

COUNTER-INSURGENCY, LIBERALISM,
& THE TRANSMOGRIFICATION OF RADICAL MEANING

BY

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ABSTRACT

Privilege, intersectionality, and “the personal is political” are the sites of liberalism’s contemporary counterinsurgency, which occurs through the transmogrification of radical meaning. In this thesis, I argue that rhetoricians presently lack a method to adequately theorize racial capitalism and the nation-state form as they shift and destabilize radical terminologies through introducing the politics of representation via multiculturalism and technologies of governance. I intervene in rhetoric’s conceptualization of the public and private spheres, the rhetorical situation, and the artifact through the introduction of what I term the racial-sexual mark of enunciation, an analytic that attempts to thoroughly theorize Black and Native positionalities against the Settler/Master monopoly on the proper use of speech.

INTRODUCTION: *Liberal Counterinsurgency & Radical Meaning*

Today the U.S. left is plagued by a culture of political correctness, a culture that shows up in the demand for mastery over a certain set of social justice vocabulary and in the desire to be, feel, look, and act ethically. Terms like privilege, intersectionality, and “the personal is political” have gained currency in this atmosphere in order to denote ethical modes of speech. The circuitry of this culture is corroborated by liberal pundits and social media influencers, and it trickles down *a la* Reaganomics to leftists struggling to find language for power and violence. The result is this terminology frequently appears as the only accessible or available tools to apprehend power and violence in the moment of their enactment. I am talking about a culture emboldened and made possible by liberalism in its various forms: racial capitalism, the nation-state, and the university. It is a culture whose primary goal is individuation through the marketing and exposure of “good politics.”

As I was beginning to radicalize in the early 2010’s, these words felt like an opening to a new vista of subjectivity. I found mobility in these terms as challenging, subcultural, and counter-hegemonic invocations. Saying them felt like speaking truth to power, as an old debate coach of mine used to say. Privilege, intersectionality, and “the personal is political” were useful because I

wanted to be the right kind of radical. These terms allowed me to publicly out people who lacked a grasp of the right language *and* spend as much time as I could managing my own linguistic choices so that I could avoid being publicly outed. I feared my own capacity for harm, and, more than that, I envisioned these terminologies as placing me soundly in an ethically adjusted subjectivity.

The moment that inaugurated privilege, intersectionality, and “the personal is political” as counter-hegemonic terms was also conditioned by the cultural politics of what has routinely been described as the death of the subject. The narrative goes, the subject – conceptualized by these discourses as white and male – and his monopoly, having been successfully challenged by his racialized others, was dethroned, and subsequently the cultural and racial others who undermined the subject’s hegemony were able to lay claim to a properly political voice through cultural representation. As Denise Ferreira da Silva explains, “[S]ocial analysts described these circumstances as the onset of a new site of political struggle —the politics of representation, that is, the struggle for the recognition of cultural difference —that registered the demise of the metanarratives of reason and history that compose modern representation.”¹ Thus a struggle around representation ensued, and the battlefields of that struggle expanded through social media sites, university classrooms, and activist contexts where the question of the representation of modernity’s cultural and racial others remains primary.

¹ Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007): xxi.

Unfortunately, these representational politics remained wedded to the durability of liberal modernity's subject. As da Silva continues,

What was probably less self-evident, perhaps, was that the subject's passing would not result in its complete annihilation. I am not referring here to how the former private holdings of the subject, Truth and Being, were being invaded by its others, because it was precisely their "fragmentation" that led many observers to announce his death. What has yet to be acknowledged, however, is how this invasion belies the productive powers of the very tools that carved and instituted the place of the subject.²

The counter-hegemonies that felt so ineffably resistive were themselves animated by a melioristic model of subjectivity whose claim on liberatory representation was modeled after the subject of its critique.

Now terms like privilege, intersectionality, and "the personal is political" have come to feel like the closing in of counterinsurgents on revolutionary meaning. A recent *Millennial Revolution* article, entitled "Why Privilege Makes You Soft" champions the skills learned from growing up in poverty as opportunities to succeed in the financial marketplace, which apparently, along with creating a seven-figure investment portfolio and frugal spending habits, constitutes "a revolution."³ A blog post from the ACPA argues for "starting a revolution" by asking how to make college campuses more diverse and welcoming to multiply marginalized students, such as offering advising outside business hours and including gender neutral bathrooms.⁴ A personal blog post from Robin Morgan explains that "the personal is political" is a revolutionary phrase, and one

² Ibid, xx.

³ FIRECracker, "Why Privilege Makes You Soft," *Millennial Revolution*, 15 May 2017, <https://www.millennial-revolution.com/build/privilege-makes-soft/>.

⁴ Donald "DJ" Mitchell, Jr. "How to Start a Revolution: Use Intersectionality as a Framework to Promote Student Success," *ACPA Senior Scholars Blog*, <https://www.myacpa.org/blogs/senior-scholar-blog/how-start-revolution-use-intersectionality-framework-promote-student>.

decidedly aligned with “the American spirit,” because it can motivate calls for expansions of healthcare in service of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”⁵ The “revolution” explained by these think pieces is a far cry from the liberation movements and radical traditions that inspired the coinage of privilege, intersectionality, and “the personal is political.” The above blog posts advocate for expansions of racial capitalism, the university, and the nation-state form through an affirmative relationship to marginality and a welcoming attitude towards racial and cultural difference. This so-called revolution, then, invites a limited reading of history and violence. In other words, the left’s culture of political correctness is limited by that very thing which it understands to be most advantageous to it: its preoccupation with ethicality, goodness, and being on the right side of history. The terms have shifted, or I have shifted, or both.

I began writing this thesis not because I have transcended the need for those terms, or because I think that power must no longer be challenged, but instead because I have come to find the desire to be the right kind of radical itself a kind of enclosure, a delimitation of what can be thought, enunciated, and felt. Even charting the history of my radicalization as beginning when I started to use these terminologies belies a refusal to read my younger experiences, structured by genocide, racial capitalism, antiblackness, the nation-state form, and coercive gender assignation, as radicalizing moments or opportunities for refusal. In other words, I am always re-learning that I do not want to be right – not on the right side of history, the right side of discourse, the right side of the library, the right

⁵ Robin Morgan, “The Personal is Political is Revolution,” *RobinMorgan.net*, 3 July 2017, <https://www.robinmorgan.net/blog/personal-political-revolution/>.

side of the classroom, or the right side of the most recent Twitter or Facebook fight. I want to be wrong. And I want the revolution – not the expansion of liberalism but instead the destruction of it – to win.

This project, then, emerged from my sense that radical meanings are being transmogrified into political sense-making through the logics of multiculturalism, representative democracy, and a really vile insistence on non-violent consciousness-raising. The politics of representation, a phenomenon which I explore in depth throughout this project, emerged in the last fifty years or so as a counterinsurgent strategy to manage revolutionary uprising. The successes of multiculturalism and the politics of representation have been most apparent in moments where liberal institutions (the university, capital, and the state, among others) have utilized them to route desires for upheaval in the register of raciality back into the community of liberal Humanity. Liberalism's ability to domesticate the political imaginations carried by radical terminologies has endured through the politics of representation. This politics performs its counterinsurgency through changes to the terrain that do not fundamentally change the battlefield itself, by preserving what the counterinsurgency has always been trying to protect: its own monopoly on the proper use of violence in service of the protection of the ascendancy of white life.

This thesis emerges from my observation that the grammars for oppression, violation, and violence that we develop in the university also structurally speak to those who are “outside” academia and its infrastructures. That non-profits whose leadership may never have read Crenshaw still invoke intersectionality, that queer and trans youth who have never read Butler still

explain that “gender is a performance,” and that “cultural appropriation” conceptually gains pop-cultural resonance even as many who use it have never thought alongside *Kapital*, speak to the fact that the terrain of academia is more porous than many who theorize the academy as merely an “ivory tower” have imagined. As such, my theoretical work routinely shifts scales from the geopolitical stakes of the project, in undermining racial capitalism and the nation-state form, to the scales of friendship and intimate violence, as those scenes which act out the protocols of governance and the endurance of what I term the racial-sexual mark of enunciation.⁶

Liberalism & Counterinsurgency

Liberalism refers to a modern system of thought and governance that emerged in the Enlightenment period, where theorists of (white) life and politics boldly declared their (particular) civilizational inheritance as paradigmatic. Its systemic functioning depends upon a conceptual frame which it continues to use to colonize virtually the entire globe: the liberal individual. As Shannon Winnubst explains,

Classical liberalism writes the individual as the (allegedly) neutral substratum of all political decisions, positioning it as separable from historico-political forces. In carving the individual out of both the natural and socio-historico-political landscapes, modern political and epistemological projects turn around Locke’s fundamental metaphors of enclosure. The individual, that seat of political and personal subjectivity, is enclosed and thus cut off from all other forces circulating in the social environment. The individual effectively functions as a piece of private property, with the strange twist of owning itself, impervious to all intruders and protected by

⁶ I theorize the racial-sexual mark of enunciation explicitly in Part 3 of the thesis.

the inherent right of ownership, derived from the ontological right to one's own enclosed body.⁷

Liberalism's individual, then, acts agentially upon History without being confined to its spatio-temporal meanings, as this individual is fundamentally neutral, de-historicized, and bracketed off from the environments which surround its embodied and enclosed limit.

While liberalism maintains an obsessive relationship to freedom (as that which animated the nascent imaginings of racial capitalism and the nation-state form in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries⁸), its own imagining of freedom through mobility is understood, as Winnubst explains, through the individual's "transgression of boundaries and liberation from constraint."⁹ This delimited conceptualization of freedom explains why the death of the subject was, as da Silva suggests, not a "complete annihilation" – because what representational politics mark under liberalism is merely freedom through transgression and unfettered mobility. And these would, of course, become the very affirmative relationships to difference that gave legitimacy to the cultural turn and to the subject of culture and raciality. As Winnubst elaborates, "[N]otions of freedom as the transgression of boundaries or liberation from constraint only enmesh us further in the very systems of domination we seek to resist."¹⁰ Thus liberalism's individual maintains its referential traction through an insistence upon an individuated conception, the subject, as "the alpha and omega of all

⁷ Shannon Winnubst, *Queering Freedom* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 39.

⁸ Ibid, 18.

⁹ Ibid, 18.

¹⁰ Ibid, 18.

deliberations,”¹¹ precisely because it institutes transgressive mobility as the *prima materia* of freedom.

Indeed, the boundaries of the cultural turn have been staked through the primacy of the liberal individual. Winnubst writes,

Individualism simultaneously demands two apparently contradictory moves: 1) that we transcend material differences and understand ourselves as “just human”; and 2) that we conceive of ourselves through the rigid categories of identity that lock us into raced, sexed, classed (and so on) individuals. Individualism demands both identity and difference: the first of these perpetuates the Myth of Sameness, while the second reduces our subjectivities to the delimited categories of difference.¹²

In the cultural turn, the liberal individual’s self-possession takes the form of possession of difference, such that, as Winnubst argues, “[t]he modern project of liberal individualism thereby reads difference as that which is, can be, or ought to be demarcated, delimited, enclosed—and owned.”¹³ It is through presenting ownership over racial difference (and, by extension, the neutral substratum of selfhood that liberalism insists belies it) that the politics of representation have managed to articulate the subject of culture and raciality as an overhaul of the subject of European Enlightenment.

The major limitation of the articulation of difference as a facet of liberal individuality is that it presumes sameness with a deviation. The very language of difference already suggests the interiority of the subject as a full template upon which difference can be added. This, then, is how difference has come to authorize the cultural turn; through multiculturalism, the logic of racial

¹¹ Ibid, 52.

¹² Ibid, 18.

¹³ Ibid, 42.

inclusivity, and the politics of representation that structures both projects, race is sublated as culture. Anxieties about racial phenotype can be managed by multiculturalism's gestures towards possession of food, fad, and festival as simply *different* meditations on the same core of the subject.

As a result, the cultural turn initiates a debate between the hegemonic and the counter-hegemonic, and in order to become legible in that debate, the racial/cultural subject must presume possession of difference as the animating analytic for redress. The problem with framing the terrain of contestation on these terms is that recognition remains primary. As Audra Simpson explains of the politics of recognition, "Seeking oneself in the gaze of another can be a fallacy of endless suffering if not in and of itself an impossibility."¹⁴ What the analytics of race/culture/difference already presume is that the scale of enunciation and representation can shift in the favor of one side or the other, but certainly never be abolished; therefore, the subject of this scale can never slide into dispossession or objecthood.

The politics of representation, therefore, centers on liberal individuality and its corresponding institutional frameworks because it requires presence in order to authorize injury. Seen in the valence of the representational dilemma, privilege, intersectionality, and "the personal is political" provide redress because they enable interlocutors to affirmatively presence racial-sexual difference in response to violation and therefore maintain the ethical impulse of the left's culture of political correctness. As a counterpoint to these gestures, in this thesis I

¹⁴ Audra Simpson, "The ruse of consent and the anatomy of 'refusal': cases from indigenous North America and Australia," *Postcolonial Studies* 20, No 1 (2017): 12.

ask, following Robyn Wiegman, what are “the consequences of a disciplinary apparatus that relies on presence to produce evidence of the commitment to justice?”¹⁵

As I explore in the following sections, the articulation of privilege, intersectionality, and “the personal is political” rely upon presence to substantiate racial-sexual injury, a demand that remains consistent across the politics of representation. The presence that these terminologies rely upon and imagine into existence rests upon the enduring exigency of the modern project and its agential and individuated actor: the subject.

While the cultural turn marked the nominal inclusion of racialized others into this individuated form called the subject, what has remained unchanging is that this subject can only form against that absence from which it emerges but promptly disavows in order to maintain its agential potentiality and unfettered mobility. I describe these structural absences here as genocide and slavery, those modalities of violence which, as Frank B. Wilderson, III suggests, “[outstrip] the power of connotation.”¹⁶ Wilderson explains that, while the grammars of suffering for the Human rest on alienation and exploitation, the grammars of suffering for Blackness rest on accumulation and fungibility, and the grammars of suffering for Nativeness rest on sovereignty and genocide. The grammars of suffering which refuse constituency in the Human community include accumulation, fungibility, and genocide, positioning Blackness decidedly outside

¹⁵ Robyn Wiegman, *Object Lessons* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012): 53, footnote 9.

¹⁶ Frank B. Wilderson, III, *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010): 195.

and Nativeness partially outside liberal subjectivity.¹⁷ This is true even (and perhaps especially) in progressive or inclusive imaginations of liberal Humanity.

As Wilderson elaborates,

[T]hough the semantic field on which subjectivity is imagined has expanded phenomenally through the protocols of multiculturalism and globalization theory, Blackness and an unflinching articulation of Redness are more unimaginable and illegible within this expanded semantic field than they were during the height of the FBI's repressive Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO).¹⁸

In spite of the more inclusive subject articulated through the politics of representation, demands in the registers of genocide and slavery, those historical stillnesses that Nativeness and Blackness inescapably reference but cannot elaborate within liberal grammars of suffering, have registered with less legibility in the last fifty years than during open revolutionary struggle in the 1960's.

Genocide and slavery cannot be made present through the politics of representation and its requirement of presence to provide justice because they are themselves the structural absences upon which the subject is written and can claim injury. As constitutive of "the grammar of political ethics," genocide, accumulation, and fungibility, in Wilderson's terms, "go unspoken" because they are "the structure through which the labor of [ethical, political] speech is possible."¹⁹ This is not to say that genocide, accumulation, and fungibility cannot break in on the political and ethical terms of debate; it is simply to say that they gesture towards what Wilderson terms "an unspeakable ethics,"²⁰ an ethics that

¹⁷ For more on this triangulated structure of U.S. antagonisms, see Frank B. Wilderson, III's "The Ruse of Analogy" in *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms*.

¹⁸ Wilderson, *Red, White & Black*, 9.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 5.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 1.

emerged through the revolutionary struggles of the 1960's in the United States but only fleetingly in the counterinsurgent representational politics that have since taken hold of the surface of ethical and political speech.

These unspeakable ethics that gesture towards revolutionary overhaul of the system of modernity are not waged through the presuppositions of ethical speech and freedom from constraint that characterize liberal Humanity. Rather, as Wilderson explains,

[T]echnologies of accumulation and fungibility [...] recompose and reenact their horrors on each succeeding generation of Blacks. This violence is both gratuitous (not contingent on transgressions against the hegemony of civil society) and structural (positioning Blacks ontologically outside of Humanity and civil society). Simultaneously, it renders the ontological status of Humanity (life itself) wholly dependent on civil society's repetition compulsion: the frenzied and fragmented machinations through which civil society reenacts gratuitous violence on the Black – that civil society might know itself as the domain of Humans – generation after generation.²¹

As such, revolutionary action that is authorized by accumulation and fungibility intervenes in the repetition compulsion that reproduces liberal Humanity through repeatedly reenacting gratuitous violence that confirms the subject's status and belonging against the constitutive outside that is Blackness. It is important, here, to presence another significant implication for my work: unlike capitalism, the state, and the university, which are typically conceptualized as top-down institutional frameworks, antiblackness is a reiterative violation. Its hold on the infrastructures of sociality, institutionality, and the imaginative potentiality of liberal Humanity is restaged through the mundane architectures of

²¹ Ibid, 55.

life as it is lived. In my project, the structural absencing of the grammars of genocide, accumulation, and fungibility is only inevitable insofar as the speech situation is preoccupied with the continuance of the Human community (which, as we will see, is the primary occupation of the politics of representation and its counterinsurgency).

While I frequently theorize genocide and slavery together in the thesis, genocide is not reducible to slavery. While the historical stillness of slavery introduces Blackness not as a racial subject, but as a deracinated object, Nativeness in the register of genocide introduces a deracinated object, but Nativeness in the register of sovereignty introduces a racial subject with a stake in the Human constituency. As Wilderson explains, “The genocided object cannot sustain a heritage; like the accumulated and fungible object it had a past, not a heritage. Sovereignty, on the other hand, rescues the [Native] from the genealogical isolation of the [Black].”²² I have written extensively elsewhere about the necessity of theorizing Nativeness through the grammar of genocide rather than sovereignty, as the latter includes an appeal for inclusion into the Human community, while the former requires the collapse of the Human community and the liberal subjectivity that populates it.²³

I theorize genocide in this manner because I find that genocide is the single modality through which Nativeness is structured that refuses to lay claim to an undiluted priorness. It is for the very reason that genocide evacuates the

²² Wilderson, *Red, White & Black*, 51.

²³ Taylor Brough, “Eleazar, Native Debate, and the Stakes of Concession,” *Contemporary Argumentation and Debate*, forthcoming.

possibility of colonial nostalgia that I find that it must be thought alongside slavery, as it is the only grammar of Native existence that refuses the formalization of the subject that animates modernity's slave-making and savage-murdering violence. As I see it, the stakes of this theoretical work are quite high because the endurance of slavery constitutes Blackness through deracination, non-belonging, and the repetition of gratuitous violence that secures these processes. The question for Nativeness, as I explain elsewhere, is how to theorize towards the dissolution of subjectivity – and not, as other critics have accused, towards the dissolution or disappearance of the Native.²⁴

While the politics of representation have initiated a number of counter-hegemonic responses to liberalism's paradigmatic subject, these counter-hegemonies have merely secured liberalism against the insurgencies posed by Blackness and an unflinching articulation of Nativeness. Thus the cultural turn in academia, in social media, and in activist contexts has effectively reproduced the subject's formal power through rendering unspeakable the positions of Blackness and Nativeness. The politics of representation instituted in and through the cultural turn have also been thoroughly ingrained in the discipline of communication, within which they have posed substantive formal limits to studying the primary vehicle through which liberalism's transmogrifications have occurred: rhetoric.

²⁴ Ibid.

Counterinsurgency & Rhetoric: A Note on Method

Since the introduction of identity knowledges²⁵ to the domains of rhetoric and critical media studies, the field of communication has been confronted with its elision of its own, taken-for-granted object: the relationship between speech and the body. The summer 2019 #RhetoricSoWhite social media and CRTNET discourse is but one example of a series of provocations that have escalated what the field of rhetoric understands to be an emergent crisis.²⁶ Rhetoric is deeply discomforted by the introduction of Black and Native knowledges, seeing them as undermining a field of communication rendered around a set of universal critical practices for rigorous study of communicative activity. While scholars like Lisa Flores have argued for transformative inclusions of these alternative, racialized practices,²⁷ I want to take rhetoric at its word: that the place for Black and Native communication is no-place.

The field imaginary of communication is solidified around a series of base principles which can expand and contract in order to nominally include a broader scope of representation, a process which Roderick A. Ferguson explains as an “affirmative mode of power” in relationship to minority difference.²⁸ Nascent work in rhetoric of race scholarship often belies this representational politics even as it gestures towards the inability for Black and Native claims to legibly

²⁵ I borrow this term from Robyn Wiegman's *Object Lessons*, which understands identity knowledges as fields of academic knowledge including but not limited to: Women's and Gender Studies, Ethnic Studies, Black Studies, Native Studies, etc.

²⁶ For more on this crisis, see the special issue of the *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 105, No. 4 (2019) on #RhetoricSoWhite.

²⁷ See Lisa A. Flores' "Toward an insistent and transformative racial rhetorical criticism."

²⁸ Roderick A. Ferguson, *The Reorder of Things: The University and its Pedagogies of Minority Difference* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012): 181.

weigh on rhetorical theory and criticism. Tiara R. Na'puti's germinal 2019 essay on the foreclosure of indigeneity and settler colonialism from rhetorical study provides one such example. Na'puti's call for rhetoric to engage "indigeneity as analytic" reorganizes the frames for speech, kinship, and inheritance in a manner that demands that rhetoric "confront its colonial presence and indigenous erasure."²⁹ While Na'puti correctly notes that rhetoric's fullness as a discipline is consolidated through the genocide of Native people, her turn toward Native heritage attempts to find secure spatio-temporal coordinates through which Nateness can map itself relative to the Settler/Master. This suggests that a recognition and theorization of kinship would be enough to overcome the genocidal violence of rhetorical practice as presently theorized and attempts to invite the Native into an intra-Human community with the Settler/Master. As such, the politics of recognition manifest here as a desire to assemble Native life into an ethical constituency through expanding rhetoric's territory of subjectivity to include Native rhetorical practices. Na'puti's theory of indigeneity does, however, gesture towards what Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang refer to as the "incommensurability" of Native positionality with that of the Settler.³⁰ In order to think with incommensurability against the enduring violence of the modern project and its representational demand, I believe that the theory of genocide as constitutive of Native life must be applied to the rhetorical situation.

²⁹ Tiara R. Na'puti, "Speaking of indigeneity: Navigating genealogies against erasure and #RhetoricSoWhite," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 105, No 4 (2019): 498.

³⁰ Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization is not a metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* Vol 1, No 1 (2012): 4.

Rhetoric of race and racial rhetorical criticism name emergent fields of study that challenge rhetoric's whiteness and that advocate an expansive reading of what rhetorical theory and criticism can be. In her piece "Between abundance and marginalization: the imperative of racial rhetorical criticism," Lisa A. Flores describes the necessity for scholars of rhetoric to think the question of race, suggesting that "[r]hetorical meanings, as they circulate on and around bodies, are already raced."³¹ Flores' vision of racial rhetorical criticism not only situates race as its object of analysis, but also requires reforming existing rhetorical methods in order to situate the particularity of raced speech, speakers, and audiences. Writing about the #RhetoricSoWhite phenomenon in 2019, Darrel Wanzer-Serrano suggests that rhetoric must unsettle "the kinds of intellectual practices and political commitments that make rhetorical studies such an overwhelmingly white space."³² Rhetoric of race scholarship obtains its name through its object of study: race. But this begs the question of which rhetorical situations are not marked by raciality, and therefore the question of what rhetoricians take "race" to be altogether. How does race show up in rhetorical situations? And what does Blackness' thorough deracination and Nativeness' partial deracination bring to bear on the study of rhetoric of race? These new fields require refinement of their category of analysis in order to more fully articulate the limits of (white) rhetorical methodology and practice. In service of this refinement, I have constructed a shifting and unstable rhetorical theory of

³¹ Lisa A. Flores, "Between abundance and marginalization: the imperative of racial rhetorical criticism," *Review of Communication* 16, no. 1 (2016): 7.

³² Darrel Wanzer-Serrano, "Rhetoric's rac(e)list problems," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 105, No 4 (2019): 468.

the text that I believe can follow the projects of deracination (of Blackness and Nativeness) through tracking liberalism's transmogrifications of radical meaning.

