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## Arbitrage on Life, *Differánce* of the Flesh: Racialization and Colonial Gender Formation as Algorithmic Innovation

### Keywords

life, derivatives, racialization, colonial gender formation, femicide, currency issuance

### Abstract

Who/what can be had at an ontological discount? By grasping the “anitrelationality” and “dismediation” of social relations by capital’s system of accounts, we discern not only the epistemicide and the expropriation of the cognitive-linguistic by capital, we shed new light on racial abstraction and gender abstraction. We grasp in “the coloniality of race and gender” the logistics of abstraction that at once code the social factory and give rise to what I have called the derivative condition—a condition in which the multiple forms of being, when dissolved in and as executable information, are functionalized as contingent claims on the value-form by means of “the world computer.” When we say that semiotic processes are metapragmatically put under economic and informatic pressure, we are also saying that the datafication expresses more than a simple analogy to the commodity form by assigning numbers to qualities. Rather, datafication appears as the preeminent mechanism for the commodification of sociality, and thus also encodes access to social currency. Femicide and the ritual violence of parastate cartels of “gore capitalism” can be seen as alternative means of issuing derivative (soft) currencies by imposing extrajudicial if equally violent systems of account.

95

## Arbitraža o življenju, *differánce* mesa: rasizacija in kolonialno oblikovanje spola kot algoritmična inovacija

### Ključne besede

življenje, derivati, rasizacija, kolonialno oblikovanje spola, femicid, izdajanje valut

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### Povzetek

Koga/kaj je mogoče dobiti z ontološkim popustom? Z razumevanjem »anirelacionalnosti« in »dismediacije« družbenih odnosov, ki jo izpeljuje sistem bilanc, ki ga določa kapital, ne razberemo le epistemicida in razlastitve kognitivno-jezikovnega, ki prihaja od kapitala, temveč tudi na novo osvetlimo rasno abstrakcijo in abstrakcijo spola. S »kolonialnostjo rase in spola« lahko pojasnimo logistiko abstrakcije, ki hkrati kodira družbeno tovarno in povzroča to, kar sem imenoval derivativno stanje – stanje, v katerem raznovrstne oblike bivanja, kadar so kakor izvršljive informacije in raztopljive vanje, s pomočjo »svetovnega računalnika« postanejo funkcionalne kot kontingentne zahteve do vrednostne oblike. Ko pravimo, da so semiotični procesi metapragmatično postavljeni pod ekonomski in informacijski pritisk, pravimo tudi, da datafikacija izraža več kot zgolj analogijo z blagovno formo s tem, da kvalitetam pripisuje številke. Nasprotno, datafikacija se kaže kot poglavitni mehanizem za komodifikacijo družbenosti in tako kodira tudi dostop do družbene valute. Femicid in ritualno nasilje paradržavnih kartelov »gore kapitalizma« lahko torej razumemo kot zgolj drugačno obliko izdajanja izpeljanih finančnih instrumentov v (mehkih) valutah, a z uvedbo nelegalnih, čeprav enako nasilnih sistemov računanja.



In a brilliant essay entitled “Racial Capitalism,” Jodi Melamed argues that

we need a more apposite language and a better way to think about capital as a system of expropriating violence on collective life itself. To this end, one way to strengthen racial capitalism as an activist hermeneutic is to use it to name and analyze the production of social separateness—the disjoining or deactivating of relations between human beings (and humans and nature)—needed for capitalist expropriation to work. Ruth Wilson Gilmore suggests a similar understanding of racial capitalism as a technology of *antirelationality* (a technology for reducing collective life to the relations that sustain neoliberal democratic capitalism) in her seminal definition of racism.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jodi Melamed, “Racial Capitalism,” *Critical Ethnic Studies* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 78, <https://doi.org/10.5749/jcritethnstud.1.1.0076>. See also Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

The generalized production of antirelationality, or what Allen Feldman calls “dismediation” in *Archives of the Insensible*<sup>2</sup> entails, in political terms, the severing of horizontal connections among various social agents. This severance effects what I have elsewhere called read-write ontologies.<sup>3</sup> Marxism has understood this severance of individuals from their historical milieus as the dissolution of traditional societies and the subsequent separation; these ideas are detailed, for example, in the work of Georg Lukács as reification<sup>4</sup> or Guy Debord as spectacle.<sup>5</sup> Decolonial scholarship sees antirelationality as epistemicide.<sup>6</sup> The dissolution of prior ontologies, *their cultures and material cultures*, was not just a stage of primitive accumulation, but in many cases, genocide.

In semiotic terms, as Paul Kockelman details in “A Semiotic Ontology of the Commodity,” the dismediation organized by racial capital can be expressed as the delimiting of a “conditional relationality” generally operative in an open semiotic field of signifying practices by a “collateral relationality”<sup>7</sup> in which the value-form overdetermines the semiotic process and thus *the semiotic processing* of sociality. Melamed writes:

Although at first glance, dense interconnections seem antithetical to amputated social relations, it is capitalism’s particular feat to accomplish differentiation as dense networks and nodes of social separateness. Processes of differentiation and dominant comparative logics create “certainties” of discreteness, distinctness, and discontinuity—of discrete identities, distinct territorializations and sovereignties, and discontinuities between the political and the economic, the inter-

<sup>2</sup> Allen Feldman, *Archives of the Insensible: Of War, Photopolitics, and Dead Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Beller, *The World Computer: Derivative Conditions of Racial Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1972).

<sup>5</sup> Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Black and Red (Maitland: Bread and Circuses, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> See Aníbal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America,” *International Sociology* 15, no. 2 (June 2000): 215–32, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580900015002005>; Walter D. Mignolo, “Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of De-coloniality,” *Cultural studies* 21, no. 2–3 (2007): 449–514, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162647>.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Kockelman, “A Semiotic Ontology of the Commodity,” *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 16, no. 1 (June 2006): 89, <https://doi.org/10.1525/jlin.2006.16.1.076>.

nal and the external, and the valued and the devalued. In the drawing of the line that constitutes discrete entities and distinguishes between the valued and the devalued, people and situations are made incommensurable to one another as a disavowed condition of possibility for world-systems of profit and governance.<sup>8</sup>

Melamed's point about people being made incommensurable to one another identifies a peer to peer *dismediation*. People in our midst, across the tracks, across the border or at the podium, become incomprehensible in certain dimensions—and therefore *narratively* (and perhaps horizontally) incommensurable—incommensurable to one another in their/our social differences and in the violence of rupture that is at once entailed and disavowed in the creation of these differentiations. This epistemic incommensurability inherent in racism, sexism and the repression endemic to oppression, is effected not only through the violent reorganization of perception, apperception, institution, ideology, and infrastructure on the horizontal plane we might refer to as “the ground,” but through the concerted and disciplining curation of emergent forms of embodiment and, of course, labor. Nonetheless, and despite their re-encoding as anti-relational (or indeed by virtue of it), bodies *retain* their commensurability and are *rendered* commensurable in another system of account, that of capital and its capacities for horizontal organization through vertical integration. These myriad bodies, however, are assigned values and thus accounted for in the ratios determined by racial capitalist semiotics—its denomination of life, significance, meaning and worth in money as wages, value, price, but also as opportunity, power, claim on reality, risk, precarity, etc., all of which have their economic metrics.

By transforming relationality, racial capital “impose[s] a forgetting of interconnections, of viable relations, and of performances of collectivity that might nurture greater social wholeness, but are deactivated for capital accumulation and state management.”<sup>9</sup> Socially, conditional relationality becomes collateral relationality; the broadband pluripotentiality of meaningful interchange faces the *metapragmatic dissolution* of various forms of sociality to become *the condition of relations of liquidity preserving collateralization*. Who/what can be composed as an asset and by what means? Who/what can be had at a discount? By grasping the contrast between alternate ontological accounts of social relations and

98

<sup>8</sup> Melamed, “Racial Capitalism,” 78–79.

