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Black Hospitality

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Black Hospitality

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An abstract of
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Abstract

Black Hospitality
By Mukasa Mubirumusoke

My dissertation entitled “Black Hospitality” argues that French philosopher Jacques Derrida’s conception of unconditional hospitality provides the most accurate and advantageous framework for describing and conceptualizing Black ethical behavior in a white supremacist antiblack America. Antiblack racism and white supremacy express their power, for the most part, by attempting to undermine the ethical nature and political expression of Blacks by means of severe physical and psychological violence. Jacques Derrida’s unconditional hospitality offers a framework and logic of ethics that identifies the resistive power of Blacks against the almost insufferable hegemonic and homogenizing momentum of antiblack racism and white supremacy in America. Questioning the motives, contesting the practices, and undermining the reality of antiblack racism and white supremacy are the catalysts that motivate Black critical thought and this dissertation will continue this tradition with Derridian deconstruction guiding its core argument.

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And to the ‘Sixty Million and More’.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction 9
2. Chapter One: Extra-Ordinary Vulnerability 20
    a. *Introduction*
    b. *White Supremacy and Antiblack Racism*
        i. *The Systematic Constitutive Violence of White Supremacy*
        ii. *The General Economy of White Supremacy and Extra-Ordinary Vulnerability*
        iii. *The Shifting Presentation of Whiteness*
        iv. *Antiblack Racism*
    c. *Vulnerability in Mind and Body*
        i. *Double Consciousness*
        ii. *From Double Consciousness to the Black Body*
        iii. *The History of the Extra-Ordinary Vulnerability of the Black Body*
            1. *The Middle Passage*
            2. *Slavery*
            3. *Reconstruction*
            4. *Jim Crow*
            5. *Post-Civil Rights*
    d. *Conclusion*
3. Chapter Two: The Black Home 65
    a. *Introduction*
    b. *The Unthought, The Dispossessed*
    c. *Fred Moten's Blackness: Setting the Foundations of the Black Home*
    d. *The Black Home as Black Agency*
        i. *Celebration*
        ii. *The Dialogic and Feminine Intervention of Wright*

        iii. *The Black Home in Beyoncé's Lemonade*
    e. *Conclusion*
4. Chapter Three: Black Hospitality 114
    a. *Introduction*
    b. *Nahum Chandler and the Negro as Problem for Thought: Refiguring the Positionality of the Black Subject*
    c. *Derrida, Hospitality, Blackness*
        i. *The Vulnerable Host*
        ii. *The Impossibility of Black Hospitality: Transgression and Criminality*
        iii. *Self-Interruption and Responsibility*
    d. *Three Vignettes of Black Hospitality: Charleston, Sandra, Eric*
    e. *Conclusion*
5. Chapter Four: *Beloved* 171
    a. *Introduction*
    b. *Vulnerability*
    c. *The Black Home…124 Bluestone Road*
        i. *The House*
        ii. *Temporality*
        iii. *Community*
    d. *Black Hospitality*
    e. *Conclusion*
6. Conclusion 203
    a. *Review*
    b. *Remarks*
7. Works Cited 207

Introduction

I. Black Hospitality?

I had very few anxieties or fears moving to the South; however, as a Northeasterner I had been warned: strangers in public would want to speak to you, maybe even ingratiate themselves with you and for no reason at all. Five years later, while generally well adjusted, I still find this uncomfortable. In the end, I am from Massachusetts. But I am also Black and something always seemed off putting, if not outright pernicious, about the expectation to be open, and, in a way, to reify the very real vulnerability that follows from being a Black person, all in the name of 'southern hospitality'. And then there was Trayvon, Sandra, and Charleston too but also Michael Brown and Eric Garner. Although it feels southern, Black vulnerability, Black deference to all and everyone, Black generosity, or Black hospitality if you will, permeates the entire African diaspora. Blacks are expected to be open to their subjugation, to be generous with their welcoming; meanwhile, any action that may or may not take place can be read as violation of the way things are supposed to be, the way Black people are supposed to act; Blacks are expected to be hospitable but, more than often, presumed hostile.

This project aims to set the foundations and then give an account of the eerie 'Black Hospitality' alluded to above. In fact, the issue of Black vulnerability and the expectation of Black generosity—which are two sides of the same coin—actually became an object of thought and meditation for me while reading Jacques Derrida's proposal for understanding ethics as a structure of unconditional hospitality[1]. In his sophisticated, perhaps convoluted, yet always enlightening thought, Derrida argues that ethics in its most proper formulation leads to aporia insomuch as a proper response ethics of hospitality would require that there be no conditions placed upon the other, or guest, in one's welcoming. The welcoming of all and any, under no conditions whatsoever, he argues, should be the only true account of hospitality. However, any particular form of welcoming the other—a gesture that is obviously necessary for hospitality to take place—we will see implies some sort of conditions that the other is forced to or presumed to prescribe. For instance, there being a condition that the other person speak a common language or understand the gesture of welcoming at all. This impasse in the formation of unconditional hospitality, this 'aporia', for Derrida, amounts to the impossibility of any hospitality. Indeed, the only hospitality is the impossibility to satisfy true hospitality[2].

While Derrida did often find an ethico-political atmosphere to contextualize hospitality, he never explored a deep cultural background for his observations in which one may understand the context to which these extreme conditions would exist. Moreover, he often intimated that the other, or the guest, would be the disenfranchised. This is where this project takes a step beyond Derrida's accounts of hospitality. Black Hospitality explores the dark crevices of the house that racism built in America, particularly of white supremacy and antiblack racism. At stake is to push the extremely insightful but often unhelpfully general accounts of Derrida's unconditional hospitality to a theoretical space where the experience of Blacks as ethical agents can be thought more fruitfully. One of the more significant efforts made in this vain was to conceptualize Black Americans in Derrida's schema as the hosts as opposed to the guests. Providing this account from the perspective of the host is important because the experiences of Blacks as ethical agents is not that of the guest that cannot get into the house of white supremacy or 'humanity'; but the abused, displaced, and extremely vulnerable host who cannot reconcile a world of white supremacy with his or her Black life.

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[1] Derrida proposes the structure of unconditional hospitality in numerous works that will be discussed below. c.f. Derrida, *Of Hospitality*; "Hostipitality"; "Hospitality, Responsibility, Justice".

[2] At first glance, to those familiar with the Kantian Idea, this issue appears to be one of perfectability. Derrida, however, is clear that this is not the issue. He is not worried about approximating unconditional hospitality but of the structural inaccessibility and barring from its possibility. c.f. Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 169, 200.

Now, accounts of or arguments for the irreconcilability of Black life with white supremacy are not difficult to come by. There need not be a first: from slave songs that have survived and the others that have passed into oblivion, to David Walker's *Appeal*, to Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents*, the poetry of Langston Hughes, the writings of Wright, Ellison, Baldwin, and of Wells, Walker, Cooper. Needless to continue, there are many—although I suppose not enough—examples of literature, art, philosophy, protest, and theology that have come address Blackness, Black life, and the hostility it solicits, relentlessly, from the proverbial hands of white supremacy. Relatively consistent in these accounts of Black grief, anger, and vulnerability are direct or indirect appeals to the political disenfranchisement of Blacks, especially from philosophical texts because the political exclusion and evisceration of Black life demands a reckoning with a public consciousness that can promote, without a blink, universal rights. Accounting for the horrors of Black life in terms of the injustices of systematic prejudice towards Black people has been a staple of Black thought, particularly in a country whose founders and citizens have lauded its appeals to freedom and liberty for all. This brazen inconsistency in rhetoric—and only rhetoric, since we will see later that indeed Black subjugation and universal 'human rights' go hand in hand logically—has agonized and mobilized the Black community to not just free themselves from enslavement but to ensure political rights for themselves and their descendants.

I mention the significance and persistence of the appeal to the political for good reason. While I do not want to diminish the importance of discussing Blacks' relation to political institutions, political rights, and liberties, this project wants to examine the parameters of the ethical experience and the possibilities of critique and even resistance. This is not to say that the immoralism of white supremacy and antiblack racism has been lost on those who discuss the political. Often there is an implicit moral claim attached to the political inconsistencies that Black theorists and protests attend to when they make their claims for civil rights. This project, however, aims to find a grounding experience and agency that comes to fruition in the account of Black Hospitality. In other words, in light of the political, I will argue it is important for us to ruminate upon the ethical life of Blacks in America and in this regard, I believe this project will provide an important intervention into current debates and inquiries into Black life in America.

One may ask at this point if this project remains so invested in giving a fresh account of Black life and experience, then why does a European philosopher of the 20th century play a central role for the argument? Would not an appeal to Black people and their experience provide the most accurate, if not most respectful, account of Black life? In his very powerful essay, "The Derelictical Crisis of African American Philosophy: How African American Philosophy Fails to Contribute to the Study of African-

Descended People"[3], Tommy Curry argues that, indeed, African-American philosophy has rooted itself in the traditions of American and European philosophy to the detriment of African descended people. Without a unique relation to the lives of Black people, African-American philosophy is rendered derelict. While I find Shelby's appeal for African-American philosophy, or simply Black thought, to set its foundations in the intellectual work and lives of Black people, I also find it imperative that we recognize to what extent Black lives and Black experience are founded in the intellectual history of European and American thought. Therefore, while a healthy skepticism should be employed when considering these thinkers—and I believe the parameters in which I adopt Derrida satisfy this skepticism—nevertheless, I fear a complete exclusion, or better yet, disavowal may lead to another form of dereliction, where we overlook the machinations and systematic implementations of the white supremacist and antiblack machinery as they arrive from the horse's mouth, so to speak. With that said, while I do at times make use of thinkers of European descent, the overwhelming majority of sources, voices, and echoes will be that of Black people. I am interested in the lives and experiences of Black people from the perspectives of history, theory, art, and everyday experiences. Hopefully the ends, and beginnings, of philosophy will not obscure this interest.

II. Chapter Outline

Black Hospitality has been divided into four chapters. The first two chapters provide crucial theoretical foundations for the third chapter, which addresses the idea of Black Hospitality head on, while the last chapter provides an aesthetic rumination to further articulate and expand the richness in which Black Hospitality gives an account of Black ethical experience.

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[3] c.f. Tommy Curry, "The Derelictical Crisis of African American Philosophy: How African American Philosophy Fails to Contribute to the Study of African-Descended People", *Journal of Black Studies*. Vol 42: 3. 314–333.

Chapter one, titled Extra-Ordinary Vulnerability, begins us down the road towards Black ethical experience through an exposition of how Blacks are rendered vulnerable in/by a white supremacist and antiblack racist America. We start here as a first gesture in the recontextualization and reconceptualization of Derrida's conception of unconditional hospitality. Unconditional hospitality falls under the rubric of a branch of ethical theory called response ethics. The main insight of response ethics follows from a reversal of traditional moral theories, which focus first and foremost on the moral calculus and reasoning of the first-person agent, and instead argues that the moral agent's responsibility begins and lies solely in responding to the other. As a subset to response ethics, there is vulnerability ethics that takes into account in particular the vulnerability of the other in different ways and forms. Now, Derrida never addresses either of these schools of thoughts but he has a penchant for describing the responsibility of the host to unconditional hospitality as recognizing the risk of hospitality, i.e. a vulnerable exposure to a guest that could be monstrous. This chapter is dedicated to the detailed account of the monstrosity of white supremacy and antiblack racism that renders Blacks vulnerable.

However, there is a uniqueness to the vulnerability of Blackness that goes beyond even the parameters set by vulnerability ethics. Therefore, after describing these parameters, I give a theoretical account of white supremacy and antiblack racism that ultimately centers around Jared Sexton's description of white supremacy as an excessive general economy that follows no strict reasoning or logic and instead is an infinite source of iterations and practices of white supremacy's domination and antiblack racism. This particular characteristic highlights an insidious characteristic of white supremacy that forced me to articulate a concept that breaks from the traditional account of vulnerability, which I employ through the neologism ‘extra-ordinary’. The term highlights both the constitutive nature of white supremacy that renders its eternal return banal but at the same time its excessive extraordinary nature that overwhelms Black life and existence. The chapter then concludes through an extensive historical account of this extra-ordinary vulnerability as it manifests in mind and body.

Chapter two, titled The Black Home, takes up the characteristics of the ethical actor in Black Hospitality. This move is important for two reasons. The first reason follows from furthering the project’s intention to enrich and refigure Derrida’s bare account of hospitality. While Derrida often appeals to the ethical actor and his or her difficulties under the name of the host, an extensive description of what may qualify as the house or home in which the host resides is virtually non-existent. Therefore, I use the opportunity of this absence to refigure Black agency through the trope of the home. The trope of the home offers a dynamic topography to give an expansive account of agency that troubles the traditional liberal masculinist white account of ethico-political subjectivity by displacing the centrality of an autonomous agent and embracing an agency that recognizes historical, social, communal, and dialogical understandings of a self that has a very specific Black quality. Building on the context of extra-ordinary vulnerability developed in the first chapter, we are led to the dilapidated, haunted, displaced, yet social and communal, Black Home.

Following specifically from the context of the relation of extra-ordinary vulnerability to an understanding of the Black self brings us to the second reason a discussion of the Black Home is important. The first chapter's account of vulnerability is nothing short of devastating. The historical accounts from slavery up until modern times, concerning issues such as the prison industrial complex, leave very little left for developing an understanding of selfhood or agency. To articulate the stench of despair that suffocates the first chapter in terms of the Black self, I confront a few of the thinkers that I use in the first chapter that belong to or are within proximity to the school of thought known as afro-pessimism. I begin with Saidiya Hartman's rather bleak account of the Black self as the unthought down from slavery all the way until her own life experience and then turn my attention to her student and the forefather—at least of the title—of afro-pessimism, Frank Wilderson III. For Wilderson afro-pessimism gives an account of the political ontology of white supremacy that positions the Black person into the fungible and accumulated slave through gratuitous violence, who, at the expense of its own capacity, libidinally and economically supports the capacity of white civil society.

To resuscitate a sense of self from the devastations of afro-pessimism, I first set the foundations for the Black Home with the work of Fred Moten and his direct counter to afro-pessimism that he calls Black Optimism, Black Operations, or simply Black-Ops. Moten conceptualizes a Blackness that precedes the objectification of Blacks in Wilderson's political ontology utilizing an idea of paraontology developed by Nahum Chandler. Moten sees Blackness neither as object or subject, for that matter but as a fugitive social excessiveness that functions as a condition of possibility beyond the political death articulated by Wilderson. From there I begin to construct a social and celebratory understanding of the Black self through the dynamic trope of the Black

Home. I utilize Michelle Wright's ideas on Black femininity and the dialogical, as opposed to dialectical, creations of the self to further the distance of the Black Home from the autonomous white male dominant subject. Lastly, I do a reading of Beyonce's 2016 visual-album *Lemonade* to articulate the communal, historical, and feminine components of selfhood that really bring together the trope of the Black Home.

Chapter three, titled Black Hospitality, takes the contours of the Black self as set against the landscape of white supremacy and places them into the context of an ethical life built on the impossible conditions of Black Hospitality. This chapter goes full force into the peculiar experience of the Black self as constructed through vulnerability with an expectation of unquestioned generosity that, following from the im-possible structure of Derrida's unconditional hospitality, is nevertheless understood as hostility.

The chapter begins with an account of Nahum Chandler's centering of the Negro within western thought through his thorough and inventive reading of Du Bois in his book *X: The Problem of the Negro as a Problem of Thought*. The purpose of this section is to elaborate conceptually why it is advantageous to place the liminal, displaced, and unstable understanding of the self in the position of host in the account of hospitality as opposed to the guest. In convincing manner, Chandler articulates how Du Bois' articulation of the problem of the color line, and more specifically, the problem of the Negro is, in fact, a problem of western thought in general. In as much as western thinkers were attempting to articulate a conception of the human through contradistinction to Blacks, through his reading of Du Bois, Chandler shows how these westerners unveiled the impossibility to articulate a fully formulated stable conception of identity, thus disrupting western thought altogether.

From this theoretical rendering of a certain sense of centrality of the Negro to western thought we move into Black Hospitality. We begin by giving an account of Derrida's unconditional hospitality and then move to further justify why it would be advantageous to understand the Black experience through the lens of hospitality by employing a comparative analysis of Derrida's understanding of the vulnerable host and the vulnerability of Black people as rendered through white supremacy, which, furthermore, acknowledges a historical precedent of compulsory Black hospitality. We then move to the experience of impossibility for the Black host through an account of the necessary transgression of the laws of hospitality and how this transgression accounts from the always already criminalization of Blacks. We will then go through an understanding of self-interruption and the responsibility of the Black Host. Lastly, I provide three vignettes of recent incidents concerning Black people that I would like to read under the parameters set for Black Hospitality. There I will provide a reading of the events at the Emannuelle AME church in North Carolina, Eric Garner in New York, and Sandra Bland in Texas.

The dissertation concludes with a chapter on Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, titled Beloved, read through the lens of Black Hospitality. We turn to fiction, and Morrison's masterful work in particular, for the more expansive and vivacious account of Blackness and the experience of Black people that can be rendered through an aesthetic medium. In this chapter, I take us through every conceptual aspect and concept explored in the previous three chapters and explain how Morrison, with the liberty of certain aesthetic choices and literary devices, gives an exceptional account of Black Hospitality. There are many events and characters that one could use to situate and articulate the experience of

Black Hospitality but I focus on the event and characters that inspired the story and world of *Beloved*, namely the infanticide of Sethe’s second youngest daughter, Beloved. This event conjures the experience of impossibility in a way that ‘cannot be passed on’. I will conclude with an abbreviated account of where I believe this project could lead me that will actually bring us back to chapter two and four to ponder whether there we can understand Black aesthetics as certain form of ethical gesture in its own right.

Chapter One- Extra-Ordinary Black Vulnerability

I. Introduction

At the turn of the 21st century characterizing the Black experience as grounded fundamentally in a state of vulnerability for much of America was anachronistic. In February of each year American school children learn of a dark and distant past where people that looked like Oprah, Jay-Z, Beyoncé and our 44th President Barack Obama were brought over from Africa and forced into labor because of the color of their skin. They learn of Abraham Lincoln's emancipation proclamation and then are reminded of the reason they got a three day weekend a few weeks ago when they come to Martin Luther King who fought for the rights for children like themselves to learn next to each other, sit next to each other on a bus, and eat together at restaurants. Fast forward a few decades to the present day and supposedly race/racism is no longer an issue; America had blinded itself to the trivialities of race.

The rhetoric of a colorblind present and future in the media reached its apex with the election of President Obama. The leader of the free world was a Black man and, therefore, a great majority of Americans—particularly white Americans—declared antiblack racism, as we know it, ostensibly over. However, while Barack Obama and figures like the aforementioned Oprah and Beyoncé embraced great amounts of popularity, admiration, influence, and money, a significant amount of Blacks simply could not concede to the proclamations of the death of racism. The projection of these figures into the limelight, rubbing shoulders with American elites, was fool's gold; the general public was wearing rose colored glasses. Nikhil Pal Singh astutely articulates the misleading nature of these exemplary individuals in *Black is a Country,* where he observes "the projection of images of Black inclusion (often through the elevation of exemplary individuals) minimizes a contentious, unfinished history of collective struggles against white supremacist monopolies on nationalist ideals and practices"[4]. The reality of the still existent and thriving white supremacist monopolies came to the public eye most vividly with the murder of Trayvon Martin.

The death of Trayvon Martin galvanized a collective voice of Black Americans that revitalized the conversation on race and in particular their own vulnerability to systematic and personal racism. Trayvon was an unarmed Black teen shot to death by George Zimmerman after returning from a convenience store. The outrage over his death was palpable in the streets and on the internet and while sadness and grief subsumed a great part of a Black community in mourning there was also a revitalization of Black pride. Trayvon Martin's image and the images of protesting Americans were wallpapered on traditional and social media alike. Trayvon's image began to circulate with many other symbolic images of Blacks in America. From Emmett Till's face, swollen and beaten, the unnamed Blacks being hosed on the streets of Alabama, Martin Luther King on the steps of the Washington monument, to Tommie Smith and John Carlos on the podium of the 1968 Olympics or the Black Panther wielding guns on the stairs of the Capitol building.

As we know, Trayvon was only the tip of a giant iceberg that continues to emerge from the dark cold depths of America's subconscious. With the subsequent deaths of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Freddie Gray, Walter Scott, Sandra Bland and numerable others, the Black community grieved and has together, through movements like Black Lives Matter, redressed the disproportionate number of Blacks in prison, the continued practice of housing discrimination, and police brutality. For many, it is no longer a question that racism continues to be an issue and through reporting, protests, and personal testimonies the Black community embraced their identities and the value of their lives by bringing to the light their experience of their radical vulnerability in a white supremacist antiblack 21st century America.

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[4] Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy*, 17.

In philosophy, the concept of vulnerability has found increased consideration and importance in the latter half of the 20th century, specifically within the field of ethics. The emergence of vulnerability as a central concept for ethics follows from a general turn away from the autonomous rational subject found in deontological or utilitarian ethics and a turn to the ontological relationality to and dependency upon others and the outside world that consequently makes a person vulnerable, that is to say open to injury or deprivation. In the introduction to their 2014 reader entitled *Vulnerability*, Mackenzie, Roger, and Dodds displace the traditional role of rationality for describing the essence of humanity and instead proclaim, “Human life is conditioned by vulnerability”[5]. While vulnerability may have universal applicability for human life, they argue it does not come in one standard universal form. They break down vulnerability into a helpful taxonomy that situates the different ways it manifests itself through our materiality as needy bodies, through the social and affective nature of our being as open to others through grief and humiliation, or through our socio-political nature as open to exploitation and oppression. Also, vulnerability can emerge from a different variety of sources, i.e. inherent, situation, or pathogenic, as well as exist in different states, i.e. dispositional or occurent.

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[5] Mackenzie, Roger, and Dodds, *Vulnerability*: *New Essays in Ethics and Feminist Philosophy*, 1.

Under this rubric, the experience of Black vulnerability falls under an occurent state, meaning it is not a matter of dispositional possibility of becoming vulnerable but rather their vulnerability is manifest constantly. Also, its source is pathogenic which entails a systematic oppression that is not simply inherited by means of being human or strictly situational. Makenzie Roger and Dodds explain, “A key feature of pathogenic vulnerability is the way that it undermines autonomy or exacerbates the sense of powerlessness engendered by vulnerability in general”[6]. For Blacks, their vulnerability manifests itself through their self-consciousness as a serious check on their understanding and conception of autonomy and it manifests itself in their body in virtue of it being marked as Black and thus subject to violation.

In addition to occurent and pathogenic, however, we will see that this vulnerability should also be described as excessive, or extra-ordinary, on account of the logic, or lack of logic, that founds white supremacy and the objectification of the Black body. According to Jared Sexton, white supremacy does not follow a straightforward and consistent logic that would rationally justify pathogenic and occurrent oppression but rather belongs to an open ended general economy. A general economy refers to an excessive unlimited source of a particular phenomenon, in this instance, white supremacy. The well from which the phenomenon, in this case the sentiment of superiority, is bottomless, and, moreover, it does not follow any specific laws, rules, or logic. Accompanying general economies are correspondent restricted economies that deploy the energy and sentiments of the general economy in a specific way, for instance the logic of disproportionate punitive action, i.e. since Blacks are inherently criminal they should be subject to harsher punishment. The different manifestations of the restricted economies refer to pathogenic vulnerability, i.e. the different ways racism manifest through systematic practices of racial oppression. However, white supremacy by and large, inasmuch as it belongs to a general economy, opens up Blacks to a vulnerability that is never settled in strict laws, rules, or customs. Instead, it points to an excessive extra-ordinary source of degradation that follows from the bottomless well of prejudicial sentiment of white supremacy that renders Blacks in one respect, as fungible accumulative objects.

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[6] Ibid, 9.

In the following chapter we will do two things: first, we will give an extensive account of the foundations of white supremacy and antiblack racism in America; second we will recount the different ways the minds and the bodies of Blacks in America are constituted as vulnerable. These sections will compile arguments and concepts from a wide variety of Africana thinkers who employ different techniques and come from different schools of thought. The goal is to give the most comprehensive account of the phenomena, particularly inasmuch as they lead directly to the vulnerability of Black people in America.

II. White Supremacy and Antiblack Racism

The foundations of the experience of vulnerability as occurent, pathogenic, and excessive for Blacks can be located in the systematic regimes of white supremacy and antiblack racism that pervade the history and foundations of American life. The renewed popularity of using the term white supremacy within the media and public discourse has left many confused and uncomfortable. While many who write on race have never abandoned the term, for the majority of Americans white supremacy refers exclusively to the extreme politics of hate groups such as the Aryan Brotherhood or Ku Klux Klan. This is a popular and divisive diversion of the discourse on race and racism to a select group of people with extreme prejudicial views that many Americans can find comfort in distancing themselves from. With the prejudicial views expressed by these groups, we often think of vulnerability in a more existential sense, i.e. the vulnerability a person or persons of color experiences at the hands of the particular violence and abuse of another particular person or group of persons. This very limited understanding of racism, while still existent and troublesome in America, overlooks largescale systematic and institutional, or simply, structural racism. These two understandings of racism are not mutually exclusive; the latter, however, has for a long time gone overlooked and underappreciated because of its distance from the personal sentiments that overdetermine one's perspective on the experience of race. Structural racism is not easy to pin down since it cannot be attributed to any particular perpetrators and instead functions at the abstract level of institutions and history. Nevertheless, the structural manifestations of white supremacy are the primary culprit in producing the vulnerability of Blacks as a group throughout history. As a depersonalized system of checks and imbalances, the non-logical white supremacy often goes obscured by economic or pseudo-scientific justifications. These restrictive logics intertwine to create a nebula that clouds the extra-ordinary wealth of unfounded sentiments that expose Black bodies to violation.

a. The Systematic Constitutive Violence of White Supremacy

Now, one of the founding tenets of white supremacy, particularly as it manifests against Blacks in America, is a systematic physical violence that leads to occurent and pathogenic vulnerability. In an essay Jared Sexton co-authors with Steven Martinot entitled the "The Avant-garde of White Supremacy" the two authors hone in on white supremacy as it belongs to a state apparatus that calls for the brutal murder of Blacks by the executive force of the police. With the overwhelming number of instances of police brutality and other forms of violence in American history, it has come to appear that these actions are not just arbitrary or exceptional circumstances of rogue officers. Rather, police violence against Blacks is standard procedure that functions necessarily within the structure of the state. Even active protests and resistance do not seem to work, instead instigating stronger police reactions[7]. The police are officers of the state who have a license to commit these killings not simply with impunity but as an honest day's work. In reference to the murder of Amadou Diallo by a New York special crime unit force in February of 1999, Sexton and Martinot explain:

> the true excessiveness is not in the massiveness of the shooting but in fact that these cops were there on the street looking for this event in the first place, as a matter of routine business. This spectacular evil is encased in a more inarticulable evil of banality, namely that the state assigns certain individuals to (well-paying) jobs as hunters of human beings.[8]

Police, according to Sexton and Martinot, embody a law unto themselves in which the rest of the state apparatus is bound to protect. At all stakes, police brutality must be protected to ensure the functioning of the state as an arbiter of justice. The functioning of white supremacy at the level of the state offers no solution for its Black 'citizens' whom want to fight a system that has been structured to create their bodies as vulnerable to arbitrary killings as an everyday occurrence.

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[7] Sexton and Martinot, "The Avant-garde of White Supremacy", 170.
[8] Ibid,170.

If we want to account for Black vulnerability as the mundane disposability of Black people, questions of logical coherence or intelligibility often follow. For Sexton and Martinot the intelligibility of the limits of white supremacy and its excessive executive force lead to the impossibility of reconciling police brutality and the insatiable desire for the ethical accountability of these actions:

> All attempts to explain the malicious standard operating procedure of US white supremacy find themselves hamstrung by conceptual inadequacy; it remains describable but not comprehensible…the ethical meaning remains beyond the discursive resources of civil society, outside the framework for thinkable thought.[9]

The impossibility of thinking reconciliation actually functions quite well within the structure of white civil society. The fact that such violence can go ignored by white civil society speaks to the necessary conditions of securing white civil society. White civil society can enjoy its own apparent comfort and security only insomuch as it hides that this is supported by the economic and emotional labor of the Black race. Attentive to the fears of Saidyia Hartman in *Scenes of Subjection* on the spectacular violence of Blacks overshadowing the mundane scenes of violence against Blacks, Sexton and Martinot argue that the logic of this ignorability lies in the spectacle of police brutality in modern media. To acknowledge and discuss police brutality relies on conjuring particular events that are peppered in the news from month to month and this necessarily over shadows the mundanity of white supremacies everyday rule. White supremacy is far too saturated into the fabric of civil society for it to be articulated in its particularity.

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[9] Ibid,172.

However, to reiterate, the actions of police brutality are not simply spontaneous or isolated acts of individual anger; they serve the ends of white civil society inasmuch as whites, while recognizing police brutality, feel safe from the fears and dread of its reality in the Black community and more importantly feel as if the police are doing their job. As Sexton and Martinot state explicitly:

> White supremacy is not reconstructed simply for its own sake but for the sake of the social paranoia, the ethic of impunity, and the violent spectacles of racialization that it calls the "maintenance of order" all of which constitute its essential dimensions. The cold, gray institutions of this society — courts, schools, prisons, police, army, law, religion, the two-party system — become the arenas of this brutality, its excess and spectacle, which they then normalize throughout the social field.[10]

In the practice of police brutality, the subjection of Blacks is a necessary component to justify the presence of police and to secure the normalcy of white civil society. Of course, within this logic, there is a reversal of who truly is aggressor and who is keeping the peace, and this too diverts attention from white supremacy’s ultimately terroristic rule. The criminality of the Black body is a major component to the order of white supremacy in America and this will be discussed at length below. What is important at this junction, however, is the manner in which white supremacy successfully diverts attention from its own prerogatives. Calling attention to the psychology of individual person’s possible prejudices often only reaches the level of the restricted economies of racism and obscures the functioning of white supremacy as a general economy of oppression.

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[10] Ibid,180.

b. The General Economy of White Supremacy and Extra-Ordinary Vulnerability

Reading the manifestations of racism in terms of two economies, the general and the restricted economies, is perhaps Jared Sexton's most interesting contributions to the understanding of white supremacy and the grounds upon which the excessive or extra-ordinary understanding of Black vulnerability becomes clear. He describes white supremacy as a general economy in the "Avant-Garde" essay but explores the concept with more depth in his book *Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism*. While in the former essay he uses the term 'hyper economy', in the latter he uses the term general economy explicitly, citing Arkady Plotnitski's *Reconfigurations* as his source. Georges Bataille also infamously introduces the concept of the general economy in his series *The Accursed Share.*[11] The essential quality of a general economy is its never-ending excessive productivity. In Bataille's cosmological account, he cites the sun as an example of this excessive wealth of productivity that fuels the growth and movements of all other ecological economies; for Sexton white supremacy as a racist endeavor is a general economy unto itself fueling the violence and oppression of Blacks. White supremacy is an endless source of racist sentiments grounded in white superiority as human rational subjects but again, while often feigned throughout Western history by different kinds of essentialisms that deem Blacks—through biology or sociology or anthropology—to be provably and essentially inferior, there is in fact no true essential quality or logic to white superiority.

Citing the work of Albert Memmi, Sexton agrees that racism's meaning is not found in its coherence or functionality; in fact, although we see racism manifest in different structures, white supremacy's meaning is naïve and has its force only in affect or simple conviction[12]. Of course, this force and conviction need not be reduced to the psychology of individuals but is carried through historical practices and beliefs expressed through people. There is no true logic that can justify why Blacks should be subject to oppression; there is only a conviction that whites are superior and rational human agents and this is masked through different proposed logics, i.e. restricted economies that have particular ends and ultimately justify the general economy, for example, the war on drugs would be a restricted economy.[13] Blacks, as they are ultimately subject to the excessive general economy of white racism, are thus excessively vulnerable since they are continuously open to illogical and ostensibly endless manifestations of racist practices of oppression grounded in the sentiment of their inferiority as objects for whites. In the "Avant-Garde" they explain:

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[11] CF. Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*. Cambridge: Zone Books. 1991.

> On the one hand, there is an economy of clearly identifiable injustices, spectacular flash points of terror, expressing the excesses of the state-sanctioned system of racial categorization. On the other, there is the structure of inarticulability itself and its imposed unintelligibility, an economy of the loss of meaning, a hyper-economy. *It is this hyper-economy that appears in its excess as banal*; a hyper-injustice that is reduced and dissolved in the quotidian as an aura, while it is refracted in the images of the spectacular economy itself. (my emphasis)[14]

The 'hyper', i.e. general, economy remains for the most part hidden and elusive, while the spectacular, i.e. restricted, economies have their own logics and manifestations in the real world in instances like police brutality but also laws of segregation, Black criminalization, logics of lynching, or the focus of Sexton's book, laws against miscegenation. Under these instantiations, which transform in different spaces and throughout history, racism appears to follow a certain kind of logic and its outcomes coherent, while in reality there is no coherence or logic that justifies the sentiment of white supremacy itself. In this respect, white supremacy is also illusive. In *Amalgamation Scheme* Sexton writes, "Racism only ever appears in *this* way; that is, it appears as what it is not, as something other than it is. It is essentially misleading, suggesting that the underlying affective system operates only to the extent that it does not appear as such."[15] While the general economy of white supremacy remains essentially illusive, the restricted economies are the way it manifests; its excessive productivity can only come to form in particular practices of oppression and persecution that render Blacks as objects, or as argued below reduces Blacks to their bodies.

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[12] Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism*, 27.

[13] Michelle Wright also argues that in fact the racist discourses of the West are incoherent and that antiblack racism is based on personal agendas and belief and not objective, i.e. logical, criterion. Wright, *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora*, 65.

[14] Sexton and Martinot, "The Avant-garde of White Supremacy", 177.

Consequently, the excess of the general economy of white supremacy goes beyond the standards of occurent and pathological vulnerability described above. Black vulnerability is occurent, i.e. constant, pathogenic, i.e. undermining autonomy, and also excessive, or extra-ordinary. Extra-ordinary captures both the 'banality' of white supremacy's everyday manifestations, e.g. the ease and efficiency with which the prison industrial complex functions, and the excessiveness that takes Blacks beyond simply undermining autonomy but denying the possibility of a certain type of political agency and actually being an object for the other, i.e. becoming a Black body. Frank Wilderson III in his book *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms,* borrows from Hortense Spillers' and Saidya Hartman's articulations of Blackness— both of which will be discussed below at length— to give a vivid description of what I would like to call extra-ordinary vulnerability. He writes, "This violence which turns a body into flesh, ripped apart literally and imaginatively, destroys the possibility of ontology because it positions the Black in an infinite and indeterminately horrifying and open vulnerability, an object made available (which is to say fungible) for any subject."[16] While Wilderson articulates the extra-ordinary as 'infinite and indeterminate', nevertheless his contention clearly correlates as the consequence of Sexton's proposal of white supremacy as an excessive general economy. For Wilderson, Blacks do not belong to the civil society of whites, who have normal access to certain political guarantees, rights, and expressions of freedom. Instead of being subjects, or humans, Blacks are slave objects that are made available for the subjects, i.e. whites; they are reduced to their bodies.[17] The objectification of Blacks and the gratuitous violence that constitutes their existence follow from a white supremacy that does not follow any logic or reasoning but an ever flowing economy of affect of superiority. Moreover, this infinite and indeterminate vulnerability goes without acknowledgement by society at large every day, despite its different manifestations. In this respect, Black vulnerability is truly extra-ordinary.

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[15] Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism*, 27.

c. The Shifting Presentation of Whiteness

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[16] Wilderson, *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms,* 38.

[17] To vivify the distinction that Wilderson wants to make between the slave object and the human, here he makes a comparison between the genocide of Jews during the holocaust and Blacks: "The violence that turns the African into a thing is without analog because it does simply oppress the Black through tactile and empirical technologies of oppression…Jews went into Auschwitz and came out as Jews. Africans went into the ships and came out as Blacks. The former is a Human holocaust; the latter is a Human and a metaphysical holocaust". This quotation will be discussed furthermore in the next chapter but, nevertheless, it is clear that the pathogenic vulnerability is not strong enough to account for the vulnerability of the objectification of blacks. Wilderson, *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms,* 38.

