In a recent review of evolutionary psychologist Robert Kurzban's book *Why Everyone (Almost) Is A Hypocrite: Evolution and the Modular Mind*, philosopher and linguist Jerry Fodor takes sharp exception to Kurzban's assertion that our brains, insofar as they are nothing more than a bundle of heuristics capable of performing discrete sets of computational operations, neither imply nor require the organizing principle/principal that we ordinarily call a self. According to Fodor, Kurzban sees no reason for the science of psychology to acknowledge selves. "Well," Fodor retorts, "Here's one in a nutshell: selves are the agents of inference and of behavior; you need executives to account for the rationality of our inferences; you need the rationality of our inferences to account for the coherence of our behavior; and you need the coherence of our behavior to explain the successes of our actions." When Fodor asserts the necessity of the executive, a relation between the knowledge and the care of the self is implied, though what Michel Foucault claims to be the priority of care to knowledge is inverted. In the intensity of his normative philosophical self-regard, Fodor's executive is at least proximate to the one that Foucault, in a brief reading of Seneca's *De Ira*, calls the administrator. For Foucault, however, that nearness also encompasses an unbridgeable distance since knowledge prepares the way for renunciation, which, in the end, cannot abide with care. But insofar as Fodor's critique of Kurzban seems to leave renunciation by the wayside, to consider the representative generality that emerges when Fodor's self, which seeks to "explain the success of [his] actions," and Foucault's self, which prepares "for a certain complete achievement of life," are posed together seems nothing less
than an imperative. At stake in such a pose, in the assumption of the possibility of position, is not only how but also that one looks at oneself, how and that one gives an account of oneself in the end, as an end in a discourse of ends above means. In the meantime, in a temporality of means that might not even be discernible as a moment's absence, the mode of renunciation that derivates from philosophical self-absorption is endlessly refused in an ongoing flash of exhaustion and consent. Our flesh of flames burns bright in its submergence. Its (neo-)plastic burl still folds. I want to study the poetic registration of this immeasurable preface to the world.

In sketching an outline of the "technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality," Foucault presumes a clear difference between them and those "technologies of production, which permit us to produce, transform or manipulate things." This is to say that while these technologies "hardly ever function separately," they do operate against the backdrop of a sharp distinction between things and selves, which move within two different technological hemispheres—the technological manipulation of things and signs, which "are used in the study of science and linguistics," and the "technologies of domination and the self," which Foucault concerned himself with in the development of his "history of the organization of knowledge," his historiography of the present.

Black studies, which does or should consider what Nahum Chandler calls "the problem of the negro as a problem for thought" within and by way of imperatives that are beyond category, is constrained to investigate the integration of these hemispheres and is particularly responsible for forging an understanding regarding the relationship between (the manipulation of) things and (the care of) selves. This is to say that insofar as the ungovernability of things and signs within and outside or underneath the field that is delineated and enclosed by the manipulative efforts of selves caught up in the exertions of governmentality is or should be our constant study, we have to comport ourselves in and toward the juncture of technological breakthrough and technological breakdown. Black study moves at the horizon of an event where certain instruments, insofar as they can no longer either calculate or be calculated, are bent towards the incalculable. That juncture, that event, doesn't just imply and assume and consider movement; it is itself on the move as a kind of fugitive coalescence of and against more than agential force, more than agential voluntarism, as a kind of choir, a kind of commotion, whose general refrain—like a buzz or hum underneath self-concern's melodic line—is that it's not your thing, you can't just do what you want to do. Such clamor might best be understood, in its constant improvisational assault on the understanding that was sent to regulate it, as antiadministrative, antiexecutive action.

Fodor believes that evolutionary psychologists, like Kurzban, have taken the notion of the modularity of mind—an idea, derived in part from the Chomskyan idea of innate and specific mental device, that states that such a device is evolutionarily developed to have a specific function—too far. Though Fodor is a major contributor to that notion, he believes that too much liberty is taken with and derived from cognitive impenetrability, the condition in which mental mechanisms are understood to be not only distinct but also independent, "encapsulated from beliefs and from one another." And so he takes Kurzban severely to task for attempting to show that such encapsulation predicts, as it were, the absence of the executive. For Kurzban, the fact that we can believe two contradictory beliefs is explained by the fact that the brain contains distinct, discrete modules—bundles of software, as it were—that are devoted to separate operations. It's not the mind or the self that believes contradictory things; it's just two different packages within the brain that do. Contradictory views correspond to different functions, different uses to which the brain is put that correspond, in turn, to different packages of mental processes. As Kurzban puts it,

this functional approach includes the idea that in the same way computer software that is very flexible consists of a very large number of subroutines, the human mind has a large number of subroutines—modules—designed for particular purposes.

An important consequence of this view is that it makes us think about the "self" in a way that is very different from how people usually understand it. In particular, it makes the very motion of a "self"—something of a problem, and perhaps quite a bit less useful than one might think.

Fodor's concern and his critique are derived from his sense that Kurzban's psychological Darwinism—"the theory that some/many/all of the
traits that constitute our 'psychological phenotype' are adaptations to problems posed by the environments in which the mind evolved)—can explain negation (the relation or copresence of P and not-P) but not addition (the relation of P and Q). He argues that Kuczban can explain how there can be negation without an executive but not how there can be interpenetrability (interarticulation, interanimation) without an executive.

