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The Creation of Non-Being

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[1] Anti-blackness operates axiomatically. This is the case, at least, insofar as we speak of what Frank B. Wilderson, III, has called "the world" (Wilderson 2003: 234).^[1] The aim of this essay is to address the consequences of this axiomatic operation for some rather classical terms of reference within continental philosophy, such as being, analogy,^[2] communication, possibility, and knowledge. Such terms are the means by which the world claims to grant itself coherence; they form the grammatical ground, the structuring condition, of the world. If the "gratuitous violence" of anti-blackness extends into the very "grammar" of the world (Wilderson 2010: 38, 131),^[3] then the aforementioned terms—far from providing retreat into a "metaphysical" domain unaffected by the historical and material—serve as points for the articulation of antagonism toward anti-blackness. In fact, the gratuity of such violence—its irreducibility to purposive meaning—entails a refusal of the coherent ground that these very terms claim to supply. This is to say that being—or the possibility thereof—grounds itself not through its own coherence, but through an enactment of power that is staged by anti-black violence. Power precedes grammatical ground.

[2] Maurizio Lazzarato's analysis of contemporary capitalism approaches the anti-blackness analyzed by Wilderson. Lazzarato argues that capitalism is not grounded in any coherent science of economy, but is an enactment of the power to make indebted beings. It is by way of this emphasis on power that he links a purportedly secular capitalism to the theological structure of Christianity—that is, to a being that acts gratuitously, or without ground. Yet Lazzarato, I argue, ultimately wards off an encounter with anti-blackness through reliance on a coherence implicit in "the indebted man" (Lazzarato 2012: 8). I elaborate this argument by drawing on Gilles Deleuze's concept of "difference in itself" (Deleuze 1994: 36-89). This concept, on my reading, ungrounds the purported coherence of being by way of a logically prior differentiability, which is expressed as non-being. Essential to this argument is the task of articulating such non-being without conversion to an affirmation of the world.

Non-Being: Deleuze Against Affirmation

[3] Deleuze's philosophy has come to be associated with habits of affirmation, where "habits" indicate the practices or operations by which reality is experientially and experimentally enacted.^[4] This association could be attributed to Deleuze's invocation of concepts such as the rhizome, which appears to advocate teeming, emergent, multiplicitous movement in excess of all boundaries. In such a landscape of fluidity and flux, Deleuze's notion of creation then becomes associated with the affirmation of alternative

possibilities. This association may also be attributed to Deleuze's rigorous refusal of the being of negativity. He contends that negative being plays no role in the determination of reality, that it is in fact an illusion that conceals the force of differential immanence. Given the centrality of this contention, any association of Deleuze's thought with habits of affirmation would have to depend on the following claim: the refusal of negative being entails the refusal of habits of negativity, in favor of habits of affirmation.^[5]

[4] Yet it is fundamentally mistaken to conflate the refusal of negative being with the refusal of negative habits. The call for habits of affirmation is theoretically illegitimate: if all habits are real, and if reality has no negative being, then all habits—precisely because they are real—do not involve negative being; the reality that is habituated—regardless of whether this habituation is characterized as affirmative or negative—has no negative being. If the call for habits of affirmation is therefore not entailed by Deleuze's refusal of negative being, then from where does this call arise? If habits of affirmation are imperative, then from where does this imperativity draw its mandate? To begin to answer these questions, one must address the ways in which habits of affirmation are *logically consistent*—and ultimately *politically complicit*—with the contemporary conjuncture of capitalism.

[5] This conjuncture, which has been variously described in terms of "late capitalism," "postfordism," or "communicative capitalism," is marked by an affirmation of mobility, innovation, fluidity, possibility, and creativity. Deleuze analyzed this conjuncture in terms of control societies, which he distinguished from disciplinary societies. Control establishes domination not by setting up in advance strict boundaries, but rather by a kind of unending encouragement, or motivated permissiveness: control establishes and expands itself by establishing and expanding possibilities of communication. Domination "no longer operate[s] by confining people but through continuous control and instant communication" (Deleuze 1997: 174). Whereas discipline names the prohibition of excessive mobility and innovation, control names the "modulation" of the possibilities implied in such mobility and innovation (Deleuze 1997: 179).

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[6] With control, domination remains not despite, nor in opposition to, but precisely as possibility, which is modulated through a communicability that is ever more fluid and receptive in its listening in order to be ever more innovative in its surveilling.^[7] Following Deleuze's analysis of control, habits of affirmation—of multiplicitous possibilities, or of the possibility of being-otherwise—are not resistant to, but actually constitutive of, control's modulation. Control is marked by "*endless postponement*" (Deleuze 1997: 179), meaning that the future—as that which breaks with the present—never takes place. The present is extended into the future, and so the future becomes a modulation of the present; an essential incommensurability between present and future remains unthinkable.^[8] Given Deleuze's analysis, it is not by accident that he increasingly experimented with habits of negativity. In his last book, *What is Philosophy?* – co-written with Félix Guattari, and published one year after his analysis of control—one can observe, for instance, his attentiveness to "shame" (Deleuze and Guattari 1996: 107), which was motivated by his reading of Primo Levi, or his indication of agreement with the negative dialectic of Theodor Adorno.^[9]

[7] One finds, in the same book, a polemic against communication and a concomitant positioning of creation as distinct from and incommensurable with the communicative.^[10] Simply put, Deleuze's increased attention to control, or communication, directly corresponds to his increased attention to the negative—not as being but as experience and experiment, as habit. Thus it is not only that Deleuze's refusal of negative being cannot be conflated with habits of affirmation, it is also that Deleuze, when attending to control, attempts to articulate habits of *negativity*. *What is Philosophy?* concludes with an articulation of the *No* of chaos, the *non* of thought that enables creation: philosophy must attain "an essential relationship with the No that concerns it"; philosophy does "not need the No as beginning, or as the end in which [it] would be called upon to disappear by being realized, but at every moment of [its] becoming or [its] development" (Deleuze and Guattari 1996: 218).

[8] The creation named by Deleuze's philosophy is thus in immanence with the No, and it is this No-creation immanence that begins to articulate antagonism toward communication: "Creating has always been something different from communicating" (Deleuze 1997: 175). This divergence between communication and the No of creation is utter, essential, and irredeemable. There is no possibility of emancipating communication, nor is there any affirmative basis for creation—for the base is communication. There is nothing to affirm, and so creation is immanent with the negativity of the non: "The key thing may be to create vacuoles of noncommunication" (Deleuze 1997: 175).

The Reality of Non-Being

[9] My argument, drawing on Deleuze, is that the logic of possibility actually serves to modulatively reproduce the anti-black grammar of the world. Creation, defined as a break with the presently given world, is not a possibility. It is rather immanent with an axiomatic No to such possibility, with habits of negativity.

[10] This thesis concerns a key problematic that stems from the Afro-Pessimist analysis of anti-blackness: if blackness stands both within the habitus of modernity, as an organizing principle, and without this habitus, as a perpetually banished subjectivity, then the very articulation of blackness would seem to depend on and reproduce such a habitus. In other words, both *being-within* and *being-without* are possibilities governed by modernity's dominative positioning of blackness. The articulation of blackness is in fact bound by this problematic insofar as one remains within the ambit of habits of affirmation. In other words, the presumption of affirmation is co-extensive with the reproduction of the habitus of modernity: that which is presently available for affirmation is already governed by modernity and its articulation of blackness, and so habits of affirmation inevitably participate in and reproduce the double-bind in which modernity positions blackness.

