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The Position of the Unthought and the Invention of Nineteenth Century Democratic Literature

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Doctorate of Philosophy

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An abstract of
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James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
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Abstract

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By Ryan C. P. Fics

In animal rights discourses, utilitarian philosophy, and Posthuman Animal Studies (PAS), the analogy between contemporary animal cruelty and slavery during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is often used to illuminate the terrors of animal cruelty in our contemporary world. This dissertation claims that recourse to this analogy not only conceals the terrors of nineteenth century slavery and the legislative rhetoric that justified it, but it also prevents scholars (past and present) from adequately accounting for the status of both slaves and animals in the nineteenth century. Therefore, this dissertation returns to some of the founding political, legal, philosophical, and literary writings of the United States to unearth the formation of this analogy and to demonstrate how it mystifies and therefore renders the legislative and political positioning of the slave unthought. Bringing together writers from black studies, deconstruction, and American Studies, my dissertation argues that blackness and whiteness became metaphors for alterity and sovereignty in nineteenth century texts, such as Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*, James Madison's retelling of the Three Fifths Compromise in the *Federalist Papers*, Ralph Waldo Emerson's essays and journals on slavery and race, and Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*. In the writings of these (and other) authors, the captive body is projected as incarnating a terrifying formlessness against which racial whiteness defines its sovereignty and political ontology. By demonstrating how whiteness was constructed out of assembling the captive body as the embodiment of blackness—a threatening formlessness—I argue that the ideology of democratic sovereignty in nineteenth century literature founds itself through negating the captive body. This dissertation is an exploration of how this negating logic impacts contemporary debates about the relationship between literature, democracy, sovereignty, and ontology in the nineteenth century.

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Introduction

> It is in the play of a certain proximity, proximity to oneself and proximity to Being, that we will see constituted, against metaphysical humanism and anthropologism, another insistence of man, one which relays, relieves, supplements that which it destroys, along pathways on which we are, from which we have hardly emerged—perhaps—and which remain to be examined ("The Ends of Man" 124)

As Jacques Derrida observes in the quotation above, since one has no choice but to draw from the discursive material of the logic of proximity to destroy, escape, or dismantle metaphysical humanism, one can do nothing other than supplant the very humanism one wishes to escape with another form of humanism. In the social sciences and humanities across academia in the United States, Derrida's observation of "the end of Man" as a historically recurring call that continues to return in various guises and forms, is often accredited with establishing what has become a scholarly imperative: namely, that every announcement of an end of man become a central topic of inquiry, interrogation, and critique. It is commonly held that Derrida's work set the stage such that any later attempt to announce the end of "man," or depict its formation, would typically be met with skepticism.

For example, *In What is Posthumanism?* Cary Wolfe writes that what his project wishes to accomplish is "to bring out in a detailed way how the admirable impulses behind *any* variety of philosophy that challenges anthropocentrism and speciesism […] demand a certain reconfiguration of what philosophy (or 'theory') is and how it can (and cannot) respond to the challenge that all the philosophers discussed here want to engage: the challenge of sharing the planet with nonhuman subjects and treating them justly" (*What is Posthumanism* 62). As Wolfe suggests, in his work, he wishes to show how any philosophy that announces the end of man, demands a certain reconfiguration of the discursive resources one uses (be it philosophical or theoretical), which can only result in demonstrating how one can and cannot respond to the questions one pursues, and that one can never *really* escape metaphysical humanism. What I would like to suggest in this introduction, and by way of departure from what I call Posthuman Animal Studies (PAS) for reasons that will appear below, is that the intervention of PAS undercut itself when its scholars effectively evaded the analytical challenges posed by the categories of race and slavery.

When PAS arrived in the early 2000s, it posed brilliant challenges to the epistemological integrity of a range of remaining conceptual pieties clinging to debates regarding “the end of man” (as seen above in my quotation of Wolfe’s *What is Posthumanism?*) In doing so, PAS attempted to recalibrate the way scholars across the social sciences and humanities understood concepts like “community” and “agency” by underscoring the interdependency and porosity of the living. PAS scholars demonstrated a profound skepticism of subject/object distinctions and dominant ontologies, generated important critical concepts, such as Wolfe’s “newly *expanded* community of the living” (*Before The Law* 105), Rosi Braidotti’s “posthuman predicament” (*The Posthuman* 6),[1] and Pramod Nayar’s “species cosmopolitanism” (*Posthumanism* 152). These concepts, and others like them that can be found throughout what I am here calling PAS for reasons that will appear momentarily, stressed the processual and co-constitutive nature of embodiment, knowledge accumulation and production, in relation to the environment, nonhuman animals, and technology. Agency was conceived as an intricate web of relations that replaced the figure of self-mastery with the processes of entanglement with one’s environment to the extent that intentionality had become

[1] It is worth noting here that the posthuman predicament we all face, according to Bradotti, is thinking through what it means to live a quality life, which entails, as she puts it, revaluating “what exactly the basic unit of common reference [is] for our species, our polity and our relationship to the other inhabitants of this planet.” “In my view,” she continues, “the common denominator for the posthuman condition is an assumption about the vital, self-organizing and yet non-naturalist structure of living matter itself. This nature-culture continuum” she states, “is the shared starting point […] that can help us re-think the basic tenets of our interaction with both human and non-human agents on a plantetary scale” (*The Posthuman* 6).

conceived of as non-speciesist. What PAS held in common overall was a challenge to how Enlightened "man" humanizes himself through the negation of "the animal."

What I am here calling Posthuman Animal Studies (via the acronym PAS), in other words, are scholars who argue that the figure of man (from antiquity to the present) builds itself out of the negation of the animal, and that the animal remains the baseline for the political rhetoric of state sanctioned violence and exclusion. While there is no widely agreed upon definition of what precisely constitutes "the posthuman," or "posthumanism," to a large degree, I would argue, it has become clear that "the animal" is what is held in common by posthuman scholars. As such, the question of the animal has become the heuristic device through which critiques and reconfigurations of man and the end of man get played out. What I would like to suggest is that this recourse to the heuristic of the animal to rewrite anthropocentrism, speciesism, and the structural relation of "the human" to "the other," has covered over or hidden a foundational dimension of state sanction violence and sovereignty that has been constitutive of the citizenship, rights, and the very figuration of the category of man, since before the nineteenth century. To exemplify the problem I am identifying, I will provide a brief genealogical sketch of its formation in the earliest animal liberation writings and how it has prevailed in more recent posthumanism scholarship. A sketch of my chapters and the overall aim of this dissertation project will follow shortly after.

A Brief Genealogy of The Problem

There is no denying that the question of the animal has renewed debates about democracy and how flexible it can be made for including non-human animals in the legal "personhood" category. And yet, the centrality of this question in animal rights discourse and posthumanism is in danger of providing scholars and students alike with the false impression that the human/animal divide is *the* institutional, physical, and administrative mechanism and knowledge structure used to oppress people in ways that are reproduced through everyday interactions in the body politic. What I would like to suggest is that, while the discursive resource of the human/animal divide is certainly a kind of apparatus of managing, maintaining, and exercising power over the political body, it is not the only apparatus, nor is it even a "foundational" apparatus of modernity as many PAS scholars have claimed. While the human/animal divide may inform part of the problematical concept of sovereignty, prompts scholars to rethink autonomy and what it means to be human, I believe that positing it as foundational has had negative consequences for how we might think about politics, exclusion and inclusion, as well as democracy more specifically. We gain glimpses of this problem in some of the foundational literature of the animal rights movement which influenced what I am calling PAS in this introduction. To demonstrate this problem, by way of example, I will turn to the moments in animal rights texts where slavery is made analogous to animal cruelty.

This analogy between slaves and animals—a common analogy that appears in the works of animal rights philosophers and activists such as Peter Singer, Richard D. Ryder, Tom Regan, Paula Cavalieri, and Gary Francione—is derived from a footnote in Jeremy Bentham's *Principles of Morals and Legislation*, where he addresses the issue of animal cruelty in nineteenth-century England. While it is hard to say exactly when this analogy became so common, it certainly had its start for PAS with the publication of Peter Singer's 1975 *Animal Liberation*. According to Peter Singers:

> In a forward-looking passage written at a time when black slaves had been freed by the French but in the British dominions were still being treated in the way we now treat animals, Bentham wrote:
>
> The French have already discovered that the blackness of the skin is no reason why a human being should be abandoned without redress to the caprice of a tormentor. It may one day come to be recognized that the number of the legs, the villosity of the skin, or the termination of the *os sacrum* are reasons equally insufficient for

> abandoning a sensitive being to the same fate. What else is it that should trace the insuperable line? Is it the faculty of reason, or perhaps the faculty of discourse? […] The question is not, Can they [animals] *reason*? nor Can they *talk*? but, Can they *suffer*?" (7).

Drawing an analogy between the way black slaves were treated in nineteenth century Britain and the way the United States treated animals in the 1970s, Singer not only hides the history of the horrors and terrors of nineteenth century slavery, and the rhetoric that was used to justify it, but he forecloses the possibility for himself (and consequently, of generations of scholars after him) from being able to think the cruelty inflicted upon animals and the language that is used to legitimize that cruelty. The reason why this is so is because Singer uses the heuristic of animal cruelty in the United States to think about and interpret the suffering of black slaves, which then leads him to assume that black slaves were treated the same way that the United States treats animals. In other words, the suffering and status of slaves is mediated through the heuristic of animal cruelty which is assumed to be based on the way black slaves were treated in nineteenth century British society, which utilitarian philosophy, animal rights scholars, and (as we shall soon see) PAS scholars assume were excluded by the law in the same way as animals. This reductive analogy of animal cruelty and the terrors of slavery mystifies the position of the slave, and renders its history unintelligible to readers. This mystification and covering over of the position, status, and history of slaves, can be seen in the works of PAS scholar Carey Wolfe (I will stick with Wolfe as my example since he is the one I began with).

In *What is Posthumanism?* Wolfe argues that "Singer, more than thirty years ago in *Animal Liberation*, drew attention to a passage buried (as Paola Cavalieri has reminded us) in a footnote in Jeremy Bentham's *Introduction to The Principles of Morals and Legislation* that also serves, remarkably enough, as a crucial locus for Derrida's later work on 'the question of the animal'" (*What Is Posthumanism* 63). Going on to quote Bentham's passage, Wolfe draws on Martha

Nussbaum, Cora Diamond, and Derrida to articulate a notion of "shared embodiment" under the rubric of "Flesh and Finitude." This new framework of flesh and finitude to think through embodiment, Wolfe tells his readers, "is not so much to take Nussbaum's work on its own terms but to respect and rearticulate more successfully the impulse behind her Aristotelian conception that 'situates human morality and rationality firmly within human animality, and insist human animality itself has dignity" (68). The common dignity that units us all in the flesh and finitude of animality becomes what Wolfe calls an "arche-materiality" in *Before The Law: Humans and Other Animals in a Biopolitical Frame.*

In *Before the Law*, Wolfe takes up Derrida's *The Animal That Therefore I Am* in an attempt to found an "arche-materiality" in the form of what he calls, following David Wills, the "prosthetic" relation of the "who" (humans) and the "what" (animals) (*Before* 130). This prosthetic relation between beings classified as "who" and "what," make a critical intervention in the framework of biopolitical thought, which he claims has had "little or nothing to say" about "nonhuman beings—a cruel irony indeed," he says, "given how 'animalization' has been one of its main resources" (10). Wolfe's intervention into biopolitics attempts to show how the inclusion of nonhuman animals in the framework of biopolitics would offer the most radical vocabulary for conceiving of a "critical posthumanism" which would emphasize that, "only by recognizing the link between speciesism and discriminatory practices like racism or sexism, and the shared vulnerability of all species, can we begin to rethink connectedness and mutuality with *all* forms of species and life" (156). Similar to what he suggests in *What Is Posthumanism?*, in *Before The Law*, Wolfe contends that the "flesh and finitude" or "arche-materiality" which unites us all is the fact that "to live under biopolitics is to live in a situation in which we are all always already (potential) 'animals' before the law—not just nonhuman animals according to zoological classification, but any group of living beings that is so framed. Here," he claims, "the distinction 'human/animal—as the history of slavery, colonialism, and imperialism well knows—is a discursive resource, not a zoological designation" (*Before* 10).

The problem with Wolfe's claim, and that this dissertation wishes to demonstrate, is that Wolfe's "arche-materiality" remains a regionalized ontology because it is predicated on the idea that every "body" has always been thought through the category of a "species" and therefore ought to be thought through the common ground of the "materiality" of "animality." Therefore, although Wolfe and other PAS scholars claim to begin from a position of undecidability and uncertainty via grounding the existence and experience of the human in "the animal," the animal often acts as another figure of presence that grounds modern man. In other words, the animality of man in PAS scholarship is just another version of what Jacques Derrida calls the metaphysics of presence, or what Ethan Kleinberg calls ontological realism (as we shall see in Chapter One). My reason for suggesting this is because insofar as "the animal" is determined as the figure of uncertainty that defines the precarity of human life, it simultaneously grounds "the human" in a precarity that is assumed to be *the same* for every body. This claim reduces what we call "precarity" and "finitude" (violability) to a shared or common "sense" via animality. What I will argue throughout this dissertation is that while it is perhaps the case that every "body" can be made into a "potential" animal at any point in time by the biopolitical agenda of the modern surveillance state, this process of making one into an "outlaw" or "animal" is not only nothing new, but also predicated on a much more archaic form of violence. What the "common animality" claim does, in other words, is hide or cover over the incalculable violence of the slave trade and slavery. It smothers it, and renders it silent for the purpose of (re)founding a notion of man in a common sense of finitude when the truth is that what we call "finitude" is anything but common. To propose a different thinking of "the body," then, one that is not grounded in a form of shared materiality or common sense of violability (which is essentially another form of presence), I will briefly turn to the work of Derrida to demarcate how the hermeneutical strategy of this dissertation project departs from that of PAS scholarship.

Many fields, including what I have been calling Posthuman Animal Studies (PAS), have been inspired by the legacy of Derrida's generative critique, often taking up the title of his 1997 *l'animal que donc je suis—The Animal That Therefore I Am*, or *That Therefore I (Am) Follow(ing)*—as a perverse dictum that signifies not necessarily the absolute end of man, but rather a heretical critique of man as that which has always already been haunted by "the animal" as the interminable, plural "other" within.

What is important to note about Derrida's title is that it does not desert the most classical determination of the essence of man as *zōon/zōe* (the ensouled, or living which excludes plants, but includes animals and gods), or even the more Greco-Roman, and therefore Christian humanist interpretation as *animal rationale* (from *anima*, meaning breath). Rather, by working through this determination of man as 'person,' as spiritual-ensouled-bodily being, Derrida undertakes a deconstructive rereading of Aristotle's arguably most influential notion—that man is a *politikon zōon* ("Politics" 1278b 19), or later *animal rationale*. For my purposes here, what *The Animal That Therefore I Am* demonstrates about this rereading is the following two things. First, even though "the tradition" of philosophy, as Derrida sometimes refers to it, defines the human as *politikon zōon*, or *rational animale*—as an "animal" endowed with reason—it has always positioned the figure of "man" in radical opposition to the rest of animalkind. The violence that is done to animals begins here, Derrida explains, with the homogenous pseudo-concept of "the animal" that reduces all animals to the use of this word in the singular.

Second, in response to this violence, Derrida invents the word *animot.* When spoken, *animot* has the plural *animaux* heard within its singular pronunciation. The sound of the plural that rings in the singular, recalls the extreme diversity of animals that the homogenizing formulation "the animal" erases. Additionally, when written, *animot* makes it clear that the word [*mot*] "animal" is precisely that—*only a word*. As a result, throughout Derrida's text, the term *animot* functions as an alarm designed to call the attention of the reader to the unavoidable, yet all too often unnoticed dogmatic use of *the animal*, in the singular. This multiplication of differences is precisely Derrida's thesis: "*Limitrophy* is therefore my subject," he writes. "Everything I'll say will consist, certainly not in effacing the limit, but in multiplying its figures, in complicating, thickening, delinearizing, folding, and dividing the line precisely by making it increase and multiply" (*Animal* 29). In other words, what Derrida is interested in thinking is not necessarily whether or not there is a limit that produces a discontinuity between "Man" and "Animal," but rather what a limit becomes once it is abyssal, "once the frontier no longer forms a single indivisible line but more than one internally divided line; once, as a result, it can no longer be traced, objectified, or counted as single and indivisible" (*Animal* 31).

This gesture of multiplying the limits can be traced from Derrida's early texts, where the question of *corps* (body or bodies) was thematized conjointly with that of writing in ways that challenged the traditional binary opposition between body and soul. In *Of Grammatology,* Derrida states that

> writing, the letter, the sensible inscription, has always been considered by the Western tradition as the body and matter external to the spirit, to breath, to speech, and to the logos. And the problem of soul and body is no doubt derived from the problem of writing from which it seems—conversely—to borrow its metaphors (*Grammatology* 35).

As Derrida suggests here, since metaphysics always privileges presence (the stated examples of which are spirit, breath, speech) over absence, in philosophy, juridical, and political writings, the body and spirit (or soul) appear in a hierarchical, oppositional relation to one another. This hierarchical, and classical onto-theological opposition posits the soul as the Infinite Ideal, Being, or God, and the body as finite, vulnerable, violable, and material. Rather than maintain this binary opposition of the body as a sort of pseudo encasing that conceals or mediates the relation to the "real" or "true" presence that lies beneath, Derrida demonstrates that the "spirit," soul, or "proper" presence that the body houses is as concealing of "the truth" or "reality" as the encasing body of textual representation (the written or spoken word). Therefore, while it is traditionally thought that the body that occupies the position of the subordinate (deviant concealer of the "truth"), Derrida argues that what is equally concealing is "proper" presence. The presupposed presence of the soul or spirit, in other words, is as much of a metaphysical phantasm as the so-called "body." This critique of the binary body/soul, demonstrates that in presupposing an assumed presence, one has already (unknowingly) admitted that one does not have the presence one claims to have, as well as that one never had it to begin with. If one had it to begin with one would not need to superimpose it. As such, in depending on a superimposed notion of proper presence, one is already engaged in an attempt to *restore* it. And this attempt to restore would always already be predicated on the fact that what one "restores" will not be the same as what it was before as well as the fact that even if one could "restore" what has been lost, whatever it is that has been restored always retains the necessary possibility that it can go astray once more. Rather than being satisfied with the discourse of restoration and recovery, or of claiming that one has what one has probably never had, Derrida proposes to approach the problem of the *corps* differently.

We can briefly summarize this approach as follows. According to Derrida, from the standpoint of a metaphysics of presence, one can do nothing other than aim at restoring the "property" of the body because it starts from the position of having lost what is proper to the body—presence—which automatically entails that one had a body to begin with. In contradistinction to the restorative argument, Derrida explains that the body ought to be thought as that which is always already undergoing the process of rewriting itself, of translating itself, of transforming itself, of altering itself, and of therefore becoming other than what it so often mistakenly takes its "self" *to be*. To think the *corps* as that which is always already undergoing change, one would have to presuppose a sort of non-origin, or place of undecidability out of which the body is made to appear as a body which remains susceptible to alteration. One might therefore say that what Derrida calls "writing" in general, supposes a quasi-structural dispersion of "verbal bodies" that come before and are beyond the appearance of any "body" as such. In "La Parole soufflée," Derrida explains that this quasi-structural dispersion is the condition for the possibility of what he calls "expropriation" (La Parole 234).

Since one really has no "real" self, no real "sense" of a "Self," no possession of, or relation to a "Self," since one's property is not really one's own, one's property (including one's private property, i.e. their *corps*), is violable and always vulnerable to theft, mistreatment, misrepresentation, and the most terrifying horrors (hence the necessity for laws). What Derrida's notion of expropriation helps us understand is that the loss of the body does not constitute an unfortunate accident that happens or happened to a preexisting body-as-presence. Rather, expropriation is the condition for the possibility of the jurisprudence of *habeas corpus* more generally. In other words, in contradistinction to the symbolic ideal of what one conventionally refers to as "the body," Derrida calls, in *Freud and the Scene of Writing*, for a thinking of "*le corps verbal,*" as Elissa Marder aptly reminds us in here essay "Force and Translation."

According to Marder, in "Freud and the Scene of Writing," Derrida explicitly writes that it is "'the verbal body' ('*le corps verbal*') that cannot be translated or carried over into another language." In the English translation of this text by Alan Bass, Marder shows us that the word "body" in *le corps verbal* is replaced by the word "materiality" in each instance ("Force and Translation" 11). What enables the supplementary replacement and translation of the word *corps* as "materiality," is precisely what Derrida calls expropriation. What expropriation implies, in other words, is that the condition for the possibility of the body is not based in an a prior presence but rather the lack or absence of a presence, of an underlying "meaning" or "proper" truth. This non-origin, makes the body (anatomical and verbal) always already subject to violability. This state or condition of violability, the always already violable body, is what Derrida calls "the nonethical opening of ethics" in *Of Grammatology* (140/*DG* 202). According to Derrida, "There is no ethics without the presence *of the other* but also, and consequently, without absence, dissimulation, detour, differance, writing. The arche-writing is the origin of morality as of immorality. The nonethical opening of ethics. A violent opening" (*Of Grammatology* 140; *De la grammatologie* 202). If we take into account what Derrida means by arche-writing here—a writing that comes *before* and after the body (self and other), then perhaps the prefix "non-" can be read as heterogeneous, designating and therefore designated by a double movement.

On the one hand, the "non-" can perhaps be read as a "not," an aporia, or spacing of non-passage that is *prior* to the presence of any body. In which case, as a signifier, the "non-" of Derrida's nonethical opening is marked precisely by what it is not—what we will think of as a non-arrival. On the other hand, it is this state of non-arrival which plays a role in helping to bring about the signification of the prefix "non-." This is not to say that we can locate, understand, see or grasp the non-arrival of the pre-fix "non- " as such or "as" it really "is." I am not here suggesting that now we can finally understand or "know" what this non-arrival is *sensu stricto*, or that it really *is* nothing at all. Nor am I attempting to say that this "non-arrival," read as a "not," signifies some kind of potentiality that is hidden in it like an intrinsic property waiting to be revealed through some archaeological process of excavation. Rather, the non-arrival of this “Non-,” I suggest, is not something, nor is it completely nothing. Rather, it is what I will call throughout this dissertation a *quasi-nothing*, somewhat akin to what Derrida describes, in *Acts of Literature*, as “the nothing-ing of nothing that interests our desire under the name of literature” (*Acts* 47). It is precisely the appearance of this nothing-ing, or *quasi-nothing*, in the works of Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Herman Melville that this dissertation explores.

It is necessary to note that what I am here calling a non-arrival, or quasi-nothing, though similar to what Geoffrey Bennington calls the “quasi-transcendental” in *Jacques Derrida,*[2] or “the

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[2] In *Jacques Derrida,* Bennington states that “We have seen that in Derrida what makes possible immediately makes impossible the purity of the phenomenon made possible. What allows a letter to be sent and received, a postal network, simultaneously makes the nonarrival of this letter possible too. What makes a performative possible (iterability) means that a performative can always be ‘unhappy.’ What allows language to be transmitted in a rapid ion opens meaning to a dissemination which always threatens any transmission of a thought. What makes the statement of the *cogito* possible also makes possible its repetition after my death or in my madness. This last example will help us here. Only the ideality of the sign ‘I’ allows the movement of transcendence with respect to the ‘I’ stating it: this ideality depends on the repetition which implies the possibility of my death as a figure of my necessary finitude. Having thus ‘produced’ the transcendental, philosophy puts death in with the empirical and the accidental whereas it was necessary to the production of what now secondarizes it. This is what we were earlier calling a *necessary* or *essential* possibility. This analysis does not ruin the transcendental by bringing it back down to a harsh reality of death, but contaminates it with the contact of what it attempted to keep at bay, whereas it lived only on the basis of that keeping at bay” (276-277). And a little later “If one says that finitude is in some sense the condition of transcendence, one makes it into the condition of possibility of transcendence, and one thus puts it into a transcendental position with respect to transcendence. But the ultra-transcendental thus produced puts into question the very structure of transcendence, which it pulls back down onto a feature that transcendence would like to consider as empirical [...] This deconstruction moves toward a comprehension of any discourse ruled by the empirical/transcendental opposition and everything that goes along with it: but this movement, which would traditionally be represented as a movement upward, even beyond what has up until now been recognized as transcendental, is in fact, or at the same time, a movement ‘downward,’ for it is the empirical and the contingent, themselves necessarily displaced, in this movement, toward the singular event and the case of chance, which are found higher than the high, higher than height, in height’s falling. *L’erection tombe*. ‘Quasi-transcendental’ names what results from this displacement, by maintaining as legible the trace of a passage through the traditional opposition,

necessarily-possibly-not" in *Scatter 1: The Politics of Politics in Foucault, Heidegger, and Derrida*,[3] is not to be collapsed into those concepts. Although my research is indebted to Bennington's interpretive formulation and translation of the quasi-transcendental and the necessarily-possibly-not, the difference I would like to impose here is that, while Bennington's quasi-transcendental reads "the event" as always entailing a somewhat quieted (and much less Kantian) sign of "the impossible unconditional to come" (*Scatter* 280), what I am here calling a quasi-nothing is the the impossible unconditional without a "to come." In other words, what this dissertation wishes to think is the absolute ruin of the quasi-transcendental. The quasi-nothing is what cannot come, does not necessarily remain to come, but is rather an emptiness, a complete and utter loss (and not a contamination). The question of this dissertation is what it might mean to think a body of irremediable and irreparable loss. What would it mean to think a body that does not arrive? Or perhaps more accurately still, what would it mean to think a "body" that arrives without organs? Or with its organs that undergo a process of oppressive erasure so severe that they are not simply displaces, supplemented, or replaced, but completely lost and utterly destroyed? To a certain extent, this is the question that haunts the writings of writers like Jefferson, Madison, Emerson, and Melville. These writers, each in their own way, sought to think through and resolve the problem of how to think about where a body without cultural memory "fits" in the body politic

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and by giving this opposition a radical uncertainty which we shall call 'undecidability' on condition that we take a few supplementary precautions (*Jacques Derrida* 278-79). On Bennington advice from the passage above, this dissertation is an attempt to think this "radical uncertainty," or "undecidability" as he refers to it, by taking into account the supplementary precautions of the transatlantic slave trade and the conditions of enslavement. In other words, while Bennington's analysis of the transcendental is more about its "contamination" rather than its absolute and utter "ruin," this dissertation wishes to think the ruin of the transcendental via Hortense Spillers's discourse on the transatlantic slave trade.

[3] For instance, in the final lines of *Scatter*, Bennington writes "Deconstruction is an affirmative thinking of the necessarily-possibly-not in general as a positive condition for any event whatsoever" (*Scatter* 281).

of the worlds first "representative democracy." How does one represent what *cannot be* represented? This dissertation explores the ways these authors, each in their own way, attempt to conceptualize, frame, and "resolve" this problem. Therefore, to a certain extent, the distinction or limit I am attempting to multiply here between my interpretation of Derrida and the interpretation of Derrida by PAS scholars such as Cary Wolfe is important for two reason.

First, Derrida's notion of expropriation suggests that there is a certain (non)countability of *corps*, something that is made more visible by Derrida, once again, in French. Unlike the words "body," "bodies," and "materiality" in English vernacular, the French *corps* appears in both the singular and the plural. The French *corps*, then, like *animaux*, functions as an alarm that awakens us to the dangerous, yet soothing and reductive ordinary usage of the terms "body," "bodies," or even "material," and "materiality." Far from bringing about a simple reversal of perspective, of confusingly substituting the classical opposition of "body" and "soul" with a no less deceptive failure to differentiate, or of restoring to the *corps* that which it never had to begin with (a formal sense of presence), Derrida patiently multiplies the differences and brings to our attention the fragility and porosity of the supposed frontiers of the "proper" upon which philosophical, juridical, and legislative-political writings more often than not found their notions of "Man"—the self-possessive being. Second, the (non)countable, (non)replaceable, (non)substitutable, or (un)translatable dimension of what Derrida calls *le corps verbal*, demands an address—one that seems impossible since one cannot simply escape the language that one deconstructs. This brings me to the problem of PAS scholarship, which this dissertation takes its point of departure from.

Although compelling, contrary to Wolfe's claim that the history of slavery understands his claims about animalization, in this dissertation, I will argue that if we read the debates about the status of slaves in the foundational materials and texts of the American Republic, as well as

Emerson's overlooked essays on race and slavery, we find that the status of the slave is not only ambiguous, but also that what the Founding Father's of American representative democracy called "blackness" was described as some mysterious "thing", and therefore not animal, nor human. More often than not, the "blackness" projected onto the captive's skin was spoken of as existing somewhere outside of the categories of knowledge, outside of species being, in other words, and therefore in need of severe experimentation. What is perhaps more disturbing, however, is that the strange status of "blackness," and the analogy between animal cruelty and slavery that appears in the Bentham quote that has come to influence generations of scholars, has never been questioned by PAS scholars in spite of the fact that it has been reproduced in the works of animal rights, utilitarian philosophy, and PAS scholarship since the publication of *Animal Liberation* in 1975. Very briefly, in what follows, I will demonstrate that the reason for why the cruel treatment of animals and the horrifying terrors of slavery are analogized, and thus go almost entirely unthought in discourses about the animal question, is because of what is written about black slaves in Bentham's now famous passage. After outlining this erasure, I will proceed to the outline of my Dissertation Chapters.

As can be seen in the passage from Bentham's *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, according to Bentham, before black slaves were allowed into the category of man in France, the reason why black slaves were excluded in the first place was because of what came to be called the "blackness" that was projected on to their bodies. Bentham explains that "blackness" is no reason why a "human being" *should* be abandoned. This statement indicates that what the British and French (and as we shall see in Chapter Two the Founding Fathers of the United States) called "blackness" was the reason why slaves from Africa were denied the status (and thus the rights, freedom, and power) of "man."

To better understand the complexity of Bentham's statement without recourse to the heuristic of animal cruelty, then, we would have to ask why "blackness" constituted a state of abandonment to begin with. Why is it that what the British and French called "blackness," disqualified the individuals they took from Africa from the category of "man"? Why is it that what they called "blackness" disqualified them from being treated as equals? With fairness and justice? And what exactly is "blackness" according to the metaphysical principles undergirding the French and British systems of jurisprudence? How could what they called "blackness" legitimize the injustice and horrors of slavery? Moreover, how would a theoretical and philosophical reading of "blackness" change our understanding of slavery, and the position of the enslaved in the nineteenth century?

We gain some footing, not necessarily for answering these questions but for perhaps better understanding their importance when Bentham continues by stating that blackness is no reason for abandonment "without redress to the caprice of a tormentor." This does not mean that blackness is not a reason for abandonment, but that the decision of abandonment now involves the process of "redress" for the whimsical harms inflicted upon "the free" black by any random tormentor. The blackness of the skin, one might say, then, still remains the condition for the possibility not only of "the free" black's abandonment (via punishment if the claims to redress are dismissed as perjury), but also for the caprice of a tormentor. Even when introduced into the category of man, the black individual can still attain injuries at the whims of some random tormentor, as Bentham himself indicates. This illustrates that the relationship between those deemed "black" and the law, is fundamentally different than it is for white people (in the nineteenth century and today). What makes the body of the "free black" violable, in other words, is fundamentally different than what makes the body of other members of society violable. While Bentham acknowledges the tension between blackness and freedom (that blacks are granted rights and liberties "equal" to whites, but not necessarily an ontological status and position of safety in society), he nevertheless assumes that the issue will resolve itself by superimposing a humanism onto the captive body. In other words, by restoring the humanity (presence, Being, soul or spirit) that had been denied, stolen, or taken away from African's when they were turned into slaves, the free black can assume the same position of liberty and security as every other in society in the same way. What this projected humanism does is cover over the history and the violence of the slave trade and slavery. As such, the difference for the conditions of violability, therefore, go unthought.

What I will suggest throughout this dissertation is that this humanism neutralizes (by way of forgetting, displacing, and censoring) the terrifying history of slavery. Although "humanized," and technically grounded in human animality, the "free black" is still subjected to acts of systemic discrimination and terror by random tormentors not because "we are all always already (potential) animals before the law," as Wolfe suggests, but more specifically because "blackness" cannot be understood through the discursive resources of a humanity that grounds itself in animality, much less a "human animality." My reasons for suggesting this is because the status of "blackness" does not correspond to that of the animal species that the human has been grounded in since Aristotle. The category of blackness, as we shall see through readings of the political writings of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Herman Melville, is never designated as having spirit, soul, or the sacred breath that constitutes the sentience (animality) that grounds (the rights and freedoms of) human ontology. And on this point it is important to note that sentience is the common category that envelopes human and non-human animals.[4] The title of Peter Singer's

[4] According to Richard Ryder and Harlan B. Miller, the reconceptualization of personhood during the 1970s, especially with debates surrounding abortion, is part of what they call, along with Singer, "*The momentum of liberation.*" Writing about the momentum of liberation in 2005, 30

Animal Liberation, is not just about opening the cages and liberating the animals. More specifically, it is about recovering, restoring, and therefore liberating the animal within—the lost sense or common sentience that he and other scholars claim all beings in the animal kingdom share. This discourse on recovering and restoring sentience derives from the earliest political and literary writings of the American republic. As we shall see, it is the foundational narrative of representative democracy.

This category, the baseline sentience, or arche-materiality of animality, as Wolfe refers to it, was denied to black slaves—but this denial and its consequences are left unthought and unexamined by PAS scholars. As such, what I will argue throughout this dissertation is that the site of the abandoned—the place before or outside of the law—is the concealment of the consequences of what this denial amounted to—the disastrous obliteration and loss of African customs, cultures, languages, and resources that occurred during the transatlantic slave trade and slavery under the aegis of representative democracy in the United States. This horrifying loss—horrifying because irremediable and irrecoverable—I hope to show, is not only what the racial category of blackness comes to signify in the writings of the Founding Fathers and democratic literature of the republic, but it is also what the racial category of whiteness defines itself against.

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years after the publication of *Animal Liberation*, in "Speciesism in the Laboratory," Ryder explains that "Once colonialism, racism, and sexism had been intellectually challenged, then the next logical stage in the expansion of the boundaries of the moral in-group was an attack upon speciesism" (*Wave* 187). Ryder's argument is based on the one that Singer had laid out in *Animal Liberation,* where Singer quotes Thomas Jefferson stating in a letter that black people "are on par with ourselves" and that "whatever be their degree of talent it is no measure of their rights" (*Liberation* 6). The analogy at the end of this passage, along with a quotation by Sojourner Truth that is placed just after Jefferson's in an attempt to showcase and prove Jefferson's point that intellect is not appropriate for determining who should have rights and who should not. This leads Singer to argue that what Jefferson and Truth show us is that "the case against racism and the case against sexism must both ultimately rest" because "the attitude that we may call 'speciesism,' *by analogy* with racism [my emph.], must also be condemned" (*Liberation* 6).

And this is where my dissertation project begins, with the formation of what Saidiya V. Hartman calls "the position of the unthought" in her interview with Frank B. Wilderson, and the emergence of what I call "ontological speciesism."

Chapter Outlines

Chapter One, "The Primary Narrative: Spillers and Derrida," undertakes a reading of Hortense Spillers's essay "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Gramma Book," through Jacques Derrida's conceptualization of the trace structure in *Of Grammatology*. As understood via the trace structure, I argue that Spillers's notion of American Grammar lays out what I call a transcendental violence. The word "transcendental," I contend, can be understood as a violence that comes before any decision or will of any one to violate any other (expropriation, or what Derrida deems the nonethical opening of ethics). In other words, Spillers's notion of "American Grammar" lays the groundwork for thinking transcendental violence as an a priori operation that set in motion the destruction of the values, customs, and resources that grounded the living conditions and lives of subjects from Africa before the transatlantic slave trade and slavery in the United States.

In *Ontological Terror: Blackness, Nihilism, and Emancipation*, Calvin L. Warren describes this violence as "the thanatology or onticide of African being" (*Ontological Terror*, 42). What emerges on the other side of this metaphysical holocaust, Spillers and Warren contend, is the distinction between "body" and "flesh" (the difference between a liberated and captive position), or what Warren deems "being" and "existing." Reading Warren along side Spillers and Saidiya V. Hartman in the third and fourth Sections of Chapter One, I interpret what Spillers calls the "flesh," or "zero degree" of social conceptualization as the formation of what Hartman calls "the unthought" position of the slave (the title of my dissertation is based on Hartman's concept).

Drawing on Warren's reading of the unthought "zero degree" position of the slave, I argue, gives a slightly different meaning of Derrida's notion of "expropriation." Drawing on the work of Bennington's notion of the necessarily-possibly-not, I rendered this slight difference in the following manner. Although before the slave trade we might have been able to say that every other (one) is every (bit) other, what Spillers's "hieroglyphics of the flesh" demonstrates is that after the slave trade the condition that is added to the trace structure ends up re-articulating it as something like every other (one) cannot necessarily be every (bit) other due to the irremediable and irrecoverable loss of African customs, cultures, and resources during the transatlantic slave trade and the conditions of enslavement. This "loss" I argue, is the condition for the possibility of what I call "ontological speciesism"—the racial category of Euro-American man which forms in reaction to the terror of the nothingness that the "blackness" of the slave is made to represent through what Spillers calls the American Grammar that unfolds from the machinery of the transatlantic system.

Chapter Two, "The Non-Democratic Opening of Democracy," is preoccupied with investigating the relation between the unthought position of black slaves, ontology, and the invention of representative democracy. As we unfurl this relationship, I demonstrate that the grammar of representative democracy is programmed by the transcendental violence of the transatlantic slave trade, and that representative democracy sustains the obliteration of cultural memory that grounded African subjectivity before the slave trade. The discourses of "integration," "emancipation," "freedom" and "equality," all remain problematic because they are grounded in a notion of human ontology that covers over, and even desires to forget, the irremediable damage of the slave trade and slavery. Therefore, contrary to conventional narratives about democracy as the concept, government regime, or *doxa* that preserves and protects freedom, I argue that it emerges from a host of creative and deceptive mutations that sustain the metaphysical holocaust. As such, freedom—the assumed faculty or power to do as one pleases, to decide, to choose, to have self-determination, and self-mastery—and the desire to preserve freedom, is an illusion, or simulacrum *made* possible by maintaining the position of the slave unthought.

To demonstrate this, I focus on how the “blackness” that is projected onto the slave designates the semantic vacancy or indetermination that exists before and at the very heart and center of any democracy. This vacancy, I claim, is the “non-democratic opening of democracy.” To argue this point, Section I opens with a reading of Jacques Derrida’s analysis of Thomas Jefferson’s draft of the *Declaration of Independence* in his short essay “Declarations of Independence.” Derrida’s exposition of Jefferson’s monarchical desire to be the sole signer of a document that declares democratic independence from the monarchy of Great Britain, I contend, provides us with an opportunity to further explore what dictates Jefferson’s monarchical desire.

Turning to the notes from General Congress and the Federalist Conventions, in Section II, I draw on the work of W.E.B. Du Bois to argue that the images of insurgent slaves from the Haitian Revolution that appear in the notes from General Congress meetings serve as manufactured mechanisms of terror that were not only used by members of general congress to preserve and protect the *kratos* (freedom and power) of the *demos* (people), but also to restore and re-create the ontology of “American man.” In Sections II and III, I demonstrate that this process of restoration and recovery can be seen at work in overlooked passages from Jefferson’s *Notes On the State of Virginia*.

In Jefferson’s *Notes*, the slave is configured as neither African, nor Euro-American, but as “black.” With help from Warren’s analysis of “blackness” in comic books, periodicals, and other cultural materials during the antebellum United States, I argue that, for Jefferson, “blackness” represents formlessness. As such, Jefferson's re-invention of the specifically "black" slave as the incarnation of a terrifying formlessness is an example of what Warren calls "black ~~being.~~" Black ~~being~~ is that dimension of the Whole (Being or Nature) that is represented in nineteenth century discourses as irrecoverable and irremediable. In other words, it is the dimension of Being or Nature that cannot be restored because it is permanently gone. Thus, in Jefferson's strange metaphysics, a space or gap of nothing exists between one end of Being (spirit or soul) and the other. This abyssal depression, or gap of nothing, represents what Warren calls the "execration of Being" (*Ontological Terror* 27). Thus, rather than being re-introduced into the legal order as a human, as a species being in other words, Jefferson re-creates the slave as a host to house the formlessness of blackness, and therefore turns black ~~being~~ into an "accursed share" of creation unintelligible to human ontology.

In Sections III and IV, I delve into an analysis of the Three Fifths Compromise recounted through a fictional narrative by James Madison in "Federalist Paper 54." Reading this Compromise through the primary narrative of the loss outlined in Chapter One, the metaphysical status of black slaves as representing three fifths of a person marks the continuation of the obliteration of the transcendental violence of the slave trade. The alienated two-fifths that are missing represent what cannot be represented—the non-place of that which never arrived and therefore cannot be restored or translated. Furthermore, the fundamental reproduction of this process of obliteration and alienation I contend, exposes the problem at the heart of democracy. Namely, that insofar as democracy remains based in a return to a space of pure "freedom" to renew itself, and that is open to its own historical transformation and interminable self-criticiziability, it sustains the metaphysical holocaust of the transatlantic slave trade via the erasure of that holocaust. This chapter unpacks the haunting concealment of this paradoxical problem.

