

Conceiving difference through alternative reading strategies:  
Deleuze, Deleuze and Guattari, Derrida and Post-Civil Rights US minority texts

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## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Moon Ja Park, and to my daughter, Bo Bae Valerie Park Buss.

## Abstract

This dissertation aims at engineering a dialogue between Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari and Jacques Derrida's conceptions of difference and expressions of difference in Post-Civil Rights US minority texts. I assemble these divergent manifestations of difference under the united cause of resisting a "master" discourse of difference which harnesses difference as the rationale of Modern racism. I begin by introducing the problematic of an established narrative that maintains difference in negative relation to "sameness." This narrative subordinates difference *vis-à-vis* an imagined white universal subjectivity, evacuating the singular, a-relational difference inherent to the particular. The four chapters of my dissertation argue for a reclaiming of positive, non-dialectical difference by proposing alternative reading strategies. I synthesize Deleuze and Guattari's notions of "becoming-minority," "deterritorialization" and "collective enunciation of minor literature," Deleuze's writing on the "suspension of judgment," and a Deleuzian understanding of Spinoza's *Ethics* with Derrida's conceptions of "becoming friendship," "becoming literary," "*différance*," "interval of undecidability," and "*lovence*." The texts used to bear out these articulations of difference include artworks by Kara Walker and Faith Ringgold, the legal storytelling of Derrick Bell, the album liner notes of John Coltrane and the fiction of Maxine Hong Kingston. This dialogue on difference, between philosophy and cultural texts, produces ways of imagining subjectivities that resist the conception of subjectivity associated with such figures as Aristotle, Descartes and Hegel. These figures are among the "masters" whose discourse of difference I challenge through the uprising of Deleuze, Guattari and Derrida in conjunction with differential writing produced by US minorities.

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## **Introduction**

### **The master's discourse of difference**

The words of radical black lesbian writer Audre Lorde strike a chord with this dissertation in her essay “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House”:

Advocating the mere tolerance of difference between women is the grossest reformism. It is a total denial of the creative function of difference in our lives. Difference must not be merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic... Within the interdependence of mutual (nondominant) differences lies that security which enables us to descend into the chaos of knowledge and return with true visions of our future, along with the concomitant power to effect those changes which can bring that future into being...(Lorde, 1984, 111-112).

The now popular adage “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” questions the efficacy of making recourse to theories of resistance that are themselves imbricated within dominant structures of knowledge and are, therefore, produced within the circuits of power that those theories attempt to challenge.<sup>1</sup> Lorde calls for an uncompromising stance that spurs radical feminists of color to “stand alone against” white capitalist patriarchy and the “house” that it built. Simultaneously, she enjoins her reader to collaborate with those others excluded from the master’s house so that “those of us who have been forced in the crucibles of difference... learn to make

common cause.” Lorde recognizes that difference is polygenetic and multiply situated. Moreover, differential consciousness reorganizes elements of difference beyond structures of dominance that function only through stringent categorizations of race, sex, gender, class, age, etc. To Lorde, racial hegemony is the massive, white plantation house characterized through its monolithic homogeneity. Its relentless whiteness welcomes heterogeneity only insofar as it can be exploited for sparking creativity and providing labor. Difference, in contrast, is a site of affirmation through the production of cultural work and through the radical politicization of identity. Difference erodes the master’s house; or at the very least, it attempts to build new dwellings without resorting to the master’s blueprint.

Lorde’s insights into the invisible structure of racism embedded in US consciousness is at first glance at odds with a conception of racial difference which has been historically employed for both oppressive and for liberatory ends, and which still persists today. The myth that racial difference can be situated through a dialectic, personified if you will by the trope of master and servant, conceptually shapes the practice of racism in the US. Slavery, disenfranchisement, quotas against foreigners, anti-miscegenation laws—the particular histories of racial exclusion of various minority communities in the US share the common thread that they were enabled by the presence of an absolute color barrier making it possible for white supremacy to recognize itself as distinct from *others*. Whiteness is maintained through a stable, homogenous category from which those marked by racial difference deviate. This logic of difference is also present in the strategies of survival, cultivation of resistance, and creative production

within US minoritarian culture. In a cruel act of irony, it seems that a positive defense of difference, as diversity, is held hostage by the dialectic that seeks to subordinate it.

Lorde's conception of difference, for example, as relational, contradictory, dialectical, may simply not be radically different enough to challenge normative definitions of difference that keep racial hegemony in place. One of the central premises of this dissertation concurs that difference is an affirmative and creative force. Lorde's choice of language, however, indicates an almost contradictory set of conceptual limitations. For instance, Lorde refers to the "fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic." Viewing difference as a "fund" positions difference as a fixed, essential reserve which can then be appropriated as a commodity. This weakens difference of its dynamic, disruptive force, i.e., its ability to interfere with the smooth operation of racial hegemony. More importantly, by defaulting to a dialectical relation of difference, Lorde's writing may be interpreted as a call for a resolution of difference rather than an elaboration or a proliferation of it. Though I applaud her initiative to create common ground for building alliances, I question the necessity of engaging in a form of dialectical thinking in order to do so. When all is said and done, I am not convinced that Lorde actually does disavow the master's conceptual tools instead of unwittingly using them to dismantle the master's house.

"Ours is becoming the age of minorities" say Deleuze and Guattari (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 469). Likewise, despite recent "evidence" to indicate otherwise, now is the time when difference, as racial diversity, must be reconsidered with unflinching attention. We are deep in an age where difference as diversity matters. The recent election of a racially mixed president, who passes as African American, has an Arabic

middle name, and Asian family members, is a timely litmus test to evaluate whether minor histories and expressive cultures of struggle, the histories of US minorities and their thriving continuation into the present, will or will not continue to be repressed through national amnesia and acts of silencing. The undeniably inspiring and symbolically significant figure of the 44<sup>th</sup> president is not merely reducible to his physiology or to his name: what is of greater relevance to my inquiry here is that the majority of the American public is able to identify with a candidate who exemplifies the “celebration of diversity” that is currently embraced for commercial and managerial motivations. For many Americans, as well as global bystanders who share a common interest in race and colonial struggles, Obama’s election represents a sort of redemption. A black president signifies that Dr. King’s vision of “freedom” is “at last” being put into action.

Furthermore, for some, who adopt a more conveniently color-blind ideology, the most recent presidential inauguration is proof positive that we do indeed inhabit what far too many race-neutral commentators have implied is the inauguration of a *post-racial* era: by situating racism as a solved problem, whose solution was demonstrated large-scale by Obama’s victory, the enunciation of on-going minority struggles can be dismissed that much more easily as merely highly subjectivist remnants of *ressentiment* instead of as valid social critique. The possibility that we continue to live in what Attorney General Eric Holder calls “essentially a nation of cowards,” fearful of, defensive towards and eagerly deflecting the very mention that racism “still” exists, has brought on a backlash of expected editorial responses from those who wish to silence critique on the basis that racism has been solved.<sup>ii</sup>

The notion that the struggle for racial equality has been redeemed by the appearance of a black man heading the Oval Office remains a cause for concern. To use Stuart Hall's terminology, the "relations of representation" in the US are transforming in such a way as to prove that a black president in a historically white dominant country is not only thinkable but is also actualizable.<sup>iii</sup> Yet the question remains as to whether the ideological structure and the institutional edifices that buttress the "master's house," and the restricted modes in which those who reside in the master's house conceive of themselves, remain unchallenged. This is true of both the conceptual master's house lodged in the national psyche as well as the physical master's house located at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

The recent cooptation of diversity as *de riguer* and sufficiently managed, prohibits the possibilities for imagining difference outside of classical Eurocentric philosophical frameworks. In US minority discourses, both academic and activist, a dialectical tension persists as the established paradigm through which to approach difference. Minority consciousness, in an attempt to affirm itself, too frequently adheres to these frameworks. The recent commemorative revisitation of the landmark collection of radical women of color writing from *This Bridge Called My Back* through *this bridge we call home* contradicts this claim by offering essays that critique the trap of identity with epistemological sophistication.<sup>iv</sup>

Yet, despite the emergence of promising scholarship that excites growing discourses of difference to be thought differently, there is still much to be explored. Intellectual production aimed at conceiving of difference as singularity within an ontological realm seems to have taken a backseat to representing difference as it relates

to identity. Thus, the question we commence with at the start of this dissertation remains significant and timely: how can we envision difference, difference that is not reduced to the simple, dialectical terms of identity and selfhood, as a tactic within the struggle against racism, a major form of discrimination/objectification/exploitation/terror, which defines itself through difference? As I will demonstrate, one way in which to challenge a master discourse of difference is to develop reading practices that resist the oppositional and relational foundation of modern racism.

This dissertation facilitates a dialogue utilizing Gilles Deleuze's concept of difference, written in collaboration and independently from Félix Guattari, and Jacques Derrida's concept of difference with expressions of difference from a diverse sample of American texts. This endeavor challenges the notion of "standing alone against" the master's conception of difference. What I propose, instead, is an analysis of French Post-structuralist philosophies of difference strategically conjoined with US Post-Civil Rights minoritarian literature and art. As I will demonstrate, assembling these divergent forms of difference under the united cause of resisting an established "master" discourse yields beneficial results. This dissertation is not intended as a comprehensive index of Derrida, Deleuze and Deleuze and Guattari's writings on difference. I wish to explore, on a much humbler scale, a few useful aspects of their conceptions of difference in order to engage their writing with a series of overlapping US minority writers and artists. Although coming from different contexts, I will establish how this particular set of conversations is mutually enhancing. The specter of mastery and subordination undergirding conservative conceptions of difference, however, is underscored by a

difficulty inherent to this very project: unresolved tensions produced when positioning major, not orthodox but certainly popular and influential, thinkers such as Deleuze, Guattari and Derrida alongside minor writers and artists of color are legion.<sup>v</sup>

Deleuze, Deleuze and Guattari, and Derrida's respective conceptions of difference, likewise, differ from each other. As I will explore, however, they do complement in productive, dialogic ways. In the interest of such a dialogue, I discuss how Deleuze, with and without Guattari, and Derrida, function alongside one another in order to produce a reading of difference in texts as singular. Difference as singularity counters the long established notion of difference that is captured by the plane of representation and subordinated to an ideal conception of "sameness." As I shall explore, Deleuze dismantles the conventional understanding of difference through a four part matrix of opposition, analogy, resemblance, and negativity. Difference for Derrida can be understood through a set of effects similar to Deleuze and Deleuze and Guattari's. However, Derrida develops his most celebrated theorization of difference, *différance*, along relational axes: the lines of presence/absence and presence/deferral that locate the dynamic movement of the "discord of different forces" (Derrida, 1982, 18). As I will investigate in the following chapters, these three theorists consider differences as an affirmative act of singularity that ultimately undermines the notion of identity.

My rationale for hybridizing French Post-structuralist sensibilities and American texts addresses this very concept of difference as identity. The US is unrivaled as a locale for multiple histories and contemporary cultural expressions of diversity, or the ongoing proliferation of difference. This statement is not borne out of a sense of

perverted nationalism or derivative patriotism. Rather, I proceed with the contention that the US, founded as a colonial state whose expansionist policies extended globally, is uniquely situated upon the world stage. The identity of the US, unlike Europe, was never and can never be understood solely or primarily as the white man's hearth: in other words, the master may have built his house here, but he can't justifiably lay claim to a deed. This is true even as the range and depth of the white man's presence has shaped its institutional power relations. Yet in a Foucauldian sense, resistance against, collaboration with and absolute indifference to white male institutional dominance is just as constitutive of these power relations. Despite centuries of epistemic dominance to insist otherwise, the identity of the US is inherently steeped in a *differential* consciousness.

As referenced earlier, Lorde writes that "within the interdependence of mutual (nondominant) differences lies that security which enables us to descend into the chaos of knowledge and return with true visions of our future... [sic]" Though I may disagree with her conceptual tactics, I am in wholehearted agreement with Lorde's multi-platformed, coalitional desire to fight against racism in our present and for the future. So, how can we conceptualize a future that differs, not just comparatively but categorically, in accordance to the particularities which we seek to affirm? For minorities in the US especially, this question is of crucial importance if we truly risk rising up against the master, the master's house, and, the master's discourse.

To this end, I have compiled texts produced by contemporary American minority writers, artists and musicians. The objects I study span different disciplines and emerge from different communities of color. I believe, however, that this



interdisciplinary and inter-racial approach lends itself to the spirit of diversity that underscores the exploration of difference as I propose it. Limiting an inquiry of critical conceptions of difference *qua* expressions of difference to a body of works defined by discipline or racial/ethnic community is an arguably more focused approach. Yet this approach could very well be constrained to the logic of identity, identity in difference, which I attempt to undermine. The following chapters are intended to function as a collection of essays that actively refute the idea that difference is containable to essentialist notions of identity. They are, moreover, arranged in a non-hierarchical, horizontal fashion in order to complement one another without the threat of displacement or conflation. Just as this dissertation is guided by an optimism in the possibilities of coalition-building between various communities in the US with particular yet solidifying interests, so too are these chapters meant to follow parallel paths that conjoin at the point of political engagement.

Chapter One fully introduces how Deleuze, Deleuze and Guattari and Derrida resist master narratives by yoking their conceptions of difference to Kara Walker's *An Abbreviated Emancipation* from her collection *Emancipation Approximation*, and Faith Ringgold's *Picasso's Studio*, respectively. Both are contemporary artworks that address the historical legacy of the racialized gaze using non-traditional media. The starkness and eloquent simplicity of Walker's work lends itself to a multiplicity of reading methods. I therefore analyze *An Abbreviated Emancipation* through a series of readings that offer a variety of philosophical styles. I ultimately argue that Deleuze and Deleuze and Guattari's application of difference as "becoming" yields the most strategic profit for escaping the confines of difference as a relation to "sameness." Likewise,

Ringgold's patchwork piece illuminates the non-dialectical aspects of Derrida's *différance* by dispersing the unity of the subject into a "sheath-like" array and by situating marginality into the center. This chapter is intended to lay the general intellectual groundwork for the ensuing chapters.

Although the following chapters address their respective objects with a greater degree of specificity unique to the text in question, they are intended to connect one to the other in a seamless fashion. Moreover, the chapters as a whole carry the leitmotif of minor conceptions of difference throughout.

Chapter Two focuses on critical race theorist, law professor and American writer Derrick Bell's short stories "The Space Traders" and "Redemption Deferred: Back to the Space Traders." In this chapter I distinguish between the institution of the law and the ideal of justice in an attempt to preserve the latter for minority struggles for equality. At the same time, and through Bell's hypothetical scenarios, I critique the notion of equality, as it has been molded by liberal humanist discourses which conflate equality with a form of transcendent redemption. I consider Derrida's idea of "undecidable interval" and Deleuze's notion of the "suspension of judgment" in order to argue that forced group identification, e.g., the categorization of communities through race, ethnicity, etc, suppresses the diversity of those who are restricted to those groups. The very idea that extracting a monolithic decision or forcing a unified choice from an internally differentiated group is consistent with the founding violence of the law.

Chapter Three continues a critique of the transcendent through an analysis of John Coltrane's poetic liner notes to *A Love Supreme*. By reading Coltrane's poetry alongside Spinoza's *Ethics* I attempt to move the discourse of redemption away from

the transcendent plane and towards aesthetico-ethical virtuosity. Throughout the chapter I continue the ongoing dialogue of difference between Deleuze and Derrida by inviting the ideas of singularity, love and perfection *vis-à-vis* socio-creative expression. Chapter Three functions somewhat like a musical accompaniment to Chapter Two by arguing for a materialist understanding of the divine, the sublime and virtuosity, which conjoins “beatitude” to the project of emancipatory, collective politics.

Chapter Four connects to the concept of the politics of collective enunciation in its analysis of Chinese American novelist Maxine Hong Kingston’s *Tripmaster Monkey: his fake book*. In this chapter I return to the concepts introduced in Chapter One, namely, Deleuze and Deleuze and Guattari’s “becoming” and Derrida’s *différance*. By using these concepts I demonstrate that the figure of the minor, read through minor reading practices, disrupts the organizing principles that both segregates the major from the minor and also keeps the major in a historically real, but artificially constructed, position of supremacy. The minor reading practices that Hong Kingston’s work invites criticizes the way the minor functions as a metaphor through a majority utilization of the racialized figure. One significant aspect of my critique in this chapter is to indict two of the architects guiding my thought in this dissertation, Deleuze and Guattari, as possible collaborators in the subjugation of minor figuration. In this way, perhaps, I end the dissertation with the serious, yet respectful suggestion that any theorists chosen to assail the master’s discourse of difference ought never to take the place of “masters” themselves.

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<sup>i</sup> Lorde delivered these conference comments at the “Personal and the Political Panel” during the 1979 Second Sex Conference at New York University. She was responding to what is now arguably perceived as what could very well have been the fatal flaw of second wave feminism, i.e., the inability of white, and more often than not, middle to upper class, educated, heterosexual, women to genuinely respect differences internal to the feminist movement between the 1960’s through the 1980’s. Lorde, alongside other pivotal figures such as Cherríe Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa and Trinh T. Minh Ha, were pioneers in offering this particular set of grievances.

<sup>ii</sup> For an exemplary compilation of several such responses see Tobin Harshaw’s editorial on Holder’s speech (Harshaw, Tobin. “A Nation of Cowards, Stimulus-Wielding Chimps and Hip-Hop Republicans,” *New York Times* 21 February 2009, morning ed.).

<sup>iii</sup> See Hall’s oft overlooked distinction between the “relations of representation,” or the suspension of criticality in the affirmation of identity, versus the “politics of representation,” of political strategies that do not presume an essentialist stance, which are at stake in the now maligned terrain of “identity politics” (Hall, Stuart and Paul de Gay, eds. *Questions of Cultural Identity*. London: Sage, 1996.)

<sup>iv</sup> Chela Sandoval’s foreword and select sections under the headings “‘locking arms in the master’s house’ . . . omissions, revisions, new issues” and “‘shouldering more identity than we can bear; . . . seeking allies in academia” exemplify this growing trend. (Anzaldúa, Gloria E. and Analouise Keating, eds. *this bridge we call home*. New York: Routledge, 2002.)

<sup>v</sup> If non-critically conceptualized and carelessly executed, this project could easily end up reproducing those very power relations that I seek to challenge. As Edward Said has argued so astutely, situating minor texts as objects of knowledge within dominant discursive structures reinforces the very hegemonic foundation upon which those discourses are generated. See for example the essays “Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies, and Community,” “Representing the Colonized: Anthropology’s Interlocutors” and “The Politics of Knowledge” from *Reflections on exile, and other essays*. (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2000) and “Permission to Narrate” from *The Edward Said Reader*, Eds, Moustafa Bayoumi and Andrew Rubin. (New York: Vintage, 2000).

## Chapter One

### “Difference as such” and difference as *other*: the artwork of Kara Walker and Faith Ringgold

Chapter One picks up immediately where the Introduction leaves off. My goals here are threefold: in Section I, I further discuss difference held captive within the “master’s” narrative. This narrative subordinates difference *vis-à-vis* an imagined white universal subjectivity. Section I elaborates upon those aspects of Deleuze’s concepts of difference, concentrating on the text *Difference and Repetition*, in relation to Kara Walker’s art installation: “An Abbreviated Emancipation.”<sup>1</sup> In Section II I turn my attention to Derrida’s notion of *différance*: I consider his seminal, eponymously titled essay from *Margins of Philosophy*, writings from *Positions*, and excerpts from *Of Grammatology* in relation to another African American feminist art work, “Picasso’s Studio” by Faith Ringgold. Section III connects Deleuze and Derrida through their mutual interest in anti-Hegelian, non-dialectical difference. It concludes with a speculation on how difference, viewed through a non-dialectical lens, might revitalize viewing strategies in support of the struggle against racism.

#### *Section I: Deleuze and “difference as such”*

Situated in the same decade that Lorde writes “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” yet separated in space, literally an ocean apart, Deleuze and his friend Michel Foucault share a conversation in France. This conversation speaks

to many of the points that Lorde makes in the US regarding using the tools of theory for practical, political ends. Deleuze writes: “A theory is exactly like a box of tools. It has nothing to do with the signifier. It must be useful... I leave it to you to find your own instrument, which is necessarily an instrument for combat.” He continues by discussing the emergence of a new relationship between theory and practice that would neither subordinate practice to the status of applied theory nor, conversely, imagine practice as the “inspiration” preceding theory. Theory and practice, rather, work in conjunction in such a way that “practice is a set of relays from one theoretical point to another, and theory is a relay from one practice to another” (Foucault, 1977, 208). Deleuze’s general argument about the new relation between theory and practice posing “a system of relays... within a multiplicity of parts that are both theoretical and practical,” challenges conceptions about consciousness and subjectivity associated with vanguardism (Foucault, 1977, 206-207).<sup>2</sup>

Both in the realm of the political and in the realm of the theoretical, which are for Deleuze ultimately the same realm looked at from two different perspectives, Deleuze is interested in creating concepts. Like Lorde, he eschews reproducing master discourses of difference. Yet to say that Lorde and Deleuze have divergent views on difference is a grand understatement. Their approaches to writing, their experiences, their political orientations, their audiences, and their allegiances belong to distinct spheres. However, there are a few key points through which they both dwell within a field of resonance: herein, their conceptions about power, production, action, and most notably, difference, not only overlap but, one might even say, serendipitously collide. Their notions about

difference are not merely “close” due to similarity or through proximity. Instead, they confront in a fashion that further proliferates notions of difference.

Foucault and Deleuze offer complement and counterpoint to Lorde’s writings on the dyad between power and knowledge in a way that explores not only the concrete structure of the master’s house, but its very conceptual blueprint. For Lorde, “the chaos of knowledge” is a site of immanent power. It is not a power to be exchanged or won within a relation of dominance and subordination; it is, rather, a power that grows out of itself. It is self-generating power. Lorde’s identification of power with her self-identified role as feminist lesbian of color is absolutely important here. She is *queering*, in both colloquial and denotative senses, a relationship to rhetorically masculinist black power and implicitly white feminist power. Lorde’s notion of power is derived from her multiple subject positionality and her desire to enhance the multiplicity of her identity with others who are likewise multiply positioned.<sup>3</sup>

A number of questions arise from staging Deleuze’s statements about theoretical tools with Lorde’s injunction against the master’s tools. In the “Intellectuals and Power” essay I refer to above, Deleuze, like Lorde, is concerned with the instantiation of revolution over and above the continuation of reform. According to Deleuze, what are the tools necessary for this “emergent” type of revolution? Answer: theoretical. Where are these tools to be found? Answer: philosophy. *Difference and Repetition* argues for the recuperation of a philosophy of difference by presenting an extended critique of its subordination and demonization. “To rescue difference from its maledictory state,” writes Deleuze, “seems, therefore, to be the project of the philosophy of difference” (Deleuze, 1994, 29). From whom does Deleuze endeavor to save difference? Throughout this opus

he consistently attacks a body of philosophers who he critiques for participating in the suppression of ontological and material difference, including Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, Hegel and Leibniz.

He instead makes recourse to minor anti-statist philosophers, such as Epicurus, Spinoza, Nietzsche and Bergson, in order to undermine what he views as an oppressive adherence to the “history of ideas” lineage within philosophy. Specifically, in the “Difference in Itself” chapter, he focuses on Plato and Aristotle. By attacking these classical “masters” from antiquity, this book distinguishes itself as an inquiry into the very ground of philosophy. It also implements Deleuze’s desire to plow under that ground, to “overturn Platonism” in fact.

To Deleuze, difference is a dynamic, positive, material process, i.e., it is *differentiation*. The purpose of his philosophy of difference is to launch a war against the tyranny of “sameness” that conceptually controls it. To accomplish this, he attempts to declassify axiomatic relations between mind/body, cause/effect, idea/concept, and sense/*Cogito*. In the process of declassification, Deleuze is making profound political interventions *vis-à-vis* the corporeal body by issuing the imperative to think in concert with the body and not against it. Deleuze is thus invested in exploring ways to liberate the sensual body, realized within the impromptu aggregation of “events,” from the crushing oppression of mind, reason and common sense. <sup>4</sup>

Deleuze refers to the scheme through which sameness tyrannizes difference as the “four iron collars of representation.” The four collars, AKA four “shackles,” function in two notable ways: first they tame difference by fishing it out of an “ocean of dissemblance” and subjecting it to a plane of mediation. An ancillary process follows



wherein difference is rendered as “evil on first impression” and then “saved” through representation. Here, representation grants secondary status to difference by removing it from a state of “determination as such,” or “difference in itself.” According to Deleuze, the four collars include: “identity in the concept, opposition in the predicate, analogy in judgment and resemblance in perception”—identity, opposition, analogy and resemblance (Deleuze, 1994, 262).<sup>5</sup> Deleuze argues that unrestrained difference is, instead, a-relational, primal, affirmative and dynamic. Repetition is the last major quality that he develops in reference to difference. For the sake of this analysis I shall mainly focus on difference as a-relational, through the critique of difference between determinable concepts. It is, however, clearly impossible to completely isolate one collar from the other three.

Deleuze names Aristotle as one of the most influential philosophical ancestors to subordinate difference to a merely relational status. His quarrel with Aristotle focuses on the latter’s conception of being. In his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle endeavors to situate being itself, or being *qua* Being, as an object of study. This is true especially in regard to “first principles and highest causes,” or “first philosophy.” But Aristotle’s notion of Being is situated within a problematic system of differentiation. According to Deleuze, “Aristotle says: there is a difference which is at once the greatest and the most perfect... the greatest difference is always in opposition... Contrariety alone expresses the capacity of a subject to bear opposites while remaining substantially the same...” (Deleuze, 1994, 30). Deleuze argues that Aristotle’s notion of difference, which hinges on relationality and as such can not be expressed in terms such as *diversity* and *otherness*, is a founding moment

in the construction of a master narrative of difference within philosophy that is itself built upon opposition and contrariety.

In order to better understand Deleuze's critique against Aristotle with the interests of anti-racism strategies in mind, let's consider the following piece of art:



Figure 1-1

The image above is a detail from a larger installation-sized piece entitled *An Abbreviated Emancipation* from the 2002 *Emancipation Approximation* collection by contemporary artist Kara Walker (Figure 1-1). Arguably, this piece illustrates the

conventional way of thinking about difference which Deleuze attacks. Walker's art is stunning: much commentary has already been published on its larger than life capacity to affect viewers.<sup>6</sup> Her work may be so well received because it reinforces conventional understandings of racial difference that are trapped within a logic of representation. However, there may be ways of reading her artwork that offer different ways of viewing difference. Following, I offer three series of interpretations of "An Abbreviated Emancipation" in order to reinforce my central position that difference attempts to hold thought hostage to forms of dialecticism, which can be further extended to how race is thought. I begin with examples of hegemonically conservative methods for reading difference and conclude with what I believe to be a method that yields more possibilities.

In *An Abbreviated Emancipation*, one male and one female youth, presumably slaves, hold up a third adult male. Because this third figure personifies an undeniably colonialist presence, in dress and in visage, we can safely assume he is the white master. The lanky boy seating the master brings to mind the mythological Atlas who was sentenced by the gods to shoulder the weight of the earth and the heavens. The girl, on bended knee, appears to be in the process of fellating the master. The master with remarkably erect posture and prodigious groin is either directing the girl's mouth toward his genitals or patting her benevolently upon the head. In this piece, as well as in others, Walker captures the silenced dynamic upon which southern slavery was built in the ambivalence of the hand on the girl's head. This gesture succinctly signifies how the master of the plantation was often figuratively, and literally, a father figure.<sup>7</sup>

The presence of a white father is of crucial importance within Walker's interplay of erotic desire and differential positions of power *vis-à-vis* familial roles. The father is

the imperial center of the threesome. In keeping with his central role, pleasure is his to take and receive at will. Those raced bodies under him are there merely to serve: their desire is incidental to the singular one of the master. This particular reading of desire, as it relates to a psychic structure of patriarchy, corresponds to Deleuze and Guattari's critique against the underlying familial dynamics of Oedipalization. They write, "we are Oedipalized! we are castrated; psychoanalysis didn't invent these operations, to which it merely lends the new resources and methods of its genius" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 67). They continue that the Oedipal ensemble composed of "boy-girl and parents-agents of production and anti-production" is enabled by the presence of a preceding ensemble made up of the individual and the socius that presides over the organization of the group fantasy (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 61). Deleuze and Guattari thus favor the group as a primary locus from which to analyze the mechanics of fantasy rather than relying upon a bourgeois conception of the individual within a nuclear family.<sup>8</sup>

*An Abbreviated Emancipation* typifies how Walker's visually stunning collection could be accused of conceiving race exclusively in black and white terms. Her *modus operandi* as a silhouette artist is practiced through adhering cut paper across bare and starkly lit walls to create installations that illuminate the shadows lurking in America's history of national racism with an emphasis on the more violent and graphic aspects of its antebellum past. Walker's dichromatic color palette reinforces the notion that black and white are in direct opposition. Further, in her artwork black and white not only oppose one another, they define one another. Black requires white and vice versa: like images interpreted from Rorschach inkblots, each leans upon the other as a defining border in order to take coherent shape and form historically meaningful signs. This

commonsensical interpretation can be aligned to Aristotle's notion of "greatest and smallest differences." The ensuing interpretation would insist that blackness and whiteness, as they are utilized by Walker, represent two polarities within a single graphic unity. The thematic content of the image echoes the notion that the opposition between black and white also extends towards race. Even though all three figures are silhouetted in black, this reflection on America's practice of anti-black racism reproduces a Manichean divide. Our commonsense argument would continue that her artwork quite deftly reveals the sins of America's white (fore)fathers. Yet they are hermeneutically stuck in the trappings of dialectical difference, a hallmark of modern racism. Ultimately, if we read black and white according to a logic of contrariety, her art work, in medium and in message, makes use of the master's conceptual tools in an attempt to dismantle his house. The dichotomization of black and white, i.e., the very category of race containing these "contraries," is implicated in the structure of consciousness required to maintain racism.

Deleuze's philosophy of difference jumbles the arrangement of oppositions in the interpretation just offered by disentangling the notion of difference "in degree" from difference "in kind" (Deleuze, 1994, 3). Deleuze begins by pointing out how for Aristotle the greatest difference is not "real," i.e., categorical, but rather "specific." According to Deleuze, Aristotle is dealing with differences of species within genus. That is to say, Aristotle understands difference as it is expressed within a category, not between. By extension and in application, we can extrapolate that, for example, the difference between black and white is contained within a discourse of color that privileges white as the normative ideal against which black is considered the greatest deviation. We are stuck in

a mode of thinking that substitutes genus for categorical difference in order to arrange the codification of objects according to a continuum of value. “Value” in this sense condenses quality within a hierarchical spectrum of “lesser” to “greater” opposition, instead of through a more horizontal continuum of difference that manifests as diversity or otherness.<sup>9</sup> One interpretation of Walker’s image relies on the concept that black constitutes the greatest difference to white. But why is this? Couldn’t other qualities differ from white with as great an intensity? Wouldn’t qualities such as *fuzzy* versus *white*, or *noisy* versus *white*, pose much greater differences?

Thus, Aristotle’s concepts of genera, including the genus of concepts mediated through what Deleuze will explore as “the image of thought,” are determined by external, relational differences. Relational difference is stamped with a stigma that is not real, but superimposed. Relational differences are “inorganic” genera insofar as they are falsely attributed specificity. The specificity is more accurately attributable to the order of species than to genus. Yet this mode of attribution is used as the very foundation for determining genus. Deleuze introduces this substitution as “a synthetic and constitutive predicate” through which “difference carries with itself the genus and all the intermediary differences. The determination of species links difference with difference across the successive levels of division...” (Deleuze, 1994, 31). Diversity, and otherness *qua* incongruity, is thus subordinated within a scheme that traps or “blocks” singularity within a classification system that taxonomically subordinates parallel qualities. Deleuze concludes that Aristotle is guilty of committing a *sleight of hand* wherein “the determination of the concept of difference is confused with the inscription of difference

in the identity of an undetermined concept... [ergo] difference then can be no more than a predicate in the comprehension of a concept” (Deleuze, 1994, 32).

Difference, then, is recruited from a state of singular primacy, arrested in its process of dynamic differentiation and then concretized. Deleuze refers to difference as “privatized” into a false characteristic. To what does this predicate refer? Difference in this case is seen as an extension of the subject which is bestowed identity.<sup>10</sup> The predication of difference, its conscription into the rank of genus, creates the condition by which a universal subject can part the seas of diversity and hold others in opposition to himself. In doing so he asserts his subjecthood through the illusion of “sameness.”<sup>11</sup>

Through *An Abbreviated Emancipation* we glimpse the resulting effects when difference is “shackled” by mediation: difference is not simply held in opposition, and specifically, in opposition “sameness” according to a logic of sameness as identity. All four shackles of representation, opposition, analogy, identity, and negativity, are enabled precisely through the apparatus of relationality. These forms of relationality yoke difference, in its a-relational, non-mediated state of active differentiation, to a totalizing and centralized structure of representation.

Walker’s piece is also consistent with Deleuze’s writings on the Hegelian repudiation of difference. Deleuze points out that “like Aristotle, Hegel determines difference by the opposition of extremes or of contraries” and further conjoins the contrariety of difference to the service of identity through negativity (Deleuze, 1994, 44 and 49). With these comments in mind, let’s revisit Walker’s artwork:



Figure 1-2

Here, again, is the master (Figure 1-2). By zooming in on the three figures mentioned earlier with fresh eyes we can see that an alternate interpretation of this image would suggest that the profiles depicted here do not actually belong to separate bodies. Trace a line from the top of the master's head, through his torso and then through his legs. In our first analysis we interpreted the master as sitting on and against two slaves. Now imagine the master as the collapse of three separate figures into the totality of one: the master is a kneeling monster whose limbs grow into other bodies—the leg upon which he kneels gnarls into the silhouette of the Atlas slave boy and his extended leg blooms into the exquisite profile of the young slave girl fallen to her knees. Master and slave(s) are both



confined within a singular body which adheres to its own internal logic of value and specification.

Given this new interpretation, in *An Abbreviated Emancipation* we can see an image of difference as it exists within a single form, not between forms. The body of the *masterslave*, like some kind of sadistic minotaur, conjoins radically different bodies at the torso. It incorporates within itself other corporeal entities in order to define itself. But it is clear that it is the top half of the body that rules over the entirety insofar as it enhances itself through the labor and the pleasure provided by the forms that it subsumes. This monster is a visual personification of the lord bondsman dialectic from *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. It is an icon of the conflict between the lord and the bondsman which is fought between the independent consciousness of the lord and dependent consciousness of the bondsman as they grapple with their respective roles of difference. When this difference is resolved, the lord remains having a consciousness for himself. The bondsman too will have consciousness for the lord.<sup>12</sup> Their interdependent relation, aimed at the lord, requires this differential consciousness.

For Hegel, desire and labor are two key tools through which lord and bondsman achieve recognition through one another. Specifically, labor mediates desire, furnishes self-realization and grants liberation. He writes that, "the lord puts himself into relation... to a *thing* as such, the object of desire, and to the consciousness for which thinghood is the essential characteristic" (Hegel, 1977, 115). The job of the lord is to "achieve satisfaction" and take "pure enjoyment" in the bondage that is produced in the mutual recognition of lord and bondsman. The bondsman's job, on the other hand, is to work (Hegel, 1977, 116). In the exchange of labor the lord achieves his subjectivity as a lord. It

is not merely naked labor, however, but labor attached to desire, labor with a higher purpose, which binds the lord and bondsman into self-consciousness union. Sequentially, labor follows and supplants desire as the “thing” that mediates lord and bondsman in achieving mutual recognition. Of course for Hegel, this is labor seen from the vantage point of the one receiving it, i.e., the master.

One important aspect of reading Walker’s work alongside Hegel’s comments on the lord bondsman dialectic is that they intersect in a historically uncanny fashion. Hegel is writing in the continual process of the bourgeois revolution which is temporally syncopated *vis-à-vis* labor practices. At the time Hegel is writing his treatise on lordship and bondage, industry is developing at a quickening pace in the Western world. However, we are also dealing with an era that marks the beginning of the end of the transatlantic slave trade in Europe and the Americas. Wage labor, indentured servitude and chattel slavery coexist in often times competing ways. Thus, by using the terms “lord” and “bondsman,” Hegel is including the way in which these terms circulate in the past and in his present. Although in other writings he is clearly an apologist, if not advocate, for slavery, here he manages to sidestep some of the messier issues that may accompany actual, forced slave labor in the blossoming of Modernity.<sup>13</sup> The most obvious pitfall is that the humanity of one party, the slave, is necessarily excluded in order to justify the labor needs of the second party, the master. Arguably, if this were the case, there can be no moment of genuine mutual recognition. The slave is not capable of mutual recognition and the slave trade, by extension, is merely captive, forced labor.

Now I propose one final reading of Walker’s piece that does not hermeneutically default to an Aristotelian or to a Hegelian interpretation. Perhaps this one might even

loosen the “four shackles of representations.” Through a further close-up of *An Abbreviated Emancipation* we see something remarkably odd about the entwined figures: if read as a singular being, not merely connected but assembled through differentiation, we are witnessing a body in hyper-transformation. This is the mutant, heterogeneous body combining all three of Walker’s figures into a form whose simultaneous singularity and diversity disrupt Aristotelian forms of classification and Hegelian consciousness through master/slave relations.

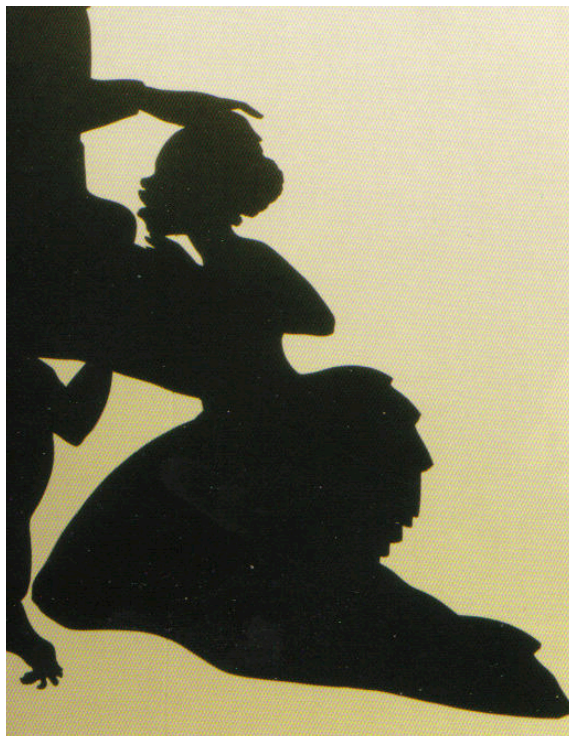


Figure 1-3

Upon magnification we observe that the young girl's flounced bustle and elongated, talon-like leg imply she is transforming into a bird (Figure 1-3). This feature is, incidentally, echoed both in the master's ruffled blouse and the feathery wings of the cherubs locked in a coital embrace shown in Figure 1. Walker's collection is frequently marked by aviary touches. This piece is no exception. Although the allusion to flight is not explicit in this image, the young girl's slender neck, delicate torso and heavy, tiered skirt, gathered in a crouch, invoke the elegant profile of a swan, or perhaps the exotic viscera of a flamingo or the regal body of an ostrich. The figure is presented here as half-human-girl half-bird, alongside the erotically entwined angels who are also hybrids between human and bird, add elements of beauty, grace and fantasy to an otherwise stark image depicting sexual violence and subordination.

The master is becoming girl who is becoming bird. The notion of "becoming" is one of the more well-circulated and celebrated of Deleuze and Guattari's concepts. Becoming is especially elaborated upon throughout *A Thousand Plateaus*, notably in the trope of "becoming-woman." This concept contests the fixed entity of Woman through a unique transitive process. Becoming challenges the axiological blueprint for categorizing man, animal, insect, or any entity that is defined by its seemingly discrete attributes and characteristics and then subsequently categorized. The fluidic process of becoming emphasizes dynamism, volatility and transformation. It describes the proliferation of mutating substance that has the capacity to resist "sedimentation" and "stratification" through a "molecular" assemblage, rather than one that is "molar."

It is crucial to keep in mind that when we invoke the term becoming *vis-à-vis* girl, swan, angel, etc, we would be committing a misreading of Deleuze, and in the process

doing ourselves a great disservice, to literally interpret girl, boy, man, swan, Atlas, master, slave, or any of the other forms in a restrictive sense that actually constrains becoming to a strictly anthropocentric perspective. Remember that Deleuze's criticism against Aristotle was that the latter conflates real difference with specific difference. In his *Metaphysics*, argues Deleuze, Aristotle assigns the measure of greatest opposition to the poles of contrariety within a generic order, thus rendering difference to the service of the "identity of the same." Walker's art, on the contrary, embodies Deleuze's dissent with Aristotle and simultaneously reflects his radical material ontology. For instance, in the "1730:BECOMING-INTENSE, BECOMING-ANIMAL..." chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari connect what is perceived to be an individual to more expansive and constantly shifting collective bodies. Walker's body, likewise, is both a site of in-dwelling change and one that moves in an evolving environment filled with other mutating bodies. Hers is the "body to come," the "becoming body" that has yet to reach a final destination in the form of girl, boy, man, swan, Atlas, master, slave, *ad infinitum*. Walker's graphic depiction of a body in the throes of becoming flesh out, as it were, a concept in Deleuze and Deleuze and Guattari that is difficult to convey through written description alone.

Becoming is never about an imagined corporeal *telos*. To construct a body from the starting point of a transcendent blueprint or under a teleological regimen would simply be to construct a body through the operation of resemblance and ending in the culmination of an ideal body. Deleuze and Guattari write:

A body is not defined by the form that determines it or as a determinate substance or subject nor by the organs it possess or the functions it fulfills... *a body is defined only by a longitude and a latitude*: in other words the sum total of the material elements belonging to it under given relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness (longitude); the sum total of the intensive affects it is capable of at a given power or degree of potential (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 260).

Thus, the “woman” in becoming-woman is not to be confused with the sign for woman, “Woman,” to which women have historically been conscripted. To undergo becoming-woman has nothing to do with the category woman. It is, rather, the threshold that the body endures in its intensive transmogrification and on-going re-assemblages. The becoming body is thus corporeal immanence *par excellence*. Immanence here is marked by degrees of intensity through the body. It is as well the composition, decomposition and re-composition of bodies that tirelessly relate to one another through various affects and forces.<sup>14</sup>

When combined into a single body, Walker’s silhouettes of historically scarred bodies become a novel body that is frightful, even monstrous. “Thought ‘makes’ difference, but difference is monstrous” (Deleuze, 1994, 29). What is this monster but a composite made by a swarm of differential historical, semiotic, aesthetic and corporeal elements? *Man—girl—swan—oppressive—visual... Master—slave—pet—wall—paper... Imperial pleasure—laboring body—possibility of flight—black and white*. What would happen if we took these analogous qualities and shuffled them: *Man—slave—laboring body—oppressive... girl—pet—imperial pleasure—visual—paper*. Better yet, what would happen if we defied the convention of analogy? Could we disrupt the Aristotelian tyranny

of homology to which Deleuze quite balefully refers? *Girl—swan—black—possibility of flight*. The capacity for reshuffling discrete determinations is infinite. In their multiplicitous, recombinant assemblages they produce just as infinite a number of incongruities within a formerly singular, totalizing body. Yet the incongruity of *quiet black*, or that of *girl swan*, is perfectly sensible, absolutely functional, in the newly emergent figure comprised of internal differences that threatens the logic of difference as relational, analogous, and oppositional.

