 15 years imprisonment for his role in “the movement”: the narrator states, “It seemed as if she had never known anything. She wondered how this system could be destroyed, what system would replace it” (189). A few pages later, Dikeledi presses this further as part of her response to Oupa’s attempts at recruiting her into the movement:

I don’t think it is even a thing which we have to believe or not believe; the issues are much bigger than that. We all believe that we must be free. We all believe that we must work towards that, that it is necessarily a voluntary act. And then, we also know that many people tried this out before us; so we are saying to Oupa, how do we know we are going to be saved? And I don’t think Oupa can guarantee us that. He cannot. It is a matter in which we must realize we are risking ourselves, and voluntarily take the risk. I agree with Oupa that perhaps the hope we have is that eventually what we stand for must win. So I ask, what do we stand for?

(205)

Read in relation to the Freedom Charter and the mode through which it seeks to situate persons inside a particular trajectory of resistance, Dikeledi’s questioning of the ends of recruitment into the movement specifies the risk that is waged in *deciding* to join the struggle. It is a risk that is sharply inflected with a loss of responsibility in relation to that which occurs: Dikeledi wants to be saved. It is striking that this desire for salvation does not mark the character of Tsi. For him, as my discussion of the metaphor of the stew will make clear, it is a question of “contending” through “blood and tears” for a possibility

that might be realized and that already is. This measure of risk, this uncertainty of what *comes after*, the specter that whatever comes after will—despite any attempts to the contrary—always be a system, poses a problem that I argue Serote’s novel attempts to work through. It is a question that haunts *To Every Birth Its Blood*, as opposed to “structuring” it, precisely to the extent in which the novel, in both form and content, invokes the question without dispatching it into any easily reproducible structures of resolution.

To Every Birth Its Blood is divided into two parts, the times of which seem to run up against each other in an anachronous destabilisation of each other’s unfolding. The first part of the novel is narrated by Tsi Molope, an inhabitant of the township of Alexandra just outside Johannesburg. The time in which this opening sequence is set is more difficult to establish, although it is implied that the action opens sometime during the period of the 1960s, when organized political resistance to apartheid has been crushed and those designated as non-white are living, in the words of several of the novel’s characters, as a “defeated people”. An ex journalist who also participates in theatre, the character of Tsi is in constant movement throughout the novel, lumbering from the homes of friends to the *shebeen* and back again. Although Tsi’s friends and family are involved to varying extents in the liberation struggle, he spends most of the novel in a strange separation from those actions. The only period of political action for Tsi (when he works at a correspondence College in the city) ends in his detention and interrogation by the Security Branch (an event that recalls his earlier experience of torture at the hands of the police while he was still a journalist, the trigger for his initial despair).

Resisting the temptation to read this novel through a biography of Serote that would mimic his own movement from a black consciousness philosophy to a movement politics (the movement that Cronin and Suttner's articulation of the Freedom Charter attempts to ensure), I argue that what is traced in the text is a particular line of black consciousness philosophy as it *interacts* with its more hardened modes of expression and the movement politics that led South Africa into the post-apartheid moment.⁵⁴ What Serote calls attention to in this moment of a celebratory non-racialism—a non-racialism that is precisely not “non” due to the manner in which it carries the conceptual ground of apartheid along with it—is what I term in my third chapter, following Fanon, “the lived experience of the black man”. In other words, it is the tactility of the body that orders (doubly) the possible emergence of the new.

One of the first scenes in which we encounter Tsi occurs in the middle of one of his persistent slides from home to home and *Shebeen* to *Shebeen*. After confronting his inability to express the trauma of what has taken place—what the reader later discovers is the trauma of being tortured—Tsi walks out of the house:

As usual, I walked into crowds. I have never walked with crowds. I walked into them. Where was I going with four rands in my pocket? I stopped an old man and asked him for time [...] I walked into crowds

⁵⁴ Despite the very different readings that are offered by literary critics of Serote's novel, it is striking that almost every reading proceeds through locating the text biographically in relation to Serote, see for example Nick Visser's "Fictional Projects and the Irruptions of History: Mongane Serote's *To Every Birth Its Blood*", *English Academy Review*, No. 4, 1987, and Dorian Barboure's essay "Mongane Serote: Humanist and Revolutionary." In: Daymond, M.J. Ed. *Momentum: On Recent South African Writing*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1984. I am grateful to Kelwyn Sole for initially pointing me to these. For an interesting reading of time in relation to Serote's novel (although I disagree with the reading of the role of Black Consciousness in the novel that it offers) see Kelwyn Sole, "'This Time Set Again': The Temporal and Political Conceptions of Serote's *To Every Birth Its Blood*." *English in Africa*. Vol. 18, No. 1, 1991, pp 51 – 80.

flooding from the bus terminus, people, many people stopping now and then to talk to one another, and moving on. (p 6)

The movement that is constantly invoked throughout the novel is complicated in this passage where it serves to mark Tsi as a character that is out of time with the crowd, the persons that structure his environment: the community that is supposed to operate as a condition of recognition for Tsi, according to the concept of apartheid outlined above. This image of being out of time with the crowd resonates, as I show in the next chapter, with Césaire's initial diagnosis of the consciousness of being black in his *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*. These people that Tsi walks into, that he is not in time with are all engaged in the practice of life in apartheid South Africa: they are arriving into the township of Alexandra, in recognition with each other, having been dispensed of the obligation to work in the white city. This apparent functioning community, however, is both heightened and unsettled through the metaphor of the "terrible stew" as it depicts Tsi's own nausea:

‘I was born there’: [in Natal] that is, the biological act of my birth took place there. That is all. I grew up in Alexandra. I am a curious and dangerous combination, if we are to take Verwoerd's dream of South Africa seriously. We have not taken it seriously, but that does not mean that we do not have to deal with it, in blood, in tears [...] this is a terrible stew in terms of the influx laws of South Africa, but then that is another story entirely. Alexandra is just that – a terrible stew. The stew bubbles [...] (25)

This passage takes place the morning after Tsi had been walking into crowds and had witnessed a murder, a murder that his friend wanted to watch more closely. The question of birth, or of indigeneity as it will be phrased in my second chapter, is presented for

thought here in relation to the question of the formation of subjectivity in apartheid South Africa. It is not just that Tsi does not live in the place of his birth, rather, as a child of parents from two different ‘ethnic groupings’ – Sotho and Zulu – he does not conform in his body to the sense of community that is integral to the construction of a self through the concept of apartheid. What is critical, in this moment, is how the refusal to define the self through the terms of apartheid (“Verwoerd’s dream”), even though this refusal is almost simply a recognition, is presented as always already failed. It is Verwoerd’s dream that must be accounted for, in the blood and tears of those who inhabit “the terrible stew” of Alexandra. It is possible, in contrast to readings of Tsi offered by figures such as Sole, to suggest here that what Tsi confronts here is not straightforwardly a loss of community that is somehow necessary for coming to terms with apartheid (“This time set again”, 64, 67, 71) but rather the difficulty of walking out of the script of that community—a script that through torture Tsi understands as a reduction of the self to flesh, the open wound of being black.

The metaphor of a stew is poignant in relation to the sense through which the concept of apartheid works towards the realization of whole, reified, communities defined by cultural and racial markers. A stew is, precisely, not a melting pot. The metaphor here is not of a fusional multiplicity, nor is it of a reduction to one through the differential of community. Rather, there is a messy pressing together that accounts for the singularity of others while, perhaps, accruing a sense of style or flavor from those singularities. In other words, Alexandra is not the terrain of an apartheid community despite being labeled as such by the State and, through identifying with this “bubbling

stew” (an identification that is maintained throughout the first part of the novel), the character Tsi articulates a sense of self that is similarly constituted through singularities (of history, of biological descent). The event, in this first part of the novel that brings about Tsi’s realization—a realization that is not an escape but that nonetheless marks him as unavailable to community—is his torture at the hands of the Security Police.

This event occurs on the way home from a meeting with a local tribal authority. In the middle of a conversation with his co-worker and friend, Boykie, that deals with the question of Black Consciousness and its suitability as a mode of resistance (64-66, where Boykie declares that it is a “necessary stage”), they are stopped at a police roadblock. In the ensuing altercation with the police due to their documentary threat (Tsi and Boykie photograph what appears to be a dead person on the side of the road) they are taken to a police station where they are detained for six days and tortured. The threat articulated here is precisely the threat of a Sartrean return of the gaze: in these terms, the black man looking at the white man’s violation. The response from the Security Branch is to reduce that look to the status of body. Tsi narrates this torture as it pertains to his body: he is grabbed by the testicles which are then persistently squeezed and pulled away from the torso (72). In this moment of torture Tsi attempts to stand, he attempts to not give in to the pain; in the process he exhausts all his bodily strength as well as the ‘cultural’ resource of calling on his dead grandmother. In this silence Tsi begins to scream: “That was when I began to weep, and scream, and I fell on the floor [...]” (74). This experience of torture reduces Tsi to the level of his body, the functions of his body (“shitting”, “pissing”, “farting”) are the manifestation of his anguish. The realization of his isolation

in his body presses Tsi into a state where “a loud silence took over” (75), where the black body actually marks him in silence despite his scream. He is “detoured from his true cry”, as it were (*Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, 2).

Inhabiting this embodiment of silence, Tsi walks into crowds. It is in this state that he comes to recognize, in an expression of community that is not available to him, the same trauma as the one fundamentally marking his father’s existence: “I realized what his eyes were saying, with their weary bloodshot look. I began to understand why his shoulders were so bent, why his movement, as if carrying an unbearable load, seemed to creak, I began to understand.” (85). This image of Tsi’s father, an image that resonates with Césaire’s description of the encounter with the old man on the tram car in his *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* (that I discuss in the next chapter), turns on the perception of the manner in which the mind and body have become one: the father’s eyes are bloodshot. Following my discussion of Merleau-Ponty and Lacan above, the eye as mind is in this moment saturated with the physicality of the body (blood), a physicality that registers the weight of existence under the burden of being produced as black—as body—in the look of the Security Branch as much as in the look of all his white colleagues who “were informed about [his] shame [...] Eyes and eyes did not let me go [...] they held on and wanted me to go through that other journey again” (102). The eyes invoked here fix Tsi in place. According to Tsi’s narration of them, they want to mark him as proper to the experience of torture, they want to fix him into a subjectivity of trauma that registers the physicality of the act without accounting for the subjectivations

that are brought into play through it (for example, Tsi spends a great deal of his time post-torture contemplating the meaning of Alexandria and life, p 91).

By the end of the first part of the novel, Tsi has come to a certain political consciousness: he works for a community college and wants to offer an education that could unleash minds. However, at the height of this apparent articulation of a self in opposition to apartheid, Tsi is again detained by the Security Branch. Although he is not physically tortured, in that moment the force of his reduction to flesh through torture returns to unsettle him. As the final line of part one states: “A silence fell among us” (132).

In considering the second section of the novel, it is necessary to keep in mind the physicality of the encounters—even flows of movement are physical, Tsi walks into people—that structure the notions of the subject as they emerge in the first part of the novel. The second part of the novel takes place after what lends itself to be read as the Soweto uprising of 1976. In this section Tsi drops out of view until the final pages, appearing only through slight references at times. The presence of those he has already encountered, however, heralds Tsi as a trace that haunts this part of the narrative: the reader is always wondering when Tsi will re-emerge, how the physicality of his existence would operate in this more fluid and almost superficial plane of political action. Shifting from the first to the third person narration, this second part takes as its focus a number of friends who, for a variety of reasons (such as guilt, vengeance, and loyalty), have taken up the struggle under the banner of “the movement”. It is “the movement” that is seen to orchestrate and implement armed resistance against the State until the war spreads to the

rural areas as well as to the surrounding countries. Some of the protagonists who support the movement, such as the central character of Oupa (Tsi's nephew, who is only an infant in the first part of the novel but who is instrumental in the movement in the second) are captured by the police and tortured to death. The conflict occurring between the movement and the State becomes increasingly violent as the novel progresses, saturating its pages towards its close. However, the novel does not offer any straightforward sense of conclusion, as though the reader might get to declare "mission accomplished". Rather, Tsi re-emerges in the final moments of the novel. Living in exile, he is still suffering and struggling. In the last moments, the final paragraphs, the character of Tsi is sliced into with an image of a nameless woman, struggling to give birth; a closing scene that I would argue is too opportunistically read as a hint toward the birth of a new nation.

The struggle, in the second part of the novel, seems to center on the desire to not be reactionary, to attempt to determine the unfolding of events according to a separate agenda (148). The passage with which I began my reading of *To Every Birth its Blood* is located in this second part and offers a useful frame for its unfolding: the characters not only struggle against the apartheid State, they also struggle with the problem of naming that State, of delimiting its powers. This attempt to work through the question, however, has shifted from an attempt to account for the self to a more generalized locating of the self in "the movement". While this shift resonates strongly with the argument that Durrant formulates with regard to postcolonial narrative, this shift is complicated by the occasional palpability of the body and, finally, by the return of the character of Tsi. One such moment of palpability is the arrival at Russia's farm (the uncle of one of the main

characters, Morolong) of Morolong. Morolong is confronted there by his uncle with “bloodshot eyes” on a rundown farm whose most defining feature was that it “had no fence” (183). This is held in contrast to the experience of Dikeledi in Alexandria township, which she describes as: “a deadly township, with terribly mean streets, a very close-knit township, where almost everyone is related to everyone else, related through the skin” (192). The farm is without fencing, without any markers of being produced inside the confines of western society (Cf. the centrality of the fence in Locke’s sense of property, discussed above). The township, however, is “closely-knit”, it is stitched together. This is not, however, a spontaneous recognition of the self in relation to one’s own community, as envisioned by apartheid but it is rather a stitching that occurs only at the level of flesh, at the level of having been *reduced flesh*.

A second moment of physicality occurs shortly after Oupa organizes the assassination of a number of key security branch operatives. Oupa is arrested for having a banned pamphlet on his person. While in custody he is tortured, the description of which is even more graphic than that of Tsi. In the final moments, when he is asked to declare whether or not he is a member of the movement, Oupa gathers a sense of defiance through his body that has been literally reduced to an open wound: “He thought: I must stand up [...] he staggered back, summoned all his muscles to support him, asking them to support him for the last time. ‘Yes, I am a member of the Movement,’ he said (254). The next line, although describing the farm from which the insurrection was about to be launched, operates as the definitive marker of this final encounter for Oupa: “The silence here is stubborn” (254). What seems to occur in this final scene of defiance, where Oupa

gathers the strength to stand, is a realization from Oupa's side—notably after he has been reduced to an open wound—that to express a self not determined by the apartheid State is, as Césaire phrases it in *The Notebook*, to be “Standing / And / Free”. This is not a freedom that is entered into; it is encountered in the moment of death. The echo in this final scene of the death of Steve Biko in detention in 1977 is absolutely pivotal for the reading of Oupa as coming to consciousness in this final moment: the signifier of “the movement” finds a form of freedom in reckoning with his reduction to flesh, taking this as the ground from which to speak. In a sense, it can be argued that effectively Oupa declares “this body reduced to flesh is the movement.”

This consciousness that has to do with the problem of indigeneity and the tactility of the body is not, in Serote's novel, offered as an escape. It is perhaps in the final moments of the novel that this is made most explicit: Tsi re-emerges after the death of his nephew, Oupa. His existence is still one of a struggle for bare existence: a struggle against his subjectivation through the differential of community. The difficulty that confronts Tsi in this moment is the question: “whether we are still able to love” (289). Love: a question that had been foreclosed—even on the immediately preceding page—throughout the novel through the assertion of sex as a more immediately gratifying form of knowledge. This question of love passes through the remaining few pages of the novel that narrate an intensifying guerilla campaign against the apartheid State, a campaign that Tsi declares “the strongest will win” (298). This declaration is a departure from Dikeledi's confident assertion that “what we stand for will win”. Spliced into this

moment is the image of a woman giving birth; the last lines indicate that it is still a process that has not been realized.

It is tempting to read this moment of birth as the beginning of something new—a new subjectivity or sense of community constituted by love or, at least, where love is possible. However, the novel does not allow such utopian release. Birth, as perhaps one of the clearest instances of the materiality of the past, designates that what emerges carries the past with it, in the form of blood, and in the form of the constitution of its body. Cronin’s poem ended with the difficult predicament of the affirmation of a community of the black fist that simultaneously also affirmed its limit, namely the production of the self through community. As the differential of the concept of apartheid, community is not a sufficient mode through which to come to terms with its legacy or in view of which such a task should be undertaken. Rather, it marks that which comes after it; it produces the subject within the lines of apartheid. What this refusal of community through the character of Tsi offers for thought – through the tactility of the body and the indigeneity to the concept of the “terrible stew”, that runs the risk of shattering his existence – is precisely what must be taken along into any production of the new, of that which might try to come to terms with the legacy of apartheid. Any such attempt to come *after* must come with “its blood”, a realization that “the movement” in the novel does not come to. In the next two chapters I will offer a reading of this question of indigeneity and of tactility as it is set to work in the interventions made by Aimé Césaire and Franz Fanon, so as to come in the fourth chapter to the question of what *life* in the wake of apartheid might mean.

Indigeneity in the wake of Man

I am not a distinct country of the Diallobé facing a distinct Occident, and appreciating with a cool head what I must take from it and what I must leave with it by way of counterbalance. I have become the two. There is not a clear mind deciding between the two factors of a choice. There is a strange nature, in distress over not being two.

Samba Diallo, in *Ambiguous Adventure* 150-151

Whereas in the previous chapter my focus was on community as a mechanism in the production of the racial formations of apartheid, and particularly on the modes through which community both operated as a terrain for the subject *in* apartheid as well as the ground for attempts to both work against and come *after* apartheid, in this chapter I will proceed from the openings offered by Cronin and Serote so as to offer a sense of the role of ‘indigeneity’ in coming to terms with apartheid’s legacy. Indigeneity has, of course, been implicated in what can loosely be termed ‘the project of Man’ (a formulation that will become especially important in the next chapter) and specifically in the project of apartheid through the articulation of politics of autochthony expressed in the language of the nation and the Bantustan. Following my reading of Serote, however, I argue that the call is to produce indigeneity as the term for a relation to a concept of life that has been ordered by the tactility of the body. Such a move amounts to a shift from sensual becoming (premised on essences: such as blackness) to conceptual becoming (where what might have been an essence is turned into an adjective: consciousness that is black). Aimé Césaire’s *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* is central to this re-inscription

of indigeneity and the emerging sense of the tactility of the body. The next chapter will offer a reading of the latter concept as it becomes articulated in Frantz Fanon's work.

It is worth beginning with a brief recollection of the key moves I set out previously with regard to the concept of apartheid and community: Framing my chapter through a reading of Jeremy Cronin's offering of a community of the touch through his "Motho ke motho ka batho babang", I argued that apartheid should be understood as a particular articulation whereby race is reified through the differential of community. This is not to argue that race is non-existent in South Africa prior to this moment, nor is it to suggest that the policies concerning the "native question" (such as the Native (Urban Areas) Act of 1923) did not articulate a sense of racial formation that is both essentialist and negative. Rather, my argument in the previous chapter sought to pose the centrality of the mechanism of community in the specific articulation of the question of racial formations in South Africa that is named through the signifier "Apartheid". A formation that I argued is principally concerned with the production of whiteness. I contend that as a constitutive node in the emergence of apartheid, the extent to which community conceptually underpinned both the programme of the Freedom Charter and the dominant modes of coming to terms with the legacy of apartheid marks the extent to which these articulations inadvertently work to guarantee the return of the same in this moment. It is in this context that Serote's intervention into the question of what comes after apartheid, or as the character Dikeledi phrased it, "what do we stand for?" becomes important.

What Serote offers, through the character of Tsi and his interaction both with the question of community and of *coming after* apartheid, is the weightiness of the body as it

orders what I call *life* (the condition of the subject prior to the social differentiations of race, gender, and sexuality) in the wake of apartheid.¹ Critically, in both Cronin's poem and in Serote's novel the sense of that which comes after—whether it is a community of the touch or the violent, political, overthrow of apartheid—is neither offered as certainty nor is it framed as a condition from which it is easy to walk out. Rather, what becomes clear is that it is not easy to emancipate the subject from any particular script as it produces the conditions of subjectivation. In fact, in neither case does this potential release occur, except through the death of Oupa in Serote's novel. It is this difficulty of not simply being capable of 'walking out' that Césaire's understanding of indigeneity as a notion of conceptual becoming helps to come to terms with. As such I argue that Césaire's sense of indigeneity, an indigeneity not fixed to place, is integral to the production of the conditions for *life* in the wake of apartheid.

The epigraph to this chapter, a quote from the main protagonist in Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure*, offers a productive counterpoint (in the musical sense of contrapuntal) to the sense of indigeneity as it emerges in Serote's *To Every Birth Its Blood*, and helps to set out the stakes of my reading of Césaire. After a brief reading of Kane's novel, I turn in more depth to a particular strand in Césaire's broader text while tracing the difficulties raised by the juxtaposition of Serote and Kane. *Ambiguous*

¹ I find Gilles Deleuze's sense of immanence—where the subject simultaneously expresses the world and is an expression of it, where it emerges as a supplement to singularities producing a particular style that holds a difference in common—useful for thinking the basic thrust of the sense of life invoked here. However, I do think that the productivity of Deleuze's intervention is limited by the inability to adequately account for what I term the weightiness of the body. On life as premised on Deleuze's understanding of immanence, see particularly Gilles Deleuze, "Immanence: a life". [1995] In: Gilles Deleuze, *Pure immanence: Essays on a life*. Translated from the French by A. Boyman. New York: Zone Books, 2002, 25 – 33.

Adventure narrates the intellectual formation (which extends into early adult life) of a young boy, Samba Diallo, as it runs up against what is considered his country's ability to hold on to its own sense of identity and the demands of conforming to a westernized, particularly French, understanding of the world. The central question around which Kane's novel unfolds is articulated by the Chief of the Diallobé, Samba Diallo's uncle, in the midst of a debate over whether the children of the Diallobé should be sent to the new French school. He asks: "Can one learn *this* without forgetting *that*, and is what one learns worth what one forgets?" (*Ambiguous Adventure*, 34, hereafter *AA*). At stake, in the terms of the conversation, is a choice between an education framed through Europe and the preservation of a particular training in the Word of Islam. As the chief's phrasing makes plain, the problem of forgetting is not hypothetical, it is considered as certain. In effect, as Diallo's father phrases it a little later, it is a choice between either a "new egoism" of the West or the dissolution of the individual self such that "nothing in him was alive but this voice" (*AA*, 60 and 69). That which is subjugated and denied in this practice of becoming voice is, particularly, the body: it is routinely beaten, burned, and kept in poverty so as to become adequate to the expression of the Word (*AA*, 9 – 33). The body, in this mode of becoming, is a weight that fixes the self "to the earth" (*AA*, 33). In other words, it is a weight that restricts the ability to become pure spirit in the articulation of the Word.

This choice, which is strikingly not centered on an idyllic African past but rather on a mode of becoming that derives from a particular reading of Islam, is ultimately settled in favor of the "new school". However, this decision is not one that

straightforwardly leads to an understanding of defeat. Diallo's father, a character simply referred to in the novel as "the knight" (in reference to an imagined knight from medieval Europe, although Kierkegaard's "knight of faith" clearly resonates), frames the decision in a conversation with Diallo in such way that it is clear the decision is thought of as strategically situating the Diallobé at the core of the future "citadel" of the West, as an "abyss" that would unsettle that future (AA, 80). In short, the Diallobé, even in embracing the intellectual condition of the West, are to function as a type of wound, recalling "the insufficiency of the guarantee man offers to man" (AA, 101). While this insufficiency is primarily contrasted with the sufficiency of God's guarantee (of becoming spirit), it is also articulated in response to Europe's colonial and postcolonial domination of Africa—a relation that is defined as "the art of conquering without being in the right" and in which all of Africa "found themselves, when the day came, checked by census, divided up, classified, labeled, conscripted, administrated" (AA, 37 and 49). Although when studying in France Samba Diallo's lover, Lucienne, characterizes him as being overly consumed with "being a Negro" and obsessed with his "Negroness" (AA, 141, the term in the French is "*négritude*" and it isn't elaborated as it is in the translated text), the mode through which this choice is framed while still in Africa constructs it as one not primarily concerned with the body. The novel, quite startlingly, does not pursue the notion of Diallo's "negroness" apart from indicating it as the reason (in Lucienne's estimation) for his resistance to Marxist political resistance and as being registered through the sense that in Europe Diallo "has the impression that nothing touches [him] anymore" (AA, 143 and 150). This absence of the touch, an absence that strongly evokes the hope of a community

of the touch that I argued earlier is at work in Cronin's "Motho ke motho ka batho babang", is due to the perception that in Europe the world is fundamentally separated from flesh: the body disappears and is replaced by the shell of a mechanical vehicle, the feet are shod, the ground is covered (*AA*, 89 and 170). Despite his uneasiness about the lack of flesh, Diallo's resistance to a Marxist inscription of politics more likely stems from its materialism than from an attachment to blackness in any physical sense.

As a student, Diallo pursues the philosophical training associated with the new school in Diallobé as rigorously as he pursued the training by the "teacher of the Diallobé" in the art of becoming a vessel of the Word. While he marvels at the accomplished expression of Word that he perceives both in the teacher and in the knight, it is precisely the accomplishment of denying and controlling the body that he marvels at. We see this as he muses during one of his moments of habitual withdrawal among the bones of the graveyard:

Naturally, she [old Rella, the dead body alongside which he lies] had never made any answer, and this was a weighty argument in favor of doubt. [He] knew that within these low heaps of earth rested only little piles of bones [...] under all these mounds there was no longer any flesh, no more open eyes, ears attentive to the step of passers-by, as he had imagined, but only laid-out chains, as it were, of whitened bones. (*AA*, 40 – 41)

The fixity of death that emerges in this thought, the idea according to Diallo that perhaps after death there is nothing but a continuance in memory (*AA*, 42), constrains the reading of his admiration for the near perfect expression of the word: it is the form of denial and articulation that is admired, not any theistic sense of God and the concomitant idea of an

afterlife. While the valorization of mind that Diallo perceives in French philosophy certainly resonates with this description of the practice of Islam, for Diallo (as his father summarizes it) the distinction between these two systems has to do with their ends. French philosophy is involved in the production of a sense of “I”, whereas the training of the Diallobé produces the dissolution of any self in the realization of Word (hence the argument by Diallo that the splitting between Occident and Africa is to be marked in Descartes, *AA*, 114).

Despite the difficult decision with regard to the trajectory of education for the Diallobé, it is only once Samba Diallo begins to study in France that the question of indigeneity is raised as a concept in the novel. The question of indigeneity is posed in the midst of a discussion with the sons of a man named Pierre-Louis, a third generation descendant of slaves in the Caribbean who worked as a legal administrator in the French Colonial project (*AA*, 130). This man, who understands the practice of the letter of the law as the most poignant mode through which to challenge colonial Europe (as in his view Europe is, above all, constrained by the letter) is perceived by Diallo as a point of comfort in the onslaught of bodily alienation that is French society (*AA*, 133). In an image that resonates (as will be discussed below) with Césaire’s *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, Samba Diallo first encounters Pierre-Louis while walking in the street in a state characterized by a sense of sheer disembodiment. In that state of mind, Diallo walks into “an old Negro” who is “standing” holding a “white cane” (*AA*, 129). This encounter proceeds from a physical touch, a collision of bodies, rather than from an ocular and auditory perception, as it does in Césaire’s text. What is striking here is that

this “old Negro” is not decrepit and worn down as the figure that we encounter in Césaire’s text is, rather this man is the embodiment of the “soul of revolution”, a man who while not blind had “the whole surface of his left eye [...] covered by a white film” (AA, 129). That one of Pierre-Louis’ eyes is normal while the other has become white, and that he carries a stick that is white, foreshadows Diallo’s own statement with regard to indigeneity and stands in strong contrast to the encounter that occurs in Césaire’s text.

In Pierre-Louis’ home, Diallo is confronted with the arguments (emanating from Pierre-Louis’ two sons) that Africa must learn to accept the offer of Europe, whether it be in terms of technocratic or humanitarian assistance. It is here that Samba Diallo makes the statement on indigeneity that forms the epigraph to this chapter. He argues that the notion that one entity must receive the gift from another entity is misplaced, if not impossible. The shift that occurs in this refusal of the demand that Africa and Europe be viewed as two separate entities occurs, critically, at the level of thought. It is refused as a conceptual impossibility. This is not, however, a fusional multiplicity. Diallo argues that “there is not a clear mind deciding between the two factors of a choice. There is a strange nature, in distress over not being two” (AA, 151). What becomes clear in this refusal is that in his assertion of “not being two” Diallo simultaneously refuses what he considers to be the distinctly European separation of mind from existence: the subject is *in* this “not being two”, it does not survey it as, in different articulations, it does through mind in Descartes, Kant, or Hegel. In this statement a new sense of indigeneity as it relates to the concept of the subject emerges: the subject is an expression of the interactions of thought rather than an entity that authorizes thought. This is an indigeneity, or terrain of

emergence, however, that is haunted by what can only be named as a disembodiment: it cannot account for the scar as which Diallo's father seeks to re-inscribe the Diallobé.

This refusal and haunting is, further, mimicked both in Samba Diallo's imminent death and in the death of the teacher of the Diallobé. Having become obsessed with the idiosyncrasies of his failing body, at the moment of his death the teacher inexplicably reverses the thrust of his teaching (that the body must be foregone so that the Word can be expressed) and declares: "My God, I thank Thee—for this grace which Thou hast bestowed upon me [...] to sustain me with Thy presence, to *fill me with Thyself* as Thou art doing now, even before I die" (AA, 168, my emphasis). The teacher's companion attempts to muffle this declaration since it transgresses the sense that the body is that which must be denied so that the Word might be expressed: here God inhabits the body. Similarly, when Samba Diallo returns to the country of the Diallobé he refuses the trajectory that marked their training: he refuses to pray, to become the Word of God. It is in his final rumination on this sense of "not being two" in the wake of his refusal to pray, an indigeneity that ultimately is constituted through the double refusal of learning "learning this" or "forgetting that", that the companion of the teacher murders Samba Diallo, freeing him to enter into the unambiguous realm of death (AA, 175 – 178). As with the character of Oupa in Serote's *To Every Birth Its Blood*, however, this is a non-ambiguity that is *only* entered into in death. It is, strictly, not realized.

While the body, particularly the weightiness of being reduced to flesh, forms the core of the question of indigeneity in Serote's novel, in Kane's intervention the concept of indigeneity is developed in relation to the question of thought. In both cases, however,

indigeneity or the terrain of emergence of the subject (as it is more properly understood in relation to Césaire) is produced as a concept that does not simply deal with the new, but also contends with the weight that it comes after. This weight is expressed as the blood of birth in *To Every Birth Its Blood* and as the surprising weight of disembodiment in *Ambiguous Adventure*. Regardless of whether the difficulty is resolved materially or ideally, through bodily flesh or through philosophical thought, the attending concept stumbles on this tension. It is my contention that it is precisely this tension that the Césairean concept of indigeneity attends to and, as such, I now turn to a more sustained discussion of what I have called a particular strand in his text.

Turning through Césaire

In what follows I will read a number of Césaire's works so as to draw out a different strand in that broader text, one that unsettles the rapid recourse to notions of essentialism that seems to characterize, as I argued in the introduction, much politics at present. In approaching this task I first set out what is at stake in poetry as a mode of intervention through reading Césaire's lecture on that question alongside Walter Benjamin's essay "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man", a text that curiously rhymes with that of Césaire. Within the frame thus established I then turn to a reading of *The Notebook*, while focusing primarily on the manner in which the concept of indigeneity is altered through the articulation of what I term weightiness, movement, and the scream. The fourth section of this chapter turns to Césaire's lecture on "Culture and Colonialism" both to 'flesh out' what is at stake in *The Notebook* and as a transition into Césaire's

major statement on colonialism, namely the *Discourse on Colonialism*. Through drawing this text in relation (again) to Benjamin and with Georg Lukács' notion of reification, I suggest that indigeneity as it is put into play in the *Discourse* enables an understanding of the curious work of redemption (to use Benjamin's term) as it is articulated in the *Discourse's* final paragraphs.

To the extent that this not straightforwardly essentialist strand is made available in his broader text it is possible to argue that Césaire attends to the problem of racial formations through the production of the concept of indigeneity. This concept, as my discussion of Serote and Kane makes clear, cannot fit easily into the colonial binary of Europe and its Other: it is not simply oppositional but hovers over the difficulty of “becoming” that is opened up in the refusal of this binary. Offered in relation to my argument on the Freedom Charter and its maintenance of the racial formations that underscore the project of apartheid (the production of whiteness and blackness through the differential of community), this encounter opens “a line of flight” that is turned toward the future as that which is already and always yet to come while carrying with it the injunction of the tactility of “the lived experience of the black man”.² This weightiness that does not succumb to its weight is what is offered in Césaire's production of the concept of indigeneity that is threaded through his understanding of negritude and decidedly marks his oeuvre. Indigeneity as it is developed here is not only to be understood in its adjectival form but also operates as an adverb, as a particular practice of reading in relation to the scripts that produce the conditions for subjectivation. What is at

² The title of the fifth chapter in Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. 1952. Trans. Richard Philcox. New York: Grove Press, 2008.

stake in this production of indigeneity is scored across a reading of the turn offered by Césaire through his equation “Colonisation = Thingification” (DC 42) and its echo of the earlier work of Georg Lukács and its resonance into the later work of Zita Nunes. In short I argue that Césaire offers through his articulation of the notion of negritude a strong affirmation of the potentiality of what we might call ‘a difference in common’ while, concomitantly, putting in play a strong critique of whiteness through the weightiness of what I term the cut of the body.

There is, finally, a double stake—in the sense of that which punctures or holds as well as that which is at risk—at play in the construction of blackness in Césaire’s text: a double stake that constitutes the rhythm of Césaire’s expression of negritude and which demands to be kept in mind in the act of reading. On the one hand, the force of Césaire’s critique bears down on the integral process whereby colonisation produces blackness through the work of epistemic and physical violence (the explicit concern of the *Discourse*, for example). On the other hand, Césaire’s work asks to be read simultaneously as a *construction* of blackness itself. As my reading of the later lecture will make explicit, the blackness that is under construction is not something that is itself taken as given, rather, it is to be produced as a becoming lodged in the movement of what I am calling indigeneity. It is this double stake that comes to be named negritude, and it is this naming that constitutes the work of Césaire’s poetry.

Slicing: Cutting/Brushing

In his 1944 lecture on the relation between poetry and knowledge (which was presented as a keynote address at a conference on philosophy in Port-au-Prince) Césaire offers a sense of poetry, particularly surrealist poetry, as an intervention into the stifling weight of scientific judgment.³ Apart from affirming Césaire's relation to the project of surrealism, it is in this articulation of a particular expression of poetry that we are given some holds through which to more adequately grapple with the concept of negritude and the mode through which it attends to the question of racial formations as Césaire constructs it. It is particularly Césaire's sense of poetry as a weapon that can be set loose in the world, and the way in which this shapes the understanding of the world, that is of interest here.

Framing the scientific as not only a category of thought but rather as a ground for thinking, Césaire argues, in an expression that chimes with that of “the knight” in *Ambiguous Adventure*, that it “impoverishes man” through its objectification of the world (“Poésie”, 157). This making object—a process that is strategically named by the term “thingification” in the *Discourse*—comes to be expressed in the isolating function of scientific focus and resonates into the “royal” and “sacred” speech of the emergent nation

³ Aimé Césaire, “Poésie et connaissance.” *Tropiques*. Vol. 2 [Fort de France], 1945, all translations my own. A note on translation: some of the texts read in this chapter—and in this dissertation—are only available in their original language. In such instances I have generally translated these texts. In addition, when reading a text in translation I have attempted to juxtapose that text with its original, so as to better grasp its nuances. In the case of Césaire this task can be quite challenging (not least because of his stated aim to explode the French language), and I have attempted to maintain the feel of that difficulty in this chapter. For a reading of the difficulty of translating Césaire, see Gregson Davis, in his “‘Towards a Non-Vicious Circle’: The lyric of Aimé Césaire in English”. *Stanford French Review*, 1, 1977, pp 135 – 146. While I disagree with the manner in which Davis marks Césaire as “black”, a marking that precisely echoes Fanon's critique of the mode of inclusion that infuses the system blackness/whiteness, and his refusal of surrealism as a resonant project for Césaire, I agree with his notion that what threads Césaire's argument and what must be attended to for translation is “image”.

and its disciplines (“Poésie”, 159).⁴ What is crucial in this making object is not simply that it heralds a utilitarian and extractive inclination that marks a particular understanding of existence, but rather that man *as a concept* is itself made object, cut off from movement and placed under the weight of the law. It is in this “poverty of judgment”—a poverty due to its effect on man—that Césaire locates the intervention constituted by what he understands as the poetic (“Poésie”, 168).⁵

It is not, however, through a supplemental action that poetry stages its intervention, as though it might work to make the harshness of scientific existence palatable; rather poetry functions as a weapon that shatters without substitution, a weapon that opens the possibility of an encounter not only through unsettling dominant modes of thought, but also through shattering language itself (Cf. “Interview”, 83). Césaire suggests that one of the key movements that poetry sets in play is the shift from human to cosmic being, where:

En nous l’homme de tous temps. En nous, tous les hommes. En nous l’animal, le végétal, le minéral. L’homme n’est pas seulement homme. Il est univers.

In us, man of all times [“ages”, or possibly, “forms of time”]. In us, all of man. In us, the animal, the vegetal, the mineral. Man is not solely [strictly “not only”, but also “not singularly”, “not in isolation”] man. It [or “he”] is *the world* [also, “the universe”]. (“Poésie”, 162)

⁴ A productive comparison to Césaire’s argument can be found in Deleuze and Guattari’s highly influential, although, as I argued in the previous chapter, somewhat dangerous, critique of Royal or State Science through an affirmation of “Nomadology”. Cf. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem & Helen R. Lane. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983, especially the discussion on race in the “nomadology” essay, p376 – 379.

⁵ Michel Foucault has made a similar argument with regard to the poverty of judgment in *The Order of Things: an Archeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1971, see particularly chapter 3 on “Representing”.

Quite clearly foreshadowing the sense of the subject that is articulated in Samba Diallo's statement on indigeneity, the concept of man is produced through this shift no longer as *an* object but comes to be named as an expression that is both constitutive and derivative of a new terrain, a terrain that incorporates this fractured notion of man. It is poetry, in Césaire's argument, that opens up the possibility of this shift, a shift that registers difference while refusing to essentialise it: in this passage the difference between the animal, vegetal, and mineral (it specifies the categories) is marked at the moment of expression through the same term, man—not as a measure of these but as an articulation of their concatenated thread, as a quilting point. As such, man is not a “measure” of the world, a concept of man that Césaire strongly critiques in his *Notebook*, rather, in a formulation that is echoed in *Ambiguous Adventure*, man is that which is produced by the world, and as such names it, in its folds. The question of naming that is posed here by Césaire's adherence to the term “man”, an adherence that can perhaps be read as signaling a latent humanism, is somewhat problematised by the assertion that “in naming [...] an enchanted world of monsters [is brought] into view” (“Letter to Lilyan Kesteloot”, 204, cited in “Aimé Césaire: Poetry is/and Knowledge”, 116), an assertion that resonates with Benjamin's short essay “On Language as Such and on the Language of Man”.⁶ As will become clear, resonances with Benjamin's interventions are not limited to this instance. The question of man and its naming, particularly in relation to its potential humanism, needs to be confronted and, as such, I momentarily digress into a

⁶ Walter Benjamin, “On Language as Such and on the Language of Man” [1916]. In: Bullock, M. and Jennings, M.W. Eds. *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Vol 1: 1913 – 1926*. Translated from the German by Edmund Jephcott. Harvard University Press, 1996.

reading of Benjamin's essay so as to enable a post-humanistic reading of Césaire's invocation of man.

The proper name, that which Benjamin calls the "frontier between finite and infinite language", (or in Césaire's language, the shift from human to cosmic being) has nothing to do with work but is rather understood as expression ("On Language", 69). In a formulation that ripples across Césaire's argument in the lecture and that marks Benjamin's Spinozism, Benjamin asserts that all things have language in that there is always an expression of the "mental entity", and that as such, language is not situated within a humanistic concept of existence ("On Language", 62). Man is not separated from the 'animal world' through its language, or its reason (logos), on the contrary, man takes place within the language of *the world* as an intertwining which opens onto both infinity and the finite (this shift being perhaps one of point of view). As Benjamin argues:

[The former] view is the Bourgeois conception of language [...] It holds that the means of communication is the word, its object factual, and its addressee a human being. The [latter] conception of language, in contrast, knows no means, no object, and no addressee of communication. It means: in the name the mental being of man communicates itself to God. ("On Language", 65)

The Bourgeois conception of language, a language of fixity (as both Césaire and Fanon come to articulate it, and as it has already been articulated by Cronin and Kane), is the function of logos, or reason through language, and offers an urgency toward the work of communication: statistics, charts, maps, architectural plans, in short, administration. As the expression of that which is expressible in a thing, in other words as that which gives forth "the linguistic being of things" or their essence without becoming substance ("On

Language”, 63), Benjamin suggests that language is the unfolding in which all things are shown to have communion. It is in this unfolding that Benjamin locates the place of man and the function of the proper name.

To rephrase this in a formulation that resonates strongly with Césaire in the *Notebook*, man is to be understood as the quilting point where the unfolding of *communion to the measure of the world takes place*. This is not an issue of the expression of content, as though the meaning of a proper name points to an essence or to a subject that surveys existence, rather it is *the act* of giving a proper name itself that constitutes the expression of man’s place in linguistic being. The proper name, as the naming of that which names, is considered as pure language, pure expressibility, which, as Deleuze argues in his *Expressionism and Logic of Sense*, is expression without essence apart from the act of expressing (it is signification as such, not the signified), it is always constitutive.⁷ However, for Benjamin, the language of man is also that which names things; it is that which registers the linguistic being of things and, as such, it is also that to which expressibility is expressed: the proper name (such as man) is pure language *and* the language of things, and takes place in the intertwining of what Benjamin names as God.⁸ It is in this frame that I would locate Césaire’s insistence on using Creole terms for the naming of places, fauna, and flora in his poetry. Writing in French, Césaire *names* in Creole so as to accomplish both his stated aim of fracturing the French language (it is

⁷ Cf. Gille Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*. 1968. Trans. Martin Joughin. New York: Zone Books, 2005 and *The Logic of Sense*. 1969. Trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale. London: The Athlone Press, 1990

⁸ It is important in this discussion of being toward infinity to recall that this ‘always already’ state of communion shown forth in language bears a striking resemblance to Spinoza’s third knowledge, or, “infinite love of God” which he sets out in the fifth part of the *Ethics*. This is an understanding of God that, it seems, is shared by the character Samba Diallo in *Ambiguous Adventure*.

incapable of assimilating the terms on its own basis) through exploding it in image and word and, in this fracturing, Césaire produces the displacement of interpretive authority—the reader needs to acquire a sense of both Martinique and France (either concretely or at least conceptually) in order to grasp the text. Along these lines it becomes possible to read Césaire’s use of the term “man” as an attempt at *fracturing* “man” *through holding on to it*. It is precisely such a gesture that I read in the character of Tsi in *To Every Birth Its Blood*, where it is the holding on to the body and its production as black that unsettles the new identity that might become available through “the movement”.

In a continuation of this resonance with the Benjaminian notion of language as expressibility, it is striking that in his lecture on poetry and knowledge Césaire articulates an understanding of poetry as enabling a philosophical project. The poetic, in this formulation, has nothing to do with “rendering the world intelligible” (“Poésie”, 164), an action that is premised on the calculative fixing of identities in place, but rather operates in the instability of a wager as an expression of the intertwining of the world:

*Et c’est sur le mot, copeau du monde, lèche secrète et pudique du monde
qu’il joue toutes nos chances ... Les premières et les dernières.*

And it is on the word, shaving [also, “chip”] of the world, stealthy and discreet brushing [in the sense of a small and delicate stroke with a paint brush] of the world, that he [the poet] plays all our chances [or, “puts all our odds/potentialities into play”] ... the first and the last. (“Poésie”, 164)

Poetic expression is here understood as setting a small piece/rendering of the world loose, directing it while not determining (in the sense of controlling) its movement. Resistant to a notion of laboring towards the fashioning of an image that expresses a fixed essence or

identity, in other words a totality, poetry can be understood as a wager that sets words into motion. It sets to work through the articulation of images that “shatter [*bouleverse*, also “changes” or “disrupts”] all the laws of thought” so as to offer the possibility of an encounter with difference (the injunction, the fundamental ground of logic, that Césaire addresses is that A is not non-A) that unsettles the specificity of its terms so as to make possible “the maintenance of a balance” (“Poésie”, 166), a movement toward the expression of the intertwining of linguistic being.

Despite the triumphant tone in which this declaration with regard to the poetic is expressed, Césaire’s lecture is simultaneously haunted by the difficulties of this precise declaration—much like the disquiet that unsettles Samba Diallo’s sense of “not being two”. What is difficult here is not the apparent value and therefore need of the scientific ground of existence—something that Césaire vociferously undermines—but rather the value of what is *named* in the space of emergence that is produced; a difficulty that is consistently threaded through Césaire’s oeuvre. Exactly how a balance can be maintained between two non-discrete elements is not addressed by Césaire. A little later in the lecture, however, he argues that there is a dialectics of the image that enables it to “transcend its antinomies” so as to bring about a moment of emergence (“Poésie”, 167). Stated differently, in Césaire’s argument, balance gives way to sublimation so as to make room for the emergence, or the becoming, of something apparently new.

This moment of emergence, in which the new subject “raises itself up to stand tall”, “*se lève sur la pointe des pieds*”, literally, “to raise oneself up onto the tips of one’s toes,” echoes the emergence of what I read as a consciousness that is black in the final

moments of Oupa's life in *To Every Birth Its Blood*—a consciousness that carries with it the weight that marks its emergence without succumbing to it. What is at stake here, to state it plainly, is precisely the ground for this emergent subjectivity; it is a question of naming and emergence. Directly following this assertion the reader is confronted with a solitary line: “And what also emerges is the old ancestral ground” (“Poésie”, 167). This ancestral background (“ground,” “*fond*,” can also be rendered as “background” or “content”) emerges, Césaire suggests, alongside the emergence of what he terms the “ground [*fond*] of the individual”, by which he does not mean an essentialised trait such as skin colour, nation, or race, but rather “intimate conflicts”, “obsessions” and “phobias”: chips of the world.⁹ That these conditions that poetry brings into view might, in fact, be considered as derivative of the production of man stamped in the image of enlightenment rationality, and not simply as remainders of that process, is not considered by Césaire. As derivative, however, it would mark a particular continuity with that from which his understanding of poetry seeks to break. In addition to this, and I think more critically, it is on the emergence of an ancestral background that Césaire's argument, in its affirmation of what emerges, stumbles.

