

## AFFECT &amp; RACE/(BLACKNESS)

## AFECTO &amp; RAZA/(NEGRITUD)

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## Abstract

We question the question of affect and race as one that has already built itself upon blackness and anti-blackness, such that the question *a priori* for an affect theory seeking to address race, we argue, is that of black ontology. We first examine various works in affect theory that theorize race through new mechanisms of discourse, works that theorize interpersonal and emotive affects, and works that have contributed to a biopolitical understanding of race, affect, and assemblage. Delving deeper into a Deleuzian legacy of affect as capacity we assert that the theoretical works of afro-pessimism and black optimism (as black ontology) allows for generative thought around the materializations, value, and productions of racialized capacity—specifically the affective capacity of blackness. This work points to a vital direction for affect theory that can no longer dismiss or transcend race in a bid for a universal masked/marked posthumanism.

## Resumen

Cuestionamos la cuestión de afecto y raza como una pregunta que ya se ha construida a sí misma por sobre la negritud y la anti-negritud, de tal manera que la cuestión *a priori* para una teoría del afecto que busca abordar lo racial es, según nuestro argumento, una ontología de lo negro. Primero examinamos varios trabajos dentro de la teoría del afecto que teorizan la raza a través de nuevos mecanismos de discurso, trabajos que teorizan el afecto interpersonal y emotivo, y trabajos que han contribuido a un entendimiento biopolítico de lo racial, el afecto y el ensamblaje. Indagando más profundamente dentro del legado deleuziano del afecto como capacidad, aseveramos que los trabajos teóricos de afro-pesimismo y optimismo negro (como ontología negra) permiten un pensamiento generador alrededor de las materializaciones, el valor, y las producciones de capacidad racial—específicamente la capacidad afectiva de la negritud. Este trabajo señala una dirección vital para la teoría del afecto que ya no puede descartar o transcender lo racial en su apuesta por el posthumanismo universalista enmascarado/marcado.

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*Blackness is not the pathogen in the afro-Pessimist imagination and it is a wonder how one could read it so, even as it is no wonder at all. No, blackness is not the pathogen in afro-Pessimism, the world is. Not the earth, but the world, and maybe even the whole possibility of and desire for a world*

(Sexton, 2011, p. 31)

## Introduction: On race? and affect

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Affect, defined as the capacity to affect and be affected (Clough, 2007) highlights in its definition the amorphous and somewhat unwieldiness of its conceptualization. Thinking through then the genealogy and use of affect theory in relationship to what may be understood as the intersection of the two fields of race studies<sup>1</sup> and affect theory or, for us, the specific ‘location’ of ‘blackness and affect’ is an arduous journey where the mapping of affect and race becomes quite the topographical challenge.

Our decision to begin this journey with the specific locality of affect and blackness is not a move to obscure a larger question of racial formation/or to ignore the field of race studies as a whole but instead, it is with adamant certainty that this understanding of blackness and capacity as representative of the potential of affect in relationship to race allows us to question normative uses of “race” as a heuristic device (generally to understand social construction) and as a “higher order” category of social stratification. The space of a possible intersection of affect and race elaborated here questions the location framed as such, suggesting that “race” may be necessary for understanding subjectivity and discipline but breaks down/ is broken down in analyses of societies of control (Deleuze, 1992), where the question of race is better understood via theories of affect and assemblages in which racial hierarchies and constructions do not inherently “supersede” “specific” racialized capacities. This, however, is not a complete negation of race as non-material or non-ontological which we contend often becomes the assumption within much New Materialist thinking (Ashley & Billies, 2017). We trace the lineage of theory that finds itself at the intersection of race and affect to conclude that work happening in both the field of affect as well as the vital work of scholars whose work we refer to as ‘Black Ontologists’, highlights that the most generative potential of this intersection of ‘race’ and affect is increasingly work that moves away from questions of subjectivity to questions of ontology without dismissing a productive account of race and the affective capacities of racial production. Further, the central, incessantly dismissed role of blackness in theory makes central the responsibility of theory to wrestle with its own anti-blackness when, as we contend, blackness is necessarily world and human making.

