

The Prison Slave as Hegemony's (Silent) Scandal

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"The Black experience in this country has been a phenomenon without analog."
Eugene Genovese, *Boston Review* October/November 1993.

There's something organic to Black positionality which makes it essential to the destruction of civil society. There's nothing willful or speculative in this statement for one could just as well state the claim the other way round: There's something organic to civil society which makes *it* essential to the destruction of the Black body. Blackness is a positionality of "absolute dereliction" (Fanon), abandonment, in the face of civil society, and therefore can not establish itself, or be established, through hegemonic interventions. Blackness can not become one of civil society's many junior partners: Black citizenship, or Black civic obligation, are oxymorons.

In light of this, coalitions and social movements, even radical social movements like the Prison Abolition Movement, bound up in the solicitation of hegemony, so as to fortify and extend the interlocutory life of civil society, ultimately accommodate only the satiable demands and finite antagonisms of civil society's junior partners (i.e. immigrants, White women, the working class), but foreclose upon the insatiable demands and endless antagonisms of the prison slave and the prison-slave-in-waiting. In short, whereas such coalitions and social movements can not be called the outright handmaidens of White Supremacy, their rhetorical structures and political desire are underwritten by a supplemental anti-Blackness.

In her autobiography, Assata Shakur's comments on coalitions vacillate from interesting and insightful to painfully programmatic and "responsible." The expository method of conveyance accounts for this air of responsibility. But toward the end of the book she accounts for coalition work by way of extended narrative as opposed to exposition. We accompany her on

one of Zayd's many Panther projects with outside groups; work "dealing with white support groups who were involved in raising bail for the Panther 21 members in jail" (224). With no more than three words, her recollection becomes matter of fact and unfiltered. She writes, "I hated it."

At the time, i felt that anything below 110th street was another country. All my activities were centered in Harlem and i almost never left it. Doing defense committee work was definitely not up my alley...i hated standing around while all these white people asked me to explain myself, my existence. i became a master of the one-liner (224).

Her hatred of this work is bound up in her anticipation, fully realized, of all the zonal violations to come when a White woman asks her if Zayd is her "panther...you know, is he your black cat?" and then runs her fingers through Assata's hair to cop a kinky feel. Her narrative anticipates these violations-to-come at the level of the street, as well as at the level of the body.

Here is the moment in her life as a prison-slave-in-waiting, which is to say a moment as an ordinary Black person, when she finds herself among "friends"—abolitionists, at least partners in purpose, and yet she feels it necessary to adopt the same muscular constriction, the same coiled anticipation, the same combative "one-liners" that she will need to adopt just one year later to steel herself against the encroachment of prison guards. The verisimilitude between Assata's well-known police encounters, and her experiences in civil society's most nurturing nook, the radical coalition, raises disturbing questions about political desire, Black positionality, and hegemony as a modality of struggle.

In *The Wretched of the Earth* Fanon makes two moves with respect to civil society: First, he locates its genuine manifestation in Europe—the motherland. Then, with respect to the colony, he locates it only in the zone of the settler. This second move is vital for our understanding of Black positionality in America and for understanding the, limitations of radical social movements in America. For if we are to follow Fanon's analysis, and the gestures toward this understanding in some of the work of imprisoned intellectuals, then we have to come to grips with the fact that,

for Black people, civil society *itself*—rather than its abuses or shortcomings—is a state of emergency.

For Fanon, civil society is predicated on the Manicheism of divided zones, opposed to each other “but not in service of a higher unity” (38-39). This is the basis of his later assertion that the two zones produce two different “species” between which “no conciliation is possible” (ibid.). The phrase “not in service of a higher unity” dismisses any kind of dialectical optimism for a future synthesis. In “The Avant-Garde of White Supremacy,” Martinot and Sexton assert the primacy of Fanon’s Manichean zones (without the promise of higher unity) even in the face of American integration facticity. Fanon’s specific colonial context does not share the same historical or national context of Martinot and Sexton, of course, but the settler/native dynamic, the differential zoning and the gratuity (as opposed to the contingency) of violence which accrue to the blackened position, are shared by both texts.