<sup>9</sup> Melamed, 79.

the proletarianization of narrative and relational capacity by capital's system of accounts, we begin to discern not only the expropriation of the cognitive-linguistic by capital and the productive role of creatively navigating its forms of false consciousness. We also grasp the logistics of abstraction that at once code the social factory and give rise to what I have called the derivative condition—a condition in which the multiple forms of being, when dissolved in and as executable information, are functionalized as contingent claims on the value-form. To take just one example: your social graph indexes your credit-worthiness and thus what you will pay for money.

Skipping ahead analytically, the commodity-formation of living, where the logistics of price recursively reinscribes the emergent conditions of living across a multitude of social differences, leads to a double articulation of everyday life. This emergence is recursive and dialectical. At one and the same time we dream in the semantic life world and simultaneously in the capitalist one. We dream in “natural language” and the imaginaries of our communities, but also in and through a system of accounts that we will here identify as capitalist datafication and its calculus of costs, benefits and risk. For the moment, we will leave images out of the discussion and analytically collapse the essential functions of visual culture into the categories of perception and apperception. When we say that semiotic processes are metapragmatically put under economic and informatic pressure, we are also saying that datafication, as we increasingly know it under the regime of ubiquitous computing, which presumably indexes life informatically, expresses more than a simple analogy to the commodity form by assigning numbers to qualities. Rather, datafication is a mechanism that has become the preeminent mechanism of commodification.

Famously, the commodity has a use value comprised of its physical qualities and an exchange value in which there is “not an atom of matter.”<sup>10</sup> The exchange value is manifest in the “hieroglyph” that is the commodity, and, in Marxist thought is indexed in the field of exchange to “abstract universal labor time”—the *quantity* of “socially necessary labor time” inherent in each commodity. The price thus indicates the exchange rate of one commodity for another, by a comparison of the quantity of necessary labor inherent, on average in each commodity type. How-

<sup>10</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume One*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1976), 138.

ever, 1) this comparison, if not made directly with the money commodity, is mediated by money, and 2) the “socially necessary labor time,” indexed by a quantity of money, is an abstraction that generalizes labor time (“abstract universal labor time”) from all the particulars of labor. This analysis of “socially necessary labor time” inherent in the commodity is the result of a background calculus that comes about in practice by averaging the costs of fungible options through the socio-metabolic exchange of commodities—and as Frederick A. Hayek brought out in his analysis of the “telecommunications”<sup>11</sup> of money (albeit without any reference to the specific importance of labor) creates a form of distributed but actionable knowledge regarding price and value derived from what people do in market transactions. More directly, the market produces knowledge from what happens when people spend their money, and it does so by collapsing a tremendous amount of information into the informatics of price.

A key socio-technical result of all these market exchanges is abbreviated and functionalized as a “real abstraction” by the specific commodity that becomes the general medium of exchange, namely, the money commodity.<sup>12</sup> Money is abstraction in practice. Once a particular commodity achieves this status, be it shells, gold, or fiat money, it is capable of notional and real pricing in its function as “the money-commodity” in “the motley mosaic” of the relative values available for exchange. The value of all commodities can now be organized by means of comparison with the single standard, money. Money then indicates the ratios of abstract universal labor time between one commodity and others as price ratios denominated in the commodity serving as money. The money commodity, or simply money, we must remember, is that particular commodity (also procured through labor) which rises to the status of general equivalent. In simple circulation we exchange one concretized form of socially necessary labor time for another, money for commodity, commodity for money.

100

Anticipating further discussion of what becomes for us the key term “informatic labor,” we add here that what is being quantified in the exchange valuation of the commodity is the value of abstract labor time necessary to change the state

<sup>11</sup> Frederick A. Hayek, “The Use of Knowledge in Society,” in *Knowledge Management and Organizational Design*, ed. Paul S. Myers (Boston: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1996), 7–15.

<sup>12</sup> Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology*, trans. Martin Sohn-Rethel (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2020).

of the matter in question from that of its inputs plus the value of these inputs. State changes, whether in everyday matter, cognitive conditions, or data sets platformed on discrete state machines, become cyphers of value. The values of commodities are discerned, abstracted, and thus measured in terms of material state changes indexed to labor time.<sup>13</sup> How much labor is required to produce a particular change of state in a particular form of matter? Though as Marx wrote, “there is not an ounce of matter in exchange value,” exchange value is a social assessment of the abstract universal labor time necessary to create the material state changes that are legible. The price, then, is a partial decryption of the hieroglyphics of the commodity, a processing of the manner in which matter has been informed, a calculation about the general cost of accessing such a materialized state from a particular place and time, it is a read of a commodity’s *in-form-ation*.<sup>14</sup>

We thus also observe from this exploration of the ontological transformation of the status of objects by money, that a Commodity C is composed of Raw Materials R plus Labor time L.  $C = R + L$ . However, the raw materials in a current phase of production were very likely themselves purchased as commodities composed of labor and raw materials—as with lumber purchased to build a table, or a motherboard to build a computer. Thus, “raw materials” can be seen as implying regressions ( $R' = R + L$ ) to some prior state, which in the last analysis would be a pre-infrastructure and precapitalist state whose historical origin has all but disappeared and whose costs have been layered into current commodity production and amortized as a series of cycles of capital and, at the extreme, epochs of capitalism. “Nature” is thus the limit case to capital’s representational horizon, and as such beyond its purview.

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<sup>13</sup> We note for future consideration that just as Moishe Postone has shown that the expansion of capitalism and the generalization of the commodity form (and its prices) results in the abstraction and we should say occupation and indeed colonization of time, so too will the regime of informatic labor and computation, generate its temporal effects—new forms of non-synchronicity, local run times, repetition, non-linear times, and even silos of time. See Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx’s Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>14</sup> We further note here that this read is always from sometime, somewhere, and is therefore in flux, which is to say volatile, which is to say derivative. A strike price on a volatility spread of prices moving around a value, is not the value itself, it is a contingent claim on that underlier.

Nonetheless, capital builds itself upon precapitalist and precolonial materialities that not only persist but inform its substrate. Atoms and electron bonds pre-exist the modern period, of course, but their changes of state as value can be indexed to the history of racial capitalist colonization. The history of capitalism is thus presupposed and collapsed in the sale of each and every commodity when paid for “in full,” wherein all prior costs have been amortized, that is to say accounted for so far as capital’s ledgers are concerned, going all the way back to deep time. The costs borne during a history of production but not paid for (in wages or reparations) have been externalized as suffering and the proceeds from this violent externalization reaped as profit. Capital, as Robert Meister puts it, compounds injustice.<sup>15</sup>

What those costs were, how they were configured, and who paid (bodily, socially, ecologically, epistemologically) is a topic we cannot avoid and must continuously bear in mind. This disavowed history is all the more important because the value of the past injustices of racial capitalism is compounded by the fact that capital uses the proceeds to finance further cycles of injustice down to the present and into the future.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the legibility of commodities in the calculus of value is inseparable from the (il)legibility of people and peoples in the same calculus. In the wake of colonialism and of chattel slavery—social and institutional techniques of value extraction whose value to capital has been compounded in the present arrangements—it becomes imperative to view the history of capital as a ceaseless arbitrage on the cost of labor at the expense of life. The cheapening of labor is a cheapening of life for the benefit of capital and that of the owners of capital. From the standpoint of capital, the cheapening of life is also a peculiar type of innovation.

102

Capitalism is an exercise in efficient management (“optimization”) that includes not simply technical development but the driving down of the cost of labor per unit commodity: one definition of efficiency means less labor to create or accomplish the same thing. Driving down the cost of labor to combat the falling rate of profit is thus also a ceaseless driving down of the existential status of people, below a particular socially negotiated average in a society—negotiated,

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<sup>15</sup> Robert Meister, “Justice as an Option,” in *Justice Is an Option: A Democratic Theory of Finance for the Twenty-First Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 109–36.