The field of race studies has largely been constrained by the working through of race either at the level of identity or at the level of structure and the relationship between those levels. The work between the levels—while often itself interested in

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Race studies’ itself must be seen as a heuristic device to describe the general and holistic work on race being done in multiple fields and done interdisciplinarily. This includes but isn’t limited to—Critical Race Theory, Critical Ethnic Studies, Transnational Feminisms, etc.

questions of processes, doings, becomings—has a hard time asking questions that think of process as outside, beneath, or *a priori* to this binary way of understanding the social world. A similar argument is made by James M. Thomas (2014) who calls for a need to utilize theories of affect within sociology of race frameworks. The limits he places on Sociology's inability to do so are to be largely found in Sociology's "reductivist account of the role of culture in the production of race and racism and the essentializing of the political identity of racial Others" (Thomas, p. 72). He instead argues for an affective understanding of race where affect becomes useful as a way of rethinking utilizations of culture and discourse to largely avoid the pitfalls of identity politics. Rightfully, Thomas (2014) wants to concentrate on the 'feltness' of race with the directive that "race scholars need to 'multiply the modalities, practices, and agencies of mediation,'" (p. 78 citing Lawrence Grossberg, 2010, p. 189). However, we find that while Thomas wants to rescue considerations of cultural and discursive mediation from constructivist accounts, he doesn't fully embrace ontological understandings of production fully at the level of affect. While important ontological considerations emerge through his directive, the focus is still on mediation in ways that reproduce certain traps of subjectivity. These traps of subjectivity and the benefits of theorizing racial capacities and affects in lieu of these traps are usefully explored by Ashley and Billies (2017), where potential is granted to a rethinking of subjectivity instead of completely dismissing it or returning to a human centered essentialist/constructivist binary subject. We contend that the benefit of thinking through race and affect is to attempt to approach a materialist account of race at the level of ontology that allows theory to more effectively move beyond the subject reproduced in this binary way—the actual limiting figure in essentialist and constructivist accounts.

While Thomas (2014) does illuminate certain problems of traditional race-based work that are mired in issues of identity and subjectivity, he also reproduces one of the major problems consistent among most affect studies that address the question of race. Thomas (2014), in effect, wants to, as is the push for so many critical thinkers, 'transcend race'. Affect theory has largely been restricted by its anti-identitarian/anti-subjectivity stance, avoiding race in its attempts to transcend it. This turn in many ways is a reaction to an over reliance on language and discourse as mediation for the material world brought about by the linguistic turn in much of postmodern thought. However, the ontological assumptions of affect allow for a rejection of the constructivist/essentialist binary in a way that actually might tell us something new about certain racial processes that may prematurely be written off as 'simply identity' that should be 'transcended'.

In this article we attempt to transcend the desire to transcend race, mapping affective blackness by traveling through and with a trajectory of thought from black studies that we are calling ‘Black Ontology’. The first half of this paper touches on frameworks of affect and frameworks of race & affect to lay out the terrain in which we are surveying. For us ‘Black Ontology’ can be best understood in the question of the contradiction (or if as Jared Sexton [2011] points out, the contradiction that is a non contradiction) between Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism. It is in the space of that friction that we argue blackness, ontology, and affect can be charted to avoid dead end trail blazes of racial subjectivity and instead mark the production and productivity of blackness as affective capacity.

### Which affect theory? Capacity rather than ‘feltness’

Any accounting of the work being done on race and affect must acknowledge the multiple and various frames in which one can understand affect. Our concentration on capacity/process operates in a very specific paradigm of affect studies. In their foundational work for the field, Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth (2010) delineate various paradigms of affect theory. They point to the two dominant vectors of affect theory in the humanities: one regarding the differential affects of Silvan Tompkins and the second originating from the Deleuzian/Spinozian ethology of bodily capacities. Our mapping of the field follows largely in the Deleuzian tradition in which we find much political and theoretical potential in understanding the processes of material production that shape the social world and the multiple categories of ‘bodies’ that “inhabit” it. Our affect orientation then is concerned with the New Materialist process philosophies that seek to understand affect as it assembles with technologies/structures/systems of power and is also productive of them. This orientation allows for a broader and more nuanced understanding of what should be taken up as ‘productive,’ or as productivity, as the material world itself is rethought. This orientation then also allows for revitalized understandings of culture, of information, of the computational, and of the body. The traditions we draw from are those approaches to bodies, the inorganic and nonhuman, that move away from a primary concern with human bodies (and their subjectivities) toward an understanding of bodies “defined by their potential to reciprocate or co-participate in the passages of affect” (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010, p. 2), such as reflected in the work of Elizabeth Grosz (1994, 2005), Brian Massumi (2002, 2010), Patricia Clough (2007, 2009), Jasbir Puar (2007), and Antonio Hardt & Michael Negri (2000).

