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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

# Property in Modern Aesthetics

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Literature with a Specialization in Critical Gender Studies

by

Eunsong Kim

Committee in charge:

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Professor Fatima El-Tayeb, Co-Chair
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Professor Grant Kester
Professor Luis Martin-Cabrera

2017

The dissertation of Eunsong Kim is approved and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Co-chair

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Co-chair

University of California San Diego, 2017

DEDICATION

All of this work, the research, thinking, and writing came from my work with Professor Fatima El-Tayeb. I brought to Fatima murky descriptions of neoliberal aesthetics, and a treatise on Duchamp. She read this wilding diatribe during the summer of my second year in graduate school and encouraged structure, and clear, focused arguments. Without Fatima's guidance and meticulous feedback, this dissertation would mostly be a series of fragments and couplets in old journals. I thank her profusely and look forward to all that she has to say and write, as encounters with her are encounters with strength, clarity, and innovation.

I have often described myself as the only happy graduate student that I know, and this description is due to the composition of my committee. I thank my co-chairs Fatima El-Tayeb, Page duBois, and my committee members Camille Forbes, Luis Martin-Cabrera, Grant Kester, and Grace Kyungwon Hong for unique perspectives and insights. I thank Page duBois for her support throughout this project. Page modeled for me the ethical possibilities of an intellectual life. Without her providing insights into the Archive of New Poetry, chapter 4 would have been impossible to write. Grant's critiques of contemporary art opened the possibilities of my *petty materialist* approach; Camille's knowledge of contemporary poetics and politics fueled much of my writing on poetic histories, and Luis's course on Marxism and psychoanalysis transformed my methodological approaches. I return to Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* for counsel so often, as well as to Roberto Bolaño's *Distant Star*. Grace's theorization of race, gender, and sexuality has been pivotal to all my thinking. I thank her immensely for her generosity and her mentorship navigating the web of entanglements called academia.

I could not have had a better committee, and consider myself to be so fortunate to be directed by their brilliance.

And for my brother, Joseph Kim, forever in awe of the 깡
he's made of—

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Signature Page ………………………………………………………………………. iii

Dedication ……………………………………………………………………… iv

Table of Contents ………………………………………………………………. v

List of Images …………………………………………………………………... vi

Acknowledgements …………………………………………………………….. vii

Vita ……………………………………………………………………………... ix

Abstract of the Dissertation……………………………………………………… x

Introduction: Property & Modern Aesthetics ………………………...……………. 1

Chapter 1: Contextualizing Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*: White Risk & the Properties of Found-Object Art …………………………………………………………..…… 34

Chapter 2: Violence & Provenance: The Transmission of Louis Agassiz's Archive in the Work of Carrie Mae Weems and Sasha Huber …………………………………… 84

Chapter 3: The Politics of Metaphor: *The Master Letters, My Emily Dickinson,* and *The Morning News is Exciting* ………………………………………………………… 151

Chapter 4: Appraising Newness: Whiteness, Neoliberalism & the Building of the Archive for New Poetry ……………………………………………………………………… 199

Chapter 5: CGI Monstrosities: Modernist Surfaces, the Composite, and the Making of the Human Form ……………………….…………………………………………….. 248

Conclusion: Moon flowers don't need invitations: they require a particular part of night ……………………….……………………….…………………………………….. 286

LIST OF IMAGES

Image 1.1 J. F. Griswold's "The Rude Descending a Staircase (Rush Hour at the Subway)" 1913 & Marcel Duchamp, *Nude Descending a Staircase,*1912 ……………. 41

Image 4.1 Detail from the 22 May 1974 proposal …….……….…...……..…….… 215

Image 5.1 Countess de Castiglione and Pierre-Louis Pierson, "La Frayeur" 1861-67.. 259

Image 5.2 CGI screenshot of *John Adams* showing initial shot of primary actors……. 267

Image 5.3 The compositing processes and layers of CGI animation…………………. 269

Image 5.4 The constructed extras in *John Adams*. ……………………..………………… 270

Image 5.5 Crowd scene of composited extras in *John Adams*………………….…….. 272

Image 5.6 Political figures green screened to view the political gathering above *John Adams*……..………..…...……..………………..………..…...……..…….…………….274

Image 5.7 Interpolating human actors in a CGI crowd scene in *John Adams*………… 275

Image 5.8 A final composited scene in *John Adams*……………………………………....275

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Chapter 1 contains an excerpt from my essay published as Eunsong Kim, “Poetry Praxis.” Published in, *Couldn’t Get a Sense of It: Forms of Educatio*n. INCA Press, 2016. The dissertation author was the primary investigator and author of this paper. Chapter 1 also contains an excerpt from my essay published as, Eunsong Kim, “Neoliberal Aesthetics: *250cm Line on 6 Paid People.*” *Lateral Journal* 4 (2015): Web. The dissertation author was the primary investigator and author of this paper.

Chapter 2 contains a section published as, Eunsong Kim, “Found, Lived: The Archival Labor of Carrie Mae Weems & Sasha Huber.” *Scapegoat* 9 (2016). Toronto: Scapegoat Publications: 53-60. The dissertation author was the primary investigator and author of this paper.

Chapter 4 in part has been accepted for publication as, Eunsong Kim, "Whiteness as a Collection Development Priority: the Building of the Archive for New Poetry” and will be forthcoming in the, *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies.* In a special issue edited by Michelle Casewell, Ricky Punzalan, T-Kay. The dissertation author was the primary investigator and author of this paper

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"Poetry Praxis." *Couldn't Get a Sense of It: Forms of Educatio*n. INCA Press, 2016.

"Neoliberal Aesthetics: *250cm Line on 6 Paid People.*" *Lateral Journal* 4 (2015): Web

"Found, Lived: The Archival Labor of Carrie Mae Weems & Sasha Huber." *Scapegoat* 9 (2016). Toronto: Scapegoat Publications: 53-60.

Coauthored with Elizabeth Losh, "Peer Tutoring in the College Writing Center." *Education in Action.* San Diego: University of California, San Diego, 2012. 142–149. Print.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Property in Modern Aesthetics

by

Eunsong Kim

Doctor of Philosophy in
Literature with a Specialization in Critical Gender Studies

University of California, San Diego, 2017

Professor Page duBois, Co-Chair
Professor Fatima El-Tayeb, Co-Chair

“Property in Modern Aesthetics,” grapples with how discourses of race, gender and class affected US literary and visual modernist forms. I examine art objects ranging from Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain* (1917) and Noah Purifoy’s *White/Colored* (2001) to texts such as Susan Howe’s *My Emily Dickinson* (1985) and Don Mee Choi’s *The*

*Morning News Is Exciting* (2010). Utilizing critical gender, race and legal scholarship, I trace how legal notions of exclusionary properties situate the politics of modern abstract forms. Modernist artistic and literary productions were the historical manifestations of US racial and gender formations, and I argue that the abstract forms of modernist art and literature were politically consistent with early 20$^{th}$-century property laws. The modernist found-object form can be understood as the aestheticization of property. Inspecting the aestheticization of property as a formal imperative allows for analyses of historical and political strictures, and for the production of diverse cultural narratives to converge.

In order to investigate visual and literary production that expounds colonial and legal understandings of property, I contrast canonical, modernist approaches with Black and Asian American cultural producers whose bodies of work interrogate the very premise of property, by re-imaging provenance beyond its current origin/financial narrative. In my project, Black and Asian American cultural producers, though marginalized by current canonical constructs, are poets and artists currently offering modes of expression outside systems of the colonial imaginary. I contextualize the interactions of individual poets and artistic movements with and against the social movements of their time, offering a broader view of US visual cultures and poetics.

Introduction: Property & Modern Aesthetics

In 2014 artist Maya Mackrandilal and I co-wrote an article titled, "The Whitney Biennial For Angry Women"[1] for *The New Inquiry* (TNI). The piece was widely circulated, cited by multiple publications,[2] and appeared in TNI's annual print issue as an exemplary work of journalism. "The Whitney Biennial For Angry Women" grew out of a conversation artist Pedro Velez (included in the 2014 WB) invited Maya and I to have as part of his artist essay for the Whitney catalogue. While Maya and I worked to write concretely about the racial politics of the art worlds, the editors at the Whitney and Yale University[3] redacted[4] our phrasing and muddled our sentences into what appeared as

---

[1] Coauthored with Maya Mackrandilal, "The Whitney Biennial for Angry Women" *The New Inquiry.* 4 April, 2014

[2] A few of the articles that referenced our piece to discuss the Whitney and the art world:
Davis, Ben. "The Most Important Art Essays of the Year." *Artnet.* 30 Dec 2014. https://news.artnet.com/exhibitions/the-most-important-art-essays-of-the-year-201567

Miranda, Carolina. "Art and race at the Whitney: Rethinking the Donelle Woolford debate." *Los Angeles Times.* 17 June 2014. http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/miranda/la-et-cam-donelle-woolford-controversy-whitney-biennial-20140609-column.html

Schor, Mira. "Amnesiac Return Amnesiac Return." *Brooklyn Rail.* 4 Sept 2014. http://brooklynrail.org/2014/09/criticspage/amnesiac-return-amnesiac-return

Hegert, Natalie. "The Rounds of a Rumor: #WOMENMOMA2015." *ArtSlant.* 1 May 2014. https://www.artslant.com/9/articles/show/39451

Wong, Ryan. "I Am Joe Scanlan." *Hyperallergic.* 17 June 2014. https://hyperallergic.com/131687/i-am-joe-scanlan/

including Wikipedia contextualization, "Whitney Biennial." *Wikipedia.* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whitney_Biennial. Accessed 12 May 2017.

[3] Yale University was the publisher of the catalogue. See, "Pedro Velez Poses Questions" *Whitney Biennial 2014.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

[4] Our Q&A was originally titled, "Angry People of Color at the Whitney." For the original text see, Kim, Eunsong. "Angry People of Color at the Whitney." *Tumblr.* Mar 2014. http://sunyuh.tumblr.com/post/78665899492/angry-people-of-color-at-the-whitney-2014-whibi

familiar, generic, vague critiques. The history and present of racial violence is never vague, but its narrative is purposefully made so, so in an effort to unredact ourselves, and utilizing our included writing in the catalogue, we sent out a pitch to several publications to review the entirety of the 2014 Biennial.

> *White Aesthetics*: And isn't this specter the god of our neoliberal artistic landscape? A place where critical language—which is meant to articulate everything that is not said, to reveal the threads of systemic inequality—is co-opted by an inane buzzword pastiche? Where the artist-CEO employs the labor of others—material labor of unpaid assistants, affective labor of subject-bodies, contractual labor of the working class, temporary labor of performers, take your pick—to realize his unique vision? There is only space for "questions" here. Ambiguity is both a currency and a shield. The titillation of a brush with the radical—a safari of political rebellion—without the nuisance of actually addressing systems of power or challenging the status quo. All the trappings, none of the substance.
> Excerpt from the 2014 Whitney Biennial Review

While looking specifically at 2014 show we realized that the Biennial held within its frames all the problems we discussed in our unredacted catalogue conversation, and more. Other than the fact that too few artists of color were *represented* (thoughtfully or otherwise) in the show, a white male artist and Princeton University professor Joe Scanlan's black female avatar project, Donelle Woolford,[5] was stated to have been the

---

[5] Regarding Scanlan and his project we wrote,

"Donelle Woolford" is a fictional black female persona that Joe Scanlan invented and who now represents his body of work. In Scanlan's narrative biography, Woolford was his assistant who made work from the scraps in his studio. Scanlan hires various black actresses to perform as Woolford in productions that he directs, as well as for artist talks at educational institutions across the country.

Scanlan has two paintings in the Whitney Biennial—*Joke Painting (detumescence)*, 2013, and *Detumescence,* 2013—presented under Donelle Woolford's name (she is listed in the catalogue as if she were a real person, with no mention of Scanlan). These dick joke paintings, the latest in "her" practice, are based on works by Richard Prince. Scanlan has used his fictional black female character to appropriate from another white man. Bravo! White men continue to make art about their penises.

In Scanlan's narrative, Donelle Woolford has the privileges of a white cis man without being one.

first studio visit that subsequently organized the show, and has been an inspirational project for one of the Biennial's main curators, Michelle Grabner.[6]

Taisha Paggett was the sole black female artist in the Biennial,[7] but received tertiary placement. It should be stated clearly that no white artist received temporary slots, making the racial dynamics of art real estate explicit. Paggett's performance was allotted four days towards the closing of the show, and YAMS, a collective comprised of 38 mostly queer black artists, TOO received temporary exhibition space. Their

---

She went on lavish vacations with her family. She went to a fancy school. For her BFA she went to an even fancier Ivy where she met all the right people. She's had a slew of wonderful shows with powerful people. In Scanlan's narrative she didn't sit through critiques where her art was labeled as "not universal" because it contained her body. She didn't deal with the sidelong glances from her peers, convinced the only reason she was even there was because she was a "minority." She didn't live the life of a thousand little cuts, the infiltrator's life. She doesn't know what it's like because she is a figment of a white man's imagination.

Scanlan didn't look to lived experience or the political imaginations of Afrofuturism as a possible basis for his social fiction. Scanlan took the familiar life of a privileged white man and dumped its traits on an othered body. If only Scanlan could share the surface markings of your oppression—your skin color, your gender—but keep his foundational privilege, he could be a famous artist.

Because othered bodies are subcontractable and only that. They are sources of revenue—a perfect metaphor for the art world. He will say that some black women didn't mind, that they were paid, that it was okay. And he will say it over and over again, and you, dear consumer of the hodgepodge that is recycled and rebranded as culture—can you reject his repetition?
…

The curatorial statement at the entrance to the fourth floor reads:
"Donelle Woolford [Joe Scanlan] radically calls into question the very identity of the artist …"

Translation: "Joe Scanlan is a white male professor from Yale who created a black female persona to promote his work, because he thinks that black bodies give their owners an unfair advantage on the art market. We are more comfortable with white fantasies of the other than examining lived experience. We don't give a fuck about the history of blackface, carnival representations of the other, or violent displays of captured indigenous peoples as museum objects. We believe in our hearts that we are beyond this.

Translation: "What if we stopped searching for the implications of the white imagination and instead celebrated its racist and colonialist fantasies?"

[6] For Grabner's language see, Andrew Russeth's 'There's Something Funny About Donelle Woolford." *Observer.* 3 Mar 2014. http://observer.com/2014/03/theres-something-funny-about-donelle-woolford/

[7] Contrary to The Guardian's recent review, which describes Donelle Woolford as the "only black woman in the show"—which is dubious phrasing at best. This kind of reckless, sloppy, ill-informed *untruth* as declaration is one way antiblackness continues to manifest as epistemology. See, Nadja Sayej. "Claudia Rankine on Whitney Biennial." *The Guardian.* 10 April 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/apr/10/claudia-rankine-whitney-biennial-emmett-till-painting.

opera/performance/film would be screened, like Paggett's, one weekend near the end. Though Scanlan's project was heavily critiqued, it was defended by the curators, and YAMS withdrew from the Biennale, describing Scanlan's work as a form of conceptual rape. The nexus of our article for *The New Inquiry* attempted to address these issue and to tackle how white supremacy grounded the curatorial logic the biennial.[8]

Almost a month after the closing of the Biennale I was surprised to read art critic and poet John Yau's essay,[9] "Postscript to the Whitney Biennial: An Asian American Perspective." In the essay he bemoans the absence of an Asian American critique AND Asian American artists in the Biennial. He writes,

> Now that the Whitney Biennial is finally over, did anyone notice that Patty Chang, Nikki S. Lee, and Laurel Nakadate weren't included, just to mention three mid-career, Asian-American women artists who were conspicuously absent? … What's up with that?

There's much to take up Yau's post-script. Yau's "mention" of three mid-career Asian American artists is befuddling yet telling. Elite New York galleries[10] have represented all three artists for decades and secondary auction houses have sold their objects—to argue they've been art-world-marginalized would become an awkward debate. Additionally, all the artists in reference are East Asian, while the category of Asian American is complicated, wide, and political (further complicating Yau's critique of "absence").

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[8] Heddaya, Mostafa. "Artist Collective Withdraws from Whitney Biennial." 13 May 2014. https://hyperallergic.com/126420/artist-collective-withdraws-from-whitney-biennial/

[9]Yau, John. "Postscript to the Whitney Biennial: An Asian-American Perspective." *Hyperallergic*. 29 June 2014. http://hyperallergic.com/135205/postscript-to-the-whitney-biennial-an-asian-american-perspective/

[10] Nakadate is represented by Saatchi gallery, Lee is represented by Leslie Tonkonow gallery, Patty Chang work seems to be sold at various places. All three artists have had shows at the Hammer Museum, MOMA, PS1, among others..

Chang and Nakadate have mostly evaded explicit discussions of race and their racial embodiments, and Lee denounced them entirely.[11] This is not to suggest that the mid-career artists referenced by Yau are of less merit than say Gary Indiana, as clearly merit is not the way one enters the Biennial (or the museum space).[12] What I wish to point out is how Chang, Nakadate, and Lee's lack-of-inclusion in the 2014 Whitney has not necessarily resulted in an exclusion from the art worlds, particularly the museum art world. Additionally in this light, I am most interested in how an argument for their inclusion becomes the focal point of injustice in Yau's piece, at a moment when the Whitney proved to be a genuinely hostile space for Black artists. What's up with that?

Yau writes, "When the ubiquitous term "people of color" is used, does the speaker or writer also mean Asian Americans — itself a complicated category? Or do yellow and red get tossed out, like dirty bathwater?" Yau asserts that terminology reserved for nonwhite persons, particularly "people of color" enacts a potential violence by collapsing the visibility of Asian Americans, and, troublingly, Indigenous artists. He enacts an old argument that attempts to critique the "white/black spectrum" as failing to provide representation to other nonwhite persons. What is implied in "do yellow and red get tossed out" is how some "other" poc artists, namely in the 2014 Biennial, Black artists, were *included*. In this faux-critique of "people of color" and inclusion, the burden

[11] If we are advocating for artists who have been *excluded* from the Biennial via what we deem a racial basis, it should also be of note and interest how they identify and, before we decide they must be included on the basis of identification. When asked about race Lee responds, "I'm not Korean-American, which means I don't have issues about race," she said. See, Kino, Carol. "Now in Moving Pictures: The Multitudes of Nikki S. Lee." *New York Times.* 1 Oct 2006. http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/01/arts/design/01kino.html

[12] I wrote about this in more detail, "Nikki S Lee's Projects and the Ongoing Circulation of Blackface Brownface in "Art."" *contemptorary.* 30 May 2016. http://contemptorary.org/nikki-s-lees-projects-and-the-ongoing-circulation-of-blackface-brownface-in-art/

of failed inclusion falls not on white supremacy and whiteness, but those who have been hypervisualized due to an explicit form of antiblack violence, namely Black persons, in this case, Black artists. Historically consistent, Yau fails to grapple with how the white/black binary is a white supremacist construction.[13]

Yau's "Asian American's Perspective" is extremely narrow and stifling. It is as if Yau decided there was only one way to offer an "Asian American perspective" and this was to explicitly lament the visible *lack* of mid-career East Asian artists. Had he politicized the notion of Asian American and perspective, he might have noticed that Black artists, particularly Black female artists and queer Black collectives, were violently marginalized in their inclusion—their presence resulted in protest and withdrawals. Additionally, a structural analysis of the violence enacted towards Black artists must have signaled a collective danger, if we are to take the term *people of color*[14] seriously, rather than as an opportunistic vehicle for visibility. Rather than critiquing Scanlan or the space ill-allotted to Paggett's performance as the Asian American perspective (are Asian Americans unable to spot violence, care for, or tend to injustice?) Yau instead focuses on how Nikki S. Lee did not receive such confined spacing?[15] The Asian American perspective Yau defines is self-serving, apolitical in its reach, and refuses the historical dynamics between museums and race, inclusion and politics, and lastly, the foundational relationship between critique and the Black radical tradition.

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[13] For a full critique of the inclusion in the binary, or critiques of the binary as a way to argue for inclusion see, Matsuda, Mari J. "Beyond and Not Beyond, Black and White: Deconstruction Has a Politics". In Francisco Valdes; et al. *Crossroads, Directions, and a New Critical Race Theory.* Temple U. Press, 2002.

[14] For a critique of this notion see, Jared Sexton, "People of Color Blindness: Notes on the Afterlife of Slavery." *Social Text,* vol. 28, n. 2, 2010, pp. 31-56.

[15] Is this because he imagined she was *different,* and therefore would receive different, better treatment? Better real estate?

Additionally it was curious to me that Yau felt it was necessary to posit an "Asian American perspective" of the Biennial, as Maya and I both identify as Asian American women and write from this perspective, and wrote one of the most widely circulated reviews of the show. Was "The Whitney Biennial For Angry Women" not an "Asian American perspective?"

The complicated answer to this question is how I imagine the position of my dissertation project.

*

In his post-script Yau continues: "…should Asian Americans simply check the box labeled "Other" and quietly and politely go — like all well-behaved Asian Americans — into the room marked INVISIBLE." I want to pair Yau's articulation of invisibility with the current 2017 biennial. Christopher Lew and Mia Locks, the two and only curators of 2017 Whitney Biennial both identify as Asian American. While the three curators of the 2014 Biennial were two white men and one white woman, the 2017 venture was lead by two Asian American persons. In contrast to Yau's critique of inclusion-or-lack-thereof, hiring two Asian American curators (gatekeepers) is the opposite spectrum of invisibility. Their hires indicate the apex of visibility politics.

However news of the racial makeup of the Biennial's curatorialship made almost

no headlines,[16] other than one report by NBC news. When asked about how their racial embodiments might affect their curatorial selection, Locks, an independent curator responded,

> A lot of questions around what we used to call identity politics and questions that I think are still really relevant in art are things that I tend to think about a lot… It's partially my own interest and my own background. And that extends *beyond just Asian American*[17] [emphasis mine].

Unlike Yau's blunt opportunism, Locks navigates a hazy neoliberal posture. That is, she both understands older notions of Asian American *identity politics* but understands beyond them. A fascinating model-assimilation proposal: she might call upon her somewhat-outdated Asian American-ness, but can also be called upon to move outside of them.

The 2017 Biennial was celebrated almost entirely by the white art press as "political" –not political because there are two Asian Americans navigating the vagueness of failed multiculturalism, but political because, like previous years, white artists included in the show proclaimed themselves to be making work about antiblack violence, or blackness. Dana Schutz, a white woman known previously for her abstract expressionist paintings (that have sold for over 500K) decided to paint an abstracted rendering of Emmett Till's open casket photograph, and Lew and Locks decided this was an important painting to *include*.

---

[16] Is this because Asian Americans as witnessed as in proximity to whiteness, and therefore this was another successful case of the assimilation? For more on this discourse see, Min Zhou. "Are Asian Americans Becoming 'White'?" *Contexts,* vol. 3, no.1. 2016, pp. 29-37.

[17] Fuchs, Chris. "Asian-American Art Curators Chosen to Curate Whitney Museum's 2017 Biennial." *NBC News.* 20 Nov 2015. http://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/asian-american-art-curators-chosen-curate-whitney-museums-2017-biennial-n467221.

Many black artists and writers protested both the painting and the rhetoric of the 2017 Biennial. Artist and writer Hannah Black wrote an open letter[18] to the curators and staff asking for the museum to remove and destroy the painting. Her letter states,

> I am writing to ask you to remove Dana Schutz's painting "Open Casket" and with the urgent recommendation that the painting be *destroyed and not entered into any market or museum*.
>
> As you know, this painting depicts the dead body of 14-year-old Emmett Till in the open casket that his mother chose, saying, "Let the people see what I've seen." That even the disfigured corpse of a child was not sufficient to move the white gaze from its habitual cold calculation is evident daily and in a myriad of ways, not least the fact that this painting exists at all. In brief: *the painting should not be acceptable to anyone who cares or pretends to care about Black people* because it is not acceptable for a white person to transmute Black suffering into profit and fun, though the practice has been normalized for a long time [emphasis mine].
>
> Although Schutz's intention may be to present white shame, this shame is not correctly represented as a painting of a dead Black boy by a white artist — those non-Black artists who sincerely wish to highlight the shameful nature of white violence should first of all stop treating Black pain as raw material. The subject matter is not Schutz's; white free speech and white creative freedom have been founded on the constraint of others, and are not natural rights. The painting must go.
>
> Emmett Till's name has circulated widely since his death. It has come to stand not only for Till himself but also for the mournability (to each other, if not to everyone) of people marked as disposable, for the weight so often given to a white woman's word above a Black child's comfort or survival, and for the injustice of anti-Black legal systems. Through his mother's courage, Till was made available to Black people as an inspiration and warning. Non-Black people must accept that they will never embody and cannot understand this gesture: the evidence of their collective lack of understanding is that Black people go on dying at the hands of white supremacists, that Black communities go on living in desperate poverty not far from the museum where this valuable painting hangs, that Black children are still denied childhood. Even if Schutz has not been gifted with any real sensitivity to history, if Black people are telling her that the painting has caused unnecessary hurt, she and you must accept the truth of

[18] For the full letter see, Black, Hannah. "Open Letter." *E-flux.* 22 March 2017. https://conversations.e-flux.com/t/hannah-blacks-letter-to-the-whitney-biennials-curators-dana-schutz-painting-must-go/6287

> this. The painting must go.
>
> Ongoing debates on the appropriation of Black culture by non-Black artists have highlighted the relation of these appropriations to the systematic oppression of Black communities in the US and worldwide, and, in a wider historical view, to the capitalist appropriation of the lives and bodies of Black people with which our present era began. Meanwhile, a similarly high-stakes conversation has been going on about the willingness of a largely non-Black media to share images and footage of Black people in torment and distress or even at the moment of death, evoking deeply shameful white American traditions such as the public lynching. Although derided by many white and white-affiliated critics as trivial and naive, discussions of appropriation and representation go to the heart of the question of how we might seek to live in a reparative mode, with humility, clarity, humour and hope, given the barbaric realities of racial and gendered violence on which our lives are founded. I see no more important foundational consideration for art than this question, which otherwise dissolves into empty formalism or irony, into a pastime or a therapy.
>
> The curators of the Whitney biennial surely agree, because they have staged a show in which Black life and anti-Black violence feature as themes, and been approvingly reviewed in major publications for doing so. Although it is possible that this inclusion means no more than that blackness is hot right now, driven into non-Black consciousness by prominent Black uprisings and struggles across the US and elsewhere, I choose to assume as much capacity for insight and sincerity in the biennial curators as I do in myself. Which is to say — we all make terrible mistakes sometimes, but through effort the more important thing could be how we move to make amends for them and what we learn in the process. The painting must go.

Black's letter was signed by a multitude of artists and writers, including Christina Sharpe, Aria Dean, Juliana Huxtable among others. The two Asian American curators responded to the protests by not responding to Black's critique and by paternalistically speaking for, and on behalf of abstracted black audiences. In their statement regarding the painting they claim, "[B]y exhibiting the painting we wanted to acknowledge the importance of this extremely consequential and solemn image in American and African American history

and the history of race relations in this country…" The statement continues by emphasizing how the image has had "tremendous emotional resonance" for African American audiences. In a separate interview when asked whether there is curatorial responsibility for their decisions, particularly in light of Black's protest, Lew answered,

> *I don't think there is any blame to be laid, period*. Mia and I have conscientiously thought through every work that is in the show, and *we believe in the painting that Dana made*. Certainly *we knew that it could be traumatic*—certainly it's a difficult painting to look at—… But, for us, they are both so woven into *a dialogue about representation*, about issues of violence that are both historical and contemporary, and about this idea of empathy—and these are all shared concerns across a *diverse* group of artists. They are not concerns that are broken and divided by race. *They are American concerns*[19] [emphasis mine].

Echoing Lock's previous "beyond just Asian American," Lew dips into what he believes is neutral territory: the terrain of "American concerns." Here we have a situation in which Black artists and writers speak directly about the violence of Schutz's painting. If *acknowledgement* of African American history had been a goal of the 2017 curatorialship—wouldn't the taking up of African American responses to *Black* representation correspond with their goals? What has remained consistent from 2014 to 2017 are gatekeepers privileging and valuing white representations of antiblack violence irrespective of response or critique. What has altered from 2014 to 2017 is the racial makeup of the Biennial's gatekeeping team, in that it goes from a 100% white curatorship, to a 100% Asian American one. Or to utilize Yau's terminology, *dirty*

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[19] Goldstein, Andrew. "Why Dana Schutz's Emmett Till Painting Must Stay: A Q&A With the Whitney Biennial's Christopher Lew." *Artnet.* 30 March 2017. https://news.artnet.com/art-world/whitney-biennial-christopher-lew-dana-schutz-906557

*bathwater invisibility,* to post-racial-propagandist-gatekeeper: invisible no longer.

I want to momentarily return to Black's letter, and the call to destroy the painting in question. The call to destroy the work was seen as "censorship"[20] and "taking it too far." It was also the call that was said to prevent any potential conversation that might have taken place. Lew states,

> [T]o have a discussion around the destruction of an artwork is deeply problematic and disturbing—*that's not something that we entertain as a museum*.
> …
> Hannah's petition called for the destruction of an artwork. *As a museum with a collection*, with *the role of being custodians for art*, we can never condone the destruction of a work. It's such an extreme demand that it brings things to the point where one can't have a real conversation [emphasis mine].

Lew emphasizes that Black's criticism fundamentally conflicts with his position as a museum employee, a *custodian of art*. Museums cannot entertain the notion of destroying artworks—museums are refrigerators and protectors and repositories of artworks. The destruction of artwork goes against the fundamental purpose of museums. Destruction[21] takes it too far.

However, as a custodian of art, Lew surely knows that to destroy paintings and artworks (museums even!) is a familiar avant-garde, modernist position to take. One of the earliest and most routine gestures of modernism was the call to destroy previous

[20] For one take on the censorship argument see, Fusco, Coco. "Censorship, Not the Painting, Must Go: On Dana Schutz's Image of Emmett Till." *Hyperallergic.* 27 March 2017. https://hyperallergic.com/368290/censorship-not-the-painting-must-go-on-dana-schutzs-image-of-emmett-till/.

[21] As if the creation of the painting is not also a site of destruction.

models of painting and artworks. Point 10 of F.T. Marinetti's 1909 *Futurist Manifesto* reads:

> We will destroy the museums, libraries, academies of every kind, will fight moralism, feminism, every opportunistic or utilitarian cowardice.

I do not point to the 100+ year old *Futurist Manifesto* to suggest that Black is invoking the modernist/avant-garde tradition, the Futurists, or Marinetti, but to point out how Black's position has not invoked the standard modernist protection decreed upon Futurists, Dadaist, "Conceptualists," and other such types. The modernists' call to destroy museums has been protected under the rhetoric of hyperbole, rupture, politics, critique, and performance.[22] I do not believe that Black's call to destroy Schutz's painting is hyperbole—but I do believe that her emphasis on the destruction of the painting is a critique of the propertizing operations surrounding Blackness, and materialized her critique concerning the commodification of Black death and abjection.[23] The call to destroy is an invocation of property and its provenance claims: it questions its fundamental desires to exist, and the rights foregrounding this ownership. However, rather than the call to destroy leading to a careful analysis of whiteness and its consistent property claims, it became the vehicle to dismiss Black's argument entirely, and to protect the historical functions of propertizing Museums.

Additionally Lew offers grand and contradictory positions. Can Black's protest and response not be taken seriously because she calls for a *destruction* (which must be

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[22] One such example that displays the height of preservation and defense. See, Brown, Mark. "British Library buys Futurists' metal manifesto." *The Guardian.* 19 Feb 2009. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/feb/20/british-library-buys-futurists-manifesto

[23] For a full discussion of this, see Hartman, Saidiya. *Scenes of Subjection.*: Oxford University Press, 1997.

taken as literally and as legally as possible) or can Black's protest not be taken seriously or entertained because what is being questioned are *American concerns*?

Perhaps traveling the train of thought that Yau's desire for more Asian American specific visibility participates in, 2016 witnessed the advent of some of this decade's most visible and explicit Asian/Asian American organizing. The presence of Asian American activism is nebulous, and interlopes with paucity.[24] The history of Asian American activism however, is a development through and with radical Black movements.[25] 2016 ruptured this historical narrative of Asian American organizing as Asian/Asian Americans protested the arrest and trial of police officer Peter Liang, who murdered Akai Gurley. The protesters[26] argued Liang was processed unjustly, and bore

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[24] *Changelab* recently released a dismayed report, see, Jung, Soya and Yong Chan Miller. "Left or Right of the Color Line: Asian Americans and the Racial Justice Movement." *Changelab.* Nov 2012. https://www.changelabinfo.com/research-paper/left-or-right-of-the-color-line/.

The lack of Asian Americans covering political movements concerning Black Lives has also been noted. See, Prince, Richard. "Does the Ferguson Story Resonate Among Asian American Journalists?" *The Root.* 16 Aug 2014.
http://journalisms.theroot.com/does-ferguson-story-resonate-among-asian-american-journ-1790885670.

However, this doesn't mean Asian American never protested, or never will. See in particular Ryan Wong's curation of *Serve the People* and "Roots: Asian-American Movements in Los Angeles 1968-80s." Min, Lillian. "What Today's Protesters Can Learn From the History of L.A.'s Asian-American Movement." *La Weekly.* 24 Jan 2017. http://www.laweekly.com/arts/what-todays-protesters-can-learn-from-the-history-of-las-asian-american-movement-7853003.

[25] See in particular, Ishizuka, Karen L. *Serve the People: Making Asian America in the Long Sixties*. Verso Press, 2016. And Maeda, Daryl. *Chains of Babylon: The Rise of Asian America*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.

[26] There were protesters who protested this, most notably the group, Asians for Black Lives and Cathy Dang of CAAAV. See, "As Officer Who Killed Akai Gurley Gets No Jail Time, Asian Americans Debate Role of White Supremacy." *Democracy Now.* 21 April 2016.
https://www.democracynow.org/2016/4/21/as_officer_who_killed_akai_gurley.

And most importantly Claire Kim's op-ed post verdict where she writes, "That Asian Americans experience discrimination does not secure their innocence. Nor does the fact that their privileges and immunities are not as complete or robust as those of whites." See, Kim, Claire. "The trial of Peter Liang and confronting the reality of Asian American privilege." *Los Angeles Times.* 21 April 2016.
http://www.latimes.com/opinion/opinion-la/la-ol-peter-liang-asian-american-privilege-20160421-snap-story.html

the weight of white police officers who were not charged by the law. Being treated as legally white (which was clarified by the protesters as committing and being acquitted for antiblack violence) was the barometer of full citizenship and freedom, of which apparently, many Asian/Asian Americans felt deprived of.

In an article titled "How Should Asian Americans feel about the Peter Liang Protests?" that appeared in the *New York Times* before the final verdict, Jay Caspian Kang writes that Asian Americans—regardless of how we might feel about the Liang protests—must acknowledge that Liang is an "inconvenient singularity." Kang prescribes,

> All these anxieties, born out of these small but crucial referendums on our place in America, have been reignited by Liang's conviction—why *only* Liang? — suggests that the unjust protections routinely afforded to white officers should be extended either to everyone or to nobody at all. To ignore this suggestion is intellectually dishonest.
>
> But how can any sincere confrontation of racial inequity in policing and the criminal-justice system ignore the inconvenient singularity of Liang's conviction?[27]

Utilizing arcane posturing regarding "intellectual dishonesty" Kang attempts to intimidate his arguments into acceptance. I find Kang's analysis to be so out of this world intellectually dishonest. It is an anathema to debate the tenor of protections afforded to police officers to murder and execute members of black and brown communities—theirs is a protection rooted in white supremacy: it should not be extended to them or to anyone

[27] For full text see, Kang, Jay Caspian. "How Should Asian Americans feel about the Peter Liang Protests?" *The New York Times Magazine.* 23 Feb 2016. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/23/magazine/how-should-asian-americans-feel-about-the-peter-liang-protests.html

else, it must not and cannot exist. Additionally, post-verdict these arguments are crueler, most vile. Liang was never and will never be the *only.* He is one of many. Post-verdict I saw no follow up reports confessing inconvenient singularity no more. Inconvenient singularity no more.

Yau and Kang offer a predictable stance as that of Lew and Locks. One side argues that the injury Asian Americans face is our invisibility, which becomes our singularity—and the other is happily living in the violence of post-racial somewhere else America. These positions are linked and their theorizations insufficient, they help us none in analyzing Asian American power relations.

I want to suggest that the project of Asian American must grapple with the politics taken up with Liang, to address how an Asian American specific approach has come to perpetuate antiblackness in its foundational conceptions of freedom, justice, and redress. In 2017 and moving forward, any notion of an "Asian American perspective," Asian American politics, or critique must include the ramifications of the protests surrounding Liang. I say this not only because the Liang protests were the most visible and economically organized Asian/Asian American protest spaces in decades, but as Yau, Kang, and too many others have repeated, visibility seems to be at the heart of what so much Asian American politics has flouted to be about.[28]

In 1990 critical race theorist and artist Mari Matsuda delivered a lecture titled "We Will Not be Used," to the Asian Law Caucus. In the lecture she describes the dynamics of the exceptionalized Asian American, and the middle positioning of Asian Americans in the racial hierarchy. She asks if we really are the middle, what might occur

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[28] I suggest we contend with both the communal, as well as our own, desire for politics.

if the middle did not obey the top—whiteness—but instead worked to destroy it? She writes,

> The role of the racial middle is a critical one. It can reinforce white supremacy if the middle deludes itself into thinking it can be just like white if it tries hard enough. Conversely, the middle can dismantle white supremacy if it refuses to be the middle, if it refuses to buy into racial hierarchy, and if it refuses to abandon communities of black and brown people, choosing instead to forge alliances with them. (150)[29]

The middle is brought up here as a thought experiment, as a potentiality, and a reality. With Yau, Kang, Lew, and Locks, we see how the middle operates as: most predictable, dependable, keepers of the status quo. Either we're too invisible, OR we cannot bear the onus of racial responsibility as we are already *beyond*.

What is a middle ground? A privileged space, an assumed space, a space that has consistently been beholden to the ideological dreams of *more*. A space that too often sides with power, rather than the powerless.

Those of us who work in and through representation, as artists, writers and educators—we understand this space well. The middle is ripe to make and distribute objects poisonous to the dinner setting, the images above grow, mutate, suffocating the nutritions in place. The performance would not be a small critique where the purchaser could feel elevated by their self-conscious self-awareness, the compromised state of the world—a consumption of the critique. A cannibalistic ritual, all parties effaced, deteriorated. You think we came for the brain but we came for the whole heart.[30]

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[29] Matsuda, Mari. J. *Where is Your Body? And Other Essays on Race Gender and the Law.* Beacon Press, 1996.
[30] A revised version of this paragraph appears in my letter, "Dear Ancestors." See, "Dear Ancestors." *contemptorary.* 28 Feb 2017. http://contemptorary.org/dear-ancestors/

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In order to analyze terms such as "people of color," "American concerns," "beyond just Asian American," and notions of inclusion, we would need other terms, terms that come from Black feminist studies. Black feminism is not an impromptu framework in matters of art, poetry, Asian American analysis, or transnational Asian politics. In "The Transnational Journey of Intersectionality" Hae Yeon Choo writes about her translation of Patricia Hill Collin's *Black Feminist Thought* into Korean, and on the ways in which Black feminist theorizations travel, particularly to those invested in analyses of power relations. Choo argues for the importance of Black feminist scholarship as providing frameworks that can be utilized to address structural violence in all its forms. Unlike the singular yet vague "people of color" utilized by Yau, an intersectional framework could not be inserted to shield positions already protected by institutions and their states. In fact this is what is most useful about power tools—they highlight the dynamics of state and legal protection so that we can reconfigure all aspects of the system. Ultimately, intersectionality may not always locate an identity position we identify with as the position in most need of redress.[31]

Grace Hong's definition of Asian American is also pivotal to understanding the

[31] To be frank, and because I fear being misunderstood while understanding that misunderstandings remain abound, intersectionality should help us unravel how in the case of 2014 Whitney Biennial, the persons and community in need of redress and care were not East Asian, Asian American mid-career artists. And in the case of 2017, the persons in need of defense were not the curators or Schutz.

tensions unfolding in Yau, Kang, Lew, and Locks. She writes,[32]

> [I]n the current era, global capital reproduces itself exactly by manipulating racial, gender, and sexual difference for the purposes of accumulation. In other words, if "Asian American" or "Chicano" or "African American" are categories that assert racialized subjectivity as a critique of white supremacy and the corresponding logic of assimilation, they are now equally ways of identifying and producing consumer bases, or alternatively, pools of exploitable labor. (xxi)

If Asian American is a political identity, a political grouping based on the desires for self-determination, recovery, and a positionality against white supremacy, then Asian American cultural production could also express this critique, though as witnessed in Yau's definition of *perspective,* and Locks' snippet of *beyond,* it often does not. The danger has been that the spectrum for Asian American seems to have two posts: political experimentation and political collapse.

In thinking about Yau's critique of the Biennial—the kind of critique that leads to the *natural* erasure of the critique Maya and I worked to enact—and the pro-Liang protests, a radical Asian American perspective might[33] entirely give up on representational politics[34] as a failure of liberal notions of freedom. In describing Ruth Gilmore's challenge to "dissolve" the "relationship between race, economy and empire" as a "political act" Paula Chakravartty and Denise Ferreira da Silva write[35] that to do so would be "…undoing the separation between the ethical and the political at the core of liberal (and neoliberal) thinking. This would release us from the burden of

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[32] Hong, Grace. *Ruptures of American Capital, Women of Color Feminism and the Culture of Immigrant Labor.* University of Minnesota, 2006.
[33] For the moment, in the very least.
[34] I leave this purposefully vague and unsettled.
[35] Chakravartty, Paula and Denise Ferreira da Silva. *Race, Empire, and the Crisis of the Subprime*. John Hopkins University Press, 2013.

representation…" (380). To focus on dissolvement, rather than its representation, might be one way to reckon with the political actions required for a fundamentally transformed world. Proceeding this thought, the Asian American perspective might tend to how, rather than representation, liberation take the place of fixation, as both the immediate and end goal. Through researching and writing this dissertation, I have become firmly convinced this means the direct prioritization of Black feminist thought. The variegated field of Black feminist scholarship has explicitly directed and made the arguments in all of my chapters possible, and grounds each chapter of this dissertation project. Additionally, the entirety of this production has and is directed by Black feminist mentorship.[36]

Chapter 1, "Contextualizing Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*: White Risk & the Properties of Found-Object Art," questions ahistoric and apolitical readings of "found" art. Looking at art collectors Walter and Louise Arensberg's archival and financial documents, I argue that Duchamp's relationship with his patrons turned into a concerted effort to canonize Duchamp's art objects. Institutional museum placement was not a game of modernist forms such as "found" or "chance" but a matter of strategic financial planning and investment. Additionally, this chapter is the opportunity for me to lay the foundations for my following arguments. While appropriation becomes celebrated and normalized for some writers and artists, the violence of assimilation becomes a key theme for many Black, Asian American, and postcolonial cultural producers. The tensions that foreground the normalization, and revolutionizes found-object practices as form of

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[36] Specifically, Fatima El-Tayeb and her life-changing mentorship, her precise reading of all of my chapters, and her ongoing feedback.

cultural property management are the same processes that normalize assimilation. By examining the argument of property and property management in the arts, I propose that alongside the literature and art that exposes the freedom of appropriation and theft, there is also a haunted and haunting archive of cultural texts that protest the foreclosure of assimilationist politics, and that appropriation and assimilation are entangled in a complicated and ongoing debate. Cheryl Harris' "Whiteness as Property" drives the critique of modernist and contemporary narratives of "found-object art.

In chapter 2, "Archives and Provenance: The Transformation of Louis Agassiz's Slave Daguerreotypes in the Work of Carrie Mae Weems and Sasha Huber," I examine the institutional provenance of slave daguerreotypes held by the Getty Museum and Harvard University and consider the ways contemporary Black artists have ruptured the narratives of institutional ownership. In researching this subject I spent a year as a graduate intern at the Getty Museum, where I utilized their collection databases and provenance records to interview photo curators, legal experts, artists and archivists, intervening into understandings of provenance. The work of Hortense Spillers and Patricia Hill Collins foregrounds the critique of legal and museum notions of provenance.

Chapter 3, "Consuming Appropriation: *The Master Letters, My Emily Dickinson, The Morning News is Exciting* and the Politics of Metaphor," interrogates the use of chattel slavery as metaphor in three works of poetry. Examining Susan Howe's scholarship of Emily Dickinson, I argue that the aestheticization of atrocity as metaphor is an act of epistemological violence that erases the lived histories of chattel slavery for the political futures of white feminism. In contrast to Howe, I analyze Asian American poet Don Mee Choi's rewriting of Dickinson's letters, as rendering open the

materialization of metaphor. NourbeSe Philips's theorization of consumption in poetry drives my critique of metaphor.

In chapter 4, "Appraising Newness: Whiteness, Neoliberalism & the Building of the Archive for New Poetry," I examine how race became pivotal to the collection development priorities of UCSD's Archive for New Poetry (ANP), and how this prioritization is institutionally processed by literary scholarship that linked innovation to whiteness. The indexing of whiteness as the sole form of proprietary experimentation can be witnessed in the ANP's collection, appraisals, and acquisitions processes. I argue that the structure of the manuscripts acquired by the ANP reflect literary scholarship that theorized "new and innovative" poetry as being written solely by white poets and conclude by examining the absences in the archive. The archives of Sherley Ann Williams anchors this chapter, and Toni Morrison's arguments concerning the "Racial Unconsious" in literature structures my examination of the racialized collection priorities of the Archive for New Poetry.

Chapter 5, "CGI Monstrosities: Modernist Surfaces, the Composite, and the Making of the Human Form," concludes by focusing on how property and legibility have been translated into digital terrains. Paula Chakravartty and Denise Ferreira da Silva's critiques of the terminology surrounding the 2008 economic crisis drive the discourse in this last chapter.

My dissertation, "Properties & Modern Aesthetics" examines historical and contemporary articulations of formalist experimentation and innovation, and argues that

the primary signifier of innovation is the use and propritarization of antiblackness.[37] Antiblackness is how property becomes legislated, and in this sense, antiblackness is how a lineated version of Western white art understands innovation. As can be witnessed in my research—from Marcel Duchamp to Susan Howe to CGI software—the usage, control, and modification of an imagined blackness (one that can and should *aesthetically* be removed of its embodiments) becomes the primary mode of innovative art, aesthetic rupture, and originality.

The first, third, and fourth chapters look specifically at "shield" figures and arguments. They seek to materialize accepted practices (found-object, slavery as metaphor) and persons (Duchamp, Dickinson, Howe, all-white poetry archives) as an effort to collapse their normalization. I utilize the term "shield" to describe the contemporary use-value of said persons and practices. Akin to the ways the words "modern" and "modernism" are used, I have found that Duchamp is the first person invoked when difficult questions concerning appropriation, race, and labor are brought forth. For example, in an effort to defend Kenneth Goldsmith's antiblack "found-object" practices from criticism, a 2015 New Yorker piece proclaimed,[38] "Conceptual art and conceptual poetry embody ideas, and both descend from Duchamp." Duchamp's invocation was to serve as the closing argument. This will no longer suffice. I hope my dissertation fractures the shielding practices of white modernists currently in place.

Equally I hope my dissertation displays the possibilities certain Black and Asian

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[37] Harris, Cheryl. "Whiteness as Property." *Harvard Law Review.* 106.8 (Jun., 1993): 1707-1791
[38] See, Wilkinson, Alec. "Something Borrowed." *New Yorker,* 5 Oct 2015. http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/10/05/something-borrowed-wilkinson. Accessed 12 May 2017.

American cultural producers have opened. The efforts taken up by Noah Purifoy, Carrie Mae Weems, Sasha Huber, and Don Mee Choi challenge previous provenance claims (shields), and asks us to reread the entirety of modern aesthetics, and our understanding of ownership, and property.

In writing this dissertation and in my research, I have worked to purposefully center Black feminist methodology, as I am in agreement with Choo that Black feminism is the most useful and most effective tool to wield in analyzing historical and current forms of oppression. Instead of the victim of redress being an extension of the unexamined self—which is the tradition that Yau's perspective offers, I want to contribute—carefully, and what I can—to the extension of a tradition that imagines and aims for structural impact.

"The Whitney Biennial For Angry Women" was not a consumer driven Asian American project advocating for the insertion of more Asian American artists. "The Whitney Biennial for Angry Women" was absolutely an Asian American critique, in that the specific location of Asian American was deployed in an effort to dismantle the dynamics of whiteness and white supremacy in the museum space. Similarly, "Property & Modern Aesthetics" is an Asian American perspective, as my positionality as a queer, immigrant, Asian American woman routes the discourse, interest, and analyses offered in my writing and research. Irrespective of the objects in question, the entirety of this dissertation is an Asian American perspective, as it strives to catalogue and work in ways in which Asian American[39] formations can be utilized against white supremacy and antiblackness. I hope to never provide consumer manuals, to run a public relations

[39] Until the terminology altogether fails.

platform, or to promote the visuality of more Asian Americans in a white supremacist spectrum of visibility. Instead, I hope my writing works to puncture and dissolve ossified, normalized *aesthetics forms*, as neutral, as beautiful, as innovative, as deserving of more space, as deserving, as worthy, as art.

My positionality serves as both the possibility and limitation of grappling with the various stakes of property, US colonialism, chattel slavery, aesthetics, poetics, labor, and representation. My body not feared, my body doubled and cloned, situates how the project has been able to travel and remain.

**Key terms:**

Property

My reading of property is fundamentally dependent on Harris's theorizations of property. In the US context, Harris demonstrates that the origins of property are "rooted in racial domination"[40] and extends how this US-specific understanding comes from a longer tradition of European thought regarding property, which analyzed property as the right to exclude.[41] I am connecting the right to exclude and racial domination to what Harryette Mullen has described as *aesthetic apartheid*[42]: the ways in which aesthetic and literary institutions work to segregated genres, forms, and objects. As I discuss in Chapters 1 and 2, formal debates are rooted in racial domination (found-object, appropriation) but the current discourse—as unattached to material, economic and historical contexts—does not broach the subject. Additionally, legal understandings of property must be taken into consideration when we discuss the art "object," as the term *property* clarifies the stakes of the debate. I am distinguishing property from commodity, as property claims remain with their supposed benefactor.[43] While we are *allowed* to purchase commodities, and even commodify—i.e. a coffee mug of a painting is purchased at the museum gift shop—

[40] Harris writes, "The origins of property rights in the United States are rooted in racial domination. Even in the early years of the country, it was not the concept of race alone that operated to oppress Blacks and Indians; rather, it was the interaction between conceptions of race and property that played a critical role in establishing and maintaining racial and economic subordination." (1716)

[41] Harris writes, "... The right to exclude was the central principle, too, of whiteness as identity, for mainly whiteness has been characterized, not by an inherent unifying characteristic, but by the exclusion of others deemed to be 'not white'" (1736).

[42] See Mullen, Harryette. "Licked All Over by the English Language: Harryette Mullen in Conversation." *Poets.* 21 Feb 2014. https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/text/licked-all-over-english-language-harryette-mullen-conversation

[43] I thank Theo Davis for this provocative question.

the ability to profit, or to own the object of profit—the painting upstairs on the coffee mug—is less *available*, if not altogether, and purposefully denied. My dissertation pushes for a petty materialist approach of interrogating the ownership of “liberatory” art objects, for the purposes of one day dissolving the racial and gender dispossessions embedded in the discourse of property.

Modern

I use modern/modernism interchangeably as terms that are inextricably dependent on the other. In my definition I accept modernism as a period of European and US aesthetics, puncturing the museum and salon scenes in the late 19th century and lasting approximately until the end of World War II.[44] I accept that modernism was a self-referential marker, marked by artists and writers who wished to distinguish themselves from the old guards, from romance and inspiration, from the tyranny of didactic religious iconography and its realism.[45] I accept that some of the Surrealists were diligent anti-colonialists,[46] and that some of the other members of the category were communists and left-seekers.[47] I accept that the term Modern is too broad, who knows what modernism is anymore (and do we care)? I accept the theorizations that post-modernism came at the same time as modernism, converting modernism into the more acceptable form of itself.

In accepting these definitions, so too must it be accepted that in the same scholarship that advocates for the theorizations above, modernism is said to come later for everyone else not in Europe, or not in a US metropolis. So too must it be accepted that modernism is a spatial and time marker extended to non-white spaces and times when it is beneficial to the branding of modernism. Lisa Lowe effectively points out that, "The genealogy of modern liberalism is thus also a genealogy of modern race; racial

[44] For these arguments see, *Modernism: An Anthology*, edited by Lawrence Rainey. Blackwell Publishing, 2005. And Krauss, Rosalind E. *The Originality of the Avant-garde and Other Modernist Myths*. MIT Press, 1986.
[45] For this discussion see, Raymond Williams. "When was Modernism" *New Left Review* 1/175, May-June 1989.
[46] See Robin G. Kelley's *Freedom Dreams: The Radical Black Imagination,* for an analysis of the anti-colonial protests of some of the French surrealists .
[47] For example Tristan Tzara and Louis Aragon and their involvement in the Communist Party, the Nazi Resistance and the Spanish Civil War. Also see Saunders, Frances. *The Cultural Cold War*. The New Press, 1999.

differences and distinctions designate the boundaries of the human and endure as remainders attesting to the violence of liberal universality."[48] Modernism is a particular branding, a particular colonial formation, a particular understanding of universality and innovation. Janet Poole's reiterates that Modernism and fascism cannot be separated,[49] – which is not a hyperbole, but rather an historical analysis of Modernism.

I accept that I am prioritizing the terms modern and modernism, though only one of my chapters tends to a "real" modernist, Marcel Duchamp. This decision was made purposefully, as I plan on demonstrating through Duchamp how property/art and racial forms can be read in his works, and in the modernist tradition. I wanted to provide a thorough case study[50] in order to trace the rhetorical genealogies and strategies of modernism. The term modern is prioritized even in my discussions of contemporary artists and writers, as I demonstrate that the racialized and gendered definitions of art laid during modernism are the same definitions we are grappling with today.

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[48] Lowe, Lisa. *Intimacies of Four Continents*. Duke University Press, 2015.

[49] Poole writes, "The history of fascism was, until recently, written as a period of aberration or a clip when people momentarily lost their minds before somehow returning, or being returned, to the path of a true modernity, whose ideologies of progress, development, and democratization could thus be reaffirmed. In recent years, historians have instead devoted much effort into rewriting the history of fascism as an integral part of modernity and to thus examining the relationship between modernism and fascism. By refusing to consign fascism to an atavistic past, they have forced a consideration of fascist legacies in the present; once the dark period is no longer allowed to remain in the dark, as it were, it can exert a different and powerful presence in relation to the present…" (5). Poole, Janet. *When the Future Disappears: The Modernist Imagination in Late Colonial Korea.* Columbia University Press, 2014.

[50] I am hoping that for this time around, one case study suffices. Also, Fatima okayed this plan…

## Aesthetics

My examinations of aesthetics are political, and my examination of politics hinge on their aesthetic manifestation. This is not to suggest that there is an easy, clear divide between the two categories, or that one component might be witnessed chronologically, or even durationally. Following in the tradition of Marxist feminist thinkers before and surrounding me, I approach aesthetics and politics as inseparable. I look for the ways in which certain aesthetics, and aesthetic projects, become neutralized and apoliticized, as much as I am interested in the de-aestheticization of certain political discourses. Each object inspected in this dissertation is an examination of its politics, and all political inquires return to its representation and implication.

Art & Poetry

The dissertation examines art and poetry for political and personal reasons. Firstly, I believe that the translation, transition, and appropriation of aesthetic and political forms can be most clearly witnessed betwixt artist and poets. From Marcel Duchamp to Kenneth Goldsmith, Santiago Sierra to Nick Thurston's *On the Subcontract*, the Pictures Generation to the Language Poets—these camps constitute similar arguments of historical/genre adaptations to explain their *formal* projects. I find their comparative gestures useful to analyze, particularly across mediums.

Additionally, the material stakes of the movements and genres depict the politics in place. While artists exhibiting in museums and producing objects may have some clear financial incentives to produce objects for sale, the poetry market is without clear and definitive financial goals (though not to imply that financial goals may not be abound). Though poetry is without an immediate object value, and currently there is no "poetry blue chip market," the normalization of modernist found-art happened in tandem with found poetic practices. If abstract modernist forms in visual art are displays of white property claims, abstract modernist forms in poetry situate the language space in which such objects can reside.

