

**Overrepresented Man:
Genre, Violence, and Hegemony**

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Abstract (Academic)

This thesis explores the intersections between practices of epistemic production and distribution and material violence. Following the work of Sylvia Wynter, a framework of “genre” is engaged to provide an account of intersectional social identities, disproportionately distributed hegemonic violence (including both state and non-state actants), and the traditions and technologies of anti-colonial theoretical modeling, material praxis, and political work engendered by the rich, interdisciplinary body of Black Feminist thought. To address the continued practices of social, political, and material violence which sustain the Wynterian onto-epistemological “Overrepresentation of Man,” an emergent archipelagic politics of heterogenous coalition-building presents a viable path of becoming for liberatory political projects.

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Abstract (General)

Racialized violence and state violence against racial minorities enjoys a long history within the United States and remains a topic of both popular controversy and political urgency. In more recent years, owing in part to several high-profile cases which have managed to garner significant media attention, a cultural conversation has emerged around topics such as representation, cultural biases, police brutality and militarization, and the Black Lives Matter movement (among others) has managed to inject popular American discourses on race with a more pointed critical edge. While cases of Black men's unjust deaths have galvanized much of this revitalized political discourse, Patrisse Khan-Cullors reminds us that Black Lives Matter is not "just about boys and the police," but rather addresses a problem which is part of a deeper systematic intersection of race, sex/gender, class and so on. Sylvia Wynter's concept of "genre" provides a framework through which to explore these and other intersections, account for racialized violence, and to think toward the political work required to move toward a more liberatory and just frame of social existence.

Table of Contents

Abstract (Academic).....	ii
Abstract (General).....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Genre.....	7
Chapter 2: Legibility	34
Chapter 3: Movement.....	57
Chapter 4: Work.....	69
Conclusion.....	90

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Introduction

This is a story about gender, race, class as assembled by hierarchical social orders and the everyday practices that conjure, sustain, and celebrate a legacy of brutality, even as its existence is often denied outright. This is a story about the figure of Man (whom you will “meet” soon enough) and one which also seeks to enunciate the work that needs to be done to disrupt his ongoing attempt at violent monopoly over the category of humanity. This is also, although only partially, a story about oppression, micro-politics, and liberatory organizing within an average so-called “white city” and the trajectory of events connected to the life and death of one of its citizens, Kionte Spencer. In many respects, this begins as a localized story yet it is one that seeks to stretch its particularity into relations of continuity with countless other brutal episodes which mirror the world that I will attempt to describe. If there is work to be done, how might we best understand the task(s) at hand and formulate strategies of amelioration? This is also a story about Black Feminist praxis and the utopian political demands and possibilities we might be dutifully inclined to struggle for and to win.

As long as the figure of Man continues to be overrepresented as the human itself, no full or universal political emancipation can be possible. While this overrepresentation will be commented on in greater length shortly, it is important to note that this is a material claim (and not merely metaphoric) as well as an epistemological matter. I cannot see any viable theoretical

avenue forward which does not understand and engage with the analytic contributions of Black Feminist insight. Guided most directly by the work of Sylvia Wynter, the stories I am attempting to tell can most succinctly be described as a meditation on the dismantling of the domination of Man and the indispensable Black Feminist theories which may make possible to do so and help to secure a more liberated world.

One thing that must be foregrounded: these narratives emanate from a white male body; there is a person (in) here. The stories begin in the southwestern Virginia town in which I, your white male narrator, was born. Roanoke has a sordid history similar to many small to midsized U.S. cities: an unbroken line of racialized violence from lynch mobs in the 1800's, segregation and Jim Crow in the 1900's, urban renewal in the 70's and the contemporary encroachment of gentrification in what is still routinely reported as socio-geographically one of the more segregated cities in state.¹ Kionte Spencer was a young Black male citizen who was killed while walking alongside the road, although we will get to that shortly as well. I am telling part of this story because it is a local, concrete, and material microcosmic connection into a widespread pattern of racialized political violence which comes part and parcel with what Sylvia Wynter cites as the overrepresentation of Man.²

This introductory chapter seeks to outline this project's major goals, limits, and to gesture toward the organizing theoretical framework. The central errand of this thesis is to think through racialized violence³ through a Black Feminist theoretical lens with the intention of moving

¹ <http://statchatva.org/2012/04/30/residential-segregation-in-virginias-counties-and-cities/>
https://www.roanoke.com/news/education/roanoke-roanoke-county-school-borders-among-most-segregated-in-virginia/article_360e3db6-374f-5ba1-b3ce-259f0d543b81.html

² Wynter, Sylvia. 2003. "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/ Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation- An Argument." *The New Centennial Review*. Vol 3 No. 3. Michigan State University Press: 260

³ I use this term as a shorthand reference to acts of violence which include but exceed state violence against Black people and people of color. Even as a heuristic, it is an incomplete or insufficient term.

toward a wider and deeper understanding of these brutal phenomena and what can be done to dismantle the social order that continues to carry them out. First, I situate a framework grounded in the intellectual contributions of both Sylvia Wynter and Hortense Spillers. From this, I move to a critical investigation into possible modes of analysis and praxis which are grounded in an emphasis on legibility. The spheres of visibility and/or audibility (I take both as forms of legibility) seem clearly to contribute to the problem(s) of racialized violence.

The solutions that follow from an emphasis on legibility often tend to be strategies which seek to garner enhanced visibility of these incidents and problems as well as increased representation of Black people and people of color within institutions such as police departments. While visibility seems to certainly be a vitally necessary mode of analysis and praxis, there also seem to be compelling reasons, elucidated by Wynter's concept of genre, to believe that legibility politics comes with important limits as well. Differently put, legibility is a crucial part of liberatory politics, but we must not stop there.

I will also consider movement as an illuminating mode of analytic discovery as well as a common thread in the manner in which racialized violence is situated and carried out. Ultimately, this project will focus on the work needed to be done in order to secure a social order which is not predicated on violently enforced forms of hierarchy and the manner in which a theory of genre can help to animate this goal. A close study of selected cases, both historical and contemporary, will animate both the potential utility and familiar limitations of this analytic tactic as well as articulate the theoretical import provided by Wynter's conceptual apparatus. Ultimately, I will suggest that an ontology of genre, held in dialectical tension with epistemologies of race, gender, class and so on, is indispensable (and perhaps necessary) for an account of racialized violence.

It is also the intention of this project to consider practices of resistance as demonstrated by various vibrant social movements guided by Black Feminist theory. Highlighting these extant practices of resistance is important in that they demonstrate important and viable political modalities and imaginaries. While the focus of this paper seeks to center the epistemic contributions, lived experiences, and resistance practices which emanate from Black feminist thought, I also contend that there is an ethical duty, particularly for white men, to carry out social praxis within their immediate social environments, to mount *anti-racist*, *sexist*, and so on (rather than non-racist, sexist, etc.) practices, and to attend to quotidian sites of political domination. Man's overrepresentation functions as a hegemony, in the Gramscian sense, comprised of both the violent repressive agents which work on behalf of the state as well as forms of consent (both tacit and explicit) on the part of white civil society.⁴ Given this ethos, it is also my intention to carve a normative argument imploring white men (who most benefit from the overrepresentation of Man as normative ideal type) to elide and dismantle the figure of Man as well, although this element is a slightly more minor note within this project's orchestration. Ultimately, a broad, ecumenical, intersectional coalition organized against Man's ongoing overrepresentation guided by marginalized knowledges, whose unique situated vantage points present an indispensable epistemic orientation, is required to end Man's dangerous reign.

Through following some of the details surrounding the events of Kionte Spencer's life and death, it is my hope to remain faithful to the ethos of pursuing transformation within one's own local sphere, to illuminate the utility and limitations of legibility, and to gesture toward a potent set of Black Feminist epistemic and organizational practices. Alongside this narrative errand, the main methodology animating this project will be that of a case study, narrative

⁴ Gramsci, Antonio. Ed. And Tr. Hoare, Quentin and Smith, Nowell Geoffrey. 1971. *The Prison Notebooks*. International Publishers, New York: 12

analysis which seeks to non-homogenously contextualize chosen cases in relation to broader social patterns. The conceptual tools provided by Sylvia Wynter and others present a framework capable of harmonizing disparate cases without equivocating or reducing them into one another.

Through discussions of genre, Wynter presents a theoretical apparatus that elucidates the historically established normative center of Man and the non-fixed (though often continuous throughout various histories) constellations of deviant genres/identities which are hierarchically organized outside of it by varying degrees. This flexibility makes Wynter's ontology particularly well suited toward diagnostic errands as large and complex as social phenomena like white supremacy, sexism, political violence etc. For the purposes of this project I will indeed be pursuing a focus on gender, race, class and violence. Other crucially important areas of study such as transgender violence, LGBTQ+ oppression, and cognitive/physical ability marginalization will not receive the amount of attention that they rightfully deserve. It is still my hope that while my analysis of the events and cases which I have selected for this project largely do not tell as much of these stories, they will implicitly be understood as salient fixtures of what Wynter might understand as genre- practices. More particularized and contextual analysis would be required to give a fuller account of these elements, that unfortunately largely exceeds the scope of this project.

There is a phenomenological limitation that quite obviously accompanies my role as narrator for this project overall, but more particularly relating to the events of Kionte Spencer. In my telling of the events, Kionte's mother, Antonia Askew, emerges, alongside as a central figure of inspiration and instruction. As a measure of full disclosure, I must make clear that I have an ongoing relationship of friendly association and correspondence with Antonia. Antonia is a friend and not a source, informant, or an object of study. Further, I have no pretensions toward

any sort of narrative objectivity, although where appropriate I have rendered empirical events and facts as closely and honestly as possible.

Another uneasy yet unavoidable ethical and metaphysical problem arises from the intrinsic nature of a white male drawing on Black Feminist theory to analyze racialized violence. Experiential limits exist that make it impossible for me to ever understand the embodied experiences of the Black women, girls, boys, men, trans people and gender non-conforming people whose lives overwhelmingly form the textures of this project. An ethical issue of responsibility arises from both this fact, which calls into question the legitimacy of my analytic account, as well as the possibility that my analysis converts the material experiences of marginalized bodies into something which aids and furthers my own graduate work and academic ambitions. This seems unavoidably to be the case, however, I would feel irresponsible in *not* attending to these issues of violence and political domination of which my own life as a white male is inextricably imbricated. Similarly, it would seem obtuse at best to pursue an analysis of racialized and gendered violence with an exclusively European/white theoretical framework. In this regard, I have turned to Black Feminist thought with the analytic intentions of centering and learning from thinkers whose theoretical and embodied vantage points clearly situate them as superior commentators on issues of racialized and gendered violence. Apart from the theoretical import of Black Feminist thought, there is also an ethical pursuit involving the centering of scholars who tend to be disproportionately marginalized within academia (and the general society, for that matter) so as to avoid this unfortunately common trend. The aporias tied to my white maleness remain unresolved and in tension throughout this work.

Chapter I. Genre

This section seeks most principally to outline Sylvia Wynter's concept of genre, which forms the central theoretical framework of this project. Wynter sees genre as that which is ontologically at bottom with regard to social categories and political struggles. Within this line of thought, Wynter also offers an illustration of "descriptive statements" which is of central importance as well, as these statements perform much of the work of genre. For my purposes, I also emphasize the sense of continuity which Wynter develops through her genealogical account of Man, as well as the analytic flexibility which her framework makes possible.

Wynter's 2003 essay, *Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation- An Argument* presents a genealogical account of the construction of Man through the entangled history of the European Enlightenment and colonial era. On Wynter's account, the figure of Man is a normative model which designates European, upper economic class, white maleness as the exclusionary definition for full humanity. Wynter's opening sentence proclaims:

"The ARGUMENT PROPOSES THAT THE STRUGGLE OF OUR NEW MILLENIUM WILL be one between the ongoing imperative of securing the well-being of our present ethnoclass (i.e. Western bourgeois) conception of the human, Man, which overrepresents itself as if it were the human itself, and that of securing the well-being, and therefore the full cognitive and behavior autonomy of the human species itself/ourself."⁵

⁵ Wynter, Sylvia. 2003. "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/ Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation- An Argument." *The New Centennial Review*. Vol 3 No. 3. Michigan State University Press: 260

This opening sentence foregrounds several important things. The extended sequence of all-capital letters enunciates a literal grammar of material urgency which also identifies the contours of a distinctly *collective* struggle. The language of *our* present conception of Man denotes that while it is an ontological fiction motivated by ideological commitments which preserve hegemonic power (benefiting some and oppressing others), we are all stuck with Man, so to speak, although the qualification of a “present conception” makes clear that this formulation of the human is a construction, and thus is pliable. The emphasis on the “ongoing” nature of this struggle underscores a sense of continuity which follows Man throughout European history. Wynter centers an encounter with the overrepresentation of the genre of Man as a necessary prior errand for any praxis of liberation which might address what she calls the coloniality of power.⁶ Thus, the material struggle against Man (as “he” has been consolidated and arranged institutionally, structurally, and politically) also requires an epistemological challenge to Man’s ongoing overrepresentation. The language of overrepresentation refers to the descriptive practices which articulate Man as if it were the human itself, and not one of its many different iterations or styles of being. Wynter continually underscores the politics of knowledge which accompany Man’s overrepresentation and political domination throughout her account.

Before proceeding further, it is worth pausing on a consideration of genre in a more general sense in order to illustrate the kind of work it does as a concept for Wynter. Genre is typically considered as a mode of categorization which groups like material by form, style, and/or subject matter and it is often discussed in artistic contexts, such as literary, film, and musical genres. What makes genre interesting is the way it identifies non-static continuities that tend to be contingently and relationally defined. Some group of things coheres in such a way as

⁶ Ibid: 260

to provide enough resonance with certain tenets of a given genre. Which things? What such way of cohering? The sources, intensities, organization, and applicable threshold for attaining this resonance are seldom absolutely precise and are often contested, yet generally recognizable. For instance, 1970's Jazz in the style of Grant Green features much stylistic overlap with Funk, including shared modes and arrangements of instrumentation, key signatures, rhythms, and so on, yet we could hardly simply equate Funk and Jazz as identical genres. Genre also usually acts as a more specific point of reference back to a much broader overarching category, such as "literature" or "music," and thus carries out the epistemic work of descriptive specificity. It does not tell us very much about his artwork to note that Grant Green is "a musician," whereas locating him as a Jazz musician is a bit more helpful. Furthermore, genre typically proliferates even more specific sub-genres (Modal Jazz, Cool Jazz, Acid Jazz, Bop, and so on) and/or hybrid formulations such as Jazz Fusion or, in the case of 1970's innovations, Jazz-Funk.

Genre offers a non-static theory of both continuity as well as discontinuity (there is something that still makes Grant Green a *Jazz* player, although he may exceed this frequently) in which contingent arrangements produce resonances which are sustained relationally, rather than essentially. There is likely no single identifiable trait or characteristic by which we could describe Jazz or that it requires in order to be coherent as a genre. Its unique rhythmic applications derive from African forms and its music output has historically often been developed and enunciated through the use of European forms and instruments, among others. Jazz is identifiable by its usage and preference for certain types of chords, scales, modes, improvisational schemes, combinations, harmonies, phrasings, tensions, and so on, but all of these elements are evident in (and many inherited from) other distinct genres as well. It is the

particular, historically/contextually situated arrangement of familiar characteristics or tenets together which formulates and animates Jazz as a genre.

A point of departure for Wynter's work on genre and these more general musings on Jazz concerns the selection of which particular characteristics are to be taken as elements of a given genre. As will be explored, Wynter elaborates a theory of Man, whose genre always retains an anti-Black, European, bourgeois, and patriarchal orientation. Musical genres tend not to sustain or exclude essential elements to the same degree that western political hegemony has historically insisted (and continues to insist) on social forms such as white supremacy. It is the case that within musical genres, conservative tendencies do often *attempt* to maintain essential and/or exclusionary principles and we can trace some instruction in these attempts and their eventual failings. For instance, it is still the case in many traditional, orthodox, or conservative Jazz guitar circles (these tend to be elite and/or academic and technical institutions) the practice of bending strings (a la Hendrix) is proscribed or heavily discouraged. This stylistic preference is likely a reflection of both Jazz's developmental origins in brass instruments as well as a distinguishing characteristic away from the stylings of the even older Blues tradition. It is also the case that this restrictive sensibility has become increasingly minoritarian.

More broadly in the contemporary world of Jazz music, bending strings as well as other techniques borrowed from other genres are widely accepted and utilized. Often sustained practice and iconoclastic performance is the way in which the norms of musical genres shift. Stanley Jordan's brilliant Jazz translation of 1980's Metal/Rock's finger tapping, as famously evinced in his performance at the 1990 Montreal International Jazz Festival, and Bob Dylan's transgressive decision to use electric- rather than acoustic- instrumentation at the 1963 Newport Folk Festival come to mind as genre-shifting performances, although musical history is replete

with such examples of genre shifters; Miles Davis, Sister Rosetta Thorpe, Nina Simone, and so on. The model of mutating genre by way of performance seems instructive in ways, but it might be pointed out that the regime of Man and the violent colonial history of western modernity loom as a much more deeply entrenched locus of power than say, a couple of stubborn, old school Jazz players or anti-electric folk musicians.

Apart from being elusive horizons of tendencies which are often difficult to pinpoint or define, genres are decidedly non-static and usually subjectively situated. For instance, the genre label of “heavy metal” was applied in the 1960’s and 1970’s to artists like Jimi Hendrix (who, by the way, popularized for the Rock genre many chords-Major7#9 being the most famous- which he learned from Jazz players) although today, most would more readily associate such a genre label with decidedly heavier, louder, and more aggressive bands. This observation reveals the always intermingled, subject to transformation over time, and generally contested qualities which inform musical genres, but it also points to the oppositional or exclusionary underside which can accompany genre. Jimi Hendrix was considered heavy metal early on because his sound, volume, and style departed significantly from most R&B (itself a genre which has transformed significantly) and Rock acts which he might otherwise have been grouped with. Similarly, it is only today in relation to the development of contemporary Metal that we would more readily group Hendrix as Psychedelic Rock, Blues, or simply Rock. Genre presents a non-essentialist yet still identifiable set of appeals to (sometimes ineffable) style, contingent arrangement, and historical situatedness.

While there is relatively little risk of social harm involved in the politics of heavy metal labeling, a different example might underscore the binary-oppositional textures which inform this risky underside of genre. Just as genres like western Rock have transformed in such ways

that render previous classifications as dissonant, whiteness has morphed historically as well into its current categorical status. Cedric Robinson discusses the proto-racial thinking which the burgeoning English colonial state “practiced” on their Celtic neighbors in Ireland, which constructed images of Irish savagery and promoted notions of the “deficiencies of the Irish ‘race.’”⁷ Robinson locates these practices as motivated by the way in which they provided justifications for English colonial expansion as well as the devaluation of cheap Irish labor. So, we can glean an account of the degradation or “racialization” performed on the Irish which shifted drastically when European coloniality met the indigenous people of Africa and the Americas. What allowed the Irish to enter the category of whiteness?