... Kuczban's thesis that we can do without anybody who's in charge. Something has to ensure that, in many, many cases, if you believe P and you believe Q, you also believe P&Q. In traditional intellectualist models, this is part of what executives do. The executive is an inference-making organ; it is structured so that when it finds P is on the list of your beliefs, and Q is on the list of your beliefs, it adds P&Q to the list of your beliefs. Very roughly, it allows for the construction of relatively complex mental states from relatively simple mental states; so it can (maybe) explain how it is possible for a creature with a finite head to have indefinitely many beliefs. On this sort of view, it is not an accident that the belief P is a constituent of the belief P&Q; and it is not an accident that the sentence "John prefers coffee" is a constituent of the sentence "John prefers coffee in the morning." If you have an executive, you can (maybe) make sense of all that, if not, then—so far as anyone knows—you can't. Intellectualism suggests the possibility of a unified treatment of logic, language, and thought.

What I've been wondering, by way of the specificity of Fodor's critique of Kuczban but against the grain of what Fodor understands to constitute the ground of that critique and from the perspective of someone who is also interested in certain operations that have been done on bodies and soul, as well as on Body and Soul, is whether the self is better understood as something akin to what David Kazanjian calls a "flashpoint" marking a socially generated rebellion against the executive that is manifest in the form of the solipsist who can now be thought of as sociality's nonfull, nonsimple, anarchic, and chaotic, old-new avatar? The executive function is an exclusionary, regulative function: it says that the issue at hand is about the difference between the negation of P (here called the not-P) and Q. But what is excluded here is a (de)generative, expansive, imaginative, and imaginative totality—given in the undercommon intellectual works and lives of the ones who are constrained to mind their Ps and Qs—that is, neither the negation of P nor Q. More precisely, what is missing is a vast range of extrarrational relations for which we cannot, strictly speaking, account; relations, which is to say things, that cannot be accounted for because they cut and augment inference; things like whatever occurs when believing P and believing Q is more or less and/or more and less than P and Q. (In general, the general is more and less, given in new sentences that some might see as unworthy constituents for which we cannot account but which others might see more clearly as instantiations of the invaluable. Worked minds work wonders with 6.2 words, making do with less and more.) At the same time, radical disbelief in cognitive penetrability both within what we refer to as the individual mind and between individual minds does, as Fodor suggests, imply a strict and limiting regulation of mental processes, which is to say of the relation between mind and world, mind and things in the world. While psychological Darwinists might be able to account for contradiction, they cannot account for generative interarticulation, which Fodor speaks of under the rubrics of inference and behavior and Foucault (like Arendt) speaks of under the rubrics of thinking and acting, things which things are said not to be able to do but always in relation to social history insofar as "the way people really think (and act) is not adequately analyzed by the universal categories of logic."

Consider, for instance, by way of Foucault, how the valences of constituency entail both the belief, or the sentence, that is "simpler," more fundamental, and the power to constitute the consent-to be governed and represented by a derivative of supposedly greater complexity. This double edge of constituency—a kind of anoriginal potential that is often constrained to submit to what it generates, to what represents or gives accounts (of it), where giving an account is a taking stock of oneself that is inseparable from a taking stock of one's things—returns us to Foucault's concern with self-concern. The constituent is subject to the derivative, the calculation, which is held in and as credit in a kind of freedom from mutuality. The elemental, in its irreducible supplementarity, is given over to a kind of fixed contingency that is called the executive, which, when it is supposed to give an account of what is essential in and as generativity instead gives an account of itself, an account of the self understood as a kind of interplay of slavery and freedom and not as an effect of the generative force of anoriginal fugitivity, an accounting in which that self is misunderstood to be originary.
When the self is understood to be originary, interpenetrability is both warped and lost—warped when the always already given internal difference of “simple” cognitive states or processes is forgotten in a discourse of penetrability that is held in the very idea of the individual mind; lost when interpenetrability between minds is submitted to the notion of the individual mind’s originarity rather than its derivations from the social constituency.

There is something like, but both a little bit and a whole lot more than, what Alan Turing described/imagined: an infinite memory capacity with an infinite amount of time whose computational force allows us to chart the limits of what can be computed. This other thing goes over the edge of that limit. It is as if it has been thrown over the side of the vessel, the state-sanctioned ship or self that navigates that limit. The self’s or the subject’s transcendence has usually been associated with what it is to stand on the edge of the abyss to which it is and has been committed. Transcendence matters to the one who stands there only if it is given in her immaterial, her thingliness, her fallenness, her movement in and with submarine sound, in and as the Atlantic underbridge.

Consider that the transition from a philosophy or a natural history to a biology of race accompanies and informs the pseudoscientific emergence of what we now recognize as the science of the brain and that the Kantian revolution in moral, aesthetic, and political theory and the theory of mind are fatefully and fatally coupled with and enabled by the invention of the philosophical concept of race that submits difference to a sovereign power that will have been both refined (in the recovery of a single originary purpose, a monogenetic impetus) and dispersed (wherein that purpose is, as it were, replicated and reproduced as human mental endowment). Do so while keeping in mind that the revolution in theories and techniques of computation (especially the computation of risk and maritime positioning that helped significantly to fuel the transition from mercantilism to [the interplay of the dispersion of sovereignty and the refinement of private accumulation and the conceptualization and regulative exclusion of externalities that we call] capitalism) that began to emerge in the mid-nineteenth century with the work of Charles Babbage and that took more immediately practical and efficient shape in the mid-twentieth century by way of the contributions of Alan Turing, Norbert Wiener, and others coincide roughly with the inception and return of Afro-diasporic revolutionary social movement and the new modes of consciousness (and their globalized dispersal) such movement reflected and helped to shape. The desire to study the black insurgency whose traces remain in and as the dissemination of phonic substance in literature and music is now inseparable from attending to the history of the interplay of calculation, displacement, and abolition. This juncture manifests itself in frenzied, troubled, muffled speech over the edge of whatever is supposed to divide sacrament from profanation. Foucault, by way of Philo of Alexandria, recalls “an austere community, devoted to reading, to healing meditation, to individual and collective prayer and to meeting for a spiritual banquet (agape, ‘feast’).” These common practices, he argues, “stemmed from concern for oneself.” Foucault then shows how the movement from self-care to self-knowledge is finally and fully instantiated in techniques of verbalization that are first deployed in the service of ascetic self-renunciation and then, with the advent of the human sciences, are given over to a mode of self-representation that is the necessary accompaniment to what Angela Mitropoulos calls “the proliferation and democratization of sovereignty.” The undercommon articulation I want to study, the symposium I want to join, marks the material dispersal of the knowledge and care of flesh, in the flesh, not in the self’s or the king’s divided body, in and against the terror and privation that attend the long career of self-concern’s self-displacement. When drowned speech becomes fire music, embalming burned flesh with a runaway sermon’s fragrant sound, an alternative is announced.