In Chapter Three, "Emersonian Double Evasion and the Invention of Democratic Literature," I argue that the origins of what I call "democratic literature" were born out of Ralph Waldo Emerson's attempt to address the failures of the Founding Fathers which had led to a divided and morally impotent republic. Normally, Emerson is read through a Marxist critique and dialectical materialism. The influence of this reading, in part, comes from the compelling work by PAS scholar Cary Wolfe, Cornell West, Sharon Cameron and a handful of other writers I address in my chapter. Through these and other authors, I explain that current interest in Emerson's legacy is centering less and less on a young mystic or sage attempting to break away from the puritanical traditions of his time to make a name for himself as a new kind of scholar in the American academy, and more on a persuasive and serious philosopher of self-critique. In the spirit of this new Emersonian "self-critique," I argue that the different approaches to Emerson that have emerged since the 90s only ever interpret what Emerson often referred to as The Fall or "crisis" of Universal Being through the framework of a Marxian cultural analysis of the French and American industrial revolutions. I contend that, although helpful in some respects, this way of reading Emerson has ultimately prevented readers from considering the possibility that Emerson's narrative on "the Fall" of Universal Being was less about the industrial revolution and more about the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade and slavery in the United States.

Revisiting some of Emerson's often overlooked essays, journals, and commentaries on race and slavery I reframe the problem of the crisis of Being as stemming from the history of the enslavement of African's which Emerson claims began at the beginning of time. My focus is not so much with the factual "truth" of this claim, but rather with what *function* it serves for Emerson's overall project. The horrors of slavery, I argue, led Emerson to believe that he could *historicize* and therefore interpret the indeterminable, and otherwise sacred ambivalence of the event of "The

Fall." Being capable of historicizing this event is important for Emerson because through its historicization Emerson believed he could restore and even improve Universal Being.

In Section II and III, I trace out Emerson's project to restore and improve Universal Being via his intention to re-create a new notion of "man." As such, I conceptualize Emerson's response to the catastrophe that slavery caused for the moral sentiment of humankind as an attempt to found a democratic literature which would enable him to restore the spirit and strength of humankind. Emerson's process of restoration and recovery involves gathering the best individuals from each race and culture for the purpose of reproducing the might and power of what Emerson calls "Universal Being." In contradistinction to more recent scholarship that has attempted to recuperate a utopian cosmopolitanism from Emerson, I argue that this "gathering" is an attempt to not only preserve, but also enhance "the Saxon" race. This enhancement, I contend, is Emerson's plight to overcome the complete obliteration of the Saxon race—the terror of nothing that the black slaves of the American Republic represent to Emerson. Once again, ontological speciesism shows itself as grounding Universal Being in a notion of sentience that is denied to black captives.

The Fourth and final Chapter of this dissertation, "Blackness, Whiteness, and Terror in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*," is a re-reading of Melville's *Moby-Dick*; *Or, The Whale*. In section one I draw on the work of Toni Morrison and Calvin L. Warren to reframe and therefore reinterpret the reviews and letters Melville wrote during the time he was composing *Moby-Dick*, to shift our understanding of a novel about capital to one about race relations in the United States. In doing so, I outline Melville's criticisms of Nathaniel Hawthorne as a staging of the problem of the "free black" for democratic society, which Melville continues to pursue in *Moby-Dick.* With the help of Morrison, I argue that Melville's notion of "ruthless" and "unconditional" democracy stages a critique of the abolition and anti-abolition discourses of his time.

In section two, I unpack Melville's neither abolitionist, nor anti-abolitionist position via following the narrative of Ishmael's and Queequeg's friendship. I analyze Ishmael's commentary on (and anxiety towards) Queequeg's blackness and contend that to overcome his anxiety, Ishmael writes Queequeg's biography and attempts to understand who he is and where he comes from. When faced with the uncertainty and impossibility of not being able to account for Queequeg's origins, Ishmael covers over the past that remains a mystery to both Ishmael and Queequeg by slowly humanizing him over the course of the novel. In contradistinction to the claims of other authors (namely, D. H. Lawrence, C. L. R. James, and Morrison), I argue that although Ishmael believes he is doing the right thing by humanizing Ishmael, by seeing that they are both occupied by the same "self," he nevertheless ends up repeating the violence of the past by hiding the absences and silences that make up an integral part of Queequeg's identity with a blanket humanism. In other words, I argue that every attempt Ishmael makes to rewrite Queequeg's identity involves, to a certain degree, a misrepresentation of Queequeg.

In the final stages of this chapter, I explain that although the "unconditionality" of democracy is normally thought of as a space free of conditions from which a different (and hopefully better) form of democracy will always remain to come, in contradistinction to Emerson, for Melville it seems that every attempt Ishmael makes to occupy that position of freedom reproduces a problematic antiblack arithmetic of utility. With every attempt to transcend the juridical and political norms of representative democracy, Ishmael reorganizes taxonomical grammars, scientific and artistic methodologies in ways that perpetually renew a vicious cycle of institutional violence. In closing, I argue that, far from being a narrative about the commercial enterprise of whaling, Melville's *Moby-Dick* is about how the lexicon and grammar of race informs our perceptions desires, and lexicons of zoology and evolutionary models of man.

Chapter 1
"The Primary Narrative"

Introduction

> The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line,—the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea (*The Souls of Black Folk* 15)

Although it is difficult to find an exact origin for the phrase "color line" because of its increasing appearance in newspaper articles, magazines, and other forms of popular and public media after 1868, one might say that Du Bois's notion of it derives from an article by Frederick Douglass, entitled "The Color Line," published in the *North American Review* in 1881. In Douglass's article, he explains that "the color line" is an archaic form of racial prejudice and discrimination that, through centuries of development from antiquity, reached its most intense form of discrimination through racial segregation laws that were enforced via military oppression used against black people in the years after the abolition of slavery in the United States. The expression "the color line" received popular attention as a phrase of critical commentary about the discrimination of segregation laws in the United States through W. E. B. Du Bois's own use of it in his "Address to the Nations of the World" at the First Pan-African Conference in London in July of 1900. An elaborate exploration of what Du Bois describes as the problem of the color line that both he and Douglass claim haunted the American Republic in the twentieth century appears three years later in his 1903 publication of *The Souls of Black Folk*. Nearly fifty years later, in 1952 (nine years before Du Bois moved to Ghana), Du Bois wrote an essay for *Jewish Life* magazine about his experiences during a trip to Poland. In that article, he documents how his experience of the Poland ghettos's changed his understanding of the color line. As Du Bois puts it in "The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto," "the race problem in which I was interested cut across lines of color and physique and belief and status and was a matter of cultural patterns, perverted teaching and human hate and prejudice, which reached all sorts of people and caused endless evil to all men" ("Ghetto" 45-46). In this essay, Du Bois's notion of the color line reflects a less restricted and a more general understanding of the reorganizational program of racism. After the world wars and by the early to mid 1950s, for Du Bois, the problem of the color line seems to reflect a more dynamic, even incalculable movement of racial discrimination that manifests itself trans-nationally.

It is important to note this here because this chapter follows Hortense Spillers's effort to answer what is perhaps the unresolvable problem of the historicity of what Du Bois called "the color line." For the problem of the color line has everything to do with the problem of historicity, of "the event" of the Middle Passage. Therefore, this chapter opens with a reading of the childhood memory that Du Bois says led him to understand that to be black in the United States is *to be* a problem. In so doing, I suggest that Spillers locates the emergence of what Douglass and Du Bois call the color line in the world-making event of the Middle Passage. Following Spillers into the materials of and on the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the color line emerges out of what I understand as the pre-existing grammar of the translation Atlantic slave trade. In section two, with help from Ethan Kleinberg and Jacques Derrida, I demonstrate how, according to Spillers, the grammar of ungendering African subjectivities during the trans-Atlantic slave trade impacts and problematizes the discourses of sexual difference in certain strands of feminism and Freudian psychoanalysis in particular. By exploring Spillers's caution against the sometimes strongly adopted use of gender undecidability, I attempt to demonstrate how Spillers's caution can be understood through what Kleinberg calls the perils of ontological realism, or what Jacques Derrida in *Of Grammatology* (and other writings), calls the ethnocentrism of the metaphysics of presence. In the third section, with help from Frederick Douglass and Elissa Marder, I attempt to make more explicit how and why, according to Spillers, Freudian psychoanalysis remains oriented by an ethnocentric, and therefore patrilineal notion of sexual difference. My claim is that Freud does not, and to a certain degree cannot, account for sexual difference beyond a certain notion of ethnocentrism due to the historical erasure of black subjectivities that Spillers maps out in “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe.” By making her critique of psychoanalysis more explicit, I then demonstrate how Spillers refurbishes the Freudian notion of the oceanic and the maternal function to reinterpret the event of the Middle Passage. Spillers’s reinterpretation of the Middle Passage, therefore, is already at work from the beginning of her article. As such, I argue that the Spillers’s rearticulation of the oceanic is the condition for the possibility of her attempt to “invent” a new or primary narrative about irremediable and irreparable loss.

In the fourth and final section, I propose that the irremediable and irreparable loss of the language, knowledge, customs, and culture that grounded what I can only insufficiently refer to here as “African subjectivity,” is the condition for the possibility of what I call “ontological speciesism.” In the final stages of this chapter, I suggest that the terror of this irremediable loss results in the formation of the racial category of whiteness. Whiteness, I contend, emerges as an animal species. As such, the epistemic category of Euro-American man appears as a reaction formation through the negation and loss of African culture and customs during the transatlantic slave trade. Next chapter, we will explore the formation of this ontological speciesism and the problem of representation in Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes On the State of Virginia* and James Madison’s *Federalist Papers*. By way of preparing for the chapter to come, it will be shown that what Spillers calls “the hieroglyphics of the flesh” is what I call “the non-democratic opening of democracy.”

Section I

In the opening pages of *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B Du Bois recalls the moment in his childhood when he realized that he was black. As Du Bois explains, the problem of the color line became apparent to him during an exchange of welcome cards between his classmates. His card was "peremptorily" refused by a tall Southern white girl because he was black. Of this denial and rejection from the play of exchange between his classmates, Du Bois writes that "it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap [*sic*], in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil" (*Souls* 8).

For my purposes here, Du Bois's veil concept can be read as threefold: first, the veil is a socially constructed marker denoting darker skin complexion as a factual difference from whiteness. Secondly, the veil marks that white people do not see black people as "true" Americans. And lastly, the veil refers to the difficulty of Black-Americans to see themselves outside of the structured web of related concepts and ideas that Euro-American scholarship, legislation, and popular discourse has prescribed for black subjectivity. Therefore, one might say that the veil is a kind of grammar that mediates Du Bois's sensual relationship to himself. As such, Du Bois is born into a pre-existing grammar that he must draw on to represent, and account for himself. What Du Bois finds perplexing, is not so much that the grammar he inhabits is not his own, but that all of the points of reference that he draws from (in English, French, and German) to give an account of his temporal and historical position in and to the world, are not only dehumanizing and humiliating, but also radically insufficient to account for his general state or status in a society that has works to fundamentally excluded him (be it through the Constitution, the carceral state, the exception clause in the Thirteenth Amendment, and Jim Crow Laws). In other words, there are no points of reference for Du Bois that go beyond a misinformed, anthropological Euro-American gaze. This is “the real problem,” according to Du Bois. “To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word” (7). Indeed, what does one do when one has no point of reference to account for oneself? And perhaps, further still, how does one account for the fact that one has no point of reference? Or, to put it somewhat differently, how might one account for the largely unthought *problem* of the historicity[5] of what Du Bois called “the color line”?

In “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” Hortense Spillers sets as her task to answer this question. To do so, she explains that “The symbolic order that I wish to trace in this writing, calling it an ‘American grammar,’ begins at the ‘beginning,’ which is really a rupture and a radically different kind of cultural continuation” (“Mama’s” 68). Aside from the work of Du Bois, what prompts Spillers to trace out what she calls “American grammar,” is Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s *The Negro Family: The Case For National Action* (known as the Moynihan Report, 1965).

Spillers begins her interpretation of “The Moynihan Report” by pointing out that it is organized by “a class of symbolic paradigms that 1) inscribe ‘ethnicity’ as a scene of negation and 2) confirm the human body as a metonymic figure of an entire repertoire of human and social arrangements” (66). As such, “The Moynihan Report” positions “white” and “black” families in a problematic binary opposition. As Spillers demonstrates, the report blames black women for

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[5] I write “historicity” because the question that Du Bois is asking is how can one account for what cannot be counted? For the missing, the forgotten, and destroyed customs and language that, before the slave trade, were used to account for one’s self. If historicity means the historical actuality of persons and events, the quality of being part of history as opposed to being a historical myth, legend, or fiction, then the best Du Bois can do is account for the historicity of the catastrophe or the disaster of the utter destruction and loss of the languages and customs no longer available for him to use. For more on Du Bois’s notion of the color line and how it relates to the problem of historicity and ontological difference, see Nahum Dimitri Chandler’s *X-The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Thought*, 68-80 and 109-110. Although Chandler’s discussion of Du Bois (and Spillers’s reading of Du Bois) is invaluable I cannot pursue a reading of his work here.

perverting the economic and political integration of black communities with "the rest" of society. According to Moynihan's findings, "In essence, the Negro community has been forced into a matriarchal structure which, because it is so far out of line with the *rest of American society*, seriously retards the progress of the group as a whole, and imposes a crushing burden on the Negro male and, in consequence, on a great many Negro women as well" (*Report* 75).[6]

Among many things, what the statement "rest of American society" reveals to Spillers is how a certain notion of ethnicity functions as the transcendental, historical experience in and from which all meaning is made. According to Spillers, "'ethnicity,' from the point of view of the Report, embodies nothing more than a mode of memorial time, as Roland Barthes outlines the dynamics of myth" (Ibid). Although Barthes's essay "Myth Today" is cited and mobilized by Spillers to help her describe ethnicity as embodying a mode of time similar to that of myth, Spillers does not simply depend on Barthes to demonstrate the problem she sees at work across a number of disciplines, from sociology and history, to psychoanalysis and the emergence of certain strands in feminism. Rather than demonstrating how Barthesian discourse comes to inform and direct Spillers's analysis, then, in this section I follow her into the grammar of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. In doing so, I attempt to excavate from her work "the American Grammar Book" that is the condition for the possibility of the ethnocentric mode of "memorial time" that Spillers identifies as the organizing and coercive structure of not just the Moynihan report, but also the feminist and psychoanalytic paradigms she engages throughout her essay. What this section (and Chapter) *does not claim*, however, is that psychoanalysis, sociology, history, and feminism are completely inadequate and should therefore be abandoned. Rather, what I hope to show is how Spillers's attenuation to the problem of the emergence of a specific notion of ethnocentrism allows her to

[6] Also in Spillers's "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 65.

demonstrate the shortcomings of psychoanalysis and how certain dimensions of psychoanalysis can be transformed and re-used to open a discussion on language and the problem of representation.

Section II

From the point of view of the Report, “ethnicity” can be understood as a variant of what Ethan Kleinberg calls “ontological realism” in the opening pages of *Haunting History: For a Deconstructive Approach to The Past.* According to Kleinberg, “ontological realism [is] a commitment to history as an endeavor concerned with events assigned to a specific location in space and time that are in principle observable and as such are regarded as fixed and immutable” (*Haunting* 1). From this definition of ontological realism emerges two variants of thinking about history: a stronger position and a weaker position. On the one hand, the stronger position thinks that we can have full access to the past. According to Kleinberg, there are very few (if any) historians who currently hold this belief. On the other hand, the weaker variant posits an ontological reality to the past that historians believe “we can only approach from a limited perspective and incompletely from our position in the present and thus with epistemological uncertainty about that which is ontologically certain” (2). This latter perspective of the past is the one that, as we shall soon see, both Kleinberg and Spillers engage for the purpose of demonstrating how, as Kleinberg puts it in his book, “the stronger version is always at work unannounced in the weaker one” (Ibid). In other words, as I will show in a moment, what concerns both Kleinberg and Spillers about the weaker variant of ontological realism is that it takes its current epistemological understanding of the past as the ontological reality of the past, and therefore represses different possibilities for thinking about how certain events or even different dimensions of events that happened in the past contributed to shaping the language scholars use to describe themselves, their contemporary moment, and their relation to history. Such an approach to thinking about the past, then, remains (knowingly or unknowingly) predicated on misunderstanding its historical condition as contained within a permanently enduring present. The (intentional or unintentional) permanence that is sometimes smuggled in under the guise of terms like "uncertainty" leads the ontological realist to forge a notion of the past that mirrors what they misconstrue as their present condition. Therefore, one might say that in spite of themselves and their claims to the uncertainty of their current ontological condition, ontological realists end up positing themselves as self-present subjects that unknowingly and therefore ironically posit the past as permanently enduring. The current epistemological understanding of the past is taken to be the ontological reality of the past" (Ibid). As such, "It is this indifference to the epistemological understanding," Kleinberg continues, "that allows one to take our historically contingent mode of understanding as indicative of a method that is universally valid for all time" (2).

For Jacques Derrida, ontological realism would be a version of "the metaphysics of presence," or the phantasy of a form of self-proximity that gives "a privileged position to a sort of absolute now, the life of the present, the living present," which thinks of "the originality of the present as the absolute form of temporality" (*Of Grammatology* 336). Rather than thinking of subjectivity through the discursive of self-presence, or what Derrida later calls "*ipseity*" (*Rogues* 11),[7] he suggests an absence-presence way of thinking about how one experiences one's self and their relation to the world in general. But what exactly is absence-present? And perhaps more

[7] In *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, Derrida explains that ipsiety is the desire to be completely self-present. "By *ipseity* I thus wish to suggest some 'I can,' or at the very least the power that *gives itself* its own law, its force of law, its self-representation, the sovereign and reappropriating gathering of self in the simultaneity of an assemblage or assembly, being together, or 'living together,' as we say" (11).

importantly, what is "absence"? If presence is pure *ipseity*, "the one-self that gives itself its own law, of autofinality, autotely, self-relation as being in view of the self, beginning by the self with the end of self in view" (Ibid), then what is "absence"? And why is it important for Derrida's way of thinking about the constitution of subjectivity as not being fully (or even remotely) self-present? Is absence something wholly and entirely reserved to the point of being completely reticent? Or, is what Derrida calls absence a sort of "quasi-nothing" residue that enables unending cyclical and interminable re-turns? In a certain sense, one might say that absence is neither simply absent, nor simply present, but connotes what Derrida calls the trace structure in *Of Grammatology*.

According to Derrida, "The trace, where the relationship with the other is marked, articulates its possibility in the entire field of being [*étant*], which metaphysics has defined as the being-present starting from the occulted movement of the trace" (*OG* 47).[8] In this passage, the trace that Derrida says "is marked" by a relationship with the other might lead one to believe that "the trace" and "the other" are synonymous. In other words, one might be led to believe that the self-occultation of being—its temporal and spatial distancing that enables a self to appear as a self-present-image to itself—is made possible by the invisible "other" within it. Or, put a bit differently, a being only appears to itself *as* a being through the intervention, or even interiorization, of "the other" *as such*. If one keeps reading, however, they will come to find that if the self-occultation that allows a being to appear to itself "as such" were due to an "other" within, then the other would only ever be conceptualized according to the metaphysics of presence, or better yet, the positing of an origin, stable ground, or Being (such as God for instance). In other words, "the other" within

[8] Translation modified. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak translates the French *étant* as "entity." However, since Derrida is referring to how metaphysics has defined "being" as a "being-present" which starts from the self occulting movement of the trace, I prefer to translate *étant* as "being" rather than entity.

could only ever be thought as a synthesis of difference, or as a wholly, complete, or absolute "other" (God, essence, Being, or Idea). To avoid conceptualizing the trace as the other in this sense, Derrida goes on to write that "The field of being, before being determined as the field of presence, is structured according to the diverse possibilities—genetic and structural—of the trace" (*OG* 47; *DG* 69). Derrida seems to be describing the status of the trace here—occulted, neither present or absent, laden with diverse genetic and structural possibilities—as beyond the conceptual reach of any ethnocentric, or regional ontology which posits the subject as a self that can be defined according to a form of presence that it draws near to, or approximates towards (such as the Kantian Ideal, for instance). Thus the status of the trace in Derrida's work is *not* based on a notion of the other as completely other. Rather, what Derrida wishes to activate is a thinking of "the other" within, and that comes before any one, through the terms of the trace. To activate (as we shall soon see) what Derrida calls the "unmotivated" trace structure of metaphysics, Derrida claims that what he calls the general trace structure appears to metaphysics in the guise of "the other" in general. This is why, in *Of Grammatology*, Derrida writes that "the trace must be thought before being. But the movement of the trace is necessarily occulted, it produces itself *as self-occultation*. When the other announces itself as such, it [the other] presents itself in the dissimulation of itself" (*OG* 47) (emph. Mine).

Insofar as the other is dissimulated and is therefore not the complete or wholly "Other," *tout autre est tout autre*; or, as Geoffrey Bennington translates it "'every other (one) is every (bit) other'" ("Write, He Wrote" 131). What Spillers's analysis of ethnocentrism can add to Bennington's formulation here is that because every other (one) is every (bit) other, in spite of the structural similarity or symmetry of every other (one), every trace structure is not the same. This puts us in a better position to think through trace structures that involve severe forms of loss and trauma. I believe that it also helps us better understand why it is the case that if "the other" remains conceptualized as "the other" in general—and not as having been built out of the bits of every other—the general structure of the trace will continue to operate according to an ethnocentric ontology that mistakenly posits "the other" under the category of a general and concrete alterity. Under the aegis of an ethnocentric metaphysics of presence, the general structure of the trace remains "unmotivated" because it has always appeared under the guise of "the other" in general. Derrida notes that this is what is deceptive about the trace structure—it always *appears* to operate in the same way as the structure of the relation to "the other." To motivate (but not necessarily awaken) the trace structure and distinguish it from what the metaphysics of presence more often than not posits as the relation of the self as the general relation to "the other," Derrida suggests that it is necessary to engage in an abstraction. According to Derrida, "The general structure of the unmotivated trace communicates in the same way and cannot be separated except by abstraction, the structure of the relationship with the other, the movement of temporalization, and language as writing" (*OG* 47/ *DG* 66).[9] What I would like to suggest is that what Derrida refers to as "abstraction" is what Spillers's project is involved in accomplishing. The question for us therefore becomes how does one abstract something from nothing, from what is not there, has been utterly and completely obliterated? What does one's trace structure become when it is conditioned by absolute and utter absence? This question is important because, for Spillers, terms such as "uncertainty" and "undecidability," although important, need clarification because they do not mean the same thing for every one. This is what I take Spillers's point to mean when she writes

[9] Translation modified. Unless otherwise noted, I depend on Spivak's 1976 translation of *Of Grammatology* published via Johns Hopkins University Press.

about why the term "gender undecidability" is not universe and can sometimes appear to be used in a problematic way.

When "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe" was being prepared for publication, as Spillers explains in her essay, critical feminist discourses were making compelling arguments for why scholars across the social sciences, hard sciences, and humanities should adopt a system of thinking about gender in terms of "gender 'undecidability'" ("Mama's" 66). While undecidability is necessary for the possibility of gender differentiation, at the same time (and this is more towards what I interpret as Spillers's point here) it does not operate in the same way for every one. Undecidability can be a problem when it becomes universalized or even mobilized by the rigid framework of what Kleinberg calls the stronger form of ontological realism that operates (knowingly or unknowingly) in the guise of its weaker variant as "undecidable" or "uncertain." Policed by the science of "undecidability" or "uncertainty," one is never allowed to attempt to provide different accounts about historical events and how they may (or may not have) contributed to, for instance, how something like ontological uncertainty or gender undecidability came about. Such accounts are necessary, Spillers argues, if we are to de-idealize the terms "Female" and "Male," and make them available for saying something other than what they mean within existing systems of legislation. To de-idealize them, or to engage in a process of de-sedimenting them, would not necessarily be an attempt to altogether dismiss these categories. Rather, it would be an attempt to displace them as the constitutional points of reference for the way medical systems and systems of government define and think about sexual difference. As such, I interpret Spillers's caution about undecidability as an effort to open up a pathway for thinking sexual difference on a different register. But the difficulty of opening up such a pathway, or opening up a space into a different register, as we shall soon see, is more difficult than most scholars understand (hence Spillers's precaution about the way the term "undecidability" is so often used).

To open up a path for thinking gender undecidability on a different register than it is normally thought (still within the heuristic of an ethnocentrism that cannot account for irremediable and irrecoverable loss), Spillers recites the nicknames people routinely use to describe "her." These nicknames (which I will recite in a moment), Spillers argues, are indicative of a broader juridical and political framework for describing "black femininity" that stems from a largely unthought history of the corporately sponsored, government sanctioned, dehumanizing commodification of African bodies during (and after) the trans-Atlantic slave trade. "Embedded in a bizarre axiological ground," Spiller's explains, this largely unthought economy of nicknames, "demonstrate[s] a sort of telegraphic coding; they are markers so loaded with mythical prepossessing that there is no easy way for the agents buried beneath them to come clean" (Ibid). As a form of forceful signification that is involved in a sort of surplus layering—a way of naming that corrodes, obscures, or buries the possibility of (re)inventing a notion of self not bombarded by a dominant terminology that is not one's own—subjects under such conditions can become so fragmented that they begin to forget (and perhaps even forget that they have forgotten) that one is not, as Spillers states in the opening lines of her essay, "peaches," "brown sugar," "sapphire," "Earth mother," "Aunty," "Granny," God's "Holy Fool," a "miss Ebony First," or "Black woman at the Podium" (Ibid). To think, speak, and write otherwise about her personal identity, Spillers explains that she "must strip down through layers of attenuated meanings, made an excess in time, over time, assigned by a particular historical order, and there await whatever marvels of my own inventiveness" (Ibid). Indeed, as I will demonstrate, Spillers seeks to open an avenue or pathway for thinking otherwise about what she calls "the *potential* [Spillers's emph.] for gender differentiation as it might express itself along a range of stress points, including biology in its intersection with the project of culture" (Ibid).[10]

Under the aegis of ethnicity as mythical time—self-present, transcendental consciousness codified through legislation that secures patrilineal lines of inheritance—the writer of the Moynihan report fails to recognize and reflect on the extent to which his personal perspective of time projects onto the past. As such, taking the time of the past as a reflection of the present, Moynihan fails to account for some of the historical forces involved in the formation of the gender categories that he uses and imposes onto black subjects to make them intelligible not only to the legislative bodies of the state apparatus of representative democracy, but also to the general public. According to Spillers, if one reads carefully enough, what the "Moynihan Report" allows one to glimpse are the effects of a violent historical repression that guides Moynihan's caricaturization of "Daughter" and "Father." The signifiers "Daughter" and "Father" can be read as doubles. On the one hand, the categories "Father" and "Daughter" assume the biological gender categories female and male. Since African captives were commodified and turned into objects, as Spillers

[10] I believe that Spillers stresses the word "potential" in this sentence to indicate the kind of rigorous thinking she claims is needed to open a pocket where something like gender differentiation can be glimpsed as a possibility within a system of legislation that has not sufficiently accounted for the past that still directs the way gender is commonly thought. No doubt, Spillers is not the first to raise questions about how to think more rigorously and carefully about gender differentiation. She makes no such claim in "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe." Rather, as she explains, her efforts in this essay are an attempt to add to the "feminist investigation" seeking to fill "the disquieting lacunae" which, if accounted for, would help public discourse (73). The rigorous, reflexive attenuation to detail that she demonstrates and calls for, as we shall soon see, through her reading of the problem of naming and the re-organization of the socio-political symbolic order of the "proper" name in "The New World" due to the transatlantic slave-trade, seeks to open potential dimensions of thinking about the history of sexual difference that would have otherwise remained unregistered and unthought. It is with respect to this "unthought" dimension of the historical narrative of gender in the historiography of the slave trade that Spillers wishes to draw attention to for the purpose of refining the way critical feminist discourses and psychoanalysis think about "gender 'undecidability'" (66).

shows in her essay, this attribution of a biological body to a subject who has always been denied the biomedical status of a "proper" body (according to international laws delegating the exchange of commerce between multiple nation states), represses and therefore covers over the history of the historical process of dehumanization and objectification that Africans were subjected to. On the other hand, this erasure covers over the position of black subjects within the social stratification of the United States. As such, the categories of "Father" and "Daughter" in this report harbor an unthought, yet common historical ground that destabilizes the certainty and security of these traditional gender categories. As mentioned earlier, since every trace structure is not the same, what Spillers is arguing here is that when the gender categories of "Male" and "Female" are superimposed onto the body of people whose traditions were destroyed due to the transatlantic slave trade, the logic of undecidability appears differently than it would for other cultures and ethnicities. The undecidability that Spillers is speaking about and referring to is a place of absolute loss, complete oblivion. This space or point of non-reference, is the point of absence, of non-arrival, that provides Spillers with the condition for the possibility of black femininity and masculinity as "double." According to Spillers, "my contention that these social and cultural subjects make doubles, unstable in their respective identities, in effect transports us to a common historical ground, the socio-political order of the New World" (67). The New World order, Spillers will go on to explain, "*represents* for its African and indigenous peoples a scene of *actual* mutilation, dismemberment, and exile" (Ibid). The slave trade, as well as European colonization of the Americas, is marked by what Spiller's calls "*a theft of the body* [emph. Spillers]" and a "severing of the captive body from its motive will, its active desire" (Ibid).

This violence (the severing, uprooting, mutilation, and diasporic mass movement of bodies from Africa to the Americas between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries) resulted in a certain kind of loss, according to Spillers. "Under these conditions," she writes, "we lose at least *gender* difference *in the outcome* [emph. Spillers], and the female body and the male body become a territory of cultural political maneuver, not at all gender-specific" (Ibid). To account for what Spillers means by the loss of gender specificity, she reopens documents from the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and returns to the events that "interrupted hundreds of years of black African culture" in an effort to add to the unappeasable hunger of its recorded memory (68).

According to Spillers, researchers familiar with the material she is reading have found themselves at a loss when attempting to locate references to African women during the opening years of the slave trade. "[T]his cultural subject," she writes, "is concealed beneath the mighty debris of the itemized account, between the lives of the massive logs of commercial enterprise that over run the sense of clarity we believe we had gained concerning this collective humiliation" (69). We see the concealment that Spillers draws our attention to in Elizabeth Donna's four-volume work *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America* (1932), which Spillers reopens to unpack the long history of misnaming, stereotyping, and animalizing that grew out of Gomes Eanes de Zurara's conquest (1441-1448), the epistemological classification systems of Portuguese Christian science, and Euro-American taxonomies (69-70).

Reading the vertical columns of accounts and ledgers that comprise Donna's work, Spillers notes how "the terms 'Negroes' and 'slaves' denote a common status" (73). In reports from 1700 to 1702, these terms appear as synonyms. This early example of homogenizing African captives under one category is evidence of what Spillers understands as the process of "the destruction of the African name, of kin, of linguistic, and ritual connections" that is overlooked more often than readers of these records would like to admit. This erasure, she explains, is not a simple silencing but a rewriting, a fictional caricaturization and styling of African persons. Since "the trader is not interested, in any *semantic* sense, in this 'baggage' that he must deliver," Spillers argues, we have all the more reason "to search out the metaphorical implication of *naming* as one of the key sources of a bitter Americanizing for African persons" (73).

Tracing out a structured web of related metaphors and nicknames along a path of historical impression points that "lend shape to the business of dehumanized naming," Spillers demonstrates that there is no shortage of nicknames to be found in the records she is reading. From market pricing and bestialization, to the deployment of nicknames and categories such as "the faithless," "hideous," "primitive," "heretical," "child-like," and "savage," these nicknames, Spillers argues, show us the emergence of a discourse that stems from a fear of blackness as an altering negative force. By the time these nicknames become common throughout Europe, "the 'faithless,'" Spillers explains, "become an *altered* [Spillers's emph.] human factor" (70). On the one hand, what the nicknames illustrate is that, according to European epistemology and classification, blackness signified the danger of corruption and degeneration, of a "fall" from a pure or healthy state. On the other hand, the common parlance of this language also illustrates a kind of birth or invention of the European ego. As Spillers puts it, "The altered human factor renders an alterity of European ego, an invention, or 'discovery' as decisive in the full range of its social implications as the birth of a new born" (71). What Donna's records of the slave trade show, then, is how *the heuristic of difference and a certain notion of the European ego were forged out of the animalizing and commodifying rhetoric of the slave trade.* This heuristic of animalizing and commodifying is built out of the process of erasure. In other words, the nicknames not only contribute to the complete erasure of African's customs and culture, but they also *conceal* or *hide* this obliteration in the process. And against the emergence of the commodified body (an object without a referent), comes the emergence of a form of the European ego—a subject with the capacity for (patrilineal) self-referentiality. This European ego marks the beginnings of what I call "ontological speciesism"—a being who understands himself as having a point of reference (and everything that comes with this, including a notion of a "sense" of self and where one comes from). The link between "sense," self, and culture becomes grounded, and hence the emergence of a certain kind of ethnocentrism.

If we follow Spillers, it is impossible to account for speciesism outside of an ethnocentrism that not only builds itself out of the objectification of African subjects to give to itself a certain kind of power or capacity, but also takes its own ideal of itself as the criterion against which all life is to be measured. This is already demonstrated by Douglass in his autobiography when he writes the scene of valuation. According to Douglass:

> We were all ranked together at the valuation. Men and women, old and young, married and single, were ranked with horses, sheep, and swine. There were horses and men, cattle and women, pigs and children, all holding the same rank in the scale of being, and were all subjected to the same narrow examination. Silver-headed age and sprightly youth, maids and matrons, had to undergo the same indelicate inspection. At this moment, I saw more clearly than ever the brutalizing effects of slavery upon both slave and slaveholder (*Narrative* 37)

What this scene demonstrates is not so much that slaves were animalized or ranked alongside animals because they were seen or labeled as animals according to existing laws in the United States during the nineteenth century. Rather, it demonstrates that because Douglass and others lack a point of reference, and therefore incarnate a metaphysical nothing, they are ranked according to different kinds of animals. In other words, the point of non-arrival or non-referral, enables the invention of a system of ranking based on animals traits and abilities. "Horses," "cattle," and "pigs" all signify a certain kind of labor and place within the economic of the plantation system. The lexicon of (Euro-American) identity and difference, in other words, would at least in part derive from and remain dictated by the way people from Africa were pathologized during the trans-Atlantic slave trade and under the conditions of enslavement. And as we shall see in Chapters Two and Three, the observations of what Spillers describes as this public and scholastic perception and fear of blackness as an altering force or factor of degeneration, is what prompts American philosophers and literary writers to return to the question of Being. Indeed, as Derrida argues in "Racism's Last Word," the discriminatory rhetoric and phobia of blackness is *le dernier*—the last, the worst, and "the most racist of racisms" ("Racisms Last Word" 291).

"Racisms Last Word" is an essay of Derrida's that appeared in the preface to "Art against Apartheid," which is an exhibition assembled by the Association of Artists of the World against Apartheid, headed by Ernest Pignon and Antonio Suara, in co-operation with the United Nations Special Committee against Apartheid. In his essay, Derrida comments on the art exhibition's response to the South African government's apartheid policies. According to Derrida, the exhibition attempts to do the impossible—give time so that there be a future where it seems as if there presently is none due to the systematic efforts of the juridical and political processes of apartheid. The exhibition, Derrida writes, "offers only a foresight in painting, very close to silence, and the rearview vision of a future for which *apartheid* will be the name of something finally abolished" (291).

Tracing out the historical forces that led to the invention of the term "apartheid"—a word which has never been translated—Derrida explains, "racial segregation didn't wait for the name *apartheid* to come along" (Ibid). Rather, the word apartheid grew out of an archaic logic, by which "white must not let itself be touched by black, be it even at the remove of language or symbol" (Ibid). And yet, according to Derrida, "hasn't *apartheid* always been the archival record for the unnameable?" (291). Tracing out the archaism that the word apartheid has concentrated into it, Derrida demonstrates that the language of what he calls "apartitionality" derives from British slavery laws. As such, the word apartheid is guided and assembled by an older attempt to limit and police story-telling to a few for the purpose of preserving a notion of human identity as a form of sovereign purity, or non-divisible presence:

> The word concentrates separation, raises it to another power and sets separation itself *apart*: "apartitionality," something like that. [...] There's no racism without a language. The point is not that acts of racial violence are only words but rather that they have to have a word. Even though it offers the excuse of blood, color, birth—or, rather, *because* it uses this naturalist and sometimes creationist discourse—racism always betrays the perversion of a man, the 'talking animal.' It institutes, declares, writes, inscribes, prescribes. A system of marks, it outlines space in order to assign forced residence or to close off borders. It does not discern, it discriminates (292).

The judicial simulacrum and political theater of state racism that Derrida outlines in his essay, he argues "would have had no chance outside a European 'discourse' on the concept of race" (Ibid). "That discourse," he states, "belongs to a whole system of 'phantasm,' to a certain representation of nature, life, history, religion, and law" (Ibid). What Derrida's notion of "apartitionality" helps us understand about the point Spillers makes in her essay, is that the heuristic of difference, alterity, and degradation that she is drawing our attention to, is built out of and remains guided by a narrative grid of associations, "or semantic and iconic folds," Spillers writes, "buried deep in the collective past, that come to surround and signify the captive person" ("Mama's" 69). As such, for both Derrida and Spillers, the archaic onto-theological language of the slave trade not only helped to "invent" the phantasm of blackness as a force of degeneration, at the same time we can also see that the phantasm of blackness was used to invent the phantasm that Derrida says calls itself "*homo politics europaeus*" ("Racisms Last Word" 294).

Giving a rigorous account of the processes of writing that led to the birth of the phantasm *homo politics europaeus*, or the European ego, in "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," Spillers undertakes a comparative reading of the *Life of Olaudah Equiano* (first published in London in 1789) and de Zurara's *The Chronicle of The Discovery of the Conquest of Guinea*. In both these accounts, regarding encounters with “the other,” Spillers locates what she calls a “Hierarchical impulse in *both* de Azurara’s and Equiano’s narratives” which translates “all *perceived* differences as fundamental degradation *or* transcendence,” with the exception that “in Equiano’s case, cultural practices are not observed in any intimate connection with skin color” (71). Comparing the grammar of Equiano and de Zurara, Spillers demonstrates that de Zurara’s grammar allows us to see “the perspective of ‘declension,’ not of simultaneity,” and also that de Zurara’s “point of initiation is solipsistic—it begins with a narrative self, in an apparent unity of feeling” (70). The perspective of de Zurara can be read, according to Spillers, as *an example* of how the phantasm of blackness as a negative agent of change came to inform the lexicon of “‘transcendence’ and ‘degradation,’” and therefore became “the basis of a historic violence that will rewrite the histories of modern Europe and black Africa” (71).

From here, Spillers continues to reflect on Equiano’s account of his experience on the slave ship that transported him from his homeland to the Virginian colony in the United States. Commenting on the nicknames that Equiano recounts were given to him by his captors, Spillers explains that Equiano’s nicknames are further examples of the slave trade practices of nicknaming during Equiano’s time and that they contribute to the process of “ungendering” African subjects. Taking Equiano’s narrative as her case study, Spillers explains that the nicknames that are given to Equiano rewrite his identity in the trans-national cultural imaginary of the slave trade that informed the juridical, political, and legislative culture that Equiano was transported to. In this trans-national cultural imaginary, nicknames operate for the purpose of making Equiano and other captives intelligible as commodities under the legislative framework of international property laws. In addition to this, the nicknames which work to reduce gender specific markers of identity through the process of commodifying African subjects, also come to inform the architectural arrangements of space on slave ships. According to Spillers, the ungendering logic of the nickname can be glimpsed in the blueprints and maps of slave ship design. Through a critical analysis of the architectural measurements of space on slave ships documented and reproduced in Donna's volume, Spillers unpacks the kind of calculative thinking that contributed to "the dehumanizing, ungendering, and defacing project of African persons that de Zurara's narrator [Donna] might have recognized" (72). Black women, she tells us, are measured according to an arbitrary measurement of the anatomy of black males, which the passages that Spillers quotes from Donna's historical record of the conditions of transit show. The female body, she writes, is "quantifiable by the same rules of accounting as her male counterpart" (Ibid). In other words, even the design of the spacial arrangements to transport bodies by ship contributed to the historical process of ungendering African subjects.

To be clear, the process of ungendering that Spillers is carefully unfolding is not a simple erasure. Ungendering is a long process of rewriting the body in multiple registers and venues (from history and psychology, to philosophy, literature, medical, and legal policy) that has taken place over centuries but emerges in its most intense form during the trans-Atlantic slave trade. From a Freudian perspective, "under these conditions," Spillers writes, "one is neither female, nor male, as both subjects are taken into 'account' as *quantities* [Spillers's emph.]" (Ibid). As such, Spillers continues:

> Those African persons in 'Middle Passage' were literally suspended in the 'oceanic,' if we think of the latter in its Freudian orientation as an analogy for undifferentiated identity: removed from the indigenous land and culture, and not-yet 'American' either, these captive persons, without names that their captors would recognize, were in movement across the Atlantic, but they were also *nowhere* at all. Inasmuch as, on any given day, we might imagine, the captive personality did not know where s/he was, we could say that they were the culturally 'unmade,' thrown in the midst of a figurative darkness that 'exposed' their destinies to an unknown course (72).