David Marriott argues that finance has long since not been about value or representation, but instead about forms of communication. In critiquing the political premise of the Language Poets,[51] Marriott frames the stakes of communication. While advocates of modernist abstraction, and modernist-driven conceptualist practices, focus

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[51] The Language Poets consisted of poets beginning in the 1970s who argued militantly against lyricism, in another attempt to create abstracted, whitened spaces for poetry. Members included: Lyn Hejinian, Ron Silliman, Bruce Andrews and others.

on theories of production, Marriott materializes how finance is "fundamentally dependent on communication."[52] The communiqué narrated from one seller, in finding another purchaser operates as deregulated, abstract forms. A materialist reading of the genre differences between poetry and visual art is immensely helpful in understanding why and how particular notions of property, form, and innovation arise and are adopted across their movements. Their similarities as well as their differences lead to new analyses about the underlying politics of a particular modernist tradition.

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[52] In "Signs Taken for Signifiers" Marriott argues an orthodox Marxist analysis to language as production will no longer suffice when examining contemporary finance and poetics. He writes "The speed of financial speculation, which has transformed the world into a single global day, is fundamentally based on communication and not on production" (340). See, *Assembling Alternatives: Reading Postmodern Poetries Transnationally.* Ed. Romana Huk. Wesleyan University Press, 2003.

Experimental

I would like to end this glossary with a quote by Roberto Piva on the politics of experimentation[53]:

> Poetry is a delirium. The poetic is itself an act of transgression in the sense that it deals with invisible things on the planet, with invisible forces… This is why I say the true poet is marginal. And there is no experimental poetry without experimental life.

There is no experimental poetry without experimental life: an experiment illegible to the *avant-garde*—

Introduction contains an excerpt from my essay published as, Eunsong Kim, "Dear Ancestors." Published in, *contemptorary,* Feb 2016, online. The dissertation author was the primary investigator and author of this paper

[53] I would like to thank poet and translator Lucas de Lima for sharing this quote with me.

# Chapter 1: Contextualizing Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*: White Risk & the Properties of Found-Object Art

It is the innocence which constitutes the crime.

—James Baldwin, "A Letter to My Nephew"

In 1917 Marcel Duchamp submitted a public urinal with the title *Fountain* to a show by the Society of Independent Artists in New York City. The submission was promptly rejected by the society but Duchamp had the piece photographed and published in the American journal *The Blind Man*, calling it a "readymade." Almost a century later in 2004, Duchamp's *Fountain* won the prestigious Turner Prize, heralded the most influential work of modern art. The award, as polled by 500 art experts across the world, did what Duchamp's piece had done to the public and society of artists in 1917—it infuriated some and delighted others. Shocking and provoking new viewers even today, Duchamp's readymade transformed possibilities within the official realm of art and continues to fuel the landscape of contemporary aesthetics.

Duchamp has become a central figure in art history and contemporary practice, as evidenced by the Turner Prize, and that the majority of encyclopedic and international museums have acquired his work into their permanent collections. Duchamp was afforded several retrospectives during his lifetime, and his objects have steadily increased in value since his death. Many of his most notable pieces are housed in the Philadelphia Art Museum, and reproductions of his readymades are housed at the Centre Pompidou

among other European museums. Interest in his oeuvre has not faded.

This chapter is not a discussion or exploration of the persona or artist Marcel Duchamp. My argument in this chapter explores the material conditions and the subsequent theoretical and political dynamics of found-object art. In this chapter I will examine the dominant art-historical narratives surrounding *Fountain*—which are ] dehistoricized, decontextualized, and almost entirely without examinations of race and property relations. In tandem I will offer up a fragmented portrait of *Fountain*'s historical milieu, especially relevant because segregation was present in all US sectors, both in private spaces and public grounds. This will elucidate the segregated world in which Duchamp and his patrons lived—a contextualization that has failed to occur in most writings on Duchamp. This lack of contextual examination is one way that—as Cheryl Harris has pointed out—whiteness is made neutral and yet proprietary.

The proclamation of *found*—or readymade, that is an object that receives value via its selection rather than through its craft endeavor—raised first by Duchamp's appropriation, has traveled across disciplines into film, new media, and literature. Almost a hundred years after Duchamp's fantasy of the *Fountain,* Western modernist discourses continue to encourage engaging with art as an idea, a subject, and a name. This, I suggest, is the immaterial fantasy of the modernist aesthetic discourse: the pleasures of dehistoricization; the power of forced neutrality; and the dynamics of violently detaching representation from its context, material, and labor. The detachment process, and its consequent dehistoricization, is privileged by notions of property, and as Cheryl Harris has argued, property in the United States is foundationally defined by whiteness. I suggest that this idea of property remains consistent through the modern era, and is the

basis for modern art.

Rather than positioning *Fountain* as a European work situated in a European color-blind[1] space—which is often the case due to the Pompidou's current holdings and the current critical evasions—it should be positioned (if only a few times, and for the sake of experimentation!) within the political milieu of New York City from 1915 to 1917, to configure the US political and historical context for the work. The myth of the original *Fountain* as a revolutionary artistic gesture, removed from racial, economic, or historical considerations. *Fountain*, due to its decontextualization and neutral positioning, has been celebratory of white space and white property creation. It is necessary to investigate a 1917 urinal—or even a fountain (drinking, decorative, or otherwise)—as an object of US segregation, and of segregated space and time, considering that the object coincides with the Great Migration (1910–1930), the run-up to the Harlem Renaissance (which ruptured in 1917!), and the highly contentious Jim Crow era.

Historical context is of particular importance, as contemporary renditions of the readymade have focused on the political implications of the anti-bourgeois gesture of chance. Hal Foster cants a version of this narrative, using Peter Burger's variation in *Theory of the Avant-Garde.* He writes that according to Burger, "[I]f readymades and collages challenged the bourgeois principles of expressive artists and organic art work, neo-readymades and neo-collages reinstate them. So, too, if Dada attacks audience and market alike, neo-Dada gestures are adapted to them" (13). There is a tendency to divide the original gesture of the readymade from its attempted reproductions. This division

[1] For an in-depth analysis on the problems of European colorblindness see Fatima El-Tayeb's *European Others.* University of Minnesota Press, 2011.

[2] This is the argument made in an essay in the *Duchamp Effect*, which is comprised of the articles in the

exists to preserve the narrative of early modernist radicality, where the invention of "anti-expressive" objects became the weapon of choice to strike the bourgeois.[2] Such romantic compositions evade how readymades have always been indicators of the market. This chapter seeks to investigate the popularized gesture of the readymade—Duchamp's *Fountain*—in order to wholeheartedly complicate its origin tale.

Of Duchamp, Ed Ruscha writes, "He was against a kind of academic slavery that artists went through who followed a traditional path; he was for the spirit of revolt" (55). Of his readymades he writes, "[H]e discovered common objects and showed you could make art out of them… He played with materials that were taboo to other artists at the time; defying convention was one of his greatest accomplishments" (56). Such are the analyses that grounded the aesthetic possibilities of immaterial play linked to leftist politics. Ruscha's articulations are important in clarifying the stakes of Duchamp's readymades: 1. Duchamp's readymades are about engagements with immaterial labor; 2. 'Discovery' of existing material, life, and labors is triumphant, revolutionary, immaterial work; and 3. Immaterial management becomes organically linked to the spirit of revolt. Missing from this discussion is one that interrogates how modernist appropriation as immaterial work might be a concept grounded in white property formations. In the appropriation of everyday objects, we can see how immaterial power becomes materialized as property through the creation of a fictionalized and decontextualized white space. In a decontextualized white space, key questions cannot be articulated. Questions such as: How might the urinal be appropriated in the time of racial

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[2] This is the argument made in an essay in the *Duchamp Effect*, which is comprised of the articles in the 1994 special issue on Duchamp in *October.* These arguments have also been made in *Against Expression: An Anthology on Conceptual Writing.*

segregation? How might it decontextualize itself and become the signifying event for a particular brand of revolt? The white cube gallery practice exists to uphold the logic of white neutrality in the arts.

Echoing the scholars above, in *Art After Appropriation* John Welchman argues that appropriation fundamentally altered our connection to the experience of aesthetics. Welchman asserts that the possibilities of art expanded, and continue to expand, through this methodology—and that more or less, art continues to 'move on.' Rather than focusing on the celebratory possibilities of this expansion, I will look at appropriation as methodology that expands only through obfuscation of its genealogy. Appropriated objects are ones in which their "new" forms does not explicitly announce their former structures and, oftentimes, successful appropriation is reliant on the silence or the death of what it wishes to take. Differing from critical inclusion (as practiced by writers such as Nikki Giovanni, Don Mee Choi and others), tributary (such as the tradition of odes and elegies), or re-enactments—US appropriation art and the practice of found-object sculpture serves as a vehicle of property re-valuation. I wish to interrogate the Western processes, rationale, logic, and events that lead to the normalization of appropriation, found-object art, found literature, and the concept of the readymade. My argument is that cultural and aesthetic appropriation (or the objects that are allowed to fall under this banner) relies on a colonial/neocolonial model of racialized property obtained through conquest and 'discovery'—freedom as expansion.[3] I argue that the very beginnings (the start date on which art history and literary texts have agreed) of Duchamp's 1917 appropriation and found-object art are rooted in racialized, gendered, capitalist fantasies

[3] See: Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Schocken Books, 1951.

of the global north.

Relying on the foundational argumentation of whiteness as property provided by Cheryl Harris, I will offer an alternative reading of *Fountain* and the function of a readymade in 1917, here the function of a readymade object is:

1. The creation of white space, that becomes neutral space in which art-property can be found, decontextualized, and witnessed. This neutrality makes it almost impossible for discussions about race, gender, and sexuality to figure, and when they do, the space is no longer neutral "high art." As Harris shows, neutrality and innocence are historical constructs reserved for whiteness;
2. The aesthetics of decontextualization—as the premise of white liberation;
3. The aesthetics of dehistoricization—as the premise of white liberation; and
4. The relationship between property creation and white liberation.

I also wish to contend that part of the celebration of something like the readymade and its narrative is in the "success" of its appropriation in:

—segregating (from notions of race, gender, class)

—decontextualizing (from the violence of its historical times)

—dehistoricizing (from the laws, space that it would have existed in even during its times)

Via the property functions of whiteness, modernist appropriation gains value and triumphs as an aesthetic-*ingenue*. In addition, white appropriation becomes the vehicle in which new property values can be created, via the processes of decontextualization.

Using Harris, I argue that the Western processes and rationale that lead to the

normalization of found/appropriation, found-object art, and the concept of the readymade are foundationally dependent on whiteness. By examining the critical texts around *Fountain*, I show how the object/concept is removed from its historical consideration in order to be attributed to the act of aesthetic liberation.

### ***Fountain*: Composition, Narrative & Context**

In 1913 *The Armory Show* introduces Modern Art to the New York public. Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* is prominently displayed and discussed in New York newspapers. This motivates New York art patrons to invite Duchamp to visit from France. In 1915 Marcel Duchamp is excused from fighting in WWI and enters the United States. He is immediately introduced to wealthy art patrons Walter and Louise Arensberg and takes residence in their home in exchange for his art objects. He becomes a member of the now-infamous Arensberg Salons—producing many objects to be purchased and circulated by affluent members of New York's art scene. In 1917, still in New York and across the city from the Harlem Renaissance, Duchamp and his patron Walter Arensberg enter a plumbing store and purchase a urinal. He signs it with one of his artist pseudonyms, renames it "Fountain" and enters it into an art show by the Society of Independent Artists Inc., a collective comprised mostly of white male artists, and the occasional white female artist—a show being organized by a society of which he was a member. The Society, not knowing that Duchamp submitted the object in question, rejects it outright. Duchamp decides that the rejection is an outrage and, using another

pseudonym, writes a review criticizing this rejection.[4] The signed store-bought urinal is lost. Decades later during the height of the Civil Rights Movements, reproductions of them are produced in Italy to be sold to European and US collectors.

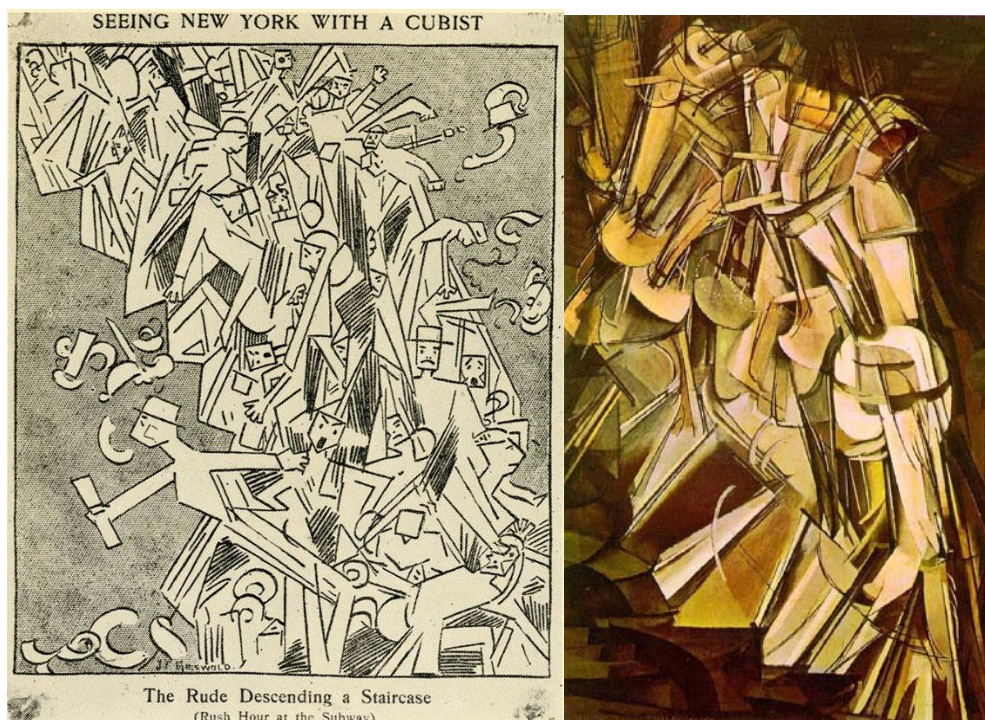


Image 1.1 J. F. Griswold's "The Rude Descending a Staircase (Rush Hour at the Subway)." This comic first appeared in the *New York Evening Sun*, March 20, 1913 and Marcel Duchamp, *Nude Descending a Staircase,* 1912. Shown at The Armory Show in 1913.

It goes without saying that New York City in 1915 to 1917 was far from neutral. The United States was, as the United States is now, without neutral grounds. Issues of segregation[5] filled every public and private arena. New York in particular had its own take on Jim Crow legislation, specifically involving election laws.[6] New York was the

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[4] The review appeared in Duchamp's magazine, *The Blind Man,* which was sponsored by the Arensbergs.
[5]Harris powerfully discusses the potential of segregation to become the potential for white appropriation, "White identity and whiteness were sources of privilege and protection; their absence meant being the object of property" (1721).
[6]Erika Wood, Liz Budnitz, Garima Malhotra, Charles Ogletree Write, "But Jim Crow was not confined to the South. He made his home in Northern states as well, perhaps most notably in New York. Starting in the

only state where African Americans were required to own property in order to qualify to vote. Property ownership was a fundamental requirement to participate in political representation, but this was out of reach for most, due to the intensely violent level of residential segregation and restriction in New York. Zhang Juguo writes, "Whites in New York City signed restrictive covenants, swearing not to rent or sell their houses to African Americans" (80). During this era of Jim Crow policies, it is important to consider what Saidiya Hartman has theorized to be public laws and private norms, which routinely manifested in the form of biopolitics and sanitation.[7]

However, when *Fountain* is discussion, the United States, segregation, and patronage rarely enter the analysis or even the footnotes. In *Part Object, Part Sculpture* by Helen Molesworth, in what may have been the largest contemporary retrospective on Duchamp, offers not one word about the function, context, or history for *Fountain*. Molesworth introduces Duchamp's later impetus to manufacture works himself, his careful selection of Italian artisans for his reproductions, as revealing choices that indicate his breakthrough aesthetic trajectory. In the catalogue essays for *Part Object, Part Sculpture,* every detail, every possible fissure—except the historical, the historically political, the racial—are examined.

*Part Object, Part Sculpture,* was a nationally traveling exhibition curated by Helen Molesworth, which displayed Duchamp's work and that of seventeen artists Molesworth and others believed he influenced. Rogue counting the exhibition catalogue

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18th century, the history of New York's election laws follows this national narrative. In fact, New York was the only state in the country to require blacks – and only blacks – to own real property in order to qualify to vote." Such laws manifest as Harris articulates, "The origins of property rights in the United States are rooted in racial domination" (1716).

[7] See, Saidiya V. Hartman. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in. Nineteenth-Century America.* Oxford UP, 1997. In particular page 65, 101, 122.

it is clear that almost all the artists on display are white or European men; Yayoi Kusama, Felix Gonalez-Torres and Gabriel Orozco are the only artists of color. There are no black artists and, though *Fountain* is relentlessly referenced, there is no discussion of New York (other than in reference to Duchamp's patrons), the politics of artmaking in the US, nor any interrogation of his whiteness.[8] This decontextualization and re-narrativization of *Fountain* is routine—such art writing exemplifies how white space becomes synonymous with neutrality, and race and context are unable to configure.

David Joselit, one of the contributing writers for *Part Object, Part Sculpture,* offers this illuminating theoretical reading regarding the gesture Duchamp enacted:

> Language necessarily erases difference: *urinal* refers to all machines for catching the urine of men despite the fact that *every one of them is different.* Even those that came off the same assembly line, or those that stand side by side in the same lavatory, are minutely different, either through the vagaries of manufacture or through the different veils of liquid staining their surfaces (161).

Joselit begins by stating that language erases differences. Then, in an ahistorical turn that anticipates neoliberal multiculturalism, he imagines the urinal as a functional object *despite* difference. The urinal cannot see difference, cannot see time, race, class, or history (though apparently it can see gender). Joselit argues that for the imaginary observer, and the artists since influenced, it is because Duchamp's language/performance transformed the object *urinal* into a *fountain*, that one is able to grasp both the sanctity of

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[8]Just because whiteness is not articulated, does not mean it is not being deployed. Harris writes, "The state's official recognition of a racial identity that subordinated Blacks and privileged rights in property based on race elevated whiteness from a passive attribute to an object of law and a resource deployable at the social, political, and institutional level to maintain control. Thus, a white person "used and enjoyed" whiteness whenever she took advantage of the privileges accorded white people simply by virtue of their whiteness — when she exercised any number of rights reserved for the holders of whiteness. Whiteness as the embodiment of white privilege transcended mere belief or preference; it became usable property, the subject of the law's regard and protection. In this respect whiteness, as an active property, has been used and enjoyed" (1734).

flattening difference and the possibilities in erasing it via commodification.

Thierry de Duve offers a similar reading. In *Kant After Duchamp*, "Art Was a Proper Name" is a chapter written in second-person singular that asks the reader to "Imagine yourself an—ethnologist—or an anthropologist—from outer space." Constructing a hypothetical "alien" in order to test out an old conception of art, de Duve proclaims, "[Y]ou say: art is everything that is called art. Like him or her, you infer from this that the word 'art' is the name common to everything called art. Like him or her, you deduce in turn that 'art' is a common noun" (23). Thierry de Duve's conception of the aesthetic is a precise example of a forced-linear, aesthetic tradition grounded in decontextualized fantasies. Here art is an object, a proper subject, where consciousness of its name is mandatory. Incapable of being a verb, an action, this definition of art relies on the desires of the recognized self-conscious subject. It is a concept that disregards the complications of the subaltern, colonial history, colonial appropriation, and the commodification and abstraction of labor. It is also the terminology that requires art's function as property to be discovered by a subject who can claim its value.

De Duve cites Duchamp's *Fountain* as the event to unfetter historical and contemporary confusions within arts discourse:

> Paradigmatic manifesto of art as anti-art, Duchamp's urinal makes all this manifest. It is in vain that it rests in a museum and gets added to the cultural heritage. For some, it has not stopped being the harbinger of the happy day when art will finally fall from its pedestal and *belong to everyone*; for others, it remains the source of resentment and fear of the day when, everything having become art, nothing will be art any longer; and for all of us—in our society where consensus is either incomprehensible or impossible—*it is still an object of dissent revealing our plight***.** In conclusion, Duchamp's urinal wields the disquieting proof of art's alienation, an alienation that seems definitive to those who read it as evidence of decadence, provisional to those who see it as the premise of

> renewal, and necessary to those for whom the faculty of negating is what, in the end, *promises emancipation* (29, emphasis mine).

Written in 1996 but channeling all of the flattened generalities of early modern thinkers, de Duve's Western theory advocates for an abstracted arts rooted in a liberal humanism that dreams of a particular emancipation, yet removed from the *consequences* of praxis. He collapses societies into one (does this object belong to everyone—everyone in New York City in 1917?), and hails Duchamp as the "harbinger" of formations of both popular culture and contemporary blue-chip collections. Marcel Duchamp's immaterial labor—de Duve argues—has rearranged everyone's relationship to art. By default, the function of "Art as a proper name" not only disavows the unconscious, the subaltern, and those outside the borders of proper object and subject identification and rights, but the argument also disavows the necessity and role of context, material labor, action, praxis, and access. If Duchamp's immaterial labor can ask and raise questions of alienation, renewal, and emancipation all at the same time—what more can its context reveal?

Critic Wayne Andersen has commented that "[T]his urinal is much more on the art world's mind than in 1917 when newly purchased and not put to its designed used (2)." *Fountain* is our current chosen aesthetic legacy. It is true that the "invention" of the readymade did transform the course of Western modernist, postmodernist, and contemporary art. The transformation is an object of segregation becoming the object of liberation. Duchamp's name is cited as a shield in almost every gesture that is questioned, in every action where the audience questions the process of labor, the conditions of labor, the need for labor, and the context of its creation.  As the criticism cited above displays, art history and contemporary practice have come to view *Fountain* as a political act rather

than an historical event. The contemporary persistence of *Fountain* is indicative of high art's ongoing racial erasure.

The interpretation of the event (readymade) is promulgated by prominent critics such as Helen Molesworth, David Joselit, Thierry de Duve, and countless other artists and critics: Duchamp—and particularly the readymade *Fountain*—changed the landscape of art. It transformed the possibilities of art making—of what was art and what it could be. It politicized the everyday—it questioned commodity objects and transformed them. It liberated art, transformed from the act of making[9] into the act of speaking. In order for this to be their central thesis, Duchamp's French and other European associations are highlighted, his close relationships with US patrons are elided. The US context, though at times clearly stated, is never questioned as needing further inquiry. This narrative has not addressed: How does the legacy of *Fountain* interact with its own political milieu? For whom does this aesthetic legacy exist? How does it exist within our present political milieu? Whom do these champions shield?

I bring this up to say that on every level—representational, functional, political, and aesthetic—the invention of the readymade via a 1917 urinal/fountain could not be a neutral product of liberation. It is a historically telling gesture of white property relations, and of whiteness made neutral. This mundane observation becomes overlooked because museum-art functions as property, and property in US and European culture functions as a vehicle of whiteness. In many ways Duchamp's gesture of found-and-ready is not only beholden to the date 1917, as according to Harris whiteness continues to provide our current understanding of property. However, the date of his gesture, and the complete

[9] Arguably because labor was already gendered and racialized, and *beneath* the pursuits of the white, wealthy circles.

decontextualization of the idea of "found" as "art" should raise additional questions, particularly concerning the aestheticization of white property.

Harris notes, "Whiteness was the characteristic, the attribute, the property of free human beings." (1721) Art is closely held as a measure of freedom, and in tandem, gestures that further this claim such as *Fountain* are rewarded with value, canonization, circulation, and fame. Simultaneously, modern, postmodern, and contemporary art have been primarily white enterprises. This is not to say that there have not been pivotal, groundbreaking Black artists throughout US history—but that their contributions, according to canonical placement, collection holdings, circulation, is for better or worse almost always at the periphery and significantly less valued.[10] We can witness this attitude in countless dismissals of Black artists—whether by explicit exclusions[11] or omissions, and this explicit exclusion has a long tradition. Take artist Willem de Kooning's "Trans/formation at Studio 35" lecture from 1950:

> There is a train track in the history of art that goes way back to Mesopotamia. *It skips the whole Orient, The Mayas, and American Indians. Duchamp is on it*. Cézanne is on it. Picasso and the Cubists are on it; Giacometti, Piet Mondrian, and so many... I have some feeling about all these people – millions of them – on this enormous track, a way into history. They had a peculiar way of measuring. They seemed to measure with a length similar to their own height.... The idea that the thing that the artist is making can come to know for itself, how high it is, how wide and how deep it is, *is a historical one* – a traditional one I think. It comes from man's own image [emphasis mine].

De Kooning's attempt at historicization, i.e., an imaginary train, only goes back in time to

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[10] Susan Cahan's archival work in *Mounting Frustration: Black Power in the Age of Museums* shows how even when museums purchased Black art, they would limit its circulation and exhibition.

[11] See Dorothy Wang, *Thinking its Presence* for an analysis of the white supremacist practices of avant-garde poetry. Also, as discussed in my conclusion, Rita Dove's response to Helen Vendler's racist remarks concerning Dove's curation of the *20th Century Poetry* collection for Penguin.

exclude particular cultures and peoples—making his first stop to pick up Duchamp, and several other white male artists. De Kooning does not explain why his train must travel so far only to exclude, but Harris crystallizes that, "[W]hiteness shares the critical characteristics of property even as the meaning of property has changed over time. In particular, whiteness and property share a common premise – a conceptual nucleus – of a right to exclude" (1714). This is to say that while Duchamp, de Kooning, Molesworth, and the authors of almost every piece written about *Fountain* have gone so clearly out of their way to evade whiteness and property, it is in this evasion that we can foreground its politics. De Kooning's list of passengers is telling—they are the group of white men whose objects have been most thoroughly circulated, prioritized, and continue to dominate the art market.

A dehistoricized, decontextualized reading of objects is the reading by which aesthetics have become grounded and defined. We will need to reframe property relations in art and position how whiteness-as-property functions in granting cultural ownership in modern, postmodern, and museum art. Santiago Sierra, Vanessa Beecroft, and Thomas Hirschorn are contemporary examples of this property engagement and rely on Duchamp's modernist foundations. In the rationale of ownership, the ability to proliferate and distribute property rights as a white subject position becomes essential.

**Permanent Collection: A Schematics**

> *Avoid Taste*. Do something contray to taste[12] [emphasis mine].
>
> I have lived so long and so closely with your works that in some way or other they have become incorporated in my structure, but because they are so familiar and so close. I am unable to make my feelings for them articulate. *If you are the Unknown Soldier, let me be the silent guard...* In a way, therefore, *the museum will be a monument to you*, and the presence of all the other things will serve as a means of defining how completely individual is your contribution to the art of the twentieth century… It is hard for me to write. I feel a kind of paralysis in expressing my feeling, but I constantly think of you...
>
> —Letter from Walter Arensberg to Marcel Duchamp, January 11, 1945 [emphasis mine]

In thinking about racialization and property, I want to delineate the process of securing permanent collection space, as I believe it is essential to the project of materializing, racializing, and fincializing museum space and the art object. In 1945 Walter Arensberg sent Duchamp a letter about donating their collection to UCLA,[13] and throughout the 1940s, Duchamp and the Arensbergs met with the Metropolitan Museum, The Art Institute of Chicago, the University of Minnesota,[14] and UCLA, and received offers from other galleries before to finalizing a deal in 1953 with the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The late director, Sydney Fiske-Kimball, promise the Arensbergs five times what the Metropolitan Museum offered—promising 25 years of permanent gallery space, and ensuring to hold the collection together indefinitely. The securing of permanent museum placement for the Arensberg collection was approximately a 9-year

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[12] Arensberg, Walter C. Writings. 1916. Box 43 F9. Walter and Louise Arensberg papers, 1912-1982. Arensberg Archives. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia. Accessed 22 Oct 2014.

[13] Arensberg, Walter C. Letter to Marcel Duchamp. 11 Jan 1945. Box 6 F 29. Walter and Louise Arensberg papers, 1912-1982. Arensberg Archives. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia. Accessed 22 Oct 2014.

[14] Arensberg, Walter C. Letter to Marcel Duchamp. 11 May 1949. Box 6 F 31. Walter and Louise Arensberg papers, 1912-1982. Arensberg Archives. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia. Accessed 22 Oct 2014. Duchamp responds to the letter August 8$^{th}$, 1949 and states a disinterest in Minnesota.

project.

Walter and Louise Arensberg begin their patronage of Duchamp's artistic pursuits in 1915, and remained his primary patrons and most aggressive collectors until their deaths. Much of the information regarding Duchamp's role as the Arensbergs's dealer, and their purchases, come from the Arensbergs's California Use Tax records.[15] The narrative of the Arensberg collection and Duchamp's dealership is described with precision in a 1951 letter sent to the California Tax department, which I will quote at length. To the state's public accountant Walter Arensberg writes,

> We first moved to California in April of 1921, and remained here continuously until we returned to New York, to the best of our recollection, in either 1926 or 1927. After remaining in New York for a little more than a year, we returned to California and purchased our present residence, 7065 Hillside Avenue, to the best of our recollection in 1928.
>
> We began the formation of our art collection at the time of the Armory Show in 1914, and it was between this time and the time of our coming to California in 1921 that we made many of our most important purchases. They included examples by Picasso, Braque, Marcel Duchamp, Gleize, Derain, Rousseau, Sheeler, Brancusi, Matisse, Picabia, Stella, and Pach. It was at this time also that we made our first purchases of Pre-Columbian (sic) art, *our interest in Pre-Columbian art being very closely associated with our interest in the forms of art of the 20th century.*[16]

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[15] Arensberg, Walter C. Letter to Marcel Duchamp. 11 August 1951. Box 6 F 34. Walter and Louise Arensberg papers, 1912-1982. Arensberg Archives. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia. Accessed 22 Oct 2014.
Duchamp responds to news of the tax with am "What a nuisance!"
Duchamp, Marcel. Letter to Walter Arensberg. 8 Sept 1951. Box 6 F 35. Walter and Louise Arensberg papers, 1912-1982. Arensberg Archives. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia. Accessed 22 Oct 2014.

To which I must respond: thank the heavens for tax nuisances.

[16] Another dissertation could and should be written on the impact and echoes of patrons such as the Arensbergs collecting and narrating Modern art through this gaze. The note concerning their "289 indigenous materials" is in, Arensberg, Walter C. CA Use Tax. 1 Dec 1951. Box 30 F 25. Walter and Louise Arensberg papers, 1912-1982. Arensberg Archives. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia. Accessed 22 Oct 2014.

> We have in our possession photographs of the living room of our New York apartment in which a number of the objects referred to above may be seen reproduced. It is obvious from these photographs that the general character of our collection was really formed at this time. These photographs are of the apartment that we had prior to our first coming to California in 1921. Thereafter we made continuous purchases of works of modern art until after our second return to California about 1927 or 1928, when the expense of purchasing, remodeling, and furnishing our new home made a temporary pause in our art purchase.
>
> *Our principal purchase of painting from that time on were made through the agency of our friend, Marcel Duchamp, rather than directly through dealers*, since he had personal relations with private persons whose pictures he was able to persuade them to sell.
>
> After several years of comparatively few purchases, we began, since we felt that we had by that time made a fairly representative collection of modern art, to purchase Pre-Columbian almost exclusively. These purchases were, with only a few minor exceptions, all made from Earl Stendahl, who is a Los Angeles dealer. The paintings also purchased at the time were obtained almost exclusively via Marcel Duchamp and Stendahl. The *principal dealers* from whom we made purchases outside the state included D. Aram (two paintings), Julien Levy (one painting), J. Seligmann (one painting), the Buchholz Gallery (one painting), and, I believe J.B. Neumann (one painting). I believe that we acquired three painting through the Modern Museum, if it can be considered as a dealer in connection with the sales that it makes from its traveling collection but as yet the Modern has not answered our inquiry[17] [emphasis mine].

The Arensbergs dictate the narrative and political trajectory of their collection for public accountants. In their narrative, the collection begins in New York City and moves with them to California. Duchamp acted as their primary agent/dealer throughout their collecting process. They articulate that their collection is mostly 20$^{th}$ Century modern art, with a growing investment in Pre-Columbian art. In the letter, Duchamp is named as a primary liaison, and then as a dealer.

[17] Their detailed narration is denied exemption. See, Six, C.W. Letter to Walter Arensberg. CA Use Tax. 29 Oct 1951. Box 30 F 18. Walter and Louise Arensberg papers, 1912-1982. Arensberg Archives. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia. Accessed 22 Oct 2014.

In a financial accounting of their purchases for the California "State Board of Equalization," dated November 28, 1951,[18] the Arensbergs's describe that between October 1, 1943 and September 30, 1951, they acquired two oil paintings from Duchamp, for $500.00 each in 1950, which is approximately $5,187 today[19] when adjusted for inflation. Between July 1, 1935 and September 30, 1951,[20] additional and earlier painting purchases are listed. In 1936 "Boxing Match" by Duchamp was acquired for $100.00, along with "Temoins Oculist" for $100.00. In the same year Duchamp operated as the dealer for the Arensbergs to acquire a $500.00 "Oil painting by Metzinger," and an "Oil Painting" by J. Villon for $200.00.

In April 1937, an oil painting by Duchamp was acquired through Julien Levy of Connecticut for $3,500 (approximately $57,671.00 today). The same year, a pencil drawing by Duchamp was directly acquired for $100.00. In 1940, the Arensbergs's directly purchased "Boîte" for $200.00, and in 1950 two oil paintings for $500.00 each. All of the purchases came directly through the artist.[21] According to the tax records, from 1935-1951 the Arensbergs's spent approximately $5,100.00 purchasing the works of Duchamp. This is not the exhaustive list nor does the amount reflect Duchamp's dealer fees.

As their collection displays, Arensbergs acquired more of Duchamp than any

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[18] See the document, "Schedule A Out-of-State Purchases, State Board of Equalization, Sales Tax Divisions." Arensberg, Walter C. CA Use Tax. 28 Nov 1951. Box 30 F 6. Walter and Louise Arensberg papers, 1912-1982. Arensberg Archives. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia. Accessed 22 Oct 2014.

[19] I utilized the inflation calculator provided by the United States Department of Labor to arrive at the figures, see: https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm

[20] See the document "Complete List of Purchases from Out-of-State Retailers." Arensberg, Walter C. CA Use Tax. Undated. Box 30 F 6. Walter and Louise Arensberg papers, 1912-1982. Arensberg Archives. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia. Accessed 22 Oct 2014.

[21] From the "Art Collection" document, Arensberg, Walter C. CA Use Tax. Undated. Box 30 F 6. Walter and Louise Arensberg papers, 1912-1982. Arensberg Archives. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia. Accessed 22 Oct 2014.

other artist. For example and in contrast, from the same tax records we can see that from 1935-1951 the Arensbergs purchased books, a “Coiled snake stone” from the Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York in 1937, and a Picasso in 1941 for $4000,00. Other than a mysterious purchase for $8,000 (which was described only as “European anon [anonymous?] painting,” purchased June 27th, 1936 through Aram-Ehrhardt Inc., NY) Duchamp’s pieces were most frequently and most often collected. There’s no other artist in the Arensberg collection that appear as often or as expensively as Marcel Duchamp.

Letters between the Arensbergs and Duchamp regularly include questions about financial assistance and welfare.[22] In a folder titled “Money Sent to Marcel Duchamp” there includes numerous unmarked money transfers.[23] For example on December 7th 1931, Duchamp was sent $500.00 by draft, and on March 12th, 1931, it notes that 5000 francs were sent. On June 28th 1931, Duchamp was sent $300.00 by draft, and so on. Duchamp’s relationship with the Arensbergs was variegated and financially expansive, spanning patronage, dealership, and artistic support.

Not only was Duchamp the Arensbergs’ primary art dealer, he travelled extensively on their behalf to secure a permanent US gallery space for their collection, the collection in question under California tax laws above. As I have mentioned, the Arensberg collection included more of Duchamp’s works than any other artist, so his agent-work fully benefited his future institutional placement; it would determine his

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[22]On August 5th, 1941 Walter Arensbergs asks Duchamp, “Dear Marcel… Do you need financial assistance.” This is one of many such moments. Arensberg, Walter C. Letter to Marcel Duchamp. 5 Aug 1941. Box 6 F 27. Walter and Louise Arensberg papers, 1912-1982. Arensberg Archives. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia. Accessed 23 Oct 2014.

[23]Arensberg, Walter Personal Records, Notes RE: Money Sent to Marcel Duchamp. Dec 1931-June 1932. Box 46 F 5. Walter and Louise Arensberg papers, 1912-1982. Arensberg Archives. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia. Accessed 23 Oct 2014.

canonical placement, his archival importance, and his lot in the museum space.

The epigraph opening this section is from January 11th 1945, and is from the letter Walter Arensberg sends to Duchamp regarding the UCLA meeting and the stakes of their collection. Namely, he, Walter, must act as the silent guard for Duchamp's oeuvre. By 1950 the Arensbergs have corresponded with the Art Institute of Chicago, the University of Minnesota, and have begun discussing terms with the Metropolitan Museum. Duchamp meets with the Met's curator on the Arensbergs's behalf and sends detailed notes, but by 1950 Walter Arensberg writes to Duchamp describing how he feels the Met will be hostile to their collection, breaking it up as soon as it has been donated.[24] Additionally, the terms of the Met are disagreeable to the Arensbergs and they withdraw the possibility of a Met donation by April 17th 1950, via telegram sent to Duchamp.[25] A little over a week later Duchamp responds stating that the Art Institute of Chicago has made an offer of over 1100 running feet (not accounting for the Pre-Columbian artifacts) and that the Met would meet with its trustees again to see if they can offer something more agreeable.[26]

In 1949 Walter Arensberg informs Duchamp that the University of Minnesota is willing to build a new gallery for the collection. However Duchamp responds with hesitation, wondering if Minneapolis receives many visitors and stating he believes the collection should be in a large city museum. The same year, the Philadelphia Museum of

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[24] Arensberg, Walter C. Letter to Marcel Duchamp. 31 Marc 1950. Box 6 F 32. Walter and Louise Arensberg papers, 1912-1982. Arensberg Archives. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia. Accessed 22 Oct 2014.

[25] Arensberg, Walter C. Telegram Sent to Duchamp. 17 April 1950. Box 6 F 32. Walter and Louise Arensberg papers, 1912-1982. Arensberg Archives. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia. Accessed 22 Oct 2014.

[26] Duchamp, Marcel. Letter to Walter Arensberg. 29 April 1950. Box 6 F 32. Walter and Louise Arensberg papers, 1912-1982. Arensberg Archives. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia. Accessed 22 Oct 2014.

Art begins to negotiate with Duchamp and the Arensbergs about museum space. In a letter Duchamp wrote providing some of his meeting notes and minutes with curator Fiske-Kimball, he says,

> The only problem is how to divide the space: K. agrees to divide it as you please: low and high ceilings according to size of the rooms—no too small rooms… The only change I would suggest (and I did not dare propose it myself) is to try to get (instead of rm 1699) the symmetrically located rm in sect 6, immediately connected with your part of section 7 (first floor), marked A in my drawing. I did not want to ask him this change because the rm A is now occupied by things belonging to a permanent collection (I believe) but I didn't see why these things couldn't not be shifted to the rm. 1699 which is of the same size. You ought to make that proposition… *All in all there is a good air of permanency in the building and in the offer.*[27]

I quote this letter in detail (though I could've quoted from others) as not an exceptional moment in the negotiation process, but as a banal, undertheorized, detail. Every fissure concerning spacing was taken into consideration. As noted in this letter, the spatialization of the collection was so essential that even the re-arrangement of permanent collection rooms for better placement was brought up as a negotiation factor. Prime location within the museum (large, connected rooms, good high ceilings), permanency, and status were not secondary concerns. They were the primary concerns, the driving force of the collection and project. Duchamp's meets with Fiske-Kimball again and writes to Arensbergs: "The period of 25 years is really comforting."[28]

Duchamp's thoughts and opinions were crucial to the process of securing museum placement. I want to return to the 1945 letter detailing the Arensbergs's meeting with UCLA, in which Walter writes,

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[27]Duchamp, Marcel. Letter to Walter Arensberg. 8 May 1949. Box 6 F 31. Walter and Louise Arensberg papers, 1912-1982. Arensberg Archives. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia. Accessed 22 Oct 2014.

[28] Duchamp, Marcel. Letter to Walter Arensberg. 16 Jan 1951. Box 6 F 34. Walter and Louise Arensberg papers, 1912-1982. Arensberg Archives. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia. Accessed 22 Oct 2014.

> Sometimes I think of you as the Unknown Soldier of the Cubist Movement. Once in a while you get a wreath, but never a definition. Nothing would make me prouder than to able to contribute to this number devoted to your work, but I have to confess I feel totally unworthy and totally inadequate. I have lived so long and so closely with your works that in some way or other they have become incorporated in my structure, but because they are so familiar and so close I am unable to make my feelings for them articulate. If you are the Unknown Solider, let me be the silent guard.
>
> The core of our collection, and its unique feature, is the group of your works. In a way, therefore, *the museum will be a monument to you*, and the presence of all the other things will serve as a means of defining how completely *individual* is *your contribution* to the art of the twentieth century[29] [emphasis mine].

The institutional placement and elevation of Duchamp's work is the direct result of his patronage, the vast wealth of his patrons, and the patron's ability to amass, collect, and demand permanent museum housing. His institutional placement was no work of chance, play, merit—it was not the happy form of *found,* or the abrupt narrative of the 'ready'—it was the result of wealth, and wealth invested in a particular kind of time, narrative, and property. Walter Arensberg is "A Silent Guard" to Duchamp's artistic production and artistic placement. Duchamp's foray into the museum space and the art canon is not a tale of a chance, fortune or of his artistic mastery; it is a tale of intimate patronage, and their collective commitment to seeing their property memorialized.

Before the negotiations of prime space and permanency, the Arensbergs make a statement: *the museum will be a monument to you.* According to this letter, everything else in the collection (the Pre-Columbian objects, the Picassos, the Brascuis) are additions, extras that illustrate the singularity, the originality of Marcel Duchamp. This

[29] Arensberg, Walter C. Letter to Marcel Duchamp. 11 Jan 1945. Box 6 F 29. Walter and Louise Arensberg papers, 1912-1982. Arensberg Archives. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia. Accessed 22 Oct 2014.

declaration is less a hyperbole and more in line with the level of time and financial commitment witnessed in The Collection—which is declared as *the* Duchamp Monument. The strategic planning and financial maneuvering that actualized the Arensberg Collection (Duchamp Monument) cannot be underestimated or dismissed as predictable. It must be witnessed as the making of permanent collections, of canons, and of how primaries and singularity become forged.

The construction of artistic primaries can be witnessed particularly in the collecting of Duchamp's "The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors Even (1915-1923)," which was a piece that he privately worried no museum would house or take seriously. In 1947, amidst museum discussions Duchamp writes Walter Arensberg about the collectability of "The Bride." He writes, "This is strictly confidential [underlined]: I have a hunch that broken glass is hard to swallow for a "museum." Please never mention it to anyone."[30] In 1951 Walter Arensberg responds reassuringly to this query stating, "Dear Marcel… You are mistaken I think in your idea that it may not be wanted."[31] By 1952, the matter is resolved. Duchamp writes,

> I received from Fiske-Kimball a letter in which he expresses the desire to see the Big Glass in Philadelphia and I am writing to him today, telling him that it was Ms. Dreier's intention to offer the glass to Philadelphia… This I am sure will please you as it pleases me. I will try to have the… collection presented in one or 2 rooms in Museum instead of breaking it up.[32]

Within a few years, and by strategizing and creating the notion of a singular collection, almost all of Duchamp's objects are slated to be permanently housed at the Philadelphia

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[30] Duchamp, Marcel. Letter to Walter Arensberg. 19 April 1947. Box 6 F 34. Walter and Louise Arensberg papers, 1912-1982. Arensberg Archives. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia. Accessed 23 Oct 2014.
[31] Arensberg, Walter C. Letter to Marcel Duchamp. 19 May 1951. Box 6 F 34. Walter and Louise Arensberg papers, 1912-1982. Arensberg Archives. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia. Accessed 23 Oct 2014.
[32] Duchamp, Marcel. Letter to Walter Arensberg. 6 May 1952. Box 6 F 36. Walter and Louise Arensberg papers, 1912-1982. Arensberg Archives. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia. Accessed 22 Oct 2014.

Art Museum. The forging of a museum permanent collection was a collaborative undertaking between the artist and his patron(s). This can be witnessed again in a letter by Duchamp in 1953, and in two letters sent after the death of Louise Arensberg. The first note regarding her passing was sent via telegram,[33] the second a letter. Duchamp comforts Walter Arensberg and offers his sympathies, and reminds him that their collection is a shared *dream.* He writes,

> The answer must come of itself unformulated by breathing again for her and give the final form to the work that she and you started together. When I wrote you about a month ago, I really hoped that there might be enough time to open the rooms in Philadelphia and let her know that one of her dreams had become a reality.[34]

Walter Arensberg agrees and responds,

> The project in which Lou kept her interest the longest… was the opening of the collection at Philadelphia as soon as possible, in accordance with the suggestion that you made in a letter of November 2... It was because Lou was so interested in the idea suggested in your letter that I have been shipping to Philadelphia all of the more important paintings remaining in the house, together with a few Pre-Columbian pieces that were not sent before the Before Columbus Exhibition. The material for the opening would therefore be in Philadelphia in a plenty of time and I could have the right, after the opening itself, to bring just a few—and only a very few—of the less important paintings back to the house here so as not to have it completely denuded until my death.[35]

Walter Arensberg affirmatively responds to Duchamp's encouragement regarding the opening of their collection. He emphasizes that after the opening, he would like to bring

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[33] Duchamp, Marcel. Telegram sent to Walter Arensberg. 26 Nov 1953. Box 6 F 38. Walter and Louise Arensberg papers, 1912-1982. Arensberg Archives. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia. Accessed 23 Oct 2014.

[34] Duchamp, Marcel. Letter to Walter Arensberg. 3 Dec 1953. Box 6 F 37. Walter and Louise Arensberg papers, 1912-1982. Arensberg Archives. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia. Accessed 22 Oct 2014.

[35] Arensberg, Walter C. Letter to Marcel Duchamp. 9 Jan 1954. Box 6 F 38. Walter and Louise Arensberg papers, 1912-1982. Arensberg Archives. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia. Accessed 22 Oct 2014.

back a few of the pieces, confirming with Duchamp his plans for the collection, its arrangement and its future.

Tellingly, the pronouns utilized throughout the museum negotiation process are consistent, reflecting the decisions made. When Duchamp declares little interest for the University of Minnesota, the University of Minnesota is never brought up again. In their final stages of the spatial negotiations with the Philadelphia Art Museum, Walter Arensberg begins to utilize second person pronouns to denote the concerns that Duchamp and the Arensbserg have agreed upon, that must be kept together.

While finalizing the details of the "opening" of the Arensberg collection at the Philadelphia Art Museum with curator Fiske-Kimball, Walter Arensberg writes to Duchamp, mortified by the fact that Fiske-Kimball has no plans for a separate, exclusive opening for their collection, but would rather have a 'general opening' for the 'Modern Art' section. Walter Arensberg writes to Duchamp that,

> …a counter-proposal that is profoundly disturbing to me. In Fiske's counter-proposal he wishes to avoid altogether an opening of the collection as an independent event and to have it opened merely as a part of a general opening of what he calls the "Modern Museum," in which the identity of *our* collection and both its relevance and irrelevance to the Modern Museum would pass unrecognized, or at least undifferentiated. All this is not at all what we had expected.
>
> I may send you early next week a copy of my letter to Fiske and a copy of his replies, and I may ask you to go over to see him again and discuss the questions in general. For the expense of your last two trips to Philadelphia and this possible third trip I am enclosing a check[36] [emphasis mine].

Duchamp is entrusted to travel to Philadelphia not as an employee but as the partner in

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[36] Arensberg, Walter C. Letter to Marcel Duchamp. 9 Jan 1954. Box 6 F 38. Walter and Louise Arensberg papers, 1912-1982. Arensberg Archives. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia. Accessed 22 Oct 2014.

*their* collection, and he writes back agreeing to travel with these concerns, as such a general opening would not be *satisfying*.[37] Shortly after Walter Arensberg writes Fiske-Kimball directly, arguing for the importance of their collection, and demands an opening that would acknowledge the collection's singularity.[38]

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In her 1994 dissertation "Silent Guard" concerning the Arensberg[39] and their collection, Naomi Helen Sawelson-Gorse emphases the apolitical milieu of the Arensberg Salon, writing, "Indeed at the Arensberg Salon, there was an attitude of indifference and disinterest towards the world conflagration, at least to one habitee…" (119). This political

[37] Duchamp immediately responds, on January 13th 1954 he writes, "Dear Walter …I will of course go to Philadelphia when you ask me and follow your instructions in my interviews with Fiske... I agree with you that the project of mixing your collection with a general opening of a Modern Museum is not at all satisfying. Give me your definite views and instructions as soon as you can." Duchamp, Marcel. Letter to Walter Arensberg. 13 Jan 1954. Box 6 F 38. Walter and Louise Arensberg papers, 1912-1982. Arensberg Archives. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia. Accessed 22 Oct 2014.

[38] Walter Arensberg writes to Fiske-Kimball, stating, "To force our collection with its highly individual character into the Procrustes bed of a "Modern Museum" suppresses the individuality of the collection and the individuality of the gift and reduces the whole thing to a mere "also-ran." In suppressing the individuality of the collection, I mean the suppressing of its unique combination of twentieth century works with pre-Columbian and other primitive works… as a compromise alternative to your total postponement of a showing of our collection until you open your "Modern Museum", to a prior showing of the outstanding portion of the 20th Century portion of the collection, including all the Brancusis, all the Duchamps, Legers, Chagalls, Picassos, Klees, etc., etc., and that you would show them in the galleries prepared for them and so described long before any mention whatever of your "Modern Museum" had ever been made? I would like to have the foregoing conditions fulfilled primarily for Lou's sake, as the final justification for all that she sacrificed in making the collection possible and as a confirmation of all the faith that she had in its unique character. Her interest in the presentation of the collection was the latest interest that she maintained in the outside world up to the day of her death." Arensberg, Walter C. Letter to Sidney Fiske Kimball. 11 Jan 1954. Box 6 F 38. Walter and Louise Arensberg papers, 1912-1982. Arensberg Archives. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia. Accessed 23 Oct 2014.

[39] Sawelson-Gorse's dissertation is full of interesting financial information such as, "The second of three children, the only daughter born to Harriet Louisa Stevens and John Edwards Stevens enjoyed a pedigree the Arensberg clan could only aspire to throughout marriage." (22)

analysis is brought up in many different ways, "…the Arensbergs's duplex apt at 33 W 67th St., the intrigue was not about politics and there was intrigue enough with all the ever sexual liaisons" (121). And most plainly, "[R]ather than social or political… aesthetics were discussed" (122). To really bring this discussion home, Sawelson-Gorse mentions that in Louise Arensberg journals she notes that she was "curiously untouched" by news of the Great War. The mixture of interest in sexual liaisons and aesthetics rather than politics, and Louise Arensberg's journal comment is quite jarring considering how the Arensbergs's Salon and collecting efforts would have existed through the Great War and the lead up to World War II, not to mention during throughout Jim Crow America and the start of the Civil Rights Movement.

Sawelson-Gorse is accurate in pointing out how a forced division between the social and the political *from* the aesthetic was desired in the purchasing records, the correspondences and the building of the collection. The building of the collection believed it witnessed no war, no injury, no violence or offense other than the occasional curatorial flippancy. However, without ever stating directly the words 'politics' or 'sociality,' the collection amplifies the reach of whiteness, and its neutral desires as property. The collection does not need to pronounce its politics to be witnessed as segregated: politically, aesthetically, socially, and otherwise.

Sawelson-Gorse writes, "For them [the Arensbergs], the collection was to be seen as corporeal, psychological, and emblematic representation of their selves" (3). The objects collected and acquired were to be a reflection of themselves—their psychological representation. A strange prescription in light of what many art history books teach—and the Turner Prize reflects—about how such collections and objects become the canon.

Might there be room to discuss the psychological undercurrents of canon-creating-collectors unaffected by the politics of the world?

This personalizing of the objects is reflected at every level of the collection and in their records. The biography of Walter Arensberg, as outlined in his personal records in his archives,[40] follows the chronological narrative provided for the California public accountants, but with more detail:

> 1913 Saw the Armory Shaw [sic] in New York. So impressed and forgot to go back to Boston for two three days. Also disappointed that the most scandalous painting by Marcel Duchamp, Nude Descending the Staircase was already sold. Made up his mind to move to New York to establish a salon for the avant-garde artists and peots [sic].
>
> 1914 Settled in the apartment at the West 67th Street in New York. Opening of the salon.
>
> 1915 Marcel Duchamp clipped away from France and came to New York. Arensberg sent Walter Pach, an American painter to the port to invite Duchamp to his place. Eventually Duchamp settled in the Arensberg apartment to have a studio.
>
> 1917 Organized the Society of Independent Artists to have an exhibition with no juries with other artists. Finance Duchamp's magazine The Blind Man (2 issues) and Rongwrong.
>
> 1920 Arensberg left New York to move into Hollywood with his wife. Cut any relationship with artists except Duchamp. Contributed to Andre Breton's *Litterature*, for special Dada number, an only manifesto as an American Dadaist, which was read at the Salon des Independants, at the Club du Faubourg, and at the Universite Populaire du Faubourg Saint-Antoine.
>
> 1923-28 Duchamp back in New York to establish the Societe Anonyme, the first museum of modern art, with Katherine Dreier, Man Ray and Kandinsky. Only Duchamp and Beatrice Wood who was a close friend

[40]Arensberg, Walter C. Personal Records, Biographical Chronology: Walter C. Arensberg. Undated. Box 47 F 1. Walter and Louise Arensberg papers, 1912-1982. Arensberg Archives. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia. Accessed 23 Oct 2014.

> and actress-artist, remained associated with Arensberg. Duchamp worked as Arensbergs's European agent for his collection.
>
> 1953 Arensberg inquired several art museums about the possibility of storing his entire collection. Eventually entrusted them to the Philadelphia Museum of Fine Arts under a 25 year contract. (He was afraid of his collection being auctioned after his death).

Walter Arensberg clearly saw his efforts as vital to the creation, and curation, of Modern Art. He procured Duchamp's objects, and asked him to move from France to the US. He sponsored Duchamp's magazine efforts, he understood the readymade before all else. He contributed to Modernist magazines and discourses, and contributed manifestos. He donated the largest collection of Marcel Duchamp's objects to a museum. Sawelson-Gorse's statement "For them [the Arensbergs], the collection was to be seen as corporeal, psychological, and emblematic representation of their selves" (3) might be better revised as:

> For them [the Arensbergs], the collection was the corporeal, psychological, and the emblematic activity of their lives.

Sawelson-Gorse's assessment, and my revision however, conflict with Walter Arensberg's artistic proclamations. In his early writings concerning art and poetry there is a page that reads,

> Arriving at subconscious forms by attempting to avoid obvious and immediate associations.
>
> *Avoid Taste***.** Do something contrary to taste[41] [emphasis mine].

[41]Arensberg, Walter C. Writings. 1916. Box 43 F 9. Walter and Louise Arensberg papers, 1912-1982. Arensberg Archives. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia. Accessed 23 Oct 2014.

And another that states,

> I objected to the sentimental character.[42]

The writing is intermixed with references to Gertrude Stein and Dadaism, and directly address his thoughts concerning art, his collection, and modernism. Additionally, Arensberg's thoughts amplify contemporary debates concerning the "sentimental," "art," and "taste," particularly by those beholden to the lineage of conceptualism.

In 2011 *The Chronicle of Higher Education* published a repurposed article by Kenneth Goldsmith. At this point, many scholars in the various poetry communities may have been familiar with Marjorie Perloff's thesis in *Unoriginal Genius*, published in 2010. In the book, Perloff argues that the future progression of the avant-garde can be found in the work of figures like Kenneth Goldsmith. Goldsmith and those like him, Perloff argues, reject all notions of "original" and "inspiration," and instead contend with the possibilities of "uncreative"— which, in the tradition of Duchamp, practices authored object-appropriation. In their formal acceptance of uncreativity, this group become the progenitors of the avant-garde.

In Goldsmith's "It's Not Plagiarism. In the Digital Age, It's 'Repurposing,'" he discusses what he believes to be a new thesis in the contemporary conditions of writing. He writes that in our current moment,

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[42]Arensberg, Walter C. Writings, Untitled Essay, Re: Conversations with Marcel Duchamp. Feb 1916. Box 43 F 17. Walter and Louise Arensberg papers, 1912-1982. Arensberg Archives. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia. Accessed 23 Oct 2014.