White supremacy does not maintain the same forms in its restricted economies but instead it is constantly readjusting creating new venues of discrimination throughout history and in different spaces. While whiteness has remained supreme over the last 500 years, the status of Blacks in America, for instance, has transformed: from slavery where Blacks were *de jure* inferior to whites, to the modern political climate where Blacks are by law proclaimed to be equal but *de facto* white supremacy still reigns. In this sense Charles Mills will claim that white supremacy is neither synchronically uniform nor diachronically static.[18] Whiteness, as the purveyor of white supremacy, constantly adjusts. In *Amalgamation Schemes* Sexton contends that whiteness' mutability is a necessary component to its power, stating, "The suppleness of racial whiteness—its elasticity and expansiveness; its affinity for ambiguity, impurity, and complexity; its vital dependence on the transgression of borders, continual alteration, and the incorporation of novel elements. This has been the historical case…"[19] The 'suppleness' of whiteness was witnessed in the United States during the 20th century. Those who fell under the status of white changed continuously as European immigrants were consistently ostracized and then bestowed the status of white political subjects.

In *Amalgamation Schemes* Sexton provides a possible explanation of the metamorphoses. While he agrees with Mills that whiteness for the most part remains in the backdrop, he also argues that whiteness as such is articulated when it is threatened. When there is crisis, white supremacy must assert itself. He explains, "Typically, that crisis takes form in the prospect of increased Black freedom, that prospect is declared a violent threat to the white body politic (the res publica), and that threat of violence is infused with fears of consuming, violating Black sexuality."[20] Sexton thus argues that miscegenation is the true threat to white purity and therefore racial politics always imply a politics of regulating sexuality—whether it be lynching or police brutality. In these crises brought about by the threat of Black freedom, the racial boundaries are strictly enforced and for him the project of multi-racialism partakes in this enforcement through a rejection and hostility towards Black politics.

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[18] Mills, *Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race*, 101.
[19] Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism*, 193.

In the academic field of multi-racial studies it is asserted not only that Blacks have morally reprehensible behavior but also that they have, as a result of the civil right's movement, become the oppressors by commandeering the agencies of the federal government to suit their social and economic benefit.[21] Multiracialism purports the practice of reverse racism on the grounds of Blacks having a hegemonic political hold on all issues. The proliferation of multi-racialism, thus, is another form in which whiteness has come to reassert itself through a fear of miscegenation. However, this fear should not be overstated as the desire for the complete abolition of miscegenation. Sexton suggests, "Rather than establishing themselves in vulgar opposition to miscegenation, *white supremacy and antiblackness produce miscegenation* as a precious renewable resource, a necessary threat against which they are constructed, a loyal opposition, a double exposure."[22] The general economy of white supremacy, which is constantly in flux and constantly reinterpreted to include different ethnicities of whiteness that did not always necessarily belong to its conception, creates a discourse of purity in which miscegenation becomes a threat to its purity. As aforementioned, whiteness is a universal and foundation for humanity that must protect itself. Following this logic, however, we see how racemixture, i.e. at least its possibility buttresses the entire discourse of white purity as its constitutive other. “But, from who or what must whiteness protect itself from?” The answer is Blackness.

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[20] Ibid, 12.
[21] Ibid, 52-53.
[22] Ibid, 25.

d. Antiblack Racism

When discussing white supremacy Sexton often invokes the notion of antiblack racism in the same breath. Antiblack racism is the other side of the systematic racist coin in America. The term itself was popularized in philosophy by Black existential philosopher Lewis Gordon. Lewis Gordon approaches the discussion of Black experience from the view point of Black existentialism, which employs the Sartrean concept of bad faith but particularizes it for the antiblack racism of the West. For Sartre, one lives in bad faith when one denies his or her freedom of existence by allowing the essentialisms pervasive in one’s social reality to determine their agency and constitution of meaning.[23] Antiblack racism situates bad faith and racism within the context of a binary logic of oppositional racial values that is particular to the West and is based on a Manichean divide separating white goodness as a material existence which is desirable from Black evilness which is to be avoided. Gordon explains, “The Western valuation system has historically placed positivity and its self-identity on the value of white that means, then, that it structures primary oppositions on the level of the Black. To speak of racial opposition then is to speak of white and Black.”[24] For Gordon, the positive side of the spectrum, i.e. white, is the objective standard of humanity and as such has no racial demarcation. Blackness is the other side of the spectrum and it occupies the ideal raced position from which all other colored people are tainted increasingly as they approach it.

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[23] Gordon, *Her Majesty’s Other Children*, 75.
[24] Ibid, 76.

In the antiblack world the relationships of recognition are not equal and normal human desires are obscured. Gordon argues, "In an ordinary human environment…human phenomena are accessible to all human beings…they become, in a word, typical. In a skewed context, however, the typical has been transformed in such a way that the atypical becomes normative."[25] Subsequently, Blacks are conceived as subhuman, i.e. without reason and history, and their existential freedom is fundamentally denied through an oppressive condition of anonymity. In the antiblack world there is "a violent namelessness committed against Blacks whose familiarity is so familiar that it transforms the protective dynamics of anonymity itself."[26] Anonymity for fully fledged humans, i.e. whites, marks transcendence, i.e. the freedom to be an individual and have choices. Whites are free to pursue their desires and the goals they prescribe themselves within the given limits of their existence and as such justify their own existence as a standard criterion of humanity, "whereas the inferior groups can only be 'justified' in terms of the superior group. In effect, then, the category of superiority demands the impossible of the inferior."[27] Blacks, by virtue of this spectrum, do not have access to whites' justificatory tools and thus they cannot possibly justify their own existence. Whites conceive of themselves in terms of pure Sartrean transcendence, while Blacks are reduced to the facticity of their existence without any sense of transcendence. Therefore, Blacks are not just dominated but they are subjugated through desubjectification. They experience anonymity as an actual attack on their existential constitution, i.e. their subjective freedom to choose and, one may be inclined to presume, also their freedom to resist. He agrees with Frantz Fanon's sociogenic conception of racism where there is a

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[25] Ibid, 80.
[26] Ibid, 13.
[27] Ibid, 55.

"convergence of the existential situation of an individual amid social forces that may 'overdetermine' his significance."[28] The overdetermination of social forces for Blacks in America would be precisely that of an antiblack racism that falsely attributes inferiority to Blackness and inhibits their freedom of choice.

Sexton's take on antiblack racism does not begin with the precepts of a Black existentialism but instead focuses on the larger political order that is at play in regulating Blacks through violence and sexuality. He argues that Blacks suffer from an organized state violence that is prompted by a conception of Blacks as the threatening outside to the white pure polity. When their political energy is low, the racial lines are not as strictly enforced and discourses like multi-racialism can take place. However, when they are strong, the limits of Blackness are heavily policed by the one-drop rule where "one suffers and/or enjoys with respect to the state-sponsored social organization of violence and sexuality."[29] Blackness interrupts the impersonality and general forms of a well ordered white society by making sexual relations vulgar, polarizing race discussions, and hindering the prosperity of America. Therefore, Sexton says the antimiscegenation that takes place in America "is not so much a defense as it is activation, an agency or an aggression that is only inversely indexed in the savage violence attributed to the ontology of racial Blackness."[30] White supremacy is not inert defensive position but is an active aggression against the supposed threat of Blackness through claims to antimiscegenation. This is one sense in which to understand the prefix of antiblack racism; there is an active antagonism set against Blackness, not simply a passive defense of white purity.

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[28] Gordon, *Bad Faith and Antiblack Racism*, 72.
[29] Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism*, 9
[30] Ibid, 25.

While antiblack racism remains fervent today, Sexton traces its systematic roots to slavery and the status of 'captivity' that began for Blacks when they were stolen from Africa for slavery in America. Under captivity Blacks in America are denied the status of autonomous subjectivity and selfhood through active subordination that leaves them structurally vulnerable. Sexton explains as much when he explains:

> The ethos of slavery, the ideological and affective metric of the white supremacist project, admits no legitimate Black self-defense, recognizes no legitimate assertions of Black self-possession, privacy, or autonomy. Living in a permanent state of theft, seizure and abduction orders the affairs of the captive community. Structural vulnerability to appropriation, a perpetual involuntary openness is the paradigmatic condition of Black existence in the modern world, the defining characteristic of antiblackness.[31]

Antiblack racism calls upon the precise history of the slavery of Blacks. While other non-whites have fell victim to the effects of white supremacy, the 'ethos' of slavery that Sexton calls upon refers to a particular condition of theft and captivity that aims to decapitate Black self-identity and autonomy. It is in the moment when reflecting on the condition of vulnerability, the fact that Blacks still live in the captive state in the same sense of those Blacks that were stolen from Africa, he argues, is the defining characteristic of antiblackness. The excessive structural vulnerability of Blacks in America that is opened up through the general economy of white supremacy is the condition of availability and openness to the other, to violence and death that antiblack racism facilitates actively through different restricted economies.

III. Vulnerability in Mind and Body

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[31] Ibid, 148-149.

If white supremacy and antiblack racism frame the systematic foundations of Black vulnerability, double consciousness and the Black body provide two perspectives on how vulnerability has and can been experienced, especially in its extra-ordinariness as excessive to foundational logics of oppression. Both concepts have a rich history of reflection in Black thought and the aim of this section is to give an account of how the minds and bodies of Blacks have been affected by a racism predicated on making Blacks vulnerable through physical and psychological subjection. As we will see, while I will approach both concepts separately, it is difficult to separate mind from body exclusively, and therefore the two concepts remain intimately tied to one another. However, in the end we will see how the Black body comes to overdetermine Black consciousness, insomuch as the rendering of Black people as Black bodies is the overwhelming conclusion of white supremacy and antiblack racism and the grounds upon which their extraordinary violence rests. This is just a cursory account of the bodies and minds of Blacks as interpreted from the vantage point of vulnerability.[32]

a. Double Consciousness

Double consciousness was introduced to Black thought by W.E.B. Du Bois, with its most notable formulation in the essay "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" from *Souls of Black Folk*. The concept evolves from an anecdote where Du Bois recounts exchanging welcoming cards with his classmates, when a white girl gives him a look that suggests she does not want his card. It was with this glance that he realized he was significantly different than the white children, that his world of experience was distorted by a doubling. Double consciousness describes the Black reality of seeing oneself through one's own eyes and simultaneously through the eyes of the other, "of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused pity and contempt. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two waring ideals in one dark body."[33] For Du Bois this splitting of the Black psyche is constitutive of the Black experience in America,[34] For Black experience there is a constitutive discordance of living in a white supremacist antiblack world where the objects and goals of humanity are visible and understandable, and yet one's Blackness prohibits their achievement and actualization. The Black psyche suffers a fracture whereby Du Bois had come to recognize his existence in America as a problem, an irreconcilable, aporetic striving for Blackness.[35,36]

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[32] This breakdown is actually consistent with Bataille's economic proposal since his general position is that the restricted economies that humans attempt to employ to justify certain economic endeavors or utilitarian goals, i.e. there must be an ultimate rationality and purpose to these actions, must always give way to the general economy that supports it, sometimes spectacularly like with the Potlach. Cf. George Bataille, *The Accursed Share*.

Through double consciousness, Du Bois highlights the way white supremacist politics and antiblack racism directly influence the psychological experience of Blacks in America. Commentators such as Shamoon Zamir and Ernest Allen, Jr. argue that the account of double consciousness in "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" is in fact not intended to universalize Black experience but instead refers to a specific historical and class psychology of the Black middle class elite.[37] The goal of reconciling the trajectory of one's Blackness and humanness through a mutual recognition that would reconcile twoness was reserved for the ‘Talented Tenth’. While Zamir provides a convincing argument that in fact this was Du Bois’ intended demographic, it is difficult to deny that this discordance resonates with most Black’s experience in America. The institutional and systematic structures infiltrate the psychology of the individual and community of Black people alike. They have to ask themselves why indeed they understand themselves as potentially free and equal and yet, incomprehensibly, also understand themselves as perhaps never free and excessively vulnerable to the subjection of a racist enterprise. In this respect I agree with Kevin Quashi who believes doubleness is a general condition of Black subjectivity that highlights its generally public nature. He suggests, “In double consciousness, the twoness of Black subjectivity…is a kind of pathology, a fractured consciousness that is overdetermined by a public language of Black inferiority”.[38] Doubleness, for Quashi, is essentially a description of Blackness as public and resistive to white supremacy and he wants to turn attention to the internal components of Blacks folks’ subjectivity that he rightly argues are overlooked in the name of the public resistance to white supremacy. This criticism of Black studies generally does not undermine the central place of the concept of doubleness in Black experience. The fact that the young Du Bois’ self-conception could be shattered in a glance speaks to the extreme vulnerability of his Blackness inasmuch as he is held captive by the white gaze. Psychological vulnerability leads Blacks to hopelessness and self-doubt and this is an internalization that permeates an entire community that wishes to be free but also retain their Blackness.

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[33] DuBois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 2

[34] For considerations of double consciousness beyond the scope of America c.f. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*.

[35] DuBois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 1-3

[36] The aporetic structure of double consciousness will be discussed at more length in the following two chapters through the work of Nahum Chandler's *X: The Problem of the Negro as the Problem of Thought.* However, in this chapter I only want to highlight the sense of excessive vulnerability in comparison with some other prominent thinkers.

[37] Zamir, *Dark Voices, W.E.B. DuBois and American Thought, 1888-1903*, 116; Allen, Jr., "On the Reading of Riddles: Rethinking DuBoisian 'Double Consciousness'", 52.

A recent article by *The Atlantic’s* columnist Ta Nahesi Coates highlights how the psychological vulnerability of double consciousness takes hold and points towards the excessive. In this column Coates reflects on the remarks of 2016 democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders who was asked whether he was in favor of reparations from slavery where he responds,

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[38] Quashie, *The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture*, 14.

> No, I don't think so. First of all, its likelihood of getting through Congress is nil. Second of all, I think it would be very divisive. The real issue is when we look at the poverty rate among the African American community, when we look at the high unemployment rate within the African American community, we have a lot of work to do. So I think what we should be talking about is making massive investments in rebuilding our cities, in creating millions of decent paying jobs, in making public colleges and universities tuition-free, basically targeting our federal resources to the areas where it is needed the most and where it is needed the most is in impoverished communities, often African American and Latino.[39]

There are quite a few telling things in this response to consider. Coates points out a clear discrepancy in the logics of possibility that frame Sander's response to this question and Sander's own proposed political platform. His knee jerk reaction points to the limits of the political process under the particular circumstances of America today. There is no chance of congress passing a bill that would mandate reparations but as Coates points out, there is also a general consensus that some of Sander's stronger political platforms, e.g. single payer health care or a 1 trillion jobs and infrastructure bill, also have small chances of being passed. Coates sees this lack of moral imagination as a failure to confront white supremacy head on. Addressing the poverty and economic class wholesale will not necessarily correspond to ameliorating antiblack sentiments. He explains, "But raising the minimum wage doesn't really address the fact that Black men without criminal records have about the same shot at low-wage work as white men with them; nor can making college free address the wage gap between Black and white graduates"[40]. These discrepancies in economic opportunity are guided by the color line not the economic line. White supremacy and antiblack sentiment do not correlate simply to class exploitation. The horrors that took place against Blacks from slavery through Jim Crow "repeatedly plundered Black communities" and this was not simply an exploitation of the lower economic classes; it was malicious dynamic antiblack terrorism that incurred both moral and monetary debt.[41]

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[39] Coates, "Why Precisely is Bernie Sanders Against Reparations?"

There are a few additional points that Coates does not address that also we should consider and will address why I believe Sanders' positions ultimately points to the psychological vulnerability as double consciousness that belongs to Blacks in America. When Sanders responds to the question of reparations and rejects its possibility this points not simply to the current political climate and psychological makeup of congress but he also highlights a history of Black suffering not worthy of consideration. Reparations is not an imaginary object; it has a political history in the United States in terms of discrimination. Americans are well aware of the reparations that have been allotted the Japanese Americans and Native American people. I am far from saying that the question of Black reparations is as simple as "if them not why us"; however, the lack of imagination or consideration, the ready-made response that rejects Black reparations immediately exposes the psychological vulnerability of splitting Black consciousness between Blackness and Americanness. Blacks may respond positively and admire the inclusivity of Sander's economic plan and at the same time feel more than disregarded but even hated inasmuch as this plan excludes the question of reparations despite examples in American history where this very same ameliorative device was employed. In fact, I would contend, the history of reparations for other groups illuminates the vulnerability in the sense that Blacks come to consider this psychological doubling as irreconcilable in the way other groups in the past made certain steps. Antiblackness goes beyond all logic and there is no end in sight for their vulnerability; instead, instead Blacks become an object for the project of economic reform as a voting force without any considerations of the possibility of their humanity through reparations. Perhaps even more indicting to Sanders' response is that what he actually proposes, under a certain conception, can be understood as reparations. Contributing directly to the economic infrastructure of Black communities is in a reality a form of reparations. However, the fact that Sanders lacked the moral imagination to consider these pointed interventions as recompense for antiblack racism, which it was beyond the pale of the white supremacist imagination, points once again to the excessive vulnerability of Blacks that fractures their consciousness into pieces of dirt that the rest of America can be built upon.

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[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.

b. From Double Consciousness to the Black Body

In his book *Black Bodies, White Gazes*, George Yancy offers a different reading of double consciousness that calls attention the role of the body that is not discussed explicitly by Du Bois. Yancy highlights what he calls a phenomenological process whereby the traumatic revelation of Du Bois' double consciousness did not necessarily call attention to the vulnerability of the Black psyche but instead marks the emergence of Du Bois' Black body as a problem through a "slippage…in his corporeal schema".[42] What is at stake in the aporetic doubling of consciousness for Yancy is the manner in which the racist glance of the tall white girl "possessed the power to confiscate the Black body, only to have it returned to Du Bois as a burden and a curse".[43] The body is the site where the white racist apparatus operates on Blacks, where the 'white gaze' dehumanizes Blacks. Therefore, it is the Black body to which he turns to highlight the effects of double consciousness. The 'confiscation' of Du Bois' body by the white gaze is the theft of Du Bois' humanity and individuality, only for it to be returned to him as a problem for white society, as a 'curse', as something to be avoided. He no longer sees himself as merely human, or American but double consciousness illuminates the way his body in America is always already inferior. Yancy—using an existential phenomenological lens similar to Lewis Gordon's—characterizes the problematization of Du Bois' body as his reduction to the facticity of his criminality as Black without the complementary transcendent free will that is necessary for human agency.[44]. The Black body is simply that, an object that has no qualities of the human subject that can extend projects into the future with hopes of change or redemption. The Black body's role in antiblack racism and white supremacy does not undermine the psychological vulnerability highlighted above, but it introduces a new element by which the power of racism is deployed and experienced. There is a long, morbid historyof the Black body being exposed to the machinations of the white supremacy and antiblack racism that also expresses excessiveness.

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[42] Yancy, *Black Boddies, White Gazes*, 83

c. The History of the Extra-Ordinary Vulnerability of the Black Body

i. The Middle Passage

To highlight the significance of the Black body more generally we need to return to the history of its subjection. In *Black Bodies, White Gazes,* Yancy discusses the process by which African bodies were transformed by the productive machinations of a white racism. Broadening the lens to which one understands the brutality enacted upon the African people by European slave traders, Yancy proposes that the Middle Passage is in fact a ‘regime of truth’ where the Black body became chattel to be transported across the Atlantic.[45] By ‘regime of truth’ Yancy aims to emphasize the epistemological commitments of the slave traders that allowed for Blacks to be transformed exclusively into Black bodies, i.e. objects, things, commodities, beasts, etc. From how whites referred to Blacks to how they handled the Black bodies, the truth of the Middle Passage was the moral, physical, and psychological denigration of Africans. These very socially and historically contingent beliefs about the Black body, e.g. its composition and dexterity, were created in the white imaginary, and yet in reality perceived and enforced as ontological truths. Yancy contends, “The middle passage was designed to throw into disarray any sense of subjectivity and destroy any sense of cultural teleology. The objective was to create a cultureless thing, an object that was defined within the same context as other commodities”[46]. In the Middle Passage the humanity of Blacks, any conception of agency with subject-like qualities, was intended to be completely obliterated. From the many kingdoms and societies along the Western coast, e.g. the Ashantis, Mandigoes, etc., their culture and history were rejected in order to reify the objectification and commodification of their bodies. Millions of Blacks were transported from Africa to the Americas, chained and squished in the hull of these slave ships as nothing more than cargo.

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[43] Ibid, 85.
[44] Ibid, 87.

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[45] Ibid, 144.
[46] Ibid, 146.

In her remarkable essay “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book” Hortense Spillers vivifies the vulnerability of the Black body as it is transformed by the racist practices of the slave trade with her descriptions of the Black body as captive. While simple, the term sharply describes the manner in which the Black body of the African peoples was not simply transformed but was also snatched and held under conditions of forced restraint. Spillers explains, “[The African people] New world, diasporic plight marked a *theft* of the body—a *willfull* and violent (and unimaginable from this distance) severing of the captive body from its motive will, its active desire”.[47].There is no question that the Africans were the victims of a crime that aimed to dispossess their worldly attributes as subjects and the adjective captive emphasizes the status of which the Black body remains as essentially stolen, becoming a disposable object rendered with extra-ordinary vulnerability.

However, while the body was indeed stolen from the African continent, the true crime, she contends, was the violence against the ‘flesh’. Spillers distinguishes the captive body from the flesh; the latter is what constitutes the essential quality of the traditional subject position. Spillers says, “before the ‘body’ there is the ‘flesh’, that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse or the reflexes of iconography…if we think of ‘flesh’ as a primary narrative, then we mean its seared, divided, ripped-apartness, riveted to the ship’s hold, fallen, or ‘escaped’ overboard”.[48] The flesh for Spillers represents that which belongs to Blacks before their bodies were permanently captured and subject to the significations of the white supremacist and antiblack discourses and practices that ruled their enslavement. It is the flesh, perhaps, that serves as possibility of agency but this topic will be explored in the next chapter.

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[47] Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book”, 205

[48] Ibid, 206.

ii. Slavery

In Saidya Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-making in 19th Century America*, we move to the actual experience of slavery and get a profound description of the vulnerability of the Black. The project of *Scenes* takes on an important perspective in that she is not so much interested in 'spectacular' scenes of Black suffering. She fears that these horrors are just reduced to the spectacular and masks the terror of the mundane.[49] In the mundane Hartman exposes the manner in which the captive Black body of the slave entails a fungibility that it is reified by gratuitous violence and, thus, excessive vulnerability.

Fungibility is a quality traditionally reserved for the commodity and she proves the legitimacy of applying the dynamism implicit in this characterization of the Black body through an analysis of the practices of a white abolitionist by the name of John Rankin. Rankin wants to empathize the horrors of slavery by imagining himself in the position of the slave who is subject to the shocking spectacle of unimaginable violence. However, this imaginative practice of empathy, no matter how goodhearted, exposes the vulnerability at the heart of the captive Black body. Hartman explains:

> Empathy in important respects confounds Rankin's effort to identify with the enslaved because in making the slave's suffering his own, Rankin begins to feel for himself…by exploiting the vulnerability of the captive body as 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

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[49] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in 19th Century America*, 19.

> chattel slavery…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.[50]

The sentient captive body remains exploited even in these sympathetic motives because of the extent to which the Black body has already been the object of gratuitous violence and thus conceived of as vulnerable to manipulation as an object of property, non-sentient, etc. Fungibility is precisely this interpellation and confirmation of the status of the captive Black body that allows it to be open to the emphatic erasure of sentience, replacing any sense of humanity with the functions of an economic object, i.e. an object that is fundamentally replaceable by nature. Or as Hartman states, "The fungibility of the commodity makes the captive body an abstract empty vessel vulnerable to the projection of other' feelings, ideas, desires and values; and as property, the disposed body of the enslaved is the surrogate to the master's body since it guarantees his disembodied universality and acts as the sign of his power and dominion."[51] Hartman argues the slave's suffering is attempted to be made legible to others through Rankin who actually in effect erases the suffering of the slaves and calls attention to himself. The transfer of attention to himself does not expose the extremity of the suffering of the Black body but intervenes and ostensibly replaces it as a commodity while also bringing pleasure to the slave holders and abolitionists like Rankin. In other words, Black suffering is eluded by the openness of the Black body to be replaced by other signs and bodies. Chattel slavery is the possibility and the desire to possess and don Blackness as a sentimental resource and a locus of enjoyment for whites with the Black body as the central figure.

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[50] Ibid, 19.
[51] Ibid, 201.

While Hartman adopts a performative understanding of how race should be understood, she nevertheless finds violence and its reign over the materiality of the captive body as the constitutive markings of racial Blackness. Theories of racial performance denaturalizes race and show its coercive production by associating certain characteristics and practices with certain races instead of any phenotypical determinations. Therefore, Hartman will suggest that the naturalization of Blackness as a pained contentment takes a lot of violence and force to maintain since we recognize it is performance and not inherent to any particular peoples. This of course alludes to the groundless sentiment of white supremacy and the extra-ordinary vulnerability of Blacks can be further refined in the sense that Blacks can be reduced to their body, that the body as opposed to the intellect is the dominant signifier of Blacks' existence. The body is the locus of racial differentiation in the racialization of Blackness. She explains, "The 'givenness' of Blackness results from the brutal corporalization of the body and fixation of its constituents as indexes of truth and racial meaning."[52] Blackness is material and it has a weight that is anchored in terror and subjugation to such a large extent that it seems to exceed production and performance. The body is its truth and meaning; any appeal to the more traditional human qualities of reason or sentience are for the most part overlooked or undervalued except in circumstances that reinscribe the excessive vulnerability of the Black body to violence.

A vicious circular logic is at play where the violence and objectification of Blacks can never be overcome since access to any sense of their humanity is seemingly always mediated or misconstrued by white supremacy and antiblack racism. As we have seen, attempts of empathy in scenes of suffering fail in as much as they need to be mediated by the figures of the ruling peoples and thus turn away from any true representation of Blacks as sentient beings. During slavery, Hartman reminds us that the denial of sentience and the scenes of subjection were constitutive of the civil society of whites, and this includes all whites, not simply the actual slave owners. Legally, all Blacks were not simply inferior but they were subject to the domination of all whites.[53].White rights were in effect exercised through the subjection of Blacks and this includes the provision that Black agency is ultimately denied except under pretenses that support slave's subjection.

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[52] Ibid, 57.

For instance, Hartman notes how often the horrors of slavery were attempted to be masked by redressing scenes of exploitation through an atmosphere of entertainment. Whether it was accompanying scenes of a coffle with songs and dance or the relatively light atmosphere of the auction block, the Black body's suffering was obscured by attempts to paint the captive Body as enjoying its predicament. Sentience, while denied when it comes to Black pain, is acknowledged but only through the encouragement of song and dance by the master class under certain circumstances that reinforce contentions that Blacks should be enslaved because they enjoy of their condition.[54] Nevertheless, Hartman vehemently defends the existence of Black pain, although it was often masked by Blacks through subversive acts in their celebration or distorted by the master class in order to reinforce a picture of slavery as natural and even morally advantageous.

The Black body was also made vulnerable through sexual exploitation. Slaves were not subject to common law but statutory laws and therefore sexual violence, whether through rape or castration, was not considered illegal. To justify sexual exploitation it was common to view slaves in contradictory terms. Hartman argues, "The dual invocation of the slave as property and person was an effort to wed reciprocity and submission, intimacy and domination, and the legitimacy of violence and the necessity of protection."[55] Slaves were ultimately helpless in terms of sexual exploitation, especially slave women who were subject to an inordinate power relation in the heteronormative framing of all sexual violence on top of general exploitative conditions of the captive body. Enslaved women could not be raped within the white imaginary or legal arrangements. Hartman says as much: "As the enslaved is legally unable to give consent or offer resistance, she is presumed to be always willing…the sheer lack of limitations regarding the violence 'necessary' to the maintenance of slave relations—that is, Black submission—unmoors the notion of 'force'".[56] The concept of the will, of course, does not disappear under these conspicuous legal and violent circumstances. The willfull submission of the will-less was circumscribed by the passions of the slave woman to satisfy the master and more generally of the natural affinity of slave to master through paternal affection. The slave's will, while ostensibly nonexistent in most circumstances, did make an appearance when it came to satisfying the 'mutually beneficial' relationship of master and servant, or the 'bonds of affection' that anchored social order and harmony.[57] Of course, these relations were also mediated by the accusations of a bestial-like lasciviousness which also made their sexual desire a central force of their constitution and therefore all sexual encounters were more than willing by the enslaved women. The compounded and non-reconcilable logics that mired the rape of the enslaved alone reiterate the contention that the Black body was nothing less that extra-ordinarily vulnerable.

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[53] Ibid, 25.
[54] Ibid, 35.

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[55] Ibid, 80.
[56] Ibid, 81.
[57] Ibid, 88.

The impossible agency of Black women in the ‘illogic’ of seduction during slavery was also extended to the agency of Black men in terms of criminality. Blacks under slavery, particularly Black men, where both considered property and thus lacking all agency, until the actions considered were criminal. Hartman explains “the punitive recognition of will and responsibility that justified punishment while denying the slave the ability to forge contracts, testify, or sustain natal and conjugal relations.”[58] The entrance into the legal system solely through criminality marks another axis in which the excesses of vulnerability are brought about by white supremacy. The objectification and subjection of Blacks extended beyond the mere imaginary irrational savagery of the Black body into the legal system and civil society in the form of an accountable agency but only to create another front in which the Black body was made vulnerable and its subjection exacerbated. In effect, this allows Hartman to conclude, “In positing the Black as criminal, the state obfuscated its instrumental roles in terror by projecting all culpability and wrongdoing onto the enslaved.”[59] As a result of this obfuscation, all whites could justify any form of violence against Blacks as a necessary check on the inherent criminal and disruptive nature of Blacks upon society. The open season on Blacks bodies reinscribes their vulnerability.

iii. Reconstruction

The production of the Black body in its bounded contradictions and criminality continues after the abolition of chattel slavery, through Reconstruction and Jim Crow, and into the latter half of the 20th century after the civil rights movement. Of course, the emancipation of the slaves marks an enormous shift in the ideology of white supremacy and antiblack racism. While we definitely identified the inconsistencies in the logics of certain practices and conventions used to reify the racial hierarchy of white supremacy and antiblack racism, these inconsistencies never truly contested the structure of the white polity because of the very viscerally corporeal subordination that Blacks suffered under the conditions of chattel slavery. These inconsistencies actually unveil the general economy peeking through the eventual transformations and failures of the different logics that attempt to be employed through restricted economies. However, with emancipation and the ratification of the 13th Amendment the objectification of Blacks was no longer anchored in the legal status of property and therefore the means of subjecting the Black body necessarily took on a new valence. Or, in other words, new restricted economies of Black domination formed out of the excessive wealth of white supremacy and antiblack racism.

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[58] Ibid, 25.
[59] Ibid, 82.

The abstract equality of individuals envisioned by America's liberal democratic foundations and supposedly guaranteed to Blacks by the 14th Amendment, as we well know, did not amount to Blacks—of the South or the North— being considered equal in any meaningful sense. The specter of slavery and the spirit of white supremacy and antiblack racism lived on in America, rendering formal equality for the newly freed Blacks nothing but a dream. Hartman describes the transition as essentially a double bind:

> The advent of freedom marked the transition from the pained and minimally sensate existence of the slave to the burdened individuality of the responsible and encumbered freed person… Freed from slavery and free of resources,

> emancipated and subordinated, self-possessed and indebted, equal and inferior, liberated and encumbered, sovereign and dominated, citizen and subject.[60].

In the end, freed Blacks were expected to be a subordinate labor force and were far from respected as political equals amongst the civil society of whites. The burden for Blacks was to navigate a freedom that was mired with legal, extralegal, and customs that aimed to ensure their subjection. Alas the extra-ordinary vulnerability of the Black Body was not relieved.

Following emancipation the criminalization of the Black body continued through legal means with the Black Codes. The Black Codes were sets of laws that followed, in form and content, from the Slave Codes in that they articulated particular actions that were considered illegal only for Blacks. These laws included vagrancy or insulting actions, which means for their (supposed) lack of participation in a political economy ruled by whites or for their (supposed) lack of moral deference to a civil society reserved for whites, Blacks were subject to punitive repercussions. Perhaps unsurprisingly, these punitive repercussions often placed Blacks into forced labor situations that mirrored slavery. Angela Davis points out in her book *Are Prisons Obsolete?* that slavery and involuntary servitude were abolished by the 13th Amendment *with the exception* of the conviction of a crime.[61] This exception opened up the door for the supposedly freed Blacks to return to forced labor through a convict leasing system. The Black body was once again made vulnerable to the discriminatory power relations of white supremacy and antiblack racism.

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[60] Ibid, 117.

[61] Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete* 28.

The excessiveness of the vulnerability of the Black body that gestures beyond the restricted economy of Blacks Codes, however, rests in the proliferation of false indictments by whites in an already specious legal category. In *Are Prisons Obsolete?* Davis calls upon Frederick Douglass who observes other means whites would employ to reify the already discriminatory legal practice. She writes, “When a particularly egregious crime was committed, [Douglass] noted, not only was guilt frequently assigned to a Black person regardless of the perpetrator's race but white men sometimes sought to escape punishment by disguising themselves as Black.”[62] Subjecting Blacks to a separate legal code was not enough; Blacks had to also be made accountable for crimes they did not even commit, and their Black bodies replicated, again reduced to materiality that can be appropriated. The restricted economy of Black Codes opened itself up beyond its own limits by placing the burden of any crime on the backs of Blacks and this burden would be redeemed through incarceration and involuntary labor.

While the Black Codes represented legal means of exploiting the vulnerability of the Black body through its criminalization, lynching was the most infamous extralegal means of exploiting the Black body immediately following emancipation. During slavery capital punishment for Blacks was rare since the slaves were a serious financial investment. Of course, the Black body was far from cherished and the death of a Black body could still serve to reify white supremacy; nevertheless, the practice of lynching did not serve its truly horrific functions until the Black body was no longer under the shackles of the institution of forced labor. The lynching of the Black body reached its heights in the last two decades of the 19th century; however, the practiced continued well into the 20th century.

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[62] Ibid, 30.

iv. Jim Crow

In the essay “Capital Punishment as Legal Lynching”, Timothy V. Kaufman-Osborn discusses the spectacle event of lynching throughout its dominance as a tool of white terror to reify white supremacy in post slavery America. Lynching could be explained through a number of different restricted logics of racism, whether it be retaliation for Black organization, or guilt from losing the war, or redressing the threat of white masculinity from Blackness, nevertheless its foundation was always securing the default rule of white supremacy and antiblack racism..[63] With lynching, especially ‘spectacle lynching’, the Black body’s extra-ordinary vulnerability was on full display, as the practice attempted to reduce Blacks to their corporality and subhuman category despite their status as freedmen (the 14th Amendment, as we know, only applied to Black men; women were not included in this concession to apparent equality). They were not offered due process as full citizens who had committed crimes presumably would have been because the practice of lynching was much larger than the justice amongst equal citizens. Employing the work of Charles Mills, Kaufman-Osborn explains that spectacle lynchings were “highly ritualized expressive performances aimed at communicating the terms of the racial contract to Blacks and whites alike, and the medium of that message was the subhuman body.”[64] As we saw above with the implementation of the Black Codes, Blacks needed to be reminded that despite a supposed status of citizen, in fact, they were truly not citizens. The Black body was tortured and mutilated to further contest its human form. The Black Codes and forced labor were not enough to subjugate the

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[63] Kaufman-Osborn, “Capital Punishment as Legal Lynching”, 27.
[64] Ibid, 29.

Black body; again we see another instance where there is an excess to certain restricted logics of white supremacy and antiblack racism.

White terror, in order to be terror, needs to break formal modes and the lynch mobs terrorized the Black body by breaking the procedures of state laws, while nevertheless confirming the higher law of white supremacy. As Kaufman-Osborn highlights—summoning Max Weber—the state is the institution that has a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence, and the right to exacting death should be the limit of the state's monopoly.[65] When the state no longer can control the enforcement of justice, when the law is exacted by private individuals, its integrity as an institution is challenged. This was not the case with lynching. With lynching the state's investment in white's supremacy and antiblack racism was revealed with the publicity of the event; however, "these lynchings were public not in the sense that they were authorized by a formal code of state law but rather in the sense that they ratified popular but unpromulgated norms regarding the superiority of the white race."[66]. It was not foreign for public officials to participate or attend the events of a public lynching and therefore imply the state's complicity in these events. Lynching, in its extralegal status, was for all intents and purposes an informal process that exposed the extreme and excessive vulnerability of the Black body as simultaneously within and beyond the scope of legal recognition.

v. Post-Civil Rights

When it comes to the post-civil rights era, the primary production of Black bodies in their vulnerability remains within the scope of criminalization and terror, however, the most infamous take the forms of police brutality and mass incarceration. The deification of figures like Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and the participants of SNCC has led many Americans, white America mostly, to believe that equality has been reached *de jure*. Consequently, Singh explains, “No longer do the racial practices of the dominant society deform the lives of peoples of color, it is said but their own single-parent households, lack of work ethic, criminal tendencies, and welfare dependency are to blame.”[67] While this rhetoric of lazy and undeserving Blacks still existed at the turn of the twenty first century and well into President Obama’s tenure, in more recent years the proliferation of public discussions and images of state-sanctioned and enforced violence against the Black body has left a mark on the collective American conscience and political landscape. For those of us living in the second decade of the 21st century we have been hit by a freight train of news stories describing Black Americans criminalized and often brutalized by the state apparatus or, at the very least, the state’s tacit acceptance: Oscar Grant, Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Sandra Bland, Tamir Rice, Eric Garner (to name *only* a few). However, we should not forget the story of Rodney King who, in the not-so-distant past, also is a tragic example of the extra-ordinary vulnerability of the Black body to the criminalization and brutalization of the state and its enforcers.