<sup>16</sup> Meister.



it should be said through custom yes, but also resistance, refusal and doing otherwise. Decreasing the cost of labor per unit commodity is accomplished in part by placing differentiable others partially or completely outside “society”—on the margins, on the periphery, across the border, in the ghetto, the shtetl, the reservation, the camp, the colony, the domestic space, the whorehouse, or the prison; in “female” bodies, “brown” bodies, “native” bodies, “disabled” bodies, “alien” bodies. The socially negotiated price of labor depends on the socially negotiated price of laborers subject to social differentiation. The equation of decreasing labor costs per unit commodity that comes with increases in the technological efficiency of capital is balanced not by every member of society having access to proportionally more wealth in the form of more commodities as their just share of the social product. Rather, the falling rate of profit that drives efficiency actually decreases the share of social wealth accessible to wage workers relative to that accessible to capital. Those whose wages are discounted access an even smaller proportion of the social product as they are induced to give a larger proportion of their working day to capital for the same subsistence wage, thereby producing wealth for capital and poverty for themselves. This arbitrage on the cost of labor is an arbitrage on life.

Capital offsets the falling rate of profit by taking an increasingly large portion of the working day as surplus labor (and thus paying for a smaller portion of the working day). This is standard issue Marxism. The falling rate of profit as an unavoidable, i.e., mathematical, consequence of the fundamental law of capital expansion demands constant innovation. Innovation can take many forms, but as noted above, all are aimed at lowering the cost of labor per unit commodity and thus engage in market arbitrage: building the same thing for less while being able to sell it at the same price, or in abstract terms, harvesting value at a lower cost to capital due to lag times in the generalization of (the technical knowledge of) innovations. This driving down of the cost of labor, necessitated by the falling rate of profit, along with the struggle among the many capitalists for higher rates of surplus value relative to the general rate of return on capital, required and requires a method of discounting the cost of labor which, without the romantic trappings, simply means increases in “efficiency.” Efficiency here consists not only in making things “smarter” (cheaper) with “labor-saving” devices, but also in forcibly discounting people, their communities, their material worlds, their lands, biospheres and histories, their ontologies and lives. For capital, smarter here means discounted costs, by any means. While some of this

passing on the costs of production to workers and ecosystems has been referred to as the creation of “externalities,” we want to note here the monetary, informatic and narrative-semantic implications of “discounting.” We further note that the expansion of capital, whether as technical innovation or as the discounting of people’s claims on the social product and thus on reality, means precisely colonization and imperialism (this observation is, or should be, uncontroversial given the history of capital expansion), and thus, as we will explore further, means also racism, sexism, and war. Racial capitalism is a planetary endeavor, and racism, sexism, and warfare are fundamental tools of innovation, of revolutionizing the productive forces. Racial capitalism, or what I sometimes call *computational racial capitalism*, endeavors to organize all aspects of the known and knowable world in accord with the requisites of the value-form.

In what follows, we focus on the central roles of social differentiation and/as computing, *a computing without which racial capitalism can no longer exist*. But what is to be eliminated? Where to begin?

### **An Expanded Consideration of “Algorithms of Oppression” (Nobel)**

We can glimpse the scale, focus, and scope of the world-historical endeavor that culminates in converting the digits of the invisible hand to those of the AI of a virtual machine that I have hypostasized as “the world computer,”<sup>17</sup> by turning to the work of Aníbal Quijano. Quijano’s work stands alongside Cedric Robinson’s *Black Marxism*,<sup>18</sup> and in this context can be seen to supplement Robinson’s deduction of the concept “racial capitalism” that inspires the work of Melamed and so many others. It helps here to take up the challenge posed by Melamed to sharpen our understanding of the forms of violence against collective and racialized life that are constitutive of racial capitalism. For Quijano, “the idea of race” that lays the groundwork for both the colonial and post-colonial eras, is an “idea” emerging from historical and material innovation. Reflecting on the historical moment of its writing, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Social Classification” opens as follows:

<sup>17</sup> Beller, *World Computer*.

<sup>18</sup> Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

What is termed globalization is the culmination of a process that began with the constitution of America and colonial/modern Eurocentered capitalism as new global powers. One of the fundamental axes of this model of power is the social classification of the world's population around the idea of race, a mental construction that expresses the basic experience of colonial domination and pervades the more important dimensions of global power, including its specific rationality: Eurocentrism. The racial axis has a colonial origin and character, but it has proven to be more durable and stable than the colonialism in whose matrix it was established.<sup>19</sup>

For Quijano, “Eurocentrism,” “the idea of race,” and elaborate, discriminatory social classification are part of colonialism, and more than that, these innovations outlast the historical phase generally understood as colonialism. This “new model of power,” which would indeed outlast the planetary cancer of the so-called colonial world, embarked on “the codification of the differences between conquerors and conquered in the idea of ‘race,’ a supposedly different biological structure that placed some in a natural situation of inferiority to the others.”<sup>20</sup> Quijano says, “On this basis, the population of America, and later the world, was classified within the new model of power.”<sup>21</sup> The accompanying process “involved the constitution of a new structure of control of labor and its resources and products.”<sup>22</sup>

In laying out the form and terms of this new structure for the control of labor and its resources and products, Quijano writes:

Social relations founded on the category of race produced new historical social identities in the Americas—Indians, blacks, and mestizos—and redefined others. Terms such as *Spanish* and *Portuguese* and, much later, *European*, which had until then indicated only geographic origin or country of origin, acquired from then on a racial connotation in reference to the new identities. Insofar as the social re-

<sup>19</sup> Aníbal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Social Classification,” trans. Michael Ennis, in *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, ed. Marel Moraña, Enrique D. Dussel, and Carlos A. Jáuregui (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 181.

<sup>20</sup> Quijano, 182.

<sup>21</sup> Quijano, 182.

<sup>22</sup> Quijano, 182.

lations that were being configured were relations of domination, such identities were considered constitutive of the hierarchies, place and corresponding social roles, and consequently of the model of colonial domination that was being imposed. In other words, race and racial identity were established as instruments of basic social classification.<sup>23</sup>

It should be remembered that the role of these classifications was the control of labor, and thus also, the organization of capital. It was, in short, an innovation, a revolutionizing of the productive forces, a violence that had ideological and practical dimensions for the colonizers. Quijano tells us that “as time went by, the colonizers codified the phenotypic trait of the colonized as color, and they assumed it as the emblematic characteristic of racial category.”<sup>24</sup> “In this way, race became the fundamental criterion for the distribution of world population into ranks, places and roles in the new society’s structure of power.”<sup>25</sup> Thus there emerges “a systemic racial division of labor.”<sup>26</sup>

This “racial division of labor” is intensified by the organizational power of money and its withholding. Or rather we could say that monetary organization and racial differentiation co-evolved. With the emergence of a racial (racializing and racialized) division of labor we also find “a quasi-exclusive association of whiteness with wages, and of course, with the high-order positions in the colonial administration. Thus each form of labor control was associated with a particular race.”<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, “Europeans associated nonpaid or nonwaged labor with the dominated races because they were ‘inferior’ races. The vast genocide of the Indians in the first decades of colonization was not caused principally by the violence of the conquest or by the plagues the conquistadors brought, but because so many American Indians were used as disposable manual labor and forced to work until death.”<sup>28</sup>

Money, it seems, confers not only agency but also recognition for certain forms of embodiment at the expense of others. American Indians were imagined by

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<sup>23</sup> Quijano, 182.

<sup>24</sup> Quijano, 182.

<sup>25</sup> Quijano, 183.

<sup>26</sup> Quijano, 184.

<sup>27</sup> Quijano, 185.

<sup>28</sup> Quijano, 186.

their colonizers as only the means to value and never as recipients of value, and as Tzvetan Todorov<sup>29</sup> argues, the genocide in the Americas was not an atavistic holdover from the Dark Ages, but the first thoroughly modern historical occurrence: a genocide in which the abstraction power of the value form thoroughly and instrumentally organized apperception by removing the “Indian” from the colonizer’s capacity for mutual recognition. It is as if money not only secures Whiteness but confers it. With this “whiteness as value,”<sup>30</sup> we might confirm Frantz Fanon’s observation that at first the colonized man only wants to kill his colonizer, live in his house and sleep with his wife.<sup>31</sup> There is a burgeoning model of agency that is simultaneously linked to wealth and race; the semantic fields and imaginaries that these weave through practice are themselves colonial. We cannot emphasize enough that money and its calculus created a kind of presence in the social accounting that is to be associated with not only rights and existence, but also with “the human community” and “humanity.” The power of money to confer humanity (and Whiteness, by the very denial of it to others) became more generalized by means of racial abstraction, and the violence inherent in making these abstractions “real.” From this we can (also) infer that in this worldview, which, Quijano persuasively argues, was becoming generalized, and thus “universal,” humanity” has been de facto, i.e., by historical material definition, “White.” And Whiteness, no less cooked up than this so-called humanity, perceived itself to be, as it were, at once a sign of it and one with it. Those from whom humanity (and wages) were withheld were *made* unworthy—violently so—while this self-same violence was used to produce Whiteness in its beneficent humanity, megalomania and narcissism in a Eurocentered world-view. Money, then, conferred belonging and was, in fact, a form of social know-how and socio-semiotics—a medium of practical knowledge that, on the one hand, conferred social currency that included access to social product, recognition, and belonging, and, on the other made its holder a contractual party to unspeakable violence—the unspeakable, irredeemable, and disavowed vio-

<sup>29</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, trans. Richard Howard (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999).