Section III

As those familiar with psychoanalysis know, the "oceanic" appears in a letter sent to Freud by Romain Rolland in 1927. In that letter, Rolland asks Freud to provide an explanation for what is sometimes referred to as the inexplicable "religious experience" of the eternal, which Rolland likens to an oceanic feeling[11] without perceptible limits. Taking up Rolland's request at the end of *The Future of an Illusion* and *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud argues that the "oceanic feeling" adults sometimes experience can be understood as the return of a "primitive ego-feeling" in adult life that precedes the creation of the ego until the mother ceases breastfeeding her child. Because the infant is regularly breastfed in response to its crying and whenever it demands to be fed, the infant has no conception of its "self" because it is interpreted by Freud as comprising an undifferentiated part of the mother. The mother's body, in other words, from the perspective from the infant, does not exist apart from the baby and vice-versa. At the earliest formative stage, or near zero degree of living, the infant's identity can be interpreted as undifferentiated, yet unknowingly undergoing the slow process of erotic zone formation. Through breast feeding the process of erotic zone formation and a feeling that something is lacking becomes recognizable. From this feeling of "lack" Freud argues that one can map out the ways in which human beings have been programmed to strive for pleasure. He then goes on to examine different cultural activities, such as intoxication, religion, art, music, writing, and "technological advancement" in general (*Civilization* 61), as (conscious and unconscious) reproductions of the efforts of human beings to recover that oceanic feeling of happiness, or what becomes idealized as the state of pure,

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[11] «Mais j'aurais aimé à vous voir faire l'analyse du sentiment religieux spontané ou, plus exactement, de la sensation religieuse qui est (...) le fait simple et direct de la sensation de l'éternel (qui peut très bien n'être pas éternel, mais simplement sans bornes perceptibles, et comme océanique).» *Un beau visage à tous sens. Choix de lettres de Romain Rolland (1866-1944)*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1967, pp. 264–266.

originary pleasure that has been lost, but nevertheless remains recoverable (if only briefly) through these cultural inventions and activities.

In Chapter Three of *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud argues that the lack that emerges due to what human beings come to think of as the "loss" of this originary state of pleasure, gives way to three things, which contribute to human suffering: the feeling of the superior power of nature, the degeneracy of the body, and the relationship to each other and the nation-state. In so far as human beings are part of nature, and nature harbors within itself the processes of death and decay, human beings can never master themselves, nor sufficiently satisfy or fulfill that original lack which they continuously attempt to recover through various avenues of cultural activity.[12]

Turning to political philosophy, Freud then goes on to explain that because human beings can never sufficiently satisfy or fulfill the lack they feel as they grow older, it is perhaps easy to understand why, in so many political discourses, civilization or political society is conceptualized as contributing to the suffering of human beings via the production of social ills. Although civilization was built to protect human beings (from the destructive processes of nature and human

[12] There is an important and vast bibliography of work (past and present) on the question of nature, mastery, and the relationship of pleasure and death, Eros and Thanatos, the pleasure principle and the death drive in Freudian psychoanalysis, especially by scholars in literature, philosophy, and psychoanalysis. And although that work is of great interest to me and is important for my research in this dissertation, my focus in this section of this Chapter is not to give a rigorous reading of the oceanic in Freud, but rather to provide a very general, and in many ways inadequate, narrative in an attempt to account for what Spillers's implicit criticism of what the Freudian notion of the oceanic does not, and therefore, cannot account for due to the destruction of African culture and customs during the transatlantic slave trade. As such, what I am arguing here is that in so far is Spillers depends on the oceanic to demonstrate her point, in turn, what her point demonstrates is that there is a concentrated historical dimension in the Freudian oceanic that goes unaccounted for by Freud, which complicates his discourse on sexual difference in *Totem and Taboo* and *Civilization and Its Discontents*. This (un)countable point, would be space of non-reference through, upon, and out of which she opens her discourse on gender differentiation. This would be the opening up onto the "other register" that I alluded to in Section's I and II above when discussing Spillers's warning about the universal deployment of terms like "gender undecidability."

beings) so that people may live a good and happy life, those mechanisms of protection are also the same ones that contribute to the psychological neuroses of human beings, via the legislative repression of freedom that can lead to frustrations which play themselves out through the human relations that make up the general social fabric of society. The cultural ideals that generate the pressure Freud attempts to unpack in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, can be traced back to two major cultural activities: the victory of Christianity over the "heathen" religions and the studies conducted by anthropologists of "primitive" people (59). The case of the former marks a devaluation of life through the dominance of the Christian doctrine of the flesh (rules regulating sexuality that then leads to the generation of different neuroses). The rise of the doctrine of the flesh, in turn severely impairing the sexual life of civil subjects, is what eventually leads anthropologists to study "primitive" races, which Freud argues led European anthropology and and society to not only romanticize non-Christian cultures, but also to mistakenly think that cultures not governed by Christian ideology do not suffer from the social neuroses produced by Christianity. Rather than viewing Christian ideology and social-values as the birth place of all social-ills and sexual repression, Freud locates the intensification of social-ills under the helm of Christian culture as stemming from a mythic past which, in *Totem and Taboo*, he argued is observable in, and can be recovered from, the systems of Totemism and their laws prohibiting incest in the aboriginal communities of Australia, and among the cultures of the Pacific Islands and Africa.

For Freud, like "the system of totemism," the ideals of Christian social values stem from an originary guilt, the consequences of which follow from an act of aggression carried out against the father. As such, the emergence of religion or Christian ideals and social values can be read as a claim to redeem mankind for the original sin of murdering the father, which produces mankind's guilt. Playing on an earlier formulation at the end of *Totem and Taboo*, in Chapter 8 of *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud interprets the biblical scene of the death of Christ as an iteration of the pre-historic and primitive murderous act of sons killing their father. This murderous act, Freud argues, gives birth to the guilt that comes to found civilization (its social norms, legislative acts, and religious practices). In *The Mother In the Age of Mechanical Reproduction: Psychoanalysis, Photography, Deconstruction*, Elissa Marder describes this founding act as "the paternal function" (the cultural meaning of which has traditionally occupied a pivotal role in the founding narratives of cultural institutions of all kinds including religion, anthropology, psychoanalysis, politics, and the law)" (*Mother* 3). The guilt that emerges from the death of the father is what leads to the paternal function—the mechanical reproduction of social and legal norms or pressures that inhibit and frustrate sexual freedom. As such, a multitude of socio-political anxieties and neuroses emerge (such as obsessional neuroses and phobias). "It was discovered" Freud writes, "that a person becomes neurotic because he cannot tolerate the amount of frustration society imposes on him in the service of its cultural Ideals" (59). As such, "All the things with which we seek to protect ourselves against the threats that emanate from suffering are part of that very civilization" (*Civilization* 58). Technological achievements, such as the train, the telephone that allows one to hear the voice of their children, friends, and family from afar, and all the other accomplishments we can think of which turn the human into what Freud calls "a prosthetic god" (65), are "cheap enjoyments" (61).

The "cheap enjoyment" of technological advancement, as Freud refers to it, cannot sustain happiness, and only briefly acts as a cheap supplement for the loss of that originary, infantile oceanic feeling that Freud argues we all pass through before transitioning into the guilt-stricken symbolic order of civilization. And yet, according to Freud, this is precisely the generative, and perhaps "positive" function of civilization—to mechanically reproduce finite technologies that stimulate, and therefore re-simulate the feeling of the oceanic. As such, psychoanalysis serves the purpose of locating, revealing, and relieving the patient of their social frustrations. There is, perhaps, the movement of a *fort/da* condensed into Freud's formulation of the paternal function of civilization in this text. As is well-known, "fort/da" is Freud's name for a game played by his 18-month-old grandson involving a cotton reel. The boy would repeatedly throw the cotton reel out of his crib, forcing his mother to retrieve it for him, at which point he would express his appreciation through sounds that are not of the common order of language. Nevertheless, Freud interpreted the noises of the baby as approximations to the German words "*fort*," meaning "gone," and "*da*," meaning "there." The significance of the game appears in Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). In this text, Freud argues that the game demonstrates how the child transforms an unhappy situation, one in which the boy has no control, into a happy one in which the parents are, once again, at the beck and call of the child. At the risk of simplifying and deforming this narrative, along with a history of many compelling analyses of it that are certainly much richer than my description of it here, one might say that since civilization is a product of the paternal function, and that the paternal, father, or "Man" comes from nature, as Freud himself argues, there must be something intrinsic to nature, and therefore to human beings, that withholds the achievement of full satisfaction, or denies human beings from ever having full satisfaction. This withholding, according to Freud, is what gives way to the production of seemingly limitless avenues to experience and recover that originary oceanic feeling of happiness via the paternal function. But what exactly is "it" that is withheld? Or, to put the question a bit differently: what is withheld in *Freud's account* of that which is withholding?

One might say that, for Spillers, what is unthought and therefore withheld in Freudian psychoanalysis is the figure of the African mother. Although this critique of Freud is not explicitly stated in “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” it is nevertheless demonstrated by Spillers in her examination of the condition for the possibility of this withholding as an epistemic problem for political society in general. In addition to the process of ungendering dehumanization that Spillers maps out through a reading of the nicknames and categories of the animalization of Africans during the slave trade, she undertakes a reading of materials from “the internal African slave trade, which, according to Africanists, remained a predominantly *female* market” (“Mama’s 72). Working through Herbert S. Klein’s “African Women in the Atlantic Slave Trade,” and Donna’s third volume “New England and the Middle Colonies,” Spillers attempts to account for the position of black African women in documents and materials from the Atlantic slave trade. “Because it was the rule, however—not the exception—that the African female, in both indigenous African cultures and in what becomes her ‘home,’ performed tasks of hard physical labor,” Spillers writes, “we wonder at the seeming docility of the subject, granting her a ‘feminization’ that enslavement kept at bay. Indeed, across the spate of discourses that I examined for this writing, the acts of enslavement and responses to it comprise a more or less agnostic engagement of confrontational hostilities among males. The visual and historical evidence betrays the dominant discourse on the matter as incomplete, but *counter-evidence* is inadequate as well: the sexual violation of captive females and their own express rage against their oppressors did not constitute events that captains and their crews rushed to record in letters to their sponsoring companies, or sons on board in letters home to their New England Mamas” (73). Indeed, there is an absence of the life of women, children, infants, pregnant female captives, and the unborn in literature from and on the “Middle Passage.” “This cultural subject,” she writes, “is inscribed historically as anonymity/anomie in various public documents of European-American mal(e)venture, from Portuguese de Zurara in the middle of the fifteenth century, to South Carolina's Henry Laurens in the eighteenth century" (Ibid). This disturbing and disquieting silence is read by Spillers as a nickname for a distortion that has come to influence and direct the language of psychoanalysis which seems to unknowingly draw from the slave trades discursive framework that had not only caricatured the identity and difference of blackness, but also made it ready to hand for European anthropologists, sociologists, religious studies scholars, and researchers in their accounts of African families and mothers.

For Spillers, the literature that Freud draws on to write about the ego, the oceanic feeling, the splitting of the subject, subject object relations, and the family structure, especially in works such as *Totem and Taboo* and *Civilization and Its Discontents*, are dictated and directed by the heuristic of the slave trade. In other words, the accounts that Freud read about the totemic systems of "primitive" societies and African peoples would have been, at least in part, informed, organized, directed, and dictated by the early formative stages of what Spillers calls the American grammar book. The calculative measures taken to ungender and therefore *rewrite* African identity during the trans-Atlantic slave trade, as Spillers shows, led to the phantasmatic caricaturization of Africans, indigenous peoples, and more specifically, for Spillers, African mothers who remain absent from all the materials she reads. This means that the social anthropologists, religious studies scholars, and archaeologists who Freud read to conduct his analysis of the family structures of Africans and indigenous peoples and their laws in *Totem and Taboo*, would have been built out of the animalizing terms, nicknames, and ungendering grammar of the African slave trade.

It would not be hard to show this for two reasons. First, of all the texts that Freud read, the most influential of which is James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890) (which Freud draws from extensively), none of them takes into account the the event of the Middle Passage and the historical process of ungendering that Spillers outlines. In other words, not one scholar accounts for the absence that accrues from the obliteration and destruction that Spillers is mapping out in her essay. Insofar as Frazer, Freud, and others do not take the destructive processes of the Middle Passage into consideration, or at least never explicitly mention it and how it might have a potential impact on their thought and language, Freud cannot think outside of what he deems his own cultural frame of reference to translate the names or titles of non-European family members and their kinship roles within the communities he is reading and writing about in *Totem and Taboo*. Even my own use of terms such as "family members" and "kinship roles" remain insufficient signifies for attempting to name what is irremediable and irrecoverable. "The linguistic custom of these tribes, as well as of most totem races" Freud writes, have familial names that Freud says equate to what Western culture calls "'uncle' and 'aunt,'" which he also says can "be found in a transferred sense when we speak of 'Brothers in Apollo,' or 'Sisters in Christ'" (*Totem* 10-11). What this shows us is that Freud's point of reference for translating the linguistic customs and terms of the communities he is reading about is based on the heuristic archive of "proper" names and titles that (whether he knows it or not) come from Freud's conception of western culture and society. Therefore, since Freud takes what he calls the European model of the family as his point of reference for translating and equating non-European names, customs, and titles, he is, in effect, unconsciously using proper European familial titles that, at least in part, came *to be* via the process of ungendering African captives. Therefore, in spite of himself and his attempt to use non-Christian customs and ideals to speak of sexual difference and the family household as the condition for the possibility of the event of Christianity, Freud's notion of the totemic system uses a very general notion of European Christianity as its point of reference and turns "the linguistic custom of these tribes, as well as of most totem races" into a version of Christianity that Freud then attempts to read as something which comes before Christianity and Greco-Roman prehistory. The result of his study is already determined by his point of departure—the Christian family structure.

Insofar as Freudian psychoanalysis never bothered to question the configurations of the family structures in the accounts Freud read to write *Totem and Taboo* and *Civilization and Its Discontents*—seminal texts that have influenced generations of scholars in and outside of psychoanalysis—the Freudian corpus not only remains haunted by the grammar of the slave trade, but more specifically it remains haunted by the absence of the African mother in them. For Spillers, the absence of the voices of African mothers is what haunts the documents and history of the slave trade, anthropology, psychology, theology, philosophy, psychoanalysis, and politics. And furthermore, this disquieting silence is what haunts the discourse of haunting. It is, as the title of Anneleen Masschelein's book puts it, *The Unconcept* of the Freudian *unheimlich*.

And yet, it is also worth mentioning that perhaps the African mother remains the unconcept of Masschelein's unconcept since Spillers and other scholars working at the intersection of black studies and psychoanalysis are not cited or discussed at any point in Masschelein's book, which is an elaborate exploration of the historical, and scholarly movements that contributed to the paradoxical configuration of the Freudian *unheimlich* (that which is most familiar and most strange) in late twentieth century theory. Given the unthought history of the ungendering historical repression that Spillers outlines in her essay, it is perhaps unsurprising why, even though Masschelein undertakes a rigorous reading of the dissemination of the Freudian *unheimlich* in fields as uncommon and diverse as hauntology, ghost studies, robotics, and artificial intelligence (in English, French, and German), she does not cite, nor engage, Spillers, or any other scholar working at the intersection of black studies and psychoanalysis. As such, since discourses on haunting in critical race studies and black studies (such as Toni Morrison for instance) remain unaccounted for by the psychoanalytic order of haunting that has come to have a significant impact on many fields across the social sciences and humanities, it is perhaps also unsurprising why, for Spillers, psychoanalysis remains insufficient for thinking beyond a certain ethnocentric framework of history that has yet to account for the historical paradoxes and complexities of the family unit under the conditions of enslavement after the Middle Passage. And yet, insofar as Spillers exposes why Freudian psychoanalysis cannot account for, and thus remains unconsciously oriented by, the lexical processes that led to the ungendering commodification of African subjects during the slave trade, Freud's notion of the oceanic can now be refurbished and used for performing an active reinterpretation of the Middle Passage, or what Spillers calls "the beginning." Although it is hard to imagine what possibilities can be culled from this vulnerable oceanic space of the unknown in the middle of the Atlantic, how Spillers and other scholars interpret the incalculable reticence of this impossible journey, as I hope to show, is remarkable.

Section IV

According to Dionne Brand, "The Middle Passage" is the door of no return. "The Door of No Return," she writes in *A Map to The Door of No Return*, "is of course no place at all but a metaphor for place" (*Door* 3). As the metaphoric place of no place, it is "a collection of places," "real, imaginary and imagined" (4). The door of these real, imagined, or imaginary places, she writes, is "The door out of which Africans were captured, loaded onto ships heading for the New World. It was the door of a million exits multiplied. It is a door many of us wish never existed" (Ibid). As such, the Middle Passage is "a tear in the world," according to Brand (4). It is an opening that cannot be returned to but nevertheless returns in the most untimely ways and manifestations, as Christina Sharpe shows in her insightful commentary on the *Narrative of The Life of Frederick Douglass* in *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects*.

When Douglass describes his childhood memory of having to bear witness to the torture of his aunt Hester, he writes that what he saw "was the blood-stained gate, the entrance to the hell of slavery, through which I was about to pass" (*Narrative* 16). Recalling this scene, Christina Sharpe writes that "From those Africans forced to step over the threshold of the door of no return into the Middle Passage, to their dispersal in the diaspora and entry through the bloodstained gate, new forms of subjectivity are created not only for people of African descent in the diaspora but also for Africans, Europeans, and others. Extraordinary sites of domination and intimacy, slavery and the Middle Passage were ruptures with and a suspension of the known world that initiated enormous and on going psychic, temporal, and bodily breaches" (*Monstrous* 4). Following Sharpe, one might say that since the Middle Passage represents the creation of new subjectivities, it is also the condition for the possibility of a new international modernity. This new international modernity, one might also suggest, is made out of the monstrous intimacies that haunt the socio-political, and economic fabric of the every day from within, as Jared Sexton explains in the interview "On Black Negativity, Or the Affirmation of Nothing" with Daniel Colucciello Barber.

In "On Black Negativity," Sexton picks up on what Sharpe demonstrates in her book and returns to the work of Brand in order to rethink this "tear in the world" or "tearing of the world" as a dehiscence that has been unleashed everywhere in the advent of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. According to Sexton, this tear in the world "is also a statement, an offering or gift, really, for thinking differently about space, time, being, existence and so on—a whole series of ontological matters—*through* [Sexton's emph.] an inextricable and inescapable nexus of sociopolitical problems giving rise to divergent ethical dilemmas" ("Black Negativity"). What Sexton helps us understand about the Middle Passage is how it confronts the world with the question of what it means to live in households and nation-states made and unmade by slavery. What does it mean to live in a world torn apart and put back together through the emergence and evolution of the slave trade? Drawing on the work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in *Ontological Terror: Blackness, Nihilism, and Emancipation*, Calvin L. Warren interprets The Middle Passage as an ontological catachresis that results in the production of a black ~~being~~ without a proper referent (*Terror* 88). For Warren, to exist without a proper referent in an anti-black world, means to exist in a state of unending terror.

Working somewhere at the intersection of literature and history, Spillers interprets the oceanic of the Middle Passage as "a wild and unclaimed richness of possibility that is not interrupted, not 'counted'/'accounted,' or differentiated, until its movement gains the land thousands of miles away from the point of departure" ("Mama's" 72). For Spillers, the unaccounted for space of the oceanic in the middle of the Atlantic offers a possibility for thinking carefully and rigorously about how the slave trade shaped the inescapable nexus of sociopolitical problems and divergent ethical dilemmas of the United States. The slave trade had a significant impact on international policies and political relations all over the world and within the United States in the years leading up to and following the American Revolutionary War. As such, it remains an important event for understanding the shift from feudalism and monarchy, to slavery and the invention of representative democracy. In a certain sense, the Middle Passage can be understood as what I will call *the non-democratic opening of democracy*, or what Herman Melville called *unconditional democracy*.

The phrase "unconditional democracy" appears in an 1851 letter from Melville to Nathanial Hawthorne. Melville tells Hawthorne that "It seems an inconsistency to assert unconditional democracy in all things, and yet confess a dislike to all mankind—in the mass. But not so. –But it's an endless sermon,—no more of it" (*Correspondence* 191). Although I will explore the meaning of what Melville calls unconditional democracy more thoroughly through a re-reading of Melville's *Moby-Dick* in the fourth and final Chapter of this dissertation, it is nevertheless important to note here that what I think Melville felt and tried to articulate, reflects what Sexton describes as a dehiscence everywhere. What I am calling the non-democratic opening of democracy, then, is the tearing open of the world that gives way to the monstrous play of what Spillers calls the emergence of an unrecognized distinction between body and flesh, covered over by the heuristic of color, that began to appear in the literature and historical materials in the United States during the turn of the eighteenth into the nineteenth century. As I hope to show in the final stages of this chapter, what Spillers calls "the hieroglyphics of the flesh" that emerges out of this monstrous play is the factious spirit that, as we shall see next chapter, haunts the Federalist system of representative democracy from within.

According to Spillers, the historical memory of the nicknames of the slave trade that she charts, "demonstrate the powers of distortion that the dominant community seizes as its unlawful prerogative" (69). Since the process of "gendering" takes place for Spillers "within the confines of the domestic, an essential metaphor that then spreads its tentacles for male and female subjects over a wider ground of human and social purposes," the lexicon of the domestic can be traced back to specific cultural fictions that involve the logic of repurposing "proper names, more exactly, a patronymic, which, in turn, situates those persons it 'covers' in a particular place" (72). To understand the particular place or position of black captors within the patronymic system of the New World order, Spillers undertakes readings of different historical materials produced under the political order of the United States in the eighteenth century to show how "the dynamics of naming and valuation, remains grounded in the originating metaphors of captivity and mutilation so that it is as if neither time nor history, nor historiography and its topics, shows movement, as the human subject is 'murdered' over and over again by the passions of a bloodless and anonymous archaism, showing itself in endless disguise" (68).

Spillers contends that the unaccounted for distinction of body and flesh emerges in different narratological accounts about the torturing of captives in the United States. She shows this through critical commentary on medical reports and advertisements, the narratives of Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, and "William Goodell's contemporaneous study of the North American slave codes" which give "precise expression to the tortures and instruments of captivity" (67). Although all the materials Spillers comments on are important and crucial for understanding what she calls the "split between body and flesh" emerges and presents itself to her, I will only comment on her analysis of Goodell and then Douglass because I believe it is in Goodell's study in particular that Spillers sees how the most extreme articulation of the distinction between body and flesh emerges from the dehumanizing, ungendering processes of the slave trade.

"Reporting an instance of Jonathan Edwards's observations on the tortures of enslavement," Spillers writes about how the descriptions of torture by Edwards and Goodell mark and remark the heuristic of alterity that distances the captive as object from the subject position of the captor. From scholarly and scientific accounts of these cruelties, Spillers goes on to "make a distinction in this case between 'body' and 'flesh' and impose that distinction as the central one between captive and liberated subject-positions" (Ibid). By way of a critical commentary on Goodell's study of North American slave codes and the technical instruments used to torture black captives in the scene of the domestic, she interprets the descriptions of the "indecipherable markings on the captive body" as "a kind of hieroglyphics of the flesh whose severe disjuncture come to be hidden by the cultural seeing by skin color" (Ibid). For Spillers, the horrifying wounds she reads of create distance between what she calls "a cultural *vestibularity* and the *culture*, whose state apparatus […] apparently colludes with a protocol of 'search and destroy'" (Ibid). The torturous marks on the flesh remain hidden beneath the cultural racial categories that were built out of the torturous markings. The cultural signifier that marks the enslaved as "black male" or "black female" cover over and hide these marks that not only marked the enslaved, but also the cultural memory of generations to come. The unseen torturous "hieroglyphic" markings of the flesh, mark the irremediable and irrecoverable loss of African culture, customs, and resources. This loss or point of non-reference transfers over from one generation to the next, but is never seen by the majority of American culture due to the racial category "black," which hides the difference between a legally protected body and unprotected flesh, a gendered body and "female flesh 'ungendered'" as Spillers describes it (Ibid). Therefore, although before the slave trade we might have been able to say that every other (one) is every (bit) other, what Spillers's "hieroglyphics of the flesh" demonstrates is that after the slave trade the condition that is added to the trace structure ends up being something like every other (one) cannot necessarily be every (bit) other due to the irremediable and irrecoverable loss of African customs, cultures, and resources during the transatlantic slave trade and the conditions of enslavement.

In addition to the cruelties that Spillers undertakes readings of, she states that the positions of legally protected bodies and unprotected flesh are perhaps most visible in the way government apparatuses within the United States sanctioned the use of enslaved communities for medical research. While I will not reproduce the medical advertisements that sought to purchase and/or receive donations of both healthy and sick black captives, it is important to note that for Spillers the language of these documents indicates a complete disassociation and unrelatedness of ungendered black flesh from gendered bodies protected under the juridical and legislative framework of *habeas corpus*.

Under these conditions, according to Spillers, "we lose any hint of suggestion of a dimension of ethics, of relatedness between human personality and its anatomical features, between one human personality and another, between human personality and cultural institutions. To that extent, the procedures adopted for the captive flesh demarcate *a total objectification*, as the entire captive community becomes a living laboratory" (Ibid). I believe that what Spillers interprets as the distinction between body and flesh in the historical materials she examines is informed by the institutionalization of what I have begun to describe here and will go on to elaborate in the next chapter as the "ontological speciesism" around which representative democracy is structured. As we shall soon see, according to Madison's exposition of the philosophical principles underlying the American Constitution, under the system of federalism, unlike black slaves, American citizens have rights to their own bodies and therefore remain protected under the constitution in ways that black slaves are not because citizens own their body. Because American citizens have a body in contradistinction to slaves under the system of federalism, they also help form part of an institutional body, which Madison defines as the federalist system of "representative democracy." Federalism, as Madison will come to tell us, is not a nationalism. For Madison, the age of nationalism belongs to old world regimes of Europe. The regime of federalism comes with a new constitution of personhood. By studying Madison's discourse on factions we will gain a better sense of what disturbs this corpus from within. Before we get there, however, it is important to continue to outline the distinction between body and flesh that Spillers culls from her analyses of different materials in the United States.

By analyzing the "externally imposed meanings and uses" of captives in catalog reports from slave ships, sociological studies, advertisements, medical reports, and autobiographical literature, Spillers argues that the captive appears to function in the order of the social and political norms of the New World in the following ways:

> 1) The captive body becomes the source of an irresistible, destructive sensuality; 2) at the same time—in stunning contradiction—the captive body reduces to a thing becoming *being for* the captor; 3) in this absence *from* a subjective position, the captured sexualities provide a physical and biological expression of 'otherness'; 4) as a category of 'otherness,' the captive body translates into a potential for pornotroping and embodies sheer physical powerlessness that slides into a more general 'powerlessness,' resonating through various centers of human and social meaning (67)

What the imposed meanings and different uses of captives as objects allows one to understand about the position of captors in the texts Spillers reads, is the displacement of "genitalia, the female's and male's desire that engenders future" (73). Understanding this displacement is crucial, Spillers contends, because it will help us better understand the complexities of the black family structure under the conditions of enslavement.

Undertaking a critical review of "kinlessness" in Claire C. Robertson's and Martin A. Klein's *Women and Slavery in Africa*, and Claude Meillassoux's "Female Slavery," Spillers notes that, although problematic, Meillassoux's determination of the idea of kinlessness becomes useful "as a point of contemplation when we try to sharpen our own sense of the African female's reproductive uses within the diasporic enterprise of enslavement and the genetic reproduction for the enslaved" (74). Under the conditions of captivity not only is the mother's relation to her experience of giving birth mediated by property law, at the same time the offspring of the enslaved is rendered unrelated to its parents and their owners. Therefore, according to Spillers, the familial status of the child under the conditions of enslavement remains "yet to be defined" (74). Furthermore, because the child is born into a patronymic, patrifocal, patrilineal, and patriarchical order, kinship loses meaning, according to Spillers, "since it can be invaded at any given and arbitrary moment by the property relations" (74). As such, not only does the category of femininity lose its "sacredness" under the conditions of enslavement, but "so does 'motherhood' as female blood-rite/right" (75). One can see this most clearly, Spillers argues, in the 1845 autobiographical *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*.

Spillers argues that Douglass's account, at the opening of his narrative, of the loss of his mother allows us to understand Freud's notion of "the maternal function" in a new light under the material conditions of enslavement. Spillers demonstrates that for Douglass, the maternal function constitutes "a psychological bonding whose success mandates the mother's presence" (76). Paying specific attention to the environmental conditions that induce Douglass's impulse to view his mother as a kind of home, and to therefore desire the presence of his absent mother, Spillers argues that even Douglass's sense of failed morning for the arbitrary loss of his mother at an early age is the supplement of a pre-existing grid of meaning. In these overdetermined conditions, once captives realize this, as did Douglass after he taught himself how to read and write, the captive is opened to the chaos of their social ambiguity. After recounting how he taught himself to read and write, Douglass notes that he repeatedly read Richard Brinkley Sheridan's catholic speeches on the emancipation of slavery. "What I got from Sheridan" Douglass writes, "was a bold denunciation of slavery, and a powerful vindication of human rights. The reading of these documents" he continues, "enabled me to utter my thoughts, and to meet the arguments brought forward to sustain slavery; but while they relieved me of one difficulty, they brought on another even more painful than the one of which I was relieved." According to Douglass:

> The more I read, the more I was led to abhor and detest my enslavers. I could regard them in no other light than a band of successful robbers, who had left their homes, and gone to Africa, and stolen us from our homes, and in a strange land reduced us to slavery. I loathed them as being the meanest as well as the most wicked of men.

> As I read and contemplated the subject, behold! That very discontentment which Master Hugh had predicted would follow my learning to read had already come, to comment and sting my soul to unutterable anguish. As I writhed under it, I would at times feel that learning to read had been a curse rather than a blessing; It had given me a view of my wretched condition, without the remedy. It opened my eyes to the horrible pit, but to no ladder upon which to get out (*Narrative* 34-35).

Douglass's realization about his own discontentment is that he has no point of reference to express his feelings of discontent beyond the language of Master Hughes and the way he understands discontentment. Douglass's anguish is truly unutterable and agrammatical because it cannot be represented, except through a language that provides him with no referent to express a form of suffering that does not simultaneously refer to or imply the dominant, bodily norm of civilization and its discontents. And since, for Douglass, his father "was most likely the 'master,' not by any means special to Douglass," Spillers writes, what Douglass faced was the "hideous paradox" that, at best, fatherhood will be "a supreme cultural courtesy, attenuated here on the one hand into a monstrous accumulation of power on the other. One has been 'made' and 'brought' by disparate currencies, linking back to a common origin of exchange and domination" ("Mama's" 76). Due to the slave trade, not only is Douglass's perception of himself mediated by titles that are not his own, but his feelings are mechanically reproduced and manufactured by the pre-existing environmental grammar of enslavement. The realization of this split consciousness, or that one has no point of reference beyond four centuries worth of the supplementary grammar of enslavement, is what Du Bois calls the unsettling double consciousness of African subjectivity. "Under these arrangements," Spillers continues, "the customary lexis of sexuality, including 'reproduction,' 'motherhood,' 'pleasure,' and 'desire' are thrown into unrelieved crisis" (76). Although unimaginable, we can gain perhaps a conceptual understanding of just how critical this crisis is in the opening pages of Elissa Marder's *The Mother in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction: Psychoanalysis, Photography, Deconstruction.*

Among many things, what Marder helps us understand about the radical crisis of the maternal function for sexual difference across different epistemic registers, is that according to Freudian psychoanalysis the event of "one's own" birth is radically unthinkable and therefore unrecoverable. As Marder puts it, "However much we might want to lay claim to having a unique relation to the singularity of the event of our own birth, we have no direct access to it. We remain both bound to and exiled from our own birth. As an event, birth accrues and produces psychic meanings long before there is anyone 'home' in the self who would be able to attempt to read those meanings. In this sense," she continues, "the event of our birth is not our own even if it is profoundly and uniquely addressed to us" (*Mother* 4). What complicates this event and makes it radically unthinkable, Marder explains, is that in one's absence, it is generally assumed that "someone else, the mother, is there at the scene—in our place—without being there as our witness, proxy or representative" (Ibid). Indeed, as she says a little later, "The mother's presumed 'presence' at the scene of our birth strangely accentuates the paradoxical fact that we ourselves are radically excluded from it" (5). For Marder, then, since the event of one's birth is radically unthinkable because one cannot be "present" to it, through different avenues of cultural reproduction, we spend a fair portion of our lives (knowingly and unknowingly) attempting to return to this scene, to re-present it, "to account for it individually and collectively" (5).

As if matters were not complicated enough, the event of birth is further inundated, Marder argues, when we shift our attention to the mother. Marder explains that "to the extent that the mother is 'present' at the scene at all, she is not entirely 'present' to herself, since she is there in two very different capacities: as a human being with a history of life experiences and a set of expectations (both conscious and unconscious) about the birth in which she participates, and as the incarnation of a reproductive capability of the maternal body" (Ibid). In other words, in so far as the mother is "there" in two very different capacities, she also cannot be fully present as a witness to herself in this event (hence why the event of birth is "inundated"). As such, although it is generally assumed and taken as an empirical fact that the mother is fully present to herself and the event of the birth of her child, at the same time her experience of herself is informed by a pre-existing grid of language and meaning that mediates her relationship to herself in ways that she cannot entirely anticipate. "Although the physical act of bearing children may be construed (and experienced) as a 'natural act,'" Marder writes, "the place accorded to the mother in culture and history, and the philosophical, political, and psychological *meaning* of what I shall call 'the maternal function' is anything but natural" (2). In other words, Marder's notion of the maternal function does not refer to "mothers" as it is conventionally understood in many important symbolic, psychic, and cultural activities under the conditions of a legal, biomedical framework.

Since the "Mother" is still popularly represented and philosophically understood as a natural figure of stability within the symbolic order of society, as can be seen or heard via the use of popular phrases such as the "Universal Mother," "Divine Mother," "Mother Nature, "the motherland," and so forth, in her book, Marder undertakes a rigorous exploration of "the concept of birth and the 'maternal function' independently of the role of the mother as a real person in the life of the child" (4). She takes this approach, in part, not to contest acts of mothers that may or may not provide comfort to their children, but to veer away from "the consequences of defining the cultural concept of 'Mother' as the symbolic place-holder for 'home' as stable point of origin," which Marder argues is "not only problematic but also inherently untenable" (Ibid). In fact, it is this inherent untenability of the mother that has led it to appear, quite paradoxically, as "both excluded from the realm of representation on the grounds that she is 'natural' and simultaneously inscribed into representational practices as the very name for that which cannot be represented"

(3). Thus, through a rigorous analysis of some of Freud's most visited works, and close readings of haunting cases (past and contemporary) about maternity that have become widely circulated among the general public of France and in French social media, Marder's notion of the maternal function wishes to account for the asymmetrical, and radically incommensurable relation between mother and child in the event of birth (4). In doing so, Marder understands the maternal function as the condition for the possibility of the mechanical reproduction of the many meanings that become attached to the maternal body in different, yet intersecting cultural and historical discourses in French literature, public case studies, psychoanalysis, philosophy, and photography.

Spillers's focus on the maternal function under the conditions of enslavement is not an attempt to deny that African subjects created and maintained powerful ties of sympathy and networks of feeling across time and space. To the contrary, Spillers argues that powerful ties of sympathy and networks of feeling endured through the formation of a new topography under the conditions of enslavement. She calls this new topography of memory formation "the hieroglyphics of the flesh" (67). Spillers's notion of the hieroglyphics of the flesh offers a way of accounting for the often unaccounted for historical (un)positioning of black subjectivities within dominant historical, political, biomedical, psychological, psychoanalytic, theological, and theoretical models of thinking. In other words, what Spillers calls the hieroglyphics of the flesh accounts for a different trace structure, one that takes into account the irremediable and irrecoverable loss of African customs, cultures, and resources during the transatlantic slave trade and the conditions of enslavement. In doing so, what I would like to suggest is that in taking this loss into account, Spillers opens pockets of potential narration that disrupt ethnocentric models of thinking about the body that have become universalized in different epistemic registers as diverse as legislation, political philosophy, biomedicine, and psychoanalysis. Insofar as one does not take this history into account, however, one risks perpetuating the historical processes that led to the (un)positioning of black subjectivities. The consequences of such short sightedness would therefore result in rendering the historical memory of the position of the enslaved "unthought," as Saidiya Hartman and Frank B. Wilderson III describe it in their interview "The Position of the Unthought," which I will turn to now in closing.

Conclusion

In "The Position of the Unthought," Hartman explains that in her book, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, she sought "to illuminate those practices that speak to the limits of most available narratives to explain the position of the enslaved. On one hand, the slave is the foundation of the national order, and, on the other, the slave occupies the position of the unthought. So what does it mean to try to bring that position into view without making it a locus of positive value, or without trying to fill in the void?" ("Unthought" 185). Like Hartman, Spillers is invested in exposing and therefore resisting the coercive measures of an integrationist political discourse that maintains a very rigid perspective of the body which, in turn, contributed (and continues to contribute) to hiding, forgetting, and covering over the "unthought" position of the enslaved and the destruction of their cultural memory. "Indeed," Spillers contends, "the *revised* 'Black Family' of enslavement has engendered an older tradition of historiographical and sociological writings than we usually think" (74). Insofar as the language of this older tradition of writing remains unscrutinized, Spillers argues, contemporary thinkers risk writing about the body in strictly ethnocentric register. As such, the distinction between body and flesh offers a rigorous way of thinking and writing that may allow us to glimpse "a rather different case from the moves of a dominant symbolic order, pledged to maintain the supremacy of race" (75).

On the one hand, the distinction between body and flesh that Spillers draws out of the historical materials she reads is an attempt to expose how the language of the body that we have inherited is a reproduction, rather than a transformation, of the language of slavery that still operates at the intersection of different paradigms of thinking as well as through legislative policies. On the other hand, this distinction is also a call for the de-idealization of the gender categories the govern the body. What I hope to demonstrate in the following Chapter is that what Spillers calls the hieroglyphic of the flesh haunts the federalist system of democracy from within. It is what threatens to undo the fabric of every social bond in the Federalist system. As we shall soon see, the terror of the absence of cultural memory, is precisely what the federalist system is built to manage and repress.

Chapter Two
"The Non-Democratic Opening of Democracy"

Introduction

Last chapter I read Hortense Spillers's notion of the "hieroglyphics of the flesh" through Jacques Derrida's conceptualization of the trace structure in *Of Grammatology*. As understood via the trace structure, Spillers's notion of American Grammar lays out what I called a transcendental violence. The word "transcendental," I contend, can be understood as a violence that comes before any decision or will of any one to violate any other. Understood in this sense, I contended that Spillers's notion of "American Grammar" lays the groundwork for thinking transcendental violence as an a priori operation that set in motion the destruction of the values, customs, and resources that grounded the living conditions and lives of subjects from Africa that existed before the transatlantic slave trade. To a certain extent, as discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, Spillers's notion of transcendental violence gives a slightly different meaning to the transcendental violence of Derrida's notion of "expropriation." In sections two and four of last Chapter, I rendered this slight difference in the following manner. Although before the slave trade we might have been able to say that every other (one) is every (bit) other, what Spillers's "hieroglyphics of the flesh" demonstrates is that after the slave trade the condition that is added to the trace structure ends up re-articulating it as something like every other (one) cannot necessarily be every (bit) other due to the irremediable and irrecoverable loss of African customs, cultures, and resources during the transatlantic slave trade and the conditions of enslavement.

In *Ontological Terror: Blackness, Nihilism, and Emancipation*, Calvin L. Warren describes this violence as "the thanatology or onticide of African being" (*Ontological Terror*, 42). What emerges on the other side of this metaphysical holocaust, Spillers and Warren contend, is the distinction between "body" and "flesh" (one and the non-arrival of one), or what Warren deems "being" and "existing." In the fourth and final section of Chapter One, I interpreted what Spillers calls the "flesh," or "zero degree" of social conceptualization as sharing an affinity with what Saidiya V. Hartman calls "the unthought" position of the enslaved. The unthought position of the enslaved, I claimed, and will go on to demonstrate in this Chapter, is the "non-democratic opening of democracy."

This Chapter is preoccupied with investigating what is unthought about the unthought position of the slave in the writings of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. As this Chapter unfurls, I will demonstrate that the grammar of representative democracy is programmed by the transcendental violence of the transatlantic slave trade and that representative democracy sustains the metaphysical holocaust (the complete obliteration of the values, customs, and resources that once grounded African subjectivity). Therefore, contrary to conventional narratives about democracy as the concept, government regime, or *doxa* that preserves and protects freedom, in what follows, I argue that it emerges from a host of creative and deceptive mutations that sustain the metaphysical holocaust. As such, freedom—the faculty or power to do as one pleases, to decide, to choose, to have self-determination, and self-mastery—and the desire to preserve freedom, is an illusion, or simulacrum *made* possible by the position of the unthought. To demonstrate this, I focus on how the "blackness" that is projected onto the slave designates the semantic vacancy or indetermination that exists before and at the very heart and center of representative democracy.