[11] Against such reproduction, it is essential to insist on habits of negativity. Such insistence is total: since it is affirmation *as such* that entails participation in the being here indexed by modernity, even a modicum of affirmation mitigates the force enacted by negativity. The power of creation therefore resides entirely and essentially on the side of negativity—and not at all on the side of affirmation. Concomitantly, to invoke such power actually entails an unmitigated refusal of habits of affirmation; affirmation does not

name or support, but on the contrary denies, the power of creation. Given the double-bind in which modernity positions blackness, this is to say that the negativity of the non, in virtue of its immanence with a force of creation, indexes blackness as a power of non-being, as that which is without need of—and in fact opposed to—reliance on the affirmative.

[12] It remains necessary to outline the articulation of this immanence of creation and non-being—that is, to theoretically express how an unmitigated insistence on habits of negativity can be both a refusal of affirmation and an enactment of power. This warrants a return to Deleuze's thought by way of some questions: How can habits of negativity, articulated via Deleuze's insistence on the non, gain theoretical consistency with his conceptual refusal of negative being? If negative being is refused, then in what sense can there be insistence on the non?

[13] Deleuze argues that "being is difference itself. Being is also non-being, *but non-being is not the being of the negative* . . . non-being is Difference" (Deleuze 1994: 76-77). This makes clear that negative being is refused in virtue of *difference*; what is essential is difference in itself. Hence difference is articulated not as the affirmation of affirmative being, nor even as the affirmation of being as such. On the contrary, difference is articulated as "non-being": negative *being* is refused, but it is refused in favor of *non-being*. Difference antecedes both positive being *and* negative being, thereby displacing their dialectical or conflictual relation. In other words, difference is not between opposed beings but in itself, autonomous from and antecedent to every being or thing; difference is real, but precisely as a matter of *non-being*. Its reality is not the being of a thing, it is *no-thing*.

[14] Such theorization enables the delinking of creation (as force of non-being, or no-thing) from affirmation (as possibility of being). Difference, or non-being, marks a real force of creation that is without, and incommensurable with, being. In virtue of this unanalogizability of non-being with being, creation is articulated as a force stemming from negativity, and not at all from affirmation: affirmation is said of being and its possibilization, whereas creation is said of non-being. Habits of negativity, which antagonize every (positively or negatively described) being, or being as such, are thus coeval with an insistence on the real force of non-being.

[15] This argument can be used to negotiate a tension between the Afro-Pessimist emphasis on irresolvable negativity and the concern of Black Optimism to emphasize a power named by blackness: while the former's emphasis on negativity extends to habits of affirmation as such, this negativity immanently involves—and thus does not abandon—an insistence on the power of creation. Consequently, the Black Op concern to speak of the power of blackness may be satisfied entirely within the space of negativity, or social death, on which Afro-Pessimism insists. Such satisfaction does not then require recourse to qualifications that would mitigate the negativity of this space. On the contrary, power is immanent to a redoubled negativity, or a negativity toward both being and the affirmation of the possibility of being-otherwise.

[16] Yet even as Deleuze's philosophical efforts may be deployed by and for the articulation of Afro-Pessimist claims, these claims vertiginously intensify Deleuze's theorization of non-being: Deleuze

theorizes non-being in terms of a "vertigo" of immanence (Deleuze and Guattari 1996: 48), yet blackness is the historical, material experience of such vertigo. Drawing on a distinction made by Wilderson, this is to say that for Deleuze non-being is a "subjective vertigo," or a vertigo *into which* Deleuze's thought makes an entrance, while blackness is experienced as "objective vertigo," meaning that vertigo is—historically or materially—*always already* there (Wilderson 2011: 3). Immanence, or the vertigo of non-being, remains an *object for* the thought of Deleuze; blackness is historically or materially the *objective reality of* non-being—the very reality of the vertigo of immanence. Consequently, to think non-being according to blackness entails the reading of Deleuze's theoretical articulation in terms of the operations by which historical, material power is enacted.

Debt, Power, and Christianity

[17] A central feature of control is debt. As Deleuze remarks, "A man is no longer a man confined but a man in debt" (Deleuze 1997: 179). The experience of the indebted man is one of endless postponement, for the creditor-debtor relation sets the terms, in the present, for the future of this relation. Otherwise put, the relation between present and future is circumscribed within the relation between creditor and debtor: to have credit is to have the future as a present creditor; to have debt is to have the future as a present debtor. The future is given credit by the present, or the future is what one is given to pay off the debt of the present. In such a relation, the future is endlessly postponed while the present remains, endures, as credit and debt. Any negativity toward the present is foreclosed, and so the future is never *created*.

[18] Yet Deleuze's analysis of control, and thereby of debt, is inchoate. For this reason, it will be useful to turn to the arguments set forth in Lazzarato's recent text, *The Making of the Indebted Man*, which offers a thoroughgoing development of the insights of Deleuze's analysis. The usefulness of this text arises, additionally, from the fact that Lazzarato—unlike many who work in a Deleuzian vein—tends to avoid dependence on an ineliminable excess of being that is presumed to overcome the limits of the present. Rather than treat Deleuze's thought as the index of an indefatigable, constitutive power of being that *guarantees* political possibility, Lazzarato attends to the ways in which control has *foreclosed* such possibility. As such, Lazzarato is perhaps the best available candidate for exemplifying Deleuzian thought without the presumption of affirmation.

[19] Lazzarato presents the indebted man as the subjective terrain of communicative capitalism's apparatus of control, and in doing so develops some of Deleuze's central claims. For instance, he observes how debt "preempts non-chronological time, each person's future as well as the future of society as a whole," and contends that debt is the "principal explanation for the strange sensation of living in a society without time, without possibility, without foreseeable rupture" (Lazzarato 2012: 46-47). Furthermore, he confirms that debt marks the appearance of capitalism's capacity to *make* being as such, and thus to make the future: "The power of capitalism, like the world it aims to appropriate and control, is always *in the process of being made*" (Lazzarato 2012: 107).

[20] Lazzarato offers a key advance on Deleuze with his emphasis on the aforementioned being-making capacity of capitalism. Specifically, he insists that debt is not a scientific necessity—something that

stems from autonomous economic laws—but rather a product of *power*. Debt belongs to the exercise of power, and as such it is a making of beings that are logically prior to—and thus do not gain their coherence through—any science of economy. "Measure, evaluation, and appraisal"—the means by which debt expresses and constructs itself—"all arise from the question of power, before there is any question of economics" (Lazzarato 2012: 80). It is in virtue of the centrality of power within his analysis that Lazzarato offers an additional advance: the claim that attention to the debt-relation is inseparable from attention to the Christian relation. The power at issue, Lazzarato argues, is one in which the "origin of valuation and measure is both religious and political" (Lazzarato 2012: 81).

