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On Twisted Sovereignty: White Queer as Master and Slave and Other Poststructural Perversions

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**On Twisted Sovereignty: White Queer as Master *and* Slave and
Other Poststructuralist Perversions**

by

Stephanie M. Lemmer

A Creative Work

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Abstract

Greg Thomas insists, “Any sexual transformation that does not willfully transpire on fiercely indigenous, anti-colonized terms is only a racist pretext for cultural destruction, whether this pretense is staged in heteroerotic or homoerotic, masculine or feminine fashion.” Following queer theory’s practice of locating desubjectivation through the erotic—the self-shattering of *jouissance*, to its current manifestation of locating the shattered self in enslaved flesh, this thesis is primarily concerned with white queer cooptation of the subjugated black subject position as utopic. The operation question of this inquiry is: *How it is that a sadist, imperialist nightmare is rescued and recouped as a (white) queer ideal?* Ultimately, I argue the invocation of sadomasochism into this scene of racialized desubjectivation reinscribes racialized erotic violence and the perpetual calcification of the black body in the temporality of enslavement.

I adduce as examples what Mari Ruti terms the “pulverized subject” of critical theory at two additional sites: the queering of the Marquis de Sade and E.M. Forster. Queer theorist Gert Hekma moves beyond the existentialists who wish to distinguish Marquis de Sade’s texts as mere philosophy to prescribing his tenets as materially viable—and queer. Likewise, the queer literary recapture of our gay writers has overlooked the foregrounding imperial operatives evidenced in some “gay” literature. For instance, E.M. Forster’s work evidences precisely this colonizing of brown bodies toward a reckoning of a white queer self.

The colony in colonial literature and the subject(less) position of the black body in American enslavement have been presented as ideations in sexuality by specific white queer theorists. In both locations, the subjugated body is not only the location of transgressive sexuality but also a utopic site of temporal interruption—out-of-time, no-where and deontologized. What this illustrates is a historically congruent, colonial maneuver, *queered*: a desire for the nonnormative—the uncivilized, the “primitive.” Foregroundingly, the site of the subjugated body is the site of acute violence exercised upon the Other, who, through this imperial narrative, is naturalized as a masochist. The act of erotic violence (or, S/M) does not, in fact, dissolve the subject position of the sadist, however, but reifies it. I conclude by inquiring what a vanguard of queer ethics might do *after* desubjectivation.

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Dr. Dorn: Some of my favorite feedback words ever: “Well, it certainly shows how intense you are.” Though that specific response was to my doctoral application, it likely applies to most of my expressions. That you knew of this intensity early on and took me on graciously anyhow, please know of my vast appreciation. Your quiet humor and intellectual rigor sustained me these past two years.

Dr. Pelaez and Dr. Perry: Thank you for humoring these words ahead and for your voluntary reading. The honor has been mine to work with both of you (finally and again) this past year. Blessings.

To my gremlins: Not much time has passed since the last acknowledgements, but everything has shifted. I’m gathering up pieces of this nest remaining, wiping tears with some, putting others in the typewriter. There is so much I need to tell you all. Someday, I hope to have words to put down that will have meaning for you in relation to me, your mama.

To my Monroe: Shucks...Let’s go to Fargo...When everything depends upon recounting the story with a patient unfolding, I might fail in eagerness, but know, I know you know how the story turns out (and about). Thank you for all of your twelve ears open for those chaotic files. No matter how I tease, I hear you when you say (though perhaps not in Sonny and Cher’s voice), “I got you, babe.” As you do. Over and over again...Now, onto Western Minnesota.

Something in the darkness smell new but known.

—Marlon James, *The Book of Night Women*

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Preface

Why then is this persistent need to see the black body as narrow referent, as reproducing a historical fixation for human being while simultaneously offering itself up to the discipline as someone else's to own and manage?

--Sharon Patricia Holland

The ossified signification of the black body from the time of American enslavement continues to reference an ontological ground zero, all too persistently, as Holland insists. Herein I grapple with what is, at present, in white queer theory's utilization of "the black body as narrow referent," specifically in the poststructuralist maneuver of desubjectivation. Following queer theory's practice of locating desubjectivation through the erotic—the self-shattering of *jouissance*, to its current manifestation of finding the shattered self in enslaved flesh, my concern is white queer cooptation of the black subject position as utopic. Further, I'm troubled by the invocation of sadomasochism into this scene of racialized desubjectivation as a reinscribing of racialized erotic violence and the perpetual calcification of the black body in the temporality of enslavement. In fact, a discussion about sadomasochism must be a discussion about race. As literary scholar Biman Basu maintains, "Like whips and collars, race is used prosthetically as such a marker in the performance of S&M" (10). My inquiry asks: How does the subject position of the enslaved black body become a prosthesis for white queer theory's (violent) desubjectivation?

This journey winds its way around a few paths. The juncture where these paths meet reveals itself at the site of erotic violence. Ultimately, where this unfinished project's futurity resides is *unqueering* erotic violence. The conflation of queer with erotic violence occurs in the rhetoric of the "perverse." Perversity, as the umbrella term for nonnormative sexualities, has

detrimentally conflated its subcategories. Queer theory's radical anti-normativity has embraced "perversity" without a threshold.

Queer theorist Gert Hekma moves beyond the existentialists who wish to distinguish Marquis de Sade's texts as mere philosophy to prescribing his tenets as materially viable—and queer. Likewise, the queer literary recapture of our gay writers has overlooked the foregrounding operatives evidenced in some "gay" literature. For instance, E.M. Forster's work evidences precisely this colonizing of the Other's body toward a reckoning of a white queer self. For white queerness, the colony in colonial literature serves a parallel function as the subject(less) position of the black body in American enslavement. In both locations, the subjugated body is not only the location of transgressive sexuality but also a utopic site of temporal interruption—out-of-time, no-where and deontologized. What this illustrates is a historically congruent, colonial maneuver, *queered*: a desire for the nonnormative—the uncivilized, the "primitive." Foregroundingly, the site of the subjugated body is the site of acute violence exercised upon the Other, who, through this narrative, is naturalized as a masochist. The act of erotic violence (or, S/M) does not, in fact, dissolve the subject position of the sadist, however but reifies it. According to Basu,

The imperious and gratuitous infliction of punishment is an exorbitant enactment of the self, and its imprint is received and absorbed by an erasure and evacuation of the self by the submissive and his gift of selflessness. The self is simultaneously enacted and canceled. What is produced here is not a self, and identity, or the subject. (164)

Unlike queer theorist Elizabeth Freeman who imagines that interracial S/M play and its “switch” of dominant/submissive positions in the S/M scene can reverberate outside of the scene (or rearrange time, thus history), I find myself anxious about this postulation. Rather, if race is used as a prosthetic marker in S/M, race is “view[ed] ...as static representations, iconographically and inextricably linked to acts that they once signified, [which] contributes to their power to represent these acts as if they are *outside history*” (45). Further, these “representations of the historical have gotten in the way of our ability to see black/white relation in anything but static terms” (45). Whips and collars are static referents to enslavement.

Queer theory’s “subjectless’ critique has such provocative pull on the queer imaginary that its intellectual claim of doing certain work for us is *prima facie* and seductive” (Holland 80). Though this critique has been extensively criticized elsewhere, I find its continual employment is necessary considering white queer’s perpetual desire for desubjectivation. As Holland concludes, “[T]hese bodies [black.female.queer] have resonance *historically*, but do they do not figure as *contemporary interlocutors* to engage” (85).

What this preface offers, post this summation, is additionally a few “premonitory statements [which] indicate the presence of an unsettling anxiety” (Holland 85). The following accumulation of words does not represent a culmination in thinking but rather an attempt at articulating something troubling (me). The “trouble [is] our present certainties, including those that attach to the term queer itself” (Amin 75). To suggest *unqueering* might be to ask for trouble. Following are sources of “unsettling anxiety.” At the close of the last scene in this thesis, I grew wary of the repetition of “black flesh” and “black suffering” and other terms that calcified abjection with blackness. Though my critique is solitarily engaging white queer

theory's exploitation of historical black subjugation, I reflect here upon the tricky maneuver of talking about what's being talked about without reinscribing the discourse. What this peculiar pick-up of Hortense Spiller's groundbreaking article, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," by "white gay men" enacts is the delimiting of the very grammar, the language, created by Spillers to talk about black women theoretically. At the site of cooptation of Spillers' grammar and off the tongues of white queers, black women become temporally ossified in the history of enslavement. Black bodies, through white queer, utopic thought, evacuate

embodiment, [and] this fleshiness is marked by a particular conglomeration of sexuality, violence, and objectification. This is flesh that has been caught in the perpetual wound of slavery, so that agency cannot even be illusory: it has already been foreclosed. Through this emphasis on objectification, we begin to see the particular process of flattening at work. (Musser 160)

In other words, white queer theory requires the blackness to be statically reduced to flesh to fulfill the queer desire of desubjectivation—flattened. Agency is evacuated along with the evacuation of embodiment. The "disturbing attachment[s]" of queer and anti-normative (Amin iii) exceeding the threshold of violence makes me anxious. "Unsettling anxiety" guides us through the scenes to come as we explore just how it is that a sadist, imperialist nightmare is rescued and recouped as a (white) queer ideal?

Queer attachments can be negative, indeed, as this thesis explores.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Race, Sexuality, and the Colonizing of “An American Grammar Book”

Everything has been pulled inside out.
--Hortense Spillers

On Saturday, October 28th, 2006, Hortense Spillers, Saidiya Hartman, Farah Jasmine Griffin, Shelly Eversley, and Jennifer Morgan sat down together to discuss the profound impact Spiller’s essay, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” has had not only on the scholars present at the roundtable, but also an entire generation of black feminist intellectuals whose scholarship was inspired and informed by Spiller’s foundational articulations. Published in 1987 in *Diacritics: A Review of Contemporary Criticism*, Griffin recalls of the article, “I really couldn’t think of another essay that had that kind of impact on a generation” (“WGD” 299-300). “Indebtedness” is the solitary word Saidiya Hartman emphasizes, defining her relationship to Spiller’s scholarship (“WGD” 300). Over a decade since the roundtable discussion was published and nearly a decade from the publication of “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe” to the roundtable, Spiller’s essay continues to be engaged with no less vigor, some three decades later. Answering the question of why the essay has become so imperative not only to black feminist thought but additionally to other disciplines, Griffin discloses, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe’ gave us a vocabulary” (“WGD” 302). Expounding on what it means to be “searching for a vocabulary” Spillers discloses,

the available discourses all seemed to come out of experiences that somehow, when they got to me, did a detour...Or the languages broke down. Or it could not speak in theoretical terms. There were always reasons why the academy couldn’t

address race and gender. And so my anxiety was finding a way to actually be in battle. To actually go to war with a whole repertoire of violent behavior that was always performed in a very genteel way...And so the idea was to break from that barrier. (“WGD” 301)

While languages of white feminisms inscribed gender as the originating determiner, Saidiya Hartman identifies Spiller’s work as “questioning the purchase of gender as an analytical category” (“WGD” 303). Since “the refusal of certain gender privileges to black women historically was a part of the problem,” gender was, in fact, not a synonymous category for black and white women (“WGD” Spillers 304). Further, in returning to the deontologizing space of the middle passage, Morgan corrects, “what defines difference, if you start with the transatlantic trade as the inaugural, is racialized violence” (“WGD” 305).

A language, a grammar, a category with which to talk about black women theoretically, Spillers reveals, was her intent. Her articulation in “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe” foregrounds such a vocabulary to address the question, “[W]hat is it like in the interstitial spaces where you fall between everyone who has a name, a category, a sponsor, an agenda, spokespersons, people looking out for them—but you don’t have anybody” (Spillers, “WGD” 308). The paradox Spillers addresses is that while black women “are invisible people,” “there is not a subject that you can speak about in the modern world where you will not have to talk about” black women (“WGD” 308). Because Spillers’ work is principally concerned with fracturing this paradox, she expresses concern over the uptake of the Black Atlantic at present. The Black Atlantic, evaluates Spillers, is being “configured...to circumvent gender rather than to further complicate it” (“WGD” 305).

“Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe” had an unexpected reception among a peculiar demographic. Discloses Spillers, “I knew that something weird or odd had happened” when she discovered that gay white men constituted a significant readership of her work. Spillers’ recalls her ambivalent response to this group so vigorously engaging her article, “[U]h, oh, is this good or bad—I don’t know what this means!...The first people who responded to me in relationship to this essay—outside the community of African Americanists, or African American African Americanists—were gay white men. And I thought that was really pretty remarkable that they were interested in this” (“WGD” 302). Indeed, why were *gay white men* so compelled by Spillers’ creating a vocabulary for *black women*? And why, in the decade since this roundtable discussion has this compulsion only increased?

This thesis intends to explore this question and its implications. Certainly, what might be troubling (for Spillers) is that black feminist theory’s concentration upon a specific temporality—the institution of American enslavement, has been uptaken by gay white male academics. Precisely, I contend that the dynamic response to Spillers’ essay by white gay men canters along three Western traditions: 1) No matter how queer, this expressed desire reifies the American institution of “black people being treated as a kind of raw material,” a colonizing of blackness for the profit of whiteness (Spillers, “WGD” 300); 2) Queer theory’s subset, queer negativity, is informed by both a post-structuralist foundation and Lacanian theory. These traditions desiring the “pulverization of the subject” have manifested in queer negativity’s ideation of the enslaved black woman as representative of radical desubjectivation (Ruti 5); and 3) This colonizing white (queer) compulsion is constructed as integral through the mutual production of blackness and the homosexual. Rey Chow, insisting that this mutual production

cannot be ignored, explains in a discussion on biopower (the sovereignty controlling the viability of life):

It is perhaps the habitual tendency in the West to privilege sexuality in the narrow sense—as having to do with sexual intercourse, sex acts, and erotics—that has led to this failure, this collective blindness. Seen in the light of biopower, sexuality is no longer clearly distinguishable from the entire problematic of the reproduction of human life that is, in modern times, always racially and ethnically inflected. Race and ethnicity are thus coterminous with sexuality, just as sexuality is implicated in race and ethnicity. To that extent, any analytical effort to keep these categories apart from one another may turn out to be counterproductive, for it is their categorical enmeshment—their categorical miscegenation, so to speak—that needs to be foregrounded. (*Protestant Ethnic* 7)

Foregrounding this “categorical miscegenation” is not to theoretically place the categorical queer and categorically raced on a plane of equivalent substantiation, however. This is a jagged plane which is defined by and additionally constructs oppositions and hierarchies. Continuous with white supremacist ideology, (white) homosexuality can be enveloped, while the “abnormally” sexualized black body remains temporally immobile, permanently *excessive*. The envelopment of the white homosexual is dependent upon the pathology of sexuality residing in the racialized other—a contagion. White homosexuality becomes absorbable into the normative status quo only when its gays mirror the characteristics of heterostasis—the exclusive misnomer of the *right* gay is homosexuality, the homosexuality that is interchangeable with heterosexuality but for the gender of the participants. This is to say, racialized tropes of hypersexuality construct

homosexuality as well as heterosexuality and subsequently, homonormativity, whose whiteness is implicit. Chow's "categorical miscegenation" is not an equal marriage, in other words.

**Starting Backward: The "Categorical Miscegenation"
of Sexuality and Race**

To begin to address the queering of black enslaved women by white gay men, we must begin by directing our gaze backwards, tracing the genealogy of the "categorical miscegenation" between sexuality and race. Siobhan Somerville's work determines the co-constitution of the overtly-sexualized black body and the likewise hyper-sexualized homosexual body. In her article, "Scientific Racism and the Emergence of the Homosexual Body," Somerville insists,

While gender insubordination offers a powerful explanatory model for the "invention" of homosexuality, ideologies of gender also, of course, shaped and were shaped by dominant constructions of race. Indeed, although it has received little acknowledgment, it is striking that the "invention" of the homosexual occurred at roughly the same time that racial questions were being reformulated.
(244)

Somerville asks, "Is it merely a historical coincidence that the classification of bodies of either 'homosexual' or 'heterosexual' emerged at the same time that the United States was aggressively policing the imaginary boundary between 'black' and 'white' bodies?" (245).

As we have learned from Foucault, previous to the 19th century, homosexuality was located in specific erotic acts rather than in marked bodies. The advent of the embodied homosexual was not relegated merely to one who performs homosexual erotic acts (most often determined as sodomy) but additionally, one who is congenitally abnormal or abnormally developed. The onslaught of biological determinism "mapped upon the body" eventually came

to be read as pathologies of both race and sexuality, often with the same markers (Somerville 249). Biological determinism while projected as an objective scientific endeavor, involved interpellated scientists, who, “however professedly innocent their intentions, were driven by racial ideologies already firmly in place” (Somerville 250). Though there exists much ado about the mythological distinction of black male genitalia, Somerville’s research finds that “comparative anatomists repeatedly located racial difference through the sexual characteristics of the female body” (251). The rationale for this gendered focus is paradoxically that the measure is on the same outcome: hypersexuality is concomitant with masculinity. Black male hypersexuality had already become a secured mythology during enslavement (defined through an opposition of purity, chastity and fragility of white feminine sexuality). Black female sexuality routed through a biological deterministic project sought to evidence a feminine sexuality that was excessive, tipping toward the masculine (thus, black femininity was additionally defined as contrasting with white feminine sexuality). Since sexuality is determined through the polarities of the heterosexual and the homosexual and determined by one’s erotic object choice being either differently gendered or engendered self-same, gender and sexuality must be mutually productive.

The project of constituting pathological sexuality then begins at gender. The female body, racialized and/or homosexualized must be evidenced as biologically abnormal at the site of sexualized anatomy. Gender must become ambiguous: the black female and the lesbian must be constituted as less feminine, which is to say, more masculine in a zero-sum game of engendering. A “phantom” phallus is inscribed onto the body deemed pathologically hypersexual (Somerville 255). The clitoris of the pathologized body is then deemed overdeveloped. The homosexual,

previously termed the “sexual invert” by a seminal (and deeply flawed) text of sexuality studies circa 1900, *Sexual Inversion* by Havelock Ellis, relied on an ambiguity of biological gender determinacy which perceived the lesbian with a pronounced clitoris (Somerville 246). Black women were defined precisely as having this same genital excess. To be sure, this abnormal anatomical citation did not see black women and lesbians as mutually afflicted, however. Blackness was additionally pathologized. Further bifurcating the female gender along a racialized dichotomy that reinscribes white as chaste and black as wanton, black women’s bodies were not only masculinized at the site of the clitoris but also deemed excessive at the site of the buttocks—a hyperfeminization. The bodies of black women and lesbians were ultimately deemed, through evolutionary science and civilization discourses, primitive and underdeveloped. “Defective” anatomy, biological determinism claims, sources “abnormal” behavior as stemming from biologically maleficent bodies.

Black is pre-emptively read as more perverse or sexually ambiguous, even when considering homosexuality. Biological rationalizations for race and sexual pathologies begin to fade in the early 20th century with the advent of psychological reasons for “abnormal” object choice. Psychologist Margaret Otis, in “A Perversion Not Commonly Noted,” reported on a particular “perversion” that was quite common according to Otis, in girls’ reform and boarding school—interracial, homosexual sex between black and white girls (Somerville 260). Exemplifying the residual effects of biological determinism that remained prescriptive in psychology’s treatment of homosexual desire, Otis concluded that the black girl “seemed the man” in these relationships (quoted in Somerville 261). Ultimately, Otis “used a simple analogy

between race and gender in order to understand their desire: black was to white as masculine was to feminine” (Somerville 261).

The pathologizing of “nonwhite” and “nonheterosexual” bodies was orchestrated not just within science and psychology but additionally written into law (Somerville 247).

Antimiscegenation statutes and sodomy laws legislated interracial marriage and “gay” sex as illegal. At the front, these legislations read as proscribing the acts of same-sex and interracial couplings. However, since the desire for these acts has been located in pathologized bodies (sanctioned by science and psychology), the outlawing of miscegenation and sodomy made “perverse” and “peculiar” *bodies* rather than acts unlawful. Segregating the maneuvers of biological determinism (scientific racism) and psychology when historicizing the pathologizing of black bodies and homosexual bodies is slippery, because the distinction isn’t made at the site of embodiment. This is to say, the black body and the homosexual body are the embodied location and container (hypostatized by biological determinism) from which psychology’s “perverse” desire germinates. Scientific racism has postulated from an evolutionary standpoint that black bodies and homosexual bodies are underdeveloped—not yet evolved relative to white and heterosexual bodies—and not only primitive but also savage. Desires located in black bodies and homosexual bodies then have been determined to be operating at a deficit, or quite literally, at the level of the body—untamed by the mind, which has been determined as not yet evolved (or impossible for evolution by the impediment of the particular/peculiar body). These base desires, as it goes, run amuck, creating the hypersexual, the black wanton body of the female or the black male rapist or the lesbian specter male or the ceaselessly fucking homosexual.

The Cartesian split of mind/body is apparent in scientific racism from which the homosexual emerges. The body is signified as black or homosexual, while the mind is preemptively white, male and heterosexual. The black body and the homosexual body are always already legally suspect, therefore, as criminal desire is always “at the ready,” lurking just under the surface of these devolved bodies. The bodily desire of sexuality is antithetical to reason (of the mind). Consequently, sexual desire is assigned holistically to the Cartesian categorical of the body. Enlightenment’s reasonable mind represses and controls sexual urges as they come along, brought in tow by the embodiment of blacks and homosexuals. These bodies become the locations of sex. In a quite literal sense, they are perceived as the location where sex germinates. These bodies become carriers of contamination, of pathological desire. Black bodies and homosexual bodies endanger public health and create a public health crisis to which the historical response entailed drawing up legislation. Statutes proscribing miscegenation and sodomy are enacted, punishable by imprisonment. Public safety concerns insure that white bodies are safeguarded from the sexual contamination resulting from “sexual miscegenation” with blacks and homosexuals.

The mutual production of the sexually pathologized black body and the homosexual body must not be read as a parallel construction, but rather on a deeply racialized, therefore uneven terrain.

The Racialized Locus of Transgressive Sexuality

Thus far in my inquiry I have been guilty, but cognizant, of my own slippage. I have, at moments, invoked a split that racializes black bodies outright and homosexual bodies without the articulation of race, which is to mark homosexuality as white. Recalling Otis’ study on

interracial lesbian relationships at girls' reform schools, transgressive sexuality is located in the black body. This, I argue is not isolated to such interracial instances, but quite holistically according to Western ideology's doctrines on transgressive sexuality—perversity is embodied in the Other. Consequently, the white homosexual has been cited as acquiring homosexuality from the Other who pre-emptively embodies sexual transgression. Recalling Edward Said's concept of Orientalism and sexuality, the Other "functions as a prediscursive space of sexual acts and the return of surges of unrestricted and unregulated desire" (Puar 74). The space of the white homosexual and the Other is a space where the "perverse and primitive collide" (Puar 75). The white homosexual has been widely historicized as obtaining and exercising sexual perversity from the Other, located in the Western colonial project's (Orientalist) homoeroticism (which I later reinterpret as sexual imperialism *not* distinct from heteroerotic projects using sex as a colonial weapon) to the United States' own tropes of primitive sexuality couched in black bodies.

Norman Mailer evidences a candid account of such an American collision of the "perverse and the primitive" (according to Mailer's own accounting). In his 1957 article, "The White Negro" (which Jean Radford calls an "emphasis on orgasm" [146]), Mailer expounds that "many hipsters are bisexual" (279). These hipsters, Mailer reveals are a "new breed of adventurers who drifted out at night looking for action with a black man's code to fit their facts. The hipster had absorbed the existential synapses of the Negro, and for practical purposes could be considered a white Negro" (279). This code, according to Mailer, revolves around the orgasm:

[T]he Negro...could rarely afford the sophisticated inhibitions of civilization, and so he kept for his survival the art of the primitive, he lived in the enormous present...relinquishing the pleasures of the mind for the more obligatory pleasures of the body, and in his music he gave voice to the character and quality of his existence, to his rage and the infinite variations of joy, lust, languor, growl, cramp, pinch, scream and despair of his orgasm. For jazz is orgasm, it is the music of orgasm, good orgasm and bad, and so it spoke across a nation, it had the communication of art even where it was watered, perverted, corrupted, and almost killed, it spoke in no matter what laundered popular way of instantaneous existential states to which some whites could respond, it was indeed a communication by art because it said, "I feel this, and now you do too." (279)

Mailer's quest to feel is "the energy of the orgasm," and "it seemed he could only re-acquire the energy of the orgasm by seizing on *black culture*" (Greif 31). What Mailer locates in black culture is sexuality, a sexuality proscribed by white, heteronormative culture. The "feel" that he ascribes and appropriates from black culture is a pathologized sexuality (for Mailer, the homosexual seizing of the black body), germinated in (anti)blackness that Mailer, through contagion, now is able to "feel" too.

The idea that transgressive sexuality was located and accessed through the bodies of the racialized Other affected how sodomy laws were implemented. American masculinity and its attendant registers, the public sector of national manhood and the mirroring private sector of the patriarchal family were at stake with homosexuality. The judicial process found a way to hold "asymmetrical" the actors accused of sodomy: culpability and consent (Shah 130). By

muddling culpability, charges of sodomy were unequally enacted. While enacting legislation was claimed to be

aiming at universal applications, appellate courts relied upon racial, class, and national differences in developing verdicts and explanations for rampant sexual perversity and amoral criminality. Racialization and foreignness emerged repeatedly in providing the counterpoint to normal masculinity, white racial identity, and American and Canadian nationality. (Shah 130)

The age of consent was engaged to repudiate the culpability of one of the actors in a sodomy trial while ascertaining the other as the perpetrator. In 1928, a one such typical case was recorded in California. The case of Rola Singh, an Asian migrant worker, and Harvery Carstenbrook, the white, 28-year-old who was referred to as the “Carstenbrook boy” throughout the trial for sodomy resulted in a racialized, asymmetrical verdict. Carstenbrook’s whiteness proffered his “boy” status [which] shielded him from any further scrutiny and interrogation as a potential accomplice, and he was released from jail without charges, while Rola Singh was convicted and sentenced to seven years’ imprisonment in San Quentin” (Shah 142). Another Asian migrant farm worker tried and convicted for sodomy with a white boy was condemned by the county prosecutor for his “disgusting Oriental depravity” (Shah 141). Contrarily, “judges maintained that middle-class white men could impart moral development,” and “white racial identity and respectable middle-class status overrode suspicions of sexual assault even when the victim also belonged to the white middle class” (Shah 140). What is repeatedly evidenced in cases of interracial, transgressive sexuality is the legally sanctioned perception that sexual pathology has been procured from the racialized subject. The true revulsion evidenced in the asymmetrical

verdict of interracial sodomy cases is that of white purity resultantly becoming perverted and contaminated.

What I have attempted to quite briefly and summarily outline thus far is how the germ of transgressive sexuality has been assigned to the racialized Other.

While Somerville's research illustrates the "emergence of the homosexual body" from the biological determinism of scientific racism, evidencing similar physical traits of interrupted evolution among black females and lesbians, I posit that what this evidence also suggests is that what is emerging from scientific racism is the homosexual as a failed representation of white purity, akin to the black female. Rather than a paralleled Othering, homosexuals are deemed "less white" by evolutionary science. The pink triangle is a horrifying reminder of this linkage.