To demonstrate this, in Section I, we begin with Jacques Derrida's analysis of Thomas Jefferson's draft of the *Declaration of Independence* in his short essay "Declarations of Independence." Derrida's exposition of Jefferson's monarchical desire provides us with an opening to explore what motivates Jefferson's monarchical desire. Turning to the notes from

General Congress and the Federalist Conventions, in Section II, I draw on the work of W.E.B. Du Bois to argue that the images of insurgent slaves from the Haitian Revolution that appear in the notes from General Congress meetings serve as manufactured mechanisms of terror that were not only used by members of general congress to preserve and protect the *kratos* (understood in this context as the power to posses freedom) of the *demos* (people), but also to restore and re-create the ontology of "American man." In Sections II and III, I demonstrate that this process of restoration and recovery can be seen at work in passages from Jefferson's *Notes On the State of Virginia*.

In Jefferson's *Notes*, the slave is configured as neither African, nor Euro-American, but as "black." Drawing on the work of Calvin L. Warren, I argue that, for Jefferson, "blackness" represents formlessness. As such, Jefferson's re-invention of the specifically "black" slave as the incarnation of a terrifying formlessness is an example of what Warren calls "black ~~being.~~" Black ~~being~~ is that dimension of the Whole (Being or Nature) that is represented in nineteenth-century discourses as irrecoverable and irremediable. In other words, it is the dimension of Being or Nature that cannot be restored because it is permanently gone. Thus, a space or gap of nothing exists between one end of Being and the other in Jefferson's metaphysical schema. While it may seem odd as to why Being or nature would have "ends," this is precisely the "oddity" that this Chapter investigates. And what this investigation attempts to demonstrate is that the the gap of nothingness represents the "zero degree" of black ~~being~~ that Warren calls the "execration of Being" (*Ontological Terror* 27). Thus, rather than re-introducing the slave into the legal order as a human, Jefferson re-creates the slave as a host to house the formlessness of blackness, and therefore turns black ~~being~~ into an "accursed share" of creation unintelligible to his schema's of ontology.

In Sections III and IV, I argue that Jefferson and Madison need the slave to represent the incarnation of nothingness via the racial category of blackness to preserve the freedom of the racial category of "whiteness." As we shall see, the destruction of the flesh—what Warren calls "onticide"—produces the slave as property through which Jefferson and Madison re-member their ontologies as continuations of European "man." This racial re-configuration brings about a split between freedom and emancipation in their political writings. This split, or fundamental gap between freedom and emancipation, I argue, exposes the problem at the heart of democracy. Namely, that insofar as democracy remains based in a freedom of return that is open to its own historical transformation and interminable self-criticizability, it sustains the metaphysical holocaust of the transatlantic slave trade via the erasure of that holocaust. This chapter unpacks the haunting concealment of this problem.

This

I

In 1976, Jacques Derrida prefaced a lecture on Friedrich Nietzsche with some remarks on a version of Thomas Jefferson's draft of the *American Declaration of Independence* at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. The timing of the text's presentation is significant for two reasons. First, 1976 is the *bicentenary* of the *American Declaration of Independence* (1776). Second, it comes a year after the English translation of Derrida's critical response to John Searle's criticism of Derrida's essay "Signature, Event, Context." To begin his analysis on the bicentenary, the question that Derrida pursues, as he puts it, "is this one: *who signs, and with what so-called proper name, the declarative act that founds an institution*?" ("Declarations" 48). To unfurl some important points that will help us better understand Derrida's answer to this question, the first section of this chapter takes a brief detour through "Signature, Event, Context."

First, we should note how Derrida treats the "performative utterance." Opening J. L. Austin's *How To Do Things With Words*, Derrida explains that, for Austin, a performative utterance depends on the context in which it is spoken. For example, according to Austin, the phrase "I pronounce you man and wife," spoken at the end of a wedding ceremony, has meaning only if certain conditions are in place. If the same words were spoken on a stage during a play the meaning would not hold the same weight as it would during a wedding ceremony, even though the scene on stage during the play may produce the same effect on its audience as the ceremony. As such, the meaning of the phrase "I pronounce you man and wife," according to Austin, holds a different kind of meaning at the end of a wedding ceremony than on stage. Since the same phrase can change in meaning due to its context, then, according to Austin, a performative depends on the context in which an utterance is made. In "Signature, Event, Context," Derrida argues that this context-dependence is a constitutive feature of *all* utterances. In other words, Derrida's notion of a more general and enveloping text precedes and prepares Austin's claims about the strict criteria that he thinks "properly" contextualize a performative utterance, and argues that all texts (spoken or written) are part of a broader context, therefore making them contingent. There are, Derrida contends, only contexts "without any centre or absolute anchoring [*ancrage*]." ("Signature" 12). Since every mark has no *absolute* center, then, as demonstrated via our explanation of the trace structure in Section II of the last chapter, one might say that each mark is marked by each and every other mark. "This citationality, this duplication or duplicity, this iterability of the mark is neither an accident nor an anomaly, it is that ('normal'/'abnormal') without which a mark could not even have a function called 'normal'" (Ibid). The question that Derrida goes on to ask next will be the one that occupies us in section two of this chapter. Derrida asks, "What would a mark be that could not be cited?" (Ibid). I will return to this question after discussing the problem that Derrida makes of intention at the moment of any declaration.

According to Derrida, for all utterances (spoken or written) to be communicable they must be necessarily understandable in the absence of the speaker or author. Derrida demonstrates this in his polemical response and refutation to Searle, from whom he derives the following example:

> *At the very moment* 'I' make a shopping list, I know…that it will only be a list if it implies my absence, if it already detaches itself from me in order to function beyond my 'present' act and if it is utilizable at another time, in the absence of my being-present-now…in a moment, but one which is already the following moment, the absence of the now of writing, of the writer maintaining [*du maintenant-écrivant*], grasping with one hand his ballpoint pen (49).

There are two things to note about Derrida's point here. On the one hand, (traditionally understood) intention is tied to what Derrida calls the metaphysics of presence (discussed in section II of Chapter One). Intention is privileged because the meaning of a statement is generally thought to be connected to the thoughts of a speaker or author. This "thought" is usually conceptualized as present and thus making the writer or speaker present to himself and not absent-minded. Through Searle's shopping-list example, which Derrida uses against Searle, Derrida displaces the belief that intention is what dominates the production of meaning by suggesting that communicable utterances (whether written or spoken) have a life outside the context in which they are (re)produced. The life "outside" is the capacity to escape from any particular context *in general*. Derrida's shopping list example demonstrates that presence is always divided, or split by what he calls the trace structure. The written mark, even in the very ("present") moment in which it is written, can function in the *absence* of the author. This absence marks (is marked by and perhaps indexes) a broader terrain of text within which the shopping list is assembled. Intention, though important and relevant in many respects, cannot be the point or foundation from which meaning is produced (at least not according to how it is traditionally understood). For if it were, the list would not be able to function in the author's absence. Thus, the list functions without the author due to an invisible trace-structure or pre-existing grid of meaning that both inhabits and envelopes the list. It is therefore the "absence" of a centre and the absence of any present ground or foundation that is the condition of possibility for the list to even appear. As discussed in chapter one, this absence is not only imperceptible, but also non-methodical. It is, one might say, the necessary process of self-occultation that makes effects or presence and meaning and thereby any (ethnocentric) subjectivity possible.

Although on a slightly different register, one can see this argument at work in Derrida's reading of the *American Declaration of Independence*. As noted above, Derrida's "Declarations" turns on a two-fold question: "who signs, and with what so-called proper name, the declarative act that founds an institution?" ("Declarations" 48). At first glance, the answer to this question might appear uncontroversial: *The Declaration* is signed by the representatives of the United States of America in General Congress. And yet, closer examination yields a different answer. "Prudence imposes itself here," Derrida writes, "as does attention to detail. Let us distinguish between several instances within the moment of your Declaration" (48). Although Derrida does not label or distinguish these instances himself, I have taken the liberty of enumerating four instances that Derrida sees as having been condensed into the moment of the signing of *The Declaration*.

The first instant appears when Derrida focuses on Jefferson, "the draftsman" of *The Declaration*, and argues that "No one would take him for the true signer of the Declaration" (Ibid). As the draftsman, Jefferson writes down what the other representatives already knew they wanted to say. "He was not responsible for writing, in the productive or initiating sense of the term, only for drawing up, as one says of a secretary that he or she draws up a letter, of which the spirit has been breathed into him or her, or even the content dictated" (Ibid). The second instant comes about when Derrida recounts that the other representatives revise, correct, and ratify the draft of the *Declaration* (Ibid). For Derrida, this means that "for the 'representatives themselves,' they do not sign, either. In principle at least, because the right is divided here" (Ibid). And if it can be said that they do sign as a kind of collective entity, their signature is still divided because "they sign for themselves but also 'for' others" (Ibid). The third instant follows from the second. Because these representatives sign "*in the name and by the authority of the good people…of these United States*," according to Derrida, "By right, the signer is, thus, the people, the 'good' people (a decisive detail because it guarantees the value of the intention and the signature, but we will see further along on what, and on whom such a guarantee is founded or founds itself)" (49). And the fourth instant has everything to do with God. The signer, the good people, as Derrida will go on to argue near the end of his examination, sign or guarantee their goodness in the name of God. We will return to this last instant shortly, for it is where Derrida will make his intervention. For the moment, however, I will proceed by following how Derrida demonstrates the ways these four instants thread themselves together into the knot or moment of a signature.

The first three instants lead Derrida to return to the moment of the signature to ask the following questions:

> Is it that the good people have already freed themselves in fact and are only stating the fact of this emancipation in [par] the Declaration? Or is it rather that they free themselves at the instant of and by [par] the signature of this Declaration? (49).

The problem that Derrida has outlined here allows us to glimpse a necessary undecidability that emerges between the performative and constative structures of the *Declaration of Independence*. As Derrida puts it, "this undecidability between, let us say, a performative structure and a constative structure, is required to produce the sought-after effect. It is essential to the very positing or position of a right as such, whether one is speaking here of hypocrisy, of equivocation, of undecidability, or of fiction" (Ibid). Unlike the negative form of undecidability I call "the science of undecidability" in Section II of Chapter One, like the Spillerian notion of undecidability, the Derridian form of undecidability is generative in-so-far as it *allows* one to account for the historical forces or breaches involved in the circularity, or rotational turning that is built out of and up with what comes to call this turning an "I," "individual," self-determining, self-relational, self-actualizing sovereign subject, or citizen. In other words, I understand Derrida's discourse on undecidability here as an attempt to account for how the circulatory, circuitous-teleology of self-referentiality operates in *The Declaration of Independence*. Only by accounting for how the teleology of this *Declaration* works will Derrida not only be able to demonstrate how it derails itself, but he will also put himself in a position to put forth a hypothesis about what he thinks this declarative act hides.

To show this, Derrida turns his attention to the status of "the people" as the sovereign guarantor of the constitution. Derrida argues that "the people" is not only radically indeterminate and internally differentiated but also temporally deferred and can never be presented as such. Perhaps more importantly, however, Derrida is not *exclusively* concerned with disavowing the "foundations" of the state or state institutions. Rather, by excavating the conditions of possibility on which its "foundation" seems to rest, he seeks to displace the auto-affective economy which keeps it in place. In other words, the question that Derrida brings to bear on the *American Declaration of Independence*, is the question of bearing (or birth) itself. As Derrida puts it:

> The 'we' of the Declaration speaks 'in the name of the people.' But this people does not yet exist. They do *not* exist as an entity, it does not exist, *before* this declaration, not *as such* [Derrida's emph.]. *If it gives birth to itself* [emph. Mine], as free and independent subject, as possible signer, this can hold only in the act of the signature. The signature invents the signer. This signer can only authorize him- or herself to sign once he or she has come to the end, if one can say this, of his or her own signature, in a sort of fabulous retroactivity ("Declarations" 49-50)

On the one hand, although the representatives (the "We," which are already split) sign on behalf of "the people" (also split), the representative "We" and the entity "the people" do not exist before the signature. The representative "We" and "the people" can therefore only appear *post factum*. As such, the authority of "the people" is conjured through a retroactive affirmation. As guarantors of the constitution, then, the "We" and "the people" remain in a state of temporal deferral and can never appear "as such." This means that, on the other hand, Derrida's reading of this scene of declaration puts into question not so much "the people" or the representatives, but the notion of their "birth."

In the passage above, I have emphasized when Derrida writes "If it gives birth to itself" because the word he uses in French is *naissance* ("Declaration" 23). The word *naissance* comes from the intransitive French verb *naître*, which corresponds to the third-person singular simple present of the English "be born." Following Derrida's logic, the born only appears to be through a process of withholding and deferral. So the birth of "the representatives" and "the people" only appear to themselves as "the representatives" and "the people" through a retroactive process that involves an undisclosed, indirect object or "absence" at the heart of the representatives and the people. To "be born," then, connotes *a third* "thing" that makes the subject appear to its "self" as such. This excluded thing within is the condition that makes the subject's appearance to itself possible. Therefore, if "the people" gives birth to itself, then its "birth" occurs through some kind of withholding or hiding of some secret that has been repressed, sent off, or put under erasure. In-spite of having been excluded, this indirect or oblique "third" will nevertheless be used to unleash the declaration of every humanism and anti-humanism alike. I will return to the logic of this human and anti-human birth in sections three and four below. For now, however, it is important to note that what I am arguing here is not so much that the signature represents the site of an interminable scene of writing that, as Derrida puts it, can only "donne naissance" to another scene of writing, or declaration, such as Derrida's own "Déclaration d'indépendance" on the occasion of its bicentennial. Although this is important to Derrida's point here, it is not the focus of the kind of reading I am interested in performing here. Rather, I am interested in thinking through how the possibility of exorbitance (the beyond and the freedom to "go beyond") remains tied up with a specific kind of erasure, one that makes the attainment of a universal position appear as a possibility. Derrida's decision to account for the fictional foundations of every declarative act allows us to glimpse a problematic structure of referral that involves a certain kind of violence. According to Derrida, part of this violence can be glimpsed after the signature, when the signatories, representatives, and the people give themselves the power or capacity of self-referral. This declaration of power, like all declarative moments, produces a fable about an event which will never have been present:

> With this fabulous event, with this fable that implies the structure of the trace and is indeed only possible by means of the inadequation of a present to itself, a signature gives itself a name. It opens *for itself* a line of credit, *its* own credit for itself *to* itself. The *self* rises forth here in all cases (nominative, dative, accusative) as soon as a signature gives or extends credit to itself, in a single 'coup de force,' which is also a stroke [*coup*] of writing, as the right to writing. The 'coup de force' makes right, founds right or law, gives right, *brings the law to the light of day, gives both birth and day to the law* [*donné le jour à la loi*]. Brings the law to the light of day, gives both birth and day to the law [donné le jour à la loi] (50/23) (Derrida's emph.)

We shall return to the question of credit, of what it means to "open *a line,*" and what makes the economic infrastructure of representative democracy possible in Section III of this chapter. For now, however, it is important to note that in the translation of Tom Keenan and Tom Pepper, the French *donne le jour à la loi* is translated as "gives both birth and day to the law." Keenan and Pepper add the word "birth" to Derrida's sentence. On the one hand, if we follow the English translation of Keenan and Pepper, this *coup de force*, or stroke of writing, should be understood as that which gives both birth and day to the law. For Keenan and Pepper, then, this stroke, coup de force, or coup d'écriture, is a kind of subject that puts birth and day under the command of the law. If we were to translate the French as "gives the day to the law," we would perhaps better retain Derrida's notion of *naissance* as an interminable or unruly scene of erasure that simultaneously produces "the people" which works to sustain itself by hiding an important dimension of itself. I point this out because the self that Derrida says rises forth out of a fictional coup de force should not be restricted to an economy of the beautiful, or act of loving creation. It is not an opening from which wonderful things come, but remains open to and is fundamentally constituted by a terrifying cruelty. What we can take from Derrida's critical investigation is that the danger lies in the fact that "In signing, the people say," Derrida writes, "henceforth, I have the right to sign, in truth I will already have had it since I was able to give it to myself. I will have given myself a name and an 'ability' or a 'power,' understood in the sense of power- or ability-to-sign by delegation of signature. But this future perfect, the proper tense for this 'coup de droit' (as one would say, 'coup de force')," Derrida writes, 'should not be declared, mentioned, taken into account. It is as though it did not exist" ("Declarations" 50). Drawing our attention to the danger of this coup de droit, of the act of declaring the future in one's own name, Derrida goes on to demonstrate why the future perfect should not and perhaps cannot be properly declared.

Turning his attention to *The Declaration's* claim to have "dissolved" its "links of colonial paternity or maternity," Derrida recalls "the singular context of this act" in order to comment on "the *simulacrum of the instant*" (51). This simulacrum of the instant, one should not forget, is made possible through the repression of the third. Here we arrive at the fourth instant of the moment we began outlining above. At this point, it is important to remember that the "good people" of America call and declare themselves independent "at the moment at which they invent (for) *themselves* a signing identity" (Derrida's emph.) (Ibid). "They sign," Derrida writes, "in the name of the laws of nature and in the name of God" (Ibid). Indeed, "They pose or posit their institutional laws on the foundation of natural laws and by the same 'coup' (the interpretive 'coup de force') in the name of God, creator of nature" (Ibid). Although *The Declaration's* appeal and positing of its founding on natural laws and God may seem a safe and stable bet to many, according to Derrida, it is perhaps not a stable, safe, or secure declaration in the conventional sense. Because the figure of God is invoked to guarantee the unity and goodness of the people, as the founder of natural laws, God is therefore the condition for the possibility of "the whole game that tends to present performative utterances, *as* constative utterances" (Ibid). On Derrida's account, in *The Declaration*, God ought to represent an exorbitance, the infinite terrain of text that is the condition for the possibility of all declarations. To show this he quotes the "and" in the segment of the sentence "are and of right ought to be" from *The Declaration*, and argues that "[and] articulates and conjoins here the two discursive modalities, the *to be* and the *ought to be*, the constatation and the prescription, the fact and the right. *And* is God" (51-52). In *The Declaration*, God is posited as the creator of nature, supreme judge of what is (the state of the world) and of what will be (what remains to come). This can be read in the opening lines of *The Declaration,* which states the following:

> When in the Course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another and to assume among the powers of the earth, separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and Nature's God entitle them…

Let us interrupt this declaration here. According to Derrida, already at this point God is posited as "the very best" name. "God is the name—the best one—for this *last instance* and this ultimate signature (52) (emph. Mine). Since God is the very best and proper name [Dieu est le nom propre le meilleur]" (Declarations 28), "someone, let us call him *Jefferson* (but why not *God*?)," Derrida writes, "desired that the institution of the American people should be, by the same token, the erection of his proper name. A name of state" ("Declarations" 52). In other words, Jefferson desired to be the sole signer of *The Declaration of Independence*.

Precisely in the last instance, or in the place of God, Jefferson alone would have signed his own name. "Did he succeed?" Derrida asks. "I would not venture to decide," he answers (53). However, would Derrida have had more time, "if I had the time or the strength," he states, he would have pursued the following question: "How is a state made or founded, how does a state make or found itself? And independence? And the autonomy of one that both gives itself and signs its own law?" (53). While Derrida's analysis of a draft of *The Declaration* lays out the fictional logic that allows something like the subject or nation state to erect itself, he does not pursue the "*après coup*." What Derrida's analysis demonstrates about what the draft of *The Declaration* hides is that Jefferson *desired* to be the sole signer, or monarchic figure of a document that declares independence from sovereign monarchies. But he does not focus on, nor make mention of, any hypothesis about what makes Jefferson's monarchical desires possible. From where does this desire come? What structures the particular axiomatic not only of Jefferson's declaration, but more particularly, Jefferson's democracy? With this opening, then, Derrida ends where the next section of this chapter begins: with an analysis of "black insurgence" in the notes from the federalist convention and Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia.*

Section II

In *On Revolution*, Hannah Arendt argues that the "true culmination" of the American Revolution was its "spontaneous outburst of constitution-making." The Federal Constitution was the "foremost and noblest of all revolutionary deeds," according to Arendt (*On Revolution* 45). And yet, the Founding Fathers wrote under the strong impression that the American Revolution was imperiled by an overwhelming debt and the lack of a national authority and identity to bind the States together. Indeed, public fear of moral degeneration via the replacement of the "Old World" order with a "New World" order under the aegis of "representative democracy" loomed over the republic. As W.E.B. Du Bois points out in his 1896 dissertation, *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America 1638-1870*, this national dissent led to heated debates about the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade. What came to play a significant role in this debate during meetings in general congress and in the federal conventions in the United States from 1787 to 1806, according to Du Bois, was news of the Haitian revolution.

During this period, Article I. Section 9 of the United States Constitution was highly debated. Designed to tax the slave trade out of existence because abolition was not seen as a practical option to the founders of the republic, Section 9 states that Congress does not have the authority to prohibit the State migration or importation of "Persons" before the year 1808, and that "a Tax or duty" would be "imposed on such Importation, not exceeding ten dollars for each Person" (*Suppression* 43). Drawing on Du Bois's reading of the notes from the federalist conventions and meetings of general commerce, and delving into an analysis of Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* and *The Federalist Papers*, I will argue that in the Federal framework of what Madison calls "representative democracy" the appearance or image of "black insurrection" was manufactured as a "crisis" to displace or restore an economically shattered republic (essentially, a crisis of being, of reason, and the nation-state). As we shall see, the "threat" of the Haitian revolution is manufactured as an ideological tool to create solidarity. Using a specifically "black" antagonism, I argue, is what enables the fictional process of restoring and recovery what I call the ontological speciesism of man.

The terror of black insurgency appears in the notes of the meetings from the federal conventions and general congress, as noted by Du Bois in *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America, 1638-1870*. Although Du Bois engages in a rigorous reconstruction of the general juxtaposing economic motivations undergirding the debate, the fear of black insurgency that emerges at crucial points throughout the notes of these debates are given a spotlight of importance by Du Bois, but nevertheless call for further analysis. For the most part, it seems that Du Bois was interested in outlining how the tragic *laissez-faire* attitude of the federal government led to the loss of a sense of moral urgency via its perpetual hesitation and deferral to abolish slavery and the slave-trade.[13] This analysis inevitably led Du Bois to argue that what motivated the general government to impose a bill to abolish the slave trade was not some great moral, heroic, brilliant, or even unheard of philosophical or religious argument. Rather, the unmotivated, in-amicable attitudes of general congress were suddenly motivated to find common ground, Du Bois argues, because of the terror of Toussaint Louverture. Although Du Bois argues that during "the age of revolution" Toussaint "rose to leadership in a bloody terror" and influenced "the final prohibition of the slave-trade by the United States in 1807" (50), Du Bois does not consider that the terror which Toussaint represents is an invention, or tool used precisely for the purpose of *finding* common ground, of recovering an ontology held in common, by the commons. What I am suggesting here is that Toussaint was invented as *the crisis* that needed overcoming. Toussaint was used to rationalize slavery and the slave trade for the purpose of overcoming the fear of nothing (of having no future, as well as having no past). Toussaint became the canvas upon

[13] As Du Bois puts it, "Instead of calling the whole moral energy of the people into action, so as gradually to crush this portentous evil, the Federal Convention lulled the nation to sleep by a 'bargain,' and left the vacillating and unlike judgment of the States one of the most threatening of the social and political ills which they were so courageously seeking to remedy" (44).

which the governors of general congress painted their anxieties. And the common ground they found is therefore a materialization that stems from their ideological representation of Toussaint as *the crisis* that would bring about complete destruction of the power (*kratos*) of the people (*demos*).

As Du Bois demonstrates, talk of this utter destruction appears everywhere throughout the notes of general congress and federal conventions after news of the Haitian revolt had reached the shores of the Carolina's and Georgia. In response to this news, Benjamin Franklin, who was then serving as the first ambassador to France, sent an official petition to Congress to abolish the slave trade. During the first Congress debate on this petition in 1789 (six years prior to Jefferson's publication of *Notes*), one governor from South Carolina opposed Franklin's anti-slave trade petition on the basis that it had been influenced by French philosophy. "Too much of this new-fangled French philosophy of liberty and equality," Rutledge of South Carolina stated, had come to influence anti-slavery sentiments. Governor Dana of Connecticut also declared that Franklin's anti-slavery petition "contained nothing but a farrago of the French metaphysics of liberty and equality" and that "it was likely to produce some of the dreadful scenes of Saint Domingo." The manuscript then reads that Chief Justice, and Governor of South Carolina John Rutledge held up images of the French Convention listening to the overtures of "three emissaries from St. Domingo," and thus yielding "one of the finest islands in the world" to "scenes which had never been practiced since the destruction of Carthage." Rutledge continued by pleading that "we have lived to see these dreadful scenes. These horrid effects have succeeded what was conceived once to be trifling. Most important consequences may be the result, although gentlemen little apprehend it" (*Suppression* 83).

Here, in the social-imaginary of the founding fathers, readers are presented with a thunderous, theatrical presence of black surrogacy—an informing, stabilizing, and disturbing element used to depict what would have appeared almost ubiquitously to many in 1789 as the unspeakable destruction and death of democracy before it had even been born in the form of a nation state. In other words, the images of black insurgents are the *imago* of terror par excellence to the post-revolutionary American republic because it depicts the loss of the New World in island form. To borrow a phrase from Frank B. Wilderson III "No slave, no world" (*Red, White and Black* 11). This is important to note because shortly after news of the Haitian revolt had reached general congress, the House committee declared "the French colonial government, of the West Indies, [as] fraught with danger to the peace and safety of the United States. That the fact stated to have occurred in the prosecution of that system of policy, demands the prompt interference of the Government of the United States, as well as Legislative as Executive" (*Suppression* 84). In other words, it was not necessarily French philosophy and its "metaphysical principles of freedom and equality" that frightened these American governors. Rather, what goes unsaid is that the three emissaries represent something that the American governors and metaphysical principles of freedom and equality in general could not (and perhaps still cannot) think—black freedom. The metaphysical principles of freedom and equality could not think black freedom because the principles of freedom and equality are grounded in an ontological speciesism built out of the obliteration of African customs and resources during the transatlantic slave trade. To answer Derrida's question about "what could a mark be that could not be cited," one might say that a mark that could not be cited would be nothing. But since it is impossible to be nothing in an onto-theologically constituted world (a world that is essentially anti-nothing), nothing must by necessity represent something. It must be overcome and cannot be permitted to exist without citation. Thus, the signifier /black/ must by necessity fill this void of the non-mark so that it can be identifiable, or citable. Black and nothing become synonyms this way. As such, what comes to signify as "black" in these writings is formlessness or nothingness. As we shall see, blackness as nothingness comes to function as a threat to the political order of society. By turning Toussaint into "a bloody terror," as Du Bois puts it, general congress can restore its common ontological ground to overcome the crisis of nothing. To demonstrate how this strange pattern and process of overcoming the problem and terror of nothing is at the very heart and center of the system of representative democracy, I will now turn to Jefferson's *Notes On the State of Virginia*.

Published nine years after the signing of *The Declaration of Independence*, *Notes on the State of Virginia* appeared as the first public "American" manuscript comprising information about the new nation and the place of the state of Virginia within it. In the section "A Comparative View of the Quadrupeds of Europe and of America," Jefferson uses the comparative method of French Naturalist Buffon to chart and compare the similarities and differences of the weight, size, and color of the species of the state of Virginia to those of France and England. Taking Buffon "for my ground work," Jefferson writes, "because I think him the best informed of any naturalist who has ever written," he moves on to the topic "of man." He states "Hitherto I have considered this hypothesis as applied to brute animals only, and not in its extension to the man of America, whether aboriginal or transplanted" (86). At this point, Jefferson takes his departure from Buffon's arguments about racial difference, but does not depart from the comparative method of natural history, as he seeks to re-ground his understanding of American identity as a triumphant form of the European species by reconfiguring the racial category of "whiteness." Jefferson states that he will begin with "what I have seen of man, white, red, and black, what has been written of him by authors, enlightened themselves, and writing amidst enlightened people" (88).

Having just written about the meaning of freedom in *The Declaration of Independence*, a foundational text declaring the independent, and sovereign identity of the United States as the so-called "first" democratic world power, one would think that Jefferson's point of contention with Buffon's naturalist theory of racial difference would be about the dangers of racial stereotypes and how they limit a person's freedoms and rights to self-determination. But this is not the case. Instead, Jefferson begins his review of the literature on racial difference by taking issue with de Buffon's analysis "of the race of whites, transplanted from Europe," whom Buffon and the French naturalist Guillaume Thomas Raynal saw as a degenerate form of the white European. Jefferson explains that Buffon and Raynal thought that the natural, environmental climate, and therefore the geopolitical conditions under which white Euro-American's lived, inhibited them from producing poets, mathematicians, or geniuses in the arts and sciences.[14] In response to this claim, Jefferson argues that "In war we have produced a Washington, whose memory will be adored while liberty shall have votaries, whose name will *triumph over time*," and adds that "in physics we have produced a Franklin, whom no one of the present age has made more important discoveries [than], nor has enriched philosophy with more, or more ingenious solutions of the phenomena of nature" (98) (emph. Mine). Jefferson also mentions the astronomer "Mr. Rittenhouse," whom he praises as a man that "has not indeed made a world; but has by imitation *approached* nearer its Maker

[14] "Its application to the race of whites, transplanted from Europe, remained for the Abbe Raynal, 'On doit être étonné '(he says) que l'Amérique n'ait pas encore produit un bon poète, un habile mathématicien, un homme de génie dans un seul art, ou une seule science [We must be astonished (he says) that America has not yet produced a good poet, a clever mathematician, a man of genius in a single art, or a single science]'" (97-98). Jefferson is Quoting from Raynal's *Historie de philosophie*, (92). And later in the Apendix, Jefferson also writes, "In speaking of the animals of America, the theory of M. De Buffon, the Abbe Raynal, and others presented itself to consideration. They have supposed that there is something in the soil, climate and other circustances of America, which occasions animal nature to degenerate, not excepting even the man, native or adoptive, physical or moral. This theory, so unfounded, and degrading to one third of the globe, was called to the bar of fact reason" (335).

than any man who has lived from the creation to this day" (99) (my emph.) I have italicized the word approached because what dominates Jefferson's thinking of racial difference is the logic of proximity—the movement of drawing nearer to what Jefferson here refers to as the "Maker" (God, the ideal figure of presence, and so forth). As we shall soon see, what undergirds this logic of proximity or, more precisely still, what enables its operation, is perhaps something like what Nahum Chandler describes as an often unrecognized or unthought "metaphysical infrastructure" that undergirds nineteenth century discourses "concerned with the status of a European, and, later, 'White,' historical subject along with […] the African" (*X* 20). In short, what I am pursuing here is what makes the logic of proximity possible for Jefferson. The movement of approximating towards what Jefferson here calls the Maker (God, the ideal being that grounds the ontological speciesism of Jefferson's Euro-American man), cannot operate without the invention of what Jefferson calls "black existence." In other words, the ideal of the "Maker" (Being as pure presence) cannot appear *as such* without the invention of what Hortense Spillers describes as the "physical and biological expression of 'otherness'" ("Mama's Baby" 67). We can interpret this "otherness" as Jefferson comes to describe it as "black existence."

Drawing on census data from 1781, Jefferson explains that in Virginia, there were "567,614 inhabitants of every age, sex, and condition. But 296,852, the number of free inhabitants, are to 270,762, the number of slaves, nearly as 11 to 10" (114-115). These numbers lead Jefferson to write up an alteration and amendment to the then existing 126 laws of the State of Virginia. First the alteration then the amendment:

> To make slaves distributable among next of kin, as other movables.
> To emancipate all slaves born after passing the act (203).

Reflecting on this amendment, Jefferson goes on to describe an elaborate proposal to relocate the emancipated outside of the Republic.[15] "When freed," Jefferson writes, blacks are "to be removed beyond the reach of mixture" (214). In anticipation to the question "why not retain and incorporate the blacks into the state," he says that it would never be possible due to the "ten thousand recollections, by the blacks, of the injuries they have sustained" (204). These "recollections," Jefferson continues, "will divide us into parties, and produce convulsions, which will probably never end but in the extermination of the one or the other race. To these objections, which are political, may be added others, which are physical and moral" (Ibid). As we shall see, Jefferson's "political objections" are preceded and informed by his so-called "physical and moral" objections which, in contradistinction to French and English theories of racial difference, posit the "black" of the captive population as existing outside of the ontology of the human species.

Although calling his theory of racial difference "a suspicion only," Jefferson does not hesitate to announce it in the name of a new enlightenment or age of reason that has passed from the old world to the new: "her [European] philosophy has crossed the channel, her freedom the Atlantic, and herself seems passing to that awful dissolution whose issue is not given human foresight to scan" (100). Dismissing Buffon's account of racial difference as a theory built out of "hearsay" rumors,[16] Jefferson arrives at the conclusion that enslavement, social conditions, and in

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[15] "The bill reported by the revisers does not itself contain this proposition [emancipation]; but an amendment containing it was prepared, to be offered to the legislature whenever the bill should be taken up, and further directing, that they should continue with their parents to a certain age, then be brought up at the public expense to tillage, arts or sciences, according to their geniuses, till the female should be eighteen, and the males twenty-one years of age, when they should be colonized to such place as the circumstances of the time should render most proper, sending them out with arms, implements of household and the handicraft arts, feeds, pairs of the useful domestic animals, etc. to declare them a free and independent people, and extend to them our alliance and protection till they have acquired strength" (204).

[16] According to Jefferson, "Don Ulloa here admits, that the authors who have described the Indians of South America, before they were enslaved, had represented them as a brave people, and

general one's environment or geo-political location is not sufficient for thinking about racial identity because it does not account for the relation between skin color and what he thought of as the so-called natural talents of the races.[17]

"To judge," Jefferson writes, "to form a just estimate of their genius and mental powers, more facts are wanting, and great allowance to be made for those circumstances of their situation which call for a display of particular talents only" (94). Comparing the so-called talents of "white" slaves in antiquity to the enslaved natives of North America, Jefferson writes that "we shall probably find that they [north american natives] are formed in mind as well as in body, on the same module with the 'Homo Sapiens Europapeus'" (94). "The Indians," Jefferson continues, "will often carve figures on their pipes not destitute of design and merit. They will crayon out an animal, a plant, or a country, so as to prove the existence of a germ in their minds which only wants cultivation. They astonish you with strokes of the most sublime oratory; such as prove their reason and sentiment strong, their imagination glowing and elevated. But never yet could I find a black that had uttered a thought above the level of plain narration; never seen even an elementary trait of painting or sculpture" (207). For Jefferson, the carved out designs on pipes, or crayoning of animals, represent what he thought of as the germ, divine capacity, or imitative ability, most proper to man. "For man is an imitating animal," Jefferson later writes in his query on education. "This

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therefore seems to have suspected that the cowardice which he had observed in those of the present race might be the effect of subjugation" (100). Jefferson Dismisses Ulloa's and Buffon's claims as not being based on any scientific evidence or studies.

[17] As Evidence for his argument Jefferson turns his attention to the conditions of enslavement in antiquity, to argue that white slaves, unlike other slaves (black and red) excelled in the sciences and the arts. Therefore, according to Jefferson, the conditions of enslavement have no affect on one's capacities or intellectual talents: "Yet notwithstanding, these and other discouraging circumstances among the Romans, their slaves were often their rarest artists. They excelled too in science, insomuch as to be usually employed as tutors to their master's children. Epictetus, Terence, and Phaedras, were slaves. But they were of the race of whites. It is not their condition then, but nature, which has produced the distinction" (211).

quality [imitation] is the germ of all education in him. From his cradle to his grave he is learning to do what he sees others do" (240).

No doubt, many will recognize or hear in this declaration about man an echo of Aristotle. As is well known, for Aristotle, speech, specifically poetry, metaphor, and grammar, is proper to man and separates him from other animals. However, as Derrida explains in "White Mythology," the dogmatic distinction Aristotle affirms between man as *zōon logon ekhon* and animal as without *logos* allows us to glimpse an overlap that makes metaphor and metaphysics indissociable before they become distinguishable from each other in the Aristotelian schema. To demonstrate this, Derrida cites the following passage from Aristotle's *Poetics*:

> The Letter is an indivisible sound of a particular kind, one that may become a factor in an intelligible sound. Indivisible sounds are uttered by the brutes also, but no one of these is a Letter in our sense of the term (Ibid; *Poetics* 1456b22-25).

What Derrida points out here is that, for Aristotle, no internal characteristic distinguishes the atom of animal sound and what Aristotle comes to determine as the ontology of the letter (thus meaning that so-called "human" language is always somewhat haunted by an "outside" that was always already its interior). Derrida goes on to point out that it is because of this ambiguity in sound that Aristotle attempts to make the clear-cut distinction between the speech of man and the sounds of animals. Because of this ambiguity, for Aristotle, it is only on the basis of the signifying phonic composition of language, on the basis of meaning and reference in other words, that the so-called "human" voice can be distinguished from the call of an animal. As Derrida puts it, "Meaning and reference: that is the possibility of signifying by means of a noun" ("White Mythology" 237).

Commenting on Derrida's reading of this passage in "Political Animals," Geoffrey Bennington argues that in this instance, metaphor (the tool of rhetoric in the Aristotelian schema), as well as rhetoric itself, is a specific feature of the logos that "we might be tempted to call a residual *phōnē*, a kind of persistent animality of language (perhaps what Derrida in a rather different context calls an 'animality of the letter,' as the 'primal and infinite equivocality of the signifier')" ("Political Animals" 34). The expression "animality of the letter" appears in Derrida's early essay "Edmond Jabès and The Question of the Book" from *Writing and Difference*. In that little read essay, Derrida explains that

> There is, then, an animality of the letter that takes the forms of its desire, unease and solitude. […] Of course, the animality of the letter at first appears as one metaphor among others…But it is above all metaphor itself, the origin of language as metaphor, in which Being and Nothing, the conditions beyond metaphor of metaphor, never say themselves. Metaphor, or the animality of the letter, is the primal and infinite equivocality of the signifier as Life. The *psychic* subversion of inert liberality, that is to say, of nature, or of speech returned to nature. This overpowerfulness as the life of the signifier is produced within the anxiety and the wandering of the language always richer than knowledge, the language always capable of the movement which takes it further than peaceful and sedentary certitude ("Jabès" 73)

As Derrida states in the opening line of the quotation above, the animality of the letter represents the movement of the figure of life more generally that not only takes the forms of its desire, but also its *unease and solitude*. In other words, the animal figures in Jabès's work, according to Derrida, also represent "the extraordinary reflection of man finally attempting today—and always in vain—to retake possession of his language (as if this were meaningful) by any means, through all routes, and to claim responsibility for it against a Father of the Logos" (Ibid). In other words, in spite of Jabès's efforts to demonstrate that what he calls "life" is always already in the throes of a dissimulated dissemination, the animal figures in his poetry show themselves as repositories where some unscathed, or natural resource can be mined and brought back for the purpose of distinguishing the Socratic tradition from the Hebraic tradition. In spite of his intentions, beneath the language, operations, and greatest achievements of his work, the animal figures in Jabès's text expose themselves as the author's anxiety of not being able to distinguish the Hebraic tradition from the Socratic tradition. According to Derrida, "the same anxious movement"—the desire to recover and easily distinguish the one from the other (the Socratic tradition from the Hebraic tradition)—"can be found in the work of Emmanuel Levinas as well" (Ibid).[18] As such, the animals in Jabès's work appear as attempts to make sense of non-sense, to overcome the formless by giving it a pure and simple form via the figures of animals. As devices that work for Jabès, these animal figures can also be used against Jabès. More generally, then, they represent what Derrida calls the animality of the letter. We can understand what Derrida calls the animality of the letter as a technique that Derrida uses to expose and critique not only problematic binary oppositions that would seek to found a definition of life (or in the cases of Jabès and Levinas "tradition") on the unscathed, the holy, or the pure. This is important to note because in the Aristotelian framework, precisely in the moment where Aristotle would like to make a clear cut distinction between man and animal, Derrida claims that something of the sound of the animal, of what Aristotle designates as the constitutive "outside" of language, is interiorized by the Aristotelian man. As Bennington

[18] In "Violence and Metaphysics," Derrida critiques Levinas for reiterating Hegel's notion of "the other" as the wholly and concrete "other" as such. According to Derrida "If, as Levinas says, the same is a violent totality, this would mean that it is a finite totality, therefore is abstract, more other than the other (than an other totality), etc. The same as finite totality would not be the same, but still the other. Levinas would be speaking of the other under the rubric of the same, and of the same under the rubric of the other, etc. If the finite totality was the same, it could not be thought, or posed as such, without becoming other than itself (and this is war). If it did not do so, it could not enter into war with others (finite totalities), nor could it be violent. Henceforth, not being violent, it would not be the same in Levinas's sense (finite totality). Entering into war—and war there is—it is conceived, certainly, as the other's other, that is, it gains access to the other as an other (self). But again, it is no longer a totality in Levinas's sense. In this language, which is the only language of western philosophy, can one not repeat Hegelianism, which is only this language coming into absolute possession of itself?" (119); and a little later "What we call philosophy, which perhaps is not the entirety of thought, cannot think the false, nor even choose the false, without paying homage to the anterior […] and the superiority of the true (same relationship between the other and the same). This last question, which indeed could be Levinas's question to Hegel, would demonstrate that as soon as *he speaks* against Hegel, Levinas can only confirm Hegel, has confirmed him already" (120).

puts it somewhat "jokily" in his article "Political Animals," this would mean that "logos [language] is always somewhat *phoney*, that politics is always somewhat animal, that humanity has no essential definition, and that the concept of sovereignty is always a rather desperate and hollow expedient" ("Political Animals" 34).