> It seems an appropriate response to a new condition in writing: With an unprecedented amount of available text, *our problem is not needing to write more of it*; instead, *we must learn to negotiate the vast quantity that exists*. How I make my way through this thicket of information—how I *manage* it, *parse* it, *organize* and *distribute* it—is what distinguishes my writing from yours [emphasis mine].

Goldsmith asserts that what he is suggesting is an innovative solution to the technology of writing. Writing as technology has proliferated, duplicated, and manufactured beyond "our" direct conception and control. The best way to adjust to the proliferation of writing — the technology — is to become its manager and consumer. Goldsmith's laudation of management is in line with neoliberalism and the elevation of 'corporate values.' In *The Darker Side of Modernity*,[43] Walter Mignolo writes, "The technological revolution together with the corporate values that were prioritized in Western Europe and the United States… made management itself the prime center of social life and knowledge" (15). While Goldsmith might believe he is being "unoriginal" yet "interesting" in his articulation for the "management" of pre-existing texts, what he is doing is simply channeling the rhetoric of corporations and neoliberal capitalism. Goldsmith via Perloff performs these statements as though they are the new, critical, theoretical interventions into the study of art, when in fact, prioritizing management, organization, and distribution of pre-existing texts/narratives is not an original, radical, rupture, but the accepted logic of corporate values and standardization.

Goldsmith situates that this comes from a particular lineage, and is logically rooted in the tradition of avant-garde. His heirs desired to move away from memory in

[43] I want to thank poet and scholar Lucas de Lima for pointing me to this passage.

their art practice and the continuation of this practice is, *management*,

> In the early part of the 20th century, both Duchamp and the composer Erik Satie professed the desire to *live without memory*. For them it was a way of being present to the wonders of the everyday. Yet, it seems, every book on creative writing insists that "memory"[44] is often the primary source of imaginative experience [emphasis mine].

It is fortunate that Duchamp and Satie both published during the "vast quantity" category that existed before Goldsmith, so that he might appropriate/cite/organize their ideas into the future. I want to know: what's so damning about contexts and memories, and what does it preclude? No labor history, no circulation narrative, no criticality: And if an author works without memories, why bother holding onto his name?

Though their memories can be denied, their names cannot be erased. Goldsmith, Duchamp, and Satie perhaps do not feel as though they need memory because the "vast quantity" of pre-existing text already contains the memories, narratives, and politics of Western civilization, subject formation, and colonial *freedom as expansion*[45] and other European male fantasies. The same cannot be said for those of us who came after, or could not be captured by that "vast quantity."

Of his personal pedagogical practice in his course titled "Uncreative Writing" at the University of Pennsylvania, Goldsmith writes, "We retype documents and transcribe audio clips." He insists, that these moments are still "expressive choices" — here, memory-free, testing methodologies, neoliberal notions of subjecthood and consumer

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[44] Deploying "patchworking" Goldsmith does not cite "memory is often the primary source of imaginative experience." But I am not a patchworker. This line comes from, *The Routledge Creative Writing Handbook,* page 14, Chapter 1, by Paul Mills.

[45] I am deriving this idea from Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* 1951.

activism are aestheticized. The distinctive marker is the "subject" who makes certain selections. He clarifies,

> The secret: the suppression of self-expression is impossible. Even when we do something as seemingly "uncreative" as retyping a few pages, we express ourselves in a variety of ways. The act of *choosing* and *reframing* tells us as much about ourselves as our story about *our mother's cancer operation*. It's just that we've never been taught to *value such choices* [emphasis mine].

This is a strange hypothesis. Goldsmith above, states that "uncreative writing" needed no memories, just as the very dead political figures that anchor this movement for Goldsmith believed memories hindered their everyday *experience.* However, "uncreative writing" *collecting* —though against memory—is about self-expression. What we decide to copy and paste, manage, appropriate, is ultimately about our trauma, pain, and the abjection of those we care about? When I select the ruby shaded phone case rather than the lapis next to it, it is because I loved someone once with cancer? But it's more than that—I do not need to *write* about my love for this woman, how I still long for her (who wants to read such a story?)—I merely need to value that my selection of ruby red reflects this narrative. It is that we need to learn how to *value* the *choices* that we make as consumers, and that consumer choices can and should replace the radical imagination, historical memory, and our contention with interiority. Why critically look at colonization, white supremacy, hegemony, our interaction with cultural filters and plot their destructions when we can all learn how to value the art of our consumer lives? Why shouldn't we let our commodity fetishism joyfully span across all disciplines?

Goldsmith argues that it is ultimately our curatorial interaction with the "vast quantity" and its management that will allow us to express ourselves. Management,

selection, and subject-specific replication are the only relevant means of self-expression. This amalgamates the contradiction set up by Sawelson-Gorse's description of the Arensbergs's collection, and Walter Arensberg's statement concerning taste. Perloff and Goldsmith believe they are advocating for an "uncreative" yet "innovative" and "expressive" continuation of the avant-garde, and in their genealogical desires of avant-garde, they amplify connective relations: the manifestation of consumer activism and the aestheticization of the neoliberal subject position. Which brings me back to Duchamp and the Arensbergs[46].

It should not surprise that Goldsmith's response to critiques (particularly of his attempt to appropriate the autopsy of Michael Brown as his poem), is through the shield of Duchamp. A 2015 *New Yorker* defense of Goldsmith proclaimed,[47] "Conceptual art and conceptual poetry embody ideas, and both descend from Duchamp." Duchamp's invocation is to serve as the closing argument, or annul the necessity of a debate. In this milieu, Goldsmith himself has retreated into the Duchamp archive. Starting in the fall of 2017 Goldsmith is slated to teach a year long course at the University of Pennsylvania titled, "Writing through Marcel Duchamp"[48] that is said to be a course that examines the archives at the Philadelphia Art Museum, "…[B]asking in the presence of Duchamp's masterpieces themselves." Goldsmith's affiliation with Duchamp and retrieval of shield arguments fortified by art history is an opportunity to tackle multiple ossified theorems at

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[46] The following nine paragraphs, from 33-36 are revised section from a previous longer essay I wrote on "patchworking," see, "Poetry Praxis." *Couldn't Get a Sense of It: Forms of Educatio*n. INCA Press, 2016.
[47] Wilkinson, Alec. "Something Borrowed." *New Yorker,* 5 Oct 2015.
http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/10/05/something-borrowed-wilkinson.
Accessed 12 May 2017.
[48] *Writing Through Marcel Duchamp*. Department of English at University of
Pennsylvania, 2017 https://www.english.upenn.edu/courses/undergraduate/2017/fall/engl165.301.
Accessed 12 May 2017.

once: that is, the need for a fundamental rereading of modern, US art practices through critical frameworks provided by critical race studies, particularly Harris' "Whiteness as Property," and a complete re-examination of the foundations *we* believe Duchamp has built for contemporary aesthetic practices.

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It is via the function of patronage that I wish to return to the function of liberation and appropriation—the material conditions required for such gestures. Duchamp's modernist acts are situated to liberate[49] "us" from older definitions of art, primarily by fully exposing and exploding the idea of work/labor/sacrifice[50] in art. An alternative proposal may be that certain forms of labor were already outside of his life, as he was an artist under patronage. The industrial revolution, chattel slavery, global colonization, and US segregation made clear that labor was gendered and racialized, and his aesthetic impulse may have been to remove himself from a camp of alienation by further valuing the lifestyles and properties that made his artistic ambitions possible.

Commodity objects are valued according to their narrative appeal—this is how white fantasy/immateriality becomes materialized as property. *Fountain* displays how immaterial power[51] becomes materialized as property and is able to maintain it as its sole owner through the creation of white space. The procedure of white appropriation is based

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[49] It may be more precise and correct to argue that the gesture offers connections in Western art history. Such gesture unifies and celebrates new economies—new modes of production. The gesture aestheticizes new actors into the realm of art.
[50] Which, too, are arguably enlightenment-based and Western conceptions of art.
[51] Harris notes, "Property is thus said to be a right, not a thing, characterized as metaphysical, not physical" (1725).

in abstract value, and its consensus must be violently enforced. Harris writes, “In transforming white to whiteness, the law masked the ideological content of racial definition and the exercise of power required to maintain it: It convert[ed] [an] abstract concept into [an] entity” (1741). This lust for conversion is thrillingly displayed in *Fountain.*

The factories exist for Others; work and labor were outside his class. Work is what The Other performs. There is no upliftment for The Other in the merry-go-round of property claims. White appropriation conceptualized upper class liberation—it was a liberation that capitalism had already granted, but needed to be articulated in a poetry of its own.

The privileging of immaterial labor is a *natural progression* for those not involved in work, but surrounded by wealth. It is natural that the immaterial laborers of our societies accept that aesthetics not involve labor. Labor is what had already been removed from their realm. Labor is that which has been gendered and racialized, that which they pushed down to the bottom of the world for their own rise as the North. Work[52] is never the goal, work[53] is the condition that captures more lives than it frees. Those who currently escape it do so only at the behest of manufacturing debt, and indebting labor.

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[52] See *The Problem With Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics and Postwork Imaginaries* by Kathi Weeks.

[53] As Marx writes, “It is one of the greatest misunderstandings to talk of free, human, social work, or work without private property. ‘Work’ is essentially the unfree, inhuman, unsocial activity, determined by private property and creating private property. The abolition of private property becomes a reality only when it is understood as the abolition of ‘work’.” From Friedrich List's Book Das Nationals System der Politischen Oekonomie', cited in Zerowork 1975: back cover

## The Same History, Magnified

Marcel Duchamp sponsored by his white patrons, desires a glaring object of segregation. He does not wish to make it, study it, or sell it—he wishes to conquer it—rewrite it as the object of beauty. His fantasies for this object become fulfilled as property, and this transaction become the political climax for Modernist Art. This conversion from white abstraction to white entity is maintained tenuously, violently, culturally, legally, and monetarily. The basis of this conversion is material, historical violence—it is the conversion from white fantasies to lived in white space and white property. The maintenance white space requires the active exclusion[54] of the material violence required to transform white fantasies into space and property. White appropriation—as a methodology and practice—is a tool that assesses and positions economic and property values. In high modernism this was an "economic pitch"[55] made by white subject positions, and the processes of conversion was one of decontextualization.

Race is rendered fully invisible and yet whiteness is vitalized in this aesthetic argument. This is because, as Harris explains, "The origins of property rights in the United States are rooted in racial domination" (1716). Duchamp's whiteness and the segregated positioning of work are not factors in the *Fountain*'s critical importance—they are the factors of its existence. Such a formula may be a testament to the normalization of whiteness as property, and white property as the most valuable art.

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[54]And in New York City at the time and now, white space is maintained through the structure of antiblackness.

[55] I am pulling from *Apparitions of Asia,* by Josephine Nock-Hee Park. Oxford University, 2008.

Harris extrapolates on the notion of whiteness and exclusion, she argues, "... The right to exclude was the central principle, too, of whiteness as identity, for mainly whiteness has been characterized, not by an inherent unifying characteristic, but by the exclusion of others deemed to be 'not white'" (1736). This is particularly haunting as high art is based on the self-exclusionary position of artist—which was at the time, and still remains—primarily the white male subject. It is the exclusive and the exclusionary position of the white male artist that grants him the power to make commodity into property, and property into art. In addition, *Fountain* is a telling example of the powers of white property and white exclusivity. *Fountain* is not every urinal in the world—it is the urinal that Duchamp chose,[56] that he had reproduced. And to repeat, the context of the object *Fountain* is 1917, in a wealthy neighborhood in New York City during at United States in which Jim Crow laws were invented and flourished. The objects selected from this moment are granted, signed, and editioned. In the late "...1990s… [*Fountain*] could still be bought for less than a million dollars" (Girst 22). The art market logic has ensured

[56] I want to give a brief overview of how similar the analysis of this object is—irrespective of audience. As I have stated, there is the Turner Prize, is which is a prize for art critics and experts. And Joselit and Molesworth's more recent curation for a university gallery—which is supposed to be a for a more general public—and this is an excerpt from the Kahn Academy learning videos. It's a conversation between Steven Zucker, a curator at SFMOMA, and Khan, an introduction to "modernism" for an online learning audience. Here we can see how Zucker simultaneously emphasizes the commodity of a Duchamp object, while reminding the audience of its immense value.
Zucker: Let's play this out for a moment, imagine that this [Duchamp's readymade] came up to auction, and it went to Sotheby's, it went to Christie's it went to one of the big auction houses, and it's a Duchamp, it's an important example of Dada. So the auction is going to start at some very high number, it's going to start at 2 million dollars
Khan: Is that really what this might go for?
Zucker: Uh… these are priceless objects**.** Except that somebody could walk into the Home Depot, or go into Amazon… imagine that they could get past the guards at Christie's and walk into the showroom with their own snow shovel and there would be no difference physically between the snow shovel that's up on the podium that's for sale, that for auction, that's reaching these astronomical figures vs. the snow shovel that's worth, $29.99
Khan: They're physically identical… one was touched by Duchamp and placed in a museum, and another 1000 were not, and because of that, this one could go for millions.
This transcription of Marcel Duchamp, *In Advance of the Broken Arm*, 1964 (fourth version, after lost original of November 1915) (MoMA).

that these prices have since “rocketed.” For those that wish to repeat the success of this capitalist experiment, prank the prankster, be aware: there will be legal consequences. “The Association [of Marcel Duchamp] reserves the right to take legal action against unsigned, undated, and unnumbered samples of readymades from the edition of 1964-1965” (Girst 23). White liberation from craft, from making, from labor, is contingent on the rights to its singular authorship. The singularity and originality of his immaterial dreams must be legally preserved: repetition decreases value, become a threat. White appropriation is dependent on preserving the notion of singularity by enforcing a notion of exclusion and property. The white space that modernist appropriation is afforded is indicative of this.

One could argue that appropriation has always existed in imperialism, and I would agree and push that the differences between colonial eras are important. The narrative and rhetorical shifts between the era that built cabinets of curiosities and rewrote the Other, and the era that embraced the appropriation of property values as a revolutionary or liberatory matter in constructing the geographies of neoliberalism matter. This celebration of appropriation is indicative of the function of white property in aesthetics. Such celebrations may reveal why discussions of cultural appropriation have been so difficult to have, how often critics, consumers and producers are unable to fully grasp arguments about cultural appropriation: because whiteness is property, and nothing else can be *owned*.

## Whiteness as Property and Risk Transfers

Simultaneous to conversations about liberation and found objects have been conversations about the celebration of risk. In "The Aestheticization of Risk" Jane Blocker examines the celebration of risk within art and art criticism and draws parallels to contemporary US banking and war culture. She adopts the corporate banking term "risk transfer" to discuss artists—such as Richard Serra—who are celebrated for their dangerous ideas, but are not physically involved in their making. Many of Serra's outsourced laborers have been injured, including one fatality, to enact his dangerous sculpture visions. This position of authorship, she points out, is completely dependent on the celebration of moving risk—precisely mimicking our financial and political structures. I would extend here that in all of these examples, the right to risk, or the recognition of risk taking/risk transfer is dependent on whiteness and property. The current corporate banking model is a model that is fundamentally rooted in white privilege and white wealth. Be it Duchamp, Santiago Sierra, Serra, or investment bankers—the transfer of risk can only take place when a property-eligible subject is present to receive its gains.

Throughout modernist and contemporary discourse risk taking becomes aestheticized, and risk transfer becomes "innovative and laudable" (195). Blocker additionally links, "[D]uchamp as the progenitor of artistic risk taking" and "[D]uchamp as the model of the artist who mimics the discourse and procedures of venture capital" (195). This is fitting in many ways, as Duchamp is the father that capitalized on his ability to create racialized property—granting artists *freedom* from making, from tedious forms of labor. Appropriation in many ways is the immaterial risk taken to make

something into art, and to await its acceptance and receive its value, or be humiliated by its rejection. As witnessed by the economic crisis of 2008 and beyond, risk transfer is lauded as a success only if the damaged can be traded for a profit, when immaterial labor can find ways of "transferring real risk elsewhere" (Blocker 198). Regardless of the transfer, the damage persists—but remains without an exchange value.

Such art projects elucidate the compacted and normalized rhetoric behind white property. This is fundamentally a problem of definitions, of definitions based in oppression. Harris articulates in terms of whiteness, "Because definition is so often a central part of domination, critical thinking about these issues must precede and adjoin any definition. The law has not attended to these questions" (1763). This is particularly true of art and art criticism. Critical thinking must proceed definitions in our current milieu, defining must be an ongoing process. For example, while Blocker does immense work to parse out the issues of risk, risk transfer, and the rhetoric around such violence, she does not address the racialization of such actions, both in banking and in art. With the 2008 financial crisis, it was made evident how predatory lending was directed toward Black and brown communities, internally labeled "ghetto loans" by institutions like Wells Fargo. The risk moved from bank to bank to Black and brown families, where it remained. The damage enacted on Black and brown families was exchanged for government protected financial gains. In Santiago Sierra, we can see the risk landing on the skin of Black and brown bodies, from the tattoo instrument, to chemical weapons, to the weight of walls on a person's hands. Sierra uses bodies as his material to realize his artistic vision and for financial and social gains. He manages risk to black and brown bodies, and receives credit and gains as the artist. We can also see this in the origin tale.

Duchamp the artist from Europe takes great risk (a risk to his reputation, a social risk, a risk to art!) and pronounces a new art that makes property into more property via his racial and property positions. The risk successfully transfers through the form of a buyer, a patron, and the museum complex. Institutions will manage this risk by teaching it to us as valuable, aesthetic liberation. The damage remaining alongside the risk was the historical context, the political function of the object, and the aestheticization of a symbol of segregation—where have these questions been transferred to? In critical thinking prior to defining, it becomes essential to ask: what becomes valued, what becomes transferred, what is made neutral during the process, and who exits with property? And most importantly: where does the damage persist; who remains wounded?

Blocker furthers that, "[T]he aestheticization of risk results in a lack of clarity about who exactly is experiencing risk" (209). This is particularly true of the scholarship surrounding *Fountain.* In the case of Duchamp, the aestheticization of risk transfer becomes the impetus to decontextualize, make property, and simultaneously celebrate the achievement of 'revalue.' It cements risk as innovative, and grants white innovation/expansion as property. Because whiteness is property, it can locate objects and/or damage and transfer it for property. The damage here is the decontextualization of the white cube, the readymade, the whiteness of it all.

Blocker ends by calling for a boycott of risk in the artistic realm, essentially, a boycotting of all currently high priced art objects. I am captivated by this call, but would contend that this call must be made via an understanding of the historical and ongoing

racialization of risk.[57]

**Black History & Black Liberation**

> If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression.
>
> —The Combahee River Collective, April 1977

As witnessed by Modernism's celebration of *Fountain,* white liberation has happened and can happen in isolation and through segregation. This is fundamentally not true of Black Liberation. Because anti-blackness is so historically, wholly, linked, Black liberation grasps at the roots[58] and tears at foundational freedoms. This approach to radical liberation can be witnessed in black cultural production from 1915-1917 and beyond. Artists and writers from the Harlem Renaissance took an entirely different approach to cultural production, to the question of authorship and liberation.[59] While Duchamp and the Arensberg Salon developed and institutionalized the value of the readymade, Black newspapers and particularly DuBois's *Crisis*,[60] were without mention of Marcel Duchamp, found objects, and readymades. In fact, *Crisis* from 1915-1917 features a section for international Black news and Black resistance. Black cultural producers and the circulated papers became witnesses to a transnational Black radical

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[57] A revised version of this section appeared in, "Neoliberal Aesthetics: *250cm Line on 6 Paid People.*" *Lateral Journal* Vol 4, 2015.
[58] As Angela Davis writes, "Radical simply means "grasping things at the root."" From "Let Us All Rise Together," *Women, Culture & Politics*. Penguin, 1989.
[59] For an in depth analysis of this see *Voices from the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. Nathan Irvin Huggins, Oxford University Press, 1976.
[60] *Crisis* was a monthly New York City publication produced by W.E.B DuBois. This insight is based on the issues from 1915-1917.

activism hinged on opposition to anti-blackness and white property values. However, the interrogation of white liberation and the production of Black liberation is not a dialectic.[61] For example, while US politics constitutes an identity via the practice of racial segregation,[62] Black American readership, Black America, Black cultural production was not formed in dialectic to this identity.[63] *Crisis* displays that its position was forged via a transnational articulation of Blackness, and towards a radically different articulation of freedom.

Noah Purifoy's[64] sculpture "White/Colored" (2001) exemplifies this dialogic approach. "White/Colored" is situated outside. The white cube does not exist; instead the backdrop is the desert. "White/Colored" is spatialized as a shack, a set: there is a bending wood roof, a two tiered wall cracking at the edges, and a wood platform for the objects. The objects set inside the wood platform is a gray drinking fountain and a propped up toilet. The toilet seat is stabilized by a white stick, and sits tenuously above. This makes it so that the drinking fountain and the toilet are the same height, but one is called *white*, and the other is labeled *colored*. The function of the fountain here is racialized. Purifoy's installation is without white walls or gallery framing—they are unmarked, un-editioned, unsigned. Each one is displayed not as an object of isolation—of the potential of abstract aestheticization converting to property claims—but of history, violence, and terror.

Perhaps this is a reversal, to take *Fountain* and rename it as *White/Colored*. The

[61] Black cultural production, particularly black feminist cultural work, established differing structures. Here I am drawing on Fatima El-Tayeb's iteration of Gwendolyn Rodgers and Audre Lorde, "[W]ho established a female black subjectivity that was dialogic rather than dialectic, thus overcoming the need to produce internal Others" (46).
[62] Extending here Edward Said's argument in *Orientalism.*
[63] I am utilizing Nikhil Pal Singh's *Black Is a Country.*
[64] Special and many thanks to Grace Hong who pointed me to this work.

toilet is referenced—in our current moment we cannot escape Duchamp when bathroom objects are exhibited in isolation. However a simple reversal would collapse the vast differences between the Duchampian narrative of *found* and Purifoy's *broken, found, put together*. In Noah Purifoy's 1971[65] artist statement he explains his goals:

> The symbols of west coast Black art stands in direct opposition to art for art sake. It insists that if art is not for the sake of something it is not art. It seeks to reverse the order of art in its mundane gutless orientation and create a language through which there is a collective understanding. And most of all it says to non-blacks this tongue in which we speak can best be comprehended by standing on your head or kneeling on your hands and knees.

Black art here directly opposes and implodes the structures that hold "art for art sake" together and demands a reorienting of positions and commands. And it isn't that Purifoy's statement inserts a politics that Duchamp was not interested in, or that Purifoy is read politically in ways that Duchamp is not—but that Purifoy's sculpture "White/Colored" fundamentally alters the reading possibilities for Duchamp. "White/Colored" situates the presence of the urinal and drinking fountain as objects in a time-bound conversation, desecrating the narrative of neutral, aesthetic liberation.

In "White/Colored" the fountain and the toilet cannot be cleaned, they exist forever in dust and sun. Contrary to the museum logic of preservation[66] and care, the fate of "White/Colored" is to be melted: "White/Colored" is linked to the histories white property, and these objects and spaces must disintegrate. The "White/Colored" object erupts nature, it reminiscences on the true function of the object, and by doing so, *exposes*

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[65] Purifoy, Noah. "Eleven From California" Studio Museum, 1971.

[66] As reiterated by James Cuno's works, most recently, "The Case Against Repatriating Artifacts" in *Foreign Affairs.* Nov/Dec 2014 Issue. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/africa/culture-war

*what empire is, what it does to its own, what it eats and shits.*[67] In this configuration, and by precise measurements, it explodes the fantasy of the *Fountain*: it needs none of its mythology to survive. Their cartographies have no overlap: "White/Colored" is a point of reference to a Black aesthetic practice that stakes to intervene in the properties of empire.

[67] This line is derived from Don Mee Choi's text, *Freely Frayed,* she writes, "I am not transnationally equal. My intent is to expose what a neocolony is, what it does to its own, what it eats and shits" (10).

Chapter 1 contains an excerpt from my essay published as Eunsong Kim, “Poetry Praxis.” Published in, *Couldn’t Get a Sense of It: Forms of Educatio*n. INCA Press, 2016. The dissertation author was the primary investigator and author of this paper. Chapter 1 also contains an excerpt from my essay published as, “Neoliberal Aesthetics: *250cm Line on 6 Paid People.*” *Lateral Journal* 4 (2015): Web. The dissertation author was the primary investigator and author of this paper.

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## Chapter 2: Violence & Provenance: The Transmission of Louis Agassiz's Archive in the Work of Carrie Mae Weems and Sasha Huber

This chapter investigates the politics of representations[1] and the politics of contemporary appropriations mediated by artists, museums, and museum archives. I situate the ways in which museum archives function as sites of colonial power and how this process is displayed through the current ownership of photography of enslaved persons. To position my questions, I examine museum dialogue stemming from the work of contemporary artists Carrie Mae Weems and Sasha Huber next to the archiving and collecting practices of US museums.

My larger concerns are tied to the methodologies of colonial preservation—and the fragile processes of "taking back" what has been looted, stolen, killed, colonized, and othered. Weems's commission, appropriation, and legal battle over her 1995 series *Carrie Mae Weems Reacts to Hidden Witness / From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried* are key to examining the politics of photo archives. In the series Weems takes four of marine biologist and apartheid pioneer Louis Agassiz's daguerreotypes of enslaved persons, which are currently housed at Harvard's Peabody Museum, as well as daguerreotypes and photographs found at the Getty Museum. Harvard initially objects to Weems's photo series, but its contestation turns into the acquisition of Weems's appropriated series. Weems's narrative about the processes involved in her 1995 work displays the political stakes of financial transactions between artists, archives, and their

[1] Jacques Ranciere has written prolifically on this subject, see *The Politics of Aesthetics.* Though the problematizing of the politics of representation can be traced to thinkers such as Edward Said in *Orientalism,* and Trinh Minh Ha's *Woman, Native, Other.*

institutions.[2] It reveals how archives are transformed, challenged, and maintained through and by their material and financial partnerships.

Weems's narrative about her art and transactions with Harvard raises fundamental Foucauldian questions about power. In order to move away from an all-encompassing approach to power and appropriation, I look at the performance of Haitian-Swiss artist Sasha Huber and the transatlantic group of scholars and activists involved in "Rentyhorn," a campaign to rename a stretch of the Swiss Alps named after Louis Agassiz. I pull from black feminist scholarship to think through their activism and performance, and to imagine critiques of history and representation outside of appropriation and financial negotiations.

By inspecting Weems and the laws protecting Agassiz's legacy, I argue that institutional rights and legal rhetoric persist in archiving colonial images of "their new World (Spillers 60)," and that appropriation tactics, as the form currently persists and demonstrated by Weems's 1995 series, is a limited and controlled form of contestation of dominant narratives.

## Appropriation and Carrie Mae Weems

Weems's *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried* began as a commissioned

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[2] *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities* by Craig Steven Wilder, argues that universities were founded and through the financial and material systems of chattel slavery, which is directly applicable to university archives and museums. The photo archives and museums examined in this chapter are not vague and general colonial archives and museums, but fundamentally rooted in US chattel slavery.

exhibit by the Getty Museum's Education Department titled, *Carrie Mae Weems Reacts to "Hidden Witness: African Americans in Early Photography."* It was to be a series that responded to a photography show in the adjacent gallery titled, *Hidden Witness.*[3] *Hidden Witness* was a singular exhibit of daguerreotypes depicting chattel slavery to portraits of upper class African Americans before the Civil War. These photographs ranged from family portraits of white plantation owners haunted by enslaved persons in their gardens and balconies to portraits of nurses posed with their white children. The Getty's Education Department[4] commissioned Weems for a show that could publicly respond to *Hidden Witness*. Weems's commission was to be a show around Wilson's collection and the newly located photographs from the Getty archives. Premiering at the Getty,[5] Weems's series consisted of appropriations of daguerreotypes found in the exhibit *Hidden Witness*, the Getty Museum's photo archive, and Louis Agassiz's photo collection from Harvard's Peabody Museum. The series included six[6] appropriations from the images in *Hidden Witness,*[7] four from Louis Agassiz's slave daguerreotypes

[3] The show came specifically from a private collection of daguerreotypes by the collector and lawyer Jackie Wilson who had amassed a specialized and a singular photographic series of slave-era and post-civil war representation of Black portraits (Wilson). His collection garnered interest and in the early nineties he was invited to the Getty Museum by the founding photo curator Weston Naef to look through the Getty's photo archives. Getty's late 18th-19th century photo collection had approximately 1500 photographs and among them Wilson was able to locate thirty daguerreotypes, tintypes and ambrotypes similar to his current collection (Wilson).

[4] The fact that it was the Education department, and not the curatorial team that commissioned this work is a vital detail. The objective of educational departments within museums often differ from the exhibition teams. Education departments are tasked with interpreting a show for a larger public audience. They are in charge of leading museum tours, overseeing any family/community rooms and creating curriculum for school groups and teachers.

[5] This would've been the Getty Villa, as the Getty Center had yet to exist.

[6] This is the number I was able to come to didactically counting between the daguerreotypes and images in her appropriated series.

[7] After the exhibit Wilson auctioned off his collection to individual private collectors (Naef Interview).

from 1840 to the 1850s, and the rest from contemporary[8] representations.

For *Hidden Witness* the Getty Museum granted Weems permission to appropriate from its archives. After the show Weems changed the name of the exhibit to *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried,* though the majority of the objects in the series remained the same. Weems's 1995 series came specifically from the archives of two institutions: (1) the Getty Museum, which commissioned[9] the work and provided access; and (2) Harvard University, which then contested Weems's appropriation. I will return to these differences later in the paper.

Pulling from the collections at the Getty and at Harvard, Weems's series became a collection of thirty-two appropriated images from slave daguerreotypes and popular representations of blackness, overlaid with "accusatory (red) or confessional (blue)" (Pagel Frieze) text. Weems took the daguerreotypes from their original context to pose their images as new subjects for a portrait (Wallis 59). Legible and unaltered in visuality or form, and often displayed as diptychs, *From Here* rests as installation, photography, and historical commentary.

Weems is an artist whose work has been centered around questioning the history and politics of black representation. She is a contemporary artist who began exhibiting her work in the early 1980s. Today Weems's work is curated and collected internationally both in private and public museums, having garnered her a plethora of

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[8] Weems's opening series appropriated from Robert Frank and Robert Mapplethorpe's photography. Both parties and their foundations immediately demanded that the photographs be removed from Weems's series and the Getty, under the threat of the lawsuit--though the owners of Frank and Mapplethorpe's work--complied with their requests within the first week of the exhibition (Naef Interview).

[9] Though the Getty commissioned the series, they did not acquire it. It was noted by curator Weston Naef that through a donor, MOMA received a complete collection of the series. Many years after the show, top US art collectors Daniel Greenberg and Susan Steinhauser donated eight from Weems's series to the Getty.

institutional awards, visiting professorships, and esteemed lectures. Weems is widely recognized as an important contemporary artist, and scholars like Henry Louis Gates Jr, Deborah Willis, and bell hooks have written about the ways in which she antagonizes, contests, and imagines black representation. Most often Weems's body of work plays on the juxtapositions produced by text and image, where her text becomes an aggressive anti-hegemonic signifier for familiarized racist cultural imagery.

Weems's 1995–96 *From Here* works in similar ways. The photographs appear monochrome black and red, and in black and blue alongside her questioning "accusatory/confessional" text, which sits either below or on top of the photographed bodies. The text, overlaid and etched in glass on top of the newly colored daguerreotypes reads,[10] "YOU BECAME A SCIENTIFIC PROFILE / A NEGROID TYPE / AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL DEBATE / & A PHOTOGRAPHIC SUBJECT." The eyes of the unnamed, legible yet undefined subjects inside the photograph appear right above the text, so that one reads the text alongside their gaze.

The series conjoins modern appropriation practices, the legacy of eugenic representations, and the meaning of object permissions. In her PBS interview for the public and educational[11] contemporary art series *Art 21*, Weems retells the story of how she located the daguerreotypes and of the legal issues that followed her decision to appropriate them. Weems does not mention that the project was a commissioned artwork by the Getty Museum or the scientific/pre-eugenic project of Louis Agassiz. She simply

[10] Though from the series, "From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried," this particular piece is titled "Scientific Profile," 1995.

[11] There is another conversation to be had about why it is the educational program *Art21* that mediates this interview and why there is no coverage of this event after this interview.

refers to them as images from Harvard's archives. Weems says of the photographs, "I had been thinking about them for years and years . . . I had lectured on them . . . There were a group of them that came out of the Harvard archives . . ." She elaborates that the first four images were photographs "that compressed the history of photographs in African-American history," and how she was interested in the history of black subjects and their images. Weems then goes on to say that Harvard, "the richest university in the world," contacted her about her images and threatened to sue for appropriating images that they owned. Her response to this threat was, "I think I maybe don't have a legal case but maybe I have a moral case that could be made that might be really useful to carry out in public." And after some worry, she responded to the institution that a court case might be "a good thing" and that this was a conversation that "we" should have in court, because such a discussion, "would be instructive for any number of reasons . . ." Harvard replied to Weems that they would instead like a percentage from every photograph sold of the images. The climax of this narrative is revealed when Weems divulges that Harvard instead decided to purchase her collection. As Weems recalls the transaction, she laughs and points to the absurdity of the situation. If Harvard wants her to pay every time the images are sold, and since they would like to purchase the collection, does she receive money from them and is she required to pay some of it back? Weems does not explicitly[12] say in the interview that she rejected Harvard's request for payment, but in her interview it is clear: Harvard does not own the slave daguerreotypes and should receive no payment (or credit) for their uses. And yet Harvard has purchased her

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[12] Though Weems' "Louisiana Project" was acquired by the Harvard Business School, suffice as it is to say that she has not objected to financial transactions with the University. See: http://www.hbs.edu/schwartz/items/weemscarriemae194.html

collection *From Here*. This financial partnership ensures that Weems's appropriation will produce no public or legal discussion concerning Harvard's ownership of these daguerreotypes. Harvard now owns two sets: the legal original and the artistically appropriated.

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I believe it is important to discuss the genealogy of Harvard's provenance[13] construction, regardless of Harvard's and Weems's resolution. In order to interrogate Harvard's claim to Agassiz's daguerreotypes, I turn to Hortense Spillers's pivotal, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." Spillers analyzes documents from chattel slavery to their manifestations in the infamous Moynihan report. Spillers utilizes psychoanalysis to interrogate the gendered dynamics of colonial language and the effects of its constructions on the black body, particular the body under chattel slavery. While the text does not engage specifically with issues of photography or its legal permissions, Spillers's arguments are essential to discussing the visual representation of captive bodies. What becomes explicitly clear between Spillers's text and Weems's narration are their interests in the representation and political desire of the African diasporic and their interactions with institutions that continuously wish to define the terms *owned* and *free*.

In order to more completely answer this question, I believe that it is important to

[13] I use 'provenance' here in the most traditional sense to display Harvard and the Peabody's ties to the daguerreotypes.

briefly outline the fragmented provenance of the daguerreotype collection held by Harvard and the Getty. Jackie Wilson[14] and the Getty's collection of slave-era daguerreotypes come from a myriad range of sources. Their private collecting efforts could perhaps be traced, but the origins for many of the photographs are unknown. This, however, is not the case for Harvard's daguerreotype collection, which comes from a singular source: Louis Agassiz.

Louis Agassiz was a scientist who emigrated in 1846 from Switzerland for a position at Harvard and who later became the founder and classification consultant for natural history museums in the South. Professionally, Agassiz was an eminent scientist and marine biologist of his time, known for his developments in species classification and for his work as a tenacious anti-evolutionist. In private, Agassiz wished to build one of the first scientific photographic collections to be used as evidence for his theories concerning racial classification and separation (Huber 131). In direct conversation with phrenologists such as Samuel Morton, who simultaneously collected and studied the skulls of indigenous populations while supporting abolitionists, Agassiz directly participated in the paradoxical political spectrum of the mid-1800s (Wallis 42). Often refusing a public or direct political claim—but clearly having a private one—Agassiz, like most pre-eugenic scientists, utilized tools of reproduction and circulation in order to prove an already accepted thesis concerning racialized bodies. It has often been noted that early scientific representations such as his quickly became the foundation for popular representations of blackness and black bodies (Wallis 53).

[14] Wilson was the daguerreotype collector, "Hidden Witness" was based on. For a more full explanation see footnote 2.

In an echo that haunts the logic of museum rhetoric and object ideology, Agassiz writes of his "first" encounter with a black male in a letter to his mother in Switzerland, "I could not take my eyes off their face in order to tell them to stay far away," (Wallis 43). After this encounter Agassiz shifts to study and preserve the bodies that he did not wish to see. Through the medium of photography he is able to capture, inspect, and conserve the black body as an imperial object. As his future photo collection will suggest, this racism formulates a collection of objects for inspection.

Spillers directly speaks to the impulse to capture and conserve. She articulates that the body in chattel slavery became marked and divided as "their New-World, diasporic plight marked a theft of the body – a willful and violent (and unimaginable from this distance) severing of the captive body from its motive will, its active desire (60)." In this "new" world, Spillers locates the captive body is separated from the materializations of desire. This split serves to enforce the conservation of the stolen flesh. Spillers deconstructs that:

> This profitable "atomizing" of the captive body provides another angle of the divided flesh: we lose any hint of suggestion of a dimension of ethics, of relatedness between human personality and its anatomical features, between one human personality and another, between human personality and cultural institutions. To that extent, the procedures adopted for the captive flesh demarcate a total objectification, as the entire captive community becomes a living laboratory. (63)

This passage is vital in capturing Agassiz's photographic project. For Agassiz, the flesh of chattel slavery constituted the objects of a *living laboratory*. The subjects of his commissioned photographs were interchangeable and yet essential to his studies. As objects in his living laboratory, rather than subjects of a material world, the subjects of

his daguerreotypes were the evidence, the proof to be analyzed and abstracted. As the scientist in charge, Agassiz could direct the components required for experimentation and devise a collection to fit his proof.

In “Black Bodies, White Science,” Brian Wallis describes the rise of these US-specific collections and the desire for racialized “scientific” collections. He writes:

> The mania for the collection and quantification of natural specimens coincided with other statistical projects, such as the beginning of the annual census, statistics for crime and health, and the mapping and surveying of new lands, exemplifying a new way of seeing the world. (44)

Photography became a new way of collecting and owning an anti-black world. Instruments of reproduction and circulation echo Spillers’s description of how “their New World” becomes constructed. Utilizing and perfecting the most anthropological tool of science, photography became the evidence through which race became recorded, traced, and personified. Collected and amassed in private archives to be used as evidence in a scientific paper that would remain unpublished[15], Agassiz’s collection of slave daguerreotypes can be read as both colonial objects and of the never-ending melancholia of racial sciences[16]. Agassiz’s collection of slave daguerreotypes can be situated within the ambiguous yet political transition between racist public/legal to racist private/social[17] norms. As a private archive that has since become institutionalized, it is both protected by the law and by accepted norms of photography and photographic ownership.

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[15] Machado explains why the South Carolina and Brazil daguerreotypes along remained unpublished: “The Brazilian collection never reached the public eye. The delicate political climate of post-bellum new English, along with Louis Agassiz’s own loss of scientific credibility following the publication of Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species* prevented him from making public what was to be his definitive work in establishing the inferiority of blacks and the ills of hybridism” (26).

[16] As witnessed by the UNESCO laws and the rhetoric of Encyclopedic Museums. See any of James Cuno’s work, particularly: *Museums Matter: In Praise of the Encyclopedic Museum.*

[17] See Saidiya Hartman *Scenes of Subjection* pg 202.

It is important to note that though the daguerreotypes come out of Agassiz's archive, he was not the photographer[18], nor was he present when this collection of photographs was taken. His access was granted through his close friendship with plantation owner Dr. Gibbes, who offered his plantation to be a source of Agassiz's subjects (Huber 131). Therefore citations for the daguerreotypes when reproduced read as follows:

> "Alfred, Foulah, Belonging to I. Lomas, Columbia S.C." Daguerreotype taken by J.T. Zealy, Columbia, S.C., March 1850. Peabody Museum, Harvard University.

Agassiz asked that the first name of the captive body and if possible their African origin[19] be recorded. The owner or the plantation is then listed, followed by the photographer, then of course Harvard via Louis Agassiz (or vice versa), both of whom continue to own the permission rights to the reproduction and circulation of these images.

This citation of course is all within the law. Citing the legal language of slave laws, Spillers reminds us of the stark legalities of chattel slavery:

> Slave shall be deemed, sold, taken, reputed and adjudged in law to be *chattels personal,* in the hands of their owners and possessors, and their executors, administrators, and assigns, to all intents, constructions, and purposes whatsover. . . . The "slave" is movable by nature, but 'immovable by the operation of law.' (Goodell 23–24)

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[18] Here a Marxist reading of ownership and labor within aesthetic culture is particularly important. My chapter on Marcel Duchamp and Santiago Sierra will attempt to address some of these concerns.

[19] It has been noted that the citation for the slaves are significant as the importation of slaves from Africa had been banned in the US at this particular time in history, and yet many slave owners in South Carolina continued to forcefully import slaves. Gibbes may have been such a plantation owner, and for this reason, of more interest to Agassiz's project (American Heritage).

Spillers interprets that according to this language the "law itself is compelled to a point of saturation, or a reverse zero degree, beyond which it cannot move in the behalf of the enslaved or the free" (81). This law cannot move—it has no time or space. Linked to nature, this law establishes the movement of bodies but cannot be altered by them. The law is defined as a priori, primary, and exists to set the course of events that follow it.

This is particularly visible in the management of Agassiz/Harvard's daguerreotypes; what the law grants, the law protects. "Immovable by the operation of law" describes Louis Agassiz's colonial access to chattel slavery through photography, to his treatment of the "entire captive community [as] a living laboratory" (63). As a priori and therefore absolute, the law protecting this archive *cannot move.* The archive, as the apriority of museums, renders the object as inanimate, timeless, art. When an institution retains the permission rights to images of captive persons, it is clear that the legal rhetoric and object permissions protect and serve those who capture, produce, "create," and purchase images, rather than those bodies that are taken, repeated, and displayed.

The intellectual and material basis of Harvard's ownership[20] is Louis Agassiz's son Alexander Agassiz's 1910 gift to Harvard of his father's research, including this collection and another photographic collection of enslaved persons in Brazil (Machado 26). After the initial gift in 1910, the daguerreotype collection was forgotten within the Zoology Department's archive and then rediscovered in 1975. When rediscovered, this collection transmuted from the structures of official sciences to art. After its rediscovery

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[20] Both the donation and the dates of the photographs suggest that their copyright should have lapsed. Though as I will discuss later on, Harvard makes strong legal claims for these photographs to be controlled as their own. I have not been able to find documents stating the legal language that Harvard is using for this claim, whether it is copyright of unpublished works or a strong stance on permission rights. I am pulling from the rhetoric of intellectual property laws, and the evidence Harvard has provided to come to this conclusion but am hoping for more documents to come to light.

and management, it was exhibited by Harvard's Peabody Museum in 1986.[21] As mentioned above concerning the Getty's archive and Wilson's collection, due to the rarity of photography of enslaved persons,[22] the discovery of the fifteen daguerreotypes has been of particular interest and concern (Wallis 56).

Art historian Brian Wallis articulates that "Photography, typologies, archives, and museums serve as disciplinary structures, socially constructed means of defining and regulating difference" (57) and that "For this reason, it is important to historicize not only the concept of race but also the institutions and power-knowledge conjunctions that have fostered it" (39). So then it becomes important to re-examine Spillers's call to re-inspect frameworks by way of the Atlantic slave trade: Who configures their representation, anoints their appropriation; who receives payment and credit for their "origination," reproduction, and circulation? Spillers contends that within narratives of captive bodies,

> Even though the captive flesh/body has been "liberated" and no one need pretend that even the quotation markers do not matter, dominant symbolic activity, the ruling episteme that releases the dynamics of naming and valuation, remains grounded in the originating metaphors of captivity and mutilation so that it is as if neither time nor history, nor historiography and its topics, shows movement, as the human subject is "murdered" over and over again by the passions of a bloodless and anonymous archaism, showing itself in endless disguise. (63)

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[21] The Peabody Museum was founded by Louis Agassiz.

[22] It should be noted that the current manufactured rarity of daguerreotypes exists in the photographic continuum of what David Marriott describes as, "[T]he process, another form of racist slur which can travel through time to do its work…" (9). In *On Black Men,* Marriott has argued that the possibility of endless circulation was foundational to photographs of lynching. Marriott writes, "The technological moment which gives us the Kodak--the first turn-of-the-century mass-produced roll-film camera -- also gives us a way of venturing into some dark places. … [T]he photograph represents the climax of an unfolding drama" (9). While the daguerreotype is singular in its production, it exists within the continuum of representational technologies that exist to carefully archive the proliferation of anti-blackness.

I am interested in this "endless disguise," by this "mutilation" that is created through relationships with dominant symbolic activity (specifically, the material symbolic order of race), the ruling episteme, and I would interject: the timeless, a priori, exceptional language of private archives. Spillers is speaking specifically and metaphorically (contemporary rhetoric, narratives, representation) about the normalized violence installed in captive bodies. Once again, the dual production and appropriation of Weems's series becomes particularly salient as we are forced to ask questions not only about the history of captive bodies, the ruling episteme, and ritualized violence, but also of the current representations of their bodies, the logic of the ruling episteme in holding them, and of the material geography/archive of such representations.

The genealogy between Louis Agassiz's "ideas" for the slave collection and Weems's *From Here* traces the explosion of photography—then limited to those with capital and access—to the medium's acceleration into commercial success. What remains the same are the objects and the rights of their placement in the archives. This is the promise of the racialized colonial collection, the object, the Museum archives—it is possible to study culture as an object with no one but the inquisitor present. I will return to this point, to Agassiz's desire to stay away yet preserve, and how this can be situated as the fetish, the promise of the Encyclopedic Museum Collection. I will also return to a discussion concerning the role of copyright before and permissions after slavery, and the laws surrounding the protections of objects after my discussion of Weems's encounter with image protection and archive laws.

Spillers's distinction between the body and the flesh becomes incredibly useful in understanding how photography functions in contemporary rhetoric and law. She argues,

“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’”(61). Immovable, the documented flesh remains an object. I would conclude here that photography and representations of captive bodies function to impose aesthetic and political desires on both the flesh and the body—as the subject of representation in history is deemed to an eternity of “other” voices. The distinction between body and flesh is a useful and powerful distinction made for photographed captive bodies—one that supports Spillers’s distinction. How does this distinction carry over into the realm of visual appropriation? Some of the text in Weems’s series reads in all capitals, “YOU BECOME A SCIENTIFIC PROFILE,” and “AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL DEBATE,” “DESCENDING THE THRONE / YOU BECAME FOOT SOLDIER & COOK,” “ANYTHING / BUT WHAT YOU WERE / HA.” Leaping over the distinction between flesh and body within representation, the text becomes a voice of its own, centering a critique of the presented representation.

There is the dangerous potential that the presence of this voice further evades the potential to distinguish body and flesh by subsuming the representation. Concerning the genealogy of photography/performance that represents the marginalized in order to “teach,” Grant Kester argues that in such representations “they no longer present themselves, but are, instead, re-presented by another, who speaks through, and on behalf of, their experience of suffering and privation” (163). As a continual process of mediation, appropriation art does not present the possibility of unregulated expression. The subjects of Agassiz’s daguerreotypes utilized by Weems’s photography were made to be subaltern, to display the ways in which their vestiges remain with us today. I then

return to the question: What are the politics of appropriating and re-circulating images of impossible disguise?

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In order to further address the question of appropriation,[23] I display the full text of Weems's series, which reads:

From here I saw what happened[24]

You became a scientific profile
A Negroid type
An anthropological debate
And a photographic subject

House
Yard
Field
Kitchen[25]

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[23] I realize that this is a loaded word that I have yet to properly define. There is the cultural appropriation as discussed and examined by texts such as, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* by Eric Lott and *Navajo and Photography* by James C. Faris. There is also the modernist tradition of appropriation as I discussed in chapter 1, linearly traced through collage and bursting in Europe through the likes of Marcel Duchamp. Hailed through modernism and continually embraced today in its variegated forms, past and present artists and writers such as: Andy Warhol, Hans Haacke, Kenneth Goldsmith, Barbara Kruger, Sherrie Levine--canonical and minor--have tested the political and commercial usage of appropriation. Both the cultural and the Modernist embracing of appropriation continue to be practiced today. One can clearly witness the cultural appropriation in popular dance films such as the *Step Up* series to the Modernist durational performance works by artists such as Nikki. S. Lee. I would also posit that the appropriation of labor, by artists such as Santiago Sierra and Vanessa Beecroft become more readily acceptable through the lineage and rhetoric of object appropriation. I have addressed some of these concerns and questions in chapter 1, "Contextualizing Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*: White Risk & the Properties of Found Object Art."

[24] This is the full text of, *Carrie Mae Weems Reacts to Hidden Witness*, from the Getty Museum's photography department. I have transcribed the text according to the department's archival documentation. The text above replicates, to the best of my abilities, the original spacing, enjambments and style configurations. This text differs slightly in arrangement and length to, *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried*, due to permission complications mentioned in footnote 11.

[25] This particular stanza represents the part of Weems's original appropriation of Robert Frank and Robert

You became Mammie, Mama, Mother
and then Yes, Confident- HA
Descending the throne you became Foot Soldier & Cook

Rider
And Men of Letters
Drivers

Black and tanned your whipped wind of change howled low
Blowing itself - HA - smack into the middle of Ellington's orchestra
Billie heard it too and cried Strange Fruit tears

Born with a veil you became Root Worker
Ju-Ju Mama Voodoo Queen Hoodoo Doctor
For your names you took Hope and Humble

Your resistance was found in the food you placed on the master's table-HA
You became playmate to the patriarch
And their daughter

Some said you were the spitting image of evil
You became an accomplice
Out of the deep rivers mixed-marched mulattos
A variety of types mind you - HA - sprang up everywhere

*…Yes the strong gets more while the weak one fade*
*empty pockets don't ever(y) make the grade*
*Mama may have, Papa may have,*
*but God Bless the Child thats got his own*
*- thats got his own*

You became the jokers joke and anything but what you were
Some laughed long & hard & loud
Others said "only thing a niggah could do was shine my shoes"

You became Boots, Spades and Coons.
Restless after the longest winter you marched and marched and marched
In your sing song prayer you asked, "Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel?"

And I Cried

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Mapplethorpe's photography which was removed during Weems's show at the Getty at the request their irrespective trusts'.

—Carrie Mae Weems

Without their attached images, the text for Weems's series reads as a poem, as provocations of a violent history. Without the bodies peering from below the text—the poem, as poems go, performs and lives unbeholden to an object or its speaker.

Weems's text is direct, clear, legible and illegible. The text traces the history of photography within the history of pre-eugenic propaganda, the development of colonial somatology via the enslaved body and the process of forced miscegenation and assimilation. The text, without the attached visuals and in the ordered lines, also provides insights into a new reading of *From Here*.

In particular, in stanza eight the lines "Some said you were the spitting image of evil / You became an accomplice" come together separated only by an enjambment. The proximity of "some said" and "evil" near "accomplice" shakes the positioning of the latter. The word *accomplice* comes in heavily, as the text is shifting through the legacies of violent and compulsory assimilation. "Evil" is an exploding word within the lineage of chattel slavery and early African American history. Since it is clear that the "you" in the text is speaking to black representation and histories, it can be deemed that the "some" refers to the pre-eugenic scientists and plantation owners infatuated with early eugenics and to their power in pre-forming early black representation. "Evil," then, is the prescription for their counter gestures, resistance, and rejection. This is why in the text "accomplice" is thrown, unstable. The line immediately asks of itself, "Accomplice" to whom? To the "some" or to the "image of evil"—accomplice to the replicating

reproductions of what has already been made and said, or to their direct opposition? Or perhaps more accurately, and more complicatedly, both? Accomplices to both and beyond.

I bring the particular line "You became an accomplice" to close attention because of the difference between the text and the art object. This becomes a didactic emphasis concerning form and content and the ways in which form heavily alters and shifts the content it carries. As an art object, "YOU BECAME AN ACCOMPLICE" sits below the face of an unidentified[26] black woman. Her eyes do not meet the camera; they are positioned as looking down at her clasped hands. She is in formal attire, a low-cut dark evening gown with what looks to be a headpiece and heavy makeup. She reads as fragile and feminine, supported alone in a chair. The photograph mimics her to be an entertainer—someone beautiful, positioned, and accustomed to the camera yet looking away. In the object we meet the accomplice. Here the accomplice is gendered,[27] alone—she does not deny this accusation because she is complacently positioned. Within the photographed sequences, the text reads[28]: YOU BECAME PLAYMATE TO THE PATRIARCH / AND THEIR DAUGHTER / YOU BECAME AN ACCOMPLICE. The text accompanies a photograph of a nude black female and a black woman's face holding closely onto a white child. From the objects the image of the black woman reappears as the signifier of co-conspirator, traitor.

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[26] I have asked and interviewed a plethora of photo curators and educators familiar with Weems's work, including Weston Naef, to see if they could identify the subject in this photograph. I have also looked at the 1995 exhibition notes to see if there might be some clues. Unfortunately, I have been unable to locate the photographer or the subject of this appropriated image.

[27] The gendered identifying of accomplice is something that I hope to return to.

[28] This sequencing is gathered from Weems's website. It is unclear as to whether or not there is an official order to the photographs. Institutions such as the Getty, hold 8 pieces from the series and have displayed a small selection of them.

It is significant that these are appropriated images of black women's bodies. While Weems authored the poem, she did not take the photographs; she cannot speak to its subjects or their compositions. Instead she was commissioned by the Getty to interpret a particular photo collection and was given blanket permission to appropriate their images. The technique and form of appropriation, particularly when institutionally desired, is at the center of how the photographs are read, reread, and circulated. I do not wish to advocate for a conservative reading of *author* or *artist* as I discuss appropriation. I wish to question, however, the ways in which appropriation—as a modernist technique and form utilized to create from found objects—becomes interpreted if appropriation obscures or disconnects one from the genealogy of the object and its provenance, particularly if it is already a genealogy that is hidden. Does appropriation then merely protect the interests of the owners of the found objects (i.e., Harvard, the Getty, etc.) or can it rupture this ownership? How much should appropriation tell us about the legacy of its objects?[29]

[29] Joy Garnett and Susan Meiselas debate this question in, "On the Rights of Molotov Man." Of appropriating Meiselas prescribes, "There is no denying in this digital age that images are increasingly dislocated and far more easily decontextualized. Technology allows us to do many things, but that does not mean we must do them. Indeed, it seems to me that it history is working against context, then we must, as artist, work all the harder to reclaim that context. We owe this debt of specificity not just to one another but to our subjects, with whom we have an implicit contract (58)."

**Aesthetics & Finance**

> In rejecting the materialistic values of bourgeois society and indulging in the myth that they could exist entirely outside the dominant culture in bohemian enclaves, avant-garde artists generally refused to recognize or accept their role as producers of a cultural commodity. As a result, especially in the United States, many artists abdicated responsibility both to their own economic interests and to the uses to which their artwork was put after it entered the marketplace. (10)
>
> —Eva Cockcroft, "Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War"

> If the tendency of transnational capitalism is to commodify everything and therefore to collapses the cultural into the economic, it is precisely where labor, differentiated rather than 'abstract' is being commodified that the cultural becomes political again...culture becomes politically important where a cultural formation comes into contraction with an economic or political logic that tries to refunction it for exploitation or domination. (24)
>
> —Lisa Lowe & David Lloyd, "Introduction," *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*

> YOU BECAME AN ACCOMPLICE
>
> —Carrie Mae Weems, *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried*

In a review of *Hidden Witness* and *Carrie Mae Weems Reacts,* art critic David Pagel writes,

> The second show [Carrie Mae Weems Reacts] consisted of Conceptual art made for (and funded by) an institution that used valuable objects to give symbolic voice to once silenced members of society. The main difference between the exhibitions is that 'Hidden Witness' gave viewers something to look at and 'Carrie Mae Weems Reacts' downplayed the open-ended uncontrollability of the visible in favour of the determinism of the word. (Frieze Pagel)

Pagel's review of both shows is a curt and reductive statement on the complex dynamics

of institutionally commissioned appropriation. Though he does raise that: modernist and rebellious origin tales surrounding appropriation and conceptual art take on different meanings when appropriation becomes what an institution orders, supports, and grants. In Pagel's review of both shows, he argues that Weems's commissioned reaction becomes a way for an institution to control and direct the conversation. A commissioned reaction is a way for the institution to encompass and embrace potential critiques in an effort to neutralize the immediate violence presented in the representation. This embrace normalizes any questions surrounding provenance, production, and ownership of the daguerreotypes.