By utilizing Deleuze to read Walker's artwork, and reciprocally, using Walker's artwork as a tool to better comprehend Deleuze's conception of non-contrariety, we arrive at a conception of difference that disrupts the hegemony of difference. In creating the monstrous girl-swan we have arguably stumbled upon a sort of virtual "line of flight" away from the binding influence of Aristotle and Hegel. Could we instead be approaching a plane of corporeal intensities that affirms rather than resolves incongruity? Imagine the homely monster produced when combining the eyes of a swan to the ebony face of a girl. Connect them to the juvenile torso of the Atlas slave boy, with one limb a girl's arm and the other a large, serrated wing. Connect them again to the master's bulging groin. Connect once more to the gliding swan bottom which rests atop the master's foot. Alternately, imagine a different kind of monster, perhaps a dark girl of Amazonian proportions in a blossoming tutu—a black Anna Pavlova dancing a *ballet blanc* in the celebrated role of dying swan, pausing momentarily to stab master impresario Diaghilev past his ruffled tuxedo blouse and right through his pneumatic chest. Then, *black-girl-swan* jetées clear out of the auditorium. This might be an example of our most beautiful monster, from a mixed Deleuze Walker lineage, made coherent

form: *Girl—black—floating—flight—swan bottom* created to do combat against *master—white—phallus—sitting—sedentary—imperial leather boot*. Both creatures designed here are assembled out of categorical incongruities. As such they suggest an excess of predicates without a clearly definable subject. Yet it is this denunciation of a fixed and isolated subject, alongside the vitality of seemingly incongruous but eminently conjoinable, “machinic” parts, which is at the heart of Deleuze’s attack on the master discourse of difference.

Introducing the threat of incongruity into the ways that race is conceptually ordered in racist discourse takes on greater figurative significance when incongruity and univocity are thought concurrently. A rather noteworthy feature about Walker’s art is that all the figures are univocally black: that is to say, they are all black against a uniformly stark white background. This is true regardless of the actual racial assignment of the figures. In the visual arts it is common to refer to the space of the object, the space upon which the artist wants the viewer to focus, as positive space. Negative space supports positive space by surrounding and defining positive space. Negative space is also sometimes referred to as white space in sculpture and graphic design. However, in canonical oil paintings the celebrated female nude has often been depicted to the contrary. Walker’s utilization of the conventions of silhouette depictions, wherein black is positive and white is negative, provide subtle commentary upon the institutional compulsion of Western art to do just the opposite, i.e., to grant lighter pigments, regarding both oil paint and skin tone, a positive role. Consider, for example, one of the “masterpieces” of early modernism, *Olympia* (Figure 1-4).



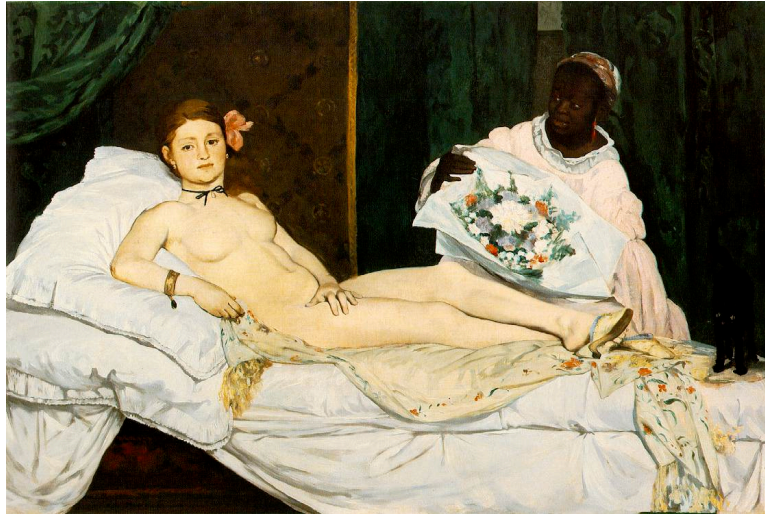


Figure 1-4

Manet's scandalous 1863 painting of a prostitute cites Titian's legendary Venus.<sup>15</sup> In terms of the presence of an African servant in the darkened background, *Olympia* also references Ingres' 1840 *Odalisque with a slave* where the same composition between pale-skinned symbols of classical nude beauty, sexual appeal and availability can be seen. In this painting, the odalisque is foregrounded against a medium-complexioned, more fully clothed musician and a dark-skinned, most fully clothed servant (Figure 1-5).



Figure 1-5

In the cases of both paintings, the skin color of the slave and servant “darken” to the point of blending almost seamlessly with the shadows of the room. These figures are rendered almost invisible. Awash as they are in negative space, the real “Venuses” are showcased in the compositions. In contrast, Walker’s piece inverts the use of positive and negative absolutely. The inversion is especially absolute in the sense that all figures, including the white master, are rendered black. Walker’s piece provides critical commentary, through oppositional execution, of an entire edifice or stereotypical representations of racialized bodies, racialized beauty and the use of color in Western high art.

Walker’s contraposition of negative and positive in *An Abbreviated Emancipation* actually corresponds to a Deleuzian play on the term *chiaroscuro* as it is articulated, amongst other works, in *Difference and Repetition*.<sup>16</sup> The tropes “indifference” and *chiaroscuro* are especially important because they defy a conventional understanding of

black and white as paragons of opposition. *Chiaroscuro*, especially, connects to one of the ontological bases through which Deleuze develops his notion of difference as determination as such.<sup>17</sup> *Chiaroscuro*, from the Italian *chiaro*, “light,” and *scuro*, variously translated to mean “dark,” “not clear,” and “shade,” refers to the method of using bold contrasts between light and dark in images.<sup>18</sup> Walker’s work suggests the ambience, if not the precise technique, of *chiaroscuro* because it is so exclusively engaged in black and white. Also, her silhouette imagery is deliberately intended to exude the quality of shadow.

In cooperation with the “abstract line,” *chiaroscuro* illuminates “the precise point at which the determined maintains its essential relation with the undetermined” (Deleuze, 1994, 28-29). This is the zone of indifference which Deleuze describes in the following way:

Indifference has two aspects: the undifferentiated abyss, the black nothingness, the indeterminate animal in which everything is dissolved—but also the white nothingness, the once more calm surface upon which float unconnected determinations like scattered members: a head without a neck, an arm without a shoulder, eyes without brows. The indeterminate is completely indifferent, but such floating determinations are no less indifferent to each other. Is difference intermediate between these two extremes? Or is it not rather the only extreme, the only moment of presence and precision (Deleuze, 1994, 28).

Rather than using black and white to rehash old dichotomies (negative/positive, evil/good, soiled/pure) we enter into a situation between, on the one side, total indifference recognized through homogenated contours (black nothingness). On the other

side we have total indifference in the free flow of partial determinations (white nothingness). Poised between nothingness and nothingness is presence, an exact presence that Deleuze comes to identify as difference itself, i.e., “difference as such”—the singular. It seems that even for Deleuze, difference dwells in between black and white. However, Deleuze’s difference *qua* presence, does not mediate the two as if they were necessarily oppositional. It is rather, “the only extreme” within a zone including black and white. In connecting the term indifference, as it is developed here to light and dark, we get a glimpse of what a non-dialectical *chiaroscuro* looks like. It is the interplay of light and dark that subtends gradations, not merely the image of white staged contra black.

One of Deleuze’s later essays, “Coldness and Cruelty” resonates in particularly useful ways with the theatrical deployment of *chiaroscuro* in Walker’s image.<sup>19</sup> Specifically, Walker’s graphic enactment of the tensions between black and white problematizes Deleuzian scholarship. In this particular essay, Deleuze develops a theorization of sadomasochism that completely counters those of Freud.<sup>20</sup> Deleuze declares that “there is a masochism specific to the sadist and equally a sadism specific to the masochist, the one never combining with the other” (Deleuze 1991, 134). By severing sadism from masochism, Deleuze argues that “sadomasochism” is not, as Freud much earlier theorized, necessarily a unity: by extension the roles of sadist and masochist are not a unity. In fact, sadism and masochism belong to two different “economies.”<sup>21</sup> Though the primary roles of “sadist” and “masochist” are separate, the sadist can still commit acts of violence and cruelty. Likewise, the masochist can seek out someone who will perform in the capacity of “sadist.” The Sadean universe and Masochean universe

are overlapping but distinct. Deleuze argues that the Masochian universe is ultimately more liberatory because it creates the conditions for a “contractual” revolt against the “institutional” logic of Sadism. He further insists that “there is an aestheticism in masochism, while sadism is hostile to the aesthetic attitude” (Deleuze, 1991, 134).

Deleuze distinguishes between the Marquis de Sade and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch by stating that in the work of the former, the aesthetic is “mechanical, repetitive” and forces the reader to identify with the tormenter. In the work of von Sacher-Masoch the aesthetic is marked by “arrested movement” and “suspense” (Deleuze 1991, 134). Indeed, *Venus in Furs* is compulsively concerned with frozen images in the form of painted and sculpted Venuses. In fact, the title is derived from the protagonist’s obsession with Titian’s 1555 Venetian masterpiece *Venus with a Mirror* (Figure 1-6).<sup>22</sup>



Figure 1-6

The notion of a “masochistic aesthetic” is especially relevant in the case of Walker’s artwork. Her silhouette pieces archive the most repugnant atrocities that the US has historically perpetrated on its own racialized subjects. Slavery, lynching, rape, tar and feathering—these are but a few historical acts eerily captured in Walker’s art. They are eerie in their citation of our domestic past and also for their association with our nation’s international policies, i.e., the nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.<sup>23</sup> Walker’s work serves the viewer images of pain. More significantly, it does so by “freezing” the figures in the midst of enacting scenes of torture and anguish. Her images are imbued with a sense of “suspense” along the same lines as the characters in von Sacher-Masoch’s novel. Many of her pieces in *The Emancipation Approximation* suggest

that something is about to happen. However, since the scene is frozen in movement and in time, what is about to happen never actually comes to fruition. The viewer is instead eternally denied the execution of the act. Her images of pain are elevated to an even greater torment because they frustrate the possibility of closure, paving the way for trauma. From a masochist's perspective, however, this promise of eternal yet non-redeemable pain is perfect: the perpetual delay of the fulfillment of desire is just another source of pain. Deleuze refers to this situation when he writes that "masochism is a state of waiting... waiting in its pure form" (Deleuze, 1991, 71). The postponement of gratification, heightened as it were in *chiaroscuro* nuanced scenes of pain and tyranny are, according to Deleuze, the very stuff that masochistic dreams are made on.

There is some excellent scholarship that valorizes textual connections between slavery and masochism. For our immediate purposes, however, the question of whether *An Abbreviated Emancipation* indulges in masochistic fantasy, as well as the question of whether we viewers are vicarious masochists by appreciating her works, is academic.<sup>24</sup> I propose we turn the conversation instead to how Walker's *chiaroscuro* depiction complicates Deleuze's understanding of von Sacher-Masoch instead of complying with it. Consider again how Walker's silhouettes, wherein the figure is black and the negative space is white, inverts the conventional representation of white female nudes. She crashes the art historical parade of Venuses, pale beauties floating against dark backgrounds, that has held such a prominent place in post-Renaissance European art wherein the function of the black figures was to provide contrast, in color, and contrast in measures of beauty.

We have a near identical situation in *Venus in Furs* with the juxtaposition of Mistress Wanda against the trio of her black female servant. In his novel, von Sacher-

Masoch includes countless descriptions of Wanda's whiteness. Her skin is likened to marble, to the moon, and to all manner of pale, lustrous objects that have a poetic aura and are all the better for being set off by the dark furs in which she cloaks herself. Her servants as well, "three slender young Negresses like ebony carvings," perform a similar function. They offset Wanda's whiteness, her beauty, and her race, by contrasting it against their own. These are but peripheral characters, showing up in the novel to do their mistress's bidding only to recede again into the background. They may be nubile and sexually alluring, but in terms of the aesthetic that von Sacher-Masoch creates, their purpose is the same as *Olympia's* "mammy-like" maid and the Odalisque's "Moorish" servant: they are the negative space by which Wanda emerges as the mistress of Severin's dreams, the glorious, icy, beautiful, marble-like Venus.

Deleuze makes casual mention of the three "Negresses" in his essay, assigning them as actors wearing the masks of the oral mother and the Oedipal mother in psychoanalysis. He does not address the race of the servant girls. Nor does he, for that matter, meaningfully address the race of any of von Sacher-Masoch's characters. One must wonder, however, if Deleuze's obliviousness to race *qua* color, as it has been developed by von Sacher-Masoch himself, reinforces the relegation of black servants into the background. This criticism is legitimate for he himself associates the elaborate "setting," the scenes and props within von Sacher-Masoch's novel, as integral to its *chiaroscuro* aura.

By inverting the use of black and white, Walker disrupts the visual racism of the Western art canon where the white female nude is offset by the darkness of racialized bodies. Walker is not merely reversing black and white. Her inversion adds a profound



dimension by pulling human figures out of the background, the scenery, and into the foreground. In this way, Walker does not merely give us images of pain and oppression suspended for the viewer according to a masochistic aesthetic. She is also giving us images of the historical real lurking beneath fantasies that eroticize the subordination of race. Thus, Walker puts a new twist on the concept of *chiaroscuro* by playing with the notions of “light” and “dark” that respond both to the use of color in a composition and its analogous racial application within artistic masterpieces.

Walker’s work differs in radical and potent ways from a master discourse of art that associates the fair, the light and the white with positive neo-Platonic attributes. It does so not simply because it appropriates the primacy that white holds in a composition and reinstates dark for light and black for white. More significantly, her art differs because it demonstrates the threshold between difference and indifference about which Deleuze writes. White nothingness, with its free-floating, undetermined unconnected parts, and black nothingness, the site wherein everything is subject to an absolute compression and dissolution, are captured in the broad, flat, featureless juxtaposition of black paper against white wall. No depth, no hues, no specificity—Walker’s images correspond to Deleuze’s theory that difference emerges as the “precise” line by cutting patterns through suggestive puddles of black and white. Walker then pushes Deleuze, via a critical race perspective, into the territory of the historical real by including actual, transatlantic slaves and servants into her artwork. Her optical revolt against the masters, led by the figure of a black slave girl fellating the plantation owner but transforming into bird, reinforces difference as a positive, non-dialectical movement that undoes the commonplace distinction between black and white.

*Section II: Derrida and difference as other*

At this point I would like to direct the reader to a parallel set of arguments about difference as they are articulated in the work of Derrida. If Deleuze's comprehensive philosophy of difference can be understood through the key phrase "difference as such," Derrida's philosophy of difference reflects an understanding of difference through the trope *difference as other*. Derrida's conception of the other, alongside the marginal, is not maintained within a derivative opposition to the concept of a fixed, unified subject. The other, rather, refers to the primary field of general differentiation, *différance*, which is prior to the construction of the self. In the place of the self, there is a multiplicitous swarm of others that are active in the circulation of texts, or the circulation of those things that are produced and have value in their capacity to carry meaning.

In order to think about Derrida's philosophy of difference *contra* master discourses of difference, I propose we return to the master's house. More accurately, in this instance, let's visit the master's studio. By utilizing her unique method of aesthetic production, Faith Ringgold challenges Pablo Picasso, distinguished even within his own time as one of the indisputable "masters" of modern art, in her work *Picasso's Studio* from the 1991 *French Collection* (Figure 1-7). She creates multimedia documents that piece together disjunctive patches of truth and fiction, autobiography, collective history, criticism and wistful desire. Using disparate media such as painted and tie-dyed fabrics and ink, her "story-quilts" tell visual counter-narratives that playfully interrogate the imperialist narrative of European art.



Figure 1-7

Befitting the different sensibilities of the artists studied, my analysis of Ringgold differs from my analysis of Walker. Walker's piece benefited from a series of multiple, repeated, interpretations: it is singular in its presentation but by returning to it again and again different narratives arise. Ringgold, on the other hand, produces art that issues multiple narratives simultaneously through the interplay of various elements. Whether or not it is Ringgold's intention to produce a multiplicity of interpretations in her work is, for our analysis, not an issue. I would rather redirect our focus to the reader's responsibility in determining his or her own hermeneutic strategies: after all, the notion of a singular interpretation consistent with the artist's intent is just another element of the master's blueprint for producing and understanding texts.

The lack of a clearly defined center, the plurality of subjects, and the hyper-production of meaning in Ringgold's art-quilt conceptually coincides with *différance*.<sup>25</sup> As in the case of Walker and Deleuze, Ringgold's work does not merely bear out Derrida's concept of difference, it enhances it through augmentation and refinement. Ringgold specifically does this with regard to a significant characteristic of *différance*, "le faisceau." In order to expand upon this, I would like to provide a few introductory comments about *différance*.

*Différance* is the textual coupling of writing and difference. It is both a neologism and a neographism: the *a* replacing the *e* is only possible to detect in its inscribed form. As such, it can only be understood through a graphic illustration, its appearance through writing (Derrida, 1976, 3).<sup>26</sup> Following, and then exceeding the work of Saussure, Derrida's writings on *différance* attempt to dislocate "meaning" from a stable sign by disconnecting the signifier from any primal, mythical origination connected to a signified. Derrida's utilization of *différance* for this objective coordinates with his desire to dethrone "Absolute Logos" from its privileged position.

*Différance* is not limited to discrete graphemes and signs, if such a thing could even exist. Derrida is ultimately concerned with revealing the semiotic chains, series, proliferations, and the meaningful structures that they conserve. His writing attempts to undo these structures through substitution, displacement, approximation and play. Throughout Derrida's works, writing as *différance* is a site of infinite ludic pleasure; that is to say, it is "a play that constantly produces effects" (Derrida, 1982, 11). It constitutes a space of thrilling, dangerous promiscuity in its ability to connect differential elements within hysterical combinations and recombinations of signification. In the process,

*différance* subverts the notion of presence in both an ontological sense as well as in a temporal sense.<sup>27</sup> It does so through a process of infinite accretion. Derrida writes that *différance* can be thought as a complex of elements. He writes,

“je voudrais précisément tenter, dans une certaine mesure et bien que cela soit, au principe et à la limite, pour d’essentiels raisons de droit, impossible, de rassembler en *faisceau* les différentes directions dans lesquelles j’ai pu utiliser ou plutôt me laisser imposer en son néo-graphisme ce que j’appellerai provisoirement le mot ou le concept de *différance* et qui n’est, nous le verrons, à la lettre, ni un mot ni un concept” (Derrida, 1972, 3).

Difference is “ni un mot ni un concept;” it is “neither a word nor a concept.” It is, rather, *un faisceau*. I refer to the French original here because there are potentially significant stakes in disputing the translation of the term. In the 1982 Alan Bass translation of this text, *faisceau* is translated as “sheaf.” Alternately, *faisceau* is commonly defined as “beam” or even “bundle”: this is especially true within the context of light, as in *faisceau de lumière*. I will return to this contested term later in this essay. For now, I would simply like to call to the reader’s attention how for Derrida, *différance* is not a complex word or idea. It is a complex itself. It is the assemblage derived when combining words and ideas. It is, according to Bass’s Derrida, “the complex structure of weaving” consisting of “different lines of meaning—or of force—to go off again in different directions” (Derrida, 1982, 3). *Différance* is the ensemble of disparate parts that, when stitched together, form coherent impressions that resist the tyranny of a single and uniform meaning.

Ringgold's work jibes with *différance* in its ability to expand upon the tropes of the *other* and *writing*. Specifically, *Picasso's Studio* gathers together *un faisceau* that counters the master narrative of the heroic, male artist genius, epitomized here through Picasso. Ringgold includes Picasso in a canvas that is veritably congested with eclectic pieces reflecting her life, heritage, and personal relationship to artistic production. The fictional text in the margins expresses the frustrations and desires on the part of the socially marginalized model, through whom Ringgold further identifies.<sup>28</sup> Ringgold also enunciates her grievances with the exclusionary and hierarchical nature of canonical western academic art, as being both African American and a woman, she is doubly marginalized.

Through the framing of the model and the figure of Picasso himself, *Picasso's Studio* visually expresses W.E.B. Du Bois' term "double consciousness." The text on the border of the painting reinforces this as well: "...doesn't matter where [the African masks] comes from. We see where, every time we look in the mirror." In order to valorize an alternate community, one in which her desires are not restricted and one to which she can "look" positively, she includes text within the composition which expresses a fictional link to a family of female black crones. These figures encourage her artistic aspirations despite the disadvantages accompanying her minority status.<sup>29</sup>

Ringgold's inclusion of an imagined history, or a history that never was, threatens the exclusive phallogocentrism of the art world. Her piece invokes one of the more famous elements of Derrida's defense on writing, that is, that writing has been "suppressed" within a history of metaphysics wherein it is only addressed through maledictory terms.<sup>30</sup> In *Of Grammatology* the term *writing* is thoroughly and repeatedly

interchangeable with terms such as “death,” “danger,” “violence,” abomination,” “transgression,” etc. This is crucial for Derrida: writing is synonymous with difference because it lurks in the shadows of a dominant conception of signification that links meaning to presence.

To Derrida, writing *qua* difference belongs to a general economy of textual play that reflects “a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of the systematic play of differences” (Derrida, 1982, 11). Writing describes what exceeds the sign. Yet writing also indexes what is lacking. The sign becomes the “supplement” in that it is interpreted as a “deficient” substitution of the thing it represents. However, it also exists as a “surplus” entity with regard to its representative function (Derrida, 1976, 144-145). It constitutes “the fullest measure of presence,” that is, the apogee of plenitude. The “supplement” thwarts the energies of desire by deferring the possibility of pleasure. Writing is the name of this particular form of difference, known alas as a “local difference.” It is also associated with difference in the most general terms, i.e., difference as it is positioned against the being of presence (Derrida, 1978, 268). Derrida’s use of an economic analogy emphasizes how writing has been deployed as means of “enslavement” which is homologous with capital itself. Yet for Derrida, “enslavement” is a form of movement that “can equally legitimately be called liberation” (Derrida, 1987, 130-131). The excessive nature of writing, alongside its violent and transgressive characteristics, gives writing *qua* difference its greatest potential. Writing has the capability to subvert a monolithic and totalizing history of “presence,” in the discourse of metaphysics that lays the foundation of the bourgeois consciousness. Writing presumes,

and then reveals, the emptiness of the identity of difference: this is the subject's self-presence which collapses the pronominal Subject, "I," with "Being."

*Picasso's Studio* is an exemplary companion piece of *différance* as it is literally overwhelmed with the play of marginality. Significant images are located inside the borders. Yet the borders themselves are also crammed with a parallel set of textual marginalia, or writing on the margin. The inner canvas, which is comprised of three thematic panels is bordered by the aforementioned blocks of text, and then again surrounded by a motley quilt binding. The text, read alongside a simultaneous viewing of the inner image, subverts the authority of Picasso as master. Likewise, Ringgold's appropriation of Picasso's cubist style undermines his *seminal* influence upon abstract modernism.

The text and the image interweave in such a way that they are temporally and causally indistinguishable: that is to say, there is no way to determine which comes first. *Picasso's Studio* plays with this chaotic plurality of aesthetic styles through a surplus of hyper-citatoriality. The panels of the inner canvas are occupied in the following way: the figure of the black female nude is positioned in a supine pose on a chaise lounge in the central third. She is rendered in a style incongruous with the assemblage of white female nudes, painted in Cubist style, which she foregrounds. To the viewer's right there are more abstract canvases referencing Picasso's prolific career. To the left, Ringgold inserts the figure of the master himself, a semi-nude Picasso in the process of painting, and leering at, his nudes. This brings to mind the convention of inserting the artist in his own work as famously done in Velasquez's celebrated 1656 painting *Las Meninas* (Figure 1-



8). It also references Picasso's quotation of Velasquez in his version of *Las Meninas* exhibited 301 years after the first Spanish "master" (Figure 1-9).



Figure 1-8



Figure 1-9

*Picasso's Studio* deftly explores the interplay of intertextuality through *intertextuality*. Borrowing quilting vocabulary, the use of “patches” and “blocks” references the abrupt, blunt, modularized quality of cubism. In this composition, however, everything is already depicted through a two dimensional array rather than as a “flattening out” of three dimensionality as seen in cubism. *Picasso's Studio* also references the great artist's use of multiple styles within a single painting. In a similar vein, Ringgold depicts a riot of patterns colliding against one another. The patterns of the various fabrics in the central part of the composition are juxtaposed against the patterns of the fabrics used in the quilt border. In the border, the patterns are floral, homey, calico; they are the “remnants” of black Americana that contrast against the more geometrically abstract African patterns also used. Connecting all the disparate patches is a barely perceptible “running stitch” superimposed upon the entire composition.<sup>31</sup>



Figure 1-10

Clearly, *Picasso's Studio* is a direct citation and critique of Picasso's 1907 modern masterpiece *Les Femmes d'Alger* (Figure 1-10). The other is depicted in relation to the male spectator and in relation to the European spectator within this "masterpiece." Likewise in Ringgold's work, the other is the subject in a set of complex conversations explicitly painted within the image and also outside it, i.e., in the text border. One set of dialogues happens between the black model Willia Marie, the other female models, and the masks themselves. As Willia Marie poses, boredom leads her into a *reverie* wherein both the African masks and the French nudes suggest that she must "give up her power as a woman" in order to challenge the supremacy of the white male artist. And, as the ladies in the painted brothel hiss, in the event that she is defeated she can always fall back on her body as a sexual commodity: "if they throw your art back at

you, *te fais pas de bile*. Don't worry, cause you got something else you can sell. You was born with it, just in case.” The black model here is absolutely aware that her presence in the art world is restricted by dint of her gender. She succumbs to the doubt that she will never be a great artist; she will merely remain an art object.

Art critic Linda Nochlin famously made the argument that the question “why are there no great women artists” is actually a red herring that obscures the system of institutional and cultural power and privilege conferred through the rubric of “greatness” (Nochlin, 1988, 147-158). Ringgold interweaves the feminist attack against “greatness” and “artistic genius” with a specifically racialized critique of the white patriarch. Consider, for instance, her 1997 story-quilt *A Family Portrait* from *The American Collection #2* (Figure 1-11).



Figure 1-11

The “family portrait” pictured here exhibits the very complex history of hereditary relations in the South: as alluded to in Section I of this chapter, “race-mixing,” though not institutionally tolerated nor otherwise publicly validated, was certainly not an uncommon occurrence in the plantation family structure. In the artwork above, Ringgold illustrates the multiple roles of the white slave master as both head of plantation household, including the slaves in his “possession,” biological father to his own white children, and biological father to the illegitimate children that he covertly had with his black female slaves. The role of the seated black woman in relation to the figures in the portraits above her is ambiguous: is the man her not too distant ancestor or perhaps a lover? And the woman posing seductively for the artist—could she be a mother, grandmother, etc? Finally, it is unclear who the children, one black and one not, are. Are they both her children? Or perhaps she is a mother to one and a nanny to the other, thereby invoking the historical role of “mammy.”

Read alongside *A Family Portrait, Picasso's Studio* brings to mind Picasso's patriarchal presence in the world of modern art.<sup>32</sup> Picasso, if not a direct influence on Ringgold's art apprenticeship, is at the very least an undeniable progenitor. The writing in the margins displays Ringgold's ambivalence toward the artistic “master”: “Picasso's first cubist painting was called barbaric, *la mort*, the death of art! But that didn't stop him. In fact, it started *le mouvement moderne du art*. The European artists took a look at us and changed the way they saw themselves.” Through the text Ringgold acknowledges Picasso as an artistic pioneer. This acknowledgment is tempered by the legitimate criticism that Picasso's inspiration was, in turn, African art. Alongside his contemporary Georges Braque, Picasso's “primitivist” forays into analytic cubism were highly

influenced by the multi-perspectival faces of African masks and sculpture. Picasso references this in *Les Femmes d'Alger* by posing two of his models in African masks and rendering the rest of his models in varying degrees of an aesthetic derivative of African art. Ringgold critiques Picasso's appropriated aesthetic by writing, "it's the African mask straight from African faces that I look at in *Picasso's Studio* and in his art. He has the power to deny what he doesn't want to acknowledge..." Her quilt then explores how her own artwork is, to some degree, made possible by the colonialist patriarch whose work suppresses the work of actual African artists.

The text, alongside the array of Picasso's African derived objects which she includes in her quilt, stages a parodic reenactment of a mythical "first contact" between Picasso, the white explorer-artist, and the African masks, the "barbaric," "primitive" other caught under an anthropological gaze. This is saliently underscored with the comment, "the European artists took a look at us and changed the way they saw themselves." The cooption of the other's perception contributes to the wholesale appropriation of the colonized artist. But what really commands the viewer's eye is Ringgold's attention to the previously mentioned African patterns and to her choice of color palette. Specifically, the patterns surrounding the female nude are rendered in lively, bold colors and are geometrically assertive. Bluntly drawn black lines swirl, circle and zigzag; they form an African inspired optical maze around the African American model who is vivified through warm, brown undertones and surrounded on three sides by shades of lilac, burgundy, sienna, all atop a blue-grass rug.

Stylistically, Ringgold "captures" Picasso by painting him as if he were caught in one of his own "periods": he is a pale, ashen figure washed over in shades of deep marine

blues and slate gray. Picasso is rendered in the same frigid hues as his randomly placed paintings inside the artist's studio.

Through acts of appropriation, reappropriation, cross-appropriation, etc, traversing "*Picasso's Studio*," Ringgold is exceeding a simple Postcolonial critique of Picasso. Instead, in ironically Cubist fashion, she examines the complex facets of her ambivalent relationship to modern art, Picasso, and the European avant garde in the same composition where she reflects upon her own experiences and history growing up an African American woman artist. Thus when Aunt Melissa gives Willia Marie her blessing to practice art in Paris, even if modeling is her only *entrée* to do so; she encourages her to "show us a new way to look at life." Aunt Melissa tells her to do exactly that which Picasso is credited with doing for a Western audience *via* abstract modernism: this in spite of the fact that the same was done for him thanks to the labor of others who remain nameless and faceless. "The European artists took a look at us and changed the way they saw themselves"... "Show us a new way to look at life." Ringgold's rendition of the famed artist's studio becomes a canvas by which the viewer might look at modern art differently. Perhaps Ringgold, instead of absolutely subverting him outright, is giving us a new way to look at both the art and personal life of Picasso. As we shall see, her way of looking stages a veritable battleground for an internal contest of highly politicized, historicized looks.

*Picasso's Studio* positions the figure of Willia Marie *contra* Picasso. In contrast to the ladies of Avignon who stare blankly ahead, as well as the ambiguous focuses on the faces of the figures in the paintings on the right and on the masks on the left, Willia Marie looks back. She returns the gaze, directly and forthrightly, at the master in her dual

roles as artist's model as well as artist in her own right. She must not only contend with her inner fears that her role as model will always supersede her role as artist in a male dominant art world. Her role as model, as the ladies of Avignon suggest, is not so distinct from prostitution. She simply sells her body, if not directly to the artist, then to the "spectator owner" who will ultimately survey it. Thus despite the cross-hatching effect produced by the multiplicity of looks going on in the composition, the most powerful is the one that occurs between model and artist who are locked together in a scopical relation that disrupts the power balance of conventional male artist /female nude dyads. This battle is also inflected with the dynamic of race: Willia Marie returns the look of an artist whose success was in no small part due to the appropriation of her roots.

*Picasso's Studio* demonstrates through a cacophony of colors, patterns, styles, periods, images, and words an imagistic collapse of all the presumed relations between male and his other, female; white and his other, black; and artist, and his other, model. Remember that Derrida refers to his concept of *différance* as *un faisceau*, neither word nor concept but an "interlacing which permits different threads and different lines of meaning" taking on the "structure of a weaving." Derrida's choice of figurative language, which associates written text to *texture* and *textiles*, is absolutely pertinent in considering Ringgold's work. In "*Picasso's Studio*," Ringgold "pieces," or "quilts" together differential parts on a fabric medium. Moreover, the parts of the story-quilt relate to one another through their difference, through their otherness. Here the conventional unity consolidated by setting up a dualism between a central, sovereign, unified notion of selfhood and its alteric other is pushed aside in order to explore a more fluid, dynamic and pluralistic set of relations between figures inhabiting multiple roles.



*Picasso's Studio* also exemplifies simultaneous acts of spectatorial play occurring throughout, and even beyond, its own borders. Here I propose exploring *un faisceau* as it can be translated as a “beam” over a “sheaf.” The latter connotes the agrarian, papers, and archery. Whether referring to grain, arrow or paper, it refers to quantity. “Beam,” however, is strictly formal. Beams describe a column composed of matter such as wood. But beams also describe immaterial columns: beams of energy, light, and heat penetrate air and infuse objects. *Le faisceau*, as beam, more accurately describes Ringgold’s immaterial use of looks traversing the canvas. These looks are not only exchanged between the figures. They also formalistically connect the disparate elements of the canvas just like lines connect dots in simple drawings. Conversely, the exchange of looks creates a secondary set of running stitches superimposed upon the quilt. These spectatorial beams, the vectors created by frozen stares, create a complex perspectival structure of looking.

Yet perhaps of greatest significance the viewer in this situation is implicated in the battle of multiple looks: *Picasso's Studio* is not merely a critique against sexual and racial exclusion and subordination practiced by the artist genius. It is a graphic and textual set of conversations between bodies, faces, masks, and eyes, including those of the viewer. The quilt opens further conversations on how to strategically nuance the concept of the other by pluralizing a conception of consciousness which alienates the viewer from his visually dominant role. This corresponds to a notion of otherness that Derrida attempts to rehabilitate from the influence of Levinas and Heidegger. In regard to the former, he disarticulates otherness from a transcendent notion of alterity. In his essay *Différance* Derrida charges Levinas with investing in an ontological project that

maintains the illusion of an absolute other which Derrida decries. With respect to Heidegger, Derrida is attempting to extract otherness from a set of propositions about the ontological and temporal presence that Being (*dasein*) requires in order to set the conditions for its own existence.<sup>33</sup>

By recapping the observations made about *Picasso's Studio*, we can see how well it resonates with Derrida's critique against "pure presence" for three interconnected reasons. First, Ringgold turns the tables by explicitly depicting Picasso as a marginal object off to the corner and outside the frame, rather than positioning the artist off center yet inside the frame as in Velasquez' *Las Meninas*. She further contextualizes him in relation to the African objects and methods of artistic production that he has "mastered." Ringgold's work further demonstrates a tongue in cheek progression of the ladies of Avignon from "folk art" (African mask and sculpture) to "high art" (European oil painting), and then back to "folk art" (African American quilting). Likewise, in the manner of a quilt, *Picasso's Studio* is a pastiche comprised of scraps. Using the fictional black female ex-patriot Willia Marie as a focal point, Ringgold pieces together various periods in Picasso's career with snippets of African and African American "craft."

Secondly, Ringgold is not merely challenging Picasso's presence within his own artwork, as well as his Olympian role within the pantheon of abstract modernism; she is challenging the patriarchal *look* by returning the artist's look with that of the model. The quilt in fact catches acts of infinitely ricocheting looks: the white male artist, positioned on the periphery, looks at the black female model, who looks back at the artist, *ad infinitum*. The white models, in contrast, look straight ahead in blank resignation. The African masks' looks are simply unknowable. Ringgold too, as the artist of *Picasso's*

*Studio*, looks back and forth between different periods of time and different geographic spaces in order to construct a palimpsest out of Picasso's works, her personal history and the collective history with which she identifies.

Thirdly, the composition of the piece denies the viewer the security of centralized objects with which to validate their role as spectator. Willia Marie is posing just off center engaging in nonverbal conversations with Picasso, the masks and the ladies in the painting. She is oblivious to any outside viewer, to anyone who is positioned *externally* to the painted figures. In this way the studio functions more like a crowded depot than like a traditional portrait. The model is not seeking the sole recognition of the artist or the spectator. Instead, the figures in the studio co-mingle. They relate to one another through an affirmation of their respective standpoints rather than relating to a presumed viewer who relates to them from a privileged vantage point from outside the image.

### *Section III: non-dialectical difference*

By multiplying the relations of looks, Ringgold's work refuses casting difference within a dialectic that presupposes the role of a fixed, essential subject contrasted against an agent of difference. If this reading of Ringgold accurately corresponds to the concept of *différance*, we are granted an opportunity to see one point of agreement between Derrida's philosophy of difference and Deleuze's. The differences between the two in their unique approaches are too profound to explore at length here. Suffice it to say they have distinct philosophical

orientations focusing on different sets of thinkers and divergent, yet sometimes overlapping, problematics.<sup>34</sup>

Vincent Descombes has pointed out in his comparativist study of Deleuze and Derrida that both are invested in a recuperation of difference as non-contradictory and non-oppositional (Descombes, 1979, 136). He argues that both Derrida and Deleuze's challenges to one of the "masters" of continental philosophy, Hegel, effectively reveals and then repudiates the presence of *identity qua consciousness* lurking in the dialectic. For our immediate purposes, this is the most crucial aspect of the overlap between the two thinkers. To reiterate, the commonsensical logic behind the "lord bondsman dialectic," AKA "master slave" dialectic, exerts an inordinate influence on the construction of race in the US. This construction holds that racial difference occurs in binary, relational terms. The process between dialecticism and the construction of race maintain the country's historic legacy of white supremacy and current practices of white privilege. The "lord bondsman dialectic," in particular, situates differential consciousness as the key determination between the master and the slave. The relations between the lord and bondsman are reproduced within the hegemonic inscription of racialized identity through relationality and recognition.

As true as this is for those deemed "white," it is doubly true for those not. Those subjected through minoritized status as different or other to the presumed universality, neutrality and transparency of whiteness, are put into a position of radical alterity that absolutely overdetermines identity. It would be a mistake, however, to simply view racial identity as the exclusive province of the minority. Although those who inhabit the rather

flexible sphere of whiteness benefit over those who do not, the perpetuation of racial difference is injurious even to those who are apparently immune from its restrictions and exclusions. This is because even though whiteness bestows the security, advantages and privileges of being “unmarked,” the category itself disallows everyone, even whites, from escaping capture into a form of racialized consciousness that forecloses other, freer, possibilities.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It might seem that Deleuze’s writings on “the minor,” developed in the work he co-authored with Guattari *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, would be a more suitable choice in a project involving racial minority. This may be true of other works that look at these two elements in tandem. For this chapter, however, I am focused more on introducing Deleuze’s complex elaboration of difference as a philosophical project. I do address the Kafka book at length in Chapter Four.

<sup>2</sup> Specifically, Deleuze argues against the assumption that the intellectual is heir to the role of revolutionary intermediary. He, along with Foucault, questions the role of the intellectual in “Intellectuals and Power” alongside the need for representation in revolutionary struggle. Deleuze instead, is interested in the mobile and fluid formation, reformation and transformation of “groupuscules” in their drive for theoretical and practical action.

<sup>3</sup> As a working class African American, Lorde challenges the explicit racism and implicit privileges of white feminists in this and other essays. As a lesbian, she challenges the masculinist and heterosexist tenor that characterized African American consciousness-raising and resistance in the 1960’s, from liberal civil rights to black nationalism. For more on this see “An Open Letter to Mary Daly” and “Scratching the Surface” in *Sister Outsider* (Berkeley: The Crossing Press, 1984).

<sup>4</sup> This, I believe, addresses *why* Deleuze wrote this book. *How* is a matter of philosophical method and literary style. Both are undertaken in a decidedly performative act of writing that injects affirmative chaos within the kingdom of received philosophy. Deleuze is ultimately interested in the coronation of “crowned anarchy” in a “history of ideas” that has heretofore been, for the most part, allied with negativity.

<sup>5</sup> This four part scheme is consistently maintained throughout the book despite some minor changes to its composition. For example, when comparing Chapter 1 and the Conclusion, Opposition—Analogy—Resemblance—Identity is interchangeable with Opposition—Analogy—Resemblance—Negativity. Yet, keep in mind that when “identity” is invoked, it is not to be confused with the identity of difference (or “concept of difference”). For difference to have an identity would be to assume that it has essential attributes that differ in relation to “sameness.” This is the very “idea” of difference which Deleuze detests (Deleuze 1994, 262).

<sup>6</sup> Walker’s work has met with extraordinary success not only in the museum and gallery worlds but also in the academic world, and in the American mainstream as well. In fact, she was named one of *Time Magazine*’s “100 Most Influential People in The World” in 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Keep in mind that slave masters freely participated in a continuum of symbolically paternal acts, such as the granting of surnames, and reprehensible acts not so symbolic, such as non-criminalized rape. Walker illustrates how the patriarchal structure of the south justified itself, in part, by attempting to pass itself off in a benevolent paternal light.

<sup>8</sup> Deleuze and Guattari write that, “it is obvious that... traditional psychoanalysis explains that the instructor is the father, and that the colonel too is the father, and that the mother is nonetheless the father too.” According to their critique, Freudian psychoanalysis leads to a reduction and flattening out of all figures into the role of *father*. The constructive powers of the libido are thus leashed to familial determination: it reduces all of desire to a familial determination that “no longer has anything to do with the social field” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 62). Although the family can perform in roles that the group fantasy offers, the “group fantasy is plugged into and machined on the socius. Being fucked by the socius, wanting to be fucked by the socius, does not derive from the father and mother” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 62).

<sup>9</sup> Deleuze illustrates how Aristotle’s system of differentiation relies on the faculties of “distributive and hierarchical judgment,” in an effort to understand the greatest difference. This will be further developed in the next chapter in the discussion of the “analogy of judgment.”

<sup>10</sup> For a complementary study of the predicate of the subject, versus the attribute of being, see Deleuze’s study of Leibniz’ philosophy in *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (Trans. Tom Conley. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993). Here Deleuze argues that the predicate is internal to the subject. It is an event-relation expressed when the subject is connected to a verb.

<sup>11</sup> For more on Deleuze’s in-depth analysis and attack against Aristotle and Plato see James William’s *Gilles Deleuze’s Difference and Repetition: a Critical Introduction and Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> Hegel draws a distinction between consciousness existing "in itself" versus consciousness "for another." This will prove to be the essential distinction between autonomy and bondage. Hegel writes, "self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is it exists only in being acknowledged.... Its moments, then, must on the one hand be held strictly apart, and on the other hand must in this differentiation at the same time also be taken and known as not distinct..." (Hegel, 1977, 111). He further argues that the reconciliation of difference might be understood as procedural. Difference exists. However, *via* consciousness difference is bent to the will of another, thus falling under the dominion of the dominant "self." When full recognition between lord and bondsman occurs in this way “freedom” is soon to follow. Throughout this process, a certain universal paradigm is attained. This is a paradigm in which lord and bondsman attain unity in the realm of “Absolute” relations.