This is important to note for the purposes of this chapter because both Aristotle and Jefferson are involved in the operation of attempting to found or recover a pure notion "of man." As Derrida demonstrates, for Aristotle, the word mimesis posits "a possibility proper to *physis*" (237). In the Aristotelian schema, the operation of mimesis is the reflection of a certain state of nature that is itself representing its mimetic operation to itself. In this sense, mimesis is therefore said to be the way in which nature comprehends itself through the logos or self-referential structure of man's speech act. For Aristotle, then, mimesis is the most "natural" process of self-discovery because it enables Nature to not only recognize its own operation, but through that operation allows it to draw closest to itself through it. This is the teleological set up of Aristotle's system of metaphor. By way of *mimesis*, Aristotle can claim to (re)discover that "naturality in general says itself, reassembles itself, knows itself, appears to itself, reflects itself, and 'mimics' itself par excellence and *in truth* in human nature" (Ibid). This is why, for Aristotle, mimesis is proper to man. As Derrida puts it, for Aristotle, "man alone learns to imitate, man alone learns by imitation. The power of truth, as the unveiling of nature (*physis*) by mimesis, congenitally belongs to the physics of man, to anthropophysics" (Ibid). Aristotle's teleological set up therefore claims that nature's natural destination is man. But not just any man. Nature's natural destination is to a specific notion of man. It reserves itself for those it chooses *to be* gifted or talented, to have full command and mastery over language for the purpose of illuminating themselves via the categories of knowledge. The power of mimesis is reserved for those who use language to come back to *physis*, to its powerful operation of relocating its presence, or "natural" place of origin. It is for the philosopher, or in our case the statesman, who can always re-find his way, draw close to, or reassemble and resemble his most natural "self." As such, in the Aristotelian schema, Nature gives itself more to some than others. As Derrida puts it:

> More to men than beasts, more to philosophers than to other men. […] In nature each has his nature. Some have more nature than others, more genius, more generosity, more seed. If 'the greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor,' some have the genius of metaphor, know better than others to perceive resemblances and to unveil the truth of nature (244).

Aristotle's theory of mimesis and metaphor shows itself as putting forward a theory of the chosen—either one knows or does not know, can or cannot, is blessed or damned. And the blessed are chosen by nature as a retainer for the capacity "to substitute one term for another. The genius of *mimesis*," Derrida continues, "can give rise to a language, a code of regulated substitutions, the talent and procedures of rhetoric, the imitation of genius, the mastery of the ungraspable" (245). This means that, for Aristotle, language is a closed unit. In so far as language is a unit that is completely closed on itself, only speaking to itself about itself by referring to itself, the best one can ever do with language is rearrange it and be rearranged by it. The *polysemia* of language—all its different significations and internal divisions—are finite, limited, but nevertheless can be infinitely re-arranged. Therefore, there is no outside of language according to the Aristotelian framework. As such, *polysemia* remains mastered by the one whom nature designates as having a proper command of metaphor. Insofar as metaphor always involves the process of revealing and rediscovering the same, "the same *physis*, the same meaning (meaning of Being as presence or, *amounting to the same*, as presence/absence), the same circle of revealing/concealing one's 'self'" ("White Mythology," 248), one always knows not only what one is, but also what one is speaking about, and to whom one is speaking. The thought that language could be open to a beyond is not only intolerable to Aristotle, but also incomprehensible to philosophy which continues to posit Greece as the port to and from which language perpetually travels.

Guided by this Aristotelian schematic, Jefferson also argues that Nature gives more to some than others. But unlike Aristotle, Jefferson's ontology is not predicated on the negation of "the animal" or the sound of animals. Rather is it predicated on the negation of "black(ness)":

> Whether the black of the negro resides in the reticular membrane between the skin and scarf-skin, or in the scarf-skin itself; whether it proceeds from the color of the blood, the color of the bile, or from that of some other secretion, the difference is fixed in nature, and is as real as if its seat and cause were better known to *us*. And is this difference of no importance? (*Notes* 204) (Italics mine).

There are many things that could be stated about the passage above, but I will limit myself to two observations for the sake of brevity. First, black is not the color black, but rather the index of formlessness. As such, for Jefferson, "it" *is not*, and therefore can only be superficially discussed as difference itself. Thus, in spite of its formlessness, black here also assumes the form of some "thing" different. As both something and nothing, it is a quasi-nothing. As a quasi-nothing, it functions as a kind of reserve or reservoir for some higher purpose in Jefferson's operation. This takes me to my second point. Jefferson's so-called "awareness" of blackness as difference is supposed to demonstrate what makes "whiteness" what it is in contradistinction to blackness. This can be seen via Jefferson's use of the first person plural pronoun "us." I have italicized the *us* in the passage above to emphasize that by its very grammar as the object pronoun of the sentence, the "us" posits an index for what is supposedly open and capable of making such determinations, of coming to such an understanding, or making such judgements. The capacity for judgment, in other words, will have always already been accessible to the transcendental consciousness of the Euro-American ego that Jefferson is here attempting to gather and consolidate under the racial category of whiteness. This "us" presupposes a formal structure of referral and approximation that

Jefferson assumes is most proper to Euro-American identity within what he imagines as the collective community and continuity of a strictly Indo-Euro-American milieu. Therefore, as a reserve, black(ness) here functions as a kind of toolkit of devices or mechanisms that he needs to help him reveal the whole of nature as being under the force and command of the white Euro-American mind. Black therefore functions to solicit this whole via its constitutive exclusion. The quasi-nothing existence of black(ness) is designed as the wholly "outside" that is simultaneously and mysteriously inside Jefferson's configuration of what I call ontological speciesism. It therefore comes to displace or fill in what I call the non-democratic opening of democracy. Black(ness) is therefore made to function as the "not" which the *demos* (people) utilizes to perpetually construct its *kratos* (sovereignty or power) in the form of a more perfect union (at the level of the individual, the State, and the Nation).

We can detect this ever-emerging construction of ontological speciesism via Jefferson's efforts to reveal, via comparative analysis, that blackness exists outside of species being. "Comparing them by their faculties of memory, reason, and imagination," Jefferson writes, "it appears to me that in memory they are equal to the whites; in reason much inferior, as I think one could scarcely be found capable of tracing and comprehending the investigations of Euclid; and that in imagination they are dull, tasteless, and anomalous" (207). According to Jefferson, reason ought to be guided by proper names, or by following a legacy of proper points of reference. This process of tracing out and comprehending what came before, of turning back, of being free and capable of possessing the *kratos* (power) to turn back, is what defines the being of a *demos* (people). The phantasy of recovering a pure sense of "self," or the continuity of an uninterrupted Euro-American consciousness, can only ground itself *as* being universal or as closest in proximity to the universal being (ideal of pure freedom) via the invention of the captive as the incarnation of nothingness. As the incarnation of nothing, the black slave is used to enable the act of turning back as an act of over-coming in the form of an interminable, self-criticizability in perpetuity. This is what grounds Jefferson's ideal of imagination, as well as what he thinks it means to be capable of advancing the spirit of the human species. It is what grounds his idea of who can contribute to the making of a democratic republic (differentiating it from the monarchies, aristocracies, and oligarchies of Europe), which will in turn enable the growth and development of the arts, sciences, and technology more generally. What makes this idea of freedom possible for Jefferson, is the invention of the "blackness" of the captive as almost other worldly. This other worldliness shows itself in Jefferson's text in many different ways, but two of which I will turn my attention to now.

First, near the end of Query XIV, Jefferson poses a rhetorical question about blackness to his readers in the following manner: "How much more then where it [blackness] is a faculty [and] not a substance, we are examining; where it eludes the research of all the senses; where the conditions of its existence are various and variously combined; where the effects of those which are present or absent bid defiance to calculation" (212). As can be seen again here, for Jefferson, black existence (Jefferson's words) indexes a formless faculty exceeding all categories of knowledge, calculative schemas, and paradigms of thinking. It is the "or" that makes "presence" and "absence" appear as presence and absence. As a mystery, it poses a perplexing and threatening problem for Jefferson and to the newly declared democratic republic of the United States. To overcome this perplexing and threatening problem (threatening because perplexing), Jefferson proposes the following solution. "To justify a general conclusion," he writes, "requires many observations, even where the subject may be submitted to the anatomical knife, to optical classes, to analysis by fire, or by solvents" (212). In this quote, Jefferson is stating that the blackness of the captive is inconclusive. To gain a better understanding of what it is, because it exists beyond

Jefferson's grammar, he proposes that the captives body be subjected to violent scientific experimentation—the anatomical knife, analysis by fire, or by solvents—to gain an understanding of what "blackness" is. Through terror and violence, in other words, the captive is forced to embody the formlessness that blackness represents. The captive's body thus provides form for the quasi-nothing formlessness of black existence. Jefferson's ontological speciesism therefore constructs its "self" (personhood, humanism, or humanity more generally) as a proper body (of knowledge) in the form of a species by forcing the captive to occupy the position of nothing. It does this by negating and objectifying black existence into a general and concrete "other" that it excludes and uses to help man recover its ontology in the form of a commonly shared species between White Europeans and White Americans. All the features of ontological speciesism that Jefferson will go on to elaborate (evolutionary vestiges, future potentialities, and networks of social relations recognizable to existing frameworks of knowledge), are only made possible in Jefferson's framework through projecting the formlessness of nothing onto the captive's body, which Jefferson constructs as an anomaly with no existing point of proper reference. "It would be unfair to follow them to Africa for this investigation," Jefferson states. Therefore, Jefferson explains that he "will consider them here on the same stage with the whites, and where the facts are not apocryphal on which a judgment is to be formed" (*Notes* 207). Neither African, nor American, the captive is invented to be black, "a ~~being~~ that is not" as Warren puts it (*Ontological Terror* 35). Within the metaphysical operation of Jefferson's schema, then, the quasi-nothingness of black existence that the captive is forced to incarnate constitutes the paradoxical position of an excluded inclusion. The captive is made to function as the quasi-nothing existence of Jefferson's metaphysics. As such, it is posited by Jefferson as that which interrupts the organization of democratic society. This interruptiveness brings me to my second example.

Turning his attention to the compositions of Ignatius Sancho, an eighteenth century British-African composer, actor, and writer, Jefferson writes that although Sancho "has approached nearer to merit in composition," he suffers from a "Shandean fabrication of words" and describes Sancho's imagination as "wild and extravagant, [and] escapes incessantly from every restraint of reason and taste, and in the course of its vagaries, leaves a trace of thoughts as incoherent and eccentric as is the course of a meteor through the sky" (208-209). Jefferson continues by complaining that Sancho's "subjects should often have led him to a process of sober reasoning: yet we find him always substituting sentiment for demonstration" (Ibid). Any talent he may have, Jefferson claims, stems from "the writers of the race among whom he lived," which leads Jefferson to use Sancho as an example to argue that "Improvement of the blacks in body and mind, in the first instance of their mixture with the whites, has been observed by every one, and proves that their inferiority is not the effect merely of their condition [slavery] of life" (209).

Jefferson's cultural hegemony bars Sancho from ever being capable of owning his art. Anything of "natural" value or worth that can be read in his work can only ever be thought as belonging to his white counterparts. In this instance, even when it comes to works of art the labor of black composers and writers is never their own. On the one hand, what this shows is that in Jefferson's hegemonic discourse on what constitutes a work of art, black composers and authors are only ever thought of as tools, vehicles, or surrogates through which the mimetic process of the Euro-American mind moves to perpetually construct itself. Sancho is therefore never seen as anything other than a captive to Jefferson. In the words of Hortense Spillers, reduced to a thing, Sancho exists as "*being for* the captor" ("Mama's Baby" 67). On the other hand, Jefferson's discourse also trembles at the thought of being consumed by what he imagines as the blackness of Sancho's composition. This is made apparent when Jefferson tells his readers that Sancho's musical compositions made him feel as if meteors were tearing through the atmosphere in flight paths that left traces of eccentric and incoherent thoughts in the sky above his head. Such a metaphor speaks about blackness indirectly as an other worldly object from an elsewhere that alters the earths atmosphere by re-inscribing it with its wake. Jefferson's fear of blackness in this instance is a powerful display of his terror.

This terror also appears in his Query on population. According to Jefferson, "It is for the happiness of those united in society to harmonize as much as possible in matters which they must of necessity transact together." "Civil government being the sole object of forming societies," he continues "its administration must be conducted by common consent." Should Sancho, or any portion of the black population ever be involved in the political processes of legislation, Jefferson writes, "They will infuse into it their spirit, warp and bias its directions, and render it a heterogeneous, incoherent, distracted mass" (129). Jefferson here configures blackness as a spirit that if introduced into the body of legislative discourse, would corrupt it. Whether civil participant or musical composer, black ~~being~~ represents the incarnation of nothing—the infinite absence of what dissolves not only the political, but more importantly for Jefferson ontology (since it is the ontology of the individual which grounds the political). Therefore, by turning the captive into the embodiment of nothing, Jefferson can use the captive as a tool to perpetually restore and secure the ontological speciesism upon which civil society stands. The black captive is therefore always positioned as the excluded within, the non-identity that not only makes up the origin and the conclusion, but also that which allows the origin and conclusion to appear as such. It is therefore the cause and the end or aim that I call the non-democratic opening of democratic sovereignty.

As we shall see in a moment, what Madison calls representative democracy is built precisely out of this power, authorization, or force (*kratos*) that a people (*demos*) give to themselves in an act of retrospective simulation. This simulation of a sovereign force that gives itself the power to decide, judge, and enforce the law is made to appear through the anti-black objectification of the captive. Nowhere is this structure more legible than in *The Federalist Papers*.

Section III

"Among the numerous advantages promised by a well-constructed Union, none deserves to be more accurately developed than its tendency to break and control the violence of faction" (*Federalist* 48). According to Madison, the most dangerous threat to a government is a faction. The most important task a political writer and government has, then, is to provide "a proper cure for it" (Ibid). "The instability, injustice, and confusion, introduced into the public councils have, in truth," he writes, "been the mortal disease under which popular governments have everywhere perished" (49). Indeed, as Madison goes on to tell his readers, the threat of faction was imminent during his time: "complaints are everywhere heard that our governments are too unstable, that the public good is disregarded in the conflicts of rival parties, and that measure are too often decided, not according to the rules of justice and the rights of the minor party, but by the superior force of an interested and overbearing majority" (49). The alarm, increasing distrust of public engagements, violations of private rights, "echoed from one end of the continent to the other," Madison writes, are the "effects of the unsteadiness and injustice with which a factious spirit has tainted our public administration" (Ibid). A specter is haunting the United States, according to Madison. And what Madison will set out to do is dispel and resolve the problem of factions to restore the state of the union and diminish civic unrest. In resolving this problem, Madison will have effectively demonstrated to the public why representative democracy is a better form of government than "pure democracy."

To accomplish this, Madison begins by (re)defining what it means to be a human being:

> As long as the reason of man continues fallible, and he is at liberty to exercise it, different opinions will be formed. As long as the connection subsists between his reason and his self-love, his opinions and his passions will have a reciprocal influence on each other; and the former [opinions] will be objects to which the latter [passions] will attach themselves. The diversity in the faculty of men, from which the rights of property originate, is not less an insuperable obstacle to a uniformity of interests. The protection of these faculties is the first object of government. From the protection of different and unequal faculties of acquiring property, the possession of different degrees and kinds of property immediately results; and from the influence of these on the sentiments and views of the respective proprietors ensues a division of the society into different interests and parties (50).

Madison begins by claiming that the reason of man is imperfect. This point is reiterated in many different ways by Madison throughout the *Federalist Papers*: "If men were angels, no government would be necessary" (257); The Federal government, he states elsewhere "has not a claim to absolute perfection" (429); and, in response to those who ask why anyone should "adopt an imperfect thing," he states that one should "never expect to see a perfect work from an imperfect man" (429). I summarize this position as one that begins by making no claims to objectivity or presence. There is no such thing as an unprejudiced, objective position of pure presence, according to Madison. A claim that is not only necessary but, as we shall see shortly, will come back to haunt Madison in Federalist Paper 54. Therefore, while at first glance it may seem as if Madison's notion of man is different from the ontological speciesism articulated by Jefferson, I contend that it is predicated on somewhat similar, if not the same anti-black principles.

In Madison's model of man, then, no objective position of self-presence is possible due to what I will call Madison's supplementary-self structure—the operation of which *only seems* to begin from a position of lack, rather than one of presence. This lack is assembled by, built out of, up with, and filled by supplies until an embodied self emerges via what appears to be an originary band between reason and self-love.[19] The impossibility of maintaining an objective position, then, is further unpacked by Madison in the lines from the long quotation above. Reason, which comes

[19] This predilection is of course not Madison's but rather comes to us as a slight modification of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. For instance, in the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau sets down the importance of pursuing an investigation of man. As such he is invested in laying out a general anthropology in order to discuss the problem of natural law and the origins of inequality. The problem or irresolvable difficulty that philosophers, sovereigns, and intellectuals interested in politics face, Rousseau tells us, is the fact that the more man develops the farther away from his natural state he gets, thus making his originary state and nature obscure to contemporary thinkers and human beings in general. The means of our investigation, the epistemological tools we have acquired through centuries of technological "development" or "progress" that man uses to think about the development of "the human," and the emergence of the political community, are a problem for thinking, and often obscure or distort thinking (*Discourse* 124). As Rousseau tells us: It is reason that engenders amour proper, and reflection that reinforces it; reason that turns man back upon himself; reason that separates him from everything that troubles and afflicts him" (153). In a word, thinking is a problem for thinking. And yet, while reason and reflection are problematic, it is precisely through it that we may be able to glimpse what has been lost in the oblivion of time between civil man and man as Rousseau constructs him in the state of nature. Rather than beginning with man as he is in civil society with all his social ills inhibiting his capacity to think, Rousseau begins with a hypothetical man invested with two principles: self-preservation and care for his well-being, with an added dose of a genuine compassion for animals like himself, thus imposing a duty on humans to treat other beings with care. This starting point makes Rousseau's subject somewhat of a quasi-man, or perhaps an animal-human more than a human-animal. As he explains in the *Second Discourse*, these two principles—self-preservation and well-being—come before reason and in fact their combination gives way to reason, as well as to the laws of natural right (127). From these two principles, reason comes about and is forced to found rules on another foundation, which will lead to reasons successive development until it eventually results in "stifling nature" (127). What humans in the state of nature and animals share is the capacity to defend themselves for the purpose of preserving their life against endangering forces. What makes man different, however, is that "Nature alone does everything in the operations of the Beast, whereas man contributes to his operations in his capacity as a free agent. The one chooses or rejects by instinct, the other by an act of freedom; as a result, the Beast cannot deviate from the Rule prescribed to it even when it would be to its advantage to do so, while man often deviates from it to his detriment" (140). It is not necessarily comprehensive understanding that differentiates man from animal, as Hobbes would have it for instance, but rather "his property of being a free agent" (141). While the animal obeys nature, man himself is "free to acquiesce or to resist; and it is mainly in the consciousness of his freedom that the spirituality of his soul exhibits itself" (141).

There is, of course, another important faculty that distinguishes man from animal according to Rousseau—the faculty of perfecting oneself. This is something that resides in the individual and the species. According to Rousseau, it is out of the activity of our passions that "our reason perfects itself; We seek to know only because we desire to enjoy, and it is not possible to conceive why someone who had neither desires nor fears would take the trouble to reason. The passions, in turn, owe their origin to our needs, and their progress to our knowledge; for one can only desire or fear to be built out of the things that matter to an individual precisely because they are what constitute the individual and their happiness, dictates to them that they should love and protect their "self." The phenomena or objects that contribute to the articulation of a self is what structures the individual's relation to the world. The objects of association that come to build up the psyche of the individual, and the way they make the individual feel, builds a pathos of self-love through the act of supplying the individual with objects that eventually accumulate into emotions of self-love. These objects become markers in which positive investments of a non-harming kind contribute to one's own self-love. The opinion that forms from this cycle of repetition—that these objects are "good" for the individual and make the individual happy—eventually comes to affect the energy investment of objects constitutive of the individuals relation to the world. In other words, "the phenomenon" has now come to *fill* the lack, or perhaps even displace it with the specific objects that Madison's man takes as the thing constitutive of his freedom and relation to the world. Therefore, man's opinion and passion "have a reciprocal influence on each other" (50). As such, opinions eventually become objects to which passions become attached. This process of attachment, according to Madison, is where "the rights of property originate" (Ibid). This process that eventuates towards the discourse on property and one's right of property to one's self—property to self-ownership—he remarks, is "an insuperable obstacle"—it cannot be overcome. Since Madison's model of the individual is centered on the untouchable character of property as the condition for the possibility of the reciprocity of rights and duties, it only *seems* to displace the

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things *in terms of the ideas* one can have of them, or by the simple impulsion of Nature" (142) (emph. mine). Perfectibility is the almost unlimited faculty that draws the animal-man out of its original state of animality and, over the course of many centuries, causes various enlightenments, vices and virtues and eventually makes it into a a tyrant for nature and human society. "Any attentive Reader," Rousseau tells us, "cannot but be struck by the immense distance that separates these two states" (186).

natural rights model. As we will come to find out, however, some have a right to ownership of self more than others. And this right is what will lead Madison to agree with his critics that because some own themselves more than others due to the amount of property they have, those who own themselves more than others have the right to own others, even though Madison's notion of self—the right to own one's body, the right to *have* a body, and to therefore be representable in a court of law (*habeas corpus*)—is predicated on the idea that the world is a supply of property, that it is a natural supply which eventuates towards subduing and owning its "self" as property in the form of man (as species and member of a political organization or group). Like Jefferson's process of thinking, Madison's is informed by the traditional Aristotelian discourse on mimesis. Like both Jefferson and Aristotle, Madison claims that the destination of the world (nature) is man.

This is why reason is imperfect according to Madison. One does not have a self, but rather an assemblage of self built out of the supplies of a world or nature that eventuates towards becoming its own property through the figure of man. One's self-relation is therefore conditioned by property which means two things. First, that one's self-love is not necessarily even a love of "self," but of property. Second, if one has no property one has no "self" and therefore only exists *for* man. From here, the operation of Madison's supplementary self expands through what he calls "the possession of different degrees and kinds of property" which will influence "the sentiments and views of the respective proprietor," and thus lead to "a division of the society into different interests and parties" (Ibid). No individual, in other words, can ever hold an objective position because their opinions and ways of thinking or reasoning remain influenced by their love of property which constitutes their relation to the world due to the interest and energy they have invested into it. Therefore, "the latent causes of faction are thus *sown in the nature of man*" (Ibid) (my emph.) Since the spirit of faction is *in the nature of man*, it constitutes the metaphysical make-up of the pre-existing phenomena that come to assemble man's being. Faction is at one and the same time the most interior and exterior, the so-called "beginning" and the "end." In a word, one might say that it is what constitutes Madison's understanding of freedom. In fact, faction can only describe what the word "faction" can only fail to capture and confine. It comes before freedom, is what renders the character of property opaque, and therefore comes before the development of the binary opposition between nature and property (or technology). And since it is part of the supply that makes up man's being, according to Madison, whatever "faction" is, it is made up with the general social fabric of society as well. It exists there, lying dormant, in reserve, awaiting activation. As Madison goes on to tell his readers, it is what founds differences of opinion about religion, government, and speculation, fuels the ambition of leaders and entices interest and curiosity; it is what has divided American civil society into parties, inflamed them with animosity, "made them oppress and vex each other," and is therefore what has led to the unequal distribution of property, thus spawning the evolution of the division of "those who hold and those who are without property," as well as "Those who are creditors and those who are debtors" (50).

Contrary to what many have believed or proposed in the past, Madison argues that instead of seeing faction as a problem, as something to be eradicated or cut out of the social fabric of society, it ought to be understood as the condition for the possibility of building and sustaining the fraternity or community of a nation-state. This is Madison's solution to the problem of factions as well as to the problem of democracy more generally. And, according to Madison, if his solution works the United States will not only have overcome factions but, in doing so, will be able to offer something to people all over the world to adopt and therefore to secure their own rights and freedoms: "Let me add that it is the great desideratum by which alone this form of government can be rescued from the opprobrium under which it has so long labored and be recommended to the esteem and adoption of mankind" (52). Indeed, as Madison goes on to explain, "A pure democracy, by which I mean a society consisting of a small number of citizens, who assemble and administer the government in person, can admit of no cure for the mischiefs of faction" (Ibid). Democracies have always been but spectacles of turbulence and contention, are incompatible with personal security or rights of property, and "have been as short in life as violent in their death" (Ibid). In other words, in pure democracies no mechanism exists to check and balance the energy and rise of a faction. Whereas "A republic, by which I mean a government in which the scheme of representation takes place," Madison writes, "opens a different prospect and promises the cure for which we are seeking" (52).

The remedy or "cure" to the problem of factions, Madison states, is *representation*. Like Jefferson, Madison needs representation to control the formlessness of what he is here calling "the spirit of faction." He needs representation because the formlessness of what the word "faction" represents is the condition for the possibility of the construction and destruction of society. It is an indestructible force that structures destruction and construction. As such, it is terrifying to Madison. Therefore, through representation one can manage, control, and use what Madison calls "faction" to sustain and secure the republic and its general interests. As much as it is a danger to society, it is also the "remedy" or "cure." This is why Madison writes that "The inference to which we are brought is that the *causes* of faction cannot be removed and that relief is only to be sought in the means of controlling its *effects*" (51) (Madison's emph.) And like Jefferson, the great crisis for Madison was the possibility of a black faction. As such, the black captive functions *for* representative democracy as a supply that at once and the same time is used to destroy and restore the relation between the human and its being, the human and its relation to its community, the nation-state, and world. Positioned as a kind of *federal reserve* at the heart of democracy, it is what secures the federalist project of perpetually (de)forming a more perfect union. Although never voiced as such, this re-presentation can be made legible in at least two instants in Madison's work, of which I will undertake a reading of in the fourth and final section.

Section IV

Du Bois's dissertation, *Suppression of the African Slave Trade*, brings us to the first instant. As noted in the first section of this chapter, Du Bois believed that the Haitian revolution played a significant role in motivating General Congress to write the bill that ought to have put an end to the transatlantic slave trade to the United States.[20] Du Bois demonstrates that Madison's strong protests, expressed disgust, and sense of urgency about abolishing slavery were transformed upon hearing the news about Toussaint and the Haitian revolt. In the notes from the Federal Conventions and General Congress (1787) leading up to the announcement of the news of the Haitian revolt (1791), Madison had argued that deferring abolition by twenty years would be a disaster: "Twenty years will produce all the mischief that can be apprehended from the liberty to import slaves. So long a term will be more dishonorable to the American character" (*Suppression* 60).[21] This is

[20] I write "ought to" because as recent scholarship on the transatlantic slave trade has shown, 1860 was the last year that a slave ship (known as "Clotilda") brought enslaved people to the US from Africa. Thus, despite the fact that the slave trade was made illegal on March 25, 1807 via the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act, trafficking continued up to the event of the Civil War (1861-1865).

[21] As many historians have noted after Du Bois, have noted since Du Bois, under Jefferson's presidency, the United States pursued a policy to isolate Haiti, which involved refusing to recognize Haitian independence out of fear that, by doing so, the volt of the Haitian revolt would spread to the United States and destroy it. For instance, see Thomas O. Tot, *The Haitian Revolution, 1789-1804* (Knoxville, 1973), 5, 53; H. P. Davis, *Black Democracy: The Story of Haiti* (rev. ed., New York 1936), 20-30; Rayford W. Logan, *The Diplomatic Relations of the United States with Haiti,* 1776-1891 (Chapel Hill 1941), 1-5, Ludwell L. Montage, *Haiti and the United States, 1714-1938* (Durham 1940), 5; Timothy M. Mathewson, "George Washington's Policy toward the Haitian Revolution," *Diplomatic History*, 3 (Summer 1979), 322; and, C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (rev. ed., New York 1963). While all these historical accounts are invaluable and provide a wealth of information beyond measure about the policy and relations between the United States and Haiti, this

remarkable because after news of the revolt had reached Southern shores in the United States, Madison changed his mind. As Madison states in Federalist Paper 41, "It ought to be considered as a great point gained in favor of humanity, that a period of twenty years may terminate forever, within these States, a traffic which has long and so loudly upbraided the barbarism of modern policy" (Federalist 65).

The second instant brings us to Madison's Federalist Paper 54, where he attempts to clarify the strange philosophical logic undergirding the reasoning that resulted in the so-called "Three-Fifths Compromise". The paper begins with Madison explaining that, under federalism each state has a population of its own and that who counts as a member of a state's population ought to depend on the legislation of each state. However, as we will come to find out, only certain members of State populations can be counted as representative citizens according to the Federal Constitution. This does not mean, however, that certain dimensions of the entire population of a state should not be recorded or go uncounted. On the contrary, the total number should be tallied even though all bodies cannot be represented as bodies, or as being part of the representable body. This is important for taxes which, as Madison argues all throughout the *Federalist Papers*, ought to be used to build new technologies, telecommunication systems, roads and railways to connect the country to itself.[22] Through taxes, technological innovation can lead to the mass development of economic and political infrastructure, resolution of the national debt owed to France from the Revolutionary War of Independence, the construction of colleges and universities to cultivate the

dissertation chapter or project is not an attempt to contribute to the historiography of the Haitian revolution. Rather, my objective is to demonstrate how the idea of the free black, its imago even, was used to construct the metaphysical infrastructure and ontology of representative democracy.

[22] For example, in "Federalist Paper 14," Madison argues that through taxes the Federal Union can protect the interests of each state and the people of those states because the taxes will allow it to not only connect the country. Roads will be built, "accommodations for travelers will be multiplied and meliorated," new technology will be invented to connect the whole country, and so forth (70).

arts and sciences, and, most importantly, the Federal government can work on funding and rebuilding the national military to protect the rights and the interests of the people from foreign invasion and internal divisions. In other words, in Madison's model of representative democracy, the slave ought to be used to build the socio-economic and political infrastructure of the country. According to Madison, however, it remained unclear how the tax system ought to work under the federalist system since the confederacy did not have a tax system in place. For those who can be counted as state residents, "the rule is understood to refer to the personal right of the people, with which it has a natural and universal connection" ("Federalist" 269). As such, the rule of taxes, "has reference to the proportion of wealth of which it is in no case a precise measure, and in ordinary cases a very unfit one" (Ibid).

Apart from the failures of the confederacy, it was difficult to measure the wealth of both individuals and states because of the status of slaves. The property that generated the most wealth, and thereby could contributed the most to military funding, was the slave trade and slave population. The ambivalence of both federal and state laws about the *status* of the slave, however, made it difficult for the federal government to determine not only the wealth of individuals, but also the wealth of a state and how much it could contribute to things like the federal army, infrastructure, and the national debt. According to Madison, the members of the Federal government and representatives from the Southern states disagreed about what the slave ought to represent or even if it could be represented at all. To demonstrate how a compromise about the status of the slave was reached Madison stages a dialogue between a northerner and a southerner. This is a peculiar moment insofar as the *Federalist Papers* are supposed to represent a collection of strictly philosophically sophisticated, and scientifically rational arguments about why the system of federalism can secure freedom for all in ways that the confederacy (or any other form of government) cannot. In other words, during a moment that is supposed to be perhaps the most philosophically (and mathematically) sophisticated because it is supposed to demonstrate to the general public how the federalist system of representative democracy will tax its citizens and use their money to protect them, Madison's conventional methods for thinking fail when he has to account for how slaves ought to be represented. The paradox of this is that just as the unintelligibility of the captive body is a problem for Madison's thinking, and therefore the operation of the system of representative democracy, it simultaneously serves as the condition for the possibility of thinking more generally. To overcome this problem and restore the political well-being of the republic, the captive body is used to invent a fictional world in which the mathematical principles of the Three-Fifths Compromise can be rationalized.

Beginning from the position of a southern slave owner, Madison argues about the meaning and definition of representation according to the legislative policies of the south. "'We subscribe to the doctrine,' might one of our southern brethren observe, 'that representation relates more immediately to persons, and taxation more immediately to property, and we join in the application of this distinction to our slaves'" (270). Therefore, according to the Southerner, "'we must deny the fact that slaves are considered merely as property, and in no respect whatever as persons. The true state of the case is that they partake of both these qualities: being considered by our laws, in some respects, as persons, and in other respects as property" (Ibid). According to the logic of southern legislation, as both property and person, the slave is conditioned to labor for another, is vendible between masters, and "is subject at all times to be restrained in his liberty and chastised in his body by the capricious will of another—the slave may appear to be degraded from the human rank, and classed with those irrational animals which fall under the legal denomination of property" (Ibid).

This Constitutional, political, and legislative determination classifies "the slave" with or alongside, but not necessarily *as* the animals that southern laws deem "irrational." Since rational and irrational are both qualities of being that designate a difference between persons and animals in this metaphysical schema, the captive is neither rational nor irrational, and seems to re-present equipment in human form. As such, the captive body is the backdrop against which "rational" and "irrational," "human" and "animal," are made possible. In other words, the captive body functions to clarify the difference between rational and irrational according to the southerner schema of legislative thinking. As the Southerner will be made to go on to tell us, this is why the captive is punishable by law, but not necessarily protected by the law: "in being punishable himself for all violence committed against others—the slave is no less evidently regarded by the law as a member of the society, not as a part of the irrational creation, as a moral person, not as a mere article of property. The federal constitution, therefore, decides with great propriety on the case of our slaves, when it views them in the mixed character of persons and of property. This is in fact their true character" (Ibid). What I would like to suggest here is that because Madison's definition of what it means to be a human depends on property, and therefore the faction or originary spirit of distortion that mediates the relation of man to himself and others, then the black captive is a problem for man. As property, although black captives make up man, they simultaneously conceal the relation of man to nature, the world, or Being. Therefore, to man the black captive is the incarnation of faction. It is the supply or equipment that provides the condition of possibility of human freedom and citizenship—things from which the black captive is constitutionally excluded. As such, since the black captive exists as equipment that the human uses to distinguish what makes being human different from being property, the black captive is not human but rather appears as some "thing" other. As such, the black captive appears as a distortion that conceals the difference between it and man. And because the language of the law lacks the proper grammar to describe the condition of the black captive, it appears in Madison's discourse as a faction or threat that provides man with the occasion of recovering his relation to the whole of nature. This means that black captives are not only denied from participating in the political activities of representative democracy, but also that they are subject to the law, but not considered *to be* subjects of the law.

But what is "it" that constitutes this inclusive exclusion here? Like Jefferson, what *makes* a slave both person and property in the Federalist system is not animality, but blackness. Once again, blackness is re-presented here as a kind of federal reserve for constructing and restoring the republic. In the legislative imaginary, the captive is not only invented to assemble and sustain the entire judicial, political, magisterial, and legislative architecture of the constitution and federation of states, but also the entire credit system of the United States economy. Put differently, "it" is the line of credit that the republic opens for itself. The paradoxical existence of both something and nothing, Madison goes on to explain in the voice of a southerner

> 'is the character bestowed on them by the laws under which they live; and it will not be denied that these are the proper criterion; because it is only under the pretext that the laws have transformed the Negroes into subjects of property that a place is disputed them in the computation of numbers; and it is admitted that if the laws were to *restore* the rights which have been taken away, the Negroes could no longer be refused an equal share of representation with the other inhabitants' (270). (My emph.)

In the passage above one can already see how any mention of restoring rights, liberty, and equality reiterate, transmit, and effect the forms of racial domination that have been at play since the transatlantic slave trade. As Hartman argues in *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making In Nineteenth-Century America*, "it is not simply that rights are inseparable from the entitlements of whiteness or that blacks should be recognized as legitimate rights bearers; rather, the issue at hand is the way in which the stipulation of abstract equality produces white entitlement and black subjection in its promulgation of formal equality" (*Scenes* 116). Since the texture of freedom is laden with the vestiges of slavery, the discourse of "restoring" rights to therefore "grant" equality not only remains tied to an ontotheology in which the freedom of whiteness is configured as the supplementary placeholder of some originary presence or abstract idea (universality via the figure of god, nature, or the world), but also that that very configuration of freedom remains predicated on and haunted by the unthought narrative of black subjection, especially since, as Hortense Spillers argues in "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," the grammar of slavery had already undergirded the rhetoric of the republic, and had therefore been guiding and sanctioning its metaphysical arithmetic of subordination and segregation. And the purpose of this metaphysical arithmetic (schematized, calculative thinking), Calvin Warren argues, "is to produce the unliving," and therefore "provide space to black ~~being~~ without an ontological place" (*Ontological Terror* 116). What I am attempting to track here is precisely how the space of the "un-" of the living, of the "un-" in the living, is not only (re)produced but also concealed in Madison's account of the Three-Fifths Compromise.

This concealment makes itself apparent to its readers when, in the voice of the southerner, Madison goes on to state that

> 'since everyone agrees that numbers are the best scale of wealth and taxation, as they are the only proper scale of representation […] could it be reasonably expected that the southern states conjure in a system which considered their slaves in some degree as men when burdens were to be imposed, but refused to consider them in the same light when advantages were to be conferred?' (271).

In other words, the ambivalent status of slaves in the Constitution makes it possible for southern legislators to use their slaves to their advantage by excluding them "from the list of inhabitants when the slaves of representation were to be calculated," but nevertheless "inserted them on the list when the tariff of contributions was to be adjusted" (270). Thus, the amount the federal government would tax the southern states for slaves in a given year would determine whether or not slaves would be classified as persons or commodities in southern State legislation to avoid being taxed. This perpetual repositioning and oscillating movement between taxable commodity and person shows us that in the socio-political, judicial, and legislative imaginary, the captive never really occupies the position of a person but is always constituted as a commodity that captors use solely for the purpose of securing and restoring their military, State infrastructure, wealth and ontology. The quasi-nothing status of the black captive constitutes what Hartman describes as the fungability of the slave:

> the fungability of the commodity makes the captive body an abstract and empty vessel vulnerable to the projection of others' feelings, ideas, desires, and values; and, as property, the dispossessed body of the enslaved is the surrogate for the master's body since it guarantees his disembodied universality and acts as the sign of his power and dominion (*Scenes of Subjection* 21).

As a fungible object, the black captive enables Madison to occupy multiple positions at the same time (southerner, northerner, and narrator). In contradistinction to Madison's freedom to be northerner, southerner, and narrator, the captive exists for the sole purpose of perpetually recovering, restoring, and securing the mobility and ontological speciesism of the people. This process of securing and restoring their ontology, can be confirmed in the northerners reply to the southerner.

In response to the southerner, the northerner is made to say that "federalism cannot override the legislative authority of each state," and that voting rights are different in each state. As such, slaves cannot vote in any state because not one state considers them persons. Therefore, "they neither vote themselves, nor increase the votes of their masters" ("Federalist" 271). Since slaves are denied the vote at the state level, and therefore across every state in the country, "Upon what principle, then, ought they to be taken into the federal estimate of representation? IN rejecting them altogether, the Constitution would, in this respect, have followed the very laws which have been appealed to as the proper guide" (271). In other words, those whoa re excluded from voting are not excluded because of the constitution, which acts as a guideline to protect the national interests of the United States, via recognition of authority of state legislation. Rather, slaves are excluded from the federal estimate of inhabitants due to decisions made by the people of the United States. In other words, to avoid what Madison thought would bring about an apocalyptic end to the Federal Union, and out of protection of his own interests, he conceded to the south, and sought a compromise that ended up reorganizing and perfecting the plantation economy. This can be read in the concluding voice of the northerner. Madison writes, "Let the case of the slaves be considered, as it is in truth, a peculiar one. Let the compromising expedient of the constitution be mutually adopted which regards them as inhabitants, but as debased by servitude below the quality level of free inhabitants, which regards the *slave* as divested of two fifths of the *man*" (Madison's emph.) (271).

How might one read the absent two fifths that make the slave three-fifths of a man? How can we understand this strange bipartisan logic? According to Warren, "the alienated two-fifths is the severing of the flesh, the primordial death. It is irretrievable. Black ~~being~~ is precisely this three-fifths (the ontometaphysical remainder, its refuse), not a metaphysical "1"—no multiplicative procedure can produce this fantastical '1'" (*Ontological Terror* 117). In other words, the missing two-fifths represent the irretrievable loss of the African customs and resources that were used to ground African existence before the transatlantic slave trade. Therefore, what I would like to suggest here is that the Three-Fifths Compromise conceals the missing two fifths. The missing two-fifths is the unthought at the heart and center of democracy—the non-democratic opening of democracy—that the three-fifths is invented to displace. As such, the semantic vacancy, space of free play, or indetermination that exists before and at the heart and center of democracy—indeed what makes democracy "representative" here—is what Hartman calls "the position of the unthought"—the missing two fifths that the Three-Fifths Compromise conceals.