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[65] Ibid, 32.
[66] Ibid, 32.

In her 1993 essay “Endangered/Endangering: Schematic Racism and White Paranoia”, Judith Butler reflects on the Rodney King police beating that took place in 1991. Guided by a phenomenological framework butler ponders how a jury and police officers could possibly interpret the severely beaten and non-resistive Rodney King—as he appeared in the infamous video—as threatening and dangerous. She ultimately argues that it is only through a “racially saturated field of visibility”—one which I would say is framed by white supremacy and antiblack racism—does the video of this Black man become evidence that contributed to the acquittal for the defense who were defending the four officers charged with assault.[68] Overdetermined by white paranoia, the jury indeed sees a threatening and aggressive Black body despite visual evidence that under other circumstance, i.e. where the victim was not Black, would be seen in a completely opposite light.

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[67] Singh, *Black is a Country*, 33.

What the white jurors saw in the video was nothing like the direct perception we often believe to be passively engaging in our everyday experiences. Butler argues that tucked behind this 'seeing' of the King video is also a reading, a reading in an antiblack racist episteme that interprets and reproduces the self-defensive posture of the Black body as threatening. We've seen this production of the extra-ordinary vulnerability of the Black body throughout this chapter; the Black body occupies this impossible position of always already threatening. Working through Fanon in *Black Skin, White Mask* butler describes the phenomena in familiar terms, "The Black body is circumscribed as dangerous, prior to any gesture, any raising of the hand." She also prudently observes that the threat is not exclusively of an immediate physical violence but "The fear is some physical distance will be crossed, and the virgin sanctity of whiteness will be endangered by proximity."[69] As we saw with Sexton and Martinot butler properly identifies the police as the protectors of white civil society, of whiteness and white people writ large. The actions of the police are not violence; they are not a violation of any space of Blackness because the Black body is the always already threat of an outside that has no propriety to be violated. The Black body is an object that is fungible for whatever ends of white supremacy; in this instance, the Black body becomes a hostile violent threat. This is supported by Butler who recalls the striking reading of the video that allowed a subdued and frozen Black body to be imbued with a threatening dangerous intentionality. Literally out nowhere, King's body threatens to attack, or even more insidiously "he is hit in exchange for the blows he never delivered but which he is, by virtue of his Blackness, always about to deliver."[70] White paranoia manifests in this transposition of violence and the figment of danger that again places the vulnerability of the Black body outside of the economy of any rationality and thus radically open to the other as an object to be disposed of or attached. Whiteness can transform its own aggression into the aggression of a submissive Black body, leaving no conceivable self-defense for the Black body. Whiteness remains clean and clear of any agency or violence while the sordid Black body remains the constant transgressor and thus vulnerable to violation.

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[68] Butler, "Endangered/Endangering: Schematic Racism and White Paranoia", 15.
[69] Ibid, 18.

However, as we know, the vulnerability of the Black body does not begin or end in the street with the brutal violence of the police. Police brutality fits within a system of criminalization that extends to the prison cell in which Rodney King's body found itself after his brutal beating. Today, the two most familiar contributors to the conversation of the production of Black bodies through mass incarceration in the post-civil rights era are Michelle Alexander, whose seminal work *The New Jim Crow* has become must read for anyone concerned with racial politics during this period, and Angela Y. Davis, who has long been an outspoken critic of the prison industrial complex. They both contend that the mass incarceration of Black bodies is not simply the effects of lingering racial bias but a systematic enforcement upon Black bodies similar to the institution of slavery and the practice of segregation and white terrorism that characterize the Reconstruction and

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[70] Ibid, 19.

Jim Crow eras. While it is true that it is disturbing on its own that today the United States has the highest incarceration rate amongst any country in the world, it is far more disturbing of the large discrepancy in the representation of Blacks in prison compared to whites. Michelle Alexander cites a study that shows in some states drug charges against Black men are twenty to fifty times higher than white male counterparts, despite another study that suggests drug crimes are more likely to be committed by white youth.[71] The mass incarceration[72] of the Black body cannot be ignored and very clearly indicates a new practice of the criminalization of the Black body.

In her 1997 essay "Race and Criminalization: Black Americans and the Punishment Industry", Angela Davis frames the post-civil rights political atmosphere, which was mentioned above, as dismissive of race issues. Of course, this dismissal allowed racism in its different forms to remain hidden from popular discourse and demonize anyone, particularly the Black people who made it a talking point—Davis mentions the withdrawal of Lani Guineir assistant attorney general nomination during Bill Clinton's presidency because of her focus on race issues as an example[73]. Racism is supposedly no longer an issue of the state and its policies but a matter of people needing to change their psychology to embrace equality. This demand, of course, skews the perspective of the devastating effects on the Black community of the mass incarceration of their people that was argued to be mere contingency, the effect of poverty, and, of course, a natural disposition of Blacks towards criminality[74].

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[71] Alexander, *New Jim Crow*, 7.

[72] Alexander defines mass incarceration beyond the physical confines of the penitentiary and includes the legal framework that places former convicts in a second-class citizenship that denies voting rights, allows for employment discrimination, and obscures education opportunities. The effects of the invisible prison bars that come in the form of parole, probation, or previous convictions are literal barriers from the same opportunities of other citizens. She writes, "Like Jim Crow (and slavery), mass incarceration operates as a tightly networked system of laws, policies, customs, and institutions that operate collectively to ensure the subordinate status of a group defined largely by race." (Alexander, *New Jim Crow*, 13.)

[73] Davis, "Race and Criminalization: Black Americans and The Punishment Industry", 264.

The reality, of course, is that the post-racial discourse diverts attention from the long association of the Black body to criminality. The focus on crimes and criminality in the abstract need not address the race of those who are disproportionately condemned to mass incarceration and consequently structural racism avoids attention. Within the archetype of the criminal other familiar characterizations of Black people, e.g. barbarity, follow without a second thought. And as we discussed above, Davis agrees that this criminalization of the Black body is predicated on protecting society from the outside and she very sternly suggests that the ideological movement towards criminalization has not been exclusive to whites but permeated Blacks political positions as well.[75] The criminalization of the Black body's swift movement to the role of incarceration from slavery was done relatively covertly in the post-civil rights era so that most of America had hardly recognized it as another version of the systematic movements of white supremacy and antiblack racism.

IV. Conclusion

While this chapter provides an extensive conceptual and historical review of the manner in which antiblack racism and white supremacy have rendered Blacks occurent, pathogenically, and extra-ordinarily vulnerable, it was far from exhaustive. In the end, however, we see that the specific claim that Blacks are constituted through the latter, extra-ordinary, vulnerability under the conditions of antiblack racism and white supremacy is an indictment of the common belief that there is an inherent logic to racism that, once made explicit, will force racial hierarchy to crumble. That is not how the economy of white supremacy works. The conviction that whites are superior, rational, and human and Blacks therefore fungible objects at their disposal does not follow reason or logic. Just in this last section there is an extensive list of the way the Black body has consistently been subject to racial violence and degradation despite decades of rhetoric claiming political equality and full reformation.

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[74] Ibid, 264.

[75] Ibid, 270.

In the end, I stand by Sexton's radical and yet poignant claim that white supremacy and antiblack racism are an endless source of racist practices grounded in an affective attachment to white superiority and Black abjectness. Blacks remain in the conspicuous position as subject to an illogical will to their degradation. However, this only represents one aspect of the experience of Black life/death in America. Blacks, against all odds and reason, continue to be, to act, and to resist. Reading through these different manifestations and iterations of racism and the unveiling of the extra-ordinary vulnerability could undoubtedly lead to a despair where any worthy sense of self or the possibility of agency would seem truly impossible. This is not the case; through community, creativity, and ties to history Blacks are in fact agents and do have a sense of self, although under the circumstances they are subjected to, it is far from the traditional liberal autonomous political subject.

Chapter Two: The Black Home

I. Introduction

In the previous chapter I argued that the experience of Blacks in America is rooted in vulnerability and gave particular attention to the phenomenon I named extra-ordinary vulnerability. Through the machinations of antiblack racism and white supremacy, an economy of oppression, violence, and degradation overdetermines the way that Blacks experience their life and their bodies in America. Their extreme exposure in this economy began from the moment Blacks were captured from Africa, carried through slavery, and continues today, with the forms and techniques of racism forever changing and with no conceivable end in sight. In analyzing this vulnerability I provided a thorough examination of both antiblack racism and white supremacy and then how these practices and institutions manifest themselves in two major conceptual devices used to describe Black experience: double consciousness and the Black body.

As the argument of Chapter One developed it was clear that the aim was to articulate the nuances of Black folks' experience of vulnerability; however, what was not necessarily clear was how this constitutive vulnerability should effect the structure of subjectivity or the self in general. With these experiences it is very fair to ask, are we still dealing with the structures of the traditional liberal autonomous subject of modernity? Or does the experience of extra-ordinary vulnerability entail a rethinking and reconceptualization of how one should consider subjectivity or selfhood altogether? I would venture to answer in the affirmative.

The self-assuredness and autonomy of the modern liberal subject was nowhere to be found in the experiences of double consciousness where one conceives oneself as having been literally severed and at odds with the grounds of one's reality. A description of the rational autonomous subject that characterizes traditional modern agency cannot adequately account for the affective disruption that Du Bois describes when the young girl denies his greeting card and he realizes his goals and achievements cannot be grounded in the logic of autonomy. Similarly, the attention given to the Black body qualifies as a direct intervention into the often disembodied characterization of subjectivity in terms of the will. Can the Black body speak?

With the history of oppression and disenfranchisement that follows directly from the physical toil, systematic abuse, and commodification of physical labor that inscribes the Black body, there is no question that there is a serious compromise to any traditional sense of rationality and autonomy for Blacks. Denied access to the political and the capacity for rational thought, captive and imprisoned Black bodies do not have the rights and institutions that were conceived to be necessary for moral and political agency to be realized. Nevertheless, despite these dire conditions, ones which a tradition of Black scholars has followed Orlando Patterson in labeling an existence of social death, it would be egregious to contend that agency altogether had been non-existent.

Conceptions of the Black self in America have not gone overlooked or unaccounted for in the rich literature that has contributed to Black thought. The most familiar accounts often are found in literature—think Richard Wrights' Bigger Thomas or Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man—or firsthand testimonies and political literature—think Fredrick Douglass' and Harriet Jacobs' autobiographies or Sojourner Truth's "Aint I a

Woman". The aim of this chapter is to approach the question of Black selfhood, and the agency that follows from it, from a philosophical perspective. This is not to say that such an approach has been neglected in Black thought, nor is it to say that the not so explicitlu philosophical text will not play a major role in contributing to this project. As we will see below, there is in fact plenty of literature on Black selfhood and subject positions. Nevertheless, through the trope of the Black Home, I propose a structure of selfhood that will mark a decisive break with the traditional liberal subject and many accounts of Black agency.

In order to proceed to the 'Black Home', however, we will follow two intertwining roads of despair and celebration: afro-pessimism and Black-optimism. We start with the afro-pessimist tradition of thought because of its heavy influence on Black thought generally and its influence on Chapter One and the concept of extra-ordinary vulnerability. Reading through some other works by Saidya Hartman and also Frank Wilderson's *Red, White, and Black*, we reconstruct their argument that the subject position of the Black is, in fact, not a subject at all but instead a dispossessed fungible object, or the unthought and the dispossessed. While components of their argument are convincing, I ultimately want to defend the possibility and importance of articulating a positive agency for Blacks and in order to do so we first go through Fred Moten's explicit response to afro-pessimism with his interpretation of Black thought as Black Ops. Moten contends Black Ops is not too different than afro-pessimism but his intervention is crucial insomuch as he looks beyond the political ontology proposed by Wilderson to a 'paraontological', creative, yet fugitive understanding of Blackness and Black social life. From Moten we can then move away from his 'paraontology' exclusively to the actual mode of selfhood and agency of Blacks as the Black Home and finish the chapter with an analysis of Beyonce’s 2016 visual album *Lemonade* as an aesthetic work that stages the different motions of what I conceive as Black communal agency through the concept of the Black feminine.

With the trope of the Black Home, I call attention to a few aspects that go overlooked or neglected in traditional accounts of subjectivity or selfhood. With the home there opens up an idea of spatiality and locality that can go unaddressed in traditional descriptions and conceptions of the self. In the space of the home there is dwelling and living and relationality with one’s close kin, community, and history. Black agency cannot be conceived of in a vacuum but must take into account these spatial and communal relations. The agency and selfhood of Blacks reverberate within these realms and through these relations. The ‘Black’ of ‘Black Home’ colors these relations in a very specific valence. Displaced from Africa, I contend the Black Home describes an experience of agency that does not extend from a space of individual confidence or assurance but, instead, darkened vulnerability, yet capacity. The Black Home remains haunted by the dead and tortured; it remains dilapidated from neglect and strain of certain material and political resources. We will see that there is no safety of origins for the Black Home, only interactive and constant negotiation amongst different persons amidst an ever-shifting foundation and constant creation of an elusive Blackness. Breaking from the explicitly political realm, where Blacks are far from anything like agents of civil society, the Black Home resides and gets its strength, at bottom, from a neglected social milieu. While just a trope, we will see how the different components and aspects that are attributed to the Black Home paint a picture of a Black agency that does not deny vulnerability but instead uses it to understand the historical, communal, and creative components of their identity and capacities.

II. The Unthought, The Dispossessed

After being thrust into hyperbolic doubt in the first of Descartes' six meditations, there is the infamous moment in the second meditation where Descartes reiterates the subordinate position of the sensuous faculties to the certainty of the mind by calling into the question the men he sees crossing in the square outside of his window. By this point, Descartes has already determined the mind, the ability to doubt, and the faculty to judge to be the truest and most certain faculty man possesses. Therefore, when he sees men crossing in the street, he asks "But what do I see aside from hats and clothes, which could conceal automata?" and then concludes, "Yet I judge them to be men."[76] Here, as he had in the first meditation, Descartes insists the sensuous faculties are far from trustworthy but the faculty of judgment, the ability to think and doubt, entail the key for claims to knowledge. The ability to see men relies on the ability to think.

In the chapter "Non-Cartesian Sums: Philosophy and the African-American Experience," Charles Mills argues that the Cartesian self, or 'Sum', narrating the meditations occupies a position that the philosophical tradition takes for granted. He is allotted with the capacities to doubt oneself, one's materiality, and remain certain of one's existence and he is also supposedly representative of a universal position. To contrast these assumptions in light of the position of African-Americans, Mills proposes the protagonist from Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, where this Black man cannot possibly doubt the world, his body, or other people because of the contingency of their vulnerability in relation to the oppressive powers of whiteness[77]. Blacks are 'invisible' to whites but according to Mills, this invisibleness is not the failure of white sight but of judgment. Instead, the power dynamics make it so "[he]e is not a full person in their eyes, and so he is either not taken into account at all in their moral calculations or is accorded only diminished standing…his problem is to convince them that he exists, not as a physical object, a lower life form, a thing to be instrumentally treated but as a person in the same sense that they are, and not a means to the end."[78] For Mills, the position of Black self, as opposed to the normatively standard Cartesian self, is that of a 'subperson'. While Blacks may be treated as objects, while they may be invisible to whites as humans, they are nevertheless humans forced into a subordinate position. While the Cartesian sum may judge the white men crossing the square to indeed be men, he may also judge the Black men to be far from men, to be sub-men, or objects at best.

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[76] Rene Descartes, *Meditations*, 68.

The subject position left open by Mills is an interesting one but following from his Cartesian analogy, it appears the Black self does not lie beyond thought, only subordinated to the white subject position. Saidiya Hartman and to a greater extent Frank Wilderson III paint the Black subject position even darker. For them the Black subject occupies the position of the unthought. In the last chapter I relied heavily on Hartman's seminal book *Scenes of Subjection* to articulate the extra-ordinary vulnerability of the Black body. In her descriptions of the captive body as fungible, accumulated, and regulated by gratuitous violence, she goes beyond Mill's contention of subpersonhood. In an interview with Frank Wilderson entitled the "Position of the Unthought", Hartman articulates the subject position of the slave, and of the Black self, as the title suggests: unthought. Speaking initially of the slave and what her research yielded, she explains,

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[77] Charles Mills, *Blackness Visible*, 8.
[78] Ibid, 9.

> it just seems that every attempt to employ the slave in a narrative ultimately resulted in his or her obliteration, regardless of whether it was a leftist narrative of political agency - the slave stepping into someone else's shoes and then becoming a political agent - or whether it was about being able to unveil the slave's humanity by actually finding oneself in that position.[79]

What she is articulating in this passage is the manner in which the experience of the slave could never be articulated as a subject in itself; rather, they would have to assume the subject position of someone else, and hence not be a slave, or vice versa. As we saw above with the case of John Rankin, empathy robs the actual experience of the slave with one's own agenda. When John Rankin attempts to see himself as a slave, the slave itself no longer has any agency or humanity in itself. It is in this sense that the slave remains ultimately unthought. The slave, and even the emancipated Blacks, in general occupy a position that recycles their subjection within the narrative of certain national investments clouded by semantics of freedom. In other words, Blacks were called emancipated but practices of subjection and occlusion were quick to follow and once again, they were only given voices under an integrationist model that occludes the real gratuitous violence that situates them; it is for her, as she says, a "paradox of agency."[80]

In the "Position of the Unthought" interview she suggests *Scenes of Subjection* is, in fact, an allegory for the position of modern day Blacks. The book she published after *Scenes of Subjection*, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* follows the narrative of Hartman's return to Ghana in the hopes of filling the void of an absence of home and foundation that she felt as a Black American that descends from slavery. In this text, from a first person perspective, Hartman articulates the position of the unthought for modern-day Blackness from her own experience. This sense of Blackness and the Black position remains intricately tied to slavery, particularly as an institution that yields social death, which characterizes the violence, dishonor, and natal alienation of slavery. Hartman writes in the prologue:

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[79] Frank Wilderson and Saidiya Hartman, "The Position of the Unthought", 184.
[80] Ibid, 187.

> If slavery persists as an issue in the political life of Black America, it's not because of an antiquarian obsession with bygone days or the burden of a too-long memory but because Black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery—skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverished. I, too, am the afterlife of slavery.[81]

And towards the end of the text she reiterates:

> I, too, live in the time of slavery, by which I mean I am living in the future created by it…History doesn't unfold with one era bound to and determining the next in an unbroken chain of causality…So the point isn't the impossibility of escaping the stranglehold of the past, or that history is a succession of uninterrupted defeats, or that the virulence and tenacity of racism is inexorable. But rather that in the perilous conditions of the present establish the link between our age and a previous one in which freedom too was yet to be realized…If slavery feels proximate rather than remote and freedom seems increasing elusive, this has

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[81] Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*, 6.

> everything to do with our own dark ties. If the ghost of slavery still haunts our present, it is because we are still looking for an exit from the prison.[82]

Hartman describes the condition of the slave ultimately as one of the stranger. The Africans sold by other Africans were not kin or friends; they were strangers with ties severed or denied. A certain strangeness follows the descendants of the captives and the haunting of slavery was carried through her childhood and adulthood in America. As one could imagine, she feels this strangeness returning to Ghana where, while she initially hopes for a homeland, she is greeted as a foreigner and remains a foreigner. As she says in the opening chapter entitled “Afrotopia”, “what place in the world could sate four hundred years of yearning for a home?”[83] Homelessness can perhaps be another name for the unthought subject position that situates Blacks and their paradoxical agency. Blacks, haunted by slavery and the terror that it induced, remain unthought for Hartman because they have no home, no memory of their homeland, without any story of origins; they have proverbially ‘lost their mother’ and as she says of herself, there remains no remedy for her homelessness.[84]

The vividness of Hartman’s homelessness comes to the fore as she narrates her encounters with the Elmina Castle. The Castle haunts Hartman’s narrative. It was erected by the Portuguese in the 15th century and then commandeered by the Dutch who took over and advanced the slave trade from the fort. The castle was the central place where captured slaves were corralled before being sent across the middle passage to the Americas. The horrors of the Africans who were captured by other Ghanaians and sold to the Europeans to be held captive at Elmina Castle, torn from kin, home, and civility weighs heavily on Hartman as she repeatedly harkens to the imagery of the captives chained in its dungeons, losing all sense of identity, and preparing to float to their death. With a tragic turn of irony, the houses of Blacks that emigrated to Ghana from America were often within view of the castle and for a time Hartman resided with an expatriate in a house set in this very predicament.

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[82] Ibid, 133.
[83] Ibid, 33.
[84] Ibid, 199.

While staying with this expatriate named Kohain, she reflects "I wanted to imagine a present not tethered to a long history of defeat but this was difficult to do with Elmina Castle dominating the shoreline...Secretly I hoped that I wasn't too late to believe in freedom dreams."[85] Following this expression of hope to herself, the narrative shifts to a conversation Hartman has with a filmmaker named Khalid from Atlanta. In this conversation, Khalid asks "'It's so beautiful, isn't it?'"[86] Hartman's hope disappears as she asks if he is referring to the castle. He says he was referring to the ocean, which he describes as vast and she retorts that it is loud. The castle and the burden of the captive slaves weighs heavily on Hartman; death and darkness clouds her vision. Even the ocean, which Khalid sees as vast and plentiful, can only be the loudness that keeps her up at night, the screams of those stolen and forgotten. Khalid goes on to explain he visited Elmina because he had felt a call from ancestry, that he was bringing all the captives back home with him; he analogizes the experience with visiting his grandmother and feeling like the rest of his family is with him.[87] Hartman responds that she has never felt more alone, that space is not the scene of grieving and rest but the scene of an accident where one has lost their family. As she tears up, Khalid makes a gesture of kinship, saying, "Sis,

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[85] Ibid, 107.
[86] Ibid, 107.
[87] Ibid, 108.

It's alright. Don't forget we're survivors."[88] In this exchange, Khalid alludes to the kinship that Blackness extends from beyond the individual or location or time in history. He speaks of his captive kin, analogizes these captives with his grandmother, and extends a hand of familiar identification to Hartman. Later, this sort of extension of Blackness will be explored in terms of the Black Home but Hartman does not seem to accept these analogies of kin and ultimately of life. She can and only feel alone, unthought of alongside a history of unthought people. The existential grief and solitude expressed by Hartman in her search for wholeness centuries after the emancipation reflects the unthinkability of Blacks, of an agency that does not extend from their social death. Where Khalid sees a horizon, Hartman sees a graveyard, and the subject position, ultimately unthought, seemingly has no agency beyond the paradoxical embrace of its own negation.

In *Lose Your Mother*, Hartman provides an existential elaboration of the negative position of the unthought, of the slave that remains but the fullest elaboration of the unthought comes from her interviewer and student Frank Wilderson III. In his truly remarkable book *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonism,* Wilderson takes much of the observations made by Hartman about the status of the slave in *Scene of Subjection* and articulates an entire political ontology for the United States that focuses on the grammar of antagonism between the subject positions of American Indians, Whites, and Blacks. When it comes to the subject position of Blacks, Wilderson belongs to the school of thought named afro-pessimism. This school includes, by Wilderson's account, the likes of Lewis Gordon, Jared Sexton, Achille Mbembe, Hortense Spillers, Orlando Patterson, George Yancy, amongst others. The afro-pessimist school follows from a reading of Fanon that situates Blacks ontologically in a position that is unthought, without any cultural or political relatability, and therefore without political agency. Wilderson describes it as such: “Afro-pessimism explores the meaning of Blackness not…as a variously and unconsciously interpellated identity or as a conscious social actor but as a structural positon of noncommunicability in the face of all other positions.”[89] In this quotation Wilderson articulates the difference between subject positions that have agential status in civil society and thus can communicate their freedom or pain, and the positions of Blacks who do not have any cultural or agential status but instead reside in a structural position outside civil society that does not take place at the level of civil discourse. This is precisely why he focuses on the level of ontology instead of cultural performance; he wants to argue Black ontological position is not a traditional position although that is the generally accepted narrative of Black liberation.

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[88] Ibid, 108.

For Wilderson’s political ontology the grammar of suffering he attributes to Blacks rests on the distinction between conflict and antagonism. With conflicts there can be resolutions. In civil society, he would argue a conflict between the class differences of whites could be reconciled. However, with antagonism there are no resolutions; the different positions of Black and White are antithetical and incommensurable with no hopes of a dialectical resolution. The ontological suffering of Blacks belongs to a political grammar that makes possible the position of whites and the civil society they inhabit. The grammar of suffering of the Black is precisely that of the slave as articulated by Hartman or Orlando Patterson. The Slave does not belong to a grammar of exploitation, as it is for the worker. Wilderson proposes:

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[89] Frank Wilderson III, *Red, White, Black: Cinema and the Structures of US Antagonisms,* 58.

> If, as an ontological position, that is, as a grammar of suffering, the Slave is not a laborer but an anti-Human, a position against which Humanity establishes, maintains, and renews its coherence, its corporeal integrity, if the Slave is, to borrow from Patterson, generally dishonored, perpetually open to gratuitous violence, and void of kinship structure, that is, having no relations that need to be recognized, a being outside of relationality, then our analysis cannot be approached through the rubric of gains or reversals in struggles with the state or civil society, not unless and until the interlocutor first explains how the Slave is of the world.[90]

Under these circumstances Wilderson will argue that the ‘position’ of Blacks is really a ‘dispossession’, insomuch as Blacks are dispossessed of any of the characteristics of humanity. Following from a psychoanalytic and neo-Marxist framework of humanity, Wilderson contends that Blacks are not alienated and exploited but instead are fungible and accumulated; they are anti-human commodities, and thus extra-ordinarily vulnerable.[91] This phenomenon is unlike any slavery before, where it was not the case that an entire group, a race, is a priori recognized as slaves. Slavery changed from a condition virtually available for anyone to the ontological status reserved for Blacks. For Wilderson, this position, or dispossession, of the slave marks the freedom of the human as dependent on the social death of Blacks, and from there a freedom of contingency evolves. The humanist freedom does not reach the ontological level of a full freedom but only the ontic level of a freedom from some contingent condition, e.g. from patriarchy, religious persecutions, etcetera.

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[90] Ibid, 11.
[91] Ibid, 14.

Despite the ontological distinction that Wilderson wants to highlight, there is always a tendency and desire to analogize the condition of Blacks with those of other groups in struggle. The confusion occurs between the difference of social oppression and structural suffering, a ‘ruse of analogy’. In a divisive example, and following Fanon, he contends the event of the Holocaust was not the effect of structural conditions but rather a horrible event resulting from a social oppression that occurred within white civil society and therefore philosophers like Georgio Agamben are mistaken to regard that event as occurring on an ontological level. Wilderson writes, “The violence that turns the African into a thing is without analog because it does not simply oppress the Black through tactile and empirical technologies of oppression…Jews went into Auschwitz and came out as Jews. Africans went into the ships and came out as Blacks. The former is a Human holocaust; the latter is a Human and a metaphysical holocaust.”[92] Blacks are not of the world, they are dispossessed, even if ‘the ruse of analogy’ may tempt a contemporary Descartes to look out of his study and claim that he not only sees but judges that Blacks are indeed human. Blacks may walk around the city square or they may seem a part of the discussions in the agora but for Wilderson they are ontologically excluded from civil society.

We get a sense of this exclusion in an earlier article by Wilderson, “Gramsci’s Black Marx: Whither the Slave in Civil Society?”, where he argues quite convincingly that Marxis,m overlooks the role that Africans and slave labor played in the development of the American political economy. Establishing the different ontological status of the different racial positions is important for Wilderson in this early article as well, thus he points out that slaves can in no way be considered subjects of wage labor exploitation, i.e.

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[92] Ibid, 38

they were not the traditional Marxist proletariat ‘worker’. Instead, Blacks were objects used to generate capital through slavery and now they are incarcerated to resolve an ‘over-accumulation’ crisis.[93] The antagonistic position of the Black to the worker of the capitalist order demands more than just democratization of the means of production, as Wilderson states, “The worker calls into question the legitimacy of productive practices, the slave calls into question the legitimacy of productivity itself.”[94] The positionality of Blacks cannot be reconciled with the current system. In the position of the slave there is no relation of independent value to their work because the slave is interpellated completely by the external pressures of white supremacy. The rational dialectics that lead to the exploitation and potential liberation of the worker cannot be reconciled with the irrationality of a white supremacy, i.e. non-logical in the sense described above with Sexton, invested in the suffering and oppression of the Black body. Blacks occupy this position of disposability because they are not legible in the white supremacist grammar of what qualifies as human; they are incoherent as subjects in the “New World Historical Axis.”[95] This allows Wilderson to posit a thought experiment analogizing Blacks with the cows of the meat-packing industry, where the stability of the productivity of the worker in civil society is strategically contingent upon the death of Blacks.

As one could imagine, what would remain to discuss about the abilities of the Black subject position remains bleak. In *Red, White, and Black* he articulates the subject position in juxtaposition to whiteness, explaining:

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[93] Wilderson, “Gramsci’s Black Marx: Whither the Slave in Civil Society?”, 230.

[94] Ibid, 231

[95] This axis contains a number of categories that allow other species to be legible as humans. Wilderson articulates the codes for humanity, which he describes as legible for Native Americans and Latinos to a certain extent, and which include Rights/Entitlement, Sovereignty, Immigration, none of which are applicable to Blacks in America. (Wilderson, “Gramsci’s Black Marx: Whither the Slave in Civil Society”, 237).

> Whiteness is parasitic because it monumentalizes its subjective capacity, its lush cartography, in direct proportion to the wasteland of Black incapacity. By 'capacity' I have meant something more comprehensive than 'the event' and its causal elements and something more indeterminate than 'agency'. We should think of it as a kind of facility or matrix through which possibility itself…can be elaborated.…Without the Negro, capacity itself is incoherent.[96]

In this excerpt Wilderson uses the term capacity to articulate the possibilities of White actions and motivation, even before any actual event or disposition is properly formulated. The possibilities of Whites remain grounded in the structural violence that incapacitates Blacks. Whites' in the valence of psychoanalysis, may be alienated and their actions can be articulated by the possibilities they have of recognizing themselves as alienated and learning to relate to themselves and others in terms of their alienation. Wilderson uses a Lacanian framework in this text—as opposed to the Gramscian Marxism above—to articulate the libidinal economy in which the human's possibility of subjectivity is dependent on alienation and relation to the other. The alienated subject creates a narcissistic ego, when it believes their words, or 'empty speech', are the bearers of their truth. When the self recognizes that words only provided a symbolic relation and this self realizes that it is always already outside itself because it is constituted through relation—and not through a self-formation using words—then the self achieves Lacanian full speech.[97] On the other hand, however, "the Black has sentient capacity but no relational capacity. As an accumulated and fungible object, rather than an exploited and alienated subject, the Black is openly vulnerable to the whims of the world."[98] While Blacks assume this position, they are often understood and portrayed—and the realm in which this discussion takes place for Wilderson is film studies—as having political agency and subjected to the law with rights, as if Blacks were truly subjects of alienation. They are, however, objects and "[structural, or absolute, violence] is not a Black experience but a condition of Black 'life'. It remains constant, paradigmatically, despite changes in its 'performance' over time—slave ship, Middle Passage, Slave estate, Jim Crow, the ghetto, and the prison-industrial complex."[99]

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[96] Wilderson, *Red, White, and Black,* 45.
[97] Ibid, 68-72.

In these different performances, Blacks remain in the hull of the proverbial ship buttressing white civil society and the intra-relations that take place there. While for Lacan and the white subject position, language is the space in which positionality is framed, for Blacks, according to Fanon, violence has this role: "[The Black position] is less a site of subjectification and more a site of desubjectification—a species of absolute dereliction, a hybrid of 'person and property', and a body that magnetizes bullets."[100] In the topography of American society, the magnetization of bullets is usually reserved for the police, and the mundanity of Black death contributes to the perceived safety and homeliness of white civil society. As discussed above with Sexton and Martinot's "The Avant-Garde of White Supremacy" Wilderson also argues that *all* white people are deputized as the police. All white people have the symbolic power to regulate Black bodies, to instantiate civil society through the structural violence that marks them as socially dead. Subsequently, "[f]or Black people, civil society is a state of emergency."[101]

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[98] Ibid, 56.
[99] Ibid, 75.
[100] Ibid, 77.
[101] Ibid, 80.

Civil society does not have policing as a contingency for its regulation; instead, policing is the paradigm that frames and makes demands of civil society.[102] The labor of alienation of the human that is performed through acts of contingent violence of transgressions rests upon the labor of death, of negativity, done to Blacks.[103] The imaginary and symbolic dialectic that takes place at the level of the Lacanian subject depends on the absolute distinction between those two and the structural violence of the real that remains at the level of the Black. The impossibility of Black humanity is the condition of possibility for white freedom and civil society, i.e. the possibility of the coherence of contingent violence in the forming of full speech and subjectivity proper.

III. Fred Moten's Blackness: Setting the Foundations of the Black Home

What is left of Black selfhood after the afro-pessimist intervention? Better yet, what is left of Black life? Iit is clear that when Wilderson is speaking of the Black subject position he is not speaking of the experience or possibility of Black selfhood or agency, and that when he is speaking of social death he is not speaking of Black community or life; nevertheless, he leaves no resources to think of either's understanding or articulation. To be sure, Wilderson does not leave Blacks completely lifeless. In the "Position of the Unthought" interview, responding to a description of Blackness as negation articulated by Hartman, Wilderson does stave away from the most hyperbolic pessimism exclaiming, "In my own work, obviously I'm not saying that in this space of negation, which is Blackness, there is no life. We have tremendous life. But this life is not analogous to those touchstones of cohesion that hold civil society together."[104] And yet, exactly what this 'tremendous life' looks like remains to be seen from Wilderson's perspective; the grounds for understanding Black subjectivity or selfhood remain unarticulated and I believe that is a direct result of the afro-pessimist position. In *Red, White, and Black* we are left with a conception of the Black person as the slave, completely severed from meaningful relations of kin, and predicated on a structural violence that would deny Blacks political agency, community, or social life because of the extra-ordinary vulnerability they are constituted by.

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[102] Ibid, 84.

[103] Ibid, 78.

[104] Wilderson and Hartman, "The Position of the Unthought", 187.

This lack of life, the overall pessimistic outlook on Black life, has not gone unnoticed or unchallenged by other participants in Black thought. The strongest and most direct respondent to the contemporary afro-pessimist contingency is theorist and poet Fred Moten. In a movement he has coined as ‘Black Optimism’, ‘Black Operations’, or ‘Black Ops’ for short, Moten challenges the positions offered by Wilderson vehemently, while remaining quite close and sympathetic to the general argument and description that sets the framework for afro-pessimism.[105] The essay “The Case of Blackness” offers Moten’s first direct contestation of the afro-pessimist discourse. In this essay he recognizes and acknowledges that Blacks, and Blackness specifically, have always and continue to be pathologized. However, amidst this pathologization, alongside the question of what is wrong with Black people, has always resided a Black radicalism that is the movement of Blackness proper. Black radicalism is the performance of the critique of ‘the proper’, ‘normative’ or ‘the standard’ in general, i.e. the default criteria of what one may call the human, justice, perhaps even history. From the perspective and operations of this radicalism Moten proposes we can think a Black social life that goes unacknowledged by the afro-pessimist tradition. With Moten’s critique of the afro-pessimist tradition I set the proverbial foundations and acquire the tools to build up the "Black Home" agential trope proposed above. Moten's account of Blackness and Black social life provide two significant contributions by locating Blackness outside and prior to the political ontological schema described by the afro-pessimist tradition, while simultaneously articulating this Blackness as essentially social. These two moves open a space of recognizing Black agency, performed by Black people, at the crux of thinking agency in general, while also recognizing a social element beyond the existential subjective experience of individual autonomous decision maker.

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[105] The shift from afro to black maybe a negligible aesthetic shift but there is also something significant in the ubiquity of a certain blackness that transcends ‘afro’ that locates the position exclusively to an African origin.