<sup>13</sup> Although Hegel concludes that slavery is an “injustice” he clearly justifies modern slavery of blacks in his writings. See for example the introduction of *Philosophy of History* where he argues that transatlantic slavery is a far better fate for Africans because the “fundamental characteristic of the race” prohibits them from achieving consciousness, and thus, bars them from the capacity for freedom (Hegel, 1900).

<sup>14</sup> Deleuzian feminists have written at great length on the topic of becoming-woman by specifically calling into question the role that gender plays. See, for instance the work of Camilla Griggers, Eleanor Kaufman, Rosi Braidotti, Claire Colebrook, Elizabeth Grosz and Dorothea Olkowski, among others.

<sup>15</sup> According to art historian Robert Berrson, Manet was especially inspired by Titian’s 1538 *Venus of Urbino*, though *Olympia* references several celebrated depictions of reclining “Venuses.” (Berrson, 2004)

<sup>16</sup> Deleuze uses the same artistic convention to produce a differently nuanced set of concepts in his essay “Spinoza and the Three ‘Ethics.’” He argues that *chiaroscuro*, in relation to Spinoza’s system of semiotics, maintains that “everything is light” and that darkness simply references the thing itself in shadow (Deleuze, 1997, 141).

<sup>17</sup> Being is difference. That is the foundation of a univocal and egalitarian ontology such as the one produced by Deleuze, especially “Spinozist” Deleuze. For Deleuze, being is equal, univocal, omnipresent, unmediated; it is, in short, Spinoza’s substance (Deleuze, 1994, 28). Difference connects to the univocity of being insofar as being in its multidimensional, un-obscured form exhibits “individuating differences” that precede those differences with which Aristotle was concerned in his doctrine of greatest differences. Difference, in Deleuze’s notion of being, functions similarly to *cause* in Spinoza’s writings on God: internal and self-generating being, presence, God, substance neither presume the externality of a transcendent force from which to draw theological origins nor the externality of negativity from which to assert positivity.

<sup>18</sup> Artists whose works exemplify *chiaroscuro* include Rembrandt, Caravaggio, and Goya. These artists not only hail from different artistic schools, but from different countries spanning consecutive centuries as well. What much of their work has in common is a heavy, moody, dramatic interplay of light and shadow.

<sup>19</sup> Deleuze published this essay in the volume *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty* as a companion piece to Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's infamous *Venus in Furs*. The "collaboration" between the essay and the novel bring to mind his many collaborative works with Guattari, among others.

<sup>20</sup> Freud's writings on sadomasochism are highly developed in his three essays, "Essay One" of *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, "A Child is Being Beaten" and "The Economic Problem in Masochism." In the 1905 publication *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* Freud attributes the initial diagnosis of sadomasochism from Krafft-Ebbing's research on psychosexual "disorders." Freud distinguishes sadism and masochism from "algolagnia," the enjoyment of pain alone. Specifically, sadomasochism also involves "cruelty," "violence," "maltreatment," "humiliation" and "subjection" (Freud 1962, 23-24).

<sup>21</sup> Deleuze's decoupling of *s* from *m* in sadomasochism refutes Freud's fundamental theories: the primary position he refutes holds that sadism is a primary, "cannibalistic" impulse. To Freud, masochism is simply an internalized form of sadism": a sadist is always a masochist turned inward" (Freud, 1962, 25).

<sup>22</sup> Severin, our masochistic hero, is enamored with many graven and painted images of Venus in the novel. None, however, rivals what he refers to as "Venus in furs," Titian's Venus, who is embodied through the character Wanda von Dunajew.

<sup>23</sup> Consider how these, arguably, racially motivated bombings created their own ghastly images. When Japanese in close proximity to ground zero were instantly vaporized by the fateful nuclear blast, only carbon particle silhouettes outlining the victims' bodies remained, etched into the surrounding concrete and stone, black against white.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Biman Basu's essay "The Genuflected Body of the Masochist in Richard Wright" (*Public Culture* 16.2, 2004) and Marianne Noble's essay "The Ecstasies of Sentimental Wounding in Uncle Tom's Cabin" (*Yale Journal of Criticism* 10:2, 1997) as well as the responses it provoked in volume 12:1 of the same journal.

<sup>25</sup> For a sustained analysis on the relationship between painting and philosophy, especially regarding Kant and Heidegger, see Derrida's collection of essays in *The Truth in Painting* (Trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

<sup>26</sup> The neologism was most elaborately developed in a speech given at the French Society of Philosophy (La Société française de philosophie) and simultaneously published in the *Society Bulletin* in 1968. Derrida writes that "it is read, or it is written, but it cannot be heard. It cannot be apprehended in speech." Yet ironically, he introduces the term *différance* through a verbal address. This "impossible" situation mirrors the role of *différance* as it is suspended between "the strange space... between speech and writing" (Derrida, 1986, 3-5).

<sup>27</sup> In terms of presence, *différance* provides a negative self-definition, or more precisely, a working definition that resists self definition. *Différance* can only be understood through what it is not. It is defined as an interval, a space, an undoing, it is the *other* to what *is*, i.e., that which is defined by its presence or being and complicit with the "metaphysics of presence" that Derrida actively rejects. *Différance*, in other words, can not be defined through a state of being; rather it simply *is* (Derrida, 1982, 6). Its unfixedness in meaning notwithstanding, the term produces at least one positive description through its effects. *Différance* creates more differences in its own process of ongoing differentiation. It regenerates difference by producing what is not in relation to what, mythically, is.

<sup>28</sup> Marginality also corresponds to Derrida's "marginal" writings on philosophy and even, incidentally, to his specific circumstances as a Jew born in colonial Algeria.

<sup>29</sup> The text fringing the margins on the top and bottom of *Picasso's Studio* is patched together in two narrow horizontal blocks. The text follows:

Dear Aunt Melissa, I really think modeling is boring. Standing, sitting or laying down.  
Peu importe! Doesn't matter. You may know what to do with your hands, your feet, the look on your face. But what do you do with your mind, with your misplaced or mistaken identity? Et l'artiste, what do you feel about him?

2. I started hearing voices from the masks and paintings in *Picasso's Studio* but your voice, Aunt Melissa, was the clearest. 'You was an artist's model years before you was

ever born, thousands of miles from here in Africa somewhere. Only you'all wasn't called artist and model. It was natural that your beauty would be reproduced on walls and plates and sculptures made of your beautiful black face and body.'

3. 'Europeans discovered your image as art at the same time they discovered Africa's potential for slavery and colonization. They dug up centuries of our civilization, and then called us savages and made us slaves. First they take the body, then the soul. Or maybe it is the soul, then the body. The sequence doesn't matter, when one goes the other usually follows close behind.'

4. You asked me once why I wanted to become an artist and I said I didn't now. Well I know now. It is because it's the only way I know of feeling free. My art is my freedom to say what I please. N'importe what color you are, you can do what you want avec ton art. They many not like it, or buy it, or even let you show it; but they can't stop you from doing it.

5. Picasso's first cubist painting was called barbaric, la mort, the death of art! But that didn't stop him. In fact, it started le mouvement moderne du art. The European artists took a look at us and changed the way they saw themselves. Aunt Melissa, you made me aware of that 'Go to Paris, Willia Marie,' you told me, 'and soak up some of that Africana they using in those cube paintings.'

6. It's the African mask straight from African faces that I look at in *Picasso's Studio* and in his art. He has the power to deny what he doesn't want to acknowledge. But art is the truth, not the artist. Doesn't matter what he says about were it comes from. We see where, every time we look in the mirror.

7. The masks on Picasso's walls told me, 'Do not be disturbed by the power of the artist. He doesn't know any more than you what will happen in the next 5 seconds—in your life or his. The power he has is available to you. But you must give up the power you have as a woman. No one can have it all. What do you want, Willia Marie? When you decide that, you can have it,' the masks said.

8. Les Demoiselles d'Avignon, with their tortured twisted faces Europeanized in Picasso's brothel theme, made a counter-attaque on the wisdom of the African masks. 'You go ahead, girl, and try this art thing,' they whispered to me in a women-of-the-world voice straight from the evening. 'We don't want HIM to hear us talking, but we just want to let you know you don't have to give up nothing.'

9. 'And if they throw your art back at you, te fais pas de bile. Don't worry, cause you got something else you can sell. You was born with it, just in case. Every woman knows that. Some women will ask a high price and some men will pay it, all depends on the deal. Their wives don't have to know anything about it. That's been going on since Adam and Eve.' The ladies of the painting said.

10. I can hear you now, Aunt Melissa, 'Willia Marie, modeling aint' so-o boring you have to talk to masks and paintings. The only thing you have to do is create art of importance to YOU. Show us a new way to look at life.' 'You better listen to Aunt Melissa, girl,' the ladies of Avignon whispered. 'She's the only one making sense.'

<sup>30</sup> As Michelle Wallace noted in the *Downtown Arts* lecture "Miscegenated Modernism," (New School, New York, September 1998) the works belonging to *The French Collection* represent a counter-history of "what could have happened" over what did. Contrast this to the motifs in *The American Collection* wherein the works serve more as a graphic illustration of historical, yet largely undocumented, institutional white racism.

<sup>31</sup> This running stitch calls to mind the Derridean notion of "spacing" in its ability to constantly interrupt the stitches. Yet also, in coordination with the stitches, it has the capacity to make the quilting pattern coherent throughout the composition. Derrida refers to spacing as "productive, practical movement"... designating the position of the other (Derrida, 1981, 94).

<sup>32</sup> This art work also invites us to consider Picasso's personal life, where he fathered at least four children by three separate women.



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<sup>33</sup> The link that connects Levinas to Heidegger in this essay is the famous Derridean notion of the “trace,” or *spur*. Derrida writes, “since Being has never had a ‘meaning,’ has never been thought or said as such, except by dissimulating itself in beings, then *différance*, in a certain and very strange way, [is] ‘older’ than the ontological difference or than the truth of Being. When it has this age it can be called the play of the trace...” (Derrida, 1982, 22). Derrida describes the trace like after effects in lieu of presence. It is a powerful concept in its capacity to disrupt the metaphysical determination of signification.

<sup>34</sup> Daniel Smith extracted key concepts from Giorgio Agamben’s essay on Derrida, Deleuze and their respective relations to the philosophy of “difference” versus the philosophy of the “plenum.” Smith argues that there may exist an unbridgeable fault line between Derrida’s transcendent reckoning of difference versus Deleuze’s fundamentally immantacist notion of difference (Patton and Protevi, 2003, 46-66). Another argument too complex to fully elaborate upon here is that Deleuze’s notion of difference is absolutely grounded in affirmation whilst Derrida’s, though perhaps not negative in a traditional sense, implies the characteristics of negativity in its attempt to reveal that being has no positive ground.

<sup>35</sup> The lord within the “lord bondsman dialectic” is only a lord in relation to the bondsman and through the fortuitousness of his title. Hegel writes, “the lord achieves his recognition through another consciousness; for in them, that other consciousness is expressly something unessential” (Hegel, 1977, 116). The lord is thus captive to a role that requires a “supersession” of “ambiguous otherness” through the utter domination of one consciousness over another. Within consciousness formation, the lord and bondsman “each seeks the death of the other.” Freedom is only proven through risk of life as the free man will not suffer bondage as the slave; he will, according to Hegel, fight to the death in the hopes of winning freedom. Since to be white in the US is possible only through the accident of birth, the necessary Hegelian battle of wills is conveniently canceled. Lordship granted in a racialized dialectic, that positions whiteness over non-whiteness, is granted through physiognomy only.

## Chapter Two

### Deferral of decision and suspension of judgment in the legal storytelling of Derrick

Bell



Figure 2-1

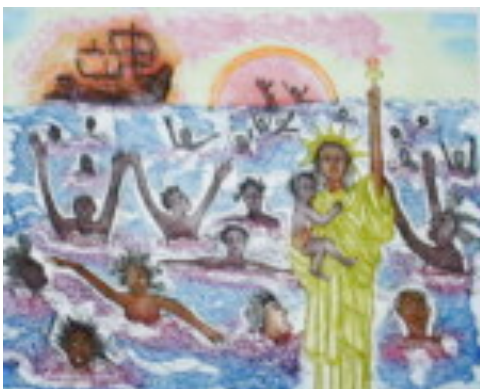


Figure 2-2

*“17 January. The last Martin Luther King holiday the nation would ever observe dawned on an extraordinary sight. In the night, the Space Traders had drawn their strange ships right up to the beaches and discharged their cargoes of gold, minerals, and machinery, leaving vast empty holds. Crowded on the beaches were the inductees, some twenty million silent black men, women, and children, including babes in arms. As the sun rose, the Space Traders directed them, first, to strip off all but a single undergarment; then, to line up; and finally, to enter those holds which yawned in the morning light like Milton’s ‘darkness visible.’ The inductees looked fearfully behind them. But, on the dunes above the beaches, guns at the ready, stood US guards. There was no escape, no alternative. Heads bowed, arms now linked by slender chains, black people left the New World as their forbears had arrived.”*

—Bell, 1992, 194

There are two artworks bearing the title *We came to America* by Faith Ringgold.<sup>1</sup>

The first is showcased in her 1997 *American Collection* (Figure 2-1). Ringgold unveiled the second in 1998 (Figure 2-2). As part of the accompanying text to the first artwork Ringgold wrote that *We came to America* illustrates a dream in which a young black expatriot returning from Paris to America envisions a burning slave ship, which is located at the upper right of the canvas.<sup>2</sup> Escaped slaves flee toward shore, inspired by a stony-faced black statue of liberty situated in the lower left-central section of the composition. A small child is swept up safely into her arms. Nude bodies swarm the rest of the canvas; their limbs sprout madly and break the infinite, scalloping waves. The searing coral tones cast on the water by the burning slaver and blazing sun contrast against the fairly uniform color of their bodies, ebony with ash undertones, and the eerily lustrous green of the statue's robe. It is unclear from the subjects' faces whether they are in a state of horror or of jubilation: with mouths agape, eyes wide, and arms stretched up toward the heavens, their expressions are inscrutable.

The 1998 *We came to America*, in appearance and in name, is similar to the 1997 work. Beyond difference in media, a print instead of a quilt, the second is crucially different. It is a mirror image with all the major components in the second composition polar inversions of the first: the slave ship is situated to the left of the sun instead of to the right; the statue of liberty is in the right foreground instead of in the left. Even the child being held away from the treacherous, tumultuous waters is poised on the hip opposite to the child in the earlier version. The color scheme, too, is altered. The ocean, painted in shades of navy and violet, contrasts against the less vibrant hues of mauve and chartreuse. The bodies are portrayed in warm variations of cocoa and rose. Even the

statue and accompanying infant are revitalized in warm flesh tones. Although in both works the images seem extraordinarily similar, the respective palettes betray this essential difference: the earlier version is clearly an image of night and the latter a robust depiction of day. The question of which *We Came to America* marks the arrival of dawn and which leads to dusk is significant, for it leads to so many others: is the ship in the second version on fire too? Are the bodies in the second version still approaching America? If so, are they drowning in the hostile waters or are they coming upon deliverance to friendly shores?

This chapter begins with a rumination about both *We came to America* 1997 and *We came to America* 1998 alongside the conclusion from Derrick Bell's "The Space Traders." Both Ringgold and Bell use their respective media to portray America's participation in transatlantic slavery as well as to reference African American initiatives for exodus and separatism, e.g., the founding of Liberia and Garveyism, which reverse the direction of the middle passage and toward a "promised land." Both artworks depict that whether coming from or going to, America is a land of modern racism. As I shall demonstrate, at first glance Bell's short stories appear to be quite similar to each other in their message. The former is indeed a sequel to the latter. Yet elements of difference as I explored in the preceding chapter are also exhibited between the texts as well as discretely situated within each story.

American law, as well, is steeped in a history of racism that continues today. In order to demonstrate how the law is complicit in American racism, this chapter will analyze Derrick Bell's "The Space Traders" and "Redemption Deferred: Back to the Space Traders." My objective is to distinguish *justice* from *the law*. Anti-racist strategies

must necessarily promote the active and prompt disarticulation of justice from law because, at least within an American context, the law is made “just” through majoritarian rule. Majoritarian rule in the US has and continues to be white dominant, if not numerically then through firmly entrenched power relations. Within America, the non-white minority is always and already subject to the judgment of the majority: this is evidenced in the inscription of the law from its transcendent constitutional foundations to its culmination as a repressive state apparatus. It is also present ideologically, i.e., through the psychic internalization of law that in turn reinforces racism within majoritarian consciousness. Bell’s trader stories complicate commonplace notions of law and justice. In particular, his stories critique the notion of salvation-through-judgment, or “judgment day.”

Moreover, his stories provide literary scenarios in which internal and contiguous differentiation occurs in under-theorized ways through the deferral of decision and the postponement of judgment. They thus illustrate and complicate the Derridean “undecidable interval” and the Deleuzian “suspension of judgment,” respectively. Through his stories, the interval of undecidability and the suspension of judgment disclose and then test juridical mechanisms through which the process of racialization in America is legally produced.

One premise must be emphasized at the outset. For our immediate purposes, let’s not assume that “law” and “judgment” are interchangeable terms. Their separateness can be understood as the distinction between the *juridical* and *judicial*. Both pertain to judgment. The juridical however, is the property of the state. The state uses the courts to exercise their juridical force. In doing so, the state maintains the law as both the method

and the rationale by which to rule. In this way, the state melds law and judgment together. In fact, law cannot exist without judgment: it requires the performative utterance of a sentence, a verbal execution, in order to exert itself. Law without judgment is a parody of the state entombed in an endless bureaucratic catacomb: it is, in short, Kafka's "castle." The judicial, on the other hand, can and does exist outside the law. As I will explain throughout this chapter, the judicial dwells within the simplest and most conventional thought. It is, however, the function of law to appropriate judiciousness back into the domain of the state, the juridical. This is how law serves as the foundation of itself. In other words, the abstract transcendent law furnishes the raw horsepower energizing the American juridical system, through the courts, or the concrete articulation and execution of law. Paradoxically, the law also takes the lead in steering the chariot of the democratic state by laying the ideal foundation upon which it is built through legislation, or the initial inscription of law.

My objective is to consider how Bell's trader stories force us to rethink dominant conceptions of difference as they are inscribed juridically, in the law of the state, and judicially, in the psyche of the one judging. Section I explores how Bell's writing complicates yet also complies with relaying the promise of deliverance that yokes the "force of law," to use Derrida's phrase from his "Force of Law" essay, to illuminate the shadow of salvation. Bell's belief in the "permanence of racism" endemic in the US court and legislation, alongside his sharp critique of democratic representation, enable a deconstructive interrogation of the law consistent with Derrida's project.

In Section II I analyze how Bell's stories reveal the limitations of the American civil rights movement so long as the movement is rooted in idealist conceit. His stories

demonstrate the necessity for a decoupling of social liberation from idealist doctrines of soteriology that are inscribed in the American state and through Judeo-Christian faith.

This section pays attention to the particular form of Bell's writing, legal storytelling, as it deliberately, and inadvertently, undoes the superimposition of the spiritual onto the political.

Section III is primarily concerned with comprehending the logic of representation inherent to judgment by exploring the difference between political liberation and spiritual liberation occurring in the "suspension of judgment," or the deferral of "judgment day." Deleuze has written comprehensively about this concept in *Difference and Repetition* and in one of his last essays "To Have Done with Judgment" in ways that are indispensable to our inquiry.<sup>3</sup> This section picks up and develops the position introduced in the previous chapter that some practices used to affirm race and ethnicity by racialized minorities share in the same set of logical assumptions as dominant practices of racialization used to oppressively differentiate minority populations. This section interrogates the role of racial identity caught in the battle between racial "sameness" and "difference" as it relates to the interval of undecidability and suspension of judgment illustrated in Bell's texts.

*Section I: decision and judgment in "The Space Traders" and "Redemption Deferred: Back to the Space Traders"*

The plot of "The Space Traders," from the 1992 collection of short stories *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*, is deceptively simple: extraterrestrial aliens arrive just off American shores on the first day of the second Christian millennium. They offer gold,

chemicals capable of “unpolluting the environment,” and a “totally safe” nuclear engine in exchange for one thing, “to take back to their home star all the African Americans who lived in the United States” (Bell, 1992, 160). After much commotion, the deal is finalized 16 days hence. On the day that America commemorates its most beloved civil rights leader, Martin Luther King, Jr., American blacks are traded to the aliens and taken away in giant interstellar ships. “The Space Traders” clearly illustrates Bell’s pessimism towards civil rights and towards institutional reform through legal redress. In this story, among others, Bell simply refuses to equivocate about his position. If offered the hypothetical prospect of instant mega-wealth and inexhaustible, clean, renewable energy, civil rights would certainly fail because the institutional and cultural system to which it appeals is chronically flawed, toxic and ethically bankrupt. No amount of manna from above, in the form of limitless bounty, can fill the void of national moral and ethical poverty which the trade is intended to relieve. In this story, when pressed to choose, Americans will opt for the quick fix of prosperity, for its already advantaged majority, over the rights of its historically disadvantaged slave descendents. Bell’s belief in the “permanence of racism” is well-established in his work as radical law professor rattling the chains of the most elite US law schools. He is also a pioneer in the field of American CRT, critical race theory.<sup>4</sup> This is significant because the particular genre in which he writes, “legal story-telling,” demands that attention to law as it is actually “on the books” cannot be dismissed.

Bell contextualizes his legal storytelling within a theater that casts history, law and fiction as interactive roles. For instance, he concludes his story with a unique hybridization of Judeo-Christian law, poetry and science fiction. He summons Milton in a



compelling manner when he writes: “the Space Traders directed them . . . to enter those holds which yawned in the morning light like Milton’s ‘darkness visible.’” The phrase “darkness visible” quite literally references the dark skin of the surrendered Americans. It also spotlights the process of racialization that they suffer because of the white hegemonic processes that interpellates them. Like Ralph Ellison’s “invisible man,” the black Americans are hyper-visible to a visually race conscious America. But that visibility obscures valences of identity beyond those projected through racialization. They are, in the eyes of the white majority, a teeming mass of black bodies crowding American shores. And they are, like Ringgold’s slave subjects, almost uniformly depicted.

The connection between visible darkness and Bell’s story is not merely “skin deep.” The phrase “darkness visible” is taken directly from line 63 of Milton’s epic poem *Paradise Lost* as a literary depiction of Hell.<sup>5</sup> Bell must be astutely aware of God’s role within the poem as the supreme Law, i.e., “Eternal Justice” from line 70, who metes the sentence of damnation against the first and most memorable apostate of Heaven, Satan. Clearly, however, the reader of *Paradise Lost* and “The Space Traders” is solicited to extend sympathy for the devil. Milton famously cast Satan as an antihero for the sake of political allegory. Bell makes a parallel casting choice with the African American “inductees” who are faced with the prospect of “no escape, no alternative” just as Satan and his minions are expelled to a realm where “hope never comes.”<sup>6</sup> Bell’s allusion to *Paradise Lost* underscores his belief that America’s minorities, and specifically black minorities, are damned— they are juridically condemned to live out their lot in a land where “racism is permanent.”<sup>7</sup> “The Space Traders” is, in this regard, dissimulation *par*

*excellence*. It expresses with adamant force the belief that being “free at last, free at last” is King’s unrealizable dream, and, that the hope to “overcome someday” will not arrive. There is no salvation.

Or so it would seem.

Bell’s 1996 sequel to “The Space Traders,” “Redemption Deferred: Back to the Space Traders” from the collection of essays in *Gospel Choirs: Psalms of Survival in an Alien Land Called Home*, offers a glimmer of hope. While safely aboard the alien ship the African American hostages pass through that “curtain of darkness,” the “darkness visible,” and into a “vast enclosure, a realm of light” (Bell, 1996, 19). The story opens with the extra-terrestrials revealing their reasons for arranging the barter:

We find we cannot re-create your robust warmth and humor. We cannot re-create your emotional and spiritual strength whereby you have sustained that humanity through your travails. We cannot, that is, re-create your ability to transcend suffering—to sing through it... We hoped to bring you back to our home star, to be settlers there, to mingle with our citizens as equals and full partners in our development and growth (Bell, 1996, 20).

The plot of the sequel is as direct as the first story. As it turns out, the aliens have been compassionately watching the insurmountable hardships that African Americans have endured since their forced migration to the New World and the inequities they continue to confront into the present day. Out of respect and admiration, they invite their captives to live among them as “equals.” Their dreadful mode of acquiring the African Americans through a trade was staged so as to demonstrate to the captives that white

dominant America would easily and quickly sacrifice them. The aliens' invitation, however, will only stand if they gain the full consent of all their captives: they insist that the African Americans vote democratically on whether or not to "go on" to the distant home star or to "go home" to America. Because the captives cannot decide, they, the space traders and their captives, stay in outer space indefinitely.

Derrida's essay "Force of Law" is perfect for exploring how the captives' refusal depicts how law and justice are distinct.<sup>8</sup> Derrida writes that, "there is something decayed or rotten in law, which condemns it or ruins it in advance. Law is condemned, ruined, in ruins, ruinous" (Derrida, 1990, 999). Bell and other critical race theorists are quick to agree that the law, in its foundation, form and application, is indeed rotten and ruined. Both Bell and Derrida are concerned with exposing what about the law is rotting it from the inside out through the process of deconstruction.<sup>9</sup> Justice, from the perspective of a Derridean critique, cannot deconstruct. The law, however, can undergo a process by which it undoes itself. Derrida explains how justice is imperviousness to the deconstruction that can undo law in the following way:

It is this deconstructible structure of law (*droit*), or if you prefer of justice as *droit*, that also insures the possibility of deconstruction. Justice in itself, if such a thing exists, outside or beyond law, is not deconstructible. No more than deconstruction itself, if such a thing exists. Deconstruction is justice. It is perhaps because law (*droit*) (which I will consistently try to distinguish from justice) is constructible, in a sense that goes beyond the opposition between convention and nature, it is perhaps insofar as it goes beyond this opposition that it is constructible and so deconstructible and, what's more, that it makes deconstruction possible, or at least the practice of a deconstruction that, fundamentally, always leads to questions of *droit*.  
 1. The deconstructibility of law (*droit*), of legality, legitimacy or legitimation (for example) makes deconstruction possible. 2. The

undeconstructibility of justice also makes deconstruction possible, indeed is inseparable from it. 3. The result: deconstruction takes place in the interval that separates the undeconstructibility of justice from the deconstructibility of *droit* (authority, legitimacy, and so on) (Derrida, 1990, 945).

This passage illustrates several key premises. First, a distinction is drawn between the concepts of law (*droit*), “right,” and justice. Both are ideal forms that are rhetorically harnessed by the state. But only law, strictly speaking, belongs to the state. Secondly, the law attempts to subsume justice by appropriating the qualities of justice even as it is not justice. Thirdly, law can be thought of as being both deconstructible and not deconstructible because law *qua* law is deconstructible whereas law *qua* justice is not: justice is deconstruction itself. Fourthly, both the deconstructibility and undeconstructibility of the law enables systemic deconstruction. The deconstruction of law involves a metaprocess unrestrained by the workings of the law. Law seizes justice and then contains it by the legal agent of force, the state. This discourse enables the enmeshed fragments of law and justice to unravel. Fifthly, and for our immediate purposes most pertinently, simultaneous deconstructibility and undeconstructibility within deconstruction is only made possible by an “interval” that distinguishes law (*droit*) from justice.

Derrida refers to this interval as the “space in which transformations, indeed juridico-political revolutions take place” because the deconstructibility within the interval carries with it the possibility for justice insofar as the law can be deconstructed (Derrida, 1991, 955-957). The law must make contact with justice in order to impersonate it. And

in this moment of contamination through contagion, justice pollutes the pristineness by which the law maintains its structural integrity and the purity of its “mystical foundation.”<sup>10</sup> If this brief summary of Derrida’s work is not elucidating, consider for illustrative purposes Azdak’s judgment in Bertolt Brecht’s *Caucasian Chalk Circle*.<sup>11</sup> Azdak, like King Solomon, is asked to decide the custodial fate of the local magistrate’s son who was abandoned at a young age during a political *coup*. Who has the right to raise the child? The wealthy governor’s wife who bore him but carelessly left him behind, or the peasant woman who cared for him at risk of political persecution? Justice, in the form of black robes, is cruel. King Solomon and Azdak parody the cruelty of the law *qua* justice when they threaten to cut a child in two or tear him asunder. In Derrida’s writings on the law, there is some amount of literal truth to this parody. He writes that “justice, as law, is never exercised without a decision that *cuts*, that divides... It begins, it ought to begin, by right or in principle, with the initiative of learning, reading, understanding, interpreting the rule, and even in calculating” (Derrida, 1991, 963). The law requires a decision in the form of division even if that decision is rendered with callous intention or savage execution.<sup>12</sup>

Further, the whole structure of decision-making that conflates what is legal with what is just and declares the resulting amalgam “true,” is contextualized within a set of choices which are never completely free nor unlimited from the perspective of the claimant. They are only free and unlimited from the perspective of the one who judges. The one whose decision rules has the freedom to determine guilt or innocence, who lies and who tells the truth, who is the rightful possessor and who is not. Moreover, he is, in Derrida’s words, a “calculating machine” whose position *vis-à-vis* the law “stops short before the

undecidable or if he improvises and leaves aside all rules, all principle” (Derrida, 1991, 963). Solomon and Azdak deliver sentences through *reductio ad absurdum* that illustrates how the authority of jurisprudence lies not only in the execution of the law but in its authority *above* it. The judge, as the face of the law, or right (*droit*), is bestowed the right to choose when and if to prescribe existing law and when to disregard it. Former president G.W. Bush’s public declaration “I’m the decider” assumes immunity from the scrutiny of constituents and from the guidance of advisors.<sup>13</sup> His imperial proclamation performatively establishes the role that state (*droit*) plays in the simultaneous act of speaking and breaking the law. “I’m the decider” takes on the same prohibitive injunction as the parental *ipse dixit*, “because I said so.” Similar to the parent, the judge has absolute authority in inscribing the law for the sole reason that he is the judge. Further, he reserves the right to qualify his judgment with equally arbitrary punishment.

The judge steps in and makes a binding decision at the crucial moment between grievances and their resolutions. We can utilize Derridean legal deconstruction to diagnose this crucial moment as one that “stops short before the undecidable” in relation to the crisis of decision-making aboard Bell’s alien craft. Derrida’s comment is significant as it locates the interval of undecidability as one that is endowed with both the promise and the seeming impossibility of justice. If we can interpret the “interval that separates the undeconstructibility of justice from the deconstructibility of *droit*” as one and the same as the interval wherein decision is suspended, “stops short,” we can imagine that it is this moment of undecidability that offers the possibility of justice by evacuating the role of sovereign judge. The judge who is law onto himself is removed from the bench, leaving only claimants.

*Section II: Amazing Grace*

The US has a history of sacrificing the rights of its minorities for the interests of its majority. For instance, one need only recall the internment and disenfranchisement of Americans of Japanese ancestry during WWII. In “The Space Traders” as well, right wing leaders and fundamentalists view the sacrifice of racially targeted citizens, African Americans, as somehow necessary to the economic rescue of the entire union. Through debate, they persuade moderate and even liberal voters to join their ideological camp by deploying the combined rhetoric of liberal democracy and spirituality. When these two conspire, they produce a transcendent notion of salvation that completely elides actual social progress. Specifically, in “Redemption Deferred” the crisis of democracy is illustrated by the tyranny of the vote.<sup>14</sup>

The issue of “choice” integral to a public voting process undergoes some important shifts by the time the reader reaches the conclusion of the story. In “The Space Traders” the choice of whether or not to accept the aliens’ offer falls predominantly to America’s white majority both by virtue of their superior numbers and by the ingrained racism that allows the viability of so outrageous a proposal. Further, they construct a juridical and penal system that supports their democratic right to choose. The voting process for gaining the consent of the American people for this issue is consistent with the rhetorical scaffolding of the Bill of Rights and the underlying principles of the US Constitution. The nation votes 70% to 30% to ratify the constitutional amendment that would enable the forced delivery of fellow citizens into an unknown fate through two of the most respected forums of liberal democracy, the crowded arena of public debate and the privacy of the voting booth. The Selective Service Act of 1918 becomes the precedent

through which African Americans are drafted, or inducted, to surrender themselves to the aliens for the sake of national welfare.

In “Redemption Deferred,” recurring characters Gleason Golightly and Geneva Crenshaw argue passionately “to go home” or to “go on,” respectively. The captives then vote telepathically in order to reach a “democratic” decision about their final destination. The decision, however, consistently wavers with each side reaching 70% of the vote. Keep in mind that this figure is a repetition of the one used to vote the African Americans off earth. The decision-making process used aboard the alien craft thus utilizes the tools of public debate and majority vote in order to reach judgment.

Yet an interesting disagreement emerges between the concept of numerical minority and racial minority. It is assumed that the African Americans can come to a group decision using majority vote. Yet the aliens do not accept majority vote as a measure of general consent. Further, they are unconvinced that these decisions are valid because the captives are so easily swayed by the oratorical skills of Golightly and Crenshaw. In the absence of a definitive decision, the aliens announce that they cannot risk bringing the African Americans onto their planet without their full consent. Their ship becomes a stellar reproduction of the Flying Dutchman as they announce, “we will circle your galaxy until we decide what to do with you” (Bell, 1996, 28).

“In Redemption Deferred” it seems as if the choice to “go on” or “go home” appears to rest squarely on the captives until story’s conclusion. Yet choice is not limited to those doing the voting. The aliens as well exercise their choice by interpellating the black Americans in the first place in the original story. What began in “The Space Traders” as a horrific sacrifice results in the opportunity to be amongst the first colonists



invited to join a peaceful and egalitarian community on a planet far away from the material and moral impoverishment of Earth. African Americans are *the chosen* precisely because they have suffered. Their suffering is intimately connected to their history of racialization; it is a testament to the blues, and the legacy of “who’s gotta right to sing ‘em,” that make America’s slave descendents a chosen people in the eyes of the Christ-like aliens.<sup>15</sup>

The notion of salvation seems to mutate within the interaction of the two texts. In the first story salvation pertains primarily to social justice. In the second work salvation follows a transcendent model, with the aliens supplying the mask on the *deus ex machina*. It seems counterintuitive that Bell would embrace the transcendent in his trader stories. Certainly, the aliens he created propose a choice to their captives. Yet this choice is an act of largess. It is only offered insofar as the aliens act as an external agent to the humans’ decision-making process. Choosing either of the options would contextualize their actions in accordance with docile compliance rather than to politically wrought freedom, independence through self-determination. But Bell is testing the very ideal of a promised land, as well as the American myth of democracy through the vote, in his narrative. Both tests draw inconclusive results. The captives and the reader are left in a state of suspense in search of what, and how, to decide; that is, how to exercise choice individually and within a group. As frustrating and politically impotent as the conclusion appears, it also disrupts the very foundations of legal rationalism upon which liberal democracy is built.

For instance, in “Redemption Deferred,” Bell critiques liberal democracy through Golightly and Crenshaw. Golightly, a former presidential cabinet member, who strikes more than a passing resemblance to Clarence Thomas, argues in favor of going back to

Earth. He argues, justifiably, that the strides African Americans have made in the US are great. Their return is founded on their inalienable rights as citizens. Crenshaw, on the other hand, counters by arguing that the aliens' offer is the Zionist redemption for which they have long awaited: "did not the Lord promise the Israelites a home, a land of their own? Is He not now, offering us a home beyond the corrupting influence of capitalism, colonialism, and racism?... Let us go on with the Space Traders to a new beginning" (Bell, 1996, 25). The grounds of Crenshaw's appeal bears significant resemblance to the history of Jewish national persecution from ancient Egypt and into the last century.<sup>16</sup> The captives on the ship eagerly refer to the pact made between God and the Israelites in the Old Testament. And the aliens suggest that the former Americans ability to "transcend suffering," indeed to "sing through it," is the unique attribute they wish to emulate upon their planet. Talk amongst the African Americans indicates that many believe in the promise of an "extraterrestrial New Jerusalem" that hearkens to a "land of milk and honey" (Bell, 1992, 176).

Notably, Golightly and Crenshaw's arguments are formed through an attachment to, and belief in, democratic ideals whose power comes from their spoken iterability rather than their application. Their decisions are based on precedents, promises and narratives that hearken back to the past. The aliens, on the other hand, are not swayed by the mythical and compelling force of the law that has enthralled the captives. They refuse to allow ingrained ways of decision-making through public debate to determine the future of the inductees. Instead, the aliens, like President Bush, seize control of the situation entirely by adopting the role of "decider." Then, they simply defer any action until making a decision.

It is at this point that “Redemption Deferred” stops short of doing something really remarkable. It fails to extend the limitless possibilities inherent to a hypothetical situation. Bell’s choice of narration and reliance on literary devices parallel the convention of the “hypothetical,” or *hypo*, used in most American law schools for more than a century.<sup>17</sup> The *hypo* is intended as a critical tool in its capacity to test laws by changing the facts as if they were variables in an equation wherein the rule of law remains a constant. It is also used to alienate the student from certain prejudices with which they enter into the arena of judgment. It does so by rendering the law as transcendent to the particulars of a given scenario by supplying its own shuffling of details and by randomly substituting characters and agents. Yet in a brilliant reversal, Bell uses the *hypo* format to challenge the law, as transcendental, precisely through the particularity of race.

Even more noteworthy is his transformation of a merely outlandish scenario, as it is presented in “The Space Traders,” into a scenario that almost completely reverses his original position in “Redemption Deferred.” Bell’s drastic turn from the profane litigious to the transcendental redirects the hypothetical into the fantastic. The question “what would you do if...” that provoked the reader in “The Space Traders” becomes completely unmoored from concrete application. In “Redemption Deferred” the question mutates into one of “what if...” This can be dangerous, for hypothetical questions carry the unfortunate risk of distracting some readers from the more urgent matter of actual injustice.

Bell enters into the realm of the unactualizable hypothetical by granting the aliens idealized status. In the first story, aliens appear as traders who tersely and quietly

vocalize their outrageous demands from the sidelines. They dangle the tempting fruit in front of the real players involved in the narrative action. Within this hypothetical diorama these would include: the office-holding political representatives and their grass-roots adversaries; the largely nameless, faceless voting public, black and white; and corporate and media interest groups. In the second story, the aliens disclose that they are not in fact traders, but are saviors. They go from being merely Christ-like to actually becoming messiahs by providing deliverance to the African Americans.<sup>18</sup>

Yet in the sequel, the *hypo* is at risk of deteriorating into a fairy tale. The critical reader in this situation is encouraged to ask: in what world are minorities ever faced with so glorious a dilemma? On which planet can, to use Fanon's phrase, the "wretched of the earth" decide between enjoying the splendor and radiance of an unspoiled extra-terrestrial utopia without having to participate in actually producing that society? The alternative to this, the other "choice" for the African Americans, would be to return home having clearly earned the cache of moral superiority over those who voted them off the earth, as well as the sympathy of the entire globe.<sup>19</sup> Submerged under all the "what ifs" lies one glaring facet of reality: the possibility of this *hypo* is so remote that it can only happen on another planet, in a galaxy far, far away and through the providence of benevolent messiahs. Science fiction and fantasy provide the genres through which Bell writes. These genres are useful in their allegorical capacities: they draw from the *hypo* style of legal pedagogy in order to deliver fresh types of textual transmission, i.e., legal storytelling, to a contemporary American reading public that is largely jaded but still not well educated about racism. In "Redemption Deferred," however, the genre becomes the *telos* of the story. Bell's premise itself is so "out of this world" that it loses touch with its

initial allegorical function. This is why the sequel ends on a note of indeterminacy. Bell's *hypo* has spun out of his control just when the story needed, more than ever, to develop *hypos* that would truly challenge established modes of thinking about law, judgment, choice, restitution and the arrival of justice. As it currently stands, we readers, too, remain waiting for textual redemption.

The title speaks for itself: "Redemption Deferred" maintains the allure of redemption by indefinitely denying it. Furthermore, the allure is so strong that it discourages any revolutionary action within the text. The forfeiture of agency resounds: there is not yet social redemption, only spiritual. But it is of utmost significance, at least as far as this analysis is concerned, that Bell's use of the hypothetical in legal storytelling and his turn toward spiritual salvation creates the condition for a crisis in meaning within the texts that collapses the law of the people with the law of God. The crisis depicted in Bell's short stories, the deferred redemption, occurs when the juridical law collides with the transcendental law. In the space where those two forms of law make contact, the very foundations of both forms of law are "ruined."

It almost appears as though Bell undermines his own attempts to critique the relation between spiritual salvation and civil rights by allowing their collusion. Although Bell speaks little, if at all, about actual theological matters, his belief in the restorative powers of gospel and his pursuit of redemption betray an attachment to a spiritual reckoning reminiscent of "the Beatitudes." *The Book of Matthew* and *The Book of Luke* attest to the day when the meek shall inherit the earth, mourners shall receive comfort, and the poor and those persecuted for their righteousness shall gain entry into the

kingdom of heaven. Similarly, Bell highlights the connection between suffering and redemption at the conclusion of “Redemption Deferred”:

The ship settled into its new course. The only sound was Geneva singing the old hymn, “Amazing Grace.” Written in the eighteenth century by John Newton, a former slave-ship captain, it seems more than speculation that that melody may have emanated from the sounds of sorrow and strength rising from the holds of Newton’s ship. As darkness fell, another voice joined Geneva, then another and another—all swelling into a great chorus as they reached the verse: *Through many dangers, toils, and snares/I have already come; /’Twas grace that brought me safe thus far, /And grace shall lead me home* (Bell, 1996, 28).

The historical significance of “Amazing Grace” is undeniable.<sup>20</sup> In “Redemption Deferred,” Bell repeats the same excerpt cited in “The Space Traders.” “Through many dangers, toils, and snares/I have already come; /’Twas grace that brought me safe thus far, /And grace shall lead me home...” Within the first story, the hymn is led by Reverend Justin Jasper, who is a possible allusion to Jesse Jackson, at an Anti-Trade Coalition meeting. Those assembled discuss civil disobedience tactics to combat the trade. Yet they fail to remember that passive resistance not only requires sheer numbers of dissenters, who may or may not be expendable. It also requires, as Thoreau would have it, a fundamentally ethical community before which the actions of the government could be brought to dishonor and disrepute. Neither of these elements is present enough to impact the final outcome. Bell’s black protagonists must undergo a final act of suffering for the sake of redemption. Thus the stark and outrageous *hypo* posed in “The

Space Traders” is a necessary precondition to their emancipation *from* America with the assistance of the aliens.

*Section III: the undecidable and unjudgeable in “The Space Traders” and “Redemption Deferred”*

The captives’ emancipation never arrives. “We will circle your galaxy until we decide what to do with you.” The brief interval of undecidability introduced in “Redemption Deferred” is all too quickly closed by the aliens. They deprive their captives the freedom of choice, and the freedom from choice, when they determine that they are experiencing too much difficulty in their decision-making. But the prospect of deciding is difficult precisely because the aliens make their choice so conditional. Both choices are inadequate. After all, as Solomon and Azdak demonstrate, what is the sense of having the right to choose when what you ultimately claim is half a child’s body? “Go home” or “go on.” Why are these the sole options for the captives? Any number of possibilities remains un-broached: what if the captives commandeer the ship and live as extraterrestrial pirates? What if they request “going on” to a planet different from the aliens, to live as castaways with greater control of their future circumstances? And perhaps the simplest scenario of all: what if some “go home” while the others “go on.” Must they act as a group?