In conclusion, as we saw last Chapter, according to Spillers, the ungendering objectification of the African body during the transatlantic slave trade resulted in the split between body and flesh. Warren calls this violence the "onticide of African being," or the "metaphysical holocaust" that "is the execration of Being"—the "particular process of producing black ~~being~~ through the murder of African existence" (*Ontological Terror* 42).

Throughout this Chapter, I tracked this violence through some of the early Constitutional, legislative, and political writings of representative democracy. Through an analysis of the Three-Fifths Compromise, and following Warren's analysis of the arithmetic of the Compromise, I suggested that the compromise connotes a censoring of what has never arrived. On the one hand, the designation of the three-fifths functions to allow one to see that there is something missing or not there. On the other hand, what is not there conceals what never arrived, cannot return, and therefore does not remain to come. Warren conceptualizes this concealment via his notion of black ~~being~~. As explained in the fourth and final section of this chapter, black ~~being~~ represents the non-place that gets concealed via the process of seeing what is invisible. The bar in "Black ~~being~~" therefore attempts to represent what is impossible to present—the always already not here or there. Through an analysis of the relation between democracy and literature in Emerson, in the next chapter I will attempt to demonstrate that insofar as democracy remains based in a freedom that is conditioned by anti-blackness, it will continue to sustain the metaphysical holocaust of the transatlantic slave trade via the concealment of that holocaust

Chapter Three
"Emersonian Double Evasion and the Invention of Democratic Literature"

Introduction

> Expediency of literature, reason of literature, lawfulness of writing down a thought, is questioned; much is to say on both sides, and, while the fight waxes hot, though dearest scholar, stick to they foolish task, add a line every hour, and between whiles add a line ("Experience" 235).

Taking the question of literature as his topic of conversation in 1823, during the American Philosophical Society conference at the University of Philadelphia, Reverend William E. Channing attempted to define what a "new" national literature might be: "We begin with stating what we mean by national literature. We mean the expression of a nation's mind in writing" (*Remarks on National Literature* 124). Elaborating on what he means by this, Channing goes on to declare that under the category of literature he includes philosophy, history, anthropology, religion, legislation, politics, biology, physics, and all other "departments of imagination and taste" (Ibid). Recalling that literature has often been "confined to compositions which relate to human nature and human life; that it is not generally extended to physical science; and that mind not matter is regarded as its main subject and sphere" (Ibid), Channing then goes on to generalize the definition of literature in a way that no longer remains restricted to the binary oppositions of mind and matter, spirit and body. According to Channing, "the worlds of matter and mind are too intimately connected to admit of exact partition," and since "moral and physical truths have many bonds and analogies, and, whilst the former [moral] are the chosen and noblest themes of literature, we are not anxious to divorce them from the latter [matter], or to shut them up in a separate department" (Ibid).

What Channing's definition of literature attempts to describe, but does not necessarily declare, is that the distinction between mind and matter, spirit and body, the natural and the artificial, is only possible due to what we might think of as the literature of literature. In other words, the condition for the possibility of all literature is an as of yet, unthought general notion of literature which encompasses all and has the capacity to bring together the most seemingly opposite things. Channing believed that American literature could one day be such a literature. As he goes on to conclude:

> The expression of superior mind in writing we regard, then, as a nation's literature. We regard its gifted men, whether devoted to the exact sciences, to mental and ethical philosophy, to history and legislation, or to fiction and poetry, as forming a noble intellectual brotherhood; and it is for the purpose of quickening all to join their labors for the public good that we offer the present plea in behalf of a national literature" (Ibid).

A form student of Channing's, and responding to his call, in the opening lines of his famous essay "The American Scholar," Ralph Waldo Emerson reflects on what he deems the closure of an old epoch and the beginning of a new age of literature: "Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close" ("Scholar" 91). "We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe," he writes (107). "Who can doubt," he continues, "that poetry will revive and lead in a new age, as the star in the constellation Harp, which now flames in our zenith" (Ibid). This new age of literature, Emerson will go on to argue, finds its grounding in the debris of an old fable. "The old fable," he writes, states "that there is One Man,—present to all particular men only partially, or through one faculty; and that you must take the whole society to find the whole man." This original unit, "this fountain of power," he writes, "has been so minutely subdivided and peddled out, that it is spilled into drops, and cannot be gathered" (92). According to Emerson, "The state of society, is one in which the members have suffered amputation from the trunk, and strut about so many walking monsters,—a good finger, a neck, a stomach, an elbow, but never a man" (92). The duty of what Emerson calls the new "American scholar" (107), then, is to help the American Republic restore its relationship to the voice of an original principle of divine morality that it cannot hear. As Emerson puts it, "I believe man has been wronged; he has wronged himself. He has *almost* lost the light, that can lead him back to his prerogatives" (103) (my emph.). But how exactly has man wronged himself? What was the crisis that led Emerson to believe that modern man had lost his common sense of morality and civic duty? And why is a new "literature" a solution to this problem, according to Emerson?

More recently, Emerson scholars have been asking themselves these questions. As such, Emerson has been placed at the forefront of American cultural critique by some of the most compelling writers across fields in the social sciences and the humanities ranging from American Studies and Interdisciplinary Studies, to Philosophy, and Comparative Literature. And the stakes of Emerson's legacy (whether it can address the prevailing issues of our times, how it ought to be read, and so forth) have never been higher. Driven in part by the influence of Marxist theory in American Studies during the 80s and 90s,[23] the current interest in Emerson is centering less and less on a young mystic or sage attempting to break away from the puritanical traditions of his time to make a name for himself as a new kind of scholar in the American academy, and more on him as a persuasive and serious philosopher of self-critique.[24] In the spirit of this new Emersonian "self-critique," and while the fight waxes hot, this Chapter will take up the foolish task of attempting to "add a line" to some of the more recent scholarship on Emerson.

[23] For example, see Barbara Packer, *Emerson's Fall: A New Interpretation of the Major Essays* (New York, 1982); Michael T. Gilmore, *American Romanticism and the Marketplace*, University of Chicago Press (1985); Myra Jehlen, *American Incarnation: The Individual, The Nation, and The Continent* (Cambridge, Mass., 1986); Donald E. Pease, *Visionary Compacts: American Renaissance Writings in Cultural Context* (Madison, 1987); John Michael, *Emerson and Skepticism: The Cipher of the World* (Baltimore, 1988); Cornell West's *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (1989).

[24] For example, see Carey Wolfe's "Alone With America: Cavell, Emerson, and the Politics of Individuals, *New Literary History*, Vol. 25, No. 1, (1994); Sharon Cameron's "The Way of Life By Abandonment: Emerson's Impersonal," *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 25, No. 1 (1998); Branka Arsic's, Cary Wolfe's, and Stanley Cavell's *The Other Emerson* (SUNY 2010).

To add this line, in the first Section of this Chapter, I demonstrate that the different approaches to Emerson that have emerged since the 90s interpret what Emerson often referred to as The Fall or "crisis" of Universal Being through the framework of a Marxian cultural analysis of the French and American industrial revolutions. Although helpful, I argue this analysis often overlooks Emerson's remarks on slavery as the disaster or crisis of Universal Being.

To demonstrate that the crisis which Emerson writes of is more about the slave trade and slavery than the industrial revolutions, I revisit some of Emerson's often overlooked essays, journals, and commentaries on race and slavery. Drawing from Emerson's own commentary on race and slavery throughout his career, I reframe the problem of the crisis of Being as stemming from the history of the enslavement of African's which Emerson claims began at the beginning of known history. My focus is not so much with the factual "truth" of Emerson's claim but rather with what function it serves for Emerson's overall project. The horrors of slavery, I believe, led Emerson to *historicize* and therefore interpret the indeterminable, and otherwise sacred ambivalence of the event of the destruction of Being. It is important to note this because not once throughout Emerson's writing does he link what he calls the "crisis" that he later says poisons Being to the industrial revolutions or some other event (such as a natural disaster), as most contemporary readers of Emerson assume. It is only after his research into the origins of the atrocities of slavery that Emerson names the crisis of Being.

In Section Three, I claim that Emerson's response to this catastrophe is to found a democratic literature which will enable him to not only give an account of the event of the Fall by historicizing the destruction of Being through the history of the enslavement of Africans, but will also enable him and other American scholars to leave this past behind by recovering and restoring the "might" and "power" of Universal Being. Part of this process of restoration and recovery involves introducing only the best and most talented members of the African population into what Emerson envisions as a newly emerging "Human Race."

This process of restoration and recovery, I explain, also involves gathering the best bits and pieces of every remaining civilization into a republic to not only reassemble, but to strengthen what Emerson refers to as the colonizing force of "the Saxon" race. This enhancement, I contend, is Emerson's solution to the fear of the disappearance of the Saxon race—the terror of nothing. Emerson's phantasy of preserving and enhancing the Saxon race to overcome the terror of nothing by feeding off of the best bits and pieces of other civilizations is only made possible through forgetting what never arrived.

Section I

> The absence of moral feeling in the white man is the very calamity I deplore. The captivity of a thousand Negroes is nothing to me. (Emerson's *Journal*, Vol. XI, 385)

Most readings of Emerson focus on what he described as the Unity in the variety of Nature. This "Unit," "Man," "Over Soul," or "Universal Being," as Emerson sometimes referred to it, is in all things and meets the individual everywhere. Even the most seemingly opposed things, Emerson argues in many places, can be shown to be inhabited by the same Universal Being or Over Soul. As he puts it early on in his first book *Nature* (1836), "Not only resemblances exist in things whose analogy is obvious, as when we detect the type of the human hand in the flipper of the fossil Saugus, but also in objects wherein there is great superficial unlikeness" (*Nature* 52). No matter how different, opposing, distinct, dissimilar, or separate things may seem, Emerson contends, Universal Being can be found everywhere and in everything.

According to Cornell West, the importance of such a discourse during a time of drastic socio-political, and economic upheaval cannot be overstated. "Not only does he [Emerson] create a vocation and constituency for himself," West argues, "he also formulates a conception of power that enables himself and others to respond to the crises of his day" ("Emersonian" 11). Emerson's "Rhetorical strategies, principally aimed at explaining America to itself, weave novel notions of power, provocation, and personality into a potent and emerging American ideology of voluntaristic invulnerability and utopian possibility" (10). Indeed, as West and many others before him have noted,[25] Emerson was a scholar who took seriously the relation between theory and practice, thought and action, private scholarship and public discourse. He was a deeply involved individual who attempted to respond to the pervading socio-political ills of his time. And Emerson's efforts to respond to the crises of his time has led some of his readers to accentuate his rejection of history, flight from the past, refusal of authority, and denial of time.[26] This reading of Emerson tends to

[25] For instance, see Stanley Cavell's "Finding As Founding" in *This New Yet Unapproachable America: Lectures After Emerson After Wittgenstein*.

[26] In *American Romanticism and the Marketplace,* Michael T. Gilmore argues that Emerson's social critique of Jacksonian democracy, and its complacency to capitalism, is itself a product of that capitalistic machinery. "Disavowing, on the one hand, the commercial outlook of the times [Jacksonian democracy]," Gilmore writes, "Emerson, on the other, purifies and sanctions an aggressive, 'capitalistic' ethos of mastery over nature" (*American Romanticism* 30). Similarly, in *The Limits of American Literary Ideology in Pound and Emerson*, Cary Wolfe argues that Emerson's notion of individualism demonstrates how "We can all possess different things (our natures, our selves) only if we all possess—or more precisely are *possessed by*—the same thing: Emerson's God or Spirit" (*Limits* 5). "If all this sounds familiar," Wolfe contends, "it should, for it describes nothing other than the central organizing structure of the economic and ideological totality of Pound's and Emerson's America: private property. It is this structure that provides the conditions of possibility—the social 'logic of content,' to borrow Fredric Jameson's phrase—for the radical individualism of Pound's and Emerson's 'American literary ideology" (Ibid). What Wolfe says next is remarkable because it marks (and is marked by) the limits of his frame of analysis. "I have given it that name in my title because that ideological structure seems to me so remarkably pervasive in American culture that it is *nearly invisible*." Accordingly, Wolfe explains, "I cannot pursue that argument in any convincing way here" (Ibid) (my emph). It is precisely this "nearly invisible" dimension of property, and what it hides—namely, an unrecognized metaphysical infrastructure that is the condition for the possibility of the structuring force of the logic of property and the social logic of content—that this Chapter (and dissertation) pursues. While the work of Gilmore and Wolfe are important and helpful, my project seeks to reframe the way we read authors like Emerson and Whitman for the purpose of opening a different avenue of

illustrate him as a "radical" non-conformist, or usurper of aristocratic authority, carving his own path in directions opposed to those of European philosophy, epistemology, and intellectual history. As such, Emerson is sometimes represented as a rapacious individual who espoused a philosophy of self-reliance motivated by a moral faith in the greatness of human reason and creativity which he often boasted could not only overcome the socio-political problems of the world and American society, but in doing so could also re-unite the common man with his superior "Self" or "Being."

Although this reading is insightful, often yielding rich and important facts about Emerson and his relation to the socio-political, and economic issues of his world, it does not go far enough. It does not go far enough because in focusing on what Emerson described as the Unity in the variety of Nature, it more often than not *conceals* why he was obsessed with restoring and recovering this "Unity." Whether "radical," philosophical, or cultural critic (problematic and helpful), in more convention (and even less conventional) readings of Emerson the *crisis* that Emerson was responding to is always conceived of by his readers within the terrain of political economy, or dialectical materialism. Emerson is therefore always thought along Marxian lines as someone responding to and confined by the socio-political, and economic problems unleashed by the American and French industrial revolutions.[27] He is never thought of as an intellectual thinker

conversation about overlooked dimensions of their work at the intersection of the philosophy and history of nature, race and slavery.

[27] In *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, Cornell West writes that "The three major historical coordinates of Emerson's career are the cultural metamorphosis of Victorian New England, the economic repercussions of a nascent industrial capitalist order, and the identity crisis of the first new nation." While West does link the identity crisis of the settler-colonists of the United States to the economic repercussions of colonizing "virgin" lands, and the exploitation of "new black, brown, red, yellow, and white labor," he does not think that the identity crisis that Emerson was responding to has anything to do with a crisis of Universal Being, which would involve the thought of a terrifying finitude—that what has been destroyed (the culture's of other "civilization's," to use one of Emerson's words, of other culture's subjected to an atrocious and cruel violence) cannot be recovered, restored, or brought back.

of *survival*, or of producing a discourse about surviving what he often described as "The Fall"—the destruction of Universal Being that produced an apathy in himself and the general public. In other words, the crisis that Emerson addressed is never thought as one of spirit. As such, it is also never thought in terms of a desire or need to survive and therefore overcome the terrifying idea that its ruin happened through the irreparable and irremediable destruction of other cultures and civilization. This destruction and irreparable loss of other cultural worlds, is what Emerson thought had produced an empty space, gap, or irreparable apathy in his heart, and at the center of the spirit of the human species. What I am suggesting here is that Emerson's seminal reflections on "Universal Being" are never read as meditations on overcoming nothingness.

I believe this interpretive occultation in Emerson scholarship results from the metaphysical holocaust and program of erasure set forth by the transatlantic slave trade (discussed in Chapter's One and Two). This transcendental violence of erasure, and therefore erasure of this transcendental violence (via the birthing of epistemic practices of reading and interpretation that guide readers and writers to evade, avoid, or skip over these topics, rather than engage them), has led many contemporary readers of Emerson to understand his project as a critical commentary on political economy, rather than metaphysics and ontology. As such, many have sought to (re)claim Emerson as the unsung founder of American pragmatism,[28] of a New American Religion,[29] or even as an intellectual giant connected to the "European philosophical tradition."[30] I am not suggesting that one ought not read Emerson in the ways previously mentioned. There is no denying that Emerson was a critical thinker who had a major impact on the agenda and terms of the modern world. But

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[28] For instance, see Cornell West's Chapter "The Emersonian Prehistory of American Pragmatism" in *The Evasion of American Philosophy*.
[29] For example, see Harold Bloom's *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* as well as his *Agon: Towards A Theory of Revisionism*.
[30] For example, see Branka Arsic's, Cary Wolfe's, and Stanley Cavell's *The Other Emerson.*

if we are to think him as such, then perhaps we are better off reading him as someone who, in response to other philosophical systems, as West has convincingly argued, strategically “evaded” those systems for the purpose of inventing his own. It is precisely what West describes as the invasion of the Emersonian “evasion” in the intellectual spirit of “American” writers that preoccupies me.

What exactly is this “evasion”? According to West, Emerson’s strategy of evasion “is one of the ways in which he sets tradition aside” and is “one of the means by which he exercises his own intellectual self-reliance” (37). And yet, one might wonder if this “evasion” of philosophy is already a philosophy *of* evasion. Might Emerson’s evasion already be the very evasion *of* the epistemic genealogies of man produced in modernity (philosophically or otherwise)? Might we say that Emerson’s evasion is not so much that he evades philosophy but rather that he evades the question that modern philosophy also evades/evaded? And that his philosophical intervention of evasion occurs precisely at the expense of the evaded? Of neglecting to strip the profession of philosophy of its pretense of world spirit, of disclosing its affiliations and reliance on institutions of power (both rhetorical and political), and producing a critique that unsettles the many mechanisms of oppression and domination that inform and direct the social and collective complacency of culture and society?

As we shall see in the following Section, Emerson evades the evaded (the missing, discredited, and discarded) to not only restore and maintain the narrative of some pure, unscathed, Universal Being or notion of Reason, but also to benefit, preserve, and insure the survival and therefore supremacy of racial whiteness. Although, as Carey Wolfe argues in *The Limits of American Literary Ideology*, Emerson was a radical who provided (and still provides) his readers with a “destructuring” notion of self (*Limits* 10), I will argue that, by necessity, Emerson’s process of thinking remains oriented and dictated by a grammar that favors the fantasy of preserving, restoring, and universalizing racial whiteness at the expense of the silenced and the forgotten. If there is anything "evasive" about Emerson's project, it is that it cannot think the unthinkable, nor say the unsaid.

Section II

A good place to begin our reframing and analysis is with some of Emerson's often overlooked reflections on race. In his early writings, Emerson held a traditional view of nature as a "great chain of being." Similar to Jefferson, Emerson viewed the races as fitting into a hierarchical chain of faculties and talents. As he explains in one of his early journals:

> All men are born unequal in personal powers and in those essential circumstances, of time, parentage, country, fortune. The least knowledge of the natural history of man adds another important particular to these; namely, what class of men he belongs to—European, Moor, Tartar, African? Because, Nature has plainly assigned different degrees of intellect to these different races, and the barriers between are insurmountable. This inequality is an indication that some should lead, and some should serve (*Emerson In His Journal* 19).

As we read on in this *Journal*, in matters of intellect and talent, Emerson explains that the "African" is a beast and not a man. According to Emerson, the distinction between "Man" and "Beast" is that "Man" has reason, whereas the "Beast" lacks reason. "If we speak in general of the two classes Man and Beast, we say that they are separated by the distinction of reason and the want of it" (19-20). As if to provide evidence in support of this claim, Emerson goes on to record his observations of black men:

> I saw ten, twenty, a hundred large lipped, lowbrowed black men in the streets who, except in the mere matter of language, did not exceed the sagacity of the elephant. Now is it true that these were created superior to this wise animal, and designed to control it? And in comparison with the highest orders of men, the Africans will stand so low as to make the difference which subsists between themselves & the sagacious beasts inconsiderable. It follows from this, that this is a distinction which cannot be much insisted on. And if not this, what is the preeminence? Is it in the upright form, and countenance raised to heaven—fitted for command. But in this

> respect also the African fails. The monkey resembles Man, and the African degenerates to a likeness of the beast (20-21).

Neither "Man" nor "Animal," in Emerson's view of the great chain of being, "the African" is configured as a "beast"—an ambivalent category existing outside the realm of Species Being and moral reason. As such, in the passages above, blacks are (re)presented as the physical incarnation of a distortion in the map of nature.

In *Emerson on Race and History*, Philip Nicoloff explains this dimension of Emerson's work by claiming that, like many nineteenth century North Atlantic intellectuals, Emerson was a "mild racist" (*Emerson on Race* 124). Similarly, according to West, Emerson was indeed "a unique variant of the North Atlantic bourgeois subject" ("Emersonian" 28). But unlike Nicoloff, West contends that Emerson's racism stems from his research and reading of natural history. Natural history, and evolutionary theories were becoming increasingly popular during Emerson's time and therefore, according to West, Emerson's efforts to read "the science of his day," can be interpret as his attempt to make sure that "the best knowledge available about nature buttressed and supported his idealism" (Ibid).

According to John Lysaker, however, the question of race in Emerson's work emerges "within the philosophy of history, the attempt to locate basic principles that govern the becoming of phenomena that not only endure but also evolve, for example, the family, civil society, and the state, to invoke a Hegelian triad" (*After Emerson* 90). Lysaker argues that what motivates Emerson's question of race, "is the emergence of British colonial power, and he offers race as a force or principle responsible for its emergence" (Ibid). Within Emerson's attempt to provide a philosophical explanation for the historical rise of British colonial power, two forces become important, according to Lysaker: credence and civilization.

On the one hand, civilization refers to a sedimented history of knowledge (knowingly and unknowingly) passed on from one generation to the next. As Lysaker puts it, it is "what we might term 'culture' in an anthropological sense—that stock of practice-bound knowledge that allows emerging generations to use its predecessor's achievements, from wheels to constitutions, quasars to modal improvising. 'It implies,' he [Emerson] writes six years later, 'the evolution of a highly organized man brought to supreme delicacy of sentiment, as in practical power, religion, liberty, sense of honor, and taste'" (90). We will return to this evolutionary figure of organized man in Section Three below. For the moment, it is important to point out that, on the other hand, credence involves the ways in which one actively participates in interpreting, changing, or refining what is given or projected onto us when we are born into the world through existing categories of knowledge. In other words, each term in the couplet of civilization and credence works the other in turn. Civilization provides the means with which and in which one is born into the world. As such, it is what enables the practice of credence. Through the practice of credence that one inherits from previous generations, one can make a contribution to their culture by transforming the given elements of civilization they have inherited. According to Lysaker:

> As a site of reception and response, credence is a site of possible transformation. Unhappy with what my race and civilization provide, I might disavow or at least countermand both and try to revise some or much of what they bequeath. For example, I might write an essay titled "Race" and develop a way of gauging its place in the arc of my life (91).

While the readings of Nicoloff, West, and Lysaker are insightful, I would like to suggest the possibility that what motivated Emerson's evolving outlook on race was not necessarily his attempt to make sure he was supported by the popular ideology of natural history and philosophy, nor because he was unhappy with his own race and civilization. Rather, what motivated Emerson's thoughts on race, and therefore his entire project of recovering and restoring Universal Being, was the terrifying thought that civilizations, and therefore entire cultures could disappear and possibly had already completely disappeared without a trace. Moreover, I would like to suggest that what prompted this thought was Emerson's reading of natural history and philosophy.

As the passage above from Emerson's journal indicates, like Jefferson, Emerson's ontological speciesism places the black population outside of the "animal" kingdom from which "the human family" emerges. We might say that at this point, Emerson's notion of human freedom is preconditioned by an ontological speciesism that does not include black subjects. In other words, it is already of the opinion (under the influence of certain natural historians and philosophers) that African's had either lost their culture and civilization or never had one. What West and Lysaker help us understand, however, is that Emerson was never really satisfied with the discourse of race provided by natural historians and philosophers. On the one hand, as West argues, the popularity of evolutionary biologists Robert Chambers, and his 1845 publication of *Vestiges of Creation*, influenced Emerson to shift away from natural philosophy and the polygenist scholarship of Louis Agassiz (a good friend of Emerson's at Harvard). On the other hand, as Lysaker suggests, since historians and philosophers often used the category of race in an ambivalent manner to explain the rise of British colonial power as a "natural" phenomenon, and to therefore justify British imperialism, Emerson wished to provide an account of British power that did not depend on the puritanical elements of creationist narratives. As Emerson himself puts it in his journal from 1845:

> There are always two histories of man in literature contending for our faith.
>
> One is the scientific or skeptical, and derives his origin from the gradual composition, subsidence and refining,—from the Negro, from the ape, progressive from the animalcule savages of the water drop, from *volvox globator*, up to the wise man of the nineteenth century.
>
> The other is the believer's, the poet's, the faithful history, always testified by the mystic and the devout, the history of the Fall, of a descent from a superior and pure race, attested in actual history by the grand remains of elder ages, of a science in the East unintelligible to the existing population; Cyclopes architecture in all quarters of the world (*Journals Volume VII* 80-81).

Never entirely satisfied with either of these narratives, Emerson sought to draw up his own account of racial difference under "the name of Being" ("Experience" 239). Borrowing metaphysical principles from Emanuel Swedenborg, Immanuel Kant, Hegel and other modern philosophers, mathematicians, geographies, and writers of all sorts during and before his time, by the late 1830s, Emerson had constructed a vision of the human race, but had simultaneously arrived at a problem. As he puts it in his journal entry from August 27, 1838: "Whence came the negro?" (*Journal* 194). As Emerson began to delve into this "history [that is] somewhere worth knowing" (Ibid), his perceptions of black subjects and their position in the great chain of being as "beasts" began to change. As Emerson writes in his address on the anniversary of the emancipation of slaves in the British West Indies, "From the earliest time, the negro has been an article of luxury to the commercial nations. So has it been, down to the day that has just dawned on the world. Language must be raked, the secrets of slaughter-houses and infamous holes that cannot front the day, must be ransacked, to tell what negro-slavery has been" ("Address" 266). The more Emerson looked into the business of slavery, he explains, "the more shocking anecdotes came up,—things not to be spoken" (268). Emerson's investigations led him to conclude that slavery had destroyed Being, had covered over the guiding light of universal reason. As we shall see in the following section, we find passages about this crisis all over Emerson's work, but especially in the two overlooked dimensions of his writings on slavery and race.

Section II

In his address on the emancipation of slaves in the British West Indies, delivered in the Court-House in Concord, Massachusetts, in August 1844, Emerson begins by arguing that the whole world benefitted from slavery. "The sugar they raised was excellent; nobody tasted blood in it. The coffee was fragrant; the tobacco was incense; the brandy made nations happy; the cotton clothed the world" (277). This international and world wide "devastation," Emerson goes on to explain in his 1855 essay "American Slavery," "reached its crisis in the acquiescence in slavery in this country,—and in the political servitude of Europe, during the same age" ("American Slavery" 356). Likening slavery to viruses and epidemics, he writes that "Slavery is an evil, as cholera or typhus is" (352); that it makes people "apathized and indifferentists" (354); and, that it is what stops the American's "mouth, ties his hands, forces him to submit to every sort of humiliation, and is the fountain of poison which is felt in every transaction and every conversation in this country" (358). Commenting on the Three-Fifths Compromise, he tells us that "The fathers, in July 1787, consented to adopt populations as the basis of representation, and to count only three-fifths of the slaves." This decision, according to Emerson, resulted in a "*fatal blunder*" (358) (my emph.). In spite of Emerson's misreading of the Three-Fifths Compromise, which as we saw last Chapter was not about population but rather the status of slaves, what Emerson describes in these essays is the cause of what he considered to be an epoch of utter destruction. In this epoch, the intensity of this destruction had reached its height with the institutionalization of slavery under the aegis of representative democracy in the United States. Due to this historical tragedy, what Emerson calls "Universal Being," or the original unit, had been destroyed.

Emerson's historical investigation into the crisis of Being allows us to read him from a different, and rather unconventional perspective. Since Emerson's account of slavery begins at "the beginning," with the earliest possible historical fragments that were available to him during his time, we might say then that the crisis or disaster that Emerson was addressing all along was precisely the crisis of Being that was *caused* not necessarily by the industrial revolution, but through the cruelty of slavery. In other words, what I am arguing here is that by combining elements of creationist narratives, natural history and the philosophy of nature, Emerson could *historicize* the destruction of Being. Since his first book, Emerson claims that universal reason and therefore moral sentiment had been destroyed but he never really had an adequate reason or explanation as to why this was the case. What the history of slavery offered Emerson was both a way to contextualize the problem of the aperture of Being through the black body. Emerson had been writing about this destruction since his first book *Nature*. According to Emerson, "The reason why the world lacks unity, and looks broken and in heaps, is, because man is disunited with himself" (*Nature* 221). Similarly, in the "American Scholar," Emerson states that

> The old fable covers a doctrine ever new and sublime; that there is One Man,—present to all particular men only partially, or through one faculty; and that you must take the whole society to find the whole man. Man is not a farmer, or a professor, or an engineer, but he is all. Man is priest, and scholar, and statesman, and producer, and soldier. In the *divided* or social state, these functions are parceled out to individuals, each of whom aim to do his stint of the joint work, whilst each other performs his. The fable implies, that the individual, to possess himself, must sometimes return from his own labor to embrace all the other laborers. But unfortunately, this original unit, this fountain of power, has been distributed to multitudes, has been so minutely subdivided and peddled out, that it is spilled into drops, and cannot be gathered. The state of society is one in which the members have suffered amputation from the trunk, and strut about so many walking monsters,—a good finger, a neck, a stomach, an elbow, but never a man ("American Scholar"' 92)

To borrow a term often used by Emerson, Universal Being, "Man," or the "original unit," is therefore *scattered*.[31] In the years following these papers, this crisis leads Emerson to claim that "There is no Union," that "Language has lost its meaning," and that "*Representative Government* is really misrepresentative" ("Remarks" 383). Indeed, because of this crisis, all throughout his writing career Emerson will argue that one cannot depend on government to resolve the problem

[31] For instance, see Emerson's 1832 Sermon (CLXI) on "The Lord's Supper," where he writes of "the scattering of the nation" ("Supper" 3), his 1836 essay "Humanity of Science," where he discusses the "scattered blocks" of nature's unity ("Humanity" 76), or his 1838 "Divinity School Address," where he refers to "the scattered company of pious men" who retain "the genuine impulses of virtue, and so still command our love and awe, to the sanctity of character" ("Address" 120).

of Universal Being ("Kansas" 383). That one cannot depend on skeptics, critics, or books of the past ("The Transcendentalist" 164-173; "American Slavery" 360; "American Civilization" 442). What the world needs, Emerson contends, is a way to resurrect and resuscitate Being, to restore it and make it even stronger. And from the very beginning of his writing career, Emerson's solution to this crisis is the invention of a new literature:

> This time, like all times, is a very good time, if we but know what to do with it. The literature of the poor, the feelings of the child, the philosophy of the street, the meaning of household life, are the topics of the time. It is a great stride. It is a sign—is it not?—of new vigor, when the extremities are made active, when currents of warm life run into the hands and the feet. I ask not for the great, the remote, the romantic; what is doing in Italy or Arabia; what is Greek Art, or Provençal minstrelsy; I embrace the common, I explore and sit at the feet of the familiar, the low. Give me insight into to-day and you may have the antique and future worlds ("American" 105).

The new literature is to be brought into the world by a new American scholar who can re-assemble "the One," "Man," original unit, or Universal Being through the stories of the people. By recording these unheard of stories, by shedding a light on dimensions of democratic society that had never been seen or heard before, the American scholar could help unite "America," and therefore reattach its people to a re-assembled Universal Being. Like the poet, it is the duty of the American scholar to re-attach things to the whole, to provide sense, direction, or pathways back to Universal Being. Such a project wishes to give the individuals of this new national order an identity and therefore a new sense of moral direction.

As Emerson will go on to argue, this literature is needed to further the independence of the United States from the hegemonic culture and ways of thinking of the old world order. "We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe. The spirit of the American freeman is already suspected to be timid, imitative, tame" (107). The association of the United States with the traditions of the old world, in Emerson's opinion, reinforced a cultural dependence on slavery which had therefore resulted in a sense of national inferiority or of living in the shadow of European governance, art, and ways of living. To disrupt this association, dependence, and self-doubt, Emerson calls for the invention of a literature by intellectuals who not only reinvent and re-constitute "the nation," but also consolidate it as an independent geopolitical entity:

> Is it not the chief disgrace in the world, not to be a unit—not to be reckoned one character;—not to yield that peculiar fruit which each man was created to bear, but to be reckoned in the gross, in the hundred, or the thousand, of the party, the section, to which we belong; and our opinion predicted geographically, as the north, or the south. Not so, brothers and friends,—please God, ours shall not be so. We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds. Then shall man be no longer a name for pity, for doubt, and for sensual indulgence. The dread of man and the love of man shall be a wall of defence and a wreath of joy around all. A nation of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men (107-108).

Despite the difficulties of the time, Emerson conceptualizes this new democratic literature as a vehicle to overcome divisive obstacles, to solve all problems, and go beyond all limitations. Emerson states this most clearly in the opening lines of *Nature,* where the mark of this crisis appears as a hieroglyph. "Undoubtedly we have no questions to ask which are unanswerable," Emerson writes. "We must trust the perfection of the creation so far, as to believe that whatever curiosity the order of things has awakened in our minds, the order of things can satisfy. Every man's condition is a solution in hieroglyphic to those inquiries he would put" (*Nature* 34).

As we can see, in this opening passage from *Nature*, the hieroglyph appears as both problem and solution. It is an abstract distortion at the heart of Being. This distortion gets historicized as the crisis of slavery that has plagued the nation in Emerson's writings from the 1840s onwards. It is this space of indeterminacy and distortion at the very heart and center of Being that enables Emerson to call for American scholars to "invent" a democratic literature to account for this unaccounted for crisis. This literature, he also states, "builds the sepulcher of the fathers. It writes biographies, histories, and criticism" (Ibid). Emerson believed that a new literature (poetic, philosophical, biographical, anthropological, historical, critical, and so forth) could help unleash or actualize the potential and genius of individuals in the United States if they could only learn to rely on themselves and their own stories rather than the stories of Europe and the labors of others. Indeed, for Emerson, this literature was a way for the republic "to see the miraculous in the common," and therefore build "the kingdom of man over nature" (*Nature* 69).

But what is the "sepulcher of the fathers"? From the Latin *sepelire* (to bury), or *sepulcrum* (burial place), a sepulcher is a kind of tomb, vault, grave, or burial place. What exactly is it that is being buried with the fathers? In attempting to lay the ways of the old world to rest, to "evade" them as West would say, might Emerson be evading the problems that the fathers of the old world evaded? What I am suggesting here is that what Emerson describes as the "sepulcher" or crypt that the American scholar builds for the fathers, is at once and the same time the sepulcher or crypt *of* the fathers. One might say that the American scholar's sepulcher has built into it a recess—a hidden and hollow space sectioned off by a wall that sits back from the rest of the crypt. By burying the fathers of the old world, this new democratic literature could encrypt a problem for the purpose of restoring the ontology and unity of the American subject and people. By evading the crisis and problem of slavery, the American scholar could democratize literature and therefore literalize democracy to restore the ontology of a deeply divided, and morally impotent republic. Although Emerson thought that this "American literature and spiritual history" remained in what he called "the optative mood" ("The Transcendentalist" 170), he nevertheless believed that it could be actualized by a self-reliant American scholar:

> The scholar is that man who must take up into himself all the ability of the time, all the contributions of the past, all the hopes of the future. He must be an university of knowledges. If there be one lesson more than another, which should pierce his ear, it is, The world is nothing, the man is all; in yourself is the law of all nature, and you know not yet how a globule of sap ascends; in yourself slumbers the whole of Reason; it is for you to know all, it is for you to dare all. Mr. President and

> Gentlemen, this confidence in the unsearched might of man belongs, by all motives, by all prophecy, by all preparation, to the American Scholar ("American Scholar" 107).

Emerson's call for a new American scholar to pen a new literature to overcome all obstacles led Harold Bloom to famously note that Emerson's "Truest achievement was to invent the American religion" (*Agon* 145). Similarly, Cornell West describes it as "Emerson's own brand of mysticism that extols receptivity, detachment, praise, and worship" ("Emersonian" 24). This new "Mysticism," West argues, "domesticates and dilutes the devastating critiques of American civilization put forward by Emerson himself" ("Emersonian" 17).

According to West, Emerson celebrates moral transgression over social revolution. "Moral transgression essentially consists for Emerson in the exercise of personal conscience against custom, law, and tradition. It rests upon a deep distrust of the masses, a profound disenchantment with the dirty affairs of politics and fervent defense of individual liberties" (Ibid). Although West is right about Emerson's desire for non-conformity and self-reliance, what I am arguing here is that Emerson's radicalism and doctrine of self-reliance is deceptive. And deceptive not only to his readers but also to himself. While Emerson may seem to promote separateness over solidarity, detachment over or against association, and individual intuition over against collective action, his metaphysics speak otherwise. His self-reliance operates for the end and aim of solidarity, for the achievement of association, collective action, and social cohesiveness. On the one hand, in this sense, his doctrine of self-reliance is not transgressive insofar as it does not challenge the conventional boundaries of man, but rather reinforces them. On the other hand, his doctrine of self-reliance is transgressive insofar as its drive towards unity and social cohesiveness is at the expense of the evaded. As I have been arguing, we gain insight into this when we read Emerson's often overlooked essays on slavery and race alongside his more "mystifying" and well-known passages on nature or Universal Being. To demonstrate this, I will now turn to perhaps one of the most famous passages in *Nature* on "the transparent eye-ball":

> In the woods too, a man casts off his years, as the snake his slough, and at what period soever of life, is always a child. In the woods, is perpetual youth. […] In the woods, we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life,—no disgrace, no calamity (leaving me my eyes), which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground,—my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space,—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am. Nothing; I see all: the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God. The name of the nearest friend sounds then foreign and accidental; to be brothers, to be acquaintances,—master or servant, is then a trouble and a disturbance. I am the lover of uncontained and immortal beauty. In the wilderness, I find something more dear and cognate than in streets and villages. In the tranquil landscape, and especially in the distant line of the horizon, man beholds somewhat as beautiful as his own nature (*Nature* 189).

What this passage shows us is that *nothing* cannot escape Universal Being and Emerson. Fully cognizant and self-present, though nature cannot repair Emerson's eye, Emerson himself can restore his sight and even be or exist *as* nothing. Paradoxically, this means that he can also be or exist as everything. The reason why Emerson is confident in this assertion is because of what he calls "the Universal Being," that "uncontained and immortal beauty," or pure, unscathed reason and faith he has in the Unity of all. Emerson's genealogical regression back to a state of infancy, where "nothing can befall" him, where "no calamity" can resist repair, reflects his desire to recuperate a time before time, an unconditional place in and from which he can shed his skin, begin again, or start anew. This is what American literature ought to accomplish, according to Emerson. It is the power to view one's self and relation to the world *sub specie aeternitatis*. Literature is that vehicle, device, or technology through which Emerson believes one can travel back (through time and space) to the guiding voice of reason, to the eternal or Universal Being. Literature is essentially a time machine that is completely rid of all social ills, while simultaneously encompassing all of them. And as many have noted before, it is perhaps first and foremost the poet, as well as the duty of the American scholar, to re-attach the disparaged to the Universal Being to reveal the Unity in all things. As John Lysaker puts it in "Emerson, Race, and the Conduct of Life," Emerson celebrates poets because they reattach things to the whole. In wild figurations they redraw nature's vast synchronic and diachronic dance" ("Life" 88).

And yet, while West, Lysaker, and Bloom (each in their own way) are adamant that Emerson's own "epistemology of moods " ("Thinking of Emerson" 125), as Stanley Cavell deems it, precludes and therefore resists such an all encompassing viewpoint, I would argue to the contrary. No doubt, like both Immanuel Kant and G.W.F. Hegel, Emerson acknowledges that what one sees is mediated by what one sees with and through. As Emerson puts it in his 1855 essay "American slavery," "Everything rests on foundations, like the globe of the world, the human mind, and the calico print. The calico print pleases, because the arrangement of colors and forms agrees with the imperative requirements of the human eye" ("American Slavery" 356). In other words, calico print pleases because the human eye is programmed by Nature or the Universal Being to be pleased by it. Its arrangement is already prior to the eye, thus informing its receptivity to it. The calico print and the eye are one and the same, and already belong to a program of one and the same—the geometric symmetry of Universal Being. What one can glean from this is that nothing can be lost in this system. Everything is locatable, recoverable, and relatable. And yet, as West has compellingly argued, for Emerson the way things actually are and the general state of the world is not only incomplete, but also in flux. This dimension of Emerson's thinking can be read in his 1841 Essay "Circles," where he writes of the geometric exorbitance of the world and our incapacity to contend with the incomprehensible panorama of an ever changing and expanding whole:

> Every action admits of being outdone. Our life is an apprenticeship to the truth, that round every circle another can be drawn; that there is no end in nature, but every

> end is a beginning; that there is always another dawn rise on mid-noon, and under every deep a lower deep opens.
>
> This fact, as far as it symbolizes the moral fact of the Unattainable, the flying Perfect, around which the hands of man can never meet, at once the inspirer and the condemned of every success, may conveniently serve us to connect many illustrations of human power in every department.
>
> There are no fixtures in nature. The universe is fluid and volatile. Permanence is but a word of degrees. Our globe seen by God is a transparent law, not a mass of facts. The law dissolves the fact and holds it fluid.
>
> In nature every moment is new; the past is always swallowed and forgotten; the coming only is sacred. Nothing is secure but life, transition, the energizing spirit. No love can be bound by oath or covenant to secure it against a higher love. No truth so sublime but it may be trivial tomorrow in the light of new thoughts. People wished to be settled; only as far as they are unsettled is there any hope for them ("Circles" 152)

As West suggests in his reading of this passage, "Language, tradition, society, nature, art, and the self are all shot through with contingency, change, and challenge" ("Emersonian" 15). In other words, according to West, this contingency does not allow Emerson's system to base itself in a model of self-presence. But this is not necessarily the case. Emerson's model *desires* self-presence in the name of a self-reliance that no longer needs to speak of a "self" or of "reliance," but rather only of that which "relies." This is precisely what Emerson states in his 1841 essay "Self-Reliance." According to Emerson, "Inasmuch as the soul is present, there will be power not confident but agent. To talk of reliance is a poor external way of speaking. Speak rather of that which *relies*, because it works and is" ("Self-Reliance" 139). In fact, we might even suggest that the orthographic punctuation of the hyphen that separates "self" from "reliance" in Emerson's construction "Self-Reliance," represents the problem that he desires to delete and overcome—the crisis that slavery causes for Universal reason and moral sentiment. Therefore, my point here is that the only way for Emerson's self-reliance to work is through the complete evasion or deletion of the evaded. In fact, the end and aim of literature, for Emerson, is to allow the American scholar and general republic to act *as if* they were the first to ever see, to act *as if* no one had ever seen before them. It is a discourse that wishes to wipe the slate and begin again.