The dichotomy between white ethics [the discourse of civil society] and its irrelevance to the violence of police profiling is not dialectical; the two are incommensurable whenever one attempts to *speak* about the paradigm of policing, one is forced back into a discussion of particular events—high profile homicides and their related courtroom battles, for instance. (Martinot and Sexton 6 Italics mine)

It makes no difference that in the USA the “casbah” and the “European” zone are laid one on top of the other, what is being asserted here is an isomorphic schematic relation—the schematic interchangeability—between Fanon’s settler society and Martinot and Sexton’s policing paradigm. For Fanon, it is the policeman and soldier (not the discursive, or hegemonic, agents) of colonialism which make one town White and the other Black. For Martinot and Sexton this Manichean delirium manifests itself by way of the US paradigm of policing which (re)produces, repetitively, the inside/outside, the civil society/black world, by virtue of the difference between those bodies that don’t magnetize bullets and those bodies that do. “Police

impunity serves to distinguish between the racial itself and the elsewhere that mandates it...the distinction between those whose human being is put permanently in question and those for whom it goes without saying” (Ibid. 8). In such a paradigm White people are, ipso facto, deputized in the face of Black people, whether they know it (consciously) or not. Whiteness then, and by extension, civil society, can not be solely “represented” as some monumentalized coherence of phallic signifiers, but must be first understood as a social formation of contemporaries who do not magnetize bullets. This is the essence of their construction through an *asignifying* absence; their signifying presence is manifest by the fact that they are, if only by default, deputized against those who do magnetize bullets: in short, White people are not simply “protected” by the police, they *are—in their very corporeality*—the police.

This ipso facto deputization of White people in the face of Black people accounts for the materiality of Fanon’s, Martinot, and Sexton’s Manichean delirium in America. What remains to be addressed, however, is the way in which the political contestation between civil society’s junior partners (i.e. workers, White women, and immigrants), on the one hand, and White Supremacist institutionalities, on the other hand, is produced by, and reproductive of, a supplemental anti-Blackness. Put another way: How is the production and accumulation of junior partner social capital dependent upon on an anti-Black rhetorical structure and a decomposed Black body?

Any serious musing on the question of antagonistic identity formation – a formation, the mass mobilization of which can precipitate a crisis in the institutions and assumptive logic which under gird the United State of America -- must come to grips with the contradictions between the radical social movements’ (like the large prison abolition movement’s) political demands—i.e. the abolition of the prison industrial complex—and the ideological structure which underwrites its political desire. I contend that (1) the positionality of Black subjectivity is at the heart of those contradictions and (2) this unspoken desire is bound up with the political limitations of several naturalized and uncritically accepted categories which have their genesis mainly in the works of

Antonio Gramsci: namely, work or labor, the wage, exploitation, hegemony, and civil society. I want to theorize the symptoms of rage and resignation I hear in the words of George Jackson, when he boils reform down to a single word, "fascism;" in Assata's brief declaration "i hated it;" and in the Manichean delirium of Fanon, Martinot and Sexton because, today, the failure of radical social movements to embrace symptoms of all three gestures is tantamount to the reproduction of an anti-Black politics which nonetheless represents itself as being in service to the emancipation of the Black prison slave.