Rhetoric's conception of the figure of the rhetor, its vision of communication as an act that passes from one individuated party to another, and, most pressingly, its presumption of an already full artifact through which textual meanings can be understood, provides a limited framework for critical intervention. Critiques proffered throughout rhetoric's respective critical and cultural turns have destabilized the rhetor, text, and audience, opening rhetoric's theoretical tools to concepts like the counterpublic, visual rhetoric, and vernacular rhetoric. While this proliferation of alternative frameworks for study certainly seemed transgressive and even liberatory at times, the expansion of an already existent modern field of possibilities remains merely a transgression or destabilization, not an overthrow of the enduring hold of the subject that subtends these concepts.

Rhetoric's critical turn was one such transgressive attempt to destabilize rhetoric's objectifying understanding of the speech situation. In 2009, Raymie E. McKerrow argued for a turn to rhetoric as contingent, knowledge as doxastic, and power as performative, suggesting that a critical rhetorical practice must remain persistently critical in demystifying relations of power.³³ McKerrow argued for the interrogation of discourse as "the tactical dimension of the operation of power in its manifold relations at all levels of society, within and between institutions,

³³ Raymie E. McKerrow, "Critical rhetoric: Theory and praxis," *Communication Monographs* 56: 2 (2009): 92.

groups and individuals.”³⁴ McKerrow suggested that rhetorical criticism could therefore challenge power through insisting on antinormative transgression against the regimes of knowledge and enunciation that institute themselves as hegemonic.

Borrowing from McKerrow, Kent A. Ono and John M. Sloop invoked *telos* in order to suggest that the position of the critical rhetorical critic must include an agential purpose against freedom/domination.³⁵ Ono and Sloop were preoccupied with the ethics of rhetorical criticism, namely delimiting “right” versus “wrong” action, a strategy which depends upon the left’s culture of political correctness and harkens to Aristotelian models of persuasion (finding the “right” words at the “right” time).³⁶ Their conception of *telos* imports a critical agency into the rhetorical critic, assuming a methodological possibility that forecloses Black and Native enunciation in the grammars of suffering that pose an enduring and impossible exigency toward the end of modernity and its disciplinary formations in academia.

The critical turn’s transgressive politics are dependent on the underlying tenets of liberal Humanism, namely an understanding of freedom as liberation from constraint. McKerrow’s discussion of language as a dimension of power which exists between “all institutions, groups and individuals” assumes *a priori* that discourse operates on a field in which the subject’s relationship to the available means of persuasion is neutral and preordained. Ono and Sloop’s *telos*

³⁴ Ibid, 98.

³⁵ Kent A. Ono and John M. Sloop, “Commitment to *telos*—a sustained critical rhetoric,” *Communication Monographs* 59: 1 (2009): 48.

³⁶ Ibid, 49.

requires the enunciative agency of the one who acts upon space and time in order to delimit and enclose the rhetorical situation. It is, once again, this neutral individual, this subject, who delimits the rhetorical situation and hence discursive practice. Against this neutral distribution of rhetoricity, I argue that the Settler/Master maintains an ethical monopoly on the proper use of speech and the available means of persuasion. The object of my critique, then, is that which is already assumed in the critical turn's formulation of power: the subject.

I take issue with rhetoric's desire to arrest-through-knowing its fixed, full, objects of study and, in turn, to arrest the position of both the rhetor and the critic. This comes into light at the moment of liberal transmogrification, because it means that in a field of shifting meanings, rhetoric's preoccupation with a fixed text is disadvantageous to theorizing the multivalent and polysynchronous meanings that radical terminologies could come to signify. Rhetoric's artifact is presumed to exist in time and space relatively undisturbed by the presumption of its fullness, interiority, and plenitude, presenting a theory of persuasion premised on an already-existent set of meanings and potential for signification that relies upon a neutral field of shared language. Against this presupposition, I attempt to theorize with the mobility of the artifact, not as a liberatory horizon free from constraint, but rather as that which juxtaposes itself against the historical stillnesses of genocide and slavery.

In other words, my methodological choices endeavor to undo the relationship between liberalism as a modern project and rhetorical theory and criticism. Against the demand for presence authorized by the politics of recognition, I ask, why do rhetoricians demand the institutional bulwark of

liberalism's sovereignty as the thing that authorizes a rhetorical situation? As Fred Moten poses, "[W]hy does the problem of scale always swerve into the problem of audience? Why does the need for institutions always show up as a problem of scale? [...]What if what the people suffer ain't large absence but small noncommunicabilities?"³⁷ Beginning from the premise that the grammars of suffering of the Black and the unflinching articulation of the Native are noncommunicable, I write about the unstable and shifting rhetorical trajectories of privilege, intersectionality, and "the personal is political" under liberal modernity. I seek to investigate what they fail to communicate in their dispersal across academic sites, social media, and activist contexts, endeavoring to think with the radical hopes that inspired their coinage even as I critique their continued use on the surface of the politics of recognition.

As such, my method refuses the presumption of the plenitude, interiority, and sovereignty of the artifact, as I find that it is the predisposition of a full text that invites the kinds of critical settlement and mastery that have brought #RhetoricSoWhite to its impasse with the politics of recognition. The sparse textuality that I articulate throughout this thesis provides an opportunity to study the shifting terrain of communication as liberalism poses its counterinsurgency in service of the continued operations of genocide and slavery. Studying the transmogrifications of radical meaning under liberalism requires the understanding that objects of study move, and that the knowledge gleaned by arresting them must similarly undo itself and become destabilized in order to

³⁷ Fred Moten, "resistances, impromptu," *BLACKOUT ((poetry & politics))*, <https://my-blackout.com/2020/02/08/fred-moten-resistances-impromptu/>.

wage critical insurgency against modernity. In order to write theory with attention to the exigency of modernity's liberalism, a phrase that undoes the term exigency in its weddedness to the enduring immensity of genocide and slavery, critics must follow rhetoric through moving in and out of spatio-temporal coherence.³⁸

In Part 1: Privilege, Racial Capitalism, & Indebtedness, I study the rhetorical transmogrifications of privilege from its early coinage as advocacy for mass revolution against capitalism to its contemporary usage as individual self-reflexivity. I argue that both its early coinage and contemporary usage reinvest in the plenitude, interiority, and sovereignty of the subject, retrenching white life as both value and valuation through the extractive violences of genocide and slavery. Against the presupposition of the fullness of the subject, I suggest that theorizing indebtedness can begin to foster revolutionary subjectivity against racial capitalism and towards the otherwise foreclosed by privilege's invocation.

In Part 2: The Nation-State Form, Intersectionality, & its Underside, I look at intersectionality from two valences: its surface and its underside. I argue that surface-readings of intersectionality are characterized by the presumption of the fullness of the categories of race, gender, class, sexuality, etc. and thusly reproduce the affirmative action mandate and the liberal subject of the Human community. I advocate for a turn to intersectionality's underside, its rigorous

³⁸ I borrow this term from Frank B. Wilderson, III's *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms*, where he utilizes it in order to think through the Historical and cartographic coordinates that secure Human capacity.

theorization of those forces which do and undo the subject of the juridical form, as an invitation to a mode of being that does not attempt to make form out of matter and that, instead, dwells in genocide and slavery's incessant refusal to complete the body, the subject, or, indeed, the apparatus of governance.

In Part 3: "The Personal is Political" & the Rhetorical Tradition, I apply my arguments about racial capitalism and the nation-state form specifically to rhetoric's theorization of the public and the private. I read white feminist rhetoricians' separate spheres theory as an extension of settlement and mastery through the techniques of white domesticity. Against this theory of public versus private enunciation, I introduce the racial-sexual mark of enunciation as an alternative theory of rhetoric that can attend to genocide and slavery as violences which exceed the delimitation of the propertied spheres of either the personal or the political.

Finally, I conclude, in brief, with an invitation for rhetoricians to further theorize the racial-sexual mark of enunciation and the transmogrifications of liberalism.

PART ONE: *Privilege, Racial Capitalism, & Indebtedness*

Privilege. It is the object of this part's investigation, but certainly a roving object, invoked differently at different times and in different spaces. It is used with an increasing intensity in contexts that claim to desire social justice. Among many U.S. so-called leftists, the term is a buzzword designed to denote the *right kind* of leftism: namely, leftism focused on self-reflexivity and accountability. Given its popularity, it is strange that the term "privilege" is rarely investigated for what it signifies, and almost never for the content of its signification or the limits of what it can say. The rhetorical invocation of privilege that I address in this section is populated by numerous egregious and counter insurgent iterations across social media. By way of example, a chart entitled "How Privileged Are You?" provides thirteen identity categories with numbers assigned to where a given person might fall in each. These categories range from race, sex, orientation, size, and gender, to country of origin, religion, attractiveness, and profession, including a question about whether the user is reading the chart on a Friday or Saturday night and a question about whether the user in question can do basic math. Within each category, users are to self-select their identity formation, which corresponds to a number, either positive or negative. After adding the numbers up, the user can locate themselves within a range of

privilege: “very disprivileged” (from negative 2,585 to negative 100), “non privileged” (from negative 100 to zero), “above average” (from 0 to positive 100, which includes a “privileged” subgroup from 50 to 100), and “check it daily” (from 100 to 235). Categories that confer the lowest scores include: Black, blind, Muslim, intersex, gay, trans, short, from the Middle East, having a disfigurement, being homeless or incarcerated, working as a scientist, doing the chart on a Friday or Saturday night, and not being able to add.³⁹ The highest scoring categories include: white, able-bodied, Jewish, cis, male, straight, tall, from Northern Europe, ranking a nine or ten on the attractiveness scale, being a plutocrat, and working as an investment banker.⁴⁰ While this assignation of value to identity categories may seem absurd, aids like these are routinely circulated on social media in order to inform the presumably uneducated masses about the nature of power. Curators of these privilege checklists rarely take personal credit for their work, meaning that charts like these generally disseminate as memes upon which users participate in self-identification in the register of social justice. In other words, this chart’s rhetoric of privilege appears to be something of a rule in the social media world of social justice work, not an exception.

In what follows, I assess privilege’s enunciative capacities through tracing its historical usage in order to investigate the subject of address of “privilege” and its limitations within the liberal world order. The chart described above is animated by the differential valuation of identity categories under racially

³⁹ The irony of including this element on a list of privileges, of course, is that one must be able to add in order to assess whether they are disprivileged in not being able to add.

⁴⁰ “How Privileged Are You?” Digital Image. *Reddit*. April 3, 2015. https://www.reddit.com/r/BadSocialScience/comments/31c3ky/how_privileged_are_you/

capitalist and multicultural regimes of difference predicated on liberalism's desire for innocence and fetishization of victimhood.⁴¹ For example, the positive value ratings for categories of privilege range between +5 and +50, whereas the negative value ratings for categories of disprivilege range between -5 and -750, suggesting implicitly that disprivilege has a more significant effect on one's life than privilege, thereby reinstituting the subject of privilege (white, male, straight, etc.) as a normative value.

Similarly, the chart asserts that the profession with the lowest value is "scientist" and that "Jewish" is the most highly valued religion. While the chart provides no warrant to substantiate these claims about privileged versus disprivileged value (a fact which has been noted by numerous Tumblr and Reddit users⁴²), even more concerning to me in the contemporary discourses of privilege is the incessant preoccupation with valuation itself. The differential valuations imposed by the chart suggest an investment in racial capitalism's calculative logics. As Shannon Winnubst writes, "[I]ndividuals in neoliberalism begin to internalize the calculative rationality of the market as the most effective way of becoming subjects."⁴³ As such, these valuations institute, rather than deconstruct, the subject of privilege that they portend to address.⁴⁴ As in other popular discourses of privilege, the term privilege is here almost inseparable from wealth,

⁴¹ For more on victim fetishes, innocence, and the dynamics of multiculturalism's summoning of trauma, see *The Reorder of Things: The University and its Pedagogies of Minority Difference* by Roderick Ferguson and "Suspending damage: A letter to communities." by Eve Tuck.

⁴² See e.g. the comments on the Reddit post at the following URL: https://www.reddit.com/r/BadSocialScience/comments/31c3ky/how_privileged_are_you/.

⁴³ Shannon Winnubst, "The many lives of fungibility: anti-blackness in neoliberal times," *Journal of Gender Studies* 29:1 (2020): 107-108.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 108.

and therefore from racial capitalism and its modes of valuation. Indeed, in the chart, “plutocrat” is the highest privilege designation, while “homelessness/institutionalization” is among the lowest.

Much of the discursive terrain of privilege, then, is mediated by whiteness and its value-laden ethical judgments under racial capitalism. Invocations of privilege frequently require the collapse of categories of difference into one another onto the same plane of valuation, using whiteness as a mediator. For example, a 2017 article entitled “Straight Black Men are the White People of Black People” argues that, in spite of disprivilege relative to white America, straight Black men enact various forms of intraracial privilege among Black people, enabling them to function as white America when it comes to Black women.⁴⁵ While the collapse of straight Black men into white people elides antiblackness as a structure of feeling,⁴⁶ this reduction also reveals the intractable dimensions of privilege and whiteness. As such, a historical reading of the relationship between whiteness and privilege is required in order to assess this terrain of invocation.

“White skin privilege” was first put into writing by Theodore W. Allen in his call for a “John Brown Commemoration Committee” in 1964. Inspired by Du Bois and the Civil Rights Movement, he argued that white Americans, if they truly

⁴⁵ Damon Young, “Straight Black Men are the White People of Black People,” *The Root: Black News, Opinions, Politics, and Culture*, 19 Sept 2017, <https://verysmartbrothas.theroot.com/straight-black-men-are-the-white-people-of-black-people-1814157214>.

⁴⁶ As Zubairu Wai describes in “The empire’s new clothes: Africa, liberal interventionism and contemporary world order,” contemporary empire constitutes not a form of territorial acquisition from the West to the rest but rather a structure of feeling that requires that Western subjects of liberal empire believe in their own benevolence and that colonized peoples remain “grateful natives.” In this case, antiblackness as a structure of feeling suggests that power does not move from white people to Black people but instead poses a grammar for (non)relationality.

believed in the future of their country, must give up their white skin privilege. He theorized that white skin privilege incentivizes white people to refuse coalition with Black people and other people of color, particularly in the realm of labor rights.⁴⁷ Allen would later collaborate with Noel Ignatin on “White Blindspot,” which argues that white chauvinism is detrimental to the formation of an interracial proletariat class, also harming white workers.⁴⁸ In his 1994 text *The Invention of the White Race*, Allen argues that white privilege was cultivated in the late 1600’s by the ruling class of Virginia in order to subdue and fracture Black and white labor solidarities.⁴⁹

The terminology of privilege was, however, not broadly recognized in popular culture in the United States until Peggy McIntosh’s “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” was published in 1988. Within it, McIntosh turns from Allen’s collective theory of white privilege towards an individual one. McIntosh identifies a long list of unearned privileges that she benefits from, suggesting that “[d]escribing white privilege makes one newly accountable.”⁵⁰ McIntosh does not offer a prescription, though she does suggest that it is through the process of recognizing and self-reflecting upon one’s privilege that one might be able to do differently. While this final call to action is notoriously absent, McIntosh suggests that it is through consciousness-raising and self-reflexivity

⁴⁷ Richard Moser, “White Skin Privilege,” *CounterPunch*, 14 August 2017, <https://www.counterpunch.org/2017/08/14/white-skin-privilege/>.

⁴⁸ Noel Ignatin and Ted Allen, “White Blindspot,” *Understanding and Fighting White Supremacy*, 1967, <http://www.sojournertruth.net/whiteblindspot.html>, 26-33.

⁴⁹ Theodore W. Allen, “The Invention of the White Race, Volume 1: Racial Oppression and Social Control” (London: Verso, 1994).

⁵⁰ Peggy McIntosh, “White Privilege, Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack,” *Independent School* 49 (1990): 31.

amongst white people that white racial privilege can be either used or undermined.⁵¹ In invoking the “use” of white privilege, McIntosh implicitly suggests a politics of racial lack and reinvestment in white subjectivity, as I explore later.

It is significant to note that self-reflexivity is not only the primary, but the *only* aspect of the early discourses of “white privilege” that is taken up within current left discourses in popular culture and the academy. Allen and Ignatin’s earlier attempts to offer a theory of racial capitalism as constitutive of white subject formation, building upon Du Bois’ *Black Reconstruction*, have been virtually evacuated from contemporary discourses of “privilege.” The social media landscape, from Twitter to Facebook, is littered with social justice advocates, describing white people and others operationalizing power as “speaking from a place of privilege,” or asking racists to “Google it,” constructing slave-making and genocidal violence as the result of the wrong kind of speech or ignorance rather than theorizing violence as constitutive of the subject and liberal modernity. While the enclosure of “privilege” to the realm of self-reflexivity was not present in Allen and Ignatin’s work, which gestured towards collective action against capitalism and its antiblack effects rather than the narcissism espoused in “Unpacking the Privilege Knapsack,” its contemporary usage is also made possible by Allen and Ignatin’s own communicated desire for innocence, community, and ethical subjectivity.

⁵¹ Ibid.

I will first elaborate a critique of Allen and Ignatin's early work through an investigation of the white subject of racial capitalism. I will discuss how their depiction of capitalism's violence as racialized resource disparity, rather than genocide and slavery as the means of production for white subjectivity-as-value, paved the way for contemporary usages of privilege, which reiterate racial lack and the politics of racial uplift in order to preserve rather than challenge the endurance of slavery and genocide. I will then investigate the contemporary fixing of "privilege" to self-reflexivity through an analysis of Peggy McIntosh's work on privilege, including the assumed desirability of privilege confessionals as zones of transcendence for white subjects. I investigate how "checking privilege" attempts to perform accountability for the antiracist white subject, who counts their debts in order to situate their whiteness itself as value-laden under neoliberalism. I will briefly detour to explain how these conceptualizations of privilege assume a misapplication of the center/periphery conceptual apparatus, thus retrenching rather than challenging the racialized appropriations and expropriations that characterize global racial capitalism. I will offer some closing thoughts about privilege's limited conceptualization of accountability and white racial debt, suggesting that its enduring counterinsurgency lies in its ability to suggest that the debt of genocide and slavery can be paid at all. I will, instead, gesture towards indebtedness as an alternative conceptualization of revolutionary work against racial capitalism.

'White Blindspot' Has A White Blindspot

Theodore Allen and Noel Ignatin's "White Blindspot" should be read as one moment in a long (underside of) history of attempts to theorize and refuse racial capitalism. They identify white racial privilege as the material base for the racial split in labor politics, as well as challenging the fallacy, still held by many white communists, that class struggle and racial struggle are separate battles. Instead, they point out that a revolution by the proletariat can only be undertaken through white workers' refusal of white racial privilege.⁵² For them, "white privilege" announces a mass struggle against the ruling class, including opposition to "the original sweetheart agreement" between white workers and the U.S. bourgeoisie.⁵³ As Ignatin writes in 1976,

'[R]epudiation of white skin privilege' does not mean that our major work should consist of asking white workers, one by one, to give up their relatively good neighborhoods, jobs and schools in favor of Blacks and other Third World people (although individual actions are certainly appropriate and effective at times). The phrase in quotes refers to a policy of struggle, of which mass action is the decisive aspect, against the ruling class policy of favoritism for whites[.]⁵⁴

Unlike the contemporary usage of privilege, which locates it as a quality possessed by individuals (a phenomenon that I elaborate in the following section), the above quotation demonstrates its early usage in the context of mass struggle against racial capitalism.

Allen and Ignatin's depiction of white racial privilege as a policy, deal, or "sweetheart agreement" throughout the piece is, however, worth noting on the question of the liberal individual. The etymology of privilege derives from Latin

⁵² Allen and Ignatin, "White Blindspot," 26.

⁵³ Ibid, 27.

⁵⁴ Allen and Ignatin, "White Blindspot," 26.

privus, meaning individual or private, and *lex*, meaning law. Together, these roots suggest that privilege is “an ordinance in favor of an individual.”⁵⁵

Theorizing white racial privilege as a contract established between parties therefore invokes that the law protects privilege as a property of individuals and policy of favoritism. As Allen and Ignatin write,

The terms of the deal, worked out over the three hundred year history of the development of capitalism in our country, are these: you white workers help us conquer and enslave the non-white majority of the earth’s laboring force, and we will repay you with a monopoly of the skilled jobs, we will cushion you against the most severe shocks of the economic cycle, provide you with health and education facilities superior to those of the non-white population, grant you the freedom to spend your money and leisure time as you wish without social restrictions, enable you on occasion to promote one of your number out of the ranks of the laboring class, and in general confer on you the material and spiritual privileges befitting your white skin.⁵⁶

Privus and *lex*, constructed here as “white racial privilege,” appear to gloss a critique of the ruling class in collaboration with whiteness.

Indeed, their construction of privilege as a deal struck between the white worker and (white) ruling class, elaborated in the quotation above, would suggest in its most radical form that privilege describes the contractual obligation of the state and the law to protect the liberal subject’s right to compete under (racial) capitalism.⁵⁷ This critique – of the liberal subject with the right to compete, whose right is secured through the law’s protection of liberal competition through capitalism – would demand interrogating the compact of white racial privilege

⁵⁵ Etymonline, “privilege (n.),” 2001, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/privilege>.

⁵⁶ Allen and Ignatin, “White Blindspot,” 27.

⁵⁷ Denise Ferreira da Silva, “The Racial Limits of Social Justice: The Ruse of Equality of Opportunity and the Global Affirmative Action Mandate,” *Critical Ethnic Studies* Vol 2 No 2 (2016): 187.

through deconstructing the existence of the (white) liberal individual.⁵⁸ However, Allen and Ignatin do not take this route. Firstly, of course, they assume a real, lived bifurcation between the ruling class and the white worker, neglecting the enduring whiteness of the ruling class under U.S. capitalism.⁵⁹

Secondly, and more to the point, their elaboration of the original deal or sweetheart agreement suggests implicitly that the situation of white workers is desirable compared to that of Black workers and other workers of color. For example, they pose, “Does this mean that, as far as the white workers are concerned, communists must sit passively and wait until the ruling class, of its own necessity (e.g. loss of colonial holdings) moves to cut its losses at the expense of some of the white workers’ racial privileges and attempts to *reduce them to or near the level of black, brown, and yellow workers?*”⁶⁰ Their emphatic answer to this question is, of course, no. They suggest that white workers must not be *reduced* to the level of Black workers and other workers of color in service of labor solidarity, but rather that the differential distribution of resources (an effect of racial capitalism) should be challenged such that everyone can live comfortably.

⁵⁸ See, e.g. Denise Ferreira da Silva’s “The Racial Limits of Social Justice: The Ruse of Equality of Opportunity and the Global Affirmative Action Mandate” and Anna M. Agathangelou’s “What suicide and Greece tell us about precarity and capitalism.”

⁵⁹ The white racial position under racial capitalism cannot produce the a priori bifurcation between “white worker” and “(white) ruling class” depicted by Allen and Ignatin. This is because racial capitalism designates whiteness as always already a form of value; in other words, it is not the collusion between two distinct entities which constitutes this sweetheart agreement but rather the inability to meaningfully distinguish the white worker from the white bourgeoisie in the registers of interiority, plenitude, and sovereignty. As Franz Fanon writes, “The cause is effect: You are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich.” (*Wretched of the Earth*, 4)

⁶⁰ Allen and Ignatin, “White Blindspot,” 27. Emphasis mine.

The politics of comparison depicted here – wherein white life is constructed as desirable, comfortable, safe, and thereby ethical, and where the critique of racial capitalism is framed as a distribution issue rather than a concern of valuation, subjectivity, and the world order – is detrimental to their own anti-capitalist position. The framing of reduction in the above quotation stakes quite simply the liberal politics of “white racial privilege” in this instance. Allen and Ignatin suggest that the prior plenitude, interiority, and sovereignty of the white worker should be universal aspirations; whites should not be expected to *reduce* their plenitude, interiority, or sovereignty to the denigrated status of non-whites under racial capitalism. The security afforded the white subject position should not be undermined, even in the quest to refuse racially capitalist social relations and white chauvinism.

What, then, is the anatomy of the politics of this refusal *to be reduced* in one’s whiteness? As Anna M. Agathangelou aptly explains, citing Fanon, “The governing fictions of capitalism include the resolution of figures, that is, signs and metaphors that are self-referential[.] Precarity [makes] it possible for readings of violence to continue refusing to see logics and thoughts and practices that are the ‘limits of [their] own fictioning[.]’”⁶¹ This white worker is framed in Allen and Ignatin’s writing through the precarity of loss (the constancy of alienation and exploitation).⁶² Their reading of the white worker as at risk of alienation and exploitation from the (white) ruling class provides a self-

⁶¹ Anna M. Agathangelou, “What suicide and Greece tells us about precarity and capitalism,” *Globalizations* (2018): 14.