While we are drawing out the importance of capacity-driven work, it is necessary to point out the race and affect work around emotion and ‘feltness’ that is extremely

important in this theoretical space of race and affect. Sara Ahmed's (2004) work around Frantz Fanon, blackness, and fear, and José Muñoz's (2006) work on 'feeling brown' are a few examples of this pivotal work. These scholars do work where affect exceeds the idea of emotion but often remains tethered to properties or experiences of individual human bodies and subjects. Muñoz's (2006) work for example, departs from individualist psychological treatments of depression to highlight 'a depressive positionality' that both emanates from and emanates minoritarian bodies. These 'brown feelings' animate minoritarian bodies affectively generating non-normative belongings through fields of loss and guilt. This lends to minoritarian bodies a type of tolerance/resilience that resists desires to destroy or reject this emanating depressive position. Instead these 'brown feelings' represent a potential, a capacity for an affective type of hope. Such work has been foundational in its departure from the human subject of race. However, still underexplored is racial capacity itself and its productions that exist not only inside and between human bodies but also outside, beneath, and beyond. The scholars in this 'emotional field' explore ideas of 'racial becomings' but primarily as properties of human bodies or components of assemblages rather than these becomings in and of themselves as capacity. Still under-theorized is the question of what does race do? What is its capacity? Race in these theorizations still operates as a mediating force.

We believe the future direction of this pivotal work around racial capacity and affect is better found in the work that moves toward biopolitical theorizations that can alternatively breakdown distinctions between living and dead in cybernetics and bioengineering and weave contagion together with population-making. Much of this current work that does move beyond feltness and emotion takes seriously various productive accounts of race—often as a technology of affect. Work that most effectively address the question of what race can do examines its productive capacity from a Marxist and materialist perspective, and we argue, is best analyzed biopolitically at the level of population. Many of these theorists usefully think through race as an event produced through and as assemblages. Michalinos Zembylas (2015), for example, thinks about race as a technology of affect that orders and creates space inside the classroom. At the same time, because he follows Ahmed's consideration of emotion as excess that circulates in and through interpersonal racializations, he misses a myriad of forces potentially contributing to the ordering of space—including how space itself materializes via racial capacity. In his work, space and the subject slip into each other, such that the ordering of (human) bodies in racial interaction is taken to comprise the entire meaning of ordering racial space. Derek Hook (2005) also treats race as an affective technology, one that works as a currency to produce racist sentiment and nationalist furor. At a population level, this currency works to 'glue' certain populations

together while forming populations of exclusion. Hook joins the roster of theorists using affect theory to ontologize race, though he often leans too heavily on productions of attachment and of 'extra-discursive' subject-making that yet again re-centers the subject. This slight return to the subject is also found in the work of Jason Lim (2010) who speaks of memory and race in his understanding of race as a technology of affect. Though his analytical breakdown of affect also evokes an understanding of racial productivity, Lim's (2010) analysis falls short with his evidence; his autoethnographic method renders him the unexamined source of mediation of the racial perception of subjects, through which he reproduces race squarely within the realm of representation. Hook and Lim, like the affect work of many others, remain primarily concerned with interpersonal relations, limiting the full potential of racial capacity at the level of affect.