[21] Lazzarato's theorization of capitalism as a power to *make* the debt-relation—and not as a secular science regulating this relation—leads him to introduce and emphasize the Christian valence of "debt obligations" (Lazzarato 2012: 40-41). He argues that what makes the debt-relation hold (as its necessary, if not sufficient, condition) is obligation, and that the theorization of this obligation requires attending to the Christian character of debt. Being is made through the establishment of a creditor-debtor relation, yet essential to this relation is the establishment of obligation, and obligation, Lazzarato argues, is established by Christianity (from which capitalism inherits it). Simply put, the making of beings through debt is made through obligation, which is made through Christianity. It is along these lines that he claims we are now "indebted to the 'god' Capital" (Lazzarato 2012: 32). Lazzarato's analysis of the debt-relation thereby demonstrates that the power by which capitalism makes being is bound up with a power named by Christianity. Capitalist power must then be analyzed in its undividedness from Christian power, and in a way that attends to the negativity of non-being against being.

Asymmetry as Analogy

[22] One way of addressing this task is to think debt as inheritance—that is, to think the inheritance of Christian debt by capitalism, and in doing so to think how a *capacity* of being is inherited by capitalism from Christianity. We inherit debt, and debt requires that our future be inherited—ahead of time—as the debt enacted in the present. But it is not just that *debt* is inherited, it is also that debt *constitutes its inheritors as something*, as beings analogically belonging to a "we." Note, for instance, the collective first-person of Lazzarato's claim: "We are no longer the inheritors of original sin but rather of the debt of preceding generations" (Lazzarato 2012: 32). *Who is "we"?*

[23] It is by way of this question that one begins to encounter a limit of Lazzarato's analysis, which I will address in a logical register before returning to the explicitly historical marks of the inheritance that he tracks. This limit, *logically* speaking, is Lazzarato's focus on asymmetry. He clearly observes the injustice of the debt-relation by articulating the deep asymmetry between creditor and debtor.^[11] While this observation is not incorrect, the approach to which it belongs ignores the ways in which asymmetry remains *within* being. In order for one thing to be communicated as asymmetrical with or disproportionate to another thing, these things must be analogical to one another, possessing a minimal degree of likeness or commonality. Therefore creditor and debtor, despite the extremity of their asymmetry, remain analogous to each other *as* beings.

[24] This is to say that the debt-relation operates as a domain of analogous being, and that Lazzarato—by presupposing and leaving in place this domain—fails to encounter the negativity of non-being.^[12] Whereas asymmetry presupposes the commonality and analogical relation of beings, non-being names that which is without being, and thus without analogical relation to being(s): something and nothing are not asymmetrical but incommensurable. Lazzarato's critique of debt, by focusing on asymmetry, ignores this absence of analogy between being (whether positive or negative, creditor or debtor) and non-being, and so it can only amount to a *modulation* of being—that is, a modulation of *we*.

[25] Returning to Lazzarato's history of Christian-capitalist inheritance, I contend that this modulation is evident as an apparent transmutation within the "we": we were *once* the inheritors of original sin, whereas we are *now* the inheritors of debt. Yet a deeper continuity remains, for while we are different, it is *we* who have undergone—and survived—discontinuity: we are still *we*. Previously we inherited original sin, whereas now we inherit debt, but we are still those who inherit—and, in virtue of this being-inherited or inheriting-being, we are *something*. We are *we*, and we remain *we*, across any apparent discontinuity of Christianity and capitalism, because what remains, what is constant, is the capacity to inherit. Such inheritance is not so happy, of course, for to inherit sin, or to inherit debt, is to be exploited by God or capital. Yet this structure of exploitation maintains an analogy between exploiter and exploited: we are exploited, but precisely through this exploitation, this inheritance of debt, we still know ourselves as *we*.

[26] In this sense, "we" names the inherited capacity to be-something, or the capacity to inherit being. What is ultimately inherited is not debt so much as this *capacity*: the debt that exploits is the debt that gives being, that gives the capacity *to be* in analogy with other beings, and thus to participate in or communicate as *we*. To frame the inheritance of debt primarily in terms of its asymmetry or exploitation is thus to obscure the fact that inheritability, or the ability to inherit, is the common or communicable being underlying all asymmetry. This is to say that Lazzarato focuses his analysis on the conflictual *relation* between beings of the anti-black world and thereby fails to address the more essential antagonism between blackness and the world. Lazzarato remains *within* the being of inheritance, or within the *we* that underlies and guarantees the "coherence"^[13] (Hartman and Wilderson 2003: 187) of asymmetrical relation, whereas any break with the present must be articulated according to blackness, which is *without* relation.

[27] The break, then, must be articulated according to the *uninheritability* of blackness. For Lazzarato, however, blackness remains in "the position of the unthought" (Hartman and Wilderson 2003: 185), and this is precisely because he adheres to the universalizable horizon of the *we*. "Everyone is a 'debtor,' accountable to and guilty before. Capital has become the Great Creditor, the Universal Creditor" (Lazzarato 2012: 11).^[14] Yet it is clear that there are those who do not participate in the *we* of the indebted man.^[15] Logically prior to the domination articulated via asymmetrical relations of *we* (inheritance of debt), there is domination articulated as non-being: "the damned of the earth"^[16] do not inherit.

The Anti-Blackness of the Indebted Man

[28] This is to name the essential limit of Lazzarato's account as the failure to analyze the ways in which the domination of capitalism is constituted by the domination of anti-blackness. In making this claim, I am following Wilderson's argument that "the privileged subject of Marxist discourse is a subaltern who is approached by variable capital—a wage. In other words, Marxism assumes a subaltern structured by capital, not by white supremacy" (Wilderson 2003: 225). The essential limit of Marxism, he argues, is its theorization of capitalism in terms of "*exploitation* (rather than accumulation and death)" (Wilderson 2003: 234). Marxism thus begins from and stays within the being of whiteness, a being whose coherence is premised on the denial of the fact that capital "was kick-started by approaching a particular body (a Black body) with direct relations of force, not by approaching a White body with variable capital" (Wilderson 2003: 230).

[29] The position of the worker, in virtue of its raced difference from the position of the slave, asserts a capacity for analogical relation—even amidst exploitation—with the exploiter. The exploited and the exploiter, despite their asymmetry, share a being that is made through the denial of blackness, which is positioned as the slave; the worker possesses an analogical relation to the owner that the slave does not. To presume that the slave position can be analogized with the worker position is thus to attribute the latter's analogical capacity to the former, which is without analogy. It is to presume an analogy between what is capable of being analogous with what *is not*: "the ruse of analogy" (Wilderson 2010: 37).

[30] This means, as well, that there can be no question of an intersection between separate but equal spheres of class and anti-black racism, much less of an account that takes up anti-blackness as a means of proceeding toward a supposedly essential antagonism of class. Against such accounts, Wilderson remarks that, within them, "racism is read off the base, as it were, as being derivative of political economy" (Wilderson 2003: 225). On the contrary, what is essential is anti-black racism, or the incommensurability between non-being and being: class division concerns relations between analogizable terms (owner and worker) that, however conflictual or exploitative, presume a common being, a being whose making—and being made coherent—is premised on (the *denial* of) the real non-being of the slave.