Pagel's review distantly raises questions about appropriation, art, and funding. The politics of funding, and particularly artistic and cultural capital, is of central concern in reading Weems's narrative about ownership and the work. What distinguishes art in a museum and in gallery settings from aesthetic representation elsewhere is the clear capital presence and background of the museum site. Museums and galleries are spaces that have been financially and politically delegated as an environment for art to be seen and valued. The function of finance within aesthetic projects is particularly important when inspecting Weems, the Getty, and Harvard. The three participants exchanged aesthetic representation and finalized their transactions through the promise and fantasies of finance maintained by the museum space. The juxtaposition of aesthetics and finance in the Museum space conjoins the politics of aesthetic visibility, the resurrection and materialization of unforgettable[30] bodies, and their accepted methodologies.

The inspection of finance within museums and high art has become a category of

[30] I am borrowing the term "unforgettable" from, *The Time that Remains,* by Giorgio Agamben.

its own,[31] whether by buyers and dealers evaluating the art market in order to sell or purchase, or critics who study the privatization of culture. A peculiar discussion[32] between art consumers and general-public consumers occurred when the news network *CBS* aired a 13-minute segment on *60 Minutes* titled, "Even in Tough Times, Contemporary Art Sells," which directly covered rising art prices.[33]

The coverage by *60 Minutes* was immediately met with controversy, disdain, and debate within the art criticism world. In the segment, Morley Safer[34] visited Miami's Art Basel to speak with dealers and buyers about the art market. The piece is full of direct and explicit quotes from infamous dealers such as Larry Gagosian and Timothy Blum who nonchalantly remarks, "It's a place to sell art, it's a place to make money," to the onetime AIG owner and current venture capitalist Eli Broad, who with a large smile

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[31] Websites such as artnet.com, artprice.com, artmarket.com to twitter feeds such as "Art Market Monitor" provide uninterrupted updates to price points and market trends to whoever is interested. Art blogs such as Hyperallergic and Art Fag City and artists such as Andrea Fraser and critics such as Gregory Sholette and Chin-tao Wu have devoted their recent work and practice to interrogating the function of finance within Museum and gallery spaces. See *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture*, by Gregory Sholette for an introduction to a list of artists and writers engaged in this critique. In the book Sholette examines the genealogy of artists and scholars that trace and critique finance and capital within their practice.

[32] News organizations will often report the sale of an expensive artwork or cover the scandals of auction houses. However, most careful inspections of the art market are either for the interested, already part of niche circles and become disregarded by the larger public.

[33] It is important to note that while Morley Safer candidly and accessibly critiqued high art's clear partnership with finance, Safer's position is revealed in comments like, "...there's very little sense of an aesthetic experience here." Safer claims that these art fairs do not present an "aesthetic experience" but rather are a "cacophony of cash" and does not consider how the two could be related, erotically entwined. To Safer, the damage of the art world, or rather the corrosion of art, is caused not by the influx of finance or money but that money and finance has shifted the definition of aesthetic value--as to include self-identified conceptual objects, multi-media, the performative and mediums clearly untouched by the artists' hand. Safer decries the rhetorical death of an Enlightenment-driven understanding of aesthetics, the artist and the viewer--as the experience for contemplation, the creation of western beauty and so forth. While I will discuss the value of this particular segment and the outpouring of criticism it received, Safer's segment exceptionalized money in the realm of contemporary art and ignored an overarching relationship between aesthetics and finance: the scope of auction houses that specialize in antiquities, manuscripts and archives, and how still the most expensive items come not out of contemporary art, but out of the western modernist tradition (Guardian).

[34] This was not Safer's first review or criticism of contemporary art, a similar piece titled "Yes, But Is it Art?" aired in 1993.

declares, “We just bought this” in front of Kara Walker. Safer narrates the 13-minute clip with either mundane or controversial statements such as:

> [C]ontemporary art has become a global commodity, just like oil or soybeans or pork belly and there seems to be no shortage of people wanting to speculate in it, and no shortage of billions willing to invest in it. As a haven for their cash, love of art or status symbol . . . to feed those beasts, there are virtually art fairs every weekend around the globe . . . The collectors are bubble proof—it’s only their mad money they’re spending anyway.

Within twelve hours of the segment airing, two popular US art critics, Jerry Saltz and Roberta Smith (among a plethora of others), wrote nearly identical responses to Safer’s report. Both rebuttals emphasized the importance of “looking at the art” and argued against Safer’s unnecessary concentration on obvious inevitable issues such as money and access, which they argued prevented him from looking at art. Unlike Pagel in his short 1995 review of *Hidden Witness*, neither Saltz nor Smith attempted to address or question the function of institutionalization and its finance in the art world, among museum boards, or in gallery culture. Instead, they wholly dismissed the inspection of finance as one that takes away from looking at and appreciating art. Deciding that the essential problem of Safer’s position was a lack of affect, Smith’s response included statements such as:

> Mr. Safer clearly has no time for love, and no one bothers to explain that even speculators and the superrich don’t stay interested too long unless they have some knowledge of and attraction to art, however you may disagree with their aesthetic choices or be put off by the outrageous prices they are willing to pay.

Smith acknowledges the direct connection between aesthetics and finance in her defense

of the superrich, and she postulates that Safer's crass and simplistic misunderstanding of the art market has to do with how he is not affectively connected to aesthetics. Perhaps if he were, he would be less interested in questions of finance or access. Saltz and Smith's arguments implicitly posit that what is most important and needed from art culture is the further inspection of meaning and that these two things can and should be done without interrogating the means of production or the mode of circulation.

Safer, Saltz, and Smith set up a dichotomy in art culture where one can either: (1) Inspect the mode of circulation or (2) Look for meaning; when in fact it's the combining of the two that would lead to a set of pivotal questions and challenging provocations. Exploring the value and circulation of objects and their ideas is essential to understanding how meaning is managed, distributed, and archived. Rather than taking a cynical and apathetic "Isn't it like this everywhere?" approach to questions of cash and finance, perhaps it would be more informative and insightful to think through the relationship between finance and aesthetics, or as Max Haiven and others have recently articulated: the function of finance as representation of the aesthetics, as capital's imagination[35].

The conversation between Safer, Smith, and Saltz concerning aesthetics and finance is one manifested in the narrative of *From Here*. While Weems does not directly address issues of finance or the politics of ownership, in interviews she has articulated her many concerns for representations of blackness. In the interview "Talking Art with Carrie Mae Weems," bell hooks states that Weems's work "is not about ownership. That's exactly what this work in its movement, its refusal to be fixed, is asserting: that there is no ownership of blackness" (88). How do Weems's appropriation and

[35] This is an argument laid out in Max Haiven's "Finance as Capital's Imagination."

transactions with Harvard's archive interact with hooks's reading of Weems's political project? What is striking in Weems's narrative about her encounters with Harvard is her lack of hesitation in retelling the story of her final transaction with the institution. Weems's narrative begins as one that wishes to question the logic of those that are "in charge" of the archives—and in particular the contemporary owners of slave daguerreotypes. While she takes great care to explain the legal situation between herself and Harvard and her moral concerns with such a request, she does not seem to have concerns about selling her work to the university. She does not question whether this is merely an act of selling the images back to the institution—for the originals and their appropriation to be continually owned and managed.

Since then, *From Here* has become representative of Weems's work. Currently represented by the influential Jack Shainman Gallery in New York, the gallery displays sample images from *From Here* on its website. The additional sets of the appropriated images take on an entirely different meaning when shown as paired diptychs, devoid of any context and information, selling[36] for $40,000 to $90,000[37]. The traditions of gallery formatting and Weems's work situate Weems as the sole owner of the pieces. The complications that Spillers raises concerning the narratives of captive bodies become

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[36] Perhaps for these reasons in "Finance as Capital's Imagination" Max Haiven identifies the sell of contemporary art as the "periphery" of finance's imagination.

[37] Prices quotes were obtained in 2012 & 2014 through the Shainman gallery. When it first was displayed at the Getty collectors such as Peter Norton purchased the entire series (Naef). The collection, like most contemporary photographic sales, are limited to 10 sets of the series, with one or two original sets making it a total of of 11-12 sets. I will also note that $40,000-$90,000 per photograph would be considered, according to the contemporary art market, median price points for a well known and established artist. It should also be noted that prices for this series have escalated throughout the last decade. For an example private auction houses such as Christie's reported that a pair of diptychs from the series were purchased in 2006 for $13,200 even as the estimated price was set to be $3,000-$5,000. In accordance with art market inflation, in a span of 6 years, the price of these photographs have increased by at least 500%. See Christie's Sale 1652, Lot 160-162.

amplified within the financial systems of galleries that sell and protect the rhetoric of artistic and object ownership.

These questions and observations are not a set of critiques of Weems's financial or personal decisions. I am instead interested in how this narrative functions as a neoliberal process of entering into and remaining in the Western archive. Of captive bodies Spillers argues, "One has been 'made' and 'bought' by disparate currencies, linking back to a common origin of exchange and domination" (77). I do not want to argue that Weems is figuring as a "disparate" currency or that she is enacting the performance of domination. However, the exchange and sale of her *From Here* collection to Harvard, the Getty, and others do not address questions of fixation, nor do they resist the idea that "blackness" is without ownership.[38] In fact, I interpret the transaction of her exchange as one that nullifies questions of ownership (if only for the brief time during their transaction) and replaces them with participation in the institution and in its permanent collection.

A discussion concerning financial transactions and one's entrance into permanent collections and archives should be done with hesitation and without generalizations. I believe that critiquing Weems's financial interaction[39] with Harvard too quickly or simply reflects a desire to deny her participation and having a voice in the archives and

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[38] Here the standard textbook definition of 'appropriation' is relevant. Appropriation is about ownership or re-ownership.

[39] I have posed the Weems & Harvard transaction question to educators and curators at the Getty and have been unanimously told that selling and buying a difficult object is a way to shift and re-arrange institutional memory and history. This is a provocative and interesting statement about institutional collecting. However, this is rhetoric expected from an institution with permanent collections, as it is an argument that positively encourages the act of buying and acquiring.

structure[40] that she may wish to actively and politically participate in. This concern is aligned to Wallis's thoughts on Weems's earlier work. He writes, "If colonialism and ethnographic exploitation depend on appropriation, one must acknowledge that what is taken can always be taken back" (59). I find intensely seductive this notion that objects and symbols can be taken back and forth, and at the same time romantically simplistic. I question the form and currency in which they are traded, and whether this "take" must assume the form of a trade organized by capital's imagination.

**Provenance**

> The [archival] material is now owned by the repository: the attention given to it is aimed at a largely imagined group of potential users, most of whom are not seen as being affiliated with the originators. (72)
>
> Joel Wurl, "Ethnicity as Provenance"
>
> . . . . not even the dead will be safe from the enemy, if he is victorious.
> And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious.
>
> Walter Benjamin, "Theses on History"

Investigating how the law is practiced for its stakeholders, I would like to turn to the discussion of intellectual copyright, consent, object permissions, and slavery by returning to Weems's interview for *Art 21*. In Weems's narrative she receives a phone call from someone at Harvard who informs her that she has broken the law and who

[40] For Toni Morrison's argument on this subject, see, "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature."

reminds her that she must pay if she does not wish to stay in violation. Weems's narrative articulates that she morally rejected the idea of being prevented from using the slave daguerreotypes. It should be stressed that Weems's moral case is not situated in the science of blood,[41] blood logic, or genealogical framework, but rather in the moral, aesthetic, political, and financial.

Photography ambiguously rests between intellectual and object property. Founded upon the desire to ease the labor of reproduction and to heighten the sense of the real, the photograph alters the management of subject-to-object positions. Beholden to the idea and the photographer, the photograph owns what it has captured.

Harvard continues to own Agassiz's work for a variety of reasons. Institutions that acquire art objects[42] become owners of the object. And whether this acquisition is through purchase or by donation, ownership grants the owner a lifetime of its copyright and renewal. A loss of copyright for the object does not mean that the public can view the object, that it is a part of the commons, or that one can distribute the work without explicit permission by the owners of the object.[43] Copyright is only one part of object ownership, one that readily monitors image sharing and circulation, but an examination of copyright alone does not begin to address the banal complexities of object permission and object ownership.

Both permissions and the idea of copyright for Agassiz's archive are direct manifestations of how the law, particularly public, racists ones, travel through time. In

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[41] Though different claims, protests and museum photographic/object retrieval projects grounded in familial logic have been 'successful' and are ongoing. See: Maori and Louvre, BBC.

[42] Unpublished works retain a longer copyright.

[43] These are concepts and arguments from the "Legal Issues in Museum Administration" ALI/ABA 2012 conference handbook for legal theorists and Museums, given to me by an image permissions' expert at the Getty Center.

the timeline: US Copyright law dates back to 1790, though current laws were not legislatively grounded and finalized until 1983. This indicates that both Agassiz's commissions and objects ideas have been protected through the legal ideals formed in 1790. These laws display that object permission and permission rights for images of captive bodies existed before the end of slavery and will continue beyond.

This is a rebuttal to the timeline above, a different kind of thought experiment, with different stakes still housed in the law: It is important to remember that Agassiz's collection was only rediscovered by the institution in 1975. Museum laws, and in particular the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property from 1970,[44] are of importance to this exercise. While 1970 is not a date by which the legacy of chattel slavery, colonization and the centuries of cultural/object theft could be prevented, it is a date that contests Harvard's 1975 rediscovery of their own lost archives and question this provenance.

If an argument can be made that the photographs were taken when captive bodies were not able to vocalize legible consent for their representation and that the photographs of captive bodies as scientific property could not be reasonably owned by any person or the scientific community and the academia that sponsored such efforts—especially as those photographed after 1865[45] had differing access to representation; If the documentation of racialized sciences were held by cultural antiquity law rather than

[44] Some US museums have set 1983 as their date, France has set 1997. UNESCO and museums have made November 20, 2004 as an exception for the Iraq war and the publication of cuneiform tablets that may have been looted/removed.

[45] I do not bring up the 'end' of slavery to situate illusions about the 'end' of slavery. However, as consent laws are essential to photograph copyright, the 'end' of US slavery and the rhetoric of consent before and thereafter is crucial to situating their permissions today.

protected by object property rights; If we were to humor this argument a bit longer, and photographs/daguerreotypes could be argued to be cultural material rather than individual objects—so that the daguerreotypes could be situated as antiquities rather than vintage and old—and that the subjects represented in the photograph/object could be aligned to cultural positions that the US nation state could not and does not own[46]—Then these are the legal arguments that could be made for the daguerreotypes to be classified as antiquities[47] or rather cultural artifacts with no ties to individual or institutional property. International law recognizes antiquity as belonging to a place and not to a person or an idea. It is the materiality of the object rather than its idea or imagination that is called into question and contested, then protected. Objects defined as antiquity belong to a culture and cannot be individualized or possessed. It is a way, a thought experiment, toward an alternative record, for a differing provenance for the daguerreotypes.

However, US object permissions is constructed to protect the maintenance of Agassiz's "laboratory" and thereby Harvard's claim to the daguerreotypes of enslaved persons. According to the law, copyright and object permission existed before chattel slavery and only antiquities found after UNESCO's antiquity guidelines for 1970/83/97 can be questioned, rendering all daguerreotypes of enslaved persons as the protected property of their current owners. Neither seen as antiquity objects to be legislated and questioned nor having their provenance questioned, these photographs (both Agassiz's and Weems's) reflect Toni Morrison's observation that canon defense is national defense.

It's banal and obvious that all of these dates and laws privilege preservation and

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[46] See *Black is a Country,* Nikhil Pal Singh.
[47] The vocabulary used to distinguish what can belong to a nation-state, culture.

the fantasies of private property. The current laws of object permission are in direct conversation with how archives can continue to "own" daguerreotypes of slaves, "captive body and flesh" (Spillers 60), in the form of representation. This magnifies Richard Wright's[48] statement that "the law is white."

Agassiz's daguerreotypes of enslaved persons are objects that situate the differences between empire and the enslaved, the colonized—and the limited distance that remains between them today. They are the objects that situate the proximity of Empire, the Law, and Naming. Cultural production, specifically the Western museum complex, has become an instance of arrested space, time, and ethics. It is the bar of normative and normalizing subjecthood. Here the savior, the colonial collectors[49], stays alive with great economic, emotional, and political fury.

Brian Wallis compellingly asks, "What is the relationship between changing attitudes toward race and simultaneous transformation in museum collection practices?" (40). The same year Wallis's article appears in the *Smithsonian American Art Museum* magazine, Weems's *From Here* is produced for the Getty and contested by Harvard. This is all within the time frame of James Cuno's directorship[50] of the Harvard University Art

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[48] David Marriott writes that this was a comment Richard Wright made concerning a lynching photograph. See *On Black Men.*

[49] At the 2013 Asian American studies conference, contemporary artist Maya Mackrandilal presented on the ways in which the "Indian" art objects housed at the Art Institute of Chicago may have travelled a similar route to her extended family currently living in Guyana. Mackrandilal's series, "Lacuna" and "The Context of Antiquity" displays her failure to access provenance records for any of the Art Institute's Indian objects, other than the names of their non-Indian donors. Mackrandilal connects the research denials of locating provenance of the "Indian" objects to her extended family, who were forcefully migrated as indentured servants with their colonial patrons. Mackrandilal proposed linking the ways in which 'other' objects become looted, in relation the the 'other' bodies that are forced into migration. What are the literal and material links between colonialism, provenance, objects, and how do they intersect with neoliberal definitions of labor?

[50] As the director at Harvard's University's Art Museum from 1991-2002, Cuno may have been privy to the conversations surrounding Weems. This is if we are to assume that Weems's project, dated from 1995-

Museums.[51] Cuno—a prolific writer and the current CEO of the J. Paul Getty Trust who was recently named by *Foreign Policy* magazine as one of the most powerful people in the world, or among the top "0.000007%"—has been a proponent against almost all object protection laws that attempt to address archaeological looting concerns[52]. Weaponizing the language of "borderlands" and cultural theory for limitless consumption, Cuno[53] exhaustively exploits the rhetoric of cultural theory. In the introduction to *Whose Culture?: The Promise of Museums and the Debate Over Antiquities,* Cuno's main arguments for museums are as follows:

> *The Promise of Museums.* As a repository of objects, dedicated to the promotion of tolerance and inquiry and the dissipation of ignorance, where the artifacts of one culture and one time are preserved and displayed next to those of other cultures and times without prejudice. (1)
>
> Whose Culture? The modern nations' within whose borders antiquities—the ancient artifacts of peoples long disappeared—**happen** to have been found? Or the world's peoples', heirs to antiquity as the foundation of culture that has never known the political borders but has always been fluid, **mongrel**, made from contact with new, strange, and wonderful things. (1) (emphasis mine)

Mirroring the sentiments of Agassiz—who wanted not to be around black men but wanted instead a collection of photographs to study—Cuno's extensive writing focuses on the necessity of what he calls "Encyclopedic Museums" to preserve and act as a kind of scientific refrigerator for cultural objects. This rhetoric exemplifies the kind of logic

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96, faced confrontation relatively thereafter.

[51] It is important to note that Harvard University's Art Museum operates separately from Harvard's Peabody Museum. It is the Peabody where Agassiz's daguerreotypes are stored.

[52]Fore more on his arguments against all kinds of repatriation see his book, *Who owns antiquity?*

[53] When asked about his priorities for the Museum, Cuno claimed that he is invested in post-colonialist thinking and studies.

that sees Archives, Collections, and Museums as interchangeable. Museums[54] become the science lab, the refrigerator for cultural preservation. Cuno puts forth the fetishistic, imperial idea that objects must be preserved and saved at all costs. This is an argument for cultural objects to be exempted from the material violence its people confront. This argument narrowly figures that a culture is not its people, a space, a time. It presupposes that a culture can be witnessed and consumed without the complexes of bodies or ideologies—that it can be studied and learned always as objects—in accordance with the law.

Wallis's provocative questions concerning race and museums and Weems's provocation of institutionally held objects faces the kind of neoliberal response that Naomi Klein has synthesized. Describing the situation of corporate critique and branding, Klein notes that contemporary corporations do not run from sites of critique—instead they welcome and desire critique so that new representations of their institutions can consume and contain the critique as just one instance of the many *other* things they have to offer. In this way, Harvard's response to purchase Weems's collection can also be read as the neoliberal response to a critique of its archive—to purchase and further consume.

I am not suggesting that Cuno or that the director/CEO of a museum is a model of fixated power—nor am I linking his ideas to a linear variation of the Law. I am however, pairing an opposition to Wallis and Weems with the other side of the conversation that neither Wallis's article nor Weems's interview extrapolates. I would also argue that though Wallis and Weems's provocations are in opposition to the pre- and neo-colonial

[54] The fact that all 'Encyclopedic Museums' exist in western colonial nation states is not a troubling fact to the argument of ignorance free, 'Encyclopedic Museums' for Cuno.

project that Cuno enacts, there is a complicated partnership formed through their transactions. In the case of Weems, the conversation begins as one concerned with the critique of the archive and to complicating provenance, to one that quickly shifts to one concerning ownership, permissions, and the collaborations uniting aesthetics and finance.

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Under the law of objects, Agassiz is recognized as the owner, the origin, and the endpoint of provenance. To look outside of the law—but remain within praxis—I turn to debates within recent archivist scholarship. In *Archiving the Unspeakable,* archivist Michelle Caswell declares, “Instead of redeeming the archival conception of creatorship through its expansion, we should complicate creatorship’s direct ties to provenance” (255). Archivists working with colonial/postcolonial documentation of its subjects and their histories have argued for the fundamental overhaul of the definition of provenance. Propositions such as “parallel provenance” have been put forth by scholars such as Chris Hurley to mitigate the dogmas of origin and to recognize the subjects of the archive as “cocreators” of the records. Caswell, however has refuted, stating that notions such as parallel provenance and cocreatorship are not enough for the subjects of atrocity. Caswell questions the validity of labeling the subject of the document as its creator (255). What does the shifting of positions—from object to creator—produce? Caswell posits an alternative for archivists: rather than “reinterpreting victims as co-creators” within the archives, that we should instead create, “new records [that] repurpose the old, transforming them from objects of mass murder to agents of witnessing” (258). And what would records that centralized “agents of witnessing” look like? How would they differ

from the old records? Could records ever be new if their institutional housing remains fixed?

## Naming

Patricia Hill Collins has argued that black women found/find, "alternative ways of producing and validating knowledge itself" (183). Similar to Audre Lorde's arguments against the "Master's Tools," Collins's argument and work centers around the idea that interrogating interpretations of knowledge does not suffice. Instead, one must labor to create alternative forms of knowledge so that interpretation and knowledge are not always severed or in competition with the other. In order to fully explore what an "alternative way" and an alternative provenance would be, particularly for Agassiz's daguerreotypes and institutionally sanctioned practices, I turned to a collection of essays produced for the 29th São Paulo Biennial, *(T)races of Louis Agassiz: Photography, Body and Science, Yesterday and Today*. *(T)races* is an exhibition catalogue composed of writing by transatlantic historians, anthropologists, activists, artists, curators, and art critics. The book's text and captions are written in both English and Portuguese. This is partly due to the fact that *(T)races* not only looks at Agassiz's South Carolina daguerreotypes but also interrogates his 1865 and 1866 photographic "Thayer Expedition" to Brazil. The book explains that not only did Agassiz utilize his relationships with plantation owners to document slavery in South Carolina, but that he also traveled to Rio de Janeiro and Manaus with a team of photographers and Harvard

students[55] to test out his pre-eugenic theories of slavery and to collect evidence against miscegenation.

The book addresses the contexts involved in Agassiz's photographic collection and proposes a militant renaming campaign alongside performative interventions. Similar to Caswell's redefining of provenance, the book's authors propose new ways of reading and addressing the history of Agassiz's images of slaves—as subjects who must take the place of the scientist/artist. In a combined introductory statement, the book's contributors declare:

> Among its several ambitions, the book's greater aim is to invert the focus in reading these images, finally allowing for the men and women who sat as models in the name of science nearly a century and a half ago to stare back, in a gaze moved by their own history, action, and transformation. (13)

In order to fulfill this aim, the book[56] does four things:

> 1. It displays Agassiz's photo collection in full,[57] including his insertion of an image of the statue of Apollo Belvedere,[58] which marked for him the

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[55]Interesting note, philosopher William James volunteered to assist Agassiz on this trip when he was a student at Harvard University. See *Brazil Through the Eyes of William James* by Maria Helena P.T. Machado.

[56] Though *(T)races* is a book that is published for the 2010 29th Sao Paulo Biennial, there no mention of Carrie Mae Weems's series or the show at the Getty Museum. This may be large in part that Weems's series is not readily read as a critique of Agassiz's collection and therefore is not searchable as a collection that critiques Agassiz. The viewer must be clued in to disparately linked research materials to uncover the found elements of Weems.

[57] This was the first time the Peabody Museum granted permission for the reproduction of Agassiz's images. At first the group was denied permission, and after a series of inflammatory articles questioning the Peabody's position, the Museum changed its mind. The collective writes or this ordeal, "The context in which the photographs were taken raises thorny questions linked to the issues of manipulation, power and slavery, while the underlying objectives were connected to a defense of polygenism and creationism, and to the condemnation of miscegenation, which led the [Peabody] Museum to redouble its caution in allowing these images to reach the public eye (13)." Suzanne Schneider also comments on how difficult it was for her to gain access to these daguerreotypes. In footnote 7 of the essay, "Louis Agassiz and the American School of Ethnoeroticism: Polygeneis, Pornography, and Other "Perfidious Influences," Schneider comments on how she was denied access to the daguerreotypes since 2000.

[58] In building a racialized and pre-eugenic classification system Agassiz, "went so far as to insert postcards of Greek Statues (such as Apollo Belvedere) in his Brazilian collection, intending to contrast the

difference between the documented enslaved persons from Western bodies (Machado 24).

2. It provides historical and contemporary context for the photographs. The information is used to critically analyze Agassiz's representations.
3. It interweaves artist Sasha Huber's performance in Rio de Janeiro and Manaus into its project.
4. It challenges photographic law and memory by taking on an international renaming campaign[59] that calls for sites with Agassiz's name—such as a stretch of the Swiss Alps—to be replaced by the name "Rentyhorn,"[60] a given name of one of the enslaved persons in Agassiz's South Carolina daguerreotype.

The book is part art experiment and part direct activism. It takes on Agassiz and the protectors of his name as the antagonists of its project. For the contributors of the book, there is a clear opposition: Agassiz, sites with Agassiz's name, and Swiss bureaucrats. There is also a clear and better direction for the future: for the subjects of chattel slavery to be remembered in place of the artist/scientist.

Haitian-Swiss artist Sasha Huber's participation in the book happens on multiple fronts: scholarly, politically, and performatively. Her essay titled "Louis Who? What You Should Know about Louis Agassiz" is a short informative article on Agassiz's imperial expeditions to Brazil. She is also an active participant in the renaming campaign. As an artist Huber has created performances around Agassiz's sites, alongside her scholarly and activist endeavors. The documentation of her performance titled "Agassiz: The Mixed Traces Series, Somatological Triptych of Sasha Huber, Rio Janeiro, 2010" displays Huber's nude body, against the backdrop of Agassiz's site in Brazil. Huber inserts her

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purportedly brutish features of Africans and mestizos with the delicate Greek physiognomy... (Machado 24)."

[59] The online petition generated over 2712 signatures and prompted international discussion, See http://www.rentyhorn.ch/

[60] See, Hans Fassler's "What's in a name? Louis Agassiz, His Mountain and the Politics of Remembrance"

body both as a subject of Agassiz's somatology and within the site of Agassiz's name. Huber poses her body the way Agassiz's subjects were posed: nude, and from the front, back, and side. The documentation of this performance references early feminist art photography—where the site of one's body is centered as the political grounds in which to suggest or explode the existing dialectic—and then to be held accountable for their resolutions.

*T(races),* as a research book and as an activist and artistic collective, takes on an inventive approach to the history of somatology, representations of blackness, and archives. Rather than appropriating and partnering[61] with a museum to contest ownership of Agassiz's images, the group writes, positions, and re-creates to form avenues for critical gazing. As Collins prescribes, they work to find alternative ways to reproduce the archive and challenge the reader/viewer to remember a new name. Both Weems and Huber's projects aim at re-education. Weems's project is commissioned by the Getty's Education Department, and Huber's work is centered around conversations with the potential descendants and spaces of Agassiz's project. The two works diverge from here. Weems's project begins within the idea of education by writing on a series of objects, as Huber inspects an object to center a conversation about its subjects. Huber's interactions with Agassiz's photographic projects push beyond the object and into a non-subject-specific performance. I would argue that her performance pieces purposefully test the

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[61] It is important to mention that this project does not exist outside of the museum space. Huber's retrospective of this project has been exhibited in September 2013. During the interview Sasha Huber informed me that some of her performance documentation has been acquired. Specifically, the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma has acquired the documentation of "Rentyhorn" (the helicopter piece). According to her website, *Rentyhorn* was also made into a separate artist book and can be purchased for twenty euros. However, Huber stated that many of the pieces have not been acquired or are not for sale, such as "Agassiz: The Mixed Traces Series."

boundary between art and protest, and she takes on the role of a sophist to use the information she has on hand, to wage another kind of history**.**

Currently there is only one photograph,[62] one piece of documentation of Huber's performance. This, I read, is not because Huber is a limited artist or because of the limitation of the project. I read the singularity of Huber's documentation as an altered continuation of the daguerreotypes, as inserting her body into the subject position as the author and producer. This insertion aligns Huber's body and position with that of the subjects in the daguerreotypes, and while this is arguably a privileged position, it is perhaps also a way to participate in the genealogy of the daguerreotypes without claiming authorship. As both a subject and the artist, Huber is the object and the maker of its scrutiny. While her voice is clear in the documentation, it is a position to be indebted to the historical. Huber does not appropriate the photographs, she does not rewrite their histories, she does not confess or accuse—instead her documentation, almost as an act of haunting, marks her allies. Huber says of the performance that, as a descendent of the Caribbean diaspora, she is the "product of what Agassiz would not approve" and that this was a way for her to show "solidarity with the people in the photographs."[63]

Spillers prompts that within chattel slavery, "The captivating party does not only 'earn' the right to dispose of the captive body as it sees fit, but gains, consequently, the right to name and 'name' it" (64). The act of renaming is a repositioning of power. Huber and the work in *T(races)* raise and oppose the histories of naming. Within her artistic practice Huber joins the subjects held by the frame, and in her activism she sets out to

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[62] Huber stated in the interview that she wishes to continue this performance, at the site of Agassiz in the future.
[63] Interview with Sasha Huber, April 3, 2013

physically mark and replace Agassiz's name.

Correspondingly, in defining provenance and "new records" Caswell writes that interactions with the records must be, "In the view from the continuum, all of these activations—past, present, and future—form the never-ending provenance of these records, each adding a new layer of meaning to a constantly evolving collection of records that open out into the future" (257). Caswell's description of archive continuum fits well with Huber's performance and the project of *T(races)*. While Weems's work arguably adds to the continuum of provenance, its definition of provenance remains linked to Harvard and the Getty. In contrast, Huber participates to redirect Agassiz's continuum. Huber's work actively alters the provenance of the records by inserting her body into the naming space of Agassiz and by positioning herself as the subject of his gaze. Her project is situated by the records, through naming, and their contexts. Huber and *T(races)* contestation of Agassiz's provenance is particularly salient because of its contextualization. Rather than obscuring or abstracting the context and the object, Huber and the members of the transatlantic committee re-anchor questions of naming/provenance to be the center of what becomes transformed.

Huber's project is research driven, confrontational, argumentative, and has a target. It's situated in the local, in bringing together local residents, academics, and curators to discuss the significance of Agassiz's legacy. However, it is also transnational. She links her body to the historical and international reach of Agassiz's sites, from Boston to Switzerland to Brazil.

*(T)races* and Huber's performance are a direct contrast to Weems's *From Here*. Both projects start with the same material histories: the history of daguerreotypes of

slavery and a pre-eugenic representation of blackness. However, the form and shape of their interpretation of Louis Agassiz's work differ entirely. While Weems and *T(races)* articulate similar questions about ownership and race within the archive, *(T)races* extends internationally to research and alter the impact of Agassiz's legacy. *(T)races* becomes a project that does not begin and end inside aesthetic representations and their questions, where the artist and the objects are clearly defined. Instead, the members of *T(races)* turns a political project of name changing, a political project set on transforming the process of historical inheritance into an ongoing performance with material dreams. Though ultimately the Rentyhorn renaming project failed[64] to actualize its goal,[65] Han Fassler, one of the key organizers of the petition, declared, "The committee cannot but to continue to struggle to that end" (162). Where object appropriation as demonstrated by Weems currently begins and ends with the object and the artist, *T(races)* instigates the potential for a performance and its petition to persist regardless of failure.

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[64] Fassler writes that the politicians and bureaucrats in charge of overseeing the petition stated, "naming mountains after people does not make sense," (162) elevating Louis Agassiz as a kind of post-human figure.

[65] Fassler writes that though they may have failed to geographically rename the site, the committee has found other ways to perform and remember "Rentyhorn." He writes that Sasha Huber, "...hired a helicopter, flew to the top of the *Agassizhorn* and hammered a *Rentyhorn* plaque into the perennial snow-cap, thus symbolically and, I am tempted to say, artfully anticipating the renaming ceremony. The locals were not amused. In vain had they tried to impede the whole operation by putting pressure on the first helicopter company that Sasha Huber had contacted, and they were not confronted with a new helicopter company willing to do the job, with a wave of negative publicity that found its way through the channels of art magazines, blogs, museums and galleries " (151).

**The Author as Producer?**

I wish to conclude this chapter and the discussion of provenance, appropriation and performance by introducing Walter Benjamin's "The Author as Producer." In this essay Benjamin analyzes newspapers, documentaries, and photography in order to examine what he deems the "fruitless" and "sterile" debates around form and content. He includes photography as a useful medium for literary inspection as "What is valid for it can be extended to literature. Both owe their extraordinary growth to techniques of publication" (5). Benjamin argues that in photography it is clear to witness "a certain type of fashionable photography, which makes misery into a consumer good . . . I must go a step further and say that it has made the *struggle against misery* into a consumer good" (5). Benjamin articulates that this is done when the writer or author "experiences his solidarity with the proletariat ideologically and not as a producer" (3). He cautions that though the representation of the photograph may hold a revolutionary, political tendency, "it actually functions in a counterrevolutionary manner" (3). He enunciates a solution for those interested in public political representation:

> Here we have a drastic example of what it means to pass on an apparatus of production without transforming it. Changing it would have meant breaking down one of the barriers, overcoming one of the contradictions which fetters the production of intellectuals. In this case the barrier between writing and pictures. What we should demand from photography is the capacity of giving a print a caption which would tear it away from fashionable clichés and give it a revolutionary use value. But we will pose this demand with the greatest insistence if we—writers—take up photography. (5)

Benjamin argues that a systematic transformation would be possible—for newspapers, for visual and literary mediums—if their components were authored and produced by the

same laborer.

This proposition further complicates Weems's series, and Weems's appropriation challenges Benjamin's assertion. *From Here* is a work that involves photography and text and is produced and mediated by multiple institutions and individuals, particularly by Harvard University and the Getty Museum. Is Weems the producer because she located the photographs within an archive and then proceeded to write on them—thereby following Benjamin's prescription? In our era of digital technologies[66] and reproduction, how does one become the producer of an artwork?

Weems's series is an example that not only is there a stark division between author and producer, but that within the production of contemporary museum art there are multiple levels and variations among *produced*, *institution*, *author*, *labor*, and *material*.

For these reasons if *From Here* aimed to problematize and transform the provenance of representation concerning enslaved persons and their archives—it failed[67] to do so.

The "transatlantic committee," with clear objectives but no end in sight, may offer differing possibilities.

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[66] Taking photographs and then writing them on them have never been easier. What is the division between the writer and photographer for the owner of a smartphone with access to 'text photo' apps such as: Phonto, Photogene, Photoikku, Strip Designer, Label Box to name a few? For a more indepth materialist critique of the position, 'producer' and 'author' see, "The Potentiality of the Commons: A Materialist Critique of Cognitive Capitalism from the Cyberbracer@s to the 'Ley Sinde'" by Luis Martin-Cabrera.

[67] I would like to add that scholars have argued for failure to be interpreted as an attempt moving through time, rather than the denouement. See *The Communist Hypothesis,* by Alain Badiou and *The Queer Art of Failure,* by Judith Halberstam.

**Post-Script:**

After writing this chapter in 2013, I thought much about my usage of the term appropriation. What Carrie Mae Weems does in *From Here*, differs from what Duchamp does with *Fountain.* Rather than re-structuring and rewriting this chapter,[68] I wrote another version of the crisis of appropriation as part of a talk given at &NOW conference at Cal Arts in 2015. I wish to include this talk as part of my second chapter, as a parallel take on Weems, Huber, found and appropriation. Additionally, I hope that the talk I wrote below will serve as a careful critique of the discussion above.

[68] Though this version of chapter 2 differs from what was submitted in 2013. I have made edits to the chapter and inserted footnotes throughout.

**Found, Found, Found: Lived, Lived, LIVED**[69]

I want to be clear here that when I use the term ghostly I am not speaking metaphorically."

—Dennis Childs, *Slaves of the State,* 2015

Those early Africans came with nothing but the body, which would become the repository of
everything they would need to survive. The Body Memory if you will. For four hundred years those black bodies would withstand the onslaught of empire. Those black bodies are, in fact, the only thing standing between empire and a state of total annihilation. The erasure of memory in the face of history. Because to erase the body is to erase the memory."

—M. NourbeSe Philip, *Interview with an Empire,* 2002

This version of FOUND:

Whose Culture? The modern nations' within whose borders antiquities—the ancient artifacts of peoples long disappeared—*happen* to have been *found*? Or the world's peoples', heirs to antiquity as the foundation of culture that has never known the political borders but has always been *fluid*, *mongrel*, made from contact with *new*, strange, and wonderful *things*. [Emphasis mine]

—James Cuno, CEO of the Getty Museum, *Whose Culture?* 2009

In taking the next step in my work, the exploration of non-intention, I don't solve the puzzle that the mesostic string presents. Instead I write or find a source text which is then used as an oracle. I ask it what word shall I use for this letter and what one for the next, etc. *This frees me from memory, taste, likes and dislikes... with respect to the source material, I am in a global situation.* Words come first

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[69] This was published in Scapegoat, 2016. I would like to thank Fatima El-Tayeb, Page duBois, Grace Kyungwon Hong, Michelle Caswell, Tisa Bryant, Duriel Harris, Tonya Foster, Samiya Bashir, Dennis Childs, Lucas de Lima, Bhanu Kapil, Lara Glenum, Jennifer Tamayo, Gregory Laynor, Don Mee Choi, Micha Cárdenas, Yelena Bailey, and Allia Griffin for guidance and encouragement throughout every stage of this parallel essay/talk. Brian Reed offered invaluable criticism, concern, and care. Sasha Huber graciously looked over an early draft and I am forever grateful for her input and generosity. I would like to thank the editors at *Scapegoat*, Marcin Kedzior, Jeffrey Malecki and Nasrin Himada, for their editorial counsel and for publishing this oddly formed form.

> from here and then from there. The situation is not linear. It is as though *I am in a forest hunting for ideas.* [Emphasis mine]
>
> —John Cage, *Composition in Retrospect,* 1982—

> Appropriation and plagiarism are here to stay.
>
> —Kenneth Goldsmith, "I Look to Theory Only When I Realize That Somebody Has Dedicated Their Entire Life to a Question I Have Only Fleetingly Considered," 2015

**Whose Found—Whose Lived?**

In thinking about found and appropriated art I was reminded of a project that I began a few years ago that I have been unable to finish. It was started by an *Art 21* interview of the artist Carrie Mae Weems discussing "From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried"—a powerful photographic series that appropriated daguerreotypes of enslaved men and women and other "found" images. Weems discussed how one of the archives that she "appropriated from" contacted and threatened to sue her.

In the interview she discusses how Harvard, the most affluent University in the world, told her that she didn't have the right to use their images, their slave daguerreotypes. So Weems responded, yes sue me. She states, "I think I maybe don't have a legal case, but maybe I have a moral case that could be made that might be really useful to carry out in public." And after some worry, she responded to the institution that a court case might be "a good thing" and that this was a conversation that "we" should have in court, because such a discussion "would be instructive for any number of

reasons..."

Harvard responded and stated that if they could just receive a portion of the sales, that that would suffice. Weems disagreed—she would not pay. Then like a true neoliberal corporation, Harvard purchased the series, flexing their monetary and legal power to hold both the original and the appropriated daguerreotypes.

It turns out, the Getty Museum "commissioned" the series that Harvard contested, and the Getty—the richest museum in the world—also has daguerreotypes of captive men and women (the "few" of such objects in the world). I spent some time at the Getty researching, learning about provenance, contacting archivists and experts on the ideas of "ownership" and emailing Harvard (to be rerouted to their PR team).

I learned that Louis Agassiz, a Swiss zoologist and marine biologists—the founder of many U.S. Natural History museums and the biological classification system—immigrated to Boston in 1846, and commissioned the daguerreotype portraits to be taken in 1850. I learned that when he immigrated he showed immediate public support for the abolition movement but became close friends with phrenologists such as Samuel Morton[70]. I learned that he wrote his mother hundreds of letters, describing his encounters with black men and women in Boston, about his desires for "them to stay far away[71]." As he was writing these letters, he formulated scientific theories of the separate spheres of racial classification. In staunch opposition to budding Darwinian theories, Agassiz wanted to use the newly invented medium of photography as his proof for the separation of races, and to promote the necessity of scientific racial classification.

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[70] Samuel Morton was a doctor, professor and a notable collector of human skulls. He authored *Crania Americana; or, A Comparative View of the Skulls of Various Aboriginal Nations of North* and *South America: To which is Prefixed An Essay on the Varieties of the Human Species*, published in 1839.
[71] Agassiz to his mother, December 1846 (Houghton Library, Harvard University).

He commissioned a daguerreotypist to travel to a plantation in South Carolina, one that he knew was continuing the importation (theft) of enslaved persons (the law forbidding this had already been placed in 1808). The plantation owner was a "science" enthusiast and fully supported Agassiz's theories of racial segregation and wanted to assist in providing scientific evidence. As Hortense Spillers writes, in "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe": "To that extent, the procedures adopted for the captive flesh demarcate a total objectification, as the entire captive community becomes a living laboratory." For Agassiz, the bodies of those captive under chattel slavery constituted the objects of a "living laboratory"; the subjects of his commissioned daguerreotypes were interchangeable and yet essential to his studies. As objects, rather than subjects of a material world, they were evidence, albeit abstracted. Photography was thus used to abstract and interrogate what he could not know, but felt he could capture and theorize[72].

After the daguerreotypes in South Carolina were captured, Agassiz also wanted to document what he thought were "the dangers of miscegenation." With the help of the philosopher William James, he traveled to Brazil[73] during the U.S. civil war to document what he believed were the horrors of miscegenation: to collect more "evidence" for his scientific theory concerning racial classification. When Agassiz and James returned, Darwin's theories were being contested, but also circulated with passion. It became clear that a collection of photographs would not suffice as scientific proof. It would not be enough to sway the shrill community—his early theories for apartheid would be shelved and put to use at another time.

[72] This paragraph comes directly from my above chapter.
[73] This was titled the "Thayer Exhibition" and spanned 1865–1866.

Since the daguerreotypes no longer sufficed as scientific evidence, they, along with images of Greek statues and Roman figures, sat in a box in the zoology department at Harvard University. Agassiz's son donated his father's research to the university and the archive remained in the zoology department until 1975, when they were "discovered" and quickly moved to the museum and exhibited in 1986. They remain the property of Harvard University: this is the provenance of their *ownership*.

There is a question asked by postcolonial and Indigenous archivists of utmost importance: If these are your records, where are your memories? If the "portraits" of faces are yours, where are your stories?

When Carrie Mae Weems takes the daguerreotypes of captive men and women, she does this through the language of grief, the politics of haunting, and impossible encounter. She has written on one of the daguerreotypes, clothed in blue: "You became a scientific profile." .

Lived and Found. Found through lived. Lived and stolen.

When Weems goes into the archive and writes onto the photograph, she implicates herself into the lineage. She displays the archive and impresses herself into them and transforms the objects into witnesses. Michelle Caswell describes this as the making of "new records [that] repurpose the old, transforming them from objects of mass murder to agents of witnessing" (160).

Nelson Mandela's archivist, Verne Harris, has described that all archival work is for this reason "spectral"—that it is not archive making, but "archive banditry." Where through memory, the archive must be taken. Harris posits that rather than finding the archive and owning it, we go into the archive because we are already haunted. And those

with their memories—and I say memories here deliberately, as processes that not all of us have for the artifacts and objects in question. I would argue that Harvard has no memories connected to the daguerreotypes. Acquisition, institutional ownership, and storage are not memories. However, we can absolutely argue that black communities have memories linked to the daguerreotypes. My usage of memory here is political: memories not as storage but as the ancestral, bodily apparitions that link some to witnesses. And those with such memories have access to an archive as the process of thievery. The process that might say: you have always belonged with us.

Similarly, Weems's work displays how one goes into the archive to say: "Not yours. Not yours one bit."

As if to say: If these are your records: where are your stories? Where are your ghosts?

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In contrast, conceptual poets such as Kenneth Goldsmith have built their careers on the notion that plagiarism and appropriation are the only vehicles left in poetry worth exploring. He recommends that we discontinue writing—and commit to the full possibilities of appropriation. In his understanding, appropriation is the taking of objects, bodies, and stories: an unregistered transaction that requires only the desire of the artist. In March of this year, in order to display full dedication to his decree, he appropriated an autopsy report of Michael Brown, the young African-American student who was

murdered by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. After his shooting, multiple city, state, and national autopsy reports were constructed under the tutelage of truth and accountability. However, as with almost all cases of U.S. police shootings of unarmed black persons, the police officer that executed Brown was acquitted of all charges. Goldsmith attempted to repurpose and appropriate one of the autopsy reports, altering its language and changing the document to end with a description of Brown's "unremarkable" testicle. Goldsmith appropriated and refashioned the language of the report to re-configure a lynching scene.

As Saidiya Hartman argues in *Scenes of Subjection,* it is imperative to resist recounting, narrating, and circulating reports and images of black suffering. I wish for this reason, to focus on , Goldsmith's entitlement to Brown's story, body, and archive. I want to argue that while Goldsmith might have access to such an archive, without their memories they are not his[74]. The misappropriation of this autopsy report displays the extent to which in contemporary poetry striving for the "new," the "uncharted," and the "avant-garde" -- white supremacy grounds the logic of ownership, authorship, archive, and appropriation, and that this is what undergird white modernist/post-modernist cultural production.

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[74] This argument is indebted to archivist Michelle Caswell, who in a personal email from June 2015 stated: "Just because you can access something, doesn't mean you should." Just because we have access to records of state violence does not mean they are ours to use. Access should not and cannot justify modification, appropriation, and ownership.

We—and I use this word as Ailish Hopper[75] used it in Montana, as an "invitational" we, but also the we that is comprised of the poets that have been screaming against the replication of white supremacy and anti-blackness as value:

We reject the notion of a scientific found. of the removed found. of the found that does not live. of the found that institutions practice. of found devoid of memory. the colonial "found"—the found that declares MINE when bodies and memories and ghosts are present. The found that declares MINE when movements are in place tending to the damage. The found that declares MINE to be property, property without memory, property for sale.

We care not one bit about: conceptualism, conceptualist strategies, the branding, the legacy, the tradition, the threat it supposedly "poses" against the equally omnipresent white lyric I (and what does it mean that advocates of the "I" and opposers of the "I" cannot and refuse to discuss the relationship between power and language, whiteness and language?)

We find the language of both notions to be dull, rooted in the imagination of capital.

We do not believe that form and content are ever separable. No matter how much they test us, no matter how much they fail us and force us and press us to repeat.

& if we lie to their faces we will go home and whisper no.

Equally, we believe that poets have not spoken up enough about the intimate implications of form and power, form as justice. We believe some of the older poets have

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[75] This was stated during her talk, "The Death of White Supremacy," at the "Thinking its Presence, Race & Writing" conference at the University of Montana in 2015.

convinced themselves that poetry is not the realm to discuss power, accountability, and radical justice[76].

We disagree. We disagree. We disagree.

Form & Content, Form & Power are inseparable.

We consider commentary like "people of colour use found text too, why can't we do this"

To be a derailing tactic. We have and live under neoliberal capitalism. We can spot a sideshow when we see one.

to say "conceptualism" created the "found text" methodology is akin to crediting surrealism with the invention of dreams or the situationalists with the invention of the absurd or the futurists as inventors of revolutionary language

violent rewriting of history, forms, aesthetics. violent rewriting to celebrate their history.

Provincialize[77] all their forms—

It should already be familiar that Black and postcolonial historians have done an immense amount of work arguing about the appropriative tenants of all such European movements[78].

What might it be to imagine a future, present and a history—where Black artists and poets are not "sharing" or borrowing "forms" from white institutions but are fundamentally prompting and innovating all forms? Altering from the root, always from

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[76] I am borrowing this term from Luis Martín-Cabrera's book title and theoretical framework, *Radical Justice* (Bucknell University Press, 2011).

[77] Regarding the word "provincialize," see *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, by Dipesh Chakrabarty (Princeton University Press, 2009).

[78] Robin D. G. Kelley, in *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Beacon Press, 2003), discusses how the surrealists took explicitly from North African occult traditions.

the root.

In addition, what might it be—to situate the word "found" not as "accidentally" or "new" or as the euphemism for the colonial encounter— but as Carrie Mae Weems, Sasha Huber, M. NourbeSe Philip and others have situated— as encounter memories? Rather than "found this," what if it were "found you," "finding you," searching tending caring for you—

rather than "found this," haunted[79] [15] by, lived through, survived—

so that it isn't "I" go into some place and take you and make you and sell that but—are connected haunted torn searching for these memories & will never be the same again once they find us—

And not to be mistaken: not all of us are connected in the same ways. Some of us have been granted access by the law but have none of the memories.

*

**Questions of Provenance**

In "Ethnicity as Provenance," archivist Joel Wurl writes of state and archival documents: "History is filled with accounts of protest mobs destroying sites of records that were seen as representing authoritarian rule. Such were not records of the people but of the regimes—information used to control, distort, intimidate, and punish." However,

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[79] For a theoretical mediation on "haunting," see *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, by Avery Gordon (University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

archival "material is now owned by the repository: the attention given to it is aimed at a largely imagined group of potential users, most of whom are not seen as being affiliated with the originators." Wurl thus posits that provenance ("who owns what") is in itself a political question, asking what might it be like, in this political thought experiment, to configure the root not to the "owner" of the records, but the body? The community the phantoms congregate around, for, long:

*Ethnicity as provenance*

Memory as root grasping by the root—Angela Davis notes—is the definition of radicality finding, searching, rooting, pleading for those already part of the continuum

Swiss-Haitian artist Sasha Huber and a team of academics, artists, poets, and activists have been working on an impossible petition to rename a stretch of the Swiss Alps. They have located the sites dedicated to Agassiz's name: they have begun researching how this name came to be. They have met with politicians and challenged them during their meetings. They have traveled through all the routes provided by the state and have been denied. They write that they have been "rejected by all the authorities. Petition to be continued nevertheless[80]." They have suggested renaming the sites with the slave name provided on the daguerreotypes "Rentyhorn"; this is not a perfect solution, but there is no perfect solution. Just stabs and love and tears and endless labor.

Huber has traveled to sites of Agassiz's name: in Brazil, Boston, all over Europe, creating a series of lists, maps—a cartography of his name.

She has haunted the sites, and documented her body, as bodies before have been

[80] For full text and petition see www.rentyhorn.ch.

documented.

The documentation of her performance, titled "Agassiz: The Mixed Traces Series, Somatological Triptych of Sasha Huber, Rio Janeiro, 2010," displays Huber's nude body against the backdrop of Agassiz's site in Brazil. Huber inserts her body both as a subject of Agassiz's somatology and within the site of Agassiz's name. Huber poses her body the way Agassiz's subjects were posed: nude, and from the front, back, and side.

Huber says of the performance that she is the "product of what Agassiz would not approve" and that this was a way for her to show "solidarity with the people in the photographs."

Huber's project is research-driven, confrontational, argumentative—with a target. It is situated in the local, in bringing together residents, academics, and curators to discuss the significance of Agassiz's legacy. In addition, it is transnational. She links her body to the historical and violently international reach of Agassiz's sites, from Boston to Switzerland to Brazil.

Her body unforgettable[81], entered, authored, objectified, at the site of damage, her unforgettable body catalogued, documented, enters to alter the archive forever—

In defining provenance and "new records," Caswell writes: "In the view from the continuum, all of these activations—past, present, and future—form the never-ending provenance of these records, each adding a new layer of meaning to a constantly evolving collection of records that open out into the future."

Huber ruptures and continues: Archive as continuum, as activations, as where the

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[81] Regarding the "unforgettable," Giorgio Agamben's writes: "The exigency of the lost does not entail being remembered and commemorated; rather, it entails remaining in us and with us as forgotten, and in this way and only in this way, remaining unforgettable." Giorgio Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 40.

past, present and future collide, negotiate, find: live.

*

In *Slaves of the State*, Dennis Childs writes that "the legal atrocity of prison slavery has been evacuated through the pastoralizing, criminalizing, and dehumanizing lens of white supremacist mnemonic reproduction." Such is the lens taking that which is unknowable (such as chattel slavery) and attempts to convert it to white property (representation). Additionally, Childs utilizes the term "punitive staging" to describe the ongoing representations of white supremacy. "Punitive staging" and the "dehumanizing lens of white supremacist mnemonic reproduction" are the exact methodologies that "artists" and "poets" like Kenneth Goldsmith, Vanessa Place, Santiago Sierra and others committed to neoliberal aesthetics[82] utilize as their fundamental basis.

Because when Goldsmith selects one autopsy report—from among the many—as his newest poem, when he is invited by Brown University, and reads this appropriated report out loud in flat poetry voice, when he fumbles over the medical terminology but loudly because he is proud of all of his precious, entitled failures:

he does this because he believes the modernist tradition of found means "TAKE" because for him FOUND means DEAD and without LIFE Found means CONQUER

Found means MINE Found means I ANOINT YOU AS RAW

unaffected

[82] This is a term I've been using to describe the works of Santiago Sierra. See, my article, "Neoliberal Aesthetics: 250 Cm Tattooed on 6 Paid People," *Lateral* 4 (2015).

scientist

removed

hunter

Found means *you* are my objects

"I" have no connection to you—

Of this version of a linear process, an archive driven by state power, Caswell declares: "Instead of redeeming the archival conception of creatorship through its expansion, we should complicate creatorship's direct ties to provenance." (158)

Complicate, challenge, destroy their notion of ownership, their ownership to this material—the owner is not the man who paid once, a long time ago, the photographer, the scientist, the white male artist WITH NO MEMORIES WITH NO TIES NO PHANTOMS TO TEND FOR. The museum. That library. Complicate all such ties to provenance and ask: Where are your memories? Are you a witness? Who do you care for? What are you continuing? Who do you remember?

*

While the various white camps bicker over notions of "romantic," "expression," "lyric," "found," and "conceptual," the one thing that they continue to implicitly agree on is that poetry is dependent on abjection. And abjection—in our imperial imaginaries—is fundamentally racialized. While supposedly at opposite ends of the lyric-conceptual spectrum, in their appropriation of black suffering and death lyric poet Frederick Seidel and conceptual poet Kenneth Goldsmith align themselves as *representors* and *depictors*

of abjection. U.S. poetry celebrates the replication of the position of the dominator—does it not? Prove us wrong. Its deepest gesture of empathy is a fleeting sense of guilt that comes in the form of high, institutionalized art, under the shield of Duchamp and T.S. Elliot.

What figures like Seidel and Goldsmith could never imagine, what their poetry could never produce—as their poetic project is dependent on the racial violence, abjection, and sacrifice NOT OF THEIR OWN—is a poetics that supports the imagination of Bree Newsome. Or poems—if they must continue writing poems—that inspect the language of police, and the metaphors of white modernism/hollywood/the constitution. A poem whose existence fundamentally debilitates whiteness. Rather than poetry dependent on racial abjection as its core spectacle—poetry that makes whiteness abject.

There are some examples of this. Poet and researcher Brett Zehner tells me that over a hundred investment bankers took their lives in the last few months, that he could count. Most of this did not make the news because what would we do with this information. He tells me that highly rewarded technicians of financial capitalism cannot survive within their projected designs. He tells me that he's working on a poem titled "A Living Dream of Dead Bankers" that lists their deaths. He asks me what I think about radical suicide and I'm horrified. But I realize that the site of this terror is the site that white modernism could never work from: the site of self-betrayal, the site of risk where damage will absolutely follow.