This telos is not a strategy to deny or reject history, time, and authority. It is an attempt to usurp them. It exemplifies the desire to be capable of giving one's self the capacity or power to appear at the beginning of history so as to see beyond it, and therefore steer and direct it by re-writing it. It is an attempt to posit its "self" as the new Universal voice of reason to which the ear of the world most always listen. We might say that what Emerson's notion of literature attempts to accomplish is the conceptual recuperation of an uncompromised freedom by way of a usurping violence or force. One that attempts to plant democracy, and therefore America, as a seed at the very beginning of time which, through ages of flowering, wins out over time as both its beginning and end. Just as Emerson's walk through the wilderness opens onto a free space at the edge of a new frontier, so literature can enable one to begin from the position of a completely unmarked, unscathed, or unconditioned place in or even before time and space.

But exactly *how* does one recuperate, recover, and restore this freedom? *How* does the American scholar or poet find their way back to this freedom before time? According to West, through the commons, disenchanted, and dispossessed. Like the wilderness, slaves, aboriginal peoples, women, and children signify unlimited possibilities and opportunities for unprecedented moral development in Emerson's metaphysics ("Emersonian" 20). For West, Emerson's system depends on the disenchanted and dispossessed. They serve as the basis for American fascination. To some extent, this is certainly true. Emerson's system cannot work without feeding off of "the other." But I read a certain impossibility in West's analysis. The slave not only results in the accumulation of land, labor, and surplus capital, but also functions to restore the ontology of the human species in Emerson's project. And this process of restoration is not necessarily accomplished through the reification of slaves as commodities, but rather by making only a select few from the slave population into "man." What Emerson's project of democratic literature wishes to accomplish is the invention of a new cosmopolitan democracy that builds itself out of and around a multicultural notion of the best bits and pieces of different civilizations and cultures. As he puts it in his 1862 essay "American Civilization," "We want men of original perception and original action, who can open their eyes wider than to a nationality, namely, to considerations of benefit to the human race, can act in the interest of civilization" ("American Civilization" 442). In the third and final section of this Chapter, I will proceed by demonstrating that the benefit is always for the "Saxon Race"—the universal representation of "Man" in Emerson's later writings.

Section III

For Emerson, only certain portions of the black population qualified *to be* human beings. This ontological speciesism is most visible in Emerson's reflections on Toussaint in his 1844 emancipation address:

> When at last in a race, a new principle appears, an idea,—*that* conserves it; ideas only save races. If the black man is feeble, and not important to the existing races, not on a parity with the best race, the black man must serve, and be exterminated. But if the black man carries in his bosom an indispensable element of a new and coming civilization, for the sake of that element, no wrong, nor strength, nor circumstance, can hurt him: he will survive and play his part. So now, the arrival in the world of such men as Toussaint, and the Haitian heroes, or of the leaders of their race in Barbados and Jamaica, outweighs in good omen all the English and American humanity. […] The might and right are here; here is the anti-slave: here is man: and if you have man, black or white is an insignificance. The intellect,—that is miraculous. Who has it, has the talisman: his skin and bones, though they were of color of night, are transparent, and the everlasting stars shine through, with attractive beams. But a compassion for that which is not and cannot be useful or lovely, is degrading and futile (*Address* 286).

What Toussaint represented to Emerson was the return of sentiment to the world. He is the might and right of moral reason, the non-democratic awakening of democracy. As such, Toussaint represents the embodiment of an antagonizing *kratos* (power or force) that the *demos* (people) can use to awaken, resuscitate, and restore their morality or universal reason. Toussaint himself is not there, not present or represented in this passage. The name of Toussaint is mobilized by Emerson to represent what he considered to be the might and right of some universal moral force of reason returning to the world. And Toussaint's *absence* is precisely what bespeaks this force, cunning, ruse of war, strategy, or operation of mastery. And this overcoming force is pictured by Emerson as arriving through the (the absence of) Toussaint—the non-democratic opening of democracy.

Through this depiction of Toussaint, Emerson not only covers over the aperture of Being—the loss induced by the trauma of the slave trade—he also builds his notion of multi-cultural "Man." As an abstract anti-hierarchical, egalitarian, democratic ideal, the category of "Man," the vehicle for the force of a universal moral will, simultaneously reproduces and hides the trauma of the slave trade by discarding those who do not qualify to be part of Emerson's order of "Man." Emerson's democratic literature evaporates the "unchosen" for the purpose of rescuing and securing some notion of absolute freedom in the form of universal being, or moral reason, and progress. As he puts it in the concluding lines of his "Address":

> The intellect, with blazing eye, looking through history from the beginning onward, gazes on this blot [slavery], and it disappears. The sentiment of Right, once very low and indistinct, but ever more articulate, because it is the voice of the universe, pronounces Freedom. The power that built this fabric of things affirms it in the heart (288).

What I am suggesting here is that Emerson's discourse on literature, the freedom and form of universal progress it desires to restore and regenerate, builds itself out of reproducing and hiding the devastation of the metaphysical holocaust of the slave trade by abandoning those who Emerson says do not matter. It does this in the name not only of securing freedom, but also in the name of preserving and enhancing the "Saxon race." As he puts it in his 1860 essay "Fate":

> The imperial Saxon race, which nature cannot bear to lose, and, after cooping it up for a thousand years in yonder England, gives a hundred Englands, a hundred

> Mexicos [to it]. All the bloods it shall absorb and domineer: and more than Mexicos,—the secrets of water and steam, the spasms of electricity, the ductility of metals, the chariot of the air, the ruddered balloon, are awaiting you.
>
> […] Behind every individual closes organization, before him opens liberty,—the Better, the Best. The first and worst races are dead. The second and imperfect races are dying out, or remain for the maturing of higher. In the latest race, in man, every generosity, every new perception, the love and praise he extorts from his fellows, are certificates of advance out of fate into freedom" ("Fate" 420).

As can be seen in the passage above, the "Saxon Race" is optimally positioned to be a vehicle for "genuine" cosmopolitanism because it constitutes a receptive, inclusive, and welcoming common ground for multicultural exchange that Emerson thinks would otherwise be impossible given the forces of fate at work in the world. Emerson positions none other than the "Saxon race" as the universalizable receptacle into which all other cultures can be absorbed, assimilated, subsumed, and preserved. For Emerson, therefore, it follows that the Saxon race has a unique responsibility to take on the task of serving as the Universal Being or archive of all the languages and cultures of the world. The Saxon race therefore represents the Universal Law that will mediate the criteria for who does and does not belong. Of course, this fantasy of an all powerful, or Universal Being that has the capacity to overcome and perhaps even conquer the differences among different people is nothing new. And yet, the fact that it is more often than not overlooked merits further exploration and explanation. Therefore, in the final stages of this Chapter, what I would like to propose is that Emerson's doctrine of "Self-Reliance" can only function in so far as the "Self" or Universal Being—the "Saxon race"—perpetually remembers and even benefits from reproducing and concealing the metaphysical holocaust of the slave trade.

For the Saxon race to appear as the Universal, and symbolic ideal of "Man," it depends on and needs the dead. The paradoxic here is that, according to Emerson, what is dead is a waste of time. The dead waste time, are the waste *of* time, and therefore do nothing more than waste one's time and distort one's character. This is precisely what Emerson says. That which has "become dead to you," Emerson writes, "scatters your force" ("Self-Reliance" 131). "It loses your time and blurs the impressions of your character" (Ibid). Therefore, one should only focus on life, on the unity of the One and how to overcome death and the nothing that distorts our vision of life and the living. As we have already seen in Emerson's essay "Circles," what he calls life, as West suggests, is shot through with contingency. The contingency or indeterminacy at the heart and center of the living, I am suggesting, is the silence of what is never allowed to arrive in Emerson's project. This silence is what enables the fantasy of Emerson's self-consuming logic. And for a long time, Emerson scholars have remarked on the self-consuming structure of Emerson's project. In the *Imperial Self*, for instance, Quentin Anderson refers to Emerson's project as an "omnivorous consciousness" that feeds on this indeterminacy (*Imperial Self* 58). In *The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy*, George Santayana calls it a "digestion of vacancy" (*Genteel* 192). What I am suggesting here is that the "vacancy" which Universal (Saxon) Being "digests" is the abandoned non-arrivals that Emerson's machine obliterates. The term "vacancy," in other words, censors or displaces the not there or here (the non-place) that Emerson's Universal Being relies on to perpetually recover and restore itself.

The foundation of Emerson's metaphysics of self-reliance—his democratic literature ("mysticism," or "American religion")—is problematic. It is problematic because its self-consumptive logic relies on the production and maintenance of a residue. A residue must always *remain* to preserve, reconstitute, and recover Universal Being.Although Emerson understands that slavery is a problem, especially because the way scientific thinking classifies being along racial difference and biological hierarchies, his critiques and contestations of such foundations only lead to the establishment of another Universal Being and notion of absolute freedom via the figure of the Saxon race. In Emerson's literature, this figure thrives and survives at the expense of the excluded, the missing, and the forgotten. We will explore Herman Melville's response to Emerson, his thoughts about race, and the perils of democratic sovereignty in the next Chapter.

Chapter Four

"Blackness, Whiteness, and Terror in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*"[32]

Introduction

> What I feel most moved to write, that is banned,—it will not pay. Yet, altogether, write the *other* way I cannot
> (Letter to Hawthorne 557)

The final chapter of this dissertation is a re-reading of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*; *Or, The Whale*. Neither original nor unoriginal, abolitionist nor imperialist, cosmopolitan nor democratic, Melville's *Moby-Dick* is a ruse that tricks its readers into identifying with the coercive, and destructive efforts of Ishmael's democratic tolerance to see Queequeg as a human being.

In section one I draw on the work of Toni Morrison and Calvin L. Warren to reframe and therefore reinterpret the reviews and letters Melville wrote during the time he was composing *Moby-Dick*. In doing so, I outline Melville's criticisms of Nathaniel Hawthorne as a staging of the problem of the "free black" for democratic society, which Melville continues to pursue in *Moby-Dick.* With the help of Morrison, I argue that Melville's notion of "ruthless" and "unconditional" democracy stages a critique of abolition and anti-abolition discourses. In section two, I unpack Melville's neither abolitionist, nor anti-abolitionist position via following the narrative of Ishmael's and Queequeg's friendship. I analyze Ishmael's commentary on (and anxiety towards) Queequeg's blackness and contend that to overcome his anxiety, Ishmael writes Queequeg's biography and attempts to understand who he is and where he comes from. When faced with the uncertainty and impossibility of not being able to account for Queequeg's origins, Ishmael covers

[32] All citations in this Chapter are from Melville, Herman. *Moby-Dick; Or, The Whale*. Ed. Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker. W.W. Norton & Company, New York and London, 1967. In this version of *Moby-Dick*, Hayford and Parker comment on important typographical notations about possible mis-transcriptions in Melville's correspondence to Nathaniel Hawthorne (and others) that are important for the argument of this chapter.

over the past that remains a mystery to both Ishmael and Queequeg by slowly humanizing him over the course of the novel. In contradistinction to the claims of other authors (namely, D. H. Lawrence, C. L. R. James, and Morrison), I argue that although Ishmael believes he is doing the right thing by humanizing Ishmael, by seeing that they are both occupied by the same "self," he nevertheless ends up repeating the violence of the past by hiding the absences and silences that make up an integral part of Queequeg's identity with a blanket humanism. In other words, I argue that with every attempt Ishmael makes to rewrite Queequeg's identity involves, to a certain degree, a misrepresentation of Queequeg.

In the final stages of this chapter, I explain that although the "unconditionality" of democracy is normally thought of as a space free of conditions from which a different (and hopefully better) form of democracy will always remain to come, in contradistinction to Emerson, for Melville it seems that every attempt Ishmael makes to occupy that position of freedom reproduces a problematic antiblack arithmetic of utility. With every attempt to transcend the juridical and political norms of representative democracy, Ishmael reorganizes taxonomical grammars, scientific and artistic methodologies in ways that perpetually renew a vicious cycle of institutional violence. In closing, I argue that, far from being a narrative about the commercial enterprise of whaling, Melville's *Moby-Dick* is about how the lexicon and grammar of race not only informs perception and desire, but also evolutionary lexicons and the taxonomy of whales.

I

In the opening lines of a letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne, dated June 1, 1851, Melville writes about the "four blisters" on his "right palm, made by hoes and hammers." These injuries, which Melville tells Hawthorne he obtained from his labors as a farmer, kept him from working on *Moby-*

Dick for nearly three weeks (*Correspondence* 556). Implying a contrast between himself and Hawthorne, who had just published a new volume of stories, Melville writes, "there have been those who, while earnst [*sic*] in behalf of political equality, still accept the intellectual estates (Ibid)."

Going on to compare Hawthorne's relationship to himself to that of the Howard family (a symbol of English aristocracy) and their relations to the social plebeian's of England, Melville states: "I can well perceive, I think, how a man of superior mind can, by its intense cultivation, bring himself, as it were, into a certain spontaneous aristocracy of feeling,—exceedingly nice and fastidious,—similar to that which, in an English Howard, conveys a torpedo-fish thrill at the slightest contact with a social plebeian." He then warns Hawthorne that he may feel "a touch of a shrink," when he sees or hears of what Melville calls his "ruthless democracy on all sides" (556-57). "It is but nature," Melville continues, "to be shy of a mortal who boldly declares that a thief in jail is as honorable a personage as Gen. George Washington" (557). Melville explains that to many, what he claims may seem "ludicrous" (Ibid), but it is, indeed, truth. And no one can make a living by the truth in America, according to Melville. Even if a clergyman tried to preach "Truth from its very stronghold, the pulpit…they would ride him out of his church on his own pulpit bannister" (Ibid). "It can hardly be doubted," then, "that all Reformers are bottomed upon the truth, more or less," and that although it seems "an inconsistency to assert unconditional democracy in all things, and yet confess a dislike to all mankind—in the mass [it is] not so.—But it's an endless sermon,—no more of it" (Ibid).

According to Charles H. Foster, "it is Hawthorne's social and intellectual conservatism against which Melville ranges himself in this letter" ("Emblems" 11). A year prior to Melville's letter (and well known to readers and writers familiar with Hawthorne), are the closing pages of

Hawthorne's 1850 biography of Franklin Pierce—14th President of the United States, and northern Democrat who saw the abolitionist movement as a fundamental threat to the unity of the nation. Hawthorne writes: "The fiercest, the least scrupulous, and the most consistent of those who battle against slavery" agree with Pierce on one thing: that there is no way to end slavery "except by tearing to pieces the Constitution, breaking the pledges which it sanctions, and serving into distracted fragments that common country which Providence brought into one nation" (*Pierce* 163).

"The evil" of emancipation, Hawthorne continues, is "certain, while the good was, at best a contingency." In other words, the abolition of slavery, "if such possibility there were," Hawthorne opines, would result in "the ruin of the two races which now dwelt together in greater peace and affection" (*Pierce* 163-164). In sum, for Hawthorne, if abolition meant the destruction of the United States, then the negative effects of abolition outweighed the possibilities of the good. For Hawthorne, like Jefferson, Madison, and Emerson, the democratic union of American society must be defended from what he perceived as the potential threat and destruction of abolition.

Like Hawthorne, Melville's father-in-law Lemuel Shaw, (his surrogate father following the death of Allan Melville in 1832 and to whom he dedicated *Typee* "affectionately" in 1847), was a notorious defender of the slave clauses in the Constitution. He was also Chief Justice of Massachusetts and I believe had an influence on Melville.

As Chief Justice, Shaw's conservativism became shockingly clear to Melville and the citizens of Boston in September of 1842 when he ordered that the alleged fugitive George Latimer be returned to Virginia. Just under a decade later, in 1850, Shaw created the Fugitive Slave Act—banning runaway slaves from seeking freedom and asylum in Massachusetts—which he then transformed into federal law during the Thomas Sim's case in April of 1851. After his decision to send Sims back to his master's plantation in Savannah, Georgia, Shaw went on to deliver a prepared statement at the Court House, intending to block future abolitionist attempts to contest the Fugitive Slave Law on constitutional grounds. Evoking the language and logic of the constitution (discussed in Chapter One), Shaw stated that The Fugitive Slave Law

> carries with it, therefore, all the sanctions which can belong to it, either as an international or a social compact; made by parties invested with full powers to deliberate and act; or as a fundamental law, agreed on as the basis of a government, irrepealable, and to be changed only by the power that made it, in the form prescribed by it ("Thomas Sims' Case" 297).

For Shaw, The Fugitive Slave Law was in continuity with, and therefore supported by, the reasoning of the constitution because it worked in accordance with the criteria of the federalist principle (discussed in Chapter Two), which deferred the promise of abolition in order to secure the democratic union of the nation at the national level (between Northern and Southern States), as well as internationally.

Based on this information, some have argued that like Hawthorne, Melville's freedom to write was financially supported by the enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law. As Robert S. Levine reminds us in his "Chronology of Melville's Life," in *The New Cambridge Companion to Melville* (2014), "After honeymooning in New Hampshire and Canada," in 1847, Melville and Elizabeth Shaw moved "into a large row house in Manhattan purchased with the help of Lemuel Shaw" (xvi). What's more, Shaw often financed Melville throughout his early writing career and during his travels to and from Europe (Ibid).

As many know, this is information culled from Melville's correspondence with Shaw.[33] In *Subversive Geneaology: The Politics and Art of Herman Melville*, this information leads Michael

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[33] In "Who Eats Whom? Melville's Anthropolitics at the Dawn of Pacific Imperialism," Kennan Ferguson draws on this information to argue that Melville develops an "anthropolitical imaginary" in his early novels that legitimates American colonialism. According to Ferguson, Melville's

Rogin to conclude that the condition of the possibility of Melville's freedom, and of his freedom of expression as a writer, was inextricably linked to the juridical and political infrastructure of slavery. Perhaps more than any other Melville scholar, Rogin has conducted one of the most exhaustive studies of how deeply the social thought of Melville's time is woven into Melville's writing. He not only calls our attention to the connection that Melville himself often made between American slavery and American freedom, but he also provides evidence on how slavery impacted the social and political milieu of Melville's family. Drawing our attention to Melville's father-in-law, and his decision to make the Fugitive Slave Law an official law, Rogin writes that

> [E]vidence in Moby Dick also suggests the impact of Shaw's ruling on the climax of Melville's tale. Melville conceived that final confrontation between Ahab and the white whale some time in the first half of 1851. He may well have written his last chapters only after returning from a trip to New York in June. When New York antislavery leaders William Seward and John van Buren wrote public letters protesting the *Sims* ruling, the New York *Herald* responded. Its attack on 'The Anti-Slavery Agitators' began: 'Did you ever see a whale? Did you ever see a mighty whale struggling?' (*Subversive Geneaology* 107)

This analysis of Melville's family and its ties to the legislative infrastructure of slavery brings Rogin to interpret the white whale in *Moby-Dick* as an allegory about the all encompassing political conflict of Melville's time: slavery.

Similarly, according to Foster, although "Melville may have moved in a conservative world in some of his most valued personal relations," in his novels and short stories, Melville "demonstrated attitudes scarcely distinguishable from those of an announced abolitionist" ("Emblems" 7). What distinguishes Melville from Emerson, Hawthorne, Whitman, and other writers of the Young America Movement, claims Foster, is Melville's dedication to a certain kind

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novels develop a "scientific" and "zoological" perspective of indigeneity that "dislocates Pacific Islanders into the realm of pure nature" and therefore paves the way for American conquest and domination (1-41).

of cosmopolitanism that is rooted in abolitionist democracy. And since the publication of Foster's 1961 seminal article "Something in Emblem's: A Reinterpretation of Moby-Dick," many scholars in and outside of Melville scholarship agree that Melville advocated a certain kind of cosmopolitan democracy. As Nancy Fredricks states in *Melville's Art of Democracy*, Melville attempted "to create an art that embodies egalitarian and multicultural democratic values" (*Democracy* 4). Similarly, Ralph Savarese argues that Melville's novels demonstrate an exemplary cosmopolitanism in the form of a "neurocosmopolitanism"[34] ("Neurocosmopolitan Melville" 8). While others, (as Michael Jonik points out in "Melville's Misanthropology,") "have unfolded through Melville a politics of commonality as the shared act of producing a community not of individuals who group themselves along the lines of a unified identity, but rather of a community of non-hierarchical, differential, and impersonal singularities" ("Misanthropology" 353).

For these and other authors, Melville offers a very hopeful vision of political society. What my (re)reading of *Moby-Dick* will go on to suggest however, is that Foster and others who express similar arguments about Melville's notion of democracy take for granted what he means by "ruthless" and "unconditional" democracy. While *Moby-Dick* may seem to present us with a delimited notion of democracy—one that fulfills the constitution's deferred promise of emancipation, and therefore juridically and politically recognizing nonwhite ontologies and

[34] In "Neurocosmopolitan Melville" Savarese explains that his term "neurocosmopolitanism" is based on Oliver Sacks's notion of the "neuroanthropologist." Sacks's term invokes a cosmopolitanism that is sensitive to cultural differences. "By neurocosmopolitanism," Savarese writes, "I mean an attitude toward cognitive difference much like that of the conventional cosmopolite toward cultural difference." Therefore, according to Savarese, Melville's cosmopolitanism is sensitive to people with disabilities. He claims that in Melville's novels *Moby-Dick* and *The Confidence Man: His Masquerade*, Melville expresses a neurocosmopolitanism that accounts for cognitive difference.

subjectivities as human—I argue that "ruthless" or "unconditional" democracy opens us onto a horizon of representational and conceptual crisis.

We gain some semblance of the problem of representation in Melville's 1850 review essay *Hawthorne and his Mosses*. In that review Melville puts forward a critical response to Ralph Waldo Emerson's philosophy of "Self-Reliance," and other emerging literary writers and readers of his generation who had claimed to have freed themselves from the hegemony of European feudalism and standards of high art through the "progressivist" principles of "democratic" writing. According to Melville, although the successful American writer "is bound to carry republican progressiveness into Literature, as well as into Life," "that graceful writer," Melville says, "who perhaps of all Americans has received the most plaudits from his own country for his productions,—that very popular and amiable writer, however good, and self-reliant in many things, perhaps owes his chief reputation to the self-acknowledged imitation of a foreign model, and to the studied avoidance of all topics but smooth ones" (*Review* 545).

Turning to William Shakespeare to provide an example of the kind of daring writing he finds lacking in American authorship, he argues that Shakespeare, "says, or sometimes insinuates the things, which we feel to be so terrifically true, that it were all but madness for any good man, in his own proper character, to utter, or even hint of them" (542). Inspired by Shakespeare to insinuate something terrifying about Hawthorne, Melville delves into an analysis of what he describes as "the Indian-summer sunlight on the hither side of Hawthorne's soul, the other side—like the dark half of the physical sphere" that is "shrouded in a blackness, ten times black" and which "gives more effect to the evermoving dawn, that forever advances through it, and circumnavigates his world" (540). Indeed, "it is that blackness in Hawthorne," Melville tells us, "that so fixes and fascinates me" (541). These glimpses of glimmering darkness, which Melville tells us early on in his essay, touch "such a depth of tenderness" in Hawthorne, are what "furnish clews, whereby we enter a little way into the intricate, profound heart where they originated" (539). But what exactly is this dark half of the physical sphere that makes the continuous force of day-break possible? What is "The Trillionth part [that] has not yet been said," according to Melville, and that "multiplies the avenues to what remains to be said"? (544).

As Toni Morrison explains in *Playing in The Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, "There is no romance free of what Herman Melville called 'the power of blackness,' especially not in a country in which there was a resident population, already black, upon which the imagination could play; through which historical, moral, metaphysical, and social fears, problems, and dichotomies could be articulated" (*Playing* 42). "This black population," Morrison continues, "was understood to have offered itself up for reflections on human freedom." Through close readings of Edgar Allan Poe, Mark Twain, Saul Bellow, and Ernest Hemingway, Morrison argues that the metaphors of blackness used by these and other nineteenth century writers to construct an African persona or presence in their novels constitute something like an indestructible mass of dark matters, as Howard Winant might call it,[35] which white nationalist writers played on to

[35] In "The Dark Matter," Howard Winant argues that because "Race was invented along with the modern era" it remains unthought as an invisible path of investigation for many fields of inquiry. As an invisible path of investigation, according to Winant, "Race and racism may be termed the 'dark matter' of the modern epoch. 'Dark matter', as you know," he continues, "makes up much of the universe. Invisible, it possesses mass and gravitational attraction" (601). Indeed, the invisibility of the "darker peoples of that time" Winant contends, "were not invisible at all as 'matter', as something that mattered," but rather "They were invisible as *people*" (602). In other words, because race was invented over the course of several centuries—through the historical process of the worldwide European seaborne empire, the Westphalian state system, conquest and settlement, the African slave trade, and the advent of enlightenment culture—from the perspective of the juridical and political infrastructure that came to frame and regulate the everyday interacts of Euro-American thinking in the nineteenth century, "darker peoples" were not seen as human beings. The "'dark matter' of the world," according to Winant, "are still more 'matter' than people" (603). To an extent, this chapter attempts to follow Melville's critical investigation of what Winant and Morrison deem the dark matter of nineteenth century epistemology.

construct the anatomical phantasy of their own self-image and notion of human freedom. In other words, the metaphors of blackness used to describe the bodies of the enslaved and forgotten that Morrison investigates in her study, constitute something like a reserve of possible transformation at the heart of the strategies and processes of nineteenth century American self-definition and self-discovery.

In the following section what I would like to suggest is that part of this strategic process of nineteenth century American self-definition and self-discovery involved the invention of racial classification systems grounded in a universal notion of man. And through the all encompassing figure of a pre-historic white whale, Melville explores the symbolism associated with this universal whiteness, from the general to the racially specific. As I will go on the demonstrate, contemplation of the whale is so closely tied to contemplation of racial whiteness that Ishmael's observations can be interpreted as an attempt to de-universalize whiteness in a culture programmed to presume its superiority, universal significance, and desirability. This process of de-universalization, I argue, can be read in what I call Melville's "subversive geology" in his "Fossil Whale" Chapter. We will turn to this chapter now to unpack Melville's methodology of de-universalization.

II

In perhaps what has become one of the most commonly quoted and commented on paragraphs of "The Fossil Whale," the narrator tells us "Unconsciously my chirography expands into placard capitals." And from placard capitals, "outreaching comprehensiveness," it goes on to "include the whole circle of the sciences, and all the generations of whales, and men, and mastodons, past, present, and to come, with all the revolving panoramas of empire on earth, and throughout the whole universe, not excluding its suburbs" (379). Indeed, since this writing is "unconscious," and therefore beyond the reach of comprehension, it is the other side of writing—a silent sub-verse against and over which the grammatical rules of language, epistemic ways of philosophical-scientific reasoning, and systems of classification are made to appear. I interpret the excess spin-offs of each written letter that produce this silent sub-verse as what the title of Toni Morrison's 1988 Tanner Lecture refers to as *The Unspeakable Things Unspoken*.

In an attempt to do the impossible, and speak the unspeakable, the narrator changes his vocation from that of a writer to a geologist: "I present my credentials as a geologist" (379). Recounting its experience as "a stone-mason," "great digger of ditches, canals and wells, wine-vaults, cellars, and cisterns of all sorts," we are led through winding descriptions of "Detached broken fossils of pre-adamite whales" and fragments of bones and skeletons that have been discovered in the geological stratification of the earth dating back to what we are told is "the Tertiary period, which is the last preceding the superficial formations" (*Moby-Dick* 379). Following the scattered remnants of "skeletons, skulls, tusks, jaws, ribs, and vertebrae," the narrator tells us "I am, by a flood, borne back to that wondrous period, [wh]ere time itself can be said to have begun; for time began with man" (380). By digging paths and canals through the verbal and therefore metaphysical soils and bedrock of the world, the narrator tells us that this process allows it to "obtain dim, shuddering glimpses" of a "distinct geological period prior to man" (381), and therefore of a time before time, or before the superficial formations of what is now referred to as the time of "man."

Contrary to the confidence and security of Emerson's project of returning to nature to recuperate some universal notion of man that is based in an onto-theology represented by some notion of "Universal Being," Melville carves a path that opens us onto a horizon of representational and conceptual crisis. "I am horror-struck at this antemosaic, unsourced existence" and its "unspeakable terrors," the narrator tells us (380). Through this subversive geology, Melville confronts us with the terror of an "unsourced existence" (Ibid), a crippling non-origin of non-reference, or what we might think of as an abandoned site of inquiry that demands an address. But, as you may have already guessed, to say the unsayable, to account for what has not yet been counted, already seems impossible since the discursive material, mode, or methodology that Melville uses to speak the unspoken, as Melville himself explains in his *Review*, covers over and therefore multiplies the avenues to what remains to be said (even as a geologist). The unspeakable things unspoken, in other words, always exceed one's comprehension. And yet, rather than give up, Melville works tirelessly through different vocations in *Moby-Dick,* not necessarily to give a voice to what cannot be said, but perhaps to address and account for how our current epistemologies, methods, and modes of thinking not only fail to say the unsayable, but through their failing reproduce the unsaid as an excess beyond comprehension. No where is this made more explicit than in what is arguably Melville's most important chapter—"The Whiteness of the Whale."

Ishmael begins "The Whiteness of The Whale" by stating that "What the white whale was to Ahab, has been hinted; what, at times, he was to me, *as yet remains unsaid*" (my emph) (163). Ishmael goes on to postulate that "Aside from those more obvious considerations touching Moby Dick there was another thought, or rather vague, nameless horror concerning him, which at times by its intensity completely overpowered all the rest" (Ibid). The "vague and nameless horror" is horrifying not because it is vague and nameless, but because Ishmael is interested in exploring what has not been said, named or described, or perhaps cannot be named or discussed in any proper manner. As Ishmael goes on to explain, it is not necessarily the whale that terrifies him, but rather: "It was the whiteness of the whale that above all things appalled me" (Ibid). Despairing at the task that lies ahead, Ishmael writes, "But how can I hope to explain myself here; and yet, in some dim, random way, explain myself I must, *else all these chapters might be naught* (my emph.) (Ibid).

Commenting on the beauty, regality, purity, and holiness of whiteness, Ishmael explains that whiteness has come to designate something that "enhances beauty, as if imparting some special virtue of its own" (163). He elaborates on the power designated upon whiteness to "enhance" objects that become associated with it or even "various nations" who prescribe "a certain royal pre-eminence in this hue," promulgating a sense "of dominion" over things (Ibid). "This preeminence," Ishmael observes, has led many to presume that "it applies to the human race itself, giving the whiteman ideal mastership over every dusky tribe" (Ibid). Noting an overwhelming amount of symbolic references to the spiritual, religious, material, and royal significations of whiteness (too many to recite here), Ishmael tells us that whiteness has come to designate "the majesty of Justice" or "symbol of divine spotlessness and power." (164).

And yet, despite numerous examples lauding the majestic significance of whiteness, Ishmael goes on to describe what he finds most appalling in its application: "there yet lurks an elusive something in the innermost idea of this hue, which strikes more of panic to the soul than that redness which affrights in blood" (164). "This elusive quality," Ishmael explains, "causes the thought of whiteness" (Ibid). Turning his attention to this elusive quality, Ishmael devolves into a commentary on the "other" side of whiteness. Mentioning "the white bear of the poles and the white shark of the tropics," "the albatross," and "white steed of the prairies," he asks: "what but their smooth, flaky whiteness makes them the transcendent horrors they are?" (164-65). Indeed, "the white shark," Ishmael explains, is most vividly described "by the French in the name they bestow upon that fish"—*requin.* (Ibid). Ishmael alludes to the beginning of the Roman Catholic mass for the dead, which "begins with '*Requiem eternam* [eternal rest].'" The French named this shark “*Requin*” for its “silent stillness of death” (Ibid). “While these terrors seize us,” he continues, “let us add, that even the king of terrors, when personified by the evangelist, rides on his pallid horse” (165). “Therefore,” Ishmael writes, “symbolize whatever grand or gracious thing he will by whiteness, no man can deny that in its profoundest *idealized significance* it calls up a peculiar apparition to the soul” (my emph.) (Ibid).

“But not yet,” Ishmael continues, “have we solved the incantations of this whiteness, and learned why it appeals with such power to the soul; and more strange and far more portentous—why, as we have seen, it is at once the most meaning symbol of spiritual things, nay, the very veil of the Christian’s Deity; and yet should be as it is, the intensifying agent in things the most appalling to mankind” (169). Telling us of his “hope to light upon some chance clue to conduct us to the hidden cause we seek,” he continues his process of analysis in an attempt to illuminate the elusive “thing” that causes the thought of whiteness. From the “White Friar” and “White Nun” and their white robed outfits in the “Middle American States,” to the “White Tower of London,” “Byward Tower,” and “spectralness” of the “White Sea,” Ishmael devolves into a critical interpretation of the material he has gathered about whiteness up to this point.

According to Ishmael, these references to whiteness bring him to understand that “whiteness keeps her ruins forever new; admits not the cheerful greenness of complete decay; [and] spreads over her broken ramparts the rigid pallor of an *apoplexy* that fixes its own distortions” (168). Let us take note of Ishmael’s use of the word “apoplexy” to formalize his discourse on whiteness into a general logic. To do so, we must go back to the source from which his lexicon is explicitly imported. It is only from this perspective that we can decipher the elusive trait that Ishmael tells us is the cause of whiteness and its all encompassing blank of associations.

To write *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael tells us that he purchased Samuel Johnson's[36] 1755 *Dictionary of the English Language* "to compile a lexicon to be used by a whale author like me" (379). According to the fourth edition of Johnson's dictionary, apoplexy stems from the Greek *ἀποπληξία* (164). From ἀπό (*apó*, meaning "from" or "away") and πλήσσειν (*plḗssein*, "to strike"), apoplexy means something like "to strike from" or "a striking away." Quoting the medical writer John Quency and the Scottish physician and satirist John Arbuthnot, we learn that "Apoplexy is a sudden abolition of all the senses, external and internal, and of all voluntary motion, by the floppage of the flux and reflux of the animal spirits through the nerves destined for those motions." Citing Shakespeare's definition of apoplexy in *Coriolanus*, we also discover that, "Peace is a very *apoplexy*, lethargy, mulled, deaf, sleepy, insensible." And finally, according to John Locke, whom Johnson also quotes under the heading of this term, "A fever may take away my reason, or memory, and an *apoplexy* leave neither sense nor understanding" (Ibid). At first, Ishmael's associative metaphor seems almost impossible to decipher. However, if apoplexy designates a fatal state of peace that is the absolute negation of life (as each definition indicates), then apoplexy can be interpreted as *nothingness*, the absolute absence of spirit caused by a sudden hemorrhaging.

To follow Ishmael's logic, what causes specific associations of whiteness—its ontological, spiritual, and symbolic idealization—is the absolute terror of *nothingness*. Nothing is an unruly

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[36] As per the practice of lexographers during the eighteenth century, Johnson's dictionary does not provide page numbers. Fortunately, Volume IV of Johnson's dictionary has been made available to the public and can be found in PDF in the online archive at https://archive.org/details/dictionaryofengl01johnuoft/page/n163. I must also extend my gratitude to Robert Woodruff Library Archives & Special Collections at Emory University for allowing me to spend time with and read the original copy of the fourth edition of Volume 1 of Johnson's dictionary which was indispensable for my research and for the writing of this chapter. Due to the absence of page numbers in the original then, all citations refer to the digital copy in the online archive cited above.

void, an intangible, unquantifiable, unconditional abyss. Yet paradoxically, the terror of nothing also provides the condition of possibility for meaning-making. In other words, "The Whiteness of the Whale" demonstrates that the perceived superiority of whiteness is not intrinsic to whiteness, but rather that it is the result of cultural construction. The mythologies and epistemologies about white superiority, purity, and regality that structure Euro-American desire, society, perception, and ideas about consciousness, is therefore shown to have been invented to overcome the terror that there is no origin to what the sciences call "human" identity. And yet, what also terrifies *Ishmael* is the self-occultation of this unspeakable truth that results through the production of various epistemologies. As Ishmael puts it in the concluding lines of "The Whiteness of the Whale":

> Like willful travelers in Lapland, who refuse to wear colored and coloring glasses upon their eyes, so the wretched infidel gazes himself blind at the monumental white shroud that wraps all the prospect around him. And of all these things the Albino whale was the symbol. Wonder ye then at the fiery hunt?" (170).

To understand how Ishmael probes the significance of the self-occultation of whiteness necessitates understanding how racial meaning and content are fabricated through epistemological processes that led to the concretization of the racial meaning of whiteness. Within the first few pages of *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael is already invested in unpacking how racial meaning is constructed, preserved, and passed on from one generation to the next.

III

Under the heading "Etymology: Supplied by a Late Consumptive Usher to a Grammar School," *Moby-Dick* opens with the following statement:

> The pale Usher—threadbare in coat, heart, body, and braid; I see him now. He was ever dusting his old lexicons and grammars, with a queer handkerchief, mockingly embellished with all the gay flags of all the known nations of the world. He loved to dust his old grammars; it somehow mildly reminded him of his mortality (xv).

In this opening passage, we are given the image of an old Usher who, as the etymology and history of this figure indicates (*ostium*), is our guide into an institution that gathers volumes of books and standardizes the rules that structure words, language, and the way we express and make meaning in the world. Dusting these lexicons and grammars with a handkerchief "mockingly" decorated with all the flags of the world reduces the different ways grammars and lexicons in every culture across the world accrue and construct knowledge to the particular cultural norm of writing (as it is conventionally understood). Indeed, the centrality of this institution and its context accrue slowly over the course of the "Etymology" and "Extracts" sections where the lexical history of the term *whale* is recounted as it appears in both Webster's and Richardson's Dictionaries. Both record various translations of the word "whale" in languages that range from Hebrew, Greek, and Latin to Fegee and Erromangoan.

In the section entitled "Extracts," one finds a collection of 77 quotations about whales from sources that range from the Bible (Job, Jonah, Psalms, Isaiah) and classical writers (Plutarch, Pliny, Lucian), to Renaissance humanists (Rabelais), literary writers (Shakespeare and Hawthorne), political philosophers and statesmen (Michel de Montaigne, Thomas Hobbes, Edmund Burke), as well as voyage literature (Captain Cooke, Harris Coll, Captain Cowley), and the journals of missionaries and Naturalists (Charles Darwin). What these extracts and lexical history of the word "whale" offer us is a birds-eye view of the formation and sedimentation of an archive.

This archive constitutes something like a reserve of knowledge about "whales." And it is this reserve of Euro-American culture and thinking about "whales," its legacy and standardized tropes and metaphors bequeathed to us by a specific history, that Ishmael wishes to throw into question. I write the word "whale" in quotation marks because, as Ishmael tells us: "you must not, in every case at least, take the higgledy-piggledy whale statements, however authentic, in these extracts, for veritable gospel cetology. *Far from it*" (emph. mine) (*Moby-Dick* 2). In other words, in this novel, the word "whale," and its associated terms, do not necessarily designate whales as they are conventionally determined and understood. Therefore, if the extracts, excerpts, citations, and quotations about whales in a novel supposedly named after a whale are not *really* about whales (or even whaling), then what are they about?

What I would like to suggest is that these and many other sources throughout Melville's novel contribute to an ideology asserting the superiority of racial whiteness. And while "Extracts" provides us with an idea about the variety of ways in which this ideology mutates and repeats itself from one generation to the next, it is within the more detailed passages on cytology in this novel that we gain insight into how such sources not only construct cultural and racial meaning, but also produce problematic narratives about the evolution of man. In other words, what I am suggesting is that because evolutionary narratives during Melville's time closely linked whales to humankind (as seen in Emerson's description of the human hand in the whale flipper last chapter), Melville's chapters on cetology critique the ways zoologists and taxonomical systems of classification anthropomorphize whales through systems of racial classification. In other words, Melville's critique is double. On the one hand, he wishes to think of whales in ways that do not depend on evolutionary models informed by racial classification systems which end up obscuring our knowledge and understanding of marine life. On the other hand, by freeing up marine life from the racial categories of a problematic humanism, Melville can also attempt to rethink the identity of the mariner's renegades, and castaways of the whaling industry without grounding them in a universal notion of man.

