

# The social life of black things

## Fred Moten's *consent not to be a single being*

David Lloyd

I want to identify not with creaturely life but with the stolen life of imagining things.

Fred Moten, 'There is no Racism Intended'

Fred Moten's three-volume collection of essays, *consent not to be a single being*, draws together some fifteen years of his consistently inventive but widely dispersed work in Black Studies, thus allowing his reader finally to begin the task of grasping it in its ensemble as something like a whole.\* That task is complicated by precisely what makes the reading so exhilarating, namely the form that the work mostly takes. These are essays that, as African American poet Nathaniel Mackey aptly notes in his endorsement of the second volume, *Stolen Life*, each constitute 'what John Coltrane called pursuance, in flight and toward something ... an unremitting search prone to unexpected turns.' Their construction is – as befits a critic who is also a poet and performance artist – poetic, in the sense that their flight often operates by way of association and through condensations and displacements of meaning which, though working at a high level of theoretical engagement, obey a logic of resonance and turn, recurrence and dispersion rather than gradual exposition. They remain in the problematic they engage with rather than seeking resolution and exit.

That refusal is intrinsic to an ethic as well as an aesthetic that drives the writing: both defy any injunction to pursue the emancipation or resolution of the subject through the (impossible) securing of autonomy from condition. The motto of these essays might be the phrase 'I ran from it but was still in it', from the third part of the trilogy, *The Universal Machine* [UM 39], that also fur-

nished the title of one of Moten's poetic sequences.<sup>1</sup> For the reviewer who is drawn to offer a preliminary account of the whole assembly, this entails an invidious task akin to paraphrasing a poem: the work of reduction inevitably does a certain violence to the form. What passes here for an exposition of Moten's thinking proceeds, then, by reassembling strands of argument that are, in the original text, widely dispersed rather than continuously developed. The purpose is to offer a pathway through a body of work whose very volume might daunt the first-time reader even as its content excites and inspires. That pathway hopefully also will serve as a gateway into the work.

### Aesthetic tradition as radical tradition

Moten's first book, *In the Break*, was subtitled *The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*.<sup>2</sup> One way to understand the gathering of brilliant, mobile and rhizomatically interconnected essays that compose *consent not to be a single being* is as an extended adjustment of that earlier subtitle into the proposition that the black radical tradition is (above all) an aesthetic tradition. It is as if the parenthetical hesitation in the phrase 'black radicalism is (like) black music' were now subject to an ongoing decision that abolishes it:<sup>3</sup> Moten's claim is not that the black radical tradition *has* its accompanying musical forms, but that black music – by extension, black aesthetic practice in general – *is* and cannot be separated from black radicalism, even by so slight a difference as resemblance entails. Just how radical a proposition that

\* *consent not to be a single being* consists of three volumes: *Black and Blur* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017); *Stolen Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018); and *The Universal Machine* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018). These are cited in the text hereafter as BB, SL and UM respectively.

turns out to be may not be evident at first sight. It would be all too easy to reproduce the dismissive compliment that reduces black folks to their cultural performances, a devious tradition that runs from ‘the pageantry of the coffle’ under slavery to contemporary ‘play-labour’, the transformation of black play into commodities that Robin Kelley has trenchantly analysed.<sup>4</sup> Such a reduction depends already on the positioning of aesthetic culture over and against the constraining spheres of the political and the economic, as a space of free and harmonious play that pretends to compensate for the effects of the division of labour, not to speak of coerced labour. The condescension of such compensatory allowances does not survive Moten’s radical subversion, his thorough overturning of that aesthetic tradition from its very root in Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*.

To put things this way is to acknowledge, as Moten everywhere does, that the aesthetic tradition furnishes not only, and not so much, a theory of art as a theory of freedom and of the subject, which, taken together, constitute the conditions of possibility for any modern concept of the political. The aesthetic is an expressly regulative faculty for Kant, both in the technical sense that its concepts necessarily have no constitutive or determinative force and in the sense that Moten elaborates, its will to regulate the ‘lawless freedom of the imagination’. But it is also regulative in the sense of establishing the terms in and through which freedom and the autonomy of the subject are thought as properties of the universal human. If, in one regard, aesthetic freedom is compensatory for restraint felt elsewhere in the system, a reserve of ‘free play’ to the side of the constraints of labour and the unfreedom of political life, its larger concept exemplifies and prepares human freedom in and through identification with the Subject whose abstraction from particular material properties and interests grounds its universal claims.

Such a formal conception of freedom as the autonomy of the subject and as categorical for human being requires in the first place the subject’s indifference to its own materiality and to any enjoyment of its object. Likewise, the judgment of taste is obliged to let go, ‘so far as possible ... of the element of matter, i.e., sensation, in our general state of representation’, and reflect solely upon the ‘formal peculiarities’ of that representation.<sup>5</sup> The formal freedom of the subject is, for Kant, at once

the condition and the product of that ‘public or common sense’ without which no realm of liberal political subjecthood could be imagined. But the autonomous subject is necessarily set over and against another human that Kant elsewhere designates the pathological subject. This is the human subjected to necessity, whether in the form of external forces or of internal needs and desires, the human as material being, capable perhaps of approaching freedom but only at the price of being subjected to formation. This formal freedom is both closely regulated and regulative of a disposition of human beings and their relative value along a scale that ranges from the representative universal and free subject to humans subjected to matter and necessity. A whole history of cultural pedagogy or *Bildung* instituted in and by liberal states through the apparatus of education stems from this exemplary model of freedom and continues to play out to this day.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, as Moten points out, ‘The regulative discourse on the aesthetic that animates Kant’s critical philosophy is inseparable from the question of race as a mode of conceptualising and regulating human diversity, grounding and justifying inequality and exploitation ...’ [SL 2].

As a counter-aesthetic of life-in-common, rather than a universal common sense that finds its ultimate representation in the state ‘as a kind of degraded representation of commonness’ [SL 8], the black radical tradition, in Moten’s reinscription of it, deconstructs this Kantian regulative discourse at every turn. This is in part because blackness can be read as the ‘anteKantian’ as much as the antiKantian instantiation of that ‘lawless freedom of the imagination’ whose wings and whose flight aesthetic judgment is tasked with clipping. Blackness historically becomes the object of an *aesthetic* regulation in ‘a set of brutally discursive maneuvers’ that critically exceed any of the longstanding phenomena that concern historians and sociologists, that is, the deployment of racial difference in the disciplining of coerced labour or the segmentation of the labour force and its political counterpart, a militant working class. ‘This is so even as what is continually revealed, if not confessed, is that what is now, in the wake of those maneuvers, called blackness makes those very maneuvers possible and – for and as eternally thwarted and dispersed sovereignty – necessary’ [SL 3]. What is revealed across the extended terrain of *consent not to be a single being* is that the aesthetics that is and is of the black radical tradition is

consubstantial with the practices of an alternative sociality or life form that ‘animaterialises’ both a constant underpresence, ‘the dynamic hum of blackness’s facticity’ [SL 10], and the white racial fantasies and projections that constitute the series of figures for sensuality and indiscipline. Those figures ‘have always been inseparable from a “natural” history of inequality’, calling forth and legitimating ‘a predispositional servitude, a captivity in which the embodiment of the need for constraint ... precisely insofar as she [the black (woman)] is supposed to be incapable of self-regulation, is given over to the ultimate form of governance, namely that phantasmatic and im/possible condition of being wholly for another’ [SL 13].