[31] All this is to say that anti-black racial ontology is the condition of *possibility* for the Marxist demand—central to Lazzarato's own version of autonomist Marxism—for *being* free from exploitation. As Christina Sharpe remarks: "The legal captivity of Africans and their descendants was central to the codification of rights and freedoms for those legally constituted as white and their legally white descendants. That is, freedoms for those people constituted as white were and are produced through an other's body legally and otherwise being made to wear unfreedom and to serve as a placeholder for access to the freedoms that are denied the black subject" (Sharpe 2010: 15). The being of freedom, or the articulation of a free being – that is, *the very link between being and freedom*—is premised upon a denial of blackness, or non-being. This is the case even (or especially) when freedom is expressed as a *possibility*, for such possibility—pertaining only to that which has already emerged as being—cannot articulate that which this emergence denies. As Saidiya V. Hartman remarks, the "language of freedom no longer becomes that which rescues the slave from his or her former condition, but the site of the re-elaboration of that condition" (Hartman and Wilderson 2003: 185).

[32] Freedom names the modulative, mutational possibilities of being(s). Marxist discourse, however innovative, addresses free beings, or the being of freedom. It leaves unthought non-being, the reality of which is logically prior to all being, and thus to all possibilities of being. It is for this reason that Lazzarato's account of capitalism in terms of debt, while an extremely innovative form of contemporary Marxism, still fails to articulate the essential antagonism of non-being.^[17] When Lazzarato speaks of the indebted man, of the "we" of debt inheritance, he is speaking of the position that Marxism ascribes to the worker—instead of a capital-work relation we have, in Lazzarato, a credit-debt relation.^[18] Debt innovatively re-defines the meaning of work, but it does not change the positionality of the worker, which remains as the position of the debtor.^[19] His critique proceeds in virtue of a link—foreclosed by debt—between being and freedom, without ever articulating that *the very possibility* of this link is premised on the denial of non-being, on the making of blackness as that which is without the possibility of being free. Lazzarato thereby fails to address how the being of the worker, now the indebted man, is rendered visible by standing out against the background of (black) flesh.^[20]

Accumulation, Time, and Relative Negativity

[33] The encounter between Lazzarato and Wilderson is of interest because it shows that even an innovated and deeply critical Marxism, responsive to the contemporary foreclosure of the future (or to the *relative* negativity therein), remains complicit in anti-blackness. This may be further elaborated by attending to the ways in which Lazzarato, by conceiving capitalism as a matter of power rather than of scientific economy, actually seems to *require* attention to the anti-blackness that he nonetheless evades. In other words, to give power's violence analytic priority over economy's rationality, as Lazzarato does, is to begin to theorize capitalism's *constitutive* violence—that is, the gratuitous violence that Wilderson locates in slavery (Wilderson 2010: 38).

[34] This dynamic is particularly evident in the *apparent* convergence between Lazzarato's analysis of primitive (or "original") accumulation and Wilderson's argument that the slave position perdures in contemporary capitalism. For Lazzarato, the power that is enacted in the creditor-debtor relation—even if it is now peculiarly manifest—is not merely contemporary. On the contrary, he argues that capitalism has *always* been a matter of a power irreducible to economic structure, from its beginning to its unending present, and that this is because accumulation is never simply primitive. What gets *cast* as primitive accumulation is actually something that *never ceases*: "The original accumulation of capital is always contemporaneous with its expansion; accumulation is not an historical stage, but an ever-renewed actuality" (Lazzarato 2012: 43).^[21] In other words, capitalism is the power to accumulate, and must be treated as such, without any developmental distinction between primitive and contemporary accumulations.

[35] Lazzarato's refusal to abide by such a developmental distinction is connected to what I have called relative negativity. The present, defined by control, appears to foreclose rather than develop possibilities of the future. Faced with such foreclosure, a developmentally oriented Marxism, with its tendency toward

mediatic or hegemonic advance, is put under severe stress. Its emphasis on affirmation, which underwrites historically progressive development, is called into question by the present foreclosure of the future. In contrast to this approach, Lazzarato takes up a relative negativity: he refuses the distinction (between primitive and contemporary accumulation) on which the affirmation of progress rests. In doing so, he permits theorization of the foreclosure of possibility: if the affirmative basis (on which progress depends) is refused, then the foreclosure of progress into the future ceases to be inexplicable.

[36] An instance of the sort of affirmative basis that Lazzarato refuses is provided by Antonio Negri's ontological redescription of labor power. For Negri, the possibility of the future can never be entirely foreclosed because the priority of labor to capital is ontological. Labor-power, no matter how exploited, belongs to a "constituent" power of being and thereby rests upon an inextinguishably affirmative basis.

[22] Along these lines, Lazzarato's emphasis on debt, as opposed to labor, may be understood as an attempt to articulate a subjectivity without affirmative basis, a subjectivity that *cannot access* the guarantees provided to labor by its supposed ontological priority.

[37] Nonetheless, Lazzarato's negativity remains *merely* relative; it does not accede to the negativity of non-being.[23] Once again, this is peculiarly striking insofar as his refusal to narrate a development from primitive to contemporary accumulation should force him to encounter the anti-blackness in which capitalism was *always already subsumed*—long before the more recent development of real subsumption. In other words, if capital's accumulation is just as much primitive as it is contemporary, then the conditions marking the former—namely the slave basis of capitalism—remain essential to the establishment of the present. Lazzarato's articulation of the contemporaneity of capitalism's "original accumulation" thus entails the contemporaneity of anti-blackness.

[38] Yet he keeps distance from the essence of capitalism—that is, from the non-being marked by anti-blackness (social death of the slave). Simply put, Lazzarato's *own* analysis of the temporality of capitalist accumulation should lead him, for instance, to Hartman's articulation of the "time of slavery": temporality that "*negates* the common-sense intuition of time as continuity or *progression*," and that does so in virtue of an insistence that "then and now coexist; we are coeval with the dead" (Hartman 2002: 759; emphases mine). Seeking to escape this negativity, Lazzarato *affirms* a different "we"—not a "we" "coeval with the dead," with non-being, but rather an indebted "we" that continues to presume the capacity to be.

The Logic of Inheritance

[39] This capacitation of being is structured by a logic of inheritance. Lazzarato, despite his ultimate collusion with such capacitation, already espied this logic when he observed a certain undividedness of Christian power and capitalist power. Nonetheless, his analysis of inheritance (in terms of debt) evades encounter with the essence of the power that inheritance enacts: the power to damn non-being. This logic of inheritance is the logic of the contemporary world;[24] the contemporary, or the presently given, is given *precisely as* inheritance. Such a claim refuses the understanding of the contemporary world as

secular—that is, as divided from, in supersession of, an historically prior period of Christianity.^[25] In doing so, it serves to emphasize the constitutive violence of the secular.^[26]

[40] Essential to the secular is the disavowal of its own violence, which it accomplishes by referring such violence to a domain of religion that is cast into the past. The gratuitous violence of secular anti-blackness exceeds the self-definition of the secular, but this excess is warded off, denied contemporary appearance, insofar as the secular treats violence as a matter of religion, which it claims to supersede in principle and to inevitably progress beyond in practice. To insist on the inheritance of Christianity by secular capitalism, then, is to refuse any operation whereby the violence of the secular—indexed, via Christianity, as (a) being that gratuitously damns—is disavowed. It is to insist that damnation perdures within a purportedly distinct secular frame.

[41] The logic of inheritance thus refuses any narrative according to which the secular divides from and thereby progresses beyond the Christian. Yet to refuse this division is not to reduce capitalist power to Christian power—as if capitalism were simply Christianity in disguise. Nor is it to understand the anti-blackness of secular capitalism as reducible to—and thus as a ruse for—the mode of domination set forth by Christianity. On the contrary, there is—amidst the undividedness of inheritance—a *qualitative intensification* of violence.