Heteronormativity, Homonationalism and the Moynihan Report

The latter half of the 20th century witnessed white gays capitalizing on a single-axis civil rights campaign. The LGBT assimilationist discourse, "We're just like you," ushered in Lisa Duggan's coinage of homonormativity, insinuating that our only abnormality is homosexuality. Embraced was the notion that we're "born this way" and biological determinism was no longer feared as gays now claimed to be worthy of functioning in the nation-state as prolifically as their heterosexual counterparts. Whites became the "right kind" of gays while the sexual pathologies of nonwhites were further reified. Jasbir Puar expounds on the racializing effects of "gay marriage initiatives" whose "benefits"

disaggregate strata of racial privilege and racial disenfranchisement at the same time that legalization proffers a much coveted return to American citizenry that was lost with the taking on of a nonnormative sexual identity. Thus, the

conservation of sexual, gender, and kinship norms cannot be disaggregated from its nationalist, classist, and racist impulses, or from the liberal underpinnings of subject formation. The ascendancy of whiteness does not require heterosexuality as much as it requires heteronormativity, or its mimicry in the form of homonormativity. (TA 128)

The enfolding of these white, citizen gays into the functioning machine of the nation-state is the impetus of Puar's furthering of Duggan's homonormativity: homonationalism.

Homonationalism is distinct from homonormativity in that gays are not only claiming to be "normal" in every way but gay, but also homonormative gays are patriots to the state.

Homonationalism reifies the racialization of sexual pathology. The acceptable gays are white, middle-class citizens—the gays that would "fit" American ideological status quo but for their homosexuality. Nonwhite gays and gays who otherwise do not "fit" the status quo are further marginalized as "not quite, not white" (Homi Bhabha). Cathy Cohen, in her seminal essay, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" interrogates the whiteness of "queer." While queer as an identity umbrella for all that is nonnormative attempted to correct the GBLT movement's homonormative structure and proclivities, Cohen outlines queer theory and activism's failure to engage those who are preemptively "outside of heteronormativity" not due to their homosexuality, "but rather the perceived nonnormative sexual behavior and family structures of these individuals" (46, 41). Sexual "pathology" is ascribed as the condition causing the "weakness of the family structure." Cohen traces this trope:

[P]oor women, often black and Latina, are portrayed as unable to control their sexual impulses and eventual reproductive decisions; unable to raise their children with the right moral fiber; unable to find “gainful” employment to support themselves and their “illegitimate children”; and of course unable to manage “effectively” the minimal assistance provided by the state...In this same discourse of the “underclass,” young black men engaged in “reckless” heterosexual behavior are represented as irresponsible baby factories, unable to control or restrain their “sexual passions” (to borrow a term from the seventeenth century).

(41)

Cohen contends that the black body has always been read as queer, that is, if queer is defined as that which exceeds heteronormativity, or, to invoke another queer term, anti-normative.

However, Cohen declines the term queer to describe herself as a black, gay woman, citing that “queerness as it is currently constructed, offers no viable political alternative since it invites us to put forth a political agenda that *makes invisible the prominence of race, class, and to varying degrees gender in determining the life chances of those on both sides of the hetero/queer divide*” (emphasis mine; 35). Queerness, Cohen evidences, is an exclusive category in political practice.

The often-cited 1965 Moynihan report, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, determined “at the center of the tangle of pathology is the weakness of the family structure” (qtd. in Cohn 41). Black women’s sexuality is preemptively assigned as exceeding heteronormativity. In fact, Moynihan concludes the de-masculinizing of black men by (unfeminine) black women is the cause of the anti-patriarchal black family—“a transgendered

pathology” (Thomas 34). Spillers addresses Moynihan’s naming of the black family as “father-lacking” in “MBPM.” Moynihan, Spillers contends, assesses that the “Negro Family”

has no father to speak of—his name, his law, his symbolic function mark the impressive missing agencies in the essential life of the black community, the Report maintains, and it is, surprisingly the fault of the daughter, or the female line. This stunning reversal of the castration thematic, displacing the name and the law of the of the father to the territory of the mother and daughter, becomes an aspect of the African America female’s misnaming. (204)

Recalling the roundtable discussion and critical theme of engendering, Spillers reminds us that benefits of gender have often not been imparted to black women. Misonaming is additionally a continuation of the denial or pathologizing of gender. Spillers elucidates, “Moynihan’s *Negro Family*, then, borrows its narrative energies from the grid of associations, from the semantic and iconic folds buried deep in the collective past, that come to surround and signify the captive” (“MBPM” 210). The space defining what Spillers calls “undifferentiated identity” is the “Middle Passage” where captives were “culturally ‘unmade’” (“MBPM” 215). In this space of unmaking, “one is neither female, nor male, as both subjects are taken into accounts as *quantities*” (“MBPM” 215). The “semantic and iconic folds” of dehumanization denies gender as it denies the humanness of the captive body.

If the homosexual body emerged from the biological determinism of scientific racism, it was the whiteness of the body that determined envelopment into normativity and the nation-state. Against new measures of the homonormative, the sexually pathologized black body has been determined to be “too queer” to be enveloped. Civil rights legislation “posits sexual identity as

‘like’ or ‘parallel to’ race,” rather than recognizing sexual identity as racialized (Puar, *TA* 118). What is assumed when sexual identity is positioned as a civil rights issue “parallel to race” is that it is unraced. The formula, avers Puar, “fosters anti-intersectional analyses” (Puar, *TA* 118). Race is subsumed into sexual identity. For example, LGBT civil rights as “the final frontier” of legislative inclusivity posited a “miscegenation analogy” that situates the 1967 decriminalization of interracial heterosexual marriage as the precursor to the legislation of same-sex marriages, thus cleaving race from homosexuality and ‘enact[ing] a kind of amnesia about how U.S. legal discourses historically has produced narratives of homosexuality in relation to race” (Puar and Somerville qtd. in *TA* 118). In fact, colorblind rhetoric that postures sexual identity as a single-axis issue continues this tradition of constructing queerness “in relation to race.” The distinction presently is that the GBLT movement has constructed queerness with an erasure of race, without being transparent about what happens when race is made invisible—people of color are made invisible and reified to the margins. Homonormativity and homonationalism reify the bifurcation of sexual pathologization into the citizen white gay and the “too queer” body of color, regardless of sexual identity. Summarily,

It is not only that a history of race is produced through sexuality that renders white heterosexuality proper in contrast to (black, slave) colored heterosexuality as improper, and as always in the teleological progressive space of mimicry. The history of Euro-American gay and lesbian studies and queer theory has produced a cleaving of queerness, always white, from race, always heterosexual and always homophobic. But now we have the split between proper, national (white) homosexuality (...queerness?) and improper (colored) nonnational queerness.

Therefore, the proliferating sexualities of which Foucault speaks (the good patriot, the bad terrorist, the suicide bomber, the married gay boy, the monster-terrorist-fag, the effeminate turbaned man, the Cantor Fitzgerald wives, the white fighters, tortured Iraqi detainee...) must be studied not as analogous, dichotomous, or external to each other, but in their singularities, their relatedness, their lines of flight, their internalities to and their complicities with one another. (Puar, *TA* 78)

Ultimately, according to Puar, the advent of civil rights activism and discourses constructed a formula that “repeatedly coheres whiteness as a queer norm and straightness as a racial norm” (*TA* xxiv). However, the straightness that Puar refers to in this formula remains fastened to the exterior of heteronormativity.

The civilization discourses have structured this split according to a new cosmopolitanism—the global gay. The progressive, global gay narrative claims queer-inclusivity as modern and democratic. Perhaps the most prominent example of this new global gay cosmopolitanism is Puar’s naming the pink-washing of Israel. Israel’s gay-friendly status “pink-washes” its occupation of Palestine, while Palestine is cited as uncivilized for its “antiquated” values regarding sexuality. Under this formulation, Palestinians simultaneously are deemed failures of heteronormativity and national homophobes (with a murderous intent toward gays). Puar traces this new “homosexual question”—“How well do you treat your homosexuals?” as supplanting the “woman question of the colonial era to modulate arbitration between modernity and tradition, citizen and terrorist, homonational and queer” (*TRTM* 98, 99). This “liberal missionary narrative design” begins in colonialism with Gayatri Spivak’s axiom “white men saving brown women from brown men” transmuting in Western feminism’s “white

women saving brown women from brown men” under human rights proclamations to the cosmopolitan to the contemporary global queer “white queers (queer men?) saving brown homosexuals from brown heterosexuals” (Puar, *TRTM* 99). What becomes apparent through the genealogy of American queerness is that the homosexual has not only emerged through scientific racism, but also the homosexual continues to find identity through and against imperialist and racist constructions of bodies of color.

Shelly Eversley’s response to the question of white gay men’s attraction to “MBPM” alludes to what Heidi Nast terms “queer white patriarchy” (qtd. in Puar, *TA* 30). Eversley posits the draw “might be about the way that [Spillers’] essay intervenes in the patriarchal structure of the family, an arena which queer studies, especially gay male studies, has to find a way to critique as well if the gay male subject can somehow have the authority of a ‘man’ who does not produce this family in the way that a hetero man might” (“WGD” 302). Eversley brings us to a critical distinction that must be drawn between the homonormative family and the type of “queer white patriarchy” Nast defines through a neo-Marxist frame. The “queer white patriarchy” does not require a gay spin on the archetypical family, substituting two men and adopted children for one woman and one man and biological children. In other words, it does not require the private mirroring of the public sphere, only the reproductive capacity of replicating the capitalistic patriarchy of the marketplace. The queer white patriarchy is rather “folded into the life and reproducing life, an aspirant class of wealthy white gay males who can simulate the biopolitical mandate to reproduce and regenerate may actually have it better than their hetero counterparts” (Puar, *TA* 30). The queer white patriarchy is connected, for Eversley, to cosmopolitanism, which “reifies the discourse of gender, a masculinist superiority...Cosmopolitanism comes back to the

idea of a civilized intellectual that is...founded on...the legacy of the patriarch” (“WGD” 303). Spillers’ response to Eversley’s connecting gay white men and cosmopolitanism concludes, “[T]he notion of the cosmopolitan is a way to reclaim positions that have been given up; that the framing of the conversation is a way to reassert race as hegemonic male whiteness. It’s reclaiming certain features of a very old argument” (“WGD” 303). The gay cosmopolitan taking a liberationist stance articulated through an imperialist discourse of civilization attempts to “reassert” his hegemonic status lost at the site of gay identity. The discourse of civilization allows for the patriarch of the (queer) family to be reinstated—the white male takes his “natural” position in Western society, precisely pitted against the pathologized black family whose “father-lack” and masculine matriarch has historically been defined as uncivilized.

Here we revisit Puar’s conceptualization of the “split between proper, national (white) homosexuality (...queerness?) and improper (colored) nonnational queerness,” “between the married [white] gay boy” and “the monster-terrorist-fag.” Contrary to everything that has come before—from the homonormative to the homonationalist and the quest for the envelopment into the nation-state, a critical distinction is required between the GLBT civil rights movement as a segment of the gay population and that sector cordoned off as queer theory and queer activism. While GLBT civil rights focuses on chiseling into the hegemonic center to find its place among the status quo, [white] queer theory desires what I term a “voluntary dejection”: an obstinate refusal of the hegemonic voucher preemptively granted (at the juncture of whiteness and GLBT civil rights). An anti-identity, anti-normative politicking defines this queer stance. If an analogy must be made: GLBT civil rights is pro marriage (rights) as queer is against marriage.

(As a crass generalization) queer theory (white queer theory—which from heretofore, unless explicitly noted, will exclusively denote white queer theory since herein lies the interrogation of this inquiry) has been defined by its gender fluidity and categorical/identity elusiveness. Cohen explains, “A traditional reading of queer theory, [is] one committed to a subjectless, white, sexual practice and post-identity analysis (along the lines detailed and critiqued by scholars such as Jose Muñoz or Jack Halberstam)” (*Death* 128). *The distinction I am attempting to draw here is that the subjectless queer (distinguishing himself from the homonational gay) has rejected the proposal of “married [white] gay boy,” and instead aligns himself with the “monster-terrorist-fag.” I offer that this alignment is the something “weird or odd” about gay white men’s desirous interest in Spillers’ work.*

And here I must draw a break from the previous section of this introduction which attempted to (briefly and selectively) offer a glimpse of the intermingling production of homosexuals with and against bodies of color. While this abbreviated background is essential to note historically and offers an alibi for white queer theory taking interest in and uptaking black feminist theoretical texts, my focus forward will be on the maneuvers of a white queer theory that appropriates, subsumes and exploits black bodies. Rather than perceiving the black body as symbolically exchangeable for the queer body, the enslaved, captive body is utilized by queer theory much in the way it was utilized during enslavement—as a commodity. According to Hartman,

The fungibility 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 domination. (21)

The “captive body” in Spillers and other black feminist theoretical texts is indeed being utilized as an “abstract and empty vessel” wherein the “dispossessed body of the enslaved is the surrogate” for white queer theory’s pulverization of the subject.

Queering the “Captive Body”: Blackness as the Site of Queer Theory’s Subjectivation

A queer temporality that drags back to the time of enslavement could be affectively turning toward what anthropologist Renato Rosaldo terms “imperial nostalgia,” wherein “people mourn the passing of what they themselves have transformed” (68). Rosaldo offers another definition of imperial nostalgia and its essential paradox, “A person kills somebody, and then mourns the victim” (69). What follows is a process of deification and ideation. Rosaldo attributes deification to the anthropologist Allen Batteau’s take on the close of the 19th century’s shift on perceptions of Native Americans. He cites, “as the frontier was closing, racism was codified, and people began to deify nature and its Native American inhabitants. This attitude of reverence toward the natural developed at the same time that North Americans intensified the destruction of their human and natural environment” (71). Idealization occurs as similar to “forms of sacrifice where people draw a line between the profane (their civilization) and the sacred (nature), and then worship the very thing their civilizing process is destroying” (Rosaldo 72).

In “Eating the Other,” bell hooks employs Rosaldo’s imperial nostalgia in reading a *Tweeds* catalogue photographed in Egypt. The bodies of color provide the backdrop, the landscape for the real subjects of the ad—the white cosmopolitans, whose progressive, liberal

persona befriends their frozen temporal primitives of Africa, “longing...to inhabit, if only for a time, the world of the other” (hooks 28). The catalogue introduces their motivation candidly: “[W]e wanted to rediscover our clothing in the context of a different culture. Was it possible, we wondered, to express our style in an unaccustomed way, surrounded by Egyptian colors, Egyptian textures, even bathed in an ancient Egyptian light” (qtd. in hooks 29). Hooks asks, “Is this not imperialist nostalgia at its best—potent expression of longing for the ‘primitive’?” (29). Rediscovering, or rather, as queer negation desires, unbecoming oneself at the site of the Other works upon the perception that the Other inhabits an ontological ground zero.

Deontologization, through this maneuver, is deemed utopic. White desire for “a taste of the Other[‘s desubjectivation]” evacuates the Other—the Other becomes “dispossessed” in order to become a “surrogate” for whiteness, in a nonmaterial and temporary invocation. Hooks contends, “It is precisely that longing for *the* pleasure that has led the white west to sustain a primitive paradise, whether that location be a country or a body, a dark continent or dark flesh, perceived as a perfect embodiment of that possibility” (27). That possibility requires a fantastic evacuation of whiteness wherein material whiteness and its “symbolic integrity” is not impeded. In other words, this evacuation, rather than emptying oneself, creates the fantasy of evacuation through the surrogacy of “dark flesh.” Thusly, the “symbolic integrity” of whiteness remains intact (along with its subject position), while the desubjectivation of black flesh “becomes a metaphor for freedom” (hooks 37). Queer negativity’s quest for the anti-normative misunderstands enslaved, black flesh as liberated, free from the grips of Western ideology. The desire to be undone creates

a longing [that is] rooted in the atavistic belief that the spirit of the ‘primitive’ resides in the bodies of dark Others whose cultures, traditions, and lifestyles may indeed be irrevocably changed by imperialism, colonization, and racist domination. The desire to make contact with those bodies deemed Other, with no apparent will to dominate, assuages the guilt of the past, even takes the form of a defiant gesture where one denies accountability and historical connection. Most importantly, it establishes a contemporary narrative where the suffering imposed by structures of domination on those designated Other is deflected by an emphasis on seduction and longing where the desire is not to make the Other over in one’s image but to become the Other. (hooks 25)

Historically, the most prolific (and grotesque) temporality wherein blackness has been reduced to flesh for white surrogacy, is, of course, enslavement, at the site of the captive body. The captive body is presently recaptured by queer negativity’s longing for desubjectivation—an imperial nostalgia, no doubt.

The captive body, Spillers elucidates, in “MBPM,” outlines four “externally imposed meanings and uses”:

(1) the captive body as the source of an irresistible, destructive sensuality; (2) at the same time—in stunning contradiction—it is reduced to a thing, to *being* for the captor; (3) in this distance *from* a subject 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 center of human and social meaning.

(206)

This passage lines-up and reads as the uses of the captive body by queer theory.

Contrary to being antinormative, I argue these queer maneuvers are consistent and continuous with white supremacist and slave master tropes, psychologies and actions.

Ultimately, I claim that gay white men’s cooptation of Spillers’ work, as well as the intellectual labor enacted more broadly by black feminist theorists engaging American enslavement, is violently detrimental.

My argument rests upon the following implications: The first and foundational implication this inquiry engages is that a subjectless status deemed desirous denies the material repercussions of the enslavement and its inheritances, most specifically under the organizing rubric of anti-blackness. Herein lies the inherent “whiteness” of queer theory: Its writ is inscribed from a position of secure subjectivity—a queer freedom, “an elite cosmopolitan formulation contingent upon various regimes of mobility” (Puar, *TA* 22). The freedom of movement implicated in queer theory perceives subject de-centering, or perhaps more accurately, destruction of the subject as a (paradoxically) liberating movement—a voluntary dejection. *The situatedness of the “severely traumatized subject” becomes a perverse ideal through which queer theory aspires to inhabit* (Ruti 11). As Mari Ruti, in “The Bad Habits of Critical Theory,” evaluates (along with other critics of desubjectivation) “that the destruction of the subject leads not only to the erasure of the self but also to the erasure of the other, including the other who has already been erased by various collective inequalities; the other, after all, is also a self” (11). My claim is that gay white men returning to the subjection of enslavement for models of

desubjectivation is, to enact a double-move articulated by Ruti's postulation, exploiting the Other's erasure in order to erase the self. The queer quest for the "pulverized subject" pursues the enslaved as "the ultimate sign of alterity" (Ruti 5, Li ix). Rather than a liberationist quest, this queer project falls in line historically with the subjection of black bodies whose labor benefits whiteness. It is a continuation of the appropriation of blackness while simultaneously reifying the deontologizing of blackness.

One prominent citation of Spiller's "MBPM" in recent queer theory relates to what Spiller's has termed "gender undecidability" (204). "The potential for gender differentiation *in the first instance* is already the potential—indeed the capacitation—of whiteness; the capacitation to lean into gender 'undecidability,' the province of that same whiteness," Puar furthers (*TRTM* 40). Precisely it is this queer white gender "undecidability" that perversely desires the "culturally unmade" captive body. What Puar is marking is that while the captive body was denied gender's attached privileges, whiteness has been inscribed the capacity to not only embody a normalized gender but also, paradoxically, to "unmake" one's gender. Queer negativity's desire for desubjectivation "produces a way of talking in which notions of lack, subalternity, victimization, and so forth are drawn upon indiscriminately, often, with the intention of spotlighting the speaker's own sense of alterity and political righteousness" (Chow, *Reader* 40). Gender "undecidability" is an anti-normative status that *whiteness* can "lean into." Moynihan's evaluation of the black family as not only a "tangle of pathology" but also a "trans-gendered pathology" posits the contemporary black female as well as the captive female for white queer ideation (Thomas 34). According to Spillers' own assessment on gender "undecidability":

[I]n the historic outline of dominance, the respective subject-positions of “female” and “male” adhere to no *symbolic integrity* [emphasis added]. At a time when current critical discourses appear to compel us more and more decidedly toward gender “undecidability,” it would appear reactionary, if not dumb, to insist on the integrity of female/male gender. But undressing these confluences of meaning, as they appear under the rule of dominance, would restore, as figurative possibility, not only power to the female (for maternity) but also power to the male (for paternity). We would gain, in short, the *potential* for gender differentiation as it might express itself along a range of stress points, including human biology in its intersection with the project of culture. (“MBPM” 204)

Queer gender desubjectivation (gender fluidity) “speaks with power, but identifies with powerlessness,” which denies the material necessity for the empowerment of those without power (Chow, *Reader* 41). While gender fluidity for whiteness is deemed empowering through queer’s destruction of the subject, gender “undecidability” “under the rule of dominance” is marked by a usurpation of power.

“Ethnicity as a Scene of Negation”: The Implications of Queer Negativity’s Colonizing Slip

What are we to make of queer negativity’s slippage from the ideal of a subjectless status to the status of subjection via the ideation of the enslaved black woman? If “symbolic paradigms” informing queer theory “inscribe ‘ethnicity’ as a scene of negation...and conform the human body as a metonymic figure for an entire repertoire of human and social arrangements,” might we conclude that it is this very “scene of negation” of blackness enslaved that invokes the desire of queer negativity’s return to the black body by means of colonizing maneuvers?

(Spillers, “MBPM” 205). Here, we are reminded of Homi Bhabha’s formulations in and around the concept of mimicry. Considering the above questions, and though in a different context, Bhabha calls attention to the fact that queer negativity’s return to the black (female) body is an instantiation of “mimicry” wherein queer theory “rearticulates [its] presence in terms of its ‘otherness,’ that which it disavows” (Bhabha 158). In doing so, it positions itself against “the fetishized colonial culture [which] is potentially and strategically an insurgent counterappeal” (Bhabha 158). “It is then,” Bhabha concludes, “that the [black] body...lose[s its] representational authority. Black skin splits under the racist gaze, displaced into signs of bestiality, genitalia, grotesquerie, [queer excess,] which reveal the phobic myth of the undifferentiated whole white body” (159).

James Bliss, a white scholar, interjecting and attempting to make a holistic correction on the engagement of Kimberle Crenshaw’s intersectionality in “Black Feminism Out of Place,” posits that “Black women are created only to be buried,” while, in a swift move, prefaces his own action (740). To further explore this queer maneuver of perverse appropriation, in later chapters I will engage more fully Lee Edelman’s engaging of Spillers’ work, along with James Bliss’ coupling of queer negativity and black feminist theorizing wherein Bliss posits that “[W]hile the *experience*, the *archive*, and the *politics* of Edelman’s queer are white..., the *position* of Edelman’s queer is Black,” furthering that “Gay minstrelsy is nothing new, but in Edelman’s hands it comes the closest to reckoning with Blackness as a (queer) structural position and to reckoning with the sort of epistemological violence necessary to undo a social order” (86). I postulate that the slippage of the white queer into the black subject position via American

enslavement in order to relieve the “the *experience*, the *archive*, and the *politics* of Edelman’s [white] queer” is obscene.

The second implication of white queer theorists positioning themselves through the bodies of the enslaved is the affirmation of desubjectivation through violence, specifically what Saidiya Hartman terms a “libidinal investment in violence” (“Venus” 5). The engagement of the “*space* of the middle passage” wherein “violence caused gender to evaporate” as an emblematic and even utopic space for desubjectivation and self-shattering—an ontological ground zero—is sadistic (Morgan, “WGD” 304). The enmeshing of the erotic and sadism (to my thinking, sadism preemptively implies the erotic) is a manifestly troubling aspect of white queer theorists’ desire for processing queerness through enslavement. Here is where I locate this perverse allure: For queer theorists, specifically that strain of queer theory tagged by the terms queer negativity and anti-sociality (most prominently engaged by Edelman and his precursor Leo Bersani), the erotic is a portal to desubjectivation via a self-shattering which, according to Lacanian theory, occurs where pleasure becomes unbearable—*jouissance*. “[A] state of absolute psychic, affective, and bodily disintegration (desubjectivation)” is the aspirate state of queer negativity—“a moment of orgasmic *jouissance* or cataclysmic pain” (Ruti 11). *Excessing a metaphoric, post-structuralist move (in other words, a rhetorical and linguistic scrabble that is so often critiqued as practically vacuous), I argue that queer theory’s negativity slips into a practice of actual violence—a postulation that insists violence is necessary for proper unbecoming.*

At its apex, “Lacanian antinormativity...[formulates] groundless, senseless violence into an ideal” (Ruti 19). Proper for unbecoming, violence is thusly mandated for the “pulverization of the subject.” This pulverization, rather than espousing the post-structuralist allegory of self-

shattering seeks to actualize a visceral self-destruction as a counter-hegemonic act. Yet another instantiation of queer theory's negativity requiring whiteness, this maneuver is requisitely conducted from a subject position through which a self-shattering would have political implications—a subject position that has not been preemptively obliterated. Ruti finds an example of this voluntary masochism in Jack Halberstam's *Queer Art of Failure*, wherein Ruti assesses that Halberstam “redefines feminism as a matter of ‘feminine’ masochism, passivity, submission, and sacrifice, going as far as to claim that self-cutting ‘is a feminist aesthetic proper to the project of female unbecoming’” (7). Ruti responds to Halberstam's thesis with an articulation of its absurdity. How, Ruti inquires, “it is that a heteropatriarchal nightmare gets turned into a queer feminist ideal?” (7). Inherent in Halberstam's white queer negativity is not only the theoretical, post-structural pulverization of the subject but also literal self-destruction—a pulverization of the subject (through a blade) into (the) flesh.

This act, reducing the self, the subject to flesh, has a direct correlation to Spillers' work. In “MBPM,” Spillers designates the flesh as subjectless: “But I would make a distinction in this case between “body” and “flesh” and impose that distinction as the central one between captive and liberated subject-positions. In that sense, before the “body” there is the “flesh,” “that zero degree of social conceptualization” (206). Edelman (along with other queer theorists appropriating black feminists' texts that theorize on American enslavement) situates his Lacanian antinormative, self-shattering ideal in the positionality of the enslaved black woman (reifying the annihilation of black subjectivity)—a subjection that reduces the subject to a pre-body state, to mere flesh. For Edelman and other radical, queer negativists, this “zero degree of social conceptualization” is the objective. This perverse paradox is what I attempt to work

through in this second implication: *How it is that a sadist, imperialist nightmare is rescued and recouped as a (white) queer ideal?*

The coupling (confusion?) of pleasure and pain is what is invoked when queer negativity's death drive is uptaken through "subjective destitution, defined as the act of exiting the big Other (the symbolic order) through a suicidal plunge into the *jouissance* of the real" (Ruti 12). This "suicidal plunge" has a praxis among certain queer theorists who practice and reflect upon BDMS culture, and perhaps most starkly, through the act of "barebacking," condomless anal sex (most prominently articulated in Tim Dean's *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking: On barebacking, HIV and Intimacies*). A "libidinal investment in violence" has long been established before the movement of gay white men's uptake of the texts of black feminist theorists who specifically work on the period of American enslavement, but I argue that this is precisely the appeal. Douglas' "blood-stained gate" so regularly cited for envisioning the violent initiation into enslavement articulates this reducing the body to flesh. For the enslaved black woman, the "blood-stained gate" included an erotic sadism. Whippings and raping were not distinct, but a coupled inclination of the slave master's titillation. I claim that this investment constitutes the appeal of gay white men to this space of an ontological ground zero where abject subjecthood is produced not just through violence, but very often through *eroticized* violence. The twist of sovereignty—the white queer is master *and* slave. In a subsequent chapter, I will engage white queer theorist Elizabeth Freeman's concept of erotohistoriography from her text, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* wherein she imagines a rewriting of history through interracial acts of sadomasochism which specifically reenact narratives of black enslavement.