The European racial imaginary was expanded when it came in contact with those Africans and Indigenous Americans who differed from white Europeans much more drastically in skin tone, language, and social practices than the Irish had. Whiteness has been developed and (trans)formed historically, contingently, and arbitrarily⁸ and these mutations have generally always been predicated on oppositional difference. The European racial imaginary, while shifting and mutating through history, has always maintained an orienting point of anti-Blackness as the point of most absolute deviance from white Europeans. The Irish, then, were eventually allowed to be white because they were decidedly not Black. This is what animates Robinson’s musings that the Irish and Irish Americans are “opportunistic subjects. Opportunistic in the sense that their history was coincident with Blackness...The Irish were negatively

⁷ Robinson, Cedric. 1983. *Black Marxism*. Zed Press. London: 39

⁸ Arbitrarily in the sense of lacking consistent grounding and not in the sense of being a “random” practice.

racialized, even before the Africans, in the European imagination. We were simply a lob to occupy a category already established.”⁹

Returning to genre, we can see that it can function in a similar way of forging oppositional distinctions which are fluid, unstable, historically contingent, and tend to be directed by those in power. This last point is what most principally animates Sylvia Wynter’s account, but the observation about the Irish re-description (which is also a re-valuation) reflects Wynter’s emphasis on epistemology as well, which is explored in this section. There is likely much more which could be said about genre more generally, but it is these elements which seem to make it a fitting analytic vehicle for Wynter’s framework. The story which Wynter unfolds is about a genre of Man who has no true foundational or ontological essence, but gains coherence through descriptive practices, the arrangement of certain tenets (For Wynter it is whiteness, bourgeois character, and maleness which most centrally operate), and a historical legacy which has been brutally enforced.

Wynter’s genre framework emphasizes that Man forms a normative center which presents (and enforces) itself as the human itself. As a corollary, all those who fall outside of the genre of Man are considered, by varying degrees, sub-human and non-human. Wynter’s account also makes clear the degree to which Man has always been fluid, creative, and non-static. The same can be noted for Western conceptions of racism (which themselves are non-identical across place, time, and actor) which have shifted, rebranded, and reorganized throughout different historical and sociological contexts. Wynter’s opening sentence does not strain itself to provide an exhaustive list of precisely what social characteristics do and do not define Man. Instead,

⁹ Robinson, Cedric. 2017. “Preface” in *Futures of Black Radicalism*. Ed. Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin. Verso. London, New York: 7

Wynter abbreviates “i.e. Western Bourgeois,”¹⁰ with the assumption that the space held by “i.e.” is dynamic and difficult to comprehensively list in a way which might be true for all cases at all times. An attempt at locking down the normative category which informs Man would seemingly also risk reifying Man and would also constrain the analytic scope which Wynter uses to examine genre.

This being said, for certain understandings of social identity markers, which either are underdiscussed or do not receive explicit analytic treatment (i.e. age, impairment/(dis)ability, sexual orientation, and so on), yet are important sociological components of lived experience, we can understand these to be accounted for within the space of “i.e.” Wynter’s foundational grounding of genre, however, implicitly calls into question these and other social categories and posits them as effects of genre. The implications stemming from this move suggest a connected and collective form of political struggle. Wynter elaborates upon this:

“The correlated hypothesis here is that all our present struggles with respect to race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, struggles over the environment, global warming, severe climate change, the sharply unequal distribution of the earth’s resources... these are all differing facets of the central ethnoclass Man vs. Human struggle.”¹¹

Wynter’s fusing together of otherwise disparate issues makes clear that we are all imbricated (from varying positionalities and points of privilege) in these entangled struggles. This cohesion supports her analytic insistence on privileging genre as an underlying object of analysis. In an interview with ProudFlesh, Wynter has stated

¹⁰ Ibid: 260

¹¹ Ibid: 261

“I am trying to insist that “race” is really a code-word for “genre.” Our issue is not the issue of “race.” Our issue is the issue of the genre of “Man.” It is this issue of the “genre” of “Man” that causes all the “–isms...Now when I speak at a feminist gathering and I come up with “genre” and say “gender” is a function of “genre,” they don’t want to hear that.”¹²

In this way, issues of class, race, and gender are not banished from Wynter’s analysis but are elaborated with a unique form of epistemological and metaphysical emphasis, as genre. Still, Wynter has been subject to critiques which charge her with neglecting gender within her work. Alexander Weheliye voices his concern that Wynter’s genealogy of Man “leads to the repudiation of gender analytics as such.”¹³ Weheliye’s objection is worth considering and so I will explore whether, despite Wynter’s holistic and inclusive framing of genre, we might still require a “thick” concept of gender for analysis and whether Wynter’s framework forecloses such a move. This issue will be re-explored shortly alongside a reading of Hortense Spillers. Prior to this, however, it is worthwhile to delve into a few crucial moments within Wynter’s genealogy of Man and to locate the practice of descriptive statements.

Wynter traces the development of Man in two main phases, Man1 and Man2, although they should always be understood in continuity with one another. Wynter’s history of Man1 begins with the (European) Renaissance-era humanist scholarship which reformulated Man away from theocentric terms and instead as a rational political subject.¹⁴ This shift took place

¹² Wynter, Sylvia. 2006. Interview with Greg Thomas. *PROUDFLESH: A New Afrikan Journal of Culture, Politics & Consciousness*. Issue 4.

¹³ Weheliye, Alexander. 2014. *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*. Duke University Press: 40

¹⁴ Wynter: 277

alongside developments in the natural sciences which made possible modes of thinking beyond those previously prescribed by religious thought. Prior to Man1, Wynter discusses European knowledge systems which believed the geographic boundaries of Europe to be the extent of the habitable world. Wynter notes the incommensurability of the “non-navigable Atlantic Ocean (since both of these areas, Black Africa and the Americas, had been held to be uninhabitable).”¹⁵ The intellectual contributions of post-medieval humanists and scientists redescribed the earth as a homogenous substance (dispelling delimitations of habitable/inhabitable earth) and one which could be discovered by empirical activities.¹⁶ Katherine McKittrick emphasizes the degree to which these large epistemic shifts produced not merely scientific wonder (as many images of the enlightenment might suggest) at the expansion of their world, but also profound anxiety. Having now to make sense of places and people which previously were considered nonexistent, McKittrick notes that (the dominant European concept of) “Humanness was thrown into crisis by the seeable, ungodly, indigenous peoples and their lands.”¹⁷

In this vein, Wynter emphasizes the point that these epistemic ruptures upturned assumptions which had previously been considered crucial and indispensable to the European worldview.¹⁸ It is also important to note that Wynter describes this new subject Man in terms of hybridity. The new secular Man1 retains some of the historical and epistemological textures from the pre-Enlightenment era. The sensibilities of previous medieval knowledges “survived the degodding”¹⁹ of the European episteme and so although certain sharp ruptures make possible the new inventions of Man, Wynter’s narrative is largely one of palimpsestic continuity. Wynter’s

¹⁵ Ibid: 275

¹⁶ Ibid: 278

¹⁷ McKittrick, Katherine. 2006. *Demonic Grounds*. University of Minnesota Press. Minneapolis: 125

¹⁸ Ibid: 281

¹⁹ Ibid: 275

project is also one of contingency and historical specificity, which sustains her emphasis on the constructed and non-natural figuration of Man. Musing over the infamous *Las Casas v Sepulveda* debate, Wynter probes the question of why some terms as opposed to others became the dominant ordering code for Man's genre.²⁰

With the decline of a theocentric understanding of the world, which divides humanity by religious affiliation (which is to say, degrees of deviance from a normative Christian center), comes a new system of division based on rationality. This shift is importantly one which presented a descriptive statement which quite easily allowed Europeans to justify colonial projects, genocides, and chattel slavery against those who were described as irrational/sub-rational.²¹ Wynter demonstrates the imperial character of European Enlightenment thinking and the entangled relationship between brutal expressions of colonial power and universalizing projects of knowledge production within Eurocentric epistemes.

Wynter's analysis also importantly connects, but does not homogenize, the brutal expropriative experiences of Indigenous people in the Americas with those of Africans who would be violently forced into slavery. Both colonial operations conceive of an *other* who does not have access to full personhood or rationality, as neither corresponds with the genre of human which European intellectual projects inscribed as the human itself. As Wynter notes

“While “indios” and “negros,” Indians and Negros, were both made into the Caliban-type referents of Human Otherness to the new rational self-conception of the West, there was also(as Poliakov notes) a marked differential in the degrees

²⁰ Ibid: 282

²¹ Ibid: 281

of sub rationality and of not-quite human-ness, to which each group was to be relegated within the classificatory logic of the West's ethnocultural field."²²

While a binary of normative/deviance does underly the progression of genre, it is clear from Wynter's genealogical account that the "inside" is subject to mutation and the "outside" contains a nuanced dispersion of degrees of deviance which, we might infer, also are pliable, albeit deeply ingrained, constructions. Wynter's account presents a vivid illustration of the European construction of genre and the shifting, yet overlapping, descriptive statements which epistemologically sustained it as a knowledge project at various historical junctures. Wynter's narrative also depicts the universalizing nature of the European genre project while denaturalizing Man as an actual ontological universal. Just as European society was organized by a set of descriptive statements or master codes, Wynter denotes the culturally specific codes held by other social groups, such as the Bantu. The crucial difference seems to be that the Bantu never violently exported their own organizational social codes or attempted to project them onto the rest of the world as universals.²³

The second major shift which produced Man2 arose alongside developments in the biological sciences, notably including Darwinian selection models. Rather than being drawn in terms of rationality, under Man2, the exclusionary logic of the color line was expressed as those not selected as most fit by evolution.²⁴ This biocentric classificatory system recast Man as a more secular agent endowed with superior capacities for reason, which more specifically was elaborated as an image of economic rationality. Those previously considered antithetical to European christianity were merely transformed into a description of those less biologically

²² Ibid: 301

²³ Ibid: 302

²⁴ Ibid: 314

and/or culturally (these two modes of describing genre have shifted even more in Man's recent history) deselected.

This model of exclusion opens and animates Wynter's archipelago of otherness and allows us to think about which bodies are marginalized, stigmatized, and abused in the operations of contemporary neoliberal capitalism; the disabled, interned, incarcerated, homeless, and so on. Wynter's model continually shows radically different descriptive terms which Europeans weaponized against non-whites; from ugliness to associations with the natural earth to non-Christian to irrationality to evolutionarily deselection. The consistent logic of genre, which requires othering between white/non-white, remains epistemologically and historically constant. Wynter importantly uses the language of shifting "grounds of legitimacy,"²⁵ which further alerts the reader to the motivations of European epistemology to justify or legitimate the political projects of domination which, in reality, Europeans would likely carry out regardless of a lack of substantial truth or logic. Through all of these iterations of genre and the associated figure of Man which they articulate, Blackness is produced consistently as the most despised, most extremely opposed, and most absolutely non-human.²⁶

Kayla Schuller's *The Biopolitics of Feeling* contributes an interesting addition to Wynter's tracing of Darwinian biology alongside the rise of Man.² Schuller demonstrates how the notion of impressibility, which maintains that species develop through interaction with a given environment rather than by the genetics of immutable genes,²⁷ informed racial thinking and remained influential in America even after Darwin's publications.²⁸ While Darwinian accounts

²⁵ Ibid: 290

²⁶ Ibid: 316

²⁷ Schuller, Kyla. 2018. *The Biopolitics of Feeling*. Duke University Press. Durham.: 41

²⁸ Ibid: 168

of race became the dominant epistemic paradigm in the western world through which to justify brutal social hierarchies, Schuller demonstrates that this transition was not an even or universal one. American racial science continued to retain a very different understanding of human biology and development which theorized a linkage between physical place and genetic composition.

The American evolutionary school thought of race in terms of something which could be transformed through changes in physical environment, rather than as something biologically determined by genetics, as Darwinian racial thought asserted. Schuller's account emphasizes the manner in which these scientific paradigms were linked to social policies and governance, such as imperatives to deport African Americans for fear that their presence, construed as uncivilized bodies, could impress upon civilized whites, particularly women.²⁹

As the Darwinian model eventually came to more fully replace the American school's impressibility/environment thesis, Schuller denotes that modes of racialized social control merely shifted in style: "new forms of "better-breeding" replaced their predecessor."³⁰ Schuller's account add an interesting supplement to Wynter's assumption of an even transition to Darwinian race thinking, but it also further underscores the point that the exact descriptive statement matters very little for genre thinking. As soon as the impressibility thesis began to lose credibility, owing to empirical work such as August Weismann's experiments which demonstrated that the offspring of tail-less mice were still born with tails,³¹ a new paradigm was adopted to continue the work of stratification. What should otherwise have been a damning disruption of a major structuring assumption of white supremacist thinking was cast aside without any disturbance to the underlying social order. The epistemological apparatus of Man is

²⁹ Ibid: 65

³⁰ Ibid: 168

³¹ Ibid: 177

clearly quite flexible with regard to specific content so long as it maintains a form which displaces Blackness outside of the category of the human. Wynter describes Man 2, apart from being bio-centric (and grounded in Darwinian evolutionary theory) and secular, as being constructed with an economic (capitalist) logic as well. This shift also adds a new set of emphases to those who fall outside Man as well:

“ Seeing that if at one level Man 2 is now defined as a jobholding Breadwinner and even more optimally, as a successful ‘masterer of Natural Scarcity’(investor or capital accumulator), what might be called an archipelago of its modes of Human Otherness can no longer be defined in the terms of the interned Mad, the interned ‘Indian,’ the enslaved ‘Negro’ in which it had been earlier defined. Instead, the new descriptive statement of the human will call for its archipelago of Human Otherness to be peopled by a new category, one now comprised of the jobless, the homeless, the Poor, the systematically made jobless and criminalized- of the ‘underdeveloped’-all as the category of the economically damnes(Fanon 1963), rather than, as before, of the politically condemned.”³²

Wynter’s usage of the imagery of an archipelago artfully reiterates a theme of connected yet non-identical marginalization by all who fall outside of the normative territory of Man. Throughout different descriptive statements, a common othering operation consistently distinguishes between humanity and non-whiteness. As Wynter demonstrates, racial difference is always also implicated in class structures, among other social identities, all of which issue from the logic of genre. Wynter’s genealogy of Man addresses poverty and global economic in a way

³² Wynter: 321

which importantly elides class reductionism and/or schemas of economic primacy. Speaking about Marxian inspired social and political movements, Wynter notes

“The result was that, then, many of us had thought that what first had to be transformed, was, above all, our present free-market/ free-trade mode of capitalist economic production exploitation system into a new socialist mode of production. The idea was that once this was done, everything else would follow...It didn't, of course.”³³

This rejection of class primacy in favor of her formulation of genre serves as an instructive transition into discussions of gender. While Wynter locates and responds to a certain tendency toward economic reductionist thinking which has at times notably marginalized feminist, postcolonial, and critical race projects, certain critics have charged Wynter with similarly neglecting gender as an analytic category.

Spillers, Gender, Weheliye

Prior to exploring Spillers, it is necessary to contextualize Wynter's theoretical position in relation to the criticisms of omitting gender which have been directed toward Wynter. Wynter's project insists on the destruction of genre, rather than merely gender. Simply put, a politics of genre would attend to gender, but the converse is not necessarily the case. Further, Wynter's insistence on a more comprehensive scope reflects the history of white, bourgeois women's dominant position within mainstream feminism. In some sense, the exclusion and marginalization of women of color (and their knowledges) from feminist discourse follows a

³³ Wynter, Sylvia. In Conversation with Katherine McKittrick. 2015. *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human As Praxis*. Ed. McKittrick, Katherine. Duke University Press. Durham and London: 41

logic akin to the overrepresentation of Man. Just as Man was constructed as a universal object of analysis, certain strands in mainstream feminism have circulated descriptive statements which overrepresent the figure of white, bourgeois woman as a totalizing and exclusionary subject of feminist discourse. This sensibility has also tended to privilege gender as the most fundamental form of social analysis, as bell hooks explicates: “Many contemporary feminist activists argue that eradicating sexist oppression is important because it is the primary contradiction, the basis of all other oppressions. Racism as well as class oppression is perceived as stemming from sexism.”³⁴

Against this tendency to ignore race, class, and other structures of domination, Wynter offers genre as an illustration of the way in which different forms of marginalization are constitutive of each other. Wynter explains in an interview with Katherine McKittrick that “further, within the overall enactment of each such ‘second set of instructions,’ the *ism* of gender is itself- while only one member class- a *founding* member class...I am suggesting that the enactments of such gender roles are always a function of the enacting of a specific *genre* of being hybridly human.”³⁵ Wynter interestingly also gestures toward Judith Butler’s notion of gender performativity to suggest an extension of this theory to all social roles which are produced by and produce genre. It is clearly the case that Wynter is alive to gender as an important analytic category, however she rejects assigning a fundamental primacy to it as part of her more holistic scope.

Even so, her account of the genealogy of Man still contains an implicit narrative of gender as a constituent category of the construction of genre. Speaking with David Scott about the epistemic shifts which allowed for the revaluation of Man as a political subject as well as the

³⁴ hooks, bell. 1984. *From Margin to Center*. South End Press. Boston: 35

³⁵ Wynter and McKittrick: 33

medieval residue of theocentric Man, Wynter states: “The gender roles of the medieval order were themselves structured now in spirit/flesh terms. Women, like Eve and like the peasantry at the bottom of the social ladder, were therefore being represented by the learned scholars of the time as being more prone to the temptations of original sin. more prone to give into carnal desire, to the wicked lusts of the flesh”³⁶

From this short review, it should be clear that gender (the word) does not show up as much in Wynter’s work because gender as a concept is taken to be a part (integral as it may be) of the larger ruling code of genre. In returning to Weheliye’s criticism, it is similarly clear that he retains a lucid awareness of Wynter’s positionality and motivation. Weheliye writes: “While Wynter’s resistance to the universalization of gendered categories associated with bourgeois whiteness in certain strands of feminism is understandable...Wynter’s dismissal of gender/sex as forceful indicators of the hierarchical ordering of our species thus seems to discard sexual difference with the proverbial bathwater,”³⁷ The force of Weheliye comments seems to derive from a reading of Wynter’s account of Man which would suggest that gender was subsumed by race as a marker of difference.

In “Beyond Miranda’s Meanings,” an essay from which Weheliye quotes in order to direct his critique, Wynter does indeed refer to a “mutational shift from the primacy of the anatomical model of sexual difference...to that of the physiognomic model of racial/cultural difference” but only after offering a narration of “an ostensible difference in ‘natural’ substance which, for the first time in history was no longer *primarily* encoded in the male/female gender

³⁶ Scott, David. 2000. “The Re-Enchantment of Humanism: An Interview with Sylvia Wynter” *Small Axe*. Issue 8: 187

³⁷ Weheliye: 40

division as it has been hitherto...”(emphasis original).³⁸ Wynter suggests that with the shift to the secular (Man 1), a new descriptive statement of “men vs. natives” came to underwrite epistemological genre projects (and their material colonial expressions) more so than the traditional division of male/female. Wynter is quite clear, however, that both mutations can be understood “each as the condition of the other”³⁹ and that the male/female distinction comes to play a reinforcing role which is “none the less powerful.”⁴⁰

There is another element which seems important to highlight about Wynter’s style in that she continually stresses continuity within her descriptive accounts of the coloniality of being as enacted historically by European Man. Man 1 and Man 2 are best understood in dialectical relation with one another and so it seems unlikely that Wynter envisions a clean point of rupture from gender to race as anchors of difference. It is not clear that Wynter believes that the male/female distinction ever disappeared even as a new descriptive statement of race arose. Wynter refers to this mutation also as a discursive shift from statements which primarily asserted patriarchy to a discourse which is “monarchical in its Western-European, essentially post-Christian, post-religious definition.”⁴¹ Wynter’s entire project retains an epistemological emphasis and so, while Weheliye contends that Wynter’s account “assumed a substantial variance between physiognomy and anatomy,”⁴² it seems that her narrative is intended to track the discursive productions of Man through historically emergent descriptive statements throughout colonial-modernity.