<sup>30</sup> Neferti X. M. Tadiar, “In the Face of Whiteness as Value: Fall-Outs of Metropolitan Humanness,” *Qui Parle* 13, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2003): 143–82, <https://doi.org/10.1215/quiparle.13.2.143>.

<sup>31</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008).

lence constituent of “the human community,” about which we could correctly remark that there is, in fact, no such thing and that there never has been.

Today, hopefully, we already know versions of this demoralizing story from Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Sylvia Wynter, Enrique Dussel, and many others.<sup>32</sup> I have little to add, except perhaps a perspective on what has become of all this. Racialization in all its brutality, is also a form of calculus and now computing, a means to the assignation of number and value to life. This quantification is of course, affective, experiential, contestable, contested. Lived abstraction.

Quijano remarks that along with such material violence dedicated to the advance of what would become the economics and culture of Humanism, the colonizers also waged epistemic war as they

repressed as much as possible the colonized forms of knowledge production, models of the production of meaning, symbolic universe, and models of expression and of objectification and subjectivity. As is well known, repression in this field was most violent, profound, and long-lasting among the Indians of Ibero-America, who were condemned to be an illiterate peasant subculture stripped of their objectified intellectual legacy. Something equivalent happened in Africa. Doubtless, the repression was much less intense in Asia, where an important part of the history of the intellectual written legacy has been preserved. And it was precisely such epistemic suppression that gave origin to the category “Orient.” [ . . . ] In different ways in each case, the Europeans forced the colonized to learn the dominant culture in any way that would be useful to the reproduction of domination, whether in the field of technology and material activity or of subjectivity, especially Judeo-Christian religiosity. All of those turbulent processes involved a long period of the colonization of cognitive perspectives, modes of producing and

<sup>32</sup> Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: New York University Press, 2001); Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*; Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument,” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 257–337, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ncr.2004.0015>; Enrique Dussel, “Eurocentrism and Modernity (Introduction to the Frankfurt Lectures),” *Boundary 2* 20, no. 3 (Autumn 1993): 65–76, <https://doi.org/10.2307/303341>.

giving meaning, the results of material existence, the imaginary, the universe of intersubjective relations with the world: in short, colonization of the culture.<sup>33</sup>

We should note at this point that the coloniality of power means epistemicide. The simultaneous emergence of Eurocentered capitalism with racial classification entails not only acts of violence that were unprecedented in their intensity and scale, but also acts of violence aimed at controlling labor. They therefore sought their institutionalization through the colonization of culture and, as mentioned at the outset, the conscription of the socio-semiotic as well as practical capacities of Indigenous and then enslaved populations. Thus, we see a radical divergence between the system of accounts that organizes racial capitalism, and the many systems accountable in and to the various ontologies, cosmologies, structures of feeling and ways of life antecedent to and yet persistent in forms of temporality and fugitive survival contemporary with racial capitalism. With *Orientalism*, Edward Said reveals the violence of this wealth appropriation/making as one with the violence of culture appropriation/making in Europe, both in the form of the “West” and of its constitutive fetish, the “Orient,” and so much of what emerges between.<sup>34</sup> Accordingly, Mark Driscoll identifies “white superpredation” as a modality designed by Whites to put the Chinese “entirely at their disposal” in both a financial and ecological “CO<sub>2</sub>loniality.”<sup>35</sup> It would certainly be a major analytical and political error to understand these racial orders, which are also forms of geopolitical, cultural and ecological coordination, simply as the sovereign imposition of an imperial monologue or monoculture that held sway as if without struggle. Nonetheless, we may observe that the struggle to impose classification on the planet is a thoroughgoing affair occupying a superabundance of energy. The social practices entailed in the installation of an episteme, are also forms of economic practice and ecology that will come to be called biopolitics and later necropolitics.

109

Quijano notes the systemic coordination endemic to this model of power required its institutionalization as well as “the control of intersubjectivity.”<sup>36</sup> We begin to see that Kockelman’s account of the displacement of “conditional rela-

<sup>33</sup> Quijano, “Coloniality of Power,” 189.

<sup>34</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Concepts of the Orient* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

<sup>35</sup> Mark W. Driscoll, *The Whites Are Enemies of Heaven: Climate Caucasianism and Asian Ecological Protection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020).

<sup>36</sup> Quijano, “Coloniality of Power,” 193.

tionality” by “collateral relationality” in semiosis, mentioned above as an overdetermination of semiotic function by the exigencies of capital-logic (derived by Kockelman from neo-liberal NGO-colonialism in an ecological tourism site in Guatemala), is a world historical project of unprecedented violence. At minimum, it registers the existential threat of insolvency under a capitalist money economy on meaning and world-making. But we also should register that collateral relationality, understood as a feature of racial capitalism gives rise to what Hortense Spillers has called and called out as “an American grammar.”<sup>37</sup> This grammar depends on and is founded in the reduction of enslaved Africans to “flesh” during the middle passage, and on the violent epistemic destruction that accompanied the physical and psychic terror of plantation slavery along with the national and racist disavowal of this history. Referring to the coloniality of race, Quijano shows, that “this model of global power [which includes the epistemic and semiotic functions under discussion here] is the first that covers the entire population of the planet” and that “humanity in its totality constitutes today the first historically known global *world-system*, not only a world.”<sup>38</sup>

## The Program

Regarding this “first historically known global *world-system*,” which we endeavor to show here has morphed into the operating system of a virtual machine, we must also say, if race, then gender and sexuality. In “Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System,” María Lugones, in critical dialogue with and against Quijano among others, offers “a framework to begin thinking about heterosexism as a key part of how gender fuses with race in the operations of colonial power.”<sup>39</sup> Lugones further specifies, “Colonialism did not impose precolonial, European gender arrangements on the colonized. It imposed a *new gender system* that created very different arrangements for colonized males and females than for white bourgeois colonizers.”<sup>40</sup> Taking Quijano’s understanding of gen-

110

<sup>37</sup> Hortense J. Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 65–81, <https://doi.org/10.2307/464747>.

<sup>38</sup> Quijano, “Coloniality of Power,” 193.

<sup>39</sup> María Lugones, “Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System,” in “Writing Against Heterosexism,” ed. Joan Callahan, Bonnie Mann, and Sara Ruddick, special issue, *Hypatia* 22, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 186, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2007.tb01156.x>.

