



## ***Blackness and Governance***

By Stefano Harney and Fred Moten

### **1.**

There is an anoriginary drive whose fateful internal difference (as opposed to fatal flaw) is that it brings regulation into existence, into a history irregularly punctuated by transformations that drive imposes upon regulation. Those transformative impositions show up for us now as compensation and surplus: as the payment of a massive and incalculable debt by the ones who not only never promised it; and as the massive and incalculable range of labored living, “the thing realized in things...the universality of individual needs, capacities, pleasures, productive forces, etc., created through universal exchange” that Marx called wealth. The anoriginary drive and the insistences it calls into being and moves through, that criminality that brings the law online, the runaway anarchic ground of unpayable debt and untold wealth, the fugal, internal world theater that shows up for a minute serially – poor but extravagant as opposed to frugal – is blackness which must be understood in its ontological difference from black people who are, nevertheless, (under)privileged insofar as they are given (to) an understanding of it.

### **2.**

Consider the following statement: “There’s nothing wrong with blackness”: What if this were the primitive axiom of a new black studies underived from the psycho-politico-pathology of populations and its corollary theorisation of the state or of state racism; an axiom derived, as all such axioms are, from the “runaway tongues” and eloquent vulgarities encrypted in works and days that turn out to be of the native or the slave only insofar as the fugitive is misrecognized, and in bare lives that turn out to be bare only insofar as no attention is paid to them, only insofar as such lives persist under the sign and weight of a closed question?

### **3.**

The black aesthetic turns on a dialectic of luxuriant withholding – abundance and lack push technique over the edge of refusal so that the trouble with beauty, which is the very animation and emanation of art, is always and everywhere

troubled again and again. New technique, new beauty. At the same time, the black aesthetic is not about technique, is not a technique, though a fundamental element of the terror-driven anaesthetic disavowal of “our terribleness” is the eclectic sampling of techniques of black performativity in the interest of the unproblematically dispossessive assertion of an internal difference, complexity or syntax which was always and everywhere so ap- parent that the assertion is a kind of self-indulgent, self-exculpatory superfluity. Such assertion amounts to an attempt to refute claims of blackness’s atomic simplicity that have never been serious enough to refute (as they were made unfalsifiably, without evidence, by way of unreasonable though wholly rationalized motivations, in bad faith and dogmatic slumber).

#### 4.

The dismissal of any possible claim regarding the essence or even the being of blackness (*in its irreducible performativity*) becomes, itself, the dismissal of blackness. Differential or differentiating techniques are made to account and stand in for an absence. Appeals to internal difference are made in order to disallow instantiation. Abstraction of or from the referent is seen as tantamount to its non- existence. The techniques of black performance – in their manifest difference from one another, in the full range of their transferability and in their placement within a history that is structured but not determined by imposition – are understood to constitute the “proof ” that blackness is not or is lost or is loss. In this regard, abstraction and performativity are meant to carry some of the same weight where the refutation of claims about the authenticity or unity of blackness be- comes the refutation of blackness as such. This appeal to technique is, itself, a technique of governance. Meanwhile blackness means to ren- der unanswerable the question of how to govern the thing that loses and finds itself to be what it is not.

#### 5.

Not in the interest either of some simple or complex opposition of *Technik* and *Eigentlich-*

*keit*, but rather in the improvisation through their opposition moves the black aesthetic. What is the content of (your) (black) technique? What is the essence of (your) (black) performance? An imperative is implied here: to pay attention to (black) performances since it is left to those who pay such attention to re- theorize essence, representation, abstraction, performance, being.

#### 6.

Disavowal is a tendency inherent in the black radical tradition, a kind of inevitability that emerges from the pathologically auto-critical force of a more genuine (anticipatory variant of) enlightenment, on the one hand, and the more basic – which is not but nothing other than to say base – desires that animate the *ideology of uplift*. The logic of correction is political instrumentality’s fugitive, though such fugi- tivity has a doubled, self-consumptive edge – the pathological drive of the pathologist; the end of an anti-essentialist anti-racism without the necessary re-routing. Such instrumentality can very quickly turn sour or get turned out in the interest of empire (artists against art in the interest of gold, prefabricated knockoffs – with readymade prov- enances – of a certain New York intellectuality, a state of mind, a state mind, a mind of the United States of Exception, of the unoriginal gangsters of The American Century who stole modern art from the ones who stole away as modern art, the moving, motley, sculptural, animated, theatrical things).