Despite the clear attempt to resist the folding of this “ancestral background” into a form of primitive existence that might be heralded in a political project of return, when this assertion is read alongside Césaire's earlier formulation of the slippage that is marked in the poetic image, namely, “the words of the poet: primitive words: the world played and undermined” (“Poésie”, 164), and the implication that it is the “poetic

⁹ As will be discussed below, this sense of putting into play “chips of the world” resonates strongly with Benjamin's sense of redemption in his “Theses on the Philosophy of History”.

atmosphere” in which such “hereditary images” can be deciphered that constitutes the ancestral ground (albeit “worn down”, “*miné*”, translated as undermined can also mean “worn down” or “mined”), it becomes difficult to resist such a folding. It is the danger of this reduction to essentialism that I argue Césaire’s construction of the concept of negritude seeks to limit through precisely carrying this danger with it *as such*.

Poetry, according to Césaire, is therefore not about the expression of the self or of a supplemental and romantic notion of the human as reducible to an I. Lodged in *this danger*, poetry in its setting to work, or playing or wagering on the “chipping” or cut of the world, in its “hazy and emotional apprehension” has as its “only means of expression” this shattering which is made available in poetry’s articulation of “love and humour, in word, in image, in myth” (“Poésie”, 168). To the extent that what Césaire names as man is understood as an expression of “movement”, poetry, in its articulation of this rhythm through image, is the force that enables a “living belief” in man while simultaneously working the boundary so as to bring the interior and the exterior (the defining problem of western philosophy, the division, essentially, between mind and body) into contact (“Poésie”, 169-170). In short Césaire argues that:

Le poète est cet être très vieux et très neuf, très complexe et très simple qui aux conflus vécus du rêve et du réel, du jour et de la nuit, entre absence et présence, cherche et reçoit dans le déclenchement soudain des cataclysmes intérieurs le mot de passe de la connivence et de la puissance.

The poet is that very old and very new being, very complex and very simple that exists [*vécus*, also, “lived”] on the edge of dream and reality, the day and the night, between absence and presence, searching and receiving in the onset [*le déclenchement*, also, “in triggering”] of sudden

internal catastrophes the word separated from [*de passe*, literally, “went from” or “past”] complicity [*connivence*, also, “collusion”] and power.

(“Poésie”, 170)

Setting to work on this horizon the poet, as the name for an existence that ruptures boundaries, that exists at points of confluence, is affirmed by Césaire as a shattering that constitutes and is derivative of a subjectivity expressed not as a totality but as a chipping, that which has been broken off and is continuously at a move so as to resist the stamping of scientific reason as the ground for existence. It is to this extent that Samba Diallo’s refusal of the reified distinction between the Occident and Africa gains its value for my reading of Césaire. This self that is “in distress over not being two” is lodged on the terrain of the world that, in a sense, demands that there be two; a terrain that specifies difference and fixes it through indigeneity. However, Diallo refuses the expression of this difference in the hope of constituting a new terrain (a hope that might be construed as searching for a non-autochthonous indigeneity). This hope encounters a limit in the knife of “the fool”, the companion of the teacher who kills Diallo for refusing the expression of the Islamic understanding of subjectivity. While Diallo enters into “non-ambiguity”, he does so through death. In other words, it is a non-realization: the script of reified difference cannot be easily abandoned. The articulation of movement and image that Césaire argues is the expression of poetry, and its relation to a terrain of emergence is a central thread that runs through the *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* and the construction of a concept of negritude as that which might shatter and reconstruct the grounds through which emergence in the world becomes possible. As such, I now turn to that text.

Negritude: A Cry

The *Notebook* is one of Césaire's earliest published works and is often considered to constitute the first articulation of the concept of negritude. Despite having lost the status of first articulation—the term appeared in a 1935 article that has been recently rediscovered¹⁰—it is in this poem that the ground of the concept as I read it is most clearly laid.¹¹ The speaker in Césaire's *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*¹² traverses space as both a geographic and a bodily inscription so as to open a new ground for subjectivity in/against the face of colonialism, a ground that the later *Discourse* and the lecture "Culture and Colonialism" seek to constitute. It is, I think, necessary to preface this discussion by turning through two somewhat startling assertions that Césaire produces in a much later interview with René Depestre, in 1967. The first of these has to do with the role of ethnography:

Césaire: I knew very little about Africa, but I deepened my knowledge through ethnographic studies.

¹⁰ Cf. Ronnie Scharfman, "Aimé Césaire": Poetry is/and Knowledge". *Research in African Literature*. Vol. 41, No. 1, Special Issue: Aimé Césaire, 1913 – 2008: Poet, Politician, Cultural Statesman, Spring 2010, 110. Scharfman, in reading the rediscovered essay "Conscience Raciale et Révolution Sociale", marks the conceptual continuity in the formulation of the concept of negritude despite reading Césaire's call to "break the identificatory mechanism of races" (113, citing Césaire) while discovering "the immediate black man" (113, citing Césaire) as offering an arrival of black "presence" (119). The question of what happens to the term "black" in Césaire's formulation is not read.

¹¹ For a broader engagement with Césaire's text Cf. Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith, "Introduction" in *The Complete Poetry* and their notes on the use of Creole terms for fauna and flora. See also, Robin D.G. Kelley's review of the place of Césaire's oeuvre, and especially the *Discourse on Colonialism*, "A Poetics of Anticolonialism". While I consider Kelley's reading of the place of the Césaires in the invention of surrealist thought and in the development of postcolonial thinking more generally as compelling and accurate, I find the argument with regard to "thingification" in the *Discourse* less so. As I contend below, Césaire's argument here is already evident in *The Notebook* and is not reducible to the statement that race must come before class but rather problematises both these categories.

¹² Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*. 1939. Trans. Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2001, hereafter *NR*. For the French I have used "Cahier d'un retour au pays natal." *The Collected Poetry*. Trans. Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1983, hereafter *NRF*. The French text is published alongside this translation (which was based on Vol. 1 of the *Oeuvres complètes*).

Depestre: I believe that European ethnographers have made a contribution to the development of the concept of negritude.

Césaire: Certainly. (“Interview with Aimé Césaire” 89)

That the concept of negritude owes a certain positive debt to the work of ethnography, one of the disciplines that Césaire argues in the *Discourse* are complicit with the structure of colonialism, is in itself a rather unsettling pronouncement. However, that these ethnographies take the place, it is implied, of an encounter with Africa profoundly unsettles the claims—which will be read later on—that Césaire made a decade earlier about the physicality of the encounter that an adequate critique of colonialism requires. On another level, however, rather than simply reproducing the structure of colonialism, Césaire does suggest that it was through his encounter with Senghor that Africa was actualized for him and that this encounter, which was supplemented by ethnography as, perhaps, a scarring, was constitutive of a “concrete coming to consciousness” (“Interview” 91) for them both. In other words, it did not position Senghor as a native and, as such, suggests a manner of reading that makes possible an emancipatory engagement with those texts.

Secondly, while discussing the notion of negritude as a concrete rather than an abstract coming to consciousness, Césaire argues that, in fact, “everyone has his own negritude” (“Interview” 91). Negritude is a coming to consciousness that entails both an epistemic and a physical encounter with the scarring of colonialism—a scarring that, once comprehended and encountered as a cutting (in the sense of the noun), begins to cut or slice both ways. This cutting, turned through language and set loose as a miraculous

weapon, clears the ground for the arrival of a new expression of the subject, one named through negritude. How this notion of negritude fits into the schema of a vertical solidarity, where “black” marks an essence intrinsic to an oppositional civilization (the guiding structure for the lecture on “Culture”), is not elaborated by Césaire, although the concept of negritude as it is set out in the later text does seem to mark, at a certain level, a significant departure from that offered in the *Notebook*.

In turning to Césaire’s *Notebook* it is worth sketching the basic outlines of the poem before offering a close reading that tracks its rhythms and images. It is possible to frame a reading of the poem through a three-fold structure that centers on a series of encounters that crystallize a sense of consciousness. It is clear, and what follows supports this, that despite being able to offer such a schema the poem simultaneously resists this schema. Partly derived from Césaire’s sense of the poetic as a weapon that resists systematization and moves toward a post-humanistic (following Benjamin) sense of expressionism, the images and rhythms that are unleashed in the poem and that sketch a sense of encounter simultaneously also encounter each other, destabilizing and unsettling their easy interpretation. Despite this it is necessary to provide an idea of these three stages: the first has to do with the abjectness of colonial or even postcolonial existence, a condition understood as “thingification” (the narrator’s point of departure); the second takes place in a moment of the refusal of this abject existence, where the narrator embraces all that characterizes the concept of man from within Europe (this encounter is the point of complicity); finally I suggest that there is a third stage characterized by an acceptance of both prior stages and “the lived experience of the black man” (to borrow

Fanon's phrase), an acceptance that orders the possibility of an alternate expression of the subject named through negritude. This last stage, despite carrying with it the weight of the colonial encounter (both physically and intellectually), is not a synthesis in any strict sense: Césaire's poem, despite its tripartite structure, is not in the form of a Hegelian dialectic, at least not in any straightforward sense.

The title of the *Notebook*, arguably Césaire's best known poem, offers a number of keys to the terrain that it traverses, and demands to be reckoned with in any reading of the text. As a "notebook" it suggests not a lack of continuity but rather an exercise in the production of images that forms *a* terrain. Quite specifically, a notebook is supplemental to an activity, it does not carry the same constitutive authority as a "charter" or "manifesto," in the sense that it would seek to prescribe a certain set of minimal requirements. Rather, a notebook offers the sense of a sketch, of an articulation that would resist finality. As the site of the first full articulation (a joining as opposed to an enunciation) of negritude, the supplementarity of the notebook needs to be held in view: it is a survey, written about the movement of not only Césaire, but of negritude itself.¹³ In its movements, a folding of images, a terrain is produced that is not simply reducible to Martinique, France, or Césaire (a realization that asks for a different reading of the assertion in his interview with Depestre that the *Notebook* has his own consciousness as its terrain); rather, cutting into all of these, the *Notebook* is offered in opposition to a "universal declaration of man" or "rights," drawing attention in its naming to the

¹³ That the *Notebook* was first penned during a visit to the island of Martinska in the Adriatic Sea in 1936 is in itself indicative of the movement that erupts in negritude: Yugoslavia (as it was then called), one might recall, although not straightforwardly European, is conventionally not 'black'.

movements and screams (of the excluded, of what is taken to represent what Lyotard names as “the jews”) that are elided in such programmatic declarations.

In addition to its character as a notebook, the *Notebook* in its naming also evokes the type or quality of terrain that is constituted. The poem has to do with “a return to *the* native land”, “*d’un retour au pays natal*,” which can be translated “a return to the land of birth”, or pushing the translation somewhat, “a return to the terrain of emergence.” This suggests that the relation being explored, its terrain, is the problem of indigeneity as it informs the expression of negritude and that the poem offers *an* encounter with this, an encounter that is neither total nor totalizing, an encounter that resists autochthony. Maintaining this position in relation to the poem, I will draw attention to three threads that constitute the movement in its weave, namely, flatness, measurement, and what is set in motion by the cry. In this movement that offers a sense of the concept of negritude through its offering of three crystallizations of consciousness, Césaire simultaneously reveals his understanding of a non-dialectical dialectics as that which would, precisely, name this movement.¹⁴

The poem expresses movement not only as a rhythm or as a marker of the traversal between the apexes of the trans-Atlantic triangle (both of which are discussed below), but also as a return to what can be understood as explorations of alternate moments of emergence, or natality. The opening line of the poem, a line that is threaded throughout its text, “At the end of daybreak”, heralds not only an image of awakening

¹⁴ Cf. Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of the rhizome as a non-dialectical and non-hierarchical mode of thought, a mode that nonetheless cannot escape from the condition of the dialectic as such. See “Introduction: Rhizome” In: Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Translated from the French by Brian Massumi, London: The Athlone Press, 1988, pp 3 – 25. Print.

associated with the dawn, of the birth of a new day, but situates this awakening at its edge, on the horizon, on the cut that marks the fold between night and day. It is on this edge that the speaker in the poem articulates the first thread of what will become an emergent negritude: “[...] and there, rocked by the flux of a never exhausted thought I nourished the wind, I unlaced the monsters and heard rise [...]” (*NR*, 1).¹⁵ This nourishing of the wind—which signifies both that which enabled the slave trade (dominant winds for sailing) and the force of change that gives rise to negritude, adding weight to its movement—is coupled with the setting loose of monsters, the images named by the poet so as to constitute the conditions for an emergence whose content shifts over the course of the poem. Springing not only from the “flux” (“*les effluves*”, literally “effluvium, an unpleasant smell”, *NRF*, 34) of movement, this intervention emerges in the midst of a stench—which from the rest of the poem we might understand as a stench of death—a nauseating smell that is registered in the body of the speaker: he is rocked by it. The terms of this never exhausted thought are not elaborated, almost as though it is thinking in general that is being invoked. However, what arises in this moment of emergence are “turtle doves and savanna clover”, signifiers of peace and Africa, enables a reading that this thought is, precisely, the meditation of the *Notebook*: the thread of an emergent consciousness knotted with the weight of its history and desire. In this first thread is registered the demand to action that simultaneously infuses its expression, a

¹⁵ This cut-line between apparent binaries is consistently played with throughout the poem, not only in relation to day and night but also in terms of gender and celestial bodies. For a reading of how the play on this binary might unsettle the conventional critiques of negritude that hinge on marking its patriarchy, see Hedy Kalikoff, “Gender, Genre, and Geography in Aimé Césaire’s *Cahier d’un Retour au Pays Natal*”. *Callaloo*, 18.2 (1995), pp 492-505, especially p 496 where the horizontal and vertical planes in the imagery of the poem are discussed.

double weight that I named through my reading of Serote's *To Every Birth Its Blood*, 'the cut of the body'.

Interspersed with images of flatness, the speaker shifts to narrate a unique festival that cuts across the expression of flatness: a festival of birth, Christmas (*NR*, 7; *NRF*, 38). Here the reader is offered a first sense of consciousness that derives from the attempt to simply embrace what it encounters: inadequacy (in a turn of phrase that will return, we might call this a consciousness of transplant without transposition). Whereas other festivals are expressive instances that flout the strictures of societal norms, or allow the celebrants to find space for rest, Christmas withdraws from this openness:

It had agoraphobia, Christmas did. What it wanted was a whole day of
bustling, preparing, a cooking and cleaning spree, endless jitters
[*de-peur*, "for fear"] about-not-having-enough,
[*de-peur*, "for fear"] about-running-short,
[*de-peur*, "for fear"] about-getting-bored (*NR*, 7 *NRF*, 38)

In the final three lines the concatenation of the fears (the English text leaves out the first words) through the insertion of hyphens has a double effect. On the one hand, the hyphens cut out the potential for a measured iteration of these lines, the words slice into each other leaving the reader out of breath. As such, the state of anxiety ("jitters", "*d'inquiétudes*" can also be rendered as "state of anxiety") brought on by the arrival of Christmas, an anxiety that focuses on lack, incompleteness, and a seemingly interminable list of chores, is performed in the structure of the poem. On the other hand, the concatenation of these lines, the chaining of the words that express the fear of inadequacy and lack, evokes the sense at the level of a quiet rumbling of an image that will momentarily explode onto the scene of the poem, namely, slavery. This evocation of the

image of slavery is reinforced through the Christmas festival's stated "agoraphobia", an implied cause of the need to be ordered, prepared, and structured in celebration. This phobia results in the containment of the festival first in the home and then in the "little church" where the rhythm of the refrain that constitutes the Catholic Mass: "Kyrie Eleison ... Leison ... Leison, Christe Eleison ... Leison ... Leison" (*NR*, 8), registers only partially in the echo of its enunciation.

This rhythm, centered on a festival of nativity, reaches a climactic conclusion where "joy bursts like a cloud" as the body is saturated with the excesses of the moment; but, despite this release, arriving, finally, in the refrain: "this town sprawled flat" (*NR*, 8-9).¹⁶ This refrain, naming the town as "*plate-étalée*", literally both "flattened" or "limp" (*plate*) and "spread out" and "sprawled", but also "flaunted" (*étalée*), constructs an image of a town that is kept down, effectively with its face in the mud, and simultaneously gives the sense of this town as compliant—or docile—in the sheer mass of its existence. In addition to this double construction of the town, the phrase also asks to be read as "a making spectacle", it is not simply that the town is flattened or limp, it is put on show as such—a construction that echoes the images of the "lazy native" and the "native as patient" that operate as a trope in liberal and colonial political discourses and that are addressed directly as the poem unfolds. The conclusion of the festival of nativity in this

¹⁶ This perpetual inability to get out of the self, an inability to escape, carries a strong resonance with Emmanuel Levinas' early essay on the fixity of finitude in the condition of humanity. Cf. Emmanuel Levinas, *On Escape*, [1935] Translated from the French by Bettina Bergo. Stanford University Press, 1982. Although the problem emerges differently—for Levinas it begins as an attempt to resolve the distinction between "I" and "non-I" (53) whereas in the case of Césaire the problem is that the black "I" *is* the "non-I"—the ultimate struggle becomes quite similar both in the resistance to straightforward Marxist and/or Capitalist resolutions and in the realization that this becomes an escape from the "I" itself (55, 64). This is, however, in Levinas' argument, never purely realizable (72). Rather, the fixity of existence, the sense that to get out of the self without ever managing to, is articulated by Levinas as the terrain from which "getting out of being by a new path" might be possible (51).

refrain draws attention to its failed promise: as a moment that inscribes transplant (at the level of the participants and at the level of the festival itself) rather than transposition (understood in its musical sense), it registers a failure to take root, a failure in the production of indigeneity.

The first steps of this encounter with flatness take place earlier in the *Notebook*, under the image of a “venereal sun” that surveys the world “night and day” (*NR*, 1). A diseased sun that does not adhere to its containment in the laws of physics, a sun that is present even in its privative condition, night, surveys the world in the sense of both moving over it and charting it, setting the world on a map. Here, “at the end of daybreak, this town sprawled-flat . . .” (*NR*, 2) is produced in this first instance as an image of the “squalling [*criarde*] throng [...] detoured [*à côté de*] from its true cry” (*NR*, 2; *NRF*, 34). The use of the adjective “*criarde*”, which can be translated as “shrill” or “garish”, to describe the throng (an image in itself of movement) likens it to an incessantly screaming child that does not know of what it screams.¹⁷ That the throng is set alongside (*à côté de*, literally “alongside”) its true cry, “of hunger, of poverty, of revolt, of hatred”, is compounded by the description of the throng as “so perfectly alone”, as a “throng incapable of thronging” (*NR*, 3): those that constitute the throng have become “experts in disencasement” and, in this refusal of thronging—a refusal of locating indigeneity in the mass, of being planted in it—have lost the ability to be adequately expressive.

To be adequately expressive, or in Césaire’s language, to be able to stand and declare “right on” (*NR*, 41), is not about attempting to exit the waiting room of history, it

¹⁷ The Oxford Dictionary, for both English and French, suggests that the adjective in this sense is most commonly applied to an annoying child.

is not about attaining a certain level of humanity. Rather, in this image where “sprawled-flat” marks “inert” and “desolate” and is produced as a state of wretchedness through the function of colonialism, the town which is in fact characterized by hills is unable to stand up, it is: “not connected with anything that is expressed, asserted, released in broad earth daylight, its own” (*NR*, 3). To not be one’s own, to not take part in or to be connected with the possibilities of expression or affirmation, is (and it is clear that this only occurs, for the speaker, in expressivity), for Césaire, precisely the condition of alienation that colonialism produces, an alienation not only from one’s labor or one’s past, but also from a self as such. In colonialism the black “I” is reduced—in a formulation that anticipates Fanon’s intervention—to the status of “non-I”. As such, in this first instance of consciousness that the poem offers, it is understood as an adequate understanding of the alienation—or objectification—that is produced through colonialism. It is therefore not the same alienation as that of a split subjectivity—its basic dominant condition since Descartes—the subject is doubly split, split from its split, as it were, and this splitting is registered in the cry—detoured, set alongside—that haunts the “town, sprawled flat”. This will come to be expressed as the horizontal edge of solidarity that Césaire notes in his 1955 lecture on culture and colonialism. In this state, the speaker of the poem begins a movement towards the second crystallization of consciousness in the poem, which takes him along the triangulation of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, oscillating between its three apexes and refusing all of them.

Leaving the dirt and weight of Martinique behind, the speaker moves toward “that other dawn of Europe” (the “dawn” here is the same phrase, “*petit matin*”, *that is*

rendered as “daybreak” in relation to Martinique) whose weight persists into the present (NR, 11, NRF, 42), where man is named and categorized in the European expression of what it is not: “As there are hyena-men and panther-men, I would be a jew-man / a Kaffir-man / [...] the famine-man, the insult-man, the torture-man, you can grab anytime, beat up, kill—no joke, kill—without having to give account to anyone” (NR, 12; NRF, 42). The language invoked here can be understood at a similar level to Lyotard’s argument with regard to the status of “the jews” in European thought. Quite simply, the slicing of these categorizations into the concept “man” forces these categories to stand-in as representative of that which is repressed in the constitution of European Man—this making representative is the premise that enables their seizure and annihilation as an act of forgetting.¹⁸ In addition, the evocation of the slave trade, colonialism, and the ongoing exploitation of those who are not “Europe” (or as is implied by the speaker, not simply “man”) in this passage by the concatenation of the classificatory signifier and the noun “man” through a hyphen is made explicit in the articulation of seizure that is given as a condition of the existence of categorized man—the making object of man.

This movement is threaded with a new refrain: “*Partir*”, which is rendered in its most direct translation in the text as “to go away” (NR, 43), however, in its Latin root the verb *partīre* means “to share”, or “to divide out”, actions that require separation and, in some instances, cutting. As such, it is possible to read this movement not simply as a longing to depart from the weight of existence in Martinique, but also as a movement to work out the *cut* that Europe constitutes in relation to those who might seek to arrive—a

¹⁸ See my discussion of Lyotard’s *Heidegger and “the jews”* in my previous chapter. In Lyotard’s text see pgs 23, 37, 89 and 90, in particular.

reading that the above discussion of the categorization of man resonates with. In this movement the speaker speculates as to what encountering Europe would entail, at the level of an imagined physical experience (of distancing the weight of classification) and at the level of an intellectual encounter that is framed as a “rediscovery”. At the height of this speculation the narrator offers himself with his rediscovered knowledge as a representative for the “throng”, as one whose voice will become the “freedom of those who break down [...]”, and who in this intervention will work against the making “spectacle” and the detoured “scream” of those who emerge in the “throng” (NR, 13).

The triumphant declaration of a return: “And behold here I am!” wilts on the realization that what the speaker is confronted with is not life, but death, “without sense or pity”, the realization of which transforms the speaker, in his consciousness, in a flash: “and I alone, sudden stage of this daybreak when the apocalypse of monsters cavorts [not in the original] then, / capsized, hushes” (NR, 14, NRF, 44). The speaker, made to own the scene of daybreak at the moment when the beautiful monsters (*le beau l'apocalypse des monsters*, literally “the beautiful apocalypse of monsters”, NRF, 44), that we are able to read (following the lecture discussed earlier) as poetic words set loose, are brought under the water in silence in the same manner that the Antilles consistently threaten to do, is not in this moment reduced to a “town sprawled flat”. Rather, through the wilting of speculated hope the speaker becomes himself a ground for a new articulation (the beginning of a second expression of consciousness). The mode through which this silence operates as the possibility of a new terrain for the emergence of consciousness chimes

strongly with the silence that Samba Diallo experiences in his moments of seclusion among the bones of Rella in the graveyard: a rumbling, disquieting, silence of death.

Confronting the reality of the weight of colonialism, the poem circles around descriptions of the ground on which this new articulation is produced that enables an overturning of measurement and a focusing of the cry in its lack of jointure. I will consider this cry further on; focusing now on this ground, saturated with “putrid blood” (*NR*, 16) it registers the centrality of death not only in the experience of colonialism and slavery itself, but also in the emergence of what the speaker refers to as “Europe’s dawn [*petit matin*]”, in other words, the enlightenment. Offering a proclamation as to “what is mine”, the speaker narrates over four stanzas an image of Toussaint L’Ouverture, the leader of the Haitian revolution, imprisoned in a cell of whiteness. This whiteness that saturates Toussaint up to the point of his death slips in the narration to become death itself, riding on a “white horse”, at first exuberant in its triumph over Toussaint only to stumble, expiring “in a white pool / of silence” (*NR*, 17). This “white death” of Toussaint resonates into the “four corners / of this dawn [*petit matin*]”, particularly of Europe’s daybreak, bringing about “screams erect from mute earth” that threaten to “burst open” (*NR*, 17; *NRF*, 48): whiteness becomes silent in the face of the scream, or cry, rising up from muteness.¹⁹

¹⁹ It is crucial that this overturning of muteness is not reduced in a facile manner to an identity politics manufactured out of a sense of guilt or shame as is the case in Samantha Vice’s paper “How do I Live in the Strange Place?”, in *Journal of Social Philosophy* 41 (3) 2010. This expression of silence is problematic on at least two levels: first, it maintains the privilege of those who *claim to be* white by granting them the right to withhold their speech, in other words, to ‘graciously’ enable the black subject to speak. Secondly, this expression misreads both whiteness and blackness as being straightforwardly reducible to the colour of one’s skin, a notion that obscures any thought of how these might be produced as concepts with effects—this thought is the very weave of Césaire’s *Notebook*. Despite its productive gestures, an equally problematic engagement with whiteness is offered by Sarah Nuttal, “Subjectivities of Whiteness” *African*

A central question this inscription of a new articulation in the weightiness of its trajectories poses is that of speech, or more pointedly, of words (and, one might add, this question also offers a severe indictment of the closing moments of J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*, discussed in the context of Durrant's intervention in the previous chapter, where after having silenced whiteness it is, finally, Friday's cry that is rendered as silenced). Already in play from the first stanza of the *Notebook*, and constantly invoked through the images of muteness and of the cry, the role of the voice is addressed directly soon after this depiction of a cry that stands up erect out of a mute earth. In response to the argument that the speaker's land, its terrain of emergence, is without the markers of 'civilization', such as churches and roads, the speaker replies: "So what? / We would tell. Sing. Howl. / Full voice, ample voice, you would be our wealth, our spear pointed. / Words? / Ah yes, words!" In this violent declaration of coming to terms with the weight of colonialism through words, the speaker lingers on their name, "*des mots*", savoring their enunciation, as though recognizing their image for the first time. A little later in the *Notebook*, the speaker again returns to the question of words. In this instance words are deployed by those (named as "you" in the stanza) who would seek to disqualify the voice of the mute ground as it cries, a reminder that they are "*mumblers of words*", in other words, that those constituted as native through colonialism lack the ability of articulation. It is in reply to this charge that the reader is given a glimpse of the work of transposition—in the musical sense, where a piece is taken and transformed through playing it in a different

Studies Review vol. 44, no 2, 2001, where whiteness as a structure is worked through—in a move that lacks all irony—without any notion of the production of blackness as a structure. This oversight leads directly to the assertion of essentialised difference in note 13 through an uncritical notion that a white (in skin tone) person has a voice that *is* white.

key—as it operates in the emerging consciousness of negritude: “Words, ah yes, words! But / words of fresh blood, words that are / tidal waves and erysipelas/ malarias and lava and brush / fires, and blazes of flesh, and blazes of cities ...” (*NR*, 23). Words, here, in the moment of their recognition are shifted into weapons as well as being markers of the violence of colonialism. That the blood is fresh resonates with and, it seems, heralds the arrival of words whose tone of enunciation has shifted so as to invoke the strength of nature at its most expressive as the marker for the new action that words must perform: the shattering of language and the construction of a space for emergence.

At the height of this making expressive of an emergent consciousness the speaker declares: “Put up with me. I won’t put up with you!” More than simply a statement on toleration, the notion of accommodation (*Accommodez-vous*, translated as “put up with me” can also be “accommodate yourself”) returns us to the problem of belonging and indigeneity that is central to this new expression. There is no offer of compromise in this statement, no call for a minimal set of outcomes, rather the command “accommodate yourself” recalls the concatenation of man and its categorizations discussed above: here it is the speaker as expressive of this new consciousness that cuts into (European) man, unsettling its designation of itself as primary and authoritative.

The *Notebook*, having traversed the construction of images that have sought to register, both conceptually and physically, the weight of colonialism as it demands and is carried into the production and clearing of space for the emergence of a possibility of coming to terms with that weight, sketches, in the command registered above, the crystallizing outlines of this emergent subjectivity (the second stage in my brief sketch of

the unfolding movements of the poem). However, it is not only in relation to a geographical or historical emptying out that the flatness from which this subjectivity tries to emerge is produced. In the middle of the narration of the birth of a new consciousness, at the height of its triumphant claims, this flatness re-emerges as a sense of complicity, which it is worth quoting at length:

And I, and I,
 I was singing the hard fist
 You must know the extent of my cowardice. One evening on the streetcar
 facing me, a nigger [*nègre*]
 [...]
 He was a gangly nigger without rhythm or measure.
 A nigger whose eyes rolled a bloodshot weariness
 [...]
 And the whole thing added up perfectly to a hideous nigger, a grouchy
 nigger, a melancholy nigger, a slouched nigger, his hands joined in prayer
 on a knobby stick. A nigger shrouded in an old threadbare coat. A comical
 and ugly nigger, with some women behind me sneering at him.
 He was COMICAL AND UGLY,
 COMICAL AND UGLY for sure.
 I displayed a big complicitous smile ...
 My cowardice rediscovered!
 Hail to the three centuries which uphold my civil rights and my
 minimized blood.
 My heroism what a farce!
 This town fits me to a t.
 And my soul is lying down. Lying down like this town in its refuse and
 mud.
 This town, my face of mud. (NR 29-30)

The narrator adds that it is poverty that has produced, or shaped, this old man into the appearance of a “comical and ugly” “nigger”. The use of the term *nègre* to label this man is important not because it registers skin tone (*noir* would have sufficed in that case), but because it recalls the manner in which this most pejorative descriptor later becomes the root for a form of consciousness that attempts to deal with the complicity registered here, namely, negritude. What is narrated here is an encounter not only with a “nigger” produced in a particular way through the meticulous action of poverty but, in the same moment, with the “giggling” of the women who are located behind the speaker, offstage as it were. The location of this encounter is, I think, important. The speaker is no longer speculating as to what an encounter with Europe might achieve, but is in this moment confronting what Fanon terms “the lived experience of the black man”. It is here, the point where the conceptual and political rhetoric of an emerging consciousness (signified by the “hard fist”, an image of community that resonates with Cronin’s poem discussed in the first chapter) comes into contact with the tactility of what it resists (the man produced through poverty as “comical and ugly”), that this scene takes place—not simply in the sense that an activity occurs but more pointedly in the sense of occupying space so as to draw together, to create the conditions of a close contact without spacing: touching.

The figure that the speaker encounters, face to face, is strikingly presented as the embodiment of all that has been resisted to this point: the figure is “shrouded” in a coat, an instance of “encasement” that the throng that inhabits the town in the opening of the *Notebook* so thoroughly resists; the figure is tired, old, poor, and oozes blood from his eyes (the term translated as bloodshot, *sanguinolente*, can also be rendered as

“bloodstained” or “oozing blood”) or at least has bloodshot eyes, an image that can be read by understanding the eyes as signifying the mind and the blood as signifying the body and, therefore, as suggesting that the weight of existence is registered for this figure in his, to use Césaire’s term, “soul” or mind (as will become clear in the following chapter, this is precisely Fanon’s argument on the lived experience of the black man). Finally, the “knobby stick” which can quite simply register the figure’s poverty, also, read through a Southern or Eastern African lens, can be understood as signifying a “knobkierrie” (stick with a large knob on top), a ‘traditional’ walking stick and weapon carried by men, marking the figure as thoroughly embedded in an expression of ‘African’ culture, and, critically as a man in that society. As such, at this level of the encounter the speaker is brought face to face with the content of his declaration: “By a sudden and beneficent inner revolution, I now honour my repugnant ugliness” (*NR*, 26; *NRF*, 60).²⁰ It is in the construction of this image that Césaire’s poem finds a counterpoint in Cheikh Hamidou Kane’s *Ambiguous Adventure*. In that novel, Samba Diallo is confronted with a similar encounter. However, in that encounter the man is produced positively as upright, dignified, and holding a straight white stick that is ostensibly a walking aid but that also expresses a Western sense of linearity and calculation (it is perfectly measured and straight). The difference in expression of these two characters, however, derives from a difference at the level of the eyes: Césaire’s figure has “bloodshot eyes” (which I read as

²⁰ In their translation of the *Notebook* in *The Collected Poetry* Eshleman and Smith rely on the French edition in the *Oeuvres complètes* which includes the word “j’ignore” rather than “j’honore”, and they translate it accordingly. In their more recent 2001 edition, they have used the 1983 *Présence Africaine* edition which uses “j’honore”. It is not clear how this change in the French editions occurred, although Eshleman and Smith do indicate that Césaire made many revisions to his work at that time (“Introduction”, 20). It is interesting, especially in the light of Fanon’s arguments, that both terms work for my reading of complicity in this moment of the *Notebook*: ignoring the markers of blackness or honoring them as an essence are both, ultimately, modes of complicity with whiteness.

the infusion of mind with body) while Kane's figure has one completely "white eye" (similarly with regard to the mind, here it is signified as becoming white—the mode of complicity with which this passage will confront the narrator).

It is, however, the second encounter—the encounter inside this primary encounter—that creates the conditions for the speaker to "sprawl flat". To this point the reading of the figure has been offered entirely by the speaker as a part of the first encounter. Here, what is introduced into the narrative is *not another perspective*, but rather the hearing of laughter emanating from women the speaker cannot necessarily see—the term translated as "sneering", *ricanaient*, can also be "giggling". It is this laughter that triggers the second encounter: the speaker interprets the laughter as an indication of the other figure's "comical and ugly" appearance *that he has registered* (in opposition to ignoring or honoring), and is immediately confronted with the cost of honoring or ignoring "my repugnant ugliness": complicity. To either honor or ignore "the lived experience of the black man", to treat blackness as *only* conceptual or as an affirmative essence, here is registered as a complicity with the structure of whiteness. That the speaker understands as an instance of "cowardice" this expression of complicity that flattens any consciousness that was becoming expressive, and more particularly as a cowardice that the speaker has itself "pushed" to its furthest edge, indicates that on the one hand this moment could have been narrated differently and, on the other, that a new articulation of consciousness might emerge from this.

Precisely when the speaker expresses his complicity with the structure of whiteness²¹—named through the mock affirmation of the “three centuries that uphold my civil rights and minimized blood”—there occurs a double recognition: first the speaker’s expression of an emergent consciousness, an expression that the speaker considered as heroism, is understood to be a “farce”. The juxtaposition between the speaker who was “singing the hard fist” (implying rhythm and measure) and the “nigger without rhythm or measure” evokes the movement that Césaire argues is necessary for a cultural expression that would come in the wake of colonialism, and implies that the speaker constitutes an expression of this. In the flattening of complicity—the term translated as “lying down”, “*couchée*”, can be rendered as “flattened”, a flattening that does not stem from a blocking of this movement—where the speaker is leveled into the flatness of the town, the work of indigeneity is revealed (it attempts to root the speaker to an essence) together with the reworking of this that emerges later. That the speaker’s face is revealed as constituted out of mud, in other words, out of dirt and refuse, but also a lack of clarity and, finally, the color brown, allows a reading that suggests that as these form a determining essence, an expression of indigeneity; the speaker is flattened. This flattening occurs in the recognition of that into which he is flattened as “*my cowardice*”. Indigeneity here is not related to a place—the town fits the speaker, not the other way round—but to a concept that produces both the place and the subject, namely, colonialism and its structure of whiteness. The smile or singularity that triggers this flattening and its recognition is put

²¹ As I argued in Chapter One, this is the structure of racial formation in Apartheid through the differential of community, and, as I will argue with regard to Fanon in the following chapter, the manner through which man as concept is produced through the double work of naming white and black.

on display as “big”, as complicitous not only in its laughter at the “nigger”, but in its own production of itself as conforming to the stereotypical image of the black man.

In the midst of this, however, there is a further recognition that is registered through the assertion that the town “fits me to a t”, a statement that both evokes a sense of totality—the futility of escape—and offers, as an anticipation of Levinas, this fitting as a beginning, as a point from which to depart. As the phrase is rendered in the English translation it is possible to argue that the town *only* fits “to a t”, the beginning of the term which has been flattened. In the French, however, the phrase reads “*Cette ville est à ma taille*”, which can be translated as “this town is to my size”. Quite clearly, the statement that the town is “in my size” and the English idiom of “fitting to a t” are close to each other with regard to meaning. The word, “*taille*” which means “size” can also however, when referring to the work of a tailor for instance, mean “cut” (as in “the cut of a suit”) or even “clippings”, “trimmings”, “cuttings”; in short, it can indicate the products associated with tailoring clothing and, as such, suggests that “this town is within my *cut*”, or “cut out for me”. The cut, in this instance, resonates with a later articulation of negritude—when the term is finally used—where the speaker “accepts” without honoring or ignoring the markers of the lived experience of the black man while altering the expression of these terms: “I accept both the determination of my biology [...] and negritude, no longer a cephalic index, or plasma, or soma, but measured by the compass of suffering” (*NR*, 43). Negritude, no longer an expression of ‘scientific’ objectification through the measuring of bodily form, blood type, and skull size, now offers a new measure, one that records and orientates in relation to suffering, particularly, the cuts produced through

colonialism, both physical and psychological, that the speaker has confronted throughout the poem.

The basis for the departure that is made available at the edge of this recognition is evoked in the marking of “rhythm and measure”. While measurement is the mechanism through which the surveying of the world is undertaken, this world is surveyed precisely through the enabling assistance of the colonized. The ambiguity of this scenario resonates across two images in the poem. In the first, the speaker asserts that he has no “right to measure life by my sooty finger span”, a statement that evokes both the labor that the speaker performs as well as the condition that guarantees the performance of that labor.²² The calculation implied in this statement (the term translated as “measure”, “*calculer*”, can also mean “to work out” or “weigh up”, “to calculate”) would also take the colonized man as the ground for this measure (as opposed to the metric system, for example), and it is in this manner that the assertion implies an insertion of the speaker between latitude and longitude. This question of right is complicated by the assertion that it would “overturn [*bouleverser*] creation” to “include myself between latitude and longitude” (*NR* 14); this is, of course, the function of poetry according to Césaire. What is being suggested here is not that the speaker might assume a European subjectivity, namely that of the man as measure. Rather, it is being suggested that this insertion goes to the fabric of “creation”, not to its domination. As Samba Diallo phrases it, this is a “disquiet over not being two”. To state this a little differently, this overturning is not interested in being

²² It is necessary to think this absence of right as an indictment of the law. Indictment, precisely a legal term because, I would argue, that the law nonetheless is not done away with in this gesture.

lodged at the level of what Chatterjee names as the problematic, but rather seeks to unsettle the grounding thematic of these problematics.

Toward the end of the poem, the speaker returns to this question of measurement. He asserts a new relation with the world: “my special geography too; the world map for my / own use, not tinted with the arbitrary colors of scholars, but / with the geometry of my spilled blood, I accept” (NR 43). For the speaker, it is the widespread (the word “spilled”, “*répandu*”, is literally “widespread”) blood of the colonized—which is expressed as an overturning of a certain Cartesian calculability—that constitutes an “original” (“special”, “*originale*”, is more properly “original”) geography, in the production of a new indigeneity that comes to be named negritude. Having taken root in the “red flesh of the soil” and the “ardent flesh of the sky” (NR, 35), in other words through the physicality of the colonial and postcolonial encounter as these constitute the terrain for the emergence of a sense of consciousness (understood as the cut of colonialism set loose through poetry), the speaker asserts a new cartography, one that does not work in the interests of colonialism but that marks the insertion of the colonized—and the violence of their production, a soil and sky burning (“*ardent*”) with the stain of blood—into the fabric of the world. That which allows an understanding of the space of the world, geometry, is in this image premised on the “blood” of the colonized rather than on the abstraction of mathematical forms. It is, of course, also the discipline of geometry that works with forms such as the triangle, consistently evoked as a metaphor for the trans-Atlantic slave trade and, in a certain sense, geometry is also the mathematical outworking of Descartes’ philosophy of subjective certainty. Indigeneity, in

this constellation, moves toward the world without territory and is not simply available to scholarly abstraction. What reverberates between these two modes of indigeneity that are both present to the speaker simultaneously—an indigeneity of territory, unsettled by Tsi in *To Every Birth Its Blood*, and pure conceptuality, invoked by Samba Diallo in *Ambiguous Adventure*—is the cry.

The end of daybreak, that which the day breaks on to and that which is on the horizon, that which is to come after daybreak, is marked by what is perhaps one of Césaire’s most famous formulations: “What can I do? / One must begin somewhere. / Begin what? / The only thing in the world worth beginning: / The End of the world of course” (NR 22). The end of daybreak: the end of the world. One of the modes through which creation is overturned is through the weaving of the colonized into the fabric of the world, not as a remainder, but rather as something that is precisely constitutive of its possibility. However, this beginning is inscribed on both the colonizer and the colonized through the weight of colonization. It is this cry, “ENOUGH OF THIS OUTRAGE” (NR 23), that emerges in the movement toward a new consciousness, one characterized by the will to be “standing / and / free” (NR 48) that both opens onto this new horizon and carries with it the weight of what it escapes: the horizon can never escape what comes before or after it.

“Leaving Europe utterly twisted with screams” (NR 24) not only its own, but also the haunting screams of its violence against the colonized Fanon analyses in *The Wretched of the Earth*, is a movement that carries both its potential stoppage and its openness with it to the “convocation of conquest” where there is “room for all”, an

openness that is expressed as a refusal of Europe as a determining force (*NR* 44). It is this movement that is affirmed in the closing pages of the poem where the speaker declares “right on” in the midst of a slave revolt on a ship journeying through the middle passage (*NR* 46-51). What is affirmed is the double move whereby the “old negritude / progressively cadavers itself” while through the becoming expressive of a new negritude “the horizon breaks, recoils and expands” (*NR*, 47; *NRF*, 79). In this affirmation of a negritude that functions both as an instrument to record the weight of the past and that, due to its weight demands that the past be redeemed, the word as weapon is unleashed. The image that unfurls the triumph of the moment is that of “standing” precisely on the surface of the slave ship. This scream of slavery which merges into a cry of victory, the shame of complicity that slides into the hope of a beginning, the flattening into the world that enables the re-weaving of the fabric of that very world – it is this movement that emerges in the poem as the ground for a new indigeneity, a third crystallization of consciousness: an indigeneity of the cry located neither in the subject or in an ‘authentic’ relation to land. An indigeneity expressed in the image of the speaker (an image that returns us to Cronin’s community of the black fist in chapter one), “standing now, my country and I, hair in the wind, my hand puny in its enormous fist” (*NR*, 44).

This expression of indigeneity, read in conjunction with the affirmation of a community of the touch in Cronin’s “Motho ke motho ka batho babang” that resides in this fist that the *Notebook* clearly argues is not reducible to a simple politics of difference, is the terrain that might enable a “line of flight” that renders the subject from a reified consciousness into an effect of becoming. As such, it is a terrain that includes what might

be called the risk of the subject (a risk that similarly unsettles all the key texts read) in creating the conditions whereby a new expression might be produced: a terrain that extends beyond a fusional multiplicity, a terrain that articulates a difference in common.

Spacing Encounters

The concept of indigeneity as it emerges in Césaire's text tracks with the problem of racial formations and subjectivity that is thread through both the literary and the political texts that have been read up to this point. Working in the space, or rather anticipating the space, between the fracturing of indigeneity that occurs in Serote's *To Every Birth Its Blood* and the attempted although failed resolution of it through pure ideality in Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure*, the concept of indigeneity offered by Césaire produces a sense of the terrain on which a non-reified expression of the subject might become articulated. A critical element in this move is Césaire's understanding of the poetic as the setting into motion of a "cutting" that itself cuts—in the case of colonialism, the production of the black "I" as, precisely, "non-I". The weight of this production is crystallized through Césaire's *Notebook* into a monad, an irresolvable cutting that simultaneously orders the new and structures its possibility. If, in the South African instance of racial formations, the differential of community (articulated through apartheid) produces reified subjects of race, then in Césaire's intervention what begins to emerge is indigeneity as a conceptual node that alters the terrain of emergence so as to enable the expression of a difference-in-common through the articulation of subjectivity as an effect of becoming. The terms of

this becoming, however, are what is named by the signifier “negritude” and it is to this naming that I now turn.

In his 1956 lecture at the first International Congress of Black Writers and Artists, Aimé Césaire offers a schema at the edge of decolonization.²³ This schema is posited so as to address the double problem, on the one hand, of determining the ground for a relation covered by the signifier “black” and, on the other, refusing to reduce this ground simply to the premise of a colonial present or past, in short, this lecture deals with the tension between the differing modes of indigeneity that *A Return to the Native Land* traverses. As a more direct and, almost, clinical expression of the terms that are confronted in the *Notebook*, this lecture assists us in “fleshing out” what is at stake in this new expression of negritude. In the first movement of his lecture Césaire argues that in a certain fundamental sense what draws together all those attending the congress is the common condition of colonialism. In fact, he argues that “like it or not, we cannot pose the problem of black culture, without posing at the same time the problem of colonialism, because all black cultures presently develop under this particular condition of colonialism, semi-colonialism, or para-colonialism” (CC 190). Quite clearly, then, black culture is a problem for thinking precisely due to the work of colonialism which, in turn, is itself also a problem for thinking: while, in its broadest sense, colonialism functions as a common denominator across black cultures, what each of these terms are in themselves is not, for Césaire, self-evident. To address this he turns to a distinction between civilization and culture.

²³ Aimé Césaire, “Culture et colonization.” *Présence Africaine: Le 1er Congrès International des Écrivains et Artistes Noirs*. Paris, Sorbonne, 1956. Print. All translations my own.

So as to resist the argument that culture must in its origin be national, Césaire posits, following his reading of Marcel Mauss, the notion of “particularities” and “affinities” where civilizations take on the function of a grouping of particularities according to their tendency to affinity. The definitive example for Césaire is that of Europe: while, he argues, we speak of particular national cultures we nonetheless identify certain tendencies or similarities in these that lead us to name them as European (CC 191). Leaving aside for the moment the manner through which Césaire, particularly in his *Discourse on Colonialism*, deploys the full weight of the naming of this common affinity as a diagnosis of a malignancy as/for the concept Europe, it is striking how Césaire posits culture in its “singularity” (CC 192) as an expression of a desire toward “endowing” a “collective humanity” with the “richness of a personality” (CC 191). In other words, for Césaire cultures are dynamic expressions of differing tendencies within a collectivity defined by a general affinity and, as such, are constitutive of nationalities rather than generated from them. To this extent “culture” carries a very similar operative value in the production of nationalism as the differential of “community” in the articulation of apartheid. The work of culture is pedagogic to the extent that it aims to bring about “personality”, the quality of being a person, or in Césaire’s decidedly Levinasian language, having “a face”. Through the logic of analogy Césaire argues that there is a general affinity of cultures that can be placed under the name “black-African civilization” and that, as such, in the “absence of nationalities” these cultures can be named “black” (CC 191).