By examining the strategy and structure of the Black subject's absence in, and incommensurability with, the key categories of Gramscian theory, we come face to face with three unsettling consequences:

- (1) The Black American subject imposes a radical incoherence upon the assumptive logic of Gramscian discourse and upon today's coalition politics. In other words, s/he implies a scandal.
- (2) The Black subject reveals the inability of Gramscian discourse and social movements to think white supremacy (rather than capitalism) as the base and thereby calls into question their claim to elaborate a comprehensive and decisive antagonism. Stated another way: Gramscian discourse and coalition politics are indeed able to imagine the subject which transforms itself into a mass of antagonistic identity formations, formations which can precipitate a crisis in wage slavery, exploitation, and hegemony, but they are asleep at the wheel when asked to provide enabling antagonisms toward unwaged slavery, despotism, and terror.
- (3) We begin to see how Marxism suffers from a kind of conceptual anxiety: a desire for socialism on the other side of crisis -- a society which does away not with the category of worker, but with the imposition workers suffer under the approach of variable capital: in other words the mark of its conceptual anxiety is in its desire to democratize work and thus help keep in place, insure the coherence of, Reformation and Enlightenment foundational values of productivity and progress. This is a crowding out scenario for other post-revolutionary possibilities, for instance idleness.

Again, the scandal, which the Black subject position "threatens" Gramscian and coalition discourse with, is manifest in the Black subject's incommensurability with, or disarticulation of, the Gramscian categories of work, progress, production, exploitation, hegemony, and historical self-awareness. Through what strategies does the Black subject destabilize -- emerge as the unthought, and thus the scandal of -- historical materialism? How does the Black subject function within the American Desiring machine differently than the quintessential Gramscian subaltern, the worker?

Capital was kick-started by the rape of the African continent. This phenomenon is central to neither Gramsci nor Marx. Lindon Barrett claims that there was something about the Black body in and of itself which made it the repository of that violence which was the slave trade: for it would have been far easier and far more profitable to take the white underclass from along the river banks of England and Western Europe than to travel all the way to Africa for slaves.

The theoretical importance of emphasizing this in the early 21st century is two-fold: First, capital was kick-started by approaching a particular body (a black body) with direct relations of force, not by approaching a white body with variable capital. Thus, one could say that slavery is closer to capital's primal desire than is exploitation: A relation of terror as opposed to a relation of hegemony. Secondly, today, late capital is imposing a renaissance of this original desire, direct relations of force, the despotism of the unwaged relation: and this Renaissance of slavery—i.e. the reconfiguration of the Prison Industrial Complex has, once again, as its structuring metaphor, and primary target, the Black body.

The value of reintroducing the unthought category of the slave, by way of noting the absence of the Black subject, lies in the Black subject's potential for extending the demand placed on state/capital formations because its re-introduction into the discourse expands the intensity of the antagonism. In other words, the positionality of the slave makes a demand, which is in excess of the demand made by the positionality of the worker. The worker demands that productivity be fair and democratic (Gramsci's new hegemony, Lenin's dictatorship of the proletariat, in a word,

socialism), the slave, on the other hand, demands that production stop; stop without recourse to its ultimate democratization. Work is not an organic principle for the slave. The absence of Black subjectivity from the crux of radical discourse is symptomatic of the text's inability to cope with the possibility that the generative subject of capitalism, the Black body of the 15th and 16th centuries, and the generative subject that resolves late-capital's over-accumulation crisis, the Black (incarcerated) body of the 20th and 21st centuries, do not reify the basic categories which structure conflict within civil society: the categories of work and exploitation.

If, by way of the Black subject, we return to the underlying grammar of the question What does it mean to be free? that grammar being the question What does it mean to suffer? then we come up against a grammar of suffering not only in excess of any semiotics of exploitation but a grammar of suffering beyond signification itself, a suffering that can not be spoken because the gratuitous terror of white supremacy is as much contingent upon a logic -- say the logic of capital, or the logic hierarchy -- as it is upon the irrationality of white fantasies and shared pleasures. It extends beyond textualization. When talking about this terror Cornel West uses the terms black invisibility and nameless to designate, at the level of existence, what I am calling absence, void, or scandal at the level of discourse. He writes:

[America's] unrelenting assault on black humanity produced the fundamental condition of black culture -- that of black invisibility and namelessness On the crucial existential level relating to black invisibility and namelessness, the first difficult challenge and demanding discipline is to ward off madness and discredit suicide as a desirable option. A central preoccupation of black culture is that of confronting candidly the ontological wounds, psychic scars, and existential bruises of black people

while fending off insanity and self-annihilation. This is why the "ur-text" of black culture is neither a word nor a book, not an architectural monument or a legal brief. Instead, it is a guttural cry and a wrenching moan -- a cry not so much for help as for home, a moan less out of compliant than for recognition (80-81).