Moten’s aim, however, is not to recuperate black dignity and humanity from the aspersions cast and instrumentalised in the name of regulation, as has been the tendency in so many political and cultural movements predicated on political freedoms embodied in rights and enfranchisement, or to demand those forms of recognition that Frantz Fanon continued to hanker for, a recognition as a subject or ‘being-for-oneself’ to the object whose ‘being is wholly for another’. His project is, rather, to unfold ‘the tumultuous derangements of a certain politicoaesthetic imagination that might more improperly be understood as the essential resistance of the object that manifests itself as lawlessness, as a kind of being against the law, as the lawless freedom and the struggle for freedom in unfreedom, in quite specific modes of discipline and regulation that we call slavery and colonialism’ [SL 55–56].<sup>7</sup> To pursue this ‘politicoaesthetic imagination’ enjoins the elaboration of the protocols through which that ‘tumultuous derangement’ is played out, especially in the procedures of black poetry and black music. Those protocols refuse the formality of the Kantian aesthetic and its abstraction from sensuous enjoyment that determines the pathological subject; they cleave to materiality and to the very feelings that Kant designated ‘pathological’ and thus shape an aesthetic practice that does not seek to lift itself up over the constraints of the flesh, of necessity, the needs and desires that play out in life in common, but inhabits them, in the words of the first volume of the trilogy, *Black and Blur*, in mobile ensemble: ‘it hurts to play this music’ [BB xiii].<sup>8</sup>

Recounting a fraught discussion between visual artist Ad Reinhardt and jazz musician Cecil Taylor, Moten com-

ments at length on the formal and distantiating tendencies of traditional aesthetics, for which ‘detachment’ is ‘the very essence of intellectual and aesthetic experience’, as opposed to the communal and pathological tendencies of ‘black aestheticosocial life’:

To insist on the distinction between the canvas as scene [of forms] and the canvas as thing is to detach oneself from the scene as much as it is also to represent the scene. It is to establish something like a freedom *from the community* in the most highly determined, regulative *legal* sense of that word, in the sharpest sense of its constituting a field in which the human and the (disorderly) thing are precisely, pathologically, theatrically indistinct. Let us call this community the black community, the community that is defined by a certain history of blackness, a history of privation (as Taylor points out) and plenitude, pain and (as Taylor points out) pleasure. It is from and as a sensual commune, from and as an irruptive advent, at once focused and arrayed against the political aesthetics of enclosed common sense, that Taylor’s music emerges. [UM 166–67]

I’ll come back to the question of thingliness that preoccupies Moten in his reflections on blackness momentarily, in order to focus at first on the significance of this ‘pathological’, sensuous aesthetic that forms the ground for a music that emerges from the improvisational, generative ensemble of a life in common.

## Subjecthood and freedom

An apparently constitutive double bind has always bedeviled the study of slavery and of the cultural work of the enslaved and continues to shadow debates on black being in the wake of enslavement and through the historical experience of racial subjugation. The problematic can be stated summarily as follows: if the historian celebrates the vitality of that culture, does the representation of vitality itself represent a mitigation of the unremitting violence of the order of slavery? If, on the other hand, the historian emphasises that unremitting violence and the negation of black being, is the culture, on which the extraordinary traditions of black cultural life in the United States are founded, to be seen as a more or less epiphenomenal compensation, ‘a cry of pain’, so to speak? What are we to make of the *pleasures* of the slave where those pleasures were so often recruited to legitimate the system of the slave economy? As Moten put it in *In the Break*,

Saidiya Hartman ‘allows us to ask: what have objectification and humanisation, both of which we can think in relation to a certain notion of subjection, to do with the essential historicity, the quintessential modernity, of black performance?’<sup>9</sup> In this question, implied again in Moten’s paraphrase of Taylor, lies a profound meditation on the relations established in the Euro-American and more or less Kantian tradition between the spaces of aesthetic pleasure or judgment and the emergence of the autonomous subject itself. How can one think the slave’s pleasures where the very things that pleasure is taken to signify – humanity and an at least latent autonomy – are at once denied the slave and, whenever pleasure is taken or stolen, stand as evidence of their enjoyment of the qualities that have been denied them?<sup>10</sup>

What Moten shows us, and elaborates across *consent not to be a single being*, is that the terms of that double bind are intimately connected with the imagination of both subjecthood and freedom in the post-Enlightenment aesthetic tradition. The cultural productivity of those whose quotidian experience is one in which ‘pain is alloyed with pleasure’ constitutes a radical and thorough-going refusal of those terms, an ‘affirmative refusal’ [UM 186] that ‘refuses what was refused to them’, to use a phrase repeated several times throughout these essays. The black radical tradition entails ‘a refusal of a polity or community structured by refusal’ [UM 90] that turns out to be also a certain form of dissenting assent, a crucial act of consent. To refuse the poisonous gift of an autonomy or a citizenship or a right that is always withheld is also to refuse the tortured logic that apprehends racialisation – as, in one moment of his restless dialectic, Fanon does – only as the negation that installs a lack in being in the black non-subject, or as an enduring social death. As Moten puts it in a passage I want to return to, ‘Taylor speaks of and out of possibilities embedded in a social life from which Fanon speaks and of which he speaks but primarily as negation and impossibility’ [UM 160]. Moten spells out at length the ways in which the performance of black music and poetic writing embody and figure the modalities of that ‘social life’ in a meditation on Francophone poet Édouard Glissant and jazz musician Anthony Braxton that tracks the relation of the soloist – who embodies what is elsewhere described as a ‘differential integrity in and to the unit’ [UM 69] – to the ensemble, ‘in the depths of our

common impasse, our common flight, and our common habitation’:

They allow and require us to be interested in the unlikely emergence of the unlikely figure of the black soloist, whose irruptive speech occurs not only against the grain of a radical interdiction of individuality that is manifest both as an assumption of its impossibility as well as in a range of governmental dispositions designed to prevent the impossible, but also within the context of a refusal of what has been interdicted (admission to the zone of abstract equivalent citizenship and subjectivity, whose instantiations so far been nothing but a set of pseudoindividuated aftereffects of conquests and conquest denial, a power trip to some fucked-up place in the burnt-out sun), a kind of free or freed ‘personality’ that will have turned out to be impossible even for the ones who are convinced they have achieved it, even as they oversee its constant oscillation between incompleteness and repair, distress and fashion. ... Such refusal, such dissent, takes the form of a common affirmation, an open consensus given in the improbable, more than im/possible, consent, in Glissant’s words, ‘not to be a single being’. [UM 136]

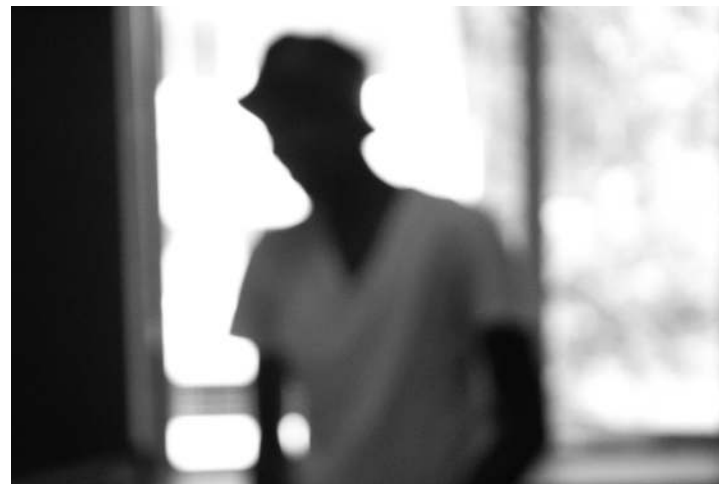
Where the Kantian aesthetic at once feelingly apprehends (in all his ‘black genius’ [SL32]) and yet seeks to regulate the lawless generativity of this collectively backed solo performance in the interests of a disciplined freedom and autonomy, the aesthetics of blackness follows in its fugitive, improvisatory performances not the road to freedom but a line of flight that is obviously grounded in the liberatory practices of the enslaved, but is also entirely attuned to the ruse of freedom that Hartman has called its ‘encumbrance’. As she put it, ‘The discrepant bestowal of emancipation conferred sovereignty as it engendered subjection.’<sup>11</sup> Moten’s understanding of the articulation of the freedom drive in the politicoaesthetic imagination of blackness with the conditions of constraint and of privation, working, like Olaudah Equiano, ‘between law and motion, between constraint and a privileged loss of control’ [SL 61], is all too cognisant of the knowledge that ‘Leaving, differing, stealing away, is always under the threat of interdiction, of protected theft, of mastery’s protected “right” to steal, of the roguish force that is always most powerfully wielded by proper subjects and proper states’ [SL 113].

Fugitivity, then, does not escape the law, conditioned as it is by the long reach of the law that it calls forth, but no more does it embrace the sovereignty of freedom, the

autonomy of the subject in its disciplined and abstracted individuated representation of the universal. Nevertheless, this ‘unruly music that moves in disruptive, improvisational excess ... of the very idea of the (art) work’, and that is also ‘the site of a certain lawless, fugitive theatricality’ [SL 111], remains in its own peculiar relation to law, but one that exceeds any Kantian regulation of the imagination. Drawing on legal theorist Robert Cover’s classic essay ‘Nomos and Narrative’, Moten notes that ‘the fearsomeness of ungoverned generativity is held, for Kant, in the fact that what is being generated is law; that, above all, it is what Cover calls “the fecundity of the jurisgenerative principle”, which is manifest as endless mutation and differentiation, that freaks him out’ [UM 115].<sup>12</sup> Cover’s point, on which Moten so generatively elaborates, is that *jurisgenesis*, the capacity to create legal meaning, exceeds the law as written and determined by any given legal system. It is, therefore, ‘the problem of the multiplicity of meaning – the fact that never only one but always many worlds are created by the too fertile forces of *jurisgenesis*’<sup>13</sup> that the institutions of the law are concerned to contain by imposing a single *nomos*, or legal order. The law seeks ‘to maintain some coherence in the awesome proliferation of meaning lost as it is created – by unleashing upon the fertile but weakly organised jurisgenerative cells an organising principle itself incapable of producing the normative meaning that is life and growth’.<sup>14</sup> The rationale for legal interpretation and for those interpretive institutions, the courts, is, accordingly, not the need for law, but the ‘need to suppress law, to choose between two or more laws, to impose upon laws a hierarchy. It is the multiplicity of laws, the fecundity of the jurisgenerative principle, that creates the problem to which the court and the state are the solution.’ Accordingly, ‘[i]nterpretation always takes place in the shadow of coercion’.<sup>15</sup> Cover’s ‘jurispathic’ courts, in all their implicit violence against difference and multiplicity, correspond to Kant’s judgment of taste that seeks to ‘clip the wings of the lawless imagination’, to curtail the flights of fantasy that generate ‘the awesome proliferation of meaning’ that is at once fertile and ephemeral, ante- and anti-institutional.

Cover’s formulations prompt Moten ‘to imagine something on the order of an anoriginary criminality with which blackness is inextricably linked – or to think blackness, perhaps more precisely as the paradoxically

anarchic principle and expression of a jurisgenerativity that demands a reconfiguration of the very idea of law’ [SL 19] – and, we might say by extension, of the aesthetic.<sup>16</sup> It’s not hard to see how the fugitive nature of an unconstrained jurisgenerativity corresponds to the protocols of improvisation and the ‘weakly organised cell’ of the ensemble, not least as Moten goes on to characterise blackness’s undoing of the law’s sentence in precisely such terms: ‘the improvisational para-statement – the extragrammatical run-on, that informal incompleteness where the sentence lives against its own execution – continually and ubiquitously establishes itself otherwise, elsewhere and at another time, neither here nor there nor here and now, as a kind of anoriginal (declaration of) independence’ [SL 20].