By way of the din of generative multiplicity, which sounds like a quartet’s rhizomatic excess of itself, or like what kids’ anarchic sounding does to speech, or like the evolutionary step of loved, invaluable flesh’s instantiating interplay of artifice and intelligence, its blessedness inseparable from its woundedness, both new, interminable in beatitude, in poverty’s radical theoretical attitude: M. NourbeSe Philip’s Zong (and more generally the black history that is the sea, as Derek Walcott didn’t quite say), documents of descent and dissent, experiments in ascension and consent, as an emergence anticipatorily after the fact of the ongoing imposition of a submarine state of emergency that the dispersed sovereign (the executive whose sentences are constrained to administer the brutalities of broken felicity, fractured enjoyment), having commenced merchant, is serially enjoined to declare. What they know of their injury is given in what they know of their blessing.

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There's an uneasy interplay of silence and chatter that hom Baudrillard's massively illuminating book, ensemble and idiosyncratic archive, Spectres of the Atlantic, replays. There, the Zong's exhausted, inspiring cargo--250 or 253 persons (omission of the number always changes as if marking an inherent inscrutability)--thrown into the sea whose trace was buried in the hold of the official language and documents of the governmental and financial entities that authored their disappearance--enacts its emergent and meta-emergence again. Thinking, but also living, between silence and chatter persists on other registers, in all languages: not only the silencing of things, the silence of an unheard case, of a modified appeal consigned to lower frequencies, of disruptive wave and terminally colliding particle where no one can observe; and not only that other effect that constantly nascent and dying capitalisms and colonialisms produce, the soundless chatter of administration, regulation and what Baudrillard calls "phenomenal busy-ness", but also the silence and chatter of song, which thinkers have been known to microgenesis as an unbearable lightness, but also the talk, the life of language on "the spectrum," where I am an initiate under the protection of my son. He moves between silence and chatter, where the set pieces that adults usually reserve for the forced participation of kids break down in the face of a constant contact improvisation that you have to be ready for, as Al Green or Danielle Goldman would say. The brilliant surprise of the silly sobs (so, do, it, h, ... sung to the rhythm and melody of the old tune) or the belated chervening of a dinosaur (the protestation, his bones discovered in illicit breakfast reading) must be heard to be believed. But those improvisations (How old are you? Are you ready for Santa Claus? Are you strong? Show me your muscles! Do you like school?) aren't the only scripts, all of which aren't so easily done without. Every return of I love you as a treasure when every incalculable gift was occasioned by an unimaginable loss and when the gift is often harder to accept, or would be, if it weren't for what you had already been given by poems, which Charles Bernstein, thinking about Robin Blamey, calls "the flowers of associated thinking." Lorenzo gives me a fresh bouquet everyday as I learn to stop mourning for something I never had.

One of the hard parts of caring for a child with a "Spectrum Disorder" is the problem of where they should go to school. And if you're lucky about school to the point of not believing in it even though you love it so much you never want to leave it, if you're so committed to the conservation of the strange and beautiful that your mistrust of the normal is redoubled to a level of intensity that can actually keep up with your desire for your child to have a normal life, then the general necessity of the alternative (school), which may have been a principle you've been trying to live by, now becomes concrete and absolutely. It requires you to go back to first grade, at least every Tuesday morning, in order to play and get dirty and paint and make bird baths and talk about princesses. Lorenzo and I facilitate communication with the other kids for one another out in the woods, where all those flowers gone. On Tuesday afternoon I go to school with the big kids, whose interest in those flowers often goes against the grain of their schooling, where critical and creative attendance upon both silence and chatter is poured upon in the interest of a whole other kind of preparation. In the afternoon we try to read Zong. This means we get together to decide how to get together to decide how to read it. A collective enterprise is implicated here—I don't think anybody can do it by themselves. Philip's memorial bouquet—faded, fading, mummified, submerged, dissolved, decomposed, evanescent, is an effect of a range of superimpositions exposed as beauty, the amplification of an associationist field that evokes the mutual aid that it also requires.