⁶² For more on alienation and exploitation as grammars that constitute the position of the white/Human, see Frank B. Wilderson, III’s *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms*.

referential ethical paradigm, wherein the repudiation of white racial privilege is returned through the ethical mechanism of absolute priority for white subjectivity, comforts, and standards of life. This theoretical framework not only inadequately theorizes relations of capital and has limited explanatory power for global raciality as expropriative and appropriative world-making fodder for speculative capitalism,⁶³ but, as Agathangelou further explains, citing Denise Ferreira da Silva,

[Precarity] is a pivotal moment of inscribing colonial expropriations in a hierarchized grid of global labor (i.e., the total value yielded by native land and slave labor that ‘bet on an ethical indifference to the annihilation of the native and the enslaved’) [...] in the national itself, and this process of inscription is constitutive of the contemporary moment of capitalism.⁶⁴

Thus Allen and Ignatin’s empathy- and ethics-driven politic of universal precarity and uneven resource distribution is underwritten by a significant moment of failure to explain racially capitalist, expropriative relations of violence. As such, it returns us to the foundational violence of capital even as it promises redress.

What, then, might offer an analytic for racially capitalist expropriative and appropriative violence that attends to raciality? On this question Denise Ferreira da Silva elaborates:

[R]aciality, through the *logic of exclusion* and the *logic of obliteration*, aids the state’s current work for global capital. Whereas the pervasiveness of the *logic of exclusion*, through the thesis of discrimination, allows for a celebration of social inclusion measures to mark states’ commitment to equality of opportunity, the *logic of obliteration* continues to perform a decisive role, as the unacknowledged justification for a security apparatus designed to curb political and social unrest that expose the modalities of economic expropriation – namely, elimination of social provisions,

⁶³ Agathangelou, “What suicide and Greece tells us about precarity and capitalism,” 2.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

poor quality of social services, and expropriation of land and resources – characterizing global capitalism.⁶⁵

The thesis of white racial privilege forwarded by Allen and Ignatin assumes the logic of exclusion, which, according again to da Silva, “figures racial discrimination/inequality as a stain in the otherwise transparent U.S. social context, and assumes this anomaly would disappear with the elimination of racial beliefs – through education and improving Black people’s conditions, through mechanisms to bring about equality of opportunity.”⁶⁶ In other words, Allen and Ignatin restage the state politics of the affirmative action mandate in the presupposition of an a priori ethical white subjectivity, through the refusal to *reduce* the white worker to the status of the enslaved Black or genocided Native. This is because their presumption is that the violence of racial capitalism results from unequal access to resources, rather than calling into question the “the expropriation of the total value yielded by native land and slave labor,”⁶⁷ including their use value and surplus value in the production of the white subject, as the condition of possibility for capitalism.

The logic of exclusion also shares core premises with the logic of obliteration, as elaborated above by da Silva. The logic of obliteration glosses “ethical indifference to the annihilation of the native and the enslaved”⁶⁸ through situating value expropriation of native lands and slave labor through the differential distribution of resources as a moral deficiency on the part of the Black/Native, justifying the intensification of annihilation through the state’s

⁶⁵ da Silva, “The Racial Limits of Social Justice,” 185. Emphasis original.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 189.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 189.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 189.

global security apparatus. Thus both the logic of exclusion and the logic of obliteration are animated by racial lack and the politics of racial uplift. Both logics locate the value expropriated through genocide and slavery as a moral deficit in the Native and the Black⁶⁹ through naturalizing liberalism's progressive, de-historicized subject,⁷⁰ as if this subject were not made possible by the endurance of these expropriations.

Therefore, unlike orthodox Marxist theorists who locate the production of capital in appropriation and expropriation of the commodity and who presume this commodity exists to be competed over in a transparent field of self-interested, sovereign individuals, the logics of exclusion and obliteration explain the processes of accumulation by dispossession⁷¹ that characterize contemporary racial capitalism. As such, the white subject under racial capitalism would be better understood, not as a worker laboring to produce use value and surplus value for the (white) bourgeoisie,⁷² but instead as itself a function or modulation

⁶⁹ Ibid, 186.

⁷⁰ Shannon Winnubst, *Queering Freedom* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2006): 26.

⁷¹ Jackie Wang, *Carceral Capitalism* (South Pasadena, Semiotext(e), 2018): 113.

⁷² Tiffany King and Frank B. Wilderson, III, among others, have extensively theorized how slavery is not a form of labor but rather a technology of antiblack dispossession, deracination, and commodification that renders Black flesh through the grammars of fungibility and accumulation. However, very little has been written to investigate the corollary of this argument: that whiteness itself, then, should not be understood through labor but rather, as I argue here, as a form of surplus value and use value produced through the extractive processes of antiblack dispossession. Shannon Winnubst's "The many lives of fungibility: Anti-blackness in neoliberal times" assesses the transmutation of fungibility under neoliberalism, wherein white subjects proliferate their interests, and therefore interesting-ness, through the making of the self-as-market, explaining how white people make themselves valuable from within antiblack ontologies. Thus I suggest that, for whites under neoliberalism, the space of interiority is made available as *interest* and therefore confers value onto white subjectivity and interiority itself. This is frequently done through the neoliberal market mechanisms of colonial extraction, often glossed in popular culture as "cultural appropriation," i.e. the Kardashian family's obsession with Black men and Black hairstyles or the white people who keep coffee table books filled with black-and-white pictures of genocided Native people. As Audra Simpson suggests in "The State is a Man," and Frank B. Wilderson, III, suggests in *Red, White and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S.*

of use value and surplus value, extracted through the endurance of genocide and slavery. The (non)existence of the Native and the Black, then, can be investigated as the means of production for white subjectivity, a site of racial lack whose value is only rendered insofar as it is expropriated for the purpose of white interiority, sovereignty, and plenitude. As Tiffany King writes, “Native bodies are always slipping into death, Black bodies are always sliding into states of fungibility and accumulation. The flux and instability of the Black and the Native enable the Settler to experience a self actualizing state of both [liberatory] stability and transcendent autonomy.”⁷³ The demand that the Native and the Black remain sites of fixed-flux is a libidinal one for the white subject, whose full psychic interiority depends upon the endurance of genocide, accumulation, and fungibility.⁷⁴ These extractive processes are intensified under neoliberalism, which writes white interiority, sovereignty, and plenitude through the extraction and then valuation of Blackness and Nativeness under market rationalities and calculative logics.⁷⁵

Allen and Ignatin’s use of “privilege” to challenge racial capitalism from within the logic of exclusion is neither an effective strategy for Native/Black liberation nor a compelling argument against the racial position of the logic of exclusion in politics. Said another way, Allen and Ignatin’s approach to resource disparity, rather than the value expropriated through native land and slave labor

Antagonisms, Black and Native people do not possess a prior interiority but rather are “emptied out so other things can pass through.” (Simpson, “The State is a Man.”)

⁷³ Tiffany King, *In the Clearing: Black Female Bodies, Space, and Settler Colonial Landscapes*, Durham: Duke University Dissertation Submission (2013): 92.

⁷⁴ Wilderson, *Red, White & Black*, 15.

⁷⁵ Winnubst, “The many lives of fungibility,” 108.

that constitutes white subjectivity as use and surplus value, is not a winning strategy against the racially capitalist elite, who can respond to the former claim through suggesting more inclusive mechanisms for racial capitalism in order to better distribute its privileges (the spoils of empire) through neoliberal market mechanisms, while still enacting the logic of obliteration through its security apparatus (e.g., the police, military, prison, death) against those who pose a life otherwise.

This strategy of appeasement has been undertaken variously by the U.S. government in multiple arenas of power. In particular, Nixon's invention of Black capitalism in 1968, in order to redirect Black political energy from the Black Panther Party and towards strategies of state-sanctioned capital accumulation,⁷⁶ speaks to both the endurance and effectiveness of counterinsurgent state strategy to protect its mechanism of evaluation rendered through colonialism and the slave trade. As Roderick Ferguson writes,

With this concept [Black capitalism], Nixon did not attempt to [deny] the allure of minority difference. Instead, he evolved a mode of regulation based on affirming and redirecting nationalist ideals of self-determination, redirecting them toward state and capital's interests, rerouting those ideals by presenting state and capital as the very entities that could offer self-determination to minoritized subjects.⁷⁷

Thus at stake in these multicultural politics, framed around racial lack and the logic of exclusion, is the transmogrification of radical political imaginations from envisioning life against and beyond state and capital, to finding within these two

⁷⁶ Roderick Ferguson, *The Reorder of Things: The University and its Pedagogies of Minority Difference* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2012):56.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 56.

liberal institutions the path to an illusory freedom. It is important, here, to situate how the U.S. government and institutions of capital simultaneously domesticated the Black power movement through the affirmative action mandate, via multiculturalism and Black capitalism, and the power of its security apparatus, via COINTELPRO and state-sanctioned murder.

Because privilege, like whiteness, begins its enunciation from capacity (by which I mean plenitude, sovereignty, and interiority via the liberal subject of modernity), it is implicitly an enunciation grounded in racial lack, therefore legitimating both the affirmative action mandate and the security apparatus described above. Privilege's primary and enduring presupposition is that the privileged subject lives a life that others (the underprivileged) do not have, and that possession of this life is unearned. The dynamics of this assessment suggest that white privilege's racial others *desire* the form of life granted to whiteness through the racially capitalist production of the subject via (expropriation and appropriation of) the historical stillness of genocide and slavery. Privilege thus forecloses the possibility of white privilege's racial others desiring a life otherwise, an alternative form of life that gestures against the presupposition of subjectivity, racial plenitude, sovereignty, and interiority. Thus, privilege supports the politics of racial uplift insofar as its libidinal gravity rests on the desirability of ethics, happiness and enjoyment, therefore requiring that the racial others of Humanity aspire to equality (read: mimicry) among the privileged. It stakes a claim on the moral arrangement of white life through instituting all other forms of life as underprivileged and therefore axiomatically undesirable, except as *accoutrements* to add value to white subjectivity, e.g., "I

have Black friends” or through a carefully curated and inclusive social media profile identifying support for various social justice causes.⁷⁸

That Allen and Ignatin’s “White Blindspot” refuses to render an accurate depiction of this violence, but instead retreats to the logic of exclusion as its primary descriptive power, suggests they retain an investment in the quintessential innocence, plenitude, interiority, and sovereignty of the white subject produced through racial capitalism, fixing their analysis of “privilege” to a reiteration of the liberal individual and the discrimination thesis. As Agathangelou writes, “[T]hose who proceed under precarity’s sign must remain scrupulously attentive to the simultaneous work of the logics of expropriation [...] and the logics of obliteration, if it is to move beyond well-meaning and empathetic but empty humanisms.”⁷⁹ Allen and Ignatin’s inattentiveness to these logics, in service of their well-meaning and empathetic humanism, renders their politics of radical overhaul of racial capitalism merely a reiteration of white subjectivity. Because white subjectivity writes its existence into the future via racial capitalism and the nation-state form as twin pillars of liberalism,⁸⁰ this reification opened their political trajectory up to the contemporary, counter-insurgent rhetoric of privilege that I now investigate.

⁷⁸ Winnubst, “The many lives of fungibility,” 109.

⁷⁹ Agathangelou, “What suicide and Greece tells us about precarity and capitalism,” 15.

⁸⁰ Winnubst, *Queering Freedom*, 26.

Unpacking “Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack”

Peggy McIntosh’s “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack,” published in 1988, structures much of the contemporary discursive terrain of privilege. In this text, McIntosh lays out a political program (if it can even be called that) for white people, remarking that counting one’s privileges enables unseen dimensions of domination to come to the fore.⁸¹ She alludes to the possibilities that self-reflection on the part of white people enables changes to the social order and to white privilege – namely, that overcoming white obliviousness challenges the unearned entitlements that white people have come to take for granted.⁸²

This gesture towards self-reflexivity is repeated throughout social media networks and academic theory on social justice alike. Rhetoric scholars thinking and writing in identity knowledges frequently suggest self-reflexivity as a method of interrogating the stubborn adhesiveness of racial and gendered power dynamics. Nakayama and Krizek, for example, describe the importance of self-reflexivity through three principles: 1) “reflexivity encourages consideration of that which has been silenced or invisible in academic discussions[.]”⁸³ 2) “reflexivity encourages consideration of the representation of research and the articulation of the researcher’s position vis-à-vis social and academic structures[.]”⁸⁴ and 3) “reflexivity encourages an examination of the institutions

⁸¹ McIntosh, “White Privilege,” 31.

⁸² Ibid, 36.

⁸³ Thomas K. Nakayama and Robert L. Krizek, “Whiteness: A strategic rhetoric,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 81, no. 3 (1995): 303.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 304.

and politics that produce ‘knowledge.’”⁸⁵ These dimensions of self-reflexivity attempt to understand the imbrication of the critic themselves within a rhetorical situation through reflecting on the representational politics of power and knowledge.

The proliferation of calls for white people to be self-reflexive is, however, not contained to critiques such as Nakayama and Krizek’s. The request for self-reflexivity remains enmeshed in a certain kind of cultural politics, particularly on social media, and belies a certain anxiety about white subjectivity. Said another way, self-reflexivity, framed in this contemporary moment as integral to a certain type of white identity formation, announces one’s apologetic, anxious subjectivity as if apology or anxiety rendered the white subject ethical, or even not racist. As Sara Ahmed describes, “An anxious whiteness would be one that is anxious about such worrying: this white subject would come into existence in its very anxiety about the effects it has on others, or even in fear that it is taking something away from others. This white subject might even be anxious about its own tendency to worry about the proximity of others.”⁸⁶ Peggy McIntosh’s invisible knapsack contains many placeholders for this anxiety; she invokes that white people must become upset – distressed even – by the presence of their privilege, and that a choice must be made either to “use” white privilege to undermine systems of unfair racial advantage or to risk “reconstruct[ing] power systems on a broader base.”⁸⁷ The politics of this “use” imports the same sense of racial lack (animated

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Sara Ahmed, “Declarations of Whiteness: The Non-Performativity of Anti-Racism,” *Borderlands* Vol 3 No 2 (2004).

⁸⁷ McIntosh, “White Privilege,” 36.

through either the logic of exclusion or the logic of obliteration) elaborated above. In this case, situating white subjectivity's amelioration through its apologia-as-antiracism restages a commitment to the use value of whiteness, which requires appropriation and expropriation via genocide and slavery. As such, I want to think through the composition of the anxious white subject through apologetic enunciation, not least because of the proliferation of "privilege" and "self-reflexivity" across multiply mediatized networks, with limited critical investigation of the terms at hand.

In Sara Ahmed's critique of privilege confessionals as unhappy performatives, she describes how, through critical reflection, "whiteness becomes an object through the expression of anxiety about becoming an object."⁸⁸ As she elaborates, "[w]e do after all get attached to our objects of study, which might mean that whiteness studies could 'get stuck' on whiteness, as that which 'gives itself' to itself."⁸⁹ The enunciation of privilege that McIntosh advocates contains this anxiety about fixing whiteness as an object of analysis, both in the sense that white people are very anxious to talk about their unethicity and because the study of whiteness can easily become its reification. Indeed, self-reflexive gestures belie an anxiety that, to once again borrow Ahmed's words, "if whiteness assumes integrity as an object of study, as being 'something' that we can track or follow across time and space, then whiteness would become a fetish, cut off from histories of production and circulation."⁹⁰ Whiteness as privilege risks becoming

⁸⁸ Ahmed, "Declarations of Whiteness."

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

a fetish object under contemporary racial capitalism because the presencing of white anxiety prevents an analysis of the ongoing stillness (absence) of genocide and slavery against which whiteness is made and returned through the white racial subject, possessing interiority, plenitude, sovereignty, and a monopoly on ethics (including the proper use of enunciation).⁹¹ In other words, the privilege confessional is also premised on reification, or the process by which social relations are perceived as inherent attributes of the relation, rather than located within circulation and production. In “checking one’s privilege,” or counting up one’s own white racial experiences, the counting itself is said to render the white subject ethical through enunciation.

This politic thus forecloses the existential critique of white subjectivity, or subjectivity in general. One can say, “When I enter a shop I can expect to be greeted as a customer, rather than assumed to be a thief.” And while this experiential admission does expose the differential experiences of, for example, white experiences of shopping and Black experiences of criminality, it does not open itself to the question of the ethics of the existence of white subjectivity in general. In other words, the desire to check one’s privilege through this mechanism of accounting is circulated, not through a critique of wealth (as in Allen and Ignatin’s “White Blindspot”) or through a critique of the plenitude, interiority, and sovereignty constitutive of whiteness through racial capitalism (as in Agathangelou and da Silva’s work), but rather through reterritorializing the

⁹¹ Wilderson, *Red, White, and Black*, 78.

subject as desirable and situating the return of this “new” subject’s anxious, guilty, apologetic enunciation as itself a form of racial justice.

The rhetoric of “checking privilege” fuels this return to white subjectivity, as it introduces enunciation of one’s own whiteness as a form of accountability. “Checking privilege” refers to the process of confessing various unearned entitlements and benefits that white people earn by virtue of their whiteness. “Checking privilege,” or counting the experiences that a given white person has had, or has never had, colludes with the calculative neoliberal rationalities of the market. As Shannon Winnubst explains, “In capitalism’s most recent iteration, neoliberalism, it is once more the abstraction of numerical orders that sets fungibility into fresh orbits, but not explicitly the abstraction of lives. In neoliberalism, the abstraction takes hold in the treasured subjective space of interiority that has grounded classical liberalism and its racializing apparatus.”⁹² This “treasured subjective space of interiority,” monopolized by whites, acquires value through its libidinal architecture, built through the endurance of slavery via the commodity-status of Blackness.⁹³ Under neoliberalism, then, the a priori plenitude, sovereignty, and interiority of whiteness is transmogrified through the calculation of interests; as Winnubst writes, “[T]o become a neoliberal subject is to become ‘interesting.’”⁹⁴ The desire to perform “interest” through the lens of social justice proliferates endlessly across social media, from Tumblr’s white “social justice warriors” to white Twitter users with “#BlackLivesMatter” or

⁹² Winnubst, “The Many Lives of Fungibility,” 108.

⁹³ Wilderson, *Red, White, and Black*, 7.

⁹⁴ Winnubst, “The Many Lives of Fungibility,” 108.

“#MMIW” in their “about me” section. White social media performances of interest in racial justice, including privilege confessionals, represent white subjectivity as interest-bearing under the neoliberal logics of the market, rendering the white user a proper neoliberal subject laden with both use value and surplus value.

Indeed, as McIntosh herself explains, “[d]escribing white privilege makes one newly accountable.”⁹⁵ It is therefore through the mechanism of accounting, or “checking privilege,” that whites imagine themselves born again, a phenomena that is intractably linked to neoliberal racialization. As Sara Ahmed explains, enunciations of privilege are animated through a “fantasy of transcendence,”⁹⁶ as if self-reflexivity is capable of introducing a new (white) subject, more ethical, less racially biased, and certainly not the same kind of white as one was before the self-reflexivity was offered. Self-reflexivity here becomes its own form of valuation – the valuation of an anxious, or apologetic, or critical whiteness as a more ethical position, or, at the very least, a better and more ethical mode of speech. The fantasy of transcendence is hence animated through critical distance as an innocence-producing mechanism, valued as such because of the white position under racial capitalism. The logic goes, “I have reflected on my whiteness, so therefore I have produced critical distance between the kind of whiteness I possessed prior to reflection and the kind of whiteness I possess now, which is a whiteness innocent of that previous, unreflected whiteness.” This assumes that racism is a function of ignorance or unawareness, and that,

⁹⁵ McIntosh, “White Privilege,” 31.

⁹⁶ Ahmed, “Declarations of Whiteness.”

therefore, renewed awareness will undermine the racism. The whole enunciation is premised on a desire for ethical existence, itself already monopolized by whites.

Against this fantasy, I want to pose an uncomfortable, racially violent conundrum. The fantasy of transcendence described above is in fact a white experience. While for the subject enmeshed within this fantasy, the white gaze is transcended through focusing centrally on its own (white) self as the object of analysis (rather than on the racial other as object), seeing whiteness in this manner is itself an exercise in the white gaze. The fantasy of transcendence can only function through the presumption that the gaze ceases to be white when turned upon a white self, which Ahmed describes as “constitut[ing] its subject as transcending its object in the moment it apprehends itself as the object (*being white*).”⁹⁷ Privilege, then, operates through white people (racially) marking themselves through the prior experience of being (racially) unmarked (by other white people). Admissions of privilege therefore function as narcissistic fantasies of self-development and self-transformation, which are, again, value-laden quantities under neoliberal racialization.⁹⁸ Privilege confessionals attempt to constitute newly realized white subjects through critical distance and racial apologism as (white) markers for the continued monopoly of ethical speech and thought. In other words, admissions of privilege narcissistically return the white subject back to itself, as the one whose feelings really matter.

Ahmed describes this whole process of enunciation as an “unhappy performative,” meaning a speech act that does not deliver on its promise (of

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Winnubst, “The Many Lives of Fungibility,” 109.

antiracist action, of ethical subjectivity, etc.).⁹⁹ While she correctly diagnoses that these white performatives of antiracism *fail to be antiracist*, she ignores that they also *succeed in producing the continued conditions of possibility for whiteness, mastery, and settlement*. In other words, the “unhappy performative” only remains unhappy if one is focused on the recuperation of ethical white subjectivity. Certainly, the privilege confessional fails to produce the effects it had desired to produce, in the register of antiracist subjectivity. But white people are not failing at being antiracist. To say so would be to suggest that white people are failing at being white, since antiracism is a quality only attributed to white people. The performative is, then, insidiously a happy one; white people are succeeding at racism, which is to say whiteness, or the reification of the structural principles of modernity: the security of their own white life. Ahmed’s term “failure” here assumes a prior plenitude, suggesting that antiracism is one of many choices for the white subject “to be,” which ignores that the right of choice is already circumscribed by liberal modernity and the liberal subject.¹⁰⁰ In other words, while the privilege confessional attempts to make visible the choices white subjects are afforded by virtue of their whiteness, it neglects that enunciation of white racial privilege is itself a choice afforded by virtue of whiteness.

The liberal reading of privilege as “choice” delimits the enunciation of privilege; rather than opening political imaginations toward an otherwise through an exposure of social arrangements, including one’s own subjectivity, as open to refusal, privilege confessionals foreclose alternative forms of life through

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ da Silva, “The Racial Limits of Social Justice,” 187.

the presumption of ethical speech. The only way for the rhetoric of privilege to get out of this conundrum – the choice to be ethical, ignoring that this very choice is motivated by modernity – unscathed would be to make privilege about an epistemological critique, rather than a critique of position. This is, of course, precisely what privilege confessionals attempt to do in order to preserve their monopoly on ethics.

Proponents of self-reflexivity who want to delay the critique I offered above routinely pivot between critiques of position and critiques of epistemology. While there is much to be gained from critiques of (white) position and critiques of (white) epistemology, respectively, it is the blurring of lines between the two that I now endeavor to expose.

The critique of how we know what we know and its attachment to dynamics of power is routinely attached to the very same modes of self-reflexivity I indicted above. For example, Raka Shome suggests that, in context of postcolonial applications, scholars privileged by Western nationality should ask, “To what extent do our scholarly practices—whether they be the kind of issues we explore in our research, the themes around which we organize our teaching syllabi, or the way that we structure our conferences and decide who speaks (and does not speak), about what, in the name of intellectual practices—legitimize the hegemony of Western power structures?”¹⁰¹ In this context, then, practices of self-reflexivity attempt to intervene in epistemological decisions that attempt to conceal their complicity with power at the same time that they operationalize it.

¹⁰¹ Raka Shome, “Postcolonial Interventions in the Rhetorical Canon: An ‘Other’ View,” *Communication Theory* Vol 6 No 1 (1996): 45.

Along these lines, Thomas K. Nakayama and Robert L. Krizek suggest that interrogating whiteness as an unmarked referent is best achieved through exposing its rhetoric.¹⁰² They argue that, through understanding whiteness as a strategic manipulation of the rhetorical situation,¹⁰³ whiteness institutes itself as normative by policing the boundaries of representation. Here the theory of the universalizing function of race is quite clear: whiteness represents itself as the center of political enunciation, marginalizing other forms of speech.¹⁰⁴

Understood as the (unmarked) center, white privilege as epistemology appears to dodge the critique of self-reflexivity I initiated above; how could one possibly account for white knowledge-making practices without reflecting on the boundaries that white people draw in service of centering their own whiteness? In order to assess the delimiting, liberal boundaries of even this question, I will now turn my attention to the center/periphery binary and its relation to this section's object of analysis: the rhetoric of privilege.