That allusion to the declaration of independence affirms less the autonomy of a black life-form than a procedure, the sheer generative performativity of improvisation itself as it brings into being some new state of play out of the fugitive encounter of constraint and invention in and through the interdependence of the ensemble. Everywhere Moten insists on this performativity of a blackness that is not an ontological essence nor an originary identity but a constant process, a performativity that is necessarily non-performance insofar as it is never subjected or given over to institution, to the dismay of interpretation.<sup>17</sup>

One way to grasp the significance of this performativity of blackness is by watching how, in the passage I partially quoted above, Moten invokes Cecil Taylor’s ‘claim on aestheticosocial life’ over and against that still Hegelian dimension of Fanon that is fascinated by the demand for recognition and haunted by its refusal:

[Taylor] speaks not only out of but also of the lived experience of the black. This is to say that Taylor moves by way of an experience, an aesthetic sociality that Fanon can never embrace insofar as he never really comes to believe in it, even though it is the object, for Fanon, of an ambivalent political desire as well as a thing (of darkness) he cannot acknowledge as his own. In other words, Taylor speaks of and out of the possibilities embedded in a social life from which Fanon speaks and of which he speaks but primarily as negation and impossibility. [UM 160]<sup>18</sup>

In some sense, the whole of *consent not to be a single being* could be seen to flow from and to this passage. Performativity, this capacity to invent out of nothing and out of the constraints that proclaim one's nothingness, is the generative cell of the 'aesthetic sociality' of blackness. Aesthetic sociality significantly shifts the terms in displacing 'the political aesthetics of enclosed common sense' and even the 'politicoaesthetic imagination' elsewhere invoked. The sociality of the aesthetic refuses the moment of individuation through which the Kantian subject of taste arrives at its universality by way of the enclosure of a common sense that proscribes the feelings on which life-in-common is predicated as 'pathological'. Aesthetic sociality, as the social life predicated on that pathological lived experience of pleasure and pain, stands – in ways understated here but that form the groundwork of the trilogy's larger critique – against the ambivalence of Fanon's precisely *political* desire. For the sphere of politics is the terrain of one's recognition as both citizen and autonomous subject, the domain of formal freedoms for which the Kantian aesthetic limns the conditions of possibility in that 'enclosed common sense' through which the subject finds its abstract universality. The very formulation 'social life' in itself contests the containment of black life in the dismal frame of 'social death'; Orlando Patterson's seminal formulation in his history of slavery. Not only is black life 'irreducibly social', its 'irreducibly aesthetic sociality' is an ongoing ruptural apposition to the politics of aesthetics as that has been imagined since Kant: 'black life is lived in *political* death or ... in the burial ground of the subject by those who, insofar as they are not subjects, are also not, in the interminable (as opposed to the last) analysis, "death-bound"' [UM 194].<sup>19</sup>

In his extended critique of Hannah Arendt's 'degradation of sociality' in both her book-length *On Violence* and

in her occasional essays on the civil rights movement, Moten addresses the distinction she makes between the non-public realm of the social and the valorised public realm of the political. This distinction is for Arendt troubled by what appears to her as the violence of black social movements and their claims, their irruption into what is 'the already given institutional structure' whose protection, she insists, is 'the prepolitical condition of all other, specifically political, virtues' [UM 91, citing Arendt].<sup>20</sup> Arendt's emphasis on the inviolability of those 'given' political institutions of liberal society has as its obverse an overlooked and prior violation of blackness:

Her yoking of that insistence to the eternally dangerous black example is nothing less than the reimposition of the obligation to consent (to one's own violation). This reimposition will have been justified insofar as refusing the obligation, however violently imposed, however unaccompanied by some reciprocal promise, is to relinquish one's claim to a polity and, therefore, to humanity. [UM 91]

In a quite brutal inversion of the old Aristotelian adage that man is a political animal, Arendt suggests that to refuse or contest the political itself, and not merely the specific form or allowances of some political regime's given institutions, is to be something less than human. But what if the historical preference of the enslaved, whose legacy continues to inform black social life, were rather to take flight from than to accept enforced incorporation into those institutions whose freedoms are so differentially bound to enslavement? Then the mere non-violent, Bartlebeyan act of 'preferring not to' be conscripted to those institutions in the coercive name of freedom and sovereign subjecthood manifests as a mode of violence:

And if the slave, in the interest of the abolition of slavery, which is understood by her not as a goal but as an ideological commitment, relinquishes that place, flees that 'home', then not only is she expelled from humanity but she is also guilty of a violence fundamental to the tacit consensus (imposed upon her in the absence of any protection of her personhood and in the oppressive fullness of its protection of her acquired thingliness) in which and from which that home is constructed. [UM 92]

In a peculiar twist on Walter Benjamin's recognition that the state regards any nonviolent movement that chal-

lenges the foundations of its law as a manifestation of violence, Arendt, the political subject, ‘can only understand such preference as violence’.<sup>21</sup>

Arendt’s (mis)understanding is a general disposition of the political intellectual, a constitutive ignorance of the subject, one might say:

Blackness as violence, in a communicability that, again, will have always already exceeded the very idea of what are imprecisely called black bodies and the bounds imposed on black people when they are constrained to bear their bodies as loss; blackness as a refusal of a polity or community structured by refusal; blackness as a form of social thought in social life is the irreducible, antifoundational danger to which legitimate American intellectual work responds. [UM 90]

If we follow Moten’s formulation of ‘blackness as a form of social thought in social life’ in the context of these imperiously political demands, we can see not only why black refusal, black irruption, black fugitivity, necessarily appear within and to the polity as violence, criminality, something other than humanity. We can also see that ambivalent Fanonian political desire, the desire for incorporation or assimilation (what Denise Ferreira da Silva has nicely dubbed ‘engulfment’, and Moten ‘exclusionary assimilation’ [UM 38]),<sup>22</sup> the desire for rights and the right to rights, the very desire for freedom, betray the subject as well as the subjected to the subjection that is their constitutive obverse. For this social life has been forged in exclusion from, ‘in apposition’ (to use Moten’s favored phrase) to, citizenship, as ‘the refusal of refused and therefore tainted citizenship’ [UM 93]. Forged thus, and forged in this domain of an imposed and ‘acquired thingliness’ through which the commodified human is denied even her vestigial humanity, black sociality has nothing recuperative about it; it takes oblique flight not against but to the side and in the shadow of those political ends that at times stand in for but could never realise the imaginative excess of black freedom dreams:

It’s not about what it is to live under the shadow of a falsifying disregard, even when it reveals a threadbare aspect of an otherwise sumptuous life of the mind; the thing is that lived, luxuriant mindfulness that such disregard brings inadvertently into relief: the collective head, the hydratic passage, the hydraulic story that is the refuge and fuge(d) state of the stateless, the refusers, the refugees, which we share in common where blackness and study are in play. [UM 95]

In this very unHegelian, anti-Arendtian sociality, a juris-generative sociality that antecedes but does not anticipate the political, the double bind of violation and cultural richness, of social death versus affirmative negritude, is refused: the violation that reduces humans to things furnishes the ground for what Moten will come to call, very precisely, ‘the social life of black things’ [UM 207], a social life guaranteed, perhaps, not by a recovered fullness of autonomous being, but by ‘a certain black incapacity to desire sovereignty and ontological relationality whether they are recast in the terms of and forms of a Levinasian ethics or an Arendtian politics, a Fanonian resistance or a Pattersonian test of honour’ [UM 206].