Thus, the Black subject position in America represents an antagonism, a demand that can not be satisfied through a transfer of ownership/organization of existing rubrics; whereas the Gramscian subject, the worker, represents a demand that can indeed be satisfied by way of a successful war of position, which brings about the end of exploitation. The worker calls into question the legitimacy of productive practices, the slave calls into question the legitimacy of productivity itself.

From the positionality of the worker the question What does it mean to be free? is raised. But the question hides the process by which the discourse already assumes a hidden grammar which has already posed and answered the question What does it mean to suffer? And that grammar is organized around the categories of exploitation (unfair relations of work or wage slavery) and work (bodies that labor). Thus, exploitation (wage slavery) is the only category of oppression which concerns Gramsci: society, Western society, thrives on the exploitation of the Gramscian subject. Full stop. Again, this is inadequate, because it would call white supremacy "racism" and articulate it as a derivative phenomenon of the capitalist matrix, rather than incorporating white supremacy as a matrix, which is also foundational to American institutionality. This, in addition, has scandalous implications for the relationship between hegemony and Black positionality.

What I am saying, is that the insatiability of the slave demand upon existing structures means that it can not find its articulation within the modality of hegemony (influence, leadership, consent)—the Black body can not give its consent because “generalized trust,” the precondition for the solicitation of consent, “equals racialized whiteness” (Lindon Barrett). Furthermore, as Orland Patterson points out, slavery is natal alienation by way of social death, which is to say that a slave has no symbolic currency or material labor power to exchange: a slave does not enter into a transaction of value (however asymmetrical) but is subsumed by direct relations of force, which is to say that a slave is an articulation of a despotic irrationality whereas the worker is an articulation of a symbolic rationality. White supremacy’s despotic irrationality is as foundational to American institutionality as capitalism symbolic rationality because, as Cornel West writes, it

[D]ictates the limits of the operation of American democracy -- with black folk the indispensable sacrificial lamb vital to its sustenance. Hence black subordination constitutes the necessary condition for the flourishing of American democracy, the tragic prerequisite for America itself. This is, in part, what Richard Wright meant when he noted, "The Negro is America's metaphor." (72)

We all know that a metaphor comes into being through a violence which kills the thing that the concept might live. Gramscian discourse and coalition politics can only come to grips with America's structuring rationality—what it calls capitalism, or political economy—but not with America's structuring irrationality which is anti-production of late capital, the hyper-discursive violence which first kills the Black subject, that the concept may be born. In other words, from the incoherence of Black death, America generates the coherence of White life. This is important when thinking the Gramscian paradigm and its spiritual progenitors in the world of American organizing today, which are so dependent on their overvaluation of hegemony and civil

society: struggles over hegemony are seldom, if ever, asignifying—at some point they require coherence, they require categories for the record—which means they contain the seeds of anti-Blackness.

What does it mean to be positioned not as a positive term in the struggle for anti-capitalist hegemony, i.e. as a worker, but to be positioned in excess of hegemony, to be a catalyst which disarticulates the very rubric of hegemony, to be a scandal to its assumptive, foundational logic, to threaten civil society's discursive integrity?

In *White Writing*, J.M. Coetzee examines the literature of Europeans who encountered the South African KhoiSan in the Cape between the 16th and 18th centuries. Those Europeans who encountered the KhoiSan during this period came face to face with an Anthropological scandal: a being without (recognizable) customs, religion, medicine, dietary patterns, culinary habits, sexual mores, means of agriculture, and most significantly, without character -- without character because, according to the literature, they did not work.. Even when press-ganged into service by the whip, by the bible, by the specter of starvation, they showed no valuation of industry. The only remedy for this condition, according to one Cape writer, was terror -- their annihilation.