Privilege: Centering the Center

This brief detour through the center/periphery conceptual apparatus and its application to privilege may seem strange, as privilege portends to address white subject position, while the center/periphery offers an epistemological critique with epistemological registers of address. It is emphatically not preoccupied with identity or experience. But privilege clearly borrows its

¹⁰² Nakayama and Krizek, "Whiteness: A strategic rhetoric," 298.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 297-298.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 293.

anxieties from certain applications of the center/periphery concept, due in no small part to bell hooks' *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, which articulates an epistemic critique of the centering of (privileged) white feminists through re-centering "those who have knowledge of the margins and the center," (Black feminists and others) by virtue of living at the margins, as producers of feminist theory.¹⁰⁵ hooks' critique offers a theory of the relationship between experience and epistemology that does not assume an inevitable, one-to-one causality between the two. As hooks writes elsewhere, "Personal testimony [...] is such fertile ground for the production of liberatory feminist theory because [...] it forms the base of our theorymaking. While we work to resolve those issues [...] that are most pressing in daily life, we engage in a critical process of theorizing that enables and empowers."¹⁰⁶ This point suggests that theory should not be reduced to experience, but that experiential dimensions ought to inform epistemological work. To reduce position to experience, then, is to conflate experience with analysis. However, the tenuous relationship between the experiential dimension (which many people incorrectly interpret as *position*) and the epistemological dimension is assumed as absolute by contemporary discourses of privilege, in a generalized misreading of hooks in popular culture. The investigation of the center/periphery conceptual apparatus that follows will assess this assumption of absolute causation, as well as its rhetorical function in service of the preservation of the counterinsurgent rhetoric of privilege.

¹⁰⁵ bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (New York, Routledge, 2015): xvii.

¹⁰⁶ bell hooks, "Theory as Liberatory Practice," *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism* 4: 1 (1991): 8.

The center/periphery conceptual frame had been meaningfully articulated by myriad Latin Americanist theorists of economic dependency following their nominal independence from European colonizers.¹⁰⁷ Because this history is far too long to meaningfully reproduce here, I will focus first on Raúl Prebisch, a leading theorist in the first economic school of thought from the periphery. As one of the early founders of dependency theory, Prebisch argued that the core European powers depended upon and dominated peripheral countries, who produced food and raw materials for industrial states, challenging the evolutionist and developmentalist economic view held by economists in the core.¹⁰⁸ The core/periphery theory was further explicated by Immanuel Wallerstein, who developed world-system theory to explain global capitalist political economy through analyzing the development projects that the core articulated in order to govern its extractive practices from the periphery.¹⁰⁹ Latin Americanist critiques of development, some preoccupied with race and ethnicity and others focused on class as their sole unit of analysis,¹¹⁰ eventually found their opening in the Latin Americanist school of decolonial theory, a field where the center/periphery conceptual apparatus proved useful to describe a globalized, racially capitalist account of political economy. This analysis, of course, could not be separated from decolonial critiques of the representational economies of modernity, wherein epistemic and ontological contradistinctions between

¹⁰⁷ For a longer investigation of this history, see Ramón Grosfoguel's "A TimeSpace Perspective on Development: Recasting Latin American Debates."

¹⁰⁸ Ramón Grosfoguel, "A TimeSpace Perspective on Development: Recasting Latin American Debates," *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* Vol 20 No ¾ (1997): 485.

¹⁰⁹ See Immanuel Wallerstein's "The Concept of National Development, 1917-1989: Elegy and Requiem."

¹¹⁰ Grosfoguel, "A TimeSpace Perspective on Development," 479.

humanitas (center) and *anthropos* (periphery) proved durable in the reification of otherness.¹¹¹

Because of these enduring representational dynamics from the center to the periphery under the modern capitalist world-system, epistemically approaching otherness risks either returning the other (periphery) to the same (center) through the presumption of a monotopic hermeneutic premised on universal *humanitas*, or abjecting the other as total unknowability through the presumption of an absolute boundary of interpretation between *humanitas* and *anthropos*.¹¹² Both presumptions return to the impossibility of hermeneutically negotiating otherness due to the presence of racially capitalist forms of power that dictate subjectivity, including the possession of sovereignty, plenitude, and interiority described in previous sections.

However, Latin Americanist decolonial theorists offer a third approach to the hermeneutic question. Walter Mignolo and Madina Vladimirovna Tlostanova term this approach a pluritopic hermeneutics. As they explain,

[I]n the case of pluritopic hermeneutics, we localize the understanding subject in the colonial periphery, which automatically disturbs the easy and clear rendering of “tradition,” or point of reference. Indeed, pluritopic hermeneutics questions the position and the homogeneity of the understanding subject. It moves in the direction of interactive knowledge and understanding, reflecting the very process of constructing the space that is being known. The pluritopic approach does not accentuate relativism or cultural diversity. It stresses instead the social, political, and ontological dimensions of any theorizing and any understanding, questioning the Western locus on enunciation masked as universal and out-of-concrete-space.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Walter Mignolo and Madina Vladimirovna Tlostanova, “On Pluritopic Hermeneutics, Trans-Modern Thinking, and Decolonial Philosophy,” *Encounters* Vol 1 No 1 (2009): 12.

¹¹² *Ibid*, 17.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 18.

In this regard, the hermeneutic challenge posed by the center/periphery approach is clear: the center must be thought on the same epistemic terrain as the periphery, utilizing hermeneutic tools to decenter the center as the assumed locus of enunciation and to presume, even experimentally in speech, the periphery as multiple loci of enunciation simultaneously.

The center/periphery discourse has been taken up in a multicultural slight-of-hand in service of the contemporary discourses of privilege. I described above hooks' momentary slippage between privilege and center, and their corollaries, disprivilege and margin. The moments of this slippage proliferate seemingly endlessly on social media, from Twitter users who describe endlessly how "the privileged always center themselves" to social justice groups on Facebook whose rules include "do not speak on an issue you are privileged in." While I do not necessarily wish to problematize these critiques of white space-taking, I do want to problematize the assumption that privilege and the center are compatible phenomena.

I have described throughout Part 1 the myriad ways that privilege fails to articulate a compelling critique of the political economy of racial capitalism, constituted in and through the racially capitalist (white) subject, which is itself the product of the expropriated surplus and use value from ongoing genocide and slavery. Because privilege does not intervene critically in the reification of this subject, it cannot be granted that it critically intervenes in the center/periphery elaboration of global political economy, or that its theory of the subject is compatible with the center in racially capitalist globality. In fact, privilege and the

center undergo a reversal of terms when performing their respective epistemological critiques.

Because the center in decolonial theory is understood to be predicated on epistemic erasure and domination, decolonial theory advocates putting the center on the same epistemic plane as the periphery. Unlike decolonial theory, however, the politics of enunciation that attend privilege *claim* the center as the locus of apologetic, anxious enunciation, suggesting that the epistemic intervention cannot hold. Indeed, the idea of putting the West on the same epistemic plane as, for example, Anishinaabeg, is quite compelling in its critical unsettling of colonial official histories, ways of knowing, and forms of life. But the idea of putting white people on the same epistemic plane as Black or Native people does not hold up, as it would merely gloss an already-existing desire for equality or universal subjecthood promised by liberal modernity, which I have above described in its libidinal manifestations through the dynamics of racial lack and the politics of racial uplift. This is because privilege is not an epistemological critique; instead, privilege wants to be a critique of position that *becomes* a critique of experience because privilege returns the (white) subject to itself through it attempts to reify whites' monopoly on ethical speech.

The gap between position and epistemology is bridged by privilege's focus on self-reflexivity. More specifically, lived, personal experience is supposed to link position and epistemology, hence the social justice focus on "do not speak about something you have not experienced," where experience is assumed to be the causal outcome of one's (racial) position. If position and experience are linked in a more complicated way than merely causality – if, perhaps, as hooks has

gestured towards in suggesting that experience must *not* be conflated with analysis, the correlation between them is a deeper and more structural phenomena than “experience” can explain – then the center does not hold; lived experience cannot possibly absolutely explain either the existence of a subject or the epistemological grounding of said subject. This is because the sublation of position into experience must assume a prior plenitude of the subject’s interiority as given before the enactment of the violence of raciality that constitutes whiteness. Said another way, the assumption that the white racial position correlates fully with experience imports the fullness of the category of whiteness a priori, as a universal condition of self-reflection. This presumption derives from the desire to possess oneself, a tenet fundamental to liberalism’s dehistoricizing project, which privileges the liberal individual as its primary unit of analysis.¹¹⁴ As I have established, this liberal individual is intractably bound to whiteness, and therefore to the endurance of genocide and slavery, suggesting that, as Harney and Moten put it, it is “self-possession [...] that represents the real danger.”¹¹⁵

As such, conflating experience with position allows neither the examination or refusal of the condensation of whiteness into a full category, whose fullness is itself the epistemological condition for the enunciation of privilege and the hermeneutic condition for the interpretation of (an allegedly universal) terrain of experience. Thus the reading of privilege as compatible with center, which uses lived experience to modulate this slippage, restages the very

¹¹⁴ Winnubst, *Queering Freedom*, 25.

¹¹⁵ Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Wivenhoe, Minor Compositions, 2013): 17.

conditions of enunciation that make *both* whiteness and the West into value and valuation under global, racially expropriative and appropriative capitalism.

Privilege can only think presence (of category, of lived experience), while decolonial theory can think the conditions of possibility for this subject and their enunciation. This is to say, decolonial theory's approach to the center is differentially attentive to violence than the popular discursive accommodations of privilege because decolonial theory can think *absence* (of Native and Black forms of life, cosmologies, and hermeneutics) as conditions of enunciation. This is because enunciations of privilege make whiteness into a fetish object, cut off from the historical stillness of genocide and slavery that must be expropriated in order to confer use value and surplus value to white subjectivity.

Unlike decolonial theory, the rhetoric of privilege indulges a fundamentally colonial project. Privilege is incompatible with decolonial work because it enacts empire's violence in service of the self-preservation of *humanitas*. As Zubairu Wai has identified, the form of imperial power has shifted in recent years towards what he terms "postcolonial imperialism."¹¹⁶ Postcolonial imperialism attempts to enforce globally, via juridical and military interventions, the cosmopolitan and humanitarian values defined by Western liberalism, including democracy, human rights, good governance, and neoliberal market mechanisms.¹¹⁷ The maintenance of this humanitarian mode of empire requires that those in the imperial core believe deeply in their own benevolence and, just

¹¹⁶ Zubairu Wai, "The empire's new clothes: Africa, liberal interventionism and global world order," *Review of African Political Economy* 41: 142 (2014): 493.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, 493.

as in previous iterations of empire, postcolonial imperialism requires the presence of “grateful natives.”¹¹⁸ Privilege, in its vested interest in the ethical potentiality of the white subject, affirms this same humanitarian project in its presumption of innocence and benevolence through white, self-reflexive enunciation. And, much like the project of empire, privilege confessionals require “grateful natives” who must indebt themselves to the project of the confessional through presuming white innocence exacted through ethical speech and, often, even thanking their benefactors for their self-awareness. Thus, privilege enunciations restage, rather than abolish, a world where colonialism, and hence whiteness, could exist.

Privilege’s attempts at intervention, then, lack attentiveness to global dynamics of racially capitalist power through conflating whiteness with the center of political action and then attempting to determine whether such political action towards the margin is *either* violent (bad) or ethical (good). This poses a complex spatio-temporal dilemma: if whiteness is the center of all political enunciation, and its racial others are the margins, then what of the various classes of people who find themselves in proximity to this “center”? The endurance of slavery, settler colonialism, and postcolonial migrations (often forced by the neoliberal “postimperial” project of whiteness) frequently puts Black people, Native people, and other racialized others in the imperial core – in intense proximity to white people.¹¹⁹ Because privilege’s application of the center/margin framework

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 493.

¹¹⁹ For more on the racially capitalist, slave-making, and genocidal processes which bring racialized others into the imperial core, see *Carceral Capitalism* by Jackie Wang and *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability* by Jasbir K. Puar.

presumes an absolute distance between *humanitas* and *anthropos*, it fails to consider the proximity of racial others to the white subject even as such proximity remains an enduring project of racial capitalism. Thus privilege enunciations reiterate the spatio-temporal politics of the Settler/Master through reifying the very circumstances of whiteness' reproduction and circulation: the globally dispossessive accumulations of slavery and genocide. Indeed, as Sara Ahmed points out, racialized otherness is established not merely through distancing whiteness' others but also through recognizing racialized others *as* others in their very proximity to whiteness.¹²⁰ As she writes, "Others become strangers (the ones who are distant) [...] only through coming *too close to home*, that is, through the proximity of encounter[.]"¹²¹ Again, we find that enunciations of privilege reiterate, rather than deconstruct, the racial milieu that constitutes the very being of whiteness.

How, then, can privilege ever provide redress for harm? The collapse of privilege into center renders its desired accountability through white people "shutting up," "taking up less space," and engaging in intense forms of self-reflection on their own whiteness. Each process of so-called accountability presumes a fundamental distance from racial otherness and therefore cannot conceptualize restitution with proximate racial others. In its epistemological valence, privilege desires to make the privileged subject smaller, conflating white anxiety with smallness and accountability with avoidance. This desire to avoid

¹²⁰ Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London: Routledge, 2000): 3.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, 12.

harm and thereby claim anxious enunciation as ethical speech is connected to racially capitalist modes of valuation that reward feeling, looking, and acting *good*.¹²² What Shannon Winnubst refers to as the making of the self-as-market – a neoliberal form of valuation that implicates not only what subjects want to consume but also how they want to *appear*¹²³ – delimits the forms of redress that privilege enunciations perform. In other words, the desire to look, feel, and act as benevolent subjects of empire requires that, when faced with their own positions in, as, and through global violence, the privileged subject turns away from proximate entanglements with racialized others in favor of avoiding their own propensity to harm.

To harken back to the chart that opened this section's investigation, if the politics of privilege continue to suggest that the differences between the privileged and the disprivileged are simply mediated by a differential distribution of resources, they will continue to miss that global racial terror constitutes a fundamentally entangled phenomenon where the (white) position of privilege cannot exist without the expropriation of the racial lack apportioned through genocide and slavery. As such, the privileged cannot claim the center without rendering its margin an unclaimed, effaced sign.

Uncountable, Unaccountable Indebtedness

Throughout this Part 1, I have established that privilege reifies racial capitalism, returns a “new” kind of white through apologetic and anxious

¹²² Winnubst, “The Many Lives of Fungibility,” 108.

¹²³ Ibid, 108.

enunciation, claims that enunciation from and about power is sufficient to overcome the conditions of globally capitalist, racially expropriative violence, and depends upon a libidinal investment in (re)instituting white life as ethical. Due to its commitment to racial capitalism, privilege is being divorced from its usage a critique of property relations and instead becoming a property of (white) selfhood.

Privilege confessionals are subtended by a fundamental belief that white racial debt *can* be paid, and that the price for reparation is as low as an acknowledgement of the existence of the debt.¹²⁴ McIntosh repeatedly invokes white privilege as “an unearned benefit” and suggests that acknowledgement that it is unearned results in a nebulous form of accountability.¹²⁵ The idea that a white entitlement can be “unearned” also suggests the corollary: that a privilege can be *earned*, presumably through earnest hard work. This, of course, echoes the propertied forms that racial capitalism requires in order to function, as well as the delimitation of property such that it can belong to a single individual. It is through taking the more rigorous route – that whether white people work hard or not, and whether white people are antiracist or not, their racial debts can never be accounted for – that I have attempted to situate this section’s critique.

Understanding white life as valuation exercised through racially capitalist protocols enables us to think through expropriation and appropriation as phenomena which are both enduring and intractably racialized. Expropriation continues, through the durability of slavery and genocide, as that which must be

¹²⁴ Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons*, 152-153.

¹²⁵ McIntosh, “White Privilege,” 31.

extracted and then valued in the emergence of the white subject; and appropriation continues in the system of racial marks reified by the modern project.¹²⁶ When critiquing racial capitalism, then, we must critique the means of production of the white racial subject, not merely the differentially distributed resources that support their existence. As Harney and Moten pose, “Not only is a lot of the shit that they have had, but so too is their very mode of having. We don’t want that. We don’t need that. We have to avoid that. And what I’m saying is that there is a kind of really sclerotic understanding of these problematics of having and not having, of privilege and under-privilege[.]”¹²⁷ Seizing the means of production would require seizing “their very mode of having.” It is these technologies of valuation themselves which reify the white racial position and the conditions of global racial capitalism and which, therefore, must be overthrown.

If we refuse to take the route I have suggested here, white life maintains a monopoly on ethics, a monopoly that privilege modulates through the concept of accountability. Accountability is framed as a listing-off of racialized debts that the white subject accrues through their *experience* of racial plenitude, i.e. not experiencing employment discrimination or being able to see people who look like them in T.V. commercials. Accountability here functions as a mode of accounting, including the supposition that the debt can be paid through its enunciation and, perhaps more insidious, that the debt *can be paid at all*. Fred

¹²⁶ Anthony Paul Farley, “The Apogee of the Commodity,” *DePaul Law Review* Vol 53, Issue 3 (2004): 1231.

¹²⁷ Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons*, 121-122.

Moten explains the unpayability of white racial debt, invoking debt “as a principle of social elaboration,”¹²⁸ when he says,

I don't believe that what has happened in general is reparable, but if the United States finally decided to write me a check, I would cash the check and put it in the bank or go buy something stupid with it, a Rolls Royce or a Bentley, something that will really make George Stephanopoulos mad. I would accept the check, and be pissed off that it ain't as much as it should be. But I also know that what it is that is supposed to be repaired is irreparable. It can't be repaired. The only thing we can do is tear this shit down completely and build something new.¹²⁹

It is in service of this “something new,” this life otherwise, built in and of the tearing down of this shit completely, that I offer this critique of privilege.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 152.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

PART TWO: *The Nation-State Form, Intersectionality, & its Underside*

While Part 1 focused on privilege and the racially capitalist forms of power to which its rhetorical invocation ascribes, Part 2 turns the lens to intersectionality and its relationship to the nation-state form. While neither the previous part nor this one assumes that the state is exogenous to capital, I have separated them somewhat in order to thoroughly investigate each pillar of liberalism in detail.

Intersectionality has animated much of the pop cultural critical imaginary, particularly for those attempting to find some analytic for justice in a world that feels totally unjust. Intersectionality's invocation inevitably opens into questions about justice, amelioration, ethics, and inclusion. The social media landscape seemingly cannot escape what Jennifer C. Nash has termed the "intersectionality wars,"¹³⁰ or what I describe here, following Robyn Wiegman, as an anxiety about the paradigmatic and the particular.¹³¹ Much of the institutional and social media discourse about intersectionality is fueled by an anxious relationship to paradigmatic universality symbolized by white manhood.¹³² On the other hand,

¹³⁰ Jennifer C. Nash, *Black Feminism Reimagined: After Intersectionality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019): 6.

¹³¹ Wiegman, *Object Lessons*, 241.

¹³² *Ibid*, 241.

because of intersectionality's origin story in Black feminism, and because the intellectual projects of Black feminism are so frequently conflated with Black womanhood,¹³³ an anxious relationship to the particularity of Black womanhood and the inability for Black women to be fully attended to by single-issue identity politics animates large parts of the contemporary conversation about intersectionality.¹³⁴ This, of course, is not to say that the position of Black women should not be important to Black feminism or to totally refuse the origin story of intersectionality in Black feminist epistemologies; rather, following Nash, I want to think through and against the ways that intersectionality is imagined as a particular racial and gendered embodiment which overrepresents Black womanhood as "quintessentially identitarian."¹³⁵

The question of who can use intersectionality, what the term describes, and how to delimit what can be understood to be intersectional analysis versus what lies outside of its explanatory power remain at the heart of academic debates around intersectionality and their pop cultural equivalents on social media. In April of 2019, when Lori Lightfoot was elected mayor of Chicago, one tweet reads, "Chicago politics just got super intersectional. Lori Lightfoot just [became] the city's first openly gay black female mayor."¹³⁶ Responses to the tweet included substantial condemnation from leftist Twitter users. One response says, "I wish everyone who used the word 'intersectional' in a sentence was

¹³³ Nash, *Black Feminism Reimagined*, 45.

¹³⁴ Wiegman, *Object Lessons*, 240.

¹³⁵ Nash, *Black Feminism Reimagined*, 76.

¹³⁶ Jordyn Holman, Twitter post, April 2 2019, 9:09pm, <https://twitter.com/jordynjournals/status/1113247096512098304?s=21>.

required to publicly state what they think the word means.”¹³⁷ Another Twitter user writes, “I don’t even use the word ‘intersectionality’ anymore. Return to Kimberlé Crenshaw immediately,”¹³⁸ followed by “Non Black people done taken that word and given it all kinds of definitions outside of what intersectionality was originally intended to be.”¹³⁹ The above Twitter exchanges alternatively suggest that intersectionality is fraught by a Black/non-Black divide in usage, that pop cultural invocations of intersectionality improperly apply Crenshaw or have simply not read correctly, or, troublingly, that intersectionality can be attributed to the bodily presences of Black women themselves.

At stake in the above representations of socially engaged media presence is the question of intersectionality’s particularity. One Tweet reads intersectionality as the position of Black women themselves, and therefore as a form of diversity work, while the other Tweets suggest that non-Black readings of intersectionality (in service of diversity and inclusion) have misread Crenshaw and must therefore read her work with more attentiveness. This question about the meaning of intersectionality is a debate over the particularities of its terms: *how* intersectionality is explaining Black womanhood, and in service of *what* kinds of political goals. The positions taken by these users fit under what Nash terms “intersectional originalism,”¹⁴⁰ or the turn towards a specific origin story of intersectionality in order to confirm its truth-value.

¹³⁷ Mo Torres, Twitter post, April 5 2019, 12:52am, <https://twitter.com/motorresx/status/1114027994421637120?s=21>.

¹³⁸ venus di’khadija selenite, Twitter Post, April 14 2019, 11:35am, <https://twitter.com/venusselenite/status/1117451397715226626?s=21>.

¹³⁹ venus di’khadija selenite, Twitter Post, April 14 2019, 11:37am, <https://twitter.com/venusselenite/status/1117451703417065472?s=21>.

¹⁴⁰ Nash, *Black Feminism Reimagined*, 13.

On the other hand, some Twitter users construct *everyone* as intersectionally positioned; for example, a Tweet linking to an Esquire article about white men and depression remarks “This is what real #intersectionality looks like.”¹⁴¹ This response is echoed by some academics, such as Devon W. Carbado, who suggest that *everyone* is intersectionally positioned and that the terms of intersectionality do not have to remain wedded to Black womanhoods.¹⁴² This side of the debate poses questions about intersectionality’s paradigmatic utility, constructing the particularity of Black womanhood as a problem for paradigmatic thinking.

Insofar as the terms of the debate remain concentrated around this central anxiety about the paradigmatic and the particular, it is difficult to arrange the terms differently or pose different kinds of questions about the relationship between identity, power and violence. Against the delimiting function of these well-staked sides, I suggest that there is a third valence from which to approach the debate: the underside of intersectionality. In the first section of Part 2, I advocate a reading of intersectionality as a critique of the subject of liberal Humanity and a refusal of the presumed coherence of identity categories as conceptualized through liberalism. I think alongside Kimberlé Crenshaw, Patricia Hill Collins, Frances Beal, Deborah King, Hortense Spillers, Saidiya Hartman, and Tiffany Lethabo King, among others, in order to attend to how the persistent construction of the fullness of identity category (race, gender, class, etc.) requires

¹⁴¹ Meghan Daum, Twitter post, February 16 2019, 3:03pm, https://twitter.com/meghan_daum/status/1096862636116008961?s=21.

¹⁴² See e.g. Devon W. Carbado’s “Colorblind Intersectionality.”

(even as it disavows) the endurance of genocide and slavery in order to constitute the subject of juridical discourse. For me, the underside of intersectionality names the generative potential of refusal as that which disorients the juridical logics of racializing and gendering violence. I ask, how do we take up the Black feminist insight that we must do and undo ourselves with attention to the juridical demand for coherence of category? I suggest that much of Black feminist work gestures towards intersectionality's underside even as this underside is disavowed by the "intersectionality wars," which read intersectionality's surface in order to presume the coherence of category *a priori* as its unit of analysis.

In the second section, I turn to intersectionality's surface. My intervention understands the surface of intersectionality as requiring the trope of Black women as caretaker/disciplinarian in order to construct them as either saving women's studies from its own injustice or as claiming an undue intellectual authority. In either case, the surface of intersectionality demands the presumption of the fullness of category in order to construct Black womanhood as an already known quantity. For intersectionality's surface, the particularity of Black womanhood remains an anxious problem for the advancement of rigorous critical theory, particularly when faced with the question of the paradigmatic nature of justice.

I conclude with a thorough consideration of the implications of intersectional theorizing for non-Black scholars, with particular focus on the necessity of our day-to-day revolutionary refusals.