The third implication of queer theory's partiality to black feminist theorizing on enslavement is also couched in a historical tradition of violent, imperial sovereignty. Queer theory has rested upon the white alibi of *mutual* abjection. Simultaneously engaging the catchphrase "We're just like you" to position gays for a homonational stance, the posturing of "We're just like you" has additionally been invoked by queers to deny the privilege of whiteness, to deny the partaking in racist domination. Greg Thomas, in *The Sexual Demon of Colonial Power: Pan-African Embodiment and Erotic Schemes of Empire* avers, "Any sexual transformation that does not willfully transpire on fiercely indigenous, anti-colonized terms is only a racist pretext for cultural destruction, whether this pretense is staged in heteroerotic or homoerotic, masculine or feminine fashion" (93). What Thomas postulates is that queer cannot be an alibi when queer is colonial. Not only do I apply Thomas' thesis to the aforementioned (colonizing) implications but also to a wider contention that positions, paradoxically, queer self-shattering in alignment with the historical project of Western sovereignty, wherein the sovereignty of one requires the usurpation of another's (the Other's) freedom and breeching of bodily boundaries. I examine this queer maneuver in two scenes. The first, through a rereading of E.M. Forster's "The Other Boat," that insists the story is not a queer love story but a colonial narrative of erotic violence, dejecting the story from the queer archive, and additionally putting to question the LGBT "archive fever" quite generally. I ask, how might we draw a distinction between what we deem our gay ancestral characters and characters who impart an imperial sovereignty and happen to do so through homosexual actions? I claim that critical theory applied to the queer archive reveals that our rescued queer characters might not always be redeemable through their queerness alone. The second scene I am concerned with is proposition inherent in

the title of William F. Edmiston's work *Sade: Queer Theorist*. Gert Hekma's assessment of Sade sums up Edmiston's thesis: "[T]he marquis was the archetypal queer and in that sense a precursor to queer theory and life" ("Review"). What this thesis ultimately offers up is that Hekma is correct: Queer theory's radical and obstinate anti-normativity culminates in a Sadean Universe, a universe postured on a sovereign usurpation of another's subjectivity in order to articulate queer desubjectivation.

Chapter 2: Scene One

The Historical Marketplace of Flesh and Desire

Tracing the historicity of SM's embeddedness within institutions of black enslavement in the U.S., Marcus Wood's historical text, *Slavery, Empathy and Pornography* examines artifacts of restraint and torture and their utilization during enslavement, providing a historical account that evidences a "libidinal investment in violence" (Hartman, "Two Venuses" 5). What this inquiry claims is that race impinges the "freedom" that Foucault and other white queer theorists insist can be located in S/M play—"a practice in which subjects manipulate bodies and power relations in order to reconfigure their own relationships to pleasure" (Musser 9). While white subjects may voluntarily deject themselves from identity and subjecthood by the shattering of the self, accessed through the simultaneity of pain and pleasure, the fact of blackness already begins at the position of inflicted pain by the fact of whiteness—a *self* already shattered and a *subjecthood* already in question.

I postulate that this queer project of SM identity-fragmentation reifies whiteness through coerced black labor. In other words, the inscrutability of the white self and chaotic intransigence characteristic of black bodies are united through the well-worn methodology of yoking the raw materiality of black bodies to the white self in order to stabilize notions of whiteness that are "indefinable and uncontainable" (Wood 411). This yoking is thus pressed into the service of idealizing the white queer self and utopianizing white queer desire—*denormalizing* both the white self and white desire, discursively, as ontologically unstable while, in fact, concealing the inherent instability embedded in the very methodological yoking, in the first place. Woods' text excavates the obscenities buried within "the cultural inheritance of Atlantic slavery" and the

meaning of this “inheritance” and its ensuing implications in the arena of “twentieth-century sado-masochistic bondage culture, not to mention the casual reader of pornography” (Woods 398). At this juncture, Greg Thomas, in *The Sexual Demon of Colonial Power: Pan-African Embodiment and Erotic Schemes of Empire*, prefaces, “Here are the histories of empire that are erotics of Aryanism and erotics of Aryanism that are histories of empire” (90).

Wood’s research insists we recognize that attempts at disembedding BDSM culture from its “inheritance of Atlantic slavery” is deceitful. Wood’s text archives paintings among other visual artwork, literature (including biblical), and BDSM restraint and torture devices which invariably link enslavement and sadomasochism. For example, Woods conducts a side-by-side comparison between a “sheet of engravings produced by Thomas Clarkson to describe the implements used to torture slaves during the middle passage” and pages from an online BDSM retail site (413). Noting unnerving similarities (which, unfortunately, I cannot reproduce here), Wood inquires, “[r]oughly two hundred years separate this series of pictures, but what, it must be asked, admitting some obvious differences in reproductive medium and in the style, separates the fetishized representation, indeed display, of the torture implements?” (409). Wood concludes that the absence of black flesh is an absent presence—the fetish *is* black flesh, implicit is the “fetishized representation” of the Atlantic slave trade. The absent presence of the suffering of blackness does not create an increased aesthetic distance of the fetish of the torture of black flesh. What I mean here, and this is crucial, we see black suffering even in the absence of black bodies, through the staging of the scene, which is inherently racialized. To solidify this point, Thomas maintains that “the history of racialization...is simultaneously a history of sexualization” (9). This history, Thomas avers, isn’t a mutual coeval. Racialization has been

erotically implemented. More critically, and this is Thomas' thesis, Western empire has been constructed through a "libidinal investment of violence" (Hartman, "Two Venuses" 5). The "carnal dynamics of white domination" have defined the American enslavement of African peoples. Thomas stresses,

The entire history of our African presence in American captivity lays bare a raw sexual terror that defines the cult of white supremacy here and elsewhere. Whether we think of the ceaseless assault on Black family existence, the obscene hysterics of apartheid lynching, the physical violations of direct and indirect colonization, or the sadomasochistic torture of formal enslavement and its transatlantic trade in flesh, we see that *the rule of Europe has assumed a notably erotic form.* (emphasis mine; 1)

Through interrogating Thomas' notion of the "carnal dynamics" of enslavement, Hortense Spillers contends that "our notions of intimacy and the chains of intimacy are thrown into crisis" ("Shades" 30:42). We will return to Spillers' recent lecture a little later; however, what is important to maintain is the inscrutability of the white queer self—its attempts towards ontological instability with concomitant maneuvers of utopianizing white desire. What Thomas and Spillers insist upon—and, invariably, what Marcus Wood historicizes—is that the history of Western modernity (Empire, Civilization, Nation-states) is infected by and imbricated with sexualized/eroticized violence. More, these "carnal dynamics" structure and inform all "notions of intimacy." Whether we are talking Renaissance-, Classical-, Victorian-, or Modern-era notions of love and romance, Europe/the West has founded the human over and against notions of the inhuman. Thus, and to be more specific, any theoretical maneuvers to obscure BDSM's "cultural

inheritance” of Atlantic slavery is to rearticulate the concealing gesture of the methodological yoking mentioned earlier. This “crucial move, the annexing of Atlantic slavery,” Wood points out, “as an ideal model for sexual bondage slavery” is “a troubling gesture” (Wood 399).

“A troubling gesture,” indeed. What Wood implies is that there is a fetish character, involved in the highly erotic and sexualized schemes of BDSM play, that structures something of an ahistorical contingency: “a slave is a slave is a slave” (400). Understanding the problematics of this contingency bears some historicizing to fully grasp the notion of the marketplace of flesh and desire. For starters, such a contingency posed by the “fetish character,” historically, socially, and economically evacuates enslavement of its temporality: “it remains in definitional terms a constant” (Wood 400). Further, this evacuation grants a sexualized discourse, such as BDSM (possibly, a “bad habit” of queer theory), the belief in slavery’s “transhistorical, abstract, [and] transcultural” nature “which allows for the absurd yet sinister marriage”—a triangulated bond between “the cultures of Atlantic slavery, erotic love, and ascetic Christianity” (Wood 399). This triangulated fusion, consequently, “achieve[s] the composite slave-lover-martyr, the essential bondage complex” (Wood 399). Historically speaking, this triangulated fusion has “generated a big archive that reaches across literature and the visual arts” (399). The foundational question this thesis will continually address “is how has the black slave body been incorporated into the Western cultural archive” and the extent to which this “Western cultural archive” bespeaks the fact “the art and literatures generated by slavery appear to be consistently fueled by a *desire* [emphasis mine], on the part of creator, to subsume the traumatic experience of the slave” (Trouillot 110). Effectively, this sublimation reconciles the inscrutability of the white (shattered) self, its universal conceits; to affirm and substantiate what Michel-Rolph Trouillot tells us is “the

nostalgia of the entire West for a history that it never lived, for a place that exists only in its mind” (110).

The history of enslavement and commodity fetishism converges at the site of and with the idea of the marketplace. The marketplace in this context is necessarily conditioned by meaning generated from within “erotic schemes” and “carnal dynamics” that not only inform the performance of Empire, for example, in E. M. Forster’s homoerotic situatedness in “The Other Boat,” but also in the queer theorizing of Lee Edelman, James Bliss and Elizabeth Freeman.

These instantiations of my fundamental polemic as well as the fundamental question raised by the Spillers Roundtable’s discussion (appeal of black feminist theorizing to white gay males), are necessarily located at the nexus of the flesh, desire and the marketplace.

The Marketplace of the Flesh—*The Sea*

Historically, and without being too rigid about chronology, we might say that the process of de-ontologizing the black body (flesh) was occasioned on the terrains of at least two sites that constituted the making of human commodities: the first, the actual Middle Passage—“the watery space of the Atlantic Ocean”—which was constitutive of the “social conditions and human costs embedded in the world of maritime slavery” (Mustakeem 3). And while the intent is not to “compare plantations to slave ships or attempt to suggest any spatial hierarchies of trauma,” it becomes imperative to “broaden the gaze of captivity toward the interior and rather contentious seaborne spaces occupied by bond people, surgeons, and sailors” (Mustakeem 3). Therefore, grasping the importance of this first site in the process of the making of human commodities allows for the understanding that “the Middle Passage comprised a violently unregulated process critically foundational to the institution of bondage that interlinked slaving voyages and

plantation societies” (Mustakeem 3). Further, historians Marcus Rediker and Stephanie Smallwood have published research finding “the magnitude of the Middle Passage” was “symbiotic to slave societies and the modern world” (Mustakeem 4). For example, on the one hand, Rediker “unravel[s] the series of multifaceted human dramas involving crewmen, slaves, and abolitionists to argue that slaving voyages devastated the lives of purchased captives” as “slave ships became the primary instrument fueling globalization and capitalism” (Mustakeem 4). Whereas, on the other hand, Smallwood forcibly argues that the transatlantic illicit trade in human flesh must be framed through “the intricate process of commodification into which bondpeople were cast on different sides of the Atlantic, astutely revealing that the most powerful instrument locking captives in as commodities for Atlantic trade was the culture of the market itself” (Smallwood qtd. in Mustakeem 4).

Furthering Rediker’s notion of the symbiosis between the “watery space” of the Middle Passage and evolving conceits of modernity and the self, Emma Christopher, in *Slave Ship Sailors and Their Captive Cargoes, 1730–1807*, charts the “complex lives of slave ship sailors to forge much greater insight into the meaning of whiteness, power, and the fragility of their own freedom as laborers within histories and memories of the slave trade” (qtd. in Mustakeem 4). Taken together, Rediker, Smallwood, and Christopher all reveal that the process of ontologizing the white self while simultaneously de-ontologizing the African captive, had as its epicenter the “social space of ships and the oceans . . . in the making and unmaking of” New World identities that, at one and the same time, were birthed and evolved in relationship with the forging of a “New World economy, based largely upon the labor of enslaved populations” (Mustakeem 5).

Furthermore, as “[t]hese variegated seaborne pathways operated as the primary isolated channel through which bondpeople arrived into the Americas” (Mustakeem 5), “land and sea” became yoked not only as an ever-expansive politico-economic terrain for the production of New World commerce, but they were also yoked, precisely at the moment land and sea constituted a formative ontology: “this point of civic animation, buoyed by international trade and markets, by the end of the eighteenth century would be the iconic referent of human presence—the ‘subjective’ animation drawn into the material and interpretive diffusions of the Atlantic commodity and cultural exchange represented, concomitantly, as discrete nomination” (Barrett 44). This “discrete nomination” exposes the inscrutability of the white self by the emergence of a dilemma marked by a “contrived performance, drawing the uncertain proposition that human animation fails the criteria of human being: the pragmatic meaning of the mass introduction and presence of Africa-derived persons” into “the modern Atlantic commerce and society” (Barrett 44). The inscrutable white self, articulated by this “unsteady performance,” bears the mark of “psychic, scripted, and social ruptures” (Barrett 44). Consequently, the intransigent black body produced by the “carnal dynamics” of “modern Atlantic commerce and society” occupies the epicenter of a society—whose “iconic referent” and “discrete nomination” is further situated in the black body removed from consciousness, manifesting an absent presence, a hauntological scene unsettling whiteness in a perpetual anxiety of ontological inscrutability. Foucault articulates the effect of such a psychic scene: “the space of order is from now on shattered: there will be things, with their own organic structures, their hidden veins, the space that articulates them, the time that produces them; and then representation, a purely temporal succession in which those things address themselves (always partially) to a subjectivity, a consciousness,” a

shattered “singular effect of cognition, to the ‘psychological’ individual who from the depth of his own history, or on the basis of tradition handed on to him, is trying to know” (239 – 40).

The second site, or terrain, constituting the process of making of human commodities has already appeared above as the other side of our symbiotic relationship between land and sea and the modern world. Therefore, “watery space”—“the oceanic transport of African captives served as the lifeline of the evolving New World economy” (Rediker 4). If the oceanic expanse, the constant “zone of death” constituted the aquatic mediator of “entrepreneurial networks” that facilitated the *natural* “pooling of distant monies for the buying and selling black bodies,” the Middle Passage, *the sea*, constituted the stabilizing hinge to the “intercontinental enterprise” that “set into motion an economy of violence [which] systematically fueled . . . entrepreneurial networks . . . that facilitated successful operation of the ‘human manufacturing process’” was sequenced and operationalized “through three key phases: warehousing, transport, and delivery” (Mustakeem 302, 6). *The land*, plantation enslavement, our second site whereby the process of making of commodities continues, is not by any means a final destination regarding the sequential movement of cargo from one continent to another. More importantly, we see that the ontologizing and de-ontologizing process accompanied the “movement of money” and “a global vortex of trade and terror internationally linked between Europe, Africa, the Caribbean, and the Americas” and came together in concert to “enforce bondpeople’s rapid adjustment to plantation slavery” (Mustakeem 6–7; Sheridan 28, 33). The landed proprietorship of Plantation enslavement, *the land*, again, constitutes our second site in the dramatic process of the making of human commodities.

Hartman explains the anti-sociality of enslavement: “The most universal definition of the slave is a stranger. Torn from kin and community, exiled from one’s country, dishonored and violated, defines the position of the outsider” (*Lose Your Mother* 16). Contrasting tropes often rooted in (white) denial, “Africans did not sell their brother and sisters into slavery. They sold strangers: those outside the web of kin and clan relationships, nonmembers of the polity, foreigners and barbarians at the outskirts of their country, and lawbreakers expelled from society” (Hartman, *Lose Your Mother* 16). Further, there could be no betrayal of one’s race, unless one imagined oneself as a member of a race. To this point, language that embodies notions of race/blackness/savage/the Other “developed in the modern period and in the context of the slave trade” (Hartman, *Lose Your Mother* 16). Even though we know that the very term “slavery” derived from the word ‘Slav,’ because Eastern Europeans were the slaves of the medieval world[,] it was not until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that the line between the slave and the free” hardened the distinction “between Africans and Europeans” (Hartman, *Lose Your Mother* 16). Consequently, after the Foucauldian epistemological break occurring in the 16th century, we begin to see that “[f]or Europeans, race established a hierarchy of human life, determined which persons were expendable, and selected the bodies that could transformed into commodities” (Hartman *Lose Your Mother* 16). This “hierarchy of human life” might otherwise be thought of in terms espoused by Sylvia Wynter as the *Master Symbolic Code of Life and Death*. In other words, “to reckon with lives undone and obliterated in the making of human commodities” is to come to terms with the fact that these “undone and obliterated” lives were “drawn into the maelstrom of Western expansion” and subjected to an existence “codified by law” (Hartman *Lose Your Mother* 16) with no phenomenologically translatable nor inhabitable

“semantic grid.” This point of the “semantic grid” becomes vital in the procedural translation of the process from African captivity into Atlantic commodity and then, again, from Atlantic commodity into America slave (Smallwood, n.p.).

The Marketplace of the Flesh—*The Land*

Philip D. Curtin’s *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex* provides a broad, comparative outline of the origin, nature and function of the institutions of enslavement upon *the land*—consequently limning this phenomenon the “plantation complex.” Curtin contends that “[t]he plantation complex was an economic and political order centering on slave plantations in the New World tropics” (Curtin xi). As time progressed, we come to find that “they played an important role in the European-dominated portion of the world economy” (Curtin xi).

Potentially, in many cases, as the third phase—recalling Mustakeem’s notion of the three phases—“warehouse, transport and delivery”—“these plantations, like their successors, produced mainly for a distant market in Europe, thus becoming the center for a widespread commercial network to bring in labor and supplies and carry off the finished product” (Curtin xi). Curtin continues by informing us that “with the passage of time, the heart of the complex moved westward by way of the Atlantic islands, Brazil, and the Caribbean. “It ultimately stretched,” he further suggests, “from Rio Grande do Sul in southern Brazil to the Mason-Dixon line, and it had outliers, even at its eighteenth century prime, on the Indian Ocean islands of Réunion and Mauritius” (Curtin xii).

Antedating Columbus’ voyages, to be sure, the institution of the “plantation complex was therefore much more than an economic order for the tropical Americas alone; it had an important place in world history at large,” and thereby constituted “nevertheless an interrelated aggregate

of human experience that deserves investigation as an entity” (Curtin xii). And, as a decidedly “human experience” meriting its own study or “investigation as an entity,” we do accept, mostly, that the subject of slavery (not the *subject* bearing subjectivity, but the subject constitutive of enslavement) “carries strong emotional overtones—for Afro-Americans and Euro-Americans alike. These feelings involve guilt, shame, and the attempt to assess blame for the atrocities committed by people long since dead” (Curtin 113). For Curtin and many of his contemporaries, the reigning belief is that, even though “no one defends the slave trade as a humane institution and few indeed defend it on any grounds[,] it may be well to concede that the era of the slave trade is beyond the effective range of moral condemnation[.]” (Curtin 113).

Therefore, “rather than placing blame, however well deserved” our task “should be to find out what happened and why” (Curtin 113). Circumscribing the “effective range of moral condemnation” notwithstanding, we should understand, as Veronica Marie Gregg points out in her “Introduction” to *Caribbean Women: An Anthology of Nonfiction Writing, 1890–1980*, that “[w]ith differing formulations, and from a variety of ideological perspectives, the intellectual efforts were still rooted in the plantation society model. Its framework continued to produce scholarship in a variety of fields—sociology, social history, economics, literature, and history” (Gregg 61). For example, as Gregg recalls, “Lloyd Best, together with Kari Levitt, established [a] paradigm on the Plantation Economic System” (Gregg 61). That Curtin finds it necessary to remark upon any “range of moral condemnation,” however effective or ineffective, bespeaks a blind spot within the disciplinary undertaking of historiography to discover “what happened and why.” A curious phenomenon, it remains to be, the frequency with which morality is simultaneously evoked & consequently disavowed when discussing matters directly related to,

entangled with, and defined by the “cultural inheritance of Atlantic slavery.” On the one hand, when having to do with the very situatedness of African Derived bodies (which are defined “beyond God or the devil, represent[ing] the outside that defines the boundaries imposed by law and sin within the social, economic, and moral order that the European man inhabits”), it seems acceptable or even customary, on both sides of the slavery debate (whether pro- or antislavery), to accept the “tacit assumption of the inferiority of the Negro and the agency of the European” (Gregg 8). On the other hand, revealing a history of the conflation of presence and absence, African derived bodies’ “exclusion defines [the European’s] inclusion. She is brought into the social and discursive economy in a particular way—as constitutive negation” (Gregg 8). Further, “through . . . ventriloquism, she enters the discourse of slavery in order that her moral, social, and, therefore, human exclusion may remain intact, thereby justifying the status quo” (Gregg 8).

The conflation of presence and absence occurs, therefore, by the incorporation of the enslaved person’s tacit humanity as well as their perpetual inferiority. In this way we come to find that slaves’ narratives presented a problem in the fabric of existence. Still, in many cases, antislavery movements relied upon these narratives as much as their proslavery counterparts. On both sides of this debate, the (actual or literary) voice of the “native” or the black was “the ventriloquist’s puppet: a voice that speaks, paradoxically, to confirm its place outside the social and discursive orders and that simulates a human attribute only to show itself as lacking that selfsame attribute” (Gregg 8). And when Curtin and others suggest that “moral condemnation” is beyond our reach due to some implicit notion of historical aesthetic distancing, we might remind him to “pay attention to the political, discursive, and aesthetic traditions that produce this idea of the Negro [person] and study the rhetorical and figural uses to which she/it is being put”

(Gregg 7). Furthermore, “there is an important sense in which the trope *cannot* be untangled from the imagination and subjectivity and their abiding discourses that gave [the trope of the Negro person] life” (Gregg 7).

As this “semantic grid” comes into focus, another question comes to the front: what broader institutional contexts conditioned the making of human commodities within the landed proprietorship of the “plantation complex” as well as the broader institutional implications contained therein?

This question upends two implicit projects that prefigures the making of human commodities and, therefore, remains central to the inquiry I am pursuing in this thesis. Pressing a bit further, these two projects are distinguished between and authorized by incompatible moral claims and epistemological procedures: The first project concerns establishing the importance of the plantation economy and society to the study of African American history and life; secondly, is the studying of African American history and life from within the context of the plantation economy and society. So, for example, in her powerfully subtle and far-reaching meditation, “Novel and History, Plot and Plantation,” Sylvia Wynter asks: “First, let us define our terms. What, in our context, is the novel? What, in our context, is history? What *is* our context?” (95). In the ambit of the marketplace of flesh, this section’s focus being that of *the land*, Wynter begins her meditation by recalling a passage from Jamaican economist, George Beckford’s 1972 *Persistent Poverty: Underdevelopment in Plantation Economies of the Third World*, wherein he writes: “In America, the locus of the plantation system is the Caribbean. Indeed, this region is generally regarded as the classic plantation area. So much so that social anthropologists,” Beckford concludes, “have described the region as a culture sphere, labelled Plantation America”

(qtd. in Wynter 95). Because these regions were “planted” with people who were in place in order to facilitate the production of a single commodity for the market, “plantation-societies ... came into being as adjuncts to the market system; their peoples came into being as an adjunct to the product ...which they produced” (95). Considering the fact that humans came into being tethered to products which they produced, which were themselves tethered to the market system for which these products were produced, we come to understand something of the preliminary process of making and forging human commodities.

The tremendous and lasting effect of the forging of human beings into commodities that existed in relationship to other commodities, can be summarized by Eric Williams’ classic and unsettling thesis: “[Plantation] societies were both cause and effect of the emergence of the market economy; an emergence which marked a change of such world historical magnitude, that we are all without exception still ‘enchanted,’ imprisoned, deformed and schizophrenic in its bewitched reality” (qtd in Wynter 95).

The notion of the marketplace of the flesh, symbiotically links *the sea* and *the land*, to show how the of forging human commodities out of the lives of Africans, occurred on both earthly terrains, under the codified auspices of law: 1) to either shape the market system under the pressures of the emergent demands of the emerging selfsame market system; or, 2) to guide captains, sailors, crewman, and merchants who had to discern the extent to which working-class identity (“the meaning of whiteness, power, and the fragility of their own freedom as laborers within the histories and memories” (Mustakeem 4) of slavery) could be forged and worked out over the “waterways,” the “seminal spaces where history was made and slaves were produced” (Mustakeem 10).

What Wynter points out, in recalling Eric Williams, is that the modern world cannot escape and, in fact, is still “enchanted” by the ambit that is an institutional outcome of the extraordinarily violent regime of terror marked by the illicit Atlantic trade in human flesh. These (obvious) linkages are inextricably present and condition the emergence of economies, markets, and disciplines. Therefore, when thinking about the emergence of “the novel form itself, according to Goldmann,” Wynter continues, it “came into being with the extension and dominance of the market economy, and ‘appears to us to be in effect, the transposition on the literary plane, of the daily life within an individualist society, born of production for the market’” (Wynter 95). Further, “history, then, these things that happen, is, in the plantation context, itself, fiction; a fiction written, dominated, controlled by forces external to itself” (Wynter 95). Therefore, regarding the novel, an epic form, recalling “Lukacs’ remarks,” Wynter conclusively observes that “the hero is essentially at one with the values of his world. Within the novel form, the rupture of the hero and the now inauthentic values of his world begins” (96). Thus, we come to terms with the fact that “the novel form and [plantation] societies are twin children of the same parents” (95).

If these inextricably linked forms, one disciplinary, the other, societal, are conditioned by the symbiosis of land and sea, the Middle Passage and the “plantation complex,” a dual marketplace of the flesh, we therefore arrive at the point of a semantic grid that thereby allows for the critical interrogation, for example of the kinds of theorizing that takes place along the terrains of Africa Derived bodies—Edelman’s queer theorizing and utilization of Harriet Jacob’s literary body to imagine a site to which the queer returns and recovers the shattered pieces of and

reassemble the self in the writing of the fiction of a queer genealogy whose primacy is located at the site of the Middle Passage.

Therefore, *the land*, our second site of the making of human commodities, comes into being through a process of legal ontologization. The “semantic grid” on which theoretical maneuvers occur—whether we are talking the theoretical justification of the institution’s existence or the historical and contemporary utilization of black archetypal figures derived from historical modes of representations in literary texts—“would be codified by law.” Cambridge University historian, Betty Wood in *Origins of American Slavery: Freedom and Bondage in the English Colonies*, continues:

In 1705, almost exactly a century after the first colonists had set foot on Jamestown, the House of Burgess codified and systematized Virginia’s laws of slavery. These laws would be modified and added to over the next century and a half, but the essential legal framework within which the institution of slavery would subsequently operate has been put in place. It had taken the English in Virginia the best part of one hundred years to finalize their construction of a legal status quite unknown in the Common Law of England, to declare unequivocally that Africans were a form of property: that they were, and henceforth would remain, ‘Strangers’ and ‘outsiders’ who would be required to live out their lives according to an entirely different set of laws from those that governed people of European birth and ancestry. (qtd. in Wood 92)

The consequences of the legalistic precarity, the structuring of the “semantic grid” within which they “would live out their lives,” is elucidated by Saidiya Hartman:

The calculation of slave existence was determined by the base conditions necessary for functioning as an effective laborer, and the extent of protection to life and limb was decided by diminutions in the value of capital. Within these boundaries, degrees of injury and magnitudes of labor decided the meaning of the slave person. It is difficult to acknowledge this savage quantification of life and person as a recognition of black humanity, for as argued earlier, this restricted stipulation of humanity intensified the pained existence of the enslaved. This scale of subjective value was a complement rather than a corrective to the decriminalization of white violence that was the foundation of slave law.

(Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection* 95)

The marketplace of the flesh, the symbiosis of the sea and the land, provides profound insight into what Marcus Wood understands as the “cultural inheritance of Atlantic slavery” and the tremendous extent to which the “black slave body [has] been incorporated into the Western cultural archive” (Wood 398, 401). Additionally, what the historical context, above, intends towards is establishing the *semantic grid* within which slave life was to be lived, while also detailing the structuring of that *semantic grid*—as it manifested and came into being across the watery space of the Middle Passage as well as its landed articulations within the “plantation complex”—that served not only as “[s]ites of absolute power and exploitation—whether economic, sexual or physical” but also as sites whereby “arts and literature generated by slavery appear to be consistently fueled by a desire, on the part of the creator, to subsume the traumatic experience of the slave” (Wood 403, 401). The attempt to utopianize desire through subsuming the traumatic experiences of enslavement might otherwise be understood as the tragic attempt to

reckon with the shattered self, ontologically, at the site of the slave-body. This move is further impacted by a temporal interruption, a *desubjectivation*, of which the remainder is a *subjectless* positionality.

The attempted arrival at such a positionality, on the part of white queer theorists, might be brought back to the moment of symbiosis, between *the land* and *the sea*. The marketplace of the flesh, as it was constructed and contained within the terrains of both, land and sea, falls under the auspices of the processes of forging human commodities for market economies as well as for the task of grounding and establishing forms of the *sovereign*.

Fetish and the Marketplace of Desire

Let us remember that the 'fetish' is an entirely European term, a measure of persistent European failure to understand Africa.

Anthony Shelton, "The Chameleon Body: Power, Mutilation and Sexuality."

Valerie Steele, in her work on fetishism, defines fetishism through four levels of increasing intensity. The fourth and most intensified level, "high level fetishism," is determined when "specific stimuli take the place of a human participant" (Wood 413). Wood reads, through Steele's fetish theory, Thomas Clarkson's *Substance of the Evidence of Sundry Persons on the Slave Trade Collected in the Course of a Tour Made in the Autumn of the Year 1788*, the first of two "classic and most wide-selling inventories of slave torture" (413). Clarkson reports, upon his entrance in a Liverpool shop, on the display of torture devices sold specifically for enslavement of black bodies. Revealing his purchases, one of which, a "speculum oris," he explains the use for as follows:

This instrument is known among surgeons, having been invented to assist them in wrenching open the mouth as in the case of a locked jaw. But it had got into use in this trade. On asking the seller of the instruments upon what occasion it was used there, he replied, that the slaves were frequently so sulky as to shut their mouths against all sustenance, and this with a determination to die; and that it was necessary their mouths should be forced open to throw in nutriment, that they would had purchased them might incur no loss by their death. (qtd. in Woods 414)

Clarkson's fondling and acquisition of these enslavement tools, along with imaging how the devices were used on black bodies, is what determines Wood's diagnosis of Clarkson's high-level fetishism: "specific stimuli," the torture devices, have subsumed the human—the enslaved black body. Clarkson's cataloguing of these torture devices itself is an act of sadism. Wood insists, "In its peculiar narrative movements this passage can be read as classic SM fantasy" (414). Further, Wood resolves (and this is worth quoting at length):

As Clarkson moves methodically through the instructions for use, the objects hang there in space, exactly as the mask, speculums, paddles, and whips hang in space in the virtual reality of the Bondage Boutique catalogues, with their rather more enthusiastic descriptive copy. Yet in both cases the implements await the gaze of the viewer to imagine the pain they can inflict, they can wait empty. Their ghastly potentiality sets out a challenge for us to humanize them, for us to get inside them and adopt, in a grotesque gesture, simultaneously the position of the suffering of the slave and the action of the torturer. *These torture implements are icons, commodities, abolition fetishes.* (415; emphasis added)

Might these torture devices, regardless of narrative, exhibit as high-level fetishism, no matter the context (since the content is preemptively inscribed)? Further, what implications does Wood's thesis have for the practice of S/M? As I have argued and Biman Basu has proffered, "The materiality of the contemporary practice of SM desire is an enactment of the contemporary poststructuralist articulation of the dissolution of the subject," however, it must be elucidated that desire to inhabit desubjectivation through torture devices utilized during the Atlantic slave trade contradicts the quest for a subjectless state (163). The fetish of black flesh, materially presently or absently present, is implicit in S/M "play"—a hauntological anxiety. Preemptively racialized, "SM desire" rather reifies subjectivity.

In the introduction, I attempted to outline a brief history of the mutual production of the racialization of blackness and homosexuality, in which both subject positions were constructed as nonnormative, and the prior sections of this chapter's "scene" historicized the fused ontologies of blackness and whiteness at the site of enslavement. Conclusively, what this chapter attempts to stage is the "scene of subjection" that is always already inscribed with a "libidinal investment in violence," in order to even further situate the historical groundwork necessary to define the trouble with queer negativity's mutual nonexclusive pairing of American enslavement with an antisocial sexuality. Queer negativity, foregrounded by Leo Bersani and Lee Edelman embraces this antinormativity, constructing a theory of sexual praxis which transcends the subject through pulverization of subjectivity. And precisely here is where we witness the sovereign who feigns nonsovereignty—the hauntological anxiety of the inscrutable white subject. This voluntary dejection from social normativity eschews identity politics, precisely because whiteness affords a "anarchical libertinage" (Mehta 64). Reapplying Mehta's postulation of "anarchical libertinage"

to white queer negativity, I ask (though of a different subject), “[H]ow [might the historicities of enslavement] with such unrestrained foundations fortify themselves from being usurped by a variety of theorists who are commonly considered as anathema to liberalism, including not merely anarchists but also, for instance, the infamous French profligate the Marquis de Sade?” (Mehta 64). Bersani and Edelman are indeed such anarchical libertines—white, male intellectual “rakes” who quite literally quest to, in Edelman’s words, “fuck the future,” (or fuck to erase the future if we answer Bersani’s question in, “Is the Rectum is a Grave”):

Fuck the social order and the Child in whose name we’re collectively terrorized;
fuck Annie; fuck the waif from Les Mis; fuck the poor, innocent kid on the Net;
fuck Laws both with capital ls and small; fuck the whole network of Symbolic
relations and the future that serves as its prop” (*No Future* 29).

While both Edelman and Bersani have been taken to task for the white subjectivity (which is to say, a power-position) of their “anarchical libertinage,” what needs appending is that the specter haunting their violent, incessant fucking—the queer inscrutability worked out and worked on through S/M play—is the hauntology of enslavement.

The scene of Edelman and Bersani’s “anarchical libertinage” makes a playground of racialized history, further evacuating the history of eroticized violence. Here the critique of critical (queer) theory being vacuous and abstract rather than material is “fleshed out.” While the power play of erotic violence through S/M may “switch,” the material erotic violence enacted on black flesh is, as Spiller’s informs us, always present—blackness itself is inscribed by enslavement’s “hieroglyphics of the flesh.” Basu summarizes the abstraction of this “anarchical libertinage” enacted by queer S/M “play”:

Foucault thinks that “even when the roles are stabilized, you know very well that it is always a game” (*Essential* 169). Bersani claims that sadomasochistic practice involves an “aestheticization” of “power structures” (89). What I am suggesting is that we cannot “stylize,” “aestheticize,” and “play” away the reality of power relations in the practice of S&M. (50 n. 8).

At present, queer theory, most precisely in the work of Elizabeth Freeman’s erotohistoriography, attempts to “play” upon power and race rather than evacuate these operatives. Freeman will be engaged more fully in the upcoming “scene,” “Colonial Binds.” Quite honestly and plainly, I will state here: Making transparent the absence presence of blackness in S/M play does not erase or diminish the power of whiteness. I contend that the transparency of racialized S/M scenes does little more than disclose and reveal the hauntological aspect and fetish quality of sadomasochism.

Mehta’s “unrestrained foundations” need not fortify themselves, since they are not all that divergent from anarchists—the utilization of the subjected toward the liberation of the sovereign is the constant. I’m suggesting here that the normative and antinormative converge at the site of the sovereign and the subjugated, frequently at the location of black flesh. In this postulation, it becomes imperative to reiterate that black bodies have put into service by queer theory. Queer theory’s antisocial sexuality is postulated as “anarchical libertinage,” which is to insinuate a sexual emancipation, while black sexuality, all the while yet nonnormative, remains inscribed as pathological. This twisting juncture problematizes the mutual production of blackness and homosexuality evidenced by Somerville. Though mutually marked as hypersexual and sexually uncivilized, whiteness retains its power to supersede its sexual deviancy, to the

effect of being enveloped into the national fold through homonormativity or to reject the proffered subjectivity of normativity for a self-proclaimed “anarchical libertinage.”

In 2016, Spillers delivered the Henry Louis Gates, Jr. lecture at Yale University, “Shades of Intimacy: What the Eighteenth Century Teaches Us,” wherein she discusses her continuing inquiry on forming a grammar—“how to name” the political economy of intimacy during enslavement, “intimacy in a circumstance where flesh becomes the medium of exchange” (24:33, 23:37). The labor of the enslaved was physical labor which included sexual and reproductive work. The enslaved woman, systemically impregnated by the slave master, physically subsidized the American slave plantation. According to the matrilineal measure enacted by property law, a child born to an enslaved woman inherited her status as property of the plantation, of the slave master. Sylvia Wynter, in an examination of “Lady Nugent’s Journal,” a “mistress of the house” on a Jamaican slave plantation, cites Gilberto Freyre, 19th century author of *Masters and Slaves*, who determines

In reality neither White nor Negro in himself was the active force, in the sexual and class relations that developed. What was given expression in these relations was the spirit of the economic system that like a powerful god, divided us into enslaver and enslaved...There is no slavery without sexual depravity...Depravity is the essence of such a regime...In the first place economic interest favours it, by creating in the owners of men an immoderate desire to possess the greatest number of crias (children). (314)

While Freyre sublimates the slaveholder’s power into a dynamic of political economy, effectively denying the “libidinal investment in violence,” he articulates the lucrative

consequence of this dynamic: “The most productive feature of slave property is the generative belly.’ The master of these slaves favored dissoluteness in order to increase the herd...” (Nabuco qtd. in Wynter 315). This is to say, the perpetration of sexual violence of the slave master upon the enslaved woman is “the kind of violence that, of course, also then increased the slaveholder’s...economic bottom line” (Spillers, “Shades”63:27). Not to construct rape as motivated solely with economic benefit, however, Leon Higginbotham contends, “the end of slavery is not merely ‘the [economic] profit of the master’ but also the joy of the master in the sexual conquest of the slave” (qtd. in Hartman, *Scenes* 86). The production of the slaveholder’s (sadoomasochistic) sexual enjoyment was imbedded into the economy of enslavement.

The absence of freedom mandates the absence of love, concludes Spillers. A perverted “intimacy” between property and property owner was thusly defined through “physical violation” and “sadoomasochism.” The enslaved women “subjected to the torture of the flesh in the discipline of the sexual and laboring body become the quintessential image of the terror of the peculiar institution...The erotic and the sexual are meaningless except that we recognize them by their absence not protected by the ties of sentiment” (“Shades” 63:27). A new grammar articulating an intimacy of the flesh must be articulated from this absence which, isolated at the epidermis, is requisitely anti-social. Social bonds are not forged. As Harman determines, the absence of freedom, the usurpation of the sexual integrity of the enslaved, reveals that,

[V]arious mechanisms of sexual domination—the repression of rape, the negation of kinship, and the legal invalidation of slave marriage—act in concert...[S]exuality is a central dimension of the power exercised over and

against the slave population and entails everything from compulsory couplings to the right to manage life.” (*Scenes* 84)

The “mechanisms of sexual domination” constitute the biopolitical anti-sociality of enslavement.

Not only is this intimacy of the flesh anti-social, as Thomas insists, it is defined by “raw sexual terror,” an inextricable binding of violence and the erotic. An absence of sentiment is not the singular characteristic of “intimacy” under enslavement and imperial desire. The prominent property of the intimacy of the flesh is the loss of bodily integrity. Spillers furthers,

The single most powerful evidence of the loss of freedom is the fact that bodies lose their integrity and may be invaded or entered, so to speak, by coercive power. This touch that we associate with intimacy can, under the right conditions, engender invasion and violence and in its immediacy in relationship to the enslaved, robs the haptic power to heal, to bind, to cure and becomes instead the power to wound and violate. (“*Shades*” 35:05)

An intimacy of the flesh turns inside out the customary grammar of intimacy—from bonding to a wounding attachment of capture. The “haptic power” enacted through enslavement is a sadomasochistic intimacy, an erotic violation that occurs at the site of the flesh. The flesh, as Spillers reminds us, appears prior to the body and demarcates the division “between captive and liberated subject-positions” (Spillers, “*MBPM*” 206). Embodiment is reserved for citizen-subjects, while the flesh of enslaved subjects serves as a “primary narrative...[to] mean its seared, divided, ripped-apartness, riveted to the ship’s hole, fallen, or ‘escaped’ overboard” (“*MBPM*” 206). The intimacy of the flesh is inscribed with erotic violence.

“Haptic power” as the “power to wound and violate” is recorded by William Goodell’s interrogation of slave codes. Goodell deduces, “The smack of the whip is all day long in the ears of those who are on the plantation, or in the vicinity; and it is used with such dexterity and severity as not only to lacerate the skin, but to tear out small portions of the flesh at almost every stake” (qtd. in Spillers, “MBPM” 207). The flesh of the enslaved, categorically, becomes (literally) inscribed with debility by the whip—the whip’s “undecipherable markings on the captive body render a kind of hieroglyphics of the flesh whose severe disjuncture come to be hidden to the cultural seeing by skin color” (Spillers, “MBPM” 207). The violated flesh becomes hereditary post-abolition, demarcating “*symbolic substitutions*,” wherein “the flesh is the concentration of ‘ethnicity’” (Spillers, “MBPM” 207). Black flesh is symbolically, contemporarily, through the “hieroglyphics of the flesh,” “deemed available for injury...objects of disposability” (Puar, *TRTM* 81). American black subjecthood has been constituted through a violation of the integrity of the body—the very denial of embodiment through the reduction of the black subject to mere flesh.

The whip is a libidinal tool. A “female body strung from a tree limb, or bleeding from the breast any given day of field work because the ‘overseer,’ standing in the length of the whip, has popped her flesh open” evidenced not only a violation of the flesh by the whip but also a loss of bodily integrity perpetrated an erotic invasion by the slaveholder (Spillers, “MBPM” 207). Written on the flesh of enslaved women is additionally the sexual sovereignty of the slaveholder, a sovereignty defined by the “invasion” of captive flesh. “Absolutely subject to the will of another,” the deduction of the enslaved woman as captive flesh creates a dialectic where “rape is unimaginable” (Hartman, *Scenes* 80-81). The slaveholder’s titillation through his

sadomasochistic, dual rupture of the enslaved flesh is everywhere evidenced by the “smack of the whip ...all day long in the ears” and the progeny of children resulting from this intimacy of the flesh. Saidiya Hartman, in *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-making in Nineteenth-Century America*, describes what she terms “the normativity of rape”:

The rape of black women existed as an unspoken but normative condition fully within the purview of everyday sexual practices...the normativity of sexual violence establishes an inextricable link between racial formation and sexual subjection...The virtual absence of prohibitions or limitations in the determination of socially tolerable and necessary violence sets the stage for the indiscriminate use of the body for pleasure, profit, and punishment. (85)

“Pleasure, profit, and punishment” is the triad of enslavement enacted through “sexual subjection.” What is crucial to comprehend is that sadomasochistic erotics were not exercised by select slaveholders but rather intrinsic to the very architecture of enslavement. The distillation of an enslaved person into captive flesh articulated the prerequisite necessary to violently manufacture the subjectless status of the enslaved—the culmination of desubjectivation. The desubjectivation of the enslaved woman was articulated through systemic rape.

Spillers, recollecting willing herself to view the film version of *Twelve Years a Slave*, reveals, “I was afraid to go to see what I actually had to see in the movie” (“Shades” 31:37). She recounts

You will recall the juxtaposition of two scenes...and this is the work of film editing, of course, but then we also imagine that something like that actually happened quite a lot in real life. The scene where one of the protagonists is

beaten takes place the night after the master has been in person's bed... This is what I'm talking about when I asked the question about what intimacy or close proximity promises or guarantees in the social order, and in this case, it guarantees nothing." ("Shades" 31:37)

The scene of the beating that Spillers' is referring to is a scene whose duration is nearly three minutes. The scene reenacts a sadomasochistic whipping. Epps, the slave master, takes the whip from enslaved Northup who fails to exhaust the torture of Patsey. In an overtly eroticized act, Epps is filmed for 41 seconds whipping Patsey to his own (implicitedly erotic) culmination. In this scene, Patsey is naked, tied to a whipping post. The voyeur's vantage point is of her backside. Epps thrusts the whip as he thrusts his hips. The whip becomes a phallus. Epps' lips purse in anticipation as the whip nears Patsey. His mouth opens wide in exaltation as the whip meets Patsey's flesh. Her flesh ruptures. Epps' climax is envisioned as blood ejaculates from Patsey's back, her buttocks quivering. The scene elicits other than the compassions it portends. A YouTube upload of the clip warns, "For entertainment purposes only," and further elucidates Spillers' analysis (*YouTube*, "The Beating of Patsey"). Jax, a commenter, writes of Epps's face, "Thats the face I make when I masterbate" [*sic*]. Jack Hoodie, asks, "Who else masturbated to this?" In addition to 20 "likes," this commenter receives many affirmatives. AJ exalts, "I wanted to fuck her raw after this scene. Anyone else turned on by this scene?" (*YouTube*, "The Beating of Patsey"). These comments are thematic, not only of the reaction to the film but also of the white gaze upon the suffering of black bodies.

"The spectacle of punishment" enacted upon black bodies did not dissipate post-emancipation (Hartman, *Scenes* 20). The white voyeur, as evidenced by both the erotics of the

whipping scene and the titillated commenters, evidences the interminable “hieroglyphics of the flesh” that fuses blackness with suffering through the prism of the erotic. Titillation takes the place of empathy under the white gaze. As Hartman concludes, “[T]he elusiveness of black suffering can be attributed to a racist optics in which black flesh is itself identified as the source of opacity, the denial of black humanity, and the effacement of sentience integral to the wanton use of the captive body” (Hartman, *Scenes* 20). So engrained is this racist optic that a film motivated by an intent to make transparent the suffering of the black body might be said to reinscribe the very suffering it attempts to undo. Marston Anderson, in *The Limits of Realism*, terms this effect as a “troublesome aesthetic dilemma” through which the reproduction of violence aesthetically enacts further violence. Anderson avers, the filmmaker must address this “troublesome aesthetic dilemma,” “lest [the artist’s] own work be guilty of further disseminating the spectacle of violence, the [literary] narration must, while faithfully rendering scenes of paradigmatic social significance such as depicted...disallow *unthinking transmission* of their original message” (qtd. in Chow, *Primitive Passions* 206).

The “violence of communication” that Anderson is concerned with, translated to *12 Years a Slave*, is intrinsically erotic and specifically sadomasochistic. Said another way, it is pornographic. If we recall Spillers’ postulation on the sexualization of absolute subjection, “the captive body translates into a potential for pornotroping and embodies sheer physical powerlessness” (“MBPM” 206). The prototype fashioned at enslavement’s inception overlydetermined the slaveholder (that is, whiteness) as the masochist and the enslaved as the sadist, which is inscribed as the “hieroglyphics of the flesh” of blackness.

Scenes of suffering need not exhibit naked bodies or script sexual encounters to titillate the white, masochistic voyeur. Slave narratives recounting torture and suffering were not uncommonly used as masturbatory material. White abolitionists parading the violation of black bodies as immoral, did not however, perceive those same bodies as moral beings. In fact, in a slippage of erotic projection and bourgeois sensibilities, not only was the impulse of the erotic to be suppressed, “the desire to inflict or receive pain became a marker of savagery” (Musser 100). Sadomasochistic fantasies were thusly projected onto “savage” and “primitive” flesh and those who violated these subjected bodies. Spillers terms this maneuver “splitting the difference,” which described the “long train of abolitionist thinkers who embrace emancipation yet believe at the same time that the African is far less human and socialized” (“Shades” 40:59). Abolitionist texts, then, in addition to arguing for emancipation, proffered black suffering and black flesh for fantasies elsewhere taboo. The widely-cited reference on sexual pathology, Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis*, details a case study in which the patient utilized Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as masturbatory material. The patient reveals, “Particularly exciting for me was the thought of a man being hitched to a wagon in which another man sat with a whip, driving and whipping him” (qtd. in Musser 100). In *Sensational Flesh: Race, Power, and Masochism*, Amber Jamilla Musser confronts this citation with an implicit but unasked question: Did we unconsciously and compulsively ascribe race to these men? What is the pattern of racialization that is inherent in this scene? Musser analyzes,

The explicit eroticization of suffering is striking for its omission of race. The writer does not describe the man being whipped as black, but by invoking *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* he does not need to. It is understood that the body that suffers will

be black. Therefore, we cannot consider his pleasure in the scene without considering race, especially because his pleasure is derived from the black body in pain. Whiteness, Farley argues, produces a ‘sadistic’ pleasure from the black body in pain, whereas the pleasure of blackness is a form of humiliation... What is ambiguous in this fantasy is the narrator’s subject position—Is he identifying with the person being whipped, that is to say, has he substituted his own body for the body of the suffering black man, is he the one causing the pain, or is he a voyeur, someone gaining pleasure (corporeal, physical, or psychic) from this scenario through the working of empathy? (100)

While Musser’s point on the absent present of race is astute, I take issue with the subject position being flexible. The titillation, no matter the patient’s erotic proclivity of subject position is preemptively racialized. The white patient is always already the sadist. If it can be said that the patient climaxed through the pornographic empathy of the masochistic position of being dominated, it must be understood to be a voluntary dejected from his actual subject position: The white patient does not find himself, materially and permanently transposed into the subjugated and tortured black body. The titillation of a masochistic empathy is inherently dependent upon the temporal moment of the erotic encounter.

The temporary script is necessary for compartment into the subject position of captive flesh. That is to say, sadomasochistic “play” in which the white body, dominant through racialized sociality, consents to fantasize the submissive subject position (inherently involuntary through racialized sociality and implicitly black), depends on the “game” ending. No doubt this slippage into subjected and tortured body resulting in titillation additionally constructs the

projection of hypersexuality onto the black body. If the white patient finds erotic scintillation in a submissive, violated subject position, it allows him to project his own sadistic impulses as originating in the body tortured.

Hartman describes this projection as “the imputation of lasciviousness that dissimulated and condoned the sexual violation of the enslaved, and the punitive recognition of will and responsibility that justified punishment while denying the slave the ability to forge contracts, testify, or sustain natal and conjugal relations, enjoyment registered and effaced the violence of property relations” (*Scenes* 25). What Hartman problematizes here is the ability of whiteness to empathize genuinely with the subjection of blackness. Imputing sexual and masochism into the tortured black body not only allows for enjoyment and titillation of “playing” a submissive subject position, it also, paradoxically, validates the erotic torture enacted by the sadist, which, outside of “play” and fantasy, is recognized solitarily through white, material power. As the iconic sadist Marquis de Sade himself insisted (and through whom such a philosophic and material lineage prospered), “The degradation which characterizes the state into which you plunge him by punishing him pleases, amuses, and delights him. Deep down he enjoys having gone so far as to deserve being treated in such a way” (*120 Days of Sodom*).

As Harman concludes, “despite the antislavery blackface of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, the violation of the ersatz black body engendered pleasure” (*Scenes* 26). Further, the white empath, in the end, is not identifying with the human that is black in order to embody the sensations of their suffering, but rather he “must supplant the black captive [with a white body] in order to give expression to black suffering, and as a consequence, the dilemma—the denial of black sentience and the obscurity of suffering—is not attenuated but instantiated,” resulting in a

“violence of identification” (Hartman, *Scenes* 19, 20). To return to Musser’s assertion of the narrator’s subject position being ambiguous, in conversation with Hartman’s account of a white abolitionist, an alignment begins to emerge, evidencing Spillers’ “splitting the difference.” The sexual pervert masturbating to abolitionist texts and the abolitionist themselves are not divergent in their inability to effectively empathize with the black subject; both require acute black suffering in its most grotesque display in order to recognize the black subject’s humanity. At this climatic recognition, the black subject has both been displaced with a white sentience and has titillated the white spectator with the pleasure of their own power.

As evidenced by both the film *12 Years a Slave* and its concomitant YouTube comments, the white spectator titillated by black suffering has sustained, post-emancipation. Marcus Wood interrogates precisely the aforementioned tension: the slippage amongst the formulaic triangle of slavery, empathy and pornography. The tension arrives when empathy for the enslaved turns pornographic. In his conclusion, “Slavery and Memory, What Happened, What’s Happening? Fetish, Bondage, and Slave Bodies,” Wood opens with “an obscene example of what the cultural inheritance of Atlantic slavery can mean for twentieth-century sado-masochistic bondage culture, not to mention the casual reader of pornography” (398).

Obscene Desire

*The materiality of the contemporary practice of SM desire is an enactment
of the contemporary poststructuralist articulation
of the dissolution of the subject.*

—Biman Basu, *The Commerce of Peoples:
Sadomasochism and African American Literature*

The “obscene example” Wood evidences is a 1998 edition of the notorious masochistic tale of Pauline Reage’s *The Story of O*, in which an appendix has been added, “A Slave’s Revolt:

An Essay on *The Story of O*,” by Jean Paulhan. The essay, an anecdotal recounting by Paulhan, tells of “some two hundred Blacks” upon their emancipation from enslavement, “presenting themselves at the door of their former master...and besought him to take them back into bondage” (qtd. in Wood 389). What is made transparent with this essay’s addition to *The Story of O* is that the enslaved body is preemptively black, even in the absence of blackness. To speak of sadomasochism is to speak of the Atlantic slave trade. To maximize the titillation of masochism, *The Story of O* is tethered to the history of involuntary enslavement. Wood claims,

The crucial move, the annexing of Atlantic slavery, as an ideal model for sexual bondage slavery, is a troubling gesture. The trouble lies in the unproblematic manner in which the connection is engineered: an unsubstantiated anecdote reporting the voluntary re-enslavement of a group of *nineteenth-century plantation slaves justifies the pornographic fantasy of O’s total abandonment to her voluntary sexual expression.* (399-400; emphasis added)

“O’s total abandonment” can also be read as a quest for desubjectivation (Foucault’s notion of subject dissolution). What is proffered through O’s quest—the lack of a subject position, is aligned with the subject position of the enslaved. The subject position of the enslaved, as we have reviewed, has been determined by the reduction of the black human to captive flesh, flesh inscribed by the slave master’s whip. Captive flesh, in through this annexing, is written as the apex of desubjectivation. The position of the involuntary enslaved black subject, through this maneuver, is propped up as, paradoxically, the apex of freedom through the poststructuralist compulsion to “pulverize the subject.” In the case of the enslaved Black American, the subject is quite literally pulverized. A “troubling gesture,” no doubt.