### Another way of thinking things

How do we parse this provocative and fecund formulation, ‘the social life of black things’, given how radically it seems to break with a whole tradition of recuperative humanisation of the enslaved and of black people? After all, thingliness has long been the index of the greatest degradation, the reduction of the human to brute, lumpish matter, ‘mere’ existence without value. Consider only Hegel’s famous dismissal of the African in the *Philosophy of History* that is also a justification of her transatlantic enslavement: ‘For it is the essential principle of slavery that man has not yet attained a consciousness of his freedom, and consequently sinks down to a mere Thing – an object of no value.’<sup>23</sup> The thing is that which lacks freedom, value and subjecthood. Furthermore, one might say that not only is the thing a lack of subject, it is the default of the object, which is always a phenomenon for or in relation to a subject. Accordingly, we can see across the panorama of *consent not to be a single being* a shift from the thematic of *In the Break*, which concerned the ‘resistance of the object’, the objection, as Moten put it there, raised by the speaking commodity that in turn gives rise to ‘a theory of value – an objective and objectional, productive and reproductive ontology’.<sup>24</sup> Such a thematic is not lost in *consent not to be a single being*, but the conception of a social life of (mere) things raises different questions, grounds the question of blackness differently, perhaps more deeply, in a thingliness that has neither value nor ontology. Indeed, the first volume of the trilogy, *Black and Blur*, opens with a kind of penitence over the first sentence of *In the Break*, which runs:

‘The history of blackness is testament to the fact that objects can and do resist’ [BB vii].<sup>25</sup> What now seems wrong with that sentence may be its predication of blackness as objecthood, an implicitly oppositional formulation that *consent not to be a single being* is devoted to undoing. Doing so, it undoes a whole lot else. What Moten refers to as ‘an irruption of the thing into a discourse from which it had been excluded and which it had made possible’ [UM 28] is no less an intervention into ‘the ongoing accumulative disavowal of the thing that animates certain essential strains of Western philosophy’ [UM 9]. There, the fate of the thing, most notably by way of the Kantian phenomenon or the Hegelian phenomenological dialectic, has been to be subsumed into an object for the subject, an object which, just as the condition of slavery is the constitutive other of freedom, anchors the self-consciousness and autonomy of the subject. And for the subject to *have*, to grasp or possess its objects is also to commit itself to the enclosure of interiority: ‘To be turned toward the world of objects, is to be turned inward, to be enclosed in an inner theatre of representations’. ‘Meanwhile, things stand out from the outside’ [UM 32].

There where the object was, the thing shall come. Following Moten, ‘We must appeal to another way of thinking things that is offered in the social aesthetics of black radicalism and its improvisatory protocols’ [UM 10]. His trajectory – in an extended engagement with Heidegger’s writings on the thing and his formulation that ‘the thing is resistance’ – from the resistance of the object to that of the thing is striking, not least in furnishing a kind of ground bass for the trilogy that makes up this work.<sup>26</sup> And where the speaking or shrieking object produced a ‘phonic matter’ irreducible ‘to verbal meaning or conventional musical form’,<sup>27</sup> a sounding out of captivity and commodification, the thing appears as that peculiarly ‘thingly resistance to the status of mere thing’, and does so in forms of improvisatory, generative and no less musical sociality that bypasses the individuation of the subject and its separation from its objects: ‘a certain thingly resistance to the status of mere thing plays itself out precisely as a resistance to signification’ and appears again as an ‘irreducible phonic materiality’ [UM 9]. The differing echo of certain formulations in *In the Break* is unmistakable, as is the departure from that book’s lingering logic of oppositionality. Things get relegated to the threshold, on the edge of the outside, of the phenom-

ological tradition of philosophy, which may after all be no more than ‘an ongoing disavowal of fallenness, an ongoing disavowal of and devaluation of things, of falling into the world of things’ [UM 24]. Accordingly, things afford no purchase for the oppositional, for the Master-Slave dialectic that – precisely by the appropriation of the thing as his object – would make a subject of the Bondsman.<sup>28</sup>

Thinking from thingliness, thinking as the thing, requires a turning away from the hankering after freedom and autonomy, the ever-frustrated desire for the sovereign completeness that would be the impossible achievement of self-identity, and takes place to the side of those concerns, appositionally. Moten starts from the deceptively simple question: ‘What would it mean to deal with the thingly in oneself, to attend to the possibility of being-captivated, to think from the position of the captive and thereby to enact possibilities of escape ...?’ [UM 36] That thinking does not end, but approaches again and again the ethic that Cedric Robinson deciphered in the black radical tradition, a carelessness for individual survival that was profound care for what he termed ‘the ontological totality’, a phrase whose somewhat enigmatic formulation *consent not to be a single being* is devoted to illuminating.<sup>29</sup> Crucial to whatever ethic emerges from the position of the captive thing is simultaneously the inhabitation of the injury, the open wound out of which the thing’s articulate cry emerges – the whole brutal history of capture, enslavement and racist violence – and the refusal to apprehend that injury as mere negation, as denial of one’s very being.

Intrinsic to black radicalism in Moten’s elaboration of the ethics implicit in Robinson’s account of it is this commitment to think from the place of the thing, with the pathological, suffering/desiring subject in its sensuous ensembles rather than by way of transcending either suffering or incapacity. This is not to linger in injury, but at once to refuse and take on an injurious history in a ‘critical encounter’ [SL 104]. The ‘black incapacity to desire sovereignty’ is a radical transvaluation of incapacity that impels the alternative, appositional ethical-aesthetic of blackness, the counterstrophic accompaniment of modernity understood as the advent of freedom and progress. From within that alternative trajectory:

We might think by way of, and perhaps through, the thing, with the thing’s thought, that thought’s expression





and habitation in the quotidian, in otherwise systematic rhythms, in the suffering of the suffering that is seemingly without voice, in the industrial, in and as the commodified, in the mute, mutant, mutated language of the mute, mutated, mutant instrument as it moves, finally, in the irrepressibly nonidentical. [SL 84]

Crucial to that thought is its punning thinking of instrumentality against its grain, not as radical alienation, but as ‘the instrumental sociality of things in common’ [SL 14]. If the ethical foundations of abolition, as of the prohibition of torture, have rested on some version of the categorical imperative, that no human should be used ‘merely as a means’ on account of ‘the autonomy of his freedom’, what can be the ethic of those whose historical experience, intellectual traditions and aesthetic performances are rooted in the knowledge of what it is to be ‘mere means’ and therefore a ‘mere thing’?<sup>50</sup> Thinking out of, rather than in refusal of that knowledge, the black radical aesthetic tradition is an anti-instrumentalist instrumentalism of the ensemble, ‘one that continually, and at first glance paradoxically, manifests itself through enactments of blackness as instrument and apparatus in melodramatic irruption’ [SL 110]. The deep historical

knowledge of blackness is given in ‘the refusal, by way of black and fugal operations, of the subject’s long, developmental nightmare’ [SL 243] whose culmination now may be the general instrumentalisation of everything and everyone, black or not, in the brutally appropriative drives of contemporary capital.