The Underside of Intersectionality

In contemporary debates, intersectionality's academic trajectory is frequently envisioned as flowing from early Black feminist works who prototypically dabbled in what Crenshaw would later depict as intersectional theorizing, presuming a natural progression from a rudimentary Black feminist thinking (primarily speeches and written works throughout the nineteenth century from Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Harriet Jacobs, and Anna Julia Cooper, among others¹⁴³), into Frances Beal's "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female," to Deborah King's "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology," finally arriving at Crenshaw's celebrated coinage and consolidation of what Black feminists have been attempting to investigate over centuries of theoretical work.¹⁴⁴ While I find the terms of this origin story deeply troubling, I engage it substantively in this section in order to think with the insights offered by the Black feminists listed above, insights which are frequently disavowed by surface-readings of intersectionality that presume the fullness of race, gender, sexuality, class, etc. as already prior to the object of intersectionality's application.¹⁴⁵ I have termed my approach "the underside of intersectionality," a mode of theoretical inquiry which

¹⁴³ For a robust citational history of intersectionality, see Jennifer C. Nash's *Black Feminism Reimagined: After Intersectionality* and Ange Marie Hancock's *Intersectionality: An Intellectual History*.

¹⁴⁴ For more on this origin story, see Jennifer C. Nash's *Black Feminism Reimagined: After Intersectionality*.

¹⁴⁵ While this section is in no way an engagement with the totality of Black feminist thinking, I have included in my analysis thinkers who are frequently invoked by intersectionality's origin story in order to narrate an alternative conceptualization of its terms – one which unsettles the primacy of category.

articulates a pressing critique of the subject (of liberal Humanity) and a generative refusal towards an otherwise.

I begin with Sojourner Truth's famous declaration: "Ain't I A Woman?" In her 1851 speech to the Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio, she argues compellingly against the pitting of women's suffrage movements against abolitionist movements by suggesting that womanhood as conceptualized by white women's suffrage could not apprehend her Black womanness. Her rejoinder "Ain't I A Woman?" points to the ways that conceptual feminisms that retain a theory of (unraced) womanhood premised on passivity and juxtaposition against manhood are unable to signify Black womanness or provide redress for Black women. As Truth explains,

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man - when I could get it - and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?¹⁴⁶

In the above, Truth notes that the white feminist movement of her time was incapable of rendering womanhood outside of whiteness. Truth theorizes white womanhood as a protected category of liberal modernity inasmuch as white women are "helped over carriages, lifted over ditches, and [...] have the best place everywhere." She repeats "ain't I a woman?" to note the unavailability of the

¹⁴⁶ Sojourner Truth, "Ain't I A Woman?," *SojournerTruth.com*, <https://www.sojournertruth.com/p/aint-i-woman.html>.

protected category of womanhood to Black women, depicting the ways that Black women are rendered not-women through slave-making violence.

Kai M. Green and Marquis Bey contrast surface-readings of intersectionality with a reading of the underside when they write, “[M]any scholars and organizers assume the answer to Sojourner truth’s question, ‘ain’t I a woman?’ is ‘Yes!’ But what if we instead took the gift of Truth as a proposition to dwell in the question.”¹⁴⁷ To dwell in the question, then, is to refuse to presume that the categories of Black and woman always touch. It is to refuse to read Sojourner Truth’s question “ain’t I a woman?” solely in the register of the appeal – to solidarity, justice, or the category of womanhood itself. Rather, reading from the underside of intersectionality suggests that the terrain of Black womanhood is not so much a terrain at all, but rather an unstable dynamic produced by, and through, relations of racializing and gendering violence. In this way, the underside of intersectionality represents a reading strategy against the presumption of the fullness of category, noting the moments when Black and woman do not effectively consolidate matter into form¹⁴⁸ but instead multiply undo the coherence ascribed to the category (whether paradigmatic, as the liberal Human, or particular, as Black womanness).

Sojourner Truth’s question, “ain’t I a woman?,” speaks to how, unlike the liberal Human subject’s ownership over gender, Black gender is constituted

¹⁴⁷ Kai M. Green and Marquis Bey, “Where Black Feminist Thought and Trans* Feminism Meet: A Conversation,” *Souls* 19: 4 (2017): 441.

¹⁴⁸ I elaborate on the relationship between matter and form below; for more on matter and form in the context of Blackness, see Denise Ferreira da Silva’s article “1 (life) ÷ 0 (blackness) = ∞ or ∞ / ∞ : On Matter Beyond the Equation of Value.”

through a disassembly of properly gendered performance, a disassembly that can be selectively animated at the will of the Master.¹⁴⁹ As Saidiya Hartman explains,

The captive female does not possess gender as much as she is possessed by gender – that is, by way of a particular investment in and use of the body. What "woman" designates in the context of captivity is not to be explicated in terms of domesticity or protection but in terms of the disavowed violence of slave law, the sanctity of property and the necessity of absolute submission, the pathologizing of the black body, the restriction of black sentience, the multifarious use of property, and the precarious status of the slave within the public sphere.¹⁵⁰

When Truth invokes that she can simultaneously be made available for forced reproduction *and* toil in the fields with the men,¹⁵¹ she evokes this technique of selective animation, what Hartman describes as “the multifarious use of property” and “a particular investment in and use of the body.” While Truth is made to approximate a gender category of the liberal Human in the register of reproductive capacity (as what Hortense Spillers describes as the position of “female flesh”¹⁵²), she is categorically denied the fullness of that very category, suggesting that it is not, in Spillers’ words, “the *loss* of gender” or the violation of the category of womanhood that constitutes her tenuous and dynamic position,¹⁵³ but rather the enduring fact that, in the eyes of the Master, this category was never hers to begin with.

¹⁴⁹ Hortense J. Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics* Vol 17, No 2 (1987): 74.

Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997): 102.

¹⁵⁰ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 100.

¹⁵¹ Truth, “Ain’t I A Woman?”

¹⁵² Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 68.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, 77.

Through the underside of intersectionality, Ida B. Wells-Barnett's theoretical investigation of lynching offers a similar interrogation of the ways that Blackness and gender do not touch. Wells-Barnett describes how it was the illegitimacy of Black (male) desire (for white women), weaponized (by the white community) as rapacious, lustful, and dangerous, that provided justification for lynch mobs which endeavored to protect the legitimacy and purity of white womanhood.¹⁵⁴ In this case, Wells-Barnett suggests that white people's enjoyment of mutilation, sexual violation, and public celebrations of death – the lynching itself – is predicated on a sexual economy wherein Black men do not possess their manhood but rather are possessed by it.¹⁵⁵ In this way, Black manness is selectively animated as desirous of white women, but Black men are themselves foreclosed from the agential actualization of this category. As such, Blackness undoes sovereign claims on manhood through presenting manhood as available to Black men insofar as it can be weaponized against them. Unlike Black men, the white men who constitute the lynch mob are authorized as sovereign and determinate individuals whose right to protect their women from violation by Black male desire (constructed in the lynching narrative as dangerous, illegitimate, and unruly) is absolute.

¹⁵⁴ Ida B. Wells-Barnett, "Lynch Law in America," Republished by *BlackPast*, (Originally Published in *Arena* [1900]), 13 July 2010, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/1900-ida-b-wells-lynch-law-america/>.

¹⁵⁵ In addition to her investigation of the relationship between Blackness and gender *qua* Black men, Wells-Barnett also takes note of the brutal murders of Black women authorized by U.S. lynch law. For Wells-Barnett, Black women are, again, structurally absented from the protected category of (white) womanhood that licensed lynch law's violent operation against Black men, women, and children.

The liberal Human subject of Wells-Barnett's analysis—the one who can own both gender and desire —is delimited by a body morphology of raced genitalia, namely the white phallus.¹⁵⁶ This body garners its sovereignty through the propertied form: the practice of delimiting time and space such that it can *belong* to a determinate individual.¹⁵⁷ Sovereignty and determinacy, as properties of the liberal Human subject, become evidence of self-possession and are protected by the nation-state form insofar as this form institutes a regime of liberal personhood predicated upon what Robyn Wiegman describes as “contractual relations[, or] the ability to enter into and stand as a responsible agent in a contract obligation to both the state (as citizen) and to other citizens[,] as transactors of labor and property ownership[.]”¹⁵⁸ Here liberal personhood is premised on upholding a contractual relationship to the state and its citizens through fulfilling the promise of labor transaction and property ownership.

A transparent modern society, or a *socius* that is hospitable to this liberal Human subject, is populated by self-interested individuals whose right to labor and own property is protected by the state.¹⁵⁹ This is the fantasy through which the United States, for example, has developed its legal, juridical, and policing infrastructures. It is also the means through which the subject (of liberal Humanity) and its racial others are made possible.¹⁶⁰ The juridical mandate that locates the subject within a state contract requires self-possession as that which exceeds the law in order to invoke it, and, in fact, allows this subject to write its

¹⁵⁶ Winnubst, *Queering Freedom*, 68.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 14.

¹⁵⁸ Wiegman, *Object Lessons*, 253-254.

¹⁵⁹ da Silva, “The Racial Limits of Social Justice,” 188.

¹⁶⁰ da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race*, xxiv.

own law in the language of Enlightenment humanism, as long as that law proves consistent with the juridical mandate.¹⁶¹ Possession of self is thus a propertied, delimited arrangement that exists prior to and in excess of the legal apparatus which institutes the form of the nation as its fullest embodiment.¹⁶² Shannon Winnubst explains this process of delimitation as individuation, or the process of differentiating the subject from its spatio-temporal surroundings as a discrete, full, and autonomous entity.¹⁶³ This is what, in its academic valence, is frequently glossed as “agency” – the capacity to exert one’s will on the stuff of History and property – to order time and space through acting outside of and upon it. As such, in this world-ordering, those who are foreclosed from property ownership and from acting as agents of History, the performance of what Frank B. Wilderson, III terms cartographic and temporal capacity,¹⁶⁴ cannot enact the protocols of liberal individuality, though they certainly can be selectively animated (structurally adjusted) in order to enforce the coherence of the nation-state form and its liberal Human subject.¹⁶⁵

In both Sojourner Truth and Ida B. Wells-Barnett’s investigations of the liberal Human subject in relationship to Blackness, they elucidate the ways that this subject of liberal Humanity orders Blackness through the selective animation of Black gender towards the protocols of the nation-state form. The nation-state *form* here glosses the nation as, in Benedict Anderson’s terms, an “imagined

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 10.

¹⁶² Winnubst, *Queering Freedom*, 14.

¹⁶³ Ibid, 68.

¹⁶⁴ Wilderson, *Red, White & Black*, 54.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 96.

community.”¹⁶⁶ Lest this definition be understood as too optimistic, as Sara Ahmed explains, imaginations are still quite real:

The imagining of the nation as a space in which ‘we’ belong is not independent of the material deployment of force, and the forms of governmentality which control, not only the boundaries between nation states, and the movements of citizens and aliens within the state, but also the repertoire of images which allows the concept of the nation to come into being in the first place.¹⁶⁷

The nation-state, then, as I envision it, is not a discrete or knowable institution located in the halls of Congress or within the walls of the capitol building, but instead a series of protocols and contractual obligations which produce both “the material deployment of force” which secures the geopolitical organizations of the social body *and* “the repertoire of images” which reproduce its social and lived infrastructures. These protocols constitute a mode of governance that organizes matter into form, wherein fleshly arrangements can be made sovereign institutions (such as the U.S. government, the university, and the nuclear family, among others).¹⁶⁸ As Anna M. Agathangelou explains, citing Fanon, these protocols depend upon an asymmetrical segregated order:

[Fanon] illustrates the incommensurability of the intimate encounter of black flesh with the body of the coloniser and focuses on the structuring processes required to make it possible. [...] He tells us that the constitution of this sovereign subject depends on an asymmetrical segregated-order[, and] that this order’s constitution depends on direct violence that turns a species into slaves, black, and colonised.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ See Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*.

¹⁶⁷ Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, 98.

¹⁶⁸ I am indebted to Fred Moten and Stefano Harney’s *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* in order to think through many of these insights about governance.

¹⁶⁹ Anna M. Agathangelou, “Bodies to the Slaughter: Global Racial Reconstructions, Fanon’s Combat Breath, and Wrestling for Life,” *Somatechnics* 1: 1 (2011): 213.

In order for the nation-state form to exist, then, Blackness is situated as the object of its racializing and gendering violences, a mode of unsovereign disarticulation of the logics and protocols of governance.

I am using the modifier nation-state *form* intentionally. Ida B. Wells-Barnett's theoretical work approaches the lynch mob as an extra-legal institution, an "unwritten law"¹⁷⁰ that is paradoxically made real through governance, which is to say the protocols of the liberal Human subject and the enactment of direct violence. Governance is an epistemological project; its juridicality requires the unsovereign in order to maintain its legitimate claim on sovereignty, which is why the logic of the juridical fulfills the role of assessing breaches to the fundamental contract between governance and sovereignty and providing redress to perceptibly harmed parties. The breach and the redress remain dependent upon propertied logics which can imagine the liberal individual as a whole and complete entity with a stake in the Human community. The juridical logics of the nation-state form are, therefore, never wholly contained by the sovereignty of the law itself, as this sovereignty is extended through the construction of what Agathangelou terms "gratuitous violence zones."¹⁷¹

Ida B. Wells-Barnett and Sojourner Truth both intervene in the nation-state form through disarticulating the governing logics of gender as they pertain to Blackness. This is, as I read it, an enduring quality of Black feminist thought. As Hortense Spillers suggests,

[J]ust as we duly regard similarities between life conditions of American women—captive and free—we must observe those

¹⁷⁰ Wells-Barnett, "Lynch Law in America."

¹⁷¹ Agathangelou, "Bodies to the Slaughter," 214.

undeniable contrasts and differences so decisive that the African-American female's historic claim to the territory of womanhood and "femininity" still tends to rest too solidly on the subtle and shifting calibrations of a liberal ideology.¹⁷²

Black feminist thinking has expressed a continuous commitment to excavating the calibrations of this liberal ideology through noting the moments when the signs of Black and woman fail to touch. In Frances Beal's "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female," a text which is frequently (problematically) dismissed as prototypically-intersectional, she assesses the ways that the conjoined systems of racial capitalism and the nation-state form foreclose Black men from possession of manhood, constituted through the liberal subject's relationship to labor and property ownership.¹⁷³ Beal further suggests that, while (white) womanhood is constituted through the delimitation of the domestic sphere via property, the fact that Black women of both poor and middle-class families work outside of the home has effectively dissipated "the mirage of womanhood."¹⁷⁴ In both of these instances, I read Beal as noticing the selective animation of Blackness as matter into the form of gender – womanhood or manhood – and that these gendering techniques do not precisely mirror the liberal Human subject but instead require a different order of investigation. For Beal the question of liberatory theory is focused around struggle and revolution, specifically armed revolution against racial capitalism and its congruence with the nation-state form.¹⁷⁵ I read Frances Beal here as analyzing multiple forms of power, including the power of the law

¹⁷² Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 77.

¹⁷³ Frances Beal, "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female," *Meridians* 8: 2 (2008 [reprinted]): 167-168.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 167.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 175.

(and its relationship to Black intimacies) to adjudicate and delimit the potentialities of Black life based on their ascription to the liberal Human subject. Unlike many contemporary readings of Crenshaw, Beal does not explicitly locate the law itself as a site of transformation but instead suggests that the dictates of racial capitalism and the nation-state form infiltrate intimate imaginations, suggesting the exigency of becoming otherwise than the liberal Human subject. As Beal suggests, “To die for the revolution is a one-shot deal; to live for the revolution means taking on the more difficult commitment of changing our day-to-day life patterns.”¹⁷⁶ In this way, Beal is *thinking through* the underside of intersections of various forms of power, specifically racial capitalism, the nation-state form, and Black gender.

Deborah K. King’s “Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology” offers a critique of attempts to conceptualize Black womanhood solely through the vectors of race and gender, instead suggesting that “[t]he necessity of addressing all oppressions is one of the hallmarks of black feminist thought.”¹⁷⁷ King argues that “racism, sexism, and classism constitute three independent control systems” and says that seeing these systems as multiply interacting, rather than simply additive, “better captures these processes.”¹⁷⁸ As she explains, there are multiplicative effects of the interactions between control systems such that “the relative significance of race, sex, or class in determining the conditions of black women’s lives is neither fixed

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 175.

¹⁷⁷ Deborah K. King, “Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology,” *Signs* 14: 1 (1988): 43.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, 47.

nor absolute but, rather, is dependent on the socio-historical context and the social phenomenon under consideration.”¹⁷⁹ King goes on to describe how “the legacy of the political economy of slavery under capitalism”¹⁸⁰ constructs Black woman alternatively as wage laborers, homemakers, and mothers, which provides contradicting racializing/gendering roles for Black women and influences how Black women come to understand and define womanhood.¹⁸¹ As she suggests, “To reduce this complex of negotiations to an addition problem (racism + sexism = black women’s experience) is to define the issues, and indeed black womanhood itself, within the structural terms developed by Europeans and especially white males to privilege their race and their sex unilaterally.”¹⁸² As such, a nuanced form of Black feminist critique emerges here, in the suggestion that framing womanhood through the liberal Human subject can simply not account for the non-universality of Black women’s experiences such that they cannot be scripted through the Eurocentrism of the liberal Human subject.¹⁸³

The delimited form of self-possession that underwrites liberal Human subjectivity and its fullness before the law rests on what Denise Ferreira da Silva describes as the transparency thesis: the presumption of a neutral, universal, and fundamentally legible personhood within a liberal order capable of reading and locating all persons under its purview.¹⁸⁴ This worldview was inaugurated

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 49.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 50.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 50.

¹⁸² Ibid, 51.

¹⁸³ As I argue here, this is because Blackness is barred from the grammars of the liberal Human subject; as such, Blackness remains a generalizable particularity for the problem of gender that cannot atomize an individual but instead retains the qualities of its surroundings.

¹⁸⁴ da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race*, xvi.

through guiding theorists like John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, and the slave-owning and savage-genociding class of the so-called American revolution, among others. Over the past several centuries, amidst various challenges to the hegemony of the liberal Human subject, its configuration around the figure of the white, male, straight, wealthy, able-bodied, etc. figure has expanded somewhat to include a class of Humans whose relationship to their transparent selfhood is one of possession.¹⁸⁵ In other words, if a being can't express ownership over their own body – if, perhaps, the historical facticity of genocide or slavery has negated the very possibility of a body's invulnerable autonomous organization – then it is not possible to transpose agency (as the proper effect of liberal selfhood) into the world because of a prior lack of the cartographic and historical capacity to do so. Nonexistence, or unsovereign and indeterminate matter without form, cannot make the self into property because it lacks the interiority to transpose the propertied form in time and space.¹⁸⁶ As a result, Blackness categorically refuses the laboring and propertied logics which enable self-possession, rendering Blackness an indeterminate object *in* time and space, rather than a subject *acting on* History and property. As such, Blackness does not own its selective animation into coherent categories of form; it is, instead, the hegemony of coherent categories of form which *own* Blackness and thereby gain sovereignty through the making of form out of formless matter.

¹⁸⁵ Winnubst, *Queering Freedom*, 178.

¹⁸⁶ Denise Ferreira da Silva, "1 (life) ÷ 0 (blackness) = ∞ or ∞ / ∞ : On Matter Beyond the Equation of Value," *e-flux journal* #79 (2017).

Through the expansion of the territory of the liberal Human subject to provincially include those other than white, man, straight, wealthy, etc., the state's affirmative action mandate was produced. I critiqued this phenomenon and its relationship to the counter-insurgent potentialities of multiculturalism thoroughly in the Part 1. In the context of intersectionality and the nation-state form, the affirmative action mandate gave way to a host of juridical transmogrifications of the transparency thesis, namely what I describe as the presumption of the fullness of category. In order to enforce its juridicality in the age of multiculturalism, which brought marginalized groups of virtually every (and overlapping) category into the scope of institutional life, the state would nominally expand the transparency thesis by articulating a fundamentally transparent, universal model for subjectivity to which various forms of difference might be added. Woman, Black, lesbian, poor, disabled, etc. could each be added to the transparent model of subjectivity as a means of nominal inclusion without interrupting the function of the transparency thesis *or* the legibility of category.

However, as Crenshaw notes in “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” these celebrations of multiculturalism in the context of juridical institutions (like antidiscrimination legislation) are more fraught than a recourse to transparency or legibility could allow. She suggests that claims in favor of inclusion largely rest on one's ability to return to the transparency thesis *and* the legibility of category through saying “I [the opaque] am the same as you [the transparent liberal Human subject] *but for* this one

mode of difference.”¹⁸⁷ In this “*but for*” statement, the claim to liberal Human subjectivity rests on a delicate balance because it must endeavor to minimize illegibility through providing a notation of it as merely an addition to the template of the liberal Human subject, rendering transparency *but for* one small illegibility. As Tiffany Lethabo King explains, “The axiomatic linking of the rights-bearing juridical subject to an exclusive category of humans (that do not include Black women) must be undone [for Black women to be included in the law]. A discursive crisis occurs within juridical discourse.”¹⁸⁸ What Crenshaw noted in this article was that the *but for* became troubled when the illegibilities multiplied, such that neither the transparency thesis nor the legibility of category could hold. As such, the (il)legibility of multiple categories could variously unravel itself, resulting in too many discrepancies between the transparent “I” and the affectable opacity that Crenshaw denotes as Black womanhood. Thus the additive model could not configure a spatio-temporal location for Black womanhood before the law because it required too many sites of incongruence between the template of liberal Humanity, rendering Black womanhood a site of unruliness and chaos.¹⁸⁹

Crenshaw describes how the juridical conceptualization of the liberal individual could not produce a legal paradigm where Black and woman could touch. In her analysis of *DeGraffenreid v General Motors*, she cites the court’s

¹⁸⁷ Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, Vol 1989, Issue 1 (1989):151.

¹⁸⁸ Tiffany Lethabo King, “Post-Identitarian and Post-Intersectional Anxiety in the Neoliberal Corporate University,” *Feminist Formations*, Vol 27, Issue 3 (2015): 128.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 129.

indication they could not rule in favor of Black women as a protected class, “governed only by the mathematical principles of permutation and combination,” as this would open “Pandora’s box.”¹⁹⁰ This explicitly suggests that Black women’s multiplicative marginalization poses chaos for the juridical scene governed by the affirmative action mandate. In Crenshaw’s investigation, Black women could not be protected in discrimination law because they could not constitute a class themselves without unleashing chaos on the justice system (*DeGraffenreid v General Motors*),¹⁹¹ because they could not categorically represent all women (*Moore v Hughes Helicopter, Inc.*)¹⁹² or because they could not categorically represent all Black people (*Payne v Travenol*).¹⁹³ Therefore, the law cannot effectively redress violence against Black women because its rendering of the liberal Human subject and the affirmative action mandate presumes the fullness of category and cannot account for the multiple cross-cutting overlays of power and violence that betray the logic of self-possession.

I do not offer this critical, Black feminist itinerary to restage the by-now familiar origin story that Kimberlé Crenshaw gave name to what Black feminists hadn’t yet, thereby relegating significant Black feminist works to the genre of prototype. But I do find it significant that much of the work commonly regarded as prototype troubles the collapse of Black and woman into one singular identification, suggesting that they may not always touch but instead are frequently undone at the point of their intersection.

¹⁹⁰ *DeGraffenreid*, 413 F Supp at 145. (cited in Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersections of Race and Sex,” 142.)

¹⁹¹ Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersections of Race and Sex,” 142-143.

¹⁹² *Ibid*, 145.

¹⁹³ *Ibid*, 148.

If, as reading intersectionality from its underside suggests, Black women are undone before the law, as well as in other sites touched by its juridical logics, then part of the legacy of Black feminism has been to question both the transparency thesis and the legibility of category. As Tiffany Lethabo King suggests, “[T]he intersectionality that speaks to indeterminacy and undoing remains uninterrogated[,]” specifically for those scholars who find themselves reading the surface of intersectionality rather than its underside.¹⁹⁴ Indeed, as Patrice Douglass explains in “At the Intersections of Assemblages: Fanon, Capécia, and the Unmaking of the Genre Subject,” Fanon and other Black theorists have “demonstrate[ed] a reading of black gender that is constituted by a violent relationship of what it means to be black in the world.”¹⁹⁵ Like Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Frances Beal, Deborah King, and Kimberlé Crenshaw, Douglass describes how single-issue analyses of oppression that articulate sexism as its primary and driving force render unthinkable the position of Black women because they neglect the ways that antiblackness as a structure of feeling positions Black women. As she explains, “The universalism of gendered violence as a theoretical model to apprehend the truth of suffering for black women will always fall short of accounting for just how black womanhood disfigures understandings of the role gender and sexual violence play in the configuration of blackness.”¹⁹⁶ Much like the scholars described above, then,

¹⁹⁴ King, “Post-Identitarian and Post-Intersectional Anxiety in the Neoliberal Corporate University,” 130.

¹⁹⁵ Patrice Douglass, “At the Intersections of Assemblages: Fanon, Capécia, and the Unmaking of the Genre Subject,” (unpublished draft of later essay by the same name in *Conceptual Aphasia in Black*, Eds. P. Khalil Saucier and Tryon P. Woods [Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016]: 103-126.)