It is through these two elements—that of the common affliction of colonialism and that of a civilizational quality marked by the term black—that Césaire posits his schema for solidarity:

Il y a entre tous ceux qui sont réunis ici une double solidarité: une solidarité horizontale: une solidarité qui est une solidarité que leur fait la situation coloniale ... qui leur est imposée du dehors. Et d'autre part une autre solidarité, verticale celle-là, une solidarité dans le temps, celle qui provient de ce fait qu'à partir d'une unité première, l'unité civilisation africaine ...

There is a double solidarity among us gathered here: *a horizontal solidarity*: a solidarity that is a solidarity due to their factual colonial situation ... imposed from outside. And also another solidarity, a vertical one, *a solidarity in time*, that arises from the fact of a primary unity, the unity of African civilization ... (CC 192-193, emphasis in original)

Under the banner “black” there is an existential or horizontal solidarity to the extent that there is a common encounter with a structure or function and, on the other hand, there is an internal, vertical, in other words, essentialised, solidarity that emanates from Africa as a civilizational marker. That this latter is perhaps made available as a marker precisely through the former is not interrogated by Césaire (for this critique it is necessary to wait for Fanon). Rather, by framing this second solidarity as one located “in time” and as more primary than colonialism, Césaire places it outside the realm of phenomenological or, indeed, empirical encounter. The concept of time at play here, it seems, is diachronic—it moves forward in a straight line—and exposes a shift from his earlier *Discourse* (discussed below) where time is *made* diachronic through the structure of colonialism. This assertion is protected by Césaire through his insistence that there is no

option of a return to an ideal past as it is the function of culture to develop, to alter in its expression over time (CC 194), to return would be to return to a corpse. Furthermore, as he argues later in the lecture, there is also no “blank slate” from which to begin, rather, the future has to take on the heterogeneity of *cultural* encounters; it is produced through these while not being determined by civilization (CC 204). What happens to “black-African civilization” as a primary marker of solidarity in this context is not clear; however, what is made clear is that the function of this claim to a vertical essence is designed to produce a political solidarity. In other words, it can be thought of along the lines of the “beautiful apocalyptic monsters” that were invoked in the *Notebook*—set loose to shatter and order the world, not to be its foundation. It is a somewhat ambiguous lodging of an essence so as to produce an effect while, simultaneously, guarding against its arrival in cultural forms as an essentialism.²⁴

Having posited this schema of a horizontal and vertical solidarity, Césaire interrogates the function of colonialism as an element in this. It is quite clear that by the term colonialism Césaire does not simply mean the political or economic control that Europe exerts over the majority of the rest of the world. His discussion, for example, of the “artificial manner” through which “blacks” are incorporated into the “modern nation” of the United States of America – “a situation that cannot be understood without referring to a colonialism that has been abolished, but whose aftermath has not stopped reverberating in the present” (CC 190) – indicates that colonialism is a particular function

²⁴ Such a move is clearly available to a reading along the lines of Spivak’s notion of strategic essentialism, although such a reading may, in turn, be too generous. See her “Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography” (1985). Eds. Landry, D. and Maclean G. *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*. New York: Routledge, 1996.

in the relation between civilization and culture and that it is a function that does not, in any straightforward sense, obey the rules of diachronic time.²⁵

The work of colonialism in this schema has a double edge. On the one hand, it is understood as a socio-political mechanism “through which a people are emptied of their culture” due to its removal of a peoples’ “self-determination” and thereby their creativity (CC 194). As such, the moves toward decolonization make available the potential for a cultural development or expression; however, Césaire argues that this in itself does not offer a solution. What is needed is a new expression of culture, one not tied into the colonial schema. Colonization is that which removes the ability of cultural renewal or improvement from a people so as to fix this people in place, as Césaire argues through the example of chauvinism in colonial Tunisia; it is colonialism that seeks to perpetuate these tendencies to exploitation as an integral element in its “guardianship” over the colony so as to facilitate the extraction of financial gain (CC 195). It is critical to note that Césaire does not argue that colonialism produces these cultural tendencies (he does not hold to a utopic view of the African past); rather, the function of colonialism is to restrict the possibility of change in these cultures, to produce them as static:

savoir que l’Europe est la première à avoir inventé et à avoir introduit
partout où elle a dominé, un système économique et social fondé sur

²⁵ This is a generous reading. One could argue that colonialism itself, in this sentence, is not reverberating in the present. However, in the frame of the lecture (particularly its conclusion), I would (as I have) offer the reading above. The use of an anachronic notion of time to speak of the function of colonialism while deploying a diachronic notion of time in relation to the possibility of a return is an intriguing move on Césaire’s part. One way of thinking this apparent paradox (perhaps too generously but I think, nevertheless, correctly) is that particular concepts deploy particular notions of time; so a concept of nation/essence/civilization functions through a diachronic notion of time whereas colonialism, as a function, operates synchronically (as we discover in the *Discourse*, colonialism has many expressions that are not named as such) and thus the use or refusal of certain notions of time occurs in Césaire’s argument on the terrain of the concept that he addresses.

l'argent, et d'avoir impitoyablement éliminé tout, je dis tout, culture, philosophie, religions, tout ce qui pouvait ralentir ou paralyser la marche à l'enrichissement d'un groupe d'hommes et de peuples privilégiés.

know that Europe is the first to have invented and introduced throughout its dominion an economic and social system premised on money, and to have pitilessly eliminated all, I say all, culture, philosophy, religions, *all that could slow or paralyze the movement toward the development of a group of men or privileged people.* (CC 196, my emphasis)

It is precisely this paralysis of the ability to stem a negative movement that is brought about by colonialism that, Césaire argues, undercuts Europe's claims to have given humanity to the world. The claims embodied in Europe's "grand revolution" as an assertion of human dignity, freedom of belief, and intellectual rigor, are premised on the removal of the possibility of these from the colonized (CC 195). The sense offered in this passage that there is a natural tendency toward domination in civilization and that it appears to be the work of culture to limit this domination carries a strong resemblance to Hobbes' understanding of the social compact as limiting "the war of all against all" (*Leviathan* 72), and starkly reveals what might be at stake in Césaire's continued attachment to humanism, even if prefixed with the value of truth, namely the maintenance of a certain reified subjectivity (*DC* 73).²⁶

So as to block the attempt made by figures such as Spengler to limit the negative effect of the above on Europe's sense of itself through either an articulation of the

²⁶ From the *Notebook* it is clear that through the becoming expressive of negritude the concept of the human becomes thoroughly altered, such that we might even consider there to be, in Césaire's thinking, a fundamental break or rupture in the concept's development. However, and this is the danger that haunts Césaire's text, the continued use of the actual term in contexts where the ground work done in the *Notebook* is not always possible or available constitutes a risk of reintroducing the European concept of the human through the back door, as it were.

“civilizing project” or in its more desperate moments, the claim to cultural replacement, Césaire turns to Malinowski’s notion of the “selective gift” of colonization (CC 198). Insisting on the notion that culture is an assemblage of social functions and techniques, he posits the idea that to truly “civilize” or “substitute” a culture the imputation of “mastery” would be required, something that Césaire suggests is not hard to show has never happened. Notably, as will be discussed later, the one moment where such a mastery has taken place, namely the instance of the United States, is understood in the *Discourse* as an arrival of barbarism (DC 76). As such, in the absence of the imputation of such a mastery what is understood by European civilization (human dignity, etc) is similarly paralyzed through the function of colonialism (its other edge): European civilization is revealed as a mechanism to enable exploitation—here Césaire comes very close to Fanon’s notion that whiteness/blackness together constitute a function that seeks to produce Man as white, propertied, male and responsible.

This production of cultural paralysis as the function of colonialism leads Césaire to argue that what is required is the possibility of a face-to-face encounter or contact, an encounter “incompatible with colonialism” as the latter works relentlessly to institute a hierarchical relation premised on stasis (CC 202). When placed alongside my earlier discussion of Cronin’s “Motho ke motho ka batho babang” in the previous chapter, this question of the face-to-face is understood through “contact” and not the voice, as this latter would re-introduce the notion of the subject as self-presence that the *Notebook* sort to unravel. In short, in Césaire’s argument colonialism closes and homogenizes space and time, as does the enlightenment sense of the subject as present-to-itself, and as such

removes the possibility of alternate points of view. It is here that the articulation of a vertical solidarity acquires its poignancy as well as its difficulty (apart from its essentialism) in Césaire's argument: it suggests an alternate basis for encounter that is not, for Césaire, subsumed under the function of colonialism. However, it is situated, structurally, within the understanding of the closed homogenized time that colonialism produces in each instance of time in which it manifests. Somewhat ambiguously he argues that this basis, that of a face-to-face encounter, cannot be premised on what is considered to be good in different cultures, as though we might produce a "Franco-African" culture, as such an approach already assumes an encounter between equals whereas the term "Franco-African" does not make sense outside of the function of colonialism (CC 200). Despite marking this difficulty, and here is where the ambiguity of Césaire's statement lies, he asserts that this future will be constituted through the blending of the "new and the ancient" (CC 205) as an expression of the decidedly new, an assertion that marks a continuity with Césaire's argument in his lecture on poetry and knowledge. Césaire argues:

Et c'est là ce qui en définitive nous permet de définir notre rôle à nous autres hommes de culture noirs. Notre rôle n'est pas de bâtir à priori le plan de la future culture noir; de prédire quels éléments y seront intégrés, quels éléments en seront écartés. Notre rôle, infiniment plus humble est d'annoncer la venue et de préparer la venue de celui qui détient le réponse: le peuple, nos peuples, libérés de leurs entraves, nos peuples et leur génie créateur enfin débarrassé de ce qui le contrarie ou le stérilise.

And it is this which permits us to define our role in relation to other men in black culture. Our role is not to build a future black culture from a preconceived plan, deciding what will be included or excluded. Our role is

infinitely more humble, to announce and prepare the arrival of those who have the answer: the people, our people, liberated from their shackles, the creative genius of our people finally rid of that that works against or sterilizes. (CC 205)

The work of black artists and writers, then, is to produce the conditions that would enable the arrival of a future-to-come understood as a people that has been marked by colonialism but that is no longer hemmed in by this marking: a people that is no longer within its cut. This people, who are named as black by Césaire, will not be reducible to a difference between Europe and its others, an insistence that immediately complicates how this “black”, as a naming, is meant to be thought (CC 200). Similarly, throughout his lecture Césaire has been dependent on a range of European intellectuals in formulating his argument in an affirmation of the notion of culture as a function that he has both sought to critique and to deploy. It is the joining of culture and colonialism – where culture indicates a tendency toward multiple levels of commonality and colonialism operates as a reificatory function stemming the apparent positive potentials in this – that Césaire seeks to unsettle in this lecture. That both Europe and Africa are reified through the function of colonialism, and that both these instances of reification are negative, resonates with Cheikh Hamidou Kane’s intervention. What Césaire unfolds through this lecture is the work of producing the possibility of a new indigeneity, a sense of indigeneity to a terrain produced by a non-homogenous ideality: Samba Diallo’s “disquiet over not being two”. This terrain as a condition for emergence is what names the emergent “people” as black. In other words, this emergent people is not understood as

a community but rather as a potentiality set loose by the unleashing of the cut of colonialism—the production of the black “I” as “non-I”.

Face-to-face? Contact in the storm

In the lecture it is particularly Césaire’s privileging of the notion of contact, a privileging that recalls the attempt to show forth an alternate concept of community in Cronin’s “Motho ke motho ka batho babang”, that seems to underscore the naming of this potential people. I turn to Césaire’s *Discourse on Colonialism*²⁷ so as to engage with its structuring concept, namely, contact, in closing the chapter. Contact in Césaire’s argument is not equivalent to touching as an interaction with the surface of the other that simultaneously engages and disengages that other—a *mêlée*²⁸—rather, for Césaire contact carries the double weight of a demand for recognition through a face-to-face encounter (so personality and essence are still in play here), and the lack of space that is set in place through the structure of colonialism: it is without spacing, in other words, it takes place. Stated differently, what Césaire seems to argue is that the expression of contact that is colonialism, its “redistribution of energy” (*DC* 33), while recognizing difference, does not allow for difference, it takes heterogeneity and expresses it as a particular type of homogeneity (*CC* 202). This homogeneity is of a very different order to the sense of “not being two” that unsettles Samba Diallo in *Ambiguous Adventure*. In this latter instance, it is the awareness of the demands of colonialism as a function (a reified Europe versus a

²⁷ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*. 1955. Trans. Joan Pinkham. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000, hereafter *DC*. For the French text I have relied on the 1955 *Présence Africaine* edition, hereafter *PA*.

²⁸ The itinerary here is vast but, for an eloquent overview, see Jean-Luc Nancy, “Corpus”. *Corpus*. (1992, 31) where this touching is linked to the concept of love.

reified Africa) and Diallo's own sense of multiplicity that produces the disquiet.

Homogeneity of the colonial type, however, always stamps multiplicity into difference in a similar mode to the function of community as a differential in the expression of apartheid.

The argument of the *Discourse* methodically diagnoses the effects of this colonial contact, both for what is designated as European civilization and for the colonized, so as to answer the "innocent first question: what, fundamentally, is colonization?" (DC 32; PA 8), what is the principle through which it operates? The basic answer to this question is not very different from that offered in his lecture on Culture and Colonialism, although the ground of the offer is different. Confronting this question requires careful, or as Césaire terms it in an echo of Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (an echo that reverberates throughout the *Discourse*), "dangerous" thought. It is through its weightiness, in other words through its effects, that colonization comes to be defined.

In the instance of European civilization, particularly its bourgeois capitalist expression, Césaire argues that after every act of violence, after every physical atrocity perpetrated against the colonized, Europe's, specifically France's, citizens simply

accept the fact, civilization acquires another dead weight, a universal regression takes place, a gangrene sets in, a center of infection begins to spread; and that at the end of all these [acts of violence and acceptance] a poison has been distilled into the veins of Europe and, slowly but surely, the continent proceeds toward *savagery*. (DC 36; PA 11)

The complicity that Césaire marks here between the citizens of Europe—those who function in their existence in an affirmative manner within the binary of Europe and its others—and the violence of colonialism is presented as a cutting that infects civilization

with a degenerative disease.²⁹ What civilization has achieved, the point at which it has arrived, is that it amounts to nothing but its own dead weight. While in the later lecture

²⁹ A productive turning of this “cut”, one which is hosted in a “European” text so as to invite a different reading, is locatable in Nancy’s essay “Corpus”. Nancy’s text, which can be read as taking one concept (i.e. the body) and pursuing it through all its possible incarnations so as to open up a line of flight, pursues this questioning through acknowledging a very specific relation to the ‘Third World’. Writing of the body as something terrifyingly European, Nancy asks the question “Does anyone else in the world know anything like ‘the body?’” (“Corpus” 7). This question, which is not a valorization of Europe, posits the question of difference at the heart of Nancy’s exposition. As he elaborates a little further on, “Certainly not a single one of *their* words tells us anything about *our* body. The White Man’s body, which *they* find pallid, always almost scattered instead of tightened up, unlinked by any mark, carving, or incrustation—for them, this body’s *stranger* than anything foreign. It’s almost not a *thing*” (“Corpus” 7). Through this inscription of difference it is the European body which is made other, not simply due to its physical appearance, but also due to how society relates to it: it is without inscription, something elided in a logocentric turn. However, the language deployed in constituting the European as such also appears to simply reaffirm Europe’s penchant for arriving at its own identity by working forcefully through the body of the non-European.

Nancy’s project is not, however, about constituting the European as ideal. In a later discussion of this otherness attached to the body Nancy argues that we always know the other as body precisely because our body is always other to us (I can never recognize my body as mine while asserting the ‘I’, Cf. Paul de Man, “Sign and Symbol in Hegel’s *Aesthetics*”). The realization of this otherness comes with the arrival of the other, who is also always already other to himself (nose, eye, mouth, ear, etc.), a “touching of the body” which amounts to a “coming together *and* being dislocated at one and the same time” (“Corpus” 31). This ‘uneasiness at being two’ is carried through into his earlier positing of difference:

until it becomes clear that *other* is not even the right word, just *body*. The world where I’m born, die, and exist isn’t the world “of others,” since it’s “mine” as much as anyone’s. It’s the world of bodies. The world of the outside. The world of outsides. The world inside-out, upside-down. The world of contrariety. The world of being countered. An immense, unending encounter (“Corpus” 31)

Positing the world through thinking the body as encounter, a touching which by definition never penetrates, is always “outside”, Nancy clearly troubles the notion of difference which he posited in his opening pages, while, I think, coming very close to Césaire’s insistence on contact. If a body is always of bodies encountering other bodies, and this encounter, or taking place, is the world, then clearly there can be no essentialised notion of the other. However this raises the question as to what the function of Nancy’s positing of difference is, or, indeed, how it asks to be read.

A suggestion might be located in the *cut* Nancy draws between the First World and the Third World. Critiquing the insistence on becoming modern (a critique he shares with Césaire), an insistence which he describes as becoming a pure urgency, “without program”, Nancy posits the following as the condition of this urgency:

Just turn on the television, and you’ll get the answer every day: in a quarter or a third of the world very few bodies circulate (only flesh, skin, faces, muscles—bodies there are more or less hidden: in hospitals, cemeteries, factories, beds from time to time), while everywhere else in the world bodies multiply more and more, the body endlessly multiplied (frequently starved, beaten, murdered, restless, sometimes even laughing or dancing). (“Corpus” 9)

The open critique of the modern reliance on technology to think for it (getting answers from the TV), moves into a more subtle double critique: on the one hand, the masking of the body which occurs in much European theory – and the exemplars here are Deleuze and Guattari (flesh, skin, face ...) and Foucault (hospitals, cemeteries ...) – is marked as accompanying the multiplication of the body, understood as carrying the weight of exploitation, in the Third World. On the other hand, this critique also extends to the

on Culture and Colonialism Césaire argues rigorously for a somewhat ambiguous concept of black-African civilization, in the *Discourse* civilization is taken, quite clearly, as a universal in itself. In other words, that civilization is infected through Europe is of concern in this argument not only due to the direct effects of colonialism on the colonized but also due to its effect on the future possibility of civilization as such—civilization has arrived, weighed down by its weight. Civilization, in this instance, resonates with what Césaire designates as “world” in his *Notebook*: it is that which must be brought to an end.

Savagery, while clearly carrying the tones of an evolutionary discourse that moves away from a state of nature toward some sort of higher ideal (for Césaire it is a “true humanism” *DC* 73), here marks the manner through which colonialism, understood as a destruction of men for the benefit of Man, is reminiscent of an act of cannibalism (*DC* 48). While at one level this cannibalism is clearly conceptual, Césaire also draws attention to these “heads of men, these collections of ears, these burned houses, these Gothic invasions, this steaming blood, these cities that evaporate at the edge of a sword” (*DC* 41) as irreducible instances that even the most rigorous European discourses are not able to dispose of: these are the instances that Europe’s citizens (a concept that extends beyond epidermal whiteness) must accept as fact. Critically, this double edge of

straightforward importation of European theory into the Third World: this is precisely the urgency which he argues has overdetermined modernity.

Clearly the manner through which Nancy introduced the concept of difference a few pages earlier falls within the first line of critique mentioned here, and, as such, I would argue that it should be read as an invitation to read “Corpus” *differently*, or, to use Nancy’s language of love, it offers “a touch of the open”. Instead of positing a “generic human brotherhood” as the opposite of racism (which in the context of the passage cited above might be read as “we are all the same, let me be you”) Nancy suggests that racism itself should be understood as responding to this dis-location of the body, an attempt through reason to unify a body within a continuum so as to salvage the unity of the ‘I’ (“Corpus”, 35). This understanding of the function of racism draws close to my understanding of the differential of community in the articulation of apartheid. As such, rather than accepting race, racial formations become a problem for thought.

colonialism is felt differently: for Europe it is purely epistemic (until the arrival of Hitler who brings genocide to Europe), while for the colonized it is both epistemic and physical. This thinking of black mutilated bodies by Césaire is produced in relation to, and as a critique of, one of Europe's principle masks in this endeavor, namely, progress. In making this argument Césaire puts into play a particular 'Marxist' rhythm, an action of reading that resonates with his argument in the *Notebook*.

It is in the name of contact, the facilitation of progress, that Europe seeks to justify its actions. However, as Césaire argues:

between colonizer and colonized there is room only for forced labor, intimidation, pressure, the police, taxation, theft, rape, compulsory crops, contempt, mistrust, arrogance, self complacency, swinishness, brainless [décérébrées] elites, degraded masses" (*DC* 42; *AP* 19).

Colonialism is not simply a relation of domination or of extraction that perhaps can be attenuated by claims of progress. The project of colonialism, its function, according to Césaire (as we saw in the lecture) is the production of masses *fixed in their immediacy*. It is to this extent that colonialism can be both "arrogance" on behalf of the colonizer and "a storage facility for the dead" (the two possible translations for "*la morgue*"); and that colonialism degrades the masses—sprawls them flat, reduces them to flesh—while simultaneously producing this as a cost saving mechanism (the word translated as "degraded", "*avilies*", carries both of these senses). All that *takes place* is violation, exploitation, orientation, confiscation, and mutilation. This arrogance and being before death, of course, also calls to mind the centrality of finitude in Western philosophy and, particularly considering Césaire's language of *facing*, the thinking of being as finitude

that Levinas offers—marking this offering even more explicitly with the scar of colonialism as, perhaps, both its limit and its condition of possibility.³⁰ There is no space to move or express; rather, in a similar move to that of Cronin with regard to time, space becomes the medium in which the colonized is moved around.

As part of this critique of the mask of progress Césaire posits a beautiful echo of Benjamin's *Theses*: "I hear the storm" (*DC*, 42; *AP*, 19). The effect of this storm of progress is measured not only in relation to the thingification of the colonized, as I will discuss below, but also in its effect on the colonizer:

The moralists can do nothing about it. There is a law of *progressive dehumanization* in accordance with which henceforth on the agenda of the bourgeoisie there is—there can be—nothing but violence, corruption, and barbarism (*DC*, 68; *AP*, 47)

I would suggest that agenda, here, designates not only that which needs to be achieved, or that which is set down as an ordering of the day, such that all that the bourgeoisie can achieve is violence, corruption, and barbarism, but rather it also designates a purpose, an intention. Later Césaire amplifies this critique of the mask of progress even further:

One of the values invented by the bourgeoisie in former times and launched throughout the world was *man*—and we have seen what became of that. The other was the nation. [Césaire summarizes the slaughter and destruction of non-European nations] The truth is that this policy [of destruction in the name of progress] *cannot but bring about the ruin of Europe itself* and that Europe, if it is not careful, will perish from the void that it has created around itself. (*DC* 74-75; *AP*, 55)

³⁰ For a discussion of this limit and condition of possibility in European philosophy more generally see Gayatri C. Spivak's *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999, especially the section on "Philosophy".

That Césaire names humanism alongside man in the French (*l'une est celle de l'homme et de l'humanisme*, literally “one of these is man and humanism”) is crucial for understanding his attachment to that concept. What is critical here is that humanism is not offered, in this moment, as a concept on its own, rather, it is attached to man, an attachment that evokes the image from the *Notebook* of the slicing of categorization into man. As such, when Césaire calls for a “new humanism” made to the “measure of the world”, what is at stake in that articulation is precisely the separating of humanism away from man as its terrain of emergence, and placing it within the world produced by the weightiness of the cutting of colonialism (in the sense articulated in the *Notebook*). The concomitant image of the ruin of Europe in the face of the void sharply places Césaire’s critique of the mask of progress in colonialism on the horizon of Benjamin’s angel of history.³¹ This is a resonance that is worth explicating a little further before continuing with this reading of the *Discourse* not only because it offers an alibi in my reading of Césaire, but also due to the mode through which Benjamin manages to handle religion as a central concept in philosophy without offering it as a theism. This mode assists in thinking the centrality of religion in Cheikh Hamidou Kane’s *Ambiguous Adventure*.

For Benjamin, the question of history (particularly of what distinguishes historical materialism from historicism) has to do with its availability to redemption—a similar question to that which haunts Samba Diallo. Despite this theological framing, it is particularly the effect on time and its relation to sense that makes the possibility of Benjaminian redemption attractive. Working from the 8th thesis, where Benjamin argues

³¹ Benjamin, Walter. “Theses on the Philosophy of History”. *Illuminations*. Trans. Harry Zohn. Ed. Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken Books, 1968, hereafter TPH.

that the task of redemption is to bring about a real state of emergency (TPH, 277), it is clear that this state of emergency, in other words the kernels that might produce a moment of revolution, is brought about through two concomitant injunctions: the shattering of progress and the logic of event, injunctions that resonate strongly back into the *Discourse*, the *Notebook*, and Césaire's lectures on poetry and colonialism.

The shattering of progress (which is not a rupture as that would maintain the same concept of time), a central concern in the *Discourse*, is articulated on a number of levels in the Theses. At one level it is understood as the defining principle that separates historical materialism from historicism, a distinction that Benjamin is careful to demonstrate as having been blurred by those claiming to hold to a historical materialism with the transition into democratic socialism (see for example Theses 10, 11, and 13). At another level, however, progress is understood as inseparable from a particular concept of time, namely "homogenous, empty time" (TPH, 261). Against this concept of time, which is primary for historicist notions of an additive history, and which is shared by the historical materialism of social democrats, Benjamin offers historical materialism as the seizing "hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger" (TPH, 255). It is precisely such a moment of danger that is narrated in the *Discourse* and which is brought to a head in its final section. This seizing hold is understood as an "arresting" of thought where "thinking suddenly stops [*einhält* – "stops", but also "meets" or "encounters"] in a configuration pregnant with tensions [*Spannungen gesättigten Konstellation* – also "constellation saturated with tensions"], it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes into a monad" (TPH, 263). This relation to sense offered through a departure

from diachronic, or even synchronic, notions of time is understood by Benjamin as a condition of redemptive availability to the “chips [*Splitter* – “chips” or “fragments”] of messianic time” (263). A figuring of time and the world that resonates strongly with Césaire’s understanding of the work of poetry—a work that I think Cronin’s “Motho ke motho ka batho babang” is on the edge of—and that chimes with Césaire’s formulation in his lecture on Culture and Colonialism of the labor of black writers and artists as both preparing the people and preparing the space for the arrival of a new civilization: the “colonized” intellectual in Césaire’s argument now takes on a mediating role toward redemption.

Pressing this resonance with the work of Benjamin a little further, the angel of history (of Thesis 9) as an image designed to shatter (in the same manner as Césaire understands poetry to operate) the concept of progress can be read as carrying a peculiar valence. The angel holds the place of a point of view, fixed in place by the prevailing winds of progress, and blind to its destination. What it perceives is not a series of occurrences but a mass of destruction, not a line through chaos but a waste that is produced through the winds of progress as unavailable to redemption. Even the angel’s desires (akin, perhaps, to those of reformists or liberals) are curtailed by the very wind which assigns it its place: its future is open but can never arrive in conjunction with the past. The necessity and urgency of a Benjaminian redemption and its concomitant slicing of the time of progress is made stark by this image of alienation, or as Césaire terms it, thingification. This alienation, which is the point of view of those that refuse to “throng” in the *Notebook*, as well as of Tsi in *To Every Birth Its Blood*—a danger that Benjamin

suggests permeates existence as far as it is determined by modernity—is contrasted in the theses with the notion of the historical materialist as one who is about to “make the continuum of history explode” (261) through the crystallization brought about by the flash of a particular memory of a configuration that brings past and future into connection through the abridgement of the present (what Benjamin names a “Messianic cessation of happening”, 263). It is this explosive quality that marks Césaire’s understanding of poetry as an intervention that carries with it the cut of the body—its weightiness.

The angel, however, is characterized as trapped within its intention to intervene, as something that is never fulfilled; it is pinned by the winds of progress. As Césaire argued in his lecture on colonialism, intention, or in his words the civilizing principle, is offered by Europe as a supplement to the mask of progress. The weakness of this move is made apparent by Césaire on two fronts. First, Césaire argues that “the idea of the barbaric Negro is a European invention” (*DC* 53). The idea of the barbaric is produced in a similar manner to which the descent of Europe into barbarism is plotted, namely, as an effect of the function of colonialism. Second, the function or structure of colonialism, as with the angel of history, makes the assertion of intention superfluous: the structure works to determine the outcome each time. In order to make this argument, Césaire briefly passes through select works by Gourou, Temples, and Mannoni, demonstrating in each case how the intention (to produce an adequate study in relation to the native) is foreclosed by the structural necessities of colonialism: Gourou does not push his conclusions far enough, Temples in arguing for a recognition of Bantu philosophy restricts the colonized within ontological terms, in other words, in bare existence, and

finally, Mannoni in his analysis of the inferiority complex effectively argues that the psychological structure of the black man necessitates colonialism (*DC* 55-59). Frantz Fanon, in his *Black Skin, White Masks* will particularly critique Mannoni's conclusions about the inferiority complex and the black man. What is most striking in Césaire's analysis is not the fact that none of these figures manage to transcend the colonial structure, but rather that Césaire argues that this failure is due to a tendency to reduce the colonial problem to only an idea (*DC* 62), a similar limit to that which haunts the character of Samba Diallo in *Ambiguous Adventure*. It is here that his departure from certain articulations of Marxism begins to emerge, a departure the logic of which seems to rhyme with the interventions made by Benjamin.

To state this differently, for Césaire the only effective form of critique with regard to colonialism is one that is both physical and epistemic—hence the demand for a new understanding of indigeneity produced through the signifier *negritude*. This is of course entirely coherent with his broader argument that colonialism must be understood as a structure or function, not simply a condition or state of affairs. This insistence perhaps casts light on Césaire's assertions surrounding a “true humanism” that must be a “humanism made to the measure of the world” (*DC* 73). Such a humanism is clearly situated in contrast to Europe's tendency to respond to the world through “tolerance”, understood as premised on an encounter with one's own greatness; in other words, it is offered in contrast to the “white man's burden” that stems from the subjectivation of European man (*DC* 73). The weightiness of the latter is, of course, what slides Europe toward barbarism. A humanism made to the measure of the world is both a thinking and a

practice that takes as its double condition the notion that colonialism, and particularly its latest expression in the form of the United States of America, is “a domination from which one never recovers, I mean from which one never recovers unscarred” (*DC* 77). This scarring is both that which conditions, clears the space for, arrival and that which conditions, limits, that which does arrive.

Césaire’s critique of this weight of colonialism and Europe, though, is pointedly not produced in a language of justice, human rights or community, the mode through which the Freedom Charter came to be articulated in South Africa.³² Rather the intervention is framed through a re-articulation of a certain expression of Marxism: Césaire argues, in an echo of Georg Lukács’ argument with regard to alienation and existence, that the instrumental reason of colonialism—its regulatory and extractive power—discloses the objectification of the colonized, leading to the equation, “colonization = ‘thingification’ [*colonisation = chosification*]” (*DC* 42, *AP* 19). What is carried under this equation is the cut of colonialism, both at the level of consciousness—as the *Notebook* makes clear—and at the level of tactility. As such the equation slices into the very terms of its formulation, unraveling the demand of immediacy that colonialism produces; a move that simultaneously and somewhat ironically invokes the very calculability that Lukács grapples with in his discussions of reification so as to unsettle it. The weight of this intervention becomes clear when it is read alongside the final lines of the *Discourse* which ascribe a redemptive hope to the proletariat, enabling a reading of

³² The discourse of human rights had been available in an ethical and philosophical sense for some time and had, more pointedly, recently been taken up as a discourse that carries the weight of, if not law, at least international political necessity through the adoption of the United Nations Charter on Human Rights in 1948. As such, its absence from Césaire’s intervention on colonialism is poignant.

this move that is not simply reducible to an attempt to hold on to a sense of Marxism in the moment of Césaire’s split from the Communist Party. This question of “fixity” or “thingification” marks the condition of being black in the world as it is articulated by Serote in *To Every Birth Its Blood* and similarly marks the interventions articulated by Fanon. In addition this fixity is also precisely what is produced through the signifier of apartheid and that of colonialism and, as such, it is worth digressing momentarily into the critique of “reification” so as to adequately grapple with the concept as it emerges in these texts. In addressing this trajectory I will briefly pursue the markers that this formulation opens up through Lukács’ essay, drawing out on the way a number of its limitations through calling attention to its resonance across the work of Zita Nunes, particularly her argument with regard to remaindering as a by-product of thingification.³³

Lukács’ essay, “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat”, unfolds through three sections that deal, respectively, with reification as a concept, the philosophical trajectory of reification, and the “standpoint of the proletariat”. While it is particularly this third section that is of interest for a reading of Césaire’s invocation of the proletariat, what is at stake in that formulation is set out in the discussion of reification as an element

³³ Lukács’ text first appeared in German in 1922 under the title *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein: Studien Über Marxistische Dialektik* hereafter *GK*. The earliest French translation that I have been able to find dates from 1960, five years after the publication of the *Présence Africaine* edition of the *Discourse on Colonialism*: Georg Lukács, *Histoire et conscience de classe. Essai de dialectique marxiste*. Trans Kostas Axelos and Jacqueline Bois. Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1960. I have relied on the English of the new edition, Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*. (1968) Trans. Rodney Livingstone (1971). Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1999, hereafter *HC*. Zita Nunes, *Cannibal Democracy: Race and Representation in the Literature of the Americas*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008, hereafter *CD*. It should be noted at the outset that the purpose in reading Lukács alongside Nunes is not to make the necessary but easy argument that he neglected to attend to race or colonialism and that he is Eurocentric in his approach, but rather, it is to draw out these limitations as they inform the project that faces us: the problem of racial formations in the wake of apartheid.

of philosophical thought. According to Lukács, what we might name as the condition of modernity is characterized by what he terms a “reified structure of consciousness” whereby “the human” as a general concept has become a commodity (*HC*, 99). As with commodity-fetishism, the reified concept of the human operates as a “veil”, masking what Lukács names as material reality through the valorization of its markers of immediacy (*HC*, 86). It is in the interests of making calculable—the condition of possibility for mastering the world as a totality, and a condition that is explicitly unsettled in the *Notebook*—that this production of concepts into things is undertaken, a production that results in a situation where “the immediately perceived is taken as the immediately understood” (*HC*, 150). This is precisely the notion of perception that the prisoner in Cronin’s “Motho ke motho ka batho babang” relies on in order to open a transgressive space of articulation. What is significant here is not simply that “material reality” (which in his terms is clearly not reducible to “a thing”) is made object, but rather that this objectification, or “thingification”, which is expressed in labor in the terms of specialization, *fixes* immediacy *in* place, it is an action akin to that of community in apartheid and the winds of progress that pin the angel of history in Benjamin’s “Theses”:

We have already described the characteristic features of this situation several times: man in capitalist society confronts a reality ‘made’ by himself (as a class) which appears to him to be a natural phenomenon alien to himself; he is wholly [*widerstandslos ausgeliefert*, also “given over without resistance”] at the mercy of its ‘laws’, his activity is confined to exploitation of the inexorable fulfillment of certain individual laws for his own (egoistic) interests. But even while ‘acting’ he remains, in the nature of the case, the object and not the subject of events [*des*

Geschehens, also “what takes place”]. The field of his activity thus becomes wholly internalized: it consists on the one hand of the awareness [*Bewußtsein*, also “consciousness”] of the laws which he uses and, on the other, of his awareness [*Bewußtsein*] of his inner reactions to the course taken by events [*Ereignisse*, also “occurrences”]. (*HC*, 135; *GK*, 136)

Events, from the perspective of a reified consciousness, are taken as apparently accomplished things that constitute the ground against which the subject struggles to attain a sense of agency, in other words the subject is split, or more aptly for Lukács’ terminology, it is doubled. As such, in a clear resonance with my reading of Césaire, Lukács argues that what is rooted firmly in its immediacy is not only the world but, more pointedly, man itself that is now produced as a thing in the world, not a concept (or an agent). Man is not an adequate cause of actions but is rather derivative of them, only responding, always. It is this division between “man”, on the one hand, and apparent “natural phenomena”, on the other, that operates as the ground for the tyranny of rationalism which he argues marks this condition of modernity and finds its expression in capitalism.

This exact division between “man” and the “natural phenomena” is what Zita Nunes attends to in *Cannibal Democracy* as a critique of the possibility of inclusionary democracy (*CD*, 13).³⁴ However, her argument resonates somewhat differently here in the midst of Lukács’ discussion of reification as, for Nunes, consciousness does not fit

³⁴ Zita Nunes, *Cannibal Democracy: Race and Representation in the Literature of the Americas*. Critical American Studies Series. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008, Print, hereafter *CD*. Nunes’ intervention is not only important with regard to the question of the remainder. Rather, her attempt to critique the production of blackness in relation to the crystallization of liberal democracy in the Americas resonates strongly with the overall tone of my intervention. As such, the incorporation of her work into this chapter signals one of the key lines along which my argument can potentially be extended into the question of blackness as it emerges, particularly, in Brazilian modernism.

into the binary opposition of reification and its other—the objectification is always multiple, producing remainders.³⁵ It is in that binary, however, that Lukács argues that what defines modern European philosophical thought (in his words “bourgeois thought”) is precisely the attempt to define the nexus between subject and object; stated differently, it is the attempt to bridge the divide between mind and body, between form and content (*HC*, 123). It is worth recalling, in the light of Césaire’s arguments, that this divide is shaped through colonialism such that the European is taken as “I” while the non-European is produced as “non-I”, or in more provocative terms: the European is mind whereas the non-European is body expressed in labour and rhythm.

Central to this divide, and to the trajectory of reification in modern European philosophy, is the figure of Immanuel Kant.³⁶ For Lukács, the strength of Kant’s philosophy rests on his resolute refusal to offer any “dogmatic resolution” to the split between the subject and the “thing-in-itself”. Rather, he suggests that Kant “bluntly elaborated the contradiction and presented it in undiluted form” through specifying the disjunction between nature (the thing-in-itself), on to which formal processes are

³⁵ It is worth noting, however, that for both Lukács and Nunes that which has been objectified always presents as remaindered, in other words, for Nunes as derivative of a process whereby a whole is produced into a part (man into whiteness/civilized) and for Lukács as the privative of what man should be, process. In neither of these critiques, productive as they are in their own right, is it considered (although Lukács comes close) that what is remaindered is perhaps produced so as to allow for a notion of a whole or ideal, not derived from such an ideal.

³⁶ Gayatri Spivak, in her chapter on “Philosophy” in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* offers a reading, through drawing attention to Africa and its relation with Europe, that would complicate this simple binary opposition that comes in Lukács’ argument to concretize the proletariat: “I think of the ‘native informant’ as a name for that expulsion from the name of Man—a mark crossing out the impossibility of the ethical relation” (6). This understanding of the mark “native informant” is brought home forcefully in her discussion of Kant’s relation to “aboriginals” considered as non-human: in response to the question “who comes after the subject” Spivak responds by positing the Kantian exclusion of the “savage” (excluded not simply from culture but from humanity as such) as coming before it, forming its condition of possibility (25 – 31; particularly Note 32). In anticipation of Lukács’ argument, I would suggest that what is lacking in it is precisely the mode through which objectivity is dispatched to the colonial world as a condition for the emergence of European subjectivity.

projected, and thought, which is devoid of any substantial materiality (*HC*, 134). Lukács argues that the attempts to transcend this divide by producing thought as action, an endeavor that he locates in Kant's understanding of aesthetics and in Schiller's deployment of the concept of play, apart from constituting the ground for a creator subject still take mind—in its primacy—as their condition of possibility (*HC*, 139). Similarly, although Lukács is generally favorably disposed toward the dialectical method, he argues that Hegel's formulation of it results in an affirmation of pure mind premised on a resolution of the dialectic in recognition (i.e. in a category of thought) rather than in existence (*HC*, 146).³⁷

In contrast to this, Lukács argues that the productivity of the dialectic can be summarized in the formulation: “*things should be shown to be aspects [Momente, literally “moments”] of process*” (*HC*, 179; *GK*, 169), they are neither concrete nor primary. Stated differently, the dialectic *as a process* should potentially unravel the work of reification that he argues takes the mind/body and form/content distinction as its primary veil in thought. Rather than attempting to in some manner synthesize form and content, Lukács argues that facts, things, and “man” are all processes, in other words, that “this reality is not, it becomes [*Diese Wirklichkeit ist nicht, sie wird*]” (*HC*, 203, *GK*, 186).³⁸ It is here that Lukács locates the standpoint of the proletariat, and where Nunes

³⁷ For a productive reading of what I consider as Hegel's confrontation with this problem and his resultant flight into the aesthetic, Cf. Paul de Man, Sign and Symbol in Hegel's *Aesthetics*” (1982) *Aesthetic Ideology*. Ed. Andrzej Warminski. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

³⁸ This understanding of reality underscores Lukács' meticulous discussion in the preface to the new edition in 1967 of the itinerary of the publication of both editions of *History and Class Consciousness*. While setting out an argument that draws attention to what he considers to be the limitation of the text, namely, the equation of objectification with alienation (xxiii), Lukács specifies how it might and did constitute an intervention into this becoming of reality, rather than simply deriving from it. It is striking, however, that his anxiety with regard to the first edition is placated through an invocation of “world events” (by which he

would locate the productivity of the remainder as a destabilizing factor (*CD*, 85). The reality of existence is the same for both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat—it forms a totality. However, whereas the bourgeois is situated inside the double consciousness iterated above, where it sees itself as affected by but separate to the process of objectification (in other words, in a position akin to the angel of history), the proletariat is situated in the pure objectivity of existence: “forced into becoming the object of the process by which he is turned into a commodity and reduced to a mere quantity” (*HC*, 166). The term “proletariat” becomes a name for subjects “sprawled flat” through the work of reification. This force of objectification carries a strong resonance with that which Nunes argues Du Bois worked against through developing his concept of “double consciousness” as an attempt to resist the injunction that blackness “must be repressed to become an American” (*CD*, 88). Lukács’ attachment to totality, however, whether of the dialectic or of society, restricts his argument to a diachronic trajectory, in other words, to a certain inevitability that forecloses any attempt to attend to remainders. Particularly, reification for Lukács only occurs in relation to commodity-fetishism and not, for example, in relation to the production of a racial structure such as blackness, or to the objectivity of gender: reification is only economic.

In the face of what Lukács names as a most “extreme dehumanization” (*HC*, 149) whereby the proletariat is reduced to a “mere cypher” in a system that “does not need him”, the cry is not for immediacy, for a unified or essentialised sense of consciousness, but rather for a coming to consciousness of a complex sense of the dialectic, for the

means Europe) that held a double value of heralding a certain kind of becoming and constituting a context in which to intervene (xv).

overturning of the total system of reification (*HC*, 177). While this cry does not in itself address the material condition of the proletariat—their condition is still practical slavery—Lukács argues that such a coming to consciousness would unravel the process, namely reification, whereby reality (and the proletariat) is fixed in place in immediacy. As such, it would open toward a future “that is to be created but is not yet born” (*HC*, 204), and, to this extent, his argument allies with Nunes’ argument that identity always produces remainders, and that the task is to attend to these so as to open a future in which identity is unsettled—what she terms necrophilia or necrophagia as a conceptual “living with remains that can never be made whole” (*CD*, 161).³⁹

The redemptive hope that Lukács locates in the proletariat, a hope that is premised on a coming to consciousness that somehow does not reintroduce a distinction between object and thought, is produced, perhaps inadvertently, by Lukács as a condition through which history will become, truly, “a history of mankind [*Geschichte des Menschen*, literally, “history of man”] (*HC*, 186; *GK*, 174) *understood as European*. Discussing the actions taken by a capitalist society aware of the limitations of accumulation, Lukács asserts that capitalist society shows itself “by actions that force upon the capitalist class the awareness that [the limit of accumulation] is on its way: actions such as feverish colonization, disputes about territories providing raw materials or markets, imperialism and world war” (*HC*, 182). That each of these “actions” folds into the next, in other

³⁹ Nunes’ sense of necrophilia must be read against Achille Mbembe’s invocation of “necropolitics” in relation to African modes of “self-styling”. Nunes’ learning to live with remainders bears a striking similarity to Derrida’s “learning to learn to live” that he argues for in *Specters of Marx* where this learning is not an accommodation but rather an embrace of that which destabilizes subjective certainty, thereby opening the possibility of a new sense of the subject. Cf. Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics”, Translated from the French by Libby Meintjies. *Public Culture*, 2003, vol. 15, Issue 2. Print.

words that colonization is the basis for the ownership of territories which is in turn the ground for empire and which, in its turn, is the pretext for a claim to world war, is I think fairly straightforward; which is to say that the selection of terms by Lukács is not accidental. The colonial world in this account, however, is produced in the precise reified terms against which Lukács is writing—a production that is due to the absence of a sense in which the colonial world is objectified so as to enable the emergence of a European subjectivity. Colonization is understood in terms of territory, rather than in terms of politics, and these territories are understood as providing raw materials or markets. Stated differently, the only space that the colonized are provided is that of a commodity: it is the territory owned by the colonizing power that has agency, the colonized and their “culture” (to use Césaire’s term) are incidental cyphers in this equation (and incidental to the entire thrust of Lukács’ text, occupying only half a sentence).