The condition of that knowledge is the anti-possessive ethic of those whose experience of modernity has been the violently imposed dispossession that constituted it. To affirm that a preferential option for the dispossessed is the ethico-political legacy of black radicalism is inseparable from taking on the knowledge that emerges from the assumption of the self’s instrumentalisation, both as a matter of historical and brutal economic fact. The resulting disposition toward the world involves, once again, blackness’s refusal of that which has been refused, but which is proffered over and over again as the release from bondage, that is, the lure of autonomous subjectivity as the form of the human: ‘What if man escapes the labour of the negative via self-inflicted release into the thingly, a simple auto-dispossessive gift of self to instrument that resets both self and instrument in an ongoing, general recalibration of any and every

such relation?' [UM 29]. That thought, which is the unseen, disregarded thinking of blackness, does not lend itself to conceptual formulation, to any easily legible program, but entails the difficult and repeated work of improvisational making and unmaking of the given, or imposed, structures and forms, their 'ongoing general recalibration', the parsing and unraveling of concepts that appear as the general and fugitive law of motion of Moten's philosophical investigations. As he parenthetically remarks, 'You have to come around again and start all over and hope that what you do gets close to what you're trying' [UM 29]. This is a thinking that, having been unseen, obscene, within the philosophical tradition, is 'an auditory affair' [SL 155], that is, has to be heard, as the long, multiply appositional phrasings of Moten's exploratory sentences must best be heard to be followed, like Coltrane's 'irrupting into and erupting out of that self-inflicted, rendering condemnation of man who had seemed to make such ruptive motion impossible, determined to keep returning to – or to keep turning in – that exhaustively locomotive breaking until he comes round right' [UM 29].

In this 'movement of things against owning' [SL 84] sounds and resounds a whole history of black radical commitment to commoning, in refusal of any 'tacit pseudouniversal consensus' that would make of the universal a carefully guarded enclosure for the possessive individual:

As Kant says ... 'the common right to the face of the earth ... belongs to humans generally.' Like all such ownership, it is only ever fully enacted in its having been relinquished. Such autodispossession is the (*first*) common right. Resistance to enclosure is its vehicle. ... Such assertion of world community is the essence of black radicalism/black abolition. [UM 94]

Two figures in particular perform this enactment of black radical thinking whose 'productive imagination moves to make present what has not already been there; but this is to say that it makes present, presents in the open, the original compact that was always already there' [UM 94]. One is (black) study, that anti-disciplinary, multi-disciplinary and dialogical mode of reflection and improvisation that is 'against sequestration, in always open unison' [UM 95] and which is 'blackness as a critical-historical project' [SL 99]. The other is, again, the soloist whose relation to the ensemble offers a kind of counter-

model to the individual subject, the instrumentalist subjected to their instrument 'in attentive enactment of the open collective' and who furnishes 'the form of scholarship to which black students ... have long been devoted.' These students, these soloists, 'emancipate dissonance in a conception of sociality hinged on dispossession where one is bereft but for the specifically human, irreducibly necessary possibility of enacting new social forms, into which one disappears.' And once again, parenthetically, the mode of study is listening in: 'We hear that disappearance in audition's improvisational incursion of the song form' [UM 95].

The blackness that animates study, that emerges in the relation of soloist to ensemble or collective, is, to repeat an earlier point, performative, coming to presence in the protocols of performance and as the ongoing performative irruption of the 'old-new thing' [SL 156] whose felicity is that it refuses institutional sanction, thus manifesting as nonperformance, as Moten stresses in his dialog with Sora Han in 'Erotics of Fugitivity' [SL 241–267]. As the repeated work of an ethic of dispossession on the part of the (self-)dispossessed, blackness cannot itself be a property any more than, as iterated performance, it can be essence or identity. Moten urges this point more than once throughout *consent not to be a single being*: blackness 'is not reducible to black people' [UM 67], 'is not the property of black people' [UM 237], even if black people have a privileged relation to blackness 'insofar as they are given (to) an understanding of blackness' [SL 35] that is a function of their history of non-privileged relations to property. This is a formulation that gives rise to one of Moten's sharper rebukes to a certain kind of injured anti-racism on the part of those who 'step up to black history as if it were nothing but a serial injury inflicted upon them; as if every injury were their private property' [243]. Nor is blackness reducible to epidermalisation, as Fanon put it. Indeed, to riff on a phrasing of Moten's cited above, emphasis on colour and on the visible marks of racialisation could be to confuse the black as seen with blackness as thingliness. Blackness is not an ontological condition, nor even the denial to black people of 'ontological resistance' in the eyes of the white man, as Fanon thought. On the contrary, 'blackness is the anoriginal displacement of ontology' [SL 194]: as against one reading of Fanon, 'The lived experience of blackness is, among other things, a

constant demand for an ontology of disorder, an ontology of dehiscence, a paraontology whose comportment will have been (toward) the ontic or existential field of things and events' [UM 150]. Thus an over-emphasis on the colour line, on the black/white binary in contemporary black studies has led to 'a field of racialised existence in which blacks, within a general structure of difference, have been made, against the grain of their own anoriginal, collectively unselfconscious self-making ... to signify a certain deanimated otherness-in/as-blackness while having been devoided, in the same horrific and impossible figuration, of the idea of blackness as a form of life' [SL 33–34].