³⁸ Wynter, Sylvia. 1990. “Afterword: ‘Beyond Miranda’s Meanings: Un/silencing the ‘Demonic Ground’ of Caliban’s ‘Woman’” in *Out of the Kumbia: Caribbean Women and Literature*. Ed. Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido. Africa World Press. Trenton, NJ: 358

³⁹ Ibid: 358

⁴⁰ Ibid: 358

⁴¹ Wynter. “Beyond Miranda’s Meanings”: 358

⁴² Weheliye: 41

Put differently, Wynter's identification of (European) discursive shifts which came to emphasize racial difference does not necessarily suggest that she herself holds gender as a category to be less foundational or important in contemporary analysis. Wynter's interviews and discussions of the criticisms of ignoring/forgetting gender suggest the opposite; that gender is a fundamental part of, but not the totality of, a ruling symbolic code. Again, for Wynter, genre, which interfaces with "all of the -isms" as they provide the conditions for each other, is the master code which must be dismantled. It is not my intention to dismiss Weheliye's concerns as they seem to productively emphasize something which I actually think Wynter would likely agree with: "the banning of the Black subjects from the domain of the human occurs in and through the domain of gender and sexuality."⁴³ Weheliye's suggestion that we must read Wynter in alliance with Hortense Spillers derives from his assertion that Wynter lacks a fuller exploration of gender. Even if one thinks (as I do) that gender would be well-attended to through a Wynterian theorization and/or a politics of genre, Weheliye does importantly demonstrate the fruitful possibilities of reading Wynter and Spillers alongside one another.

Spillers' project can also be contextualized, to some extent, by 1980's era critiques of the white, bourgeois feminism which Wynter's work elides and critiques. In an interview with Saidiya Hartman about Spiller's "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe": An American Grammar Book," Hartman and Spillers provide an instructive dialogue on gender which offers a helpful point of entry for reading Spillers and Wynter together:

"Spillers: So, I think what you're suggesting is that the essay is attempting to look beyond the feminist project to a larger human project; is that right?

Hartman: Yes, that's how I understand the essay.

⁴³ Weheliye: 42

Spillers: I think that is what I was trying to do, at the same time that I wanted to point out what is problematic about Black women stopping at the gender question. Because the refusal of certain gender privileges to Black women historically was a part of the problem. At the same time, that you have to sort of see that and get beyond it and get to something else, because you are trying to go through gender to get to something wider.”⁴⁴

Spillers’ affirmation of Hartman’s invocation of a larger project provides a note of harmonic resonance with Wynter’s colossal genealogical account of Man. Further, Spillers’ emphasis on the specificity of gender as a realm in which practices of genre, which is also to say the ontological negation of Blackness and exclusion from the category of humanity, have been carried out illuminates the substance of Weheliye’s critical questions as well.

In addition to the historical context of mainstream feminism’s universalizing whiteness and subsequent sidelining of issues of race, Spillers’ essay can also be seen as doing genealogical work in a similar manner as Wynter, albeit with a somewhat different object of knowledge. Spillers’ essay begins with a list of names: “‘Peaches’ and ‘Brown Sugar,’ ‘Sapphire’...”⁴⁵ which act or have acted as descriptive statements for Black women. As Spillers notes, these “overdetermined nominative properties” have buried the actual human person underneath them.

Accordingly, Spillers’ task is a genealogy of how Black women have come to be constructed along the reductive, dehumanizing lines which western thought has historically (including the present) deployed against them. This task proceeds by way of interrogating the

⁴⁴ Spillers, Hortense, Saidiya Hartman, Farah Jasmine Griffin, Shelly Eversley, and Jennifer L. Morgan. 2007. "'Whatcha Gonna Do?': Revisiting 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book': A Conversation with Hortense Spillers, Saidiya Hartman, Farah Jasmine Griffin, Shelly Eversley, & Jennifer L. Morgan." *Women's Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 1/2: 303-304

⁴⁵ Spillers, Hortense. 1987. "Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book" *Diacritics*. Issue 17 no. 2. Johns Hopkins University Press. In Spillers, Hortense. 2003 *Black White and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture*. University of Chicago Press. Chicago, IL, USA, London, UK: 203

dominant symbolic order, which Spillers names “American Grammar,” and stripping down through the “layers of attenuated meanings,”⁴⁶ through which Black women have been abused, dehumanized, and misnamed. Spillers’ notion of grammar corresponds in many ways to Wynter’s descriptive genre. American Grammar would then refer to something akin to Man’s symbolic economy or arsenal of descriptive statements.

The infamous Moynihan report, which as Spillers shows constructed a narrative of Black women as inappropriately matriarchal and as pathologically arresting the progress of Black Americans as a whole, provides a material illustration of the type of misnaming which remains a mainstay of American Grammar. Spillers accents continuity in this demonstration as well by emphasizing the manner in which Daniel Moynihan’s deplorable report harmonizes with an entire system of rhetorical configurations of the human. This system of American Grammar utilizes a logic of binary opposition as a descriptive strategy with which to construct races.⁴⁷ Along these lines of humanity, Spillers introduces a distinction between the body and flesh.⁴⁸

The body represents that which might most closely be associated with Wynter’s Man. The body retains control over itself, possesses rational capacity, and produces its own meanings. The flesh, on the other hand, is what Spillers sharply describes as “that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse or the reflexes of iconography.”⁴⁹ The flesh is consistently dehumanized and objectified; it is the total binary opposite of Man and is subjected to American Grammar as a totalizing master code. The flesh

⁴⁶ Ibid: 203

⁴⁷ Ibid: 205

⁴⁸ Ibid: 206

⁴⁹ Ibid: 206

loses its right to name,⁵⁰ and thus is vulnerable to the descriptive statements, stereotypes, and dehumanizing names which Man circulates.

Spillers also adds a temporal dimension to her account with the notion of the “hieroglyphics of the flesh.”⁵¹ This notion refers to the literal and descriptive scarring inscribed on Black bodies and the passing down of these brutal markings through generations. Spillers’ chillingly captures the intersections of Man’s dehumanizing and vicious material legacy of brutality alongside the descriptive logics which have accompanied these violent projects throughout Man’s history. Furthermore, Spillers reminds her readers of the particular forms of violence that Black females, relegated to the realm of flesh, routinely face:

“...the African female subject, under these historic conditions, is not only the target of rape- in one sense an interiorized violation of body and mind- but also the topic of specifically *externalized* acts of torture and prostration that we imagine as the peculiar province of male brutality...”⁵²

Spiller’s narration offers a valuable and material articulation of the specificity of gendered forms of oppression as one of the premier ways in which Man has historically sought to overrepresent himself as the human itself. Further, Spillers’ schema of continuity between historical flesh and contemporary Black bodies within a society which remains under the rule of American Grammar foregrounds crucially important insights about violence against Black females provided by Andrea Ritchie.⁵³

⁵⁰ Ibid: 210

⁵¹ Ibid: 207

⁵² Ibid: 207

⁵³ Ritchie’s *Invisible No More* highlights both the rampant and vicious quality as well as underdiscussed nature of contemporary violence against Black women, particularly by state security agents. This will be explored in the next chapter.

While attending to gendered violence against Black female flesh alert us the utility provided by a specific focus on the historic male/female distinction, Spillers also demonstrated that a process of “ungendering”⁵⁴ also provided an important dimension of the middle passage’s dehumanization. For Spillers, gendering reflects a process which occurs socially and generally within the domestic sphere. But those relegated to the realm of the flesh lose the ability to create meaning and can only be animated through the descriptive statements of the other. In this regard, the discourse of white slave traders (and the society at large) degendered those enslaved Black males and females alike by quantitatively reducing them to calculations of bodily measurement, ship space, and expected economic return.

As Spillers puts it: “under these conditions, one is neither female, nor male, as both subjects are taken into account as quantities.”⁵⁵ The only manner in which those enslaved interacted with gender was mediated through white epistemologies. Parenthood became a category similarly controlled, as enslaved offspring were conceived of as the property of white slave owners, constituting a form of orphaning.⁵⁶ From this it also follows that those quantified subjects were considered non-human against the criterion of Man.

Spillers’ project demonstrates the particular assaults (physical and otherwise) experienced by Black women as well as the more general regime of Man from which they derived. American Grammar describes Black women as degendered, dehumanized, and deprives them of motherhood. This series of attacks constitutes a prominent part of contemporary operations of Man, particularly as expressed by the American state.

⁵⁴ Ibid: 214

⁵⁵ Ibid: 215

⁵⁶ Ibid: 218

While Spillers' project has much to add with regard to analyzing the violent and disturbing histories of Man, her account also emphasizes the possibilities for liberation that sit as the underside to repression. For instance, while the ungendering of those enslaved by ship archives constitutes a technology of dehumanization, it also provides the grounds by which to question dominant narratives of uprisings (which tend to assume male actants) with a feminist optic. As Spillers notes: "the quintessential 'slave' is *not* male, but rather a female- we wonder at the seeming docility of the subject, granting her a 'feminization' that enslavement kept at bay."⁵⁷ A persistent problem presented by the historical dominance of European actors is that of the Eurocentrism of the archives.

Under slavery, Black people were denied the capacity to write their own histories and instead were subjected to white epistemologies and Man's narratives. Saidiya Hartman captures this problem succinctly: "And the stories that exist are not about them, but rather about the violence, excess, mendacity, and reason that seized hold of their lives, transformed them into commodities and corpses..."⁵⁸ Spillers' attention to white practices of degendering presents a space of imagination in which dominant accounts of slave ship and plantation uprisings as exclusively male events can be questioned. This tradition of resistance importantly corresponds to Wynter's call for a dismantling of the dehumanizing logic and projects of Man. Spillers' description of middle passage uprisings as "both frequent and feared"⁵⁹ underscores the fact that Black (importantly including female) resistance to Man's violent regime has just as long a history as that overrepresentation. This often-overlooked history of resistance is crucial to keep

⁵⁷ Ibid: 215

⁵⁸ Hartman, Saidiya. 2008. "Venus in Two Acts" *Small Axe*. No. 26. Vol 12: 2

⁵⁹ Spillers: 215

in memory when considering contemporary social movements and the unbroken line of revolutionary praxis which informs contemporary Black liberation struggles.

In the essay's conclusion, Spillers also imparts the radical and emancipatory proposition that Black women write their *own* genre of being outside of American Grammar.⁶⁰ While an analytic of gender intersects with Spillers' histories of racial subjugation to provide a critical epistemic vantage point, Spillers' project calls for moving beyond as well: "we are less interested in joining the ranks of gendered femaleness than gaining the *insurgent* ground as female social subject."⁶¹ Spillers' project indeed provides harmonic resonance with Wynter's call for the dismantling of the overrepresented genre of Man. Wynter and Spillers map out a trajectory of how colonial modernity, soaked in blood and propelled by both epistemic brutality and material violence, has unfolded into the contemporary world. Following Wynter, a redescription of Man is sorely needed but how might that work begin? What must be done? Who must do it?

February 26, 2016

On February 26, 2016, 18-year-old Kionte Spencer was killed by police in Roanoke, Virginia on the type of cold, dark, solemn night which has a morose history of providing the climate⁶² amenable to the brutal blossoming of those strange trees which bear odd Southern fruit.⁶³ Around 7:15pm, Roanoke County Police received a 9-11 call that described a "Black male with a red bandanna in front of face and headphones on" who was waving around a gun

⁶⁰ Spillers: 229

⁶¹ Ibid: 229

⁶² See concepts of "climate" and "weather" in Sharpe, Christina. 2016. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Duke University Press. Durham, NC, USA, London, UK: 104

⁶³ See Holiday, Billie. 1939. "Strange Fruit" Commodore Records. Adapted from a poem by Meeropol, Abel (1937).

identified as a “Glock.”⁶⁴ What happened next is a perniciously familiar story. Police are said to have tazed and then shot the young man after he did not comply with their order to stop. While the Glock was quickly revealed to be BB gun, at least one part of the 9-11 call can be verified: Kionte was certainly wearing headphones which neighbors would later describe as usually the case during his regular walks up and down the same road. It seems likely that he did not hear the orders to halt issued by the police. However, this thesis will suggest that the central issue at play was less so one of audibility on the part of Kionte so much as an issue of genre. A high school student, just barely old enough to be legally considered an adult, did not appear as a fragile life or as someone who might need help. Kionte appeared as a threatening presence; the wrong genre and illegible as fully human.

Kionte’s brother Carl would later describe his sibling as someone who perhaps could not answer a math question off of the top of his head (nor can I usually), but otherwise followed thoughts and conversations. For certain dominant genres of white people, this is sometimes called introversion, slow-wittedness, or just “down southern.” It is clear that for Others (those who are othered) this same generosity is not extended. It is also painfully well known how poorly skilled⁶⁵ police agents tend to be in navigating interactions with those who fall (by any degree) outside of the normative set of cognitive expectations or who do not immediately apprehend situational realities. Further details become a bit murky as the police refused to release the video of the incident and concluded after an internal investigation that the shooting was justified. A small yet vigorous campaign of community leaders, organizers, and affected

⁶⁴ Friedenberger, Amy. May 25, 2016. “Roanoke County Officers Will Not Face Charges In Shooting Death of Kionte Spencer.” *Roanoke Times*. Roanoke, Va.

⁶⁵ There is compelling and growing evidence that “skill” may not be the most operative category. There seems to be a very selective deployment of certain skills, such as de-escalation, mediation, and non-lethal apprehension.

citizens attempted to push for a more rigorous investigative process to no avail. Roanoke County Police would later conduct an internal investigation and clear all officers of any wrongdoing.

Chapter 2: Legibility

One response to the problem of the unchecked violence which U.S. police and security agents routinely and disproportionately deploy against non-white citizens has been the call for increased visibility as a form of accountability. A certain commonsensical recognition of the fact that racialized violence *seems* more common in the past ten year or so as a result of technological change seems to accompany this logic of visibility. Rodney King's infamous assault perhaps marks an earlier instance of video recording being used to spotlight well known yet frequently invisible police violence. Today, cellphones or other recording devices and social media provide a (mostly)free, easy to operate, and wide platform with which to spread information. It also cannot be denied that an integral part of the movement for Black lives continues to emanate from digital forms of organization, knowledge sharing, and community building; after all, in 2013 in the wake of Trayvon Martin's murder, there was #BlackLivesMatter.

With regard to police violence, some have further gestured toward technological possibilities in the form of state issued body cameras. During her presidential campaign in 2016, Hillary Clinton, while speaking about racialized police violence, called for body cameras as an integral part of criminal justice reform: "We should make sure that every police department in the country has body cameras to record interaction between officers on patrol and suspects, that will improve transparency and accountability it will help protect good people on both sides of the

lens."⁶⁶ Mark O'Mara advocates for body cameras while articulating a politics of legibility as he notes: "we cannot correct injustice if we cannot see it. Gandhi said that we "must make the injustice visible," and that may be the real value of body cameras in policing. Body cameras have the potential not only to expose when cops break the rules, but they will also help expose laws that are unjust."⁶⁷ An October 2016 article from *The Economist* advocates for the efficacy of police body cameras by asserting that: "the gadgets improve the behaviour both of cops and those they deal with."⁶⁸ O'Mara and Clinton both articulate a liberal politics of reform predicated on legibility, as does *The Economist* to some extent, and a commonsensical recognition of the visual resources provided by body cameras does seem to intuit that visibility can be important. After all, many calls for and legal attempts at justice in the aftermath of police killings are undermined by the fundamentally incomplete accounts of these events which are left available after one of the storytellers has been killed by the other. In broadening this thought beyond (strictly speaking) state violence and opening it up to the problem of Man's ongoing overrepresentation, perhaps visibility offers a path toward liberation.

Certainly, Man operates not only through violent repression but through the invisible silence of hegemony as well. Man overrepresents himself as the human itself in part by hiding his particularity and forgetting the contingent historical conditions of his domination. Wynter describes the "usually excluded and *invisibilized* situation"⁶⁹ of Bauman's New Poor and Fanon's *les damnés*, both of which inform her conception of a global archipelago of those marginalized by Man. In unsettling Man, it seems that we must make more visible both the

⁶⁶ Keilar, Brianna. April 29, 2015. "Hillary Clinton calls for mandatory police body cameras, end to mass incarceration" *CNN*. <https://www.cnn.com/2015/04/29/politics/hillary-clinton-police-body-cameras/>

⁶⁷ O'Mara, Mark. Dec.8,2014. "Why police body cameras would work" *CNN*. <http://www.cnn.com/2014/12/05/opinion/omara-police-camera-protection/index.html>

⁶⁸ The Economist Explains. "Why the police should wear body cameras" Oct. 2016. *The Economist*. <https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2016/10/19/why-the-police-should-wear-body-cameras>

⁶⁹ Wynter. "Unsettling the Coloniality...": 261

overrepresentation itself as well as those excluded. In what follows, I will consider a politics of legibility as a path forward and beyond Man's overrepresentation by thinking primarily through the work of Andrea Ritchie and Melissa Harris-Perry, as well as considering contributions offered by Judith Butler and Jacques Rancière.

Much of Judith Butler's work, particularly post 9/11, centers on the relationship between violence and legibility. In texts such as *Precarious Life* and *Frames of War*, Butler tends to ask how certain lives come to be visible (and thus considered worthwhile) while others do not. The preface to *Precarious Life* situates Butler's overall project within a Levinas-inflected framework of nonviolent ethics which emphasizes the ease with which human life is annulled.⁷⁰

Accompanying this work is an illumination of the fickle conditions of legibility which animate and constitute the public sphere. Butler's concern with visibility is very much tied to the public realm. Jacques Rancière tends to share this orientation as well. Public life not only circumscribes who counts as a worthy life, but also what types of subjects may be taken seriously as political actors.⁷¹ On Butler's view, this largely occurs in relation to both de facto and de jure forms of delimitation placed on legibility, which comprises visibility as well as audibility. Illegibility, for Butler, creates the conditions for violence.⁷²

An important index for legibility that Butler identifies is the extent to which one might be given recognition after death; "they stage the scene and provide the narrative means by which 'the human' in its grievability is established."⁷³ This theme of grievability will be reconjured later on, but for now it is important to note that Butler outlines an important connection between legibility (mediated here through who is allowed to be mourned) and who gets to be counted as

⁷⁰ Butler, Judith. 2004. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. Verso Books. London, UK: xvii

⁷¹ Ibid: xvii

⁷² Ibid: 145

⁷³ Ibid: 42

human. This seems to present an obvious point of resonance with Wynter's theorization. Later, Butler cautions that we make a mistake if we take "a single definition of the human, or a single model of rationality" to be that which defines humanity.⁷⁴ It would seem that Butler's concerns with legibility as the conditions for violence make clear that the dominance of genre must be undone by projects of increased visibility.

Rancière similarly asserts an emphasis on legibility and conceives of politics as intricately tied to public visibility and shared aesthetic experiences. Rancière notes in *The Politics of Aesthetics*: "The important thing is that the question of the relationship between aesthetics and politics be raised at this level, the level of the sensible delimitation of what is common to the community, the forms of its visibility and of its organization"⁷⁵ Although rarely clear in his prose, Rancière maintains a consistent emphasis on the aesthetic and visual dimensions of politics and elsewhere offers the formulation that politics itself is about contesting what in fact counts as politics.⁷⁶ In a manner convergent with Butler, Rancière maintains that politics operates best by making visible forms of existence that are excluded by dominant regimes. For Rancière, this necessarily requires an engagement with public life in which politics proceeds by:

"re-qualifying these spaces, in getting them to be seen as the places of a community; it involves these categories making themselves seen or heard as speaking subjects (if only in the form of litigation) - in short, as participants in a

⁷⁴ Ibid:90

⁷⁵ Rancière, Jacques. 2004. *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*. Tr. Gabriel Rockhill. Continuum Publishing Group. London and New York: 18

⁷⁶ Rancière, Jacques. 2010. *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. Continuum Publishing Group. London: 35

common aesthesis. It consists in making what was unseen visible; in making what was audible as mere noise heard as speech.”⁷⁷

From Rancière, it seems to follow that seeking liberation should entail marginalized agents demonstrating their own equality, worth, and deserving access to the common category of citizens. While this form of demonstration seems to carry positive and liberatory psychic value for those who carry it out, it seems less clear that it might disrupt the dominant social regime’s ordering logic of genre. Demonstrations of the sort, while effective in calibrating revolutionary agency and forming organizational communities, tend to be repressed, ignored, or appropriated rather than listened to. Nonetheless, Rancière presents an important consideration of legibility as an aspect of public democracy.