Bell could have retreated from exploring a fuller range of hypothetical options because he was himself exhausted of the energy, ideas and momentum necessary for so optimistic a project. Another explanation is that the real objective of his trader stories was

to illustrate a type of crisis whose strategic solutions could then be explored beyond the confines of the narrative. Authorial intention notwithstanding, Bell's characters, alien and earthling alike, fall victim to a deplorable lack of imagination in "Redemption Deferred." Consequently, all those aboard the vessel remain in an indefinite limbo. On one side lies the glorious promise of a time and place where racism is abolished and the law of the land commands that everyone be granted equal rights and opportunities without compromising the vitality of difference—salvation. On the other side of limbo the American racial minority continues to be vulnerable to the "dangers, toils, and snares," i.e., the terror, exclusion, persecution, and injustices, that compel Bell to invoke Miltonian depictions of Hell, or "darkness visible." Derrida's "Force of Law" characterizes this limbo as the interval of undecidability that is pregnant with so many heretofore unthought possibilities. Unfortunately, the interval contracts into closure by the paucity of options, the captives' reluctance to make a choice between the limited options, and the aliens' declaration to decide what is just in the absence of the captives' decision.

Deleuze's work on the suspension of judgment and the restitution of justice parallels Derrida's critique of the law in a number of regards. Without sounding too reductivist, I believe that we can, for the purposes of this analysis, safely assume that what Derrida describes as an interval of undecidability Deleuze refers to as a suspension of judgment.<sup>21</sup> This concept has a vital relationship to a prior concept, his "analogy of judgment." Deleuze provides sketches of his arguments about the analogy of judgment in *Difference and Repetition*, wherein he considers analogy on its own and in conjunction with judgment. Analogy itself is anathema to Deleuze's philosophy of difference.



Remember that Deleuze identifies analogy as one of the four “shackles of mediation” discussed in the previous chapter. Deleuze’s insistence that difference is a-relational, non-representational, primary, singular, and affirmative is paramount. Analogy opposes Deleuze’s understanding of difference in nearly all these regards. Most prominently, it conflicts with Deleuze’s conception of a-relational difference, or difference as “the state in which one can speak of determination *as such*,” as opposed to difference which is captured by a system of equivalence seeking to identify one object solely as it is “distinguished” by another. Difference is instead the condition through which determination takes the form of “unilateral distinction” (Deleuze, 1968, 28).

Let’s consider his writing on the subject of analogy in order to refresh our memory:

There are four principal aspects to reason in so far as it is the medium of representation: identity, in the form of *undetermined* concept; analogy, in the relation between ultimate *determinable* concepts; opposition, in the relation between *determinations* within concepts; resemblance, in the *determined* object of the concept itself. These forms are like the four heads or the four shackles of mediation. Difference is ‘mediated’ to the extent that it is subjected to the fourfold root of identity, opposition, analogy and resemblance (Deleuze, 1968, 29).

By definition, an analogy’s function is to devise relations between two objects based upon a given set of corresponding attributes. Analogies level singular attributes by crafting a defining, “determinable” relation between a thing and another thing through their representability. The greatest power of analogy resides in its capacity to move

beyond the confines of basic equivalences and to provide the means by which singular objects are contextualized within complex sets of classification. But for Deleuze, this whole process of mediating objects which are defined as “determination as such” into objects that are determined through relation to another, is strictly illusory. For “representation is the site of transcendental illusion” (Deleuze, 1968, 265).

Deleuze connects judgment to analogy as part of a reaction against Aristotelian forms of representation.<sup>22</sup> He maintains that the immanent quality of difference, how difference differentiates itself in a primal sense, is subordinated by two functions of judgment. Judgment, as distribution and hierarchy, has been developed in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. Also recall from the last chapter that Deleuze specifically criticizes the Aristotelian system of “greatest differences.” He further argues that when Aristotelian “contrariness” is accepted, “analogous” thinking based upon the concept of an object ensues. This in turn is instrumental to establishing the codification of undetermined objects into predicative, analogous, and classified objects (Deleuze, 1968, 30). Objects are then arrayed across a spectrum of value which grades quality within a hierarchical continuum of “lesser” to “greater” opposition.<sup>23</sup> Distribution, which “ensures the *partition* of concepts,” is exercised through “common sense.” Hierarchicalization, which “ensures the *measuring* of subjects,” is exercised through “good sense” (Deleuze, 1968, 33-34). Common sense and good sense convene at the moment of judgment: this is the moment that Deleuze characterizes as subject to *coupure*, the moment which is “cut” by the decision.

Bell offers his own commentary on judgment in three instances which dramatize the *cut* inherent to decision-making. The first, from “The Space Traders,” stretches over

two weeks of deliberation over the initial offer. Herein, the process of decision-making is played in a series of vignettes. At story's end, the overwhelming decision to forcibly hand over the African Americans to the aliens, established through the public vote, is executed with the utmost exigency. Indeed, it is carried out with all the "deliberate speed" lacking in the *de facto* application of civil rights laws. Judgment is cast. The second opportunity for judgment, an almost mirror inversion of the first, results in a series of oscillations. The captives cannot make a final decision. Judgment is stalled. The last instance of judgment is indefinitely suspended because there is an excess of decisions "to go home" or "go back." Judgment is refused. Bell ends the sequel before resolving the third opportunity for judgment. Here, as in the second instance, decision is once again postponed since the aliens have not yet revealed their plans. The difference between the latter two instances, however, is significant. The captives cannot or choose not to decide. They do not judge. Thus, the aliens step in and act as judge in the situation. But ultimately, they recuse themselves from having to actually make a decision. The reader is left to wonder what their sentence might be, or, if the eventual outcome even corresponds to one that fits into a narrative of "common" or "good sense."<sup>24</sup> After all, the aliens are not restricted by the humans' conventional wisdom. They may simply never decide, or, may decide to do something wholly unanticipated.

Conjectures notwithstanding, in the third example of decision-making Bell withdraws from the arena of judgment through the act of deferment. "Judgment day" does not arrive. Apocalypse, where all is revealed; redemption, where all debts, accrued by the enslaved, exploited and oppressed, are paid; and judgment, where a claimant's fate is established through the sentence of a judge, are suspended indefinitely. The effects of

Bell's narrative are clear. His refusal to provide a judgment to the reader connects the frustration accompanying the long overdue promise of racial equality with a broken faith in the democratic ideals of the state. Add to this another element: Bell designs his *hypo* with the presence of divine intervention. The aliens stand in as the transcendent purveyor of justice. But despite their noble offer of social salvation to the captives, they never actually deliver. They cannot because, at least in terms of this "interval," this propitious moment, judgment and justice are incompatible.

Like Becket's Godot, for whom Vladimir and Estragon futilely await, justice "will not come today" for those aboard the alien vessel.<sup>25</sup> However, the pessimism that marks Bell's attitude towards the American legal system and toward white America in general, is tempered by his faith in the people that the system holds down. Arguably, he is "buoyed" by a touch of spiritual faith as well.<sup>26</sup>

It is crucial to point out here that the captives, acting as a group, do not accept the terms of their decision-making outright. They resist fulfilling their destiny, i.e., to judge themselves. And here, Bell may just be redeeming himself brilliantly as a radical race critic. He may not have gone far enough with his *hypo*, i.e., he stopped short of exploring all possible options. But he allows the captives the *right to refusal* in casting their own sentence as the terms of the aliens' choices requires. The captives do not follow the aliens dutifully. This act leads this reader to surmise that this form of salvation, one that is external to their world, their experiences, their histories, and their capabilities, is not their redemption after all.

The moment of indecision may be characterized as "undecided" if not "undecidable." Moreover, it is unmistakably, categorically different from the moments of

decision-making that precede and follow it. To understand this distinction I propose we look to Deleuze's "To have done with judgment." This short essay offers literary criticism of fiction by Lawrence, Artaud, and Kafka and the philosophy of Spinoza and Nietzsche. All five figures are said to have "suffered from judgment." Deleuze then sets out to explore how these figures, in their distinctive ways, addressed the collusion of judgment, cosmic debt, and time in order to produce a "suspension of judgment" in relation to the "doctrine of judgment." According to Deleuze, the West has been enthralled by this doctrine from antiquity to modernity:

It is not as if the judgment itself were postponed, put off until tomorrow, pushed back to infinity; on the contrary, it is the act of postponing, of carrying to infinity, that makes judgment possible. The condition of judgment lies in a supposed relation between existence and the infinite in the *order* of time. The power to judge and to be judged is given to whomever stands in this relation... But the judgment of knowledge in this sense implies a prior moral and theological form, according to which a relation was established between existence and the infinite following a order of time: the existing being as having a debt to God (Deleuze, 1997, 127).

In this section, Deleuze credits Nietzsche with the revelation that the "infinite" and "unpayable" debt that man is born into precedes his actual birth. That is, "the creditor-debtor relation was primary in relation to all exchange." Deleuze's understanding of judgment squares with Derrida's notion of the law in that both figures understand the law and judgment, respectively, as built upon transcendental foundations. Both also describe the law and judgment in the language of accounting: Derrida views the

law as “calculating,” and “dividing.” Deleuze understands judgment as an act of cutting, “*coupure*,” situated within, indeed enabling, a system of debt relations. The most significant relation about which Deleuze writes exists between the ultimate limit, or infinite form of God’s judgment, and the condition of “being-defendant.” The relation is a protean one: existence within this system of debt convolutes so that debt is prior to the creditor and the debtor. In Deleuze’s elaboration of the “doctrine of judgment,” the debtor does not remain solely before the bench nor does the judge remain behind it. Rather, judges pop up everywhere, and in everyone, because they are conceived internally. Just as in Kafka’s “Before the law” parable, one stands before the gates of the law seeking entrance. Perpetually denied satisfaction he grows old. Approaching death, the gatekeeper shouts to the one who has waited an eternity for the law, i.e., the dispensation of justice, that no one else has sought entry at this gate because it was “assigned” solely for him. It is his law alone.<sup>27</sup>

Deleuze, along with Derrida, is consistent in diagnosing the calculability inherent to judging. Judgment is a quantifiable form of assessment.<sup>28</sup> It measures and cuts that which enters its jurisdiction. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze alludes to this system of assessment as it is enabled by distribution and hierarchicalization, *vis-à-vis* “good” and “common sense.” Likewise, in “To Have Done with Judgment” he describes judgment as the process by which existence is divided in “lots,” as in, how one’s “lot” in life is calculated and then parceled out. It is a form of “partition” (Deleuze, 1997, 128-129).

A quick summary of Deleuze’s critique of judgment follows: first, judgment is caught within the representational web of analogy; it is problematic to begin with because it is part of a system of mediation that works through approximations and “illusions.”

Secondly, judgment is not to be confused with decision. Both cut. There are, however, subtle yet important differences between them. Deleuze briefly mentions this distinction as one that consists of differences in effects. Decisions allow for movement and shifts of direction during times of crisis. Judgments function likewise. They do so, however, only through the authority of force, *puissance*. Moreover, they do so through a logic of calculation, equivalence and quantifiability. For both these reasons, judgment, like Derrida's notion of law, is not justice. Justice, what is *juste*, attempts to deliver rectitude to the aggrieved. It does so through the cultivation of impartiality, fairness. The law, on the other hand, may appropriate the language of justice to legitimate itself, yet it is nothing but partiality. It cuts, divides, and partitions through its judgments. For Deleuze, the two are absolutely antithetical: "justice is opposed to judgment, provoking a veritable inversion of the sign" (Deleuze, 1997, 128). Judgment forecloses the "liberatory processes," and the "emergence of new forms of existence" that Deleuze comes to associate with justice (Deleuze, 1997, 128, 135).

By following the work of Derrida and Deleuze I hope to have successfully established that judgment, both as it is edified as the universal façade of the law, *droit*, and as it is internalized in the individual, are at odds. In Bell's works the distinction between judgment *qua* law and justice are further bourn through the particularity of race. In the trader stories the conflict between judgment and justice is a site of "visible darkness" filled with the presence of racial difference. The stories clearly reference race as a politico-cultural category signaling a history of shared oppression. Bell's discussion of the practice of transatlantic slavery, and its legacy in America explicitly, contextualizes the category of race in relation to racial discrimination. In his work,

racialization through the formation of groups, the majority and the minority, further critiques how the US fixation with democracy conflicts with its spoken commitment to equality. In “Redemption Deferred,” the inability of the captives to form a consistent decision and their refusal to make a judgment demonstrates a repudiation of an insidious form of interpellation that is fundamental to the way that modern racism operates in America.

Racial hegemony in contemporary America operates within different, perhaps even incongruous, orders. Race, as means to judge and classify people; race, as an organizing principle of resistance against that judgment; race, as it is understood in an anthropological context, i.e., ethnicity—the excess of divergent meanings issuing from a single signifier are in a constant play of collusion and conflict which is impossible to escape in the trader texts. The white dominant American voting public and the aliens appear to subscribe to one kind of racism and it seems the aliens are actually guilty of subscribing to a racism belonging to a different variety. America is clearly guilty of racism in “The Space Traders”: centuries old prejudices and implied feelings of entitlement are revealed by the majority vote. Similarly, the aliens’ offer taps into our unique history of transatlantic slavery with bull’s eye accuracy. It is consistent with a chronic and “permanent” racism that connects barbaric practices of the past with less explicit forms of contemporary racial discrimination.

Why do the aliens awaken the slave trade? Both “The Space Traders” and “Redemption Deferred” seem to illustrate the kind of repetitiveness that has saturated our history of structural, ingrained racism and insurgencies against them. In another story from his collection *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*, “Divining a Racial Realism Theory,”



Bell muses that “despite our best efforts to control or eliminate it, oppression on the basis of race returns time after time—in different guises, but it always returns... all the formal or aspirational structures in the world can’t mask the racial reality of the last three centuries” (Bell, 1992. 97). For Bell, strides made towards eliminating racism do not constitute an advancing march with each step gaining more purchase towards the goal of equality. What passes as social progress is instead more akin to a continuous series of iterations: civil rights are won, celebrated ephemerally and then to a greater or lesser degree rolled back. For this reason, Bell has referred to civil rights in the US as a “cyclical process” that coordinates with the cultural and political climate of the times.<sup>29</sup>

But, as I just argued, the alien’s racism is not the same as the white Americans’. The aliens’ trade offer was just a ploy. They do not truly want black slaves. Instead, they interpellate Americans who legally identify as African descendents as part of an elaborate ruse. Their basis for determining African American status strictly adheres to those whose parents declared them African American on their birth certificates.

The plot of “The Space Traders” thus illustrates how race is thought through different modes of judgment operating simultaneously. The captives think themselves African American, the aliens think the captives African American, and the white majority voters think the captives African American. However, the signifier “African American” mean different things according to subject position. What may occur to one as racial difference may occur to another as racial similitude. Both may occur within the same figure because racialization of a subject happens in both ways. The treatment of Gleason Golightly, for instance, demonstrates how race is politically deployed as a double-edged sword. Golightly’s attempts to reason with the conservative white cabinet are met with

accusations of “Tomming” from prominent leaders in the African American community. On the other hand, the other all white cabinet members treat him with undisguised disdain and hostility: Bell portrays them as flaunting their outright racism and white privilege in no uncertain terms. As the only black figure accessing both communities, his dual role makes him intolerable to either.

Race is simultaneously the basis for ethnological and psychic exclusion within some communities and inclusion within others. It appears that only the kidnapped African Americans realize this. With the exception of a minority of dissenters, the US voting majority is revealed for being short sighted, avaricious bigots. In the sequel, the aliens appear to be allies in the struggle against racism in America. However, they insist they want the group aboard the ship to decide overwhelmingly and with unwavering finality what “they” want. Yet, the issue of how “they,” i.e., the captives, are constituted in the first place is problematic. The aliens are implicitly relying upon statist forms of racial identification, birth certificates, in order to hail their captives with the intention of offering them social justice. In effect, they are coordinating their “rescue” with the identificatory practices in part produced by American racism.

Moreover, the division of race in such stark demographic “black and white” terms poses major problems to those who do not fit neatly into those categories. As Bell points out in a barely noticeable comment in “The Space Traders,” whites who live as part of African American communities, who belong by ties of family and friendship, have no choice but to watch their loved ones’ be sacrificed. Even more problematic is the absence of those who identify as neither fully black nor fully white, Asian or Latino by nature of

their mixed-race heritage. The aliens are thus complicit in a terribly outdated but dreadfully common form of binary thinking *vis-à-vis* race.<sup>30</sup>

How can the aliens free the African Americans from the “permanence of racism” if they implicitly subscribe to its structural logic? They acknowledge that their captives’ “lot” in life, as the descendents of slaves, is fundamentally unjust. Yet they sentence them to a repetition of that same lot in order to offer them paradise. In this regard, the aliens merely seized the robes of the judge by demanding a unilateral decision from a group without recognizing the diversity, disunity, and particularity of its singular members. The aliens demonstrate how the “analogy of judgment” functions through the dual mechanism of identity and resemblance by participating in one of the most basic and vulgar forms of judgment to date, the stereotype. The aliens’ racism can be summed up by the brutally simple racist trope “they all think alike.”

The captives’ refusal to decide draws attention to the type of racialization that is reactivated in “Redemption Deferred.” Ultimately, the reason for the African Americans’ inability to decide actually relates to their forced minority status: they cannot reach group consensus because they are not a self-formed group. Further, since the original trade offer is agreed upon between the aliens and the US majority, the process of group voting disenfranchised the sole group being affected, African Americans. In this way, their “choice” to “go home” or “go on” is not consensual or free. It may carry the appearance of opportunity, but the opportunities offered are actually qualitatively and quantitatively restricted by both dominant America, who traded them away, and by the aliens who demanded them as trade only to then assume the unsolicited role of “liberator.” The captives, however, are not victims in this story by any means. Their refusal to decide

forces a suspension of judgment which does not retroactively authorize the right to judge, as Deleuze's discusses in "To Have Done with Judgment." In the case of "Redemption Deferred," the captives are not fleeing from a decision. Rather, they demonstrate their intractability through their refusal to decide once and for all.

In "Redemption Deferred" the aliens' response is more of a non-response. They appear to simply not know how to judge. This in turn gives everyone on board more time to think about other possibilities. The reader, as well, is granted the opportunity to transform the hypothetical "what if" to the more strategic question "what next?" One of the real merits of science fiction is to create scenarios by which to imagine the unimaginable. Deliberately or not, Bell utilizes this in his form of legal storytelling and couples it with the urgent project of creating the space for new solutions to the problem of racial injustice.

By way of conclusion I propose revisiting Ringgold's haunting image as we think about what is implied by "going on" or "going home." The black figures in the water that have fled the burning slave ship could be interpreted as doing either as well. If it hasn't already been made clear, I do not make this juxtaposition between Ringgold and Bell in order to imply that they are the same. To reiterate, not only are the set of "We came to America" artworks and the set of trader stories different from each other, they are different internally. However, put together in the frame of a single thought they produce richer effects for the reader than if apprehended consecutively. Likewise, Bell's stories complement Deleuze and Derrida's philosophies of difference even as they are all different entities. Of even greater consequence, Bell's stories reveal the commonplace confluence of revolutionary praxis with transcendent and idealist promises of salvation.

This chapter has striven to differentiate one from the other in keeping with Bell's critical race objectives.

In order to develop new forms of anti-racist strategy it is crucial that transcendent forms, as they constitute spiritual salvation and democratic emancipation, not be allowed to elide justice. Bell illustrates that the struggle against "the permanence of racism" demands a call for justice performed outside the Law. This is true even if we are currently unable to positively identify what justice is. Even if justice resides in virtual provinces, or is suspended in the realm of the undecidable or undetermined, it is not premature to assume that it will never come.

For Derrida, justice has a dimension that is inextricably tied to a futuricity when he writes that justice:

*may have an avenir, a 'to come,' which I rigorously distinguish from the future that can always reproduce the present. Justice remains, is yet, to come, à venire... the very dimension of events irreducibly to come. It will always have it, this à-venir, and always has. Perhaps it is for this reason that justice, insofar as it is not only a juridical or political concept, opens up for l'avenir the transformation, the recasting or refounding of law and politics (Derrida, 1990, 969-971).*

It is important not to underestimate the difference between Derrida's "à venir" and *destiny*, or a diachronically and teleologically conscripted future. To conflate "what can come" with "what should come" is to restrain the future with transcendental chains. Further, "*avenir/ à venire*" is a form of futuricity that is not restricted to a conventional understanding of temporality. Derrida quite eloquently expresses that each present

moment is endowed with potential, *à venire*, which distinguishes “not now” from the more optimistic “not yet.” A reinterpretation of the law can lead to revolutionary conditions to come: “what the state fears (the State being law in its greatest force) is not so much crime or brigandage... the state is afraid of fundamental, founding violence, that is, violence able to justify, to legitimate... or to transform the relations of law” (Derrida, 1990, 989). Revolutionary conditions can transform the liberal state into one that is absolutely despotic. Conversely, it can also pave the way for more equitable and ethical social conditions in which to implement the dismantling of institutional and quotidian racism.

While Bell’s works may exude resignation and defeat over the promise of legal emancipation, he is ultimately hopeful about the value of narrative in the quest of social justice. Bell is committed to an engagement, in and outside the law, which will make “something out of nothing”: “carving out a humanity for oneself with absolutely nothing to help... beating the odds while firmly believing in, knowing as only they could know, the fact that all those odds are stacked against them” is nothing new to Americans of color (Bell, 1992, 198). Bell knows that in order to begin to conceive justice those invested in anti-racism must not cling to the notion that the law is justice. The law will never dispense justice; it can only dispense what it produces, more law.

Bell’s stories illustrate that the interval of undecidability is useful for disrupting the law. Likewise, the suspension of judgment reveals the judge lurking inside us.<sup>31</sup> Most importantly, Bell’s stories demonstrate that without the exigency of “all deliberate speed,” justice cannot be actualized. This legal phrase harmonizes with Derrida when he writes “justice doesn’t wait... a just decision is always required immediately... the

moment of decision, as such, always remains a finite moment of urgency and precipitation” (Derrida, 1990, 967). Similarly, in his 1963 “Letter from a Birmingham jail,” Martin Luther King Jr. refers to the English jurist William Gladstone’s famous quotation “justice delayed is justice denied” in order to argue for the immediate institution of civil rights laws (Carson, 2001). The verdict is that if those seeking justice procrastinate, or justice is otherwise delayed, then “justice is denied.”

Dr. King’s words can mobilize masses and transform the world, but they also carry the implication that justice is something to be given or denied by a higher authority. I will conclude by considering Malcolm X’s more proactive stance on the subject: “nobody can give you freedom. Nobody can give you equality or justice or anything” (Breitman, 1990). Justice is not an act of grace or a pardon from the state. It must be strategically seized by those who are categorically denied it through the concerted efforts of the minority and his allies. The ethico-political task at hand in the ongoing determination of justice requires that we transform the question “what would you do if...” to “what do we do now?” Otherwise, like Bell’s captives, those of us who are genuinely invested in developing critical strategies in the service of justice are left “circling the galaxy” awaiting a judgment day that will never come.

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<sup>1</sup> Both *We came to America* works offer impressions of coming to America that simultaneously deliver a record of the violence of the Middle Passage as well as hinting to more contemporary forms of violence surrounding African American communities, e.g., the burning of the ship, the sun and the statue’s torch remind this viewer of the Watts Riots, burning crosses, and incidents of torching in black communities.

<sup>2</sup> For a full description and catalogue information see *Dancing at the Louvre: Faith Ringgold’s French Collection and Other Story Quilts* (Dan Cameron, et al, ed. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> Also see his sparser writings on Kafka’s “The Judgment” in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* for an explicit connection between law and the minor.

<sup>4</sup> Bell was teaching a course at Harvard Law School which dealt with CRT issues when he resigned in protest over discriminatory hiring practices. Against faculty support, the course was resumed as a student led “Alternative Course” focusing on Bell’s text *Race, Racism and American Law*. This watershed moment is viewed as one of the founding moments of Critical Race Theory. For the specific features of Bell’s

protest, see the short story "A Law Professor' Protest." For more detail on Bell's on-going dissent with institutional racism see *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*. For more information on Bell's contribution to the inception of Critical Race Theory, see *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed The Movement* (Kimberlé Crenshaw, et al., eds. New York, NY: The New Press, 1995), and *Words That Wound: Critical Race Theory, Assaultive Speech, and the First Amendment*. (Mari Matsuda, et al., ed. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993, 4).

<sup>5</sup> Cast down from the Heavens, Satan and his legion of fallen angels awaken in a state of disorientation, shock and agony. They are banished by God to what Milton further describes as a dimension of utter darkness "served only to discover sights of woe/Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace/ And rest can never dwell, hope never comes" (Milton, 2005, 5).

<sup>6</sup> Bell's identification with Milton is understandable. Milton was renowned for his religious piety as well as his notorious support of regicide. It is well established that Milton's choice to cast Satan as a protagonist against God bears more than accidental resemblance to his work with Oliver Cromwell against the monarchy.

<sup>7</sup> Elsewhere Bell has written, "emancipation, while it ended slavery, did not bring freedom. The lives of black people were filled with trouble and hard times. Their daily experiences suggested that the future, as far as they could see or imagine, offered only more anguish, more woes" (Bell, 1996, 2).

<sup>8</sup> Part I of this article was originally drafted as a speech presented at the "Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice" colloquium at Cardozo Law School in 1989. As it appears in the *Law Review*, Part II of this article includes some of Derrida's writing on the problem of racism and the law, "Nazism and the Final Solution," which was prepared for another colloquium that took place in the following year.

<sup>9</sup> The law has been subject to deconstruction by critical race theorists and critical legal studies scholars for over two decades now. From the outset it is important to distinguish between two sets of discourses. Legal deconstruction, as the term is commonly used within actual legal fields by scholars such as Bell, Delgado, Matsuda, Crenshaw, Williams, Kennedy and others, is a horse of a different color from deconstruction of "the law" as it is understood by Derrida, Cornell, Butler and others who are working with decidedly more abstract conceptions of the law. The former tends to put greater emphasis on practical jurisprudence while the latter concentrates on a linguistic or philological component. Both are attuned to the philosophy of law, the historico-social environs in which the law is situated, and the political consequences the law creates. Yet when legally trained critics, theorists from within the law, refer to "deconstruction," they are most likely diverging from an abstract textual understanding of deconstruction circulating in critical theory and cultural studies. They are instead referring to a process of legal dismantlement and to the *reform* of existing national and international codes of jurisprudence. The two most common strategies of legal deconstruction from within, is to thus either expose the law for its contradictions, that is, to rehabilitate the law, or to challenge existing law, that is, to draft new law.

<sup>10</sup> Derrida uses this phrase when putting Pascal and Montaigne in dialogue regarding how to critique the law as a form of ideology. Taking a cue from structuralist Marxism, he considers juridical ideology as it works through "superstructures of law that both hide and reflect the economic and political interests of the dominant forces of society." (Derrida, 1991, 941).

<sup>11</sup> Brecht's play about the folly of judgment left to the hands of the aristocracy and bourgeoisie in a war-torn USSR parallels "The Space Traders" in interesting ways. Both use the form of parable to question conventional jurisprudence. In *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, Azdak does this by acting the part of the trickster who thwarts both the landed gentry and the official state in order to offer restitution to the local peasantry.

<sup>12</sup> Common sense, the most capricious of all the senses, dictates that the law in its "blindness" metes out justice through equality. Thus, the parody of cutting a child in half, though ludicrous, almost appears to be sensible by the laws of the state. This understanding of equality absolutely lays waste to the singular existence of living: some things may not be "cut" and parceled out. Brecht's play inspires the connection between this concept of singular, differential justice and the Marxist truism "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need" from the *Critique of the Gotha Program*.

<sup>13</sup> In spring of 2006 Bush publicly issued his vote of confidence for defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld and his actions in the Middle East by declaring "I listen to all voices, but mine is the final decision... I read the front page, and I know the speculation. But I'm the decider, and I decide what is best. And what's best is for



Don Rumsfeld to remain as the secretary of defense." Bush made his declaration only to exercise his right to fire him shortly thereafter. For a transcription of this segment see *Associated Press's* story "Bush shuffles economic team, says more changes coming" (April 19, 2006).

<sup>14</sup> Bell indicates that the aliens are at least somewhat aware of a crisis in political representation when he writes, "'we have been studying Earth and its peoples for a long time, particularly the experiment with democracy in your United States of America, and even more particularly the blot upon that experiment: the refusal to grant you full human rights along with its citizens'" (Bell, 1996, 19). Bell's position, as illustrated in the aliens' criticism, is not based on a fundamental philosophical aversion to democratic ideals. To the contrary, his stories attest to an abiding desire for freedom from racial inequality. Likewise, Bell is not spurning the notion of equality born of Enlightenment objectives of self-governance and liberty. Rather, his critique is grounded in legal praxis. His rejection of Enlightenment ideals stems from the fact that they have never been fully applied.

<sup>15</sup> Bell's aliens arrive at dawn of the Christian millennium, 1/1/2000, and are given Christ-like characteristics. They are described as "literally walking on the waves" (Bell, 1992, 159).

<sup>16</sup> Bell creates a literal alliance between Jews and Blacks in "The Space Traders" by including the presence of a vocal Jewish oppositional bloc (The Anne Frank Committee) against the Trade Offer. He also recognizes the actual, historical expulsion and extermination of Jews under the Third Reich as precedent for imagining a science fiction version of "America's Final Solution" to the "Race Problem," i.e., that "they" would just "go away."

<sup>17</sup> In American law schools the *hypo* is one of the most orthodox methods of pedagogy. Bell uses the *hypo* in complement with his fantasy/science fiction mode of writing. His approach to legal storytelling thus slips in between genres that make his texts, in particular, especially difficult to identify: referred to as science fiction, speculative fiction, fantasy, allegory and fable by his fellow CRT writers and critics, Bell's stories incorporate the imaginary with citations of actual statutes and constitutional laws in a manner that complements Ringgold's "ficto-critical" approach to art.

<sup>18</sup> Metaphorically, the aliens aurally transmorph between the two stories as well. The reader is given very little by way of an actual, physical description of the aliens. In the first story they are perceived as white and have adopted the voice of Ronald Reagan to communicate with the Americans. In the second story, their "voice" changes to one that is "definitely a black voice, warm and resonant" (Bell, 1996, 18). They thus have the ability to transcend the particularity of race. And yet, even given almost god-like aura, they are not petty, demanding or unilateral as demiurges are often depicted. By offering the captives the choice to "go on" or "go home," they seem to give them the choice to decide how to actualize their own salvation.

<sup>19</sup> The second option extends further vindication to the captives for, as we find out from the aliens in "Redemption deferred," the US has managed to exhaust its "inexhaustible" supply of financial wealth and energy through corporate greed and mismanagement. They have also been largely disowned and soundly disparaged by the rest of the world's nations for their despicable actions.

<sup>20</sup> Newton was not merely the former captain of a slave ship. He left slaving due to a religious conversion that was accompanied by a newfound commitment to the abolitionist movement in England. As such, "Amazing Grace" has often been sung in the service of Civil rights struggles. Bell recognizes the power of the song to sustain its listeners. It is as if the space ship is the dream of those on the slave ship, similar to the burning slave ship is Ringgold's dream. The darkness of the holds is like Milton's "visible darkness," a place where anguish is so intense and so prolonged that the hope for salvation is almost extinguished.

<sup>21</sup> Perhaps this is one and the same, perhaps not. Ultimately I do not think the "identity" of the concept is a major concern: even if they are not the same, they do work in complementary fashion.

<sup>22</sup> As brought up in Chapter One, Deleuze also indicts the philosophy of Plato, Kant, Leibniz, and Hegel, each for their different reasons, for subordinating difference through the analogy of judgment.

<sup>23</sup> For more explanation of Deleuze's attack against Aristotelian metaphysics, see James William's primer *Gilles Deleuze's difference and repetition: a critical introduction and guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003).

<sup>24</sup> Deleuze further develops his critique of "common sense" and "good sense" in "The Image of Thought" chapter of *Difference and Repetition*. Suffice it to say for our purposes; in this chapter he imbricates these two forms of dominant thinking to the hegemonic production of culture.

<sup>25</sup> Consider the parallel between the finale of Beckett's play and Bell's conclusion:

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ESTRAGON: I can't go on like this.  
 VLADIMIR: That's what you think.  
 ESTRAGON: If we parted? That might be better for us.  
 VLADIMIR: We'll hang ourselves tomorrow. (*Pause.*) Unless Godot comes.  
 ESTRAGON: And if he comes?  
 VLADIMIR: *We'll be saved.* [*italics mine*]... Well? Shall we go?  
 ESTRAGON: Yes, let's go.  
*They do not move*

The last stage direction of the play, "*They do not move*," punctuates the immobility of the characters which the audience has witnessed throughout the play. Beckett underscores the hope for salvation as the reason for their paralysis.

<sup>26</sup> In the prologue to *Gospel Choirs*, Bell calls for "new tactics that speak directly to today's crisis, that also encompass the vehicles of faith and steadfastness that have served us so well in past struggles. A stack of gospel music recordings sparked my thinking and buoyed my spirits..." (Bell, 1996, 11).

<sup>27</sup> "Before the law," is one of many stories by Kafka used to explore the law of the father, that is, both patrimonial and theological law, in conjunction with the bureaucracy of the state. Other notable works include *The Judgment* and *The Trial* itself, from which "Before the law" has been translated and published independently in several anthologies.

<sup>28</sup> There is a very real overlap existing between Deleuze and Derrida in regard to judgment *vis-à-vis* the concept of time, debt, and systems of exchange. Although it falls outside of our immediate scope, it would be interesting to consider Deleuze's notes in "To Have Done with Judgment" with Derrida's theory of debt in relation to Mauss' conception of the gift in *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money* (Trans. Peggy Kamuf. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>29</sup> With their claims substantiated by now declassified government documents, Bell and many other CRT scholars have repeatedly pointed out that federal support for desegregation in the 1950's was motivated, largely in part, by the US campaign to woo third world countries from its Cold War Soviet nemeses. After all, if the US practiced a legally sanctioned form of apartheid against its own citizens how could it successfully win the allegiance of newly forming nation states composed primarily of non-whites?

<sup>30</sup> For a complementary project, it would be productive to consider racial difference in accordance to the "shackles of representation" which Deleuze decries, i.e., through the logic of opposition (binary structure of race), analogy (reproduction of group identity), resemblance (visuality of race) and identity (hegemonic interpellation which shuttles the legal mechanisms of demographic "factuality" to the instantiation of psychic "selfhood").

<sup>31</sup> Deleuze's critique of the internalization of judgment in "To Have Done with Judgment" is reminiscent of Foucault's light-hearted, but no less profound, indictment against our "inner fascists" in the Preface to *Anti-Oedipus* (Trans. Richard Hurley, et al. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

### Chapter Three

#### **A virtuosic encounter between Spinoza's *Amor Dei intellectualis* and John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme***

In the previous chapter I differentiated justice from law in order to support Derrick Bell's argument that the American legal system is so entrenched in racism as to be incapable of meting justice to its minority subjects. I concluded that acts of justice performed outside the law, and specifically those that disrupt the narrative of spiritual salvation, disrupt assumptions upon which the law is built. This chapter analyzes the "poetry" of African American jazz legend John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme*. Here, I argue that Coltrane's conceptions of supreme love, as virtuosic power exercised on material and ethical planes, harmonize with Benedict de Spinoza's materialist conception of God: this is especially true when considered in relation to Spinoza's articulation of *Amor Dei intellectualis*, or the "intellectual love of God." Together, the unlikely duo Coltrane and Spinoza challenge the master discourse of difference by demonstrating minor ways of imagining love, virtue, and ethics.

This demonstration furthers our engagement with difference via Deleuze and Derrida. I also refer to the insights of Antonio Negri, Paolo Virno, and Louis Althusser as contributors to the polyamorous encounter mediated here. The organization of this chapter adheres to the title of Coltrane's work by consulting each individual term as an aperture through which to open a space for: "A," in Section I, an instance of indeterminate singularity that is simultaneously endowed with the attributes of non-

quantifiability and immeasurability; “Love,” in Section II, or how *Amor Dei intellectualis* could be harnessed to a materialist approach and then deployed towards struggles for anti-racist struggles; and “Supreme,” in Section III, how the cultivation of virtue in the quest for “beatitude” resonates with the labor of the aesthetic virtuoso. Two intermezzos connect the three sections described above.

As I will allude to, the particular medium in which Coltrane plays, jazz, is significant. However, Coltrane does not fulfill a metonymic function: his role is not to “represent” a larger class of composer, writer, or musician. Though Coltrane’s creative work expresses certain characteristics that are shared amongst jazz artists, I propose engaging Spinoza’s *Ethics* in specific regard to *A Love Supreme* only. *A Love Supreme* is hardly an exclusive example of Spinozist ethics. Yet in its particular kind of virtuosity, *A Love Supreme* is *exemplary*. Through its aesthetic it bears the attributes of ethics.

Furthermore, the notion of the particular *vis-à-vis* expression has a valence in the work of Coltrane. *A Love Supreme* can only exist within the specific context of its production: it is a spiritually idiosyncratic, musically experimental, culturally influential album produced by a young, black man playing in an overwhelmingly African American genre at the peak of the civil rights movement. An adventurous but, surprisingly, commercially successful jazz suite, *A Love Supreme* reflects the beginnings of free jazz. It also portends the avant-garde direction that Coltrane will later take with his music. The composition conveys a joyous, restless energy and the turbulence of political discontent. Music historian Ashley Kahn notes that “jazz had already begun to reflect the increasingly confrontational stance of black America.”<sup>1</sup>

Despite Khan's observation that Coltrane was more pacifist than some of his contemporaries, Coltrane's music left an indelible mark on black cultural politics at the time. Musician Archie Shepp connects the timing of the album with the emergence of politicized black consciousness. Hot on the heels of invigorated civil rights activity, the synchronicity is undeniable. Although some of Coltrane's work, such as "Alabama," tapped more directly into the politico-cultural fervor of the times in which it was produced, *A Love Supreme* expressed a unique and well-traveled message.<sup>2</sup> The music arose from a particular set of conditions and became universal in appeal. In the process, however, it never lost its particular, idiosyncratic qualities, its minor qualities, within an already minoritized musical genre.

### *Section I: A*

Nestled in the heart of San Francisco's Western Addition, between the housing projects on Eddy Street and the bars and clubs ushering in the gentrification of Fillmore Street, survives the Saint John Coltrane Church. The Church is founded upon the 1964 jazz suite, *A Love Supreme*. *A Love Supreme* is established in legions of music bulletins as one of the greatest jazz pieces ever produced and as a masterpiece of American music regardless of genre. Coltrane's "canonization," instantiated with the inception of the church in 1971, recognizes John "Will-I-Am" Coltrane as having attained sainthood through music.<sup>3</sup> The Coltrane Church icon card *Holy Ghost Horn* (Figure 3-1) is derivative of the late Byzantine ambivalence with iconography and iconoclasm. The

haloed figure of Coltrane, his flaming horn, and the “scripture” in his hand all lend themselves to the “Orthodox” aesthetic of the clearly unorthodox congregation.<sup>4</sup>



(Figure 3-1)

Let’s consider the text of *A Love Supreme* in Coltrane’s liner notes. It consists of a two-part message including a letter to his listeners and a devotional poem. The letter and the poem, alongside the recorded music, are not independent texts. They communicate in different yet symbiotic modes: where one falls short of expression, the other succeeds in a different medium. Specifically, the poem can be thought of as a *libretto* to the instrumental music (Kahn, 2002, 144). Coltrane synthesizes two different orders of signs, words and musical notes, in order to mirror one in relation to the other. Yet since the

poem is never aurally animated, the music denies the insurgence of song. *A Love Supreme* is somewhat reminiscent of Handel's arrangement of Milton's poems by the same name in *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato*. Both composers' works offer meditations bridging philosophy, divinity, poetic verse and instrumentality. But significantly distinct from Handel, there is an absence of interaction between the music and poem in *A Love Supreme*. Coltrane lets the instruments sing on their own behalf: in "Part I—Acknowledgment" of the four part suite, a sigh emanates from Coltrane's saxophone, connecting with the four bass notes echoing the rhythm "a-love-supreme." In the final section, "Part IV—Psalm," the music articulates the pattern as if it were spoken, issuing one note per syllable. Yet with the exception of the chanting of the poem's title towards the end of the first part, Coltrane's poem is physically confined to the sleeve of the album.

The curious poem is reprinted in its entirety below so that we can refer to it throughout the course of this chapter:

## A LOVE SUPREME

I will do all I can to be worthy of Thee O Lord.		God loves.	
It all has to do with it.		May I be acceptable in Thy sight.	
Thank you God.		We are all one in His grace.	
Peace.		The fact that we do exist is acknowledgment	
There is none other.	5	of Thee oh Lord.	40
God is. It is so beautiful.		Thank you God.	
Thank you God. God is all.		God will wash away all our tears...	
Help us to resolve our fears and weaknesses.		He always has...	
Thank you God.		He always will.	
In You all things are possible.	10	Seek Him everyday. In all ways seek God everyday.	45
We know. God made us so.		Let us sing all songs to God	
Keep your eye on God.		To whom all praise is due... praise God.	
God is. He always was. He always will be.		No road is any easy one, but they all	
No matter what... it is God.		go back to God.	
He is gracious and merciful.	15	With all we share God.	50
It is most important that I know Thee.		It is all with God.	
Words, sounds, speech, men, memory, thoughts,		It is all with Thee.	
fears and emotions—time—all related		Obey the Lord.	
all made from one... all made in one.		Blessed is He.	
Blessed be His name.	20	We are from one thing... the will of God...	55
Thought waves—heat waves—all vibrations—		thank you God.	
all paths lead to God. Thank you God.		I have seen God—I have seen ungodly—	
His way... it is so lovely... it is gracious.		none can be greater—none can compare to God.	
It is merciful—thank you God.		Thank you God.	
One thought can produce millions of vibrations	25	He will remake us... He always has and He	60
and they all go back to God... everything does.		always will.	
Thank you God.		It is true—blessed be His name—thank you God.	
Have no fear... believe... thank you God.		God breathes through us so completely...	
The universe has many wonders. God is all.		so gently we hardly feel it... yet,	
His way... it is so wonderful.	30	it is our everything.	65
Thoughts—deeds—vibrations, etc.		Thank you God.	
They all go back to God and He cleanses all.		ELATION—ELEGANCE—EXALTATION—	
He is gracious and merciful... thank you God.		All from God.	
Glory to God... God is so alive.		Thank you God. Amen.	
God is.	35		

JOHN COLTRANE— December, 1964



The title begins with the seemingly humble but very significant letter *A*.<sup>5</sup> Coltrane's specific reference to *A* love as opposed to *The* love or simply *Love* discloses an entire way of thinking about God which will ultimately prove to be characterized as *panentheistic*, that is, characterizing God as directly inhabiting the world. First, *A* implies a general designation instead of a specific one. Secondly, *A* can be used to indicate both one singular thing and a plurality of those things. We can thus do away with the numerical tensions existing between pantheism and monotheism. This is because Coltrane's use of an indefinite article does not promote an exclusive affinity to a singular object of faith. In his poem, love is described in much the same way that pantheism describes devotion to plural, demotic gods. *A* love supreme indicates Coltrane's hybrid spirituality forged from his appreciation for Christian, Jewish and Islamic mysticism, Hinduism, Buddhism, philosophy and astrology: "I believe in all religions," says Coltrane in the liner notes of his 1965 album *Meditations*. From *A Love Supreme* we likewise arrive at a conception of God that is *non-quantifiable* and *immeasurable*.