Wood, while not engaging poststructuralist notions, furthers the idealization of desubjectivation equating freedom. He furthers,

What is being celebrated is the notion that the choice to live in a state of enslavement constitutes an ultimate form of freedom. The state is desirable, ideal, because the more exploited and abused you are, the less you have to take responsibility for your exploitation and abuse. Abuse is proof of freedom and the more conscious you are of this freedom from responsibility, the more you need to have this enslavement affirmed...[which is] perversely redefined as the achievement of liberty through voluntary re-enslavement rather than the more conventional option of emancipation. (399)

Reading Wood thoroughly, we see he is acknowledging additionally the moves of civilization discourse. While the forcibly enslaved may be unable to recognize legal emancipation (as proffered through the appended essay) or the “liberty” to be found in enslavement, the voluntarily enslaved is postulated to be enlightened to the “ultimate form of freedom” of a subjectless position. Of course, these positions are preemptively racialized—the involuntarily enslaved is to be read as the uncivilized, “primitive” black body, while the voluntarily enslaved is white and “modern.” Ideation of enslavement additionally attempts to unburden white guilt of slavery. “Playing” the masochist as a liberatory position ultimately diminishes, dissolves even, the material violence enacted upon millions of black people during involuntary enslavement. As Wood contends,

the art and literature generated by slavery appear to be consistently fueled by a desire, on the part of the creator, to subsume the traumatic experience of the slave.

That these appropriative processes extend to include pornography and the fetish is a disturbing fact, but also an inevitable process given the *convoluted operations of empathy* which provide a constant undertow within the literatures of slavery.

(401; emphasis added)

Desire is contingent upon the spectacle of suffering. Empathy is bound-up with desire, in other words. “The literatures of slavery” extend beyond slave narratives and abolitionist texts. “The literatures of slavery” are an absent presence that can be traced through the poststructuralist “pulverization of the subject,” sadomasochist desire, and, in fact, as Spillers’ avers, “there is not a subject that you can speak about in the modern world where you will not have to talk about African women and new world African women” (“MBPM” 308). And as Hartman reminds us, “sexual violence is crucial to the construction and experience of gender for black women” (*Scenes* 229). The implications for the writ of this erotic violence is incomprehensible in magnitude.

The “carnal dynamic” of white supremacy that runs compulsively in queer theory’s queer negativity is sadomasochism—an exercise of sexual sovereignty that requires one’s bodily boundaries to be overtaken in order that the other’s erotic freedom can be actualized. SM is, by definition, unequal, termed through dominance and submission and the “commingled affects” of pleasure and pain (Amin 73).

Queer negativity’s attention to Lacan’s *jouissance*—unbearable pleasure, or the tipping of pleasure into pain—has embraced these “commingled affects” as characteristic of anti-normativity, which is to say, desirable for negativity. Queer negativity, working through a radical paradigm of anti-normativity evaluates that “erotic egalitarianism” is normative (Amin

42). Contrarily, erotic inegalitarianism is the “impolite and impolitic admission that it gets off on power” (Amin 42). However, “the idealization of Western modernity as [erotically] egalitarian and democratic” is absurd (Amin 42). Here is the rub: While queer anti-normativity embraces erotic inegalitarianism, erotic inegalitarianism, is, historically, *normative*.

At the juncture where queer negativity’s ideation of the enslaved female body whose very subjecthood is constituted through raping and whipping meets its desire for *jouissance* through SM practices, preemptively arriving through a utopic desubjectivation, an illustration manifests of Thomas’ “carnal dynamic” of white supremacy. A “two-fold erasure” presents here: the initial erasure of the captive body as an “empty vessel” for the slave master and the eroticized violence of enslavement. Determines Thomas, “No one else exists; *nor does the sexual violence waged against us, by them*; further, this “erasure cannot be underestimated, for sexuality is academically, analytically coded to mean what colonizers do to themselves for pleasure, not what they do to the colonized for purposes of pain, pleasure, or politics” (23).

Chapter 3: Scene Two

Colonial Binds: Elizabeth Freeman's Erotohistoriography

There is no glory in this suffering; it is not an ode: it opens up only onto idiocy. Debility is that ground, a permanent one...where "intimate" suffering, both physical and psychic, joins with sexual excesses...Caught on the black slope where desire founders in drive or affect, where representations are blurred, where significations vanish, this form of sex is an inebriation, another word for debilitated suffering.

—Julia Kristeva

But however one views S/M, it is inescapably true that the body in sadomasochistic ritual becomes a means of invoking history—personal pasts, collective sufferings, and quotidian forms of injustice—in an idiom of pleasure. This is its scandal and its promise. And, I will risk saying, this mixture of scandal and promise may be especially potent in scenes of interracial S/M.

—Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*

Desire is always what is inscribed as a repercussion of the articulation of language at the level of the Other.

—Lacan

Fred Moten opens *In the Break: The Aesthetic of the Black Radical Tradition* in conversation with Saidiya Hartman's introduction in *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. Here, Moten is foremost interested in Hartman's refusal to re/enact Frederick Douglass' narrative accounting of his Aunt Hester's beating, which, according to Hartman, "reinforces the spectacular character of black suffering" (3). Further, Hartman's text sets to interrogate that "only more obscene than the brutality unleashed at the whipping post is the demand that this suffering be materialized and evidenced by the display of the tortured body or endless recitations of the ghastly and the terrible," inquiring, "[H]ow does one give expression to these outrages without exacerbating the indifference to suffering that is the consequence of the benumbing spectacle or contend with the narcissistic identification that obliterates the other or the prurience that too often is the response to such displays?" (4). Conclusively, Hartman seeks to address what violence is done by the retelling,

the rhetorical performative of the reenactment, though her larger concern of address is the opposing poles of abjection and desire—the substantiated slippage of horror into pleasure (Kristeva).

This is to ask, then, what of revisionist history when suffering is titillating? Moten’s question to Hartman at this juncture remains, “whether performance of subjectivity...always and everywhere reproduces what lies before it” (4). Does “intimate suffering” “open up only onto idiocy,” or does it, as Elizabeth Freeman would have it, “invoke history” in order to pervert dominant historical re/productions through “an idiom of pleasure?” Can subjectivity be remade or does historicity always already interpellate through “what lies before it?” Elizabeth Freeman claims, through the concept of erotohistoriography, that interracial S/M ritual can, through bodily sensations of pain and pleasure, reparatively reorganize history.

Fantasy, Fetish and the Flesh

Unquestionably, what this historicity depends upon is recognizable representations. When these recognizable representations, specifically here, black suffering, are eroticized, we’ve entered the domain of the fetish. According to David Marriott in “On Racial Fetishism,”

We must therefore distinguish the determination of the fetish-as-stereotype from the from the fantasies that sustain it, which derive pleasure from the mortification so consecrated but which leave us undisturbed in our everyday relationships, allowing us to explore our relations to ambivalence, but only in the absence of any crisis of dissolution. If the fetish is a defense against exposure, a defense crucial to the belief that it is possible to draw a veil over the (misrecognized) implications of others, this is because psychically it represents a disciplining of (egoic) enjoyment. *Politically, fetishism leaves us unfree within our*

representations but frees us from the presuppositions and outcomes of mutual exposure to ourselves and others. (emphasis mine; 218)

“Endless recitations” of a representation perpetually reconstitute the fetish. The pleasure derived from the fantasy of the fetish requires the continuity of the fantasy. As Hartman insists, the retelling of Aunt Hester’s beating reinstatiates the fantasy at every recitation. As previously discussed in Kraft-Ebing’s case study of the patient masturbating to a whipping scene, race is inherent in the titillation of suffering rather than articulated—an absent presence. While the whip may represent the fetish, the fantasy the fetish constitutes is the whip on black flesh, black suffering. In both this scene and in the scene of the beating of Aunt Hester, the erotic component is invisibly inherent (we recall here the routine rape of enslaved women that coincided with the physical torture of the enslaved). That is, the erotic isn’t displayed, because it has been removed—the “disciplining of the (egoic) enjoyment” has been employed, the real source of titillation is revealed in the fantasy rather than through the isolate of the fetish.

If, as Marriott states, “fetish is a defense against exposure,” and we recall Valerie Steele’s definition of high-level fetishism as the removal of the human from the fetish, we must reengage the fantasy operating the fetish to reveal what is at stake. As we have seen, the removal of the black body from the whipping scene conceals the fantasy of black suffering and isolates the whip as the fetish. Evidenced in historic and contemporary pornography’s trope of “BBC” (an acronym I’ll leave to the reader), the reduction of the human to an appendage or apparatus is another manifestation of fetishism. Marriott, citing Fanon, reveals, when one “let’s oneself go, that is, when one abandons oneself to the movement of images, one no longer perceives the negro, but a member: the negro is eclipsed. He is made a member. He *is* a penis” (218). The

fetishization of blackness through the reduction of dismemberment evidences a “shameful attachment,” a “stand-in for the *jouissance* whose proxy and meaning he [Fanon] is” (218).

Remembering Macharia’s claim that blackness is “the portal of homosexual desire,” along with my insistence that queer genealogies traced through blackness must be racially distinct, I aver that what is at stake in Freeman’s erotohistoriography is the “fantasmatic occlusion” of white desire for and enjoyment of black suffering (Marriott 216). What makes Freeman’s erotohistoriography “work” for her is the (black) body as fetish, as a recognizable representation of “invoking history—personal pasts, collective sufferings, and quotidian forms of injustice—in an idiom of pleasure...especially potent in scenes of interracial S/M” (137). What makes the scene “work” is precisely that imperial desire has been inscribed at the site of the whip on the black body. To remove the whip from the lashing black flesh is to enact high-level fetishism, to conceal the white fantasy of black suffering. Further, to place the fetishized whip outside the fantasy of black suffering and place the whip onto the white body makes impotent not only the fetish but more importantly the fantasy that Freeman postulates can rewrite history. The power inequity that Freeman admits is more “potent” in interracial S/M doesn’t work because the black body as masochist can be exchanged with the white body as sadist, but because, regardless of the temporal “switch” and queer, poststructuralist compulsion toward subject dissolution, the desire functioning in S/M play resides in the fantasy of the “pulverization of the [black] subject.”

Despite claims of restitution and reparation, attending to the other’s pleasure rather than suffering might not be what is transpiring in this “switch.” A “fetishistic commitment to the other’s *jouissance*, or pleasure” is a transference of a white desire for black suffering onto the black subject—black pleasure becomes the enjoyment of self-suffering, under this “switch.”

Fanon's "fetishistic substitution" concluding in the reduction of human for "penis" (as black man as solitarily phallic) illustrates this maneuver. This transference is also evidenced in the creation of the fetishized jezebel—the hypersexed enslaved woman who "tempted" the slave master. Sadism was assigned as resulting from the masochism of the enslaved woman rather than the depravity of the slave master's perverse sexual desire. In common, contemporary parlance, "S/he asked for it," would be the translation of this transference.

Considering this discussion of fetish and fantasy, I claim that Freeman's decisively white, gay uptake of queering history through S/M plantation play is "precisely the formal mechanism of fetishism...whereby *the signifier depends upon yet erases its signification*" (emphasis mine; Taussig 225). The signification in erotohistoriography is the fantasy of black suffering; the signifier is fetishized black flesh. Erotohistoriography in its

genealogizing is to restore the traces and erasures and weave a spell around what is, socially speaking, at stake in making. This amounts to a European history of consciousness making itself through making objects, and this involves a compulsion to fuse and separate and fuse once again the maker with the making with the thing made...the fetish takes us into the realm of praxis, and to genealogize the fetish...is in effect to problematize praxis—the subject making itself through making the object." (Taussig 225).

Freeman's project of erotohistoriography, through Taussig's theorizing, is a genealogy of the fetish, a queer *unbecoming* through the portal of blackness.

Freeman's queer temporal return acknowledges that "S/M is always...a racialized practice," but she insists, "S/M is not always racist" (Freeman 164). Considering S/M is power

eroticized, and nowhere is power disparity more (historically) apparent than in a slave economy, it is predictable and evidenced that interracial eroticism is potently power-infused. Which is to say, S/M is a colonializing practice. Here, I take Freeman to task, asserting in no uncertain terms: S/M is always already a racist practice, and her read of a black queer's man's film as an artifact for her thesis is appropriative and problematic.

Erotohistoriography and the Ideation of Violence

*Lacanian [queer] antinormativity...[turns] groundless,
senseless violence into an ideal.*
—Mari Ruti

Greg Thomas, in *The Sexual Demon of Colonial Power: Pan-African Embodiment and Erotic Schemes of Empire*, inadvertently answers Moten's question of reinscribing subjectivity, stating the performance of (sexual) subjectivity is implicated at the front through Western ideology. Further, Thomas incites, "'para-neurotic sadism and brutality' is conveyed as the socio-historical essence of European sexuality, after colonialism, in and for colonialism" (91). Freeman is in agreement with Thomas on this point, but slips in her assumption that we are *past* "after colonialism." Thomas' own thesis disarticulates the possibility of a ritualized S/M performance being able to interrupt or reorganize plantation history through the body. In other words, through Thomas' definition, Freeman's erotohistoriography represents a continuity of the "para-neurotic sadism and brutality" that is definitive of Western sexuality—be it queer or heterosexual, rather than a rupture.

To Freeman, our concern is psychic healing through a rewriting of history through the flesh. To this end, she assembles the neologism erotohistoriography, a "method" of "counterhistory,"

Erotohistoriography is distinct from the desire for a fully present past, a restoration of bygone times. Erotohistoriography does not write the lost object into the present so much as encounter it in the present, by treating the present itself as a hybrid. And it uses the body as a tool to effect, figure, or perform that encounter. Erotohistoriography admits that contact with historical materials can be precipitated by particular bodily dispositions, and that these connections may elicit bodily responses, even pleasurable ones, that are themselves a form of understanding. It sees the body as a method, and historical consciousness as something intimately involved with corporeal sensations. (95-6)

What we encounter in the present is bodies. Bodies that carry tightly bound significations, and in the case of racialization, firmly fused signifiers with the signified. Freeman's "corporeal sensations" are tethered to this "historical consciousness" in that what the body finds titillating is "precipitated by particular [raced] bodily dispositions." Hence, the utilization of "body as a tool" glides upon the very history Freeman wishes to transpose yet fails to invert.

The interracial S/M ritual Freeman exhibits as a positive performance of erotohistoriography reenacts whipping scenes. The film, *The Attendant*, by Isaac Julien, serves as the artifact through which she proffers her thesis. The plot of *The Attendant*

features a black museum guard who has an afterhours sexual encounter with a white museum visitor in one of the museum's galleries. The encounter, however, appears modeled on a painting depicting the transatlantic slave trade. Reality and fantasy begin to mix at this point, and the film becomes a series of tableaux vivants depicting the black man's domination by the white man. These images

invoke the transatlantic slave trade and the historical oppression of black people, but the atmosphere is suffused with eroticism and pleasure. (Musser 167)

To be clear, my concern here is not Julien's film but Freeman's possession of it toward her own conceptual utilization. For Freeman, the film's inversion of the whipping action upon the black body, transposed onto the white body being whipped, culminating in the interracial bodies standing side-by-side alters Thomas' "socio-historical essence of European sexuality." Except the white body being whipped interrupts the chain of signification that the fantasy requires. Rather than rewriting history as Freeman postulates, what is enacted is a pornographic scene that depend upon the very significations it attempts to elude. Here we must heed Thomas' contention that sadism and brutality, aligned with the erotic, are colonial conceptions. In fact, at this scene, Freeman signifies the whip with the phallus, converging brutality with the erotic, at the site of the black body.

The black body, conclusively, is activated as the vessel through which Freeman's work—the work of erotohistoriography as a queer temporality—is required. The slave economy is not altered through Freeman's thesis but is reinstantiated through what can only be understood as slave labor, working (through) the black body. The white body inversely whipped cannot hold the counter signification as whiteness itself is always already read as embodied, while the black body is read as mere flesh (Spillers). Thus, the very inversion of these histories does not, cannot, excess them into a body (or psyche) writ otherwise—the black and white body are not exchangeable under colonial consciousness.

Recalling Spillers concept, the "hieroglyphics of the flesh," the black body remains inscribed, as a resilient writ of slavery's heritage. The whip (and the phallus) leave

“undecipherable markings on the captive body [which] render a kind of hieroglyphics of the flesh whose severe disjunctures come to be hidden to the cultural seeing by skin color...[as] *symbolic substitutions* in an efficacy of meaning that repeat the initiating moments,” resulting “in person the marks of a cultural text whose inside has been turned outside” (“MBPM” 207). The white phallus upon the black body is the whip upon the black body. The slippage Freeman makes is too easily the erasure of the routine rape as a ritual of subjection. Black women (and men) serve/d as sexual chattel for white men. The history of slaveholders’ whip and phallus, as Spillers elucidates, writ upon the skin as the “hieroglyphics of the flesh,” remains in the American consciousness as black skin. The fusion of brutality and the erotic are the foundation and perpetuation of slavery’s empire, as the very rape of slave women procured the next generation of labor under the slave economy. To return to Hartman, what pleasure might be found in the performance of such an “endless recitations of the ghastly and the terrible?” (4).

Perhaps Freeman’s most blasphemous move in *Time Binds* is her mishandling and outright twist of Hartman’s own text. Freeman, at the front of her chapter, “Turn the Beat Around: Sadomasochism, Temporality, History,” frames the chapter’s thesis, “sadomasochism as...a finely honed erotohistoriographic instrument for encountering the horrors of the transatlantic [sic] slave trade” with a quote from Hartman’s own chapter on reparative memory, “Redressing the Pained Body: Toward a Theory of Practice.” Freeman, on her chapter’s first page, cites,

Hartman argues of black physicality, the very ravished, wounded, discontinuous, fragmented, subjected body that anchors the scene of white subjectification also,

potentially, 'holds out [more] possibility of restitution [than] the invocation of an illusory wholeness or the desired return to an originality plentitude.' (137)

Freeman either did not read Hartman's text's opening or was counting on her readers having not. As aforementioned, Hartman opens with the refusal to relay the "terrible spectacle" of Aunt Hester's beating. The possibility of which Hartman speaks is not of an inverse repetition of violence (through Freeman's postulation of a ritualized sadomasochistic exchange), but rather of a re/membering to counter the very denial of the hieroglyphics of the flesh, the scarring of the savaged body turned inside out, into a collective consciousness that is presently recounted (through a *symbolic substitution*) of flesh, specifically black skin. Freeman's "defense against exposure" is emptied when we instantiate Hartman's own words which preface Freeman's citation of Hartman. To fill in Freeman's gap, Hartman states,

The recognition of loss is a crucial element in redressing the breach introduced by slavery. This recognition entails a remembering of the pained body, not by way of a simulated wholeness but precisely through the recognition of the amputated body in its amputatedness, in the insistent recognition of the violated body as human flesh, in the cognition of its needs, and in the anticipation of its liberty.

(74)

This eliding by Freeman of Hartman's words with Freeman's own contrary intent is not only in grave error, but racialized. We must pause here and interrogate whose liberty is being anticipated through the re/marking of black flesh? Neither must we forget queer negativity's project of subjectivation through the erotic and how it might inform Freeman's postulations. The white queer, through a "commingling of pleasure and pain" (Amin 73) seeks "pulverization" of

subjecthood. The subjection of the enslaved black person becomes desirous through this formulation, a utopic state of unbecoming for white queer anti-normativity. Though Freeman's erotohistoriography, the "recognition of loss" of the "pained body" of enslavement becomes turned inside-out. The white, temporal escape into the masochistic subject position in Freeman's erotohistoriographic S/M play postures that there is pleasure to be found among pain. The liberty that Hartman anticipates is not the liberty that Freeman gestures. While Hartman's liberty bespeaks ontological emancipation from subjection, Freeman's liberation echoes that in the Reage's *Story of O*—that of voluntary enslavement, "the ultimate form of freedom."

Liberationists' Libidinal Investments

Freeman's postulations are historically continuous in that they posture sexuality through the portal of blackness and are contingent upon black suffering, but what might not be apparent at the front is that her "liberating" alibi also is steadfastly historical. Two significant liberal maneuvers are apparent in Freeman's concept of erotohistoriography: 1) the site of the erotic as a site of revolution, and 2) the tethering of "terror" and "enjoyment" through the spectacle (or, as with S/M, "scenes").

Drucilla Cornell and Stephen D. Seely, in "There's Nothing Revolutionary about a Blowjob," examine,

[c]ertain tendencies in U.S. queer theory [that] seem to actually think that there might indeed be something revolutionary about a blowjob. Indeed, that a certain sexual 'acting out' is the only true resistance to heteronormativity, either through a 'subversion' of (hetero)sexual norms or through a purported identification with the *jouissance* of the Real or the death drive. This trajectory in queer thought

holds that not only is revolution an impossible emancipatory metanarrative, but that the proliferation of antisocial sexuality is the only means of escaping the grip of the heterosexist Symbolic order. (1)

Cornell and Steely astutely summarize Edelman's negativity, as discussed in the previous chapter, and additionally echo the title of his recent lecture "There is No Freedom to Enjoy." Queer negativity rests on "antisocial sexuality" as a temporal escape precisely as an anti-normative reactionary move to the "impossible emancipatory metanarrative" of LGBT liberation through civil rights. Erotohistoriography, rather than seeking equality, offers up a practice of "nonegalitarian sexual ethics" and "asymmetrical reciprocity" (Amin 35-6).

What Freeman propositions through commemorating the inequality of racialized S/M scenes is in-line with queer negativity's "antisocial sexuality" and anti-normative subjectivity. In other words, Freeman attempts to create a reparative alliance of queer and black at the site of black flesh—explicitly, through the self-shattering of S/M's pain and pleasure that reduces the body to mere flesh. Freeman interprets a whipping scene in *The Attendant*:

His *tableau vivant* of the slave trade insists that the sufferings of black people are in the first instance fleshy—and thereby not fully reducible to the heterosexist, sentimentalist account that the violation of their family ties constitutes the worst offense against them. Conversely, the *tableau vivant* also offers a queer image of aliveness, of sheer animacy unfettered by the narrative drives of biology or history, and in so doing conjures up the possibility of a future beyond both reproduction and writing. (150)

Echoes of Spiller's work on black flesh are evidenced in this passage from Freeman and turned inside-out. For Freeman, black people are preemptively queer since through the bodily reduction to mere flesh, they inhabit the impossibility of operating the reproduction of heteronormativity. (Recall here also Spiller's critique of the Moynihan Report which diagnosed the black family as pathological—as outside heteronormativity). In eliding racist notions of the animated excess of blackness with “a queer image of aliveness,” queer liveliness is situated, for Freeman, in the “sufferings of black people” in this same “*tableau vivant*.” Ultimately, as in Edelman's invocation of Jacobs, the enslaved at absolute abjection is perceived by Freeman as a “queer” option against heteronormativity.

Progress is not marked in Freeman's anti-normative project through rights-based legislation, but through the (S/M) erotic. The ideological shift suturing queer and black is enacted at the site of the body, at the flesh. Taboo pleasures of interracial desire (constructed through fetish and fantasy) are embraced rather than forbidden. Amin's tracing of this “liberationist” tactic offers this formula for “erotic coalition”: “*homosexual oppression + postcolonial interracial sex = coalitional solidarity*” (78). Erotic inegalitarianism, the “impolite and impolitic admission that it gets off on power,” is engaged in Freeman's erotic coalition (Amin 42). Freeman's resolve is that inversion (in S/M culture, “switching”) of power dynamics enacted through the erotic balances a power differential—a restitution. In 1971, the leftist journal *Tout!* (edited by Jean-Paul Sartre) published a piece by the Homosexual Front of Revolutionary Action (FHAR) whose most prominent line might be: “We've been butt-fucked by Arabs. We're proud of it and will do it again” (Amin 77). FHAR's politics are situated in the erotic act of inverting the colonial dynamic of imperial sex. The group proclaims,

Everyone is obsessed with the cliché of the old European pederast who fucks young Arabs. Aside from the fact that it's never that simple, we want to emphasize that in France, it's our Arab friends who fuck us and never the other way around. Impossible not to understand this as a revenge, to which we consent, against the colonizing Occident. Do you imagine that it's possible for us to have the same relation to Arabs as everyone else or as the typical French man when we commit with them what bourgeois morality makes out to be the most shameful of acts? Yes, we feel a very strong solidarity of the oppressed with Arabs. (qtd. in Amin 77-8)

Queerness, in the perception of FHAR, is “against the colonizing Occident.” The mere fact of homosexuality through a “solidarity of the oppressed” deems FHAR as outside the colonizing apparatus. As examined through Forster, queer has been historically engaged as an alibi against imperialism and racism. (As we also witness through Forster, this “erotic coalition” culminates in the murder of the racialized Other). Conclusively, the “switch” of imperialist erotic tactics engages precisely the same fetish and fantasy of the originating violence.

Amin, though drawing a distinction between Freeman's erotohistoriography and racial fetishism (due to Freeman's “unpredictably nonlinear embodied politics of history,” which is to say, queer temporality), he astutely summarizes the trouble we've seen when queer theory attempts to align itself with abjected and racialized subject positions while yet retaining the fetish and the fantasy of poststructuralism's subjectivation:

These readings of racial fetishism should lead us to question the idealization, within psychoanalytic queer theory, of self-shattering *jouissance* as something

beyond the political that dissolves the social identities on which political orders allegedly rest. Far from destroying social identities, racialized self-shattering *relies* on incoherent histories of race, which it continually reanimates and reinvents with desire and erotic force. To put it bluntly: *sexual self-shattering is not a utopian escape from the social order, but a method of its maintenance.*

Rather than being the Achilles heel of racist social orders, sexuality can operate as their *lifeblood*, reinvigorating and nourishing archaic fragments of racial history that might otherwise fall out of collective memory. In fact, I would argue that the source of sexuality's *negativity* is less its fragmentation of corporeal and psychic integrity than its *uncontrollable historicity*—the ways in which its embodied imaginary is continually hurling backward to violently oppressive historical and cultural pasts. (100-1)

Amin's insistence that queer negativity's commingling with postmodernity's fragmentation is less effectively a rewriting and reorganizing history through erotic coalition than it is a reification of the (racist) politics it attempts to evade.

The Failure of Empathy: The S/M Scene as Spectacle

Spectacle is a form of camouflage. It does not conceal anything; it simply renders it unrecognizable. One looks at it and does not see it. It appears in disguise.
—Steve Martinot & Jared Sexton, "The Avant-Garde of White Supremacy"

The second liberationist tactic I'm concerned with appearing in Freeman's erotohistoriography is the tradition continuous from American enslavement that fuses "terror" and "enjoyment" in the spectacle, or (S/M) scene—"qualities of affect distinctive to the economy of slavery" (Hartman, *Scenes* 21, 23). Since Freeman relies on Hartman in her formation of

erotohistoriography, Harman's chapter, "Innocent Amusements: The Stage of Sufferance," will inform this brief section. Primarily, I'd like to juxtapose Hartman's own theorizing of supplanting the white body for the black body in order to close the aesthetic distance of black suffering to the white spectator, to "bring slavery close," with that of Freeman's erotohistoriography that attempts the same maneuver, but through S/M "play" (17). Hartman examines the letters of John Rankin to his slaveholding brother which recount the sadism of slavery from an abolitionist perspective. Rankin fantasizes himself taking the place of a black man being whipped for the "pleasures" of the master—he becomes a "proxy" for black suffering (18). In other words, Rankin's own fantastic suffering is made legible through his whiteness. Hartman asks, and let us ask these questions also of erotohistoriography, "Does this not only exacerbate the idea that black sentience is inconceivable and unimaginable but, in the very ease of possessing the abased and enslaved body, ultimately elide an understanding and acknowledgment of the slave's pain?" (19). Further, "Does it not reproduce the hyperembodiment of the powerlessness?" (19). For a white body to be whipped by a black body in the "switch" of Freeman's proffered "scene," whiteness supplants black suffering—the suffering evidenced is not enacted upon black flesh, the affect "learned" is not empathy for black suffering, but the pain one feels for oneself: "The endeavor to bring pain close exploits the spectacle of the body in pain and oddly confirms the spectral character of suffering and the inability to witness the captive's pain" (Hartman 20). Hartman terms this the "precariousness of empathy" (19). In S/M play, the pain isn't fantasized, however, the pain is material, which may make it all the more precarious as a form of empathy, since the pain of the whip isn't imagined but felt acutely on one's own body. The apex of powerlessness, through this S/M scene, of course, is

situated in the “hyperembodiness” that occurs at the sensation of pain. Hartman furthers, “The violence of the institution can only be brought into view...[by] placing white bodies at risk,” which is “reinforcing racist assumptions of limited sentience [of black people]” (21).