[42] In other words, just as the logic of inheritance tracks the secular "backward" into the Christian, so it tracks the Christian "forward" into the secular. This last is partially indicated by Lewis R. Gordon's claim that Christian being was inherited by or passed on as anti-black being: "Th[e] problematic of blackness is symbiotically linked to the world in which Christendom was transformed into Europe, where Germanic and Mediterranean Christians were transformed into whites ... blackness is fundamental to the formation of European modernity as it is one that imagines itself legitimate and pure through the expurgation of blackness" (Gordon 2013: 728-9). The qualitative intensification at issue in this passage from Christian to secular may be articulated by way of the passage from the (Christian) positioning of Jews and Muslims to the (secular) positioning of blackness.

[43] Christianity subjected Jews and Muslims, who had "wrong religion," to the choice between conversion and death. Importantly, having-wrong-religion was simultaneously racialized: Christian religion named the properly human, and so having-wrong-religion also meant being on the wrong side of the human *race*. Not only does the secular world inherit the Christian religio-racial discourse, it also intensifies this discourse as anti-blackness: Jews and Muslims, due to their possession of religion, were positioned as being capable (in theory) of *converting* to the full humanity named by Christianity and thereby retained a minimum of humanity;^[27] blacks, however, were denied the possibility of humanity. In other words, when Jews and Muslims were damned by Christianity, they were damned as *possible* humans—humans who lacked the actualization of full humanity (Christian being), but humans nevertheless. In secular capitalism, on the other hand, the form of actualization is no longer Christian being but a more generalized human being—one that is denied to blackness, to the position of the slave, as *such*. The damnation of Christian power is thus inherited, and qualitatively intensified, through the

positioning of blackness by secular power as that which is denied even the possibility of human being.

[44] This passage "forward," while a qualitative intensification, did not have the effect of leaving Christianity behind. On the contrary, secular anti-black racialization was able to be "retroactively" applied by Christianity to the subjects of its domination. This is evident, for instance, in the case of the Moriscos (Muslims baptized as part of their forced conversion to Christianity). As Ramón Grosfoguel observes, "Despite the Christian church prohibition to enslave Christians and people baptized as Christian," after the historical establishment of anti-blackness "Moriscos were massively enslaved in Granada" (Grosfoguel 2013: 85). In other words, a position that Christianity had prohibited or saved from enslavement was, in view of a consequent anti-blackness, subjected to the violence of such anti-blackness.

[45] The argument that I am advancing must be made precise. It is not that the violence of anti-blackness was already articulated by Christianity, such that the position of blackness was the mere extension of a position here exemplified by the Moriscos. This cannot be the case, since Christianity had already positioned Moriscos so as to be saved from enslavement. Nor is the point that the position of Moriscos, after enslavement, became analogous to the position of blackness—unlike blacks, Moriscos have the capacity to *narrate* enslavement as the *loss* of a prior being-saved from enslavement. The point is simply that once anti-blackness is articulated, Christianity does not mitigate—much less refuse—such violence. *On the contrary*, it renders such violence operable within its own logic. In this sense, Christian damnation recognizes the anti-blackness operative under secular capitalism as its own heir, as a violence whose qualitative intensification remains something that Christianity is able to recognize and claim as its own.

[46] Christianity's readiness to recognize and claim this violence as its own demonstrates its ultimate commensurability with the anti-black violence of secular capitalism. To attend to this commensurability is to understand that the limits of any Christian humanitarianism—when posed as a possible ally in combating anti-blackness—stem from (intrinsic) logical operation rather than from (extrinsic) historical conjuncture. This is to say, for instance, that an abolitionist claim motivated by Christian humanitarianism is contradictory at essence. In fact, even to grant such contradictions of intention is already too generous: if Christianity is ultimately commensurable with anti-blackness, then such a call for abolition is the capture of antagonism toward anti-blackness by means of the (redemptive) possibility of human being or freedom. It reproductively *modulates* the anti-black world through the possibility of emancipation—a possibility that is already narratively inscribed within Christian salvation as the redemption from sin, or debt. And debt remains a matter of inheritance.

[47] The logic of *inheritance* is meant to emphasize not only the undividedness of Christian power and secular power, of Christian being and secular being, but also the means by which this world *makes* (and continuously remakes) the division between being and non-being: kinship. This is to follow Hortense J. Spillers' argument concerning the central role played by (the denial of) kinship in anti-blackness. She remarks, for instance, that this establishment is one in which kinship, in terms of blackness, "loses meaning, *since it can be invaded at any given and arbitrary moment by property relations*" (Spillers 1987: 74). Blackness is subjected to a violence, enacted in slavery, from which kinship saves. Hence it is not

just blackness, but also the possibility of kinship within or for blackness, that is subjected to expurgation: "under conditions of captivity, the offspring of the female does not 'belong' to the mother, nor is s/he 'related' to the 'owner,' though the latter 'possesses' it, and in the African-American instance, often fathered it, *and*, as often, without whatever benefit of patrimony" (Spillers 1987: 74). The gratuitous violence to which blackness becomes subject, then, is both brought about by and reproduced as the denial of kinship.

[48] It is this violence, this uninheritability, that remains unthought in Lazzarato and thereby marks the commensurability of his analysis of debt with the anti-black world. As I have argued, his focus on the asymmetry of the creditor-debtor relation remains within the domain of being, and thus his account of the capitalist inheritance of Christianity fails to address the damnation marked by non-being. This means that even as he rightly articulates capitalism as the power to make being, he evades the central means of this making: not the power of debt that forecloses the freedom of being, but the power of kinship that denies blackness.^[28]

[49] Blackness is denied the capacity to inherit, whereas whiteness, no matter how exploited, still possesses this capacity—in fact, to be white is to inherit capacity as such. Making the same point, but from another angle, this is to say that blackness is subject to and imaginable in terms of enslavement precisely because kinship—the capacity for or inheritance of which defines one as something, and particularly as something that cannot simply be treated in terms of non-being—is already defined in terms of whiteness. It is not only that the experience of slavery deprives blackness of kinship, it is also that blackness is subjected to this experience of slavery precisely because kinship, as that which precludes such subjection, is already articulated as whiteness.^[29]

Control According to Captivity

[50] Given this adumbration of the logic of inheritance, non-being may be recapitulated—in a sense irreducible to Deleuze's strictly conceptual articulation, and in accordance with Afro-Pessimism's analysis of the forceful negativity of blackness—as that which is without the *kinship of being* or the *being of kinship*.^[30] One consequence of this approach is the reformulation of control societies in terms of George Jackson's analysis of "captive society" (Jackson 1994: 4), the elaboration of which draws upon the indications of Michelle Koerner's "Line of Escape."^[31] Conceiving control according to captivity has the analytic advantage of foregrounding anti-blackness in a way that control does not: a slave society is also a captive society, and so to speak of control according to captivity is to speak of the perdurance of anti-blackness in the contemporaneity of control. Whereas control may be reduced to debt, and thus to the supposed universality of the indebted man, the insistence on captivity breaks this universality through a position bound not to debt—the we of anti-black social life—but to gratuitous violence.