At circle time on Thursday, Lorenzo declared that when he makes smores for Julian (who I wasn't aware that he'd ever done, because I think he's never done it) he makes them with bricks, sticks and snow. He has become an amateur king of confectionery. When everybody stopped laughing all the other jokes started flying around. Have you ever seen a Bethany eat another Bethany? Have you ever seen a Christopher eat a dishwasher? The circle broke into a whole bunch of ferry, delectable shapes driven further out by chocolate milk. Orchard Hill School became the river of rivers in North Carolina (centrifugal curriculum, vigor, local abstraction). Then it was time for me to go to real school and time for them to go to the sheds. I wish my class were at the normal school. That's what I'm trying for. But I have been lecturing my ass off, driven by the Holy Ghost that Philip is giving away. The only way I'm gonna be able to shut up is to go to Chicago. But I hadn't gone yet last week so my poor students had to bear with me, sitting around the table, while I repeated myself again, hoping that it was in a different way and hoping that the difference mattered. Then I said, in desperation, that the thing about this class is that I just want to be in a band, preferably this band, pointing to the speaker, listening to that first modification of the one's that Bahn's Baraka to use atom bomb and switchblade in the same phrase, Miles and them in "no. In Stockholm, with Wynton instead of Red, Jimmy instead of Philly Joe. There's a sped-up deepening of "All Blues" that was only gonna get faster and more loudest over the next handful of years as the universal machines kept blowing things up. From there we went back to "The Bessie Song," a Gil Evans installment, arranged horns clashing measure into the room with the
moving walls. Abram said, "Well, he’s just so cool that he can play his way out of any situation."

In a long set of unmade circles, the conditions and effects of miscommunication are brutal and glorious. They keep going till you stop—to revel in something that breaks you up; to rebel in dread of reverse and whatever brings it because if there were nothing it would be impossible and easier. I’m trying to talk about zones of miscommunication + areas of disaster + their affective ground and atmosphere and terrible beauty. They’re the same but really close to one another but unbridgeably far from one another, connected by some inside stories we keep running from, the way people flee a broken park when the island is a shipwreck. The crumbled refuge is a hold and a language lab. Half the school falls away from the other half that escapes. Help in the form of a madman’s persistent gunship. The settler’s exceptional and invasive mobile fortress. Aggressive, hovering neglect of the instructor. He says the constant variety of distraction makes collaborating impossible and the other story’s been buried again, concrete taken for water. The serially disrupted plan should have been disrupted but the disruption is serial—the same, enlarged catastrophe whose sociomusical, sociopoetic anticipation will peek through every once in a while, as suppressed reports of suppression. Somebody has to imagine that, and how we keep dying for the shit we live for. The slave trade’s death toll takes another shock today and still we cannot quite engage, always a little turned away and elsewhere, a little alone. At 1:15 we have to see if we want to figure out a way to work through this, which is to say in this. To move in, which is to say through, the obscenity of poetry, of what it is to think about one little boy but removed, upstairs, in the luxurious monastery. The question of how we can read this poem is redoubled now. Now, how can we read this poem? This, too, is what Zong! is about, having claimed the catastrophe. And also: how can we turn the whole world into rubble for what was already held in the catastrophe.

Poetry is rhythm breaking something to say that broke rhythm, an afterlife installation where knowledge takes the form of pauses, a soundscape made of risen questions, a machine made out of what happened when we were together in the open in secret. It miscommunicates catastrophe with unseemly festivity, in an obscenity of objection; it knows not seems, it doesn’t know like that, its Jullianic showings go past meaning, in social encryption, presuming the form of life whose submergence it represents. But it doesn’t represent. It more and less than represents. There’s a rough, unskilled transaction that moves against repair to make a scar. The new thing is a scar. It’s hard to look at something when you can’t look away. In Scenes of Subjec-

1 communism is how you get nasty with enjoyment. good morning is the new catastrophe of our boulevard. so you gave up what you never had and now you’re a collection agency. you need a lawyer. at a loss, I say, good morning, he says, good morning. how are you? good. how are you? good. we feel obscenely good about ourselves.13

Catastrophe is the absence of the realistic account. Unflinching realism cannot account for such exhaustion. Attempts at such accounting are brazen in their hubris unless whatever such account moves up and down an incalculable scale. The assignment of a specific value to the incalculable is a kind of terror. At the same time, the incalculable is the very instantiation of value. The incalculable is what I think I mean by innovation. You could think about it in relation to Arendt’s understanding of natality, but only by way of a suspension of Arendt’s brutal exclusions. This is Hartman’s encryption. The logic of reparation is vulgar. It’s inseparable from representation understood as the thing, which is presumed to have a hole in it, made whole. To make whole, as if one could ever find that completion, as if such completion weren’t an absolute brutality, as if the whole were static, as if it were the original, as if it were ever anything other than more and less than itself, as if the simple logic of the synecdoche could ever have been adequate to the mobile assemblage (the Benjaminian constellation where what has been comes together with the now), is an act of violence. It’s a heuristic device for attorneys and their literary critical clerks, who have no sense of time. Meanwhile, Jetzein is the supplement like Selassie is the chapel.

The commitment to repair is how a refusal to represent terror redoubles the logic of representation. The refusal of our ongoing afterlife can only ever replicate a worn-out grammar. The event remains, in the depths. The
event-remains are deep and we stand before them, to express them, as their expression. These bits are a mystery, a new machine for the incalculable, which is next, having defied its starting place. I almost remember this in a dream, where we were just talking, and nothing happened, and then it was over, until just now, with your hands, and light on the breeze’s edge. I just can’t help feeling that this is what we’re supposed to do—to conserve what we are and what we can do by expansion, whose prompt, more often than not, shows up as loss (which shows up, more often than not, as a prompt). More shows up more often than nought if you can stand it.

There’s a mutual transformation that occurs when the thing is engaged, a mutual supplement that serrates fantastmatic scenes of repair, that is always manifest as getting through or past or behind it to its essence or its message. What if the messages were displaced by the ongoing production of code, which is our social life and what our social life is meant to conserve? What if what we talked about under the rubric of silence were discussed under the rubric of space? Or, in a different register, air? Or water? What is it like to be in the world with some other thing? What does it mean to consider that the relation between the reader, the poem, and history is spatial, a special relation, a north Atlantic entreaty, a plea, an exhortation in the form of a world embrace in resistance to enclosure? To speak the space-time of articulation as futurity, as projection? There’s a mutual transportation that occurs when the poem is engaged, a mutual indirection that turns the way back round, this beckoning descent onto the gallery floor or fire or flo or banquet or bouquet.