Reading Freeman through Hartman (and offering Freeman a reread of Hartman) evidences that erotohistoriography is not a revolutionary or anti-normative practice of rearranging history but rather a historical continuation of “fixing and naturalizing this condition of pained embodiment [at the site of blackness]” (Hartman 20). Additionally, erotohistoriography as a means of converting “trauma into pleasure” engages the fetish as black people as “purveyors of pleasure” (Amin 69, Hartman 23). Interracial S/M play via Freeman’s thesis enacts not healing but a “simulation of agency and the excesses of black enjoyment” and the “transubstantiation of abjection into contentment” (Hartman 22, 23). Erotohistoriography, a scene Freeman insists moves us from trauma to pleasure, needs to be understood as inhabiting distinct racialized positions. Rankin, from a position of whiteness, is “immune neither from the masochistic fantasy nor to the sadistic pleasure to be derived from the spectacle of sufferance” (Hartman 21). “Pleasure” is racialized. Hartman avers, “[E]njoyment defined the relation of the dominant race to the enslaved” (23).

Freeman is a white queer propositioning her thesis upon a historicity (and continuity) of black suffering. White ontology is what is being reconfigured through this “scene of subjection”—a queer negativity, poststructuralist desire for desubjectivation. What the erotohistoriography’s interracial S/M scene allows is an alibi for the cleaving of white queers from the racist erotohistoriography that inflicts simultaneously white ignorance and white guilt. What it enacts is instead is an “*uncontrollable historicity*” of white supremacy. Remembering

Thomas' insistence that, "Any sexual transformation that does not willfully transpire on fiercely indigenous, anti-colonized terms is only a racist pretext for cultural destruction, whether this pretense is staged in heteroerotic or homoerotic, masculine or feminine fashion," casts erotohistoriography as a "racist pretext" toward a continuation of racialized, nonegalitarian erotics (93). Thomas prefaces colonial context as Lacan's future anterior, "What is realised in my history is not the past definite of what was, since it is no more, or even the present perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in the process of becoming" (38). Which is to say, perhaps a fissure, a rupture can be made, through memory, through a remembering, through a rejection of overdetermination, but not, as Freeman contends, through a ritualization of sadomasochistic reenactment of slave plantation whippings, no matter who is the receptacle.

Chapter 4: Scene Three

Genealogical Gaps: The Elliptical Space of “black...gay”

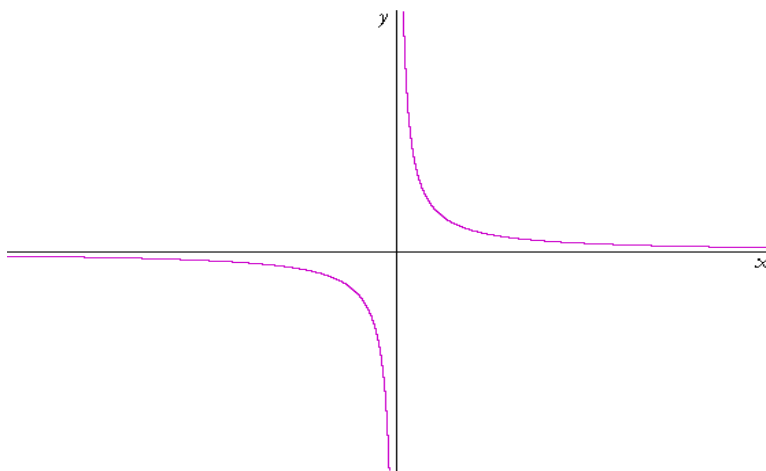
In 2013, Keguro Macharia guest authored on Bully Bloggers, a “queer word art group” (perhaps most known for queer negativity’s contributor, Jack Halberstam). Macharia, by his own definition, “black...gay,” contemplates his recent experience at a (queer) academic panel. The panel, addressing the “limits of antinormativity” concludes that we’ve yet to fully understand our (queer) “white mothers.” Taking up the task, Macharia authors, “Queer Genealogies: Provisional Notes,” wherein he proposes a pluraling of queer genealogy, adding additional origins other than the “foundation” that perpetually begs the return to “Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Judith Butler, Gayle Rubin, and a distant Foucault.” The proposition by Macharia: trace the genealogy of queer through Frantz Fanon and Hortense Spillers. Rather than abandoning Fanon (as queer theory has historically done), Macharia insists we uptake Fanon. He avers,

Fanon remains stubbornly attached to Queer studies, demanding an accounting of how blackness comes to figure within and as desire, as *the portal to homosexual desire*. And if the materiality of blackness forces a mad dash for psychic figuration, Fanon has already been there: *the Negro and the Negro’s genitality are psychic figurations within colonial modernity that the homosexual cannot do without*. (“Queer Genealogies”; emphasis added)

Blackness as “the portal to homosexual desire” no doubt must be traced. This genealogy, undoubtedly must be racially distinct. What I mean to say is that there are two projects inherent in this tracing of queer genealogy through blackness—black genealogy and white genealogy.

While the two are mutually constitutive and thusly fused, they are simultaneously constructed as mutually exclusive categoricals and are decidedly unexchangeable. Said plainly, queer can never supersede race in American dialectics.

The first is the foregrounding work being done by black queers in attempt to suture the bifurcation of black and queer—the corrective made imperative by the whiteness of GBLT studies and articulated through Macharia’s articulation of “black...gay” (“black...gay”). Macharia explains this elliptical articulation of identity, “Ellipses figure affective excess: they mark the place where language struggles to create, and fails. This *place* can be figured as the gap of the asymptote” (“black...gay”). Macharia defines asymptote as “a straight line that continually approaches a given curve but does not meet it at any finite distance,” along with his definitive geometric diagram illustrated below (“black...gay”).



The two sets of magenta lines here represent black and gay. The space between (the lines never intersect) are the space Macharia marks linguistically with ellipses. He furthers, “Ellipses are tethered to, but not restricted by, the words that precede and follow them. To write “black . . . gay” is to embed oneself within the afterlife of slavery” (“black...gay”). This gap, as Macharia articulates, acknowledges the inscription of enslavement in queer genealogies, the gap that

fortifies the categories of black and gay. A solitary queer genealogy that keeps returning to the foundation of our “white mothers” can be fractured through Spillers and Fanon at this gap, Macharia claims. From the space of these ellipses, a grammar is introduced which “attempts to name and inhabit the possibilities of the ellipses: to find a form for silence and language, to find a form for the unimaginable and the quotidian, and to risk thinking into the void” (Macharia, “black...gay”).

Exclusively Queer: Ontological (Gay) Breaks

The juxtaposition of black and gay as incongruent is Calvin Warren’s concern in “Onticide” Afro-pessimism, Gay Nigger #1, and Surplus Violence.” Warren’s article invokes the troubling epigraph “Gay Nigger #1” from the literal inscription on Steen Keith Fenrich’s postmortem skull. Fenrich, a gay black man, was murdered and dismembered, and subsequently positioned in a plastic tub. The culmination of Warren’s article is found not only in his coining of the term “onticide” but also in his Derridean (re)articulation of “~~Gay~~ Nigger” (406). What this strikethrough signifies is the impossibility of the commingling of the two terms. Warren clarifies that the conflation of “Gay Nigger #1” presents a “philosophical conundrum” due to the “antagonism between humanism and fungibility within its discursive structures,” which is to say, “The term *Gay* indexes *human* identity, and *Nigger* is the ‘thing’ void of human ontology” (392). This “conundrum” elucidates the distinction imperative in queer theory: queer, in signifying alterity, remains significantly human, while black puts into question “human ontology” at the front. We might here recall the two magenta lines of Macharia’s “black...gay” as representing an ontological gap.

What Warren and Macharia elucidate is that queer theory has fallen short in making the distinction between alterity and “thingness.” Warren here expounds,

Queer here conceals and preserves the humanity that queer theorists...proclaim it disrupts. We might suggest that the ‘different relationship to violence,’ and concomitantly, the different relationship to ‘nothingness’ is the limit between ‘being-for-the-captor’ (fungible object) and the ‘human subject’ experiencing oppression. *Queer*, as a conceptual term, collapses these positions and inappropriately applies the position of ‘object’ and ‘nothingness’ to a structure of oppression, thus creating a form of equivalence between the structural position of the commodity and the position of the human...‘Unfreedom’ bring the subject to the limit of subjectivity, but it is a limit, nonetheless. In cases of extreme unfreedom, we might describe this being as a ‘liminal subject’—where the rider ‘liminal’ registers the existential crisis of unfreedom...but the ‘liminal subject’ is *not* the object denied symbolic placement, differentiating flesh, and a grammar of suffering. (403)

Warren and Macharia make a distinction that articulates queer (theory) as requisitely white in its “collapsing” of subjectivities.

Macharia invokes Hortense Spiller’s foundational essay, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” as not only creating a grammar through which to speak of black women but also a grammar through which to think about queerness. In the following passage (worth quoting at length), Macharia uptakes critical terms from Spillers’ essay to ask, “How might the unthinkability of blackness direct our queer gazes?”:

The thing-making project of New World subject production (the “captive body” is “*being*” for the captor) refuses the too-celebratory discussions of undifferentiated gender and un-gendering in Queer studies. The much-heralded “blur” and “undecidability” understood as conditions of freedom must contend with its longer genealogy in a thing-making project. One cannot uncritically celebrate gender or sex undecidability. Instead, one must work through the micro- and macro-positions created in the New World: “captive body,” “thing,” “captured sexualities,” “otherness,” “potential for pornotroping,” “sheer powerlessness.” How might these terms and their emergence from slavery provide other ways to approach Queerness? How do we work through the problem of the “thing” in that micro-transition from “captured bodies” to “captured sexualities,” where thingness becomes a mediating term, a filter, a catalyst, a door? How is sexuality within colonial modernity always (and) only approachable through the thing? (“Queer Genealogies”)

When white queer theory’s gaze attempts to think through “blackness” in order to understand its own genealogy, Macharia’s call becomes expropriated and perverted. The “blur” and “undecidability” that Macharia cites as part and parcel of the “thing making project” elides with post-structuralism’s ideation of desubjectivation, which has been foundational in the construction of queer theory. What are the implications when white (queer) subjects take up Spillers’ work to find its own subject(less) position? Through a turning inside out of Spillers’ grammar, white queers construct a utopia from a site the material subjection of blackness. American white

genealogy is tracked back to the position not of the enslaved, of course, but of the enslavers.

This distinction is crucial when considering what we learn from Spillers.

Spillers, disclosing her motivation in “MBPB,” states, “my idea was to try to generate a discourse, or a vocabulary that would not just make it desirable, but would necessitate that black women be in the conversation. And that is a theoretical conversation about any number of things” (300). When white queers, through a queer negative turn, attempt to uptake Spillers’ vocabulary, I claim it evacuates material blackness. Spillers foreshadows this occurrence, “They always want to do something that forgets the African presence or reabsorbs it, reappropriates it in another way. The need to confront psychological violence, epistemic violence, intellectual violence is really powerful” (301).

This brings us to the second project inherent in this tracing of queer genealogy through blackness—white (queer) genealogy. Through a white queer genealogy, the humanness of the queer is not in question—the subject position is retained, if oppressed. “Unfreedom” has a limit, as Warren tell us, for the white queer. The black queer, however, is denied humanness, rather demarcated as object or “thingness.” Further, Warren concludes, “blacks become disqualified from the human identity ‘gay’” (399). When white queer theory collapses the positions of “being-for-the captor” and “human subject” through the genealogy of Spillers and Fanon as “*the portal to [white] homosexual desire,*” a crucial problem arises. Precisely because “unfreedom” has a limit and white queerness a subject position inside humanity, the “thingness” of blackness becomes a site of unbecoming for the white queer, a place to rearticulate the self, a (perversely) utopic location through which to “play” with desubjectivation. Through an obscene twist, the work of black queer theorists to create a grammar that articulates the elliptical space between

black and queer, when in the mouths and pens of white queer theorists, becomes a reification of black thingness. When whiteness attempts to occupy this elliptical space as a site for a (Foucauldian) desubjectivation, a white genealogy of violence against black ontology is maintained and perpetuated. This problematic is the crux of concern of my project attempts to grapple with: White queer sovereignty has not been immune to the white imperialist project of sovereignty, one which requires the bodily boundary of another to be usurped or subjugated. A white queer genealogy evidences a lineage of such sovereign manifests. Herein I wrestle with a heritage that claims Sadean tenets, colonizing homosexuality and, at present, queer negativity's self-shattering through black "thingness." The violence inherent in aligning white queerness with the "thingness" of blackness that Spillers and Fanon so adeptly theorize is profusely evidenced in Lee Edelman's most recent work, to which we will now turn.

Chapter 5: Scene Four

Queer Theory's "Neo-Primitivist" Turn

*The subject will realise that his desire is merely a vain detour with
the aim of catching the jouissance of the other.*

—Lacan, *Seminar XI*

*There is no transgression here, but rather an irruption, a falling into the field,
of something not unlike jouissance—a surplus.*

—Lacan, *Seminar XVII*

Freedom is what you do with what's been done to you.

—Sartre

Lee Edelman, seventeen years after the publication of his *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, is still perpetually and ceaselessly engaging Lacan's concept of jouissance. Jouissance, in Edelman's theorizing, is the embodiment of queer. As the "unnameable [*sic*] remainder" of "the Real internal to the Symbolic order," queer is synonymous with jouissance—a surplus that exceeds identification and articulation (*No Future* 25). Queer then becomes a disruption of the signifier rather than an originating signification. Instead of a positive signifier, queer signification is rather defined by what it is not, a definition through an opposition to normality: unnameable. This negativity demarcates the epistemological foundation of anti-normativity. This first, critical stance of queer theory's negative turn is expressed through polarity, a bifurcation of sociality. What is normative is anti-queer; what is queer is anti-normative. The trappings here are quickly apparent as queerness comes to signify a void, an emptiness—a negative definition.

Edelman's compulsion toward *jouissance* reveals an addendum to queer negation: the second stance of queer's negativity. Queer *excesses* the normative, a "remainder" of the "Symbolic order" rather than solitarily its opposition. Here is the conundrum: this remainder

fails actualization outside *jouissance*. Because queerness is outside the linguistic structure, it cannot be articulated in positive terms, or quite at all, if we follow Edelman's following of Lacan: To be queer is to be Real. Lacan's Real is defined by its inability to be verbalized within the Symbolic order. Queer *is*, if anything, unnameable: "an inarticulable surplus" (NF 9). Queer is *more than* either normativity or anti-normativity. At the same time, queer is "called forth to figure: the negativity opposed to every form of social viability" (NF 9). Situated in a "place of the social order's death drive," the queer is not socially viable through the very impossibility of the queer's articulation *within* the social (NF 3).

(Queer) *jouissance*, Edelman tell us, is also elided with "enjoyment": "a movement beyond the pleasure principle, beyond the distinctions of pleasure and pain, *a violent passage* beyond the bounds of identity, meaning, law" (emphasis added; NF 25). Further, the unnameability located and exercised through *jouissance* is motivated by the death drive. *Jouissance* is the surpassing of the threshold of pleasure. It is pleasure so gratuitous that it becomes unbearable. *Jouissance* is a pleasure tipping into pain. The self-shattering prescribed foregroundingly by Leo Bersani's anti-social turn in "Is the Rectum a Grave?" locates this anti-identity through the "fantastmatic escape" from Symbolic order. The death drive as a portal, Edelman exposit, undoes us:

To the extent that *jouissance*, as fantastmatic escape from the alienation intrinsic to meaning, lodges itself in a given object on which identity comes to depend, it produces identity as mortification, reenacting the very constraint of meaning it was intended to help us escape. But to the extent that it tears the fabric of Symbolic reality as we know it, unraveling the solidity of *every* object, including

the object as which the subject necessarily takes itself, *jouissance* evokes the death drive that always insists as the void in and of the subject, beyond its fantasy of self-realization, beyond the pleasure principle. (NF 25)

If queer theory exists primarily as a disarticulation of the Symbolic social (because an impossibility of queer articulation doesn't allow textual production), this passage from Edelman's canonized text is the apex of what is required by the concept of queer: absolute desubjectivation. The problems of Edelman's postulation (along with his queer negativity contemporaries) have been widely written on. Namely, Edelman's (ironically) fatal flaw is that he cannot rid himself of his upper-classed, white masculinity. His desubjectivation cannot be actualized as his power is immanent outside of his queer (non)identity. Essentially, Edelman's negativity is vacuously theoretical. Further, the project of desubjectivation is a privileged project. Desubjectivation is an undertaking reserved for those with a tenable subject position. It presumes a position *inside* to deject oneself from. The project becomes moot when queers are otherwise disenfranchised. This is precisely the reason queer theory has been divided along a color line.

Anti-normativity and negativity as a voluntary dejection from the status quo has been the theoretical apparatus of white queers. Queer futurism is the theoretical temporality of a queer of color critique, coinciding with a refusal of polarity. (Of course, this is not a tidy divide, but the temporal distinction is overtly racialized). According to José Esteban Muñoz, in his writing on queer futurity, the utopic term "disidentification" is "the third mode of dealing with dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology" (*Disidentifications*

11). The distinction that Muñoz creates here is the difference between excessing the dominant ideology and being “beside” and already “outside straight time” (25). If there exists a surplus for Muñoz, it is an “affective surplus,” a constructive and relational (social) formula that constitutes subjecthood otherwise, through disidentification with hegemonic ideology (*Cruising Utopia* 25). Muñoz answers to Edelman’s negativity directly by pointing out that “all queers are not the stealth-universal-white-gay-man invoked in queer antirelational formulations,” which is to say, not all queers have a guaranteed future to opt-out of. Further, Muñoz cites, “Edelman’s theory...is enacted by the active disavowal of a crisis in afrofuturism” (*CU* 94). This disavowal must be understood as a voluntary dejection. The reproductive future that Edelman eschews is already racially demarcated for white capacity and nonwhite debility. Muñoz evaluates Edelman’s refusal of the future to be white terrain, concluding, “Theories of queer temporality that fail to factor in the relational relevance of race or class merely reproduce a crypto-universal white gay subject that is weirdly atemporal—which is to say a subject whose time is a restricted and restricting hollowed-out present free of the need for the challenge of imagining a futurity that exists beyond the self or the here and now” (*CU* 94).

What propels my inquiry and critique of queer’s anti-normativity recognizes and expands upon these critiques that cumulatively reveal queer negativity’s dependence upon the positionality of whiteness in order for queer negativity to *work*. Where I diverge from this conclusion is in my insistence that queer’s anti-normative stance quite requires nonwhite bodies to *do this work*. Specifically, my inquiry explores how queer theory’s notion of the place “outside and beyond” depends not upon not only its own “*violent passage* beyond the bounds of identity, meaning, law” but also how that violent passage is enacted in “a movement beyond the

pleasure principle, beyond the distinctions of pleasure and pain,” which relies upon and reifies the Symbolic structures of power, specifically race. The queer, possessing the remainder of the Symbolic order, renders a location outside and beyond that is not colonized by the normative. How might this space be preemptively colonized by queer negativity’s whiteness? If the (white) queer body may access sovereignty, paradoxically through *jouissance* (queer is simultaneously sanctioned and shattered, and hence autonomous through the breaking of this demarcation), does queer sovereignty yet rely on the power *over* others’ bodily boundaries? Does *jouissance* desubjectify all of us? Which is to ask, is queer *jouissance* a paradoxical universalism at the site of the Real, where identity is made impossible? The universal becomes an identity precisely at the point where it becomes transcendental. Could queer desubjectivation paradoxically shatter into the “crypto-universal white gay [un]subject?” The inquiry queer negativity has failed to engage is: If “*subjectivation* keeps involving *subjection*,” do we (falsely) assume desubjectivation preemptively disallows subjection? (Balibar 208). Ultimately, what I am interested in here is how queer anti-normativity and negativity theory’s new projects utilize the ontological ground-zero of subjectivation: enslaved blackness.

Freedom is Lethal

Edelman’s recent lecture, “There is No Freedom to Enjoy,” evidences such a maneuver. In 2017, Edelman spoke in Belgrade on sexual subjection and sexual sovereignty, a seemingly queer subject. Edelman proffers his objective, which “exposes the gap on which every version of freedom founders, the gap of the subject’s division between pleasure and enjoyment between desire and drive” (63:47). The gap he abides interrogating is the gap of my inquiry. The space between the sovereign’s freedom and the usurpation of the subjected’s freedom is a violent gap.

Edelman's concern is an attempt at a (self)corrective, imaginably an attempt to address the limits of queer negativity, perhaps an attempt to recapitulate his equation: queer=jouissance. Playing with the relativity of freedom, in quite a double, even triple turn, Edelman posits:

Where freedom is mapped on to our comfort zone of mutuality and consent of universally recognized human rights and a protection from discrimination or harm, it opens onto the nightmare world of enjoyment as queer negativity. We can never own or own up to such queerness any more than we can escape it. Avowing it would misrepresent it as a prescription for the good, but if queerness is to remain an active concern an ongoing challenge to social norms and not just a name for the project of non-normative sexual normalization, then we have to confront the abyss of enjoyment from which queerness, like the will to restrain it, springs, the abyss of enjoyment that enslaves us to the lethal dream of being free. Lethal because it is also the dream of being free from queerness, whatever the names by which queerness may go including blackness, femaleness. (66:26)

In these concluding remarks, Edelman is referencing Harriet Jacobs, whose slave narrative, *Incidents of a Slave Girl*, serves as a prominent focus of his lecture. The “abyss of enjoyment” refers to the source from which Jacob's master draws for the (perverse) enjoyment of his property—quite literally here, the use of Jacobs as his sexual object. The freedom *from* queerness is the freedom from being “prematurely knowing,” Jacob's term for child sexual exploitation. Queerness “springs” from this very same “abyss of enjoyment,” insists Edelman. According to this estimation, freedom from the “obscenities of slavery,” must be additionally understood as freedom from queerness. Further, “Freedom as an end point remains the master's

self-universalizing property, the condition within which his mastery appears” (Edelman 66:26). Sovereignty and subjection are intertwined, under freedom, in other words. Here, we see the reifying of queer negativity: *freedom is lethal*.

Edelman’s thesis is disconcerting at the front and treating the entirety of his presented paper is not my duty here. My task will be limited to briefly drawing attention to the frame of Edelman’s argument, which illustrates a larger trend in queer theory—the ideation of the middle passage (a slippage from Edelman’s *violent passage*) and enslavement as the apex in desubjection. Specifically, what interests me in Edelman’s lecture is where the gap between sovereignty and subjection are evidenced. The tension occurs at the following three points: 1) the freedom to universal human rights as a manufacturing of sovereignty (which always requires the subset of subjection), 2) the avowal of pain and Edelman’s “violent passage” as a condition for queer jouissance, and 3) the queering of Jacobs (while she paradoxically stands-in for the anti-queer). Ultimately, I argue that all three of these points evidence queer theory’s neo-primitivist turn. The “neo-primitivist turn,” a concept theorized by Victor Li in his like titled text, is,

the conceptual move through which the rejection of primitivism allows it to reappear in new, more acceptable forms. Neo-primitivism is a contemporary version of primitivism in which the critical repudiation of earlier primitivist discourses paradoxically enables their re-introduction, under different names and configurations, to be sure, as cultural, political, ethical, and aesthetic alternatives to Western modernity...Neo-primitivism can thus be characterized as an anti-

primitivist primitivism that simultaneously disavows and reinscribes the primitive. (Li ix)

The primitive serves as an ontological ground zero, the barest human, in this methodology (and here we might be served by considering how this anthropological concept informs, also, as ground zero of Western epistemology generally). The primitive, therefore, comes to be “the ultimate sign of alterity” (Li ix). Critical theory, in its interrogation of alterity, has embarked on what Li calls an “anti-primitivism primitivism,” wherein the term primitive vanishes only to be replaced by “alterity, culture, and modernity” (Li x). Even as critical theory interrogates the many manifestations of primitivism in deft critique, much of these theories fall to utilizing the same tropes of the primitive as found in the very works they are taking to task. If the Other is the location of “the ultimate sign of alterity” and a postmodern ethics of alterity has taken up “local forms of otherness...in the struggle against the universalizing metanarratives of a Eurocentric modernity,” Li posits that “the concept of alterity thus follows the fetishistic logic of neo-primitivism in disavowing the primitive only to reinscribe its difference once again” (42).

Rather than deliberating race and class in queer negativity, I venture that Edelman’s invocation of Jacobs engages just the maneuver Li conceptualizes: Jacobs, for Edelman stands-in for the “ultimate sign of alterity.” Rather than the “primitive” of another location, Edelman puts Jacobs in service as his “domestic exotic” (Li 15). Jacobs is queer in her alterity, in her desubjectivated status, or rather her status as not-yet subject. For Edelman, Jacobs (along with his citation of Fredrick Douglas) abides by natural law rather than a legal system that does not protect them. Citing the enslaved as subscribing to an “uncivilized” law and ascribing that law as inherently queer is a neo-primitivist turn. The enslaved is Edelman’s primitive through which

his own theory of negativity is illuminated. Jacobs' subjection is reified as Edelman claims that Jacob's own desire for freedom from "prematurely knowing," is a freedom from queerness. Edelman places Jacob squarely here in the "violent passage" of *jouissance*. (Though I've quoted "violent passage" from *No Future*, Edelman reinvokes this phrase, in a turn of phrase, to call-up the association with Douglass' "blood-stained gate" as the violent passage to slavery). Her queerness depends upon her subjection. Her freedom unqueers her—her freedom is lethal, according to Edelman. At this juncture, we see quite a queer failure indeed—a failure of queer negativity's ethics. Though Edelman implores us that we must "confront" this "abyss of enjoyment" from which the master's sovereignty and queerness both originate, his conclusion is the abdication of an ethics. Tendayi Sithole, in "The Concept of the Black Subject in Fanon," explicates how this abdication of ethics is a result of how "a subject is positioned in the existential realm of anti-Blackness," furthering,

Those who are at the receiving end of subjection survive in that their existence is exposed to life and death in an arbitrary fashion in which the norm of ethics is rendered collapsible. To survive clearly means that the humanity of the Black subject is brought into question, and it is through Fanonian intervention that it is essential to engage the concept of the Black subject from the ontological zero point. That is to say, the Black subject should be understood from lived experience and the form of a living being that is rendered non-existent but being the one that possesses the possibility to emerge. (Sithole 25)

Jacobs is a tool for an existential inquiry for Edelman, allowing him to conclude that (with another turn of phrase) "the abyss of enjoyment enslaves us to the lethal dream of being free." If

blackness is the site where “the norm of ethics is rendered collapsible,” and Edelman’s anti-normativity works on the postulation that “the more thoroughly pulverized the subject gets, the more ‘ethical’ it will be,” what is determined at the outcome of this theorizing is that the “ontological zero point” of (enslaved) blackness is the utopic state of white queer theory’s desubjectivation (Ruti 5). Edelman’s compulsion toward “unfreedom,” of course, is theoretical rather than material. In a temporal “disappearing into the whirlpool of jouissance,” Edelman, from his stable subject position, can come up for air, up and out of desubjectivation. For desubjectivation as an ontological goal is nothing more than a theoretical abstraction, the kind of nonsense that critical theory is so rightly condemned for. Edelman’s conflation of Jacobs and Douglas’ materiality with queer theory’s negativity postulates, in the end, that “there is no freedom to enjoy”—a reification of subjection, for blackness, that is, since as Warren and Macharia emphasis, white queers preemptively inhabit a subject position of recognizable humanity. As Ruti summarizes the danger inherent in the “darling ideals of poststructuralism: fragmentation, disintegration, decentering, disunity, fluidity, mobility, and volatility,” she grants, “Though it made perfect sense for French poststructuralists to use these ideals to dismantle the rational, unitary, and stable humanist subject, they cannot possibly be translated into all-purpose blueprints for living” since “the world is filled with people who are already so devoid of agency that the attempt to crush the last hint of it comes across as a bit obscene” (8). Queer anti-normativity via Edelman, through poststructuralist ideals, locates queer sovereignty at the site of the ultimate “pulverized” subject—the enslaved black. In posturing to give up the freedom he never materially relinquishes, Edelman denies a freedom that has never been substantially granted to the preemptively marginalized subject.