Returning to Césaire’s invocation of the formulation “colonialism = thingification”, it is apparent that he is not content to leave Lukács to Europe. He argues rather that colonialism takes place (it articulates progress) through effecting a “thingification” or reification that works to leave the colonized weighed down by the weight of its production as “non-I”, a weight that covers Europe with a “pall of mortal darkness”. This sense resonates with Césaire’s diagnosis of the world in his lecture on poetry and knowledge and which echoes Benjamin’s depiction of destruction in the wake of progress (*DC*, 78). However, for Césaire the colonized are not simply abandoned to this weight. Rather, the force of his formula (colonization = thingification) inserts the colonized into a revolutionary trajectory opened up by Lukács. Although Lukács missed

the weightiness of the colonized body—something that Césaire attempts to rigorously attend to, his offering of the proletariat as the name for the most dehumanized class and as such as the marker for the only potential of “Revolution” opens a strategic potential that Césaire exploits; he seizes hold of it in a moment of danger (*DC*, 78). It is in this recognition that the last passages need to be read: In the face of the unleashing of what Césaire names as American barbarism, from which we never recover unscarred, he argues for a European intervention *not* so as to rescue the colonized (as the *Notebook* and lectures make clear, such a rescue must fail) *but so as to offer the potential of rescue to Europe*; what is at stake here is a gift of a more human face (*DC*, 77). This gift resonates into the diagnosis offered by Steve Biko twenty years later: “There is nothing the matter with blacks. The problem is WHITE RACISM and it rests squarely on the laps of white society” (“Black Souls, White Skins”, 23). While blackness needs to be attended to, it is whiteness from which we all struggle to emerge: as demonstrated in the literary interventions of Cronin, Serote, and Kane. It is in this context of Europe altering its trajectory that Césaire suggests that:

the salvation of Europe is not a matter of a revolution in methods. It is a matter of the Revolution—the one which, until such time as there is a classless society, will substitute for the narrow tyranny of a dehumanized bourgeoisie the preponderance of the only class that still has a universal mission, because it suffers *in its flesh* from all the wrongs of history, from all the universal wrongs: the proletariat. (*DC*, 78; my emphasis)

Quite clearly this passage is available to a reading that would suggest Césaire places his hope (and, I think, for Césaire unlike for Nunes, the question of a new humanism is a question of hope) in the ability of the European proletariat (whom Césaire has already

specified as complicit with colonialism) to effect a revolution in Europe. However, it is necessary to recall that Césaire has already inserted the colonized into the name of the proletariat through articulating his formula: colonization = thingification. As such, by placing the colonized into the dialectical consciousness argued for by Lukács, the proletariat in this last line does not only name a class that holds the place of objectification in Europe, but rather names the colonized as such. This is a proletariat that is not simply objectified, but that carries the wounds of this thingification “in its flesh”; a marking that registers both violence and the specificity of the flesh in the function of this thingification: “my face of mud” (*NR*, 30). It is under *this* weight (preponderance carries with it the notion of being before a greater weight) that Césaire attempts to shatter the world, turning a new concept of indigeneity through the sign of negritude. This similarly marks an attempt to explode the stalled dialectic of Benjamin’s angel of history, to articulate negritude as a concept that marks the cut of the body, and, as such, orders the terrain for the emergence of a people of the touch not weighed down by its own weight but offering the world, “a gift of a more human face”. In the next chapter, the role of tactility in the production of blackness and in the ordering of this terrain of emergence is set out through a reading of the intervention of Fanon.

Tactility

He is running toward us. Into our exile. Into the return of exiles. Running towards the negotiated settlement. Towards the democratic elections. He is running sore, into the new South Africa. Into our rainbow nation, in desperation, one shoe on, one shoe off. Into our midst. Running.

Jeremy Cronin, “Running towards us”, Stanza 26¹

The question of racial formations that this dissertation takes as its point of departure was framed, in the first chapter, through a discussion of the function of community both in the articulation of apartheid and in the dominant modes of coming after apartheid—whether the purpose is to bring it to an end or to put it to rest. Framed through an emergent potentiality of a community of the touch explored by Jeremy Cronin in his “Motho ke motho ka batho babang”, I argued that in the articulation of apartheid, community operates as a differential that produces reified subjects of race and, critically, that the concern of this articulation of apartheid was the production of whiteness. This production of whiteness through the black body is what is obscured in the Freedom Charter through its attachment to the concept of community; a similar attachment is central to and orders Sam Durrant’s intervention into the wake of apartheid. Durrant’s intervention, through

¹ This is the final stanza of a poem that is ordered around the witnessing of an aborted attempt at the ‘necklacing’ of an unspecified, unknown subject that becomes a “corpse covered in petrol” running toward *us*. This witnessing is in the wake of a brutal expression of state violence in Crossroads Township. Jeremy Cronin. “Running toward us”. 1986—97. *Even the Dead: Poems, Parables & A Jeremiad*. Cape Town: David Philip Publishers and University of the Western Cape: Mayibuye Books, 1997, pp 93 – 95.

readings of Coetzee, Harris, and Morrison, articulated the primacy of European trauma and, through the attachment to communities constructed out of always already reified subjects, maintained into his offer of mourning a re-inscribed humanism premised on the assumed commonality of the human—an assumption that Lyotard's discussion of "the jews" (which structures Durrant's argument) unsettles. Quite simply, for Durrant, subjects are always already either black or white and endowed with a quality of the concept man. As such, both Durrant and the Freedom Charter, I argued, maintain the terrain of the subject that was operative for Apartheid and, as definitive turns in the wake of apartheid they both ask to be reckoned with. While throughout the first chapter the weightiness of the body was consistently posed for thought, it is in Serote's *To Every Birth Its Blood* that this body most clearly emerged not only for thought, but as its condition of possibility. Such a condition of possibility is constructed through the double concept of indigeneity and the tactility of the body and it orders, in the sense of demanding and of structuring, the terrain for a new expression of the subject as effect.

It is this concept of indigeneity that guided my reading of Aimé Césaire in the second chapter, and it is the concept of the tactility of the body that the present chapter attends to through, primarily, a reading of a trajectory in Frantz Fanon's thought. If community forms a stumbling point in the attempt to come after apartheid, it is nevertheless the weightiness of the body that orders this necessity of coming after. Setting to work in the interstices of the questioning of indigeneity offered by Cheikh Hamidou Kane in his *Ambiguous Adventure* and that offered in Serote's novel, I suggested that what these novels make plain is the difficulty of putting the script of

apartheid, colonialism, or whiteness to rest. At the same time, they also demonstrate the urgency of this action, the demand it lodges through the body. In other words, the re-inscription of indigeneity that is central to the main characters of these novels, while dismantling the ground of constitutive community nonetheless stumbles on the very body that orders this re-inscription. It is here that Césaire's understanding of poetry as a miraculous weapon that shapes and sets loose a cutting (in the sense of a noun) of the world—in this case the production of the black "I" as "non-I", as object—becomes important. Césaire's sense of poetry allows him to construct a concept of indigeneity that carries the possibility of shattering "the world" by carrying the weight of the body produced as black with it as a cutting that cuts. As such, indigeneity in Césaire's text becomes a relation to *life* (a new expression of subjectivity) ordered by the tactility of the body as well as a resistance to the work of reification that underpins the trajectories of apartheid, colonialism, and capitalism (he lays hold of and reworks Lukács to make this argument). Here it is not as straightforward as asserting the problem of race over and above that of class (or the opposite, as Alexander would have it); rather, it has to do with the condition of possibility, the terrain, of both—this is primarily a question of subjectivity understood through the lens of man. Césaire attempts to construct the conditions for a terrain through which the emergence of a non-reified subjectivity might be possible: it is this action that is named by Césaire as *negritude*, and by Cronin as emerging in the "black fist" of the touch. As both a physical and an epistemic critique of colonialism and the making object that is necessitated through the European claim to man, in an echo of Benjamin's understanding of the proper name Césaire offers *negritude*

as a naming of a potentiality that he calls “a humanism made to the measure of the world”, the offer of a “more human face”.²

Turning in this chapter to the concept of the weightiness, or tactility, of the body as it is produced through the project of man and as it, in turn, comes to order the terrain for an expression of a new subjectivity, I take the interventions of Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* as well as certain passages from *The Wretched of the Earth* as guiding texts. I argue that in these interventions the understanding of blackness as a schema that carries weight in the world is disclosed, and the project of man comes to be understood as the twin violence of this schematization. Fanon’s understanding of the black/white schema and its function in the production of man, where whiteness leads to man and blackness to objectivity, clearly resonates with the production and reification of race in apartheid South Africa that was discussed in the first chapter. Before getting into the core of my reading of Fanon in relation to the rest of this project it is necessary to linger for a while on the epigraph, the final stanza of a poem by Jeremy Cronin that poses the question of the human in relation to both the body and the post-apartheid moment in South Africa. Following this I then turn to Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* where, I argue, what is at stake is not a question of rescuing or refashioning ‘man’ but the opening of the grounds through which a concept of the human might be produced. The core of

² Formulating my reading of Césaire in this manner is to agree with a more recent interpretive line that would emphasize Césaire’s resistance to essentialisms as such, and rather focus on his attempt to fracture universalisms through particularities. An overview of this position, and of the positions (that view Negritude as essentialist) that it responds to, is included in Dorris L. Garraway’s, “What is Mine’: Césairean Negritude between the Particular and the Universal”. *Research in African Literatures*. Vol. 41, No. 1. Special Issue: Aimé Césaire 1913-2008: Poet, Politician, Cultural Statesman (Spring 2010), pp. 71-86. Print. Despite a strong sympathy for this line of reading Césaire I nonetheless disagree with the tendency to understand this as a classic “humanism” (80) and the understanding that Fanon wants a purified “blackness” (78). I take issue with this mode of reading Fanon throughout this chapter.

this argument is located in a pivotal chapter in the book—“the lived experience of the black man” [*l’expérience vécue du noir*]*—*that poses the problem of what I call tactility in the midst of a thinking of blackness as structure, a thinking that follows the contours of Aimé Césaire’s *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*. As such, contrary to assertions by critics such as Dorris Garaway, I do not read the “lived experience of the black man” as a simple critique of negritude (“What is Mine” 76). In the wake of *Black Skins, White Masks*, and before reading a number of key passages in *The Wretched of the Earth*, I consider a reading of the role of the body in Ousmane Sembène’s intervention into the question of indigeneity and the emergence of the European concept of man, namely his novella *Vehi-Ciosane, or, White Genesis*, as an attempt to understand how this body lodges (or as Fanon phrases, how it “inserts itself”) in the moment of emergence so as to order the grounds of that which comes after. In the final part of this chapter I read the continuity of Fanon’s critique of the structure of blackness/whiteness as it informs the problem of the project of man and its related colonialism.

Running out of joint

Cronin’s poem, “Running Towards Us” (hereafter, “RT”), the last stanza of which is the chapter’s epigraph, offers a questioning of time, the visual, movement, and tactility at the edge of apartheid. As such, it draws together a number of the key questions raised in the previous chapters of my dissertation and enables a crisp articulation of these in view of the question of tactility. At the same time this poem is profoundly unsettling for the thinking of the post-apartheid present in South Africa. This is not because of its always

already removed (or distanced) narration of a violence that is shown to permeate both the logics of resistance to apartheid and the instrumentality of the security apparatuses in their response to such logics. Nor is it unsettling due to the very difficult articulation of uneasiness and potential regret that saturates the voice of the narrator and its accomplice (Trevor). Rather, it is unsettling due to the manner in which the reader comes to be included in the “us” of the narrator towards which the “the corpse” is running.³

Despite being written, or at least set, directly after the violent forced removal of thousands of people from the informal township surrounding Crossroads (itself a formal township outside Cape Town) in 1986, the opening line of the poem, as well as the range of dates provided for its composition, ask that its reading not be confined to that moment.⁴ The poem is dated from 1986 right through to 1997 when it was published as one of two poems in the opening section of *Even the Dead*, titled “explaining some things”, and as such extends beyond the events of the 1980s into the time of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the publication of the new South African Constitution.

³ The difficulties in narration that this poem presents—a present narrator that is not present, a death that is not a death but is nonetheless maintained as one—finds an interesting correlate in the short story by Maurice Blanchot, “The Instant of my Death” and Jacques Derrida’s commentary on it in “Demeure: Fiction and Testimony”—published together in the series *Meridian: Crossing Aesthetics* and translated from the French by Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford University Press 2000). The impossible necessity of testimony—that it must be haunted by fiction as it is always unknowable, strictly, by the other (pp 30, 47)—constitutes a spectral law expressed in an “absolute anachrony of time out of joint” (61) that shatters the possibility of a unified or reified subjectivity (66).

⁴ In the mid-1980s, after a series of failed attempts by the Apartheid State to enforce removals in crossroads due to the political organization of the United Democratic Front (UDF), the removals turned exceptionally violent when a group known as the “*witdoeke*” [white cloths] were set loose on the shack dwellers resulting in deaths as well as the destruction of more than a third of the informal settlement on the edge of the formal Crossroads Township. This violence was not one-sided, hence the ubiquitous explanation offered by the apartheid State of ‘black on black violence’, but it was clearly enabled by the apartheid security apparatuses. On the question of black-on-black violence see Riedwaan Moosage, “A Prose of ambivalence: liberation struggle discourse on necklacing”. *Kronos*. Vol. 36, No. 1, Nov. 2010, pp 136 – 156. On the specific case of Crossroads Township see Josette Cole, *Crossroads: the Politics of Reform and Repression 1976-1986*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987. Print.

This framing of the poem, which lodges it at the core of the production of South Africa as a post-apartheid democracy, is reinforced in the 7th stanza where the speaker notes in the midst of describing the unfolding of present events the fact that a particular church “will itself be burnt down in the coming days” (“RT” lines 22 – 23); a fact that locates the speaker as somehow ahead of the events being narrated, the speaker is outside its time. However, this framing not only transforms the poem, broadening it into a question for the post-apartheid democratic state, it also constrains its reading. Twice during the narration of unfolding events, the speaker declares a desire to not “be here” (“RT” line 27). However, considering that the speaker is lodged in an ambiguous time that is out of joint with that of the poem it is difficult to comprehend precisely what is meant by the desire to leave. On the one hand, the desire to leave, to “go, please” (“RT” line 49), has to do with the violence of the events being witnessed as this violence comes to bear on the speaker and his companion: it manifests as a sense of “horror”, “rage”, “self-disgust”, and “fear” (“RT” lines 51 – 54). Each of these responses, and the speaker articulates an uncertainty between them, has to do with watching, with the moral question of what should have been done and why it wasn’t, as well as with the visceral fear of becoming part of the violence, of moving from voyeur to victim. On the other hand, the desire to leave can be read as expressing a sense of disquiet with regard to the broader critique that the poem lodges at the core of the post-apartheid moment: to stay, to think through the questions and implications that the poem raises are perceived as a danger to the narrator himself, perhaps even to the narrator as a self.

In a strong resonance with Cronin's poem "Motho ke motho ka batho babang", the events narrated in this poem unfold around the language of visibility. The narrator and his accomplice, Trevor (a figure that is very easily read as Trevor Manuel⁵), first go to Crossroads so as "to have a look", an action they undertake with "eyes unpeeled" while they weave through the scars of the battles that raged a few days earlier ("RT" line 3, 5). This mode of looking, determined by the debris and the damage of the recent violence and expressed as looking with "unpeeled" eyes, is contrasted in the very next stanza to the mode of surveillance employed by the security apparatuses: as an echo of the look of the warder in "Motho ke motho ka batho babang" and my brief discussion of the "visor effect" in relation to this, surveillance in this poem emanates from the armored vehicles of the security apparatuses. It is a look that has a specific origin but that is not tamed through this specificity. It is strictly un-locatable as the speaker does not know if it is aimed at him; its weight, however, weighs on all that it surveys, leading the speaker to decide not to "linger" ("RT" lines 6 – 9). Again, this desire to move on must be read both viscerally and conceptually: in its most immediate sense it has to do with the fear of being targeted by the security apparatuses, while at the conceptual level it has to do with the fear that lingering in this gaze that produces "uncertainty" might, perhaps, lead to an obsession or a fascination that fixes the one held in this look in place.

The violence that the security apparatuses watched over—in a strong sense it can be argued that they were the warders of this violence—has left what the narrator

⁵ Trevor Manuel, currently Minister in the Presidency in charge of the Planning Commission in the South African government (i.e. defining the economic trajectory of the country until 2030), served as the Minister of Finance in both Mandela's and Mbeki's governments and was, more critically for the reading of this poem, one of the key figures involved in the formation of the UDF along with Jeremy Cronin.

describes as “neuralgic points” scattered in its wake (“RT” line 18). These points, highly sensitive and prone to sudden eruption due to the raw tactility of the violence (an outworking of the apartheid production of reified racial subjectivities and their respective mandated forms of indigeneity), are described by the narrator through the language of visuality. The first two neuralgic points, however, are registered very quickly, taking 8 lines in total. The first of these is of an old man carrying building materials, “running” and “stumbling” (“RT” lines 18 – 21), visibly terrified in the look of his eyes. The second names the church that will be destroyed and describes a general throng of “refugees”, out of which a multiplied (they are numbered three, twenty, sixty) stream of youths emerge at speed (“RT” lines 22 – 26). Critically, in both of these the movement is described as directionless, or at least directionless with regard to the look of the spectator: the old man is running, but “from whom, and to where?” (“RT” line 21), while the youths are either “pursuing” or “fleeing” (“RT” line 25). While marking the ambivalence of this violence, the indeterminacy in these first two neuralgic points is in stark contrast to the definitive movements invoked in the narration of the third point, and which takes 44 lines.

The speaker encounters this neuralgic point as he turns a bend in the road on the edge of what he describes as “the outline” (“RT” line 10) between “sanctioned black poverty” (“RT” line 29, the formal township) and the now “burnt-out acres” of the informal, unsanctioned, township (“RT” line 30). As they turn the corner, the first scene that they encounter is of people watching an open field that has a corpse lying in it (“RT” line 32). This corpse moves. It quickly becomes apparent that what is being witnessed is a highly staged, almost theatrical, performance of a “necklacing”, as the speaker declares:

“The lackadaisical visibility of this execution must be the main point” (“RT” lines 40 – 41). Taking place around the corner of the security apparatuses and in front of hundreds of witnesses, the perpetrators, who remain unknown, unidentified and without a definable motive, meticulously prepare the body for its fiery demise in an image that recalls “a macabre human sacrifice on the lip of a still smouldering volcano” (“RT” line 45). This spectacle is staged right to the point of placing the car tire on the chest of the victim. However, at the precise moment that the speaker slips into the first person so as to beg his accomplice to go, a sudden and startling shift takes place: the executioners and the crowds “disappear”, “melt away”, “fade off” (“RT” lines 55 – 59). None of these actors flee; the executioners do not leave due to a threat of any perceptible sort. Rather, all actors and spectators in this spectacle—apart from the speaker, his accomplice, and the victim—simply begin to vanish from sight: they become the invisible condition of possibility for the visibility of the event that follows.

In a flash reminiscent of a Benjaminian seizing hold of a chip of messianic time so as to shatter the continuum of progress, the corpse rises and turns, running “in our direction. A wild, hobbling dash” (“RT” line 60). The speaker immediately responds to this projectile like corpse by asking after the meaning inscribed in the sudden reprieve from death: is it a “victory of life over death”, the freedom of “the innocent small person” (“RT” line 62)? However, this running corpse (the speaker continues to refer to it as a corpse) is not so easily dismissed. It exposes the difficulties of a middle ground (such as, drawing from the first chapter, the Freedom Charter attempts to occupy) by posing the question “what is the middle” and lodging it in the midst of the quagmire of innocence

and political complicity that marks the emergence of democracy in post-apartheid South Africa. The corpse moves “away” from the spectators, police, and army, (none of which are presented as innocent), thoroughly saturated in its imminent destruction (“covered in petrol”, line 68) and moving away from “a death it has already died” (“RT” line 70). This final line of the second last stanza defines the corpse as a living death, sculpted by the marks of the physical and epistemic violence of apartheid: physical as the terms of apartheid and the struggles against it define its sacrifice, and epistemic as apartheid constructs the conditions through which the corpse is perceived as available to this sacrifice. This body that cannot escape the weight of its own death is set loose, running toward *us*.

It is particularly through this running corpse that the weightiness of the past is brought into play. On the one hand, the corpse has been produced as in the process of its execution due to a presumed (undisclosed, undetermined, constantly under question) complicity with the apartheid state and, on the other hand, it is produced as slipping out of its death on the cutline of the double movement of struggle and instrumental force that the encounter between the apartheid security apparatuses and those residing in Crossroads Township puts into play. Its weight, however, comes to bear on that which it runs into and toward: the figure runs “into” exile, “into” the new South Africa “our” midst, but “toward” the negotiated settlement, the democratic elections. There are two issues at stake here; first, the issue of encounter, and second, that of movement.

“Into” designates both the sense of ‘arriving in the midst of’ as well as a sense of ‘collision’, a double sense that irreducibly marks the encounter: at what point is there

welcome, at what point confrontation? The distinction at the level of exile is important, not least because it narrows the applicability of the pronoun “us” or “our” as it proceeds in the stanza: the final “our midst” is not straightforwardly that of an entire nation (which is presented as an object not owned by the “us”: *the* new South Africa) but rather tracks with the first sense of exile, an exile separated from an exile from South Africa during apartheid. If its moment is unclear (is it an exile from the nation under apartheid, from the post-apartheid, in the self, from the events in the poem?), its responsibility is not: the narrator joins it with a sense of the “rainbow nation” somewhat removed from the triumphant declaration of a “new” South Africa. This body that reeks of imminent death through necklacing, in other words, of the violent conditions for the emergence of what is named as the post-apartheid, marks a difficulty for the operative potential of the rainbow (a metaphor that recalls the opening refrain of the Freedom Charter)—the figure (named in the second last stanza as a “running corpse”) irreducibly carries the weight of its existence with it, in its flight, troubling the grounds on which a new community might be constituted.

This is why, in its movement that is somewhat off kilter, the figure, “running sore”, aims at the “negotiated settlement” and the “democratic elections”. These constitute the mechanism through which the post-apartheid moment is congealed into actuality, and operate as a not-so-veiled reference to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Whether this figure’s heading toward the conditions for the emergence of the post-apartheid moment is to be read as a threat or as a hope for refuge is not specified (its desperation could mark either of these). Nevertheless, it is clear that the encounter to

come is also the destination of the “us” into which the figure runs: “our midst” and the figure join in the final word of the poem—“running”. Any sense of community in whose name the post-apartheid present might be worked out is, through this final stanza of the poem, thoroughly fractured. What is presented for thought here is how this body, in its violence and movement, unsettles the terms (however strategic) on which a “new South Africa” can be produced. This line of flight offers the necessity of thinking the weightiness of the body as it touches “us”, unsettles “us”, in the moment of refusing the discourses (reconciliation, democracy, rainbows) that attempt to *subvert it*. With the destabilizing weight of this body in sight, I now turn to a reading of the production of this weight in Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*.

The structure of blackness in Fanon’s Black Skin, White Masks

The centrality to my project of Fanon’s first book length intervention into the question of race and the structure of blackness stems from the manner in which Fanon manages to articulate a critique that is both conceptual and visceral. This is not to argue that I read Fanon as offering a clear way out, but only that the line he negotiates is precisely that which confronts any attempt to come *after* apartheid in any meaningful sense. As Fanon makes absolutely clear, there is a double demand in coming after colonialism and apartheid (and there is, conceptually, no distinction between these): a reckoning with the weight of the body, and a reckoning with the formation of that weight.

Cronin's refusal of that which would subvert the weight of the body similarly marks the intervention made by Frantz Fanon in his *Black Skin, White Masks*.⁶ The tone of the text is set in the introduction where Fanon makes plain his reason for setting out an intervention: he states, "there are too many idiots on this earth" (BS, xi). Exactly what constitutes idiocy for Fanon is outlined almost immediately, and then elaborated through some broad strokes in the remainder of the introduction: idiocy is the "striving for a new humanism", an endeavor that hinges on the formulation "I believe in you, Man" (BS, xi). The tone registered here is quite clearly one of open derision of any privileging or redemptive hope lodged in the concept of Man. This is not, however, simply a rhetorical formulation that might serve to enable the articulation of a concept in opposition to that of Man. As *The Wretched of the Earth* makes clear, Fanon is still invested in a form of humanism, a form of actualizing a true man. Rather, for Fanon the concept of Man takes the place of a very particular function that operates in relation to society and its "metaphysics" of blackness and whiteness and, as such, cannot simply be opposed but needs to be removed (BS, xii).

"Man" is the concept on which both blackness and whiteness are articulated and it is also "what brings society into being" (BS, xv).⁷ It would, however, be too quick to therefore only focus on dismantling Man and producing a new terrain for humanity (the focus of most critiques of Eurocentrism); the question of blackness is not that easily

⁶ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated from the French by Richard Philcox. New York: Grove Press, 2008. Print, hereafter BS. For the French I have relied on *Peau noir masques blancs*. Éditions du Seuil, 1952.

⁷ This point is borne out by even a cursory look through some of the key texts that form the foundational moves in modern western society, for example, Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* has as its opening moves the articulation of the centrality of Man and then the analysis of what Man is so as to establish a ground for the articulation of a commonwealth. Cf. Thomas Hobbes, [1651] *Leviathan*. Edited by Richard E. Flathman and David Johnston. New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1997.

dismissed. For Fanon, Man as a concept does not designate an entity in itself; rather, Man is a becoming that in modern society is produced through the operation of whiteness/blackness, as he phrases it: “The black man wants to be white. The white man is desperately trying to achieve the rank of man” (BS, xiii). This relationship, where both black and white are “locked” in place (BS, xiv), where “whites consider themselves superior to blacks” and “blacks want to prove” their equality with whites (BS, xv), and where blackness is relegated to a position of “non-being” (BS, xii), has produced a “massive psycho-existential complex” that Fanon’s intervention attempts to destroy (BS, xvi). Quite clearly, while not using the Césairean formulation “colonization = thingification”, the emphasis on being “locked” in place, or perhaps more pointedly from the French *enfermé*, “trapped”, is an echo of the Césairean critique of the role of Man in colonization.

It is the conceptual terrain produced through the mechanism of blackness/whiteness that leads Fanon to declare that “an individual who loves Blacks is as ‘sick’ as someone who abhors them”. Conversely, the black man who strives to whiten his race is as wretched as the one who preaches hatred of the white man” (BS, xii). Importantly this is not to be read as some sort of affirmation of multiculturalism—a call for us all to get along in our particularities—rather, it is because whiteness and blackness constitute a mechanism in the project of Man that produces blackness as non-being and whiteness as the potentiality of man that *any* relation to whiteness or blackness *as such* is a sickness. This understanding of blackness and whiteness is very close to the function of community in the articulation of apartheid and adds a further layer to that critique:

whereas I argued community operates as a differential that produces reified subjects of race in the articulation of apartheid and that the primary concern of that articulation was the production of whiteness, here it becomes possible to argue that the apartheid investment in whiteness was, in effect, an investment into the very possibility of attaining to the status of ‘man’. In the first three chapters of *Black Skin, White Masks* Fanon opens up the question of the production of blackness in relation to the self who is black, so as to correctly diagnose and unsettle the sickness of blackness/whiteness. He does not offer a genealogy of this production of blackness. I would suggest, however, that this is what is at stake in *The Wretched of the Earth* in the sense that it deals with colonialism as an expression of Man.

As the above makes plain, the concern of *Black Skin, White Masks* is not simply to correctly diagnose the problem—although this is one of its concerns. Rather, its object is to transform the world, to shatter it, as Césaire would phrase it. This transformation is not fulfilled in the attempt to demonstrate that the black man is equal to the white man. As Fanon argues, such a demonstration is “easy” but is “not our purpose”. Fanon seeks rather “to liberate the black [*noir*] man from the arsenal of complexes that germinated in the colonial situation” (BS 14). Language, the focus of the first chapter, is of particular importance for Fanon as it is in language, particularly in the adoption of the language of the colonizer, that “a world and culture” is “appropriated” (BS 21). This appropriation of French—in a similar manner to the tendency to speak to the black man in pidgin [*petit-nègre*]
—works to “imprison [*enfermé*]” the black man within the trajectories of colonialism (BS 18), a condition in which an inferiority complex has been instilled (BS

2). Fanon understands this action of colonialism in very similar terms to those expressed by Aimé Césaire in his lecture on culture and colonialism, namely, that culture is removed, history is obliterated, and the black man is fixed in place, made emblematic of this artificial stasis (BS 18). The language Fanon uses in this diagnosis of the attempt to “imprison [the black man] as the eternal victim of his own essence, of a *visible appearance* for which he is not responsible” (BS 18), a condition that he argues is held in common with the Jew even if the Jew has the privilege of less visibility, resonates in interesting ways with Lyotard’s formulation in “the jews” on the manner in which Jews are made representative of that which they cannot represent (namely, “the jews”). Although Fanon is particularly dealing with pigmentation in this moment, taken in his broader argument on the mechanism of blackness/whiteness in the production of Man, Fanon’s formulation seems to anticipate Lyotard’s later intervention. While in this context (of being fixed as expressive of non-history and non-culture) the affirmation of a “black [*nègre*] civilization” (BS 17) is understandable to Fanon, this move nonetheless misses the point (as does the desire by critics such as Breton to valorize Césaire as a *black poet*).⁸ That this discovered civilization is named *nègre* by Fanon indicates that what he has in mind, at this point, is a certain expression of negritude. It is the distinctions that are embraced so as to articulate such a history that Fanon finds suspect, as he argues, “I am speaking here on the one hand of alienated (mystified) Blacks [*noir*], and on the other of no less alienated (mystifying and mystified) Whites” (BS 12). And a little later:

⁸ Cf. André Breton, “A Great Black [*noir*] Poet” [1947]. In: Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, Translated from the French by Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith. Wesleyan University Press, 2001.

All I know is that anyone who tries to read in my eyes anything but a perpetual questioning won't see a thing—neither gratitude nor hatred. And if I utter a great shout, it won't be black [*nègre*]. No, from the point of view adopted here, there is no black [*noir*] problem. (BS 13)

The reason for Fanon's refusal of the idea of a reworked and valorized blackness as an answer is that this incorrectly diagnoses the problem as a black one (as I will show in the next chapter, this formulation becomes exceptionally important for Steve Biko in the South African context). Fanon is very careful in this formulation of the problem. While clearly affirming that it has to do with both white and black as categories, his assertion on the absence of a particularly black problem is clearly contingent on "the point of view adopted". This is important for grasping the weight of the intervention lodged in the fifth chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks*, an intervention that echoes the warning of the moment of complicity in Césaire's *Notebook*: while blackness/whiteness is a schema, there is nonetheless such a thing as "the lived experience of the black man".

Fundamentally, however, for Fanon the ethical orientation of man has to do with relationship, with love and, as such, in the chapters on the "woman of color and the black man" as well as "the man of color and the white woman", Fanon examines specific instances of the orientation towards the white person. Arguing that the possibility of love is contingent on an adequate resolution of unconscious tensions, Fanon suggests that the structure of blackness/whiteness restricts the adequate expression of the possibility of love. In other words, the cases that Fanon examines (and he is always careful to limit his analysis while being free in extrapolating from them) have nothing to do with love but reveal hidden tensions. In the case of the woman (Mayotte Capécia) that, Fanon argues,

desires a white husband and wrote a book to this effect, Fanon suggests that this desire is, effectively, a mimicking of the slippage that the structure whiteness/ blackness brings into play—a slippage that goes both ways. It is precisely this slippage that, I argued in chapter one, the apartheid legislation sought to contain and then prohibit as the production of whiteness became more ‘stable.’ Invoking Hegel’s idea of subjective certainty, Fanon argues that to be white is the culmination of the structure into which Mayotte (along with the rest of us) has been lodged (BS 27).⁹ As such, for her the question is “black” and “white”, where white pertains to mind, rationality and light, and “black” designates a relation to earth, the body, and rhythm.¹⁰

Describing such a situation in the terms of a *mêlée*, a struggle at the level of the body in which we are “locked in our particularity” (BS 28), Fanon argues that “it is because the black woman [*négresse*] feels inferior that she aspires to gain admittance in to the white world” (BS 41). However, the fact that this inferiority complex exists has

⁹ Invoking Hegel to argue for the possibility of subjective certainty is, on one level, obvious. However, on another level this move clearly maintains the apparent efficacy of Hegel’s system even while marking it as somehow (Fanon doesn’t name it as such, not even in his explicit reading of Hegel in the last chapter) complicit with the structure of blackness/whiteness. For an expression of subjective certainty that could be read similarly, cf. Jacques Lacan, “Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty” in Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, Translated from the French by Bruce Fink. New York: Norton, 2006. Print.

¹⁰ The tone that Fanon uses in his critique of Capécia has most often been marked as disclosing a sexist undercurrent to his work. Although there is something to be said for the role women play in Fanon’s imagination and how this relates to traditional concepts of the nation and the family (Fanon focuses on reproduction, for example), I would argue that critiques that focus expressly on Fanon’s targeting of Capécia miss the point. For Fanon, there is no issue if a person who happens to be black has a relationship with someone who happens to be white; the problem arises when these persons are lodged in the social structure as either black or white and when, *in the terms of that structure*, there emerges a desire for the white man or woman. In other words, what Fanon attacks is a desire for recognition in and therefore maintenance of that system. Cf. Cheryl Duffus, “When one drop isn’t enough: War as a crucible of racial identity in the novels of Mayotte Capécia”. In: *Calaloo*, Vol. 28, No. 4, 2005, pp 1091 – 1102, for a reading of Capécia’s novels in relation to Fanon’s critique. While her arguments for the resonance between Fanon and Capécia’s work is provocative on some levels (although her argument that Fanon misses how Capécia is located in her culture misses Fanon’s extended footnote 25, pp 139 – 141, where he makes the exact same point), Duffus misses Fanon’s fundamental argument about blackness and whiteness as a structure.

nothing to do with pigmentation, even though pigmentation makes it very difficult to “escape the body” (BS 47). Rather, through a lengthy discussion of abandonment neurosis as it manifests in the figure of Jean Veneusse (who bears a striking resemblance to the character Samba Diallo in *Ambiguous Adventure* in his interiority and attachment to reason) Fanon demonstrates that this has nothing to do with skin color. As Fanon puts it, Veneusse is “a neurotic, who happens to be black” (BS 61). To read the inferiority complex, or an abandonment neurosis, as derivative of blackness is to mistake the symptom for the cause, as Fanon argues in what can be read as a very clear anticipation of the distinction between the problematic and the thematic that Chatterjee raises:

In no way must my color be felt as a stain. From the moment the black man [*nègre*] accepts the split imposed by the Europeans, there is no longer any respite, and “from that moment on, isn’t it understandable that he will try to elevate himself to the white man’s level? To elevate himself into the range of colors to which he has attributed a kind of hierarchy?” We shall see another solution is possible. It implies restructuring the world. (BS 63)

Accepting the split, only working at the level of the problematic, serves to maintain the enabling conditions for the mechanism blackness/whiteness to take hold of and to trap subjects. In the face of this fixity, Fanon argues, there is only one action worth taking: restructuring the world—in other words, attempting to lodge a critique at the level of the thematic so as to enable the conditions for encounters to take place “in freedom” [*à liberte*] (BS 44).

As a first step in this process Fanon extends his analysis from individual capacities for adequate encounters to a more generalized study of the psychological foundations of the colonized undertaken by Mannoni. However, Fanon argues that

Mannoni's study falls short primarily due to his mistaken coordinates. According to Fanon, Mannoni overlooks a number of key principles in his study of the colonized, namely: an adequate understanding of racism, the structural role of colonialism, and the tactility of the experience of the black man (this last Fanon leaves to the next chapter). In missing these coordinates, Mannoni argues for an innate inferiority complex in the colonized and an innate authority complex in the European. In short, Mannoni ultimately justifies colonialism as an adequate response to latent psychological predispositions (BS 66). Critiquing Mannoni's idea of racism, Fanon does not argue that race does not exist, but rather that there is no special type of racism in the world: all racisms, whether anti-Semitic or anti-Black, take as their object the production of Man, as it is "the racist who creates the inferiorised" (BS 69).

In contrast to Mannoni's misdirected argument Fanon suggests that the key difficulty is structural since the colonized only exist in relation to the colonizer (BS 77).¹¹ At the level of formal logic this equation is reasonably straightforward. However, Fanon nuances his position through his asserting that racism always has Man as its object, and his consequent statement that "South Africa has a racist structure [...] Europe has a racist structure" (BS 72). This structure leads to the assertion that forcing "the white man to acknowledge my humanity," in other words to recognize how I express the qualities of man, is to "make myself white" (BS 78). Quite clearly this structure is not reducible to a

¹¹ This formulation, along with the earlier formulation on the creation of the inferiorised by the racist, is precisely the argument that Deleuze and Guattari articulate in their discussion of nomadology in *A Thousand Plateaus*. While conceptually I would argue that Fanon, Deleuze, and Guattari are all in agreement with regard to race, racism, and its utilization in the production of man, what Deleuze and Guattari miss is, precisely, the fifth chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks*, namely, "the lived experience of the black man."

simple economic or political model, as though Fanon is arguing for a class reading of race. Rather, the structure that Fanon invokes is a conceptual, or in his terms metaphysical, ordering of the grounds for the emergence of Man: an ordering that occurs through the mechanism black/white. It is through the “racial allocation of guilt” (a guilt that goes both ways) that Fanon argues this mechanism is shifted from a structural condition to a black problem (BS 83).

Consequently (and in a similar mode to the discussion of sickness), Fanon argues, with a sense of pain to which I will turn later when I discuss “the lived experience of the black man”, that “there is but one destiny for the black man. And it is white” (BS, xiv). Of course, Fanon is not arguing that black people must or will inevitably be white; neither is he arguing that the Western concept of Man is inevitably triumphant. What is at stake in this formulation is the notion that if an identity is understood as black, then it is immediately inside this mechanism that produces whiteness as the being of man (in other words, if you exist in this framework you must eventually become white). Fanon’s analysis in the text, however, is not focused on whiteness as such nor is it focused on a thorough critique of the concept Man, rather, for Fanon the task is to break “the vicious circle” and to “liberate the black man from himself” (BS, xii).

It is at this point in his argument that Fanon turns to a discussion of what he calls “the lived experience of the black [*noir*] man”, a chapter that has sometimes been read as a straightforward critique of negritude.¹² While Fanon has argued convincingly to this

¹² It does not take a lot of work to show that Fanon is not straightforwardly dismissive of negritude—that is, if he is dismissive at all. The attempt to read Fanon, particularly in this chapter, as a theorist of hybridity, while interesting, seems to me to miss the entire thrust of the text (i.e. the critique of fusional multiplicity as a valorization of man). Cf. Anjali Prabhu, “Narration in Frantz Fanon’s ‘Peau noire, masques blancs’:

point that blackness is a structural condition, in this chapter he confronts the reality that this structure is nonetheless *lived* in its effects. To use a turn of phrase that has recurred throughout this dissertation, this chapter serves to mark the limit of a critique lodged only at the level of the thematic: blackness cannot simply be abandoned (and, Fanon would add, neither can whiteness). Fanon opens his engagement with the question of how blackness is lived by drawing a distinction between what he names as a “bodily schema” and as a “racial historical schema” that becomes rendered as a “racial epidermal schema” (90). Whereas for Europe existence is a question of establishing a bodily schema that mediates the interaction between mind and body/world (Fanon’s example is the realization of the desire to smoke by manipulating the body according to its environment, BS 91), there is, in fact, strictly no question of existence (where existence means an expression of essence, i.e. ontology) for the black man (BS 118).¹³ Rather than an essence—in the European, and for Fanon specifically Hegelian, case, this essence is ‘mind’—what the black man has is a “racial historical schema”, in other words, the

some reconsiderations” *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (Winter, 2006), pp 189 – 210. While Prabhu’s arguments with regard to the historicity of the black experience as narrated by Fanon is convincing (194), his reading of negritude in Fanon as a necessary stage leaves something to be desired. His major contention, in mitigation of Bhabha’s reading of hybridity in Fanon, has to do with his sense of hybridity as a joining of a “universal, collective, historical ‘I’” and the “subjective personal still-in-formation ‘I’” (201). This hybridity, while perhaps more palatable to Prabhu than Bhabha’s, is, in my view, quite simply the Kantian split between the universal “I” and the empirical “I’.

¹³ For a critique of the role of gender in Fanon’s work, but particularly in *Black Skins, White Masks*, see Gwen Bergner, “Who is that Masked Woman? Or, the Role of Gender in Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*.” In: *PMLA*, Vol. 110, No. 1. Special Topic: Colonialism and the Postcolonial Condition. Jan, 1995, pp 75 – 88. Bergner reads the wounding that occurs in this chapter through the lens of castration which frames it quite intriguingly in relation to Freud and Lacan (the extended footnote 25 on pg 139 of *Black Skin, White Masks* indicates how this reading relates to that of my own). I see this “amputation” that Fanon mentions in relation to “circumcision” and the being made representative of the unrepresentable, in other words, as a foreshadowing of Lyotard’s argument on “the jews”. As a more general approach to the problem of gender in Fanon, Nigel C. Gibson has opted to translate “*noir*” and “*nègre*” as “black” (and sometimes negro) rather than as “black man”. While this move certainly defuses a large part of the critique of gender bias or insensitivity in Fanon, it actually obscures the problem of the production of these markings through the mechanism male/female while not taking the difficulty of language, as specified in the first chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks* into account.

modes through which he is produced as black in relation to whiteness. While this schema enables a form of interaction on the terms of whiteness (it is described as a rehearsal of a supposed content), it is incapable of sustaining an attempt to “confront the white gaze” (BS 90) that “fixes [the black man] in place” (BS 95): at that moment of attempted resistance the reified black subject explodes and is reshaped, “put together by another me” (BS 89). A more physical example of this moment than what Fanon narrates in the rest of this chapter—even though he narrates it viscerally—is the moment of torture in Serote’s *To Every Birth Its Blood* where Tsi is fixed in his blackness as an irresolvable chipping or monad that conditions thought (see chapter 1).

This “fragmentation” that is put back together can be read equivocally. On the one hand it marks the disintegration of any sense of self for anyone who is marked as black, as Fanon describes the experience:

Disoriented, incapable of confronting the Other, the white man, who had no scruples about imprisoning me, I transported myself on that particular day far, very far, from my self, and gave myself up as an object. What did this mean to me? Peeling, stripping my skin, causing a hemorrhage that left congealed black [*noir*] blood all over my body [...] (BS 92)

This wounding occurs in the moment where the self wanted to be affirmed, recognized, as “a man among men”, “a man, and nothing but a man” (BS 92). In other words, at the precise moment when the black man wants to be affirmed in distinction from a generalized blackness, when he wants to be seen as entering society through mastering the script defined for him by the white man (i.e. assimilation), he is reduced in recognition to a body that signifies blackness: “ethnicity”, “cannibalism”, “backwardness”, “fetishism”, etc. (BS 92). This “self” that is separated from itself, or in

Césaire's language is "separated from its true cry", is reduced to an open wound that is fixed in place. Whereas in the *Notebook* the old man in the encounter on the tram had bloodshot eyes, oozing blood, here, the whole body oozes with blood and (in an image that recalls the corpse running towards us) is returned, "disjointed" (BS 93).

Although for a brief moment this forced representation is "accepted" as a mode of ancestral belonging, it very quickly becomes apparent that this is not a representation of one's own ancestors, in this case slaves. The body is made representative of a history that has nothing particularly to do with the self but rather of a generalized sense of being non-man as a condition of possibility for "segregation", "lynching", slave labor (BS 93). This open sore, a fragmentation—strictly a splitting where the "I" is no longer available, there is only a body—that takes place in the moment of recognition that this script (the racial historical schema) that was the basis for an engagement in society is insufficient, is registered in the language of spectacle:

My body was returned to me spread-eagled [*étalé*], disjointed, redone, draped in mourning on this white winter's day. The Negro [*nègre*] is an animal, the Negro [*nègre*] is bad, the Negro [*nègre*] is wicked, the Negro [*nègre*] is ugly; look, a Negro [*nègre*]; the Negro [*nègre*] is trembling, the Negro [*nègre*] is trembling because he's cold, the small boy is trembling because he is afraid of the Negro [*nègre*], the Negro [*nègre*] is trembling with cold, the cold that chills the bones, the lovely little boy is trembling because he thinks the Negro [*nègre*] is trembling with rage, the little white boy runs to his mother's arms" "*Maman*, the Negro's [*nègre*] going to eat me." (BS 93)

The structure revealed in this passage is critical to understanding the problem of the lived experience of the black man: first there is a discursive articulation of what the Negro is

(animal, bad, wicked, ugly). Within that frame a particular recognition takes place that has effects both ways. In this second stage, where the body of the black man is named as “negro” (look, the boy cries, pointing) both participants in the encounter begin to tremble: the black man due to the cold, the boy due to fear.¹⁴ Due to the discursive framing of the negro, the young boy can only read the negro’s trembling as a marker of rage that necessarily leads to cannibalism; the boy speaks this fear of cannibalism thereby fixing the black man in place as a negro. It is the body—the site of the open wound—that is returned to the black man “spread-eagled” in this encounter. *Étalé*, the precise term that Césaire employs to characterize the condition of being black that is confronted as the first crystallization of consciousness in the *Notebook*, is translated as sprawled flat or spread-eagled, but also signifies flaunting, or being placed on display. Precisely what is being put on display is made plain in the next sentence where the word *nègre*—one of the most pejorative terms for a black person in French—recurs eleven times. In an occurrence that resonates with Fanon’s critique of Mannoni, the young boy misreads the expression of the black man as he encounters the black man through incorrect coordinates: he perceives “*nègre*” “trembling”, a perception that forecloses alternate readings and leads to the inevitable conclusion that this “*nègre*” is going to eat him. Society, as Fanon says, has a racist structure.

¹⁴ This trembling, despite the immediate causes that are attributed in the text, clearly also signals the distress and anxiety that marks the “paradox of faith” as a condition of becoming a fully individual subject in Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling*. [1843] Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy. Edited by C. Stephen Evans and Sylvia Walsh. Cambridge University Press, 2006. Print. The structure outlined in this passage also resonates strongly with Lacan’s aphorism on “Logical Time and the anticipation of subjective certainty”.

Still reeling from the fragmentation brought about by the white gaze, a gaze that imprisons him not only in the sense of fixing him in place but also through a saturation of his surroundings with a whiteness that “burns me to a cinder” (BS 94), the black man shifts into an alternate articulation of this fragmentation. This violent structure that produces him as black, as a “sooty finger” that becomes a condition of possibility in Césaire’s *Notebook*, is taken as a “chipping” that gets thrown back at whiteness: “The handsome Negro says, ‘Fuck you,’ madame” (BS 94). That this response is first offered to a woman (who noted the handsome Negro) can be read at a number of levels. Perhaps the reading that is most available is that the black man only responds like this to a woman, which is to say that this moment betrays a certain undercurrent of sexism at work in Fanon’s text. However, when it is recalled that the moment of encounter in which the black man is split from his self (a splitting from a splitting, as it were¹⁵) takes place in the interaction between a black man and a young child who, in turn, runs to his mother, a second level of reading becomes available: the woman addressed is potentially this mother. That is to say, a moment of attempted redress from her side—a redress that remains inside the structure black/white—is rejected. This reproduction of the structure blackness/whiteness is precisely what Fanon later argues takes place when dealing with the origin of the phobia of the black man (BS 144 – 145). Over both of these readings, however, I suggest that when we consider the similarity to key moments in Césaire’s

¹⁵ A central question in European philosophy has been the resolution of the split between the mind and the body: the question appears in Descartes, Kant, and Hegel, to name but a few. It seems to me that in Fanon’s analysis, the structure of blackness/whiteness emerges precisely as a means to settle this question: the white man becomes mind, the black man becomes body. In this process the black man becomes doubly removed from his self (mind) since where the white man has mind, the black man only has body (this is the moment of wounding narrated above). As Fanon argues in *The Wretched of the Earth*, this process is always incomplete; Europe can never afford to fully rend the black man from his self as this would leave him useless to the settler (32 – 33).

Notebook (and as will be seen, the similarities extend further), both in language and in the force of the encounter that is narrated in this chapter, a third level of reading becomes available. In the *Notebook*, the moment of a second crystallization of consciousness takes place when the speaker registers the laughter of some women that seems to him to confirm his perception of the old man that he encounters on the tram. Here, what is heard is the double inscription of “the Negro” and his apparent physical appeal (Fanon offers a more direct reading of this in chapter 7, where he suggests that the black man is a penis, 147), and it is this attempt at fixing him in his place that is rejected.