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

Douglass takes issue with the relationship between the liberal Human subject, the transparency thesis, and the presumption of fullness of category when it comes to apprehending Black womanhood. Indeed, as she suggests,

Rather than approaching blackness as a racial category, it instead should be approached as a paradigm predicated on dissociation. Blackness must be theorized *as* class, gender, and sexuality as opposed to attempting to think blackness *through* class, gender, and sexuality. Blackness in its constitution is distinction. However[,] the differentiation is produced through a totalizing violence that merges and overdetermines difference as sameness. Hence why blackness is invoked as matter-of-fact when it encapsulates vast plurality.¹⁹⁷

It is Douglass' call to think through Blackness *as* category rather than *through* category that motivates my turn towards intersectionality's underside: a critical approach to the liberal Human subject which continues to go unthought and unrecognized in readings that presume *a priori* the fullness of category. The following section more fully explores the territory of the "intersectionality wars" and the tendency for these surface readings to presume Blackness itself as a full and knowable racial category, rather than a "paradigm predicated on dissociation." For now, however, I want to sit with some thoughts about Black feminism, the liberal Human subject, and the case study that intersectionality poses.

I have argued in this section that intersectionality's underside – the side rarely taken up by institutional discourses and pop cultural memes – is capable of undoing the anxiety that floats between the paradigmatic and the particular, as this anxiety requires an investment into the Human constituency. It is from

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

within the restrictive worldview of the liberal Human subject that the messiness of life can be consolidated into a full category, a total body, or an atomized individual, thereby rendering refusals of the transparency thesis as betrayals of the logic of property and hence vulnerable to the state's security apparatus. The underside of intersectionality, instead, can provide languages and tools for analyzing aspirations to and refusals of the terrain of liberal personhood and the contract inhabited by the juridical.

Refusals in the register of unsovereignty and indeterminacy are generative – they gesture towards an otherwise to the form of life imposed by the liberal Human subject and their ensemble of securitizing logics. In the above, I have thought carefully through how Black feminist projects have undone one of these logics (the logic of the juridical) in relation to the (un)gendering and racializing violences that attempt to delimit and secure the location of the subject of liberal Humanity. I see the undoing of this subject not in the expansion of representational economies across the modern project but rather in the endurance of intersectionality's underside across and beyond the spatio-temporalities posed by History and the nation-state form.

The underside of intersectionality asks how we do and undo each other, how we are done and undone, touched and held – sometimes in the same place and sometimes in the way that opens to a new kind of thing we hadn't thought we could become – a process Harney and Moten have described as “the uncanny that one can sense in prophesy.”¹⁹⁸ The underside of intersectionality has something

¹⁹⁸ Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons*, 42.

to tell us about refusal, the way that refusals can be an opening, a crack, a fissure in stone that appeared too solid to move. The underside of intersectionality opens into a question about how we consolidate ourselves, how we become form only through the disavowal of the mattering stuff, the stuff of matter, the stuff that does rather than is, that verbs rather than nouns. The stuff of what da Silva terms affectability,¹⁹⁹ of processes that do not become the body but rather unbecome it – our complexities and the ugliness and beauty of desire cloaked in what it means to move in a way this world wasn't designed to feel or sense, what it means to have sensation that doesn't presume agency or interiority.

The underside of intersectionality is reaching for a mode of being that isn't about depth or surface, but is more like the ways shards of mirror reflect each other, the way the body leaks and leaks and opens and opens, and cannot close itself to this leaking because it is not itself. It is, rather, a continuous process of leak and drip and inhale and excrete. The underside of intersectionality is an uncomfortable side that isn't a side at all, just a dwelling undercurrent that moves because it is trying to un-discover that thing that keeps being found and founded by the civilized. It is asking us to undo ourselves. How can we emerge and remain hidden? How can we appear as apparitions?²⁰⁰ In other words, I view Black feminism as an intellectual project that *does* and *undoes*, asking how we can refashion ourselves, reorganize our desires, and, ultimately, as Green and Bey

¹⁹⁹ da Silva, "1 (life) ÷ 0 (blackness) = ∞ or ∞ / ∞ : On Matter Beyond the Equation of Value."

²⁰⁰ For more on these questions in relation to intersectionality, see Tiffany Lethabo King's "Post-Identitarian and Post-Intersectional Anxiety in the Neoliberal Corporate University."

pose, challenge ourselves to refuse the idea “that these categories have the capacity to deliver us to ourselves fully and wholly.”²⁰¹

The Surface of Intersectionality

This section contrasts the previous one by reading, not through intersectionality’s underside, but through the surface of intersectionality in order to explicate its rendering of Black womanhood, justice, and critical amelioration. I am particularly preoccupied with the tendency to render Black womanhood an already knowable personhood, invoking both the transparency thesis and the legibility of category. It is the presumption that Black womanhood requires no further study that animates the war over the paradigmatic and the particular at the heart of Nash’s “intersectionality wars.”

Reparative readings seek to assure intersectionality’s audience that the term’s ameliorative power results from its critical reflex alone, as if placing an already known Black womanhood into critical practice itself produces justice. On the other hand, readings that emphasize that intersectionality is too wedded to the particularity of Black women suggest either that the term must be applied to *all* intersectional subjects (and implicitly that theory that begins with Black womanhood is simply too unreliably partial to provide a paradigmatic critique) or that intersectionality must be moved beyond entirely because it is conceived as a rudimentary and identitarian theoretical resource.

²⁰¹ Green and Bey, “Where Black Feminist Thought and Trans* Feminism Meet,” 447.

The taking-up of intersectionality within these delimited terms gains its leverage through the presumption of the fullness of category: namely through multiculturalism and its transmogrification of juridical evaluative logics (in service of their reproduction). As Roderick Ferguson thoughtfully describes, following the 1960's social upheavals in the form of student movements at various universities, coordinated revolutionary action against the state, and a distinct anti-capitalist agenda, the university, state, and capital constellated in order to form "a reorder of things" that would enable them to protect their hegemony and institutional legitimacy: multiculturalism. The logic of multiculturalism derives from a recognition of the demands of movements and an affirmative mode of power²⁰² that twisted the dreams of insurgents such that they appeared to be dreaming about institutional life all along.²⁰³ This counter-insurgency remains effective because it is not a top-down system; rather, its cognitive architecture contains contradictions which resolve themselves in real time and, often, in mundane actions that mystify relations of power through appearing to cede power while continuing to maintain a monopoly on it.²⁰⁴ Multiculturalism is, therefore, a broad grammar for counter-insurgency, and to think through its violent legacy critically requires the understanding that the appearance of racially/sexually marked individuals in high-ranking positions within university administrations, at the upper echelons of capitalist companies, or in the most powerful leadership roles of the nation-state is not the arc of

²⁰² Ferguson, *The Reorder of Things*, 181.

²⁰³ Ibid, 13.

²⁰⁴ Ibid, 29.

progress bending towards justice but instead a means of maintaining institutional legitimacy and monopoly on the proper use of violence.

It is, in part, because of multiculturalism that intersectionality has become such a pervasive and decisive terminology, with a wingspan reaching from university administrations to mission statements of private companies, from legal frameworks to days-long Twitter debates. Nash thoughtfully historicizes the relationship between intersectionality and university diversity missions, suggesting that in women's studies departments across the United States, intersectionality has been imagined as the flipside of white feminism. She explains: "[A]s the university is increasingly enlisted in pedagogies of citizenship – instructing students on how to desire, on how to be antiracist, on how to perform left subjectivity – intersectionality has become [...] a keyword, transforming students into ethical political subjects."²⁰⁵ As such, intersectionality's meanings are transmogrified in its institutional life, rendering it a (policed) expression of correct left political subjectivity²⁰⁶ rather than opening room for a critique of the liberal Human subject.

Because intersectionality is always haunted by the figure of Black womanhood,²⁰⁷ its institutional meaning as a form of diversity work has largely utilized Black women as a symbol of amelioration, justice, or counterpoint to ethical concerns about white feminism. This is because intersectionality is imagined not as merely an analytic but also a racial embodiment,²⁰⁸ as a

²⁰⁵ Nash, *Black Feminism Reimagined*, 25-26.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 26.

²⁰⁷ Jennifer C. Nash, "Re-thinking Intersectionality," *Feminist Review* no 89 (2008): 11-12.

²⁰⁸ Nash, *Black Feminism Reimagined*, 76.

continuous gesture towards Black women as simultaneously caretakers (vested with the power to ameliorate white feminism, and women's studies more broadly, from its own injustice) and disciplinarians (too particular; claiming an undue intellectual authority).²⁰⁹ Much of the war staged between the paradigmatic and the particular rest on whether a given text constructs Black women as caretakers or disciplinarians. In a valence that understands the particularity of Black womanhood (conceived as an already knowable entity) as one of the valuable tenets of intersectional theorizing, Black women are constructed as caretakers – as saviors capable of rescuing everything, from white feminism to electoral politics, from itself. But in a valence that disparages intersectionality as too identitarian, Black women must be disciplinarians – overly invested in the particularity of their Black womanhood.

The cultural images of Black womanhood that rest on caretaker/disciplinarian have been soundly critiqued by Black feminists for decades. Patricia Hill Collins' extensively discusses the "controlling images" of Black womanhood, each of which "reflect the dominant group's interest in maintaining Black women's subordination."²¹⁰ As she identifies, the cultural image of Black women as caretaker derives from a slave economy which utilized this controlling image in order to secure Black women as willingly obedient.²¹¹ Because the caretaker image is juxtaposed to the "bad Black woman," its function is to prevent Black women from claiming matriarchal disciplinary authority²¹² —

²⁰⁹ Wiegman, *Object Lessons*, 250.

²¹⁰ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 72.

²¹¹ *Ibid*, 73.

²¹² *Ibid*, 74-75.

hence the debates about intersectionality that routinely pivot between the two. As Spillers argues, “I describe a locus of confounded identities, a meeting ground of investments and privations in the national treasury of rhetorical wealth.”²¹³ She continues by explaining that

the names by which I am called [...] render an example of signifying property *plus*. In order for me to speak a truer word concerning myself, I must strip down through layers of attenuated meanings, made an excess in time, over time, assigned by a particular historical order, and there await whatever marvels of my own inventiveness.²¹⁴

As such, the controlling images of caretaker/disciplinarian that I address here signal Black women as property *plus*, producing a confounding series of significations and meanings that mark and reproduce ongoing dynamics of objectification.

The weaponization of these cultural images in the context of intersectionality is quite ironic given the enduring legacy of Black feminist work that challenges the tropes that animate the image of Black women as caretaker/disciplinarian. However, as da Silva explains, the politics of recognition has drawn cultural lines in order to enact racialized scripts, rendering Black womanhood “thoroughly social, always-already determined by something which lies outside of her, but without which she would not be able to be.”²¹⁵

In what follows, I note the presence of caretaker/disciplinarian tropes within intersectionality debates, as I see these controlling images as violent reproductions of a social order predicated on what Sharon Patricia Holland

²¹³ Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 65.

²¹⁴ *Ibid*, 65.

²¹⁵ Denise Ferreira da Silva, “‘Bahia Pêlo Negro’: Can the subaltern (subject of raciality) speak?,” *Ethnicities* 5: 3 (2005): 338.

describes as a mode of “theorizing that cannot account for itself without that [Black, female, queer] body’s erasure—even in its precise moment of absolutely recognizing and inscribing it.”²¹⁶ I further critique these tropes within their contexts in debates about intersectionality, as they underwrite an enduring misrecognition of Blackness as a full racial category rather than a “paradigm predicated on dissociation,” a paradigm which confounds the emergence of Black womanhood under the evaluative logics of multiculturalism. Unlike the underside of intersectionality, the tropes of caretaker and disciplinarian write Black women into a static existence for the purpose of a critical agenda motivated by a spatio-temporal desire to *get beyond* an object of critique – whether the object of critique is the scene of injustice in the world or Black women themselves. As Nash suggests, within the debates about intersectionality’s surface, “black women are imagined as both saviors and world-ending figures, and [...] intersectionality is both peril and promise.”²¹⁷

Intersectional critiques that depend on the caretaker trope are largely characterized by what Nash terms “intersectional originalism.”²¹⁸ As Nash explains,

Intersectional originalism describes an interpretative framework that confers value on “deep engagement” with Crenshaw’s articles, invests in the notion that these articles have a singular meaning that can be ascertained through sustained practices of close reading, and contends that later work “distorts” that true meaning through careless readings.²¹⁹

²¹⁶ Sharon Patricia Holland, *The Erotic Life of Racism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012): 38.

²¹⁷ Nash, *Black Feminism Reimagined*, 13.

²¹⁸ *Ibid*, 61.

²¹⁹ *Ibid*, 61.

As such, theorists are supposed to presence “care” for Crenshaw’s original two articles by accepting them as true and suggesting that all critiques of Crenshaw have demonstrated bad faith reading. As Nash points out, the presumption that there is one correct interpretation of Crenshaw’s initial articles neglects the polysemy of the text because it acts as if “there is a singular correct and ‘true’ way to narrate the story of intersectionality and [argues] that citation is care.”²²⁰

Another difficulty with the claim to intersectional originalism is that intersectionality presently lacks a well-defined methodology, making the claim to origin tenuous. Patricia Hill Collins notes in 2019 that intersectionality does not yet obtain as a critical social theory, as it lacks analysis of its own analytic capabilities and cognitive architectures.²²¹ Jennifer Nash points out that intersectionality lacks a methodology through which to articulate its intervention,²²² suggesting intersectionality’s ameliorative justice derives from invoking the presence of Black women (as symbols of exclusion and elision) in contexts that typically absence them.²²³ As Robyn Wiegman explains, “[Intersectionality] takes the key impediment to identity-oriented justice as the problem of partial attention and locates such partiality in the universalizing effects that attend the institutionalized monotheism of identity as a solo sojourn, [...] compartmentalized [...] under the singular rubrics of race, gender, sexuality, or nation.”²²⁴ But it is as of yet unclear what intersectionality’s precise

²²⁰ Ibid, 64.

²²¹ Patricia Hill Collins, *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019): 152-153.

²²² Nash, “Re-thinking Intersectionality,” 89-90.

²²³ Wiegman, *Object Lessons*, 240.

²²⁴ Ibid, 240.

methodological commitments are, absent presenting multiple categories of race, gender, sex, nation, etc. through the racial and gendered embodiments of Black womanhood.

Readings of intersectionality that advance the logics of the caretaker trope also do so through privileging what Nash describes as intersectionality's "irresistible visuality," or the endurance of the crossroads metaphor, which generates "the term's capacity to allow its reader to imagine its analytic import."²²⁵ While Nash has some concerns about intersectionality's visuality,²²⁶ Hill Collins celebrates intersectionality's metaphoricity:

Crenshaw's metaphor was recognizable to many people because it invoked the tangible, spatial relations of everyday life. Everyone is located in physical space, and everyone has had to follow a path or move through an intersection of some sort. People could pick up the metaphor, imagining different kinds of pathways and crossroads, and use intersectionality as a metaphor to understand very different things. The idea of an intersection where two or more pathways meet is a familiar idea in physical, geographic space.²²⁷

For Hill Collins, then, intersectionality effectively communicates the fraught positionality of Black womanhood to those who do not experience it by invoking a common experience of the intersection. However, in evoking the intersection as an already known quantity, Hill Collins appears to suggest that Black women (as the intersection itself) are an already known quantity as well, proposing that intersectionality evokes a familiar spatial imagery in order to evoke a familiar embodiment: the embodiment of Black womanhood.

²²⁵ Nash, *Black Feminism Reimagined*, 11.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

²²⁷ Hill Collins, *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory*, 27.

In most of its popular and academic discursive uses, intersectionality is supposed to intervene in the vector of gender through instituting race, perceived to be embodied through the figure of Black woman. Intersectionality's metaphorical function successfully fulfills the ameliorating caretaker role, as it positions the metaphor of the intersection as the promise of white feminism or women's studies insofar as the category of Black-woman-as-savior must be introduced in order to provide justice. However, I question the extent to which the metaphor's familiarity opens itself to the undoing that Black feminists have potentialized.

Indeed, in Hartman's brilliant critique of John Rankin, a white abolitionist, she gestures towards the problems of the commonality of the metaphor. John Rankin's abolitionism was forged through his brutal imagination of himself and his family as slaves, enabling "a vicarious firsthand experience of the lash" that motivated Rankin's opposition to the institution of slavery.²²⁸ As Hartman writes,

[E]mpathy [...] confounds Rankin's efforts to identify with the enslaved because in making the slave's suffering his own, Rankin begins to feel for himself rather than for those whom this exercise in imagination presumably is designed to reach. Moreover, by exploiting the vulnerability of the captive body as a vessel for the uses, thoughts, and feelings of others, the humanity extended to the slave inadvertently confirms the expectations and desires definitive of the relations of chattel slavery. In other words, the ease of Rankin's empathic identification is as much due to his good intentions and heartfelt opposition to slavery as to the fungibility of the captive body.²²⁹

²²⁸ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 18.

²²⁹ *Ibid*, 19.

Thus Rankin's abolitionism retained an empathic condition fundamental to his own position, requiring the fungibility of the enslaved body (through empathy) in order to argue against its fungibility through the institution of slavery.

In intersectionality's metaphor, however, the question of empathic identification is wholly abstracted to a spatial imagination that does not require the immediate presence of Black women in order to imagine the position of Black womanhood. However, Tiffany Lethabo King takes the theory further by arguing that fungibility functions at such an abstracted level that the metaphor can take hold of virtually anything, from liquid to dust or even space:

Black fungible bodies have unlimited figurative and metaphoric value. A metaphor contains slippage and therefore the signified and signifier fail to line up squarely at the sign of the intended commodity with which it is to be exchanged. [...] Black fungibility is the treatment of the Black enslaved body as an open sign that can be arranged and rearranged for infinite kinds of use. [T]he Black fungible body and its sign can be made liquid, dust, and more. [...] Black fungibility can even become a symbol for space.²³⁰

As such, in intersectionality's irresistibly visual and familiar metaphor, Black womanhood constitutes an open category. Intersectionality's attempts to intervene in the discourses of gender through race speaks to the problem of fungibility, of the seemingly infinite ways to which Blackness can be put to use. The metaphorization of intersectionality, even and especially in attempts to care for its analytical lineage, requires making Blackness elastic and fungible such that it can attach to all kinds of things – even a traffic intersection. Thus intersectionality's caretaker trope reifies the condition where Black womanhood

²³⁰ Tiffany Lethabo King, "The Labor of (Re)reading Plantation Landscapes Fungible(ly)," *Antipode* Vol 48, No 4 (2016): 1025.

is rendered an already available quantity rather than the dynamic potentiality posed by intersectionality's underside.

In fact, Nash observes the conundrums of fungibility and the caretaker trope when she notes that

intersectional originalism is marked by an intense proliferation of calls for careful citations and “right” readings of Crenshaw’s work as a way to take care of intersectionality, yet this same reading practice suggests that the analytic’s “travel”—a sign of its political power—hinges on its ability to be untethered from black women’s bodies.²³¹

Even as the caretaker trope attempts to render Black women as central to the intersectional investigation, its ameliorative promise still traffics through marking this centrality as infinitely available to enrich white feminist experience and theory.

Unlike the caretaker trope’s familiarity with Black women, the trope that sees Black women as disciplinarians is characterized by the desire to *get past* the bodies of Black women, or what Tiffany Lethabo King terms “post-intersectional critique,” which constructs intersectionality’s Black womanhood “as an anachronistic time-space of liability—the post—that one must pass quickly through.”²³² The post-intersectional anxiety constructs Black women as simply too particular or, in Nash’s terms, too “quintessentially identitarian,”²³³ to provide a rigorous theory of violence and justice, responding in kind with a desire to locate the critique of violence within other categories of identity or flows of power. The approaches which utilize the logics of this trope range from

²³¹ Nash, *Black Feminism Reimagined*, 76.

²³² King, “Post-Identitarian and Post-Intersectional Anxiety in the Neoliberal Corporate University,” 118.

²³³ Nash, *Black Feminism Reimagined*, 76.

addendums to intersectionality that advocate that the term apply to everyone,²³⁴ to attempts to expand intersectionality's origin story or theoretical congruence such that it can think in solidarity with women of color as a broader constituency deserving of justice,²³⁵ and, in the disciplinary trope's most full usage, to approaches which suggest that intersectionality must be abandoned (almost) entirely in order for some other conceptualization of justice or amelioration to emerge.²³⁶

My preoccupation with the disciplinary trope is not intended to suggest that intersectionality cannot move theoretically, or that its influence upon *all* theorists, and not only Black women theorists, is inconsequential. What I am interested in uncovering is how the logics of this trope implicitly require the construction of Black womanhood as an impediment to broader analytical work – a concern that animates the questions of the paradigmatic and the particular at the heart of readings of intersectionality which leave behind its underside.

In some cases, the logic of the disciplinary trope shows up in the reactive insistence that intersectionality applies to all subjects (against the assumption that Black womanhood is too particular to stage a claim on theoretical importance). Devon W. Carbado, for example, addresses the anxiety about the paradigmatic and the particular through suggesting that Black womanhood's particularity does *not* pose a problem for intersectional theorizing, as

²³⁴ See eg Devon W. Carbado's "Colorblind Intersectionality."

²³⁵ See e.g. Robyn Wiegman's *Object Lessons*, Ange Marie Hancock's *Intersectionality: An Intellectual History*, Jennifer C. Nash's *Black Feminism Reimagined: After Intersectionality*, and Patricia Hill Collins' *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory*.

²³⁶ See e.g. Jasbir K. Puar's "Queer Times, Queer Assemblages" and "'I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess': Becoming Intersectional in Assemblage Theory."

“intersectionality does not necessarily and inherently privilege any social category.”²³⁷ As such, Carbado suggests that intersectionality can apply to *everyone*, depending upon the unit of the social category under analysis. That intersectionality appears to be too particular to stage a meaningful intervention absent its applicability to a broader spectrum of racial and gender embodiments speaks to the logic of the disciplinary trope, which constructs Black women as impediments to rigorous theoretical intervention.

Several Black feminists attempt to intervene in the anxiety about the paradigmatic and the particular through expanding intersectionality’s reach beyond Black women, presumably in response to the construction of Black womanhood’s particularity within university contexts. In Ange Marie Hancock’s *Intersectionality: An Intellectual History*, she attempts to broaden intersectionality’s analytic capabilities from its focus on Black womanhood by suggesting that the origin story of intersectionality be expanded to include (non-Black) women of color.²³⁸ Patricia Hill Collins echoes this approach when she argues in favor of opening intersectionality up to other origin stories, including and especially from Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga, constructing this broadening as opening up to a richer sense of intersectionality’s sociological practice.²³⁹ Similarly, Jennifer C. Nash explicitly argues that intersectionality is fraught by a “Black feminist defensiveness” and that response to this defensiveness must include detaching intersectionality from ownership by Black

²³⁷ Devon Carbado, “Colorblind Intersectionality,” *Signs* Vol 38, No 4 (2013): 812.

²³⁸ Ange Marie Hancock, *Intersectionality: An Intellectual History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016): 29.

²³⁹ Hill Collins, *Intersectionality as a Critical Social Theory*, 145.

women.²⁴⁰ To each of these scholars' credit, many of these insights come from analyzing Black feminist reactions to perceived attacks on intersectionality and how these reactions delimit the possible things that intersectionality can do (or undo).²⁴¹ However, I question the assertion that intersectionality's limitations are due to its focus on Black womanhood; instead, its limitations are the result of a reading that assumes that Black womanhood is too particular when confronted by the paradigmatic subject of liberal modernity.

While the disciplinarian trope is present across a wide range of “post-intersectional” critique, my primary focus is the critique of intersectionality forwarded by Jasbir K. Puar across several years of scholarship. Puar is perhaps the most widely cited critic of intersectionality,²⁴² and, as such, one of the scholars most thoroughly investigated by Black feminists. Jennifer C. Nash thoughtfully addresses Puar's non-Blackness as the reason for this engagement in *Black Feminism Reimagined: After Intersectionality*, but without taking a stance on Puar's argumentation itself.²⁴³ Tiffany Lethabo King labels Puar decisively as a “post-intersectional” scholar with the desire to move past intersectionality, though she does generously suggest that Puar may have constructed intersectionality in this way “unwittingly.”²⁴⁴ Patrice Douglass perhaps offers the most rigorous critique of Puar's approach to intersectionality, suggesting that Puar's construction of Blackness as “without generative possibility” renders her

²⁴⁰ Nash, *Black Feminism Reimagined*, 83.

²⁴¹ *Ibid*, 4.

²⁴² *Ibid*, 50.

²⁴³ *Ibid*, 50.