[51] If contemporary social life is constituted through what Jackson calls "neo-slavery,"^[32] then any public space for mediating conflicts, much less any *state* as a space for mediating the representation of (conflictual) people, is inadequate to social antagonism. As Koerner puts it, "Jackson asserts that,

despite the theatrics of representational democracy, the function of the state in 'captive society' is not exactly a political function but a *policing* one. The state here emerges not as the site of political power but as a *weapon*" (Koerner 2011: 167). Police violence, as the weapon constitutive of captive society, thus indicates a violence logically prior to any public. The gratuity of such violence can be analyzed only insofar as it is connected to the violence of a slavery that – contrary to the progressive aspirations of a public—has not ended.

[52] To observe this point is to redouble the refusal of any secular frame that purports to be distinct from Christian theological violence.^[33] This is because the inadequacy of the public sphere or the state is fundamentally an inadequacy of the secular. After all, both the public sphere and the state are imagined by or as the secular, which presents itself as a space of neutrality (at least in principle) for the mediation of conflicts. The secular claims this capacity for mediation insofar as it defines itself as fundamentally distinct from religion, which in turn is defined as the cause of the violence that sabotages the neutrality of secular space. As I have argued, however, secular capitalism should be understood as undivided from Christianity. This means that the secular, while correct in its claim that religion—specified as Christian damnation—is an index of violence, uses this very claim to disavow its own perpetuation and qualitative intensification of such gratuitous violence via anti-blackness.

[53] Against the world's gratuitous violence, there is no means of mediation, no space of reasons. As Koerner remarks, "Power, in the terms of Jackson's analysis, is *essentially predatory*. And it is for this reason that Jackson conceptualizes the forces of resistance in 'captive society' in terms of escape and, above all, running" (Koerner 2011: 168). She observes that one of Deleuze's central concepts, the "line of flight," is essentially a gloss on Jackson's writing. "Jackson's name – always accompanied by the refrain, 'I may run, but all the while that I am, I'll be looking for a stick'—appears" in three of Deleuze's texts, and, "In each instance, Jackson's line announces the idea that 'escape is revolutionary'" (Koerner 2011: 160). Escape, however, cannot be separated from antagonism: "a line of flight composes itself as a search for a weapon" (Koerner 2011: 161). I contend that the connection between escape and weaponization, which remains indeterminate in Deleuze, should be addressed via the distinction between control and captivity: under conditions of control, flight may remain an imaginable possibility; under conditions of captivity, the stakes of such flight involve the end of the possibility of this world.

Knowledge Never Inherited

[54] The question of escape, or Deleuze's "line of flight," thus becomes a different matter when under the pressure of the Afro-Pessimist analysis, elaborated here in terms of inheritance. Captivity is not a space within the world, but the world itself; as the world is the very inheritance of being, the line of flight is less a matter of escape than a matter of knowing – without inheritance—to antagonize being as such. Escape, then, is not the (ultimately inextinguishable) appearance of a freedom of being. It is instead the (intrinsic) vertiginosity of non-being.^[34] The operations of the force immanent to this vertiginous non-being are indexed at an epistemic (rather than ontological) register: non-being's absence, its incommensurability with any being, entails its essential enactment as a knowledge that is antagonistic

toward *conversion*.

[55] Conversion, in its specifically Christian formulation, was marked by a turn toward the salvific, transcendent being of Christ. The term may be defined, within the logic of inheritance, as the act of turning toward any being that claims to save (and thus indebt), and that in doing so claims, more basically and by sovereign presumption, the power to damn. To be damned can be understood at the level of names, or in terms of what Louis Althusser famously conceived as "interpellation." In his account, he named interpellation—literally—in terms of conversion. Koerner cites the key passage, in which Althusser says of "the hailed individual" that "By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty degree physical conversion, he becomes a subject" (Althusser 2001: 118; Koerner 2011: 171).

[56] Koerner cites this passage because it is the police who do such hailing, and whose doing so provides an Althusserian script for the occasion of Jackson's flight. Yet in contrast to Althusser's emphasis on naming as ideological, Jackson's being-named puts him under the gun, subject to a violence that exceeds any analogy between himself and that from which he runs—gratuity is, by definition, without the measure of analogy.^[35] In other words, the conversion to which Jackson is subjected is not a scene whereby he is confronted with and constituted by an ideological name; it is a scene in which he is bound to an intensified modality of violence that is inseparable from his namability as non-being.^[36]

[57] Jackson does not turn around or convert: he *knows* that he is being named, or damned—in this instance, unlike a purely "ideological" subject, it amounts to the same thing—by captive society's police; he *knows* that on the basis of this conversion, this "mere one-hundred-and-eighty degree" turn, he is subject to gratuitous predation. Jackson's communicability is Jackson's capture. His antagonism has no name on which to base itself, for the only name it has is already damned. To *not* convert—to not turn around, to not have a name, to not communicate—is *non-being*. Yet _____ knows this. And this knowledge, while baseless rather than a basis, while negative rather than affirmative—an enactment of non-being rather than a conversion toward being-something—is real.

[58] Such immanence of non-being and knowledge, or "gnosis," is incommensurable with the inheritance of being.^[37] The inheritance of being is imposed, whether through Christ or the police, by external means. Yet gnosis is knowledge without inheritance, knowledge that is not acquired or possessed but rather baselessly enacted.^[38] In this sense, gnosis is not a matter of what Sharpe critically describes as a narrative "in which readable progress is proximity to whiteness, and where both come to signify as a gift, as (positive) inheritance" (Sharpe 2010: 13). Gnosis is without need of any gift of being, any grace of inheritance.

[59] Jackson's knowledge enacts itself as *knowledge of uninheritability*.^[39] Such knowledge has nothing to do with *being* transcendent or prior to genealogy. It immanently enacts *non-being* as negativity toward the given inheritance of slaveness. As Jackson remarks: "When I revolt slavery dies with me. I refuse to pass it down" (Jackson 1994: 250; Koerner 2011: 157). When he "refuse[s] to pass it down," Jackson refuses every alternative possibility, every being-something or being-otherwise, of inheritance: non-being

against the being of kinship and the kinship of being.^[40]