Moten's challenge to afro-pessimism continues the ontological discussion of Blackness and Blacks as those who lack a certain type of subjectivity and also who remain external to the laws and justice of civil society as it exists in the paradigm of white supremacy. However, what is at stake for Moten is a far more nuanced reading of the ontological than what appears under the guise of Wilderson's afro-pessimistic political ontology. Moten wants to consider Blackness and Blacks from what he calls a paraontological level. He attributes the idea of the paraontological to Nahum Chandler who, through a reading of Du Bois, argues the fashion in which Blacks fail to occupy any stable identity displaces any ontology as founded in purity or ideality. Blacks in America are fundamentally displaced, oscillating between the failure of being either simply African or simply American, i.e. white or human. Blacks are exorbitant to any ideal sense of being, they are 'both/and' as well as 'neither/nor' African-American, thus not only destroying the essence of the concept of race but showing the limits of being in general. The paraontological thus escapes traditional ontology and its logic by means of a 'fugitive movement':

> This fugitive movement is stolen life, and its relation to law is reducible neither to simple interdiction nor bare transgression. Part of what can be attained in this zone of unattainability, to which the eminently attainable ones have been relegated, which they occupy but cannot (and refuse to) own, is some sense of the fugitive law of movement that makes Black social life ungovernable, that demands a paraontological disruption of the supposed connection between explanation and resistance.[106]

While it is difficult to glean out what Moten intends to articulate about Blackness and Black people with this conception of the fugitive, as Moten continues to elaborate it becomes increasingly clear that he conceives of Blackness similarly, and often in the same language, as the many iterations of the critique of presence that takes place in twentieth century continental philosophy. Blackness or the Black, or Black social life, for Moten is also the name of the constitutive difference and non-presence that twentieth century thinkers such as Derrida, Deleuze, and Heidegger theorized in their writings. The inability of Black social life to be fully present and its characterization by Moten as a fugitive movement that does not simply oppose or violate the law but remains in a sense outside of the law as a constative force go hand in hand.

In *The Case of Blackness*, in order to begin to speak of Blackness in this fugitive mode, Moten appeals to Heidegger's *Das Ding* from his famous Bremen Lecture series of the 1950's. With this move towards a thinking of 'things' in the Heideggerian sense Moten wants to go beyond the political ontology of Wilderson's afro-pessimism which focuses on the denial of subjectivity and the rendering of Blacks as fungible objects in the manner that Fanon articulates in his writings and as we also saw in Hartman. Instead of thinking Blacks as subjects or objects, he wants to consider Blackness as relation or spacing between Heideggerian Dasein and das ding. Moten writes:

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[106] Fred Moten, "The Case of Blackness", 179.

> What I am after is something obscured by the fall from prospective subject to object that Fanon recites—namely, a transition from thing(s) (*choses*) to object (*objet*) that turns out to version a slippage or movement that could be said to animate the history of philosophy. What if we bracket the movement from (erstwhile) subject to object in order to investigate more adequately the change from object to thing…What if the thing sustains itself in that absence or eclipse of meaning that withholds from the thing the horrific honorific of "object"? At the same time, what if the value of that absence or excess is given to us only in and by way of a kind of failure or inadequacy—or, perhaps more precisely, by way of a history of exclusion, serial expulsion, presence's ongoing taking of leave—so that the non-attainment of meaning or ontology, of source or origin, is the only way to approach the thing in its informal (enformed/enforming, as opposed to formless), material totality? Perhaps this would be cause for Black optimism or, at least, some Black operations. Perhaps the thing, the Black, is tantamount to another, fugitive sublimity altogether.[107]

The move that Moten inaugurates in this passage is subtle and yet aims to disrupt the binary and dichotomies implicit in afro-pessimism's ontology. Instead of simply adopting Wilderson's grammar that begins with the violence employed by the human subject over and against the slave object, Moten, through his elusive, interruptive, and doubling prose, hints to and ultimately attends to the possibility of grammar in general as a result of this fugitive movement of Blackness as a 'thing' as it transitions to object. Moten inaugurates a reversal, where instead of a top down movement from subject to object, i.e. some sort of agential capacity to the disposable object, he proposes a movement from bottom up, i.e. from the elusive 'absent or excessive' thing to the object. In this movement from an unstable, neither/nor, or fugitive articulation of 'the Black' to the possibility of object and subjects, Moten sees an attunement for Black people to recognize their existence—due to their proximity to Blackness and this fugitivity—as fundamentally different.

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[107] Ibid, 181.

Moten places Fanon in a history of philosophy—what we may want to call a history of metaphysics considering his evocation of Heidegger—that concerns itself mainly with objects. The object belongs to a representational thinking, according to Heidegger, and in this mode of thinking the object is only or simply that which stands forth, it is there for humans, or Dasein, as readily available but not as something that engages with any active tension with humans, at least from a philosophical reflective position. The 'history of exclusion' and 'serial expulsions' connects Blackness as that pathology recognized and diagnosed by Fanon, with a philosophical and historical prejudice of those objects and subjects that have been interpreted as self-present, autonomous, ready to hand, or standing reserve. However, Blackness resists this objectification as such; it is the primordial possibility of creating the object, therefore, in reference to the 'thing' that is Blackness. He writes: "Its thingliness does not inhere in its having been made or produced or represented. For Heidegger, the thingliness of the thing, the jug, is precisely that which prompts its making…I am after a kind of shadow or trace in Fanon—the moment in which phenomenology strains against its own, shall we say, reification of a certain philosophical experience, its own problematic commitment to what emerges from making, in order to get at ‘a meaning of things’.”[108] Thinking thingliness occurs before reification and objectivity, not in terms of temporal succession but in terms of the possibility of objects that can be found in the ‘shadows’ or ‘traces’ of a thinker like Fanon.

Moten specifically has in mind the chapter in *Black Skin, White Masks* that—in its most recent translation by Richard Philcox—has been rendered “The Lived Experience of the Black Man” but famously was mistranslated in past editions as “The Fact of Blackness”. Here, Fanon gives account after account of the manner in which his Blackness has reduced him to an object, where the young white boy screams ‘Look! A Negro’ and he speaks of his body being returned to him, as it exists for the white person as an object of distortion and disfigurement. What is at stake, in turning to things and the shadows is the connection of Blackness to a generative excessive movement that opens up the very possibility of the Fanon who infamously explodes. When reflecting on Fanon’s phenomenological recitation of his lived experience, Moten wants to go beyond and before the experience of Fanon’s objecthood to a fugitive Blackness and also to account for the people that dwell near it, namely Black people. He explains:

> So I’m interested in how the ones who inhabit the nearness and distance between Dasein and things (which is off to the side of what lies between subjects and objects), the ones who are attained or accumulated unto death even as they are always escaping the Hegelian positioning of the bondsman, are perhaps best understood as the extra-ontological, extra-political constant—a destructive, healing agent…*this dangerous supplement, as the fact out of which everything else emerges, is constitutive. It seems to me that this special ontic-ontological*

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[108] Ibid, 183.

> *fugitivity of/in the slave is what is revealed as the necessarily unaccounted for in Fanon. So that in contradistinction to Fanon's protest, the problem of the inadequacy of any ontology to Blackness, to that mode of being for which escape or apposition and not the objectifying encounter with otherness is the prime modality, must be understood in its relation to the inadequacy of calculation to being in general.*[109]

This is clearly a dense passage; however, what is important is the way Moten wants to move away from the traditional ontological and political, from the objecthood that we find in Fanon's account of his lived experience, to the 'constitutive' moment of the fleeting Blackness, a 'prime modality' which is 'not the objectifying encounter with the other' but even more primordial for Blackness that is available through—or at least thinking through—the position of the slave. Notice also how he mimics Heidegger by trying to destabilize the entire metaphysics of subject/object by speaking of Dasein and things, 'which is off to the side'—the 'para' of paraontology. Black people, in their nearness to Blackness through their practices, reality, and as I will argue in the next chapter, their ethical experience, are attuned to this paraontological conundrum of being neither/nor, both/and, thus recognizing 'the inadequacy of being in general' perhaps better than the Black Forest philosopher himself.

Moten's Blackness introduces an entirely new landscape for reconsidering the Black position of the subject by locating Blackness at the paraontological level. In terms of the general economy of white supremacy described in the first chapter, I propose that this conception of Blackness as irruption, excessive, and fugitive offers an alternative general economy that works counter to the conception of extra-ordinary vulnerability. To be specific, what Moten here discusses under different names and guises but essentially alludes to, is an excessive, extra-ordinary, and extra-ontological understanding of Blackness as a general economy that undergirds the ontology, economy, and grammar of white supremacy. Before Black vulnerability and exploitation—and yet near by—the condition of their possibility remains a certain fugitive movement that is precisely the non-present capacity or condition of possibility that allows for the impressions of oppression and objectification to take place. Logically before the anti-human politics of civil society and the policing that characterizes it is the excessive richness of possibility that is Blackness. While the general economy of white supremacy begets a certain political ontology that ultimately rests in a certain disposition towards Blacks as inferior objects, the conditions of possibility of white supremacy—of any political ontology, of agency in general—follows from a certain understanding of Blackness that Black people dwell near.

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[109] Ibid, 187. (my emphasis)

The ontological operations of white supremacy according to afro-pessimism describe the movements and techniques of a system of oppression against Black people. When we think of the different techniques discussed in the first chapter and the existential and ontological elaborations in terms of subject positions discussed earlier in this chapter, we were left with the descriptions of a bleak history of the experiences of Blacks in the West. And yet we see Moten argues the very pathologization of Blackness, its history of being a term and concept that denotes disease and deformation, is in fact the hidden resource of all the possibilities posited in the metaphysics of white supremacy:

> The brutal history of criminalization in public policy, and at the intersection of biological, psychological, and sociological discourse, ought not obscure the

> already existing ontic-ontological criminality of/as Blackness. Rather, Blackness needs to be understood as operating at the nexus of the social and the ontological, the historical and the essential.[110]

The nexus, of course is that fugitive movement, criminal in its darkness, in its non-presence, in its transgression of norms and standards. However, as the logics of the general economy dictate, Blackness is also excessive in its openness "It turns out, then, that the pathological is (the) Black, which has been figured both as the absence of color and as the excessively, criminally, pathologically colorful (which implies that Black's relation to color is a rich, active interanimation of reflection and absorption)."[111] Again, through the trope of its excess, pathology but also criminality, Blackness, or Black social life, calls forth possibility not only for 'the absence of color' but for the richest colors. It is at the foundation of all possibility, not just Black possibility; it is the foundation of 'humanity', not just the slave or any conception of a 'Black humanity'. Blackness is not anti-human as Wilderson proposes but is the possibility of the human, the subject, and the object. It is in this sense that Moten will very enigmatically but persistently insist that Blacks do not 'own Blackness'. Its disruptive force is not something to own or be possessed—or even 'dispossessed—by anyone its constitutive fugitivity slips through the fingertips of not only white civil society but of Black slavery, even though the slaves inhabit its space.

However, at this point, just as Wilderson and afro-pessimism left us wondering if Black subjectivity and social life were possible, Moten's fugitive Blackness still leaves a lot to be desired when considering what may be ‘Black social life’.[112] If Blacks do not own Blackness, if it is something outside of the reach of their fingertips, if it is not embodied, how should we figure a relation to Blackness? From the “Case of Blackness” we can glean some important information about Black social life, before we turn to Moten’s 2013 essay *“*Blackness and Nothingness*”.* In the former, Moten tells us that, “Black(ness), which is to say Black social life, is an undiscovered country”; this displacement, its undiscovered status, allows us to think not only its fugitivity but also the manner in which it nevertheless demands attention and search—that is, insomuch as it is undiscovered, and not indiscoverable, it is not simply a Black hole but also “the reflective surface of a color and vitality in the depths and darkness of the Black.”[113] Also, despite the generative force for all humanity that Moten attributes to Blackness, Black people specifically have a privileged relationship to this fugitivity and disruptive force; referring to the “colonized, the enslaved, and the enclosed” Moten says “what is claimed in the name of Blackness is an undercommon disorder that has always been there, that is retrospectively and retroactively located there, that is embraced by the ones who stay there while living somewhere else. Some folks relish being a problem.”[114,115] Those who ‘relish being a problem’ also dutifully oppose oppression and objectification. This position is reserved for Black folk; they are resistant in their social life and in “Blackness and Nothingness", we learn that this social life is precisely that which stands opposed to the social death that provides the centripetal force of the afro-pessimist.

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[110] Ibid, 187.
[111] Ibid, 213.

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[112] Here, I think what Moten appears to want to say about Black social life is close to what George Bataille has in mind when he thinks of community through inner experience. For Bataille, this community takes place through a recognition of the ecstatic self that exists outside of the possessive and internalized nature of the sense of self dictated by the delimiting nature of knowledge. I think the same limitations that Bataille attributes to the knowledgeable subject and the discursive practices that inscribe it, Moten would attribute to the reading of Blackness through a political ontology of the black object. c.f. George Bataille, *Inner Experience*.

[113] Moten, *Case of Blackness*, 202.

[114] This, of course, is a twist on W.E.B. DuBois famous proclamation in *Souls of Black Folk*, where he imagines white folk asking him, as a Black man, ‘How does it feel to be a problem”?

[115] Ibid, 187.

*"*Blackness and Nothingness*"* is an essay Moten wrote in response to and in conversation with Jared Sexton's "The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism" and other afro-pessimist responses to Black Ops.[116] For our purposes, what is most important in Moten's response is the strong invocation of Black social life as opposed to the social death of the afro-pessimists. He returns to Orlando Patterson and deduces that the status of slave life is not one of 'social death' but of political death. He attributes this slippage to a misreading by Patterson of Hannah Arendt, who in her own work marks a stark difference between the political and the social that Patterson does not pick up on. Here Moten explains:

> What I am trying to get to, by way of this terminological slide in Patterson, is the consideration of a radical disjunction between sociality and the state-sanction, state sponsored error of power-laden intersubjectivity…[To have 'honor' for Patterson] is to become a combatant in transcendental subjectivity's perpetual civil-war…[T]he unspoken violence of political friendship constitutes a capacity for alignment and coalition that is enhanced by the unspeakable violence that is done to what and whom the political excludes…I am in total agreement with the Afro-pessimistic understanding of Blackness as exterior to civil society and, moreover, as unmappable within the cosmological grid of the transcendental subject. However, I understand civil society and the coordinates of the

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[116] Sexton in this article is responding primarily to Moten's "The Case of Blackness" and he argues quite convincingly that afro-pessimism may be closer to black optimism than Moten leads one to believe. c.f. Jared Sexton's "The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism".

> transcendental aesthetic…to be the fundamentally and essential antisocial nursery]for a necessarily necro-political imitation of life.[117]

Just as in “Case of Blackness”, Moten asserts that Blacks and Blackness do not belong or live within the confines of civil society, and as I explained Blackness’ fugitive moments precede the political ontology proposed by Wilderson. However, in locating the actions and participants of civil society within the transcendental horizon of the political and not the social, Moten makes a very specific claim about the political and the nature of subjectivity. The political remains the space of the transcendental, homogenous, ‘autonomous’ subject and is essentially anti-social. Instead of the tone of lament that follows from Wilderson’s account of afro-pessimism and social death, Moten re-evaluates the binary distinction by connecting Black social life outside of the political and as the only space in which sociality can truly take place. ‘Intersubjectivity’, ‘transcendental subjectivity’, ‘civil society’—these belong to a grammar of the political that indeed is a grammar of suffering, especially for those excluded. However, social life, Black social life still exists outside of the confines of the political order; Blackness is “irreducibly social” and therefore its non-analogous relationship to the subjects and humans of civil society may in fact be a means for celebration.[118]

IV. The Black Home as Black Agency

a. Celebration

Moten’s illumination of the ‘irreducibility’ of sociality and Blackness plays a crucial role in the Black Home as a trope for conceiving of the Black self. With traditional accounts of the liberal autonomous agent, the constitutive role of space, community, and even history, for the most part, go unaccounted for or underappreciated. However, the concept of home already evokes a sense of community and sociality. The home is often located amongst other homes but more important for the ‘Black Home’ it is inhabited by a specific group of people that share a certain type of kinship of exclusion. In the home, one’s actions and decisions take place within a shared economy of goals and inspiration. It is in this respect that I want to argue that the Black Home helps conceptualize the nature of Black agency over against the transcendental autonomous subject that dominates modernist conceptions of agency, and as Moten correctly asserts—although somewhat indirectly—political conceptions of agency. In the realm of the political—i.e. civil society, institutions of the state, etc.—Blacks suffer from exclusions and oppressions. And therefore, there is no true or tangible sense of the Black self when one tarries along in the realm of the political. When it comes to the laws and norms of civil society the Black anonymity provocatively evoked by Lewis Gordon runs rampant and this anonymity is transcendental in the way it reduces individuality to just another Black body.[119] Nevertheless, the deaths that occur at the hands of America’s political machinery, e.g. the police, somehow also resonate at the level of the individuality of those killed. Trayvon Martin is at once another Black body slain and yet President Obama can say his name and even confess perhaps Trayvon Martin could have been him. The transposition that President Obama feels compelled to articulate with Trayvon Martin, and the growing number of highly publicized deaths of Blacks in this second decade of the 21st century, resonate at the level of the strong social life of Blacks—even though politically these Black women and men die alone, that is, with no political accountability. In the realm of the political there is no sure experience or expression of agency; traffic stops, elevator rides, and bookstore perusals often confirm this, as the long arm of the law shades every movement.

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[117] Fred Moten, “Blackness and Nothingness”, 740.

[118] Ibid, 739.

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[119] Lewis Gordon, *Her Majesty’s Other Children*, 14.

However, at the level of the social there is a sense of Black life and even a Black self. The two are mutually constitutive: this self is buttressed by a community, a social communion, which, of course, is inhabited by other individuals. Through the Black Home, the relationship of the Black self and Black social life come together and we see Black agency as the intertwining of both. In social life, Blacks' capacity to act in a constructive life-affirming manner is highlighted, even amidst hardship and the terror of civil society. We might even contend that Black social life is something to be celebrated or the only means of Black celebration. In "Blackness and Nothingness" Moten very provocatively introduces the idea of celebration to his conception of Black thought. He writes:

> Our aim, even in the face of the brutally imposed difficulty of Black life, is cause for celebration…[T]he cause for celebration turns out to be the condition of possibility of Black thought, which animates the Black operations that will produce the absolute overturning, *the absolute turning of this motherfucker out*. Celebration is the essence of Black thought, the animation of Black operations, which are in the first instance, our undercommon, underground, submarine sociality.[120]

Now, Moten does not give any extensive articulation of what he may mean by celebration, or even who he may include using the possessive pronoun 'our'. However, the term may be a great way to start thinking of the Black agency I have in mind. The possibility of Black thought, of Black sociality and agency, despite the circumstances that civil society has placed on Blacks, is almost impossible to conceive and therefore its existence is undoubtedly a means for celebration. In fact, Moten appears to contend that celebration is not simply the reaction to Black social life but in reality the essence of its possibility, that Blackness as the condition of possibility and Black social life as its manifestation can only exist as celebration. In other words, possibility as Blackness, the 'turning of this motherfucker out', is not a reason for celebration but always is celebration. To be clear, Moten is not concerned with thinking through agency or questions of self when he is writing about Black social life and Black thought, or Blackness for that matter. His discussions of sociality and Blackness, again appeal to the fugitive movement, the spacing and the conditions of possibility discussed extensively above.

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[120] Fred Moten, "Being and Nothingness", 742. (my emphasis)

While I maintain that thinking community and sociality in this sense remains an important component in the intervention that Moten makes within the afro-pessimist tradition, I am concerned with articulating a sense of self and agency that Black people in fact do experience, most vividly at a social and communal level that traverses history. As aforementioned, the Black sense of self and agency does fundamentally challenge the traditional form of subjectivity. The Black self is not the liberal, autonomous, moneyed actor in civil society. The Black self is in fact porous; it relates to itself and operates fundamentally through a sense of shared terror within a community and a history that we see in music, story-telling, dancing, and cooking. The Black Home captures both this terror and the sociality and communal experience of the self. The home has a centripetal force that can gather people from past and present and anticipate the future; allowing tangible bodies and apparitions to navigate its architecture. The Black self and the Black body also call forth a community of people of past and present and sometimes future; even though this communion emerges out of a dark abyss which is the reality of racial politics under the rule of white supremacy. The blockbusting, redlining, and subprime loans may take Black people out of houses, they may put them on the street or back to grandmas but these tactics cannot destroy the Black Home. A home is not a house, a home is ‘where the heart is’, and the Black heart(h) bleeds through time, space, and communities: across the Atlantic in the hull of the ship, from the South to the North and back, on railroads above and below ground, from the slave quarters to the ‘big house’, on the backs of horses and in the backs of police cars.

The Black Home is not a stable location—although it feels southern. It is the Underground Railroad, it is Elmina Castle, it is Wilderson’s hull of the slaveship, it is government housing, it is the Black church, and it is the dilapidated house at the edge of any American town. While there have been, and continues to be, plenty of criticisms of the existence or possibility of the liberal, autonomous, and rational self, I find that the Black self, specifically the manner in which it invokes community by means of the shared vulnerability, anonymity, and celebration of Black life, makes Black people feel as if they could have been Trayvon Martin or that they could not breathe with Eric Garner or that they broke through into mainstream pop alongside Michael Jackson. The Black Home does not deny that Blacks do not experience themselves as individuals but rather their identity and actions are gathered in a displaced spatiality that evokes both a certain intimacy with other people of immediate and distant relation and a shared sense of vulnerability and gloom that nevertheless is celebration. Black self, Black pride, Black celebration—itself a sort of oxymoron—is that impossible sense of self, life, and love that exists both in moments and times of tragedy and triumph. I say impossible to invoke not only Wilderson's contention that the Black subject is structurally impossible in the schema of white supremacy and civil society but also to describe an affective disposition towards a life that does not seem possible to live. Extra-ordinary vulnerability exposed not simply the fragility of self as object that Blacks must endure due to white supremacy but it also leads us to think through how the fungible Black self is also a porous Black self, maintained and sustained through the shared experience of its vulnerability with Black folk over time and space.

b. The Dialogic and Feminine Intervention of Wright

The Black self moves in space, travels through time, and communicates with others, it is always already other to itself and its agency embodies this otherness. In Michelle Wright's *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora* the otherness from within moves beyond historical displacement and focuses on the interactions of more than one person. In this move she also evokes the feminine in a provocative way, adding another dimension to the trope of the home: the matriarch. In the first three chapters of her book, Wright works through a development of Black subjectivity via critiques of the dialectical constitutions of white subjectivity via the negation of Black people in the works of Thomas Jefferson, Hegel, and Gobineau, the reactive constitution of Black subjectivity found in the counter discourses of Du Bois, Cesare and Senghor, and lastly the Black, nationalist, hetero-patriarchal subjectivity found in Fanon. In the fourth chapter Wright introduces the crucial role of the Black female subject via Carolyn Rodgers and Audre Lorde and this engagement proves most fruitful to the trope of the Black Home. Wright's move to Black femininity entail three interventions:1) Black men cannot beget subjects on their own, 2) all subjectivity is inter-subjectivity, and 3) subjectivity cannot be produced dialectically, i.e. in the negation of the other in order for a higher singular order.[121] While retaining the skepticism that Moten introduced with the term of inter-subjectivity and its allegiance to the political order, I nevertheless agree with the spirit of Wright's contention that we need to consider the feminine and inter-relational—what she will call the dialogical—constitution of the self.

The omission of women in the history of subjectivity by Michelle Wright's account is not a mistake but a neglect that helps fortify the illusory dialectical progression of subjectivity implored by both white subjectivity and the Black subjectivities of the theorists above. In reality, subjectivity, or the self, is not constituted or founded in the logical progression of negating the other for the sake of recognizing one's own masculine personhood; instead, the Black self operates and exists through interaction that cannot ignore the feminine. Wright attributes the negligence of Black theorists to the incoherent position of the "founding father" trope that dominates the discourse of subjectivity and its condition of possibility upon the nation. Men cannot beget men; this much is obvious but ignored: "By excluding the role of the mother, nationalist discourse can grant male citizens fantastic powers, albeit ones wholly located within the ideal, or discursive, realm rather than the material, or realm of praxis…[w]hile tropes of founding fathers rely on linear constructions of time, the trope of the mother speaks to circularity, connecting peoples not only to future generations but to previous ones."[122] While I disagree with her figure of the circle, nevertheless, Wright correctly associates the material or practical conception of selfhood as including, as metaphorically leaning on, the idea of the feminine. Through the Black matriarch, or let us say the Black mama as the host of the Black Home, we gain a more explicit acknowledgment of the material historicity of selfhood. There is no Black self without the physical existence of women, this much is obvious; however, metaphorically, the feminine also conjures a sense of mutual relation and collectivity that the patriarchal rejects for a dialectical liberal structure of self-development, which ultimately hinges on individual conquest and hierarchy.

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[121] Michelle Wright, *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora*, 22.
[122] Ibid, 141.

Wright begins her introduction of the feminine with a reading of Carolyn Rodgers' poem "For Muh' Dear" in *How I Got Ovah*. Wright reads the poem contrary to the traditional dialectical interpretation where the exchange between mother and daughter is overcome and a reconciliation achieved of past and present. Instead she appeals to Bahktin's dialogics, where literature reads as a continuous movement between different texts, or in this instance between the protagonists, without summation or pinnacle. Wright rejects the pretensions of an origin and instead calls for relational movement without absolute beginning or end; imagine a family maneuvering through their home, where no one person or space can be attributed to getting the day started since yesterday bleeds into today and tomorrow. Wright explains:

> Rodgers positions her mother and daughter in dialogic rather than oppositional relation to create an intersubjectivity that reclaims and recuperates the history and contributions of Black women past and present. This in turn exposes the multiple meanings of Blackness. Much like with Bakhtin's dialogic, *How I Got Ovah* does not offer a 'moral center,' an omniscient or divinely wise narrator to offer the 'correct' message from the series of dialogues between mother and daughter. The

> mother, like daughter, is a central but ambivalent figure, as in her sometime signifier, the church.[123]

Despite her use of the term intersubjectivity, Wright appeals to the social dynamic of selfhood and agency in her reading of Rodgers. The displacement of the autonomous liberal subject by the relation and dialogue of the protagonists and the church points to a social network that contributes to the creation of one's self and agency. The matriarch retains an ambivalence since she symbolizes the relations of contemporaries, of past generations, and those of the future. As host of the Black Home she also is absolutely open in her hospitality of the other's past, future, and present, from down the street or from up North. These qualities of the Black mother, again, displace the idea of an absolute origin or center to the self. Wright explains:

> Neither Rodgers nor Lorde ever position [the Black mother] as an absolute origin—rather, she is the point of orientation for all Black subjects, the medium through which, willingly or not, they negotiate their intersubjectivity. As a result space becomes a series of conflations rather than strictly defined borders between subjects, races, and nations…[T]he trope of the mother locates this Other as within the subject rather than external to him or her, and in recognizing this conflation comes to realize that Other's independent subject status.[124]

While I agree that the Black mother, as a trope, helps orient the interaction of different Black selves, ultimately describing how these selves exist and act only through these interactions, with the trope of the Black Home, there is a stronger sense of the spatiality, locality, and the porous borders of Blackness to the outside world. The Black matriarch exists within this larger home of social relations where there need not be any absolute or dominating ideology. The pan-Africanist of past and the afro-futurist to come can wander the rooms and halls of big mama's house and all come to determine their sense of agency by respecting and paying homage to the past, and setting the foundations for the future through dialogue with others. Black experience necessitates the fluidity of this identity. From the forced yet bonded kinships of slavery to the displacement of families by the prison industrial complex, all gesture towards a home that implies no centrality but the coming and going of forces of 'self-determination'.

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[123] Ibid, 145.
[124] Ibid, 178.

c. The Black Home in Beyoncé's *Lemonade*

In introducing the dialogical, the Black feminine, and reinforcing the denial of origins, Wright contributes significantly to the fluidity and communal nature of the Black self and agency. However, in order to develop with more fullness the trope of the Black Home, we turn now to Beyoncé's 2016 visual project, *Lemonade.*[125] *Lemonade* premiered on HBO on April 23, 2016, with Beyoncé's album sharing the same title released after its airing. The visual project contains many layers: with the audio album, in abridged form, serving as the major soundtrack, the video also includes narration recited by Beyoncé through the poetry and prose of expatriate Somali poet Warsan Shire, all alongside the visual narrative. The visual is broken up into 11 chapters named Intuition, Denial, Anger, Apathy, Emptiness, Accountability, Reformation, Forgiveness, Resurrection, Hope, and Redemption. The chapters frame a narrative of the protagonist, played by Beyoncé, dealing with infidelity in a marriage and the process of reconciliation with herself and her husband. The video immediately received an enormous amount of fanfare, notably inciting a witch-hunt for the supposed other woman via social media and also an avalanche of thought pieces and online discussions focused on Beyoncé's feminism, as well many addressing the representation of Black femininity specifically. While I generally agree with the popular interpretation of the visual as narrating a story of the emotions and affects following a woman discovering, confronting, and ultimately reconciling with an unfaithful husband, we will focus on the manner in which the project highlights and gives life to the notion of agency and the self as Black Home developed thus far. In *Lemonade* we will experience a sense of self that is framed by the historical, the social and the creative, i.e. the aesthetic, which simultaneously works through ideas of Blackness and home.

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[125] Beyoncé. Lemonade, Parkwood Entertainment, 2016,

As *Lemonade* opens, Beyoncé is by herself: first with her head against a car, next on her knees on a stage, and then alone in a field of tall grass that stretches above her. The first song unveils to the watcher that she has lost trust in someone close. The music, coupled with the imagery, at first glance conveys simply a sense of loneliness, abandonment. The opening and early parts of *Lemonade* emphasizes Beyoncé as a singular individual. At moments her pain, grief, and developing anger suggest to the viewer that the travesty of her broken relationship with her lover is a very personal, but also a completely singular experience. However, one will also notice that the video is montaged and alongside these images and scenes of Beyoncé alone, and the feelings of existential abandonment they conjure, there are moments, one may even say fugitive moments, where we are taken to an old southern property. We are still in the introduction of the visual when, in a group of passing moments, Black girls and women, dressed in southern gothic attire, appear still, staring blankly, as they stand and sit in different locations. In their striking silence and stillness, emphasized by an earthy rich color tone that shifted from black and white, a sense of constitutive, ancient, and yet also futuristic Blackness emotes from the screen. The shift in scenery and tone mark the beginning of the first chapter, Intuition, where Beyoncé, after the title appears, recites: “I tried to make a home out of you.”[126] While she seems to clearly be speaking of her lover, trying to make of him a place where she would feel safe, warm, and loved, the evocation of home is very interesting considering the images of the Black women on the southern property. These women seem at home in this environment, even though it evokes a dark, Black past, where southern plantations were hardly homely for Blacks. They stand motionless on guard, both as gatekeepers and yet also impossibly invoking a sense of hospitality. All are welcome and warned; the Black Home, deep in the south, smothered by a sun that shines hardest and darkest, reflects against and gives light to Beyoncé’s singular emotions. The role in the narrative of these Black women and the Black Home they inhabit is not clear at first but as the narrative develops and their imagery continually refracts upon the protagonist, their centering and begetting role for Beyoncé’s sense of self overwhelms.

In the second chapter Denial, the individualism of the narrative still holds the most gravity. It begins with Beyoncé leaping off a tall building, pummeling towards the concrete, only for the concrete to give into a water-filled bedroom where she confronts a sleeping version of herself on a bed and in a bedroom that very well could be in the house mentioned above. There is potentially a lot taking place in this sequence but what resonates strongest is the way the transition from city to southern home foreshadows an upcoming slower transition from a certain individualistic sorrow and rage to a collective recollecting of self that also follows the move from city to southern home. The quick fix after tragedy, marked by a metaphorical suicide, will not provide honest reconciliation, she cannot return home with a ‘selfish’ act of suicide, and therefore she merely finds herself alone and underwater, alive but muffled and restricted by her environment/mental state. We could say at this moment of deep introspection her agency, in fact, is not fully functional.

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[126] Ibid.

This introspective moment of her underwater leads to one of the most infamous and celebrated scenes of *Lemonade*, where Beyoncé, sporting a yellow dress that many have argued alludes to the Yoruba deity of water and sensuality, Oshun. Oshun is known for her temper when wronged and Beyoncé embodies this temperament as the song “Hold Up”—describing a woman scorned and livid lyrically, alongside an upbeat almost triumphant sounding track—plays in the background as she smashes a cityscape with a bat[127] and ends with her driving a monster truck over several cars. In the narrative of self as Black Home that I am constructing, this scene still belongs to an individualistic and existential conception of self, not the robust community of the home. This self, while evoking true and real emotions, also conveys a sense of artificiality; she exhibits a vengeful justice that is empty and hollow like the houses she passes on what appears to be a sound stage. She exhibits fantastic abandonment and feats of strength with her bat; and while women look on with admiration and encouragement, there remains a distance. They are simply outside observers and not mutual participants in coming to terms with her emotions and sense of self. While this scene is very powerful, rich, and even celebratory, it takes place in the city, the hub of self-interested capitalism, a space of displacement for Blacks as they migrated north for better opportunity, only to be displaced in the ghettos and projects, their homes Blackened by disenfranchisement. In this environment and stage of her grief, the full sense of self and agency as Black Home has yet to be fully embraced and recognized.

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[127] Kamaria Roberts and Kenya Downs, “What Beyoncé teaches us about the African diaspora in ‘Lemonade’”.

In the next chapter, Anger, groups of Black women return but this time in motion. A troop of parade dancers marching down back roads, another group of women in a parking garage donning all-white gowns and attached to one another by tied sleeves. These images serve as a transition and the words of Warsan Shire are again recited as the visual transitions to the track “Don’t Hurt Yourself” where the theme of improbable love, resentment, and antipathy bubble to the surface. The emergence of the dancing women is important and as “Don’t Hurt Yourself” plays out, we see that women are not just observing but are communicating through camaraderie and dance. The dialogical communication expressed through these dancers takes the individualistic self-centering rage of “Hold Up” into a larger agential network. Moreover, dancing calls attention to the Black body as not simply a locus of pain and extra-ordinary vulnerability. These qualities can be expressed aesthetically and in doing so contest the dispossessed objectification of the Black body that cannot resist, or at the very least express on its own. Together, through a singular shared Black flesh, these women shed light on Black pain as it has been invested into the body in the aesthetic movements of creativity that shadow Beyoncé as she sings their bodies becoming conduits of agential capacity. Black is not simply beautiful but it is the active creation of beauty that takes place through the object.

To be certain, Beyoncé is still the central figure, the host of the home that is betrayed but in the dark undercommons of this parking garage, Black life is social, and the anger of her lyrics and the guitar played by Jack White resonate through the body movements of these women to give the sense that her true self and the range of possibilities rest not alone but in the shared grief and history of Black people and women specifically—in fact, there is a moment where the track is interrupted by audio of Malcom X exclaiming that Black women are the most disrespected people in America, while a montage of Black women from modernity plays.

As the video transitions to the Apathy chapter, the active role of Black women becomes more pronounced and accompanying their positioning, the role of the aesthetic also crystalizes. In this chapter, which has the track "Sorry", we see a group of women painted in Ori, another Yoruba reference, on a bus dancing in concert and then we see Beyoncé in a big house accompanied by Serena Williams who is also dancing. Again, there is an agency expressed by Beyoncé in her apathetic chorus where she claims "I aint' sorry" that is transferred through the other Black women that dance with and around her as she sings through the song. However, alongside this communal, relational, dialogic expression of apathy through the Black body, the aesthetic richness of the overall project comes through. The Black self is not simply expressed through relation; it is also one that grows from and is created through community. We begin to see in Apathy a new Beyoncé emerging, one which comes to life through aesthetic creation. Through dance, wardrobe, poem, song, film, editing, i.e. the entire visual album itself, *Lemonade* also shows how the Black self as Black Home creates spatiality and relationality, which then allows for the creativity that indeed will transform a house into a home—and as the house catches fire during the Emptiness chapter, filled with smoke and soot, we know definitely the house is Black. As the different aesthetic mediums play off and through each other, calling to time and space—encapsulated in the young girls running through the house during Accountability—the excessive wealth of Blackness from which Beyoncé's grief can be transformed alludes to Moten's constitutive celebration. Beyoncé's growth and creative manifestation in this visual album, as it follows a narrative beginning with the pain of infidelity, calls for and calls from celebration but calls through a shared aesthetic creativity of light out of pain and darkness.