<sup>40</sup> Lugones, 186; italics added.



der as “too narrow and overly biologized,”<sup>41</sup> Lugones argues that, “the heterosexualist patriarchy has been an ahistorical framework of analysis” and seeks “an understanding of gender that sees it as a colonial concept.”<sup>42</sup> She asks:

How do we understand heterosexuality not merely as normative but as consistently perverse when violently exercised across the colonial modern gender system so as to construct a worldwide system of power? How do we come to understand the very meaning of heterosexualism as tied to a persistently violent domination that marks the flesh multiply by accessing the bodies of the unfree in differential patterns devised to constitute them as the tortured materiality of power?<sup>43</sup>

The question concerning “the tortured materiality of power” is made more complex along axes of imposed differentiation because Lugones also pursues

the indifference that men, but more important to our struggles, men who have been racialized as inferior, exhibit to the systematic violences inflicted upon women of color. [. . .] Feminists of color have made clear what is revealed in terms of violent domination and exploitation once the epistemological perspective focuses on the intersection of these categories. But that has not seemed sufficient to arouse in those men who have themselves been targets of violent domination and exploitation any recognition of their complicity or collaboration with the violent domination of women of color. In particular, theorizing global domination continues to proceed as if no betrayals or collaboration of this sort need to be acknowledged and resisted.<sup>44</sup>

Lugones puts this forcefully, not just as in intervention in the critical moment in which she writes (namely 2007), but as a provocation to rethink the historiography and theory of postcolonial accounts of colonization, where complicity and betrayal of “women of color” have offered payoffs to those who would be men. Lugones wants to make visible “the instrumentality of the colonial/modern gender system” and “to reject this gender system as we perform a transformation of communal relations.”<sup>45</sup> For it is precisely the dismediation and indeed shat-

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<sup>41</sup> Lugones, 193.

<sup>42</sup> Lugones, 187.

<sup>43</sup> Lugones, 187–88.

<sup>44</sup> Lugones, 188.

<sup>45</sup> Lugones, 189.

tering of community that colonization accomplishes by imposing its particular framework of race and gender.

Lugones' argument, like Quijano's, is too complex and nuanced to do it full justice here. For the purposes of this essay however, it is important to note that she cites the argument in *The Invention of Women* by Oyéronké Oyewùmí that "gender was not an organizing principle in Yoruba society prior to colonization by the West."<sup>46</sup> Quoting further we find:

For females, colonization was a twofold process of racial inferiorization and gender subordination. The creation of "women" as a category was one of the very first accomplishments of the colonial state. It is not surprising, therefore, that it was unthinkable for the colonial government to recognize female leaders among the peoples they colonized.<sup>47</sup>

Lugones adds that Oyewùmí "notes that the introduction of Western gender system was accepted by Yoruba males, who thus colluded with the inferiorization of ana[tomical]females."<sup>48</sup>

In detailing what in effect were and are the wages of masculinity, Lugones also considers the work of Paula Gunn Allen, who "characterizes many Native American tribes as gynocratic" and "emphasizes the centrality of the spiritual in all aspects of Indian life and thus a very different intersubjectivity from within which knowledge is produced than that of the coloniality of knowledge in modernity."<sup>49</sup> According to Lugones, Allen sees the destruction of gynocracies as

crucial to the "decimation of populations through starvation, disease, and disruption of all social, spiritual, and economic structures." The program of degynocratization requires impressive "image and information control." Thus "recasting archaic tribal versions of tribal history, customs, institutions and the oral tradition increases the likelihood that the patriarchal revisionist versions of tribal life,

112

<sup>46</sup> Oyéronké Oyewùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 31, quoted in Lugones, "Heterosexualism," 196.

<sup>47</sup> Oyewùmí, *Invention of Women*, 124, quoted in Lugones, "Heterosexualism," 197.

<sup>48</sup> Lugones, "Heterosexualism," 197.

<sup>49</sup> Lugones, 198.

skewed or simply made up by patriarchal non-Indians and patriarchalized Indians, will be incorporated into the spiritual and popular traditions of the tribes.<sup>50</sup>

Thus we see that “*information control*” is a kind of encoding that is also a form of *programming*, and that codification not only containerizes its referent as something like an underlier, but by indexing it constitutes, addresses and indeed instructs agents who will interpret the codes that signify on her/it. I dwell here on Quijano and Lugones at such length because together their work provides an opportunity to observe the coloniality of power working through and as the imposition of a framework of race and gender. This framework invests power and divests particular people(s) of power in accord with the requisites of codes of capital expansion. This claim is not offered to exhaust the affective dimensions of either the hatred and fear with which colonialism proceeds, or to foreclose knowledge of the suffering and resistance that colonization and its aftermath produces. John Keene’s *Counternarratives* and Saidiya Hartman’s “Venus in Two Acts” come to mind as exemplary openings onto the presence and abiding struggle of those subject to the of the epistemic colonizing and racializing foreclosure endemic to racial capitalism.<sup>51</sup>

Even if we are inclined to doubt the totalizing accounts rendered here in the powerful work of Quijano and Lugones, which I must confess, I am, my drift here is that we attend to the organizing principles and recognize that they project an idealization of global capitalist power: an idealization that I want to bring out as the ideal *program* of racial capitalism and its calculus.

Lugones’ follow-up to “Heterosexism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System,” the essay “Toward a Decolonial Feminism,” states:

I understand the dichotomous hierarchy between the human and the non-human as the central dichotomy of colonial modernity. Beginning with the colonization of the Americas and the Caribbean, a hierarchical dichotomous distinction between human and nonhuman was imposed on the colonized in the ser-

<sup>50</sup> Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 42, quoted in Lugones, “Heterosexualism,” 199.

<sup>51</sup> See John Keene, *Counternarratives* (New York: New Directions, 2016); Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 12, no. 2 (June 2008): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.1215/-12-2-1>.

vice of Western man. It was accompanied by other dichotomous hierarchical distinctions, among them that between men and women. This distinction became a mark of the human and a mark of civilization. Only the civilized are men or women. Indigenous peoples of the Americas and enslaved Africans were classified as not human in species—as animals, uncontrollably sexual and wild. [. . .] The behaviors of the colonized and their personalities/souls were judged as bestial and thus non-gendered, promiscuous, grotesquely sexual and sinful. [. . .] The civilizing transformation justified the colonization of memory and thus of people's senses of self, of intersubjective relation, of their relation to the spirit world, to land, to the very fabric of their conception of reality, identity and social, ecological and cosmological organization. [. . .] In using the term *coloniality* I mean to name not just a classification of people in terms of the coloniality of power and gender, but also the process of active reduction of people, the dehumanization that fits them for the classification, the process of subjectification, the attempt to turn the colonized into less than human beings.<sup>52</sup>

This universal reduction, here violently and as it were universally imposed by the coloniality of race and gender, is the central feature of the program of racial capitalism and of its dialectical leap into computational racial capitalism. This reduction, we could say with Spillers analysis of the middle passage in mind, *to flesh*, is ideational and socio-semiotic in as much as it produces social death. But we cannot emphasize enough that such sensibility-defying reduction is executed and imposed through cascading acts of ongoing violence—violence whose avalanche brings (some of) us into the present. As Quijano noted, this is the precondition for “globalization” and—in my own critical-theoretical terms—for the emergence of the machine language and the operating system for the virtual machine that is the world computer.

114

### Agency/Subjectivization/Currency

The principle of incentivizing the reduction of others, narratively, ideologically, materially and corporally to be sure, but eventually to the statistical and probabilistic forms with which we are increasingly familiar and disconcertingly com-

<sup>52</sup> María Lugones, “Toward a Decolonial Feminism,” in “Feminist Legacies/Feminist Futures: The 25th Anniversary Issue,” ed. Lori Gruen and Alison Wylie, special issue, *Hypatia* 25, no. 4 (Fall 2010): 743–45, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2010.01137.x>.

fortable becomes a general paradigm in the operating system of computational racial capitalism. Increasingly, the categories pertinent to financial management are all categories. This relentless application of racial capitalist classification, heuristics and statistics presupposes and further enables the reduction of being and of beings to number, to information. The world-system that emerges as the coloniality of power percolates into and granularly re-codes the various worlds, their ontologies, cosmologies, social relations, practices, and more, and in doing so, in rendering everything and everyone computable, it saturates semiotic processes with blood. The blood of racial capital, that accompanies its classifications along with their explicit and implicit systems of accounts and discounts, is to say the blood of those who are in one way and another denied humanity in the production of so-called humanity. The blood of the enslaved, the colonized, the raped, the desecrated, the encamped, ravaged and annihilated is exacted at the bottom of the stack. This encoding is (or would be) imposed universally, pushing the claims of “prior” and/or pluriversal ontological beliefs and practices, as far as possible to the margins and/or into the enclosures. It is as if computational racial capital’s anthem, hummed in the background, were “Social Death for Y’all!” The entire epistemic framework of racial capital, which excludes or encapsulates its contradictions and sustains the expansion of the dominance of the value form is at once materialized in “civilization’s” institutions, technologies and infrastructures, and built on bloodshed—built, to be clear, with the express intention of shedding more blood. Nearly everyone yet living is existentially forced to find their place within this practical, socio-semantic, material webwork of operations, whether through subjective adaptation, reservation, incarceration, abjection, willing participation, or other psycho-somatic aspects of rationalizing a generalized demonization through and as the myriad means to further colonization.