## Race as Event, Population, Assemblage

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Arun Saldanha's (2006), Puar's (2007), and Clough's (2007, 2009) theorizations of race as an embodied, material event fully moves race away from questions of epistemology and places it in new materialist, Deleuzian territories of ontological becoming. Saldanha (2006) contributes the crucial characterization of race as "viscous" to affect studies, pointing to the ability of race to make bodies stick with each other, space, history, etc. His materialist critique asserts the latent potential of phenotype, whose biological materiality is contingent in space and time; emerging as it participates in the event of race. His re-ontologization of race is an emergent, rather than essential, ontology that is concerned with what phenotype can do rather than its meanings. Building from Grosz, he portends the anti-racist potential of phenotype as the proliferation of 1000 tiny races, where viscosities among nonwhite races become productive.

While theorizing race as nomadic and impure, his numerous other references to race as face, blood, and identifier means Saldanha also under theorizes race itself, a gap he then fills with a deeply problematic valorization by Deleuze and Felix Guattari of face (race) as individual choice, citing the poet Rimbaud who denounces his French nationality and claims himself Black (Saldanha, 2006, pp. 14-16). By doing so, race—specifically, blackness—becomes an apolitical universal available to anyone. Here, then, is the problem with conflating colonial capitalist desire for race—a potentially productive idea—and the individual white desire to be black—a problem we continue to argue is due to a limited understanding of racial capacity.

Saldanha argues that race has the potential to emerge in its "true mode" unstifled by racism (Saldanha, 2006, p. 21) but leaves the machine of racism seriously undertheorized. Lim and Zembylas join him in entertaining an anti-racist politics that might be

termed 'the joy of potential' but also leave un-theorized how assemblages of racism territorialize race before, during and after such different proliferations. Clough (2007, 2009) and Puar (2007) take questions of relating, doing, and producing further by thinking through these processes at the level of biopolitics, the approach that takes the question of race and affect furthest from the problems of subjectivity and discipline and helps illuminate the workings of societies of control (Deleuze, 1992) as well as questions of liberation.

In Patricia Clough's work with Craig Willse's (2010) on "political branding," race is nonreducible and ontological, operating through "mnemonic control" - the generation of memories that create "the bodily or affective sense of an experience one has not had or a memory one does not have" (pp. 47-8). Rather than disciplining individuals, control generates populations—"statistically organized and manipulated as groupings of characteristics, features, or parts" (p. 51)—toward the modulation of life capacities. This biopolitical process occurs through the calculation of racial differences that carry the potential for value "as racial probabilities" which are "circulated as data" in "speculative, informational, and affective economies" (pp. 48, 50). The manipulation of populations through a population racism, therefore, is a manipulation of life capacities, of vitality, and produces sensation, affects, and somatic effects that are felt not only at the individual level but, more importantly, at the population level through political branding (51). This work on affect and political branding clearly moves beyond race as a subjective or even relational entity within or between bodies.

Essential for Puar's (2007) post 9/11 analysis of the emerging relations between race, queerness, and national security is an understanding of "biopolitic's direct activity in death while remaining bound to the optimization of life" (p. 35). Incorporating Achille Mbembe's theory of necropolitics, she argues the bionecropolitical management of information and bodies is key to the production of white queer populations slated for life (gay marriage, families, etc.), which is dependent on a racial demarcation of queer populations of color slated for gradations of debility and death (xii,xiii). Significantly, she describes this process in which race's viscosity operates as a means through which bodies, spaces, sexualities, sensations, atmospheres, etc. become sticky and cluster into aggregates (190). Circulations of raced, gendered, and sexual patriot and terrorist populations then function to create a secure nation as forces of capital and governance enact "desiring production" (p. 210), a nonindividual, animating desire which brings together elements of machinic assemblages that do work, that produce.

Her critical materiality analyzes the figure of the turbaned man, a terrorist assemblage in which the turban as a nonorganic body part functions to create and manage new kinds of potential for life and death among populations of racialized queers.

She sets aside the recognition of targeted subjectivities to focus on the dramatic pulls that set queer, brown, terrorist threats in circulation and the populations of white gay patriots and perverse brown terrorists, their bodies, data, opinions, geographies, etc. that can then be modulated and regularized.