Wherever the European went in South Africa the project of colonialization was sutured, brokered, and fought with the help of discourse, and therefore, no matter how bloody it became, no matter how much force it necessitated at times, the project did not face the threat of incoherence. Africans, like the Xhosa who were agriculturalists, provided European discourse with enough categories for the record, so that, through various strategies of articulation, they could be known by the textual project which was the accompaniment to the colonial project. But not the KhoiSan. S/he did not produce the

necessary categories for the record, the play of signifiers that would allow for a sustainable semiotics.

According to Coetzee, European discourse has two structuring axes, upon which its coherence depends: the Historical Axis, codes distributed along the axis of temporality and events; and the Anthropological Axis, an axis of cultural codes. It mattered very little which codes on either axis a particular indigenous community was perceived to possess -- and possession is the operative word here for these codes act as a kind of mutually agreed upon currency -- what matters is that the community has some play of difference along both axes: enough differences to construct taxonomies that can be investigated, identified, and named by the discourse: without this the discourse literally can't go on. The discourse is indeed reinvigorated when an unknown entity presents itself, but its anxiety reaches crisis proportions when the entity remains unknown. Something unspeakable occurs. Not to possess a particular code along the Anthropological axis or along the Historical axis is akin to not having a gene for brown hair or green eyes on an X or Y chromosome. But not possessing a Historical or Anthropological axis altogether is akin to not having the chromosome itself. The first predicament throws the notion of what kind of human into play. The second predicament throws the notion of the human itself into crisis. Whereas even the Xhosa presented the Discourse of the Cape with both an Anthropological and Historical play of difference; the KhoiSan presented the Discourse of the Cape with an Anthropological void.

Without those textual categories of Dress, Diet, Medicine, Crafts, Physical Appearance, and most importantly, Work, the KhoiSan stood in refusal of the invitation (or hegemonic solicitation) to become Anthropological Man. S/he was the void in Discourse which could only be designated as idleness. And idleness had been (a) counter posed to labor and (b) criminalized and designated with the status of sin, long before the Europeans reached the

Cape: it was not a signifier within Anthropology but the death knell of humanity and spirituality itself.

Thus, the KhoiSan's status within Discourse was not the status of an opponent or an interlocutor, but was the status of an unspeakable scandal. His/her position within the Discourse was one of disarticulation, for he/she did little or nothing to fortify and extend the interlocutory life of the Discourse. Just as the KhoiSan presented the Discourse of the Cape with an Anthropological scandal, so the Black subject in the Western Hemisphere, the slave, presents both Marxism and American textual practice with a Historical scandal. How is our incoherence in the face of the Historical Axis germane to our experience of being "a phenomenon without analog"?

A sample list of codes mapped out by an American subject's historical axis might include

1. Rights or Entitlements: here even Native Americans provide categories for the record when one thinks of how the Iroquois constitution, for example, becomes the American constitution.
2. Sovereignty: whether that State is one the subject left behind, or one, once again the case of American Indians, which was taken by force and dint of broken treaties. White supremacy has made good use of the Indian subject's positionality: a positionality which fortifies and extends the interlocutory life of America as a coherent (albeit imperial) idea because treaties are forms of articulation; discussions brokered between two groups presumed to possess the same category of Historical currency: Sovereignty. The code of Sovereignty can have both a past and future history, if you'll excuse the oxymoron, when one considers that there are 150 Native American tribes with applications in at the B.I.A. applying for Sovereign recognition that they might qualify for funds harvested from land stolen from them.
3. Immigration is another code which maps the subject onto the American Historical Axis: narratives of arrival based on collective volition and premeditated desire. Latino subject positions can fortify and extend the interlocutory life of America as an idea because racial conflict can be articulated

across the various contestations over the legitimacy of arrival, immigration. Whites and Latinos both generate data for this category.