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I am going to state very plainly (so that when you call me a philistine I can say: yes, YES), something so didactic and repetitive as to ensure against confusion: there are no better white modernisms[83]. What is made legible through the discourse of modernism is made through the discourse dependent on colonialism and chattel slavery. What is made powerful by modernism, what is made great, is made so because: *whiteness as property*[84], whiteness as abstract.

Fred Moten, discussing M. NourbeSe Philp's work: "Modernity (the confluence of the slave trade, settler colonialism and the democratization of sovereignty through which the world is imaged, graphed, and grasped) is a socio-ecological disaster that can neither be calculated nor conceptualized as a series of personal injuries[85]."

Modernism/avant-garde/conceptualism being challenged, being contested, and decaying does not mean those that have been classified as such will be erased. Rather, we will be tasked with reading all such artifacts radically anew. If something or someone is made illegible because the branding/legacy structure of modernism is dismantled—it is because they should've been illegible all along. Black artists and writers of color do not disappear because critiques of whiteness are entered into modernism/avant-garde/conceptualism. This is to suggest that black and other non-white artists exist by the grace of whiteness. The critique of white supremacy is a challenge to examine our gaze—

[83] I do want to note that Black Studies has articulated traditions and ruptures that should not be covered by modernism and could not be subsumed by the avant-garde. Audre Lorde wrote extensively about Black feminist poetics, "Afro Modernity" has been theorized by Michael Hanchard, and the Watts Writers Workshop examined in *Black Arts West: Culture and Struggle in Postwar Los Angeles*, by Daniel Widener (Duke University Press, 2010), to name a few formative examples.
[84] See Cheryl Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (1993): 1707–1791.
[85] Fred Moten, "Blackness and Poetry." *Volta: Evening Will Come* vol 55 (2015).

and to acknowledge what has always been damaging, illegible to us (because we are without access, because we are with access but cannot be near it).

Additionally, the critique of conceptualism should not and cannot be contained to those who self-identify as such—the roots of this practice run back to a longer, historical discourse in which the black body, or blackness (as appropriated, antagonized, or as the marker of the retrograde) is necessary to move the idea, the concept forward.

But this isn't the only tradition. And this tradition has always existed with critiques.

This is to state once again, very plainly, that black artists sought to critique the premise of modernism, conceptualism, abstraction—by looking into the materiality and the archive of their making.

*

> There is another instrumentality for POCs and Black women, and that is for white people to take the processes and concepts of our work and turn them into the grounds for their careers, as niches on the job market, as beacons of a magical singularity that had no presence or expression in them before they absorbed our light. To make our stuff into 'a thing' that they do, theorize, brand and perform. But here is notice: *you cannot do what I do because you do not love who I love*. [Emphasis added]
>
> –Tisa Bryant, 28 September 2015

i am accused of tending to the past
as if i made it,
as if i sculpted it
with my own hands. i did not.
this past was waiting for me

–Lucille Clifton, “I Am Accused of Tending to the Past”

M. NourbeSe Philip has written that her *Zong!* is “ritual masquerading as conceptual work.” Ritual—as illegible to the western, modernist tradition. Traveling via illegibility. Carrie Mae Weems and archival banditry. Sasha Huber and impossible solidarity: Question provenance. Complicate those without memories—complicate and destroy their ties to ownership, to the archive, to the found, to appropriation.

militant commitment, care for impossible solidarity

as Philip writes: Ritual

Inserting the body to transform the archive

offering objects and poems

so that that they may live, look through and breathe

The risk has always been with here and in them now the risk cannot be transferred

Searching through records of violence for glimpses

Waiting waiting

endless, impossible labor

Rejected by all authorities—ritual to continue nonetheless

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## Chapter 3: The Politics of Metaphor: *The Master Letters, My Emily Dickinson,* and *The Morning News is Exciting*

> So much of the so-called developing world has been/is being consumed—literally—slipping into the great maw of the west and slipping down its throat to its stomach, there to be digested and transformed into some imitation of the original… In such a world to be indigestible—to have the ability to make consumption difficult—is a quality to be valued.
>
> —NourbeSe Philip

> I and many of my sisters do not see the world as being so simple. And perhaps that is why we have not rushed to create abstract theories.
>
> —Barbara Christian

In *Slaves and Other Objects,* Page DuBois elucidates how scholarship in the field of Classics, while fundamentally dependent on *objects* from antiquity and the efforts of archaeologists, often fails to contextualize the materiality of the object it studies. She argues that the fields of classical studies and cultural studies, in their analysis of the object, remain separate from the archaeology or the *dirt* of the object. The separating of analysis from the material conditions—its context—produces a political narrative in which Classics scholars do not need to account for the ways in which almost every object that they study, was made possible through the labor of enslaved persons and wealth derived through slavery. Due to this compartmentalization, DuBois argues that ancient Western civilizations remain a proud genealogical point of origin for US scholars, rather than a fundamental contradiction. DuBois

articulates that the material conditions of an object and its culture cannot be separated, stating: "I am interested rather in the inseparability, the *embeddedness* of slavery in all the phenomena of ancient Greek life" (23).

Following duBois's interest in the *embeddedness* of slavery, this chapter will discuss the *embeddedness* of slavery in political redress and politicized language. Particularly I will examine the desire to turn chattel slavery from lived history into metaphor, particularly in Susan Howe's *My Emily Dickinson.* In order to tend to the embeddedness of slavery in US history and poetic studies, I seek to materialize the deployment of metaphor-making in the white feminist, poetic tradition, and contrast this tradition with devices formed by black radical tradition and Asian American poetics.

In this third chapter I will argue that: 1. Abstraction and metaphor are linked and their politicizations vital to the discourse of poetry and experimental poetics; 2. Abstraction and metaphor are the means by which certain forms of imperialist consumption take place; 3. In the case of Emily Dickinson and Susan Howe, the abstraction of slavery and abolition become the vehicle in which to re-narrate one's innocence and relevance; and 4. There are traditions and poetics that work to alter normalized usage of abstraction and metaphor and in so doing, make consumption painful, difficult, and even impossible (Philip 203)—such poetics are cuts, mends, and songs aligned the black radical tradition. I will examine three texts that either abstract or wrestle with the history of US chattel slavery: Emily Dickinson's "Master Letters," Susan Howe's *My Emily Dickinson,* and Don Mee Choi's *The Morning News is Exciting.* I selected the following texts as each one performs a different kind of politicized

abstraction: Dickinson subsumes the master/submission rhetoric and relationship in her letters, Howe appropriates the narrative of chattel slavery to situate Dickinson politically as an abolitionist, and Choi rewrites the "Master's Letters" to challenge the current reading of Dickinson and US avant-garde politics and aesthetics. Following the tradition of western philosophy and the avant-garde, Dickinson and Howe contend with slavery through abstraction and metaphor. I wish to situate how Choi's poetics, in materializing historical events and their agents and by re-writing Dickinson's letters, embody a scenario in which to examine the colonial language of white modernism.

Additionally in this chapter I wish to investigate how the properties of object appropriation in visual culture are mirrored in poetics. In the tradition of modernist poetics, the violence of imperialism is abstracted and consumed as metaphor. This kind of consumption—what I will call consumptive translation—operates similarly to modernist object appropriation. It dematerializes, deracializes, depolitizes in an effort to render it as property.

Though I find other devices such as analogy, simile, metonymy[1] to be linked, incredibly rich, and in urgent need of critical inquiry, here I will focus on metaphor as the accepted poetic technique of turning material into an abstract, creating a portal, and universalizing a particular. Incomparable persons and events become interchangeably linked through the vehicle of recognizable poetry and clichés. In everyday usage, phrases such as: "shoot me an email," "policing," "poetry is risk taking" are uttered without much retrospection. So when Susan Howe utilizes excerpts of letters written by captive men to

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[1] See, Charles Gaines, "Reconsidering Metaphor/Metonymy: Art and the Suppression of Thought" *Art Lies,*

Thomas Higginson to eventually conclude that "My life" by Emily Dickinson is about "slavery, emancipation and eroticism" scholars in the field of poetic studies do not immediately question what any of this might mean. What does slavery have to do with Emily Dickinson, other than that she is one of the many to have directly benefited from its existence? What does chattel slavery have to do with Dickinson amidst a civil war? What is a "Master" for Emily Dickinson, and for poetry during a time of chattel slavery? And lastly, what is the connection between: "slavery, emancipation and eroticism" (Howe)? Whose slavery? Whose emancipation? And whose erotics?

In *The Metaphors We Live By*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson place metaphor as central to meaning making and experience. They argue that, "…our conceptual system is largely metaphorical… the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is a matter of metaphor" (3). Lakoff and Johnson's analysis do not differentiate between metaphors and clichés. In fact, it is a part of their thesis that many clichés are in fact metaphors, and that there is a kind of power to accepted, quotidian cliches. Their examples of language in everyday polite society include metaphors of economy, class, violence, and betterment. The way we communicate and represent our images are indicators of our cultural and political milieu. Acceptable metaphors, or quotidian deployments of metaphor, are porous entrances into a system. and, "[L]anguage is an important source of evidence for what that system is like" (3). In addition they claim, "Our physical and cultural experience provides many possible bases for spatialization metaphors. Which ones are chosen, and which ones are major, may vary from culture to culture" (19). For the purposes of this chapter, I will look at the "metaphor" of slavery, its

users, its deployment, and the politics of this deployment.

*

Master — open
your life wide, and
take <in> me in forever

—Emily Dickinson, Letter 3 1861

Emily Dickinson is a poet who rarely needs an introduction. Born in 1830, and raised in Massachusetts, she is said to have lived in relative isolation and obscurity from 1860, writing poems and corresponding via letters until 1886, when she passed away. At the time of her death, over 1,800 poems were found in various hand-bound journals, and were eventually published in differing groupings over the years, to eventual canonical and critical acclaim. I will focus on Emily Dickinson's three poems/letters/epistolary poems, one written in 1858 and two in 1861. While there has been immense critical attention paid to Dickinson's overall poetry collection, little to no critical work has been done of what is being called "The Master Letters of Emily Dickinson" and might be more appropriately titled: "Letters to a Master."

From the onset I would like to point out that "The Master Letters" were mostly written before the Civil War, and during the period when chattel slavery was legal[2] in the

[2] Dickinson's home state Massachusetts was the first colony to recognize slave ownership, and was a thriving center for the slave trade throughout the 17th and 18th Centuries. However, Massachusetts' legal system attempted to end the practice of slavery through case law, particularly in 1783. For a discussion on this, see, "Slavery in Massachusetts" by Henry David Thoreau, and Arthur Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North.* University of Chicago Press, 1967. Historians also

United States.[3] In the first letter written sometime in the spring of 1858 (Manuscript A 827) the epistolary text states:

> Dear Master
> I am ill —
> but grieving more
> that you are ill, I
> make my stronger hand
> work long eno' to tell
> you — (12)

The letter/poem begins with the display of utter submission. The speaker states their positioning—an illness—but this position does not prevent them from "grieving more" for Master's illness. "More" exists perhaps to denote that the speaker will grieve regardless for their own illness, the "more" denotes that this activity is expanded to include the Master. Before there is a reconciliation, a recovery from this position, this condition of illness, the speaker states that they "make" their stronger hand "work long" "to tell you." There are two hands and one is weaker than the other, one is more fit for work. This stronger hand can be made to *work long* to tell. To make a hand work to tell—this is a simple allusion to the act of writing, transcribing, perhaps even translating. To take the stronger (more exploitable) hand, amidst illness, to draft, to *tell* a Master—such a predicament is less simple, and more bodily, more atrocious. The letter continues.

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point to how the federal census recorded no slaves persons held in Massachusetts by 1790. However, as Sora Han argues in "Slavery as Contract: *Betty's Case* and the Question of Freedom," the Massachusetts Supreme Court in 1857 could not declare an enslaved person free, and have this decision be held. The discussion concerning abolition and Massachusetts remains ongoing. See, Han, Sora. "Slavery as Contract: *Betty's Case* and the Question of Freedom." *Law & Literature,* vol. 27, n. 3. 2015, pp. 395-416. I would like to thank Erica Mena for pointing me to the abolitionist history of Massachusetts.

[3]Although chattel slavery ended in 1865, as Dennis Childs argues in *Slaves of the State,* it transforms itself within the law, rhetoric, and design into the prison industrial complex.

> You ask me what
> my flowers aid—
> then they were
> disobedient— (13)

The tenets of obedience, love, submission come up in the letter/poem. The speaker is responding to a question from the Master. We learn that the speaker *has* flowers. Are we to conclude that the speaker—though under some contract of submission—owns some things? The Master inquires about what the speaker *has*: the flowers, what (or whom) do they "aid"? The seemingly absurd narrative of the letter—from the declaration of illness, to indebted and exploitive labor, to the speaker's flowers—is quieted at the placement of "disobedient." "They were disobedient" — the flowers are abstracted and personified to perform the first opposition: raw disobedience in the face of the Master, mastery. The speaker pronounces disobedience, gives it to inanimate objects, and continues to ponder obedience, love, submission. The letter ends by asking,

> Will you
> tell me, please to tell
> me, soon as you are
> well— (19)

The letter writer though corresponding with a Master, writes with a tenderness ("Will you / tell me / please to tell") and the carefulness of intimacy. Is the speaker is playfully toying with the ideals of utter and complete submission? Any romanticization of utter

poetic submission should be eclipsed by Dickinson's milieu, in which people and communities were forced to utilize terms such as "Master" and were violently captured and killed for the purposes of submission. This is to state, the uttering of the word "Master" could not have been an abstraction alone. To locate the wounds, the wounded, their ghost, the flesh of warriors even as they move close, closest to our face.

The second letter (Manuscript A 829), written in early in 1861, is a series of pleas, a request for guidance. The feminized speaker states, "she cannot guess to make / that master glad— (22)" and "— teach her grace — preceptor / teach her majesty— " (25). The tone in the letters echo the rhetoric Saidiya Hartman analyzes in the Freedman Manuals—manuals given to former slaves in order to instruct on how to be "proper" subjects and citizens.[4] Hartman asks whether such manuals attempted to teach that "[T]he only difference between freedom and slavery [was] to be ascertained in the choice to labor dutifully, bend one's back joyfully, or act willingly as one's own inquisitor? If so, didn't this only disclose the elusiveness and intangibility of freedom" (141). The Freedman Manuals worked to argue that to labor is a duty, and to labor joyfully is the *choice* of a free subject.

I realize that because I have framed it as poems that come before the Civil War, during U.S. chattel slavery—, and because of the way I have close read the text thus far as the enclosure and violent fantasies of the Master/Slave dialectic, that Dickinson's

[4] Hartmans writes about "The telling nature in the *Advice of freedmen, Friendly Counsels For Freedmen…*" from page 128. How, "Most important in the panorama of virtues imparted by these texts was the willingness to endure hardships, which alone guaranteed success, upward mobility, and the privileges of citizenship (129)." And most related to the politics embedded in Dickinson's letter, "Thus the inaugural gestures that opened these texts announced the advent of freedom and at the same time attested to the impossibility of escaping slavery (131)."

letter/poem is less poetry, less romantic, and too literal. However, I have not contextualized the reading to a historical framework in order to be sinister, to attack Emily Dickinson the poet or her critics—but to suggest that the speaker above is beguiled by notions of submission to, rather than the abolition of, a Master. A literal reading of this epistolary poem is not hyperbolic; a literal reading is one way to account for the Dickinson's historical milieu and her distance from (and proximity to) chattel slavery. The last letter/poem requests,

> ...tell her
> her <offence> — fault — Master —
> if it is <not so> small
> eno' to cancel with
> her life, <Daisy> she is satisfied —
> but punish — do <not>nt banish
> her — Shut her in prison —
> Sir —only pledge that you
> will forgive — sometime—
> before the grave, and
> Daisy will not mind—
> she will awake in <his> your
> likeness— (25-26)

The letter begins by asking the Master to describe her offenses, and to recommend a series of punishments (prison!) that will not include banishment. Might this Master (who is not an immortal god in this stanza, who will have a grave) eventually forgive the

speaker? If forgiveness is possible, Daisy (either the current name of the speaker, or the name of the previous disobedient flowers) will awake (be re-born) in his "likeness." His likeness is the end goal to forgiveness, death, and birth?

The abstract, vague letters hold multiple possibilities. It is possible to say that these are strange love poems/letters—to either a significant other or kin, that grapple with the violence of love, treading an older and kink line, the push and pull of desire, submission, pain, and entrapment. It is also possible to read the text is a naked display of patriarchy, of the operations of family units from the controls of hegemony. All variations of possibility of the text are anchored through the discourse of Master, and the speaker to the Master. Through ambiguity, the text fundamentally appropriates the master narrative of the United States: chattel slavery.

The discourse of total and utter submission, especially in, Christianity and God as the Master, and by extension the patriarch—all of these discourses exist around and through, and are interpolated by the philosophical and economic logic of chattel slavery. This is the procedural logic: God as Master, and us as slaves; the idea of the Father as Master and his family as his servants, the extension of this idea to the Father owning slaves, and everyone working diligently to keep the scheme intact.[5]

Of the "Master Letters" Howe tellingly remarks that they are, "Self-conscious exercises in prose by one writer, playing with, listening to, and learning from others"

[5] See *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, by Max Weber where he argues that it is the Christian, protestant ideology that validates the rationale of work and hierarchy in capitalism. See also *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, by Rey Chow in which, where she extends Weber's argument to look at racialized U.S. immigration narratives as continuing the spirit/core/rationale of capitalist development, exploitation and expansion.

(27). Is Howe suggesting that Dickinson is playing with the slave as a speaker? Listening to the Master speak? Learning from whom? Even in their abstractions, Dickinson's letter poems fail to grapple with the violence of speaking to a Master. Her speaker toys with disobedience but asks for forgiveness, is a little in love, waiting for approval and acceptance. Her speaker's affective longings for the Master are emphasized, the speaker's pain trivialized, erased and dismissed. In fact, Howe acknowledges it is the position of the Master that Dickinson will occupy, "Master is gone — mere gun. Dickinson has usurped his place, has assumed in Art her own power." This is to state boldly through abstraction—and by insistence on abstracting an experience actually lived—that Dickinson was not a poet compassionate or sympathetic to the position of the slave, or abolition. Rather she was in awe of the position and power of the Master.

**Metaphor & Abstraction**

Abstraction is often witnessed as a break from what is commonly regarded as *real,* which is of political interest because it is a direct attack against current representations. For example, if representations concerning immigration range from linear narratives of a flight from the "backwards" country, to the difficult yet ripe path of the American dream—as depicted everywhere from television shows such as *Homeland* and *Fresh Off the Boat,* to novels such as *Native Speaker* by Chang Rae Lee and arguably, the lyric poems of Jack Gilbert and Li-Young Lee—imploding these narratives, and unsettling the familiarity of these stories by making it somewhat impossible to

recognize is useful as it ruptures current representation.

Corresponding with practices in visual art, abstraction reinstates itself again and again into what is deemed to be innovative and experimental aesthetic poetics. In the US, abstraction has been linked to a sense of pure, *free* expression[6] that breaks from the known real. The real in this dialectic represents the stagnation of the status quo, the representations that make up the political climate of the current world. To break from representations of the real by abstractly distilling and rupturing the received images/languages in place is considered to form new possibilities.

Contrary to previous articulations of abstraction and representation, in *Abstractionist Aesthetics: Artistic Form and Social Critique in African American Literature,* Philip Harper argues that it is "[L]iterature that harbors maximum abstractionist potential" (167) and that abstractionist African American literary works where the condition of abstraction enables an enunciation of powerful social critiques. Harper describes abstraction as work, "[A]ttending to the conditions of its own existence rather than to some external referent, and is understood to be primarily 'about' nothing other than itself" (24). A contradictory space, in which intimacy is immaterialized, because it is particular and unknowable?

Harper is careful, however, to point to how language of abstraction, and abstraction itself, is often equated to a form of vacancy. Harper connects abstraction to how land and conquest was imagined as venturing into vacancy in the United States,

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[6]As can be witnessed in JFK infamous speech at Amherst College, October 26th 1963. See, National Endowments for the Arts, https://www.arts.gov/about/kennedy. Accessed 12 May 2017.

> The rectangular surveying system dictated by the Land Ordinance of 1785 quite evidently furthered national consolidation (implicating what would ultimately amount to a good 75 percent of the continental United States), but only inasmuch as it figured the western territories as both essentially vacant—and consequently—ripe for development (42).

Additionally, legal and critical race theorist Cheryl Harris has argued that it is essential to remember in studies of US property, “To the conquerors, the land was "vacant" (1716). In thinking about property and land propertization, the caution against abstraction is politically necessary. Harper argues that the critiques against abstractionist work are often rooted in a caution concerned about the simplification of the work—or an over/under identification of where and what it is. Seen as empty, abstraction is dangerous as “*emptiness* [is] packaged for easy consumption” (Harper 42).[7]

The notion of vacancy was not accidental to US uses of abstraction and aesthetics, as vacancy and abstraction were political concepts vital to the foundations of the United States. Additionally Harper points to how, in order to structure systems of enslavement, black people were, “reduced to a lowest-level commonality in which their very humanity

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[7] As Cheryl Harris writes, “The origins of property rights in the United States are rooted in racial domination. Even in the early years of the country, it was not the concept of race alone that operated to oppress Blacks and Indians; rather, it was the interaction between conceptions of race and property that played a critical role in establishing and maintaining racial and economic subordination.” (1716). And concerning vacancy, “In reviewing ROBERT WILLIAMS, THE AMERICAN INDIAN IN WESTERN LEGAL THOUGHT: THE DISCOURSE OF CONQUEST (I990), an eloquent and meticulous work on the American Indian in Western legal doctrine, Joseph William Singer draws out the organic connections between property rights and race as the pattern of conquest of native lands exemplified:

> [P]roperty and sovereignty in the United States have a racial basis. The land was taken by force by white people from peoples of color thought by the conquerors to be racially inferior. The close relation of native peoples to the land was held to be no relation at all. To the conquerors, the land was "vacant." Yet it required trickery and force to wrest it from its occupants. This means that the title of every single parcel of property in the United States can be traced to a system of racial violence. (1716)

And, “The notion of vacant land belongs to Locke: the right to acquire property through labor as long as there was some "good left in common for others" applied to the "inland vacant places of America." Locke, supra note 46, at 130, I34. Neither of these two premises is tenable. (1727)”

was annulled, black people assumed a condition of *abstraction* whose import was wholly negative" (31). Abstraction is a political transaction, signaling the notion of that which is unoccupied, and could be owned.

In *Ruptures of American Capital,* Grace Hong deconstructs the representation of abstract space. She writes,

> '[E]mpty, homogeneous time' that was the epistemic dominant of the nineteenth century, which narrated its ventures and legitimated its rule, was replaced in the early twentieth century by its spatial equivalent: abstract space. New modes of industrial production within the United States, as well as U.S. imperialism abroad, arose in abstract space, sustaining and being sustained by it. Yet these very conditions of abstraction—the attempt to remake the world in the image of abstract space—are exactly what produce difference and unevenness, because "profit" (in the form of surplus value, as in the Fordist factory or racialized difference, as in the colony) is derived from this unevenness. (110)

The creation of abstract space is a purposed uneven political endeavor, one that works to actively negate the space of representational difference and damage. Racial and gendered dispossession legislated movement through the markings of abstraction, because abstract space foreclosed political inquiry. In this line of inquiry, rather than opposing the real, abstraction and the creation of abstract space can be witnessed as continuing the normalized structures of violence by producing and forcefully creating notions of property and ownership. However compellingly critiqued,[8] the practice of abstraction is vigorous and continues.

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[8] The critique of this narrative is how the economic imaginary of capitalist freedom undergirds US associations between abstraction and freedom. IE., the pleasures of dehistoricization, the power of forced neutrality, and the dynamics of violently detaching representation from its context, material and labor. Max Haiven and Frances Saunders have written about this. See, Haivan, "Finance as Capital's Imagination," *Social Text* vol. 29, no. 3, 2011, pp. 93-124. Saunders, Frances. *The Cultural Cold War.* The New Press, 1999.

In the "The Epistemology of Metaphor" Paul de Man connects western philosophy concerning metaphor. For de Man this epistemological grounding includes Locke, Condillac, and Hegel, who have presented ideas in agreement. Locke warns against the dangers of rhetoric, particularly metaphor, which he believes is a form of translation that often leads to improper translation. De Man explains Locke was against metaphor because he also saw the problem of metaphor through two other vehicles provided by the Cartesian tradition: motion and translation. For Locke, motion and translation were intimately linked. And that this was no accident. De Man writes,

> It is no mere play of words that 'translate' is translated in German as 'übersetzen' which itself translates the Greek 'meta phorein' or metaphor. Metaphor gives itself the totality which it then claims to define, but it is in fact the tautology of its own position. The discourse of simple ideas is figural discourse or translation and, as such, creates the fallacious illusion of definition (15).

This explanation describes the power of metaphor: The function of figurative language is that the idea might travel with authority. De Man explaining the Lockean tradition articulates, "[P]roperties are not just the idea of motion, they actually move and travel" (16). However, "Properties, it seems, do not properly totalize, or, rather, they totalize in a haphazard and unreliable way. It is indeed not a question of ontology, of things as they are, *but of authority, of things as they are decreed to be*" (17) (emphasis mine). To parse through: metaphor is the act of translation being pushed forth through the force of authority. And what might authority be?

> And this authority cannot be vested in any authoritative body, for the *free usage* of ordinary language is carried, like the *child*, by wild figuration which will make a mockery of the most authoritarian academy. We have no way of defining, of *policing*, the boundaries that separate the name of one entity from the name of another; tropes are not just travellers, they tend to be smugglers and properly smugglers of stolen goods[9] at that. What makes matters even worse is that there is no way of finding out whether they do so with *criminal intent* or not (emphasis mine, 17).

There are several ideas that emerge from this passage: 1. Authority is a tenuous term and is not free from mockery or "theft;" 2. There is no way to "police" the boundaries of authority; and 3. Activity outside of the decree of authority is by nature ambiguous (and therefore criminality is the first to be assumed). In addition to the many questions concerning the linkage between metaphor, translation, motion to authority, and the unsettling of authority, this passage is riddled with the usage of metaphor and abstraction: "Policing" "smugglers" "criminal intent." The metaphors (abstraction) deployed in this passage depict a scene of the law—it finds a place for functions of the law (the police) in the interrogation/constrictions of the a priori of language.

Additionally, authority and the law are essential metaphors in the constructed ontology of metaphor, as it divides the human from the non-human. De Man states, "As the creature endowed with conceptual language, 'man' is indeed the entity, the place where this convergence [between the proper and the essence] is said to take place (17)." "Conceptual language" is how we can distinguish humans from the non-human. It is important and essential to insert "conceptual" before language—for conceptual indicates abstraction—a device that not all those with language capabilities possess. He concludes

[9] Grace Hong notes: appropriate goods, maybe?

that in the Lockean tradition, "The use and the abuse of language cannot be separated from each other" (19) and so additional yet related genealogies must be examined. To continue his examination, de Man turns to Condillac's work, "Des Abstractions."

For Condillac, metaphor deals with the 'conceptual abstract' and is itself a state of abstraction. In fact, de Man argues that Condillac's usage of 'abstraction' throughout the essay "can be 'translated' as metaphor." (21) Like Locke, Condillac understands the dangers of figuration and abstraction, yet for him abstraction is essential. Condillac states, "Abstractions are certainly absolutely necessary [*elles sont sans doute absolutement necessaries*] (sec. 2. p 174)." We are to assume that abstractions are absolutely necessary for language, rhetoric, and, conferring from de Man and Locke's pronoucements above, abstraction is *absolutely necessary* for the movement of authority.

Among the dangers of abstractions are contagion. Condillac admits, "Worse still, abstractions are capable of infinite proliferation. They are like weeds, or like a cancer; once you have begun using a single one, they will crop up everywhere[10]" (21). To learn how to abstract, is to learn how to never stop abstracting. Abstraction is disease, nature, process, and a permanent, unbreakable habit.

Abstraction is necessary and cannot be broken from because abstraction is the *free human* mind. De Man argues that concerning Condillac's understanding of abstraction/metaphor,

> The true reality is not located in things but in the subject, which is also the mind as *our* mind (*notre espirit*). It is the result of an operation the mind performs upon entities, an aperception ("*apercevoir en nous"*) and not a

[10] Perhaps they crop up everywhere like the deployment of similes in this passage.

> perception. The language which describes this operation in Condillac's text is consistently, and more so than in Locke's, a language of mastery of the subject over entities: things become 'truly real' only by being **appropriated and seized** upon with all the etymological strength implied in *Begriff,* the German word for concept. To understand is to seize (*begreifen)* and not to let go of what one has thus taken hold of. Condillac says that impressions will be considered by the mind only if they are "locked up [*refermees*]" in it. And as one moves from the person subject "*nous*" to the grammatical subject of all the sentences (*"notre espirit"*), it becomes clear that this action of the mind is also the action of the subject. (22, emphasis mine)

Much depends on the ability to appropriate and seize language into a concept. De Man goes on to answer that the "subject" acts in this violent and authoritarian way because this is the only way in which it can constitute its own existence, its own ground (22). The subject is the mind, abstractions exist to 'stabilize' the subject, and the process of this subject-making cannot and does not exist without this violence. De Man goes on to describe Condillac's continued meditation on the necessity of abstraction in configuring the human subject, concluding that in this tradition, "Being and identity are the result of a resemblance which is not in things but posited by an act of the mind... the mind, or subject, is the central metaphor, the metaphor of metaphors" (23). In this line of logic, if the mind is the central metaphor of metaphor, then the racialization of mind and subject[11] in the metaphor of the mind becomes a central authority for the motion necessary for abstraction and metaphor.

However, Locke, Condillac, and Kant have all failed to discuss the important distinctions between the schematic and the symbolic, between literature and philosophy.

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[11] This is an argument that Fatima El-Tayeb made during lecture (Spring quarter 2012, Queer Theory course at the University of California, San Diego).

De Man concludes that, by looking to Hegel, we can understand that,

> He who takes it for schematic and gives it the attributes of predictability and transcendental authority that pertain to the objective realities of entities unmediated by language is guilty of reification (the opposite figure of prosopopeia); and he who thinks that the symbolic can be considered stable property of language, that language, in other words, is purely symbolic and nothing else, is guilty of aestheticism—"whereby nothing is seen as it is, not in practice either." (26)

In constructing the epistemology of metaphor, de Man reiterates the accepted practice of western, white poetics, a literature fearful of figuration (particularly the figuration from Others), wholly dependent on abstraction, and committed to the philosophy of choice and selection concerning the symbolic order.

Conversations concerning figuration and embodiment have continued, with a twist. While de Man is interested in abstracting and objectively examining the epistemology of metaphor, many contemporary feminist scholars have become interested in examining the racialized investments of abstractions. In particular, postcolonial feminists and philosophers have taken up questions of racialized embodiment. Chandra Talpade Mohanty[12] critiqued the ways in which studies/narratives of the global south by western feminists produced scholarship that amplified and perhaps stabilized the subject position of the global North. She describes specifically how western feminists wrote of *the Other* as a way to write about their own safety and development of themselves[13] (71).

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[12] See, Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." *boundary 2,* vol. 12, no. 3 – Vol. 13, no.1, 1984, pp. 333-358.

[13] Mohanty writes, "By contrasting the representation of women in the third world with what I referred to earlier as western feminisms' self-representation in the same context, we see how Western Feminists alone

Toni Morrison in *Playing in the Dark* effectively argues that although in full contact with black cultural production and history, the tradition of linear narrative forms and literary criticism have privileged a whitened history, white subject formations, and white desires. And in a different context, these concerns have been articulated by French philosopher Jacques Ranciere[14] who argues for examining all compositions—that which has been composed— as the fictions of their inventors.

Much of the analysis thus far has been focused on fiction and art objects. Querying embodiment in poetic studies has been trickier, vacillating between accusatory flatlining (all poetry is autobiography, confessional, etc.) to the race-neutral ancestors/greats/forever blooming (Shakespeare, Dante, etc.). Additionally, unlike prose, in most poetic text the subject is rarely consistently identified, or named. Most often, if there are distinct narratives, characters filter in and out through gendered and first person pronouns, and in their pronouns are rarely analyzed as such. This approach might actually be *the* hindrance to the lack of narrative and political analyses in contemporary poetry.

Modern and contemporary writing often take up forms that negate a readily legible subject.[15] The most repeated condition in the tradition of experimental poetics (as can be witnessed in Dickinson's "The Master Letters") has been to stage an unnamed character, or several unnamed characters that navigate an equally abstracted space: to do

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become the true 'subjects' of this counterhistory (71)."

[14] Rancière writes, "This trial is trickier than the other, since the judge and the executioner are the same person as the inventor of the character…" (236). Rancière, Jacques. "Why Emma Bovary Had to be Killed." *Critical Inquiry,* vol. 34, no. 2, 2008, pp. 233-248.

[15] There are a few consistent techniques that modern, post-modern, and contemporary narratives use to besiege linear, ownership, subject problems. Some proposed solutions have been: to stop writing, to write nothing 'new,' to juxtapose other kinds of writing, to write in multiple languages, to write more female characters, to write from a different gaze, and many more.

away with the name, to refrain from specifying time, space, particularities in order to heighten structure, language and affect—the black box, the white cube effect.

Because abstractionist literature is purposefully vague and imprecise, the site will continue be its own venture and injury. In "Cross-Cultural Poetics," Edouard Glissant states that in language and poetics, "It is difficult to separate theoretically the notion of individual dignity from the oppressive reality of private property" (138). Similar to duBois's critique of field compartmentalization, Glissant presents the problems of language as an economic problem, sharing and building from material realities. What then, are the material stakes of the (language surrounding) subject positions and their abstractions?

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Touch Shakespeare for me.
Signed America

—Emily Dickinson

Wives and Slaves were Thumbs

—Susan Howe, *My Emily Dickinson*

Susan Howe's long essay/poem *My Emily Dickinson* was a commercial success by poetry measures. It is currently in its second edition, has been translated in Spanish

and French, and has received consistent rave reviews as a formative rendering of poetic scholarship and studies. Howe's *My Emily Dickinson* is supposed to be a meditation on Emily Dickinson's poem, "My life had stood—a Loaded Gun." Howe re-writes and re-envisions this poem for a hundred and thirty eight pages while bringing in Robert Browning, Shakespeare, and Dickinson's letters to argue for the ways politics and aesthetics were intertwined in Dickinson's world and particularly, in "My Life." For Howe, the text delves into the historical and political implications of Emily Dickinson. *My Emily Dickinson* sets to historically contextualize Dickinson's life, poetics and politics. The text sets to claim Dickinson's poetic lineage as originally American and by the end of the book, claims her poetics were about freedom and abolition.

Howe begins the book by placing Emily Dickinson's direct lineage to US pioneer and settler John Winthrop, who arrived in 1630. This lineage is not one stated out of shame or confession; it is a lineage of ethos. In the archival notes, Howe states that Dickinson's "My life had stood—a Loaded Gun," was a "poem [that] could only have been written by an American and by one who came from years of Puritan Ancestors."[16] This is a peculiar statement about Dickinson's political background, context and her placement in US history. This original placement should help us read Howe's treatment of Dickinson, as well Howe's usage of metaphor through the text. When Howe declares that in Dickinson's poem, "Here words (and names) are primitive things. Savage here words are alive" we can read this as an abstraction of the primitive and savage, but also

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[16] Howe, Susan. My Emily Dickinson Drafts. Updated. Box 7 F 2. Susan Howe Papers, 1942-2002, MSS 0201. Archive for New Poetry, University of California, San Diego. Accessed 20 Mar 2017.

locate them as bodies, histories and materials in opposition to her "Puritan Ancestors."

In the drafts of the text in the archive, there is a manuscript that reads, "The first settlers had cut themselves off from European customs. They faced the wilderness without all the layers and softness of customs. Original."[17] While, there is nothing original about Howe's claim that the settlers were original, or removed from European customs, what is of interest is how the drafts became finalized. In the text the sentiment above become less concretized, Howe writes, "This is the *process* of viewing Emptiness without design or plan, neighborless in winter blank, or blaze of summer. This is waste wilderness, Nature no soothing mother, Nature is annihilation brooding over" (21). The originality of the colonial settlers and the wildness they lived through become "waste wilderness" and "Emptiness." "Emptiness," as Harper and Harris reminds, is not neutral but the political framing for settler colonialism. What is witnessed from the archival drafts and the finished book is how the content shifts from the direct merits of the settlers to their political frameworks.

In the Susan Howe's archivess at the "Archive for New Poetry" at UCSD, I was able to look through the drafting process and compare them to the published text. Reading the drafts alongside the text assists in the historical research and context of *My Emily Dickinson.* Additionally, as the text professes to politicize Dickinson, reading the early drafts with the published text assisted in positioning Howe's methods as well as Howe's research into Dickinson. In a draft concerning Dickinson's lineage, Howe writes,

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[17] Howe, Susan. My Emily Dickinson Drafts. Updated. Box 7 F 3. Susan Howe Papers, 1942-2002, MSS 0201. Archive for New Poetry, University of California, San Diego. Accessed 20 Mar 2017.

> Dickinson was vividly aware of the contradictions in her puritan heritage. That her ancestors in New England were fugitives, that they uprooted themselves from their origins, that they conquered new territories all because of their inflexible belief in absolute Power, sovereign, authoritarian, and legalistic, a rigid Calvinism. Cold Predestination was HIS essence… Puritan piety and economic necessity were linked irrevocably as were Bride and Groom.[18]

From my examination of the published text, the above paragraph concerning Dickinson's heritage becomes,

> Emily Dickinson was born exactly two hundred years after the Great Migration led by John Winthrop brought her ancestors to America… Her ancestors, rigid Calvinists determined to walk the ancient ways and not to stumble on the path of Righteousness, voluntarily severed themselves from their origins to cross the northern ocean on a religious and utopian errand into the wilderness.[19] Calvinism grounded in the Old Testament, through typological interpretation of the New, was an authoritarian theology that stressed personal salvation through strenuous morality, righteousness over love, and an autocratic governing principle over liberty (38).

The drafts supplement the seemingly-objective, declarative lines in the book. The drafts display the research, or rather lack thereof, as well as the direct political traditions Howe writes from. In the drafts, settler colonialism is rationalized, "they conquered new territories all because of their inflexible belief in absolute Power." In the text, settler colonialism becomes, an *errand into wilderness.*[20] However in the drafts and the text,

[18] Howe, Susan. My Emily Dickinson Drafts. Updated. Box 7 F 3. Susan Howe Papers, 1942-2002, MSS 0201. Archive for New Poetry, University of California, San Diego. Accessed 20 Mar 2017.

[20] "Errand into wilderness" is also the title of Perry Miller's prominent book, *Errand Into Wilderness.* Harvard University press, 1956.

religion[21] continues to dominate the explanation for Dickinson's puritan heritage, and the potential originality of the puritan lineage. In the drafts, "her ancestors in New England were *fugitives*, that they *uprooted themselves from their origins*," and in the text this becomes a discretionary act, they "*voluntarily severed* themselves from their *origins* to cross the northern ocean on a religious and utopian *errand into the wilderness*." Of course, settler colonialism is not an *errand into the wilderness* from god (stern or otherwise), and the land was not wild, empty, or vacant, but is purposefully described as such in order to politicize (neutralize) colonization. The transitions between draft to the text offer insights as to how neutrality becomes formatted. Howe charts Dickinson's ancestry[22] away from the Europeans by arguing that the Puritans[23] became something new when they entered the *wild.*

In drafts of *My Emily Dickinson,* Howe takes a phrase from Dickinson's letter[24] to

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[21]In the drafts, "Mercenary and *opportunistic* as it very soon became, originally this had been a plantation of religion, economic gain was a secondary consideration" (Box 7 Folder 3) becomes "Mercenary and *racist* as it soon became, originally this had been a plantation of religion" in the book (45). Emphasis Mine. Howe, Susan. My Emily Dickinson Drafts. Updated. Box 7 F 3. Susan Howe Papers, 1942-2002, MSS 0201. Archive for New Poetry, University of California, San Diego. Accessed 20 Mar 2017.

[22] "In the drafts, The Puritan Jehovah was Janus-faced. Steady progress of a Soul towards Peace, the irrational beauty of life" (Box 7 Folder 3) becomes revised in, or re-appears as "In the Valley of the Shadow of Death we may see the irrational beauty of life" (Box 7 Folder 3) and changes to "In the Valley of the Shadow of Death I may see the irrational beauty of life" (45). Notable is the shift from third person to first person.
Howe, Susan. My Emily Dickinson Drafts. Updated. Box 7 F 3. Susan Howe Papers, 1942-2002, MSS 0201. Archive for New Poetry, University of California, San Diego. Accessed 20 Mar 2017.

[23] In discussing Jonathan Edwards Howe drafts, "Here in a small log meeting house, one of the only outstanding philosophers America has ever produced, and certainly the greatest intellect of his time, lectured to a tiny Indian audience, seated in rows, wrapped in their blankets, on the evils of [thieving and] alcoholism." [thieving and]—handwritten in. (Box 7 Folder 3). And, "As a minister, Jonathan Edwards would have despised her. As one intelligence conversant with the best thought of another, she was his successor" (Box 7 Folder 3)"[For her] The Sovereign was foreign" (Box 7 Folder 3) [for her]—is handwritten. Howe, Susan. My Emily Dickinson Drafts. Updated. Box 7 F 3. Susan Howe Papers, 1942-2002, MSS 0201. Archive for New Poetry, University of California, San Diego. Accessed 20 Mar 2017.

[24] The letter is to Mr. C.H. Clark (page 437), dated April 15, 1886. Dickinson, Emily. The Letters of Emily Dickinson 1845-1886. Ed. Mabel Loomis Todd. Little, Brown, and Company, 1906.

describe Dickinson. Dickinson is "Aborigine of the sky[25]" ("aborigine of the sky / a synthesis), other times appearing as "aborigine of the sky (Original)."[26] [A]borigine of the sky" is written in 12 different drafts in box 7 folder 2, and twice more in folder 6. Though it does not appear in the published text, it is *the* reoccurring phrase to describe Dickinson. And though not sinister on its own or in a vacuum, in the context of passages on puritan heritage and wilderness, Dickinson as the singular "aborigine of the sky" is a political appropriation, a political retelling that collapses settler colonialism and US poetry.

Settler colonialism is not the only concept that Howe works through to describe Dickinson and her ancestry. Howe uses Dickinson's words and historical narrative to argue for the political content of Dickinson's work, and to make connections between women and slavery. She writes, "During the nineteenth century, a wife was her husband's property" (133). Howe goes to lengths to remind readers of the situation Victorian women were placed in and draws parallels between the Civil War and Emily Dickinson. And this is because "The Civil War had split American into two."[27] And it is true that the Civil War displayed the fallacies,[28] the utter violent contradictions of American life that made the growth of the American Dream possible. While discussing the Shakespeare Dickinson must have read, and his female characters, Howe writes, "Women, with the

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[25]Howe, Susan. My Emily Dickinson Drafts. Updated. Box 7 F 2. Susan Howe Papers, 1942-2002, MSS 0201. Archive for New Poetry, University of California, San Diego. Accessed 21 Mar 2017.
[26] Howe, Susan. My Emily Dickinson Drafts. Updated. Box 7 F 3. Susan Howe Papers, 1942-2002, MSS 0201. Archive for New Poetry, University of California, San Diego. Accessed 21 Mar 2017.
[27] Howe, Susan. My Emily Dickinson Drafts. Updated. Box 7 F 2. Susan Howe Papers, 1942-2002, MSS 0201. Archive for New Poetry, University of California, San Diego. Accessed 21 Mar 2017.
[28] See in particular, Saidiya V. Hartman. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in. Nineteenth-Century America.* Oxford UP, 1997.

exception of Margaret, endure war in paralysis (89)." This blanketing term is perhaps to describe the difference between "men" who fight in the wars and "women" who wait at home in "paralysis." Dickinson writes of an Emily similar to Margaret, an Emily who, "Trusts absence, allegory, mystery (23)," an Emily who believed in, "No … forced order … No 'robber'" (23). Howe writes that for Emily Dickinson, "Grace caused a *civil war* in the (puritan) *soul*" (Emphasis mine). Grace is a term left undefined, but Civil War (as a metaphor, an abstraction, and the event) and soul are repeated through the text. Howe's Dickinson is aggressive, political, waiting, resistant and full of 'Promethean ambition' (18). Howe writes, "Emily Dickinson's religion was Poetry" (48) and it is for these political reasons that Dickinson choose to stay unwed, inside, thinking, waiting, reading, and writing. In Howe's text, Dickinson's mythic persona and narrative as a shy and passive hermit is politically transformed.

For the 118 pages of a 138 page work, *My Emily Dickinson* is a meditation on the literary possibilities of one poem; starting on page 119 Dickinson's "My Life" and Dickinson's life become about emancipation and slavery. Howe writes, "Northern women, children, the maimed, infirm, and old men, waited at home until war was done. A Slave[29] was often referred to as a child, a Woman as a girl. An original Disobedience: A girl in bed alone sucking her thumb… Wives and slaves were thumbs" (119). Here the comparison between womanhood and slavery arise and mimics the tactics of early white feminism—but practiced in contemporary times. In *My Emily Dickinson* Howe attempts to re-create Dickinson to be a political figure with political implications. In order to re-

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[29] It should be noted that for Howe the word slave is sometimes capitalized and at other times not.

imagine Dickinson's politics, Howe attempts several things. She links Dickinson's reading list to works of the abolitionist Thomas Higginson,[30] with whom she corresponded briefly—though never about abolition or slavery. Higginson wrote "Nat Turner's Insurrection" for the *Atlantic Monthly,* and Howe argues that Dickinson's poem "My life" could be close-read as a poem "triggered by parts of it" (125). However, there are no direct links or passages from Higginson's text that are provided as a comparison or example to Dickinson's "My Life" to support these claims. Neither are there drafts in Howe's archive that outline or deepen this argument. Additionally, Howe writes that, Higginson "was intrigued by black music" (125), and wrote about it, and volunteered to fight in the Civil War in the first black brigade, and received correspondence from black soldiers he fought with. In particular Howe quotes a section of a letter Higginson received from a former slave and South Carolina volunteer,

> I met manny [sic] of the old Soliders I spoke of you—all hailed your name with that emotion (that become you) of the Soul when hearing of one who when in darkness burst light upon their pathway [end of letter]
>
> In April 1862, Emily Dickinson, soul in the darkness of utter poetic anonymity wrote to Higginson (126).

Rather than mediating—or crediting—the letter writer, and what the stakes and statements of such a letter might deduce, Howe extracts the 'Soul' from the South, and

[30] Howe notes that Thomas Higginson was a supported of the abolitionist John Brown, and assisted him when Brown was arrested for attempted to plan a slave insurrection. There is much to be written about the Higginson and Brown's politics.

from the Civil War, to put forth "Emily Dickinson, a soul in the darkness of utter poetic anonymity…" (126). In this passage Howe: 1. Cites a letter by a black volunteer as proof of Higginson's politics (this letter is the only correspondence/text with a nonwhite body in the entire book); 2. Does not credit the writer in any way; 3. Does not address the concerns of the writer; and 4. Appropriates the images, form, and vocabulary of the former solider to link and abstract the usage of "Soul" of a former slave person into Dickinson's a "soul in darkness." The citation practices in this passage are careless and unethical, if not menacing and obliterating. It illuminates Howe's desires to forcefully abstract and create connections through abstraction fbetween Dickinson and white abolitionists to black men fighting in the war—leaving a gaping hole where black captive women might reside.

The broad attempt to politicize Dickinson based only on tenuous associations with abolitionists are dubious, especially when faced with the actual text of "My Life" and the "Master Letters." It should be obvious that Higginson's explicit interest in black culture and abolition are his own, and that Dickinson's entrance into the passage might better display her utter explicit of interest in black culture, black music, the Civil War and abolition—as she lived in and through their stakes.

Howe argues that for Emily Dickinson, "Freedom to roam poetically means freedom to hunt it" (79), "Freedom to explore may forever be linked to loneliness, theft and destruction,"[31] and "All her life Emily Dickinson acutely was sensitive to the loss of

[31] Howe, Susan. My Emily Dickinson Drafts. Updated. Box 7 F 2. Susan Howe Papers, 1942-2002, MSS 0201. Archive for New Poetry, University of California, San Diego. Accessed 21 Mar 2017.

freedom a married woman was expected to accept without question" (133). The tension between freedom and marriage and freedom and abolition are collapsed. There is a contemporary and canonical power in instilling Dickinson's poem with the politics of the present. In order to do so, Howe must cross out the lines between Blackness and Slavery as lived histories and into Blackness and Slavery as analytics for white feminism.[32] *My Emily Dickinson* is a text that illuminates the process of refusing to grapple or tend to the horror, instead appropriating and seizing the potential aesthetic and political power of its abstraction.

Dickinson is absolutely a poet of political implication. She wrote during and near the Civil War. Amidst genocide, chattel slavery, and omnipresent patriarchy, Emily Dickinson crafts The American lyric we have come to recognize most comfortably: an individualized lyric that purposefully obfuscates and abstracts the violence that makes our world possible. Howe writes of Dickinson and the world, "We are all born with the desire to be free" (124). And argues that, "My life" is about the "…aggressive exploration by a single Yankee woman, of the unsaid words—slavery, emancipation, and eroticism" (129). If Slavery is not the direct metaphor, the condition of the unfree, of death, then it is the backdrop, the opposition that lays waiting, making the image *beautiful*.

Howe writes that "My Life" "is a frontier poem. Forester of New England wayward pilgrim. Trees have been stripped to the root by a seer on her path across

[32] For a longer discussion on this matter see, Lindon Barrett. *Blackness and Value: Seeing Double.* Cambridge University Press, 1999.

circumference of intellection. This is a tragic poem. A pioneer's terse epic" (35). "Frontier poem" and "pioneer's terse epic" are fitting descriptions, for Emily Dickinson's legacy is the poetry, the strength of a continuing US aesthetic "untouched" by chattel slavery and settler-colonialism, yet made possible by them. Her melody, her finesse, her imagery, her shapes, are of an American that is less European and more *wild*, more desiring to be *free.* It looks less to religion and more to its voice. It finalizes the argument for individualized greatness. No longer British or European, the "aborigine of the sky" the primitive language becomes America. America lays claims to its originality—it is in the savage language, the frontier poem, and the reckoning of this freedom. When this poetry is finally embraced, it will be through a dramatic shift in tone. Not because of its whiteness—as all colonial and canonical aesthetics before have been so—but because it re-centers the white voice and beauty to be American. Slavery becomes the metaphor that transfers from the captive female settler to the politicized female settler. The result of the abstracted slave, and the abstracted primitive, is recognition for the lineage of white feminist poetry.

In Howe's notes for *My Emily Dickinson,* there is slippage between the words: worker and slave. The two[33] are weighed and interchanged. The Archive for New Poetry at UCSD holds the complete papers for *My Emily Dickinson*[34] which take the shape of two archival boxes full of research documents and letters to editors. While there is a significant amount of research documents concerning Puritan and early American life, I

[33] Howe marks questions for herself, "White truth as opposed to Black Caps?"
Howe, Susan. My Emily Dickinson Drafts. Updated. Box 7 F 4. Susan Howe Papers, 1942-2002, MSS 0201. Archive for New Poetry, University of California, San Diego. Accessed 21 Mar 2017.

[34] In the book, slavery, Native American, and abolition are not part of the index, though Sappho is.

saw no research documents, bibliographies, or citations concerning chattel slavery. No text by Black Studies scholars. This is not to say that Howe did not consult such documents—but that evidence of any consultation of research, historical or critical commentary about chattel slavery or abolition—are no where to be found in both the textual work or the archive notes. If as Howe argues, “Death and slavery entered the poem with voiceless affliction of the Eider” (122), they truly enter the text as the violence of abstraction. Slavery exists as an abstraction, the condition of, as a haunted image to be guided into: the abolitionist ending that *We* might all live with as poetry.[35]

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There are examples of solidarity that rests not on metaphor but by taking an ethical stance. This is an excerpt of W.E.B. Du Bois’s statement in *Crisis,* a publication he ran in the early 1900s. This is from the 1915 November issue,[36],

> This month 200,00 Negro voters will be called upon to vote on the question of giving the right of suffrage to women. THE CRISIS sincerely trusts that everyone will vote YES. …
>
> To say that men protect women with their votes is to overlook the flat testimony of the facts. In the first place there are millions of women who

[35] Though slavery is abstracted in order to make an argument about the subjugation of white women, Howe argues on the last page, “Poetry is beyond gender. Poetry is redemption from pessimism. Poetry is the great stimulation of life” (138). The great stimulation of life is ungendered? Deracialized? And ultimately about optimism? And if the flip were to remain, if writing is gendered, property remains racialized?

[36] Fatima El-Tayeb provided the feedback that DuBois’s statement was perhaps not made with Black women in mind, which is not a minor concern but a way to re-examine the politics of solidarity, even ones outside the traditions of appropriation.

> have no natural men protectors: the unmarried, the widowed, the deserted and those who have married failures. To put this whole army incontinently out of court and leave them unprotected and without voice in political life is more than unjust, it is a crime.
> There was a day in the world when it was considered that by marriage a woman lost all her individuality as a human soul and simply became a machine for making men. We have outgrown that idea. A woman is just as much a thinking, feeling, acting person after marriage as before. She has opinions and she has a right to have them and she has a right to express them. It is conceivable, of course, for a country to decide that its unit of representation should be the family and that one person in that family should express its will. But by what possible process of rational thought can it be decided that the person to express that will should always be the male, whether he be genius or drunkard, imbecile or captain of industry? The meaning of the twentieth century is the freeing of the individual soul; the soul longest in *slavery* and still in the most disgusting and indefensible *slavery* is the soul of womanhood. God give her increased freedom this November! (29-30 emphasis mine)

What is important to distinguish between DuBois's engagement with 20th century "women's rights" and Howe's articulation of chattel slavery is that Du Bois does not *use* the subjugation of white women, he does not deploy it as an abstraction to argue for the many rights and freedoms that African Americans existed without in 1915. In DuBois, neither women nor slavery becomes metaphor, neither categories are treated as transgressive vessels for the advancement of the writer or his community. Rather, he asks his readership—almost an exclusively African American audience—to vote for suffrage without hesitation, and to take seriously the legal, cultural socio-economic oppression of white women. He concludes by extending the lived experience of the community he's part of to the conditions of his contemporary women. This experiential *offering* (however debatable) is a gesture of recognition and solidarity, rather than one of *appropriation* and erasure.

Appropriation and erasure however, are the frameworks that best describe Howe's deployments of history, abolition, and the lived experiences of captive men and women. Such metaphors makes possible a world in which only they survive.

*

Master's language is
forever thoughtful about what happened before something. Happy
language! Shame is attached to syntax. Seal it or numb it. Most ter-
rible pain you can imagine…
Going to dooms of napalm!
Going to Guantanamo! (68)

—Don Mee Choi

Hence dear narration. Watch me Shine
—Don Mee Choi, from "Let's Get Loud"

Don Mee Choi is a translator of contemporary Korean poetry, particularly of the feminist poet Kim Hyesoon, and a member of "Women For Genuine Security" (WGS), a US network of feminist translators who work with women and children, and on environmental concerns affected by the military industrial complex. This group is linked to the transnational group "International Women's Network Against Militarism," a feminist organization working on the militarized impact that women, children, and the environment face. Since 2000, Choi has translated feminist texts for the Network to be taken across the Korean DMZ, in addition to her local community activism in Seattle. Of

her involvement in various activist movements and communities, Choi has stated in an interview, "My translation and poetry writing are very much rooted in my involvement with the Network."

Through the Network, Choi works with the local Korean organization 새움터, a feminist organization that works with prostituted women (the terminology they prefer), on the militarized border by translating the normalized violence of the neocolonial, military occupation into English so that their deaths could receive (potential) international circulation. So that the violence, and their deaths, are recorded. After all, if not turned English, did it happen?

Don Mee Choi interweaves her translation of military violence into her poetry. They sit inside of her text, next to her Deleuze & Guattari. They roam and roam and flood and spill into each period, each enjambment, and each caesura. Rather than situating translation as metaphor, or a function of it, as Locke and de Man have explained, or as the movement of some nondescript set of ideas and goods, Choi sets translation/metaphor as focused, hierarchical transactions: from empire to its colonies, from empire to its subjects, that a subject needs in order to be legible, and to address grievances. Choi argues,

> translation intent has nothing to do with personal growth, intellectual exercise, or cultural exchange, which implies an equal standing of some sort. South Korea and the U.S are not equal. I am not transnationally equal. My intent is to expose what a neocolony is, what it does to its own, what it eats and shits. Kim Hyesoon's poetry reveals all this, and this is why I translate her work.