These everyday striations of race and gender, and the statistical matrix that they give rise to in which “the laws of chance” are free to operate, constitutes, I am afraid, “our” framework of emergence, that is, the framework at least in part, of anyone who would claim rights, citizenship, or access to the social product (and thus—temporary— exemption from social death) in the terms currently offered by capitalism—by anyone, who for example, uses money. Like the plastic filled oceans, this deadly field of emergence overcoding social relations and striated by the vectoral and indeed matrixial logic of racial capital as a calculus of social difference is the water in which we swim in and the air we can breathe. Cue

those Hollywood images of the hordes dressed in rags clambering up mountains of people to get over the wall.

But the war of each against all is not only brutish. Often, it is far more sophisticated and refined. Almost civilized. Recognizing the near total saturation of the global socius by the practical and semiotic requirements of racial capitalism and its relentless value computing in through and by means of social relations helps us perhaps to better understand Sayak Valencia's powerful analysis of "gore capitalism" as a *systemic* emergence.<sup>53</sup> Gore capitalism, for Valencia, becomes a culmination of sorts of (a qualitative shift in) the colonial logic of racial capitalism, a condition of what we are here endeavoring to understand as world-computing. It is as if verisimilitude were not to be found on Fox News, but with *Westworld*.<sup>54</sup> Focusing on "the big postmodern city of Tijuana" in which "the urban landscape has been altered by houses papered with 'For Sale' signs and by people carrying guns," Valencia records what is clearly a well know local fact: that "*becoming a murderer* allows an individual to have access to and to legitimate oneself within a consumption-based existence."<sup>55</sup> What is well known in Tijuana may be no less true on the US side of the border, but the mediations, entanglements, and forms of disavowal are different. For Valencia, the "endriago subject" is the emerging subject-form responding with violence to the new and ever more brutal terms for survival in a landscape extending across Mexico, much of Latin America and the world, a landscape and a socius that has been destroyed by colonialism, depleted by imperialism, and decimated by neo-imperialism. For the endriago subject "violence is converted into a resource for the gangster to manage, produce, and sell; it has become the tool *sine qua non* to carve out a space on the capitalist ladder."<sup>56</sup> "Using extreme violence endriago subjects create a lifestyle, work, socialization, and culture."<sup>57</sup> "The subjectivities operating within and characteristic of gore capitalism are endriago subjects,

116

<sup>53</sup> Sayak Valencia, *Gore Capitalism*, trans. John Pluecker (South Pasadena, California: Semiotext(e), 2018).

<sup>54</sup> *Westworld* is an American science fiction thriller franchise that began with the 1973 film *Westworld*, written and directed by Michael Crichton, and whose latest sequel is a television series by Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy that first aired on HBO on October 2, 2016.

<sup>55</sup> Valencia, *Gore Capitalism*, 195.

<sup>56</sup> Valencia, 197.

<sup>57</sup> Valencia, 138.

who have created a kind of new international class that we have called *the criminal class*.”<sup>58</sup>

Valencia writes:

In gore capitalism, traditional weapons have been converted into ancillary tools compared to new methods, which assume an increased level of cruelty. These methods—founded in extreme ferocity and efficacy—become means to deploy, reinforce, and preserve their powers of intimidation; thus, they create a reticular and managed terror, transferred from the bodies of the injured and murdered into the bodies of those who have not yet suffered such violence. Research into the most effective and cruel methods of torture and killing leads to the introduction and implementation of a series of techniques including decapitation, dismembering, immersion into pools filled with piranhas or crocodiles, or into acid (which dissolves living victims into practically nothing). What has been fashioned is a semiotics of violence and a *signature* specific to each mafia organization.<sup>59</sup>

Valencia’s work is a smart and harrowing analysis of experiences and practices that though geographically situated beyond the borders of the global North are at once responses to the violent colonial and imperial accumulation that underwrites its constitution and, also, characteristic of the forms of hyper-masculinity reigning in the state-fascism of the superpowers themselves.<sup>60</sup> The collapse of others, their work, their lifetimes into raw material for endriago self-fashioning, produces vectors of subjective agency. This is a fractal logic as well as a fascist one. The global expansion and intensification of capital logic imposes shifts in forms of subjective agency and expression, as well as the intensification and partial recasting of gender as social differential. These mutations index a further collapse of the guarantees promised by development capitalism, albeit selective

<sup>58</sup> Valencia, 283.

<sup>59</sup> Valencia, 154.

<sup>60</sup> We note in the above a dynamic similar to what Sara Ahmed calls “affective economies,” in which the stickiness of signs is then inscribed on bodies through the particulars of their precarity and circulate in the production of affect. The fractal model of capitalist agency demands a revolutionization of productive force, which in this case entails becoming your own law, your own regime of truth, that secures your currency. The law itself becomes subservient to branding, and the cartel emerges to impose its economy and style, in short, to impose its claims on reality.

and minimal, which, systematically, it can no longer afford to deliver on or even promise.

This mutation is a kind of intensification that is also an internal collapse, that at once gives the lie to the rule of law and to the sovereignty of the state form, and deals out dire consequences for those least able or willing to become brutal. What the notable work on the US Mexico border has documented and theorized (Rosalinda Fregoso,<sup>61</sup> Melissa Wright, Lourdes Portillo and others), including practices of feminicide, disposable life, “denationalization” and the institution of a necropolitical order in which gendered violence, at times in the form of ritualized rape, torture and murder, becomes a new vernacular of masculine and governmental sovereignty, has in Valencia’s view become part of the structural mutation that Valencia christens “gore capitalism.” Alongside a system of maquiladoras in which the disposability of young women is in fact the very thing that represents their value,<sup>62</sup> “Mexican drug traffickers enact a particular style of violence that they link to a signature or a brand in underworld tradition.”<sup>63</sup> The narcos (and the police) are writing code. Valencia describes in gruesome detail, “some codes linked to the semiotics of overspecialized violence,”<sup>64</sup> and argues that “*the lacerated and violated body is itself the message.*”<sup>65</sup>

From the theft of life in the maquiladoras at five dollars a day, to the theft of life in toto by means of rapacious feminicide of the police and drug cartels alike, we see the further development and refinement of capital’s “factory code,” as a social factory code, the elaboration of the tool kit endemic to computational capital’s operating system. Lourdes Portillo’s film *Señorita Extraviada* (2001), an important if controversial work, also details the ritual cutting of the backs of young women as a kind of signifying process practiced by, in Valencia’s terms, endriago subjects. This transformed existential and semiotic field, in which “*the*

118

<sup>61</sup> Rosa Linda Fregoso, “‘We Want Them Alive!’: The Politics and Culture of Human Rights,” *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture* 12, no. 2 (March 2006): 109–38, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630600583296>.

<sup>62</sup> Melissa W. Wright, “The Dialectics of Still Life: Murder, Women, and Maquiladoras,” *Public Culture* 11, no. 3 (Fall 1999): 468, <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-11-3-453>.

<sup>63</sup> Valencia, *Gore Capitalism*, 155.

<sup>64</sup> Valencia, 162.

<sup>65</sup> Valencia, 163.



*illicit appropriation of the body of the Other has become a kind of currency*<sup>66</sup> is built by hypermasculinist self-assertions of a right to violence and the “complicit masculinities”<sup>67</sup> that directly or tacitly endorse these “rights,” and benefit from them. Such masculinities emerge out of the coloniality of race and gender described above by Quijano and Lugones, and appear as a kind of next stage, a mutation of the requisite codifications of gender, race and class for the development of racial capitalism. They assert the right to issue, that is, to mint local currency and to sign transactions on the flesh of their victims, an assertion, by means of the absolute reduction of, in this case, young women to victim, trophy, and sign that becomes part of the financial messaging percolating through the global compute. The issuance of currencies and signing of transactions is not a metaphor here, it is a feature of emergent economy. It creates binding contracts and gives endriagos and their cartels purchase on the world and on the world of commodities.