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Notes

1. "World" here refers not to reality as such, but more precisely to the paradigmatic operations by which reality is structured, positioned, and rendered sensible. Yet this does not mean that one can directly express or pose reality as distinct from the world, for the world governs the very conditions of possibility for expression or position. Even purportedly universal terms, such as humanity, social life, and—to invoke the concern of this essay—being itself, are operations of the world. The Afro-Pessimist thesis, following Wilderson, is that this world constitutes itself and maintains its coherence, at essence, through anti-blackness: the world has being insofar as blackness does not. Since the grammar of this world, or the logic of the aforementioned operations, is so naturalized—enacted and assumed by/from power—that it generally has no need to appear (much less defend itself), the articulation of reality without the anti-black world must begin as an articulation against this world.
2. Both the reading of Lazzarato I provide below and my general argument, which revolves around the question of negativity and analogy, are deeply shaped by—and only conceivable thanks to—the writings of Wilderson, whose claim about analogy is summarized in the following remark, made in conversation with Hartman: "In my own work, obviously I'm not saying that in this space of negation, which is blackness, there is no life. We have tremendous life. But this life is not analogous to those touchstones of cohesion that hold civil society together. In fact, the trajectory of our life (within our terrain of civil death) is bound up in claiming—sometimes individually, sometimes collectively—the violence which Fanon writes about in *The Wretched of the Earth*, that trajectory which, as he says, is 'a splinter to the heart of the world' and 'puts the settler out of the picture.' So, it doesn't help us politically or psychologically to try to find ways in which how we live is analogous to how white positionality lives, because, as I think your book suggests, whites gain their coherence by knowing what they are not" (Hartman and Wilderson 2003: 187).
3. Wilderson, in this context, speaks of a "grammar of suffering."
4. Given the appearance of an (at least minimal) indeterminacy of reality, habit names the enactment—and concomitant determination—of reality's indeterminacy.
5. It may be useful to address a question that inevitably accompanies my argument: Is the association of Deleuze with habits of affirmation simply a misreading of Deleuze—a sort of external manipulation of his philosophy—or is there something in his thought that elicits such an association? Deleuze's metaphors of flux, considered in isolation, certainly do not preclude an alliance with the networked affirmation of the contemporary conjuncture of capitalism. Along these lines, his critique of affirmation, which is made explicit in his later work, enters as a kind of intervention into his previous work. Apart from such intervention, however, my claim is that Deleuze's thought—at its conceptual center, which is the theorization of difference in itself—already provides the resources for a critique of habits of affirmation.
6. Control is "like a self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one moment to the next, or like a sieve whose mesh varies from one point to the other" (Deleuze 1997: 179).
7. The fundamental insidiousness of control is that it permits and encourages the fluidity, mobility,

and possibility implied by the sheer *capacity* to narrate. Communicative capitalism does not work by mandating what can and cannot be narrated, rather it calls for any-narration-whatever, as long as the possibility of narration *is* affirmed.

8. On this operation of modulation, particularly in its authoritarian, global, and racialized implications, see Massumi 1998.
9. He remarks that his understanding of philosophy is "closer to what Adorno called 'negative dialectic' and to what the Frankfurt School called 'utopian'" (Deleuze and Guattari 1996: 99).
10. For a discussion of these themes in Deleuze, specifically as they connect to questions of creation and the future, see Barber 2014.
11. He remarks, for instance, that there is "no equality (of exchange) underlying social relation, but rather an asymmetry of debt/credit" (Lazzarato 2012: 11).
12. To be a debtor—not to mention a creditor—is to be made a being capable of narration, a being that communicates. Consider, for instance, that even though debt can make one feel guilty, as if one is in the wrong, it thereby makes the debtor into something—a being with guilt. In doing so, it makes a being with the capacity to move, a being in possession of the possibility to be—and to narrate its being—emancipated from guilt.
13. Wilderson, in dialogue with Hartman, remarks: "as I think your book suggests, whites gain their coherence by knowing what they are not."
14. It may be noted that Deleuze resisted, to some degree, this universalization of debt with his remark that "capitalism still keeps three quarters of humanity in extreme poverty, too poor to have debts" (Deleuze 1997: 181).
15. In view of this investment in universalization, the gendered nature of "the indebted man" should be observed. More precisely, universalization's taking-distance from the feminine should be connected to its taking-distance from blackness.
16. I am drawing on Miguel Mellino's claim—see Mellino 2013—that Fanon's classic text should be translated into English not as *The Wretched of the Earth*, but rather as *The Damned of the Earth*. For a discussion of Fanon and "the damned," see Marriott 2011.
17. While Lazzarato's work is meaningfully distinct from—particularly in its being less affirmative than—Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's theory of "the multitude" (Hardt and Negri, 2001), there remains a connection insofar as Lazzarato, like Hardt and Negri, seeks to articulate a scenario of "real subsumption," in which the entire scope of life is entangled in capitalism. For Wilderson's critical account of Hardt and Negri, see Wilderson 2010: 247-284.
18. In fact, Wilderson's analysis and refusal of Marxism's account of the worker holds just as much for Lazzarato's account of the debtor. To see this, it is enough to cite an instance of Wilderson's analysis, but in doing so to replace "civil" society with "debt" society, "hegemony" with "communicative control," "worker" with "debtor," and "wages" (or "waged") with "debts" (or "indebted"): "[Debt] society is the terrain where [communicative control] is produced, contested, mapped. And the invitation to participate in [communicative control's] gestures of influence, leadership, and consent is not extended to the Black subject. We live in the world, but exist outside of [debt] society. This structurally impossible position is a paradox because the Black subject, the slave, is vital to [debt] society's political economy: s/he kick-starts capital at its genesis and rescues it from its over-accumulation crisis at its end—Black death is its condition of possibility. [Debt] society's subaltern, the [debtor], is coded as [indebted], and [debts] are White" (Wilderson 2003: 238).

19. Debt, he remarks, "implies the molding and control of subjectivity such that 'labor' becomes indistinguishable from 'work on the self'" (Lazzarato 2012: 33).
20. As Spillers writes: "before the 'body' there is the 'flesh,' that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse, or the reflexes of iconography. Even though the European hegemonies stole bodies—some of them female—out of West African communities in concern with the African 'middleman,' we regard this human and social irreparability as high crimes against the *flesh*, as the person of African females and African males registered the wounding. If we think of the 'flesh' as a primary narrative, then we mean its seared, divided, ripped-apartness, riveted to the ship's hole, fallen, or 'escaped' overboard" (Spillers 1987: 67).
21. On this point, Lazzarato is highly indebted to the work of Silvia Federici. See Federici 2004.
22. See, for instance, Negri 1999.
23. It may be claimed that Giorgio Agamben's philosophy has acceded to non-being. This is because Agamben, against the presumption that potentiality must pass over into the actuality of being, argues that there is a potentiality not to be, or a potentiality of non-being. (See, for instance, Agamben 1999.) For Agamben, then, non-being involves a potentiality irreducible to being. While similarly concerned to account for the present's foreclosure of possibility, Agamben—unlike Lazzarato—has no need to invest in an affirmation of the present: the foreclosure of possibilities of affirmation can already be explained as the intrinsic foreclosure of non-being by being.

However, there remains a key distinction between Agamben's non-being and Deleuze's non-being. For Agamben, non-being is in a vestigial dialectics of potentiality (or possibility) and actuality, of non-being and being. Given such a scenario, he is right to valorize the former term in each of these oppositions. Nonetheless, such valorization is ultimately inseparable from that to which it is opposed. In other words, the potentiality of non-being is ultimately bound to a relation with what it opposes—its negativity thus remains *relative* to the being it negates. This is why it tends to be articulated as a *withdrawal of relation from* being, rather than as a *force against* being. Such withdrawal presupposes a position, within being, that possesses the capacity to withdraw. Withdrawal narrates itself as *no longer* being, whereas antagonism toward anti-blackness requires articulation of a position that *never was* being.

On the other hand, I have argued that Deleuze's non-being names difference in itself, which may be understood as the reality of force. This force is articulated as "non" precisely because its reality, as differential, is *irreducible* to the coherence (and relationality) entailed by "being." Articulation according to non-being is simultaneously articulation of a real power of unmitigated negativity (pessimism) with regard to all being (the world). In other words, such emphasis on a force that is powerful as non-being allows articulation of an antagonism that is powerful *precisely* in its absence of being. This coequality of force and *essential* non-being—without any temporal narrative of withdrawal—allows Deleuze to be used (in a manner that Agamben cannot) for the articulation of a logic adequate to anti-blackness.