In order to explore non-quantifiability I invite the reader to consider the *Upanishadic* dictum *tat tvam asi* as a reflection of Coltrane's fascination with eastern spirituality. *Tat tvam asi*, "Thou art that," says Uddālaka to his son Śvetaketu as they ponder the role of human consciousness within the embrace of Brahma's theater of Ultimate Reality.<sup>6</sup> Coltrane's poetry resonates with the monistic flavor of Vedic mysticism without denying the consubstantiality of the Christian God with which he also identifies. "Words, sounds, speech, men, memory, thoughts, / fears and emotions—time—all related... / all made from one... all made in one" (lines 17-19).

*A Love Supreme* chronicles Coltrane's "spiritual reawakening" after overcoming a heroin addiction in the late 1950s. After his metaphorical "rebirth," Coltrane identified with a divinity whose attributes defy anthropomorphic and numerical representation. Quantitative questions concerning the nature of God, "how many," "how much," cease to be relevant because, as the poem repeats several times, "God is all."

This understanding of God is consistent with Spinoza's. So as to begin engaging the former, let's momentarily bracket Coltrane.

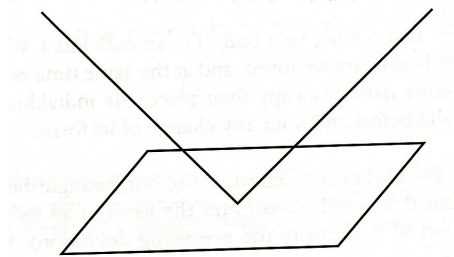
God's non-quantifiability in the form of ubiquitous oneness penetrates the binary division between devotee and deity which is a hallmark of Western monotheistic religions. Martin Buber's famous *Ich Du*, "I-Thou," exemplifies how a dualism cleaving humanity from God necessarily exists underneath the apparently monistic resolution of mystical union. This reasoning branches into two auxiliary sets of conflicts that are intimately attached to religious adherence to an alienated god, which Spinoza and his redactors denounce. The first is an artificial tension existing between the notion of the one and the many. The second corresponds to the concepts of "numerical" versus "real" distinction. Both can be elaborated upon through Spinoza's interrelation of "substance," "attribute" and "mode," especially as it creates an affinity between substance, "God," and "extension," or the attribute of body.

Spinoza articulates the relation between substance, attribute and mode in "Part Two: On the Nature and Origin of the Mind" and its lengthy annotation. Quite simply, the proposition holds that "the object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body, or, a certain actually existing mode of extension, and nothing else" (E<sub>2</sub>P<sub>13</sub>). He then

follows this simple haiku of a proposition with a tome of corollaries, scholia, axioms, lemma, definitions, and a set of postulates intended to valorize and affirm the body.

Thus, in the extraordinary annotation devoted to Proposition 13, Spinoza upturns the Cartesian applecart. Descartes outlines his famous mind body binary, where mind and body form distinct substances and the former is privileged over the latter, in “Meditation Two” of *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Contrary to Descartes, in this section of the *Ethics* we learn that not only are mind and body parallel attributes of a singular and all-encompassing substance. Also, as attributes of the same substance they are united. Negri’s theorization of immeasurability complements thinking non-quantifiability in relation to the body, the mind, and the parallelism and interconnected capacity for magnification that both share. Whereas the concept of quantifiability can be understood as pertaining to numerical value, the concept of measurability can include quantity but can also encompass other modes of evaluation—time, space, money (and its accumulation in capital), affect, body, knowledge, etc. For this reason, Negri chooses to distinguish as one of his main priorities in *Time for Revolution*, time or *kairòs*. This genus of time is a ripe and perfectly situated, that is, not too soon yet not too late, interval. *Kairòs* differs from the long march of chronological time associated with *chronos*. Instead of imagining time as a linear “arrow” that penetrates the world, Negri’s conception of time as *kairòs* imagines the present as a moment or opportunity, an instance of “nowness” that opens onto a plane of possibilities (Negri, 2003, 134-135). I will return to Negri’s notion of immeasurability, in connection with non-quantifiability, shortly.

Before doing so, I would like to engage Spinoza's conception of the body. In his *Ethics*, bodies are defined by "motion and rest," "speed and slowness," "hardness and softness," and "fluidity." When discussing matter, Spinoza asserts his "demonstrations in geometrical order" against the "mathematical certainty" Descartes uses to posit God and establish hierarchy of Idea over Matter in his First Philosophy.<sup>7</sup> Descartes refers to the honeycomb, the object defined as much by the ratios required to determine its shape as by the sensations it produces, in order to address the mutability of wax (Descartes, 1993, 21-22). Descartes' Icarian honeycomb illustrates how the mind forms erroneous judgments about bodies because those bodies themselves are subject to a barrage of affects and affections from other bodies. For instance, the body of the honeycomb loses its integrity and becomes a protean lump of wax when held too close to fire. Otherwise, its hexagonal structure fixes its form and function. But then again, as Descartes explains, the stuff of beeswax can be remolded into a triangle. Similarly, Spinoza discusses the role of affect in the interaction between bodies through geometric analogy:



(Figure 3-2)

Figure 3-2 is Spinoza's graphic illustration of the following proposition:

when a body in motion impinges on another which is at rest, which it is unable to move, it is reflected, so that it continues to move, and the angle of the line of reflection with the plane of the body at rest, on which it impinges, will be equal to the angle which the line of incidence of motion makes with the same plane" (E<sub>2</sub>P<sub>13</sub>A<sub>2</sub>).

Spinoza metaphorically replaces one natural body, the honeycomb, with another, the crystal, as a more useful model for considering the inter-affect of bodies. For Spinoza's philosophical system, the vector piercing the plane is more conceptually useful because it allows for ongoing prismatic proliferations, infinite angles intersecting infinite planes. The crystalline structure of bodies in motion and bodies at rest more accurately describes Spinoza's assertion that incremental parts forming "simple" bodies move and are moved by other bodies in such a way that they connect. The bodies themselves, the movement between them, and their interchangeability defy quantification and measure. They cannot be reduced to singular bodies: instead they form aggregates, or "composite bodies," making an individual. These individuals then combine with others, affecting and being affected in all possible way until "we shall easily conceive the whole of Nature to be one individual, whose parts—that is, all bodies—vary in infinite ways" (E<sub>2</sub>P<sub>13</sub>S<sub>2</sub>).

Deleuze elaborates upon the notion of the undivided, aggregate, collective body by connecting attribute, or "that which intellect perceives of substance," with mode, or "the affections of substance, or, that which is in something else, through which it is also conceived" (E<sub>1</sub>D). In his chapter on "modal existence" from *Expressionism in*

*Philosophy: Spinoza*, Deleuze discusses both the nature of simple bodies and their relationality towards one another as “extensive,” “extrinsic,” and “external.” For Deleuze, simple bodies *are* as they *do*. Their being extends to their (inter)action: as attributes of substance they extend and, presumably, contract. In relation to one another, simple bodies continue to vacillate between activity and passivity. This is how their particularity, their relational definition from each other, is seen from an external perspective. From a different perspective, simple bodies “are always grouped in infinite wholes, *each whole being defined by a certain relation of movement and rest*.” Moreover, their simplicity measures their deficiency as independent units. Simple bodies “have no internal essence or nature” (Deleuze, 1990, 5). As such, they only live in dependent relation to substance, i.e., as parts of “the whole of Nature.”

Coltrane’s work illustrates nature in its wholeness, its simultaneous unity and diversity, its infinite variation, through the collective musical ensemble in which he performs. Coltrane, returning to tenor sax after having made a career-altering move to soprano, plays with McCoy Tyner on piano, Jimmy Garrison on bass and Elvin Jones on drums. The four comprise what would later be referred to as Coltrane’s Classic Quartet. *A Love Supreme* was partially developed in previous live performances wherein the quartet had played. That is not to say, however, that a strong improvisatory element did not also exist in the two-session recording. Coltrane indicated how he wanted to arrange some basic chords and structure for the session. Beyond that, he gave his musicians improvisational liberty. Despite this, the suite had, according to Tyner, a “connectedness” worthy of distinction (Kahn, 2002, 94). *A Love Supreme* is consistent with the unscripted, performative nature of jazz improvisations which, for our purposes, is valuable for

considering how bodily encounters lead to the creation of greater, more “empowered” collective bodies. One could argue that any valued musical selection shares the characteristics discussed above. However, *A Love Supreme* is especially illustrative of Spinozist principles. This is true not only because of its highly affective and “scoreless” nature. Also, as I will discuss further, Coltrane’s materialist conception of love for God, and God’s love for us, lends itself to an exploration of Spinoza’s *Amor Dei intellectualis* with aesthetic acuity.

Both the relative scorelessness of *A Love Supreme* and its integral dependence on ensemble performance are crucial in our consideration of non-quantifiability and immeasurability. Each player is responsible for bringing a singular sound to the union of musicians within the quartet: they rely upon one another in order to produce a community of music to which each member belongs and a commonality of sound to which each musician contributes in his unique fashion. As a result, the recording, though held together through musical convention as a coherent unity, subverts the transcendent paradigm of aesthetic totality. Instead of viewing notes as units harmoniously distributed in order to produce a finished sum, that is, through the lens of measurability, we can instead view the improvisational structure of *A Love Supreme* as an antidote to the finished score, the musical “masterpiece” of western, canonical music.

In a more abstract sense, Coltrane’s work is consonant with a reading of Spinoza that considers the non-quantifiability and immeasurability of material bodies as they have been historically inscribed and narratively fixed, as well as material bodies *to come* that are likewise unrestricted and indefinite. Clearly we are aware that Coltrane’s quartet is comprised of the bodies of black men laboring together in a musical genre invented in

America almost exclusively by African Americans. The issue of their labor, specifically what Paolo Virno might diagnose as *virtuosic*, non-productive, “servile” labor, is of no small significance and will be accordingly addressed in Section III of this chapter.

For the moment, however, let’s consider how the musicians’ bodies can be de-personalized, broken down into infrared bodies in a recording studio: they are bodies defined by motion and heat playing as an ensemble. There also exist modal bodies, or bodies of musical notes, coursing between the blues and jazz scales that infiltrate the composition. From the perspective of the listener, this is the most affective set of bodies. These are bodies of sound moving together—interpenetrating, changing chords, creating multiphonic textures and consistencies. The musicians playing together bring to mind the quality of Coltrane’s earlier work with Miles Davis. While with Davis, Coltrane was notorious for his rapid-fire, aggressive, and even discordant approach which spurred jazz critic Ira Gitler to refer to his playing as “sheets of sound.” (Gitler, 1958, 16-17). The body of sound emanating from the suspended cadence of Garrison’s bass can alternately shatter, like broken glass, or sag, like aged glass, when impacted by the onrush of sound from Coltrane’s plaintive horn. Likewise, the earthy, mellow vocals that Coltrane provides in the “a love supreme” chant create a multiplicity of planar relations—more sheets of sound.

In considering the various ways in which bodies can be thought, how they are positively and negatively “impinged” upon, and how they act, we arrive at one of Deleuze’s fundamental preoccupations. This is articulated in the question “what can a body do?” Admittedly, this question has been so well-trodden in Deleuzian circles as to almost make it trite. But since it is so significant to the specific interrogation at hand, I



will include it into the analysis with all the sincerity I believe it deserves. Spinoza's original comment follows:

no one has so far determined what the body can do; that is, experience has so far taught no one what the body can do and what it cannot do by the laws of Nature alone, in so far as Nature is considered as corporeal only, without being determined by the mind. For no one so far has had accurate knowledge of the structure of the body that he can explain all its functions... (E<sub>3</sub>P<sub>2</sub>S).

Deleuze transforms Spinoza's statement, "no one has so far determined what the body can do," into the question "what can a body do?" He hastens, "when Spinoza says that we do not even know what a body can do, this is practically a war cry." He adds that "we speak of the consciousness, mind, soul, of the power of the soul over the body; we chatter away about these things, but we do not even know what bodies can do. Moral chattering replaces true philosophy" (Deleuze, 1990, 255).<sup>8</sup> It is vital that we keep in mind that this "war cry" is an excited question meant to illicit an energetic response, but hardly does it seek a conclusive answer. We don't know what a body can do, the full extent of its "powers to act," or its "fabrication," because the composition of the body is in ongoing transformation. Its unknowability is its strength, its internal power. The body's ability to "endure" when affected by external bodies or when being the agent of active affections correlates to its power, its *potentia*. The ability to be "affected in a great many ways" is the measure of power within modal bodies. This is distinct from God's ability to be affected in "infinite ways", that is, his power as *potestas* (Deleuze, 1990,

218). The most powerful body is thus *a* body, not *the* body which is already committed to an implied determination. Further, as Spinoza would say, the more power a body has, the closer it is to substance, “or God,” as power is substance itself.

When considering the enormity of the affirmative consequences derived from the question “what can a body do,” Negri reminds us that in Spinoza’s universe the body must be thought in simultaneity with the mind. More precisely, he views two crucial elements of the body, expression and imagination, as parallel features of a body that undergoes “living the process of the totality of being.” In this way, Negri emphasizes a wholly materialist position that exalts the body as the primary entity within a “field of being” (Negri, 164, 2003). The body is the key to immeasurable existence through its affective capacity. Its ability to affect and be affected, to “impinge,” augments its power.

The production of the body emerges from a swarm of singular bodies and then develops into aggregate bodies. The body’s traversal of singular and multiple incarnations connects to its ability to withstand quantification. To repeat, Coltrane writes, “words, sounds, speech, men, memory, thoughts, / fears and emotions—time—all related.../ all made from one... all made in one.” He follows this sentiment with lines 25-26: “One thought can produce millions of vibrations/ and they all go back to God... everything does.” Describing the movement from one to millions and back to one, Coltrane’s prose resonates with Deleuze’s writings on “real” versus “numerical” distinction. Distinction, argues Deleuze, belongs to the categories of numerical, modal, or real.<sup>9</sup> I will focus on the conflict between real and numerical distinction as this seems to strike at the heart of both Coltrane and Spinoza’s panentheism.

Descartes insists that the ideal, divine realm exercises rightful dominion over the material world. In *Meditations*, he privileges God, mind and reason as entities endowed with greater reality than body and nature. On the other hand, Spinoza's substance desegregates God, mind, reason, body, nature, affect, etc. All elements perceived as attributes or conceived as modes flourish within an interconnectedness whose very existence is Singularity without relation: "Besides God no substance can exist or be conceived" (E<sub>1</sub>P<sub>14</sub>). And since for Spinoza substance is not divisible, it can only be understood under the category of real distinction<sup>10</sup>

This differs radically from Descartes who contends that the body, "by its very nature, is always divisible," whereas "the mind is utterly indivisible" (Descartes, 1993, 56). Deleuze sets out to analyze how Spinoza makes recourse to Descartes in order to "turn [his own system] against him" (Deleuze, 1990, 29). For Spinoza, the immaterial resides alongside the material without the antagonism that Descartes' mind and body framework implies. Spinoza resolves Descartes' problematic through the presence of substance, the parallelism of attribute (the "perception" of substance by intellect) and the recursion of mode (the "affect" that substance issues) (E<sub>1</sub>Def).

The significance of Spinoza's position is further underscored by his choice to prove the existence of God *a posteriori* in the *Ethics*: without demonstration, he begins the book by confronting the reader directly with the smoothly running machinery of substance, attribute and mode. Like the god of Coltrane from line 13, "God is. He always was. He always will be." This resonates with the paramount qualities mentioned in Spinoza's opening definition of substance as the "infinite" and "eternal" God. Remember here that it would be a mistake to contextualize Spinoza's God in a monotheistic

tradition. But neither is Spinoza's cosmology pantheistic: it is a divine and material realm of consubstantiality wherein the numerical ceases to factor. The issue of real distinction versus numerical distinction, however, does tie in to the particularity of the minor. This issue will be duly addressed towards the end of the chapter.

For now, another way to look at the problematic framed here is to pose the question: how many gods are there?

In the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 3:9, Vidagdha poses this question with foolish but necessary insistence. "How many gods are there?" he repeatedly asks. The response reflects a different, descending number each time. The first answer is "three hundred and three and three thousand and three," soon followed by "thirty-three" to "six" to "three" to "two" to "one and a half" and then down to "one." The story continues that there is simultaneously one God and then again, hundreds of thousands. This *Upanishad* concludes that the gods themselves are composed of natural bodies and elements.<sup>11</sup> Out of this multitude of elements ascend two divinities that Yajnavalkya privileges above all others: "Which are the two gods? Matter and the vital breath." Finally, the pantheon is condensed into one god only, breath (*prana*). Could this possibly be lost upon John Coltrane who, with lips poised in embouchure towards his saxophone, could not help but be absolutely aware that his sax paean depends entirely on the act of respiration? Further, in Coltrane we can switch the question "how many gods" or "which god" to "who is breathing?" God is. "God breathes through us so completely.../ so gently we hardly feel it... yet,/ it is our everything" (lines 63-65). Breath is literally the animating force that courses through matter, making it "divine."

This *Upanishad* splendidly illustrates that God is infinite, eternal, ubiquitous and non-quantifiable. This noteworthy feature about God resonates with the repetitive musical quality of *A Love Supreme*: in particular, Part I exhibits the promise of “endlessness” that corresponds to Coltrane’s notion of God as infinite.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, substance, is indivisible (P<sub>12</sub>, P<sub>13</sub>). Deleuze’s position supports the idea that substance by definition must be indivisible because numerical distinction and measure require an external causality to render internal division. This would be impossible in Spinoza’s system, for God, as substance, is said to be “self-causing.” Moreover, God is the only “free” cause and is even the “first cause” (E<sub>1</sub>P<sub>16</sub>Cor<sub>1-3</sub>). God is dependent upon no other. God alone exists, “necessarily,” because it is God’s *nature* to do so. God’s essence is God’s existence (E<sub>1</sub>P<sub>17</sub>Cor<sub>2</sub>).

God, *qua* substance, can only jibe with the category of real distinction because substance is “qualitatively, but not quantitatively distinct—or to put it better... ‘formally,’ ‘quidditatively,’ and not ‘ontologically’ distinct.” The status of real distinction confers onto the natural world a freedom to “express difference within Being” without undergoing a quantitative restructuring administered by an external, transcendent force that claims to be “real” (Deleuze, 1997, 37-39). The brilliant absurdity acknowledged through the existence of “three hundred and three and three thousand and three” gods, or “one god,” or “one and a half” gods, vaporizes the distinction between the one and the many. Being, in the form of material existence, exists in a state of infinite diversity “all made from one... all made in one” that is quantitatively indefinable, without measure. God is neither subject to scrutiny as the one, the many or as a fraction.

*Intermezzo I: A Love*

Before exploring the bonds between Coltrane and Spinoza further, I would like to ask aloud: why love? Much critical attention, led by such figures as bell hooks, Cornell West, Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, among others, has been turned to the topic.<sup>13</sup> Initially, I understood the affective force love can have for galvanizing communities and forging resistance against statist and even suprastatist power. I recognized the capacity that love has for being harnessed into a tool for creating affinities that privilege the democratic and egalitarian goals of friendship over the authoritarian and absolute laws of kinship, the bourgeois paradigm of the romantic couple and the social isolation and apathy of the curmudgeon. But, from a minority perspective, I also understood that where love can *include*, it can also *exclude*. Love is an extension of political and cultural insiderism that can be used to define the restrictive criteria for being loved in much the same way that liberal humanism has enabled systems of evaluating what classes, races, religions, etc, are more “human” than others.

I bring up these apprehensions when posing the question “why love” because through the workings of an interesting conjuncture, the sudden interest in love marking the beginning of the new millennium coincides with the recent Spinoza revival that has also been fomenting at the same time. “Why love?” actually dovetails with “why Spinoza?” at the moment of “why now?” What does Spinozism bring to a discourse of love at this particular time? As far as this chapter is concerned, the value of Spinoza’s remarkable writings on love lies in his conception of the intellectual love of God. This form of love is not contradicted when experienced alongside reason. Perhaps even more significantly, this love bridges the conceptual schism between the plural application of

the universal and the solitary connotations of the singular. The valorization of the singular, as an essential characteristic of substance, is one of our primary considerations. It returns us to our continuing investigation of difference through, as Deleuze put in *Difference and Repetition*, the “difference in Being” in relation to “the univocity of being,” that is, through “the clamor of Being.” As we shall see in the next section, how we explored the concept of “A” as non-quantifiable and immeasurable impacts how to then establish “love” as the incalculable relation between intellect and body, God and human, and the singular and the multitude.

For this chapter, it is critical to question how love might be refashioned to suit social relations that affect the concerns of minoritized communities. As I previously argued, the emotional love that binds some communities together can also drive unloved persons outside its borders and restrict others from ever gaining entry. Love in any of its publicly instituted forms, provincial, patriotic, racist, hetero-normative, etc, often demands homogenous practices to the exclusion of a myriad of different, creative forms of loving. These different forms of loving become extremely valuable in their capacity to challenge national, racial, sexual, economic, and familial hegemonies. Thus, the question that must follow is: how is love possible as Spinoza describes through his writings on “commonwealth,” especially in Part Four of the *Ethics*, without being appropriated as a tool for affective majoritarian rule, both in between and within different communities?

### *Section II: Love*

To begin answering the above question, I propose consulting Derrida’s writings on love. Derrida discusses love in his writings on mourning and on friendship in

*Memoires for Paul de Man* and *The Politics of Friendship*. I would like to briefly explore the latter here. In *The Politics of Friendship* he hounds his reader with the same statement that haunts his philosophical inquiry into friendship, “O my friends, there is no friend.” He then uses the entirety of the book to process the relationship between love and friendship which is inspired by Montaigne’s statement from his essay “On Friendship.” For Derrida, the experience of love, love in the absolute present, is not truly possible. Love always misses the mark of its intent because it is forever wedged inside an aporia. Derrida begins the book by complicating the accountability, the sheer enumeration implicit within the economy of love broached within the statement “O my friends, there is no friend.” He retorts “I am addressing you, am I not?/ How many of us are there?/ — Does that count?” (Derrida, 2005, 1). Somewhat reminiscent of our *Upanishadic* hero Vidagdha mentioned in Section I, Derrida implies that love is incalculable.

In order to navigate the aporia of love, Derrida deploys the term “lovence” (*aimance*) in regard to the impossibility of a loving friendship. Why is love in friendship impossible? Derrida recalls that in Aristotle’s writings on *philia*, from the *Nicomachean Ethics*, love can be categorized in ascending order by its use, i.e., based on pleasure, utility or for “the good.” He cites Aristotle’s reasoning that in order that love not be based strictly on utilitarian grounds, it is better to love than it is to be loved. After all, the actions of the beloved imply ulterior motives consistent with an economic system of reciprocation and recognition. By insisting that love is based on an ethic of exchange (“I love you and expect you to love me back just as much”) love becomes an object of guaranteed, “equal” investment. “Good friendship,” on the other hand, “supposes disproportion.” It demands a certain rupture in reciprocity or equality. Derrida recognizes



the “disproportion” of friendship as proposing “a species of love more loving than love” that transforms the aporia of love into a gateway of possibility (Derrida, 2005, 62-63).

This love beyond love, *lovence*, is also referred to as the process of “becoming friendship” that makes love not only immune to the logic of equivalence and exchange, but also to other forms of calculability as well (Derrida, 2005, 66). Is this love “perhaps” possible asks Derrida. More precisely, can we hope for its possibility “among friends, between two, between two or more (but how many?) who love each other” (Derrida, 2005, 70). He reflects upon the grander consequences of transforming “becoming friendship” to “becoming political.” For Derrida, this political friendship is connected to “an affirmation of life, to the endless repetition of this affirmation” that requires that current politics be thought differently (Derrida, 2005, 123). Indeed, it necessitates a different politics of loving altogether. Is it possible that one recipe for a different politics of loving, akin to *lovence*, might be found in Spinoza?

To seriously consider this question we should begin by reviewing the role of emotions in Spinoza which, for our purposes, are fundamental. Spinoza begins Part Three of the *Ethics* by referring to the emotions as “confused ideas,” “passions of the mind” providing “inadequate,” “mutilated” knowledge (E<sub>3</sub>P<sub>3</sub>Part<sub>3</sub>). He then outlines three primary emotions “desire,” defined as “conscious appetite,” “pleasure” and “pain” (E<sub>3</sub>P<sub>9</sub>S). Pleasure and pain, in Latin respectively *laetitia* and *tristitia*, can alternately be understood through the pairing of “happiness” (or “joy”) and “sadness.” Pleasure has the capacity, as affect, *affectus*, to increase the power of the mind. Pain diminishes our power. Remember here that the mind and the body are the same thing viewed from the perspective of two different attributes, thought and extension. In this respect, emotions, in

their ability to convey pleasure and pain, play a paramount role. They provide an apparatus by which mind and body communicate and come to understand one another.

Spinoza categorizes love as an emotion as well. It is, however, not a fully autonomous emotion. Love, alongside its inverse hatred, is dependent upon external relations: “Love is simply pleasure, with the accompaniment of the idea of an external cause, and hatred is simply pain, with the idea of an external cause” (E<sub>3</sub>P<sub>13</sub> S). This is, incidentally, distinct from “self-love,” or Spinoza’s conception of love, pleasure and self-preservation set within a utilitarian context discussed at length in Part Four of the *Ethics*.<sup>14</sup> Elsewhere, Spinoza also refers to love as desire both for an external object and as the desire that everyone else harbor desire for that object (E<sub>3</sub>P<sub>31</sub>C). Love can either take an active form or a passive form depending upon whether it develops into “actions” or “passions” respectively.<sup>15</sup>

In Part Three of the *Ethics* Spinoza develops his theory of emotions through the process of dilation. He begins the book with a “Definition,” adds “Definitions of the Emotions,” and concludes with “General Definitions of the Emotions.” In this section he comments upon the nature of love in relation to pleasure and pain. He implies that the “good” kind of love harnesses desire to pleasure because “pleasure is man’s transition from a lesser to a greater perfection” (E<sub>3</sub>Def of Emotions). He then explains that he uses the term “transition” because perfection is not an innate quality. Instead, perfection, or man’s “power of acting,” must be increased through agreeable encounters. By book’s end, Spinoza credits emotions as more than merely confused ideas. He writes:

...the idea that constitutes the form of the emotion affirms something of the body, which genuinely involves more or less reality than before. And since the essence of the mind consists (by Props<sub>11</sub> and <sub>13</sub>, Part<sub>2</sub>) in the fact that it affirms the actual existence of its body, and we understand by perfection the very essence of a thing, it therefore follows that the mind makes a transition to a greater or lesser perfection when it happens to affirm of its body, or of some part of it, that which involves more or less reality than before.

Love, a genus within the order of emotion, is one manner by which the body is affirmed and empowered. Love also creates a feedback loop between the attributes of mind and body that enhances both. Finally, love enables the mind to intensify its “perfection,” to access “reality” in incrementally greater degrees. Clearly for Spinoza, the activity of love is a *good* thing.<sup>16</sup> This leads us to what Spinoza most favors as the object of love, the love of God.

Spinoza’s intellectual love of God ineffably resonates with Coltrane’s non-quantifiable, immeasurable love: is it possible that they are in such agreement that they could almost be said to love one another? That is to say, can a set of philosophical concepts connect affectively with a set of lyrical concepts made manifest in sound? Love between concepts of different orders is not incompatible with a Spinozist onto-epistemological system, especially *vis-à-vis* his theory of interrelating “three kinds of knowledge.” As Spinoza repeats throughout the entirety of the *Ethics*, there are three kinds of knowledge that humans can hope to possess. He introduces his categorization of knowledge in Scholium 2 of “Part Two: On the Nature and Origin of the Mind” by writing:

It is clearly evident that we perceive many things and form universal notions; first, from particular things, represented to us through the senses... Secondly, from signs—for example, from the fact that on hearing or reading certain words... In what follows, I shall call each of these ways of regarding things ‘knowledge of the first kind’, ‘opinion’, or ‘imagination’. Third and last, from the fact that we have common notions and adequate ideas of the properties of things (see Prop. 38, Coroll., Prop. 39 and Coroll., And Prop, 40, Part 2). This I shall call ‘reason’ and ‘knowledge of the second kind’. Besides these two kinds of knowledge there is, as I shall show in what follows, a third kind, which we will call ‘intuitive knowledge’. This kind of knowledge proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of some of the attributes of God to an adequate knowledge of the essence of things.

For Spinoza it follows that the first kind of knowledge is comprised of a) representational knowledge provided by sensoria, and b) semiotic knowledge which is “the sole cause of falsity” as it includes the true and the false indiscriminately. On the other hand, the second kind of knowledge, referred to both as reason and “common notions,” and the third kind of knowledge, “intuitive knowledge,” enable us to distinguish truth from falsity (E<sub>2</sub>Prop<sub>41</sub>, Prop<sub>42</sub>).

Common notions deserve some special attention here. In Spinoza’s philosophy the mind is already a collective entity. Thought is not privatized within the interiority of an individual. He instead articulates a theory of collective knowledge, common to all individuals, over personal, subjective knowledge. It would be erroneous, however, to assume that knowledge is absolutely true on the basis of its commonality: common notions are not interchangeable with common sense. Rather, common notions are those concepts derived by agreement between individuals. They are superior to the first kind of knowledge because they transport perceptions of the particular attributes of a thing towards a more universal form of knowledge. The first kind of knowledge, characterized

as imagistic, sensorial, and “passional,” is restricted to the body. The second kind, however, allows us to know things from the perspective of the mind. More importantly, it allows us to know things from a plurality of minds. The second kind of knowledge enables our grasp of a more comprehensive knowledge by including the properties of things.

But it is only through the third, intuitive kind of knowledge that we can configure universal knowledge from the formal essence of particular things. This form of knowledge alone leads us, our minds, to greater and greater degrees of adequacy. Spinoza also refers to the third kind of knowledge, when it is connected to “a species of eternity,” as the intellectual love of God, *Amor Dei intellectualis*. He begins the *Ethics* with the assertion that God is said to be a substance, verily the only substance, endowed with infinite attributes and eternal essence (E<sub>1</sub>Def). We begin Part I with a conception of God seemingly beyond our capabilities of comprehension. Then he saves the best for last: by Part Five, having undertaken a rather complex journey, Spinoza tells us *how* we might achieve communion with God. He offers guidance on how to experience the affect of love, pleasure, as it is “accompanied by the idea of God as its cause” and to “understand God to be eternal” (E<sub>5</sub>Prop<sub>32</sub>Corol) We take pleasure and fulfillment in our knowledge of God because we can, hypothetically, *know* God as God knows himself, with adequate understanding of cause and from the perspective of eternity. This is not to imply that knowledge of God, once acquired, accumulates and remains preserved. No, the knowledge of God of which Spinoza writes does not come with a guarantee that the person knowing will always be in possession of that knowledge nor that that knowledge will necessarily increase. However, as illustrated in Part Five, a Spinozist undertaking of

producing knowledge of God through the systemic practice of ethical conduct is intended to enhance the conditions by which knowledge of God can be approached.

The prose of the *Ethics* from start to conclusion, like Spinoza's desired amplification of knowledge, follows an expansive, multi-dimensional form of movement. We begin with two-dimensional planes, affects and bodies interacting upon each other. We then encroach upon the third dimension beyond latitudinal and longitudinal coordinates. On this plane we can move freely with full range of motion because an understanding of attributes brings with it an infinity of directions. Finally, through knowledge of God, we can navigate the fourth dimension, time, as well. Specifically as Spinoza repeats throughout Propositions 20-23, and their attendant scholia and demonstrations, our minds become subject to a kind of eternity in our heightening capacity to understand God's eternal presence. In this radiant movement of spatio-temporal expansion we realize that God has more dimensions than we can know.

This may be the moment of plenitude: perhaps it is the ineffable fulfillment which Coltrane expresses in his music and poetry. *A Love Supreme* was essentially written during an affective descent. Coltrane was deeply in love with his second wife, and fellow musician in her own right, Alice. The two eagerly expected the birth of their first child together, John Jr. Days after the birth of John Jr., Coltrane arranged the backbone of the music for *A Love Supreme*, which he recorded three months later. Alice recounts the details of that summer day in 1964:

It was like Moses coming down from the mountain, it was so beautiful. He walked down and there was that joy, that peace in his face, tranquility. So I said, 'tell me everything, we didn't see you really for four of five

days...’ He said, ‘this is the first time that I have received all of the music for what I want to record, in a suite. This is the first time I have everything, everything ready.’ (Kahn, 2002, xv).

Coltrane appears to have had a mystical event. Arguably, this is one that was ultimately more useful to him than the drug-induced hallucinations which he disavowed. Alice describes the fruit of their reproduction in sacred language. Yet, as I shall elaborate upon in *Intermezzo II*, though mystics are associated with religious traditions it is important to keep in mind that their states of love are not necessarily transcendent. Unlike Paul who was lightning-struck into a life of evangelism, the mystic does not require an external sign in order to gain prophesy. Prophecy may erupt from the experience gained not merely through the senses and through the signs interpreted by mortal faculties, but through intense affective states produced within the body.

The feeling of love-pleasure that is palpable in the music of Coltrane’s suite and legible in his liner notes corresponds to Spinoza’s claim that “from the third kind of knowledge there arises the highest contentment of mind that can exist” (E<sub>5</sub>P<sub>27</sub>). Why is this love so remarkable? Simply put, it is one thing to love God, but something far more extraordinary to realize that God loves you back, without, of course, assuming this bridge of love has as its foundation the logic of exchange of which Derrida is critical. The intellectual love of god is the love we have for god and the love god has for us. More precisely, it is knowledge of the love God has for us. Spinoza says this is true with respect to the third kind of knowledge: “...it follows that God, in so far as he loves himself, loves human beings, and consequently the love of God for men, and the intellectual love of the mind for God, is one and the same” (E<sub>5</sub>P<sub>36</sub>C). In the scholium to

follow he states that the beatitude, “blessedness” and “freedom,” produced by this divine love affair is one in which we experience pleasure alongside the “accompaniment of the idea of himself.” He continues that the “essence of our mind consists in thinking alone, of which the principle and the basis of God... becomes evident to us how, and in what way, our mind follows from divine nature...”(E<sub>5</sub>P<sub>36</sub>S).

I cannot overemphasize the significance of this proposition. Remember, love is defined as “simply pleasure, with the accompaniment of the idea of an external cause” (E<sub>3</sub>P<sub>13</sub> S). Spinoza opens the *Ethics* by identifying substance as “that which is in itself and is conceived through itself: that which does not need the concept of another thing, from which concept it must be formed” (E<sub>1</sub>Def). This concept of substance *qua* God squares with Spinoza’s reference to the intellectual love of God as intuitive, as pertaining to an inherent property within, without making recourse either to a point of origin or to the framework of an exterior. The paradigmatic shift from established devotional love, of the external-transcendent, to in-dwelling love has extraordinary consequences. This is especially true in relation to a Cartesian understanding of God which obstinately maintains God’s transcendent role over man, and mind’s role over body. If, as Deleuze wrote, the question of what a body can do is a “war cry” against Descartes, then the following proposition sounds a death-bell: “There exists in Nature nothing that is contrary to this intellectual love, or, that can destroy it” (E<sub>3</sub>P<sub>37</sub>).

The human mind is capable of participating in God’s infinite and eternal essence. In some limited ways, so too can the human body when it accesses the mind. “What can a body do?” (And for that matter, “what can a mind think?”) The full extent is unknown because it is infinite, eternal. The mind and body are connected in this outpouring



towards eternity. Finally, what we experience as the intellectual love of God cannot be destroyed. In the “Preface” of “Part Five: On the Power of the Intellect” Spinoza respectfully and politely invokes Descartes’ theory of the mind and body relation only to completely dismiss it as “false” at the end. Spinoza capsizes Descartes’ subordination of body by arguing that “the person who has a body which is capable of very many things has a mind the greatest part of which is eternal” (E<sub>3</sub>P<sub>38</sub> S). The mind and body, in concert with other minds and bodies, cooperate in their endeavor to love God intellectually.

In his defense of Spinoza as having paved the “royal road” to materialism through nominalism, Althusser enjoins his reader to consider how this particular union, between mind and body within a given body, impacts the Spinozist legacy in materialist thought. In the essay “The Only Materialist Tradition, Part I: Spinoza,” Althusser emphasizes the unity of mind and body, under the province of body, when he writes that, “the *Amor Dei intellectualis* is in no way an ‘intellectual’ love” but rather “love of the entire individual, which is a finite mode of infinite substance—a love of the body substantially united (from the moment of constitutive substance, that is God) with the love of the *mens*, and bringing about in the movements of the *mens* the very movements of the body, those of the fundamental *conatus*.” (Althusser, 1997, 17).

Althusser further argues that the union of body to mind has been overlooked due to an overly reactionary response against the privileging of intellect over body. The mind, its activity, and its inseparability from body in Spinoza are critically misunderstood. This is because the conceit that the passions can be conquered by the intellect in such a way as to assert the mind’s supremacy over the body. This subjugation of body, continues Althusser, is the byproduct of the “position of the philosophy of the Enlightenment,

which saw in knowledge and its public diffusion the solution to all personal and social contradictions, including the dissipation of all ideological illusions” (Althusser, 1997, 17). There is no transcendent valence exterior to ideology: to imply that either the mind or the body can successfully trump the other implies a transcendence beyond the limit demarcating ideal from material.

I would now like to expand upon one more point regarding how Spinozist love is consistent with Coltrane’s music. As mentioned earlier, the third kind of knowledge, intellectual love of God, is knowledge of a specific kind: love that is only possible through modal differentiation is required for the third kind of knowledge to occur. In order to obtain comprehension of essences, and from partial duration to eternity, we require knowledge of the particular. This is one way in which modes and substance are interconnected: “the more we understand particular things, the more we understand God” (E<sub>5</sub>P<sub>24</sub>). The knowledge of particular things is said to be even “more powerful” than universal knowledge (E<sub>5</sub>P<sub>36</sub>). But in order to make this assertion Spinoza has to call his entire methodological system into question. He concedes that his demonstration “although legitimate and beyond doubt—does not so affect our mind as when it is inferred from the very essence of any particular thing which we declare to depend on God” (E<sub>5</sub>P<sub>36</sub>S). Knowledge of particular things is derived from intuition. And as we know from the three types of knowledge, intuition bests reason in adequacy and perfection.

As knowledge of particular things seems so essential, we would do well to consider what Spinoza means when he refers to the particular and how it might be extrapolated to the concept of the singular. First, in the most general sense, particular things correspond to the simple bodies discussed earlier. These are bodies at their most

elemental level, irreducible to other bodies which can then combine into composite bodies (E<sub>2</sub>P<sub>13</sub>L<sub>3</sub>A<sub>2</sub>). This is summarized well in translator G.H.R. Parkinson's introduction to the text: "there can be no more than one substance, and the 'most simple bodies' have to be regarded as mode of the one substance, or more precisely of the one substance conceived under the attribute of extension" (Spinoza, 200, 20). Particular things are the affections of substance (E<sub>1</sub>Def). Also remember that both the ideas of particular things, as well as their formal essences, are present within the attributes of substance, and specifically within the attribute of extension (E<sub>2</sub>P<sub>8</sub>). Ultimately, however, these particular things fall short of the divine because we cannot verify that they are eternal (E<sub>2</sub>P<sub>31</sub>C).

In "Part Four: On Human Servitude" of the *Ethics* particular things take on yet another dimension. Here, Spinoza presents particular things as they are connected to humanity or "the power by which particular things, and consequently a man, preserve their being is the power of God, i.e., of Nature (by Prop. 24, Coroll., Part 1); not in so far as it is infinite, but in so far as it can be explained by actual human essence" (E<sub>4</sub>P<sub>4</sub>D). The particularity of man is said to also belong to the infinite essence of God. But particularities are arranged in such a way that they can compete against one another: "there exists no particular thing in the universe such that there does not exist another thing which is more powerful than it, but given any particular thing there exists another which is more powerful than it and by which it can be destroyed" (E<sub>4</sub>A). Particular things are simultaneously eternal and infinite, as a property of God, and ephemeral and contingent.

Spinoza goes as far as to say that particular things are essence without existence ( $E_3D_3$  and  $E_4D$ ). Deleuze rearticulates the essential yet mystifying quality of particular things, *qua* modes, through the trope of “expression.” “Substance” he writes, “first of all expresses itself in itself...expresses itself to itself” (Deleuze, 1996, 185). In the first wave of formal expression substance understands itself. In the second wave of expression substance *re-expresses* itself. According to Deleuze, “the attributes in turn express themselves in modes.” He then argues that this expression is a form of production. God, in trying to understand himself, produces an infinity of modes. The modes express God’s essence, which is constantly producing an excess of what he formerly was.

### *Intermezzo II: Love Supreme*

Before continuing I would like to take a short detour and discuss the role of immanence in order to set the tone for the next section.

One of the more incommensurable aspects of this particular project is also one of its more transfixing qualities. At least for this writer, when attempting to analyze *A Love Supreme* in relation to *Amor Dei intellectualis*, and taking a leap of faith to consider both in a serious and earnest manner, it is difficult not to succumb to the temptation of transcendent thinking. What initially seemed like a good idea, repetitively playing the recording of *A Love Supreme* for the purpose of setting an inspiring mood while writing, lulled me into a deep mystical stupor from which I did not want to emerge. The affects produced while listening to the music in conjunction with the desire not to simply “translate” the language of the divine to which both Spinoza and Coltrane make recourse upon a different framework, made an earlier draft of this chapter quite vulnerable to the

seduction of transcendent thought. This earlier version fatally insinuated that supreme love, which I identified as mystical knowledge, belonged within a post-ideological strata hovering above the realm of social and historical mediation. When this was brought to my attention I considered how this conception of supreme love is actually at odds both with the immediate affective power of Coltrane's music and with the superbly sophisticated material philosophy of Spinoza.