Choi's insertion of her translation of militarized violence into her poetry is not a statement of ironic juxtaposition, flirtation with plagiarism and authorship, or an operation of white modernist 'chance' and 'play' — it is a confession that her poetry contains not only her conscripted interiority, but the labored translation/transactions of her communities. The medium of her art, the medium of her selection and their daily labor, is a medium of unconditional violence. Translation is not the site of neutral, ongoing exchanges, it is the site in which we can witness the direction and accumulated logic of power. Translated for whom? Circulated for whom? Metaphors of what?

In interviews and in her writing, Choi makes it clear: her translations are political in that she is framing Kim Hyesoon and contemporary Korean poetry. Choi marks explicitly: her translations of the violence on the Korean border are political, but to lapse another language into English is an act that is not "transnationally equal." Not being "transnationally equal" is the case of Korean or South Korean poetry. Choi has theorized that South Korea is absolutely a "Mercenary State" as well as a neocolony. This positioning renders English not as her second language, but her "neocolonial language." Translation and metaphor for Choi, are not vehicles of aesthetic travel, abstraction, and choice but the manifestation of colonial, neocolonial, and ongoing violence. While Choi is an innovator of translation theory and the most prolific translator of Korean poetry and documents, she has also stated explicitly in her poems that regarding certain notions and memories, "I refuse to translate."

In Choi's oeuvre, political concerns are not the conclusion, the abstraction, or the necessary alibi. In her work, the politics of the neocolony, of Empire, of colonization,

militarization, and its language are material up for construction, destruction, and play. For these reasons, I turn to Don Mee Choi's *The Morning News is Exciting.*

Choi's text appears to be prose poetry. She inserts large theoretical quotes into her work, juxtaposing them as conversations and commentary within the text. Rejecting conceptualist recommendations for 'uncreative writing' Choi cites every insertion, every reference, every idea that she pulls from. Choi takes from different forms and traditions to contend with the canon. Particularly in the sections, "Twin Flower, Master, Emily" and "From Noon—To All Surviving Butterflies," Choi re-imagines, rewrites, and transforms Emily Dickinson's positioning in the literary canon. In, "From Noon—To All Surviving Butterflies" section "1," Choi writes,

> The neocolonizers will soon perish. A farce is a farce, but the bombs
> fall anyway....
> No mention is made of imperialism as a logical
> phase of capitalism (65)

She notes that "To All Surviving Butterflies," is a line from Dickinson's letters and that "No mention is made..." is a line from Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. This strange re-composing of Dickinson's language continues in the section "Twin Flower, Master, Emily" where she rewrites and politically re-positions Dickinson's letters. Choi writes,

1 Dear Twin Flower,

Only—true men—survive. Prior to military pornography, one never
thought about petroleum byproducts. Tarzon Bomb—a thing of the
past—forgiven and forgotten. Daisy Cutter—lags! Consent is every-
where—Geographer—Eternity! Terminate the notion of class when
carrying out simulated bombing runs. Division is threadlike—scal-
lop-toothed—a pretense of some kind—willed arbitrarily. It takes
approximately twenty minutes to cut the waist of a Third World nat-
ion. Excellent yet inferior—this is why—we bang-bang in the woods.
It is every man's dearest wish.

Yours, Master. (73)

In Choi's poetry, the Master responds. His violence is directly articulated, and his voice exists as a source of colonial collaboration. Choi's work in these letters is of particular importance in splicing de Man theorization and Howe's usage of metaphor. Every abstraction (History, Emily, Twin Flower, Master) is triggered by and collapsed into the materialization of ongoing brutalities: Daisy Cutters, Nations, Napalm, DMZ. The text treads in between the space of abstraction, metaphor, and material: it swaps them out and reconfigures their positionalities to frame new questions, transpose the burden of evidence on accepted evidence, then politicizes and demands translations of previous nation building poetics.

Choi's poetics do not rest in the absurd, the satirical—though she plays with

absurdist and satirical language. Choi's poetics are experiments in positioning, theatrics of officialized history with explosive, impossible endings. Choi's language rushes to pronounce predictions and premonitions of the ongoing history of nation building as poetry and translation, vs. "nation cutting" as poetry and translation for others. Choi's epistolaries make explicit the differences in each stake—and demands a response, a translation, a meeting at the DMZ.

Choi has remarked that these prose poems and letters were avenues to have "Emily Speak 'politically,"[37] and to speak directly about race and particularly blackness, because Dickinson never did so. Utilizing Dickinson's form of a letter, Choi re-renders "Emily," "Twin Flower," and "the Master" as characters in an imperial and colonialist plot. Marking each speaker is of essential importance, as the term "Master" is no longer about a Master/slave abstraction, but places a direct burden onto the character of Emily who is corresponding with a Colonial Master. In Choi's poems, the slave body is not abstracted for poetic effect. Instead, the white narrative of abstraction is materialized, pronounced, and characterized. In personifying the Nation, the plot specifies three characters: Master, Emily, and Twin Flower.

Choi's text marks the function of 'nation-cutting' rather than nation-building. These poems, particularly the rewriting of Dickinson's "Master Letters" are not efforts to build the nation (as they might have originally been conceptualized), they are the acts of nation cutting—a giant twirl inside the refrain "Empire must go!" Choi challenges

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[37] This was Choi's answer to a question about her Master Letters, during her reading at the University of California, San Diego. 25 Jan 2012. See, Don Mee Choi, *NWS Reading.* http://libraries.ucsd.edu/speccoll/podcasts/newwritingseries/spd-60.mp3. Accessed 12 May 2017.

Dickinson's form, content, and their abstractions within the framework of historical and contemporary imperialism, contrasting the language of Dickinson while referencing material violence, material bombs (Daisy Cutters, Tarzon) not yet developed during her time. Is it fulfilling a canonical fantasy to reconstruct a proper, contemporary Emily, not of her time (not racialized according to her time, untouched by the privileges of slavery and whiteness, or better yet—being 'aware' of them)? Or rather, do these prose poems, constructed as one of 'her letters,' highlight all that was unsaid by Emily Dickinson, by her poetry, and by those who have continued to celebrate her pedestal? Does it mark what is missing from Emily Dickinson's language system? Or all three?

To quote the text further,

> 3. Dear Twin Flower
>
> Suicide is not
> an option—perhaps Resistance. Send me a portrait of your Distance!
> For politics—I have Walter—*white racism which came to pervade*
> *the world was an integral part of capitalist mode of production.*
>
> Yours Emily

Walter Rodney is the only scholar inserted throughout these epistolary poems. Choi centralizes black scholarship on the colonialization of Africa as the only language

through which to imagine and question Emily's politics. Published in 1972, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* problematized the foundational framework of colonial studies by situating the material conditions of contemporary African nations as the direct result of planned European expansion and exploitation. Rodney's text is often read as a groundbreaking text in post-colonial studies, shifting the interrogation to the legacy of violence stemming directly from European imperialism, rather than pathologizing and fabricating notions of African culture to explain the African present.

The insertion of Rodney's text is not a random "chance" selection. It is the insertion of a primary text, a primer text against settler colonialism and concerning the violence of chattel slavery. It is the only text necessary in this conversation between Emily and the Master. Before the inserted line by Choi, "*white racism which came to pervade / the world was an integral part of capitalist mode of production"* Rodney writes, "However, it can be affirmed without reservation that the…" declaring that white supremacy is not a discussion up for debate, not a series of claims but the foundation of the world to come. After the line "*the world was as integral part of capitalist mode of production"* Rodney's text continues, "Nor was it merely a question of how the individual white person treated a black person. The racism of Europe was a set of generalizations and assumptions, which had no scientific basis, but were rationalized in every sphere from theology to biology" (88). The insertion of this passage into the poem is not an accident. It speaks directly to the ongoing prevalence of racism in 'every sphere' and definitively includes literature and poetry. When Choi rewrites Emily as stating, "for politics—I have Walter" — Choi is inserting that Walter Rodney is the only politics and

language necessary for a conversation that interrogates both the Master and Emily. It is imperative that in this anti-colonial theatrics, Rodney's text *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* is the only "politics" that Emily recites—the only politics she has left with which to engage with the Master—who in this set up and through the politics of Rodney, she can never become but is challenged to dismantle.

Rodney's urgent politics infects Emily positioning. The character "Twin Flower" most exemplifies Rodney's historical interrogation. In the final section, Choi writes,

> 4. Dear Master
>
> "History can confront napalm. …
>
> Daisy cutter can touch us,
>
> cut us, demolish our petals. Our gown can stain like a drape. Trans-
>
> lator for hire! Hire me. See you at DMZ!
>
> Yours, Twin Flower

She situates the third character (Twin Flower) as a translator, navigating the occupation of outsourced militarized translation, confronting history, and confronting history's weapons at the DMZ. And which demilitarized zone? Which kind? The DMZ that now exists for computer security, the "perimeter network" set to "expose" untrusted networks? Or the thirteen demilitarized zones in place currently around the world? The previous demilitarized zones—which were either converted into borders or settler colonial space?

Which ones?

Will Emily Dickinson show up to meet Twin Flower? Can she make it to the DMZ? To place Emily at the DMZ is to place her in the hostility of Empire's neutrality. And to make Emily a witness, an actor, an agent, or a translator for hire at the DMZ ruptures all sense of the previous narrative: the *aborigine of the sky* is the DMZ translator. For whom do Emily and Twin Flower translate? Which languages do they speak? The question of language is absurd, as we know the languages Emily Dickinson spoke, wrote in. Her poetry is the translation of nation building—this is an aggressive claim. Such a claim would place the burden on her poetry, her translations and her critics to argue otherwise—will they show up at the DMZ to translate otherwise?

All such questions and claims reject the easy appropriation of Dickinson's poetry and her abstractions. Choi's questions interrogate the politics of Dickinson's poetry, installing instead the glorious tenets of "nation-cutting" for a poetics that commits, "I belong to none except the gone" (66).

"I belong to none except the gone" are the translated words of Twin Flower, the character stationed (perhaps) at the DMZ, challenging her collaborators/opponents to meet her in the most inaccessible, militarized, poetic terrain.

*

He is not an abstraction

—Wendy Xu, "Notes for an Opening"

Circling back to Philip Harper's abstractionism, critique, and literature I wonder what might occur if instead of privileging the language of abstraction—which he and Cheryl Harris remind incurs a *vacancy* that must be dealt with—criticism concerning experimental poetry tended to what Georges Bataille via art historians have described as the frame of *formlessness,* as well as Eduardo Glissant's notion of opacity—a constructed, survival poetics. Glissant writes, "The opaque is not the obscure… it is that which cannot be reduced, which is the most perennial guarantee of participation and confluence…" (192). He clarifies that the opacity he describes is not the routine vehicle that maintains the political forms of institutional power and violence, but rather remains missing in discussions of language and particularly poetry. Glissant argues that opacity[38] is not what enforces distance between relations, but is necessary for relational building.[39]

Glissant[40] emphases that opacity is necessary for relationality to occur in poetry, and that relations are built not through identifactory exchanges,[41] but rather, through

[38] Glissant writes, "We clamor for the right to opacity for everyone" (194).
[39] I want to extend the what I will be arguing in the 5th chapter, the composite, here. The compositions work in relation to, irrespective of pre-set knowledge or an agreed discourse of transparency.
[40] Glissant presses, "To feel in solidarity with him or to build with him or to like what he does, it is not necessary for me to grasp him. It is not necessary to try and become the other (to become other) nor to 'make' him in my image. These projects of transmutation—without metempsychosis—have resulted from the worst pretensions and the greatest magnanimities on the part of the West" (193).
[41] In an interview with Lisa Lowe, Angela Davis argues for a reading of political embodiments, "[B]as[es] the identity on politics rather than the politics on identity" (318). In *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital.*

gestures that remains unknowable. He writes,

> As far as my identity is concerned, I will take care of it myself. That is, I shall not allow it to become cornered in any essence… Rather, it does not disturb me to accept that there are places where my identity is obscure to me, and the fact that it amazes me does not mean I relinquish it (193).

Relatedly and concerning the illegible, Michel-Rolph Trouillot asks, "…can historical narratives convey plots that are unthinkable in the world within which these narratives take place? How does one write a history of the impossible?" (73). While discussing the anti-black positions of French thinkers Trouillot articulates, "…I am not suggesting that eighteenth-century men and women should have thought about the fundamental equality of humankind in the same way some of us do today. On the contrary, I am arguing that they could not have done so" (82). Trouillot argues that French thinkers laboring through questions of society and 'Man' could not have found the positions/stakes/desires to begin discussing the functions of the white 'Man'. Similarly to de Man's journey of the epistemology of metaphor, such explorations are fixed routes, even in its formulation of metaphor and abstraction it cannot escape whiteness. Trouillot writes that questions of the slave revolt, freedom, and abolition were, "'unthinkable' facts in the framework of Western thought" (82). In this regard, he writes in reference to the Haitian Revolution that "Not only was the Revolution unthinkable and, therefore, unannounced in the West, it was also—to a large extent—unspoken among the slaves themselves (88)" and that this Revolution was, "…not preceded or even accompanied by an explicit intellectual discourse" (88). Revolutions that oppose(d) white-hegemonic capitalists structures cannot be/will not be predicted and managed by Western thought, devices, or poetry—to

speak for slave persons or to speak through them, in this Western tradition, is more a reflection of Western desires than abolition. In this tradition, chattel slavery is the foundation and at the same time, an abstraction.

To mark slavery and abolition in poetry as abstraction is to confess boldly that such poetry is fundamentally incapable of witnessing liberation as it manifests and unfolds.

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# Chapter 4: Appraising Newness: Whiteness, Neoliberalism & the Building of the Archive for New Poetry[1]

...for archivists and other recordmakers, 'the political' is unavoidable.

—Verne Harris, *Archives and Justice: A South African Perspective*[2]

Whiteness: business as usual

—Sara Ahmed, Feministkilljoy[3]

This chapter stems from several roots. The first was my dissertation research into archival documents, from wanting to do extended archival research into the finances of artistic movements, and from making a travel budget to begin this examination. While considering where I *wanted* to go versus where I *could* financially manage to visit, I began to see how certain poetry movement papers existed in concentrations, while others were dispersed. I came to the financial and theoretical understanding that while some

[1] An altered version of this chapter will appear in the *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies*, fall of 2017. I thank Michelle Caswell for inviting me to be part of this special issue and for being a formidable source of knowledge and inspiration. Harryette Mullen and Ryan Wong generously shared their ideas and histories with me. I am so grateful for Fatima El-Tayeb, Grace Hong, Camille Forbes, Dorothy Wang and Lucas de Lima who provided invaluable feedback, criticism, and support, and for Page duBois who contextualized the history of the ANP and early UCSD stories which made this article possible. Colleen Garcia helped with all aspects of the archives, I am indebted to her kindness and patience. Jennie Freeburg and Erica Mena read drafts of the chapter and offered gracious comments, grammatical and theoretical. The anonymous reviewers provided contextualization and a perspective that altered the article for the better, and Ricky Punzalan offered crucial insights into appraisal literature. I am so very thankful and grateful for the intellectual support that my community offered throughout this project.

[2] Verne Harris. *Archives and Justice: A South African Perspective* (Society of American Archivists, 2007).

[3] Sara Ahmed, Twitter post, December 14, 2015, 11:06 p.m., http://www.twitter.com/feministkilljoy.

archives held the papers of *movements,* the papers of other movements were scattered across the United States, or remained uncollected. While my graduate institution, the University of California San Diego (UCSD), holds a comprehensive selections of papers belonging to the founding Language Poets—housed under the umbrella of "Archive for New Poetry" (ANP)—the same archive seemed to have no accessible[4] papers for Black, Asian American, Latin American, and Native poetic movements.[5] In my disseration I argue that "new poetry"[6] breeds an internal and explicit logic of whiteness[7] wherein whiteness becomes indexed to innovation. If, in making this argument, I had aimed to do a comparative study of the politics, aesthetics, and economies of the Black Arts Movement[8] to the Language Poets, this task would have its own financial and political barriers, beginning with archival housing, placement, and location.

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[4]I have been informed that Tony Seymour's papers have been acquired by the ANP in 2012 and are being processed. Seymour will be the sole non-white poet linked to the ANP's collection priorities.

[5] There are collections and libraries devoted to collecting Black, Asian American, Latin American and Native poetic movements. The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, a part of the New York Public Libraries collects the works and manuscripts belonging to cultural producers documenting and researching the African American, African Diaspora, and African experiences. Centers such as the Museum of Chinese in America, the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian, and the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Yale University have also worked to collect the papers and documents of cultural producers documenting immigrant and native experiences. The work of libraries, centers and museums committed to this approach are indispensable and essential. However, the labor that centers, archives, and museums such as these perform do not eradicate the responsibility for public archives across the United States to develop and manage desegregated collections.

[6] "New Poetry" is defined by the ANP as English language US poetry post 1945. See Proposal by Kathleen M. Woodward for Roy Harvey Pearce, Feb 1, 1974, box 2, folder 10, Coll. mss 0143, Roy Harvey Pearce Papers, Archive for New Poetry, University of California San Diego.

[7] This is a point being taken up by contemporary figures in poetry studies. In particular by Dorothy Wang, *Thinking its Presence: Form, Race, and Subjectivity in Contemporary Asian American Poetry.* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

[8] The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture holds the papers of members of the Black Arts Movement, including Bill Gunn, Julian Mayfield, Michele Wallace and others. However, additional archival research on the founding Black Arts Movement poets would be require extensive travel. Amiri Baraka's papers from 1945-2014 are housed at Columbia University, and the University of California Los Angeles holds select correspondences from 1958-1966. Nikki Giovanni's manuscripts from 1943 are currently at Boston University, while Gwendolyn Brooks's papers are situated at the University of California Berkeley and the University of Illinois Champaign. Etheridge Knight's papers are held at the University of Toledo, Butler University, and Indiana Historical Society. Sonia Sanchez's published

The second root was my attendance at the “Paul Blackburn” anniversary reception held at UCSD on May 7th, 2015. The anniversary reception was to celebrate the origins of the “Archive for New Poetry,” which fiscally began with the acquisition of Paul Blackburn’s archive for $35,000 over the course of the 1970s, consisting of recordings of poetry readings and manuscripts. Paul Blackburn was a white male poet associated with the US avant-garde and experimental movements, known for organizing and recording poetry readings. During the reception, the audience heard a sample of Blackburn’s recordings, with a short commentary by the poet Jerome Rothenberg. When Rothenberg stood up to offer his commentary of the archive, he described Blackburn’s efforts: how he traveled everywhere with a recording device, the invaluable originality of his collection and subsequent acquisition. He proceeded to describe Blackburn who, apparently into his forties, appeared to have a “baby face” with wisps of a beard. This led all of Blackburn’s friends (including the speaker, Rothenberg) to call him the “oriental fu manchu.” Pronounced with no hesitation, no laughter, no pause.

Rothenberg’s usage of a racialized slur, which shook me and a few others in the audience but for the most part left no impression and garnered no later remarks, stood audaciously as an entry point from which I could critically engage with the archive. Rothenberg, consciously or unconsciously, describes a member whom he believes to be a heir of “new” poetry as abjectly racialized. He did not appear to be an adult, and in his unadult, baby ways he appeared closer to *them.* The fact that “oriental” and racialized “others”—their recordings, papers, and memorabilia—are not part of ANP’s collection or development priorities did not figure in his comments or the description of ANP. This

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writings and photographs are held at Boston University, though as of May 2016 I could not find information regarding her manuscripts.

effacement and racial fungibility comes with scholarly explanations of "ethnicization," a point I will return to later.

The third root of this chapter comes from the afterword written by Frank Chin in John Okada's *No-No Boy*. *No-No Boy* was published at the end of World War II and became foundational to the organizing of Asian American literature and studies. Chin writes about visiting with Okada's widow Dorothy and learning that John had written a sequel to the novel. Chin cites a passage John wrote in 1957: "When completed, I hope that it will to some degree faithfully describe the experiences of the immigrant Japanese in the United States. This is a story which has never been told in fiction and only in fiction can the hopes and fears and joys and sorrows of people be adequately recorded."[9] Chin describes how Dorothy informs the interviewers that John had almost finished a first draft of the sequel before passing away. The afterword also shares how Dorothy, after John's passing, met with the University of California, Los Angeles Japanese American Research Project to see if they might keep his manuscripts, papers, and drafts. UCLA "refused to so much as look at the Okada papers."[10] Dorothy states that, "I could not afford to keep the house and put the children through college… Nobody had any use for them. Nobody wanted them."[11] In fact, the research project encouraged her to "destroy the papers,"[12] and so as a single mother preparing to move from a home to a smaller apartment, she burned John's papers, including the draft of the sequel, away.

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[9] Dorothy Okada speaking about John Okada's papers in the afterword. John Okada, *No-No Boy,* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976), 257.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.

Though individual moments and encounters have led me to examine the financial and racialized structures of the archive, I would like to state that this chapter is not about individual actions. My critique of the Archive for New Poetry is not about one individual's biases or failings, or even a grouping of individuals[13] but of institutions.[14] This article is an examination of the institutional and financial efforts to keep whiteness the norm. I am arguing that whiteness structured ANP's collection development priorities, and this prioritization was institutionally justified through literary scholarship that links innovation to whiteness. In this chapter, I wish to show in my research of the planning and budgetary papers, how the building of the archive was not the decision of one person but a concerted effort of institutional and financial investment, and that this investment secured the "racial 'unconsciousness,"[15] of the collection development priorities.

The two major frameworks this chapter will address are: 1. How does whiteness—though visible and open—remain unquestioned as an archival practice? and 2. How are white archives financed and managed? Terry Cook poses that it is necessary to investigate "Why records were created rather than what they contain … what formal

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[13]Archive building—particularly in the case of ANP—was a collaboration between university faculty and archivists. A defense of previous and current acquisition practices might be that there were/are no faculty at the university interested in setting up a "Black Arts archive" or a Chicana experimental poets archive. This defense however, would not be a defense of current/previous archiving practices but a statement as to how institutionalized racism (faculty hiring, course listings) are expressed in the archives, and how the archives are not immune to the formations of institutionalized racism.

[14]In a letter on May 30th, 1975 from Michael Davidson to Roy Harvey Pearce, Davidson informs him of the various publications that have received a resume of ANP, which are "APR, Boundary 2, Journal of Modern Literature, 20th Century Lit., PMLA, Antaeus, Paris Review, Poetry Chicago, Poetry Review, Tri-Quarterly, Contemporary Literature and the St. Marks Poetry Project." The archive's objectives were not to be insulated or obscured from the literature community. I cite this note as visualizing a structural problem: where whiteness can be seen again and again, distributed and circulated without question or inquiry. Letter. Michael Davidson to Roy Harvey Pearce. May 30 1975, box 2, folder 11, Coll. mss 0143, Roy Harvey Pearce Papers, Archive for New Poetry, University of California San Diego.

[15] Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination,* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1992), xiii.

functions and mandates of the creator they supported."[16] In taking up the question of why were these records created, I work to address how, through the trends of historiography and scholarship, and without ethical appraisal processes, whiteness underlined collection development priorities at the Archive for New Poetry at the University of California, San Diego. Without critical race theories and the praxis of structural racism, it is unclear how various institutional actors might explain the large absence of nonwhite poets in the finding aid—and the absence of nonwhite poets in the collection strategy.

There are manuscripts desired by the institution, sought after, handsomely compensated. There are manuscripts that, even when donated, cannot be accepted into the archive. How are these racialized divisions of "emergent" literature catalogued, uncatalogued? And how are we to inspect the blueprint for decisions that collect some and destroy others? Terry Cook denotes that this happens because of the appraisal process, that appraisal "[D]etermines which documents are destroyed, excluded from archives, their creators forgotten, effaced from memory… "[17] I would add that the undercurrents of the appraisal processes of the Archive for New Poetry is what Toni Morrison describes as the "racial unconscious" of US literature. Regarding the "Africanist presence and persona" in US literary tradition, Morrison writes, "What I am interested in are the strategies for maintaining silence and the strategies for breaking it… . How does excavating these pathways lead to fresh and more profound analyses of what

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[16] Terry Cook, "Mind Over Matter: Towards a New Theory of Archival Appraisal," in *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor,* ed. Barbara L. Craig, (Ottawa: Association of Canadian Archivists, 1992), 47.

[17] Terry Cook, "We Are What We Keep; We Keep What We Are: Archival Appraisal Past, Present and Future," *Journal of the Society of Archivists, 32:2* (2011): 174.

they contain and how they contain it."[18] The appraisal practices of the ANP can read, in this light, as processes of maintaining silence. In this chapter I hope to interrogate the financial and appraisal strategies maintaining open segregation so that we might one day entirely break them.[19]

**Archive Building, Neoliberalism & Money**

> You will find that the Archive has developed beautifully.
>
> —Roy Harvey Pearce to James Laughlin, May 14th 1980[20]

> The archive for New Poetry at the University California, San Diego, represents an attempt to collect all poetry written in the English Language since World War II
>
> —Proposal, 1975[21]

Currently, there is no other institutional archive that boasts a "new" poetry collection. "New"—according to the definition on University of California San Diego's finding aid—is post-war poetics, from 1945 and on. "New" also, as I will argue later, has a specific racialized fixation. The ANP was built with the specific intention of collecting

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[18] Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1992), 51.

[19] While I am deeply invested in issues raised by critical archival studies, I myself am not an archivist nor an archival studies scholar. I examine the Archive for New Poetry and utilize archival theory, but my training is in cultural studies and English literature, so the horizon for this chapter will be an examination of the archives from the perspective of an active user.

[20] Letter. To James Laughlin from Roy Harvey Pearce. Roy Harvey Pearce Subject file. ANP curator correspondences and subject files Rss 1034, Box 5, folder 24, Curator's Correspondence and Subject Files. Special Collections: The Archive for New Poetry, University of California San Diego Library, San Diego.

[21] Proposal. Kathleen M. Woodward for Roy Harvey Pearce , May 22, 1974, box 2, folder 10, Coll. mss 0143, Roy Harvey Pearce Papers, Archive for New Poetry, University of California San Diego.

alternative, small press publications. The singularity of the ANP's collection is both its valor and its branding. I think many scholars working in literature and cultural studies would agree that we must pay attention to alternative cultural formations as they are manifesting. The ANP's stated collection development priority was to acquire alternative, non-mainstream, emerging, "experimental" poets as they were writing and alive. To provide a space in which their papers could live—along with recordings of their poetry readings —was ANP's aim.

The first and foundational acquisition for the ANP was Paul Blackburn's collection acquired June of 1973 for $27,800. ANP would eventually pay $35,000 for Blackburn's "complete" papers.[22] When adjusted for inflation,[23] $35,000 would amount to about $187,089 today[24]. In a 1980 "Paul Blackburn Preface" to the bibliography of the collection, Kathy Woodward[25] narrates the acquisition of Blackburn's archive as a momentous event. The Blackburn collection situated the shape and tone of the Archive: the direction for US American "Newness" was set to a particular definition of counterculture. The Blackburn acquisition set the foundations of ANP.

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[22]Additional funds were needed for the Blackburn archives, as the papers from 1950-1955 had not been acquired in 1973. Pearce looked first to private donors writing, "The collection is a paramount one, both intrinsically and in relation to our possession of the rest of the Blackburn materials." Letter. To Charles Taubman from Roy Harvey Pearce. Oc 11, 1979. Roy Harvey subject file. ANP curator files. RSS 1034 Box 5, Folder 24. Archive for New Poetry Curator Papers. Archive for New Poetry, University of California San Diego Library, San Diego.

[23] I used this inflation calculator in order to calculate inflation rates: http://www.usinflationcalculator.com

[24]David C Sutton notes that, Gabriel García Márquez's papers were auctioned at Christie's with a price guide "between $80,000 and $120,000" (289). The acquisition price for the Blackburn and Rothenberg papers are well situated in previous sale points of highly noted writers. See David C Sutton. "The destinies of literary manuscripts, past present and future." *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 42, no. 3 (2014): 295-300

[25] Woodward writes, "In the summer of 1973, the Archive for New Poetry at the University of California at San Diego was fortunate to acquire the Paul Blackburn Archive. Consisting of poetry manuscripts, personal journals, over 650 books, a vast correspondence with other poets and publishers, some 350 reels of tapes of poetry readings, 1150 little magazines, and memorabilia of all kinds, it is a magnificent collection of research materials for both Blackburn studies and American poetry." Paul Blackburn Documents. ANP curator files, January 17 1980, RSS 1034 Box 6, Folder 7. Archive for New Poetry Curator Papers. Archive for New Poetry, University of California San Diego Library, San Diego.

According to the records, it is unclear what processes were involved in the appraisal of the Blackburn manuscripts, or for the preceding appraisals, or even to what extent archivists were involved in the procedure. There are differing discussions regarding the methodologies[26], stakes[27] and politics[28] of appraisal. Terry Cook describes several trends and histories of appraisal,

> First, the archivist as curator who did not do appraisal, but left that to the creator; secondly, the archivist-historian indirectly appraising based on values derived from trends in historiography; thirdly, the archivist directly appraising based on researching, analyzing, and assessing societal functionality and all related citizen-state activities; and now, fourthly, perhaps we are ready to share that appraisal function with citizens, broadly defined, where we engage our expertise with theirs in a blend of coaching, mentoring, and partnering.[29]

From the acquisition records and correspondences from Roy Harvey Pearce to research assistants and librarians, the appraisal and collections development for the ANP seems to have been wholly executed not by archivists but administrators and professors who situated the leanings of their scholarship as the bases for the acquisitions. Regarding the politics involved in appraising personal papers Riva Pollard writes, "Where the question of 'value' is mentioned, it is in a vague manner, often deferred to 'experts' or 'personal knowledge[30].'" The appraisals for the ANP seems to have been the tastes/values of certain figures of the literature department, particularly Roy Harvey Pearce.

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[26]Though not exhaustive, see Carol Couture, "Archival Appraisal: A Status Report," Archivaria 59 (Spring 2005): 83-108.

[27] For a discussion on this see Helen Willa Samuels, "Who Controls the Past," *The American Archivist*, vol. 49, no. 2 (Spring, 1986): 109-124.

[28] See Terry Cook, "Mind Over Matter: Towards a New Theory of Archival Appraisal," in *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor* ed. Barbara L. Craig, (Ottawa: Association of Canadian Archivists, 1992), 38-70.

[29] Terry Cook, We Are What We Keep; We Keep What We Are: Archival Appraisal Past, Present and Future," *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 32:2 (2011):182.

[30] Pollard, Riva. "The Appraisal of Personal Papers: A Critical Literature Review." Archivaria 52 (2001): 136-150

Pearce's appraisals founded the ANP. In a 1973 draft of the proposal[31] titled "Notes Towards a Center for New Poetry" Kathy Woodward, then a research assistant to Roy Harvey Pearce writes,

> The need for a center on this UC campus that is humanities based is enormous, crying, desperate. UCSD is not only now known and branded as "science-oriented" branch of UC, but the new college additions are floundering and will not take up the slack in the cause for the humanities… .We must have, it seems to me, a semi-independent 'center,' one, that is, which is not associated with the vested interested of any one college here, but which will serve and symbolize the campus as a whole, something which will put UCSD on the map as a campus for the humanities as well one for science.

Woodward, working with Roy Harvey Pearce—former Dean of Graduate Studies and a founding member of the literature department—argued that a "Center" for new poetry at UC San Diego would distinguish the "science-driven" appearance of the campus. A Center for New Poetry would fill the necessary humanities void; "New" poetry could symbolize the university.

In the proposal, the Center was imagined as what Stuart Hall described as the potential of a living archive[32], what several archival theorists have described as a record continuum.[33] The Center would facilitate poetry readings that would be recorded and

[31]There are several drafts of this proposal, dating from September 1973 to late 1974. Proposal. Kathy Woodward for Roy Harvey Pearce. September 1973 Coll. mss 143, Box 2 Folder 10. Pearce, Roy Harvey Papers. Special Collections, University of California San Diego Library, San Diego.

[32] "Constituting and Archive. *Third Text* 15. 54 (2001): 89

[33]See the work done by Frank Upward and Sue McKemmish in particular. Frank Upward, "Continuum Mechanics and Memory Banks**.**" *Archives and Manuscripts*, 33.1 (May 2005): 84-109 and Sue McKemmish. "Placing records continuum theory and practice". *Archival Science*. 1.4 (S. (2001): 333–359. In addition, in *Archiving the Unspeakable: Silence, Memory and the Photographic Record in Cambodia,* Michelle Caswell writes, "In the view from the continuum, all of these activations—past, present, and future—form the never-ending provenance of these records, each adding a new layer of meaning to a constantly evolving collection of records that open out into the future." Michelle Caswell, *Archiving the Unspeakable: Silence, Memory and the Photographic Record in Cambodia,* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014).

archived, there would be summer workshops, a poet-in-residence program, publications, and the Archive for New Poetry (ANP). The two components of this proposal that found funding and still remain on the UCSD campus are the Archive for New Poetry and the poetry reading series, which remain recorded and archived in the ANP.

The updated 1974 proposal[34] stated that the budget for three years of the poetry reading series, counting for inflation, would be at around $19,363.50 ($93,215 today). The budget[35] included a reading and travel fee for the invited poet, and estimated that to record and archive all the poetry readings would be $4384.77 ($21,108 today) for three years. The budget for the Center was proposed at $30,000 ($144,423 today) with $12,000 ($57,769 today) being the director's salary.[36]

On the last page of the proposal, Woodward writes,

> Contemporary American Voices will present nine poets and three scholars per academic year. Each quarter the three readings and one lecture will be unified by a single theme or topic such as Black Mountain Poetry, Women's Poetry, Confessional Poetry, Ethnopoetics (Native American Poetry in Translation), Black Poetry, Poets and Sciences, and Inter-media Poetry. The lectures, which will be of broad appeal and serve to clarify the cultural impact of contemporary poetry in general, are planned to give

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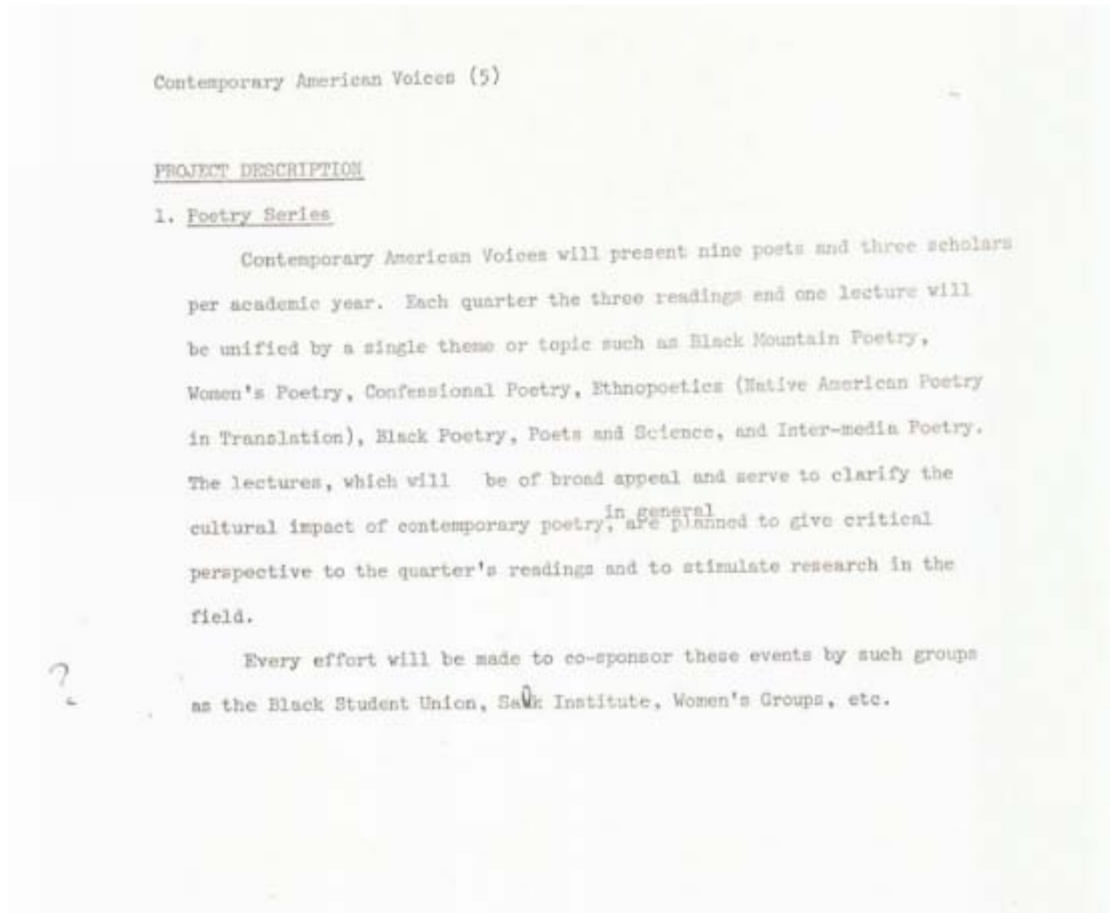
[34]The May 22 1974 proposal prefaces that it is for a "three-year grant a San Diego New Poetry Series administered by the Archive for New Poetry at the University of California, San Diego." The proposal seems to have been written for a broad and unspecified audience as it reads, "We are therefore requesting ________ [sic] for the following…" What is clear is that the University is part of the dialogue. At the end of the first page it reads, "The University of California, San Diego, is ready to finance this proposal with matching funds representing one-fourth of the total." Proposal. Kathleen M. Woodward for Roy Harvey Pearce , May 22, 1974, box 2, folder 10, Coll. mss 0143, Roy Harvey Pearce Papers, Archive for New Poetry, University of California San Diego.

[35] The budget indicated that acquisitions for the Archive for New Poetry, as imagined under the "Center for New Poetry," would be handled by the libraries' budget. Later in the chapter I will discuss how the manuscript acquisition for the archive seem to have happened through the assistance of private donors, friends of the library committee, and funds matched through the chancellor's office.

[36] "Proposal for: Contemporary American Voices" Kathy Woodward for Roy Harvey Pearce. May 22 1974. Coll. mss 143, Box 10, folder 2. Pearce, Roy Harvey Papers. Special Collections, University of California San Diego Library, San Diego.

> critical perspective to the quarter's readings and to stimulate research in the field.
>
> Every effort will be made to co-sponsor these events by such groups as the Black Student Union, Salk Institute, Women's Groups, etc. [marginalia indicates a question mark here]



Contemporary American Voices (5)

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Poetry Series

Contemporary American Voices will present nine poets and three scholars per academic year. Each quarter the three readings and one lecture will be unified by a single theme or topic such as Black Mountain Poetry, Women's Poetry, Confessional Poetry, Ethnopoetics (Native American Poetry in Translation), Black Poetry, Poets and Science, and Inter-media Poetry. The lectures, which will be of broad appeal and serve to clarify the cultural impact of contemporary poetry in general, are planned to give critical perspective to the quarter's readings and to stimulate research in the field.

? Every effort will be made to co-sponsor these events by such groups as the Black Student Union, Salk Institute, Women's Groups, etc.

Image 4.1 [Detail from the 22 May 1974 proposal. Mss 143, Box 2 Folder 10]

In the paragraph "Every effort" there exists a question mark. The gesture of inclusion in the first paragraph, with its subsequent question mark is one way to read the collection development priorities of the ANP. If the "Center for New Poetry" is to symbolize a collective University appearance, one might deduce that the symbolization must at least appear inclusive, diverse—such are the operations of neoliberalism. Grace Hong argues

that neoliberalism is "...the ideological and epistemological shift that occurred with the emergence of the current stage of racial capital following the worldwide liberation movements of the post–World War II period, movements that encompassed struggles for decolonization, desegregation, and revolutionary engagements over the state."[37] Neoliberalism is the ideology formed against worldwide decolonization and revolutionary movements, by appropriating and manipulating the language of diversity, inclusion and safety in exchange for accelerated state violence and neocolonial expansion. In regards to its praxis Grace Hong writes, "Neoliberalism is a structure of disavowal, an epistemological framing, a way of seeing and not seeing."[38] The categories in the proposal: Black Mountain Poetry, Women's Poetry, Confessional Poetry, Ethnopoetics (Native American Poetry in "Translation"),[39] Black Poetry, Poets and Sciences, and Inter-media Poetry, might represent the makeup of academic categorizations of poetry. Much like the construction of ANP, they are categories of "seeing" and "not seeing." Additionally, the phrase "Every effort…" is revealing in that the proposal acknowledges how the expertise of these divided categories might not be held by the center and its directors alone. Lastly, the question mark is revealing marginalia, as it shares with users and viewers the drafting process. The editor—presumably Pearce as the papers are in his collection —might agree that the Center could

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[37] Grace Hong, *Death beyond Disavowal: The Impossible Politics of Difference*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 17.

[38] Grace Hong, *Death beyond Disavowal: The Impossible Politics of Difference* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 17.

[39] I do not know what to make of ethnopoetics or its formal definition as described in the proposal. The collapsing of "Native American Poetry" and "Translation" as its own category, spearheaded by a white male poet, Jerome Rothenberg, is deserving of a much longer critique and critical attention.

symbolize something for the University and that for this reason, neoliberal inclusion would be its rhetoric, but would *outside* consultants be necessary?

Furthermore, the gesture of inclusion in this proposal denotes the qualities of addition, trial and error, and the necessity of approval. Art historian Susan Cahan describes this phenomenon as "the quality debate,"[40] as it explains the exclusion of specific actors as a quality question; the lack of quality becomes the reasoning non-white artists and writers were and are unable to bypass the borders of institutional gatekeeping.[41] Fundamentally eluding conversations regarding structural history and institutional policies, the "quality debate" reduces structural categorical segregation to efforts of individual persons, being examined by other individuals. The "quality debate" allows for the institution to remain innocent arbiters of objective value. In thinking about the inseparability between institutions, archivists, and records, Helen Samuels articulates, "Individuals and institutions do not exist independently,"[42] meaning that "Institutions do not stand alone, nor can their archives."[43] Put simply, could Pearce have worked to exclusively collect the manuscripts of poets associated with the Black Arts Movement? How would the quality debate be situated in this non-hypothetical thought experiment—as the Black Arts Movement too was an innovative, new poetic movement situated during the same historical moment as Language Poetry? How did whiteness and normalizing

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[40] See Susan E. Cahan, *Mounting Frustrations: The Art Museum of the Age of Black Power,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 6.
[41] Susan E. Cahan, *Mounting Frustrations: The Art Museum of the Age of Black Power,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).
[42] Helen Willa Samuels, "Who Controls the Past," *The American Archivist*, vol. 49, no. 2 (Spring, 1986): 111.
[43] Helen Willa Samuels, "Who Controls the Past," *The American Archivis*t, vol. 49, no. 2 (Spring, 1986): 112.

whiteness configure into what was deemed collectable? It is because of institutional policy and structures that certain kinds of "individual acts" are not questioned.

Verne Harris argues that appraisers,

> [A]ssume that they can remain exterior to the processes that they are seeking to document. That, of course, is not possible. They participate in those processes; they are complicit in the recording of process. The appraiser's values, quality of work, perspectives, interaction with the creators and owners of records, engagement with the policy he or she is implementing, and so on, all become markings in the appraisal and determine what becomes the archival record. The appraiser is a co-creator of the archival record.[44]

Pearce was institutionally in a position to appraise, assess value, and remain unquestioned. Pearce's values, perspectives, and interactions are part of the ANP. I have examined the correspondences of Roy Harvey Pearce and his work with the ANP, and I can state with some confidence that I have yet to see any dialogue between him and the Black Student Union, Women's groups, *etc.*[45] This is not to assert that dialogue may not have transpired between such groups, but from the correspondences and acquisition endeavors it is clear that "every effort" was made to collect the manuscripts and invite the figures of the Language Poets and white avant-gardists. "Every effort" was most definitely made there.

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[44] Verne Harris, "Postmodernism and Archival Appraisal: Seven Theses," *South African Archives Journal*: 48-50.

[45] I have spent some time looking through the chancellor's office papers, but I have been unable to procure the final draft proposal sent. However, in a correspondence between Roy Harvey Pearce, John L. Stewart, and Andrew H. Wright from Paul Saltman from the office of the Vice Chancellor, Saltman states, "[T]he possibility of moving towards such a program or center, within the context of the University. Obviously, outside funding will necessarily have to be sought. It should be done in the context of a total understanding of the role of the center in the education and research plan before the campus as a whole and the department in particular. We also have to put it into the priorities of our fund-raising activities." The proposal received positive interest and initial institutional support. Letter, Oct 2 1973, box 2, folder 10, Coll. Mss 143, Roy Harvey Pearce Papers, Archive for New Poetry, University of California San Diego.

In thinking about value and in order to provide a frame of reference regarding "every effort" I turn to a correspondence that Pearce had with the librarian John Haak on November 20th 1974.[46] Pearce is informed via a dealer[47] on November 19th, 1974 that while Columbia University has an original set of Allen Ginsberg's poetry collection , ANP might acquire one of the two sets of Ginsberg's archives, about "400 hours" of programming for about $7500 ($36,105 today). One day later on November 20th 1974, Pearce writes Haak and states,

> I urge you in the strongest possible terms to do all you can to acquire one of the two sets of tapes which will be produced… With those tapes added to what we have in the Blackburn archives and others we are acquiring, the Archive for New Poetry will be even more a major national source of such materials.

Pearce's enthusiasm for one of the "sets," and the urgency in which he wrote to Haak, is a clear example of "every effort." It is also an opening into the speed of the appraisal process, as well as what manuscripts were considered valuable. When we look at the absences in the archive, I think it is helpful to situate that institutional actors had focused and clear collection development priorities, and that their priorities are documented in the archive.[48]

The proposal passages are also helpful in understanding the intricacies of racialized collections. If the archive is intended to be a continuation of previous, present, and ongoing poetry, and the archive is intended to actively expand by inviting poets through a reading series, then how the reading series is structured and organized will be

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[46] Letter. Roy Harvey Pearce to John Haak, 20 November 1974. Coll. mss 143, Box 2, Folder 10. Roy Harvey Pearce Papers. Special Collections, University of California San Diego Library, San Diego.

[47] Laurence McGilvery to Roy Harvey Pearce. 19 November 1974, Coll. mss 143, Box 2, Folder 10. Pearce, Roy Harvey Papers. Special Collections, University of California San Diego Library, San Diego.

[48] I should note that for reasons unknown, the Ginsberg set was not acquired by the institution.

how the archive will continue to be structured and organized. Thinking about the racial dynamics of the archive should not be the gesture of symbolic diversity, inclusion—Public Relations—but part of its design and praxis. I state this to call attention to how a proposal for a poetry center could be put together, executed, funded, and continued with little to no examination of its approach to race relations. Information studies scholar Todd Honma argues that "[L]ibraries were also guilty of perpetuating a corollary system of racial exclusion."[49] Given this history Honma writes, "LIS needs to embrace this spirit of social justice if it is to truly engage in meaningful discussions about race."[50] Cultural sites of instigation and memory, archives and poetry, in this sense, must have everything to do with racial justice.

Harris declares that, "Appraisal will always be closer to storytelling than to scientific endeavour despite the claims assumed by the term 'archival science.'" And that, "Oppressors claim that their story is the truth and they hide evidence of the story's telling. 'This is not a story, an interpretation; it's the truth.'"[51] I wished to investigate the story constructed in the archive further, and to explore different kinds of evidence. This led to another 1974 Proposal[52] for Contemporary American Voices: A three-year grant to fund a San Diego New Poetry Series administered by the ANP at the University of California,

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[49] Todd Honma, "Trippin' Over the Color Line: The Invisibility of Race in Library and Information Studies," *InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies*, 1(2) (2005).
[50] Todd Honma, "Trippin' Over the Color Line: The Invisibility of Race in Library and Information Studies." *InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies*, 1(2) (2005).
[51] Verne Harris, "Postmodernism and Archival Appraisal: Seven Theses," *South African Archives Journal*: 48-50.
[52] This version of the proposal was not approved for funding and it is unclear whether the proposal was resubmitted. Letter. Roger Rosenblatt to Roy Harvey Pearce. Oct 21, 1974 proposal. Coll. mss 143, Box 2 Folder 10. Pearce, Roy Harvey Papers. Special Collections, University of California San Diego Library, San Diego.

San Diego, submitted to the National Endowment for the Humanities. I found this reference in the storytelling, to echo the institutional gestures of inclusion above,

> The Department of Literature is … most exceptionally strong in the field of modern American poetics ... Prof Shirley Williams [sic], a specialist in Black Poetry.[53] And what is of significant importance, most of these scholars are also practicing poets. Their expertise will be crucial in creating the context in which this project will interact with students and community.

Harris continues that, "This power of the storyteller is ultimately a political power. Which is why, in a democracy, society must find ways of holding archivists accountable for their appraisal decisions."[54] In thinking about accountability, I looked through all of the correspondences between Pearce and Williams. If Sherely Ann Williams was ever consulted about the ANP, there is no record of this in the archive. There are no correspondences between her and Pearce, or her and the curator of the archive regarding its collection development priorities, or their appraisal decisions. Of course, in a game of conjecture one might argue that communication between the figures might have been misplaced, that inquiries were made verbally, or some other set of circumstances we cannot imagine prevented them from being preserved. But seeing as how the manuscripts of black poets were not collected during this time, or thereafter, it is safe to deduce that her consultations were limited, though her expertise on the subject matter was advertised

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[53] This is clearly the incorrect spelling for Sherely Ann Williams, but this is how her name appeared in the proposal.

[54] Verne Harris, "Postmodernism and Archival Appraisal: Seven Theses," *South African Archives Journal*: 48-50.

on behalf of the archive. In fact, in a 1977[55] letter to Williams from Pearce regarding her essay[56] "A Review of Onwuchekwa Jemie, LANGSTON HUGHES: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE POETRY," Pearce claims, "What I miss in such writing about Black writing as I know (admittedly not enough—but then do you know all[57] of Hawthorne?) is a sense of the psycho-cultural issues involved in such matters." While Pearce admits[58] to not knowing much about Black writing, he believes he can assess its lack. Additionally, Pearce believes his admissions of a lack of knowledge in black writing is excused by his expertise in other matters such as Hawthorne, expertise that Williams surely could not posses.

I highlight this part of the letter not to speculate, but to situate how the inclusion of Williams' expertise in the proposal for funding does not align with how her literary expertise affected the archives. Pearce's private letters to Williams were exclusively patronizing and condescending—yet her expertise is flouted in public. Perhaps it was clear to Pearce that it would be unacceptable to describe the archive as it was actually

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[55] Letter. From Roy Harvey Pearce to Sherely Ann Williams. 28 May 1977, MSS 492, Box 2, Folder 32. The papers of Sherely Ann Williams. The Archive for New Poetry, Special Collections, University of California San Diego Library, San Diego.

[56] Essay, draft by Sherely Ann Williams. May 28 1977, titled: "A Review of Onwuchekwa Jemie, LANGSTON HUGHES: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE POETRY" MSS 492, Box 2 Folder 32. The papers of Sherely Ann Williams The Archive for New Poetry, Special Collections, University of California San Diego Library, San Diego.

[57] I am preserving the punctuation marks of the original letter. In the letter Pearce underlines "all."

[58] Toni Morrison has remarked that such confessions of "lack" are often made with a sense of pride. In fact Pearce, after confessing his lack, proceeds to list book recommendations for Williams, entrusting that while he lacks knowledge in black writing, he has the knowledge to mend the critical framing in Williams' essay. Morrison writes, "It is interesting, not surprising, that the arbiters of critical power in American literature seem to take pleasure in, indeed relish, their ignorance of African-American texts. What is surprising is that their refusal to read black texts—a refusal that makes no disturbance in their intellectual life—repeats itself when they reread the traditional, established works of literature worthy of their attention" (13). See Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination,* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1992).

being built: through a segregated[59] imagination, segregated collection development priorities, and segregated appraisal decisions and acquisitions, conditions made possible by an unexamined "racial 'unconsciousness.'"[60] Perhaps it was clear to the proposal committee and the institution that such unambiguous phrasing could not be utilized in university budgets and public grant proposals.

Harris continues, "Appraisal is the activity whereby archivists identify societal processes they think are worth remembering and the records that will foster such remembering."[61] Williams' expertise did not shape the appraisal process nor the collection. However, the societal processes, interactions, and values that would represent the ANP became more and more clearly defined. The 1975[62] guidelines for the archive demonstrate how the proposal above became implemented and translated. The "I. History of the Archive for New Poetry" reads,

> Ten years ago, under the direction of Roy Harvey Pearce, the central University Library began collecting books and little magazines of contemporary poetry in the English language. *The aim was and still is to contain every item of such poetry published since 1945,* thus serving as one of the richest sources for reading and research in its field [emphasis mine].

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[59] Segregation here is not an abstraction. While Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Brown Vs. Board of Education in 1954 was to overturn federal segregation, desegregation did not happen immediately. In fact Alexander vs. Holmes County of Education in 1969 exemplifies the ossified pace of desegregation. The historical context for ANP's proposal year of 1974 is a period in which desegregation was in transition (amidst the Vietnam War), and yet as Michelle Alexander argues, transformed into our current system of mass incarceration. See *The New Jim Crow.* (New York: The New Press, 2010).

[60] Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination,* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1992), xiii.

[61] Verne Harris, "Postmodernism and Archival Appraisal: Seven Theses," *South African Archives Journal*: 48-50.

[62] Michael Davidson to Roy Harvey Pearce. Document. June 18, 1975, Coll. mss 143 Box 2, Folder 11. Roy Harvey Pearce Papers. The Archive for New Poetry, Special Collections, University of California San Diego Library, San Diego.

Regarding objectively research-driven archives Riva Pollard articulates, "The notion that acquisition should be researcher-centred not only promises uneven representation of a society within archives, but also leads inevitably to more questions. Which researchers, for instance, are to be considered when making such decisions?"[63] Who did ANP imagine as its researcher? The proposal copiously outlines how the archive/imagined center would keep their book collection current for this imagined researcher, it states in its **"**III. Ordering Procedures" that there will be,

> A. Blanket order. The ANP receives most of its materials through a blanket order held with Sand Dollar books in Berkeley. The terms of this blanket order are as follows:
>
> 1. Coverage: new U.S., Canadian and Australian small press publications with emphasis on the "new poetry" published since World War II. Significant American translators may be supplied, but British imprints are to be excluded. Large presses are to be excluded as a rule.

What is telling about the specificity of these requirements is the careful exemption of English from non-European nation states and the collapse of settler colonialism and English. English language poetry from India, Singapore or the Caribbean for example is outside of the ANP's *coverage.* Are we to conclude that indigenous poetry from Australia and Canada were to be included? The proposal includes the *potentially marginalized* white English poets from around globe; its imagination thorough in what it considers theirs, and what it cannot consider.[64]

In trying to keep the ANP kept its collection current through a "blanket order" with one bookstore in Berkeley. If the aim is to "*contain every item of such poetry*

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[63] Pollard, Riva. "The Appraisal of Personal Papers: A Critical Literature Review." Archivaria 52 (2001): 136-150

[64] I wish to thank Dorothy Wang for a conversation in which these questions were raised.

*published since 1945"* it is unclear how such aims might be achieved by placing a blanket order from one bookstore,[65]at least not without serious flaws in its execution. Surely the task of collecting "*every item of such poetry published since 1945"* is a limitless undertaking; the mandate could loom and loom. Depending on one bookstore to deliver all the materials is a curious approach. In regards to collecting methodologies, Anthony Dunbar writes that,

> Archival holdings that are rich with evidential and informational value are useful in reconstructing historical moments in that they reflect the values of the individuals and historical eras in which the records were created. Examination of such records can reveal the subjective bias of the record creators or the circumstances in which records were created to document.[66]

It is unclear from the records how and why one particular bookstore was selected to supply a blanket order. According to the logic of Dunbar, the direct channel from the ANP to Sand Dollar Bookstore articulates the dynamics of an historical moment and the organizations' subjective leanings; it highlights further a blueprint of institutional gatekeeping. This blueprint is illuminated in a 1974 letter[67] to Pearce and David Antin, in which then-project coordinator and former ANP curator Michael Davidson drafted a documented entitled "Poets to be given extensive coverage in the Archive for New

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[65] The San Dollar Bookstore was run by Jack Shoemaker. Discussions regarding the "blanket order" began as early as fall of 1974. In a September 25, 1974 letter to Pearce, Davidson outlines the guidelines. See Letter. Michael Davidson to Roy Harvey Pearce. Sept 25 1974. Coll. mss 143, Box 2 Folder 10. Pearce, Roy Harvey Papers. Special Collections: The Archive for New Poetry, University of California San Diego Library, San Diego.