Lest anyone think these mutations are merely local phenomena, similar forms of gore capitalism and hypermasculinity are visible from Bolsonaro’s Brazil to Duterte’s Philippines and far beyond. Everyone, everywhere seems to be issuing derivative currencies, and we suddenly grasp that the Facebook “like” and cryptocurrencies themselves are endemic to a new social (dis)order in which everything has become (is revealed as) a derivative (a contingent claim on the underlier “Value”), while the right to issue has become a new form of social struggle. From prison in Sao Paulo, gang leader of the Primer Comando de la Capital (PCC, Capital’s First Commando), Marcos Comacho, also known as Marcola, notes the mutation, and tells his cowed interviewer that emerging beyond the now staid conceptions of class struggle “there is a third thing”:

**O Globo:** Aren’t you afraid of dying?

**Marcola:** You are the ones afraid of dying, not me. Better said: here in jail, you can’t come over and kill me, but I can easily have you killed outside. We are human bombs. In the slums, there are a hundred thousand human bombs. We are right in the middle of the unsolvable. You are between evil and good, and in the middle, there’s the frontier of death, the only frontier. We are already a new species, different bugs, different from you. For you, death is this Christian drama ly-

<sup>66</sup> Valencia, 159; italics added.

<sup>67</sup> Valencia, 270.

ing in a bed, with a heart attack. Death for us is daily bread, thrown over a mass grave. Weren't you intellectuals talking about class struggle? About being a martyr? A hero? And then, we arrived! Ha, ha . . . I read a lot; I've read 3,000 books, and I read Dante, but my soldiers are strange anomalies of the twisted development of this country. No more *proletariat*, or unhappy people, or oppressed. There is a third thing growing out there, raised in the mud, educated through sheer illiteracy, getting their own diplomas on the street, like a monstrous Alien hidden under the crevasses of the city. A new language has already sprung. That's it. A different language. You're standing right before post-poverty. Post-poverty generates a new murderous culture, helped by technology, satellites, cellular phones, internet, modern weaponry. It's all that shit with chips, megabytes.<sup>68</sup>

The violence of the codes of value, the “new language,” bound up in and bound to value capture, iterating recursively through the cycles of world history, have done their work in the imposition and mutation of the lived abstractions of racial capitalism. The struggle for liquidity again revolutionizes the rules of the infernal game. The metapragmatic imperative to stave off insolvency, leave your old ontology, and enter “the false community of the commodity” has organized planetary space-time under the reign of an epistemology and a cosmology built on violence. One result is the hyper-masculinity of an emerging, indeed insurgent criminal class that rises to fill but also reformat “that desire called fascism.” In the Philippines, the extrajudicial killings of supposed drug addicts becomes a kind of necropolitical signifying by the Duterte regime—bound corpses with heads wrapped in tape with clown faces drawn on them in Sharpie by the very cops who killed them have become a kind of vernacular—a vernacular, which is again to say a kind of currency—one that backed by violence, compounds violence, pays dividends, creates new businesses and income streams. The negotiation of racial capital's encodings of the semio-social milieu, where differentiable others become means to income streams, has created situations akin to Batesonian schizophrenia.<sup>69</sup> If the terms of the imperatives (their metapragmatics) cannot themselves be overturned, capital's schizoid overcode produces innovation for capitalism overturning its existing rules by means of the very activities (and desperation) generated by its contradictory scripts. That too

120

<sup>68</sup> Marcos Camacho, “There is a Third Thing,” interview by O Globo, trans. Pepe Rojo, *Hostis* 1, July 22, 2017, <https://incivility.org/2017/07/22/there-is-a-third-thing/>.

<sup>69</sup> Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

is innovation. These vernacular of violence in necropolitical orders are merely intensifications of the everyday language of empire—a virtuosic reappropriation of its expressivity by those whom the current law does not quite serve. These new vernaculars of power, written on the flesh to create both victims and kin, are currencies of the flesh, economic media that propose innovations in the procuring of deliverables by reducing their cost of production.

**O Globo:** But, couldn't there be a solution?

**Marcola:** You will only get somewhere if you stop defending “normalcy.” There won't be any more normalcy. You need to auto criticize your own incompetence. But, to be quite frank, your morality. We are at the center of the unsolvable. The difference is we live here, and you have no way out. Just shit. And we already work in it. Understand me, brother, there's no solution. And you know why? Because you can't even understand how widespread the problem is. As the divine Dante wrote: “Abandon all hope. We are all in hell.”<sup>70</sup>

“We are all in hell.” The competing and contradictory parameters of capital's imperatives to freedom and to subjugation, that is its dialectic of freedom by means of subjugation, create schizoid ruptures in the framework of morality and indeed of reality. In the current global conjuncture, the rule of law is obsolete and the reigning order is hell itself. The double standard, freedom for self, subjugation for the other, solvency for self by means of insolvency for the other, is the standard. Again, the mutation takes place not because of a shift in the character of the primitives of the code of racial capitalism (accountability through solvency), but an intensification. A change in the quantity of events organized by this dialectic leads to a change in the qualities of its expression. The codes themselves, as differentiated strategies for the pursuit for autonomy by means of the subjugation of others, as means to assemble contingent claims on the social product, come into contradiction as competing forms of social currency (social programs), different in allegiance, group or cartel, but with the same basic extractive logic. The war of each against all has become a war among the various currencies of violence. The offloading of capital's contradictions onto the people of the world driven by the imperatives to balance accounts among the hard currencies of banks and states, in short, driven to stay liquid in geopolitical terms in order to survive, means that people survive through social computing, a continuous calculus among the

<sup>70</sup> Camacho, “There is a Third Thing.”

competing soft currencies, and therefore among the competing regimes of truth and reality propositions. Social computing of this type emerges as a structural response to the globality of racial capital's computations of value. The overriding imperative in this game, the rule that trumps them all, is that this game will be fully lived: each player must fight to survive (to secure guns, protection, food, shelter). In a world in which non- and ante-capitalist forms of social belonging have been cannibalized and social guarantees have been all but eliminated, survival is purchased by maximizing one's returns in a specific currency. In gore capitalism endriago subjects have found ways to collateralize violence and their capacity for violence, and from this securitization of the flesh of others, this banking on death, they can derive recognition, agency, employment, currency and income. Social accountability to cartelized regimes of violence provides their liquidity. Arbitraging the rule of law, endriago subjects find a cheaper pathway to value. Arbitraging the state, they find a way to impose a new law, for less. They do so through an arbitrage on life, by cheapening it through its generalized devaluation. Such is innovation.

In the chapter of *Gore Capitalism* called "Transfeminism and New Masculinities," Valencia writes that because endriago subjects "are simultaneously subjects of rebellion and servitude,"<sup>71</sup> it becomes crucial in resistance movements that "the deconstruction of masculinity and the creation of a plurality of masculinities go hand in hand with gender-based perspectives and transfeminism. By transfeminism, we mean not only a social movement made up of women, but also as an epistemological category for the conception and creation of new, non-dystopian—feminine and masculine—identities."<sup>72</sup> Such a "deconstruction" along with the creation of new identities points the way to alternative currencies, the currencies of alternative modes of life and living.

122

### **(Alternative) Futures**

Invoking Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga keen awareness of the difficult road for the overturning of heteropatriarchy,<sup>73</sup> Valencia pursues a notion of mi-

<sup>71</sup> Valencia, *Gore Capitalism*, 272.

<sup>72</sup> Valencia, 273.