However, while wanting to right the course this chapter is taking, I do not want to completely dismiss the role of mysticism permeating supreme love, or "love supreme." Rather, I propose we take this opportunity, instead, to produce an alternative conception of love supreme as an instance of non-transcendent mysticism. Is it possible for mind-body-affect to breach the limits of knowability and to expand the frontiers of linguistic mediation without denying the real presence of ideology? Can we reformulate a conception of ecstasy, *ekstasis*, which does not rely upon an escape from corporeality, rapture, prophetic flight? Could we instead perform a reading that would consider expansion inside the body so powerful as to make a fundamentally new body with a radically differentiated consciousness? Would this endeavor engender the ability to subvert the notion of the isolated bourgeois subject in favor of indefinite bodies? Could we appropriate transcendent language, divine, mystical, ecstatic in order to strengthen the position that bodies in love, formed from imagination and expression, knowledge and affect, are squarely anchored onto the plane of social mediation.

With these numerous questions in mind I strive to embrace the sensibilities of immanence over transcendence, as Deleuze and Deleuzian scholarship offers, in the last section. Section III, expands upon the idea of "supreme living" through the hinged

concepts of ethical virtuosity and artistic virtuosity. Before commencing it would be useful to elaborate upon how Deleuze's conception of immanence bears upon ethical living. Deleuze picks up on an aspect of Spinoza that will become crucial to his entire body of works in *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*. Therein he writes, "the entire *Ethics* is a voyage in immanence; but immanence is the unconscious itself, and the conquest of the unconscious. Ethical joy is the correlate of speculative affirmation" (Deleuze, 1988, 29). He expounds on this position in *Difference and Repetition*, *The Logic of Sense*, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, *Pure Immanence* and in other works.

Deleuze urges that an ethics of immanence is the corrective to the misapplication of morality in relation to the individual acting within social codes. Immanence holds a special place within a system of thought that is grounded in positive ontology. As he writes in *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, "immanence for its part implies a pure ontology, a theory of Being in which Unity is only a property of substance and of what is... immanence does not do away with the distinction of essences; but there must be common forms that constitute the essence of substance as cause, while they contain the essences of modes as effects" (Deleuze, 1997, 172). For Deleuze, Spinoza's immanence undergirds the cooperative faculties of form, matter, affect and concept.

Immanence becomes the joint by which love and sociability *happily*, both joyfully and propitiously, collide. For in the process of fluid transformations inherent to constantly composing and decomposing bodies, semiotic and political bodies arise as well. The body accumulates within itself all sorts of other bodies—the bodies of meanings, concepts, and signs (or as Coltrane might put it, "words, sounds, speech, men, memory, thoughts, fears and

emotions—time”). It is within the nature of all bodies to assemble through extensive relations, and in so doing, develop intensive capacities. It is also their wont to undergo processes of articulation and “double articulation.”<sup>17</sup> Immanence thus reveals its singular virtuosity, that is, its ability to be anything, express anything, do anything. Contrast this to the logic of transcendence which necessarily implies a limit in order to define itself.

Immanent strategies for gathering power are thus useful for generating unforeseen qualities in order to coax virtuosity from life and lead us toward the goal of beatitude. I now turn our attention to the role that the most supreme forms of living, beatitude, has in generating the intellectual love of God—a love supreme—a life supreme.

### *III: Supreme*

What is supreme? Coltrane’s use of the term in the title of his work, in the accompanying poem, and in the mantra within the music carries a denotation of supreme as “highest” and an auxiliary connotation of God, as in “supreme ruler.” Spinoza relies on a similar term in order to describe the pursuit of beatitude. “Perfect.” The inflection between that which is supreme and that which is perfect is no small matter. Traditionally, supremacy carries the distinction of authority. This in turn can be utilized in the hierarchical and comparative relation between one thing or person and another. Perfection, on the other hand, is an appropriate term to describe things in their a-relational, singular state. Something can be perfect without relying on measure against its own model. In Spinoza perfection does not resemble a flight into a Platonic realm of ideals. Quite the contrary, perfection is the epitome of the real for “the more perfect each thing is, the more reality it has” (E<sub>5</sub>P<sub>40</sub>).

The differences between the common usage between the terms “supreme” and “perfect” notwithstanding, it might be worthwhile to consider reading Coltrane’s deployment of “supreme” through Spinoza’s immanent lens. Could *A Love Supreme* be an instance of Spinozist perfection? Is this a love without exterior, transcendent properties? Can it instead be a kind of love as it is multiply expressed by Coltrane, generated in the act of living, the artistic event, and the immediacy of performance? In response to my own questions, I propose that the use of the term *supreme* by St. John of the Horn corresponds to Spinoza’s notion of perfection through the concept of beatitude.

Beatitude is Spinoza’s final concern. In his *Ethics* the intellectual love of God is predicated upon loving God’s “will” and power in conjunction with his intellect (E<sub>1</sub>P<sub>17</sub>S). This intellectual love affirms the relations between mind, body, and affect in an attempt to achieve beatitude. We have discussed this at length. Our analysis now turns to the question of *how* Spinoza’s supreme life might be undertaken by engaging Coltrane’s love supreme. Taken together the elements of mind, body, affect, and practice form the basis for an immanent composite corresponding to Spinoza’s understanding of beatitude through ethics.

For the purpose of clarification I will include Spinoza’s prescription for virtuous conduct. He writes in the Scholium to Proposition 49, Part Two of the *Ethics*:

[The *Ethics*] benefits us in so far as it teaches us to act solely in accordance with the command of God and to be participants in the divine nature, and the more so as we perform actions which are more perfect, and the more we understand God. This doctrine, therefore, besides the fact that it makes the mind entirely calm, has the further benefit that it teaches us in what our supreme happiness consists... Secondly, our doctrine benefits us in so far as it teaches us how we must conduct ourselves with regard to



matters of fortune, or, matters that are not in our power: that is matters which do not follow from our nature... Thirdly, this doctrine contributes to social life, in so far as it teaches us to hate no one, to despise no one, to deride no one, to be angry with no one, and to envy no one. It also contributes to social life in so far as it teaches us that each one should be content with what he has and should help his neighbor solely from the guidance of reason... Fourthly, and lastly, this doctrine contributes greatly to society in general, in so far as it teaches us how citizens are to be governed and led: namely not so that they should be slaves, but so that they should do freely what is best.

In this passage Spinoza outlines the rationale for his ethics: virtuous actions bring us in greater proximity to God, perfection; good conduct assists us when we are not in full possession of our powers; equanimity, the conquering of passions through reason, corresponds with sociability; and finally, the development of a commonwealth of citizens enhances our chances for freedom. Spinoza's ethics can be further thought according to a four part set of affirmative, dynamic, vital principles. The body lives. This is the first principle. The second principle, as discussed in length in the previous section, conceives of thought in conjunction with body, extension. The second principle affirms that thought lives. Like Deleuze and Guattari's celebrated "desiring machine," thought is alive and plugged in to everything, affirming our very material existence (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, 1). The third principle, as Spinoza declares, follows: "The principle of life is love" (E<sub>5</sub>P<sub>36</sub>S). We have already established the particular form of love, *Amor Dei intellectualis*, which Spinozism espouses. The fourth principle is that the manner in which we live affirms body and thought. The *Ethics* are ultimately concerned with *the way* in which living is conducted, that is to say, how we might best proceed with

affirming thought and body through micropolitical principles and through macropolitical objectives.

Here, it is vital to question the imperative of morality and the obligation of duty that is so often associated with transcendent ethics versus an immanent and antinomian ethology I alluded to in Intermezzo II. Spinozist ethics are not to be confused with morality, or a set of dictates that distribute human actions and affections on a continuum of good to bad. The continuum itself is useless for determining and actualizing free, creative and productive lives.<sup>18</sup>

However, although ethics can quickly transform into codes of microfascism and social prohibitions, that does not eliminate the value of experimenting with ways of living that are guided by modes of conduct. What is vital to our analysis here is a reconsideration of the concept virtue. I do not invoke how the term is extended from an origin in moral uprightness. Rather, I would like to consider virtue in relation to the *virtuoso*. Both moral virtue and virtuoso share the same etymological root in Latin, *virtus*. But they diverge into two distinct sets of meaning. The former pertains to morality, chastity, probity. The latter connotes a dazzling performer, a brilliant artist, and even a passionate devotee of the senses.<sup>19</sup> The virtuosity of the virtuoso fulfills *techné* by combining the masterful training of his craft with the creative passion of his art—John Coltrane coaxing his saxophone to states of musical ecstasy while performing *A Love Supreme*; Handel’s musical navigation of joy, melancholy and reflection in his arrangement of Milton’s *L’Allegro* and its companion *il Penseroso*; and this art song showcasing contemporary choreographer Mark Morris’ swarm of dancers, healthy bodies defying the devastation and terror of AIDS in the proclamation, “and with thee I choose

to live”—these are a few affective mementos that provide glimpses of the excellence of virtuosos. They are extraordinary examples of how to live beautifully, profoundly and *powerfully*. They exemplify aesthetic ways of “good” living that open up new horizons for “free men”: this is literally true when considering how the concept of *virtus* in antiquity applied primarily to men, over women, children and slaves.<sup>20</sup>

The question of virtuosity also brings up the concept of acts or performance. This is especially true when acts are contextualized *contra* faith in a religious setting. Derrida brings fresh insight to this binary in his essay “Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of ‘Religion’ at the Limits of Reason Alone.” Regarding the “return of religions” at the turn of the century, Derrida analyzes in fifty-two sections the “mondialization” of faith which is encrypted onto the religious troika of the West, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In Section 15 Derrida considers the impact of Kant’s thesis in *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*. Kant proposes there are “two strata of religion” leading to a distinct genealogical split. On the one hand, there are those cults that seek “favours of God” through prayer. On the other exist religious communities seeking salvation through “good conduct of life,” i.e., morality. Morality not only makes faith subservient, it also subordinates knowledge. Derrida continues that for this reason Kant developed the notion of a “reflecting (*reflektierende*) faith” which “agrees with the rationality of purely practical reason... and thereby ignores the difference between faith and knowledge” (Derrida, 2002, 49).

Derrida argues that this opposition, between faith versus knowledge and faith versus conduct, has led to the presumed supremacy of Christianity over all other faiths. This is because, according to Kant’s argument, Christianity is the only “truly moral”

religion. Christian revelation, moreover, dominates as the most pure reflecting faith.

Derrida connects Kant's thesis to a Nietzschean disavowal of God. In so doing, Derrida redoubles the urgency of conduct within the 21<sup>st</sup> century religious revival: "One must act as though God did not exist or no longer concerned himself with our salvation. This shows who is moral and who is therefore Christian" (Derrida, 2002, 50). "Acting" in good faith supersedes a merely reflecting faith. However, it also leads to a radical break with God, who is the Absolute "Other."

Derrida's exposition of Kant, *via* Nietzsche and then later Hegel and Heidegger, reflects the convention of uniting faith and knowledge together under the banner of morality. Further, this morality implies that fidelity to God is proven through alienation from God. Spinoza is able to bypass the opposition between faith and knowledge, prayer and reason, because God is the culmination of reason. Even more significantly, conduct, or acts for Spinoza, is a matter of performance, i.e. *experience* or even *experiment*. Action is viewed as positive or negative based on its effects rather than upon moral judgment. His notion of *virtus* is concerned with ensembles of agreeability, pleasure, power, and harmony and not on forgone spiritual conclusions, which are themselves motivated by eschatological urges.

To truly understand Coltrane's statement "I felt that basically the music should be dedicated to the goodness in people, the good things in life" in the context of composing *A Love Supreme*, requires that we consider his relationship not simply to composition but also to practice (Kahn, 2002, 51). Coltrane's role as virtuoso relies upon his lyrical performance. This, in turn, is enabled by relentless practice. Testimonials from fellow musicians and family reveal his near obsession with musical exercise. Biographical

evidence testifies to the dedication, what has also been referred to as “religious conviction,” with which Coltrane attacks his sax.

Coltrane is renowned for the intensity, precision, speed, and skill at deftly maneuvering through musical scales. His solos were said to mimic the kind of physical exertion used in eliciting ecstatic states. Kahn writes that “Coltrane’s woodshedding became a study in personal endurance” in a way that suggests he was engaging in intense trials of discipline, practicing both inhabiting and pushing the borders of his physical body, through countless hours of solitary practice (Kahn, 2002, 28). Kahn enthuses elsewhere about his technique, claiming that Coltrane “explored harmonic pathways at will, applying the ingrained scalar patterns he had been studying incessantly. His solos became bursts of virtuosity, slaloming through chord changes” (Kahn, 2002, 29). As a side note, it is worth considering if this sort of discipline, intense aesthetic cultivation, differs in kind from forms of discipline that are more oppressive in nature, or that originate in external agents and are later self-imposed.

Coltrane traffics in these disciplined intense states of affect when playing the music for *A Love Supreme* and penning its liner notes.<sup>21</sup> Although Spinoza does not delve explicitly on the subject of aesthetics, he does offer some comments on exemplary living that are applicable to Coltrane’s virtuosic skills. In the preface of Part Four of the *Ethics* he writes: “I shall understand by ‘good’ that which we know with certainty to be a means by which we may approach more and more closely that exemplar of human nature which we set before ourselves” (E4Pref). The *Ethics* is not merely a work of metaphysical inquiry and argumentation, but also one, as eponymously indicated, that unfolds into a practical guide. It is a compass for creating *a good life*.

At this point I would like to remind the reader about the significance of the letter *A* as deployed in Section I. *A* good life is not to be confused with *the* good life. Coltrane believed in living *a* good life led by his own compass of virtue. But this compass is not universal. As far as lives are concerned, your life and mine are not the same, nor should they be. Yet the differences in our lives should not deter us from asking, *darling, was it good for you?*

We ask this question in order to determine those forms of shared goodness that bridge particularities, that is, those forms of goodness that mutually enhance our physical bodies, thoughts, desires, temperaments, inclinations, senses, etc. This highlights how Spinoza's notion of virtue challenges the conventional understanding of virtue *qua* moral conduct. The latter demands that all individuals forfeit their particular powers in order to uniformly obey a set of universal commands. Spinoza's four point platform on ethics, on the other hand, is merely one set of ethics among many that are possible. I believe Spinoza would argue that the best set of ethics are the ones that are simply most useful. What is *good* is that which maximizes upon power, and therefore, virtue.

Recall that for Spinoza, power is virtue (E<sub>4</sub>D<sub>8</sub>). This is power exercised and enjoyed through the movement of *conatus*, or the endeavor of a thing to persevere in its own being (E<sub>3</sub>P<sub>6-9</sub>). Conatus affirms essence. It would be erroneous to draw a privatized, individual or otherwise bourgeois conception of conatus or to view it under a Freudian lens. Conatus is composed of will, desire and appetite (E<sub>3</sub>P<sub>9</sub>S). Yet these terms are not fungible with drive. Moreover, the desire of conatus is absolutely productive. As Spinoza writes in Part Three of his *Ethics*, "virtue, in so far as it is related to man, is the very

essence, i.e. the nature, of man, in so far as he has the power of doing certain things which can be understood through the laws of his nature alone” (E<sub>3</sub>D).

We might benefit from inquiring into whether conatus also takes on a collective form. This is especially true if we accept the hypothesis that intellectual love of God cannot be accomplished by an individual. This is not to say that one human cannot do it. It is rather to assert that one cannot proceed from the premise that one is individual. To reiterate, one is actually composed of simple bodies, which in turn conglomerate into a composite body. This body perceives its individuality because it has inadequate knowledge of its true composition. Insight into this notion of collectivity, however, is not enough: full realization, actualization, can only occur within a conceptual and material web of relations. Working towards beatitude and freedom is a social act between people that also expresses an intellectual love affair *with* God beyond calculation. Perhaps through Spinoza, we are thus one step closer to making possible Derrida’s dream of lovence.

At this point I would like to turn our attention back to the virtuoso and specifically to how his virtuosity connects to labor. The performance of the virtuoso is indeed indebted to self-imposed labor. Virno’s work explores this relation in a crucial way. In his essay “Virtuosity and Revolution: The Political Theory of Exodus,” Virno specifically invokes music in his reflections on immaterial labor. He elaborates upon Marx’s analysis of labor as falling into two types in “Results of the Immediate Process of Production”: the first is “the immaterial activity that has as its result ‘commodities which exist separately from the producer..., e.g. books, paintings and all products of art as distinct from the artistic achievement of the practicing artist.’” Virno then cites Marx’s

description of the second type of intellectual labor as “those activities in which ‘the product is not separable from the act of production’—activities that find their fulfillment in themselves, without being objectivized in a finished work existing outside and beyond them.” Virno includes performing artists, such as musicians and dancers, as well as others whose occupations involve “virtuosic performance,” such as orators, teachers, physicians and clergy (Virno, 190, 1996b).

One could argue that Coltrane’s jazz suite fits the criteria of Marx’s second form of intellectual labor. It is performance without the production of object. This is recognizing, of course, that the recording of the object in album form is distinct from “finished” objects produced, for example, in literature, painting and the plastic arts. Virno refers to Marx’s argument that the musical virtuoso “leaves no lasting traces” and as such is committing himself to non-productive labor. However, he takes issue with Marx’s position, stating that “the ‘performing artist,’ put down and parasitic is thus consigned to a limbo of service work” (Virno, 191, 1996b).

Virno diverges from Marx’s dismissal of “productless,” immaterial labor as being “without lasting effects” by implying that it is this kind of labor, the labor of the virtuoso, that brings virtue onto the plane of the socio-ethical. Calling upon Aristotle, Virno reminds us of the classical distinction between work and action. The former has an extrinsic objective: work is done to produce something of value that can then be exchanged for surplus. On the other hand, action is, according to Virno’s reading of Aristotle, “activity that manifests itself as a ‘conduct,’ . . . and coincides precisely with political praxis.” Virno concurs that the labor of the performing artist is consistent with the activity of political action (Virno, 191, 1996b).



For Virno, this is especially true insofar as the production of labor without finished product is a strategy by which the multitude can assert itself in the face of the “paralysis of action” that afflicts leftist struggle today. Radical disobedience, the right to refusal, exodus—these are all forms of virtuosic performance set upon a political stage. More precisely, virtuosic performance of this form is referred to as “virtuosic cooperation,” or the collaboration within the “multitude,” in contrast to the monolithic notion of the “people,” to subvert the “absolute command” of the state. This challenge to the state can easily extend to the state’s participation in suprastatist capitalist global networks.

Virno’s insights further engage a reconsideration of labor wherein “the product is not separable from the act of production,” i.e. self-fulfilling labor, in the performative event. In the performance of the event, and the simultaneous *absence* (of a finished product) and *presence* (of a worker) that it conjoins, the virtuoso is ontologically indistinct from the music he creates.<sup>22</sup> The conjoining of player, music, and live performance actually resonates with the work of one of Coltrane’s contemporaries Cecil Taylor. Taylor’s 1966 album *Unit Structures*, which was recorded and engineered in the same studio as *A Love Supreme* albeit under a different label, exhibits those qualities of intimate virtuosic labor that we are discussing here. Taylor writes in the accompanying liner notes of his album:

The player advances to the area, an unknown totality, made whole thru self analysis (improvisation), the conscious manipulation of known material; each piece is choice; architecture, particular in grain, the specifics question-layers are disposed-deposits arrangements, group activity establishing the ‘Plain.’ *Enter Evening’s* anacrusis consists of 4

separate lines, unequal in length; statements with changing consecutives. *Unit Structure's* anacrusis isolates amplitude in note freezing sound; in attitude, the mobile phrase grouping piano attack happening across *Structure's* TPT. Area illustrating prime power control. Each instrument has strata: timber, temperament; internal dialogue mirror turns: player to nerve ends, motivation 'how to' resultant Unit flow..."

Taylor's stream of consciousness liner notes convey, in a highly esoteric manner, how the musician and his instrument converge into a unified ensemble in order to produce music. In the case of jazz improvisation, it is crucial to consider how the "scorelessness," mentioned in Section I factors into production. Both *Unit Structures* and *A Love Supreme* exist independently of inception through musical notation. Also, both rely in part on liner notes because of a rupture between word and sound, illustrating instances of virtuosic performative labor wherein "words don't go." Cultural studies scholar Fred Moten elegantly describes the break, the *caesura*, between words and sounds in his reading of Cecil Taylor's *Chinampas*. "Words don't go there. Is it only music, only sound, that goes there?... this implies a difference between words and sounds; it suggests that words are somehow constrained by their implicit reduction to the meanings they carry." Moten's analysis implies how an "absence of inflection; a loss of mobility, slippage, bend; a missing accent or affect; the impossibility of a slur or crack and the *excess*—rather than loss—of meaning they imply" complicates the already vexed relation existing between word, sound, and sign in the performative event (Moten, 1997).

Moten's comments emphasize the sentiment behind Virno's argument about labor and virtuosity. These insights in turn connect to Coltrane, and specifically to Coltrane's quartet—black laboring bodies participating in a "destiny of marginality" built upon the

“virtuosity of cooperation” (Virno, 202, 1996b). Marx relegates the production of music to servile labor. This in itself presents a disturbing association between black labor and servitude. Yet Coltrane’s work, albeit immaterial, was not produced for the sole pleasure, comfort and delectation of a bourgeois white listening public. It was produced within a predominately black musical idiom, by a jazz musician for jazz listeners. Furthermore, the effects produced by the Coltrane Quartet, drawing their power from invention and spontaneity, transformed the affective grid upon which the edifice of music, of its time, was built.

The black bodies of musicians laboring, Coltrane’s quartet, can be thought alongside Virno as a recuperation of virtuosic performance that reinstates the creative labor utilized for “unfinished products” from a lowly state of servitude to the amphitheater of political action, to *praxis*. We hear the musicians’ collective *labor of love*, their love supreme, testified in the recording. This love is inextricably linked to the minoritized lives of the performers. Further, this love suite exudes the affective qualities of Spinoza’s conception of power, as virtue, as the ability to act and be acted upon, as reality. Moreover, it powerfully, and lovingly, paves the way for the historical emergence of *black power*, made manifest in the explosion of various forms of cultural pride and cultural nationalism, which followed in hot pursuit.

To reiterate, power is not merely a type of virtue, it is virtue itself. Coltrane believed the same. In an interview given after the international debut of *A Love Supreme*, he revealed his endeavors to use music as a practice for cultivating power:

I want to discover a method so that if I want it to rain, it will start immediately to rain. If one of my friends is ill, I'd like to play a certain song and he'll be cured. When he'd be broke, I'd bring out a different song, and immediately he'd get all the money he needed. But what these pieces are, and what is the road to attain the knowledge of them, that I don't know. The true powers of music are still unknown. (Clouzet and Delorme, 1963).

The last line in this interview segment, “the true powers of music are still unknown,” is remarkable. We can add “we don't know what music can do” to the already existing declarations “we don't know what a body can do,” and its correspondence in thought, “we don't know what a mind can do.” Affect, body, mind— their powers, by inference, are unlimited. Coltrane looks to music for its nourishing qualities. As accompaniment to a rain dance or as medicine, and certainly not least of all as a spiritual tonic, Coltrane seeks to maximize his own power through music.

As I have tried to convey, Spinozist power draws an individual into greater degrees of adequacy towards perfection by entering into states of knowledge that are infinite and eternal but are also completely contingent upon the movement of ephemeral bodies in their ongoing production of expression and imagination. This pierces the heart of what Spinoza means when invoking beatitude, which exceeds even reason itself because it is generated within the agent. Beatitude accompanies intuition, the most powerful form of knowledge, and brings into existence a discipline of freedom.

Coltrane's work further resonates with Spinoza's *Amor Dei intellectualis* through a particular set of minoritarian conditions of production. According to Amiri Baraka in “The Phenomenon of Soul in African-American Music,” *A Love Supreme* is the culmination of what preceded Coltrane in the sphere of African American musical

traditions. Baraka credits various sources, including black church, rhythm and blues, big band, bebop and hard bop, as shaping Coltrane's music to become "the most evocative and influential sound and style of his time." Baraka further goes on to say that Coltrane is the "essence of the Soul-playing black jazz musician" (Baraka, 1987, 273). I would like to add that Coltrane makes "soul," in both musical parlance and mystical speech, a little more materially useful by changing the terms in which it is conventionally thought. "Soul" is freed from the province of spirituality and extended onto the plane of musical invention. Further, the "soul" of his music demands that we acknowledge materiality, the body and its rhythms, its swing, its sway, its weight, its gait, as it is expressed in minoritized forms of music such as jazz.

Finally, Baraka interprets a blistering quality in Coltrane's music that is significant:

Trane... spoke to black national consciousness, not only as a soulful player, but by the very forms he used which opposed commercial music in the extreme and spoke of African and African-American spiritual and cultural reality. Frequently, in fact, Trane is linked to the black leader, Malcolm X, not only because they were contemporaries, but the fire and vision and rage heard in Trane's music seemed to complement the violent truths of the great Malcolm" (Baraka, 1987, 273-374).

As Baraka suggests, in Coltrane we hear the fire of a secular Pentecost: recall how the "fire" in his music is commemorated in the icon card of Coltrane in Figure 3-1 at the beginning of this chapter. Baraka draws a parallel between the "fire, vision and rage" between Malcolm X's incendiary speeches and Coltrane's often aggressive bebop

inspired style, which contrasts against the “cool” jazz sensibilities that mark the style of mentor Miles Davis. Baraka recognizes both Coltrane and Malcolm X for participating in moving African American consciousness raising, black pride, civil rights, and community building, in radical new directions. *A Love Supreme* fuels the furnace of internal powers and redirects those powers towards reshaping the destiny of oppressed communities. This power is illustrative of the particular cultural and historical set of coordinates which Coltrane occupies as a black musician who spent time in the ghetto, overcame his addiction to heroin, rededicated himself body, mind and “soul” to a deliberately vague conception of God and blazingly clear conception of music, and found “ELATION—ELEGANCE—EXALTATION” (line 67) in the process.

*Coda: A Supreme*

In Intermezzo I, I attempted to connect the term *A* to *Love*. In Intermezzo II I tried to make explicit the link between *Love* and *Supreme*. The final task, it would seem, would be to explore the relation between *A* and *Supreme*, with *Love* as the pivot between the two.

The ways in which *A* modifies *Supreme* could easily constitute a project onto itself. The task exceeds this particular analysis but deserves at the least some brief mention. It is crucial to keep in mind that not only is *A* an indefinite article. It is an example of a non-quantifiable singular. It is exemplary of the paradigm for a-relational, non-oppositional, non-identitarian difference which we have been discussing throughout the dissertation. Focusing on the singular in this way invites a restaging of the tension between the particular and the universal. Arguably, the struggle between the particular

and the universal is trapped by its own discourse: its inherent dialecticism limits the possibility of escape from the discursive problematic it sets out to diagnose.

I believe that elaborating on this point any further extends our immediate analysis beyond a manageable scope. I will, however, offer the following argument. Regarding singularity: the space between singularity and Spinoza and Coltrane's conceptions of love and of virtuosity is incalculable. It cannot be calculated by value, quantity or distance.

What we call *A* is an indefinite article. What we call *Supreme*, the divine in absolute form, exists, but it does so without guarantee. We are far from God. Despite this we can endeavor to make contact with God, over an incalculable distance, through beatitude. Beatitude is the creation of good living generated through material and social affirmation. It is best approached through ethical living that enhances the "good that follows from mutual friendship and a shared society, as well as of the fact that the highest self-contentment arises from a right way of living" (E<sub>5</sub>P<sub>10</sub>S). Beatitude is not isolatable. It is a matter of cooperation and collaboration between particular instances.

Nevertheless, a very real difficulty exists when attempting to join *A* and *Supreme*: this difficulty is inherent to the confrontation with mysticism I discussed in the last intermezzo. The term *Supreme*, unlike Spinoza's "perfection," carries with it connotations of the absolute. However, what is *Supreme*, despite its aura of transcendent, divine limit, is not inconsistent with Spinoza's writings on beatitude and the "glory" and "blessedness" that it engenders (E<sub>5</sub>P<sub>36</sub>S and E<sub>5</sub>P<sub>42</sub>Dem). It is indisputable that when Spinoza writes about God he does so with subversion in mind. Spinoza was a heretic. *The Ethics* challenged both the orthodoxy of the Jewish establishment of his time and the contemporary idealist philosophy of Descartes in one fell swoop. As Deleuze, Negri and

Althusser teach us, this reading of Spinoza, Spinoza as immanent saboteur, undoes conventional assumptions about how we can go about loving God. Mysticism then, as intuitive knowledge that forces the expansion of reason beyond its present bounds, can be said to belong to the province of immanence rather than transcendence. “Intuition,” the backbone of *Amor Dei intellectualis*, is said to bridge the singular to the common.

Althusser expounds upon this quite elegantly:

For at the foundation, in the ‘third kind of knowledge,’ we are never faced with a *new* object but simply a new form of relation appropriation (the word is Marx’s) of an object that is *always already there* since the first kind of knowledge: the ‘world,’ the *Lebenswelt* of the first kind, is elevated while remaining the same, a concretion of universal singularities in itself, all the way up to the universe or nature and its substantial cause (God). What changes is never the being it-self of things (what is a finite mode if not a universal singularity in its kind?) but the relation of appropriation that the human subject enters into with others (Althusser, 1997, 8).

The purpose of living ethically is twin to the desire to transform the world. That desire shares the names love, living labor, etc. It is articulated through an understanding of virtue not as a set of transcendent moral codes, but as an affirmation of material ontology. As Althusser insists, this transformation does not require a change in substance, which according to Spinoza is unchanging and eternal. Instead, the “concretion of universal singularities” that make up the world undergoes a “change of relation.” It remains ontologically affirmative even as it shifts into different combinatorial possibilities. Likewise, *A Love Supreme* illustrates the affective and corporeal labor through which that kind of affirmation bears the potential to move the experiences of minoritization beyond the identity of the minority. As I



hope to have illustrated, the encounter between Coltrane and Spinoza compels us, through the principle of love, not to live virtuously. Rather it compels us to live as virtuosos.

In a gesture to embrace virtuosity in my life, I listen to *A Love Supreme* while writing this coda. Harrod, a colleague who had reviewed this chapter in an initial draft, made the comment, “I want to hear a little more about the music itself—what does it sound like to you now? You mentioned in one intermezzo that it did not benefit you to listen to it while writing. But once you wiped away most of its mystique, what did you hear?” Feeling invited to indulge myself at my colleague’s prompting and to see “how the music would sound like to me now,” I listen once more to the recording. This is what I find: the music still carries with it the mantle of alluring, invocative “mystique.” Its affective force is inexorable, desirable, powerful, and ineffable. But I am mindful of not following the affect of mystique down the path of mystical transport. Echoing Derrick Bell’s refusal of law as juridical redemption, if *Amor Dei intellectualis* is to offer any sort of salvation it must do so from Spinoza’s premise that God is not alien to the world. Inversely, it is the material realm, operating within the machine of the historical, that is “divine.” The corporeal has not undergone a transformation and neither has God. The song remains the same. Instead, the terms of conceptual relation have shifted in order to promote an *agreeable* encounter between the revolutionary potential of the singular *vis-à-vis* the common. This is crucial for considering a minor cultural politics, here produced through the musico-textual event, that does not subordinate shared struggle and aspiration to an essentialist position.

(And on this last note, Coltrane plays our outro. From lines 34-36...“Glory to God... God is so alive./ God is./God loves”...)

<sup>1</sup> Kahn cites drummer Max Roach, saxophonist Sonny Rollins, and singers Abbey Lincoln and Oscar Brown Jr. as spearheading the idea of jazz and social commentary by making music that “bristled with their political message” (Kahn, 2002, 76).

<sup>2</sup> According to Kahn, Coltrane’s music traversed cross-generational, racially mixed audiences. The album enjoyed popularity, measured by extensive radio play and remarkable record sales, with black urban youths, white college students and mature jazz aficionados in the US and abroad.

<sup>3</sup> Borrowing a cue from the Roman Catholic Church this essay accepts the working premise that beatification precedes canonization. With this in mind, Coltrane’s music and writing will be explored *vis-à-vis* Spinoza’s notion of “beatitude” in the *Ethics* but stops short of considering Catholic sainthood.

<sup>4</sup> The Coltrane Church is a scion of the African Orthodox Church (AOC), founded in the US nearly a century ago to promote the synthesis between anti-discrimination practices and spiritual renewal for African Americans and other peoples of color. The Church is subject to a kind of nomadic existence due to its history of fires, landlord disputes, etc. Despite this, devotees, musical enthusiasts and tourists continue to pay homage during weekly masses delivered by the “ministers of sound,” practicing local jazz musicians, and to hear Biblical psalms and AOC sermons.

<sup>5</sup> *A*, coincidentally, is the crucial letter Derrida uses to distinguish “difference” from *différance*, as discussed throughout the dissertation.

<sup>6</sup> See the *Chandogya Upanishad* 6.8.7, were it is written: “Believe me, my son, an invisible and subtle essence is the Spirit of the whole universe. That is Reality. That is Atman. THOU ART THAT.”

<sup>7</sup> It may be useful here to invoke the possible role that Jewish mysticism played in Spinoza’s “geometric” demonstration. For instance, the mystical numerology of *Gematria* is said to create a code of correspondences between numbers and divine letters. As illustrated in the *Zohar*, the Sephirot especially, resonates with the sense of interconnectedness permeating Spinoza’s writings on the nature of bodies.

<sup>8</sup> Deleuze reads Spinoza against Leibniz in order to provide an extended and careful consideration of the functions of the body and its untapped mortal processes. As a consequence, we are in a better position to understand how the return to Spinozism heralds a new “naturalism” challenging Descartes’ subordination of the material to the ideal.

<sup>9</sup> Deleuze makes the categories between real and numerical distinct when he writes, “Formal distinction is, in effect, a real distinction, since it is grounded in being or in the object; but it is not necessarily a numerical distinction because it is established between the essences or senses” (Deleuze, 1997, 39).

<sup>10</sup> On the topic of attributes, Spinoza elaborates that “no attribute of a substance can truly be conceived from which it follows that substance can be divided” (E<sub>1</sub>P<sub>12</sub>), and “no substance, and consequently no corporeal substance in so far as it is a substance, is divisible” (E<sub>1</sub>P<sub>13</sub>C).

<sup>11</sup> These natural elements include: thunder, fire, water; celestial bodies like the sky, the moon and the stars; mortal bodies including the organs; and sexual bodies coursing with lust.

<sup>12</sup> Musicologists cite repetition as one of the key differences between African derived music, including jazz and rap, and Western music. It would be interesting to think about how repetition, interwoven with variation in jazz composition, would agree with Deleuze’s concept of repetition as difference.

<sup>13</sup> See for example hooks’, *All About Love: New Visions* (New York: William Morrow, 2000) and Hardt & Negri’s *Empire* (Boston: Harvard UP, 2000).

<sup>14</sup> Consider, for example, Spinoza’s assertion that, “men are most useful to one another when each man looks most for what is useful to himself. For the more that each person looks for what is useful to himself and endeavors to preserve himself, the more he is endowed with virtue (by Prop. 20, Part 4), or, what is the same (by Def. 8, Part 4), he is endowed with a greater power of acting in accordance with the laws of his nature, that is (by Prop. 3, Part 3) of living in accordance with the guidance of reason. But men are said to agree most in nature when they live in accordance with the guidance of reason (by the preceding Proposition); therefore (by the preceding Corollary), men will be most useful to one another when each one looks most for what is useful to himself. QED” (E<sub>4</sub>P<sub>35</sub>C<sub>2</sub>).

<sup>15</sup> Here it is useful, and for Deleuze critical, that we differentiate affection, *affectio* from affect, *affectus*. Both involve emotional events. The latter, however, is also endowed with *potentia* directly correlated to how much our power is increased.

<sup>16</sup> This is not always true: love can sour and turn into something else (E<sub>3</sub>P<sub>35</sub>). But, on those occasions where love and hatred scuffle and love triumphs over hatred, it “is greater... than if hatred had not preceded it” (E<sub>3</sub>P<sub>44</sub>).

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<sup>17</sup> “God is a Lobster, or a double pincer, a double bind,” write Deleuze and Guattari. In “10,000 B.C.: THE GEOLOGY OF MORALS” they discuss, through geologic analogy, how articulation and double articulation creates “sedimentation,” “folding” and “suppleness” upon substances and forms. These concepts are significant for understanding their celebrated concept “deterritorialization” which will be discussed at greater length in Chapter Four (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987).

<sup>18</sup> Here we may consider the famous passage in Spinoza, about which Deleuze, as well as Negri and Žižek write, wherein Adam is chastised for misinterpreting the prohibition to NOT eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of Good and Evil. For Spinoza the prohibition is actually a warning: caution... contents of this food will not agree with your nature. Adam, instead, construes the warning as a commandment. As Deleuze brings up in *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, “ethics, a typology of immanent modes of existence,” ought to be distinguished from morality, “which always refers existence to transcendental values” (Deleuze, 1988, 23).

<sup>19</sup> It may be interesting here to consider virtue alongside the virtual. However, I do believe this is the subject of a different project.

<sup>20</sup> Virtuosity, as I am deploying it here, also coordinates well with Foucault’s Hellenistic cultivation of the self from the third volume of *History of Sexuality* (Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Random House, 1986).

<sup>21</sup> And who can argue that the album is not affective based on its musical virtuosity? *A Love Supreme* is not only inspiring to listeners; it also offers a musical paradigm for several generations of musicians, including Archie Shepp, Alice Coltrane, Carlos Santana, Wynton and Branford Marsalis, among others, to follow by example.

<sup>22</sup> For more on absence and presence *vis-à-vis* performance, see Peggy Phelan’s “The ontology of performance: representation without reproduction” from *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

## Chapter Four

### Seizures of flight: *becoming* and *unbecoming* in Maxine Hong Kingston's *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book*

This chapter continues our investigation of difference by exploring Maxine Hong Kingston's 1987 novel *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book* alongside relevant Deleuze, Deleuze and Guattari and Derrida's texts. The actions of the novel's hero "tripmaster monkey" Wittman Ah Sing, and his friends, present an example of Chinese American literature which complicates the very notion of minor(ity) writing. These characters challenge the hierarchical binary undergirding the concept of the minor. Hong Kingston's presentation refuses to subordinate minor characters as peripheral and relational to a major, centrally dominant use of literary voice and expression of language. Hong Kingston also implicates California, and specifically the San Francisco Bay Area, as a locus wherein minority Americans undergo volatile racial subject formation in order to transform minor relations in ways that undo the major. Her characters' transformations of "identity" incite the transformative potential immanent to the text itself: the external movement of the Chinese diaspora in America parallels an internal movement, or *becoming*, which is distinct from a descent into subjective interiority.

In Section I I will analyze how *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book* sets an example for minor writing by posing the threat of difference *qua* writing that Deleuze, Deleuze and Guattari, and Derrida prescribe in their own works. These theorists' works are routinely applied to texts by literary scholars who are invested in the particular

struggles and experiences of the minority. Despite successful operations, I will analyze in Section II how Deleuze and Deleuze and Guattari's writing have their utility barred at a crucial point: their writing on minority is, in subtle ways, constrained to a majority position. This position makes recourse to an instrumental use of the figure of the "minor" which contradicts a basic premise of their theoretical structures of reading differently. But their delinquency, a "minor" but no less significant one, is profoundly productive.

Section III furthers an investigation of how Deleuze, and Deleuze and Guattari read minor literature in ways which delimit their joint ability to pronounce the final, authoritative voice on minor literature. Yet I also argue that they still provide theoretical tactics which are useful to the minority.

Section IV focuses on these theoretical tactics by bringing *Tripmaster Monkey* back into the conversation.

Section V introduces the trope of *seizure* which I use to bridge writing, the politics of identity and the emergence of novel forms of difference that do not subscribe to the "master's" discourse," as it has been elaborated upon throughout the dissertation. In its capacity to challenge established theoretical apparatus, *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book* provides an illustration of re-appropriation through literary seizure. What are seized, in this instance, are the voice, place, body, and writing of the figurative use of the minor for the interest of the minority. This seizure does not merely critique the centrality of dominant, first world, hegemonic literature and literary theory. I also argue that this book itself is a creative affirmation of the multitudinous worlds that traverse and reside upon its periphery, and ultimately penetrates the center. Wittman Ah Sing and his yellow American compatriots, shed a critical light on writing the diasporic experiences of Asian

America. The geo-political-theoretical stakes of this exploration of minoritized identity are crucial. Hong Kingston tests the limits of identity through the trope of diaspora. However, she presses the “foreign-ness,” the strangeness, alienation, and exclusion of the collective Asian American experience without defaulting to an essentialist model of identity. This textual turn complicates the presumed boundary between major and minor: the turn invites a consideration of the minor which is not merely a supplement to major characters, experiences and positions. The minor is, instead, integral to the existence of the major itself.

Ultimately, this chapter questions the tools that these theorists, Deleuze and Guattari in particular, offer in order to do to a text what they did not; that is, I will attempt to write the minor without reducing minority to a figurative function *for the sake* of the major. Towards the end of the chapter I include some relevant points that emerge Derrida’s work, namely, the Derridean concept of “becoming literary” in order to form a complementary and user-friendly ensemble to Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of “becoming-minor.”

*Section I: Becomings—animal, minor, writing*

As discussed in Chapter One, the concept of “becoming” is Deleuze and Guattari’s most well-trodden. Becoming is discussed most notably in *A Thousand Plateaus*, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* and in select later interviews and essays by Deleuze alone. However, one can easily see glimpses of the concept to come as early as *Anti-Oedipus*. Becoming is distinguished as the quality of perpetual movement and

change which “always has a component of flight that escapes its own formalization” (Deleuze, 1997, 1-2). As such, the thing that becomes, be it animal, vegetable, woman, minority, tool, molecule, environment, etc, to the vanishing point of “becoming-imperceptible,” resists mimetic identifications with ideal forms. Instead of formal definition, the *becoming* thing enters a “zone of proximity” by which it balances in-between, or even “amongst” defined categories.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari’s figurative use of woman, racial minority and animal *vis-à-vis* becoming are most developed in “1730: Becoming-Intense, Becoming-animal, Becoming-Imperceptible...” and in “Year Zero: faciality.” In the *Kafka* book, these transformative figures emerge throughout:

There is no longer a designation of something by means of a proper name, or an assignation of metaphors by means of a figurative sense. But *like* images, the thing no longer forms anything but a sequence of intensive states, a ladder or a circuit for intensities that one can make race around in one sense or another, from high to low, or from low to high. The image is this very race itself; it has become becoming—the becoming-dog of the man and the becoming-man of the dog, the becoming-ape or the becoming-beetle of the man and vice versa. We are no longer in the situation of an ordinary, rich language where the word dog, for example, would directly designate an animal and would apply metaphorically to other things (so that one could say ‘like a dog’) (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, 21-22).

The becoming of a given thing, human for example, is its own detour away from the model of itself, the anthropomorphic image of itself, as prescribed by the major thrust of language. “The image is the race” which traverses “circuits of intensity.” When carried

away by intensive circuits, or “lines of flight,” the “human” undergoes a metamorphosis. Deleuze and Guattari are quick to caution, however, that this transformation ought not to be completely constrained to the level of figurative language. “Kill all metaphor” they proclaim: metamorphosis not metaphor. This is why they turn to Kafka’s shrinking, mistreated man-insect in *The Metamorphosis* as an example. Gregor Samsa does not merely appear to be vermin; he has become an insect through affect, function and interaction with his family. The unfortunate transformation from traveling salesman to despised recluse is his animal state of becoming.