Melissa Harris-Perry is helpful in shifting the conversation of legibility into the arena of racialized violence and the political challenges and oppression facing Black women. Harris-Perry’s *Sister Citizen* grounds an exploration of anti-Blackness within the realm of the everyday and of politics. *Sister Citizen* explores the centrality of emotions within politics⁷⁸ and the manner in which negative images of Black women circulated by the dominant regime act to arrest social and political progress, to form dominant policy stances, and to inscribe harmful affects within Black women themselves. Harris-Perry demonstrates the materiality of negative images and provides a counter to many contemporary discourses which marginalize these concerns as “mere” identity politics. Along these lines, Harris-Perry fields critiques from thinkers like Nancy Fraser, who are apprehensive about the manner in which politics centered on recognition might ignore material circumstances.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Ibid: 38

⁷⁸ Harris-Perry, Melissa. 2011. *Sister Citizen*. Yale University Press. New Hampshire: 177

⁷⁹ Ibid: 42

It is important to note that Harris-Perry's concerns about visibility are grounded in the concept of (mis)recognition. Harris-Perry's project reconciles Fraser's concern with the material by demonstrating the manner in which misrecognition acts as political barrier for Black women in the United States. Harris-Perry introduces a field psychology study in which individuals are tasked with aligning themselves upright while sitting in a crooked chair in tilted room.⁸⁰ The imagery of "the crooked room" is used to illustrate the distorted perceptions which dominant ideological fictions cultivate and project onto Black women, who must attempt to reorient themselves. Poetry, literature, and aesthetics are viable ways by which one might grapple with the distortions of the crooked room. Writing about Ntozake Shange's *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf*, Harris-Perry notes: "...noticing not that one is alone in the crooked room but, rather, that there are others standing bent, stooped, or surprisingly straight. It is an experience of having someone make visible the slanted images that too frequently remain invisible."⁸¹ Within *Sister Citizen*, misrecognition is pursued as a project which has negated the humanity of Black people, thus recognition proper is required as amelioration. Following Harris-Perry, the problem is not merely legibility, as an enhanced visibility without recognition of humanity brings its own problems. Harris-Perry writes "...Black women in American live under heightened scrutiny by the state. As members of a stigmatized group, African American women lack opportunities for accurate, affirming recognition of the self and yet must contend with hypervisibility imposed by their lower social status."⁸²

The issue of hypervisibility raised by Harris-Perry complicates the politics of legibility. While on one hand, Man's overrepresentation proceeds by rendering invisible those on its

⁸⁰ Ibid: 29

⁸¹ Ibid: 31

⁸² Ibid: 39

margins, it also utilizes techniques of surveillance and visibility to control Black bodies and movement(s). This tension has been a common site of apprehension within the analogous consideration of body cameras. While they do seemingly offer a technology, which could conceivably hold state agents more accountable for violence, they also present an increase in surveillance which principally targets racialized communities. Responding to this decidedly mixed set of possibilities, Deray McKesson offers: “I think that one of the things that we’ve learned is that there’s no one solution. Body cameras can be implemented effectively as a part of a comprehensive set of solutions, but alone they are not the win.”⁸³ From Harris-Perry, we can appreciate the need to correct misrecognition, but her refusal to equate simple visibility with political recognition is instructive regarding legibility. Andrea Ritchie, whose work presents an extremely urgent and compelling treatise on visibility, is helpful in further exploring the promises and limits of legibility. Ritchie’s archive of particular forms of gendered and racialized violence accentuates the utility in retaining gender as an analytic category and anticipates the next chapter’s meditation on movement.

Invisible No More

Andrea Ritchie’s *Invisible No More* provides an unflinching history of multifaceted forms of police violence against women of color. In Angela Davis’ rendering, Ritchie “does not urge us simply to add women of color to the list of targets of police violence...she asks us to consider what the vast problem of state violence looks like if we acknowledge how gender and sexuality, disability, and nation are intermeshed with race and class.”⁸⁴ Davis’ remarks are instructive and the holistic conceptualization offers a formulation which is quite consistent with Wynter’s genre of Man.

⁸³ Opam, Kwame. “Interview with Deray McKesson” *The Verge*. Nov. 29, 2016.

⁸⁴ Davis, Angela. “Forward” in Ritchie, Andrea. 2017. *Invisible No More*. Beacon Press. Boston, Ma: ix

Further, Ritchie's emphasis on gender provides a keen insight into a foundational category of Man's governing code of genre. Ritchie's work emanates from a long history of activism within anti-violence movements. Even among these spaces, Ritchie highlights that Black women's experiences of profiling, abusive treatment, and deadly force remain largely invisible within critical conversations about police violence.⁸⁵ Ritchie recounts and analyzes a litany of individual cases throughout the book while building a narrative of a systematic, routine, and invisibilized pattern of marginalization, violence, and stigmatization. *Invisible No More* offers a powerful form of praxis by gathering together women of color's experiences which are generally ignored or neglected and in doing so puts together a crucial archive of twenty-first century violence.

After situating Ritchie's project and parsing through some of the important contributions which it adds to a more general theory of Man's overrepresentation, I will more closely consider the shooting deaths of Philando Castile and Jordan Davis using insights derived from the Black Feminist optic which Ritchie provides. Ritchie's text is a substantive corrective to the invisibility and erasure which accompany the pervasive and systemic violence waged daily against people of color in America, but how far can this legibility praxis take us with regard to dismantling Man's political dominance?

While the two cases which I will examine at the end of this chapter involve the deaths of a Black boy and a Black man, Ritchie's account demonstrates how women of color are routinely victimized by white supremacist violence. I have chosen these two cases for things which they reveal about the Black women who were involved as well as what they suggest about legibility. I have also chosen them because they involve as perpetrators, both police and citizen white males.

⁸⁵ Ritchie. *Invisible No More*: 2

Following Ritchie, we can see that pervasive violence against racialized people is not merely a problem of police misconduct but is underwritten by white civil society as well. Man takes on many individual roles in doing the work of enforcing genre hegemony. Nonetheless, women of color should be understood as the direct and frequent victims of mistreatment and violence. Ritchie's archive forcefully confirms Patrisse Khan-Cullors's reminder that there is a fallacious belief circulating that Black Lives Matter is "just about boys and the police."⁸⁶ Attention to gender allows for a specific and targeted understanding of the violent work of overrepresentation which Man carries out.

Further, Ritchie's intersectional work also identifies other particular arenas of vulnerability and abuse, such as (dis)ability.⁸⁷ In her discussion of the case of Marlene Pinnock, for instance, Ritchie highlights the intersections of bipolar diagnoses, homelessness, race, and gender which collided violently together as Pinnock was stopped and then beaten by a highway patrol officer. Pinnock was further subjected to a forced mental observation by the hospital after the officer proclaimed her mentally unstable.⁸⁸ Wynter's account of Man demonstrates the shift from describing people of color as inherently sinful to a discourse which deemed them as inherently irrational. Thus, converting Pinnock's bipolar diagnoses and/or supposedly erratic behavior into the conditions for violence fits well into Wynter's account. This is perhaps a form of denying legibility (as a rational actor) as the precondition for violence as Butler would have it.

Pinnock was targeted ostensibly because she appeared as a threatening presence as she walked along the highway, evidently barefoot and speaking with herself. This pattern is resonant with Kionte Spencer, who was similarly stopped while walking, deemed threatening and/or

⁸⁶ Khan-Cullors, Patrisse. From the February 20, 2018 Conversation with Angela Davis. Moderated by Melissa-Harris-Perry. Merkin Concert Hall at Kaufman Music Center, New York City.

⁸⁷ Ritchie. *Invisible No More*: 90

⁸⁸ *Ibid*: 89

mentally unstable, and in his case, killed. Luckily, Pinnock was not killed, and her assault was captured on video. This documented evidence led to a strong campaign to secure justice for Pinnock, gaining the support of well-known civil rights leaders. While this form of violence against vulnerable women of color happens routinely, it has historically been less frequently captured on film. In this way, video technology can indeed act against the regime of invisibility which frequently structures racialized violence. Given the propensity for police officers to falsify their accounts, thus rendering invisible the truth, visual evidence provides a crucial mechanism for garnering visibility. As Pinnock rightfully noted: “without that video, my word may not have meant anything.”⁸⁹

While Pinnock’s story gained significant visibility and highlighted the way in which she had been denied humanity by the officer, this itself did not secure justice. Despite the visual evidence, as well as the officer admitting to “fucking wailing away” on her, the Los Angeles County D.A.’s office investigated the case and deemed the use of force both legal and necessary.⁹⁰ Police violence is driven by similar stereotypes of Black women to those which Harris-Perry identifies. Ritchie notes the usage of “strong” to describe Pinnock, which recalls the figure of the “strong Black woman” who possess a super/non-human immunity to pain and thus is an appropriate target for physical abuse. Ritchie also shows the culpability of white civil society in fueling anti-Black state violence. The individuals who first reported Pinnock to the police described her as threatening and “looking like a psycho”⁹¹ which highlights that Pinnock was not, as it were, completely invisible to them. She was illegible as a human, but much more fundamentally we can say that she was misrecognized or subjected to the descriptive statements

⁸⁹ Ibid: 90

⁹⁰ Ibid: 90

⁹¹ Ibid: 90

of Man which dehumanize Black women. In this way, it is not such a surprise that visual technologies or media visibility could not by themselves secure justice for Marlene Pinnock when Man remains intact and in power.

In a similar vein, Ritchie's account also considers the same concern for hypervisibility which Harris-Perry raises. The increased intensity and disproportionately violent police interactions among racialized populations speak to the role of visibility in making certain bodies more vulnerable than others. The aggressive and warlike "broken windows" style of policing which has been adopted by the vast majority of U.S. departments encourages police officers to occupy territory and scrutinize any who are *perceived* to be criminal figures (which is always mediated through race, class, and so forth). Ritchie also discusses the frequent weaponization of visibility, such as with the unnecessary, invasive, and humiliating public searches which dehumanize and criminalize women of color.⁹²

Invisibility, as Ritchie demonstrates, is not only a weapon against people of color but it is also a tool which can protect white privilege, white supremacy, and Man's overrepresentation. In 2015, fourteen-year-old Dajerria Becton was violently assaulted by Texas police officers who responded to phoned complaints about Black youth holding a graduation cookout at a community pool located in a majority white Dallas suburb. When armed officers appeared, they began accosting people of color but as a young white partygoer describes: "Everyone being put to the ground was Black, Mexican, Arabic. The cop didn't even look at me. It was like I was invisible."⁹³ While legibility seems to remain as a crucial site of political struggle vis-à-vis Man's overrepresentation, it is clearly not so simple as securing visibility and removing invisibility. Just as Wynter's account shows Man's flexibility in adopting new descriptive

⁹² Ibid: 50

⁹³ Ibid: 71

statements to sustain its overrepresentation, Ritchie's account demonstrates that Man's logic is paradoxical, fluid, and always anti-Black.

This chapter closes upon two case studies in genre'd violence which both provide insight into the brutal conditions into which Black women who suffer the loss of a loved one are thrown and the ways in which they navigate them. My analysis of the murders of Jordan Davis and Philando Castile follow a methodology of reading these events with attention directed toward the women whose stories, knowledges, and agency offer strong resistance against Man. By ruminating on these practices, I hope also to demonstrate that legibility remains a powerful tool for countering oppression even as it too often provides incomplete victories.

Philando Castile and Diamond Reynolds

Philando Castile was shot and killed by Minnesota Police officer, Jeronimo Yanez, on July 6, 2016, during a routine traffic stop. The stop is "routine" in the casual usage of the term in that it was ostensibly initiated in reaction to a minor traffic infraction. More importantly, it was routine in that being stopped by police was an ordinary part of Castile's regular harassment by a police department which had pulled him over more than forty-six times in thirteen years.⁹⁴ This particular stop would turn lethal within seconds and became an episode of racialized violence which achieved a high level of media visibility largely due to the fact that Castile's girlfriend, Diamond Reynolds, who was in the car along with the couple's four year old daughter, live-streamed the interaction on social media. Many have remarked on Reynold's tranquil disposition amidst the tragic circumstances. During the first 30 seconds of the video, Reynolds, still sitting in the car next to her dying boyfriend and held under gunpoint by Officer Yanez, calmly reports

⁹⁴ Saslow, Eli. Sept. 10, 2016. "For Diamond Reynold, Trying to Move Past Ten Tragic Minutes of Video" *The Washington Post*.

that Yanez had fired 4-5 shots into Castile as he had followed instructions to produce his driver's license.

Yanez, still pointing his gun into the car, can be seen screaming: "I told him not to reach!" as Reynolds matter-of-factly counters this narrative: "you told him to get his license, sir" while cordially responding to shrieks of "keep your hands where they are!"⁹⁵ Around one minute and a half into the video, Yanez curtly instructs Reynolds out of the car: "Get the female passenger out!" and immediately begins issuing hostile instructions: "Keep walking! Get on your knees! Hands up!" Yanez's aggressive posture is disturbingly paired with instructions governing Ms. Reynold's movements, despite having just shot her boyfriend to death for complying with similar instructions. This theme of movement which as the next chapter will explore, seems to be a consistent obsession among agents providing security for Man's overrepresentation and one which must be considered.

Throughout the rest of the video, Diamond Reynolds remains incredibly cordial and calm but also emits deep expressions of grief. This is vitally important. A consistent feature of those who are dehumanized, as Butler keenly points out, is that they are denied the ability to be mourned for. Narratives of criminality, terroristic affiliations, and dangerous disposition are among the most common strategies through which victims of state violence are dehumanized and rendered illegible; declared as not having led lives worth grieving for.

Reynolds disrupts this tendency through her visceral wails of anguish as well as her with straightforward offering of truth to power: "you shot four bullets into him, sir."⁹⁶ Reynolds, in her anguish, turns her speech to her god in prayer for her slain boyfriend: "he don't deserve

⁹⁵ Diamond Reynolds' life-stream video.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

this...please make sure he's okay.”⁹⁷ Sylvia Wynter lucidly demonstrates the manner in which Man's categories of oppression are often cast in terms of a binary of deserving/undeserving. Those who fall outside of Man's normative range are rendered both undeserving and disposable. This seems like another fundamental problem which legibility politics alone cannot quite reach. The disproportional way in which life value is differently attributed-- what Eddie Glaude calls a “value gap”⁹⁸-- seems deeply entrenched in Man's logic. Diamond Reynolds enunciates on behalf of Philando that his life was worthy and was ended for no (legitimate) apparent reason.⁹⁹

While the grisly murder and immediate recourse by Officer Yanez to blame his victim constitute the big stories thus far, in the background (literally) emerges another vitally important political actor. At minute 1:48, four-year-old Dae'Anna can just barely be heard in the background crying. As soon as Reynolds gets out of the car, she asks where her daughter is. Five minutes later, having just calmly restated the sequence of events for her live-stream archive and having prayed for her boyfriend, Reynolds wails in an anguish which exceeds words. After staying almost silent during the entire ordeal of witnessing her father's death before her, Dae'Anna's brave voice emerges in response to her mother's pain: “it's alright mama, I'm right here with you.”¹⁰⁰

Dae'Anna's tender solidarity with her mother signals two extremely important knowledge practices; an ethic of care and a strategy for survival. Dae'Anna has held her silence thus far because her mother has previously taught her how to survive a routine traffic stop.¹⁰¹ Her mother has likely taught her that one must keep still, quiet, and calm because anything else

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Glaude, Eddie. 2016. *Democracy in Black*. Broadway Books. New York: 6

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Saslow

recalls the descriptive statement by which Man categorizes Black people as threatening, violent, and unpredictable. Indeed, in later interviews, officer Yanez would remix a familiar chorus: “I thought I was gonna die. And, I was scared because, I didn’t know if he was gonna, I didn’t know what he was gonna do.”¹⁰² It is also worth pointing out that Yanez is not a white man. This fact attests that Man’s overrepresentation is supported by a variety of agents who otherwise likely may not be recognized by Man’s normative descriptive statement. Yanez is also a demonstration that placing more non-white men on police forces is seldom sufficient in disrupting the deeply entrenched logic of violence.

Dae’Anna and Diamond display a touching sensibility of care for one another, mutually attending to the unspeakable loss which they have both suffered. This practice of knowledge becomes especially important for families such as this one in the post-trauma context.

Immediately after the murder, Reynolds and her daughter are detained despite having been the victims, rather than perpetrators, of violence. Upon leaving detention, Reynolds moved straight from precinct to protest site to demand justice for Philando.¹⁰³ The concluding chapter of this thesis will further highlight this dynamic of post-trauma work, but for the meantime it is worth noting that for Diamond, work, stress, and crisis only intensified after Philando’s death. The work of pursuing justice sits most notably on Diamond’s (and so many other Black women) shoulders as labor which she shouldn’t have to do.

While so many cases just like it are swept under the rug, Philando’s death garnered a hugely visible media presence. In the wake of his death, thousands demonstrated, wrote, and agitated for justice in solidarity, anguish, and anger. In a familiar turn of events, Yanez was

¹⁰² Berman, Mark. June 2017. “What the police officer who shot Philando Castile said about the shooting” *Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2017/06/21/what-the-police-officer-who-shot-philando-castile-said-about-the-shooting/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.924ad0950e2f

¹⁰³ Ritchie. *Invisible No More*: 229

acquitted of all charges against him and subsequently received \$48,500 as a buyout as part of a separation agreement with Minneapolis PD.¹⁰⁴ Far from justice, Diamond and Dae'Anna are forced to move on as best they can, their small family now placed into additional precarity as Reynolds attempts to support her daughter as a newly single mother. After the media attention dies down, people stop writing and calling in with solidarity as they move on to the next tragedy which makes the national news. No formal support network is extended by the state which robbed Dae'Anna of her father. Diamond, still an incisive mixture of matter-of-fact and melancholia, notes: "Nobody was worrying about me before all this, and nobody's going to be fixing it all up now."¹⁰⁵

While Diamond and Dae'Anna continue along in an unjust world which renders them outside of any genre worth caring about, Valerie Castile, Philando's mother, has been doing work of her own. For her, it is not enough to decry the disturbing lack of justice within Philando's murder. Working with the local legal authorities within Minneapolis, Valerie has set up a "crisis tool kit" which offers criteria through which departments can gauge their state of preparedness for police shootings. It also makes the normative suggestion that a prosecutor should be immediately assigned in the case of all future shootings.¹⁰⁶ It is almost not worth pointing out how unreasonable it is that a private citizen, particularly one forced to prematurely bury her son, had to take on this work. There is also the macabre fact that Valerie's policy activism operates on a deeply held piece of knowledge that violence like this will occur again.

¹⁰⁴ Forliti, Amy. 2017. "Cop who killed Philando Castile to be paid \$48,500 in buyout" *USA Today*. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2017/07/11/cop-who-killed-philando-castile-paid-48-500-buyout/466918001/>

¹⁰⁵ Saslow

¹⁰⁶ March 18, 2019. "Prosecutor, Philando Castile's mom develop crisis kit" *Minnesota Public Radio AP*. <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2019/03/18/prosecutor-philando-castile-mom-develop-crisis-tool-kit>

Man remains fluid, creative, and tactical yet hundreds of years later he continues to carry out the ritual of violence which seems essential to his very construction.