At the moment when recognition (as a man among men) is denied the black man, this moment when he is produced as body, the black man decides to embrace that which he cannot escape, he asserts himself as a “BLACK MAN [*NOIR*]” (BS 95). Immediately, Fanon protects this move from a straightforward designation of complicity by drawing a distinction between what he calls the Jewishness of the Jew and the black man. The Jew, argues Fanon (and he cites Sartre’s *Anti-Semite and Jew* to make this argument) is marked *internally* and therefore any adherence to the stereotype is complicity, whereas the black man is a “slave not to the ‘idea’ others have of [him], but to [his] appearance” (BS 95). Determined utterly by the external appearance of flesh, there is no escaping the full extent of what Fanon names as “betrayal” (of the promise that assimilation through the white script was possible): the encounter with the white gaze reveals “the arrival, not of a new man, but of a new type of man” (BS 95). In that condition of being, every act and every achievement is measured by a new touchstone—black skin—and this “vicious

circle” produces in the black man a fixity to the self as body that is expressed as nausea (BS 96).

In the midst of this emerging sense of being black in the world (where all articulations of difference are racist) the interventions of Césaire, in particular begin to shape a sense of negritude in the face of this white gaze. While there is a very clear hesitancy with regard to certain expressions of negritude, particularly with regard to the affirmation of “black magic! Orgies, Sabbaths, pagan ceremonies”, an affirmation that leads to the “ground” rising up in “laughter” that marked the black man’s “reluctance” to embrace this negritude (BS 105), there is, ultimately, no option but the embrace of it in the face of the force of the white gaze (BS 106). This turning toward negritude returns the black man to the world, without possession. What is narrated is an affinity of essence; the black man cannot own the world because he is the world. As Césaire phrases it: the black man has been “inserted between latitude and longitude” (*Notebook*, 14). The hope of this negritude, what Fanon names in a foreshadowing of *The Wretched of the Earth* as a “wretched romanticism” (BS 114), leads to a declaration of defiance and resistance in the face of the white gaze that emphatically echoes the *Notebook*: “I put the white man back in his place; emboldened, I jostled him and hurled in his face: accommodate me [*Accommodez-vous*] as I am; I am not accommodating anyone” (BS 110). This refusal to compromise, which in the *Notebook* is translated as “put up with me [*accommodez-vous*], I will not put up with you”, results in an apparent victory whereby the white man is put in his place, fixed. However, in response to this challenge the white man informs this newly

emergent “black consciousness” that the new found affinity to world, to its rhythms, is simply a stage that the white world has already passed through (BS 111).

It is, however, the publication of *Black Orpheus* by Jean-Paul Sartre, a figure that holds an exceptionally important role in *Black Skin, White Masks*, that brings a staggering blow to the trajectories of negritude that had been opened up. Utilizing the Hegel that had conditioned much of Fanon’s theory with regard to recognition, Sartre argues that this Black Consciousness, or negritude, is *a stage* on the path toward a new man, a weak stage in the dialectic of progression. While Sartre may have been correct, although I think there are many arguments that can be advanced against his position (not least that he is operating inside a black/white binary), according to Fanon what he inadvertently demonstrates is that Negritude (as Sartre understands it) is effectively a mode of complicity with whiteness: its trajectory is already known and determined by whiteness as its condition of possibility.

This complicity, however, is not definitive. The now shattered Negritude is gathered together and refashioned again (a move similar to the statement in the *Notebook* that “the old negritude progressively cadavers itself” in the moment of the emergence of a new negritude). In this refashioning, the black man realizes that this negritude is not reducible to the single black male. Instead, at the core of this new sense of negritude is an understanding of multiplicity whereby the black man is a signifier of both a particularity and of a generality. What was produced to fix the black man in place becomes a form of liberation. Stated differently, it is not possible to fully conquer negritude by marking it as a generalized blackness or as a particularity in the stage towards the full realization of

man. Rather, Césairean negritude always returns so as to refuse “this amputation”—the production of the body as marked by generalized blackness. The wounding, or cutting, of the black man so as to render the body as all that the man signifies (a totality that negritude attempts to refuse) carries a marked similarity to the practice of circumcision: a cutting that marks the Jew in his body as a representative of an impossible representation, namely, of “the jews” as named by Lyotard (a nomadic relation to the un-name-able). However, as a multiplicity, the question of a lived experience of the black man becomes one, simply, of pain: the black man cannot “get up” (he is still sprawled flat), he is held down by an “eviscerated silence” that “surged toward [him] with paralyzed wings”: as Césaire says in a similar echo of Benjamin’s Angel of History, “I hear the storm”. Fanon begins to weep.

After having inserted the lived experience of the black man into his analysis of the structural dynamic of blackness/whiteness, Fanon turns, in his final two chapters, to examine the role of the “negro” in psychoanalysis and philosophy. It should be noted here that while Richard Philcox’s translation of *Black Skin, White Masks* is exquisite, particularly in the resonances he conveys between Fanon and Césaire, in his translation of these last two chapter titles he has substituted *nègre* with *noir* in each case: a striking alteration considering the content of the immediately previous chapter. The black man [*noir*] is reduced to being black [*nègre*] in the world as a lived experience that takes place in an encounter with blackness as a structure, and it is the terms of this encounter that Fanon discusses in his final two chapters—hence his designation of *nègre* rather than *noir*. Beginning with the question of psychopathology, particularly how it is that the

black man is given an inferiority complex while the white man acquires a fear of the black man, Fanon argues that in this case it is not a question of Oedipus. Or, rather, the question of Oedipus is limited to the constitution of the European “I” and is no longer effective once the problem is the relation between that “I” and its Others. Critically, I do not think that this is a case of Oedipus coming first; I would instead argue that in the production of whiteness through the structural relation of blackness/whiteness, Oedipus emerges to *mask* this relation; in Fanon’s words, the “Oedipus complex is not a black complex” (BS 130). For Fanon, the secondary repression that is associated with the Oedipus complex and its conditioning of the potentialities of the subject is intimately connected with the western concept of the family and the nation and is effective in that context (BS 121). However, in a move that tracks well with Lyotard’s formulation of the concept of “the jews” almost four decades later, Fanon suggests that what is named as the death of the Father is in fact this extraction of an “I” as European “eye” that becomes the condition of possibility for Oedipus and European, or white, subjectivity.¹⁶

In a move that similarly correlates with Césaire’s reading of the problem of Man as it is claimed by Europe, it is the claiming of the “eye” as European that is expressed in the structure of blackness/whiteness (BS 178). As such, for that which is black the constitutive problem is a relation to whiteness, a relation that is strictly imaginary (BS 154). Whereas for the European it is a question of mind, for the black man it is increasingly a question of the body. The “Black man [*Nègre*] is nothing but biological” (BS 138), argues Fanon, he is a “penis symbol” (BS 142), an object fixed in place by “the

¹⁶ I would argue that this is precisely the move Lacan makes in his discussion of the “*objet petit a*” (discussed in the first chapter) when he invokes Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of “the flesh” and “the eye” in the emergence of subjectivity. Fanon returns to this question later in the chapter.

weight of one's melanin" (BS 128). In this attack that reduces the black man to pure corporeality, there is a distinction between the Jew and the black man: the Jew signifies, according to Fanon, financial savvy and intellectual rigor, hereditary qualities that threaten the dominance of the white subject; and as such the Jew experiences the weight of its exclusion through extermination: the attempt to curtail the bloodline (BS 142). In contrast to this, the black man, as the chapter on the lived experience clearly indicates, *lives this extermination in the present*. These are two different expressions of the same attempted repression of that which would unsettle (through recalling) the primary repression that enables the emergence of a white subjectivity (here Lyotard and Fanon are, I think, in full agreement). As such, Fanon argues that the black man and the Jew are joined together as that which the European production of subjectivity marks as "evil" (BS 157).

Returning to the question of psychopathology, Fanon argues that in this relation the black man takes the place of a particular function in relation to the white man, specifically, the black man is the site of the white man's "collective catharsis" (BS 126). In short, all that does not fit within the designation of whiteness is jettisoned—through mainly literary devices such as comic strips—into black characters. In the language of Zita Nunes, blackness is the remainder of whiteness. Drawing on his earlier discussion of the centrality of language (that the colonial language dominates the colonized), Fanon argues that this literature, developed as a cathartic structure for white folk, is imbibed by both white and black children and, as such, the black child is produced as inferior while the white child learns to fear the black. In the face of this structure whereby the black

man is forced to live his perpetual extermination in the present, Fanon suggests that the only answer is to “call on Césaire”, by which he means an articulation of negritude that neither embraces blackness nor dismisses it, but rather allows the black man to “touch with our finger all the wounds that score our black livery” (BS 164). It is, for Fanon, “the eye”, the emergence of perception in the flesh as articulated by Merleau-Ponty, which enables “a corrective” that is adequate to “Césaire’s vermiculate howl” (BS 178). This not a question of looking but a question of the gaze, a question of the emergence of subjectivity and, in a formulation that reverberates through my reading of Cronin’s “Motho ke motho ka batho babang,” it has to do with the realization of a community already at play through the palpability of the gaze.

In the final chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon returns to the question of recognition that has structured much of the analysis in the book. Affirming the Hegelian understanding of the human as emerging out of a mutual recognition, a form of recognition brought about by imposing oneself on the other such that it cannot not recognize you, Fanon argues that such an encounter is foreclosed in society due to the structure of blackness/whiteness that conditions its emergence (BS 187). It is to this extent that Fanon argues, through a reading of Juan de Mérida, that blackness is not about color (as he says elsewhere, these people “happen to be black”, BS 179) but rather about this social structure that produces the black man as *nègre*, as an object in the white world. Formal equality, such as was granted to the slaves upon emancipation, does not go far enough as it leaves the structure in place: the black man is still produced as such. Clearly resonating with the post-apartheid South African present and its reliance on the

constitutive terrain ordered by the Freedom Charter, Fanon suggests that the only way to liberate the self is to liberate the Other (BS 192). This offer of liberation takes the form of smashing the project of man as the defining principle in the constitution of the terrain for the emergence of subjectivity—a movement that Fanon affirms in his conclusion.

Despite this critique of the place of Man there is, nonetheless, at first reading a somewhat strange affirmation of Man that emerges in the conclusion. Offering an interpretation of Bourgeois society, where it is defined as “any society that becomes ossified in a predetermined mold” and where “bourgeois society is a closed society where it is not good to be alive [...]” (BS, 199)—in other words where bourgeois society is a society of reification, or as Césaire frames it, thingification—in the midst of his critique of fixity that hinges on the foundational concept of Man, Fanon declares that “I am a man” (BS, 200). This declaration, which he elaborates later by asserting: “I am a man, and I have to rework the world’s past from the very beginning. I am not just responsible for the slave revolt in Saint Domingue” (BS, 201),¹⁷ is set off against the sense of a *black* man who is always “a slave to the past”, attempting to find something of cultural or

¹⁷ After the intervention by Susan Buck-Morss in *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009, where she situates the Haitian revolution at the heart of Hegel’s “Master-Slave Dialectic”, Fanon’s refusal is realized even more forcefully. Considering the centrality of Hegel for Fanon’s thought, finding the slave revolt of Saint Domingue at the heart of it would, I imagine, have been exhilarating. However, it still leaves intact the structural dynamic of blackness/whiteness that makes an effective encounter in western society impossible: the terrain has incorporated Haiti while remaining the same. Ama Ata Aidoo’s *Our Sister Killjoy: or Reflections from a Black-eyed Squint*, Longman African Writers Series. Longman, 2006, reinforces this position through the main character’s (Sissie) response to her friend’s death in a car accident. They had recently had an argument over the value of the first heart transplant, where her friend Kunle held the position that this signified the end of racism, while Sissie argued that that reading misses the structure of race, and at the news of his death Sissie states: “what utter waste [speaking of Kunle’s heart, perishing]” “it certainly would have gladdened Kunle’s heart to find itself in the hands of the Christian Doctor. A thoroughly civilized / meeting” (107 – 108). The irony here is the point: the heart is pure flesh, it has nothing to do with blackness (let alone sentiment). It is only the conceptual conflation of a piece of meat for a racial epidermal schema that possibly allows for a reading that claims the end of racism, and even then, the terms of this encounter are still inside the civilizational drive of the schema.

political value in relation to whiteness (BS, 200). In contrast to this, Fanon argues that revolt takes place not due to such a discovery of ancient value, but rather due to the weightiness of existence in the present. Quite clearly, as it structures the unfolding of the lived experience of the black man Césaire's *Notebook* is in the background of this nuancing of historical responsibility. However, I think it is important to specify what is being refused: Fanon resists the sense that the 'black' past can be or should be allowed to become absolutely determinative of the present; it is the sense that these scripts simply produce us that is refused.

Continuing this vein of resistance, Fanon declares that he "does not have the right" to embrace blackness, to justify its historical worth or the value lost through the institution of slavery. These apparent rights of blackness that are jettisoned by Fanon are likened to "the justification of a facial profile", an act that not only produces the black man but also the white man (BS, 203). In the face of all the demands to accept the psychological constitution of the black man, to embrace the historical value of blackness (both of these being irreducible to the lived experience of the black man), Fanon declares:

Here is my life caught in the noose of existence. Here is my freedom, which sends back to me my own reflection. No, I have not the right to be black. It is not my duty to be this or that. If the white man challenges my humanity I will show him by weighing down on his life with all *my weight of a man* that I am not this grinning *Y a bon Banania* figure that he persists in imagining I am. (BS 203, my emphasis)

The response that Fanon offers in the moment of this attempted interpellation into blackness is both the weight of his body and the weight of Man as conceptual becoming, thrust against that of the white man. This isn't simply physical violence, nor is it a return

to the already refused production of ‘equality’. What is at stake here is the unraveling of whiteness by the weight of its production through the body that is black. Arguing that the “real *leap*” (Kierkegaard, again) for Man has to do with the introduction “of invention into life”, and that to this extent “[he is his] own foundation”, Fanon sets the terms through which he suggests “man [*les hommes*, i.e. plural] can create the ideal conditions of existence for a human world” (BS, 206). However it is still in the name of Man—this time devoid of blackness or whiteness—that Fanon posits the potential of this human world. Having already invoked the weight of the body, it is in the last line of the text that Fanon returns to the terms through which this re-invocation of man can be unsettled: the last line is a cry addressed to the body as that which is constitutive of existence in the world. Fanon writes, “oh my body, always make me a man who questions!”

White Genesis and the weight of Man

Having specified the structure of blackness/whiteness as it operates in the production of man, in this final part of the chapter I turn to Ousmane Sembène’s *Vehi-Ciosane*, or, *White Genesis*, as a way to read the problem of the intersection of the weight of the body and indigeneity in the postcolonial moment.¹⁸ Importantly, I am not arguing that Sembène should be thought of as an exemplar of negritude or Black Consciousness as a political programme. Rather, I am suggesting that in this novella Sembène works through the problem of the body in relation to the terrain of emergence for subjectivities. While many of Sembène’s novels, and especially *Vehi-Ciosane* (as it is his first properly

¹⁸ Ousmane Sembène, *The Money-Order; with, White Genesis*. Translated from the French by Clive Wake and John O. Reed. London: Heinemann Educational, 1972. Print, hereafter WG.

'postcolonial' novel) are read (or at least specified) as lodging a critique of the failure of postcolonial promise in Africa, I argue that his novella *Vehi-Ciosane, or, White Genesis*, presents us with a different problem. Specifically, at the most fundamental level *Vehi-Ciosane* poses the problem of how to read a name that at once is not a name and yet demands to be taken as one. This is not to suggest that *White Genesis* is not available to readings which limit themselves to the realm of national allegory or other political work, or that these readings are simply wrong. Rather, through raising the question of the name, I argue that what is at work in this novella has less to do with a straightforward political critique and more to do with opening up potentialities for alternate articulations of the human. In other words, I argue that Sembene's novella attempts to unsettle the structure of society that guarantees the trajectory of man and, as such, that it functions as a line that moves from a realm of "sensory becoming" to a realm of "conceptual becoming". It is particularly through the mode in which the body intersects with the name, and the mode through which the novella reworks the terrain of emergence constitutive of the European sense of the subject, that a new terrain of emergence comes to be narrated, although, as will be seen, this terrain is not one of escape.

The central event around which the novella unfolds is the birth of Ngone's granddaughter who is named by her as Vehi-Ciosane (White Genesis). The novella opens with four prefaces, the first two highlight the futility and damage of armed struggle, the third heralds the hope of a future addressed to the proper name Vehi-Ciosane, and the fourth is an iteration of the stranger crossing the Niaye. These prefaces work to frame the novella with what I call a refusal of hope in hope, or in a more Fanonian and Benjaminian

turn of phrase, as a chipping that might shatter the constitutive ground of the problem expressed as the project of Man—the progress of whiteness. Vehi-Ciosane, the hope of the novella, is a child of incest, and the novella is punctuated by different discussions of the implications of this. As a child of incest, born to the daughter of the village Chief due to the Chief's relationship with her, the character Vehi-Ciosane and the events surrounding her birth strongly echo the terms of another (this time, mythical) narrative, namely, the events surrounding the birth, life, and death of Oedipus and their inscription into the Oedipus Complex as the definitive model (according to Fanon, Lyotard, and Deleuze and Guattari) for the grounding, the fixing in place, of *European* subjectivity.

White Genesis opens in a movement that traces the futility and irony of struggle and death in the 'Third World'. The first five lines of the novella, which function as an epitaph for a soldier named Pathè, mark the soldier's ironic death: "penniless" in the service of the "God of gain" (WG 2). The poem, or eulogy, which follows this epitaph, titled "lifeless" and addressed to Pathè, adds to the irony of his death through drawing attention to the "melancholy figures" of Indo-China, still struggling against yet another imperial power who now bombs Pathè's grave, rewarding him with a "dead death" (WG 3). The final stanza, "Poor mother Africa/ Sterile you might have been a paradise/ for your sons ..." (WG 3), explicitly ironic in its formulation, works to tie together neatly the force of this opening: in a context of exploitation, both physical and financial, where subjects work against their own interest, and the death of struggle is piled onto Africa (death is what is "planted" on), it would be paradise for "mother" Africa if she had been incapable of producing any sons. The lack of hope in this opening is pressed further by

the inclusion of a local proverb (as we are told on page 13) which effectively shatters any hope that might be built on the past.

Sometimes, into the most ordinary low caste family, a child is born who grows up and glorifies his name, the name of his father, of his mother, of his whole family, of his community, of his tribe; even more, by his work he ennobles Man.

More often, in a so-called high caste family which glories in its past, a child comes into the world who, by his actions, sullies his heritage, does harm to the honest Man he encounters and even robs the individual diambur-diambur of his dignity. (WG 4)

The second part of the proverb posits the notion that what is considered to be good in society, what is considered to best express its ontological essences (“the high caste family”, WG 4), more often than not works to upset that conformity, troubling the very grounding of that society. Stated differently, the proverb suggests that if there is any hope in or for society, it does not come through inheritance, but, rather, through flouting such inheritance. In a Fanonian turn of phrase we might say that it comes through shattering the trajectory of Man as it is located in the mechanism of blackness/whiteness.

These first two of the novella’s prefaces (Pathè and the Proverb) would seem to work to underscore any reading of Sembène’s novella which mark it as critical of the postcolonial situation in Africa, and indeed, globally. However, I argue that the framing effect of these prefaces should be read as a refusal rather than as a premise for a simple critique. They signal the need to hold on to, or abide by, the actuality of life and the effects of economic and political exploitation *in the moment* of opening an alternate trajectory that does not simply replicate the cycle of death narrated in the first preface. As

such this novella offers a clear look at what would be considered an instance of severe moral decay (i.e. incest), not in a voyeuristic sense, but rather so as to lodge this difficulty at the core of any notion of “system” (to recall a term from Serote’s text) that would come after colonialism.¹⁹ They work as a refusal of hope *in* hope.

It is in the third preface, which takes the form of a letter and is dated as coming nine years after the first that this trajectory begins to be opened. The narrator, in describing the resistance which has been articulated in his intention to tell this story, marks the limit of “racial solidarity” in the face of Europe’s violence as being “only subjective” and as working to mask the weaknesses of Africa. Echoing Fanon’s hesitancy with regard to negritude and, more particularly, his critique of those who love or hate blacks, “racial solidarity”, as a consciousness which takes blackness as a self-positing essence or ground for the basis of political action, is marked by the narrator as complicit due to its valorization of the subject, which obscures, in this case, ethical or moral issues that need to be thought. It is in this context that this story, which is already labeled as dealing with a moral failure that is universally condemned even though its origin is hard to locate, is *grounded in a name*: Vehi-Ciosane (WG 6).²⁰ We are told that Vehi-Ciosane is a child, not yet in school, not yet literate, but more than likely trapped within the futility of misdirected struggle, while the child’s mother is illiterate and alone, clothed in

¹⁹ W.H. Archer’s, “Review: Sembène Ousmane *The Money Order with White Genesis*” In: *Books Abroad*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 1973, p 205, is a fairly consistent example of how the novella is read in terms of morality, its failure, and the death of women as a result.

²⁰ It is important to recall the function of the name as it emerged in my reading of Benjamin’s, “Of Language as such and on the language of man”: it marks the mode through which Man comes to be understood as the quilting point of sense, as the becoming expressive and the already expressed of the world.

her drama (WG 6). After staking out these general trajectories, the narrator appears to rescue Vehi-Ciosane from these with a strong echo of the general thrust of the *Notebook*:

As for you, VEHI-CIOSANE NGONE WAR THIANDUM, may you prepare the genesis of our new world. For out of the defects of an old, condemned world will be born the new world that has been so long awaited and for so long part of our dreams. (WG 6)

In this last paragraph of the letter, Vehi-Ciosane, who has already been marked by the narrator as trapped within the common futility understood mainly in economic terms, is hailed as holding the possibility of a new beginning through the invocation of her proper name. Or, rather, it is her name that is hailed in this way. Vehi-Ciosane is, herself, not the genesis of *our* new world, rather, in her name such a genesis, the arrival of which has been much awaited, might be prepared.

If the task in relation to Sembene's novella is to read the proper name Vehi-Ciosane as constituting the possibility for the genesis of a new world, a world held in common, then within the theory of the proper name outlined in my reading of Benjamin in Chapter Two, addressing this possibility to the proper name should be read as an affirmation of Man (as Man is that who names and is named—pure expressivity of the name). However, in making this argument it must be kept in mind that the concept of Man that is held onto through the proper name is no longer the project or concept of Europe that Aimé Césaire so thoroughly critiqued in his *Discourse on Colonialism*, but rather a concept of Man made to the measure of the world, a non-human humanism. This is then not a possibility-to-come that can simply do without Europe (Europe is a part of the world) or simply push Europe to the side, as though we might make of it a province.

The question of Man is a central concern precisely because of Europe and, as such, Europe is part of that through which we must work. In other words, as subjects always already lodged in the structure of blackness/whiteness, it is necessary to shatter that structure in order to clear the ground for a new expression of subjectivity to become possible.

This position of a non-human humanism is, however, not entirely sufficient and, in fact, Sembène's novella refuses it as a straightforward possibility. The notion of a non-human humanism, while I argue that it is a key element in ordering this future to come, is a somewhat risky wager due to its proximity to the valorization of a "fusional-multiplicity" that underscores much of Europe's auto-critique. In other words, to stop at this apparent desire to abide by Man is to risk stamping the postcolonial in the image of Europe. Doing so would also have the effect of eliding the refusal with which the narrator frames the story of *White Genesis*. It is this refusal, and the possibilities of reading that it offers, to which I now turn.

The character of Tanor Ngone Diob, the brother of Khar Madiagua Diob, the victim of incest who is about to give birth to Vehi-Ciosane, is ambiguous in terms of what he signifies with regard to the postcolonial moment. While clearly operating as an echo of the opening focus on Pathè with regard to the devastating effect of war, Tanor had enlisted in the French Army and had fought in North Africa and Indo-China against those who would be considered as fighting for their freedom. However, in his village he is honored as one who "knows how to welcome the toubab-commandant" (WG 36), precisely because of his participation in those wars. In short, Tanor's complicity with

French colonial power, at one level at least, fashions him as adequate to receive the representative figure of that power. However, the ambiguity with regard to Tanor's position is opened through a conversation between his mother, Ngone War Thiandum, and her friend, Gnagna Guisse.

Look at Tanor (her eldest son, who had fought in Indochina and North Africa), the children make fun of him because *he is mad*. In a way, it is better for him, now. He doesn't suffer. Morally, I mean. Yet he was the finest young man of his generation. You remember him, when he returned from his military service. It was you who welcomed him, spreading fine cloths beneath his feet.

I remember

I expected to see a man. It was less than a man I welcomed home. I was proud when he went away, and anxious, too. He came back to me insane [...] (WG 20, my emphasis)

Later in the passage Ngone continues to lay the responsibility for her son's insanity within the realm of war itself. War is figured as marring fine young men, making them unavailable to the function of society as it imagines itself. This latter comment is made clear in her description of Tanor as "less than a man", in other words, as not being capable of performing the work – both in terms of reason and employment – associated with such a designation.

It is within the context of a broader discussion of Tanor's madness by the men of the village that the earlier comment on his ability to welcome the toubab-commandant is uttered. While on the one hand the statement works somewhat ironically to validate the position of collaboration, on the other hand it quite clearly unsettles this through suggesting that the one who *knows* how to welcome the toubab-commandant is, precisely,

out of his mind. The character of Tanor can thus quite plainly be read as simultaneously signifying resistance to colonialism, collaboration with it, and the physical as well as epistemic violence that either of these positions performs. Tanor's ambiguous position is reinforced toward the end of the novella, when he dramatically murders his father for having committed incest, a murder which actually fulfills the legal requirements which the Men of the village had been shirking (59 – 62). The murder also troubles Ngone's assertion that his madness places him outside of the burden of the moral order: his act is coupled with the phrase that echoes the character Samba Diallo in *Ambiguous Adventure*, "I don't pray" (WG 62). It would have been interesting to see how Fanon would have responded to a character such as Tanor. On the one hand, Tanor's madness is clearly constitutive of particular kinds of relations both to the colonial power and to those he lives amongst. He is allowed to look after the children, and he is allowed to welcome the government official. Recalling the fixity produced in the black man through the white gaze, it is interesting that the only one deemed capable of resisting that gaze has already been made insane by it. In the end, however, Tanor's insanity is the only mode that is able to carry out the proper judgment in relation to his father's act.

A central topic of conversation among the men of the village, which forms the backdrop for their discussions of the act of incest, is the steady exodus of families to the larger towns that are to be connected to infrastructure such as roads and that have modern shops. Unable to speak collectively of their pain in relation to the disintegration of their community, their griot and shoemaker Dethye Law eulogizes the destruction of the

departing families' homes. The destruction unfolds silently, but at its core it attacks the central fiber of their community:

It [the sand] begins its work with the hearth, once the center and reflection of the family's security. The women and children used to glance at it furtively, silently expressing the peace in their hearts and the hope in their eyes. There, *and nowhere else*, is where the sand accumulates first. Then it reaches the bed, under the bed, and begins to pile up. (WG 34, my emphasis)

That it is the hope and peace of the women and children that is first destroyed, and that the destruction accumulates at the point of the bed, is clearly designed to resonate with the effect on the social structure of the Chief's act of incest— if the women and children are those looking at the hearth, and by implication the bed, with hope, who is it that rests on that bed? In this image, however, permanent departure, or urbanisation, which is always justified by both those who leave and those who remain in the pragmatic terms of finding a suitable husband for one's daughters (WG 52) or of avoiding tax (WG 53), is equated with incest. In other words, these actions are understood in the novella as a fundamental turning away from community, and, by extension, the whole novella through its central narrative can be seen to be placed under this pall.

What the above discussion of 'exodus' and madness in the novel highlights is, I think, precisely the double register in which Sembène's novella can be read. On one level it is available to diagnosis – as the following discussion of Medioune Diob will highlight even further. However, on another level, while insisting on the force of these discussions the novella resists being reduced to them. In this light, the figure of Ngone offers itself to a different reading. Medioune is first introduced into the story as the one who reveals the

truth to the men about Guibril Guedj Diob's incestuous act (WG 41), which is coupled with an insistence that the law be followed: "the punishment must be carried out in public, in front of everyone, or the guilty party must be thrown into a well and the opening blocked with stones" (WG 42). This insistence, although articulated as stemming from a concern for the honour of the community, is revealed by Dethye Law as actually being derived from a desire for power. As Dethye announces his intention to leave the village after Khar has given birth, he confronts Medioune about the events that took place prior to Guibril's murder. Dethye suggests that Medioune instructed Tanor to kill his father, with the intent that Guibril would be removed as chief and Tanor would become ineligible to replace him (WG 65 – 66).

There is no formal judgment pronounced on this accusation, however, and as Dethye Law finally begins to leave he turns to face the village and ushers the call to prayer. After a moment's hesitation, the men of the village begin their prayers together, apart from Medioune and the Imam (WG 68). Medioune is consequently excluded from the community and Dethye Law does not leave the village. This (highly) romanticized scene of resolution in the novella, where the problems of the misplaced desire for power as an expression of patriarchy, of urbanization/exodus, and of incest, are all resolved in one act of religious devotion, can be read as lodging a kernel of hope in the possibilities of political work. In other words, it offers a political program centered on moral regeneration as an effective solution to the problems that carry through into the postcolonial.

Ngone's narration of her own suffering due to Guibril's act of incest is not, however, quite as readily available to such a hope (or, I would argue, to a straightforward feminist reading that would seek to overwrite it as simply that). While her husband's act is devastating in its own right, its most profound effect has to do with her understanding of her own position in society in relation to that of her husband, which she describes as having been characterized by "passive docility" in which "the woman found herself a listener" (WG 14 – 15). His act which undercut his patriarchal role as the one who might "intercede in her favour for a place in paradise" (WG 15), ripped Ngone out of her "moral existence", a process she describes in the language of a wound:

Like a tear, a tiny hole which she unconsciously enlarged, she fell in with her realization – a new step for her – that she could judge events from her own, woman's point of view. This new responsibility was a shattering experience for a woman like herself, whose opinions had always been decided for her by someone else. (WG 15)

In her mulling over both Guibril's act and her own responses to it, it becomes clear that for Ngone the patriarchal system that produced her as a "listener" is based within the community's religious faith (the hope of paradise) as its alibi. As such, it serves to trouble the resolution Dethye Law manages to bring about towards the close of the novella, precisely through the operation of religious devotion. While Dethye Law's intervention constitutes the triumph of a representative of a lower class over those who hold the power in society, whether political (Medioune) or metaphysical (the Imam), it nonetheless serves to entrench the order that produces Ngone as silent, inferior, and fixed in place.

This concept of a tear, which Ngone utilizes to explain how it has come about that she allowed herself to develop her own thoughts, resonates throughout *White Genesis* in Ngone's bodily manifestation of her distress, constituting what I refer to, following Fanon, as the tactility of the body. It is while Ngone is lying in bed, awake, mentally deliberating the difficulties of her daughter's situation and its implications, that the first intersection between her thinking and her body is manifested. Due to the demands her husband is able to place on her, she has been unable to move her leg during the night as her husband's leg lay on top of it. For two pages in the text, Ngone's thoughts on her and her daughter's situations revolve around the effect of this weight on her leg. The site of this weight begins to over determine her thinking, standing in for her husband's betrayal:

She was unable to detach her thoughts from that spot. The disgust that her body felt for that limb deprived her of any kind of aggressive movement, and held it, like a canoe stranded on the mud of the Casamance, waiting to rot [...] she felt the desire to rebel for once, for just once in more than twenty years, and withdraw her foot. She gave in, morally defeated [...] She plucked up the courage to withdraw her foot carefully, got out of bed, and closed the door behind her. (WG 12 – 13)

This progression, which punctuates her thoughts on Khar and Guibril's act, mirrors the progression she passes through to arrive at the point where she can speak from her "own mind". It is not simply because her husband's leg, referred to as "that limb", somehow represents his act of incest that Ngone is filled with disgust. Its weight registers the act *in her body* not simply as pain or disgust, but as inertia. It is not possible for her to deny the

act; it forces her to register her own complicity in it.²¹ As such, the body itself becomes part of her thoughts and becomes part of that which would constrain her response while recording that restraint. The body here becomes that which haunts thinking: Ngone's thinking cannot do without it. In naming this weight as the body, its expression in tactility is thus both figural and literal. Of course, this challenges much Western writing *about* the body as though it is only a site of ex-scription. The cut of the body, I argue, is precisely its expression. Quite clearly the content of what is represented in this instance through the body is quite different to that of the lived experience of the black man as narrated by Fanon. Whereas with Fanon the body is produced as that which stands in for being, in this case it is an irreducible kernel that is set against the cultural stasis brought about by the colonial and soon to emerge postcolonial conditions. While not taking the structure blackness/whiteness as its explicit target (although given the title of the novella this can never be far from the mind) this body operates in an echo of Césaire and Fanon as a cutting (noun) that cuts (verb).

This body, always offered to the reader as broken or in pain, becomes the seat of Ngone's tragedy as she describes how the act of incest and its surrounding dilemmas is "now part of her" (WG 23), a "devastation" not unlike "termites eating away the inside of wood" (WG 48), wood being a common metaphor in Sembène's writing for people as such. However, this devastation is not simply limited to Guibril's betrayal; it is joined by a much deeper struggle which had been suppressed in her "moral existence," the

²¹ Levinas' concept of nausea, the irrevocable awareness of being nailed to one self, unable to escape while wanting to escape absolutely, is very close to the notion I am trying to posit here, Cf. Levinas, *On Escape*, 1935.

suppression of which had led her to her complicity (the double alibi of religion and culture). Ngone's response to this emerges initially as a cry suppressed:

she strangled the cry that rose from her belly, a cry she had suppressed so long; it tore itself from her throat, taking with it pieces of burning flesh. She struggled to keep a grip on herself, and her cry came out in a gasp, with a shudder of desperate supplication. It was the cathartic explosion of undirected thought. Her whole body was on fire. (WG 18)

This cry, which wrestles with her body and sets it on fire, is contained through Ngone's "desperate supplication" which transforms her flesh into an open wound. While her struggle to "keep a grip" on herself clearly has to do with her social position—she wants to act as society expects her—it is also implied that if her thoughts were to be allowed direction/articulation, this "herself" that she recognizes would become something new, a stranger (WG 15). It is later, when Ngone is finally able to articulate her own thoughts through the act of naming the unborn child, that she is able to give voice to this cry. It is in the naming of this "stranger" in their midst, that the opening of an alternate subjectivity is offered. However, Ngone is not able to partake in this hope. After Khar gives birth to her son, Gnagna Guisse discovers "Ngone War Thiandum inert, the spider and the piece of poisonous root from the niaye in her hand" (WG 69). Ngone's suicide occurs on the same night that she names Vehi-Ciosane.

On the one hand Ngone's death is clearly in response to the shame that she has experienced due to the betrayal of Guibril, and it is received and praised in this light by all the characters in the novella apart from Tanor, who seems to suspect a deeper matter behind her death (WG 60 – 62). Yet on the other hand, it is also the final scene in which her body is presented for thought, and it comes after her act of naming. Her death,

considered as part of the problem of thinking in and through the body, can perhaps be read as cutting into the project of hope which is mandated through reading *White Genesis* as national allegory. Ngone is dead *before* she knows that Vehi-Ciosane has been born and that the baby is female. The body lies on the floor, inert. As such, I would argue that the body's dead weight is carried into the novella's multiple readings. The refusal of hope that is registered in the body troubles the instrumental political readings of the text through offering the text a kernel that is not available within its regulative domain for thinking-in-itself (her death can only be seen as, or reduced to, an act of honor). The body re-orders the other readings of the novella, offered above. It is not that the more programmatic readings are discarded as part of the cut constituted by Ngone's body, but rather that through the cut these readings are in fact respected as indispensable to the future without reducing them to a tool of the present. Thought of in this way, I would argue that the future to come, which is located in the act of naming, carries along with the potentiality of a new concept of Man, the weight of the body as a cut that orders the space of its arrival.

The naming of Vehi-Ciosane occurs in the hours before Ngone's suicide. The passage opens with her celebrating the fact that her daughter's body has a very regular constitution, as all the female bodies on her mother's side have had (WG 48). After having been told by Gnagna Guisse that her daughter "has said nothing" (WG 49), Ngone proceeds to flout all conventions in proclaiming a name and a heritage for the baby. This proclamation is done in the hope that Vehi-Ciosane will be a male, and that "with him another life would begin, onto which would be grafted the unhappy lot of all men,

renewing and fulfilling it” (WG 50). Ngone, bequeaths “him” all her jewellery – a gift usually passed from mother to daughter at the daughter’s wedding day – and bestows on “him” her clan name “Thiandum” (WG 50). The radical nature of this ‘departure’ in naming is emphasized to the reader through Gnagna Guisse’s unspoken meditations on the act. In the moment of birth, however, the “radical hope”²² that is constituted in this act is broken through the birth of a daughter.

It is in this context that the narrator’s address to the name Vehi-Ciosane in the opening of the novella needs to be recalled. The narrator addresses the name precisely because it is without body except as a cut – Vehi-Ciosane’s body is the very cut that shatters the hope that Ngone delivered at the cost of her body. As such, this name, which drags with it the cut of the body, lodges itself in the cut offered by Nancy (see chapter two) in his rigorous pursuit of the body. It consequently inscribes Nancy’s “birth of the body” (“Corpus”, 35) with the marks of a particular cut that might allow it to escape the trap of a new humanism constituted through “fusional-multiplicity”. This inscription clearly goes beyond the limits of racial solidarity outlined by the narrator. As has been shown, thinking from the outside, thinking through the body and positing the name for thought, offers Sembène’s *White Genesis* a different reading; and this reading, in turn, offers the world a “gift of a more human face”.

At this point the temptation is strong to leave this reading. However, this would again mask the refusal that is declared in the opening two prefaces of this novella. Khar Madiagua Diob is banished, with her daughter, from the village. Alone, without money, she makes her way to Dakar. On the way she encounters a number of men digging sand

²² Cf. Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope* for a discussion of this radical departure as an act of resistance.

from the beach who eventually offer her a lift for some of the journey. When asked where she comes from, Khar answers vaguely “over there” – she has become a stranger, wandering. Expressing disappointment in the gender of the baby, the driver of the truck comments: “I have never heard such a name: Vehi-Ciosane [...] Which Thiandum was her father?” Khar responds with silence. This silence is not simply a silence of refusal. In a very serious sense the question is an impossible one: the infant was not named by a father, its named lineage marks the infant as a descendent from her grandmother’s line of the family: an inheritance that is impossible in a male dominated society.

Having sketched the trajectory of the novella, paying attention to the role of the body as it gets lodged in the problem of incest (incest is, of course, always already precisely a problem of the body as it is marked in the symbolic order) and the society’s attempts to deal with it, it is necessary to ask what manner of origin, or birth, this naming of Vehi-Ciosane signifies? While there is a strong resonance with the Oedipus Myth, the divergences from it are also striking. Vehi-Ciosane does not have, at its core, a question over what kind of law is adequate to the emergence of a new sense of the state. Neither does it follow a typical trajectory for a tragedy whereby the hero inadvertently performs the act that in fact undoes him: this is of course what occurs in the Oedipus myth when Oedipus inadvertently murders his biological father and marries his biological mother, and later becomes the investigator who uncovers the truth even when his wife/mother, fearing the truth, begs him to stop—in both cases he is undone by his own action. As such, *Vehi-Ciosane* does not easily lend itself as a metaphor for the outworking of self-identification in the context of the family and nation.

Nevertheless, recalling the extended description of the stranger with which this novella opened and the fact that Vehi-Ciosane and her mother, Khar, have now become strangers wandering without any sense of fixity in relation to heritage or place, it becomes possible to argue that the genesis invoked here is of a shifting sense of subjectivity. In other words, an existential outworking of subjectivity that crystallizes in each encounter (as with Khar and the sand-diggers) and that is not available to a politics of autochthony. As attractive as such a sense of the subject is—especially since it is articulated through the weight, the dead weight, of the body—this genesis is, simultaneously, marked as “white”. In the following chapter I offer a more sustained engagement with this question of the label white in relation to the genesis that is named, however, here I offer three brief possibilities in relation to this name. On the one hand, this is available to be read as a critique of this emergence, that it is derivative of whiteness and therefore maintains its structural trajectory, or at least that it is dependent on a certain expression of whiteness for its articulation. On the other hand, it could be read more positively as a departure from the damage of whiteness—in both the Fanonian and the Césairean sense: the black man produced as body and the devastating stasis brought about by colonial thingification. Finally, however, this name could quite simply represent the naming of something unnatural or foreign in its environment. In other words, the baby of incest in a devout Muslim and noble African family (the societal structure into which it is born) is as foreign as a person living in Africa who still articulates their identity as white: it is a structure that marks that expression of existence as peculiar.

Before turning, in my final chapter, to the question of the concept of life that is set in play by the ordering of the cut of the body, I will briefly draw this discussion of the body in *White Genesis*, as well as the structure of blackness/whiteness, into relation with Fanon's interventions into the question of Man and decolonization in *The Wretched of the Earth*.²³

Sartre's reading of the question of the Jews as well as of the question of Blackness has been seen to be central in *Black Skin, White Masks*, a centrality that was shown to be both positive and negative in an example of the kind of reading at the edge of the fullness of a text that I have tried to express (following Casarino's sense of "philopoesis") in this dissertation. It is, therefore, worth opening a discussion of *The Wretched of the Earth* by drawing attention to some of Sartre's comments in the preface. Taking the space of the preface as a site through which to address *The Wretched of the Earth* to a European audience, Sartre mimics the language that Fanon utilizes in the opening passages of *Black Skin, White Masks*. Whereas Fanon states that "no one asked us to write this" Sartre says to the European reader of *The Wretched of the Earth* that 'this is not for you': in the text "the Third World finds *itself* and speaks to *itself* through his voice" (WE 9). Its force in relation to the European, according to Sartre, is that it diagnoses the European condition, a diagnosis that can set the European on its own path to dis-alienation (WE 12). Central to this movement towards dis-alienation is the critique of humanism and the role of violence. It is clear, to Sartre, that the central focus of *The Wretched of the Earth* is the destruction of what I called, in my reading of *Black Skin,*

²³ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Translated from the French by Constance Farrington. Penguin Books, 1969, hereafter WE. For the French I have relied on *Les Damnés de la Terre*, Éditions de la Découverte, 1987.

White Masks, the structure of blackness/whiteness as that which produces Man. Speaking of the implications of this structure, Sartre declares that “there is nothing more consistent than a racist humanism since the European has only been able to become a man through creating slaves and monsters” (WE 22). This “creation” operates according to the binary of black and white, a reality that leads Sartre to argue that to shatter the binary it is necessary to destroy both its intended product (man) and its mechanism (black and white) (WE 19). As such, the violence of the process of decolonization is “neither sound and fury, nor the resurrection of savage instincts, nor even the effect of resentment, it is man re-creating himself” or, even more forcefully from the French “*se recomposant*,” re-writing himself, or putting himself back together (WE 18). It is precisely this continuity between the critique offered in *Black Skin, White Masks* and the intervention offered in *The Wretched of the Earth* with regard to the destruction and re-creation of man that I will now briefly consider in drawing this chapter to a close.

Although his text does not begin this way, Fanon opens his intervention into the event of decolonization in *The Wretched of the Earth* from the position that “Europe is literally the creation of the Third World” (81). In the context of his argument Fanon is speaking mainly of financial, or at least, material modes through which the labor and wealth from the colonies were incorporated into Europe to make it into the “First World”. And, premised on that fairly unproblematic (from today’s perspective, one hopes) understanding of Europe’s *indebtedness* to the Third World, Fanon builds an argument for the redistribution of wealth as one of the most critical questions raised by decolonization. However, Fanon’s statement can be read in line with *Black Skin, White*

Masks at an even more forceful level. Recalling the centrality of the structure of blackness/whiteness in the production of Man as white and the black man as body in *Black Skin, White Masks*, the above statement on the creation of Europe can be understood at the level of subjectivity: the European subject is produced through the making object of the Third World subject. Holding the question of the production of man and how that subjectivity is lived as the guiding line for a reading of *The Wretched of the Earth* allows the persistent invocation of violence to be read in a more nuanced way. However, while I think this is the correct mode through which to read *The Wretched of the Earth*, it must nonetheless be affirmed that physical violence is a central category in Fanon's thinking on the event of decolonization—it cannot easily be done away with. As his opening statement makes clear, however, this violence is neither glorified, vilified, or necessarily simply demanded. He states, “decolonization is a violent phenomenon” (WE 27); for Fanon this is, absolutely, a matter of fact.

The violence of colonialism, a violence that Fanon argues the colonized learns to speak (WE 67), permeates the existence of the native not only as a material condition of his existence (police checks, pass laws, interrogations) but also as a metaphysical condition of that existence. As Fanon argued in *Black Skin, White Masks*, however, this existence is more a persistence in a state of object-hood where the black man has no ‘essence’ to express but rather is made to be only body—a condition described in the language of a wound produced by violence. It is precisely this condition that Fanon names as the “here and now” of violence in which the colonized lives and to which the West is always a late arrival (Césaire, in his *Discourse on Colonialism*, marks the Second

World War as one of these late arrivals) (WE 64). However, this object-hood is never totalizing, as the colonized needs to maintain a semblance of ‘humanity’ in order to be useful to the colonizer. The disjunction between the recognition of a self on behalf of the native (its semblance of humanity) and the production of pure corporeality in the structure of colonialism, leads to the emergence of the struggle for decolonization (WE 33). Expressed initially in “muscular dreams and demonstrations” (WE 44, 101) this struggle to be human, to have a non-reified consciousness so as to signify more than corporeality (WE 112 – 114), increasingly takes on the rhythm of a national struggle and moves towards adopting a program (at least, this is what Fanon calls for) that offers “an idea of man and the future of humanity” (WE 105 and 164). That such a program was precisely the function of the Freedom Charter in the struggle against the apartheid regime is, I think, fairly clear. However, as I have also argued, the concept of man that the Freedom Charter articulates—through the concept of community and the uncritical maintenance of whiteness—is precisely the concept of man that was produced by apartheid.

Returning to the assertion that in expressing violence the native has learned the language of the colonizer, or more pointedly the settler, it is striking that this “language” is not simply physical force but also the categorical divisions through which society is perceived (its racist structure). However, as the struggle proceeds and a greater sense of consciousness is achieved, Fanon argues that

the people who at the beginning of the struggle had adopted the primitive Manichaeism of the settler—Blacks [*noir*] and Whites, Arabs and Christians—realize as they go along that it sometimes happens that you

get blacks [*noir*] who are whiter than whites [...] Consciousness slowly dawns upon truths that are only partial, limited, and unstable. As we may surmise, all this is very difficult. (WE 115 – 117)

In this passage the language of the colonizer begins to fragment in the painfully slow [*laborieusement*] or laborious coming to consciousness of non-reified existence. This coming to consciousness is so difficult not simply because of colonial and settler resistance, but rather due to the fact that this begins to unsettle the precise terms through which the native had begun to recognize itself as man. While at first it was a question of possessing the existence of the settler, possessing the fullness of his recognition, in this moment it becomes a question of constructing a “new man”.