#### 7.

But blackness still has work to do: to discover the re-routing encoded in the work of art: in the anachoreographic reset of a shoulder, in the quiet extremities that animate a range of social chromaticisms and, especially, in the mutations that drive mute, labored, musicked speech as it moves between an incapacity for reasoned or meaningful self-generated utterance that is, on the one hand, supposed and, on the other hand, imposed, and a critical predisposition to steal (away). In those mutations that are always also a regendering or transgender- ing (as in Al Green’s errant falsetto or Big Maybelle’s bass – which is

not but nothing other than basic – growl), and in between that impropriety of speech that approaches animality and a tendency towards expropriation that approaches criminality, lies blackness, lies the black thing that cuts the regulative, governant force of (the) understanding (and even of those understandings of blackness to which black people are given since fugitivity escapes even the fugitive).

## 8.

The work of blackness is inseparable from the violence of blackness. Violence is where technique and beauty come back, though they had never left. Consider technique as a kind of strain and consider the technique that is embedded in and cuts techniques – the (Fanonian as apposed to Artaudian) cruelty. The internal difference of blackness is a violent and cruel re-routing, by way and outside of critique, that is predicated on the notion, which was given to me, at least, by Martin Luther Kilson, Jr., that there's *nothing wrong with us* (precisely insofar as there is something wrong, something off, something ungovernably, fugitively living in us that is constantly taken for the pathogen it instantiates). This notion is manifest primarily in the long, slow motion – the series of tragically pleasurable detours – of the immediate (of improvisation, which is something not but almost nothing other than the spontaneous), a re-routing that turns away from a turning on or to itself. The apposition of Fanonian and Artaudian cruelty is an itinerancy that bridges life and blackness. Movement towards and against death and its specific and general prematurities and a willingness to break the law one calls into existence constitute their very relationality. But what's the relation between willingness and propensity? And what's the difference between flight and fatality? What are the politics of being ready to die and what have they to do with the scandal of enjoyment? What is premature death? What commerce ensues between what Jacques Lacan identifies as man's specific pre-maturity of birth and what Hussein Abdilahi Bulhan identifies as the specific (and irreducible threat of ) prematurity of death in blackness?

## 9.

Addressing these questions demands some attempt to discover how blackness operates as the modality of life's constant escape and takes the form, the held and errant pattern, of flight. So we've been trying to find out how the commons cuts common sense – the necessarily failed administrative accounting of the incalculable – that is the object/ive of enlightenment self-control; and trying to get with that undercommon sensuality, that radical occupied-elsewhere, that utopic commonunderground of this dystopia, the funkyed-up here and now of this anacentric particularity that we occupy and with which we are preoccupied. It must be that in exploring the black market underside of this constant economy of misrecognition, this misery cognition, it will be possible to discover the informal, form-giving pleasures of the content economy: because we're in love with the way the beat of this slum-like deictic circle flies off the handle; how event music, full of color, blows up the event horizon; how the soundwaves from this black hole carry flavorful pictures to touch; how the only way to get with them is to sense them. This information can never be lost, only irrevocably given in transit. We could never provide a whole bunch of smooth transitions for this order of ditches and hidden spans. There's just this open seriality of terminals in off transcription. Some people want to run things, other things want to run. If they ask you, tell them we were flying. Knowledge of freedom is (in) the invention of escape, stealing away in the confines, in the form, of a break. This is held close in the open song of the ones who are supposed to be silent.

## 10.

Whom do we mean when we say "there's nothing wrong with us"? The fat ones. The ones who are out of all compass however precisely they are located. The ones who are not conscious when they listen to Les McCann. The Screemers who don't say much, insolently. The churchgoers who value impropriety. The ones who manage to evade self-management in the enclosure. The

ones without interest who bring the muted noise and mutant grammar of the new general interest by refusing. The new general intellect extending the long, extra-genetic line of extra-moral obligation to disturb and evade intelligence. Our cousins. All our friends.