Lemonade undoubtedly embraces a Black aesthetic and we can capture another angle of its importance through Fred Moten's elusive but intriguing conception of phonic materiality that he introduces as an essential component to the Black radical tradition. Phonic materiality is a performative power, a repetition of difference in each performative act that always already disrupts scenes of objection by means of its confluence with Blackness. In the essay "Black Mo'nin'" from his book, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*, Moten argues that the photo of Emmett Till resonates with phonic materiality and deconstructs the facticity of Black death through the iterability of the performative act that follows from the photo's reproducibility. Instead of provoking simply horror, he contends the picture offers affirmation, "not of but out of death." He continues, "Black Art, which is to say Black Life, which is to say Black (Life Against) Death, which is to say Black Eros, is the ongoing production of performance."[128] The shriek of Till's mother at the sight of her son's corpse is divisive and productive as it reverberates in the performative act of Blackness that is captured in the photo. The photo is an 'ongoing production of performance' throughout time as it is reproduced in newspapers, anthologies, etc. and thus it resists dying as a static moment.

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[128] Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*, 209.

In *Lemonade* we see the phonic materiality of Blackness emerge very similarly to Moten's articulation of the photo of Emmett Till's photograph. By the time we arrive at the chapter Resurrection, where we will feel the phonic materiality resonate through photography as well, the visual has already progressed through a few more emotions and images of the community of Black women has also remained prominent—even as we witness the reconciliation with her husband in Forgiveness. The Resurrection chapter, however, begins with a number of images of Black women again on a southern property dressed is southern gothic garb. These young Black women come in all different shapes and sizes and shades. There is a moment where we see photos strewn across the ground and James Blake begins to sign the song "Forward.". Then the visual turns to the interior of a home where a number of Black women hold photos of Black men and children. We know of some of these women and their deceased: the mother of Michael Brown, Lesley McSpadden; the mother of Eric Garner, Gwen Carr; the mother of Trayvon Martin, Sybrina Fulton. Above Moten leaps from Black Art to Black Life, to opposing Black Death, and lastly to Black Eros; these all create a consolation of equivalency, reverberating through the performativity of the photos, as they not only will be recreated in different times and spaces but as their phonic materiality resonates and is amplified they participate in the aesthetic performance that is *Lemonade*. Black Art as Black Life fighting against Death in the name of Eros lives in in the tears of Lesley McSpadden, in the dancing of Serena Williams, in the bat named Hot Sauce—in and as the entire film. This phonic materiality represents just another mode in which the self and agency transfer from the individual through the other and space and time. The aesthetic creates a medium that can traverse through different modes of materiality, giving life and sound to the walls of the Black Homes decked with photos of the deceased, even as grieving women sit without uttering a word.

The underlying constitutive Blackness of *Lemonade* reverberates in its fugitive motions expressed through the repetitive, subtle, yet, nevertheless, exclamations of Black femininity that are those scenes with the Black women at the southern home. In light of the different landscapes and spaces that the visual album takes the watcher, the power and space of Blackness is found strongest in these scenes of collective Blackness that appear more frequently and prominently as the narrative progresses. One breathtaking scene that encapsulates the workings and spacing of the Black Home through these women occurs when Beyoncé and ballerina Michaela De Prince perform “Freedom” on stage during the Hope chapter while the other Black women sit and watch. Freedom, perhaps the most vivid and prized instantiation of agency, comes to fruition through Beyoncé’s performance and the dialogic relationship she has with the other women as they watch. As the montage continues, it shows these women eating, sitting in and outside the house, and standing in the yard and they go through these motions both together and alone. There is an oscillation between the individuals as they stand alone in some scenes and as a group, interweaving self and other into community, using both black and white film and colored film. As this scene reflects and connects with the other scenes of these women at this home, Blackness shines through in its ever-present return, from a past that is never truly past but which is always haunting the present; giving life and possibility to the individual as it refracts through the collective.

In the Redemption chapter, the Black Home retains its position as framing the interrelations of these women; only now, Beyoncé recites a poem about the Black mother. The Black grandmother becomes the bearer of the historicity of Blackness, as we see young women and girls interacting with older Black women throughout the house. The poem begins with the instructions for lemonade, and like any recipe it can be carried through from generation to generation. The recipe, as it is transferred through daughters, alludes to the continuous possibility that the concept of the Black feminine provides. The recipe of lemonade is one example of making something out of the no-thing that is Blackness and sharing that something with others through time and space. Grandma "spun gold out of this hard life, conjured beauty from the things left behind, found healing where it did not exist," or as Hattie White, Beyoncé's grandmother-in-law professes at her birthday, "I was served lemons but I made lemonade."[129] Possibility emerges from impossible existence of Blackness, from the extra-ordinary vulnerability of Black people. Grandma unveils the wealth of creativity, space, and community that emerges as Black social life which is then reflected in the scenes of these Black women occupying the Black Home together.

As Redemption transitions from the poem about grandmothers into the final song "All Night," there are no more black and white visuals. In full rich color, we once again see the women of the Black Home, however, this time in modern attire as opposed to the southern gothic style they had donned until then. With this concluding song, we see the true possibilities of Blackness come to fruition as full color. The song begins and the visual transitions from the southern property, its landscapes and people, to Beyoncé singing alone in a field where the sun is setting, montaged with home videos of her with her husband and daughter and also videos of other people and other couples embracing in everyday settings; however, there is a marked difference when it comes to the other

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[129] *Beyoncé. Lemonade.*

couples: the people are not just Black. Throughout the entire visual the screen time is dominated by Black people, mostly Black women. In these final moments of full color and vividness, as Beyoncé sings about forgiveness and desire, the lovers in this segment are of all different races and are engaged in all different types of relationships. The possibility of Black life, of Blackness as possibility, reaches it pinnacle in this final song as we see it transcend the barriers of race, age, and sexual orientation. Blackness, and the Black self and agency it begets, ultimately reflects and touches all life and love.

V. Conclusion

As the sun set on Beyoncé's *Lemonade* it is difficult not to notice the tremendous distance traveled throughout this chapter in the understanding of the Black self and its agency. The radical vulnerability discussed in the first chapter is not dismissed or unacknowledged in the trope of the Black Home but instead we see possibility that gushes out of Blackness in its own right. Noticeably, there were no explicit white antagonists in *Lemonade*. Instead, we are given a narrative of a woman scorned by a cheating man and the affects that give life to a process of grieving and redemption. However, the aesthetic articulation of this process delves deep into Blackness, as I have argued above, and the circumstances of Blackness, even when not explicit, necessarily intertwine with the machinations of white supremacy—whether it is how the Black rage embodied by Beyoncé in her destruction of the city alludes to the many riots of the 60's and that continue today in response to injustices or whether it is how the emphasis of communal dialogical expression that pulsates throughout the visual album runs counter to the individualism and autonomy deified in the political, the realm where Blacks have been systematically denied access. It would be beyond naïve to ignore that the circumstances of the Black southern community and creativity so beautifully displayed in *Lemonade* were not haunted by acts of white terror, thievery, and objectification.

The Black Home, therefore, shows not only the life but also the active negotiations of self through and with others in time and space. The afro-pessimist tradition provides profound insight into the circumstances of Blacks in America, however, with Moten's Black Ops intervention, along with Chandler's, Wright's, and Beyoncé's contributions, ultimately the unthought and dispossessed needed to be given an account of their capacities. The Black Home, indeed, is drenched in a darkness reflected in the many tragic circumstances that plague and, in fact, constitute Blackness and the history of Black people. Nevertheless, the reality of self and agency cannot be denied, altjough the trope of the Black Home aims to express the manner in which the self and agency depart from traditional autonomous individuality in the name of a fluid communal sociality, historicity, and aesthetic creativity.

Chapter Three: Black Hospitality

it is astonishing that recoil is not the dominant posture, surprising, in other words, that Black history has been marked so prominently by a spirit of tremendous generosity, an ethics of inclusion, a willingness to connect across the color line—politically, culturally, or socially—on whatever terms of humanity are available. *It is a truly amazing aspect of the historical record that Black people have managed to foster such catholic disposition in the face of unremitting domination, exploitation, and appropriation from friends and foes alike, though we must add immediately that any such 'hospitality' emerges not simply despite the circumstances but also because it is compelled by them, a compulsory hospitality*…refusing to relinquish 'ownership' of culture, politics, even of body, is neither the symptom of Black people's unreasoned passion nor the abandonment of their better principles. *More likely, it is an indispensable property of encounter under conditions of severe and organized brutality, a term of negotiation put forth by those who survive, even if the procedure is rarely, if ever, respected.*[130]

Jared Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes*

From the sun I learned this: when he goes down, overrich, he pours inexhaustible riches into the sea, so that even the poorest fisherman can still row with golden oars. For this I once saw and never stopped weeping.[131]

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

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[130] Jared Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes* 149 (my emphasis).
[131] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 198.

I. Introduction

In the first two chapters, I established two aspects of Black life to justify the larger argument of the dissertation and the topic of this chapter specifically, namely that the ethical experience of Blacks in America is best described through a re-envisioned formulation of Jacques Derrida's concept of unconditional hospitality, or what I will call 'Black Hospitality'. In the first chapter, I described the nature in which Blacks, under the structures of a general economy of white supremacy, are constituted fundamentally by an extra-ordinary vulnerablilit, that is beyond the traditional limits of political, social, and corporeal structures of vulnerability. In the second chapter, I argued, despite this vulnerability, there remains a social capacity for Black agency, which I described as the Black Home: communal, dialogic, historical, and creative.

With 'extra-ordinary' vulnerability and the 'Black Home' my intentions were to outline a picture of Black selfhood that was of course accurate but that would also set the scene for a robust picture of Black ethical life as an impossible unconditional hospitality. It is not very difficult to imagine to be honest. As I had mentioned earlier, here and now, midway through the second decade of the 21st century, we are given ample examples: the extra-legal extermination of Black life (Tamir, Walter, Renisha, Trayvon…), the collective mourning and protests (Ferguson, Baltimore, Everywhere), and an impossible unconditional hospitality (Eric, Sandra, Charleston). In this chapter, I want to give voice to an area of Black studies and thought that often gets underappreciated or even unrecognized considering the profound and conspicuous effect that Black political subordination has on everyday life. The political agency of Blacks, or lack thereof, remains an indispensable area of study, of course; however, there is also a place to think sincerely of how Blacks, under this subordination, are interpellated as ethical agents. Tangential to the political, what is the ethical experience, or ethical life,[132] of Blacks in a white-supremacist America? Without drawing out specific duties and moral attitudes, I want to describe how Blacks are orientated as ethical agents and how we might conceive that they experience themselves and their actions in their ethical life.[133] In order to do so, I have contended that Derrida's response ethics as hospitality is prescient for this project.

Of course, the move to Derrida after these first two chapters, perhaps, seems awkward at best and foolhardy at worst. Moreover, claiming that the foundation of Black experience is that of unconditional hospitality seems dangerous. So, to answer this latter concern first, this experience of unconditional hospitality does not imply by any means that Blacks are asking for or beckoning their own oppression. Blacks do not greet and welcome their subjugation with open arms or with a smile and an open door. Instead, as the first chapter helps set up, Black hospitality follows primarily from the formal structure of their condition as structured by white supremacy. This is precisely why Derrida proves to be so helpful. From his very first published works Derrida has been a thinker of the margins, the excluded, the exorbitant, and the aporetic, and in his thinking of hospitality, in certain ways, we will see these characteristics shine through and illuminate the figure of the Black Home and the Black host as parts of a structure of unconditional hospitality.

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[132] I use the term 'ethical life' here specifically, as I recognize it invokes GWF Hegel's use of *sittlichkeit* in *The Philosophy Right* as the objectification of morality through the institutions of the family, civil society, and the state. In these institutions Hegel finds the actualization of an inter-subjective recognition through the dialectics of individual wills and objective duties to others. I use the term as a kind of parody of these possibilities for Blacks, especially the dialectical relation of the ethical duties of the individual in relation to family and to state but I also want to retain the sense in which Hegel invokes a more communal understanding of duties, right and wrong, etc. even if for Blacks we will see the duties beholden to their specific community as impossible and anything close to the expression of rights not accessible to them. c.f. GWF. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*.

[133] I recognize that when it comes to the morality and ethics of Blacks it has not so much as gone ignored but exists most abundantly in the religious, specifically Christian tradition, of African-American thought. While I do not want to dismiss this area of thought as unimportant or unrelated to what I want to do in this project, the way that I have set up the argument has led me to consider that area for a later time.

Derrida develops his conception of unconditional hospitality through a reading of Emmanuel Levinas in one of the most thoughtful and thought-provoking memorial texts, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*. There Derrida re-conceptualizes Levinas' ethics, which he says in passing always reminded him of a sort of hospitality. Therefore, Derrida adopts this term indirectly but in doing so introduces a new ethical lexicon and proposes an aporetic structure common to his other reflections on politics and ethics.[134] While we will go into the many details and layers that Derrida explores when discussing hospitality in a number of different texts and interviews, the primary aporetic structure that leads to the 'im-possible' experience follows from the fact that the constitutive conditions of enacting hospitality, of being a hospitable host, e.g. welcoming the other through acknowledgment or greeting, necessarily undermines the fundamental principle that demands unconditional openness to the other. This is to say the possibility of being hospitable in any kind, of being the best host, of satisfying the fundamental principles guiding ethical behavior, cannot take place because all nominal, metaphorical, and traditional norms of hospitality violate the ultimate condition which is complete openness. To introduce language, communication, or acknowledgment introduces a condition upon welcoming the guest, e.g. she understands your language or gesture, and therefore violates the unconditional welcoming. The possibility of hospitality, the response of the host which extends hospitality to the other, is in fact conditioned by it being impossible to satisfy: this is the aporia.

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[134] Here I have in minds his work on forgiveness, democracy, the gift, etc. c.f. Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*; Derrida, *Rogues*; Derrida, *The Gift of Death and Literature in Secret*.

Now, while Derrida implies that unconditional hospitality as the structure of ethics applies to any and all ethical relations, I insist that it is particularly fruitful for understanding the experience of Blacks as agents in an antiblack white supremacist America. As the subjects of a long history of racial discrimination, violence, and terror, Blacks have occupied a particularly extreme position as ethical agents, specifically, insomuch as they have and continue to be subject to unimaginable psychological and physical vulnerability.[135] In Derrida's unconditional hospitality we come across a structure that can account for an ethical agency rooted: 1) not only in an extreme vulnerability similar to the positionality of Blacks in America, but also, 2) the always already transgressive act in unconditional hospitality—which, at once, describes the aporetic structure and experience of impossibility described just above—reflects an experience of impossibility in an always already Black criminality, and lastly, 3) the initial gesture of hospitality in Derrida's conception that extend from the other within is, at once, crucial to a Derridian criticism of the traditional autonomous subject and also to how Black selfhood and its expressions of agency invoke an otherness within that is the ever-persistent and resistive Black community and its history. These three aspects highlight the ways in which the white supremacist political order has come to impose a specific ethics and ethical agency as it exists for Blacks, whereby the white supremacist political ontology interpellates an excessively vulnerable Black self, who is always already criminal, and who is also never self-same, but instead acts from an otherness within. An imposed ethics and the experience of an impossible ethical life that follows from it as Black hospitality colors Derrida's unconditional hospitality in an unexpected shade by taking into account how the very real suffering of Blacks under white supremacy bring to light and to life the aporetic features of a metaphysics particular to the west and its project of purity.

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[135] c.f. my discussion of 'extra-ordinary' vulnerability in Chapter One.

This last contention, that the project of purity and western metaphysics has foundations in Black suffering, or in the 'the problem of negro', will be the launching pad for this chapter. The Blackening of Derrida's hospitality will begin with Nahum Chandler's *X: The Problem of the Negro as a Problem of Thought* where he reads W.E.B. Du Bois as exposing an aporetic conceptualization and experience for Blacks that highlights not only the failure of the project of white purity that was at the center of defining the human from the seventeenth to ninetheeth centuries, but also how this failure can expose the limits of ontology altogether. This, thus, reconfigures the positionality of Black people's experience—as this experience is created under the reign of white supremacy and antiblackness—to a central or privileged position when one encounters different aporetic paradigms in western thought including, I argue, ethics. Chandler's argument, therefore, grounds the non-intuitive architecture of Black hospitality I propose that places the Black person first and foremost in the position of the host, i.e. the primary agential position, as opposed to the position of the guest, i.e. the other.

In the history of discourses produced from the perspective of marginalized groups of people,[136] it is commonplace, maybe even natural, to consider their experience and positionality from the outside looking in, as the 'Other' to the ruling sovereign subject—typically white and male. It would, therefore, be intuitive when reflecting upon Derrida's unconditional hospitality to analyze the experience of Blacks from the perspective of the guest who asks for hospitality and is not afforded it because of the oppressive and exclusionary power of white supremacy—and this intuition is supported by Derrida, who more than once situates the demand for welcoming the guest, explicitly and implicitly, in terms of the politics of the border and the excluded immigrant.[137] However, when we consider the positionality of the Negro in western thought proposed by Chandler, it would now not only be natural but strategic, to consider the primary agential position and experience from the ontic and paraontologic aporetic experience of Black people and Blackness and not from some sort of white hegemonic autonomous subject—'natural' if you accept Chandler's argument for the re-positioning of the negro at the aporetic center of western thought and 'strategic' if you accept my argument for the capacity and agency of Blacks within a fugitive ethical life despite dispossession in civil society and political ontology. This would mean, in the end, that I am arguing that ethics, in fact, can be best conceptualized and effectively understood from the experience of Black people.

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[136] I am thinking of theory and literature that would fall under the genres or disciplines of feminism, race-theory, post-colonial theory, disability studies, and many more.

Therefore, in this chapter I will begin with Chandler and his arguments for placing Blacks, or the Negro problem, as a central and indispensable figure in the metaphysics of western thought. From Chandler I will move to an in-depth and thorough analysis of Derrida's conception of hospitality and translate it into the perspective of Black ethical life as Black hospitality. In this section, I will provide an account of the lexicon, structure, and central issues that arise through Derrida's many discussions of hospitality, while also arguing for interpreting these qualities from the perspective of Blacks under white supremacy. Crucial to this analysis will be the three qualities described above that darken, or better yet, blacken Derrida’s conception of hospitality. Lastly, I would like to offer three modern vignettes to situate how we may understand Black hospitality: the shooting at the AME Emanuel Church in Charleston, the arrest of Sandra Bland in Texas, and the strangling death of Eric Garner in New York. With these three different events I will call attention to the specific ways in which Blacks experience themselves as participating in the impossible double binds of unconditional hospitality in America.

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[137] c.f. Jacques Derrida, "Derelictions of the Right to Justice (But what are the 'sans-papier' lacking?); J. Derrida, "Hospitality, Justice, and Responsibility: A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida"; J. Derrida, "Hostipitality".

II. Nahum Chandler and the Negro as Problem for Thought: Refiguring the Positionality of the Black Subject.

In *Souls of Black Folk* W.E.B. Du Bois infamously claimed the problem of the 20th Century was the problem of the color line. What exactly Du Bois means by this phrase has solicited reflection and reconsideration since it was written; however, perhaps its most ambitious and radical interpretation comes from Nahum Chandler in *X: The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Thought*. As the title suggests, Chandler takes Du Bois’ original provocation that appears to be at the level of a social and moral issue to the level of thought in general, and western thought in particular. In convincing manner, Chandler reads the figure of the Negro, i.e. the Black person, in Du Bois’ work in a new non-intuitive light, where what appear to be ontic descriptions of the Black person and their experience opens the unstable foundations of ontology altogether.[138] Or as he says in the “Anachrusis” of the text, what takes place in Du Bois’ thought is a “making tremble of the logic *of being*.”[139]

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[138] If this connection of Blackness to the critique of ontology sounds familiar, it is because, as aforementioned, Moten attributes the concept of paraontology to Nahum Chandler in both “The Case of Blackness” and “Blackness and Nothingness”.

[139] Nahum Chandler, *X: The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Thought*, 9.

To shed some light on this oblique description of Chandler's project, it is clear from the epigraph of the first chapter that his reading of Du Bois owes credit to Jacques Derrida and the deconstructive project. As we know, one of the hallmark deconstructive approaches in the early writings of Derrida consists of rethinking, reconsidering, rereading, i.e. deconstructing, the rigid hierarchal binary oppositions that tend to lurk under the surface and orient the reasoning for the legitimacy, accuracy, and worthiness of a proposed philosophical position. For the epigraph, Chandler chooses a passage from the *Positions* interview where Derrida discusses specifically this phenomenon. Derrida describes how deconstruction recognizes the specious foundation of a proposed hierarchical opposition, and instead of simply neutralizing the opposition of the two terms, equalizing their apparent worth or significance and, therefore, depoliticizing the opposition, deconstruction at first flips the hierarchy to show the speciousness of putting the first term over the other, and then this leads to the next move that is an exposition of the difficult distinguishability of the two terms to begin with. These moves are all in the service of unveiling the constitutive spacing of difference, i.e. the working of diff*é*rance, allowing the dichotomy's original hierarchical rigidity to be put into question. In the reversal of the hierarchy a doubling takes place that unveils this constitutive spacing.

Take, for example, an instance of the classic dichotomy of good over evil. Suppose, then, it is always good to love thy neighbor and evil to kill the innocent. Well, one may reason that the best, most assured way to insure the love of one's neighbor would be to kill every other person, including oneself, because of the potential threat others pose to one's neighbor. Therefore, what is first proposed as evil we recognize as what is really the good, insomuch as it secures the original proposition of what is good, namely to love thy neighbor. With this realization, the evil of good over evil is replaced by a newly emergent ‘evil’ of evil over good. In this reversal, however, deconstruction calls attention to and allows for the questioning of the possibility of a hierarchy of good over evil that would depend on a univocal, singular understanding of the subordinate position of evil that the initial proposition offers. It is impossible to settle on an understanding of evil that does not oscillate between its initial subordinate position that forbids killing and its secondary superior position that demands it. ‘Evil’ is both of these conceptions and neither at the same time.

Therefore, the movement of deconstruction is not simply a matter of arguing that evil had been a strawman in an unjustified hierarchical order where what was once derided under the name of evil finally gets its due respect and triumphantly stands over a subjective conception of good. This, of course, only leads to another unsubstantiated hierarchy; instead, Derrida calls attention to how a concept like evil in this example can be mobilized in such a way as to expose the impossible distinction, or interval, between the evil that is both the same and different in its two positions of the hierarchy, the evil that is indistinguishable always both as evil qua subordinate to good and evil qua superior to good qua its originally unsubstantiated subordination. The doubling that allows evil, in this example, ‘to be’ both never quite itself nor its other orient Chandler’s reading of Du Bois and the Negro problem in this chapter.

The title of Chapter One in its entirety is “Of Exorbitance: The Problem of the Negro as a Problem of Thought.”. The doubling phenomenon described above in the example using evil is the phenomenon that Chandler will continually trace in this chapter through a reading of Du Bois, opening up the hierarchical dichotomies proposed and examined to an exorbitance and excess beyond the oppositions of white and Black, human and Negro. The chapter begins, however, with the notion of problematization, specifically how beginning in the sixteenth century the problematization of existence, or what qualifies as 'human' in western thought, ran parallel to the emergence of slavery. In response to the emergence of the questioning of the human and the establishment of slavery, a discourse of thought Chandler identifies as Africanist proposes a challenge to the exclusion of Blacks from humanity and subjectivity. This assertion is indeed crucial inasmuch as the possibility of Blacks identifying themselves in the subject position posits "a problem to the problematization of their own itinerary of existence" which "enacted or enabled the elaboration of a fundamental questioning of the possible character and order of social and historical being in general."[140,141] In other words, the possibility of 'Africanists'— i.e. Chandler's name for the original theorists of Black human status—to assert their own existence as subjects or humans disrupts the socio-historical discourse of western thought that asserted existence and being belonged only to white or European identity. With this move, we first feel the rumblings of being that the Negro can bring forth.

Now, Chandler's next move in his exploration of the disruptive force of the Negro takes aim at contemporary writers on Black identity—specifically, how they have come to disparage the original Africanist intervention, accusing these older positions of being caught in an untenable essentialist position on identity. Their position is presumably that identities are not homogenous singular essences, etched in stone clearly and distinctly but

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[140] Ibid, 13.

[141] It would be interesting in the future to trace the different ways Chandler employs the importance or role of 'questioning' versus the importance and role of a 'problem' and 'problematization'. Do certain 'problems' lead to fundamental questions? Perhaps there an unpronounced Heideggerian logic orient Chandler.

rather are heterogenous amalgamations of different qualities. This assertion by the contemporary critics of the early Africanists amounts to an attempt at reversing the binary by highlighting the heterogeneity of Blackness and re-establishing an essence, and this is precisely what Derrida forewarns us against in the selected passage of the epigraph. Chandler does not fall for the inverted argument and explains of the contemporary Africanist position:

> it naively implies that a nonessentialist discourse or position can be produced. As such, it presupposes an oppositional theoretical architecture at its core, in the supposed and self-serving distinction between a discourse or position that does not operate on the basis of an essence and those that do. *It thus all the more emphatically presupposes a simple essence as the ground of its discourse, in both conceptual and practical, that is, political terms*.[142]

The non-essentialist Africanist position attempts to neutralize the hierarchy of existence polarized in the distinction of European from the Negro by essentializing the opposition between the heterogenous Black with the homogenous white. In an attempt to undermine a discourse on the essence of Blackness, this form of critique only re-inscribes the essentialist distinctions; we get an essential heterogenous Black that feigns an opposition to homogeneity. In reality, the discourse of the Negro never emerges on a stable ground but rather emerges within what Chandler articulates using an aural metaphor: a 'cacophony' surrounding the question of identity and the ability of identification in general.[143] He warns us, just as Derrida has numerous times, that when attempting to question the oppositional qualities of a binary one cannot simply deny the reality of the disfavored half of the binary, saying simply that Blackness or evil does not exist. It only magnifies the conceptual field in which it has emerged as legitimately articulating the differentiation at stake. It legitimizes Blackness through its attempted negation. To say that Blackness is not this specific thing buttresses a discourse that says Negros are 'a thing' and the conceptual groundwork of distinguishing the Negro from the other remains intact on grounds of its affirmation through negation.

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[142] Ibid, 14.
[143] Ibid, 14.

At this point, the choice to wade through Chandler before turning to Derrida and the question of hospitality should be becoming clearer. The aporetic positionality of the host will refract throughout the cacophonous emergence of the discourse on the Negro, where the instability of self and other, European and Black, host and guest reverberates within the general economy of the white supremacist political order and throughout the constitutive fugitive Blackness.

However, continuing with Chandler's argument, he comes to crystallize the problem of the Negro in its more radical disruptive form from within the project of purity. The discourse of the Negro developed in a more defined form by the end of the eighteenth century going into the nineteeth century.[144] There are a series of questions that outline this discourse: the public questions that directed this discourse were whether Blacks were human and how should they be judged when comparing to other humans (intellect, body, etc.), and whether black's relation to humans were of a fundamental or relative difference. Behind this is the question of what is human.[145] One may ask: are Negroes inferior due to society or nature and, if so in either case, what should be done if they are emancipated? A corollary question would ask the status of the white European

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[144] Chandler is clear to point out that this discourse is not defined in completion or an exact systematicity but rather is constituted through a recurrence of key terms and concepts. c.f. ibid, 21.
[145] Ibid, 21.

American juxtaposed to the Black, which is never quite articulated formally but comes to light obliquely via the laws against miscegenation. The ultimate question, however, is an ontological one, i.e. how does one determine a being? The distinction of beings must be absolute to create the hierarchy desired; that is to say the terms must be complete and oppositional. This presumes the possibility of an oppositional distinction in thought and also the social practice of realizing this distinction, e.g. through practices of subordination and oppression.[146]

Now, when it comes to the distinctions of being predicated on race, white is the pure and coherent term, the norm which helps determine social identities through power, authority and law and "according to these premises, even if by multitudinous and contradictory movements of logic, even if considered human, the Negro is produced as an exorbitance of thought: an instance outside of all forms of being that truly matter."[147] The Negro can be named and identified by reason, but remains outside of reason, privative. The Negro need not be affirmed; instead, the affirmation of whiteness marks the Negro's exorbitance and liminal character. Also, one need not name a foundation for this postulation, because it is mobilized through a presumption of a solid foundation and a telos towards the metaphysical opposition of the purest of white as the highest term and the Negro structurally below and metaphysically outside.

This takes us to Du Bois whose work is exemplary at the level of irrupting the white purity discourse since it addresses so many different figures of the Negro. According to Chandler, Du Bois combines the micrological understanding of the American Negro as a type of knowledge without an essence and the macrological understanding of Africanist studies as infiltrating the development of all modern systems.[148] In both of these registers, Du Bois will propose the differential positioning through the figure of the double upon which the discourse of the Negro can be elaborated and interventions can be made.

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[146] Ibid, 22.
[147] Ibid, 23.

Chandler calls the reader's attention to one of the first double gesture plays in Du Bois' oeuvre which is found in the conceptual organization of "The Conservation of Races." In this essay, Du Bois shows how the concept of race is confounded with that of the Negro. The Negro, while thought of as emerging historically by Du Bois, nevertheless is articulated as an ideal that will never be truly realized in the future.[149] Du Bois strategically hesitates to affirm this ideal since race is always articulated in terms of mixtures, malleability, and historically specific properties.[150] At work in this logic of conservation is the necessary affirmation of the Negro in past and presen, by postulating an apparent ideal to come. Therefore, while critical of the concept of race, Du Bois nevertheless must use it to elaborate the historicity he is interested in. This leads to a specific aporia that pertains to his articulating and opening a discourse he is attempting to question. Chandler explains, "The conundrum is simply the logical *aporia* that requires that he speak *as if* that which he wishes to bring under one coherent analytical frame already exists as such an epistemological (or reflective) entity."[151] In other words, Du Bois must at the same time posit and discuss the concept of race, even though his ultimate goal is to explain how such a concept does not and cannot exist in itself, i.e. race is always contingent on historical articulations and different mixtures of identity, and therefore always to come. Thus, through a development of the discourse of the Negro, an incommensurable doubling of the Negro occurs where one needs to posit an initial concept of the Negro in order to catalyze an argument that explains the Negro never was and never will be precisely because of the aforementioned contingencies.

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[148] Ibid, 31.
[149] Ibid, 33.
[150] Ibid, 33.
[151] Ibid, 34.

In addition to this first gesture of lending credit to a concept just to justify the deconstruction of that very concept's coherence, there is a second gesture[152]: Du Bois consistently dramatizes the character of the lives of Negros both in terms of their experience and their place in social systems so that their excessiveness to the racial ontology is thematic and also to provoke and solicit as opposed to found definitive racial distinctions.[153] This dramatization of the excessiveness of Black life comes to an apex most memorably in the opening chapter of *Souls*:

> The Negro is…born with a veil, and gifted with a second sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness…It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity…One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two

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[152] I borrow this language of 'lending credit' to describe this phenomenon from Derrida's reading of Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* in his essay "Otobiographies" in the collection *The Ear of the Other*. In Derrida's essay, amongst other revelations of Nietzsche's preoccupation with difference, he identifies a passage in the Preface where Nietzsche infamously proclaims that no one has truly heard or saw him, that he lives on his own credit, and that perhaps it is a prejudice that he lives at all. Here we see Nietzsche placing himself and his life under question. The certainty of his identity, of his life, cannot be afforded by others who are not him, and, moreover, even himself. He is not certain of his existence, he can only offer some credit, live off the presumption that indeed the person he says he is, who writes, is in fact Friedrich Nietzsche. Acknowledging the gap between the Nietzsche that lives and thinks, between he who thinks and writes, between he of now and then and later, results only in the prejudgment that he indeed 'lives' in any colloquial sense as presented or in the present, so to speak. C.f. Jacques Derrida, "Otobiographies" in *The Ear of the Other*..

[153] Chandler, *X: The Problem of The Negro as a Problem for Thought,* 34.

> warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.[154]

Chandler recognizes that for Du Bois, while tragic, this doubleness was also a good, a gift. What we read in this passage traces the violence of the splitting of the negro, i.e. the failure of a 'true self-consciousness', the battle of a home that remains hostile to your very inhabitation.

However, the instability—one may even say impossibility—of the Negro as *a* being, and thus its status as a 'problem of thought', does not begin and end with a psychological dissolution and its political incapacity. It may be tempting to analogize at this point the impossibility of the Negro described by Du Bois in this dramatic doubling with the structural impossibility of the slave as it was introduced by Wilderson in the texts discussed in the previous chapter. In "Gramsci's Black Marx: Whither the Slave in Civil Society?" and *Red, White, and Black,* Wilderson's political ontology connects the objectification of Blacks with their role as disposable bodies for the political and libidinal economy of white supremacy and, therefore, he concludes they are dispossessed and structurally prohibited from civil society.

The ontological impossibility of the Negro that Chandler identifies in his reading of Du Bois, however, runs deeper and logically precedes political incapacity in the way described by Wilderson. Recall that the *para*ontology which Moten mobilizes in his critique of afro-pessimism, a movement that operates *beside* traditional ontology, was inspired by Chandler. In fact, undoubtedly, the doubling of the Negro that configures its positionality as both/and, neither/nor an American or a Negro describes the fugitive constitutive movement that is Moten's conception of Blackness. This movement logically precedes the political ontology of afro-pessimism and this movement is the dark abyss out of which both any conception of an object or subject could emerge.

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[154] Ibid, 36.

Moreover, since it is the Negro that has prime access to this movement insomuch as its ontic positionality determined by oppression and objectification lend to it feeling firsthand the reverberations of the impossible grounds upon which its specific identity—and being in general—lay it is for that reason and in this capacity the Negro is afforded 'second sight'. The Negro has the optimal position to see the hypocrisy of its oppression and the fallaciousness of racial hierarchy precisely inasmuch as it occupies this undecidable impossible position of 'being' both/and, neither/nor American and a Negro—a status unveiled to the Negro in discriminatory and objectifying practices. The constitutive displacement of the Negro, thus, entails a critical distancing, a 'freedom and responsibility', that emanates from its very own extra-ordinary vulnerability in that the Negro comes to recognize the limits of its own subjectification—and objectification—through the undecidable threshold of its violent inclusion and exclusion into American society and western thought, i.e. its status as the captured Black body in the land of the free.[155]

The undecidable status of the Negro as 'both/and' as well as 'neither/nor' simply Black and American that Du Bois provides us in *Souls* leads us back to the primary objective of this section—namely, to justify positioning the Black self in the non-intuitive primary agential position of the hospitable host. In this last section, I showed how Chandler's reading of Du Bois and the Negro question, in fact, lends itself to this central role inasmuch as it is this figure of the Negro—and not the fantastic white, autonomous, and sovereign male—that is crucial to revealing the aporetic underbelly of Western thought, specifically, how the question of being and thought are wrapped up in the question of the Negro. Also, as was touched on above and will be elaborated below, possibility in general begins with aporia for Derrida, and, therefore, that is another angle of the same argument for how the aporetic structure of Blackness would lend Black people to be ideal as the host in configuring the schema of the im-possibility of an ethics of unconditional hospitality and lead to an understanding of Black Hospitality as the ethical life of Blacks.

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[155] Ibid, 37.

III. Derrida, Hospitality, Blackness

As usually follows from the Derridean/deconstructionist style, the term hospitality, which orients Derrida's reflections on ethics, arrives through a reading of another writer, in this case his friend and teacher Emmanuel Levinas. In the memorium "Adieu" Derrida first speaks of hospitality— in addition to friendship, grace, and the gift—to describe the generosity of Levinas' character generally and as orientating his philosophical reflections specifically in light of, and perhaps despite of, an infinite and ever-present distance from the other that beckons responsibility and care. However, it is only in the text "A Word of Welcome" which Derrida delivered a year after "Adieu"—which accompanies the original address in a collection entitled *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*—that he gives his first large outline of his own specific conceptualization of an unconditional hospitality. Derrida admits that the term hospitality rarely appears in Levinas' seminal text *Totality and Infinity*, where the latter argues ethics, not ontology, to be first philosophy.[156] However, despite its infrequency in Levinas, hospitality will serve not only as the central theme of Derrida's reading of the former in *Adieu* but also ultimately be the primary signifier of the structure of ethics for the latter.

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[156] Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emannuel Levinas*, 21.