According to Fanon, this uneasy emergence is always already lodged in a moment of danger and, as such he argues that it be taken up as an intellectual position (WE 161). This danger is more than a little due to the terms through which the struggle for decolonization emerges, namely, the rhythm of nation and the language of colonial violence. Fanon’s warnings against the “pitfalls of national consciousness” are well known. What is of more interest to my argument is the role of what Fanon calls culture in the maintenance and production of this opening. Working against the dangers of a chauvinistic negritude (WE 127) or a rampantly emergent religious particularism (WE 129), both of which fall under Fanon’s criticism of having “learned nothing from books” (WE 140), Fanon articulates a position that is fundamentally in agreement with Césaire’s lecture on culture and colonialism from 1956. For Fanon, cultural expression (and he means culture in a “biological sense”) must “throw open” (WE 187) the ground for the future so as to enable the emergence of a people to come (WE 182 – 187). It is, in a strict

sense, only this “future humanity” that counts, since anything else amounts to “mystification” (WE 189). Read within the terms of *Black Skin, White Masks*, where mystification characterized the state of being reified in racial difference, the force of Fanon’s statement rests on the need to shatter and remove the structure of society that operates through the distinction of blackness/whiteness. As he argues a little later,

this struggle which aims at a fundamentally different set of relations between men cannot leave intact either the form or the content of the peoples’ culture. After the conflict there is not only the disappearance of colonialism but also the disappearance of the colonized man. This new humanity cannot do otherwise than define a new humanism both for itself and for others. (WE 198)

The shattering envisioned here, an action perhaps best described in Césaire’s phrase as “the end of the world, no less”, seeks to clear the ground on which a new expression of man, in other words a new humanism, might be lodged. This is not a humanism constituted through a fusional multiplicity whereby a certain hybridity comes to articulate the expression of man as the ordering principle of such a hybridity that is still man. Neither is this a humanism of reified difference somehow made to co-exist, what is often meant by the term ‘multiculturalism’ and which is precisely the term that Hendrik Verwoerd deployed to explain apartheid. This is an understanding of man that needs to be “raised up on to the tips of its toes” (as Césaire puts it in the *Notebook*) so as to be adequate to both the “prodigious” value of certain articulations that have emerged from Europe while simultaneously never forgetting “Europe’s crimes”: its production of the structure of blackness/whiteness so as to enable the emergence of European man. This

new man being set loose on the world is, I argue in the next chapter, what is meant by the expression of a life that enables the becoming expressive of subjectivity as an effect.

A Life ...

[White liberals believe] that we are faced with a black problem. There is nothing the matter with blacks. The problem is WHITE RACISM and it rests squarely on the laps of white society.

Steve Biko, "Black Souls in White Skins", p 25¹

What is Immanence? A life ...

[...]

It is a haecceity no longer of individuation but of singularization: a life of pure immanence, neutral, beyond good and evil, for it was only the subject that incarnated it in the midst of things that made it good or bad.

Gilles Deleuze, "Immanence: A Life", p 28 – 29²

I have thus far set out an understanding of a number of the key elements of what I term the philosophy of black consciousness that together constitute a hinge on which a concept of life that comes *after* the grounds of apartheid might emerge. Critical to this intervention is the understanding that the black-I, as non-I, is always external. It is this sense that was named as "the lived experience of the black man" by Fanon, and which the Césairean concept of indigeneity seeks to abide by while unleashing it as a cutting that cuts. In this chapter I read the trajectory of a minor discourse in the philosophy of black

¹ Frank Talk, "Black Souls in White Skins?" In: Steve Biko, *I write what I like*. Collected and Edited by Aelred Stubbs. Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2010. Biko wrote a series of articles for the South African Student Organisation (SASO) Newsletter under the pseudonym of Frank Talk and under the collective title of "I write what I like" from 1970.

² Gilles Deleuze, "Immanence: A Life" [1995] In: Gilles Deleuze, *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life*. Translated from the French by Anne Boyman. New York: Zone Books, 2002. Deleuze is describing what takes place in the event of care in a moment where *life* seeps into Life as it is narrated in Charles Dickens', *Our Mutual Friend*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

consciousness as it has been expressed in the South African context, and read this alongside an intervention into the question of subjectivity and the terrain of its emergence that is articulated by J.M. Coetzee in his novel *Life and Times of Michael K*. It is particularly the mode through which Coetzee attempts to think the relation of the subject, as both an effect and as a substance, to *life*, that I argue enables *Michael K* to be read as ordered by the philosophy of black consciousness. In order to adequately frame both of the readings that will be offered in this chapter it is necessary to briefly return to two novels, namely *Vehi-Ciosane, or, White Genesis* and *To Every Birth Its Blood*, so as to articulate what is at stake in the question of whiteness as it comes to bear on the potentiality of life in the wake of apartheid.

In the first chapter I argued that the differential of community in the discourse of apartheid produced reified racial subjectivities so as to enable, in particular, the emergence of a unified sense of whiteness. This formulation was subsequently enhanced through my reading of Fanon, where he argues that the schema of whiteness/blackness works to produce Man through the double action of reducing the black man to an object and setting the white man on to a path of attaining the designation 'Man'. In short, I argued that the production of whiteness in apartheid South Africa can be understood as an attempt to lodge those designated as white inside the trajectories of the European project of Man, a project that works to mask the primary repression that enables its articulation: the stamping of *life* into subjectivity. Through my reading of Fanon, Lyotard, and Deleuze and Guattari across the previous chapters, the Oedipus myth, whether in its

articulation as a complex in certain forms of psychoanalysis or as an articulation of the place of justice in society, was disclosed as central to this expression of the European project of Man. It is particularly at the level of the grounds for a statement of justice that comes *after* that I briefly want to return to Ousmane Sembène's novella *Vehi-Ciosane, or, White-Genesis* that, I argue, re-inscribes this myth through the weightiness of the cut of the body, and its relation to a critical moment in Serote's *To Every Birth its Blood*. Before turning to these novels, however, it is necessary to sketch in more detail what is at stake in the Oedipus myth as it comes to bear on these.

In *Antigone*, the first play by the Greek playwright Sophocles that deals with questions surrounding the Oedipus myth, the character of Antigone constitutes the central node through which the problematic of justice in relation to the State, the law, gender, and deity is expressed. It is precisely her role in the myth as a monster (of a peculiar type due to incest) that enables her functioning in this manner and, as such, it is worthwhile elucidating the role of the monster with some care. There are, of course, two conventional monsters in the myth: the Dragon and the Sphinx.³ The Dragon is the first to appear and is that which would prevent the founding of Thebes (slaughtering Cadmus' men) and, consequently, is killed by Cadmus. It is from the planting, or cultivation (an activity that becomes important for my reading of *Michael K*), of the Dragon's teeth that the Spartoi emerge from the ground, the survivors of which assist in the City's founding. Quite clearly, as Lévi-Strauss argues, the Dragon symbolizes an autochthonous sense of becoming: the founders of the city emerge from the earth, a sense of becoming that is

³ For my reading of the role of the monster in the myth I draw on Claude Lévi-Strauss' "The Structural Study of Myth". Lévi-Strauss suggests that myth, as such, offers a structural frame through which the impossible question of emergence can be thought.

similarly signaled by the Sphinx as a chthonic creature. However, both these creatures are killed by men. As such, Lévi-Strauss argues that their structural role in the myth is to signal the “denial of the autochthonous origin of man” (“Structural Study” 215). It is in the names of *men* that Lévi-Strauss suggests the opposite function to these creatures is to be located as the names of Oedipus (swollen foot), his father Laios (left-sided), and his grandfather Labdacos (lame), all indicate difficulty with walking or lameness. In other words, he argues that their names indicate a persistence of the “autochthonous origin of man” as this difficulty in walking is common to those who are “born from the earth” (“Structural Study” 216).

The tension between these two functions is reinforced, according to Lévi-Strauss, through a resonant pair of functions, namely the “overvaluing of blood relations” and the “undervaluing” of the same that is evidenced, on the one hand, in the search for Europa, Oedipus’ marriage to Jocasta and the burial of Polynices, and on the other by the killing of Laios and the mutual killing of the brothers Polynices and Eteocles (“Structural Study” 214 – 215). As such, Lévi-Strauss contends that it is the scaffolding of this tension (a tension that he suggests similarly structures the Freudian iteration of the myth) that forms the function of myth more generally (“Structural Study” 217). To support the claim that it is the question of emergence, particularly as it pertains to emergence from one (autochthony) or two (copulation), that is held in the structure of myth, Lévi-Strauss turns to a series of myths from the Americas highlighting, through a discussion of cultivation and its relation to autochthony, how the same structure can be located in those myths (“Structural Study” 221).

That this question of emergence has to do with the question of Man becomes apparent through the Sphinx's riddle. It is not simply due to the fact that the answer to the riddle is "man", but rather to a sketching of a trajectory in relation to the earth. The Sphinx asks, "What has four legs in the morning, two legs in the afternoon, and three legs in the evening?" On this trajectory, one that Oedipus affirms through his answer, Man emerges in close proximity to earth, distances itself from earth and then, ultimately, enlists the assistance of a prosthetic so as to resist the return to earth through the failure of its body (Myth might be read as fulfilling such a role of prosthetic to the extent that it resists a resolution of the problem). The struggle that defines Man, it seems, is a struggle to stand and remain standing. Quite clearly, following my readings of Césaire and Fanon, this is a struggle that finds a repetition in the struggle against the mechanism of blackness/whiteness. In an echo of the production of blackness as it is sketched in Césaire's *Notebook* it is possible to argue that the mechanism blackness/whiteness works to produce those designated as black not only as body but also as autochthonous—sprawled flat: the white has mind and society, the black has body and earth, it becomes a third prosthetic limb for whiteness.

It is interesting how this question comes to be held in the character of Antigone.⁴

While Lévi-Strauss argues that Antigone is an integral element in the myth only as it comes to the question of the "overvaluation" of blood ties (which he reads as resonant

⁴ *The Theban Plays* have received an immense amount of attention which I do not have the space to replicate here. Perhaps one of the most sustained discussions of the problem of ethics through a reading of the plays can be found in G.W.F Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, particularly in his discussion of the unity of self-consciousness and the self in its relation to "the ethical order" and the realization of morality. For my reading of the place of Antigone in the play, especially as it relates to the structural reading of the myth offered by Lévi-Strauss, that I unfold in this chapter I have found Paul Allen Miller's "Lacan's Antigone: The Sublime Object and the Ethics of Interpretation". *Phoenix* Vol. 61, No. 1/2, (Spring – Summer 2007), pp 1 – 14, to be quite helpful in its return to the problem of translation.

with the question of autochthony), I suggest that Antigone, through her name that can be read as signifying opposition to birth, becomes available as a singularity that exceeds the demands of the Symbolic Order of the Law, the demand of institutionalized difference.⁵ To make this argument it is necessary to read Antigone at the level of the name, action, and existence. Antigone's name, which Lévi-Strauss chooses not to read, situates her as being against her blood, opposed to the marker of her birth. However, in a reading that can be taken as contesting this, Miller argues through his detailed analysis of the opening lines of the play, which he describes as "a text that constantly escapes itself" (5), that it is Antigone's desire for the singularity of "same-wombbedness [the term with which she addresses her sister Ismene in the opening line] that is at the heart of the Oedipal family romance". It is this desire, which he reads as an affirmation of birth as it is an invocation of the mother, that comes to be expressed in Antigone's desire to be united with her brother in death through flouting the law of the tyrant ("Lacan's Antigone", 4). In this formulation Antigone's actions work against her name in a very similar manner to how the action of Oedipus with regard to the Sphinx works against the operation of his name as it is framed by Lévi-Strauss. However, Antigone's claim to same-wombbedness, a claim that positions her as a monster due to the implicit affirmation of incest, also enables her to respond to the attempt to resolve the dislocation inherent in the myth (the dislocation brought about by the tension between autochthony and copulation). In this reading Creon (the tyrant who is also her uncle, the brother of Jacoste) signifies the realm

⁵ Cf. "Antigone" in *A Dictionary of First Names* (2nd Edition), Patrick Hanks, Kate Hardcastle, and Flavia Hodges. Oxford University Press, 2006, where it is argued that the two terms that constitute her name, namely "*Anti*" (meaning 'opposed') and "*gen*" or "*gon*" (meaning 'birth'), signify opposition or contrariness to birth.

of the Symbolic Order of the Third, of the institutionalization of difference, while Antigone signifies a desire for sameness, of immanence, that resists the injunction of this Third (“Lacan’s Antigone”, 8 – 9).

Antigone emerges in this moment as a potential mediator in the struggle that lies at the heart of the myth.⁶ However, Antigone is significantly unlike Creon who first attempts to secure the return of Oedipus and failing this, following the battle between Polynices and Eteocles, issues a decree that was designed to situate the sovereign as the source of right in Thebes (i.e. to resolve the problem of emergence through subsuming it within societal structure). Instead, she responds to the event of her brother’s death through maintaining the disjuncture that structures the myth. To phrase this a little more pointedly so as to draw it in line with the understanding of ethics that will be outlined below (through Deleuze and Sartre), Antigone’s freedom is articulated in her statement that would entrench a particular understanding of the condition of Man as universal (namely the irresolvable tension between autochthony and copulation) as it is materialized through the lived experience of her actions. The resistance to the Symbolic Order of the Law that is signified by Antigone enables a glimpse of the “embrace of Being,” perceived in a flash as she articulates the impossibility of not choosing death so as to bury her brother (“Lacan’s Antigone”, 12). This choice is not simply one of blood over society; rather, Antigone accepts the authority of Creon to put her to death for flouting his decree even as she declares it to be unjust in relation to the law of the gods. As such, Antigone affirms both senses of right, obeying both as sources of authority even

⁶ Although the figure of the mediator forms a central component in the structure of myths originating in the Americas, it is not mentioned by Lévi-Strauss in relation to Oedipus (“Structural Study”, 226).

as she rejects the expression of Creon's own affirmation of his authority (which would resolve the tension between these two laws). Her capacity to produce such a statement of justice as an expression of the ethical (I think particularly of her refusal of Creon's edict in lines 391 – 409, and the subsequent perception of its consequences in lines 730 – 736 and 788 – 796),⁷ however, is dependent on her particular monstrosity: Antigone's desire for her brother, expressed in the metaphor of same-wombedness and her consequent actions and statements, recall precisely that which Creon's decree sought to repress, namely the disjuncture that is held in the structure of the myth, the problem of Man as it comes to be worked out in the actions of Oedipus and his sons. Antigone, then, can be read as a nodal point, one that is produced through her action, at which the Myth of Oedipus—and any resolution of it through repression or the law and the attendant *socius* brought into existence through this—begins to unravel itself.

When this understanding of the role of Antigone is brought into relation with the re-inscription of the Myth of Oedipus in Sembène's *White-Genesis*, it becomes possible to articulate a further level of resonance between that text and the intervention of black consciousness philosophy. While the shifting sense of the subject that emerges in the final pages of Sembène's novella, even marked as it is by the signifier "white", clearly cuts against the patriarchal conditions through which subjectivity comes to be expressed in its 'community', it is worth recalling the implicit distinction lodged in this moment with the figure of Antigone in the Oedipus myth. In the myth, Antigone is the daughter and sister of Oedipus and she is the monster that enables the unraveling of the calculative

⁷ Sophocles, *The Theban Plays: King Oedipus, Oedipus at Colonus, Antigone*. Translated from the Greek by E.F. Watling. Penguin Books, 1966.

resolutions of its dilemmas—dilemmas that, in their action, are the outworking of a blind error.⁸ Vehi-Ciosane, however, is born at the close of the novella: she makes no statements and, with regard to the question of inheritance, her mother similarly remains silent. It is the grandmother of Vehi-Ciosane, the wife of the man who *knowingly* impregnated his own daughter, which carries a function in the novella resonant to that of Antigone in the play. Ngone, whose name can be read in contrast to Antigone's as an *affirmation* of birth, does not utter an equivalent articulation of justice in relation to the Symbolic Order. Rather, Ngone transgresses this order through registering the weight of its injustice, and the weight of her inability to adequately perceive her husband's actions, in her body as a wound (*White-Genesis*, 18). The act of incest that transforms this weight into a "tear" that unravels the conditions of Ngone's subjectivity, and hence of the terrain on which it is lodged, is only the most explicit expression of this injustice (it extends into her sense of culture and of religion) and reveals the conflation in this order between the right of the sovereign (patriarchy) and divine right (morality). However, in the midst of affirming the adequacy of her ancestral line as it manifests in her daughter (Ngone marvels at the "regularity" of the women on her side of the family (48)), Ngone names what she imagines to be her future grandson as a descendent in her own line, bestowed with the material blessings (jewelry) belonging to a properly betrothed wife (*White-Genesis*, 50). In her naming, Vehi-Ciosane is cut off from her father—where the weight

⁸ It seems to me that visuality and perception play a large role in the Oedipus myth and in Sophocles' renditions of it. The myth is held by the tension between the Oracle of Delphi and Tiresias, the blind prophet. The first perceives the future, thereby setting the entire myth into motion, while the second perceives the past—the terrain on which judgments were articulated—and thereby brings an adequate understanding of complicity in the articulations of justice. Oedipus clearly acts in blindness, in the sense that he does not adequately perceive who he kills or marries, and explicitly adopts the physicality of that condition as a sign of his error. Ultimately, I would argue, it is only Antigone who 'sees clearly' and is thereby able to issue an adequate statement on justice in the myth.

of his incest would have been, there is now only silence. This birth, then, is actualized on a different plane (outside the patriarchal strictures) but, critically, it does not amount to a triumphant declaration of the new: there is a resounding silence without amnesia.

Ngone's death in the wake of this naming, in addition to its articulation of the weight of the body that I discussed in the previous chapter, also serves to add finality to this naming: there is no one alive to rename the child.

Brought into relation with the role of Antigone in the Oedipus of myth as well as with the re-inscription of indigeneity that is integral to black consciousness philosophy, the name Vehi-Ciosane can be read as signifying the future-to-come in the wake of a transgressive intervention that reorders the terrain on which subjectivity becomes expressive. To this extent, naming the child "White-Genesis" in the midst of an echo of a foundational myth for the genesis of the European concept of Man, recalls the primary repression that produces whiteness as man *even in the moment of unraveling that trajectory*. In making this argument it is necessary to recall the intervention made by Césaire in his lecture on "Culture and Colonialism", namely, that it is colonialism that brings about *stasis* in society: although the patriarchy and divine order are not simply due to colonialism, the negative aspects of these are entrenched through its action. As such, when Ngone registers the injustice of these, through her husband's act of incest, as a tear in her body that begins to unravel her fixity in relation to these discourses, it can be read as an unraveling of the mechanism through which colonialism fixes the black body in place—the making non-I of the black-I as an external existence through the mechanism blackness/whiteness. Recalling this mechanism in the moment of its weakening, the

naming could also be read through the title of Serote's novel: *To Every Birth Its Blood*.

This potential birth carries with it its blood in terms of that which orders its necessity and its arrival. It is in relation to this novel that a counterpoint to this refusal of forgetting in the moment of the potentiality of the new is articulated—an articulation that invokes the diagnosis of the problem offered by Steve Biko that forms part of the epigraph.

Shortly after the conclusion of a political trial in the second part of *To Every Birth Its Blood*, a conversation takes place between David Horowitz and his wife Susan as they drive home two of the central characters of this second part, Dikeledi and her sister Mpho. One of the main accused in the trial was Dikeledi's father who, in his final argument before sentencing, contended that the only future for South Africa is one of violent struggle because the State had made any other form of resistance impossible (187). It is in this context that these two white characters engage in a conversation, which is a performance held in the gaze of Dikeledi, about apartheid and the resistance to it. As the narrative transitions from the trial to the journey home, the weight of silence comes to bear on the characters in the car as something uncomfortable and "terrible". This is juxtaposed with the terrain through which the car moves which is characterized as "very quiet, very peaceful", and that was marked by a red sky "like spilled blood" (an image that evokes Césaire's "ardent sky" in the *Notebook*) that appears as "beautiful" in Dikeledi's thought (188). In this frame David breaks the silence and offers Dikeledi a lift to her house, an offer that is replied to with reference to the South African pass laws:

'If you don't have the permit, I don't think you should come in, for yourselves and for our sake', Dikeledi said strongly.

'I do have a permit, but Susan does not have one,' David said.

‘Oh fuck it, I don’t care, I really don’t,’ Susan said with all her strength.
(188)

Apart from showing the restrictions on movement that are placed on both white and non-white through apartheid legislation, it is in Susan’s response to Dikeledi that the kernel of the difficulty with ‘white liberals’ is registered. Despite the context, in which Dikeledi’s father has been sentenced to 15 years in prison, for Susan the question of a permit has to do with her sense of her own position before the law. Susan is not capable of registering the concern from Dikeledi’s side that Susan’s transgression would weigh on Dikeledi—there is no sense from Susan of what I have been calling (following Fanon) the lived experience of the black man. This is compounded through the conversation that ensues in response to David’s incredulity before the realization that there is no option but violence:

‘What’s that?’ Susan asked, still angry.

‘Did you not hear Mr Ramono [Dikeledi’s father] say that?’

‘I don’t want any part of this madness, no, I don’t, I don’t want to be white, I don’t want it, oh my god, I don’t want it ...’ Susan began to sob.

(188)

[...]

Dikeledi and Mpho were silent in the back seat. (189)

[...]

David and Susan kept exchanging notes about the speech, about the meaning of the sentences, about how there was no way South Africa could be changed. Although they did not address Dikeledi directly, in a sense they did. They were trying to tell her that they did not in any way feel that they were associated with the regime. (189)

[...]

‘Oh God, Dave, I don’t know, I really don’t, I think we have to get out of here, as soon as we can. I said that straight after the Soweto days. You keep postponing! I think we have to go.’ (190)

[...]

He wanted to go home now, straight home, to rest, to be with Sue, to be with his children, to go far away from this, mad, cruel, sad world. As he thought all this, he also realized there was no way of running away. They could never run away from it.

‘Dikeledi, do many people know about the trial in Alexandra?’

It was a tough question. Dikeledi thought it a tough question: not because it had no answer. If she said yes it would have been an understatement.

Most people knew and followed the case. It was a tough question because somehow she knew that deep inside him, David wished she would say no.

It was a question which had reared its head many times, in many different ways. It was a question of Freedom. (190)

This discussion over the future trajectory of the struggle in South Africa, and more pointedly of its perception by those designated as white, takes place in front of Dikeledi and Mpho without any active engagement with their point of view: they are in fact spatially and politically removed in this instance to “the backseat”. They do not direct, they are patients in the discourse. This “madness”, as Susan phrases it, does not in any straightforward sense refer to apartheid as a system, but is rather articulated as a response to the violent trajectory that the reified subjects produced by apartheid now appear to have embarked on. To state this differently, for Susan the problem isn’t her whiteness due to the manner in which it is produced through the objectification of blackness, rather, for her the problem is that whiteness appears to produce her as a target.

The desire for escape that is articulated by Susan is, in truth, a desire to abdicate responsibility where that responsibility renders the self as liable for the violent expression of the apartheid regime and the struggle against it. Notably, she does not want to leave, at least not in any direct sense, due to the ethico-political problem of apartheid. Rather, Susan wants to “get out” because of the increasing risk of violence that inheres in staying. The underlying notion that structures Susan’s thoughts, namely that as long as the violence is ‘out there’ it is not an issue, similarly structures David’s thinking on the situation. For him, the “mad, cruel, sad world” is one that is external to his primary existence: retreating into his home, into his family, leaves this world ‘out there’, effectively, where the black people are. While his realization that it is not possible to escape could be read affirmatively as an understanding of his structural position in the problem, his question to Dikeledi brings his realization into line with Susan’s fear of the impending violence that will be directed at those designated as white.

David’s question is one of magnitude. At its core, and this is what Dikeledi registers, the question seeks to calculate the probabilities of the violence of the struggle coming to bear on his family, on *his* lived experience. This sense of a white lived experience is critical, especially when I turn through Sanders’ notion of complicity a little later: here, it is *only* the lived experience of the white man that can escape to family, to leisure, to life external to (at least able to be imagined as external) the objectification of existence that marks those produced as black. Through his question David seeks to grasp the tone of the struggle so as to calculate the probabilities of channeling it, directing it away from a threat to his bodily integrity (in the Fanonian sense: a mind–body schema

that works). In her thoughts that occur in the midst of and after the sections quoted above, Dikeledi poses two problems that direct the reading of David's question as I have offered it above. Firstly, it is while she is produced as a patient in the conversation, without agency and reduced to silence—a condition that she describes as seeming “to not know anything” (189)—that Dikeledi first poses the problem of South Africa in terms of “systems” and the adequacy of what comes after that I discussed in chapter one. Very briefly, the system Dikeledi names in this moment is not only the apartheid regime and its repressive apparatuses, but rather the mode through which she is produced as silent in this conversation: it goes to the very structure of blackness/whiteness. As such, the inadvertent complicity expressed by David and Susan in the moment of their denial of complicity is what marks them as liberal: the liberal affirms the metaphysics (to use Fanon's phrase) of blackness/whiteness in the moment of their overt posturing against ‘the system’ *as whites*.⁹ Secondly, she notes the irony of her friendship with David considering that she “was coming out of the Black Consciousness days” and the manner in which white liberals had called for these “Black Consciousness boys” (the term “boy” is explicitly derogatory in the South African context) who were understood as “blacks being racist” to be “stopped” (*To Every Birth Its Blood*, 191). This is the question of Freedom that has been repeatedly asked: it is a mode of measuring the struggle in relation

⁹ In Fanon's argument, those who resist ‘the system’ as blacks would be similarly complicit. In the South African context the mechanism of blackness/whiteness is more overt, being expressed as non-white/white. As such, and this is the intervention of someone like Steve Biko (who I read below), those who take the position of “black” in South Africa are refusing the mechanism of non-white/white, what Fanon calls the metaphysics of blackness and whiteness.

to the condition of white liberalism with the underlying implication that to be a Man, to be free, you need to be liberal, male, and white.¹⁰

In contrast to the openness toward the future that characterizes the becoming stranger of subjectivity in *White-Genesis*—an openness that is ordered by recalling the weight of that which it unsettles in the moment of unsettling it—the articulation of a certain solidarity with what is understood as a black cause (otherwise how would retreating to one’s white home, or even leaving the country, help?) misses the actual problem that needs to be resolved. As the quote from Biko included in the epigraph phrases it: “the problem is WHITE RACISM and it rests squarely on the laps of white society”. As will become clear in what follows, this diagnosis is not reducible to a question of guilt or to a politics of blame. Rather, I argue that the philosophy of black consciousness works as a wrench lodged in the mechanism of blackness/whiteness so as to produce a point where calculability stops: a singularity disclosing the gift of a more human face.¹¹

The philosophy of black consciousness

So as to adequately set out the intervention made by black consciousness philosophy into the problem of white liberalism and the question of what might come *after* apartheid, I

¹⁰ I discuss the role of gender in black consciousness philosophy below. However, it should be noted that male/female operate as a similar mechanism to blackness/whiteness to the extent that both systems work to constitute the designation of Man.

¹¹ My reading of the gift, in this instance, joins it to the Benjaminian understanding of redemption where it has to do with “seizing hold” (255) of a “chip of messianic time” so as to “make the continuum of history explode” (263): an event that brings about a “messianic cessation of happening” (263), an abridgement in which the injunction of progress is sliced through an encounter with the materiality of the irresolvable weight of the past, a weight registered in the bodies of those destroyed. Cf. Walter Benjamin, [1940]. “Theses on the Philosophy of History”. In: Arendt, H. Ed. 1968. *Illuminations*. Translated from the German by H. Zohn. New York: Schocken Books.

will briefly sketch a sense of how Black Consciousness is read in the South African present before offering a reading of its intervention as it shapes and is shaped by the broader text of black consciousness that I have read in this dissertation.

In his major contribution to the shape of post-apartheid thought in South Africa, *Complicities: the Intellectual and Apartheid*, Mark Sanders offers a notion that I would characterize as a curious sense of redemption through complicity.¹² In making this argument, Sanders distinguishes between two notions of complicity in a move that clearly echoes and yet departs from Lyotard's and Fanon's reading of the condition of what is called humanity. On the one hand Sanders specifies a primary complicity that has to do with guaranteeing a "folded-togetherness" that is somehow always already "human" in its articulation and, on the other hand, he suggests a secondary, narrow complicity that always runs the risk of threatening this originary human folded togetherness (C 8). This emphasising of folded togetherness certainly carries a resonance with the notion of a community of the touch as expressed by Jeremy Cronin or with a sense of the pre-individual as it is implied in Lyotard. However, through specifying it as always already human by arguing that "sociality is this foldedness" (C 22) where the social is constructed out of distinct individuals (C 21) that are understood as being either black or white (C 166 and 204 – 205), Sanders withdraws from the productivity of that resonance. In other words, in Sanders' argument the original folded-togetherness is, effectively, what Fanon derides as a "fusional-multiplicity". While this slippage does constitute a limit to Sanders' intervention (these individuals ultimately constitute communities that in turn

¹² Mark Sanders, *Complicities: the Intellectual and Apartheid*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2002, hereafter C.

constitute greater communities: an ever increasing folding of individuals understood as persons), his argument is useful to the extent that he reads both apartheid and Black Consciousness as rooted in a form of liberalism (C 169).

With regard to apartheid, Sanders reads figures such as N.P. van Wyk Louw and Alfred Hoernlé to disclose the extent to which it was considered to be an intellectual and “ethically just” response to the difficulties of racial tension that had emerged in Europe in the first half of the twentieth century (C 58). This is not to argue that Sanders suggests apartheid was not an expression of racism; he in fact states categorically that particularly Louw’s form of argument had a “deeper form of evil at work with the racism that it entrenches” (C, 91).¹³ Sanders, however, is concerned to demonstrate how in its intellectual inception apartheid was framed as a form of justice toward the other in a particular community. This is an argument that clearly resonates, at least to a certain extent, with the reading of apartheid that I offered in the first chapter. According to Sanders, apartheid, understood as a liberal gesture that seeks to end domination, constitutes what Hoernlé describes as a form of humanism that is premised on the image of the Afrikaner (C 65, 69), and that seeks to bring that image into its “fullness” (C 71). This understanding of apartheid amounts to what Sanders terms a narrow complicity—it takes the conditions of possibility of the Afrikaner, a particular language and skin color, and projects this as the condition of possibility for all other subjects. This projection is,

¹³ The question of what constitutes evil in Sanders’ view is not discussed, although considering his stated Derridean influence it might be possible to read this as an instance of what Bennington calls, and Derrida affirms as, “radical evil” rather than as an invocation of a moralistic order. Along this line (a line that Sanders does not take up in any explicit form) the concept of complicity as it is developed by Sanders could become synonymous with Derridean “radical evil”, bringing a Kierkegaardian “trembling” in its wake. Cf. Geoffrey Bennington, *Interrupting Derrida*, New York: Routledge, 2000, especially the chapter on ethics, as well as Bennington’s lecture “For the sake of argument”, pp34 – 56. In: *Arguing with Derrida*. Edited by S. Glendinning. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001.

ultimately, what Sanders understands by apartheid as an “exemplary” instance of “complicity” in which “to be an Afrikaner [...] meant apartheid” (C 201). In other words, there is no Afrikaner without a Xhosa, a Zulu, or, to phrase this differently, an understanding of the other as a radically unified entity that is different (this is precisely the difficulty that Durrant’s reading of Coetzee, discussed in chapter one, runs into). This is to say that complicity, in the case of apartheid, has to do with a particular form of indigeneity that is taken (and given) as being in common.

Given this understanding of apartheid, Sanders argues that at one level, as a form of resistance to apartheid that was understood as expressing itself through the language of separate development (Sanders cites Mpahlehle as a definitive voice for such a reading, C 94), Black Consciousness was clearly complicit in the understanding of subjectivity produced through the image of the Afrikaner. As I framed the question in my first chapter, however, I contend that the function of community is more nuanced than this: the image of the Afrikaner and its Others emerges concomitantly in the differential function of community. Without explicitly rejecting Mpahlehle’s reading of Black Consciousness, Sanders argues that its goal was a broad complicity whereby the narrow sense of apartheid national groups would be replaced by a broader notion of “hospitality” and “uBuntu” (C 125 – 127, as my discussion of black consciousness will make clear, this reading is, ironically, far too narrow). Complicity, for Sanders, is logically unavoidable (a person can only engage with an other if certain terms are held in common) and, subsequently, what matters is the goal of complicity.

For Sanders, then, the question of consciousness in Black Consciousness has to do with understanding the conditions whereby the black or white individual (the categories of black, white, and individual, are self-evident for Sanders, a position that he shares with Durrant) collaborates “materially and psychically, in their own misuse” (C 158). It is critical that both black and white are seen to participate in their own misuse, for Sanders, as individuals that are *always already* black or white. As such, Black Consciousness emphasizes the complicity of the oppressed in a move that Sanders suggests is derived from Fanon’s reading of “the intellectual and complicity” (C 179), so as to enable the articulation of a broader complicity of “human folded-togetherness” (C 8). It is in this light that the strategic shift from ethnic or national identities to a broader black identity is read by Sanders. At this point of participating in their own misuse, Sanders turns to the question of white liberals and their relation to the arguments of Black Consciousness. While he suggests that the logic of Black Consciousness and particularly of Fanon’s influence on it—namely the sense that “to be black in the world is to be alienated” (C 190 – 191)—implies that there must be a sense of being white in the world, Sanders does not consider Fanon’s diagnosis that this form of “being” has to do with a desperate attempt to become Man. In addition, as the decided lack of a sense of the body in Sanders’ discussion of the death of Biko makes plain (C 160), this understanding of being black is utterly devoid of any sense of tactility.¹⁴ This limited reading of “being black”, and by

¹⁴ Sanders does read what he suggests are Derridean traces that come to constitute Biko’s body as a body of evidence (160 – 161) in a somewhat productive attempt to abide by the absence of the last few days of Biko’s life. However, what he focuses on is how “conscious, unconscious, and consciousness” come to mark Biko’s body as it is read after his death—the mode through which this ex-scription mirrors the production (its absence is, I would suggest, a form of blackness) of the lived experience of the black man is not articulated, and, as such, despite naming the body its absence is maintained as such.

implication in Sanders' argument of being white, is critical as its sense of alienation is clearly reducible to the alienation produced, loosely, through capital. In other words, Sanders argues that through figures such as Rick Turner (who I will briefly discuss below), white liberals adopted the injunction of Black Consciousness by turning to an understanding of apartheid defined by a question of class (C 173, 190 – 201).¹⁵

In the logic of Sanders' argument, the turn toward a critique of racial capital on behalf of white liberals in South Africa constitutes an attempt to dislodge whites from a narrow complicity dependant on race to a broader complicity in which all humans are already in "folded-togetherness". As a mode through which a 'lived experience' of alienation comes to be confronted, this move deals with the problem of 'being white' taken as akin to 'being black' in the world. However, to the extent that such a "radical turn" does not confront the question of the production of whiteness, I would argue that it is complicit with the structure that produces the black man as an object and the white man as Man—a structure that extends into the very intellectual discourses (i.e. the humanities) that Sanders relies on for his argument, and places the white liberal in the front seat of David's car, as it were. In short, as Xolela Mangcu argues, the "gaping wound in our body politic" that was formed through the death in detention of Steve Biko, "continues

¹⁵ Nigel C. Gibson, "Black Consciousness 1977-1987: The Dialectics of Liberation in South Africa". *Africa Today*, Vol. 35, No. 1, Black Consciousness in South Africa, 1st Quarter, 1988, argues along similar lines with regard to liberals and a shift to the question of class. A key figure for Gibson in this shift is Neville Alexander and the notion of "racial capital". The shortfall with such a reading, however, according to Gibson is that it entrenches a tendency to read Black Consciousness as "only a stage" (13). In other words, Black Consciousness after 1977 comes to be read as a "fairly straightforward philosophy of solidarity" that is reduced to the level of a footnote in the history of the struggle, Cf. Nigel C. Gibson, *Fanonian Practices in South Africa: From Steve Biko to Abahlali baseMjondolo*. University of KwaZulu-Natal Press and Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p 58 and 70. Steve Biko, in an interview with Gail M. Gerhart, similarly argued that this move has to do with a desire to "detach us from anything relating to race" as it is feared that this "threatens" whites, it makes them targets. Cf. Gail M. Gerhart, "Interview with Steve Biko". In: Mngxitama, A., Alexander, A. and Gibson, N.C. (eds), *Biko Lives! Contesting the Legacies of Steve Biko*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, 34.

[in the present through] the failure of white South Africans to own up to their collusion” (*Biko* 264).¹⁶ Of course, Sanders is correct that a certain degree of complicity is impossible to avoid. However, I would suggest that the mode through which he offers this complicity to the liberal redeems too quickly the immediate interaction, through obscuring the structural problem that the philosophy of black consciousness sought to unsettle.

While Sanders’ intervention can be read as offering complicity as a conceptual terrain for a re-inscription of subjectivity in post-apartheid South Africa, lodged in a similar position to that which the Freedom Charter is meant to hold—where his reading of Black Consciousness functions as an alibi to this argument—the intervention produced by Xolela Mangcu attempts to position the figure of Steve Biko as such a quilting point in itself.¹⁷ To make this argument, Mangcu spends a considerable amount of space reading Biko—by analogy and association—into the general history of the dispossession of the Khoi and the Xhosa by, particularly, the British colonialists. His argument is that it is in missionary and prophetic figures such as Tiyo Soga that it is possible to locate a mode of resistance that gives a cultural depth to the interventions offered by Biko (*Biko* 66 – 67).¹⁸ Mangcu’s point is not so much that Biko is the inheritor of a form of resistance that has

¹⁶ Xolela Mangcu, *Biko: A Biography*. Pietermaritzburg: Tafelberg, 2012. The persistence of this wound is what Nigel C. Gibson describes in his *Fanonian Practices* as the “problem of unfinished liberation” (42).

¹⁷ This is not to argue that all readings of Black Consciousness attempt to effect such a displacement with regard to the Freedom Charter. Gibson, for example, argues that it is the Freedom Charter that constitutes the ethical notion meant to shape the post-apartheid. Cf. Gibson, *Fanonian Practices*, 190 – 191.

¹⁸ Tiyo Soga was one of the first black Africans to be ordained in South Africa. He studied theology in Scotland for a few years before returning to South Africa to translate the bible and to do the work of a missionary. Cf. Bhekisizwe Peterson, *Monarch, Missionaries, and African Intellectuals: African Theatre and the Unmaking of African Marginality*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2001, for a discussion of the role of Soga in relation to other African intellectuals. Peterson proposes a very similar argument to that of Mangcu, the question has to do with the formation of a pan-African nationalism which, he argues, was to be constructed along the lines of the values of Western Humanism (120, 177, 223).

been, always already, a highly sophisticated philosophical intervention, but rather that certain strategies, such as the formation of a general anti-colonial solidarity (*Biko* 43), were common modes of resistance that Biko reworked in an attempt to “reframe European modernity into a progressive African modernity” (*Biko* 12), as opposed to a frustrating contradiction (*Biko* 37).¹⁹ Although at pains to highlight the manner in which Biko can be understood as a point of articulation for more ‘traditional’ and more modern understandings of resistance to colonial and apartheid rule, it is with regard to his argument that the primary concern of Black Consciousness has to do with the terrain of emergence (to borrow a phrase from Césaire who is strikingly not mentioned in Mangcu’s—or almost anyone’s—reading of Black Consciousness) for subjectivities, both black and white that his intervention is most persuasive (*Biko* 241).

Arguing that for Biko “nothing is pure” (*Biko* 280), Mangcu suggests that the function of the Black People’s Convention (BPC) and the general emphasis on the question of culture had to do with a strategic need to create the conditions for the emergence of a new consciousness (*Biko* 274 – 280). The issue here was not to be simply derivative, to be considered a spin-off from the European project of Man. Rather, in an existentialist echo of Fanon (who was echoing Sartre), the BPC was meant to mark a

¹⁹ In formulating his argument, however, Mangcu treats history (and he uncritically incorporates biography as a form of history as storytelling) as a repository of facts, displacing questions of its role in the formation of the mechanism of blackness/whiteness, a role that both Fanon (obliteration of history) and Césaire (cultural stasis) critique. As such, while Mangcu clearly attempts a displacement with regard to the terrain for subjectivity in post-apartheid South Africa, his narration of an uncritical history runs the risk of being reduced to a straightforward historicism (in this instance, perhaps, a narrow complicity of the order which Sanders critiques). Apart from the broad critique of history internationally, in South Africa the role of history in foreclosing questions of gender and postcoloniality in relation to the events he narrates has been critiqued by figures such as Premesh Lalu in his *The Deaths of Hintsa: Postapartheid South Africa and the Shape of Recurring Pasts*. HSRC Press, 2009 and Helen Bradford in her “Women, Gender, and Colonialism: Rethinking the History of the British Cape Colony and its Frontier Zones, c. 1806 – 70”, *Journal of African History*, Vol. 37, 1996, pp 351 – 370.

“self-independence” from “history” (*Biko* 234); stated differently, it was to enable a statement that “I am my own foundation” (*Black Skins, White Masks*, 205). These movements were not attempts at re-discovering an original sense of black culture, as Mangcu argues the ANC and other critics of Black Consciousness contended (*Biko* 290), but were rather attempts at accumulating peculiar styles (in a turn of phrase that recalls Merleau-Ponty’s concept of “the chiasm”, discussed in relation to Cronin in chapter one) that were capable of ordering the emergence of alternate expressions of subjectivity.²⁰ It is in this capacity that Mangcu characterizes Biko as a “midwife of a much more cultural nationalist stage of our revolution” (*Biko* 278). Despite the affirmation of Biko’s sense for the new—as Mangcu phrases it “those who make claims to pure blackness have no understanding of what Steve Biko stood for” (*Biko* 280)—Mangcu nonetheless argues that the ultimate goal (apparently following Fanon) was to achieve an “actional racial moral identity” (*Biko* 284).²¹

This slippage is, to a certain extent, mirrored in the discourse of Black Consciousness on the level of what Daniel Magaziner argues is a transition from what he

²⁰ As Andries Oliphant’s essay on the understanding of “African culture” as it ordered the idea of a “more human face” makes clear, a romanticized and uncritical sense of the African past and its cultural values that were argued to be, without any sense of irony, exactly antithetical to a certain European capitalist individualism were also available inside the movement of Black Consciousness. Cf. Andries Oliphant, “A Human Face: Biko’s Conceptions of African Culture and Humanism”, pp 213 – 232. In: Mngxitama, A., Alexander, A. and Gibson, N.C. (eds), *Biko Lives! Contesting the Legacies of Steve Biko*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

²¹ This slippage between reading Black Consciousness as an intervention that unsettles recourse to valorized racial and ethnic identities, and the articulation of a programme premised on precisely such an identity is actually quite common place. In the terms of my argument, I suggest that the slippage has to do with the difficulty of thinking ‘that which comes after’, in other words, it has to do with the difficulty of thinking the status of the term “black” in the philosophy of black consciousness. For examples of this slippage see the *Steve Biko Memorial Lectures 2000 – 2008*, which tend to offer theoretically astute readings of Black Consciousness only to stumble on this question of identity. See especially Njabulo S Ndebele’s “*Iph’ Indlela? Finding our Way into the Future*” (16); Zakes Mda’s “Biko’s Children” (24); and Thabo Mbeki’s “30th Commemoration of Steve Biko’s Death” (104). Trevor Manuel’s lecture that offers a definition of freedom as “conscientisation” (128) appears to avoid this pitfall.

calls “conscientisation” to the articulation of “doctrine”; in other words, a shift from black consciousness as a philosophy to an “orthodoxy” of Black Consciousness (*The Law and the Prophets*, 131 – 133).²² Although Magaziner sketches a very similar historical terrain for the emergence of Black Consciousness to that laid out by Mangcu, his intervention is not particularly concerned with shifting the terrain for an expression of politics in the present. Rather, for Magaziner the major concern in writing a history of the Black Consciousness Movement is “additive”, in the sense that he argues the theological and spiritual foundations of the movement have largely been elided (*LP* 5). It is in addressing this apparent problem that Magaziner sets out to trace the influence of, particularly, Black Theology on the shifting expression of Black Consciousness, from its moment of inception in 1968 up to the death of Biko in 1977. While Magaziner argues that a central tenet of black consciousness is the argument that blacks are produced as “non-men” through the action of apartheid, his reading of the movement gives no sense of a critical understanding of the condition of whiteness (*LP* 32). As such, in discussing the split between the South African Students Organisation (SASO), the formation of which was the first official move to a black consciousness platform for struggle, and the liberal National Union of South African Students (NUSAS), Magaziner suggests that at the root of this divergence was a “difference of perspectives” (*LP* 28). While this is no doubt correct, it misses how this divergence was calculated as an act that could lead to the “conscientising” of those understood as whites, called for by Biko in his “Black souls in white skins”. As will be seen, conscientisation in this instance is not about

²² Daniel R. Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets: Black Consciousness in South Africa, 1968 – 1977*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010, hereafter *LP*. Throughout his book Magaziner deploys the lower case for the philosophy and the upper case for the orthodox expressions of Black Consciousness.

understanding the self as either black or white, but rather has to do with disclosing the mechanism through which such identities become available.

This oversight stems from the root of the distinction between black consciousness as a philosophy and it as orthodoxy. What is striking in Magaziner's analysis of the shift from the former to the latter is the relatively stable frame that encapsulates both expressions. Apart from the understanding of the black as a non-Man, Magaziner argues that both expressions held that the "terrain of struggle was the mind" and that its purpose was "the gift of a more human face", understood as an ethical intervention that extended beyond political liberation (*LP* 38, 188). However, whereas philosophically the emphasis was laid on the problem of conscientisation, on breaking the bonds of mental slavery (*LP* 131), in its orthodoxy Black Consciousness was about "identities" that were derived from an "Africanisation of religion" (*LP* 79, 82), which posited "faith" as the path to liberation (*LP* 93). Religion in this instance is monotheistic and hinges on a sense of universalism that comes to be expressive of an identity assumed to be African. Magaziner suggests that the Black Peoples Convention (BPC) was instrumental in articulating this shift, as its interventions at the level of the aesthetic "paced the progression from dialogic conscientisation to didactic politicization" (*LP*, 138). In other words, Magaziner marks the shift in terms of a movement from 'making aware through dialogue' to 'making political through teaching', where the latter is assumed as the role of the aesthetic.