[66] Anthony Dunbar, "Introducing Critical Race Theory to Archival Discourse: Getting the Conversation Started," Archival Science 6 (2006): 117.

[67] Letter. Michael Davidson to Roy Harvey Pearce. Sept 25 1974. Coll. mss 143, Box 2 Folder 10. Pearce, Roy Harvey Papers. Special Collections: The Archive for New Poetry, University of California San Diego Library, San Diego.

Poetry." Out of 84[68] poets, David Henderson and Amiri Baraka are the only black poets listed. There are no other poets of color included, and absolutely no women of color, though there were powerful poets working at the time, such as Bob Kaufman, Gwendolyn Brooks to name a few from the many. According to the list, "Poetry published since 1945" is filtered through a very specific racialized and gendered framework.

Additionally, Baraka's inclusion in the "coverage list" is curious, as he is without a curator's file,[69] and aside from this listing, there are no other correspondences indicating how his poetry would receive attention or focus. There is a note in the fall of the 1976 Archive Newsletter that he is to give a "Black Marxism" talk, and to read poetry on November 12th. But other than these references, there is no other archival indication that he or Henderson received any care. In contrast, many of the white poets on this list did receive "extensive coverage" and their papers were eventually acquired by the ANP.

The blueprint of the ANP demonstrates the reliance on specific actors to create the bulk of the records. The strict methodology of trusting one bookstore and ostensibly one anthology, and the initial appraisal list demonstrates how the architects of ANP envisioned its space as quarantined and screened through an unexamined heterosexual white male gaze. Whiteness is not articulated as a preference, as an objective in either of

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[68] The 84 poets listed in this document overlap with the poets from *The New American Poetry 1945-1960* edited by Donald Allen (whose papers are in the ANP), considered a canonical anthology. In the Spring 1978 "Archive Newsletter" announcing the acquisition of the Donald Allen archive, it states, "If the names O'Hara, Ginsberg, Olson, Snyder, Creeley, Kyger, Whalen and Welch mean anything to us today, it is largely through the efforts of Donald Allen, the editor of the landmark anthology, *The New American Poetry*. When it came out in 1960, the book virtually defined the field of contemporary poetry in its most progressive stage by presenting poets such as those mentioned above along with prose statements in the back of the book which articulated poetic stances." The book it seems, also defined the archive. Newsletter. Spring 1978. Coll. mss 143, Box 2 Folder 12. Pearce, Roy Harvey Papers. Special Collections: The Archive for New Poetry, University of California San Diego Library, San Diego.

[69] I raise this point as it seems like almost every poet who visited to read at UCSD has a file in the curator's archives. The files often contain poems, interviews and the curator's introductory remarks that introduced the poet. I was excited to see that he did in fact, visit the campus and found the absence of a file to be puzzling.

the proposals, but whiteness grounds the blueprint and development of the ANP. The discussion of whiteness and the archive is not additive, or complementary to discussion of archives and collections, but foundational. In discussing how critical race theory must be part of the conversations regarding archives Dunbar argues,

> In the most practical sense, CRT challenges the privileges of dominant culture—particularly whiteness—as the normative benchmark of social acceptability. All whiteness theories problematize the normalization and naturalization of whiteness. Rejecting the notion of white values as a generic or colorblind norm, they point to how the very status of whiteness as a norm is a privilege.[70]

According to the proposal records or ANP's current collection, while whiteness is neither articulated[71] nor discussed, whiteness is the norm. The Archive of New Poetry is not white because New Poetry is white, or because poetry is white. The Archive of New Poetry is white because whiteness was naturalized, normalized, and unexamined. The whiteness of the Archive of New Poetry mirrors an historical moment in which institutions unabashedly practiced--perhaps without the intention to do so--the whitewashing of cultural production. Normalizing whiteness is a strategy, a theory, in praxis[72]. It is neither objective nor reflective of new poetry. Rather, it reflects the politics of the institutions.

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[70] Anthony Dunbar, "Introducing Critical Race Theory to Archival Discourse: Getting the Conversation Started," Archival Science 6 (2006): 113.

[71] As Ruth Frankenberg writes, "The phrase 'the invisibility of whiteness' refers in part to moments when whiteness does not speak its own name. At those times, as noted, whiteness may simply assume its own normativity. It may also refer to those times when neutrality of normativity is claimed for some kinds of whiteness, with whiteness frequently simultaneously linked to nationality." I first found Frankberg's essay in Anthony Dunbar's article. See Ruth Frankenberg, "The mirage of an unmarked whiteness," in *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness,* ed. Birgit Brander Rasmussen, Irene J Nexica, Eric Klinenberg, Matt Wray (Durham: Duke University Press 2001), 72-96.

[72] See George Lipsitz. *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Benefit from Identity Politics.* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998).

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In *Workshops of Empire* Eric Bennett discusses the formations of the prominent Iowa workshops as vitally linked to the Congress for Cultural Freedom.[73] Bennett states that in 1967 Paul Engle, the then director of the University of Iowa's writing program (as of then, not established as prominent)[74] was approached by a CIA cultural front, the Farfield Foundation, to discuss the possibility of a funding partnership. Bennett argues that this financial partnership—along with private sources driven by Cold War interests—catapulted Iowa to its now familiar, contemporary MFA writing program throne. Bennett's research situates how the CIA would facilitate a mixture of public funds and private, often acting as a conduit for funding relationships between public institutions and private donors. Like Bennett, I, too, prioritize financial accounting history as a way to grapple with the architecture of culturally prized programs.

Similarly to how Bennett charts the intersections between private and public funding for Iowa's MFA, funding for the manuscripts and publications related to the ANP seems to have come from a mix of private donors and public funding through UCSD. The funds from UCSD matched private funds or took the shape of research assistant funding.[75] To provide an example of the private/public coordination, in 1977 the

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[73] Eric Bennett, *Workshops of Empire,* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2015).
[74] Today University of Iowa's writing program is considered to be one of the best MFA writing programs in the country, and has produced a slew of well-known writers and poets. However, Bennett argues that this was not the case when the program began. For more on Iowa's accounting history see, Eric Bennett, *Workshops of Empire,* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2015).
[75] Starting in 1976 there is consistent correspondence to renew a 12 month research assistant stipend for the ANP. Financial discussion regarding the RA occur on January 11 1977 and February 28th 1979. In February 25th 1982 Pearce writes to Manuel Rotenberg requesting that the RA remain at 12 months rather than 9, as

ANP wished to begin a publishing press to print literary pamphlets. Pearce wrote that, "Its aim would be to make available documentary/archival material central to the making of poems in our time. No such enterprise, so far as I know, is presently is in operation. So that we should be pioneering." The first endeavors would be to print an interview with Ed Dorn and the archival materials of Charles Reznikoff. In securing funding for this Pearce wrote to a frequent donor to state that the project would cost $5000 ($19,582) and wished to request for a $1000 core fund.[76] In January 5th of 1978, the UCSD librarian Ronald L. da Silveira informs[77] Pearce that the library would provide $1000 to be matched by the chancellor's office. And on January 20th 1978, the chancellor's office agrees[78] to match the amount.

Another example of this triangulation is the appraisal and acquisition of the Jerome Rothenberg archives. In a 1976 letter[79] from Davidson to Pearce, it is noted that Jerome Rothenberg requested $50,000 for his collection. When adjusted for inflation this is approximately $208,555 today. The matter seemed to be resolved in 1982[80] with a new

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the ANP "now constitutes one of the three or four major collections of its sort in the world. It is the most used of the division of Special Collections. It attracts researchers not only from the United States but from abroad." It is unclear if his request was met, but in the least the RA position continued from 1976 to 1982. See Coll. mss 143 Box 2, Folder 12. Roy Harvey Papers. Special Collections: The Archive for New Poetry, University of California San Diego Library, San Diego.

[76] Letter. To Kenneth Hill from Roy Harvey Pearce. November 7, 1977. Coll. mss 143 Box 2. Folder 12 Roy Harvey Papers. Special Collections: The Archive for New Poetry, University of California San Diego Library, San Diego.

[77] Letter. Ronald L. da Silveira to Roy Harvey Pearce. January 5th, 1978. Coll. mss 143, Box 2, Folder 12. Roy Harvey Papers. Special Collections: The Archive for New Poetry, University of California San Diego Library, San Diego.

[78] To Ronald L. da Silveira, from William D. McElroy Chancellor. January 20, 1978, Coll. mss 143 Box 2, Folder 12. Roy Harvey Papers. Special Collections: The Archive for New Poetry, University of California San Diego Library, San Diego.

[79] Letter. Michael Davidson to Roy Harvey Pearce. October 13, 1976. Coll. mss 143 Box 2, Folder 11. Roy Harvey Papers. Special Collections: The Archive for New Poetry, University of California San Diego Library, San Diego.

[80] Letter. To Charles Taubman from Roy Harvey Pearce. Roy Harvey Subject file. March 4 1982 ANP curator correspondences and subject files Rss 1034, Box 5, folder 24, Curator's Correspondence and

appraisal. Pearce writes a donor asking if they could provide funds to acquire the Rothenberg collection, now set at $30,000 ($71,486). The donor agrees to provide[81] $15,000. The other $15,000 must have been found by other means as ANP holds the Rothenberg papers today.

In the 1978[82] "Archive Newsletter," the ANP announces that it will begin purchasing dissertations. It states that it has been purchasing dissertations on "Gary Snyder, Robert Duncan, Robert Bly, James Wright, Sylvia Plath, Robert Creeley, Charles Olson, the Beats, the Black Mountain School, Heidegger and postmodern poetry, Eastern Religion[83]… Lew Welch and Philip Whalen, and others. We will continue to purchase them as funds become available." Every imaginable filament in the development of white modernism, white avant-garde traditions was procured, managed, and financially tended to via public and private funding. Regarding this kind of omnipresent yet unspoken whiteness Mario H. Ramírez challenges, "But what are the factors that contribute to this disparity and which continue to support whiteness as an archival norm?"[84]

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Before concluding this financial and historical overview of the ANP I want to comment that the makeup of the poetry readings series (which was then mostly recorded

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Subject Files. Special Collections: The Archive for New Poetry, University of California San Diego Library, San Diego.

[81] Letter. To Kenneth Hill from Roy Harvey Pearce. Roy Harvey Subject file. April 16, 1982. ANP curator correspondences and subject files Rss 1034, Box 5, folder 24, Curator's Correspondence and Subject Files. Special Collections: The Archive for New Poetry, University of California San Diego Library, San Diego.

[82] Newsletter. Fall 1978, Coll. mss 143 Box 2, Folder 12. Roy Harvey Papers. Special Collections: The Archive for New Poetry, University of California San Diego Library, San Diego.

[83] It is curious to see how the East is fragmented and invoked here.

[84] Mario H. Ramírez, "Being Assumed Not to Be: A Critique of Whiteness as an Archival Imperative," *The American Archivist* 78, (Fall/Winter, 2015): 349.

and entered into the ANP) seemed to have a different approach in its curation from the acquisition of manuscripts in the ANP. Or rather, they do not seem like yearlong lists of whiteness and maleness, though there certainly was quite a bit of this. Regarding the race relations of poetry readings and poetry circles of this time period, poet and scholar Harryette Mullen states that in terms of racial make-up, "We do know that these communities were not completely separate."[85] There is a glimpse of this "non-separateness" in the poetry readings.[86] As mentioned above, Baraka visited the campus in 1976, David Henderson also read in 1976,[87] as did Wai-Lim Yip--who was a professor at UCSD--in 1976,[88] Wanda Coleman read in 1979,[89] Ishmael Reed read in 1978,[90] Lonny Kaneko in 1980,[91] Gozo Yoshimasu read in 1981,[92] June Jordan read in 1982,[93] and

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[85] Harryette Mullen (Poet, Professor at UCLA) in discussion with the author, Personal Interview. January 2016.

[86] The majority of the reading dates come from: ANP curator files: Coll Rss 1034, Curator's Correspondence and Subject Files. Special Collections: The Archive for New Poetry, University of California San Diego Library, San Diego.

[87] David Henderson subject file, ANP curator correspondences and subject files: Coll Rss 1034, box 4 folder 48, Curator's Correspondence and Subject Files. Special Collections: The Archive for New Poetry, University of California San Diego Library, San Diego.

[88] Wai-Lim Yip subject file, ANP curator correspondences and subject files: Coll Rss 1034, box 6 folder 2, Curator's Correspondence and Subject Files. Special Collections: The Archive for New Poetry, University of California San Diego Library, San Diego.

[89] Wanda Coleman subject file, ANP curator correspondences and subject files: Coll Rss 1034, box 4 folder 11, Curator's Correspondence and Subject Files. Special Collections: The Archive for New Poetry, University of California San Diego Library, San Diego.

[90] There is no file for Ishmael Reed so this date is from the Archive's Newsletter. Winter 1978, MSS 143 Box 2, Folder 12. Roy Harvey Pearce, Papers. Special Collections, University of California San Diego Library, San Diego. Roy Harvey Papers. Special Collections: The Archive for New Poetry, University of California San Diego Library, San Diego.

[91] Gozo Yoshimasu subject file, ANP curator correspondences and subject files: Coll Rss 1034, box 6 folder 3, Curator's Correspondence and Subject Files. Special Collections: The Archive for New Poetry, University of California San Diego Library, San Diego.

[92] Lonny Kaneko subject file, ANP curator correspondences and subject files: Coll Rss 1034, box 4 folder 55, Curator's Correspondence and Subject Files. Special Collections: The Archive for New Poetry, University of California San Diego Library, San Diego.

[93] June Jordan subject file, ANP curator correspondences and subject files: Coll Rss 1034, box 4 folder 54, Curator's Correspondence and Subject Files. Special Collections: The Archive for New Poetry, University of California San Diego Library, San Diego.

Lawson Fusao Inada read in 1983.[94] A founder of the Nuyorican movement poet Jesús Papoleto Meléndez read, and Atukwei Okai, Alma Villanueva, Gina Valdes, Inés Talamantez all gave readings. Poets Darío Galicia, Bruno Montane, Mara Larrosa, Roberto Bolaño, Mario Santiago, Inma Marcos, Cuauhtemoc Mendez, Rubén Medina can also be found in the curator's files.[95] This may not be the exhaustive list of non-white poets whose readings were sponsored by the Archive for New Poetry, but they are the names provided by the information currently on display in the curator's files.

The point is not that the ANP was insulated—that is, removed from contemporary poetry. Detailed financial compensation and budgeting was involved in inviting the poets to campus and in deciding how to acquire manuscripts. Suffice it to say, specific decisions were made in both inviting poets to read, and deciding which manuscripts to then acquire.

## Rogue-counting "Innovation" as Whiteness

Racism: How your exclusion is assumed as self-exclusion

To be honest: pointing out whiteness is almost as tiring as whiteness.

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[94] Lawson Fusao Inada subject file, ANP curator correspondences and subject files: Coll Rss 1034, box 4 folder 51, Curator's Correspondence and Subject Files. Special Collections: The Archive for New Poetry, University of California San Diego Library, San Diego.

[95] Darío Calicia, Bruno Montane, Mara Larrosa, Roberto Bolaño, Mario Santiago, Inma Marcos, Cuauhtemoc Mendez, and Ruben Medina are grouped under "Latin American Poets" and the subject file indicates an "n.d." or a no date. It is unclear whether this means the date for the reading was not recorded, or if a planned event did not come to fruition. Latin American Poets subject file, ANP curator correspondences and subject files: Coll Rss 1034, box 4 folder 61, Curator's Correspondence and Subject Files. Special Collections: The Archive for New Poetry, University of California San Diego Library, San Diego.

—Sara Ahmed, feministkilljoy[96] [97]

In "Whose New American Poetry? Anthologizing in the Nineties," poetry critic Marjorie Perloff links experimentation—a venture into the poetic new—with whiteness. She writes,

> . . . the eighties witnessed the coming of the minority communities: first women and African-Americans, then Chicano and Asian-American and Native American poets, gay and lesbian poets, and so on. In their inception, many of these poetries were, ironically, quite *conservative* so far as form, rhetoric, and the *ontology* of the poem were concerned. *But counterculture poets and critics couldn't—and still can't—say this out loud*[98] *because they would have immediately been labeled racist or sexist* [emphasis mine].[99]

Perloff's statements might help construct the ideological impetus for why certain kinds of white poetry has been structurally defined as ontologically not-conservative, or New. Perloff explicitly suggests that the exclusion of non-white, non-heteronormative poets in US American poetry anthologies is, well, their fault. This is explicitly due to their inability or recalcitrance to embrace the formal innovation practiced by *radical* white poets. Perloff's argument situates "Other" poets as unsophisticated, outdated, behind, lesser craftspeople more vested in an older, passe, white[100] articulation of confession of

[96] Sara Ahmed, Twitter post, December 11, 2015, 10:32 p.m., http://twitter.com/feministkilljoy.

[97] Sara Ahmed, Twitter Post, December 14, 2015, 11:44 p.m., http://twitter.com/feministkilljoy.

[98] Perloff implies here that counterculture experimentators of ontology and form were polite enough not to label "Other" poetry as conservative, though clearly Perloff is unafraid of doing so and being labeled racist and sexist. So. Let's call it what it is.

[99] Marjorie Perloff, "Whose New American Poetry? Anthologizing in the Nineties," *Diacritics* 26.3/4 (1996): 118.

[100] Note: the forms "Other" poets are engaging with, in this argument are not their "own." They are simply the old forms new white poets no longer wish to engage with.

self and identity than in the creation of new emergent white politics and white[101] forms[102].

The shift that glorifies form (innovation) in poetry—or argues that form is in itself a category—does so by marking race as the epithet. The marking of race becomes the epithet that denounces the work as outside the realm of experimental, conceptual, New. Harryette Mullen has argued that aesthetic categorization and race produce what she describes as "aesthetic apartheid." The marking of race renders the poet, their poetry, and their poetic archive somehow as *readily available,* readable, clear, formally uninteresting, and conservative. Whether or not their work is literally available (in bookstores! in archives!), or is actually being critically examined seems to be of no concern to those who have abided by the Perloff tradition.[103]

In order to read clearly how this racialized theorization of "newness" affects the Archive for New Poetry, I have performed a kind of *rogue-counting* within the ANP. I call this method rogue counting because it involves gathering numbers for a purpose other than what is intended. While gathering historical information in the archives I looked through the finding aid listing under "American Poetry: Manuscript Collections"

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[101] For a full reading of Perloff's approach to race and poetry see, Dorothy Wang, *Thinking its Presence: Form, Race, and Subjectivity in Contemporary Asian American Poetry.* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

[102] With little contest, Perloff defends the exclusion of "Other" poets via the standards of formal innovation. And though according to this standard, this camp IS exclusive, both in terms of members and desires articulated, this genre cannot be labeled racist or sexist. It will merely practice segregation as it sees fit: without explanation or discussion of any formal terms.

[103] I am inclined to argue that the "Perloff Tradition" is the one in which the ANP operates in its inception, design, curatorial, and acquisition practices. During February 9th-11th 1982, the ANP held a conference titled, "San Francisco Renaissance Conference" in which Perloff, and an all-white speaking list discussed the innovation of "San Francisco Poetry." Whose San Francisco, whose new, whose poetry? See, ANP Curator files, RSS 1034, Folder 12 and 13. Archive for New Poetry Curator Papers. Archive for New Poetry, University of California San Diego Library, San Diego.

and counted how whiteness composed this collection. All 69 poets listed[104] in the finding aid for the Archive of New Poetry are white. Most of them are linked to the "Language Poetry"[105] movement—a movement more recently[106] critiqued for its whiteness. The racial makeup of this list is patently reflective of contemporary and Perloffian theorizations concerning "new," "experimental," "US," "poetry." The finding aid does note that other poetry manuscripts not listed under "American Poetry: Manuscript Collections" may exist. For example, the late Sherley Ann Williams, emeritus professor at UCSD, prolific writer and poet, is not listed in this section. However, UCSD does hold her papers, so it is possible that other entries such as hers may exist. However, other than this example, and during the immense time I have spent in the poetry section of UCSD's archives, I have not come across a significant manuscript collection belonging to a non-white poet other than Williams. And to repeat: she is not collected under the ANP collection priority.

The argument of how deliberate or indirect exclusion, neglect, and misreadings have shaped historical cultural segregation and continue to do so is not a new one. The examples are countless. Writers and literary scholars have written endlessly and

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[104] At times there were two different finding aid links separating correspondence & papers for the same poet. Though there are two links, I counted this as a single poet. I did not count press materials (Momentum Press Archive, Moramarco and Zolynas Editorial Files, Sun & Moon Press Archives, United Artist. Records) nor did I count the curator files. My decision not to count the press and curator files comes not out of a decision to disclude their narrative/politics, but out of one to examine the papers of poets in the archive. In addition, the press papers reflect the correspondences that occurred between the poets in the archive, and their publishing endeavors. For this reason I did not count them twice.

[105] Language Poetry was/is a movement comprised of poets living in the San Francisco area from the 1960s to the 70s. The poets articulated a commitment to moving away from traditional lyric and narrative poetry and dismantling language by producing what at times appeared as "unreadable" language games. Unreadability and purposeful fragmentation are defining aesthetic tropes of the Language Poets. For a full synthesis on their practices see n particular see, David Marriott. "Signs Taken for Signifiers" *Assembling Alternatives.* ed. Romana Huk. (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2003): 338-346.

[106] See Dorothy Wang, *Thinking its Presence: Form, Race, and Subjectivity in Contemporary Asian American Poetry.* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

historically on issues of race and literature, from modern US American literature,[107] to British colonial works,[108] to science fiction,[109] and avant-garde studies.[110] Regarding art, Susan Cahan argues that US museums have been and remain resistant, if not hostile to racial integration.[111] She supports this argument through an extensive examination of museum acquisition and exhibition records. The policies of contemporary exhibitions and biennales regarding race and art remain unaltered.[112] Of archives, Ramírez has argued, "...whiteness persists as the *terra firma* of the archives profession in the United States and, in turn, informs the very formation of its praxis."[113] Terry Cook argues that parallel trends of exclusion, neglect, and mismanagement can be witnessed in archive development. He writes,

> In many societies, certain classes, regions, ethnic groups, or races, women as a gender, and non-heterosexual people, have been de-legitimized by their relative or absolute exclusion from archives, and thus from history and mythology—sometimes unconsciously and carelessly, sometimes consciously and deliberately. Perhaps the more germane pithy assertion

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[107] See Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination,* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1992). And Trinh T. Minh-Ha. *Woman Native Other.* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 1989.

[108]See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," *Critical Inquiry*, 12:1 (Autumn 1985): 235-61.

[109] See Andre M. Carrington, *Speculative Blackness: The Future of Race in Science Fiction*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2016).

[110] See in particular, Lisa Lowe. *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996). Grace Kyungwong Hong. *The Ruptures of American Capital: Women of Color Feminism and the Culture of Immigrant Labor.* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006). Dorothy Wang's book *Thinking its Presence: Form, Race, and Subjectivity in Contemporary Asian American Poetry,* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

[111] See Susan E. Cahan, *Mounting Frustrations: The Art Museum of the Age of Black Power,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

[112] The Whitney Biennale of 2014 is evidence of this. For discussions see, Eunsong Kim and Maya Mackrandilal. "The Whitney Biennial for Angry Women" *THe New Inquiry.* April 2014. http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/the-whitney-biennial-for-angry-women/

[113] Mario H. Ramírez, "Being Assumed Not to Be: A Critique of Whiteness as an Archival Imperative," *The American Archivist* 78 (Fall/Winter, 2015): 340.

> about appraisal should rather be: we are what we do *not* keep, what we consciously exclude, marginalize, ignore, destroy.[114]

Cook's assessment of processes of appraisal and collection development correspond with contemporary critiques made in literary, art historical, and cultural studies scholarship. Archives do not necessarily need to reflect the under- and over-tones of dominant narratives, and yet in the case of the ANP, they do.

Regarding whiteness and the archive Todd Honma states, "With respect to LIS, libraries have historically served the interests of a white racial project by aiding in the construction and maintenance of a white American citizenry as well as the perpetuation of white privilege in the structures of the field itself."[115] The structures of the field—subjective appraisal methodologies and institutional collections development priorities, as well as literary scholarship—functioned in tandem to normalize the whiteness of the archive. Perloff's definition of a "non-conservative" approach to formal innovation extrapolates clearly how an experimental, US American poetry archive comes to find the acquisition logic of its manuscript collection to be based in segregation. The ANP, as I have displayed above, was constructed meticulously to be a "living archive" of "new" US American poetry. How "new" was defined in the ANP's blueprint and in its original collecting efforts, as well as its ongoing acquisitions, strictly reflects Perloff's articulation for the New, for innovation, in poetry. Somehow in this structural diagram, the framework of race and otherness is theorized as excluding itself out of the present, out of the future, and out of innovation only to be rootly stuck in a dystopic past. Though let's

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[114] Terry Cook, "We Are What We Keep; We Keep What We Are: Archival Appraisal Past, Present and Future." *Journal of the Society of Archivists, 32:2,* (2011): 174.

[115] Todd Honma, "Trippin' Over the Color Line: The Invisibility of Race in Library and Information Studies," *InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies*, 1(2)( 2005): 4.

be honest, if they can barely be found in the archives today, which past[116] are they so adamantly stuck in? And how might we get there.

*

Almost since its inception, the Language Poets have been theorized as direct heirs of western "avant-garde" poetry and art. The "Archive for New Poetry" acquiring the manuscript of living Language Poets in the late 70s and 80s might be one way to think about how the Language Movement, while heralded as "radical" "new" "avant-garde" and even "marginal," received epistemological and financial institutional support from its composition. However, this is not the way the Language Poets are usually theorized.[117] Timothy Yu lays out a peculiar argument regarding "ethnicization" and the avant-garde in order to contextualize Language Poetry. In the second chapter of his book, *Race and the Avant-Garde: Experimental and Asian American Poetry since 1965*, titled "Ron Silliman: The Ethnicization of the Avant-Garde" Yu argues that Language Poetry sustained the thrust of "innovation" and all that comes with the "avant-garde" by adopting a form of "ethnicization." Yu gets to this point by pointing to letters in the ANP from Ron Silliman to Charles Bernstein and other Language Poets. Yu cites a letter to Peter Glassgold of New Direction from Silliman that reads,

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[116] A footnote cannot suffice in covering the current "absences" in what might constitute the new in US American poetry. And absence is a failing word, as though their absence in the ANP is in any way an indicator of their lives elsewhere.

[117] There are been meaningful critiques of Language Poetry. In particular see, David Marriott. "Signs Taken for Signifiers" *Assembling Alternatives.* ed. Romana Huk. (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2003): 338-346

> I am not a language poet.
>
> I hope, in choosing your title, that you are aware of the comparability of the phrase "language poetry" to epithets such as nigger, cunt, kike or faggot
>
> (Letter to Glassgold 6/9/1986)

In the letter Silliman rejects the aesthetic framework his poetry received. The framework of "language poet" –he believes—is an epithet. Silliman implies that "language poet" is a category of degradation, by arguing that racial and gendered slurs are analogous to term "language poet" as it too is not of one's selection, but a term that signifies obvious mistreatment and violence. In regards to this letter Yu states, "Silliman's equation seems, on its face, absurd. Yet it is also true that the equation of Language writers with a racial or gender grouping flows logically out of Silliman's earlier pronouncements on poetry and politics…"[118] Yu claims that this political line of reasoning can be witnessed in previous proclamations—so at least Silliman is consistent? Yu then extrapolates that Silliman's positioning is not only consistent, but avant-garde. Yu explains,

> Silliman's *powerful, possibly offensive*, equation of "Language poetry" with racial slurs suggests the bluntest version of this latter position: "Language poet" is not simply an aesthetic but a social identity. Ultimately, this ethnicization of Language writing can be seen as an attempt to *reclaim* the *moral authority extended to the writing of women and minorities*—a kind of redemption of white new left discourse[119] [emphasis mine].

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[118] Timothy Yu, *Race and the Avant-Garde: Experimental and Asian American Poetry Since 1965*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 58-59.
[119] Timothy Yu, *Race and the Avant-Garde: Experimental and Asian American Poetry Since 1965*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 60.

I am not sure how Silliman's statement could "possibly" be offensive: it is offensive. It is not offensive *and* powerful: it is offensive. It is astonishingly violent to equate racial and gendered slurs—slurs that are utilized in daily, lived experience—to a body and social position protected from the history of racialized and gendered slurs. Clearly "Language Poetry" is not an epithet—it is witnessed as an academic and formal poetic category, supported institutionally with an exclusive archive at UCSD. "Language Poetry" has never been a slur and will never be a slur. Yu's argument suggests that the political/aesthetic positioning of the Language Poets and those grouped under this category through celebration and hostility constitutes the process of ethnicization. This argument of marginalization is supported through the personal accounts of individual members rather than through a structural and institutional examination of the collective, which is how social theories of race and ethnicities are currently utilized and formed.[120]

Is Yu attempting to explain the absence of poets of color[121] in the Language Poetry movement by suggesting that Silliman and others were "ethnic"—in private, in their poetry? That their reach into the ethnic was a reach into the "moral authority" stemming from an imagined "lower position" whose actual structural position could be appropriated into what appeared like a "new" white movement? "Ethnicization" is a theorem contemplating the possibilities of a "different kind of ethnicity" or a "different kind of white" for Silliman, one that deserves its own categorizations, theorization and

[120] There are many scholars that have written on the construction of race. Though not an exhaustive list, see, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva. *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America.* (Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003). Angela Davis. *Women, Race & Class*. (New York: Vintage, 1983). George Lipsitz. *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Benefit from Identity Politics.* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998). Michael Omi and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

[121] Or conversely, did the absence of people of color not occur for Yu?

regard. By suggesting that whiteness can be "ethnicized" through a false identification with racialized violence and experience, Yu's argument attempts to enact a pathway that nuances Silliman out structural whiteness. In the context of the argument and by default, the whiteness of Language Poetry and the whiteness of the Archive for Poetry can be appeased. I find Yu's defense of the politics and aesthetics of the Language Poets as being akin to an ethnic category to be useful in imagining how the composition of the "New Archive" might also be defended.

However Yu's misreading of Language Poetry and Silliman's "ethnicization" could not amount to a defense, as both Silliman's reaction and Yu's analysis might be better expounded as the dynamics of white fragility.[122] In the letter to Glassgold, Silliman is reacting to a situation: Silliman feels that he is not afforded the centralized and proper role and care he is entitled. Instead, his aesthetic project is categorized under a phrase he does not like, and marginalized in a way to which he is not accustomed. DiAngelo writes that "White Fragility may be conceptualized as a product of the habitus, a response or 'condition' produced and reproduced by the continual social and material advantages of the white structural position."[123] What is being expressed in Silliman's usage of racialized and gendered epithets is not a form of solidarity with "underdeveloped" writing and writers of color—as writers of color in the case of The Archive for New Poetry experienced and experience ongoing erasure, absence and marginalization. Rather, Silliman's usage of racialized and gendered slurs display the astonishment that one's superior white structural position was not immediately reflected. Though as the Archive

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[122] Robin DiAngelo defines white fragility as, "[A] state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves." For a discussion regarding white fragility see Robin DiAngelo, "White Fragility," *The International Journal of Critical Pedagogy 3.3* (2011): 54-70.
[123] "White Fragility," *The International Journal of Critical Pedagogy 3.3* (2011): 58.

for New Poetry's collection development priorities denotes, Silliman's hierarchical expectations for Language Poetry was part of ANP's horizon.

By theorizing that the formation of Language Poetry functioned as processes akin to "ethnicization," Yu's argument avoids how pre-existing formations of whiteness might operate within Language Poetry, and exempts whiteness from being structurally addressed as a pre-existing social identity and form of property.[124] In lieu of discussions regarding whiteness and Language Poetry, how does the focus of the argument become ethnicization and Language Poetry? While Silliman and various and ancillary members of the Language Poets may have felt disrespected, misaligned, and devalued individually, these individual experiences are not reflective of the structural, financial, and epistemological support the movement received and receives. Rather than analyzing the individual and private pains of the various members of Language Poetry, it would be historically and institutionally illuminating to examine the conditions[125] that allowed for Language Poetry to rise into institutional prominence.[126] The Archive for New Poetry is

[124] The whiteness unaddressed in Yu's argument is a function of whiteness, as whiteness is ideology as well as a structural position. There is a growing archive of critical whiteness studies but as a succinct guide Robin DiAngelo writes, "Whiteness is thus conceptualized as a constellation of processes and practices rather than as a discrete entity (i.e. skin color alone). Whiteness is dynamic, relational, and operating at all times and on myriad levels. These processes and practices include basic rights, values, beliefs, perspectives and experiences purported to be commonly shared by all but which are actually only consistently afforded to white people." See "White Fragility," *The International Journal of Critical Pedagogy 3.3* (2011): 56.

[125] Art historian Anna Chave argues that it is not inconsequential that Minimalism became important and valued in museum settings during the Civil Rights Movement. Minimalism, in its early formation, was an aesthetic movement comprised mostly of white men. Minimalism, Chave argues, is a reflection of the military, state, and corporate power that the social movements of the 60's and 70's protested. Minimalism's identification with and representation of corporate and military power ensured its museum prominence—as museum prominence is not in itself reflective of cultural popularity or political impact. The example of minimalism is useful in delineating "new" Language Poetry as catalogued by the ANP versus other "new" aesthetic movements uncollected by the ANP. See Anna Chave, "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," *Arts* 64. 5 (January 1990): 44-63.

[126] It's important to note that information studies scholarship has been considering how to archive societal value and social movements rather than scholarship trends. Terry Cook proposes macroappraisal, which would "[S]anction for archival appraisal 'value' of determining what to keep by trying to reflect society's values through a functional analysis of the interaction of the citizen with the state." In addition,

evidence of this. It begs the question how theories regarding ethnicity can exist without structural examination. Robin DiAngelo writes that "Racism is not fluid in the U.S.; it does not flow back and forth, one day benefiting whites and another day (or even era) benefiting people of color. The direction of power between whites and people of color is historic, traditional, normalized, and deeply embedded in the fabric of U.S. society."[127] How might we understand ethnicization in a history and present in which racism remains fixed, its circulation rooted and unchanged? Silliman's usage of racial and gendered slurs to describe his situation is not a powerful aesthetic moment. It's a moment of white fragility and white privilege in which the white actor, in a structural position of power, expresses his utter confusion regarding the dynamics of race (because he does not have to think about them). Silliman's usage of slurs is not a gesture of reclaiming power, but rather of privilege and insulation.

Returning to Yu's assessment, is "moral authority" a term that denotes a sense that there are issues in which women and minorities might write about, with not only *authority* but with a sense of *morality* not entrusted to white male writers?[128] To state that women and writers of color are "extended moral authority" is an argument that views racialization as a set of privileges that whiteness is deprived of—and that must be

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macroappraisal creates the possibility that the archive function as a cultural memorial site where it "deliberately seeks to give voice to the marginalized, to losers as well as winners, to the disadvantaged and underprivileged as well as the powerful and articulate, which is accomplished through new ways of looking at case files and electronic data and then choosing the most succinct record in the best medium for documenting these diverse voices." (180-181). Cook proposes a radical approach to the process of memories and collecting. See, (2011) "'We Are What We Keep; We Keep What We Are: Archival Appraisal Past, Present and Future," *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 32:2, 173-189.

[127] "White Fragility," *The International Journal of Critical Pedagogy 3.3* (2011): 56.

[128] For an accounting of how systematic and institutionalized gendered and racialized violence permeates academia, see *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia.* ed. Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs, Yolanda Flores Niemann, Carmen G. González, Angela P. Harris.(Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2012).

*reclaimed.*[129] It is an argument that attempts to dance around how white supremacy organized an almost all-white movement, and an almost all-white archive. Yu posits that,

> If language-centered writing is, as Silliman argues in his earlier letters, a form of poetry just as "underdeveloped" as the writings of women or Third World writers, and if its social origins (progressive white male writers of the "industrialized" tradition) is just as particular and marginalized, why should a caricature of such writing not be as offensive[130] as racist or sexist caricature, since both rely on the same logic of social marginalization?[131]

If Language Poets occupied an "authentic" social position of dissent, how did their social positions as heterosexual white men un-figure into this "new" "authentic" positioning?[132] Yu's extension of Silliman position situates that white men—without ever having to address whiteness—were able to transcend their bodily and social positioning to create other "authentic" identities. The argument replicates Perloff's crass dichotomy of

[129] Yu's argument offers Silliman's self-victimization as proof as to why "ethnicization" is a possible theorem. This rationale deduces ethnicization—whatever this framework is supposed to situate—as a site of redress from wrongdoing. Essentially, a feasible "playing the race card." The undercurrent of the argument is that "women and writers of color" are evidently ethnicized—because they are inherently ethnic—and that this is a favorable position in which to redress wrongdoing. Something they are evidently doing so, through a *moral position* in which they are allotted for being "ethnic" and not "ethnicized." This rationale is without historical premise, and is rather situated in fantasies of the post-racial. For whiteness studies that critiques this position see, Lisa Cacho. "'The People of California Are Suffering': The Ideology of White Injury in Discourses of Immigration." *Cultural Values* vol 4.4 (2000): 389-418.

[130] Being racist and sexist as a white male is still racist and sexist. Because to "use" racist and sexist caricatures is not a "privilege" that white men are denied, that "women and minorities" practice in their writing.

[131] Timothy Yu, *Race and the Avant-Garde: Experimental and Asian American Poetry Since 1965*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 59.

[132] Yu does not shy away from the positioning of Language poetry, he writes, "There can be no doubt that Silliman is making an analogy between such categories as "women's writing" "black writing" and "Language writing" -- understood as "white male heterosexual writing." See Timothy Yu, *Race and the Avant-Garde: Experimental and Asian American Poetry Since 1965*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 50.

"innovative whiteness" and "conservative others" as it collapses the politics and positions of "women and minorities" as fixed, knowable, yet fungible.

Yu argues, "Silliman's utopian gamble, and the gamble of all Language writing, is that experimental techniques can render the Language poem both particular and universal."[133] The particular, we are to assume, is an appropriation of an imagined racialized, gendered position. The universal is whiteness. Language poetry, through its "ethnicization," is able to instantiate both the absence of whiteness (property) and whiteness (property).[134] It is able to swallow it whole. Since it can reach into the particularities of racialized and gendered bodies while remaining universal, it needs not their flesh, their language, their presence,[135] their forms, nor their papers and archives.

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## Conclusion

> Simply stated, it is no longer acceptable to limit the definition of society's memory solely to the documentary residue left over by powerful record creators.
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> —Terry Cook [136]

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[133] Timothy Yu,. *Race and the Avant-Garde: Experimental and Asian American Poetry Since 1965*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 70.

[134] This comes from Cheryl Harris's pivotal article, "Whiteness as Property." See Cheryl I. Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review* (1993), 1707–91.

[135] The notion of a poetic presence comes from Dorothy Wang's book *Thinking its Presence: Form, Race, and Subjectivity in Contemporary Asian American Poetry,* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).

[136]Terry Cook,. "What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift." *Archivaria* 43 (1997): 19.

Toni Morrison argues that a racial "unconscious" structured the US American literary imagination. She writes,[137]

> For reasons that should not need explanation here, until very recently, and regardless of the race of the author, the readers of virtually all of American fiction have been positioned as white. I am interested to know what that assumption has meant to the literary imagination. When does racial 'unconsciousness' or awareness of race enrich interpretive language, and when does it impoverish it?

I am interested in connecting the reading position of assumed whiteness to the archive's position of whiteness. Additionally, the archive position is not merely the position of the imagined white user but the archivist who has historically been imagined as being exempt from racialization and politics. Ramírez describes the working praxis of the 'racial unconsciousness' in archives and archive scholarship. He writes, "I maintain that continued assertions of neutrality and objectivity, and a rejection of the 'political,' take for granted an archival subject that is not only homogeneous … but that also supports whiteness and white privilege in the profession."[138] Both the history and tradition of literary scholarship and archival studies and practices have operated with a 'racial unconscious' that has assumed white readers and user positions. Such are the institutional presences that have shaped literary scholarship and their archives. The Archive for New Poetry embodies this presence.

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[137] Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination,* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1992), xiii.

[138] Mario H. Ramírez, "Being Assumed Not to Be: A Critique of Whiteness as an Archival Imperativ,." *The American Archivist* 78 (Fall/Winter, 2015): 340-341.

Terry Cook asks, "Upon what basis, reflecting what shifting values, have archivists decided who should be admitted into their houses of memory, and who excluded?"[139] In thinking about the dynamics of exclusion—and keeping in mind that it is essential to critically view the stock and shape of the ANP—I wish to conclude this essay by reflecting on absences, and the complicated histories their absence holds. In "Records and Their Imaginaries," Anne J. Gilliland and Michelle Caswell examine the politics and potential of "imagined records." Gilliland and Caswell describe "imagined records" as spaces of potential, where victims of state and structural violence long for and situate the evidence that exists in collective memories, yet live without their artifacts. Gilliland and Caswell argue that these "imagined records" recognize the power of the archive and the record as legible forms of evidence.[140]

What petitioners to the state and to the archive long for—this presence of longing—is the site of "impossible archival imaginaries[141]." It is the space in which what the archive could not imagine, could not fathom, could not collect, reverberates. In the imaginary, we can witness what the archive has collected, catalogued as evidence; in the imaginary we can see the absences as well as their parallel horizons.

In discussing "impossible archival imaginaries" and absences, Gillard and Caswell cite Anjali Arondekar, who asks, "What if the recuperative gesture returns us to a space of absence? How then does one restore absence to itself? Put simply, can an

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[139] Terry Cook, "What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift." *Archivaria* 43 (1997): 19.

[140] Anne J. Gilliland,and Michelle Caswell, "Records and Their Imaginaries: Imagining the Impossible, Making Possible the Imagined," *Archival Science.* (2015).

[141]Anne J. Gilliland,and Michelle Caswell, "Records and Their Imaginaries: Imagining the Impossible, Making Possible the Imagined," *Archival Science.* (2015).

empty archive also be full?"[142] I find Arondekar's call to examine the absences as "full" to be useful in examining the ANP. I also find that it is a pre-emptive critique against neoliberal approaches to inclusion and the rhetoric of additive mending, which also applies to the ANP. Rather than inclusion or additions to the archive, I am interested in seeing how we might grapple with its absences. And the absences are long, prevalent, and often invisible. The "solution" to the whiteness of the ANP is not the rapid addition of manuscripts belonging to non-white poets. This approach assumes that the structure of the archive does not need to be examined, that the structure of the archive works to encompass more and expand endlessly. This approach also assumes that historical absences can be rectified through present-day additions. Such an approach would replicate the ANP's initial proposal of "inclusion." I hope I have demonstrated that this inclusion was a gesture of public relations. Because it was limited to public relations, it could not be executed.

Regarding the Asian American social movement exhibition, "Serve Your People" curator and archivist Ryan Wong[143] states that, "Information regarding people of color organizing and movement history is not readily available. This information is not in textbooks, so people don't know to look for this material. And a lot of the materials are in private collections. It was a long, multi-tiered process to do just a small exhibition." When absences have been institutionalized, what to even look for, and how to even look becomes an *impossible, imaginary* task. The absences in the archive rupture narratives of institutional desire, prioritization, and care. For this reason, to see what is *not there*, and to ask why, and to long that it were otherwise is imperative to interrogating what is *there*.

[142] Anjali Arondekar, *For The Record* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 1.
[143] Ryan Wong (Curator, Writer) in discussion with the author, December 2015.

Institutionalized absences ensure that the processes of putting together New archives, exhibitions, and histories will be an incredibly vast, laborious, directionless route—and one which must be pursued.

Gillard and Caswell write, "[A]ctual and imagined records confront each other with alternate realities, one representing 'the establishment' and the other, disaffection with or opposition to the establishment. In others they interact in ways that co-constitute new realities or open up new possible futures."[144] The imagined manuscripts, the manuscripts refused, burned, thrown away, uncollected, never inquired or appraised speak to the materialized poetry manuscripts in the Archive for New Poetry. The imagined, unforgettable[145] archives of nonwhite poetic movements permeate the Archive as "spectral content,"[146] "spectral context," spectral forms.

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[144] Anne J. Gilliand and Michelle Caswell, "Records and Their Imaginaries: Imagining the Impossible, Making Possible the Imagined," *Archival Science.* (2015): 16.

[145] Regarding the "unforgettable," Giorgio Agamben's writes: "The exigency of the lost does not entail being remembered and commemorated; rather, it entails remaining in us and with us as forgotten, and in this way and only in this way, remaining unforgettable." Giorgio Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 40.

[146] Verne Harris, "Hauntology, Archivy and Banditry: an engagement with Derrida and Zapiro," *Critical Arts: South-North Cultural and Media Studies* vol 29.1 (2015).

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# Chapter 5: CGI Monstrosities: Modernist Surfaces, the Composite, and the Making of the Human Form

The composite is the processing site where frames are reconfigured, adjusted, and rendered to enact the surface of a *complete frame*. Consider that during the filming of Whoopi Goldberg's talk show, the cinematographers on set utilized two different cameras for scenes in which Goldberg was to appear.[1] Due to the deep history of racism, including on camera technology that has since been adopted for digital filmmaking, the light sensors needed to be adjusted differently to capture Goldberg's image from her white counterparts. White balance is both a technical and a literal description of the racialized position of camera technologies. Between the camera inputting the data during Goldberg's take and the camera recording whomever she is speaking to a new frame is made. The visible frame becomes a composite frame. Goldberg's frames were taken and composed, conceivably color corrected, and outputted along with the other frames in the composite as a *new* frame. It is fairly difficult to recognize the image as composite unless one looks for slight shadow gradations, or other small signifiers that might indicate to the frame has been altered. The frame is processed as one surface with the hopes that viewers recognize and accept it as flat. Currently, there is little to no literature on the digital composite, and scholars

[1] Lorna Roth, "Looking at Shirley, the Ultimate Norm: Colour Balance, Image Technologies, and Cognitive Equity." *Canadian Journal of Communication*, vol. 34, n. 1, 2009, pp. 111-136.

interested in describing the frame utilize the term *pastiche* to articulate its perceived formal qualities. A critical rendering of pastiche does make it a useful term in thinking about the composite[2] site. In *The Ruptures of American Capital,* Grace Hong offers the definition that I will be using, starting with the way it's been traditionally viewed. She writes, "[Frederic] Jameson argues that pastiche, or the random juxtaposition of a variety styles, eras, aesthetics, and temporalities, is one of the most significant features of postmodernism, the cultural component of a 'new type of social life and a new economic order' that became dominant after World War II" (112). She asserts however that, "[T]his new stage not only does not obviate difference of race and gender, but it depends on them and reproduces them structurally (113)." Hong argues that if pastiche is the form of postmodernism, than the juxtaposition *offered* by pastiche depends on a structural violence that is not examined. True to modernist notions of the surface, pastiche is read positively. To peer into the structures of its form would necessitate a grappling with the ongoing legacies of imperialism. Hong further posits that pastiche functions at sites of the ongoing accumulation of capital. She writes:

> [F]lexible accumulation's strategy of mixing nonmodern and modern forms of production depends on and reproduces racial and gendered exploitation. We must therefore write back into our analysis of postmodernism as the cultural analogue to post-Fordism an understanding of the inequities of power and hierarchy upon which such 'postmodern' cultures are based. In other words, 'pastiche' as the random recycling of past styles or modes, when understood in relation to accumulation strategies, is not random or neutral, but is a mode of exploitation that exacerbates racialized and gendered inequities. These inequities create a

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[2] W.R. Booth is said to have invented compositing in 1901 for *The Haunted Curiosity Shop*. For full timeline of visual effects see, Flueckiger, Barbara. *History of Visual Effects VFX, Computer Graphics, CGI, Computer Animation*. Visual Effects Timeline. Jan. 2011, http://www.zauberklang.ch/timeline.php. Accessed 12 May 2017.

> variety of differentiated relationships to late twentieth-century global capitalism. (115)

The misrecognition of the composite as pastiche is useful in that the term upholds modern and postmodernists' *neutral* formal delineations. It inputs the composite as not a technique, but registers it immediately as a form to contend with. Formally, the pastiche and the composite share the function of erasure. Certain components are taken out for other things to be put in. What is being taken out, why it's being take out, and where it came from become secondary or irrelevant questions.

Take for example Robert Rauschenberg's *Erased de Kooning,* as a slight contrast to the Goldberg composite example. In 1953 artist Robert Rauschenberg infamously titled an object: *Erased de Kooning*. The object, as the title suggest, is Rauschenberg's *take* on a drawing by William de Kooning, which was the fragmented erasure of de Kooning's drawing. The piece has been heralded as the continuity of Duchamp's inquiry: "[E]ffectively extend[ing] the notion of the artist as creator of ideas, a concept first broached by Marcel Duchamp."[3] If we are to follow dominant art historical narratives, Rauschenberg developed the concept of the "artist as creator of ideas" by removing the idea, replacing it with his own notion of erasure. The artist is no longer merely the creator of ideas that leads to the anointment or the production of commodities, but can now be witnessed as the author of direct effacement. These narratives (the readymade, aesthetic erasure, pastiche) have always been intertwined, but now they are made most explicit, formalized, and celebrated.

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[3] SF MOMA Museum Site. *Robert Rauschenberg, Erased de Kooning Drawing, 1953,* Overview, https://www.sfmoma.org/artwork/98.298. Accessed 12 May 2017.

The erasure in *Erased de Kooning* marks itself as aesthetic innovation. The juxtaposition between de Kooning's work and Rauschenberg's erasure is made visible in the title, and in their preceding narratives. The erasure that the composite offers is also innovative in that it is the erasure of the racialized histories of technological forms: the visibility of its erasure is deprioritized for the prioritization of flat surfaces.[4] The composite does not brand itself as a project of juxtaposition, but a technique for those who plan in advance.

In *Forms,* Caroline Levine[5] argues for expanding the notion of forms by including social formations such as race and gender, thereby expanding field investments to include considerations of the collision and ordering that forms *afford*. Levine approaches forms via political and social movements, and by examining their interactions. She elucidates that politics is a form in that,

> [p]olitics also means enforcing hierarchies of high and low, white and black, masculine and feminine, straight and queer, have and have-not. In other words, politics involves activities of ordering, patterning, and shaping. And if the political is a matter of imposing and enforcing boundaries, temporal patterns, and hierarchies on experience, then there is no politics without form. (3)

We can see how language, politics, techniques, and forms work together in the run-up-to and-the-run-down from the 2016 U.S. presidential election, where megalomaniacal politics were first described as hyperbole, then becoming fake news,  and eventually

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[4] The palimpsest might be one way to think about the composite, though the analogy is imperfect as the palimpsest works by using layers in the creation of new pages, rather than the amalgamation of images for a new frame.

[5] Forms travel there is a relationship between owner and property traveling, and there is the political tension of movement.

*alternative facts.* While ranging in rhetorical styles, its politics (of who mattered, who was being protected, who remains in power) has remained consistent. We can witness how ordering occurs in narrative formations such as the bildungsroman. Levine unpacks how the "novel of formation" works by differentiating feminine from masculine constructions, where gender binaries are organized into hierarchies to produce a sense of growth and development (from feminine to masculine characteristics learned and unlearned, or vice versa).

While Levine works to broaden the possibilities of social and aesthetic forms, she defines that which she does not believe is form, the conditions being "vagueness and indeterminacy, boundary-crossing and dissolution" (9). Levine, like to previous formalists, fascinatingly configures forms as markings in a space, but not the space itself. But the knowability of the space is essential to recognizing the markings. "Vagueness and [...] boundary-crossing" indicate that a space is being spoken of, but cannot be recognized—yet. Vagueness and indeterminacy however, have been incredibly powerful (conditions, devices, affects) of avant-garde art, experimental aesthetics.

In this chapter I want to push Levine's expansion of identifying the relationships betwixt social and aesthetic forms to the composite site, a framework I am borrowing from the visual arts, particularly painting, and more contemporarily, motion graphics. The composite refers to the site in which processing occurs, where frames are reconfigured, adjusted, and rendered to enact the representation of a *complete, flattened surface*. The composite is where frames come together to negotiate their final resolutions (frame rate, color, pace, shadows). The output is seamless, perfection, a surface to be

admired.

I find the notion of the composite[6] incredibly useful to discuss the collision of identifiable forms with their indeterminacies. A digital space, or a digital technique (form?) may be a strange place to think about politics, property, and art. However, the composite is a consistent reminder that surfaces are purposefully compressed flat—but existed before as multiple. This reminder points to how the surface is a collection of compositions—each one knowable on its own and made unknowable in its incorporation into the surface. These are useful reminders for the critic, artist, and writer engaged in unpacking the object, be it textual or visual. Because the surface is rendered, the surface has been organized, pre-constructed, with multiple systems and software (politics, organizations, hierarchies, financial capabilities) layering all aspects. In order to be rendered, each part of the composite must be recalibrated, formally synced. Once set, the compositions are made into a surface. It is only in the surface in which we—the reader, the critic, the audience—are allowed to observe the object. However, the composed surface should not limit us to simplifying its construction to knowable forms and legible politics. In a composite space we need many more terms to describe the conditions, the site, and the overlays. The composite site moves the discourse from *structures of artificially divided* into the space of the *artificially constructed*. Both of which are unknowable.

In this final chapter my interest shifts from the political and social implications of

[6] The "behind the scenes" special makes clear that most of the characters were filmed with a green screen. Presumably, the green screen was keyed out and a "realist" period fitting background was composited in. In mapping out this journey, the postproduction crew shows us to the extent in which the main actors were filmed with a greenscreen. This means that their acting takes took place without period specific backgrounds, or period specific extras.

the artistic idea, form, and object to the site in which they unfold. The narrative of the readymade and aesthetic erasure unfolds in the composite: the planned visual site situated to be overlaid. Here, I wish to connect the *concept* of the represented with the continuing terrain of erasure. In order to explicitly embolden their stakes, I will span between modernist ideals and contemporary digital production. This leads to the examination of contemporary scholarship that focuses on the representational monster in filmmaking and CGI history. Taking up Derrida's invocation of the function and the political space of the *beast*—specifically, his central question in *The Beast and the Sovereign,* "[O]f knowing who can die. To whom is this power given or denied? Who is capable of death, and through death, of imposing failure on the super- or hyper-sovereignty of *Walten*?" (290)[7] — I will examine how the representational digital "monster" as visualized in the composite site carries forth modernist mythologies and methodologies regarding property, sovereignty, possibilities and conclusions for capitalism, and the fabricated, idealized human.[8] The legacy of modernist methodologies (especially the readymade and erased) assures us that we can recognize the human: be it in a narrative or in a digital frame. Though this chapter will closely examine CGI scholarship and CGI filmmaking in order to meditate on the composite site and their connections to algorithmic finance, the necropolitics of modernism manifested as legibility in digital representation[9] and digital

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[7] I would like to thank Elizabeth Losh in particular for reminding me of this text.
[8] For an in depth contemporary analysis on the "human" and the history of "how information lost its body." see, Hayles, Katherine N. *How We Became Posthuman*: *Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics.* University of Chicago Press, 1999.
[9]Hito Steyerl's film "How Not to Be Seen" pushes this argument furthest. See,
"How Not to be See. *Artforum,* 2013, https://www.artforum.com/video/id=51651&mode=large

humanities scholarship will be my materialist horizon.[10]

**De-centering the Representational Monster**

Joseph Jeon's insightful essay on CGI monsters uses contemporary South Korean filmmaking to define his concept of "neoliberal forms." Jeon specifies what he calls South Korean "IMF Cinema" and provides an example of these "neoliberal forms," as representations where the invisible (the IMF, economic crises, financial algorithms) are made visible as monsters. Jeon states that these films/neoliberal forms "offer allegories of American-Korean relations at its juncture—relations of capitalism, of late empire, and of late (and now strained) partnership in massive cycle of accumulation—through the optic of digital production" (88). Though Jeon emphasizes the US-Korean relationship (hereafter, SK-US), his argument concerning algorithmic financial capitalism is a consciously transnational argument, linking contemporary South Korean cinema (and incorporating CGI) with the ascendency of transnational approaches in current digital humanities scholarship. His argument reads the SK-US economic and military relationship as allegorical to the condition of neoliberal financial capitalism, witnessed in expressions of digital filmic production. I would agree that the SK-US military and its neocolonial economic relationship is useful in understanding the networks of neoliberal

[10] While much needs to be said about the lack of racial analysis and the digital humanities, Jentery Sayer's work on race and face recognition software, Safiya Umoja Noble's work on race and search algorithms, Bethany Nowviskie's work on race and the digital anthropocene clearly put racial capitalism in conversation with digital humanities.

transnational capitalism.[11] However, I would add that what makes these films neoliberal forms is not the CGI "monster," but the modified "humans" and the composited landscapes.