Jordan Davis and Lucy McBath

Jordan Davis was killed by white man and private citizen, Michael Dunn, on November 23, 2012. Davis, a 17-year old high school student, was at a gas station with three friends listening to music in one of the boys' cars. Dunn and his fiancé, Rhonda Rouer, pulled into the spot next to them and, as Rouer entered the store, Dunn became perturbed by the music emanating from the adjacent car. After an argument about the music's volume escalated, Dunn fired a gun into the car, mortally wounding Davis. Dunn's version of events could have easily been borrowed from Jeronimo Yanez. As Dunn tells it, he politely asked the teenagers to lower the volume of their music. Dunn then states that they not only declined but brandished a shotgun at him and threatened his life, although no gun was found and no other witnesses- including Dunn's fiancé whose testimony explicitly contradicts Dunn's story¹⁰⁷ - corroborated this claim. Dunn maintains that he had no choice but to shoot at the teenagers who, at this point, had elected to leave the premises rather than stay and argue with Dunn. Dunn justifies his lethal actions against unarmed and non-threatening teenagers with a narrative of protecting his fiancé: "I was worried about the blind firing situation, where they would shoot over their heads, whatever, and hit me, or hit me and Rhonda."¹⁰⁸ Dunn's discourse activates a long tradition of patriarchal Man offering justification for violence against a racialized other based on his protective duties over a

¹⁰⁷ Alvarez, Lissette. Feb.11, 2014. "Florida Man's Fiancé Contradicts Part of his Testimony in Killing of Teenager" *NY Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/12/us/florida-mans-fiancee-contradicts-parts-of-his-testimony-in-killing-of-teenager.html>

¹⁰⁸ Ibid

white woman. Countless American lynchings were undergirded by the same imagery of a delicate white female who must be protected from a dangerous Black male.

Angela Davis tracks the myth of the Black rapist in post-civil war American south and notes that this construction emerged to sustain the political practice of lynching, but only after a different set of justifications (the fabrication of Black conspiratorial insurrection plots) had collapsed. Davis writes: “During the first great wave of lynchings, propaganda urging the defense of white womanhood from Black men’s irrepressible rape instincts was conspicuous for its absence...later, when it became evident that these conspiracies, plots and insurrections were fabrications that never materialized, the popular justification for lynching was modified.”¹⁰⁹ Davis’s narrative points to the familiar strategy of deploying descriptive statements in order to dehumanize Black people and to justify the violence of Man’s overrepresentation. Mendaciousness on the part of white civil society provided a crucial support for the brutal practices of lynching.

Angela Davis’s account and Jordan Davis’s murder seem to converge in this way, as Michael Dunn explicitly reconjured the textures of predatory Blackness, vulnerable white femininity, and white patriarchal duties to justify his actions. Of course, no evidence of the teenage boys possessing a firearm was recovered and Rouer testified that Dunn did not make any mention of Davis possessing a weapon after the murder.¹¹⁰ Further, Rouer testified that prior to her entering the gas station, Dunn had lamented the “thug music” which Davis and his friends were listening to.¹¹¹ Although Dunn challenges this, instead asserting that he must have said “rap

¹⁰⁹ Davis, Angela. 1983. *Women Race & Class*. Vintage Books. New York: 185

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Zook, Kristal Brent. November 2015. “The Lessons of Jordan Davis’ Murder: Revisited” *The Nation*. <https://www.thenation.com/article/the-lessons-of-jordan-daviss-murder-revisited/>

crap” or something similar, it is instructively clear that Dunn had formed a presupposition about Davis and his friends which served as the precondition for violence.

Hip-Hop was coded as criminal, dangerous, and aggressive for Dunn, which signaled a group of disposable and threatening lives. Music has often served as the criteria for Man’s abusive treatment of others and no African-American artform has seemingly been met with quite as much vitriol as Hip-Hop. Deemed offensive, non-musical, and dumb by a white supremacist cultural imaginary, Hip-Hop serves another index for Man’s overrepresentation. While Dunn’s actions and discourse communicate the antipathy which conservative white(supremacist) culture often asserts against Hip Hop, it is also clearly an artform which has been accepted, appropriated, and marketed by popular white civic culture.¹¹² In expressing his disdain for Davis’s music, Dunn is likely in a minority of white males(although perhaps not for his age and/or other sub-demographics), yet the cultural success of Hip Hop has not mitigated the abusive perceptions or treatment of Black people in America. Amandla Stanberg released a short YouTube video in 2015 which articulates a commonly circulated observational question: “What would America be like if we loved Black people as much as we love Black culture?”¹¹³

Against Rancière’s optimism about the radical democratic possibilities which might extend from shared aesthetics practices, it is clear that they also constitute another set of grounds by which Man stigmatizes and negates the Black humans which fall outside of Man’s normative range. In this way, well before Dunn interacted with Davis, a sonic rather than visual sensibility had already coded Davis as other. Genres of humanity, as constituted by Man, also divide along

¹¹² See Rose, Tricia. 2008. *The Hip Hop Wars*. Civitas Books. New York.

¹¹³ Stenberg, Amandla. 2015. “Don’t Cash Crop on My Cornrows” *YouTube*.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O1KJRRSB_XA

genres of music, although we can reasonably speculate that a white teenager listening to the same music would not have been constructed as a threat.

While the events of Jordan Davis' murder seem rather familiar, the case as a whole actually diverges quite a bit from Man's usual script. Michael Dunn, after presenting his false narrative of an armed Black assailant and evoking Florida's infamous "stand your ground" law, was sentenced to life without parole. The rare occasion of the legal system supplying the closest equivalent to justice that it could reasonably be expected to offer certainly signals an optimistic chord. Dunn's sentence will never return the stolen life of a teenager back to his family, of course, but it does signal a small victory over Man's enduring ability to kill with impunity.

Just as Valerie Castile and Diamond Reynolds had to pick up the pieces in the wake of Philando Castile's death, so too did Lucy McBath, Jordan's mother. Like so many others left painfully in the wake of white supremacist violence, Lucy McBath got to work; becoming a virulent activist against violence. McBath joined the political support group, "Mothers of the Movement" which is comprised of African-American women whose children have been killed by gun violence. This group also demonstrates an ethic of care as it offers mutual support to women struggling with the loss of their loved ones. Crucially, the group mobilizes discourse and activism against racial oppression, violence, and injustice. McBath is currently serving as a member of the House of Representatives for Georgia's 6th congressional district and continuing her policy advocacy against gun violence.

The tragic case of Jordan Davis' death served a call to work for McBath, whose ascendancy to political office matters quite a bit in a country in which Black women are scandalously underrepresented in formal politics. Davis's case is also one which made national news and secured a version of legal justice which did, to the extent such a thing is possible,

satisfy his family's desires for justice. At Dunn's sentencing, McBath addressed her son's killer:" I choose to forgive you Mr. Dunn for taking my son's life. I choose to release the seeds of bitterness and anger and honor my son's love. I choose to walk in the freedom of knowing God's justice has been served. I pray that God has mercy on your soul."¹¹⁴

This case's outcome does speak to the efficacy of legibility politics. It is also worth noting that McBath's call to work in the wake of her son's death was also a call to movement. In this next chapter, I will examine more closely the role of movement in contributing to genre'd violence, but Lucy McBath's trajectory of activism speaks to the liberatory work of social movement which Black women instructively take up against an unjust system. Lucy McBath is an inspiring figure who demonstrates the possibilities of post-trauma work, but certainly her case is unique. As I write this, Antonia Askew is still struggling to find decent work and housing in a strange city, her son's destructed potential equally burned into her memory. There will be no congressional campaign for Antonia and no justice for Kionte anytime soon.

Legibility offers a crucially important lens with which to consider violence. The conditions of dehumanization are supplied by the descriptive statements which refuse to make certain humans *appear* as such. Rendering certain figures as invisible makes violence much easier to carry out and justify as well. Given this, a politics of legibility which seeks to improve the visibility of marginalized, oppressed, and violently victimized people is a requirement for social movements which seek to counter Man. This politics might include addressing media coverage, making more proportionate political and professional representation, and combating the types of misrecognition which undergird dehumanizing descriptive statements circulated by

¹¹⁴ Luscombe, Richard. Oct. 2014. "Michael Dunn sentenced to life without parole for killing of Florida teenager" *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2014/oct/17/michael-dunn-sentenced-life-without-parole-florida>

dominant white culture. These types of activities, while of the utmost importance, can only carry us so far toward freedom as long as the logic of Man still governs the institutions, social norms, and cultural landscape of western societies. Jordan Davis's deeply tragic case is something of an anomaly given the regularity with which genre'd violence is carried out in this country. We will likely need to move beyond securing legibility in order to build a better world

February 26, 2018

Two years after Kionte's death, on February 26, the Roanoke NAACP along with community organization, the Roanoke People's Power Network, arranged a peripatetic memorial service along the same road to lay wreaths upon the spot where Kionte was killed. In the brisk evening's settling darkness, the small circle offered remembrance and love to Kionte's mother, Antonia Askew, who spoke with a powerful, shaking, inspiring, heartbreaking, and hopeful voice. Antonia recalled the painful moments in which Kionte was taken from her at age three as she was struggling to economically sustain herself as well as her two boys. Kionte was placed in foster care; separated violently from his family which was merely the beginning (which is not to say the start) of a series which would end his world and profoundly damage hers.

Antonia's narrative testimony highlights an important dimension of the problem(s) of racialized violence and resolves us to implicate structural conditions which overrepresent women in poverty and women of color. Recalling Judith Butler's emphasis on grievability, Antonia's moving testimony at the post office and her unabashed assertion that her son deserves to be mourned and deserved to be counted as livable demonstrates that legibility, even with limits, is a powerful and viable form of political appeal. Further, it suggests and illuminates a sense of

culpability on the part of an administrative state¹¹⁵ which has a long tradition of violently separating the families of those which it does not and has never deemed fully human. Hortense Spillers account refers to this brutal legacy of separation by noting that manner in which “the enslaved offspring was ‘orphaned’”¹¹⁶ as the plantation economy rendered Black people as objects of property commonly belonging to an owner who could sell, trade, and dispose of them as he wished.

Antonia struggles to make it through her prepared words, stopping several times to apologize through tears and to thank everyone lovingly for attending the memorial. The fits and starts in her testimony mirror the violence, precarity, and tragedy which have ruptured her pursuit of a happy and **safe** life as a woman of color in the United States of America. So too, however, does her shaking yet continued voice demarcate the persistence and resilience¹¹⁷ with which she navigates a racialized society which has finally taken her son away for good.

In the aftermath of everything that has happened in Roanoke, Antonia has moved out of town. Now she lives in the state’s capitol and struggles with the new world in which she no longer has either of her sons nearby. Steady, decent work is a bit harder to find these days and Antonia thinks often about her son and the justice he never received. When asked what she would prefer for people to know about her son, she accentuates the spirit of care with which he looked after his family, particularly his younger brother, Carl. Carl, too, found lingering painful memories inhabiting Roanoke’s geography and has since moved to California. Carl raps in a

¹¹⁵ See Bracey, Glenn. 2014. “Towards a Critical Race Theory of State. *Critical Sociology*. Vol. 41 Is 3. on the role of the state in epistemologically Critical Race Theory and ontologically as racialized instrumentality.

¹¹⁶ Spillers, “Mama’s Baby...”: 218

¹¹⁷ This very word presents a certain problematic in its own right. Antonia does indeed embody resilience in the face of ceaseless tragedy, and yet I do not utter the word as a gleeful or uplifting description. Resilience is too often a technique of eliding a serious grappling with the overwhelming socio-structural conditions which require some to take on so much as an individual. Yes, Antonia is resilient, but it is societal scandal and a political indictment that she is tasked with such an errand.

song recorded with Kionte’s former music teacher: “look what the system has done to me. Chewed me up and spit me out and took my brother from me...How much more will you take; it’s been enough for me.”¹¹⁸ Antonia and Carl continue to try and find a lawyer who can help them reopen Kionte’s case and move toward securing justice. So far, progress has been slow. Antonia has dealt regularly with issues in workplace exploitation, lingering health issues, and economic challenges in the decidedly more difficult landscape of Richmond. All of which remains compounded by the traumatic memory of losing her son. None of which restrains her commitment to pursuing justice for her son or her will to resist and survive.

Chapter 3: Movement

. Following the cases I have reviewed thus far, a certain pattern oriented around movement emerges. Philando Castile’s death began with a traffic stop; a cessation of Black bodily movement through space by the external powers of Man. This was also the case for Kionte Spencer as he strolled through the February night in Virginia, as well as Trayvon Martin- killed in Florida 4 years earlier to the day. On the less (directly) lethal side of things, the infamous “stop and frisk” policy made famous by the NYPD organized its systematic campaign of profiling, violating the rights of, and in many cases violently abusing Black and Hispanic citizens around a logic of movement. Officers who carried out stop and frisk policies- and who conducted at least 4.4 million stops between 2004 and 2012- referred to “furtive movements” as a criterion for determining suspicion.¹¹⁹ This explicit recourse to movement elaborates on both Man’s material tactics and the fluidity of Man’s organizing logic. What counts as a “furtive”

¹¹⁸ OGprettyboyCarl with Bernadette Brown. 2017. “How Much More” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nZ4_uF3BLKs&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR22-aeQtYlaLaINoteW6aXbgvSRpD-IMLdY10UFMosfj1U7U0J1jN9vPUU

¹¹⁹ Hill, Marc Lamont. 2016. *Nobody*. Simon and Schuster Inc. New York: 58

movement? This determination is made by Man and remains vague enough to enjoy wide application. Lauren Williams' article, "21 Things You Can't Do While Black" further expounds upon this point by demonstrating a litany of everyday activities which people of color have been criminalized for carrying out. Williams' list notably includes movement-oriented items such as: walking home with snacks, driving after swimming and/or with a white female, and walking on the wrong side of the street.¹²⁰

Given the prevalence of movement as both the occasion for Man's confrontation with Black bodies as well as the instrument by which these bodies are abused and destroyed (for instance, with Freddie Gray), I consider the proposition that Man's central methodology of overrepresentation is the use of tactics which that control and/or stop (free) movement. As we have seen, legibility can be tolerated by Man and even extended under the right conditions, but it seems that Black movement is always coded as threatening to white supremacist patriarchal society. In order to investigate the sphere of movement in the operations of racialized violence, I will take up three case studies including Mya Hall, Malaika Brooks, and Sandra Bland. Visibility and legibility still remain important frames of reference for all of these cases as well. Hall and Brooks demonstrate the continued need for a politics of legibility in that neither received satisfactory justice partly because their cases never secured high levels of societal/media visibility. Sandra Bland, on the other hand, received a huge outpouring of support, visibility, and activism on her behalf yet her case demonstrates the limits of legibility, which by itself can secure little if any justice as long as genre remains intact. After considering the role of movement which, like legibility, can inform both the conditions for racialized violence as well as methods

¹²⁰ Williams, Lauren. Feb 2014. "21 Things You Can't Do While Black" *Mother Jones*. <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2014/02/21-things-you-cant-do-while-Black/>

of resistance against Man's overrepresentation, I turn, by way of conclusion, to the implications of work.

Mya Hall

On March 30, 2015, Mya Hall took a wrong turn on the highway and onto NSA property and was promptly shot to death while still operating an SUV. Later it would be (obsessively) revealed and reported that the SUV was stolen and that Hall, riding with friend Brittney Fleming, was a sex-worker with a petty criminal history. Media reports repeatedly misgendered both trans-women and summarized the deadly events with headlines which referenced Hall as “NSA attacker”¹²¹ and “transgender thief”¹²² to the extent that they discussed her at all. Indeed, Hall's criminal history and transgender identity were points of fascination for the familiar ritual of postmortem character assassination which Man tends to inflict on people of color, particularly those killed by security agents. Botham Jean, a Black man killed in his own home by an off-duty police officer who evidently “entered the wrong apartment,”¹²³ had his reputation assaulted after his murder when authorities and media promoted the information that a small amount of marijuana had been found in Jean's home. Suddenly, rather than a focus on the violent, senseless, and unreasonable actions of officer Amber Guygur, Jean became the target of character assassination for possessing a relatively harmless, immensely popular, and (in many states) legal and quasi-legal substance. Michael Brown was similarly turned into “no angel” by the descriptive statements circulated after his murder by Darren Wilson.

¹²¹ Moyer, Justin. April 2, 2015. “NSA Attacker Identified as Transgender Homeless Sex Worker” *The Washington Post*.

¹²² Associated Press. June 24, 2015. “No Charges After Fatal Shooting of Transgender Thief Outside NSA” *New York Post*. <https://nypost.com/2015/06/24/no-charges-after-fatal-shooting-of-transgender-thief-outside-nsa/>

¹²³ This given narrative has been found questionable by many, although this is less relevant than the fact that John was murdered in his own home.

While Hall's character assassination sits in continuity with the usual post-murder rituals of Man, her case takes on a different valence than many. As a poor, Black, trans-woman working in a criminalized profession, Hall was already living in a simultaneously hyper-visiblized and marginalized state. In the aftermath of her death, these trends clearly continued, yet no outbreak of protest rocked Baltimore's streets as they had with the uprising in the wake of Freddie Gray's death. Hall's death received very little popular attention and perhaps this speaks to what Beth Richie deems the "dangerous schism" between so-called deserving and undeserving victims.¹²⁴ Differently put, Hall's social identity deviated too far from the normative center of Man to any significant solidarity from mainstream civil society at large.

Hall's death is also instructive in that it reveals something about the manner in which Man codes the movement of Black bodies as threatening and dangerous. Man's response is to cease this subversive movement, which not uncommonly, as with Hall, utilizes deadly force in order to do so. Hall's mistaken entry onto NSA grounds is by no means unprecedented; many others have accidentally trespassed at precisely the same highway exit.¹²⁵ Yet Mya's movement into a territory guarded by one of Man's most vigilant security agencies was perceived immediately as a violent incursion. This trajectory again falls into continuity with a long list of Black bodies whose movement has been deemed threatening. The Police statement initially reported the two as "dressed in women's clothing," and later made a point of clarifying that this was not, in fact, part of a "disguise,"¹²⁶ also reveal the extent to which the pair's transgender

¹²⁴ Richie, Beth. 2012. *Arrested Justice: Black Women, Violence, and America's Prison Nation*. New York University Press: New York and London: 24

¹²⁵ Ritchie, Andrea. *Invisible No More*: 65

¹²⁶ Hermann, Peter. April 3, 2015. "Baltimore's Transgender Community Mourns One of its Own, Slain By Police" *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/crime/baltimores-transgender-community-mourns-one-of-their-own-slain-by-police/2015/04/03/2f657da4-d88f-11e4-8103-fa84725dbf9d_story.html?utm_term=.4b245400e34f

status amplified the negative perception which they elicited from Man. Marc Lamont Hill comments on the necessity of considering Mya Hall's death with an intersectional lens to understand "how sexism and transphobia conspire with structural racism to endanger Black trans bodies."¹²⁷

While there is no explicit account of transphobia in Wynter's account of Man, her insistence that genre produces all of the "-isms" can be instructively taken to include it. Man is not only rational, bourgeois, white, and male, but also cis-gender, heterosexual, able-bodied and so on. Hall's case demonstrates the deeply paranoid character of Man and the genre'd manner in which threats are coded. It further shows that movement presents an often-deadly point of contact between Man and people of color and that a lack of visibility greatly aids in unjust deaths, such as Mya's, being swept under the rug. Hall's friends back in Baltimore, deeply saddened by the loss of a woman whom they remembered as a generous, jovial, jokester, asked who collected her body and if she would receive a proper funeral.¹²⁸ These inquiries point to the marginalized status which accompanies those coded as "nobody" in Hill's terms as well as the ongoing need for visibility in holding authorities accountable and mobilizing activism and solidarity. The very act of questioning on her posthumous behalf also relays a politics of care and implicitly describes her as deserving of grievability.

¹²⁷ Hill, Marc Lamont. *Nobody*: xxii

¹²⁸ Hermann, Peter.