²⁴⁴ King, “Post-Identitarian and Post-Intersectional Anxiety in the Neoliberal Corporate University,” 125.

critique contrary to the linked projects of intersectionality and Black feminism, and is therefore troubling in its disavowal.²⁴⁵

In “Queer Times, Queer Assemblages,” Puar argues that intersectionality is an identitarian discourse because it presupposes the coherence of the body,²⁴⁶ arguing that intersectionality fails to interrogate the “will to knowledge that invariably reproduces the disciplinary interests of the U.S. nation-state.”²⁴⁷ In Deleuzian fashion, she suggests that intersectionality’s ameliorative potential is limited by its focus on molar categories of being, and instead advocates for assemblage theory and becoming as a more radical resistive formation.²⁴⁸ She even argues that intersectionality “privileges the pole of identity as the evolved form of Western modernity.”²⁴⁹ While she concedes that “we cannot leave it completely behind,”²⁵⁰ for Puar intersectionality remains a rudimentary and identitarian project wedded to the development of U.S. statehood.

In “‘I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess’: Becoming Intersectional in Assemblage Theory,” Puar revisits her critique of intersectionality with substantially more nuance, arguing that intersectionality and assemblage theory are not oppositional, but rather “frictional.”²⁵¹ It is unclear, however, to what end this friction produces liberatory potential, as Puar commences to critique intersectionality as undertheorizing the category of nation within its

²⁴⁵ Douglass, “At the Intersections of Assemblages.”

²⁴⁶ Jasbir K. Puar, “Queer Times, Queer Assemblages,” *Social Text* 84-85, Vol 23, No 3-4 (2005): 129.

²⁴⁷ Ibid, 122.

²⁴⁸ Ibid, 127.

²⁴⁹ Ibid, 136-137.

²⁵⁰ Ibid, 130.

²⁵¹ Jasbir K. Puar, “‘I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess’: Becoming Intersectional in Assemblage Theory,” *philoSOPHIA* Vol 2 Issue 1 (2012): 50.

multiplicative approach to power,²⁵² as becoming synonymous with inclusion in its globalizing iterations,²⁵³ and as presuming that difference precedes and defines identity.²⁵⁴ She further writes that intersectional critique intervenes in the rights-bearing subject while reproducing its (identitarian) disciplinary demands.²⁵⁵

Most significant for this section on the attachment of the disciplinary trope to Black womanhood, Puar suggests that Crenshaw's intersectionality is problematic because it is a juridical formulation reliant upon the question of whether a crime has occurred and who is at fault.²⁵⁶ Puar argues that assemblage theory is more useful because it focuses on "the patterns of relations – not the entities themselves, but the patterns within which they are arranged with each other."²⁵⁷ She writes, "Unlike Crenshaw's accident at the traffic intersection, the focus here is not on whether there is a crime taking place, nor determining who is at fault, but rather asking, what are the affective conditions necessary for the event-space to unfold?"²⁵⁸ The problem, for Puar, is with intersectionality's preoccupation with blame for harm caused, and her solution is that the assemblage's preoccupation with affective conditions enables a strategy of harm prevention.²⁵⁹

²⁵² Ibid, 55.

²⁵³ Ibid, 55.

²⁵⁴ Ibid, 55.

²⁵⁵ Ibid, 62.

²⁵⁶ Ibid, 61.

²⁵⁷ Ibid, 60-61.

²⁵⁸ Ibid, 61.

²⁵⁹ Ibid, 61.

In Puar's construction, intersectionality's failures are directly attributable to its disciplinarity, a disciplinarity which seeks out blame for harm and is therefore inseparable from the nation-state form and its irreducible juridicality. Indeed, Puar's critique of intersectionality is consistent with much of the "post-intersectionality" scholarship, within which, as Tiffany King explains,

Crenshaw comes to function as a synecdoche [...] for the specter of the mass of Black and Latina women (specifically Puerto Rican, Dominican, Mexican, and sometimes Native American women who are conceived as a domestic problem) who, within US imaginaries, are understood as supplicants of the state and representatives of redistributive politics.²⁶⁰

As such, the post-intersectional move against juridicality and the nation-state form invoked by Puar must also gesture away from the identitarian presences of Black women, whose embodiment itself renders them supplicants of the state and purveyors of (assumptively liberal) redistributive politics. Puar's criticism imagines Black womanhood as an already-knowable quantity – in this case, a tropic formation decidedly similar to the welfare queen – in order to suggest that the Black womanhood invited by intersectional theorizing is too preoccupied with identifying harm to meaningfully produce a justice-oriented politics outside of the nation-state form.

Puar's critique is one in which imagining a response to harm requires the existence of a disciplinary Black womanhood in order to attribute blame and provide evidence of violation. While I am sympathetic to the dangers of internalizing juridical logics that require punitive responses to harm, Puar's

²⁶⁰ King, "Post-Identitarian and Post-Intersectional Anxiety in the Neoliberal Corporate University," 123-124.

slippage between naming harm and the state apparatus relies upon intersectionality's indelible particularity (Black womanhood) conceived as occupying the paradigmatic seat of the nation-state form. As Douglass argues,

[I]ntersectionality as a theory is indeed shortsighted in assuming the state as separate from and not invested in the misrecognition of subordinate subject categories even when those subjects are seemingly incorporated into the dominate schema. However the formation of intersectionality around the disproportionate levels of violence perpetuated against black women both by individuals and the state, is not an accidental or inconsequential observation made by Crenshaw. In fact [it's] quite profound in the sense that it recognizes and names the victimization of black woman as deserving a critical inquiry all its own.²⁶¹

In other words, that there are limits to intersectionality's view may be attributable to the ways that state violence renders (or attempts to render) Black life unlivable, Black domesticity unprivate, and Black gender ungendered, among other mundane incursions. It is therefore not that Black women themselves inhabit punitive processes; it is, instead, that Black women's confounding of gender is sublated into a generalized confounding of the coordinates of non-Black subjectivity, threatening the interiority of the liberal Human subject, and that this is then transmogrified as a form of state encroachment. This process requires that Black womanhood's unruliness be domesticated through the trope of the disciplinarian.

The disciplinary trope, therefore, stands in as that which motivates the post-intersectional turn and its construction of Black womanhood as too identitarian and too confining of radical potentiality. Douglass explains,

As descriptive theories labor to apprehend the constitutive relationship between black gender and violence, the response

²⁶¹ Douglass, "At the Intersections of Assemblages."

identifies the description as the cause. Black feminists are thus accused of producing a condition so confining it infringes on the radical freedoms of others, rather than seeing this condition as that which black gender is confined to.²⁶²

As such, attempts to move beyond intersectionality, rather than think with its underside, illuminate the importance of Black feminist insights to begin with: that, rather than attempting to configure an unfettered mobility that forecloses the multiplicities of Black womanhood by rendering it an already known quantity, we must refuse to constitute ourselves as autonomous and enclosed entities through invoking the fullness of the category. It is for this reason that I am interested in posing the question, what if Puar's "frictional" assemblage theory is re-read through intersectionality's underside? What if, rather than posing an indictment to intersectionality, her project is understood as one that similarly critiques the fullness of category and the transparency thesis, or as refusals of the nation-state's juridical logics and the presupposition that the categories of identity (in Puar's case, of Muslim and queer in the context of the War on Terror²⁶³) can, and do, already touch?

Writing with the Underside

Throughout this section, I have suggested that intersectionality's underside is disavowed by surface readings that presume the coherence of category, as these readings construct Black womanhood as either caretaker or disciplinarian in order to stage a claim on the possible futures that

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ See e.g. Puar's "Queer Times, Queer Assemblages."

intersectionality can effectuate. While this debate decidedly overdetermines the position of Black women as an already knowable quantity, I have posed that intersectionality's underside opens to Black feminism as a project of undoing the subject of liberal Humanity and its claim on spatio-temporal coherence. This is because, rather than preoccupying itself with presence, the underside of intersectionality opens into structural absence.

At stake in this project, for myself and for other non-Black scholars, is a methodological and theoretical question at the heart of our entanglements with intersectionality, Black feminism, and Black women: how do we write, think, and move in a way that undoes our claims on subjectivity and spatio-temporal coherence, as these very claims are what authorizes the violence that Black feminist theorization attempts to refuse? I am not posing this question through the subjectless criticism of postmodernism, but rather in service of the underside of intersectionality that I have theorized here. It seems to me that any approach to the underside by non-Black scholars must tend towards the dissolution of the subject, the propertied form, and the construction of Black womanhood as an already knowable personhood. I say tending towards these dissolutions because the process remains replete with ongoing reiterations of violation, and because assuming a deterministic relation to Black feminism would suggest that the liberal subject once again dictates the horizon of our imaginaries.

I return to Beal's point that living for the revolution requires rethinking our day-to-day desires and social organizations, not merely being ready to die. My interventions in Part 2 have centered on non-Black libidinal investments in the reproduction of Black womanhoods as fungible, knowable quantities through

imposing the fullness of category as that which legitimates the subject of liberal Humanity. Staying with the underside of intersectionality, rather than insisting on the knowability and juridicality of the full category, is an invitation for non-Black scholars to more thoroughly theorize (and, perhaps, refuse) the day-to-day mechanisms through which we mark Blackness for objectification and disavowal.

PART THREE: *“The Personal is Political” & the Rhetorical Tradition*

Parts 1 and 2 on privilege and intersectionality have assessed the trajectories of each social justice term and its corresponding imaginary within racial capitalism and the nation-state form as modalities of power which attempt to domesticate radical meanings and transmogrify them such that they correspond to the protocols of liberal institutionality – namely, the fullness, interiority, and plenitude of the liberal Human subject and its transparent categories of being. In so doing, I have read History and its underside in a manner that does not presume the plenitude and fixity of my object of study; rather, I have attempted to *do* a rhetorical theory capable of thinking with the processes of transmogrification and instability that characterize rhetorical meanings in shifting landscapes of power and violence. In particular, I have evoked a rhetorical theory that, I hope, thinks beyond and otherwise than the spatio-temporal politics of the Settler/Master through tracing and refusing the domestication of radical theoretical frameworks, as well as gesturing towards communicative modalities that think against the liberal mandate towards political and cultural representation as the sole liberatory activity.²⁶⁴

²⁶⁴ For more on the question of representation and its relation to the modern project of raciality, see Denise Ferreira da Silva's *Toward a Global Idea of Race*.

In the previous sections, implicit in my work has been a methodological attentiveness to the manner in which racial capitalism and the nation-state form exceed the simple rhetorical moves towards the rhetoric of the public (an arena of political and cultural representation that presumes equal and transparent democratic deliberation) or the rhetoric of the private (the delimited propertied form which both makes possible and is produced by civic, and labored, life). Both privilege and intersectionality slip between publics and privates, frequently calling into question the relationship between rhetorical artifact and audience, requiring that rhetoricians overhaul the presumption that public rhetoric occupies a wholly separate sphere from private rhetoric. While privilege has introduced a public (or semi-public) confessional form as its primary rhetorical intervention, its logics also spill in from and beyond its desired public audience. Privilege speaks its counterinsurgency into intimate registers as well, implicating how we understand harm and accountability and reinscribing interiority and plenitude as the platform of intimate life. Similarly, intersectionality and its figural conception of Black womanhood is not easily bounded as either a public or private rhetoric. In its surface valence (as opposed to its underside), it (re)potentializes juridical evaluations of Black womanhood as an already known quantity, rendering Black women as fungible, knowable territory, which exceeds the public and the private because of the excessiveness of racial-sexual violence and its delimiting function for both civic and intimate life.

In Part 3, I make explicit my interventions in rhetoric's cherished conceptualization of the public and private. I think with the social justice terminology "the personal is political," relating it to the spatio-temporal politics

of the Settler/Master and attempting to rigorously undo its foundational presuppositions: that the personal and the political are, indeed, fundamentally separate spheres *and* that the primary difference between them is prescribed by (biologized) sexual difference. Rather than simply suggesting that “the personal is political,” too, is animated by various counterinsurgencies of liberalism (although I certainly think that it is), I apply my critical work specifically to the field imaginary of rhetoric. In my attempts to think through the delimitations of rhetoric’s disciplinary imaginary, I find that the public and the private repeatedly surface as convenient ways to delimit a rhetor’s audience and to selectively pick apart *how* a given form of communication travels within these delimited forums. However, these rhetorical forms of study are unable to assess how the delimited forum of the public or private offers an expansive range of rhetorical mobility to *some* orators and modes of rhetorical practice but foreclose this mobility from others in the process of iterating what I describe as the racial-sexual mark of enunciation.

“The personal is political” was coined in the 1960’s in women’s consciousness-raising groups, mainly populated by white women in the middle and upper economic classes.²⁶⁵ As Carol Hanisch explained in her foundational 1970 essay “The Personal is Political,” consciousness-raising groups allow participants to “discover that personal problems are political problems,”²⁶⁶

²⁶⁵ Alison Phipps, “Whose personal is more political? Experience in contemporary feminist politics,” *Feminist Theory* 17, no. 3 (2016).

King, “Multiple Jeopardy,” 58.

²⁶⁶ Carol Hanisch, “The Personal is Political,” In *Notes From the Second Year: Women’s Liberation: Major Writings from Radical Feminists*, Eds. Shulamith Firestone, Anne Koedt (Firestone and Koedt, New York, 1970): 76.

illuminating common experiences in order to develop a political paradigm against women's subordination.

The limits of this political paradigm have been repeatedly exposed by the racial others of domesticity and civic life, who have suggested their inability to be made fully present within the term's framework for power and violence. Crenshaw describes how this approach presumes that women are constructed as passive, while men are viewed as active; however, the separate spheres ideology neglects how Black women have been constructed as "pathological matriarch[s]" and therefore how "Black subordination wholly frustrate[s] access to [white gender] norms."²⁶⁷ Along similar lines, Deborah King has argued that "the personal is political' [...] describe[s] the politics of imposing and privileging a few women's personal lives over all women's lives by assuming that these few could be prototypical."²⁶⁸ Nancy Marie Mithlo complicates "the personal is political" when she writes, "For many Native American women, the ability to earn an income is a necessity, not a choice."²⁶⁹ Through the advent of these critical insights, the category of womanhood has been increasingly exposed as open to power. Unfortunately, many contemporary activists and scholars in the register of social justice tend to interpret the critique as an opportunity for a more inclusive politics – for Black people and Native people in particular to present themselves from within an already existing spatio-temporal arrangement. I want to read the critiques of "the personal is political" as gesturing towards something

²⁶⁷ Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Gender," 165.

²⁶⁸ King, "Multiple Jeopardy," 58.

²⁶⁹ Nancy Marie Mithlo, "'A Real Feminine Journey': Locating Indigenous Feminisms in the Arts," *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism* Vol 9, no 2 (2009): 21.

other than inclusion. In what follows, I interpret the critiques as structural indictments of the private and public spheres as anti-Black and genocidal apparatuses of violation, constructed through racial capitalism and the nation-state's protection of Settler/Master forms of life and their corresponding domesticities. In order to do so, I investigate the spatio-temporal politics of the personal and the political in their intractable machinations.

The Political Public & the Personal Private

"The personal is political" was coined throughout the 1960's in response to what Carol Hanisch depicted as a "male supremacist" movement culture predicated on sexist views of patriarchy as "women's personal problems" and issues that could be worked out within the institution of heterosexual coupledness.²⁷⁰ Hanisch did not coin the term; it was, instead, utilized broadly as an organizing tool and language across consciousness-raising groups and the nascent Women's Liberation Movement in the U.S. in the 1960's.²⁷¹ In her 1970 essay "The Personal is Political," Hanisch described how consciousness-raising groups were "a form of political action" because they offered intellectual forums for women to begin to understand that "[w]omen are messed over, not messed up!"²⁷² Hanisch gestured towards a real frustration that the consciousness-raising groups were understood as therapy, not political action, invoking Marx, Lenin, and Mao in order to point to the importance of basing theory and movement

²⁷⁰ Hanisch, "The Personal is Political," (1970): 76.

²⁷¹ Carol Hanisch, "The Personal is Political" (*Introduction*, 2006): 1.

²⁷² Hanisch, "The Personal is Political" (1970): 76.

actions on lived experience.²⁷³ She wrote, “One of the first things we discover in these groups is that personal problems are political problems. There are no personal solutions at this time. There is only collective action for a collective solution.”²⁷⁴

In 2006, Hanisch wrote another essay entitled “The Personal is Political” where she reflected on the endurance of the terminology, noting, “Like most of the theory created by the Pro-Woman Line radical feminists, these ideas have been revised or ripped off or even stood on their head and used against their original, radical intent.”²⁷⁵ However, she also wrote, “While trying to think how I would change ‘The Personal Is Political’ paper if I could rewrite it with today’s hindsight, I was actually surprised how well it stands the test of time and experience.”²⁷⁶ Hanisch did not give the 1970 paper its title and initially had not intended it for publication. The original essay, she explained, “was written in reply to a memo by another staff member, Dottie Zellner, who contended that consciousness-raising was just therapy and questioned whether the new independent [Women’s Liberation Movement] was really ‘political.’”²⁷⁷ Hanisch’s 1970 piece was explicitly anti-therapy, proclaiming that “I am greatly offended that I or any other woman is thought to need therapy [...] We need to change the objective conditions, not adjust to them. Therapy is adjusting to your bad personal alternative.”²⁷⁸ According to Hanisch, these “bad personal alternatives”

²⁷³ Ibid, 77.

²⁷⁴ Ibid, 76.

²⁷⁵ Hanisch, “The Personal is Political” (2006): 3.

²⁷⁶ Ibid, 1.

²⁷⁷ Ibid, 1.

²⁷⁸ Hanisch, “The Personal is Political” (1970): 76.

included everything from “liv[ing] with or without a man, communally or in couples or alone, [getting] married or unmarried, liv[ing] with other women, go[ing] for free love, celibacy, or lesbianism, or any combination[.]” It is interesting that Hanisch suggested that the totality of the woman’s situation is so dreadful that even alternative arrangements cannot distance themselves from sexist oppression, even as the majority of examples of personal/political problems under her consideration (the having of babies, men making more or less money in a relationship,²⁷⁹ women “surviving” by looking pretty to keep either a job or a man,²⁸⁰ men refusing to help out around the house,²⁸¹ etc.) appear explicitly related to a narrow conceptualization of heterosexual coupledness under racial capitalism, the nation-state form, and propertied domesticity.

The above, as I read it, begs the question of what is meant by personal and political as spatio-temporal designations. By political, Hanisch emphasized in 2006, she was referring to “the broad sense of the word as having to do with power relationships, not in the narrow sense of electoral [sic] politics.”²⁸² However, she also wrote that “there were women within New York Radical Women and the broader feminist movement who argued from the beginning against consciousness raising and claimed women were brainwashed and complicit in their own oppression, an argument rooted in the sociological and psychological rather than the political.”²⁸³ In thinking through Hanisch’s

²⁷⁹ Ibid, 76.

²⁸⁰ Ibid, 77.

²⁸¹ Ibid, 77.

²⁸² Hanisch, “The Personal is Political” (2006): 1.

²⁸³ Ibid, 1.

argument that the sociological and psychological are not themselves “political,” I find myself bumping up against the limited political (and personal) conceptualization of violence that the term articulates. What, then, is “the political” if not the power held psychically and extended into the social? If neither the sociological (political economy) or the psychological (libidinal economy) are properly political objects, then what can the terms of “the personal is political,” as a political conceptualization itself, reveal about the constitution of the social situation through violence?

What is, in fact, even more troubling about this line of argumentation is that Hanisch rendered the sociological and psychological apolitical sites in order to write womanhood as categorically innocent of complicity; in her conceptualization, the figure of the woman is paradoxically visited by constant violation (in movement contexts, in consciousness-raising groups, in lesbian relationships, in the home, out of the home, in bearing children, etc.) and yet simultaneously must have the freedom to author her own experience such that she can remain innocent of the possibility of ever desiring her own oppression. Hanisch’s objection to the sociological and psychological seems to be that to analyze through these frames might require the understanding that women participate in the construction of oppression, including their own, and might even at times be its primary architect. The innocence articulated here is symptomatic of the broader terrain within which “the personal is political” is invoked in popular culture.

“The personal is political” has animated much of leftist and feminist discourse since its coinage. As a terminology, it is frequently invoked in feminist

responses to sexual violence and patriarchy,²⁸⁴ by social media users in order to argue for the validity of personal experience as a form of knowledge,²⁸⁵ in academic scholarship addressing the gendering of the rhetorical audience,²⁸⁶ and in movement literature providing theoretical bases from which to organize against gendered, domestic, and sexual violence.²⁸⁷ Its usage is virtually ubiquitous in the contemporary social media landscape, political speech, and activist contexts.

The phrase “the personal is political” has circulated in and out of the field of communication as a further attempt to understand lived experience and identity as primary, both for rhetorical criticism and for the operations of power. Many early white feminists critiqued rhetoric’s focus on orators in the public sphere for its alleged centering of (white) men and masculinity. Bonnie Dow’s “Feminism, difference(s), and rhetorical studies” argued that the rhetorical canon is violent due to its delimitation of rhetoric to the public sphere, at the cost of excluding women’s (presumably private or domestic) rhetorical practices and valorizing men’s speech acts.²⁸⁸ As such, white feminist rhetoricians like Bonnie Dow, Barbara Biesecker, and others attempted to turn attention back to the intimate, personal, and domestic spheres.

²⁸⁴ See e.g. bell hooks’ *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*.

²⁸⁵ See e.g. the #MeToo movement as paraded on Twitter by Alyssa Milano and other white celebrity women.

²⁸⁶ See e.g. Bonnie J. Dow’s “Feminism, difference(s), and rhetorical studies” and Karlyn Kohrs Campbell’s “Biesecker Cannot Speak for Her Either.”

²⁸⁷ See e.g. *The Revolution Starts at Home*, an anthology by INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence.

²⁸⁸ Celeste Michelle Condit, “In Praise of Eloquent Diversity: Gender and Rhetoric as Public Persuasion,” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 20, no. 2 (1997): 93. See also Bonnie J. Dow’s “Feminism, difference(s), and rhetorical studies.”

These contexts generally suggest that the broader public lacks an appreciation for the kinds of knowledge, violation, and empowerment that can come from the private spheres and that, therefore, the public must be made aware of these intimate, personal knowledges in order to proceed with its political deliberation. In Hanisch's conceptualization and in its further reiterations in rhetoric, activist, and social media contexts, "the personal is political" assumes the ethical nature of personal (women's) spheres and the unethicity of political (men's) spheres. However, this unethicity is not absolute; it is through the extension of intimate, personal, private knowledges into the political spheres that public deliberation can proceed ethically and towards the "unity" that marked the goal of the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1960's and beyond.²⁸⁹ It is, therefore, not simply the existence of the personal, but rather the *politicization* of it, or its entry into spheres of democratic deliberation, which promotes solidarity and women's liberation.

Attempts to politicize the sexual difference these white feminists believed to be posed (and contained) by womanhood's monopoly on the intimate sphere are related to multiculturalism and the affirmative action mandate, a process of evaluation produced by racial capitalism and the nation-state form. As Barbara Biesecker noted in 1992, "recent attempts to render the discipline [of rhetoric] more equitable by supplementing the canon with texts spoken by women have [...] a relationship with what only a few decades ago was coined as affirmative

²⁸⁹ Hanisch, "The Personal is Political" (1970): 76.

action[.]”²⁹⁰ Biesecker was, I think, rightly concerned about this application of affirmative action to the rhetorical canon, as it “conserves the putative authority of the center by granting it license to continue to produce official explanations by the designation of what is and what is not worthy of inclusion.”²⁹¹ However, Biesecker’s alternative to a practice of affirmative action that decenters rhetoric’s individualistic focus on male orators was simply another practice of affirmative action focused on a tenuous women’s collective speech.²⁹² Biesecker’s critique of the white feminist attempt to expand the rhetorical canon, then, merely restaged the demand of the affirmative action mandate through situating the evaluation of the private sphere *in public* as the only imaginable ethical solution to the violence which founds publicity.

Bracketing for a moment my concern about the spatio-temporal dimensions and delimitations of Biesecker’s critique of rhetoric’s focus on individual oratory-as-manhood and the recuperative potential of collective speech-as-womanhood, I want to turn to her critique of consciousness-raising, “depth hermeneutics,” and the sovereignty of the (white feminist) subject. She wrote, “‘consciousness raising’ signifies the project of bringing to the surface something that is hidden, the task of making manifest something that is concealed or covered over.”²⁹³ She continued, “‘consciousness raising’ marks the deliberate attempt to recover the potential originary space before the sign ‘woman’; in staging the specifically feminist project in recuperative terms,

²⁹⁰ Barbara Biesecker, “Coming to Terms with Recent Attempts to Write Women into the History of Rhetoric,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 25, no 2 (1992): 142.

²⁹¹ *Ibid*, 143.

²⁹² *Ibid*, 144.