In their treatments of race, many affect theorists either try to ‘transcend race’ in such a way that leaves race undertheorized, or manage to return to a normative subject of which they claim to be avoidant. Others who do address race as a technology of affect often become overly processual in the sense that everything is becoming, circulated through assemblages. (This may be related to fears of subjectifying or re-essentializing race). Even when considered at the level of population, there is rarely a moment “the becoming” is measured as an object or materialization of becoming. This limits the fuller range of understanding capacity and production (value, time, space, as well as isness/inundation) that affect offers, leaving under-theorized the actual materiality of race. The Deleuzian question flowing through much of affect theory is, “What can a body do?” Yet affect theorists do not ask, “What can a black body do?” They also do not highlight the capacity driving productivity of race to ask, “What can blackness do?”

Affect theory’s tendency of being race-avoidant often reproduces and is productive of a universalizing “race-making.” Put another way—the framing of race as only representational is part of the productive processes of race making, specifically, whiteness as universality. This in effect prevents theorization of the becoming materializations of blackness as capacity. We instead highlight blackness and affect because to do so allows for the theorization of blackness as an affective capacity outside of subjectivity, essentialism, discourse, epistemology etc. The affective capacity of blackness is especially important to recognize as a force that produces surplus value (Ashley & Billies, 2017). As black ontologists have elaborated, race is ontological—not simply a mediating force of perception between individuals or segregation among social classes—but as a viscous force supporting the production and regularization of populations. It is crucial to hold onto that moment when those objects emerge at the level of population, space, atmosphere, and threat as those productions are infused with value. Blackness has particular value—that surplus value then matters and what it also produces and re-circulates into anoriginary blackness (Ashley & Billies, 2017).

We therefore turn to the work of a group of ‘race scholars’ that together are theorizing questions of black ontology—not to supplant affect theory with their work or vice versa—but to show where affect theory produces its own limitations by delineating itself as outside of the very considerations that many of these scholars are deeming as material.



## Black Ontologies of Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism

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Much of the ontological work in this orientation has been recently framed within two paradigms of black thought: afro-pessimism and black optimism, but does not fully fit such a neat delineation (one often rejected by various scholars listed in these camps). However, these frames allow us to elaborate the insights of these ‘black ontologists’ that we contend should be in conversation with affect theory more directly.

Blackness—and anti-blackness—is widely cited at the (continual, scientific, philosophical) birth of the human, which is also the birth of the world (Fanon, 1952/1967; Wilderson, 2010, 2014; Wynter, 2003). In this field of black ontology we are including the more contemporary work of Katherine McKittrick (2006), Fred Moten (2007, 2008a, 2008b), Fred Moten & Stefano Harney (2011), James Sexton (2011), Alexander Weheliye (2014), Frank B. Wilderson (2010), and Sylvia Wynter (2003), the classical work of Frantz Fanon (1952/1967), Orlando Patterson (1982), Cedric Robinson (1983) and the expansive work of Hortense Spillers (1987,1996) and Saidiya Hartman (1997, 2006). The conversation between afro-pessimism and black optimism highlights our belief that this work falls within affective theory. In a simplistic, often reductionist framing of this conversation, afro-pessimism (Wilderson, 2010) is thought to represent the complete impossibility of ontological blackness—or the idea of blackness as purely social death—in such a way that liberatory potential lies outside of the very realm of blackness. Black optimism (Moten, 2008a) in contrast is understood as positioning blackness as always liberatory through an ontology of continual transformation and fugitivity. Both rely on various understandings of the work of the scholars outlined above such as Hartman and Patterson but take them to different theoretical places. We however begin with Sexton’s point that afro-pessimism and black optimism may be two sides of the same coin and we contend that together they point to a larger field of black ontology that leads to insights on the productive capacity of blackness. Sexton’s framing of the tension between afro-pessimism and black optimism begins with a series of questions that we argue center blackness as a world/human making capacity:

What is the nature of a form of being that presents a problem for the thought of being itself? More precisely, what is the nature of a human being whose human being is put into question radically and by definition, a human being whose being human raises the question of being human at all? Or, rather, whose being is the generative force, historic occasion, and essential byproduct of the question of human being in general? What is the being of a problem? (Sexton, 2011, pp. 6-7)

He begins to answer these questions by looking at the social life (black optimism) within social death (afro-pessimism) instead of seeing these strands of thought as oppositional. He understands Wilderson's (2010) position on 'police power' as a condition of forever slavery but also finds that Moten's understanding of "how black social life steals away" and ultimately "calls that very policing into being" (p. 36) is necessarily an understanding of the permanency of anti-blackness. The social life within social death then reaffirms, "the logical and ontological priority of the unorthodox self-predicating activity of blackness" (p. 36).