Chapter 6: Scene Five

This is Not a Love Story: Unqueering E.M. Forster's "The Other Boat"

*The closet in the colony only has room for the colonizer;
the colonized must find other accommodations.*

—Elaine Freedgood

*[W]estern modernity and its imperialist projects produced at least one entirely novel form
of same-sex erotic hierarchy—that of the white colonial man and the brown native boy.*

—Kadji Amin

"Kiss me," Coconut whispers to Lionel, "Kiss me" (195). The end of the last scene of E.M. Foster's short story begins with an appeal for a kiss. It climaxes with Lionel's descent into the sea, "naked and with the seeds of love on him" (196). The mid-section of the scene, however, reveals that this is not a (queer) love story:

"Kiss me."

"No."

"Noah? No? Then I kiss you." And he lowered his mouth onto the muscular forearm and bit it.

Lionel yelped with the pain.

"Bloody bitch, wait till I..." Blood oozed between the gold-bright hairs. "You wait..." And the scar in his groin reopened. The cabin vanished. He was back in a desert fighting savages. One of them asked for mercy, stumbled, and found none.

The sweet act of vengeance followed, sweeter than ever for both of them, and as ecstasy hardened into agony his hands twisted the throat. Neither of them knew when the end came, and he when he realized it felt no sadness, no remorse. It was part of a curve that had long been declining, and had nothing to do with death. He covered again with

his warmth and kissed the closed eyelids tenderly and spread the bright-coloured scarf.

Then he burst out of the stupid cabin onto the deck, and naked and with the seeds of love on him he dived into the sea. (195-6)

“The Other Boat” is a murder-suicide. What we witness in the above passage is the simultaneous erotic climax of Lionel during his strangulation of Coconut. What is to be made of Lionel’s kissing “tenderly” the eyes of Coconut, postmortem? Are Coconut and Lionel lovers? Is “The Other Boat” a story of the impossibility of homosexual love?

These questions surfaced during a seminar in which my literary theory class centered on applying various theoretical frames to the short story. The overwhelming consensus in answering the aforementioned questions was that the story is a tale of forbidden love, ending tragically because the homophobic world (of the past) would not permit love between two men. The class was curious most about the character of Lionel, the British man who, they decided, was suffering under his mother’s rigid rule and the propriety of British society. Lionel, it was understood, buckled under this bifurcated psyche in which his gayness was subsumed by a disallowing society. (Homo)sexuality lay dormant in Lionel before his encounter with Coconut. His encounter with the Eastern (coy) Other is portrayed as awakening (or manipulating) Lionel’s gayness, culminating his downfall. Lionel, murdered Coconut, the object of this affection, the class decided, out of a madness resulting from a love that couldn’t bear witness—the story, a tragic romance.

Forster’s “The Other Boat” became a specter, creating apparitions in so many other reads of that semester (and prompting the inquiry of this thesis). I could not help but be called back to the murder/suicide of Coconut and Lionel during our reading of Alan Sinfield’s “Cultural

Materialism, *Othello*, and the Politics of Plausibility” which examines the murder/suicide, unexpectedly *not* of Desdemona, but of Othello’s murder of “a malignant and turban’d Turk” (qtd. in Sinfield 747). Unlike the murder of a white woman, of which Othello recognizes his crime, the murder of the Turk gives Othello “boast” in his last speech—the “kind of thing the Venetian state likes” (747). By murdering he who is seen as barbaric, Othello performs legitimate violence. Only in murdering in Desdemona is Othello himself re/marked as uncivilized.

Echoing our class discussion, which focused upon Lionel’s suicide (and less upon the murder of Cocoanut—in fact, the conversation even saw slippage toward sympathy for Lionel), Sinfield asks why the pronounced questioning by critics of Othello’s suicide while, he declares, “I haven’t noticed them worrying about the murdered Turk. Being malignant, circumcised, and wearing a turban into the bargain, he seems not to require the sensitive attention of literary critics in Britain and North America” (747). Is it possible that readers of the “Other Boat” may see the murder of Cocoanut as legitimate violence? What parallels are being offered up between the Turk and Cocoanut (as the Oriental whose perverse sexuality infects white heterosexual, colonialist society)? Additionally, Sinfield addresses the critical read of characterization in literature as stories of individuals, to which he issues a corrective: “But the violence here is not Othello’s alone, any more than Venetian racism and sexism are particular to individuals” (747). The same corrective can be applied to Lionel and Cocoanut—the traditional literal assumption would be to mistake the individuals in the story for individuals rather than ideological embodiments. Applying new materialism, the murder/suicide (in both instances) can be read as a containment of subversions.

Of course, this Orientalist trope is all too familiar, and indeed permeates virally our “reads” and exhibits throughout cultural factions. It is through this manifest encounter that “The Other Boat,” the history of its reception and “reads,” encapsulates the inquiry of this project, namely: How has Western empire/imperialism defined the freedom of the West in not only the conquering and proprietary usurpation of land, but specifically removing the integrity of physical boundaries of peoples? In other words, how has the making of empire been inherently dependent on sexuality, or more concisely, sexual exploitation? Further, how has this legacy informed, continued to inform, Western sexuality (and sexuality under Western empire) presently? Most pointedly, I’m interested in how colonial notions (here I include the U.S. as a settler colony) have informed gay white culture, specifically in an erotic context. Conversely, this is all to say, my read of “The Other Boat” requires the interrogation, “What’s love got to do with it?” I read Forster’s short story as representative, foremost, of a colonial conquest. The trouble here (or what I’m troubling) is the conflation of the transgressiveness of queerness with transgressing colonialism. As if, transgressing one notion of normativity provides an alibi against an offense of oppressing another Other.

Starting Backward: Unqueering the Read

Published posthumously, this story is not Forster’s only work that has been recaptured by a queer literary archive. Gay archival work, in attempting to “find our gay ancestors” in living and literary history, finds gay characterizations in some places and spaces that may be worth reevaluating as not only (or even) “gay,” but also as evidencing erotics of empire. The rhetorical maneuver of queering everything, as if a queer ideology is able to transpose alterity essentially and entirely, is what I’m considering here. An instance of this omniscient queering is

substantiated in Yonatan Touval's "Colonial Queer Something." Touval, while extrapolating the colonialism and Orientalism of another of Forster's works, yet assures the reader that queerness offers a recovery writ large. He insists,

The interstices of nationalisms and sexualities occupy a queer space—if we take “queer” to mean the mapping out, and in the process the demystification, of relations and identities that a hegemony of the normative would rather keep unexamined. In the climatic final chapter of *A Passage to India*, Aziz opens up just such a space, in a rhetorical performance that perceptively exposes the insidious collusion between colonial imperialism and Western sexuality. (237)

For Touval, this collusion, rather than evidencing an entwinement of how gayness is enacted and the imperial desire for bodily usurpation (inscribed upon *both* genders), interprets this evidence of “the queerness of ‘East meets West’: not merely in the sense that both of these institutions exist side by side, but also that the ancient one...the Irani hamman...represents a culture (if not a religion) with relatively few injunctions against homosexuality,” and that, ultimately, “gay sex is illegal in India only as a holdover from the British colonial statutes” (252).

Touval paradoxically illuminates both sides of my argument. Firstly, he rides upon the Orientalist trope that the East embodies an inherently (to the West, abhorrent) queer sexuality. Secondly, Touval (all the while missing his point) articulates the ideological and legal impact of sexuality as an apparatus of (British) empire. Rather than allowing that the (queer) erotic can “overcome” colonial tensions (as queer reads of Forster suggest), I postulate that the erotics of empire instead inform these queer instantiations. Which is to invert these “recovery readings.”

Instead, I suggest that we consider the erotic as a location always already informed by empire's usurpation of boundaries—both spatial and bodily.

“Cocoanuts” Are Not the Only Fruit: Queering the East

Edward Said's postcolonial theory of Orientalism is an obvious invocation to address Cocoanut and Lionel's affiliation. According to Said, the projection of sexuality takes on a specific manifestation under colonialism. Orientalism theorizes that the West defines itself in direct opposition to the East, in hierarchical, binary terms. Most prominently for the discussion of Lionel and Cocoanut's relationship is the definition of the East as "feminized" and sexually perverse (exotic). Isolating these characteristics in Cocoanut's racial identity, Lionel is able to securely locate his own gayness outside of himself, even as he engages in a sexual relationship with Cocoanut. Elaine Freedgood, in "E.M. Forster's Queer Nation: Taking the Closet to the Colony in 'A Passage to India,'" argues,

The burden of representing the possibility of homoerotic fulfillment, however, is place squarely on the colonized...intimate estrangement may be the ideal relation of the closeted to the colonized man. Estrangement protects British male subjectivity from being overwhelmed by desire for and identification with the 'East,' while the irreducible remainder of intimacy preserves the East as a place where [gay] liberation can be imagined as possible. (141)

Said's own articulation of transference reads Lionel transferring his sexuality onto not the individual of Cocoanut, but rather the categorical East. Just as Lionel's father was "ruined" by the "primitive" temptation of a native woman, then, Lionel is likewise destroyed by the temptation of the Other.

Further, Greg Thomas, in *The Sexual Demon of Colonial Power: Pan-African Embodiment and Erotic Schemes of Empire* (a post-colonial theoretical critique of colonial [homo]sexuality), postulates

The very notion of Western civilization is...founded on a primary opposition between white and non-white persons that is graphically sexualized. Sylvia Wynter maps...a dichotomy between rational and sensory nature which defines humanist imperialism around the sixteen century. The Man of Reason claims to master the world of sensuality in which primitives are said to dwell. (7)

Colonialism thus must be read through Enlightenment's Cartesian split of mind/body and reason/sensuality, specifically as a precursor to and excessing Orientalism.

Additionally, as Said engages the very Freudian notion of transference, especially in relation to homo/sexuality, it is useful to further entangle queer theory with postcolonial theory to brave a correction in which queer theory is not immune from its own colonializing. Specifically, Lee Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, in conversation with Thomas, may illuminate the "pleasures of the conquest" always already inherent in imperialist relations with the Other (Pirbhai 345). Pointedly so, this dialogue inverts the notion of the Other infecting the empire with perverse sexuality and turns out instead the empire's conquest *through* sexual manifest. Forster's "The Other Boat" is not a love story, nor a story of homosexuality, but a writ on the "pleasures of the conquest," a morality tale of colonialism in which sexual conquest of the Other is sensationalized through the death drive.

Said (through postcolonial theory) might approach "The Other Boat" by interrogating the dichotomous characterizations of Coconut and Lionel, along with other characters in the story.

Said might additionally inquire about location, space, place and positionality in the story, asking who is located where, who takes up space, who determines place, ultimately, what is the positionality of each character. Where else does sexuality manifest in the story? How does this converge/diverge from the main characters' relations? If, as Robert Dale Parker states of Said's theory of Orientalism, the West "feminizes the colonized, partly to masculinize itself...[and] that the West constructed the East by unconsciously taking qualities that the West feared in itself and projecting them onto the East," what can be determined of Lionel's character as a metaphor for the West and Cocoanut's for the East? (295).

Forster's text evidences a colonized sexuality always already determined to be in need of a correction, marked by a Western notion that queers the colonized regardless of sexual orientation. Thomas insists, through the quotes that thread throughout this thesis, "Any sexual transformation that does not willfully transpire on fiercely indigenous, anti-colonized terms is only a racist pretext for cultural destruction, whether this pretense is staged in heteroerotic or homoerotic, masculine or feminine fashion" (93). Thus, Thomas would preface colonial context before notions of homosexuality. Freud undoubtedly would consider the mother, the repetition of "failed" sexuality and its transference to an inappropriate object, and the death drive that spurred the climax of the story. Further so, Lee Edelman might apply his concept of "no future" to the relationship of Cocoanut and Lionel, interrogating in what ways it may be simultaneously enacting colonial discourse, while failing and forsaking that very dialogic. A very queer (white, colonializing) move, indeed.

At the approach of Cocoanut's and Lionel's consummation, after referring to Cocoanut a few times as a "kid" who has "that touch of the tar-brush," Lionel is situated as succumbing to

Cocoanut who implores him, “Lionel, O Lion of the Night, love me.” To which Lionel responds (exasperatedly and benevolently),

“All right. Stay where you are.” Then he confronted the magic that had been worrying him on and off the whole evening and had made him inattentive at cards...When he was ready he shook off old Cocoanut, who was now climbing about like a monkey, and put him where he had to be, and manhandled him. (173)

This passage as an exemplar of an Orientalizing characterization of Lionel and Cocoanut demonstrates a collection of Said’s duality of East/West, colonized/colonizing. Specifically, Lionel’s repetition of “kid” in reference to Cocoanut aligns with the infantilizing of the colonized; “the touch of the tar-brush” invokes a infectious, primitive symbolism; Lionel as the Lion and Cocoanut as a monkey positions Lionel as the “king” (of the jungle) while Cocoanut is the irrational, silly, manic monkey who needs to be “shook off”; Lionel ultimately succumbs to “magic,” becoming “inattentive” to his rational mind, signifying the mysticism of the Orient(alism); ultimately, Lionel effeminizes Cocoanut by masculinizing himself “manhandling” Cocoanut. The apex of colonial discourse through this Orientalism read is “a morality tale of colonialism” in which conquest (through the sexual) becomes mandated through a need to contain the Other.

During an intimate conversation between Cocoanut and Lionel, Lionel discloses the Mater’s (his mother’s) and his father’s failed relationship, “Oh yes, the Mater’s husband, my Dad. He was in the Army too, in fact he attained the rank of major, but a quite unspeakable thing happened—he went native somewhere out East and got cashiered.” Cocoanut’s responds to inquire, “With a girl or a boy?” Lionel, aghast, “A boy? Good God! Well, I mean to say,

with a girl, naturally” (183). Read through Thomas’ theory on the “erotic schemes empire,” we see specifically how sexuality is inscribed onto Coconut and the native woman for whom Lionel’s father voluntarily (supposedly) dejects himself from empire for. The dichotomy of “white and non-white” diverges also at the rational and sensual, locating sexuality specifically at the sight of non-white bodies that threaten to infect white, rational bodies causing downfall and death. Non-white bodies, therefore, are always already queer (wrongly, excessively sexed), regardless of homo/sexuality. Lionel and his father are victims of sexual infection through “Oriental” Others, their responses but “pleasures of conquest,” the rational occupation and overthrowing of colonized bodies.

“The Other Boat” climaxes and abruptly closes with a murder/suicide—of Coconut by Lionel. Here the infection by the colonized, the Orientalized Other, is fully fruited. Edelman neologizes the *sinthomosexual* in an attempt to address Freud (and Lacan) in addressing one who passes through and out of the death drive, but nevertheless, yet retains symptoms (one who is “redeemed”). I’m reading Lionel thusly. Edelman insists of the *sinthomosexual*,

In breaking our hold on the future, the *sinthomosexual*, himself neither martyr nor proponent of martyrdom for the sake of a cause, forsakes *all* causes, *all* social action, all responsibility for a better tomorrow or for the perfection of social forms. Against the promise of such an activism, he performs, instead, an act: the act of repudiating the social, of stepping, or trying to step, with Leonard, beyond compulsory compassion, beyond the future and the snare of images keeping us always in its thrall. Insisting, with Kant, on a freedom from pathological motivation, on a radical type of selflessness no allegory ever redeems,

the *sinthomosexual* stands for the wholly impossible ethical act. And for just that reason the social orderproves incapable of standing him. (101)

Though Edelman is referring here to another plot (Saint Leonard, St. Martin's Place), his analysis might be applied to Lionel's character as Forster has constructed him. Specifically, Edelman's characterization brings insight into the subsequent suicide of Lionel: Forsaking Cocoanut, forsaking his queerness, he also, through the taking of his life, is forsaking his colonial prowess, his redemption, his Oedipal incantation. In short, Forster, in a metaphorical draw of the ultimate no-future, *queers* Lionel.

Certainly, Forster's work has been uptaken as both too queer and not queer enough, colonial and post. Freedgood implores us to read Forster through a homonationalist lens—one that desires the homosexual to be enfolded into the nation-state as a patriot, one who,

Instead of challenging this set of ideologies...worked to change the moral valance of homosexuality, to bring it within categories that his readers [assumedly white] could recognize and approve. He described homoerotic feelings as “primitive,” but also as part of the “common stock” of human emotions...India might be a place where the “primitive” nature of homosexuality might flourish, where he and men like him could be left alone, and where sensuality might triumph over even the sturdy but *constraining rationality* of Englishmen. (126)

Here, too, we see (and will further explore in the next [Sadean] scene) the Other as a reprieve for the Enlightenment's prescription for the repressive and restrained exercise of sexuality. The site of the Other is a utopic location, in other words—outside temporality, space and subjectivity. Perhaps rather than championing either invocation, on either side of queer or postcolonial theory,

we can listen instead to Forster's characters and the plot they construct, watching attentively to what they illuminate instead of deciding upon the author's intent (and sexuality) or evaluating his own status as pro/antagonist. Although Forster's "The Other Boat" remains one of his least written about texts (perhaps because it fails as a queer love story), it is one of his most revealing in regard to the imperial erotics of queerness. In looking at the short story freshly, through Freud's transference and read through Said's *Orientalism* juxtaposed with queer theory's death drive, we might align our reading with Sylvia Wynter and Greg Thomas who understand the sexual construction of the West mandated by a colonial discourse that locates the sensual in the always already racialized Other and the "Man of Reason" in the colonizer. The apex of this comprehension dissipates questions of homo/sexuality and turns the conversation to how the Cartesian split of the enlightenment will never be able to relinquish nor untether the Western ideology of sexuality from the infectious perversion of the Other and the rational "pleasure of the conquest" of the rational white man.

Chapter 7: Scene Six

On Freedom and Flesh: UnQueering the Sadean Universe

Nothing that provokes an erection is villainous, and the only crime in the world is to deny oneself the pleasure.
--Marquis de Sade, 120 Days of Sodom

A freedom which is interested only in denying freedom must be denied. And it is not true that the recognition of the freedom of others limits my own freedom: to be free is not to have the power to do anything you like.
—Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*

Sadism is an effort to incarnate the Other through violence, and this incarnation 'by force' must be already the appropriation and utilization of the Other."
—Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*

Any sexual transformation that does not willfully transpire on fiercely indigenous, anti-colonized terms is only a racist pretext for cultural destruction, whether this pretense is staged in heteroerotic or homoerotic, masculine or feminine fashion.
—Greg Thomas, *The Sexual Demon of Colonial Power: Pan-African Embodiment and Erotic Schemes of Empire*

In 2014, precisely 200 years after the death of the Marquis de Sade, the Musée d'Orsay in Paris opened an exhibit under the curation of Sadean scholar Annie Le Brun: "*Attaquer le Soleil*" ["Attacking the Sun"]. The exhibition revolves around the "revolution of representation" effected by Sadean compulsions, according to the Musée d'Orsay. The works span from the 18th century to the present, with no restrictions on medium. Film, literary texts, as well as traditional visual arts are represented: Picasso's *L'Enlèvement des Sabines* is displayed, as well as a quite aged collection of erotic "tools." Though Sarah Moroz of *The Paris Review* reads the exhibit as demonstrating "how [Sade's] ideas about desire and violence seeped into the cultural zeitgeist and into some of the most seminal art created during and after his lifetime," Le Brun is quick to correct the notion that Sade is the initiator of such vicious debauchery. Rather, she insists, "We didn't try to illustrate Sade—on the contrary, the propos of Sade illuminates the violence that exists deep within at the moment of mythological, historical, religious painting ... everything

that Sade addresses was there before, and will of course continue after” (qtd. in Moroz). Yet Le Brun is strategically placing Sade in an iconic position. As an icon for vicious debauchery, Le Brun’s exhibition not only remarks upon Sade’s influence in the 18th century, but in a motivated temporal excess, she admits to imploring a “rereading...of the history of modernity via a Sadeian [*sic*] prism” to “bring Sade into our era” (qtd. in Moroz). What Le Brun omits is that the Sadean lens, in fact, is very present and has been readily apparent and evidenced in the history of modernity (thus her ability to curate an exhibit with this iconographic trace). As Hussein Ibish reveals in his “United Sades of America,” “[t]he shade of Sade is a markedly unquiet one...Like other repressed ideas, Sade is everywhere and no-where” (98). If we peer through Le Brun’s vision of the Sadean, would modernity look different; or, might this rereading of the intermingling of brutality and the erotic be redundant?

Sex and violence might be uncomfortable bedfellows, but their routine entanglement is historical. According to Saidiya Hartman, “The libidinal investment in violence is everywhere apparent in the documents, statements and institutions that decide our knowledge of the past” (5). The “traffic between fact, fantasy, desire, and violence” marks the juncture where the erotic of the West is situated (Hartman 5). Greg Thomas, in *The Sexual Demon of Colonial Power: Pan-African Embodiment and Erotic Schemes of Empire*, postulates, “Para-neurotic sadism and brutality’ is conveyed as the socio-historical essence of European sexuality, after colonialism, in and for colonialism” (91). Not only do erotic schemes of empire structure heterosexual intimacies where the “slippage between victims and sweethearts, acts of love and brutal excess” function, but additionally these schemes inform transgressive modalities of sexuality (Hartman 5).

Herein lies the elision I'm attempting to interrogate: Sade as an icon of transgressive sexuality has been *queered*—enveloped by the categorical queer that stands-in for all that is anti-normative. Sade as emblematic of anti-normativity is a grave misnomer, however. Recalling Thomas, “para-neurotic sadism and brutality” is the defining norm of Western sexuality. Sade’s biographical and textual accounts regenerate the violent rendition of the erotics of empire rather than transgress this paradigm. Sadean erotics cannot be said to be holistically anti-normative, therefore. What we might learn from the move to queer Sade is how queerness, like Sade, excuses itself from oppressive normativity by way of sexuality. In other words, queerness as a transgressive mode of heterosexuality does not exclusively transcend the problematic paradigm of the “libidinal investment in violence.” In fact, I contend that certain articulations of transgressive sexualities reinforce rather than excess the imperial pairing of sex and violence. My concern over what happens in the bedroom is less concerned with what two consenting adults do with their bodies (though I am concerned about *informed* consent, but more on that later). Rather, my inquiry resides in what is presently termed “nonegalitarian sexual ethics,” inherently evidencing a dominant body wielding power over a vulnerable body (Amin 35). If revisiting Sade teaches us something, the lessons might occur by tracing the genealogy of “nonegalitarian sexual ethics” that tend to be posited upon brutality. Specifically, I’m concerned with how eroticized violence is queered under the category of sexual transgression. How is “the libidinal investment in violence” manifested and evidenced through queerness? How might this investment be hegemonic rather than subversive? What might be revealed if we acknowledge queerness to be contained within the categorical concept of Western sexuality rather than exceptional to it?

Echoing Le Brun, queer theorist Gert Hekma insists on “the importance of Sade’s work in our times,” contrarily posing the question, “But why should we oppose bonds of inequality that for sure will not wither away...Equality in sexual desire is for Sade unimaginable, and therefore his libertines have to force their wishes upon their often unwilling victims. Perhaps we could say that sexual equality is only possible in societies that have straightened out difference” (14). Hekma is not alone in his impulses toward a Sadean universe. In fact, Sade has been an icon of transgressive sexuality, long before Le Brun’s curation. Sadism’s etymology, a derivative of Sade’s work, bespeaks his affinity for erotic brutality. Sade’s preferred act—sodomy—has read (and consequently rendered) Sade as queer, but the adoption of Sade as a queer theorist is additionally contingent upon Sade’s philosophical inversion of sexual norms. For Sade, sodomy is the “simulacrum of the destruction of norms” (Klossowski 6). Here the parallel signifies more than a sexual act. As Jack Halberstam insists, “Antinormativity is the organizing principle for queer scholarship.” Queer scholarship’s alignment with Sadean tenets, however, may require a selective memory in recalling Sade’s actual textual material, as “there appears to be a strong inverse proportion between the popular reach of his name and image and actual familiarity with his writings and thought” (Ibish 98).

Hekma properly draws our attention to the elision of anti-normativity and the question of power in sex, but rapidly embraces nonegalitarian sex as the only possibility within hegemonic sociality. For Hekma, the mirage of egalitarian bonds is a sexual naiveté of Western modernity, of those societies that have claimed to have “straightened out difference,” which is to say, *gone straight*. This tongue-in-cheek rhetorical move embraces inequality as queer difference and, in a double-move, indicts rigid heterosexuality as the cause and effect of making (a problem of)

difference. Hekma's slippage between nonegalitarian and transgressive sexualities invites another normative bond for queer theory to transgress: the polarities of "amoral and innocent" as enacted through sadism.

Hekma attempts to address (perhaps motivationally) the forgotten Sadean violence, installing a (rickety) bridge to elide the slippage between transgressive and violent sexuality. Rather than dismissing Sade due to his imperative of violence in the erotic, Hekma's solution is a reconsideration of the tenet that a sexuality inclusive of violence is immoral. What follows is, at length, Hekma's reconfiguration of the violent erotic:

[C]onfessing to have been a victim of sexual abuse or harassment has become widespread and well regarded... This has led to a general feeling that sexual violence is morally wrong while definitions of abuse have been stretched far to include harassment and erotic conversations or sexual acts with younger people. Sade's approach to enjoying the pleasures of violence is now off limits. Victims of sexual violence often experience feeling of excitement during the act but are after-wards ashamed of such emotions. Disapproving attitudes toward such sexual violence create negative feelings not only regarding sexual behavior in general but also various forms of sociability. It could be worthwhile, following Sade, not only to accept the pleasures of abuse, but also to prepare children in sexual education for such contradictory sentiments that are not specific to cases of abuse but also exist in erotic situations of mutual consent. The dichotomy of villain and victim, of amoral and innocent is as unreal and ineffective as male-female or gay-straight dichotomies. (14)

Rather than gaining traction in queer theory's engagement with Sade, Hekma here further glides along the queer "synecdoche that stands in for all other imaginable depravities," succumbing to hegemonic law that homosexuals embody a "sexuality ontologically different from that of normal men" (Amin 41). If the endgame in queer theory is to suture the dichotomy of villain and victim, of gay-straight paradigms, is Sade our alter-ego?