It is from within this perspective (to use Magaziner's term) that Magaziner suggests Biko's critique of liberals, his refusal of the system, was a dogmatic call for "Africanism" (*LP* 142 – 147). Read as dogmatism rather than a strategic intervention

designed to dislodge the production of Man through the mechanism of blackness/whiteness, Black Consciousness increasingly became, according to Magaziner, a question of “laying down of life”, of “sacrifice” in the biblical sense (*LP* 165), which aimed at overthrowing a legal rather than a mental oppression. While this expression of Black Consciousness is credited by Magaziner as having replaced “fear” with “hope” and “faith”, a replacement that he argues constitutes the “legacy of Black Consciousness” (*LP* 172), it is also the move that has resulted, he contends, in the increasing popularization of Biko as a form of “commodification [that] marks a particular sort of revolution” (*LP* 187). For Magaziner this represents an ability in the South African present to celebrate blackness, though Mngxitama, Alexander and Gibson argue that what this represents is a reduction “to slogans on T-shirts weaned of all radical content as a philosophy of black liberation” where “images of Biko have come to adorn glossy magazines and fashion houses” (*Biko Lives* 18).

Central to the differing perspectives on this notion of a present expression of Black Consciousness is an understanding of the philosophical shift that the movement attempted to construct. The debate surrounding the problem of gender in Black Consciousness—a problem that has also repeatedly haunted both Césaire and Fanon’s interventions—is typical of the distinction that I lodge here. Almost every commentary on Black Consciousness mentions the difficulty of gender, by which is meant that Black Consciousness focused on “we Black Men” and seemed not to be concerned with questions of gender equality and freedom. Xolela Mangcu, in his biography of Biko, takes a candid look at Biko’s reputation as a “heavy drinker and womanizer” (*Biko* 207),

arguing that it was considered as politically damaging as well as ethically unscrupulous by the religious and Africanist elements associated with Black Consciousness (his examples of critics are Robert Sobukwe and Barney Pityana) (*Biko* 204 – 212).

Through reading Biko's response to his detractors, Mangcu argues that this lifestyle was, in part, due to the loneliness and isolation experienced by key members of the movement during the times in which they were "banned".²³ This argument, of course, does not deal with the conceptual place of gender in the discourse of Black Consciousness. Kopano Ratele, in "The end of the Black Man," argues that the "silence" in Black Consciousness on the question of gender was "not necessary". It is not enough to explain the silence away through recourse to the argument of "time" or "political mobilization" (60), as there are examples of gendered resistance to apartheid. Rather, he suggests that "Black Man" was a category produced through apartheid and, subsequently, turned against apartheid by figures like Steve Biko (62). Despite noting the structural production of identities, Ratele argues that "there are no black men before white society, the discourse of whiteness, and the rule of white people" (63), before what he calls "whiteness as regime" (61). It is this regime that, according to Ratele, produces the Black Man as the opposite of the White Man. As such an opposite, the Black Man emerges as emasculated and un-propertied: a scenario that explains, according to Ratele, the hyper-masculine articulations of Black Consciousness (62).

²³ Under the Suppression of Communism Act, no. 44 of 1950, a person could be named as a communist (the definition of which had nothing to do with communism but, rather, had to do with the promotion of racial tension and social disturbance so as to bring about social, political, or economic change) and restricted. This restriction was commonly referred to as "banning" as the person would be confined to their Magisterial District, prohibited from publication and public speaking, and limited to conversations and interactions among a maximum of two to three persons (including the banned person) apart from immediate family.

Ratele's argument is echoed by Magaziner when he argues that Black Consciousness produced women as "witnesses" and "mothers" in a subordinate role to the men of the Black Consciousness movement: a condition most acutely manifested in the assertion that the suffering of Black Men was allowed to be public while Black Women had to suffer in private (*LP* 166 – 167). Both of these arguments are necessary and carry weight into the post-apartheid present. However, what they miss is black consciousness as a philosophical intervention. In Ratele's reading, despite the potentialities he marks that would work against this, the category of white is produced as primary, as existing *prior to blackness*. If Ratele's intervention were to be brought into relation with Fanon's argument that both blackness and whiteness are produced as a mechanism in the production of, or at least in the claim to, European Man (recall Fanon's argument that the white man "is desperately trying to attain the rank of Man"), the question of masculinity would, I think, be reframed as deriving from that concept of Man. This does not remove the question of gender; rather, it asks that it be read as a problem constitutive of Man as such.

M.J. Oshadi Mangena, in her essay "The Black Consciousness Philosophy and the Woman's Question in South Africa: 1970 – 1980", argues against a gender-critical reading of black consciousness. From an empirical point of view, Mangena suggests that while the movement did not consider gender to be "an organizing principle", in other words, a basis through which conscientisation could occur, it was nonetheless "tacitly endorsed" (255), resulting in a scenario where the BPC was the first resistance movement

in South Africa to elect a female president, namely Motlalepala Kgware in 1973 (260).²⁴

More critical than this empirical evidence of an endorsement of gender equality, for Mangena, is the conceptual understanding of gender and its relation to subjectivation. Rather than focusing on anatomy, Mangena argues that gender must be understood as a social structure that produces those marked as female in a position of subordination to those marked as male (255). This is a condition that Mangena associates with the broader mechanism that black consciousness as a philosophy sought to dislodge. Recalling that the term “non-white” signified in black consciousness discourse someone still “mentally enslaved by the ideology and values of the oppressor” (257, such non-whites were excluded from the BCM), Mangena argues that “authentic liberation of women cannot be attained without the contemporaneous liberation of men” (256). What is at stake here is the notion that both male and female are produced as markers at the same time and by the same mechanism, namely, the European project of Man (the implication is that there can similarly be no liberation of the black man without a simultaneous liberation of the white man).

It is to this extent that the question of gender is akin to the problem of the commodification of figures such as Steve Biko and the attendant desire to read this as a form of revolution: it misses the centrality of the un-named future-to-come that framed

²⁴ It should be noted, by way of comparison, that the ANC has never had a female President, Deputy-President, or Secretary General. Despite having a form of Women’s Wing since the 1930s, the ANC Women’s League was officially formed in 1948 (5 years after women could become members of the organization), and the first woman was allowed onto the National Executive Committee in 1956. This reality is compounded by the fact that, although South Africa has twice had a female vice-president, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka (who replaced Jacob Zuma after his dismissal by Thabo Mbeki) and Baleka Mbete (who replaced Mlambo-Ngcuka after Mbeki’s dismissal by Zuma after he was elected president of the ANC), in neither case did they become vice-president of the ANC (it is usually the vice-president of the party who becomes the vice-president of the country).

the intervention of black consciousness philosophy. Rather than effectively commodifying women through a mechanism of inclusion that would name them as that which would need to be brought into the male system, Mangena argues that the black consciousness movement “recognized women as equal participants but not on the basis of gender” (259).²⁵ The distinction here is precisely that made by Steve Biko in his essay on “black souls in white skins”, where he argues that the future that the white liberal works toward is the incorporation of the black man into white society (“Black souls in white skins”, 23). In short, the repeated indictment that Black Consciousness was oblivious to the women’s struggle, an indictment that asks for the inclusion of women as such, carries an eerie echo of the function of the conversation between David Horowitz and his wife Susan while driving Dikeledi and her sister home: that conversation, which took place in front of Dikeledi, silencing her, was meant to be performative of their liberalism, it served to demonstrate that David and Susan did not consider themselves to be part of the repressive regime while, effectively, abdicating responsibility in relation to it.

While Mangena’s argument is both useful with regard to setting out the conceptual intervention that black consciousness philosophy attempts to make, and, I think, is a reasonably effective defense of black consciousness from a gender-critique that

²⁵ Mangena’s argument can be read as a counterpoint, in agreement, with the critique of the critical overview of the place of race and class in the suffragist movement in the United States of America offered by Angela Y. Davis. Davis outlines how “for the suffragists and clubwomen alike, Black women were simply expendable entities when it came time to woo Southern support with a white complexion” (148), in other words, white women embraced a position in which they were primarily defined by race to the detriment of a broad based women’s struggle. Cf. Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race and Class*, New York: Random House, 1983. Mangena argues that black consciousness, while insisting on the weightiness of the skin did not jettison the question of gender but rather attempted to regard those marked as female outside of the strictures of that marking. For an extensive overview of the suffragist and, more particularly, woman’s movement in Southern Africa that resonates with Mangena’s argument even as it subordinates both the question of race and gender to that of class (41), see M.J. Daymond, Dorothy Driver, Sheila Meintjes, Leloba Molema, Chiedza Musengezi, Margie Orford, and Nobantu Rasebotsa (eds), *Women Writing Africa: The Southern Region*, New York: The Feminist Press, 2003.

is still lodged within the European project of Man, I would argue that it is inadequate to its task at one critical level. A central element—and I return to this in my reading of Biko below—in the philosophy of black consciousness is what I call “tactility”, or the lived experience of the black man. In other words, even in its conceptual argument, black consciousness is ordered by the weight of the body. While the argument at the conceptual level with regard to gender holds a measure of weight, it is entirely devoid of any sense of the lived experience of women, it is not ordered by the weightiness of the female body (in distinction from, for example, Sembène’s intervention in *White-Genesis*). As such, it is not easily equated with the intervention made by black consciousness philosophy, especially when it comes to the notion that it is the lived experience of the black man, the cut of the body that orders the clearing of ground for the possible arrival of a new expression of subjectivity.

It is clear that, as a political programme, Black Consciousness has been received in South Africa in the ambiguous condition of both unsettling and valorizing racial identities, while at the conceptual level it has been understood as a more theoretical unraveling of such subjective potentialities. However, in both these understandings what is missed is the double articulation located at the core of the intervention made by black consciousness philosophy. This double articulation draws strongly from both Césaire and Fanon in its invocation of indigeneity and tactility as it shapes the intervention of black consciousness philosophy in South Africa. As a philosophical intervention, I argue that black consciousness constructs the conditions for the emergence of a new expression of subjectivity through its definitions of blackness and of the future society, as well as the

demand it places “in the laps” of those designated as white. In order to flesh out this intervention I will briefly discuss these three nodes that constitute the weight of the double articulation of black consciousness philosophy by turning through the interventions made by Steve Biko and Rick Turner.²⁶

For Biko, the use of the term “black” to designate those who are liberated from the position of “non-white”, a position that is first and foremost understood as “mental”, comes as a response to what he calls the “two faced position of the black man to this whole question of existence in this country” (State v Cooper and 8 others, 4366).²⁷ It is critical that the question of “two-faced-ness” is first a question of position rather than attitude. Biko’s example is of a black man who is routinely referred to as a fool by his white boss. He suggests that this is more than “name calling” as what it reveals is a structural system in which the black man is produced as a non-white, in other words, as a

²⁶ Rick Turner was a political philosopher and a member of the New Left in South Africa. Initially from Cape Town, Turner studied philosophy at the University of Cape Town before moving to Paris to complete a PhD in philosophy on the work of Jean-Paul Sartre at the Sorbonne, he returned to South Africa in 1966. In 1970 Turner accepted a permanent position as a lecturer in political philosophy at the University of Natal. In addition to his academic work, Turner worked as an advisor to NUSAS and, in that capacity, had many interactions with the student leaders of the newly emergent SASO. Turner was assassinated by the apartheid security apparatuses in January 1978, less than four months after the death in detention of Steve Biko.

²⁷ This is the official title of what is generally referred to as the SASO/BPC Trial. Nine leaders of the South African Students Association and the Black People’s Convention were arrested under the Terrorism Act after organizing rallies in support of FRELIMO in September 1974. Steve Biko and Rick Turner (both of whom were banned under the same law) were called as witnesses for the defense during the course of the trial. For an overview of these rallies see Julian Brown, “An Experiment in Confrontation: The Pro-Frelimo Rallies of 1974”. *Journal of Southern African Studies*. Vol. 38, No. 1, 2012, pp 55 – 71. Brown argues that these rallies constitute the only “public acts” of SASO and the BPC and that they mark a radical shift in Black Consciousness philosophy toward militancy (57, 60). Precisely how a speech, pamphlet or testimony in a public court case do not constitute public acts is not explained by Brown—he appears content to categorize these as “intellectual” (57). Additionally, in an attempt to mark the significance of these rallies Brown argues that they mark the point at which SASO and BPC become relevant to the consciousness of the white press and government precisely due to the manner in which the rhetoric surrounding these events departs from the philosophical ground of Black Consciousness and seems to endorse the ANC and PAC shift to armed struggle (64). This statement both misses the fact that leaders of these organizations were already banned prior to these events and implies that the Black Consciousness movement only becomes relevant nationally when it ceases to be a Black Consciousness movement.

“black man who is man only in form” (“We Blacks” 30). The brutality of this structure is felt in the manner through which the black man is compelled to offer himself up to it. Biko narrates how, when asking this man why he allows his boss to speak to him as he does, the reply has to do with the necessity of earning a wage, of acquiring the means to live in this society. This is not, however, understood as a question of class, even if the majority of those designated as non-white during apartheid are largely confined to the working class (it is this that Turner will take issue with). Rather, this scenario, where poverty is equated with pigmentation (“White Racism and Black consciousness” 68), is to a certain extent incidental to the structure of blackness/whiteness that Biko is identifying. He suggests that this positioning inside the structure of society has to do with a self-negation whereby the black man places himself in a particular relation to the white man and adopts the position of being non-white in the world (State v Cooper and 8 others, 4367).

It is in the context of this explication of the production of the black-I as non-I through the mechanism of blackness/whiteness that one of the most famous exchanges from the trial is produced:

The court: Mr. Biko, why do you people then pick on the word black, I mean, black is really an innocent reference that has been arrived at over the years, the same as white [...] why do you people refer to yourselves as Blacks, why not Brown people, I mean you are more brown than black?

Biko: In the same way as that I think White people are more pink and yellow and pale than white [...] (State v Cooper, 4368)

Biko goes on to argue that “historically, we have been defined as Black people” and that despite having a whole range of terms available, such as “Natives”, “Africans”, “Kaffirs”,

“Bantu” or “non-White” it is through the term “black” that the process of objectification is set in motion (State v Cooper, 4368). What is at stake in this discussion over naming is not the discovery of a term most appropriate to appearance (which is what the judge assumes), rather, it is the mechanism that produces the ‘I’ as ‘non-I’ and therefore renders it as available to reification through the differential of community in apartheid as either “Bantu”, “Xhosa”, “Indian”, etc. – or perhaps even White. It is in this sense that Biko advances a double move whereby the term of objectification is re-inscribed as a mechanism of conscientisation and, simultaneously, the end goal of that objectification is resisted through embracing the most “accommodating” term: it weighs on everyone (State v Cooper, 4368).

As a term that comes to name and, subsequently, re-inscribe this mechanism, Biko argues that “being black is not a matter of pigmentation—being black is a reflection of a mental attitude” (“Definition of Black Consciousness” 52). In this definition Biko is distinguishing “being black” from being “non-white”, to the extent that a non-white is someone who is still lodged inside the “white-black stratification” of society (“Black Souls in White Skins” 26), in other words, “non-white” names someone whose “aspiration is whiteness but [whose] pigmentation makes attainment of this impossible” (“Definition of Black Consciousness” 52). In contrast to this, blackness has to do with “holding [one’s] head in defiance” and placing oneself on a “road towards emancipation” (52). Despite Biko’s invocation of the Hegelian dialectic as the model on which black consciousness should be understood, where South African society is characterized by a strong “white racism” and this necessitates a strong black antithesis, the purpose of this

process of conscientisation—a process that Biko argues involves interventions into what blackness signifies in culture, education, religion, and economics (57)—is not, however, purely instrumental. In an echo of Fanon’s critique of Sartre’s argument that black consciousness represents a weak stage in the dialectic that will produce a future society, Biko argues that it aims to produce “real black people who do not view themselves as appendages to white society” (55). When this is read alongside the position taken in the SASO Policy Manifesto of 1971 where it argues that “whites must be excluded” so that “a solid group” can “work out their direction clearly and bargain from a position of strength” (“SASO Policy Manifesto”, sec 3 and 5), it becomes clear that what is at stake in this separation is a redefinition of the terms *before* they re-encounter each other. To state this differently, the term ‘black’ comes to mark a political solidarity (of oppressed peoples) that enables the expression of an alternate concept of subjectivity (not reducible to these peoples) that will enable the emergence of an “open society” (sec 4) after an encounter (on a different footing) with that which is designated as white.

While the question of liberation and, consequently, of a future society, orders the intervention constituted by black consciousness philosophy, it is precisely as a philosophical intervention that it refuses any concrete outlines of what such a future society would look like. At its most superficial level the refusal to specify the outlines of this society-to-come is a response to the liberal project that hinges on integration as both “a means” and as an “end goal” (“Black Souls in White Skins” 21). As will be seen, this emphasis on integration mistakes a “lived experience” of dehumanization for a “problem to be solved” (24). While the broad thrust of this new society envisioned by black

consciousness philosophy is articulated in the notion of “one man one vote”, where there will be “free participation” in “social, economic, and political” terms (State v Cooper 4400 – 4401), its most specific articulation within black consciousness philosophy is found in the term “African Communalism”. The function of this term, however, is not prescriptive. Rather, there is what Biko calls a certain kind of “plasticity” to the concept that is derived from at least two sources (State v Cooper 4416). On the one hand, this plasticity can be attributed to the understanding that culture must be considered as being in perpetual development—not in a teleological sense but rather in the sense that it is an expression that resists stasis (State v Cooper 4421). As such, the concept of “African” that qualifies the relation of “communalism” is not readily accessible as an expression of autochthony. Rather, in an echo of the shift that Césaire articulates in the *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, it comes to mark a condition common to those that declare themselves as black: it names both the lived experience of the black man and the resistance to this that is ordered by black consciousness philosophy. On the other hand, apart from naming a certain relation premised on a form of being in common that is often likened to the concept of *uBuntu*, the designation of communalism principally comes to signify the understanding that the society-to-come will be constituted through a process of “bargaining” (State v Cooper 4418). This bargaining, understood as inevitable due to the realization that eventually the apartheid regime would relinquish power, would take place primarily between black and white (as these terms come to be defined by black consciousness philosophy) and, as such, the project of conscientisation is aimed at producing the strongest possible position in that encounter (State v Cooper 4429).

However, this emphasis on bargaining so as to achieve “the gift” of “giving the world a more human face” (“We Blacks” 51) means that the specifics of a future society cannot be named—it emerges in a moment of encounter.

It is at this level that the “intellectual friend” of both Biko and of black consciousness philosophy (State v Cooper 4817), namely Rick Turner, intervenes into the question of the society-to-come. Although Biko argues that Turner was “not a black consciousness thinker” as he was more preoccupied with class than he was with race, Turner was nonetheless called as a witness for the defense in the SASO/BPC Trial. At the trial Turner first set about critically engaging the entirety of the prosecution’s case against SASO/BPC, demonstrating almost line by line how the State had failed to exercise its reason in reading both political theory and the specific positions of the Black Consciousness Movement (Cf. vol 56 – 60 of State v Cooper).²⁸ In his capacity as a defense witness Turner largely repeats the understanding of the society-to-come as I have discussed it above. He argues that black consciousness envisages a certain kind of continuity in the sense of the basic principles of democracy that would be at work in the society-to-come, yet he also underscores Biko’s insistence that this society would be a “political community” without recognition of minority or majority as understood through race or ethnicity since such a recognition would assume the existence of such categories (State v Cooper 3062 and 4800). Turner did, however, consider the conceptual openness

²⁸ The force of this critique, along with the rigor of Biko’s interventions, led the Court to anxiously affirm in its final judgment that “in any event, it is the function of the court to construe the language used in the documents” (State v Cooper, B 237), an affirmation that sought to allay the fear that Biko and Turner had unsettled the Court’s common sense reading of key terms in the Trial (such as the interaction with Biko on the role of the term “black”). Their interventions were branded as too “emotionally involved” to be of any objective use, this despite the Court accepting Turner’s argument that SASO and BPC are not revolutionary movements.

of the society-to-come, a society ordered by a certain indigeneity and tactility, to be inadequate. As he argues in *The Eye of the Needle*: “being Black is not a political programme” and, more critically, an emphasis on being black works to “obscure” the problem of class (55).

Quite clearly for Turner, any sense of a society-to-come must rigorously define the primacy of “the clash of material interest” that is not simply reducible to the problem of “ignorance and irrationality” (*Eye* 26) as the problem of race prejudice apparently is. The sense of programme that Turner has in mind is, of course, the highly detailed analysis of a utopic South Africa characterized by “participatory democracy” that he outlines in *The Eye of the Needle* (28). This society, which would come replete with checks and balances so as to maintain “love as a consistent rather than fleeting relationship between people” (33 and 30), is understood by Turner as a legally framed structure into which individual subjects are placed. However, from the perspective of black consciousness philosophy, the very notion of the individual subject that underpins the European project of Man is up for contention in the moment of encounter. This is not to suggest that black consciousness philosophy argued for a dissolution of individuality—such a claim would be at odds with the call to bring about “true integration” through the encounter of “self-determined” “lifestyles” (“Black Souls in White Skins” 22)—but rather that the haecceity that produces a sense of the individual comes to be altered through the conscientisation that enables a person to call themselves black: a moment in which a new expression of subjectivity, the potentiality of *a life*, might become available.

This society-to-come emerges, as I have argued, in the moment of an encounter between blacks (a sense of subjectivity no longer simply dependent on white society) and whites. Although politically these blocks are held as homogenous entities, at the level of the subject it is clear that that which is understood as black includes subjects at various degrees of conscientisation. Similarly, a key question that is asked by black consciousness philosophy has to do with the quality of whiteness that is available for encounter. It is the instability of both these subjective categories that makes it very difficult to specify the form of what will emerge from that encounter: as with Cronin's articulation of a community of the touch, there is always a risk of slipping into precisely that from which an attempt has been made to emerge. This is not to suggest that liberation is made contingent on the question of whiteness: as the "SASO Policy Manifesto" states, "a truly open society can only be achieved by Blacks" (sec 4). I suggest this declaration of SASO should be read as an echo of Fanon's declaration that if the white man continues in the mechanism of blackness/whiteness that he would "show him by weighing down on his life with all *my weight of a man* that I am not this grinning *Ya bon Banania* figure that he persists in imagining I am" (*Black Skins, White Masks* 203, my emphasis). In other words, the black man, as the marker both of the objectification of the black in the production of whiteness as Man and of the shattering of this mechanism, carries enough weight to bring about a new society: it shatters the possibility of claiming oneself as white. However, as a gift of a more human face, black consciousness philosophy is not content to leave it at this, rather, the question of conscientisation is turned towards those designated as white.

As the first quote in the epigraph makes clear, Biko and black consciousness philosophy offer a diagnosis whereby the problem in South African society is “white racism”. What Biko asks for in his critical engagement with white liberals is that they confront the question of freedom from a position of responsibility. This is not a question of guilt or blame—it cannot be settled by weeping confessions or the washing of feet²⁹—but rather has to do with the understanding that the liberal and even the emergent radical, as a white person, is also oppressed. In other words, the liberal, rather than concerning themselves with helping Blacks, must “fight for their own freedom” through confronting “the real evil in our society” (“Black Souls in White Skins” 27 and 25). This evil, clearly, is the mode through which the white man is produced as Man through the objectification of the black man. As an injunction laid on the laps of whites, this enables a re-inscription of Biko’s formula that “the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed” (“White Racism and Black Consciousness” 74). While clearly dealing with the question of a mental attitude, this statement also indicates the process of objectification outlined by Fanon in which whiteness becomes mind and blackness becomes body. Here it is both the mental condition of viewing the self as white or non-white that is a potent weapon, as well as the existence of those who claim to be white as such. In other words, it is this claim to whiteness that must be unraveled for the society-to-come to be realized as fully open. This is a scenario that Biko characterizes in the

²⁹ Adriaan Vlok, the security minister in the apartheid government during the 1980s, came to the Reverend Frank Chikane in August of 2006 to ask forgiveness for his role in the apartheid regime’s violent suppression of resistance in the 1980s. Chikane was the subject of an attempted assassination that would have been authorized by Vlok. The act of contrition that accompanied this moment was a symbolic washing of Chikane’s feet—a gesture that has been widely criticized as insufficient, especially considering that full disclosure of the actions of the security apparatuses has still not been given. Cf. BBC News, “Feet washed in apartheid apology”, 28 August 2006.

SASO/BPC Trial as a situation “where whites first have to listen”—a formulation that carries a strong resonance with Spivak’s call for an ethical relation understood as “the infinite unguaranteed patience to learn to learn from below” (“From Haverstock Hill”, 34) and Derrida’s formulation of the ethical as “learning to learn to live” (*Specters of Marx*, 31)—so as to effectively respond to the injunction that they are “either part of the solution or part of the problem” (“SASO Policy Manifesto” sec 3). This response where the white man might become part of the solution, as Biko makes clear in his testimony in the SASO/BPC Trial, is possible only when the white man “accedes and becomes part of the Black Man” (State v Cooper 4401). Quite clearly, the society-to-come that would emerge after an encounter between black and white where white is already a part of black would be quite different to a society where whiteness has been shattered as such due to the weight of blackness. To become part of the black man, I would suggest, has to do with becoming part of the unraveling of the subjective potential of Man that is embodied in whiteness. In short, it has to do with a form of what Deleuze and Guattari term “deterritorialisation” in the *face of the black man*.³⁰

A Question of Freedom

The question of freedom that Dikeledi poses and with which this chapter opened is directed, through the work of black consciousness philosophy, toward those lodged on the script of whiteness so as to insist on an ethical response toward the emergence of this face. While there is a strong resonance of this insistence on the ethical with the

³⁰ For a discussion of deterritorialisation as I use it here, see Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980), particularly ‘November 28, 1947: How Do You Make Yourself a Body Without Organs?’

interventions made by Derrida and Spivak, particularly as these both have to do with learning to listen, it is in the definition of the ethical offered by Gilles Deleuze that I suggest a response (and that this is understood as a response is critical) can be located. Particularly, I suggest that it is the Deleuzian notion of the ethical as a practice of singularity, in other words as the living of *a life*, that enables such a reading. As such, before turning to what I read as a literary engagement with a practice of singularity, namely J.M Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K*, I will briefly sketch the contours of this Deleuzian practice of singularity as an expression of the ethical.

In the "21st series of the event" in *The Logic of Sense*, Gilles Deleuze offers a formulation of the ethical: "Either ethics [*la morale* – ethics in the strong sense, a philosophical inclination adequate to existence] makes no sense at all, or this is what it means and has nothing else to say: not to be unworthy of what happens to us [*ce qui nous arrive* – what happens/ comes/ arrives to us]" (149). This statement *grapples with us*, not simply because of its apparent reformulation of the ethical problem as pertaining primarily to the self, in other words as valorizing the concept of the subject that black consciousness as a philosophy attempts to unravel, but also due to the subservience to occurrence that it seems to imply. However it is not easily dismissed and nor should it be. Firstly it is fascinating in its construction: Deleuze does not state that we *must be worthy*, rather, the statement is formulated entirely through the negative, registering a call for resistance or struggle against being *unworthy* [*indigne*]. Secondly this statement on ethics is preceded by an injunction that what Deleuze considers as event imposes the demand of "becoming a citizen of the world" (148). The event here is understood as a wounding,

prior to and unsettling of individuality, a destabilization to which the subject, as a concept, must become adequate. As such, the event here can be construed as an encounter, in the wake of Césaire, Fanon, and Biko, with the face of the black man.

Deleuze's formulation of the ethical seems to draw strongly from a Sartrean expression of existentialism that resonates throughout the broader text of black consciousness philosophy and, especially, in the statements produced by Fanon and Biko.

Existentialism, as a practice, hinges on the double notion that man as a particular form of man *is* only due to the decisions and actions that produce man as such, and that these actions occur in a scene where man is always already "in the face" of others ("Existentialism is a Humanism" 22, 24). The question of worthiness as it is posed by Deleuze is, according to Sartre's sense of existentialism, precisely the condition of man to the extent that "in choosing myself, I choose man" (Existentialism is a Humanism" 25). This is a state of anguish (a condition Sartre draws from Kierkegaard) that reveals every meaningful choice and action as defining man as a whole: "in creating the man each of us wills ourselves to be, there is not a single one of our actions that does not at the same time create an image of man as we think he ought to be" (Existentialism is a Humanism" 24).

The manner through which this statement of not being unworthy functions as a structure of a statement on the ethical will become clear in what follows. The terms 'the world' and 'the event', which clearly inform Deleuze's statement on ethics and work to distance it somewhat from Sartre, are worked out across his oeuvre and are worth briefly considering. Here I draw particularly on *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (2006,

hereafter *TF*) and *The Logic of Sense* (1990, hereafter *TLS*).³¹ The world, for Deleuze, is not simply that which is. Rather, and he draws heavily on the philosophy of Leibniz (particularly his invention of calculus) to make this argument, the world is an infinite series of infinitely variable singularities (what he later terms multiplicity: neither the one nor the multiple but variation) with each of these singularities containing the entire series in their point of view (*TF*, 26 – 27). Here we might think of the world as expressing “a truth of relativity (as opposed to a relativity of the true)” (*TLS*, 23). As such the subject does not own or strictly possess a point of view; rather what is named as the subject is that which remains in point of view as an effect traversing these singularities: the subject does not come to hold a point of view, rather, it is an effect produced through/by/in each instant of a point of view that becomes concatenated in the concept of the subject. While this emphasis on point of view resonates with Sartre, it is the mode through which the subject is similarly created in each point of view that distances Deleuze’s intervention. Sartre’s sense of the subject is derived from the certainty of Descartes cogito, even if that certainty is only realized in each moment (“Existentialism is a Humanism” 40 – 43). Deleuze’s formulation articulates that certainty as a failure to recognize the singularity of each point of view. In short, he would argue that such a certainty takes an effect as a cause. Stated differently, the subject in Deleuze’s formulation emerges as a supplement to singularities producing a particular style that holds a difference in common, a production that carries with it the risk of concatenating or chaining these singularities into a unified substance – the subject of enlightenment thought. The subject is thus not set apart from

³¹ See also Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy*. Translated from the French by Martin Joughin. New York: Zone Books, 2005. The importance of the work of Merleau-Ponty for Deleuze’s understanding of world and event is immense – the work on *The Fold* is saturated with references to his work.

the world, independently adjudicating existence, although it risks this as its expression. It is grasped, rather, as an expression of the world that simultaneously also expresses the subject. This condition, what Deleuze understands as immanence, is the basis for his thinking of life as the condition of the subject *prior* to the social differentiations of race, gender, and sexuality—and it is this sense of life that is articulated in the second quote of the epigraph.

In relation to this, event takes on a particular meaning in distinction from accident, as Deleuze phrases it: “The splendor and magnificence of the event is sense. The event is not what occurs [*arrive*] (an accident), it is rather inside what occurs [*arrive*], the purely expressed” (*TLS*, 149). Sense, here, can be thought of as a condition of possibility, as that which constitutes appearance. In other words sense names those singularities that collide, or knot, so as to constitute an occurrence, and event names the possibility of an encounter, without expectation, with the infinite series of singularities that constitute the world: an encounter with sense. Following Deleuze and Guattari’s argument in *What is Philosophy?*, this encounter takes on the quality of a pedagogy, instructing the subject in its deterritorialisation (12). Event, then, is that which reveals the subject as an effect, or more forcefully as a supplement, traversing the truth of sense inherent in what happens to us. As such the event is a wound or wounding, a breaking of the tyranny of subjective certainty.³² It is nonetheless that which takes place in my point of view, in a similar manner, as Deleuze suggests, to which death is something that is grounded in me (my death can only be mine) but that can never be realized in me (I can

³² For an analysis of subjective certainty as a tyranny see Jacques Lacan, “Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty: a New Sophism” (1945). I offer a brief engagement with this essay in footnote 32 below.

never know that I am dead). In other words, it is nonetheless that to which we must not be unworthy.

The significance of this understanding of world and event for Deleuze's statement on the ethical is immense. To not be unworthy of what happens (arrives/appears) to us is thus not about subservience to occurrence or about the reduction of ethics to the self as this would be contrary to the operation of event. Rather, it is about realizing event with all its implications with regard to subjectivity and resisting the pull, or risk, of resolving this variation into the matrix of subjective certainty as an actuality – the reflex or habit of the reasoning of existence since, at least, Descartes. In short, the ethical for Deleuze is a counter-actualisation in which the event as a wound enables the expression of 'a life': the practice of singularity. In the context of black consciousness philosophy and its attachment to a Sartrean existentialism it is possible to argue that "not being unworthy" designates the necessity of recognizing the conditioning of blackness/whiteness as that for which the subject is responsible—and hence the demand for conscientisation.

My purpose in turning to Coetzee to think the productivity of the practice of singularity in this encounter, in the face of blackness, is double: on the one hand I read Coetzee as deliberately unraveling and critiquing the concept of Man as it founds European Society and, by implication, unraveling and critiquing the basis of whiteness. As such, his novel can be read as a response to the injunction that black consciousness as a philosophy places on those lodged on the script of whiteness. On the other hand, I argue that the weightiness of the body, to the extent that it is inscribed in this novel without reference to the mechanism of blackness/whiteness, asks for an encounter with the face of

the black man. As such, this novel seems to turn toward a future encounter ordered by black consciousness philosophy as that which might offer the articulation of a new form of society. Stated differently, reading Coetzee at this point in my dissertation reflects an effort to take the offer of a “gift of a more human face” seriously.

Coetzee’s novel *Life and Times of Michael K* comes to bear on the question of the emergence of what Biko names as “white society” through abiding by the unraveling of subjectivity in the echo of Heinrich von Kleist’s *Michael Kohlhaas: From an Old Chronicle*.³³ Although Coetzee and Kleist’s novels are both before the same question (a question that similarly structures the Oedipus myth as well as *Vehi-Ciosane*), namely on what terms a person is marked as a member in society, Michael Kohlhaas (Kleist’s protagonist) demands the recognition of these markings, whereas Michael K (Coetzee’s protagonist) demands the living of life apart from these markings. Working out this demand, in Kleist’s novel the difference between the Hobbesian understanding of the state of nature and the state of society becomes the mechanism along which Michael Kohlhaas’ violent demand for the realization of justice is articulated. In what follows I will briefly sketch the lines of articulation in Kleist’s novel before offering a more sustained reading of *Life and Times of Michael K*.

Kleist’s novel is set in the middle of the Sixteenth Century in Saxony, Germany, and revolves around the outworking of two claims of, or two modes of claiming and

³³ J.M. Coetzee, *Life and Times of Michael K*. London: Vintage Books, 2004, hereafter *LT*. Heinrich von Kleist, *Michael Kohlhaas: A Tale from an Old Chronicle*. [1808] Translated from the German by Frances H. King. New York: Mondial, 2007, hereafter *MK*.

attempting to guarantee, subjective certainty in society.³⁴ The first claim, which structures the majority of the novel and forms the focus of Coetzee's intervention, is reflected in Kohlhaas' sense of justice before the State, while the second, which overshadows the first in the latter parts of the novel, is reflected in the Elector of Saxony's irrational fixation on knowing the unknowable. It is the response to an experience of extortion and abuse of those who are meant to administer justice in society that triggers Kohlhaas' military and propaganda campaign to seek out justice (*MK* 1 – 7). The moment of extortion and abuse hinges on the claim that Kohlhaas requires a "pass" to travel with his horses to Dresden in order to sell them (*MK* 4). He leaves two of his horses in trust so as to continue on to Dresden and, on his return after discovering the claim that he required a pass was incorrect, he discovered that the horses had been worked and abused in his absence. It is the failure to receive justice in regard to this slight that leads to Kohlhaas' campaign. This campaign reveals one of the major differences—apart from their desired relation to society—that is reflected between the protagonists in Kleist's and Coetzee's novels. Kohlhaas has the capacity in society to overtly contest the terms of his inclusion or exclusion: he has property, commands men in his employ (*MK*, 15 – 17), and has both the schooling to engage in propaganda (*MK*, 24, 25), as well as the material position to have

³⁴ A provocative reading of the tension that leads to such an assertion can be found in Jacques Lacan's "Logical Time and the Assertion of Anticipated Certainty". In brief, Lacan argues that the temporality of logical deduction (his example is that of three inmates that each need to accurately define their own hidden marker before the others) is critical to the understanding of subjectivity. This temporal movement is significant for Lacan as it presents what he terms the "logical form . . . of the psychological 'I'" ("Logical Time", 170) as a form premised on "ontological anxiety" that is resolved through an assertion which is objectified (through the double imputation of logical thought) into the other as such. In other words, the decision that enables the assertion of the "I" is de-subjectified ("Logical Time", 171). Lacan extends this logic of the subjective assertion into "the logical notion of collectivity" (i.e. society). He argues that within the collective it is always the anxiety of being declared not X (where X designates whatever the collective is constituted through, for our purposes we can designate X as "a man") that causes the subjective assertion of being X. In other words, if A does not declare itself to be "a man", then others might convince A that A is in fact not "a man", hence A declares itself to be "a man" ("Logical Time", 174).

direct access to the principles of the State (*MK*, 32 – 41); Michael K has little formal schooling, was employed as a garden worker, and lived alternately in a men's hostel (owned by the City Council) or his mother's room under the stairs at the flat where she worked as a domestic (*LT* 4).

Michael Kohlhaas, presented by the narrator as a moral tale or legend, also differs from Coetzee's *Michael K* at the level of its narrative voice (I will discuss the narrative voice in *Michael K* below). While both novels employ the third person, in *Michael Kohlhaas* the narrator is decidedly limited with regard to the inner thought processes of Kohlhaas. The narrator consistently presents the actions and statements produced by Kohlhaas, leaving the reader to impute these actions with a sense of *internal* rationality, a rationality that is assumed by the narrator to be proper to Kohlhaas. This is to say that the narrative technique is effective in producing Kohlhaas within the trajectories of modern European subjectivity, thereby legitimating his actions, through the mode in which such a subjectivity is implied as available to the reader. A correlate of this can be found in the text in the description of the Elector's response to the denial of the knowledge of the prophecy: Kohlhaas is the focal point of the narrative throughout the novel and, as such, the descriptions of the expected glee due to satisfaction and the actual despair due to refusal are read through his perspective (*MK* 85). In other words, Kohlhaas reads the Elector in much the same way as the reader is required to read Kohlhaas. In this way the apparent madness attendant to the Elector's obsession comes to be imputed as proper to the Elector. Within the structure of the argument of the novel, it becomes clear that through this imputation the Elector loses his status of embodying a rationality proper to

him and, as such, is placed on the edge of losing his status in society—a perspective that the closing lines of the novel reinforce.

Reasoning that without receiving justice he was effectively stripped of the dignity of being a Man in society, Kohlhaas sets out to claim justice for himself. This much is apparent from his conversation with Martin Luther, who intervenes in the situation on behalf of the principals of Saxony. Kohlhaas, in speaking of the terms through which a person is recognized as a Man in society, declares that for him a person who is cast out of society is one “who is denied the protection of the law” (*MK* 33 – 34). Quite clearly, Kohlhaas recognizes the denial of justice as an expulsion from society. Such a removal from society necessarily results, for Kohlhaas, in a subject position of lawlessness, a situation he considers to be akin to living with “the wild beasts”. Lawlessness is not equivalent to being a bandit or criminal; rather, it is a state of being outside of any measure wherein such a declaration might make sense. He asserts that his actions (murdering the inhabitants of von Tronka castle and burning down parts of Wittenberg) can only be considered as wrong, as unjust, if he is part of the society which is itself premised on justice. In effect what is taking place in the above discussion with Luther is a refusal of the position of the not-X (or lesser X) in the collective. In Lacan’s model one of the key medium’s that is required for the subjective assertion is logic: if logic is denied then it is not possible to declare oneself as X. From Kohlhaas’ perspective it appears that that enabling medium is justice. He effectively declares that without justice he is not a man (understood here as a subject within German society) and is thus not subordinated to any common laws of man. This assertion, premised as it is on the demand for resolution,

is strikingly different to Antigone's statement on justice, a statement that precisely refuses resolution and its attendant subjective certainty. This position is reinforced by Luther's recommendation to the Elector of Saxony to grant Kohlhaas amnesty for his actions and to treat Kohlhaas in the same manner as he would a foreign power (*MK* 37).

The rationale behind his military action is disclosed in his conversation with his wife before her death and with his conversation with Luther a little later, and has to do with Kohlhaas' understanding of what designates the value of being "a man" in society. To be a man, for Kohlhaas, is to receive justice from the principles of the state. In other words, it is to be recognized as a subject in a reciprocal relation with the State through, particularly, having his right to property maintained. This understanding of the subject and its relation to the State is very similar to that offered by Hobbes in his *Leviathan* from 1651, written 100 years after the time in which *Michael Kohlhaas* was set but written 150 years before Kleist's text. As the guiding text for the logical form of Kleist's novel I will briefly offer an overview of some of its key terms as they come to bear on it. Hobbes argues that "civil society" emerges out of a necessary compact between individuals in which the subject is taken as primary. In fact, it is through an understanding of "man" that you come to the necessity of the "common-wealth". The concept of the subject that is at play in Hobbes' text is one where the subject as a capable agent with an independently active will applies itself to the world so as to make sense of it (34). In the state of nature, in which man is nonetheless not simply part of nature (the subject, due to mind, is not an animal among other animals), Hobbes argues that man is free to achieve his own ends (as there is no law except might) and that, as such, there is a

competition over resources which, ultimately, places man in a perpetual state of “Warre of every one against every one” (72). This is effectively the position that Kohlhaas assumes.

For Hobbes, the classic present example of the state of nature can be found in “the savage people in many places of *America*” (71). However, it is a state that he also asserts has never generally existed over the entire world; there has never been a total state of nature (71). As a state characterized by the realization of will only (the more science one has, the easier this realization), Hobbes argues that in the state of nature there are no “notions of Right and Wrong, Justice and Injustice” (71), as there is no mediating power to impose these (morality and justice must be imposed from outside). In contrast, in the state of society, or common-wealth, men have made themselves subject to another, who they determine can protect their interests most forcefully, so as to remove the overriding fear of war, namely, death. A central protection, here, is that accorded by the right to property (99), which delineates the material bounds of a subject’s will. This right of property can be seen as mirrored in the limited third person narrative form of Kleist’s novel: only Kohlhaas has access to his internal deliberations. For Hobbes, this protector is the figure of the sovereign (for him, particularly the monarch) who, he argues, becomes the embodiment of the social will and is, thus, outside of the limit of the categories of “injustice or injury” and is without reproach (98, 117). It is, ostensibly, as an act of resistance to being placed in a state of nature, where his rights to property and to justice from his sovereign are not recognized, that Kohlhaas begins his quest to extract justice by force from those who are meant to guarantee it, namely the State. In other words,

Kohlhaas acts in accordance with what Hobbes would define as the rule of the State of Nature, namely, might.

Although Luther secures Kohlhaas a temporary reprieve through his interventions, ultimately the machinations of those allied with von Tronka, the figure who initially slighted him, are more successful and Kohlhaas is sent to Brandenburg to face trial for treason (*MK* 44 – 65). It is on his journey to Brandenburg that the reader discovers the second claim to subjective certainty, this time premised on a form of mysticism or superstition and emanating from the Elector of Saxony himself. Kleist's narrative strategy can in this instance be considered as affirming the sense of personal property that is attached to the question of the subject: only Kohlhaas has access to the knowledge of the prophecy, it is never disclosed to the reader or to the Elector (a refusal that drives the Elector to insanity). Kohlhaas accidentally comes to be the bearer of a prophecy concerning the future of the Elector's line, leading the Elector to attempt to intervene to protect Kohlhaas and, ultimately, leads to the Elector's apparent insanity (*MK* 67 – 75). This obsession on the part of the Elector brings about a somewhat startling conclusion of the novel. The final passages of *Michael Kohlhaas* present the reader with a tidy summation of Kohlhaas' desire for justice: he is given full satisfaction in the form of the return of the horses and the imprisonment of von Tronka (Kohlhaas is recognized as a man) and he presents full satisfaction to the state through his subsequent execution (as a man he is guilty of a crime). However, Kohlhaas' possession of the prophecy enables him to inflict pain on the Elector even as the Elector harms him permanently by removing his head. Directly before his execution Kohlhaas silently reads the paper in front of the

Elector and then consumes it, reinforcing the knowledge that only Kohlhaas knows the prophecy. Directly after this act Kohlhaas is executed. This turn of events presents a devastating blow to the Elector and, I would argue, it is noteworthy that the novel concludes by mentioning the long line of Kohlhaas' descendents while giving absolutely no mention to the Elector's line (*MK*, 83 – 85). As such, subjective certainty is attained for Kohlhaas through the mechanism of inheritance. It is as if only through a pursuit of justice, as opposed to power, the future might be secured. It is at the level of the type of questioning pursued and its relation to subjectivity that the most productive resonance between Kleist's and Coetzee's novels takes place.

In the case of Coetzee's novel the title is instructive: it is not simply one life or a particular time that is Michael K's, rather there are times or lives that can be thought through the designation of Michael K and, critically, the novel itself unfolds through what I read as a series of births that carry the materiality of their pasts with them—every birth has its blood, as it were. As such, I contend that this novel thinks subjectivity through the flash of singularity so as to attempt to unravel the demands that place the subject on the path toward requiring recognition as a Man. In this sense it similarly resonates with my reading of Antigone outlines above. In order to think through this questioning of the production of subjectivity, it is necessary to locate it in the repetitions (which can be thought of as a cycle of births) that both structure the unfolding of *Life and Times of Michael K* and of which Coetzee's novel, in its repetition of Kleist's text, is itself an example. *Life and Times of Michael K* opens with a description of the aftermath of what appears to be Michael K's initial birth and closes with an explicit repetition of its

activity. The first empirical fact that the novel discloses about Michael K, through the perception of the midwife who attended to his birth, is that the infant was born with a “hare lip” shaped like a “snail’s foot”. The first marker, however, that the reader perceives is the curiosity of his name:

The first thing the midwife noticed about Michael K when she helped him out of his mother into the world was that he had a hare lip. The lip curled like a snail’s foot, the left nostril gaped. Obscuring the child for a moment from its mother, she prodded open the tiny bud of a mouth and was thankful to find the palate whole. (*LT* 3)

The detailed description of the infant focuses on the characteristic that would mark him as a monstrosity and that, following my reading of *Antigone*, also marks him as a character capable of mediating the problem of Man (namely the disjuncture between autochthony and copulation): it discloses his deformity, a deformity located at the level of the face. This deformity defines the first weeks of his life as he struggles to gain nourishment from his mother. His deformed face can be read as a foreshadowing of the failure with regard to human interaction that marks Michael K’s existence, a failure that Michael K registers in his body as a “stupidity” that covers him like “a fog”, expressed in a lack of knowledge about “what to do with his face”—he persistently covers his face with his hands (*LT* 29, 64). His name, however, is replete with immediate resonances, some ostensibly allegorical such as *uMkhonto we Sizwe* (abbreviated as MK, the joint military wing of the African National Congress and the South African Communist Party) and some more structural, such as the title and main character of Kleist’s *Michael Kohlhaas*. While the allegorical reading of *Life and Times of Michael K* into a simple political treatise about the liberation struggle in South Africa is perhaps the least

interesting (and most often done) of these, the resonance between Kleist's and Coetzee's novels allows a figuring of Michael K as both a character in its singularity as well as a marker of a type of questioning (of what and how one comes to be Man in society) that repeats.³⁵ This repetition with a difference is framed, in Coetzee's novel, through the deployment of various narrative techniques as these express the problematic of Michael K's subjectivity and, as such, it is worth taking some time to specify their contours

Michael K is divided into three parts: the first dealing with Michael K's relation to his mother and his move to the Visagie farm, the second with his internment in a medical detention facility in Kenilworth and the final part with his imagined return to the Visagie farm following his escape from that facility. Throughout the first and third parts of the novel the narrative unfolds through the voice of an omniscient third person narrator. In distinction to what takes place in Kleist's *Michael Kohlhaas*, in the first part of *Michael K* the narrator provides detailed descriptions of the internal thought processes that lead to the actions Michael K undertakes. While the thought processes are clearly those of Michael K, what emerges through this is the manner in which all of his thoughts take place as responses to given situations. This is to say that Michael K is produced as an entirely contingent expression of subjectivity. The only persistent principles that seem to structure his thoughts are his relation to his dead mother and his sense of himself as a cultivator, both of which are presented by the narrator as unresolved questions for Michael K and can be read as indicating the possibility of resolving the problem of Man through autochthony.