For Deleuze and Guattari, becoming necessarily relates to writing and language. Writing, especially, is a privileged and vital site for “writing is a question of becoming, always incomplete, always in the midst of being formed, and goes beyond the matter of any livable or lived experience. It is a process, that is, a passage of Life that traverses both the livable and the lived” (Deleuze, 1997, 1). Becoming also describes the relation between minor and major usages of language, or rather, what the minor *can do* to the major on a linguistic plane. As described in the “November 20, 1923: Postulates of Linguistics” chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus*, minor treatments of language sabotage the major by undermining its “territorialization” under totalizing regimes that uphold “the majority” as a constant, unchanging entity holding dominion over “minor” language. Becoming “overloads” major language through a series of syntactical shifts, deviations and proliferations. When major usages of languages become minor, the language itself undergoes “deterritorialization.” “Deterritorialization” can then be co-opted by major forces through “reterritorialization.” This is, however, an iterative process.



Deterritorialization and reterritorialization are constantly at play in a manner that resonates with Derrida's writing on "play" discussed in Chapter One.

Deleuze and Guattari position deterritorialization as repetition. Likewise, they connect reterritorialization as a re-absorption of renegade language into dominant language. Deterritorialization poses a significant intervention against the oppressive hold that "majority" extends over language. It illuminates the ruse of the majority, namely, that the majority is "no body." "No body" corresponds to the model which the major upholds as a standard measure. According to Deleuze and Guattari not even the straight white male, who normally enjoys the benefits of inhabiting both a major role, as constant, and minor role, as variable to the constant, can reap the illusory benefits that the mantle of majority promises. Minority, on the other hand, offers real promises to "everyone": "the minority is the becoming of everybody, one's potential becoming to the extent that one deviates from the model. There is a majoritarian 'fact,' but it is the analytic fact for Nobody, as opposed to the becoming-minoritarian of everybody" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 104-105).<sup>1</sup>

It is a matter of political necessity, however, to point out that this conception of the minor as "everybody" undermines the category of the minority as it is applied to particular classes of persons within the context of rights. The minor, remind Deleuze and Guattari, is not numerically defined. Rather, it is a way to designate social relations schematized through an axis of "deviation."<sup>2</sup> Deleuze and Guattari's insights on minority and racism may be illuminating to those who are unaware of the mechanics of racial alterity, either experientially or abstractly. But imagined deviation from a white norm is a palpable reality of minority experience since the inception of the nation. Those

historically burdened by minority consciousness, as an outcome of forced group identity, shoulder this awareness without abstract theoretical assistance. For clearly democratic reasons, “becoming minor” may be of benefit to “everybody,” in the atomistic sense of “every (single) body” who would do well to shed the costume required for inclusion in an imagined “majority.” It would also undoubtedly benefit “everybody” who belongs to the collective social *corpus*. Despite this, in an American context the category of minority is often the only legal refuge for groups that routinely suffer discrimination by the majority. The legal concept of minority, understood as a “protected class” in US anti-discrimination statutes, gets easily confused with the concept of minority as essential component of identity as well as with the literary use of the minor invoked by Deleuze and Guattari. For this reason it is crucial that the discrete usages of minor and minority be treated with some amount of care, even as the terms themselves overlap. Otherwise, attempts to rectify the reality of discrimination against minorities are elided by linguistic conflation. A facile interpretation of Deleuze and Guattari’s celebration of the minor as the province of “everybody” could lead to just this kind of political erasure.<sup>3</sup>

With these considerations in mind, I propose turning directly to Hong Kingston’s human menagerie wherein people appear as minorities and animals but, more interestingly, also “become” them through narrative action and character interaction. I contend that Hong Kingston’s presentation of protagonist Wittman Ah Sing is an example of what Deleuze finds so refreshing and vital about American literature. Deleuze writes:

Is not American literature the minor literature par excellence, insofar as America claims to federate the most diverse minorities, 'a Nation swarming with nations'? America brings together extracts, it presents samples from all ages, all lands, and all nations. The simplest love story brings into play states, peoples, and tribes..." (Deleuze, 1997, 57).

Wittman Ah Sing demonstrates the spirit of exilic, ambulatory origin and diverse destination. First and foremost, he is "becoming monkey." Specifically he is Hong Kingston's "tripmaster monkey": he is the ABC, American born Chinese, *griot* trained to perform in his immigrant, itinerant parent's traveling burlesque act. He is an American playwright, writing and producing his own work at novel's end. He is the broken, mechanical department store toy *détourned* during the Christmas shopping season by a disgruntled employee. He is simultaneously the employee himself, who poses the toy to lasciviously hump a blonde, blue-eyed Barbie doll. He is Sun Wu King (alternately Sun Wukong) the magical "king of the monkeys." Arguably, he is descended from India's legendary monkey myth Hanuman, avatar of Shiva, who is said in *The Ramayana* to have led an army of monkey warriors and to have used his miraculous powers against the demon Ravana. China's Sun Wu King, as well, exercises feats of supernatural ability, changing size, changing form, multiplying, in order to outsmart his larger, ostensibly more powerful opponents. Wittman is the Chinese opera monkey transforming his guise through different corporeal forms, endowed with human and simian bodies. He is the literary invention born of a bastardized lineage of Chinese folk tale, American writing, and American drug-saturated counter-culture. As tripmaster and tripper, Wittman "practices having hallucinations," citing Antonin Artaud as the muse of his surrealist,

ethnographic essays. Wittman is Frank Chin, the notoriously masculinist, Chinese American writer who famously criticized Maxine Hong Kingston.<sup>4</sup> He is the revolutionary tactician, notably admired by Mao Tse-tung, who leads by spinning a narrative that redirects the major flow of history into minor, local currents. The monkey, as polymorphic, parodic, strategist suggests a reconsideration of Witt(man) as a man descended of Chinese men. We are, as well, drawn to consider Wittman as writer, descendent of Whitman, “becoming” canonical “dead white guy.” His name, and namesake, is perilously close to (White)man. Further, (Witt)man is a master of “wit,” a clown, a trickster and a wry commentator who indulges in literary play.

Wittman is an internally heterogeneous, hyper-citational being with multiple subject positions. As such, his story ultimately deemphasizes the possibility of mono-identity and, instead, privileges positionality in the ongoing organization and reorganization of minor subjectivities. Politically, this shift is invaluable for it insinuates new directions by which a minority can conceive itself as a “people to come” instead of as a people immobilized in thought and action by a self-imposed prison of “identity.”

Hong Kingston elaborates upon inventing subjectivity by merging human and animal, that is, through a double act of becoming. Wittman Ah Sing is a newly graduated Cal alumnus. Having had his fill of unsatisfying retail employment, he comes to a point wherein he embraces government welfare and enjoys life on the periphery of the “system.” He drifts outside the labor force and “drops out” of society. His AJA, American of Japanese ancestry, college friend Lance Kamiyama, however, follows a different career path. Lance throws a party to celebrate his integration within the system. He recently married his WASP college sweetheart Sunny, with whom he bought his first

house in Oakland. He also began employment with a secure government job under a respectable GS9 ranking. During Lance's party, the psychotropic climate engineers animal/human fusions:

[The trippers at the party] must be on that trip where the margins between human beings, and between human beings and other creatures, disappear, so that if one hurts, we all hurt, so that to stop war, all we have to do is drop lysergic acid into the water supply but we don't even need to do that—because all human beings of all time are in connection—the margins didn't disappear—there aren't any margins—psychedelics only make you know about things, and do not cause a thing to be—it is—it already is” (Hong Kingston, 1987, 88).

The term “margins” is interesting when thought in conjunction to Deleuze and Guattari's writings of “periphery” in the subsection “Minorities” of “7000 B.C.: Apparatus of Capture” from *A Thousand Plateaus*. Here, the authors dare to imagine a world “a more radical reversal that would make the white world the periphery of a yellow world” in order to challenge the “axiomatic” of the majority (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 471). Such a movement is not a proper “reversal” in the sense that the two, the “white world” and the “yellow world,” are put in inverse relation. Rather, the periphery would saturate the very axiom by which the “white world” sustains itself in relation to “other” worlds. The integrity between center and margin would then collapse under the stress of competing “axiomatics.”

The disappearance of margins impelled by the diversions in and out of each others' life stories in *Tripmaster Monkey* is also reflected through the characters'

changing physiognomies (Hong Kingston, 1987, 103). Wittman is monkey: Hong Kingston's repeats this throughout the book. Wittman's friend Lance is fox. Judy Louis, a woman he meets on the bus *en route* to the party, is boar. Hong Kingston's descriptions of Judy as "pig woman" correspond to a deep-seated ambivalence for Wittman. Judy represents Hong Kingston's acknowledgment of the boar's Chinese virtues which go unacknowledged by Wittman's westernized ABC perspective. Upon sight, Wittman notes her lack of appeal and grace. He silently wishes she weren't Chinese, "the kind who works hard and doesn't fix herself up." Judy recognizes in Wittman a fellow Chinese yet he attempts to dodge her advances by "passing" as Japanese. She pursues regardless. After chatting awhile, Wittman connects his negative evaluation of Judy to what he considers a repellant inassimilability of Asian descendents in America: "Loafers with striped socks. Flat shoes, flat chest, flat hair, flat face, flat color... Traveling with food, unto this generation. Yeah, the lot of us riding the Greyhound out of Fresno and Watsonville and Gardena and Lompoc to college..." (Hong Kingston, 1987, 73-74).

To Wittman, the girl is both boorish and boring in conversation. As the two make their way over the Bay Bridge from San Francisco into Oakland, he begins to hallucinate that she is becoming an actual boar. Dusk descends and as the colored streetlights penetrate the windows of the bus he remarks on her transformation:

He looked at the girl again, and she looked blue-black in the dark. He blinked, and saw sitting beside him a blue boar. Yes, flints of light on bluish dagger tusks. Little shining eyes. Not an illusion because the details were very sharp. Straight black bristly eyelashes. A trick of dark? But it was lasting. Eyes and ivory tusks gleaming black and silver. Like black

ocean with star plankton and black sky with stars” (Hong Kingston, 1987, 78).

The last line features the repetition of a simile. (Perhaps this is just another example of the incessant presence of the metaphor in fiction.) Fathomless, dark surfaces are spotted with illuminating points. Wittman’s anti-Asian observations about Judy mirrors his indignation over Jack Kerouac’s prose from the 1950 novel *The Town and the City* which he cites and then denounces in disgust just minutes before meeting Judy:

Soldiers, sailors,  
 the panhandlers and drifters,  
 [no] zoot suiters, the hoodlums,  
 the young men who washed dishes in cafeterias  
     From coast to coast,  
 the hitchhikers, the hustlers, the drunks,  
 the battered lonely young Negroes,  
 the twinkling little Chinese,  
 the dark Puerto Ricans [and braceros and pachucos]  
 and the varieties of dungareed Young Americans  
     in leather jackets  
     who were seamen and mechanics and garagemen  
     everywhere...

Shit. The ‘twinkling little Chinese’ must be none other than himself. ‘Twinkling’?! ‘Little’?! Shit. Bumkicked again. If King Kerouac, King of the Beats were walking here tonight, he’d see Wittman and think, ‘Twinkling little Chinese.’...Kerouac didn’t get ‘Chinese’ right either. Big football player white all-American jock Kerouac. Jock Kerouac. I call into question your naming of me. I trust your sight no more. You tell people by their jobs. And by their race. And the wrong race at that... What do you know? You don’t know shit. I’m the American here. I’m the American walking here. Fuck Kerouac and his American road anyway. Et tu, Kerouac. Aiya, even you. (Hong Kingston, 1987, 70).

Hong Kingston demonstrates the dilemma of the colonized psyche, which Frantz Fanon so lucidly diagnoses in *Black Skins, White Masks*, and to which Wittman falls prey. This moment of weakness, ethnic self-loathing, is by no means a defining characteristic for Wittman. But, at least here, he “unwittingly” succumbs to a disavowal of his Chinese ancestry. He dissidentifies with Judy’s Chinese-ness and adopts a Japanese identity when confronted by Judy’s overwhelmingly FOB, “fresh off the boat,” appearance and mannerisms. Indeed, he categorically rejects Judy’s FOB attributes with the same insistence that Kerouac idealizes it in his travel novels. Hong Kingston’s illustration of ABC ambivalence towards Chinese nationals demonstrates this point thoroughly. Yet, in this interpretation, her critical observations never quite leave the plane of representation: the boar is symbolic of positive qualities in the traditional Far East and negative ones in the West.<sup>5</sup> Wittman, as the cultural product of both, is trapped in a contradictory situation as a Chinese American who distances himself from his ancestral roots by disavowing the pig-woman, even as he defends those roots from the romantic white proclivity to do anthropology to “exotics.” But, as I will discuss, elsewhere Wittman does redeem himself.

*Section II: Unbecoming metaphors—the minor(ity) as metaphor*

For Deleuze and Guattari, becoming-animal has the same function as becoming-minor. In their book on Kafka, Deleuze and Guattari perform a reading which resists the traditional urge to “interpret” Kafka’s text. Instead, they read Kafka in order to illustrate “lines of flight” away from the codification of major language. They argue that the minor



Kafka offers a “high coefficient of deterritorialization” between the major language and the minor one. Kafka’s language is thus positioned as “impossible.” By resisting co-option by major languages, Kafka offers possibilities for new reading methods. Deleuze and Guattari contend that a minor literature:

turns literature into something impossible—the impossibility of not writing, the impossibility of writing in German, the impossibility of writing otherwise. The impossibility of writing other than in German is for the Prague Jews the feeling of an irreducible distance... And the impossibility of writing in German is the deterritorialization of the German population, itself, an oppressive minority that speaks a language cut off from the masses... this can be compared in another context to what blacks in America today are able to do with the English language (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, 16).

This is the first of three characteristics Deleuze and Guattari identify in minor literature, i.e., that it is so inassimilable to major language and literature as to destabilize the latter. The second characteristic is that minor literature bears a politicized “immediacy,” that it is always and inescapably political. Minor literature bypasses the concerns of the individual, as they are defined within familial and marital structures, due to its confinement within a “cramped space [that] forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, 17). The third characteristic of minor literature, directly connected to the second, is that minor literature vocalizes a “collective assemblage of enunciation.” There is a collective value found in every instance of minor literature that “allows the conception of something other than a literature of masters; what each author says individually already constitutes a common

action.” Minor literature thus “finds itself positively charged with the role and function of collective and even revolutionary, enunciation. It is literature that produces an active solidarity in spite of skepticism” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, 17). Deleuze and Guattari further argue that the conditions enabling the collective enunciation are explicitly due to a “scarcity of talent” within minor literature.<sup>6</sup>

For Deleuze and Guattari, one thing about minor literature is clear: “There is nothing that is major or revolutionary except the minor” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, 26). For this very reason, many scholars preoccupied with minority issues have adapted Deleuze and Guattari’s writings about the minor *qua* minority in their own works.<sup>7</sup> But for Deleuze and Guattari, the minor(ity) ceases to be merely a person, or in their words an “immigrant,” “nomad,” or “gypsy,” one who is disenfranchised linguistically and socially (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, 19). The minor(ity) is, instead, a literary tool. Deleuze and Guattari’s use of this figure in their concept of becoming is arguably trapped within a logic of metaphor which they apparently despise. This situation begs the question whether it is possible to use Deleuze and Deleuze and Guattari for interrogating the category of the racial minor in order to undermine racism when they themselves are complicit in using race as metaphor.<sup>8</sup> Race, as an “intensive” state, rather than as an essential, biologically fixed category, is an especially peculiar presence in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. The authors blurt out the names of shadowy racial figures with near delirious fervor. Following is an exemplary catalogue of these textual eruptions:

From page 98 of *Anti-Oedipus*:

It is the function of the libido to invest the social field in unconscious forms, thereby hallucinating all history, reproducing in delirium entire civilizations, races and continents, and intensely 'feeling' the becoming of the world. There is no signifying chain without a Chinaman, an Arab, and a black who drop in to trouble the night of a white paranoiac"...

From page 105:

The revolutionary unconscious investment is such that desire, still in its won mode, cuts across the interest of the dominated, exploited classes, and causes flows to move that are capable of breaking apart both the segregations and their Oedipal applications—flows capable of hallucinating history, of reanimating the races in delirium, of setting continents ablaze. No, I am not of your kind, I am the outsider and the deterritorialized, 'I am of a race inferior for all eternity... I am a beast, a Negro'...

From page 340:

At times we contrasted the molar and the molecular as the paranoiac, signifying, and structured lines of integration, and the schizophrenic, machinic, and dispersed lines of escape; or again as the staking out of the perverse reterritorializations, and as the movement of the schizophrenic deterritorializations. At other times, on the contrary, we contrasted them as the two major types of equally social investments: the one sedentary and biunivocalizing, and of a reactionary or fascist tendency; the other nomadic and polyvocal, and of a revolutionary tendency. In fact, in the

schizoid declaration—‘I am of a race inferior for all eternity,’ ‘I am a beast, a black,’ ‘we are all German Jews’...

From page 378:

Desire, the desert-desire, the revolutionary investment of desire... that is indeed what undermines capitalism: where will the revolution come from, and in what form within the exploited masses? It is like death—where, when? It will be a decoded flow, a deterritorialized flow that runs too far and cuts too sharply, thereby escaping from the axiomatic of capitalism. Will it come in the person of a Castro, an Arab, a Black Panther, or a Chinaman on the horizon?...

From page 379 of *A Thousand Plateaus*:

Only he or she can invoke race who says, ‘I have always been of an inferior race... I am of an inferior race for all eternity... There I am on the Breton shore... I am beast, a n\*\*ger... I am of a distant race: my ancestors were Norsemen’... [Asterisks mine]

Bear in mind that this list is abbreviated for the sake of brevity.

Deleuze and Guattari refer to Rimbaud’s *Une Saison En Enfer* in order to fabricate a hero who is not constrained by the familial, bourgeois oedipal narrative that they critique in *Anti-Oedipus*. They use the figure of the “delirious,” enraged, outcast racial minority to threaten the oppression of “molar” assemblages, or, the fixed subject

operating under the regime of interpretation. Their use of the racial minority becomes a device for bursting apart the seams of an oedipal familial triangulation of mother, father, and subject. In so doing, Deleuze and Guattari illuminate the oedipal *pyramid* hidden behind the *triangle*. This added racialized dimension is "phylogeny."<sup>9</sup> Arguably, in a parallel vein, their outcast minority hero corresponds to the *telos* of the revolutionary proletariat embraced in the narrative of orthodox Marxism. Their attack against the Freudian paranoiac, as opposed to the schizophrenic, in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* dovetails with their development of a conception of *machinic production*, "desiring machines." Desiring machines locate the desires of multiplicitous parts, instead of individuals, within a scheme that does not adhere to the rigid subjectification, in strategy or ideals, to which the orthodox Party adhered.<sup>10</sup>

Deleuze and Guattari's remarkable "I am..." statements above are the ricochet of Rimbaud's original writing:

Here I am on the Breton shore. Let the towns light up in the evening. My day is done; I'm quitting Europe. Sea air will burn my lungs; strange climates will tan my skin. To swim, to trample the grass, to hunt, and above all to smoke; to drink liquors strong as boiling metal—like my dear ancestors around their fires.

I'll return with limbs of iron, dark skin and furious eye; people will think to look at me that I am of a strong race. I will have gold: I will be idle and brutal. Women nurse those fierce invalids, home from hot countries. I'll be mixed up in politics. Saved.

Now I am an outcast. I loathe the fatherland. The thing from me is a very drunken sleep on the beach (Rimbaud, 1961, 13).

In the “Mauvais sang” section of *Une Saison En Enfer* Rimbaud identifies with an “inferior race,” a “leper,” a “pagan” in order to stress his own feelings of restless, tortured alienation. Through hallucinatory visions, he attempts to pry himself from his roots and inherited morality by creating a metaphoric affinity between himself and, for instance, the despised “n\*\*ger.” This is the figure that Rimbaud positions as most wretched and therefore best suited to undertake uprising. This particular use of metaphor, however, poses some serious problems. “Je suis une bête, un nègre. Mais je puis être sauvé. Vous êtes de faux nègres, vous, maniaques, féroce, avarés...” (“I am a beast, a n\*\*ger. But I can be saved. You are false n\*\*gers, you, maniacs, fiends, misers...”) (Rimbaud, 1961, 17). Clearly, Rimbaud is writing on the figurative backs of the “beasts” and “n\*\*gers.” Further, the near instantaneousness with which he conflates “beast” and “n\*\*ger” is almost too seamless; indeed, brutally so.<sup>11</sup>

These criticisms, however, yield limited use. Perhaps, a more productive criticism would consider the curious use of the word “faux” in his accusation against the “judges,” “merchants,” etc, who are also “nègres.” If they are “fake n\*\*gers” according to Rimbaud, who stands as “authentic”? Who has the greater verisimilitude, the metaphoric “n\*\*ger” whose experiences render him despised, disenfranchised, enslaved? Or, would the authentic “n\*\*ger” be the “outcast” who was born into a socius that was already too ready to interpellate him as such, whose “sang” (blood) actually is tainted by the “mauvais” (bad) stain of race? The argument could too easily be made that, for literary purposes, the histories of actual slave descendents were evacuated from Rimbaud’s text so that he would be able to occupy their positionality. Throughout “Mauvais sang”

Rimbaud's colonialist use of "I" in his statements excludes those very people necessary for his particular literary figuration.

Deleuze and Guattari's "I am..." statements, direct scions of Rimbaud's "I am..." statements, are likewise politically suspect. It appears that the presence of the former is defined by its ability to destabilize a majoritarian position precisely by making use of one. Thus, Deleuze and Guattari's "I am..." statements may result in a displacement of the interests of the minority by the metaphoric use of the minor figure. A critique of the metaphoric utility of the minor(ity) in Deleuze and Guattari finds its antecedent in Alice Jardine's well-presented argument against the two theorists in *Gynesis*. Here, Jardine cites Irigaray's criticism of the disembodied woman in Deleuze and Guattari's figure of the "body without organs." Jardine builds upon Irigaray's position that the male authors manipulate the sign of woman as metaphor in order to argue her own analysis of how *le devenir femme*, the becoming-woman, jettisons real women. Jardine writes that Deleuze and Guattari's work "represents the efforts of new kinds of male bodies attempting, if not always successfully, to invent new kinds of subjectivities." She then points out that within the constraints of patriarchal culture women have been excluded from the kind of universal presence which men are endowed by sex-right. She concludes that it is "up to women not to disappear from that space of exploration wherein subjects redefine themselves through the radical liberation of Desire" (Jardine, 1985, 223). Jardine's critique against Deleuze and Guattari is a legitimate corrective against an over-exuberant and politically vacuous exercise of male privileged "lines of flight." Her critique however, also finds affinity in Deleuze and Guattari's own injunction that even women must "become women," in no small part due to the fact that there is no "becoming-man"

(Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 292).<sup>12</sup> They are quite clear in disarticulating the process of becoming-woman from the sign of woman, as well as from the material actuality of women's bodies. Despite this, Irigaray, and to some extent Jardine, rightfully charge the male authors with a writ of *habeas corpus*.

My analysis will bracket off the question of the body, important as it is, and focus on the space denied the minority when the minor is limited to a literary metaphor. In the spirit of Jardine's argument I pose the question: is becoming-minor also a line of flight for the referential figure who has been condemned to minor status in a pre-existing relation to the major? Does the "Chinaman" himself transform any more than the "Negro" or the "beast" even as the white man "becoming-Chinaman" or "becoming-Negro" does. "I am" implies who "I" is. The textual contact made in such statements as "I am best, negro, Chinaman," or "I am of an inferior race," the metamorphosing "I," is not the minority who fulfills an inspirational function, i.e., the "I" who creates a radical self-consciousness for a minoritized class. "I," instead, is the white man who becomes other to white man without actually arriving at the static point of Chinaman, Negro, beast, insect, woman, etc. For, as Deleuze and Guattari remind us, becoming is perpetual flux: there is no arrival. To arrive *from* a state of becoming would be to board a line of flight only to be grounded back into a "molar assemblage." We are, however, still confronted with Deleuze and Guattari's, as well as Rimbaud's, curious propensity for racialized delirium.

It could be argued that both the referential "I" and the active "I" never possessed a fixed, unified subjectivity in the first place. Rather, they are both more than "I" to start. Becoming is contingent upon the thing that is to become losing its formal identity.



“Becoming-minor,” for instance, requires that the “white man” cease to be white and cease to be man. But it also requires that the minor also cease to be minor, that the “Chinaman,” “negro,” and “aboriginal” no longer embody the mimetic roles thrust upon them by state apparatuses and cultural mechanisms: “Becoming is always double, that which one becomes becomes no less than the one that becomes...Becoming is never imitating... One does not imitate; one constitutes a block of becoming” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 305). Blocks of becoming require the forfeiture of identity that the minority develops in his or her consciousness in response to coerced minority identification. Thus the loss of subjectivity is part of a greater, relational, process of becoming that affects both the major and the minor. In his “On the Superiority of Anglo-American Literature” essay, Deleuze again describes this mutual condition as an asymmetrical “block” of becoming. In the encounter between white man and other, the roles are not exchanged. Rather, “the one only becomes the other if the other becomes something yet other, and if the terms disappear” (Deleuze, 2002, 58). But this is becoming viewed from the perspective of the one who is becoming other, not the other that is becoming other to other. The latter is how minor writers, such as Kafka and Hong Kingston in *Tripmaster Monkey*, can write about the minor. This is because minority writers, at their best, write in the minor. Their tonality adamantly refuses the key, that is, the voice, postures, utterances, expressions, positions, and most importantly, strategies, of the major.

Wittman’s artificially derived delirium in his capacity as *tripmaster*, or guide to hallucinogenic tripping, contrasts with Deleuze and Guattari’s major forms of racialized delirium. Wittman instigates the “seizure” of a major leitmotif of American writing.

Wittman “Ah Sing” co-opts Whitman’s “I sing.” The latter’s own litany of “I am” statements from “Song of Myself,” from the collection *Leaves of Grass*, is distinguished from the objective “me.” Wittman argues that the figure of the Chinese minority has been relegated to “me,” instead of “I,” in America. On the topic of media representations of Asians, Wittman wryly comments on the image of the Chinese coolie, the houseboy, and the waiter who are often played in “yellow face” by established white actors such as Lon Chaney, Peter Sellers and Mickey Rooney. The “Asian” characters they play are prohibited from speaking in the first person nominative, e.g., “me no likee.” Wittman asserts that “they depict us with an inability to say ‘I.’ They’re taking the ‘I’ away from us. ‘Me’—that’s the fucked over, the fuckee. ‘I’—that’s the mean-ass motherfucker first person pronoun of the active voice, and they don’t want us to have it” (Hong Kingston, 1987, 318).

The relegation of “I,” the actor, to “me,” the acted upon, in mainstream media depictions of Asians deserves special attention. It should be emphasized, and indeed is by Hong Kingston, that in Chinese script “I” and “me” are fairly interchangeable:

我

The strokes of the character for “I/me” printed in *Tripmaster Monkey* vary a bit from the one above. Yet this is a fairly standard depiction in traditional Mandarin, and in Kanji, Hanja and other languages that rely upon Chinese script as well. This brings up an



(Hong Kingston, 1987, 319). Wittman uses “I” no less than ten times in his monologue. This active “I,” the warrior, who fights against the white establishment, is never the solitary “I” understood as the highly individuated Western subject. The “I” who belongs in the universe, and to whom the universe belongs, is a plural, social “I.”

Are these histories of “I,” “me,” “我,” etc simply lost upon Rimbaud, Deleuze, Guattari, and so many others in their invocations of racial delirium? More to the point, do the theorists under accusation engage in a particular form of writing that encourages a literary subordination of the minor figure *qua* minority? Do they appropriate the non-Western “I” and then situate it to a Western plane of representation? Do they then miss the opportunity to fully dissociate the minor from a majority paradigm of thought altogether? These minor figures could, instead, be studied for the minor writing practices that they produce. Deleuze and Guattari were successful at this approach in their study of Kafka, but were inconsistent within their body of works. Yet this approach, of generating minor practices from minority positions, is especially crucial in terms of how minor figures and minor writing might function to dismantle majoritarian positions in the first place.

This critique has been introduced not only in the feminist criticism of Irigaray and Jardine, but also, quite famously, in the legendary quarrel against Deleuze and Foucault launched by Spivak.<sup>14</sup> The crux of Spivak’s argument is that Foucault and Deleuze, as first-world, white, male intellectuals, are participating in a “politically interested refusal” that does not take into account the contradictions and differences between “revolutionary” desire and the interests of those for whom they refuse to “speak.” For Spivak, the upshot of this refusal is that Foucault and Deleuze are “incapable of

articulating a theory of interests.” This in turn leads to an “indifference to ideology,” in an Althusserian sense. She also criticizes their writing on subjectivity by problematizing the way that the “S/subject” has been “transparently” driven to a set of “denegations.” Spivak argues that both thinkers partake in an intellectual imperialism that assumes the West as the Self which must be stricken out. Their concept of Self does not encompass a subaltern form of subjectivity: it does not extend beyond the phallogocentric inclinations of the West.

But this critique is not where my analysis concludes. Criticizing Deleuze and Guattari’s work for being unable to “escape” the historical conditions of its own production offers a certain amount of usefulness. However, a critique that is solely negative cannot produce what I am chiefly concerned with, that is, innovating forms of minor reading. Thus, I propose we stay vigilant about refusing to embrace these theoreticians, or any for that matter, as charismatic cult leaders. The very nature of Deleuze and Guattari’s theoretical infrastructure in particular is compelling: it is too easy to become intellectually seduced and happily capitulate to the figuration that their writing offers. It is thus too easy to lose sight of the immediate political impact which also grounds their work. With this caveat in mind, I insist that there is much to retain in Deleuze and Guattari philosophy. And for my analysis, the extraordinary wealth of their insights are best thought in accordance with a theoretical praxis that does not neglect the stakes of minor(ity) cultural politics.

Furthermore, Deleuze and Guattari are not exactly blind to the gravity of minority struggles. In “7000 B.C.: Apparatus of Capture” they write of:

minority as a universal figure, or becoming-everybody/everything (*devenir tout le monde*). Woman: we all have to become that, whether we are male or female. Non-white: we all have to become that, whether we are white, yellow, or black. Once again, this is not to say that the struggle on the level of the axioms is without importance; on the contrary, it is determining (at the most diverse levels: women's struggle for the vote, for abortion, for jobs; the struggle of the regions for autonomy; the struggle of the Third World; the struggle of the oppressed masses and minorities in the East or West... ) (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 470-471).

In the above passage Deleuze and Guattari regard minorities not solely as figurative tools but also concrete groups invested in very real struggles. They insist, in fact, it is the “innovation of the particular” which minorities bring to bear upon the system of majority, steeped in a numerical calculus of axioms, which makes them so formidable a force of change.

*Section III: Deterritorializations, Reterritorializations, Deterritorializations...*

*Tripmaster Monkey* is set in 1960s San Francisco and its surrounding environs. The history of San Francisco is unique: it is one of the “last cities” perched both on the geographic precipice of the continent and the limit of the conceptual American frontier. In her novel Kingston accesses the entire Bay Area. She takes the reader from Chinatown next door to North Beach, in the aftermath of the Beat poets converging at Ferlinghetti's City Lights bookstore. She also travels across the bay to Berkeley and Oakland, during the days of voluntary LSD testing and experiments in intentional living, and just before socio-political dissent and subcultural experimentation were nationally co-opted by the Peace Movement, Woodstock, the Summer of Love, etc. The novel advances even further

down into murkier depths of the peninsula such as Watsonville and San Bruno. The latter's Tanforan race track housed thousands of interned Japanese descent Americans and resident aliens during WWII. With its history as an international trade port San Francisco experienced the simultaneous migrations of various ethnic groups. This is especially relevant to Kingston who focuses on Chinese laborers and other transpacific immigrants. Kingston's writing illustrates how California, an epicenter of natural disaster prone to earthquakes and spontaneous wildfires, is a diasporic limit where the "orient" comes to a halt and proclaims itself with seismic urgency. Like the land beneath it, San Francisco convulses under its own weight of cross-hatched histories of migration and detainment. These are forms of mobility particular to the West Coast detailing collectively forced and personally exercised movement on unstable ground. In Kingston's San Francisco, viewed through Wittman's Asian American eyes, one fault is broken open upon the smooth terrain of American literature from which emergent forms of minor subjectivity erupt.

As is the case with other minority writers, and in particular those writing Asian American experiences, geography figures prominently in Hong Kingston's text. It is crucial to point out, however, that *Tripmaster Monkey* is not overly concerned with indexing origins and destinations. The figure of the "nomad," so celebrated in Deleuze and Guattari's writings on deterritorialization, is paralleled to some degree both by Wittman and by his friend Lance. In the midst of a confrontation during the hallucinogenic party discussed earlier, Lance reveals that he himself dropped out of society to travel during an unaccounted for semester at Cal Berkeley. At that time, he was "lost" on the Molucca-Sulu Islands of the Indonesian Archipelago, ferreting out fellow

“ex-Japanese” scattered throughout the globe. As Lance tells Wittman about other secret aspects of his personal history, Wittman realizes that beneath Lance’s conservative, “assimilated” exterior lurks not only the tortured restlessness that propels him to aimlessly island-hop, but also the terror of racialized rage. Lance confides to Wittman about his mysterious youth:

‘The fox is without a home; I’m without a home. My mama-san took me up to my room and shut the door—I thought she was going to tell me about sex. She told me that I had been raised by whites. She showed me photographs. She wasn’t lying. She had newspaper clippings about a mass family murder. Done with a plantation machete. Come over here. Look at the house through these long willow leaves. I escaped alive. I saw the moon shine red through hanging leaves. There was a blond on the full moon’

What is he telling me? Is this a confession of murder? Or has he spilled a plan for future doing? (Hong Kingston, 1987, 123).

Wittman is confused about Lance’s childhood but intrigued by his self-imposed exile. Instead of carrying the tone of alienation, Lance’s exile offers an option that Wittman dared not consider. He feels a combination of admiration, envy and hope when he hears of Lance’s adventures on the islands. Loss of identity in formal group inclusion, being “out of place,” homelessness, statelessness—these are the very states that Wittman aspires to cultivate in his life choices. These are also the affective states that he would like his friends and family to explore when playing the roles he writes in his play.

Wittman and Lance’s affective micro-liberations demonstrate key aspects of deterritorialization, or “the operation of a line of flight by which ‘one’ leaves a territory”



(Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 508). The function of deterritorialization is to permit acts of becoming: one thing becomes another, which in turn becomes another by leaving “molar” states and becoming “molecular.” Lance, especially while lost on the islands, is Deleuze and Guattari’s nomadic dream. Deleuze and Guattari write that:

a minority is capable of serving as the active medium of becoming, but under such conditions that it ceases to be a definable aggregate in relation to the majority. Becoming-Jewish, becoming-woman, etc., therefore imply two simultaneous movements, one by which a term (the subject) is withdrawn from the majority, and another by which a term (the medium or agent) rises from the minority (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 291).

To reiterate, the minor’s engagement in “two simultaneous movements” are withdrawal and uprising. The minor’s withdrawal from the majority and uprising from the minority is the dual-pronged action of the minor on a line of flight framed within the discourse of deterritorialization. Deterritorialization itself can be absolute, defined in terms of pure movement, or degrees of intensity. It can also be relative, subject to reterritorialization, wherein a line of flight is co-opted back into a molar state. But according to a non-transcendent logic, deterritorializations must always confront molar relations. They are, within an immanent scheme, relative, or negative, deterritorializations. Relative deterritorializations, in turn, require the absolute, the “all-encompassing” movements that “overcode” the earth, that in essence “make a new earth” as described in “Conclusion: Concrete Rules and Abstract Machines” from *A Thousand Plateaus*. This “new earth” is populated by a “people to come,” a minor that leaves the

territory of the major. Yet at the same time, the minor floats over the major in a metamorphosed form

Within the fray of withdrawal and uprising something remarkable happens to the “subject” undergoing the movements. The subject becomes de-subjectified and is instead cast into the role of “medium or agent.” The process of de-subjectification is an integral component of deterritorialization in writing since, “the aim of writing is to carry life to the state of a non-personal power. In doing this it renounces claim to any territory, any end which would reside in itself” (Deleuze, 2002, 50). Likewise, Wittman, Lance, and Judy have subjectivities in flux, without territory. Sometimes the characters morph into animal. Other times they become entirely different human personas. Yet they consistently retain at least some of their particular characteristics, demonstrating how “individuation without a subject” can occur in the course of fluid character development (Deleuze, 2002, 40).

Lance survives the internment camp wherein he was detained as a toddler, he escapes a mass murder of his adopted white family which may have been executed by his own hand, he voluntarily goes into exile out of the US, and he breaches the conceptual borders of being Japanese. He seeks out other Japanese refugees in the process. He returns home and appears to assimilate. Yet all the while Lance has become fox as he “rises up” from “being” solely AJA—cunning, stealthy, fleet. Learning this, Wittman attributes stereotypical qualities used to besmirch Japanese nationals but gives them a positive twist. And while Lance becomes fox, Wittman becomes Japanese—he performs being Japanese in order to dissidentify with Judy. He also desires to be Lance whose time in the internment camp, thinks Wittman, gives more legitimacy to his historical struggle.

He even “out-Lances” Lance by telling him “you should have stayed lost longer, Lance. You didn’t go far out enough. You spent the whole trip trying to get back” (Hong Kingston, 1987, 134).<sup>15</sup> Wittman both becomes monkey and becomes Japanese without contradiction. This is because becoming involves leaving static, homogenous conditions, not reproducing them. In *Tripmaster Monkey* Wittman is becoming monkey, Lance is becoming fox, and Wittman, again, is becoming monkey becoming Japanese. The minor-becoming-animal-becoming-minor responds to the metaphor dilemma put upon the shoulders of the minor(ity) beautifully. When put upon to do the textual labor for the major, the minor is, after all, “capable of serving as the active medium of becoming” for the major. But the minor, in this textual instance, *seizes* the line of flight away from appropriation by the dominant (the majority) and the counter-dominant (the minority). The minor keeps deterritorializing. Keeps becoming. Keeps fleeing.

Likewise, the flight that Lance takes is two-fold. The more explicit movement he undertakes involves locomotion. He advances from mainland to island to island to island to mainland in an ambulatory tour. The other, more implicit and interesting type of movement, involves the double action of leaving the US and leaving his identification with his Japanese ancestry. This is what propels his locomotion. This latter type of movement is a possibility-laden flight involving “motionless travel.” In a related way, Deleuze criticizes the French, in their literature, for underestimating the possibilities of flight. He writes:

To leave, to escape, is to trace a line... cross the line of the horizon. The line of flight is a deterritorialization. The French do not understand this

very well. Obviously, they flee like everyone else, but they think that fleeing means making an exit from the world, mysticism or art, or else that it is something rather sloppy because we avoid our commitments and responsibilities. But to flee is not to renounce action: nothing is more active than flight (Deleuze, 2002, 36).

Flight does not necessarily imply “transport” from the world through sublimation (Deleuze, 2002, 37). Nor does it necessarily imply a disengagement with struggle. It is, in fact, a tactic that can lend itself to social struggles. As a case in point, Deleuze looks for inspiration from Marxist Black Panther activist and writer George Jackson. Jackson, founder of the Black Guerrilla Family, was sentenced to San Quentin prison located on the border of San Francisco Bay. He was later executed by prison officials during an alleged escape attempt. Most likely citing one of his prison letters from *Soledad Brother*, or possibly *Blood in my Eye*, Deleuze writes, “George Jackson wrote from prison: ‘It may be that I am fleeing, but throughout my flight, I am searching for a weapon’” (Deleuze, 2002, 36). “Finding a weapon” is, for Deleuze, the line of flight not away from life but towards the production of the real, the creation of life (Deleuze, 2002, 49). Language, through literature, speech codes, pidgin dissemination, music, ritual, etc, is a territory that undergoes constant deterritorializations and reterritorializations. The territory of language can be seized by the minor. Remember, “I” may be a trap but it can also be a weapon: this is true of the “I-warrior.” It is also true in the case of George Jackson. It is especially true of George’s brother Jonathan Jackson. Jonathan laid siege against the Marin County Courthouse and took hostages in exchange for the release of the Soledad Brothers, to

which George was a member. Language and action dovetail in a radical seizure involving physical parry and linguistic thrust.

*Tripmaster Monkey* is far more subtle in its fiction than the actions of the Jackson brothers. But whereas the Jackson brothers engaged in seizures of state power, *Tripmaster Monkey* invites its readers to consider seizures of subjectivity. Specifically, it does so through the appropriation of figuration in literature. As I've written, in its textual framing, the minor characters take a line of flight away from their prescribed racial identities. The disarticulation from Deleuze and Guattari's formula for seizing subjectivity, "I am Negro, beast... Chinaman," is Hong Kingston's radical seizure of flight. Through several characters, Hong Kingston demonstrates these acts of seizure, renouncing the "I" of the minority, with all that that particular trope implies—the loss of conventional consciousness begetting differential consciousnesses; the confiscation of power through insurgent and volatile acts of force, guided by rage, delirium and desire; the tremor of the earth (California) embodied in the convulsion of the yellow body in variously begotten states of hallucination... This is the movement of America in the minor key.

Regarding Walt Whitman, Deleuze writes:

In America literature is naturally *convulsive*: 'they are but parts of the actual distraction, heat, smoke, and excitement of those times.' But 'convulsiveness,' as Whitman makes clear, characterizes the epoch and the country as much as the writing. If the fragment is innately American, it is because America itself is made up of federated states and various immigrant peoples (minorities)... (Deleuze, 1997, 56).

Walt Whitman characterizes one form of seizure which is co-opted by the major. Wittman Ah Sing characterizes another which is of conceptual use to the minor reader. The minority “Chinaman” (Wittman) becomes literary “Chinaman.” In the process he seizes the white man’s metaphoric image of the “Chinaman” *qua* minority (white man here being Whitman, Kerouac, Deleuze, Guattari, et al.) only to undo the “Chinaman” in favor of other personas—white poet, acid tripper, *griot*, monkey, Japanese. Wittman lays claim to all these identities not to locate a “true” or “essential” one for himself, but to play with the possibilities of becoming other to himself.

Behind him, as in Walt Whitman’s ragged cast of disenfranchised, restless characters from *Leaves of Grass*, is a “people to come.” This is a people who have not yet arrived at their destination but who self-create through their own suffering, resources and artistic quotient (Deleuze, 1990, 174). They are thus given the choice to either restlessly seek out a permanent home or, in Wittman’s words, to simply “stay lost.” “People to come,” the horde, and in Hong Kingston’s case the “yellow horde,” not only perform a figurative function for the text but also offer real alternatives for the minor reader. Wittman, Judy, Lance, Wittman’s parents, and others perform this seizure during Wittman’s play. They stage an uprising against the sentence to “be” Chinamen by dismantling the edifice of identity which has been forced upon them and, conversely, which they have to varying degrees reactionarily accepted. These former Chinamen illuminate Deleuze’s assertion that the people to come are “a universal people composed of immigrants from all countries... This is not exactly a people called upon to dominate the world. It is a minor people, eternally minor, taken up in becoming-revolutionary” (Deleuze, 1997, 4).