There are many ways to approach the various occasions Derrida writes on unconditional hospitality. To begin I would like to give a general outline of how one could conceive of hospitality functioning in an ethical framework. At first glance, in this schema, there are two distinct agents: the host and the guest. Now, unconditional hospitality as such is not a virtue that one obtains or cultivates as one may see in Aristotle and his contemporary proponents, or one specific law or rule of ethics, as one may find in Kant's moral philosophy and some consequentialist theories.[157] Unconditional hospitality for Derrida refers to ethics itsel; its very possibility and its demand is for the host to be hospitable or welcoming to the guest.[158] The host is fundamentally passive and responsible to yield all power to the infinitely other, i.e. the guest, by extending this unconditional welcome.[159]

However, the unconditional nature of Derrida's hospitality has a very unique quality in his account of ethicality and is what eventually leads to aporia. By unconditional he wants to distinguish his interpretation from a traditional hospitality that entails certain precepts and qualifications in order for hospitality to take place, specifically the demand that the guest show gratitude through reciprocation. In an interview entitled "Hospitality, Justice and Responsibility", Derrida analogizes traditional hospitality with gift-giving in as much both practices fall into a circular economy where one gives with the expectation of receiving something in return. At stake in a traditional economy of hospitality, where the host opens his or her home under the conditions or with the expectation that he or she will receive a gift, e.g. a bottle of wine, is mastery: "The host remains the master in the house, the country, the nation, he controls the threshold, he controls the borders, and when he welcomes the guest he wants to keep the mastery."[160] For Derrida, this desire for mastery that takes place in the traditional exchange model is precisely what needs to be relieved for a true, pure, and unconditional hospitality to take place. How could one be welcoming if they make demands or have expectations and conditions upon which welcoming and hospitality is extended?

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[157] Hospitality, in this register, becomes a duty that emerges from the external demand of law; however, "for it to be what it 'must' be, hospitality must not pay a debt or be governed by a duty: it is gracious…this unconditional law of hospitality, if such a thing is thinkable, would then be a law without imperative, without order and without duty. A law without law."c.f. Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 83.

[158] Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emannuel Levinas*, 4.

[159] Ibid, 25.

a. The Vulnerable Host

Therefore, hospitality must be completely open, true hospitality will be unconditional, demanding nothing of the other. The parameters by which Derrida recognizes unconditionality cannot be compromised to any degree, so much so that he ponders famously in the book *Of Hospitality*, "We have to come to wonder whether absolute, hyperbolic, unconditional hospitality doesn't consist in suspending language."[161] Even the extension of a hello to the guest, so the logic goes, would instigate an expectation of exchange with the other or presume something about the other, i.e. his or her language, and that would jeopardize this openness and reify one's mastery. "Does hospitality consist of interrogating the new arrival?" asks Derrida "Does it begin with the question addressed to the newcomer: what is your name…or else does hospitality begin with the unquestioning welcome, in a double effacement, the effacement of the question and the name."[162] No questioning, no name, the other is always welcomed.

Well then, does Derrida truly believe one must simply open themselves to all or any other? In fact, he indeed does. In that same interview cited above he says:

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[160] Derrida, "Hospitality, Justice and Responsibility" 69.
[161] Derrida, *Of Hospitality* 135.
[162] Ibid, 27,29.

> If, however, there is a pure hospitality…it should consist in this opening without horizon, without horizon of expectation, an opening to the newcomer whoever that may be. It may be terrible because the newcomer may be a good person, or may be the devil; but if you exclude the possibility that the newcomer is coming to destroy your house…there is no hospitality.[163]

The possibility of unconditional hospitality requires that one be open to anything and anyone. Philosophically what is at stake for Derrida is undermining the traditional attributes of sovereignty, mastery, or simply full control that is often implied in the idea of the subject. In this structure, the host, i.e. the subject, recognizes to what extent his or her identity and agency is from the start mediated by the other, and in this respect compromised.

However, before broaching the problem of the self/other and the identity that is at stake completely, I would like to highlight the marked vulnerability that the host is presumed to take. The host risks his or her house, his or her life in the name of welcoming the other and for Derrida that risk is absolutely necessary. This would be driving a hard bargain to say the least and some have objected. Malek Moazzam-Doulat in his essay "Future Impossible: Carl Schmitt, Jacques Derrida, and the Problem of Political Messianism" asks, "Can we never say no? Can we affirm an absolute openness to whatever is to come with so much danger, so much monstrosity behind us and on our horizon?"[164] I believe for any person this would be a reasonable question. As host, must one really open themselves completely to the machinations of the Other?

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[163] Derrida, "Hospitality, Justice and Responsibility", 69.

[164] Malek Moazzam-Doulat, "Future Impossible: Carl Schmitt, Jacques Derrida, and the Problem of Political Messianism" 5.

With these questions in mind, I would like to take the first steps towards broaching the ethics that I am calling Black Hospitality, beginning by highlighting the similarity between the vulnerability placed upon the host in Derrida's politically and socially un-situated unconditional hospitality and the vulnerability of Blacks in the white supremacist antiblack America, which I described in detail in the first chapter.

In the first section of this chapter, Chandler offers a convincing argument for why we should consider the Negro, i.e. Blacks, as a central figure of western metaphysics, in configuring the discourse on the human and thus, I argue, a good candidate for the position of the host and the aporias that we will see follow from this position. Within the realm of Derridian ethics the scope of this positionality of Blacks by Chandler's reading of Du Bois is further justified through the former's description of the vulnerable host, where the risk of hospitality for the other is constitutive to its unconditional status. For Blacks in America, the demands of an ethics of unconditional hospitality—an exposure to the world exacted upon the experience of a displaced or misplaced host—are structured through white supremacy and antiblack racism.

As I argued in the first chapter, under the rubric of vulnerability ethics described by McKenzie, Roger, and Dodds, Black vulnerability would be both occurant and pathogenic, the former meaning a constant manifestation of vulnerability and the latter systematic. Antiblack racism and white supremacy have a deep-rooted history of oppression that affects the daily lives of Blacks in these two ways as we are constantly reminded by the surveillance and systematic incarceration of Black bodies, for example. However, also recall I introduced the idea of an extra-ordinary vulnerability predicated on Jared Sexton's contention that white supremacy exists as a general (or hyper) economy, an excessive infinite source of different specific machinations of the white supremacist ideology. The general economic formulation of white supremacy takes the occurant and pathogenic characteristics of vulnerability and exposes their source as a non-rational affective commitment to Black subordination, brutalization, and suffering. The extra-ordinary vulnerability imposed by white supremacy, i.e. a vulnerability that is excessive and infinite in its source and leads to the brutal objectification of Blacks, I argue grounds the demands for an *unconditional* hospitality for Blacks.

In the epigraph to this chapter, I quote Jared Sexton from *Amalgamation Schemes* as he confesses:

> It is astonishing that recoil is not the dominant posture, surprising, in other words, that Black history has been marked so prominently by a spirit of tremendous generosity, *an ethics of inclusion*, a willingness to connect across the color line—politically, culturally, or socially—on whatever terms of humanity are available. It is a truly amazing aspect of the historical record that Black people have managed to foster such catholic disposition in the face of unremitting domination, exploitation, and appropriation from friends and foes alike, *though we must add immediately that any such 'hospitality' emerges not simply despite the circumstances but also because it is compelled by them, a compulsory hospitality.*[165]

Interestingly enough, this realization of his appears in the conclusion of his second chapter, a 'quick aside' as he finishes his thoughts on the practices of coercion and miscegenation. Nevertheless, it speaks volumes; unbeknownst to himself, he locates in this short passage the grounds for the unconditional ethics of Black Hospitality with shocking precision.

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[165] Jared Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes*, 14. {my emphasis)

The history of Black generosity, particularly as an ethics of inclusion for all people to join in celebration and in pain—as found, for instance, in the politics of Dr. Martin Luther King or Black music—can be dumbfounding. However, it is imperative to note that what Sexton also identities as an "ethics of inclusion"—a 'welcoming'—does not *just* concern a peculiar disposition of Blacks through history to be generous and inclusive but is, in fact, first and foremost, a 'compulsory hospitality'. The 'compulsory hospitality' that Blacks offer is not the result of, for example, a strategic stereotype to justify Black exploitation. Rather, the compulsion of Black openness, generosity, and, yes, an ethics of hospitality follows precisely from the constitutive vulnerability imposed by white supremacy.

Just as Moten argues that, while Black people do not own Blackness, their ontic conditions place them in close relation to an understanding of a fugitive paraontological Blackness, I further contend that the ontic vulnerability of Blacks places them in a position to bolster the responsibility of the host for an unconditional hospitality that they themselves surely do not own and, furthermore, has been imposed upon them. The hierarchical orientation of white purity over and against Black sordid criminality is not an incidental historical anomaly. As Derrida has taught us, such hierarchical orderings are constitutive components for a western metaphysics grounded in articulating and justifying certain ideas and concepts in terms of an elevated position of purity, essence, and non-contradiction, and attempting to leave their conceived opposites outside of or below through impurity, non-essentiality, or perhaps even non-existentence. When deconstructed, however, the logic of these hierarchies are unstable, untenable, undecidable. This is the Negro as a problem of thought in Chandler and the fugitive paraontological Blackness in Moten.

Now, insomuch as the racial hierarchies persist, Blacks take the form of fungible objects for libidinal and economic exploitation and as sentient responsive beings that are interpellated as offering themselves and inviting their exploitation. The white supremacist general economy continually uses different and evolving institutions and practices to situate Black people in a subordinate, submissive role, of a subject welcoming this role in relation to its other, or otherness, in general. In this sense, it is not impossible to see a generosity in Black behavior and ethical life that can be conceived of as being hospitable, and under the machinations of white supremacy, conceiving of this hospitality as ‘compulsory’.

Interestingly enough, the contention that the hospitality of the host may first and foremost be compulsory—in the sense that the host’s hospitality is a response to the other and the circumstances of this otherness—actually maps quite well onto Derrida’s proposed schema of unconditional hospitality. In this regard I have in mind the Derridian ‘yes, yes’ structure, or the always already affirmation of the other. In the “A Word of Welcome” from *Adieu*, Derrida writes:

> Since [the welcoming of the other] opens itself to the infinity of the other, an infinity that, as other, in some sense precedes it, the welcoming of the other (objective genitive) will already be a response: the yes to the other will already be responding to the welcoming of the other (subjective genitive), to the yes of the other. *This response is called for as soon as the infinite-always of the other is*

> *welcomed…this "as soon as" does not mark the moment or threshold of a beginning, of an arche, since infinity will already have been pre-originarily welcomed. Welcomed in anarchy. This responsible response is surely a yes but a yes to be preceded by the yes of the other.*[166]

Here, Derrida explains that the 'yes' or the unconditional welcoming of the host offered to the other—the unconditional hospitality demanded by the parameters of a true hospitality—is, in fact, compelled not simply by the demands of an ethics of hospitality but also is a response to the 'pre-originary' circumstances of otherness. This is to say that the mortal and *finite* host, any ethical actor, is actually responding with their welcoming, first and foremost, to the circumstances of the *infinite* openness of otherness that necessarily precedes it. Hospitality, therefore, does not take place out of the blue; instead, it must be understood as circumscribed by an initial 'otherness' that the host may, or may not, recognize sets the grounds for its welcoming.

For the Black host of Black hospitality in the politically situated circumstances of Blacks in America, the infinite other—or what may be better described as 'otherness' considering its infinite quality—that makes possible its unconditional hospitality is none other than the infinite general economy of white supremacy. Its non-rational exorbitant logic precedes the welcoming extended by the Black host, with a welcoming of its own. Of course, something that cannot be ignored, which is implied by resituating the structure of Derridian unconditional hospitality in a framework that explains the experience of Blacks, is that this ascribes a pre-originary 'welcoming' (yes) offered by this otherness that is the general economy of white supremacy and a responding 'welcoming' (yes) made by the Black host.

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[166] Derrida, *Adieu,* 23. (my emphasis)

I would argue first that although white supremacy seems the furthest from anything like a welcoming of Blacks, we need to remember Wilderson's contention that white civil society and the human/subject capacity that it allows for gains its coherence and its possibility from Blacks. The subjection of Blacks provides the libidinal and economic foundation upon which white supremacy can expend its energies and manifest in its different forms and institutions. In this sense, then, it's hard to imagine the pre-original 'yes' of white supremacy as anything other than a welcoming of Blacks, even if in the end we realize the circumstances of this infinite otherness has at its core nothing other than violence, hostility, and the reproduction of disposable bodies.[167]

As for the second yes, or the 'welcoming' of the Black host in response to the first yes, this is not a 'positive' or 'encouraging' affirmation to one's own subjection. Rather, it is an affirmation that the Black host recognizes, in some sense or another, that it is compelled by the circumstances of white supremacy that circumscribes it. We will return to this 'in some sense' later when we broach the topic of the 'other within' but at this point recognize at least this: that while perhaps there are some circumstances where we would say that a person willfully accepted their demise, in the end, resistance—which I will argue is in fact always at play because of Black's proximity to Blackness as fugitive in Moten's articulation—always in some sense needs to recognize or affirm the reality of its subjection. In this sense, we can see another side of affirmation where the Black host is compelled to say yes to or welcome the other.

Also, this is a good place to mention that we need to realize that the guest is not necessarily a white person. It is absolutely undeniable that different machinations of white supremacy—whether actions performed from perceived personal sentiments or as conduits of an institution—can and will be carried out by any person of any color; for an easy example, think of Black police officers. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that the preoriginal otherness framing the environment named white supremacy is truly infinite, that is, without limit, in its manifestations. Consequently, even though a Black man's car window is transparent and when a Black officer approaches this Black host *may* be inclined to be more at ease, nevertheless, as Derrida suggests, you can *never* know if the guest may wreck the place, or may be a monster.

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[167] I use reproduction to say that white supremacy in the end cannot will genocide or complete obliteration of Blacks but only use violence and death to maintain its processes of objectification.

With that in mind, I would say that when Derrida writes of hospitality in his wide sweeping appeals to the host as always desiring to be "master of the household, master of the city, or master of the nation, the language, or the state, places from which one bids the other welcome," he undervalues the experience of a specific person who may carry the burden of host in a very particular and enforced way, precisely in the way I argue Blacks do.[168] Black Hospitality cannot be interchanged with the experience of just any host. The extremes of their extra-ordinary vulnerability, rooted in white supremacy and antiblack racism, impose a 'compulsory hospitality' that not only brings to life Derrida's non-situated unconditional hospitality but also highlights the stakes of a response ethics grounded in an impossible welcoming or gratitude.

b. The Impossibility of Black Hospitality: Transgression and Criminality

I use impossible deliberately, as it is actually the next component I would like to address in Derrida's account of unconditional hospitality. From as early as *Speech and Phenomena* , Derrida has identified an 'im-possible' structure to certain ideas, i.e. where the possibility of certain concepts actually follows from their impossibility, which is to say, for example, the possibility of communicating with another person is contingent on the impossibility of any perfect complete indisputable transference of information, i.e. communication. We see this structure frequently in his later works that reflect on topics such as gift-giving, democracy, forgiveness, and, of course, hospitality. When the requirement of the host to be unconditionally open in welcoming the other is first introduced—an openness that forbids even something as seemingly harmless as a hello—this undoubtedly seems like an impossible task. However, usually this impossibility is taken as an issue of perfectibility, as if the task, while impossible, can be approximated. In *On Hospitality* Derrida, however, is clear that it is not an issue of approximation, as when Kant employs his regulative ideas. Derrida writes, "[P]ure unconditionality appears inaccessible, and inaccessible not only as a regulatory idea, an Idea in the Kantian sense and infinitely removed, always inadequately approached but inaccessible for the structural reasons, 'barred' by the internal contradictions."[169] Instead of this perfectibility structure, the structure of the im-possible makes it so the project of unconditional hospitality, its possibility, undermines the non-conditional prerequisite. This is why Derrida often accompanies his explication of unconditional hospitality with an insurance claim: 'if such a thing exists'. Derrida describes the impossibility structure in *Of Hospitality* as such:

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[168] Jacques Derrida, "Hostipitality", 213.

> [I]I is as though the laws of (plural) hospitality, in marking limits, powers, rights and duties, consisted in challenging and transgressing *the* law of hospitality, the one that would command the 'new arrival' be offered unconditional welcome… [T]he law [of unconditional hospitality] is above the laws. But even while keeping itself above the laws of hospitality, the unconditional law of hospitality needs the

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[169] Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 169.

> laws, it requires them. This demand is constitutive. It wouldn't be effectively unconditional, the law, if it didn't have to become effective, concrete, determined, if that were not its being as having-to-be…. In order to be what it is, the law thus needs the laws.[170]

Structurally the 'aporia' or the impasse that is in the structure of hospitality that Derrida articulates here exists because a hospitality, if it is to be true and not conditioned by rules, regulations, and obligations, must be unconditional hospitality; the host must look beyond "marking limits, powers, rights, and duties". Nevertheless, Derrida argues the unconditional law of hospitality demands also that hospitality take place in the world, that the finite host/master identify him or her as such and actually extend welcoming, 'effectively, concretely, and determinately'.

In other words, unconditional hospitality constitutively demands its own defeat or the possibility of any hospitality; it always already undermines the ultimate law that says the host shall not regulate, presuppose, or demand anything from the guest. Not only is it inevitable that the host acknowledges the guest but it is also necessary. Hospitality begins at its collapse, with a hello, a handshake, a 'come in, please'; or, to use Derrida's own nomenclature, hospitality begins with a transgression; it is wedded to its own hostility—hence Derrida's essay cited above, "Hostipitality".

Now, we should not be quick too forgo the issue of transgression that Derrida mentions in the previous citation. Transgression as a concept plays an important role in the European thinkers of difference that Derrida belongs to, although he himself in the 1980's dismissed the relevance or potency of the term. In conversation with Michael Clifford at the Collegium Phaenomologicum in 1987, he referred to the concept as a

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[170] Ibid, 75-79.

'tired notion'.[171] Nevertheless, considering the position of Blacks as always already transgressive I still find currency in this term, especially since Derrida does indeed use it. Transgression is an important means in which Black subjectivity articulates itself, particularly as a sort of criminality.

Take for instance Saidyia Hartman's account of a slave, Sukie, on the auction block who, in a scene of subjection, is recounted by another slave Fannie Berry to have exposed her body. As Hartman astutely observes in this transgressive act:

> Sukie's actions place her outside the law because she defies the fundamental tenent of slavery: the slave is subject to the master's will in all things. This breach of law enacted in the insolent disregard of the block's decorum, interestingly enough, provides the only possibility of emergence of the subject, since criminality is the only form of slave agency recognized by the law. Thus the fashioning of the subject must necessarily take place in the violation of the law, as consequently, will, criminality, and punishment are inextricably linked. [172]

Hartman describes here an interesting phenomenon but one not foreign to Black thought, namely the foundation of a type of agency in transgression for those objectified and condemned to death. Further along in *Scenes*, Hartman, in what she describes as minor 'transgressions', i.e. attending dances, meetings, and seeing lovers, recognizes that these transgressions take place outside the 'political proper'.[173]

Transgressive acts of Black hospitality need not take place in the explicitly political world, e.g. though protest or voting but instead we see transgression take place in often mundane and everyday acts of ‘welcoming’, those duties of an ethical life that we see take place in common courtesy or contestation of some other’s violation. Most importantly we should recognize, also, that these acts of transgression are not just foolish acts that serve only to highlight the hostility towards Black bodies. Rather, criminality, i.e. transgression, is a primary mode in which Black agency and cultivation takes place following from this structure of response ethics. Therefore, criminality takes a step beyond Derrida’s opaque recognition of the role of transgressing the unconditional law of hospitality to the more robust category and recognition of a criminality that we recognize is attached to Black people specifically and throughout history in an attempt to systematically oppress and undermine their agency and humanity. However, despite this narrative of criminality in Black hospitality and the transgression it begets, we will see how transgression can lead to a cultivation and articulation of a sort of dark, fugitive, ethical life. Listen to George Yancy as he espouses transgression’s profundity:

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[171] Michael Clifford, "Crossing (out) the Boundary: Foucault and Derrida on Transgressing and Transgression", 223.

[172] Saidya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 41.

[173] Ibid, 63-64.

> There is no attempt here to propound an idealist, ahistorical conception of agency/resistance or one grounded in a mere fleeting private moment of joyous transgression while the social and material conditions of oppression go unchallenged. My point is that there is something powerful to be said about the initial moment the Black self proposes, reflectively generates other ways of being in the world especially within the context of those white iconographic frameworks that perpetuate distorted and dehumanizing depictions of the Black self.[174]

These transgressions are not in vain for individual satisfaction or simply as one-off acts of deviance. They are done with the effects of challenging the political order that has condemned the Black body, the Black soul, and the Black Home. Through the concept of the Black Home we can recognize, for instance, in another slave's recollection of Sukie's transgression, the communal and transhistorical significance that Hartman found so profound that she wrote about it two hundred years later. Sukie's defiance resonates with the fellow Black people of her time, in history, and to come as an act that challenged the narratives of complacency and practices of violence that aimed to undermine her agency psychologically and through physical restraint and humiliation.

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[174] George Yancy, *Black Bodies, White Gazes,* 113.

Transgression, while perhaps not the only means of action, is profound for Black agency, specifically considering the parameters of response ethics articulated thus far. In the double bind of Black ethical life, transgressions can be read as cultivating the Black Home in a space of celebration—albeit Black celebration—and of possibility out of the fugitive impossibility of a hospitality that always escapes the grasps of Black people no matter how generous, or hostile for that matter, their actions may be or be perceived to be in the norms and rules governing white civil society. Transgression thus inscribes a history, community, and ethical life that can be read as belonging to Black people insomuch as white supremacy invokes this compulsory hospitality.

In an echo of Yancy, Fred Moten identifies the paraontological movement of Blackness that Black people are attuned with, particularly in moments such as those just recollected, are not ' simple interdiction nor bare transgression' but a specific "zone of unattainability, to which the eminently attainable ones have been relegated, which they occupy but cannot (and refuse to) own, [Blackness] is some sense of the fugitive law of movement that makes Black social life ungovernable, that demands a paraontological disruption of the supposed connection between explanation and resistance."[175] Furthermore, in his own words, Moten recognizes a certain criminality to Blackness, as he writes, “the brutal history of criminalization in public policy, and at the intersection of biological, psychological, and sociological discourse, ought not obscure the already existing ontic-ontological criminality of/as Blackness.”[176] In this quotation Moten is referring again to the fugitive nature of Blackness but in this case he highlights an analogy of criminalization of Black people that is evident in history with the manner in which the paraontological status of Blackness entails a quality of escaping stable identity and thus challenges the contention that being capable of giving a ‘thorough explanation’ of some actions is the only way to qualify an act as resistance.

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[175] Fred Moten, "Blackness and Nothingness", 179.

The aporia described above with the demands of a Black host for openness and yet the impossibility of ever achieving such hospitality that characterizes Black ethical life cannot be fully explained but it does not undermine the fact that the paraontological status of Blackness that keeps Black people from strict ontological interpellation is in itself resistance. Black ethical agency, action, or identity cannot be contained; it is contradictory and aporetic; it escapes through the night the rules and regulations of a white metaphysics: it is criminal.

The analogy is not specious; what Moten brings to attention is both the way in which Blackness escapes ontology and the manner in which Black people in general escape the long arm of the law insomuch as their identity is malleable and pre-disposed to being criminal, transgressive, and disposable in the scope of white supremacy. In this instance, Moten is explicitly—along with Yancy and Hartman, I would argue—contesting the emergence of governable objects with a recognition of the criminalization of Blacks and their actions, allowing for another non-intuitive reading of Derrida’s hospitality or hostility in this instance, through a rethinking of the violations of unconditional hospitality at the threshold that in fact can be seen as Blacks expressing themselves and even be considered a practice of self-understanding—this will be clearer in the vignettes.

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[176] Fred Moten, “The Case of Blackness”, 187.

Through the Black Home, self-creation or cultivation does not necessarily lead to what is all wonderful and self-affirmative. Sometimes cultivation unveils wounds and corpses. When Blacks transgress the limits of hospitality, when they assume this always already criminality, it often takes sacrifice and death. To act from this aporetic position, to transgress is dangerous but it is also the Black person's means for life; I believe this is what is at stake when Moten asks: "How can we fathom a social life that tends toward death, that enacts a kind of being-toward-death, and which, because of such tendency and enactment, maintains a terribly beautiful vitality?" Moten, at this point, invokes Du Bois and the 'problem of Blackness'. [177]

Now, inasmuch as we understand that the structure of hospitality leads to aporia and demands transgression, I also want to note that this im-possibility is not just structural but also experiential.[178] The host experiences the aporia of hospitality; his or her welcoming is also at the same time a transgression and this is a tension that cannot go overlooked. Aside from believing that the host merely commits a miscommunication or unintentional slight thus confusing welcoming with hostility, this experiential impossibility seems far-fetched for Blacks, however, not so much. One need only imagine the instances throughout history in America where violence against Blacks resulted from an intrepid smile towards a police offer that was read as a smirk, and therefore a violation of the impossible standards of submission by Blacks that white supremacy demands. The Black body is always already criminalized and, thus, always already hostile, despite and in light of an astonishing hospitality—compelled or not.

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[177] Ibid, 188.

[178] Jacques Derrida, "Hostipitality", 211.

The aporia of agency I am considering follows from the creation of certain laws or perpetuation of certain norms that prohibit certain behavior that Blacks are already presumed to not have the capacity to do or not to do—e.g. it being illegal to teach slaves to read although there already exists a discourse that says there is no way they should be intelligent enough to read, or implementing vagrancy laws for a group already understood to be unemployable and lazy. This aporetic structure of Black criminality exposes the norms and laws of the politics of white supremacy and its inability to account for Black agency as essentially something that precedes these laws and the political in general. Black agency thus should be understood through the communal and special dimensions of the Black Home emerging from the always already transgressive nature of paraontological Blackness that exposes the sociality of Black life, or possibility through impossibility, that escapes and operates over against the political. Blacks, in their denial of political identity alongside a systematic appropriation that rejuvenates their existence as dispensable and criminal, know contradiction and impossibility all too well.

The experience of impossibility is a crucial aspect of Black Hospitality, it situates the aporetic ethical experience of Blacks as the primary register in which responsibility remains intelligible. Following Wilderson, I would argue that ethics, real ethics, lies in the politically incapacitated Black host; "Ontological incapacity, I have inferred and here state forthright, is the constituent elements of ethics. Put another way, one cannot embody capacity and be simultaneously ethical. Where there are slaves, it is unethical to be free."[179] There are no ethics for the free subjects of civil society in the antiblack white supremacist political ontology described by Wilderson in the second chapter. An aporetic ethics of responsibility, however, remains with the politically/ontologically incapacitated, with the self-contradictory Black host who responds through transgression—imagined or real—of the prescribed norms of white supremacy.

The other or guest in a white supremacist ideology can only see Blacks as hostile—as opposed to white political order—even though the structures situate Blacks in the extremely vulnerable position described above. In the vulnerability of Blacks and the interpreted hostility, there is in fact a resistive nature to Black Hospitality and a response ethics that is framed by their own oppression and highlighting its contradictory nature not just for the individual but for the entirety of the Black Home. The feeling of Black impossibility, the always already criminal and vulnerable, exudes the double gesture presented by Nahum Chandler as a problem of thought but here as a problem of white political ontology, creating an impossible other that escapes the violence of the political and exudes agency through contradiction at what we called above a Black sociality. The transgression is the second yes in Derrida's 'yes, yes' structure but an affirmation of a Black sociality that is a 'no' to the given, prescribed, inscribed dark political status of Blacks in white supremacy.

c. Self-Interruption and Responsibility

Now to think responsibility we have to expand upon the idea of the host and this will allow us to think again the idea of the Black Home. With the Black Home, I proposed an agency founded in a Black sociality distinct from civil society—and even intersubjectivity—that relied on a communal and historical attunement to describe the actions of the individual. The Black host thus resides in the Black Home, which consists in the dialogical constitution of selfhood, interrupting any traditional account of an autonomous self. This brings us to the last component of Derrida's unconditional hospitality that I find crucial to understanding Black Hospitality and the Black Home in which the Black host resides, namely the begetting of responsibility through the interruption of the self.

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[179] Frank WIlderson, *Red, White, Black: Cinema and the Structure of US Antagonisms*, 49.

In *Adieu* Derrida asks, "Is not hospitality an interruption of the self?" He continues, "One will understand nothing about hospitality if one does not understand what 'interrupting oneself' might mean, the interruption of the self by the self as other."[180] Self-interruption is crucial to hospitality but note, he is not referring to the interruption that may come about through the hostility of the guest, instead it is the 'self as other'. He reiterates this contention in the "Hospitality, Justice, Responsibility" interview, "[T]here would be no responsibility or decision without some self-interruption, neither would there be any hospitality…[A]s master and host, the self in welcoming the other, must interrupt or divide himself or herself. This division is the condition of hospitality."[181] By self-interruption, Derrida has in mind the manner in which the host is always other to himself or herself in the sense that he or she is constituted through history and community and to welcome the guest from without, one needs to recognize the other within.[182]

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[180] Jacques Derrida, *Adieu*, 52.

[181] Jacques Derrida, "Hospitality, Justice, Responsibility", 81.

[182] Cynthia Willett argues that an issue of the post-modern is that the sense of alterity that destabilizes the Other is still narcissistically dependent on the self. For Willett, this undermines the deconstructive decentering the subject. However, for Derrida, since his articulation of alterity in this gesture often remains vague, I would like to think the Other that interrupts self is an already displaced host of a socially and culturally constructed home, and, therefore, need not fall victim to this criticism. c.f. C. Willett, *Maternal Ethics and Other Slave Moralities*, 6.

This is precisely what I wanted to highlight with the idea of the Black Home, the internal otherness that begets one's own self-identity. Michelle Wright, addresses this otherness within directly, using the concept of the Black feminine to invoke the manner in which the Black self emerges through the dialogic and a communal begetting. The Black self as the Black Home embraces the otherness within through a sociality with a history and within a community, grounded in the fugitive Blackness that begets possibility and that is a problem for thought. This is another iteration of the doubling that stretches Blackness, paraontologically, away from any origin story and the difference within the self that is non-reconcilable but can still live in the same Black Home. Geoffery Bennington reminds us that for Derrida " 'I' am only insofar as I already harbor (welcome) the Other in me"—with this 'other' being the history, community, and the traditions one inherits, thus showing how one is never self-same.[183] The 'Other in me' mediates identity by a constitutive disjuncture that challenges the violent hierarchy brought about by a political ontology grounded in what Moten identifies as the political death of Black peoples. We cannot simply deny the existence of this political ontology, critique necessitates that one recognize its reality and power but the critical capacity comes in this disjuncture of essence from Blackness that allows the hospitable Black host to dare to think differently, to leave the question of his or her impossibility open, to keep the Black Home open and open the door for the guest, even if it takes place through hostility and challenging of the political order.[184] One can be responsible for the guest only if one is responsible for oneself, only if the Black host embraces 'the other within', the otherness that dissembles the fantasy of a fully autonomous self-present subject and allows one to recognize and open the pain in the history and community of Black ethical life that is constitutively unstable. Ethics needs this self-othering to recognize the extent of the hosts' responsibilities but more importantly, recognizing this otherness is also another means of resistance insomuch as it truly opens up the possibilities and necessity of seeing, doing, and living differently, even if you personally do not get to experience and live that life.

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[183] Geoffrey Bennington, *Interrupting Derrida*, 44.

[184] Nahum Chandler, *X: The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Thought*, 50. Moten reiterates this point in his reading of Fanon when he writes, "the lived experience of blackness—which might be understood here as the troubling of and the capacity for the rehabilitation of the human—converge as a duty to appose the oppressor, to refrain from a certain performance of the labor of the negative, to avoid his economy of objectification and standing against, to run away from the snares of recognition…This refusal is a black thing". c.f. Fred Moten, *The Case of Blackness*, 211.

IV. Three Vignettes of Black Hospitality: Charleston, Sandra, Eric

Using Chandler as preface once more, in this section I would like to conclude with a few vignettes of how we may read Black Hospitality into some recent, real life, events. Through Du Bois, Chandler highlights the effectiveness and importance of giving an account of real life events to coming to understanding how the self is interpellated and how to come to an understand of race in general. In the third chapter of *X: The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Thought*, he reflects on Du Bois' use of autobiography in thinking difference and the problematic ontology of the Negro. By harkening to specific micrological instances of Negro identity, Du Bois does not summarily dismiss the large conceptual apparatuses operating under the sign of race but instead uses personal identities and the historical example as a way to approach and think through the larger historical and ontological stakes of the problem of the Negro as a problem of thought.[185] In other words, to get a grasp of the larger structural and theoretical underpinnings of race, or for our sake Black Hospitality, it would be fruitful to look at singular specific instances in the world.

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[185] Ibid, 70.

What Du Bois referred to as the autobiography of the concept allowed him to think larger questions about racial differentiation through, “a subjective practice that is not reducible to the intentionality of the subject, and in the constitution of the African American subject, thought in terms of its concept or possibility (hence in terms of subjectivization) as a unique structure of repetition.”[186] In other words, we can look at different iterations of specific Black experience, beyond the ‘intentional’ ends of the person—that is to say, the Black person need not be consciously or autonomously conducting a sort of Black performance, or Black Hospitality—and nevertheless, in these observations and the repetitions of certain acts, we can deduce more general information about race. For our purposes with these vignettes, we will see how the difference at the center of iterability and Black performance can magnify the subjective experience to the larger structures of its impossibility, through Blackness and the Black Home. Chandler explains in terms of autobiography:

> Du Bois explicitly indicates that his intention as (an individual) subject does not *constitute,* pure and simple, the phenomenon being described (the *experience* of an individual subject). Rather, this subjectivity, this experience, the organization of intentionality, as well as sense in general—insofar as it is a specific object of Du Bois’ inquiry—is itself situated in terms of systematic possibility. However, if this is so…in order for distinction by way of a social idea or formal concept of race to operate as an iterable distinction, as a system of repetitive marks, it can only do so in the making of subjects—*in* the making and not before. It is not given in the thing itself whatever it is.[187]

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[186] Ibid, 74.
[187] Ibid, 82.

In this selection, Chandler is explaining, through Du Bois, how the concept of race is always in the making through subjects. This means with each individual there is a possibility of performing one's identities through the material and psychical conditions that are provided the individual, e.g. a specific Black person living in New York City has certain options to experience him or herself. In this experience of oneself, the concept of Blackness is magnified and the subject is seen through the eyes of the concept, e.g. we can identify the person as indeed Black. However, the movement is also reciprocal and therefore subjectivation is dynamic, not simply empirical or ideal, this means the Blackness in question is being made in the different iterations of Black performance, and what is meant to be Black is not done and settled beforehand. For Chandler, Du Bois is interested in concrete social practices and objectivity that must go through the subject and history. The radical difference of the subject is between the systematic and the individual or: "The subject is situated in history and historicity; yet, the very possibility of historicity is situated in the structure that opens the possibility of subjective practice."[188] I am interested in conceptualizing this 'between' using the Black Home and Black Hospitality in these different events; they are close to the same and yet different iterations. The dynamism of the Black Home, along with experience of impossibility, will resonate in different tones, with the same pitch.

Let us start in Charleston, South Carolina with the terrorist attack by Dylann Roof at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church. The Emanuel AME church is a special place with a rich history for Blacks in America. Founded in 1816 it stands as one of the oldest Black churches in the South and was created as a place of refuge for worshipping Blacks. With the institution of chattel slavery still 47 years away from its federal abolition, it is safe to say that at the heart of the church's creation was a reaction to fervent, state sanctioned, antiblack racism and white supremacy. Nearly two hundred years later, the Church has remained a symbol of Black resilience and community, serving as a platform for demonstrations against the plight of Black Americans throughout slavery, the Civil Rights movement, and more recent manifestations of protest such as the Black Lives Matter movement.[189]

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[188] Ibid, 85.

Emanuel AME offers a specific history and spatiality—i.e. in form of a church—for the concept of the Black Home. As a conceptual device to describe Black agency, the Black Home relies on the intertwining of history and communal social action that carries through individual actions and, therefore, we see that the hospitable actions of those patrons the evening of June 17th belong not only to that specific group at that specific time, i.e. a collectivity found in the difference that are these patrons but also a history of a famous Black Church. How could we not configure the actions of hospitality that took place not simply as the hospitality of those people specifically but a hospitality that configures the spatiality of that specific church as a place for refuge, for protest, and for open doors? And as we see, its identity as a place of worship and hospitality extended beyond Blacks as was witnessed when Dylann Roof, a twenty one year old white man, was welcomed into the church during a mid-week Bible study session. Roof remained in the church with the other attending patrons, all Black, for an hour before he stood up, delivered the prelude that "I have to do it. You rape our women and you're taking over our country. And you have to go"[190] and then shot at the patrons while yelling racial epithets until he was out of ammunition. He killed nine people.

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[189] Ed Payne, "Charleston Church Shooting: Multiple Fatalities in South Carolina", *CNN,* June 2015.