Malaika Brooks

In November of 2004, Malaika Brooks, then seven months pregnant, was stopped by Seattle police and issued a speeding ticket. When Brooks refused to sign, she was tazered, dragged facedown, handcuffed, and charged with both her refusal to sign and with resisting arrest.¹²⁹ Several things are immediately instructive here. While “arrest” in this context most directly denotes the legal capacity to take hold of one suspected of committing a crime, it can also be read with a more physical valence. Man literally seeks to arrest Black bodies in space and the utilization of both traffic stop and the practice of tazering, which Ritchie describes as one which supplies both excruciating pain and temporary *immobilization* (emphasis added),¹³⁰ constitute methodologies toward this end.

Brooks’ case reveals something else however, which forces us to widen the consideration of movement in a manner parallel to the flexible uses of legibility. While Brooks’ movement through space as she drove her son to school was the occasion for her assault, her non-movement also played a pivotal role in eliciting the callous treatment which she received. Her refusal to sign the ticket demonstrates a refusal also to move her body in a particular way as directed by the police. Once again, Man’s logic is flexible, contradictory, and always anti-Black. Images of the American 1950/60’s civil rights movement reflect this dynamic as well: both marches and sit-ins were met with white violence. Beth Richie describes the sexual exploitation of Black women within the infamous Rikers Island facility in which signs reading: “no talking, no standing still, and no co-mingling” populated the halls of a space in which co-mingling in unavoidable (given the overcrowding characteristic of penal facilities of this kind) and standing still is a regular

¹²⁹ Ritchie, Andrea. *Invisible No More*: 165

¹³⁰ *Ibid*: 165

instruction given by correctional officers.¹³¹ The impossible and contradictory nature of Man's prescriptions for Black movement speaks to a form of control which exceeds the simple logic of stopping movement. Brooks' case also demonstrates that something more is at play. Brooks' refusal to sign the speeding ticket constitutes a form of non-deference which is intolerable for Man, who requires subordination at all times. The figure of a defiant, Black, especially female, body likely activates longstanding anxieties on the part of a white supremacist society whose sense of self requires an inferior "other."

By refusing to sign the speeding ticket, an infraction occasioned by Black movement, Brooks signaled a denial of the infallible and absolute authority of Man and did not demonstrate subordination. As the next case will confirm, this is quite often an empowered form of action which Man reacts to with deadly force. After undergoing what she described as one of the worst things to have happened to her, Brooks eventually received \$45,000 after nearly a decade of legal struggle.¹³² Given that the police officers abused her, violated her rights, and endangered both her life and her unborn child's, this hardly seems like a substantive form of justice. Malaika Brooks was also largely absent from mainstream media reports and thus perhaps enhanced visibility might have aided in securing a more just outcome, although as Sandra Bland's case demonstrates legibility is no guarantee.

Sandra Bland

In July of 2015, Texas state trooper, Brian Encinia, pulled over Sandra Bland for ostensibly failing to signal a lane change. In the sequence of events which followed, visibility and movement co-mingle to code Bland as a threat in Encinia's eyes and to underwrite his

¹³¹ Richie, Beth: 50

¹³² Ritchie, Andrea. *Invisible No More*: 166

abusive and unnecessary treatment of her. Much of what is now known about this stop comes by way of Encinia's dashcam footage of the interaction which began with a simple exercise of issuing a traffic ticket and ends in her violent arrest. At the beginning of the video, Bland states that she is "waiting on you" in a cadence which signals her reasonable annoyance at Encinia's semi-accusatory line of inquiry (what's wrong?) as well as having been pulled over.¹³³ Bland's language of waiting underscores the suspended quality of her movement and recalls Spillers' image of the "nowhere" inflicted by the middle-passage. Encinia asks- in a manner which must be underscored as distinctly *not* an order- for Bland to put out her cigarette.

Upon her inquiry as to why this would be necessary as she sits in her own car, Encinia, becoming more annoyed, tells her to step out of her vehicle. Clearly her refusal to comply with his unwarranted request prompts Encinia to code her as defiant; as a problem. When Bland does not exit the vehicle, Encinia opens her door and begins to loudly demand: "Step out or I will remove you!"¹³⁴ with increasing aggression. When Bland questions why she is being apprehended physically despite not having been placed under formal arrest, Encinia's aggression amplifies as he proclaims: "I will light you up."¹³⁵ Bland exits the car and is eventually taken to the site of her death, Waller County Jail, but not before being further assaulted by Encinia off-camera.

The presence of the dash-cam video greatly aided in demonstrating the thoroughly unreasonable sequence of events which culminated in Bland's arrest. This, along with Bland's numerous social media videos and membership in a Black sorority,¹³⁶ likely contributed to the

¹³³ Dashcam footage from Bland's arrest. *CNN*. <https://www.cnn.com/2015/07/22/us/texas-sandra-bland-arrest/>

¹³⁴ *Ibid*

¹³⁵ *Ibid*

¹³⁶ Ritchie, Andrea: 10

huge response which her case received from the general public. Unlike so many other Black women abused by police, Sandra Bland's treatment did garner a considerable amount of visibility. While the occasion of Bland's capture arose from an arrest of her movement, Encinia's animosity was roused more so by her refusal to passively accept mistreatment. Brittany Cooper remarks: "[Encinia] firmly expected to be able to harass a citizen going about her business and have her be okay with it. He expected that she wouldn't question him. He wanted her submission. Her deference. Her fear."¹³⁷ Encinia can be understood as acting on behalf of white supremacy certainly, but his insistence on Bland's fear and deference, as Cooper's insight illuminates, also activates a constellation of patriarchal expectations. After her transportation to the Texas jail which would become her tomb, Marc Lamont Hill notes that she spent three full days there because of her inability to pay her \$5000 bond.¹³⁸ In this way, the conditions for Bland's murder coalesce around intersections of her race, gender, and class which were activated by her unapologetic refusal to insist on her legal rights and human dignity.

Bland was found dead several days after her arrest by what jail officials deemed a suicide by hanging. Bland's case includes many irregularities, such as glitches in the released dashcam footage (explained by technical malfunction rather than doctoring) as well as inconsistencies on her intake forms.¹³⁹ This, along with the fact that Bland was eagerly beginning a new job and expecting to be bailed out shortly after by her sister, has created a healthy sense of suspicion surrounding Bland's death. Geneva Reed Veal, Bland's mother, commenting on the uncertainty of her death, remarks: "What we *do* know is that she died in custody. What we *do* know is that

¹³⁷ Cooper, Brittney. 2015. "I Could Have Been Sandra Bland: Black America's Terrifying Truth" *Salon*. https://www.salon.com/2015/07/23/Black_americas_terrifying_truth_any_of_us_could_have_been_sandra_bland/

¹³⁸ Hill: 65

¹³⁹ Yan, Holly. July 2015. "Sandra Bland's Family Infuriated at Video of Her Arrest" *CNN*. <https://www.cnn.com/2015/07/22/us/texas-sandra-bland-arrest/>

something went seriously wrong. One thing we do know is, 13 months later, we still don't have answers."¹⁴⁰ Marc Lamont Hill underscores that this critical disposition is grounded in the context of a long line of suspicious deaths of Black people in state custody but pauses to consider the implications of such reasonable skepticism.

Bland was described by jail officials as having indicated that she previously had attempted suicide (a claim which her family disputes and discrepancies in documents undermine) and was taking medication for epilepsy. There is a possibility that this is a false descriptive statement of reduced rationality applied to Bland posthumously, and under suspicious circumstances, to account for her death by placing culpability squarely back on Bland. While this move would fall in line with Wynter's account of Man's monopolistic claim on full rationality, Hill cautions that disavowing any possibility that Bland experienced mental anguish presents a danger of falling into Richie's schism of respectability. Hill notes: "In a sense, many people needed to see Bland's mental health exonerated before she could be a worthy and respectable victim. All of this, however, ignores the fact that Bland's death, suicide or not, is directly linked to the actions of the state."¹⁴¹ While much remains unknown about Bland's death, there seem to be compelling reasons to remain skeptical of the account given by jail authorities.

Bland's family filed a wrongful death suit against the jail and police, which was settled out of court. Brian Encinia was initially indicted for perjury, given that video footage from both his own dashcam as well as a passerby contradicted his statement that Bland was combative and threatening, but these charges were dropped in return for his retirement from law enforcement. As part of the settlement, Bland's mother, Geneva Read-Veal insisted that measures be taken to

¹⁴⁰ Hall, Tamron. Interview with Geneva Reed-Veal. *MSNBC*. Sept. 15, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WgYKrugI1fM>

¹⁴¹ Hill, Marc Lamont. *Nobody*: 65

improve procedures of detention to prevent future mistreatment of those in police custody. In addition, Read-Veal, along with Bland's sisters, Sharon Cooper and Shante Needham, have continued Bland's tradition of social activism in the wake of her death.

While Bland's case does demonstrate the important difference that visibility makes, it also painfully outlines the limits of legibility politics. Bland's family has insisted upon converting the tragedy of their brutal loss into an inspiring campaign for reform and prevention. A significant part of this work has been insisting on policy changes for police and jail procedures with regard to arrest and detention. Unfortunately, the political process which could secure such an end remains embedded within the web of Man's logic and power, which successfully weakened the proposed bill which would attend to demands of reform. Sharon Cooper, speaking about the "Sandra Bland Act" laments: "What the bill does in its current state renders Sandy invisible...It's frustrating and gut-wrenching."¹⁴² Cooper's language is highly instructive in conceiving of how, despite such a widespread and vigilant campaign of legible activism, Bland could end up still rendered invisible and justice can still be denied. This outcome speaks to the enduring ability of a political entrenched figure of Man to co-opt, resist, and elide movements against his violence and overrepresentation. Speaking about the legal system and the lack of justice delivered to her family, Read-Veal denotes "no confidence in man" which we can read alongside Wynter's Man, and reminds that "after the lights are over, I still have a dead baby."¹⁴³

Read-Veal's testimony speaks to the irreparable harm done to her family and the limits to what her daughter's widespread visibility could accomplish. In the wake of Bland's death, her

¹⁴² Weber, Paul. May 14, 2017. "Family Says Weakened Sandra Bland Act in Texas is Gut-Wrenching" *Chicago Tribune*.

¹⁴³ Farmer, Liz. "Sandra Bland's Mother: When the Cameras and Lights are Gone, Our Babies are Still Dead" *Dallas News*. <https://www.dallasnews.com/news/news/2016/04/29/sandra-blands-mother-when-the-cameras-and-the-lights-are-gone-our-babies-are-dead>

mother's vigorous and outspoken activism, which has included Read-Veal moving to Waller County to continue advocating for policy change, is highly instructive as well. In continuity with so many other Black women, such as Diamond Reynolds, Lucy McBath, and Sybrina Fulton,¹⁴⁴ among many others, who were forced to take on political labor in the wake of unjust deaths, Read-Veal proclaims both her commitment to this labor and her vitality: "The blood still works."¹⁴⁵

This chapter's consideration of mobility has gleaned a small sense of the way in which Man's overrepresentation tends to maintain a keen focus on the control of Black women's movement. Man's object is not simply to cease Black movement, as it just as often demands particular forms of movement. While my study so far suggests that both legibility and movement are flexible and contingent categories within Man's cognition, it should be clear that resistance to Man's overrepresentation is not. From the Seattle police officers who tazed and assaulted Malaika Brooks to Brian Encinia's unbridled rage at being denied his desire for subordination, passivity, and compliance, we can think of squarely within the terms of the ongoing overrepresentation of Man and the rigidity which allows for no deviation. Movements for police accountability aim at this dimension of Man's desire to be unquestioned, absolute, and infallible, although this pattern is widely persistent within all spheres of white political and civil society.

The figure of the Man who feels persecuted by having to account for himself in the world elicits deep solidarity from other boys who elaborate themselves into Man--rather than into men or otherwise-- and hold desire for that disastrous course of existence to pass by without challenge or question. At no time is Man angrier, more aggressive, and more violent than when an

¹⁴⁵ Hall, Tamron. Interview with Geneva Reed-Veal.

unapologetic articulation of humanity, dignity, and equality from outside of the dominant ethno-social class(genre) disturbs the fantasy of superiority which Man thrives on. Man doesn't just desire to be uncritically received, Man wants to be pitied, congratulated, and endlessly overrepresented as the human itself.

From this, the Wynterian errand of dismantling genre emerges as a guiding directive for politics of resistance. Wynter's formulation of genre and descriptive statements elegantly provides a simple, yet incisive set of analytic tools with which to make sense of the countless, varied, and flexible methods by which Man carries out his violent overrepresentation. This is, of course, not the end of the story as resistance enjoys a history as long as Man's overrepresentation. The work of resistance, however, has not been equally shouldered and unsurprisingly, those who benefit most from Man's overrepresentation have also been those most complicit in it.

Chapter 4: Work

In *Arrested Justice*, Beth Richie richly describes the consequences which followed from anti-violence campaigns, which were organized by marginalized women in the 1980's and onward, gaining acceptance into the mainstream. As Richie makes clear, the movement's ascendancy into the dominant culture's frame of politics came at great cost and greatly soften the radical content which had formed it. *Arrested Justice* tracks several important tendencies which led to this co-optation, notably including a paradigm shift away from social justice and toward

social services,¹⁴⁶ as well as a broad shift toward conservative politics after the election of Ronald Reagan.¹⁴⁷

Differently put, the radical content which derived from the lived experiences and grassroots organizing of (largely) women of color was replaced with a preference for institutional and formal responses to issues of violence. As Richie notes: “While the anti-violence movement has evolved into a highly organized set of formal responses to the problem of violence against women that has led to an increase in safety for *some* women, this progress has not benefitted all women equally.”¹⁴⁸ It is clear then, that the forms of appropriation that came alongside increased mainstream legitimacy for the anti-violence movement demonstrates another way in which a politics of increased legibility comes with limits. Richie aptly summarizes the lessons and understandings of “why we won the mainstream, but lost aspects of the work that characterized it as a social change movement.”¹⁴⁹

Richie’s formulation is helpful not only in further underscoring that politics cannot stop at securing legibility and/or visibility, but also demonstrating the limits, vulnerabilities, and fragility of political movements as well. If the last chapter demonstrated the flexible relationship which Man’s toolkit of social control has with movement, it also should be noted that one of Man’s favorite and most effective strategies of sustaining overrepresentation is that of co-optation. Richie’s quote about losing the movement also homes in on a key aspect of resisting Man’s encroachment, work.

¹⁴⁶ Richie, Beth. *Arrested Justice*: 67

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*: 75

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*: 97

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*: 66

Movements require work and as Cornel West notes, this is no light proposition. In his discussion with Christa Buschendorf on the topic of Ella Baker's radical democratic organizing, West lauds the sense of urgency with which Baker worked for political change and the revolutionary consciousness which she developed and shared. West's admiration for Baker also extends to the manner in which her political organizing was geared toward fostering moments "when the rupture takes place and the system must just stop and respond rather than just keep going on and trying to deny the suffering of the people who are revolting."¹⁵⁰ West's comments help to outline and model a certain reversal in which social movements force Man's mobility to stop rather than the converse. While there are no guarantees of success for this line of action, one thing which can be known is that Man will resist any force which might seek to disrupt or cease his operations. West continues: "And when you talk about rupture, you're talking about a threefold moment of, first, hitting the streets, - and Ella is already in the streets- and second, being willing to go to jail, and third, being willing to be killed. If you don't have those three elements, you don't have a movement."¹⁵¹

While it is certainly conceivable that some might quibble with West's axiomatic phrasing, his comments make very clear that the work of movement is quite dangerous. Man can, will, and has deployed extreme violence against even the smallest acts of resistance to his overrepresentation. West's text is also important because his comments are situated in the 1960's era struggles for civil rights yet speak to today's realities as well. Angela Davis further elucidates

¹⁵⁰ West, Cornel. In dialogue with and edited by Buschendorf, Christa.2014. *Black Prophetic Fire*. Beacon Press. Boston:103

¹⁵¹ Ibid: 104

this sense of continuity with her formulation of an “unbroken line of police violence in the United States.”¹⁵²

Barbara Ransby’s *Making All Black Lives Matter* takes up this cautionary concern in its sixth chapter, “Backlash and a Price.” Simply put, as the movement for Black lives continues to grow and develop its work in interesting ways, costs and setbacks continually emerge to threaten it.¹⁵³ Ransby charts the police and legal reactionary forces which teargassed, assaulted, detained, curfewed, and arrested hundreds during uprisings in Ferguson and Baltimore.

The visibility which accompanied high profile activists also made them the targets of violence from both the state and white civil society. As an example, Ransby points to the shooting which occurred against Black Lives Matter protestors in Minnesota carried out by four private citizens in November of 2016.¹⁵⁴ The state has also taken on extreme legal measures to intimidate, disrupt, and discourage political activism by radical Black agents. The case of Jasmine Abdullah Richards, who was arrested in Pasadena in 2015 for attempting to “de-arrest” (we can think of this in terms of freeing movement or abating Man’s cessation of another activist’s movement) a fellow protestor. Abdullah was outrageously charged with “felony lynching,” a charge which made use of 1930’s era laws geared toward white vigilantes who frequently took possession of Black men in police custody prior to carrying out the murderous rituals of lynching.¹⁵⁵ While this move is revealing for its flagrant and excessive attempt at legal intimidation, as well as the deep anxiety on the part of Man, it also points to the sinister form of

¹⁵² Jefferies, Stuart. Dec. 2014. “Interview: Angela Davis: There is an Unbroken Line of Police Violence in the US That Takes US All The Way Back to the Days of Slavery” *The Guardian*.
<https://www.theguardian.com/global/2014/dec/14/angela-davis-there-is-an-unbroken-line-of-police-violence-in-the-us-that-takes-us-all-the-way-back-to-the-days-of-slavery>

¹⁵³ Ransby, Barbara. 2018. *Making All Black Lives Matter*. University of California Press. Oakland: 123

¹⁵⁴ Ibid: 125

¹⁵⁵ Ibid: 127

creativity and flexibility which white supremacist structures deploy to retain power. Alongside brutal legal repression, state assaults, and vigilante violence, activists working for the movement for Black lives also face escalated psychic challenges related to stress, exhaustion, and despair engendered by arrest. Activist suicides, such as that of MarShawn McCarrel,¹⁵⁶ reveal the deep emotional toll which accompanies a line of work which regularly involves threats of arrest and death. Thus, Ransby points to the ethic of love and care which importantly travels through the textures of Black Lives Matter, and other liberatory social movements.

This point is a crucial one. The work of social movement, whether it takes on the particular character of activism or finds its content in other forms, is no light endeavor. Rather, a deep sense of emotional stress is tied to both the everyday experiences of living under Man's overrepresentation as well as in the efforts to disrupt this hegemony. A meditation on the difficulty and the *work* on the part of marginalized, genre'd bodies involved in simply living in a society dominated by Man recalls Marc Lamont Hill's concerns with refusing to consider the mental toll which Sandra Bland may or may not have been under during her period of detention in Texas. If Bland had indeed developed an overwhelming sense of mental stress, this would also implicate the daily operations of Man which constitute an unmitigated and multifarious assault on not merely the movement or visibility, but humanity of Black women, among other marginalized individuals. Apart from state repression and other forms of social control, however, another issue in the work of dismantling Man presents a seemingly unsustainable point of challenge. The work is simply not shared equally. The vast majority of white civil society contents itself with apolitical and/or status-quo affirming mentalities and sensibilities, while those most condemned, marginalized, and abused constitute the strongest opposition to Man's

¹⁵⁶ Ibid: 129

overrepresentation. This tendency remains crucial in upholding the hegemony of Man's overrepresentation. Apart from ethical and moral arguments which would implicate apolitical forms of passivity and/or refusals to act, expressed neatly by the notion of "you can't be neutral on a moving train,"¹⁵⁷ Wynter also makes quite clear that the struggle against Man's overrepresentation is imbricated in the most pressing, potentially world-ending, and catastrophic challenges of our time.