For us, Sexton's point makes clear that afro-pessimism and black optimism are both seeking to position blackness as a productive capacity—that is also fundamentally in excess of itself. In Moten's (2003) terms, it is the "improvisational immanence" of blackness that allows it to constantly 'steal away' even as it becomes the material of anti-blackness, which is also world making. Sexton understands that the "irreducible precedence" (p. 36) of blackness is what both animates pure fugitivity and social death and also the impossible subjective beingness of blackness. This insight allows us to go back to Cedric Robinson's 'Black Marxism', Orlando Paterson's 'Social Death', Franz Fanon's 'Black Fact' and rethink the archetypal question of race and class, (and the social constructionist questions that add gender, sexuality, dis/ability, citizenship status, etc.) to elevate the ideas of blackness as productive capacity and resistant (transformative) potential. Doing so gives us new insight into being, materiality, and social change.

Weheliye's (2014) journey in *Habeus Viscous* is to theorize racial assemblages at the level of the flesh and is dependent on much of the work of Hortense Spillers and Sylvia Wynters whom we also find invaluable to a question of affect and blackness. Yet it is also his interventionist argument about the lineage of theory that we find important to thinking through questions of race and affect. Weheliye (2014) argues that the concepts of biopolitics and bare life in their anti-identitarian stance believe themselves to be "uncontaminated by and prior to reductive or essentialist political identities such as race or gender" (p. 7). This resonates with our finding of affect theory's penchant for a universalism through its 'prehuman' stakes that re-institutes productions of the anti-black relation. Seeking to circumvent these productions, Weheliye is concerned with "alternate ways of conceptualizing the place of race, or racializing assemblages, within the dominion of modern politics," where "habeus viscus" "signal(s) how violent political domination activates a fleshly surplus that simultaneously sustains and disfigures said brutality." (pp. 1-2) While Weheliye (2014) sees 'racializing assemblages' as a set of 'sociopolitical processes,' we are drawn to the way black flesh serves as a productive capacity of 'fleshy surplus':

The flesh thus operates as a vestibular gash in the armor of man, simultaneously a tool of dehumanization and a relational vestibule to alternate ways of being [...] Not an aberration, yet excluded, not at the center of being but nevertheless constitutive of it, the flesh is ‘that ether, that shit that make your soul burn slow’. (Weheliye, 2014, p. 44)

This ether, this capacity is fundamentally a question of affect and one that does not treat race simply as representational or ideological. It also emerges as a productive capacity from which to understand the positionalities of both afro-pessimism and black optimism.

We also find emergent ideas of the affective capacity of blackness directly within the work of Wilderson (2010) as well as his clear concern around questions of ontology and blackness. At the root of his afro-pessimism argument is an understanding that ‘the human’ is meaningless outside of the productive capacity of blackness that calls forth the human into being. Wilderson (2010) argues that, “Whiteness is parasitic because it monumentalizes its subjective capacity [...] in direct proportion to the wasteland of Black incapacity” (p. 45). He is in effect arguing that black people have no ontological beingness and that “without the Negro, capacity itself is incoherent” (p. 45). This we argue is a formative understanding of black (non) subjectivity that makes room for theorizing blackness as capacity outside of the human body. In this vein, Wilderson’s work actually delineates blackness *as capacity*. He uses capacity to mean, “a kind of facility or matrix through which possibility itself can be elaborated” (p. 45)—an understanding of capacity that we argue is an affective one. This leads to important critiques of classical Marxism that assume the human within ideas of ‘productive man’ and man’s engagement with the material world. Blackness delineates that some bodies in their fungibility are in essence, pre-body matter... are both laborers and produced/producing objects and are anorignary to questions of productivity within modernity. This is the insight of Wilderson’s claim about blackness and capacity, contemporary notions of social death and Sadiyia Hartman’s afterlife of slavery—blackness is affective—it is a productive capacity that has generated a world and is consistently world making. It has generated man. It has generated the human.