To recognize some structure of hospitality as framing the events of that evening is intuitive and almost inevitable. Any hospitality worthy of its name, we recall from Derrida, entails that one remains completely and unconditionally open to welcoming the Other. With no centralized figure in this particular event, the language of host may mire the communal welcome that the patrons of the Emanuel AME church appeared to offer in the spirit of Derrida's formulation of hospitality that evening. Their initial gesture of invitation remains undeniable. They allowed the strange anonymous other, i.e. Roof, complete access to their small gathering. A risky gesture for any person but extremely risky for Blacks in America. We are well aware by now of the extreme vulnerability of Blacks, i.e. the threats of intrusion and violence to self, friend, and property, and also aware that Derrida himself recognizes and sees as constitutive the risk that ones' home may be destroyed in gestures of hospitality. Black experience, however, is punctuated by a constant fear of intrusion that is particular to a history and present riddled by terrorism and disenfranchisement. The riskiness of hospitality for Blacks resonates differently than it does for everyone else in America because of a vicious history that haunts the very halls of Emanuel AME. How can one reasonably expect the patrons to welcome Mr. Roof in to this Black Home? And yet they do.

However, according to Derrida's unconditional hospitality, acknowledgment of the guest in any form undermines an unrestricted openness. Therefore, in the moments when the patrons plead for their lives as Dylann Roof opens fire the patrons' ostensibly breach the normative expectation of white supremacy and antiblack racism of full acceptance and even submission. They do not accept Mr. Roof into their home for what he is, i.e. an antiblack racist, and indeed a mass murderer. How could they? In the context of a man going on a genocidal rampage, the Black patrons must temper their invitation to the guest. It would be truly unbelievable if any of the patrons encouraged Mr. Roof. For Blacks they must always show some prudence when inviting a guest despite the demands for unconditional openness but this should be expected from a people who find themselves in ethical predicaments that expose their extreme vulnerability as Blacks in America. They are obliged to welcome the antiblack racist and they will welcome him, and yet they cannot and should not. This is one iteration of the experience of the impossible of Black Hospitality, a damned if they do and damned if they do not. Seemingly without out any specific identifying information of these specific victims, Roof calls on the long history of an always already Black criminality to justify this massacre despite their welcoming him[191]—in a place of worship, from within the scope of the highest moral authority, nonetheless. There is no irony; their ethical generosity could only be read as moral hostility and disrespect in light of the spirituality of this place of worship.

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[190] Ralph Ellis, Greg Botelho and Ed Payne, "Charleston Church Shooter Hears Victim's Kin Say, 'I Forgive You'", *CNN*, June 2015.

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[191] The radical sense of this double bind can be pushed to an even further extreme if we consider Judith Butler's position that, from the perspective of white paranoia, Blacks are always already the violent transgressor. In an essay on the Rodney King trial butler describes the violent beating of King by the white officers as a response to the perception of King's blackness that entails he is always already going to attack. From this perspective, the Black host's vulnerability to the Other is exacerbated because he or she is always already seen as transgressing the norms of white normative society before any gesture what so ever is made. In other words, the Black host does not simply accept that his or her invitation will inevitably transgress the norms of hospitality, rather Blacks extend their invitation knowing that they are always already a threat to the normative structure. Blacks accept that the Other will approach with a pre-justified hostility before they can even conceptualize their duties as a host. c.f. Judith Butler, "Endangered/Endangering: Schematic Racism and White Paranoia".

When the patrons' plea for their life, it need not, and I would venture to say, should not be read as outright rejection of the original invitation to Mr. Roof. Instead, what we witness when Tywanza Sanders intervenes and attempts to reason with Mr. Roof and protect his grandmother is an extension of the very same invitation that was offered to him when the doors opened and he walked in.[192] This invitation—which began with the initial welcoming into the church, then became a plea for their lives, and even turned into an unprecedented extension of forgiveness by the relatives of the victims—exists in a larger context as an invitation for Roof to let go of the hostility imbedded in white supremacy and antiblack racism that saturates the ethicality of being Black in America. The impossible forgiveness[193] given by the survivors and relatives of the deceased invites America to shed this violent racism and to come into the proverbial home of Blackness, of Black people, of their history and future. Such invitations may, and often do not, reach the guest as invitations; again, they are hostile ruses. The pleas for Roof to not shoot may be understood as merely an instinctual reaction from these persons under extreme duress, or, for the antiblack racist, they may be understood as a conniving and inauthentic claim to innocence since they are guilty of "raping our [white] women and taking over our [white] country".

However, I argue these pleas are an expression of the ethical agency of the patrons by means of inviting Roof, as a purveyor of white supremacy, to reject white supremacy; to come in, inhabit, even take refuge in the dilapidated, yet resilient Black

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[192] Nick Corasaniti, Richard Perez-Pena, and Lizette Alvarez, "Church Massacre Suspect Held as Charleston Grieves", *New York Times*, June 2015.

[193] Forgiveness is another concept that Derrida explores and contends shares the same aporetic structure of hospitality. One can only forgive the unforgivable. His most famous reflections on forgiveness taking place within the context of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa. C.f. Jacque Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*.

Home. If you recall, in Derrida's account of unconditional hospitality to invite the guest, which may take the form of a greeting or even naming, acknowledges the guest and, therefore, transgresses, i.e. undermines and violates, the unconditional pretense of hospitality. They are always already criminal in this 'transgression' and their actions and pleas always already appear hostile despite a certain hospitality in this context. Following this same logic, I am claiming that these patrons' pleas for their lives and their relatives' offering of forgiveness should be interpreted as acts of transgression in the same vain. We already know that Black actions and performance are interpreted as transgression or criminality and, therefore, identifying even these pleas for their lives as acts of transgression is not farfetched. As counter-intuitive as it may sound, I want to envision Black criminality as essential to challenging the precepts of white supremacy by arguing the following: if in Derrida's formulation of unconditional hospitality ethical agency is grounded 'impossibly' through transgression then, in their inevitable and always already transgressive reactions to the guest in an antiblack white supremacist America, Blacks are expressing their own unique ethical agency through transgression as their 'impossible' duty as *the* ethical agents within this paradigm of white supremacy and antiblack racism. Ethics begins with Black transgression, it begins with a welcoming of other into the Black Home from the other within through the many im-possible ways this may manifest.

We must not also forget the necessity of self-interruption. While I am sure the interruption of the self and welcoming of the other of the self within host can take many forms, for the events that took place at Emanuelle AME I contend that Black communal life and a Black history riddled with white terror and Black resilience are the different dimensions in which the self is interrupted by the self as other. The patrons of Emanuele

AME and their relatives all exist as themselves only insofar they are inhabited and haunted by the history and present manifestations of a Black community. The patron's pleas reverberate in that church and their forgiveness calls forth a history of the Black community welcoming the other in the face of terror and it is in this respect that they interrupt themselves as other. In welcoming Roof, Blacks reject acquiescing to the demands of white supremacy and simultaneously invite the Other of white supremacy into the 'Black Home' that is constituted through the recognition and irruption of a paraontological Black sociality skirting between the framework and the frame of minds of the church.

Now, for the devastating video of Eric Garner from July 17th, 2014. There are two popular ways the video may be read. One way would suggest that Garner is the aggressor and failing to cooperate. He is a threat to these police officers, the community, and justice writ large. In this case, the police officers respond with appropriate force and his death—perhaps an unfortunate accident, perhaps for the greater good—is in the end justified. Another way to read the video frames Mr. Garner as another Black man receiving another brutal attack at the hands of American police officers who find his Blackness, the fact that he appears to be a Black man, alone threatening. In this counter case, the police officers are either individually racist or the extended brute force of a racist society that systematically brutalizes its Black population in order to maintain an unjust hierarchy enforced through pain, death, and suffering. Generally, people who recognize that racism continues to be a pervasive problem in America, despite the many legal, political, and moral changes that have transpired in the past 150 years, adopt a version of the second view with the most important components being the relatively passive role of Mr. Garner and the active role of the police officers. From this perspective, the police are the sole or ultimate transgressors and Garner is the victim.

I would like to propose another option that is not quite the first or second framings but not necessarily a third. What if Mr. Garner is not simply the passive recipient of an extra-juridical law, a disposal guest in the holy house of white supremacy and antiblack racism that is America. Within the framework of Black Hospitality, Garner would be the host who responds to the other, the police, the guest who are ‘welcomed’, again in this ironic way. The Black Home? Not a church, or any ‘enclosed’ place but a street corner. In this instance, it is on Bay Street, Thompson Park, on Staten Island in New York City.[194] As we know, Mr. Garner was known for selling loose cigarettes and this was most likely the business the officers were attending to. However, there are many ‘Bay Streets’ in America where Black men participate in different economies of exchange. These Black markets, perhaps most vividly described and reported by rap artists, fuel an illegal market of drugs, prostitution, etcetera. The products/solutions for a Black community that has been displaced and misplaced by the systematic oppressive force of white supremacy. We need not recite the devastated effects of redlining, segregation, redistributed material resources, educational deprivation, police surveillance, and all the more that have created the Black ghetto and the street corners that serve as home base. However, we should not fail to mention these Black Homes, in addition to illicit commerce and the violence that may follow it, are also a space of communal celebration, education, and growth; again, spreading through time and space. And again we find a space to reflect and reconsider a form of aporetic agency that evokes the ethics of Black Hospitality.

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[194] Al Baker, J. David Goodman, and Benjamin Mueller, “Beyond the Chokehold: The Path to Eric Garner’s Death”, *New York Times*, June 2015.

Now, the street corner is a space where we once again can recognize the excessive extra-ordinary vulnerability of Blacks. We ‘know’ well that it is a place where violent looms and if your access to this spatiality happens to be news, you will recognize it as a space where dueling gang members participate in an endless cycle of death for territory, money, or glory. In the previous passage and previous chapters I provide ample examples of how this violence of neighbors already has its foundation in an oppressive system that makes sources scarce and violent solutions advantageous. However, aside from ‘Black on Black violence’ we also know that these corners are also surveilled by the prevailing white supremacist apparatus of Black violence: namely the police. Garner was aware of this presence and as it noted in the *New York Times* article “Beyond the Chokehold: The Path to Eric Garner’s Death” by Al Baker, J. David Goodman, and Benjamin Mueller, he had even been left off by some police officers earlier that same July month.[195] But the police would return and we would return and we would see how vulnerable his Black body always already would be

On that July afternoon, watching Garner, as the Black Host in his Black Home, it is difficult to imagine this interaction as an invitation of the police officers into his proverbial home. In fact, he is irate, wondering why he is being bothered, pleading his innocence; while the camera person—another occupant of the Black Home—corroborates. The always already criminal, Garner responds to the demands of an unconditional hospitality with an invitation to those officers, and soon all of America, of the impossibility this situation. He explains, “Every time you see me you want to mess with me. I am tired of this! This stops today!...Please, just leave me alone."[196] His untempered pleas ask us all to come into his home, please, and see its devastation, see that we are expected to feed ourselves and our children with no resources and if we make our own means we are greeted with hostility—a hostility, which, at least at the beginning of this video, is cool, calm, and collected. I hear him say in these pleas to his always already rowdy guests, "Hello. This invitation into my world, my reality, is all I have to offer but come in, please".

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[195] Ibid.

In this alternative interpretation of Black Hospitality, Mr. Garner offers an invitation to the other that we know can only be read or seen as a transgression of the threshold, a hostile response to his unwanted and unsolicited guests. This desire for empathy is a blatant transgression of white supremacist norms. In white supremacist/antiblack America there is always a risk that the guest which the Black person welcomes into their home will strive to destroy it—along with the host—and that is precisely what took place in the case of Mr. Garner. The police took his invitation as a threat, his hospitality as hostility and in doing so his status as active or passive agent and the understanding of himself as guest and host become vividly ambiguous. As he lay completely subdued by five police officers, and yet, unbelievably, still vulnerable, Mr. Garner made his last pleas. From within the framework of hospitality, "I can't breathe!" was a final gesture of welcoming that still echoes on the deaf ears of the guest that refused to listen; but also, I would venture to propose, that "I can't breathe!" was a transgressive act of self-definition and cultivation. 'I can't breath' echoed along every street corner, through the hallowed halls of the Black Home, and on the t-shirts of Americans. We must appeal to Michelle Wright's Black feminine/maternal to recognize in these please the dialogic constitution of Black identity which take place in this case through a sort of call and response of the Black community, reifying the horrors and celebration of Black life in the iterability of Garner's pleas. The masculine figure of dialectical sublation and conquering of the other is replaced with communal repetition that leads to the cultivation of a Black self, a Black Home that can be recognized in protest, as well as on this screen. In these gestures we recognize I can't breathe is again the impossible experience of the double bind of the always already criminal, offering a generosity in the face of these impossible stakes. For the police, as guests, to recognize the vulnerability, his vulnerability. "I can't breathe" is also, you do not have to kill me. In fact, it was an invitation to all of America, an ethic of unbelievable hospitality, that continues to resonate as videos continue to surface of Black people losing their life.

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[196] Eric Garner, "Eric Garner Video", https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JpGxagKOkv8

The video related to the death of Sandra Bland is much different than Garner's, perhaps most notably because it does not show the prospects of her death. However, before broaching the topic of her death, lets consider the situation. Sandra Bland was from the Chicago area of Illinois, although she went to college in Texas at Prairie View A&M University, a school founded by ex-slaves. Throughout her early twenties Bland would live intermittently between Texas and Illinois, struggling to find stable employment after graduation, she also, during this time, found herself with quite a few run-ins with the law while driving.[197] 'Driving while Black' is a common adage that plays on the legal offense of Driving while Intoxicated. The former, of course, refers to the disproportionate amount of attention, traffic stops, searches and arrests that Blacks are subject to as drivers. In *The Nation* article cited above by Debbie Nathan on Ms. Bland we learn that in an area of Illinois where Bland was once ticketed that "According to state data, Black drivers in towns like Naperville, Lisle, and Villa Park are up to four and a half times more likely to be stopped for traffic violations than white drivers, and up to four times more likely to be searched."[198] Bland's is only one of many stories as of recently that can account for Black death and harassment as a result of interactions with police officers often explicitly through extra-legal procedures. Insomuch as that is the case, particularly as the car becomes a space where Black extra-ordinary vulnerability is highlighted and the exclusion from the political as well, we can consider the car another spatiality of the Black Home. The car can often be a place of celebration and friendship, especially as a space to get away from problems with family to listening to music with friends, and yet as we see it is also a space that opens Blacks to violence.

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[197] Debbie Nathan, "What Happened to Sandra Bland?", *The Nation*, April 2016

On July 10th, after returning from signing papers for a new job, Sandra Bland was pulled over by Texas state trooper Brian Encinia. We hear from the officer's dash cam that she was pulled over for failing to signal, Bland sounds annoyed as she explains her side of the story, namely that she was being approached by an accelerating police vehicle, without lights, so she tried to move out of the way. The dynamic of host and guest is pretty straight forward considering the framework we have erected thus far for Black Hospitality. The demands for unconditional access from the police to Black citizenship was highlighted above and Bland, while cooperating by all other means, showed annoyance and this, of course, was a major violation of the exchange. Of course, from Bland's perspectives we know this is not just any interaction but another time where she was being pulled over, just as many other Black people in cars have been as well. She was just returning from a job interview in the town of her alma mater, finally catching a break, after years of tough breaks, heartbreak, and depression.[199] The Black Home she sat in that July was dark and tattered, she did her best to welcome her guest but we see the final provocation was actually by the guest, when the officer asks Bland, in her own car, to put out her cigarette. This hospitable gesture by Bland—mimicing an iteration of \ Sukie's exposure on the slave block addressed above—insomuch as her smoking was most likely an attempt to calm her nerves after being audibly annoyed, again, as we have seen time and time again, was flipped and seen as transgression, as an egregious violation of the power of the white supremacist state. From there we see the tone change, simply for refusing to extinguish her cigarette, Encinia demands that she get out of the car and as she continues to refuse we see video of Encinia physically assault her until she walks out of the car on her own volition.[200]

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[198] Ibid.

From there the tragedy continues as Bland is jailed by herself at a county jail, where while at first filling out paperwork to the contrary, she confides in a guard, explaining she is very depressed and had attempted suicide. The proper procedures were ignored for getting Bland assistance from a medical health professional, and when Derrida says there is always the threat that the guest can come and destroy the place, well the treatment of Bland in these circumstances is nothing short of destruction. Four days after her initial encounter with Encinia she was found hanging from a bathroom partition. We learned above that there is no hospitality without the self being interrupted by the other within, by recognizing the other within so that one can recognize the other without. In this case, Bland's 'self-interruption' was by the guest or other within that could no longer bare the other without. Perhaps, in taking her life, the most radical form of transgression, it is indeed impossible and perhaps even offensive to read this a gesture of welcoming. Nevertheless, undoubtedly Bland gave insight into the darkness of and difficulty of enacting agency from the positionality of the Black Home. And by a hanging, no less, an image that resides deep into the history of Blacks in American. The possible does indeed proceed from the impossible and Bland undoubtedly galvanized a response from the Black community from an impossible tragedy where her ultimate transgression was to take her life in state custody and expose the ravages that white supremacy had exacted in the Black Home because of her refused hospitality. Sometimes, resilience and cultivation at the limit only expose more wounds, only naively could someone believe Sandra Bland's were self-inflicted.

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[199] Ibid.

[200] https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/video/2015/jul/22/dash-cam-sandra-bland-arrest-video

V. Conclusion

In this chapter we introduced the concept of Black Hospitality and in its wake an account of the impossible ethical demands placed on Blacks in the paradigm of white supremacy. Nahum Chandler, whose work hardly, if at all, mentions the word ethics served as our guide, a kindred spirit, in thinking through the complex and aporetic experiences adopted from Derrida's conception of hospitality. However, just as I insist upon with the concept of the Black Home, this was ultimately the effort of a collective to think through the different movements and the logics of a radical response ethics grounded in a radical conception of Blackness and white supremacy.

Ultimately, the conclusion is that despite an extra-ordinary vulnerability and an impossible criminality. Black agency exists and persists, perhaps most noticeably in the aporetic expectations of their ethical positionality. Denied from the political proper, Blacks articulate themselves through a historical and communal attunement to the horror of their existence. While the vignettes on Charleston, Eric, and Sandra were tragic—and occurring so close in time—the responses from the community and the reality of Black celebration and social life prevail. Through music, dance, protest, and literature, Blacks do prevail.

Chapter Four: *Beloved*

We are the subjects of our own narrative, witnesses to and participants in our own experience, and in no way coincidentally, in the experience of those with whom we have come in contact. We are not, in fact, 'other.'[201]

– Toni Morrison "Unspeakable Things Unspoken"

If I hadn't killed her she would have died and that is something I could not bear.[202]

–Toni Morrison *Beloved*

I. Introduction

Beloved, one of the greatest novels of the twentieth^th century will be the subject of this chapter. The recipient of an innumerable number of accolades and critical responses, it may seem trivial to add another voice to the overabundance of commentary, and yet it still offers overwhelming generosity. With that said, I would like to read *Beloved* through the constitutive concepts and ethical framework of Black Hospitality developed thus far.

First and foremost, and of significant importance, we should acknowledge that *Beloved* is a work of fiction and the process of fiction writing in the African-American literary tradition is often a reckoning with the past of slavery, whether explicitly or implicitly. *Beloved* takes this task explicitly insomuch as its strongest source of inspiration is the true story of Margaret Garner. Garner was a slave that escaped with her four children from Kentucky in 1856 and made it as far as Cincinnati where her owner, Archibald K. Gaines, and police officers caught up to them in a house of a free Black man named Kite. Cornered, Garner grabbed a butcher knife and killed her youngest daughter and attempted to kill the rest of her children and herself rather than return to slavery.[203]

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[201] Toni Morrison, "Unspeakable things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature", 133

[202] Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, 200.

It is important to keep in mind that when Morrison takes up Garner's story in particular and the reality of slavery and reconstruction in general she is working with the historical archive of slavery that was purposefully obscured and overlooked. *Beloved*, as an inspired fiction, thus uses literary techniques that attend to the erasure and real-life horror of the persons of slavery that often went unaccounted or forgotten, e.g. she employs the ambiguities of multivalent narration, the intricacy of temporality, and even the material manifestation of the spiritual.[204] Morrison herself explains she is attempting to unveil the events too horrible to account for in the popular slave narratives, events that her contemporaries, white or Black, do not wish to remember, however, without describing these horrors, particularly the infanticide, in an obscene or pornographic way.[205]

Therefore, despite being a work of fiction, *Beloved* takes to task American history head on, carefully exposing its foundations as fundamentally a history rooted in slavery and its aftermath; in this context, it falls under the genre of the neo-slave narrative.[206] The story gives an account of the personal life of slaves and their 'post-emancipation' status in a way the exposes the underbelly of America and American historiography that attempted to leave/render these lives and their reverberations silent. Despite its difficulty and a clear resistance by American academics, artists, and general population alike, Morrison not believes there is a task of reviving the past for the present[207] but also through certain allusions reveals continuities from past conditions to contemporary ones.[208]

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[203] C.f. "Margaret Garner and Seven Others"-Samuel J. May from *Toni Morrison's Beloved: A Casebook*

[204] "Beloved presents a new way of conceiving of history, one that refuses master versions of history…Beloved does not assert a 'definitive' version of the Margaret Garner case, the historical event upon which the novel is based but rather offers several contradictory of Garner's (h)istory, which exists simultaneously, yet complimentary". Maggie Sale, "Call and Response as Critical Method: African American Oral Traditions and Beloved", from *Critical Essays on Toni Morrison's Beloved*, 178.

[205] Nellie, Y McKay, "Toni Morrison, "Site of Memory." from *Toni Morrison's Beloved: A Casebook*, 10.

[206] It is generally accepted that Morrison belongs to the modernist tradition and therefore garners important considerations of the function of writing, the writer, and language that inform the text. I cannot ignore these elements completely, however, I will be more concerned with how this story solicits the questions and experiences described in the previous chapters. For a great exploration of Morrison's concerns with writing as a sort of ethics throughout the writer's entire collective works see Yvette Christiansë's, *Toni Morrison: An Ethical Poetics*.

In *Beloved,* Morrison uses literary techniques that vivify the task of this project writ large, namely to account for the ethical experience of Blacks in a white supremacist antiblack America. It is precisely this vivacity that made this chapter crucial to rounding off the argument for understanding Black ethical life as Black Hospitality. *Beloved* tells the story of Sethe and her family as it came together at Sweet Home in Kentucky, a plantation owned first by the 'benign' Mr. Garner and then the cold calculated schoolteacher, and also how it fell apart at 124 Bluestone Road on the outskirts of Cincinnati, Ohio. The story begins in 1873, 8 years after the end of the civil war, and the majority of the plot takes place at 124 Bluestone Road a house originally owned by Sethe's mother-in-law Baby Suggs who has had her freedom bought by Sethe's husband and her son Halle. Sethe arrived at 124 Bluestone 18 years prior to 1873 with her daughter Denver only to meet her other daughter Beloved and her two sons Buglar and Howard, all of whom were runaways from Sweet Home. The incident that drives thet plot is the infanticide of Beloved only 28 days into Sethe's arrival, who chooses to take her child's life rather than have her return to slavery. The incident isolates the occupants of

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[207] Ashrad H. A. Rushday, "Daughters Signifyin(g) History: The Example of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" from *Toni Morrison's Beloved: A Casebook*, 39.

[208] Dennis Child challenges the neo slave narrative proposal, as the genre where contemporary writers reimagine slavery and the period of reconstruction, and he argues the *Beloved* is a 'narrative of neo-slavery' insomuch as when it references the chain gang, the slave ship, and other carceral techniques during slavery, it highlights the direct genealogy of slavery to the modern carceral system. C.f. Dennis Child, ""You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet": *Beloved*, the American Chain Gang, and the Middle Passage Remix".

124 and the house becomes particularly hostile when Beloved haunts the house first as body-less apparition and then as a young woman. Alongside this ghost story is the arrival of Paul D, who was Halle's brother and also a slave at Sweet Home along with Sethe. We learn of his trial and tribulations following his attempted escapes from captivity and he comes to try and comfort Sethe, only to be cast out by Beloved like all the other men of 124. For this Chapter I will explore the topics of the previous three chapters and show how Morrison in *Beloved* is able to bring life to these topics in a way that is simply not available with other examples. I, therefore, will explore vulnerability, the idea of the Black self through the trope of the Black Home, and Black Hospitality as I see them take shape in Morrison's gripping novel.

II. Vulnerability

There are innumerable themes to trace in Morrison's *Beloved*; however, I would venture to argue the forever returning reality of the extra-ordinary vulnerability of the Black body impresses itself upon the reader with the greatest intensity. Within the first three pages, Morrison, subtly and yet unmistakably, describes the protagonist Sethe exchanging ten minutes of sex, as if it was nothing, for an engraving of a forever unfinished epitaph: 'Beloved'.[209] I need not rehearse the arguments from above in full but only remind the reader that the captive Black body, regulated by gratuitous violence, appears only as an object of exploitation under the machinations of white supremacy and antiblack racism. In this case we may presume this assault results from a dearth of economic resources but that is not definitive, it may very well be the only compensation the engraver was willing to except. In any case the vulnerability of Black bodies, in this case of a free slave, punches the breath out the reader and there is very little opportunity as the story unravels to gain it back.

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[209] Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, 5.

The objectification and violation of the Black body through sexual exploitation and assault during the reign of white supremacy is only one manifestation of vulnerability but one that returns insistently throughout the novel. Denver articulates this extra-ordinary vulnerability explicitly, finally recognizing the feelings of her mother when she realizes, “that anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill, or maim you but dirty you.”[210] If we follow Sethe and her maternal lineage we read how sexual assault is continuously employed to reify her objectification and dehumanize her Black body. Remaining in the first chapter, Sethe recalls another sexual assault to Paul D, who was a former slave at the planation which Sethe escaped, Sweet Home, and is the brother of Sethe’s now disappeared husband Halle. As Sethe and Paul D refamiliarize themselves with each other, Sethe recalls an incident before she escaped to join her already departed children where the sons of schoolteacher—the second man in charge of the Sweet Home plantation, who exhibited a particular calculated and instrumental ruthlessness—held Sethe down and ‘stole her milk’ from her breasts.[211] Sethe relays the powerful effects of this exploitation when she reiterates the trauma of this event over against the physical beating she received that Paul D cannot get out of mind. She recalls the horror to which her husband Halle endured who had to watch with no recourse to retaliate and also the silence of Mrs. Garner, the wife of the former head of Sweet Home who she attempted to confide in. The Garners are portrayed as particularly thoughtful masters but Mrs. Garner’s silence reiterates the reality of slavery, where even a seemingly benign master cannot alleviate the reality of the Black body.

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[210] Ibid, 251.
[211] Ibid, 16.

Following the maternal line, we also learn that Sethe’s mother, whom she has very sparse and vague recollection of, was also a victim of rape. Speaking to Beloved and Denver, she recalls seeing her in the fields, learning of the marking on her chest, and that she was hung—perhaps for trying to flee; however, the knowledge of her mother’s rape comes from the wet nurse Nan. “[Sethe’s] mother and Nan were together from the sea”, writes Morriso, “Both were taken up many times by the crew. ‘She threw them all away but you’.”[212] In addition to revealing to the reader a familial lineage to infanticide that narratively and temporally preceded Sethe’s own actions, we once again are reminded of the extra-ordinary vulnerability of the Black body, this time preceding even the arrival upon the main land. We must resist the narrative that reduces the objectification of the Black body to the physical toil of the plantation. Upon capture, the violence of the white supremacist ideology takes place through the libidinal as much as the economic to render the Black body an object and politically dead.

To be sure, while sexual exploitation, i.e. rape, is often associated with the assault committed by men—and for good reason—it is not lost on Morrison to explore the extent to which gender does not unilaterally determine the grammar of white supremacist violence.[213] Paul D recalls his time in Alfred, Georgia along a prison chain gang of Blacks who were forced to their knees in the morning to perform oral sex on the prison guards per demand. Some slaves chose to lose their life and Paul D recalls vomiting his first day and receiving a blow from the butt of a rifle in response. The novel form allows Morrison to address the dynamism in which white supremacy renders the Black body vulnerable in rhetorically powerful and concise terms. This dynamism of intense objectification speaks directly to the extra-ordinary vulnerability I have been arguing for. The 'extra-ordinary' vulnerability was the effect I deduced from Jared Sexton's powerful articulation of white supremacy as a general economy, where the machinations of white violence and ideological supremacy extended beyond the traditional parameters of vulnerability from an infinite source of racial animosity and gratuitous violence against the body. Consequently, the modes of exposure challenge the imagination of exploitation, where there is no logical or reasonable ends or parameters that would limit the means to which and the time in which white supremacy may express itself in the daily lives of Black people.

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[212] Ibid, 62.

[213] One may recall Hortense Spillers argument that in in fact the captured Black body is ungendered, that there is no gender in the proverbial hull of the ship. C.f. “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book”.

We can take the dynamism of sexual exploitation along the line of gender that the scene of the gang chain represents and turn the axis to consider the historical continuities that also show Morrison's attentiveness to the machinations of white supremacy. Consider Dennis Childs' observations in his article, “"You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet": Beloved, the American Chain Gang, and the Middle Passage Remix”. Using the term 'living death', Childs—as we saw Sexton and Wilderson argue above—connects the practices of exploitation that render the Black body vulnerable beyond biological expiration and consequently can speak of continuities from the ante to post-bellum periods. He writes, “The inclusion of the category of living death within the techniques of state and corporate killing also allows us to attend to the ways in which today's modern version of mass human warehousing—that is, the penitentiary—represents an extension of rather than an antithesis to Middle Passage genocide."[214] The extension of these techniques of exploitation and violence to the living Black body again, call attention to the experience of this extra-ordinary vulnerability that is rendered mundane and with no end in the everyday life of Blacks.[215] Childs, in convincing manner, reads Morrison as employing a radical temporality that not only addresses the manner in which emancipation within the text does not exclude the formal exploitation of Black bodies but also how she alludes to later and contemporary machinations of exploitation specifically in terms of imprisonment. He explains:

> To fully understand what I mean by the "future orientation" of *Beloved* and the role of imprisonment in producing the forward-haunting aspects of the novel, we must first identify what can be thought of as Morrison's use of strategic anachronism in the chain gang scene. With this term, I am referring to her intentional placement of a punitive regime normally associated with the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century into the context of the late antebellum period. The mechanism that the Alfred, Georgia, prison camp authorities use to entomb Paul D and his fellow captive fugitives, the "box" that "resembles a cage," has a real postbellum historical referent: the portable chain gang "cage," or "moving prison," many of which were built in Georgia and distributed throughout the southern states.[216]

With this observation made by Childs, we see how the chain-gang scene not only undoes the presumptions about sexual exploitation and gender along a horizontal axis but also how she alludes to a temporal axis that allows for the rendering of the Black body as extra-ordinarily vulnerable; where time only exposes the illogical eternal return of white supremacy.

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[214] Dennis Childs, “"You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet": Beloved, the American Chain Gang, and the Middle Passage Remix”, 277.

[215] Childs ties this interpretation of living death explicitly to Morrison's text when she writes of the infanticide and determines she had not killed Beloved then she would of died. c.f. Ibid, 277.

[216] Ibid, 285.

Of course, these examples are only a small snippet of the ways in which Blacks are rendered always already vulnerable. Whether it be the scene where we learn of Sixo's burning[217]—who yells out 'seven-o!' as he dies, which can be read as another allusion to the futurity of racial violence or perhaps Black Celebration—or schoolteacher's demand of his sons to divide Sethe's characteristics along the lines of human and beast,[218] or also, in reference to the dynamism of white supremacy across racial identities, such as Paul D's attribution to Sethe of bestiality, contending she has two feet not four.[219] The pervasiveness of white supremacy that permeates not only the vicious white but the benign slave owner and even Sethe's Black lover, the Black community on the outskirts of Cincinnati who do not warn Sethe about the arrival of the slave catchers[220], or even Sethe's own infanticide: this is extra-ordinary vulnerability. Consistently and persistently the vulnerability of Black bodies is on exposition in *Beloved* and Morrison uses the novel form to expose fluid dynamism of this vulnerability through space, time, and gender in a dramatic and serious manner.

III. The Black Home…124 Bluestone Road

In Chapter Two, I dismissed the traditional liberal western conception of the subject and in its place I proposed a Black self that ruminated in the depths of the afro-pessimist tradition but then ultimately used Fred Moten to introduce a sense of Blackness as fugitive and social along with Michelle Wright for a self that is grounded in community, history, and a feminine dialogical relation. The narrative and character construction proposed in *Beloved* supports this account thoroughly. Through the novel form Morrison uses literary devices and even introduces supernatural phenomena to emphasize the extent to which the self is extended beyond traditional parameters and attends to this conception of Blackness. The trope of the home for the self is nothing new; however, the Black Home takes into account the dark history, present, and future of displacement, violence, and the consequent reliance on community and the other within that characterizes the Black self.[221] Just as with vulnerability, there are innumerable threads to follow to map the contours of the Black self through the Black Home, particularly since the very first words of the novel refer to the Black Home.

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[217] Morrison, *Beloved*, 226.
[218] Ibid, 193.
[219] Ibid, 164.
[220] Ibid, 157.

a. The House

Beloved infamously begins with the sentence, "124 was spiteful."[222] This house certainly was; it belonged to a white man named Mr. Bodwin but was rented by Baby Suggs who was bought her freedom by her son Halle some years previous. 124 Bluestone Road was located on the outer edges of Cincinnati, Ohio and we are brought to it ten years after the proclamation emancipation, eight years after the end of the civil war, eighteen years after Sethe's arrival and infanticide. When discussing the trope of the Black Home in the second chapter, location was important insomuch as Black identity is wrapped literally and metaphorically along the Mason-Dixon line. The desire for Black emancipation is a fugitive traveling northward, away from a certain Black Home on the plantation to a whole other type of devastation and haunting in the Black Homes that would be created in the North. The South will always overdetermine the Black sense of self as the central location for and the defense of slavery, even though we are not naïve to ignore the reality of different machinations of white supremacy that take place across America during any time period. The location of 124 Bluestone in the North but on the edge of the city, thus attends to the liminal and vulnerability of the escaped and freed slaves that occupied that space. Their sense of self and their actions can be seen in relation to this location. The characters and the location are free in name, perhaps but still subject to the devastations of slavery that was propagated only one state away.

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[221] Cynthia Willett shares a similar contention about the figure of the home in Morrison's work and articulates it as such: "The term 'home' names better than love or compassion the sense of connection that is for Morrison both spiritual and selfish and that compels the individual to encounter sources of meaning outside the self that also lie within". C.f. Cynthia Willett, *Irony in the Age of Empire*: *Comic Perspectives on Democracy and Freedom.*

[222] Morrison, *Beloved*, 3. Morrison gives an account of why she chooses to begin the text with numbers. C.f. Morrison, "Speakable Things Unspoken", 160.

This highlights another manifestation of the paraontological status of Blackness as fugitive and social, in that there is an impossible reconciliation of the Black Slave and the Freed Slave. We will see the impossibility that arises out of this, particularly in Sethe's act of infanticide that takes place in the woodshed, which calls attention to this liminal spatiality, her action is on the one hand that of a person free to choose to prevent her full subjugation, exploitation, and, on the other hand, the unfreedom of slavery for herself and her children insomuch as the only free choice she can make is to end life and freedom altogether. In this sense, Sethe's ethical act takes place at a threshold; informally free her actions take place at the untraceable limit of the free world and the enslaved. 124 is the space for this action, and in that sense, as Yvette Chistiansë says, "the narrative emanates less from a character than from a place, a house saturated with spite."[223]

Sethe's decision at the threshold also speaks to a persistent doubling that takes place in the narrative, a doubling that can be located in the reality of the houses that figure prominently. Sethe's decision at the threshold also refers to the two intertwining sides that are in tension at 124: Black freedom, love, community and Black captivity, hostility, violence. Michael Hogan states this quite succinctly when he describes 124 as, "a site riddled by paradox: both white house and Black house, safe house and slaughter house."[224]. This kind of paradoxical doubling speaks specifically to the Blackening of the home, where the specific conditions of vulnerability and subjection darken the American home and exhibit the way the Black self and agency develop out of and from the hostile and 'unhomely'. This hostility cannot be forgotten even in the North, citing Hogan again, he states, "124 is dangerous because it promises what it cannot provide: refuge for its inhabitants. As a free-standing American house, it promises protection; as home to African-American slaves, the disenfranchised and dehumanized, it cannot possibly deliver."[225] Vulnerability permeates the house, which is to say the home and the occupants of 124 precisely because it is a house of Blacks. Time and time again throughout the story we see how the Black Home, while a place of possibility, is never safe for the occupants. Nancy Jesser hits this nail on the head when she exclaims, "As long as white people set the limits, African American attempts to transform their houses, their communities, and their minds into safe and open spaces remain subject to a re-assertion of the narrative of slavery."[226] Also, we cannot forget that these darkened foundations cannot be avoided by choice of location—north or south—no matter how much this may lead Morrison to the useful tropes of limits and doublings. In the words of

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[223] Yvette Chistiansë, *Toni Morrison: An Ethical Poetics*, 3.