## 11.

The new general intellect is rich. And the new regulation wants to give you back what you got, publicly, which is to say partly, what can only be owed. This regulation is called governance. It is not governmentality nor is it a governance of the soul. It must be described in its inscription in that criminality that doubles as debt, that doubles the debt, that twists in inscription, that torques.

Nikolas Rose had it wrong, governance is not about government, and Foucault might have got it right. But how could he know if he could not find the priority of what he knew in North Africa? Governance is the wit of the colonial official, the CIA woman, the NGO man. Will we be in on the joke now that we all know governmentality so well? We can all read it like a book. Nothing goes on behind the backs of the new cynicism (except we need to remind Paolo Virno of what always went on beyond cynicism, what was always without home and shelter, was always outnumbered and outgunned). Will we be in on the joke of religion, of white trash, or the joke of development, of Marxism? When Gayatri Spivak refuses to laugh, she is told she wants to deny the workers their cappuccini. She holds out for reduction against the insider trading of domination, she holds out for a reduction against the coercion that exploits what it cannot reduce to an invitation to governance.

Still the invitations arrive through the smirk of governmentality by all, or on the severe and serious brow of democratisation. Critique and policy. No wonder Rose thought governance was about government. Worse still some say that governance is merely a management neologism, a piece of old-fashioned ideology. Others think governance is simply a retreat to liberalism from the market fundamentalism of neoliberalism.

But we want to reduce it up to a kind of 'state-thought,' a form of thought which for Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari supported the rendering and hording of social wealth. A thought that thinks away the private before the public and the private, but not exactly before, rather a step ahead. State-thought says "they burnt down their own neighbourhood." Not theirs, before theirs. But then nobody writes about the state any more, because governance is too clever for that, governance invites us to laugh at the state, to look back at it, its political immaturity in the face of governmentality by all, its dangerous behaviour, its laziness, its blackness. Which means really the exhaustion of blackness thought by the state and the new way to steal from the stolen, who refuse to give up the secret of thieving with their theft, the secret of their thieving of their theft.

In the newest language of the social sciences we might say that governance is generated by a refusal among biopolitical populations. Or perhaps by the self-activity of immaterial labor. But maybe we would like to say it is provoked by the *communicability of unmanageable racial and sexual difference*, insisting on a now unfathomable debt of wealth.

## 12.

Governance is a strategy for the privatization of social reproductive labor, a strategy provoked by this communicability, infected by it, hosting and hostile. As Toni Negri says "the new face of productive labor (intellectual, relational, linguistic, and affective, rather than physical, individual, muscular, instrumental) does not understate but accentuates the corporality and materiality of labor." But accumulating collective cognitive and affective labor from these highly communicable differences is not the same as accumulating biopolitical bodies that labor. Differences here matter not for order, but order matters for differences. The order that collects differences, the order that collects what Marx called labor still objectifying itself, is the order of governance.

### 13.

But governance collects like a drill boring for samples. Governance is a form of prospecting for this immaterial labor. Immaterial labor is opaque to state-thought until it becomes labor-power, exchangeable potentiality. Immaterial labor could easily be mistaken for life, which is why the biopolitical must take a new form. A form that provokes life to give up this new potential. Corporate social responsibility is sincere. The invitation to governmentality is made by way of transfer of responsibility, and immaterial labor is distinguished from the vitality of life, from its vessel, by the taking up of responsibility, and life is now distinguished by its overt irresponsibility.

Since neither the state nor capital know where to find immaterial labor or how to distinguish it from life, governance is a kind of exploratory drilling with a responsibility bit. But this drilling is not really for labor-power. It is for politics, or rather as Tiziana Terranova suggests, it is for soft control, the cultivation of politics below the political. The slogan of governance might be not 'where there is gas, there is oil,' but 'where there is politics there is labor,' a kind of labor that might be provoked, in the words of critique, or grown, in the words of policy, into labor-power. But this labor as subjectivity is not politics to itself. It must be politicised if it is to yield up its labor-power, or rather we might say, politics is the refining process for immaterial labor. Politicisation is the work of state-thought, the work today, of capital. This is the interest it bears. And interests are its lifeblood, its labor.