To insist on 'blackness's distinction from a specific set of things that are called black' [SL 157], thus to refuse the conception of blackness as an identity, even as a form of non-identity predicated on wound and deprivation, and to regard it instead as 'the dispersive gift of anoriginal dispossession' [SL 27], may inevitably provoke the question, whose formulation will no less inevitably seem blunt or naïve, as to what the limits to blackness can be. If blackness is 'a form of life' not monopolised by black people, if black radicalism has been the critical-historical study and practice of commoning in the name of a 'world community', who gets to claim and perform blackness? Moten's response to such questions, which might also inevitably seem arch detours aimed back at critique, is no less blunt: 'Everyone whom blackness claims, which is to say everyone, can claim blackness' [SL 159]. The 'open unison' that is black study enables it to conjoin with the parallel 'study of comparative racialisation' in a manner that resonates deeply both with Robinson's historical work and with W.E.B. Du Bois's extensive exploration of the global significance of the colour line and its constitutive, ongoing relation to racial capitalism.<sup>31</sup> Although the terms that animate blackness and organise black study emerge in the context of the United States, 'their continued relevance and resonance will be international as well as intranational insofar as the ongoing aggressive constitution of the modern nation-state as a carceral entity extends histories of forced migration and stolen labour and insofar as the imperial suppression of movements that would excavate new aesthetic, political, and economic dispositions – as well, of course, as those movements themselves – is a global phenomenon' [SL 158]. Far from being the name of an identity, blackness

is the moving ground of a solidarity that is intrinsic to black radicalism and its 'renunciation of actual for historical being'. For that renunciation, the owning of one's dispossession, 'will have ultimately become intelligible only as a general disruption of ownership and the proper when the ontological totality that black people claim and preserve is understood to be given only in this more general giving' [UM 236].

Dispossession is intimately bound to the condition of statelessness that is the other condition of blackness [UM 237]. In that light, solidarity amounts to more than the formal affirmation or defense of others' rights, whether a right to self-determination and sovereignty or the human rights that are bound to conceptions of citizenship and sovereign subjecthood and, above all, to the state's insistence on its own right to exist as sovereign. Solidarity is, rather, the articulation of stateless forms of life whose 'already given, constantly performed capacity for the alternative' calls forth – as jurisgenerativity does the jurispactic will of the law – the violent response of sovereign power [SL 215]. The relation of solidarity – which is entailed upon any claim to a commitment to black radicalism and internationalism – is predicated not so much on the kinds of political claims in which the discourse of rights is embedded, but on 'a particular kind of subpolitical experience that emerges from having been the object of that mode of racial-military domination that is best described as incorporative exclusion that settler colonialism instantiates' [SL 215]. That variously entangled 'more and less than political experience' of incorporative exclusion is what grounds the exemplary solidarity between black radicalism and the Palestinian liberation struggle that Moten engages, not as ethical duty but as a mode of renewal or refreshment of the black radical tradition. While the boycott called for by the Palestinian movement for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions against Israel 'might provide some experiential and theoretical resources for the renewal of a certain affective, extrapolitical sociality – the new international of insurgent feeling' [SL 216], it is no less the case that: 'If there is a stateless antinationalism that is the surreptitious essence of black radicalism, then it bears lessons for the Palestinian struggle too' [SL 224]. Solidarity is this reciprocal renewal and mutual instruction, held 'in the radical sociality of our promised and unpayable debt to one another' [SL 214].

Both the mutual debt that is the condition of a non-sovereign human entanglement and ‘the gift of historicity as claimed, performed, dispossession’ [UM 237] that is its constitutive obverse are endless, unredeemable and unredeemed. This endlessness that informs both solidarity and the modes of black collective study, in steady and studied refusal of the institutions of sovereignty that maintain their violent regulation of human sociality, makes *consent not to be a single being* resonate far outside the field of black studies. The radical challenge it poses to the political presuppositions of modernity and the philosophical assumptions that continue, even unwittingly, to sustain them in the name of freedom and rights, offers inimitable resources for thinking through what it might be to inhabit our times transformatively. Moten’s own formulation of the ethics of blackness offers a summation of that ‘alternative planetarity’ that would be the sociality performed by non-sovereign movements of the dispossessed moving in solidarity:

It instantiates and articulates another way of living in the world, a black way of living together in the other world we are constantly making in and out of this world, in the alternative planetarity that the intramural, internally differentiated presence – the (sur)real presence – of blackness serially brings online as persistent aeration, the incessant turning of the ground under our feet that is the indispensable preparation for the radical overturning of the ground that we are under. [UM 235]

## Blackness

These restless, questioning volumes inevitably yield in turn questions that will vex any reader. Afro-pessimists may continue to resist Moten’s celebration ‘of and in and through our suffering’ [BB xiii], of blackness as sociality when the unabated force of anti-blackness operates above all through the denial to black people of access to (civil) society: that police killings of black and brown people persisted and may have increased even while the presidency of Barack Obama stood as evidence of the achievement of post-racial political integration is the index of that foreclosure from social being. Doubtless, in a quite different vein, historians of black diasporic struggles for specifically *political* forms of recognition and emancipation will be troubled by Moten’s apparent indifference to the long traditions of organising for civil

rights, for franchise, for citizenship and inclusion in national polities, as for access to the distributive justice minimally represented in welfare, education and other public goods that are in the purview of the state.

What if the anarchic performance of blackness as aesthetic sociality brackets out the historical commitments of black people that have been explicitly and resolutely political in their ends and forms of organising? Does the detachment of blackness from bodies that are black, even in the effort to read the ‘free association’ of black movements as ‘desegregative planning’ rather than ‘integrationist achievement’ [UM 100], not perform its own mode of erasure, substituting a preference for ‘black refusal of political subjectivity’ [UM 101] for the historical labour of black social movements and the transformations they have effected?

Given my own anarchist predilections, which determine my sympathy with Moten’s positions, the questions that I am left with in the wake of reading *consent not to be a single being* lie in a different direction. Largely persuaded by the critique of the superordination of the political and of freedom predicated on political subjecthood, citizenship and sovereignty, I find myself perplexed in a different way by the extent and the limits of any dissociation of blackness from black people. Insofar as blackness is performative rather than predicative, how far does it risk diffusion into theoretical portability, becoming an optative signifier like the postcolonial ‘subaltern’ or race critical ‘intersectionality’, whose deployment has of late become detached from any relation to the social histories the terms were intended to designate? This is always the potential fate of any concept and Moten’s work is peculiarly dedicated to pursuing and performing the disseminative dissolution of conceptual propriety. Nonetheless, can blackness finally be thought outside the historical formation of the social – and the political – life of black people from whose survival and whose improvisational generativity under conditions of dispossession, captivity, enslavement, Jim Crow and contemporary reinscriptions of state-sanctioned anti-blackness Moten derives its ethical and aesthetic practices? Or is there a way, tempting enough given the generativity of *consent not to be a single being*’s own conceptual moves, that blackness can become, if not a theoretical term for the ensembles of practices forged in other subaltern spaces, at least a passage into thinking them in other ways and

other relations to one another? Can the fugitive forms of subaltern organising that Ranajit Guha among others have documented be rendered again in light of the improvisatory flights of blackness? Do the dispossessed and displaced Irish poor of the nineteenth century, with their own version of ‘phonic materiality’ and unruly impropriety, with their social formations that defied British notions of civility and individual property, constitute a mode of performance of blackness – as, indeed, reactionary cultural critics like Thomas Carlyle charged at the time? Analogous historical and geographical instances could surely be multiplied.