Slavery is the great leveler of the Black subject's positionality. The Black American subject does not generate Historical categories of Entitlement, Sovereignty, and Immigration for the record. We are "off the map" with respect to the cartography that charts civil society's semiotics: we have a past, but not a heritage, as Orlando Patterson points out in *Slavery and Social Death*. To the data generating demands of the Historical axis we present a virtual blank, much like the KhoiSan's virtual blank presented to the data generating demands of the Anthropological axis. This places us in a structurally impossible position, a position outside of the articulations of hegemony; but it also places hegemony in a structurally impossible position because—and this is key—our presence works back upon the grammar of hegemony and threatens it with incoherence. If every subject -- even the most massacred subjects, Indians—are required to have analogs within the nation's structuring narrative, and one subject, the subject upon which the nation's order of wealth is built, is a subject whose experience is without analog then, by that subject's very presence all other analogs are destabilized.

The Black body in the U.S. is that constant reminder that not only can work not be reformed, but it cannot be transformed, to accommodate all subjects: work is a White category. The fact that millions upon millions of Black people work misses the point. The point is we were never meant to be workers; in other words, capital/white supremacy's dream did not envision us incorporated, or incorporative. From the very beginning, we were meant to slave and die. Work (i.e. the French shipbuilding industry and bourgeois civil society which finally extended its progressive hegemony to workers and peasants to topple the aristocracy) was what grew up all around us -- 20 to 60 million seeds planted at the bottom of the Atlantic, 5 million seeds planted in Dixie. And today, at the end of the 20th century, we are still not meant to be workers. We are meant to be warehoused

and die. Work (i.e. the prison industrial complex and the shot in the arm it gives to faltering White, communities -- its positive reterritorialization of White Space and its simultaneous deterritorialization of Black Space) is what grows up around our dead bodies once again. The chief difference today, compared to several hundred years ago, is that today our bodies are desired, but not our labor. And again, the chief constant to the dream is that our labor power was never for sale.

Civil society is not a terrain intended for the Black subject. It is coded as waged and wages are White. Civil society is the terrain where hegemony is produced, contested, mapped. And the invitation to participate in hegemony's gestures of influence, leadership, and consent is not extended to the unwaged. We live in the world, but exist outside of civil society. This structurally impossible position is a paradox, because the Black subject, the slave, is vital to political economy: s/he kick-starts capital at its genesis and rescues it from its over-accumulation crisis at its end. But Marxism has no account of this phenomenal birth and life-saving role played by the Black subject: from Marx and Gramsci we have consistent silence.

In taking Foucault to task for assuming a universal subject in revolt against discipline, in the same spirit in which I have taken Gramsci to task for assuming a universal subject, the subject of civil society in revolt against capital, Joy James writes:

The U.S. carceral network kills, however, and in its prisons, it kills more blacks than any other ethnic group. American prisons constitute an "outside" in U.S. political life. In fact, our society displays waves of concentric outside circles with increasing distances from bourgeois self-policing. The state routinely polices the unassimilable in the hell of

lockdown, deprivation tanks, control units, and holes for political prisoners (Resisting State Violence 1996: 34)

But this peculiar preoccupation is not Gramsci's bailiwick. His concern is with White folks; or with folks in a White (ned) enough subject position that they are confronted by, or threatened by the removal of, a wage -- be it monetary or social. But Black subjectivity itself disarticulates the Gramscian dream as a ubiquitous emancipatory strategy, because Gramsci, like most White activists, and radical American movements like the prison abolition movement, has no theory of the unwaged, no solidarity with the slave

If we are to take Fanon at his word when he writes, "Decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is, obviously, a program of complete disorder" (37) then we must accept the fact that no other body functions in the Imaginary, the Symbolic, or the Real so completely as a repository of complete disorder as the Black body. Blackness is the site of absolute dereliction at the level of the Real, for in its magnetizing of bullets the Black body functions as the map of gratuitous violence through which civil society is possible: namely, those other bodies for which violence is, or can be, contingent. Blackness is the site of absolute dereliction at the level of the Symbolic, for Blackness in America generates no categories for the chromosome of History, no data for the categories of Immigration or Sovereignty; it is an experience without analog—a past, without a heritage. Blackness is the site of absolute dereliction at the level of the Imaginary for "whoever says 'rape' says Black," (Fanon), whoever says "prison" says Black, and whoever says "AIDS" says Black (Sexton)—the "Negro is a phobogenic object" (Fanon).