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[224] Michael Hogan, "Built on the Ashes: The Fall of the House of Sutpen and the Rise of the House of Sethe" from *Critical Insights: Toni Morrison*, 129.
[225] Ibid, 130.
[226] Nancy Jesser, "Violence, Home and Community", from *Bloom's Guides: Toni Morrison's Beloved*, 84.

Baby Suggs, “[N]ot a house in the country ain’t packed to its rafters with some dead Negro’s grief.”[227]

This includes not only 124 Bluestone but its double Sweet Home, the plantation where Sethe meets her husband Halle, and where Baby Suggs lives with Halle and the rest of her sons until her freedom is bought. The irony of a plantation named Sweet Home is not lost on the reader or the occupants, especially inasmuch as Paul D and Baby Suggs, for instance, while acknowledging that Mr. Gardner, their original owner, treats them *relatively* well, that in the end they were slaves.[228] Paul D infamously recalls early on in the novel that Garner proudly exclaimed to other farmers that his niggers were men as opposed to boys and Paul D seemed to take that to heart, and yet they were not free men and were still subject to working the farm like any other slave.[229] Even Baby Suggs, who recites fond memories of the improved treatment of her sons and her ability to become free, realizes nevertheless, “no matter, for the sadness was at her center, the desolated center where the self that was no self, made its home.”[230] ‘The self that is no self’ results from those conditions of slavery that refuse her a sense of self, particularly the effects of her being separated from her children that she recites directly after the above quotation. The non-self that is Baby Suggs can only reside in the Blackened Home.[231]

b. Temporality

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[227] Morrison, *Beloved,* 5.

[228] Paul D says so explicitly when reminiscing with Sethe of their past, “It wasn’t sweet and it sure wasn’t’ home”. Ibid, 14.

[229] Ibid, 11.

[230] Ibid, 140.

[231] I do not want the violent history of slavery to completely over determine the Black Home and as we will see in the section on community below there is the possibility for a space of communion. I therefore agree with Nancy Jesser who recognizes both sides of the coin, she explains, “The story itself…embodies a system and process by which houses, which are born out of violence and (repeated) trauma, which preserve memory and history, can be transformed into homes where violence need not be the only source of connection…The home is a place where horror becomes embodied, and where sustaining humans connections can be found”. Nancy Jesser, “Violence Home and Community”, from *Bloom’s Guides: Toni Morrison’s Beloved*, 76.

In addition to location and spatiality, Morrison articulates the reality of the Black self as the Black Home through her keen attention to temporality, most notably, the manner in which the past saturates the present and the future. As the story of Sethe, Paul D, and the other occupants of 124 and Sweet Home unravel, Morrison continually finds ways to emphasize the way the slavery haunts them, i.e. their identity, their choices, and their sense of self. Within the first few pages, Morrison introduces one of the most memorable signifiers of slavery in the novel: the scars on Sethe's back.

Sethe introduces her scarred back to Paul D in the first chapter metaphorically as a chokecherry tree, which she explains was named by Amy Denver—who we later learned helped her escape into freedom while pregnant with Denver. Paul D is confused by the reference at first but eventually it becomes clear she is referencing her scarred back that expresses not only the physical toil that she endured for her freedom and carries along with her to the present but also points to the future in its naming. The name, while appealing to a very real referent [*Prunus virginiana*], also holds within it the color of blood and a shrewd reference to the choking to death that takes place in lynching, a terrorizing practice used during slavery (Sethe tells us her mother was lynched and Paul A is lynched) but also an important and significant reference to the racial violence and terror of reconstruction, Jim Crow, and even today. Sethe's agency and sense of self; therefore, cannot be reduced to her present status as a 'freed' slave, instead she carries on her back a haunting reality of the violence she endured, she is threatened to endure, and that threatens her future through her immediate children, and kin to come. In Sethe's body, in her physical self, the long trajectory of white supremacy and antiblack racism exists and affects her reality. She will not leave or run from 124 anymore she exclaims to

Paul D, just as she cannot leave behind or run from her scar.[232] She will make a home of what she has and let history and white supremacy come as it always does. The scar represents the limitations of her choices but also an acknowledgment of where the potentialities of her decisions may come from, i.e. from the depths of displacement, terror, and violence. That tree represents the infinite machinations of white supremacy that continue to bloom year after year, following Blacks wherever, whenever. Sethe's scar and its inventive naming represents only one of various techniques that Morrison uses to highlight the temporal components of self and capacity or agency through the metaphor of the Black Home. Time passes through the bodies of its occupants some of whom are alive others of whom are dead.

Beloved, the namesake of the book and the apparitional figure, does the most significant work and is the most tangible literary figure used by Morrison to emphasize how history, personal and impersonal, come to effect the construction of self and possibilities of agency especially through the trope of the Black Home. The victim of infanticide, Beloved is Sethe's third child and slain daughter, she is the ghost that haunts 124 Bluestone Road—that instigates the departure of Sethe's sons and is banished once, by Paul D—and she is the complex young woman that comes to occupy and consume 124, until she is made to disappear, once again.[233] Beloved's multiple forms of presence in 124 comes to determine Sethe's sense of self and capacity set against the impossible decisions she has faced as a mother, a slave, and a freed Black woman.

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[232] Ibid,15.

[233] In this respect I disagree with Elizabeth B. House, who does not believe Beloved is this multivalent existence but rather is a young woman who had escaped slavery traumatized and stumbled upon 124. C.f. Elizabeth B. House, "Toni Morrison's Ghost: The Beloved Who is Not Beloved" from *Critical Essays on Toni Morrison's Beloved*.

We first learn of Beloved on the first page of the novel as she, in the form of a ghost, scares away Sethe's boys, Howard and Buglar. While initially nameless, we soon learn her name as it is carved into a gravestone, which I address above. Sethe is not completely straightforward with Paul D about the cause of Beloved's death, as he arrives at 124 and is able to free the house from the apparition. However, we learn soon enough she is the third child of Sethe, killed in an effort to be saved from the horrors of slavery by her mother. It is clear this decision made by her mother does not rest easy for the dead child and she stays at 124 in apparition form as a constant reminder to her mother, her sister, and to the reader of how the horrors of slavery and the impossible decisions it demands weigh heavily and do not simply disappear—especially insomuch she was given the name and the recipient of an action inspired by the meaning of her name: Beloved.

The extent to which the non-physical form of Beloved, and the many 'rememories' she begets, determine the actions of the characters does not go missed by the reader.[234] Beloved's destructive haunting fits in the house and the rememory of Beloved's death, which is a form of haunting itself, has left the remaining women of 124, Denver and Sethe, isolated. For ten years these women are related to their community only by exclusion, which to some extent is the result of the stoic pride of Sethe and to some extent is the petty pride and condemnation of the rest of the community. The physically non-present form of Beloved appears to be strictly a reminder and punishment for her murder, the vengeful response of a young child that paid the ultimate cost for circumstances truly beyond her comprehension. This of course darkens the home in a very specific way, highlighting for the reader one specific event that has paralyzed Sethe. However, when the apparition arrives in the physical form, the Black Home darkens considerably, as we come to see how Beloved and her infanticide carry the burden of slavery altogether through a line of mother-daughter relationships.

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[234] Sethe uses the term rememory to take into account specifically poignant events in her history that she cannot let go of; one may say living-history or living memory. Jan Furman provides a helpful description of rememories as moving the opposite direction than normal memory, inasmuch as memory bridges present to past, while re-memories carry the past to the present. She says, "Re-memories often replace existing life, becoming more authentic than the present". C.f. Jan Furman, "Sethe's Rememories: The Covert Return of What is Best Forgotten" from *Critical Essays on Toni Morrison's Beloved*.

Beloved returns in her physical form to 124 shortly after Paul D's exorcism of her non-physical existence. While at first enjoying a relationship with both a Sethe broken by guilt and rememories and an 18 year old Denver stunted by living in isolation for years, Beloved becomes increasingly obsessed with Sethe, demanding all of her attention and sustenance until in the final chapters Sethe is barely functional herself expending all her energy attempting to rid her guilt and prove her love to Beloved. She is completely overwhelmed and consumed by the physical rememory of Beloved. However, Morrison makes clear as the narrative unravels that the apparition of Beloved that returns is not simply her slain daughter. Instead, we see how Beloved extends the temporal dynamics of the Black Home and the Black self to the slave ship itself, underlining the historical significance of slavery and the Middle Passage. The dynamic personhood of Beloved also brings to light the dialogic construction of Black subjectivity or selfhood that Michelle Wright highlighted under the figure of the Black feminine, where the self's relation to otherness highlights a mutually dynamic construction of self as opposed to the dialectical sublation of otherness.

Readers and commentator of Beloved cannot help but to hone in on the significance of the dynamic personhood of Beloved. Reverence for this dynamism focuses specifically on how Sethe's returned slain daughter embodies both an allusion to a future that is always in jeopardy for Blacks and a history that may be forever anchored in their hearts. The former allusion is to Beloved, the victim of infanticide at the hands of white supremacy whose life was taken too quickly, and the latter allusion is the Beloved that recalls the imagery and experience of being in the hull of a slave ship. The apparitional quality of Beloved and the dynamism it explores in terms of the reality the Black self must account for speaks directly to the literary strategies Morrison employs. The ghosts and skeletons of slavery that have gone unaddressed, ignored, and that continue to plague Blacks even today are provided a sophisticated and poignant conduit through the character of Beloved, who, in light of the unimaginable horror of slavery and its aftermath, could really only be conjured fantastically.

Beloved's return in her fantastic form addresses the primary issue of the novel that not only runs directly through Sethe and the infanticide but also runs through the other protagonists in different ways, namely: how does one deal with the past that is slavery? For Sethe, particularly as a mother as the character type that begets life and must make the difficult choice of having children under a regime of terror, her rememories weigh heavily on the maternal lineage she finds herself in. Rossita Terzieva-Artemis articulates the difficulty of Sethe's task concisely, writing, "[For] Sethe as a mother what is at stake is the ability to overcome memory but paradoxically, without losing this memory, and simultaneously, to survive in and against the rememorying of the past."[235] As a mother, Sethe sees herself as having a special responsibility for her children, not only for Beloved who had been sacrificed but also for Denver who too suffers under the circumstances of 124. Sethe cannot simply forget her past; Beloved will not allow her to, so her character lets us into the struggles of a mother trying to work through her memories as opposed to simply reject them. Beloved opens this opportunity not only by returning as her daughter to which she tries and ultimately fails to appease on her own but she does this also by returning as a captive African woman who has endured the middle passage and is most likely an apparition of her mother.[236]

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[235] Rossita Terzieva-Artemis, "In Search of New Subjectivity: Identity in the Novels of Toni Morrison" from *Critical Insights: Toni Morrison*, 193.

A large constituency of commentators has come to agree that indeed Morrison intends the returned Beloved to be not only the daughter that has come back from the other side[237] but also an African woman who describes her travels from Africa in the hull of the ship. In part II, where Beloved provides her only first person account of herself as narrator, she describes her self as crouching, as there never being a time when she is not crouching—a description of the experience of the hull of ship[238]—and how a dead man lays upon her, how light pierces through cracks—presumably of the decks of the ship—and how 'men without skin' push other people off the ship, presumably unsellable because of their physical and mental degradation.[239] It is generally accepted that Morrison attributes this past and history to Beloved to emphasize the universal context for Black Americans of the tragic decision made by Margaret Garner and the novel that it inspired.

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[236] Jennifer Holden-Kirwan argues that indeed Beloved is not only the returned daughter but Sethe's African mother from the fact that the melody that Beloved hears in the Middle Passage and recites in Sethe's home is the same melody that Sethe hears as a child while in the presence of her mother and/or her mother's people. C.f. Jennifer Holden-Kirwan, "Looking into the Self that is no Self: An Examination of Subjectivity in *Beloved*", 420.

[237] Morrison, Beloved, 215.

[238] Referring to this section of *Beloved* specifically and connecting it to the African diaspora and the hull of the ship motif, David Childs writes convincingly of Morrison's strategy to disrupt a traditional time line., "the first line of Beloved's monologue—"*All of it is now . . . it is always now . . . there will never be a time when . . . I am now crouching and watching others who are crouching too*"—would represent how the memory of the atrocities of the Middle Passage and, by extension, of "Sweet Home" plantation is still alive within the psyche of the newly freed black subject. Although the validity of this argument is largely inarguable, I want to suggest how it might also be incomplete. A closer look at the relationship between Beloved's monologue and the novel's chain gang scene requires us to reexamine Morrison's rendering of the slave ship and plantation as sites of African diasporic living memory, or what Sethe describes as her "rememory." The transactional relationship of Black Atlantic, plantation, and Jim Crow prison architectures across boundaries of space and time registers the salience of Stephanie Smallwood's theoretical assertion of the temporal boundlessness of the Middle Passage—that, while trapped within the prison ship hold, it was "enormously difficult for Africans to clearly distinguish the phases of their journey, or to anticipate the end of one phase and the beginning of another". David Childs, "'You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet': *Beloved*, the American Chain Gang, and the Middle Passage Remix", 277.

Beloved thus is not just Sethe's daughter or mother—who, we may recall from above, performed her own infanticide. Instead, as Deborah Horvitz explains; "Beloved stands for every African woman whose story will never be told. She is the haunting symbol of the many Beloveds—generations of mothers and daughters—hunted down and stolen from Africa; as such, she is, unlike mortals, invulnerable to barriers of time, space, and place."[240] Beloved thus stokes the fire of history and demands of the characters and the readers that the horrors of Blacks' racial past and the specific techniques and decisions that were present along this backdrop cannot be forgotten and attempting to can occlude the possibilities of the future. However, we must not simply end at the symbolism when it comes to the conception of agency and self that I am trying to argue for in the Black Home. This history affects decision making and self conception and thus I agree with Cynthia Willett who asserts, "the ghost from the Middle Passage is part projection but she is also part real…the soul extends outwards beyond itself and its time."[241] By this I believe Willett is arguing that the 'soul' or the self—of my Black Home—must be understood as embodying and grounding its identity and its capacities in the history of slavery, in the depth of the hull of the ship. There is no other way to understand the conditions in which Blacks find themselves, the actions and decisions that they make or befall them, without this history in mind. In this respect, the historical ‘other within’, the Black self of the Black Home, cannot be simply sublated; Sethe cannot dialectically overpower Beloved as mother or daughter, nor can she have them overwhelm her[242], instead there is a not so hidden dialogical relationship between the characters with a maternal quality, that sees a mutual construction of identity, even when a character like Sethe tries to deny this dialogical reality through forgetting. Rossita Terzieva-Artemis explains this relationship to the past incisively:

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[239] Morrison, Beloved, 210-213.

[240] Deborah Horvitz, "Nameless Ghosts: Possession and Dispossession in *Beloved*" from *Critical Essays on Toni Morrison's Beloved*, 93.

[241] Cynthia Willett, *The Soul of Justice: Social Bonds and Racial Hubris*, 206.

> Morrison…demonstrates that there is no placebo effect of forgetting, and, equally, no remembrance can effectively silence a sore memory that sometimes outcries the deed itself. Thus the rememorying of the past is breaking up with the present and, equally, breaking up with the impossible future of forgetting.[243]

Sethe’s relationship to Beloved and even the reader’s relationship to the novel and to the history of slavery more generally is an opened ended back and forth practice of acknowledgement and self-construction that affects the prospects of self-understanding and action in the future as much as the present. One cannot out run one’s past, instead Blacks are in constant negotiation with it, and sometimes a certain memory in the past highlights an entire political reality—e.g. from infanticide to the institution of slavery—that we also cannot deny and must negotiate. Beloved, both in her reflection as an African mother who survived the Middle Passage, gave birth to many children, but kept only one from love and as the returned apparition of a life taken too soon, from a love that is too strong, and with an appetite too large represents the negotiation that Sethe makes as her character develops.

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[242] Mag G. Henderson agrees with this maternal ordering and its use to project a lineage to the past, she writes, “The image of motherhood functions heuristically to explain or ‘trace’ Sethe’s history and that of the community along ‘motherlines’.” C.f. Mag G. Henderson “Toni Morrison’s Beloved: Re-membering the Body as Historical Text” from *Toni Morrison’s Beloved: A Casebook*, 95.

[243] Rossita Terzieva-Artemis, “In Search of New Subjectivity: Identity in the Novels of Toni Morrison”, 193.

c. Community

The figures of the house and temporality, however, do not exhaust the conception of Black selfhood and agency that I have figured in the conception of the Black Home. We must also consider the role community plays in conceptions of selfhood. When I evoke the idea of community, of the Black community specifically, I normally intend it with rather broad boundaries, where we can consider the formation of self from varying perspectives, including one's neighborhood, one's city, one's county, or the entire African diaspora depending on the context. Also recall, that the Black Home escapes the political death through a reading of Blackness provided by Moten through an understanding of a begetting sociality from the paraontological movements. As we have already seen and will continue to see, the paraontological slide that begets the possibility—in this account the possibility of a self at the limits of time, space, and community—moves between impossible reconciliation of the Black slave and the freed Black, i.e. Sethe, and the others, are both free and not free, slave and not slave. With that said, in *Beloved* I want to focus on the role of the community on the edge of Cincinnati and how these 'freed' Blacks play a persistent although shifting role in the conceptions of the Black self, particularly Sethe. I have two particular scenes in mind, first the events that follow Sethe's arrival 18 years previous to when the novel starts that lead to the death of Beloved and secondly the last exorcism of Beloved.

The first scenes of community I would like to address begin with the arrival of Sethe to 124. Her sons Howard and Buglar arrived before her and Sethe arrives with baby

Denver in tow. 124 Bluestone at this time is central to this community of former slaves and the freed Baby Suggs has the centripetal force that kept it together. By the time Paul D arrived, the house was barren and isolated by the rest of the community, however, there was a time when it was alive and Baby Suggs, the 'unchurched preacher', brought community and warmth in her sermons that were meant for everyone.[244] After a truly trying escape from Sweet Home, Sethe arrived to 124 with this bubbling atmosphere and it appeared as if she was accepted into the community with nothing short of genuine hospitality and from there, the potentiality for a sense of self not completely over determined by slavery—where she had no sense of community with her mother dead and Ms. Garner her master—perhaps was a possibility.

The tides of hospitality and generous community began to shift after an impromptu dinner at 124. What began as simply an occasion to make a few pies—thanks to an excursion by Stamp Paid to retrieve berries—turned into a feast for ninety people and the mere abundance of "laughter, goodwill, and food for ninety, made [the community] angry."[245] The community was resentful of Baby Suggs' generosity and pride and at root of this resentment, of course, is slavery. Suggs probably was not beaten the same as the other Blacks, she lived in the home owned by the white Bodwins, and she had not even escaped but was bought and given free papers. The root of the resentment for her 'reckless generosity' and 'uncalled-for pride' was a feeling from the community that Baby Suggs did not have the proper history, the true credentials, and this allowed her to act as if slavery was not literally around the corner. Nancy Jesser contends that the community is looking for an equality of pain and oppression, not freedom and blessing and therefore, she explains, “the very openness and generosity, which demanded a structural change in the white-owned two story house, became the source of Baby Sugg’s isolation from the community.”[246]

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[244] Morrison, *Beloved*, 87.
[245] Ibid, 137.

This get-together was the beginning of a long-term isolation that reaches its apex after Sethe commits infanticide. Sethe has been there only twenty-eight days when schoolteacher, a nephew, the sheriff, and a slave catcher—the apocalyptic four horsemen—arrived. In the Black community there can never be the prospect of something like mutual recognition because the hostility of white supremacy would never really allow for the constituents to believe that any such progress could not be snatched away at any moment, with out warning. Amy Green believes Baby Suggs’ get together was an affront to this vulnerability, she explains, “Baby Suggs transgresses by setting too much stock in the future, by displaying a ‘reckless generosity’…Baby Suggs inadvertently offends by placing too much stock in hope, by loving too much at a time when nothing could be counted on.”[247] Here is an instance where the excess of Blackness, represented in this generosity that highlights Baby Suggs agential capacity, also highlights the paraontological tension of freedom and Blackness. And while we understand that Moten’s Blackness posits possibility and is celebration, the real life conditions in which possibility is granted and celebration takes place—in this case, through the memories and affects of slavery framed by an expression of generosity—sets into motion tragic events.

We come to find out that nothing indeed could be counted on and this reality came to life for Sethe, for whom any strong sense of self rooted in community and built out of something like mutual recognition was snatched away when she saw the apocalyptic arrival of schoolteacher and his gang. Jesser puts it succinctly when she explains, “Momentarily, the house is successful in providing a protected space for the community…But when the yard is invaded by slavery’s institutional forces, triggering Sethe’s desperate actions, the house becomes both an unapproachable and inescapable space—hard.”[248] Following the infanticide, Sethe’s relation to the community and the sense of self that emerges is one of isolation or stoicism as Willett contends.[249] They did not like Baby Suggs’ sense of pride with her feast and that led the community to turn their heads when schoolteacher arrived instead of warning the people of 124 that trouble was surely on the prowl that day.[250] They did not like Sethe’s sense of pride either, as she was taken away and arrested with her head held high. In her exclusion from formal and causal relations with the community she does not have strong formative and comforting bonds to buttress her sense of self but the Black Home trope retains currency, only this home that Sethe inhabits is desolate and haunted by apparitions. She only hears murmurings outside and in the attic but otherwise she is ostensibly alone with Denver and her rememories.

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[246] Jesser, “Violence, Home, and Community”, 82 and 79.

[247] Amy M. Green, “Crying, Dancing, Laughing: The Breaking and Reunification of Community in *Beloved*” from *Critical Insights: Toni Morrison*, 122.

The second scene of community occurs at the end of the book with Beloved’s second exorcism. By the end Beloved had consumed all of Sethe. Beloved would spend time with Denver but eventually she turned all her attention to Sethe who would appease any desire of Beloved in the hopes of making up for her choice eighteen years previously. Beloved began to boss Sethe around and speak of the horrors of the other side and terrorize the family. She was the embodied physical rememory of the limits to which white supremacy had pushed Sethe and as Beloved grew in size, to the point of appearing pregnant and even appearing to be the mother, Sethe shrank along with her sense of self, thanks to this apparition of slavery.[251] Her agency and capacity to act in any sense for herself disappeared and this can be attributed to her isolation from the Black community, where the capacity of the self can be cultivated and supported by those who share that dreaded history, by those who are acquainted with the paraontological fugitivity of Blackness, by those who see its potentiality.

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[248] Jesser, “Violence, Home, and Community”, 77.
[249] C.f. Cynthia Willett, *The Soul of Justice: Social Bonds and Racial Hubris***.**
[250] Morrison, *Beloved*, 157.

The tides of community and generosity finally return when Denver has had enough and at eighteen years old decides she must venture back into town, reestablish a link with community, and begin to provide for Sethe and Beloved. Jesser explains, "Denver must 'go out of the yard' …hell isn't others; others are the only defense. When Denver leaves the yard and approaches Lady Jones…she sets into motion a process that brings sustenance to 124, and begins to reintegrate Denver into the larger community through a network of generosity."[252] The recommencing of community shows how together, a strong sense of self and agency can be achieved, and we see this reach its apex when the rest of the women catch word from Denver that Beloved is terrorizing Sethe and they decide to act. Headed by Ella they head to 124 and when they arrive they are reminded of the times of Baby Suggs' hospitality. Amongst this community of women, we see agency return to Sethe who, in a haze goes to attack Mr. Bodwin whom she mistakenly believes will take her Beloved. Instead of infanticide she chooses to go after the confused identity of this white man, this time surrounded by her Black community. With this gesture Beloved has disappeared and Sethe becomes part of the community and exhibits a sense of self-awareness over against the rememories of white terror that lead her into isolation.

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[251] Ibid, 150.
[252] Jesser, "Violence, Home, and Community", 88.

IV. Black Hospitality

Thus far I have mentioned the act of infanticide performed by Sethe, inspired by the real life story of Margaret Garner but I have not weighed any moral judgment on the act itself. Sethe had chosen to take her child's life rather than submit to schoolteacher and his posse and return to slavery. This of course is a truly difficult action to make a judgment about. Deborah Horvitz argues for two mutually exclusive paths for moral judgment, either Sethe is completely accountable for the child's death or slavery alone killed Beloved.[253] I think this position to be too simplistic because it does not take into full account the complexity of Black agency in a system that is completely hostile to its existence. Terry Otten and Cynthia Willett provide two remarks that I find more fitting, although perhaps in more complex ways than they intended. The former contends, "Sethe could not have remained innocent no matter what she chose"[254] and the latter writes "The extremity of the circumstances of the sacrifice makes it impossible to decide the ethical character of the act."[255] In the last chapter I emphasized how criminality and impossibility were crucial to the experience of Blacks as ethical agents in America. If we think of the two comments together, I would agree with Willett that any ethical appraisal of Sethe's act is indeed impossible and the circumstances are extreme insomuch as Blacks are always already criminalized in white supremacist, antiblack America. The impossible character of Sethe's act is the precondition of Blacks' experience of themselves as ethical agents; Blacks are always already seen as violating the parameters of ethics that are set for them, that is, they are seen as transgressing the limits of the impossible demands of hospitality that are hoisted upon them and we see all of these circumstances in Sethe's act.

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[253] Deborah Horvitz, "Nameless Ghosts: Possession and Dispossession in *Beloved*" from *Critical Essays on Toni Morrison's Beloved*, 97.
[254] Terry Otten, *The Crime of Innocence in the Fiction of Toni Morrison,* 90.
[255] Cynthia Willett, *The Soul of Justice: Social Bonds and Racial Hubris*, 222.

Now, we need not rehearse the entire argument from the third chapter; however, as a reminder I proposed we understand Black ethical experience using the framework of Derrida's unconditional hospitality in the context of white supremacist antiblack America. Under these circumstances we would understand the vulnerability of the Black host as founded in the systematic conditions of antiblack racism that forced Blacks to be considered completely open and available to the 'other', i.e. to any other. These demands to be open and vulnerable that are placed upon Blacks could never be fully satisfied because any response but particularly Black responses, are always already seen as hostile, even criminal, and, therefore, the true unconditional hospitality demanded from Blacks is im-possible. The conditions in which Blacks experience themselves and are recognized as ethical agents is only through the transgression of the given parameters of ethicality, which is the unconditional openness to the other of white supremacy.

If we look at the circumstances considering the death of Beloved, Morrison, I contend, brings to light the truly impossible circumstances that Sethe found herself in. As a runaway slave, the conditions of vulnerability and expectations of unconditional hospitality are fairly straightforward. Schoolteacher and his three henchmen consider Sethe and her children property to be returned. When they arrive at 124, there is little doubt they demand complete and utter unconditional openness, a certain sense of hospitality, from Sethe insomuch as she and her children are schoolteacher's property as Black slaves. This is the extra-ordinary vulnerability of the Black object.

The vulnerability is undeniable but the act of transgression, the circumstances to which it may be possible for one to understand the infanticide, as an act of conditional hospitality is more difficult. The fact of infanticide is undeniably a transgression of law, it is criminal, and indeed can be seen as an act against unconditional hospitality. As a slave, and even more so as a runaway slave, any action or sign of agency by this property could and would be seen as transgressive to their status as objects, as criminal to their status as slaves but also not inconsistent at all with the Slave laws, as we saw Hartman explain in chapter one. Sethe's act in particular, the killing of her baby but also the destruction of schoolteacher's property[256], highlights the circumstances of slavery.. To perform an act of free will through the murder of an other that is most intimately one's own is Blackness opening the door of the Black Home to white supremacy with a nuclear bomb.

Terry Otten almost captures the peculiarity of the moral circumstances of the text in general and this act in particular, "The moral authority of Beloved resides less in a revelation of the obvious horrors of slavery than in a revelation of slavery's nefarious ability to invert moral categories and behavior and to impose tragic choice…an existential victory and a moral offense."[257] There indeed is a moral inversion taking place but with an impossible twist, when we recognize Sethe's hostility and her decision of infanticide as a gesture of hospitality as well, as a gesture of hostipitality as Derrida would say.[258] It is an impossible welcoming of the other into the Black Home, through a decision of the other-within the Black Home, the rememories of slavery.

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[256] Margaret Garner was, in fact, charged with destruction of property and returned to slavery. C.f. Samuel J. May. "Margaret Garner and Seven Others" from *Toni Morrison's Beloved: A Casebook*.

[257] Terry Otten, *The Crime of Innocence in the Fiction of Toni Morrison*, 83.

More so than the schoolteacher and his goons—who leave because they believe Sethe to be irreparably damaged goods—we should see the infanticide of Beloved as a gesture by Morrison to invite the readers in and observe the true horrors of slavery that America continues to fail to address. We are invited into the Black Home as it exists for Sethe and, therefore, her actions must be understood as not simply her own in the traditional western liberal idea of the self and his actions but of the way the Black self that exists and survives through strong ties to family and friends exists in community, in time, and in space. Furthermore, if we follow Derrida in arguing that hospitality, i.e. the invitation of the other, can only take place by accounting for the other within. We also know, for instance, that infanticide is not new for Sethe; but she is a survivor of a mother who chose infanticide as well, albeit for different reasons, but ultimately, both of their actions, mother and daughter, highlight the impossible ethical inversions that often result from the circumstances of slavery. And Morrison uses the novel form to really throw into relief the repetition and difference of the act.

In the end, with Sethe we know that indeed there are no truly unconditional gestures of hospitality. The conditions upon which the host invites the guest, however, are one's where we see the terrors and horrors of Sethe's life, of Black life, and of slavery and even of 'freed' slaves. Blacks have no choice but to extend this offer under conditions that still make them appear hostile and criminal in the land of the free, and yet those are the impossible ethical circumstances upon which they always already embrace as Black in America.

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[258] C.f. Derrida, *Hostipitality*

V. Conclusion

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is a truly devastating ghost story about the circumstances of slavery and the tragic decisions that continue to shape American policies and spirit. The stories of Margaret Garner and then of Sethe are difficult to read and share. Similar to how it is difficult to imagine Sethe's act as one of hospitality, and yet we must. I agree to a certain extent with Rafael Perez-Torres', reading of the refrain found in the last chapter of the novel where the narrator exclaims that the story of Beloved was not one to pass on. Perez-Torres reads a double entendre, explaining; "'Pass on' signifies both rejection and acceptance. Beloved's story cannot be repeated, the narrative warns, cannot be allowed to occur again in the world. The repeated warning also means that this is a story that cannot be forgotten, that cannot be rejected or 'passed' on."[259] We cannot forget the tragedies of slavery, however, not only so we do not repeat them but also so we may recognize a new and different form in which white supremacy has come to manifest itself in the world today. Using the form of the novel, Morrison was able to weave a narrative that touched upon a lot of the different aspects of Black life during and after slavery and in doing so showed the repetition of Black vulnerability and the impossible ethical positions Blacks find themselves in.

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[259] Perez-Torres, "Between Presence and Absence: Beloved, Postmodernism, and Blackness" from *Toni Morrison's Beloved: A Casebook,* 181.

Conclusion

I. Review

We were led to this conception of ethics by a thread that began with a radicalized sense of vulnerability. My intention was to make a break with the presumed vulnerability of vulnerability ethics and to show how the vulnerability of Blacks has its own unique parameters. I achieved this with the concept of extra-ordinary vulnerability, which I developed by borrowing from the logic of Jared Sexton's employment of the general economy of white supremacy. I explore extra-ordinary vulnerability at length through double consciousness and the idea of the Black body.

In the second chapter I developed a conception of Black agency through the trope of the Black Home. The goal with this chapter was to develop a sense of agency despite the oppressive vulnerability developed in chapter one. Moving through Saidiya Hartman and the afro-pessimism of Frank Wilderson, we get a good sense of the way Black selfhood has a unique development; however, I articulate Fred Moten's response to afro-pessimism, 'Black Ops', to set the foundations for a stronger, more fruitful, idea of the self. Blacks Ops grounds Blackness in a fugitivity he develops from the idea of the paraontological alongside a concept of the social. From there I use Michelle Wright's argument for the dialogical creation of subjectivity, along with a conceptual development of the Black feminine, to articulate a sense of the Black self and conclude with a reading of Beyonce's *Lemonade*.

The third chapter is the main chapter where I develop the concept of Black Hospitality. I first need to argue for thinking of the Black self from the main position of the host, as opposed to the traditional account of leaving the Black self in the position of the ‘other’. For this argument, I choose Nahum Chandler and his reading of Du Bois that places the problem of the Negro at the center of the problem of western thought. From their I develop the arguments for Black hospitality, describing Derrida’s conception of unconditional hospitality as a framework for ethics and arguing why the experience of Blacks may fit these parameters best. Moving through vulnerability, generosity, impossibility, and the other-within, I give a full conception of Black Hospitality. I conclude the chapter with some vignettes on Black hospitality that include the shooting in Charleston, Eric Garner, and Sandra Bland.

The fourth and last chapter gives a reading of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* using all of the concepts developed in the opening chapter. The goal of this chapter is to give an aesthetic account of these ideas since literature, in this case, has conceptual devices at its disposal that we do not find in everyday experiences and with that in mind, sheds light in an interesting way upon the arguments that I wanted to develop.

II. Remarks

‘This is not a story to pass on.’ This is an equivocation, indeed but an aporia? This is my contention, that the impossible structure found in the narrative and characters in *Beloved* and at the foundation of Derrida’s unconditional hospitality comes to life, becomes vivid, becomes realized in the name Black Hospitality. I suppose it is fit to say that the adjective ‘Black’ in Black Hospitality—elusive in its own right as an awkward phenotype, indicative of evil but also the lack of color—casts a shadow upon hospitality; a shadow so large, in fact, that people often do not even recognize the unforgivable, unsustainable, experience that not only grounds but colors their perception. What appears dim and shallow in the life of unconditional hospitality is in fact dark and deep. With that said: did something exist that we should call ethics before the creation of Black people? Of course. Do we understand ethics better after Blackness and Black people? I think so.

As with any conclusion, I would contend the project of Black Hospitality provides an opportunity for a new beginning. I would hope the project leads to new a thinking of ethics first and foremost, particularly as it is formulated in the West. However, if we accept Charles Mills contention that white supremacy is indeed a global phenomenon, I think the rubric of Black Hospitality may be helpful for all peoples, some more than others. Black political theory should also deal with this ethical conundrum. How indeed should we think of rights and liberties, of the political in general, in light of an ethical agency and a sense of self that experiences impossible demands and that demands friendship but will always already be the enemy under pre-existing conditions of applied and structured violence?

As for myself, I am most interested in the intersection of ethics and the aesthetic. The correlation, of course, is not new or novel. Many epics, plays, fairytales, and fables are intended specifically to teach a certain moral fortitude. From the Illiad and Oedipus Rex to Hansel and Gretel, Little Red Riding Hood, Goldilocks and the Three Bears, even Rudolf the Red-Nosed Reindeer. These fables, plays, epics, etc. all provide and/or present helpful lessons about the proper treatment of self and others or simply justice. The prescriptive goal of these texts to imbue and persuade the audience has its own merits. I would never venture to say that children or people should not be provided tools for certain behaviors in society.

However, I am more interested in working and thinking through a performative ethics, an aesthetic ethics. Given the history of white supremacy and antiblack racism I am often pressed to ask myself not only why I write (academically) but also why we dance, why we sing, why we read, why we watch, why do we listen with the specter of white supremacy always looming. With that in mind, I would like to harken back to chapter two on the Black Home, specifically the sections on the Black Home that call upon celebration and also my interpretation of *Lemonade*. I find both in Fred Moten's unsettling rendering of Blackness and the hull of the ship as celebration, along with Beyoncé's visual album not to be any prescription of political resistance or of mending heartache. Instead, I see a call for and a performance that troubles and battles with an overwhelming, overfull, excessive, and brilliant Blackness that struggles to gesture its invitation for all—including itself. *Lemonade* is an ethical gesture that is performed out from Blackness for no other reason than its performance. Perhaps thinking beyond Zarathustra's Sun, and through an inversion of Bataille's Solar Anus, we should set our eyes upon an all embracing Black Star at the edge of Black Hospitality that is a Black Aesthetic Ethics.

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