The logic of reparation is grounded on notions of originary wholeness, on the one hand, and abstract/general equivalence, on the other. Baucom thinks this in relation to credit and imagination but I wonder if it’s not really bound up with a strange kind of empiricism. What’s the relation between the logic of reparation and the logic of representation? And what does that relation have to do with telling the truth, or the story, or the whole truth, or the whole story, with truth telling as a way of making whole? The normative arc of becoming (a subject, a citizen) is part of this logic. What if there were a radical politics of innovation whose condition of possibility is memory, which remains untranslated, whose resistance, in turn, makes innovation possible? Not to resuscitate! No resurrection. Make it new, like they used to say, so that indexicality is an effect, a technique, so that the recording is part of an experimental impulse. The archive is an assemblage. The assemblage is an image of disaster. But I just want you to enjoy yourself and I want you to believe that. This is an enthusiasm. This is the new thing and a lot of what it’s about is just trying to figure out how to say something. How to read. Not (or not only) how to offer a reading, or even an interpretation, but a performance of a text, in the face of its unintelligibility, as if one were forced/privileged to access some other world where representation and unrepresentability were beside the point, so that the response to the terrors and chances of history were not about calculation, not bound to replicate; even in a blunted and ethically responsible way, the horrors of speculation, where new materiabilities of imagination were already on the other side of the logic of equivalence.

Fragmentation is also about more, an initiation of the work’s interior social life, a rendering of that interiority by the outside that materializes it. The logic of the supplement is instantiated with every blurb, every gliss, every melismatic torque, every twist of the drone, every turn of held syllable. I want to attend to the necessary polyphony. I don’t want to represent anything and I don’t want to repair anything but I do want to be here more, in another way. I think, in the end, Zong! works this way but even if it doesn’t work this way I want it to work this way. I want to work it this way, in coded memory, as the history of no repair, as the ongoing event of more and less than representing. Zong! is about what hasn’t happened yet. It is a bridge, which is to say a witness, to the ecstatic and general before. It moves in the irreducible, multiply lined relation between document and speculation, where the laws of time and history; of physics and biochemistry, are suspended, remade, in transsubstantiation. The ones who have been rendered speechless are given to, and by a speaker, in code, whose message, finally, is that there is speech, that there will have been speech, that radical enunciation (announcement, prophecy, preface, introduction) is being offered in its irreducible animateriality. No mercantile citizenship, no transcendental subject, no neurotypical self matters as much as this: the refusal of administration by those who are destined for a life of being thrown, thrown out, thrown over, overlooked for their enthusiasms, which they keep having to learn to look for and honor in having been thrown, which keep coming to them, which they keep coming upon, always up ahead, again and again from way back, as out recording, submerged encoding, faded script that can’t be faded, joining the sound of the ones who have (been) sounded, under an absolute duress of water, flesh that keeps speaking to us here and now, in contratechnical, counterstrophic, macrophonic amplification of the incalculable.

When we immerse ourselves in Zong!, throw ourselves into its terrible analytic of flesh, its beautiful analytic of being-thrown, we are the touring machine, dedicated to the thinking of the incalculable, suspended in the break of computation, held on the other side in always being sent, saturated in what Édouard Glissant calls our “consent not to be a single being,” still in movement,
in the quartet’s enthusiastic madness, out of which Trane’s glissando emerges to introduce us, once again, to our multiplicity. Which reminds me of a little girl named Mykah, noted for her refusal of administration, her resistance to calculation, her trend to get in over her head. She keeps caring, carefully, not taking care of herself with others all the time, is so exorbitantly common that she keeps busy worrying about her executive and her administrator, who seem too often to go on tour. One day, standing in front of a hollow place in a tree almost big enough for them to enter, Mykah said to my boy: “Come on, Lorenzo, let’s take a walk into the future.”

In “Will Sovereignty Ever Be Deconstructed?,” Catherine Malabou notes that political philosophy is still organized by or erected around the problem of sovereignty. But what if the theory of politics understands and properly calculates its object? What if political philosophy is and can be nothing other than the theory of sovereignty? Malabou’s concern with the fate of sovereignty stems from her sense of the incompleteness of what she calls its “biopolitical deconstruction,” wherein the citizen emerges as something on the order of a general equivalent (an abstract and empty signer that Malabou aligns with symbolic life). With sovereignty’s diffusion, the citizen, given in restricted, state-sanctioned protocols of dissemination and delivery, (re)constituted in a right to life that emerges with the regulation of life, takes insubstantial fade as its proper form. Malabou traces the movement of such appearance from natural history to biology, noting its correspondence with the transition from political subject to living subject that might be said to have been initiated in biology’s catalogic disenchantment, when the collection of natural facts is accompanied by a deficit of purposiveness that Kant believes to be predicated on the absence of a teleological principle. Kant moves to cut the reduction of bios to fact, instrument, immanence—to regulate its fecundity and rupture its finitude—by inventing such a principle and when he engages in such conceptual production it might be said that he is already involved in something like the deconstruction of biopolitical deconstruction, thereby allowing what Malabou now desires—a kind of mutual touch of bios and ta politika—that the biopolitical turns out to interdict and that, in any case, the political is meant to avoid with more or less deadly antisocial revulsion. Kant’s anticipation of Malabou is interesting given the particular tools he invents and deploys in the name of that deconstruction. The philosophical conception of race that Robert Bernasconi attributes to Kant would contain and rationalize the differential, (de)generative force, the finitude and fecundity, of bios, which now, in the wake of Kant’s invention, is inseparable from blackness, which has been pressed into the double duty of signifying life and death in the light and echo of their morbid interanimation. The history of this invention, which we still act out and inhabit, gives pause as we consider Malabou’s appeal to the epigenetic and the phenotypical, even if all I can do now is mention in passing an ongoing attempt to think that relation by way of phenomenology’s ambivalent appeal to genesis, which is given in and as materiality, thingliness, flesh. What’s at stake is that resistance to instrumentalization is driven by a kind of panic in the face of generativity and destruction, of an irregular play of life and death that might be something like what Malabou has been elaborating under the rubric of “plasticity” and might be said to correspond to something Kant spurns and craves under the rubric of “the imagination in its lawless freedom.” The transcendental subject, the sovereign, dispersed in and as the new citizen with a right to life, returns in the interest of a certain security, in and as a certain (faculty of the) understanding, in a way that might allow us ultimately to recognize what I think it is that animates Malabou’s essay, the notion that there is nothing other than biological resistance to biopower. She allows and requires us to ask, what if the bios is nothing other than mutual instrumentalization and, even, indebtedness within a massive field of means without end? Then, “biological determination” is a conceptual mistake. What we would speak of, instead, constantly and paradoxically, is the necessary and indeterminacy that the biological performs within the general structure of the interplay of fecundity and finitude; we would attune ourselves to an already given disruptive augmentation of bios, articulated in and as its deconstruction, its animation and solicitation by an abolitionist drive; we would engage in the ineliminable invention of an aleatory principle, improvising through the opposition of immanence and transcendence, addressing ourselves to the angel of dust with the material variability, the anapercussive breach, of N who sits (walks, leaps) in, here, for, and as the incalculable.¹⁴