Indeed...a phobogenic object...a past without a heritage...the map of gratuitous violence...a program of complete disorder. But whereas this realization is, and should be cause

for alarm, it should not be cause for lament, or worse, disavowal—not at least, for a true revolutionary, or for a truly revolutionary movement such as prison abolition.

If a social movement is to be neither social democratic, nor Marxist, in terms of the structure of its political desire then it should grasp the invitation to assume the positionality of subjects of social death that present themselves; and, if we are to be honest with ourselves we must admit that the “Negro” has been inviting Whites, and as well as civil society’s junior partners, to the dance of social death for hundreds of years, but few have wanted to learn the steps. They have been, and remain today—even in the most anti-racist movements, like the prison abolition movement—invested elsewhere. This is not to say that all oppositional political desire today is pro-White, but it is to say that it is almost always anti-Black—which is to say it will not dance with death.

Black liberation, as a prospect, makes radicalism more dangerous to the U.S. Not because it raises the specter of some alternative polity (like socialism, or community control of existing resources) but because its condition of possibility as well as its gesture of resistance functions as a negative dialectic: a politics of refusal and a refusal to affirm, a “program of complete disorder.” One must embrace its disorder, its incoherence and allow oneself to be elaborated by it, if indeed one’s politics are to be underwritten by a desire to take this country down. If this is not the desire which underwrites one’s politics then through what strategy of legitimation is the word “prison” being linked to the word “abolition”? What are this movement’s lines of political accountability? There’s nothing foreign, frightening, or even unpracticed about the embrace of disorder and incoherence. The desire to be embraced, and elaborated, by disorder and incoherence is not anathema in and of itself: no one, for example, has ever been known to say “gee-whiz, if only my orgasms would end a little sooner, or maybe not come at all.” But few so-called radicals desire to be embraced, and elaborated, by the disorder and incoherence of Blackness—and the state of political movements in America today is marked by this very Negrophobogenesis: “gee-whiz, if only Black rage could be more coherent, or maybe not come at all.” Perhaps there’s something

more terrifying about the joy of Black, then there is about the joy of sex (unless one is talking sex with a Negro). Perhaps coalitions today prefer to remain in-orgasmic in the face of civil society—with hegemony as a handy prophylactic, just in case. But if, through this stasis, or paralysis, they try to do the work of prison abolition—that work will fail; because it is always work *from* a position of coherence (i.e. the worker) on *behalf* of a position of incoherence, the Black subject, or prison slave. In this way, social formations on the Left remain blind to the contradictions of coalitions between workers and slaves. They remain coalitions operating within the logic of civil society; and function less as revolutionary promises and more as crowding out scenarios of Black antagonisms—they simply feed our frustration.

Whereas the positionality of the worker—be s/he a factory worker demanding a monetary wage or an immigrant or White woman demanding a social wage—gestures toward the reconfiguration of civil society, the positionality of the Black subject—be s/he a prison-slave or a prison-slave-in-waiting—gestures toward the disconfiguration of civil society: from the coherence of civil society, the Black subject beckons with the incoherence of civil war. A civil war which reclaims Blackness not as a positive value, but as a politically enabling site, to quote Fanon, of “absolute dereliction”: a “scandal” which rends civil society asunder. Civil war, then, becomes that unthought, but never forgotten understudy of hegemony. A Black specter waiting in the wings, an endless antagonism that cannot be satisfied (via reform or reparation) but must nonetheless be pursued to the death.

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