³⁵ For a reading of Coetzee's novel that argues against allegory as a mode of interpretation, see Derek Attridge, *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading*. University of Chicago Press, 2004, especially the chapter "Against Allegory".

Perhaps one of the most critical aspects of the novel, however, is disclosed in its second part through a shift in focalization and narrative voice. Here, where the focal point of the novel is the doctor and his movements around the opaque character of Michael K, the narrative voice shifts to the second person. The doctor is presented as continuously addressing Michael K through the personal pronoun “you”, and referring to himself similarly through the deictic personal pronoun of “I” (as my discussion of Paul de Man and Hegel below makes clear, the referent of this “I” is always unstable). In this instance the narrative voice mimics, through its failure, the inability of the doctor to come to any authoritative or even adequate knowledge of Michael K. The narrative voice fails (a failure that is, paradoxically, its success), in this instance due to the demand placed on the reader to consistently negotiate its relation to the invocation of “you” and “I”. As my reading of this part of the novel will demonstrate, in this failure the Doctor mimics the response of the white liberal as he/she comes to be diagnosed by Serote: the doctor begins to speak for Michael K, ironically assigning Michael K the task of leading him out of his own subjective certainty.

In the final part of the novel the focalization once again returns to Michael K along with an equivalent shift back to the omniscient third person narrator. In its final moments, where Michael K finally becomes an object of charity while he declares that he has “come back” (*LT* 181), the narrator discloses Michael K’s imaginings about an old man who might accompany him on a return to the Visagie farm. In this moment, in distinction to Kleist’s text, there is no sense of subjective certainty attributed to Michael K. Rather than offering resolution, the narrator reflects on the problem of having enough

seed and enough time. As will become plain, the function of the narrator in this part seems to be to reinforce the contingent expression of subjectivity that marks Michael K as he is lodged between a desire toward autochthony (the final invocation of life that he articulates) and the desire to not be unworthy of what occurs, to not become an object of charity.

In the opening passage of *Michael K*, a few lines after those with which I opened my reading of the novel, the narrator discloses the difficulty that Michael K presents to his mother, a difficulty that reveals the depth of the connection to his mother and to food that will come to form, as the novel unfolds, the recurring loop through which Michael K's existence turns. Michael K's mother, Anna K

shivered to think of what had been growing in her all these months. The child could not suck from the breast and cried with hunger. She tried the bottle; *when it could not suck from the bottle she fed it with a teaspoon*, fretting with impatience when it coughed and spluttered and cried. (*LT*, 3, my emphasis)

The infant, in this instance, is crying not due to the removal of the breast that might be read as the beginning of desire, but rather due to the visceral experience of hunger.

Michael K's perceived relation to hunger, either his own perception of it or that of those entrusted to care for him, forms a recurring theme throughout the novel (*MK* 16).

However, it is by placing this passage alongside the closing passage of the novel that a more provocative reading, one that relates to the beginnings that recur throughout the novel, is made available.

And if the old man [who Michael K imagines he is lying next to in his mother's old lodging] climbed out of the cart and stretched himself (things

were gathering pace now) and looked at where the pump had been that the soldiers had blown up so that nothing should be left standing, and complained, saying, ‘What are we going to do about water?’, he, Michael K, *would produce a teaspoon from his pocket, a teaspoon and a long roll of string*. He would clear the rubble from the mouth of the shaft, he would bend the handle of the teaspoon in a loop and tie the string to it, he would lower it down the shaft deep into the earth, and when he brought it up there would be water in the bowl of the spoon; and in that way, he would say, one can live. (*LT* 184, my emphasis)

This passage occurs in the third part of the novel and appears to function as a closing of its narrative. In the intervening passages Michael K’s mother has passed away, he has walked across large parts of the South African landscape, has lived inconspicuously off the land, has been repeatedly captured by security forces and has, finally, returned to his mother’s lodging in Cape Town. The site to which Michael K imagines he might bring the old man is precisely the place that he sets out to bring his mother in the first part of the novel. However, he only manages to bring his mother’s ashes to the site, and proceeds to scatter and till the ashes into the soil directly below the area where the water pump was located. This joining of his mother to the soil, and his connection to this by a thread, is an image that will be returned to in more depth below.

It is clear, however, that the return to the figure of the spoon in this passage is not accidental; rather, it indicates Michael K’s incessant return to his mother as the only possible source of nourishment, the only possibility for life. Accessing this life through “the shaft”, which might be read as the birth canal, would seem to mimic the inability or refusal on the part of Michael K as an infant to draw nourishment from his mother’s breast. The incorporation of the old man into his imaginings, however, complicates how

Michael K's imaginative return is to be read. Through introducing the figure of the old man as part of his imaginings – imaginings that seem to go beyond the figure of his mother (the old man actually arrives) and still remain within her (life is still only possible by drawing from her, the farm becomes Michael K's 'natal land') – the understanding of the linearity of the novel's time is substantially complicated. It is suddenly impossible to know whether the previous encounters actually took place, or if these all form part of Michael K's complex imagining of a means to "escape the charity" (*LT*, 182), or pity, to which he is subjected. The opacity of these encounters is reinforced through the shift in narrative voice in the second part of the novel. This charity is equated, in the final pages of the novel, with a process whereby all subjects that do not conform to the absolute norm are placed "in camps", a stratification that carries so much weight that he asks, "how many people are there left who are neither locked up nor standing guard at the gate?" (*LT* 182). In other words, in an echo of the role of stratification in apartheid society (as diagnosed by Biko), the stratification, the dividing of persons into camps, is a process that fixes both those who are locked in, and those who do the locking, in place. It is this process that Michael K attempts to avoid, so as to avoid recognition, and which Kohlhaas explicitly invoked so as to achieve recognition.

Within this complication of the time of the novel it is possible to think the disjuncture with regard to subjectivity that is produced through the variation of narrative voice across the novel in relation to what I have named the moments of return or 'birth' in the narrative. I read these as opening the possibility of thinking the subject in its singularity; a thinking that comes close to the opening of the possibility of *a life* as an

expression of subjectivity that might arrive in the society-to-come that is evoked in the second quote of the epigraph. This singularity, I would suggest, has to do with Michael K's relation to the land and, particularly, to the melons produced by the land as they produce him as a subject in relation to their emergence. Through the sowing of his mother's ashes, his self-identification as a gardener, and the activity of growing food, this relation is framed as one indicating autochthony. Michael K's rebirths correlate to the form of the narrative structure that unfolds through three broad episodes that closely conform to the division of the novel, except that the second episode begins in the middle of the first part. The first extends from the opening passage of the novel to Michael K's departure from Stellenbosch (where his mother dies and is cremated, an event that leads to the declaration that "there is a place for burning", (MK 32)), the second from his arrival at the Visagie farm in Prince Albert to his eventual capture and removal back to Cape Town (MK 56, 120), and the third only starts to unfold in the final pages of the novel (MK 171). The second episode will form the main focus in what follows.

Michael K's relentless drive to care for his mother, a purpose he realizes only when he first collects his mother from the hospital in Cape Town, leads him finally to arrive at the Visagie farm in Prince Albert, carrying his mother's ashes. He arrives at the decision that this is the farm of which his mother spoke, when she expressed her desire to return to the abode of her youth, more by accidental elimination (no one recognizes the names his mother gave him, but Visagie sounds similar) than logical purpose. That Visagie sounds familiar is, of course, interesting precisely because it also sounds very close to the French term *visage* meaning "face", and draws the terrain on which Michael

K scatters his mother's ashes together with the image of his deformed face that forms the locus of his monstrosity, or stupidity (a state indicating both a lack of intelligence and, historically, a loss of both physical and emotional sensation), in the moment of social encounter. Nonetheless, after a tumultuous tour through the countryside of the Cape Province punctuated by encounters with the South African security forces, Michael K arrives at the now abandoned and somewhat dilapidated farm.

He ate the last biscuits he had bought. He still had half of his money left but no more use for it. The light faded. There was a flutter of bats under the eaves. He lay on his bed listening to the noises of the night air, air denser than the air of day. Now I am here, he thought. Or at least I am somewhere. He went to sleep. (*MK*, 52)

Michael K's arrival is marked by a sense of separation from the place of others. In a practical sense, his assertion that he no longer needs his money is an indication of the possibility, which he perceives in the farm, of existing outside of society. This declaration of an "I" that "is" due to arriving in a place that could be considered as being situated outside of societal strictures is critical. Michael K's assertion that "now I am here", an assertion that might simply be read as designating arrival at the site of his mother's desire, is broadened into an assertion of being, somewhere. This claim is not simply about arrival or existence as such, rather it has to do with a recognition of existence where Michael K now takes place—what is significant is not simply that he is but that that sense of being locates him somewhere. The relief of arriving in a space where he can be "I", outside societal strictures, can be read as a reflection of his desire to both make an assertion of subjective certainty, for himself (to be his own foundation), and not to be forced into the particular rendition of subjectivity offered by the collectivity in which he

finds himself (as is outlined in Lacan's sophism). Precisely what that collectivity, in the South African context, would be is not disclosed in the novel except in the notes on a police charge sheet: in the absence of all markers of identity, the sheet inscribes Michael K with the letters "CM", indicating that according to the arresting officer he appeared to not be white but was rather a "coloured male" who was outside of his magisterial district without a pass (the actual charge on which he is repeatedly detained) (*LT* 70). Rather than reading this classification of Michael K as determinative, thereby valorizing the State's capacity to classify, I would suggest that this reflects more a need to fix subjects in place, to objectify the other in an attempt to situate the self as a Man (in this case, as capable of classification).

Although Michael K discovers a certain form of liberty on the farm it is cut short through his continued dwelling in the old farm house belonging to the Visagie family. It seems that no matter how far from the stratifications of society that order his subjectivity Michael K manages to get, the weight of its stratification still haunts him, unsettling his existence and threatening to re-constitute it (as a given subjectivity). Within the confines of the Visagie house at night, Michael K's existence is sharply contrasted to his existence in the open veld during the day. The walls and ceiling return to him an echo of his voice that is not only a trace (*LT* 58). It is the remnants of society, the inanimate markers of its functionality that attribute to Michael K his sense of insubstantiality, an insubstantiality that only makes sense within those markers. The echoes confront him with the reality that, despite being outside the strictures of society, he also now cannot assert subjective certainty. His ultimate response to this sense of insubstantiality is to return to the task of

caring for his mother rather than to demand justice from the principles of the State—in fact Michael K operates as a form of diagnostic device that reveals the injustice of the entire system of stratification and fixing through camps. As such, Michael K could be read as becoming expressive of a form of subjectivity that is, perhaps, resistant to the weight of stratification as it comes to bear on society due to its embrace of an autochthonous condition of becoming.

As such, I argue that *Michael K* returns to the question of resistance to apartheid through attempting to think the problem at the level of subjectivation rather than of race, class or a legal order. In other words, and in a turn of phrase that resonates across my dissertation, the central question that Coetzee seems to pose for the task of coming to terms with the legacy of apartheid is the question of indigeneity. A critical element in the emergence of this subjectivity is the care that Michael K directs toward his mother's ashes: he buries them on the farm in precisely the spot that he intends to plant melons. Having discovered the site through a process of trial and error, he proceeds to till the soil so as to make his mother's remains become one with the land. Initially this appears as the ultimate return of his mother to the place of her birth (if he is on the correct farm); however, it also marks a new beginning in the existence of Michael K. While he is reflecting on his somewhat sudden actions with regard to the burial of his mother's ashes, the narrator asserts that this act was "the beginning of his life as a cultivator" (*LT* 59). It is, of course, significant that culture is cultivated rather than a static weight in the way that it functions in black consciousness philosophy, and that in the context of a war aimed

at enabling “minorities to have a say in their destinies” (*LT* 157), Michael K places the problem of stratification, as that which produces minorities, into question.

He proceeds to transform the area where his mother is now buried into a small field planted with a variety of crops (pumpkin, melon, maize). Rather than providing a substantial break from the centrality that his mother plays in his life, this act of cultivation (literally a sowing of seed) strengthens his tie to his mother (he has a similar desire for same-wombedness that Antigone expresses in the Myth of Oedipus), which eventually results in two birth-like moments for him although I would suggest that he remains unaware of them as such. On the centrality of cultivation to this new beginning Michael K asserts:

It is because I am a gardener, he thought, because that is my nature. He sharpened the blade of his spade on a stone, the better to savour the instant when it clove the earth. The impulse to plant had been reawoken in him; now, in a matter of weeks, he found his waking life bound tightly to the patch of earth he had begun to cultivate and the seeds he had planted there.
(*LT* 59)

The assertion of his basic essence as being that of a gardener only occurs once he has begun to provide a space that he is able to shape into something he considers to be beautiful (he later expresses “exultation” at the thought that he will make this ground bloom). Crucially, Michael K only begins to do this, is only capable of beginning to do this, once his mother has been blended into the very ground he will cultivate. Hence the assertion that his life had become increasingly bound to that patch of land: he is still caring for his mother as the condition of his becoming. It should be noted that although this constitutes a resistance to the expression of subjective certainty as produced through

the realization of the self as man in society, it nonetheless is not a departure from one of the classic formulations of the achievement of subjective certainty in European philosophy. In order to establish this point it is necessary to briefly digress from *Life and Times of Michael K* so as to turn through an invocation of this issue outlined by Paul de Man in his “Sign and Symbol in Hegel’s *Aesthetics*”.³⁶

Paul de Man discusses the role of what we might figure as the flight of the subject into the aesthetic, in the necessity of the subject to say “I”, a similar mode to that of cultivation in the case of Michael K. De Man suggests that the two key assertions in Hegel’s *Aesthetics* are that “art is for us a thing of the past” and that “the beautiful is the sensory manifestation of the idea” (SA 103). The first assertion has generally been read as rendering Hegel’s *Aesthetics* irrelevant to post-Hegelian aesthetic theory and criticism. The second assertion, however, clearly places the aesthetic into the realm of the symbolic and thereby enables de Man to formulate an argument that alters how we might read the first assertion and, through this, Michael K.

An immediate consequence of positioning the aesthetic within the realm of the symbolic is that the distinction between the sign and the symbol immediately comes into play, even though, de Man notes, this distinction that threads throughout Hegel’s corpus does not explicitly come into play in art (SA 93 and 95). The symbol pertains to the connection between meaning and the thing; in other words, it is specifically related to a thing’s essence. On the other hand, the sign is always arbitrary and its assertion always implies an implicit subject, the “I” (SA 96); this relation between the subject “I” and the

³⁶ Paul de Man, “Sign and Symbol in Hegel’s *Aesthetics*”, In: *Aesthetic Ideology*, (1982) Edited and translated from the German by Andrzej Warminski, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, hereafter SA.

sign is not, though, unproblematic. De Man goes on to suggest that thought and the sign both, as operations or expressions of the “I” (in fact, thought works through the sign), appropriate “sensory perception”. As such, he suggests that the mind subjects the world (it appropriates while remaining separate to it), and that it does this specifically through the generality of language (SA 97).

In a move that carries similar implications to Lacan’s critique of the assertion of subjective certainty and that also outlines the failure of the narrative voice in the second part of the novel, de Man argues that the “I” which is spoken by the subject is deictic both to the subject speaking and, simultaneously, to all other subjects (SA 98). Since language unfolds through signs that are always arbitrary, and thereby general, the “I” that is spoken is always generally applicable and is therefore never simply equivalent to the speaking subject. De Man extends the implications of this problem by linking the generality of language to the act of thinking: thinking operates through language which is always general, hence it is strictly not possible to say what “I” think and, since in Hegel only an “I” can think, de Man argues that by implication it is strictly not possible to say “I” (SA 97). In other words, de Man reads Hegel as positing a subject that effaces itself through its assertion of its subjectivity.

Without detracting from the force of de Man’s reading of Hegel (in fact I would argue that the productivity of his reading lies precisely in its forcefulness) it is worth noting that the problem which he opens up in Hegel is precisely the point of productivity for Hegel himself. In his *Encyclopedia*, which is the text that de Man goes to so as to formulate his argument, Hegel seems to suggest that the declaration of an “I” marks the

site of universality (abstraction from the self) which is the condition of freedom.³⁷ In other words, the saying “I” that puts subjective particularity into question is also that which gives that particularity its freedom, a notion he terms a “principle of abstract freedom” (*E* par 20). However, the sting of this assertion (which is the site in which de Man places his reading) is dampened in Hegel’s argument through his understanding of the essence of man and of mind. He suggests:

Information of this kind [of habits, the body, anatomy] is, for one thing, meaningless, unless on the assumption that we know the universal – man as man, and, that always must be, as mind ... it fails to reach the underlying essence of them all – the mind itself.

(*E* par 377)

The abstraction from the constraints of subjective particularity which is realized in what Hegel terms “mind” is in fact to be understood as a unification with the essence of man. This effacement of the immediacy of the sensory body that utters the “I” is for Hegel the achievement of the potential of freedom in thought as the essence of man. It appears that for Hegel the relationship between the subject “I” and the sign is understood productively as one of abstraction (movement from symbol to sign). A few paragraphs later Hegel turns to the contradictory nature of this productivity:

Ordinary logic is, therefore, in error in supposing that mind completely excludes contradiction from itself. On the contrary, all consciousness contains a unity and dividedness, hence a contradiction. (*E* par 382)

The mind, then, remains aware of the sensory body which it must efface in order to realize itself. This results in a form of splitting where the mind becomes the basis for

³⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* [1830] (parts 1 and 3). Translated from the German by William Wallace. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971, hereafter *E*.

thought and the “feeling soul” (the sensory body in proximity to mind, connected through intuition) the basis of action (*E* par 403). It is the negotiation of this divide that Fanon names as a mind body schema in his *Black Skin, White Masks* and which is denied the black man through the mechanism of blackness/whiteness. Crucially, in Hegel’s argument, the “feeling soul” is not to be understood as free – it is determined in relation to both the world and mind; only mind is free due to its “elevation ... above the material” (*E* par 440). The movement of this elevation passes from “finding a world presupposed before us [mind subjective, sensory/soul], to generating a world as our own creation [mind objective, consciousness], and finally gaining freedom from it and in it [mind absolute, universal “I”] (*E* par 386). The middle term in this movement is where de Man locates the appropriation of sensory perception through language.

De Man argues however that the difficulty with the effacement, that actually makes the “I” and therefore thought impossible, is that thought as a possibility in and of existence is considered to be an imperative. De Man suggests that in order for this imperative to be fulfilled, the subject “I” must forget that it effaces itself, in other words, it must forget that it is sign and place itself within the realm of the symbolic, of art, and hence of the aesthetic (SA 100). In order to facilitate this forgetting, de Man suggests that Hegel posits his philosophy of mind as a philosophy of recognition (understood as an “inner gathering and preserving of experience”). To put it quite crudely, the “I” is posited in the future through a quasi-prophetic action and the subject then encounters and recognizes the “I” as one with itself (SA 99). It is through this action of forgetting/recognition that de Man suggests the subject “I” becomes part of the symbolic

order as it seems to allow a direct relation between the “I” and the self. As such, de Man argues that the symbol and Hegel’s designation of the aesthetic as *only* symbolic emerges as a “defense against the logical necessity inherent in a theoretical disclosure” (SA 100), or as Lacan might term it, in the necessity of the assertion of subjective certainty.

For Hegel, however, this effacement of the “private and particular self” is not something explicitly considered as a problem (*E* par 447). The value of the sensory body is precisely that it makes the move to the universal possible. However, the sensory, although it relates the subjective “I” to the world, is not suitable as a basis for thought as it is constrained by the very materiality to which it relates (*E* par 449). It is in this dyad that Fanon reads the mechanism of blackness/whiteness where whiteness designates a move to mind while blackness marks the objectification of body. As such, in contrast to de Man’s reading (though not in refutation of it) the difficulty is the limiting function of material existence:

In this form of mind [absolute mind], the content of feeling is liberated from the double one-sidedness which attached to it, on the one hand, at the stage of the soul, and, on the other hand, at the stage of consciousness. For that content is now characterized as being in itself both objective and subjective; and mind’s activity is now directed only towards making itself explicitly the unity of subjectivity and objectivity. (*E* par 446)

This attainment of the concrete unity between the subjective and objective in mind (i.e. the attainment, for Hegel, of liberty) is brought about through the work of intuition. This action, which unfolds as “a concretion of the material with the intelligence” implies for Hegel that the universal of mind already has the content as part of itself (*E* par 450). In other words, Hegel seems to argue that the mind becomes a self-sustaining sign through

the operation of intuition. This assertion of the unity between the universal sign and its content in mind – the sign of “I” does not point to the content, it carries it with it – is precisely the shift to the symbolic that de Man outlines above.

In analyzing what he characterizes as the movement of forgetting/recognition that is made in order to preserve the subject “I”, de Man argues that this is itself necessarily effaced through the operation of “memory” which, in Hegel, is a purely mechanistic and imageless process, “devoid of materiality”, that functions through the “rote learning” of “proper names”. As such, according to de Man it is clear that “memory effaces remembrance (or recollection) just as the “I” effaces itself” (SA 102). Finally, in an effort to locate the material manifestation of this theory of the sign in the *Aesthetics*, de Man argues that allegory is actually the privileged, and yet simultaneously rejected, trope in Hegel’s *Aesthetics* as it articulates the disjunction between the subject and the predicate. Hegel’s system is consequently an allegory of disjunction, which is also the condition of the subject (SA 104). It is, similarly, in this sense that I read Coetzee’s novel as an allegory, not of the apartheid regime, but rather of the problem of the subject as constitutive of apartheid as such.

The disjunction that de Man locates in Hegel’s (and in de Man’s argument, most western intellectual work post-Hegel) understanding of the subject is pushed further by Hegel himself. Memory, for Hegel, is more than simply an empty process as de Man characterizes it. Rather, memory is the way to thought through language (*E* par 464). Quite simply, language as the realm of thought is always in fact insubstantial; it dissipates as soon as the words are uttered. However, these words that are “the thing so

far as it exists and counts in the ideational realm” are preserved and recalled in memory. As such, it is only in memory where true being is ever attained (*E* par 463), and it therefore becomes possible to argue that Hegel’s subject is always only past, it never is.

Returning to my reading of *Life and Times of Michael K*, it is important that the claim to cultivation, a claim that seems to perform the function of a symbolic connection to his mother, is also simultaneously a claim to indigeneity, to natality. This is not a straightforward indigeneity to a place as such. Rather, it is an indigeneity to a concept of cultivation that carries with it the physicality of Michael K’s sense of his mother. Almost as soon as Michael K is capable of making the subjective assertion of “being, somewhere”, the possibility is again removed from him by the unexpected arrival on the farm of a man who we are told is the grandson of the Visagie family. The immediate effect of this arrival that suddenly places Michael K back into a form of social stratification is that he loses the value of his subjective assertion. He finds himself relocating himself based on Visagie’s terms, the “old hopeless stupidity invading him” again and, despite his attempts to resist, he “[feels] stupidity creep over him like a fog again ... no longer [knowing] what to do with his face ...” (*LT*, 60 and 64). Feeling himself being pressed back into the previous mould of subjectivity that was assigned to him (a qualified assertion of a lesser X), Michael K flees from the farm, thereby postponing the (now second) birth-like moment he will have in relation to the soil.

The mountains outside Prince Albert (the centrality of the town of Prince Albert is of course significant not only because of the invocation of the area from which Prince Albert came, namely the Saxony of Michael Kohlhaas, but also due to his role in the

abolition of slavery) constitute the ground to which Michael K flees. While ascending the mountain he encounters the first of two caves. Although the cave is far above the road it is clear to Michael K that it has been marked by society, since it is arranged in an orderly manner complete with a regularly used fire pit (*LT*, 65). While resting in this cave his thoughts turn to the cultivated piece of land that he has abandoned in an attempt to resist being made a subject (literally a man servant) by Visagie.

He thought of the pumpkin leaves pushing through the earth. Tomorrow will be their last day, he thought: the day after that they will wilt, and the day after that they will die, while I am out here in the mountains ... There was a cord of tenderness that stretched from him to the patch of earth beside the dam and must be cut. It seemed to him that one could cut a cord like that only so many times before it would not grow again.

(*LT* 65 – 66)

The connection that exists between Michael K and the patch of land next to the dam is more than simply a relation between cultivator and cultivated: rather, it is also the ongoing relationship that extends between his mother and himself. This cord of tenderness, an umbilical cord of sorts, is what Michael K attempts to sever when he moves further up the mountain, finding a fresh, uninhabited cave in which to reside. In his contemplation of the fate of his newly sprouting crops, the image of the “cord of tenderness” that connects him to that particular patch of land, which is also where he buried his mother, operates symbolically in that it directly relates the essence of the thing: cultivation is Michael K’s relation to his mother. This direct relation is amplified in his thoughts upon his final arrest and removal back to Cape Town, which takes place in his second birth-like experience that will be discussed below. The insubstantiality with which

he was confronted when sleeping in the Visagie house can be read, apart from confronting Michael K with the inability to say “I”, as extending this insubstantiality further, to the possibility of thought.

In an attempt to sever the cord that connects him to the land on the Visagie farm, and thus his connection to the aesthetic of cultivation and the demands of autochthony, Michael K wanders further up the mountain:

He found a new cave and cut bushes for the floor. He thought: Now surely I have come as far as a man can come; surely no one will be mad enough to cross these plains, climb these mountains, search these rocks to find me; surely now that in all the world only I know where I am, I can think of myself as lost.

Everything else was behind him. (*LT*, 66)

Although it is tempting to read this assertion of being lost in opposition to the earlier declaration of finally belonging somewhere that accompanied his first arrival at the farm, such a reading misses the force of both statements. For Michael K it is only possible to say “I”, to be his own foundation, when he manages to viscerally experience a separation from the strictures of societal stratification. In other words, to be lost is to be, somewhere. This cave in which he has chosen to reside is characterized as existing on the edge of reason—“no one will be mad enough” to come there. Michael K retreats to the edge of reason, with everything behind him.

His decision to inhabit this cave, which can be connected to his mother through its being part of the land, marks the beginning of his first birth-like experience. What is striking about his retreat into the cave is that, in addition to the desire for the enabling solitude with regard to subjective assertion, in this instance his retreat into the cave also

marks an attempt to separate himself from the symbolic order of cultivation into which he had necessarily fled while on the farm. The more time he spends living in the cave, the more Michael K feels he is “becoming a different kind of man”, “if there are two kinds of man” (*LT* 67). However, despite his early sense that he is metamorphosing into another type of creature, as time drags on he becomes increasingly malnourished and ill as he has not been cultivating or hunting for food. Rather than eventually emerging from the cave as a transformed being (i.e. what I am designating as birth), Michael K is struck by the realization that “he might die, he or his body, it was the same thing, that he might lie here until the moss on the roof grew dark before his eyes ...” (*LT* 69). There is, quite clearly, an echo in this statement of the reduction of the black-I to a non-I, where the subject is reduced to flesh. However, this echo occurs without any reference to the weightiness of the black body, thereby opening up a reading of the failed attempts to bring about a “new type of man” as derivative precisely of the inability to register this lived experience. A future encounter, I would argue, with the face of this sense of blackness is what is necessary to “set afoot a new type of Man”. This realization causes Michael K to abandon the cave and make his way back down to the town of Prince Albert, where he is arrested, placed in an infirmary and then finally released into a work camp called Jakkalsdrif (*LT* 69 – 73).

The result of this emergence (or, self-aborted birth) from the cave and subsequent release into a work camp is that Michael K is named, designated an identity, and inserted straight back into a form of society (*LT* 70). Although he manages to function relatively well, he does so due to the charity of those around him. He seizes his first opportunity to

escape the camp and, significantly, returns to the Visagie farm (*LT* 97). Upon his return to the farm he first inspects the old farm house to see if there is any sign of Visagie. Once he is assured of his solitude he leaves the house and goes to the dam. While declaring to himself that this is the place where he wants to live, the site where his “mother and grandmother lived”, he also laments the reality as he perceives it, namely that to live as he wants to live one must “live in a hole and hide by day. A man must live so that he leaves no trace of his living” (*LT* 99). This is precisely the way of life that Michael K perceives as being lived by the “soldiers from the mountains” and that he cannot pursue due to his never having been taught how to narrate a story (*LT* 111).

Having re-established his cultivation on the piece of land just below the dam and having built a “hovel” for himself a little distance up from the dam, in the middle of a gorge, Michael K gradually transforms himself into a nocturnal creature (*LT*, 103). This second period at the Visagie farm constitutes the second birth-like experience for Michael K (the one that was earlier delayed by the arrival of Visagie). In contrast to his previous experience in the cave, this time he has not severed his relation to cultivation, and as such he is able to endure his time in the ‘womb’ much more diligently: cultivation keeps him active and fed. Conceptually, the new form of man that he attempts to become through this process is rooted in an expression of autochthony in opposition to a social becoming signified by copulation. Apart from tending to his crops, the idleness of his existence was punctuated twice by the arrival of, first guerilla fighters, and then we are led to believe substantially later, government soldiers. Despite maintaining this established mode of the

aesthetic of cultivation as an attempt at resolving the problem of subjective certainty, quite clearly this assertion still fails: a failure that calls for a future encounter.

Although Michael K was strongly tempted by the possibility of chasing after the guerilla fighters and joining their cause, it was his anxiety about needing to make a subjective assertion about himself (which he articulates as needing to tell a story about himself) that resulted in his hiding inside his hovel until they departed (*LT* 109 – 110). Unlike the character of Michael Kohlhaas, who is equipped to produce manifesto after manifesto that narrates his story, an occurrence that we can read as a symbolic connection to a written aesthetic, Michael K was only able to cultivate his small patch of land. The absence of a story and its substitution by the aesthetic of cultivation, however, constitutes the basis of the unsettling effect he has on the doctor in the camp in Kenilworth, Cape Town, which will be discussed below.

As time passed Michael K became increasingly lethargic, yielding himself wholly to time (*LT*, 115 – 116). It is due to this yielding to time that he increasingly falls into what seems to be a form of delirium (in which the old man from the closing pages of the novel first appears) that results in his not realizing the presence of the soldiers at the dam and allows them to discover him. Upon his capture:

K sat with his head between his knees. Though his mind was clear, he could not control the dizziness. A string of spittle drooled from his mouth; he did not bother to stop it. Every grain of this earth will be washed clean by the rain, he told himself, and dried by the sun and scoured by the wind, before the seasons turn again. There will not be a grain left bearing my marks, just as my mother has now, after her season in the earth, been washed clean, blown out, and drawn up into the leaves of the grass.

So what is it, he thought, that binds me to this spot of earth as if to home I cannot leave? We must all leave home, after all, we must all leave our mother. (*LT*, 124)

This passage, which is narrated shortly before Michael K is deported to Cape Town, deals with the process through which he comes to sever his cord to his mother in the soil below the dam. There is a note of limited triumph in this passage; Michael K appears to be realizing that he has lived without a trace of his living. However, despite this he has still been captured by the security forces and will be interned in a camp. Through invoking the seasons, the power of the elements in relation to the mark of humans over time, he reasons that it is now time to move on from his mother, to “leave home”. This cutting of the umbilical cord, as it were, conveys the sense that this second birth, although it occurred during his delirium and he complains that he was woken too early, was apparently successful. Nevertheless, the final passage of the novel – where Michael K imagines a return to the Visagie farm – suggests that the cycle will continue.

There is one further point of resonance between *Michael Kohlhaas* and *Michael K* that needs to be examined, namely the unsettling effect that each of these characters has, through something that is given to them, on another character in the novel. With Kohlhaas this has to do with the power he acquires through holding the paper containing the prophecy concerning the future of the line of the Elector of Saxony. In Coetzee’s novel, the character on which Michael K has an unsettling effect is the doctor who is responsible for treating him in the infirmary at the camp in Kenilworth, in Cape Town. Michael K’s effect is due more to the enigma presented to the doctor by his silence and cultivation than due to anything he explicitly does to him; in fact he barely speaks or

moves. It is at this level of effect simply through existence that the novels resonate with each other. The doctor's experience of Michael K evolves from one of quasi-medical concern to one of philosophical inquiry. It is imperative to all in the camp, both the director and the doctor, that Michael K chooses to speak and tell his story. For the camp director this necessity emerges from his duties as an interrogative officer in the army; the doctor views Michael K's speech as the only way through which he might eventually get him to eat (*LT*, 131 – 152).

In a passage of what appears to be his personal diary, the narrator articulates the doctor's attempts at making Michael K speak and eat. After explaining to him that “if you will not compromise you are going to die” and just what such a death from starvation would entail, the doctor, in a typically liberal gesture, figures himself as the only possible savior of Michael K. He declares that he is the

only one who can save you. I am the only one who sees you for the original soul you are. I am the only one who cares for you ... You are precious ... in your way; you are the last of your kind, a creature left over from an earlier age ... We have all tumbled over the lip into the cauldron of history: only you, following your idiot light ... have managed to live in the old way, drifting through time, observing the seasons, no more trying to change the course of history than a grain of sand does. (*LT*, 151 – 152)

What the doctor seems to (correctly) perceive is Michael K's pursuit of the space outside of society in which he might attempt his own assertion of subjectivity. However, the meaning of this pursuit is misread by the doctor. He proceeds to declare how Michael K should be remembered as a *story*, one which he should narrate to the doctor as a matter of urgency. It is through this narration, rather than through medicine, that the doctor offers

his salvation to Michael K. What the doctor offers to save him from is precisely what Michael K would, at some level, seem to be pursuing, namely to die as he has lived – with little trace of the event (*LT*, 152).

A short time later Michael K escapes from the Kenilworth camp. In his contemplation of Michael K, both his life and his escape, the doctor attributes to him a certain intent or purpose that is bodily and not intellectual. He suggests that Michael K's pursuit is simply a matter of the body insisting on food that was not of a "camp" (*LT*, 164). This dismissal of Michael K's thoughtfulness in his endeavor misses the centrality of thought in Michael K's actions: it is the necessity of thought, of being able to say "I", that causes Michael K to flee into cultivation, which in turn makes his 'birth like' experiences possible. The inability to attribute an intellectual premise to Michael K's actions has more to do with the doctor's inability to read Michael K's aesthetic production in the form of cultivation than with Michael K himself. Nonetheless, the doctor is confronted, through Michael K, with his own desire to flee the subjectivity imposed by the camps (which we might read as society). He imagines a conversation with Michael K that takes place after he imagines to have managed to track him down:

'... Forgive me too for following you like this. I promise not to be a burden.' ... 'I am not asking you to take care of me, for example by feeding me. My need is a very simple one. Though this is a large country, so large that you would think there would be space for everyone, what I have learned of life is that it is hard to keep out of the camps. Yet I am convinced that there are areas that lie between the camps and belong to no camp ... I am not so foolish, however, as to imagine that I can rely on

maps and roads to guide me. Therefore I have chosen you to show me the way.’ (*LT*, 162 – 163)

The result of the doctor’s presentation of this speech to Michael K is (in his imagination) that Michael K will flee from him: his hope for personal escape will be denied. There are two things that are striking in this formulation, however. The first is that it is the doctor who imagines to be able to designate Michael K as his guide. In attempting to learn from Michael K how to avoid the strictures of society (represented by the disciplinary and classificatory power of the camps) the doctor immediately attempts to place such a relation on to Michael K. The second issue, which the final passage of the novel helps to make clear, is that the doctor understands the escape in perfectly spatial terms. While Michael K clearly does value space as a marker of his removal from the strictures of society, it is the relation to the earth – his mother – that enables his attempt (even though it fails) to become a new type of man. In the final passage of the novel it is through the drawing of water from the depths of the earth by a string that Michael K declares, that “in that way ... one can live” (*LT*, 184).

From the above it is clear that both *Michael Kohlhaas* and *Life and Times of Michael K*, in the structure of their narrative form as well as through the pursuits of their main characters, perform a questioning concerning subjectivity. The anxiety that surrounds the self assertion of subjective certainty is put into play, both as that which necessitates action to maintain one’s perceived designation (Kohlhaas) and as that which necessitates the movement away from the strictures of society so as to put your own designation into play (Michael K). Effectively what is at stake in this difference is the valorization or refusal of a particular concept of Man as it comes to shape society, namely

the concept of Man intrinsic to the foundations of European modernity. However, the attempt at setting afoot a new type of man that structures *Life and Times of Michael K*, in other words the attempt to refuse this concept of the subject, all fail. This failure, I contend, has to do with the relative absence of what, following Fanon, is named as the body of the black man in Coetzee's text. Where the body does appear it evokes questions of monstrosity as it comes to bear on the "face", as well as on the difficulty of mobilization due to the failure of the physicality of the body. In short it dislocates the subject in relation to the possibility of an encounter (the face), however, in neither of these instances of dislocation is the problem of the production of the black-I as a wound registered and, as such, it is this weight of the body that still calls for an encounter. As an attempt to come to terms with the weight of apartheid such an encounter, where the white-I is unraveled through the interventions of Coetzee and then brought to an encounter with the black-I as carrying the markings of its production (and the resistance to this) as non-I, is what Biko envisions when he asserts that it is impossible to define the contours of the society-to-come. However, Coetzee refuses to stage such an encounter in his narrative (a refusal already noted in my discussion of Durrant in the first chapter), allowing his novel rather to operate as a diagnostic device that might work towards clearing the ground for an encounter to come. Such an encounter would amount to what, in black consciousness philosophy, is referred to as "the gift of a more human face".

Reading Encounters

Texturing Difference: Indigeneity, Tactility, and the Text of “black consciousness philosophy” has argued that the work of coming to terms with apartheid, to practice life in its wake, is not reducible to a question of political reconciliation or economic redress, as important as these are. Rather, I argue that any attempt at coming to terms needs to adequately define the conceptual terrain on which the problematic of apartheid is lodged. At its core, this terrain is structured around the production of the concept of Man through the mechanism of blackness/whiteness, a mechanism that “thingifies” blackness while placing whiteness on a trajectory toward being Man. As Fanon argues, this concept of Man towards which whiteness strives, and against which blackness is produced as an object, is precisely also the concept through which society in modernity is constructed. For Fanon, then, it is Man as concept that must be destroyed in order to “set afoot a new man” that is not reducible to this reified expression of subjectivity that is produced through the marking of black and white. In the midst of this, Fanon echoes Césaire’s reading of indigeneity and negritude in the *Notebook* through his insistence on the “lived experience of the black man”. This is not a straightforward critique of negritude; rather, it produces the tactility of the body as the constitutive element in the objectification of the black man and in any attempt to come to terms with this. As such, through his call for “us to leave this Europe”, a call directed at those designated as black, Fanon mandates a destruction of the European concept of Man. This destruction, however, holds out the

possibility for an encounter that might enable a new relation: it is a particular expression of Europe, one rooted in Man, which is rejected.

With regard to the context of the post-apartheid moment in South Africa, I contend that apartheid needs to be understood as a system that attempted to guarantee the arrival of whiteness as Man through the objectification of the black man. In other words, apartheid was not simply about exploitation and deprivation—although this clearly marked its expression—but rather sought to produce both blackness and whiteness through the differential of community as the condition and expression of reified subjectivities. As such, any simple invocation of community as the name in which reconciliation, reparation, or even mourning should be advanced, risks carrying with it the logic along which the production of blackness and whiteness in apartheid South Africa was produced. This is why, throughout the broader text of black consciousness philosophy, there is a persistent refusal to imagine what a society-to-come might look like. Similarly, the attempt to confront the legacy of apartheid from the subjective position of being either white or black (where neither of these terms has been cut out from the mechanism of blackness/whiteness) misreads the problematic with which the post-apartheid is confronted, namely, the project of Man as it has come to register in the world. This is not to argue that there have been no useful or even exceptionally effective critiques of apartheid, community, and race both during and after apartheid. In fact, in an effort to frame my intervention in a politically scrupulous manner I offer a reading of precisely such an intervention into the problematic of apartheid in the poetry of Jeremy Cronin. However, what makes his intervention so effective is precisely the care for the

limit that it discloses: Cronin refuses to simply claim the ability to walk out of the script that produces him; in fact, he persistently highlights the potentiality of sliding back into precisely that from which he tries to emerge.

The sense of life that is opened up through Cronin's intervention, namely the always already condition of the community of the touch, held in the palpability of the gaze, that resists the stamping of reified difference, suggests a possibility of the practice of existence that would be ethical in the sense defined by Gilles Deleuze. Such a practice, the conditions of which are opened up by the offer of an encounter through the intervention of black consciousness philosophy, attempts to be adequate to an alternate expression of subjectivity as an effect rather than as a reified declaration of certainty. It is to this extent that I argue the intervention made by Lyotard into the question of "the jews" resonates with the critique of Man offered by Fanon through his reading of the mechanism of blackness/whiteness: According to Lyotard, the Jews are made to stand for the unrepresentable, the condition of the subject prior to subjectivity, namely the existence of "the jews"—what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as "nomadology". As such, Lyotard reads the extermination of the Jews as an attempt to mask the mode through which the subject is produced through repressing this primary nomadology, or life. Fanon, reading Sartre, suggests that this process of repression occurs at two levels: at the intellectual, financial level (the Jews) and at the physical level (blackness). I suggest that the differential of blackness/whiteness in its production of the white man as mind and the black man as body, in Fanon's argument, can be read as attempting to resolve the tension between Nature and Society whereby the black man is made representative of nature, a

physical object, while the white man is made representative of society, mind. In effect, what *takes place* here is the production of the black-I such that it is non-I and external to Man: a reduction to flesh that marks the black body in silence, despite its scream.

This is a mechanism that is not only conceptual. As my reading of Serote's *To Every Birth Its Blood* makes clear, this remaindering (to use Nunes' term) of the black-I such that it becomes non-I is lived in the trauma of existence as a wound (what Fanon implies is a double splitting from the self). The reduction of Tsi, the main character of the first part of the novel, to flesh through torture both reveals the thingification of the black man as something that must be resisted and, I argue, begins to unfold a sense of indigeneity that is not reducible to place or reified identity. It is in Aimé Césaire's re-inscription of the concept of indigeneity that I contend the terrain for a conceptual becoming, made to the measure of the world – not man – begins to be opened up. In formulating his argument, Césaire produces a sense of colonialism as an integral episteme in the production of Man: colonialism is not just something that took place in history, the materiality of which is still felt in the present. Rather, colonialism enables the outworking of the mechanism of blackness/whiteness, or rather settler/native, representing an attempt to produce Europe as Man. For Césaire, as for Fanon and Biko, there is a violence to this that needs to be accounted for in any attempt to set out in its wake. Accounting for this violence cannot be achieved through a liberal, multi-racial, working group (as Biko characterizes liberal movements in apartheid South Africa), rather it demands an encounter in the physicality of this reduction. There is, of course, no point in coming to such a fight unarmed and, apart from the production of a concept of

indigeneity as naming a relation to conceptual becoming not reducible to autochthony, Césaire offers through his understanding of poetry and knowledge a weapon: the ability to take the cut of the body, the tactility of the lived experience of the black man, and to lodge this as a cutting into the mechanism of blackness/whiteness so as to break its relentless production of Man, even momentarily: a singularity that enables the gift of a more human face.

Seizing hold of a such a “monad” as it flashes on the horizon, to invoke Benjamin, so as to open the terrain for an ethical practice of life extends the shift that Benjamin offers through Césaire (here I read Césaire as though he reads Benjamin) where man is thought of as a concept that can be dislodged and made expressive of the new. In Césaire’s argument, however, there is a persistent effort to open the potentiality of such a shift without ever declaring its arrival. In fact, in his lecture on colonialism Césaire figures this arrival as a future to come that cannot be specified in our present. Instead, what Césaire attends to, as do Fanon and Biko, is the act of divulging the mechanism of blackness/whiteness so as to enable what Biko refers to as “conscientisation”. For Biko, black consciousness philosophy is always about “making people ready”, about clearing the ground for a future encounter. It is this demand for the future that orientates black consciousness philosophy as an intervention that is not content simply to dislocate blackness from the mechanism of thingification. Rather, it seeks to dislodge both blackness and whiteness so as to enable the strongest possible conditions for a future encounter that might enable the arrival of a new man, made to the measure of the world. Quite clearly such a reading of black consciousness philosophy is

only possible if it is unfolded through attending to the broader network that constitutes its text.

This network extends beyond discourses that are usually considered to be ‘anti-colonial’ or ‘post-colonial’, enabling an encounter with Europe and its auto-critique that might open up the possibility for a properly ethical subjectivity, one that works against the assertion of subjective certainty. The trajectories opened up in this confrontation with the concept of man must always be seen in a state of experimental opening; as the production of new relations that are, as it were, in a semi-permanent state of departure where it becomes a question of learning to learn to live as the constitution of a life. This learning to learn to live through the intervention of black consciousness philosophy emerges out of the new sense of indigeneity opened by Césaire: it is not just that this indigeneity marks a relation to conceptual becoming rather than to land, or even the mode through which it accounts for the violence that accompanies such a reduction to land. Rather, this indigeneity works against the flattening, or stamping, of life into reified subjectivity through coming to be expressed as a particular practice of reading in relation to the scripts that produce the conditions of subjectivation, a reading that includes an encounter with the scarring of colonialism. Expressed in black consciousness philosophy through the modality in which it is often expressed, namely the notebook as it denotes provisionality, movement, and adequation, I read this practice as sketching the terms for an encounter inclined towards the future-to-come, an encounter that cannot afford to become a repetition without difference (only Europe, as the home of Man, could afford the possibility of a return). In short, rather than understanding this intervention in the

language of politics (ends, means, actionability), I suggest that it be understood through literature and its pedagogy. The intervention called for by black consciousness philosophy is not a destruction ending in despair, it is a production; it is not a triumphant declaration of the death of man, it orders an opening in the wake of man that carries the weight of the body that is black with it; this is not purely a politics, it is a pedagogy that inflects “a life” with a touch – a difference in common: the gift of a more human face.

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