Malabou’s work requires and allows us again to consider the relationship between sovereignty and law. If it’s possible to detach law from the state, as Robert Cover suggests, then it might also be possible to detach law from the sovereign, each in the interest of inviting new worlds.¹⁵
Malabou differs from those philosophers who see the biological as a field of instrumentality that must be regulated. They fear the play of life and death, which is characterized as the "state of nature," that Hobbes famously anthropomorphizes as "the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, [when] they are in that condition which is called war; and such a war as is of every man against every man," delimiting life as "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." What's just as crucial as the articulation of an assumed need for common power to keep men in awe is the rhetorical maneuver that submits biological anarchy to statist terminology, a kind of transcendental clue that allows one to consider that nature is nothing other than resistance to the sovereignty that it brings online, whether the common power that keeps bios in awe is the proper, exclusive, regulatory husbandry of an invading army or the moral law within. Insofar as Kant appeals to natural history he tries to deconstruct biopolitical deconstruction, insofar as he remains committed to sovereignty in the dispersed, democratized form of the free and self-regulated world citizen, he remains committed to a biopolitical deconstruction that insofar as it works, finally, to protect the political from the biological, engages in sovereignty's serial reconfiguration. The idea of a natural (or universal) history, which would organize the prolific, destructive informality of the biological, given as the continual giving and taking rather than the absence of form, reifies and reclaims the dispersed sovereign. Malabou puts it this way and as a general formulation: "It is then striking to notice that the critique or deconstruction of sovereignty is structured as the very entity it tends to critique or deconstruct. By distinguishing two lives and two bodies, contemporary philosophers reassert the theory of sovereignty, that is, the split between the symbolic and the biological."247

How is symbolic life delineated? By way of Foucault and also by way of Eric Santner's updating of Ernst Kantorowicz, Malabou implies that the distinction between the symbolic and the biological (given first in the king's two bodies and then dispersed throughout the citizenry) corresponds to the distinction between the body and (divested, devalued [insofar as it has been assigned and reduced to an exchange value], supposedly deanimated) flesh. She accesses Agamben's assertion that the bare-life of divested flesh is somehow incorporated into every body, as a kind of essence, that dwells in the biological body. Mere flesh is within, as well as outside, the symbolic economy. Necessarily degraded essence, flesh is within, at the core of, the body, as its reduction to the deadliness of merely living. Flesh is unaccommodated, which implies the impossibility of something like an analytic of flesh that might pierce the distinction between the biological and the symbolic, between two bodies and two modes of life, by thinking the flesh as invaluables, as the continual disruption of the very idea of (symbolic) value, which moves by way of the reduction of substance. This is to say that the reduction to substance (body to flesh) is inseparable from the reduction of substance. Saussure speaks, for instance, of the reduction of phonetic substance as a fundamental maneuver for the formation of a universal science of language; Derrida and Lacan endorse this reduction in their different ways; Guattari, on the other hand, asserts that this materiality is irreducible, and Malabou refines and extends that assertion, challenging the ascription of nonvalue to the one whose value is only in the arbitrariness of exchange or signification. I want to link the rematerializing energy of Malabou's notion of plasticity to the actuality of an analytic of the fugitive's, the noncitizen's, flesh that is predicated not on the flesh's nonvalue but on its being invaluables. That analytic is given to us twice in 1987, in the work of Toni Morrison and Hortense Spillers. In Morrison's Beloved, is Baby Sugg's fugitive sermon to the fugitives who embody the disruption of the distinction between things and persons, her injunction to them to love the flesh that they are, the flesh that is unloved and unvalued, a reinvestment, or does it preach the impossibility of flesh's divestment, which then further implies something like a radical displacement of the symbolic and its supposed force? Now we touch on a certain problematic of resurrection and transubstantiation that comes into quite specific analytic relief in experience of, which is always also to say over, the edge where being valued in exchange and having no value outside exchange converges. In the age of the biopolitical deconstruction of sovereignty, such experience is racialized and gendered. Perhaps Malabou's resounding of Derrida's insight that "the dignity of life can only subsist beyond the present living being" comes fully into its own by way of the analytic of invaluables flesh that is given in the exhaustive "consent not to be a single being" that Édouard Glissant locates in the emergence from the brutal im/possibilities of the middle passage. This is something that Spillers more fully elaborates in her distinction "between body and flesh"... between captive and liberated subject-positions. In that sense, before the 'body' there is the 'flesh,' that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment, under the brush of discourse, or the reflexes of iconography.... If we
think of the 'flesh' as a primary narrative, then we mean its seared, divided, ripped-apartness, riveted to the ship's hole, fallen, or 'escaped' overboard... This materialized scene of unprotected female flesh—of female flesh 'ungendered'—offers a praxis and a theory, a text for living and for dying, and a method for reading both through their diverse mediations.19 Bare life is (degraded) essence, sacred and sacrificial. But flesh and bare life are not the same. If, as Malabou suggests, "the space which separates bare life from the biological body can only be the space of the symbolic," then flesh is the biological, in its finitude and fecundity, that is before the body. The biological is the essence of the symbolic (its impetus, its initiation) just as flesh is the essence of the body. Essence is, here, as Malabou suggests, neither and both inside and outside. It has no place, it is inseparable as it is displacement. Flesh is the irreducible materiality of difference, "the non-full, non-simple structured and differentiating origin of differences."20 This is what is given in and as Baby Suggs's festival of things.