²⁹³ *Ibid*, 145.

rhetoric is understood, once again, as a purposive act that shuttles between consummate, sovereign, though perhaps estranged, identities.”²⁹⁴ Biesecker’s critique is useful for this project because this marks one of few moments in her 1992 article where she identified the primary danger of a white feminist politics of recuperation of the private sphere: the sovereign subject of liberal Humanity and its reiteration by rhetorical study.

The following year, Karlynn Kohrs Campbell, whose work was one of the explicit objects of Biesecker’s critique, released a reactionary piece which was entitled “Biesecker Cannot Speak for Her Either,” an obvious play on words based on Campbell’s book *Man Cannot Speak for Her*. Campbell, like many other white feminists, turned to “the personal is political” in order to restage her claim on ethical womanhood²⁹⁵ when she wrote: “The origins of women’s consciousness raising go back [...] to Marx and Mao and religious testifying through which members went [...] toward a recognition of their common condition and its relation to the nature of the system in which they lived. That is what ‘the personal is political’ meant and means.”²⁹⁶ She accused Biesecker of “attacking” her and questioned why Biesecker would “attack, *not the men*, but a woman who is trying to alter the rhetorical landscape.”²⁹⁷ Again, I find in Campbell’s words the invocation of womanhood as an ethical constituency, framed in spatio-temporal terms through the resistance to manhood. As such, Biesecker’s critique of the sovereign subject rings particularly true considering Campbell’s response.

²⁹⁴ Ibid, 146.

²⁹⁵ Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, “Biesecker Cannot Speak for Her Either,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 26, no. 2 (1993): 157.

²⁹⁶ Ibid, 157.

²⁹⁷ Ibid, 154. Emphasis original.

Neither critic, however, situated their sense of degradation as white women within zones of civilized intimacy and the murderous civic life of capital. They, instead, both advocate that their particular zones of civilized intimacy be generalized across the category of womanhood, and, importantly, that white women's lives in civilized intimacy be imbued with the same political rancor as those public spheres within which their men stake their civilized and civilizing violences. In other words, in spite of her critique of the sovereignty of the enunciating subject, Biesecker, like Campbell, cannot come to terms with the spatio-temporalities of the Settler/Master which authorize both the individual oratory of white men *and* white women's collective speech.

In attempt to recuperate Biesecker and Campbell's debate about the nature of rhetoric and imbue it with a more resistive approach, Celeste Michelle Condit introduced "gender diversity" as a counterpoint to Biesecker and Campbell's claims. She suggested that Biesecker and Campbell work from the assumption that gender actually operates according to the logics of the binary in rhetorical situations, i.e., men are never apprehensive about oratory and women are completely locked out of the public sphere.²⁹⁸ Condit argued that these claims depend upon a reduction of gender to biology and that instead, a rhetorical analysis of gender should open itself to a diversity of performances. Importantly, however, Condit did not challenge the base premise of "the personal is political," as her critique still presumed that they are wholly separate spheres. Indeed, while Condit suggested that men might be shy or struggle with public speaking and

²⁹⁸ Celeste Michelle Condit, "In Praise of Eloquent Diversity: Gender and Rhetoric as Public Persuasion," *Women's Studies in Communication* 20, no. 2 (1997): 93-94.

women might be ostentatious or loud, she articulated a “diversity” of gender performances and rhetorical analyses without addressing power or providing a theory of the public and the private as pertains to gender. She did not complicate any gender category through the introduction of racial capitalism, the nation-state form, or the liberal Human through which these gender categories have been codified. For my purposes, “gender diversity” here rings quite hollow. She further retained the spatio-temporality of the Settler/Master by suggesting that the personal is, in fact, political, although with the caveat that both the personal and the political are constructed.²⁹⁹

In other words, the application of “the personal is political” to rhetoric has maintained its trajectory as a rearticulation of biologized forms of sexual difference and the separate spheres ideology, without exploring the spatio-temporal registers of either the personal or the political. In the following section, I thoroughly critique rhetoric’s articulation of the political as a space of neutral and democratic deliberation, a sphere that “the personal is political” disavows as the sphere of man yet simultaneously aspires to in order to properly designate the personal. I do this through an understanding that the personal and the political are not wholly separate spheres, but rather authorize one another and are both authorized by the systematic absencing of slavery and genocide as that enduring stillness which constitutes public and private forms of speech.

The Spatio-Temporal Politics of the Personal and Political

²⁹⁹ Ibid, 93.

In Habermas-ian conceptions of the public that inform the rhetoric of public deliberation and dialogue, the democratic space of contestation is a preordained space, accessible to all (liberal subjects), as long as that “all” is without racially antagonistic traits.³⁰⁰ The liberal subject delimits the public and the private in order to adjudicate the terms of the (white) nuclear family, and therefore property ownership and inheritance.³⁰¹ In delimiting the private and public, the liberal subject institutes a theory of labor via what Shannon Winnubst describes as “the logic of the limit,” which introduces a teleological conception of time and an instrumental conception of space.³⁰² The liberal subject delimits the domestic sphere as separate from the public sphere through enclosing land as property and through laboring with a future-oriented telos in order to remove property from the public good and into ownership of the liberal individual (whose very existence is here construed as a public good), such that property can be passed down intergenerationally on the basis of white kinship structures.³⁰³

The private and public cannot, therefore, be conceptualized rhetorically absent racial capitalism and its attendant social arrangements, protected by the state through the promise of liberty and equality for liberal subjects under liberal governance.³⁰⁴ It is, hence, impossible to articulate the reproductive dimensions of the private sphere without attending to the productive dimensions of the

³⁰⁰ Denise Ferreira da Silva, “An Outline of a Global Political Subject: Reading Evo Morales’s Election as a (Post) Colonial Event,” *Seattle Journal for Social Justice*, Vol 8 Issue 1, Article 3 (2009): 32.

³⁰¹ Winnubst, *Queering Freedom*, 14.

³⁰² Ibid. 24.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Denise Ferreira da Silva, “The Racial Limits of Social Justice: The Ruse of Equality of Opportunity and the Global Affirmative Action Mandate,” *Critical Ethnic Studies* Vol 2 No 2 (2016): 187.

public sphere under racial capitalism, as both rely upon property as protected by the nation-state form. Both spheres require particular spatial and temporal politics – geared towards the production of both property and the future – in order to preserve the continuity and ascendancy of white life.³⁰⁵

The public and the private are thus authorized by what Denise Ferreira da Silva calls “the juridico-economic subject”³⁰⁶ of racial capitalism and the nation-state form. This juridico-economic subject cannot be disimbricated from the logics of sovereign self-possession underwritten by a particular body morphology of raced genitalia: the white phallus.³⁰⁷ The juridico-economic subject constitutes the publics of both free market competition and governance under the state. As such, the juridico-economic subject is a model for the consumer-citizen whose (recognized) labor, capital, and civic participation also enables them to enclose and delimit the domestic sphere.³⁰⁸ Thus the constellation of the public and private are mutually constitutive of white life, rather than dichotomous spheres premised on natural/biological sexual difference, as many early white feminist rhetoricians theorized.

Given this analysis, why “the personal is political” and not “the political is personal”? “The personal is political” belies a desire to politicize the intimate spheres of social life, to recognize them and imbue them with value such that the white women who understand intimacy as their righteous domain might

³⁰⁵ Tiffany King, “In the Clearing: Black Female Bodies and Settler Colonial Landscapes,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, 2013): 173.

³⁰⁶ I borrow this term, “the juridico-economic subject” from Denise Ferreira da Silva’s “The Racial Limits of Social Justice: The Ruse of Equality of Opportunity and the Global Affirmative Action Mandate.”

³⁰⁷ Winnubst, *Queering Freedom*, 14.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 24.

experience a fraction of the juridical and economic power that white men experience under white cisheterosexual coupledness and property ownership. White feminist desire to be brought into the fold of the neoliberal workplace in order to experience equality with white men animates the drive to politicize the personal rather than to personalize the political. I make this observation in order to assess the role of white women's perceived victimhood in hoping to conscribe politics, as well as intimacy, under their purview. Carol Hanisch confirmed this white feminist adherence to racial capitalism and the nation-state form in 2006, when she wrote, "I have come to agree with Susan B. Anthony that to be free, a woman must have 'a purse of her own.' Women can't be independent without participating in the public workforce."³⁰⁹ Apparently the horizon for women's liberation is simply the participation of women in a political economy founded upon the endurance of slavery and genocide.

The public and the private are made possible forums for social life through the advent of genocide and slavery as preservers of white life. Both spheres rely upon the spatio-temporal politics of the Settler/Master. Said another way, the propertied formation and futural labor that I explained above are also descriptive of what Tiffany King terms "the clearing." She advocates reading clearing as a noun rather than a verb in order to expose "the violent processes hidden in the clearing," suggesting that landscapes are not simply natural or given but are produced by the constellations of genocide and slavery.³¹⁰ The ongoing processes of genocide and slavery, then, can be described through the imposition of both

³⁰⁹ Hanisch, "The Personal is Political" (2006): 3.

³¹⁰ King, "In the Clearing," 97.

the public and the private as self-ontologizing social arrangements that endeavor to disappear and suppress the proliferation of alternative forms of life. The spatio-temporal politics of both the personal and the political require clearing – of Native flesh, life, and lands – in order to genocidally supplant them with the presence of the Settler/Master.³¹¹ Futural labor is required for the production of property, and Native people are genocided objects of the past,³¹² meaning that Native life is not constituted by the appropriate telos to constitute full beings within either the personal or the political, as the production of both spheres is only possible through the Settler/Master’s genocidal occupation and disappearing of Native life.

These very same spatio-temporal politics also require the fungibility of Black flesh in order to constitute the private and the public. Fungibility is in excess of the paradigmatic of labor, as it describes the seemingly infinite and interchangeable ways in which Black flesh can be put to use. Fungibility is required for the private and public because Blackness subtends the logics of property that make possible the logic of the limit as enclosure. Said another way, the domestic can be conceptualized as a settlement/plantation, wherein Nativeness must be evacuated and only returned through genocide and Blackness must be made into interchangeable property and only returned through fungibility that fixes Black life to the personal as slave life. As Tiffany King explains, “Property should be understood as material, social, ideological, utopic and a site of desire. Property is as much about the future as it is the past. In fact,

³¹¹ Ibid, 94.

³¹² Ibid, 95.

property at times conceals the past, particularly the conditions of possibility that made it possible. Property required the elimination of the Native people and enslavement of Black people.”³¹³ Thus the public is not possible without this rendering of the domestic propertied form; otherwise, the logics of racial capitalism and the nation-state form would not obtain as conceptual apparatuses to ground Settler/Master forms of life or spatio-temporal frameworks in the home(land).

Indeed, as Amy Kaplan describes, “According to the ideology of separate [public and private] spheres, domesticity can be viewed...as a feminine counterforce to the male activity of territorial conquest.”³¹⁴ However, she argues that the domestic provides no such counterforce, as it expands and contracts in order to stake the boundaries of home and nation.³¹⁵ The naturalization of the domestic, nuclear family, therefore, authorizes conquest, and the white woman and her personal is located at the center of this expansion. Along these lines, Nael Banaji explains the relationship between the personal (the home) and the political (the nation-state form) thusly: “If home is doubly inflected as the task of finding a home in one’s body and being able to call the nation home, then concealed under the surface of this ‘politics of home’ is the urge for normality and the desire ‘to belong without complication to a normative social sphere.’”³¹⁶ The desire for belonging that subtends both the personal and the political is also the

³¹³ Ibid, 173.

³¹⁴ Amy Kaplan, “Manifest Domesticity” *American Literature*, Vol 70 No 3, No More Separate Spheres! (1998): 584.

³¹⁵ Ibid, 584.

³¹⁶ Nael Banaji, “TRANS/SCRIPTIONS: Homing Desires, (Trans)sexual Citizenship and Racialized Bodies,” In *The Transgender Studies Reader 2*, Eds. Susan Stryker and Aren Aizura (New York, Routledge Press, 2013), 7.

desire for the continuance of the Settler/Master and their attendant forms of life and distributions of death, which is to say the projects of genocide and slavery.

The implications of the above critique are far-reaching for the field of rhetoric, preoccupied as it is with delimiting audience through thinking enunciation as either public or private. The structural bar on Native and Black public enunciation in the grammars of genocide and fungibility legitimizes the public sphere through instituting Nativeness and Blackness as structural outsiders to modernity in these registers. In other words, while Native or Black people may be visibly “present” in public locales, the public as constituted by genocide and slavery cannot legitimize enunciation authorized by genocide or fungibility, as these registers undermine the very claims to publicity and deliberative democratic dialogue that authorize public (as opposed to private) speech.³¹⁷

Similarly, Native and Black people cannot properly inhabit the private sphere. Nativeness and Blackness are barred from the domestic. Not only does racial capitalism distribute property ownership through racialized disparities, but it also refuses both the Native and the Black the sovereignty and interiority that characterize domestic life. Militarized police raids of Native and Black “homes” reveal the tenuous claims on privacy that slavery and genocide afford.³¹⁸ If the public and the private cannot be made legible for Native or Black claims, because they must excise them in order to register as public and private, then “the

³¹⁷ Frank B. Wilderson, III, *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010): 4.

³¹⁸ See e.g. Mom4Housing and the Tiny House Warriors.

personal is political” actually invokes the spatio-temporal regime of genocide and slavery.

Rhetoric & the Racial-Sexual Mark

I have termed this the structural bar (on Native and Black speech in the registers of genocide and slavery) the racial-sexual mark of enunciation. The endurance of the racial-sexual mark of enunciation speaks both to the foreclosure of public and private speech authorized by the ethical dilemmas posed by genocide and sovereignty *and* to what Saidiya Hartman has termed “the unthought,” or the position occupied by the slave. Of this position, she asks, “what does it mean to try to bring that position into view without making it a locus of positive value, or without trying to fill in the void?”³¹⁹ In other words, in Hartman’s view, slavery enacts a disappearance, one whose felt life cannot be made present if understood only through the surface of discourses of representation and valuation via public or private speech. The methodological question is how to think through these forms of violation without attempting to evaluate them, as logics of valuation require the transcription of racial capitalism and the nation-state form *qua* slavery.

My methodological focus has tasked me with asking about the kinds of disappearance enacted by both genocide and slavery, the (non)places where these disappearances converge and diverge to meaningfully unthink radical meanings

³¹⁹ Saidiya V. Hartman and Frank B. Wilderson, III, “The Position of the Unthought: An Interview with Saidiya V. Hartman Conducted by Frank B. Wilderson, III,” *Qui Parle* Vol 13, No 2 (2003): 185.

that attempt to register the otherwise posed by the unthought. Racial capitalism and the nation-state form both require the endurance of genociding and slave-making violence. These twin institutions' continued monopoly on the proper use of violence demands the enduring racial-sexual mark of enunciation. In her brilliant rereading of Fanon on the historical racial schema, Shiloh Whitney discusses how the moment of racial violence "function[s] to individuate him [Fanon] (in the spatially ambivalent, abject mode of being individuated as a phobic object), [and] is even so a thoroughly pre-individual, social and historical affective drama rather than one that plays out within an individual body."³²⁰ Thus it is not simply that the spatio-temporalities of the public and the private register an abject object in one instance of racial identification, nor is it that the top-down infrastructures of the nation-state form and racial capitalism identify an enduring racial class which they mark for death (although this frequently accompanies the racial-sexual mark). It is, instead, that the racial-sexual mark of enunciation activates a psycho-sexual, libidinal response that produces a collective Settler/Master unconscious, which then ensconces what Wilderson describes as "the drama of value"³²¹ of the community of the liberal Human within both the private and the public, and its accompanying institutional complements (racial capitalism, the nation-state form, the university, the nuclear family, etc.).

In the United States, Blackness is, in part, codified through the one-drop rule, which produces a set of racial-sexual marks premised on the assumption

³²⁰ Shiloh Whitney, "The Affective Forces of Racialization: Affects and Body Schemas in Fanon and Lorde," *Knowledge Cultures* Vol 3 (1): 20 (2014): 4.

³²¹ Wilderson, "Red, White, and Black," 249.

that Blackness is a set of dominant phenotypical and cultural traits. In contrast, Nativeness is, in part, codified through blood quantum, which produces a set of racial-sexual marks premised on the assumption that Nativeness is a set of recessive phenotypical and cultural traits. Both racial-sexual marks, while appearing to serve opposite functions, enact a prior disappearance whose felt life is registered in exacting the mark itself. In other words, both slavery (in the register of Black hypervisibility and in its recursive mandate to presence, through absenting, a continual absence) and genocide (in the register of Native invisibility and in its recursive mandate to absent a continual present-absence) require the racial-sexual mark, which is also to say the policing of appropriate racial belonging through mandating against the leakiness of the Black and the Native into the public and the private.

The racial-sexual mark of enunciation glosses the ways that rhetorical situations are themselves situated against, by, and through the historical stillness of genocide and slavery, those absences which haunt the imaginary of presence. The racial-sexual mark of enunciation attempts to think through the variety of ways that Native and Black speech that invokes this absence must be restricted. The restriction is a form of counterinsurgent violence against the insurgencies erupted through what Fanon calls the "muscular tension" of the colonized,³²² and at least part of its purpose is to restrict enunciation in the registers of slavery and genocide such that the speech that already begins from enclosure (in the form of the public and the private) can go unrestricted (other than by its own delimited,

³²² Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 17.

propertied futurity). This is because, as Wilderson explains, speech in the registers of genocide and slavery would require the blowing up of the public and private, or the destruction of the spatio-temporal coherence of the United States and its Settler/Master.³²³

Rhetoric has thoroughly foreclosed this mode of thought since Aristotle, who articulated that rhetoric must be preoccupied with the contingent, yet probable. Writing of this invocation by Aristotle, Amber E. Kelsie writes, “[c]ontingency takes on an interior spatial dimension as the possible content [of enunciation] through a disavowal of the contingency of debate’s outside that is rendered impossible.”³²⁴ According to Wilderson, the boundary between contingency and its impossible outside is drawn in blood, or what he terms gratuitous violence. Unlike contingent violence, which requires that a subject of the liberal Human community transgress a norm, rule, or law, gratuitous violence is that which accrues to its object by virtue of its very being.³²⁵ Gratuitous violence cannot be explained away by transgression, as if changes to behavior could end the violence, but rather glosses violence in the registers of objecthood (genocide and slavery) that rhetoric structurally absents in order to confirm its monopoly on the proper use of speech. Thus, that which rhetoric cannot apprehend, but which structures the rhetorical field of meaningful enunciation, is the gratuity or excessiveness of genocide and slavery.

³²³ Wilderson, *Red, White, and Black*, 3.

³²⁴ Amber E. Kelsie, “Impossible Debate at the End of the World,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, Vol 52 No 1 (2019): 65.

³²⁵ Wilderson, *Red, White, and Black*, 43-44.

In order to think further with the racial-sexual mark of enunciation and its implications for rhetorical study, I offer the following reflection on my own experience of being racially and sexually marked, as well as the foreclosed speech invited by the encounter with the mark:

I am five years old, visiting my white grandparents with my white mother and Native father. As we sit in the living room, my grandmother is telling a story. The words she says are hazy to my memory; the actual words don't matter so much as the years go by, or even in the moment of the telling, as if they are already written over by their own genocidal underside. She looks at me and my sister and starts to say (this is the only part, etched in my memory somehow permanently, that I can recall in words): "I couldn't even pee in the bathroom without these little squaw girls staring at me through a crack in the door!"

The words are arresting. Time slows and the space thickens in the invocation. Suddenly me and my sister, we are the little squaw girls. Eyes too big, peering in. I feel the outside of our bodies turn into a surface. She repeats it, her eyes closing in on us. "Little squaw girls." I feel both of us inhabiting a scene we are within yet displaced from, an inappropriately intimate gaze. Her eyes are tiny in comparison to the ones she has given to me and my sister. It is a Settler oral tradition, and it exists so that my grandmother can write whatever she wants to. I feel my dad's hand tighten on my shoulder as the geography of my grandmother's body gestures towards my sister and me like a compass pointing due North. My sister's dark eyes won't meet mine, weighted, as they are, by the

centuries of violence that still know to identify her as squaw. I can't lift my own eyes to see my grandmother. The weight of the room, the world, is too heavy. I stare at the table, at my little hands. I do not ask if they are the hands of a little squaw girl, because I know. I have been told.

This is what I remember: the ghostly, dream-image of young Native girls, like birds, eyes too big, too curious, too absent in the telling, too present in their disappearance, and the pressure of my dad's hand, digging into my collarbone. Like I needed to feel this moment, feel it in my bones and blood, feel the anger he pushed into me through his fingers. An inherited rage. A total temperature of those pressing fingers, clawing into my clavicle. There is the whole landscape of this event, and then there are his fingers against my bones, refusing to be cleared.

In the above scene, genocide is structurally absented from the scene of this (personal?/political?) rhetorical invocation, yet there is simultaneously an underside to enunciation that the racial-sexual mark indelibly provokes – that pressing of my father's fingers against the bones of my body, and a memory that is always yet to come invoked in that moment of underhanded, below the surface communication, below the register of public and private. Certainly, the moment with my grandmother evokes the propertied form, because we are in her house, in her living room, spatially enclosed on a land that had to be cleared (via genocide and slavery) in order to become legible as the domestic. Surely there must be something private about this rhetoric. Yet the memory my grandmother

shares and the story she writes with it exists – in her mind somewhere, first and foremost – but also in her mind somewhere in a public bathroom, externalized from the white psyche and materialized as *real* – a public bathroom where two Native girls could simply stare. And finding myself and my sister replacing those two Native girls from the public bathroom, in a private home, in the imaginary of my grandmother – *little squaw girls* – I find that how she saw us was so terrifyingly the same and different from how we had come to see ourselves.

The rhetoric of the public, the zones of political deliberation, cannot apprehend this violation. It does not register as violation because in order for it to do so, I would have to be able to prove that I am not like those other two little Native girls in the bathroom, that I am somehow different, deserving of protection from the white imaginary that also inaugurates this public. I would have to be able to prove that my grandmother's imagination – the very same imagination that inaugurates the public zones of deliberation – is somehow untrustworthy in her perception, unable to differentiate between the genocided flesh of her grandchildren and the genocided flesh of the Native girls in the bathroom. But we are already there and yet not there.

The rhetoric of the private, as that ethical women's space theorized by so many white feminists, cannot account for this violation of woman to "girl," of something unspeakable constituted not in loving solidarity but rather in the name of a miscegenational, genocidal kinship. The space of intimate encounter – that repetitious marking of the racial-sexual mark – is neither an exceptionally public event nor a self-contained, propertied privacy. It, rather, leaks into and between both. It exceeds both because it is that psycho-sexual thing which

constitutes the spatio-temporalities of the Settler/Master yet must remain disavowed.

That moment on the underneath of all of this, on the underside of communication – that rhetorical, bodily sensation of my dad's hand gripping my shoulder – is not a public or a private communication either. It is a thing I know you cannot understand if you have not felt it: that improperly inherited thing that lets you know when what you are inside of is a civilizing mission, a regime predicated on disappearing all that was prior to and during its violation and replacing it with rhetoric's cherished conception of the rhetor and the audience: the spatio-temporal delimitation of the public and the private.

CONCLUSION: *Communication Towards an Otherwise*

Throughout this thesis, I have gestured towards the otherwise provoked by those modalities of communication which demand an end to the project of modernity and the order of violence that it necessitates. In theorizing the racial-sexual mark of enunciation, I am forwarding a rhetorical theory which is not reliant upon the authorizations of the public, the private, or the politics of recognition which substantiate these Settler/Master spatio-temporalities. I have argued that the demands of privilege, intersectionality, and “the personal is political” as waged from within the politics of representation simply present new territorial and Historical acquisitions to the newly formed subject of liberal Humanity, whose expansive existence has nominally included its racialized others through the affirmative action mandate and the politics of inclusion. As such, I have attempted to unflinchingly provoke towards the otherwise – that exigency necessitated by the structural fact of genocide and slavery as historical stillnesses which authorize the liberal Human community and the subjects who constitute it. I have, further, articulated the potentialization of refusals in the registers of racial capitalism and the nation-state form, as liberal institutions which require incessant violation in order to articulate their monopoly on the proper use of value, violence, thought, and speech.

The racial-sexual mark of enunciation, as well as its authorization by genocide and slavery as enduring facets of liberalism, invites further theoretical inquiry into the counterinsurgencies posed by the politics of representation, as well as its implications for the nascent fields of racial rhetorical criticism and rhetoric of race. It is my hope that the theory of enunciation that I forwarded here, a structural theory predicated on deracination, gratuitous violence, and the demand for the end of modernity, will provoke further exploration of these conceptual frames within rhetoric.

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Irvine Round Robin Panel

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- Collaboratively implemented curriculum in argumentation, speech, and rhetoric
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- Researched interdisciplinary argumentation in queer/trans theory and Black studies
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- Developed curriculum for students, using Native studies and post-structural theory to analyze U.S. environmental policy
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