Turning his attention to what has been said about whales and their place in the world, Ishmael explains "my object here is simply to project the draught of systematization of cetology"

(118). Appearing to his readers as a cetologist, Ishmael's examination and preliminary sketch of the classification of whales begins by questioning the motives behind acts of classification: "First: the uncertain, unsettled condition of this science of cetology, is in the very vestibule attested by the fact, that in some quarters it still remains a moot point whether a whale be a fish" (118). Turning to Carl Linnaeus's "System of Nature, A.D. 1776," Ishmael rebukes Linnaeus for not classifying a whale as a fish.

Ishmael's rebuke of Linnaeus is significant because it was Linnaeus's classification of species and how they relate to each other that fueled the debates on the classification of man. The main issue of that debate was first proposed by Johann Friedrich Blumenbach in the first edition of his *Manual of Natural History* (1779), which was taken up by other naturalists and philosophers, most notably French zoologist Georges Cuvier, German Philosophers Immanuel Kant and G. W. F. Hegel, American natural scientist Samuel George Morton, American physician Josiah Nott, American Egyptologist George Gliddon, Statistician Francis Galton, and Swiss-American biologist Louis Agassiz.

Blumenbach's method of comparing and measuring the differences between teeth, bone structures, feet, the big toe, hands, the thumb, skin color, and the brain size of different primates, led him to invent the category *Bimana* in an attempt to designate human beings—a two handed species—as completely separate from the species he identified as *Quadrumana*. Towards the last quarter of the eighteenth century, this controversy over the Linnaean classification of man as descending from *Quadrumana* or *Bimana*, led to a major split in the taxonomical conception of human beings, resulting in the emergence and solidification of two camps: polygenism (the belief that different races had evolved separately on each continent and shared no common ancestor) and monogenesis (the idea of a single origin for all the human races). Although both camps accepted

Linaeus's classification of the human species into four groups (*Homo Europaeus*, *Homo Asiaticus*, *Homo Afer*, and *Homo Americanus*), each camp had become fundamentally divided about whether or not the four groups in the Linnaean classification system descended from a common *Quadrumana* ancestor. And the naturalists who believed in polygenism argued that certain nonwhite races, particularly Africans and Aboriginals, were not of the same species as Europeans, and thus belonged in the *Quadrumana* class.

For instance, in "The Diversity of Origin of Human Races," published in Boston in the *Christian Examiner* (1850), Louis Agassiz argues that "The monuments of Egypt teach us that five thousand years ago the negroes were as different from the white race as they are now" ("Origin" 16). Criticizing the monogenesis perspective, Agassiz writes that "to assume them to be of the same order, and to assert their common origin, is to assume and to assert what has no historical or physiological or physical foundation" (Ibid). According to Agassiz, it is important that to remember that "these are not historical races, that there are not even traditions respecting their origin" and that "we are, therefore, left entirely to ourselves to unravel the mystery of their origin by the light induction may offer us" (19). For Agassiz, it was "of paramount importance to make a distinction between the historical nations…and those races of men which we have no such reliable information, and upon whose origin we can have absolutely no information except by investigating their physical peculiarities" (27).

What these and other passages like them show is that the ultimate aim of Agassiz and other authors who used Linnaeus's classification system was to justify the supremacy of whiteness through the construction of the category of "man." And even if Melville never read Agassiz, he was certainly familiar with the school of thought Agassiz represented. The extraordinary efforts of the American schools of ethnology to fully comprehend the depth and difference between the ideological construction of what they called the "*Bimana*" and "*Quadrumana*," achieved international prominence in the 1840s and 50s. By the time of Agassiz's publication, Samuel George Morton had already published two major works on skulls: *Crania Americana* (1839) and *Crania Aegyptiaca* (1843). And following these is Charles Pickering's *Races of Man and Their Geographical Distribution* in 1848. Indeed, by 1849, the international acclaim of American ethnology led English-American archaeologist Ephraim George Squier to announce that "Ethnology is not only the science of the age, but also it is, and must continue to be, to a prevailing extent, an American science" ("American Ethnology" 386).

Through the guise of a classification system on whales, then, Ishmael proceeds by examining how the human body became invested with graded meaning and charged with mystery and revelation. He indicates how a world of meaning, coherence and difference became located in the face, skin, and skull. The taxonomical statements he engages, all of which express "antiwhale" sentiment, mirror the syntax and grammar employed in the rhetorical strategies used by Agassiz and others during his time to assert the racial inferiority of non-white groups when compared to whites in systems of classification.

In Ishmael's Chapter "The Advocate," this is demonstrated very clearly through the following list of "antiwhale" statements the Ishmael compiles:

> The whale has no famous author, and whaling no famous chronicler.
>
> Whalemen themselves are poor devils; they have no good blood in their veins.
>
> The whale himself has never figured in any grand imposing way (101).

Each of these statements resonates with the values used by Agassiz to argue the preeminence of white civilization over others: the esteem of a written tradition, the designation of selected ancestries as notable, the authorless, and non-historical origin of non-whites, and so on and so forth.

Ishmael's rebukes of such statements are carried into his Chapter on "Cetology." Once again, coming across comparisons of whales and humans, in his attempt to rewrite taxonomical schemas, he begins by commenting on how the Fin-Back has been described as "a whale-hater, as some men are man-haters," and that "this leviathan seems the banished and unconquerable Cain of his race, bearing for his mark that style upon his back" (*Moby-Dick* 122). Perhaps more explicitly, in the section subtitled "BOOK II, (*Octavo*), Chapter II. (*Black Fish*)," Ishmael tells us that when he comes across "any name which happens to be vague or inexpressive" in the taxonomies he reads and rewrites, "I shall say so, and suggest another" (124). "I do so now, touching the Black Fish, so called, because blackness is the rule among almost all whales" (Ibid).

Undertaking an attempt to rename and rewrite the description of the "Black Fish," he goes on to rename it "the Hyena Whale" (Ibid). Renaming the fish as such, Ishmael then proceeds to comment on its physical features by discussing the "inner angles of his lips," "Mephistophelean grin on his face," "Roman nose," height, weight, and overall body structure, which he tells us has led many "sperm whale hunters [to] sometimes capture the Hyena whale, to keep up the supply of cheap oil for domestic employment—as frugal housekeepers, in the absence of company, and quite alone by themselves, burn unsavory tallow instead of odorous wax" (Ibid). This descriptions and the numbers of scale that can be found in his chapters "The Decanter," "Measurement of the Whale's Skeleton" and "The Fossil Whale," remind us, that numbers are not neutral or innocuous, but often used to oppress, objectify, exclude, and pulverize their target.

After nearly eight pages of comparing and rewriting the anatomies and physical features of "whales" in his chapter on "cetology," Ishmael begins to realize that not only is his attempt to critique and rewrite these taxonomies not original, it is perhaps a re-inscription of the visceral terror and abjection of blackness deployed through nuanced colonialist metaphors and tropes of the archive he is desperately trying to escape and transform. Expressing uncertainty about his recent specious speculations, he states "it is in vain to attempt a clear classification of the Leviathan, founded upon either his baleen, or hump, or fin, or teeth" (122). Indeed, the "various sorts of whales," Ishmael realizes, "defy all general methodization formed upon such a basis" (Ibid). Although having just produced a "Bibliographical system" (123), in the closing lines of this Chapter, Ishmael declares "God keep me from ever completing anything" (128).

Present in Ishmael's cetology is the recurrent observation that one should not judge a book by its cover. Because Ishmael explores the ways in which whales are linked to humankind in his chapters on cetology, he provides his readers with implicit critiques of taxonomies that have taken other cultures and races at face value, often ranking one group and their creations above another, valuing some while devaluing others, and creating socially stratified, racial hierarchies that have come to influence the way people understand the world and their place in it. Throughout Ishmael's analysis, one can hear an echo of the queries of other writers that sought the origins of racial difference (such as Jefferson's and Emerson's inquiries into the origins of blackness, as we observed in the previous two chapters). That the tone of Ishmael's discourse on the origins of the whale echos other discourses on racial difference, makes his passages on cetology more than an analysis of whales. They are attempts to critique classification systems that all too confidently calculate and measure the worth, value, and essence of beings via comparative physiognomy, skin color, physical, anatomical, or skeletal features. Ishmael's concession to the uncertainty of using different systems of calculation and classification to measure the worth and value of beings, is what distinguishes him from thinkers like Emerson and Jefferson.

As we have seen so far, the inquiries of *Moby-Dick* are indeed broad. They question the many avenues of received knowledge through which the logic of white supremacy survives. And yet, while the novel offers critiques of classification systems and hierarchies that base themselves in a baseless supremacist ideology, it also strives to offer an unspeakable way of thinking about race and identity more broadly. What I would like to suggest is that through the motif of a whaling voyage, *Moby-Dick* revisits the event of "the encounter," and rewrites it in an attempt to create a space in which the idea of democracy is not consumed by the ideology of white supremacy.

One can find this alternative way of thinking in the narrative of Ishmael's journey, which is embedded with descriptions that recapitulate encounters between white and non-white identities. In *Whiteness Visible: The Meaning of Whiteness in American Literature*, Valerie M. Babb explains that "Whatever surprise and consternation he [Ishmael] experiences during these encounters, he generally adopts an attitude of cultural relativity that eventually leads to a spirit of cultural tolerance" (*Whiteness* 113). Like Foster and Rogin, Babb claims that Melville's whaling voyage presents us with a paragon for multicultural, interracial tolerance. In contradistinction to these readings, in the following section, I suggest that rather than presenting us with a model of utopian cosmopolitanism, the democratic spirit of tolerance with which we are presented is a ruse that leads to the utter destruction of universal man. The imagery of tolerance that Melville presents us with throughout Ishmael's journey sets its readers up for devastating scene of failure, generating a vision of undecidability and uncertainty that is far more unsettling than the conventional logic of democratic cosmopolitanism or the spirit of tolerance would falsely lead us to believe.

III

On his way to find a job on a whaling ship in Nantucket, during an overnight in New Bedford, Ishmael recounts how he "came to a smoky light proceeding from a low, wide building, the door of which stood invitingly open" (18). Entering the building and "hearing a loud voice, within" Ishmael tells us that he witnessed what

> seemed the great Black Parliament sitting in Tophet. A hundred black faces turned in their rows to peer; and beyond, a black Angel of Doom was beating a book in a pulpit. It was a negro church; and the preacher's text was about the blackness of darkness, and the weeping and wailing and teeth-gnashing there (Ibid).

It is important to bear in mind that this scene takes place in New Bedford, Connecticut. According to the Connecticut act of Gradual Abolition, passed in 1784, any child born into slavery after 1784 would be freed by the age of 25. As a result, slavery was practiced in Connecticut until 1848.

With this historical context in mind, we gain perspective into how Ishmael's perception is filtered through the textual archive which informs him, as well as the juridico-political infrastructure of the antiblack society that makes up the textual fabric of his existence. Therefore, what Ishmael assembles, can be interpreted as what Warren calls, a "catachrestic fantasy" (*Terror* 150). As Warren demonstrates through his analysis of antebellum comics and the imagery of "free blacks" in antebellum America, a catachrestic fantasy is a representation (in literature, art, painting, or some form of cultural media) of a figure, scene, or scenario that "*is not* a free black, but something else—something emancipation produced but cannot represent" (Ibid).

According to Warren, the free black "is a sign that is not a sign—nothing we are able to recognize or incorporate into the chain of associations and signifiers that provide meaning and interpretation for the world" (149). The reason why the free black is a sign that is not a sign for Ishmael is because up until 1848 in Connecticut, juridico-politically blacks had never been free in the United States. Therefore, since the free black represents nothing recognizable for Ishmael, his representation is a catachrestic fantasy. And his catachrestic fantasy emerges because the free blacks of this church lack a literal, spacio-temporal referent in Ishmael's socio-political imaginary. As such, the free black is an empty receptacle, a blank canvas vulnerable to what Hortens Spillers calls the "grid of associations, from the semantic and iconic folds buried deep within the collective past" (*Black, White, and in Color* 210). At its core, Ishmael's (re)presentation, is an attempt to give form to what he has never seen before, does not completely understand, and cannot fully articulate.

Through the textual fabric of the onto-theological biblical imagery that informs his perception, Ishmael sees and hears the free black congregation in church as a "Black Parliament" listening to a "black Angel of Doom" preach about what we can interpret as Ishmael's terror and anxiety of what he does not, and perhaps cannot, understand: the state and status of the free black in an antiblack world. The scene is so overwhelming for Ishmael that he bursts into anxious laughter and tells us that what he saw was nothing more than "Wretched entertainment" (*Moby-Dick* 18). When Ishmael codifies the free black congregation as wretched entertainment, he is refashioning it as a play space where he can manage his overwhelming anxiety and desire to overcome the *nothing* that limits what Warren calls "the metaphysical fantasy of human coherence" (*Terror* 149).

However, Ishmael slowly becomes self-aware of his own antiblack projections upon meeting Queequeg—"a native of Kokovoko, an island far away to the West and South" (56). Initially uncomfortable by Queequeg's "queering proceedings" (30), Ishmael eventually comes to think of Queequeg as his "Bosom Friend" (51). Spending the night in the same bed with Queequeg, Ishmael tells us of how "Upon waking next morning about daylight, I found Queequeg's arm thrown over me in the most loving and affectionate manner. You had almost thought I had been his wife" (Ibid). Recounting the scene above, Babb contends Ishmael becomes "Degendered" and therefore "enters into a homoerotic union with a 'spouse' of another race, an act that defies both the championed heterosexual norm of white identity and the racial purity represented through the ideal of white femininity" (115). Although Babb is right to think that a union between Ishmael and Queequeg would certainly defy any normativity of nineteenth century antebellum society, especially since Queequeg oscillates in a quasi-nothing realm between animality and humanity in the eyes of Ishmael and democratic society more generally, Babb is perhaps too quick to read this scene as one that "symbolizes tolerance and connectedness" (114), rather than as one of terror.

As Ishmael explains to us, Queequeg's arm triggers a terrifying memory in Ishmael, and brings him back to a scene in his childhood where he was sexually assaulted and went on to suffer from what we now call Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. "When I was a child," Ishmael begins, I well remember a somewhat similar circumstance that befell me; whether it was a reality or a dream, I never could entirely settle" (*Moby-Dick* 32). Having been punished by his stepmother for climbing in the chimney of his childhood home, young Ishmael was sent to his room where he spent "Sixteen hours in bed!" "For several hours I lay there broad awake," Ishmael tells us, and "must have fallen into a troubled nightmare of a doze" (Ibid). And "slowly waking from it," Ishmael goes on to explain:

> I opened my eyes, and the before sunlit room was now wrapped in outer darkness. Instantly, I felt a shock running through all my frame; nothing was to be seen, and nothing was to be heard; but a supernatural hand seemed placed in mine [and] the nameless unimaginable, silent form or phantom, to which the hand belonged, seemed closely seated by my bed-side. For what seemed ages piled on ages, I lay there, frozen with the most awful fears, not daring to drag away my hand; yet ever thinking that if I could but stir it one single inch, the horrid spell would be broken (33).

After recounting this scene of "monstrous intimacy,"[37] as Christina Sharpe might call it, Ishmael states "my sensations at feeling the supernatural hand in mine were very similar, in their strangeness, to those which I experienced on waking up and seeing Queequeg's pagan arm thrown round me" (33). In other words, the repressed nameless, unimaginable, silent, supernatural nothingness enveloping and terrifying young Ishmael, is triggered by, and associated with, Queequeg's arm, which the adult Ishmael tells us he cannot differentiate "from the quilt" they are wrapped in (Ibid).

Working tirelessly to disassociate "the awful fear" of his childhood trauma from Queequeg's blackness, Ishmael endeavors to overcome his fear of blackness in order to become Queequeg's friend: "I'll try a pagan friend, thought I, since Christian kindness has proved but hollow courtesy" (53). Ishmael's attempt to become Queequeg's friend, is indicative of what C. L. R. James tells us about him in *Mariner's, Renegades, and Castaways: The Story of Herman Melville and the World We Live In*. According to James, Ishmael is "a completely modern intellectual who has broken with society and wavers constantly between totalitarianism and the crew" (*Mariner's* 44). Tracing Ishmael's pessimism toward the world to "an unbearable sense of social crisis" in "a special class" (107), James demonstrates how the relationship between Ishmael and Queequeg is a problem for not just intellectuals and the idle rich, but also for the world as

[37] In *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects*, Christina Sharpe undertakes a close reading of "Extraordinary sites of domination and intimacy" in the literature that follows from the Middle Passage. These extraordinary sites of monstrous intimacy, she tells us, gave way to "new forms of subjectivity" that were "created not only for people of African descent in the diaspora but also for Africans, Europeans, and others" (*Monstrous* 4). As Sharpe explains in her introduction, *Monstrous Intimacies* is an attempt to work through scenes in which "black and blackened bodies become the bearers (through violence, regulation, transmission, etc.) of the knowledge of certain subjection as well as the placeholders of freedom for those who would claim freedom as their rightful yield. Put another way, the everyday violences that black(ened) bodies are made to bare are markers for an exorbitant freedom to be free of the marks of a subjection in which we are all forced to participate" (Ibid).

Ishmael understands it. And within the grammatical, syntactical, and conceptual chaos that orients his way of thinking about Queequeg and blackness, Ishmael attempts to reconfigure the terms of friendship in terms other than utility. Beginning by pondering what it will take for him to accomplish such a feat, Ishmael reconsiders his desire to have Queequeg "unite with me in my particular Presbyterian form of worship," and instead decides that he must "unite with him in his [way of life]; ergo, I must turn Idolator" (54).

Becoming idolatrous, Ishmael undertakes the task of writing Queequeg's biography, thus attempting to account for Queequeg's life in a way that traditional canonical writers have never done before. But in this biographical excavation, one that never ends as it works to document the meeting and friendship of Ishmael and Queequeg, bringing unlikely constellations into the sphere of each other's orbit, Ishmael reaches a limit of conceptual and representation crisis with Queequeg past. There are dimensions of Queequeg's history that have gone missing and that he, nor Queequeg can adequately represent or explain. For example, according to Ishmael, Queequeg's tattoos are "hieroglyphic marks" that represent "a complete theory of the heavens and the earth, and a mystical treatise on the art of attaining truth." Queequeg, he goes on to tell us, is "a wondrous work in one volume." The problem, however, is that Queequeg is marked with illegible hieroglyphics, and therefore is the mark of "mysteries" that "not even himself could read, though his own live heart beat against them; and these mysteries were therefore destined in the end to moulder away with the living parchment whereon they were inscribed, and so be unsolved to the last" (320). Therefore, although a wondrous work in one volume, the unspeakable dimensions of Queequeg's cultural history exceeds the comprehension of both Queequeg and Ishmael. As we saw in Chapter One, in "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," Hortense Spillers argues that what emerges from the violent, objectification of African bodies during and after the transatlantic slave trade is a captive body marked by an undecipherable loss which she refers to as "the hieroglyphics of the flesh." According to Spillers, the "undecipherable markings on the captive body render a kind of hieroglyphics of the flesh whose severe disjunctures come to be hidden to the cultural seeing of skin color" ("Mama's Baby" 67). In other words, the invention of the racial category of blackness was not only built out of this devastation and loss, but it is also used via the judicial and political legal system to hide it. Built out of this loss, the racial category of blackness therefore renders this loss unreadable and unspeakable to both Ishmael and Queeqeg, to the public sphere, and the juridical-political fabric of Euro-American culture and society more generally.

What I would like to suggest here is two things: first, this irremediable and irrecoverable loss renders Queequeg as an unintelligible entity within the social fabric and schema's of human ontology in Euro-American society and epistemology. Queequeg is therefore not a "man," human being, or person in the conventional and Constitutional sense of that term because he does not fit into the juridical-political infrastructure of representative democracy. As we saw in Chapter Two, the infrastructure of representative democracy is designed and built around the protection of the rights and freedoms of white ontology. They are programmed to recover, repair, and restore the ontology of Euro-American spirit when violated by other members of political society (perhaps best exemplified via the Emersonian metaphysics of transcendentalism, or the reparations that were paid to white slave owners after emancipation). Since Queequeg represents an entity without a proper point of reference, Queequeg is unintelligible to the framework of human ontology. As such, we might say that the racial category of blackness that is projected onto Queequeg turns him into a formless nothing. In other words, blackness displaces and replaces the absence of Queequeg's origins, thus making him into an ambivalent site of inquiry or fascination upon which broader society (and Ishamel) can project their fears, terrors, ideas, and desires to overcome the disharmony and disunity he causes them and society. The racial slurs and oppressive terms cast onto Queequeg's body are so prolific throughout the novel that they often go unnoticed and are hardly commented on by Melville's commentators.[38]

What I would like to suggest is that Melville simulates the broader socio-political anxiety that American culture felt towards black people who had been freed from slavery. In doing this, Melville recreates the tension that the broader socio-political context has on the relationship between Ishmael and Queequeg. He shows us how it acts as a coercive force that puts pressure on the relationship of Ishmael and Queequeg. All throughout the novel, Ishmael recounts this pressure. He often tells his readers that "As we were going along the people stared; not at Queequeg so much—for they were used to seeing cannibals like him in their streets,—but at seeing him and me upon such confidential terms" (58). Indeed, Ishmael often makes remarks about "the jeering glances" him and Queequeg received from "the passengers," and "lubber-like assembly" of other ships and townspeople who "marveled that two fellow beings should be so companionable; as though a white man were anything more dignified than a whitewashed negro" (60). In response to these coercive forces, Ishmael attempts to perpetually humanize Queequeg. For instance, according to Ishmael, "Queequeg was George Washington cannibalistically developed" (52). When Queequeg performs the heroic act of saving a crew member who nearly drowns, Ishmael remarks "Was there ever such unconsciousness? He did not seem to think that he at all deserved a medal from the Humane and Magnanimous Societies" (61). And later, Ishmael states "What's all

[38] For example, in Chapter 13, Ishmael tells us that when Queequeg walked through the street people often stared at him (58), threatened to kill him (60), called him a cannibal (Ibid), refer to him as the living embodiment of "apoplexy" (78), devil and savage (404), as well as many other racial slurs (to many to repeat here) that can be found throughout the novel.

this fuss I have been making about, thought I to myself—the man's a human being just as I am: he has just as much reason to fear me, as I have to be afraid of him" (34).

These attempts to humanize Queequeg are deceptive. They deceive its readers into thinking that because Ishmael is able to see his "self" in Queequeg, to see that Queequeg is a human just like Ishmael, means that Ishmael is able to rise above the racial, social and political issues of his time. That Ishmael provides us with a universal model of democratic tolerance and cosmopolitanism. But in fact this is the ruse of the novel. That in order for Queequeg to live together, to be friends, even lovers, they must *be the same*, of the same, or from the same place. Due to the coercive forces of the social and political context within which Ishmael and Queequeg live, Ishmael cannot help but to project his humanism onto Queequeg for his own comfort, security, and safety. He projects his own cultural identity onto Queequeg, gives it to him as an honor, and makes Queequeg into an official member of the human family that completely destroyed the language, resources, and systems of knowledge of Queequeg's home-culture. Is there anything more horrifying and tragic than this? Than being made, as readers, to see Ishmael as a triumphant, heroic figure of democratic tolerance and cosmopolitanism? This is the ruse of the novel. That Queequeg's difference, traumatic historical past, and obliterated heritage be completely and utterly forgotten. That which matters for thinking about Queequeg's identity, what makes him different from Ishmael, is completely collapsed through the coercive and assimilatory forces of a culture which covers over and oppresses his historical past. Even in his most "tolerant" moments, Ishmael cannot see Queequeg in terms other than utility.

IV

Throughout the novel, whether it be through geology, geography, zoology, or mathematics, every attempt Ishmael makes to overcome his terror of blackness, and to see Queequeg as anything other than a tool, he ends up re-inscribing Queequeg through terms of utility. Every attempted step beyond his racial perceptions result in a re-transcription of them. In *Studies in Classic American Literature,* D. H. Lawrence claims that Melville's novel depicts the end of civilization: "Doom! Doom! Doom!," Lawrence writes:

> Something seems to whisper it in the very dark trees of America. Doom!/Doom of what?/Doom of our white day. We are doomed, doomed. And the doom is in America. The doom of our white day./…Melville knew. He knew his race was doomed. His white soul, doomed. The spirit, doomed. /…What then is Moby-Dick? He is the deepest blood-being of the white race; he is our deepest blood-nature….The last phallic being of the white man. Hunted into the death of upper consciousness and the ideal will (*Studies* 1041; 1060).

In contradistinction to Lawrence's gloom and doom interpretation of *Moby-Dick*, in *Unspeakable Things Unspoken,* Toni Morrison proposes to engage the many debates concerning the canon in American literature "in order to suggest ways of addressing the Afro-American presence in American Literature that require neither slaughter nor reification—views that may spring the whole literature of an entire nation from the solitude into which it has been locked" (*Unspeakable* 1). *Opening Moby-Dick*, Morrison identifies the fabrication and idealization of whiteness as ideology, as the cause of Melville's alienation during his lifetime. "If the whale is more than blind, indifferent Nature unsubduable by masculine aggression," Morrison suggests, "we can consider the possibility that Melville's 'truth' was his recognition of the moment in America when whiteness became ideology" (15). It is important to note here that Morrison is not claiming that Melville was exploring white *people*, but rather whiteness idealized. "To question the very notion of white progress, the very idea of racial superiority, of whiteness as privileged place in the evolutionary ladder of humankind, and to meditate on the fraudulent, self-destroying philosophy of that superiority" Morrison continues, "that was dangerous, solitary, radical work. Especially then. Especially Now" (16).

In contradistinction to Morrison and Lawrence, I interpret the novel as an exposition of how Ishmael cannot think beyond the blind spot of his culturally constructed whiteness. And I think this speaks directly to what Melville means when he writes of his "ruthless" or "unconditional" democracy. Though the "unconditionality" of democracy is normally thought of as a tolerant space that is free of conditions from which a different (and hopefully better) form of democracy remains to come, it seems that that very "space" of absolute freedom is the problem—a terrifying problem one might say because it represents the open space of unmitigated freedom, which is the very freedom that led to racial hierarchies and myriad forms of subjugation. And, for Melville, it seems that every attempt Ishmael makes to get back to that space of absolute freedom to give himself permission to write democratically, he repeats the mistakes of the past and perpetually re-inscribes black being within a problematic antiback arithmetic of utility. With every attempt to transcend the socio-cultural, juridical, and political norms of representative democracy, to remake them even by making Queequeg human, he reconfigures and reorganizes taxonomical grammars, scientific and artistic methodologies in ways that perpetually renew and contribute to a vicious cycle of institutional violence—the perpetual obliteration of Queequeg's historical past. In other words, with every renewal of the concepts of equality and freedom, of rationality and reason, comes a renewal of the retooling of black being for the protection, preservation, and succession of the democratic nation-state.

Put a bit differently: the problem that Ishmael faced is perhaps put best by Saidiya V. Hartman in *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century*

America, when she asks us to consider the possibility “that the recognition of humanity held out the promise not of liberating the flesh or redeeming one’s suffering but rather of intensifying it” (*Scenes* 5). According to Hartman,

> what if this acknowledgment was little more than a pretext for punishment, dissimulation of the violence of chattel slavery and the sanction given it by the law and the state, and an instantiation of racial hierarchy? What if the presumed endowments of man—conscience, sentiment, and reason—rather than assuring liberty or negating slavery acted to yoke slavery and freedom” (Ibid).

In considering Hartman’s questions, we might say that what keeps Ishmael wedded to seeing the free black as an instrument, is reason, his belief in an original consciousness, all encompassing sentiment, and desire.

Although this may seem dubious to some, I would argue that the great white leviathan that obliterates the *Pequod*—a ship named after an exterminated Native American people—killing everyone on board—except for Ishmael—at the end of the novel, confirms my reading. At the end of the novel, when describing the second day of the hunt, Ishmael tells us that everyone aboard the *Pequod* “were one man, not thirty.” Though the *Pequod* was “put together of all contrasting things—oak, and maple, and pine wood; iron, and pitch, and hemp…all varieties were welded into oneness, and were all directed to that fatal goal which Ahab their one lord and keel did point to” (418). Referring to everyone on board as essentially the “nuts and bolts” of the ship, Ishmael recounts the final image he saw as the ship began its descent into the deep blue sea after being obliterated by the great white whale. According to Ishmael, Tashtego, the “most innocent” black member of the *Pequod*, was nailed to its mast. And as the ship sank, Ishmael tells us that what he witnessed was Tashtego’s “whole captive form folded in the flag of Ahab” (Ibid).

Upon hearing this ending one may wonder why Melville even bothered to try to speak this unspeakable thing if attempting to say it would only result in perpetual confusion, misunderstanding, and uncertainty. To this, perhaps Melville would answer as he once did in a letter to Hawthorne about Hawthorne's recently republished short story "Ethan Brand": it is "a frightful poetical creed that the cultivation of the brain eats out the heart" (Ibid). "In most cases, in those men who have fine brains and work them well, the heart extends down to the hams" (Ibid). In other words, Melville makes clear to Hawthorne, "I stand for the heart. To the dogs with the head! I had rather be a fool with a heart, than Jupiter Olympus with his head" (Ibid).

Conclusion

Recalling his experience in the United States in the opening pages of *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville writes that "as I studied American society, I saw more and more in equality of conditions, the generating fact from which each particular fact seemed to derive, and I rediscovered it constantly before me as a central point where all my observations came together" (*Democracy* 4). This generating fact from which all others derive, is what Tocqueville will later describe as the "gradual development of democracy in the Christian world" (*Democracy* 115). "When I say 'democracy' here," he continues, "I do not mean to speak only about a political form of government, but of a social state" (115-116). Democracy, then, as Tocqueville defines it, is the gradual development of the equality of *social conditions* that has been accruing over centuries. Every event in history, according to Tocqueville, and all who fought for equality and against it, were "pushed-pell-mell along the same path and all worked in common, some despite themselves, others without their knowledge, [as] blind instruments in the hands of God" to profit the gradual movement of democracy (Ibid).

With the rise of democracy in America, Tocqueville argues, the world entered a new epoch. The turn of the eighteenth century into the nineteenth follows "the planets that move in the orbits traced by the Creator's hand," as Tocqueville puts it, and therefore marks a moment in which "we are prevented by the magnitude of what is already done from foreseeing what can still be done" (14). Tocqueville writes that it is as if we have been "placed in the middle of a rapid river" where "we obstinately fix our eyes on some debris that we still see on the bank, while the current carries us away and pushes us backwards towards the abyss" (7). Carried along by the current of democracy, backs to the future and facing the past, we know not where we are, nor where we are going as we pass by the debris that democracy leaves behind in the wake of its destruction. As such, no existing methods, disciplines, or grammars know how to account for it. And therefore, “A new political science is needed,” according to Tocqueville, “for a world entirely new” (16).

But such a science would never be possible without *art*. During their visit to the United States from May 10, 1831 to February 20, 1832 to study the practice of solitary confinement in the Auburn and Pennsylvania penal systems, Tocqueville and Gustave de Beaumont believed that what they had witnessed was a society without art. In effect, what they described to their friends and family in letters throughout their journey, and what they would come to write in their books about America, is that the world was entering a new age without the arts. According to Tocqueville and Beaumont, the turn of the eighteenth into nineteenth century is marked by a form of Federalism and representative democracy that has brought on the apathetic age.

The art of science, the art of philosophy, poetry, and literature, as both Tocqueville and Beaumont thought of it, had been radically uprooted. Established traditions for how to read and write, think or sculpt, sing and dance—essentially, the art of eduction—had become paralyzed, or “frozen” in the United States. According to Tocqueville, “Art becomes *frozen* at the expense of universal equality” (9) (my emph). “America,” he continues, “has had only a very small number of notable writers; it does not have any great historians and does not have one poet. Its inhabitants see literature strictly understood with a kind of disfavor; and a third-rank city in Europe publishes more literary works each year than the twenty-four states of the Union taken together” (489). Similarly, in *Marie; Or on Slavery in the United States: A Novel of Jacksonian America*, Beaumont argues that following the three great epochs of art—defined by Beaumont as antiquity, Christianity, and practicality—no great art has shown itself in the American epoch: “Do not look for poetry, literature, or fine arts in this country. The universal equality of conditions spreads a monotonous tint over all society" (*Marie* 105). According to Beaumont, the non-existence of art in the United States is not due to ignorance. As he explains:

> There is poetry in the ignorant; when Dante was achieving immortality through a book, Du Guesclin appeared, who 'knew nothing of letters.' When the Commander in Chief of the French Armies made a treaty, he signed nothing, not knowing how; but he bound himself by his honor, which was held to be enough.
>
> This rude ignorance cannot be found in the United States, whose inhabitants, numbering twelve millions, all know how to read, write, and compute (106).

Indeed, not even "rude ignorance" can be found in the United States according to Beaumont. "Nothing," he continues, "can communicate enthusiasm to insensitive beings." "The ardor of the poet and the inspiration of the writer, which sympathy keeps alright, are *frozen* by indifference and insincerity" (108) (my emph). The sign of the paralysis of art, therefore, is evidenced by what seemed to Beaumont the emergence of an insensitive, monotonous, non-self present, and callous being whose sympathy had either come to a halt or had been ripped from its roots. As the British clergyman Sydney Smith puts it nearly fifteen years earlier in 1820:

> …In the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American book? or goes to an American play? or looks at an American picture or statue? What does the world yet owe to American physicians or surgeons? What new substances have their chemists discovered? or what old ones have they analyzed? What new constellations have been discovered by the telescopes of Americans?—what have they done in mathematics? Who drinks out of American glasses? or eats from American plates? or wears American coats or gowns? or sleeps in American blankets?—Finally, under which of the old tyrannical governments of Europe is every sixth man a slave, whom his fellow creatures may buy and sell and torture? (*Edinburg Review 33* 69-80).

What these observations of American society and democracy demonstrate is a horizon of representational and conceptual crisis. They emerge within a context of intense spiritual and physical deprivation, political demoralization, and violent destruction that demands an address—an address that seems impossible, one might say, since the discursive material used to account for it by writers, scholars, and politicians in the nineteenth century is radically insufficient to formulate a response to it. This dissertation was an attempt to understand this insufficiency and the different ways the authors studied in this dissertation wrote about it.

We began this dissertation from this radical insufficiency via our departure from the heuristic of animal cruelty often invoked by PAS scholars to address what has been deemed (via a Foucauldian framework), the violent biopolitical agenda of modern nation-state governmentality.

In an attempt to reframe this crisis through a combination of Derrida's notion of the trace structure and Hortense Spillers's "hieroglyphics of the flesh," the first Chapter of this dissertation interpreted the international crisis of modernity as the irremediable and irreparable loss of African culture, customs, and resources. The capricious violence of the transatlantic slave trade and the plantation economy of representative democracy, I argue, transforms our perspective of the body, the body politic, and the crisis that political and literary writers alike were attempting to address during the turn of the eighteenth into the nineteenth century.

By reading Spillers's notion of the "hieroglyphics of the flesh" through Jacques Derrida's conceptualization of the trace structure in *Of Grammatology*, I demonstrated that Spillers's notion of American Grammar lays out a different conceptualization of transcendental violence. The word "transcendental," I contend, can be understood as a violence that comes before any decision or will of any one to violate any other. Understood in this sense, I contended that Spillers's notion of "American Grammar" lays the groundwork for thinking a form of transcendental violence as an a priori condition governing every body. This a priori condition of violability, resulted in the destruction of African values, customs, and resources that grounded the living conditions and lives of subjects from Africa *before* the transatlantic slave trade. To a certain extent, as discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, Spillers's notion of transcendental violence gives a slightly different meaning to the transcendental violence of Derrida's notion of "expropriation." I rendered this slight difference in the following manner: Although before the slave trade we might have been able to say that every other (one) is every (bit) other, what Spillers's "hieroglyphics of the flesh" demonstrates is that after the slave trade the condition that is added to the trace structure ends up re-articulating it as something like every other (one) cannot necessarily be every (bit) other due to the irremediable and irrecoverable loss of African customs, cultures, and resources during the transatlantic slave trade and the conditions of enslavement. As such, every trace structure is not the same, but radically different. Because of the irremediable loss caused by the destruction of the transatlantic slave trade, every other (one) only *appears* as every (bit) other. However, through Spillers's rigorous reading and articulation of "the hieroglyphics of the flesh," we are, to a certain degree, in a better position to shed light on an unmotivated, and unmotivatable dimension of the trace structure, which I formulate as every other (one) cannot necessarily be every (bit).

This articulation, I argue, can be interpreted in what Calvin L. Warren describes as "the thanatology or onticide of African being" (*Ontological Terror*, 42). What emerges on the other side of this metaphysical holocaust, Spillers and Warren contend, is the distinction between what Warren deems "being" and "existing." I interpreted what Spillers calls the "flesh," or "zero degree" of social conceptualization as sharing an affinity with what Saidiya V. Hartman calls "the unthought" position of the enslaved (a formulation that the title of my dissertation is based on). The unthought position of the enslaved, I claimed, is the "non-democratic opening of democracy," as well as the condition for the possibility of the invention of democratic literature.

In Chapter Two, an unconventional notion of the nation-state unfolds in which the infrastructure of representative democracy does not seem to be preoccupied with managing *bios* or *zoe,* as Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben have claimed. Rather, the apparatus of representative democracy seems to be concerned with managing "blackness," or at least the violent, infectious factious spirit that Jefferson and Madison both seemed to think could bring and end to the newly founded republic. Although it is tempting to think of this form of surveillance through what Achille Mbembe calls "necropolitics," what I would like to suggest, but cannot pursue in full here, is that rather than think of this form of violence through necropolitics, one might rather read it through what Derrida refers to as "auto-immunity" in *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*. While it has been argued that Derrida's notion of autoimmunity comes from the suicidal cell death of *apoptosis*, as is brilliantly argued by Francesco Vitale in *Biodeconstruction: Jacques Derrida and the Life Sciences*, I read Derrida's notion of autoimmunity through the other side of cell suicide—*necroptosis*.

Necroptosis, results from unprogrammed cellular death that results from severe damage that is irremediable and irrecoverable. As such, it provides us with a different model for thinking about how the slave trade impacts our understand of the nation state apparatus of representative democracy, as well as how it continued the metaphysical holocaust of the transatlantic slave trade and the plantation economy via Jim Crow, the prison industrial complex, and the development of ghettos. I cannot pursue this any further here, however I hope it will suffice to have noted this aspect of the reframing of the crisis of modernity that this dissertation has attempted to articulate through readings of some of the Founding Fathers that are often over looked, and the ways authors such as Emerson and Melville attempted to address this crisis.

Going on to reframe the work of Emerson and Melville, this dissertation arrived at the conclusion that the grammar of representative democracy is programmed by the transcendental violence of the transatlantic slave trade and that it emerges from a host of creative and deceptive mutations that sustain its violence. In response to the failures of the American Revolutionary War, Emerson's solution to the crisis of the slave trade is the invention of a notion of literature that could help unite a severely divided and morally impotent nation. While Emerson advocates for an attempt to recover and restore Universal Being, to enhance civilized man by creating a superhuman, Melville's *Moby-Dick* offers a devastating critique of Emersonian transcendentalism by exposing it as a ruse that tricks people into thinking they can be free of racial prejudice via democratic tolerance and cosmopolitanism.

As such, perhaps more than any other author explored here, Melville's novel and way of writing can be read as one which troubles, obscures, resists, and calls itself into question, while simultaneously running the risk of betraying itself by reproducing the very logic it wishes to expose. To a certain extent, what Melville's notion of unconditional democracy, or ruthless democracy, allows us to glimpse, is the socio-political effects of an unaccounted for *necroptosis*—the social, political, cultural, and spiritual loss of different culture onset by the violence of enslavement and the development of government apparatus's that knowingly and unknowingly renew this violence by hiding it through humanizing discourses about tolerance, technological advancement, and democratic progress.

In closing, and perhaps in lieu of a project to come, what I would like to suggest is that Necroptosis is more than a right to kill (Foucault's *droit de glaive*), it is more than the right to expose people (including a country's own citizens) to death. It is more than the right to impose social or civil death, the right to enslave, and subjugate others through forms of political and military violence. It is more than a theory of the walking dead, of thinking about how contemporary forms of subjugation force some bodies to remain in states of limbo between life and death. It is more than thinking about how different forms of government power reduce people to precarious living conditions, or to make us all potential animals before the law. Rather, necroptosis is an attempt to think an alteration that has occurred through a form of violence that continues to accelerate, intensify, and multiply in ways that are incalculable, and therefore no longer allow one to understand or conceptualize what its effects have been, nor where it is going. The task of this dissertation was not to deny the unprecedented proportions of this incalculable violence, but to think it, to give an account of it for the purpose of attempting to illuminate how it shapes our understanding of politics, sovereignty and democracy in the nineteenth century (and today).

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