Perhaps Malabou would say, by way of Lévi-Strauss that the flesh, as Spillers theorizes it, is a floating signifier, possessing a "value zero," a symbolic value; that it is the very engine of the symbolic, the very instantiation of valuation. And Spillers would agree except for the fact that it also constitutes the most radical endangerment of the system of value, of the symbolic, of the discursive. What happens, then, if the traditional placement of flesh within the king's two bodies is displaced by the flesh-in-displacement that initiates what Spillers calls her "American grammar"? What if we follow Spillers in claiming the monstruity of "mere" flesh? This is another way of thinking about Malabou's assertion of the brain's plasticity. If Malabou wants to put an end to the split between the two bodies, it is by lingering in/with the flesh, the merely biological, for a while. She lingers with the analytic that it makes possible, as if there were something already there, in the persistence of its difference from rather than in its reintegration with the discursive body, in and as the very exhaustion and exhaustibility of the flesh. There is something in the flesh, in its disintegration from and of the body, its personality, and its place. There is something to be thought from the flesh's givenness in displacement, the violence it does to positionality that instantiates positional violence. Sovereignty may very well be located or instantiated in the split between the two bodies, but this still requires us to consider that sovereignty, which can never be separated from the (symbolic) body, is detachable from the (biological) flesh, which would justify some interest in the fleshliness, the thingliness, of the noncitizen. Flesh renders the difference and distance between the king's two bodies inoperative and inarticulate. The merger and dispersion of those bodies is biopolitics. In this sense, the merger of bios and to politikos is inseparable from and is manifest as the political rejection of the biological, which is given in the regulative conferral of the right to life. This is why, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has suggested, the first right must be the right to refuse, not to have, rights, even if it is exercised as the refusal of what has been refused, which is in the end the monstrous emergence that occurs where right, power, life, and death converge.

Malabou wants something like a rehabilitation of the biological that will have been accomplished by way of a liberation of "continental philosophy from the rigid separation it has always maintained between the biological, hence the material, and the symbolic, that is, the nonmaterial or the transcendental." And it is at this point that the brain appears as reinvested, symbolical, transcendental, plastic flesh. But in this regard, isn't the deconstruction of biopolitical deconstruction still a sovereign operation? Isn't the brain, in a way that flesh precisely exhausts, where the sovereign now resides? Will it be anything other than the occasion for the plastification of sovereignty, with all the attendant hierarchization left intact? Maybe the trouble we have with the king's head, its indelatable resistance to all our would-be deceptively W community, is that it has a brain in it. Maybe we can oppose the transcendental brain with the flesh's dislocative immanence. Malabou says, "We are the authors of our own brains." But who are "we"? How can "we" resist a tendency to isolate the brain from the rest of "our" (phenotypical/genotypical) flesh so that authorship doesn't reify an old administrative or executive function that is nothing other than a new version of sovereignty? How can we prevent the body's inspired materiality (the brain) leaving the flesh behind? Or a plastification of sovereignty, which is also a placement of sovereignty, a reconfiguration or opening of sovereignty's place, leaving behind what flesh-in-displacement allows us to think, a new analytic of sociality, a new analytic of thingliness-in-festivity?

Consider the music that Baby Suggs evokes—its disruption of the opposition of score and performance, writing and reading; consider its disruption of the executive function. Recall the intricacy of nature and history in the philosophical invention of race, in the philosophical deployment of the phenotypical difference that, in the century after Kant introduces it, very quickly gets enacted through a certain racial
and gender discourse of the brain. The history of the racialized, gendered philosophical interplay of phenotype and genotype, nature and culture (history), is a familiar horror. It’s not enough to say that we can separate this from a given racial and gender discourse; it’s the fact that racial and gender discourses emerge from it. I invoke Spillers and Morrison because the theory of flesh preserves what Foucault once called “the thought of the outside.” It’s not just the historical fact of biological determinism’s exclusions with which we still have to contend; it’s that there is no organization that I can imagine wanting to be a part of that wouldn’t be open to the outside’s propelling, transformative, antiseverance force. Isn’t the work of sovereignty given precisely in an essentially prophylactic protocol, where self-transformation and self-organization are now mobilized in the work of self-protection? Is there a danger of the brain becoming a kind of epigenetic wall? If there is, such a danger—given in the potential solipsism that autonomy and autoopsies might be said to carry—is revealed to us by Malabou’s analysis, which brings us to the point of being able to express a desire for the informal, which is to say that which informs, that which gives and takes form. The informal will have also been given or will have been seen to have been instantiated in every undercommon ruptural social generativity that goes over the edge. Over the edge of the ship. Overboard. Thrown. Fallen. Inescapable. The touring machine is a diving bell, an instrument for sounding that becomes, at the end of exhaustion, ascent, accent, a certain songlike, singsong quality, a singing kind of quality, a fugitive singing thing, an instrument whose forced movement in thinking the unregulated, the un-self-possessed, its rubbed, performed, informal interiority, is flesh thought inside out.