Sade, Sovereignty and the Synecdoche of Queer

Hekma's thesis encounters tension when we consider Sade's primary texts and further note that only in one of Sade's considered works, *The Philosophies of the Bedroom*, does no one suffer murder. (Though here it must be noted that the text does not actualize a murder *tout court*, the work does indeed close with the purposeful infection of an incurable and ultimately fatal STI of one of the characters). Most prominently, in *120 Days of Sodom, or the School of Libertinage*, perhaps Sade's most revered work, the work Sade himself refers to as "The most impure tale ever written since the world began," chronicles four months of escalating erotic violence enacted by four male libertines, climaxing in nearly all of the libertines' 36 victims being *sadistically* slain—the libertines' arousal depend upon the desecration of vulnerable bodies. The novel is a dictionary of 600 "passions" of transgressive sexuality. All of the passions are definitively nonegalitarian. Sixteen of the libertine's victims are aged 12-15 years of age. Though Hekma, in the case of sexual education, asks us to consider "the pleasures of abuse" not exclusive to "cases of abuse," and additionally to consider "erotic situations of mutual consent," Sade fails to evidence such amatory conditions. Sade's texts absolutely depend upon not only nonegalitarian sex, but also that the unequal participants of nonegalitarian sex be nonconsensually brutalized.

Herein lies the crux of the Sadean argument that is well-worn. The sovereignty of the libertine unequivocally depends upon the non-sovereignty of other bodies: “Sade’s sovereigns are nothing without victims” (Harrington 6). Ultimately, this is the sovereign’s paradox, as the “transgressive capacity of sovereign’s power” enacts a legal excess only in that the law is inverted or redefined autonomously—the libertines “impose all law but obey none” (Harrington 5). Reinforcing rather than transgressing the subject/object power polarity is Sadean calculus. Liberation exists solely for the subject and is contingent upon an object through which to exercise freedom: “freedom with violence” (Reddy). Sade’s lawlessness, rather than a Robin Hood ethic, is a self-serving methodology. As Samuel Herrington insists in “The Problem of Sovereignty in the Marquis de Sade: Transgression and *The 120 Days of Sodom*,” “To deny and regulate constitutes the manifestation of Sade’s political power separating and distinguishing between those who get to live a legally viable life, and those who can be justifiably conquered. Thus, the stripping away of juridical rights is the sadistic political act *par excellence*” (6-7). If Hekma sees queer sovereignty as superseding the straight paradigm of heterosexuality, then queer freedom, through this reconfiguration, is nonegalitarian, according to Hekma’s rhetorical postulation. Said another way, Hekma doesn’t disagree with the age-old moral critique of homosexuality as the “synecdoche that stands in for all other imaginable depravities,” he rather appropriates it.

If the story is old, it persists, as Hekma recalls Sartre’s simultaneous critique of and infatuation with Sade. Sartre, articulating the polarities of sadism and machoism as subject and object positions, cites that, “The object of sadism is immediate appropriation” (399). Further, Sartre, more honestly than Hekma, understands difference and nonegalitarian sexual ethics to be

situated in subjugation. Sartre contends, “Sadism is an effort to incarnate the Other through violence, and this incarnation ‘by force’ must be already the appropriation and utilization of the Other” (400). Precisely, at this point, we return to Thomas’ thesis: “Any sexual transformation that does not willfully transpire on fiercely indigenious, anti-colonized terms is only a racist pretext for cultural destruction, whether this pretense is staged in heteroerotic or homoerotic, masculine or feminine fashion” (93). This is to say, *transgression through power is a reification of power*.

Saving Sade: Sadean Philosophy or Sexual Sadist?

Le Brun reasons that the “Sadean rather than [the] Sadist” be the location for interrogations of the Marquis de Sade’s texts (qtd. in Moroz). Her begging distinction between the erotic brutality (the very conception generating the term “sadist”) and the critical, transgressive philosophies of Sade (what Le Brun is distinguishing here as Sadean) is not a new debate, as Le Brun well knows as a Sadean scholar. In fact, Le Brun is in good company in her prismatic view of Sade as an intellectual, cleaved from his erotic criminology that occurs garishly and unrestrainedly in both his texts and his living. It is this very divisiveness which allows the intellectualizing of Sade, compartmentalized from his violence. The existentialist philosophers especially have been interested in Sade’s libertine usurpation of freedom and come dangerously close to deifying him. Camus famously heralds Sade as “the first theoretician of absolute rebellion” (21).

Simone de Beauvoir, depending upon who one asks, and according to Andrea Dworkin, “published a long apologia for Sade” (93). The provocation for de Beauvoir’s polemic, “Must We Burn Sade?” might just be to contend with the prominent existential engagement into the

Sadean dispute. She concludes, in perhaps an apologetic ambiguity, “The fact that Sade was at times capable of extravagant boldness both of rashness and generosity does in the void become absurd, and the tyrant who tries to assert himself by such violence discovers merely his own nothingness” (62-3). Rather than reduce the debate solely to Sade’s own sovereign liberation, de Beauvoir demands we (re)consider Sade’s fusion of “flesh” and “freedom.” Through the principal concern with the Other, de Beauvoir critiques Sade’s bad ethics at the site of the body. If, as M. Jacqui Alexander professes, “*Morality* has become a euphemism for *sex*,” then de Beauvoir’s praise of Sade’s transgressive, anti-normative ethics simultaneously disallows his sexual transgressions as moral (133). Lacan’s assessment of the Sadist concludes that “the sadistic will to dominate rejects any of the habitual hallmarks which typify an ethic: otherness, togetherness, mutual benefit or exchange and so on. Morality requires reciprocity, equivalent ethical relations between peoples” (Harrington 5). De Beauvoir considers the erotic transcendental only when the act exceeds the object/subject paradigm. Contingent upon her postulations of subjugated engendering through the erotic in *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir revokes sanction for Sade at the absence of erotic intersubjectivity. In sum, Sade reifies patriarchal sex. He requires nonegalitarian erotics. De Beauvoir, on the other hand, demands erotic “reciprocity” and “mutual benefit or exchange.” Ultimately, decides de Beauvoir, Sade utilizes the Other toward his own ethics of freedom, simultaneously usurping the freedom of the objectified Other. For de Beauvoir, Sade fails as the liberationist hero due to his sadistic (anti)ethics.

Conclusively, if Sade transcends normativity, it is a transcendental normativity that is purchased with the currency of the violated bodies of women, children and male prostitutes.

Even if Dworkin's read on de Beauvoir's ambiguous take on Sade is unforgiving, Dworkin aligns herself with de Beauvoir in their mutual concern at the site of the Other. Dworkin, certainly including de Beauvoir as one of the existential intellectuals here, yet shares the same tension over Sadean freedom:

All of the girls and women hurt by Sade are treated by biographers and intellectuals with this same endemic contempt. An exchange of money, male to female, especially wipes away crime, negates harm—whether the commentator is a pedestrian biographer or a grand literary critic. The use of money to buy women is apparently mesmerizing. It magically licenses any crime against women. Once a woman has been paid, crime is expiated. That no real harm was done, no matter what actually was done, is a particularly important theme. This point is echoed in the Kinsey Institute's study of sex offenders and in a vast body of contemporary social analyses that, explicitly or implicitly, define sexual freedom as men doing what they want without foolish resistance from "puritanical" or "repressed" women who are incapable of knowing or telling sexual truth. (108)

Dworkin's point here must be considered on two axes: 1) (un)lawful criminality and 2) the definition of the Other at the site of the body. Though it might be obvious, the Other here is narrowly defined through class (the demand for capitalistic exchange value through the sale of the flesh) and gender (women decidedly not *owning* their sexuality). Crucial is that criminality is but a legal jurisdiction. If prostitution is illegal, it remains a crime against the state, not women who compel the crime with frigidity. Further, the "literary critic" who applauds Sade for his writ on the zenith of freedom, according to Dworkin, holds the same "endemic contempt" for the

Other as Sade. The literary critic, it might go, is himself an inspiring libertine through Sadean methodology. The absence of the criminal act does not disavow a validation of Sadean philosophy. In the end, Sadean sovereignty achieves utopia for the libertine, not his requisite victims: “The habitual subject of morality (the individual ‘I’ in its relation to humanity as an equal whole of ‘others’) is displaced and relocated solely into the other, into *him*. Sade demands that we submit to *his jouissance*, commanding the right over *our* body, without any limit stopping him” (Harrington 5). Without doubt, the Sadean (sexual) ethics of self-sovereignty require the nonegalitarian ethics that Hekma insists upon as rightly queer.

On the Body: Inscribing Sadean (Anti)Ethics

It is here, at this crossroads of both the text and the materiality of Sade’s biography that we must realize the essential requirement of the body in Sadean ethics. In *Sade: The Invention of the Libertine Body*, Marcel Henaff postulates

If the invention of the libertine body is what will occupy us here, then what this means is that the body...will be the major sign through which all other signs and their relationships are read. But why should this approach so privilege the body? [B]ecause we need to recognize we are dealing here with a concern that has shaped and permeated the whole of the modern era. From Freud to Husserl, and from Nietzsche to Foucault, the body has been named as the seat of everything that is at the stake in the distribution of forces, power, and codes. The body is both the place where they intersect and the site of their concrete activity, both the converter of their multiplicity and the model for their extension, the point of concentration both for their implementation and for their crises. If the body tells a

story, it also tells the shattering finale of that story. In fact, once we have begun to see the body, we see nothing else—not because of any fascination with the body as a theme, but because in the body we really do see *everything*. (10)

Because “the body has been named as the seat of everything that is at the stake in the distribution of forces, power, and codes,” we “really do see *everything*” at the site of the body. The site of the body is where the Other is determined, defined and demarcated as a being for another, as not sovereign. Here is where the quest for and of the Sadean body and the Other becomes problematic for queerness. As Robert Reid-Pharr emphasizes, “If there is one thing that marks us as queer...then it is undoubtedly our relationship to the body” (qtd. in Macharia). What is critical here for my inquiry is not how the body acts to queer itself, but how the queered self is contained as exclusively *body* in its status as Other. The culmination of my claim is that Sade’s utopic liberationist quest is found at the site of the flesh of the Other, because as an aristocratic libertine, he has suffered a “split” from his own body. If, as Henaff concludes, the body “has shaped and permeated the whole of the modern era,” then we must look toward the Enlightenment’s disavowal and disciplining of the body.

The Cartesian split creates a taxonomy that hierarchically polarizes all things. Categorically, a thing must appear on one side of the binary, and within the binary there exists always a superior and an inferior side. Descartes’ infamous proclamation, “I think, therefore I am,” places the mind over the body in the hierarchy of man. The human, it goes, is “split” into two aspects, the mind and the body. For Descartes and other men of his ilk, the mind is prefaced, and the body, repressed. The body is the inferior, primal functioning faction of the human. It must be controlled through the will of the mind, which is to say, reason, or the word.

The will and the rational intellect must temper all that is sensed through the body. Sade inverts the weight of this split, insisting on Descartes' prefacing of the mind: "This idea has no sound, no colour, no smell," the marquis says, "It does not come from the senses and without the senses there can be no real ideals" (qtd. in Lichfield, from Musée d'Orsay's Sadean exhibition, "*Attaquer le Soleil*"). Sade could be said to be reclaiming the body, suturing the split, entertaining and succumbing to the bodily passions rather than repressing them with the will of the mind.

However, in the case of Sade and the pervasive engagement of the villain we love to hate (yet emulate), this conclusion of a search for a holistic human would be an (obvious) error. As reason's doppelganger, Sade indeed attempts to demonstrate the detrimental apex of the Enlightenment's primary concern with the individual and the new humanism that foregrounds Descartes' logic as culminating in the ultimate destruction—murder. In fact, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, Sade takes reason and science to its very logical consequences, "pursuing the implications of reason still more resolutely than the positivists, [Sade's] secret purpose was to lay bare the utopia which is contained in every great philosophy" (93). Further, the authors insist that Sade "did not seek to avert the consequences of the Enlightenment with harmonistic doctrines...[and] did not pretend that formalistic reason had a closer affiliation to morality than to immorality" (92). Certainly, Sade achieves no contention at the point of his immorality.

The cruel absurdity of Sade's textual accounts is precisely what has granted him, by select critics, the title of satirist, of giving an account of reason that evidences the destruction of reason. Contrarily, while Sade "took science at its word," he simultaneously uses the body as the

main tool of reason's destruction—a very anti-Enlightenment concept (Adorno and Horkheimer 93). This double-move within the procedures of Sadean logic is too often overlooked.

The Boys Aren't All Right: Libertines, Rakes and the Repressive Doctrines of Enlightenment Sexuality

Sade's notion of the erotic doesn't stem solely from his own psychosis, but has a grounding in the Enlightenment's evolution of sexual sociality. Through Sade's biographies, we understand that his living behavior to be quite reflective of other libertines of the 18th century who were reacting to the new sexual codes of the time. Erin Mackie, in "Boys Will Be Boys: Masculinity, Criminality, and the Restoration Rake," explores how the rakes (and libertines) refused the sexual propriety required by this period,

[R]akish criminality is linked through nostalgic compensation to aristocratic ideals of peerless privilege and through competition with emerging ideals of the polite gentleman...Rakish criminality is articulated both in relation to residual, tenacious aristocratic masculinity sustained by elite exceptionalism and to the emergent, modern polite masculinity founded in ideals of civility and sensibility rather than status. (132)

New Enlightenment ideals frowned upon noble excess. The will, located in the mind, was to restrain and retrain the body's impulses. The "criminal sublime," the scandalous quest of excessive ecstasy, enacted by rakes and libertines granted them an outlaw status—the Sadean prestige of the glorified villain (Michael Neill qtd. in Mackie 138). This early modern methodology evidentially lingers in the present as Sade is relentlessly engaged into matters of liberation and the body, of flesh and freedom, of body and mind.

If we allow this historical contextualization into the conversation of Sadean philosophizing, we might adjust our calculations of Sade's motivations at the site of his sexual transgressions—both textual and biographical. Neither was Sade the only aristocrat indulging in violent criminal sublimity, nor was he the sole libertine fortifying himself with anti-Enlightenment diatribes. John Wilmot, Second Earl of Rochester (1647-1680) has enjoyed a notoriety second only to Sade (that Johnny Depp, for example, has acted his part as a scandalous rake might be enough to fortify the outlaw warrant). The Earl of Rochester wrote most prominently (and vulgarly) the poetic memoirs of a rake's erotic escapades, which, prefacing the work of Sade, was (though to a significantly less violent degree) dependent upon the violated bodies of the Other, most routinely, prostitutes and boys: "Stiffly resolved, 'twould carelessly invade/*Woman* or *Boy*, nor aught its fury stayed:/Where'er it pierced, a *Cunt* it found or made" ("The Imperfect Enjoyment"). His defense of his unbridled, unrestricted passions and violations, like Sade's, was "against reason"

A Satyr against Reason and Mankind

Where I (who to my cost already am

One of those strange, prodigious Creatures, *Man*)

A Spirit free, to choose for my own share,

What Case of Flesh and Blood I pleased to wear,

I'd be a *Dog*, a *Monkey*, or a *Bear*,

Or anything but that vain *Animal*

Who is so Proud of being rational.

The senses are too gross, and he'll contrive

A sixth, to contradict the other Five,
 And before certain Instinct, will prefer
Reason, which fifty times for one does err;
Reason, an *Ignis fatuus* in the *Mind*,
 Which, leaving light of *Nature*, sense behind,
 Pathless and dang'rous wand'ring way it takes.

Wilmot is quite scathingly talking back to Enlightenment reason here, specifically to that newfangled reason which was positioned to supersede a “certain Instinct.” Wilmot rather begs his freedom to engage in grotesque sensuality and punctuates his poetic declaration with “reason” being the actual detriment. The importance of Wilmot’s engagement is to illustrate the shift in the Enlightenment’s sexual prescription. Both Wilmot and Sade’s refusal of the Enlightenment’s ideological shift reveals more about historicity than the isolate example of the two rakish men.

In *Sade: A Biographical Essay*, Laurence Bongie inquires, “When do we believe him?” (212). More than answering the question Bongie poses, I’m interested in the landscape that Sade (and Wilmot) illuminate. Rather than posing and attempting to answer the bifurcating inquiry of Sade as a villain or hero, we might instead examine Sade’s legacy as the foundational articulation of sexuality’s turn at the Enlightenment. The body’s desires, according to Sade, have been willed-away by reason and rationality, the demand of the “polite gentleman.” In his refusal of these new mores, Sade must access the passions of the body, not through his own flesh, but those whose beings have been articulated as bodies rather than minds. The Cartesian split demarcated the human into mind/body, man/woman, white/nonwhite, civilized/primitive,

thinking/sensing, and on. Sade, as the 18th century marquis, is situated as the Cartesian methodologist on a quest for the capture and possessing of the (Other's) body. Thusly, Sade exemplifies the extended articulations of Descartes. It is my claim that his libertine tendencies demonstrate his quest to reclaim and suture the mind and the body, which requires the Other: A being whom the Cartesian method has demarcated as "body." The superior side of the hierarchy locates mind with man, white, civilized, thinking while the body must be accessed through the woman, nonwhite, primitive, sensing being—the Other.

The desire for the Other is an anxious attempt to repair the shattered self of the Enlightenment. To recall Thomas' assertion, "Para-neurotic sadism and brutality' is conveyed as the socio-historical essence of European sexuality" (91). The Other, therefore, must be absorbed into the sutured, rational self—as bell hooks puts it, this consummation requires "eating the Other." Sade's project is nonegalitarian erotics toward a sovereignty that reconciles the schism of the (libertine) self. Suture is attained through the violation of the body of another, the quite literal "taking" of the Other at the site of the body, procuring the Other for oneself. In *Aberrations In Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*, Roderick A. Ferguson cites Black Panther Party's Huey Newton's "master/slave dialectic to formulate a gendered and eroticized narrative of the racial oppression of African Americans":

The historical relationship between black and white here in America has been the relationship between the slave and the master; the master being the mind and the slave the body. The slave would carry out the orders that the mind demanded him to carry out. By doing this the master took the manhood from the slave because he stripped him of a mind. He stripped black people of their mind. In the

process, the slave-master stripped himself of a body...The white man cannot gain his manhood, cannot unite with the body because the body is black. The body is symbolic of slavery and strength. It's a biological thing as he views it. The slave is in a much better situation because his not being a full man has always been viewed psychologically. And it is easier to make a psychological transition than a biological one. If he can only recapture his mind, recapture his balls, then he will lose all fear and will be free to determine his destiny. (115)

While Ferguson offers a critique of Newton's "heteropatriarchal reclamation," Newton's articulation of the Cartesian split is definitively pronounced. That Ferguson yet invokes Newton's heterosexual thesis of a racialized narrative is crucial to understanding Thomas' thesis, which I extend here to articulate that the erotic under modernity is preemptively racialized. My claim is that queerness does not, cannot transcend this racialization, and is, in fact, contained by this Western tenet of sexuality. The queer Other is always already racialized, in other words. At this juncture, Hekma is correct: queerness is nonegalitarian. And here lies the dangerous slippage in queering Sade: the reification of locating the body at the site of the Other. To be clear, Hekma is not representative of what most (white) queer theorists admit to, but I contend that Hekma's transparency must be attended to and taken with intent and not in isolation.

Rather than look to Sade and Hekma for what's queer, I turn to a conversation between Greg Thomas and Sylvia Wynter:

So that's what I mean when I say that the Black situation and the homosexual situation are parallel. We are the only ones who are socialized in such a way that we cannot trust our own 'consciousness.' Because it's very different to ever

contradict the norm, whatever is the norm. And you know what this society has done to all of us? WE WANT TO BUY INTO ‘NORMALCY,’ AS ‘NORMALCY’ IS CONSIDERED WITHIN THE VERY TERMS OF VERY ORDER OF ‘KNOWLEDGE’ WHICH HAS MADE US ‘DEVIANT!’ You see what I’m trying to say? And yes, so it is ‘logical.’ Right? But this is how the system traps you. (“PROUD FLESH Inter/Views: Sylvia Wynter”)

Here, at the last “scene” of this thesis, I call for what Amin, Hekma, Freeman, Edelman and (queer) company dismiss as quite *unqueer*: an anti-racist, nonviolent sociality, a temporality, space, place, a site where “the Black situation and the homosexual situation are parallel.” This site doesn’t desire or pervert subjectivation nor make it utopic. This site *redefines* queer, removing poststructuralist perversions. Queer can no longer stand as a synecdoche for all things anti-normative. The vanguard of Thomas and Wynter’s queer is a location which redefines queer ethics. Thomas and Wynter’s parallel forecloses nonegalitarian erotics. This site does neither dismisses race nor concedes to its prescription—there is no “race play” here.

And it is here that we must demand an answer of queerness, “How, in [Sade’s] scheme of things, do we reconcile the natural rights of the strong with the rights of the others? How do we reconcile the value-neutral ‘laws of nature’ that the rapist... ‘rightfully’ exemplifies, with the conflicting claims of his victims? Basically, Sade did not face this problem. He simply dismisses it as *not his problem*” (Bongie 262). Bongie’s inquiry put in conversation with Thomas and Wynter demands that transgressing normalcy does not invoke victims nor the logic of the epistemology that has required the victimhood of the Other. It demands that we *unqueer*

Sade and his nonegalitarian erotics and ethics, that we do not abide by the modern tenet that *it's not our problem*.

Conclusion

A Queer Problem: Queer Ethics in an “Anti-Erotic Society”

Recognizing the power of the erotic within our lives can give us the energy to pursue genuine change within our world, rather than merely settling for a shift of characters in the same weary drama. For not only do we touch our most profoundly creative source, but we do that which is female and self-affirming in the face of a racist, patriarchal, and anti-erotic society.

—Audre Lorde,

“The Uses of the Erotic, The Power of the Erotic”

Luna Malbroux, in “When You Want to be into BDSM, But it’s Too Soon Because You’re Black,” reveals,

[W]hips, chains, that sort of thing—all I could think of was *Roots*. Let me you tell you something. Nothing dries you up quicker than *Roots*. If it’s not *Roots*, it’s *Amistad*, or *Beloved*, or the slave-revolt TV show *Underground*. Anyone who’s seen a slave movie knows that there are plenty of examples of black slaves having to whip other slaves’ backs, so a whip is a whip to me, no matter who’s holding it.

Further, Malbroux confessing ironically that her “safeword might just have to be ‘Harriet Tubman,’” because “as a black person in America, *you are never safe*.” Malbroux concludes BDMS, for herself as a black woman, is impossible—“No dick is so good that it’s worth being haunted by Harriet Tubman.”

If we follow Freeman’s “temporal drag,” I’ll place us, out-of-time, back to the future, post Freeman and presently Audre Lorde in her 1988 interview with Susan Leigh Star. Lorde prefaces the interview: “S/M is not the sharing of power, it is merely a depressing replay of the old and destructive dominant/subordinate mode of human relating and one-sided power” (50). Lorde’s dialogue with Star is emblematic of a precise moment in feminist history—the feminist

sex wars. A bifurcation of feminism at the site of sex, the dispute found two camps: anti-pornography feminists and sex-positive feminists. (Though, of course, neither of these camps were embodied solitarily by the following three authors, the debate is most-often reduced to these authors). Most famously, the anti-pornography feminists were fronted by Andrea Dworkin (*Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, 1981) and Catharine MacKinnon, who drafted the Antipornography Civil Rights Ordinance (ultimately struck down in courts). At the front-line of the pro-positive camp was Gayle Rubin, author of the frequently invoked *Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality*. The “unsettling anxiety” this dispute works upon is that of women and sexual agency (Holland 85). Dworkin was accused of being of asexual and often unequivocally anti-sex, effectively denying women sex. On the other hand, Rubin refused to curtail the sexual agency of women, even in a culture that was indeed, in Dworkin’s words, “woman-hating”—a hate most frequently enacted through sexual violence (as this title of her first book articulates). Rubin problematized the position of the anti-pornography feminists beyond the obvious and superficial charge of sexual puritanism, arguing that Dworkin’s position was, in fact, aligning itself with traditional gender norms that insisted upon women’s chastity. Women’s (sexual) liberation was contingent upon excessing normative sexual paradigms. Rubin, therefore called for the dismantling of the conflation of feminism and sexuality studies.

No doubt, herein lies a trace of queer genealogy (recalling here that Macharia cites Rubin as one of our queer “mothers”). Queer theory has met Rubin and raised her one, dejecting feminism(s) altogether from queer theory—a move quite in line with “gender undecidability” (recall here Spillers’ term). Sexuality took the foreground, leaving behind gender as an

antiquated and (hetero)normative pursuit. Queer is *after* gender (in the progress narrative). Situated in the anti-normative sexual paradigm, queer is decidedly sex-positive. Unfortunately, as in any binary system, everything is fitted into one of two sides (of a hierarchy). Like pornography, S/M was pressed into the categorical of (queer) sex-positivity.

Queer as its own safeword, safeguards all queers as *fondly* “perverse.” The trouble with queering all “perversities” is that there is resistance to troubling *any* proclivity. As Lorde asserts, “Because S/M is a theme in the dominant culture [*not* anti-normative], an attempt to ‘reclaim’ it rather than question it is an excuse not to look at the content of the behavior. For instance, ‘We are lesbians doing this extreme thing and you’re criticizing *us*’ (51). However, might this queer umbrella additionally create a mutual exclusivity between ethics and sexuality? Malbroux and Lorde both speak to the “unsettling anxiety” which manifests from centering sex before ethics. How can we begin to talk about what might comprise a queer ethic? Is anti-normativity or anti-sociality an ethic? Can “the flat rejection of the kind of normative ethics that relies on a set of a priori judgements about right and wrong—constitute an adequate ethical stance” (Ruti 5)? What might be the repercussions of a queer theory that is posited upon the notion that “the more thoroughly pulverized the subject gets, the more ‘ethical’ it will be” (Ruti 5)? From the location of Ruti’s “pulverized” subject, the slide into S/M erotics as an ethical practice is established. Is the “something odd” about desubjectivation that it constructs an “ethical paradigm that leaves others behind, that effectively renders the other irrelevant” (Ruti 18)? Desubjectivation in a queer anti-relational paradigm paradoxically reinscribes the sovereign subject it attempts to elude, or shatter. Through S/M play, bodily boundaries are dissolved, thresholds of embodiment are surpassed—the body is reduced to mere flesh. I end where we begin: troubling the site of

black flesh as the fetishized (white) queer fantasy enacting the apex of desubjectivation—the “pulverized subject.” My “unsettling anxiety” desires queer to be untethered from an ethics that has become so obliterated that not only does it stand for nothing, but more so, anything goes. Lorde, in response Star’s question, “What about the doctrine of ‘live and let live’ and civil liberties issues,” responds,

I don’t see that as the point. I’m not questioning anyone’s right to live. I’m saying we must observe the implications of our lives... We have been nurtured in a sick, abnormal society, and we should be about the process of reclaiming ourselves as well as the terms of that society. This is complex. *I speak not of condemnation* but about recognizing what is happening and questioning what it means. I’m not willing to regiment *anyone’s* life, but if we are to scrutinize our human relationships, we must be willing to scrutinize all aspects of those relationships. (51)

Perhaps a queer ethics can be posited from a criticality that isn’t defaulted to a reactive againstness. The erotic doesn’t need to shatter the subject to be nonnormative, nor does the erotic need to be isolated to the site of sex, as Lorde elsewhere tells us (see the “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power”). Can queer theory dissolve its “unsettling anxiety” around ethics, one that likely stems from another genealogy—the sexual morality that ostracized, vilified and out-lawed the queer? In an “anti-erotic society,” what might the vanguard of queer ethics *do*?

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