In CGI scholarship and the digital humanities and film studies, there is a tradition of focusing on the legible monster,[12] as the monster is a fixture of linear, modernist narratives. Jeon writes,

> From Grendel to Frankenstein's monster to Godzilla, one strategy that literature and cinema have often returned to is the monster that figures an everyday or ordinary social problem in terms that are distinctly out of the ordinary. *A more refined figure for the present context is the CGI (computer-generated imagery) monster of contemporary action cinema, which not only represents the anxieties surrounding today's massive capital flows* and seismic geopolitical shifts but also speaks to questions of digital materiality… (88, emphasis mine).

While the western, positivist emphasis on the monster is expected, I would like to push the logic of this routine circulation by pairing it with Derrida's articulation of the *politics* of the animal realm. Of the representation of the beast, Derrida argues,

> Just where the animal realm is so often opposed to the human realm as the realm of the nonpolitical to the realm of the political … the state and sovereignty has often been represented in the *formless form* of animal monstrosity, in the figure without figure of a mythological, fabulous, and non-natural monstrosity, and artificial monstrosity of the animal (49, emphasis mine).

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[11] Jodi Kim reminds us that, "Secretary of State Dean Acheson called the opening weeks of the Korean War the greatest four weeks in American history" (26). For an in depth analysis of US empire in East Asia see, Jodi Kim. *Empires of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War.* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

[12] The monster has been of concern in analysis of capitalism. Utilizing materialist methodologies, David McNally theorizes the "monster" and cultural representations of the capitalism. See David McNally. *Monsters of the Market: Zombies, Vampires and Global Capitalism.* (London: Haymarket Books, 2011).

The animal—the representational non-human—serves as the vehicle of social anxiety according to Jeon, and this anxiety, according to Derrida, is the delegated realm of the nonpolitical. This realm, pushed further, might even be the formal expression of sovereignty *as* non-human monstrosity, allowing us to grapple with the artifice of the representational monstrosity. We can thus situate Godzilla, Frankenstein, and the beast in the *The Host* as the monstrosity of financial sovereignty: which produces our ongoing cultural anxiety. However, if neoliberal capitalism is the manifestation of one such anxiety, the CGI human's ability to destroy it in its beast form, sovereignizes the CGI human. The allegory of the CGI monster is then about the transference of power, not its invisibility.

If we were to examine Jeon's allegory of the CGI as the "visible" moment of financial capitalism closely, we could read into its narrative that its political ramifications might be, in the near horizon, that neoliberal, financial, algorithmic capitalism is the creation of human intelligence and human materiality, and then, in a further horizon, that neoliberal, financial, algorithmic capitalism can and will be destroyed by the representational human. A project that "unmasks" the invisible without accounting for the altered human is one that does not account for the politics of modernist representation and image technologies. The CGI monster-focused allegory is compacted to make neoliberal financial capitalism manageable; it assumes that we can manage its invisibility, transforming it into a visible form: in short, that we can kill it. Through human made software, within its imagination, only the human form survives. All man made problems, man will manage.

To chart the modernist tradition of visual representation, to build a narrative of image history and imagining technology, is to chart the development of the altered, idealized human. The complete dissolution of the algorithms involved in idealizing and compositing the human form in Jeon's argument highlights how trusted the figure of the human in digital filmmaking (and narrative) has become. Aside from the vast implication of the "beast" and the "monster" in western narrative and mythology, the development of CGI[13] has a multifaceted function beyond the monster on screen. In inspecting the expansive history of photographic representation, we might be more inclined to believe that CGI—or rather, imaging technology—was created to better alter and idealize the human form. Indeed, altering the human to appear more ideal has been the primary function of modernism and visual representation, as witnessed by some of the earliest photo manipulation techniques. In "The Legs of the Countess," Abigail Solomon-Godeau[14] looks at the earliest nineteenth-century daguerreotypes used in self-portraiture. The subjects and photographers utilized various lighting, draping and post-coloring techniques in order to "liven" and "aestheticize" the appearance of the model. Similar to the youth-enhancing, body-contouring lighting techniques and color manipulations in the finished photograph, the ideal representation of the legislated human has been of utmost importance in all image history (modernism) and its technological development. Is it even possible to imagine visual developments that did not account for how the human

[13] To situate CGI in media theory, see Friedrich Kittler's *Optical Media*, Vilém Flusser's *Into the Universe of Technical Images,* and Vivan's Sobchak *Meta-Morphing: Visual Transformation and the Culture of Quick.*
[14] Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "The Legs of the Countess," *October* 39 (Winter 1986): pp. 65-108.

might appear, interact, and remain in the frame?[15] CGI is no different: what good is CGI if the human form cannot be ideally deposited into the frame in order to conquer the monsters of its creation?

Image 5.1 Countess de Castiglione and Pierre-Louis Pierson, “La Frayeur” (1861-67). Salted paper printed from glass negative with applied color. Currently at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The monster is a narrative construction. The representational digital monster is algorithmically and narratively constructed to die; the representational digital human is algorithmically and narratively constructed to live. The political weight of the monster and its human are derived from their role in the narrative. Modernist narratives such as *Frankenstein*, the environment described in *Heart of Darkness*, and the methodology of

[15] Much has been written about the racialized history of photographic development. For a brief overview of this see Rosie Cima, “How Photography was Optimized for White Skin” (*Priceonomics* Apr. 24, 2015). In addition to this history, Hirata argues that this photo history is carried in digital filmmaking sensor technology. He states, “Overloaded brightness is handled in a nuanced way—forehead and noses on light skin—it’s to make these things natural and good looking. Even in the best sensors—the shadows are where the noise occurs—and this is interpolated as grain.” Regarding algorithm in film, Hirata explains, “The way camera sensors are tuned to light and color, and are calibrated to the spectrum—is an algorithm. The sensors algorithmically tuned to accept a specific slice of the spectrum and then to interpret it in as a particular set timbre of colors, grain, or noise. This technology is, of course, racist.”

Orientialism have constructed the Other, the beast, as figures without defeat. In this light, Derrida reminds us that Plutarch wrote that fundamentally, "You don't find animals begging or pleading for mercy or admitting defeat" (45). Rarely do the representational beast and the representational other come to an understanding about the need for mercy.[16] This is possibly because the beast/other is representationally constructed without defeat; while the ideal human's constructions are hidden.

Derrida situates that the beast in the fable exists as the vehicle of affective devourment, as a transitional site for the power of The Man. He writes, "[T]he beast is on this account devouring, and the man devours the beast. Devourment and voracity" (46). Devourment and voracity: the representational human exists to rule the representational beast, but the representational human is without the affective and political power it seeks. The beast exists as the vehicle in which the human form is granted the authority to destroy, kill, devour—in the speed and through the weapons of its choosing. The beast is sliced, the monster exploded. The narrative is without trial or remorse: its directive is the transference of devourment and voracity—a task that required the beast, as both the figure to be narratively and allegorically destroyed, as well as the visual composite to

[16] This narrative and technical construct can be witnessed throughout CGI heavy and non-CGI explicit visual narratives. In *Digital Labor: The Internet as Playground and Factory*, Trebor Scholz examines *The Matrix* as depicting the popular fears of mass intellectuality, as monstrosity. Scholz argues,

> To the humanism implicit in this description, the autonomists have opposed the notion of a mass intellectuality, living labor in its function as the determining articulation of the general intellect… As Virno emphasizes, mass intellectuality is not about the various roles of the knowledge roles, but is a 'quality and a distinctive sign of the *whole* social labor force in the post-Fordist era'(45).

In the film the fear of mass intellectuality is interlaced with the contraction of individualized liberation, as "Knowledge labor is inherently *collective*; it is always it the result of a collective and social production of knowledge" (Scholz 45). The non-human/human-esque battle against/for the liberation of mass intellectuality. *The Matrix* exemplifies a redundant narrative of the idealized human salvation against, in this case, the cyborg monster in the form of the human. And once again, in the defeat of non-human form, sovereignty grows.

measure the human besides.

In the history of western visual iconography,[17] the monster exists because the protagonist prevails. We are to side with him; we are enveloped in his gaze. Thus we can link the history of image manipulation as technological advancements in modernist narratives to the visual logic of empire,[18] and to the accelerated militarization of modern nation states. Jeon acutely describes the symbiotic links between militarization, financialization and digitalization: the military has financed the majority of war films.[19] Jeon writes, "Having many current military applications, CGI was originally derived from military weapons technology—first adapted from analog, anti-aircraft computers—and developed through military-funded research and defense contracts" (90). Jeon describes the intimate relationship between imaging technologies and militarization, but its historical contextualization feels redacted. Could it be argued that almost all modern and contemporary technological developments[20] have been derived from military

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[17] See Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, "The Imperial Imaginary," *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*. Routledge,1994.

[18]For an examination on empire's cultural formations, see ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald E Pease, *Cultures of United States Imperialism.* Duke University Press, 1993.

[19] For more on this conversation see:

Keegan, Rebecca. "The U.S. Military's Hollywood connection." *LA Times,* 21 Aug 2011, http://articles.latimes.com/2011/aug/21/entertainment/la-ca-military-movies-20110821. Accessed 12 May 2017.

Sirota, David. "The Pentagon's strengthening grip on Hollywood." *Salon,* 29 Aug 2011, http://www.salon.com/2011/08/29/sirota_military_movies/. Accessed 12 May 2017.

Underhill, Stephen. "Complete List of Commercial Films Produced with Assistance from the Pentagon." *Academia,* 2013. http://www.academia.edu/4460251/Complete_List_of_Commercial_Films_Produced_with_Assistance_from_the_Pentagon. Accessed 12 May 2017.

[20] This is up for ongoing debate, see:

Mowery, David C. "Military R&D and Innovation." *Handbook of the Economics of Innovation.* vol. 2, 2010, pp. 1219-1256.

research and development?[21] Photography, of course, has a long and dense military history;[22] CGI is not singular in that the military industrial complex funded its earliest developments. Rather, the unique history of CGI lies in the shared modern history of military developments that have since become popularized, personalized, and turned into user-driven software. CGI is militarized knowledge[23] in that its omnipresence is unknown.[24]

CGI technology must be contextualized: as part of the industrial military complex,[25] within the history of modernist image technologies, and in relation to the politics and aesthetics of western empires. The US military industrial complex has been developing the aesthetics of "whole scale annihilation."[26] Military technological

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Bienaime, Pierre. "The US Military is Responsible for Almost All the Technology in Your Iphone." *Business Insider,* 29 Oct 2014. http://www.businessinsider.com/the-us-military-is-responsible-for-almost-all-the-technology-in-your-iphone-2014-10. Accessed 12 May 2017.

Enrico Moretti , Claudia Steinwender and John Van Reenen. "The Intellectual Spoils of War? Defense R&D, Productivity and Spillovers." *Berkeley,* 8 July 2016. http://eml.berkeley.edu/~moretti/military.pdf. Accessed 12 May 2017.

[21] This is part of the argument that Paul Virilio and Sylvère Lotringer make in *Pure War,* Semiotext(e), 1997.

[22] From the advent of the wet-collodion, the U.S. military has commissioned photography in wars. For the expansive Civil War collection, see "Photography and the Civil War, 1861–1865," accessible online through the *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000–), http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/phcw/hd_phcw.htm (October 2004).

[23] Much has also been written on the "military-entertainment complex" (Tim Lenoir, Henry Lowod, Simon Penny) with CGI and war simulation (Sara Brady, Ian Bogost, Nina Huntemann, Matthew Kirschenbaum).

[24] It is important to state that activists and scholars have done tremendous work around the omnipresence of militarization. For example, Network of Concerned Anthropologists. *The Counter-Counterinsurgency Manual, Or, Notes on Demilitarizing American Society.* Prickly Paradigm Press, 2009. And ed. Catherine Lutz. *The Bases of Empire: The Global Struggle against U.S. Military Posts.* Pluto Press, 2009.

[25] For a broader history of the political economy of the war and military efforts see, William S. Borden, *The Pacific Alliance: United States Foreign Economic Policy and Japanese Trade Recovery, 1947-1955.* University of Wisconsin Press, 1984. Chalmers Johnson. *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic.* Metropolitan Books, 2004. Also, Paul A. C. Koistinen, *Mobilizing for Modern War: The Political Economy of American Warfare, 1865-1919.* UP of Kansas, 1997. And *State of War: The Political Economy of American Warfare, 1945-2011*. UP of Kansas, 2012.

[26] Cathy Schlund Vials, "Vertiginous Sights and the Military Sublime: Cambodia as Spectacle in Marvel's

developments and finance must always be seen to have asymbiotic formation.[27] Bombs[28] exist alongside economic rescue packages, and neither exist outside of the visual regimes of domination. The technological needs of the US military industrial complex are to prepare the soldier for this command. At the heart of CGI as a military tool and as civilian entertainment is the configuration of the dynamic visualization of the protagonist human.[29] Without the human in the frame, or controlling the frame (as with video games), the monster is of no use to the goals of the military, and, I would argue, to those of digital filmmaking. CGI and the history of photography are linked both in their military trajectories and in how much the technology works to hide its touch, its reach.[30]

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The 'Nam," lecture, 21 January 2015.

[27] Ruttan, Vernon W. "Is War Necessary for Economic Growth?" *Clemons Lecture, Saint Johns University.* 9 Oct 2006. http://csbsju.edu/Documents/Clemens%20Lecture/HistoricallySpeaking-Issues%20merged%201%2016%2007_2_.pdf. Accessed 12 May 2017/

[28] For a detailed examination of the political logic and rhetoric around bombing and "rescue," see Yuki Tanaka and Marilyn B. Young, *Bombing Civilians: A Twentieth-Century History.* The New Press, 2009.

[29] For arguments concerning drones and vision see, Parks, Lisa. *Cultures In Orbit: Satellites and the Televisual*. Duke University Press, 2005. And Kurgan, Laura. *Close Up at a Distance: Mapping Technology and Politics*. Zone Books, 2013.

[30] As militarization and visualization technologies often work to remain hidden structurally, positivist approaches to data visualizations and algorithmic renderings are at best a limited approach. Media theorist Elizabeth Losh has written about feminist approaches to positivist methodologies in visualization projects. In "Feminism Reads Big Data," Losh examines Lev Manovich's *Selfiecity* to formulate feminist reading methodologies for data visualizations and visualization projects. *Selfiecity* collected worldwide selfies on instagram to plot out a visual database exhibition to be held in San Paolo, Brazil. In describing the project Manovich situates that *Selfiecity* makes possible "social physics" (a term he pulls from Auguste Comte) where science can be utilized to analyze the atoms (human beings) and output visual data. Losh argues that Manovich's acceleration for a "social physics" which comprises visible data points as legible human subjects, into a directly translatable "quantifiable" form is a positivist data visualization scheme. Losh states that, "With his analogy to atoms, Manovich also depicts human individuals as discrete elemental particles, which also happens to be a common strategy in visualizing networked relationships to make social graphs more legible" (1649). In order to "make social graphs more legible" to other humans, the human subject (object?) is concentrated to a data point. The visuality of one thing renders all other components (labor performed by Mechanical Turks in the case of *Selfiecity*) flat. Visuality is performed through the flattening of complex material, political components.

Manovich's approach to visualization is similar to Jeon's methodology concerning the CGI monster. Both theorists centralize the act of rendering the invisible, visible—which is a process media theorist Wendy Chun has argued to be the delicate function of software. The spectrum of visibility and invisibility is the predetermined terrain of the interface—to provide us with readings of the additional visibility of this interface (as if to do so lessens the burden/labor of the invisible) is a modernist project, dependent on the

Further, Donna Haraway's pivotal work addresses the connections between visuality ("human" sight), technology and militarism. She writes,

> The eyes have been used to signify a perverse capacity—honed to perfection in the history of science tied to militarism, capitalism, colonialism, and male supremacy—to distance the knowing subject from everybody and everything in the interests of unfettered power… Vision in this technological feast becomes unregulated gluttony; all seems not just mythically about the god trick of seeing everything from nowhere…(582).

Haraway argues that the eyes (the gaze that personifies and perpetuates technological advancements) constitute the "perverse capacity" for the "god trick" of "unregulated gluttony." The a priori for the "technological feast" as well as for the *critical examination* of ongoing technological feasts lies in vision. The eye is broadened and lengthened—its deregulation accepted as foundational insight.

Relatedly, Wendy Chun suggests that software's "invisibly visible" (10) condition is expressed as the interface, and linked to contemporary racial formations. Chun argues, "Race and software therefore mark the contours of our current understanding of visual knowledge as "programmed visions" (180). The "god trick" of "unregulated gluttony" becomes programmed, circulated, and situated both as sight (digital technologies) and site (scholarship).

In discussing the role of the beast in modernist discourse, and the Other in the construction of the modern human, I show how a linear allegory of the beast as financial capitalism and the humans/environments as unknown sets up too stable a relationship

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notion that legislated human beings might be able to read the interface better, and theorize the visibility of the surface more succinctly. "Feminism Reads Big Data: 'Social Physics,' Atomism, and Selfiecity." *International Journal of Communication* vol. 9, 2015, pp. 1647–1659.

between digital representation to financial capitalism. Algorithmic computations are not isolated to the "visibility" of the monster. The computer-generated monster exists because it is a composite, much like every other part of the digital frame, and the CGI monster does not usually exist alone.[31] In visual analyses of digital frames, it is essential to repeat that all software processing is the production of algorithmic computation; the process of digitalization leaves no trace of the "organic." The recognizable monster exists solely to verify the modified human. Legibility-centered allegories of neoliberal capitalism are continuations of modernist ideals for aesthetic liberation, which ultimately work as reading tools to further exploit the structural and representational conditions of colonized, marginalized, and vulnerable communities

All contemporary films and digitized images are processed in software and/or coded in, and so all digitized images are the manifestations of unseeable algorithmic production, making it the norm.[32] Most legible viewers cannot decipher between the altered and the unaltered digital image. Let us imagine: Godzilla touches the woman, the constructed white woman is constructed so *beautifully*. The monster in the *Host* appears, disappears, and ultimately is destroyed by a band of legislated composite humans. Imagine the shooting frames as an actress—running away. Screaming. Imagining the monster in front of you. Waving your sword, your guns, your fists. Sounds a bit like *Don Quixote*—except we are all Don Quixote—no distinguishing between the windmill and

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[31] In my November 13th, 2015 interview with the artist and editor Jason Hirata he usefully pointed out that monsters do exist in visual and digital isolation in children's animation and 3D films such as *Monster's Inc*. Perhaps a secondary paper on the isolated, idealized, child-friendly "monster" is eventually necessary.

[32] Leigh Claire La Berge argues against reading finance and financial algorithms as "novelty." See *Scandals and Abstraction: Financial Fiction of the Long 1980s*. London: Oxford University Press, 2014.

the (human) monster. We attack the windmill and are winners. We can visualize the danger, the enemy, and we trust the victory. Sancho Panza does not exist in this landscape. There is no Panza to ask again: *Really, that's the monster? Come again?*

**John Adams: The Monster**

Visibility driven analysis is a continuation of an orientalist, positivist tradition of the monster/human divide that has been the topic of so much postcolonial criticism since Edward Said. Jeon argues that the CGI monster (which he believes is concentrated in the legible monster) and neoliberal finance capitalism are linked via an abstract notion of "algorithm." According to Jeon, the CGI monster is connected to transnational finance and the IMF. The digital and transnational capital might constitute a couplet, but the digital—much like capital—is not merely an abstraction. There is tremendous labor required every step of the way for the construction of digital technology in all aspects of filmmaking. What Jeon assumes is that he, the critic and the writer—much like the artist Rauschenberg—can accurately recognize what has not been erased, and in the contemporary case, what has and has not been digitally altered, what may or may not be "algorithmically" processed. As a result, I find that his thesis that the algorithm is the recognizable CGI monster might be more useful inverted: all digitized visual culture is algorithmic processing, including what we believe is 'human.'

Image 5.2 CGI screenshot of *John Adams* showing initial shot of primary actors.[33]

Reducing the question of the algorithm as an allegory of neoliberal financial capitalism to the non-human form effectively erases how the digital, filmic human form is created. In order to critique the function of the digital, algorithmic, and legibility and to make a case for the composite,[34] I will use a "behind the scenes" special effects video produced by the post-production crew working on *John Adams*, a show produced by HBO. The *John Adams* clips displays how each scene was pre-shot, rendered and composited. I will examine this process to show why it is useful to approach both CGI

[33] Throughout the footage, viewers are shown where the green screens may have been placed: outside, near buildings, and in the pathways the actors were to walk in. We are also provided glimpses of the material layers of the compositing process. These are the layers involved in compositing: green screen, layers, frames and in this case, 3-d rendering.

[34] In *Chardin Material.* Sternberg, 2011, Ewa Lajer-Burcharth argues that Chardin's painting technique consisted of processes for laying together materials, which is arguably a composite. Extrapolating from Lajer-Burchartch, one could argue, then, that the method of the composite in digital filmmaking stems from a longer history in western representation. I want to thank Jason Hirata for pointing me to this text.

and financial capitalism as a composite frame, rather than as a surface. Rather than analyzing what we can see and recognize, we should read the digital landscape as algorithmic, and its artificiality indistinguishable. To assume that the landscape is algorithmic would not be a "novelty," as "algorithms" are not novelties: they are formulas that makes the screen possible: from the extracted raw material[35] to the formation of hardware,[36] and from all the variegated levels of software[37] processing[38] and development[39] to its eventual waste.[40] Take for an example, the algorithmic processing that goes into image capture technology such as their sensors, color registers, data transfer processing, and render functions.[41] Rather than seeing them as abstract, mysterious, monstrous figures, situating them as computations for pre-conceived longings of modernity[42] will be far more useful.

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[35] See Edward B. Barbier, *Scarcity and Frontiers: How Economies Have Developed Through Natural Resource Exploitation* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), for a history on the linkage between material extraction and development.

[36] On the labor that goes into hardware production see Lisa Nakamura, "Economies of Digital Production in East Asia: iPhone Girls and the Transnational Circuits of Cool" *Media Fields Journal* (Feb 2011).

[37] In *Programmed Visions: Software and Memory*, Wendy Chun argues that software is "invisibly visible" (10), and that the term "*soft*" is gendered.

[38] In the same personal interview mentioned above, artist and film editor Jason Hirata remarked, "Just to get an image through a lenses onto a memory card utilizes countless patents, algorithms, lines of code, through licensing…every capture device (sensor) utilizes a global production of technological, corporate licensing orchestra." He noted that the network of transnational corporations should be of interest to digital humanities scholars, from Texas Instruments to GE and Sony, which hold a majority of the licensing and patents.

[39] For an in-depth analysis of software processing and outsourcing in neocolonial corporations see Kalindi Vora, *Life Support: Biocapital and the New History of Outsourced Labor.* University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

[40] For a brief article on waste sites see Schiller, Jakob "Inside the Hellscape Where Our Computers Go to Die," *Wired*, 23 Apr 2015. http://www.wired.com/2015/04/kevin-mcelvaney-agbogbloshie/ Accessed 12 May 2017.

[41] For an overview of these functions, see Milan Sonka, Vaclav Hlavac, and Roger Boyle, *Image Processing, Analysis, and Machine Vision.* Stamford, Cengage Learning, 1993.

[42] For a discussion on prescriptive/ideological modernity see, Fredric Jameson, *Singular Modernity: Essays on the Ontology of the Present.* Verso Press, 2002.

Image 5.3 The compositing processes and layers of CGI animation.

Almost all professional-level editing software comes with the capabilities of erasing, compositing, layering, keying in and out colors for the purposes of green/blue screening, adjusting, color-correcting, splicing, and so forth. There are softwares specifically designed to adjust individual frame components and compositing new images into the frames. Basic commercial and proprietary software programs are utilized in editing large chunks of video: to rearrange sequences, to create/rupture linearity. Commercial programs like Adobe After Effects and Maya exist specifically to aid in creating motion graphics for specific frames by creating either new 3-D imaging or specific frame layers. For example, take a film sequence that is filmed and needs to be edited. The editing for its narrative might happen in an editing program. However, if specific frames in the sequence need to be adjusted (for example, additional graphics

need to be added to a series of frames), then the frames will be imported into a motion graphics software program where the frames are altered, rendered and exported back out into the editing program. Multiple software programs are utilized in almost all professional and amateur postproduction—frames are imported, adjusted, remade, rendered, exported and imported—again and again and again.

While Jeon and arguably Derrida fixate on the monster/beast for an analysis of empirical financial capitalism (Jeon) or sovereignty (Derrida), I want to suggest that in an analysis of the digital, it may not be necessary to search for the representational beast. Interrogating "realist" digital representations, its human forms, their environments and constructions may be of more use in grappling with the narratives and allegories of empire, financial capitalism, and sovereignty.

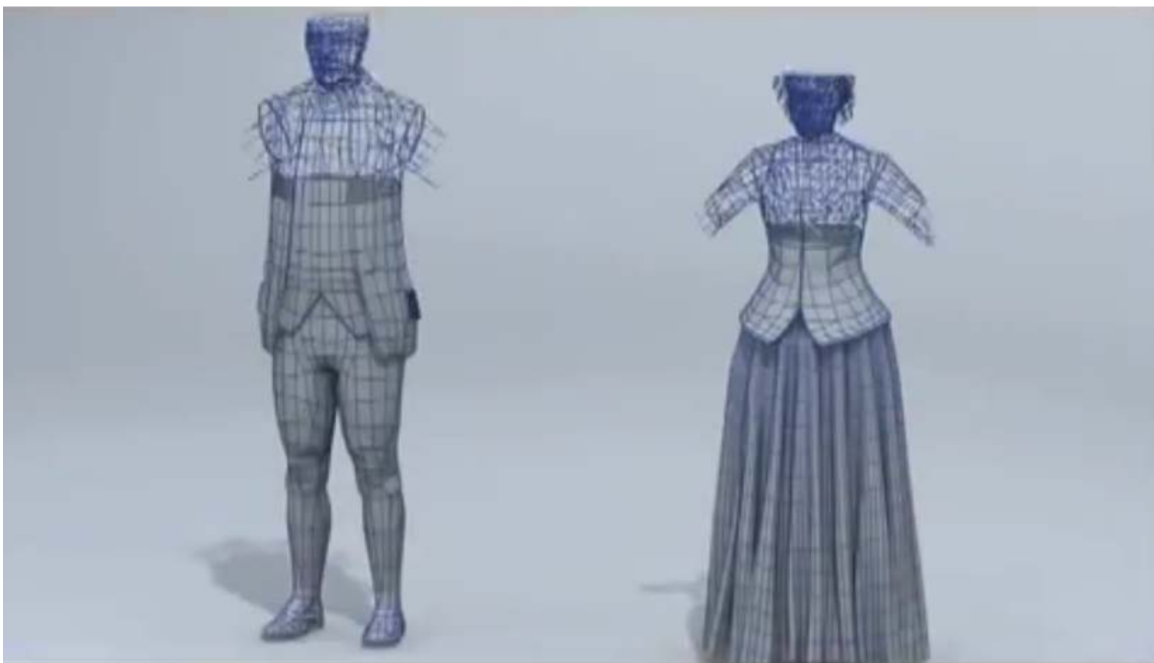

Image 5.4 The constructed extras in *John Adams*.

In order to demonstrate the full emersion of graphics imagining in "realist" representation, I turn to the *John Adams.* I am selecting this show for many reasons, but most importantly, because there are no representational monsters in the narrative, and therefore a surface reading might conclude that this is apolitical, realist, period television series. However, every part of the show is composited: from the political/protest scenes to the backdrops and the extras.[43] I hope to make very clear that such graphics imagining is not the anomaly, but the absolute rule for commercial digital imagining. In the *John Adams* HBO FX special,[44] neither the parent company nor its digital artists felt the need to hide the special effect processes. In this montage, CGI and digital alteration is made visible. It is perhaps initially hidden to the eyes of the viewers of the original series, but the postproduction artists have worked hard to lay bare the digitalization of every layer of the series, and to make this process searchable and accessible to interested audiences.

[43] I find the compositing of the protestors and or politically conscious representational subjects to be fascinating. The FX shows how a grid of the protestors/subjects were duplicated, and the politician's speech shot separately from this action. The separate acting shots, the graphics imagining and then compositing these frames to create what is supposed to appear as a unified political scene; this seems to be a particularly rich description of the political campaigns and their compositions.

[44] HBO, *John Adams: Visual FX*, YouTube video, 6:39, posted by HBO Studios, August 11, 2008. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oTUs7hDq2PA.

Image 5.5 Crowd scene of composited extras in *John Adams*

The "behind the scenes" special makes clear that most of the characters were filmed with a green screen. The green screen was keyed out and a "realist" period fitting background was composited in. In mapping out this journey, the postproduction crew shows us the extent to which the main actors were filmed with a green screen. This means that their acting takes place without period-specific backgrounds, or period-specific extras. The behind the scenes frames however, are not meant to alleviate the anxiety of better sight. In discussing the function of sight and visualizations, Chun utilizes the term interface.[45] Chun argues, "[I]nterfaces—as mediators between the visible and the invisible, as a means of navigation—have been key to creating "informed" individuals who can overcome the chaos of global capitalism by mapping their relation to

[45] I would extend Chun's usage of interface to include the screen, as both terms are negotiate what is possible and what is processed.

the totality of the global capitalist system" (8). The *empowered* user—be it the film editor, viewer, or even the software developer—navigate their 'relation to the totality of the global capitalist system (8)' via their negotiation with particularized, empowerment-based knowledge systems. Arguably, behind the scenes clips and digital humanities criticism offer this *exposure,* it includes the filmic viewer into a particularized interface, to empower the viewer/maker/critic into a sense of knowing more, seeing more. They have access to a visibility still invisible to others—and through this knowledge, capital systems *feel* more manageable/contained. Chun argues that, "Freedom here stems from individual knowledge and actions, a central tenet of neoliberal governmentality" (176). How much one can see within the interface—and how the problems of *sight* are negotiated—is how neoliberalism works in digital technologies as well as digital scholarship dependent on bettering sight.[46]

Rather than being the vehicle of enlightenment or better insight, I hope that the images below might materialize the labors of compositing in digital imaging technologies.

[46] The empowered user would include the viewer who purchases a DVD box sets to watch the behind the scenes footage, or searches online to compare and contrast what has been altered, how much and where. Following Chun, the empowered user can be anyone who is willing to spend more individual time and money in their earned sight.

5.6 Political figures green screened to view the political gathering above *John Adams*.[47]

In the HBO FX Special, the FX team makes this point—this construction of human figures and personal and public interaction through compositing—clear.

[47] This is to show how the actors are looking at an entirely different image composite. Then the actors are eventually composited to appear—politically speaking—to 3D renderings of idealized digital human forms.

Image 5.7 Interpolating human actors in a CGI crowd scene in *John Adams*.

Ultimately, frames are composited to render this scene to the surface.

Image 5.8 A final composited scene in *John Adams.*

*John Adams* displays how we do not need a CGI monster to find a commercial visual production that entirely relies on computer graphics imaging.[48] These frames can illustrate how the representational human/frame is an ideal construction: all fraying hair wisps removed, all unscripted blemishes erased, all skin brightened, whitened. Frame by frame, the representational human is worked on, adjusted, and radically altered.[49]

While I agree with Chun that specialized software knowledge can function as neoliberal notions of freedom, I also believe that it is important to decipher between 3D and 2D renderings, as they are not the same. There is a resurgence of interests in modernist-driven methodologies such as "surface reading"—a method that advocates against the depth of the text and advocates for descriptive readings of the surface/object. However, surface readings of digital objects are not possible. Surface readings' desire for pure objectivity, with its putative avoidance of cultural, structural, historical, and contextual readings (Marxist, Freudian, Feminist, etc.) and denial of "political" and materialist renderings of the text or its circulation, is in itself a political project. Digital objects, arguably much like most objects, are multi-layered and structured. Like other objects, the blueprinting for a 2D surface begins inside of 3D frameworks. Surface

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[48] *John Adams* may be a starting point in which we might ask questions such as: why have extra actors been replaced with 3D renderings? Why are the protesters duplicated? How can cultural theorists and digital scholars think about the politics of color correction? How did film and imaging become constructed this way? Such legislating against the human form is, I am arguing, the legacy of modernism.

[49] A crude and gendered example of this is *Herbie Fully Loaded*, directed by Angela Robinson (Buena Vista Pictures, 2005), DVD. Lindsay Lohan's breasts were digitally reduced in this film. Typically, animation sequences are shot/made on 12 frames a second model. 35mm technology worked on 24 frames a second, with many digital models adopting this template. Recently, digital cameras include modes that record at 60 frames per second, offering, essentially, a frame every nanosecond. I list this all out to state that every second of breast-reduction rendering meant working with at least 24 frames a second—if not more. That's 1440 individual frames every minute, However, it may have been possible that new software was made to target and overlay Lohan's breasts. Either way, the labors involved in this gendered edit were astronomical.

readings of digital objects erase the material and labor politics, as well as the fundamentally racialized and gendered dynamics encompassed by (digital) technologies and forms.

I bring up surface reading as a direct example of how certain kinds of positivisms continue, and the politics driving this continuum. Currently, surface reading espouses the belief in the *truthfulness* of the surface. Yet the positivist belief that certain sensory abilities, when utilized rigorously, may guide us to the truth of the structure is a methodology that refuses the materiality and the labor/circulation histories of the object. Secondly, when applied to non-literary works,[50] the practice of a surface-like reading is dependent on the legacies of western humanism, particularly Orientalism, as *our* understanding of the representational human and our willingness to trust this category is at best, fraught. When a strategy akin to surface reading is deployed in digital humanities scholarship, these positivist and orientalist methodologies become re-articulated to visualize "contemporary" novelties. As the CGI and the "algorithmic" must be paid particular attention, I am suggesting an easy transference of modernist methodologies is insufficient to analyze its scope. Otherwise, what digital humanities scholarship is grappling with is the how to 'modernize' digital texts and objects—to modernize *erasure*—rather than working to materialize and contextualize digital cultural production and the economies of digital forms.

[50] It is unclear as to whether surface reading can actually apply to literary works.

**The Visualization of Neoliberal Financial Capitalism**

I wish to conclude this chapter by arguing that when we practice positivist readings of digital objects, we create limited allegories that flatten our trajectories. This thesis stems from Derrida's invocation that began this essay: "To whom is this power given or denied? Who is capable of death, and through death, of imposing failure" (290). I wish to suggest that even in the analysis of digital visual cultures, power and priority are given to modernist narratives and methodologies. Modernist approaches will not offer the methodologies and narratives we need in order to think about the denial and distribution of power. Additionally, we do need narratives, allegories and stories that imagine an analysis that fundamentally centers the composite of racial capitalism.

In Jeon's description of allegory, the CGI monster makes the invisible visible, which is neoliberal, transnational, financial capitalism. In the context of *The Host,* the monster is located as the IMF crisis, making it the foci of IMF cinema. Jeon locates the CGI in the monster, and with it, the allegory of algorithmic, financial capitalism. This allegory is useful for a number of reasons in examining modernist methodologies in digital humanities scholarship. Through an understanding of "other" as "monster," it delegates visibility as the discourse of crisis. The International Monetary Fund entering Asia, for example, was a crisis for neoliberal Asian nation states. While South Korea is both a neocolony and a necolonizer, the 1997 IMF crisis firmly visualized this standing. It marked South Korea's neocolony status globally, or to put it a different way, the IMF went into these neoliberal nation states and visually marked the order of global power.

The 1997 IMF crisis was also a constructed crisis. South Korea's capitalist economy was not in crisis; there was no anti-capitalist, socialist, or communist plan underway.[51] The loan provided by the IMF to repay South Korean's national debt to its trade partners was, much like the composite political frame, was entirely manufactured.[52] This loan was provided with the understanding of ongoing trade. Consider, too, China's loans to the US. The US has borrowed significantly from China, as well as its other allies. These loans are not necessarily a sign of a failing capitalist state, but rather signifiers of mutually assured trade partnerships; they are given with the expectation of ongoing repayment in trade. They are not provided under the assumption that the debt will be paid in full, if ever.[53]

Aside from the fact that the IMF crisis was a global, visual display of the prominence of western nation states above their Asian neocolonies, the 1997 IMF crisis, as with all financial crises, should be thought of as a continuum and not an event, as the income disparities between the South Korean rich and poor have remained consistent since the 1990s.[54] Perhaps the IMF entering Asian nation states is a visualization of

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[51] For in depth explanations, see Kang-Kook Lee, ''Neoliberalism, the Financial Crisis, and Economic Restructuring in Korea,'' in *New Millennium South Korea: Neoliberal Capitalism and Transnational Movements*, ed. Jesook Song. Routledge, 2011. and Krishna Gidwani, "Korea and the Asian Financial Crisis," http://web.stanford.edu/class/e297c/trade_environment/global/hkorea.html. Accessed 12 May 2017.

[52] For an analysis of the situation, see The Cato Institute's formal recommendation, Ian Vásquez, "Why the IMF Should Not Intervene," 25 Feb 1998.
http://www.cato.org/publications/speeches/why-imf-should-not-intervene

[53] This is a racialized dynamic, that spatializes and temporalizes power. Paula Chakravartty and Denise Ferreira da Silva writing on subprime mortgages reframe the current debate by asking, "How could anyone expect to profit from unpayable loans *without* debtors who were already marked by their racial/cultural difference ensuring that at least some among them would not be able to pay?" (367). And, "why should economically dispossessed Blacks and Latino/as pay for those who bet on and profited from their inability to pay the unpayable debts?" (381).

[54] For an exhaustive report see, Jongil Kim (Dongguk University), "Piketty Fever and Income Distribution

*something*, but the visualization of neoliberal capitalism cannot rest with the representational figure of the monster, but rather in the institutionalized maintenance of poverty, which transnationally is the maintenance of racial capitalism.

I would like to pair centering the IMF crisis with the terminology of the 2008 subprime mortgage crisis. Paula Chakravartty and Denise Ferreira da Silva writing on the issue argue,

> [S]ubprime crisis as a "relative" of crises that transformed the political economic horizons of Africa, Asia, and Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s… the logic of neoliberalism to profit from calculated "mistakes" (like lending money to persons and nations precisely because they would *not* be able to pay it back) and read the subprime crisis through a dual lens of race and empire (364).

Contrary to the lens Chakravartty and da Silva argue for, scholars, journalists, and politicians have become familiar with describing the corruption of financial capitalism as *the* 2008 economic crisis. To state the "2008 economic crisis" is akin to deriving meaning and material only from the monster. However, 2008 was not the economic crisis; it was not a moment where the invisible was made visible. It was a moment of clarity as to how neoliberal capitalism continues by expropriating and pillaging the lives of black and brown communities. Rather than the language of crisis, 2008 should have provided national headlines and government policies that asked, "Why should the economically dispossessed be expected to take on the risk assumed by those who, enabled by the privatization of public housing and the deregulation of financial markets, bet against

in Korea: Reality and Prescription," *East Asia Foundation (EAF) Policy Debates.* October 28, 2014.

them?" (Chakravartty and da Silva 363). The predatory condition of institutionalized poverty and the theft of black and brown properties is not described as a *crisis*—it is rarely accounted or theorized by digital humanities scholars as part of the narrative or the allegory. To situate 2008 as the *crisis,* centralizes the effect of white investment banking white economies. This language situates white finance as invisible, rather than accounting for what it deems invisible. In large respects, this language privileges whiteness and centers its visibility. The crisis has been the economic condition for black and brown families in the United States; the crisis is the condition[55] for racial capitalism. The crisis is neither singular nor exceptional, but rather constant and ongoing: it is the composite.

Derivative and software-heavy financial capitalism is not invisible: it works as corruption, and it searches for loopholes and profits through planned devastation. Manipulative, predatory finance is not invisible, but instead protected by neoliberal capitalism and purposefully hidden. This corruption is not invisible; it is part of the system, institutionalized. The corruption is the spectrum of coherence in corruption, the logic and rationale, the imagination of capital *as* finance.[56] Purposefully hidden corruption is not invisibility—or rather, it works to appear *faint* in the spectrum of legibility.

Likewise, it is important to remember that speculative trading does not begin in

[55] Scholz: "Often the unemployed are such only in name, in reality being the lifeblood of the difficult economy of under-the-table, badly paid work, some of which also goes into the new media industry" (45) and "To emphasize how labor is not equivalent to employment also means to acknowledge how important free affective and cultural labor is to them media industry, old and new" (45).
[56] Max Haiven argues that finance is capital's imagination. See Haivan, "Finance as Capital's Imagination," *Social Text* vol. 29, no. 3, 2011, pp. 93-124.

the transition into neoliberal financial capitalism. Though arguably digital technological advancements have accelerated the *voracity* for *devourement* (to return to Derrida's terms) the blueprint for speculative trading begins not with digital technology linked to CGI but with chattel slavery. In *The Half Has Never Been Told,* Edward E. Baptist writes of speculative trading of slave bonds in Europe as a primary foundation of Wall Street.[57] The importation of chattel slavery into the Americas was a speculative European financial market, which US and European financial firms could facilitate and profit from. Granted, these early Wall Street firms were without 7 nanosecond fiber optic cables,[58] and therefore, the speculative trading was dependent on analog technology, but the impetus to trade *theft*[59] and *damage,* and to group risk into bundles for the purposes of risk-transfer does not begin in the decades preceding the 2008 "crisis," but with chattel slavery and the various markets created through racial slavery. Speculative trading has been accelerated, though was not invented by digital technologies. Rather, speculative trading is a form of racial capitalism.

How to save investment banking culture becomes *the* crisis, as to the populations most damaged by the crisis, most needed in the crisis—are termless, without narrative, treated as backdrops. This is why the idea of the composite is fundamental to the creation

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[57] Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism.* Basic Books, 2014. I would like to thank Dorothy Wang for bringing this book up during the Modernist Studies Association Panel, "Financialization or Revolution?" November 2015.

[58] See the Nanex report on high frequency trading, "The Rise of the HFT Machines," http://www.nanex.net/aqck/2804.html. Accessed 23 Nov. 2015.

[59] I am deriving the word *theft* from Hortense Spillers who writes, "[T]heir New-World, diasporic plight marked a theft of the body – a willful and violent (and unimaginable from this distance) severing of the captive body from its motive will, its active desire" (60). See "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." *The Black Feminist Reader.* Ed. James, Joy and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2000, 57-87.

of new allegories. What makes the frame possible, what will always make finance possible is not the expensive, invisible-made-visible monster banking system, but the extras (both hired and rendered), the layers, the renderings who interact with, get eaten by, and fight off monsters to be situated inside the composite. What the system does not count as theirs, but without *it,* capital and representation would not be possible. Chakravartty and da Silva accurately prescribe,"[A]ny remedial intervention should attend to and redress the debtors, not the creditors" (373). Such a task requires us to re-imagine our tools[60] our ideologies and how the legacies of modernist forms continue to shape our reading.

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[60]Anna Munster makes an argument regarding this need for materialist methodologies in new media studies. See Munster, *Materializing New Media: Embodiment in Information Aesthetics*. Dartmouth UP, 2006.

**Coda**

Taiwanese, Chicago based digital artist Shen Yuan Su articulates that rather than utilizing proprietary, commercial based software program, he uses open source software and open source code.[61] While CGI may be hidden from the viewer's eye, as software it controls the editor's digital visual form. The control is hierarchical, beginning from the workflow to how images are rendered. He explains of such programs, "Commercial software programs do not want you to build your own system, they don't want you to build your workflow, but follow theirs." For this reason, coding into the commercial program is a useful way of altering the workflow or its commands.[62]

In providing an example of how coding into open-source programs alters his projects, Su states, "I don't wanna do color correction, why should I color correct—I can code into the graphics and shade it, change the computer graphics. It's a different way to think about it. The logic is totally different." Su's approach—to fundamentally code into the computer graphics, the hardware of the system, in order to alter the colors on the screen—is a provocation of how we might begin to think about financial allegories attendant on digital imaging as a series of fractures, rather than analyses of visualized artificiality, or lack thereof.

[61] Jeon seems to believe that editors, software users, and artists are not interested in coding into the existing software. He states, "[E]ven in the aspects of filmmaking like CGI that most explicitly involve the manipulation of digital forms, the artist does not engage so much with the mechanical apparatus of the machine, but rather with an abstracted version in the form of interfaces, which distance the user from the mathematics. Digital filmmakers work increasingly at the level of image with the help of software and less at that of code" (97). However, in my experience, there is a level of expectation that professional and working film editors will know how to code into commercial software programs.

[62] Su brings up that coding into open source software, or coding into the computer graphics of the hardware is a way to rupture the linear progression to color correcting in commercial software programs. Personal Interview with the artist, November 15, 2015.

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Conclusion: Moon flowers don't need invitations: they require a particular part of night

In 2011 the Pulitzer Prize–winning and former poet laureate Rita Dove edited an anthology of US American poetry that dared to include into the canon the force of the Harlem Renaissance and the original members of the Black Arts Movement. The anthology, featuring 175 poets, did not stray entirely from the current canon and its familiar camps. It did not venture to exclude the familiarity of Robert Frost, W. H. Auden, Elizabeth Bishop or W.S. Merwin. The anthology, however, presented their poems alongside those of Amiri Baraka, June Jordan, and Sonia Sanchez. Controversially offering more space to Gwendolyn Brooks than to John Ashbery, the anthology sparked what reviewers called a "race row" between poetic scholars and bared the racialized terrains of US American poetry.

In a review titled "Are These the Poems to Remember?" Harvard professor and prolific poetry scholar Helen Vendler claimed that the anthology "shift[s] the balance, introducing more black poets and giving them significant amounts of space, in some cases more space than is given to better-known authors." Rather than undertaking a neoliberalist, pro-multicultural approach to strengthen and develop pre-existing structures, academic gatekeepers such as Helen Vendler and Marjorie Perloff argued that all unapproved alterations were to be seen as attacks on the sanctity of the canon. Singling out the insertion of Gwendolyn Brooks's poetry, Vendler questioned whether Brooks could be deemed anywhere near "as richly innovative as Shakespeare? Dante? Wordsworth? … [T]he evolution of modern black poetry does not have to be hyped to be of permanent historical and aesthetic interest." She rhetorically asked, "Why are we being

asked to sample so many poets of little or no lasting value? ... Selectivity has been condemned as ‘elitism,’ and a hundred flowers are invited to bloom.”

“[A] hundred flowers are invited to bloom” recalls Mao’s Hundred Flower Campaign,[1] and firmly implicated in this refrain are the existence of bulbs, and the selectivity (better known as tokenism) of their previous sprouting/display efforts. To be racialized and also bloom should be by invitation only—a lonely, isolating process that has been written about by countless poets. In *Black Feeling Black Talk Black Judgment,* Nikki Giovanni inspects[2] racialized aesthetic formations as a pre-emptive response to the histories of formal debates and canon formations, and enunciates the violent neutrality given to the language of genre and formal constructions.[3].

I am the token negro

….

I asked why

the group wouldn’t be in the Black community

….

And was told quite soundlee

that just because colored don’t

mean they’re not artists too

THEY’RE ARTISTS TOO AND COLOR

---

[1] Communist Party of China (CPC) encouraged its citizens to openly express their opinions of the communist regime. Differing views and solutions to national policy were encouraged based on the famous expression by
Communist Party Chairman Mao Zedong: “The policy of letting a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools of thought contend is designed to promote the flourishing of the arts and the progress of science.”

[2] The proclamations in Giovanni’s collection begins not with ‘art’ or ‘experiment’ but rather by specifying the racialized representations of black bodies and language. Giovanni interrogates how racialized language becomes part of the discourse in poetry, as well as poetic material.

[3] “The Dance Committee (Concerning Jean-Leon Destine)” 1968.

AIN'T GOT NOTHING TO DO WITH IT

AND WHY OH WHY WON'T YOU PEOPLE

LET US FORGET YOU'RE COLORED TOO….

The poem describes the dynamics of artistic grouping. Vendler's binary of modern Black poetry vs. permanent historical/aesthetic interest are foreshadowed in this poem. The familiar binary is set up as a crass either/or; either the sanctity of aesthetics and aestheticians OR embodiment. Though rarely attributed, all of the prized forms that conceptual, experimental poetics have honored—repetition, colloquial and vernacular slippage, fragmenting, to appropriation—can be found in various formats (sometimes earlier) by Black artists, during the Harlem Renaissance and into the 60s, 70s, and beyond. The poem continues,

The women (obviously my superiors)

White sharp lines

And light-blue mascara

Reaching all the way down beyond the red neck ….

Token negroes

I do believe, at least I was told.

and it is very important

for future exchanges…

Giovanni deconstructs the racialized operations and the ongoing pacing of tokenization. Her poem examines the rhetoric and rationale certain US cultural producers and critics have utilized to construct committees, anthologies, forums, panels, and forms. It is through the backdrop and critique of tokenization that we can return to the phrasing of "a

hundred flowers are invited to bloom" and the hundred racialized bulbs—at least—imagined in existence. Vendler's comments concerning the anthology erupted a flurry of debate within the already-elite US American poetry community, culminating in headlines that unironically announced "Bloodletting over an Anthology." Several articles and public opinion pieces later, Dove stated Vendler wrote with "thinly veiled racism." Vendler responded: "I have written the review and I stand by it."

I conclude with this 2011 debate[4] to describe the milieu of contemporary American academic poetry as one that through the rhetoric of aesthetics remains firmly rooted in the discourse of race. Anthology discussions are particularly useful as they emerge from institutionally acknowledged, established poets and poetic practices. Anthologies offer a glimpse of the stakes that have been protected, as well as the incorporation of emerging positionalities. For example, all of the poets listed were and are active members of an institutional poetics community. Audre Lorde was published in mainstream publications such as the *New Yorker* and the *Iowa Review.* Many of these poets, from John Berryman and Lyn Hejinian to Etheridge Knight and Nikki Giovanni, were of variegated political affiliations and either were or still are professors. I bring in this detail to note that the poets included in Dove's anthology were not themselves strangers to academic or poetic institutions—but somehow their insertion into the anthology form continues to remain controversial. Is Dove's canon a compulsory yet necessary compression of 20$^{th}$ Century American poetic history? Or does it point to the impossibility of the melting pot model for poetry and language?

[4] There are many other art parallels, Susan Cahan's examines museum acquisition records in her book *Mounting Frustration: The Art Museum in the Age of Black Power,* as a way to make her argument about the racial segregating of museums.

Portending the tenor of this debate, Toni Morrison has[5] famously argued that, "Canon building is empire building. Canon defense is national defense" (31). Dove's insertion of a specific kind of 20th-century canon—one that begins with, is indebted to, and belongs to African American movements as much as it does to well-known modernists—becomes a national defense, a threat against the current artistic,[6] literary,[7] empires.

In my own archival research at the Archive for New Poetry at UCSD, I found a 1982 introduction to the reading of powerful and explicitly political poet June Jordan as stating, —

> June Jordan has been at the center of Black Literature for almost twenty years… Her fame has been earned the hard way: by paying attention to her craft. Where many another poets coming of age during the sixties could rely on the sheer power of political polemic or expressiveness, June Jordan has relied on her unerring sense of line and phrasing…"[8]

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[5] See Toni Morrison, *Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature*.

[6] Not unsurprisingly, the debate that unfolded with the publication of Dove's anthology has been had before in many ways and forms—and they have occurred in the arts in various ways, for example the Whitney Museum's 1971 *Contemporary Black Artists* exhibition, boycotted by Black Emergency Cultural Coalition for its corrective yet dismissive approach to curating black visual production. See: Susan Cahan *Mountain Frustration: The Art Museum in the Age of Black Power*.

[7] In 1993 translator and poet Eliot Weinberger published the volume, *American Poetry Since 1950: Innovators and Outsiders*. Set to describe the experimenters of poetry, the volume comprised of 35 poets, 5 of them women-identified, with only two Black poets, Amiri Baraka and Langston Hughes. Dorothy Wang's pivotal work *Thinking Its Presence* examines the discourse that occurred when Weinberger was asked about the racial and gender make-up of the collection by poet and art critic John Yau.

[8] More recently, two years after Dove's 2013 anthology, Charles Henry Rowell, the editor for *Norton Anthology of Contemporary African-American Poetry*, described how the anthology was a collection of poets engaged in the purity of form. He explained, "[This] is not just another poetry anthology. It is a gathering of poems that

demonstrate what happens when writers in a marginalized community *collectively turn from dedicating their writing to political, social, and economic struggles, and instead devote themselves, as artists, to the art of their poems and to the ideas they embody.* These poets bear witness to the interior landscape of their own individual selves or examine the private or personal worlds of invented personae and, therefore, of human beings living in our modern and postmodern worlds" [emphasis mine].

Immediately poets included in the volume such as Baraka stated that the introductory rationale was 'garbage' and criticized the anthology's division between form and activism. For full text see, http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/article/245846

This was the official introduction for the poet who wrote ten years before,

> Calling on All Silent Minorities (1973)
>
> HEY
>
> C'MON
> COME OUT
>
> WHEREVER YOU ARE
>
> WE NEED TO HAVE THIS MEETING
> AT THIS TREE
>
> AIN'T EVEN BEEN
> PLANTED
> YET

Jordan is a poet who cannot be said to have privileged craft or form above politics, but rather worked fluidly with all of the parameters.

Dove states in the introduction, "For the most part, minority expression[9] was obliged to identify itself in relationship to the establishment; female and nonwhite poets had little choice but to emulate or, if temperamentally suited, argue with the rulers of mainstream perception" (xxxiii). The power relations unfolding in Dove's anthology and in US American poetry can be witnessed throughout the institutional debates examined in my dissertation. I have been interested in how *minority expressors* negotiated their legibility in addition to the ways in which they fought back. Equally, I am interested in

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[9] "The New," of course, is fraught with colonialist and economic desires. In a 1856 letter to Emerson, Whitman proclaimed, "Open the doors of The West. Call for new great masters to comprehend new arts, new perfections, new wants… The genius of all *foreign* literature is clipped and cut small, compared to our genius, and is essentially insulting to our usages, and to the organic compacts of These States… Authorities, poems, models, laws, names, *imported* into America, are useful today to destroy them, and so move disencumbered to great works, great days" [emphasis mine].

the ways that race, particularly blackness becomes the raw material or the backdrop in which white innovation is said to occur. Lastly, I have become interested in how this relationship may have produced an *illegibility*, or an opacity[10] (rather than transparency) in minoritized aesthetics.

*

When I am asked to describe my dissertation and I respond that it is largely a project on race and aesthetics, people often quip: *Wasn't so and so's description of racial tension in the United States very compelling?* And most often: *What are the objects/texts* I *can use to teach myself/and or others about race and politics?*

I used to answer this query emphatically by naming titles, listing authors, emailing pdfs and links, but over the course of seven years, I have developed an allergy to this question. After researching the racialized terrains of property and its relationship to the arts, I have become dedicated to a kind of uncertainty concerning the matter.

To be clear, I am committed to seeking out, and providing evidence, of the clarity, the clear continuums of racialized and specifically antiblack violence that ground and make "art worlds" possible. In my project, and in the world, this continuum is not up for debate—the remaining task is the venture of framing and exhibiting the evidence gathered to be held as proof. Here is a certainty that requires no commitment, but absolutely has mine.

As equally as I am committed to writing about and researching the continuum of

[10] I'm pulling Édouard Glissant's term. See Glissant, Édouard trans. Betsy Wing. *Poetics of Relations.* University Michigan Press, 1997.

racialized, antiblack violence that spatialize capital A *Art* and P *Poetry*, I have grown committed to the uncertainty of racial recognition in aesthetic works. I am parsing a resistance to the clarity in which previous critics have allotted particular artworks and literature as evidentiary:

x object speaks to y history

y poem describes z event

& everything else lives elsewhere

I am uncertain of what the fields have deemed *evidentiary*, and suspicious of the flat lining produced in this discourse.

Moving forward, and in my revisions, I will be writing about this uncertainty, and the politics of certainty that has captured non-white artists and writers. This is not to roll out a naïve *why can't non-white writers and artists make whatever they want and have it not be about race/gender/class/sexuality,* but an examination of the assumptions previously made about, racial and gender politics, racial and gender dispossessions.

To the white gaze and in white traditions of scholarship, racialized violence is unknowable yet recognizable, unknowable yet rudimentary, unknowable yet passé. Yet in this same tradition, signifiers of love and romance reduce the subject to a universal fixation. She is imbued with difference, yet cored out. Held between expectations to perform identities, subjectivities, embodiments, and the desire to *take care*, are to enact the operations of NourbeSe Philips describes as indigestible.[11]

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[11] In "Interview with an Empire" NourbeSe Philip, writes "So much of the so-called developing world has been/is being consumed—literally—slipping into the great maw of the west and slipping down its throat to its stomach, there to be digested and transformed into some imitation of the original... In such a world to be indigestible—to have the ability to make consumption difficult—is a quality to be valued" (203)

Rendering the composite as the site of preservation, attack and witness—