NOTES


9. See Kazanjian, Colonizing Trick, 27. Kazanjian writes, “In the strictest sense the term refers to the process of igniting a liquid, of turning a liquid into flame. Here, I interpret such a process less as a breaking out of chaos than as a material transformation with powerful effects. Flashpoint’ in this sense refers to the process by which someone or something emerges or bursts into action or being, not out of nothing but transformed from one form to another; and, it refers to the powerful effects of that emergence or transformation.” In its concern with the conjunction of form and explosiveness, Kazanjian takes a theoretical path that can be said to parallel that of Catharine Malabou, about whom more later.

10. I’m thinking a very specific interpenetration, which is, I think, only disguised as an impenetrability. The first permutation/permeation emerges in part of an epigraph for Greenberg, Devil Has Slippery Shoes: xv. “Course CDFM’s good,” said a large lady from Lauderdale County. “C’cept the things about it that’s bad. There’s a lotta good folks come here to help us. Course, there’s a lot just come to cause a fuss too. And the federal government’s finally recognized us down here—course sometimes that ain’t so good, ‘cause for every smile it gives us, it gives us a kick too. Well, at least it’s got us colored peoples workin’ for oursell’s. C’cept the ones that won’t. One thing, though, it’s great for the kids. On’ thing, it’s kinda hard on ’em when they get to real school and it ain’t like our school. God’s helpin’ us, ain’t no doubt. It’s just that the Devil keeps sippin’ in and outa things so’s we won’t get spolit. He really keeps you guessin’! Each thing, you gotta study it to see if it’s God ‘in the disguise of difficulty, or the Devil in the disguise of somebody good. This whole thing really keep us workin’ our mind.” The second comes into relief in Chomsky, “What We Know”: “A significant insight of the first cognitive revolution was that properties of the world that are informally called mental may involve unbounded capacities of a finite organ, the ‘infinite use of finite means,’ in Wilhelm von Humboldt’s phrase. In a similar vein, Hume had recognized that our moral judgments are unbounded in scope, and must be founded on general principles that are part of our nature though they are beyond our ‘original instincts.’ That observation poses Huarte’s problem in a different domain, where we might find part of the thin thread that links the search for cognitive and moral universals. By mid-18th century, it had become possible to face such problems in more substantive ways than before. By then, there was a clear understanding, from the study of recursive functions, of finite generative systems with unbounded scope—which could be readily adapted to the reframing and investigation of some of the traditional questions that had necessarily been left obscure—though only some, it is important to stress. Humboldt referred to the infinite use of language, quite a different matter from the unbounded scope of the finite means that characterize language, where a finite set of elements yields a potentially infinite array of discrete expressions:
discrete, because there are six-word sentences and seven-word sentences, but no 6.2-word sentences; infinite because there is no longest sentence (append "I think that" to the start of any sentence). Another influential factor in the renewal of the cognitive revolution was the work of ethologists, then just coming to be more widely known, with their concern for 'the innate working hypotheses present in subhuman organisms' (Nikolaas Tinbergen) and the 'human a priori' (Konrad Lorenz), which should have much the same character. That framework too could be adapted to the study of human cognitive organs (for example, the language faculty) and their genetically determined nature, which constructs experience and guides the general path of development, as in other aspects of growth of organisms, including the human visual, circulatory, and digestive systems, among others."

14. See Mackey, Broken Bottle.
17. Malabou, ch. 1, 39.
21. Malabou, ch. 1, 43.
22. See Foucault, "Maurice Blanchot," in Foucault and Blanchot, Maurice Blanchot, 54.

CHAPTER 13

Interview with Catherine Malabou

QUESTION 1

BRENNIA SHANDAR AND JONATHAN GOLDBERG-HILLER: What is the role of the philosopher today? In chapter 3, you argue that the philosopher must deconstruct biopolitical deconstruction in an effort to expose and uncover its ideological character. In several of your writings, you have framed a major contribution to this ideological distortion as a neoliberal capitalist one. One implication seems to be that the task of philosophy will end with the critique of capitalism and a renewed appreciation of the unruliness of the biological species-being. Yet Marx, to whom you often allude, also examined the historical sedimentation of capitalist appropriation that limited the choices confronting those who resisted capitalist relations, and he famously argued that the task of philosophy has ended. Why has it been necessary to keep philosophy alive after Marx? In what ways should we understand the philosophical relationship of biological unruliness, in which your own materialism is invested, to historical constraint that preoccupied Marx's ideas of materialism?

In a related vein, Alberto Toscano's paper suggests that there may be some loss in posing questions of metaphysics and capitalism to Heidegger (as you do in The Heidegger Change) but not also to Hegel (we note that capitalism is never referenced in The Future of Hegel). Is there a particular reason today why a Marxist critique of materialism, which in Marx's day was directed towards much of the Hegelian philosophical enterprise, should not add to our understanding of plasticity and biological materialism?

CATHERINE MALABOU: My relationship with Marx is not unconditional. I do not think that the Marxist critique can be, by its own strength,