24. This is the same world, I contend, to which Wilderson refers when calling for "the end of the world" (Wilderson 2010: 337).
25. For an exemplary and powerful articulation of the undividedness of the Christian and the secular—though with emphasis on the position of the Semite rather than on that of blackness—see Anidjar

2007.

26. Some qualifications of this logic of inheritance may be useful. It should be made clear, for instance, that its concern is not to provide an account of the *historical* origins of slavery, but rather to elaborate a *logical* operation of the contemporary world of anti-blackness. Furthermore, and in connection with this emphasis on the operation of the *contemporary* world, my foregrounding of Christianity is not meant to deny or mitigate the historically central role played by Islam in anti-blackness. The logic of inheritance is connected to Christianity simply because the secular—which names the dominant logic of the contemporary world – articulates itself via the inheritance of Christianity rather than of Islam. In fact, the contemporary world's Islamophobia may be understood as an index of its Christian inheritance. To observe this, however, is not to conflate Islamophobia with anti-blackness: Islamophobia is, like anti-blackness, deployed by the logic of the secular, but—unlike anti-blackness—it is not defined by non-being.
27. In fact, Jews and Muslims, even when converted, were not positioned as full Christians due to their "blood." On the question of Christianity and blood, see Anidjar 2014. For an account of the co-constitution of Christianity and the human race, see Buell 2005.
28. Of course, this is not to deny that Christianity produces debt: it offers the promise of endlessly postponed salvation, or debt forgiveness, and in doing so makes certain a state of debt. Yet to be put in a state of debt is still to be saved from damnation. In fact, the debtor, given his insecurity with regard to endlessly postponed salvation, seeks the security denied by his debt through imagining himself, at the very least, as not already damned. Or, under conditions of secular capitalism, he seeks such security through imagining himself as not black. Lazzarato's indebted man thus remains invested in the secular capacity to save him from the non-being of anti-blackness. In fact, given that "secular" means "world," one can say that the secular debtor is—at base—utterly opposed to any attempt "to start 'the end of the world'" (Wilderson 2010: 337).
29. It should be emphasized that when I use the term "kinship," it is in the sense defined and enacted by the logic of Christian and secular powers, or by what Spillers calls the "dominant symbolic order" (Spillers 1987: 75). In other words, I am addressing the way in which kinship, as defined by domination, has no analogue in blackness. This is to observe the following qualification made by Spillers: "I certainly do not mean to say that African peoples in the New World did not maintain powerful ties of sympathy that bind blood-relations in a network of feeling, of continuity" (Spillers 1987: 74). In other words, the claim that blackness is denied kinship does not preclude that there was such force and such creation within blackness, it rather speaks to the fact that, however such force and creation is articulated, it cannot be expressed in a manner that is analogous to the dominant definition of kinship, or to the definition of kinship that enables domination: "Whether or not we decide that the support systems that African-Americans derived under conditions of captivity should be called 'family,' or something else, strikes me as supremely impertinent . . . We might choose to call this connectedness 'family,' or 'support structure,' but that is a rather different case from the moves of a dominant symbolic order, pledged to maintain the supremacy of race" (Spillers 1987: 75).
30. It should be noted that habits of affirmation are necessarily complicit with inheritance. This is because affirmation requires that there is, in the present, *something* to affirm—and thus to inherit. Such affirmation may offer criticism of the present, but this criticism proceeds in virtue of something supposed to be inherited, of some *being*—a free being, or even a being of freedom—that is presently available for affirmation and is thereby *already* positioned within being's line of

inheritance. The future for which affirmation calls is thus analogous (at least in a minimal sense) with the present: there is some minimal being, given by and inheritable from the present, that can free itself for the future, or that can make the future by its freedom. Against this, it is necessary to insist on the creation of a future *incommensurable* with—without analogy to and thus uninheritable from—the present.

31. For a proper treatment of Jackson's theorization, see Jackson 1994. It is due to my essay's focus on Deleuze that I use the lens of Koerner 2011, which explicitly takes up the relationship between Jackson and Deleuze.
32. As Koerner remarks, "in aligning himself with the position of the slave, Jackson does not hesitate to identify the continuity between chattel slavery and what he defined as 'neo-slavery'" (Jackson 1994: 55; Koerner 2011: 170).
33. Part of the appeal of the Nation of Islam is its elaboration of a critique that applies simultaneously to Christian power and to the power of the secular U.S. nation-state.
34. Here I have in mind Wilderson's discussion of "objective vertigo" (Wilderson 2011: 3), particularly as it is expressed via the irreducibility of absence to loss: "loss indicates a prior plenitude, absence does not" (Wilderson 2011: 30).
35. On the essential anti-blackness of the police, see: James 2007; Martinot and Sexton 2003.
36. Antagonistic toward any affirmation of a link between being and freedom, flight does not here follow from a being-able-to-flee. Yet to formulate the power at stake in flight such that it "names an autonomous force that *precedes* capture" (Koerner 2011: 168) risks speaking of it as *something*—and thus as analogous to kinship-being—whereas it is, in and as reality, non-being. The autonomy and precedence invoked by this formulation should thus be understood, explicitly, as an enactment of *negativity* toward the world. This is to insist that the (baseless) reality of the knowledge of non-being is irreducible to the very scene of Jackson's running, which—as scene—is communicated by the same world that produces the scenes of his captivity and death.
37. The term "gnosis" is connected to the antagonism, at the very origins of Christianity, between the heresy of "Gnosticism" and the constitution of orthodoxy (or of something that could be coherently identified as "Christianity"). Those called "Gnostics"—by Christian heresiology, rather than by themselves—refused the transcendent supposition of Christian being, and they did so in virtue of a knowledge (or gnosis) without external donation. They refused conversion to Christianity because *they knew not to need* being and its logic of inheritance. (For additional discussion of Gnosticism, see King 2005 and Lacarrière 1989. Theoretically, however, my understanding of gnosis is here influenced by the "non-philosophy" of François Laruelle, the gnostic character of which can be seen, for instance, in Laruelle 2011 and Laruelle 2012). To speak of the knowledge enacted by Jackson in terms of gnosis is not to reduce him to a Gnostic—Jackson's knowledge of uninheritability takes place under conditions of a secular anti-blackness, the intensified violence of which exceeds that faced by any Gnostic. I invoke the term gnosis strictly to observe that inheritance, already in its Christian formation, is antagonized by knowledge that refuses being.
38. This is to say, as well, that the knowledge of non-being is incommensurable with anything that being has the capacity to imagine: the being that hails—that weaponizes itself against—Jackson does not know of, but rather *denies*, non-being. If being knew non-being, it could not be. That is why it denies non-being, and that is why—when such denial appears no longer to work—it damns non-being. The violence of being belongs to denial rather than to knowledge. Consequently, there is no possibility of affirming non-being in virtue of (appeal to) any knowledge that being possesses

about non-being. The reality of non-being is not what being knows and then responds to with violence. On the contrary, the reality of non-being is what being violates because it cannot know.

39. Koerner points to this when she speaks of Jackson's "knowledge of the necessity to revolt against a social order that codes blackness as criminality"—or, I would stress, as damnation (Jackson 1994: 69; Koerner 2011: 158).
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