<sup>73</sup> Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2022). See also Cherríe

croplitics whereby in “making the violence visible, we might create a critical consciousness and resistance that could lead to active engagement and the joint creation of *responsible intersubjective agreements, endowed with agency*.”<sup>74</sup> This notion of “responsible intersubjective agreements endowed with agency” is of great importance and I will return to it. Valencia says, “The force of *corporeal politics* is founded on the fact that our bodies are repositories of all actions; they are relational and can be understood as integral and active parts of events, as vehicles and linkages of socialization.”<sup>75</sup> “If we *build politically by virtue of the vulnerability of our bodies*, then we have to recognize the vulnerability of the body as something indisputable.”<sup>76</sup>

Such an account resonates with the domain of relations surfaced by Neferti Tadiar’s dialectical notion of “vital platforms,” in which embodied social relations such as kinship form economic networks that at once sustain their participants, distribute care and responsibility, and are mobilized by capitalism.<sup>77</sup> It also resonates with Paul Preciado’s “somatopolitics” and the politics and logistics of “the pharmacopornographic era,” in which a cyborgian matrix of body, technology and spectacle navigate the desiring landscape of racial capitalism.<sup>78</sup> Recognizing the myriad strategies of corporeal capture by vectors of gore capitalization, Valencia says:

We urgently need to extricate the body from media discourses that spectralize it, so that we might depict it in all of its potency and importance. If we are able to re-ontologize the body, we will be able to re-semanticize the power of death in the gore capitalist and patriarchal framework. This re-semanticization of the body and its pain will emerge from language, critique, and performative practices that are developed in public space and through *queer multitudes*.<sup>79</sup>

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Moraga, *Loving in the War Years: Lo que nunca pasó por sus labios* (Boston: South End Press, 1983).

<sup>74</sup> Valencia, *Gore Capitalism*, 288; italics added.

<sup>75</sup> Valencia, 288.

<sup>76</sup> Valencia, 289.

<sup>77</sup> Neferti X. M. Tadiar, *Remaindered Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022).

<sup>78</sup> Paul B. Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*, trans. Bruce Benderson (New York: Feminist Press, 2013).

<sup>79</sup> Valencia, *Gore Capitalism*, 292.

It is possible and perhaps advisable to embrace this call for a re-semanticization of the bodies without resorting to an ontological projection. Such a project for the creation of new language that might recast and re-express forms of embodiment is taken up, for example, in Tatiana Huezo's film *Noche del Fuego* (*Prayers for the Stolen*, 2021). This harrowing and beautiful film depicts the daily lives of three small town girls in Mexico whose mothers must hide their burgeoning adolescence from view in order to protect them from the boys and men who are either being recruited to the police and the cartels or are already members of these organizations. Much of the film takes place in the absence of fathers who have left for *el Norte* to find work and send remittances but are not heard from again. In seeing both the consequences on family life of the state and para-state systems, and also the powerful and imaginative connections forged by the young girls in a climate of ambient fear, we may understand at a profound level something more about the ways in which capital genders the body and puts some bodies under siege. We witness: Men must decide how they will betray their families, through desertion, low wage ecologically destructive jobs in mining, or criminality. Mothers must not only supplement their income by working in the poppy fields, but must cut their 10-year-old daughter's hair against their will, and punish them for the use of makeup. They must dig holes in the ground where their children must hide when cartel vehicles drive by. School teachers leave out of fear or for refusing to pay off the cartels so that they can work, gunmen and militia roam the streets. Dead girls are found dumped in the brush.

Huezo's film also shows the intimacy and strategy that evolves among the girls as they cope. The children practice a telepathic sensitivity to one another's mental states, they sing and swim together, and the camera shows us clearly that under the threat of the foreclosure of their futurity (the constant fear of abduction, rape, torture and death) they are making themselves a new kind of body. Similar to but different from say the implants among the 2030's cadre in *The Peripheral*, they create a delicate psycho-somatic tissue among themselves, that binds their subjectivities and fates while also creating a form of comfort, mutual awareness and protection. Without resorting to a new ontology or ontological projection of corporeal essence, this remaking of body and sense resonates with Valencia's call for a "re-semanticization of the body [that] cannot be conceived of without deconstruction and criticism of hegemonic masculinity—articulated in the first

person.”<sup>80</sup> For, “when there are no other options to choose from, we must be capable of transforming the sole option not into a withdrawal or death, but rather into a condition of resignification.”<sup>81</sup>

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To conclude then, at a time when gore capitalism presents itself globally as the sole option available, we must work so that instead of killing us, it might resignify us and lead us to re-think our very selves.”<sup>82</sup> So says Valencia, and I agree. If we have taken time here in the detailing of the coloniality of race and gender, the transformation of social relations, perceptions, subjectivities, corporealities and cosmologies, it is to argue that these abstractions are operationalized as real abstractions. Race and gender as real abstractions are endemic to the operationalization of the bios by the world computer. This virtual machine platforming computational racial capital is itself platformed on the bios. It operates through the incorporation of bodily existence captured and controlled through the variegated imposition of a matrix of operationalized abstract categories. Subaltern agency may be found in the temporalities of this matrix and in what Tadiar calls “remaindered life.”<sup>83</sup> Thus, we must understand “the stack” as the various social institutionalizations and machine formalizations of a computational racial capitalism that has emerged over the course of centuries. What we call computation is not only ambient, but is itself the result of the historical sedimentation and institutionalization of inequality.

The double articulation of expression as semiotic and as information in the relentless compute of value must be challenged by altering the structure of agency in both domains, that is, in the domains of meaning and of computability. At a schematic level, this challenge entails altering modes of inscription, legibility, datafication, and relation. At a socio-political level, it entails finding ways to make the pluriversal values of liberation from the multiple oppressions capable of becoming persistent in organizational, which is to say economic, modes.

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<sup>80</sup> Valencia, 293.

<sup>81</sup> Valencia, 295.

<sup>82</sup> Valencia, 295.

<sup>83</sup> Tadiar, *Remaindered Life*.

Queer, anti-racist, decolonial sociality, and ecology, for example, must find their economy.

Though we will pause here, we do so having understood that the issuance of alternative currencies and new transaction types is becoming a central question of our time. Racial capitalism is already presiding over new forms of issuance. New currencies, likes, brands, memes, cryptos, signature forms of violence and many more address the simmering afterlives of colonial racism, sexism, nationalism, subjectivity, speciation, and sovereignty. They are socio-semiotic, psycho-libidinal, and profoundly embodied. Economic media is of the flesh.

We may sum these insights up by recognizing that the rules for financial expression are changing and indeed have changed, and to avoid the default derivative protocols of endriago subjectivity and fractal fascism (or for that matter the default violences of national monies, national banks and their state, militaries and policies), a re-imaging of value- and values-creation is at the forefront: for along with a new politics of production and distribution, in short, of world-making, comes an ecopolitics and a politics of care. The social derivatives we have considered above, those risk management strategies for a volatile world that are contingent claims on the underlier value, are perhaps not the only derivative contracts that subaltern forces can write. Can we create social currencies informed by Valencia's notion of "responsible intersubjective agreements endowed with agency?"<sup>84</sup> Can such agreements be platformed? How? The Narco-traffickers use technological prosthetics for their embodied organizing, what new types of technicity and computing might emerge from subaltern strategies? How might the oppressed denominate value(s) with expressive, qualitative, future-writing forms, creating not just new types of writing but new forms of non-hierarchical social media that is also economic media? The hand up, the caress, the shared meal, the loving glance, the whisper of the ancestor, the moment of trans-subjective becoming, also leave their marks on the body. How to transmit these markings and preserve their qualities in a non-extractive medium? The body's "re-semanticization" is a cultural question and a political question, yes, and it is an economic question as well. It's easy to say we want different values so that the oppressed may live and thrive, and we do. More difficult to say is that we want alternative social currencies of our own design—unless we

126

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<sup>84</sup> Valencia, *Gore Capitalism*, 288.



perceive that these differences and forms of *differance* are already being practiced. Might currency be backed with conviviality and radical care instead of differentials founded in violence?

Just as revolution can no longer be adequately specified without an understanding of race, gender and sexuality, so too, we wager, can it no longer be undertaken without computing, calculation and economic media, for these latter are the compilers and thus the new ground of the former, as well as the means by which alternatives may be held open. How will alternative futures immanent in our survival be made current, how will these “not yet”<sup>85</sup> find their currencies? How will “we,” the revolutionary remainders of racial capitalism, yet living everywhere, including in “our very selves,” issue our emancipated futures?

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<sup>85</sup> José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2019).

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