The “invention of a people” or “people to come” is the promise of American literature for Deleuze, epitomized through such writers as Melville and Whitman. The promise is vocalized in the “collective enunciation” of a minor deterritorialization of language. Remember that collective enunciation is one of the three hallmarks of Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of minor literature. Although the writer may be singular, the enunciation is always a plural matter. It is a revolutionary assemblage wherein the minor finds its political voice through a “displacement of races and continents.” (Deleuze, 1997, 4). Why is this assemblage, this particular “machine” revolutionary? Herein lays the remarkable twist made possible by Deleuze and Deleuze and Guattari’s persistent commitment to an immanent worldview:

The author creates a world, but there is no world which awaits us to be created (Deleuze, 2002, 52).

The world, saturated and over-coded with writing, is yet to be finally written. Moreover, it is within the continual process of writing that will exerts itself and converts the plane of the virtual to that of the actual through a call to action. In an auspicious way, Marx’s famous adage from his *Thesis on Feuerbach* resounds in Deleuze and Guattari’s invocation of Kafka on minor writing: do not interpret the world when the point is to change it. Yet, thrillingly, in lieu of “changing” the world, Deleuze and Guattari prescribe “inventing” a new one or new ones. “Kafka,” they write, “was drawing lines of escape;

but he didn't 'flee the world.' Rather, it was the world and its representation that he *made take flight* and that he made follow these lines" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, 47).

The following section considers this intriguing flight, demonstrated by Kafka, celebrated by Deleuze and Guattari, and demonstrated, once more, by Hong Kingston

*Section IV: Reconciling unity and identity— Whitman AND Wittman*

The soul is always beautiful,  
 The universe is duly in order... every thing in its place,  
 What is arrived is in its place, and what waits is in its place;  
 The twisted skull waits... the watery or rotten blood waits,  
 The child of the glutton or venerealee waits long, and the child of the  
     drunkard waits long, and the drunkard himself waits long,  
 The sleepers that lived and died wait... the far advanced are to go on  
     in their turns, and the far behind are to go on in their turns,  
 The diverse shall be no less diverse, but they shall flow and unite...  
     they unite now...  
 The Asiatic and African are hand in hand... the European and  
     American are hand in hand...

—Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*

'I have a question. I want to know—I do feel clearly that I have a soul. There is such a thing as a soul. I feel it. I started to send it out of my body, but got scared and pulled it back. I may have thrown my soul out of kilter. How do you reconcile unity and identity?'

'Oh, you dear brave man,' said a perfectly beautiful girl, who laughed a wonderful laugh. Wittman wished that he too were spiritually far enough along to ask such an advanced question. How *do* you reconcile unity and identity? 'You are the universe,' said the girl, glad for each. 'The universe and you.'

Me and the universe. The universe and me.

—Hong Kingston, *Tripmaster Monkey*



In Whitman's prose there is a definite nod to the idea of the "beautiful soul" developed, for instance, in moral aesthetic philosophy which flourished in 18<sup>th</sup> century German *belles lettres* and philosophy. Whitman's "song" is a paean to the notion that the soul, beautiful in an intrinsic, objective, eternal fashion, is connected with a conception of the universe that "is duly in order... every thing in its place." Wittman, on the other hand, is concerned with whether or not his soul is properly aligned. But the "perfectly beautiful" girl implies with gentle, laughing reassurance that his soul is in harmony with the totality of its environment. She tells Wittman that he and the universe are conjoined. The two are united. The union is not based on an act of representation where one thing stands in for another, and thus eclipses the other by "being" the other through figurative language. Rather, they are united through the word "and"—"You are the universe," said the girl, glad for each. 'The universe and you.' Me and the universe. The universe and me."

Grammatically, "and" is a magical word for Deleuze; it is his favorite of all conjunctions because it has the force to transform the verb, "to be." "And" is a positive, heterogeneous, multiplicitous ontological relation that does not default to the totalizing principle unifying differential attributes under a single sign of Being. In "On the Superiority of Anglo-American Literature" Deleuze gives special mention to the burden that Being has on the construction of "first principles." He writes:

The geography of relations is particularly important to the extent that philosophy, the history of philosophy, is encumbered with the problem of being, IS. They discuss the judgement of attribution (the sky is blue) and the judgement of existence (God is), which presupposes the other. But it is

always the verb *to be* and the question of the principle. It is only the English and the Americans who have freed conjunctions and reflected on relations. This is because they have a very special attitude to logic. They do not conceive it as ordinary form containing in itself the first principles. They tell us, on the other hand, that you will either be forced to abandon logic, or else you will be led to invent one (Deleuze, 2002, 56).

The significance of relations and maintenance and construction of logic in literature are especially important to consider here. According to Deleuze, Americans can do what the French can not: they can, like Whitman, think “*with* AND, instead of thinking IS, instead of thinking *for* IS.” For Deleuze this is the “biggest secret of Empiricism.” It is empowering for it allows relations between terms and relations between sets of relations that are more permissive than old world logic will allow. “And” permits lines of flight between relations that break free from analogic, “syllogistic” thinking (Deleuze, 2002, 57). In this sense, “and” is said to go beyond its role as simple term uniting other terms. “And” is the connective membrane that conjoins, without homogenizing, disparate attributes. It is the “extra-being,” and “inter-being” that “subtends all relations, the path of all relations, which makes relations shoot outside their terms and outside the set of their terms, and outside everything which could be determined as Being, One, or Whole.” (Deleuze, 2002, 57).

“And” functions as superlative to Being itself in its capacity to create assemblages, machines, collectivities—it matters more *that* things are assembled, collected and machinic than *what* is assembled, collected and machinic. This is how conjunctive relations, instead of becoming subordinated to the verb “to be,” “penetrate and corrupt everything, undermine Being, make it topple over. Substitute the AND for IS.

A and B.” In the course of the *coup* against Being, dialectics and dualisms are also undermined (Deleuze, 2002, 57). This, in turn, allows for innovation in allowing the flourishing of ontological multiplicity. In other words, “the multiple is no longer an adjective which is still subordinate to the One which divides or the Being which encompasses it” (Deleuze, 2002, 57). This is a prime grammatical example of the virtue of becoming over that of Being. Becoming, or the flight in between states of singular differences, connects disparate parts and converts them into working machines.

As alluded to earlier, Deleuze and Guattari make specific mention of “and” in their discussion on minorities as qualitative “nondenumerable sets” as opposed to the mathematical conception of minority as simply a smaller number, or less than, the majority (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 470). Cesare Casarino and Antonio Negri offer sophisticated arguments on their Deleuzian reading of the minority as non-denumerable “multiplicity” *vis-à-vis* “rights discourse.” Casarino writes in a footnote to the “Surplus Common” preface of *In Praise of the Common: a conversation of philosophy and politics*, that “there are times when one may need to start from demands and rights because one may be unable to start from anywhere else.” However, these demands should never be confused with the “desire for change.” The former describes the struggle for full acceptance and integration into majoritarian institutional structures and the latter provides the impetus for revolutionary movements against those structures. “After all,” he continues, “to have been forced into a mode of existence so unbearable that one’s own desire can express itself only as demand for acknowledgment and recognition of such an unbearable existence is to be in the position of the slave” (Casarino and Negri, 258-259, 2008). The “position of the slave” mentioned here brings up the subjective limits of

“slave morality” and *resentiment* articulated in the works of Nietzsche. This is crucial to consider in discourses of identity politics which rely on essentialist categories as a form of consolidating interest. *Via Spinoza*, Casarino, in collaboration with Negri, schematizes a way to distinguish between essentialist minority subjectification and political, interest-based political action by arguing for “the common” over “community.” For Casarino, the notion of community is constrained by an adherence to a shared “transcendent essence” that also functions as a mode of exclusion. The common, however, is based on the accepted premise that difference exists: collective action is thus based not on sameness of identity, but on “agreement” between differential modes meeting at the “commonality of projects” undertaken. (Casarino and Negri, 267, 2008).

Casarino’s position is consistent with Deleuze’s understanding of the racial minority in the US as “conjunctive” and “connective” to multiplicitous difference, for instance in the assemblage of differential parts in minor language and literature. “American is worked upon by a Black English, and also a Yellow English, a Red English, a broken English” he writes while referring to the “spray-gun of colors” that transforms standard American English through minor appropriations. Deleuze’s comments invoke George Jackson and language as weaponry when he continues, “if slaves need to have some knowledge of standard English, it is only in order to flee, and to put language itself to flight” (Deleuze, 2002, 58). “And” connects the various uses of language, embodied here, clumsily or not, by colors: “Black English,” “Yellow English” and “Red English” in the spray-gun defile major “white,” English. Moreover, “and” creates a mode by which major, dominant English is seized by a speech impediment, or “stammer”—and, and, and—the conjunction infinitely multiplies.<sup>16</sup>

The perfectly beautiful girl answers Wittman's question of how to reconcile identity and unity. Identity is collapsed into the objective first person pronoun "me" and unity is expressed as the "universe," or, the promise of a "universal I." Is this the same universe as Whitman's, where the drunkard and the venereal sufferer await an unknown but inevitable fate, where the diverse remain diverse in their flow and union, and where the Asian and African hold hands as the American and European do? The "me" in Whitman's "Song of myself" is surely not to be constrained by identity. Or, if it is, it is one afflicted with multiple personality disorder. "I am large... I contain multitudes" famously declares Whitman in a book of poems wherein the "I" who celebrates himself expands into a global entity. Whitman's "me" disintegrates the discrete notion of subjectivity and transforms it into a form of energetic radiation embodied by diverse nations and diverse peoples within nations. This synthesis of diverse elements resonates with Deleuze's writing on Whitman as "fragmentary," as a collection of "samples" and "federated states." These are the "non-totalizable parts" which contain the stuff of a "union," or what Whitman refers to as "Unionism," without defaulting to a model of democracy represented by a homogeneous bloc. This is, for Deleuze, a "society of comrades" fueling the "revolutionary American dream" (Deleuze, 1997, 60).

Hong Kingston's San Francisco epitomizes great diversity. It is the "nation of clusters of equal nations" fulfilling an almost messianic function in its reception of peoples from around the world. This reception is mediated between the first person pronoun and the masses. Through Wittman, the reconciliation between identity and unity, situated here as the polarities of individuated subjectivity and of the world at large, is synthetically stitched together through the action of his play and interaction of the

characters, both in and out of role. Hong Kingston's visions of identity, unity and America are not, however, a clone of Whitman's. Her novel is not the effervescent, lusty paean that Whitman penned over a century before. Yet Hong Kingston does deploy 1960's yellow Wittman to channel 1850's white Whitman in a style that is unmistakably Whitman-esque:

We are as face cards being shuffled and my fanning arms are merging into the images of the fanning arms of others. And the world is in sync. In sync at last. God Almighty, in sync at last. Feet go with drums. Heart booms to bass. My pulse, its pulse. Its pulse, my pulse. Ears, eyes, synchronized. A ballet dancer and an m.s. spastic—no different—O democratic light. Innards at one with the rest of the world” (Hong Kingston, 1987, 110).

This is a vignette from the climax of the party, when the music is pulsing the loudest and keeping even time to the flashing beat of a strobe light. Wittman finds himself “monkeying around,” dancing wildly amidst a sea of other bodies that seem frozen in darkness and then once again illuminated in the bright, blinking light as Judy Louis did on the bus ride over. Wittman almost enters a trance-like state where he feels completely in monistic bliss with the other dancers. Shortly after, the drone of a siren approaches. The party-goers are hyper-sensitized by the war in Vietnam as well as by domestic actions against student activism on the Berkeley campus, Peoples' Park, the streets of Oakland, etc. They wonder if they're being bombed or raided as the local police begin to comb the party. But for a duration of time, marked by its seeming timelessness,

dancing Wittman succumbs to the unity he feels with the other dancers' fanning limbs, the pulsing music, and the strobing light.

This notion of unity is essential to understanding how identity functions for Hong Kingston specifically, and for Asian American experiences and perspectives generally. Unity adopts a decidedly politicized edge which is keen to the concerns of race and racism. The "crowd" in *Tripmaster Monkey* is Asian. It is, as mentioned, a "yellow horde" that carries the connotation of menace, or "yellow peril." The beginnings of the Euro-American rhetorical circulation of "yellow horde" in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century actually coincide with the writing of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. The latter text itself was planted in the soil of Jacksonian democracy, under the oblivious glare of "democratic light." The yellow horde, however, is stigmatized by its particular history of origin, Asia. Wittman acknowledges his desire to affect some sort of unification between himself and the globe. Yet he expresses it in ways that also pay homage to his minority heritage when he thinks aloud, "the purpose of the population explosion is to make all the multitudinous ways of being human. We are like the water of the *I Ching*, fluxing and flowing, seeking and filling each crack of each stream, each ocean..." (Hong Kingston, 1987, 103).

The *I Ching* or "Book of Change" upholds the "eternal truth" that all things are subject to flow, transformation, chance, etc. That is to say, no thing is sentenced to truth claims beyond its nature for mutability. The yellow horde that Hong Kingston conceptually re-appropriates at book's end, led by "tripmaster monkey" Wittman, is nestled within a larger current, a "population explosion," reflecting both the immediate generational demographics of the Post-WWII "baby boom" and the flourishing population of California due to over a century of immigration. The "multitudinous ways

of being,” as well, refers to three concentric demographic spheres. America itself “swarms” with “diverse nations” which contribute to its dynamic constitution. Within the diversity of ethnic communities residing in the US is Asia America, which is itself variegated nationally, culturally, linguistically, ethnically, etc. And within the Asian American population subsists the Chinese American community which, again, is a diverse collection of different ethnicities and languages. Of course, the valences of identity as a Chinese American is further compounded by other considerations such as gender, sexual orientation, class, etc. Yet I make recourse to Deleuze and Guattari in order to further my argument that none of these anchor points of identity are permanently moored: subject positions can shift and move in ways that undermine the ability to ascertain absolute ontological positions based on their relation to representational identity. “Being Chinese,” “Being animal,” “Being woman,” “Being vegetable,” etc—in a sense, the predicate is inconsequential. Being-anything is, according to Deleuze and Guattari, a hoax which has grave philosophical consequences. Deleuze and Guattari thus mock the established concept of “Being,” as eternal, inherent, immutable ontological condition in their response, “Becoming Chinaman,” “Becoming animal,” “Becoming woman,” “Becoming vegetable,” etc.

Wittman’s musings on fluxing and flowing is, incidentally, in the section of the narrative wherein he assists his friend Charlie as a “tripmaster” for the party-goers who have just ingested LSD. Wittman remains lucid while those around him alter their consciousnesses. While guiding their trip he falls into a tranquil groove meditating on “me and the universe, the universe and me” when he is ambushed by one the trippers over his racial “difference.” A random white woman comments with gleeful abandon on



Wittman's characteristically east Asian low nasal bridge and almond shaped eyes likening his face to that of a "flounder": "'Hey, I can see both his eyes. I'm looking from the side and I can see either eye... can you see out of there? How can you see out of there?'" (Hong Kingston, 1987, 106). The conversation continues as an Asian American woman, Yoshi, approaches the group and explains to the tripping whites that "their" eyes have "epicanthic folds adapted to harsh climates." Admiring Wittman's "double eye lids" (creased lids) and bemoaning her own "single eye lids" (smooth lids); she announces her intention to have them surgically altered. Her simpleness engenders curiosity and pity from the whites and unbridled hatred from Wittman. Wittman compounds his contempt with collaborative shame for not challenging the oblivious Yoshi, for her perverse desire to assimilate, and for not confronting the white spectators, for their brutally ignorant and racist comments.

Wittman's affective transition from intoxicating unity to abject ethnic shame and indignation underscores a lingering question for this analysis: how can a political response, which is traditionally organized around a feature such as identity as a form of consolidating interest, become actualized if identity is evacuated? That is to say, when identity is disarmed of the power of "I" or "me" that distinguishes it from a union, defined by the majority, how can the one perceived as minority respond? Ceasing to be a minority is impossible. Trying "to pass" by using assimilationist tactics such as having one's "eyes fixed," as Yoshi does, is one approach. Wittman finds, however, that challenging the majority itself is more appealing, though he has yet to consistently build up the fortitude to do so.

Tactics that dialectically consider both angles of the dilemma, such as “strategic essentialism,” and tactics that arise from a performative and parodic re-appropriation of formal representation have undeniable currency. However, I argue we would do well to explore other tactics which could also have the potential for forcing, from a minor perspective, a major reconsideration of the very fundamental premises upon which difference, as a disenfranchising principle, is thought and maintained. Becoming is one such tactic in its capacity to disrupt dominant narratives of Being that insinuate themselves into the construction of identity.

As I have striven to demonstrate in this chapter on *becoming* and the *unbecoming* use of metaphor, becoming is not an identical nor equivocal process for all subject positions. Rimbaud’s “becoming nègre” is simply different than Wittman’s “becoming Japanese.” Deleuze and Guattari’s “becoming Chinaman” is different from Wittman’s “becoming Whitman.” Whitman’s “becoming monkey” is different from Judy Louis’ “becoming boar” and Gregor Samsa’s “becoming roach”: no becomings are equivalent, perfectly reciprocal or interchangeable. Why? It is because the pathways from Being to becoming reflect the coordinates of positionality, both in social power and subjectivity. They start from, travel through and go through different points in a completely open field of space. To state otherwise would be to disavow the real in history and the specific attributes of the particular. To state otherwise would be to diminish the truly revolutionary power of difference.

It is also worth questioning whether or not the concept of “becoming imperceptible” is at serious risk of interpreting difference, as particularity, and then erasing it under the sign of singular univocity. I am not arguing here that this is how

Deleuze intended for his positive ontological system to be read. It is, however, easy to misread the concept by those who are all too eager to become “women, minorities, beasts,” etc, through an act of subjective mimesis. This is especially true of those readers whose interests are not at immediate risk of disenfranchisement or displacement. Metaphorically “becoming other” would potentially impact the semiotic refuge of “protected classes” mentioned earlier. I believe that Wittman Ah Sing illustrates both the problematic and one potential line of flight through the problematic concerning the political stakes of such becomings.

#### *Section V: Seizure and Writing*

As alluded to earlier, minor writing for Deleuze and Guattari is, in a sense, a double act of possession: the writer to a certain extent is always engaged in something akin to “automatic writing,” or writing that is not limited solely to the consciousness of the individual writing. The minor writer is possessed by and within a collective enunciation that issues through his or her writing. Inversely, the writing lays possession upon the dominant language itself, reworking it through deterritorialization of language.<sup>17</sup> “Becoming-writer” in this sense, corresponds to becoming-imperceptible in a way that does not subsume difference to a field of undifferentiated plasma.<sup>18</sup> Becoming-writer allows for the existence of difference through multiple, proliferating, “fluxing and flowing” lines of expression. The affect of automatic writing is palpable in Deleuze and Guattari’s invocation of writing as a line of flight when they write, “to write is to become, but has nothing to do with becoming a writer... the becomings contained in writing when

it is not wedded to established order-words, but itself traces lines of flight are quite different” (Deleuze, 2002, 43).

Deleuze’s notion of becoming-writer resonates neatly with Derrida’s notion of “becoming literary” in the essay “Freud and the Scene of Writing.” Here, Derrida discusses the possibility of the “becoming-literary of the literal.” In the work of Freud, Derrida sees a series of failed attempts towards understanding the signifier because thus far the psychoanalytic review of literature consistently invests itself in understanding signifieds at the expense of the signifier. Such a history of psychoanalytic readings, writes Derrida, reveals “the entire history of literary forms themselves, and the history of everything within them which was destined precisely to authorize this disdain of the signifier” (Derrida, 1978, 230). Here as elsewhere, Derrida takes the question of Being to task through its historicity. This is especially true when contextualizing *Being* as *presence*. Being for Derrida, is a matter of historical and metaphysical import: it is indicative of both a movement integral to history as well as to the limits of historical closure, set by epistemic brackets, within the archives of metaphysics.

The particular history of writing which prioritizes “non-literary signifieds” also privileges the model of the metaphor through the apparatus of the “writing machine.” Derrida insists that for Freud semiotics do not “transcribe living, full speech, master of itself and self-present.” Rather, these metaphors “illuminate traces” which are located squarely in the province of the psyche. He continues:

Freud *does not simply use* the metaphor of nonphonetic writing; a movement unknown to classical philosophy is perhaps undertaken here, somewhere between the implicit and the explicit... It will eventually invade the entirety of the psyche. Psychological content will be represented by a text whose essence is irreducibly graphic. The structure of the psychological apparatus will be represented by a writing machine. What questions will these representations impose upon us? (Derrida, 1978, 199).

Derrida then answers his own question. His response to the Freudian reliance on metaphor in writing is that it ultimately “presupposes an originary text, one that is immobile: the serene presence of a statue...” rather than living, spontaneous, and present in itself (Derrida, 1978, 211). Metaphor, or the particular device that enables the relations of psychoanalytic representation, is seen by Derrida as “the ‘unnatural,’ historical production of a *supplementary* machine”: it is likened to the accretion of signification “*added to* the psychological organization in order to supplement its finitude” (Derrida, 1978, 228). The production of Derrida’s “writing machine,” or psychological apparatus, requires a certain “enigmatic writing,” that is both present and absent.<sup>19</sup>

As broached in Chapter One, Derrida connects *différance* to the process by which repetition disguises a lack of origins: “to say that *différance* is originary is simultaneously to erase the myth of a present origin. Which is why ‘originary’ must be understood as having been crossed out, without which *différance* would be derived from an original plenitude. It is a non-origin which is originary” (Derrida, 1978, 203). The “presence” of *différance* in actuality cites a disappeared presence. This erasure, displacement, substitution ultimately signals the emptiness and absence of presence. As previously indicated, in so far as Derrida understands *différance* as “the displaced and equivocal

passage of one different thing to another, from one term of an opposition to the other,” difference is characterized as an active, dialectical movement, rather than an as formal determination (Derrida, 1982, 17). As he presents it in “Freud and the Scene of Writing,” *différance*, and specifically *différance* as identity, *différance* within the “economy of the same,” is the “pre-opening” of difference understood in the history of metaphysics (Derrida, 1978, 203). Derrida questions the inability of Freud’s interpretative system to push metaphors to their absolute limit by invoking the distinction between the pleasure principle and the reality principle. The distinction is not one that creates a set of external relations between reality and pleasure. Rather, it is yet another example of the deferral, the *trace*, of the non-presence immanent within presence.

To bring us back to the question of writing, Derrida argues that the history of metaphysics, *via* Freud, as well as Heidegger, is thus specifically implicit in the subordination of *writing as difference*. Writing, and its articulation as difference, has historically been subordinated to the image of *Logos*. Recall that for Derrida, presence is ultimately meaningless and derivative. *Différance*, on the other hand, is meaningless but primary.<sup>20</sup> Freud’s semiotic system creates a “detour” within the history of how speech and writing are interpreted metaphysically. However, his role does not fundamentally change this history. Instead, his introduction of “writing enigmatically” creates a new dimension to writing as metaphor whilst turning away from a serious consideration of literary signifiers.

The “unbecoming” of language, a resistance to language held captive to the operations of representation, is the “becoming of the literary” to Derrida. It is, as well, the becoming of minor literature to Deleuze and Guattari. Recall Deleuze and Guattari’s

argument that Kafka's work challenges statist forms of interpretation, metaphorization, and thus deterritorializes major language. In an attempt to return us to the question of the minor remember that:

A minority never exists ready-made, it is only formed on lines of flight, which are also its way of advancing and attacking" (Deleuze, 2002, 43).

This idea of minorities "who [do] not necessarily write on their own account, about whom no one writes either" is essential to the question of political representation broached earlier and aimed specifically at Deleuze and Guattari. I will paraphrase here the major question of this analysis which I previously introduced: does Deleuze and Guattari's use of the minor resort to a major appropriation of the minor and in so doing subordinate the minor figure, *qua* minority, to the plane of representation? That is to say, does their figurative writing of the minor, from a majoritarian perspective, adequately express the minor as it is most radically connected to minor writing practices?

This question extends itself beyond the objects of my analysis and onto the broader plane of the literary: are minor writing practices reflected in major writing? No. Is "anyone" capable of writing the official narrative of the minor? No. There is only minor writing which, by dint of being "non-official," inassimilable, collectively enunciated, and politically immediate, subverts the official narrative by setting it off on different lines of flight. For Deleuze and Guattari, these lines of flight are at once final, absolute and universal. Yet they are reckoned so through particularization.

They insist that, “the ultimate aim of literature is to set free, in the delirium, this creation of a health or this invention of a people, that is, a possibility of life. To write for this people who are missing... (‘for’ means less ‘in the place of’ than ‘for the benefit of’)” (Deleuze, 1997, 4). Literature is written for the benefit of the missing people. The woman, the black, the aboriginal, the child, the Eskimo, the Asian. The litanical murmur of Rimbaud, echoed in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, reflects the national origins of the excluded. The murmur shares a historical cadence with the National Origins Quota of 1924 which designated a similar list of immigrants, the Chinese, the Korean, the Japanese, the Pilipino, the Malaysian, the Indian, and the Turkish, among others. This congressional act is preceded by two other major US immigration acts. These series of legal prohibitions distinguished not only which country of origin, but also which country of descent, would determine exclusion.<sup>21</sup>

Yet as Deleuze and Guattari claim, the majority represents “nobody.” Further, revolutionary movements involve the “becoming-minoritarian” of everybody. In this way, minor writing, inassimilable, political and collective, is that writing which facilitates becoming for everybody: minor writing traces the line of flight for “becoming-everybody.” This writing is itself subject to “fluxes and flows,” in Hong Kingston’s words, or “a flux which combines with other fluxes,” in Deleuze’s, resulting in the “minority becomings of the world” (Deleuze, 2002, 50). These fluxes are bound together by the binding power of the “and,” or “the conjunction, the transmutation of fluxes, through which life escapes from the resentment of persons, societies and reigns” (Deleuze, 2002, 50).



The bourgeois isolation of the subject is caught in the “I.” Yet recall that identity is more complex and poly-historical than the West would have us believe. Hong Kingston explicitly illustrates the Chinese “I”: 我 through Wittman’s legion of “I”s: ”I. I. I. I. I. I. I. I. I. I.-warrior.” However, she also provides another, more intriguing pictogram of identity, quoted from the Monkey King’s aria in *The Journey to the West* (Hong Kingston, 1987, 305):

I. I. I.  
I. I. I.  
I. I. I.

This “I” is not alone: it can be choreographed into a greater, multitudinous formation. Using Romanized script, Hong Kingston crafts an ideograph that betrays the assumption that “I” is cut off from other “I”s. But she retains a conception of “I” when the tools of identity are necessary for survival, rights, and the license to live equitably. This is a mutable, flexible I which is forever “fluxing.” This “I,” as her hero Wittman Ah Sing shows us, is constantly becoming other to himself.

Becoming involves a forfeiture of subjectivity but possession of something other—seizure. The “shuffling of face cards and fanning arms merging into the images of the fanning arms of others,” noted by Wittman is reminiscent of what Deleuze refers to as “losing one’s face” in the process of imperceptibility (Deleuze, 2002, 50). According to Deleuze, “everybody” is the non-personal, first person collective that has the capacity to become imperceptible from one perspective but has distinctive features under different

ones. Similarly, everybody can partake in the “innocence of becoming,” or that process of “joyful affirmation of the play of a world [of signs]” that gleefully evades a center (grounded within the signified) without mourning the loss or lack of center (Derrida, 1978, 292). The power of the impersonal in writing advances the role of the subject-less subject within the collective enunciation.<sup>22</sup> This conception of the subject, “I-warrior,” can be put to dangerous political use against master discourses of difference. Yet this commitment to becoming-minor can only occur concomitantly with undoing “being major” with all the political investment, on “everybody’s” part, that that implies.

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<sup>1</sup> Also see Deleuze’s interview with Antonio Negri in “Control and Becoming” wherein he repeats that the majority is “nobody” in order to produce a notion of minority as a form of becoming, as the agent of an on-going process of change (Deleuze, 1990, 174).

<sup>2</sup> Regarding racism through the trope of “faciality,” Deleuze and Guattari write that “racism operates by the determination of degrees of deviance in relation to the White-Man face, which endeavors to integrate nonconforming traits into increasingly eccentric and backward waves, sometimes tolerating them at given places under given conditions, in a given ghetto, sometimes erasing them from the wall, which never abides alterity (it’s a Jew, it’s an Arab, it’s a Negro, it’s a lunatic...)... Racism propagates waves of sameness” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 178).

<sup>3</sup> For Deleuze and Guattari, however, the minor, like the woman of “becoming-woman,” and the animal of “becoming-animal,” is a matter of strategic positionality and not legal distinction. In their ambivalent defense of Deleuze and Guattari’s work on the minor, Abdul Jan Mohamed and David Lloyd ask whether “‘Becoming minor’ is not a question of essence (as the stereotypes of minorities in dominant ideology would want us to believe) but a question of position: a subject-position that in the final analysis can be defined only in ‘political terms’” (Jan Mohamed and Lloyd, 1990, 9). What Jan Mohamed and Lloyd aptly call into question is whether the category of the minor belongs to everybody within the scheme of an egalitarian and just society. They caution that *en route* to this dream the category of the minor must also be retained for particular tactical uses. Without this “protected” claim, the minority has no way to articulate his or her subject position of social discrimination, exclusion, and oppression.

<sup>4</sup> For a more comprehensive discussion on the feud between Frank Chin and Maxine Hong Kingston, see Patricia P. Chu’s “Tripmaster Monkey, Frank Chin and the Chinese Heroic Tradition” in *Assimilating Asian: Gendered Strategies of Authorship in Asian America*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> The Chinese zodiac considers the pig to be cheerful, honest, direct, industrious, etc. Positive Chinese attributes notwithstanding, the pig in Judaeo-Christian-Islamic cultures is merely considered swine, that is, profane, lazy, ugly, dull-witted and dirty.

<sup>6</sup> Jan Mohamed and Lloyd take issue with Deleuze and Guattari’s unsupported assessment that there is a scarcity of talent in minority literature. Jan Mohamed and Lloyd locate the basis for a “collective assemblage of enunciation,” instead, in the literary efforts of minor writers who “coerced into a negative, generic subject-position... respond by transforming that position into a positive, collective one.” They shift the focus away from possible aetiological causes, such as the “wealth of a major, ‘master,’ literature,” and toward political praxis in the form of coalition building out of diverse experiential writing. (Jan Mohamed, Abdul R. and David Lloyd. *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourses*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

<sup>7</sup> For instance, see Camilla Grigger's use of Deleuze and Guattari's "despotic face" in her critique of white women's faciality in visual culture in *Becoming-Woman*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997). Also see Jeffrey T. Nealon's "Refraining, Becoming-Black: Repetition and Difference in Amiri Baraka's 'Blues People'" from *Symplokē* (6.1-2, 1998. 83-95) and Charles Stivale's *Disenchanting Les Bons Temps: Identity and Authenticity in Cajun Music and Dance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003). Also valuable for analyses of Deleuze and Guattari in relation to gender are the works of Rosi Braidotti, Moira Gatens, Claire Colebrook, Eleanor Kaufman, and Elizabeth Grosz, among others.

<sup>8</sup> As Dana Polan saliently criticized in her foreword to Alice Jardine's *Gynesis*, "Already, some of the American critics' adulation of other Deleuze-Guattari texts, especially *Anti-Oedipus*, suggests how quickly a politics of the rhizomatic can assuage the unhappy guilty conscience of the depoliticized intellectual by offering him or her the alibi of a process in which everything one does can be something that one can pretend is politically engaged... a kind of anarcho-voluntarist fantasy... Men get a chance to take flight from their entrapment, but women get no chance at all except to be perfectly invisible in the flow of the discourse (Jardine 1985). A picking up of Deleuze and Guattari, then, would have to examine not only what they enable but also what they disenable" (xxvi).

<sup>9</sup> Deleuze and Guattari reject the model of filiation in Freud in favor of roaming, innovative filiations formed on the basis of desire rather than on the basis of nation and state ("the" people). This is further elaborated in the concept of the "3 Syntheses of desire" (connective, disjunctive, conjoined) in *Anti-Oedipus*.

<sup>10</sup> Deleuze and Guattari explicitly connect how "desiring machines" relate to the concept of deterritorialization when they write, "whenever a territorial assemblage is taken up by a movement that deterritorializes it (whether under so-called natural or artificial conditions), we say that a machine is released. That in fact is the distinction we would like to propose between *machine* and *assemblage*: a machine is like a set of cutting edges that insert themselves into the assemblage undergoing Deterritorialization, and draw variations and mutations of it. For there are no mechanical effects; effects are always machinic, in other words, depend on a machine that is plugged into an assemblage and has been freed through Deterritorialization" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 333).

<sup>11</sup> It can be argued that Rimbaud was extending his free-wheeling, hedonistic, expatriate sensibilities within his personal life onto his writing. Interestingly though, he does not address that other valence of his outsider status as a sexual minority, which he realized in his famously stormy and poetic relationship with Paul Verlaine.

<sup>12</sup> This sensibility would extend to other forms of becoming as well: "Even blacks, as the Black Panthers said, must become-black. Even women must become-woman. Even Jews must become Jewish" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, 291).

<sup>13</sup> Derrida, as well, subverts the history of the first person subject. This history constitutes the foundation of consciousness, or the subject's self-presence by collapsing the pronominal Subject, "I," with the presence of Being. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida writes, "immediately is there the myth of consciousness. Speech and the consciousness of speech—that is to say consciousness simply as self-presence—are the *phenomenon*, that presumed suppression of difference, that lived reduction of the opacity of the signifier, are the origin of what is called presence. That which is not subjected to the process of difference is *present*. The present is that from which we believe we are able to think time, effacing the inverse necessity: to think the present from time as difference" (Derrida, 1974, 166).

<sup>14</sup> Spivak's argument against Foucault and Deleuze in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" has multiple points. First, she considers Foucault's "heterogenic" and Deleuze's "molecular" conceptions of power in the "Intellectuals and Power" interview wherein power is said to traverse the field of social relations from multiple directions, within multiple modalities, and sedimenting within multiple locations. For Spivak, this conceptualization of power is consistent with a bourgeois discourse of subjectivity that supports the intellectual imperialism of the West. It takes for granted the universal and privileged positionality of first world male subjectivity and, in doing so, circumscribes the third world subject. (Spivak, Gayatri. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

<sup>15</sup> Hong Kingston divulges Wittman's envious thoughts by writing, "experiences befall this friend even when he means to be on vacation as a tourist. Japanese brought a fox; Chinese brought pigs and goats. And

Executive Order 9066 has given to Issei, Nisei, Sansei, their American history. And places: Tanforan, Manzanar, Tule Lake, Arkansas, Sand Island. And righteous politics, the Sansei's turn to say No and No to loyalty oaths and the draft. We ought to give A.J.A.s a deep gomenasai apology without them having to ask. If only he hadn't been but a toddler at the time, Wittman would have gotten on the train that took people who looked like himself away" (Hong Kingston, 1987, 126).

<sup>16</sup> Deleuze writes that "it is not a question of speaking a language as if one was [sic] a foreigner, it is a question of being a foreigner in one's own language, in the sense that American is indeed the Blacks' language... English, on the other hand, creates composite words whose only link is an implied AND relationship with the Outside. Blue-eyed boy: a boy, some blue, and eyes—an assemblage. AND... AND... AND, stammering..." (Deleuze, 2002, 59).

<sup>17</sup> I am revisiting Deleuze and Guattari's statement that "writing has a double function: to translate everything into assemblages and to dismantle the assemblages. The two are the same thing." They further this argument in order to distinguish between three ways of approaching Kafka, "machinic indexes," "abstract machines," and the "assemblages of the machine." (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, 46-47).

<sup>18</sup> Deleuze and Guattari go as far as to respond to "the aim, the finality of writing? Still way beyond a woman-becoming, a Negro-becoming, an animal-becoming, etc, beyond a minority-becoming, there is a final enterprise of the becoming-imperceptible. Oh no, a writer cannot wish to be 'known', recognized. The imperceptible, common characteristic of the greatest speed and the greatest slowness. Writing has no other end than to lose one's face, to jump over or pierce through the wall, to plane down the wall very patiently" (Deleuze, 2002, 45).

<sup>19</sup> Derrida invokes the "mystical pad" that manifests traces of writing which can vanish with a quick lifting of vellum in "Freud and the Scene of Writing."

<sup>20</sup> Through the role of difference *qua différance*, the play of differences through repetition and substitution is older than "the truth" of Being (Derrida, 1986, 22). *Différance* as Being is a creative matrix. Or, as Derrida writes, "the ontico-ontological difference and its ground (*Grund*) in the 'transcendence of Dasein' (*Vom Wesen des Grundes* [Frankfurt am Main, 1955], p. 16 [pl 29]) are not absolutely originary. Difference by itself would be more 'originary,' but one would no longer be able to call it 'origin' or 'ground,' those notions belonging essentially to the history of onto-theology, to the system of functioning as the effacing of difference" (Derrida, 1987, 23).

<sup>21</sup> The National Origins Quota, also known as the Immigration Act of 1924 or Asian Exclusion Act, has precedent in the Page Act of 1875, which barred all Chinese women on the grounds that they were automatically assumed to be prostitutes until they could irrevocably prove otherwise. It is also preceded by the Chinese Exclusion Act (CEA) of 1882, and the latter's many revisions and extensions, up until the quota was lifted in 1965. The Magnuson Act of 1943 repealed the CEA, allowing limited numbers of Chinese to immigrate into the US. This happened during the very time of Japanese descendents' internment as a show of alliance with China during WWII.

<sup>22</sup> On the power of the "impersonal" Deleuze writes that literature "exists only when it discovers beneath apparent persons the power of an impersonal... It is not the first two persons that function as the condition for literary enunciation; literature begins only when a third person is born in us that strips us of the power to say 'I' (Blanchot's 'neuter'). Of course, literary characters are perfectly individuated, and are neither vague nor general; but all their individual traits elevate them to a vision that carries them off in an indefinite, like a becoming that is too powerful for them..." (Deleuze, 1997, 3).

## Conclusion

Rising up against the master's discourse of difference is no easy matter. Uprisings never are. It is difficult to contend with those forces that impose difference externally, the repressive agencies that act on the master's behalf to subdue threats against the order of identity. It is perhaps even more challenging, however, to subvert the national narrative of difference that has been inscribed conceptually. Over the past half millennium this discourse has been and continues to be ingrained, through hegemonic devices, in the hearts and minds of both its majoritarian and minoritarian identified residents. The master's discourse of difference persists in the ideas that guide our culture to date. Despite the desire to erase the taint associated with difference through liberal humanist principles, actively deflecting the stigma of belonging to what Attorney General Holder refers to as a "nation of cowards" who cannot confront their own racism, we do not inhabit an age wherein radical differences are truly tolerated: radical difference can not be tolerated so long as it cannot be conceived.

This dissertation could have taken different form. Namely, I could have presented a lineage that charted how conceptions of difference moved from one episteme to the next, and accordingly, offered an analysis of how the historical conditions of each epistemic spike contributed to the totality of the discourse through textual evidence. However, I chose to resist this narrative: on an intuitive level it seemed that crafting this sort of chronology of difference ran counter to those very attributes of difference for which this dissertation argues, difference as a-relational, difference as singular, difference

as the event which can not be subsumed back upon some sort of ideal, teleological script. To subject difference to this sort of scripting would be to position it as a sort of redemption or salvation that would subordinate its power of invention and possibility to a transcendent plane. I believe that this method of presentation would not only have made recourse to “the master’s tools” but would have kept the edifice of the “master’s house” intact as well. The affirmative conception of difference which Audre Lorde advocates, and about which the theorists, writers and artists I have assembled write, does not represent a *telos* of any kind. It does not constitute the future of a diversifying America in a post-racial epoch. The kind of difference this dissertation attempts to retain cannot be confined to statist narrativizations of temporality and historical progress.

If it is true, as Deleuze and Guattari claim, that “ours is becoming the age of minorities,” difference is a timely issue. Yet given their conception of “becoming” and “minority,” we ought to consider this proclamation very carefully. Becoming is a continual process of dynamic movement. Becomings of every form, great and small, visible and imperceptible, erode the history of Being of which Deleuze, Deleuze and Guattari and Derrida are steadfastly critical. The minor(ity), as well, can not be defined in simple terms—not merely by numerical presence, access to power and political representation, or cultural artifacts that register grievance with majoritarian discourses. The power of the minor(ity) resides in its ability to effect alternative hermeneutical practices and to harness those practices with texts that push the limits of historical narrative, law, literature, visual culture, etc.

If “theory is a box of tools,” then it can only benefit those invested in minority American struggles to consider all the theoretical tools at our disposal. This is not to say

that seizing the master's tools is the only or the best tactic. Arguably, one of the very real drawbacks of relying upon hegemonic apparati to undo hegemonic structures is that hegemony is not fundamentally at threat. This is Lorde's contention. But tools, like toys, are not constrained by their identity. They are, instead, defined by their function—their value lies not in what they are but how they can be used.

The textual objects selected for analysis in this dissertation provide this function. Walker and Ringgold's artworks, Bell's *hypnos*, Coltrane's incidental poetry, and Hong Kingston's fiction illustrate eruptions of difference thought differently. They are exemplary of works that conceive radical difference in ways that traditional rights discourse and works focusing on the representational valence of identity can not. These works disrupt the logic of identity not through characterizations of identity-less or identity-free subjects. Instead, they resist normative, dominant modes of reading and viewing. The reading strategies their work invites are consistent with reading difference in a minor key that harmonizes with the philosophy of difference grounding this dissertation.

“To have been forced into a mode of existence so unbearable that one's own desire can express itself only as demand for acknowledgment and recognition of such an unbearable existence is to be in the position of the slave” (Casarino and Negri, 258-259, 2008). Casarino makes this point in order to stress the need to move beyond the mere reclamation of acknowledgement and recognition. The slave is determined by his or her impotent humility, by his or her desire to be accepted by the master. This form of ideological slavery is cultivated in the differential forms of subjectivity that position the consciousness of the slave in relation to the master. Yet slaves are not merely made

slaves by dint of their consciousness. If this were the case, the slave would merely have to refuse consenting to ideological forces subordinating his or her consciousness. Refusal of ideology does not entirely replace the active subversion of it. This is precisely the point where theoretical tools capable of enacting a deconstruction of the law and envisioning alternate reading practices of culture become so valuable. These tools are valuable insofar as they may be deployed in a struggle for justice that does not dismiss the radical difference of the particular, particular interests and the ability of the particular, in its state of singular differentiation, to persist in itself. Walker, Ringgold, Bell, Coltrane and Hong Kingston's texts, in dialogue with Deleuze, Deleuze and Guattari, and Derrida, lead a textual uprising against the master discourse of difference that has endeavored to enslave it.



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