These ontological questions about “man” and the various forces from which he is produced as human—or not—are repeated by Sylvia Wynter, who we argue also theorizes blackness as a productive capacity. While Wynter’s work does travel extensively in the realm of discourse and representation, her larger concern is decidedly ontological and lies outside of constructivist mediated accounts of discourse. Wynter (2003) writes that “the Color Line, [...] now projected as the new “space of Otherness” operationally works to “recode the extrahumanly determined differences of ontological sub-

stance” (p. 316). Weheliye (2014) points to Wynter’s use of neurobiology to explain how “racialization figures as a master code” once “race became anchored in the ontogenic flesh” (pp. 27-28). In our affective reading of Wynter’s work, it is this code that is productive of Wynter’s descriptive genres of man. These genres become materialized at the level of population through the productivity of these racialized codings.

The work of Fred Moten and Stefano Harney (2011) also recognizes the potentiality of blackness as an anoriginary drive, in one form, as a “modality” of constant escape in the form of flight (p. 355). In their reading of Moten and Harney’s anoriginary drive Ashley and Billies (2017) assert that this “capacity of blackness provokes governance in its fugitivity and also produces the conditions of both debt and generative wealth” (p. 76). Important to them is that this “fugitivity of blackness is realized because an informational blackness as coded value resists (or emerges outside of/prior to) representational regimes and spaces of enclosure” (p. 76), directing blackness towards affective production.

These are just a few examples of the work being done around blackness that ultimately must be seen as evoking questions and theories of new materialism, ontology, production, and affect in ways that acknowledge the debt of the human and the world to blackness. The affective routes of such work, the bubblings of thought travelling close and through affective assumptions is where more affect scholars should sense a form of necessary engagement. For us, the re-engagement with social death is absolutely an affective one. Affective theoretical work should not reject the specific ontological nature of blackness. These black ontological insights both illuminate a critique of categorical/analytical race work and provide new directions towards theoretical and liberatory potential.

## The World Must Be Destroyed

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For Wilderson, for Hartman, for Fanon, for Aimé Césaire—the possibility of black liberation means that the world must be destroyed and at the center of that destruction is the human. (See Ball, 2014, interview with Wilderson.) This is why theorists concerned with questions of liberation can no longer engage in materialisms that assume the exploitation of the human but refuse to engage in the ontological question of what the human is. It is telling that within black studies those beings that enter the world produced through blackness as black beings, black objects, black capacities are increasingly at the heart of breaking down the ontological assumptions of the status of the human. The post-human nature of affect theory is at a great loss if it doesn’t consider the question of blackness as it relates to the idea of the human—especially if blackness is itself ‘pre-human.’ Clough and Wilse (2010) reminds us that “future governance will

continue to engage methods of manipulating affective potential” (p. 60). Likewise, Harney and Moten’s work on debt and governance is a political directive to take seriously this affective capacity of blackness.

Taking affective blackness seriously questions the idea of ‘affect and race’, modeling a focus on specific racial productions and capacities for their singular (complex, proliferating, historical, future-oriented) capacities. The distinct ways in which blackness has been used to shape philosophies of the human is just one devastating outcome of its capacity toward death that has played a fundamental role in Western thought and world formation. Thinking through blackness and capacity allows for generative thought around black capacity—what black bodies or black space or black populations do—more specifically what blackness produces—without being stuck in the quagmire of binary structuring that is the space of essentialism vs constructionism and identity vs structure. This also actually allows us to fully embrace some of the ontological assumptions of affect theory and therefore becomes the direction in which we believe that a field of affect ultimately needs to head, in order to account for its own theoretical history, acknowledge how it has either shunned blackness in its desire for universality and distance from human subjects, or gotten trapped by thinking blackness, race, and ethnicity are primarily about human interaction, in order to participate in maximizing the potential for understanding blackness, as well as any other specific racial and ethnic formation for their affective capacities.

And, if the response to this piece is “Why blackness and not \_\_\_\_\_ (insert other “race”)” this is the point of our piece, part of our critique of the utilization of race, and why we find value in affect theory.

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