### 14.

Governance operates through the apparent auto-generation of these interests. Unlike previous regimes of sovereignty, there is no predetermined interest (no nation, no constitution, no language) to be realized collectively. Rather interests are solicited, offered up, and accumulated. But this is a moment so close to life, to vitality, to the body, so close to no interests, that the imposition of self-management becomes imperative. That imposition is governance.

### 15.

Governance then becomes the management of self-management. The generation of interests appears as wealth, plentitude, potential. It hides the waste of the raw immaterial and its reproduction in the flurry of its conferences, consultations, and outreach. Indeed within the firm, self-management is distinguished from obedience by the generation of new interests in quality, design, discipline, and communication. But with the implosion of the time and space in the firm, with the dispersion and virtualisation of productivity, governance arrives to manage self-management, not from above, but from below. What comes up then may not be value from below as Toni Negri calls it, but politics from below, such that we have to be wary of the grassroots and suspicious of the community. When what emerges from below is interests, when value from below becomes politics from below, self-management has been realized, and governance has done its work.

### 16.

The Soviets used to say that the United States had free speech but no one could hear you over the noise of the machines. Today no one can hear you over the noise of talk. Maurizio Lazzarato says immaterial labor is loquacious and industrial labor was mute. Governance populations are gregarious. Gregariousness is the exchange form of immaterial labor-power, a labor-power summoned by interests from a communicability without interest, a viral communicability, a beat.

The compulsion to tell us how you feel is the compulsion of labor, not citizenship, exploitation not domination, and it is whiteness. Whiteness is why Lazzarato does not hear industrial labor. Whiteness is nothing but a relationship to blackness as we have tried to describe it here, but in particular a relationship to blackness in its relationship to capital, which is to say the movement from muteness to dumb insolence which may be by way of bringing the noise. But the noise of talk, white noise, the information-rich environment of the gregarious, comes from subjectivities formed of objectified labor. These

are the subjectivities of interests, subjectivities of labor-power whose potentials are already bounded by how they will be spent, and mute to their blackness. This is the real muteness of industrial labor. And it is the real gregariousness of immaterial labor. Governance is the extension of whiteness on a global scale.

### 17.

NGOs are the laboratories of governance. The premise of the NGO is that all populations must become gregarious. And the ethics of the NGOs, the dream of governance in general, is to go beyond representation as a form of sovereignty, to auto-generating representation, in the double sense. Those who can represent themselves will also be those who represent themselves as interests in one and the same move, collapsing the distinction. The NGO is the research and development arm of governance finding new ways to bring to blackness what it is said to lack, the thing that cannot be brought, interests. I don't want to speak for those people is the mantra of governance.

### 18.

Governance is the putting to work of democracy. When representation becomes the obligation of all, when politics becomes the work of all, democracy is labored. No longer can democracy promise the return of something lost in the workplace, but rather becomes itself an extension of the workplace. And even democracy cannot contain governance, but is only a tool in its box. Governance is always generated, always organic to any situation. Democracy sits badly in many situations, and must be worked at, made to appear as natural as governance, made to serve governance.

### 19.

Because governance is the annunciation of universal exchange. The exchange through communication of all institutional forms, all forms of exchange value with each other is the enunciation of governance. The hospital talks to the prison which talks to the university which talks to the NGO which talks to the corporation through

governance, and not just to each other but about each other. Everybody knows everything about our biopolitics. This is the perfection of democracy under the general equivalent. It is also the annunciation of governance as the realisation of universal exchange on the grounds of capitalism.

### 20.

Governance and criminality – the condition of being without interests – come to make each other possible. What would it mean to struggle against governance, against that which can produce struggle by germinating interests? When governance is understood as the criminalisation of being without interests, as a regulation brought into being by criminality, where criminality is that excess left from criminalisation, a certain fragility emerges, a certain limit, an uncertain imposition by a greater drive, the mere utterance of whose name has again become too black, too strong altogether.

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