The example of Kemba Smith makes clear both the disproportionately racialized quality of punitive legal operations within the United States as well as an inspiring sense of focus and resolve which characterizes so much of the anti-racist work being done by women of color. As a college sophomore, Kemba Smith became trapped in a controlling, abusive, and dangerous relationship with a man whose criminal activity drew the attention of the FBI.

Smith had attempted to leave the man several times, but rightfully feared for her life and had become nearly 8 months pregnant by the time he was arrested. Smith, despite having no substantive participation in the man's illicit activity, was sentenced to 24.5 years in prison with no possibility of parole.¹⁵⁸ While there is no reasonable justification for this draconian measure, Smith's case is by no means extraordinary with regard to the criminalization of people of color, particularly Black men and women, in the U.S. Smith luckily only served 6.5 years of the sentence, largely due to the level visibility secured by her unjust treatment and the vigilant protest movement which gained national traction. Beth Richie picks up Smith's narrative later on as "Ms. Smith walked out of Prison ten years ago, flew to her waiting family in Richmond, Virginia, and almost immediately began a crusade to challenge both the violence that young

¹⁵⁷ Zinn, Howard. 2002. *You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train: A Personal History of Our Times*. Beacon Press. Boston

¹⁵⁸ Richie, Beth. *Arrested Justice*: 158

Black women experience and the criminal justice polices which entrapped her and so many of her peers in this country.”¹⁵⁹

Smith’s inspiring transition from unjustly imprisoned subject of a prison nation to vigilant activist and movement worker can be contextualized by the nearly total societal and institutional abandonment that cases like hers are frequently characterized by. In other words, it is not surprising that Kemba Smith immediately took up the work of getting (others) free given that few avenues of justice, solidarity, and mutual commitment seem to populate the U.S. socio-political landscape. No one else was going to do it,¹⁶⁰ which, even as Smith’s example is instructive and inspiring, is exactly the problem. Social fragmentation and narrow self-interest are also things that Man’s overrepresentation dearly depends upon.

Working through the activities of Mamie Till and Erica Garner in response to their respective loved ones’ cruel deaths at the hands of vigilant and police violence, I seek to move toward a normative appeal to white, particularly male, individuals. It is not enough to recognize the disproportionate privilege which Man’s overrepresentation provides, but rather the work of movement building, and Man-dismantling must be taken up as a necessary condition for any form a more just and freer world.

Emmett and Mamie Till

Thus far, a certain connection between visibility and (social) movement has emerged even as the conditions for political mobilization (as relates to legibility) often remain murky, contingent, and uncertain. In other words, analyses of various contemporary case studies have shown that securing legibility often is a necessary yet frequently insufficient condition for

¹⁵⁹ Ibid: 157

¹⁶⁰ Meaning in the dominant culture at large and not literally no one.

attaining justice and/or fomenting political change. Enhanced legibility can highlight otherwise invisible sufferings and sometimes even force accountability, restitution, and recognition of injustice. The literal applications of visibility (such as the increasing prevalence and availability of video recordings) can often spur movements which seek, sometimes successfully, to provide greater legibility to marginalized bodies, testimonies/knowledges, and experiences.

On the other hand, visibility and legibility are often the conditions for enhanced surveillance and social control of already overly targeted bodies. The promises of technologies of visibility, such as dashboard and body cameras, often fall short due to their being materially housed within the control of the institutions and individuals which they are supposed to be holding accountable. This was the case with Kionte Spencer whose family's quest for justice was mediated through the internal review mechanisms of the same police department who killed him. Movement, too, can be fraught with vulnerability, cooptation, and challenges of sustainability.

The infamous case of Emmett Till demonstrates one concrete example of how an act of legibility galvanized a broad and potent social movement which resonates today in the contemporary struggles of groups such as Black Lives Matter. Further, Mamie Till's engagement in political work in the wake of her son's brutal murder made this translation into movement possible and thus deserves close attention. The brutal murder of a young Black boy in Mississippi in 1955 highlights the continuity of white supremacist violence in this country. The manner in which Till was punished with his life for existing in Black skin and charged with an act of non-deference to Man informs much of the current operations of overrepresentation today.

Emmett Till's story is well known by now; he was falsely accused of flirting with a white woman, Carolyn Bryant, while at her family's grocery store. Later on, two white men kidnapped, tortured, mutilated and shot fourteen-year-old Emmett, and threw his body into a nearby river.

The murderous pair would be acquitted by an all-white jury and only one year later, under the protection of double jeopardy, even admit their guilt.¹⁶¹ This pattern of white vigilante and/or police agents carrying out white supremacist violence and receiving acquittal continues today. Carolyn Bryant as well would admit decades later in a 2017 interview with Timothy Tyson, something that everyone already knew: she had fabricated her initial account which charged Till with harassing her and that “Nothing that boy did could ever justify what happened to him.”¹⁶² Apart from a story about a brutal extrajudicial racialized killing and the white civil society which abated it, Emmett Till’s case became one which galvanized a movement for accountability and spurred major developments in the American civil rights movement, inspiring figures like Medgar Evers.

But why Emmett Till? Lynchings and racialized violence were commonplace in Mississippi and in the American South more generally. In 1942, roughly a decade before Emmett’s murder, two Black boys, also fourteen, Charlie Lang and Ernest Green, were accused of rape (having been seen playing in the company of a white girl), tortured, mutilated, lynched, and photographed.¹⁶³ Only one week before Till’s lynching, George Lee and Lamar Smith had been murdered by white supremacist terrorists reacting to the two men’s efforts to register Black voters.¹⁶⁴ An interview with Clarksdale NAACP leader, Aaron Henry, appears in Timothy Tyson’s *The Blood of Emmett Till* in which Henry recounts:

¹⁶¹ January 1956 edition of *Life Magazine*. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/till-killers-confession/>

¹⁶² CBS News. 2017. “Historian Recalls Moment Emmett Till’s Accuser Admitted She Lied” *CBS*. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/the-blood-of-emmett-till-carolyn-bryant-lied-timothy-tyson-new-book/>

¹⁶³ Ward, Jason Morgan. 2016. “The Infamous Lynching Site that Still Stands in Mississippi” *Time*. <http://time.com/4314310/hanging-bridge-excerpt-mississippi-civil-rights/>

¹⁶⁴ Zinn Education Project. 2018. “On this Day in History: May 7, 1955: The Murder of Reverend George Lee” <https://www.zinnedproject.org/news/tdih/rev-george-lee/>

“White folks have been killing Black boys all of my life, throwing them in rivers, burying them, and all that shit. Just why the Emmett Till murder captured the conscience of the nation, I don’t know. It could have been that it was the beginning of television and people could see things. The fact that a Black boy was killed by a white man wasn’t nothing unusual.”¹⁶⁵

Henry’s account of the everyday quality of Till’s murder again stands in continuity with the contemporary United States and also points to the puzzle of visibility. It remains still somewhat unclear why certain cases of violence garner the attention of national media and others do not. Andrea Ritchie’s work helps to understand the gendered (along with other social identity markers such as criminal records, sexuality, nationality, age, physical and mental ability, and so on) textures of such representation. Male bodies tend to receive more attention in the media at large and this trend extends to coverage of unjust murders. Still, given the immense quantity of genre’d killing which transpire daily in the U.S., there is no sure way to account for the tendency of some cases to go viral while others do not.

Still, we can locate much of the momentum which Emmett Till’s case helped to galvanize within the political labor carried out by his mother, Mamie Till-Mobley.¹⁶⁶ On the day of Emmett’s kidnapping, Mamie Till-Mobley, likely knowing that no local institution or authority would aid her, immediately began phoning newspapers in Chicago after hearing of her son’s abduction.¹⁶⁷ This move prefigures her famous decision to insist on an open-casket funeral for her child to “let the world see what I have seen.”¹⁶⁸ The duress involved with a mother even viewing,

¹⁶⁵ Tyson, Timothy. 2017. *The Blood of Emmett Till*. Simon and Schuster. New York: 69

¹⁶⁶ Mamie Till remarried several times after the death of her husband, Louis Till, in 1945. In 1957 She became Mamie Till-Mobley. Tyson: 5.

¹⁶⁷ Tyson: 57

¹⁶⁸ Ibid: 72

much less displaying, the disfigured corpse of her dear son led several to discourage the move. As Till-Mobley recounts: “I told them if I had to take a hammer and open that box myself, it was going to be opened.”¹⁶⁹

It is fitting that Till-Mobley’s articulation is one involving a hammer, a literal tool of labor, as her move to have the casket opened constitutes a powerful form of political work. In line with Ransby’s observations, this work comes with the quite obviously disturbing price of emotional stress. When Till-Mobley initially went to identify her son’s body, she naturally recoiled in horror at her son’s disfigurement, yet states that she endeavored to “steel [herself] like a forensic doctor. I had a job to do.”¹⁷⁰ Again, Till-Mobley’s language reveals the mentality of one bending toward the unpleasant work which her son’s murder encouraged her to take on, although of course she could have done otherwise. Work as a category certainly allows us to view Till-Mobley’s agency in a manner which underscores aspects of hardship, toil, and resilience. Along the way, it is important to emphasize the community of family and friends who supported and accompanied her as well.¹⁷¹

Political work carried out by Black women in the aftermath of state/civil violence, such as Mamie Till-Mobley’s, is also importantly situated within the sphere of the more ordinary work of economic survival. Recalling the enhanced challenges now placed on Diamond Reynolds as she cares for her daughter alone provides one such example of this dynamic. Black women already disproportionately face labor issues such as discrimination, relegation to low-paying often domestic/service jobs, lack of upward mobility and benefits, and

¹⁶⁹ Ibid: 70

¹⁷⁰ Ibid: 71

¹⁷¹ Ibid: 68

underrepresentation in leadership positions, to name just a few issues.¹⁷² These conditions also inform the likelihood of experiencing violence--either directly or on the part of a family member--as race, class, and sex/gender conspire within formulations of genre. Mamie Till-Mobley herself recounts a story which speaks to the deferment of political/care work by the immediacy of economic work. Till-Mobley recalls hearing a story of a young Black girl who had accompanied her mother to her job as a domestic laborer at a white family's house. The white man who lived there became angry with the young girl (after his own daughter became upset with her and ran to complain to him) and violently shook and threw her against a tree. She would later die of her injuries. Mamie Till-Mobley recounts this story (while describing the possibility that it was apocryphal) and notes: "Now, that girl's mother had to finish her day's work before she could even look after her daughter who was left there writhing in pain the rest of the day."¹⁷³

Several things are important to note here. Till-Mobley's oratory narrative reflects the kind of knowledge practices which Black women carry and pass down for survival, among other things. Till-Mobley remarks that was she was not sure whether the particular story was true, but that "somewhere between the fact we know and the anxiety we feel is the reality we live."¹⁷⁴ The knowledge that Man (and white men) are prone to extreme violence against Black girls and people resides squarely within reality. Further, Till-Mobley's story demonstrates that white men are not the only ones who must be avoided or watched out for. The sequence of events in which the little white girl informs against her Black playmate, leading to another agent's violent actions against her, stands in gross continuity with the hegemonic practice (contemporary and historical)

¹⁷² "Report: The Status of Black Women in the United States." 2017. *Institute for Women's Policy Research*.

¹⁷³ Tyson: 26

¹⁷⁴ Ibid: 27U

of white civil agents calling the police on people of color, often with disastrous results.¹⁷⁵ Man's violence and overrepresentation does not happen without the complicity and participation of white civil society. Mamie Till-Mobley's account importantly showcases the enhanced burden which violence places on already overworked and abused Black women. While we can and should laud women like Mamie Till-Mobley, whose act of insisting on the visibility of her son's mutilation at the hands of white society galvanized a broader political movement, or Diamond Reynolds, and Sybrina Fulton and so on, and the important political work which they carry out, we should recognize the stark disproportionality of this division of labor.

Eric and Erica Garner

Shifting from a 1950's Black mother's political work on behalf of her son to a Black daughter's political labor in response to her father's death, the case of Eric and Erica Garner picks up the relationship between visibility, movement, and work in contemporary times. Eric Garner's unjust death began with a scene of work. As Marc Lamont Hill recounts, for some time, Garner held seasonal work with the New York City Parks Department as a horticulturalist, however his asthma, diabetes, and sleep apnea worsened which precluded him from working a traditional job.¹⁷⁶ So Garner occasionally engaged in the selling of loose cigarettes on the streets of Staten Island, a trade which came under increased scrutiny under the operating logic of broken windows policing. In the video, taken by friend Ramsey Orta, of Garner's last moments and death, Garner can be heard proclaiming: "Every time you see me you want to arrest me...I'm tired of it, it stops today."¹⁷⁷ Garner's description speaks to the quotidian quality of police

¹⁷⁵ A fairly comprehensive account of this trend is available; "White People Calling the Cops on Black People" 2019. *The Root*. <https://www.theroot.com/tag/white-people-calling-the-police-on-Black-people>

¹⁷⁶ M.L. Hill. *Nobody*: 31

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*: 33

harassment. From there, several police officers wrestled Garner to the ground- with officer Daniel Pantaleo placing Garner in a chokehold prohibited by the NYPD- and pin his head to the sidewalk. Eleven times Garner can be heard saying “I can’t breathe.”

These would be Eric Garner’s last words and Orta’s video captures his death at the hands of state agents. Garner’s death was ruled a homicide and the direct result of Pantaleo’s illicit chokehold, yet a grand jury still elected not to indict Pantaleo or any of his fellow officers for Garner’s death. This sequence of events is familiar in that it demonstrates that even a highly visible spectacle of state violence was unable to secure any substantive justice or accountability. Eric’s daughter, Erica would remark: “My dad died on national T.V., on camera, and he still ain’t get justice...so what’s a body camera going to do?”¹⁷⁸ Erica Garner’s comments further underscore the limitations of visibility politics even in such a clear case of abuse. Like so many Black women before her, Erica, herself a parent, had to go to work fighting for justice for her late father. When asked by Don Lemon how she was able to keep herself together and to remain strong, Garner notes: “I have a five-year-old...I have to be a leader. By me being strong, you can be strong too.”¹⁷⁹

While we can (and should) recognize Erica Garner’s strength and work, this strength should also be read in the context of the disproportionate labor demands placed on Black women as well as the figure of the “strong Black woman,” which seems to contribute to this skewed division of labor by constructing Black women as superhumanly strong and thus never in need of support. Melissa Harris-Perry comments on the strong-Black-woman with an emphasis on her “sacrificial strength” and the manner in which “she suppresses her emotional needs while

¹⁷⁸ “Erica Garner Full Interview with CNN” Dec. 4, 2014. *CNN*.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=voAWMnvLUm4>

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

anticipating those of others. She has an irrepressible spirit that is unbroken by a legacy of oppression, poverty, and rejection.”¹⁸⁰ This unreasonable, superhuman expectation places undue burdens on Black women and submits them to expectations of never needing help, and thus licenses their social and political abandonment by the dominant culture at large. Joan Morgan acutely identifies this stereotype/figure while announcing her “retirement” from it and notes: “This is not to be confused with being strong, Black, and a woman. I’m still alla that. I draw strength daily from the history of struggle and survival that is Black woman’s spiritual legacy.”¹⁸¹

With this meditation on the figure of the strong-Black-woman, Erica Garner’s relentless and tireless struggle for justice, which deferred her own needs and well-being in favor of her family, can perhaps be further understood and contextualized. Erica Garner died in December of 2017 from complications stemming from a heart attack which she had shortly after giving birth to her son, Eric. Just three weeks before her death, Erica Garner spoke of the immense toll which her work and life had come to take on her: “This thing, it beats you down. The system beats you down to where you can’t win.”¹⁸² Kirsten West-Savali, a writer and friend of Garner’s, writes:

“It would have been a revolutionary act for Erica to focus on her health in a world that demands that Black women bear the burdens until we’re buried in the ground.

“It’s a marathon, not a sprint”—that’s what movement elders tell us. But

¹⁸⁰ Harris-Perry. *Sister Citizen*: 21

¹⁸¹ Morgan, Joan. 1999. *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost*. Simon and Schuster. New York: 87

¹⁸² Mbonu, Vanessa. 2019. “Erica Garner Was A Warrior. One Year After Her Death, That Legacy Lives On” *Bustle*. <https://www.bustle.com/p/erica-garner-was-a-warrior-one-year-after-her-death-that-legacy-lives-on-15573485>

sometimes the systems of oppression, neglect, violence and exploitation break us down until we feel we don't have a choice. We find ourselves carrying so much pain, suffering so much loss and holding so much rage that practicing self-care feels impossible without justice. Sometimes there can be no peace within without it. That's how white supremacy kills—slowly and quickly.”¹⁸³

West-Savali's commentary makes clear that the urgency of Erica Garner's work and highlights the fact that the violent conditions of U.S. society produce such a fervent need to fight and resist. Erica Garner's case also painfully demonstrates the dangerous underside of the work of movement; it requires exertion and elicits exhaustion. It needs to be shared and carried out collectively and when it is not, those who most direly require it are forced to shoulder far too much of the work of unsettling Man's overrepresentation. Erica Garner's death also implicates the stress, harassment, and state surveillance which tend to accompany the hypervisibility of high profile (high legibility) activism. West-Savali denotes

“She did not seek the spotlight for herself; she snatched the glaring flashlights of the police state, those lights trained on Black, brown and indigenous communities, those lights that relentlessly targeted her father, and she turned them right back on their cowardly faces...I do not know if she was unafraid, but she was brave.”¹⁸⁴

This passage speaks not only to the heightened state of scrutiny which Garner was placed under, but importantly proclaims her bravery while not denying the humanity of her experience

¹⁸³ West-Savali. Kirsten. Dec 2017. “Erica Garner: I'm in this fight Forever” *The Root*.
<http://web.archive.org/web/20180601064348/https://www.theroot.com/erica-garner-i-m-in-this-fight-forever-1821674010>

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

of fear, as anyone rightfully should in the context of state violence. Erica Garner's case also alerts us to a less obvious underside to the methodologies of legibility politics. Orta's video was no doubt instrumental in demonstrating the brutal, unjustified, and callous execution of Eric Garner and in galvanizing the waves of mass protest which would rupture New York City's usual rhythms in the days after Garner's murder.

However, it must be noted that the video of Eric Garner's death is a distressing document for his surviving family, those who have similarly lost loved ones to white supremacist violence, and others. Erica Garner recounts having watched the film repeatedly and reveals "I was traumatized by the video tape,"¹⁸⁵ as anyone would be. April Reign comments on this dimension of visibility by identifying that "footage of police killings has enabled a sick sort of voyeurism"¹⁸⁶ and further notes that "to watch videos of people who look like me being killed only increases my fear that someone I know may be next."¹⁸⁷ Jesse Williams comments on the gap between visible evidence of wrongdoing and action to correct injustice: "Even with videotaped evidence of police destroying Black people, many freedom-loving Americans remain unconvinced of a systemic problem. Maybe someday the perfect tape will be released, one in which the dead or maimed African American has just the right wardrobe, complexion, size and diction to warrant empathy."¹⁸⁸ We could productively add "the right genre" to Williams' speculation while wondering exactly it would require in the face of Man's ongoing improvisational violence and genre flexibility. Both Williams and Reign offer testimony which

¹⁸⁵ Democracy Now. Jan 2, 2018. "Erica Garner was Unbossed and Unbought" *Democracy Now*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-1zcWlX-va4>

¹⁸⁶ Reign, April. July 6, 2016. "Why I will not share the video of Alton Sterling's death" *Washington Post*.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*

¹⁸⁸ Williams, Jesse. Oct. 1, 2014. "Killing of John Crawford: Injustice for All" *CNN*.