If in fact such cases can be thought not *as* but *in relation to* blackness, in the end this is not on account of the abstraction of the concept into unlimited transferability but is, paradoxically perhaps, an index of the specificity of Moten’s deduction of the performative lexicon of blackness from the particular conditions of black social history. In that light, as he insists more than once, blackness is not an ontological essence, but an effect produced in and productive of the trajectory of modernity and its aestheticopolitical regimes. As such, blackness emerges in difference and must be thought in differential relation to other systems of racial formation. That thinking must take place with a similar degree of specificity, such that any invocation of blackness as analogue or as a means to the theoretical displacement of normative conceptual or representational frames can only do justice to that term through a painstaking attention to social formations that have emerged precisely in difference from it. Moten’s indispensable contribution to Black Studies has long been recognised; it is for those of us working in adjacent fields to learn from his procedure, rather than from the terms he generates, how to ‘turn the ground’ with an equally radical effect.

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## Notes

1. Fred Moten, ‘I ran from it and was still in it’, in *The Feel Trio* (Tucson, AZ and Denver, CO: Letter Machine Editions, 2014), 65–93.

2. See Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2003).

3. *Ibid.*, 24.

4. See Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 23; and Robin D.G Kelley, ‘Looking to Get Paid: How Some Black Youth Put Culture to Work’, in *Yo Mama’s Disfunktional! Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 45.

5. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), 151.

6. For a fuller exposition of the argument laid out here, see David Lloyd, *Under Representation: The Racial Regime of Aesthetics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019). [Reviewed by Lucie Kim-Chi Mercier in *Radical Philosophy* 2.06 (Winter 2019), 57–62.]

7. Moten is here addressing Fanon’s ‘Kantian critical discourse on nonsense’ manifested in his ‘conflicted critique of the style of the native intellectual’ in *The Wretched of the Earth*, a critique closely related to his critique of the linguistic excesses of negritude poetics in *Black Skin White Masks* that Moten elsewhere discusses [UM 215–6]. The ‘resistance of the object’ reprises the titles and concerns of the opening and closing chapters of *In the Break*. Overall, however, *consent not to be a single being* pivots towards the somewhat different resistance that is that of the thing, or of the thingly sociality of blackness, as I’ll discuss further on.

8. Moten is here citing the black trumpeter and composer Wadada Leo Smith.

9. Moten, *In the Break*, 2.

10. On those stolen pleasures of the enslaved, see Stephanie M.H. Camp, ‘The Pleasures of Resistance: Enslaved Women and Body Politics in the Plantation South, 1830–1861’, *Journal of Southern History* 68:3 (August 2002), 533–72, as well as Hartman’s own extended mediation on ‘Negro enjoyment’ in Chapter 2 of *Scenes of Subjection*, ‘Redressing the Pained Body’, 49–78.

11. See Hartman, ‘The Encumbrance of Freedom’, *Scenes of Subjection*, 134.

12. See Robert Cover, ‘The Supreme Court, 1982 Term. Foreword: Nomos and Narrative’, 97 *Harv. L. Rev* 4 1983–1984.

13. Cover, ‘Nomos and Narrative’, 16.

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*, 40.

16. The formulations I am citing here are part of a long and engaged reading of Brian Wagner’s *Disturbing the Peace: Black Culture and the Police Power after Slavery* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), and critique what Moten sees as his ‘assessment of crime as part of a state language to which blackness responds in ways that are labeled by the state as criminal’ [SL 19].

17. See Moten’s extended engagement with performance and nonperformance in dialogue with legal theorist Sora Han’s essay, ‘Slavery as Contract: Bettye’s Case and the Question of Freedom’, *Law and Literature* 27:3 (2015), 395–416, in his essay ‘Erotics of Fugitivity’ [SL 246–263].

18. The phrase, ‘the lived experience of the black’, is drawn from the French title of the fifth chapter of Fanon’s *Black Skin, White*

Masks, 'L'expérience vécue du Noir', that was rendered in the first English translation as 'The Fact of Blackness'. See Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952), 88; and *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markham (London: Pluto Press, 1986), 109. This is the chapter that moves from the famous phrase 'Look, a Negro!' to Fanon's sense of ontological annihilation on reading Jean-Paul Sartre's introduction to the volume of negritude poetry, *Black Orpheus*, that confirms that his 'blackness was only a minor term' in the dialectic (*Black Skin, White Masks*, 138).

19. Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, with a new preface (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018). Moten cites here also Abdul Jan Mohamed, *The Death-Bound Subject: Richard Wright's Archeology of Death* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), perhaps the most thorough-going elaboration of Patterson's Hegelian approach available.

20. Cited by Moten from Hannah Arendt, 'Civil Disobedience', in *Crises of the Republic* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1972), 72.

21. See Walter Benjamin, 'Critique of Violence', trans. Edmund Jephcott, in *Selected Writings, Volume 1: 1913-1926*, eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 240. For commentary on this paradox, see David Lloyd, 'From the Critique of Violence to the Critique of Rights', *Critical Times* 3:1 (April 2020), 109-130.

22. See Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race*

(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

23. G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), 96.

24. Moten, *In the Break*, 11.

25. *Ibid.*, 1.

26. Martin Heidegger, *What is a Thing?*, trans. W.B. Barton, Jr. and Vera Deutsch (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1967), 191.

27. Moten, *In the Break*, 6.

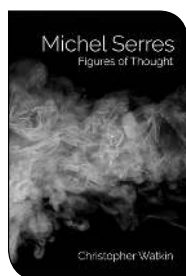
28. For a more extended discussion of Denise da Silva's and Moten's notion of the thingliness of blackness and Hegel's dismissal of the thing in the *Phenomenology*, see David Lloyd, 'The Racial Thing', in *Texte zur Kunst* 117 (March 2020), 74-95.

29. Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, new edition, foreword by Robin D.G. Kelley (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 168.

30. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, ed. and trans. Mary McGregor, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 74.

31. On Du Bois and the philosophical implications of the entwined emergence of global modernity and racial capitalism, see Nahum Dimitri Chandler, 'Exorbitance: The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Thought', Chapter 1 of *The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 11-67.

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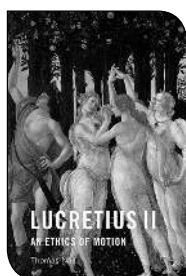


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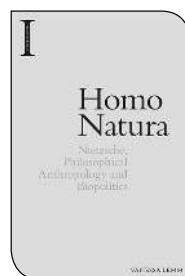


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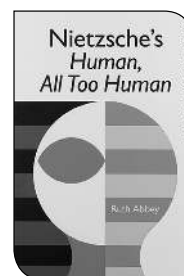


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