<http://www.cnn.com/2014/09/30/opinion/williams-crawford-walmart-killing/index.html>

gives pause to the promise of at least these particular forms (taking and circulating videos) of legibility raising, even as such videos do provide helpful counter-perspective to official/police narratives.

Erica Garner also imparted important lessons on the collective requirements for the errand of dismantling Man. After learning of her father's death (while at *work*), Garner rushed to convene with family, just as Mamie Till-Mobley "drove to her mother's apartment at breakneck speed to share both news and anguish."¹⁸⁹ Upon returning home, Erica Garner's cab ride was slowed by the throngs of protestors who by then were crowding the city streets. Garner recounts this experience with a poignant reflection on the collective capacities for support even amidst unspeakable tragedy: "In my saddest moment, when I didn't know how to feel, and I seen all these people out here for my dad. That just made me feel...empowered in a way."¹⁹⁰ Garner's testimony speaks to the possibilities and duties of collective support and struggle against Man's overrepresentation. While no amount of protest, visibility, movement, or even work could bring back Eric Garner or (in this case) secure justice for him, the support and empowerment lent to Erica Garner is a crucially important point of necessity.

Throughout this chapter, I have looked toward the political work which Black women take up and are disproportionately left to carry out. This labor should instead be a point of organization and collective solidarity if there is going to be a substantive campaign to dismantle Man's overrepresentation. This work and solidarity will likely require those of us embodied in white maleness to "become-otherwise" in a way which elides Man. June Jordan's essay "Many

¹⁸⁹ Tyson: 57

¹⁹⁰ Oct. 16, 2017." Erica Garner- Daughter of Eric Garner "*The New Yorker Videos*.
<https://video.newyorker.com/watch/erica-garner>

Rivers to Cross” recounts biographical struggle and her late mother’s suicide. The first lines of the essay underscore a set of relations between economic work and political struggle: “When my mother killed herself, I was looking for a job.”¹⁹¹

Jordan articulates her lived experience of the need for help as she struggled to find work and to provide for her son in the absence of her ex-husband and the lack of institutional support in securing child support payments.¹⁹² Jordan also emphasizes the support she received from other women, including a longtime friend, Ms. Hazel Griffin, as well as her own mother whose health had begun to decline. With no viable housing options, Jordan’s ailing mother offered a small room for Jordan to move into. Jordan recounts that it was Ms. Griffin who closed the hair salon where she worked every day in order to help Jordan and her son move.¹⁹³ Jordan’s description illuminates the rich world of mutual aid which helped sustain her, although after moving in things would decline significantly. Jordan, still looking for work, recalls a conversation in which her mother urged her to seek employment at the local post office rather than pursue “high-falutin” aspirations as a writer or researcher.¹⁹⁴ This disagreement over work would be her last substantial conversation with her mother.

A few nights later, Jordan is awoken late at night to fervent knocking at her door. Frustrated, she opens the door to discover her father: “‘It’s your mother’ he told me in a burly, formal voice. ‘I think she’s dead, but I’m not sure.’ He was avoiding my eyes. ‘I need you to go downstairs and figure it out.’”¹⁹⁵ As Jordan moved downstairs to investigate, annoyed and

¹⁹¹ Jordan, June. 2003. *Some of Us Did Not Die: New and Selected Essays*. Civitas Books. New York: 233

¹⁹² Ibid: 234

¹⁹³ Ibid: 235

¹⁹⁴ Ibid: 235

¹⁹⁵ Ibid: 235

bewildered that her father had passed this work off onto her, she discovered her mother standing upright, yet stiff. Not yet believing her mother to be dead, Jordan's first impulse is to help and she muses "maybe I've made it just in time."¹⁹⁶ Alas, she did not and soon it is revealed that not only is her mother indeed deceased, but she is also the victim of suicide. In the next scene, her father horribly gloats over his retention of money left by Jordan's mother and taunts Jordan that he would burn it before turning it over to her. However, also present are Jordan's cousins, women from church, and other supportive friends who embrace her with an ethic of care- emotionally supporting her, helping to watch her son, and providing her with the sorts of basic nutritional necessities that grief-stricken people often lack the time to secure. Jordan remarks:

"And I think all of this is really about women and work...The new women's work will mean we will not die trying to stand up; we will live that way: standing up. I came too late to help my mother to her feet. By way of everlasting thanks to all of the women who have helped me to stay alive I am working never to be late again."¹⁹⁷

June Jordan's essay provides an important testimony into what an ethos of care can look like and the way in which collective aid can make the burdens of political work more bearable. Jordan's declaration of working never to be late again emphasizes the commitment to other struggling people's which shines through in the work and knowledge of Erica Garner, Geneva Reed-Veal, Diamond Reynolds, and others who were forced by racialized violence to pick up the pieces and struggle on for the benefit of family members, friends, and strangers alike. Jordan's centering of work- and her exploration of work as care, not merely economic activity- provides

¹⁹⁶ Ibid: 237

¹⁹⁷ Ibid: 239-240

an instructive model for moving forward in the ongoing struggle against Man's overrepresentation.

Barbara Ransby muses over the importance and popularity within Black movements of Assata Shakur's poignant quote: "It is our duty to fight for our freedom. It is our duty to win. We must love and support each other and protect each other. We have nothing to lose but our chains" by emphasizing the ethos of love and care which it articulates.¹⁹⁸ Christina Sharpe similarly develops, in her text *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, a formulation of "wake work"¹⁹⁹ which, among other things, importantly calls for "daring to claim or make spaces of something like freedom, we yet reimagine and transform spaces for and practice of an ethics of care(as in repair, maintenance, attention), an ethics of seeing, and of *being* in the wake as consciousness..."²⁰⁰ Sharpe's modeling of repair, maintenance, and attention fills in valuable and instructive content into the formulation of political work.

Apart from Man's ongoing overrepresentation of himself as the human itself, what should also be abundantly clear from this project's review is the continued presence of liberatory opposition emanating from the political work of Black women. This work has always been done but has never been shared equally. At this point, what is increasingly required is a full dismantling of the figure of Man and the end to his global hegemony. Wynter, Spillers, and others provide a lucid set of tools with which to understand this venture, but it will require active and unprecedented participation from white civil society at large. Reform, increased legibility, and politics as usual will not provide the resources needed to meet this daunting, yet necessary

¹⁹⁸ Ransby. *Making All Black Lives Matter*: 129

¹⁹⁹ Sharpe, Christina. 2016. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Duke University Press. Durham: 17

²⁰⁰ *Ibid*: 131

errand. If Assata Shakur reminds us of the duties of struggle, I might impose a specifically white-male duty to unmake Man and to become otherwise. Wynter makes clear the long running, deeply engrained, and flexible nature of Man's overrepresentation which leads to a question of methodology; *how* can we, especially those of us who are white men, unmake Man?

Conclusion

Throughout this project, I have tried to think through the ways in which race, class, and sex/gender comingle and co-constitute each other to form an interlocking matrix of oppression.²⁰¹ The insights of the classical intersectionality scholars, such as Crenshaw and Collins, elucidate Black women as a principal target of this matrix's domination. Wynter's concept of genre helps package this matrix in a simple analytic framework and her notion of descriptive statements gesture toward the way that genre is remade in favor of Man's continual overrepresentation. Wynter's illumination of the process of making-Man does make clear that this overrepresentation is not fixed, but pliable. Things do not have to be this way. Humanity as a whole would be much better off if they were not. The central feature of Man is that he overrepresents himself as *the* human and importantly enforces this overrepresentation with various forms of violence, control, and symbolic operation which can be referred to as "genre'd practices." Sustaining the project of overrepresentation relies on the brutal dehumanizing and othering of all those who fall outside of Man's Eurocentric normative range of being.

I read Wynter's analysis of Man as not just a diagnosis but also a call to action or work. Wynter does not think that the category of human is actually synonymous with Man, and so the

²⁰¹ Hill, Patricia Collins. 1990. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Routledge. New York: 222

human remains a viable object of recuperation for her. There is a certain trajectory in which white boys aspire to become Man. This mode of becoming-Man seems integral to sustaining Man's ongoing hegemony. As an experimental reversal, what would happen if white boys and men sought instead to become WhiteBoy, as a replacement figure for Man? This "becoming-WhiteBoy" would constitute the reversal of the process by which Emmett Till became "less of a boy and more of an icon."²⁰²

White men need to think of themselves with greater humility, awareness of the brutal legacy of Man's overrepresentation, and with greater dedication towards an ethics of care toward others. Or, in other words, to become less of an icon and more of a boy. The well-known historical practice of referring to adult Black men with terms relating to boyhood is an intentional discursive practice designed to subordinate and to construct for white men an absolute monopoly over both manhood and the category of full humanity. Any aspirations toward humanity which rely on the negation of other's right to be human and basic dignity cannot provide a viable ethic of being in the world. Therefore, as part of the work of dismantling Man, perhaps white men need to aspire differently and to become otherwise? WhiteBoy is lighthearted and playful category which already derives some resonance within popular American culture.²⁰³

²⁰² Tyson: 200

²⁰³ For examples see: Wild Cherry. 1976. "Play That Funky Music (White Boy)" *Wild Cherry*. Epic Records., Demange, Yann (director). *White Boy Rick*. 2018. Columbia Pictures., Gary Oldman's "He must have thought it was white boy day" line in Scott, Tony (director). *True Romance*. 1993. Morgan Creek Productions, or the persistent use of "white boy" as either term of endearment or (mostly)neutral descriptive term in HBO's *The Wire*: for instance, in Simon, David. 2003. "Ebb Tide" *The Wire*. HBO; Herc (white police officer) remarks: "Fucking white boys, I love em...dumb as a box of rocks." This quote refers to the less-than careful practices used by white male drug dealers—a reflection of the lack of state scrutiny and surveillance that they are subjected to relative to their racialized counterparts.

Becoming-WhiteBoy also constitutes a project which aspires to replace Man's hegemonic grip on rationality and proclaimed monopoly on epistemology with a more curious, growth-driven, and formative imaginary and thus orients itself toward boyhood. James Joyce's *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* provides something of a blueprint for white boys seeking to elide hegemonic, culturally inscribed, models of masculinity and to emerge as freer projects of expression. Joyce's quasi-autobiographical protagonist, Stephen Dedalus, struggles against conservative political and religious influences on his development throughout the text as he grows from a boy to a man. This evasive errand is made complicated by the lack of alternative models for manhood/masculinity which are available for Stephen and ultimately require him to eschew ("traditional" Irish hegemonic) these masculinist constructions altogether. In a disheartening discussion about manhood (phrased in the terms of "gentlemen") with his good friend (although not for long) Cranly, Stephen finally reaches a boiling point in which rejects the normative identity expectations being placed upon him. In a now famous passage, Stephen remarks

"Look here, Cranly, you have asked me what I would do and what I would not do. I will tell you what I will do and what I will not do. I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it call itself my home, my fatherland, or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defense the only arms I allow myself to use, silence, exile, and cunning."²⁰⁴

²⁰⁴ Joyce, James. 1916(2004). *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Black and White Classics. New York: 133

While Joyce's text engages with a variety of historically contextualized iterations of normative masculinity—militarism, Irish Catholicism, nationalism, heterosexuality, etc.—Dedalus's most virulent fights are against the imposition of particular epistemological forms which are hegemonically produced by both the authority figures in Stephen's life as well as by his classmates and friends. Joyce's text speaks to the manner in which knowledge-production provides a central methodology of control for Man's overrepresentation and demonstrates an engagement with and struggle against manhood as part of liberatory pursuits.

Differently put, the figure of Man, and the white men who aspire toward it, routinely assume a boundlessness with reference to their knowledge systems. Jordan Peterson, Sam Harris, and Steven Pinker come to mind as white male academics who routinely and commandingly profess to hold extensive authority on topics far afield from their chosen areas of expertise.²⁰⁵ Boyhood, on the other hand, connotes a project of becoming which retains an open-ended and curious trajectory and offers a model which tends toward learning, rather than dismissing, lecturing, and Man-splaining (a term which Wynter's conceptual vantage point provides a new lens for).

If these textures remain unconvincing with regard to my playful suggestion of becoming-WhiteBoy, I submit one last piece of discussion. On an anonymous blog post (as part of an online project soliciting open dialogue on issues of race), I discovered a curious meditation on white-boyhood which remarks: "And practically my whole life is dominated by "your a white boy" and "your racist" and my school life: "get out of here 'white boy'" "you can't do anything because your white."²⁰⁶ This post is actually rather instructive vis-à-vis Man. It proclaims the

²⁰⁵ To be clear, engaging with topics outside of one's discipline is not the issue here- the authoritative tone is.

²⁰⁶ <https://theracecardproject.com/hate-called-white-boy/>

opposite of domination, feigns marginalization, and decries being called “white boy.” This pathos gestures helpfully toward some of Man’s distortions of reality and taps into the type of defensive, aggressive, and anxious sentiment which frequently populates contemporary forms of resurgent white supremacist fascism (which obsess over false threats of replacement, “white genocide,” and being “the real victims” of race-thinking). Perhaps it is the always mythical character of Man’s overrepresentation that produces so much ill-behavior and feeling within white male bodies?

Man represents himself as *the* human, but this can never fully be accomplished or taken as true. Man’s overrepresentation is predicated on a fraught project of domination which must continually be violently maintained, reterritorialized, and re-described. Becoming-WhiteBoy attempts to chart an open-ended Joycian line of flight away from the normative center of Man and does not prescribe in advance where this might lead. The central point of becoming WhiteBoy is to avoid becoming Man. WhiteBoy should not be taken as a final resting point, but perhaps rather a place holder until Man’s dismantling can be completed. After all, it seems as if we, as a human collective, cannot move beyond the present category of humanity until all are allowed to inhabit it fully. If this notion is lacking in rigor, thoughtfulness, or seriousness, it can simply serve as an experiment in thinking about doing otherwise. There is serious work to be done with regard to dismantling Man and this cannot happen if there are those who still aspire to become Man.

While the project of Man is a suicidal/genocidal errand which must be derailed, Becoming-WhiteBoy immediately encounters a problematic underside. This extends in part to the manner in which white boyhood has also always been mediated through Man’s culture and

epistemology. Appeals to white boyhood are frequently technologies of justification for abusive, violent, and deadly behavior. Cases such as Brock Turner, the Covington Catholic School *boys*, and Brett Kavanaugh's supreme court confirmation come to mind in exploring how the protective category of boyhood is deployed to excuse harmful behavior and is extended only to white males. While white supremacist discourse, particularly in the American south, has a pointed history of degrading Black men by referring to them as boys, actual Black boys and teenagers such as Tamir Rice, Emmett Till, Laquan McDonald, Trayvon Martin, and Jordan Davis have been deprived the youthfulness of boyhood. It seems clear that just as movement and legibility are always mediated through genre, so are conceptions of boyhood and manhood. Kirsten Savali West, in a piece which contrasts the police shootings of Tamir Rice with white Jeremy Mardis, offers an instructive commentary:

“Don't we know after George Stinney and Emmett Till, Trayvon, Aiyana, Kimani and too many others, that our children are at worst viewed as targets, and at best as collateral damage in the hunt for other Black bodies to destroy? Don't we know that, unlike 6-year-old Jeremy Mardis, for whom justice was swift and sure, this country does not weep for them?”²⁰⁷

Savali West's signaling of the exclusion of Black bodies from the categories of youth underscores the sharp limits of any WhiteBoy projects. While I certainly encourage white males to elide becoming Man to the extent that it is possible, this will not transform politics. The impulse to perform “counter-recruiting” against Man or to spoil the raw materials which tend to actualize as Man is generated in good faith but is ultimately naïve in its omission of the manner

²⁰⁷ West Savali, Kirsten. Dec. 28, 2015. “Tamir Rice Found Guilty of Being Young Free and Black” *The Root*. <https://www.theroot.com/tamir-rice-found-guilty-of-being-young-free-and-Black-1790862178>

in which white boyhood is already infected with genre. *Becoming-WhiteBoy* is a thought experiment designed to mitigate the harmful potentialities of Man, but it seems clear that no place-holders will be adequate as long as Man's overrepresentation remains intact. Once Man is dismantled, it is my hope that there will be little need for these categories and that something entirely new might emerge. Better than spending too much time perseverating over alternative modalities of identity which white male bodies might adopt, a focus on coalition-building seems much more promising and it is imperative that Black women's (and other marginalized people) instructive examples are followed with regard to dismantling Man.

As has already been noted, there is no shortage of Black women doing the work of dismantling Man and it is rather a problem of white civil society's complicity with Man's hegemonic overrepresentation and lack of support for resistance movements. Man's overrepresentation comprises a huge set of interlocking social and political problems and involves a wide multiplicity of potential sites of struggle. As Wynter demonstrates the interlinked nature of the major problems of our age, this should also open up locations for praxis. There is no easy blueprint but following the work of Black political movements can provide instruction.

Angela Davis, commenting on work in the more usual sense, comments: "Granted, work under the conditions of capitalism is brutalizing work. Granted, it is uncreative and alienating. Yet with all this, the fact remains that on the job, women can unite with their sisters- and indeed with their brothers- in order to challenge the capitalists at the point of production."²⁰⁸ Alongside anti-capitalist struggle- which is certainly necessary for dismantling Man's overrepresentation-

²⁰⁸ Davis, Angela. *Women Race & Class*: 240

workplace organizing presents a site of potential solidarity networking which could aid in galvanizing broader political movements and provide a framework for supporting the Black radical, democratic, egalitarian political work which has challenged white supremacy, capitalist domination, sexism, and so on (genre) from day one.

I close this essay with a meditation on just one of the many exciting sites of precisely this kind of struggle, fast food organizing. In recent years, fast food workers have provided some of the most potent, committed, and inspiring campaigns of political organizing around topics of labor, wages, and human dignity. In an economy which both despises and seemingly depends on the cheap labor provided by these workers (whose demographics tend to overrepresent those excluded by Man), they have successfully organized and won important victories.²⁰⁹ Why have fast food workers united, mobilized, and persevered where culinary workers in settings with higher status, better pay, and more general prestige largely remain apolitical and apathetic?

This is not altogether clear; however, we can glean an understanding of what has successfully mobilized the fast food movement's political work. Speaking about the struggles, both personal and political, Shantel Walker, a Black woman, a Papa Johns employee, and a Fight for 15 organizer, remarks: "The fast food workers who went on strike five years ago were regular people risking their jobs to take a stand...Fast Food Justice is the result of fast food workers uniting to educate and protect one another, improve their communities, and create change in New York City."²¹⁰ Walker's emphasis on the unity of everyday people forming a network of support, protection, and aspiration in defense of their basic dignity as workers and as humans provides an

²⁰⁹ Jonson, Stephon. 2015. "Fast Food, Minimum Wage Movement Claims Victories, Keeps Pushing" *Amsterdam News*.

²¹⁰ Swerloff, Alex. Jan 2, 2018. "How a Fast Food Worker Became an Activist" *Civil Eats*.
<https://civileats.com/2018/01/02/inside-the-life-and-struggle-of-a-fast-food-worker-turned-activist/>

inspiring correlate with much of the ethos of care outlined by some of the thinkers reviewed by this project. Walker paints a picture of a vibrant movement of laborers carrying out important political work which upturns many of the belittling presuppositions circulated by Man within white civil society. Most importantly, Walker's comments resonate with Assata Shakur's mandate for mutual love and protection and provide a re-description of her labor position as one which carries the liberatory promise (certainly as many other less obvious sites on Wynter's global archipelago must as well) of challenging, dismantling, and imagining beyond Man's overrepresentation; "Of course I'm proud of my job. I'm a fast food worker, a freedom fighter."²¹¹

²¹¹ Ibid.

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